A Theological Study of the Impact of an Interreligious Marriage: Self-Adjustment in Couples from Different Religions

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Abstract

In the world in which we currently live, individuals of different religions may be involved in many dating relationships. Interfaith couples do not have a comfortable space in this set-up because of their different backgrounds and beliefs. Consequently, interfaith relationships come under much
pressure from their environment, such as friendships and families. Problems often found in relationships between interfaith couples are obtaining approval from parents and family, the views of people around them, and conflicts resulting from interfaith relationships relating to issues of faith. Differences in religion and belief should factor in conflict between couples in interfaith relationships. Self-adjustment is very important to do and strive for to achieve happiness and find peace. This research undertaken was qualitative research using phenomenological methods. The data collection methods used were interviews and observation. The data collection technique used a purposive sampling technique. The data analysis technique consisted of preparing and processing data, reading all the data, coding, describing the coding results into themes being analyzed, presenting themes in narrative form, and interpreting the data. The research showed that the subjects were less able to adapt to the environment in interfaith marriages. The subject's emotional and social self-adjustment means that the subjects choose to undergo a relationship without thinking about the possibilities of what might happen in the future and ignore the opinions of the environment so that harmony and peace in the relationship are maintained. Future researchers can examine other factors regarding adjustment to interfaith relationships to discover new things experienced by students and others in interfaith relationships. Psychologically and sociologically, interfaith marriages can trigger and strengthen existing disputes. In addition, interfaith marriages are also considered to cause psychological and educational problems for children because they are confused about which religion to follow. Thus, allowing interfaith marriages often creates inconsistencies with the relevant legal provisions relating to guardianship, inheritance, and other related issues in such marriages.

**Keywords:** Interreligious marriage, different religions, challenges, living harmoniously.

**Introduction**

As social creatures, it is essential for individuals to consistently meet and interact with others because humans are social creatures who are encouraged to interact with each other and live in groups. According to Allport (1967), humans are different and unique creatures who can live with the freedom to choose the direction of their future lives. (Wulandari & Oemiati, 2023) Everyone has different motivations because they can choose who to be with in life. Freedom of choice frees humans to determine their beliefs or religion, whereas humans can choose their life partner in social matters. According to Hurlock (1996), early adulthood begins when the individual reaches the age of 18 and ends when the individual is 40. (Putri, 2018) When entering the early adulthood phase, the issue of love has become a matter of public discussion. In this phase, individuals have one of the developmental tasks, namely establishing relationships with the opposite sex. To fulfill this task, individuals must start from the stage of getting to know the opposite sex and then establishing a relationship known as dating. Based on this, choosing a partner is one of the developmental tasks in the early adulthood phase.

As an individual grows, his or her relationships with others will broaden; this allows the individual to have relationships with friends of a different religion and does not rule out the possibility that the individual will date individuals from a different religion. At this time, numerous individuals of different religions tend to carry out interfaith dating relationships. In religious life, even though they interact with the people around them every day, interfaith couples do not have a comfortable space. Interfaith relationships, such as friendships and family, will come under much pressure from their social environment. The problem often found in relationships between interfaith couples is obtaining approval from parents and the family for a broader scope, as well as the views of people around them and religious leaders.
Interfaith relationships are not easy to gain approval for, mainly for those in such a relationship, based on negative perspectives in society and different perspectives on life. Problems tend to occur when relationships exist between people from different religions. Most couples from different religions do not mind these differences because they do not consider continuing to a more severe level. However, there have been many interfaith marriages that started from dating people of different beliefs, and problems tend to emerge (Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), 2005). As many as 1,425 couples from different religions have married in Indonesia. Research conducted by Nasution and Lestari found that the values and norms adhered to by both families were the cause of conflict over incompatible views regarding romantic relationships as espoused in different religions. In the view of extended families who do not give their blessing if they find out that the relationship between their children has different principles, their relationship is seen as violating existing marriage laws in Indonesia. They are believed not to be following the religious teachings adhered to by each family in their particular faith. It was ascertained that the three pairs of children and parent informants generally experienced realistic conflict in such situations.

