

# Conflict Management Strategies for Children of Interfaith Marriages in Religious Decision Making

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## ABSTRACT

Interfaith marriage is a form of pluralism development in Indonesia. This, however, creates a conflict for someone who chooses to marry someone of a different religion, such as when choosing a child's religion. Parents will decide the religion of their children when they are still a baby. However, when children understand the law, they will decide their religion which is often at odds with their parent's decisions. Differences of opinion in making religious decisions will lead to interpersonal conflicts in the family. This research used a qualitative descriptive approach with a constructivism paradigm. This research was carried out in the city of Solo and its surroundings with a population of children from interfaith marriages who have reached the age of 17 years and over. The sampling technique used in this research is purposive sampling. This research aims to determine the conflict and management strategies that exist in families of different religions in making religious decisions for their children. Dyadic power theory is a theory of power that looks at several factors that cause a person to believe he has power over others through interpersonal communication.

**Keywords:** *Dyadic Power Theory, Conflict Management Strategy, Interfaith Marriage, Interpersonal Communication*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Interfaith marriage is not a new phenomenon in Indonesia, and it is a form of plurality [1]. In the view of Islam and other religions, interfaith marriage is not allowed. The holy book of Islam explains that interfaith marriage is prohibited, as well as in II Corinthians 6:14-18 regarding the prohibition of interfaith marriage. The Islamic viewpoint on interfaith marriages is expressed in the Fatwa decision of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) Number: 4/MUNAS VII/MUI/8/2005, which concludes that interfaith marriages are not permissible because they will cause conflict between Muslims and humans.

Religious differences in marriage can cause several conflicts. One of them will arise when the couple has children. Religious conflicts, such as the child's choice of religion, are common among children born from interfaith marriages. The decision to choose religion in children as adults will become the child's identity, which will affect his or her future.

Family decisions are frequently made by the person who dominates the family. This means that each family has one person with decision-making authority, namely the parents. This case is significant to study because

each family member has their own decision to make but is regularly hampered by the parents' decisions. When a child reaches the age of 18 and is legally capable, he or she will be able to make decisions about his or her own life.

Religion is a sensitive subject; it is feared that it will cause conflict among family members, with one party unable to resist each other's wishes and accept the decisions of others. This can lead to interpersonal conflict in the family, which can persist if not addressed.

There has been previous research on the religious choices of children in adolescence from interfaith marriages. The study depicted the conflict that occurred, but there was no discussion of conflict management strategies [2]. A similar study was conducted on the religious decision-making for children of interfaith couples who try to decide their children's religion but still want to maintain a respectful relationship [3]. However, this study did not use the Dyadic power theory to explain decision-making in families, instead applying communication strategies appropriate for the conflicts encountered by the informants.

Based on the above description, the researchers formulate the problem in this research as follows "How is the conflict management strategy for children of interfaith marriages in making religious decisions?"

## **1.1. Theory**

### *1.1.1. Dyadic Power Theory*

This research used Dyadic power theory which focuses on power and close relationships to make joint decisions. This theory was first coined by Rollins and Bahar (1976) and was later revised by Dunbar with the conclusion that power is part of the increase in a relationship, especially in couples, such as husband-wife, parents-children, and employees-bosses, and that it can influence how couples interact with one another and make decisions together [5].

Dyadic power theory is a power theory that examines a number of aspects that lead to a person believing they have power over others through interpersonal communication [6]. Interpersonal communication and power from others can help people make joint decisions, which can lead to better relationships.

Joint decisions made in a close relationship, such as a family, will benefit from the power that exists inside it. The power in question is that of a single-family member who holds the family's highest position of respect. Power is one way to increase close relationships with determined interpersonal communication and decision-making in the family [21]. Often, it is the parents who wield such authority. However, in this research, children play an important role in determining which religion to choose. As a result, the children take over the power that was formerly held by the parents.

Parents who believe they have authority over their children will make decisions for them. However, children are not always able to carry out their parents' decisions, which can lead to conflict. In this research, the dyadic power theory, which is a theory about the power of close relationships, is used to examine interpersonal relationships in the family. In interpersonal relationships with many differences, decisions can be made by discussion or unilateral decisions.

Unequal power in the family leads to unilateral decisions in interpersonal relationships. The power lies in one member of the family. Interpersonal relationships with unbalanced power will lead to vague satisfaction on one side when making the decision, hence it is critical for interfaith families to manage interpersonal conflicts in their relationships [6].

