



Research article

Social acceptance and adjustment of spouses in multicultural families to reduce violent behavioral conflicts in the Mueang district, Yala province

Sojirat Supanichwatana^{*}, Kasetchai Laeheim*Human and Social Development, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand*

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ABSTRACT

Currently, there is an increasing number of intercultural marriages in Thailand. Many Thai citizens, especially in various regions, tend to marry foreigners. In the southern region, particularly in the three southern border provinces, intercultural marriages mostly occur between Thai Muslim women and Thai Buddhist men. In these cases, the men usually convert to their wives' religion, Islam, which can lead to significant differences in beliefs and practices between the spouses. These differences often result in conflicts within the family and ultimately contribute to domestic violence issues. This situation has serious repercussions for both adults and children involved. This qualitative research examined the acceptance and adjustment of spouses in multicultural families to reduce violent behavioral conflicts in Muang District, Yala Province, Thailand. This study was the first research conducted in the region. To this end, data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and both participant and non-participant observations. Interview questions and group discussion topics were determined according to research objectives. Further, study samples were collected from multicultural Buddhist-Islamic families using the purposive sampling method. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze data. Results revealed that individuals' intolerance of each other's beliefs and attitudes was the major cause of violence in multicultural families. The values, beliefs, concepts, and attitudes of married couples are shaped by their primary and secondary socialization based on their cultural foundations. Therefore, spouses in multicultural families accept and adjust themselves holistically to reduce violent behavioral conflicts in their family life. Their acceptance includes: (1) physical acceptance and adjustment; (2) mental acceptance and adjustment; (3) social acceptance and adjustment; and (4) spiritual acceptance and adjustment. The findings have implications for intercultural marriages.

1. Introduction

Multicultural marriages have existed since ancient times in various civilizations. Most cross-cultural marriages were conducted in early times to establish interrelationships among tribes [1,2]. However, in contemporary times, differences or otherness are more accepted than in the past. In today's world, there is no communication boundary because of differences in the paradigm of thinking. Moreover, new technologies have enabled communication. Besides, nowadays, people tend to choose partners based on their

^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Sojiratsu@gmail.com (S. Supanichwatana).

preferences. Consequently, multicultural marriages have become widespread, leading to acculturation. In Thailand, cross-cultural marriages commonly occur among different ethnic groups. This change occurred when the Thais became open to accepting globalization culture and, as a result, cross-culture marriages. An increase in multicultural families has taken part rapidly. However, the exact number of such families cannot be traced accurately. This is because married couples' living conditions differ, as some couples register their marriages, whereas others do not [3]. Tseng [4] states that individual religious beliefs and values influence the nature of marriages between men and women from different cultural backgrounds. The differences in people's beliefs, identities, and attitudes toward each other are crucial factors that affect their selection of partners and decision to get married. Further, Kalmijin [5] argues that the presence of people of different races and religions increases the connection and intimacy within society. Despite differences in ethnicity, race, and religion, everyone has equal social importance.

Geographically, Yala is one of the four provinces in Southern Thailand, located close to the states of Perak and Kedah in Malaysia. Most of the population is Muslim (78.24%), followed by Buddhists (20.48%) and people of other religions (1.28%) [6]. The provincial Statistical Office, Yala [7], surveyed migrants aged 15 years and over and classified them by marital status, sex, region, province, and administrative region. The survey found that Yala had 514 single migrants in 2017. Among them, 108 were women aged 25–29 years. Further, out of the total number of migrants, 406 were married men, divided based on age into two categories, 361 and 44 individuals aged 20–24 and 55–59 years, respectively. Hence, most migrants living in Yala were married men between the ages of 20 and 24 years (341 people). Unlike male migrants, most of whom were married at the time of migration, female migrants were mostly single. Statistics revealed that all the migrants entering the area were married men aged 20–24 years. This is consistent with the responses obtained for the interviews conducted in the pilot survey area. It was found that more interfaith marriages took place both officially and unofficially compared to 2017. The beliefs of such interfaith couples regarding the dimensions of culture, society, and environment affected the conceptual system of violent behavioral conflicts within families (interviews conducted; March 2018–February 2021). The conflict and violence occurring in cross-cultural interfaith marriages were evidenced in the municipality called Budi, Mueng District, Yala. The general physical characteristics of this small community can be described as a semi-village and small town. It comprises 150 families, and the Budi municipality is approximately 18 km from Mueang district, Yala province. The nearest Malaysian border from Budi is Kelantan State. Norms of behavior and ways of living encompass assimilation or integration of the Northern Malay culture and local Southern Thai Culture. The multicultural couples and families facing domestic violence were detected, and the question of how to educate, release, and solve domestic conflicts was raised.

