

Kertas 7: Interethnic Marriage in Malaysia: A New Perspective

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Abstract

This study is related to Malaysian society in terms of the implications of interethnic marriage. It mostly focuses on how the interethnic couple lives and copes with their partner as well as the problems and challenges faced by those couples. This study, also includes the lifestyle, education, adaptation and awareness of children born from interethnic couples. In general, Malaysia has four main ethnic groups. This includes the various pribumi (aboriginal peoples), the Malays, the Chinese, and the Indians. The main form of gathering the needed information for this study was through questionnaires due to restraints caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. These questionnaires were conveyed to the target society and persons through multimedia and social messaging platforms. Two kinds of questionnaires were made, one for the couple and another one for the children born of interethnic marriage (multiethnic children). The sample of responses received for the study were satisfactory and the responses included a wide variety of point of views. Meanwhile, the analysis of the results demonstrated that while many people viewed interethnic marriages as a positive experience, the opposite was true for many as well. Hence the results of the study are not very conclusive towards the viability of interethnic marriages in Malaysia.

Keyword: Interethnic Marriage, lifestyle

Background / Issue Complication

Malaysia is known to have several different ethnicities, ranging from Malays, Chinese, and Indians, to the indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak, as well as the Siamese, where each ethnic group has their own culture which make up the entirety of Malaysian population. These variations of ethnicities as well as the difference in culture that comes along with it has been the pride and joy of Malaysians. While the diverse ethnic groups are able to live together in harmony, issues pertaining to their differences tend to arise from time to time, which creates prejudice and causes some people to view someone of a different ethnic negatively. Since people of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds have come together to live in the same country, mixing of ethnicities through marriage is expected and tends to occur though this is not very common.

With interethnic marriage, a fusion of cultures and traditions from both sides of the couple will take place, and every so often certain aspect of one of the cultures contradicts with the other, or even worse; might contradict with the religions being practiced by the couple. Not only do they have to live together under the same roof with the difference in cultures, they also have to bear the conflict and prejudices that someone from their family has for another ethnic group. Most ethnic groups are associated with certain preconceptions. For example, Malays are said to be lazy and hypocritical, Chinese are money-minded, while the Indians are drunkards. It is also worth noting that children born of interethnic marriages would typically have a different facial or phenotypic feature than the common facial features associated with the ethnicities of their parents (a child of Malay and Chinese mix would typically look significantly more like a Chinese than Malay). As such the children of interethnic couples are more likely to be subjected to prejudice when growing up. This is especially true considering that early schooling in Malaysia is highly segregated by ethnicities where the different ethnic groups focus on teaching their own languages, cultures and traditions to children. The number of inter-ethnic marriages has since increased these days as compared to the days when Malaysia first gained its independence, but even so, the information and studies regarding these sorts of ethnic interaction are still not clear. One can only speculate on the life of the interethnic couple. Hence, to shed

Rumusan Hasilan

Secara keseluruhan, kajian yang dilakukan adalah berdasarkan pemerhatian terhadap beberapa permasalahan yang berlaku di Fakulti Perubatan Veterinar dan ianya dipercayai berkait rapat dengan isu sentimen perkauman. Antara punca permasalahan adalah kesan daripada perbezaan agama, pengaruh politik, polarisasi, penubuhan kelab mengikut kaum, perbezaan bahasa pertuturan dan juga keselesaan dalam pergaulan. Isu ini dianggap sebagai satu perkara yang serius kerana ia boleh menjejaskan persepsi masyarakat terhadap fakulti dan juga universiti. Oleh yang demikian, langkah yang proaktif diambil dengan melakukan kajian yang mendalam terhadap faktor berlakunya sentimen perkauman daripada pelbagai aspek melalui kajian kepustakaan dan juga soal selidik. Kajian mendapati kebanyakan pelajar adalah bersikap lebih terbuka dan dapat menerima perbezaan perkauman dan hanya segelintir sahaja yang masih lagi dibelenggu dengan pemikiran yang cetek dan tidak dapat menerima perbezaan kaum manakala sesetengah daripada pelajar pula bersifat neutral.

