

**10<sup>th</sup> National Convention on Statistics (NCS)**  
EDSA Shangri-La Hotel  
October 1-2, 2007

**Beliefs and Practices of Muslim Women in Mindanao**

by

Grace Edmar Elizar-del Prado

For additional information, please contact:

Author's name	:	Grace Edmar Elizar-del Prado
Designation	:	Chairperson
Affiliation	:	Philippines Social Science Research Center and CAS Research Council, Western Visayas College of Science and Technology
Address	:	Burgos Street, La Paz, Iloilo City 5000
Tel. no.	:	(6333) 320-7190
Fax No.	:	(6333) 329-427
E-mail	:	<a href="mailto:grace_vijaya@yahoo.com">grace_vijaya@yahoo.com</a>

# Beliefs and Practices of Muslim Women in Mindanao<sup>1</sup>

by

Grace Edmar Elizar-del Prado<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

This paper, which enumerates beliefs and practices in Islam, is part of a larger study entitled “Measuring Quality of Life Among Muslim Women in Mindanao”. The objective of this discourse is to primarily achieve a healthier interfaith dialogue with Muslims in order to raise the level of understanding on the differing articulation of culture and faith affecting Christian - Muslim relations.

Three hundred eighty four Muslim women respondents in Mindanao declare Islam monotheism, fasting, praying five times a day, pilgrimage to Mecca, ‘jihad’ and charity as practices called by their beliefs – all intended to achieve a single goal – Oneness in God, respect, equality and brotherhood.

This qualitative narrative highlights valuable information about faith, practices and traditions- cultural or religious -that are perceived unique to the Muslim culture.

**Keywords:** Islam, pillars of Islam, Islam beliefs practices, Muslim women

## I. The Problem

One question asked from the Muslim women respondents was, “What beliefs and practices do you have that you perceive different from those of the non -Muslims?”

## II. Methods and Limitations of the Study

The target sample was 1000 women, excluding those from the richer families, but only 384 Muslim women were willing to respond. They came from Datu Melong and Tambler of General Santos City, Baybay, Malalag, Davao del Sur, Mana, Malita, Davao del Sur, Cotabato City, Marawi City and Zamboanga City.<sup>3</sup> Respondents chosen were those residing nearer downtown centers to minimize efficiency problem and to ensure security protection. Interviews were conducted with the help of an interpreter and with the presence of ‘Imams’ (religious leaders), ‘Ullamahs’ (learned scholars) or Muslim leaders. Answers were tabulated raw to preserve the authenticity of the original responses. The study was conducted in April and May of 2006.

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is derived mainly from the empirical results of the study of the same author entitled “Measuring Quality of Life of Muslim Women in Mindanao”, an institutional research funded by Western Visayas College of Science and Technology, Iloilo City, Philippines.

<sup>2</sup> Chair, Social Science Research Center and CAS Research Council, WVCST, Iloilo City, email: grace\_vijaya@yahoo.com

<sup>3</sup> The author is indebted to Hon. Antonio Acharon, Hon. Givel Montejo, Hon. Franklin Bautista, Hon. Muslimin Sema, Hon. Omar Solitario Ali, Hon. Ceasar Lobregat, - mayors of the sample places – for the hospitality, safety and protection that have been afforded. Inshallah!

The process however encountered unavoidable inconveniences. The ideal probability method was violated. The choice of respondents was not random and the selection was neither systematized nor stratified. Security and protection problems added constraints to it. In fact, a number of women approached refused to participate and a significant number declined to reveal identity. Moreover, only three groups- the Maguindanaos, the Maranaos and the Tausugs-were represented. Basilan and Sulu where more warring Tausugs can be found were advised to be excluded from the sample space for security reasons.

The exclusion of women samples from richer families was deliberate; on a framework that revelations of poorer women are specifically useful information on the formulation of a more stable income-maintenance policy or on a more comprehensive women-protection policy intervention. The justification is that women from higher income brackets are apparently a few and there fore their responses will negligibly affect the general results of the study.

Since the sample population was vastly homogenous in faith, relaxing stratification requirement and adopting a non-random sampling procedure do not necessarily create significantly large errors that risk the results of the study. The uniform responses by the respondents satisfy the necessary validity requirement critical in descriptive studies. Be that as it may, these however, cannot be used to generalize the prevailing opinions of the entire Muslim women population in Mindanao.

### III. **Sample Literature Support**

In one verse of the Qur'an, it says:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given the one more than the other and because they support them from their means (Qur'an, 4:34).