Domestic violence appears in many forms, such as chronic arguing and yelling, controlling behaviors, intimidation, or suicide [8]. It can happen anywhere, and the result has a long-term impact on adult victims as well as children who witness violence. Investigating drug addicts and domestic violence, Nanjundaswamy et al. found that wives of alcohol-dependent patients had high levels of perceived stress. Avoidance, discord, fearful withdrawal, and sexual withdrawal were the most common coping mechanisms identified. Domestic violence was experienced by 90% of women, mostly intellectual (69%), followed by emotional (59%), social (58%), physical (47%), economic (42%), and sexual violence (27%). Domestic violence was found to increase stress and influence the coping styles of these women [9]. In addition, Razaghi et al. investigated the circumstances and features of domestic violence against women in Mashhad, Islamic Republic of Iran, and revealed that inevitable adjustment was the main strategy of women to deal with it [10]. Kasetchai Laeheem [11] investigated the factors affecting domestic violence risk behaviors among Thai Muslim married couples in Satun province and revealed that 34.3 percent of Thai Muslim married couples had domestic violence risk behavior with statistical significance consisting of five variables, namely alcoholic husbands, jealous wives, suspicious wives, not being ready to have one's own family and a lack of time for discussion. Furthermore, the growing body of literature has revealed the impact of domestic violence on child psychology, especially for those who have been exposed to violence since childhood. They are more likely to experience violence than their peers. A wide range of difficulties, such as anger, fear, oppositional behavior, low self-esteem, and withdrawal, including poor social relationships, were identified. The evidence of the highest rates of pro-violence studies related to attitude found rigid stereotypical gender beliefs involving male privilege, animal abuse, bullying, assault, and property destruction [8]. Paul [12] also found strong evidence regarding this issue. This author examined how a child's exposure to intimate partner violence in early or late childhood could impact their social and emotional development and adjustment, leading to traumatic and family consequences. Results indicated that children exposed to intimate partner violence at an early age were highly likely to exhibit symptoms of anxiety and depression [12].

Domestic violence affects adults and children alike in terms of physical and psychological trauma, as stated above. In cross-cultural marriages, the spouses must adjust their religious views and lifestyles to overcome the pressure and anxiety of differences. The suffering conditions affecting the lives of people not only lead to anxiety but also enable individuals to contribute something to themselves and society [13]. To conform to social norms and be socially acceptable, spouses must learn and understand each other's differences in diverse ways [14].

There are many studies, both qualitative and quantitative, on the topic of domestic violence conducted in Thailand. These studies examined the types of domestic violence [15–19], causes of domestic violence [16,20–24], and effects of domestic violence [16,20,23,25–27]. There was one experimental research that used an intervention called "Muslim happy family activities" to reduce domestic violence [28]. However, the research mostly focused on Thai Muslim couples. Since intermarriage between Thai Muslims and Thai Buddhists is increasing in the deep south of Thailand, such as Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat, research examining domestic violence in interfaith marriage is limited. Few scholars have shown interest in investigating interreligious, interethnic, and intercultural coexistence [29]. It is necessary to explore the domestic violence of interfaith couples and how they adapt and adjust themselves to reduce conflicts leading to domestic violence. Therefore, this study examined the social acceptance and adaptation of multicultural spouses to reduce behavioral violence to create a sense of awareness in each society and pave the ground for more research dealing with all forms of violence. The cultural, social, physical, and environmental dimensions that affect the conceptual system of those engaging in violent

behavioral conflicts need to be investigated in-depth, looking through the holistic dimensions for possible acceptance and adaptation. The research findings from this study have contributed to the advanced knowledge regarding domestic violence in multicultural families. The results of the study are beneficial for various sectors, such as family, psychologists, social workers, and Islamic religious leaders, who help address domestic violence issues. These findings provide guidelines for solving problems and reducing domestic violence in families, especially in intercultural marriages between Thai Buddhists and Thai Muslims in Yala province. Additionally, these results could apply to other provinces in the southern border region and other regions where intercultural marriages between Buddhists and Muslims occur. Furthermore, this research may also be relevant to other intercultural marriages beyond Buddhism and Islam, where domestic violence issues persist.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social adaptation and adjustment

Adjustment is an individual's attitude, behavior, or both based on a recognized need or desire to change, particularly to account for the current environment or atypical or unexpected conditions. A well-adjusted person satisfies needs in a healthy, beneficial manner and demonstrates appropriate social and psychological responses to situations and demands. Social adaptation refers to adjustments to society's demands, restrictions, and more, including the ability to live and work harmoniously with others and engage in satisfying social interactions and relationships [30].