Beberapa inisiatif dapat dijalankan bagi mengurangkan masalah sentimen perkauman dalam kalangan pelajar mahasiswa Fakulti Perubatan Veterinar. Antara cadangan yang dapat diketengahkan adalah dengan menyeimbangkan pengambilan pelajar di setiap peringkat pengajian tanpa mengambil kira peratusan setiap kaum, memansuhkan sekolah vernakular, menambahkan ilmu pengetahuan umum berkaitan kaum yang berbeza supaya bersifat lebih terbuka, menyambut perayaan bersama serta kempen berkaitan perbezaan etnik agar dapat mengatasi masalah perkauman dan memberi keselesaan kepada para mahasiswa supaya dapat bergaul dengan semua rakan tanpa mengira kaum.

Secara konklusinya, masalah perkauman dalam kalangan mahasiswa Fakulti Perubatan Veterinar adalah wujud namun hanya melibatkan golongan yang kecil sahaja dan perkara ini dapat diatasi dengan beberapa langkah yang efektif. Mahasiswa hendaklah sentiasa seiring dalam menjalankan tugas dan tanggungjawab sebagai pelajar serta rakyat Malaysia. Mereka juga haruslah sentiasa bekerjasama agar dapat menjamin keamanan dan keharmonian sesebuah institusi dan negara serta mencapai kegemilangan bersama. Mahasiswa cemerlang, Negara gemilang.

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some light on this matter is the reason we have decided to conduct a study regarding interethnic marriage in Malaysia.

Research Purpose

There is a gradual increase of interethnic marriage trend in the Malaysian society due to increasing ethnic contact and connectedness via globalization, migration and mobilization. The purpose of this study is to have a better understanding of Malaysians who are involved in marriage with partners of different ethnicities. This includes several aspects such as their religions, cultures, challenges, as well as obstacles faced, and how it relates to the social reality in Malaysia as well as how well interethnic couples adapt to these challenges. This study was also conducted to discern how interethnic marriage influences society in various aspects, such as social interactions, the perspective, acceptance and adaptability of society, and whether interethnic marriages help us to achieve Unity in Diversity.

Methodology

The study was conducted between 4th of December 2020 and 16th January in the year 2021. The respondents of the study were limited to interethnic spouses and children born from interethnic marriage. All respondents are Malaysian citizens or permanent residents that live in Malaysia. Data was collected through the use of computer questionnaires (Google Forms). Two different sets of questionnaires were handed out to cater to the two types of respondents, where one is for interethnic couples, and the other is for children born from interethnic marriages. The questionnaire was handed out to individuals who are directly involved with interethnic marriage (who are mostly colleagues, friends, and family members) as well as requesting the assistance from family and friends to pass the questionnaire to individuals of interest. The questionnaires were handed out through text messaging applications such as WhatsApp and social media platforms such as groups on Facebook.

A total of 24 respondents participated in the questionnaire, where 10 of them are interethnic couples, while another 14 respondents are children born from interethnic marriage.

For the questionnaire for interethnic couples, there are 11 questions, where five of the questions are multiple choice questions, while another six are subjective questions. Below are the questions asked in the interethnic couple questionnaire. The answer option "Other..." for the multiple-choice questions allows the respondents to specifically state their ethnicity.

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Are you a male or female? (Male/Female)
2. Your ethnicity/race (Malays/Chinese/Indian/Pribumi Sabah/Pribumi Sarawak/Other...)
3. Your partner's ethnicity/race (Malays/Chinese/Indian/Pribumi Sabah/Pribumi Sarawak/Other...)
4. Does your marriage involve the change of religion? (Yes/No)
5. Did you convert to a different religion right before or after your marriage? (Yes/No)

Subjective Questions

6. What is your view on interethnic marriage - before and after marriage?
7. What are some of the challenges faced before and after marriage, as well as the ones that you are still facing?
8. What did you do to protect and stabilize the relationship between you and your partner, and also between both families? Do you think it's successful?
9. How do you educate your child regarding the family history, culture, family taboo, etc?
10. Are your children 'okay' growing in an interethnic family? Do they have any problem

communicating with other relatives?

