

## Interreligious Marriages: Can Couples in Interfaith Marriages Live a Happy Life?

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### Abstract

This article posits that families of interfaith couples (Muslims and Christianity/Catholicism) can achieve a state of happiness. Research data were obtained through in-depth interviews with married couples comprising one Indonesian and a British partner, aged between 25 and 40 years, residing in Indonesia and the United Kingdom, and representing diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. The study revealed that the Islamic concept of *sakinah* family embodies a totality of mercy (*rahmah*) and love (*mawaddah*) inherently present in each couple's heart. The findings suggest that happiness in interreligious or interfaith marriages can be attributed to the profound love shared by the spouses. Love can develop and grow in a romantic, intimate, passionate, and committed relationship, provided there is a willingness to accept responsibility for maintaining it. Accordingly, these research findings may have implications for a new understanding of the *sakinah* family, which, thus far, has been based upon the standard of couples having a common faith in a same-religion marriage. Nonetheless, further studies are needed to investigate whether couples in interfaith and interreligious marriages continue to lead happy lives in their old age.

### Abstrak

Artikel ini menjelaskan bahwa keluarga pasangan beda agama (Muslim dan Kristen/Katolik) bisa mencapai kehidupan yang bahagia. Data penelitian diperoleh dari wawancara mendalam dengan pasangan dari latar belakang agama dan budaya yang berbeda berusia 25-40 tahun yang berasal dari Indonesia dan Inggris. Penelitian menemukan bahwa konsep keluarga sakinah dalam ajaran Islam adalah totalitas rahmat (*rahmah*) atau cinta (*mawaddah*) yang ada dan melekat dalam hati setiap pasangan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kebahagiaan dalam hubungan suami istri dalam perkawinan beda agama dapat ditemukan karena besarnya rasa cinta yang dimiliki oleh pasangan tersebut. Cinta dapat tumbuh dan berkembang dalam suatu hubungan yang bersifat romantis, intim, penuh gairah dan komitmen serta kesediaan menerima tanggung jawab untuk menjaga hubungan. Dengan demikian, temuan penelitian ini memiliki implikasi pada pemahaman baru tentang keluarga sakinah, yang, sejauh ini, telah didasarkan pada standar pasangan yang memiliki keyakinan yang sama dalam pernikahan sesama agama. Meskipun demikian, studi lebih lanjut di masa depan diperlukan untuk mengamati apakah pasangan pernikahan beda agama dan antaragama masih menjalani kehidupan yang bahagia di usia tua mereka?

### Keywords:

Interreligious marriage; love; family; *sakinah*.

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## Introduction

Although happiness is what we intend to find, the current research is more focused on the locus where happiness can be found. We would like to assume that family is the place where happiness resides. This is because the family is the smallest unit in various broader social relations (B.T., 2021; Chen & Chen, 2021; Mayowa, 2019). The family is a unique entity that has a reciprocal effect on various social processes and dynamics, extending even to the level of a state. The presence of a family, with its domestic dynamics and routines, in solving various problems demonstrates the stability and resilience of a family (Gordon, 2018). Consequently, the process of strengthening one another and mutual understanding among family members is a crucial moment for cultivating happiness in the family. Such processes of strengthening and understanding are established upon the relationship between the spouses as the couple leading the family.

Various studies indicate that family is the place where happiness originates and resides (Moordiningsih, 2011; Wu, 2014; Andayani et al., 2018). A study by Napa et al. (2020) suggests that happiness is a fundamental human aspiration and that family life without financial difficulties is a core component of family happiness. Furthermore, having intimate and engaged relationships between family members and showing mutual care also suggests practices of happiness within a family. Meanwhile, a study by Wu (2014) shows that family is a highly influential factor in determining one's happiness, alongside other factors such as health, friends, education, and leisure.

These various studies have certainly provided elaborations asserting that the family is a place where happiness originates and exists. However, the families examined to arrive at these results were spouses of similar religious backgrounds. It appears that religious differences have not been considered as one of the defining variables of happiness within the family. To put it more appropriately, interreligious couples in a family can be a source of happiness within the family. A study by Lee and Ono (2012) explains that social and religious contexts influence happiness associated with marriage. A study by Sander (2017), which examines the correlation between religion and individual happiness in the United States, suggests that Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and even couples without a religious affiliation, have an impact on the happiness of spouses within the household. Meanwhile, Elmslie (2014) suggests that Jewish and Protestant spouses are the most likely to experience happiness, followed by Muslim and Catholic couples. A similar study conducted by Sapiro (2020) in England also indicates that Jewish married couples experience high levels of happiness and stability. While in fact, Islam's religious perspective promises happiness in same-religion marriage.