2.2. Berry's theory of acculturation

Acculturation refers to the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds come into contact and interact with each other [16]. One of the most widely used acculturation theories is Berry's acculturation model. Berry proposed four possible adaptation strategies across the two dimensions: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Assimilation involves the adoption of the dominant culture and the rejection of one's own culture. Integration refers to maintaining one's own culture while also adopting aspects of the dominant culture. Separation involves rejecting the dominant culture and maintaining one's own culture. Marginalization refers to rejecting both the dominant culture and one's own culture, leading to a sense of alienation [31].

Demographic factors such as age, gender, and education can influence the acculturation process. Male Iranian refugees in Sweden and Sudanese refugees in Australia appeared to engage in separation, e.g., resisting the new culture and maintaining their traditional authoritarian roles, whereas women tended to adopt new values [32,33]. Also, certain challenges appeared to be specific to women. For instance, for women from societies with traditional gender hierarchies, a dislocation from social support, such as group and family support, was often related to high social and individual costs [34]. In addition, liberties provided to women in host cultures might cause marital stress [33]. These female-specific challenges, as well as the distress related to the acculturation process [35,36], can lead to depressive symptoms [8,9].

2.3. Research objectives

This study aimed to examine the acceptance and adaptation of multicultural spouses to reduce violent behavioral conflicts in the Mueang District.

2.4. Research question

How can multicultural spouses adapt their behavior to reduce domestic violence?

3. Material and methods

3.1. Instruments

Instruments used in this study were research planning, two types of semi-structured questionnaires for one-to-one and focus group interviews, tape-recording, and cameras.

3.2. Key informants

The target group was selected from multicultural families focused on those who had experienced domestic violence. Twenty-one people were asked in person to participate in the study. Nine people refused to participate in the study because they were not comfortable with sharing their experiences. In total, 12 people voluntarily participated in this research project. The participants included Thai Buddhist men married to Sunni Muslim Thai women who subsequently converted to Islam. The other group comprised seven Sunni Muslim Thai women married to Thai Buddhist men who converted and became Muslims (see Table 1). The sampling age group was between 23 and 44 years old. The purposive sampling, based on theoretical and crisis sampling combined with research objectives, was used for sample findings, selection, and investigation. We conducted a preliminary field survey, pilot study, community

interviews, and national observation to get key informants with appropriate qualifications that reflect the phenomenon covering the study area. Participant observation found that domestic violence often occurred in multicultural families with Buddhist men who did not reside in the south but migrated to work in the three southern border provinces (Pattani, Yala, and Narathivas) and married local Muslim women. The men converted to Islam because of the women.

3.3. Procedure

The present study contains some sensitive issues. Thus, the study's objective was explained, and both key informants and the investigator signed an informed consent form. The data collection methods in this research consisted of individual face-to-face, one-to-one semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and direct and indirect observation. The main investigator observed the community environment and key informants. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted at different times and places, such as at home, work, and coffee shops. However, some key informants were stressed during the interviews, and the interviewer tried to accommodate them by providing a good meal and discussing another issue instead of asking questions related to the research topic. After the in-depth interviews ended, the main researcher conducted two focus groups again: Group 1 consisted of the main informants, Muslim women married to Thai Buddhist men. They changed their religion to align themselves with the women's religion. There were seven people in total. Group 2 consisted of Thai Buddhist men who married Muslim women, and five men who had converted to Islam. The main researcher functioned as a moderator in both groups differentiated by gender. Data from the interviews and focus groups were tape-recorded and transcribed by the main researcher. We analyzed the data using the thematic analysis method according to Braun and Clark's concept [37]. Triangulation techniques were used, including data and methodological triangulations implemented to evaluate the validity and reliability of the data [38].