### *1.1.2. Conflict Management Strategy*

Interpersonal conflict can cause discontent in relationships because there are differences in goals or opinions in it, therefore conflict management becomes a strategy to avoid prolonged conflict [20]. Conflict management strategies can take the forms of avoidance and doing something extreme such as physical violence [17]. Conflict management strategies are influenced by several aspects, namely goals, emotional state, cognitive assessment of the situation, personality and communication competencies, and family history. Devito outlined conflict management strategies that can be linked to research in this area [7].

#### *1) Avoidance and Active Fighting Strategy*

Avoidance can take the form of running away from the place of conflict, and emotional avoidance. Sometimes, it is preferable for an individual to fight actively by listening and respecting the opinions of others

#### *2) Force and Talk*

Force is a physical violence-related strategy that can harm interpersonal relationships. The Talk strategy might help to resolve problems by communicating honestly and giving good feedback on the other party's arguments without resorting to violence.

#### *3) Defensiveness and Supportiveness*

Defensiveness is a way of speaking in a judging tone. Conversations that pass judgment on specific parties will provoke a negative response. Supportive strategies include carefully selecting phrases to avoid making someone feel judged and making it easy for someone to listen to arguments.

#### *4) Face-Attacking and Face-Enhancing Strategies*

Face attacking strategy is used to bring down the other party by exploiting their flaws. This strategy focuses on blaming others rather than finding solutions to problems. Meanwhile, face enhancing is a strategy that emphasizes apologizing, providing support, and respecting others' decisions.

#### *5) Silencers and Facilitating Open Expression*

Silence is a strategy that involves using unpleasant actions like sobbing or shouting to silence the other person.

Facilitating Open Expression is a dispute resolution strategy that includes positive behaviors such as allowing the other person to express the truth and appreciating the viewpoints of others.

#### *6) Gunnysacking and Present Focus*

Gunnysacking occurs when someone discusses past mistakes during a conflict. The present focus is a strategy that only focuses on the current conflict and attempts to find a way out of it.

#### *7) Verbal Aggressiveness and Argumentativeness*

Verbal aggressiveness is the selfish behavior of one party to win an argument by hurting another, while argumentativeness occurs when someone gives understanding to the other party to agree to an argument without hurting him.

Rahim and Bonoma (1979) also provided five understandings of conflict management strategies, including giving obligations to others, strengthening self-will, avoiding conflict, dominating, and making compromises or discussions. These five things are based on concern for oneself and others [18].

**2. METHODS**

The constructivism paradigm was applied in this qualitative descriptive research. This method was used to investigate material in more depth. The research was conducted in the city of Solo and its surroundings, with the research population consisting of children of interfaith marriages. Purposive sampling was used for sample selection involving people with an understanding of the object of research. The sample in this research was children from interfaith couples who were over 17 years old. 17 years of age was a consideration since at that age, a person has understood the law and can decide which religion he would follow.

Data collection was carried out using primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through interviews with several research participants, while secondary data were gathered from reference books or journals related to the material on topics, including decision making, family relationships, and interpersonal communication. The review was done by comparing the findings of the interviews with the research as a whole. Data reduction was done by sorting the data so that they do not deviate from the research topic. Coding was done using a deductive approach that grouped the data in a conical manner. The data interpretation analysis stage was used to understand the data using Dyadic power

theory and conflict management Strategy. Finally, theoretical triangulation was used to test the validity of the data by determining the research pattern through analysis based on theory.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**3.1. RESULTS**

*3.1.1. Father's power in deciding his children's religion*

The experiences shared by the three respondents show that their fathers have the power to decide things in the family. The authority of the father is manifested in children's religious decisions when they are young.

"... When I was young, I was a Catholic, because my parents married in Catholicism. In Indonesia, you can't get married in two religions. I was raised Catholic even though my mother was Confucian and my father was Catholic.... (Respondent 1)

"...since I was young, my father was Catholic" (Respondent 2)

"...I was previously a Moslem, I was taught Islam since I was a kid " (Respondent 3)

The explanations of the three respondents indicated that their father had the power to decide on their children's religion while they were young. All three respondents followed the father's religion because he had the dominant power in the family. The power of each family member can influence decision-making. Dunbar argued that dyadic power applies when someone who is most dominant in interpersonal relationships has more power to make decisions [9]. The three respondents, as small kids, followed their father's religion because they could not make their own decision on which religion to follow. It occurs because the father's power is greater than that of other family members.