Numerous studies have explained that family happiness in Islam is rooted in the concepts of *sakīnah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* (Susanti et al., 2022; Fauzan & Amroni, 2020; Pongoliu, 2017). A family characterized as *sakīnah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* is a family in which happiness, harmony, peace, and comfort are manifested, and it is a family that operates based on religious and legal norms. These arguments refer to the word of Allah SWT in QS al-Rūm verse 21: *"And one of His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find comfort in them. And He has placed between you compassion and mercy"*.

In the context of Indonesian society, interfaith marriage is still an issue fraught with social and cultural sensitivity, and is often considered a form of deviation from established collective norms. Sociologically, this is inseparable from the role of religion as a social institution that has an integrative function in building cohesion and group identity (Jeniva & Tanyid, 2025). Religion in Indonesia is not only understood as an individual belief but also as a communal value system that regulates behavior, shapes social structures, and becomes a source of moral legitimacy. Therefore, when individuals choose to marry a partner of a different religion, the act is often perceived as a threat to social stability and unity, especially

at the family and community level. From an anthropological perspective, marriage in Indonesian society has a dimension that goes far beyond personal relationships (Munro et al., 2024). It is an institution that plays a crucial role in uniting two large families, even from different social systems. Therefore, religious differences in marriage are still considered a disruption to the symbolic order that is considered sacred, and therefore considered taboo or socially unacceptable.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative method to explore the acceptance of each religion by married couples of different faiths, specifically Islam and Christianity/Catholicism. Field data is collected through unstructured or free interviews so that informants can freely express their views and experiences according to the topic (Roulston & Choi, 2018). Interviews were conducted with five married couples of different religions, including one Indonesian and a British citizen.

**Table 1.**

No	Name	Citizenship	Religion
1	VT & HH	Indonesian	Islam & Christianity
2	WI & SH	Indonesian	Catholicism & Islam
3	MI & DD	Indonesian	Christianity & Islam
4	NA & KN	Indonesian	Christianity & Islam
5	Lulu Nursa & Adrien Lefauve	British	Islam & Catholicism

The interviews were conducted from April to December 2023, during which couples 1, 4, and 5 were interviewed simultaneously without separation. Couples 2 and 3 were interviewed separately. The selection of a partner is based on the purposive sampling technique, where the couple who becomes the informant meets the main criterion, namely the difference in religion between Islam and Christianity/Catholicism. The duration of the interview with each couple ranges from 30 to 45 minutes, with 18 questions.

The interview results data were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The data analysis process begins by transcribing all the interview results verbatim, so that no important information is missed. After the transcript is complete, the researcher conducts repeated readings to thoroughly understand the context and content of the conversation. The next stage is the coding process, which involves labelling or coding pieces of data that are considered important or relevant. Coding is done inductively, meaning that the code is determined based on findings that emerge from the data itself, rather than from a predetermined theoretical framework. Then it becomes the basis for further analysis to understand the acceptance of religion in the practice of interfaith marriage. The codes are grouped into broader categories to find patterns and relationships between themes. Conclusions are drawn based on these findings, which serve as the basis for interpreting the research results (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To maintain the validity and reliability of the data, the researcher applied triangulation by comparing information between pairs and conducting critical reflection during the analysis process (Hashimov, 2015). In addition, the researcher also conducted member checking by

confirming provisional results with several informants to ensure that the interpretation of the data was in accordance with their intended meaning.

### ***Kafa'ah* as a Substantive Value: A Theoretical Approach to Happiness in Interfaith Marriage**

*Kafa'ah* is generally interpreted as equality or equivalence in aspects of religion, descent, social status, and economy, as found in many classical *fiqh* books (Ardi & Shuhufi, 2024). Through equality, not just equality, equality refers to the balance in terms of values, adaptability, and emotional maturity between couples, even if they differ in educational background, social status, or life experience. *Kafa'ah* does not require couples to be identical in every aspect, but rather to have a corresponding level in important aspects that affect their life together (Affan, 2021). This understanding develops in the context of patriarchal and religiously homogeneous societies, where differences in status are often seen as barriers to domestic harmony. However, in the reality of modern society that is more open, dynamic, and socially and religiously plural, this approach begins to question its relevance. Many couples from different backgrounds—including interfaith couples—are able to build a harmonious and happy home life, even though they do not meet the standards of *kafa'ah* in the conventional sense.

