

# Muslim Youth's Way of Life in the Three Southern Border Provinces of Thailand

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the Muslim youth's way of life in the Three Southern Border Provinces of Thailand. Data were collected via forums for discussion among 15 youth leaders and 15 representatives of Islamic religious leaders. Logical context description is employed to analyze content by comparing theoretical concepts with other related studies. The results show that most of the Muslim youth make friendships in accordance with their ideology, finished their general education at the primary level, spend their leisure time with friends watching and playing sports, are not engaged in any occupation, wear clothing wrong social norm, have high-level relations with their family and other relatives at, engage in good deeds and participate in social activities; pray five times a day, and observe fasting during the month of Ramadhan.

## Keywords

Way of Life; Muslim Youth; Islamic Belief; Three Southern Border Provinces

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## Introduction

The way of life of Muslim youth at present is in the midst of a complex society and modern technologies, and so a gap between them and their parents has occurred. The parents have no time to raise and take care of their children. Muslim youth are easily influenced by the mass media and their friends and tend to like modern things and technologies and spend their spare time with them. (Baka & Laeheem, 2010; Mahama, 2009). There are many problems confronting Muslim youth, especially the issues opposed to Islamic principles, such as young Muslim women wearing the hijab but still showing their beauty. Some have boyfriends who are non-Muslim, some are drug addicts, some do not pray, and some cannot read al Quran. The problems of Muslim youth have increased and become more complex and therefore cannot be solved easily. Also the Muslim youth's faith is weak, as they are inclined to do forbidden things and commit sins against Islamic principles. They have no shame in public. They are also likely to conduct religious practices carelessly (Anmunajid, 2010; Khagphong, 2004). This paper aims to study the way of life of Thai Muslim youth in the three southern border provinces of Thailand. The researchers will attempt to learn whether their lives are opposed to Islamic principles or not and to offer suggestions for solving their problems.

## Methods

In this qualitative research, data were collected through forums of discussion among key informants from three southern border provinces: 15 youth leaders and 15 representatives of Islamic religious leaders. Data were initially classified according to the objectives. Logical context description and comparing theoretical concepts with relevant research were used to analyze the contents.

## Results

### 1.The Way of Life with Peers

Most youth make friendships in accordance with their gender, ideology, and kind. Most youth in urban and rural areas have their own principles for associating with friends. Most youth in urban areas have extra studies and duties, while in rural areas they play sports and other games. Their society wants them to be sincere and helpful and not associate with those who have done vice deeds and made themselves useless. Most youth associate with different genders in accordance with their habits, ideology, and daily conversations. Most urban and rural youth have their own way of thinking and do not differ in associating with friends, but do differ in their common activities. Most urban youth listen to music and roam around, but in rural areas they have daily conversations and play sports. The expectations of society want them to have specific discussions and benefit from learning and working and prohibit them from holding hands and flirting in public. Most respondents think that Muslim society expects its youth to make friendship according to the principles of their religion. Youth in the urban areas engage in similar activities and ideology, while youth in rural areas associate with friends who are relatives, but they can associate with others as well. Most respondents think that Muslim society wants youth to associate with different genders according to the religious teachings. Youth in the urban areas freely associate with different genders and commit deeds that contradict Islamic principles, while youth in rural areas associate with different genders in accordance with Islamic principles. (Annadwee, 2004; Arbu, 2006)

### 2.The Way of Life with Education

Most youth finished their general education at the primary level. Most urban youth and rural youth finished their studies at different levels. Most of urban youth finished their

studies with a Bachelor's degree and vocational education. The rural youth finished their studies at the primary and secondary level. Most youth completed their studies in Islamic studies at a middle level. So most urban and rural youth do not differ in the completion of their studies. Most youth are studying in general education for a Bachelor's degree. The urban and rural youth, however, are studying at different levels. Most urban youth are studying for a Bachelor's degree, while rural youth are studying for VEC/HVEC. Most youth are studying Islamic studies, but urban and rural youth study Islamic studies at different levels. The expectations of Muslim society are that they study at higher levels (Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate level) and not emphasize only a general education. Most respondents think that Muslim society expects the youth to study elementary education as well as religious matters. Youth in the urban areas prefer the general elementary education to a religious one. Youth in rural areas study both. (Baka & Laeheem, 2010; Bungatayong, 2009; Narongraksakhet, 1997)

### **3.The Way of Life with Leisure**

Most youth spend their leisure time with friends watching and playing sports. Urban and rural youth spend their leisure time differently. Most urban youth watch movies, listen to songs, and ride motorcycles, but in rural area they play sports, read books, and spend time with friends. Most youth smoke cigarettes, and some of them like night roaming, football gambling, and karaoke. Urban and rural youth are not different in engaging in temptation. Muslim society wants them to develop a place for worship, like a mosque, and not engage in any habit-forming drug use. All respondents think that Muslim society wants youth to spend their leisure time in useful ways and not in contradiction with the principles of Islam. Most respondents think that youth in the urban spend their leisure in not useful and uncreative ways, while youth in rural areas spend their leisure time in useful ways. All respondents think that Muslim society wants youth to stay far away from any temptation. Most respondents think that youth in the urban areas engage in vice deeds because of material development and modern technology, while youths in rural areas engage in vice deeds because of their attraction to cities. (Tahe & Laeheem, 2013; Kaypan, 2012).

