THE CONVERSION AND POST-CONVERSION EXPERIENCE OF FILIPINO CONVERTS TO ISLAM IN BAHRAIN: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the complex journey that Filipino expatriates in Bahrain undergo as they navigate from limited knowledge of Islam to becoming practicing Muslims. Situated in Bahrain's unique socio-cultural context, where a majority Muslim population interacts with a diverse and large expatriate community, the study investigates the motivations, experiences, and challenges faced by Filipino converts. Using an exploratory research design, this discourse provides a comprehensive profile of Filipino converts in Bahrain, investigating their motivations, life experiences, and challenges. A key research question addresses why expatriates from the Philippines, a predominantly Catholic nation with historical and ongoing Islamophobic sentiments, would want to embrace Islam. The important role that the *Shahādah* (declaration of faith) plays in the lives of converts is also explored. Additionally, the thesis examines the post-conversion experience of Filipino new Muslims and its role in facilitating their understanding and practice of Islam and easing their integration into the broader Muslim community. A mixed-methods approach is used. Twenty-five in-depth interviews along with data from a comprehensive survey of 596 respondents, provide both qualitative, nuanced insights and generalizable, statistical analyses. From the data collected, the concept of *Tawḥīd*, or the Oneness of Allah, emerges as the most common reason for Filipinos accepting Islam in Bahrain. The findings also suggest that *Fiṭrah* (innate disposition) and *Hidāyah* (Divine guidance) play significant roles. The life of Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), an embodiment of the *Qurʾān*, is advocated as the perfect model of a balanced, holistic approach to administering *Shahādah* and providing post-conversion support and education of new Muslims. Ultimately, the thesis not only contributes to the general field of religious conversion, but more importantly and specifically furthers understanding of conversion to Islam. It offers valuable insights and recommendations for *Daʿwah*, *Shahādah* and New Muslim Care to Islamic organizations and Muslim community leaders in Bahrain and beyond.

خلاصة البحث

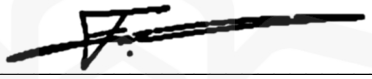
تتناول هذه الأطروحة الرحلة المعقدة التي يمر بها الفلبينيون المقيمون في مملكة البحرين خلال انتقالهم من مجرد المعرفة المحدودة بالإسلام إلى أن يصبحوا مسلمين ممارسين لشعائره. تقع هذه الدراسة في السياق الاجتماعي والثقافي الفريد لمملكة البحرين، حيث يتفاعل غالبية السكان المسلمين مع مجموعات وافدة متنوعة وكبيرة، وتحقق الدراسة في الدوافع، والتجارب، والتحديات التي يواجهها المعتنقون الفلبينيون للإسلام. استخدمت الدراسة للوصول إلى ذلك طريقة " البحث الاستكشافي"، حيث قدمت ملفًا شاملاً للمعتنقين الفلبينيين للإسلام في مملكة البحرين، وحققت في دوافعهم، وتجارب حياتهم، والتحديات التي يواجهونها. سؤال البحث الرئيس يتناول سبب إقدام الوافدين من الفلبين "وهي دولة ذات أغلبية كاثوليكية مع مشاعر معادية للإسلام تاريخيًا وحتى يومنا هذا" على اعتناق الإسلام. في هذه الدراسة نكتشف أهمية اللحظة الفارقة للنطق بالشهادة أو إشهار الإسلام في حياة المعتنقين الجدد للإسلام؛ كما تتناول الأطروحة تجربة ما بعد اعتناقهم للإسلام مع تيسير طرق فهمهم وممارستهم للإسلام وصولًا إلى اندماجهم في المجتمع المسلم الأوسع.تم استخدام منهجيات متنوعة في هذه الدراسة؛ حيث أُجريت خمس وعشرين مقابلة متعمقة بالإضافة إلى بيانات من استطلاع موسع شمل 596 مشاركًا، الأمر الذي يمكن من الوصول إلى نظرة نوعية متعمقة وتحليلات إحصائية أشمل من خلال البيانات التي تم جمعها، حيث أظهرت الدراسة أن مفهوم التوحيد، أو (إفراد الله بالعبادة)، هو أكثر الأسباب شيوعًا لقبول الفلبينيين للإسلام في مملكة البحرين، كما تشير النتائج أيضًا إلى أن الفطرة (نداء الفطرة) والهداية (التوجيه والإرشاد الإلهي) تلعبان أدوارًا رئيسة، كما تقدم حياة النبي محمد (صلى الله عليه وسلم)، تجسيدا واقعيًا لتعاليم القرآن الكريم، ونموذجًا مثاليًا لنهجٍ متوازنٍ وشاملٍ للتعامل مع معتنقي الإسلام وتقديم الدعم والتعليم المناسب لهم .في النهاية.. لا تسهم الأطروحة فقط في مجال التحول الديني بشكل عام، بل الأكثر أهمية وبشكل خاص فهم التحول إلى الإسلام؛ كما تقدم رؤى وتوصيات قيمة في الدعوة، واعتناق الإسلام، ورعاية المسلمين الجدد إلى المنظمات الإسلامية وقادة المجتمع الإسلامي في مملكة البحرين وخارجها.

APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis of Mohamed Quadir Harunani has been approved by the following:



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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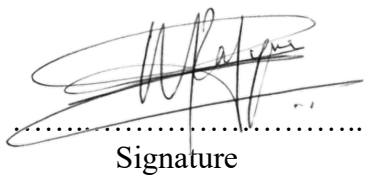
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This thesis is dedicated to my late grandfather, Abdulqadir Alladina, who always supported me, pushed me to excel, and only saw the best in me. May Allah grant him the best place in Jannat al Firdous.

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In the name of Allah, the All Merciful, the Very Merciful.

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TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

Q q	ق	Z z	ز	A a	أ
K k	ك	S s	س	B b	ب
L l	ل	Sh sh	ش	T t	ت
M m	م	Ṣ ṣ	ص	Th th	ث
N n	ن	Ḍ ḍ	ض	J j	ج
W w	و	Ṭ ṭ	ط	Ḥ ḥ	ح
H h	ه	Ẓ ẓ	ظ	Kh kh	خ
ء	ء	‘	ع	D d	د
Y y	ي	Gh gh	غ	Dh dh	ذ
Al- al-	ال	F f	ف	R r	ر

Aw aw	ـَوْ	Ī ī	ـِيْ	Ā ā	ـَأْ
Ay ay	ـَيْ	Ū ū	ـُوْ	Ā ā	ـَى

un	ـٌ	in	ـٍ	an	ـً

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AH	Abbreviation for Anno Hegirae, Latin for "Year of the *Hijrah*." It marks the Islamic calendar, beginning with the Prophet Muḥammad's migration (*Hijrah*) from Makkah to *Madīnah* in 622 CE.
ATLAS.Ti.	A qualitative data analysis software used to organize, analyze, and visualize complex unstructured data such as interviews, documents, and multimedia.
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.
CE	Common Era. It is a secular term used to denote years in the Gregorian calendar, equivalent to AD (Anno Domini), and follows the same numbering system.
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019. It refers to a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and was the illness behind the recent global Pandemic of 2020.
GCC	The Gulf Cooperation Council, a regional organization established in 1981 comprising six Middle Eastern countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.
KMT	Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Table developed to determine sample size.
LMRA	Labour Market Regulatory Authority of Bahrain.
MENA	Middle East and North Africa.
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front.
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front.
NM	New Muslim.
NMCES	The Organization's New Muslim Care and Education system.
NPRA	National Passports and Residence Affairs of Bahrain.
NVivo	A qualitative data analysis software designed to help researchers organize, analyze, and visualize unstructured data such as interviews, surveys, and text.
OFW	Overseas Filipino Workers.

PBUH	Peace be upon him. When Muslims mention or state the name of Prophet Muḥammad, they also add this epithet “peace and blessings be upon him.”
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy.
SMS	Short Messaging Service. A common text messaging service between devices.
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences is a software tool developed by the company IBM and is used for statistical analysis. It helps researchers in social sciences to manage data, perform statistical tests, and create visualizations.
US	United States of America.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONVERSION AND FOLLOW-UP

Converting from one set of beliefs to another is deeply personal and often difficult to comprehend. For a convert to a new faith, there are numerous challenges to overcome. From understanding the basics of the religion to learning a new language; from changing one's outward appearance to getting accustomed to different foods. Oftentimes this is within a very hostile environment created either from one's own family and friends who feel betrayed; or from unreasonable expectations by the new community that the convert has joined. The journey that many converts undergo is not easy, yet millions of people switch their faith every year.

Becoming a Muslim is simple enough. Recite two lines in Arabic and you're Muslim! In principle, it's almost that simple. In practice, like almost any other faith conversion, it is complex, fraught with navigating not just varied opinions on Islam, but also overcoming a myriad of societal, cultural, political, bureaucratic, and sometimes economic hurdles. Nonetheless, every year, hundreds of thousands of people convert to Islam.

Estimating the exact or even approximate numbers of conversions to Islam globally is challenging. Lack of collection of data or differing methods of data acquisition; political, social and economic pressures on reporting about Muslim conversions; and maintaining the privacy of converts are some of the reasons why accurate numbers are hard to come by. The issue becomes even more complicated when one considers that, in most cases, only the total numbers of people following a particular faith are counted. The actual number who switch faith to Islam is seldom documented. However, some sources provide estimates based on surveys, census studies and occasionally publicly available reports by Islamic organizations. One such example was a comprehensive study conducted by the Pew Research Center, where an estimated 1.3

million individuals globally were projected to have converted to Islam from other faiths between 2015 and 2020[1].

For most practicing Muslims, witnessing people accepting Islam is a joyous and highly emotional event. In many Muslim communities, potential male converts are brought to the local Mosque either after one of the afternoon or evening prayers, or more likely after the Friday congregational prayer, and asked to recite the *Shahādah* in front of the male worshipers. The convert is heartily greeted by the audience; and in many cases lines form to embrace and welcome the new "brother" to Islam. For women accepting Islam, the situation is similar except it would be other Muslim women who would embrace and welcome the new "sister" into the community. It is not just the Mosque where conversions are witnessed. Islamic organizations, courtrooms, people's homes and offices, on street corners, and even over social media, people accept Islam and are similarly welcomed into the community.

However, the celebration and genuine warmth felt by the new Muslim Convert is typically short-lived. Most new Muslims are expected to "fit" into the Muslim community, and little thought is given to their emotional, psychological, or social needs[2].

For many individuals and organizations engaged in *Daʿwah* (the invitation to Islam), the concept of "follow-up" with new Muslims tends to prioritize the outward practices of Islam. Consequently, when queried about what follow-up should constitute; the responses commonly revolve around imparting foundational Islamic teachings, such as learning the basics of Islamic beliefs and practices, reciting the *Qurʾān* properly, and performing the daily prayers (*Ṣalāh*). For female converts, wearing ḥijāb (headscarf and modest attire) is commonly regarded as an integral aspect of their conversion to Islam. Conversely, for male converts, there is often emphasis on undergoing circumcision[3].

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[1] Pew Research Center, *The Changing Global Religious Landscape*, April 5, 2017, https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/.

[2] Kevin Brice, *A Minority within a Minority: A Report on Converts to Islam in the United Kingdom* (Swansea University, 2010).

[3] *ibid*; Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Evaluations and Recommendation*, internal report to the Discover Islam Society Board, 2014; Nuradli Ridzwan Shah et al., "New Muslim Converts' Experience in Embracing Islam: An Analysis of the Pre-Conversion, Conversion and Post-Conversion Phases," *The Islamic Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2016): 443–466.

These responses are not necessarily wrong. However, they do not entirely reflect the journey that a new Muslim undergoes – from someone who knows little of Islam to a person who is a practicing *Muʾmin* (Muslim believer). While necessary for religious observance and the creation of a new Muslim identity, the focus on the outward facets of Islam often overshadows the importance of catering to the emotional, psychological, social and sometimes economic needs of the convert. For most new Muslims, the journey is not just about the ritualistic, outward practices of Islam, but also about the relationships that one has with one's Creator, oneself, and the rest of creation[4].

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Over the past 35 years, I have been involved in *Daʿwah* and the care of New Muslims in some capacity or other[5]. From being a major part of the Muslim Students' Association during my undergraduate and graduate years in Canada to founding and running an organization devoted to producing Islamic *Daʿwah* materials and to eventually heading a *Daʿwah* organization in Bahrain. My practical experience in this field is the primary reason for wanting to further my understanding of *Daʿwah* and follow up of New Muslims through academic research.

In 2014, I was commissioned by Discover Islam Society, a prominent Islamic *Daʿwah* and new Muslim Care organization (Organization) in Bahrain to conduct an in-depth analysis of the Organization and to recommend strategies to improve the Organization. After three months of interviews, surveys, discussions, and analyses, I submitted my report to the Organization.

[4] S.B.M. Kassim, M.S.Y. Abdullah, and Z. Baba, "A Study of Islamic Conversion in Malaysia," *International Journal of the Malay World and Civilization (IMAN)*, 2013: 93–105; Harunani, *Evaluations and Recommendation*; Daniel W. Snook et al., "Conversion Motifs among Muslim Converts in the United States," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 13, no. 4 (2021): 482.

[5] After careful study, in certain parts of the thesis where it seems appropriate and increases the ease of reading, I have decided to write in the first person as opposed to only writing in the third person. A primary reason for this is that my journey over the past thirty-five years in the field of Da'wah and care of New Muslims has been, and is, very personal and highly spiritual to me. As such it seems odd and disingenuous to relate them in a distant and objective manner. Writing a PhD thesis in the first person is not only acceptable but recommended in many cases (Robinson, 2020, Agaogl, 2013, Thesis Editor, 2024). The American Psychological Association as well as the Chicago Manual of Style consider writing in the first person more modern; where it is preferred for its greater clarity and less ambiguity (APA, 2024, Chicago Manual of Style Online, 2024).

A key finding relevant to this discourse was the lack of any proper follow-up system for those who accepted Islam ("new Muslims", NM) through the Organization. There was no clear definition of who a NM was or the essential needs of any NM. There were dozens of NM classes being held each week but no suitable or mutually agreed syllabus. Students were taught whatever their teacher saw fit at the time. Some NMs had been attending NM classes for years, in one case a female NM from Sri Lanka had been a regular student for almost 26 years!

There was no clear understanding or consensus on what "follow up" meant. At the time, only 20% of all who converted to Islam through the Organization attended any classes or were provided any follow-up services[6].

I made several recommendations to improve the NM Education and Care system, these included a unified, common curriculum taught in different languages. Most of these recommendations were implemented in 2015, resulting in more NMs attending classes. However, there was a "glass ceiling." Despite all efforts, the number of NMs attending classes did not exceed 31%. Over 26% refused or were not able to attend any classes, and there was no idea as to what happened to the rest (almost 43%) of all those who accepted Islam that year![7].

In 2018, I had the opportunity to conduct *Daʿwah* and new Muslim Care workshops in Nairobi, Kenya, and Kampala, Uganda. One of the sessions at each of these workshops was listening to convert narratives. Over a dozen converts shared their experiences of accepting Islam and how the Muslim community treated them. Unfortunately, most of the stories were quite disheartening.

One brother from the prominent Kikuyu tribe of Central Kenya recalled how he was very warmly welcomed with hugs and chants of *Takbīr* ("*Allāhu Akbar*" – God is Greater) by dozens of worshippers in a Nairobi Mosque when he took his *Shahādah*. He went home to his parents and announced his conversion to Islam. His father expelled him from the house. The 21-year-old amateur DJ had nowhere to turn except the same Mosque where earlier in the day he was warmly welcomed by the Muslim community. To his horror, the caretaker of the Mosque told him that there was no one to help him

[6] Harunani, *Evaluations and Recommendation*.

[7] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *New Muslim Care Presentation, December 2018*, internal report to the Discover Islam Society Board, 2018.

and he could not sleep in the Mosque. The new Muslim spent the night sleeping on the footpath outside the same Mosque. Eventually, after a few days of struggling, a kind Muslim got him a temporary place to stay and a job.

I had heard similar accounts from NMs during *Daʿwah* Training Workshops in Bahrain, Malaysia, Turkey, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia over the past several years. One story particularly stands out. After thoroughly researching Islam online, an elderly and physically challenged Sikh man in Malaysia decided to convert to Islam. He first reached out to his neighbourhood mosque but was turned away. He then approached another mosque and was directed to a larger one for the *Shahādah* ceremony. However, the larger mosque also declined and referred him to a government agency. After weeks of being passed from one place to another, a national *Daʿwah* organization finally agreed to facilitate his *Shahādah*. This may be an exceptional case of bureaucracy; but it is not an outlying case when it comes to treatment of New Muslims.

I also recalled the experiences of new Muslims during my tenure as the head of an Islamic outreach organization in Florida, USA, several years ago. Even within this organization that I headed, there were instances where new Muslims were looked down upon, bullied, and convinced they weren't good Muslims if they didn't practice Islam in a specific way. One young, typical Caucasian American man accepted Islam on a Friday at the local Mosque. I met him the following Sunday and almost did not recognize him. The brother had discarded his jeans and shirt and taken to wearing a Pakistani "*Shalwār Kamīz*" all in the name of fitting in to the "Muslim" community.

All these experiences forced me to re-examine the whole idea of how people convert to Islam and what constitutes an effective NM follow-up system.

After considerable thought and discussions with *Daʿīs* (people engaged in the work of *Daʿwah*) and new Muslims, we developed a revised NM System that prioritized the emotional and social needs of NMs. We emphasized on "care" before and above "education." This new NM Care and Education System was implemented within the Organization in 2019.

The result was quite remarkable. By August 2021, over 89% of those who accepted Islam through the Organization were attending classes either in groups or on a one-to-one basis; 9% were engaged in self-study of Islam and requested to be left alone, and at most, only 2% were not being followed up in any responsible way. Almost

85% of all who had accepted Islam in the previous eight months had received a court-administered, legal "*Shahādah* Certificate" proving that they had switched their faith to Islam[8].

Despite its real-life successes, there is a lack of well-researched, quantifiable, and documented, empirical "hard evidence" supporting this revised NM System. There is little research on the social, emotional, and psychological aspects of converting to Islam. Most studies are limited to anecdotal reports or storytelling by people who have switched from other faiths to Islam. Moreover, many of these studies are limited to the United Kingdom and select Western countries[9]. Some studies have surveyed larger groups, but they have focused on specifics like the role that mosques may play in the education of NMs[10]; or, for example, how the distribution of *Zakāh* has an impact on *Muʾallaf* in Selangor, Malaysia[11].

Addressing this knowledge gap and applying the findings in real-life settings is the crux of the present discourse.

1.3 BAHRAIN AND FILIPINOS

From 2014 to 2023, several thousand[12] individuals converted to Islam in Bahrain through the Organization, Three out of every five of these converts is an expat from the Philippines[13].

The Kingdom of Bahrain is an archipelago of over 33 islands in the Arabian Gulf. With a total land area of 786 km^2 and a total population of almost 1.58 million

[8] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Annual Report 2021*, internal document, Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2021.

[9] Brice, *A Minority within a Minority*; Shah et al., "New Muslim Converts' Experience,"; Basia Spalek and Salah El-Hassan, "Muslim Converts in Prison," *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 46, no. 2 (2007): 99–114; Kate Zebiri, *British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014)

[10] Mariam Majid et al., "Involvement in the Mosque Programs and Its Relationship in Strengthening the Islamic Faith among Muslim Converts in Malaysia," *Life Science Journal* 1212 (2015): 134–39, https://doi.org/10.7537/marslsj121115.14.

[11] Fuadah Johari, Ahmad Fahme Mohd Ali, and Muhammad Ridhwan Ab Aziz, "The Role of Zakat Distribution Among Muallaf (New Convert) in Reducing Poverty in Selangor, Malaysia," *İktisat Politikası Araştırmaları Dergisi (Journal of Economic Policy Researches)* 2, no. 1 (2015): 39-56.

[12] The Organization follows a strict policy of keeping conversion statistics and details private.

[13] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Annual Report 2024, Internal Document*, Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024.

people, Bahrain is the smallest of the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) countries and one of the smaller nations worldwide. Though heavily dependent on its oil and gas reserves, the island kingdom has gained prominence for its Islamic Banking and Finance sectors. Over the past twenty years, considerable infrastructure and real estate development has taken place. This has created a demand for foreign workers – cheap labour from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and in more recent years from Sub-Saharan Africa. Educated Workers from the Philippines play a significant role in the service and middle management segments of the workforce. According to the Government of Bahrain, over half of the Kingdom's population consists of foreign expatriates[14].

The Philippine Statistics Authority reported that there were almost 1.963 million Filipinos working overseas in 2023. Almost a quarter of them are employed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Other GCC countries like Bahrain, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar are home to over 580,000 Filipino migrant workers (Mapa, 2023). Over the past five decades, many Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in the GCC have embraced Islam.

Approximately 57,000 Filipinos reside in Bahrain, predominantly employed in service sectors such as in hotels, restaurants, hair salons, and beauty parlours; as well as in middle management roles within retail, banking, and real estate. Mainly because they are better educated, many Filipinas work for Bahraini families as nannies. Over 11,000 Filipinos identify themselves as Muslim, whereas the remaining community is predominantly Catholic Christian[15].

Filipinos possess two distinctive qualities that render them particularly appropriate to this research: 1) they constitute the majority of converts to Islam in Bahrain; and 2) they are highly educated and proficient in English, facilitating easy communication.

Bahrain provides an ideal setting for this type of research. It is small and easy to navigate and boasts excellent telecommunications infrastructure. The island kingdom is known for its respect for people of all faiths; in addition to the hundreds of mosques,

[14] Open Data Bahrain, "Explore Datasets by Theme: Population," accessed November 18, 2024, https://bahrain.opendatasoft.com/explore/?sort=modified&refine.theme=Population&disjunctive.theme.

[15] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Annual Report 2024, Internal Document*, Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024.

Bahrain houses churches, Hindu temples, Buddhist temples, and also has a Jewish synagogue.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study aims to explore the experiences that Filipino converts to Islam in Bahrain undergo before, during conversion, and after conversion. Specifically, the study looks at why Filipinos, particularly, in Bahrain convert to Islam; the conversion process itself; and the experiences that come after conversion.

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This exploratory study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify what socio-cultural, religious, and economic factors make Bahrain uniquely more favourable to Filipinos accepting Islam.
2. Explain the concept of religious conversion in Islam.
3. Describe the typical Filipino who accepts Islam in Bahrain.
4. Investigate the reasons why Filipinos convert to Islam in Bahrain.
5. Examine the process of conversion (*Shahādah*) itself and the emotional and social impact it has on the Filipinos who are becoming Muslim.
6. Explore how Filipino converts are adjusting to their life as Muslims.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central research questions this study addresses are:

1. What socio-cultural, religious, and economic factors make Bahrain uniquely conducive for Filipinos to accept Islam?
2. What is religious conversion in Islam?
3. Who is the typical Filipino who converts to Islam in Bahrain?
4. Why do Filipinos convert to Islam in Bahrain?

5. What is the social and emotional impact of the *Shahādah* on a Filipino becoming Muslim in Bahrain?

6. How do Filipino converts adjust to life as a Muslim, and what role do follow-up support systems play in this transition?

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses an exploratory research design to investigate the journey that Filipino NMs undertake from knowing very little about Islam to becoming practicing members of the Muslim community. Given the limited research on this specific topic; and the opportunity to conduct in-depth interviews and survey a large sample population; an exploratory study seems to be the best fit. Exploratory research aims to gain insights and understanding rather than test specific hypotheses or models[16]. Both qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed mode) have been utilized in this exploratory research.

In my capacity, as the de facto head of the Organization, I have had unique access to thousands of New Muslims. The latter have been or are currently associated with the Organization.

Since the language medium for this study is English, it was imperative to find, interview, and survey only English-speaking expatriates (expats). Over 60% of the NMs are expats from the Philippines, all fluent in English. Some 15% of the NMs are from English-speaking African countries. An additional 10% of NMs hail from India, Europe, and America and are also fluent in English[17]. Given that most converts are from the Philippines, are fluent in English, and are easily accessible; the focus of this study are Filipino new Muslims.

The fieldwork was divided into three stages.

[16] Robert A. Stebbins, *Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences*, vol. 48 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001).

[17] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Annual Report 2024, Internal Document*, Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024.

1.7.1 Stage 1: Interviews

From the thousands of NMs who had accepted Islam in the previous years, 42 NMs were selected and interviewed between March 2022 and March 2023. The selection of these NMs was primarily based on their availability and their fluency, both in terms of English as well as the eagerness to communicate. Although the limitation of this thesis is the Filipino New Muslim, there was an intentional decision to expand the collection of data to all NMs in Bahrain. Not only would the additional information be useful for the Organization, but it may also help with the thesis as well as potentially create opportunities for greater and wider analysis outside the scope of this discourse. As such, there was a concerted effort to get a reasonable representation of NMs regarding ethnicity. The NMs were individually interviewed via Video Conferencing (Zoom) with a base set of questions[18]. They were also given ample opportunity to share their journey to Islam (conversion narrative).

The purpose of conducting Interviews and allowing subjects to discuss their journey was chosen as a tool in this first stage of the research to give the NMs the maximum opportunity to share their feelings and experiences. The findings from the Interview Stage also helped formulate the questions asked in the subsequent Surveys.

1.7.2 Stage 2: Pilot Survey

An initial Pilot Survey (Appendix C) was conducted from August 2023 to October 2023. This was limited to staff of the Organization including *Da'īs*, New Muslim Care staff (known as *Anṣār*) and few volunteers of the Organization who also were recent converts to Islam. The purpose of this first Survey was to identify any potential concerns and to revise the Survey before administering to a larger group.

1.7.3 Stage 3: Main Survey

Over 1,500 NM expats across all nationalities and ethnicities who were fluent in English were asked to complete a detailed survey (Appendix D). This survey consisted of 103 questions. Most of the questions were Likert scale, multiple-choice, Yes/No, and

[18] See Appendix B.

demographic. There were a few open-ended questions. A total of 1,210 New Muslims completed the Survey.

Both surveys were formulated using Google Surveys.

1.7.4 Stage 4: Analysis

A large amount of data has been collected. An analysis of this data and cross tabulating with the demographics and the top research questions has been conducted. The interviews were transcribed using Otter. MS Excel helped with the qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis was done using SPSS and MS Excel.

1.7.5 Ethical Considerations

The data collection method in Stages 1 for this research project was exclusively done using the online video conferencing tool, Zoom. This method of communication had become all too prevalent during the recent Global Pandemic. The primary ethical concern with this method was that of privacy. All NMs were fully informed, and they gave their permission to record and use their interviews[19]. They were assured that all recordings will only be used for the research purpose intended and that, although, personal sensitive data will be collected it will not be shared or published. All information shared or published will be under a pseudonym assigned to each interviewee.

Data collection for Stage 2 and 3, the surveys, were done anonymously. Participants were informed that some demographic personal data will be collected. However, no personal or private data will be shared with anyone or published. Only general information derived from the surveys will be used.

This project has and will maintain the integrity and privacy of the NMs. It is essential to understand that the Organization through which this research project has been conducted has legally collected private NM data for over 37 years. This data is

[19] See Appendix A – Standard Interview Permission Protocol.

protected and is not made available to anyone outside of the Organization or the relevant departments within the Government of Bahrain.

Lastly, to the best of my ability, I will not be disclosing my full name or position within the Organization to interviewees or survey respondents to limit the degree to which NMs may be prejudiced.

1.7.6 Resources

One positive aspect of the Pandemic was the explosion of online communication – from video conferencing apps like Zoom to using Google forms and other tools that have significantly reduced the cost of research.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

As strongly suggested by the literature review below, extraordinarily little academic research has focused on the specific experience of converting to Islam and the follow up of New Muslims (NMs). Most studies have looked at Christian conversion narratives. Studies that have zeroed in on Muslim converts have been limited to small groups of people who have accepted Islam, primarily in Western countries. Some studies on Muslim converts have looked at gender issues and extremism. Few studies outside of Europe and the US, such as those in Malaysia, have looked at larger groups and have studied some aspects of follow up, like involvement in Mosques and the impact of *Zakāh* on NMs. These studies have also concluded that far more research is needed in Muslim conversion and follow-up.

This thesis hopes to address this knowledge gap. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence and a considerable amount of practical experience I have gained over the past thirty years in *Daʿwah* and New Muslim Care that underscores the importance of the journey an individual takes from knowing little about Islam to becoming a practicing Muslim. At the heart of this discourse lies the journey itself – a path Allah describes repeatedly in the *Qurʾān* as moving "out of the depths of darkness into the light.[20]"

[20] See Qur'an, 2:257; 5:16; 14:1; 33:43; 57:9; 65:11.

The process of *Shahādah* varies from country to country and even from community to community. Most born Muslims cannot even fathom how impactful this switching of faith is for a New Muslim (NM). However, it makes intuitive sense that becoming Muslim is probably one of the biggest changes in a NMs life. It also seems reasonable to postulate that the *Shahādah* is the most crucial moment in a convert's life. Most *Shahādah* are highly emotional. NMs, and often those witnessing them accepting Islam, become highly emotional. Tears of joy, exuberance, and even confusion are the order of the day. Nevertheless, there is little academic research on this immensely substantial characteristic of Muslim conversion. This study hopes to address this issue.

Understanding what goes through a person's mind when they accept Islam may provide practical solutions on how best to administer a *Shahādah*. Seeing the process of *Shahādah* from the NMs' perspective may improve our methods of the process itself. Indeed, the Prophet Muḥammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, henceforth this epithet is implied wherever the name of Prophet Muḥammad appears) set precedence (*Sunnah*) on how people accepted Islam. The numerous examples from the *Sunnah* provide plenty of room for diversity and understanding of how to administer a *Shahādah*. This affords Muslims today the opportunity to improve the process of *Shahādah* within the confines of *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), to make it a time of joy, understanding, and, most importantly, a means to help the NM on their journey of discovering Islam. This process should not be hurtful or traumatic as related by many NMs.

The moment after a person accepts Islam there may be significant doubt and confusion or there may be enlightenment and hope or sometimes both.

Most people experience doubt when they make a momentous decision that affects their lives and those closest to them – making a large purchase such as buying a car or house, getting married, changing jobs, moving to a new city or country, starting a family. These are all "big decisions" for most people, and they have a significant impact on their lives. They are also often accompanied by doubt afterwards. A period during which a person keeps second-guessing their decision. Some experience, what in customer behaviour psychology, is termed as "Buyer's Remorse." It is often associated with large purchases and stems from a sense of cognitive dissonance or, specifically, post-decision dissonance. Essentially, it is a sense of regret or doubt about a major

financial decision. However, it could equally be applied to any major decision listed above. Changing one's faith is probably the most significant decision a NM might have ever made. One can only imagine to what extent buyer's remorse may play into the aftermath of such a decision.

Another way to look at this psychological concept is from an Islamic viewpoint. It makes Islamic sense that a NM would be a target for the whispering of *Shayṭān* (the devil). *Shayṭān* would make every effort to create doubt, confusion, and outright rejection of Islam. Fear would be a remarkably effective means of sowing this doubt. Many NMs have reported that they experienced much fear about how their world would change once they became Muslim. NMs have said that their biggest fears were how their relations with their families and friends would change. Work, societal pressure, legal ramifications, and other "problems" are part of *Shayṭān*'s arsenal when targeting NMs. This research hopes to shed light on these issues.

1.9 LITERATURE REVIEW

Three sources of information have been considered in this study.

The first is contemporary religious conversion theories regardless of faith. These studies have attempted to create a theoretical framework to explain the phenomenon of religious conversion using accepted sociological and psychological concepts. The limitation of these studies is that they may not necessarily be relevant to Muslim conversion. Another limitation is that they attempt to explain conversion strictly from a secular perspective, not considering the Islamic concept of "*Hidāyah*" or guidance. Muslims are taught and believe that guidance is from Allah, and as such, there may not be a sociological or psychological explanation for every person who accepts Islam.

Contemporary religious conversion studies that look at people accepting Islam from a secular, social science perspective. These studies focus on converting to Islam and are more relevant to the current research project and are the second type of literature reviewed. Their limitation is also not considering the spiritual side of conversion and not looking at the concept of *Hidāyah* in Islam, as explained above.

Studies that offer an explanation derived from the *Qurʾān* and the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad are the third kind of literature reviewed. Contemporary and

classical studies that may or may not explore the secular angle but explain conversion from an Islamic perspective have been explored.

1.9.1 General Contemporary Religious Conversion Literature

Lewis Rambo's seminal work, "*Understanding Religious Conversion*", published in 1993, must be considered in any study involving switching faiths. Rambo's work over decades is put into this great book. His seven-stage model forms the basis of many conversion models that have evolved since then[21]. Whereas Rambo's theoretical framework has been used extensively by many social scientists studying conversion, it's relevance to the present discourse is minimal. This is foremost an exploratory study, and no hypothesis is presented nor is any theoretical model discussed.

"*Religious Conversion Contemporary Practices and Controversies*", edited by Christopher Lamb and M. Darroll Bryant, is an excellent reference book covering different theoretical perspectives on religious conversion. It also provides several conversion narratives from a variety of different faiths. The book is limited in terms of scope and does not go into detail on what happens after conversion[22].

Lewis Rambo and Charles Farhadian edited the "*Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*." This epic book covers the topic of conversion from every perspective and is the definitive guide to this subject. Many scholars identify that conversion has been studied extensively from a psychological and individual angle. However, there is less from the social and political viewpoint. The book does address this gap to some extent. Notwithstanding, there is extraordinarily little on how to follow up with Muslim converts[23].

"*Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices*" by Henri Gooren is a comprehensive overview of religious conversion. Almost as relevant as Rambo and Farhadian's book above, this book is a substantive guide to the subject. Gooren looks at the theories put forth by several others

[21] Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

[22] Christopher Lamb and M. Darroll Bryant, eds., *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999).

[23] Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, "Conversion and Commitment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

descriptively and presents his theory on conversion. The book does not focus on the challenges of converts and how to deal with them from a social perspective[24].

Apart from Rambo's ideas, primarily secular Western scholars have put forth several conversion theories that may shed some light on Muslim conversion. William James was one of the earliest to present conversion theory. He saw converting as a psychological means to healing or unifying a divided self[25]. Lofland and Stark interviewed cult converts in 1962 and 1963 and developed a four-stage "funnel" model to explain conversion[26]. In the 1970s, Travisano interviewed Hebrew Christians and Jewish Unitarians and came up with a central idea on conversion about experiencing a period of emotional disconnect, alternation, as he put it. Travisano has been criticized for relying too much on the individual experience and looking at Jews converting to Christianity where there is strong resentment of the converts by their Jewish family and friends[27].

The sociologist Roger Strauss in the mid and late 1970s, advocated a more active approach to conversion. He described the existing frameworks as akin to "brainwashing" and suggested that a convert is a seeker actively trying to explain his life more adequately. Strauss began the move toward a rational approach to explaining conversion[28]. Arthur Greil expanded on these ideas. He stated that humans are rational seekers of meaning to existence, and if their worldview has been "spoiled" they would look for meaning in social groups they are in contact with. The discourse on conversion moved from individual change only to the influence of one's social network on one's perception of reality and the purpose of life[29].

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[24] Henri Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[25] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature; Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902* (1999).

[26] John Lofland and Rodney Stark, *On Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2018).

[27] Richard V. Travisano, "Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations," *Social Psychology through Symbolic Interaction* (1970): 594-606.

[28] Roger Austin Straus, "Religious Conversion as a Personal and Collective Accomplishment," *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 2 (June 1979): 158, https://doi.org/10.2307/3709786. Straus, Roger Austin. "Religious Conversion as a Personal and Collective Accomplishment." *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 2 (June 1979): 158. https://doi.org/10.2307/3709786.

[29] Arthur L. Greil, "Previous Dispositions and Conversion to Perspectives of Social and Religious Movements," *Sociological Analysis* 38, no. 2 (1977): 115-125.

Bromley and Shupe approached conversion from the angle of the converts' position or role in their social circle and how the group (religion one has or wants to convert to) shapes the needs of the converts. Their "role theory" to conversion may help understand the significance of the social experiences during and after conversion[30].

In the 1980s, Theodore Long and Jeffrey Hadden concluded that most conversion theories fit into two types: efforts by groups to groom new members (active proselytization and preaching, the "brainwashing model") and the journey that new members take to fit into the group ("drift model"). Their study of converts and how they fit into the new groups they now belong to may provide a theoretical framework to understand the importance of follow up[31].

Most academics of conversion theory like the ones listed above and others like Snow and Machalek (1984)[32], James Richardson (1978)[33], and Gartrell and Shannon (1985)[34] mainly look at Christians or, in one case, Jews converting to other Christian denominations or cults. Some aspects of their theories may help understand why people convert to Islam, but for the most part they are not applicable.

1.9.2 Contemporary Studies of Muslim Conversion from a Secular Perspective

Marybeth Acac's PhD dissertation is a rich understanding of "Balik-Islam." The Balik-Islam are primarily Christians who have "returned" (*Balik*) back to Islam. Many Balik-Islam are former expats or migrant workers who embraced Islam in the Gulf countries and have returned to the Philippines. This study is quite relevant to the current research project in that it views the same community of expats from the Philippines who convert to Islam while working in the Gulf countries (such as Bahrain). Acac provides a revised conversion hypothesis that she terms "symbolic negotiation." She does not look at the spiritual side of the conversion narrative. She derives her conclusions from personal

[30] David G. Bromley and Anson D. Shupe, "Just a Few Years Seem Like a Lifetime: A Role Theory Approach to Participation in Religious Movements," *NA* (1979).

[31] Theodore E. Long and Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Conversion and Commitment as Specific Types of Socialization," *Sociological Analysis* 44, no. 3 (1983): 197-209.

[32] David A. Snow and Richard Machalek, "The Sociology of Conversion," *Annual Review of Sociology* 10, no. 1 (1984): 167–90.

[33] James T. Richardson, "Conversion Careers: In and Out of the New Religions," in *Conversion Careers: In and Out of the New Religions*, ed. James T. Richardson (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1978), 1-20.

[34] Charles D. Gartrell and Robert D. Shannon, "Contacts, Cognitions, and Conversion: A Rational Choice Approach," *Review of Religious Research* 27, no. 1 (1985): 32-48.

experience (she is a Filipina who grew up in a Catholic home, lived as an expat in the US, was married to a Muslim Filipino convert and considers herself agnostic) and from a handful of interviews. The study is also limited to only trying to explain the social and psychological reasons for conversion. Acac does not consider the spiritual or Islamic reasons for conversion. She explains conversion using three facets: Filipinos living away from their family and friends in the Gulf (Diaspora); Filipinos experiencing a form of cognitive dissonance or internal conflict (Discord); and Filipinos being influenced by Muslim preachers (*Daʿwah*). Her study does not look at the process of conversion itself, nor does it look at the experiences of Balik-Islam after they take their *Shahādah*. The study has relevance to the current project but looks at the whole conversion narrative from a completely different angle[35].

Caroline Neumeuller looked at native British Muslim and German Muslim converts. She mainly looked at why these people converted to Islam and if there were similarities in their narratives. She also looked at the behaviour of these converts after they became Muslim. Specifically, she focused on how these converts related to their families and friends and whether they changed their lifestyles. Neumueller provides an excellent historical overview of Muslim conversion narratives in Europe from medieval times to the modern age. She deals with some of the pertinent issues to the current research project. Her research touches on common areas, including acquiring religious knowledge after conversion and creating a Muslim identity. Being a convert has given Neumueller a unique advantage seen in her study. However, the angle of her research is mainly looking at how easily do new Muslims adjust to their new identity concerning their circle of family and friends and how this new identity has an impact on social norms like marriage and family but also on specific Western issues like dating, pre-marital relations, and homosexuality, among others[36].

In her studies of both German and American Muslim Converts, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr concludes that the most fundamental reason for converting to Islam is to solve an existing problem. Rather than using a stage model, she focuses on specific social factors that inform, shape and impact why a Christian may discover and choose

[35] Marybeth T. Acac, "Balik-Islam in the Philippines: Reversion, Symbolic Negotiation, and Becoming the Other" (PhD diss., Temple University, 2020).

[36] Caroline Neumueller, *The 21st Century New Muslim Generation: Converts in Britain and Germany* (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2012), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, U616985.

to become Muslim. She uses "Symbolism" in the same manner as Acac. However, she looks at the symbolic universe of a convert from three angles: syncretism (an amalgamation of religions), battle (internal conflict) and transformation (acceptance of a new symbolic reality). Her theoretical framework is helpful as a starting point and, like Rambo, has been used as a first basis for understanding the conversion process[37].

Muḥammad Kolila's thesis on American converts and their experiences after converting to Islam in a post 9-11 world is relevant to the current subject matter. Kolila highlights a common plight among new Muslims – the Muslim community's lack of proper follow-up or care for the converts after accepting Islam. Using Lewis Rambo's seven-stage model, Kolila looks at several convert narratives published either as academic papers or books or in two specific cases; Kolila relies on YouTube channels created by converts wherein they tell their stories. Kolila gives a good overview of the challenges faced by converts but does not investigate how this has affected their eventual understanding and practice of Islam, and he does not provide any recommendations on how to address these challenges faced by converts. Kolila does look at numerous conversions during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, adding richness to his thesis. He also provides a brief history of Islam in America, particularly concerning convert narratives. Of great relevance to this thesis is Kolila's documenting of how new Muslims view themselves and their struggles after becoming Muslim[38].

Ali Kose's research on convert stories in Britain is another relevant dissertation that looked at native converts and their reasons for accepting Islam. The interview-based study addressed why people convert to Islam and any common patterns among converts. The author also looked at various conversion theories in vogue at the time (1994) and how applicable these theories were to his interview subjects. The research is somewhat dated and, for the most part, has zeroed in on Ṣūfī conversions that were very popular in Britain in the 60s, 70s and early 80s[39].

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[37] Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, "Conversion to Islam: Between Syncretism and Symbolic Battle," *Social Compass* 46, no. 3 (1999): 351–62.

[38] Muhammad Abdelhakam Kolila, *American Converts to Islam, Post-Conversion Experiences Post 9/11* (Master's thesis, University of Denver, 2019).

[39] Ali Köse, *Conversion to Islam: A Study of Native British Converts* (London: Routledge, 1996).

Patrick Bowen's dissertation on Muslim converts in Colorado provides a good understanding of conversion to Islam at a macro level. He does "fit" his 13 convert narratives over Rambo's seven-stage model quite well[40].

Dorothy Ramahi's dissertation provides insight into conversion narratives from a familial perspective. She provides a unique perspective on New Muslim experiences in Britain today. Using anecdotal stories, she portrays the conflict that many New Muslims experience. Many converts see themselves as a one-way bridge between their new world (Islam) and their old world (their families, friends and co-workers who know little of Islam or are Islamophobic)[41].

Juliette Galonnier looks at conversion to Islam from a race perspective. She compares race-privileged White peoples' conversion narratives and post-conversion experiences to Black peoples in the US and France[42].

Ramahi and Suleiman look at British Muslim female converts and their relationship with their families and friends after conversion. They argue that converts become "intimate strangers" with their families and loved ones. The stereotypical Orientalist view of Muslims prevents families and friends from engaging with their Muslim family members in matters of faith, yet they have an emotional connection with one another. Studies of this kind shed more light on the loneliness many converts experience while among friends and family and are relevant to the current thesis[43].

Lota Marmilinta also looks at female Muslim converts. She interviewed converts in Finland in late 2015. Her study provides insight into using interviews effectively in conducting conversion studies. She builds her theoretical framework using Lewis Rambo's seven-stage model and Roald's theory on post-conversion stages. She looks mainly at the time immediately after conversion, and she breaks this period into four distinct stages. This relates to the current study and will be used as a reference. There

[40] Patrick D. Bowen, *Conversion to Islam in Colorado* (University of Denver, 2009).

[41] Dorothea Alexandra Ramahi, "Conversion to Islam and Family Relations in Contemporary Britain" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2020).

[42] Juliette Galonnier, "Conversion to Islam as Religious and Racial Crossing," *The Immanent Frame*, Social Science Research Council, June 5, 2018, https://tif.ssrc.org/2018/06/05/conversion-to-islam-as-religious-and-racial-crossing/.

[43] Dorothea A. Ramahi and Yasir Suleiman, "Intimate Strangers: Perspectives on Female Converts to Islam in Britain," *Contemporary Islam* 11, no. 1 (2017): 21–39.

are limitations in that she only focused on Finnish women, and her sample is relatively small. Her conclusions also seem very ambivalent, reflecting the small sample size[44].

Kim Knott of the Center for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST), a think-tank from the United Kingdom, has published a general overview of conversion in Islam. This is a useful guide and is packed with information. However, it is fundamental and does not deal with the social or psychological issues that converts contend with. It is handy to reference how most Westerners, particularly the think tanks and policymakers, view Muslim converts[45].

A study of converts in Kuala Lumpur and their involvement in mosque activities published in 2015 by Majid, Kawangit, and Guleng looked at respondents to questionnaires. The study concludes that mosque activities help preserve and enhance faith amongst converts. The study also recommends that much more research in this field of follow up is needed and that there are no proper follow-up programs for converts in Malaysia[46].

Professor Yassir Suleman's books, "Narratives of Conversion to Islam in Britain: Male Perspectives" and its predecessor with the same title but from a female perspective are brilliant books relevant to the subject. The books resulted from various symposia on the subject chaired by Professor Suleman. They cover many sides of conversion, from why British men and women chose Islam to how the Muslim community and their families deal with them to their self-identity. These books supply great insight into this topic, but they fall short in their applicability outside the gender-specific British ecosystem in which they have been written. In addition, the author states that there needs to be a professional network of support for converts. However, he does not specify what this support would entail and whether this would be applicable outside the British Isles[47].

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[44] Lotta Malmirinta, *The Process of Becoming Muslim: Analyzing the Post-Conversion Processes of Finnish Muslim Convert Women* (Master's thesis, University of Helsinki, Department of World Cultures, Middle Eastern Studies, January 2017).

[45] Kim Knott, "Islam: Conversion," *Center for Research and Evidence on Security Threats*, January 2017, https://www.crest.ac.uk/research-output/islam-conversion.

[46] Mariam Majid et al., "Involvement in the Mosque Programs…".

[47] Yasir Suleiman, *Narratives of Conversion to Islam in Britain: Female Perspectives* (Centre for Islamic Studies, Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK, 2013).

Tuba Boz interviewed female Australian converts in 2011. Her study zeroes in on how easily Australian Muslim female converts adjust to life as Muslims, particularly about the issue of the ḥijāb. This study has some merit in highlighting the outward appearance of Islam and how that is a point of contention for many new Muslims. However, this study is relevant to the current research thesis[48].

Naomi Kok's Master's dissertation compares Christian and Muslim conversion narratives. This is a fresh perspective on the subject but is irrelevant to the current study[49]. Yussuf Katsura reviewed published interviews and documentation on Japanese converts to Islam. His conversion narratives supply a fascinating look at Japanese culture and how Islam was greatly misunderstood initially. After careful study, most of these former Shinto or Buddhists come to Islam. This is interesting but of little relevance to the project[50].

1.9.3 Contemporary and Classical Studies that Include an Islamic Perspective

Maha Al-Qwidi's "Understanding the Stages of Conversion to Islam: The Voice of British Converts" is an excellent dissertation about conversion to Islam and post-conversion adjustment to Muslim society. The author changes Rambo's model and adds elements of classical Islam, such as *Hidāyah* (guidance from Allah), *Fiṭrah* (inherent nature of humans) and the importance of *Tawḥīd* (Oneness of Allah). By doing so, Al-Qwidi has elevated the quality of her research and boldly stated the importance of these Islamic principles. She provides an excellent theoretical framework to understand the concept of Islamic conversion. However, it is limited to only 37 British converts and their unique experiences[51].

Kassim, Abdullah, and Baba provide a good overview of Muslim converts' problems in Malaysia. They look at the challenges from a classical Islamic perspective. They cite concepts like *Tawḥīd* (Oneness of Allah), *Hidāyah* (guidance from Allah), and Ruhani (related to the soul) to help converts strengthen their beliefs and develop a

[48] Tuba Boz, "Religious Conversion, Models and Paradigms," *Epiphany* 4, no. 1 (2012).

[49] Naomi Kok, *Religious Conversion Compared* (Master's thesis, Leiden University, 2016).

[50] Yussuf Katsura, "Conversion to Islam in Japan: An Analysis of Conversion Stories from the 1980s to Early 2000s," *グローバル日本研究クラスター報告書* 1 (2018): 73–100.

[51] Maha Al-Qwidi, "Understanding the Stages of Conversion to Islam: The Voices of British Converts" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2002).

greater understanding of Islam. This is a valuable approach, but the authors limit themselves to converts in Malaysia. In addition, their solution is limited to self-discipline, and they do not look at the problem from a social or communal perspective[52].

"*A Study of Islamic Conversion in Malaysia*" is another study by the same authors, Kassim et al., providing a thorough overview of the topic. They cover every side of conversion from a practical standpoint on how to convert and the legal requirements to reason why people in Malaysia convert to the spiritual side of conversion. This study is unique because it provides detailed legal requirements of conversion in Malaysia and how the *Muʾallaf* (Muslim Converts) should be educated from a government perspective[53].

A study by Majid and his co-researchers delves into some of the spiritual and psychological reasons why non-Muslims in Selangor, Malaysia, accept Islam. Although limited to Selangor, this study gives additional theoretical frameworks and explanations from an Islamic and psychosocial perspective on conversion[54].

Shaharuddin and co-researchers found a strong correlation between *Zakāh* received and the practice of Islam among *Muʾallaf* in Selangor, Malaysia, in 2019. This is somewhat related to the current study but does not address any key objectives. The study does lend credence to the idea that helping new Muslims economically may help their journey to become better Muslims[55].

1.10 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The inaugural chapter of this study encompasses several key components: an introduction to the research topic; background as to why I decided to conduct this research; a look at the context of the study – Bahrain and Filipinos; delineation of the problem statement, consequent research objectives, and corresponding questions

[52] Kassim, Abdullah, and Baba, "A Study of Islamic Conversion."

[53] *ibid*.

[54] Mariam Majid et al., "The Conversion of Muallaf to Islam in Selangor: Study on Behavior and Encouragement," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 7 (2016): 19–28, https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2016.v7n3s1p19.

[55] Syarul Azman Shaharuddin et al., "The Relationship Between Impact of Zakat Distribution and Religious Practice Among Muallaf in Selangor," *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews* 7, no. 4 (2019): 371–376.

guiding this inquiry; an overview of the research methodology; a look at why this research is significant followed by a comprehensive literature review; and finally, a chapter overview.

In the second chapter, the methodology of the research is discussed. An explanation for electing to do an exploratory study is provided. The mixed methods research design is detailed within this chapter along with a comprehensive description of the qualitative interviews conducted and the quantitative surveys executed. Limitations of this research are also included in the chapter.

In the third chapter, there is an explanation of the subject (Filipinos) and the environment (Bahrain) being studied – essentially establishing context. These include: the social, economic, and political background of the Kingdom of Bahrain especially concerning the expat community in general and the Filipino community in particular; the Filipino group of converts being examined, along with a brief look at the history of Islam in the Philippines.

In the fourth chapter, the concept of religious conversion and particularly conversion in Islam is discussed. The idea that *Daʿwah* means to invite people to Islam is discussed in detail and the three different types of converts to Islam are extrapolated.

In the fifth chapter, the demographic data on Filipino expatriates who have embraced Islam, gathered through interviews and surveys, is presented. The typical Filipino convert to Islam in Bahrain is fully described in this chapter.

In the sixth chapter, the research findings concerning why people in general, and why Filipinos, in particular, accept Islam are presented. Correlation studies on reasons for conversion and demographics, upbringing and foundational life experiences is also provided. Islamic concepts like *Tawḥīd*, *Fiṭrah*, and *Hidāyah* are explored. Furthermore, based on the findings, the three types of Muslim converts is revisited.

The seventh chapter is devoted to the importance of the process of *Shahādah* and includes the findings and data analysis related to this research objective. It delves into the emotional dimensions of converting to Islam, evaluates the *Shahādah* process, and offers suggestions for its improvement.

The eighth chapter examines the post-*Shahādah* experiences of Filipinos who embrace Islam in Bahrain, with a focus on the follow-up process. It presents and

analyses the Organization's New Muslim Care and Education system (NMCES), drawing on insights from the life of the Prophet as well as findings from interviews and surveys with Filipino converts. Recommendations are offered to enhance the care and education provided to new Muslims.

The ninth and final chapter synthesizes the findings from the previous chapters and offers recommendations for enhancing Islamic outreach (*Daʿwah*), the conversion process (*Shahādah*), and the support and education of New Muslims.

Over the extensive span of these chapters, the transformative journey that Filipino expatriates in Bahrain undertake – from the depths of darkness into the light of Islam – will be thoroughly explored.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The field research work, including data collection and analysis, has dual purposes. Firstly, it fulfils the needs of the present thesis. Secondly, it supports the Organization's (Discover Islam Society) research initiatives to enhance *Daʿwah* practices, *Shahādah* procedures, and improve the care and Islamic education provided to New Muslims (NMs). This chapter describes the procedures used to collect and analyse qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (surveys) data.

2.2 BACKGROUND

Over the past nine years, I have effectively served as the de facto administrator of the Organization, managing all aspects of its operations. My responsibilities have spanned from fundraising to financial reporting and from *Daʿwah* efforts to follow-up with New Muslims. This role has afforded me comprehensive access to all processes, personnel, and practices within the Organization. I report directly to the Board of Directors, who have entrusted me with the authority to run the Organization.

In 2016, I realized that, like many other charitable Islamic societies, whether engaged in *Daʿwah* or other initiatives, the Organization did not prioritize research. It continued to operate in the same traditional manner with minimal changes, where innovation was not only absent but actively discouraged. For many Muslims, innovation (*Bidʿah*) is viewed as a deviation that leads directly to Hellfire. Most Friday sermons reference this well-known *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet as a reminder to avoid *Bidʿah*. As reported in multiple *Ḥadīth* collections, including Sunan al-Nasāʾī (1578), the Prophet Muḥammad said:

> Indeed, the most truthful speech is the Book of Allah, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muḥammad. The worst of affairs are newly invented matters, and every newly invented matter is an innovation (*Bidʿah*), and every innovation (*Bidʿah*) is misguidance, and every misguidance is in the Hellfire.

Indeed, inventing matters in the faith – introducing innovation in established beliefs, rituals, and practices in Islam as ordained by Allah in the *Qurʾān* and exemplified through the life and teachings of His Apostle, Muḥammad– is expressly forbidden (*ḥaram*). On the other hand, there is room for change in matters outside of faith, belief, rituals, and practices – this is sometimes referred to as *Bidʿah Ḥasanah*, good innovations. Such changes or innovations, for example, advances in science and technology, are not only permissible but highly encouraged. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of misunderstanding and ignorance among many Muslims when it comes to the idea of *Bidʿah* or innovation[1].

Therefore, introducing change (*Bidʿah Ḥasanah*) in Muslim organizations is frequently met with scepticism and sometimes outright refusal. Initially, there was some resistance to change within the rank and file of the Organization due to this caveat. However, the leadership was more open to change, the Board recognized that innovation was essential for the Organization to remain relevant and to grow.

In late 2016, we officially established a Research Department, which I have closely supervised since its inception. Our mandate was to examine every practice and process within the Organization and identify ways to improve them. We looked at *Daʿwah*, the *Shahādah* process, and the follow-up of New Muslims and we came up with ways to improve them. We kept pushing the boundaries, questioning everything and everyone. We even surveyed New Muslims asking some of the same questions that are part of this study. The practical impact of the changes we implemented in inviting people to Islam, as well as our follow-up with new Muslims, was significant. The following graph illustrates the increase in the number of *Shahādah* within the Organization from 2014 to 2023. These are people who have accepted Islam through the Organization both in Bahrain and especially from 2020 onwards from outside of Bahrain through online *Daʿwah* efforts. While the exact numbers are intentionally not provided[2], the columns reflect the relative growth compared to the baseline number of converts in 2014.

[1] Muḥammad Ghazali, *Within the Boundaries of Islam: A Study on Bid'ah* (Petaling Jaya: The Other Press, 2010).

[2] The Organization adheres to a strict policy of maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of data regarding conversions and New Muslims. To protect this sensitive information, all personal details are securely stored, and access is limited to authorized personnel only. While reporting absolute numbers is restricted, sharing relative figures, such as percentages, is acceptable to provide insights while

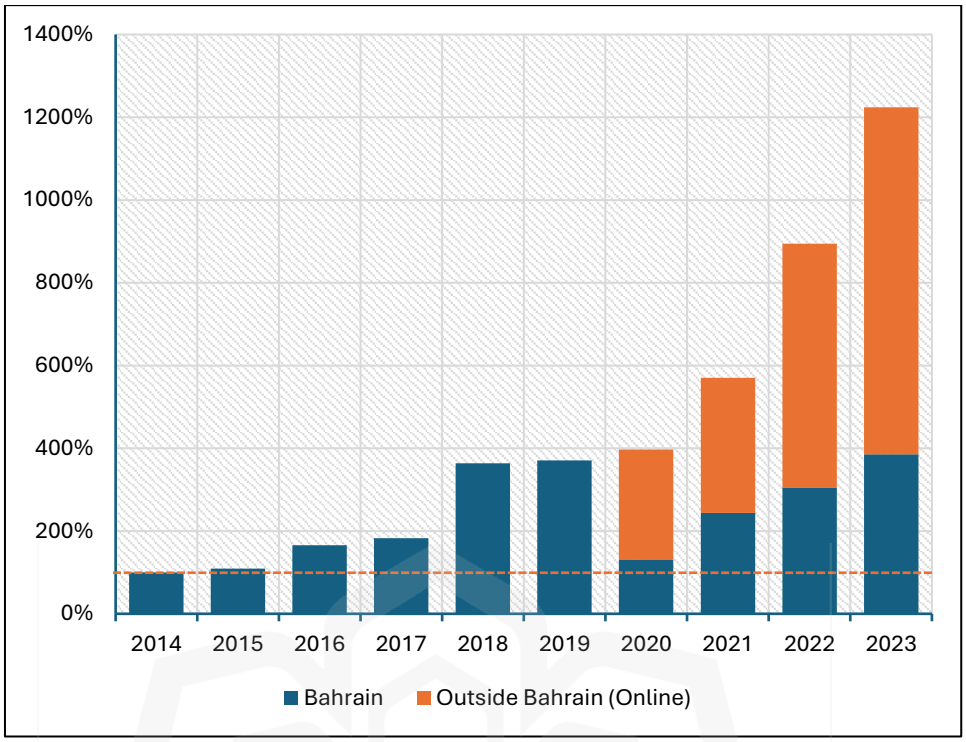


Figure 2.1 Percentage of People Accepting Islam Annually through the Organization (both in Bahrain and Outside Bahrain – Online *Da ʿwah*) Relative to the Baseline (Dashed Rust-Coloured Line) Number of Converts in 2014

Like many parts of the world, Bahrain implemented lockdown measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus in April 2020. As a result, the *Da ʿīs* and the staff of the Organization were required to work remotely. Within a few weeks, from early March to late April 2020, nearly all staff were operating from home using tools like Zoom, MS Teams, and Google Meet for video conferencing, as well as social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter (now known as X), in addition to mobile calls and SMSs. Online and remote *Da ʿwah* and New Muslim Care became the only ways for the Organization's work to continue. Instead of seeing a decline, there was an unprecedented increase in the number of people interested in learning about Islam and eventually converting. Several factors contributed to this growth. With more free time due to lockdowns and restrictions, individuals dug deeper into matters of faith. It is also believed that when faced with crises, or any kind of tribulation, people search for

safeguarding rights of converts. This approach ensures that the privacy of NMs is respected and protected, aligning with ethical guidelines and legal obligations.

answers, frequently turning to religion and spirituality. Online platforms facilitated easier connections between people wanting to know about Islam and Muslim communities worldwide, effectively eliminating geographical and time barriers[3]. This increased accessibility allowed for personalized *Daʿwah* efforts, enabling interactions that might not have been possible in a pre-pandemic world[4].

The Organization's transfer to digital modes of communication not only expanded the reach of its *Daʿīs* but also provided a supportive and interactive environment for new Muslims wanting to learn about their faith. Before COVID-19 more than 54 in-person NM classes were held at the Organization's facilities each week. Post-pandemic, only two physical in-person classes were conducted weekly to help NMs learn about their faith. Over 90% of NMs are taught online or remotely via social media.

For organizations that are open to change and innovation, disruptions like the global pandemic can propel growth. When usual methods of work are disrupted, people are forced to change. They are ready to take risks and try new technologies and this may lead to greater efficiency and improved productivity. For example, during COVID-19, the shift to remote work and interactions primarily through digital means accelerated the learning curve for the Organization and its staff. The Organization had no plan for online *Daʿwah* or online NM care and education, the pandemic forced a good innovation (*Bidʿah Ḥasanah*). Research indicates that those with a strong culture of innovation are better prepared to turn challenges into opportunities[5]. By using digital tools and new ways to connect with people, the Organization enhanced its effectiveness and relevance.

Despite our practical successes, which were partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic but mainly due to innovations in all aspects of our work, we lacked academic rigor and a professional approach to conducting research. In 2021, I decided the best way to address this challenge was to enroll in a well-known academic institution and

[3] Mandy M. Archibald et al., "Using Zoom Videoconferencing for Qualitative Data Collection: Perceptions and Experiences of Researchers and Participants," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 18 (2019): 1609406919874596.

[4] L. M. Gray et al., "Expanding Qualitative Research Interviewing Strategies: Zoom Video Communications," *The Qualitative Report* 25, no. 5 (2020): 1292–1301.

[5] Joseph Amankwah-Amoah et al., "COVID-19 and Digitalization: The Great Acceleration," *Journal of Business Research* 136 (2021): 602–611.

conduct research in an expert-reviewed environment. By doing this I can achieve my dual objectives outlined at the beginning of this chapter: conducting research with excellent academic oversight to practically benefit the Organization's work, while simultaneously fulfilling the requirements of this thesis.

2.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

To establish a comprehensive understanding of the research process, Saunders and Tosey's Research Onion[6] has been used as a guiding framework to shape the methodological decisions made throughout the study. The "Research Onion" illustrates the layers involved in the development of a robust research design, starting from the outermost layers (philosophy and approach) and progressing inward to the core of the research strategy and data collection methods.

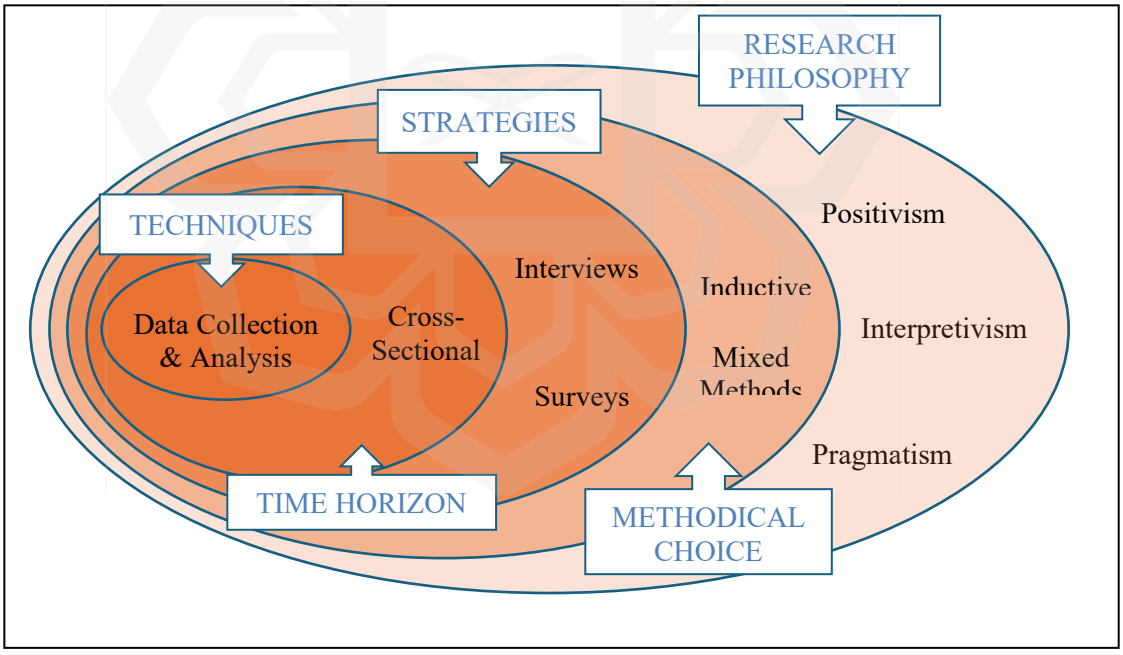


Figure 2.2 Modified Onion Methodology Chart Depicting the Strategy used for Research Design and Methodology[7]

[6] Mark Saunders and Paul Tosey, "The Layers of Research Design," *RAPPORT*, Winter 2012/2013.
[7] *ibid*.

By systematically peeling back each layer of the Onion, this section will first explore the philosophical stance underpinning the research, followed by the approach and methodological choices, and finally, the techniques for data collection and analysis. This structured approach ensures a clear rationale for each decision made, providing both rigor and coherence in the study's design.

2.3.1 Philosophical Stance: Positivism, Interpretivism and Pragmatism

Starting from the outer layer, the research incorporates positivism, pragmatism, and interpretivism. Positivism guides the quantitative side, focusing on collecting clear, measurable data through surveys. Interpretivism is at the core of the qualitative approach, capturing the personal stories and experiences of New Muslims through in-depth interviews, giving deeper understanding of their journeys and emotions. At the same time, one of the major purposes of this study is to develop better means of *Da'wah* and New Muslim Care and, if applicable, to validate existing practices within the Organization. Hence, a pragmatic or practical philosophy to the research was needed.

2.3.2 Approach: Inductive and Mixed Methods

This study is fundamentally exploratory, employing an inductive approach that is well-suited for examining the relatively under-researched topic of Filipino conversion to Islam. Rather than testing predefined hypotheses, this study allows data to shape the narrative and uncover new insights. Utilizing a mixed methods approach – combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys – provides a comprehensive perspective that captures both individual experiences and overarching trends. This approach ensures that both the detailed, personal perspectives and the larger-scale data are captured.

2.3.3 Strategy and Methods: Interviews and Surveys

The strategy used is interviews and surveys. Interviews bring out the rich, personal stories of New Muslims, revealing the emotional and psychological aspects of their conversion. Surveys complement these by providing quantitative data, helping identify patterns among a larger group. Together, these methods give a solid foundation to the study, blending personal insights with general trends.

2.3.4 Cross-Sectional Study, Data Collection and Analysis

Even though the interview and survey questions dig into the history of the respondents, the research is still only a snapshot from a research design perspective – using Saunders' terms, this is a cross-sectional study. The Filipinos surveyed or interviewed are not being followed over a period of time – there is no extended research period. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and online surveys via Google Forms. Interviews were conducted on Zoom, allowing us to dig deep into individual stories. Surveys, on the other hand, helped us gather broader data that was analysed statistically. Thematic coding of the interview transcripts allowed us to spot common themes, while the survey results were analysed for broader patterns. This combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis gives us a complete picture of the conversion process.

2.3.5 Justification of Research Design and Methodology

This design and methodology were chosen because they align well with the study's goals of exploring Filipino converts' experiences in Bahrain. The inductive and mixed methods approach is ideal for this exploratory research, as it allows us to build new insights directly from the data. By combining different philosophical perspectives and methods, we not only address the gaps in the literature but also provide practical recommendations to improve *Da'wah* practices and support for New Muslims, fulfilling the dual objectives of this study.

2.3.6 Exploratory Nature of the Study

This study uses an exploratory research design to investigate the experiences of Filipinos converting to Islam in Bahrain. Given the limited number of academic studies on this specific topic, as well as the opportunity to not only conduct in-depth interviews but also survey a large sample population across a very wide range of questions; it made sense to design this research as an exploratory study. Exploratory research aims to gain insights and understanding rather than test specific hypotheses or models. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the personal, social, psychological, and most

importantly religious dimensions of the conversion process, and it also permits a broad analysis that lets the data drive conclusions and recommendations[8].

The decision to conduct this research as an exploratory study arises from the need to address gaps in existing literature not only on the conversion of Filipinos to Islam in Bahrain but also on their follow-up after the *Shahādah*. Bahrain is a relatively small nation with a total population of about 1.58 million people. Expatriates from various parts of the world constitute 54% of the island kingdom's population. As such, this smallest of the Gulf countries provides a unique and very diverse multicultural environment that could be thought of as a microcosm of the world. Combine this with an increasing number of Filipino expats who are embracing Islam, and one has an ideal atmosphere to explore this topic. By employing qualitative methods, such as interviews, with quantitative surveys, the study seeks to identify patterns and themes that provide a better understanding of both the conversion process and an improvement in how NM follow-up occurs. This approach not only enhances academic knowledge in the field but also offers practical insights for *Daʿwah* organizations to improve their outreach, streamline the *Shahādah* process, and improve their support for New Muslims[9].

2.4 NEW MUSLIMS IN BAHRAIN

As the de facto administrator of the Organization, I have unique potential access to a substantial number of New Muslims, both past and present, who are associated with the Organization. This group of converts through the Organization served as the primary population from which interview subjects were selected and from which the sample population for the main survey was drawn.

Many individuals have embraced Islam in Bahrain over the past four decades, hailing from various parts of the world. The majority of converts have been from the Philippines. In recent years, particularly post-pandemic, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of Africans from Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda converting to Islam.

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[8] Robert A. Stebbins, *Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences*.

[9] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016); Joseph A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012).

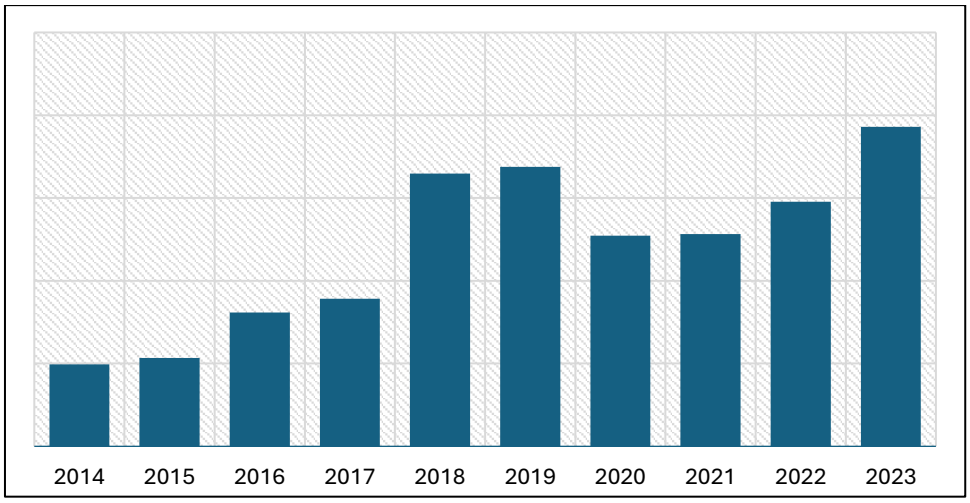


Figure 2.3 Breakdown of People Converting to Islam in Bahrain through the Organization by Year, from 2014-2023[10]

Over the last decade, from 2014 to 2023, a significant number of expatriates in Bahrain have converted to Islam through the Organization. Until 2019, there was a clear upward trend in conversions, which was disrupted by the outbreak of the coronavirus in 2020. However, the Organization quickly adapted to work remotely, and the upward trend in conversions resumed. By late 2022, most lockdowns and restrictions were lifted and a new normal emerged. Both *Da'wah* and New Muslim education were conducted using a combination of online and remote methods resulting in greater numbers of people coming to Islam.

[10] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Annual Report 2024, Internal Document*, Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024.

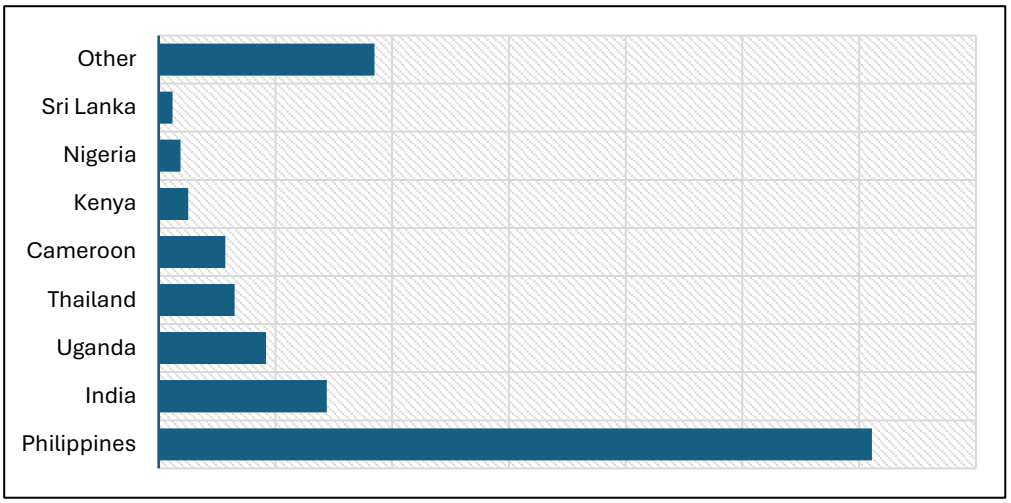


Figure 2.4 Breakdown of People Converting to Islam in Bahrain through the Organization by Nationality (Total Over Ten Years)[11]

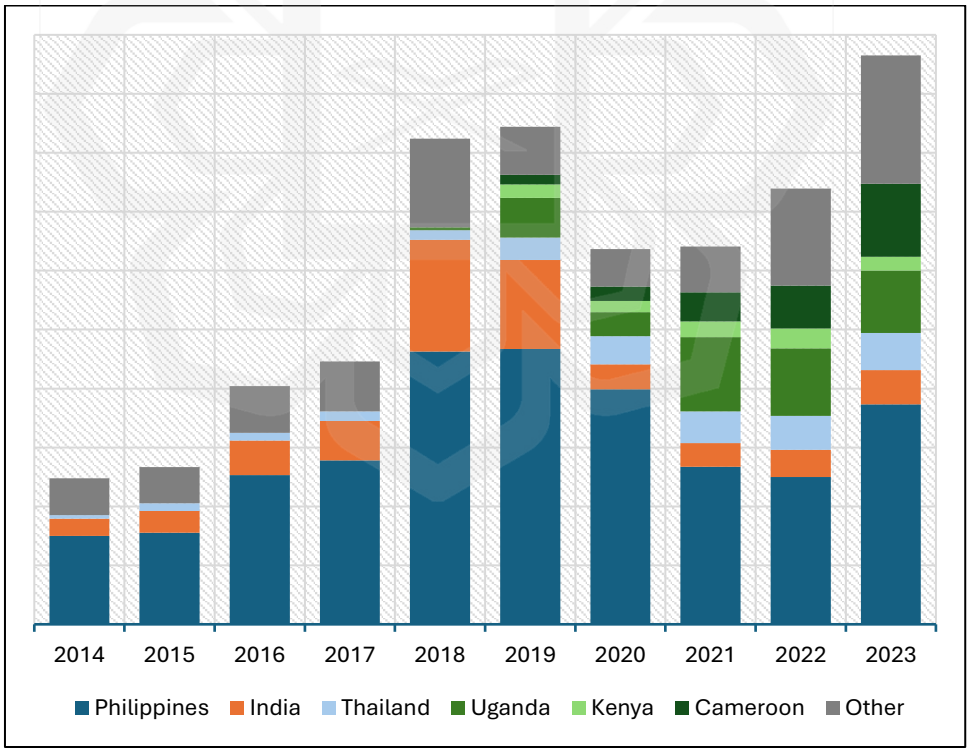


Figure 2.5 Stacked Chart Depicting People Converting to Islam in Bahrain through the Organization by Nationality from 2014 to 2023[12]

[11] *ibid.*

[12] *ibid.*

Over the past ten years, Filipinos have comprised the largest proportion of converts to Islam in Bahrain, with their relative percentage ranging from 34% to 63% per year compared to the total conversions. This significant representation has mirrored the overall trend in conversions observed during the same period (see Figure 2.5). Meanwhile, the number of Indians converting to Islam has generally declined over the years, except for 2023 when a slight increase was recorded. Conversely, an increasing number of Thai nationals have been taking *Shahādah* in Bahrain. Although African converts were present before the pandemic, the past three years have seen a noticeable rise in Ugandans, Kenyans, and Cameroonians converting to Islam. The primary reason for this rise is the growing number of East and Central Africans entering the immigrant workforce in Bahrain during this period. In addition to the total number of individuals from a particular country who have migrated to Bahrain, other factors influence the number of people from specific regions who convert to Islam. The most significant of these is the effectiveness of *Da ʿwah* efforts targeted at these specific nationalities.

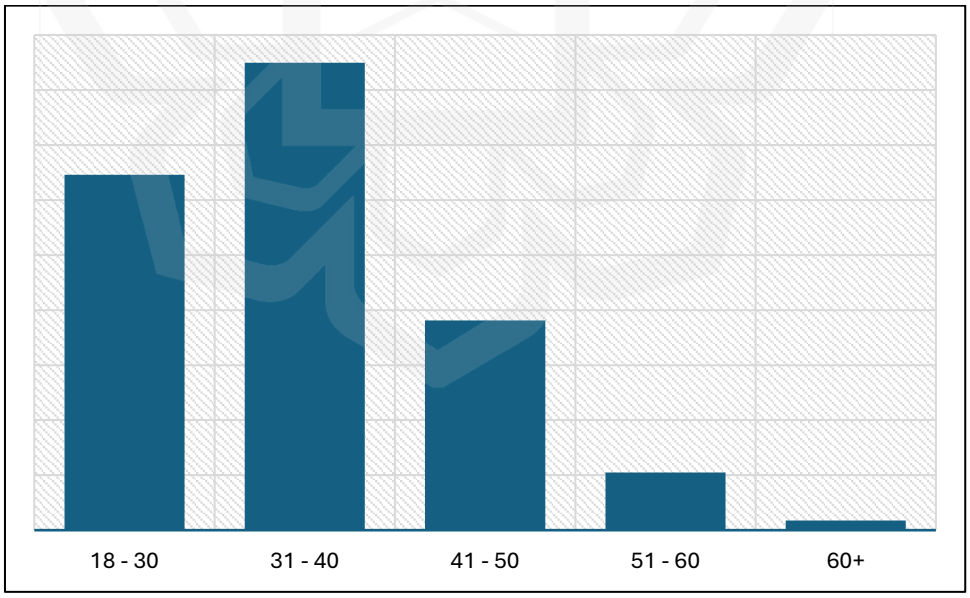


Figure 2.6 Breakdown of NMs by Age from 2014-2023[13]

[13] *ibid.*

Converts to Islam have been categorized into specific age groups by the Organization's New Muslim Department. The largest segments of the population were adults aged 31-40 and young adults aged 18-30, constituting 42% and 32% of the total converts, respectively. Middle-aged adults, aged 41-50, were the next largest group and represented 19% of the total. Senior adults, aged 51-60, and the elderly above 60, together account for about 6% of all those who accepted Islam through Discover Islam Society (the Organization) over the years 2014 to 2023.

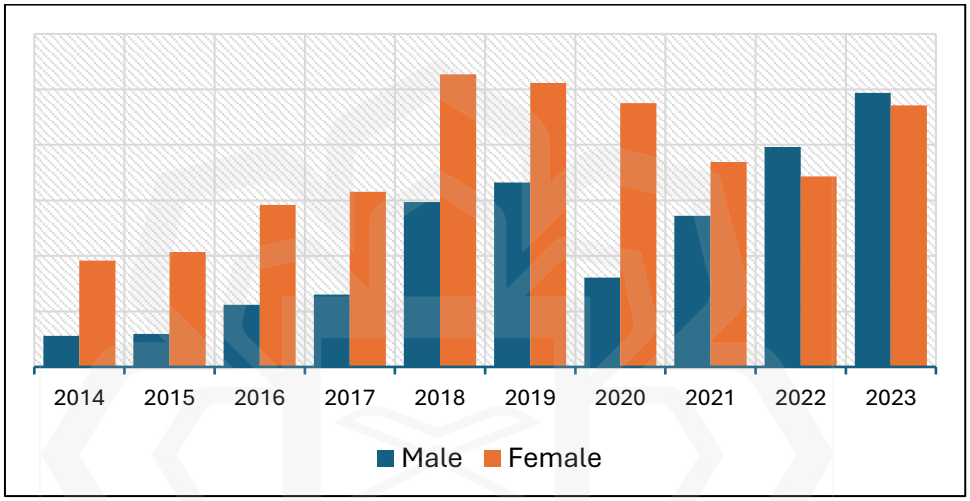


Figure 2.7 Breakdown of NMs by Gender and Year from 2014-2023[14]

The above chart (Figure 2.7) depicts the number of people who converted to Islam through the Organization over the last decade. From 2014 to 2019, overall, both male and female conversion rates saw consistent upward growth. The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on this growth and there was a substantial drop in the number of conversions in 2020 especially among men. Apart from this drop, there has been a general upward trend for men, with a substantial increase in 2018 and 2019, and then another increment from 2021 to 2023. In the first eight years, more women converted to Islam. But in 2022 and 2023, this trend reversed, and a slightly higher number of men started coming to Islam. Two primary factors are responsible for the rise in the number of men converting to Islam: Bahrain's policy change to hire more Africans; and the adoption of online and remote outreach as a result of the pandemic.

[14] *ibid.*

In recent years, a growing number of Sub-Saharan African men have migrated to Bahrain to work in construction, manufacturing, and primarily as security guards. These individuals are generally better educated, fluent in English, and more cost-effective to hire than their counterparts from the Indian subcontinent. The pandemic forced people to change the way they communicate, and more and more people now interact with one another through social media and remote channels. Consequently, men working long hours in construction, manufacturing, and security, and often living in labour camps on the city's outskirts, have become easier to reach and interact with using these new methods. As a result, more men in Bahrain are converting to Islam than ever before.

Since the language medium for this study is English, it was imperative to find, interview, and survey only English-speaking expatriates. Just over half the NMs are expats from the Philippines, all fluent in English. Some 17% of the NMs are from English-speaking African countries. Less than half of the Indian converts are fluent in English. New Muslims from Thailand and Sri Lanka make up over 6% but many are not able to effectively communicate in English. There are at most 3% NMs from the United Kingdom, the United States, and other English-speaking countries around the world[15]. Given that most converts are from the Philippines, are fluent in English, and are readily accessible, it was logical to focus on Filipino New Muslims.

2.5 MIXED METHODS APPROACH

From the outset, I decided that the study would have to include both qualitative (interviews and meetings) and quantitative (surveys and statistical analyses). My primary reason for using a mixed methods approach was to capture both the detailed conversion narratives and varied personal experiences in-depth, as well as to take advantage of my unique access to potentially large numbers of New Muslims (NMs) and collect substantial quantifiable data. Mixed methods are often utilized when trying to understand complex phenomena such as religious conversion. Qualitative methods, like interviews, capture in-depth personal narratives and the nuanced emotional and

[15] *ibid*.

psychological aspects of conversion[16]. Whereas, quantitative methods, such as surveys and statistical analysis, allow for the measurement of trends and patterns across larger populations, offering generalizable data[17]. The purpose of the research was not to test specific hypotheses or create a model of conversion but rather to explore the topic as extensively as possible. And whenever an opportunity arose, the study delved deeper into particular aspects of this rich topic. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods enabled me to explore the multifaceted, subjective experiences of NMs while also identifying patterns and relationships in the actions, emotions, and journeys that new Muslims experience. The fieldwork was divided into two stages:

a) Qualitative – Interviews with New Muslims.

b) Quantitative – Survey of New Muslims.

2.6 QUALITATIVE – INTERVIEWS WITH NEW MUSLIMS

From the large number of new Muslims who had accepted Islam in previous years, 42 individuals were selected and interviewed between March 2022 and March 2023. These participants were chosen primarily based on their availability and their proficiency in English, as well as their eagerness to communicate. Although the scope of this thesis is the Filipino New Muslim, there was an intentional decision to expand the collection of data to all NMs in Bahrain. Not only is the additional information useful for the Organization, but it also helps the thesis by providing context. As such, there was a concerted effort to get a reasonable representation of NMs regarding ethnicity and national origin. The NMs were individually interviewed via online video conferencing (Zoom) with a base set of questions[18]. They were also given ample opportunity to share their journey to Islam (conversion narrative).

While collecting data via questionnaires and studying documented cases, such as autobiographical works, was once standard practice in religious conversion studies, interviewing converts has become a central method over the past few decades. This shift

[16] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016).

[17] A. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie, *Mixed Methodology: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2010).

[18] See Appendix B.

reflects the growing recognition of the value of personal narratives and in-depth qualitative data in understanding a subject as complex and multi-disciplined as religious conversion[19]. According to Creswell and Poth, qualitative methods like interviews provide rich, detailed data that can help decipher as complex a phenomenon as religious conversion. Interviews allow researchers to explore the emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of conversion. They provide a much deeper understanding of how and why people switch their faith[20]. Although interviewing converts provides a nuanced understanding of faith conversions, it does not discredit or render obsolete quantitative methods. Ideally, a combination of both approaches explores the depth and breadth of the religious conversion experience, leveraging the strengths of qualitative insights and quantitative data to achieve a better understanding of this complex subject.

2.6.1 Participant Recruitment

The interviews were carefully scheduled by the Organization's head of the New Muslim Care Department. He was provided with clear instructions regarding the criteria for selecting participants to ensure a purposive yet diverse and representative sample. These criteria included the following:

1. **National Origin:** While the majority were to be Filipinos, a diverse representation from the African and Indian communities was also required.
2. **Recency of Conversion:** Participants should have converted to Islam within the previous five years to ensure that they can recall their experience of conversion and that the narrative they provide is current.
3. **Language Proficiency:** Participants needed to be proficient in spoken English since that is the only medium of communication.
4. **Willingness to Communicate:** Participants should demonstrate an eagerness to share their experiences openly.

[19] Eleanor Knott et al., "Interviews in the Social Sciences," *Nature Reviews Methods Primers* 2, no. 1 (2022): 73.

[20] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016).

5. **Technical Accessibility:** Participants must be able to connect via Zoom online video conferencing (this included not just the technical know-how but also access to a device with good connection speeds), ensuring that remote interviews could be conducted smoothly.
6. **Consent:** Participants had to have agreed to partake in this study including agreeing to be video recorded.
7. **Availability:** Participants needed to be available during work hours to accommodate the interview schedule.

Using the national origin of interviewees as a primary criterion for selection might suggest a stratified or quota sampling approach; however, this was not the case. Instead, as indicated by the eagerness of the new Muslims (NMs) to communicate, the diversity of their experiences, and their relevance to the study[21], a purposive sampling method was employed. This approach ensured that the selected participants were not only willing but also provided rich, varied, and relevant insights into their journeys of accepting and practicing Islam.

The purpose of conducting interviews and allowing subjects to discuss their journey was chosen as a tool in this first stage of the research to allow the NMs to share their feelings and experiences. The findings from the interviews then helped formulate the questions asked in the subsequent surveys.

2.6.2 Interview Design

This is an exploratory study. Consequently, the interview was designed to capture not only a deep understanding of conversion but also cover as wide a range of the topic as possible within a maximum window of 3 hours. The interview process was semi-structured, with an open-ended questionnaire used as a guide. This format provided flexibility for the interviewees' responses, allowing them to express nuances in their own words while ensuring that all topics were generally covered for each interviewee[22]. Most questions invited explanatory, unstructured responses similar to having a causal conversation and interviewees were allowed to deviate from the scripted questions as

[21] Eleanor Knott et al., "Interviews in the Social Sciences".
[22] *ibid*.

long as their responses were relevant and provided deeper insight. If a response became overly lengthy or veered off-topic, a gentle reminder was given to steer them back to the question at hand.

The interviews were conducted during the global COVID-19 pandemic, making in-person meetings impossible. Therefore, all interviews were carried out via Zoom online video conferencing. Utilizing Zoom for social science interviews offers several advantages, including significantly reduced costs and the ability to interview a larger number of people across vast distances[23]. Additionally, this method enhances accessibility for participants who might have scheduling conflicts or mobility issues and provides a familiar and comfortable environment, potentially leading to more open and honest responses[24].

Before starting the recorded portion of the interview, I introduced myself and other department heads from the Organization who were present. A typical interview consisted of two, sometimes three, people apart from the person being interviewed. The interviewee was then informed about the purpose of the interview and explained how the collected data would be used. Additionally, the interviewee was assured that their personal information would remain confidential and would not be shared outside the context of the interview. Given below is part of the interview preamble:

> The purpose of this research is to enable us to better understand the journey that you and others like you have gone through. We hope that through this research we will be able to better serve others who are going through similar experiences like you have. The findings and conclusions drawn from this study will be used internally by Discover Islam to improve our work. The findings will also be shared with other institutions including academic institutions; they may be published in journals; and they may also be shared with other Islamic organizations. In all cases, the information shared will be generalized and will not contain any personal, proprietary information[25].

Interviewees were also informed of their rights including the right to refuse to answer questions, to withdraw an answer, or to withdraw themselves from the Study even at a later date.

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[23] Mandy M. Archibald et al., "Using Zoom Videoconferencing for Qualitative Data".

[24] L. M. Gray et al., "Expanding Qualitative Research Interviewing Strategies"; H. Deakin and K. Wakefield, "Skype Interviewing: Reflections of Two PhD Researchers," *Qualitative Research* 14, no. 5 (2014): 603-616.

[25] Excerpt from the 'Standard Interview Permission Protocol' – see Appendix A.

> This study is completely voluntary. You have not and will not be paid for participating in this study. You may stop the interview at any time and withdraw from the study if you wish. We would very much like you to complete the study, but it is your right to withdraw[26].

In addition, the participant's consent to being recorded was taken in the following manner:

> We are video recording this interview. Please confirm now that you agree to this video recording. Please do so by answering this first question.
>
> Are you aware that we are video recording this interview and do you agree with being recorded – please answer in full by rephrasing the question as an answer?
>
> For example, "I am fully aware that this interview is being video recorded, and I have no objection to being recorded in this manner. I approve[27]."

The NMs invited to participate in this study shared some of the most intimate and vulnerable moments of their lives. From a legal, Islamic, and ethical perspective, it was and is essential to protect their identities and respect their privacy. This is a common and standard approach that conforms to ethical guidelines recommended by social science research authorities, such as the American Psychological Association (APA) and the British Sociological Association (BSA), which emphasize the importance of safeguarding participants' rights and well-being. By explicitly stating these safeguards, the protocol (Appendix A) builds trust and ensures compliance with ethical standards[28].

After ensuring the interviewee's rights were safeguarded and obtaining verbal consent to proceed with the recording, the actual interview process commenced. The interview (Appendix B) was structured into four parts:

i. Background and personal information about the participant (mainly demographic variables).

ii. Life before considering Islam.

iii. Conversion to Islam.

iv. Life as a Muslim.