The research results discovered by Arif (2009) explain the community in Tirtoadi village, where various ethnicities and religions allow for interfaith couples. This interfaith couple occurs due to underlying factors such as an impoverished understanding of personal desires, the basis of mutual consent, pregnancy out of wedlock, and low education levels. He believes that the level of harmony in Tirtoadi Village does not follow the demands of Islamic teachings. This includes problems such as social distance from society, lack of attention to religious education, and the decline of children following their mother's religion and religious routines. Differences in religion and beliefs can cause conflict in couples living in interfaith relationships. (Rofi'udin, 2009) Relationship adjustments are significant to do and strive for to achieve happiness and find peace because it is very difficult to maintain a long-term relationship without adjustments to existing differences. Based on the research results conducted by Susilawati (2023), it is argued that self-adjustment can influence relationship happiness in couples. This is because self-adjustment is a dynamic and continuous effort to learn to fulfill each other's desires, needs, and hopes in order to achieve satisfaction and happiness in a relationship on an ongoing basis. Another thing that can be done is to adapt if conflict occurs due to differences in religious beliefs so that relationships remain harmonious.

Interfaith marriage happens in Indonesia despite there being clear rules in Islamic teachings that confirm the prohibition of interfaith marriage. In terms of Article 1 of Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage: “Marriage is a relationship of body and soul between a man and a woman as husband and wife to establish a happy and lasting family (household) founded on belief in God Almighty.” Couples in relationships of different religions definitely require greater sacrifices than couples who live in romantic relationships with the same religion and beliefs. In their daily lives, interfaith couples need to be extra careful to overcome any problems that will arise later. Based on the explanation above, the fact that is often encountered is that many couples still have love relationships, although they may be of different religions and have different beliefs. Various conflicts often arise during an interfaith love relationship, and overcoming them is very important. The way to overcome problems in an interfaith relationship is the need for one to have the ability to adapt. The research results allow us to conclude that couples in relationships between different religions require making greater sacrifices, such as adjusting to a new environment, understanding the values and norms held by both families, and still having a better understanding regarding relationships between different religions. Couples in a relationship should be educated about religion before entering into a relationship to reduce family conflict so that the relationship can be more harmonious. That is why adjusting to different religions is essential for couples.
Researchers conducted interviews to find out more about the adjustment of interfaith couples. The results of interviews conducted on March 16, 2023, via Whatsapp media, showed that S2 and M, namely couples who were in an interfaith relationship, initially felt hesitant about carrying out the relationship, but because they felt that life and the process were still too long for them to support each other. Many other positive things were obtained, such as a subject feeling he could carry out the relationship first. The subject also mentioned that there must be many problems in the relationship. However, the problem related to religion was only a one-time happening, and the way the subject dealt with this was the same as other couples, namely through communication, discussing while resolving existing problems, and sometimes providing their own space if their partner asks. The subject's parents did not know about the relationship because there was a prohibition against dating, but there were several family members, such as younger siblings or cousins, who knew about it; the subject chose not to tell their parents because they would be opposed; the subject also said that people around him felt that a relationship between different religions was just a waste of time, but according to the subject, the couple can do a lot of positive things to help and support each other.

Based on the interview above, it can be concluded that couples of different religions initially felt hesitant about carrying out the relationship, but because many other positive things were obtained, the subject felt he could carry out the relationship first. The problems experienced by couples of different religions are the same as those of other couples; it is not always about religious differences. The way to solve them is through communication and giving others their space. For the family, however, and the people around them, no one agrees with the existence of this relationship. However, because they feel that there are still positive things, such as being able to help and support each other, the subject does not overthink other people's views; the subject has an interfaith relationship and views this as a regular dating relationship.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that several problems in interfaith relationships often occur; one of these problems is the lack of approval from the families of both parties and the negative view of society towards interfaith couples; therefore, the ability to adapt is essential for interfaith couples to have. Religion adjustments between interfaith couples usually include asking for parental approval, trying to understand the differences between one another due to religious differences, and accepting negative societal perspectives.

**Methods**

This research was a qualitative study with theme analysis. The qualitative method was chosen in this research because the researcher wanted to see a picture of adjustment in couples from different religions. This phenomenological research thus used a natural qualitative approach to explore information through human experience and behavior to produce in-depth results. This research focused on describing adjustment in interfaith couples. The study consisted of 16 pairs of participants. The criteria for selected participants were active students aged around 18-21 years who had relationships from different religions. Researchers use this *purposive sampling* technique to make it easier for researchers to obtain information because the data sources selected are considered to be most knowledgeable regarding the information and problems that will be studied in depth(Wahyu & Alam, 2022). This *purposive sampling* technique aims to obtain as much information and data as possible from various sources considered to have specific characteristics to be used as a design for the theory to be researched (Hanipudin et al., 2023).