Essentially, the concept of *kafa'ah* predated the advent of Islam. *Kafa'ah* is an ancient Arab terminology to adjust the condition of the bride and groom based on materials such as wealth, position and power (Fajar & Al Badr, 2021). After the advent of Islam, this term continued to be used in a broader sense, with a greater emphasis on moral values. This means that it is not only conformity based on material, but also, and more importantly, moral values. *Kafa'ah* is not a concept that is intended to standardize the religion embraced by married couples (Law & Women, 2010). Although in the classical *fiqh* tradition, religion is often used as one of the leading indicators in determining *kafa'ah*, this is more driven by concerns about household disharmony resulting from differences in beliefs, especially in a society that remains religiously homogeneous. However, in principle, *kafa'ah* leads more towards the equivalence of values (Jailan & Kusrin, n.d.) The alignment of life goals (Nasohah, 2024) and the readiness to build a spiritually, emotionally, and socially stable household (Kusrin et al., 2025).

*Kafa'ah* is primarily concerned with the equivalence of moral values between two individuals, particularly in the context of marriage. This equivalence of moral values encompasses similarities in life principles, ethics, and views on right and wrong, which form the basis for living in harmony. In Islam, *kafa'ah* is considered important because the difference in moral values that are too far apart can trigger conflicts and disharmony in the household. Therefore, similarity in terms of morality is one of the primary benchmarks in choosing a partner, with the hope of creating a relationship that supports each other, understands each other, and is founded on shared values. In addition, *kafa'ah* also leads to the harmony of life goals between two individuals who will build a household. In this context, harmony is not only seen from external aspects such as social status or family background. Instead, it focuses on the same vision and mission in living life together. When couples share the same direction and purpose in life, they will find it easier to support each other, strengthen one another in the face of life's challenges, and work together to achieve their dreams. Next is stability in social life, which is one of the important factors in building a harmonious household. This social stability encompasses the ability of individuals to interact healthily with their surrounding environment, maintain a good reputation, and be accepted within their community. In the context of marriage, equality or equivalence in social aspects such as status, employment, and family background can help minimize potential conflicts stemming from differences of view or social pressurin

When both couples have a relatively balanced social status, they will be more likely to adjust to each other and receive support from the surrounding environment.

Meanwhile, according to Islam, a marriage characterized by spousal relations that display mercy (*rahmah*) and love (*mawaddah*) is known as a *sakīnah* family. Therefore, *sakīnah* reflects a profound meaning, encompassing tranquillity and peace within the family. A *sakīnah* family can be defined as a harmonious, peaceful, and secure family because it is managed in accordance with Islamic law (Fauzan, 2020; Pongoliu, 2017). Given such an assumption, undoubtedly, the *sakīnah* family promised by Islam can only be attained by couples who both profess the Islamic faith.

Unlike the concept of *sakīnah*, the concept of happiness and the various explanations given above do not require same-religion marriage (Mursalin et al., 2023). This implies that same-religion marriage couples may or may not attain the level of the *sakīnah* family. This is because some of the same-religion married couples also experience quarrels and even divorce. Conversely, married couples who profess the same religion or different ones may experience either happiness or unhappiness.

The discussion considers the concept of *sakīnah* as a strict and binding matter, as it is regulated by religion in Indonesia and by the state through Governmental Regulation No. 9 of 1975 on Marriage. As for the concept of happiness, it is relatively more flexible since it is regulated neither by religion nor the state. Such flexibility subsequently encourages many interreligious married couples not to attain a marital level of *sakīnah* family, but to attain a happy life along with their interreligious spouse instead (Nafisah et al., 2024). Consequently, despite the existing prohibition and opposition, some couples in Indonesia still choose to engage in interreligious marriage (Sonafist & Yuningsih, 2023).

Hence, the concepts of *sakīnah* and happiness in the family may have similar meanings, yet they differ in the context of spousal relations or household life. Etymologically speaking, the word *sakīnah* comes from the word cluster *sakana*, *yaskunu*, *sukūnan* in Arabic, meaning to be still or to be tranquil, peaceful (Munawwir, 1997). Terminologically speaking, *sakīnah* can be defined as (1) *al-wadā'ah*, *al-waqārah*, *al-tuma'nīnah*, which means tranquillity; (2) *al-rahmān*, which means mercy or grace. From a textual perspective, *sakīnah* constitutes prayers sent to couples who are about to get married. This text refers to the words *ilayhā litaskunū* in the QS. al-Rūm (21), which means "So that you may find tranquillity in them".