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[26] *ibid*.

[27] *ibid*.

[28] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Sage Publications, 2016); Eleanor Knott et al., "Interviews in the Social Sciences".

2.6.2.1 Background/Personal Information about Participants

The first section of the interview focused on collecting demographic data. Participants were asked a series of questions regarding their name or pseudonym, age, ethnicity, hometown or specific region in the Philippines, languages spoken, education level, and current and previous employment. Additionally, they provided information about their family, including parents, spouses, children, and siblings. This section concluded with an open-ended question, allowing participants to share any other personal information they wished to disclose. This comprehensive approach ensured a thorough understanding of each participant's demographic background, essentially answering the overall question to the interviewee, "Who are you?"

Knott et al. suggest that beginning an interview with factual questions such as "What is your name?", "How old are you?", "Where were you born?" helps to relax the participant[29]. This approach makes it easier for them to subsequently answer more abstract or opinion-based questions. This technique is supported by other research indicating that starting with straightforward, factual questions can establish rapport and create a comfortable environment, consequently allowing the interviewee to share more personal and more profound experiences[30].

2.6.2.2 Life Before Islam

The second section of the interview explored the participants' lives before they considered converting to Islam. Questions were asked about their family's religion, their own religious upbringing, and their experiences with religious practices such as attending church or religious school. Examples of these questions include: "What is/was the religion of your parents/family when you were young/growing up? In other words what religious tradition (if any) were you brought up in?" and "Were your parents religious? Describe the household you grew up in with respect to religion?"

Participants were also asked about their satisfaction with their previous religious or moral upbringing, their views on existential questions, and any dissatisfaction they

[29] Eleanor Knott et al., "Interviews in the Social Sciences".

[30] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Sage Publications, 2016); Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (Teachers College Press, 2006).

may have felt with their life prior to learning about Islam. These questions were more probing, encouraging the interviewee to share very personal feelings and beliefs. Examples of such questions include: “Were you happy or content with your religious or moral upbringing? If not, please describe;” “Did you ever question your religion, church, parents, pastor, or priest? If so, please describe;” “What was your understanding of God at the time? Please explain;” and “Did you ever wonder about ‘why we are here’ or ‘what is the meaning of life?’”

This section aimed to understand the participants’ initial religious environment and any factors that may have influenced their decision to consider Islam. By exploring their past, the interview sought to uncover the foundations of their spiritual journey.

2.6.2.3 Conversion to Islam

The third section delved into the participants’ journey towards Islam. This part of the interview focused on the events or moments that prompted them to seriously consider becoming Muslim. Questions explored their initial opinions of Islam, any existential crises they experienced, and specific incidents that sparked their interest. The participant was pushed to dig even deeper and share some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives with questions like, “Did you at any time become disinterested in your life, particularly in terms of religion or morality or spirituality? In other words, did you experience any kind of existential crisis?” and “Did you consider or even convert to any other religion or belief prior to Islam?” These questions were challenging for anyone to answer, and the participants were not pressured to share any information they were uncomfortable with. Both verbal and non-verbal cues, such as hesitation or obvious discomfort, were carefully observed. The participants were reassured that they were not obligated to respond to any question that made them uneasy. Interestingly, in some cases, this reassurance led them to make an extra effort to answer the more difficult questions.

Participants were asked to describe their journey of exploring Islam, their interactions with Muslims, and the specific aspects of Islam that attracted them. During this part of the interview, they were invited to share their conversion narrative with prompts like, “Tell us about how, when, and why you converted to Islam. Share your conversion story.” Interviewers were reminded with notes such as, “Allow the

interviewee to tell their story in their own way; If it becomes too lengthy or digresses, gently steer them back to the main narrative," to ensure the stories remained focused and concise.

Additionally, this section included detailed questions about the moment they took the *Shahādah* (the Islamic declaration of faith) and their emotional and psychological states before, during, and after the conversion. Participants were asked to recall the exact moment they took their *Shahādah*. They were asked a series of questions to build a detailed story of their conversion:

> Let us talk about the *Shahādah* (conversion) itself – the moment you became Muslim when you recited the phrase *"Ashhadu an lā ilāha illā Allāh, wa ashhadu anna Muḥammadun rasūlu Allāh"* – I bear witness that there is no god except Allah, and I bear witness that Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah. Please narrate to us how you took the *Shahādah*.
>
> What did you feel (emotionally) while you were reciting this phrase?
>
> What was your feeling the moment you had completed taking the *Shahādah*? Imagine that time when you have just accepted Islam. You have completed reciting this phrase in Arabic and in your language. What did you now feel? Describe your emotions.
>
> Are you able to describe your mental/emotional/psychological state just before, during, and immediately after taking the *Shahādah*? Please describe.

In many interviews, this was probably the most emotional part, not only for the participant but often for the interviewers as well. Interviewees were then asked about their experiences immediately following this life-changing moment. They described what they did that same evening, how their first night as a Muslim was, and what they felt the next morning when they woke up. They were also asked whether they shared their change in faith with others, including their family.

2.6.2.4 Life after Converting to Islam

The final section of the interview examined the participants' lives after converting to Islam. This part of the interview addressed the changes in their lives after conversion, their emotional and psychological adjustments, and how they learned about and adopted Islamic practices. Participants were asked about their adherence to the five pillars of Islam, their involvement in the Muslim community, and any struggles they faced in practicing their new faith. Here is an example of the questions asked:

Was it easy to learn and accept the principles and practices of Islam?

Do you know the five pillars of Islam? When and how did you learn about them?

Do you know the six articles of faith? When and how did you learn them?

Do you know how to do wudhu? How to pray? When and how did you learn? How strict are you about the five daily *Farḍ* prayers? Do you perform *Sunnah* and *Nafl* prayers? Do you regularly attend *Jumʿah Salah*?

Are you liable for *Zakāh*? Do you pay *Zakāh*?

For many participants, this part of the interview was particularly helpful. It reassured them about the directions and choices they had made and served as a checklist, highlighting what they had already learned about Islam and what they still needed to explore. The interview then looked into the convert's life as a Muslim, and concluded with some deeply significant questions:

How do you view your life today compared to before you became Muslim?

Are you happy? Contented?

Would you change anything about your journey to Islam? If yes, what, and why?

Anything else you would like to share with us about your journey from not knowing much about Islam to becoming a Muslim today?

With this last question, participants were invited to share any additional information they deemed relevant. In a few instances, interviewees expressed concerns about aspects of Islamic education they realized they had either missed or not fully understood during the interview. Having the Organization's head of New Muslim Care and Education present was particularly beneficial, as it allowed for immediate action to address any gaps in their care or education.

2.6.3 Interview Data Collection

A total of 42 NMs were interviewed. Interviews lasted between an hour and a half to almost three hours. Initially, we conducted two interviews per day – one in the morning and one in the early afternoon. However, after a few sessions, we realized that the process was emotionally exhausting, and hearing two conversion narratives daily was extremely taxing. As a result, we reduced the schedule to one interview per day, with a

maximum of two per week. Interviews were conducted over a period of almost twelve months. One major reason for the project taking almost a year was the annual work environment in Gulf countries. Bahrain experiences long, extremely hot summers. From July to September, many expatriates take vacations to coincide with the intense heat and the extended school holidays. As a result, no interviews were conducted during the summer months. And year-end reports, planning and budgeting for the coming year, and annual Board meetings make December and January the busiest months of the year for the Organization. Consequently, most of the interviews took place from March through June, in October, and then the following year in February and ending in March 2023.

Over the course of the year, as the interviews progressed, it became evident that the responses were starting to sound repetitive. This phenomenon is referred to as sample saturation. According to Knott et al., "*Researchers often stop interviewing when new interviews confirm findings from earlier interviews with no new or surprising insights (saturation)*[31]." They further explain that between 12 and 20 interviews often suffice, as interviewing additional participants may not yield any new information or insights. However, they caution that the actual number required to achieve saturation can vary, potentially being either fewer or more than this range.

2.6.4 Interview Data Processing and Analysis

Every interview was conducted using Zoom, an online video conferencing tool, and the entire session was recorded. Since participants were connecting via their own devices, it was decided to keep the interviews audio-only to ensure smoother and more cost-effective connections for them. Audio recordings were saved at the end of each interview. The recordings were then transcribed using Otter.ai, a subscription-based online tool. Corrent and Bourgeault highly recommend Otter.ai, citing it as a relatively inexpensive and highly effective transcription tool ideal for social science research based on case study analysis of the service[32]. Similarly, Chia et al. reported that Otter.ai

[31] Eleanor Knott et al., "Interviews in the Social Sciences".

[32] Melissa Corrente and Ivy Bourgeault, "Innovation in Transcribing Data: Meet Otter.ai" (SAGE Publications, Ltd., 2022).

is a useful and accurate tool for interview transcription and works very well with Zoom online video conferencing[33].

A total of 42 NMs from different nationalities were interviewed. All 42 interviews were transcribed and then manually edited and 'cleaned.' Knott et al. discuss data cleanup as follows:

> Decisions about what to include when transcribing will be hugely important for the direction and possibilities of analysis. Researchers should decide what they want to capture in the transcript, based on their analytic focus. From a (post) positivist perspective, the researcher may be interested in the manifest content of the interview (such as what is said, not how it is said). In that case, they may choose to transcribe intelligent verbatim. From a constructivist perspective, researchers may choose to record more aspects of speech (including, for example, pauses, repetitions, false starts, talking over one another) so that these features can be analysed. Those working from this perspective argue that to recognize the interactional nature of the interview setting adequately and to avoid misinterpretations, features of interaction (pauses, overlaps between speakers, and so on) should be preserved in transcription and therefore in the analysis[34].

In the context of the current study, adopting a post-positivist perspective is advantageous not only for accurately transcribing the interviews but also for interpreting them bearing in mind the potential biases and limitations of both the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviews were further edited to remove any verbal and non-verbal recordings that did not add any value, such as 'ums,' 'ahs', and false starts. Knott et al. describe this method as 'intelligent verbatim' transcription[35].

The interview transcripts were manually[36] analysed using a pre-determined set of themes based on the research objectives of this study. The responses were thoroughly studied, and sections were highlighted and labelled according to the pre-determined themes. This method of coding the data allowed responses from different interviewees to be gathered based on their commonalities and congruence. This whole process was

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[33] Chi Kuan Chia, Simin Ghavifekr, and Ahmad Zabidi Abdul Razak, "Online Interview Tools for Qualitative Data Collection During Covid-19 Pandemic; Review of Web Conferencing Platforms' Functionality," *Malaysian Journal of Qualitative Research* 7, no. 1 (2020): 95-106.

[34] Eleanor Knott et al., "Interviews in the Social Sciences".

[35] *ibid*.

[36] Artificial Intelligence driven online tools, NVivo and ATLAS.Ti, were considered as an alternative to manual coding and thematic analysis. However, after some testing it was found that learning the software was quite time-consuming (steep learning curve) and the automated approach missed out on some of the nuances of the interviews. Manually analysing the twenty-five interviews was seen as a more efficient and accurate approach.

iterative and required going back and forth between the original audio recordings, the transcripts, and the themes based on the research objectives and questions. One major challenge was understanding the accents of some of the participants. In some cases, even after listening to the audio multiple times, it was difficult to capture exactly what was said. At times the context of the conversation and the specific question asked helped determine specifically what was uttered. These meticulous steps in the data analysis were crucial and data was selectively extracted to generate useful information. This study is primarily driven by the analysis of the data collected. No hypotheses are being tested, nor is there a theoretical approach that determines how data should be viewed. This implies an inductive approach to data analysis, where new concepts emerge solely from examining the collective responses of the interviewees. Knott et al. describe this method of data generation as follows:

> The process of analysing semi-structured interviews might be thought of as a generative rather than an extractive enterprise. Findings do not already exist within the interview data to be discovered. Rather, researchers create something new when analysing the data by applying their analytic lens or approach to the transcripts. At a high level, there are options as to what researchers might want to glean from their interview data. They might be interested in themes, whereby they identify patterns of meaning across the dataset…One example of a truly inductive approach is grounded theory, whereby the analysis aims to build a new theory, beginning with one's data[37].

Finally, to protect the privacy of the interviewee, typical gender-specific, Muslim names were assigned to each of the participants randomly.

2.7 QUANTITATIVE – NEW MUSLIM SURVEY

Based on the New Muslim interviews, a comprehensive survey was developed in July 2023. This extensive questionnaire, consisting of over a hundred questions, explored the lives of New Muslims from their childhood, through their migration to Bahrain, their journey to accepting Islam, and their subsequent experiences learning about Islam and integrating into the Muslim community.

[37] Eleanor Knott et al., "Interviews in the Social Sciences".

2.7.1 Survey Design

Based directly on the questions used in the Interviews, an online survey questionnaire (Appendix C) was put together using Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to be filled out easily by New Muslims without the need for a surveyor or interviewer – what Brace termed a "self-completion" questionnaire[38].

This questionnaire was directly created within the Google app, Google Forms – a free online web-only application published by Google as part of their Google Docs Editor suite of business productivity web-based apps. Google Forms allows users to create and edit surveys, quizzes, and forms online for data collection. Users may share Google Forms with collaborators allowing multiple users to work together in real-time. The survey created on Google Forms may then be distributed to end users (respondents) via various online platforms including via email; link sharing; embedding the link on a website or blog or any digital media; through social media like Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter); and by generating a QR code that may be printed and distributed physically. The Google Form survey may also be printed directly from the online app or saved as a PDF and shared (Google LLC, 2023).

According to a study by Vasantha Raju and Harinarayana, Google Forms is an ideal tool for survey-based research for several reasons[39]. Since it is free to use, it may be far less costly than the more traditional modes of surveying. The user interface is intuitive and requires little technical know-how. There is the option of encoding and creating more sophisticated forms, but for a novice user, the existing templates are sufficient for most survey needs. The authors further argue that the surveys can easily be distributed via email, social media, or embedded in websites, as well as printing QR codes for physical dissemination thereby ensuring a wide reach. Additionally, the responses are automatically collected by Google and may be directly analysed using Google Sheets. The two researchers conclude that "web-based survey tools (like Google Forms) may become (an) obvious choice for survey research."

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[38] Ian Brace, *Questionnaire Design: How to Plan, Structure and Write Survey Material for Effective Market Research* (London: Kogan Page Publishers, 2018).

[39] N. Vasantha Raju and N. Harinarayana, "Online Survey Tools: A Case Study of Google Forms," paper presented at the *National Conference on Scientific, Computational & Information Research Trends in Engineering*, GSSS-IETW, Mysore, 2016

Since its inception in 2008 and the above review in 2016, Google Forms has become even more sophisticated and user-friendly. In a post-pandemic world where most people prefer social media and online engagements instead of meeting in person, creating a survey questionnaire on Google Forms was an obvious and ideal choice.

The Survey was titled "2023 New Muslim Survey." This was displayed in large bold font right under a banner of the Organization's logo and was followed by a preamble on why the survey was being conducted, how the data shall be used and the option to leave the study was given to the respondent (see Appendix C). The exact wording was as follows:

> *As-salāmu ʿalaykum* – Peace be with you.
>
> Welcome to our New Muslim Survey 2023.
>
> We are collecting information on how and why people convert to Islam. We are also collecting information on the journey that New Muslims undergo to learn more about Islam after they have converted and their experiences during this journey.
>
> The purpose of this research is to enable us to better understand the journey that you and others like you have gone through. We hope that through this research, we will be able to better serve others who are going through similar experiences like you have.
>
> We are hoping that you will participate in this Survey and in doing so help countless others who, like you, are undergoing a journey to learn about Islam and become practicing Muslims.
>
> This Survey is divided into five (5) sections. Please fill out each section as accurately and as completely as you can.
>
> This Survey is completely voluntary. You are not obligated in any way to participate in this Survey. You have not and will not be paid for participating in this Survey. You may exit the Survey at any point. We would very much like you to complete the Survey, but it is your right to withdraw. You may request to have your responses withdrawn from the study if you wish by sending an email to nmcwithdraw@gmail.com. By participating in this Survey, you give us the right to use your responses to collect information and draw conclusions.

The survey was divided into five sections: basic contact information; demographic information titled 'About You'; 'Life Before Islam'; 'Interest in Islam and Conversion'; and finally, 'Life After Converting to Islam'.

2.7.1.1 Basic Contact Information

This section contained five questions: Email; Mobile Number; Name (first name only); Date of Birth; and a drop-down list of names of *Da'īs* and *Anṣār*[40] who requested the respondent to fill in this Questionnaire. All five questions were designated mandatory to answer (Google Forms provides a feature whereby a question must be answered for the respondent to move ahead on the questionnaire). These questions provided a means to 'anchor' the respondent. They enabled the respondent to be tracked through the data collected. It was expected that many NMs would fill out the final survey. Keeping track of hundreds of respondents who would have answered over a hundred questions, some with multiple responses could become a data nightmare if certain 'key' information was not used to anchor a respondent. Emails, mobile numbers, and birthdates are ideal anchors to distinguish and track individual respondents, preventing data confusion. In addition, acquiring the name of the person who requested the respondent to fill out the questionnaire helps both in identifying the respondent as well as using that to encourage greater numbers of responses (more on this later when discussing data collection).

2.7.1.2 About You

The section of the questionnaire essentially answered the question, "Who are you?" The section started with a caveat:

> We would like you to please share some basic information about yourself. None of the specific information you give will be shared with anyone outside this Study. We will only use this information in general terms to create an overall picture of the participants of the Study without disclosing any specific information.

In this way, participants in the study were assured their privacy was protected and the data they shared would be protected. Respondents were then asked to complete a series of simple factual questions such as gender, country of origin, language spoken back home (mother tongue), highest education level, current profession/job, how long they have been in Bahrain, marital status and if they have children or not. Most of these

[40] Ansar (literally 'helper' or 'supporter' in Arabic) referred to the Muslims of *Madīnah* who welcomed and supported the Prophet and his companions who migrated (*Muhajirun*, emigrants) from Makkah in 622 CE to Yathrib (later came to be known as the 'city of the Prophet', *Madīnat-un-Nabi* or simply *Madīnah*). In the context of the Organization, 'Ansar' is the term conferred on the staff and volunteers who 'support' the New Muslims in terms of caring for them and teaching them the basics of Islam.

questions were multiple choice questions and in the case of a large number of choices, a 'drop-down' list was provided where the participant had to simply click on the chosen response and move to the next question. Asking factual and relatively easier questions at the beginning of the questionnaire helps relax the respondent and encourages greater compliance and accuracy when completing the remainder of the survey[41].

Further to this the respondents were also asked about how close they were to various relations (mother, father, brother, etc.) and how important certain issues (like wealth, profession, education, religion, social media, etc.) were to them. These questions used a Likert Scale to measure the attitude of the respondents. The Likert Scale, also known as the 'agree-disagree' scale has been used for over 90 years to gauge consumer behaviour, in political polling, to evaluate personality traits in psychology, and to rate the effectiveness of a particular program or technique in healthcare, education and more[42]. The section was rounded off with an open-ended question asking the participants to share any other personal information that they deemed relevant.

2.7.1.3 Life before Islam

At the head of this section, respondents were informed that they would "answer questions about your life from your childhood until the time you seriously considered accepting Islam."

The respondents were asked to look back at their lives from childhood to when they were young adults and to answer questions about their parents and the home, they grew up in. Topics like the family's religion and attitude toward religion, their religious upbringing, and their experiences with religious practices such as attending church or religious school. Examples of these questions include: "What was the primary religion of your family/parents when you were growing up (childhood until you were 18)?" and "How often did you attend your religious institution (Church, Mosque, Temple, etc.) while growing up?" to more revealing questions like "At the most basic level while growing up (childhood until 18), what was your belief regarding God?" All these

[41] *ibid*, Eleanor Knott et al., "Interviews in the Social Sciences".

[42] Ankur Joshi et al., "Likert Scale: Explored and Explained," *British Journal of Applied Science & Technology* 7, no. 4 (2015): 396-403.

questions were followed by either multiple choice or Likert scale answers for the participants to choose.

The questionnaire also probed some activities that respondents may have engaged in. For example, the participants were asked if they ever consumed alcohol or recreational drugs; whether they were involved in pre-marital relations; or if they ever got caught up in any criminal activity. They were further asked about whether they knew any Muslims when growing up and what they thought of Muslims at the time. The section concluded with an open-ended request, "Anything else you would like to share about your life (childhood, growing up) before you became interested in Islam."

2.7.1.4 Interest in Islam and Conversion

This part of the survey covered the events or moments in the respondent's life that led them to seriously consider choosing Islam as their faith. The section further looked at the moment they made that choice and took their *Shahādah*.

Respondents were asked about their emotional and psychological state, as well as their attitude toward faith before they became Muslim. Specifically, they were queried about any disinterest in life, particularly concerning faith or religion. They were asked if they had undergone any trauma such as the death of a loved one or if they had experienced some major life-changing event like divorce or losing a job etc. They were further asked about the religion (if any) that they identified themselves with and their specific beliefs just before their conversion to Islam. In addition, their opinion about Islam and Muslims was also polled.

Having explored their journey up to the point where they were about to accept Islam, the NMs were then asked the all-important question as to exactly why they chose this faith. This was presented in various ways: some questions offered direct choices like, 'the Oneness of Allah' and 'the Example of the Prophet'; whereas others asked the NM to identify with a statement that best described their belief, such as, "I always believed in One God, I just didn't know that this was called Islam," "I always held Islamic beliefs, I just didn't know that was what they were called," "I had a problem with my previous belief system," and "I had questions about the purpose of life and Islam provided the solutions."

The survey then progressed on to their interest in Islam, quizzing what prompted the respondent to look at Islam, how they go about finding out about Islam, and so on. This line of questioning culminated with a direct question, "When did you convert to Islam?" The remainder of the section focused on the *Shahādah* itself covering topics ranging from the emotional state of the NM before the *Shahādah* to what was going through their mind during the conversion process and finally how they felt after becoming Muslim. Additionally, respondents were asked about how various people in their lives, such as parents, spouses, children, siblings, friends, and co-workers, reacted to their new religious identity. Like in previous sections, this one also ended by asking the participants to share anything else they considered pertinent to their conversion to Islam.

2.7.1.5 Life after Converting to Islam

The last section of the survey focused on the New Muslim's journey after they had taken the *Shahādah*. The respondents were asked about their current emotional state vis-à-vis Islam. They were further queried about their relationship with their parents, spouses, siblings, children, friends, and co-workers now that they had been Muslim for some time.

The survey then progressed to the final segment where New Muslims were asked about their understanding of Islamic beliefs, practices, and the challenges they have faced in adapting to their new faith. This was a particularly lengthy part of the survey as it dealt with each subject comprehensively. The New Muslims answered about their Islamic education starting with the most basic, the *Shahādah*, to more nuanced topics like the articles of faith and to very practical concerns like how to perform wudhu (ablution necessary to perform the ritual prayer, *Ṣalāh*) and how to calculate and pay *Zakāh*.

The respondents were also asked questions like "What (if any) challenges have you faced in your journey to learn about Islam? (you may choose more than one)," and were given a selection of answers to choose from. These choices included, "Memorizing Surahs or verses of the *Qurʾān*," "Learning how to pray correctly," and "Overcoming or unlearning concepts from my previous faith." The NMs were also prodded about their diligence with Islamic practices like *Ṣalāh*, Saum (fasting during the month of

Ramadan), *Zakāh* (obligatory almsgiving if one qualifies), and whether they had performed *Ḥajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah) or Umrah (the lesser pilgrimage to Makkah). The survey further inquired if the respondent had experienced any kind of prejudice like racism, sexism, Islamophobia, and Xenophobia after becoming Muslim.

The survey concluded with four open-ended questions. First, respondents were asked what they would change about their journey to Islam. Second, they were invited to share any message they would like to convey to other Muslims. Thirdly, they were allowed to share anything about themselves or their journey to Islam. This question gave the respondents the freedom to express anything they believed important to themselves. Lastly, the respondents were asked to provide feedback on the survey itself. The Google questionnaire ended with the following message.

Thank you for filling out this Survey. Insha'Allah your feedback will help us improve our work of providing care and educating about Islam.

If you have any concerns, questions or need help please contact your *Anṣār* (Coordinator or Teacher) or *Dāʿī* or contact one of the Discover Islam Branches.

2.7.2 Pilot Survey

An initial Pilot Survey (Appendix C) was conducted in August 2023. This was limited to staff of the Organization including *Dāʿīs*, *Anṣār*, and some volunteers of the Organization who also were recent converts to Islam. The purpose of this first survey (pilot) was to identify any potential concerns and to revise the survey before administering it to a larger group.

Brace stated, "*As with all self-completion media, a major disadvantage is not having an interviewer on hand to clarify questions or to repair misunderstandings*[43]." The advantage of an online survey is the ability to reach a large audience in a short time and at almost no additional cost. However, once deployed to hundreds of potential respondents a flawed questionnaire would be difficult to recall and even if one manages to stop people from filling out a form, the loss in one's credibility may harm the potential to reach out to as many respondents. Consequently, there was a need to create

[43] Ian Brace, *Questionnaire Design: How to Plan….*

and disseminate this ‘pilot’ survey. It allowed potential pitfalls and errors in the questionnaire design to be identified and addressed. By having a smaller 'guinea pig' group of respondents complete the survey and provide feedback, the survey was corrected and improved before wider distribution to NMs. Though time-consuming and logistically challenging, this step was necessary to ensure that the final NM Survey was easier to understand, unambiguous to fill out, and the data collected was relevant and analysable[44].

2.7.2.1 Distributing the Pilot Survey and Collecting Data

The pilot survey was developed and designed in July 2023. On the 19th of July, over 80 staff including *Dāʿīs* and *Anṣār*, volunteers, and department heads of the Organization were invited to a special, day-long workshop at a local community hall. It was the 1st of Muharram, the Islamic New Year, an official public holiday in Bahrain, and as such almost everyone invited, attended the unique workshop. The morning was spent addressing various organizational, logistical, human resource, and marketing-related questions. After lunch, I addressed the audience and outlined the work of the Research Department. I highlighted the numerous changes and innovations we had implemented within the Organization and the resulting improvements we had all observed. I then introduced the pilot survey, emphasizing the importance of collecting good data and explaining how this new information will further improve our work. The remainder of the afternoon was spent going over the questionnaire in detail. A good discussion ensued, and several suggestions were made to improve the survey. These suggestions were implemented over the following days, and the improved pilot survey was subsequently launched online at the end of July.

Google Forms provides numerous ways to share a questionnaire. The pilot survey was shared as a WhatsApp link sent to all the participants of the special workshop. Everyone was requested to fill out the survey as best as possible. From the 1st to the 16th of August 2023, a total of 96 people filled out the survey.

[44] *ibid*.

2.7.2.2 Pilot Survey Data Processing and Feedback

Responses submitted by participants of the pilot survey were recorded by Google Forms in real-time. The data was immediately available within Google Sheets or was downloadable as a .CSV file to be sorted and analysed using a spreadsheet program like MS Excel[45] (Google LLC 2023). Google Forms offers tools for summarizing and visualizing the collected data, but the default charts are not well suited for this thesis. All the data was downloaded and processed into a sortable table using MS Excel. The purpose of the Pilot Survey was to identify areas of concern in the questionnaire by analysing the responses and particularly reviewing the feedback.

About two in five (42.7%) of the respondents gave positive feedback for the survey. In most cases, this was expressed as a form of gratitude or prayer. Examples of this kind of feedback are as follows:

> Thank you for giving us always information and teaching us about Islam.
>
> The questions here are very good and we learned more.
>
> This is something brilliant and excellent initiative to upgrade our system.
>
> It's perfect. *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*.
>
> Excellent and very helpful. *Mā shāʾ Allāh Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*.
>
> It is very necessary to conduct a survey like this.
>
> I enjoyed the questions.
>
> *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*.
>
> Learned a lot of things, I know what I'm supposed to study more.

Some of the positive responses included specific and useful feedback. For example: "If possible, use a drop-down list for Language and Profession," This and other similar suggestions, such as "add 'Beautician' in the list of professions," were implemented in the revised New Muslim Survey[46].

One substantial and valid concern was identified when several workshop participants were unable to fill out the survey because they did not have an email address. They had to acquire an email address just to partake in the survey.

[45] MS Excel is widely used in social science surveys and interviews for its robust data management, analysis, and visualization capabilities. The software's functions allow for basic and complex descriptive statistics as well as easy to use charting tools to visually represent findings in the form of column, stacked and horizontal bar charts, and more, to effectively communicate findings.

[46] See Appendix D.

Consequently, the first question requesting an email address was removed from the final survey.

One of the key questions in the survey about the reasons for choosing Islam was creating holdups with many respondents. The question required the respondent to only fill in one answer per column. Several participants did not follow this instruction properly and kept getting error messages. This was rectified in the final survey by adding a strongly worded instruction (see below) and the problem was resolved.

(Choose only ONE response per column - if you choose more than one response per column, you will not be able to proceed to the next section - you will keep getting an error. So, please choose only ONE RESPONSE PER COLUMN).

Two respondents (2%) stated that the questionnaire was too long. And the remaining respondents (55.2%) did not give any feedback.

Of the 96 staff and volunteers of the Organization that filled out the pilot survey, 76 (79.1%) were also converts to Islam. Since almost the entirety of the questionnaire remained unchanged and the main survey was conducted within a few days of completing the pilot, it was decided to append this data of 76 NMs with data collected for the revised NM Survey. The University of Cambridge MRC CBU Wiki states that "Pilot data is often a small-scale data set used to assess study feasibility before a larger main study. The two data sets may be combined provided the sampling strategy is the same and there are no changes over time e.g. in the precision of equipment or questions in a test manual[47]." Altman et al. similarly state that if a pilot study does not lead to any modifications of materials or procedures then the data collected may be incorporated into the main study's data[48]. Thabane et al. when addressing the question of whether pilot data can be combined with data from the main study, categorically respond that "Yes, provided the sampling frame and methodologies are the same. This can increase the efficiency of the main study[49]."

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[47] MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit, "Pilot Data FAQ," last modified July 30, 2024, https://imaging.mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk/statswiki/FAQ/pilot#:~:text=Pilot%20data%20is%20often%20a,questions%20in%20a%20test%20manual

[48] Douglas Altman et al., "Why Do a Pilot Study?" published findings of NC3Rs Experimental Design Working Group report, 2006.

[49] Lehana Thabane et al., "A Tutorial on Pilot Studies: The What, Why and How," *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 10 (2010): 1-10.

2.7.3 The Revised New Muslim Survey

Over 1,500 New Muslim expats across all nationalities and ethnicities who were fluent in English were requested to complete the revised New Muslim survey (Appendix D). This survey consisted of 103 questions. Most of the questions were Likert scale, multiple-choice, Yes/No, and demographic. There were a few open-ended questions. From August 2023 to March 2024 a total of 1,210 New Muslims responded and completed the online survey.

2.7.4 NM Survey Marketing, Data Processing, and Sample Size

An additional reason for organizing a special survey workshop for the *Anṣār* and *Daʿīs* of the Organization and having them complete the pilot questionnaire was to enlist their help in promoting the main survey. By involving them early in the process, listening to them, and incorporating their valuable feedback into the final survey, I was able to encourage them to become advocates for the survey. This type of snowball sampling greatly increased the number of NMs that were contacted.

Data from the NM Survey was downloaded as a .CSV file and processed using MS Excel. Quantitative analysis was done using both MS Excel and SPSS[50]. Out of the 1,210 people who filled out the survey, 218 responses were identified as duplicates and subsequently removed. An additional 54 respondents had significant data entry errors and were also disregarded. After incorporating the 76 respondents from the pilot survey, the final sample size for the comprehensive survey, which included participants of all nationalities, was 1,014. Of this number, 596 Filipinos participated in the study.

Memon et al. suggest several methods to determine the ideal sample size for a survey. For example, they propose a sample-to-item ratio method where the sample should be between 5 and 20 times the number of items (questions) in the survey[51]. Using this method, the ideal sample size for the NM Survey should be between 515 and 2,060

[50] IBM's SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is a software tool used for statistical analysis. It helps researchers in social sciences to manage data, perform statistical tests, and create visualizations. SPSS is user-friendly and widely used for tasks like data entry, descriptive statistics and complex analyses. It is widely used in academic, government, and business research for analysing survey data.

[51] Mumtaz Ali Memon et al., "Sample Size for Survey Research: Review and Recommendations," *Journal of Applied Structural Equation Modeling* 4, no. 2 (2020): 1-20.

respondents. The Krejcie and Morgan[52] table (KMT) is well-known and highly popular for sample size determination among behavioural and social science researchers. No calculations are required to use this table, and it applies to any defined population. The KMT table suggests a sample size of 381 for a population of 50,000; a sample size of 382 for a population of 75,000; and a sample size of 384 for a population of 1,000,000 (million) or more. For a total NM population in Bahrain estimated at under 20,000, the KMT table suggests that a sample size of 377 is sufficient. Raosoft's online calculator and Calculator.net, using the same method, both produced identical sample sizes when utilized. Sekaran and Bourgie[53] indicate that a sample size above 500 may risk leading to Type II[54] Errors. However, for an exploratory study where hypotheses are not being tested, a sample of 1,014 for the larger population, including all nationalities, and 596 for the Filipino subset population appears to be adequate.

2.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The exploratory nature of this study limits the depth to which any research question is pursued. No hypotheses are being tested or any theoretical framework that drives the discussion. The entire study resides with the data being collected. While on the one hand, a very large amount of information has been gathered, ensuring data integrity and being selective about what to report in this study is crucial.

A significant limitation, especially about data collection and integrity, pertains to my dual role as both the head of the Organization and the primary investigator. While being in this position has allowed unparalleled access to New Muslims and organizational resources, it has also posed the risk of influencing respondents' answers, particularly if NMs perceived that their responses might affect their standing within the Organization. Every effort was made to mitigate this risk. Interviewees were not informed of my position within the Organization, and they were assured that their responses would have no impact on the services afforded to them by the Organization.

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[52] Robert V. Krejcie and Daryle W. Morgan, "Determining Sample Size for Research Activities," *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 30, no. 3 (1970): 607-610.

[53] Uma Sekaran and Roger Bougie, *Research Methods for Business: A Skill Building Approach* (John Wiley & Sons, 2016).

[54] A Type II error, also known as a false negative, occurs in hypothesis testing when the null hypothesis is not rejected even though it is false. In other words, it happens when a test fails to detect an effect or difference that truly exists.

The questions were quite probing, and the responses given do not indicate that the interviewees were holding back or providing biased answers.

The selection of interviewees and survey respondents was intentional, guided by specific criteria designed to identify NMs that would best serve the study's objectives. However, the possibility of selection bias cannot be ignored. The process involved asking both *Anṣār* and *Daʿīs* to recommend and arrange interviews with candidates who met the established criteria and to distribute the survey amongst NMs within their network. It appears that some of the interviewees may have been chosen based on the compelling nature of their conversion stories. It is natural for people to be drawn to narratives filled with drama and tension, as these are more engaging than simple, straightforward accounts. Stories with suspense and unexpected twists capture attention, this may have led to an unusually higher number of dramatic conversion narratives. This inclination towards more fascinating stories could influence the analysis and potentially skew the conclusions drawn from the study.

Finally, the reliance on self-reported data through surveys and interviews introduces the potential for response bias. Many New Muslims are in the process of learning about their new faith. There may be some degree of doubt or insecurity when it comes to their knowledge, understanding, and practice of Islam. As such, some participants may overly agree with statements or questions (acquiescence bias); or some may offer answers that they deem the 'right' answer to give (social desirability bias). Even though the effort was made to select recent converts (people who may have accepted Islam within the past few years), many respondents may not accurately remember past events (recall bias), leading to inaccuracies in the data[55]. In the context of religious conversion, where personal experiences and recollections may be highly emotional, there is always the risk of these biases affecting responses.

When interpreting the findings of this study and drawing any conclusions, it is important to consider these limitations.

[55] PM Podsakoff, SB MacKenzie, and JY Lee, "Common Method Biases in Behavioral Research: A Critical Review of the Literature and Recommended Remedies," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88, no. 5 (2003): 879–903

2.9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter described the mixed methods approach used in collecting a very large amount of data. A subset of the information collected pertains to this study – the Filipino Muslim convert in Bahrain. The next chapter provides contextual background to this study and delves into this subset – the Filipino community and their newfound home, the Kingdom of Bahrain, as well as briefly touching on the Organization through which they converted to Islam.

CHAPTER THREE

BAHRAIN AND FILIPINOS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

For almost fifty years, men and women from the Philippines have been coming to Gulf countries, like Bahrain, in search of better employment opportunities and a higher quality of life. Not just a better life for themselves, but a higher standard of living for the wives, husbands, children, parents, and siblings that they leave back home. The remittances that Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) send to their families have been a sizeable part of the Philippines economy for half a century.

Living in a predominantly Arab and Muslim part of the world means getting exposed to the local food, dress, language, and culture; and getting exposed to the faith of the local host community – getting to know about Islam. For Filipinos, Islam is not entirely foreign. The majority would have come across either indigenous Muslims from the Philippines (the Moro) or Muslim converts or reverts – locally known as the Balik-Islam. However, for most Filipinos, this is still the first time living and working closely with Muslims — particularly not just with other Filipino Muslims but significantly with local Bahraini Arab Muslims and Muslims from various parts of the world. In most cases, this leads to learning about Islam and in some cases embracing Islam.

Over the past four decades, several thousand Filipino expatriates have switched their faith to Islam in Bahrain.

Understanding the context or environment is essential for comprehending the phenomenon of Filipino conversion to Islam in Bahrain. Gaining a deeper understanding of Bahrain as host to thousands of Filipinos reveals how residing in this region significantly influences a typical Filipino's perception of Islam and Muslims. Equally important is knowing the Filipino expat community. Filipinos themselves are not a monolithic, homogenous group. They come from different tribes and parts of the Philippines. Their experiences growing up in the Philippines and particularly their worldview of Islam may impact their likelihood of becoming Muslim.

Given that the Philippines has had a precarious relationship with indigenous Muslims who have been vilified and marginalized, it is crucial to delve into the history of Islam in the Philippines; and to distinguish between the indigenous "Moro" Muslims and the "Balik-Islam" Muslims. This chapter provides a contextual background about Bahrain and the Overseas Filipino Workers that live here. It answers the research question as to what socio-cultural, religious, and economic factors make Bahrain uniquely conducive for Filipinos to accept Islam?

3.2 THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

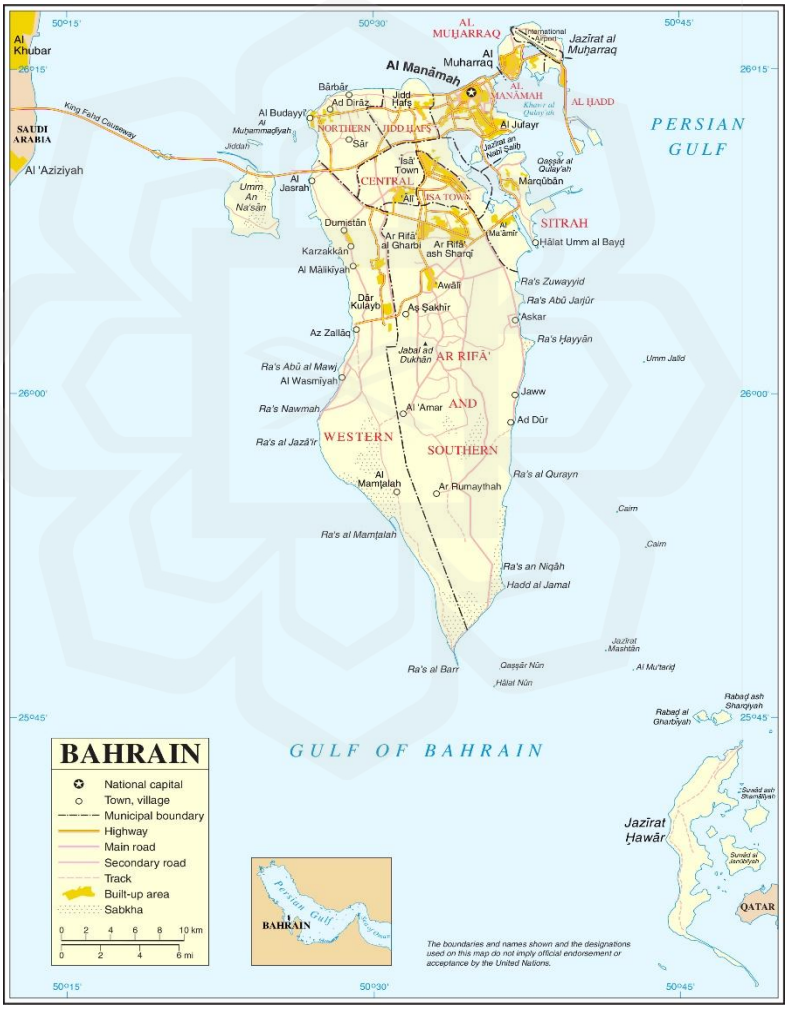


Figure 3.1 Map of the Kingdom of Bahrain[1]

[1] Maps of the World, 2024.

3.2.1 A Brief History of Bahrain

Located east and north of Saudi Arabia, west of Qatar, and south of Iran, Bahrain has historically served as a crucial trade hub in the region. The island's earliest human settlements date back thousands of years. Dilmun (also called Tylos by the ancient Greeks), encompassed the islands that now form Bahrain and parts of eastern Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and was a prosperous trading centre in the Arabian Gulf. It was renowned for its natural pearls and freshwater springs – that gave rise to its name, which means "two seas" – and attracted merchants from Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and beyond. It also attracted conquerors. At various times these islands came under the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Parthians, and the Greeks[2].

At the advent of Islam, Al-Baḥrayn (a term that refers to the entire eastern seaboard of Saudi Arabia including modern-day Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates) was part of the Persian Sasanian empire. The Prophet Muḥammad sent emissaries with letters to the de facto ruler of Al-Baḥrayn, Mundhir ibn Sawa, who eventually converted to Islam along with most of his subjects[3]. Bahrain became part of the Islamic caliphate and was ruled by various dynasties – the Umayyads, the Abbasids, and later the Safavids. For about eighty years, the Portuguese took control of these islands and in 1602 were deposed by the Persian Safavids who brought Shīʿah Islam to these islands[4]. The Persians ruled for about two centuries with brief interruptions when the archipelago was invaded by the Ibāḍīs of Oman[5].

The Al Khalifa family took control of Bahrain in 1782. At that time, they expelled the Persian rulers and established their own dynasty. This marked the beginning of their rule over Bahrain. In 1820, Bahrain signed a treaty with the British East India Company, which provided protection against external aggression in exchange for Bahrain becoming a British protectorate. This effectively placed Bahrain under British influence without direct colonial rule. Throughout the 19th and early 20th

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[2] Abdul Lateef, "Bahrain: Emerging Gulf State," *Pakistan Horizon* 26, no. 1 (1973): 10–15; C. A. Gillespie, *Bahrain* (Chelsea House Publishers, 2002).

[3] Abdullah Abu Ezza, "The Political Situation in Eastern Arabia at the Advent of Islam," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 9 (1979): 53–64.

[4] Abdul Lateef, "Bahrain: Emerging Gulf State".

[5] Patricia Risso, "Muslim Identity in Maritime Trade: General Observations and Some Evidence from the 18th-Century Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean Region," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21, no. 3 (1989): 381–392

centuries, Bahrain remained under British protection, ensuring stability and security for the ruling dynasty and repelling Persian (and later Iranian) claims to rulership. Bahrain formally gained full independence from the United Kingdom on August 15, 1971[6].

3.2.2 Bahrain Today

Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy under the rule of the Al Khalifa royal family. King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa has been the head of state since March 1999, following the death of his father, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa. The country is governed by the son of King Hamad, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Salman bin Isa Al Khalifa through an executive cabinet and ministers. Bahrain has a bicameral National Assembly consisting of a Shura Council appointed by the King and a Council of Representatives elected every four years. The country is also divided into four governorates, each headed by a Governor appointed by the Prime Minister and assisted by elected members of municipal councils. While non-Bahrainis have some representation in the Chamber of Commerce, their involvement in the country's governance remains minimal[7].

Oil was first discovered in Bahrain in 1932. This led to greater investment in the region mainly by American and European corporations. Throughout the rest of the 20th century, and particularly after the global oil crisis of the early 1970s, oil and gas played a huge part in the development of the country[8]. Today, apart from the oil and gas industries, Bahrain is also known for its finance and banking sectors, with the capital, Manama, serving as a regional financial hub. The country has also developed industries in tourism, real estate, and information technology[9].

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[6] Hooshang Moghtader, "The Settlement of the Bahrain Question: A Study in Anglo-Iranian-United Nations Diplomacy," *Pakistan Horizon* 26, no. 2 (1973): 16–29.

[7] "About Bahrain," *Ministry of Culture, Kingdom of Bahrain*, accessed July 10, 2024, https://culture.gov.bh/en/visitingbahrain/about_bahrain/.

[8] Andrew M. Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

[9] "About Bahrain," *Ministry of Culture, Kingdom of Bahrain*.

3.2.3 Bahrainis

The citizens of Bahrain, Bahrainis, make up a little less than half the country's population. Bahrainis are a product of their rich cultural heritage and diverse backgrounds, reflecting the island nation's long history as a crossroads of trade and migration. Predominantly Arab, Bahrainis also include significant communities of Persian and South Asian descent.

The majority of Arabs trace their ancestry to the Arabian Peninsula, specifically from tribes in the central and eastern regions of present-day Saudi Arabia and the surrounding Gulf area. The ruling Al Khalifa dynasty, for example, comes from the Najd region in Central Saudi Arabia. The Huwala are Sunnī Arabs who migrated from the Arabian Peninsula to the coastal regions of Iran, particularly in the provinces of Bushehr, Hormozgan, and Khuzestan, over several centuries. Later, some of these communities migrated back to the Arabian Peninsula, including Bahrain. The Ajam – Bahrainis of Persian descent – are mainly from southern Iran and speak Arabic and Farsi. There is a small community of Indian Bahrainis, primarily from Gujarat and Kerala, who initially arrived as pearl and spice traders in the early 19th century. Over time, they settled in Bahrain, establishing businesses and vibrant communities. Additionally, several thousand Pakistanis have become naturalized citizens of Bahrain over the past few decades. Given Bahrain's rich history as a trading hub and its rule by various dynasties and empires, it is not surprising to find a diverse mix of ethnic groups and cultures who identify as Bahraini today[10].

Islam, encompassing both Shīʿah and Sunnī traditions, plays a central role in the daily lives of Bahrainis, influencing social customs, festivals, and legal frameworks. The division between Sunnī and Shīʿah and their relative populations generally does not affect the conversion of expats to Islam, making it irrelevant to this study. Notably, most expats in Bahrain tend to convert to Sunnī Islam. There are a token number of conversions to Shi'ism. The primary reason for this is that there is no organized effort by the Shīʿah community to reach out to expats for the purpose of conversion (*Daʿwah*);

[10] Emile Nakhleh, *Bahrain: Political Development in a Modernizing Society* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).

and if an expat is inclined toward Islam, they are typically directed to one of the few Sunnī *Daʿwah* organizations in Bahrain[11].

3.2.4 Expatriates in Bahrain

Culturally, Bahrain is known for its tolerance and cosmopolitan atmosphere. The population is diverse, with a mix of Bahraini nationals and expatriates from various countries. Arabic and English are the official languages, but it is not uncommon to hear versions of Hindi and Urdu spoken not just by expats from the Indian sub-continent but also by the locals. Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Tagalog, Swahili, Amharic, and Farsi are also widely spoken.

Bahrain has a sizeable expatriate population. According to the official 2023 census, non-Bahrainis made up 54% of the total population.

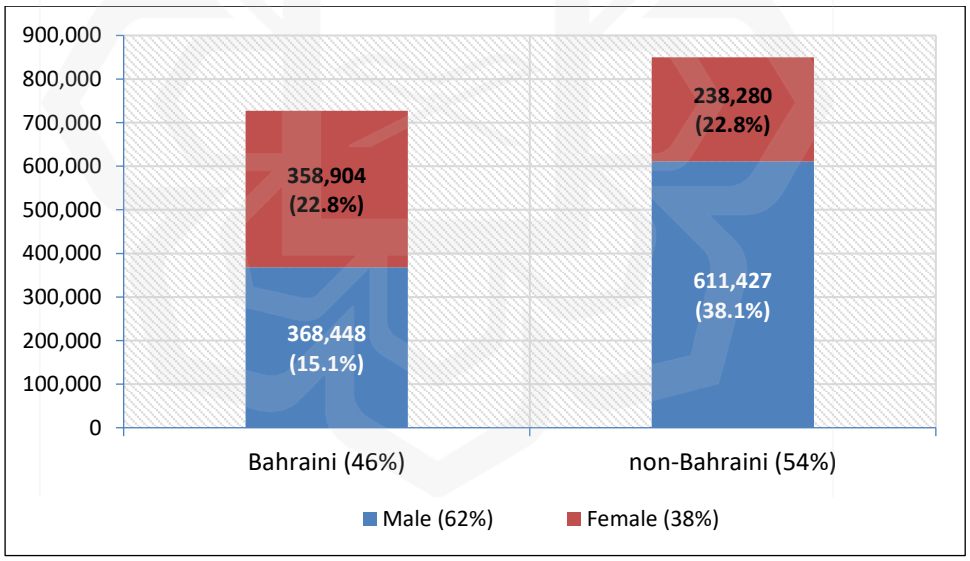


Figure 3.2 Demographic Breakdown of Bahrain's Population (1.577 million): Bahraini vs. non-Bahraini and Gender Distribution[12]

[11] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Annual Report 2024, Internal Document*, Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024.

[12] Population Data, 2024.

Bahrain has a significant gender imbalance in its expatriate population, with a considerably higher proportion of male workers. This disparity is primarily a result of a large number of labour-intensive jobs in construction (including infrastructure and real estate), industry (particularly oil and gas-related fields), and security, where men are the preferred choice of employee[13].

The non-Bahraini population or the expat population in Bahrain is quite diverse. Although the majority are from Asia, there are significant numbers of migrant workers from Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and the Americas; and from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region[14].

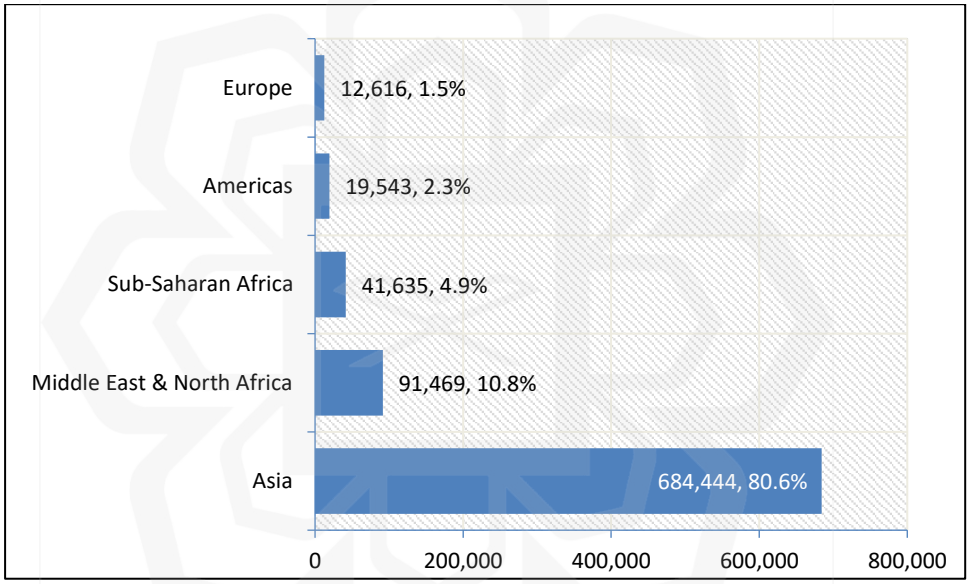


Figure 3.3 Expats in Bahrain Divided by Region of Origin[15]

Over four out of every five non-Bahrainis are from Asia. Non-Bahraini Arabs from North Africa, the Levant, and neighbouring Gulf nations make up over a tenth of all expatriates. Among these Arabs, Egyptians are the largest group, primarily employed as professionals, skilled workers, and middle management in sectors such as health, education, finance, banking, and retail. Most Arab expatriates are bilingual, speaking

[13] *ibid*.
[14] *ibid*.
[15] *ibid*.

both Arabic and English, this gives them a distinct advantage over expatriates from other regions. GCC citizens are mostly either investors or work across the King Fahd Causeway in Saudi Arabia but choose to live in Bahrain[16].

In the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, Bahrain has seen a rise in workers from Sub-Saharan Africa – they are primarily hired as security guards and in the retail sector throughout the Kingdom. Furthermore, although still a relatively small number, there is a growing trend of African women being employed as nannies. The reason for this is despite their comparable education levels to Filipinas, African women generally command lower wages for their services[17].

Europeans and Americans are typically hired by schools as teachers and administrators; by corporations in upper management, frequently as directors; and many, especially women, are also hired in sales and marketing[18]. The United States Fifth Fleet is headquartered in Bahrain – where thousands of Americans work both as military personnel and as support staff[19].

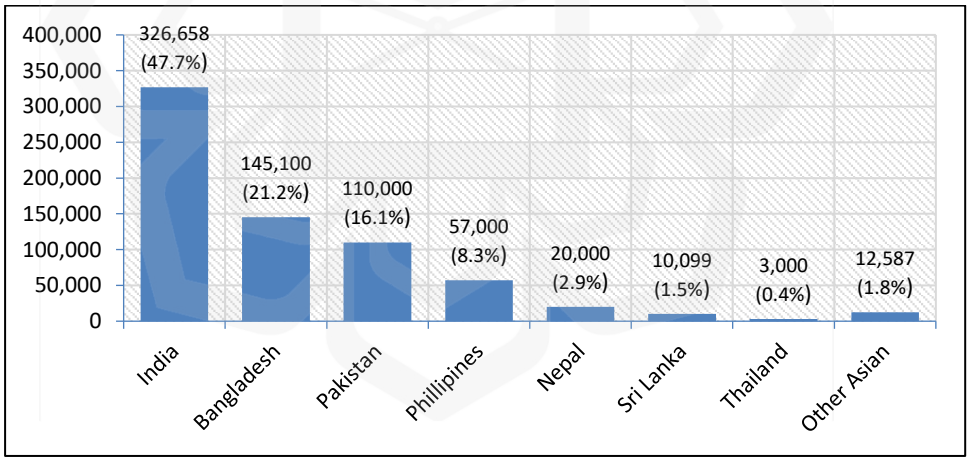


Figure 3.4 Asian Expats in Bahrain Divided by Country of Origin[20]

[16] Françoise De Bel-Air, *Demography, Migration, and the Labour Market in Bahrain* (2015).

[17] Hanada Taha-Thomure, "No Mary Poppins in Sight: Linguistic Effects of the Nanny Culture on Gulf Identities," in *Linguistic Identities in the Arab Gulf States*, 52–66 (London: Routledge, 2022).

[18] Fay Al Khalifa, "Achieving Urban Sustainability in Bahrain: University Education, Skilled Labor, and Dependence on Expatriates," *Island Studies Journal* 1, no. 2 (2016): 1–2.

[19] Joseph A. Kéchichian, "Bahrain and the Al Khalifah," in *Succession Challenges in the Arab Gulf Monarchies* (Seoul: Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2015).

[20] Population Data, 2024.

Indian expatriates form the largest group of foreign nationals in Bahrain. Many are employed as doctors, engineers, information and technology (IT) professionals, and financial experts, holding key positions in hospitals, tech firms, and banks. Skilled labourers from India are heavily involved in the construction, manufacturing, and industrial sectors, contributing significantly to Bahrain's infrastructure projects. Additionally, numerous Indians are employed in the service industry, including hospitality, domestic work, and retail, providing essential services to both households and businesses. Many Indian expatriates own and operate successful businesses, including retail stores, restaurants, and trading companies[21].

Living in Bahrain, Indian expatriates maintain their cultural presence while integrating into the local society. In addition to Indian Muslims who celebrate the two Eid holidays with the wider Muslim community, festivals such as Diwali, Holi, and Onam are also celebrated. Indian community organizations and regional associations provide social support, and educational programs, and engage in charitable activities. Indian schools in Bahrain follow the Indian curriculum, ensuring that children receive education consistent with what is taught in India. The Indian community is religiously diverse, with access to temples, mosques, churches, and even a Sikh Gurdwara. Despite some challenges related to employment, housing, and legal matters, the diverse Indian community in Bahrain has been and continues to be an integral part of Bahrain[22].

The Bangladeshi community in Bahrain comprises more than a fifth of the expatriate workforce. Many Bangladeshis migrated to Bahrain from the 1980s onwards, primarily to work in the construction and service sectors. They are mostly unskilled with little education and willing to work for very low wages, mostly doing hard labour (manual jobs in construction, industry, and retail). Many live in overcrowded labour camps or are housed in their place of work. In addition to labour roles, Bangladeshis are involved in various trades, small businesses, and the service industry. Educational needs are met through community schools and their religious needs are easily fulfilled given that the overwhelming majority are Muslim[23].

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[21] Françoise De Bel-Air, *Demography, Migration, and...*

[22] Fay Al Khalifa, "Achieving Urban Sustainability in Bahrain" ...

[23] *ibid*; Andrew M. Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

There are over 110,000 expatriates from Pakistan. Many Pakistanis moved to Bahrain starting in the mid-20th century, primarily seeking employment opportunities. They are involved in various sectors, including construction, healthcare, education, finance, and the service industry. A notable number also work in skilled trades and as professionals in engineering and IT. The Pakistani community maintains strong cultural ties, celebrating Pakistani national holidays and cultural events. There are Pakistani schools in Bahrain that follow the Pakistani curriculum, ensuring that children receive education in line with standards back home[24].

Expats from the Philippines are generally better educated than most other migrant workers from Asia. They are employed in the retail and service industries in middle and upper management and as sales staff. Many OFWs are highly skilled and work in healthcare, education, and finance. Filipinas are also employed as beauticians, hair stylists, and frequently as nannies in Bahraini homes[25]. There are notable communities of Sri Lankans and Nepalis in Bahrain, many of whom work in domestic service, healthcare, hospitality, and other service industries. The small number of Thai expats are almost all women and mostly work as masseuses, beauticians, and hair stylists[26].

Like most countries in the world, Bahrain prioritizes its own people. Bahraini citizens are provided free education, healthcare, social security, and housing. Understandably non-Bahrainis have no such rights. Some ten years ago, the Government provided subsidies to all residents of the country. Over the past several years, these subsidies that include food (meat in particular), electricity, and water have been restricted to citizens only. Non-Bahrainis pay over three times for electricity and almost nine times as much for the same consumption of water when compared to their Bahraini counterparts[27]. As such, the cost of living has gone up tremendously for expats with marginal increases in salaries. And yet, people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh,

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[24] *ibid*.

[25] Mohamed Quadir Harunani and Thameem Ushama, “The Balik-Islam Phenomenon: Filipino Muslim Reverts – Between the Gulf Countries and the Philippines,” *Al-Shajarah* 29, no. 1 (2024), https://doi.org/10.31436/shajarah.v29i1.1826.

[26] Andrew M. Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

[27] Electricity and Water Authority, "Government Subsidy," accessed July 10, 2024, https://www.ewa.bh/en/Customer/BillsTariffs/government-subsidy.

the Philippines, parts of Africa, and other parts of the world still choose to work in Bahrain as opposed to their own countries. The reason is simple. They get better employment opportunities here with higher pay and a greatly improved standard of living for themselves. They also make enough to send a good portion of their earnings to their families whose lives are greatly improved by these transnational labour remittances.

3.2.5 Religion in Bahrain

Islam is the official religion of Bahrain, with most of its citizens identifying as Muslims. However, the country also hosts a significant and diverse community of people practicing various other faiths and beliefs. Non-Muslims comprise nearly 30% of Bahrain's total population.

Muslims make up just over 70% of the population of Bahrain. The overwhelming majority of Bahrainis (99.8%) are Muslim. Among the non-Bahraini community, more than half are Muslim. They originate from a diverse array of countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Egypt, other GCC nations, the Levant, and North Africa, as well as smaller numbers from Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia[28].

[28] MIA, Ministry of Information Affairs, Kingdom of Bahrain, accessed September 14, 2024, https://www.mia.gov.bh/kingdom-of-bahrain/population-and-demographics/?lang=en#:~:text=70.2%25%20of%20the%20total%20population,of%20Bahraini%20citizens%20are%20Muslims.

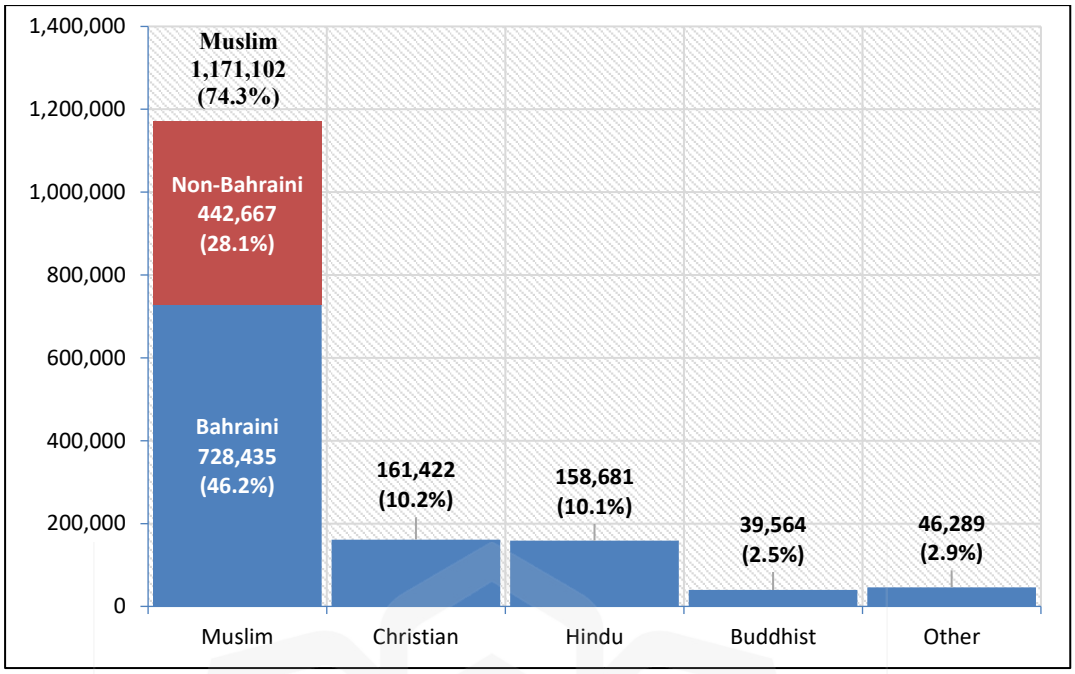


Figure 3.5 Breakdown of Population by Religion in Bahrain[29]

Just over a tenth of Bahrain's population is Christian. They come from a variety of denominations including Roman Catholics, Protestants, and even some from the Eastern Orthodox Church. A large number of Christian expatriates are from the southern Indian states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. About a quarter of the Christians come from the Philippines. Many Americans, British, and Europeans identify themselves as Christian. There is a sizeable number of Christians from African nations like Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Cameroon, and Nigeria. A small number of Sri Lankan Christians also live in Bahrain.

Bahrain is known for its religious tolerance and has several churches to cater to the Christian population. Prominent churches include the Sacred Heart Church in Manama, which is one of the oldest churches in the Gulf region, and the National Evangelical Church. These places of worship not only serve as spiritual centers but also as community hubs where Christians gather for social and cultural events. Christians in Bahrain freely practice their faith, celebrating major religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter. These celebrations often include church services, community

[29] *ibid*.

gatherings, and cultural events. Like in many parts of the world, Christmas has become a major commercial attraction in Bahrain. Given Bahrain's desert climate and sparse precipitation, the sight of Santa Claus being pulled across snow by his trusted reindeer in many malls throughout the Kingdom in December may seem rather out of place[30].

Hindus make up about 10% of Bahrain's population. The Hindu community primarily consists of expatriates from India, particularly from regions like Gujarat, Kerala, and Maharashtra. There is also a smaller number of local Bahraini Hindus who have been residing in the region for generations. Hindus freely practice their religion and celebrate major festivals such as Diwali, Holi, and Navaratri. There are several Hindu temples in Bahrain, including one of the oldest temples in the Middle East, the Shrinathji temple built by the Gujarati community in the 19th century[31].

Less than 40,000 Buddhist expatriates live in Bahrain. They come from India, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan, and smaller numbers from various other East Asian countries. There are no Buddhist temples in Bahrain, though the community does organize cultural events and celebrates festivals through the Sri Lankan and Thai embassies. Bahrain is home to several minority faiths including Bahais and a few dozen local Bahraini Jewish families that migrated from Iraq and Persia in the 1890s[32].

The Bahraini constitution provides for freedom of worship. There are many churches and temples, a Sikh Gurdwara, and a Jewish Synagogue in Bahrain. The Government of Bahrain actively promotes interfaith dialogue and understanding through societies such as the King Hamad Global Centre for Peaceful Coexistence. This personal initiative of the King facilitates discussions among global and local religious leaders and scholars from different faiths to promote mutual respect and cooperation (KHGC, 2024). Public proselytization (*Da'wah* or Christian missionary work etc.) by any faith group is regulated. Only certain officially recognized societies under the Ministry of Social Development may apply for permission to preach in public places.

[30] Abdulrahman Al-Salimi, "Migrant Religions: A Study of Religious Diversity in the GCC States," *Hemispheres: Studies on Cultures and Societies* 23 (2008): 31–39.

[31] Gulf Daily News, "Green Light for Temple Upgrade," accessed July 12, 2024, https://www.gdnonline.com/Details/1291199/Green-light-for-temple-upgrade.

[32] Eirik Kvindesland, "The Manama Riots 1947: Bahraini Jews Between Palestine and Gulf Labour Politics," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 51, no. 3 (2024): 589–604.

Missionary or Da'wah work within private offices, homes, and places of worship does not require special permissions.

Most religious conversions in Bahrain involve non-Muslim expatriates converting to Islam. While there are reports of Christian missionary activities, conversions from Islam to Christianity are extremely rare. Several legally registered charitable societies in Bahrain focus on *Daʿwah*[33].

3.3 FILIPINOS

3.3.1 Islam in the Philippines

With a population of about 110 million people spread out over thousands of islands, the Philippines is the 13th most populous nation in the world. Roman Catholics constitute almost 79% of the population, making this Southeast Asian archipelago the largest Christian nation in all of Asia[34].

According to a 2020 census by the Philippine Statistics Authority, there are approximately 6.98 million Muslims, accounting for 6.4% of the Philippine population[35]. However, the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos estimates the Muslim population to be around 12 million[36]. Regardless of the exact number, Islam has significantly influenced the country's history and politics.

There are two distinct Muslim communities in the Philippines: the “Moro” Muslims and the “Balik-Islam” Muslims. The Moro Muslims are not just “born Muslims” but have been Muslim for generations, with their heritage extending back over a millennium. They primarily reside in parts of Mindanao, the Palawan

[33] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Annual Report 2024, Internal Document*, Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024.

[34] Mohamed Quadir Harunani and Thameem Ushama, "The Balik-Islam Phenomenon: Filipino Muslim Reverts – between the Gulf Countries and the Philippines," *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)* 29, no. 1 (2024): 25-46.

[35] Dennis Mapa, *Household Population by Religious Affiliation in the Philippines*, Philippine Statistics Authority Report, 2024, accessed July 13, 2024, https://www.psa.gov.ph/system/files/psy/2023_T1_10.csv.

[36] Guilling A. Mamondiong, "Muslim Settlements – Statement by the New Secretary," National Commission on Muslim Filipinos, 2022, accessed July 14, 2024, https://ncmf.gov.ph/new-secretary.

archipelago, and the Sulu archipelago, regions collectively known as the Lands of the Moros or "Bangsamoro"[37].

Balik-Islam means "to return or revert to Islam." While the concept of returning to Islam can be applied globally to those who "return" or "revert" to the faith upon which all humanity is believed to be created (*Dīn al-Fiṭrah*), it has a dual implication in the context of the Philippines. It signifies both a return to the universal faith of humanity (*Dīn al-Fiṭrah*) and a return to the faith of their ancestors, who were Muslim before the arrival of Christian colonizers. The Balik-Islam community mainly resides in the northern regions, including the capital, Manila, other parts of Luzon, and within the diaspora[38].

Many Balik-Islam believe that had it not been for the Spanish conquest and over three centuries of colonization and forced proselytization, Islam would have been the dominant religion in the Philippines[39].

3.3.2 A Brief History of Islam in the Philippines

Muslims arrived in the Philippine archipelago prior to Christian missionaries, with Islam primarily spreading through maritime routes. Cesar Majul Adib described the arrival of Islam in Southeast Asia as an organic process, incorporating various theories on how Islam permeated these islands and nations. Adib argued that Islam's arrival in the Philippines cannot be divorced from its spread throughout the Nusantara[40]

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[37] J. Abbas, *The Moro Sultanates*, accessed July 14, 2024, http://jamalashley.wordpress.com/2007/04/16/the-moro-sultanates.

[38] Macrina A. Morados and Aisha F. Malayang, "Balik-Islam in Some Selected Areas in Luzon and the National Capital Region: Motivations of Conversion and Challenges Encountered," The UP CIDS Discussion Paper Series, University of the Philippines, 2023.

[39] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, Personal Interviews with Filipino Converts between 2017 and 2022, Discover Islam Society.

[40] "Nusantara" is an Indonesian term that refers to the Indonesian archipelago, encompassing the thousands of islands spread across Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and the Philippines. It historically denotes a maritime region where Malay-speaking peoples, cultures, and trade networks were prevalent. The concept of Nusantara emphasizes the interconnectedness of these islands through maritime trade routes and cultural exchanges, and it has been used historically to describe a unified cultural and geographical region (Khairuddin, 2019).

suggesting it was originally a unified area before colonialists later divided it into present-day political entities[41].

The earliest interactions between Muslims and the people of the Nusantara can be traced back to the 8th century, although there were no recorded conversions at that time. By the late 9th and early 10th centuries, regions of present-day Philippines were regularly visited by Arab, Chinese, Indian, and Persian traders. These routes were part of the Maritime Silk Route and extended northward from Borneo through the Sulu Islands and the Palawan archipelago, reaching Luzon and Formosa, and all the way to southern Japan[42].

Muslim traders established ports along the coastal regions, contributing to the gradual spread of Islam in the area. Their visits were primarily driven by economic motives, engaging in trade, settling in ports, and intermarrying with women from the local coastal communities. It was therefore not through intentional, active proselytization (*Daʿwah*) that Islam first came to the Nusantara, but rather incidentally through the establishment of these Muslim communities[43].

Historical records indicate the arrival of Muslim missionaries (*Duʿāt*) in the southern islands in the 13th and early 14th centuries, marking the deliberate spread of Islam in the region. By the mid-15th century and over the next 75 years, various sultanates were established by Arab-Malay "Sharifs" in the Sulu Islands, Mindanao, Malacca, Buayan, and Brunei. When the Spanish Conquistadors first arrived in 1565, even Maynilad (modern-day Manilla) was under Muslim rule[44]. The Spanish Conquistadors engaged in prolonged conflict with Muslims in the Philippines, pitting local Christianized natives ("Indios") against the local Muslims ("Moros"), and creating a religious divide that still lingers. The last Muslim sultanate fell in 1578 and marked

[41] J. Nolasco, "Islam and Philippine Society: The Writings of Cesar Adib Majul," *Asian Studies* 46 (2010): 1-2.

[42] Khairuddin, "The Impact of China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' on Southeast Asia," *Journal of Political Economy* 27, no. 3 (2019): 35-50, https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2019.1656332.

[43] *ibid*.

[44] Cesar Adib Majul, "The Role of Islam in the History of the Filipino People," *Dansalan Research Center* (1989): 308-15

the beginning of a two-century period where Spanish forces steadily pushed Muslim settlements southward to the Sulu Islands and Mindanao[45].

From 1565 to 1898, Spain ruled most of the Philippines. They brought with them their culture, their religion, and their hatred of Muslims. With the conquest of Granada in 1492 by the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, the Umayyad caliphate of Al Andaluz, finally fell. Muslims and Jews were forced to convert or put to death. The Spanish Inquisition was established by the two monarchs to rid the Iberian Peninsula of heresy, and primarily targeted Muslim and Jewish converts (conversos) suspected of practicing their former faiths[46]. The religious persecution and animosity towards Muslims were carried over from the Iberian Peninsula to the Philippine archipelago. For centuries, Christians in southwestern Europe had derogatorily referred to Muslims as "Moros" – derived from the Roman name for Mauritania – "Maurus" also called "Moors" in other parts of Europe. The Spanish conquistadors brought this negative appellation for Muslims with them to the Philippines. Over the 333-year Spanish rule Indigenous Muslims of the Philippines were ridiculed, persecuted, and systematically marginalized[47].

Following the Spanish-American War in 1898, along with Cuba, Guam, and Puerto Rico, the United States acquired the Philippines from Spain. However, both Christian and Muslim populations in the Philippines resisted the American occupation. The Philippine-American War lasted three years and in 1902, the United States finally took control of the Philippines. Compared to their predecessors, the US had an even greater disregard for the Moros. They enacted laws and treaties that further pushed the Moros away from their ancestral lands to the less hospitable regions of Mindanao. Muslim lands were sold or given away to large American corporations and Christian northerners[48].

With the Jones Act in 1916, the US started a three-decade handover of the Philippines to the local, mainly Christian Filipinos. The "Moro" problem created by the

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[45] *ibid*.

[46] Henry Kamen, *Spain, 1469-1714: A Society of Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[47] Mohamed Quadir Harunani and Thameem Ushama, "The Balik-Islam Phenomenon".

[48] Yūjirō Hayami, Agnes R. Quisumbing, and Lourdes S. Adriano, *Toward an Alternative Land Reform Paradigm: A Philippine Perspective* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990), 42-43.

Spanish and exacerbated by the Americans was inherited by the independent Republic of the Philippines in 1946[49].

Many Philippine Presidents have maintained the American colonial policy of promoting migration from the predominantly Christian North to the Muslim-majority South. When the Americans took control, Muslim Moros constituted over three-quarters of Mindanao's population and owned most of its land. However, by the 1990s, Moros made up only a fifth of the population and legally controlled less than 17% of the land. Four out of every five Moros were made landless during this period[50].

The history of Islam in the Philippines has and continues to play an important part in the relations between the majority Christians, including the predominantly Christian governments, the generational Muslims – the "Moro", and the "reverts" – the Balik-Islam.

3.3.3 The Moros

The Moros are historically and ethnically linked to tribes in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Thailand. They may be seen as one single community to most outsiders; however, the Moro population is ethnically diverse, consisting of various groups with distinct languages, traditions, and historical backgrounds. Some of the major ethnic groups among the Moros include Maguindanao, Maranao, Tausug, and Banguingui. The Moros have endured four centuries of resistance against colonial powers, including the Spanish and later the Americans. They fought to defend their territories, culture, and autonomy against foreign encroachment[51].

In post-independence Philippines, the Moros have struggled to retain their land and their identity and sometimes this has led to brutal confrontations. They have been involved in various conflicts and movements seeking autonomy and self-determination. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have been key players in negotiations with the Philippine government to

[49] *ibid*.

[50] *ibid*.

[51] Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Moro," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, December 3, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Moro.

establish a Bangsamoro autonomous region in Mindanao. This eventually led to the creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in 2019. The term "Bangsamoro" is a modern term created by combining the old Malay word for land, "Bangsa," with the derogatory Spanish term "Moro," historically used to refer to Muslims. Today, "Bangsamoro" is embraced by the indigenous, generational Muslims of the southern Philippines as a term of pride and identity[52].

Like Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir, and various other regions globally, the indigenous Muslims of the Philippines have faced significant challenges and losses over the years. They continue to struggle for their freedom and independence from colonial influences and their proxy neo-colonial administrations.

3.3.4 The Balik-Islam

Balik-Islam literally means "to return to Islam."

"*Dīn al-Fiṭrah*" is an Arabic term that translates to the "natural or inherent way of life" or simply the "natural religion." In Islamic theology and jurisprudence, it refers to the native state of human beings as naturally inclined towards submission to the will of Allah. It implies that humans are born with an inherent inclination towards belief in One God – Allah and that this natural disposition can be obscured or covered by external influences[53]. The concept of *Dīn al-Fiṭrah* resonates deeply with many people who choose to convert to Islam. They see themselves as going back, reverting, or returning to their natural state of existence and purpose.

For Filipino Muslim converts, the idea of reverting or returning carries an even greater meaning. They see themselves not only returning to *Dīn al-Fiṭrah* (Islam) but also to the *Dīn* (religion, way of life) of their ancestors. As such, to many Filipino Muslim converts the ideal term to describe themselves is "Balik-Islam"[54].

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[52] Miriam Coronel Ferrer, "The Moro Liberation Movement: From Secession to Autonomy," in *Region, Nation and Homeland*, ed. ISEAS Publishing (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2020), 13-56.

[53] Yasien Mohamed, "The Interpretations of Fiṭrah," *Islamic Studies* 34, no. 2 (1995): 129-151.

[54] Luis Q. Lacar, "Balik-Islam: Christian Converts to Islam in the Philippines, c. 1970-98," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 12, no. 1 (2001): 39–60.

Conversion narratives of many Balik-Islam mirror those of Filipinos who have left Catholicism for Evangelical or Pentecostal Protestant sects. These former Catholics now refer to themselves as "Born-Again" Christians. This idea resonates with the notion of returning to one's true nature (*Fiṭrah*). As such it is not too inconceivable to view Balik-Islam as "Born-Again Muslims." Many Balik-Islam themselves view their conversion in this light – they are "Born-Again Muslims" compared to the Moro, who are simply "Born-Muslims." This linguistic play underscores the contrasting worldviews between these two Muslim Filipino communities[55].

3.3.5 Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs)

Culturally and politically the Balik-Islam movement began in the 1970s when President Ferdinand Marcos decreed the labour code of the Philippines wherein workers were afforded certain rights and protections. The decree established formal recruitment and placement of Filipinos to work abroad. This coincided with a huge demand for workers fueled by the post-oil embargo economic booms experienced in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain. Large numbers of Filipinos started working in the Middle East. What initially started as a short-term strategy to bolster foreign reserves eventually evolved into a cornerstone of Philippine labour and foreign policy[56].

[55] Marybeth T. Acac, "Balik-Islam in the Philippines: Reversion, Symbolic Negotiation, and Becoming the Other" (PhD diss., Temple University, 2020).

[56] Mohamed Quadir Harunani and Thameem Ushama, "The Balik-Islam Phenomenon".

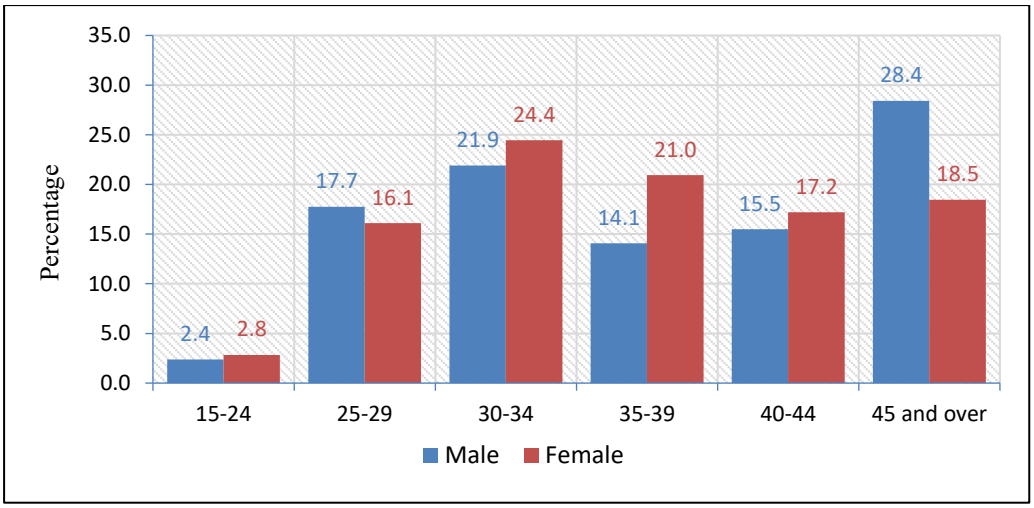


Figure 3.6 Percent Distribution of OFWs by Age and Gender[57]

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, there were an estimated 1.963 million Pinoy[58] working abroad in 2022, of which 1.135 million (57.8%) were female, while 828,000 (42.2%) were males. The largest number of OFWs, total of both male and female, were between the ages of 30 to 34 years. Men above the age of 45 accounted for the largest single group amongst all male and female OFWs. The overall distribution by age of OFWs seems consistent with the general employment of people in the Philippines[59].

[57] Dennis Mapa, *Special Release: 2022 Overseas Filipino Workers* (Philippine Statistics Authority Report, 2023).

[58] Pinoy (or Pinay in case of females) is a more causal term used to identify people from the Philippines. It is used interchangeably with Filipino or Filipina within this discourse.

[59] Dennis Mapa, *Special Release: 2022 Overseas Filipino Workers* (Philippine Statistics Authority Report, 2023).

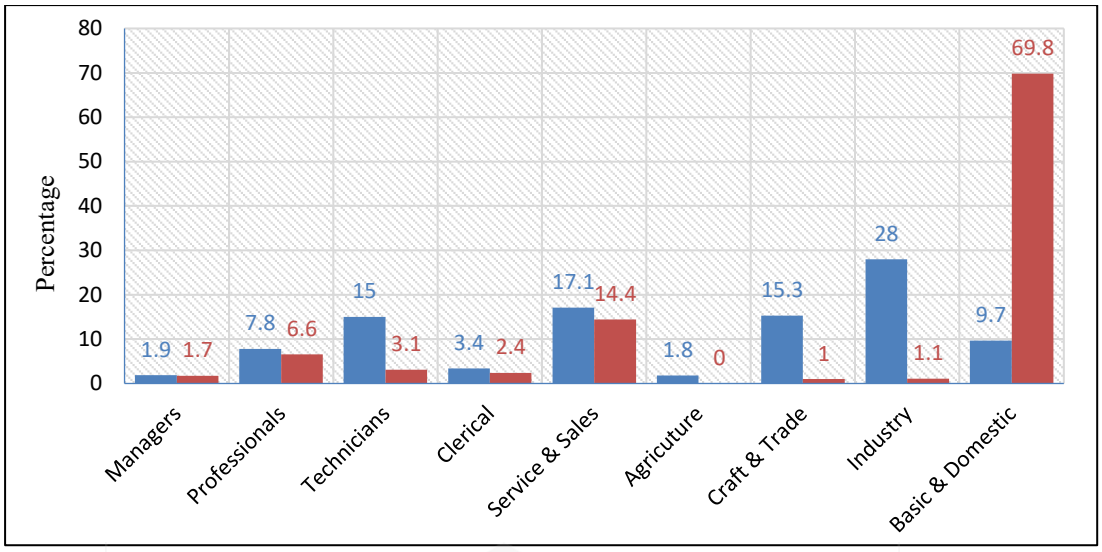


Figure 3.7 Percent Distribution of OFWs globally by Major Occupation Group and Gender[60]

The Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) contributed an estimated USD 33 billion in direct foreign remittances inflow in 2022. Almost 70% of Pinay worked in elementary or basic janitorial and domestic help jobs. Whereas most men worked in industry – including employed as machine operators, factory workers, and construction workers, among others. Men were also employed in technical fields like engineering and IT and as highly skilled labour in vocations like automotive repair, electricians and plumbers, etc. Almost a third of OFWs work in the service industry (hospitality, food, beverage, etc.) and in sales[61].

[60] *ibid*.

[61] *ibid*.

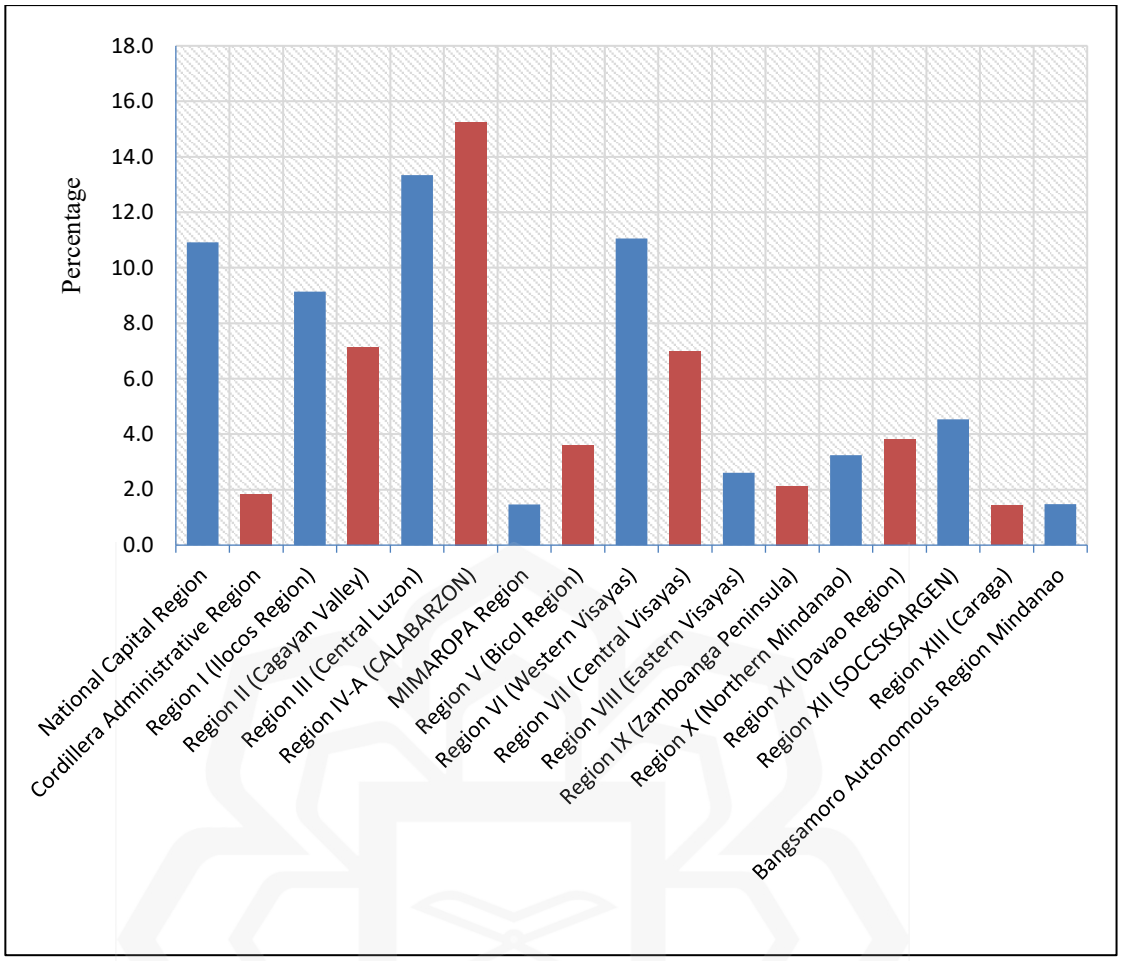


Figure 3.8 Percent Distribution of OFWs Globally by Region[62]

The majority of participants in this "Philippine Labor Brokerage" hail from the North, the Calabarzon region (southeast of Metro Manila), Manila, and Central Luzon. They are chosen and trained by the government and are recognized for being hardworking, intelligent, and highly skilled, qualities that are evident in the overseas jobs they secure[63].

The most popular destination for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) is Saudi Arabia, where nearly a quarter of all OFWs are employed (approximately 450,000 in 2022). Other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries such as the United Arab

[62] *ibid*.

[63] *ibid*.

Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain collectively host almost 580,000 Filipino migrant workers[64].

In these Arab countries, Pinoy men predominantly work as trained factory workers, vocationally skilled labourers (such as plumbers, electricians, auto mechanics, etc.), and in middle management roles (for example in banking, service industries, retail, and manufacturing). Filipina women are typically employed in the service sector (including nursing, beauty parlours, hair salons, and restaurants), retail (commonly as salespeople and store managers), and as educated domestic workers (primarily as nannies). Apart from their obvious skills, most OFWs speak fluent English, another reason why they are preferred for these prime positions compared to the migrant labourers from the Indian sub-Continent. To a certain degree, race, skin colour, and physical attractiveness, especially for female Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), play roles in the hiring process[65].

Most Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) undergo significant transformations during their time abroad. Personally, they encounter diverse experiences through interactions not only with employers but also with coworkers from around the world, profoundly shaping their worldview. They immerse themselves in new cultures, languages, cuisines, and attire. Typically, the higher income they earn leads to an enhanced standard of living for both their families back home and for themselves in the host country. This improved lifestyle often motivates OFWs to extend their overseas contracts for as long as possible, spending most of their productive lives away from their families. The sacrifices they make for themselves, and their families play a significant role in improving their family's socio-economic status. But while the resulting new generation sees a better material lifestyle it is at the expense of children growing up without one or both parents. The negative social impact of this phenomenon is well documented[66]. While some OFWs may experience homesickness, others

[64] *ibid*.

[65] Mohamed Quadir Harunani and Thameem Ushama, "The Balik-Islam Phenomenon".

[66] Maruja M. B. Asis, "Living with Migration: Experiences of Left-behind Children in the Philippines," *Asian Population Studies* 2, no. 1 (2006): 45–67; Theodora Lam and Brenda S. A. Yeoh, "Migrant Mothers, Left-behind Fathers: The Negotiation of Gender Subjectivities in Indonesia and the Philippines," *Gender, Place & Culture* 25, no. 1 (2016): 104–17; Lan Anh Hoang et al., "Transnational Migration, Changing Care Arrangements and Left-behind Children's Responses in South-East Asia," *Children's Geographies* 13, no. 3 (2014): 263–77; Brenda S. A. Yeoh et al., "Doing Family in 'Times of Migration': Care Temporalities and Gender Politics in Southeast Asia," *Annals of the American*

struggle to readjust upon returning home after a lifetime of diverse experiences abroad. Nevertheless, not only do OFWs themselves adapt to life abroad, but their families back home also become accustomed to greater independence and an improved lifestyle facilitated by substantial monthly remittances from overseas[67].

In the case of female OFWs, living as migrant workers abroad has additional complications. Many Pinays are in their early twenties when they arrive in the host countries – typically single and either hired in the service industry or work as domestic help. In most GCC countries, pre-marital relations are frowned upon or outright forbidden. This creates social challenges that they would never experience in their home country. Many remain single while abroad and marry when they return home, mostly at a much older age than they would otherwise. In some cases, Filipinas marry in the host countries and not always to fellow Filipinos[68].