**Table 1.** Demographic Information

| No. | Name                                     | Age | Previous religion | Current religion | Parents' previous religion | Parents' current religion | Origin |
|-----|--|-----|-------------------|------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------|
| 1.  | Lintang Pertiwi<br>Ramona<br>Vegarananda | 23  | Chatolic          | Islam            | Respondent 1               |                           | Solo   |
|     |  |     |                   |                  | Father: Catholic           | Father : Islam            |        |
|     |  |     |                   |                  | Mother: Confucian          | Mother: Islam             |        |
| 2.  | Adrian Radya                             | 22  | Catholic          | Islam            | Respondent 2               |                           | Solo   |
|     |  |     |                   |                  | Father:                    | Father:                   |        |

|    |              |    |       |           |                   |                   |      |
|----|--------------|----|-------|-----------|-------------------|-------------------|------|
|    | Dewantara    |    |       |           | Christian         | Christian         |      |
|    |              |    |       |           | Mother: Christian | Mother: Islam     |      |
| 3. | Respondent 3 |    |       |           |                   |                   |      |
|    | Lena Aulia   | 25 | Islam | Christian | Father: Islam     | Father: Islam     | Solo |
|    |              |    |       |           | Mother: Christian | Mother: Christian |      |

3.1.2. Differences in children's perspectives and parents' decisions

Interpersonal conflict is common in close relationships that are experiencing negative emotions as a result of differences in viewpoints and goals [24]. In delivering messages, there are times when children and parents have opposing viewpoints, which can lead to interpersonal conflicts.

"At the age of 17, I wanted to make an ID card, and I didn't feel like I fit in Islam, I just felt it was more comfortable in my mother's religion" (Respondent 3)

Respondent 3 expressed a different point of view. She felt more at ease if she practiced her mother's religion. Disagreements in viewpoints between children and parents almost always lead to conflict, including in the relationship between children and parents of respondent 3.

"I converted to Islam following my mother because many of my family are Muslim... then my father found out about this, and I was labeled as an apostate"

The experience of respondent 2 shows that there were differences of opinion between him and his father. The disagreement was over his father's religion, which he chose at a young age and the religion to which he now adheres. These differences created interpersonal conflicts between father and son. The differences of perspectives between respondent 2 and his father led to interpersonal conflicts.

In contrast to respondents 2 and 3, the different points of view in respondent 1 were more inclined to her mother. In this case, her mother had differing views and concerns about the religious views her child chose when she had not yet converted to Islam. This concern was based on the religion of her mother's extended family. However, over time the respondent's mother had the same opinion as to her, so the interpersonal conflict did not last long.

Respondents 3 and 2 shared similar interpersonal conflicts, specifically conflicts with their fathers. Their father had a different choice from the child's point of view. This caused interpersonal conflicts that made both parties uncomfortable. According to Verderber and Fink, interpersonal conflict is a disagreement between

two people who understand that their goals are different [10]. Respondents 2 and 3 had different understandings of religious perspectives and desires from their fathers. This created interpersonal conflict in their relationship.

Respondent 1 had a similar experience, despite having a different point of view from his mother. However, these differences could be addressed immediately, so interpersonal conflicts did not last long. Joint decisions were obtained through the closeness of interpersonal relationships and communication with each other in an interpersonal relationship [2]. Following the interpersonal conflict, respondent 1 became closer to and shared the same views with her mother. The closeness of the two was marked by the easing of worries of the respondent's mother about the religious decisions of her child.

3.1.3. Religious decision-making by children

Conflicts arose in the three respondents, where one of the parents, either father or mother, did not agree with the religion they chose. When respondent 1 converted to Islam, she experienced some conflicts with her Confucian mother and extended family. Respondent 1 was a devout Catholic until she graduated from high school. One day, something happened that made her fell and lost her way, and she began to waver about her religion.

This made respondent 1 decided to embrace Islam and discussed it with her parents. Both parents were relieved that their daughter chose Islam, but on the other hand, her mother did not agree with her choice of religion. It was because the mother's extended family adhered to the Confucian religion, she was afraid that her daughter would be disparaged and rejected.

"My parents' reaction was typical because my grandmother's family was diverse. In fact, the challenge was my mother's family. I didn't want to go to Medan until my grandmother got sick. My mother's family has not agreed until now, but I have not given it much thought (respondent 1)

The mother's concerns regarding her child's religious preference made their interpersonal relationship a bit problematic. However, the conflict did not last long because both of them understood and were willing to listen to the reasons for converting their religion.

Respondent 2 is still experiencing conflict with one of his parents. His father is opposed to his son changing religion.