### **4.The Way of Life with Occupation**

Most youth are not engaged in any occupation because they are still studying and do not know how to find an occupation, but some of them have an occupation, and most of them work in agriculture. The status of urban and rural youth do not differ in terms of occupation, as there are different occupations. For those who work, there are differences in occupation. Most urban youth engage in trade, government services, and labour markets, but rural youth engage in the agricultural sector or work independently. The Muslim society wants them to do work that does not contradict their religious instruction. Most respondents think that Muslim society wants youth to work, but not to contradict the principles of their religion. Youth in urban

areas do not work because they are learning, while youth in rural areas do work. (Baka & Laeheem, 2010; Baka, 2010).

### **5.The Way of Life with Clothing**

Most male youth wear a t-shirt with writing and short pants, while most of female youth wear a small veil and a tight skirt, or wear a small t-shirt and tight pants. Males in rural and urban areas have their own clothes. Most of the urban youth wear a short-sleeved t-shirt and in rural areas wear a Talok-belangor shirt (long sleeves with its hem up to the hips) and different pants. Most youth wear short pants and jeans, but in rural areas they wear long ordinary pants and warm pants. Female youth wear different veils. Urban female youth unveil their heads or cover them with short and tight-fitting veils, but in rural areas they cover their heads with big veils and are not so different in wearing a skirt and a shirt, but are differ in wearing trousers. Urban youth wear short pants or fit trousers, while those in rural areas wear jeans and warm pants. The Muslim society wants female youth to give up these kinds of impolite garments and for male youth to wear long-sleeve shirts and a sarong and not to wear low-waist jeans and imitate stars and singers. All respondents think that Muslim society wants youth to dress properly according to the principles of Islam. Most respondents think that Muslim youth in urban areas wear modern clothing, while youth in rural areas dress according to the principles of their religion. (Annadwee, 2004; Binkasun, 2001)

### **6. The Way of Life in Relation to Their Families, Other Relatives, and Neighbours**

Most youth have high-level relations with their family and other relatives at, as they travel, shop, and eat together. Youth in urban and rural areas have relations on different levels. Most youth in urban areas have relations at a moderate level, but in rural areas their relationships are at a high level and they participate in different activities. Most youth in urban areas watch television, but in rural areas they are not interested in watching television and lead their lives simply and religiously. The expectation of society wants them show favor, gratitude, and assistance. Most youth have relations with their neighbors at a low level. They visit the sick and ask them about their joys and sorrows. Youth in urban and rural areas have relations at different levels. Most youth in urban areas have relations at a low level, but in rural areas the relations are at high and moderate levels. Youth often participate in different social activities. Most youth in urban areas have no mutual activities, but in rural areas they take part in good deeds, such as visiting the sick. The expectation of society is that they love others, are concerned about others, help others, and do not exploit each other. All respondents think that Muslim society wants youth to have good relations with their family and neighbours according to Islamic principles. Most respondents think that Muslim youth in urban areas have no firm relations with their family and relatives and lack good relationships with each other, while youth in rural areas have good relation with their family and other relatives. All respondents think that Muslim society wants Muslim youth to have good relations with their community and neighbours

and pay more attention and be helpful to them. Most respondents think that youth in urban areas are not on friendly terms with others and do not care for others, while youth in rural areas have good relations with others and are helpful to each other. (Mahama, 2009; Touthern, 2010).

### 7. The Way of Life with Participation in Social Activities

Most youth engage in good deeds and participate in social activities. Most of them tend to cemeteries, pick up rubbish, and dig and dredge ditches and canals. Youth in urban and rural areas differ in participating in good deeds and activities. Most youth in urban areas never engage in good deeds and seldom perform them, but in rural areas they always and often participate in doing good deeds. Youth devotion in performing good deeds is on different levels. Most urban youth do not have this kind of devotion, but in rural areas they engage in it in the form of mosque development and digging and dredging ditches and canals, and looking after and developing the Tadika School. Muslim society wants them to participate in community development in a positive progression, a healthy community without drugs, gambling, contriving, and equivocating. All respondents think that Muslim society wants Muslim youth to do good deeds and participate sincerely in community activities. Most respondents think that youth in urban areas do not give any significance to, or participate in, community services. Youth in rural areas always engage in good deeds and participate in community services sincerely and willingly. (Rimpeng, 2008; Tahe & Laeheem, 2013; Touthern, 2010).