A few years back, I witnessed a case that articulates this problem well. A Filipina New Muslim and an older Muslim convert from south India got involved with one another. They got married. Within a few months, the wife started suspecting that her husband may have a relationship outside of their recent marriage. It turned out that the husband already had a wife back in Kerala, India, and had chosen to hide this fact from his bride. The Filipina wife immediately started divorce proceedings and within a few weeks, they were divorced. The story does not end here. The Filipina found out she was pregnant and in desperation got involved with a local Bahraini in the hopes of getting married again. Unfortunately for her, the Bahraini was married and just wanted to "have a good time." The sister was devastated and grew increasingly desperate as her delivery date approached. She went back to the Philippines where she met a Balik-Islam male who married her. Alas, this marriage also failed. It has now been a few years, and she is struggling as a single mother. These stories are not uncommon. For many single men and women, as well as married OFWs living alone away from their families and

Association of Geographers 110, no. 6 (2020): 1709–25; Theodora Lam and Brenda S. A. Yeoh, "Parental Migration and Disruptions in Everyday Life: Reactions of Left-behind Children in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 16 (2019): 3085–3104.

[67] Roland Lasin et al., "The Lived Experience of Former Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) Returning to their Home," *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 10, no. 6 (2023): 692–699.

[68] Naomi Hosoda, "Survival Strategies and Migrant Communities in the Arab Gulf States: A Case of Filipino Workers in the UAE," in *Asian Migrant Workers in the Arab Gulf States*, 172–193 (Brill, 2019).

communities getting into complicated relationships in their host countries is all too common. And in most cases, they don't end well[69].

Furthermore, many female OFWs find employment as nannies, caring for the children of others. The role of "surrogate" motherhood nurtures deep bonds with their host families, especially with the children, profoundly shaping their views on family and community dynamics. Many develop lifelong attachments to their "surrogate" children sometimes to the extent that they would rather live with their host families than go back to the Philippines. The social dimension of this is not limited to the guest worker but also has a tremendous impact on the host families. Many Gulf children grow up entirely in the care of their Filipina nannies and are pointedly influenced in terms of culture, language, and even religion[70].

While host family members changing their faith is unheard of, Overseas Filipino workers embracing Islam is a common phenomenon. Over the past five decades, many OFWs in the GCC have become Muslim. Accurate numbers are difficult to ascertain but it is estimated that over 10,000 OFWs convert to Islam annually across the Gulf countries[71]. Additionally, many OFWs influence members of their families and friends who then also convert to Islam. Estimates suggest that the number of Balik-Islam in the Philippines ranges from as few as 200,000 to as many as 2 million individuals[72].

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[69] Akiko Watanabe, "Marrying Foreign Muslims in the Gulf States: A Preliminary Study on the Mixed-Marriage of Overseas Working Filipino Women," *文教大学国際学部紀要* 28, no. 2 (2018): 157–170.

[70] Salim M. Shamas, "Socialization and Foreign Nannies in the Arabian Gulf: A Case Study in Oman" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 1993); Dessislava Vassileva Ivanova, "Social Impact of Foreign Female Domestic Workers from South Asia and Africa on GCC Families," in *Families and Social Change in the Gulf Region* (2020): 152–170; Hanada Taha-Thomure, "No Mary Poppins in Sight".

[71] Muhammad Quadir, "Unpublished Personal Interviews with Filipino Converts between 2017 and 2022," Discover Islam Society, 2022.

[72] Rommel C. Banlaoi, "Transnational Islam in the Philippines," in *Transnational Islam in South and Southeast Asia: Movements, Networks and Conflict Dynamics* (2009): 167–188.

3.3.6 Filipinos in Bahrain

There are over 57,000 Filipino nationals who live in Bahrain. Given the transient nature of migrant workers, this number has varied substantially ranging from about 40,000 to 60,000 OFWs over the past decade[73].

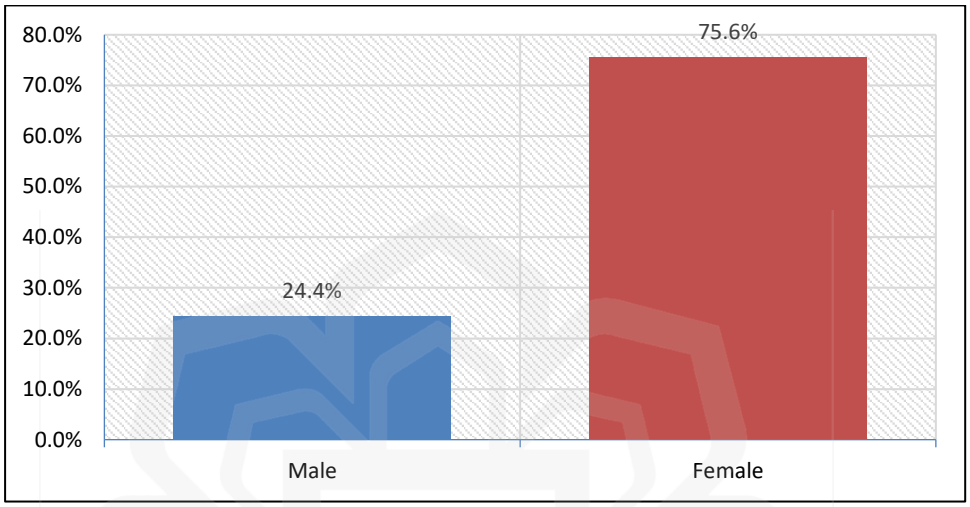


Figure 3.9 Filipinos in Bahrain by Gender[74]

Filipina women outnumber men three to one. Most women work as domestic help and in sales and service. The majority (72%) of Filipinos in Bahrain, regardless of gender, are between the ages of 20 and 64. This is understandable since most Filipinos are immigrant workers and would typically return to the Philippines on retirement. Hence, the elderly (over 65) make up only 2.1%. There are a sizeable number of Filipinos who have settled down with their families in Bahrain. Teenagers and children make up about a quarter of the Filipino population. The community has its own school, the Philippine School, that accommodates over 1,200 students and delivers Philippine Department of Education-approved K-12 education to the Filipino children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in the Kingdom of Bahrain[75].

[73] Anne Jalando-on Louis, Philippine Ambassador to Bahrain, interview by Muhammad Quadir, July 22, 2024.

[74] *ibid*.

[75] *ibid*.

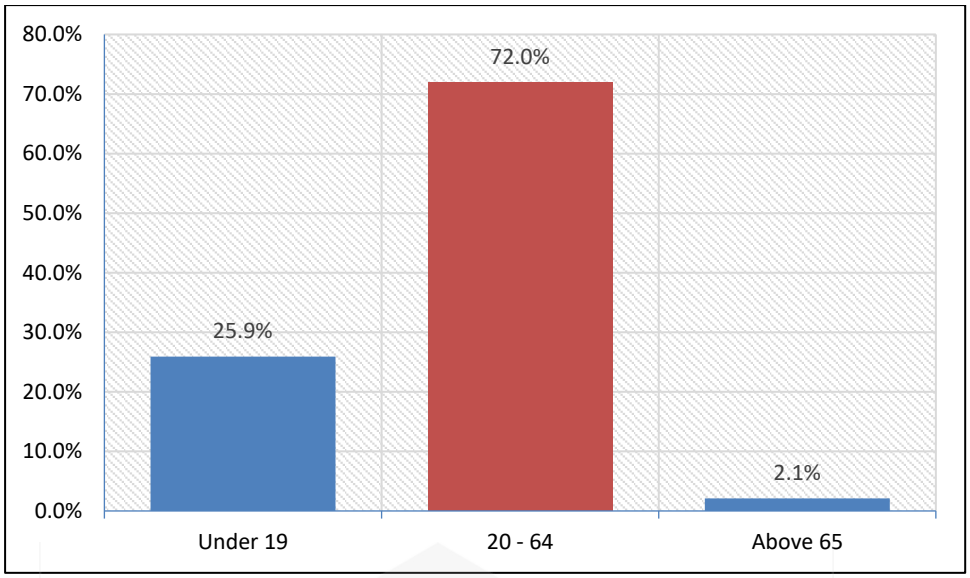


Figure 3.10 Filipinos in Bahrain by Age[76]

The majority of OFWs come from the northern regions of the Philippines and work primarily as domestic help, in sales and service, as skilled craftsmen and technicians, and in management positions. About 80% of the Philippine nationals in Bahrain identify themselves as Christian. The remaining 20% are Muslim[77]; about two-thirds of whom are converts to Islam.

The Philippine Embassy has been serving the Pinoy community in Bahrain for over four decades. Apart from diplomatic and consular services, the embassy has a shelter within its own compound for OFWs who have lost jobs or whose visas have been terminated. The embassy organizes events such as free medical services and labour counselling for its citizens. Apart from the embassy, several Filipino societies serve the vibrant community. These include sports clubs, community centers, women's groups, labour rights organizations, and religious institutions such as Churches. Pinoy food is served at many restaurants and is available at most supermarket chains in the kingdom. In short, Filipino nationals have integrated very well and have made Bahrain an ideal

[76] *ibid*.

[77] As per Organization policy, the exact numbers of conversions are not disclosed. Therefore, these are approximate percentages.

second home. OFWs come to Bahrain for a typical two-year contract but many, inevitably, end up staying most of their working lives[78].

3.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter examined the Kingdom of Bahrain as a unique socio-cultural and economic hub, characterized by its small size yet diverse population. The chapter highlighted the significant presence of Filipino expatriates, who form a vital segment of the workforce in sectors ranging from domestic service to middle management. With a history of openness to diverse faiths and cultures, Bahrain provides an ideal environment for religious interaction and dialogue.

The next chapter delves into the intricate process of religious conversion, particularly exploring the concept of conversion within an Islamic framework.

[78] Anne Jalando-on Louis, Philippine Ambassador to Bahrain.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHANGING ONE'S FAITH

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Having been actively engaged in Islamic *Daʿwah* for over thirty-five years, I have witnessed numerous individuals converting from various other faiths to Islam. But unlike most frequently repeated experiences, seeing a person take '*Shahādah*' never gets old. Every single time, it feels like a miraculous event – like seeing someone come into this world for the first time. It is a deeply moving and extremely emotional moment. And almost every time, whether witnessing a person embrace Islam or listening to a conversion narrative, one is moved to tears.

My experience is not unique, nor is it necessarily restricted to people converting to Islam, religious conversion has always held an emotional and spiritual connection for any person of faith. Changing one's faith is a complex and profound event that has puzzled scholars, moved believers, and confounded sceptics. It involves a fundamental change in one's beliefs and practices. It creates new identities and new relationships. Frequently it is a product of a multitude of factors that include personal experiences; and interactions with one's family, friends, community, and even strangers; it sometimes involves trauma and tragedy; and it may also be deeply spiritual. Viewing religious conversion from a variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology, anthropology, and religion is essential to getting a grasp of this complex phenomenon.

The reasons for conversion and the journeys that people take are as different as the people who undertake them. Some people are compelled to examine their lives and the purpose of their existence when faced with some major life-altering event. Others may be gradually drawn to a particular faith or conviction because of their experiences and relationships. Not all who switch faith are responding to some higher calling. Some enter a faith for a tangible benefit like getting married or improving one's material station in life. Regardless of the reason or the specific path taken, the process can be highly transformative resulting in a completely new identity and wholly different worldview.

This chapter is about the conversion experience – changing one's faith. It is a comprehensive response to the research question of what is religious conversion in Islam?

4.2 RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN ISLAM

There is no specific word in Arabic for "religious conversion" as understood above. However, the concept of conversion is explained within the confines of the *Qurʾānic* term, *Aslama*, literally "he/she submitted." Unlike the names of other religions that refer to a founder, "Christianity," referring to Jesus Christ (Peace be upon him, from here on this epithet is implied for all of Allah's Prophets and Messengers), or a place – "Hinduism" is a derivative of the historical name of the Indus River in the northwestern part of India; the word "Islam" is rooted in the word *Aslama* and denotes an action – the act of submitting to One's Creator, Allah. And the person who acts on this is called a "Muslim." literally "one who submits."

Islam is therefore not confined to a particular person or place but is the universal faith for all humankind. Muslims view all the Prophets and Messengers including Adam, Nūḥ (Noah), Ibrāhīm (Abraham), Mūsā (Moses), ʿĪsā (Jesus Christ), and Muḥammad (peace be upon them all) as Muslims. Allah talks of Prophet Nūḥ in the *Qurʾān* as follows:

> And recite unto them the story of Noah, when he said to his people, "O my people! If my presence is grievous to you, and [so too] my reminding of the signs of God, then in God do I trust. So, decide on your plan, you and your partners; then let there be no doubt concerning your plan, but carry it out against me, and grant no respite!
>
> And if you turn your backs, I have not asked of you any reward. My reward lies only with God, and I am commanded to be among those who submit[1]."

Prophet Ibrāhīm is associated with the word "Islam" numerous times in the *Qurʾān*. He, along with his children and progeny are commanded to "submit."

> And who shuns the creed of Abraham, but a foolish soul? We chose him in the world and in the Hereafter, he shall be among the righteous.

[1] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Seyed Hossein Nasr, Mojdeh Sazgar, and Mohammed Rustom (New York: Harper One, 2015), Surah 10:71-72.

> And when his Lord said unto him, "Submit!" he said, "I submit to the Lord of the worlds."
>
> And Abraham enjoined the same upon his children, as did Jacob, "O my children, God has chosen for you the religion, so die not except in submission."
>
> Or were you witnesses when death came to Jacob, when he said to his children, "What will you worship after I am gone?" They said, "We shall worship thy God and the God of thy fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac: one God, and unto Him we submit[2]."

All prophets and all people were commanded to submit to their Creator. Muslims are further told that true salvation is not attained by becoming a Jew or a Christian but by following the religion of Ibrāhīm. Allah says:

> And they say, "Be Jews or Christians and you shall be rightly guided." Say, "Rather, [ours is] the creed of Abraham, a *ḥanīf*, and he was not of the idolaters."
>
> Say, "We believe in God, and in that which was sent down unto us, and in that which was sent down unto Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what Moses and Jesus were given, and in what the prophets were given from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and unto Him we submit[3],."

The term "Muslim' – one who submits is found in the *Qurʾān* as the name given by Allah to those who submit to the religion of their father Ibrāhīm.

> And strive for God as He should be striven for. He has chosen [for] you—and has placed no hardship for you in the religion—the creed of your father Abraham. He named you Muslims afore time, and herein, that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and that you may be witnesses for mankind. So, perform the prayer and give the alms, and hold fast to God. He is your Master. How excellent a Master, and how excellent a Helper[4]!

In addition to the above, many verses of the *Qurʾān* highlight that "becoming a Muslim" or embracing Islam is not just about following Prophet Muḥammad but rather embodies the pure worship of, and exclusive obedience to, the Creator, and this is exemplified in the life of all the Prophets and Messengers that Allah sent to humanity. In this framework, Allah declares that "Truly the religion in the sight of God is submission[5]"; and that "Whosoever seeks a religion other than submission (Islam), it

[2] *ibid*, 2:130-133.

[3] *ibid*, 2:135-136.

[4] *ibid*, 22:78.

[5] *ibid*, 3:19.

shall not be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter, he shall be among the losers[6]". Hence, to submit, to adopt Islam, to "become a Muslim," is fundamentally to embrace the religion of all the Prophets and Messengers culminating in accepting Prophet Muḥammad as the final Messenger and Seal of the Prophets.

4.3 HOW DOES ONE BECOME MUSLIM?

In Islam, the formal, ritual, and legal act of conversion – changing one's religion to Islam, is quite simple. All one must do is to recite the "*Shahādah*." The *Shahādah* is a two-fold acceptance enshrined in the double declaration of faith, "I testify that 'there is no deity (worthy of worship) except Allah and that Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah.'" This declaration of faith may be done openly or privately. Depending on the jurisdiction or the local practice, for a *Shahādah* to be considered legally valid there must be witnesses. From the time of the Prophet until now there has been discussion as to whether this verbal declaration is sufficient as a sign of genuine belief or should it be accompanied by the ritual forms of worship and generally accepted outward practices as prescribed by Islamic law or local Muslim culture. Examples from the life of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) suggest that all it takes to be considered Muslim is to make this declaration of faith. For instance, during one of the battles, a companion of the Prophet was about to strike down his opponent when the enemy combatant declared that "there is no deity but Allah and Muḥammad is His messenger." The Muslim soldier assumed that the man was only saying this to save his life and went ahead and killed him. On being informed about this, the Prophet Muḥammad was very upset and admonished his companion asking him, "How did you know what was in his heart?[7]".

Furthermore, there is a distinction between accepting Islam – submitting to Allah and having proper belief (*Īmān*). Allah states in *Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt*:

> The Bedouins say, "We believe." Say, "You believe not. Rather, say, "We have submitted," for belief has not yet entered your hearts. Yet if you

[6] *ibid*, 3:85.

[7] Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Military Expeditions (Kitab al-Maghazi), Hadith 4269, available at Sunnah.com.

obey God and His Messenger, He will not diminish for you aught of your deeds. Truly God is Forgiving, Merciful[8].

Muslim scholars have distinguished between two kinds of *Īmān – Īmān al-Muṭlaq* and *Muṭlaq al-Īmān*. *Īmān al-Muṭlaq* is "absolute faith" wherein there is conviction in belief and this unwavering faith is reflected in one's actions. Such an individual is described as *Al-Muʾmin* – the believer. Conversely, *Muṭlaq al-Īmān* refers to the most basic level of faith that one requires to be considered a Muslim. Submitting requires one to take the *Shahādah* – the declaration of faith that there is no god but Allah, and Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah. Uttering these words implies a minimum level of *Īmān* (faith) – Mutlaq al-*Īmān*. Such an individual is described as a Muslim but may not yet have attained the status of a believer (*Muʾmin*).

To further illustrate the difference between the two types of *Īmān* consider the following. On one hand, you have an average Muslim who believes in Allah and His Messenger but is negligent in fulfilling some of the obligatory deeds (*Farāʾiḍ*) such as consistently performing the five daily ritual prayers (*Ṣalāh*). Such a Muslim understands and believes that *Ṣalāh* is obligatory (*Farḍ*), and he/she knows that they are sinning by missing a prayer, but they still regularly skip the ritual prayers. Such persons are considered Muslim; they may not yet have attained the rank of *Muʾmin*. Conversely, you have someone who not only firmly believes in Allah and His Messenger but is extremely mindful of all the obligations (*Farāʾiḍ*) and is very careful to abstain from all that is forbidden (*ḥaram*). Such a person may be considered a *Muʾmin*. In conclusion, a *Muʾmin* by definition is also a Muslim, whereas a Muslim may not necessarily have yet attained the rank of a *Muʾmin*. It is important to recall the same verse from *Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt*, where Allah reminds the Bedouins not to claim belief. In a similar way, it is not for any person to claim to be a *Muʾmin* – knowledge about the condition of the 'heart' (*Qalb*) is with Allah alone and it is only He, the Knower of the unseen, who judges as to who is a *Muʾmin* and who is not a *Muʾmin*.

The apparent or outward ritual of submitting (Islam) by reciting the *Shahādah* is quite different from the inward conviction or belief (*Īmān*), and this has been beautifully captured in a famous incident commonly known as *Ḥadīth* Jibreel. Abdullah ibn Umar reported that his father, Umar ibn al Khattab (may Allah be pleased with them,

[8] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 43:14.

henceforth this epithet is implied for all of Prophet Muḥammad's companions) told him about this well-known occurrence.

> While we were one day sitting with the Messenger of Allah there appeared before us a man dressed in extremely white clothes and with very black hair. No traces of journeying were visible on him, and none of us knew him. He sat down close by the Prophet rested his knees against the knees of the Prophet and placed his palms over his thighs and said: "O Muḥammad! Inform me about Islam."
>
> The Messenger of Allah replied: "Islam is that you should testify that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muḥammad is His Messenger, that you should perform salah (ritual prayer), pay the Zakah, fast during Ramadan, and perform *Ḥajj* (pilgrimage) to the House (the *Kaʿbah* at Makkah), if you can find a way to it (or find the means for making the journey to it)."
>
> He said: "You have spoken the truth."
>
> We were astonished at his thus questioning him and then telling him that he was right, but he went on to say, "Inform me about *Īmān* (faith)."
>
> He (the Prophet) answered, "It is that you believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His Messengers and in the Last Day, and in fate (Qadar), both in its good and in its evil aspects."
>
> He said, "You have spoken the truth." Then he (the man) said, "Inform me about Ihsan."
>
> He (the Prophet) answered, "It is that you should serve Allah as though you could see Him, for though you cannot see Him, yet He sees you."
>
> He said, "Inform me about the Hour."
>
> He (the Prophet) said, "About that the one questioned knows no more than the questioner."
>
> So, he said, "Well, inform me about its signs."
>
> He said, "They are that the slave-girl will give birth to her mistress and that you will see the barefooted ones, the naked, the destitute, the herdsmen of the sheep (competing with each other) in raising lofty buildings."
>
> Thereupon the man went off. I waited a while, and then he (the Prophet) said, "O 'Umar, do you know who that questioner was?"
>
> I replied, "Allah and His Messenger know better."
>
> He said, "That was Jibril. He came to teach you your religion[9].

[9] Al-Nawawi, *Al-Nawawi's Forty Hadith*, Hadith 2, narrated by Umar ibn al-Khattab, accessed November 19, 2024, Sunnah.com.

In Tafsir ibn Kathir, after referring to *Ḥadīth* Jibreel, the author stated, "there is a specific *Ḥadīth* that further demonstrates the difference between Islam and *Īmān*."

> Imam Ahmad recorded that 'Amir bin Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas said, "The Messenger of Allah gave (something to) some men and did not give one of them.
>
> Sa'd said, 'O Allah's Messenger, you gave to so-and-so and so-and-so.
>
> However, you gave nothing to so-and-so, even though he is a believer.'
>
> The Prophet said, 'Or say, a Muslim.'
>
> Sa'd repeated his statement thrice each time the Prophet answered, 'Or say, a Muslim.' The Prophet then said, 'I might give some men and give nothing to others, even though the latter are dearer to me than the former.
>
> I do not give them things for fear that they might be thrown on their faces in the Fire.'
>
> This *Ḥadīth* is recorded in the Two *Ṣaḥīḥ*.
>
> Therefore, the Prophet made a distinction between the grade of believer and the grade of Muslim, indicating that *Īmān* is a more exclusive grade than Islam[10].

4.4 *DAʿWAH* – AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Calling people to Islam, *Daʿwah* is not only permitted but greatly encouraged to the extent where it is considered "*Farḍ kifāyah*." This is an Arabic term used in Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) to denote a communal obligation. Unlike "*Farḍ ʿAyn*," which is an individual obligation required of every Muslim, *Farḍ kifāyah* is a duty that, if fulfilled by a sufficient number of people in the community, absolves the rest of the community from that obligation. Allah commands in the *Qurʾān*:

> Let there be among you a community calling to the good, enjoining right, and forbidding wrong. It is they who shall prosper[11].
>
> And who is more beautiful in speech than one who calls unto God, works righteousness, and says, "Truly I am among those who submit"[12]?

Muslims are further instructed on how to invite people to Islam. Allah states in *Sūrat al-Naḥl* (The Bees):

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[10] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Ibn Kathīr*, in *Quran.com*, surah 49:14, accessed August 7, 2024, https://quran.com/49:14/tafsirs/en-tafisr-ibn-kathir.

[11] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an,* Surah 3:104.

[12] *ibid*, Surah 41:33.

> Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation. And dispute with them in the most virtuous manner. Surely thy Lord is He Who knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best the rightly guided[13].

We find the same sentiment echoed in numerous sayings (*Ḥadīth*) of the Prophet Muḥammad, for example:

> Abu Huraira reported God's messenger as saying, "Learn the things which are made obligatory and the *Qurʾān*, and teach them to people, for I shall die[14]."

Towards the end of his famous farewell pilgrimage message delivered on Mount Arafat on the 9th day of *Dhū al-Ḥijjah*, 10 AH (632 CE), Prophet Muḥammad exhorted his companions with the following words:

> O people, lend me an attentive ear, for I know not whether after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore, listen to what I am saying to you very carefully and take these words to those who could not be present here today…
>
> …O people, no prophet or apostle will come after me and no new faith will be born. Reason well, therefore, O people, and understand words which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the Quran and my example, the *Sunnah* and if you follow these you will never go astray.
>
> All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness, O Allah, that I have conveyed your message to your people[15].

The *Qurʾān* posits a fundamental doctrine that emphasises that all human beings have been created with an inherent purpose – submission to and worship of their Creator, Allah. Throughout its discourse, the *Qurʾān* consistently emphasizes a recurring theme, reminding humanity of its origins and existential purpose. All human beings, regardless of their beliefs, are exhorted to recognize their Creator and worship Him alone, exclusively with no room for a partner. In essence, Muslims are repeatedly instructed to invite all of humanity to their Creator, *Allāh subḥānahu wa taʿālā*.

The idea of prophethood, the very concept of sending messengers, is to guide humanity to worship the One Creator, Allah, and to live life according to His

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[13] *ibid*, Surah 16: 125.

[14] Al-Tabrizi, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Hadith 244, Book 2, Hadith 40, accessed November 19, 2024, https://www.prophetmuhammad.com/mishkat/244.

[15] Safi-ur-Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum (The Sealed Nectar): Biography of the Noble Prophet* (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers, 2002).

commandments. From Adam to the final Prophet Muḥammad, Allah sent Prophets and Messengers to direct human beings towards Him and to serve as role models for the rest of humanity to emulate.

Prophet Muḥammad is seen by billions of Muslims as the ideal example of a human being. Muslims look at him as the greatest leader; the ideal husband and father; the epitome of human character and conduct; and the quintessential role model. Yet despite all these roles that he played; the Prophet is known as "Rasool Allah" – the Messenger of Allah. And to convey Allah's message was the Prophet Muḥammad's raison d'être – his primary purpose.

Thus, it is not unexpected to observe the pervasive acceptance of *Daʿwah*, the Islamic practice of inviting others to embrace Islam, within contemporary Muslim communities, a tradition firmly rooted throughout Islamic history. The ongoing practice of *Daʿwah* reflects Islam's emphasis on spreading its teachings to others. Annually, hundreds of thousands of individuals worldwide choose to convert to Islam, illustrating Islam's enduring appeal and relevance and underscoring the magnitude of *Daʿwah*.

4.5 TO CONVEY OR CONVERT – A TALE OF TWO *DAʿĪS*

A common question amongst Muslims who are active in *Daʿwah – Daʿīs* – is whether one's mission is to "convey" the message of Islam or is it to "convert" people to Islam.

At numerous *Daʿwah* workshops and conferences, I have asked this question to large audiences primarily made up of *Daʿīs* and inevitably the answer I get is that our "job" is to convey the message. *Hidāyah*, or guidance, comes from Allah; and the role of the *Dāʿī* is to simply convey the message[16]. But now and then, I will come across an outlier who insists that we are obligated to convert. This seems counterintuitive to the overwhelming number of verses from the *Qurʾān*[17] and *Ḥadīth* that emphasize that guidance is only from Allah. Yet could there be any merit in the "convert camp" that should be further explored? Consider the following story.

[16] Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of the Stories of the Prophets, Hadith 3461, accessed November 19, 2024, Sunnah.com, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3461.

[17] See 6:125, 17:97, 28:56, etc.

Two young Filipino converts, Abdullah and Abdurrahman were employed at the same time by a *Daʿwah* organization. Both had studied Islam and *Daʿwah* at a reputable Islamic university and came highly recommended. They both underwent further training on practical *Daʿwah* within the context of the local communities and city. The two young men were given identical compensation packages. In effect, each *Dāʿī* cost the same for the organization and were equally responsible. Both started fieldwork at the same time.

Abdullah was a natural, and within a few days he got his first "*Shahādah*." In less than a month, Abdullah would get four or five people to embrace Islam each week. In the first three months of his employment, Abdullah had successfully guided seventy-nine individuals to embrace Islam. Abdurrahman on the other hand had a completely different experience.

Even though Abdurrahman was just as active as Abdullah and had been engaged in even more *Daʿwah* conversations with non-Muslims; at his first quarter employee evaluation he only had one *Shahādah* to his credit. He was asked to meet the General Manager of the organization and explain himself. The GM assured Abdurrahman that he wasn't doubting Abdurrahman's sincerity, knowledge, or dedication, but simply wanted a reason as to why he was not able to perform remotely as well as his fellow countryman and *Dāʿī*. Abdurrahman replied that he was doing his best and that guidance was from Allah. The manager accepted the explanation and agreed to give the young brother another opportunity.

Abdurrahman got back in the field with even greater enthusiasm. He wanted to prove that he was as good a *Dāʿī* as Abdullah. Several months passed but Abdurrahman's *Shahādah* record did not improve. After twelve months of active *Daʿwah*, he only had 19 people who had accepted Islam at his hands. It was common knowledge in the organization that his counterpart Abdullah was a "super-*Dāʿī*" and in his first year had achieved a record-breaking 231 *Shahādah*. Abdurrahman found himself again in front of the GM who was asking the same questions.

Desperate to not only keep his job but also his reputation, Abdurrahman asked his boss how many *Shahādah* s Prophet Nūḥ got in all his hundreds of years of *Daʿwah*. Everyone knew that the number was small, far less than what Abdullah had achieved in just one year. Yet, Prophet Nūḥ was not considered a failure.

Abdurrahman was put on probation. As a charitable society that was entrusted to receive donations, it would be highly inappropriate to keep spending donor money on projects or people who did not bring in the expected results. And yet, the beleaguered young brother had presented the management with a veritable dilemma.

What is the logical way forward? Should Abdurrahman be let go? Has he been having genuine *Daʿwah* conversations? Is he not doing his best? Is it right to fire him? At various workshops and training programs, I have presented this story and asked the participants what they would do given the same scenario.

The answer lies in Abdurrahman's unexpected question about Prophet Nūḥ. Prophet Nūḥ spent 950 years inviting his people to the truth, the worship of Allah. Even after centuries of patient invitation, only a few dozen of his people became Muslim. Even members of his own family rejected his call. Allah describes the story of this great Prophet as follows.

> And indeed, We sent Noah unto his people and he remained among them a thousand years, less fifty; and the flood seized them, for they were wrongdoers. Then We saved him and the companions of the ship, and We made it a sign for the worlds[18].
>
> Indeed, We sent Noah unto his people, "Truly I am unto you a clear warner, and that you might worship none but God. Truly I fear for you the punishment of a painful day." 'But the notables among his people who disbelieved said, "We see you as naught but a human being like us, and we see none who follow you, save the lowliest among us, as is clear to see. Nor do we see that you have any merit over us; nay, we think that you are liars[19]."

Prophet Nūḥ, however, had never said anything different and had always asserted that, indeed, he was only a human being; and that Allah had sent him as a messenger to his people. The wealthy among his people taunted and ridiculed him saying that it was only the poorest and lowliest of the people who followed him. They said that if he wanted them (the wealthy) to believe in him, then he should shun those who were currently following him because the poor were not their equals. This is a common theme experienced by many Prophets and Messengers. The Quraysh of Makkah took the same issue with the Prophet Muḥammad's followers. Prophet Nūḥ persevered, protected his followers, and still urged his people to Islam.

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[18] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an,* Surah 29:14-15.

[19] *ibid*, Surah 11:25-27.

> O my people! I ask not of you any wealth in return for it; my reward lies only with God. And I shall not drive away those who believe; truly they shall meet their Lord. But I see that you are an ignorant people. O my people! Who would help me against God, were I to drive them away? Will you not remember? I say not unto you that with me are the treasuries of God; nor do I know the Unseen. And I say not that I am an angel; nor do I say of those who are despicable in your eyes, 'God will not give them any good'—God knows best what is in their souls—for then I would indeed be among the wrongdoers[20]."
>
> They said, "O Noah! You have disputed with us, and have prolonged the disputation; so, bring upon us that wherewith you have threatened us, if you are among the truthful." He said, "God alone shall bring it to you, if He will, and you cannot thwart [it]. And my sincere advice will not benefit you, much as I desire to advise you, if God desires to cause you to err. He is your Lord, and unto Him shall you be returned[21]."

The Quran makes it obvious that Prophet Nūḥ spared no effort in reaching out to his people. He called them to his Lord, day and night; openly and in secret; enticing them with an abundance of blessings from their Lord; appealing to their intellect and observation. Yet they were too obstinate a people, proud of their wealth and children, and refused to listen to the resolute Prophet. Allah describes Nūḥ's efforts:

> He said, "My Lord, I have called my people day and night. Yet my calling has not increased them in aught but flight. Truly whenever I call them, that Thou mayest forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, cover themselves with their garments, persist, and wax most arrogant. Then I called them openly. Then I proclaimed to them and confided to them in secret. I said, 'Seek forgiveness of your Lord! Truly He is Forgiving. He will send the sky upon you with abundant rains, Ī support you with wealth and sons, and make for you gardens and rivers. What ails you that you do not hope for God with dignity, seeing that He has created you in stages? Have you not considered how God created the seven heavens one upon another, and made the moon a light therein and made the sun a lamp? And God made you grow forth from the earth like plants. Then He will cause you to return to it and bring you forth again. And God made the earth an open expanse for you, that you may travel spacious paths therein.'"! Noah said, "My Lord they disobeyed me and followed those whose wealth and children increase them in naught but loss[22]."

Allah informed Prophet Nūḥ that despite all his efforts, his people will never come to believe. Nūḥ then supplicated his Lord to destroy all the disbelievers, not sparing any.

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[20] *ibid*, Surah 11:29-31.

[21] *ibid*, Surah 11:32-34.

[22] *ibid*, Surah 71:5-21.

> And it was revealed unto Noah, "None of thy people shall believe, save those who had already believed. So be not distressed by that which they used to do[23]."
>
> Noah said, "My Lord, leave not a single disbeliever to dwell upon the earth. Truly if you leave them, they will mislead Thy servants and will beget naught but disbelieving profligates[24]."

Allah accepted Nūḥ's prayer. And decreed punishment in the form of a flood, the likes of which had never been seen before and may never be seen again, and Allah knows best.

> Till when Our Command came, and the oven gushed forth, We said, "Carry on board two of every kind, and thy family—save the one against whom the Word has already gone forth—and those who believe." And none believed along with him, save a few. He said, "Embark upon it. In the Name of God be its coursing and its mooring. Truly my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful." And it sailed with them upon waves like mountains. And Noah called out to his son, who remained aloof, "O my son! Embark with us, and be not with the disbelievers." He said, "I shall take refuge on a mountain; it will protect me from the water." He said, "There is no protector on this day from the Command of God, save for the one upon whom He has Mercy." And the waves came between them, and he was among the drowned. And it was said, "O earth! Swallow your water! And O sky! Hold back!" And the water was made to recede, and the command was carried out, and it settled on [Mount] Jūdī. And it was said, "Away with the wrongdoing people![25]"

Was Prophet Nūḥ successful? He reached out to his people for almost a millennium and less than a hundred answered his call. Indeed, in this story told across several Surahs of the *Qurʾān* is a fundamental lesson about *Daʿwah* that is sadly lost on most people. The Flood proves that Prophet Nūḥ succeeded. Those of his people who became Muslim joined him on the Ark and were saved. And those who rejected the call to Allah perished in the Flood. Allah knew who would accept Islam and who would reject it. As such Prophet Nūḥ delivered the message completely – every one of his people was asked to submit and they chose either to join him on the Ark as submitters (Muslim) or disbelieve him and reject his call and they were the ones who Allah destroyed in the Flood.

It is imperative to establish without doubt that Prophet Nūḥ clearly and most definitely put every human effort possible to reach out to his people. There are many

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[23] *ibid*, Surah 11:36.

[24] *ibid*, Surah 71:27.

[25] *ibid*, Surah 11:40-44.

lengthy narratives of the Prophets in the *Qurʾān*. The story of Mūsā and Yusuf, the descriptions of Saleh and Hud as well as about the first man, Adam are all told in great detail across the *Qurʾān*. But Nūḥ's story is unique. There is great emphasis on his *Daʿwah*. Allah has painted a vivid picture of a humble, dedicated, resolute, and extraordinarily patient man who spared no effort to connect with his people and invite them to submit to Allah.

Nūḥ delivered Allah's message to his people and, most importantly, invited them to Islam. His people, in turn, responded in one of two ways – some accepted; the majority rejected.

So how does this story and its climax relate back to the initial question of whether Muslims are commanded to only convey the message of Islam or are they responsible for people to convert to Islam? Prophet Nūḥ did not only convey the message, but he also asked his people to accept Islam. In other words, he ***invited*** his people to Allah, to Islam. *Daʿwah* is not about "conveying" or "converting," it is about "inviting." The word *Daʿwah* literally means "invitation." And that invitation must be made clearly, where practically only one of three possible responses may be forthcoming – "Yes," "No," or "Maybe." "Yes," means the person accepts Islam. "No," means the person has rejected Islam. And "maybe" implies that the individual needs more time to ponder, to reflect, and later to decide whether to choose or refuse.

"*Shahādah*" literally means "testimony" or "witnessing." It commonly refers to the act of becoming Muslim where a person proclaims, "I testify that 'there is no deity (worthy of worship) except Allah and that Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah.'" For most Muslims, this is all that is meant by *Shahādah* – witnessing that a person has become Muslim. But what about a person who responds to an invitation to Islam in the negative? What about the person who says "No" and rejects Islam? Is that not also a form of witnessing? Could that not be considered a kind of "*Shahādah*?" Is it not bearing witness that someone has rejected Allah, rejected Islam?

In Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī[26], Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī (May Allah be pleased with him) narrated:

[26] Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Holding Fast to the Qur'an and Sunnah, Hadith 7349, accessed November 19, 2024, Sunnah.com, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7349.

> Allah's Messenger (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Noah will be brought (before Allah) on the Day of Resurrection, and will be asked, 'Did you convey the message of Allah?" He will reply, 'Yes, O Lord.' And then Noah's nation will be asked, 'Did he (Noah) convey Allah's message to you?' They will reply, 'No warner came to us.' Then Noah will be asked, 'Who are your witnesses?' He will reply. '(My witnesses are) Muḥammad and his followers.' Thereupon you (Muslims) will be brought and you will bear witness." Then the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) recited: "And thus We have made of you (Muslims) a just and the best nation, that you might be witness over the nations, and the Apostle a witness over you" (2:143).

Syed Hossein Nasr[27] comments on the above verse as follows:

> A *shāhid* or *shahīd* can also be a testimony or testament to something, evidence of something in the sense that any "witness" is in real sense living "evidence" of something or someone. Thus, a *shahīd* is both something or someone who witnesses and something or someone who is witnessed. Read in this way, this verse is saying that the Prophet is evidence or testimony for his community to look to, and in relation to the other communities of the world the Islamic community is a testimony or evidence of something for the sake of other communities, meaning that the Prophet is there to be an indicator of the truth for his community, and the Islamic community is there to serve the same function for the rest of humanity—a way for them to have knowledge of God and the truths that flow from that knowledge. See also 22:78: He named you Muslims aforetime, and herein, that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and that you may be witnesses for mankind.

Allah further states in the *Qurʾān*:

> "O company of jinn and human beings! Did not messengers come unto you from among yourselves, recounting unto you My signs, and warning you of the meeting with this your Day?" They will say, "We bear witness against ourselves." The life of this world deluded them, and they bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers[28].

Furthermore, in *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*, Allah relates the story of a group of *Banī Isrāʾīl* fishermen who circumvented Allah's command of not working on the Sabbath by devising a scheme to catch fish on that day. They did this by setting up nets and traps on Friday, the day before the Sabbath, and then collecting the fish on Sunday, the day after the Sabbath. By doing so, they avoided direct work on the Sabbath itself. Allah was displeased by this act of duplicity and turned the sinners into apes. This is how the *Qurʾān* describes the incident.

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[27] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, Surah 1:143.

[28] *ibid*, Surah 6:130.

> And ask them about the town that was by the sea, when they transgressed the Sabbath. Their fish would come to them, surfacing on the day of their Sabbath, but on the day when they did not observe the Sabbath, they would not come to them. Thus, did We try them for their having been iniquitous.
>
> And when a community among them said, "Why do you admonish a people whom God is about to destroy or punish with a severe punishment?" They said, "As an excuse before your Lord, and that haply they may be reverent."
>
> And when they forgot that whereof they had been reminded, We saved those who forbade evil, and We seized those who did wrong with a dreadful punishment for their having committed iniquity.
>
> When they were insolent concerning that which they had been forbidden, We said unto them, "Be you apes, outcast[29]."

The above verses indicate that fishing on the Sabbath divided the *Banī Isrāʾīl* in the town; a third of them wanted to fish, a third admonished against it, and a third neither fished themselves nor admonished others. A community among them (verse 164) refers to those Israelites in the town who did not participate in fishing on the Sabbath but also did not admonish those who did. Here this "neutral" group addresses those who tried actively to forbid or discourage those fishing on the Sabbath, asking why they make the effort to admonish a people whom Allah is about to destroy or punish. Their (the group that admonished) response is that it serves as an excuse before Allah, meaning that they consider themselves to be obligated to "forbid wrong," and having done so, they have fulfilled their moral duty. In effect, they are bearing witness to the flagrant violators of Allah's command to rest on the Sabbath. Moreover, in verse 165, Allah states that those who were violating the Sabbath forgot that "whereof they had been reminded" by those who admonished them; Allah then punished the violators and saved those who forbade evil – that is, by exhorting their fellow Israelites to observe the Sabbath. The lesson derived is that on the Day of Judgment Allah will take to task those who did not "invite to good and forbid evil," and those who do invite to good and forbid evil have fulfilled their obligation and will testify against the violators and disbelievers.

To summarize, it is not sufficient to only practice one's own *Dīn*, ignoring others, and consider one's moral duty (to Allah) fulfilled. It is imperative that when an opportunity arises, one should not hesitate to invite others to the *Dīn* of Allah. To extend that invitation is the completion of one's *Daʿwah*. Even when faced with

[29] *ibid*, 7:163 – 166.

insurmountable odds where the likelihood of being rejected is almost certain, Muslims are commanded to persevere and invite people to Allah. This is vividly demonstrated when Allah commanded Mūsā and his brother Harun to go to, arguably the most arrogant man that had ever lived, *Firʿawn* (Pharoah) and to invite him to Islam.

> Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh! Truly he has rebelled! Yet speak unto him gently, that haply he may remember or have fear[30]."

Did Allah not know that *Firʿawn* would reject Mūsā's message? Was Allah not aware of what was to transpire? Yet, Allah instructs the two brothers (peace be upon them) to go to the most rebellious man on earth, a person who equates himself to *Allāh subḥānahu wa taʿālā*, and invite him to Allah. And to do so "gently." Allah is not just instructing Mūsā and Harun, but Allah is teaching all believers the right way to do *Daʿwah*. The lesson here is that even under the direst circumstances one should not lose hope in Allah's mercy, and one should never assume that any person is beyond redemption.

In hindsight, it may seem obvious that *Daʿwah* means invitation. Yet in practice, most Islamic *Daʿwah* organizations and individuals involved in *Daʿwah* do not fully grasp this idea. Many who are involved in this are too shy to ask the all-important question "Would you like to become Muslim?" Others are simply not aware that exposing people to Islam is a good start, but it is not the culmination of the *Daʿwah* effort. In today's world where Muslims are persecuted and Islam is maligned, where Islamophobia has become rampant, it is not surprising that only conveying the message has become the popular understanding of *Daʿwah*. It is far easier to simply disseminate information about Islam. Handing out a pamphlet or directing someone to a website about Islam has become the norm for *Daʿwah*. Many verses of the *Qurʾān* and examples from the life of the Prophet are singled out to suggest that a *Dāʿī*'s responsibility is only to deliver the message. And many have come to understand that "deliver the message" only means to expose people to Islam. The crucial element of inviting people to submit has been conveniently forgotten. Allah teaches and consoles Prophet Muḥammad, and the believers as follows:

> Truly the religion in the sight of God is submission. Those who were given the Book differed not until after knowledge had come to them, out

[30] *ibid*, 20:43 – 44.

> of envy among themselves. And whosoever disbelieves in God's signs, truly God is swift in reckoning.
>
> So, if they dispute with thee, say, "I submit my face to God, and so too those who follow me." And say to those who were given the Book and to the unlettered ones, "Do you submit?" Then if they submit, they will be rightly guided, but if they turn away, then thine is only to convey. And God sees His servants[31].

In the context of these verses and their commentaries "submission" is understood as Islam. Allah commanded the Prophet and his followers to submit to Allah and to invite the Jews and Christians (those who were given the Book) and all people (unlettered ones) directly by asking "Do you submit?" And if they accept the invitation, "they will be rightly guided." But if they reject ("turn away") then the Prophet's duty was only to deliver the message. In Prophet Muḥammad's *Daʿwah* we see many examples of how this instruction from the Almighty was carried out.

> In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful. From Muḥammad, the slave of Allah and His Messenger, to Heraclius, king of the Byzantines. Blessed are those who follow true guidance. I invite you to embrace Islam so that you may live in security. If you come within the fold of Islam, Allah will give you double reward, but in case you turn your back upon it, then the burden of the sins of all your people shall fall on your shoulders. "Say (O Muḥammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah. Then, if they turn away, say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims[32].'"

The above *Ḥadīth* refers to the letter that Prophet Muḥammad sent to the Emperor of Byzantine in 7 AH (628 CE) wherein the Prophet directly and without much preamble invites Heraclius to Islam. A similar direct invitation to Islam was sent out to other rulers of the time.

To the joint kings of Oman, the Prophet wrote, "I am calling both of you, in the name of Islam. You will be safe if you submit to Islam. I am the Messenger of Allah to all people and warn all those living that Islam will prevail. I hope you will accept

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[31] *ibid*, 3:19 – 20.

[32] Al-Khair Foundation, "Letters from the Prophet (saw)," accessed July 18, 2024, https://alkhair.org/letters-from-the-prophet/.

Islam…[33]". Similarly, to the Najashi, Ashamah ibn al-Abjar, of Abyssinia, the Prophet wrote,

> …I call you unto the fold of Islam; if you embrace Islam, you will find safety, Say O Muḥammad: 'O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), come to a word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah.' Then, if they turn away, say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims[34].'

Likewise, to Chosroes the King of Persia, he wrote, "…O King, under the command of God, I invite you to Islam. For I have been sent by God as His Messenger to all mankind, so that I may warn all living men and complete my Message for all unbelievers. Accept Islam and protect yourself from all afflictions. If you reject this invitation, then the sin of the denial of all your people will rest on your head[35]".

Narrated Anas ibn Mālik:

> Before he died, the Messenger of Allah had written to Kisrā, Ceasar, An-Najashi, and to every tyrant calling them to Allah. This An-Najashi is not the one that the Prophet performed to the funeral *Ṣalāh* for[36].

In his direct *Daʿwah* or via emissaries sent to rulers of the world at the time, Prophet Muḥammad did not hesitate to ask people to accept the *Dīn*. He was overly concerned and distraught by the failure of his people to accept the message he had brought them as well as by their repeated requests for miraculous signs as proof of his prophethood. The Prophet is described by Allah as a "*mercy to all worlds*"[37] and it was this characteristic of extreme compassion and mercy that drove him (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to go to all lengths when inviting people to Islam. Allah consoles his beloved messenger repeatedly regarding this matter.

> Yet perhaps thou wouldst destroy thyself with grief for their sake, should they believe not in this account[38].

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[33] *ibid*.

[34] *ibid*.

[35] *ibid*.

[36] Muhammad ibn Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Jami' at-Tirmidhi*, Hadith 2716, Book of Purification, accessed November 19, 2024, Sunnah.com, https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:2716.

[37] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 21:107.

[38] *ibid*, 18:6.

> We know well that what they say grieves thee. Yet it is not thee that they deny. Rather, it is the signs of God that the wrongdoers reject[39].
>
> And let not those who hasten unto disbelief grieve thee. Truly they will not harm God in the least. God desires to give them no share in the Hereafter, and theirs shall be a great punishment[40].
>
> And what of one, the evil of whose deeds has been made to seem fair to him, such that he thinks it beautiful? Truly God leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will; so, let not thy soul be expended in regrets over them. Truly God knows that which they do[41].

In this context, Allah "leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever He will" can be understood as to why the Prophet should not grieve over the disbelievers going astray. There are many verses in the same tone[42]. Such verses direct that the Prophet should not be overly concerned about people rejecting the message of Allah but should continue to invite people to Islam.

In over a dozen "Convey or Convert" workshops conducted in five countries in person and over 30 countries online with hundreds of delegates from *Daʿwah* organizations, not a single person understood this concept fully until partway or fully through the session. Almost all those who attended these sessions expressed their amazement at how fundamental this concept was and yet how misunderstood it has become.

In 2016, this workshop was conducted for the first time within the Organization in Bahrain. At the end of the session, one of the *Daʿīs* attending raised his hand and stated that the previous weekend he "conveyed" the message of Islam to a large group of Indian expatriates working on a horse ranch. The expats seemed very keen on Islam and agreed with the basic idea of there being One God, Allah, and Muḥammad being His messenger. The *Dāʿī* was happy that they had understood his talk. He had conveyed the message. However, he admitted, that after attending the workshop he was now concerned that he had failed to "invite" them to Islam. The *Dāʿī* was urged to immediately go to the ranch and ask the group of stable hands if they would like to become Muslim. Thirty-five of these Indian expatriates accepted Islam that day.

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[39] *ibid*, 6:33.

[40] *ibid*, 3:176.

[41] *ibid*, 35:8.

[42] See 5:41; 5:68; 10:65; 16:127; 26:3; 27:70; 31:23; and 36:76.

A direct consequence of this understanding that "*Daʿwah* means to invite" resulted in a 52.4% increase in the total number of people who took *Shahādah* with the Organization when comparing the total who accepted Islam in 2016 to the number in 2015[43]. Given below is feedback collected from some of the "Convey or Convert" workshops over the years:

> I have been encountering many non-Muslims who agree with my explanation; however, I always miss the invitation part because previously I was confused with the term convert.
>
> I have always thought that we must convey and to convert is Allah's decision. If we invite, Insha Allah we can have more shahadas and save more people from hell fire.
>
> That rejection is a success still.
>
> My opinion on conversion changed.

4.6 WAS ISLAM SPREAD BY THE SWORD?

Moving beyond this question to a common stereotype about Islam, are Muslims required to actively proselytize to the extent of forcibly converting people to Islam? In other words, was Islam spread by the sword? The obvious answer by almost all Muslims would be a resounding "No!" Most would further quote the *Qurʾān*:

> There is no coercion in religion. Sound judgment has become clear from error. So, whosoever disbelieves in false deities and believes in God has grasped the most unfailing handhold, which never breaks. And God is Hearing, Knowing[44].

The life of the Prophet Muḥammad including the many battles and expeditions are testament to the fact that he expressly forbade any coercion or forcing people to "submit" to Islam, to Allah. The very basis of Islam is the concept of strict monotheism – One, Incomparable, Unique God – without a partner, free of all His Creation, not dependent on any but all are dependent on Him, Allah the Almighty. The single most, unforgivable sin is to associate partners with Allah – to commit "shirk." Any person who coerces someone to accept Islam inadvertently associates himself or herself as a

[43] Muhammad Quadir, *Unpublished Annual Board Report for 2016* (Discover Islam Society, 2017).

[44] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 2:256.

"partner" to Allah. Fearing anyone above Allah is a form of "shirk" and as such, by definition, negates any such conversion.

Despite many attempts to besmirch Islam by wrongly equating it with violence or terrorism, a true reading of history or even a cursory observation of Muslim and non-Muslim populations around the world would easily debunk all such myths. Within a few decades of the coming of Islam, Muslims did conquer large parts of the world. At its peak, the Muslim empire extended from Spain in the west to China in the east. Yet, large parts of Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and other North African countries did not become Muslim for decades, if not centuries, after they were conquered. After almost four hundred years under Muslim rule, it was not until the 11th century that the majority of Persia finally accepted Islam. Despite being under the rule of the Muslim Mughal Empire for centuries, the majority of people in the Indian subcontinent remain non-Muslim to this day. In contrast, Islam spread across the Nusantara and coastal regions around the Indian Ocean, including the east coast of Africa not through conquest, but through trade and marriage.

4.7 THE REASONS WHY PEOPLE CONVERT TO ISLAM?

In Islam, intentions are the basis of all actions. Humans are only able to observe actions. But the Divine sees people's hearts and knows the reasons why people do any deed – good or bad. Imam Nawawi's collection of forty *Ḥadīth* begins with this *Ḥadīth* on the importance of motive or intention.

It is narrated on the authority of Amirul *Muʾmin* in, Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb who said:

> I heard the Messenger of Allah say: Actions are (judged) by motives (*Niyyah*), so each man will have what he intended. Thus, he whose migration (*Hijrah*) was to Allah and His Messenger, his migration is to Allah and His Messenger; but he whose migration was for some worldly thing he might gain, or for a wife he might marry, his migration is to that for which he migrated [Bukhari & Muslim][45].

As already established, it is sufficient for one to simply declare the *Shahādah* to be considered Muslim. Irrespective of whether one has deep-rooted convictions or only

[45] Al-Nawawi, *Al-Nawawi's Forty Hadith*, Hadith 1, narrated by Umar ibn al-Khattab, accessed November 19, 2024, Sunnah.com, https://sunnah.com/nawawi40:1

an outward Islamic disposition, the declaration of *Shahādah* is enough to be legally and practically defined as Muslim. People's motivations for becoming Muslim are not relevant in this regard. However, understanding the reasons why people accept Islam greatly enhances how one understands *Daʿwah* and conversion. Reasons for accepting Islam can generally be divided into two: sincere belief and worldly gains. Dutton[46] describes these as the way of light – when someone becomes Muslim due to personal conviction regardless of external pressures, and the way of power – this is when a person enters Islam by external circumstances that make it difficult not to do so. Al-Qwidi[47] describes the two approaches as the way of *Fiṭrah* and the way of power. This approach may seem overly simplistic, but it has a certain logical appeal to it. Looking at how some companions of Prophet Muḥammad accepted Islam may provide more insight into understanding motivations and the kinds of people who choose Islam.

4.7.1 Abū Bakr Siddique

Abū Bakr, born ʿAbd Allāh ibn Abī Quḥāfah in 573 CE in Makkah, was a well-respected merchant in Makkah and a close friend of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh long before the advent of Islam. Abū Bakr was known for his integrity, wisdom, thoughtfulness, and gentle nature, and was greatly admired by the Quraysh tribe to which both he and the Muḥammad belonged.

In 610 CE, when Muḥammad received his first revelation from Allah through the Angel Jibreel in the Cave of Hira, he began to privately share his message with his family and closest friends. Abū Bakr was one of the first people the Prophet approached. Upon hearing the Prophet's account of the revelation and his message of *Tawḥīd* (Oneness of Allah), Abū Bakr immediately believed in him and accepted Islam without any hesitation. His support of the Prophet and Islam was unwavering, and throughout his life, he never hesitated to give everything for the sake of Allah[48].

[46] Yasin Dutton, "Conversion to Islam: The Qur'anic Paradigm," in *Religious Conversion*, ed. M. Darroll Bryant and Christopher Lamb (1999), 151–165.

[47] Maha Al-Qwidi, "Understanding the Stages of Conversion to Islam".

[48] Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of ibn Isḥāq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, trans. A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955).

4.7.2 ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb

The conversion of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was quite different from that of Abū Bakr. Umar was born around 584 CE in Makkah and grew up tending camels for his father. He later became a successful trader. He was honest and fiercely loyal to his tribe, his ancestral beliefs and customs, and to his people. Umar had a profound sense of justice, was very assertive, and believed in taking action. When the Prophet started to preach to the Quraysh, Umar got very upset. He saw Islam dividing his people, weakening the Quraysh both in terms of their leadership amongst the tribes and economically as the caretakers of the *Kaʿbah* that housed a host of idols. He opposed Muḥammad and became one of the fiercest opponents of Islam.

Umar's conversion to Islam in 616 CE was dramatic. Frustrated by the spread of Islam, Umar set out to kill Prophet Muḥammad but was diverted upon learning that his sister Fatimah and her husband had already converted to Islam. In a rage, he confronted them and struck Fatimah, causing her to bleed. The sight of his sister bleeding softened him, and he asked her to read the *Qurʾān*ic verses that he had heard them reciting just before he came upon them. Moved by the beauty and message of the *Qurʾān*, Umar's heart opened to the faith. He immediately went to the Prophet's house and declared his acceptance of Islam. Umar became one of the strongest supporters of the Prophet and Islam. His conversion greatly increased the clout and influence of the persecuted Muslim community of Makkah[49].

4.7.3 Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb

Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb was a prominent leader of the Quraysh tribe in Makkah and a staunch opponent of Islam and Prophet Muḥammad. He played a significant role in the battles against the early Muslim community of *Madīnah*.

Abu Sufyan became Muslim in the year 630 CE, just before the conquest of Makkah. He was taken by the Prophet's uncle, Al-Abbas, to meet the Prophet Muḥammad in his tent just as the Muslim forces were ready to enter Makkah. Recognizing the strength and inevitability of the Muslim victory, Abū Sufyān accepted Islam reluctantly. As a key leader of the Quraysh, his conversion was not only

[49] *ibid*; Ṣafī al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakfūrī, *Al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm*.

strategically significant but also facilitated the peaceful surrender of Makkah. Despite his long animosity toward the Prophet and Islam, Abu Sufyan became a major proponent of Islam and fought in several battles[50].

So how do the conversion narratives of these illustrious companions of the Prophet shed light on the motivations for conversion and the types of converts in Islam?

4.7.4 Stones and Hearts

In *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (The Cow), Allah addresses the Bani Israel following the events after which this longest surah of the *Qurʾān* is named:

> Then your hearts hardened thereafter, being like stones or harder still. For indeed among stones are those from which streams gush forth, and indeed among them are those that split and water issues from them, and indeed among them are those that crash down from the fear of God. And God is not heedless of what you do[51].

A wealthy man among the Israelites was murdered, and the community was unable to identify the killer. To resolve the matter, they sought the guidance of Prophet Mūsā. Allah instructed Mūsā to tell the people to sacrifice a cow. Initially, they questioned and procrastinated, asking for more details about the cow. Despite being given specific characteristics to look for — that it should not be too old nor too young, a yellow cow, unworked, and without blemish — they continued to hesitate and inquire further. Eventually, they found a cow matching the description and very reluctantly sacrificed it. Allah then instructed them to strike the dead man with a part of the cow. Miraculously, the man came back to life and revealed the identity of his murderer before dying again. This miracle demonstrated Allah's power and served as a reminder to the Israelites of the importance of following divine instructions without unnecessary questioning. The more common commentary in verse 74 above is how the hearts of the Bani Israel had hardened, and Allah is comparing their hardened hearts to stones and that even stones may be worn down and water flows from them or that stones crash down in awe of Allah[52].

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[50] Ibn Isḥāq. *The Life of Muhammad*.

[51] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 2:74.

[52] *ibid*.

However, contemporary scholar and self-acclaimed student of the *Qurʾān*, Nouman Ali Khan[53] describes the three kinds of stones in this verse in a very different way. He views the three stones as referring to al *Qalb*[54] (the heart) of three kinds of people who accept Islam. The first kind of person is a thinker, someone who is constantly pondering over the true nature and purpose of existence. This is a person whose heart is yearning for its maker and the moment such a heart learns of Allah, belief (*Īmān*) gushes forth and the person immediately submits with full conviction and without any doubts. The second personality type is occupied with this world. This heart is involved in worldly affairs and does not slow down enough to ponder over the mysteries of being. Such a heart requires a tap, a reason to pause and consider its true purpose of existence. And like the stone that when caused to "split," and water flows from it; similarly, this heart when shaken will submit and belief (*Īmān*) will flow from it. The last kind of heart belongs to the person who accepts Islam (submits), but belief has not yet entered the heart. This heart is like a stone that does not have any water (*Īmān*) but comes crashing down for fear of Allah. The conversion narratives of the above three companions of the Prophet resonate with this alternative understanding of verse 2:74.

Abū Bakr did not hesitate whatsoever upon hearing the call to Islam. He was very close to Muḥammad and was a witness to the Prophet's impeccable character. Like the Prophet, Abū Bakr was very contemplative and deplored the morals and ethics of his people. It could easily be argued that Abū Bakr was predisposed to the Islamic message of the Oneness of Allah, the prophethood of Muḥammad, and the teachings of kindness and compassion. His nature (*Fiṭrah*) was that of Islam and as such he did not hesitate to accept Islam the moment the Prophet invited him. We find this among many people who accept the moment they hear about it. It is as though they were always Muslim but just did not know it. Such people are described by Khan as thinkers – they are on the verge of accepting Islam the moment they know about it. These are people

[53] Nouman Ali Khan, "The Story of the Israelites, the Cow, and the Murdered Man - Surah Al-Baqarah Explanation," YouTube video, 9:58, posted by The Prophets Path, June 19, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSfZUnGIU9E.

[54] In Islamic and Arabic terminology, the term *'al Qalb'* primarily refers to the heart. However, its meaning extends beyond the physical organ. The *qalb* is the center of one's intellect, morality, and spirituality; in essence it is the metaphysical decision maker of the body (Agustiar 2017, 118). (Skinner 2019, 1–5) states that *al Qalb* is the seat of one's intelligence and in an ideal, balanced person, consciousness is found in the *qalb*, which is open to the *ruh* (soul) and directs the *aql* (intelligence) to control and manage the *nafs* (one's inner self or psyche).

who ponder the mysteries of life, they are concerned about their existence and are searching for purpose. They are not distracted by the mundane of life but are always seeking to know their Creator. Abū Bakr is described as belonging to this category. He is like the stone from which water gushes forth.

Umar, on the other hand, was strong, willful, a leader of men, and highly opinionated. Despite being fiercely loyal to his tribe and to his ancestral religion, he was also someone who had a deep-seated desire for justice and fairness. On one hand, he abhorred seeing his people divided, on the other hand, he could not help but admire the qualities of kindness, compassion, equality, and justice that he found in the Prophet and his companions. Umar was conflicted. His true nature (*Fiṭrah*) was Islam, but it was buried under layers of tribal and ancestral loyalty, a sense of protecting his people at all costs, and his pride. However, when he beat up his brother-in-law and hit his sister for accepting Islam and realized what he had done, he saw through his conflicted self. His heart paused and was ready to accept the idea of Islam. After reading verses of the *Qurʾān* that his sister had hidden, Umar knew the truth. He did not hesitate and accepted Islam immediately. Umar's journey to Islam is like that of people who are conflicted but too busy with their daily lives to give their hearts a moment to ponder, and it is only when faced with some trauma or tragedy that they would evaluate their life and start searching for the truth. These are the stones that need to be hit for water to issue from them. Khan describes such people as extroverted; they are busy with life and involved in everything around them. They are the shakers and movers. They do not have the patience to think about life and its deeper meaning. It takes some kind of trauma, or tragedy for them to be shaken up, and for their hearts to become receptive to the message of Islam.

Abu Sufyan falls into the category that both Dutton[55] and Al-Qwidi[56] describe as the way of power. These are people who accept Islam for some benefit in this world. It is not their moral conviction but the temporal gains that motivate such to submit. Examples of this kind of conversion are people who become Muslim to get married (although Muslim men are permitted to marry women from the people of the Book, in most cases both men and women convert to Islam to marry a Muslim); or who accept

[55] Yasin Dutton, "Conversion to Islam".

[56] Maha Al-Qwidi, "Understanding the Stages of Conversion to Islam".

Islam for wealth, better material opportunities etc. This is the third kind of stone that does not have water in it but comes crashing down in fear of Allah. Khan describes these waterless stones as hearts that do not have proper *Īmān* (belief) in them. These are hearts that have only submitted (*Aslama*) for reasons other than true conviction. Abu Sufyan's conversion may be compared to this third category. However, this does not imply that eventually *Īmān* (belief) does not enter their heart, for many, like the case of Abu Sufyan they do become true believers with complete conviction (*Iman*).

4.8 FINAL THOUGHTS ON CONVERSION

Despite being a psychologist, William James[57] viewed converts to Christianity as people who had a "sick soul" before conversion, and by becoming Christian they became better humans with a unified, happier countenance. Unlike James, most social scientists choose to put aside their own religious beliefs or convictions when it comes to their field of study. This is understandable. However, it seems paradoxical that, in describing and understanding how and why people undergo religious conversions, religion, metaphysics, and spirituality are often set aside.

Converting to Islam has always been viewed as submitting to one's Creator. As such, Muslims have always understood that people of all time who submitted to their Lord associating no partners with Him and following the example of their Prophet or Messenger are considered Muslim.

In today's times, many *Daʿīs*, as well as *Daʿwah* organizations, have diminished the true meaning of *Daʿwah*; only understanding that conveying a facet of Islam or exposing people to some aspect of Islam is sufficient. The nuanced yet fundamental understanding that *Daʿwah* means to invite people to submit to their Creator, their Master, *Allāh subḥānahu wa taʿālā* is frequently lost.

Lastly, submission (to Islam) is not the same as having belief (*Īmān*). One can be a Muslim (submitter) and yet not be a *Muʾmin* (believer). At the expense of overgeneralizing, converts to Islam may be people who submit with utter conviction the moment they learn about Allah; people who may undergo trials and maybe even trauma

[57] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*...

before they come to submit and believe; and lastly people submit to Islam for some material gain regardless of whether belief (*Īmān*) has entered their heart or not.

One of the purposes of this study is to identify why Filipinos in particular are drawn to Islam. To better understand this phenomenon, the following chapter identifies and describes the Filipinos who become Muslim. It provides the typical profile of the Filipino Muslim convert.

CHAPTER FIVE

FILIPINO CONVERTS TO ISLAM

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) represent the largest group of expatriates converting to Islam in Bahrain compared to all other nationalities[1]. To better understand this phenomenon, it is essential to identify and describe who the typical Filipino convert to Islam is. This chapter looks at the demographic data collected from the interviews and surveys (the first section of both types of fieldwork – see Appendices B and C). Age, gender, marital status, education, employment, family, and former religion – demographic variables that may influence the conversion journey of Filipinos are presented along with brief interpretations and explanations.

This section is a direct answer to the research question, who is the typical Filipino who converts to Islam in Bahrain? It paints a detailed picture of the typical Filipino convert and lays the groundwork for a better understanding as to why this particular community embraces Islam and how their journey in Islam proceeds after conversion.

5.2 QUALITATIVE – INTERVIEWS

The qualitative section of the New Muslim Survey captures the personal stories of Filipino converts to Islam in Bahrain through detailed interviews. Focusing on 25 participants, it examines key demographic factors like age, gender, marital status, and education that influence their conversion experiences.

5.2.1 Interview Data Findings – All Nationalities

As previously mentioned, data was collected for dual purposes: to support this thesis and to enhance the work of the Organization. Of the forty-two interviews conducted, 25

[1] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Annual Report 2024, Internal Document*, Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024.

were with New Muslims from the Philippines. Below, only the demographic findings are presented.

The participants represented a diverse array of countries. Remarkably, despite intentionally selecting only interviewees from English-speaking countries, the distribution by nationality reasonably mirrored the demographics of New Muslims recorded by the Organization over the past decade (see Figure 4.4).

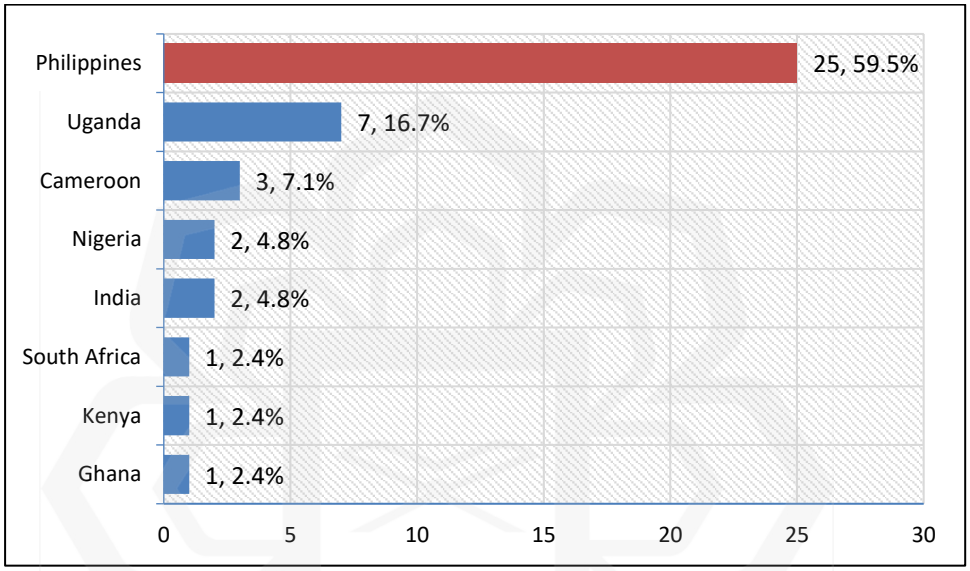


Figure 5.1 Interview Participants According to their National Origin (n = 42)

The majority of participants (59.5%) were from the Philippines, while these do reflect the significant proportion of Filipinos among all New Muslims in Bahrain, they are also indicative of the intentional selection of Filipinos for this study. The second-largest group was from Uganda (16.7%), followed by Cameroon (7.1%), illustrating a smaller but still significant, representation from East and Central Africa. Other participants included two interviewees each from India and Nigeria (4.8% of the total sample). There was one participant from each of the following African countries, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa.

5.2.2 Interview Data Analysis and Findings – Filipinos Only

This thesis focuses on the conversion of Filipinos to Islam in Bahrain. As such, the rest of this analysis will only look at the 25 Filipino participants. The overall demographic description of these Filipino interviewees shall be provided in this section. This includes gender, age, employment or vocational data, duration of stay in Bahrain, marital status, whether the interviewees have children or not, and the religion of their parents/families.

Table 5.1 Interview Respondents by Age, Gender, Origin, and Profession (n = 25)

Given Alias	Age	Gender	Origin	Profession
Aishah	38	Female	Pampanga, Philippines	Sales Representative
Ali	48	Male	Pasig City, Metro Manila, Philippines	Sales Executive
Amina	28	Female	La Union, Philippines	Maid
Amirah	30	Female	Zamboanga City, Philippines	Executive Secretary
Asma	34	Female	Malaysia	Homemaker
Fatimah	27	Female	Manila, Philippines	Interior Designer
Hafsah	31	Female	Neuva Ecija, Philippines	Assistant Manager
Hajar	41	Female	Bagabag, Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines	Receptionist
Hana	42	Female	Cebu City, Philippines	Businesswoman
Iman	33	Female	Quezon City, Philippines	Sales Coordinator
Khadijah	52	Female	Cagayan Valley, Philippines	Housemaid
Layla	37	Female	Quezon City, Philippines	Cashier

Leena	33	Female	Bulacan, Philippines	Teacher
Mariam	55	Female	Mabate City, Philippines	Clerk
Nadia	43	Female	Laguna, Philippines	Housemaid
Noor	40	Female	Iloilo City, Philippines	Salesperson
Nusaybah	35	Female	Victoria, Laguna, Philippines	Teacher
Safiyyah	33	Female	Occidental Mindoro, Philippines	Housemaid
Samira	38	Female	Manila, Philippines	Service Provider
Sarah	28	Female	Philippines	Waitress Hotel
Sumayyah	37	Female	Negros Occidental, Philippines	Secretary
Umar	31	Male	Tarlac City, Luzon, Philippines	Service Staff
Yasmin	32	Female	Bohol, Philippines	Manager
Zahra	31	Female	Cebu City, Visayas, Philippines	Teacher
Zainab	37	Female	Pasig city, Philippines	Fitness Instructor

Findings relevant to chapters 6, 7, and 8 are not discussed here but are presented within those respective chapters.

Table 5.2 Statistical Breakdown of Filipino Respondents by Age (n = 25)

Number (n)	Range	Mean	SD	Skewness
25	27 – 55	36.56	7.240	1.054

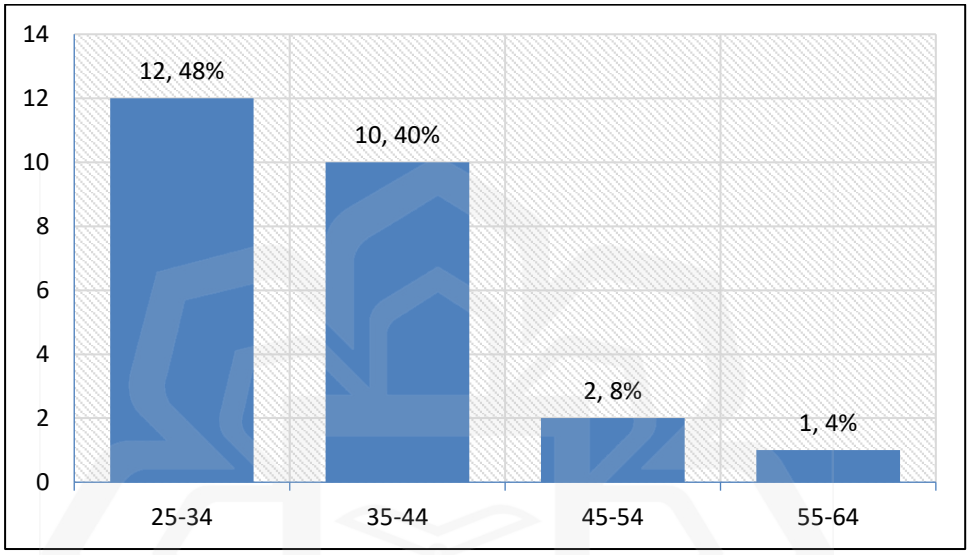


Figure 5.2 Filipino Interview Participants by Age Group (n = 25)

The age of the Filipino interviewees varied within a range from 27 to 55 years, with the mean age being 36.56, and Standard Deviation (SD) = 7.240. The largest age group was the 25-34 age group (48.0%), followed by the 35-44 age group (40.0%) delivering a demographic skew toward younger adults. The age distribution among the interviewees reflects the larger Filipino community in Bahrain as seen in Figure 2.7.

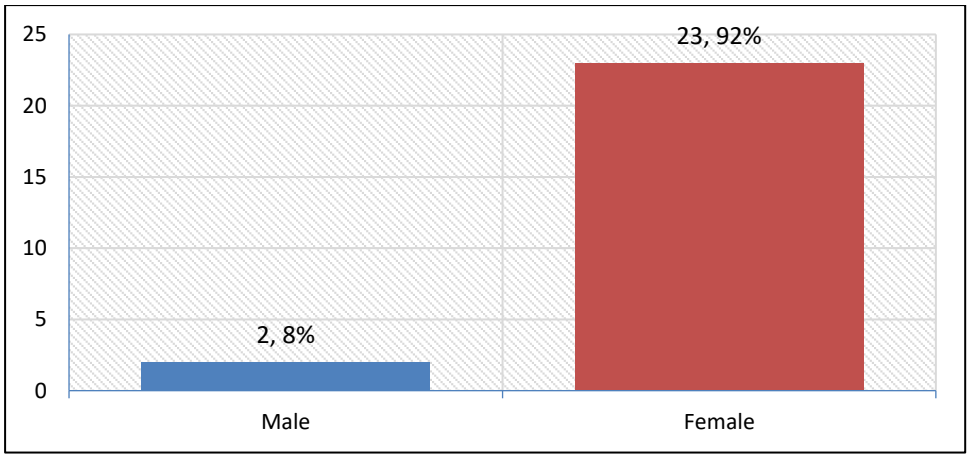
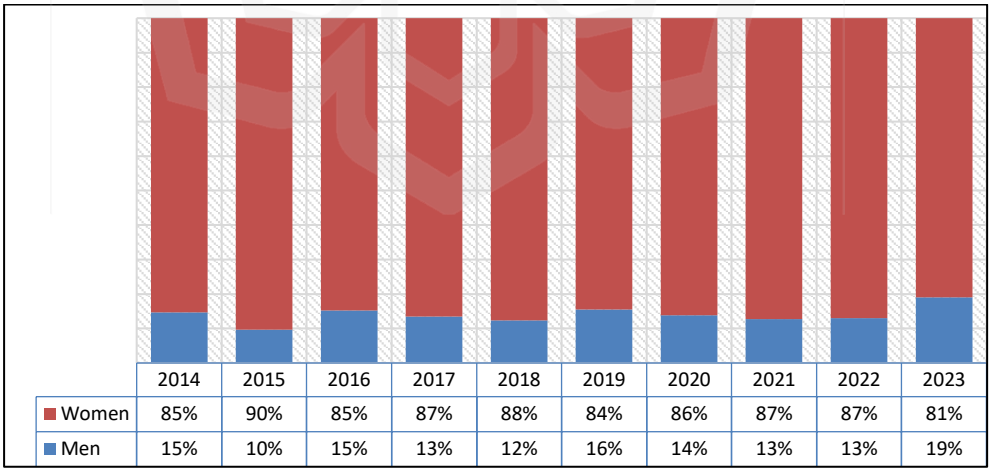


Figure 5.3 Filipino Interview Participants by Gender (n = 25)

In the larger Pinoy community, women make up three quarters of the population (see Figure 2.6). Whereas the sample of Filipino converts interviewed was disproportionately skewed in terms of gender toward females, at 92.0% (n = 23), while males made up 8.0% (n = 2). Over the past ten years, Filipinas (females) made up between 81% and 92% of the total number of expats from the Philippines who embraced Islam through the Organization (see Figure 5.4 below). The sample interviewed is reflective of this larger trend.



	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Women	85%	90%	85%	87%	88%	84%	86%	87%	87%	81%
Men	15%	10%	15%	13%	12%	16%	14%	13%	13%	19%

Figure 5.4 Percentage of Filipino Expats Divided by Gender Accepting Islam in Bahrain through the Organization over the Past Ten Years[2]

[2] *ibid*.

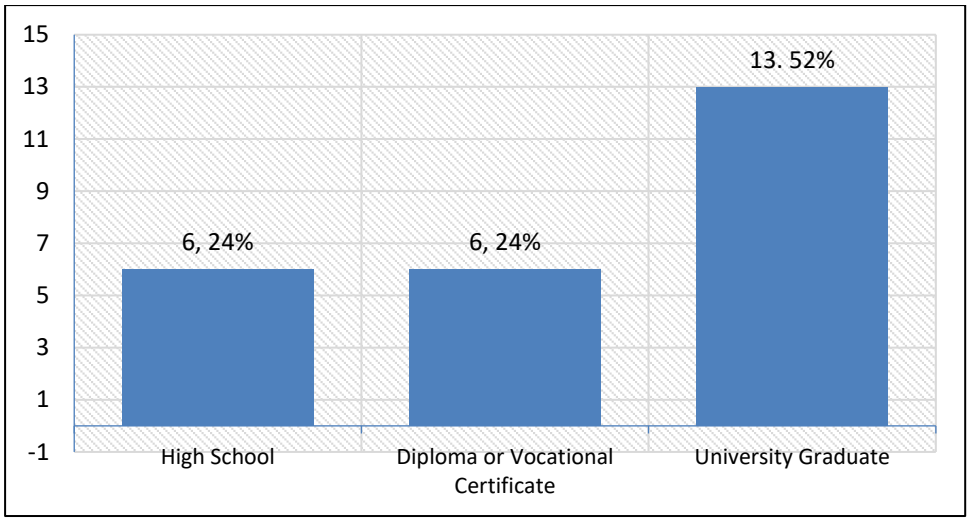


Figure 5.5 Filipino Interview Participants by Education (n = 25)

The vast majority of respondents had significantly skewed towards higher educational levels – for instance, over half of them (52.0%) had a university degree (all undergraduate). Other educational achievements were as follows: high school completion (24.0%), the receipt of a diploma, certification, or vocational qualification (24.0%). This aligns with the statement from the Philippine Ambassador to Bahrain, who noted that all Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are required to have at least a high school education. Furthermore, many are selected as immigrant workers due to their higher qualifications, such as university degrees or vocational certifications as tradespeople or skilled experts[3].

Employment status showed a diversified occupational landscape among the participants. A significant portion, 36.0%, worked in service and sales, reflective of the vocational diversity of the group. The study also had an inclusion of 12.0% professionals, 12.0% technicians and associate professionals, and 12.0% clerical support workers. Among the 25 participants, 4 (16%) worked for Bahraini families as domestic help and one identified herself as a homemaker.

[3] Anne Jalando-on Louis, Philippine Ambassador to Bahrain.

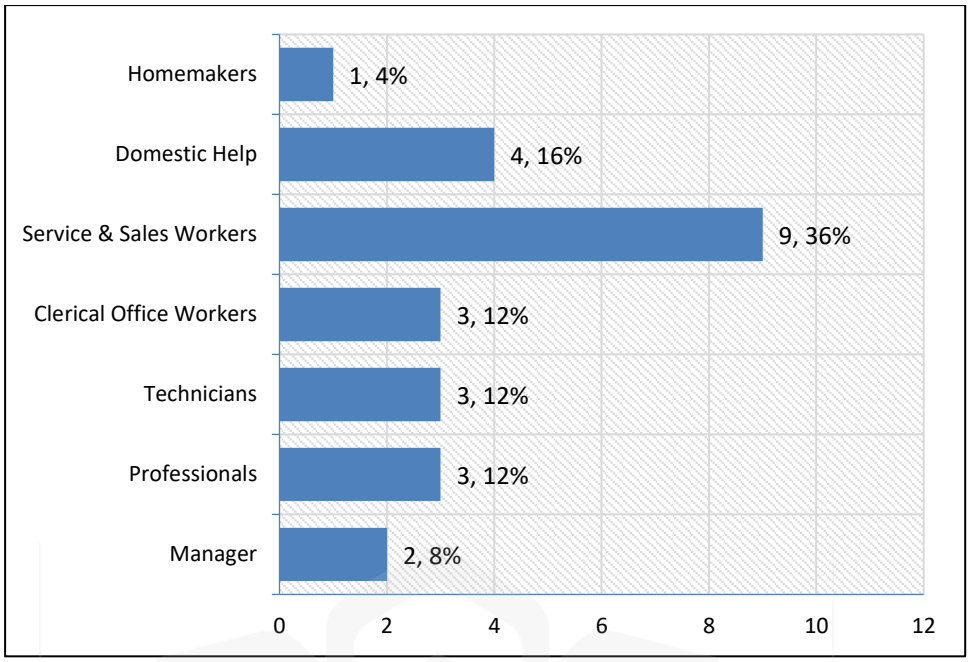


Figure 5.6 Filipino Interview Participants by Vocation (n = 25)

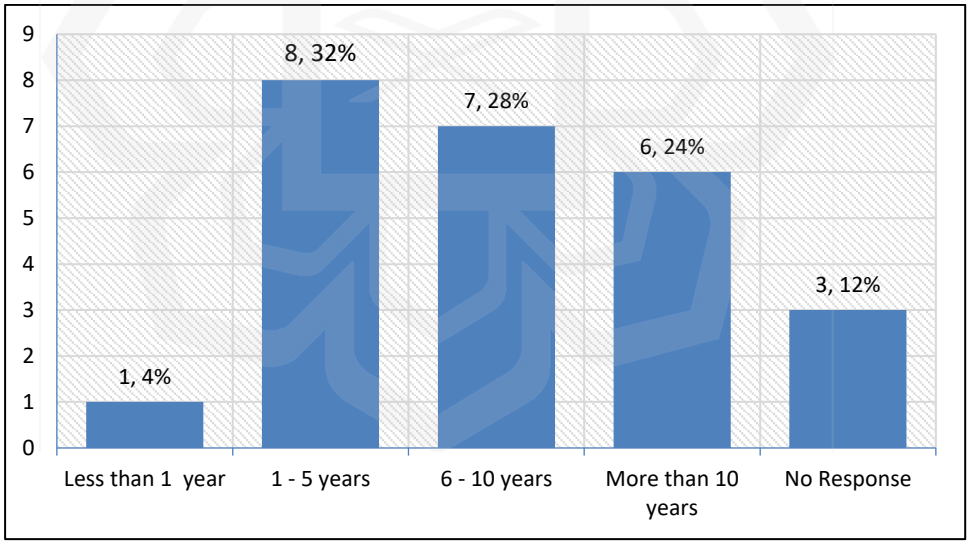


Figure 5.7 Filipino Interviewees Categorized by Length of Stay in Bahrain (n = 25)

The duration of residence in Bahrain among participants varied significantly. Filipinos are generally regarded as hardworking, well-qualified, and loyal employees. As a result, after completing the initial two-year employment agreement, most Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) retain their jobs and often receive multiple contract

extensions[4]. Eight interviewees (32%) had been living in Bahrain for between one and five years, while 4% had been in the kingdom for less than a year. The majority (n=13, 52%) had been in Bahrain for more than six years. Three of the interviewees did not clearly and specifically state the number of years they have been in Bahrain.

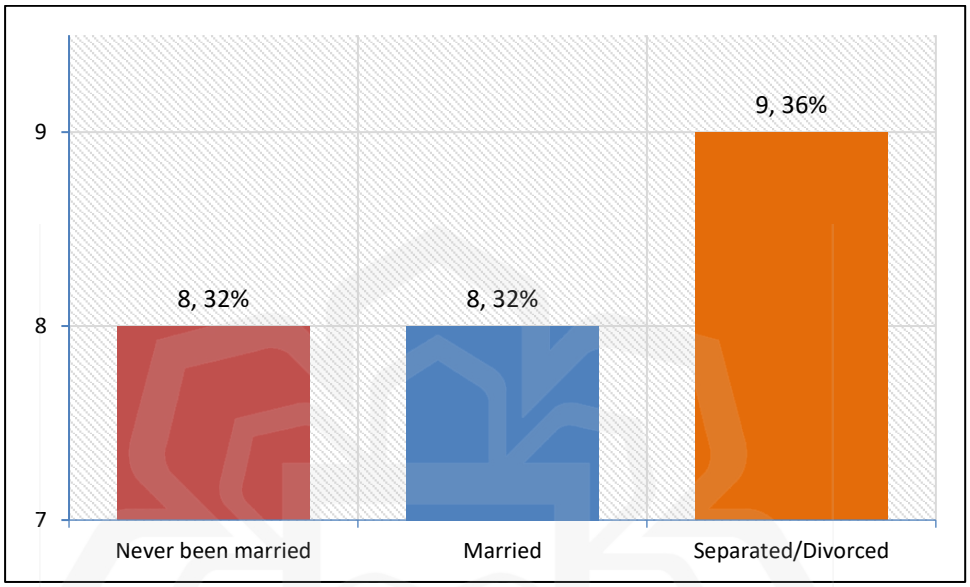


Figure 5.8 Marital Status of the Filipino Participants (n = 25)

The twenty-five participants interviewed were almost evenly split regarding marital status: 32% had never been married, while another 32% reported being currently married. Nine participants (36%), consisting of one male and eight females, were either divorced or separated, and all nine of them stated they had children. Six interviewees (24%) did not have any children, whereas the remaining 19 (76%) were parents. Notably, three women who had never been married had children out of wedlock.

It is not uncommon for Muslim converts to be separated or divorced. According to strict Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), a woman married to a non-Muslim must divorce her non-Muslim husband upon accepting Islam. While this is a widely accepted legal principle, some Islamic *Da'wah* organizations and Muslim communities adopt a more tolerant approach. New Muslimahs (female Muslim converts) are often not forced to leave their husbands or divorce them. Instead, they are encouraged to invite their

[4] *ibid*.

families to Islam. Shaham[5] reported that contemporary Muslim jurist and scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi offered a nuanced opinion on the issue of married women in the West converting to Islam. During a 2001 gathering of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, al-Qaradawi reviewed nine opinions from the classical scholar Ibn al-Qayyim and concluded that while "the scholarly consensus prohibits a new marriage between a Muslim female and a non-Muslim male, it does not necessitate the immediate separation of an existing marriage." al-Qaradawi further explained that both Ibn al-Qayyim and his teacher, Ibn Taymiyyah, agreed that "the couple should not resume conjugal life until the husband also converts to Islam."

However, many New Muslimahs eventually separate from their husbands. These separations can result in permanent dissolution of marriage or remain in a state of limbo where no legal action is taken, but the couple lives apart. This situation is common among married Filipinas who come as OFWs to the Gulf and convert to Islam, where they do not legally end the marriage but no longer live as husband and wife.

When asked about their families' religious backgrounds, the majority (84%) of the respondents stated that their parents and siblings were Roman Catholic Christians. One Filipina convert mentioned that her mother was Roman Catholic, but her father did not recognize any religion. Another interviewee's family belonged to the United Methodist Church, while another participant reported that her family identified with the Iglesia ni Cristo (Church of Christ). Additionally, one new Muslimah came from a very complicated religious background: her father was Buddhist but accepted all religions and practiced some Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist traditions, whereas her mother was born Muslim but had little knowledge or understanding of Islam.

Overall, these twenty-five New Muslims (NMs) from the Philippines represent a well-rounded group in terms of age, education, vocation, and marital status, reflecting the broader Filipino Muslim community in Bahrain. And also like the larger community, this sample is predominantly female.

[5] Ron Shaham, "Case Study II—The Impact of a Western Wife's Conversion to Islam on the Validity of Her Marriage to Her Non-Muslim Husband," in *Rethinking Islamic Legal Modernism* (Brill, 2018), 125–144.

5.3 QUANTITATIVE – NEW MUSLIM SURVEY

The quantitative section of the New Muslim Survey dives into the numbers behind why Filipinos in Bahrain are embracing Islam. With data from 1,014 respondents, including 596 Filipinos, it looks at key demographics like age, gender, education, and work status. This section helps us see the broader patterns and common threads among Filipino converts, giving us a clearer picture of who they are and what drives their decision to convert.

5.3.1 NM Survey Data Analysis and Findings – All Nationalities

This exploratory study used a large sample size based in Bahrain – 1,014 respondents – to investigate the complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and religious factors that influence conversion to Islam, and life after becoming a Muslim. While the majority of survey respondents were from the Philippines (58.8%), over a quarter (25.1%) were from African countries with Cameroonians (13.6%) making up the larger portion of Africans followed by Ugandans (7.8%) and Nigerians (3.8%). An additional 38 Africans (3.7%) from Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Gambia, and Sierra Leone also participated in the study. Thai nationals made up 5.3% of the respondents whereas only 37 Indians (3.6%) opted to fill out the online questionnaire. There were smaller numbers of Nepali, Bahraini, Sri Lankans, and various other nationalities that also responded.