In another verse it also says:

. . . And live with them (women) with kindness and equity. . . And live with them (women) on a footing of kindness and equity; and even if ye take a dislike to them it may be that ye dislike a thing and Allah created in it a great deal of good (Qur'an, 4:19).

In the above inscription, it is clear that the "power" of men over women is instituted on the "**footing of kindness and equity**". Men being stronger physically have to be more considerate and compassionate to women even if they have some disliking toward them. But this power is vulnerable to abuse and more often can be perceived as a chance to

dominate - meaning men in complete control of women - that in many cases, fulfilling such within the bounds of *charity* can be totally discarded.

This is a problem faced by some Filipino Muslim women today. A woman has difficulty marrying the man she likes if the 'wali' (guardian) refuses to give his consent to her marriage (Maruhom, 2001). The decision of the guardian is implied to have more weight than the decision of the woman concerned. Also, among child marriages, the child bride may be unable to annul her marriage especially if the 'wali' is the father or the paternal grandfather.

Even in progressive Malaysia, a similar problem emerged. The self reliant, economically independent and business-oriented Muslim women in Kelantan, not only that they are forbidden to assert their rights but also that they are restricted to speak their mind (Nik Noriani Nik Badlishah, 2001). Discussing business matters with the husband is discouraged and accepting gifts without the husband's consent is disallowed.

Even if marriages have already been solemnized, the civil recording of it should not be taken for granted. In some cases, men can still get away from their responsibilities to women especially if the traditional religious rites are not officially recorded (Ratna Batara Munti, 1996). One example in Indonesia is the case of Mandra vs. Rina 1996, where the husband failed to officially register the marriage and declare it null and void after the couple had children. The courts however, ruled in favor of the husband.

Courts in Singapore, known to be more expeditious in ruling cases on divorce, only allow polygamy if the husband is capable of providing for the needs of all the families. He shall produce an income tax statement and salary slips to support claims of financial capability and shall guarantee fairness and equal treatment to all his families. Also, the subsequent union should endow additional benefits to the society. If the first wife is barren, or is sick or that the second wife is capable of assisting the husband run his business, then subsequent marriages are justified (Halijah Mohammad, 2001).

But despite articulation of court rules, some Muslim men in Malaysia always find legitimate excuses by simply going to other states and apply for registration instead of asking permission to marry (Ratna Batara Munti, 2001). Divorce proceedings subject women to unfair bargaining negotiations. Stipulation against husbands taking another wife during the subsistence of the marriage was strongly suggested in the study of Nik Noriani Nik Badlishah (2001).

#### IV. Discussion on Findings

Before enumerating the beliefs and practices of Muslim women in Muslim Mindanao, a brief background of Islam and its foundations may be worth presenting.

##### 4. A. The Islam Faith

Islam is derived from the Arabic word root "**salema**"<sup>4</sup> which means peace, purity, submission and obedience. [In the religious sense, it means submission to the will of God and obedience to His Law]. All things, moving according to the motion of nature, are described to be in a **state of Islam**<sup>5</sup>. But since man possesses freedom of choice he is incessantly invited to submit himself to God and obey His Law as these are believed to be the best safeguards essential to achieve real peace and harmony here and thereafter.

It is said that it is unlikely for a Muslim to disintegrate the teachings of Qur'an away from the coordinated harmony of actions of the universe, including those of men. Islam is defined through its meaning, spirituality, devotion and laws that govern action with Qur'an serving as the constitution, the philosophy, the guide and emotional refuge, the very essence, the blueprint of destiny, the ideology that puts meaning to the Muslims' lives.

##### 4.B. The Foundations of Islam

Islam is based on a five-pillar foundation; each is as important as the rest. Essentially, one has to testify that there is no God worthy of worship but 'Allah' and that Muhammad is a messenger of 'Allah'. Corollary to this faith is the obligation to be in constant prayer, admitting ones 'smallness' before God and to express true brotherhood and care in 'Zakat' (obligatory charity). 'Saum' (Fasting) and Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) translate the aspiration of Muslims to achieve an ideal condition of '*equality in simplicity*' - a higher objective each Muslim aims – [noble, grand; awe-inspiring].