The researcher conducted interviews, namely in-depth interviews to obtain information, and also carried out natural observations (Karimullah, 2023), which were carried out by observing the
subject's natural environment without any desire to do anything manipulative about the subject's behavior so that the data obtained in this research was representative of what happened naturally and in reality (Riskia, 2022). Researchers contacted the participants who met the criteria, conducted interviews around campus, and made direct observations (Jaya & Susanto, 2022). The researcher conducted a structured interview in the interview process since the data he wanted to obtain was already known (Nurullah, 2022). The searchers first prepared questions and alternative answers to each question. Researchers ask the same questions to each research subject and then record the answers given by the subjects (Kurtubi, 2022). Apart from interviews and observations of subjects, data collection also required obtaining some data through informants or individuals who are used to obtain information regarding all the problems the subject has and the background conditions of the research subjects (Muddin, 2022). This research consisted of several stages, from managing and preparing the data to carrying out analysis, reading all the data obtained, analyzing it in detail by coding the data, starting with the coding process to describe the results of the information obtained, and interpreting the data.

Result and Discussion

This study used sixteen subjects who were in an interfaith relationship and agreed to participate in this research. The subjects are 19 years old and are currently studying or have student status. This research can provide an overview of adjustment in couples of different religions, considering that the subjects involved already represent the desired criteria; the subjects are interfaith couples. Religions that are still in contact today. The following is a visualization of research findings regarding the picture of adjustment in interfaith couples:

![Diagram of Interfaith Dating Relationships](image)

**Emotional Condition**
The subjects admitted that when the subject and their partner were involved in a conflict, one would give in and provide space to calm their thoughts, not prolonging the problem.

**Environmental conditions**
The surrounding environment, namely the friends of the sixteen subjects, is inconsistent in supporting them; some closest friends support them as long as the relationship is positive, and some make fun of them because they are in a relationship that has 'no way out.' The families of the sixteen subjects did not know much about the relationship that the subjects were in because
of the existing differences and the solid religious principles of the sixteen subjects’ families. The subject also does not dare to consider continuing the relationship to a more severe level because he feels this is not good for himself or his partner.

**Emotional Maturity**

The subject chose to avoid questions about his relationship because this could become a mental burden for him; the subject felt that the relationship he was in was just a matter for his partner and him; there was no need for other people to intervene because the only people who knew about how the relationship was going were the subject and his partner. He thus disliked the intrusion.

**The Analysis**

This research discusses the adjustment description in couples of different religions (Islam and Christianity). The sixteen subjects in this research, S1, and S2, had a background in interfaith relationships. An interfaith relationship can be said to be a bond between a man and a woman who have different religious backgrounds or beliefs from each other (Humbertus, 2019). An interfaith relationship is a relationship between two people who have different beliefs and are tied together in a relationship. The main element that must be present in the definition of an interreligious relationship is having different beliefs or embracing different religions and being in a relationship (Arifin, 2019). The second reason the subject decided to have an interfaith relationship was based on feelings of affection and comfort, following the factors of interfaith relationships, namely the freedom to choose a partner. It cannot be denied that many people have decided to have an interfaith relationship because it is based on genuine love and affection (Silfanus, 2022).

The sixteen subjects underwent their relationship accompanied by adjustments to maintain their relationship. Self-adjustment is a dynamic process that aims to change individual behavior in such a way as to create a more appropriate relationship between the individual and his environment and the desire to participate in social activities in his environment. S1 states that his adjustment to this relationship is that ignoring the opinions of other people who have opinions is not good for his relationship, so it will not be a burden on his mind (see also Hasanuddin & Khairuddin, 2021). S2, he stated that his adjustment to this relationship was by not listening to other people’s opinions because he felt that in this relationship, it was personal since he was going through it, and not other people. These two factors influenced his adjustment according to personality. Personality in Fanani dan Jainurakhma (2020) is stated as a willingness and ability to adapt to the environment. Apart from that, S1 and S2 also stated that their relationship is not just about dating but also about developing each other, and they also stated that the relationship they are currently in does not force them to convert to another religion. One aligns with self-adjustment characteristics according to taste, respect for people, and the ability to behave tolerantly (Lathifah, 2023).

A description of the adjustment of the sixteen subjects in this interfaith relationship can be known from their emotional states (Wahyuni, 2017). S1 stated that he experienced small conflicts several times, which annoyed him with his partner. However, because of good emotional regulation, the conflict did not escalate further, following the theory put forward by Marlina (2020) that individuals can control their mental and behavior to achieve self-harmony and environmental harmony, namely their relationship with an individual. Another way is to achieve satisfaction and happiness by changing oneself to adapt to the environment or adjust oneself according to one’s wishes. In S2, the emotional condition states that he often experienced arguments or fights, making him angry (Surawardi & Maulidi, 2022). However, he was happy to give time to the situation so that
each partner could introspect carefully so that the problem could be resolved with a cool head and does not cause other problems. This follows the theory presented by Susilawati (2023) which states that it is essential to carry out relationships and strive for the sake of achieving happiness and finding peace because, without adjustments to existing differences, it is complicated to maintain long-term relationships (Bahari & Sivana, 2022).