According to al-Jurjanī, *sakīnah* resides within the heart in the context of tranquillity or peace of the heart (soul) when something unexpected occurs and it is addressed with tranquillity that is imbued with light (*an-nūr*). This is why *sakīnah* is then interpreted by al-Zuhaylī (2009) as the resoluteness or tranquillity of the human soul (*al-isbīt and al-thuma'nīnah*) from all anxieties (*al-qalaq*) and difficulties or narrow-mindedness (*al-iqtirār*). This, conversely, means that *sakīnah* is defined as the heart's stance to leave enmity or confrontation (*al-amān*) behind, to lose fear (*al-khouf*), and the soul's sorrow (Rahman, 2015). Happiness is a well-researched mental concept that has been extensively studied in numerous psychological and philosophical investigations. The concept of happiness is, thus, often associated with deep thoughts and intuitive studies. According to Davis (1980), happiness as a concept can be categorized into relational and non-relational happiness. The relationship between the two is characterized as flexible and dispositional. This means that relational happiness opposes non-relational happiness, yet both can also change and shift in favor of one another. For example, the mental concepts of optimism and pessimism, hope and fear, disappointment and relief are opposites, but both place happiness as a central concept.

Relational happiness refers to a state of well-being that is dependent on interpersonal conditions, such as being with, relating to, or being supported by others. For example, a wife may feel happy when she is with her husband, or a husband may experience happiness in spending time with his child. Conversely, the absence of these conditions can result in



unhappiness, as noted by Davis (1980). In this sense, relational happiness is not self-contained but contingent upon specific relational factors.

### **Sakīnah Family: From Having to Being**

Each individual is entitled to lead a happy life because happiness is an inherent attribute of the human self. Essentially, happiness need not be sought and found as it resides internally within human beings, not externally (Boniwell et al., 2013). Nonetheless, humans need experiences as a basis to feel that we are living a happy life. Going through life full of romance with one's spouse constitutes one of the experiences that underlie happiness (Santos et al., 2021). According to one of the informants, a happy life with his wife, who professes a different faith, began with a feeling of attraction to her.

*“A feeling of fondness or liking toward the wife is the start of a happy life in the family. This feeling will make the relationship with the wife closer and more romantic. A more romantic relationship can lead to greater happiness. However, the liking feeling will be tested by various long-term emotional experiences. Sometimes, my wife and I argue because we have different opinions. Differences in our faith never triggered these differences. Differences emerged because my wife and I have different cultural backgrounds” (Nursa, 2023).*

In interfaith marriages, the cultural differences inherent in each couple's beliefs can be a source of conflict that is difficult to avoid. Based on the interview with Nursa, it was found that there are differences in habits related to carrying out family traditions, such as how to celebrate religious holidays and how to communicate with extended family. These differences feel foreign and cause tension when each couple feels that their traditions or cultural values are poorly understood by their partner. To overcome this, according to Nursa, intense and open communication is needed to create a complete understanding and mutual respect for traditions and beliefs (Nursa, 2023).

This interview reveals that the cultural differences inherent in the beliefs of each couple in interfaith marriages are one of the sources of complex and difficult-to-avoid conflict. This difference extends to cultural practices that are symbolic and emotional, such as how to celebrate religious holidays and communication patterns with extended family. Within the framework of intercultural theory, this condition reflects the occurrence of cultural dissonance, a situation in which individuals experience psychological distress due to intense interaction with value systems or habits that differ from their own. This is because cultural practices play a vital role in shaping personal and communal identity. When traditions are considered unappreciated or misunderstood by the couple, this can lead to feelings of isolation and lower the quality of interpersonal relationships (Ebele & Ahmad, 2024). Communication that takes place in an egalitarian manner allows each individual to articulate the meaning of the traditions they carry, while also opening up a space for compromise based on mutual respect. Therefore, it can be concluded that cultural differences in interfaith marriage do not automatically become a source of relationship disintegration, but can be a vehicle for relationship transformation.

The explanation above indicates two things. First, happiness is already present within the self, and it emerges when triggered by the advent of a liking feeling between couples. Second, a romantic relationship fostered among couples may increase the feeling of happiness for husbands and wives. According to Clavería (2019), romance is an emotional relationship based on dominant feelings of love and caring toward one's partner. Furthermore, a romantic relationship becomes apparent when physical relations dominate a couple, as indicated by behaviors such as embracing, kissing, and caressing, even if accompanied by a low level of sexual intimacy (Connolly et al., 2004; Uusiäntti & Määttä, 2013). Hence, it can be asserted

that happiness in the family is a junction between a feeling of liking or fondness that already exists within each spouse and the charm and attraction that each of them has.