##### ***The Qur'an and the Shahada (The Testimony of Faith)***

Muslims claim that Islam is not just a religion but a way of life. Every decision a Muslim makes is based on the Qur'an. Nothing is added or deleted. Anybody who intends to become a Muslim and has the full conviction and strong belief that Islam is the true religion

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.afghanan.net/islam/meaning.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

ordained by Allah should pronounce the 'Shahada' without delay. The Shahada is declared as follows:

**ASH-HADU ANLAA ILAHA ILLA ALLAH WASSH HADU  
ANNA MUHAMMADAN ABDUHU WA RASUULUH.<sup>6</sup>**

The English translation is:

***I BEAR WITNESS THAT THERE IS NONE WORTHY OF WORSHIP BUT ALLAH AND I  
BEAR WITNESS THAT MUHAMMAD IS HIS SERVANT AND MESSENGER.***

Muhammad's stewardship indicates one uncompromising Islam doctrine: that is of Islam Monotheism – meaning 'One God'. Special individuals who received spiritual callings in salvation history were regarded as messengers of God [like the angels and the prophets]. The proclamation of the 'Shahada' goes with the acceptance and conviction that Muhammad is only a messenger like any other messenger [and not a God himself].

To complete the proclamation of 'Shahada' a Muslim needs to understand that heaven opens only to one whose actions *affirm* the professed testimony. Any contradiction disqualifies the believer of the dreamed bliss.

#### ***Establishment of 'Salat' (Prayers)***

Muslims pray five times a day – every daybreak, noonday, midday, twilight and evening. At seven, a child is encouraged to pray; at ten he/she is slashed for not following. For the Muslims praying bears a supra-normal advantage, favorable to the soul in the next life. It deadens the fires of hell and by praying intensely has one contributed significantly to the destruction of hell [eternally].

Further, they clean themselves before performing 'Salat' (prayer) to remind that no one impure unites with God, no matter what the justification is. In prayer a believer is in full recognition of God's presence, regardless on whether he is in the mosque or in a congregation, in the office or in the fields, near an animal or beside the sea.

#### ***Zacat (The Obligatory Charity)***

Obligatory charity is viewed as an act of worship and a spiritual investment. By giving 2.5% of the yearly income to charity, Islam teaches gratitude to the bounties received from 'Allah'. It purifies not only the property of the contributor but also the heart of the giver from

---

<sup>6</sup> "How to become a Muslim?" can be retrieved from [http://www.realislam.com/how\\_to\\_be\\_a\\_muslim.htm](http://www.realislam.com/how_to_be_a_muslim.htm)

selfishness and greed. It sanctifies the heart of the recipient as well and frees him/her from envy and jealousy, fostering instead goodwill and warm wishes for the contributors.

### ***'Saum' (The Fast of Ramadan)***

Once a year, Muslims celebrate the Fast of Ramadan. It starts in the morning and ends in dusk and is broken with prayer and meal in the evening. The routine of no food and water continues till thirty days. Fasting is closely interlinked with prayer. It is an opportunity to inner reflection and self control making the heart and soul unite with God. Intensive worship, Qur'an reading, charity giving and behavior-purifying is hoped to achieve during the Ramadan.

Derivatives to fasting are values on sympathy, compassion for the weak, fellowship and peace, moral victory, forgiveness and brotherhood. It is also believed to be beneficial to health since this provides a break in the cycle of bad habits of overindulgence. The fasting is closed with the 'Eid Fitr' (breaking the fast), where festivities and merriment are observed to celebrate the achievement of enhanced piety.

### ***Hajj (The Pilgrimage to Mecca)***

Once in a lifetime, Muslims express the ultimate act of worship in 'Hajj', a most significant manifestation of Islamic faith and unity. During the Hajj, humility, generosity, charity, realization of equality before God, cultivation of patience, cooperation, suppressing anger, accomplishing decency, chastity and spiritual encounter may be felt.

### ***Jihad (The Struggle)***

Jihad is not considered a pillar of Islam but a duty all Muslims must respond. Jihad (struggle or endeavor) in all forms is a call in Qur'an. Its interpretation should not be limited to a bloody war only, but should be extended to include struggles aimed at preserving the 'Good' and the entire process of destroying the destroyer of the Good (evil). For example, if corruption is a destroyer of Good, then it may just be necessary to have it stopped and the struggle attached to stopping it is 'Jihad'.

Jihad can be expressed in various modes; studying Qur'an sincerely and considering its teaching essential to social change; overcoming personal issues like anger, greed, hatred, pride, or malice; or taking simple sacrifices like giving up smoking or cleaning the floors of the mosques are a few examples. In some instances it is participating in Muslim

activities, or working for social justice and forgiving people who might have caused them some pains.