11. Do you think your children have problems interacting with society (friends, schoolmates etc.)? Please elaborate further?

For the Multiethnic Children questionnaire, there are a total of 10 questions, where five of the questions are in the form of multiple choice, and another five questions are subjective questions. Below are the questions asked in the multiethnic children questionnaire. The answer option "Other..." for the multiple choice questions allows the respondents to specifically state their ethnicity.

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Are you a male or female? (Male/Female)
2. What is your father's ethnicity/race? (Malays/Chinese/Indian/Pribumi Sabah/Pribumi Sarawak/Other...)
3. What is your mother's ethnicity/race? (Malays/Chinese/Indian/Pribumi Sabah/Pribumi Sarawak/Other...)
4. How do you usually classify yourself in terms of ethnicity/race when filling official form/letter? (Malays/Chinese/Indian/Pribumi Sabah/Pribumi Sarawak/Other...)
5. Do both of your parents share the same belief (Religion)? (Yes/No)

Subjective Questions

6. When did you start to realize that you are a mix?
7. Do you have any special encounter or face any challenges for being a mix?
8. Are both sides of your family interacting well? If yes, how? If no, how?
9. Are there any conflicts due to different beliefs and cultures?
10. Do you think Malaysia is a united country?

Analysis Result

Among our interethnic spouse respondents, 90% of them are female (10 female, 1 male). These respondents are 20% Malay, 20% Pribumi Sabah, 20% Siamese, 10% Jawa, 10% Eurasian and 10% Thai.

According to the questionnaire, 70% of respondents did not change their religion right before or after their marriage, while 30% of the respondents converted their religion with marriage.