A wife who married a man of a different religion, named VT (Initial), who is Muslim, tells the beginning of her relationship with her husband, who is a Christian. VT says that their marriage is based on love. Even though the families of each side refused, he said that my father rejected marriage, not because of religion, but because of the shame of being a parent. This is because, in my village, no one is married to someone of a different religion, even though this is the first time in my family (VT, 2023).

This is why, despite the husband already having a feeling of fondness or liking as a basis for a happy family life, it still requires external stimulation in the form of charm and attraction displayed by the wife. This suggests that happiness is dependent upon each individual's emotional experience. An experience does not necessarily have to be a reasonable one. Even bad experiences, such as a fight with one's spouse, may also serve as a means to fulfil one's sense of happiness. Accordingly, happiness depends on (internal) feelings as a subjective criterion, the (external) reaction of one's partner as an objective criterion, and the relationship between the two. However, the extent to which happiness is considered a feeling is a key matter, while the objective state, although it holds a particular role, does not define happiness (Leontiev, 2012).

In the same place, VT's husband, HH (Initials), also said the same thing: I married VT based on love. Even now, at the age of our marriage, which has reached 16 years, we have survived all kinds of rejection and opposition from the family. I am a Christian from Batak, and our family is deeply rooted in the Christian faith. My parents did not accept our marriage because it was purely religious. My family does not accept different religions. I then took the initiative to move to Jakarta so that my wife and I could live quietly without rejection. This initiative arose not because I was the head of the family, but because we both agreed to maintain our love (HH, 2023).

Long emotional experiences among interfaith married couples, who sometimes do not require such reasoning, become a mysterious space. This is because, according to Frankl (2012), the requirements for attaining happiness are not happiness itself but the reasons that underlie how happiness is manifested. This implies that happiness is a result or impact of the reasons one experiences to attain happiness. If the reasons to attain happiness exist, then happiness subsequently follows these reasons and presents itself.

This argument, on the one hand, will lead to the need for another definition of the process of how happiness is created. However, on the other hand, people may avoid the need to have reasons with other meanings or definitions in order to live a happy life. According to Frankl (2011), the motive or drive to avoid reasons, which are considered the bases of meaningful happiness, leads to other dimensions that are concealed within each individual, such as addiction to alcohol or drugs. Some may feel happiness when consuming alcohol or drugs without being able to explain the reason for that. While it is clear that consuming alcohol and drugs is detrimental to one's health (Geiger & MacKerron, 2016). This will subsequently explain that the idea of happiness as the essence of marriage and the highest virtue in marriage found in each couple can be distinguished into the fulfilment of desire to satisfy instant or momentary gratification and the desire to please a true and perpetual satisfaction (eudaimonia). Happiness with actual and perpetual substance consists of various elements that are specifically unexplainable but can subjectively be felt.

The feeling of happiness experienced by some informants, along with their interreligious partners, is a prolonged emotional event. According to Veenhoven (2009), such emotional experience is explained through the affect theory. The affect theory asserts that happiness will depend on unsubstantiated emotional experiences, which reflect the satisfaction of needs. Therefore, the concept of happiness is similar to pleasure, which lacks moral, ethical,

or pious attributes. According to this perspective, the concept of happiness, thus, lies outside the realm of religious doctrines. There are no specific provisions regarding the object of activities in order to lead a happy life with one's partner. For instance, spouses may lead a happy life if they both share the same religion and faith, allowing them to participate in worship activities together as a family.

Unlike the concept of happiness, the concept of *sakīnah* emphasizes a totality in the junction between the concept of mercy (*rahmah*) and love (*mawaddah*). A totality in the relationship between the two will subsequently result in a married couple or family that is *sakīnah*. Hence, *sakīnah* constitutes the most profound basis for fostering feelings of tranquillity and peace within the family. To attain the degree of a *sakīnah* family, Islam requires married couples to be of the same faith and religion (Taufiqurohman & Musaffa, 2023). A *sakīnah* family lives in a relationship that is full of mercy (*rahmah*) and love (*mawaddah*), which eventually creates tranquillity and peace. While in fact, feelings of tranquillity and peace reside in the heart of human beings. This is why the essence of *sakīnah* is found in the hearts of each husband and wife (Rasyid et al., 2024). This reiterates that *sakīnah* is the heart's resolve to leave behind enmity or war (*al-amān*), lose fear (*al-khouf*), and be far from various forms of suffering and sorrow (Rahman, 2015).