Apart from that, several things influence the subject's ability to adapt to this relationship between different religions, namely environmental conditions. S1 stated that he felt that his friends did not provide consistent social support, and he did not want to tell his friends about his relationship because he felt he lacked support; this was not in line with the characteristics of self-adjustment according to the ability to accept and assess the reality of the external environment (Ginting, 2019). Self-objectively following rational and emotional development, he did not have positive self-regulation, which results in him not being careful in seeing reality and being unable to face reality somewhat following his needs; based on his behavior, he does not want to learn from others, so he is essentially not open to receiving input from others. S2 stated that the environmental conditions were that his friends did not provide consistent social support. At the same time, the subject's family tended to be tolerant of this; the subject also did not have the desire to reach the stage of marriage because he felt that marrying someone from a different religion would not be good following the theory put forward by Ginting (2019), and be able to act following applicable standards and have rights and responsibilities. Individuals can follow and implement applicable norms without coercion in their behavior, and their attitudes and behaviors are always based on awareness of the need for their norms and beliefs.

Based on the discussion regarding the factors that influence self-adjustment and the characteristics of self-adjustment in the subjects, it can be concluded that the subjects have poor ability to adapt to their environment. However, the subjects have good emotional conditions to overcome conflicts in different relationships and their religion being practiced.

This research was carried out by adapting scientific procedures, but there are still weaknesses and limitations in its implementation, including:

1. Gathering data on subjects was difficult, so the researcher asked the same question several times to get complete data.
2. Researchers have difficulty finding previous research because there are still few that discuss dating relationships between different religions.
3. The sample size was very small and is thus a limitation, but it opens up possibilities for further research.

Theological Study of the Impact of Interfaith Marriage: Psychological Adjustment of Couples of Different Theologies

Theologically, couples in interfaith marriages find it difficult to adjust because of their differences in beliefs. For example, fundamental differences exist between people of different religions in wedding reception. (Qomah & Chairunissa, 2022) Apart from that, interfaith marriages are polemic because they cause debate between agreeing and disagreeing, but the impact of interfaith marriages is not only personal but also social and cultural (Togatorop, 2023). There are increasing numbers of interfaith marriages in Indonesia, but until now, they have not received the place they deserve, either among society, religious leaders, or the government. This type of marriage is still considered taboo, forbidden, and contrary to religious rules, doctrines, and government laws. Society, in general, only knows that their doctrine prohibits religious marriage.
Moreover, this is a single view or interpretation of the sacred biblical texts discussing this issue. Unfortunately, this attitude is not accompanied by a critical study of the books' texts. So, an attitude emerges that tends to be dogmatic and rejects with an anti-certainty attitude. Likewise, religionists have "sole authority" in translating the message of the holy book/s to the people, the majority of whom firmly hold the interpretation of holy book texts that prohibit interfaith marriages as being hard and fast rules. People who align with religious organizations and religious leaders agree that interfaith marriages will likely be prone to domestic problems. Apart from these issues, the fact is that interfaith marriages are becoming more common every day (Togatorop, 2023).

The problems of interfaith marriages even start before the marriage and continue post-marriage. A couple must accept each other even though they have different beliefs, convince their parents and family, and be prepared for gossip emanating from society. Next, they must live their married life, each with a different religion, resulting in tricky children's faith issues, etc. An open religious orientation is critical. In theology, there are typologies of religious orientation, namely exclusive, inclusive, and pluralist. An exclusive attitude is an attitude and view that considers religion and its religious teachings to be the most correct. In contrast, other religions are viewed as being heretical and must be eradicated, or their adherents converted because the religion and its adherents are not pleasing in the presence of God. This paradigm assumes that one religion is correct and that other religions are wrong.

An inclusive attitude holds that there is also truth outside the religion one adheres to, even though it is not necessarily as complete or perfect as the religion one adheres to. In this view, other religions are implicit forms of one's religion. In this paradigm, people read other religions from their religious Perspective. A plural attitude means one believes that all religions are the same and equal. If we reflect on this religious typology, those who enter into interfaith marriages have a religious orientation between inclusive and pluralist. They may think their religion is correct while their partner's is also good and has good values. They may also assume their religion and their partner's religion are the same. It is not accessible if one of the partners has an exclusive religious orientation because their relationship will undoubtedly end before their marriage.