"When I was in elementary school, I had a baptismal name. I was raised Catholic, but my mother was originally Muslim. After my parents separated, I converted to Islam" (respondent 2)

Respondent 2 embraced Catholicism as a child until grade 1 of high school and converted to Islam when he was in grade 2 of high school. Prior to his conversion, he had a strained relationship with his father. When his father learned that he had changed religion, he became enraged and said harsh words that hurt his feelings. Respondent 2 decided not to contact his father as a result of this negative response. His parents are currently in the process of divorcing.

Religions became sensitive issues to discuss in the respondent 3 case. This occurred after she converted to Christianity, her mother's religion.

"When I was 17, I wanted to make an ID card and I didn't feel like I fit in Islam, I felt comfortable in my mother's religion. I was unsure about which religion to choose, then, I discussed it with my parents. Despite the pros and cons, until now I have embraced Christianity. My mother agrees because she is also a Christian, but my father does not because I was taught Islam from a young age (respondent 3).

Respondent 3 received Islamic education from her father when she was a child, but as an adult, she felt she was incompatible with Islam. She tried to tell her parents about it, but her father was opposed to her conversion. Her father was dissatisfied with her daughter's religious preference. To this day, religion is still a sensitive issue in the family.

The three respondents decided to change religions when they grew up. This was rejected by one of the parents. The parental refusal has an impact on interpersonal conflicts in the family. In the families of respondents 2 and 3, the power was concentrated on one side, namely the father, resulting in an unbalanced power structure. According to Dunbar, growing up in a family of unequal power can blur the lines between power and contentment on one hand [5]. Conflict arises as a result of one side's dissatisfaction with the religious decisions made by the children. This conflict creates a schism between parents and their children.

Respondent 1's experience was different; while one of the parents was initially concerned about his child's religion when the child attempted to explain, they were willing to accept differences of opinion. Dyadic power

theory shows that when the power in the family is balanced, in other words, the power lies with each family member, they tend to use communication in an approachable way [6]. The strategy used by respondent 1 was by explaining her reason for conversion.

### **3.2. DISCUSSION**

The three respondents are from Javanese families who generally follow the decisions of the family's head. They adhere to the rule that children must embrace the religion of their father. This shows the dominant paternal power in the three families. Wives in Javanese families tend to follow the decisions made by the head of the family, namely the husband. Despite having the same social status and education, this tendency persists in Javanese families. The father is the family's head and acts as a decision-maker, emphasizing the interaction of family members to negotiate joint decisions [8].

However, power dominance is not limited to Javanese families. Several studies have concluded that fathers have more influence and power in the family due to the tradition of women always supporting men, particularly in the family realm [11]. The lack of women's power in the family causes fathers to have more power to influence and make decisions. Adjustment in religion in families of different religions is borne by children and also women, meaning that they should follow the rules or religion of the head of the family [23].

This experience also demonstrates how patriarchal values influence interfaith family negotiations and how women are more likely to bear the burden of adjustment.

Two out of three respondents practiced their father's religion and were rejected by their father when they decided to change religions. This demonstrates that the father wields power in the two respondents' families, as well as the authority to make religious decisions. Decision-making often occurs amid interpersonal conflicts, especially when one party holds more power in several areas [14].

According to dyadic power theory, a person's strength and power are influenced by how they influence other people in close relationships and can control that person so that when someone who is less empowered takes power in making decisions, it becomes difficult. However, when it comes to religion for children, fathers do not have more authority because religion is a personal choice.

Differences of opinion regarding the decision can lead to interpersonal conflict. Kellerman argued that interpersonal conflict can arise when people have opposing viewpoints on a topic [12].

### 3.2.1. *Face Attacking and Face Enhancing Strategies*

Respondent 2 experienced verbal attacks from his father as a form of rejection related to religious conversion. Such attacks do not aid in the resolution of conflicts, but rather worsen relationships, particularly interpersonal relationships.

“I converted to Islam following my mother because many of my family members are Moslem. Then, my father found out about this, and I was labeled as an apostate. Now, we do not communicate any longer” (respondent 2)

The statements of respondent 2 show that the relationship between the two became increasingly distant due to verbal attacks from his father. Respondent 2 preferred not to reply to his father's words because he was upset and hurt. Verbal attacks referring to someone in a close relationship can trigger conflict by hurting and being aggressive [22].