Given the assumption that everyone desires a happy life without enmity, free from anxiety and fear, and far removed from suffering and sorrow, the concept of *sakīnah*, as an Islamic doctrine, is something that essentially exists, resides, and is inherent within the heart of human beings. Accordingly, the *sakīnah* family is the essence of marriage, and it can be found within the heart of each couple. The heart is where the human *ruhānī* resides (Ushuluddin, 2021). This is why the desire to become a *sakīnah* family is not merely a natural necessity for every human being (Fauzan & Amroni, 2020). However, it is a necessity of the *ruhānī*. Allah SWT said in the Quran (al-Fath: 4), "*He is the One Who sent down serenity upon the hearts of believers that they may increase even more in their faith*".

Nevertheless, *sakīnah* is neither a passive nor static unmoving concept. *Sakīnah* demands romantic activities and relations that are full of tranquillity and peace between the spouses. *Sakīnah* is, therefore, an inseparable part of continuously developing *ruhānī* activities (Rahman, 2015). The following discussion will distinguish the terms *sakīnah* and *ṭuma'nīnah*. Although they have similar meanings, *ṭuma'nīnah* tends to imply static and eternal peace within the heart of every human being. This is the reason why *ṭuma'nīnah* encompasses the solace of the heart with one's religious belief and faith. This can be referred to the words of Allah SWT in the Quran (al-Ra'd: 28), "*Those who accepted faith and whose hearts gain solace from the remembrance of Allah; pay heed! Only in the remembrance of Allah is the solace of hearts*".

The concept of *ṭuma'nīnah* reflects sanctity and clearness of the heart in the most essential and accurate dimension of divinity. According to the Islamic perspective, this can be depicted like a newborn baby who is born as a clean slate and pure from all wrongdoings, mistakes, sins, and various other Islamic doctrines. This is the essence of every newborn human being. Given this essence, it is possible for each mature human being in their dynamic development to return to God. Nevertheless, one's awareness of God still needs to be completed with a cleansing of the heart, based on the belief that the true essence can radiate through a person's heart onto the realm of consciousness. Ultimately, the true essence enables every human being to recognize God and potentially engage in an attached relationship with God (Latifa et al., 2019).



### ***Interfaith Marriage: Happiness due to Love***

Does religion or faith play a role in creating happiness in the family? Or conversely, do religion and faith impede the creation of happiness in the family? Various studies suggest that religion and faith have indirect impacts on marital happiness (Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008). According to Chen and Chen (2021), one's religion and faith can even influence their decision to choose a same-faith partner, as it may also affect the quality of happiness in marriage. Subsequently, religious affiliation can alter marital relations and happiness. However, for some informants, happiness in the family is not defined by religion but by one's love for their partner instead.

*"I am Muslim and my husband is Catholic. Abundant and sincere feelings of love for my partner are the greatest power to find happiness in the family. This is because loving commitment, mutual respect, protection, and care are inherent in love. This is why I love my husband, not because of his religion. This means that religion does not hinder my experience of a happy life with a husband who is of a different religion"* (Adrien, 2023).

According to all the informants, religion is not included in the category of factors that determine happiness or unhappiness living with a spouse professing a different religion. This is because religion is considered a private domain, as stated by one of the informants as follows:

*"I am merely expected to understand that my partner's faith differs from mine. This expectation requires me not only to respect but also to protect all of my wife's religious values and teachings. My wife can freely practice her religious beliefs and teachings because they are her private business, and that applies to both of us. For me, the abundant amount of love I have for my wife is enough to find happiness. The differences that frequently generate small conflicts in my relationship with my wife do not come from religious differences but cultural differences instead"* (Lefauve, 2023).

These elaborations indicate two key aspects. First, happiness can be found in the relationships of spouses engaged in interreligious or interfaith marriage, due to the significant amount of love they share. Love in this context is not merely about romantic love full of intimacy and passion, but it also relates to a commitment that is not based on religious belief. According to Sternberg (1986) and Sorokowski et al. (2020), commitment to love is a decision to love another individual and accept the responsibility of maintaining a relationship full of love and care over time. Making this decision implies the need to keep the romance alive at all times, regardless of whether you are going through good times or bad.