3.4. Data analysis

The main researcher conducted data analysis. The process was as follows.

Phase 1. Familiarization with the data. The first step involved transcribing data, reading and re-reading the transcripts, and noting initial ideas.

Phase 2. Generating initial codes. The second step involved the production of initial codes from data. Interesting feature data were manually and systematically coded across the entire data set.

Phase 3. Searching for themes. The third step involved sorting the different codes into potential themes and collating all relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes.

Phase 4. Reviewing themes. The fourth step involved two levels of reviewing and refining themes. Level one involved reviewing at the level of coded data extracts. Level two involved a similar process but with the entire data set. At the end of this phase, a thematic map of the analysis was developed.

Phase 5. Defining and naming themes. The fifth step involved ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, and generate clear definitions and names for each theme.

Table 1
Information of the key informants.

Alias	Gender	Previous Religion	Current Religion	Place	Methodology
T1	Female	Islam	Islam	Home, work, coffee shop	In-depth interviews, group discussions, & observations
T2	Male	Buddhism	Islam	Work	In-depth interviews
T3	Male	Buddhism	Islam at wife's home/Buddhism at hometown	Work, coffee shop	In-depth interviews, group discussions, & observations
T4	Male	Buddhism	Islam	Home	In-depth interviews
T5	Male	Buddhism	Islam	Home, coffee shop	In-depth interviews, group discussions, & observations
T6	Female	Islam	Islam	Work, coffee shop	In-depth interviews, group discussions, & observations
T7	Male	Buddhism	Islam	Coffee shop	In-depth interviews
T8	Male	Buddhism	Islam	Work, coffee shop	In-depth interviews, group discussions, & observations
T9	Female	Islam	Islam	Home, coffee shop	In-depth interviews, group discussions, & observations
T10	Female	Islam	Islam	Work, coffee shop	In-depth interviews, group discussions, & observations
T11	Female	Islam	Islam	Work, coffee shop	In-depth interviews, group discussions, & observations
T12	Female	Islam	Islam	Home	In-depth interviews & observations

Phase 6. Producing the report. The final step involved the selection of vivid and compelling extract examples, the final analysis of selected extracts, relating the analysis to the research question and literature, and producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

4. Results and discussion

The differences in and intolerance shown toward each other's beliefs and attitudes are the major causes of violence in multicultural families. In married life, couples must respect each other's beliefs, concepts, and attitudes and establish their values through primary and secondary socialization based on different cultural fundamentals. Consider the case of T1 (January 2021). She was born and raised in a Thai Muslim society and married to a man born and raised in a Thai Buddhist society. Following marriage, the husband of T1 adjusted himself to his situation. For example, he stopped eating pork and reduced his alcohol consumption; however, he did not follow Islamic practices even after converting to Islam. The main reason was the difference in beliefs.

Similarly, T2 (February 2021) was born and raised in a Thai Buddhist culture, domiciled in the north of Thailand, and later converted to Islam to marry a Muslim woman living in the area. T2 stated that he could not completely comprehend the principles of his new religion and expressed his lack of interest in studying them. Moreover, he felt that he could live a normal life following cause-effect rather than religious principles; further, he found religious principles to be irrational and a cause of conflict between him and his wife, who believed in Islam. Consequently, these differences of opinion led to frequent quarrels in the family.

T2's case corresponds to the case of T3 (October 2020), who could adjust his behavior to a certain extent to live with his wife without conflicts but could not accept all the concepts of Islam because they contradicted what he had believed since birth. To marry his wife, he converted to Islam without informing his parents or family and continued to behave as a Buddhist on returning to his hometown. Once, he spoke to his wife about having her convert to Buddhism. It resulted in some serious arguments and even caused physical harm, and he was banned from seeing his wife's family for several months. The couple mention this conflict in all their arguments, and the intensity of their quarrels keep increasing each day.

Therefore, the differences in spouses' attitudes and beliefs are a major cause of violence in multicultural families. Both primary and secondary socialization enables an individual to internalize a society's ideologies, traditions, cultures, and norms. Interaction between individuals from two cultures may lead to disagreements and conflicts. Finally, the main researcher identified twenty-six initial codes during the first phase of thematic analysis. The results revealed four key themes: physical acceptance and adjustment, psychological acceptance and adjustment, social acceptance, and spiritual acceptance and adjustment.