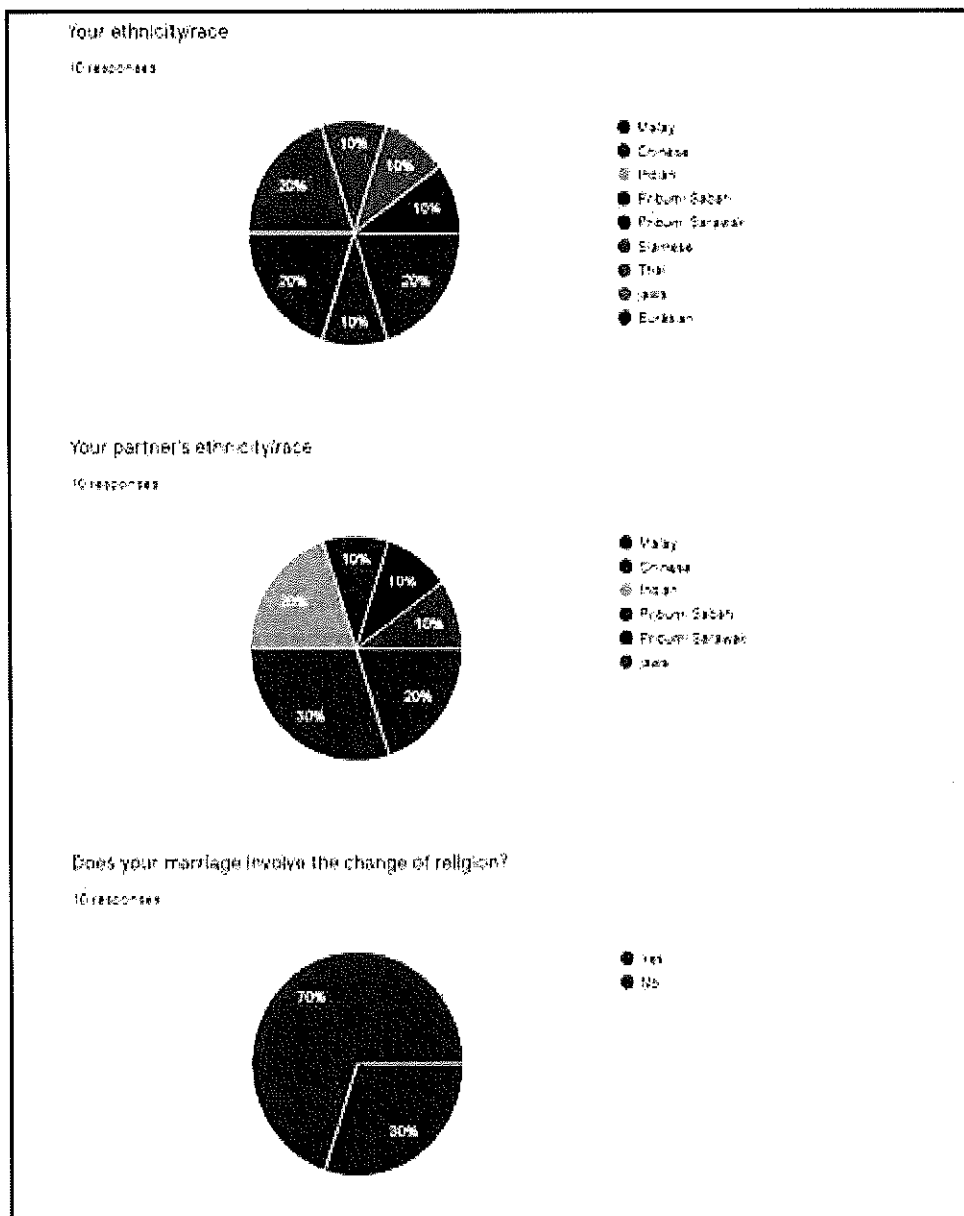
While many of the respondents have positive views on their marriage, some of the respondents do have negative thoughts about it. There appears to be a big difference in attitudes and opinions faced before and after marriage, as most of them claimed that more challenges and conflicts emerged after marriage. Some couples faced disapproval from family, negative stereotyping and incompatible beliefs before marriage. As marriage involves families from both parties, the challenges faced after marriage are mostly due to interaction with each other's family. This includes cultural, food, language and religious differences. However, some of them see it as an interesting part of their lives. From these particular respondents' perspective, interethnic marriage is beautiful and it is an opportunity to explore new culture.

When asked about their efforts in protecting their relationship, most of them think respect, compromise and communication are the keys to successful interethnic relationships. Some of them also think that love and loyalty play a big role in the success of their marriage.

Among 14 of our multiethnic children respondents, 11 (78.6%) of them are female and 3 (21.4%) of them are male. Their father's ethnicity are mostly Chinese (57.1%), followed by Indian and Malay who share the same percentage (14.3%) and the least are Siam and Chindian (7.1%). All of them classify themselves following their father's ethnicity except for one who followed her mother's ethnicity which is Malay. Only about a quarter of the respondents (28.6%) have their parents holding different religions and they are mostly Indian-Chinese spouses while one of them is Pribumi Sabah-Chinese.