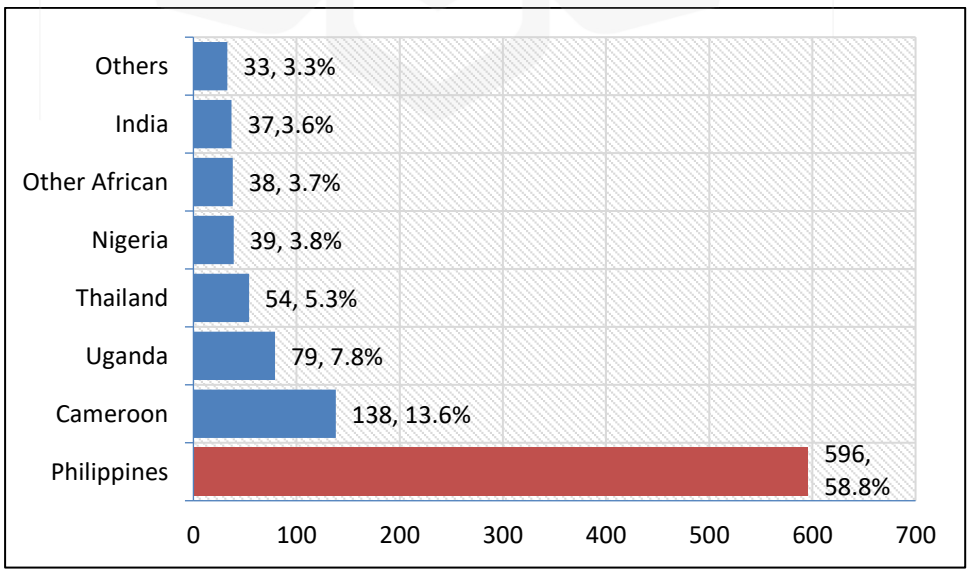


Figure 5.9 New Survey Respondents Categorized by National Origin (n = 1,014)

The above breakdown of the NM survey respondents by national origin is somewhat reflective of the larger population of New Muslims in Bahrain (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4) and correspondingly resembles the sample interview population (see Figure 4.7). However, it is also a product of the purposive and snowball sampling techniques used to reach out to the respondents. The focus of the current thesis is Filipinos. Consequently, the rest of this quantitative analysis and reporting of findings shall only dwell on the Filipino subset of survey respondents.

5.3.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Filipino Subset

This exploratory study investigates conversion to, and post-conversion experiences with Islam of 596 Filipinos living in Bahrain.

Table 5.3 Statistical Breakdown of Filipino Respondents by Age (n = 596)

Number (n)	Range	Mean	SD	Skewness
596	18 – 71	40.65	8.523	0.520

Their ages ranged from 18-71 years, with a mean age of 40.65 years (SD = 8.523). A small skewness of 0.520 characterizes the distribution of the age variable, pointing to the fact that most are middle-aged individuals, and hence their views on religious conversion would be those of mature persons.

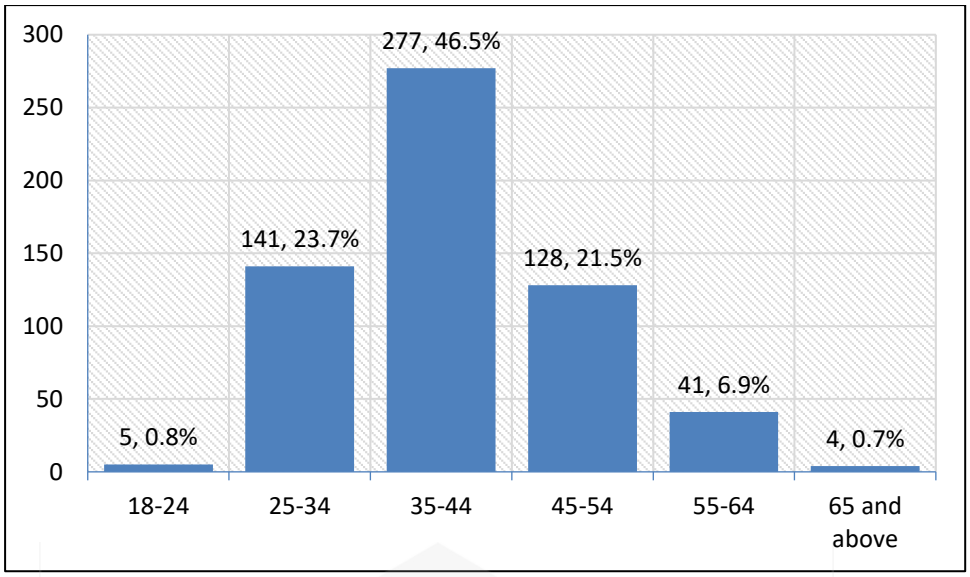


Figure 5.10 Filipino Survey Respondents by Age Group (n = 596)

The age structure consists of young adults aged 18-24 years at 0.8%, adults aged 25-34 years at 23.7%, mature adults aged 35-44 years at 46.5%, middle-aged adults aged 45-54 years at 21.5%, and seniors aged 55 years and above at 7.6%. Such age segmentation is relevant to answering how different life stages impact the nature and likelihood of religious conversion, since it mirrors the personal and social circumstances that accompany conversion at particular life phases.

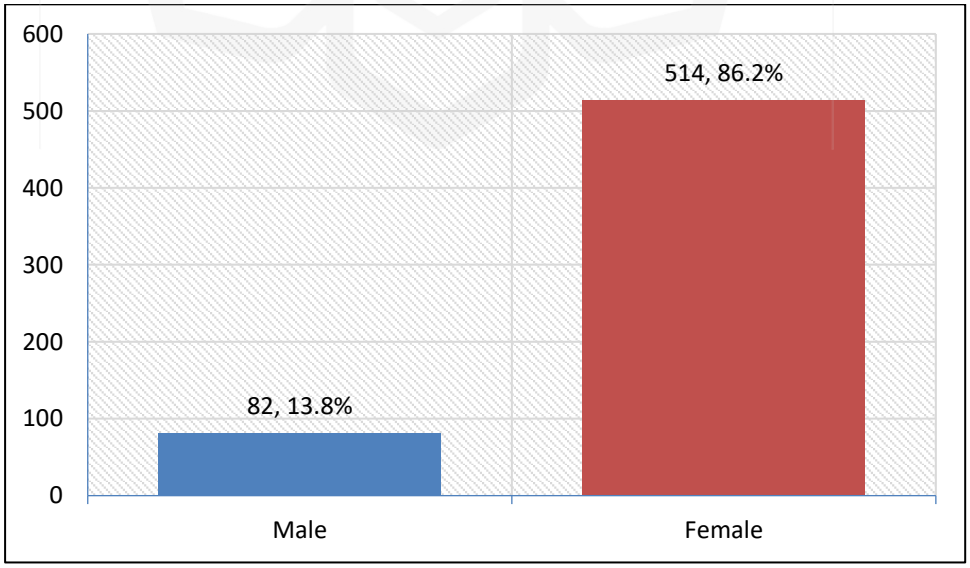


Figure 5.11 Filipino Survey Respondents by Gender (n = 596)

One of the very striking features of the study is its grossly uneven gender dynamics, with females constituting 86.2% of the sample, whereas their male counterparts are only 13.8%. This imbalance aligns almost perfectly with the Filipino female converts compared to male converts over the past ten years within the Organization (see Figure 5.4). From 2014 to 2023, 86.1% of the Filipino converts were female and 13.9% of the Filipino converts were male (Quadir, 2024).

265 or 44.5% of the respondents were married, while 29.2% had never been married, 22.0% were separated or divorced, and 4.4% were widowed. This shows diversification in marital status, and that familial responsibilities added their weight in the religious life and community involvement of 80.0% who had children.

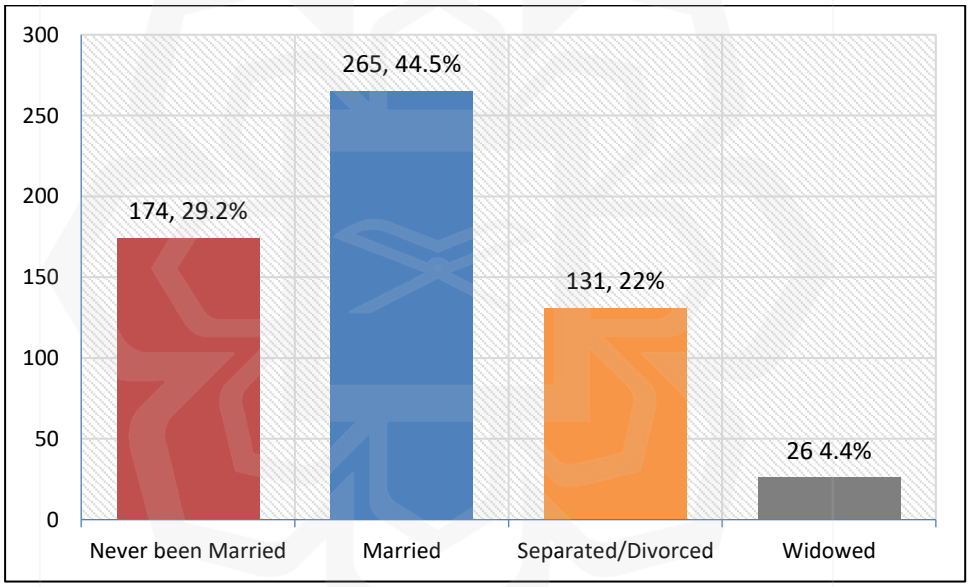


Figure 5.12 Marital Status of the Filipino Survey Respondents (n = 596)

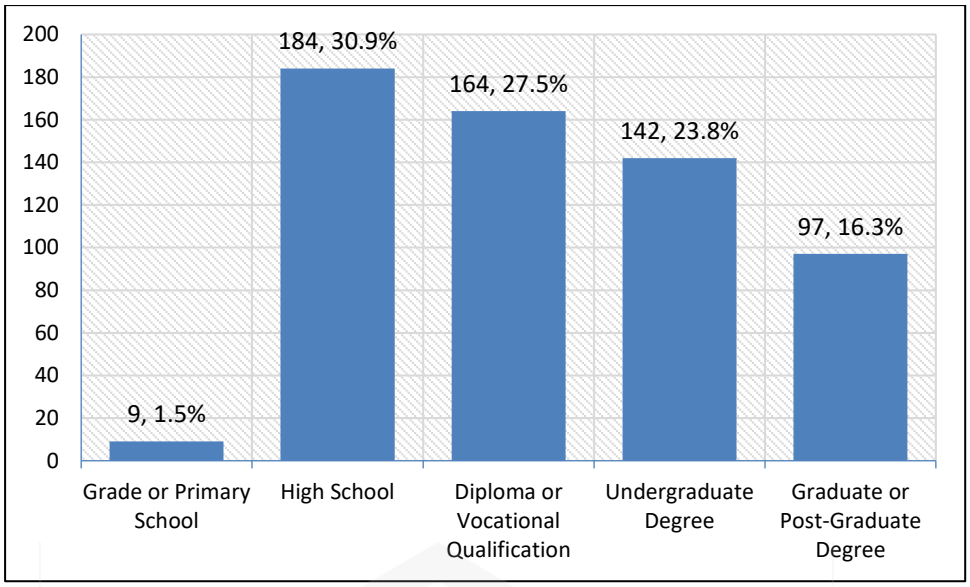
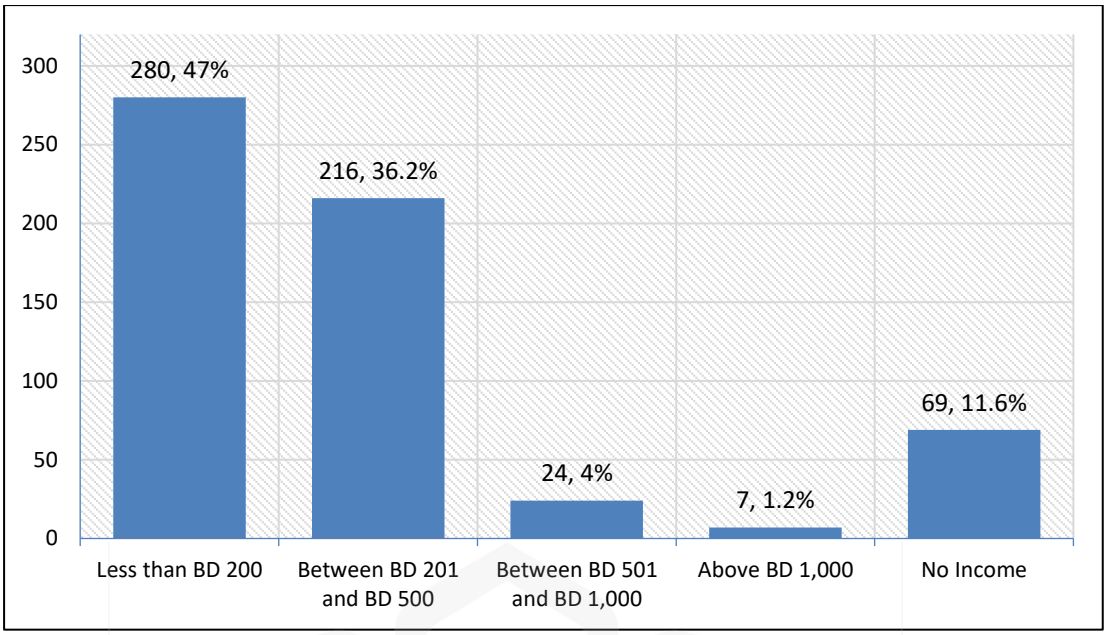


Figure 5.13 Educational Breakdown of the Filipino Survey Respondents (n = 596)

The education levels are mixed but skewed toward being more educated. High school graduates make up the largest group with 30.9%, followed by 164 who had a diploma or vocational qualification (27.5%). Over 40% had a college degree with 16.3% of them possessing a graduate or post-graduate qualification. This aligns well with the Philippine Government regulation that all Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are required to have at least a high school education. In addition, according to the Philippine Ambassador to Bahrain, OFWs are selected based on their higher qualifications, and Filipino workers are among the most educated and most skilled compared to expatriates from other Asian countries[6].

[6] Anne Jalando-on Louis, Philippine Ambassador to Bahrain.



Note: (1 Bahraini Dinar, BD = US Dollars 2.66)

Figure 5.14 Income Levels of Filipino Survey Respondents (n = 596)

The economic conditions among the respondents are quite varied, where 47.0% earn less than BD 200 per month. Another 36.2% make less than BD 500 but more than BD 200. Just above 5% make more than BD 500. 11.6% reported that they do not have any regular monthly income. Most likely these are unemployed, students, and possibly homemakers (see Figure 5.15 below). This kind of disparity in economic status could have a bearing on participation in social networks and religious communities. The nature of employment, as reflected in the diverse job categories reported, suggests that Filipinos work in a variety of fields. Approximately 19.3% are in service and sales, indicating frequent exposure to different populations and, likely, various cultural and religious practices. Around 9.2% are technicians and associate professionals, while 5.7% are professionals and managers, roles that offer greater potential for economic stability. Additionally, 16.8% work as domestic helpers, bringing them into close contact with Bahraini households and exposing them to local cultural and religious life in a way few other groups experience.

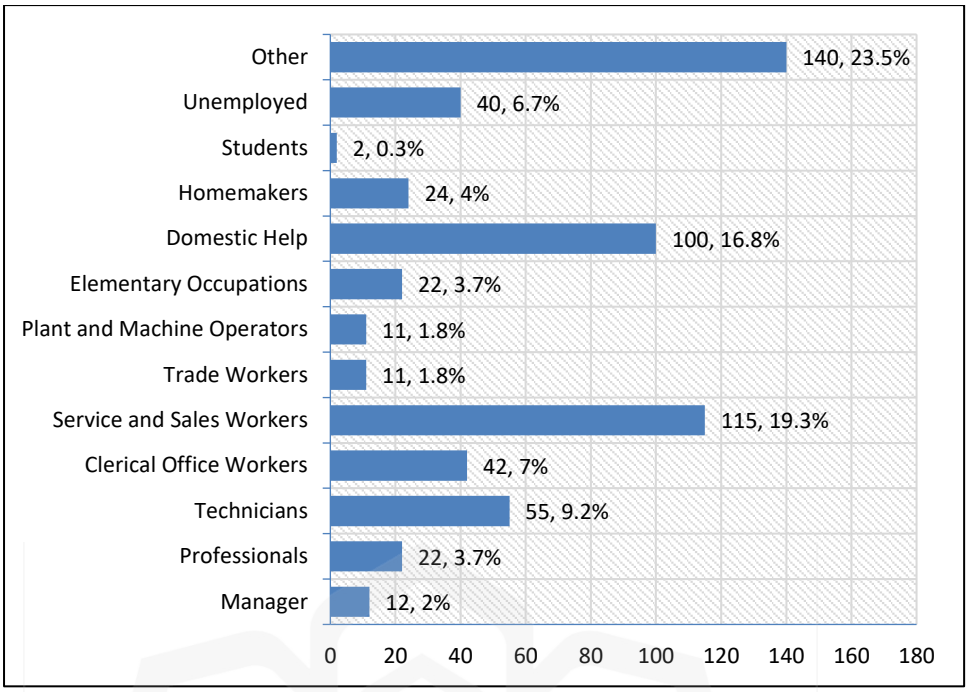


Figure 5.15 Filipino Survey Respondents by Vocation (n = 596)

When asked about how long they had been staying in Bahrain, 40 (6.7%) reported that they had been in the country for less than a year. Most had been living in Bahrain between 1 and 5 years (31%) and between 6 and 10 years (32.4%). A decent 27% of the respondents had been in this Gulf nation for over a decade. Seventeen of the survey participants chose not to answer this question. Overseas Filipino workers are known to be well-qualified, hard-working, and sincere employees. Consequently, according to the Philippine Ambassador, upon completion of their initial two-year contract, most OFWs keep their jobs, and many end up working in Bahrain for their entire professional lives[7].

[7] *ibid*.

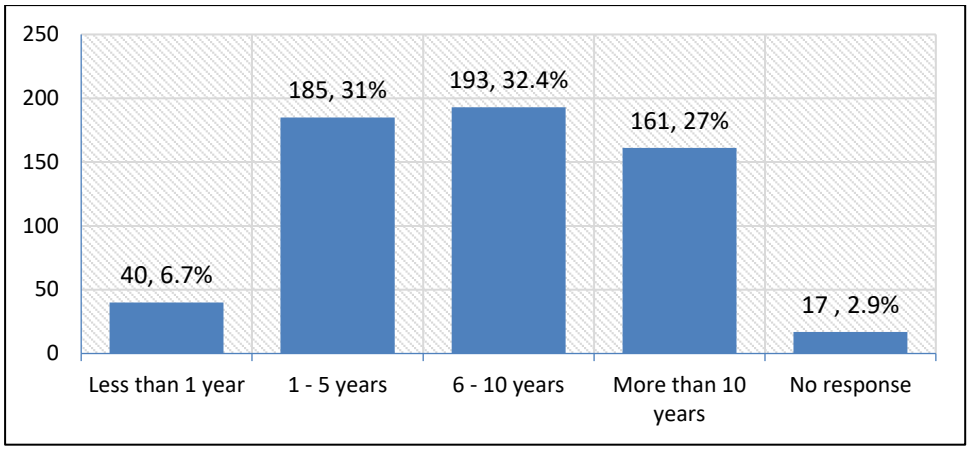


Figure 5.16 Filipino Respondents Categorized by Length of Stay in Bahrain (n = 596)

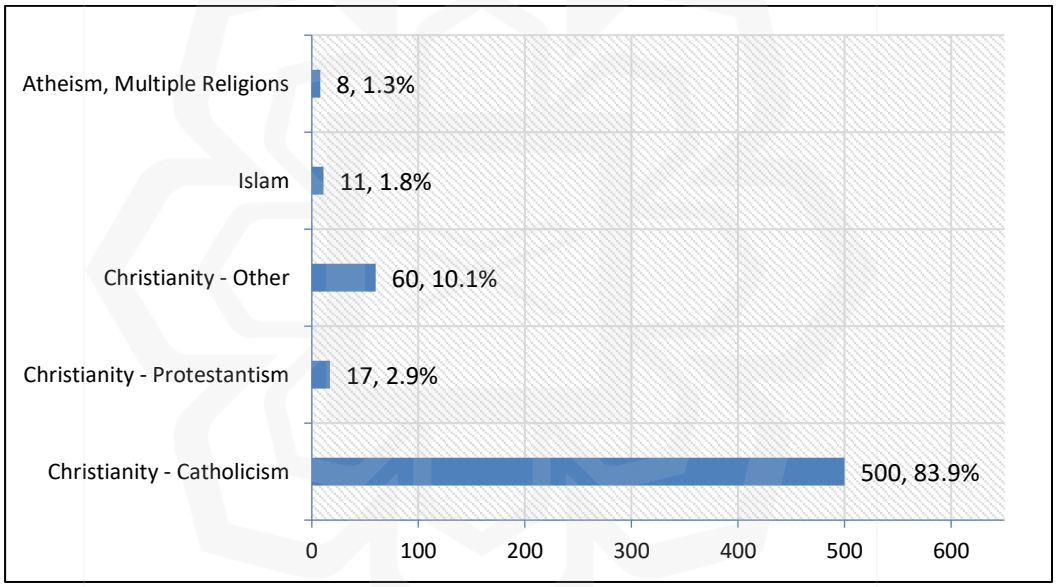


Figure 5.17 Filipino Survey Respondents' Family Religion (n = 596)

By population, the Philippines is the largest Christian country in Asia. It is not surprising therefore to observe that 96.9% of the respondents stated that their families were Christian. The majority, 83.9%, hail from Catholic families. Catholics account for almost 80% of this Southeast Asian archipelago. Only eleven participants reported that at least one parent was Muslim; and 1.3% came from a multiple religion, atheistic or agnostic background.

5.4 DEPICTING A TYPICAL FILIPINO CONVERT

The data collected from the Interviews and the Survey paint a detailed picture of the Filipino converts to Islam in Bahrain. Generally, the data parallels the larger Pinoy expat community in this island nation. Based on the demographic data collected and the analysis presented, how would one describe an archetypal Filipino in Bahrain who has accepted Islam?

A typical Filipino convert to Islam is a 36-year-old woman. She has been residing in Bahrain for over six years and works in the sales and service sector. Her mother tongue is Tagalog, but she is also fluent in English and has even picked up a few commonly used Arabic phrases. Although her job does not require a university degree, like most Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who value education, she holds a bachelor's degree from a university in Manila. She earns the equivalent of almost a thousand US dollars a month and sends a large portion of her salary back home to support her parents and her two children. Like the majority of Filipinos, her family and all her relatives are Roman Catholic. Legally, she is married, but in the four years since she accepted Islam, her Catholic husband has not converted despite all her efforts. Presently, she is separated from him and is waiting for the opportunity to legally dissolve the marriage.

This demographic-based description summarizes the findings presented in this chapter. The data and analyses provided answer the question of who a Filipino Muslim convert in Bahrain is. The chapter also lays the groundwork for the rest of the thesis, which will explore why and how Filipinos convert to Islam and what occurs during and after their conversion.

CHAPTER SIX

JOURNEY TO ISLAM

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Every year, hundreds of thousands of people convert to Islam. According to a Pew Research Centre study, 1.3 million people globally were projected to switch from some other faith to Islam between 2015 and 2020 (Pew, 2017). In the Gulf countries, a significant number of expatriates choose to become Muslim each year. Notably, more migrant workers from the Philippines accept Islam in Bahrain than migrant workers from any other country. Although exact figures are not available, anecdotal evidence and discussions with counterparts in neighbouring countries suggest that the same is true throughout the Gulf nations.

The relationship between Muslims and the Philippines since the 15th century can best be described as tenuous. As chronicled in Chapter 3, indigenous Muslims of the Philippines, the Moros, have been systematically dehumanized and disenfranchised over the centuries, first by the Spanish conquistadors, then by the Americans who replaced the Spanish, and finally, over the last few decades, by the predominantly Christian Philippine Government. The history of Muslims in the Philippines coupled with global Islamophobia portrayed through media has greatly prejudiced the majority of Christians in the Philippines against Islam and Muslims. Why then are Christians from the Philippines coming to Islam in large numbers?

Marybeth Acac[1] in her dissertation on the Balik-Islam (Christian Filipinos who have "reverted" to Islam) in the Philippines writes, "During my first visit to the Philippines in 2002, my 85-year-old grandmother forbade me from traveling to Mindanao, the southernmost region of the Philippine archipelago. Speaking in Tagalog, she expressed her distrust of Muslims and her belief that they were all terrorists." Acac further asks, "Why are a growing number of Christian Filipinos converting to Islam? Given that Christians and Muslims in the Philippines have endured a rather confrontational history – for over three centuries colonial Spain aimed to pit

[1] Marybeth T. Acac, "Balik-Islam in the Philippines: Reversion, Symbolic Negotiation, and Becoming the Other" (PhD diss., Temple University, 2020).

Christianized Filipinos in the northern islands against the minority Muslims (Moros) in the south – and why are many Christian Filipinos in the northern provinces of the Philippines actively embracing Islam?" Philippine anthropologist Luis Lacar "stressed that such conversions to Islam would have been considered "anathema" to Filipino Christians given the historical hostile and suspicious climate between Moros and Christians. This is precisely what makes the Balik-Islam a puzzling phenomenon[2]".

There are many reasons as to why people switch their faith to Islam. These typically range from the belief in the Oneness of Allah (*Tawḥīd*) to the example of Prophet Muḥammad. Some accept Islam so that they can marry a Muslim, and others embrace the faith for some perceived material gain. A central question that this chapter answers is the specific reasons why Filipinos accept Islam in Bahrain. These reasons are then compared to the demographic variables described in the previous chapter to see if there are any correlations. Going beyond the demographic description of who Filipino Muslims are; this part of the thesis then looks at Filipino NM's childhood growing up in the Philippines; their beliefs and practices before they moved to Bahrain; and their journey to Islam after they migrated to this island kingdom. Exploring the lives of Filipino Muslims and their journey to Islam offers deeper insight into why Filipinos are attracted to Islam. By examining not only their identities but also looking at their upbringing and relating their journey to Islam, we can create a more detailed and vivid depiction of Filipino Muslims. This exploration also reveals the types of conversions that occur. In essence, this part of the discourse reflects on the research question, why do Filipinos convert to Islam in Bahrain?

6.2 WHY DO FILIPINOS CONVERT TO ISLAM?

People convert to Islam for a variety of personal and compelling reasons. For many it is the simplicity and straightforwardness of the central tenet in Islam – *Tawḥīd*, the Oneness of Allah. For others, it is the life and example of Prophet Muḥammad that convinces them to become Muslim. Some people admire the lifestyle and discipline that they observe in practicing Muslims. This leads them down the path of *Shahādah*. Islamic values like justice, equality, and fellowship; structured and disciplined lifestyles; compassion, mercy, and kindness; emphasis on family and community;

[2] *ibid*.

emphasis on charity and generosity; and a rational or logical approach to life are some of the many reasons why others may choose Islam.

6.2.1 Reason for Conversion – All New Muslims

Over the past four years, the New Muslim Care Department has been tracking the reason why people accept Islam within the Organization.

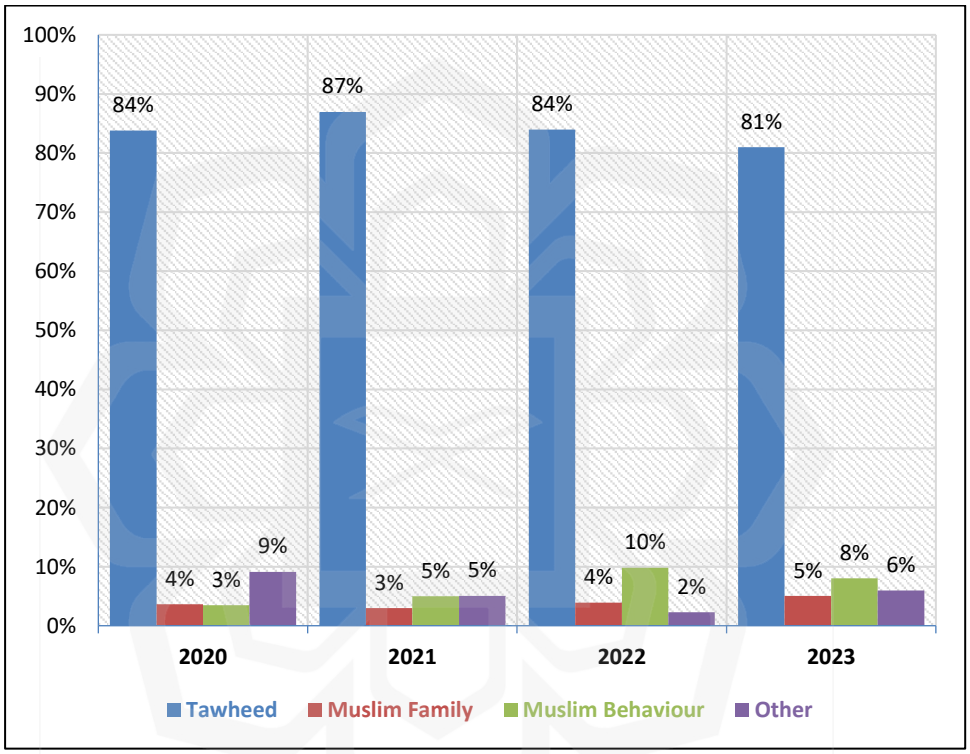


Figure 6.1 Reasons for Converting to Islam as Reported as a Percentage by the New Muslim Care Department of the Organization over the Years 2020 – 2023[3]

Over the four years from 2020 to 2023, more than 4 people out of 5 (84%) who converted to Islam through the Organization in Bahrain stated that it was the concept of monotheism in Islam (*Tawḥīd*) that compelled them to switch their faith. An average of 7% of the converts reported that it was the behaviour and example of Muslims that drew them to Islam. Another 4% accepted Islam because a family member (such as a spouse

[3] Muhammad Quadir, *Unpublished Internal Document* (Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024).

or sibling) encouraged them to become Muslim. The rest of the converts (average of 6%) gave various reasons for converting to Islam. The data provided is for people from all nationalities who became Muslim over the four years.

6.2.2 Reasons for Conversion of Filipinos – Survey Data

Regarding reasons for conversion, the data from Filipino respondents gathered from the New Muslim Survey aligns very well with the above.

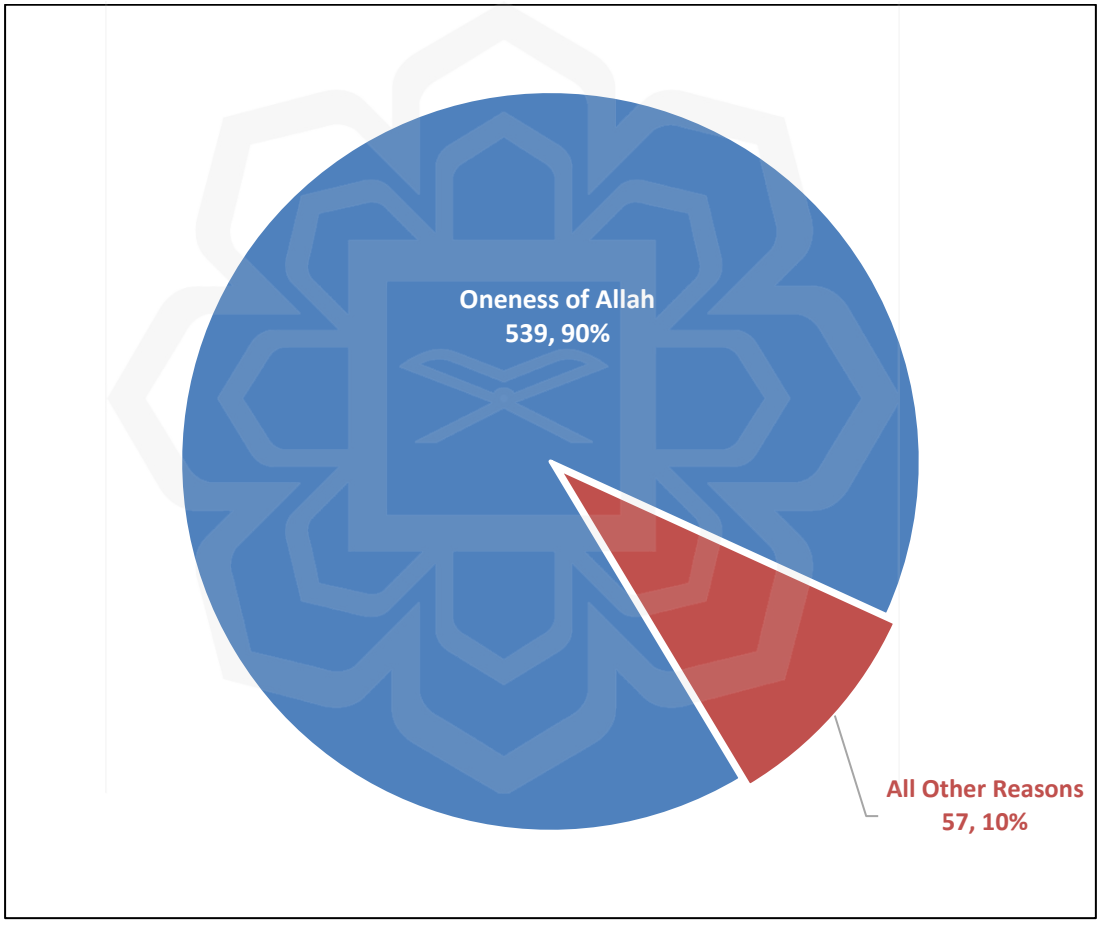


Figure 6.2 Major Reason for Converting to Islam Given by Respondents (n = 596)

From the 596 survey respondents, an overwhelming 539, or 90.4%, selected "Oneness of Allah" as the primary reason why they chose to become Muslim. The rest of the 57 participants stated different reasons for accepting Islam as depicted below.

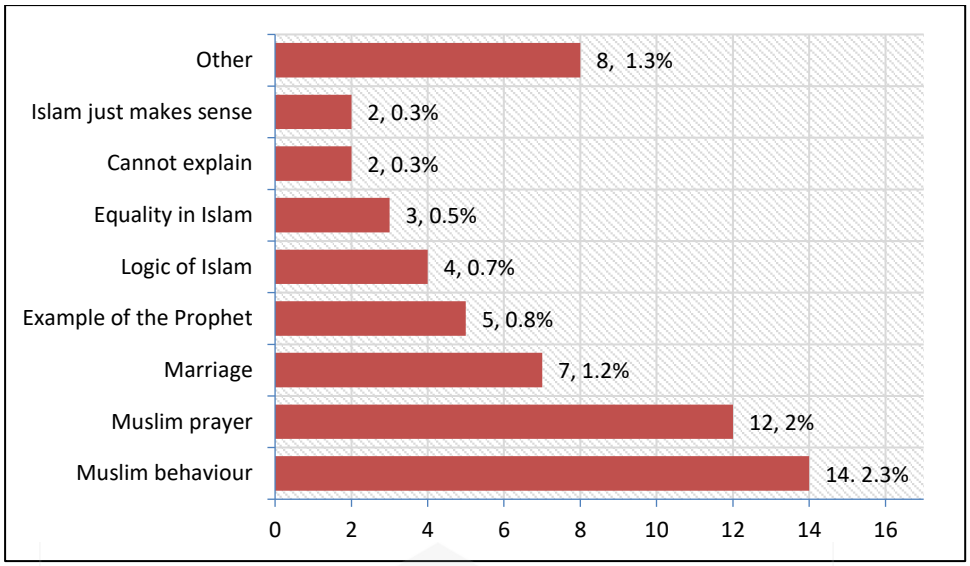


Figure 6.3 All Other Reasons for Converting to Islam Given by Respondents (n = 57)

Fourteen (2.3%) participants listed Muslim behaviour as the primary reason they chose Islam. Observing the conduct of practicing Muslims, especially in the discipline, integrity, and compassion exhibited in their daily lives may be a source of inspiration for some to want to become Muslim themselves.

The *Ṣalāh*, or Muslim prayer, was considered by 12 participants (2%) to be their primary motivation for taking the *Shahādah*. The structured and spiritual nature of the five daily prayers resonated with these individuals. Some non-Muslims admire the discipline required to perform *Ṣalāh* regularly and are drawn to the sense of peace and connection with God that prayers offer.

Seven participants (1.2%) decided to become Muslim so that they could marry a Muslim. Although Muslim men are permitted to marry from the "people of the book" (primarily believing Jews and Christians), it is generally preferred by most men to ask their betrothed to convert to Islam. Apart from preference, in Bahrain, a marriage is far easier to enact if both parties are from the same faith. Consequently, most people convert to Islam first and get a "*Shahādah* Certificate" that attests they are now Muslim before they solemnize their marriage.

Four respondents (0.7%) considered the "Logic of Islam" as their primary motivation for switching to Islam. To some, the rational and clear principles of Islamic

theology which emphasizes reason over blind faith are appealing. Such individuals appreciate the logical internal consistency in the *Qurʾān* and Islamic teachings.

Two participants (0.3%) were unable to articulate a specific reason for their choice of Islam, suggesting that their decision might be a variety of factors, or it could be some emotional reason that are not fully able to express. An equal percentage of respondents, 0.3% (2 participants), expressed that "Islam just made sense" to them. There could be a variety of reasons why Islam seemed right, but no one particular reason as to why they decided to switch their religion.

Finally, eight participants (1.3%) became Muslim for reasons not listed in the survey. These reasons could encompass a wide range of personal motivations, understandings, and journeys that eventually led them to Islam.

6.2.3 Why do Filipinos in Bahrain Convert to Islam? Interview Reports

Unlike the direct survey question on the reasons for accepting Islam, the interviewees were never explicitly pushed to answer the question "What was the main reason why you converted to Islam?" This question was implicit in a few other queries and was part of the conversion narrative. Consequently, their responses were far more nuanced and elaborate.

Zahra (not her real name[4]), a 31-year-old Filipina stated that she met a Muslim preacher (*Dāʿī*), and he explained to her the following about Allah, and it made complete sense to her that she decided there and then to become Muslim:

> So, this is the time I asked him Who is Allah? I asked him, who is Allah? So, he explained to me that Allah is the only God that need to be worshipped… So, I said how you believe this Creator? He said, "Okay, I will ask you if you don't believe Allah because we did not see him. Now I will ask you why you believe the wind?" So, I said, "Because I feel the wind." So that's the time that he told me that that's how it is with Allah we cannot see Allah, but we can feel him because there is, what we call "*Fiṭrah*" ... it's innate nature that you can feel in your heart... "that even you will say that you don't believe God. But you will say that oh my god oh my god, it's like that you will say you will feel it that there is God, but you don't know. You don't know yet." And I don't know yet those times.

[4] All Interviewees have been given aliases for the purpose of this study. Their real identities are not disclosed to maintain their privacy and as per agreement with them prior to interviewing.

> He explained to me that only Allah needs to be worshipped. He told me that there's nothing beside Him, only Allah, because he reminded me also about the purpose of my life. Why? Why Allah, the Creator, created me.

Mariam, a 55-year-old assistant manager of a Coffee shop, stated that her primary motivation to accept Islam was because it brought her a sense of peace. Her father was a Muslim and had always encouraged her to accept Islam. She narrated the following:

> I don't want to judge Christians because my family is Christian too, but the attitude of the people was really bad. Even after coming back from work, I would run to the church, but I never felt the peace of mind I was looking for. I always had doubts and questions in my mind.
>
> I was walking and I met brother Imran and his group. They had someone with them who also is a Muslim friend of mine. I see them around always and they told me to try Islam, and I always said inshallah. My father had put ideas in my mind, I was already a Muslim in some way, but I hadn't accepted it yet.
>
> My friends and family would always tell me that I'm Muslim. I'd ask them why, and they would say that I wouldn't touch pork. Even if I sat with them for a meal, I would never touch. My father would never touch it, and he would never let us touch it. He was Muslim but he told us that or taught us Islam. I accepted Islam because I have peace of mind.

6.2.4 Comparison of Interviewees' Reasons for Accepting Islam with Survey Respondents' Motivations

The proportion of interviewees who chose *Tawḥīd* as their primary motivation to accept Islam is far smaller (48%) than the 90.4% percent of survey respondents who stated that the Oneness of Allah was the main reason they chose Islam. There may be two explanations for this startling difference.

Interviews explored the conversion narrative in considerable depth. Although direct questions were asked during the semi-structured interview, NMs were provided a much greater degree of freedom to elaborate their responses as they deemed right. Unlike in the survey questionnaire, there was no answer to select from; participants talked about a variety of reasons for conversion. Their nuanced responses allowed for more complex and layered reasons for accepting Islam. At the same time, it is quite likely that there was some degree of interviewee selection bias. *Anṣār* and *Daʿīs* chose who should be interviewed; consequently, they may have selected NMs whose narratives seemed more fascinating and dramatic. The NMs were also selected based

on their willingness and enthusiasm to share their story. People with generic, uninteresting accounts are less likely to volunteer their journey to Islam.

Survey respondents were presented with the "Oneness of Allah" as the first of eleven possible reasons for accepting Islam. The overwhelming majority chose this option because they genuinely believed that to be their primary motivation. However, two additional factors should not be overlooked: 1) it was the first reason the respondents were provided, and 2) looking back at their journey to Islam, they may have regarded it as the most fitting answer. The multiple-choice responses lacked subtlety or complexity. For many NMs, "Oneness of Allah" was a straightforward and obvious choice. Additionally, NMs are thoroughly taught the foundations of Islam, with *Tawḥīd* being emphasized both intensively and comprehensively. Respondents may have felt that giving "Oneness of Allah" as the primary reason for conversion may be the more "Islamic" thing to do – this may have been a typical example of acquiescence and social desirability bias.

These differences between the two data collection methods are important to acknowledge, but they do not undermine the overall observations made or the conclusions drawn.

6.3 *TAWḤĪD* – ONENESS OF ALLAH

Tawḥīd, is the cornerstone of Islam, encapsulating the strict and unquestionable belief in the Oneness of Allah. Literally, *Tawḥīd* means "unification" – making something one or asserting oneness – and is derived from the Arabic verb "*waḥḥada*" which itself means to unify, to make one, or to consolidate into one. *Tawḥīd* applies to Allah and signifies the indivisible Oneness and Uniqueness of Allah. This foundational doctrine is not merely theology but a comprehensive worldview that dictates every aspect of a Muslim's life. *Tawḥīd* emphasizes that Allah is One, Singular, Unique, Incomparable, without any partner, and without any equal. He is the Creator, the Fashioner, the Sustainer, and the Ruler of the Universe. He is the Master and Lord, and there is no one worthy of worship except Him.

This belief is expressed in *Sūrat al-Ikhlas*, one of the shortest chapters of the *Qurʾān*, yet immensely profound. According to numerous *Ḥadīth*, Prophet Muḥammad

stated that *Sūrat al-Ikhlas* is "equivalent to one-third of the entire *Qurʾān*." This *sūrah*, in just four verses, captures the essence of monotheism in Islam. It begins with "Say: He, God, is One[5]", establishing Allah's Unique Oneness, devoid of any partners or divisions. The verse "God, the Eternally Sufficient unto Himself"[6] establishes Allah's self-sufficiency and eternal nature, underscoring that all creation depends on Him while He depends on none. Syed Hossein Nasr comments on this verse, "The enigmatic nature of *al-Ṣamad* (the Eternally Sufficient unto Himself) has led to many interpretations, most of which are different formulations confirming that God is the Master and ontological Source of all things and that all things are dependent upon Him, while He is independent of all things[7]."

Sūrat al-Ikhlas addresses the most basic theological misunderstandings about Allah. This short chapter emphasizes His Oneness and Uniqueness. The declaration about Allah that "He begets not, nor was He begotten"[8] directly challenges man-made ideas about God such as divine kinship, or theogony, or anthropomorphizing God as having children or parents, "Glory be to thy Lord, the Lord of Might, above that which they ascribe[9]". The final verse of the surah, "And none is like unto Him"[10], firmly establish Allah's unequalled and incomparable nature. As in verse 42:11, "Naught is like unto Him" this verse definitively closes any discussion on any of Allah's creation being even remotely like Him. He is the Creator and everything else is created by Him. Allah is transcendent for "all things perish, save His Face[11]".

The doctrine of *Tawḥīd* can be categorized into *Tawḥīd al-Rubūbiyyah* (literally "Maintaining the Unity of Lordship"), *Tawḥīd l-Asmāʾ wa-l-Ṣifāt* (literally "Maintaining the Unity of Allah's Names and Attributes"), and *Tawḥīd al-ʿIbādah* (literally "Maintaining the Unity of Allah's Worship). This categorization of *Tawḥīd* was not made by the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), nor his companions as there seemed no need for it. As Islam spread to Egypt, Byzantium, Persia, and India, converts from these cultures brought with them remnants of their

[5] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 112:1.
[6] *ibid,* 112:2.
[7] *ibid*. 112:1
[8] *ibid*. 112:3.
[9] *ibid*, 37:180.
[10] *ibid*. 112:4.
[11] *ibid*, 28:88.

theology. Consequently, it became imperative for Muslim scholars to develop the science of *Tawḥīd* to conclusively refute the introduction of heretical ideas[12].

Tawḥīd al-Rubūbiyyah asserts that Allah is the sole creator and sustainer of the universe, exercising absolute control over all that exists. Bilal Philips[13] describes this category of *Tawḥīd*:

> This category is based on the fundamental concept that Allah alone caused all things to exist when there was nothing; He sustains and maintains creation without any need from it or for it; and He is the sole Lord of the universe and its inhabitants without any real challenge to His sovereignty. In Arabic the word used to describe this creator-sustainer quality is *Rubūbiyyah* which is derived from the root "*Rabb*" (Lord). According to this category, since God is the only real power in existence, it is He who gave all things the power to move and to change. Nothing happens in creation except what He allows to happen. In recognition of this reality, Prophet Muḥammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to often repeat the exclamatory phrase "*Lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā billāh*" (There is no movement nor power except by Allah's will).

Tawḥīd al-Asmāʾ wa-l-Ṣifāt relates to the belief that Allah's names and attributes are unique and incomparable. Attributes, such as Mercy, Omnipotence, and Wisdom, go beyond human perception and comprehension. Allah Himself describes some of His names and attributes in the *Qurʾān*:

> He is God, other than Whom there is no god, Knower of the Unseen and the seen. And He is the Compassionate, the Merciful.
>
> He is God, other than Whom there is no god, the Sovereign, the Holy, Peace, the Faithful, the Protector, the Mighty, the Compeller, the Proud. Glory be to Him above the partners they ascribe.
>
> He is God, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner; unto Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. Whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise[14].

Tawḥīd al-ʿIbādah emphasizes that worship should be directed exclusively to Allah, unequivocally rejecting idolatry or the association of any partners with Him. Despite the broad implications of the first two categories of *Tawḥīd*, belief in them alone is insufficient to meet the Islamic requirements of *Tawḥīd*. *Tawḥīd al-Rubūbiyyah* and

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[12] Abu Ameenah Bilaal Philips, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed (Islamic Monotheism)* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: International Islamic Publishing House, 1994).

[13] *ibid*.

[14] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 59:22-24.

Tawḥīd al-Asmāʾ wa-l-Ṣifāt must be complemented by *Tawḥīd al-ʿIbādah* for *Tawḥīd* to be complete. Allah Himself has stated that the *Mushrikūn* (those who associated partners with Allah) of the Prophet's time acknowledged many aspects of the first two forms of *Tawḥīd*.

> Say, "Who provides for you from Heaven and earth? Who has power over hearing and sight? And who brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living, and who directs the affair?" They will say, "God." So say, "Will you not, then, be reverent?"
>
> Wert thou to ask them, "Who created you?" they would surely say, "God." How, then, are they perverted?
>
> And wert thou to ask them, "Who sends down water from the sky and revives thereby the earth after its death?" They would surely say, "God." Say, "Praise be to God!" Nay, but most of them understand not[15].

The pagans and idolaters of Makkah all knew and acknowledged that Allah was their Creator and Sustainer, yet they chose to associate partners with Him and direct their worship to those partners. This is similar to many peoples and faiths who acknowledge that there is only One God and yet they associate partners with Him. I have yet to meet an idol-worshipping Hindu or a Trinitarian Christian who would say that they believed in more than One God. Allah further describes such people:

> And most of them believe not in God, save that they ascribe partners unto Him.
>
> On the Day when We shall gather them all together, then We shall say to those who ascribed partners unto God, "Stop there! You and your partners!" Then We shall separate them, and their partners will say, "It was not us whom you worshipped. God suffices as a Witness between you and us. We were heedless of your worship."
>
> They certainly disbelieve, those who say, "Truly God is the Messiah, son of Mary." But the Messiah said, "O Children of Israel! Worship God, my Lord, and your Lord." Surely whosoever ascribes partners unto God, God has forbidden him the Garden, and his refuge shall be the Fire. And the wrongdoers shall have no helpers. s They certainly disbelieve, those who
>
> say, "Truly God is the third of three," while there is no god save the One God. If they refrain not from what they say, a painful punishment will befall those among them who disbelieved[16].

Allah repeatedly reminds human beings to worship Him exclusively and not to associate any gods with Him. In the very first chapter of the *Qurʾān*, *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*

[15] *ibid*, 10:31; 43:87; and 29:63.

[16] *ibid*, 12:106; 10:28-29; and 5:72-73.

– the seven verses of which are recited multiple times every day in prayer (*Ṣalāh*) – human beings are urged to worship Allah alone and seek His help exclusively: "Thee we worship and from Thee we seek help." The principal message of the *Qurʾān* is to exclusively worship One God alone – *Allāh subḥānahu wa taʿālā*.

Allah proclaims: "I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me"[17]. On this, ibn Kathir quotes:

> Al-Tirmidhī said: The meaning of this Ayah (51:56) is that, Allah the Exalted, the Blessed, created the creatures so that they worship Him Alone without partners. Those who obey Him will be rewarded with the best rewards, while those who disobey Him will receive the worst punishment from Him. Allah stated that He does not need creatures, but rather, they need Him in all conditions. He is alone their Creator and Provider[18]."

In a *Ḥadīth Qudsī*, Imam Ahmad recorded that Abu Hurayrah said that the Messenger of Allah (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

> Allah the Exalted said, O Son of Adam! Busy yourself in worshipping Me, and I will fill your chest with riches and dissipate your meekness. Otherwise, I will fill your chest with distracting affairs and will not do away with your meekness[19].

The fact that in the New Muslim Survey conducted, 539 out of 596 Filipino converts chose *Tawḥīd* as the primary reason for them having taken *Shahādah* is of tremendous significance. 90.4% is an overwhelming majority.

How does one explain this? Numerous secular theories try and explain the phenomenon of religious conversion using different social, psychological, and sometimes even economic motivations. Yet, none of these offer an explanation that fits such one-sided data. Conversely, the Islamic concept of *Fiṭrah* – the inherent disposition within every human being to reconnect with their Creator – offers a far more compelling explanation for such overwhelmingly one-sided data.

Victor Frankl[20], an Austrian neurologist, psychologist, and philosopher, suggested that all human beings have an innate desire to find meaning in life. Frankl's

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[17] *ibid*, 51:56

[18] Ibn Kathīr, "Tafsir Ibn Kathīr," in *Quran.com*, accessed August 7, 2024, https://quran.com/51:56/tafsirs/en-tafisr-ibn-kathir.

[19] Muhammad ibn Isa Al-Tirmidhi, *Jami' at-Tirmidhi*, vol. 4, book 11, hadith 2466, accessed August 7, 2024, https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:2466.

[20] Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985).

doctrine of "logotherapy" was that one must find meaning in the events that shape one's life. A Holocaust survivor himself, Frankl wanted his life in a Nazi concentration camp to have meaning. He believed that work and suffering leads one to find a purpose for their existence. And only solving this existential crisis can ultimately lead to fulfilment and happiness. Is it possible that unbeknownst to Frankl, he had stumbled upon the Islamic concept of *Fiṭrah*?

6.4 *FIṬRAH* – INNATE HUMAN NATURE

The Islamic concept of *Fiṭrah* refers to the innate disposition or natural desire towards monotheism. It provides insight into why over 90% of the survey respondents felt drawn to the Oneness of Allah. According to Islamic belief, every human being is endowed with a natural predisposition to recognize and worship One God. Allah states in the *Qurʾān*:

> Set thy face to religion as a *Ḥanīf*, in the primordial nature from God upon which He originated mankind – there is no altering the creation of God; that is the upright religion, but most of mankind know not[21].

To set one's face toward religion (Islam) means to orient one's whole life to obeying and worshipping Allah. This verse is taken by a majority of commentators (*Mufassirūn*) as commanding all people to follow the religion created by Allah for all human beings (Islam). "Hanif" denotes one who is inclined toward worshipping only One God, whereas "primordial nature" in this verse refers to *Fiṭrah*. Seyed Hossein Nasr[22] further adds,

> To *set,* "turn," or "submit" one's face to or toward religion (see 6:79; 10:105) means to orient one's whole being toward worship and obedience to God (see also 2:112; 3:20; 7:29; 30:43; 31:22). The present verse is thus taken by most commentators to be a command to follow the religion for which God created human beings.
>
> The basic understanding of *ḥanīf* may best be illustrated by a famous *ḥadīth qudsī*: "God says, 'Verily I created My servants as *ḥunafāʾ*. Then the satans came to them and distracted them from their religion.'" Seen in this light, to be truly devout (*ḥanīf*) and incline toward the worship of God and away from idolatry is to live according to one's primordial nature (*Fiṭrah*), in which all human beings have been created. One cannot change this underlying nature as a servant or worshipper of God, because

[21] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 30:30.

[22] *ibid*.

> there is no altering the creation of God. This phrase is also understood to mean that there is no change in God's religion; that is, there is no change in the substance or universal truths of religion, only in the forms in which these truths are revealed in different religions.
>
> The reference to the *Fiṭrah* is read by some to mean that human beings are born from Islam, so that anyone who follows any other religion is "astray" or "misguided". But al-Qurṭubi maintains that it is impossible for the *Fiṭrah* mentioned here to be Islam in its particular sense, because "Islam (submission) and *Īmān* (faith) are declaring with the tongue, embracing with the heart, and performing with the limbs," implying that if *Fiṭrah* pertains to the original human nature, which is related to the spirit, it cannot pertain to the specific practices of a particular religious tradition because these can only be performed while a spirit resides in a body in this world. From this perspective, the upright religion could refer to religion as such and thus to any religious practice that accords with the *Fiṭrah*. Nonetheless, most interpret upright religion as a reference to Islam in particular.

This verse suggests that the recognition of Allah's Oneness is embedded within human nature, and the acceptance of *Tawḥīd* is to return to one's original, pure, unadulterated state of existence. Classical Islamic scholars have emphasized the innate human disposition to monotheism. Ibn Taymiyyah argued that *Tawḥīd* is the foundation upon which every facet of *Dīn* (religion, way of life) is built. He stated that the Ruh, the human soul, is inherently inclined to worship of One God exclusively. He further pointed out that it is only because of external influences and societal pressures that human beings deviate from their *Fiṭrah*, their primordial state of being[23]. Allah reveals in the Quran:

> And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, "Am I not your Lord?" they said, "Yea, we bear witness"—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Truly of this we were heedless,"
>
> Or lest you should say, "[It is] only that our fathers ascribed partners unto God beforehand, and we were their progeny after them. Wilt Thou destroy us for that which the falsifiers have done?[24]"

This verse is in many ways the cornerstone of Islamic theology, sacred human history, and anthropology. It is the basis of the relationship between the Creator and His highest form of creation – humankind. All humans made this pretemporal covenant with Allah before their earthly life. This verse is directly related to the concept of *Fiṭrah*.

[23] Siti Mahmudah Noorhayati and Ahmad Khoirul Fata, "Exclusive Islam from The Perspective of ibn Taymiyah," *Esensia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 18, no. 2 (2017): 213–223.

[24] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 7:172-173.

Even though human beings do not recall this covenant, their testimony to Allah's Lordship left an indelible imprint upon their souls and established a moral obligation upon it. Allah caused Adam and all his children to testify against themselves, by responding to Allah's question of His Lordship, and all replied "Yea, we bear witness" thereby holding themselves accountable for the Day of Resurrection where no human being can claim ignorance and say, "Truly of this we were heedless."

One can surmise that how can someone be responsible, during earthly life, for a contract made long before birth and for a testimony that cannot be remembered? This verse highlights the primordial covenant between Allah and humanity, reinforcing the idea that monotheism is an intrinsic part of human nature. Syed Hossein Nasr[25] in his commentary on this verse replies to this foundational question:

> When this verse is read in the wider Quranic context and juxtaposed with Quranic prophetic history, however, this pretemporal recognition of God's Lordship can be understood as creating an innate disposition in human beings toward recognizing and worshipping God during earthly life and toward accepting the prophets and the messages they bring as "reminders" of what human beings already know inwardly but have merely forgotten. Those who reject the prophets, therefore, are considered willful ignorant, denying truths that should, in any sincere and morally uncorrupted soul, resonate with a deep but forgotten knowledge of God that nevertheless still exists within them. In this sense, those who deny and reject the prophetic messages sent to them are described as kuffar, a word most commonly translated "disbelievers," but whose etymological meaning signifies the "covering over" of something, which in the religious sense refers to covering over the innate awareness of the truth of God's Lordship and Oneness that they bear within themselves. The pretemporal covenant, then, in conjunction with God's sending of messengers to all people serves as a "proof" against the disbelievers who capriciously or cynically deny prophetic messages that they know deep within themselves to be true.

The follow-up verse affirms that, after this Covenant, no human being can hide behind the excuse that they were blindly following (*taqlīd*) what their predecessors (fathers, forefathers) did. The *Qurʾān* repeatedly emphasizes the concept of Allah's Oneness and invites all human beings to their innate disposition – their *Fiṭrah*. All human beings are born sinless and pure, in a state where the soul recognizes its Creator and is in obedience and worship of Him. In Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (2658B), Abū Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

[25] *ibid*.

> There is no newborn except that he is born upon the *Fiṭrah* (innate disposition), but his parents make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian, just as an animal produces a perfect animal. Do you see any among them that are mutilated?" Then Abū Hurayrah said, "Recite if you wish: 'The *Fiṭrah* of Allah upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah'[26]."

Understanding the concept of *Fiṭrah* may help answer the question as to why such a large number of Filipinos state that *Tawḥīd* is their primary reason for accepting Islam. Is there any link between the demographic identity or description of a Pinoy to the reason for accepting Islam?

6.5 DEMOGRAPHICS AND REASONS FOR ACCEPTING ISLAM

It is not only academically intriguing to identify specific "types" of Filipinos who are more inclined towards Islam, but this knowledge could also greatly enhance the effectiveness of *Daʿwah* efforts. Understanding that Filipinos from particular demographic cohorts, such as age, profession, or economic standing, are more likely to choose Islam, and knowing what specifically attracts them to Islam, would be extremely useful for improving *Daʿwah* strategies.

This section of the exploratory study highlights demographic influences that could impact the reasons for Filipinos becoming Muslim. Through a quantitative analysis involving all 596 participants, this study seeks to determine if demographic factors such as age, gender, education level, profession, monthly income, duration of stay in Bahrain, marital status, and children are significant predictors of the primary reasons individuals cite for converting to Islam.

The study involved ten primary reasons for conversion: Oneness of Allah, Example of the Prophet, Muslim Behaviour, Muslim Prayer, Simplicity of Islam, Logic of Islam, Marriage, Equality in Islam, Cannot Explain, Islam just makes sense, and Other. The demographic variables analysed included: age group, gender, education level, profession, income level, duration in Bahrain, marital status, and whether the respondent has children. Statistical techniques including the Pearson Chi-Square test, Fisher's Exact Test, and the Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test were utilized to explore the relationship between demographic factors with the primary reasons for converting

[26] The Holy Quran 30:30.

to Islam[27]. Notably, no participants selected “Simplicity of Islam” as a primary reason for converting, and thus it was not included in the analysis. A detailed interpretation of the findings is given below.

6.5.1 Oneness of Allah (*Tawḥīd*)

The belief in the Oneness of Allah was the most common reason why Filipinos became Muslim, yet it did not show a significant correlation with any of the demographic variables selected. This suggests that the concept of *Tawḥīd*, the most fundamental aspect of Islam, resonates universally among Filipino converts, regardless of their demographic backgrounds. Allah has created all human beings with an innate (*Fiṭrah*) knowledge of and belief in Him as their Creator and Master. Finding no significant correlation implies that the deeply inherent awareness of the Oneness of Allah transcends all external identities, socio-economic barriers, and cultural boundaries.

6.5.2 Example of the Prophet

Similarly, the example of Prophet Muḥammad did not exhibit a significant correlation with any demographic variables. This indicates that admiration for the Prophet’s character and actions is consistent across different demographic segments. Prophet Muḥammad was not sent to the wealthy nor the poor; his message was not exclusive to the educated or those in particular professions. He was sent by Allah as a messenger to all people and as an example for all humankind.

6.5.3 Muslim Behaviour

Muslim behaviour as a reason for conversion showed a significant correlation with profession (p = .018, Cramer’s V = .242). This suggests that the profession of an individual might influence their perception and observation of Muslim behaviour and consequently have an impact on their switching their faith to Islam. For instance, individuals working in professions where they are in frequent and close contact with

[27] Alan Agresti, *Categorical Data Analysis*, vol. 792 (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012); Cyrus R. Mehta and Nitin R. Patel, "A Network Algorithm for Performing Fisher's Exact Test in r×c Contingency Tables," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 78, no. 382 (1983): 427–434.

Muslims, for example working in a beauty parlour or a hair salon, in healthcare, or as domestic help in a Muslim home, may afford opportunities to observe and admire Islamic behaviour, which can positively influence their decision to convert to Islam.

6.5.4 Muslim Prayer

Muslims pray in a unique manner. The ritual of five daily *Ṣalāh* is a visible demonstration of one's faith. The act of Muslim prayer did not correlate significantly with any demographic variables. This finding implies that for the Filipino cohort studied, the attraction to the discipline and equality (especially when observing Muslims pray in congregation) of the *Ṣalāh* is correspondingly alike across all demographic groups. The physical, communal, and spiritual aspects of the ritual daily prayers have universal appeal to individuals from diverse backgrounds.

6.5.5 Logic of Islam

Although the concept is similar to "Islam just makes sense", as a reason for becoming Muslim, the "Logic of Islam" did not show any statistically significant correlation to any of the demographic variables.

6.5.6 Equality in Islam

When studied with the demographic variables, the principle of equality in Islam did not show any significant correlation. This implies that the concept of equality has a broad appeal across different demographics.

6.5.7 Marriage

Seven people (1.2%) chose marriage as the primary reason for them accepting Islam. A further 1.5% and 3% selected this as their second-most and third-most reason for accepting Islam respectively. However, marriage as a reason for conversion did not show a significant correlation with any demographic variable. Marriage-related conversions are often driven by personal relationships and the requirement for conversion to Islam to legalize a marriage.

6.5.8 “Islam just Makes Sense”

The reason "Islam just makes sense" showed significant correlations with both monthly income and education level. However, it is crucial to note that only 2 out of the 596 respondents cited “Islam just makes sense” as their reason for conversion. This very small sample size limits the reliability and generalizability of the conclusions drawn from this correlation. Nonetheless, some suppositions may be posited.

The statistical analysis concerning monthly income revealed a significant correlation with the reasoning that “Islam just makes sense”, as determined by the Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test (p = .014). The observed effect size, represented by Cramer's V value of .266, suggests a moderate influence. This finding indicates that economic conditions could be an overriding factor in the perception of Islam. Individuals with different income levels may experience and interpret the practical and spiritual aspects of Islam differently, suggesting that economic stability or personal financial contexts could guide the understanding of religious beliefs. A higher monthly income implies greater economic stability which may result in more time and opportunities to deeply engage in exploring Islam. Conversely, people with lower income levels may view the charitable aspects of Islam or the social justice that Islam promotes to be desirable traits in a faith-based community and as such may be inclined to accept Islam.

Similarly, the link between education level and the reasoning that “Islam just makes sense” was found to be significant, with the Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test yielding a p-value of .005. The effect size for this relationship, with a Cramer's V of .240, indicates that the level of education substantially influences how individuals rationalize and embrace Islam. Thus, higher educational attainments could provide individuals with a lens through which to critically engage the religious texts and doctrine. Such individuals may find that Islam has an underlying structure and rationale that seeks to create a balance in one’s life. In Islam, there is no competition between the sacred and the secular, between science and faith – human beings are encouraged by their Creator to use their reason, and their intellect and to observe the beauty and intricacy of all of Allah’s creation. Through this study, people are reminded of their purpose and role in all creation – to submit to Allah and to worship Him alone.

However, it cannot be emphasized enough that given that only two respondents chose the reason "Islam just makes sense", it is important to understand these results with caution and consider them suggestive rather than conclusive.

6.5.9 Cannot Explain and Other

Neither of the categories "Cannot Explain" and "Other" show any significant correlation with the demographic variables.

6.5.10 Concluding Remarks on Demographics and Reasons

Before conducting this study, I was of the firm opinion that "who people are" may determine how they view Islam. When explaining why research of New Muslims was so important to improve the effectiveness of *Daʿwah*, I would often state the following:

> It stands to reason that if nine Filipina women who are all in their mid-twenties, work in a beauty parlour, and are single; became Muslim because they were attracted to the concept of *Tawḥīd*; then the tenth Filipina who is in her mid-twenties, works in a beauty parlour, and is single; would most likely accept Islam if she were to learn about the Oneness of Allah (*Tawḥīd*). It was a convenient way to look at conversion and it helped market the idea of research.

In hindsight, the fact that the data does not support such correlations makes even more sense. Islam is meant as a way of life (*dīn*) for all peoples in all places and under all circumstances. Islam is not meant only for one demographic cohort. The principles within Islam – strict monotheism (*Tawḥīd*), prayer, following the *Sunnah* (example) of the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), etc., are universally attractive and applicable to all people.

6.6 FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Understanding demographic variables gives us a broad view of who these Filipino converts are, but to truly grasp their journey, we need to look beyond their identities and examine their lives and choices. We should explore their journey from the darkness of knowing little or nothing about Islam to choosing Islam as their way of life.

6.6.1 Growing up in the Philippines – Survey Findings

For the majority (89.6%) of the Filipinos surveyed, religion (in most cases Catholicism) was a big part of their life and their families' lives growing up. Thirty-four or 5.7% of those surveyed reported that religion was "Slightly Important" and a mere 28, or 4.7%, stated that religion was not important at all while growing up in the Philippines.

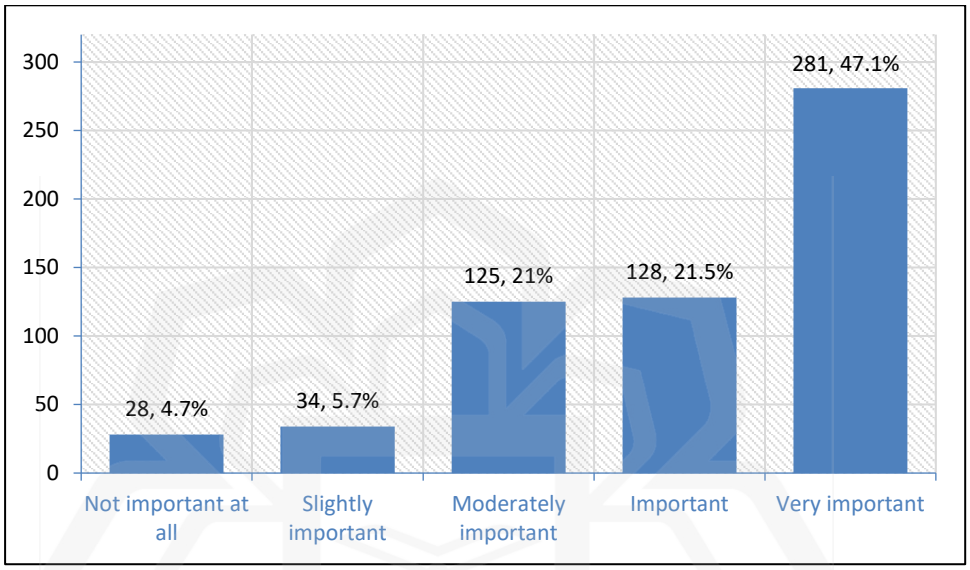


Figure 6.4 Importance of Religion in the Survey Respondents' Family while Growing up in the Philippines (n = 596)

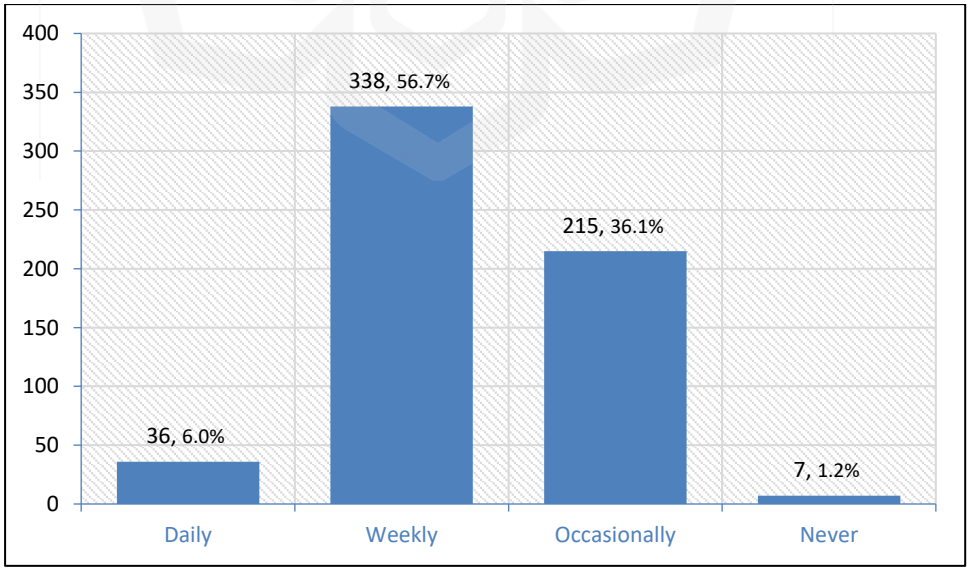


Figure 6.5 Frequency of Church Attendance while Growing up in the Philippines (under 18) Amongst Survey Respondents (n = 596)

More than half the respondents (56.7%) attended church every week. 36 of those surveyed reported daily church attendance. Whereas 36.1% attended church occasionally and only 7 of the 596 surveyed stated that they never went to Church. Two thirds of the respondents used to attend Bible classes during their childhood in the Philippines. And a further, 70 of the 596 surveyed were taught Christianity at home. Just over a fifth of the Filipinos in the study (21%) stated that they did not attend any religious classes while growing up.

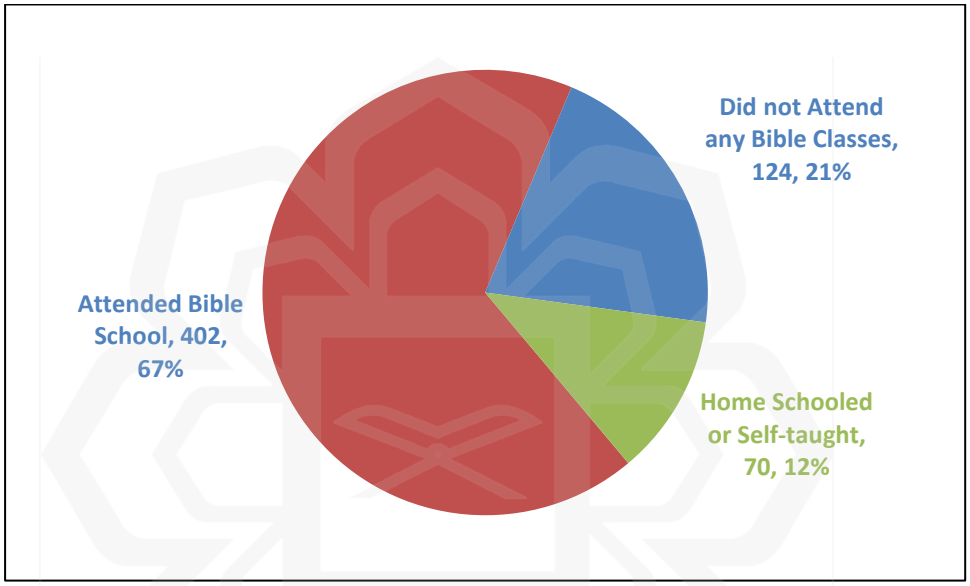


Figure 6.6 Christian Religious Education Attendance among Survey Respondents during their Childhood in the Philippines (n = 596)

6.6.2 Growing up in the Philippines – Interview Findings

In contrast to the survey data, less than half, 12 of the 25 Filipinos interviewed stated that they came from religious families and attending church on a weekly basis was compulsory. Zainab, a 37-year-old fitness instructor, described her childhood and church attendance as follows:

> When I was child, I'm a member of the church. I'm a Christian Roman Catholic. I was in the Legion of Mary…I was active because I always attended Bible studies on Sundays, and we had dance competitions. My parents they are believing but they do not go to church. And when I reached the age of 12 or 13 years old, I stopped. I only went to church sometimes to pray. That's it. I stopped attending Bible study.

Some of those interviewed stated that they grew up quite confused about Christianity. For example, Mariam said that her mother was Catholic, and her father was a non-practicing Muslim. Her father would discourage her from going to the Church. She said:

> We weren't always going to the church, and my father was always beside us discouraging us from going there, so we were confused.
>
> Yeah, my mother was a Christian but my father, I couldn't understand. He didn't like that we went to the church, and he would beat me if he found out that I was going. Whenever I went to the church or prayer meetings my father didn't like it, he would beat me say "don't go there because there are idols in the church, this is not God."

Yasmin, a 32-year-old restaurant manager, said that her father was not religious, and he discouraged her from going to church. She stopped going to church while she was still a child.

> I didn't see my father going to the church because he said he doesn't believe in it. My father always said, that "I will never go to that church!... that God is in my heart, so I will not go there."
>
> It's not that they (my parents) pressure me, like, okay, so I will go, and I'll pray, like that. But in reality, let's say like 10 years or 8 years ago that I never went to church. I just pray on my own…believe it or not, see, it's been a very long time that I didn't go to the church.

One of the interviewees, Asma, a 34-year-old homemaker grew up in a mixed religion household. Her father was a nominal Buddhist from Taiwan, whereas her mother came from a Muslim family but had stopped practicing Islam. She said that she did not really grow up with any one particular religious identity.

> My Father…he used to believe more on Buddhism. We used to attend Iglesias Ni Christo church. And we used to attend this Born-Again church as well. We were taught the Christian prayers, the rosaries, and all. And then when we get back to the house, we're practicing Buddhism. It was really confusing…my youngest sister ended up becoming this Born-Again Christian.

6.6.3 Growing up in the Philippines – Concluding Remarks

The Philippines is a predominantly Catholic country, where religion plays a big part in people's lives. The Filipinos surveyed clearly indicated that religion was dominant in their lives growing up in the Philippines. On the other hand, the group of twenty-five interviewed painted a slightly different picture. Some grew up exposed to diverse

religions and practices. Others attended Sunday Mass, and some went to weekly Bible school as children. The majority either did not attend church regularly, or lost interest in religion during their formative years. One reason for this difference between the two data sets is possibly a form of selection bias in choosing who should be interviewed as explained in Chapter 2 and above in Section 6.2.4. There may also be some degree of acquiescence bias and social desirability bias on the part of the survey respondents[28].

6.6.4 Questioning Faith

Switching from one belief system to another is a serious matter in any individual's life. For Filipinos growing up in a distinctly Catholic society where religious dogma and ritual practices are a big part of their lives, changing faith is a very profound matter. This is further compounded by the fact that these Christians are embracing Islam – a religion and a community that has historically and culturally been looked down upon by the majority of their fellow countrymen and former co-religionists. Consequently, asking whether there were any doubts about Christianity that the survey respondents and interview participants had while growing up may shed some light on their eventual discovery and acceptance of Islam.

6.6.5 Questioning Faith – Survey Findings

The majority surveyed (85%) reported that they were moderately to fully content with their religious and moral upbringing. Less than 10% were slightly content, and a mere 6% stated that they were not content with their childhood faith.

[28] See Chapter 2 and Section 6.2.4 above.

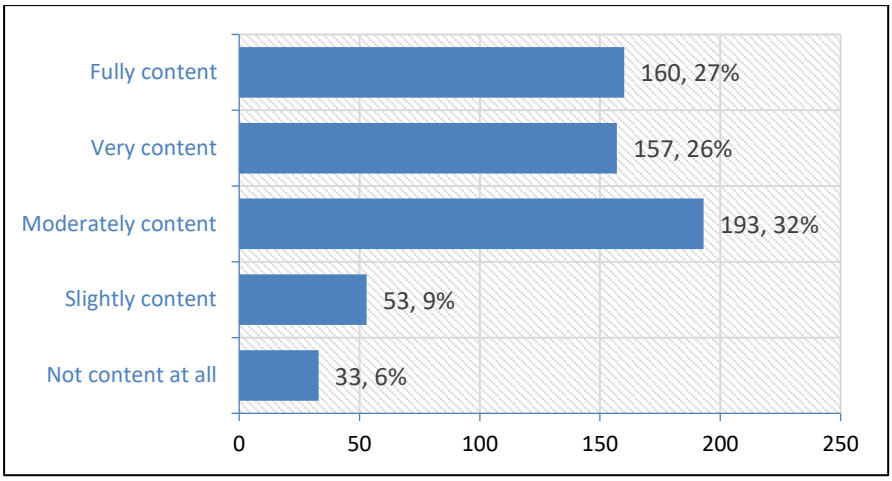


Figure 6.7 Level of Satisfaction with Religious/Moral Upbringing among Survey Respondents during their Childhood in the Philippines (n = 596)

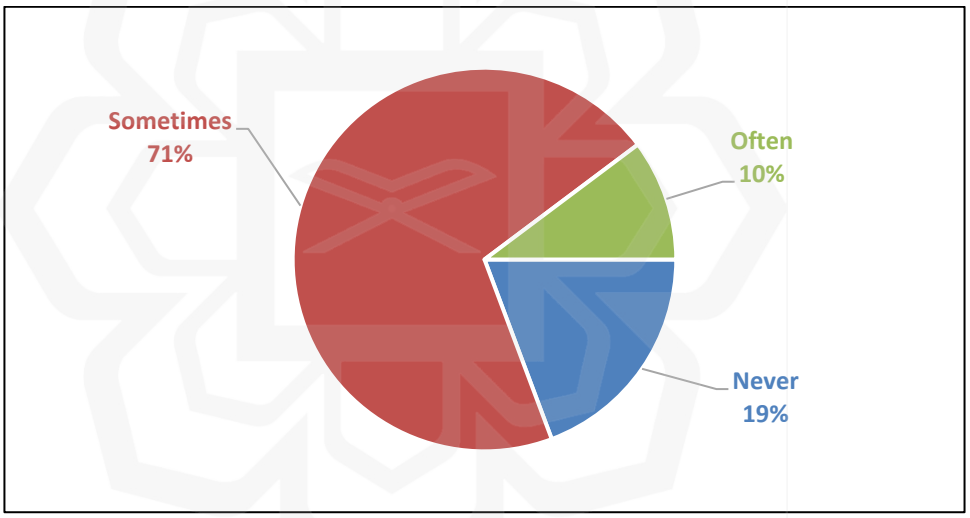


Figure 6.8 Frequency of Questioning Religious Beliefs/Practices During Upbringing in the Philippines among Respondents (n = 596)

Despite the majority reporting a degree of contentment with their childhood faith, over four out five survey respondents reported that they had questioned their religious beliefs while growing up, with 10% of those surveyed stating that they questioned their belief system quite often. Less than 20% stated that they never expressed any doubts about their beliefs or religious practices during their formative

years in the Philippines. Additionally, less than a quarter of those surveyed had actually considered changing their religion while growing up, long before they became Muslim.

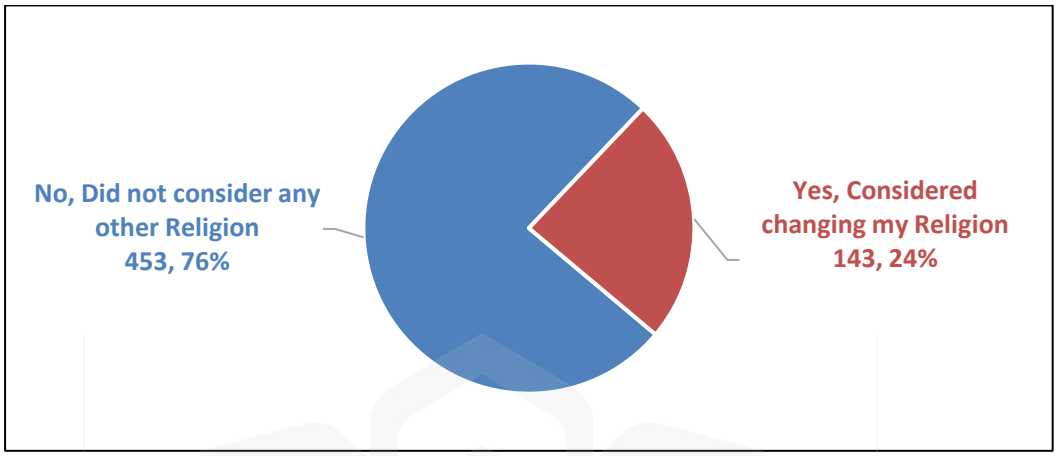


Figure 6.9 Percentage of Survey Respondents that Considered Changing their Religion while Growing up in the Philippines (n = 596)

When asked about whether they had ever considered switching their religion and embracing another faith tradition; less than a quarter (24%) of those surveyed responded positively. The majority of respondents had never considered changing their religion.

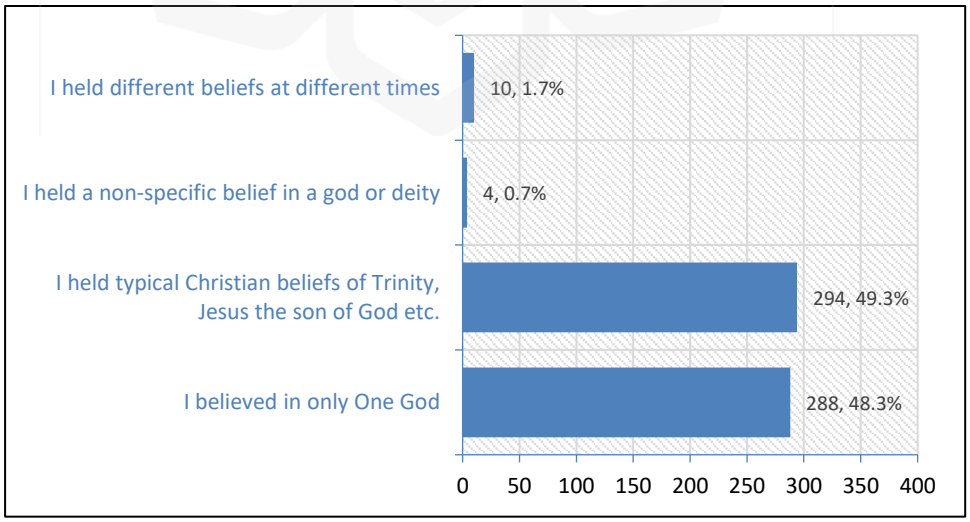


Figure 6.10 Fundamental Beliefs About God During Childhood and Adolescence (under 18 years of age) among Survey Respondents (n = 596)

Almost half the survey respondents (49.3%) stated that, despite their professed faith of Christianity, they always only "believed in only One God." A further 48.3% accepted the typical Christian doctrine of Trinity and believed that Jesus was the son of God and died for their sins. A small number of the Filipinos surveyed were recorded having different beliefs at different times (1.7%) and an even smaller number held some non-specific belief in a god or deity (4 out of the 596).

6.6.6 Questioning Faith – Data from the Interviews

The data collected from the group of Filipinos interviewed did not fully correlate with the survey sample. Sixteen of the 25 interviewees (64%) accepted the typical Catholic beliefs regarding Jesus, Mary and God. For example, Layla, a 37-year-old cashier from Quezon City, stated the following regarding her beliefs:

> Back then, I believe, or we believe that there's the Father in Heaven. Yeah, we also believe that Jesus is god. We also believe in Saints, and we also believe in other things, which is, we normally go there (church) and pray like that.

Safiyyah, a 33-year-old housemaid said that "as a Roman Catholic, we believe that Jesus is our god and I do believe about Virgin Mary, about his parents, and we do believe that god is a human." Other interviewees echoed similar beliefs:

> Growing up, I believe that there is like, God the father and Jesus, the Son of God. Like that.
>
> Before, I believe that Jesus is a son of God. Because that's what we know from the start of our beginning of our life.
>
> I used to believe in God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit, as we practice, you know, until I grew up, until I get married.

Nine of the Filipinos interviewed stated that they never believed in the typical Christian Trinitarian beliefs. Five of them stated that they always believed in a "Supreme Being." Whereas four of the Filipinos interviewed clearly stated that they always believed in only One God.

For example, Hajar, a 41-year-old receptionist from Luzon said:

> I still don't get it. I mean, I don't understand exactly why there is a son, why there is, you know in Christianity, God is three? I believe that there is one God only when I know this, that there is only God, like that. My family, they are pastors that they are telling me, they say that Jesus is…

> He is a son of God. And then when I told them if he is a son of God, why he died on the cross? That is their belief, right?

Despite the majority having strong Christian beliefs growing up, more than half the Filipinos interviewed (14 of the 25, or 56%) had doubts about their faith and questioned their Christian beliefs. For example, twenty-seven-year-old Fatima, an interior designer from Manilla, started having doubts about her faith as she grew older.

> Yeah, especially, like, I didn't understand the concept of like, my greatest question is about the Trinity. I'm not saying that because maybe I'm a Muslim now. I'm questioning before. I didn't understand the Holy Spirit thing...I started questioning what is the Holy Spirit? Like what does the Holy Spirit do to your life?
>
> If you, if you're in that church, like you would see there are pictures of people. But I don't know. I as a kid, like I was very like, struggling where to look, like which person do I look, like, we are in the church, there's an image of Joseph, there's an image of Mary, and then in the middle, there's a cross with Jesus Christ in the middle. So sometimes I was like, I don't know where to, to put my eyes and, and where to pray. So, I was like, or do I pray all together to, to all of them?
>
> I started questioning my mom, and then my dad, when I started having my own mind, when I grew up, and then like, things like just dawned on me. Like, why are we touching these things, like the sculptures? Like why we need to have them. If you know, the Roman Catholicism, they have, like, in, in my, in my area, we have like a festival for a, for a saint. And then we would need to have like the idols…And then I don't understand anything, it's like, it (idol) is just wood. I'm questioning in my mind, like, you know, like, why do we need to, like put our hands and touch it, like, like can it do something to you? Like, like, it can provide you with a miracle.
>
> I'm questioning is like, you know the, the rituals that are being performed during, during the mass. If you know what I'm saying, like, even the pastors like… that they have given their lives to the religion, but you would see them like, like do many things, they're doing things you know it's a sin. I'm seeing that. That's why I feel like, oh, I, I feel something is wrong with my religion, Catholicism.

Joe, a 48-year-old car salesman from Manilla, described his doubts as follows:

> I used to believe in God the Father, God, the Son and the Holy Spirit as we practice, you know, until I grew up... Everything as a matter of fact, my children are all Catholic, we baptize them in the church, and so on everything, you know, the rituals and everything, which I still followed them, but when I come to a certain age, then I stopped. We just, we just do it for the sake of it. It's like a trend or something.
>
> Because when we entered the church, because in our first commandment, they said in Catholicism there is only One God. Okay, and the second

> commandment, they are saying that you should not pray to other gods. But more idols and all and my question was that then why you are telling us we have three gods, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? And the second question is every time you enter the church, why do we see all so many idols inside the church?

6.6.7 Questioning Faith – Concluding Remarks

Data from the survey and from the interviews indicates that most of the Filipinos were reasonably content with their Christian beliefs and upbringing during their childhood. However, as they grew older, they started having doubts. It is noteworthy that almost half of those surveyed claimed that they never really believed in the typical Trinitarian Christian dogma but always believed in One God. In contrast, the majority of the Filipinos interviewed were comfortable with their Christian beliefs and only a small number (3 out of the 25) stated that they always believed in One God. Is there a way to characterize the kinds of converts based on the current findings? Can the Filipino converts be segregated into distinct types of conversion based on exactly how they became Muslim?

6.7 "STONES FROM WHICH STREAMS GUSH FORTH"

In chapter 4, section 4.9.4, an atypical *tafsīr* (commentary) of verse 74 of *Sūrat al-Baqarah* is presented.

> Then your hearts hardened thereafter, being like stones or harder still. For indeed among stones are those from which streams gush forth, and indeed among them are those that split and water issues from them, and indeed among them are those that crash down from the fear of God. And God is not heedless of what you do[29].

Most *tafsīr* (commentaries of the *Qurʾān*) explain that it is the Bani Israil (the followers of Prophet Mūsā) and their repeated disobedience where it is their hardened hearts that have been likened to "stones or harder still." However, *Ustadh* Nouman Ali Khan's[30] video commentary on this verse applies quite well to the Pinoy community of converts in Bahrain.

[29] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 2:74.

[30] Nouman Ali Khan, "The Story of the Israelites".

Consider the following.

288 of the survey respondents (48.3%) stated that growing up before the age of 18, they "always believed in One God." When asked the same question again but rephrased "What was your belief just before you accepted Islam?" 293 (49.2%) now stated "I believe in One God." Whereas the number who reported to have typical Christian beliefs had dropped from 293 to 288 of the total 596 surveyed. Also consider the following findings from the survey.

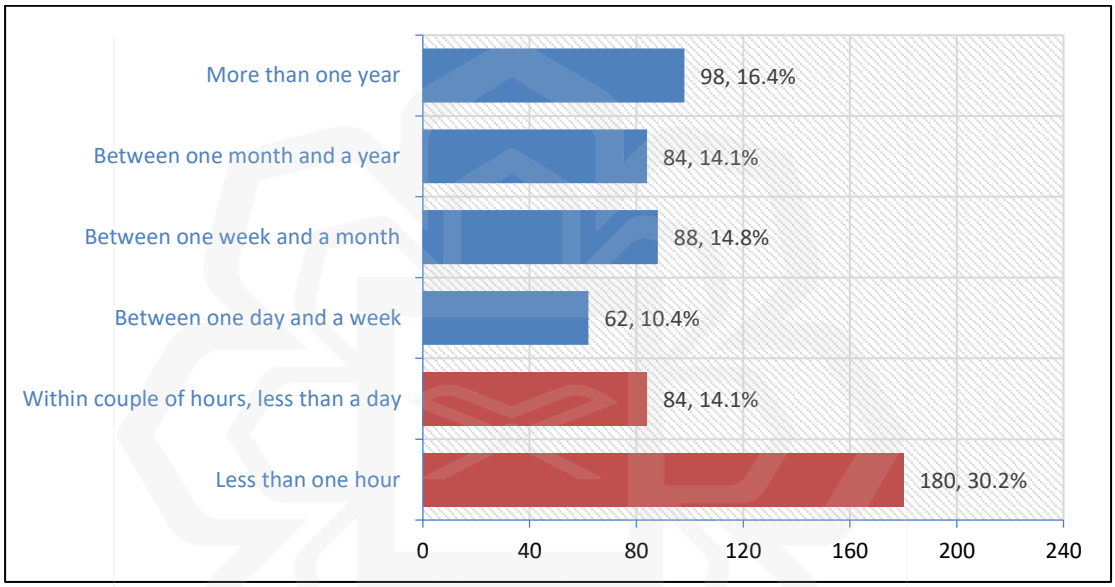


Figure 6.11 Time Elapsed between Having an "Interest in Islam" and "Actual Conversion to Islam" among the Filipino Converts (n = 596)

180 Filipino converts (30.2%) took their *Shahādah* within an hour of becoming interested in Islam. A further 84 (14.1%) became Muslim within less than a day from when they got interested in Islam. The majority of secular conversion theories are not able to explain why such a large number of people would take such a massive decision as changing their faith in such a short time! Most theories describe the conversion process over a couple of stages that span days, weeks, months, and even years. And yet, 44.3% of those surveyed stated that they changed their religious worldview in a matter of hours. How does one explain this?