4.1. Physical acceptance and adaptation

The first theme was physical acceptance and adaptation. Physical acceptance and adaptation represent crucial aspects of multicultural marriage and a way of life according to Islamic principles. These principles permeate every aspect of a Muslim's life from birth to death. Learning about the different ways of living gives rise to acceptance and resistance. Therefore, it takes time for individuals to change their behaviors to achieve physical adaptation, as explained here:

One aspect of cross-cultural married couples' physical acceptance and adaptation was the refusal to eat pork, which is haram. Islamic rules strictly prohibit the consumption of certain foods, and because families regularly spend mealtimes together, this prohibition is a particularly important topic of contention in cross-cultural families. Therefore, dietary adjustment is an important consideration for those in cross-cultural marriages. Although they refrained from eating pork, interfaith couples were found to have only limited knowledge of haram food (food that is forbidden according to Islamic principles). They believed that only the consumption of pork was forbidden according to Islamic principles, as clarified by the following interview:

"... I stopped eating pork, but I do not strictly follow this rule. I can still eat out at any restaurant, but I'd rather choose some other kind of meat instead of pork. As for the meat to eat, I don't know how it's butchered. My only concern is not to have pork on the dining table at home ..."

(T4, interviewed on March 10, 2018)

"... I don't choose anything in particular. I can eat whatever my wife prepares. When returning to work, I normally eat raw blooded beef, spicy salad, and fermented fish. As an Isan man, these are the foods I cannot live without. When at work, it will not be able to choose what to eat or not to eat. We have to eat whatever is available."

(T5, interviewed on March 24, 2018)

"... Most of the time, when we don't have meals with my wife,

we eat normally, which means we can eat anything like pork, beef, fish, eggs, wild food. We don't think we have to eat like them. We can eat the way we like. When eating together in the house, it depends on my wife. While our children were growing up, we were asked not to eat in front of them because my wife would have a hard time explaining to our children why the father could eat what he likes ..."

(Group discussion, August 15, 2019)

Based on the study's findings, it can be explained from the perspective of Berry's acculturation model [16] that in the context of food prohibitions, Thai Buddhist men who marry Muslim women often convert to Islam. Consequently, they adapt through integration, refraining from consuming pork when they are with their families. However, when the husband is away from home or eating out without his wife, he continues to eat pork or other foods that he likes and is familiar with. This pattern aligns with Collet's study [39] on marital adjustment among interfaith couples in France, where similar instances of integration adjustment were observed.

In contrast, Muslims who marry Mu'allaf (non-religious people who convert to Islam) do not follow certain practices, as mentioned here:

"... I don't really cover my head (hijab) all the time. I cover my head only when I go back to my hometown to prevent neighbors from gossiping. I dress normally when I come back to my family ..."

(Group discussion, November 4, 2019)

"... it was very stressful when I tried to adjust in the beginning because we were taught to behave according to Islamic principles. One's family or people in the neighborhood will always be watching. But when I moved in with my girlfriend, I started to get over it. I was able to adjust and did not adhere to rules as strictly as before. I sometimes do my prayers, and, some other times, I don't. The veil is worn only during special events. As for food, I can't eat pork because I have never eaten it ..."

(T6, group discussion, November 4, 2019)

Another issue associated with physical acceptance and adaptation discussed by interviewees was circumcision (the surgical removal of the foreskin of the penis). Interviews and

group discussions revealed that several male respondents did not convert to Islam according to their wives' wishes due to their fear of circumcision, despite it being performed in a hygienic hospital setting and involving the application of anesthesia and wound care according to the principles of modern medicine. A man who wanted to marry a woman who strictly adhered to Islamic principles took a long time to think, as mentioned here:

"... I don't want to do it. I'm afraid of getting hurt. Doing it as an adult can be more painful than doing it as a child. I have seen a grownup man, and I'm terrified. They can't get up for weeks ..."

(T7, interviewed on April 11, 2018)

"... There is an important reason that I haven't decided yet. I don't know what to do when I get it done, and it seems terrifying. Besides, I don't think it matters whether I do it or not."

(Group discussion, August 15, 2019)

“... I had been thinking for a year whether I would do it or not. My girlfriend also explained that it had to be done if we were going to marry. It must be correct, according to her religion. I sympathized with my girlfriend, who was being criticized by her family, so I went to the hospital for a circumcision. I slept in pain for weeks ...”