#### 4.C. The Muslim Women: Beliefs and Practices

To appreciate the responses of the Muslim women one has to realize that while they enumerate their practices, they might have simultaneously inferred that these are not observed by believers of other religions. The table that follows enumerates the beliefs and practices they currently observe:

**Table 1. Beliefs and Practices of Muslim Women in Mindanao, April and May 2006.**

1. Adherence to the pillars of Islam	f
a. Shahada	184
b. praying five times a day	287
c. obligatory charity	167
d. fast of Ramadan	289
e. pilgrimage to Mecca	53
f. Jihad (non-violent)	276
2. covering of the head and body	
a. covering of the head	248
b. covering of the body	384
3. going (traveling) out alone away from family	0
4. attending congregational prayer	257
5. accepting polygyny	178
6. arranged marriage	
a. impose it	34
b. open and liberal (convince the girl)	200
c. not observing it	25
7. Iddah	36
8. Kanduli (celebration remembering the dead)	65
9. Attending Madrasa School	167
10. do not nag with husbands	87
11. prioritizing the homes	154

**\*12. full time householders(not formally employed) 310**

\*This is not part of the revealed beliefs and practices but taken from another table signifying employment status.

Islamic civilization which is based upon the principle that women should not mingle with men, emphasizes separate domestic arrangements. <sup>7</sup> The wife shall dutifully manage the affairs of the household and the husband shall provide safety and protection of the family. To a Muslim family, the wife reigns supreme inside the household- an authority that contains her freedom as well. It is even disclosed that among Maranaos visitors welcomed by the wives are welcomed by the entire clan but visitors welcomed by the husband are welcomed by the husband alone.

<sup>7</sup> Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, *The Family Life of Islam*, (Tehran- Iran: World Organization for Islamic Services, 1984), p. 18.

Other than the authority inside the household, the Qur'an also provides that women are to be exempted from the burden of earning a living but in cases where they would like to work, they shall be permitted on a condition that the work rests within the limits of the 'Hijab' (veil). The implication is straightforward. Women should trade off not her modesty, sanctity, dignity, for career advancement, prestige or money.

Although the respondents accepted the Muslim precept that the woman's place is in the house, every one of them argued that it is quite impractical anymore to adhere to it strictly especially on the economic hardships they are facing.

Hindi kasi pwede na hindi na magtrabaho. Kailangan tayong kumita. (It is not possible not to work anymore; we need to earn.)

-A Maranao teacher-

Some 23% of the respondents (87/384) revealed they are not allowed to nag their husbands. A Maguindanao mother explains that to achieve the ultimate success of motherhood is create a home—pleasant and peaceful for the children.

As wives they avoid from nagging their husbands – a compliance of Qur'an as explained by Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi in his book "The Family Life of Islam".

ang kadaugan sa asawa, ang pagtukod sa usa ka panimalay nga malinawon para sa mga anak. Dili kami pwede mag "nag" sa among bana o maghatag ikaguol sa

mga bata . (the ultimate achievement of a wife is to create a home— pleasant and peaceful – for the children" . We are not allowed to nag to our husbands).

-a Maguindanao mother and wife-

From the table, there are 310 women who categorized themselves full time householders but this is not to obey an Islam precept; these women are actually unemployed. With regard to a practice permitting husbands to marry up to four wives, only 178 respondents mentioned this as a current practice. Specifically, it is only permitted on condition that the wife is barren or sick or in her advanced years, similar to the study of Halijah Mohammad (2001).

. However, if the first wife refuses, the husband is bound to respect her decision. Some respondents confirmed they were the ones who looked for a 'duway' (second wife) for their husbands. Finally, if either neglects ones duty or brings dishonor to the family, the injured party may seek relief from the court. As stipulated, both can ask for divorce.

The observance is 'iddah' is imperative to every wife. 'Iddah' is the period of waiting prescribed for a woman whose marriage has been dissolved by death or by divorce the

completion of which shall enable her to contract a new marriage.<sup>8</sup> The length of waiting time is four months and ten days. From the table, there were 36 of them who revealed 'iddah' as a practice observed.

One striking revelation of the women is their desire to attend "Madrasa" schools despite poverty. Unfortunately there are only a few schools operating. The Maguindanao mothers in particular are requesting the national government to look at them with compassion and provide "Madrasa" schools for the education of their children.

#### **IV. Concluding Remarks**

From the responses of Muslim women, it is apparent to notice some special quality worth emulating - *subservience to husbands, modesty in dressing all the time, recognizing the importance of motherhood and family and the wanting to study their faith intensively*. Although often they are mistakenly valued as weaknesses and defenselessness against husbands, they are the very quality necessary in building the inner strengths of their growing children.

'Madrasa' education, aside from the Western based-education offered by the government, is by far as important as their future. Equally vital this is for Muslim girls as 'Madrasa' training molds them to becoming better wives and mothers in their time. In Madrasa, they are taught the Qur'an, the Arabic language and the specific values of Islam.