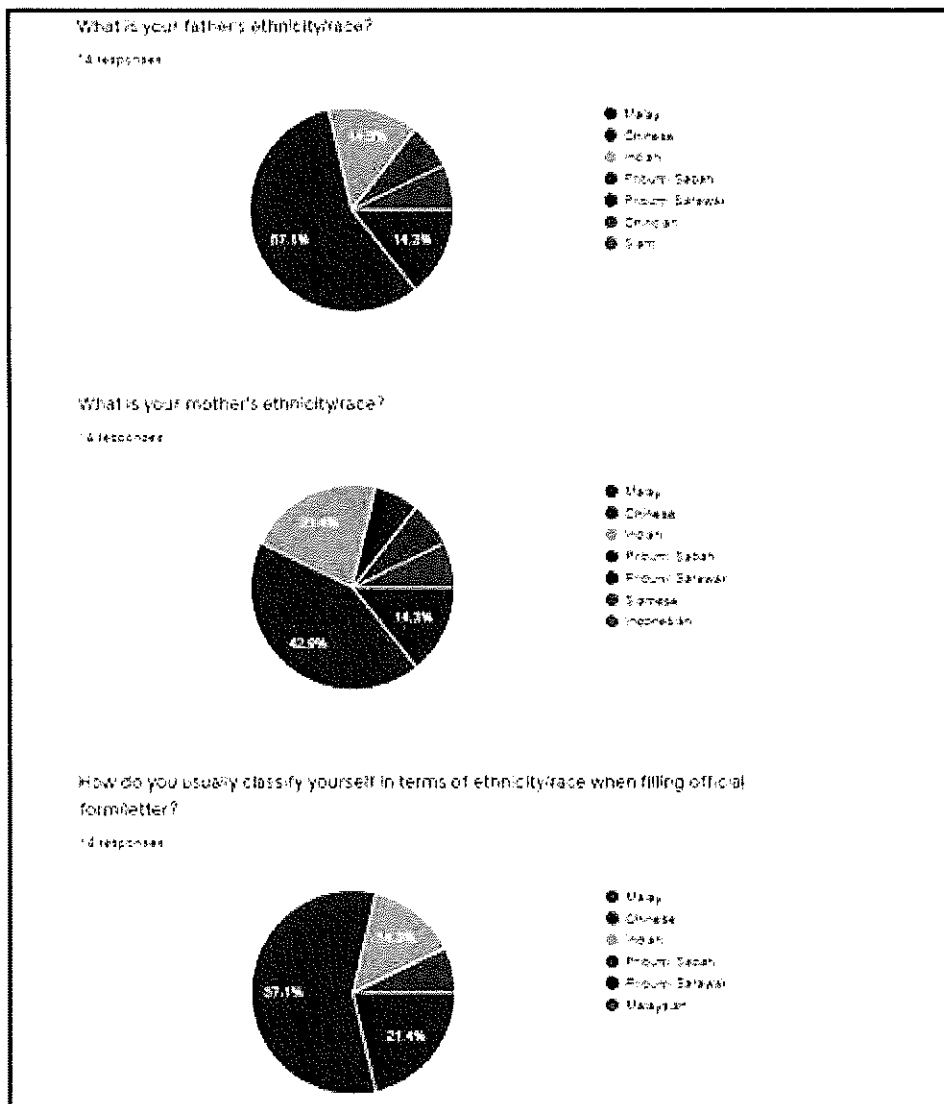
For multiethnic children, most of them confessed that they faced several challenges such as being judged for their skin colour, having a hard time making friends, and receiving unpleasant nicknames.

However, some of them do like their status as a “mix”. Fortunately, most of their family members from both parties are able to interact well with each other despite their different mother tongue and cultures. On the other hand, some claimed that they are not interacting well, mostly due to miscommunication and stereotyping. Inevitably, the differences in beliefs and cultures have caused conflicts in most of the respondents’ family, especially among families with different religions. Still, most of them do not take it as a big deal as they believe that understanding and acceptance will solve the problem.



Discussion

Based on the results, more than half of the interethnic spouse respondents did not convert their religion for their marriage. We also have just a small number of Muslim respondents from both interethnic spouses and children. The small number of interethnic marriages involving Malay could be due to other religions being flexible with their spouse's beliefs while Muslims are restricted to only marry Muslims. Hence, we inferred that people tend to avoid inter-ethnic marriages between partners whose ethnic group are members of certain religions (especially if the religion does not permit marriage with a partner from a different religion), for example in Malay-non-Malay marriages. Since Malays are Muslim by definition, those who intend to marry a Malay person are required to convert their religion before marriage. This condition may discourage some people, as converting religion may be too big of a challenge.