### 8. The Way of Life with Religion Activities

Most youth pray five times a day but do not offer supplementary prayers (sunah), and they observe fasting during the month of Ramadhan regularly but do not keep supplementary fasting. They never donate, never read al-Quran, and never remember God by utterances. Youth in urban and rural areas are different in observing the five daily compulsory prayers and supplementary prayers. Most youth in urban areas never observe prayers, but in rural areas they often observe prayers regularly. They also differ in terms of fasting during the month of Ramadhan and other months. Most youth in the urban areas never fast, while in the rural areas they seldom fast regularly. Donations are also different. Most youth in the urban donate regularly, while in rural area they never donate. They also differ in reciting the al-Quran. Most youth in the urban never recite the al-Quran, while in the rural areas they seldom recite the al-Quran regularly. In remembrance of Allah, they are also different. Most youth in the urban areas remember God, while in rural areas they seldom recall Him regularly. The expectation of society is that they practice religious obligations strictly and correctly according to the path of the prophet Muhammad (Peace Be upon Him). All respondents think that Muslim society wants Muslim youth to strictly practice religious activities. Most respondents think that youth in urban areas ignore and neglect the religious performances, while youth in rural areas are strictly engaged in religious activities. (Baka & Laeheem, 2010; Binkasun, 2001; Khagphong, 2004; Mahama, 2009).

## Conclusion and Suggestions

Most youth think that some youth take part in the present unrest. There are no different opinions about the reasons for taking part. Most youth in urban areas think that the reason is because of wrong instructions with which they were imbued, while in rural areas they think that because they were cheated or they did it to earn a livelihood. Muslim youth take part in the present unrest because they get wrong instructions and a small member of them think that they took part because of misleading threats or by being hired and exploited by shady persons.

### 1. Suggestions for Religious Leaders and Community Leaders

- 1) Muslim religious leaders needed to imbue the youth with the Islamic awareness so they can lead their life in accordance with the Islamic way of life and prophet traditions. Camping is also needed from time to time to offer the Muslim youth the Islamic moral and ethical lessons.
- 2) Muslim religious leaders and community leaders must create an absolute Islamic society according to Islamic teaching.
- 3) Muslim religious leaders and community leaders in every village must control the behavior of the Muslim youth in accordance with Islamic principles.
- 4) Muslim religious leaders and community leaders needed to imbue the youth's parents in Islam because there are still many Muslim youth's parents who are not interested in Islam and they do not conduct their behavior in accordance with the principles of Islam.

### 2. Suggestions for the Government

- 1) The government must assist the unemployed Muslim youth who have a low level of education to earn their own income.
- 2) The government must inhibit all sorts of misdeeds and intoxicant things, for example, liquor and beer shops, night clubs, karaoke bars, and other pubs and bars in the three southern border provinces of Thailand.
- 3) The government must solve the problems in the southern border provinces of Thailand.
- 4) The government must offer free education from elementary to graduate level to Muslim youth and support them in other expenditures such as food, books, uniforms, etc. The most important thing is the incorporation of religious subjects in the curriculum along with general ones in the schools of this area.
- 5) The government must promote and develop stabling long-term professions for Muslim youth.
- 6) The government must develop the family institution to control the behavior of the children in accordance with Islamic principles.
- 7) The government should systematically develop and improve Tadika in terms of salary, welfare, buildings, and curriculum books. The quality and efficiency of its teachers should also be upgraded.
- 8) The government must strictly put control on the mass media in the three provinces and not allow them to

publish and spread on air anything in opposition to Islam. Programs related to ethical and moral training should also be promoted.

9) The government should authorize the provincial Islamic Councils in the three southern border provinces to take care of the youth, especially overseeing and monitoring their misconduct in terms of their sexual behavior, clothing, and other deeds opposed to Islamic values.

10) The government must enforce Islamic law above all other laws in the three southern border provinces in connection with clothing, different sex relations, and other behaviors opposed to Islam.

### 3. Suggestions for Applications

1) The government and the other units that concerned should apply this research report to create the policy in order to solve the violence in the three southern borders of Thailand, especially all the data mentioned in this report.

2) The researchers should conduct additional research on these topics:

a. The real needs of Muslim youth in the southern border provinces of Thailand.

b. The way to develop the occupation of Muslim youth in the southern border provinces of Thailand.

c. The migration of Muslim youth to Malaysia and Singapore.

d. Reason why Muslim youth go to study at the basic level in Malaysia.

### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest

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