

The inconsistency of religious practice among converts and tolerance education strategies: Efforts to achieve family harmony

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the inconsistency of religious practice among converts (muallaf) and explore tolerance education strategies as efforts to achieve family harmony. Religious conversion often brings significant psychological, social, and familial adjustments, particularly in pluralistic societies. In many cases, converts experience fluctuating religious commitment due to identity reconstruction, social pressure, and limited support systems. These inconsistencies may trigger tension within families, especially in interfaith or culturally diverse contexts. This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study design involving converts and their families in Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The findings reveal that religious inconsistency is influenced by emotional instability, limited religious literacy, social stigma, and inadequate family communication. The study further identifies that tolerance based education strategies such as dialogical communication, inclusive religious understanding, and family-based value reinforcement significantly contribute to strengthening emotional bonds and maintaining family harmony. This research recommends integrating structured tolerance education programs within family and community religious guidance frameworks.

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Introduction

Religious conversion is a complex social and psychological transformation involving not only a change of belief, but often a restructuring of identity, relationships, and community belonging. Converts frequently undergo a period of adjustment as they internalize new religious norms and reconcile them with existing cultural and familial expectations (Umam, 2013). This process of identity reconstruction can be especially challenging within plural family systems, where converts may simultaneously navigate pressures from their previous religious community and expectations within their smaller family circle (Nisa & Nurfitriani, 2025). Recent studies highlight that conversion is also a process of meaning-making, where converts search for spiritual fulfillment and life purpose (Yaumil Indah et al., 2024). This search may influence their emotional and behavioral engagement in religious practices. Additionally, learning contexts such as pesantren or Islamic study groups can significantly shape the adaptation process of converts, offering structured guidance on religious obligations and social integration (Siregar et al., 2019).

Despite the positive motivational aspects associated with conversion, many converts experience inconsistency in religious practice following their conversion. Fluctuations in religious commitment may arise from psychological stress, identity crisis, and cognitive dissonance as individuals negotiate personal faith with broader social realities (Safitri et al.,

2025). Social dynamics such as family resistance, stigma, and lack of continuous support can exacerbate these inconsistencies, leading to irregular worship or selective adherence to religious norms (Alfusanah et al., 2024).

Within the family context, religious inconsistency can also trigger latent conflicts that may challenge ongoing family harmony. Although many family members initially resist or misunderstand a convert's new religious identity, families often adapt over time through communication efforts and emotional negotiation strategies (Wirnasary, 2021). These latent conflicts can manifest through unspoken tensions, ambivalence in family roles, and occasional misunderstandings, especially when religious practice diverges significantly from prior family norms. The role of interpersonal communication in mediating these conflicts is crucial. Effective communication helps families express expectations, fears, and emotions without inciting hostility or rejection. Research on interfaith family dynamics emphasizes that communication patterns of empathy, active listening, and mutual respect significantly contribute to long-term family cohesion (Harisantoso & Rante Toding, 2024).

A strategic intervention to address these challenges is tolerance education, which equips family members with skills to understand and respect diverse religious expressions. Tolerance education rooted in dialogue and mutual exchange can foster environments where differences become opportunities for growth rather than sources of conflict (Harisantoso & Rante Toding, 2024). Such educational strategies often include building cultural awareness, promoting religious moderation, and improving empathy within family relationships, leading to strengthened emotional resilience (Indro & Paramaiswari, 2021). In Islamic contexts, family-centered tolerance education has also been shown to support broader goals of national unity and social harmony, particularly in diverse societies where religions intersect at multiple social levels (El Hasbi & Noor Fuady, 2024). By integrating tolerance education into family routines, parents can cultivate mutual respect and understanding in ways that reinforce both spiritual growth and relational stability (Rahmadania, 2025).

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Nevertheless, there is a notable research gap in the literature regarding the inconsistency of religious practice among converts specifically within the context of family harmony. Much of the existing research has focused on theological dimensions of conversion or the sociological aspects of religious change, yet limited studies examine how inconsistent religious practice impacts intra-family relationships and how tolerance education can effectively mitigate these dynamics. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by investigating the strategies that can strengthen religious consistency and promote family harmony in convert families through tolerance education (Alamsyah et al., 2023).