Although the answers regarding pre- and post-marriage opinions are mixed, it is safe to say that there is a huge change in the respondent's opinion for before and after their marriage. This is due to the fact that after going through marriage and experiencing it for themselves, the majority of them tend to adapt and respond accordingly to their situation. Through their marriage, they may start to discover their differences that they may not be aware of, especially differences related to their culture and religion. As their marriage progresses, they are likely to be aware of cultures from other ethnic groups, and become more accepting of cultures other than their own. This may not always be the case, as sometimes family members especially parents or in-laws have animosity towards other ethnic groups, or believe in ethnic preconceptions which are common sources of challenges faced by interethnic spouses.

Multiethnic children are also subjected to prejudices as early as school years. Prejudices such as skin colour shaming, where they are belittled and made fun of for their skin colours, especially those with a darker skin tone are fairly common amongst primary school and secondary school students. Derogatory nicknames such as "Keling" are pretty common for children with an Indian descent as well as those who appear darker than the rest. These multiethnic children also face hardship when trying to find a friend especially since racial segregation is strong. Multiethnic children that look like Indian or Chinese but couldn't speak the language, often find themselves unable to mingle properly with those particular social circles. They may look the same but language and cultural barriers become a challenge in mutual understanding and thus inhibits bonding. In spite of that, interracial marriage has a positive impact on households. Families participating in interracial relationships were introduced to various traditions that are different from their own. This would contribute to beneficial results that will enable them to be more alert to new customs and lead people to better prospects, such as employment, and professions. All this diversity will contribute to a healthier and happier future.

From a scientific perspective, interethnic marriage gives a positive impact on the gene pool as the introduction and mix of different races opens up new possibilities and features for their progeny that might not be available to them and their ancestors. As different ethnic groups developed differently from each other, some of them might develop beneficial traits that are unique to their ethnic such as having a higher melanin content in their skin, allowing them to withstand radioactive waves from the sun better. As more inter-ethnic marriages occur, there is a higher chance of these beneficial traits occurring and lowering the chances of non-beneficial traits from drowning out beneficial traits if they were only to be spread inside their own ethnic gene pool. Inter-ethnic marriage allows them to spread and share their beneficial traits with others and make the gene pool of Malaysians to improve and become better to survive in the ever-changing future.

Furthermore, the promotion of social cohesion from inter-ethnic marriages can be seen when two different religious teachings and cultures are interchanged and merged. This improves the understanding of each other's uniqueness which is otherwise often ignored. However, this may not be as easy as it seems, as it requires a high level of patience, tolerance and open-mindedness, not only from the couple but also the family members. One has to be strong enough to face challenges from different aspects, which includes prejudices, societal stereotyping, religious incompatibilities, and conflict in cultural education. Sadly, these are also considered the most widespread and pernicious influence to the unity of multiple ethnicities in Malaysia. Stereotypes and prejudices have been inculcated in people's minds from one generation to the next and will be an endless issue unless someone starts to make a change. Interethnic marriage is a good indication that people are able to accept each other and it will be a good start to demolish these negative views. Nevertheless, a good start needs continuous effort to make things successful.

"Prejudice and stereotyping are mental mistakes.", said psychologist, Cherry (2013). It is a result of our tendency to quickly categorize information received, which often leads to mistakes. Therefore, rational thinking and empathy towards people of other ethnicities should be well practiced. While this practice seems difficult for intransigent adults, there is still a light of hope from our future generations. Children carry the purest soul, prejudice is absent in their world and they should be taught to treat every human being equally, regardless of the skin colour, languages and religions. Parents and teachers play an important role here. They should build good characters in their children and encourage them to interact more with members of another social group. Moral values like respect for each other, tolerance and empathy should also be instilled from young. If education is done well, children born in interethnic marriages that are exposed to more culture and

languages will gain the ability to easily socialize with people from different ethnicities, have less language barrier and better communication skills than the others.