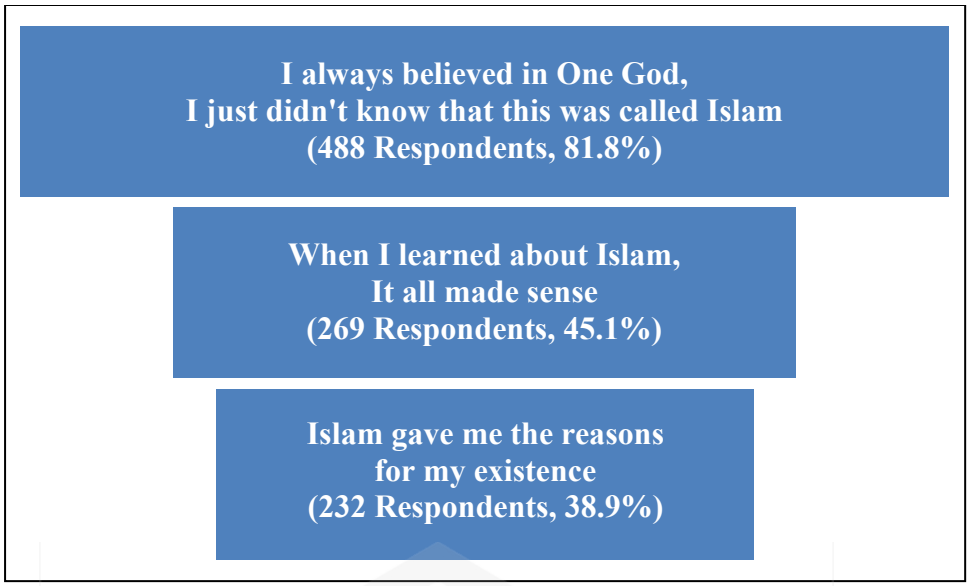


Figure 6.12 Survey Respondents Identifying Statements that Describe their Position regarding Islam after they Converted to Islam (Respondents Permitted to Select more than One Statement, n = 596)

A whopping 488 (81.8%) of the 596 survey respondents stated that they always believed in One God but did not know that this was called Islam. 45.1% of the respondents further identified with the phrase "When I learned about Islam, it all made sense." When considering all the data on prior beliefs, the time between learning about Islam and taking the *Shahādah*, and the belief statements in Figure 6.12, a clear pattern of conversion begins to emerge.

These Filipino are converts who always "held the Islamic beliefs regarding God" but were not aware that their faith worldview was called Islam. Khan (2014) describes such people as "seekers of guidance." Such people who are constantly in search of the truth and when they find the truth (Islam) they immediately accept without hesitation. Such converts are like the Prophet's companion, Abū Bakr Siddique who immediately accepted Islam when the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) invited him. Several other early converts to Islam, like the Prophet's wife, Khadija or his (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) cousin ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib accepted Islam the moment they were asked to by the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). These people may be described as "stones from which streams gush forth," where their hearts are yearning for their maker and the moment such a heart learns of Allah, belief

(*Īmān*) gushes forth and the person immediately submits with full conviction and without any doubts. These converts may further be described as people who have an innate nature of Islam (*Fiṭrah*) and upon learning about Islam they have no hesitation and immediately accept.

6.8 TRAUMA AND TESTS

The data collected from the interviews and the survey suggest a second personality or type of convert to Islam. This kind of person is deeply absorbed in worldly matters. Their heart is so consumed by daily life that they don't stop to reflect on the deeper meaning of existence. This kind of heart needs a jolt, something to make them pause and reflect on their true purpose. Just like the stone that when caused to "split," water flows from it; similarly, such a heart when tapped or shaken will submit and belief (*Īmān*) will flow from it.

The conversion narratives of several of the Filipinos interviewed involved some major trial or trauma that eventually led them to accept Islam. Sumayya, a 37-year-old Filipina grew up in a difficult environment. Her father was heavily involved in drinking and gambling, which led to frequent conflicts in the family and financial struggles. From a young age, Sumayya was forced to take on adult responsibilities, caring for her siblings and working on a farm to support the family. In an attempt to deal with the difficulties at home, she started drinking while still in high school. She got married early, hoping it would provide a solution. But her husband also turned out to be an alcoholic and an abuser. In the hopes of improving her life, Sumayya became a Born-Again Christian, but her troubles did not go away.

She then moved to Bahrain hoping to find financial stability and to get away from the challenges at home. Here, she interacted with Muslims at work and was greatly impressed by their disciplined lifestyle. In her own words, Sumayya made these observations about Muslims.

> The first thing is discipline. How Islam says that the man takes care of his wife put questions in my mind. Even though Muslim men are allowed to marry more than one woman, they really took care of their women and families. They're very family oriented.
>
> How was it they prayed five times a day? How do they meet God? The Catholics go to church once a week and even that could easily be missed.

> How do these Muslim people have this discipline that they can pray five times a day, you know?

Sumayya met a fellow Filipina co-worker who had converted to Islam. She learnt more about Islam from her and from watching YouTube lectures on Islam. Finally, after years of struggling, she finally found the peace she had been looking for in Islam and she decided to convert.

Zainab, a 37-year-old fitness trainer, went through a similar experience. In her teen years she struggled with faith and personal hardships. Growing up in a Catholic family, she was active in the church but eventually became disillusioned with the hypocrisy she witnessed. As she got older, Zainab turned to alcohol and entered into several relationships, including a toxic and abusive marriage. Her husband, who battled drug addiction and alcoholism, frequently abused her.

> Basically, he is taking drugs…and he is a monster. One day maybe, when he comes home, it will be just like the last time. That's why I said I don't want anymore. Because the last time when he beat me, he comes back from work…he has money, he drinks a lot, he is taking drugs. In the nighttime, he took me to the other room, I'm with my kids, he beat me a lot. And all the family around the house… they are listening, but they cannot control my husband. I got a chance to call my mum and dad, I said, "Right now you have to come to pick me, because otherwise, you will not see me." And he hit me a lot. Sorry. He doesn't give me the baby, my kids. But my mom and dad called the police. The police came and he didn't have a choice.

Zainab stayed with her parents for a while. She eventually got a job opportunity and moved to Bahrain. However, even in Bahrain, Zainab continued to drink and engage in meaningless relationships. But the growing emptiness and dissatisfaction with her life did not leave Zainab.

Over the years, living and working in Bahrain, she came across Filipina Muslims who seemed happy and contented with their lives. Zainab was curious but it was not until a close friend of hers completely transformed after becoming Muslim that she started to ask about Islam.

> Because at that time I'm looking for a room to stay in. When I check there is one Filipina, she is a Muslim. And I ask her, I said, "Why you are wearing like this?" She is wearing a ḥijāb.
>
> And, she said, "I'm Muslim."
>
> I said…then I'm asking, "What do you think about Muslims? What's so different?"

> She said, “It’s totally different. You will know everything, if you’re Muslim.”
>
> I said, “Like for me I’m interested.”
>
> And I know this, one of my friends also, one of my friends. She’s… I’m not saying she’s a bar girl, but she always goes to the disco. I’m with her, we go to the bar, we drink, we go all the time. But now, 2 years ago, I saw her. She is Muslim now and she’s totally different. And at that time, I’m thinking, I want to be like, I want to change my life, like to be, you know, not like before, I don’t know to back like before. I want to change like, change.

In 2016, Zainab took her *Shahādah* during Ramadan. At first, she struggled with the discipline and commitment that her new faith required of her. But over time she finally found peace and the happiness she was looking for in Islam.

> I'm so happy to be honest. I don't feel alone. If I do feel alone sometimes, I talk to God even if I don't know how to prayer perfectly yet. I get clients at work. They are so happy and respectful of me because I accepted Islam. They come and hug me in happiness, and they welcome me into the Muslim community. I feel…I’m blessed.

Yasmin, a 32-year-old Filipina from Bohol went through a troubling childhood. She grew up in a religious household. Her mother was a devout Catholic. Her father came from a Muslim background but did not practice Islam. He was, however, very critical of the Catholic Church particularly praying to statues of Jesus and Mary. He greatly influenced Yasmin, and she began to question her faith. Her childhood was filled with confusion and hardships.

> But life gives us expected problems. My brothers had their experiences too, and we had given our parents a whole lot of problems. But this happened when all of us cleaned up and given up on bad habits. About 8 years ago, in his line of work in the police, my brother was killed by a gunshot. This was so unexpected, and we really loved each other. It happened suddenly; he spoke to me before he left home that day. He had told me to look after my brothers and sisters, and he was going to work, and he would be back soon and that we would eat together. He was shot at work; he stayed in hospital for a week before he died. I heard the gunshot, and I heard the ambulance too, but I didn’t know it was my brother who was being taken. Someone came home to tell us that he was shot. We told the person it had to be someone else; my brother had just left 25 minutes ago to go to work. Our parents were very busy building our new house, to give us all a new beginning, having a nice family, a happy family staying together. It was too late.

Within a few months of her younger brother’s death, Yasmin’s older brother was killed in a military operation.

> I couldn't understand why all these bad things were happening to us. There were a lot of bad people in the world, why don't these bad things happen to them instead of us, we were good people. My brothers and I were working to put ourselves through university.

The tragic deaths of her brothers left Yasmin deeply scarred and pushed her to question the existence of God.

> I did not believe in God at this point. I did not believe in praying. There was no God. Our financial condition became bad too, and the whole family was in grief and at the that time I wanted God to either give us relief and keep us from such problems or give us death. I am watching my parents cry losing two of their children within five months of each other and this was very hard on them as a parent. There was no news of their second child, no body to bury and no closure.
>
> I had a very big question. You know, there's a lot of things that happen in life. I wanted to pray to God, and I wanted happiness from Him. I would pray and pray and hope to get happiness. But after my brothers died, I thought there can be no god. I hated life and everything about it. I'm searching for myself and looking for the truth.

Yasmin's journey to Islam began after she left the Philippines. She first took a job in Qatar and while there, an elderly Muslimah introduced her to Islam and gave her an English translation of the *Qurʾān*. Yasmin began reading the *Qurʾān* every day. However, it was not until she moved to Bahrain and began discussing her desire to become Muslim with her boss that she finally took her *Shahādah*. She reconnected with her Creator and found meaning in life. Yasmin finally found peace.

> I've believed in Islam for a very long time, but nobody guided me to take the *Shahādah* for a very long time. I wanted to follow everything in Islam, and I thought unless I do it all, I am not a Muslim. I would fast every Ramadan, but I knew I had to become Muslim, but I didn't know how. I even told my boss that I have a lot of *Qurʾān* at home but not a single thing related to Christianity. I kept telling him I wanted to become Muslim, and he kept asking me "if, I was sure." So then, he explained to me what needs to be done to become a Muslim, and I took my *Shahādah* with him.

Similar tales of trials and tests were related by seven other interviewees. Most of the conversion narratives involved alcohol and substance abuse. Some of the Filipino converts had experienced abuse from their spouses or partners. One Filipina housemaid had been repeatedly raped by her employer. Another convert was involved in a car crash where her kind and caring madam (employer) was killed. The common theme that emerges is that it was through these traumatic experiences that these individuals found meaning in their lives.

Similarly, of the 596 Filipinos surveyed, 39 (6.5%) reported near-death experiences, whereas the death of a loved one was a critical moment for 51 respondents (8.5%). 46 (7.7%) of the Filipinos surveyed reported physical or psychological abuse. Divorce or break-ups affected 81 Filipinos surveyed (13.6%), and job loss or financial instability was a turning point for 57 of the respondents (9.6%).

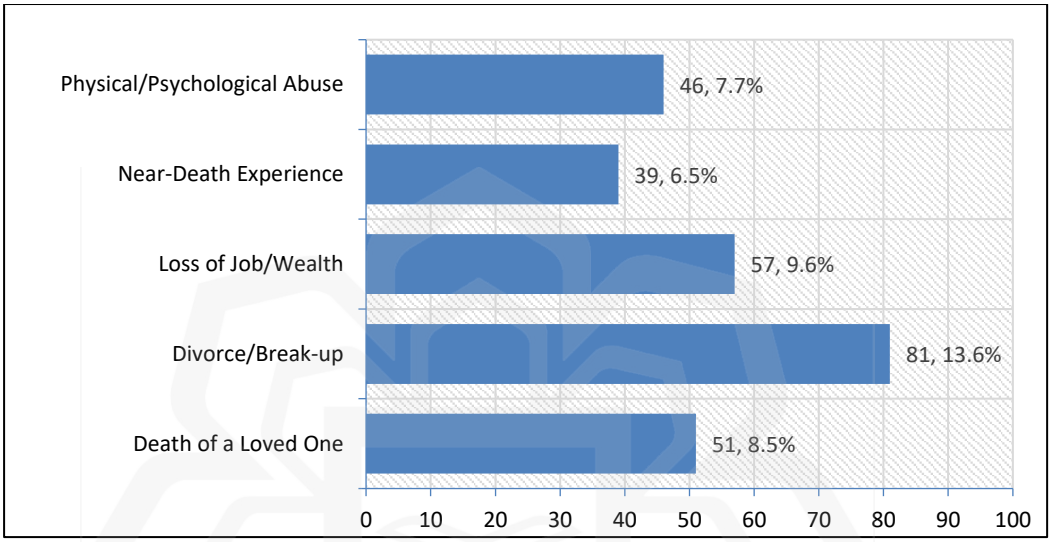


Figure 6.13 Filipino Survey Respondents who had Experienced Major Trauma or Trial Prior to Converting to Islam (Respondents Permitted to Select more than one Statement to Describe their Experience, n = 596)

The above conversion narratives and data from the survey clearly indicate a second type of conversion to Islam – people who need to be stirred, shaken out of the busy lives and be forced to look at the reasons for their being. Such was the case of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and his conversion to Islam. Umar was a strong and determined leader. He was fiercely loyal to his tribe and ancestral beliefs, yet deeply committed to justice and fairness. Although he was one of the chief opponents of Islam, he could not help but admire the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the early Muslims for their kindness, compassion, and sense of justice. Umar was internally conflicted, his true nature (*Fiṭrah*) aligned with Islam, but it was deeply buried under misguided tribal loyalty. It was only after a violent outburst against his sister and brother-in-law for embracing Islam, that Umar came to face his internal conflict. Upon

reading verses from the *Qurʾān*, Umar realized the truth and accepted Islam immediately.

Umar's journey to Islam mirrors those who are too caught up in daily life to stop and reflect. Sometimes it takes a moment of trauma or hardship to push them to ponder over their lives and look for the truth. These are the people who are always on the move, busy with the world around them, and it takes a jolt for their hearts to open to Islam. These people are described in verse 74 of *Sūrat al-Baqarah* as, "…and indeed among them are those (stones) that split and water issues from them…"

6.9 ISLAM BEFORE IMAN

A final category of a convert to Islam was described by Dutton[31] and Al-Qwidi[32] as the "way of power." These are people who embrace Islam for some worldly benefit. They are not driven by some deep moral conviction but see some gain in becoming Muslim. People in this group, for example, may embrace Islam to get married. Even though Muslim men may marry women from the "People of the Book," it becomes much easier if the potential spouse becomes Muslim. Others may convert for financial gain or to secure better opportunities in life.

Three of the Filipinos interviewed stated that their decision to accept Islam was greatly influenced by their Muslim fiancé or Muslim spouse. However, all three went to great lengths to explain that it was out of genuine belief that they became Muslim and that they were not coerced by their partners.

On the other hand, from the 596 Filipinos surveyed, 53 (8.9%) reported to have accepted Islam so as to get married to a Muslim. Two of the respondents recorded that they were prompted to accept Islam so that they may get a better job or promotion.

In the context of verse 74 of *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, this type of conversion is symbolized by the third kind of stone, "…and indeed, among them are those that crash down from the fear of God." These are people that Khan[33] describes as having hearts that do not yet have proper *Īmān* (belief) in them. Such hearts have only submitted

[31] Yasin Dutton, "Conversion to Islam".

[32] Maha Al-Qwidi, "Understanding the Stages of Conversion to Islam".

[33] Nouman Ali Khan, "The Story of the Israelites".

(*Aslama*) for reasons other than true conviction. The conversion of Abu Sufyan, a prominent companion of the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and leader of the Quraysh in Makkah may be compared to this third category (see Chapter 4). This does not mean that belief (*Īmān*) never enters their heart; in fact, many, like Abu Sufyan, eventually become true believers with absolute faith.

The data gathered from the interviews and the survey suggest that converts may be classified into the three types described above. However, one element of conversion that seems to be found in all converts is the desire for change. These are people, regardless of reasons or motivations, who believed that their lives would be better if they were to convert to Islam. They sought guidance, and Allah guided them to Islam.

6.10 *HIDĀYAH* OR GUIDANCE

A central theme found throughout the *Qurʾān* is *Hidāyah* or guidance. *Hidāyah* (also spelled Hidayah, Hidayah, or *Hidāyaht*) is an Arabic term meaning guidance, particularly Divine Guidance from Allah. It is Allah who guides people to submit to Him. In Surah Fatiha, the opening of the *Qurʾān*, we read: "Guide us upon the straight path." Several other verses of the *Qurʾān* repeat the same call.

> This is the Book in which there is no doubt, a guidance for the reverent,
>
> When My servants ask thee about Me, truly I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me, that they may be led aright (guided).
>
> Thou (O Prophet) art not tasked with their guidance, but God guides whomsoever He will…
>
> Whomsoever God wishes to guide; He expands his breast for submission. And whomsoever He wishes to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow and constricted, as if he were climbing to the sky. Thus does God heap defilement upon those who do not believe.
>
> …Whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided; and whomsoever He leads astray, thou wilt find no protector to lead him aright[34].

The concept of Allah guiding individuals towards Islam is mentioned throughout the *Qurʾān* in various verses, including, but not limited to: 2:142; 2:213; 3:101; 4:68;

[34] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 2:2; 2:186; 2:272; 6:125; and 18:17.

4:175; 5:16; 6:87; 7:178; 9:115; 10:25; 16:93; 17:97; 18:13; 24:46; 25:31; 28:56; 29:69; 35:8; 39:23; 43:61; and 67:22.

In Chapter 4, it was made clear that the role of the *Dāʿī* is not only to "convey" the message, nor is the *Dāʿī* responsible for anyone to "convert" to Islam; rather the function of the *Dāʿī* is to "invite" people to Islam. Muslims have always understood, as explained in numerous verses of the *Qurʾān*, that no one is burdened with anyone else's beliefs or deeds. And that guidance is from Allah. Allah guides whom He wills, and Allah leads astray whom He wills.

One of the ninety-nine beautiful names of Allah is Al-Hadi – the Guide. Allah is the One who guides. *Hidāyah* means "to lead and to guide." It also means to direct, to show the way, to conduct, to pilot, or to usher. From the same root word (*Ḥāʾ, Dāl, Yāʾ*) comes the term Hadiyya or gift. Guidance is a gift from the Creator to the Created.

When Prophet Adam and his wife were expelled from Paradise (Jannah) Allah said:

> We said, "Get down from it, all of you. If guidance should come to you from Me, then whosoever follows My Guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve[35].

A commonly recited *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), particularly during the weekly *Jumʿah* Sermon (*Khuṭbah*) is reported in *Sunan ibn Mājah*.

> It was narrated from Ibn 'Abbas that: The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Praise is to Allah; we praise Him, and we seek His help. We seek refuge with Allah from the evil of our own souls and from our bad deeds, Whomsoever Allah guides will never be led astray; and whomsoever is led astray, no one can guide. I bear witness that none has the right to be worshiped but Allah, alone with no partner or associate, and that Muḥammad is His slave and His Messenger[36]."

So, in the context of the Filipino conversion findings described above, how should one understand Divine Guidance or *Hidāyah*?

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[35] *ibid*, 2:38.

[36] Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, "Hadith 1893," The Chapters on Marriage, accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:1893.

Hidāyah may be viewed in two ways: *Hidāyaht al-Irshād* or "Guidance through Instruction;" and *Hidāyaht al-Tawfīq* or "Guidance through Divine Enablement[37]".

Hidāyaht al-Irshād refers to the external form of guidance, where Allah gives human beings a means to be guided. Such means of Divine guidance are primarily the *Qurʾān* followed by the example and teachings of Prophet Muḥammad. This form of guidance may also be through other sources of information, for instance the potential Muslim coming across a *Dāʿī* who shares information about Islam and invites them to submit. As such, the convert's initial encounter with Islam – through research and education, through meetings and discussions with Muslims, or by reading the *Qurʾān* – all these are different examples of external guidance or *Hidāyaht al-Irshād*. These are all the means through which one is guided. However, this is not the ultimate determinant of one's conversion to Islam. Rahman[38] further states that while Allah provides the path, it is ultimately an individual's choice to walk that path.

The second form, *Hidāyaht al-Tawfīq*, is an internal form of guidance where Allah directs a person toward the truth, towards Himself. An individual may be exposed to the message of Islam and may even be invited to submit; however, it is only through the Grace and Mercy of Allah that one accepts Islam – this is essentially the meaning of *Hidāyaht al-Tawfīq*. This second type of guidance underscores the importance of humility in a believer's journey, knowing that it is only through Allah's will that one may be guided. Therefore, while one is encouraged to strive righteously – to have the right intentions and to take the right actions – the outcome of one's exertions are completely in the hands of Allah. *Hidāyah* becomes both a personal "jihad" and a Divine gift[39]. It is only Allah who guides people. And this explains why some people, despite witnessing the truth in Islam, may not become Muslim. Whereas others are drawn to Islam wholeheartedly.

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[37] Masood Rahman, "Hedaya," *Iqra*, published 2023, accessed September 26, 2024, https://iqraaislam.info/hedaya/#:~:text=Hedaya%20is%20of%20two%20types,ability%20to%20follow%20the%20path.&text=Allah%20shows%20the%20way%20but,be%20firm%20upon%20the%20path; *Islam Q&A*, "Guidance Is in the Hand of Allah," published 2022, accessed September 26, 2024, https://islamqa.info/en/answers/12053/guidance-is-in-the-hand-of-allah; Mansoor Alam, "Allah Shows the Way, but We Have to Walk Ourselves," *Islamicity*, published 2018, accessed September 26, 2024, https://www.islamicity.org/14081/allah-shows-the-way-but-we-have-to-walk-ourselves/; Abdullah Oduro, "Friday *Khuṭbah*: Building a Relationship with the Quran," YouTube video, 30:10, published September 23, 2022, accessed September 26, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K37UAStDzBs.

[38] Rahman, Masood. "Hedaya." *Iqra*. Published 2023. Accessed September 26, 2024.

[39] *ibid*.

For the convert to Islam, it is Allah who opens their hearts and grants them the "*Tawfīq*" to fully accept Islam. Therefore, the process of conversion is not only based on one's desire or will to become Muslim, but it is also greatly dependent on Allah choosing and guiding one to accept Islam.

6.11 *DAʿWAH* IN THE LIGHT OF THESE FINDINGS

Daʿwah (inviting people to Islam) is a religious obligation (*Farḍ kifāyah*) on the Muslim community (see explanation in Chapter 4.5). It was the primary purpose for which Allah sent tens of thousands of messengers to humankind. The most prolific and fundamental message of the *Qurʾān* is *Daʿwah* – to guide humanity to Allah. In *Sūrat al-Naḥl*, Allah teaches how to call people to Him.

> Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation. And dispute with them in the most virtuous manner. Surely thy Lord is He Who knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best the rightly guided[40].

When, where, and how to call people to Islam is fundamental to the success of the *Daʿwah* effort. Over the past few decades, the methods and strategies used by *Daʿīs*, while fundamentally upholding the principles found in this verse, have evolved to accommodate the changes in how people communicate and understand one another. In keeping with this spirit of good innovation (*Bidʿah Ḥasanah*), are there strategies and methods of *Daʿwah* that may be derived from the findings of this study?

The data collected and analysed suggests key factors that can guide or shape the way *Daʿwah* is conducted, especially with regards to expatriates from the Philippines.

6.11.1 *Tawḥīd* – A Major Finding of this Study

One very important takeaway from this study is the overwhelming importance of the concept of the Oneness of Allah – *Tawḥīd*. This most fundamental of concepts in Islam is very closely tied to the innate nature that all human beings are endowed with – the *Fiṭrah*, to yearn for and connect with their Maker – to believe and worship One God exclusively. It is not insignificant that over 90% of the Filipinos surveyed cited *Tawḥīd*

[40] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, Surah 16:125.

as the primary motivation for their conversion to Islam. *Daʿwah* efforts should therefore emphasize *Tawḥīd* in a simple, understandable, and clear manner. The data also suggest that this principle of monotheism has universal appeal. The concept of *Tawḥīd* transcends all the different ways in which people identify themselves. As such, *Daʿwah* methods built on the concept of *Tawḥīd* are most effective.

6.11.2 The GORAP Method of *Daʿwah*

A common *Daʿwah* method, used within the Organization and several other *Daʿwah* organizations globally, relies on the fundamental truth of *Tawḥīd*. GORAP, an acronym that stands for God, Oneness, Revelation, and Prophethood is a simple, clear, and standard structure used in most one-on-one *Daʿwah* conversations[41].

The initial step is to establish the existence of God using rational arguments. Most Filipinos already believe in the existence of God, as such, one can move to the next stage – explaining the concept of *Tawḥīd*. This is a central argument in the GORAP approach. As explained earlier (Section 6.3), most human beings can relate to the idea of One God, it is *Tawḥīd al-ʿIbādah* ("Maintaining the Unity of Allah's Worship") that needs a more through explanation. For Filipinos raised in the typical Catholic tradition, accepting that Allah, and Allah alone, is worthy of worship, is a major leap in belief and understanding. The *Dāʿī* has to emphasize that Jesus is not the son of God; that he was a human being, a great prophet, and a messenger of God who performed miracles by God's permission; and that he did not die for the sins of humanity. Great care has to be taken to ensure that the would-be Muslim does not retain any form of shirk – associating partners with Allah. This includes associating Jesus or his mother, Mary, or the Holy Spirit (in Islamic tradition, the Holy Spirit refers to Jibrīl), or any saints to Allah. The *Dāʿī* has to emphatically argue that worship is exclusive to Allah, the One and Only God, and that all the rest are His creation and not equal to Him in any way. To emphasize this concept, when Christians are converting to Islam, they are required to add, "And I testify that Jesus is a messenger and a servant of Allah," to the standard two-part *Shahādah* about Allah and Muḥammad.

[41] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Annual Report 2024, Internal Document* Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024.

Once the concept of *Tawḥīd* is established, the GORAP method introduces the notion of Revelation, dispensations sent by Allah to guide humanity. The *Qurʾān* is then presented as the final, unadulterated, testament from the One God. Evidence of its authenticity, unique language, and miraculous nature are argued. Once the would-be-Muslim accepts the *Qurʾān*, the central role of Prophet Muḥammad as the final messenger and ultimate role model for all of humanity is contended.

What differentiates GORAP and renders it effective, is that it does not rely on logical arguments alone but rather appeals to people's innate disposition (*Fiṭrah*) to believe in, and reconnect with, the One God. GORAP, based on Verse 16:125 of the Quran (and quoted above), makes *Daʿwah* more relatable and accessible. It allows one to share the message of Islam in a manner that appeals to both the intellect (*ʿAql*) and the heart (*Qalb*).

6.11.3 "Always Believed in One God"

An additional major finding is that many of the Filipino converts always believed in One God but were unaware that their beliefs were aligned with the Islam. This notion is particularly true when it one considers the first category of convert – "Stones from which streams gush forth."

The Philippines has a sizeable minority Muslim population (see Chapter 3), yet most Pinoy are either completely oblivious to the fundamental teachings of Islam or harbour major misconceptions about their fellow Muslim countrymen. An essential part of *Daʿwah* to the Filipino community should be addressing stereotypes and misinformation about Islam. It is imperative to ask Filipinos about their beliefs and not assume that since they are Christian, they inevitably believe in the godhead of Jesus or consider Mary or the saints to possess divine attributes. *Daʿīs* should first try and gain as much information about their "customer" before trying to "sell" Islam to them.

6.11.4 Not Losing Hope

Before conducting this survey, I was of the opinion that demographics, or prior beliefs play a big part in the conversion process, however the findings from this exploratory study indicate otherwise. Muslims firmly believe in the Oneness of Allah and consider

Tawḥīd as the most powerful concept known to humankind. *Tawḥīd* overpowers all of Creation. It should not be surprising, nor should it appear strange that the overwhelming majority of the subjects of this study chose this idea, the Oneness of Allah, as the primary reason for their coming to Islam. All human beings are endowed with the same inherent characteristics (*Fiṭrah*) of recognizing Allah as One, as their only Lord and Master (*Rabb*). Looking for additional characteristics to define who is more likely or less likely to accept Islam may not yield any satisfactory answers. In this regard, the *Dāʿī* should look to the command that Allah gave to Prophet Moses when He sent him to invite the Pharoah.

> Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh! Truly he has rebelled! Yet speak unto him gently, that haply he may remember or have fear[42].

Allah sent Prophet Mūsā and his brother Prophet Hārūn to the greatest tyrant of the time. The Pharoah may, arguably, be considered the greatest villain that ever lived. Yet, Allah directs his emissaries to speak to the Pharoah "gently" in the hopes "that haply he may remember or have fear." Didn't Allah already know that Pharoah would rebel and never accept Islam? Then why gently? Nasr's[43] commentary on this verse explains why.

> Remember here refers to Pharaoh's taking heed of the warning given to him and turning away from his misguidance, while fear is understood to mean that Pharaoh would be fearful of God, return to Him, and be obedient toward Him. Haply (*laʿalla*) conveys the sense of "perhaps," "hopefully," or "it might be that." In this case, haply is said for the benefit of Moses and Aaron, who could not know the outcome of delivering God's warning and admonition to Pharaoh, but should have hope in the possibility that he would remember or have fear.

Seen from this perspective, a *Dāʿī* should never lose hope. It is not for the *Dāʿī* to decide as to who will be guided to Islam and who will not. Some people who seem least likely to become Muslim may accept Islam. Whereas some people who may seem to be on the verge of accepting Islam, may never become Muslim. The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) made every attempt to get his beloved uncle, Abū Ṭālib, to accept Islam. Yet, according to the majority of Sunnī scholars, despite being the Prophet's protector and supporter, Abū Ṭālib did not become Muslim. Allah says in the *Qurʾān*:

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[42] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, Surah 20:43-44.

[43] *ibid*.

> Surely, thou dost not guide whomsoever thou love, but God guides whomsoever He will. And He knows best those who are rightly guided[44].

In similar fashion, the wives of Prophet Nūḥ and Prophet Lūṭ did not accept Islam. Whereas, Āsiyā, the wife of the Pharoah was a Muslim. About these three women, Allah states in the *Qurʾān*:

> God sets forth as an example for those who disbelieve the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of Our righteous servants; then they betrayed them, and they availed them naught against God. And it was said unto both, "Enter the Fire with those who enter."
>
> And God sets forth as an example for those who believe the wife of Pharaoh when she said, "My Lord, build for me a house near unto Thee in the Garden, deliver me from Pharaoh and his deeds, and deliver me from the wrongdoing people[45]."

6.12 *DAʿWAH* BEYOND THE FILIPINOS

The findings from this study indicate that compared to other expatriate communities in Bahrain, Filipinos are more likely to accept Islam. What makes this particular community more inclined to Islam? The majority of OFWs in Bahrain are women, well-educated, and Catholic. The dogma in Catholicism is difficult to understand even amongst the most learned. Yet, despite the confusion, most Catholics have a basic belief in God. As the data suggests, this makes them more inclined to accept the simplicity of the Oneness of God in Islam compared to the complication and confusion that they found in the faith they were born into. A key question then is, "Are there other communities, whether in Bahrain or elsewhere, that have similar demographics making them more likely candidates for conversion to Islam?"

One can argue that most of the people who live in Central and South America are also Catholic and reasonably educated. Culturally, women play a more central role in the family in these countries than most other parts of the world. Are Latinas similar enough to Filipinas that they would be similarly inclined to Islam? Research is needed to answer this all-important question.

What about in other parts of the World? Many Sub-Saharan Africans are accepting Islam in Bahrain and within their own countries. Are Catholics in those

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[44] *ibid*, 64:56.

[45] *ibid*, 66:10-11.

countries more inclined to the teachings of Islam? Further analysis of the larger set (beyond the Filipino respondents and interviewees) of data collected from the interviews and surveys may give credence to these hypotheses. More studies are also needed in parts of Africa where large numbers of people are coming to Islam[46].

Aside from Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, there are sizeable Catholic communities in the United States, Italy, France, Spain, Poland, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Germany, and India[47]. It would be fascinating to see if Catholics in these countries are as likely to come to Islam. More research is needed.

6.13 THE JOURNEY DOES NOT END HERE

It is essential to reflect on the varied journeys that Filipino Muslim Converts have undergone from their childhood in the Philippines to migrating to Bahrain and eventually learning about and choosing Islam as their faith. Each journey is unique, yet there are common themes that have emerged. For the majority of Pinoy Converts, it is the untainted and foundational concept of monotheism in Islam (*Tawḥīd*) that won them over. For some it was observing and living amongst other Muslims, for others it was the discipline that they found in Islam. And for a few, it was the example of the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that drove them to take the *Shahādah*. Whether driven by some trial or trauma, or searching for peace, or a desire to find meaning in life, these expatriates from the Philippines sought change and found contentment in Islam.

The analysis of the data from both interviews and surveys clearly suggests that it is the innate nature that all human beings are born with, their *Fiṭrah*, that plays a significant role in their conversion to Islam. At the same time, one cannot underestimate the role of *Hidāyah* (Divine Guidance) in the conversion narratives of these Filipinos. The findings also indicate that conversions can be divided into three different types. The first category are converts who immediately accept Islam the moment they find out about it – these are people who always held Islamic beliefs (*Īmān*) but were not aware

[46] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Annual Report 2024, Internal Document* Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024.

[47] *World Population Review*, "Highest Catholic Population 2023," accessed September 26, 2024, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/highest-catholic-population.

of Islam. A second group of converts are people who are preoccupied with their worldly lives, and it takes some major test or trauma to shake them out of their routines for them to evaluate their reason for existence; such converts accept Islam and have true conviction (*Īmān*) after going through a major crisis. A third kind of convert is one who accepts Islam for some worldly gain. These are people who submit (*Aslama*) to Allah, but *Īmān* (belief) may not yet have entered their hearts.

Regardless of how they came to Islam, the act of conversion (*Shahādah*) is not the end of their story; it marks the beginning of a lifelong journey of learning and practicing their Islam. The next two chapters delve deeper into this journey; Chapter 7 looks at the significance of the *Shahādah*, whereas Chapter 8 looks at what happens after *Shahādah* – the care and education of the Filipino New Muslims.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BECOMING MUSLIM

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, I met an American woman who had recently converted to Islam. Her conversion story left a lasting impression on me.

Karen (not her real name), a 35-year-old Caucasian woman from the Protestant South, lived a fairly typical life. She was married, had two teenage children, and worked as a real estate agent in Central Florida. One day, hoping to expand her business, she decided to set up a sales booth at an Arab-Muslim conference in Orlando.

Over the course of the weekend, Karen didn't attract many clients but was greatly intrigued by the videos on Islam playing at a nearby booth. She spent hours watching them and decided to become Muslim. On the third day, she approached one of the event organizers and expressed her desire to convert to Islam. The organizers happily obliged and within no time Karen found herself on stage in front of hundreds of strangers.

Nervous and uncertain, Karen was asked to repeat the *Shahādah* in Arabic. She somehow managed to say the foreign words. The crowd erupted in joyful shouts of "*Allāhu Akbar*" (God is Greater). The response overwhelmed and scared the poor lady. As soon as she stepped off the stage, women started embracing and congratulating her. After what felt like an eternity, Karen was finally alone again, and while she packed up her belongings, she couldn't help but wonder, "What have I gotten myself into?"

Over the course of the next few months, Karen faced much greater challenges. When she related her story, she had left the "Muslim community" and had rejoined her church. I asked her if she still believed in Islam. Her response was both surprising and poignant.

"I never left Islam," she said quietly. "I left the Muslims."

She explained that while she believed in the core tenets of Islam, she was drawn back to her church because of the care and support they provided.

Karen's story deeply affected me.

What stands out in Karen's story, and is particularly relevant to this chapter, is the way in which her *Shahādah* was handled. In our collective excitement when witnessing someone becoming Muslim, it is easy to become overly enthusiastic. Unfortunately, this often amounts to putting the New Muslim in the spotlight and causing unwarranted social and emotional duress.

In the case of Karen, instead of being a joyful and profound experience, her *Shahādah* became a source of sadness and anxiety. By turning it into a spectacle, we risk making a deeply moving and spiritual experience into a painful memory.

Karen's experience is not unique. In many parts of the world, new Muslims are welcomed into the community amid great fanfare. Whereas, on one hand, this may be viewed as positive where the community is valuing *Daʿwah* and the accompanying *Shahādah*; however, in many cases, the New Muslims are not asked if they feel comfortable being paraded in front of strangers and whether a public announcement of their embracing Islam may cause emotional distress or even possibly subject them to physical and material harm.

Some Islamic societies and *Daʿīs* further exploit conversions by publicising them in the hopes of raising funds and creating awareness for their "good work." This not only undermines the sincerity of the welcoming process but can also lead to feelings of confusion and even resentment by the convert, who might struggle to find genuine love and care in a community more focused on optics.

This chapter deals with the process of conversion to Islam – the *Shahādah*. It is a response to the research question – what is the social and emotional impact of the *Shahādah* on a Filipino becoming Muslim in Bahrain?

7.2 BECOMING MUSLIM

> *Ashhadu an lā ilāha illā Allāh; Wa Ashhadu anna Muḥammadan Rasūlu Allāh.*
>
> I testify that there is no god except Allah; and I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah.

In theory, becoming Muslim is a very simple process, all one has to do is to declare the above twofold testament of faith, the "*Shahādah*," preferably in the original Arabic, and one is a Muslim.

In practice, this declaration of faith takes many forms and is sometimes fraught with lengthy processes that may take weeks, even months before one is officially considered Muslim. It is nonetheless a milestone event in the life of a convert to Islam. For most New Muslims, the moment of *Shahādah* is highly emotional. For many it is a joyous occasion, and it is not uncommon to see tears of happiness and relief on the faces of converts and their friends and family. But for some, it can be a source of anxiety and insecurity. The process of becoming Muslim seems simple enough, but it is a life-changing event that comes with responsibilities and ramifications.

This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of the pivotal moment when a Filipino in Bahrain embraces Islam. It addresses the research question, what is the social and emotional impact of the *Shahādah* on a Filipino becoming Muslim in Bahrain? And in doing so, it describes the emotional and psychological state of a New Muslim, examining the doubts and hesitation that may surface just before, during, or after switching faith. By exploring the manner in which a *Shahādah* is administered along with the experiences shared by Filipinos interviewed and surveyed, this chapter sheds light on the internal struggles and external pressures that converts go through. The findings presented highlight the importance of the *Shahādah* and its impact on the subsequent follow up and care of New Muslims.

7.3 THE *SHAHĀDAH*

The *Shahādah* is at the core of the Islamic creed, serving as a bridge between disbelief and belief. It is the formal declaration that an individual makes to announce their acceptance and embrace of Islam.

7.3.1 Meaning and Significance of *Shahādah*

The Arabic word *Shahādah* literally means “testimony” or “witnessing.” It is derived from the letters Sh-H-D that together form a root word that means “to witness,” “to observe,” or “to testify.” This root word or its derivative appears in the *Qurʾān* numerous times. In Surah Al-Imran, Allah bears witness to Himself being God.

> God bears witness that there is no god but He, as do the angels and the possessors of knowledge, upholding justice. There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise[1].

This verse categorically asserts that Allah is first to bear witness to His Unity because He alone possesses the knowledge of His own being. Allah is the Ultimate Witness. He was there when no one else existed. It was narrated by Imran bin Hussain that the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) received a Yemeni delegation who asked what was in the beginning. The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) replied, "There was Allah and nothing else before Him and His Throne was over the water, and He then created the Heavens and the Earth and wrote everything in the Book[2]".

Elsewhere, we find the verb form "sha-ha-da" which means "to witness something," "to testify," in court for example, or to "affirm a truth." The root word also gives rise to words like, "*Mushāhid*," meaning "observer" or "spectator," and "*Shahīd*" denoting "martyr" or "witness."

As an Islamic concept, *Shahādah* refers to the first and foremost Pillar of Islam – bearing witness that there is no god except Allah and that Muḥammad is His messenger. It is the foundation upon which all Islam is based. All knowledge, all understanding, and all faith is derived from it. It is the basis of belief without which one cannot claim or be considered a Muslim.

Apart from it being the entry point to Islam, this two-part testimony is ubiquitous in everyday Muslim life. The call to prayer, the *Adhān*, and the call to stand for prayer in congregation, *Iqāmah*, both have the same phrase repeated, "*Ashhadu an lā ilāha illā Allāh*," and "*Ashhadu anna Muḥammadan Rasūlu Allāh*." The same testimony is repeated by Muslims several times a day during the seated portion of the *Ṣalāh*, known as *Tashahhud*.

> Ibn ʻAbbas reported: The Messenger of Allah used to teach us *Tashahhud* just as he used to teach us a Surah of the *Qurʾān*, and he would say: "All services rendered by words, acts of worship, and all good things are due to Allah. Peace be upon you, O Prophet, and Allah's mercy and blessings. Peace be upon us and upon Allah's upright servants. I testify that there is

[1] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 3:18.

[2] Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith 7418, Book of the Prohibited Actions, accessed November 19, 2024, Sunnah.com, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7418.

no god but Allah, and I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah[3].”

Muslims also recite the *Shahādah* to a newborn baby as part of the *Adhān*. And Muslims pray earnestly for these two statements to be the last words they utter before they die. The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said: “There is no soul that died bearing witness to *Lā ilāha illā Allāh*, and that I am the Messenger of Allah, from the heart with certainty, but Allah will forgive it[4]”.

The *Shahādah* is made up of two essential components and therefore also referred to as the *Shahādatayn* (double testimony): *Shahādah al-Tawḥīd* (the testimony that there is no god except Allah), and *Shahādah al-Risālah* (the testimony that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah)[5].

Shahādah al-Tawḥīd, after the “I testify” part is in two halves, the first half (*Lā ilāha*) “there is no god” is in negative form, while the second is a positive affirmation (*illā Allāh*) “except Allah.” By negation, it reduces everything that is not Allah to nothingness. It is a negation of all deities, beliefs, convictions, or any faith in anything, including lack of any faith. The negation is immediately followed by the affirmation “except Allah” denoting that the only One worthy of worship is Allah. The affirmation further implies that it is only Allah that has existed, does exist, and will always exist. Allah states in the *Qurʾān*, “And call not upon another god along with God. There is no god but He! All things perish, save His Face…”[6]. In this manner, the Absolute independence and Unity of Allah (*Al-Aḥad*) is established in contrast to the impermanence, and total dependence on Allah, of all of Allah’s creation – in other words, all the realms of existence (*Al-ʿĀlamīn*), everything apart from Allah. The first part of the *Shahādah* forms the basis of a Muslim’s understanding of *Tawḥīd*.

The second component, *Shahādah al-Risālah*, confesses to Prophet Muḥammad as the Messenger of Allah[7]. This denotes that the witness asserts that Muḥammad has

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[3] Imam Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, "The Book of Prayers," Hadith 403a, accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/muslim:403A.

[4] Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, "Hadith 3796," in *The Virtue of Saying None Has the Right to Be Worshipped but Allah*, accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:3796.

[5] Muhammad ’Abdul Haq, “The Meaning and Significance of the Shahādah,” *Islamic Studies* 23, no. 3 (1984): 171–87, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20847269.

[6] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 28:88.

[7] Muhammad ’Abdul Haq, “The Meaning and Significance of the Shahādah,” *Islamic Studies* 23, no. 3 (1984): 171–87.

conveyed the message from Allah to humanity. These Divine messages collected and put together as directed by the Prophet constitute the *Qurʾān*. And by bearing witness to Prophet Muḥammad, one is also testifying belief in the *Qurʾān* as the exact words of Allah, verbatim, and in the order that they have been collected and preserved. By doing so, a Muslim accepts the commandments and directives in the *Qurʾān* as Allah's ever-present pronouncements to all of humanity[8]. Furthermore, the Prophet Muḥammad is seen as the embodiment of the *Qurʾān*, making it incumbent on Muslims to follow his model (*Sunnah*) and teachings (*Ḥadīth*).

Thus, the *Shahādah* becomes the foundation of a Muslim's identity and faith. It captures the core of Islam by combining the exclusive belief in the Oneness of Allah (*Tawḥīd*) with the pledge to live according to the commandments and directives of the *Qurʾān* as personified in the example and sayings of Prophet Muḥammad, the final messenger of Allah.

7.4 *SHAHĀDAH* DURING THE TIME OF THE PROPHET (SAW)

During the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, the declaration of faith – the *Shahādah* – held a profound significance both spiritually, as the declaration of joining the fledgling faith, and socially, accepting the impact this declaration has on one's standing and even one's safety and security.

> The Prophethood of Muḥammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) began in the year 610 CE. Muḥammad ibn Abdullah, a tradesman from the tribe of Quraysh used to meditate in the cave of Hira on the outskirts of his home city of Makkah. During one such retreat, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to him and conveyed the first five verses of what would eventually become the *Qurʾān*.
>
> Recite in the Name of thy Lord Who created, created man from a blood clot. Recite! Thy Lord is most noble, Who taught by the Pen, taught man that which he knew not[9].

This event marked the beginning of Prophethood and the beginning of Islam. As such, Prophet Muḥammad himself may be considered the first convert to Islam. The Prophet shared the message of Islam with his wife, Khadījah, his young cousin, ʿAlī ibn

[8] Ismail Al Faruqi and Imtiyaz Yusuf, "Shahādah (The Confession of Faith)," in *Islam: Religion, Practice, Culture & World Order* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012), 25–28, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvkc67zd.11.

[9] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 96:1-5.

Abī Ṭālib, his adopted son and freed slave, Zayd, and his close friend Abū Bakr. These were the first few people close to the Prophet who took the *Shahādah* at the hands of the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

According to the *Seerat Rasul Allah* (Biography of the Messenger of Allah) by Ibn Ishaq[10], the Prophet used to perform the daily *Ṣalāh* accompanied by his wife and his cousin, Ali. At one such occasion, Ali's father, Abū Ṭālib found them praying and asked the Prophet about this new religion, to which the Prophet invited his uncle. Abū Ṭālib refused to abandon his tribal faith but promised to protect Muḥammad as long he lived. Abū Ṭālib then asked his son, ʿAlī, about his newfound faith.

> 'Ali, 'My boy, what is this religion of yours?' He answered, 'I believe in God and in the apostle of God, and I declare that what he has brought is true, and I pray to God with him and follow him.' They allege that he (Abu Talib) said, 'He would not call you to anything but what is good so stick to him.'"

Abū Bakr was a wealthy businessman and highly respected amongst the Quraysh, he began to openly invite his closest associates to Islam. Several well-known companions of the Prophet, like ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, Zubair ibn ʿAwwām, Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf, Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, and Ṭalḥah ibn ʿUbayd Allāh, took their *Shahādah* and became Muslim through Abū Bakr's *Daʿwah*. Regarding Abū Bakr, the Prophet is reported to have said: "I have never invited anyone to accept Islam, but he has shown signs of reluctance, suspicion, and hesitation, except Abū Bakr. When I told him of it, he did not hold back or hesitate[11]."

For the early converts in Makkah, publicly professing the *Shahādah* or performing prayers in the open was a daring act of courage, that often resulted in persecution, economic boycott, and social ostracism by their family and their tribe. Some of these NMs, like Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, Abū Fakih (Aflaha), Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt, and Ammār ibn Yāsir faced bitter persecution for declaring the *Shahādah* and accepting Islam. Some even faced death. Ammār's mother and father, Yāsir ibn Amir and Summayah bint Khayyāṭ became the first martyrs of Islam. They were killed by the leaders of the Quraysh for declaring "there is no god but Allah and Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah." For the early Muslims, accepting Islam and rejecting their

[10] Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad*.
[11] *ibid*.

ancestral beliefs was tantamount to declaring war on the Quraysh. The tribe's economic prosperity and social standing among the tribes and towns of Arabia were deeply intertwined with their role as guardians of the idol-filled *Kaʿbah*. It was Prophet Ibrāhīm and his son Prophet Ismāʿīl who built the *Kaʿbah* in Makkah, a house of worship dedicated to the One true God, Allah. Over time, their monotheistic faith got corrupted and the *Kaʿbah* and its surroundings came to house hundreds of tribal gods, idols set up as partners to Allah. It was in this hostile environment that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did *Daʿwah*, inviting his fellow townsmen to abandon their idols and exclusively worship One God.

In order to avoid harassment and torture, many of the early Muslims kept their *Shahādah* secret. The early Muslims used to meet the Prophet in the house of *al-Arqam* (*Dār al-Arqam*) to learn about and practice their new faith. Not all the early converts hid their faith. In the books of *Ḥadīth*, the conversion of a prominent and outspoken companion of the Prophet, Abū Dharr al--Ghifāri is described in considerable detail.

> Narrated Abu Jamra: Ibn 'Abbas said to us, "Shall I tell you the story of Abū Dharr's conversion to Islam?" We said, "Yes." He said, "Abū Dharr said: I was a man from the tribe of *Ghifār*. We heard that a man had appeared in Mecca, claiming to be a Prophet. I said to my brother, 'Go to that man and talk to him and bring me his news.' He set out, met him and returned. I asked him, 'What is the news with you?' He said, 'By Allah, I saw a man enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil.' I said to him, 'You have not satisfied me with this little information.' So, I took a waterskin and a stick and proceeded towards Makkah. Neither did I know him (i.e. the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)), nor did I like to ask anyone about him. I kept on drinking Zam Zam water and staying in the Mosque. Then 'Ali passed by me and said, 'It seems you are a stranger?' I said, 'Yes.' He proceeded to his house, and I accompanied him. Neither did he ask me anything, nor did I tell him anything. Next morning I went to the Mosque to ask about the Prophet, but no-one told me anything about him. 'Ali passed by me again and asked, 'Hasn't the man recognized his dwelling place yet?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'Come along with me.' He asked me, 'What is your business? What has brought you to this town?' I said to him, 'If you keep my secret, I will tell you.' He said, 'I will do,' I said to him, 'We have heard that a person has appeared here, claiming to be a Prophet. I sent my brother to speak to him and when he returned, he did not bring a satisfactory report; so, I thought of meeting him personally.' 'Ali said (to Abū Dharr), 'You have reached your goal; I am going to him just now, so follow me, and wherever I enter, enter after me. If I should see someone who may cause you trouble, I will stand near a wall pretending to mend my shoes (as a warning), and you should go away then.' 'Ali proceeded and I accompanied him till he entered a place, and I entered with him to the

> Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to whom I said, 'Present (the principles of) Islam to me.' When he did, I embraced Islam immediately. He said to me, 'O Abū Dharr! Keep your conversion as a secret and return to your town; and when you hear of our victory, return to us.' I said, 'By Him Who has sent you with the Truth, I will announce my conversion to Islam publicly amongst them (i.e. the infidels).' I (Abū Dharr) went to the Mosque, where some people from Quraysh were present, and said, 'O folk of Quraysh! I testify that None has the right to be worshipped except Allah, and I (also) testify that Muḥammad is Allah's Slave and His Apostle.' (Hearing that) the Qurayshi men said, 'Get at this Sahabi (i.e. Muslim)!' They got up and beat me nearly to death. Al-Abbas saw me and threw himself over me to protect me. He then faced them and said, 'Woe to you! You want to kill a man from the tribe of *Ghifār*, although your trade and your communications are through the territory of *Ghifār*?' They therefore left me. The next morning, I returned (to the Mosque) and said the same as I have said on the previous day. They again said, 'Get at this Sahabi!' I was treated in the same way as on the previous day, and again Al-Abbas found me and threw himself over me to protect me and told them the same as he had said the day before.' So, that was the conversion of Abū Dharr (may Allah be Merciful to him) to Islam[12]."

Around the third year prophethood, the small Muslim community faced escalating hostility from the Quraysh. In order to avoid the intense persecution, the Prophet sent a dozen Muslims to Abyssinia to seek refuge under the protection of the just Christian king, the Negus, in 615 CE. Despite the Quraysh's attempts to persuade the king to hand them over, the Muslims were allowed to stay. As the situation got worse in Makkah, a second, larger group of over a hundred companions of the Prophet migrated to Abyssinia the following year. The Quraysh, determined to bring them back, sent emissaries with gifts for the Abyssinian king (the Negus) and the Christian priests, accusing the Muslims of blaspheming against Jesus. However, after listening to Jāʿfar ibn Abū Ṭālib's account of Prophet Jesus, the Negus is reported to have taken a stick from the ground and say, "By God, Jesus, son of Mary, does not exceed what you have said by the length of this stick." According to Ibn Ishaq, the Negus embraced Islam. His acceptance of the faith is a unique example of *Shahādah* from the Seerah of the Prophet.

> Ja'far b. Muḥammad told me on the authority of his father that the Abyssinians assembled and said to the Negus, 'You have left our religion' and they revolted against him. So, he sent to Ja'far and his companions and prepared ships for them, saying, 'Embark in these and be ready. If I am defeated, go where you please; if I am victorious, then stay where you are.' Then he took paper and wrote, 'He testifies that there is no god but

[12] Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "Hadith 3522," *Virtues and Merits of the Prophet (pbuh) and His Companions*, accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3522.

> Allah and that Muḥammad is His slave and apostle; and he testifies that Jesus, Son of Mary, is His slave, His apostle, His spirit and His word, which He cast into Mary.' Then he put it in his gown near the right shoulder and went out to the Abyssinians, who were drawn up in array to meet him. He said, 'O people, have I not the best claim among you?' 'Certainly,' they said. 'And what do you think of my life among you?' 'Excellent.' 'Then what is your trouble?' 'You have forsaken our religion and assert that Jesus is a slave.' 'Then what do you say about Jesus?' 'We say that he is the son of God.' The Negus put his hand upon his breast over his gown, (signifying), 'He testifies that Jesus, the Son of Mary, was no more than "this".' By this he meant what he had written, but they were content and went away. News of this reached the prophet, and when the Negus died, he prayed over him and begged that his sins might be forgiven[13].

During this time, the conditions in Makkah got even more perilous for the Prophet and the small Muslim community. On one occasion, Abū Jahl – a leader of the Quraysh and a fierce opponent of Islam – verbally and physically attacked the Prophet. On hearing of this, Ḥamzah ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, the Prophet's uncle, was deeply offended and hurried to the *Kaʿbah* where he found Abū Jahl seated amongst a group of Makkīyūn. Ibn Ishaq[14] further describes this incidence.

> When he (Hamza) lifted up his bow and struck him violently with it, saying "Will you insult him when I follow his religion, and say what he says? Hit me back if you can!" Some of Banī Makhzūm got up to go to Abu Jahl's help, but he (Abu Jahl) said, "Let Abu 'Umara alone for, by God, I insulted his nephew deeply." Hamza's Islam was complete, and he followed the Apostle's commands. When he became a Muslim, the Quraysh recognized that the Apostle had become strong, and had found a protector in Hamza, and so they abandoned some of their ways of harassing him."

Ibn Kathir in Al-Seera al-Nabawiyya added, "'And who's going to prevent me?' demanded Ḥamzah, 'when I now see clearly and can testify that he is the Messenger of God and that what he says is the truth. I'll not retract, so you just go on and stand in my way, if you're serious![15]'".

Al-Mubarakpuri[16] in *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum* (the Sealed Nectar), describes Hamza's conversion as "derived from the pride of a man who would not accept the

[13] Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad.*

[14] ibid.

[15] Ibn Kathīr, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, trans. Trevor Le Gassick, vol. 1 (UK: Garnet Publishing, 1998).

[16] Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum*.

concept of others humiliating his relative." This is reminiscent of the third type of convert[17]. Al-Mubarakpuri further states about Hamza becoming a true believer, "Later on however, Allah purified his nature, and he managed to grasp the most trustworthy handhold (faith in Allah). He proved to be a great strength to the Islamic faith and its followers."

Another significant addition to the Muslim community, was the conversion of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. As described in chapter 4[18], ʿUmar was on his way to kill the Prophet but was diverted upon learning that his sister and brother-in-law had taken *Shahādah*. He confronted his sister and her husband and attacked them. Seeing his sister hurt and bleeding caused ʿUmar to soften and reflect. He asked to read the verses of the *Qurʾān* that he had overheard them recite before he came upon them. His sister refused to give him the page of the *Qurʾān* until he had cleaned himself. ʿUmar washed himself and then read the opening verse of Surah Taha until he reached, "Truly I am God, there is no god but I. So, worship Me, and perform the prayer for the remembrance of Me.[19]"

Umar read the verses and was moved by them. He asked to be taken to the Prophet. Ibn Ishaq in his Seerah describes Umar's conversion as follows.

> So 'Umar took his sword and girt it on, and made for the Apostle and his companions, and knocked on the door. When they heard his voice one of the companions got up and looked through a chink in the door, and when he saw him girt with his sword, he went back to the apostle in fear, and said, "It is 'Umar with his sword on." Hamza said, "Let him in; if he has come with peaceful intent, we will treat him well; if he has come with ill intent, we will kill him with his own sword." The Apostle gave the word, and he was let in. The Apostle rose and met him in the room, seized him round the girdle or by the middle of his cloak, and dragged him along violently, saying, "What has brought you, son of Khattab, for by God, I do not think you will cease (your persecution) until God brings calamity upon you." 'Umar replied, "O Apostle of God, I have come to you to believe in God and His Apostle and what he has brought from God." The Apostle gave thanks to God so loudly that the whole household knew that 'Umar had become a Muslim[20].

The conversions of Hamza and ʿUmar and the support afforded by the Negus of Abyssinia greatly strengthened the Muslim community of Makkah. The Quraysh put

[17] See Chapter 6.9

[18] See Section 4.7.2.

[19] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 20:14.

[20] Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad*.

even greater pressure on the Muslims by declaring a social and economic boycott of the Prophet's clans, the Banū Hāshim and the Banū ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. The boycott dragged on for three years and only ended when some of the Quraysh took pity on their relatives and called for the annulment of the unjust boycott. Shortly after, the Prophet faced personal tragedies. His wife and supporter from the beginning of Prophethood, Khadījah and his protector, Abū Ṭālib passed away.

In the eleventh year of Prophethood, a group of six men from the Khazraj tribe in Yathrib had visited the Prophet and taken their *Shahādah*. The following year, during the Pilgrimage season, five of these men accompanied by another seven from Yathrib visited the Prophet and gave their pledge of allegiance to him. This came to be known as the First 'Aqaba Pledge. The Prophet sent Mūsāb 'ibn Umair as his envoy and *Dāʿī* with this group of twelve to the people of Yathrib. Mūsāb's *Daʿwah* was hugely fruitful and large numbers of people in Yathrib became Muslim. Al-Mubarakpuri[21] describes the second delegation from Yathrib as follows.

> The next year, thirteenth of Prophethood, June 622 A.D., during the pilgrimage season, over seventy converts from *Madīnah* came in the trail of their polytheist people to perform the rituals of pilgrimage in Makkah. The oft-repeated question amongst them was "Isn't it high time we protect Muḥammad instead of leaving him forsaken, deserted and stumbling in the hillocks of Makkah?"

These Yathribites swore allegiance to the Prophet, promising to protect him and the Muslims of Makkah.

> On the authority of Jabir, who said: "When we started to pay allegiance to the Prophet [Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him], Asʿad ibn Zurārah stood up and gave the following short address: 'Take it easy people of Yathrib! We have not covered that long distance except because we have had deep belief that he (Muḥammad [Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him]) is the Messenger of Allah. We are already convinced that following him entails departure from the pagan Arabs even if it were at the risk of our life. Should you preserve in this course, holdfast to it, and your great reward is placed in the Hand of Allah, but if you are caught in fear, I admonish you to give it up just now, and then you would be more excusable by Allah[22].'"

Following the Second or Greater Pledge of 'Aqaba, the Prophet granted permission to the persecuted Muslims of Makkah to migrate to the emerging Muslim

[21] Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum*.

[22] *ibid*.

state in Yathrib. In September 622 CE, during the fourteenth year of Prophethood, he undertook the *Hijrah* (migration) along with his companion Abū Bakr to Yathrib, which was later renamed Madinat-un-Nabi. This historic migration marked the beginning of a new era for the Muslim community and the advent of the Islamic Hijri calendar.

In *Madīnah*, the Messenger of Allah established a strong, cohesive Muslim community. He united the warring tribes of Aws and Khazraj and created a brotherhood between the migrants from Makkah (the *Muhājir*) and the hosts of *Madīnah*, the helpers (the *Anṣār*). One of his first acts in the "city of the Prophet" was to build a mosque. He drafted the Constitution of *Madīnah* and formed alliances with various tribes, including the Jews of *Madīnah*. Abdullah bin Salam, a Jew living in *Madīnah* converted to Islam. His conversion narrative is given in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.

> Narrated Anas: 'Abdullah bin Salam heard the news of the arrival of Allah's Messenger (in *Madīnah*) while he was on a farm collecting its fruits. So, he came to the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said, "I will ask you about three things which nobody knows unless he be a prophet. Firstly, what is the first portent of the Hour? What is the first meal of the people of Paradise? And what makes a baby look like its father or mother?" The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Just now Gabriel has informed me about that." 'Abdullah said, "Gabriel?" The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Yes." 'Abdullah said, "He, among the angels is the enemy of the Jews." On that the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) recited this Holy Verse: "Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel (let him die in his fury!) for he has brought it (i.e. *Qurʾān*) down to your heart by Allah's permission." (2:97) Then he added, "As for the first portent of the Hour, it will be a fire that will collect the people from the East to West. And as for the first meal of the people of Paradise, it will be the caudite (i.e. extra) lobe of the fish liver. And if a man's discharge proceeded that of the woman, then the child resembles the father, and if the woman's discharge proceeded that of the man, then the child resembles the mother." On hearing that, 'Abdullah said, "I testify that None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, and that you are the Messenger of Allah. O, Allah's Messenger (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him); the Jews are liars, and if they should come to know that I have embraced Islam, they would accuse me of being a liar." In the meantime, some Jews came (to the Prophet) and he asked them, "What is 'Abdullah's status amongst you?" They replied, "He is the best amongst us, and he is our chief and the son of our chief." The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "What would you think if 'Abdullah bin Salam embraced Islam?" They replied, "May Allah protect him from this!" Then 'Abdullah came out and said, "I testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah." The Jews then said, "Abdullah is the worst of us and the son of the worst of us," and disparaged him. On that 'Abdullah said, "O Allah's

> Messenger (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)! This is what I was afraid of![23]"

Over the following decade, the Muslims in *Madīnah* defended themselves against the Quraysh of Makkah in the battles of Badr, Uhud, and the Battle of the Trench. The influence of the Prophet and the Muslim community continued to expand. With the signing of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah in 628 CE tensions with the Quraysh eased giving way to large numbers of people accepting Islam from all over Arabia. One such conversion is narrated in Sunan Abū Dawood.

> Abū Hurayrah said "The Apostle of Allah sent some horsemen to Najd, and they brought a man of the Banu Hanifah called Thumāmah ibn Uthāl who was the chief of the people of Al Yamamah and bound him to one of the pillars of the mosque. The Apostle of Allah came out to him and said, "What are you expecting, Thumamah?" He replied "I expect good, Muḥammad. If you kill (me), you will kill one whose blood will be avenged, if you show favor, you will show it to one who is grateful and if you want property and ask you will be given as much of it as you wish. The Apostle of Allah left him till the following day and asked him, "What are you expecting, Thumamah?" He repeated the same words (in reply). The Apostle of Allah left him till the day after the following one and he mentioned the same words. The Apostle of Allah then said, "Set Thumamah free." He (Thumamah) went off to some palm trees near the mosque. He took a bath there and entered the mosque and said, "I testify that there is no god, but Allah and I testify that Muḥammad is His servant and His Apostle[24]."

In the eighth year of *Hijrah* (630 CE), the Prophet marched toward Makkah at the head of over ten thousand companions. Abu Sufyan the leader of the Quraysh in Makkah visited the Muslim encampment to assess the situation. He was intercepted by the Prophet's uncle, Al-Abbas who took Abu Sufyan through the Muslim camp, where he witnessed the strength and discipline of the Muslim forces. The next morning, Abu Sufyan was brought before the Prophet. Al-Abbas describes Abu Sufyan's meeting with the Prophet and his eventual reluctant *Shahādah*.

> The Apostle told me to take him away to my quarters and bring him back in the morning. He stayed the night with me, and I took him in to see the Apostle early in the morning and when he saw him, he said, "Isn't it time that you should recognize that there is no God but Allah?" He (Abu Sufyan) answered, "You are dearer to me than my father and mother. How great is your clemency, honour, and kindness! By God, I thought

[23] Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Prophetic Commentary on the Qur'an (Tafseer of the Prophet [pbuh]), "Hadith 4480," accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4480.

[24] Sunan Abi Dawud, *Jihad (Kitab Al-Jihad)*, "Hadith 2679," accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/abudawud:2679.

> that had there been another god with God he would have continued to help me." He (the Apostle) said: "Woe to you, Abu Sufyan, isn't it time that you recognize that I am God's apostle?" He answered, "As to that I still have some doubt." I said to him, "Submit and testify that there is no god, but Allah and that Muḥammad is the Apostle of God before you lose your head," so he did so[25].

In 631 CE, the Prophet Muḥammad sent one of his learned companions, Muadh ibn Jabal to Yemen as a governor and teacher.

> Ibn 'Abbas reported: The Prophet appointed Mu'adh as governor of Yemen, and at the time of his departure, he instructed him thus: "First of all, call the people to testify '*Lā ilāha illā Allāh*' (there is no true god except Allah) and that I (Muḥammad) am the Messenger of Allah, and if they accept this (declaration of Faith), then tell them that Allah has enjoined upon them five *Ṣalāh* during the day and night; and if they obey you, tell them that Allah has made the payment of *Zakāh* obligatory upon them. It should be collected from their rich and distributed among their poor[26]."

The Messenger of Allah continued the work of *Daʿwah* until his death. In 632 CE, during the Farewell Pilgrimage, the Prophet addressed over one hundred thousand companions, confirming that he had executed his mission of *Daʿwah*.

> "Have I not delivered the Message (of my Lord)?" "Yes, you have." Said they (the companions). "O Allah! Bear witness! Let him that is present convey it unto him who is absent. For haply, many people to whom the Message is conveyed may be more mindful of it than the audience," said he (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)[27].

On the twelfth of Rabi' al-Awal (the third month of the Islamic calendar), in the eleventh year of *Hijrah*, the Prophet Muḥammad passed away in *Madīnah* and was buried right next to his Mosque. His death marked the end of Prophethood for all times.

7.5 *SHAHĀDAH* WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

There are two types of conversions conducted within the Organization, in-person *Shahādah*, and *Shahādah* given online over the phone or over social media.

[25] Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad*.

[26] Riyad as-Salihin, *The Book of Virtues*, "Hadith 1208," accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:1208.

[27] Safi-ur-Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum*.

7.5.1 In-Person *Shahādah*

The majority of conversions to Islam in Bahrain are in-person. Regardless of reason, when someone decides to become Muslim, they typically take the *Shahādah* in the presence of Muslim witnesses. In some cases, this happens at one of the Organization's offices, in many cases the *Shahādah* takes place wherever the Muslim-to-be is ready to accept Islam – this could be their home, their workplace, in a restaurant or a café, or even on a street. Irrespective of the location, the manner in which the *Shahādah* is administered is the same.

The prospective Muslim is asked by a staff member or volunteer – often a *Dāʿī* – if they are prepared to embrace Islam. It is emphasized that they must be accepting Islam of their own free will, without any coercion or external pressure, before proceeding with the *Shahādah*. The procedure for accepting Islam is then relayed to them. They are reassured that it is a very simple process and would require them to repeat after the *Dāʿī* two lines in Arabic (the *Shahādah*) whose meaning is given to them in their native language. For example, Filipinos would typically be told the meaning of the *Shahādah* in Tagalog. They would then be asked if they clearly understand the meaning and the implication of taking the *Shahādah*. Great emphasis would be placed on understanding *Tawḥīd* and the gravity of associating partners with Allah. Once the potential Muslim has fully understood and agrees to go ahead, the *Dāʿī* then asks them to repeat after him (or her) the *Shahādah* in Arabic. Care is taken to pronounce the syllables slowly and one-at-a-time so as to make it easy for the Muslim-to-be to repeat. While it is customary for individuals to raise the index finger of their right hand while reciting the *Shahādah*, this gesture is optional and not obligatory. For Christians converting to Islam, an additional oath is added, "I testify that Jesus, the son of Mary, is a messenger and servant of Allah," and sometimes, "and he is not the son of God." Although these additional statements are not a legal requirement in Islamic jurisprudence, they are recommended to remove any confusion about the status of Prophet Jesus in Islam.

The *Shahādah* is often witnessed by several people, with the individual sometimes bringing along family and friends to celebrate the occasion. And in almost all cases, the *Dāʿī* makes sure that a second Muslim volunteer or staff – often an *Anṣār* – is present to co-witness the *Shahādah*. The *Dāʿī* introduces the *Anṣār* as the primary care giver and mentor for the New Muslim. Together, the *Dāʿī* and *Anṣār* welcome the

New Muslim into the community. They guide the NM about what to expect over the course of the next few hours, days, and weeks. They may counsel the convert on the likelihood of facing resistance from family, friends, co-workers, etc. They are reassured that they will be accompanied every step of their journey. At this point it is essential that the *Anṣār* provide the emotional support that many new converts need. They emphasize the importance of learning more about the faith over time but prioritize emotional care initially. To facilitate ongoing care and eventually Islamic education, the New Muslim is requested to share their phone number and provide a copy of their Bahraini ID card. With permission, the *Anṣār* contacts the convert the same evening or the following day to check in and offer further assistance[28].

Before parting, the New Muslim is presented with thoughtful "Islamic" gifts tailored to their needs. These may include a copy of the *Qurʾān* (in both Arabic and their native language), introductory books on Islam, a prayer mat, a headscarf and an *ʿabāyah* (long outer garment) for women, and a *thawb* (long shirt to the ankles) and *kūfī* (skullcap) for men. The specific gifts vary on the individual needs and facilitate welcoming the New Muslim.

Within less than a week after conversion, the *Anṣār* meets up with New Muslim in a casual setting, such as a restaurant or café, to discuss how the New Muslim is coping with their new faith. The objective is to get to know the convert better. The *Anṣār* tries to build a rapport and learn more about their family, their workplace, and how becoming a Muslim has impacted their life. Depending on the NMs comfort level, the *Anṣār* may suggest obtaining a court-issued *Shahādah* Certificate[29] and beginning classes on the basics of Islam. The level of care and education is customized to the needs and preferences of the New Muslim. Approximately 85% of the converts in the Organization request a *Shahādah* Certificate and provide the necessary documents for its processing. Over 90% of the converts start Islamic education classes within a month of taking the *Shahādah*. Almost all who start classes complete the syllabus within a year[30]. Further details on the follow-up process are covered in Chapter 8 of this thesis.

[28] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Annual Report 2024, Internal Document* Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024.

[29] See sample provided in Appendix E.

[30] ibid.

7.5.2 Online *Shahādah*

Over the past four years, approximately 60% of all the *Shahādah* s facilitated by the Organization involve individuals residing outside Bahrain. These people typically respond to social media advertisements and engage with *Daʿīs* to learn more about Islam. Once they are ready to accept Islam, the *Dāʿī* initiates a video call, or on fewer occasions an audio phone call, to guide them through the *Shahādah* process.

As with in-person *Shahādah* s, a *Dāʿī* introduces an *Anṣār* to the conference call to co-witness the conversion. The process that follows is similar to the physical *Shahādah* where the concept of *Tawḥīd* is thoroughly explained, any lingering doubts are dispelled, and the process of conversion is fully described. When the potential Muslim agrees to go ahead with the conversion, permission is taken to video (or audio) record the *Shahādah*. The *Dāʿī* then asks the prospective New Muslim to repeat the Arabic *Shahādah* after them. Care is taken to pronounce the words slowly and clearly. The New Muslim is then provided a complete translation of the *Shahādah* in their native language. Upon completion of the conversion, the New Muslim is congratulated and welcomed into the community. In the case of a Christian converting, the testimony specifying that Prophet Jesus is not the son of God and is a messenger and servant of Allah is added to the *Shahādatayn* (dual testimony).

A significant difference with online *Shahādah* s lies in the follow-up process of New Muslims. Detailed information, such as their phone number and place of residence, is collected. They are also informed that the *Anṣār* will either follow up with them using social media or if feasible, the *Anṣār* will introduce them to a local Mosque or Islamic organization that would support them in their journey in Islam. In most parts of the world, care and education of New Muslims is not prioritized by local Mosques and Islamic organizations. Many NMs handed over to local institutions face challenges in learning and practicing Islam. Fewer than half the converts outside Bahrain receive adequate emotional support or Islamic education, and some even leave the faith due to lack of follow up and care. Although online care and education are offered wherever practical, compliance to meet and learn is far less among online converts compared to their in-person counterparts[31].

[31] ibid.

In most countries, *Shahādah* Certificates or their equivalent are not available. Bahraini Islamic courts do not issue certificates to NMs who take their *Shahādah* outside the country[32].

Proper follow up, care, and education of online converts is a top priority for the Organization. Despite the many challenges, the Organization has improved follow up over the past four years and is constantly striving to improve care and support of online New Muslims. These initiatives include assisting Islamic institutions globally to focus on follow-up and sharing New Muslim Care principles and methods through local training workshops and Bahrain-based internship programs[33].

7.6 DECIDING TO BECOME MUSLIM

Changing faith is no small matter. While becoming a Muslim is technically quite easy, it is a massive change in one's worldview and, most of the times, in one's behavior. The change in faith is frequently accompanied by excitement and anticipation but also may come with great inner conflict. Once the decision is made, a new Muslim may experience a whirlwind of emotions – ranging from relief and joy to uncertainty and apprehension about the future. Like most converts, Filipinos converting to Islam in Bahrain face a myriad of emotions. Doubts and hesitation are common during this period. Many are excited about the change but fearful of what that change may bring. Foremost among the many concerns are how their family and friends will respond to their new-found faith. Some also express doubts about their own weaknesses and not being able to live up to the demands and discipline found in Islam. This section looks to the emotional side of conversion. It sheds light on the internal conflicts and challenges faced by Filipinos as they step into this new stage of their lives.

7.6.1 Emotional State Before the *Shahādah*

Before taking the *Shahādah*, individuals experience a complex mix of emotions, reflecting the significance of the decision they are about to make.

[32] ibid.

[33] ibid.

Five of the twenty-five Filipinos interviewed reported negative feelings like confusion, uncertainty, hesitation, and fear. The majority (80%) identified with positive feelings like joy, happiness, eagerness, anticipation, conviction, relief, and eagerness.

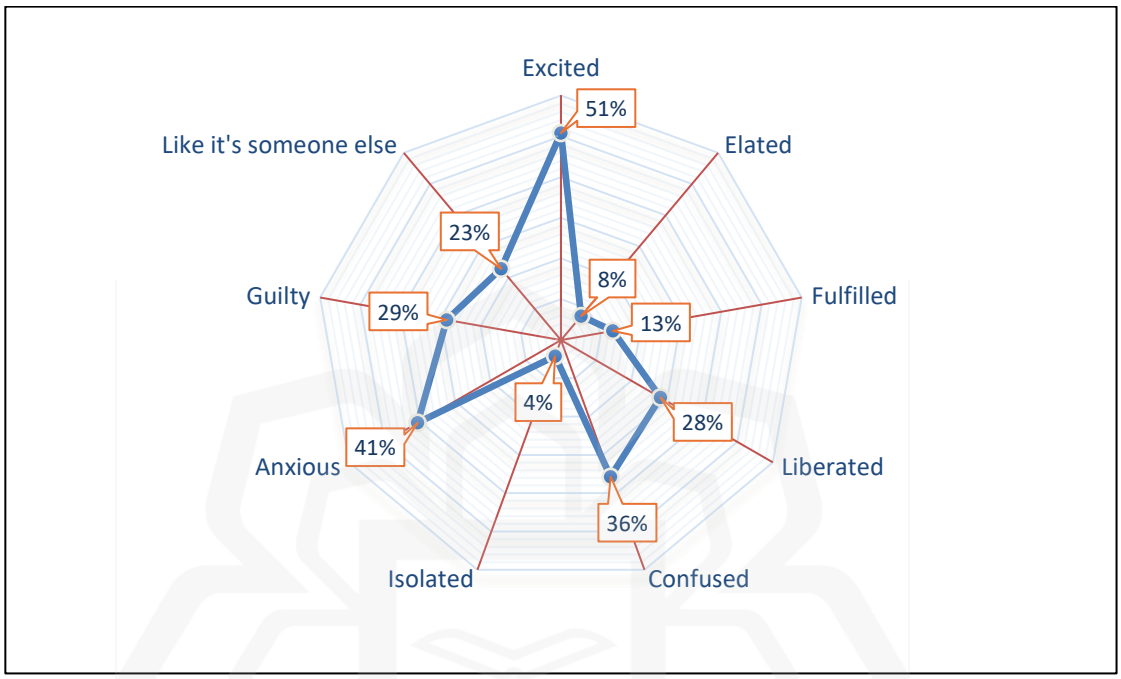


Figure 7.1 Radar Chart Depicting Emotional States Described by Survey Respondents Before the *Shahādah* (n = 596, Respondents May Choose More than One)

The radar chart in Figure 7.1 above illustrates the range of sometimes conflicting emotions reported by the Filipinos surveyed. More than half felt excited about the whole idea of accepting Islam. A small number reported elation (8%) and 77 (13%) of the 596 surveyed felt fulfilled. Over a quarter (28%) felt liberated, whereas over a third expressed confusion by the weight of the life-changing event. Only 4% reported feeling isolated – this may reflect the presence of family and friends, and reassurance provided by the *Dā ʿī* and the *Anṣār*.

Overall, negative emotions such as guilt, anxiety, and looking at the whole experience as though it were happening to someone else were quite prevalent ranging from 23% to 41%. This indicates the gravity of the decision to switch faith and is to be expected. Ullman (2013) concluded that religious conversion often involves profound emotional and psychological upheaval. Converts report anxiety, stress, and oftentimes

guilt stemming from a sense of betrayal of family, friends, and community of the faith that they are abandoning. There is also trepidation and insecurity entering into a new belief system – accepting and learning new rituals and practices, and fear of not fitting into the new faith community.

From an Islamic standpoint, one can attribute such doubts to whisperings of *Shayṭān* (Satan). When Allah created Prophet Adam and commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam, all prostrated except Iblis. Allah describes this event in Surah Al-Araf.

> Indeed, We created you, then We formed you, then We said unto the angels, "Prostrate yourselves before Adam."
>
> And they all prostrated, save Iblis; he was not among those who prostrated. He (Allah) said, "What prevented thee from prostrating when I commanded thee?" He said, "I am better than him. Thou hast created me from fire, while Thou hast created him from clay."
>
> He (Allah) said, "Get down from it! It is not for thee to wax arrogant here. So go forth! Thou art surely among those who are humbled."
>
> He (Iblis) said, "Grant me respite till the Day they are resurrected."
>
> He (Allah) said, "Truly thou art among those granted respite."
>
> He (Iblis) said, "Because Thou hast caused me to err, I shall surely lie in wait for them on Thy straight path. Then I shall come upon them from in front of them and from behind them, and from their right and from their left. And Thou wilt not find most of them thankful."
>
> He (Allah) said, "Go forth from it, disgraced and banished! Whosoever among them follows you, I shall surely fill Hell with you all.[34]"

Similar accounts of Iblis' direct refusal to obey Allah's command and the subsequent discussion are found elsewhere in the *Qurʾān*[35]. In effect Allah permitted Iblis, and by extension all *Shayāṭīn* (plural of *Shayṭān*), to try and mislead humanity. The doubts, fears, and insecurity related by Filipinos about to accept Islam may be attributed to these whisperings and machinations of *Shayṭān*.

[34] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 7:11-18.

[35] See 15:34–35, 43; 17:63; 38:77–78, 85.

7.6.2 Emotional State during the *Shahādah*

It is noteworthy that many of the negative emotions felt just prior to accepting Islam subsided during the *Shahādah* itself, giving way to more positive emotions as depicted in Figure 7.2 below.

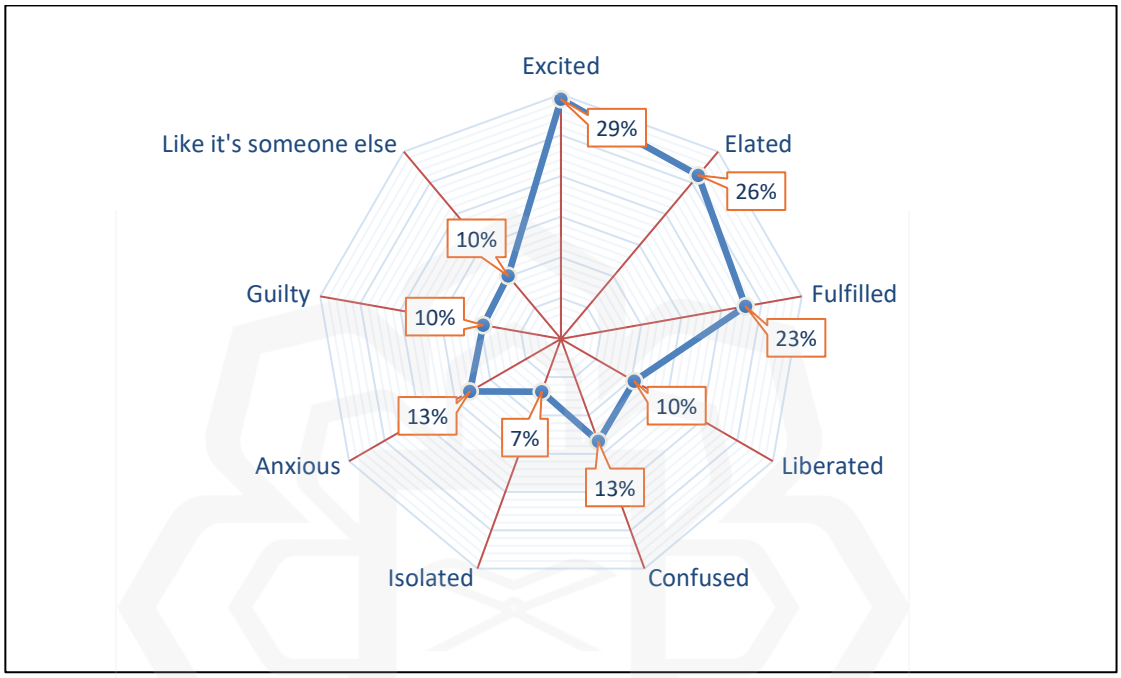


Figure 7.2 Radar Chart Depicting Emotional States Described by Survey Respondents During the *Shahādah* (n = 596, Respondents May Choose More than One)

The act of embracing Islam marks a turning point, and feelings of elation (26%), and fulfillment (23%) increase. The feeling of excitement decreases (from 51% before to 29% during) as the anticipation of taking the *Shahādah* is replaced by the actual occurrence of the *Shahādah*. Negative emotions like anxiety, guilt, and feeling like it is someone else also seem to quell during the *Shahādah* compared to just before. One explanation could be that the act of *Shahādah* is spiritually uplifting – it is an act of obedience to the Creator – and it is in sync with one's true nature and disposition (*Fiṭrah*). It makes sense that Allah replaces fear and anxiety with calm and contentment. As such, for most Filipinos surveyed, the moment of *Shahādah* was accompanied by positive feelings replacing negative emotions.

In comparison to the survey respondents, all twenty-five (100%) of the Filipinos interviewed described the moment they were taking the *Shahādah* in glowing, positive terms. "Indescribable happiness," "lightness and emotional release," and "overwhelming relief and happiness," were some of the epithets used by the Filipinos converting. Khadija, the 52-year-old domestic help, was very succinct when asked how she felt during the *Shahādah*.

> Yeah, too much happy, all my, all my burden in my life. Gone. I cried out of happiness. Happiness, brother, too much happiness.

Maryam, the 55-year-old clerk described her *Shahādah* similarly.

> I feel happy and suddenly my tears were falling because I accepted the truth without doubt and accepting Allah in my life and changing my life with Allah. That is what I believe.
>
> Yeah. When he (the *Dā ʿī*) told me, "Oh, you are now Muslim and that you are praying to Allah," my tears fell but I didn't want to cry. I feel comfortable, happy, and simple. I am now in the hands of Allah. That's in my mind.
>
> I feel like crying. No, I feel something different. I cannot explain about my feeling, but I feel different when my tears fell when I said those words. I'm happy and I feel something blew out in my mind… I felt good I feel now a lot of love and I don't have doubt because I accept the truth. I feel like I feel happy and peace of mind.

Twenty-eight-year-old hotel receptionist, Sarah, described her emotional state while taking the *Shahādah*.

> Butterflies. Butterflies, like I teared up, I teared up twice. First time I teared up was in front of him (the *Dā ʿī*). When I said that it was the first time there (on the street). Like, then I started crying in Discover Islam, it was the first time I felt accepted somewhere. Because for a while, I was floating. I didn't know where I belonged. There was a lot of confusion. So, when I said my *Shahādah*, it was like the doors had opened for me to be welcomed.
>
> For a while (before the *Shahādah*), I didn't look anywhere. Like, I wasn't practising any religion. I was just floating. So, when I said my *Shahādah*, I stopped floating, and I went somewhere, you know? It wasn't like clouds anymore. It was like, "Okay, this is finally your path."

7.6.3 Emotional State After the *Shahādah*

Following the *Shahādah*, most converts surveyed report a heightened sense of elation (51%) and fulfilment (66%), as illustrated below in Figure 7.3. For the majority of

respondents, accepting Islam brought with it a sense of relief and happiness. When compared to just before accepting Islam, negative emotions like guilt, anxiety, and confusion had dramatically subsided.

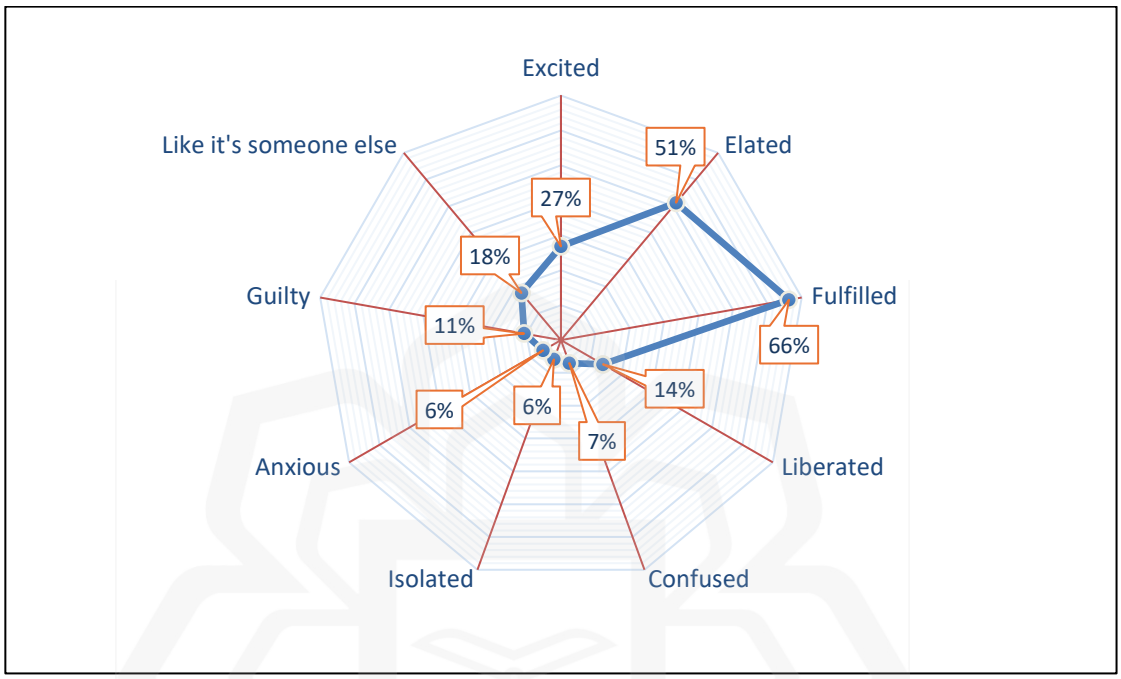


Figure 7.3 Radar Chart Depicting Emotional States Described by Survey Respondents Immediately After the *Shahādah* (n = 596, Respondents May Choose More than One)

All the Filipinos interviewed described their emotional state immediately after, and long after taking the *Shahādah* in positive terms. Some described their journey as transformative. Hafsa, the 31-year-old clerk, felt like a new person after embracing Islam. She felt deep happiness and described a sense of peace that she had not experienced before. She reflected on how her prayers made her feel calm and close to Allah, expressing, "I cannot express my happiness when I do *Ṣalāh*... it's like all the bad things in my heart are gone."

Twenty-seven-year-old interior designer, Fatimah, felt her "sins being washed away" when, after becoming Muslim, she took the ritual bath (Ghusl).

> Yeah, they (*Dāʿī* and *Anṣār*) told me to do Ghusl (ritual bath), so all of my sins from the past life, from my past life would go. When I, when I did the Ghusl, oh my God. Like I feel like something was washing away, going like in the drainage as well, you know? Like I'm imagining things

> that all of my sins are flowing down my skin, going out the drainage. The Ghusl, that Ghusl is, like, so powerful, when you do the Ghusl after. It feels like you're clean, it feels like… that's why I feel very light after *Shahādah*.

Although all the Filipinos interviewed described their post-*Shahādah* emotions positively, one of them did express some fear. Senior sales representative Aishah said that "After I freshened up and I'm looking at the books. Is that all books that I have to read? I'm looking at the ḥijāb on my head, the prayer mat they give to me in Discover Islam, and also the praying dress. I'm looking at how, how I will do this? Just only that one time. Then I keep all on the table and go to sleep."