Second, the explanations suggest that religion is not a significant determinant of happiness within the family. This means that same-religion or same-faith married couples do not necessarily lead a happy or unhappy life. Similarly, interreligious or interfaith married couples do not necessarily live a happy or unhappy life. The reason for this is that a spouse's marital happiness (or unhappiness) is not defined by religion but by the significance of the couple's love toward one another.

A wife of a different religious couple named WI (initial), who is Catholic, said that the challenges they faced with her Muslim husband did not come from their internal life. However, it comes from the outside, starting from neighbors and friends who are married to same-sex couples. We often get ridiculed, and even some of our very ideological friends stay away from us. My husband and I consider it a challenge that stems from our love for each other. We encourage and support one another (WI, 2023).

A happy life is due to love, not because of sharing the same religion and faith. In interfaith marriages, it begins with a feeling of fondness or liking, followed by a more profound feeling of love that develops through a romantic relationship, which subsequently produces a

sense of happiness. According to Clingan (2021), love is a strong affection that one person has toward another. This is why love can happen between individuals who are of different religions, ages, races, social statuses, or nationalities. True love knows no limits; that is why older couples often become more loyal and in love.

Each person's feeling of love may take different shapes and forms. However, according to Satsangi (2012), there are three aspects of love for the partner: the process of forgetting (oblivion), the pleasure of being loved (return), and the reaction to the partner's appeal or attraction (instinct). Furthermore, the attraction and personality of both individuals do not change; they may even develop over time. A study by Waldinger and Schulz (2010) suggests that loyalty to one's partner, which has been examined over a long period, including old age, is a key determinant of one's happiness with their partner.

The findings of this research remain applicable today, as the informants examined in the current study are still young. Since the teachings and faith of various Abrahamic or monotheistic religions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism emphasize marital values, marriage is viewed as a sacred union between man and woman authorized by God, and believers are encouraged to get married (Marks, 2005; Zarean & Barzegar, 2016). Followers of monotheistic religions are more likely to get married in order to fulfill God's will, and they feel reassured once they do. Such a feeling of reassurance brought about by marriage with a partner having the same religion (faith) may serve as an initial indicator of happiness.

MI (initials), a Muslim husband, stated that our marriage, which has been together for seven years, is based on mutual trust, mutual understanding, and mutual respect. At first, it felt strange to each of our families because my Christian in-laws were worried that the ritual of Christian worship carried out by my wife, both joint worship and worship done alone, would not be allowed. It turned out that after they witnessed for themselves that even though I am Muslim, I accompany my wife to worship at church. Their ignorance has been denied because they have believed and understood that I am an open person (MI, 2023).

Accordingly, followers of monotheistic religions tend to have a greater inclination to marry a partner of the same religion or faith, as this aligns with their desire to fulfil the will of God and experience happiness (Chen & Chen, 2021). Additionally, various past studies have shown a positive correlation between marriage and happiness in monotheistic same-religion marriages. Same-religion and same-faith marriage can even preserve marital stability. Having a similar religion and faith in marriage contributes to marital stability and happiness (Marks, 2003; Levenson et al., 1993; Proulx et al., 2007; Carr, 2010; Margelisch et al., 2017). Research by Chen (2021) in Taiwan suggests that there is no correlation between marriage and religion when couples share different faiths. The research reveals a unique religious demography, characterised by polytheism. More specifically, the extent of a person's desire to marry for the sake of a happy life differs depending on their religious affiliation. This underscores the role of religion in changing the relationship between marriage and happiness.

Consequently, a significant sense of love found among interreligious and interfaith couples can be considered a new category or classification, serving as a determinant of happiness in the family. This is because several prior studies assert that the determinants of happiness can be classified into financial and non-financial factors (Chen, 2012; Cuñado & de Gracia, 2012; Botha, 2014), whereas other studies have found otherwise (Tsou & Liu, 2001). However, compared to financial factors, non-financial factors hold a more substantial role in determining happiness. Non-financial factors include health and employment statuses (Ball & Chernova, 2008), friendship, and altruism (Moghaddam, 2008), as well as demographic variables such as age, education, sex, marital status, and the presence of children, as well as self-presentation and social network (Johnson et al., 2008).