Face attacking and face enhancing strategies often occur in interpersonal relationships. Face attacking is a strategy when someone attacks another person using their weaknesses [7]. Instead of focusing on resolving a conflict, some people tend to blame others, causing relationships to deteriorate. Respondent 2 had a conflict because the father was more focused on his son's religious conversion, which made him angry. The father of respondent 2 intentionally vented his emotions with harsh words that made their relationship worse.

Face enhancing strategies assist others in maintaining a positive image, and they tend to engage in discussions when looking for a solution. The results of these discussions reduce the likelihood of future conflicts and improve interpersonal relationships, particularly in family relationships [7]. Unfortunately, in this case, respondent 2 and his father did not discuss the conflict at hand. When the father vented his rage through verbal attacks, respondent 2 preferred to avoid his father and ended the relationship.

Respondent 2's strategy harmed interpersonal relationships. Conflicts were not handled properly, and the two drifted apart due to opposing viewpoints. Parents frequently respond in ways that are contrary to the wishes of their children. This can lead to conflict because parents have a sense of ownership over their

children, and it is assumed that the choice of the parents is the best choice [13].

### 3.2.2. *Avoidance and Active Fighting Strategies*

Conflict avoidance occurs when a person leaves the scene of conflict. Emotional avoidance is another type of avoidance. In other words, a person withdraws psychologically from the conflict because he or she does not want to deal with the problems and arguments that cause conflict. Instead of doing this, one should participate in interpersonal conflicts by actively listening and expressing one's opinions while not hurting the other person.

“... Due to the conflict, I had to stay at my aunt's house. Until now, my father has been adamantly opposed to my conversion to Christianity. We no longer discuss religion in the family because he is still sensitive” (respondent 3)

The narration of respondent 3 shows that avoidance was carried out by both father and daughter. Fathers try to avoid emotions by not listening and agreeing to their daughter's arguments, while the daughter chose to leave the place where the conflict was occurring. The two's response to the conflict caused the conflict to be insurmountable on the spot.

Avoidance causes a person to fail to fulfill the interests of both himself and others because he refuses to discuss the conflicts that arise [19]. Respondent 3 and her father both avoided conflict, so they were unable to reach an agreement. In this case, someone must act as an intermediary to help the two parties understand each other.

Another family member, namely the mother, must participate in family relationships in order to resolve conflicts. Unfortunately, this did not occur in the above case because the two of them had previously avoided discussing the conflict. The avoidance that both of them practice has a negative impact on the interpersonal relationship between a father and his daughter.

The rejection of religious conversion experienced by respondent 3 occurred because of the father's sense of belonging to his child. Parents put power over their children when they are young, but that can change when they grow up because children already have their own power and decisions [4].

Respondent 1 avoided the conflict as well. The avoidance took the form of an attitude of not caring about the mother's extended family's response and the mother's concern about the extended family's response. Because of this avoidance, there was an interpersonal

conflict in the family. This interpersonal conflict is the most damaging thing that can happen in a relationship because it causes negative emotions to arise [15]. Respondent 1 experienced negative emotions, so she avoided the place of the conflict.

Respondent 1 felt something was wrong with her actions after avoiding for a while, and she felt guilty. Guilt can aid in the resolution of interpersonal conflicts, [25] as a result, respondent 1 took an active role in the fight by explaining her conversion. Respondent 1 effectively communicated her argument about her religious conversion, allowing the mother to accept the different points of view.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Each family has its own way of dealing with conflict. Two out of three respondents did not succeed in resolving the conflicts that existed in their families, resulting in long-lasting interpersonal conflicts. Respondents 2 and 3 both chose strategies that negatively impacted their interpersonal relationships with their parents. In contrast, respondent 1 chose a strategy of actively fighting for parental approval. Dyadic power theory, a theory about power in close relationships, can be applied to interpersonal relationships when making decisions. However, if interpersonal conflicts arise during the decision-making process, they must be resolved first.

Essentially, dyadic power theory is a power theory in decision making that is based on power, resources, and social exchanges to reach joint decisions. When power is concentrated on one side of the family, it is very likely that decisions are made by one party only, clouding the satisfaction level of other family members. Vague satisfaction will lead to interpersonal conflict, so the power of equal family members can assist children in making religious decisions while minimizing conflicts.

Often, power is concentrated on one side of the family, namely the parents, particularly the father. Husbands or fathers typically wield more power in a relationship and can make decisions unilaterally [16]. If interpersonal conflicts arise during the decision-making process, it is preferable for someone to be aware of the conflict management strategy. Thus, it will be easy to resolve conflicts and joint decisions can be made without hurting one another because religious decisions involve several family members, not only children or parents.

#### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed equally to this work.

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