Marrying a partner from a different religion is a free choice, not based on external coercion, but solely due to the couple's determination and love for one another. In this case, the couple is compatible despite religious differences between them. Different couple's religions must uphold openness and respect the differences between them. Each partner must support the other's participation in religious life. Interfaith couples practice the values of tolerance in the truest sense. Respecting your partner means respecting your partner's religion. They are also open to people from their partner's religion. Apart from that, interfaith couples also learn the basics of their partner's religion. Learning here is not formal but through the partner's brief explanations and religious practices (Titirloloby & Refo, 2022).

In reality, inter-religious marriages experience more negative impacts and have a psychological impact on families, especially for children who may experience confusion because their family has two religions or belief systems. Of course, this will cause children not to receive proper moral education. As a result, vulnerabilities will arise in children. Interfaith marriages can cause long-term negative psychological consequences. Families face many challenges where there are religious differences between partners. From conflicts between partners to conflicts with people outside the couple, determining the child's religion, and how the child is raised are difficult. The final challenge is the problem that involves emotions because it involves the interests of many parties and is a matter of principle. In principle, all religions do not expect the marriage of two people of different religions, not only from the Perspective of religious law itself but also considering the purpose of marriage itself, which unites two different people to build a common
household. In building a household, relationships will be established to give birth to offspring raise and educate children, and parents’ rights and obligations are also essential considerations (Halim & Hosnan, 2020).

Hairunas (2022 in case No. 24/PUU-XX/2022 was filed by E. Ramos Petege, a Catholic who had intended to marry a Muslim woman. The union fell through because the Marriage Law did not accommodate interfaith marriage), which explains more clearly the impact of interfaith marriages from a psychological perspective. Belief in a religion is an individual's right as a citizen, which, in essence, cannot be forced on someone by another, including changing their beliefs. According to Hairunas, being forced to change religion because of a marriage relationship can hurt a person psychologically,. This is because interfaith marriages can injure and disrupt the stability of family harmony for both the future wife and the future husband. Even more concretely, Hairunas (2022) sees that based on psychotherapy and mental health, people in interfaith marriages tend to have difficulty interacting within the family, especially if they both have children because they will find it challenging to choose to follow one of the religions their parents adhere to.

What is more, Hairunas opines that this dilemmatic choice will continue continuously. Hairunas (2022) also argues that a person can be said to be mentally healthy when he or she is prosperous, both psychologically, emotionally, and socially. Also, mental health influences how a person thinks, feels, acts, makes decisions, and interacts with others. "So in terms of any religion, theologically, ritually, and normatively, there are huge differences; therefore, religious behavior between couples with different beliefs can give rise to disputes between hearts and minds. "So it is vulnerable to divisions and deep unrest from both parties," (StatedHairunas, who is the Chancellor of the Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau State Islamic University, in his statement regarding petition Number 24/PUU-XX/2022 in the Marriage Law review case submitted by E. Ramos Petege). Furthermore, psychologically and sociologically, Euis states that interfaith marriages can start and worsen existing disputes (Nurlaelawati, 2023). Interfaith marriages are also considered to cause psychological and educational problems for children because they are confused about which religion to follow in their lives.

"The permissibility of interfaith marriages will create inconsistencies with the relevant legal provisions relating to guardianship, inheritance, etc., so in my opinion, interfaith marriages are still relevant to continue to be regulated as regulated through or with Article 2 and Article 8 of the Marriage Law. "Apart from that, this regulation is in line with human rights principles, the implementation of which can depend on religious teachings and beliefs as well as the locality of a region or country," said Euis, a Professor at UIN Sunan Kalijaga who was present online at this trial (Nurlaelawati, 2023).

Conclusion

An interfaith relationship can be said to be a bond between a man and a woman who have different religious backgrounds or beliefs. Interfaith couples do not usually have a comfortable space because, in some cases, interfaith relationships will come under much pressure from their environment, such as friendships and family. Therefore, couples in interfaith relationships must make reasonable adjustments in order for them to be accepted by the environment. This can be based on emotional conditions, environmental conditions, and emotional maturity. Psychologically and sociologically, interfaith marriages can trigger and strengthen existing disputes. Next, interfaith marriages are also considered to cause psychological and educational problems for children because they are confused about which religion to follow. The permissibility of interfaith marriages will also create inconsistencies with the relevant legal provisions relating to inter-alia guardianship and inheritance. Interfaith marriage may be considered to be sinful by
some, but its validity depends on the conditions set by various religions, and the bride and groom have a say.

References


**Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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