Overall, for both, the Filipino converts interviewed, and the Filipinos surveyed, the emotional journey before, during, and after the *Shahādah* reveals a deeply transformative experience. Before taking the *Shahādah*, emotions were often conflicted, with a presence of anxiety, guilt, and confusion interspersed with great excitement and anticipation. During the *Shahādah*, these emotions shifted dramatically as feelings of elation, fulfilment, and spiritual liberation become more dominant, suggesting the power of faith overcoming the whisperings of Satan. For most Filipinos, confusion and anxiety was replaced by feelings of happiness and fulfilment after they had become Muslim.

7.7 DOUBTS ABOUT ISLAM

Doubts are a natural part of any major life decision, and embracing Islam is no exception. After taking the *Shahādah*, some converts may experience a form of cognitive dissonance or even "buyer's remorse," where the initial excitement and joy of conversion are overshadowed by second thoughts, confusion, or fear. Buyer's remorse stems from cognitive dissonance – the mental and emotional discomfort of holding conflicting beliefs. It particularly manifests itself in decisions that hold a lot of value in the eyes of the decision-maker[36]. Converts may question whether they truly thought their decision through. They may start weighing the benefits of converting against the backlash or negativity they may potentially experience or may have already

[36] Emily Rosenzweig and Thomas Gilovich, "Buyer's Remorse or Missed Opportunity? Differential Regrets for Material and Experiential Purchases," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102, no. 2 (2012): 215.

started to experience. This psychological tension can manifest itself in lingering doubts causing some to withdraw inwards and isolate themselves, others may even deny that the conversion actually took place. Do the Filipino converts surveyed and interviewed in this exploratory study reflect similar doubts? Do they exhibit these kinds of behaviours?

7.7.1 Doubts Reported by the Filipinos Interviewed

Three of the Filipinos interviewed expressed some fleeting doubts before they took the *Shahādah*. One of them was quite concerned about how her family would respond to her becoming Muslim. Another had concerns about whether he would be able to learn and fulfil his obligations as a Muslim. And the last one to express doubts, simply stated "Of course there were doubts. I didn't have any idea about it (Islam). I have a little bit of doubt because I don't know anything. Okay, I want to try it." The remaining twenty-two did not relate any doubts before accepting Islam.

All twenty-five interviewed reported to have no doubts at all during the *Shahādah* itself. And only one of the interviewees, Fatimah, said that she still has lingering doubts about her decision to become Muslim. Fatimah clearly stated that she was confident about her Islam, rather it was her family's reaction to her becoming Muslim that unnerved her. She reported that her mother and sisters never accepted her becoming Muslim. They were very upset and kept telling her that she was still Catholic and that it was only a phase she was going through. Their constant harassment and total rejection of her acceptance of Islam weighed heavily on Fatimah leading to occasional doubts about her decision.

7.7.2 Doubts Reported by Filipino's Surveyed

The column chart below (Figure 7.4) illustrates that almost a fifth of the survey respondents (19%) expressed doubts during the period leading up to the *Shahādah*. Lack of knowledge about Islamic teachings and practices may be one reason for such doubts. Fitting into the Muslim community may also be of great concern to some converts. For many Filipino New Muslims in Bahrain, these anxieties maybe compounded by the

concern of how their decision to become Muslim will be seen by their mostly Catholic family and community back home.

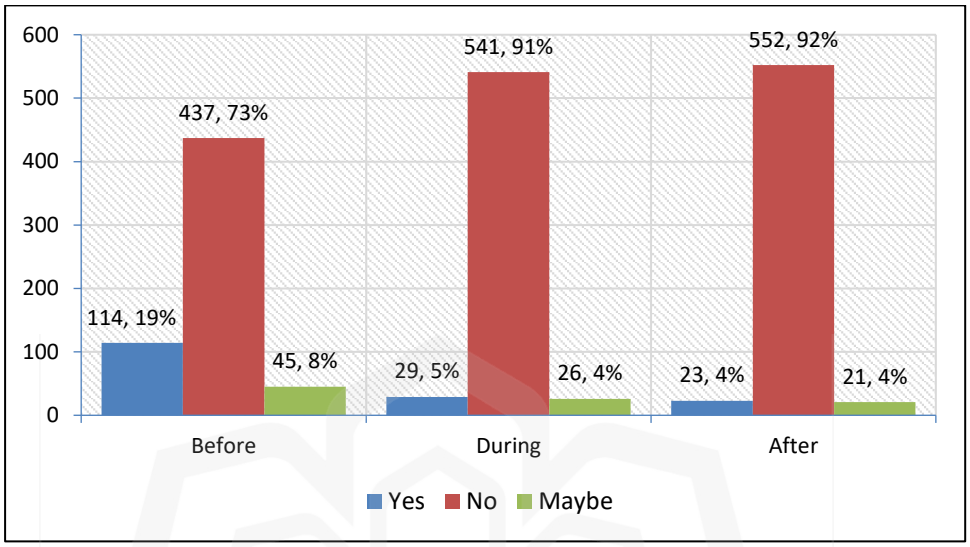


Figure 7.4 Doubts about Accepting Islam Expressed by Survey Respondents Before, During, and After *Shahādah* (n = 596)

More importantly, 73% of those surveyed did not have any doubts before the *Shahādah*. A whopping 91% of the Filipino respondents did not express doubts during the *Shahādah*, and over 92% stated that they did not have any hesitation or lingering doubts after they had become Muslim. These reports debunk the notion of "buyer's remorse" being a major part of the psychological make up of converts to Islam – at least with respect to the Filipino converts in Bahrain one can comfortably state that the overwhelming majority are firm in their acceptance of Islam and do not have any doubts. A small number, less than 4%, had lingering doubts that continued after they had become Muslim.

7.7.3 The Night After the *Shahādah*

In theory, nighttime is often when doubts and uncertainties come to the forefront. The stillness of the night can amplify internal voices, and it is during these quiet hours that Satan's whisperings tend to grow stronger, sowing seeds of fear and regret. It is a time

when new Muslims might revisit their decision, second-guessing the step they have taken and imagining worst-case scenarios.

However, the data presented in Figure 7.5 suggests a contrasting reality. Despite the potential for these negative emotions to manifest, the overwhelming majority of respondents reported sleeping peacefully and feeling at ease with their decision. The chart shows that most converts (84%) reported a peaceful night of rest following the *Shahādah*. Only 5% stated that they did not sleep well that night, and just over 10% could not recall what kind of night they had. It seems that in the case of the survey respondents the night following their major decision of converting to Islam was peaceful. Buyer's remorse or Satan's whispering do not seem to be as major a factor as anticipated.

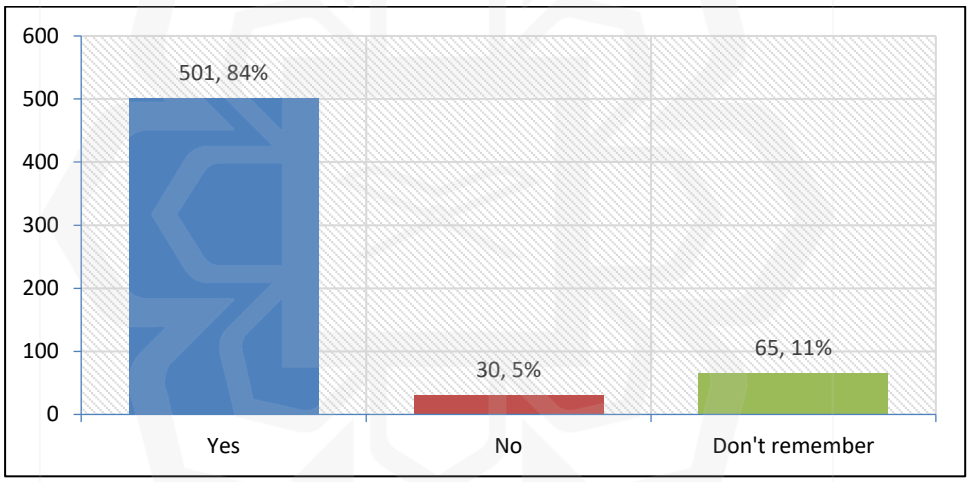


Figure 7.5 Quality of Sleep Experienced by Survey Respondents Immediately After the *Shahādah* (n = 596)

Similar to the survey respondents, the majority of Filipinos interviewed (92%) reported having a peaceful night's sleep following their *Shahādah*. Only two had difficult sleep that night. 31-year-old Umar was worried about how he would break the news of his conversion to his immediate family. Whereas, Yasmin, the 32-year-old teaching assistant from Bohol reported having nightmares the night she became Muslim.

> The first night I cannot sleep. There's a lot of things in my mind. When I slept, I had bad dreams, everything was bad. I saw the devil... I saw red

> eyes in my dream and realized it was the devil. I have the habit of putting the *Qurʾān* next to my bed when I am afraid, so I did that and tried to go back to sleep. But I didn't sleep until the morning.

Yasmin further stated that despite the difficult night, she woke up happy the next morning. And furthermore, after that first night, she never again had similar nightmares. She was at peace with her decision.

7.7.4 The Next Day After the *Shahādah*

The day following the *Shahādah* may be of emotional relevance. Looking at the world from a fresh perspective may have an impact on the New Muslim's emotional or psychological state. It may also be the gradual beginning of "coming to terms" with the idea of being a Muslim.

As illustrated in Figure 7.6, the dominant emotions reported by new converts were peacefulness, a sense of calm, happiness, and fulfilment. This suggests that for the majority of Filipino converts (44% to 62%) the decision to accept Islam had a major positive impact on their life. However, 20% of the respondents noted a feeling of anxiety; 19% were overwhelmed, 14% reported being confused, and 14% stated that they felt isolated. For many of these New Muslims, the euphoria and excitement of accepting Islam may have given way to the practical realities of switching faith. Becoming a Muslim comes with responsibilities. Learning about Islam and becoming a practicing Muslim may start weighing on some converts leading to a sense of being overwhelmed or confused. Realizing that one may have to confront one's family, friends, and co-workers with a life-changing decision may quell the initial enthusiasm felt and replace it with anxiety; or the desire to keep quiet about one's conversion may make some converts feel lonely and isolated.

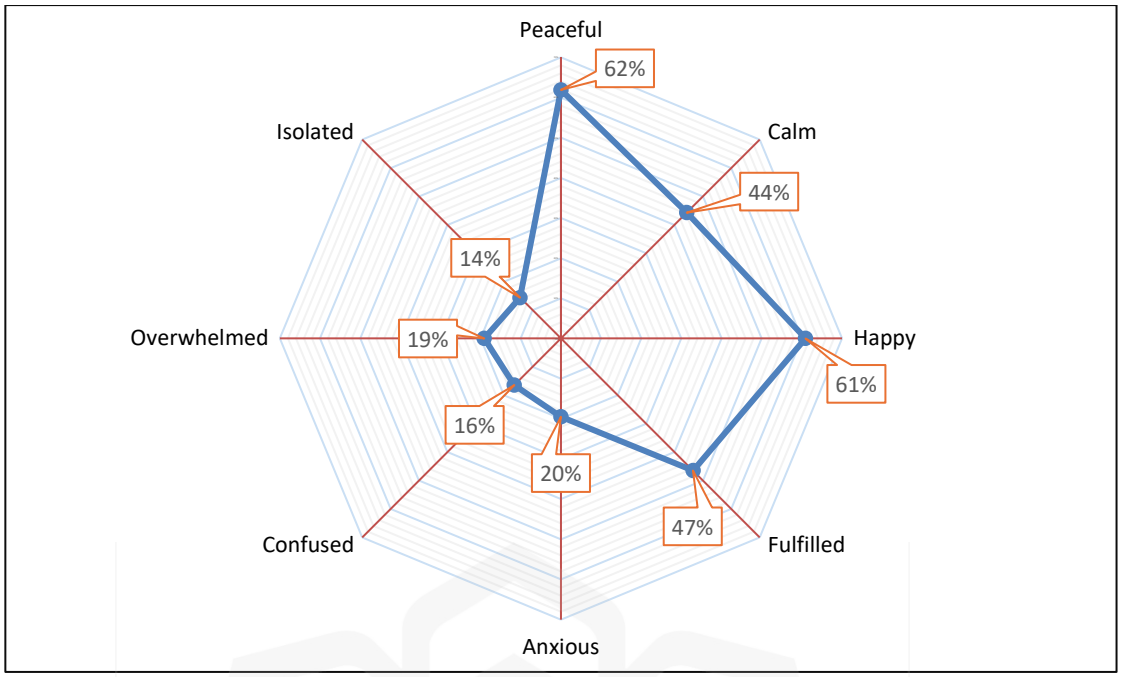


Figure 7.6 Radar Chart Depicting Emotional States Described by Survey Respondents the Day After the *Shahādah* (n = 596, Respondents May Choose More than One)

7.7.5 The Following Weeks and Months Following a *Shahādah*

As depicted in Figure 7.7 below, by the end of the first week, most new Muslims seem less emotional about their decision. Although feelings of happiness, calmness, and fulfilment continue to dominate, a smaller percent of Filipinos reported them compared to what was reported the day after the *Shahādah* (Figure 7.6). Similarly, negative emotions have also subsided over the course of the week. It is possible that during this time, most New Muslims have begun to adjust to their accepting of Islam and becoming Muslim has started to feel "normal."

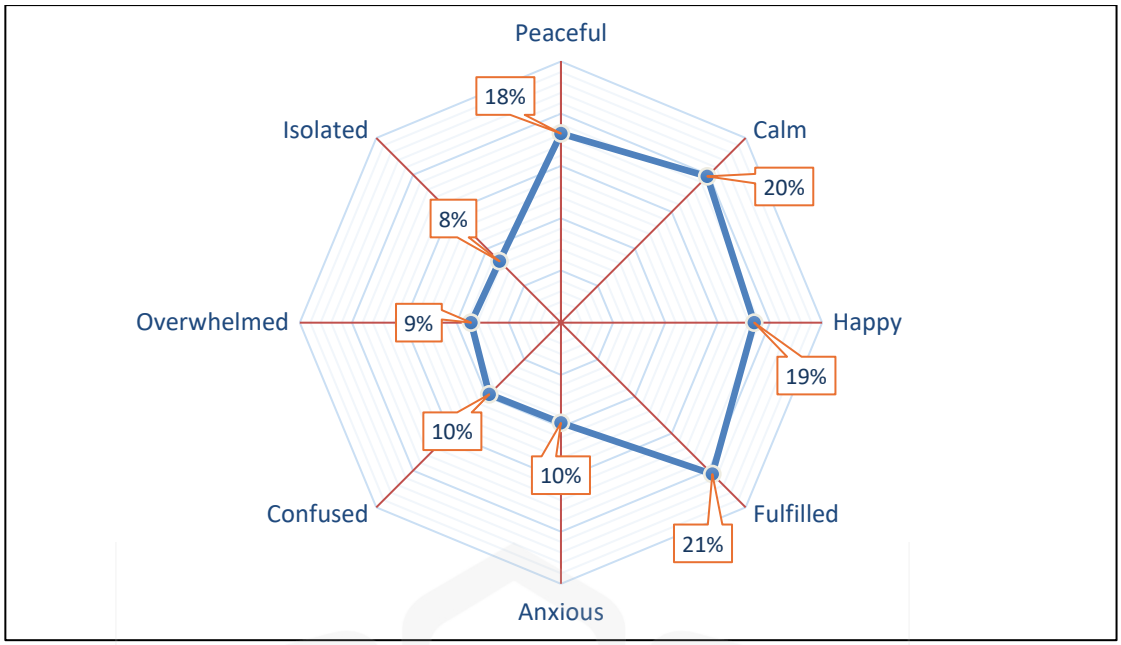


Figure 7.7 Radar Chart Depicting Emotional States Described by Survey Respondents a Week After the *Shahādah* (n = 596, Respondents May Choose More than One)

As illustrated in Figure 7.8, between 17% and 23% of converts reported positive emotions several months after converting. Negative emotions like feeling overwhelmed, confused, and anxious were reported by a slightly smaller percentage than those presented in Figure 7.8.

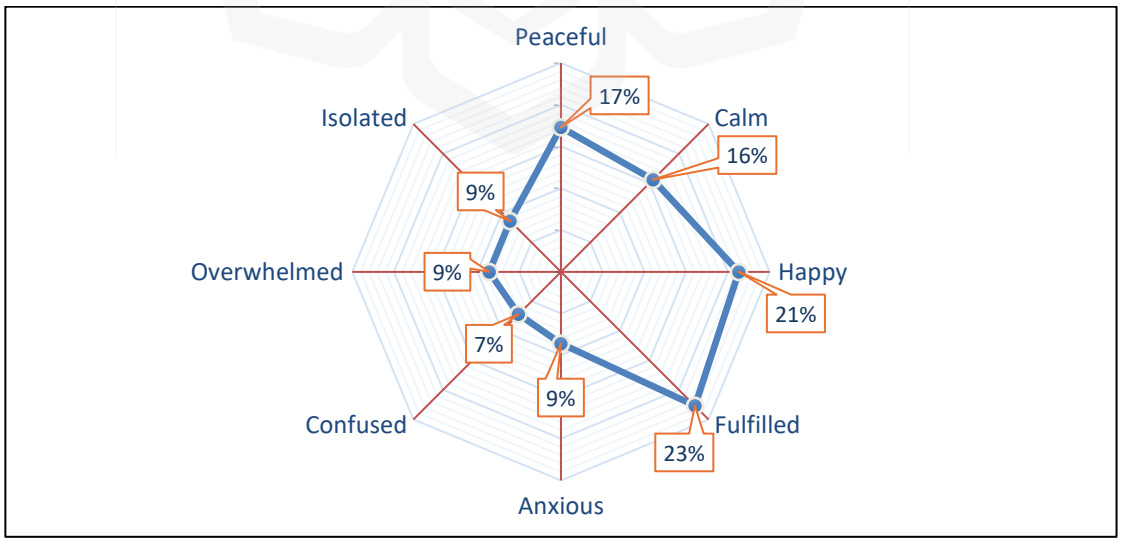


Figure 7.8 Radar Chart Depicting Emotional States Described by Survey Respondents Months After the *Shahādah* (n = 596, Respondents May Choose More than One)

Overall, whether a week after taking *Shahādah*, or several months after becoming Muslim, the Filipino respondents were not overly emotional – neither reporting hugely positive nor negative emotions. One explanation for this is the normalizing of becoming Muslim. These New Muslims are starting to adjust and internalize their switching of faith. Islamic practices and lifestyle are becoming their day-to-day, normal behavior; and exaggerated emotions are replaced by a more rational and pragmatic view of Islam. Lerner and colleagues reviewed academic literature from 1970 to 2013 and concluded that emotions play a large part in judgment and decision making[37]. The impact of emotions on how we make decisions, particularly major decisions, has been underestimated. Emotions are the primary impulse for decision making and it is only later, after the decision has been made, that one tends to justify the decision through rationalization and logical arguments. Allah commands Muslims to engage in *Daʿwah* using the following approach.

> Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation. And dispute with them in the most virtuous manner. Surely thy Lord is He Who knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best the rightly guided[38].

Allah asks Muslims to invite people (*Daʿwah*) using "wisdom and goodly exhortation" – implying inspiring words – using language that would appeal to the *Qalb* (the intelligent heart). And only then "dispute with them in the most virtuous manner" – in other words, use logical arguments. In the case of the Filipino respondents, the act of *Shahādah* carried a lot of emotional weight and a week or months later the emotional response subdued and gave way to rationalizing or justifying the decision (of accepting Islam) that they had already made.

7.8 THE *SHAHĀDAH* PROCESS

The *Shahādah* process involves a potential convert expressing their sincere intention to embrace Islam, followed by the recitation of the declaration of faith in Arabic. In most cases, a *Dāʿī* explains the meaning of the *Shahādah* in the convert's native language. This process is usually witnessed by another volunteer, typically an *Anṣār* who offers

[37] Jennifer S. Lerner, Ye Li, Piercarlo Valdesolo, and Karim S. Kassam, "Emotion and Decision Making," *Annual Review of Psychology* 66 (2015): 799–823, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115043.

[38] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, Surah 16:125.

immediate support and guidance. For a more detailed account of this process[39], see Section 7.5.

None of the twenty-five Filipinos interviewed had anything negative to report about their *Shahādah*. Every one of them stated that they were fully informed of the gravity of the step they were about to take and found the process very simple and easy. The interviewees only had positive things to say about the *Da ʿīs* or *Anṣār* who helped them with their conversion.

7.8.1 Survey Respondents Rating the *Shahādah* Process

The survey respondents were asked to rate their *Shahādah* process and suggest ways to improve the experience. Figure 7.9 depicts the ratings given by Filipino respondents on their *Shahādah* process experience. The majority, 82%, of the respondents indicated that their *Shahādah* was either "easy" or "somewhat easy." A notable proportion, 11%, rated the process as "neutral," whereas, just over 7% of respondents found it "somewhat complex" to "complex." This figure highlights the organization's efficiency in simplifying the process for new converts, though some complexity may exist for a small minority.

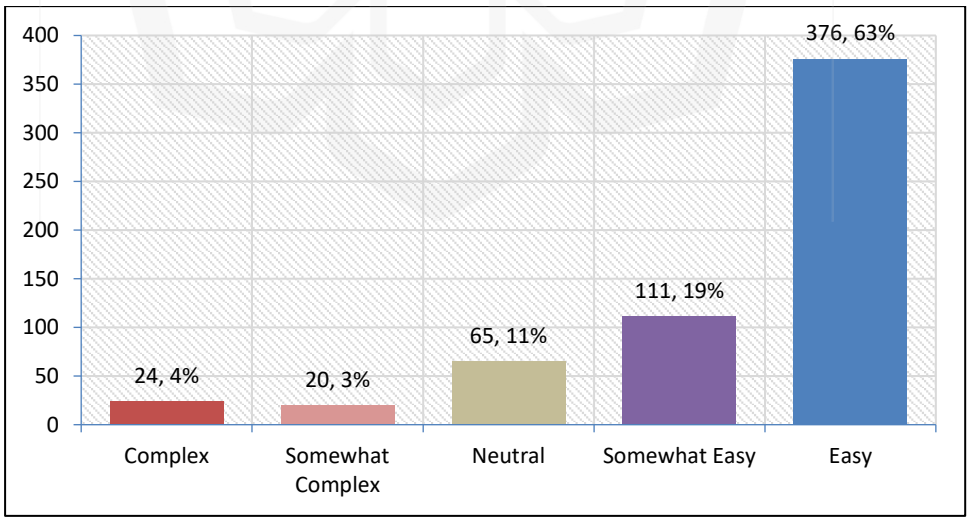


Figure 7.9 Filipino Survey Respondents Asked to Rate the *Shahādah* Process that They Underwent (n = 596)

[39] See section 7.5.

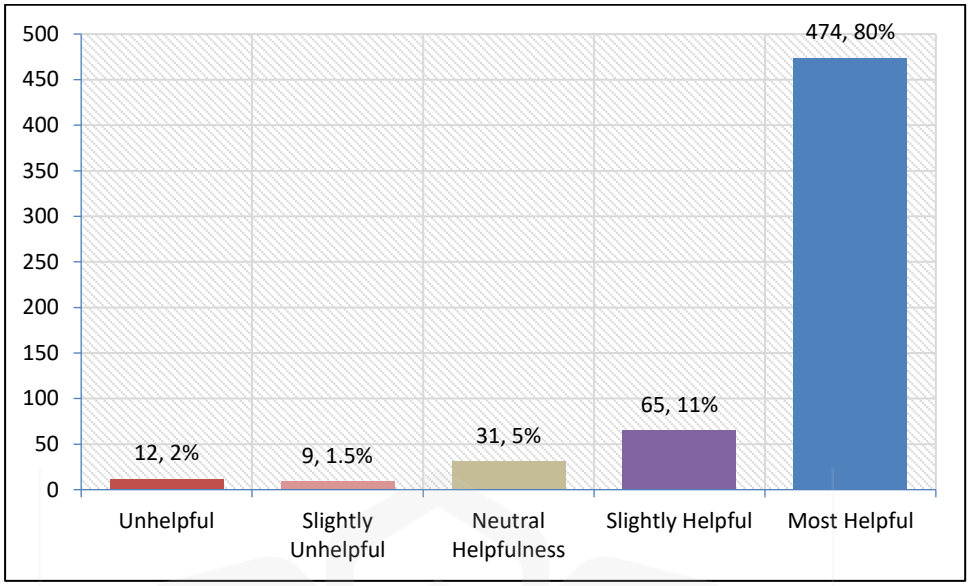


Figure 7.10 Filipino Survey Respondents Evaluation of the Organization's Staff Involved in the *Shahādah* Process (n = 596)

Figure 7.10 above highlights that over 90% of the respondents found the staff to be highly supportive with ratings of the most clustering around "most helpful" and a small number (11%) reporting "slightly helpful." About 5% had "neutral" feelings towards the staff, and less than 3.5%, a mere 21 of the 596, surveyed indicated that the staff were slightly to completely unhelpful. From a "customer satisfaction" perspective this is very positive for the Organization and bodes well for the *Shahādah* process that has been developed over the past few years.

7.8.2 Suggested Changes to the *Shahādah* Process

Despite the overwhelmingly positive feedback from the Filipino New Muslims, it is vital to continually assess the process and figure out ways to improve it. The Filipinos surveyed were asked to evaluate specific parts of the process to see if there was room for improvement.

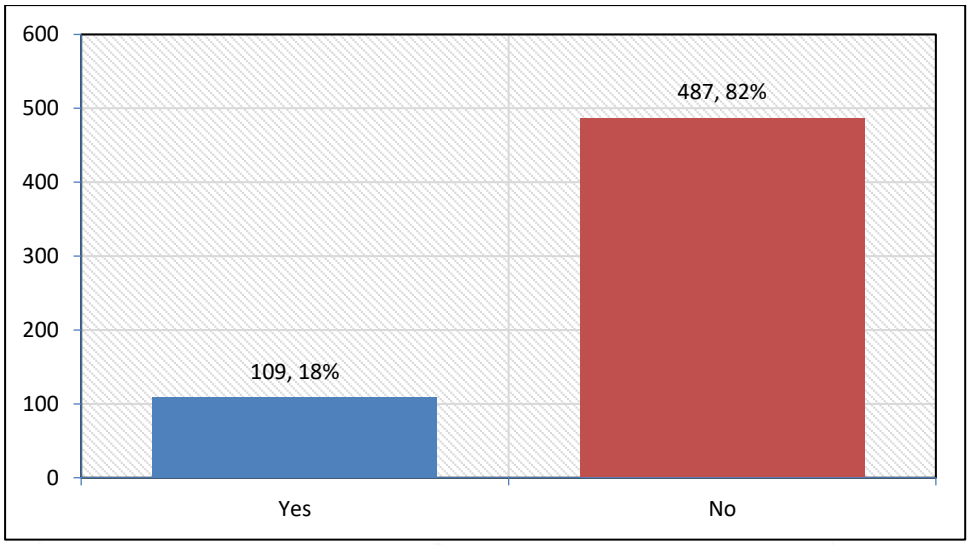


Figure 7.11 Percentage of Filipino Converts who Would Change Aspects of their *Shahādah* Process (n = 596)

The majority of respondents (82%) did not want the *Shahādah* process changed. 18% selected that they would want to change the way the *Shahādah* is conducted. These 109 survey respondents were then asked to evaluate specific aspects of the process. Their responses are depicted in Figure 7.12 below.

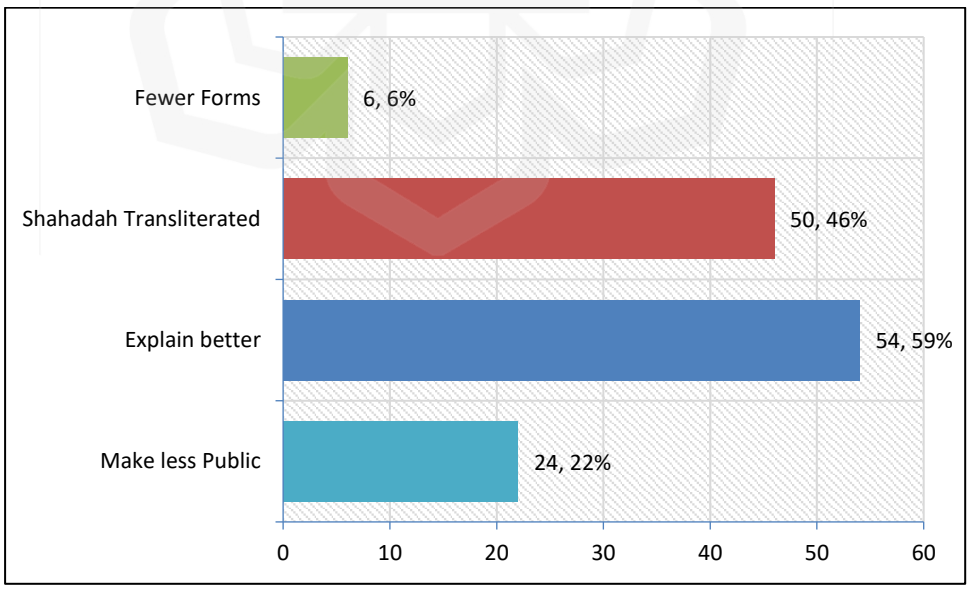


Figure 7.12 Specific Changes Filipino Converts Would Make to Their *Shahādah* Process (n = 109)

The most common suggestions to improve the *Shahādah* process include explaining the *Shahādah* better (59%); offering a transliteration of the *Shahādah* so as to make pronunciation of the Arabic words easier (46%); and 22% of the respondents suggested making the conversion process less public. A very small number of respondents (6%) felt that the amount of paperwork involved should be reduced.

7.8.3 Gifts and Celebrations

It is customary for New Muslims who take their *Shahādah* with the Organization to be given appropriate gifts. All of the Filipinos interviewed reported receiving prayer mats, copies of the translation of the *Qurʾān*, basic books on Islam, and Islamic clothing. There was no discussion about the utility or benefit of these gifts.

Most converts are presented a copy of the translation of the *Qurʾān* in the convert's preferred language. Sometimes, a dual language *Qurʾān* – containing the original Arabic text accompanied by a translation – is given. Books and pamphlets on some of the basics of Islam on topics like how to perform the prayers or make ablution are also given to New Muslims. Female converts may also be provided with a ḥijāb (headscarf) or sometimes even an *ʿabāyah* (outer robe), whereas male New Muslims are typically given a *thawb* (long shirt that reaches down to the ankles) and a *kūfī* (skullcap). Very few converts reported receiving a prayer mat upon declaring their Islam.

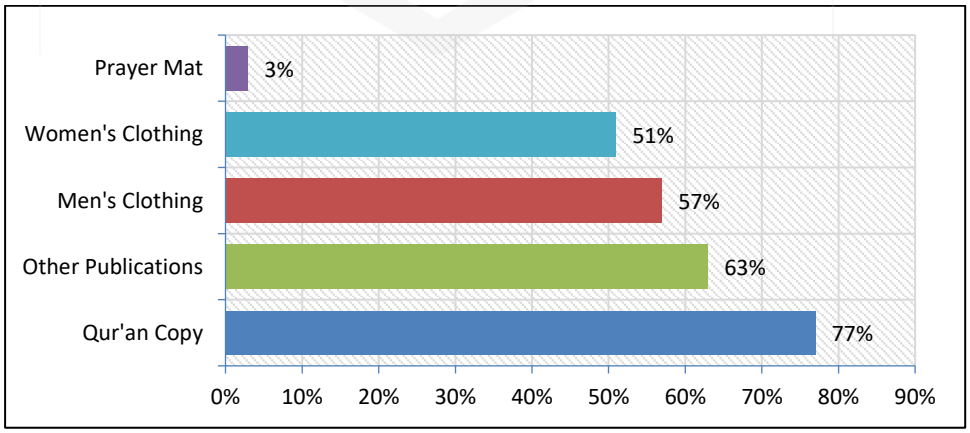


Figure 7.13 Percentage of Respondents Given Several Types of Gifts upon Accepting Islam with the Organization (n = 596)

The majority of those surveyed (81%) found the gifts given "most useful." A further forty-five of the 596 Filipinos found the gifts "useful." 4% of the respondents found the gifts "moderately useful," and only about 6% did not care much for the *Shahādah* gifts.

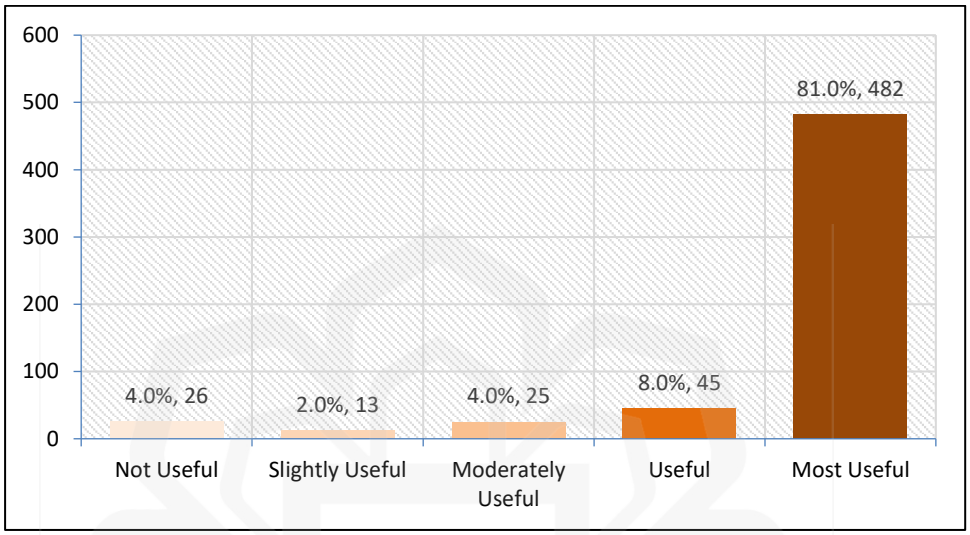


Figure 7.14 Filipino Respondents Rating the Usefulness of the Gifts Given to them by the Organization upon Accepting Islam (n = 596)

7.9 THE *SHAHĀDAH* CERTIFICATE

Upon accepting Islam within the Organization, all New Muslims are strongly encouraged to apply for a *Shahādah* Certificate[40]. This document, officially issued by the Bahraini Shariah Court, legally confirms an individual's conversion to Islam in Bahrain. The certificate is recognized in many Muslim-majority countries and other nations that recognize Bahraini law, offering numerous practical benefits for new Muslims in both religious and legal matters.

7.9.1 Name Change

Although Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) does not generally require a convert to change their name, many new Muslims prefer to adopt a more traditionally Muslim-sounding

[40] See Appendix E for sample of a *Shahādah* Certificate.

name. The *Shahādah* Certificate is critical in facilitating this process. It provides legal proof of conversion necessary for changing names on identification cards, driver's licenses, passports, and other official documents.

7.9.2 Marriage

Muslims, in general, are not permitted to marry non-Muslims. An exception to this is the allowance where Muslim men may marry women from the "People of the Book" (Jews and Christians)[41]. However, in most cases Muslim men prefer that their Jewish or Christian fiancée has taken *Shahādah* prior to the wedding. The *Shahādah* Certificate eases the legal process of marriage between a Muslim and a convert to Islam in Bahrain as well as in countries that recognize Bahraini law.

7.9.3 Performing *Ḥajj* or Umrah

Non-Muslims are not permitted to enter the *Ḥaram* (sanctuary) in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. They are not permitted to visit the *Kaʿbah* nor are they allowed to perform the rites of *Ḥajj* or Umrah. The *Shahādah* Certificate is accepted as a legal proof of one's conversion to Islam by the Saudi authorities and New Muslims are permitted to visit Makkah and perform their pilgrimage[42].

7.9.4 Inheritance and Burial Rites

According to Islamic law, non-Muslims do not inherit from Muslims and vice-versa. The *Shahādah* Certificate provides essential legal proof to prevent inheritance issues that may conflict with Islamic law. It also ensures that guardianship of Muslim dependents remains within the Muslim community.

Additionally, when a convert passes away, they should be buried as Muslims with the appropriate rites accorded as per Islamic law. These funeral rituals require that

[41] Yamani, Mai. "Cross-cultural marriage within Islam: Ideals and reality." *Cross-cultural marriage* (2021): 153-169.

[42] From 2019 onwards, non-Muslim tourists are permitted to visit Madinah including taking a tour of the Prophet's Mosque as long as they are accompanied by Government-authorized tour guides. As of now, only Muslims are permitted to visit Makkah (Inclined2Travel 2023).

the body be buried in the ground with respect and dignity, following a simple and swift procedure. Practices such as cremation, embalming without necessity, mummification, above-ground burials (mausoleums or crypts), and sky burials (where bodies are left to openly decompose or be consumed) are strictly not permitted in Islam[43]. A *Shahādah* Certificate is sometimes the only evidence to ensure that the last rites of a convert are according to Islam.

7.9.5 Access to Islamic Services and Rights

The certificate allows converts to assert their Islamic rights, for instance requesting that Islamic dietary restrictions are followed, or gaining access to Islamic religious practices and spaces, such as mosques, Islamic schools, and madrassahs (traditional Islamic religious classes), etc.

7.9.6 Organizational and Personal Milestone

The certificate is utilized by the Organization as part of the post-*Shahādah* activities. It helps reconnect with the New Muslim and provides an opportunity to meet and ensure that proper care and education is provided. It also serves as a tangible personal reminder that one has converted to Islam.

[43] Al Dawoody, Ahmed. "Management of the dead from the Islamic law and international humanitarian law perspectives: considerations for humanitarian forensics." *International Review of the Red Cross* 99, no. 905 (2017): 759-784.

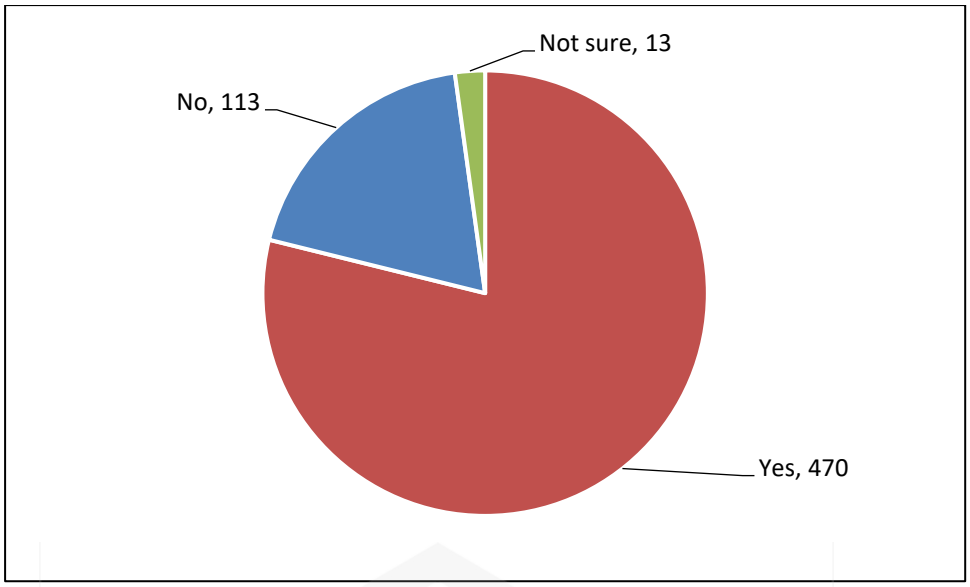


Figure 7.15 Filipino Respondents who Received their *Shahādah* Certificates (n = 596)

Within the Organization, 75% of all people who became Muslim from 2013 to 2023 obtained a *Shahādah* Certificate (Quadir 2024). The Filipinos surveyed were not an exception, 78% of them received a certificate[44]. Eighty percent of all surveyed stated obtaining the certificate was "slightly easy" to "easy." Less than 10% found the process complicated[45].

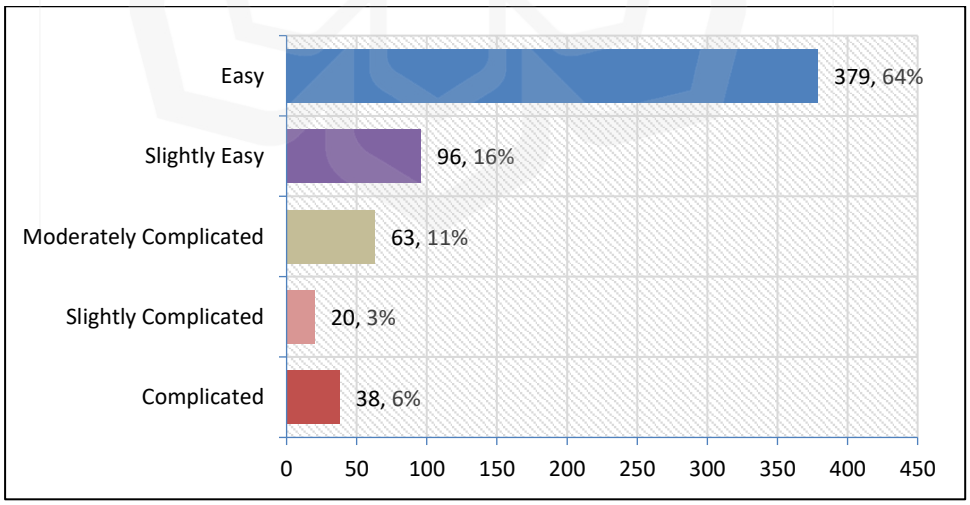


Figure 7.16 Filipino Respondents Rating of the Ease of Obtaining a *Shahādah* Certificate (n = 596)

[44] See Figure 7.15 above.

[45] See Figure 7.16 below.

Three fifths of the Filipinos surveyed received their *Shahādah* Certificate within a month. Ten percent stated it took up to 3 months, whereas for 7% of the respondents it took over three months to get their certificate. Some of the Filipino (7%) did not apply and about a tenth were unsure whether they had applied or not.

Overall, Filipinos recognize the importance of obtaining a *Shahādah* Certificate, and many are actively applying for it, finding the process relatively straightforward. Even though the procedure involves attestation and legalizing the documents through a Bahraini court, it's noteworthy that the majority of New Muslims are receiving their certificates in a timely manner.

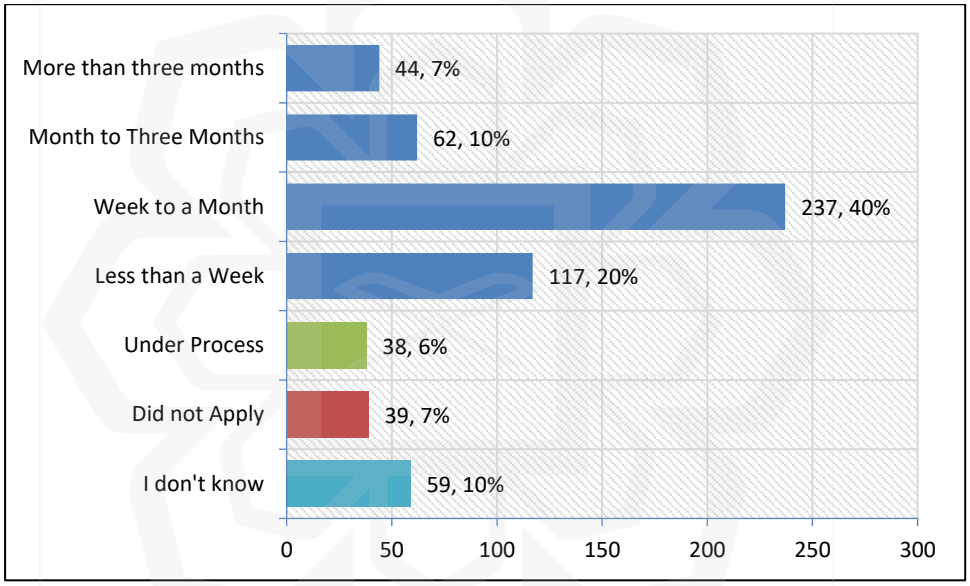


Figure 7.17 Amount of Time it Took to Obtain a *Shahādah* Certificate (n = 596)

According to Organizational records, all twenty-five of the Filipinos interviewed were given a *Shahādah* Certificate. Despite not specifically being asked about it in the Interview, three of the interviewees mentioned, in passing, that they had received their certificate.

7.10 TELLING OTHERS ABOUT BECOMING MUSLIM

Converting to Islam is a deeply personal decision, however, like any major life-changing event, it has an impact on one's family, friends, and associates. This section

explores the reactions Filipino converts in Bahrain receive from their close social circles after becoming Muslim. The responses vary widely, ranging from acceptance and happiness to concern and even hostility. By recording and analysing these responses we can improve the care and support of Pinoy NMs in Bahrain.

7.10.1 Reactions of Convert's Parents and Siblings

Nine of the Filipinos (36%) interviewed stated that their parents and siblings reacted very positively when they told them of their conversion. Asma, the 34-year-old homemaker whose mother was a non-practicing born Muslim relates her parent's reaction to her conversion and her family's eventual conversion to Islam.

> The next day, right on the next day, Wednesday, no Thursday, I told my parents right away. Oh, yeah, I told them. I said, "I didn't know that Discover Islam is teaching for free." Then my dad said, "For free? You don't need to pay tuition fee or something like that?" No. Like, I didn't know. They said it's free. Free stuff.
>
> So, I told them the story. Of course it was all still new. It was still emotional that time. So, when I'm talking, I was crying. I told them how I embrace Islam and explain to them that I felt cold. And then I was shaking, and I don't know why I was shaking. And then my dad is crying and so was my mom. Then, the first thing that my mom said, "Maybe this is what we've been waiting for in our family. Maybe you're the way, the bridge." And then my dad said, "There's going to be no hindrance for us to embrace Islam because first, we don't eat pork at all, anymore."
>
> So that's the reaction from my parents first and then later on my siblings. I call them one by one because they were busy that time. And their reaction is very genuine. They were glad. They were all so happy.
>
> And I started telling them also the meaning of "Bismillah" and "*Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*." Then they, my family, started writing down whatever I'm learning from here. I'm transferring it to them and then they're learning.
>
> *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*. Yes, the year 2020 is when we all embrace Islam, except my youngest brother. Yeah, but from time to time, he would ask me, like what is "Halal" and what is "*Ḥaram*." *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh* so, inshallah he will embrace like my mother and my sister.
>
> Because that year I embraced Islam in January. After I graduated in basics of Islam and while in the middle of the *Daʿwah* course, I made my mom embrace Islam first, around July, *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*. And then later on, it was my sister. Now there's a story also behind why she embraced Islam because of the word "inshallah." She embraced Islam and I did the *Daʿwah*. And later on, my God, that was around September, October, so within that year, when we all come to Islam. They keep on practising

> Islam slowly, except my dad, he needs a lot of help…because he just had an attack, and he keeps forgetting things. And so, yeah, my family embraced Islam already.

Eight interviewee's parents and siblings did not embrace Islam like Asma's, they were nonetheless happy and supportive. Restaurant Manager, Yasmin described her parents' reaction, "Baba was very happy, and I saw it in his eyes. My mom said she will not become angry because she saw in my eyes that I had already accepted Islam and that I was happy with that." She further said that her siblings would tease her in an affectionate manner, "My sister and brother they're fine. They're just teasing me. Ah, you cannot eat this one (pork). And they said to me, okay, it's been a long time since you stopped (eating) because you have your own belief. So, they are happy, all of them are very happy."

Thirty-eight-year-old Aishah shared a special moment with her brother, recalling, "I just take a picture wearing ḥijāb. Then I send to my brother. I thought he will get mad, but he told me, 'You look beautiful, my sister.'" Not all close family members reacted positively, nine of the Pinoy interviewed stated that their immediate family was quite upset at their conversion. Zahra recalled that when she shared pictures of herself wearing a headscarf both her sister and mother were very upset.

> Yeah, because they saw me that I'm wearing ḥijāb, so they said that why you became a Muslim.
>
> Actually, my mom she did not talk to me for one month. One whole month she did not talk to me. she just started ignoring my messages and calls. But, *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*, my father and my brothers, and later my sisters they just say that okay, we can do anything because you are far.

Some of these interviewees said that their parents initial shock wore off and over time they came to accept that their child had become Muslim. Seven interviewees reported that their parents and siblings did not react strongly to their conversion. They were not particularly upset nor were they greatly pleased. They described the reactions as "muted" or "indifferent."

The Filipinos surveyed reported more positive reactions compared to the twenty-five interviewed. Figures 7.18 and 7.19 illustrate how Filipino survey respondents' immediate families – both parents and siblings – reacted to their decision to embrace Islam. A substantial proportion, around 58%, reported that their parents reacted positively. Over a quarter of the parents expressed concern, whereas 7% were upset and

angry with their children for converting to Islam. In the case of siblings, the reactions were quite similar, 55% were happy for their brother or sister, and almost a third were concerned. 6% were outright upset or angry with their sibling's decision to switch faith. It seems that in the majority of cases (about 85%) both parents and siblings were quite supportive indicating that familial bonds amongst Filipinos may outweigh religious ties.

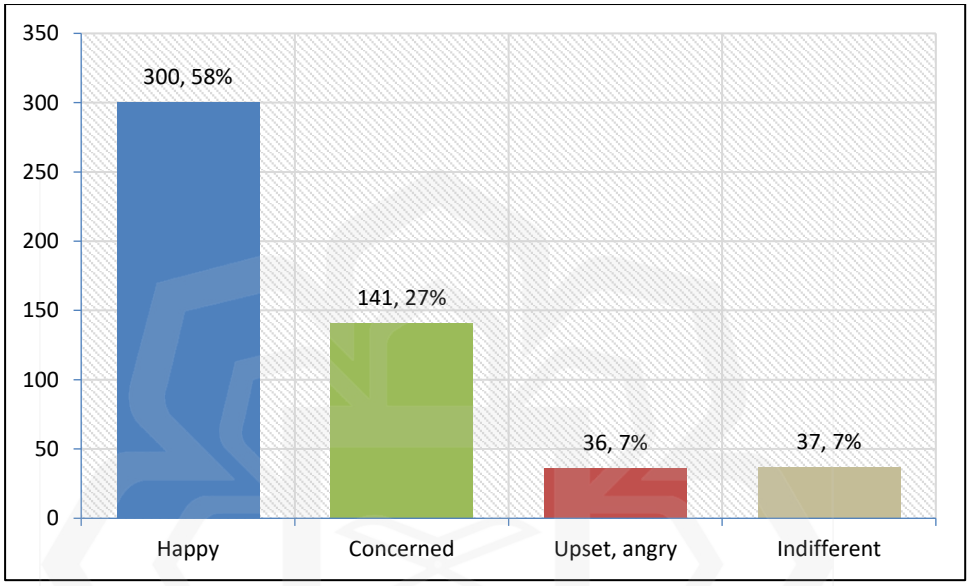


Figure 7.18 Reaction of Respondents' Parents upon Learning that their Child has Become Muslim (n = 514)

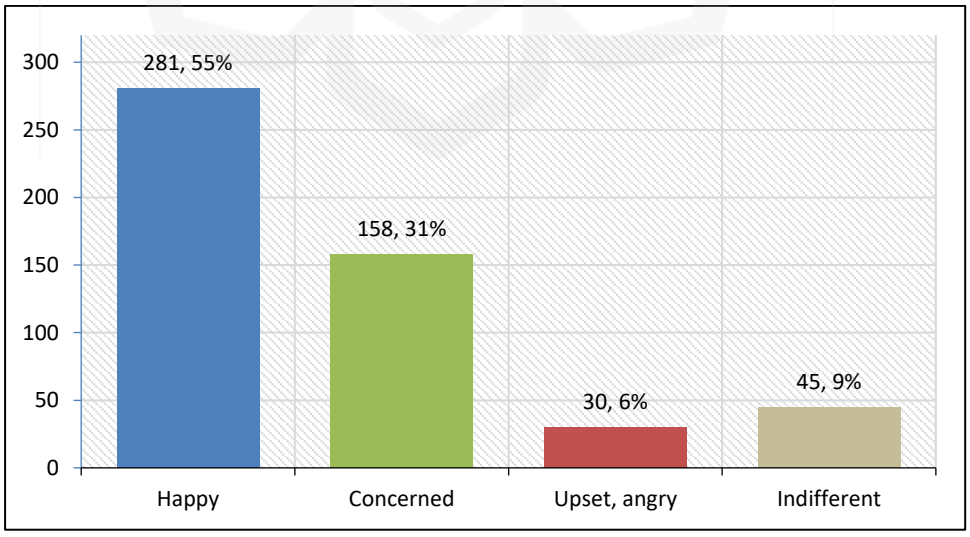


Figure 7.19 Reaction of Respondents' Siblings upon Learning that their Brother/Sister has Become Muslim (n = 514)

7.10.2 Reactions of Convert's Spouses and Children

Four of the Pinoy interviewed stated that their husbands were happy and supportive of their decision to convert. Three of them were married to Muslim men and one had a Christian husband back in the Philippines. Asma, whose parents and sister converted to Islam because of her, was one of the women married to a Muslim. Her husband and his family were very happy that she had decided to join their faith. They had never pressured her to become Muslim. Asma said that one of the reasons for her accepting Islam was the behaviour of her husband and her mother-in-law. She found them considerate and caring. She was always impressed by their discipline and dedication to their faith.

Two of the interviewees talked about how their children were inquisitive about Islam and talked about themselves becoming Muslim. Thirty-seven-year-old, Summayah said that her son asked her if he would also be fasting in the month of Ramadan. None of the Pinoy interviewed mentioned that their children were upset or indifferent about their conversion to Islam.

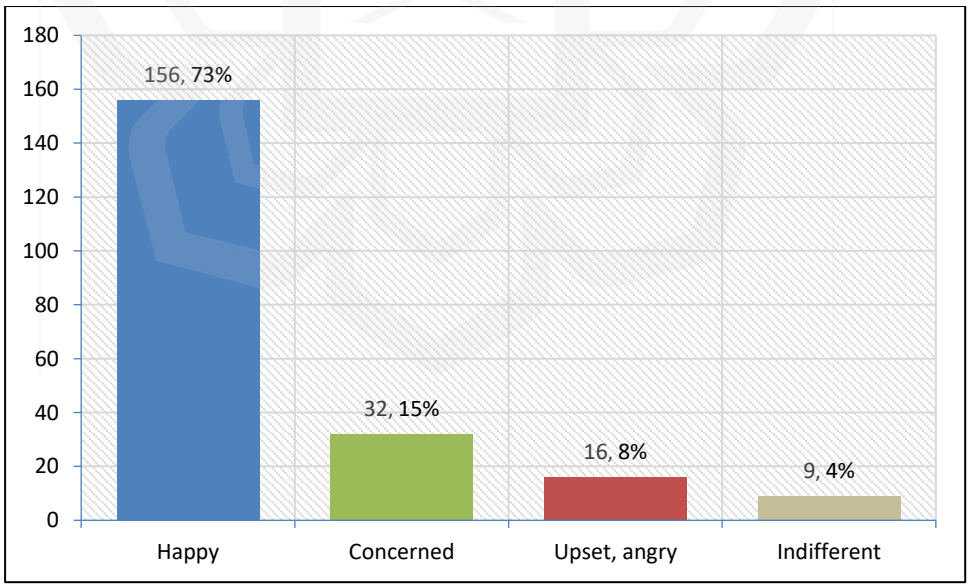


Figure 7.20 Reaction of Respondents' Spouses upon Learning that their Betrothed has Become Muslim (n = 213)

Figure 7.20 above and Figure 7.21 below highlight the reactions of the spouses and children of the Filipinos surveyed to their conversion. In 88% of cases, spouses and

children were either supportive (happy) or showed some level of concern. Eight percent of spouses were upset by the news whereas only 4% of the children took it badly.

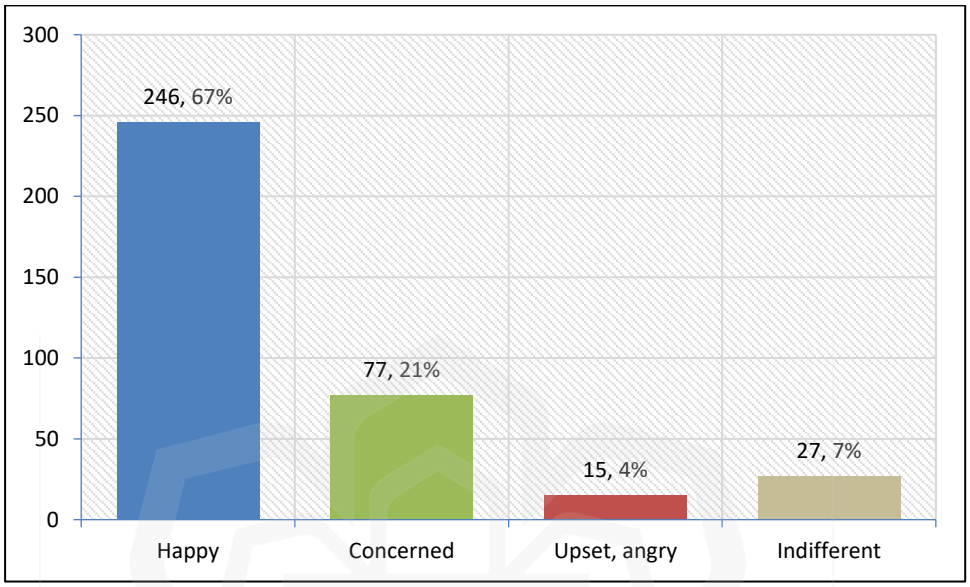


Figure 7.21 Reaction of Respondents' Children upon Learning that their Parent has Become Muslim (n = 365)

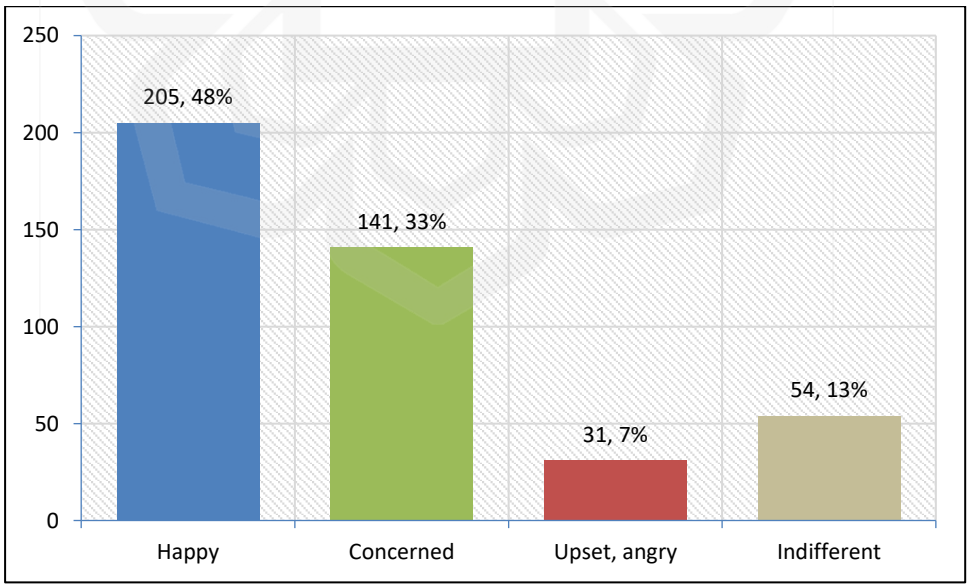


Figure 7.22 Reaction of Respondents' Other Family Member upon Learning that their Relative has Become Muslim (n = 431)

7.10.3 Reaction of Respondents' Extended Family Members

The figure above (7.22) examines how extended family members such as aunts, uncles, and cousins responded to the news of conversion. Almost half of respondents indicated that extended family members were happy about their decision. A third of these relatives expressed concern, and about 7% were upset or angry. Compared to parents, siblings, spouse, and children where some 4% to 9% showed indifference, a larger number, 13% did not care much whether their distant relative had switched religion.

None of the Filipinos interviewed described the reaction of their extended family members to them taking the *Shahādah*.

7.10.4 Reactions of Respondents' Friends and Co-workers

The two figures below (7.23 and 7.24) look at the social circles beyond the family. It seems that friends and co-workers responded far more warmly to their Pinoy friend's or associate's conversion to Islam. About a fifth showed concern, and only 3% of friends and 4% of co-workers were upset with the news. Less than a tenth of both friends and co-workers did not really care about their acquaintance converting to Islam.

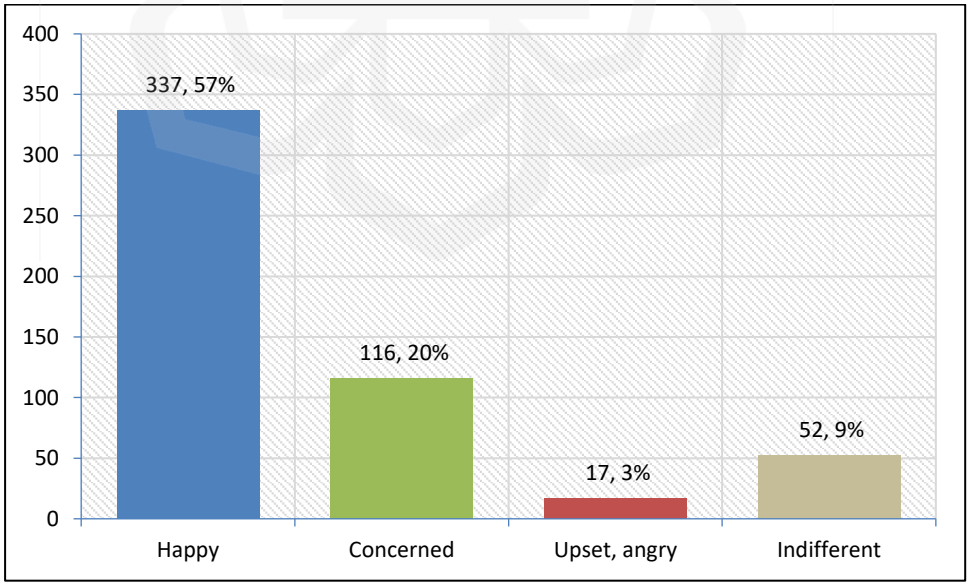


Figure 7.23 Reaction of Respondents' Friends upon Learning that their Acquaintance has Become Muslim (n = 522)

Of the twenty-five Filipinos interviewed thirteen spoke about the reactions of their friends or co-workers when they shared the news of their conversion. Four of them reported positive experiences. Three of those interviewed said that their colleagues and friends were concerned but supportive and four reported that their friends did not show any particular emotion, positive or negative.

Only two of the Filipinos interviewed experienced negative reactions from their associates. Hafsah, the thirty-one-year-old Assistant Manager said that her Filipina co-workers belittled her acceptance of Islam, saying "that I was just making drama since Ramadan was coming soon, they said that I converted because I wanted only six hours of work but I just ignored them." Another Filipina, twenty-eight-year-old Sarah, was quite annoyed by the reaction of one of her friends, she said that "one of the stupidest comments I got after I converted was, 'Oh, no, you're not fun anymore.'"

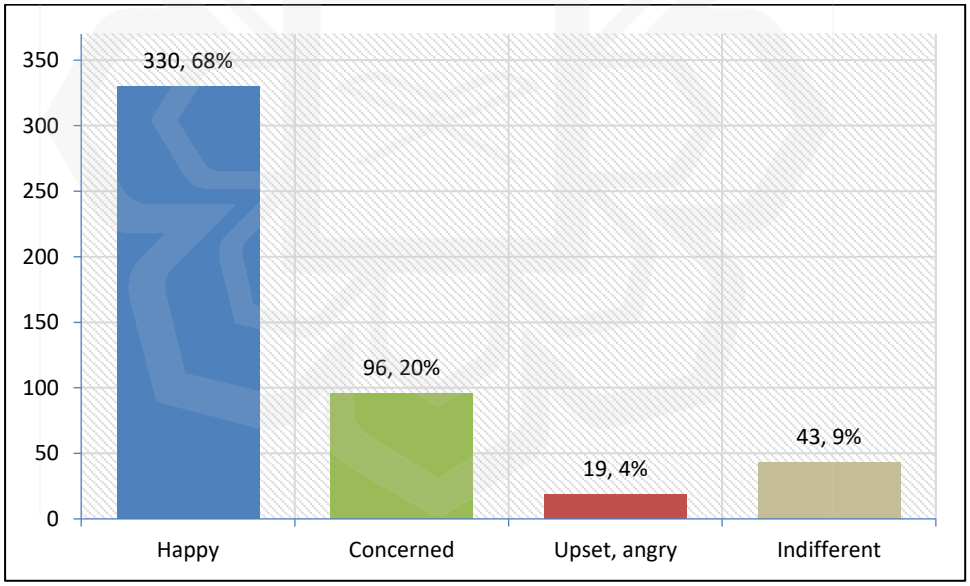


Figure 7.24 Reaction of Respondents' Co-workers upon Learning that their Colleague has Become Muslim (n = 488)

7.10.5 Reaction of Filipino Converts' Employers

Given that most employers in Bahrain are Muslim, it is not surprising that 85% of survey respondents indicated their employers were happy about their (Filipino employee)

conversion to Islam. Nine percent expressed concern, 2% were upset and 4% of the convert's employers were indifferent to their employee changing faith.

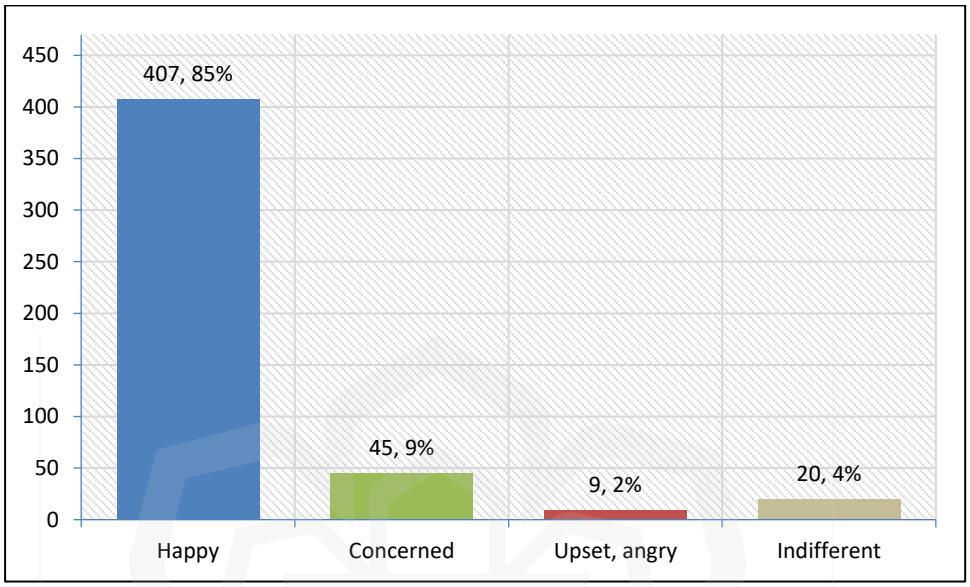


Figure 7.25 Reaction of Respondents' Employer upon Learning that their Employee has Become Muslim (n = 481)

None of the Pinoy interviewed mentioned anything their employer's reaction to their acceptance of Islam.

7.10.6 One-to-Ten

In almost all cases, *Da'īs* and *Anṣār* advise New Muslims to be cautious of sharing their conversion news with family, friends, and acquaintances. Over the decades, there have been hundreds of incidents where converts have experienced verbal or physical abuse at the hands of their relatives or associates due to their conversion to Islam. Some New Muslims prefer to keep their *Shahādah* private, fearing potential repercussions for themselves or their loved ones. This is especially common among Indian Hindus converting to Islam, where political and religious tensions have heightened animosity, leading to the mistreatment and abuse of those who embrace Islam.

As clearly depicted in the sections above (7.10.1 to 7.10.5), negative reactions and abuse are generally less common among the Pinoy. However, it is still necessary that New Muslims are cautioned about the possible backlash from their social circles.

Apart from forewarning New Muslims, an additional method of mitigating post-*Shahādah* negativity is commonplace within the Organization. *Daʿīs* and *Anṣār* try and identify the immediate social circles of all individuals who take the *Shahādah* and then in collaboration with the New Muslim they reach out to these close relatives and associates. The purpose of this outreach is to help relatives and friends adjust to the New Muslim by answering any questions or concerns about Islam and Muslims that they may have. Many converts, particularly those new to the faith, have limited knowledge of Islam and may struggle to answer the many questions they are often faced with. *Daʿīs* and *Anṣār* have been trained to field any such questions, and in doing-so, quell the concerns and negative reactions within the New Muslim's social circles. Some relatives and associates, who were initially concerned and upset, even come to themselves accepting Islam and becoming Muslim through this outreach effort.

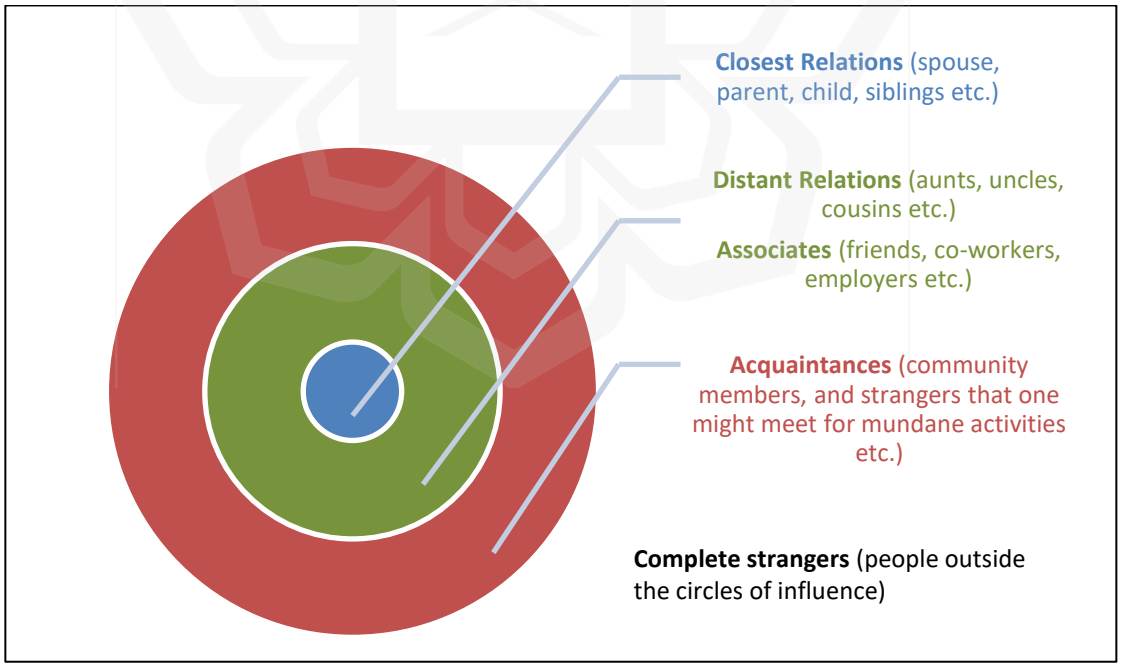


Figure 7.26 Diagram Illustrating the Concentric Circles of Influence – Social Circles

The term "One-to-Ten" refers to this unique form of *Daʿwah* practiced within the Organization. Most individuals only have a handful of people who get impacted by any life-changing change that they make. Strangers or distant relations are far less likely to be concerned when someone they do not know—or care about—accepts Islam. As one moves outward through the concentric circles of relational proximity, the level of influence, care, and concern diminishes, eventually reaching a point where individuals outside these spheres are unaffected by personal events in the life of the individual[46]. Typically, most people have only a handful to a dozen individuals within their core circle of influence. While this close-knit group may not consist of exactly ten people, the term "One-to-Ten" is both catchy and easy to explain.

7.10.7 Identifying Oneself as Muslim

Globally, there are many different monikers to identify and describe someone who has become a Muslim. Individuals born to Muslims grow up learning and accepting Islam as their faith generally end up identifying themselves as Muslim. There may be additional identities such as family, tribe, ethnicity, nationality among others, but the most common reference to those who submit to Allah (accept Islam) is Muslim. To distinguish between these Muslims and converts, the term "Born Muslims" is sometimes used. However, under most circumstances, simply "Muslim" is the nomen universale. On the other hand, New Muslim, Convert, Revert, Balik-Islam, Revertee, *Muʾallaf*, and Muslim are commonly and interchangeably used when referring to people who have converted to Islam.

Over two fifths of the Filipino respondents prefer the Tagalog term "Balik-Islam" meaning "return to Islam."[47] "Convert," "Revert," and "New Muslim" are approximately equally preferred by one sixth of the Pinoy surveyed. Whereas just over a tenth would rather simply call themselves Muslim.

[46] See Figure 7.26, derived from Urie Bronfenbrenner's *Ecological Systems Theory* (1979).

[47] See Chapter 3 Section 3.3.4 for a more detailed explanation of this term and its significance to Filipino Muslims.

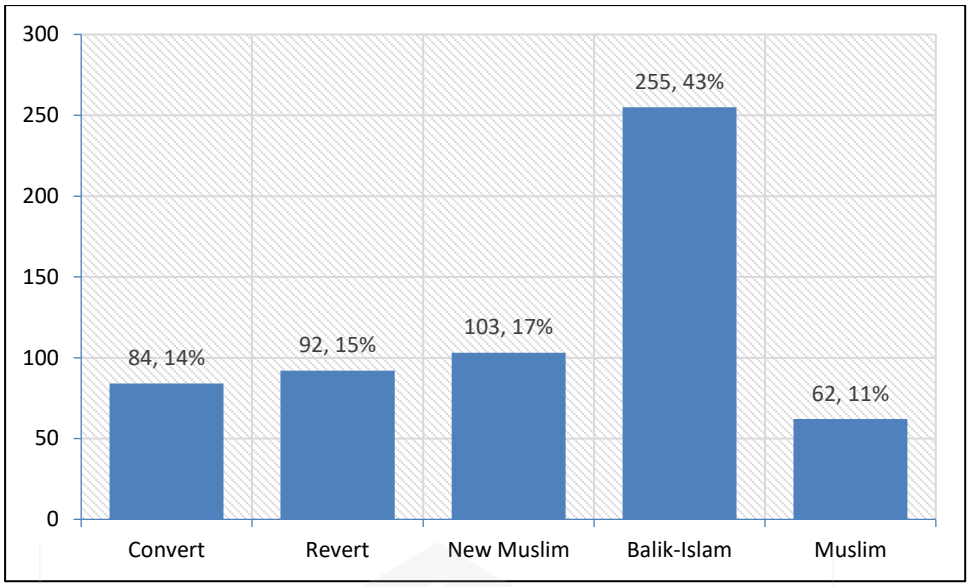


Figure 7.27 Preferred Title for their New Status Filipinos Surveyed (n = 596)

Islamically, the preferred term for anyone who has accepted Islam is Muslim. Allah says in the *Qurʾān*.

> And strive for God as He should be striven for. He has chosen [for] you—and has placed no hardship for you in the religion—the creed of your father Abraham. He named you Muslims aforetime, and herein, that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and that you may be witnesses for mankind. So, perform the prayer and give the alms, and hold fast to God. He is your Master. How excellent a Master, and how excellent a Helper[48]!

The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), his family, and companions – the majority of whom had converted to Islam at some point in time – referred to themselves as Muslim. Hence, this should be the ideal term to use, however for practical purposes using these other phrases has come into vogue. Within the Organization, converts to Islam are initially referred to as New Muslims, and after completing their basic Islamic education they are integrated into the larger Muslim community and henceforth simply called "Muslim."

7.11 BEYOND THE *SHAHĀDAH*

The transition to Islam for Filipino converts in Bahrain is a multifaceted experience. For many it is marked not only by spiritual fulfilment but also by social, emotional, and

[48] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 22:78.

practical changes in life. Filipino converts go through a range of emotions before, during, and after the *Shahādah*. For most of these converts, positive emotions like excitement and elation overshadow anxiety and fear. Although the majority become very emotional during the *Shahādah*, over time, the practical aspects of having become a Muslim overshadow these emotions. For most Filipino converts, the initial excitement and uncertainty typically give way to a stable, integrated learning and practice of Islam.

For many converts, family reactions to their conversion and the importance of maintaining social bonds are crucial. The Organization's "One-to-Ten" outreach strategy is designed to engage relatives and friends, by answering their questions on Islam, and thereby reducing their concerns and worries for the New Muslim. This approach creates a buffer within a convert's social circles and greatly helps ease their journey into Islam.

Taking the *Shahādah* is the first of many steps in a New Muslim's journey into Islam. Looking ahead, Chapter 8 will delve into this journey and explore the follow up – the care and education – of Filipinos accepting Islam in Bahrain.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LIFE AS A MUSLIM

8.1 INTRODUCTION

For most Muslim communities around the world, *Daʿwah* to non-Muslims is not a priority. And in the communities where there are efforts to invite people to Islam, follow-up is not prioritized. In more than three decades of involvement in *Daʿwah* and New Muslim Care, I have come across very few organizations that have any systematic and effective care and education of New Muslims. Follow-up is an afterthought.

The meaning of "follow-up" varies widely across communities and countries. So, what exactly is follow-up? Is it about teaching new Muslims the foundational aspects of Islam? Or is it focused on helping them integrate into the broader Muslim community? Does it involve offering emotional care and support for those who may have left family and friends behind? Or does it also include empowerment and financial assistance? Or is it all this and much more?

In most Muslim societies, follow-up is predominantly defined by educating new converts on the basics of Islam and ensuring that they adhere to the cultural and societal norms in terms of appearance, behaviour, and ritual practices. When asked what follow-up should entail, responses frequently centre on teaching foundational Islamic beliefs and practices, such as the basics of faith, reciting verses of the *Qurʾān* properly, and performing the daily ritual prayers (*Ṣalāh*). For female converts, wearing the ḥijāb (headscarf and modest clothing) is commonly viewed as an essential part of embracing Islam. Whereas, for male converts, there is often an emphasis on circumcision as part of their transition[1].

While these responses are not necessarily incorrect, they don't fully capture the journey a New Muslim undergoes – from someone who knows little about Islam to becoming a practicing believer. Although the outward practices are an essential part of

[1] Brice, *A Minority within a Minority*; Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Annual Report 2024 Internal Document* Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024; Shah et al., "New Muslim Converts' Experience,".

becoming Muslim, they often overshadow the pressing emotional, psychological, social, and sometimes economic needs of the convert[2].

How do Filipino converts adjust to life as a Muslim, and what role do follow-up support systems play in this transition? By exploring this research question, the chapter offers an in-depth examination of the concept of follow-up, redefining its significance in Muslim societies and Islamic organizations. It aims to reshape perspectives on converts to Islam while proposing a more comprehensive approach to the care and education that these New Muslims need and deserve.

8.2 FINDING THE BALANCE IN NEW MUSLIM CARE AND EDUCATION

At the risk of stereotyping religions and oversimplifying the complexities of faith-based communities, Figure 8.1 below is a useful tool for understanding why New Muslims are expected to behave in a particular manner and how one can find balance between their care and education.

Conversion to Islam typically occurs within a practicing Muslim community or amongst devout Muslims. In almost all cases, a New Muslim is welcomed into a group of people who uphold the principles of Islam, and who abide by the conventions that define a Muslim. Consequently, there is great emphasis on beliefs, principles, rituals, and Islamic practices (*ʿAqīdah* and *ʿIbādah* – Quadrant D). Unfortunately, in many such environments, the outward appearances and practices of Islam take precedence over genuine care or concern for the new Muslim. For instance, New Muslims are expected to memorize and recite Surah Fatiha (the first chapter of the *Qurʾān* consisting of seven verses) in Arabic with decent pronunciation within hours or days of converting. Or, for example, women are expected to put on the headscarf from the moment they testify to their Islam (*Shahādah*). Sometimes the expectations of devout Muslims delve into farcicality. Growing a beard and wearing pants above the ankle are indeed highly recommended *Sunnah* (practices) of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him); however, judging a man's religiosity based on the length of his beard or the degree to which his pants are above his ankle drifts into superficiality. In communities with

[2] Shah et al., "New Muslim Converts' Experience,"; S. B. M. Kassim, M. S. Y. Abdullah, and Z. Baba, "A Survey of Problems Faced by Converts to Islam in Malaysia," *E-Bangi* 8, no. 1 (2013): 85–97; Daniel W. Snook et al., "Conversion Motifs among Muslim Converts in the United States".

such misplaced emphases, priority often leans toward imparting what is deemed the "correct understanding" of Islam and demonstrating the "proper" behaviour for Muslims. New converts, in particular, may find themselves expected to quickly learn and embody Islam in a "correct" way within days or even mere hours of their *Shahādah* (Quadrant D).

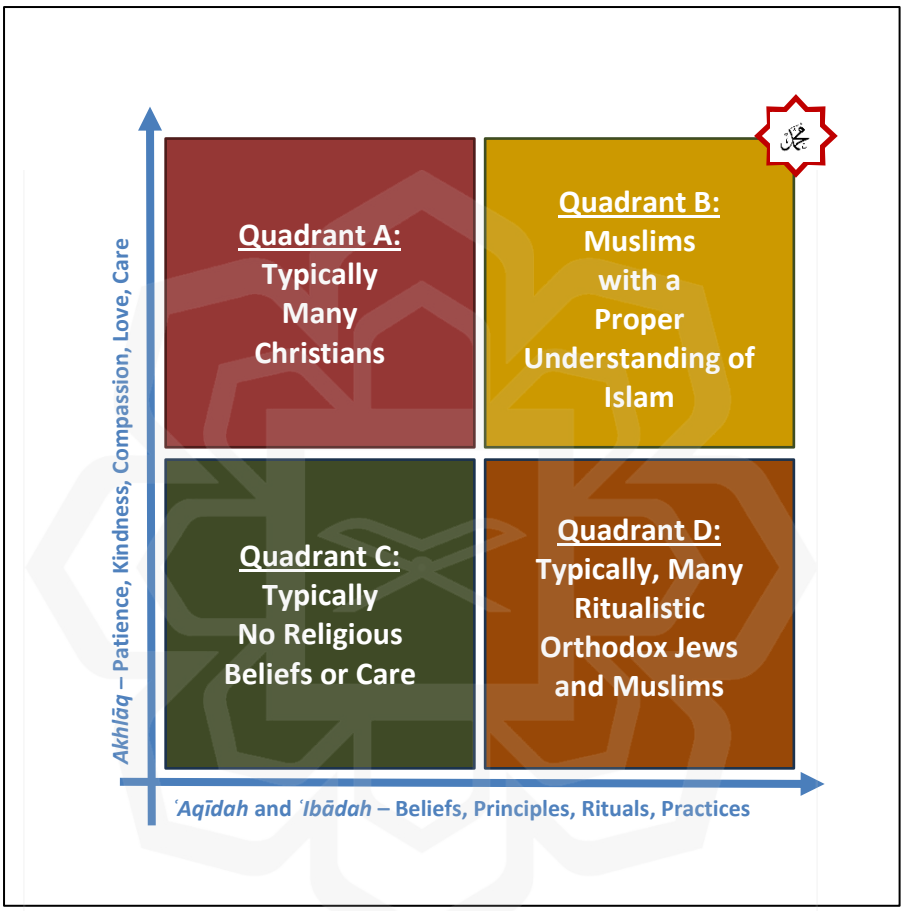


Figure 8.1 Illustration of the Balance between *ʿAqīdah*/*Fiqh* and *Akhlāq*

The challenge for the New Muslim in such cases is not only learning, adjusting, and conforming to a very defined version of Islam almost immediately upon conversion but also facing the complex task of discerning which interpretation of Islam to follow.

If one were to observe Muslims across the globe, the Muslim Ummah, one would find an almost undivided belief in the Oneness of Allah and, to almost an equal extent, belief in the finality of Prophethood in the persona of Prophet Muḥammad. In addition to this, almost all Muslims believe in the basics of faith (*Arkān al-Īmān*) – the belief in

Angels, Revelations, Messengers, the Day of Judgment, and in the concept of Qadr (destiny, be it good or bad) – and in the five pillars of Islam (*Īmān*, *Ṣalāh*, *Zakāh*, *Ṣawm*, and *Ḥajj*). But this is where the unity of belief and practice ends. In almost every detail and other matter, the Ummah is divided along many different lines. Sunnī, Shīʿah, Ibāḍī, Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī, Ḥanbalī, Jaʿfarī, Ṣūfī (and its various orders), Diyūbandī, Barēlwī, Ithnā ʿAsharī, Ismāʿīlī, Salafī, Wahhābī, and many more epithets define Muslims around the world. Furthermore, terms like devout, practicing, non-practicing, progressive, secular, reformist, cultural, and several more qualifiers and categorizers are coined to the word "Muslim" so as to very clearly distinguish what kind of a Muslim one purports to be. Unfortunately, the divisions don't just end here. Language, dialect, race, nationality, province, state, city, village, ethnicity, tribe, family, education level, social and economic standing, and political ideologies are among the many more means by which all people, including Muslims, define themselves. Asserting one's identity and relating to a particular group is a very human trait that calls back to self-esteem and self-preservation[3]. Consequently, encouraging and pressuring the New Muslim to join a particular group of Muslims and behave like them is inevitable. For some hapless converts this means conforming to a very specific cultural, ideological, and sometimes absurd version of Islam. Recall from Chapter 1, I encountered a young American Caucasian male convert in Florida who began wearing a traditional Pakistani Shalwār Kamīz to visibly identify himself as a "Muslim."

Patience, kindness, compassion, love and care (Figure 8.1 Y-axis), among other virtues, are the basis of Islamic character and behaviour (*Akhlāq*). There are hundreds of examples from the life of the Prophet (*Sunnah*) and from his sayings (*Ḥadīth*) that extoll the virtues of good behaviour. These are captured in the Prophet saying that "he (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was sent to perfect good character." Yet, despite such immense emphasis on good morals and behaviour, many Muslims fail to extend the level of patience, kindness, compassion, love, and care that converts to Islam are in dire need of. Many individuals are harassed, abused, or rejected by their families, friends, co-workers, and former faith communities after becoming Muslim. Some even

[3] Henri Tajfel, "The Achievement of Inter-Group Differentiation," in *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Henri Tajfel (London: Academic Press, 1978), 77–100; John C. Turner and Katherine J. Reynolds, "The Social Identity Perspective in Intergroup Relations: Theories, Themes and Controversies," in *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Intergroup Processes*, ed. Rupert Brown and Samuel Gaertner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 133–152, https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470693421.ch7.

lose their social and economic standing in society. At the very least, almost all New Muslims enter a phase of their life that is wholly unfamiliar and strange to them.

Recall the story of Karen, the real estate agent who became Muslim in front of a large audience of Muslims in Central Florida[4] – unfortunately her woes did not end with the very public *Shahādah*. Following the ill-advised counsel of some well-meaning individuals, she divorced her Christian husband, resulting in the loss of custody of her two teenage children. Her parents, siblings, and relatives distanced themselves, and most of her real estate clients withdrew their business. Within a few months, she married a Moroccan Muslim, but unfortunately, the marriage was short-lived; as soon as he obtained a U.S. green card, he left her. In less than two years, Karen went from being a successful real estate agent, a cherished wife, mother, daughter, and sister to living alone, relying on her rapidly dwindling savings. The Muslim community that had so enthusiastically welcomed her into Islam had left her to fend for herself. It was then that she decided to leave the Muslim community and re-establish relations with her children, family, and former community. Karen was welcomed back to the Church (Quadrant A) and given the love, care, and unconditional support that she desperately needed.

Karen's story is reminiscent of a common lament among some Western converts, "I am happy that I found Islam before I got to know Muslims."

Reflecting on the life of the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), one can clearly discern a balance between "*Akhlāq*" (Quadrant A) and "*ʿAqīdah* and *ʿIbādah*" (Quadrant D). Prophet Muḥammad would be the perfect example of both (top right corner of Quadrant B), and would be the ideal combination of *Akhlāq*, *ʿAqīdah* and *ʿIbādah* for providing proper New Muslim Care and Education (NMCE).

8.3 NMCE LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF THE PROPHET

The life of the Prophet Muḥammad presents a comprehensive model for New Muslim Care and Education, emphasizing a compassionate, gradual, and personalized approach. His example, teachings, and instructions to his companions reflect a deep understanding of human psychology and a prioritization of empathy, patience, ease over hardship, and

[4] See chapter 7.

mercy over dogma. Any system designed to care and educate New Muslims should be based on the beautiful examples found in the life of the Messenger of Allah.

8.3.1 Character and Compassion of Muḥammad Before Prophethood

Long before Prophethood, Muḥammad was known by the people of Makkah as kind, helpful, compassionate, just, and truthful. He was lovingly known as "*Al-Ṣādiq*" (the Truthful) and "*Al-Amīn*" (the Trustworthy). Even as a child and in his youth, he was always ready to help his relatives and neighbours. He would be seen helping carry firewood for his relatives or fetching water for the elderly. He would never shy away from any physical work and would help anyone and everyone in need.

One clear example of Muḥammad's concern and compassion is his participation in a pact called "*Ḥilf al-Fuḍūl*." Adil Salahi[5] in his book, "Muḥammad Man and Prophet," describes this alliance that occurred around the time Muḥammad was twenty years old.

> The immediate reason for forging this alliance was that a man from the clan of Zubayd arrived in Makkah with some goods to sell. An important man of Makkah, al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wā'il, bought them all from him, but did not pay him. When the man realized that he was about to lose everything, he appealed to several clans of the Quraysh to support him. They all declined to stand against al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wā'il and rebuked the man for his attitude. In his desperation, the man stood on top of a hill immediately overlooking the Kaʿbah at sunrise, when the men of the Quraysh met in groups around the Kaʿbah. He made his appeal to them, stating his case in a passionate and desperate manner. He reminded them of their position as the custodians of the Sacred House of Worship. Al-Zubayr ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, an uncle of the Prophet, was the first to be moved to act. He stood up and said that injustice must not be allowed.
>
> A meeting was organized in the house of ʿAbdullāh ibn Judʿān, a man of honour well respected in Makkah. Representatives of many clans of the Quraysh were present. The terms of the alliance were agreed at that meeting. Those who attended gave their most solemn pledges, swearing by God that they would stand united, supporting anyone in Makkah who suffered any injustice, whether he was a Makkan or an alien, and that they would stand firm against the perpetrator of that injustice until right and justice were restored.
>
> When they had made their alliance, those people went to al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wā'il and forced him to return to the man from Zubayd the goods he had taken

[5] Adil Salahi, *Muhammad: Man, and Prophet* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2002).

> from him. Knowing the nature of this alliance, we can understand why the Prophet continued to express his support for the ideals which this covenant endorsed. Long after prophethood he said: "I attended in ʿAbdullāh ibn Judʿān's home the forming of a covenant which I would not exchange for any material gain. If now after Islam I am called upon to honour it, I would certainly do so." This shows how Islam endorses any action or covenant made for the purpose of ensuring justice for all.