Recent empirical research has further advanced understanding of the psychological and social dynamics associated with religious conversion, suggesting that conversion not only affects spiritual practices but also personality traits and identity processes over time. A longitudinal study found that individuals undergoing conversion exhibit measurable psychological shifts in emotional stability and social behavior concurrent with changes in religious beliefs and practices, indicating that conversion can impact broader aspects of personal development beyond ritual engagement (Bleidorn et al., 2024). Additionally, recent qualitative research conducted in Indonesian contexts highlights that religious conversion involves layered social negotiation processes within families, where initial resistance can gradually transform into negotiated acceptance as converts engage in empathetic communication and shared meaning-making with relatives (Putri Najah Nabila et al., 2025). These findings emphasize that conversion is both an individual and relational phenomenon, shaping internal psychological adjustment as well as interpersonal dynamics within familial settings.

Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore the experiences of religious converts (*muallaf*) and the strategies of tolerance education aimed at fostering family harmony. A qualitative design was selected because it enables researchers to gain a deep understanding of complex social phenomena, including identity reconstruction, religious inconsistency, and intra-family communication patterns, from the perspectives of participants themselves (Creswell, 2014). The research was conducted in urban and semi-urban Muslim communities in Indonesia, chosen to represent diverse socio-cultural contexts that influence religious adaptation, family dynamics, and tolerance practices (Alfusanah et al., 2024). These settings provided a rich environment for observing how converts negotiate their new religious identities while maintaining harmonious relationships with family members.

Participants included 10–15 converts (*muallaf*) who had undergone varying lengths of adaptation within their families, 5 family members, and 3 religious counselors engaged in guiding converts. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants possessed direct experience relevant to the study objectives, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the challenges and strategies related to religious conversion, inconsistent practice, and family harmony (Nisa & Nurfitriani, 2025).

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document review. In-depth interviews explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies in dealing with religious inconsistency and family communication. Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility to explore emerging themes while ensuring that essential research questions were addressed (Safitri et al., 2025). Participant observation was carried out during religious gatherings, family counseling sessions, and tolerance education activities, enabling the researcher to observe both verbal and non-verbal interactions, providing a more comprehensive understanding of family dynamics and communication practices (Wirnasary, 2021).

Additionally, documentation review included program guidelines, counseling records, and activity logs that documented interactions and tolerance education initiatives. This method served to complement the primary data and triangulate findings from interviews and observations, ensuring reliability and contextual accuracy (Harisantoso & Rante Toding, 2024). Data were analyzed using thematic coding along with the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes three concurrent processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification. Data reduction involved selecting and categorizing relevant information; data display organized findings into thematic matrices and narrative forms; and conclusion verification ensured logical consistency and credibility in the interpretation of the data (Miles et al., 2014).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, multiple strategies were employed. Source triangulation compared perspectives across converts, family members, and religious counselors to capture convergent and divergent experiences (Indro & Paramaiswari, 2021). Member checking involved sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm the accuracy and resonance of interpretations (Nisa & Nurfitriani, 2025). Finally, peer debriefing with academic colleagues and field experts was conducted to review coding decisions and ensure objective and credible analysis (Hariansyah et al., 2020). Through these methods, this study provides a robust, in-depth understanding of how converts manage identity reconstruction, religious inconsistencies, and family dynamics, as well as the effectiveness of tolerance education strategies in promoting harmonious family relationships.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that religious practice among converts (*muallaf*) is often inconsistent, manifesting in various forms such as irregular worship, selective adherence to religious norms, and emotional based religiosity. Some participants reported performing prayers and rituals only occasionally, depending on social settings or emotional motivation, while others selectively adopted religious practices that aligned with personal beliefs or familial expectations. This variability reflects the complex process of religious identity

reconstruction and adjustment within plural family environments (Umam, 2013). Several factors contribute to this inconsistency. Internally, converts often experience psychological instability and identity negotiation, especially when their prior worldview conflicts with new religious values. Weak theological foundations can also lead to confusion regarding doctrinal obligations and moral expectations, which may result in sporadic religious performance (Nisa & Nurfitriani, 2025). Externally, family rejection, social discrimination, and a lack of structured mentoring further impede consistent religious observance. Some participants described experiencing subtle pressure or isolation from relatives and peers, which negatively affected their motivation and confidence in practicing their faith (Alfusanah et al., 2024).