(T8, interviewed on April 12, 2018)

Therefore, the physical acceptance and adaptation issues faced by Buddhist–Muslim married couples are religious restrictions on food and apparel and the Islamic practice of circumcision of men. In cross-cultural marriages, individuals leading completely different lives must adjust to and develop an understanding of each other. Even though they may ignore or neglect some sensitive issues associated with Islamic practices, couples take time to adjust to live happy and peaceful family lives. Cultural differences are a part of the everyday life of cross-cultural families. To resolve their differences, spouses learn and accept their partners’ views and beliefs and adapt to their surroundings by agreeing on what should and should not be done [40].

4.2. Psychological acceptance and adjustment

In terms of acceptance and psychological adjustment, interfaith married couples experience stress when they are required to follow religious practices both before and after marriage, as mentioned here:

“... I know that living together before marriage is wrong; it’s a sin. We love each other and want to be together. It’s very stressful. A part of me felt guilty, but at the same time, we didn’t want to break up. So, we have been talking and adapting to each other. To solve some issues, we have to meet each other halfway ...”

(T9, interviewed on March 31, 2018)

“... some of her issues are unacceptable. I think they are unreasonable (not mentioned here). Both she and I are educated; therefore, we should be open to some certain truths ...”

(T7, interviewed on April 11, 2018)

“... At first, I couldn’t accept how my husband didn’t follow our religious principles because that would make us sinners. Literally, I was stressed, while he wasn’t because he thought it wasn’t wrong not to do so. After a while, I tried to accept our differences. I started to learn how he lives; consequently, I started to understand him a bit more. We have become more relaxed, are trying to maintain good behavior, and are teaching our children in a good way. That’s what we can do for now ...”

(T6, group discussion, November 6, 2019)

Studies have shown that couples are increasingly aware of cultural differences, which leads them to make efforts to adjust and reduce stress. This awareness of intercultural differences aligns with research conducted by Ruebelt et al. [41] on the adjustment in marriages between Iranian-American women and European-American men. Research revealed that couples had to navigate their different cultural practices and adapt to their spouse’s life, whether through acclimatizing to their practices or understanding their preferences. Further, being aware of differences was identified as the first step, followed by being sensitive and accommodating to their differences. Most couples demonstrated a heightened level of awareness towards particular aspects of cultural differences, especially concerning family life.

Therefore, psychological acceptance and adjustment are important considerations for those who believe in their religions' definitions of sin. Furthermore, the love among couples in cross-cultural marriages is the main factor that creates stress and tension within the family. This causes couples to compromise with each other. Conversations and discussions between spouses affect the mental adjustment of both parties. Human beings desire a life partner for various reasons. Sometimes, individuals may develop a crush on each other and later fall in love, or they may find a partner who meets all their expectations and decide to get married [42]. Cross-cultural marriages require individuals to have an in-depth understanding of various aspects, including lifestyle, beliefs, and religion, of their partner. In such marriages, spouses must be willing to open up to and accept each other's differences, which will help them understand their partner's actions and thoughts. In the early stages of marriage, spouses may experience personal or social difficulties and pressure while adapting themselves to cultural differences. Spouses must make psychological adjustments to reduce stress, social pressure, and distractions. Having psychological conditions that reduce stress and pressure in everyday life helps couples adapt to their situation and understand each other better. Spouses with the right mindset often attempt to create something of value for themselves and society [13].

4.3. Social acceptance and adaptation

While entering the social surroundings of a different culture, spouses must adjust their lifestyles. Acceptance by the families of both spouses facilitates smooth social adaptation. Without family support, the spouses will find it extremely difficult to achieve social adjustment on their own, as mentioned here:

"... When Raya, my husband, joined my family and took our kids and my parents traveling ... He also joined my family in other festive occasions ..."

(T10, group discussion, November 6, 2019)

"... I have tried to teach my husband what to do and not to do and let him gradually learn about my family so that he can get along with my family; that is also a blessing for the family ..."

(T11, group discussion, November 4, 2019)

"... My husband doesn't like going to my family because he feels uncomfortable. He was often satirized by our relatives; so he chooses to go only when necessary. This was totally different when we visited my husband's family. I was given a warm welcome. They took me out and kept asking what I wanted to eat, or if I had any concerns. During the school break, I took my children to live with my mother-in-law and stepbrother. Our children were happy. They could speak Thai, English, Malayu, and Isaan. When we were coming back, I sometimes didn't understand what they were saying (laugh) ..."