While Malaysia prides itself on its' heritage and multicultural aspects and its' reputation as a "mixing pot" of South East Asia, it is very despondent to note that much of the legislation of Malaysia is highly biased and prejudiced in regards to how certain ethnic groups are treated when compared to other ethnic groups. This is reflected at the bureaucratic level by the system of categorizing Malaysians into rigid mono-ethnic groups. The legislation regarding intermarriage while present and concise is often open to interpretation by bureaucratic officers who handle the case and as such experiences regarding legislative procedures which have to be followed before an interethnic marriage can be committed to such as when a non-Muslim wants to marry a Malay and thus has to change their religion, are often varied and can be even ridiculous at times. This adds on to the challenges that are faced by inter-ethnic couples which can discourage such couples from tying the knot in the future. In addition, support to interethnic couples and children born interethnic marriages from government agencies is severely lacking. As such, these interethnic couples and children have to deal with informal and unofficial agencies which are associated with certain ethnic groups and are often biased towards that ethnic group. This goes on to show that the Malaysian government should introduce agencies which deal with interethnic couples and their children specifically and reduce the bias of ethnic groups which would increase acceptance and ameliorate co-existence in Malaysia.

Last but not least, mass media is also one of the biggest culprits when it comes to prejudice and stereotypes. Mass media often portray ethnic relations in Malaysia in a narrow perspective and sensationalize issues about religion and ethnic through news reports. Social media like Facebook and Twitter have also been used as a platform to spread insensitive and inaccurate posts that may effectively provoke anger. Hence, mass media should review their contents wisely and evaluate its benefits on the nation's development before release. Besides that, when reporting incidents where certain politicians are being criticized, the blame should be carried by the politician and not transferred to members of his or her ethnic group. The mass media should carry out the responsibility to make things clear but not to let their readers create their own stories.

Research Summary Result

Overall, from the study that has been conducted, we can agree that the important elements in contributing to unity in Malaysia through marriage of different ethnicities are respect for the other parties, having a good communication between partners by compromising with the subtle differences that each party may have, and to be mindful of the language being used when interacting between partners and families. Parents of either interethnic or monoethnic marriages should also instill the value of unity, equality, tolerance, teamwork, and respect for each other in their own family. With this, the children would be able to harmoniously interact with children from other ethnic groups and thus disregard the stereotypical preconceptions that any particular ethnic groups may have.

It is unavoidable for interethnic spouses and their children to face great challenges especially in a culture-rich society such as that which is present in Malaysia, where problems may come in many different aspects such as apprehension from families, cultural conflicts, language barriers and prejudices from society. Some couples are fortunate to have non-judgmental and accepting families who support their decision while some are not. These are the common scenarios in interethnic marriage. As described by the respondents.

Nevertheless, most people still accept and appreciate the beauty of interethnic marriage. This is good news and shows that the mindset of people is gradually improving and that people are becoming more open minded. This shows that Malaysia is slowly getting closer and closer to achieving Unity in Diversity.

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Kertas 8:
**PUNCA DAN CARA PENYELESAIAN ISU SENSITIVITI KAUM DAN AGAMA DI MALAYSIA DENGAN
MENGAMBILKIRA PANDANGAN BELIA**

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Ashyer Andderia, Nur Azuki Yusuff*