The impact of religious inconsistency on family harmony was evident in several ways. Families experienced communication tension, often characterized by misunderstandings and unexpressed expectations. Silent conflict patterns emerged when disagreements about religious practices were not openly discussed, resulting in emotional distancing between converts and their family members. These findings indicate that inconsistent religious behavior, even when unintentional, can create latent relational challenges and strain affective bonds (Harisantoso & Rante Toding, 2024). Recent research further supports this, showing that interfaith and multi-religious households negotiate family harmony through deliberate tolerance practices that mediate disagreement and reduce relational tension even where belief differences persist (Rahmadania, 2024). Additionally, conflict resolution frameworks rooted in culturally grounded concepts such as *maṣlaḥah* have been found effective in addressing family disputes within households affected by conversion related tensions by promoting respect, communication, and shared participation in each other's religious celebrations (Zulfan et al., 2025). Emerging studies also indicate that interfaith family tolerance is a sustained practice that contributes to long-term harmony, particularly when family members consciously engage in mutual acceptance and structured communication strategies (Lupitasari, 2024). To address these challenges, tolerance education strategies were implemented and found to be effective in promoting family harmony. Dialogical family communication was established through structured interfaith dialogues and non-judgmental listening, allowing converts and family members to share perspectives, express emotions, and negotiate expectations without conflict. This practice enhanced mutual understanding and reduced relational tension (Indro & Paramaiswari, 2021).

A religious moderation approach complemented these efforts by encouraging inclusive understanding of faith and discouraging exclusivist attitudes. Participants reported that adopting a more moderate, empathetic view of religious obligations allowed them to navigate family dynamics with less conflict and greater psychological stability (Hariansyah et al., 2020). Additionally, family based religious literacy programs, such as shared learning sessions and spiritual mentoring initiatives, provided structured opportunities for converts and family members to align values, clarify misconceptions, and reinforce ethical practices within a supportive environment (Safitri et al., 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings integrate identity theory, interpersonal communication theory, and religious moderation frameworks. Identity theory helps explain the internal negotiation and adaptive strategies of converts in balancing prior and new belief systems. Interpersonal communication theory illuminates the mechanisms by which dialogical engagement and empathetic listening facilitate relational stability. The religious moderation framework underscores the importance of inclusive, non exclusivist approaches to faith practice in reducing familial conflict (Wirnasary, 2021). Practical implications emerge in the form of community based tolerance education, counseling support for converts, and the development of a family religious resilience model. Programs designed at the community level, which involve both converts and their families, enhance empathy, reduce stigma, and promote consistent religious engagement. Structured counseling and mentoring provide converts with guidance to navigate identity challenges while maintaining relational harmony. Finally, a family-based resilience model fosters adaptive coping mechanisms, facilitating sustained tolerance, and mutual respect in households with religiously diverse experiences (Indro & Paramaiswari, 2021).

Overall, this study demonstrates that inconsistent religious practice among converts does not necessarily undermine family harmony, provided that deliberate tolerance education strategies are implemented. Structured dialogical communication, moderation based guidance, and family centered religious literacy are key interventions that enable both converts and family members to negotiate differences constructively, thereby fostering relational stability and spiritual growth simultaneously.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the inconsistency of religious practice among converts (muallaf) arises from both internal factors, such as psychological instability, identity negotiation, and weak theological foundations, and external factors, including family rejection, social discrimination, and lack of structured mentoring. These inconsistencies can create latent family conflicts, manifested as communication tension, emotional distancing, and unspoken disagreements, which may undermine relational harmony if left unaddressed.

Despite these challenges, the study finds that tolerance education strategies play a critical role in promoting family cohesion. Dialogical family communication, structured interfaith dialogues, non judgmental listening, and religious moderation approaches enable both converts and their family members to navigate differences constructively. Family based religious literacy programs, such as shared learning sessions and spiritual mentoring, further enhance mutual understanding and foster inclusive, empathetic interactions.

From a practical perspective, integrating community based tolerance education, counseling support, and family resilience initiatives strengthens the capacity of households to manage religious differences effectively. These strategies not only reduce tension and misunderstandings but also support the sustainable development of mutual respect, empathy, and spiritual growth. Overall, the findings underscore that strategic tolerance education is essential for maintaining family harmony, even in contexts where converts may display fluctuating religious practices.

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