Madrasa education, combined with the education provided by the government, produces well-educated Muslim girls who could be expected to grow as well-educated Muslim wives and mothers. Combining the simplicity of Islam that establishes the authority of mothers in home governance, in no chance that violence and strife unnecessary could not be averted. Good, educated, loving, 'always at home' mothers have the odds of molding children into good responsible sons and daughters; mothers unsatisfied, bereaved, wretched, 'displaced by wars' are likely to bring about rebellious sons and daughters in the next loop of events.

To the unspoken question - "what causes the long years conflict with the Muslims in Mindanao" - everyone affected, has reflected on different roots possible and acknowledged that deeper issues on justice-economic, social, and political- are factors that had long been

<sup>8</sup> "Article 55, Code of Muslim Personal Laws of the Philippines", (1977), *Mindanao Journal*, Vol. III Nos.3-4 ( 1977) pp.330.

left unresolved. But then again this study summarizes the answers into one radical thought, do these Muslim rebels have had homes Islam intends to create – pleasant and peaceful? Who is responsible for the destruction of these once pleasant homes?

## **VI. Suggestions for Future Considerations**

It is inadequate to comprehend the Muslims in one single study. Virtues like word of honor, respect for a covenant, valiance, fighting for a principle, family, modesty, chastity, responsibility, prayer life etc. - all the Muslim way- are not covered in the study. These suggest a new dimension of thinking, a more evolved and dynamic way of co-existing, non-Muslims might want to learn. The need to educate one another about differences and similarities may lead to the conviction that just solutions for Mindanao do not solely rest with one approach.

“Mother is at home strategy” could be an alternative approach – an approach that may solve the issue via the framework of Islam. Rather than trying to resolve problems outside Islamic paradigm, perhaps a new family policy will work. If this is going to work with Muslim homes, then it can be extended to include non-Muslims as well and observe the outcomes. The study in this regard suggests for a cultural transformation [perhaps a cultural restoration] for Muslims and non-Muslims – the Filipino way, the Filipino approach – ‘emphasizing the irreplaceable role of mothers’ in any Muslim and in any Christian family.

Reviewing the current educational curriculum and redesigning it to include a more integrated values program, incorporating the diverse preferences of the various groups in the country- Muslims and non-Muslims, indigenous and non indigenous - emphasizing the “restoration of homes” and “the return of mothers” to their homes, need some serious consideration.

Lastly may the sanctity of life and option for the poor the bases more compelling than military actions in addressing the conflict in Mindanao. More discussions and dialogues will lead to better appreciation of one another. Filipino Muslims, by and large, are Filipinos-tolerant, moderate, peace-loving. Military option is not the solution. What they need is to go back home to their mothers. Bismillah! (In the Name of Allah)

## Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge Western Visayas College of Science and Technology, Mayor Gerry Trenas of Iloilo City for communicating with the mayors in respective sample places, ensuring the author's safety and protection and the support of a number of acquaintances - the 'ullamahs', 'imams', sultans, interpreters, Office of the Muslim Affairs officials, Office of the Mayor officials, teachers and students who became friends; and to the 384 respondents who gave unselfishly their trust to the author for whatever best their responses could give in attaining better quality of life. Bismillahir Ramanir Raheem, (In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful) I offer wholeheartedly this paper for the Greater Glory of God, for my undying love of Mary, for world peace and for peace in Mindanao. Inshallah!

## References

Code of Muslim Personal Laws of the Philippines. (1977). Mindanao Journal. Vol. III. (Nos. 3-4), p. 330 Can be retrieved from [http://www.uniset.ca/phil/phil\\_musl\\_civ\\_code.pdf](http://www.uniset.ca/phil/phil_musl_civ_code.pdf).

"How to become a Muslim?" can be retrieved from  
<[http://www.realislam.com/how\\_to\\_be\\_a\\_muslim.htm](http://www.realislam.com/how_to_be_a_muslim.htm)>  
<http://www.afghanan.net/islam/meaning.htm>

Badlishah, N. N. N., Mohammad H., Maruhom, N., Munti, R. B., (2001). Proceedings from "Islamic Family law and Justice for Muslim Women" Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, *Asian Social Issues Asia Source*, posted at [http://www.asiasource.org/asip/muslim\\_women.cfm](http://www.asiasource.org/asip/muslim_women.cfm)

The Holy Qur'an Rizvi, S. S.A. (1980). *The family life of Islam*. Tehran-Iran: World Organization for Islamic Services. Can also be retrieved from < <http://www.wofis.com/asset/Books/039.pdf>. >