Nonetheless, this finding remains acceptable, at least up to the point at which this study was conducted. This is because the age of the spouses, which generally increases until they

pass away, was not included as a category. The continuously aging factor may potentially alter the views of the informants. This suggests that as a person ages, their life becomes increasingly religious, possibly due to the proximity to death (Sari, 2017; Zimmer et al., 2016; Tongeren, D.R.V., 2020). Furthermore, according to the beliefs of Abrahamic religions, people are typically connected to God through prayer. Praying together, along with a partner of the same religion or faith, may help alleviate unhappiness or enhance one's happiness (Moghaddam, 2008).

NA, a Christian wife, said that I also have concerns that one day our children will be adults. I am afraid that later they will be confused about their choice of religion. However, my husband and I had anticipated this from an early age. Starting from the freedom to make private choices, to explaining our status as parents of different religions. My son is thirteen years old. I think he has started to understand it. Therefore, as a parent, I continue to instill that in them. I allow my children to choose whatever they like as long as they do not fight to the detriment of others and themselves (NA, 2023).

This is why various research studies, age-wise, suggest a positive correlation between religion and happiness. For example, Swinyard et al. (2001) utilized data from elderly Singaporean and American couples, while Moghaddam (2008) used data from American and French elderly couples, and all show that religiosity has a positive impact on happiness. More specifically, the relationship between age, happiness, and religion was found to be 'U-shaped'. This 'U' shape suggests that at a certain age, the level of one's happiness is influenced by religion (Stavrova et al., 2013; Rizvi & Hossain, 2017; Adriani, 2020). However, at a certain age, the effect that religion has on one's happiness may decline due to various factors such as education, employment (Cuñado & de Gracia, 2012), health (Botha, 2014), and financial or social support (Chen, 2012). Many studies found that at a certain age there is no correlation between religion and happiness (Lewis et al., 2000). Yet, as people get older up to a certain age, the influence of religion and faith begins to rise in parallel with age (Tsou & Liu, 2001; Cuñado & de Gracia, 2012).

The description above reiterates that the older a person is the more religious their life becomes. Research conducted by Hou, Wu, and Huang (2023) on 5,177 elderly couples in China suggests that belief in religion can influence the manifestation of happiness among senior citizens. Older adults who maintain a religious belief are more likely to form social relationships and gain social support from religious members and groups, which can enhance their happiness. A study by Al-Kandari (2011) on 1,472 Muslim elderly in Kuwait shows that respondents with a high level of religiosity have stronger mental ability and psychological well-being. Meanwhile, research by Sari (2017) on 120 Muslim elderly in Turkey suggests that being old causes individuals to feel closer to death, and this makes them lead a more religious life by constantly engaging in religious activities. The rise in religiosity and spiritual activities among the elderly can also improve their physical, mental, and psychological health (Ede et al., 2023; Zimmer et al., 2016).

Research conducted by Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) found that religion does, indeed, determine the stability of marital happiness. However, the marriage of interfaith couples or same-faith couples can determine the degree (high or low) of marital stability. This means that marital stability will highly depend on the religious compatibility between the spouses. Additionally, Christians have a lower divorce rate than non-Christians, bearing in mind that Christian values entirely oppose divorce or separation (Antonsen, 2003; Wright et al., 2012). Although religious homogamy may contribute to marital stability and impact marital happiness and satisfaction, Hughes and Dickson (2005) found that constructive communication among interfaith couples, particularly when there are differences of opinion regarding their religion, is a strong predictor of their marital satisfaction.

## Conclusion

*Sakīnah* conveys a deep meaning of tranquillity or peace in the family. It is the totality of mercy (*rahmah*) and love (*mawaddah*) that resides within the hearts of every husband and wife. *Sakīnah* is, hence, a highly personal, private, hidden, mysterious, and spiritual feeling, as it resides in the innermost part of the heart of every couple that believes in it. This is why, in the context of a family, *sakīnah* can be defined as a harmonious, peaceful, tranquil, and comfortable environment for all its members, which begins with the husband and wife.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic family law by highlighting the need for a more contextual and humanistic approach. One of his significant contributions was the reinterpretation of the concept of *kafā'ah* (marriage equality), which was no longer based solely on religious similarities but also on the values of communication, tolerance, and emotional equality within the household. The study also emphasizes the importance of using the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* approach, which is to look back at the main goals of Islamic law, such as justice, compassion, and welfare, in assessing the feasibility of a marriage. In addition, this research highlights the need to develop social *fiqh* and minority *fiqh* that are more inclusive of the social realities of a modern, religiously heterogeneous society. Thus, this study not only enriches the treasures of Islamic legal thought but also opens up space for dialogue between religious texts and more complex practices of religious life in contemporary contexts.

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