Abstrak

Kertas ini berusaha mengetengahkan punca dan cara penyelesaian kepada isu sensitiviti antara kaum dan agama di Malaysia. Tidak dapat disangkal bahawa wujudnya sensitiviti antara agama dan kaum yang semakin membara hari demi hari. Rakyat Malaysia yang mempunyai kepelbagaian diversiti dari segi agama Islam, Hindhu, Buddha dan Kristian sepatutnya hidup tanpa perselisihan dan kesalahfahaman untuk membentuk masyarakat harmoni. Punca konflik perpaduan antara agama dan kaum menjadi kemuncak apabila isu perbezaan kepercayaan, pegangan agama dan perkauman disentuh. Terdapat banyak pengaruh yang menyebabkan isu ini sehingga tiada penyelesaian. Melalui tugas ini, punca-punca yang mendorong kepada timbulan isu-isu perpaduan seperti pengaruh politik, perbezaan dalam budaya dan kesalahfahaman agama, serta pengaruh media sosial dikaji. Pengendalian isu ini haruslah dilaksanakan oleh pihak berkuasa supaya keamanan dikekalkan untuk jangka masa yang panjang dan tidak tergoyah. Dari segi teori, sudut fungsionalisme boleh menghubungkan agama dan mengutuhkannya perpaduan. Menerusi kajian ini, antara cara terbaik untuk mengatasi isu ini adalah mengubah punca utama isu perpaduan kepada tenaga utama dalam menyelesaikan perkara tersebut. Dari pihak pemerintah sehingga ke tahap orang biasa, setiap individu harus bertolak ansur untuk menerima dan menghormati setiap perbezaan yang terdapat di Malaysia.

Kata kunci: *punca perkauman, sensitiviti kaum dan agama, belia*

Latar Belakang dan Permasalahan

Malaysia merupakan sebuah negara yang unik dengan kepelbagaian etnik yang mengamalkan agama dan budaya yang berlainan. Menurut definisi bahasa, agama merupakan hubungan dan kepercayaan yang wujud antara manusia dan kuasa alam ghaib dan rohani. Manakala, Sarjana klasik dan ahli antropologi yang tersohor, E.B. Tylor (1903) mentakrifkan agama sebagai kepercayaan kepada makhluk halus. Justeru itu, agama secara keseluruhan boleh dilihat dari segi sudut fungsionalisme. Teori fungsionalisme melihat agama dari segi fungsi dan apakah tujuan kewujudan agama tersebut.

Perpaduan boleh diertikan sebagai proses menyatupadukan rakyat dibawa ideologi negara supaya dapat membentuk identiti dan nilai yang mempunyai satu perasaan kebangsaan yang sama. Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengetahui punca utama dan cara penyelesaian isu perpaduan antara kaum dan agama. Pada masa sekarang, isu perpaduan dalam kalangan masyarakat pelbagai kaum di Malaysia merupakan topik hangat yang didebatkan kerana ia membawa kepada api permusuhan. Walaupun kebebasan beragama ditekankan dalam Perlembagaan Negara, isu perpaduan masih dikatakan seperti iklim tetap yang sentiasa ada di Malaysia sejak ambang kemerdekaan. Turut menyebabkan perbalahan antara komuniti adalah pemikiran rakyat iaitu takut didominasi oleh kaum lain dan menjadi sensitif apabila kepercayaan agama mereka disentuh.

Persoalannya, apakah antara insiden yang merempuhkan perpaduan antara kaum dan agama dan menyebabkan konflik di Malaysia sekarang? Adakah perlunya agama dan kaum seseorang menjadi pengukur kepada tuan rumah mahupun majikan untuk memilih calon mereka? Penindasan yang berdasarkan kriteria agama, warna kulit dan penguasaan bahasa asing dianggap isu yang tidak relevan antara masyarakat dan ia diungkitkan di media sosial. Perkara seperti pemilihan calon pekerjaan mengikut warna kulit dan kefasihan dalam bahasa Mandarin menyebabkan wujudnya persengketaan antara agama dan etnik. Bahasa rasmi negara iaitu Bahasa Melayu, apakah hubungkaitnya dengan syarat penguasaan bahasa lain sebegini, sedangkan perkerjaan itu sebenarnya boleh dilakukan tanpa penguasaan bahasa asing? Selain itu, antara isu yang terkait adalah robohan tempat beribadat. Pertempuran dari segi kepercayaan ini

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Kalangan Belia
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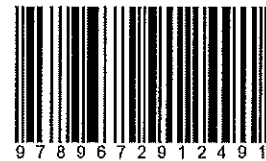
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