(T6, group discussion, November 6, 2019)

"... My in-laws kept scolding me every time they saw me, from morning to evening. It was repeatedly about how I had ruined their daughter's life. Even though I have changed my religion and done everything to be accepted, I'm still being scolded by them. When I came home with my wife, we had a fight, and I insulted her parents. I knew I was wrong. Lately, I have been trying to improve my behavior ..."

(T8, interviewed on April 12, 2018)

Therefore, couples with different social surroundings, cultures, traditions, and religions must adjust their lifestyles to achieve social acceptance and adaptation. Spouses must understand their differences. In addition, acceptance by the families of both spouses is a key factor that influences their family life. Family involvement is a crucial aspect of social adaptation. A person who enjoys a good relationship with family members and has the opportunity to interact with outsiders tends to have good social adaptability [43]. Earlier, in Thai society, cross-cultural marriages involved political, economic, and social issues for women. Further, women tended to live abroad with their husbands. However, today, women's rights are widely recognized in Thailand. Hence, women can decide how they want to live and specify their expectations of their foreign husbands based on the conditions that best suit their family [44]. In general, Thai society follows good cultural practices [45].

4.4. *Spiritual acceptance and adjustment*

Accepting and changing one's beliefs and behavior, especially attitudes, religion, values, and living, can be challenging. Cross-cultural marriages are complex relationships involving various forms of prejudice. Ethical values such as respect, tolerance, and compassion must exist in the hearts and minds of spouses on a spiritual level. Spirituality, an abstract concept, encompasses beliefs instilled in individuals since birth through family socialization and religious activities. Differences in character and shaping one's identity are factors affecting multicultural marriages, often hindering harmonious living. The capacity for acceptance and adjustment varies among individuals in pluralistic societies. Multicultural couples should not solely seek love and companionship but also learn to compromise in many aspects of life before starting a family. The current study identified three main issues causing conflicts in multicultural families: religion, conduct, and cultural differences. The first issue concerns religion. Data from interviews and focus group discussions revealed that Thai Buddhist men found it difficult to embrace Islam. Discrepancies in religious beliefs led to strained feelings, preventing wholehearted adherence to Islamic precepts or participation in village mosque congregations. Husbands' attitudes and religious conduct created conflicts and posed a risk of domestic violence. Some husbands deemed Islamic principles irrational and refused to learn them. A key informant attempted to convert his wife to Buddhism, leaving her terrified. Their responses highlighted the challenges of blending different religious beliefs within a marriage. The following response was interesting:

"... I converted to Islam because I had to marry and change my religion. To change the belief does not make sense to me. When returning home, I am still a Buddhist. Coming back to Yala, I am a Muslim. I do not go to the mosque. I stay at home and do my own things ..."

(T8, interview April 12, 2018).

A similar answer was given by T4 as follows:

"... Religion is something difficult to talk about. In Yala, I have to blend in with the family, but I also have my own family to take care of. When my relatives passed away. I attended the funeral and was ordained a monk. I can't abandon them because they are my family ..."

(T4, interviewed April 14, 2018).

In contrast, the spiritual transformation happened to a male Muslim convert, explained as follows:

"... I am studying the principles of Islam continuously, learning to adapt to its doctrine. It's new to me, and I have never known anything like this. From my point of view, it is good that religion sets the principles for practice, telling what to do and how to do it. It helps us in terms of having more guidance in our lives ..."

(T5, interviewed May 12, 2018).

Buddhism, rooted in atheism, self-cultivation, choice, responsibility, karma, natural law, rebirth, causation, and monogamy, requires rigorous self-study. It is a self-reliant religion where justice governs life based on one's actions. Islam, with its theistic core, emphasizes submission to God, humble living, and predestination. Islam also permits polygamy under certain conditions, which is a practice absent in Buddhism. Integration of religious beliefs among converted husbands varied, affecting spiritual conduct, and leading to emotional discord and misunderstanding. Sunni Islam is the dominant sect in the study area. The norms of practice are relatively lenient compared to Shia Muslims in the Middle East, India, or elsewhere. The integration of religious beliefs among converted husbands varies based on a person's spiritual level, reflected in their conduct. Emotional annoyance and miscommunication between the couple could also lead to quarrels or divorce.