8.3.2 Emphasis on Gradual Learning

The *Qurʾān* was revealed over a period of twenty-three years. The majority of Surahs and verses dispensed in Makkah focus on foundational aspects of Islam, emphasizing *Tawḥīd* and calling people to Allah. On the other hand, a large number of Revelations from the *Madīnah* phase of Prophethood deal with interpersonal, family, social, political, legal, and economic issues. Many rulings and practices were introduced after the *Hijrah*, gradually and purposefully in sync with the growth and maturity of the fledgling Muslim community. The Prophet's approach to dealing with his community was guided not just by the content of the *Qurʾān* but also by the timing and circumstances around the Revelations. This is particularly evident in how certain prohibitions and obligations were sequentially and incrementally introduced.

One prominent example is the prohibition of alcohol. There are several verses of the *Qurʾān* pertaining to intoxicating substances like alcohol; four of these are linked to its gradual prohibition. The first of these was revealed in Makkah.

> And from the fruits of the date palm and the vine, from which you derive strong drink and a goodly provision. Surely in this is a sign for a people who understand[6].

Ibn 'Abbas said: "Strong drink is the product of these two fruits that is forbidden, and the good provision is what is permitted of them." Ibn Kathir further explains that the strong drink refers to intoxicants in contrast to eating the same fruits fresh or dried, extracting juices, and making vinegar – all goodly provisions[7]. Verse 2:219 was the second injunction where wine (referring to alcohol) is mentioned and where the "sin is greater than their benefit." Although this verse does not categorically forbid alcohol, it

[6] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, Surah 16:67.

[7] Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad*.

associates it with great sin and suggests that it may be prohibited at some point in the future.

> They ask thee about wine and gambling. Say, "In them there is great sin and [some] benefits for mankind, but their sin is greater than their benefit…[8]"

Allah then commands Muslims, in Surah Maidah verse 43, not to approach prayer in a state of drunkenness. This verse revealed in *Madīnah* suggests that alcohol was not yet prohibited since Muslims were coming to prayer while drunk and yet, it escalates the issue by declaring it's prohibition in prayer.

> O you who believe! Draw not near unto prayer when you are drunken until you know what you are uttering...
>
> O you who believe! Wine, and gambling, and idols, and divining arrows are but a means of defilement, of Satan's doing. So, avoid it, that haply you may prosper.
>
> Satan desires only to sow enmity and hatred among you through wine and gambling, and to turn you away from the remembrance of God, and from prayer. Will you, then, refrain[9]?

Finally, verses 90 and 91 of Sūrat al-Mā'idah, that were revealed at a later date and are corroborated with several *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet, are considered the definitive prohibition of alcohol in Islam. This is one of the best examples of how a ruling was instituted systematically and incrementally matching the spiritual and social growth of the nascent Muslim community.

Similarly, other Islamic rulings, especially penal laws, family law, and guidelines on social behaviour, were introduced in the later years of Prophethood, when the community was ready to understand, accept, and obey. For instance, ḥijāb, or modest dress for women, was not prescribed until later in the *Madīnan* period around the 3rd to 5th year after the *Hijrah*, when the Muslim community was more established and the need for distinct identity and protection arose[10].

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[8] Seyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an*, 2:219.

[9] *ibid*, 4:43; and 5:90-91.

[10] Mufti Muhammad Shafi, *Ma'ariful Qur'an*, Tafsir of Surah An-Nur, 24:30, accessed November 9, 2024, https://quran.com/24:30/tafsirs/en-tafsir-maarif-ul-quran.

Of particular relevance to New Muslim Care and Education are the Prophet's instructions to his companions when sending them to teach others about Islam, for example when he sent Mu'adh ibn Jabal to Yemen.

> 'Ibn Abbas narrated that: the Prophet send Mu'adh to Yemen and said: "You are going to some people among the People of the Book. Call them to bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah, and that I am the messenger of Allah. If they obey that, then tell them that Allah has enjoined upon them five prayers every day and night. If they obey that, then tell them that Allah has enjoined upon them charity (*Zakāh*) from their wealth, to be taken from the rich and given to their poor. If they obey that, then beware of (taking) the best of their wealth. And beware of the supplication of the oppressed, for there is no barrier between them and Allah[11]."

This well-known *Ḥadīth* not only instructs Mu'adh to invite and teach in stages, but also to be mindful of people's sensitivities, "then beware of (taking) the best of their wealth." Furthermore, the Prophet reminds him to be just and merciful, and not be oppressive, by emphasizing "And beware of the supplication of the oppressed, for there is no barrier between them and Allah."

This principle of gradually and incrementally introducing obligations reflects Allah's incomparable Mercy. Allah says, "My Mercy encompasses all things"[12], and in a well-known *Ḥadīth Qudsī* (sacred *Ḥadīth*), Allah says "My Mercy precedes My Wrath (The Study *Qurʾān*), and in other verses Allah is said to have prescribed "Mercy for Himself[13]".

8.3.3 The Brotherhood of *Anṣār* and *Muhājir*

When the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) moved to *Madīnah*, he established brotherhood between the *Anṣār* (helpers) of *Madīnah* and the Muslims who had migrated from Makkah (the *Muhājirūn* - emigrants). This fraternity, referred to as *Muʾākhāh*, was instrumental in uniting the Muslim community in *Madīnah*. The *Anṣār* generously welcomed the *Muhājirūn* into their homes and families, they shared their wealth and offered every support to their brothers in faith. This brotherhood is a

[11] Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Book 9, Hadith 1783, accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:1783.

[12] See Qur'an 7:156.

[13] See Qur'an 6:12–13; and 6:54

powerful model for follow up and care of New Muslims today, where the established Muslim (behaving like an "*Anṣār*") supports the convert to Islam – a *Muhājir* who has "emigrated" from disbelief to Islam.

8.3.4 Generosity of the Prophet toward New Muslims

The Prophet was always known for his extraordinary generosity towards everyone, but especially so when it came to new converts to Islam. In Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, it is reported that after the Battle of Ḥunayn, the Prophet gave large shares of spoils to new converts among the Quraysh, such as Abu Sufyan and others. When asked why he gave so generously, the Prophet replied, "I give to certain people to make their hearts feel at ease." This act of generosity reflects a deep understanding of the needs of new Muslims, acknowledging that they may face emotional or social adjustments when embracing Islam. By being generous with resources, time, and attention, the Prophet made new Muslims feel valued and reassured them of their place within the Muslim community. This principle of generosity can be applied today by offering new Muslims not only financial support when needed, but also time, mentorship, and emotional care.

8.3.5 Additional *Ḥadīth* on Care and Kindness

The Prophet's teachings are rich with reminders to treat people with kindness and gentleness. In what is frequently referred to as the "golden rule" in Islam, the Prophet is reported to have said, "None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself[14]". There are numerous *Ḥadīth* and examples from the life of the Messenger that embody this principle.

> Abū Hurayrah (May Allah be pleased with him) reported:
>
> The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "He who removes from a believer one of his difficulties of this world, Allah will remove one of his troubles on the Day of Resurrection; and he who finds relief for a hard-pressed person, Allah will make things easy for him on the Day of Resurrection; he who covers up (the faults and sins) of a Muslim, Allah will cover up (his faults and sins) in this world and in the Hereafter. Allah supports His slave as long as the slave is supportive of

[14] Muhammad ibn Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Jami' at-Tirmidhi*, Book 38, Hadith 2515, accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:2515.

> his brother; and he who treads the path in search of knowledge, Allah makes that path easy, leading to Jannah for him; the people who assemble in one of the houses of Allah, reciting the Book of Allah, learning it and teaching, there descends upon them the tranquillity, and mercy covers them, the angels flock around them, and Allah mentions them in the presence of those near Him; and he who lags behind in doing good deeds, his noble lineage will not make him go ahead[15].”
>
> Narrated Anas ibn Mālik: The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, make things easy for the people, and do not make it difficult for them, and make them calm (with glad tidings) and do not repulse (them)[16].

Even when people behaved badly, the Prophet responded with kindness. For instance, a Bedouin stood up in the Prophet's Mosque in *Madīnah* and started urinating. Some of the companions caught him and got upset. The Prophet ordered them to leave him and to pour water over the defiled place. He then told them, "You have been sent to make things easy and not to make them difficult[17]".

One time a Bedouin pulled roughly on the Prophet's cloak where it left a mark on his neck and demanded that he be given charity. Instead of getting upset, the Prophet turned to him, smiled, and instructed his companions to give the man something[18].

The life and teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad provide an ideal approach to New Muslim Care. They emphasize compassion, kindness, empathy, and generosity. A hallmark of the Prophetic method was teaching gradually and making lessons and principles easy to follow. The *Muʾākhāh* (brotherhood) between the *Anṣār* of *Madīnah* and the *Muhājirūn* of Makkah paves the way for a similar relation between the New Muslims and their care givers and teachers. There are numerous lessons from the *Qurʾān* and the *Sunnah* that Muslim communities should be mindful of in their treatment of converts to Islam.

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[15] *Riyad as-Salihin*, Book 1, Hadith 245, accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:245.

[16] Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 78, Hadith 152 (Hadith 6125), accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6125.

[17] Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 78, Hadith 155 (Hadith 6128), accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6125

[18] Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book 78, Hadith 115 (Hadith 6088), accessed November 19, 2024, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6088.

8.4 NMCE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

Follow-up of New Muslims is a fundamental function of the Organization. It is accorded at least as much, if not more, importance than *Daʿwah*. Currently, almost 90% of individuals who embraced Islam through the Organization are receiving care and education, either in group settings or directly one-on-one. Another 8% have opted for self-guided learning, requesting minimal intervention. Only a small number, less than 2%, are not receiving any follow-up support. This was not always the case.

Over ten years ago, follow-up consisted of several dozen weekly New Muslim classes conducted at the Organizations' three centres around the country. However, there was no standardized or mutually agreed-upon syllabus in place, and, as a result, students received instruction based on the individual teacher's preferences and whims. Although almost half of all New Muslims were registered for these classes, in reality less than 20% actually attended. In many cases, classes had become a means of socializing, resulting in converts attending "New Muslim" classes for several years.

Following a three-month study of the entire Organization, an overhaul of the New Muslim education system was carried out in 2015. A unified New Muslim Education syllabus across various languages was instituted. Teachers were carefully selected and trained. That year, all converts through the Organization were now required to only attend these "new" classes where the coursework would have to be completed within a year, and they would graduate to join the larger Muslim community. However, a "glass ceiling" persisted. Despite extensive marketing and registration efforts, no more than 31% of the converts that year attended classes. Over 26% either declined to attend or were unable to make it to any class. The status of the remaining 43% of those who became Muslim that year (2015) remained unknown.

In the subsequent three years, various attempts were made to enhance the New Muslim Education System; however, these initiatives yielded only marginal improvements.

Following extensive introspection, numerous consultations with *Daʿīs* and New Muslims, and even a review of education and support systems beyond the conventional Islamic organizations, we finally developed a revised system that placed greater emphasis on addressing the emotional and social needs of New Muslims. The focus shifted to providing "care" before prioritizing "education." This newly structured New

Muslim Care and Education System (NMCES) was introduced within the Organization in 2019. The results were remarkable. Over 97% of all those who took their *Shahādah* through the Organization were being taken care of in some way[19].

8.4.1 Guiding Concepts Behind the NMCES

At the core of the New Muslim Care and Education System (NMCES) is a singular guiding idea: to build authentic brotherhood and sisterhood with New Muslims, offering empathy and support as if they were our own family. This foundational approach led to the establishment of essential guiding concepts for effective care and education:

- **Active Listening[20]**

Effective support and effective teaching require listening as much as, if not more than, speaking. Hearing and understanding New Muslims provides insight into the challenges they face and greatly helps in the search for solutions.

- **Prioritizing Care over Education[21]**

Many individuals experience loss of emotional care and support from their families, friends, and previous faith community after they become Muslim. As described in the previous chapter, most people experience an emotional "high" during the *Shahādah* itself – they are excited, elated, and crying for joy. This feeling may last for hours, days, and even weeks, but eventually the reality of having converted to another faith sinks in. The practical aspects of becoming a Muslim start to take shape. As discussed before, many New Muslims begin rationalizing and justifying their conversion. During this time, converts may face the whisperings of Satan, feel a lack of support from loved ones, and, in some cases, endure harassment or abuse due to their decision to embrace

[19] 89% of all converts were provided care and education directly through the Organization. 9% opted to self-study and requested to be left alone. The remaining 2% were either incarcerated, left the country, or could not be reached by the staff and volunteers of the Organization.

[20] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Principles of New Muslim Care and Education, Internal Document*, Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024.

[21] *ibid.*

Islam. At all such times, social, psychological, and emotional care of converts is extremely important and outstrips their Islamic educational needs.

- **Organic Teaching**[22]

Education was reimagined to mirror the nurturing approach used with young family members. For example, it is quite common in the Muslim community to see toddlers and young children mimic the actions of their parents during the ritual prayers. Children are quite observant of their parents and older siblings, seeing them perform *Ṣalāh*, fast during the month of Ramadan and interact with one another in typical Muslim fashion – for example greeting one another with the Islamic greeting "*Al-Salāmu ʿalaykum*," or using their right hand when eating or drinking. Consequently, children "pick up" these behaviours from their elders and try and emulate them. In a similar manner, instead of rigid classrooms and exams, New Muslims are taught through example and experience, and where Islamic lessons are delivered with empathy, love, and understanding.

- **Flexibility**[23]

Most converts have full time jobs, have families, and responsibilities that make it difficult to consistently attend classes at fixed times and places. Providing multiple options for learning and affording the flexibility to choose and change their preferred methods, times, and even switch between teachers or mentors greatly facilitates learning and enhances compliance.

- **Diverse Learning Environments**[24]

Recognizing the diversity in learning preferences, the system accommodates multiple methods: one-on-one sessions, small study groups, peer-to-peer support, online and social media learning approaches, and traditional classroom settings. This flexibility allows New Muslims to switch between formats as needed.

[22] *ibid.*
[23] *ibid.*
[24] *ibid.*

- **Independent Study[25]**

Some converts prefer to study Islam independently and would rather not have any support from the Organization. Some well-educated converts and in quite a few cases, Western converts, prefer to learn Islam on their own without help or support from the Organization. Such individuals sometimes even learn and practice Islam before actually converting. Frequently, when people convert to Islam for marriage, their Muslim spouse or their Muslim in-laws take on the role of the Organization – providing loving care, support, and Islamic education. This also occurs with some Muslim families who provide care and education to their domestic employees who choose to become Muslim. In few cases converts experience or expect to experience extreme resistance, harassment, and abuse from their family, friends, and previous faith community. In such instances keeping their Islam secret is essential. Such individuals request even before converting that no one from the Organization or the Muslim community contact them, or associate with them in any manner. Most commonly, this occurs amongst some Hindu converts who fear for their own safety and the safety of their loved ones both in Bahrain and back home in India. While assistance is always available, the Organization acknowledges and honours the choice of all converts who prefer to journey independently.

- **Transfer of Trust[26]**

In most cases, New Muslims feel comfortable and trust the person who originally explained about Islam and facilitated their *Shahādah*, for example, a *Dāʿī*. Understandably, trusting and learning Islam from someone else, a stranger, is, for most converts, challenging. Therefore, it is essential for the *Dāʿī* to introduce and "hand over" the New Muslim to a teacher or mentor – an *Anṣār*. This "transfer of trust" has been a key factor in the significant increase in effective follow-up rates among new converts.

[25] *ibid.*

[26] *ibid.*

- **Financial Support**[27]

Anṣār (teachers, coordinators, and mentors) supporting New Muslims is a serious commitment of time, patience, and effort. Some *Anṣār* maybe caring for several converts at the same time resulting in even greater sacrifice of time and effort. Many "meetings" and "classes" for New Muslims take place in cafeterias and restaurants. Providing *Anṣār* financial support for their efforts and related expenses is necessary to ensure long term commitment and continued care of New Muslims.

- **Self-Sustaining and Peer-Driven**[28]

Experience is the best teacher. Individuals who have converted to Islam and completed the New Muslim Care and Education System (NMCES) are exceptionally well-suited to become *Anṣār*. Having personally crossed the journey – from not knowing much about Islam to taking the *Shahādah* and to eventually becoming a practicing believer – they possess the unique understanding and empathy that allows them to help others navigate the same path. This provides a steady stream of potential *Anṣār*, in effect creating a self-sustaining model. Even recent converts to Islam can offer valuable insights and share their experiences with other new converts who are facing similar challenges. Such peer-to-peer support is a vital component of the NMCES.

Through these guiding concepts, the NMCE System provides a compassionate and adaptable framework, prioritizing the individual needs and preferences of New Muslims while imparting the basic teachings of Islam – it is a good balance between care and education (Quadrant B).

8.4.2 Core Principles of the NMCES

The above guiding concepts may further be reduced to four core principles that may be adaptable to most situations in different Muslim communities in all parts of the world regarding care and education of New Muslims.

[27] *ibid.*
[28] *ibid.*

- **Care Initiation**[29]

Care begins at the moment of *Shahādah* and, when possible, even prior. This early involvement establishes a foundation of support from the very start of a New Muslim's journey. It reassures the individual that they are being welcomed into a community of believers who will care and support them through this major transformation they are undergoing.

- **Customer-Driven Approach**[30]

Care is tailored to the New Muslim's preferences, allowing them to choose the level and kind of follow-up that best suits their needs, including the option to "not be followed up." They are free to move between options as their journey unfolds, ensuring that their needs are prioritized, and they are given ample flexibility – in effect they take ownership over their own care and education.

- **Transfer of Trust**[31]

Throughout their journey, multiple individuals may provide support and education to a New Muslim at different times. Each transition from one caregiver to another is marked by a proper introduction given within a warm, welcoming social setting to foster comfort and maximize trust.

- **Recognition and Reward**[32]

Daʿīs, *Anṣār*, and all those who dedicate their time and effort to supporting New Muslims are appropriately recognized and rewarded. Depending solely on the goodwill of volunteers is not sustainable. The level of care and support that New Muslims need demands either paid staff or well compensated "volunteers." Expenses incurred in the

[29] *ibid.*
[30] *ibid.*
[31] *ibid.*
[32] *ibid.*

care and education of converts should be borne by the organizations and societies whose mandate is *Daʿwah* and follow-up.

It is noteworthy that of the eight categories of people eligible for *Zakāh*, two have been clearly earmarked for supporting the care and education of converts to Islam. "*Muʾallaf al-Qulūb*" means "those whose hearts are to be reconciled," and refers primarily to converts to Islam, whereas "*Fī sabīl Allāh*" or "in the path of Allah," may be used for New Muslims, among other causes. Like other Muslims, converts may qualify for other categories of *Zakāh* depending on their financial condition or their vocation[33].

8.4.3 NMCES Processes

The New Muslim Care and Education System (NMCES) comes into effect when an individual is ready to declare their *Shahādah*. Whether initiated by a *Dāʿī* at any location, or conducted at the Organization's offices, a *Shahādah* is typically witnessed by two of its staff or volunteers – most likely a *Dāʿī* and an *Anṣār*.[34]

Figure 8.2 below is a summary of the NMCES from the *Shahādah* to completion of the basic Islamic education of a New Muslim. In most cases, the *Dāʿī* leads the *Shahādah* process directing the Muslim-to-be through this first step in their journey into Islam. The *Dāʿī* would then typically "hand over" the convert to the *Anṣār*, more specifically the *Anṣār* Coordinator (AC) – this is the first "transfer of trust." The AC would then take the lead and oversee the initial care of the convert who is now called a New *Shahādah* (NS).

[33] M. Kabir Hassan, Magda Ismail Abdel Mohsin, and Aishath Muneeza, *Application of Zakat: From Classical and Contemporary Perspective* (World Scientific, 2024).

[34] See chapter 7.

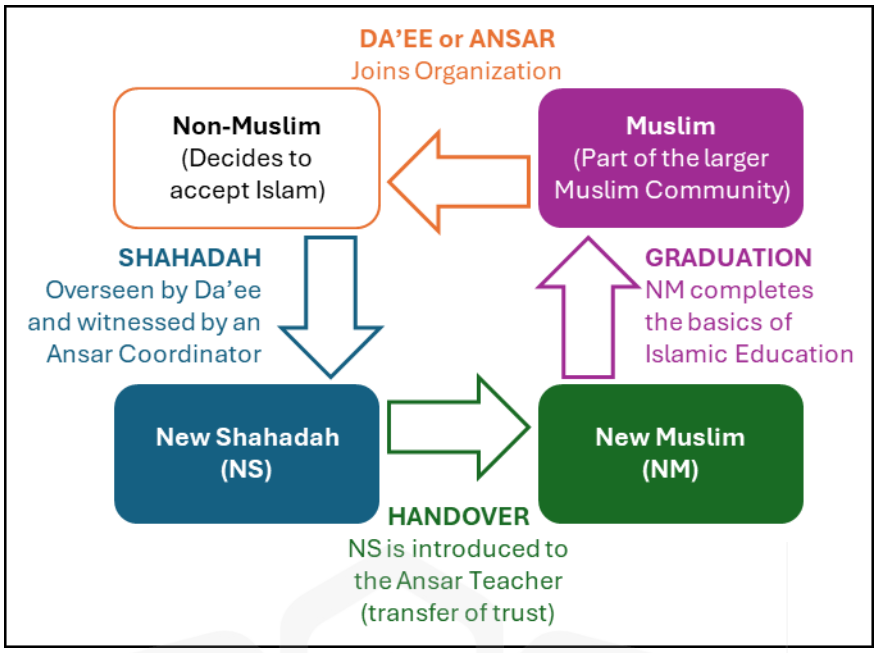


Figure 8.2 Illustration Depicting the Organizations' NMCES Flow Process[35]

In the days and weeks following the *Shahādah*, the AC plays a pivotal role in the care and education of the New *Shahādah*. The AC's first task is to fully explain the meaning of *Shahādah*, emphasizing the importance of *Tawḥīd* and ensuring that there is no misunderstanding or doubt. Additionally, the AC reassures the New *Shahādah* of the Organization's commitment to continued care and support, providing essential contact information and presenting the *Shahādah* gift pack.[36] Before the New *Shahādah* leaves, the AC records all the relevant identity and contact information and schedules a follow-up meeting within a day or two. Depending on the outcome of this second meeting, the AC may either collect information for the *Shahādah* Certificate and assign the New *Shahādah* to an *Anṣār* Teacher (AT) for ongoing support or continue providing care directly.

Following the initial phase, the New *Shahādah* is formally introduced and handed over to their designated AT, marking a second "transfer of trust." Following this transition, the convert, now referred to as a New Muslim, can select their preferred method of support and education. They may opt for personalized one-on-one sessions

[35] Mohamed Quadir Harunani, *Principles of New Muslim Care and Education, Internal Document*, Discover Islam Society Bahrain, 2024.

[36] See chapter 7.

with the AT, join an *Anṣār* Family Unit (AFU) – a group of peers mentored by the AT – or attend online or in-person classes led by the AT. In cases where there are very few New Muslims from a particular ethnicity or language then the AC, or in rare circumstances, the *Dāʿī* may take on the role of an *Anṣār* Teacher.

An AT is specially trained to provide personal care, be a mentor, and also teach the basics of Islam to New Muslims. All *Daʿīs* and ACs are also qualified ATs. *Anṣār* Teachers may not necessarily be trained as ACs or *Daʿīs*. Within the Organization, most *Daʿīs* are full time staff, whereas ACs and ATs serve as "paid volunteers." They are given a variable allowance based on the number of converts they are caring for and teaching. Additionally, they are reimbursed for budgeted expenses incurred during the care of New Muslims.

8.4.4 Flexibility within the NMCES

Not all New *Shahādah* choose to be followed up by the Organization, some opt to self-study or are taught by a spouse or employer, and some request to be left alone for various personal reasons[37]. These individuals are designated "No Response". Other New *Shahādah* may take some time to decide on their preferred follow-up and are referred to as "Delayed Response."

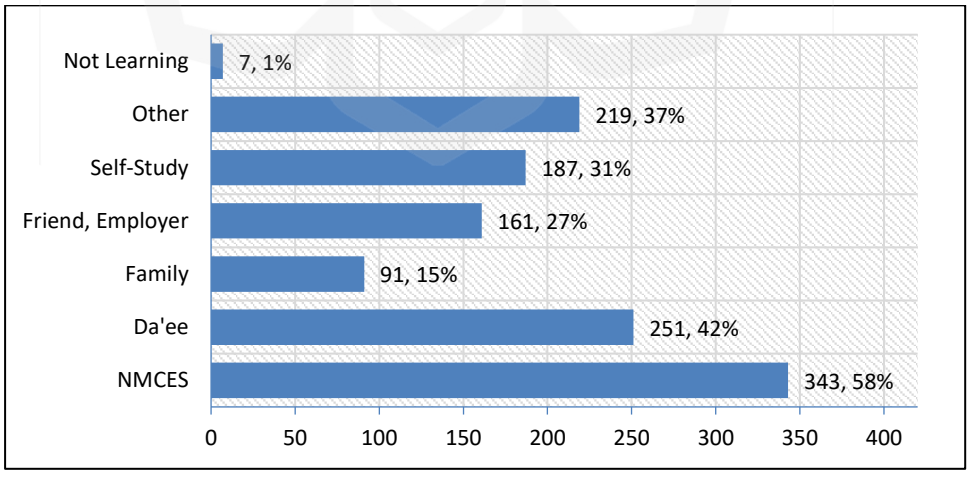


Figure 8.3 Mode of Islamic Education followed by Filipino Survey Respondents (n = 596, Respondents May Choose More than One)

[37] See Section 8.3.1 above.

Figure 8.3 above highlights the preferred modes of Islamic education among the 596 Filipinos surveyed. It should be noted that most New Muslims may acquire knowledge and get support from multiple sources. For example, a Filipina convert's husband may provide care, support, and may also be involved in her Islamic education, for example helping her memorize verses of the *Qurʾān*, or showing her how to pray. The same Filipina may also be part of an AFU, where she is pursuing her Islamic studies along with other Filipina converts.

A significant 58% (343 respondents) indicated their participation in the New Muslim Care and Education System (NMCES), underscoring its value amongst the respondents. Close behind, 251 respondents reported being guided by a *Dāʿī*. Many New Muslims feel more comfortable with the person who administered their *Shahādah*. Others may be taught by the *Dāʿī* along with other modes of support and teaching. In quite a few cases, the *Dāʿī* may be taking on the role of an *Anṣār* where either there is a shortage of *Anṣār* in that particular ethnic group, or the *Anṣār* are overworked. A major component of the NMCES is flexibility – in this instance the flexibility to choose one's teacher or mentor.

187 respondents (31%) were studying on their own, and a further 27% and 15% were being taught by friends and employers, and their families respectively. Again, given the option to be taught by more than one person or system, many New Muslims have multiple caregivers and teachers emphasizing the importance of flexibility in any effective NMCES.

219 respondents indicated that they were pursuing other forms of education. This suggests a range of less formal or alternative educational methods not captured in the main categories, pointing to the range of options available to converts. Lastly, only 7 respondents reported not engaging in any learning at all most likely due to personal reasons and limitations.

8.4.5 NMCE Syllabus

Regardless of the type of support and education selected, all New Muslims follow the same basic Islamic education course (see Figure 8.4 below). They receive identical materials, including books and online resources, and have the flexibility to switching

between the different modes of care and education. Most New Muslims complete the syllabus and graduate within a few months. They join the larger Muslim community and are no longer considered New Muslims. Some of these Muslims return to the Organization as *Anṣār* (Coordinators or Teachers) or *Daʿīs*.

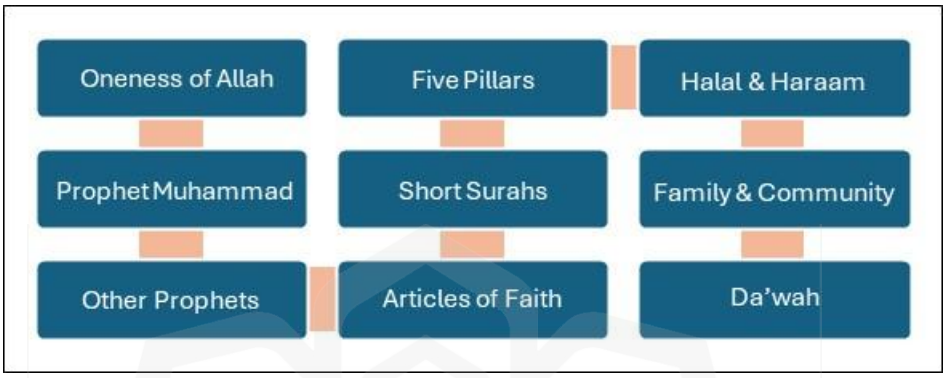


Figure 8.4 Progress of New Muslims is Marked by these Milestones (Simplified Version)

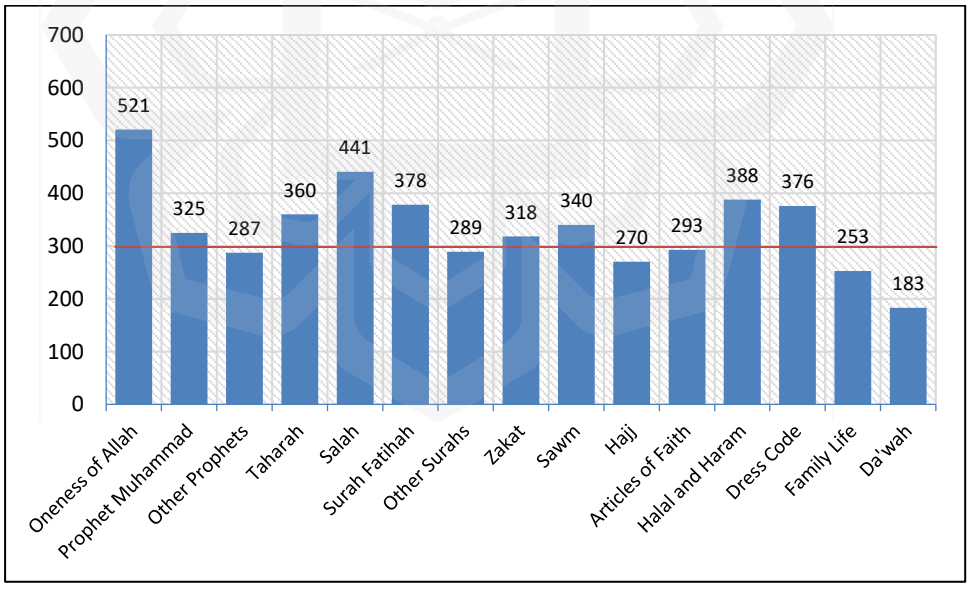


Figure 8.5 Topics Learned by Filipino Survey Respondents as part of their Islamic Education within the Organization (n = 596, Respondents May Choose More than One)

The chart above delineates the range of topics covered by Filipino New Muslims as part of their Islamic education within the Organization, indicating the extent of their

learning progress. More than half the students have completed the majority of topics offered with an overwhelming 87% of respondents reported having studied *Tawḥīd* (the Oneness of Allah), and a further 74% have learnt how to pray. Overall, the chart suggests a high level of compliancy within the Filipinos surveyed when it comes to learning about the basics of Islam. It also indicates the effectiveness of the education methods employed by the Organization.

The data from Figure 8.6 below, which depicts the levels of ease in learning Islam as reported by 596 Filipino respondents, indicates some 28% found it "easy" to "very easy." Whereas almost a third were in between (moderate). These results indicate that while a significant portion of respondents found learning Islam to be manageable (60%), the remaining two out of five found learning Islam "difficult" to "very difficult." It is therefore necessary to look at the specific topics or areas of learning that pose the largest challenges to the Pinoy converts.

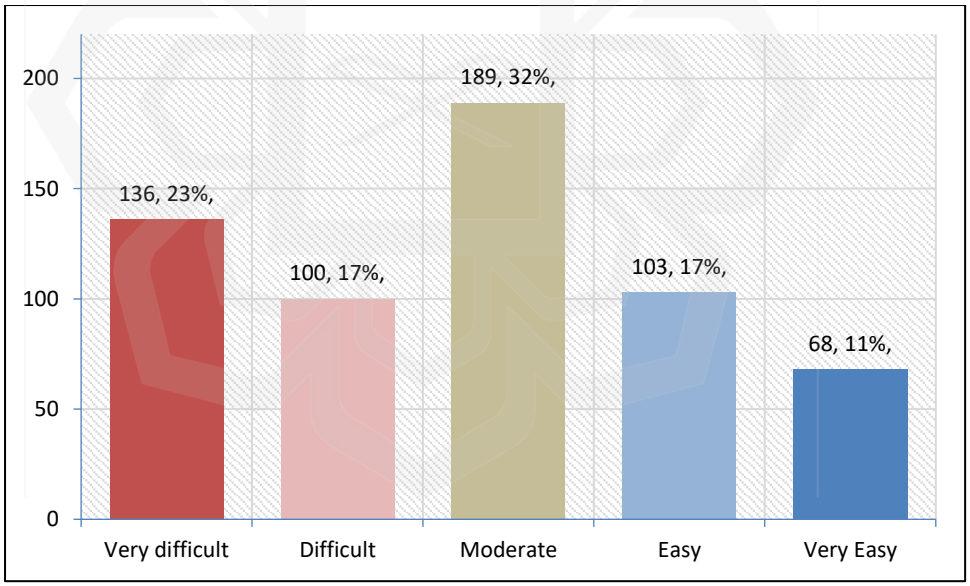


Figure 8.6 Survey Respondents Level of Ease in Learning Islam (n = 596)

8.4.6 Struggles with NMCES Milestones

Learning the principles and practices of any faith is not easy. Unlearning a lifetime of doctrine and rituals and replacing them with new fundamentals and habits, especially as adults, is even more difficult. Remarkably, the majority of Filipino converts who

responded to the Survey did not find most of the educational milestones difficult to comprehend. As depicted in Figure 8.7 below, despite being the clincher that convinced the majority of respondents to accept Islam, *Tawḥīd* was still a "sticky point" and almost a fifth (19%) were struggling to fully understand it. The concept of the Oneness of Allah may have drawn the majority to accept, however understanding its deeper nuances can be challenging.

The next most common challenging topic for those surveyed was the Islamic understanding of the Day of Judgment. 96 or 16% of the respondents were struggling with this milestone. Another 14% found the idea of Qadr hard to understand. The subject of destiny is difficult for anyone to grasp, even born Muslims find it hard to explain, hence for 513 of the Filipino surveyed to comprehend this topic is truly a noteworthy achievement. 68 respondents were still working on understanding the concept of life after death.

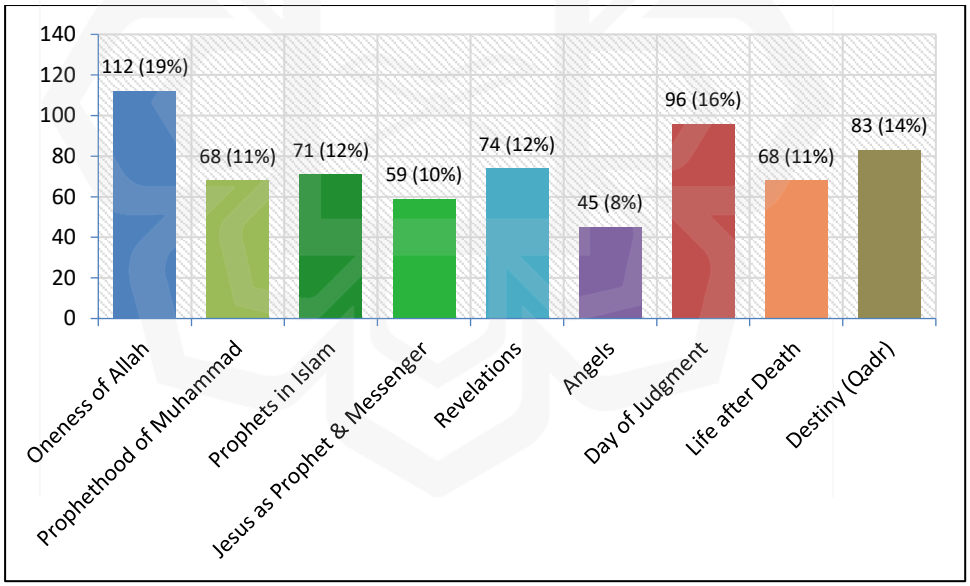


Figure 8.7 Islamic Education Milestone Topics that Survey Respondents are Struggling to Fully Understand (n = 596)

Between 10% and 12% of the respondents found it hard to fully grasp the concept of Prophets in Islam – be it the culmination of a long line of Prophets with Prophet Muḥammad or changing a lifetime of belief and getting convinced that Jesus was a Prophet and Messenger of Allah and not His son. 12% (or 74 respondents) were still

learning about the revelations that Allah sent, whereas a mere 8% found the idea of Angels hard to comprehend. The overwhelming majority of Filipino converts were previously Catholic – a faith that emphasizes similar concepts like Angels, Life after Death, and Prophets – therefore for the majority many of these ideas are not a big leap of faith.

It is also worth noting that more than half of the respondents had not yet completed their basic Islamic education. This means that many within the 8% to 19% of Pinoy still struggling with these concepts may not have fully covered these topics in their syllabus yet.

8.5 ADJUSTING TO LIFE AS A MUSLIM

Most "born Muslims" would never truly understand the sacrifices and challenges faced by converts to Islam. The simplest of acts that born Muslims take for granted, for instance greeting one another with the Arabic words, "*Al-Salāmu ʿalaykum*" (peace be with you), may become a major obstacle for a convert who finds Arabic words very strange and difficult to pronounce.

A few years ago, I met an African American convert who was noticeably hesitant to lead the *Ṣalāh* (ritual prayers). He was an elderly man who had taken his *Shahādah* more than fifteen years before. Well-educated, successful, highly respected in the community, and very eloquent in English, this gentleman had yet to master Arabic words. As such, despite knowing how to perform the ritual prayers, he would always decline leading the prayers for fear of mispronouncing the Arabic. This remarkable gentleman is far from an exception. When we recently interviewed a young, impoverished Ugandan convert to Islam, we asked about his biggest challenge after conversion. Surprisingly, he didn't point to the lack of money or a stable job. Instead, he shared that his greatest struggle was learning to pronounce the words of the *Qurʾān* correctly during prayer.

8.5.1 Adjusting to life as a Muslim – Interview Findings

The twenty-five Filipinos interviewed were asked about how challenging it had been to adjust to their new life. The majority were pleased with how easily they had adjusted to

Islam and how well they had been welcomed into the Filipino Muslim community in Bahrain. Some expressed specific challenges they faced in their transition to Islam.

Some faced ridicule and hostility from friends and family but were nonetheless happy with their decision to accept Islam. All twenty-five Filipinos interviewed expressed immense happiness and contentment with their life as Muslims. For instance, thirty-one-year-old Assistant Manager Hafsah described her life as a Muslim in the following terms.

> In my previous religion I don't have happy memories of peace that I got when I embraced Islam. I have peace in my prayers. Even if I did a sin, I could pray sincerely to Allah for forgiveness. When I used to go to the church, I was there because my family wanted me there, but now I am happy doing my prayers. When I pray to Allah, all the bad things inside in my heart are gone, and I feel very relaxed like an upgrade. When you complete the prayer, it brings happy feelings. I cannot express my happiness when I do the *Ṣalāh* even if I still I haven't memorised some of the Arabic words. I keep praying and in sha Allah I can perform the prayers well soon. You know every day, I'm talking with Allah, between me and Him already, I guess we're like best friends now. I feel like I'm telling Him about everything that happened to me in the day. Sometimes I had bad things but if I keep talking with Him, I feel relaxed…I'm so happy to be honest. I feel I'm not alone. Because sometimes, if I feel alone, even I don't know how to pray but I'm praying, I'm talking to Allah.

Most of the interviewees simply stated that they have never been happier. Some said that for the first time in their lives they had found a sense of peace and contentment. When asked if they had any regrets about becoming Muslim, every single Filipino interviewed replied in the negative – most stating "no regrets, no doubts."

8.5.2 Adjusting to life as a Muslim – Survey Findings

Like their Pinoy counterparts who were interviewed, the majority of survey respondents were very happy with how easily they had adjusted to their life as Muslims. They attributed this primarily to the support they had received from the community.

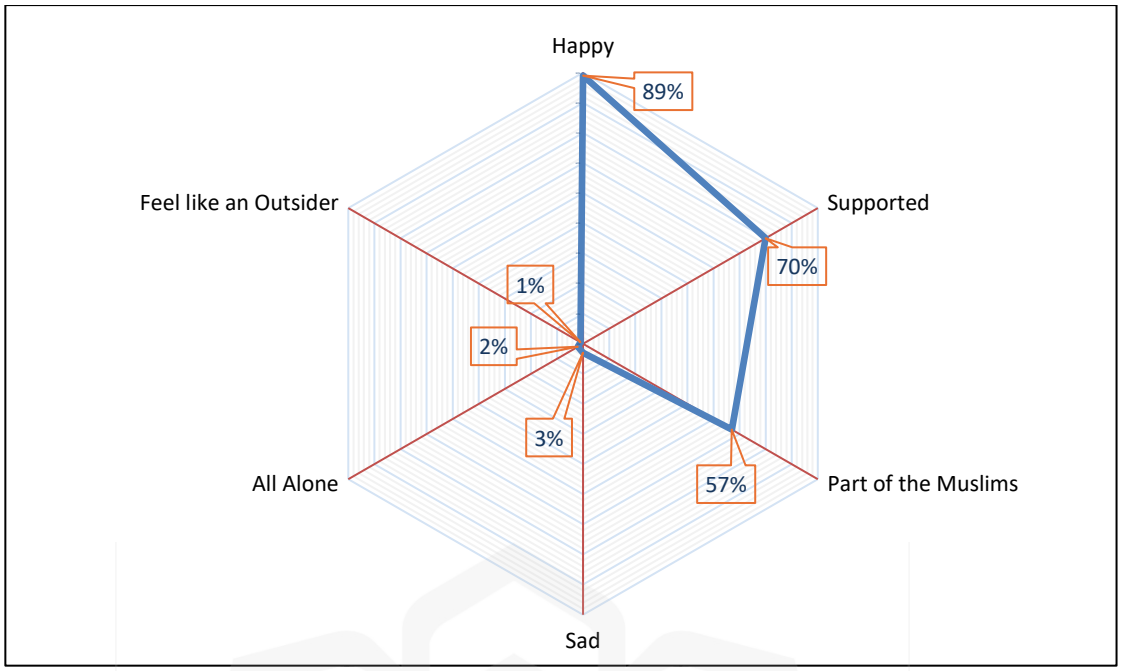


Figure 8.8 Radar Chart Depicting Emotional States Described by Survey Respondents long after becoming Muslim (n = 596, Respondents May Choose More than One)

The majority of the 596 Filipinos surveyed (see Figure 8.8) reported a general feeling of happiness (89%) and feeling supported by the Muslim community (70%). Three hundred and forty (57%) of the respondents considered themselves part of the larger Muslim community. Between 1% and 3% of those surveyed reported negative feelings like sadness, feeling lonely, and considering themselves as outsiders.

Over seven out of ten survey respondents did not experience any negative treatment after converting to Islam (Figure 8.9 below). Seventy-two (12%) reported that their family had distanced themselves due to their converting to Islam. Ten percent reported being discriminated against after their *Shahādah*. Thirty-six Filipinos (6%) stated that they were "forced to fit in" by the Muslim community and an equal number were also "made to feel inferior" by other Muslims. 6% were also subjected to verbal abuse. Only 2% reported being threatened. Twelve reported physical abuse. And twelve (2%) had lost their jobs because they became Muslim.

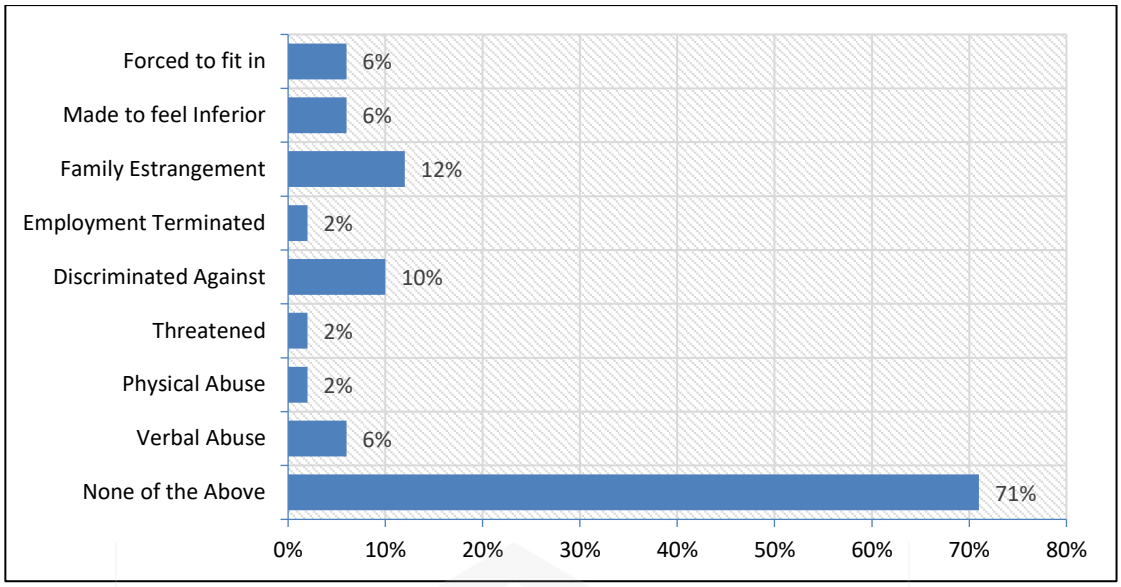


Figure 8.9 Chart depicting Negative Treatment Received by Survey Respondents After Converting to Islam (n = 596, Respondents May Choose More than One)

8.5.3 Specific Challenges Faced by the Converts – Interview Findings

The majority of Filipinos interviewed did not face major challenges after becoming Muslim. While every effort was made to mitigate this risk, there may be some degree of social desirability bias and acquiescence bias that influenced the interviewees, particularly if they believed that their answers would have an impact on their standing with the Organization.[38] Nonetheless, some New Muslims did share some specific difficulties they encountered in their journey in Islam.

Four of the twenty-five interviewees stated that they struggled with memorizing and pronouncing Arabic verses of the *Qurʾān*. Khadijah said she found the Arabic words "too difficult to pronounce in the prayer," and similarly Hafsah said that "Arabic words are difficult to pronounce." Whereas for Aishah memorizing Arabic words for prayers was challenging, she stated, "As I said before, I have a twisted tongue. I start memorising and it's now been four days, and I'm not done. But it's not, it's not continuous, you know, because I'm working. But when I'm having time, I'm trying my best to memorise it."

[38] See Chapter 2.

Few of the Filipinos interviewed found Islamic practices like fasting and prayer difficult to keep up with. Fatimah had a hard time waking up for the dawn prayer and Ali, the 48-year-old car sales executive, had difficulty fasting. Others interviewed found it hard to give up on some of their pre-Islamic habits and preferences.

Thirty-seven-year-old, Summayyah had a truly difficult time quitting her alcohol habit and stopping herself from consuming pork as well as being involved in a business that sold pork. She spoke of her doubts and challenges.

> The only… the only doubt that I had was if I can really maintain the same discipline and that if I can follow through, because I know Islam it's not only like a religion, but a way of life.
>
> It was really hard in the beginning, as Roman Catholic, we're eating this food (pork) that we are used to for how many years now? I'm 37. I have been eating pork, so from the start it's little bit hard. But I'm trying to avoid now.
>
> They're telling this (pork) is *ḥarām*, Is this really from Allah? Why? I know that Allah created all the things in the world, but…it is not allowed for the humans to eat this. So that's the first thing I know, I'm struggling.
>
> I grew up in this family, similar surroundings and neighbourhood. Everyone including my family has these habits. So, I grew up doing the same. I started drinking alcohol when I was in high school. I wanted to run away from what I was experiencing in my family, so I got married. But my husband, he was also drinking. And after we got married, we had money problems. He was drinking a lot and that would eat into our earnings. This is the main reason why we used to fight. I used to drink too, but not as heavily as him and it was my outlet for the problems we were facing.
>
> After I became Muslim. I stopped (drinking). It's very difficult. Honestly. Allah knows it's very difficult because I used to live like this for a long time. But I know Allah will help me to get through this. We're human. Sometimes you have questions and struggles. Sometimes you have to ask yourself, do I really, really need to do this. But I know I will do this.
>
> I accepted Islam because, I really, I wanted to find peace. I wanted to change myself. I will continue, I will change myself. I will follow Islam, whatever it takes. Because I know that no one can save me except myself. So, I am willing to change everything and to leave everything. What my habits were before, I will leave everything, just to continue this journey.

8.5.4 Specific Challenges Faced by the Converts – Survey Findings

The 596 Filipino New Muslims surveyed provided vast amounts of credible data that sheds light on some of the areas of difficulty that they faced while navigating their journey into Islam.

Figure 8.10 below provides greater insight into areas of learning that are most challenging for the Filipino converts surveyed. A very large number of them (460 or 77%) had difficulty pronouncing Arabic words. Whereas personal supplications (duas) may be uttered in any language, the ritual prayers (*Ṣalāh*) are always performed in Arabic. For non-Arabic speakers pronouncing words in Arabic may be quite daunting. Some sounds in Arabic simply don't exist in many other languages. For example, guttural and emphatic consonants like "ع" (*ʿAyn*) and "ق" (*Qāf*), require specific tongue and throat positioning unfamiliar to *ʿAjamī* (non-Arabic speakers). Furthermore, the use of diacritical marks to write short vowels and other pronunciation nuances further complicate Arabic for non-native speakers. Even born Muslims whose mother tongue is not Arabic find the language challenging, it is therefore not surprising to find pronouncing Arabic a major hurdle that converts have to overcome.

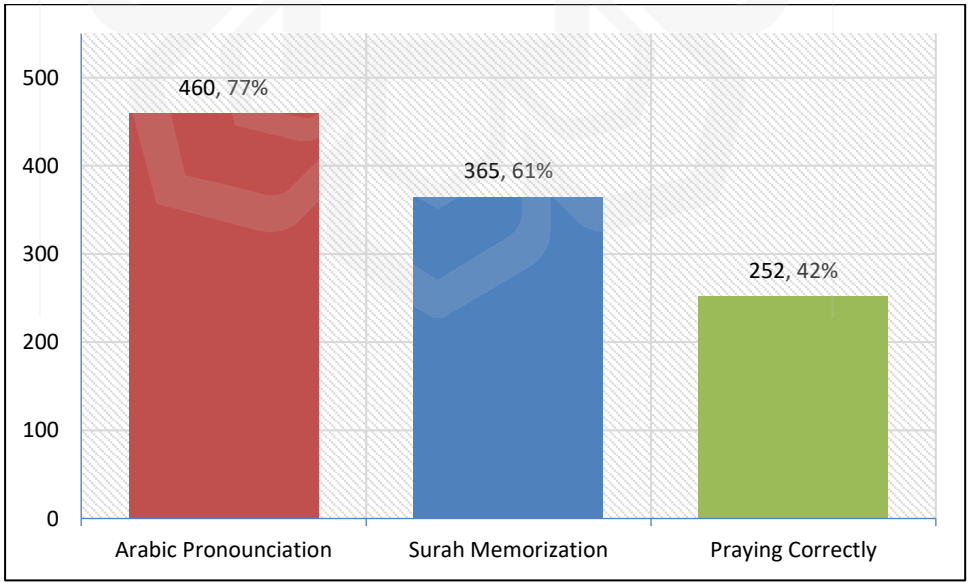


Figure 8.10 Specific Learning Challenges faced by Filipinos Survey Respondents (n = 596, Respondents May Choose More than One)

Related to pronouncing the Arabic words is also memorizing verses of the *Qurʾān* and parts of the prayer in Arabic. Over three fifths of the respondents had major problems with memorization of short Surahs (chapters) of the *Qurʾān*. Although the majority of *ʿAjam* (non-Arab speakers) do not learn the Arabic language itself, almost all born Muslims memorize Surah Fatiha, other short Surahs, and parts of the *Ṣalāh*, during their childhood and formative years. For most adults, memorizing strange words in a language that they do not understand or speak is a substantially difficult task.

Not being able to pronounce or memorize Arabic words could be one of the reasons why survey respondents indicated that "praying correctly" was the third most challenging learning milestone. Over two fifths of the Pinoy respondents found the ritual *Ṣalāh* (prayers) daunting.

Advances in technology, such as the proliferation of language apps and the availability of "smart" prayer mats with embedded screens and speakers may help some New Muslims overcome the challenges of pronouncing and memorizing Arabic. Other educational materials such as books, pamphlets, and videos need to be improved so as to facilitate ease of learning and memorizing for converts to Islam.

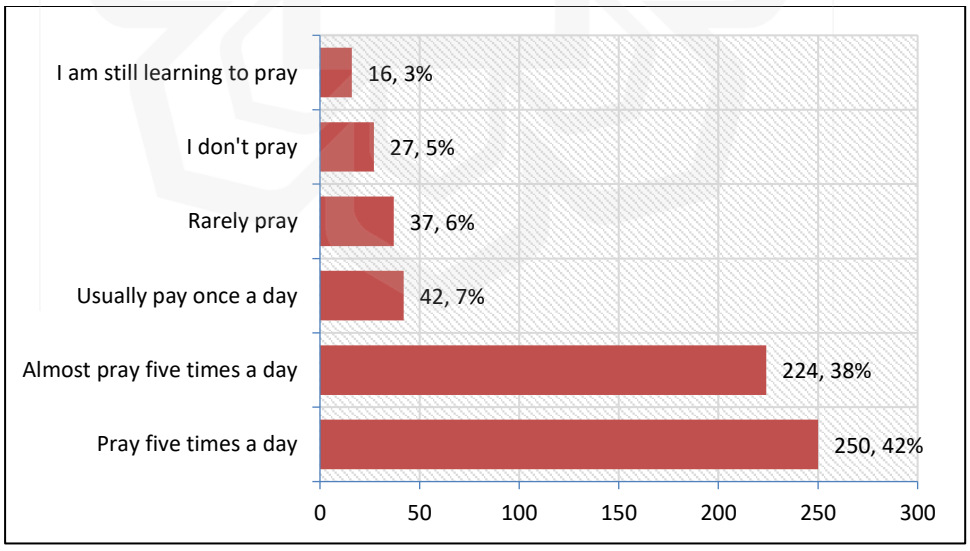


Figure 8.11 Frequency of Performing the Daily Ritual Prayers (*Ṣalāh*) Reported by Filipinos Surveyed (n = 596)

The Filipino respondents were also asked to report on their adherence to the daily prayers (*Ṣalāh*, see Figure 8.11 above). With certain known exceptions[39], adult Muslims are required to perform the five daily prayers. The reality among Muslims is that not everyone is strict about this form of worship. A cursory glance at any Muslim community and one would find the Mosques overflowing with worshippers on any given Friday Congregational Prayer (*Jumʿah*). However, the same afternoon (*ʿAṣr*) or the next early morning (*Fajr*) and only a handful of *muṣallī* (worshippers) may be present. The Filipinos surveyed seem to fare better where 80% reported that they perform "all" or "almost all" the five daily prayers. This is consistent with the Balik-Islam studied by Acac (2020) in the Philippines where the majority of Filipino converts were quite observant of the prayers and other Islamic practices and rituals. A small number of the respondents prayed once a day (7%), while 6% stated that they rarely prayed and a further 5% reported that they did not pray. Sixteen of the 596 Filipinos surveyed were still learning how to perform their *Ṣalāh*. Diligent performance of the five daily prayers is the hallmark of a devout believer. Muslims are identified by adherence to this second of pillar of Islam. It is quite remarkable that the vast majority of the converts take this form of worship so seriously.

Interestingly, and in contrast to the born Muslim community, 40% of the Pinoy respondents do not attend the weekly *Jumʿah* prayer (Figure 8.12 below). 15% are consistent with this weekly congregational gathering, and another 17% of the respondents attend the Friday prayer occasionally. 28% of those surveyed stated that as women the Friday congregational prayer was not obligatory upon them and as such they did not attend. A very likely explanation for why the majority do not attend is for the same reason, they are women. Females made up 86.2%[40] of the 596 surveyed. In view of this, it is quite surprising that almost a third of the respondents attend *Jumʿah* prayers regularly or occasionally. Further analysis of the data shows that of the 82 men surveyed, 48 attended *Jumʿah* regularly, 19 occasionally, and 15 did not attend the Friday prayers at all. This means that though not obligated, Pinoy women surveyed do attend the Friday prayers – a review of the data collected showed that 40 women regularly attend the weekly prayer and 84 attend occasionally.

[39] Menstruating and post-partum women and people who are physically or mentally incapacitated are exempt from the daily Salat, though they would be obligated to make up for these missed prayers once they are able.

[40] See Figure 5.11 in Chapter 5.

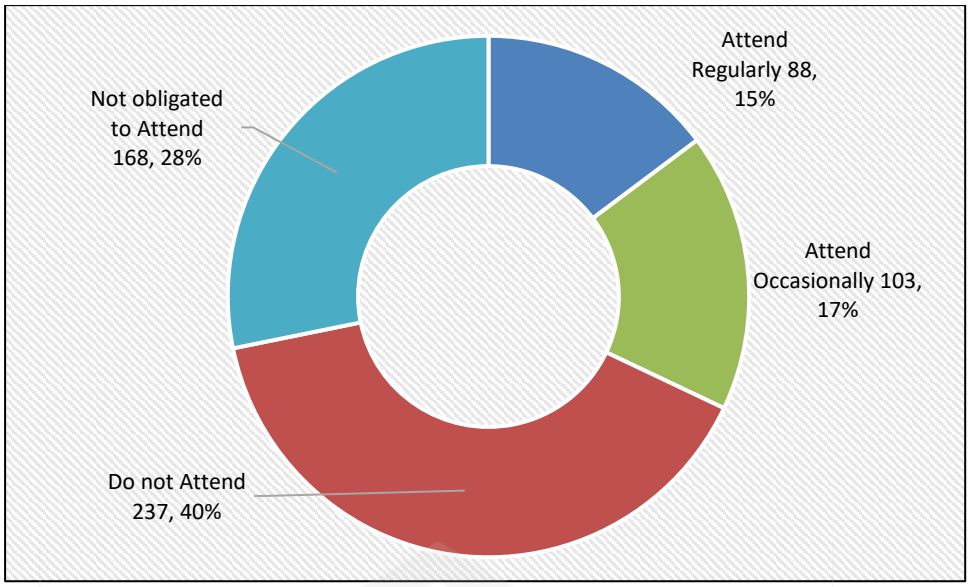


Figure 8.12 Frequency of Attendance of the Weekly Congregational Friday (*Jumʿah*) Prayers Reported by Survey Respondents (n = 596)

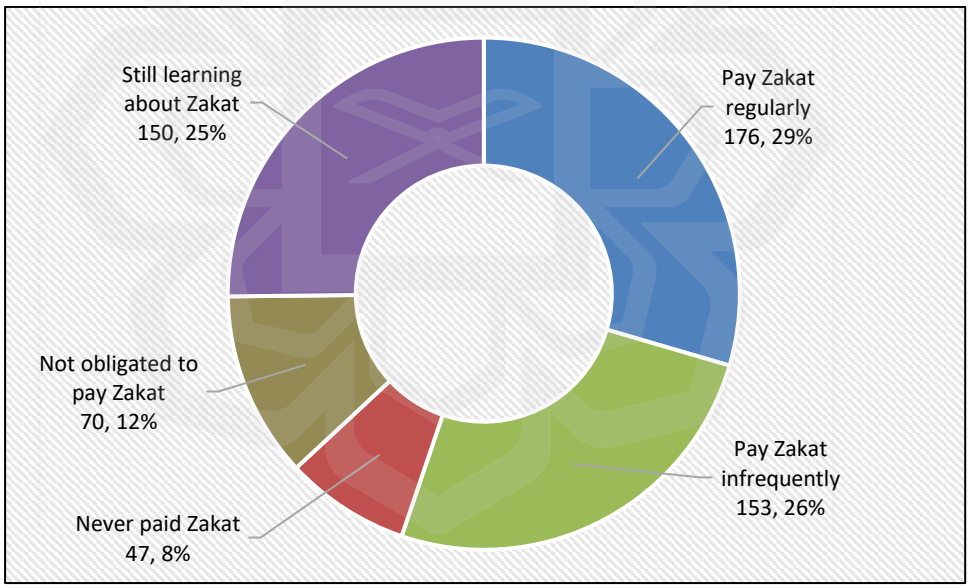


Figure 8.13 Proportion of Survey Respondents Reporting about their Fulfilment of *Zakāh* (Obligatory Charity, n = 596)

Based on the survey responses from 596 participants, Figure 8.13 above illustrates an overview of the fulfilment of *Zakāh* among Filipino converts. The data shows that 29% (176 respondents) reported paying *Zakāh* regularly, indicating that these New Muslims were not only familiar with their obligation but were also fulfilling it devoutly. 153 respondents (26%) reported paying this "obligatory charity"

infrequently, suggesting partial compliance, maybe because of a gap in knowledge or possibly personal financial circumstances.

Seventy (12%) respondents noted that *Zakāh* is not obligatory upon them implying an understanding of this important pillar of Islam and the knowledge that their financial situation exempted them from this ritual practice.

Over a quarter (150 respondents) stated that they were still learning about *Zakāh*. 47 respondents (8%) admitted they have "never paid *Zakāh*," suggesting either potential deficit in understanding or implementing this vital obligation in Islam.

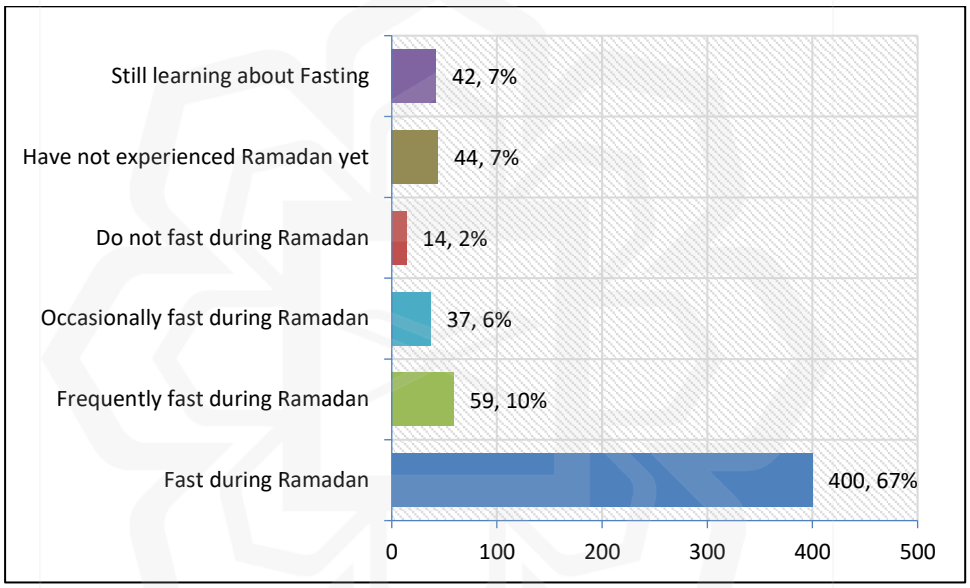


Figure 8.14 Filipino Survey Respondents Practice of Fasting during the Month of Ramadan (n = 596)

Fasting, or *Ṣawm* in Arabic, is the fourth pillar of Islam. Like *Ṣalāh*, all able Muslim adults are obligated to fast during the month of Ramadan abstaining from food, drink, and other needs from dawn to dusk. The above, Figure 8.14, illustrates this practice among Pinoy New Muslims. The data shows that 67% (400 respondents) fast throughout the entire month of Ramadan. About one in ten of those surveyed stated that they "frequently fast during Ramadan," while 37 respondents reported fasting "only occasionally."

Although only 14 respondents (2%) admitted not fasting in Ramadan, this still suggests a gap in knowledge or a deficiency in understanding the importance of this pillar. At the time the survey was conducted, 44 of the respondents had recently converted to Islam, and as such had not yet experienced Ramadan. Finally, 7% (42 respondents) indicated they are "still learning about fasting," and have yet to understand and fulfil this annual ritual in Islam.

Ḥajj, the fifth and final pillar of Islam, is the once-in-a-lifetime obligation on financially and physically able Muslims to visit the "House of Allah" in Makkah and perform their pilgrimage. Fulfilling the rites of this practice that dates back to Prophet Ibrāhīm is a major landmark in the life of any Muslim. Figure 8.12 below depicts the responses given by the 596 Pinoy New Muslims when asked about this final pillar.

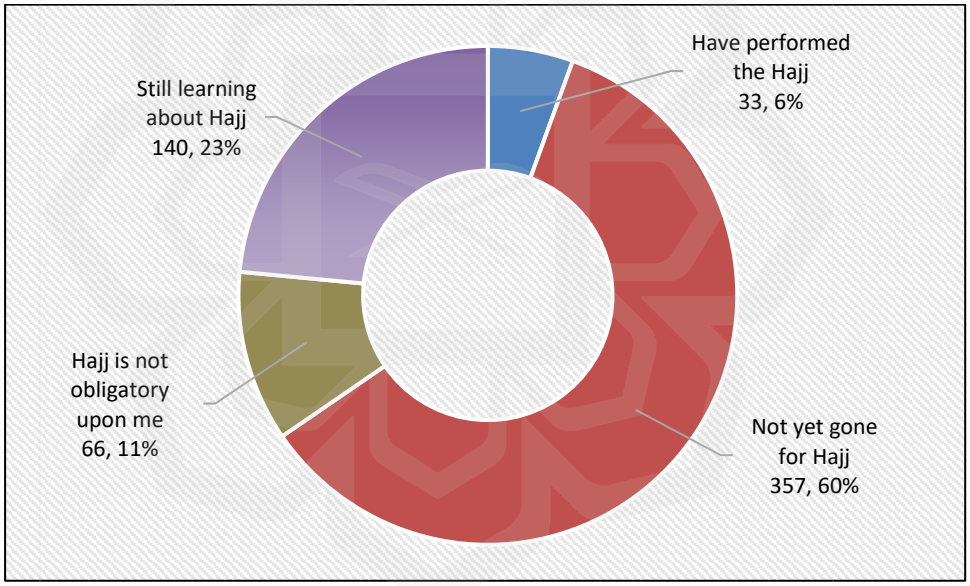


Figure 8.15 Survey Responses when Asked whether they Have Performed the *Ḥajj* (Once-in-a-Lifetime Obligatory Pilgrimage to Makkah if One is Able, n = 596)

As depicted in Figure 8.15 above, only thirty-three respondents had performed the *Ḥajj*, this is consistent with this ritual's status as an obligation only on those who are financial and physical able. A very significant 60% (357 respondents) indicated that they have "not yet gone for *Ḥajj*." Either a portion from this large group is obligated to perform and have not yet had the opportunity to fulfil this rite or there may be a number of respondents who do not fully understand the requirements for *Ḥajj* and yet choose

this response. 11% (66 respondents) understood the stipulations for *Ḥajj* and stated that they were not yet obligated to make this arduous journey. Lastly, 23% of the respondents are still learning about *Ḥajj*, and not yet in a position to know about their obligations vis-à-vis this pillar.

An important aspect of the NMCES is that it encourages the individuals who benefit from it to give back to the Organization and to the community by becoming *Daʿīs* and *Anṣār* themselves. The final module in the syllabus taught to New Muslims is *Daʿwah*. The purpose of this module is twofold: one to arm the student with enough Islamic knowledge so that they can fend for themselves when questioned by their non-Muslim family, friends, and former faith community; and two, to train them to become *Daʿīs* and invite others to Islam. As depicted in Figure 8.16 below, almost half the respondents indicated that they were either fully active in *Daʿwah* (23%) or sometimes engaged in *Daʿwah* activities (25%).

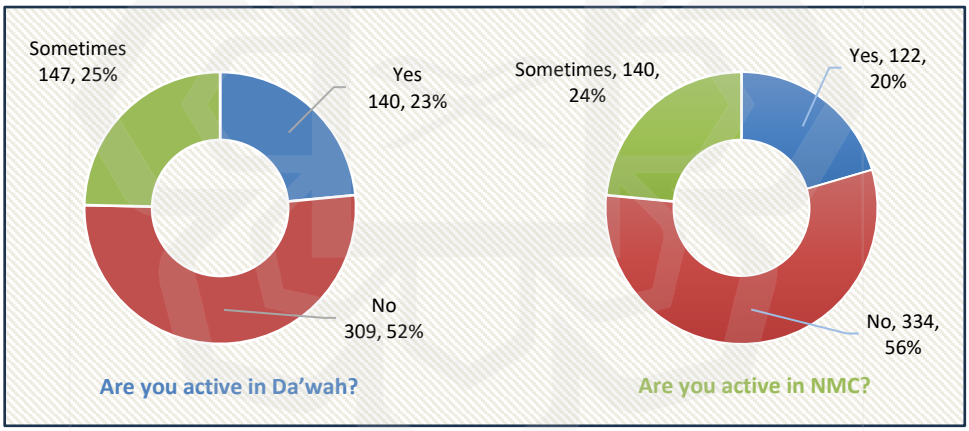


Figure 8.16 Filipino Survey Respondents Involvement in *Daʿwah* and New Muslim Care and Education (n = 596)

44% of those surveyed stated that they participated in teaching and caring for other New Muslims. Of these 262 respondents, 20% were consistently involved in *Anṣār* activities, whereas almost a quarter stated that they participated in New Muslim care and education "sometimes." Like *Daʿwah*, NMCES graduates are encouraged to take the AT training course that is regularly offered by the Organization and help fellow converts navigate their journey in Islam.

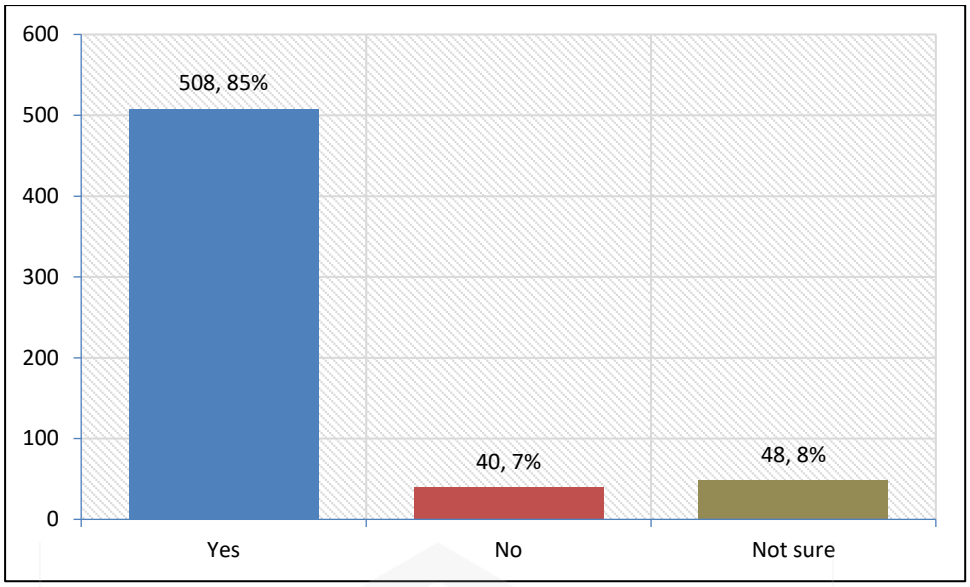


Figure 8.17 Survey Respondents when Asked whether they Consider themselves Practicing Muslim (n = 596)

Most people exaggerate their positive traits and underestimate their inadequacies[41]. Hence asking the converts in the survey about whether they consider themselves practicing Muslims or not carries the risk of self-enhancement bias and social desirability bias. Bearing this in mind, 85% of the respondents viewed themselves as "practicing Muslims" (see Figure 8.17 above). Forty of the Pinoy admitted that they would not judge themselves so highly and do not consider themselves "practicing Muslims." Lastly 8% (48 respondents) were unsure of their standing as "practicing Muslims."

Further examination of Filipino Muslims' practice of Islam may be enhanced by looking at specific Islamic rituals and behaviours and assessing the degree to which they pose a challenge. In this vein, Figure 8.18 presents data on the difficulties faced by Filipino respondents in practicing certain aspects of Islam.

Among the pillars of Islam, the data highlights that 21% (123 respondents) found performing *Ṣalāh* (daily prayers) challenging. Suggesting that performing regular prayer at specific times of the day was a significantly difficulty behaviour to establish. 15% reported that *Ḥajj* posed difficulties – this is quite understandable, the logistical,

[41] Ethan Zell, Jason E. Strickhouser, Constantine Sedikides, and Mark D. Alicke, "The Better-Than-Average Effect in Comparative Self-Evaluation: A Comprehensive Review and Meta-Analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* 146, no. 2 (2020): 118.

financial, and physical demands of journeying to Makkah is an arduous task for all Muslims. Additionally, one out of ten those surveyed recorded that fulfilling the financial obligation of *Zakāh* was contentious, this is possibly related to their financial standing or the understanding of its proper calculation and distribution. Another 9% of the Filipinos surveyed indicated that for them fasting during Ramadan presented substantial difficulties. Fasting requires abstaining from food, drink, and physical intimacy from dawn to dusk for an entire month – most born Muslims start learning and fasting from childhood and yet many adult Muslims find this pillar of Islam hard to follow. Nonetheless 91% of the New Muslims did not select fasting as one of their challenges trying to practice Islam.

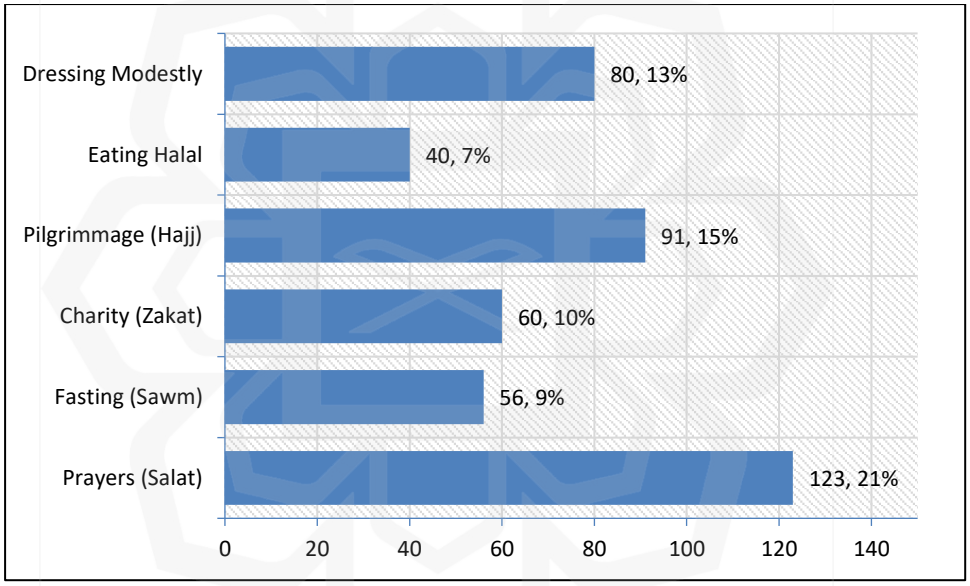


Figure 8.18 Islamic Practices and Behaviour that Filipino Survey Respondents Find Challenging to Follow Properly (n = 596)

13% (80 respondents) of those surveyed reported finding it difficult to adopt modest Islamic dress, and notably, all of these respondents were women. Compared to the generally modest dress of most Arab women in the Gulf, Filipino women often come from backgrounds where their style of clothing may not align with traditional Islamic standards of modesty. For some Pinay, this cultural difference is sometimes difficult to overcome. It should be noted that the vast majority of Filipinas who convert to Islam

adopt the typical *ʿabāyah* (loose outer garment worn by women in the Gulf) as indicated by the data where 87% of the respondents were not fazed by dressing modestly.

Similarly, the majority of Filipinos surveyed stated that changing their dietary habits and adhering to Islamic standards of consuming only Halal food and drink was not a problem. Only 7% found eating Halal only challenging. 184 respondents stated that they never ate pork and as such abstaining from it was not a challenge after they converted[42]. 58% (346 respondents) found giving up on porcine products very easy. Almost 6% (33 Filipinos) found it difficult to abstain but no longer ate pork, whereas an equal number were still eating pork occasionally. Given that pork is a common part of many traditional Filipino dishes, this data underscores a major cultural and dietary shift on the part of the Pinoy surveyed.

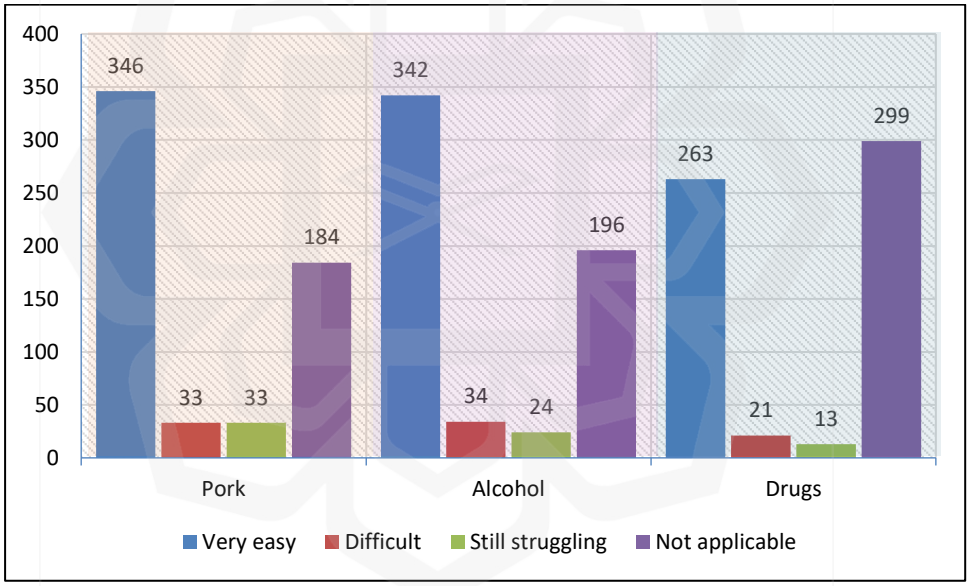


Figure 8.19 Un-Islamic or *Ḥaram* Behaviours that Filipino Survey Respondents Find Challenging to Let Go (n = 596)

Among the survey respondents, consuming and abstaining alcohol followed a similar trend as found with pork. 196 or 33% of the respondents had always been teetotallers. Over half (57% or 342 respondents) found it very easy to quit consuming alcohol, whereas 6% found it difficult to give up drinking but nonetheless they stopped

[42] See Figure 8.19.

consuming alcohol after they became Muslim. Twenty-four of those surveyed were still working on quitting this habit. A 2021 survey by the Philippine Department of Health revealed that 40.1% of Filipino adults reported consuming alcohol in the 30 days prior to the survey. The survey also indicated that alcohol use was higher among men (51.4%) compared to women (28.9%)[43]. It is quite remarkable that 94% of the respondents who previously consumed alcohol quit the habit upon accepting Islam. This remarkable shift shows just how deeply the teachings of Islam resonate with Filipino converts, motivating many to make significant lifestyle changes that prioritize their spiritual and physical well-being.

Half of the Pinoy surveyed never used recreational drugs. Among the remaining 297 respondents, an overwhelming 88% found it very easy to stop. Twenty-one respondents found it difficult to quit, whereas the remaining 13 admitted to "still struggling" with this habit. In Bahrain, recreational drug use, possession, and trafficking are strictly forbidden with severe penalties that include hefty fines, long prison terms, and even the death penalty in some cases. There is the possibility that becoming Muslim may have played some part in their quitting drugs, however most OFWs stop drug use upon migrating to the Gulf, and the 596 Pinoy surveyed were no different. With the exception of a very small minority, nearly all quit drug abuse when they started working in the region. *ā*

8.6 NMCES FEEDBACK

The New Muslim Care and Education System (NMCES) is the cornerstone of the Organization's mandate to provide support and education to all those who accept Islam. Feedback gathered from the interviews, and the survey illustrates that, for the majority, the NMCES fosters a sense of belonging and community, and also provides basic Islamic education customized to their needs. However, there were a few responses gathered from the Filipino converts that indicate there are areas of improvement that should be addressed. This section looks at the feedback collected from the twenty-five Pinoys interviewed and the 596 surveyed.

[43] Department of Health (Philippines), *National Nutrition Survey*, 2021.

Twenty-four of the Filipinos interviewed had nothing negative to say and were very pleased with the support and education provided by the Organization. For instance, Layla, the thirty-seven-year-old cashier from Quezon city described her experience with the *Anṣār* in the following words.

> Yes, brother, she (the *Anṣār* Coordinator) told me that I will be starting classes soon. She said that my teacher will help me all throughout my journey. That if I have any questions, just feel free to ask them, any questions, and if I need any support like that, during my journey.
>
> So, they were very supportive, like, whenever I need anything, they will help, they're very approachable. And they make the point to reply to you as fast as they can.
>
> I can adjust the schedule, that's very important. So, whenever I am free, I'm not doing anything. I will just call her and then she will reply and then we will have the class. So, the schedule is very flexible for me.
>
> So, whenever I share experiences or life experiences with her, she, she normally give me some advice from the *Qurʾān* like that, from situations or analogy on how I deal with those problems like that, so it was fun, and was really relieving every session.

Forty-one-year-old receptionist, Hajar accepted Islam online during the COVID-19 pandemic. She related how she took online classes and how Islam changed her life.

> And we had online class because that time brother is starting of COVID. And the COVID protocols that you cannot meet each other or cannot do discussion in person. So, they called me.
>
> When I talked to the sister, she told me the classes were, like, at 4.30pm I had nothing to worry about. It was like 4.30pm. And we would have classes. And, um, if there's no class, or like, if there's a class we would be notified ahead of time.
>
> And at that time, we have the days free and a lot of time. And sister Barbara is the one of our teachers. Yes. *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*. I learned a lot from her until now. Now I'm not attending class because I am already done with them…
>
> Yes brother, I graduated from the classes. I graduated the same year, 2020. My experience with my teacher…yes, actually. She is, she's just like a mother to us. Even now. Even we finished the study is still we have communications with each other, and even with the others in the group. And I really found my life change for the better. I met many good friends. And they are not just friends; they also help me and lead me to seek more knowledge about Islam. I feel, I really am overwhelmed, and I feel the presence of Allah. Now I can say I have more *Ṣabr* (patience). And my *Īmān* (faith) is becoming stronger than before.

> I completely accept Islam; I accept with all my heart, and I totally feel the change in my life. I can say that I have a better life right now. I love myself. Because when I was not a Muslim, before *Shahādah*. Well, I'm not that much that serious. I have some kind of *Ḥaram* (Islamically prohibited actions). *Ḥaram*. Yeah, it's my attitude and I was, like, in a forbidden relationship. But now, since I come to Islam, *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*, I avoid those things, and I feel better.

Most of the rest of the Filipinos interviewed gave very positive and emotional responses when asked about their experiences with their teacher or *Anṣār* Coordinator. For example, Sarah said, "Amazing, amazing, amazing. Like when I feel something is not right. I will ask my teacher, and she will tell me it's okay. It's normal to feel like that. Like when I did my first *Ṣalāh* (prayer). I cried. I was so happy."

Thirty-one-year-old, Amirah related the following:

> So, then afterwards, they get in touch with me after the Shahada. I remember I when I receive the hard copy of the Shahada… I don't know I really feel so happy when I saw when I saw my Shahada certificate.
>
> Honestly, because before, reverting, I was in a depression stage. You know, when I have a problem, I really don't know… my mind is so empty. I don't know what to do whatever, I don't know who to call or who will help. I really don't know. But after I became Muslim, the difference was so really far, I mean, very big differences, because they called me to follow up. They ask, 'How am I still?" And I'm still crying, you know? But they encourage me, sister Fatima she started to encourage me like, Allah loves us. Everything she explains to me slowly, that's why, you know, slowly, and then I started to attend the classes. When I started to attend the classes, and I get to know some knowledge slowly by slowly. You know, it feels like.... *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*, *Al-ḥamdu li-llāh*. I am really so happy with my mindset now.

Of the twenty-five interviewed, only one Filipina had something negative to say about the follow up system. Twenty-eight-year-old domestic helper, Amina, said that after she became Muslim it took a week before she was contacted by her teacher. However, she was quick to add, "She's a good teacher. She taught me everything. She is very, very knowledgeable." When asked if she had any complaints or regrets, Amina said, "My life before was like, heavy, heavy lifting or something. I had a problem like my heart was heavy. Now it's easy. I am calm. I am happy to be Muslim."

The survey respondents were asked to rate their journey of becoming Muslim and learning about Islam (see Figure 8.20 below). 78% (408 respondents) recorded that they found the journey "easy" to "very easy." A further 24% were neutral with their

response, choosing the option “moderate.” Twenty-nine respondents found it difficult, and only 3% or 15 individuals reported their journey as “very difficult.”

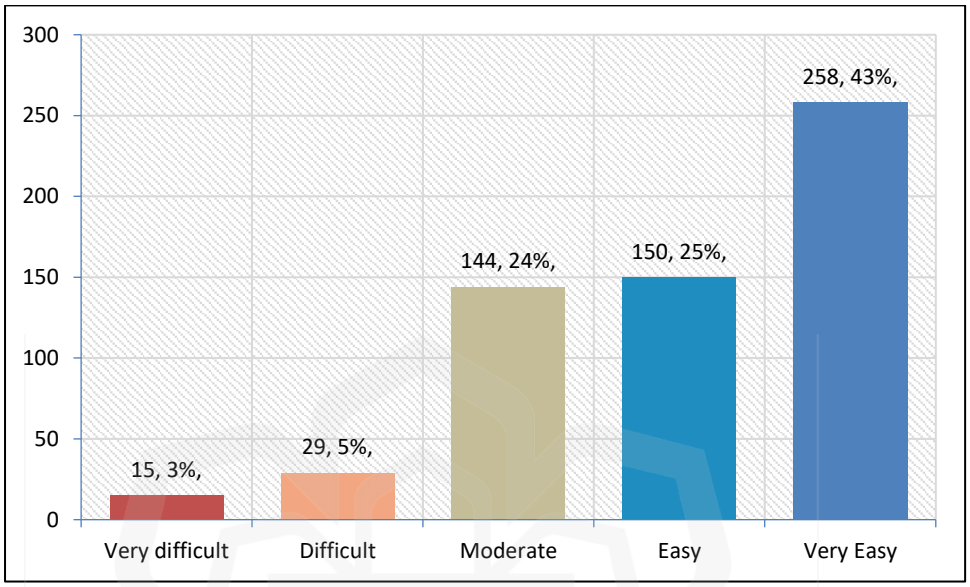


Figure 8.20 Survey Respondents when Asked to Rate their Journey Becoming Muslim and Learning about Islam (n = 596)

98% of the respondents stated that the Organization provided them with proper support. The other 14 respondents did not elaborate in what way they were not supported. There were two general aspects of their Islamic education that a significant number of respondents were finding challenging. 61% or 365 of those surveyed recorded that the amount of material they were required to learn or memorize was too much. Whereas 24% (142 respondents) stated that they did not have enough time in the day to study and were finding it difficult to keep up with their lessons. The survey respondents did not highlight any other areas of difficulty they experienced in the care and education provided to them by the Organization.

Overall, the New Muslim Care and Education System appears to be a comprehensive and inclusive approach to supporting converts to Islam, particularly among Filipino converts in Bahrain. A limitation of this research, as noted in Chapter 2, is that the interviews and surveys were conducted by staff and volunteers of the Organization. Despite efforts to minimize bias, there remains a potential for acquiescence and social desirability biases. This influence suggests that an independent

research team might have uncovered a greater number of challenges and critical feedback. Further studies are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the follow up system developed and practiced by the organizations.

8.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NMCES

The New Muslim Care and Education System (NMCES) is quite flexible. It accommodates the diverse needs, schedules, and preferences of most new Muslims as they enter and learn more about their new faith. Based on challenges faced by Filipino converts in Bahrain, the following recommendations may improve the system.

8.7.1 Customized Arabic Support Modules

A recurring challenge reported by the Filipino converts is the difficulty of mastering Arabic for the daily prayers (*Ṣalāh*) and reciting the *Qurʾān*. Although the system's flexibility allows learners to proceed at their own pace, adding targeted Arabic pronunciation and memorization modules would address this vulnerability. These modules could include "smart" prayer mats, phonetic aids, pronunciation apps, YouTube videos, and live in-person sessions or online classes with qualified *Tajwīd* (correct *Qurʾān* pronunciation) teachers or *Qāriʾ* (skilled *Qurʾān* reciter).

Bahrain has plenty of *Qurʾān* schools all over the country. Almost every large Mosque holds classes for children to learn how to recite and memorize the *Qurʾān*. Classes are conducted for free by Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs' qualified male and female instructors at these Mosques. There are several charitable societies whose primary mission is teaching the *Qurʾān*. The Organization should facilitate special *Tajwīd* (recitation) and *Taḥfīẓ* (memorization) classes for *Anṣār* Coordinators, *Anṣār* Teachers, and New Muslims through these Mosques and societies.

Additionally, there are a multitude of online resources including recorded videos on YouTube, classes conducted online, Arabic pronunciation apps and more. Curating a comprehensive list of all such resources and providing them to New Muslims may help alleviate part of this challenge.

Some new Muslims could benefit from using prayer mats printed with instructions on how to pray and what to recite during the different parts of the prayer. These instructions could be in the preferred language of the New Muslim. Moreover, though more costly, "smart" prayer mats are innovative tools designed to help users learn and perform the *Ṣalāh* accurately. A variety of models are available that utilize different technologies including touch screens, LED indicators, speakers, and touch-sensitive sensors, these mats guide users through the various steps of prayers. They are especially useful for beginners, children, or converts unfamiliar with Arabic and the specific motions of *Ṣalāh*. Although some Islamic scholars have disallowed these innovations in performing the daily prayers, most are of the opinion that these devices may be permitted as educational devices for a short time and should be discontinued once a person has learnt how to perform the prayer[44].

8.7.2 Enhanced Psychological and Legal Support Options

Recognizing that some converts face social and emotional adjustments that may require professional help, the Organization could expand its support to include more emotional and psychological resources. Trained counsellors in psychology, social work, family relations etc., should be recruited, preferably as volunteers, and in special cases as paid professionals to help converts ease into their new lives. Some *Anṣār* Coordinators and *Anṣār* Teachers could be provided additional training in psychological counselling.

Legal counsel may be sought for converts who face legal issues once they become Muslim. Developing and strengthening relations with Government agencies that deal with expatriates, such as the Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA), the National Passports and Residence Affairs (NPRA), the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the Police Department, and the General Directorate of Reform and Rehabilitation would provide valuable support to converts, assisting them as needed. Likewise, establishing strong ties with the various embassies of converts' home countries would be greatly beneficial.

[44] Kasman Kasman and Vasily G. Moshnyaga, "New Technique for Posture Identification in Smart Prayer Mat," *Electronics* 6, no. 3 (2017): 61.