The second issue involves daily conduct, including dietary restrictions, alcohol consumption, and multilingualism within the family, which may lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding, and affect relationships with neighbors and extended family. Spouses in multicultural environments should prepare for these sensitive issues. Coping with such obstacles requires patience and tolerance, which are crucial skills in maintaining these relationships. The third problem concerns cultural differences, including language variations (local Malay dialect, northeastern Thai, and central Thai), family norms, and ethnic practices. Cultural diversity, blending Malay and southern Thai cultures, requires adaptation, particularly for northern Thai male migrants marrying into different ethnic groups.

Thus, adjusting and adapting to multicultural marriages involves managing multiple factors. Success in healthy cross-cultural family living is achievable if all parties work together and embrace understanding and acceptance.

4.5. Limitations of the study

The study encountered difficulty finding key informants willing to participate in this project, resulting in fewer target groups than expected. The two interviewing groups, consisting of men and women, were not equal in size due to the method of selection based on willingness. Additionally, participants were unwilling to divulge their experiences with domestic violence in detail due to strict religious beliefs and the conservative mindset of Muslim women. Lastly, the research findings may not apply to other cross-cultural marriage relationships.

5. Implications of the study for Behavioral Sciences

The results of this study can assist individuals and agencies involved in formulating policies and strategies to encourage and support cross-cultural spouses to adapt to the social context. Thus, spouses should be provided with training to help them understand and live in different cultures, particularly Islamic culture, so that they can live peacefully with their partners.

6. Conclusions

Domestic violence is a complex phenomenon. It affects adults and children alike in terms of physical and psychological trauma. Ironically, it is still acceptable in many societies. Overall, the societal acceptance of domestic violence was higher in South Asia, with nearly half the population (47 percent) justifying it, and in Sub-Saharan Africa (38 percent), compared with Latin America and the Caribbean (12 percent), Europe and Central Asia (29 percent). In 36 of the 49 countries, mainly in South East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, women were more likely to justify the behavior than men. Country-level factors, especially the political environment, played an important role in the acceptance of domestic violence. For example, this attitude of acceptance was more prevalent in countries that have experienced frequent and severe political conflict within the past five years [46].

This study was the first study conducted in Mueang District, Yala Province, Thailand. This research aimed to examine the acceptance and adaptation of multicultural spouses to reduce violent behavioral conflicts in their family life. Results revealed that individuals' intolerance of each other's beliefs and attitudes was the major cause of violence in multicultural families. The values, beliefs, concepts, and attitudes of married couples are shaped by their primary and secondary socialization based on their cultural foundations. In addition, four important themes of adaptation and adjustment were found: physical acceptance and adaptation, psychological acceptance and adjustment, social acceptance and adaptation, and spiritual acceptance and adaptation. A holistic perspective helps us conclude that in order to achieve social acceptance and adaptation, spouses in multicultural families must change all aspects of their lives and adapt to cultural differences. It is difficult for spouses from different cultures to live together because they frequently experience circumstances that widen the gap between their religions and cultures. The cross-cultural spouses interviewed in this study lived at the borderline of different cultures and could be called in-between or controversial hybrids (products of hybridization/creolization) [47]. However, the new significance of the finding suggests that people change their religion not out of faith but due to religious regulations. For instance, if someone wishes to marry a Muslim, they are required to convert to Islam before marriage, even if they do not actively practice the faith. Many who converted did not fully study the doctrines, leading to a lack of in-depth understanding. Consequently, they lack genuine faith and find it challenging to abandon their old religion after conversion. These findings have implications for intercultural marriage, such as Islamic-Buddhist cultural training programs to help both parties understand the differences. Field experiments research is recommended for future research to evaluate the effect of training programs and interventions.

Ethical consideration

The data collection process commenced after the research methodology passed the Human Research Ethics Committee, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand (Project code PSU IRB 2019–PSU–St 008). Aliases, instead of real names, were used to identify participants, in compliance with research ethics. All participants provided informed consent to participate in the study.

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Data availability statement

Data associated with my study have not been deposited into a publicly available repository because the study contains sensitive issues. Therefore, the data that have been used are confidential.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Sojirat Supanichwatana: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Kasetchai Laeheem:** Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Project

administration, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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