8.7.3 Expanded Self-Study and Independent Learning Resources

For converts who opt to self-study, the NMCES could develop and provide self-study materials and resources. These resources could include curated online content and downloadable guides in various languages for New Muslims. Additionally, utilizing artificial intelligence technology, and creating autonomous chatbots that would teach, and guide converts at their own pace and privacy could be the next step in improving independent study of Islam.

8.7.4 Simplifying the Syllabus

While for most converts the basic Islamic education syllabus works well, for some it may be too difficult to complete within the mandatory one-year period, especially regarding memorizing Surahs of the *Qurʾān* and pronunciation of Arabic words. The syllabus could be revised and two versions developed – the existing version with all the milestones as they are for most converts, and a two-stage version for those who find the course too challenging.

The first stage would have the most rudimentary, stripped-down, minimum content that would allow New Muslims to easily and quickly get on with their practice of Islam. For instance, paring down the number of short surahs and verses of the *Qurʾān* that need to be memorized for an individual to adequately perform their *Ṣalāh*. Additionally, eliminating milestones that are not an absolute necessity for an individual to practice Islam – an example of this would be the *Daʿwah* module – which while useful for most New Muslims is not a necessity. All such trimmed content may still be taught but as a second stage of learning. This two-tiered syllabus would reduce some of the stress reported by survey respondents.

8.8 FINAL THOUGHTS ON LIFE AS A MUSLIM

In this chapter, the multifaceted journey of new Muslims was explored as they navigate their new faith and carve their place and position within the Muslim community. The teachings of the *Qurʾān* as embodied in the life of the Prophet Muḥammad are the perfect example from which to draw the vision and derive lessons for any care and education system for converts to Islam. Inspired by the Prophet's life and teachings, the

New Muslim Care and Education System (NMCES) of the Organization provides not only foundational Islamic education but prioritizes crucial emotional, social, and sometimes financial support for converts.

The customer-driven approach of NMCES, allows new Muslims to choose their level of engagement and pace of learning. This autonomy creates a sense of ownership, where individuals are personally invested in their journey and responsible for their own understanding and practice of Islam. Part of this flexible approach included the concept of "transfer of trust," where converts would be "handed over" from one caregiver to another in a recognized, transparent, and accountable manner. New Muslims would therefore feel valued, respected, and still be in control of the care and education imparted to them.

For such a system to work effectively and sustainably, it is essential that all those involved in the care and education of NMs, such as *Daʿīs*, *Anṣār* Teachers and Coordinators, and other volunteers, are amply compensated for their time, efforts, and resources expended. Utilizing *Zakāh* funds to support these caregivers provides financial stability and ensures that the system is sustainable. *Zakāh* may also be used to financially support destitute converts particularly those who may have lost support from their families or who have been laid off because of their conversion.

The chapter also outlined the NMCES processes from the moment an individual accepts Islam to the time they have completed their basic Islamic education and have joined the larger Muslim community. Inspired by the manner in which the *Qurʾān* was revealed as well as the examples from the life of the Prophet, a step-by-step approach to care and education ensures that New Muslims learn and practice Islam at their own pace and understanding.

The Organization has developed quite a robust NMCE system, however there is room for improvement. Recommendations include enhancing Arabic memorization and pronunciation through novel support modules; providing different kinds of professional counselling to New Muslims as needed; developing and availing converts with better self-study options; and simplifying the current syllabus for those individuals who find it too challenging.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 INTRODUCTION TO CONCLUSIONS

This thesis examined the multifaceted journey that Filipino expatriates in Bahrain undertake as they transition from limited knowledge about Islam to becoming practicing Muslims. It explained why Bahrain provides a fertile ground for expatriates, particularly for Pinoy, to discover and adopt Islam as their faith. It looked at the concept of religious conversion from an Islamic viewpoint, identifying the importance of *Daʿwah* and highlighting the idea of submission to Allah, the Creator and Cherisher of all. The discourse then delved into defining the Filipinos who become Muslim in Bahrain and what motivated their search for Islam, documenting their conversion experience and detailing the post-conversions challenges they faced and how they dealt with them.

This final chapter summarizes the key findings of this exploratory study and briefly reiterates recommendations that may help Muslim communities and Islamic organizations facilitate and support the challenging transition that most converts to Islam undergo whether within Bahrain or beyond.

9.1.1 Cultural and Geographical Context

Filipino expatriates in Bahrain come from a unique socio-cultural-religious background. They hail from a predominantly Catholic country that has had historical and ongoing tensions with the Muslim Moro minority; and despite a rapidly growing convert Muslim community – the Balik-Islam – most Filipinos have had little exposure to Islam and arrive in Bahrain with a skeptical attitude towards the faith.

For many Overseas Filipino Workers, migrating to the Arab world – particularly to the Gulf countries – offers a transformative perspective on Islam, revealing a worldview far different from what they may have previously experienced or anticipated. Observing and interacting with the local Bahrainis, as well as other Muslim expatriates from the Gulf, North Africa, and the Indian sub-continent, intimately exposes these

diaspora Filipinos to Islam that ultimately leads some to question their own beliefs and look to Islam for answers.

9.1.2 Motivations for Conversion

Every Filipino Muslim convert's journey is unique, shaped by who they are and how they grew up in the Philippines, their migration to Bahrain, and their eventual search for and acceptance of Islam. While each story is distinct, common themes emerge. The overwhelming majority (90%) of the Filipinos studied reported that it was the concept of monotheism in Islam, the Oneness of Allah or *Tawḥīd*, that won them over. While for the remainder, other reasons, such as the discipline in Islam, the life of the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), or the positive example of Muslims around them, were decisive factors.

The findings from interviews and surveys suggest that *Fiṭrah* or "inherent disposition" and *Hidāyah* or "Divine Guidance" play a significant role in Filipino conversions to Islam. Three types of converts were identified: those who immediately accept Islam upon learning of it, as they already held beliefs aligned with Islam; those who turn to Islam after experiencing life challenges or traumas that prompt an "existential crisis"; and those who convert for worldly benefits such as marriage, where they outwardly submit to Islam, but true belief (*Īmān*) has yet to enter their hearts.

9.1.3 The Significance of the *Shahādah*

The moment of *Shahādah* is a highly emotional and pivotal point in any convert's life. It signifies the point of transition from disbelief to belief. Many converts to Islam experience a range of emotions around the *Shahādah*.

Prior to the study, it was expected that the moment of conversion, the *Shahādah*, would be fraught with a great deal of doubt, fear, and hesitation. It was thought that the concept of "buyer's remorse," or doubt about such a major, life-changing decision would weigh heavily on the minds of the converts. However, for the majority of the Filipinos surveyed and interviewed, there were no doubts – be they a form of "buyer's remorse" or "whisperings of *Shayṭān* (the devil)" – about taking the *Shahādah*. Positive

feelings like excitement and joy outweigh any doubt or fear that comes with taking any major decision.

The *Shahādah* itself is a highly emotional moment for most, however, over time, the practical aspects of life as a Muslim take precedence. For many, the initial emotional response to becoming Muslim gives way to a more rational and pragmatic concern about learning the basics of Islam and trying to put them into practice.

9.1.4 Post-Conversion Care and Education

Unlike the majority of Muslim communities and Islamic societies around the world, the Organization prioritizes the emotional, psychological, social and sometimes financial support of New Muslims. This is done without sacrificing the imparting of basic, foundational education that is essential for any individual to practice Islam.

The life of the Prophet Muḥammad and the teachings of the *Qurʾān* demonstrate the perfect balance between care and education. It is vital that this balance is achieved for any effective post-conversion follow-up. The research revealed that such a balance may be achieved through a flexible, "customer-driven" approach. The findings also suggest that converts respond far better when they are cared for by people they know and trust. Therefore, a key aspect, "transfer of trust," ensures that converts feel respected and supported when "handed over" from one caregiver to another. Financial support through *Zakāh* further strengthens and sustains the system by compensating caregivers and helping destitute converts, particularly those who may have lost economic support due to their conversion.

9.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on these findings, the following recommendations could enhance the pre-conversion invitation (*Daʿwah*), conversion process (*Shahādah*), and post-conversion support for Filipinos accepting Islam in Bahrain, with potential applicability beyond the Kingdom.

9.2.1 *Daʿwah* to Filipinos and Beyond

Daʿwah, or inviting to Islam, is an essential duty (*Farḍ kifāyah*) for the Muslim community. The study's findings suggest that effective *Daʿwah*, especially for Filipino expatriates, has to center on the concept of *Tawḥīd* (the Oneness of Allah). This powerful idea resonates strongly with the *Fiṭrah* – the innate disposition that all human beings have to connect and worship their One Creator, Allah. Over 90% of the Filipino converts surveyed identified *Tawḥīd* as the principal reason for their becoming Muslim. Consequently, *Daʿwah* efforts should prioritize conveying the idea of *Tawḥīd* clearly and simply.

There are hundreds of thousands of Filipino expatriates in the rest of the Gulf countries. Like their fellow citizens in Bahrain, these Pinay have experienced a similar cultural shift and have a much better worldview of Islam and Muslims. Gulf *Daʿwah* organizations can benefit from the Bahraini experience and utilize similar approaches to reaching out to their much larger Overseas Filipino Workers and inviting (*Daʿwah*) them to Islam.

One particularly useful technique of *Daʿwah* is the GORAP (God, Oneness, Revelation, and Prophethood) approach. It is widely used within the Organization and may be quite effective in the rest of the Gulf countries and beyond. GORAP is particularly effective in directing people toward *Tawḥīd*. It starts with establishing the absolute necessity of the existence of God, then reasons that such a Divine Entity can only be "One God" without partner, and finally the methodology presents the *Qurʾān* and the Prophet Muḥammad as the final and uncorrupted sources of Divine Guidance. This approach combines rational arguments with an emotional appeal to one's *Fiṭrah*, making the *Daʿwah* message both intellectually and spiritually satisfying.

Many Filipinos reportedly strictly believed in One God long before encountering Islam. This points to the importance of addressing and clarifying misconceptions about Islam. The fact that the overwhelming majority of converts never knew that Muslims believe in and worship only One God is a massive degree of ignorance and misunderstanding that Muslims should rectify.

The study also suggests that, beyond the Philippines, other communities with similar demographics, such as well-educated Catholics in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, may be similarly receptive to the Islamic concept of monotheism. The

simplicity of *Tawḥīd* may appeal to those who are confounded by the Catholic dogma. Further research is needed to confirm whether other Catholics, like the Filipinos in Bahrain, are similarly inclined toward Islam. Additionally, there need to be further studies of other non-Catholic, Christian communities, as well as people of all convictions and beliefs, to identify the importance that concepts like "*Tawḥīd*," "*Hidāyah*," and "*Fiṭrah*," may play in their worldview and understanding of the purpose of their existence.

Islam is not meant for any one particular ethnic group or tribe; it is not limited to the Middle East or the Arab world; nor is it only for people of colour or for those who speak a particular language. Islam is a universal faith prescribed to all of humanity. What, then, prevents three-quarters of the world's population from learning about and embracing their God-given, pre-temporal right to submit to and worship Him alone? More studies are needed to address this fundamental question.

9.2.2 A Better *Shahādah* Experience

The Organization has developed practices that create a meaningful, supportive, and memorable *Shahādah* experience. These practices can serve as a model for welcoming new Muslims beyond this community and region.

The central paradigm shift is viewing the *Shahādah* from a convert's perspective and thereby understanding the importance and significance of this pivotal moment in the life of a convert. As such, it is absolutely vital to make the process about the convert and not about the Organization, or about the *Dāʿī*. The *Shahādah* should be a celebration of the individual who is declaring their Islam, it should be conducted in a dignified, respectful manner, and it should never be made into a spectacle.

An important aspect of the *Shahādah* process within the Organization is providing each convert with a *Shahādah* Certificate, an official document that legalizes their conversion, assisting in matters like name changes, access to religious rites, like *Ḥajj* and Umrah, and ensuring that convert's rights as a Muslim are protected, particularly in areas like inheritance and post-mortem rituals.

The "One-to-Ten" concept greatly eases an individual's declaration of Islam and acceptance by their immediate social circles. By reaching out to a convert's family and

friends and answering their questions and alleviating their concerns about Islam, the Organization helps to ease a New Muslim's transition and reduce social isolation. This approach is not just limited to Filipino converts in Bahrain; it could be valuable for Muslim converts across different cultures and locations.

During the *Shahādah*, the *Dāʿī* verbally ensures that converts fully understand the meaning of the *Shahādah* in their native language. Additionally, providing a printed meaning of the *Shahādah* in their native language as well as the Arabic transliterated can further simplify and improve the *Shahādah* experience. Immediately upon declaring the *Shahādah*, a "transfer of trust" occurs, where the convert is introduced to an *Anṣār* Coordinator who initiates mentorship and support. This immediate personal follow-up provides both emotional and practical guidance. It helps converts feel connected and secure as they begin their journey into in Islam.

The issuance of a *Shahādah* certificate, reaching out to and engaging a convert's social circle, simplifying the process, providing structured and immediate care and mentorship – these practices create a comprehensive, compassionate, and meaningful *Shahādah* experience that can easily be emulated in all parts of the world.

9.2.3 Enhancing Care and Education

Although the New Muslim Care and Education System (NMCES) is quite robust, the findings from the Filipino converts studied, suggest some room for improvements.

To address the challenge of memorizing and pronouncing Arabic, customized solutions need to be found and developed. These solutions include facilitating the use of educational tools like phonetic aids (Arabic linguistic apps etc.), online resources (live classes and recorded sessions), and "smart" prayer mats. Additionally, partnering with local mosques and *Qurʾān* schools that provide focused *Tajwīd* (pronunciation) and *Taḥfīẓ* (memorization) classes for both converts and volunteers would greatly help.

The NMCES' social and legal services may be improved by recruiting trained counsellors (preferably on a volunteer-basis, but in some cases, where necessary, to hire paid professionals) and establishing a stronger legal support network by partnering with relevant government agencies, embassies, and other expatriate support societies.

For those who prefer to learn independently, curated resources should be created and autonomous learning tools, such as AI-driven chatbots, could be developed.

Furthermore, simplifying the syllabus through a two-stage program could make it more accessible, allowing converts to initially complete the bare-minimum essential content with the option to pursue advanced studies. These recommendations aim to create a more flexible and supportive framework for new Muslims' care and education and are not limited to the Organization but can easily be customized for Muslim communities worldwide

Any follow up system for converts to Islam should prioritize their needs and aspirations. Striking the right balance between personalized, customer-driven care and support along with adequate foundational Islamic education and practical knowledge is crucial to creating a sustainable and effective system that ensures satisfaction and compliance. Looking to the life of the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions, we find clear examples of practices and norms that embody this balance. Embracing and emulating these *Sunnah* offers a timeless and ideal path for any Muslim community, regardless of place or context.

9.3 FINAL THOUGHTS

This thesis has demonstrated that the Filipino journey to Islam in Bahrain is one marked by unique cultural influences, strong spiritual motivations such as reconnecting with one's Creator, Allah, and the need for structured conversion and post-conversion follow up approaches. The findings and the conclusions drawn from this study indicate that the Organization has understood and addressed these factors quite well and has developed effective *Daʿwah*, *Shahādah*, and New Muslim Care systems. The Organization should continue to refine and improve these bespoke programs that prioritize the needs of converts. In this manner, it can not only excel in its care for New Muslims but can also serve as an example for other communities to learn from and emulate.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: STANDARD INTERVIEW PERMISSION PROTOCOL

Standard Interview Permission Protocol

My name is Muḥammad Quadir. This is Parvez Akbar. We expect that this interview will last an hour.

I/We am/are working on collecting information on how and why people convert to Islam. We are also collecting information on the journey that New Muslims undergo to learn more about Islam after they have converted and their experiences during this journey.

The purpose of this research is to enable us to better understand the journey that you and others like you have gone through. We hope that through this research we will be able to better serve others who are going through similar experiences like you have. The findings and conclusions drawn from this study will be used internally by Discover Islam to improve our work. The findings will also be shared with other institutions including academic institutions; they may be published in journals; and they may also be shared with other Islamic organizations. In all cases the information shared will be generalized and will not contain any personal, proprietary information.

We are interested in your life experiences and opinions that may relate to your conversion to Islam. We are particularly interested in how you became Muslim – what led to your conversion; the actual conversion process and what you experienced after you became Muslim.

To protect your rights as a participant in this study we would like to explain to you the following safeguards.

1. We are video recording this interview. Please confirm now that you agree to this video recording. Please do so by answering this first question.
   Are you aware that we are video recording this interview and do you agree with being recorded – please answer in full by rephrasing the question as an answer?

For example, "I am fully aware that this interview is being video recorded, and I have no objection to being recorded in this manner. I approve."

2. This interview is and will be confidential. You do not need to provide your full name. But if you do choose to share any personal information, we guarantee that this personal information will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside of this interview.
3. This study is completely voluntary. You have not and will not be paid for participating in this study. You may stop the interview at any time and withdraw from the study if you wish. We would very much like you to complete the study, but it is your right to withdraw.
4. There are no right answers. This is not a test. Every answer you give is right. We are interested in your opinions. As such everything you say is right.
5. You have the choice not to answer any question. You have the freedom to refuse to answer any question if you are not comfortable.
6. You may change your answer at any time or ask us not to use an answer.
7. You have the freedom to ask us any questions. If you are unclear about something, feel free to ask us to clarify or change the question. You may contact me (Muḥammad Quadir) at +973 3434 2024 to ask any question or to make suggestions.
8. Kindly confirm the following:
    a. You understand your rights and have agreed to be interviewed. Please answer this question fully by rephrasing the question in the answer. For example, "I do understand my rights and I do agree to being interviewed for this research study."
    b. Do you wish for us to use your full name, or would you prefer that we use a pseudonym (alias – a fake name)? Again, answer by rephrasing question in the answer. I do/do not agree that you use my full name. I prefer that you give me an alias, or I prefer that you use (this name) when you refer to me in the study.
    c. Are you over 18 years old? Please answer by stating, "Yes, I am over 18 years of age."
9. Do you have any questions, or do you need clarification about your rights before we proceed? If not, then let's move to the actual interview.

APPENDIX B: DISCOVER ISLAM – NEW MUSLIM SURVEY 2022

Discover Islam – New Muslim Survey 2022

Semi-Structured In-depth Interview

Today is the _____ of _____, 2022. It is _____(am/pm) and this interview is being conducted by Muḥammad Quadir and Parvez Akbar.

This questionnaire is in four parts.

A. **Background/Personal Information about Participant.**
B. **Life before considering becoming Muslim.**
C. **Conversion to Islam.**
D. **Life after converting to Islam.**

A. Background/Personal Information about Participant

We will ask you some personal questions. This specific personal information you provide with us will not be shared with anyone else outside of this video meeting. We will only use this information in general to create an overall picture of the participants of the study without disclosing specifics about you.

1. What is your name (optional – Pseudonym)?
2. What is your former name before you converted (optional – Pseudonym)?
3. How old are you? Or what year were you born?
4. Where do you come from? What is your hometown, province, country? Where did you grow up?
5. How would you describe your ethnicity?
6. What is the language you speak at home?

7. What other languages do you speak?
8. What is your highest educational level?
9. What is your current profession/job? Where do you work?
10. What was your previous profession/job? Where did you work before?
11. How long have you been in Bahrain? When did you first arrive in Bahrain?
12. Are you married?
13. Do you have any children?
14. Tell us about your parents, siblings?
15. Is there any other personal information you wish to share with us?

B. Life before Islam

In this section we will ask you questions pertaining to your life from childhood until the time you seriously considered accepting Islam.

16. What is/was the religion of your parents/family when you were young/growing up? In other words what religious tradition (if any) were you brought up in?

17. Were your parents religious? Describe the household you grew up with respect to religion?

18. Did you go to the church/temple regularly?

    If yes, please describe briefly.

19. Did you go to any kind of religious school? Were you given any moral/religious teaching by your parents/care givers? If yes, please describe briefly.

20. Were you happy or contented with your religion/moral upbringing?

    If no, please describe.

21. Did you ever question your religion/church/parents/pastor/priest?

    If yes, please describe.

22. What was your understanding of God at the time? Please explain.

23. Did you ever wonder about "why we are here?" or "what is the meaning of life?"

24. Were you happy/contented with your life before becoming Muslim? In other words, were you in any way dissatisfied with life prior to learning about Islam?

    Please explain.

25. Did you attempt to change your life in any way to address this dissatisfaction prior to taking any interest in Islam.

26. Describe your life in terms of moral behavior before accepting Islam. For example, your views on alcohol, drugs, relations with the opposite gender outside of marriage etc.

27. Describe your relations with your family (parents, sibling, spouse, children) before you became Muslim.

28. Anything else you would like to share with us about your life before you got interested in Islam.

C. Interest in Islam and Conversion

In this section, we look at the events or moments in your life that prompted you to seriously consider becoming a Muslim. And we will also look at the moment you became Muslim (*Shahādah*).

29. What was your opinion of Islam/Muslims prior to you becoming interested in Islam?

30. Was there anything particular about Islam or Muslims that stood out?

31. Were there any negative impressions or negative experiences that you had about Islam or Muslims?

32. Did you at any time become disinterested in your life, particularly in terms of religion or morality or spirituality? In other words, did you experience any kind of existential crisis?

33. Was there any incident in your life that triggered this dissatisfaction with your belief systems at the time? Please describe briefly.

34. Did you consider or even convert to any other religion or belief prior to Islam?

35. Before you started looking into Islam, were you at some point confused about your faith/convictions/religion/way of life? Please describe what you felt. What was your emotional/psychological state at this time of your life?

36. What prompted you to investigate Islam?

37. How did you search about Islam?

38. Did you come across any Muslims who shared their faith with you? Please describe.

39. Did you come across any websites, leaflets, videos, any media from where you learned about Islam?

40. Tell us about how, when, and why you converted to Islam. Tell us your conversion story/narrative. Give interviewee the opportunity to tell their story in their way. If it's too long or the interviewee digresses then direct them back to the story.

41. What specifically attracted you to Islam?

42. If the narrative has a *Dāʿī*'s involvement, then ask the following questions:

    a. Who introduced you to Islam?

    b. When did this occur?

    c. Where did this happen?

    d. Was it in one seating or did you discuss multiple times?

    e. What did this person tell you about Islam?

    f. Can you identify any specific words, phrases, ideas, or concepts that convinced you that Islam was the "right religion/way of life" for you?

43. Describe to us your mental/psychological/emotional state when you learned about the specific aspects of Islam that led you to change your faith.

44. Describe what you felt during this time – imagine those times when you were discovering these great ideas/concepts about Islam – ideas that made you change your faith. What did you feel? Were there any steps/stages in your emotions/psychological state?

45. Just before you took the *Shahādah* , did you have doubts? Was there a voice in your head telling you that you're doing something wrong? Were you scared?

46. What were the doubts that you had? Please share them (if you are ok with that).

47. Let us talk about the *Shahādah* (conversion) itself – the moment you became Muslim when you recited the phrase *"Ashhadu an lā ilāha illā Allāh, wa ashhadu anna Muḥammadun rasūlu Allāh"* – I bear witness that there is no god except Allah, and I bear witness that Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah. Please narrate to us how you took the *Shahādah* .

48. What did you feel (emotionally) while you were reciting this phrase?

49. What was your feeling the moment you had completed taking the *Shahādah* ? Imagine that time when you have just accepted Islam. You have completed reciting this phrase in Arabic and in your language. What did you now feel? Describe your emotions.

50. Are you able to describe your mental/emotional/psychological state just before, during and immediately after taking the *Shahādah* ? Please describe.

51. Did the doubts/fear you were feeling return?

52. What happened after you took *Shahādah* ? Describe the events/moments from that time onwards till the time you went to sleep that night.

53. What were you thinking when you went to sleep that night?

54. Did you sleep well that night?

55. What about the next morning when you woke up, what was going through your mind?

56. How about the rest of that first day after you became Muslim? Tell us about your emotional state.

57. Tell us about your life for the next few days to weeks after you became Muslim. Please tell us about how you viewed the world. Did you feel different?

58. Did you notice any changes in the world around you? Did you feel that world was different?

59. Did you share your conversion with others? Who? When and how?

60. What was the reaction of people closest to you when you told them about your conversion to Islam? (Parents, spouse, siblings, children, friends, co-workers, roommates etc.).

61. Did you talk to others about Islam?

62. Did you have doubts after converting? How long did they last? Do you still have doubts?

63. Was your *Shahādah* a positive or negative experience, explain how and why?

64. Anything else that you would like to share with us about your conversion experience?

D. Life after converting to Islam

We will now look at your life after you became Muslim.

65. How long has it been that you have been Muslim?

66. How did your life change immediately after you became Muslim?

67. Tell us about the emotional/psychological changes that you have gone through after you became Muslim. Are there specific stages, moments in time, where you have felt yourself change emotionally?

68. Are you contented now? Are you emotionally at peace?

69. How did you learn about the various beliefs and practices in Islam? Tell us in some detail your journey in Islam.

70. Was it easy to learn and accept the principles and practices of Islam?

71. Did you adopt Islamic practices immediately or was it gradual over a period?

72. Do you know the five pillars of Islam? When and how did you learn about them?

73. Do you know the six articles of faith? When and how did you learn them?

74. Do you know how to do wudhu? How to pray? When and how did you learn?

75. How strict are you about the five daily *Farḍ* prayers?

76. Do you perform *Sunnah* and *Nafl* prayers?

77. Do you regularly attend *Jumʿah* salaat?

78. Are you liable for *Zakāh*? Do you pay *Zakāh*?

79. Do you fast during the month of Ramadan? How strict are you about fasting?

80. Have you performed *Ḥajj*? Umrah? Please describe.

81. Are you actively involved in *Daʿwah*?

82. Are you actively involved in teaching others about Islam?

83. Do you consider yourself a practicing Muslim?

84. Are there any specific principles or practices in Islam that you are struggling with?

85. Have you been able to find help with respect to these struggles? Please describe.

86. What about practices, habits or behaviors that are considered un-Islamic (*ḥaram*), have you given them up? Was it easy to let go?

87. Were there any specific practices/behaviors that have been difficult to let go?

88. Tell us about your family and friends. How have they reacted over time to you becoming Muslim? Describe their initial reaction and over time (days, weeks, months and maybe years) how their attitude toward you has been.

89. Have you changed over the days, weeks, months, and years? Are you a different person now?

90. Have you noticed any changes in your personality after you have become Muslim?

91. Let us talk about the Muslim community/organizations that you may have interacted with during and after your conversion. Please describe how you were treated by the Muslims (other new Muslims, Discover Islam, Bahrainis etc.).

92. Have you built up new relationships after you became Muslim? With whom?

93. Do you or have you ever felt that you needed help after becoming Muslim? What kind of help? Did you get that help? From where and how?

94. Did you find that the help/advice/support that you got from the Muslims (other New Muslims, Discover Islam, Bahrainis, other born Muslims) helpful? Was there anything that was not helpful but rather discouraging/

95. Were you ever treated badly (in any way) after you became Muslim? From anyone regardless of faith or their relation to you. Was this related to you being Muslim?

96. Apart from other Muslims, did you get support/learn about Islam from any other sources? Books, videos, websites, apps anything. Please describe.

97. What were/are some of the obstacles that you have overcome or are trying to overcome in your journey in Islam?

98. Can you identify the most important kinds of support you have received in your journey to become a Muslim? This could be people, materials, financial help…anything that made your journey into Islam easier.

99. Let us talk about the opposite, have there been incidences, events, people etc., that have been a hindrance to you becoming Muslim?

100. Were you provided or did you receive support emotional or otherwise immediately upon conversion? If yes, what and how, and what impact did it have on your understanding and practice of Islam? If no, when if ever did you get any support and what impact did that support or lack of support have on your understanding and practice of Islam?

101. Now that you have been Muslim for some time, how would you describe your relationship with people of other faiths? Particularly with people who were a significant part of your life before Islam.

102. How do you view your life today compared to before you became Muslim?

103. Are you happy? Contented?

104. Would you change anything about your journey to Islam? If yes, what, and why?

105. Anything else you would like to share with us about your journey from not knowing much about Islam to becoming a Muslim today.

APPENDIX C: PILOT SURVEY



2023 New Muslim Survey

Assalaaamu'alaykum - Peace be with you.

Welcome to our New Muslim Survey 2023.

We are collecting information on how and why people convert to Islam. We are also collecting information on the journey that New Muslims undergo to learn more about Islam after they have converted and their experiences during this journey.

The purpose of this research is to enable us to better understand the journey that you and others like you have gone through. We hope that through this research we will be able to better serve others who are going through similar experiences like you have.

We are hoping that you will participate in this Survey and in doing so help countless others who, like you, are undergoing a journey to learn about Islam and become practicing Muslims.

This Survey is divided into five (5) sections. Please fill out each section as accurately and as completely as you can.
This Survey is completely voluntary. You are not obligated in any way to participate in this Survey. You have not and will not be paid for participating in this Survey. You may exit the Survey at any point. We would very much like you to complete the Survey, but it is your right to withdraw. You may request to have your responses withdrawn from the study if you wish by sending an email to nmcwithdraw@gmail.com. By participating in this Survey you give us the right to use your responses to collect information and draw conclusions.

Sign in to Google to save your progress. Learn more

* Indicates required question

Email *

Your email

Mobile Number *

Your answer

Name (first name only): *

Your answer

Date of Birth: *

Date

mm/dd/yyyy

Name of the person (Ansaar or Da'ee associated with Discover Islam) who requested you to complete this Survey. Please pick one name only. If the name is not present, pick "Other." *

Choose

Next

Page 1 of 5

Clear form

About You

We would like you to please share some basic information about yourself. None of the specific information you give will be shared with anyone outside this Study. We will only use this information in general terms to create an overall picture of the participants of the Study without disclosing any specific information.

Gender *

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female

Country of Origin *

Choose

What tribe/ethnicity (if any) do you identify yourself with?

Your answer

What language do you speak back home? *

Choose

What is your highest education level? *

- ◯ Grade or Primary School
- ◯ High School
- ◯ Diploma, Certification or Vocational Qualification
- ◯ Undergraduate Degree
- ◯ Graduate or Post-Graduate Degree
- ◯ Other: _____

What is your current profession/job? *

Choose

On average what is your total monthly income?

- Less than BD 200
- Between BD 201 and BD 500
- Between BD 501 and BD 1,000
- Above BD 1,000
- No income

How long have you been in Bahrain? *

- Less than one (1) year
- Between one (1) and five (5) years
- Between five (5) and ten (10) years
- More than ten (10) years
- Other: _____

Apart from Bahrain, which of the following countries have you lived in? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Kuwait
- [ ] Oman
- [ ] Qatar
- [ ] Saudi Arabia
- [ ] United Arab Emirates (UAE)
- [ ] Other: _____

Marital Status *

- ◯ Never been married
- ◯ Married
- ◯ Separated/Divorced
- ◯ Widowed
- ◯ Other: _____

Do you have any children?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

How close are you to the following relations? *

	Not close at all	Somewhat close	Very close
Parents	◯	◯	◯
Spouse	◯	◯	◯
Children	◯	◯	◯
Siblings	◯	◯	◯
Extended family	◯	◯	◯
Friends	◯	◯	◯
Co-workers	◯	◯	◯

How important are the following to your life? *

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
Work/Profession	○	○	○
Wealth/Earnings	○	○	○
Family and Friends	○	○	○
Education	○	○	○
Religion	○	○	○
Social Media	○	○	○
Social Issues	○	○	○
Politics	○	○	○
House/Car etc.	○	○	○
Technology	○	○	○

On a scale of 1 to 5, how social are you? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Loner, Not Social at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very social, love company

Is there any other personal information you would like to share?

Your answer

Back Next Page 2 of 5 Clear form

Life before Islam

Did you attend any form of Religious education (School, Weekend Religious Classes etc.) while growing up? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Home schooled or Self taught

On a scale of 1 to 5, how content were you with your religious/moral upbringing? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not content at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Fully content

Did you ever question your religious beliefs/practices while growing up? *

- ◯ Never
- ◯ Sometimes
- ◯ Often

At the most basic level, while growing up (childhood until 18), what was your belief regarding God? *

- ◯ I believed in only One God
- ◯ I held the typical Christian beliefs of Trinity, Jesus the son of God etc.
- ◯ I held the typical Hindu beliefs of One God manifested in multiple gods/deities
- ◯ I held the typical Buddhist beliefs in spiritual enlightenment without god or deities
- ◯ I held a non-specific belief in a god or deity
- ◯ I held different beliefs at different times
- ◯ I did not believe in any god or deity
- ◯ Other: _____

Were you in any way discontented with your belief system while growing up (childhood until 18)? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Before you became Muslim, did you engage in any of the following social and personal behaviors? (You may choose more than one).

- ☐ Consumed alcohol
- ☐ Took recreational drugs
- ☐ Smoked or used tobacco products
- ☐ Was involved in intimate relations outside of marriage
- ☐ Was involved in anti-social behavior (abusive, crime etc.)
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other: _____

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you describe your relation with your parents **before** you became Muslim (if applicable).

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very poor - barely had any relations	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Excellent

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you describe your relation with your siblings **before** you became Muslim (if applicable).

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very poor - barely had any relations	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Excellent

Interest in Islam and Conversion

In this section, we look at events or moments in your life that prompted to seriously consider accepting Islam as your faith. We will also look at the specific moment you became Muslim (*Shahadah*).

Before you became Muslim, did you at any time become disinterested in your life, particularly with respect to your faith or beliefs? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Somewhat

If so, were any of the following events linked to that feeling of disinterest? (you may choose more than one)

- ☐ Death of someone near
- ☐ Health trauma or near-death experience
- ☐ Loss of wealth or job
- ☐ Loss of fame or recognition
- ☐ Physical or psychological abuse
- ☐ Traumatic experience of any sort
- ☐ Divorce, separation, break-up etc.
- ☐ Breaking off with close relations
- ☐ Some existential crisis
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Other: _____

Did you ever consider or even convert to another religion or belief prior to Islam? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Your answer

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What was your religion just before you became Muslim? *

- ◯ Atheism, Agnosticism or No Religion
- ◯ Buddhism
- ◯ Christianity - Catholicism
- ◯ Christianity - Protestantism
- ◯ Christianity - Other
- ◯ Hinduism
- ◯ Other: _____

What was your belief regarding God, just before you accepted Islam? *

- ◯ I believed in only One God
- ◯ I held the typical Christian beliefs of Trinity, Jesus the son of God etc.
- ◯ I held the typical Hindu beliefs of One God manifested in multiple gods/deities
- ◯ I held the typical Buddhist beliefs in spiritual enlightenment without god or deities
- ◯ I held a non-specific belief in a god or deity
- ◯ I held different beliefs at different times
- ◯ I did not believe in any god or deity
- ◯ Other: _____

Did your opinion about Islam and Muslims change after you came to Bahrain? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Somewhat
- ◯ Not applicable

How would you have described Muslims in Bahrain (both Bahraini Muslims and Expat Muslims) before you became a Muslim yourself? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Friendly, peaceful
- [ ] Strange, different from me
- [ ] Kind, generous, considerate
- [ ] Extremist, terrorist, fanatical
- [ ] Conservative, modest, respectful
- [ ] Aggressive, opinionated, intolerant
- [ ] Family oriented, loving
- [ ] Disrespectful and abusive of women
- [ ] Respectful of parents and the elderly
- [ ] No opinion
- [ ] Other: _____

What prompted you to look into Islam? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Dissatisfied with my previous faith/beliefs
- [ ] Some major event in my life
- [ ] Muslim friends, family, co-workers or employer
- [ ] Met with a Dā'iya (Muslim preacher)
- [ ] Interested in a marrying a Muslim
- [ ] Media influence (social media, news, publications etc.)
- [ ] I experienced a personal crisis
- [ ] I was offered money or a job or some other incentive
- [ ] Other: _____

How did you learn more about Islam? *

- [ ] Muslim friend, family (including potential spouse), co-worker or employer
- [ ] Da'ee (Muslim preacher)
- [ ] Internet, social media, videos etc.
- [ ] Publications (books, pamphlets, Qur'an etc.)
- [ ] Other: _____

What did you know about Islam before you took the Shahadah? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Oneness of Allah (Tawheed)
- [ ] Finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him)
- [ ] The Five Pillars of Islam
- [ ] The Articles of Faith of Islam (Allah, Angels, Revelations, Messengers etc.)
- [ ] Halal and Haram in Islam
- [ ] Dietary restrictions
- [ ] Dress code and interactions with the opposite gender
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Other: _____

When did you convert to Islam? *

Date

mm/dd/yyyy

Where did you convert to Islam? *

- ◯ Discover Islam offices (Manama, Riffa, Busaiteen)
- ◯ Mosque
- ◯ Street, mall, restaurant, cafeteria etc.
- ◯ Home, workplace etc.
- ◯ Online
- ◯ Other: _____

What time of the day did you convert to Islam? *

- ◯ Morning
- ◯ Afternoon
- ◯ Evening
- ◯ Night
- ◯ Do not recall

Who was present during your conversion? (you may choose more than one) *

- ☐ Friend, family (including potential spouse), co-worker and/or employer
- ☐ Spouse or potential spouse
- ☐ Dawa, Discover Islam staff or volunteer
- ☐ Other: _____

How much time elapsed from the moment you first became interested in Islam to * the moment you actually accepted Islam (took your *Shahadah*)?

- ◯ Less than one hour
- ◯ Within a couple of hours, but less than a day
- ◯ Between one day and a week
- ◯ Between one week and a month
- ◯ Between one month and a year
- ◯ More than one year
- ◯ Other: _____

How would you describe what you felt before, during, and immediately after your *Shahadah*?

	Before	During	After
Excited, hopeful, curious	☐	☐	☐
Anxious, scared	☐	☐	☐
Elated, crying for joy	☐	☐	☐
Pressured, confused	☐	☐	☐
Liberated, unburdened	☐	☐	☐
Stressed, isolated	☐	☐	☐
Fulfilled, inspired	☐	☐	☐
Guilty, ashamed	☐	☐	☐
Like it's someone else	☐	☐	☐
Nothing	☐	☐	☐

Did you have any doubts before, during, or immediately after *Shahadah*? *

	Yes	No	Maybe
Before Shahadah	○	○	○
During Shahadah	○	○	○
After Shahadah	○	○	○

Do you still have any doubts about your decision to become Muslim? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Somewhat

In order of importance what were the three main reasons as to why you accepted Islam? **(Choose only ONE response per column)**

	First Reason	Second Reason	Third Reason
Oneness of Allah	◯	◯	◯
Example of the Prophet	◯	◯	◯
Muslim behaviour	◯	◯	◯
Muslim Prayer	◯	◯	◯
Simplicity of Islam	◯	◯	◯
Logic of Islam	◯	◯	◯
Marriage	◯	◯	◯
Equality in Islam	◯	◯	◯
Cannot explain	◯	◯	◯
Islam just makes sense	◯	◯	◯
Other	◯	◯	◯

With regards to converting to Islam, which of the following statements describe you. (You may choose more than one) *

- [ ] I always believed in One God, I just didn't know that this was called Islam
- [ ] I always held Islamic beliefs, I just didn't know that was what they were called
- [ ] I had a problem with my previous belief system
- [ ] Apart from Islam, no other religion made sense
- [ ] When I learned about Islam, it all made sense
- [ ] I had questions about the purpose of life and Islam provided the solutions
- [ ] Islam gave me the reasons for my existence
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Other: _____

Did you sleep well the night you took *Shahadah*? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Don't remember

How would you describe what you felt the next day, the next week and the months following your *Shahadah*?

	Next day	Next week	Following months
Peaceful, liberated	☐	☐	☐
Anxious, scared	☐	☐	☐
Calm, stress-free	☐	☐	☐
Confused, Lost	☐	☐	☐
Happy, joyful	☐	☐	☐
Stressed, overwhelmed	☐	☐	☐
Fulfilled, inspired	☐	☐	☐
Isolated, lonely	☐	☐	☐
Overall positive	☐	☐	☐
Like it's someone else	☐	☐	☐
Nothing	☐	☐	☐

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the *Shahadah* process (the exact way in which you became Muslim)? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Confusing, complex	○	○	○	○	○	Easy

On a scale 1 to 5, how would you rate the staff and/or volunteers at Discover Islam who were part of the *Shahadah* process?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unhelpful, rude	○	○	○	○	○	Most helpful, kind

Is there anything you would change about how you took the *Shahadah* (the exact process by which you became Muslim)? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

If "Yes" to the above question, how would you change the *Shahadah* process? (you may choose more than one) *

- ☐ Make the Shahadah less public
- ☐ Explain the Shahadah process in more detail
- ☐ Have the Arabic of the Shahadah transliterated and printed so it's easy to repeat
- ☐ Have less forms to fill out
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Other: _____

What (if any) gifts were you given when you accepted Islam (took your *Shahadah*)? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Copy of the Qur'an
- [ ] Other books and publications on Islam
- [ ] Headscarf and/or Muslim women's dress (abaya etc.)
- [ ] Head cap and/or Muslim men's clothing (thowb etc.)
- [ ] Other: _____

On a scale of 1 to 5, how useful or valuable were the above gifts to you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not useful, not valuable	○	○	○	○	○	Very useful, valuable

Did you get your *Shahadah* Certificate? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Not sure

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the process by which you obtained your *Shahadah* Certificate? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Tiresome, complicated	○	○	○	○	○	Easy

How long did it take from the time you took your Shahadah to the time you received your Shahadah Certificate? *

- ◯ I did not apply for a Shahadah Certificate
- ◯ Less than a week
- ◯ Between a week and a month
- ◯ Between a month and three months
- ◯ More than three months
- ◯ My Shahadah Certificate is being processed
- ◯ It has been more than three months and I have still not received my Shahadah Certificate
- ◯ I don't know

Did you change your name when you became Muslim? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Please choose the **best** term to complete the following sentence. I am a... *

- ◯ Revert
- ◯ Muslim
- ◯ Balik-Islam
- ◯ New Muslim
- ◯ Convert
- ◯ Other: _____

With whom did you share the news that you converted to Islam? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Parents
- [ ] Siblings
- [ ] Spouse
- [ ] Children
- [ ] Other family
- [ ] Friends, co-workers, employer
- [ ] Other: _____

What was the reaction of people in your life with whom you shared the news that you have become Muslim? *

	Happy	Upset, angry	Concerned	Indifferent	Not applicable
Parents	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Siblings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Spouse	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Children	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other family	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Friends	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Co-worker(s)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Employer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Pick any one or more of the following that you may have experienced **after** you became Muslim. *

- [ ] Verbal abuse
- [ ] Physical abuse
- [ ] Death threats, threats to the family etc.
- [ ] Discrimination, Islamophobia etc.
- [ ] Loss of work, reduction in pay etc.
- [ ] Distancing of family, friends etc.
- [ ] Made to feel inferior by "born Muslims" or "older converts to Islam"
- [ ] Forced to "fit in" by "born Muslims" or "older converts to Islam" (dress, behavior etc.)
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Other: _____

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would rate the entire journey of you learning about Islam and becoming Muslim? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very difficult	○	○	○	○	○	Very easy

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would rate the entire journey of you learning about Islam and becoming Muslim? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very difficult	○	○	○	○	○	Very easy

On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely would it have been for you to accept Islam if you were still living in your home country? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	○	○	○	○	○	Very likely

Would you recommend Discover Islam to others? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Maybe

Kindly share with us anything you feel is important about your learning about Islam and converting to Islam.

Your answer

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Life after converting to Islam

We will now focus on your life after you became Muslim.

How long has it been since you converted to Islam? *

- ◯ Less than a month
- ◯ Between one and three months
- ◯ Between three and six months
- ◯ Between six months and one year
- ◯ Between one and five years
- ◯ More than five years

How would you describe your current psychological/emotional state? (you may choose more than one) *

- ☐ Happy, contented, at peace
- ☐ Sad, discontented, conflicted
- ☐ Excited, hopeful, optimistic
- ☐ Anxious, hopeless, pessimistic
- ☐ Loved, supported by family and/or friends
- ☐ Lonely, no family or friend support
- ☐ Feel like I am part of the Muslim community
- ☐ Feel like an outsider, not wanted
- ☐ Other: _____

How do the people in your life think of you now that you have been a Muslim for a while? *

	Happy	Upset, angry	Concerned	Indifferent	Not applicable
Parents	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Siblings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Spouse	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Children	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other family	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Friends	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Co-worker(s)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Employer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Have any one or more or none of the following accepted Islam because of you? * (you may choose more than one)

- ☐ Parent
- ☐ Sibling
- ☐ Spouse
- ☐ Child
- ☐ Other relative
- ☐ Friend or co-worker or employer
- ☐ No one has accepted Islam because of me
- ☐ Other: _____

How have you been learning about the various beliefs and practices in Islam? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Discover Islam Ansar (New Muslim Care and Education) System
- [ ] Da'ee (Muslim preacher) who introduced me to Islam
- [ ] Family (spouse, parent, sibling, child etc.)
- [ ] Friends, co-worker and/or employer (madam etc.)
- [ ] Online education (registered online classes through Discover Islam or other)
- [ ] Learning on my own (books, videos, social media etc.)
- [ ] I am not learning about Islam
- [ ] Other: _____

What specific topics in Islam have you learned about so far? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Tawheed - the Oneness of Allah
- [ ] Finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him)
- [ ] Other Prophets of God (Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, Isa etc., peace be upon them)
- [ ] Taharah - cleaning oneself (Wudu or ablution, Gusl - ritual bathing etc.)
- [ ] Salah - ritual prayer (five daily prayers)
- [ ] Surah Fatihah (Alhamdulillahi rabil aalameen, arrahmaani raheem...)
- [ ] Other Suras of the Qur'an
- [ ] Zakat (obligatory ritual charity for those who qualify wealth-wise)
- [ ] Sawm (fasting in the month of Ramadan)
- [ ] Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah for those on whom it is obligatory)
- [ ] Articles of faith (Allah, Angels, Revelations - Books, Messengers...)
- [ ] Halal and Haram in Islam
- [ ] Dress code in Islam
- [ ] Marriage, Family Life, Parents etc., in Islam
- [ ] How to invite others to Islam (Da'wah)
- [ ] Other: _____

On a scale of 1 to 5, how difficult has it been to learn about Islam? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very easy	○	○	○	○	○	Very difficult

What (if any) challenges have you faced in your journey to learn about Islam? * (you may choose more than one)

- [ ] Arabic (pronouncing the words correctly)
- [ ] Memorizing Suraha or verses of the Qur'an
- [ ] Learning how to pray correctly
- [ ] Overcoming or unlearning concepts from my previous faith
- [ ] Lack of educational materials in my language
- [ ] Lack of support from Discover Islam
- [ ] Lack of support from family, friends, co-workers, employer etc.
- [ ] Too much to memorize or learn
- [ ] Lack of time to learn because of my work
- [ ] I have not faced any challenges
- [ ] Other: _____

How particular are you about your daily Salat (obligatory prayers)? *

- ○ I pray five times a day
- ○ I try to pray five times a day, but I do miss some occasionally
- ○ I usually pray at least once a day
- ○ I rarely pray every day
- ○ I generally don't perform the Salat - I don't pray
- ○ Other: _____

Do you regularly attend the Friday congregational prayers? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Sometimes
- ◯ As a woman, I am not obligated to attend

Do you regularly perform any *Sunnah* or *Nafl* (non-obligatory) prayers? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Sometimes

Please describe your practice regarding *Zakat*? *

- ◯ I am required to pay Zakat and I do pay regularly
- ◯ I am required to pay Zakat but I do not always
- ◯ I am required to pay Zakat but I have never paid
- ◯ I am not required to pay Zakat
- ◯ I do not know much about Zakat
- ◯ Other: _____

Please describe your understanding/practice of Fasting (*Sawm*). *

- ◯ I fast during the entire month of Ramadan (as is required)
- ◯ I fast most days during the month of Ramadan
- ◯ I fast occasionally during the month of Ramadan
- ◯ I do not fast during the month of Ramadan
- ◯ I have never fasted (Ramadan or otherwise)
- ◯ I recently became a Muslim and have not had the opportunity to experience Ramadan
- ◯ I do not know much about Sawm (Fasting)
- ◯ Other: _____

Please describe about yourself regarding *Hajj* (pilgrimage). *

- ◯ I have already performed the Hajj to Makkah
- ◯ Hajj is obligatory on me, but I have not yet performed it
- ◯ Hajj is not obligatory upon me and I have not performed it
- ◯ I do not know much about Hajj
- ◯ Other: _____

Are you actively involved in *Da'wah* (educating and inviting people to Islam)? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Sometimes

Are you actively involved in teaching others, particularly New Muslims, about Islam? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Sometimes

Do you consider yourself a practicing Muslim? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure

Are you still struggling with any specific teachings of Islam? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Concept of God in Islam (Tawheed, Oneness of God, Allah)
- [ ] Finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him)
- [ ] Prophets in Islam (Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, Isa etc., peace be upon them)
- [ ] Jesus, son of Mary, is a Prophet and Messenger of God (peace be upon him)
- [ ] Revelations or Books sent by God to humankind
- [ ] Angels
- [ ] The Day of Judgement
- [ ] Life after death
- [ ] Qadr (loosely translated as fate or destiny)
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Other: _____

With respect to the above specific teachings of Islam, have you been able to find any help? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Please help me with these struggles
- ◯ Not applicable

Are you struggling with any specific practices in Islam? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Salat - prayers
- [ ] Wudu (ablution) and/or ghusl (ritual bathing)
- [ ] Sawm - Fasting
- [ ] Zakat - obligatory giving
- [ ] Hajj - pilgrimage
- [ ] Dietary constraints - eating only Halal
- [ ] Not eating pork
- [ ] Staying away from Riba (usury, non-Shariah compliant interest)
- [ ] Wearing hijab, dressing modestly
- [ ] Staying away from people of the opposite gender who are not immediately related
- [ ] Staying away from alcohol
- [ ] Staying away from recreational drugs
- [ ] Staying away from clubbing
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Other: _____

With respect to the above specific practices of Islam, have you been able to find any help? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Please help me with these struggles
- ◯ Not applicable

Please describe how easy it has been for you to overcome the following un-Islamic behaviors (please choose one in each row) *

	Very easy	Difficult	Still struggling	Not applicable
Consuming alcohol	◯	◯	◯	◯
Recreational drugs	◯	◯	◯	◯
Eating pork	◯	◯	◯	◯

What are some of the main social issues that you have faced after becoming a Muslim? (Select any and all that apply) *

- ☐ Racism
- ☐ Sexism
- ☐ Xenophobia (intolerance towards immigrants, expats, and non-citizens)
- ☐ Religious discrimination (based on any religion)
- ☐ Islamophobia
- ☐ Being looked down upon by other Muslims
- ☐ I have not faced any such issues
- ☐ Other: _____

Would you change anything about your journey to Islam? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

If the answer to the above question about your journey to Islam is "Yes" then please explain what you would change and why.

Your answer

Would you like to share any message with other Muslims?

Your answer

Please use this section to share anything about yourself and/or your journey to Islam.

Your answer

Please use this section to provide feedback about this Survey.

Your answer

Thank you

Thank you for filling out this Survey. *Insha'Allah* your feedback will help us improve our work of providing care and educating about Islam.

If you have any concerns, questions or need help please contact your *Ansar* (Coordinator or Teacher) or *Da'ee* or contact one of the Discover Islam Branches.

May Allah bless you with all good in this world and the best in the Hereafter.

A copy of your responses will be emailed to the address you provided.

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APPENDIX D: MAIN SURVEY



2023/24 New Muslim Survey

***Assalaaamu'alaykum* - Peace be with you.**

Welcome to our New Muslim Survey 2023/24.

We are collecting information on how and why people convert to Islam. We are also collecting information on the journey that New Muslims undergo to learn more about Islam after they have converted and their experiences during this journey.

The purpose of this research is to enable us to better understand the journey that you and others like you have gone through. We hope that through this research we will be able to better serve others who are going through similar experiences like you have.

We are hoping that you will participate in this Survey and in doing so help countless others who, like you, are undergoing a journey to learn about Islam and become practicing Muslims.

This Survey is divided into five (5) sections.

Please fill out each section as accurately and as completely as you can.
This Survey is completely voluntary. You are not obligated in any way to participate in this Survey. You have not and will not be paid for participating in this Survey. You may exit the Survey at any point. We would very much like you to complete the Survey, but it is your right to withdraw. You may request to have your responses withdrawn from the study if you wish by sending an email to nmcwithdraw@gmail.com. By participating in this Survey you give us the right to use your responses to collect information and draw conclusions.

Sign in to Google to save your progress. Learn more

* Indicates required question

Mobile Number *

Your answer

Name (first name only): *

Your answer

Date of Birth: *

Date

mm/dd/yyyy

Name of the person (*Ansaar* or *Da'ee* associated with Discover Islam) who requested you to complete this Survey. Please pick one name only. If the name is not present, pick "Other." *

Choose

About You

We would like you to please share some basic information about yourself. None of the specific information you give will be shared with anyone outside this Study. We will only use this information in general terms to create an overall picture of the participants of the Study without disclosing any specific information.

Gender *

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female

Country of Origin *

Choose

What tribe/ethnicity (if any) do you identify yourself with?

Your answer

What language do you speak back home? *

Choose

What is your highest education level? *

- ◯ Grade or Primary School
- ◯ High School
- ◯ Diploma, Certification or Vocational Qualification
- ◯ Undergraduate Degree
- ◯ Graduate or Post-Graduate Degree
- ◯ Other: _____

What is your current profession/job? *

Choose

On average what is your total monthly income?

- ◯ Less than BD 200
- ◯ Between BD 201 and BD 500
- ◯ Between BD 501 and BD 1,000
- ◯ Above BD 1,000
- ◯ No income

How long have you been in Bahrain? *

- ◯ Less than one (1) year
- ◯ Between one (1) and five (5) years
- ◯ Between five (5) and ten (10) years
- ◯ More than ten (10) years
- ◯ Other: _____

Apart from Bahrain, which of the following countries have you lived in? (you may choose more than one) *

- ☐ Kuwait
- ☐ Oman
- ☐ Qatar
- ☐ Saudi Arabia
- ☐ United Arab Emirates (UAE)
- ☐ Other: _____

Marital Status *

- ◯ Never been married
- ◯ Married
- ◯ Separated/Divorced
- ◯ Widowed
- ◯ Other: _____

Do you have any children?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

How close are you to the following relations? *

	Not close at all	Somewhat close	Very close
Parents	◯	◯	◯
Spouse	◯	◯	◯
Children	◯	◯	◯
Siblings	◯	◯	◯
Extended family	◯	◯	◯
Friends	◯	◯	◯
Co-workers	◯	◯	◯

How important are the following to your life? *

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important
Work/Profession	○	○	○
Wealth/Earnings	○	○	○
Family and Friends	○	○	○
Education	○	○	○
Religion	○	○	○
Social Media	○	○	○
Social Issues	○	○	○
Politics	○	○	○
House/Car etc.	○	○	○
Technology	○	○	○

On a scale of 1 to 5, how social are you? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Loner, Not Social at all	○	○	○	○	○	Very social, love company

Is there any other personal information you would like to share?

Your answer

Life before Islam

In this Section you will answer questions pertaining to your life from your childhood until the time you seriously considered accepting Islam.

What was the primary religion of your family/parents when you were a growing up (childhood until you were 18)? *

- ◯ Atheism, Agnosticism or No Religion
- ◯ Buddhism
- ◯ Christianity - Catholicism
- ◯ Christianity - Protestantism
- ◯ Christianity - Other
- ◯ Hinduism
- ◯ Islam - Sunni
- ◯ Islam - Shia
- ◯ Multiple Religions
- ◯ Other: _____

On a scale of 1 to 5, how important was religion in your family when you were growing up? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not Important at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very Important

How often did you attend your religious institution (Church, Mosque, Temple etc.) * while growing up?

- ◯ Daily
- ◯ Weekly
- ◯ Occasionally
- ◯ Never

Did you attend any form of Religious education (School, Weekend Religious Classes etc.) while growing up? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Home schooled or Self taught

On a scale of 1 to 5, how content were you with your religious/moral upbringing? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not content at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Fully content

Did you ever question your religious beliefs/practices while growing up? *

- ◯ Never
- ◯ Sometimes
- ◯ Often

At the most basic level, while growing up (childhood until 18), what was your belief regarding God? *

- ◯ I believed in only One God
- ◯ I held the typical Christian beliefs of Trinity, Jesus the son of God etc.
- ◯ I held the typical Hindu beliefs of One God manifested in multiple gods/deities
- ◯ I held the typical Buddhist beliefs in spiritual enlightenment without god or deities
- ◯ I held a non-specific belief in a god or deity
- ◯ I held different beliefs at different times
- ◯ I did not believe in any god or deity
- ◯ Other: _____

Were you in any way discontented with your belief system while growing up (childhood until 18)? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Before you became Muslim, did you engage in any of the following social and personal behaviors? (You may choose more than one).

- ☐ Consumed alcohol
- ☐ Took recreational drugs
- ☐ Smoked or used tobacco products
- ☐ Was involved in intimate relations outside of marriage
- ☐ Was involved in anti-social behavior (abusive, crime etc.)
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other: _____

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you describe your relation with your parents **before** you became Muslim (if applicable).

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very poor - barely had any relations	○	○	○	○	○	Excellent

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you describe your relation with your siblings **before** you became Muslim (if applicable).

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very poor - barely had any relations	○	○	○	○	○	Excellent

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you describe your relation with your spouse and children **before** you became Muslim (if applicable).

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very poor - barely had any relations	○	○	○	○	○	Excellent

While growing up (from childhood to age 18) what Muslims did you know? (you may choose more than one) *

- ☐ Muslim parent(s)
- ☐ Muslim sibling(s)
- ☐ Muslim spouse
- ☐ Muslim child/children
- ☐ Muslim relative(s)
- ☐ Muslim neighbor(s)
- ☐ Muslim friend(s) and/or co-worker(s)
- ☐ I did not know any Muslims
- ☐ Other: _____

How would you have described Muslims while growing up (childhood to age 18)? * (you may choose more than one)

- [ ] Friendly, peaceful
- [ ] Strange, different from me
- [ ] Kind, generous, considerate
- [ ] Extremist, terrorist, fanatical
- [ ] Conservative, modest, respectful
- [ ] Aggressive, opinionated, intolerant
- [ ] Family oriented, loving
- [ ] Disrespectful and abusive of woman
- [ ] Respectful of parents and the elderly
- [ ] No opinion
- [ ] Other: _____

Anything else you would like to share about your life (childhood, growing up) prior to you becoming interested in Islam.

Your answer

Interest in Islam and Conversion

In this section, we look at events or moments in your life that prompted to seriously consider accepting Islam as your faith. We will also look at the specific moment you became Muslim (Shahadah).

Before you became Muslim, did you at any time become disinterested in your life, particularly with respect to your faith or beliefs? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Somewhat

If so, were any of the following events linked to that feeling of disinterest? (you may choose more than one)

- ☐ Death of someone near
- ☐ Health trauma or near-death experience
- ☐ Loss of wealth or job
- ☐ Loss of fame or recognition
- ☐ Physical or psychological abuse
- ☐ Traumatic experience of any sort
- ☐ Divorce, separation, break-up etc.
- ☐ Breaking off with close relations
- ☐ Some existential crisis
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Other: _____

Did you ever consider or even convert to another religion or belief prior to Islam? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

What was your religion just before you became Muslim? *

- ◯ Atheism, Agnosticism or No Religion
- ◯ Buddhism
- ◯ Christianity - Catholicism
- ◯ Christianity - Protestantism
- ◯ Christianity - Other
- ◯ Hinduism
- ◯ Other: _____

What was your belief regarding God, just before you accepted Islam? *

- ◯ I believed in only One God
- ◯ I held the typical Christian beliefs of Trinity, Jesus the son of God etc.
- ◯ I held the typical Hindu beliefs of One God manifested in multiple gods/deities
- ◯ I held the typical Buddhist beliefs in spiritual enlightenment without god or deities
- ◯ I held a non-specific belief in a god or deity
- ◯ I held different beliefs at different times
- ◯ I did not believe in any god or deity
- ◯ Other: _____

Did your opinion about Islam and Muslims change after you came to Bahrain? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Somewhat
- ○ Not applicable

How would you have described Muslims in Bahrain (both Bahraini Muslims and Expat Muslims) before you became a Muslim yourself? (you may choose more than one) *

- ☐ Friendly, peaceful
- ☐ Strange, different from me
- ☐ Kind, generous, considerate
- ☐ Extremist, terrorist, fanatical
- ☐ Conservative, modest, respectful
- ☐ Aggressive, opinionated, intolerant
- ☐ Family oriented, loving
- ☐ Disrespectful and abusive of women
- ☐ Respectful of parents and the elderly
- ☐ No opinion
- ☐ Other: _____

What prompted you to look into Islam? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Dissatisfied with my previous faith/beliefs
- [ ] Some major event in my life
- [ ] Muslim friends, family, co-workers or employer
- [ ] Met with a Da'ee (Muslim preacher)
- [ ] Interested in a marrying a Muslim
- [ ] Media influence (social media, news, publications etc.)
- [ ] I experienced a personal crisis
- [ ] I was offered money or a job or some other incentive
- [ ] Other: _____

How did you learn more about Islam? *

- [ ] Muslim friend, family (including potential spouse), co-worker or employer
- [ ] Da'ee (Muslim preacher)
- [ ] Internet, social media, videos etc.
- [ ] Publications (books, pamphlets, Qur'an etc.)
- [ ] Other: _____

What did you know about Islam before you took the Shahadah? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Oneness of Allah (Tawheed)
- [ ] Finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him)
- [ ] The Five Pillars of Islam
- [ ] The Articles of Faith of Islam (Allah, Angels, Revelations, Messengers etc.)
- [ ] Halal and Haram in Islam
- [ ] Dietary restrictions
- [ ] Dress code and interactions with the opposite gender
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Other: _____

When did you convert to Islam? *

Date

mm/dd/yyyy

Where did you convert to Islam? *

- ◯ Discover Islam offices (Manama, Riffa, Busaiteen)
- ◯ Mosque
- ◯ Street, mall, restaurant, cafeteria etc.
- ◯ Home, workplace etc.
- ◯ Online
- ◯ Other: _____

What time of the day did you convert to Islam? *

- ◯ Morning
- ◯ Afternoon
- ◯ Evening
- ◯ Night
- ◯ Do not recall

Who was present during your conversion? (you may choose more than one) *

- ☐ Friend, family (including potential spouse), co-worker and/or employer
- ☐ Spouse or potential spouse
- ☐ Da'ee, Discover Islam staff or volunteer
- ☐ Other: _____

How much time elapsed from the moment you first became interested in Islam to * the moment you actually accepted Islam (took your *Shahadah*)?

- ◯ Less than one hour
- ◯ Within a couple of hours, but less than a day
- ◯ Between one day and a week
- ◯ Between one week and a month
- ◯ Between one month and a year
- ◯ More than one year
- ◯ Other: _____

How would you describe what you felt before, during, and immediately after your *Shahadah*?

	Before	During	After
Excited, hopeful, curious	☐	☐	☐
Anxious, scared	☐	☐	☐
Elated, crying for joy	☐	☐	☐
Pressured, confused	☐	☐	☐
Liberated, unburdened	☐	☐	☐
Stressed, isolated	☐	☐	☐
Fulfilled, inspired	☐	☐	☐
Guilty, ashamed	☐	☐	☐
Like it's someone else	☐	☐	☐
Nothing	☐	☐	☐

Did you have any doubts before, during, or immediately after *Shahadah*? *

	Yes	No	Maybe
Before Shahadah	○	○	○
During Shahadah	○	○	○
After Shahadah	○	○	○

Do you still have any doubts about your decision to become Muslim? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Somewhat

In order of importance what were the three main reasons as to why you accepted Islam? (Choose only ONE response per column - if you choose more than one response per column, you will not be able to proceed to the next section - you will keep getting an error. So, please choose only ONE RESPONSE PER COLUMN).

	First Reason	Second Reason	Third Reason
Oneness of Allah	○	○	○
Example of the Prophet	○	○	○
Muslim behaviour	○	○	○
Muslim Prayer	○	○	○
Simplicity of Islam	○	○	○
Logic of Islam	○	○	○
Marriage	○	○	○
Equality in Islam	○	○	○
Cannot explain	○	○	○
Islam just makes sense	○	○	○
Other	○	○	○

With regards to converting to Islam, which of the following statements describe you. (You may choose more than one) *

- [ ] I always believed in One God, I just didn't know that this was called Islam
- [ ] I always held Islamic beliefs, I just didn't know that was what they were called
- [ ] I had a problem with my previous belief system
- [ ] Apart from Islam, no other religion made sense
- [ ] When I learned about Islam, it all made sense
- [ ] I had questions about the purpose of life and Islam provided the solutions
- [ ] Islam gave me the reasons for my existence
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Other: _____

Did you sleep well the night you took *Shahadah*? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Don't remember

How would you describe what you felt the next day, the next week and the months following your *Shahadah*?

	Next day	Next week	Following months
Peaceful, liberated	☐	☐	☐
Anxious, scared	☐	☐	☐
Calm, stress-free	☐	☐	☐
Confused, Lost	☐	☐	☐
Happy, joyful	☐	☐	☐
Stressed, overwhelmed	☐	☐	☐
Fulfilled, inspired	☐	☐	☐
Isolated, lonely	☐	☐	☐
Overall positive	☐	☐	☐
Like it's someone else	☐	☐	☐
Nothing	☐	☐	☐

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the *Shahadah* process (the exact way in which you became Muslim)? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Confusing, complex	○	○	○	○	○	Easy

On a scale: 1 to 5, how would you rate the staff and/or volunteers at Discover Islam who were part of the *Shahadah* process?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unhelpful, rude	○	○	○	○	○	Most helpful, kind

Is there anything you would change about how you took the *Shahadah* (the exact process by which you became Muslim)? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

If "Yes" to the above question, how would you change the *Shahadah* process? (you may choose more than one) *

- ☐ Make the Shahadah less public
- ☐ Explain the Shahadah process in more detail
- ☐ Have the Arabic of the Shahadah transliterated and printed so it's easy to repeat
- ☐ Have less forms to fill out
- ☐ Not applicable
- ☐ Other: _____

What (if any) gifts were you given when you accepted Islam (took your *Shahadah*)? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Copy of the Qur'an
- [ ] Other books and publications on Islam
- [ ] Headscarf and/or Muslim women's dress (abaya etc.)
- [ ] Head cap and/or Muslim men's clothing (thowb etc.)
- [ ] Other: _____

On a scale of 1 to 5, how useful or valuable were the above gifts to you?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not useful, not valuable	○	○	○	○	○	Very useful, valuable

Did you get your *Shahadah* Certificate? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Not sure

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the process by which you obtained your *Shahadah* Certificate? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Tiresome, complicated	○	○	○	○	○	Easy

How long did it take from the time you took your *Shahadah* to the time you received your *Shahadah* Certificate? *

- ◯ I did not apply for a Shahadah Certificate
- ◯ Less than a week
- ◯ Between a week and a month
- ◯ Between a month and three months
- ◯ More than three months
- ◯ My Shahadah Certificate is being processed
- ◯ It has been more than three months and I have still not received my Shahadah Certificate
- ◯ I don't know

Did you change your name when you became Muslim? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Please choose the best term to complete the following sentence. *I am a...* *

- ◯ Convert
- ◯ Muslim
- ◯ New Muslim
- ◯ Revert
- ◯ Balik-Islam
- ◯ Other: _____

With whom did you share the news that you converted to Islam? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Parents
- [ ] Siblings
- [ ] Spouse
- [ ] Children
- [ ] Other family
- [ ] Friends, co-workers, employer
- [ ] Other: _____

What was the reaction of people in your life with whom you shared the news that you have become Muslim? *

	Happy	Upset, angry	Concerned	Indifferent	Not applicable
Parents	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Siblings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Spouse	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Children	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other family	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Friends	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Co-worker(s)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Employer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Pick any one or more of the following that you may have experienced **after** you became Muslim. *

- [ ] Verbal abuse
- [ ] Physical abuse
- [ ] Death threats, threats to the family etc.
- [ ] Discrimination, Islamophobia etc.
- [ ] Loss of work, reduction in pay etc.
- [ ] Distancing of family, friends etc.
- [ ] Made to feel inferior by "born Muslims" or "older converts to Islam"
- [ ] Forced to "fit in" by "born Muslims" or "older converts to Islam" (dress, behavior etc.)
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Other: _____

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would rate the entire journey of you learning about Islam and becoming Muslim? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very difficult	○	○	○	○	○	Very easy

On a scale of 1 to 5, how likely would it have been for you to accept Islam if you were still living in your home country? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	○	○	○	○	○	Very likely

Would you recommend Discover Islam to others? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Maybe

Kindly share with us anything you feel is important about your learning about Islam and converting to Islam.

Your answer

Life after converting to Islam

We will now focus on your life after you became Muslim.

How long has it been since you converted to Islam? *

- ○ Less than a month
- ○ Between one and three months
- ○ Between three and six months
- ○ Between six months and one year
- ○ Between one and five years
- ○ More than five years

How would you describe your current psychological/emotional state? (you may choose more than one) *

- ☐ Happy, contented, at peace
- ☐ Sad, discontented, conflicted
- ☐ Excited, hopeful, optimistic
- ☐ Anxious, hopeless, pessimistic
- ☐ Loved, supported by family and/or friends
- ☐ Lonely, no family or friend support
- ☐ Feel like I am part of the Muslim community
- ☐ Feel like an outsider, not wanted
- ☐ Other: _____

How do the people in your life think of you now that you have been a Muslim for a while? *

	Happy	Upset, angry	Concerned	Indifferent	Not applicable
Parents	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Siblings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Spouse	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Children	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other family	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Friends	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Co-worker(s)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Employer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Have any one or more or none of the following accepted Islam because of you? * (you may choose more than one)

- ☐ Parent
- ☐ Sibling
- ☐ Spouse
- ☐ Child
- ☐ Other relative
- ☐ Friend or co-worker or employer
- ☐ No one has accepted Islam because of me
- ☐ Other: _____

How have you been learning about the various beliefs and practices in Islam? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Discover Islam Ansar (New Muslim Care and Education) System
- [ ] Dalee (Muslim preacher) who introduced me to Islam
- [ ] Family (spouse, parent, sibling, child etc.)
- [ ] Friends, co-worker and/or employer (madam etc.)
- [ ] Online education (registered online classes through Discover Islam or other)
- [ ] Learning on my own (books, videos, social media etc.)
- [ ] I am not learning about Islam
- [ ] Other: _____

What specific topics in Islam have you learned about so far? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Tawheed - the Oneness of Allah
- [ ] Finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him)
- [ ] Other Prophets of God (Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, Isa etc., peace be upon them)
- [ ] Taharah - cleaning oneself (Wudu or ablution, Gusl - ritual bathing etc.)
- [ ] Salah - ritual prayer (five daily prayers)
- [ ] Surah Fatihah (Alhamdulillahi rabil aalameen, arrahmaani raheem...)
- [ ] Other Suraha of the Quran
- [ ] Zakat (obligatory ritual charity for those who qualify wealth-wise)
- [ ] Sawm (fasting in the month of Ramadan)
- [ ] Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah for those on whom it is obligatory)
- [ ] Articles of faith (Allah, Angels, Revelations - Books, Messengers...)
- [ ] Halal and Haram in Islam
- [ ] Dress code in Islam
- [ ] Marriage, Family Life, Parents etc., in Islam
- [ ] How to invite others to Islam (Da'wah)
- [ ] Other: _____

On a scale of 1 to 5, how difficult has it been to learn about Islam? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very easy	○	○	○	○	○	Very difficult

What (if any) challenges have you faced in your journey to learn about Islam? * (you may choose more than one)

- ☐ Arabic (pronouncing the words correctly)
- ☐ Memorizing Surahs or verses of the Qur'an
- ☐ Learning how to pray correctly
- ☐ Overcoming or unlearning concepts from my previous faith
- ☐ Lack of educational materials in my language
- ☐ Lack of support from Discover Islam
- ☐ Lack of support from family, friends, co-workers, employer etc.
- ☐ Too much to memorize or learn
- ☐ Lack of time to learn because of my work
- ☐ I have not faced any challenges
- ☐ Other: _____

How particular are you about your daily Salat (obligatory prayers)? *

- ○ I pray five times a day
- ○ I try to pray five times a day, but I do miss some occasionally
- ○ I usually pray at least once a day
- ○ I rarely pray every day
- ○ I generally don't perform the Salat - I don't pray
- ○ Other: _____

Do you regularly attend the Friday congregational prayers? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Sometimes
- ◯ As a woman, I am not obligated to attend

Do you regularly perform any *Sunnah* or *Nafl* (non-obligatory) prayers? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Sometimes

Please describe your practice regarding *Zakat*? *

- ◯ I am required to pay Zakat and I do pay regularly
- ◯ I am required to pay Zakat but I do not always
- ◯ I am required to pay Zakat but I have never paid
- ◯ I am not required to pay Zakat
- ◯ I do not know much about Zakat
- ◯ Other: _____

Please describe your understanding/practice of Fasting (*Sawm*). *

- ◯ I fast during the entire month of Ramadan (as is required)
- ◯ I fast most days during the month of Ramadan
- ◯ I fast occasionally during the month of Ramadan
- ◯ I do not fast during the month of Ramadan
- ◯ I have never fasted (Ramadan or otherwise)
- ◯ I recently became a Muslim and have not had the opportunity to experience Ramadan
- ◯ I do not know much about Sawm (Fasting)
- ◯ Other: _____

Please describe about yourself regarding *Hajj* (pilgrimage). *

- ◯ I have already performed the Hajj to Makkah
- ◯ Hajj is obligatory on me, but I have not yet performed it
- ◯ Hajj is not obligatory upon me and I have not performed it
- ◯ I do not know much about Hajj
- ◯ Other: _____

Are you actively involved in *Da'wah* (educating and inviting people to Islam)? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Sometimes

Are you actively involved in teaching others, particularly New Muslims, about Islam? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Sometimes

Do you consider yourself a practicing Muslim? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Not sure

Are you still struggling with any specific teachings of Islam? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Concept of God in Islam (Tawheed, Oneness of God, Allah)
- [ ] Finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him)
- [ ] Prophets in Islam (Adam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, Isa etc., peace be upon them)
- [ ] Jesus, son of Mary, is a Prophet and Messenger of God (peace be upon him)
- [ ] Revelations or Books sent by God to humankind
- [ ] Angels
- [ ] The Day of Judgement
- [ ] Life after death
- [ ] Qadr (loosely translated as fate or destiny)
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Other: _____

With respect to the above specific teachings of Islam, have you been able to find any help? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Please help me with these struggles
- ◯ Not applicable

Are you struggling with any specific practices in Islam? (you may choose more than one) *

- [ ] Salat - prayers
- [ ] Wudu (ablution) and/or ghusl (ritual bathing)
- [ ] Sawm - Fasting
- [ ] Zakat - obligatory giving
- [ ] Hajj - pilgrimage
- [ ] Dietary constraints - eating only Halal
- [ ] Not eating pork
- [ ] Staying away from Riba (usury, non-Shariah compliant interest)
- [ ] Wearing hijab, dressing modestly
- [ ] Staying away from people of the opposite gender who are not immediately related
- [ ] Staying away from alcohol
- [ ] Staying away from recreational drugs
- [ ] Staying away from clubbing
- [ ] None of the above
- [ ] Other: _____

With respect to the above specific practices of Islam, have you been able to find *

Would you change anything about your journey to Islam? *

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

If the answer to the above question about your journey to Islam is "Yes" then please explain what you would change and why.

Your answer

Would you like to share any message with other Muslims?

Your answer

Please use this section to share anything about yourself and/or your journey to Islam.

Your answer

Please use this section to provide feedback about this Survey.

Your answer

Thank you

Thank you for filling out this Survey. *Insha'Allah* your feedback will help us improve our work of providing care and educating about Islam.

If you have any concerns, questions or need help please contact your *Ansar* (Coordinator or Teacher) or *Da'ee* or contact one of the Discover Islam Branches.

May Allah bless you with all good in this world and the best in the Hereafter.

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APPENDIX E: *SHAHĀDAH* CERTIFICATE

Kingdom of Bahrain
Ministry of Justice & Islamic Affairs & Waqf



مملكة البحرين
وزارة العدل والشؤون الإسلامية والأوقاف

1204/2024
23/09/2024 CE

Praise be to Allah who enlightened our hearts with our faith in Islam; It is Allah who said **"Whomsoever Allah desires to Guide, He Expands his chest to Islam ","The only religion acceptable to Allah is Islam", "He who chooses a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him"**. Prayers, Blessings and Peace be upon His Messenger Muhammad son of Abdullah, the last and final Prophet who was sent as Mercy to all worlds, and prayers and peace be upon his relatives, companions and whoever follows his guidance until the Day of Judgement.

On 23/09/2024 **CE** corresponding to **20/03/1446 AH**, **Justin** , who used to profess the religion of **Christianity**, appeared **In Discover Islam,** bearing Nationality from **Cameroon,** holding CPR No. at **Bahrain.** He was born in **Cameroon** on **13/04/1976** and currently resides at **Building Road (, Block), Area Gudaibiya.** He expressed his desire to convert to the religion of Islam and has pronounced the two testimonies as an adult with his full powers of reason, choice and satisfaction declaring *"I believe that there is no god but Allah, Who is divine and has no partners, and Mohammed is His slave and messenger.* He has repudiated all other beliefs except Islam and therefore he has become one among the Muslims with all the rights bestowed upon him by the Islamic law during his lifetime and after his demise, and upon him are all the obligations that the Muslims must also uphold. He has expressed desire to change his name to**: Sualiman**

Witnesses to this testimony were **Hasher Ahmed Javaid** and **Hassan Ebrahim Abdelkhalek.** He was granted this certificate based on his Islamic declaration.

May Allah guide him to success, and peace be upon the Prophet Mohammed and his relatives and companions and the ones who follow him.

JUDGE OF THE SHARIA COURT (II) Signature

مملكة البحرين
وزارة العدل والشؤون الإسلامية والأوقاف

Kingdom of Bahrain
Ministry of Justice & Islamic Affairs & Waqf

2024/1204
1446/03/20هـ
2024/09/23 م

الحمد لله الذي شرح صدورنا بالإسلام، وأنار قلوبنا بالإيمان؛ القائل: ﴿فَمَنْ يُرِدِ اللهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ يَشْرَحْ صَدْرَهُ لِلإِسْلامِ﴾ و ﴿ إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللهِ الإِسْلامُ ﴾ و﴿ وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الإِسْلامِ دِينًا فَلَن يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ ﴾ والصلاة والسلام على نبينا محمد بن عبدالله خاتم الأنبياء والمرسلين والمبعوث رحمةً للعالمين.

أما بعد:

فقد حضر إلى **مركز اكتشف الاسلام** بتاريخ **1446/03/20هـ الموافق 2024/09/23م** الرجل**جوستين** والذي يحمل جنسية **كاميرونية** بموجب الرقم الشخصي ( ) الصادر من **البحرين، الديانة نصرانية**، والمولود في **الكاميرون** بتاريخ **1976/04/13** والمقيم حاليًا في **مبنى** ، **طريق** ، **منطقة القضيبية** و أعرب عن رغبته في اعتناق الدين الإسلامي وتلفظ بالشهادتين وهو بكامل الأوصاف المعتبرة من البلوغ والرشد والاختيار والقناعة قائلاً أشهد أن لا إله إلا الله وأشهد أن محمدًا عبده ورسوله وعليه فقد أصبح من عامة المسلمين له ما لهم من حقوق شرعية في الحياة وحال الوفاة وعليه ما عليهم من واجبات، و رغب في تغيير اسمه إلى اسم جديد هو: **سليمان**

وقد شهد على ذلك **هاشر احمد جاويد و حسن إبراهيم عبدالخالق** ، وقد أعطيت له هذه الشهادة بناء على ثبوت إسلامه.

وفقه الله وهداه؛ وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه ومن والاه.

قاضي المحكمة الشرعية

التوقيع

GLOSSARY

Adhān. The call to Muslim prayer.

Ajam. Broadly, an Arabic term that denotes anyone who does not speak Arabic as their first language.

Akhlāq. Islamic ethics and moral character, encompassing virtues such as kindness, honesty, patience, and humility in dealings with others.

Allah. Literally "The God." Allah is the proper name of God in Arabic.

Allāh subḥānahu wa taʿālā. Literally "Allah, the Glorified and the Exalted." A phrase used to honor Allah's majesty and perfection.

Allāhu Akbar. Literally "Allah is the Greater." A phrase often used in prayers and as an expression of praise and gratitude to Allah.

Anṣār, Ansaar. Literally "Helpers." Refers to the inhabitants of *Madīnah* who supported Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) and the early Muslims upon their migration. It also refers to the staff and volunteers of the Organization who follow-up with NMs.

ʿAqīdah. Islamic creed or belief system, encompassing the fundamental principles of faith, such as belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgment, and divine decree (Qadr).

Arkān al-Īmān. The six pillars of faith in Islam, which are belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgment, and divine decree (Qadr), both good and bad.

Aslama. Literally "He/She submitted." Refers to the act of embracing Islam.

ʿAql. Literally "Intellect" or "Reason." Refers to the ability to think, reflect, and discern right from wrong – a gift from Allah to all humanity.

Balik. Literally "return." Common word amongst the languages and peoples of Southeast Asia referring to coming back or returning to something.

Balik-Islam. Literally “return or revert to Islam.” People who convert to Islam in the Philippines and southeast Asia in general identify themselves as Balik-Islam.

Bani Israel. Literally “Children of Israel.” Refers to the descendants of Prophet Yaqub (Jacob, peace be upon him).

Bangsamoro. Literally “land of the Moros.” A term of pride and identity embraced by indigenous, generational Muslims of the southern Philippines.

Bidʿah. Literally “Innovation.” Refers to introducing new practices in religious matters that were not practiced during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Bidʿah Hassanah. Literally “Good Innovation.” Refers to innovations that align with Islamic principles and bring benefit to the community.

Daʿwah. Literally “invitation.” *Daʿwah* means to invite people to Islam.

Dāʿī, *Daʿīs*, Da’iyah, *Duʿāt*. One who invites to Islam and it’s various plural versions.

Dār al-Arqam. The house of al-Arqam where the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his companions used to meet in secret in the early years of Islam in Makkah.

Din, *Dīn*. Way of life. Islam is the way of life prescribed by Allah for all humanity.

Din al *Fiṭrah*, *Dīn al-Fiṭrah*. The natural, inherent, way of life for all human beings as prescribed by Allah.

Dhul Hijjah. The twelfth and final month of the Islamic lunar calendar, known for the *Ḥajj* pilgrimage and the celebration of Eid al-Adha – the festival of sacrifice.

Du’a. Supplication to Allah. Different from other forms of prayer. Specific kind of prayer that can be anytime and in any language.

Farḍ, *Farāʾiḍ*. Literally “Obligatory duties.” Refers to actions mandated by Islamic law.

Farḍ ʿAyn. Obligations required of every individual Muslim, such as prayer and fasting.

Farḍ kifāyah. Collective obligations in Islam that, if fulfilled by some, exempt others, such as funeral prayers.

Fiqh. Islamic jurisprudence.

Filipino, Filipina. Terms referring to people from the Philippines. "Filipino' is used for males or the general population, while "Filipina" specifically refers to females.

Fiṭrah. The inherent nature of human beings as created by Allah.

Ḥadīth. Sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) as reported by his companions.

Ḥajj. Pilgrimage to Makkah, Saudi Arabia. One of the five pillars of Islam.

Hanif, Haneef. Literally "Inclined toward truth." Refers to a monotheist who follows the pure and unaltered worship of Allah, as practiced by Prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham, peace be upon him).

Ḥaram, Haraam. Action or things prohibited or forbidden in Islam.

Hidāyah, Hidaya, Hidayah, Hidayat. Literally "Guidance". It specifically refers to Divine guidance provided by Allah to lead a person to the right path. It is the guidance given through the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Hidāyaht al-Irshād. This refers to the external form of guidance, where Allah gives human beings a means to be guided such as through the *Qurʾān* or the example and teachings of Prophet Muḥammad.

Hidāyaht al-Tawfīq. This is an internal form of guidance where Allah directs a person toward the truth, towards Himself. Allah inspires one to become guided. This is akin to a direct acceptance of the supplication in Surah Fatiha, "Guide us upon the straight path."

Ḥijāb. Literally "Curtain or Partition." Refers to the modest dress covering by most Muslim women wherein only the face, hands and feet are not covered.

Hijrah. Literally "Migration." Refers to the migration of Prophet Muḥammad and his followers from Makkah to *Madīnah* in 622 CE, marking the beginning of the Islamic calendar and a pivotal event in Islamic history.

ʿIbādah. Worship and devotion to Allah, encompassing all actions and words done sincerely for His sake, including prayers, fasting, charity, and good deeds.

Ihsan, al-Ihsan. Literally "Excellence." Refers to worshiping Allah and behaving as if you see Him and knowing that even if you do not see Him, He sees you.

Īmān. Literally "faith." It is the first pillar of Islam where one declares their belief in Allah as the only God without any partners; and that Muḥammad is the final messenger of God sent to all of humanity.

Īmān al-Mutlaq. Absolute or complete faith in Allah without doubt or deviation (also see Mutlaq al-*Īmān*).

Iqama. The call to stand in prayer recited just before congregational *Ṣalāh* or prayers.

Islam. Surrender or submit to the will of Allah.

Jibreel (AS). The archangel Gabriel (AS).

Juma. Literally "Friday". The weekly congregational prayer on Fridays after midday includes a sermon.

Madinat-un-Nabi. Literally "City of the Prophet." Name given to city of Yathrib when the Prophet Muḥammad migrated to it in 622 CE. Today this city in modern Saudi Arabia is commonly referred to simply as *Madīnah*.

Muʾākhāh. The Islamic concept of brotherhood, established by Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) between the *Muhājirūn* (migrants) and *Anṣār* (helpers) in *Madīnah*, fostering mutual support, solidarity, and unity among Muslims.

Muhājir, *Muhājirūn*. Literally "Emigrant(s)." Refers to the early Muslims who migrated from Makkah to *Madīnah* with Prophet Muḥammad to escape persecution and establish the Islamic community.

Muʾmin, *Muʾmin*oon. Literally "Believer(s)." Refers to someone with strong faith in Allah and who adheres to Islamic principles.

Muʾallaf. Refers to a new convert to Islam who is in the process of integrating into the Muslim community. A term more commonly used in Southeast Asia.

Mufassir, *Mufassirūn*. Scholar or scholars who specialise and provide interpretations and explanations of the *Qurʾān*.

Muslim. Muslimah. One who submits or surrenders to the will of Allah.

Mutlaq al-*Īmān*. The most basic level of faith that one requires to be considered a Muslim (also see *Īmān* al-Mutlaq).

Nafs. Literally "Self." Refers to the inner self or psyche, which can incline toward good or evil.

Pinoy, Pinay. Informal terms used to refer to Filipinos. "Pinoy" is a gender-neutral or male term, while "Pinay" specifically refers to females. These terms are commonly used in casual or cultural contexts.

Qalb. Literally "Heart." Refers to the spiritual heart, the center of faith, emotions, and moral inclinations in Islamic teachings.

Qurʾān. Literally "Recitation." The final revelation from God to human beings, given to the Prophet Muḥammad (AS).

Ramadan. The 9th month of Islamic lunar calendar. Also, the month where Muslims fst from dawn to dusk (*Ṣawm*).

Ruh. Literally "Spirit" or "Soul." Refers to the immaterial essence of a person, given by Allah that lives beyond the present life in this world.

Ruhani. Refers to spiritual or metaphysical matters related to the soul.

Ṣalāh, Ṣalāh. Literally "Prayer." Refers to the obligatory prayers performed by Muslims five times a day as an act of worship. *Ṣalāh* is also the second pillar of Islam.

Shahādah , *Shahādatān*. The testimony of faith in Islam, declaring belief in the Oneness of Allah and that Muḥammad is His Messenger. Rarely used, *Shahādatān* refers to the two-parts declaration of faith – the belief in Allah and the belief in Muḥammad as His Messenger.

Shahādah ar-Rʿīsāla. The second half of the *Shahādatān*. "And I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah."

Shahādah at-*Tawḥīd*. The first half of the *Shahādatān*, "I testify that there in no god except Allah."

Shalwār Kamīz. A traditional outfit consisting of a long tunic (kameez) and trousers (shalwar), commonly worn in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan where it is considered the national dress.

Shayṭān, Shaitaan, *Shayāṭīn*. Literally "Devil(s)." Refers to Satan and his followers who misguide humans.

Shirk. Refers to the act of associating partners with Allah, considered the gravest sin in Islam.

Shura. Literally "Consultation." Refers to the Islamic principle of mutual consultation in decision-making, emphasizing collective deliberation among leaders and community members to ensure justice and consensus in governance and other matters. In some Muslim and Arab countries, the consultative council (loosely equivalent to the US' Senate or the UK's House of Lords) is called the Majlis-as-Shura or Shura Council.

Ṣawm, Saum. Literally "Fasting." Refers to abstaining from food, drink, and other physical needs from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan. It is also the fourth pillar of Islam.

Sunnah, Sunnan. Refers to the practices, sayings, and approvals of Prophet Muḥammad, which serve as a model for Muslims.

Surah. Chapter of the *Qurʾān*.

Tafsīr, Tafaseer. Explanation(s) or interpretation(s) of the *Qurʾān*, providing context and understanding of its verses.

Tahfeedh. The practice of memorizing the *Qurʾān* by heart, often accompanied by proper recitation (*Tajwīd*), with the goal of preserving and internalizing its divine message.

Tajwīd. The rules and principles for reciting the *Qurʾān* correctly and beautifully, ensuring proper pronunciation, articulation, and rhythm of the Arabic letters and words, as revealed to Prophet Muḥammad.

Takbeer, Takbir. The proclamation "Allāhu Akbar" (Allah is the Greater), used in prayer and other acts of worship. It is also a common phrase used by Muslims when experiencing something highly emotional such as witnessing someone accepting Islam.

Tʿ*Aql*id, Tʿ*Aql*eed. Literally "Imitation." Refers to following the legal rulings of a scholar or school of thought without seeking personal justification or rationalization.

Tawfīq. Allah's help and guidance that allows a person to succeed in doing good and following the right path.

Tawḥīd, Tawhid. The Oneness of Allah, the fundamental concept of monotheism in Islam emphasizing that Allah is One, Unique, and has no partners or equals.

Tawḥīd al-Asma' was-Sifa'at. The Oneness of Allah in His names and attributes.

Tawḥīd al-ʿIbādah. The Oneness of Allah in worship, ensuring all acts of devotion are directed solely to Him.

Tawḥīd al-Rububiyyah. The Oneness of Allah in His Lordship, acknowledging Him as the Master, sole Creator, and Sustainer.

Umrah. Refers to a non-mandatory Islamic pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah, which can be performed at any time of the year.

Zakāh. Literally “purification” or “growth.” Refers to the obligatory almsgiving in Islam, requiring Muslims to give a portion of their wealth (typically 2.5% of eligible savings) to support the needy and promote social welfare. *Zakāh* is the third pillar of Islam.