RESEARCH ARTICLE

NON-MUSLIMS' VIEWS OF CO-EXISTENCE WITH MUSLIMS IN SEREMBAN, NEGERI SEMBILAN, MALAYSIA

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	For a nation with multi-cultural pluralistic society to maintain or promote peaceful coexistence, it is crucial to have, positive perception towards their counterparts. Therefore, studying their perception to figure out the current situation is essential to take necessary actions. In this regard, based upon sample survey and interviews, this article attempts to find out the perception of non-Muslims about co-existence with Muslims in Seremban in the state of Negari Sembilan, Malaysia. Such a study is warranted because of the plural nature of Seremban society whose stability depends upon harmonious relations between various ethnic and religious groups. The analysis of this research involved 100 respondents, all of whom are based in Seremban and its surrounding areas. It is composed of various educated segments, professionals and university students from different religious background such as Christians, Hindus and Buddhists. The study found that majority of non-Muslims hold positive opinion about their counterpart in this area which augurs well for the stability of the region and the country. Nevertheless, there exists a good number of people holding a negative opinion about Islam and Muslims implying, therefore, the need for more concerted efforts about improving the image of Islam and Muslims in Seremban and other parts of Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

Islam promotes religious harmony and peaceful co-existence not only within the religion but also with people of other faiths. As established by Islam, it is obligatory for every Muslim to tolerate other religions. Malaysia is one of the multi-religious countries in which Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and Sikhs enjoy religious tolerance, moderation and cooperation in their socio-religious lives. Seremban is a multi-religious and multi-ethnic district in Negeri Sembilan. Ethnically it has been populated mainly by Malays, Chinese, Indians and other minor ethnic communities. The multi-religious environment of Seremban necessitate the need of peaceful coexistence among the diverse groups as differences in beliefs and faith tend to cause turmoil and conflicts when proper understanding among the communities are not well established. Several reports on religious violence and conflicts in Seremban lead to the question of troubled peaceful co-existence and necessitate the inquiry of its reasons. The religious teachings regarding harmony, co-existence and religious diversity are found almost

all religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism. Islam teaches Muslims to tolerate and cooperate with Muslims and non-Muslims. Similarly, other religions advocate the idea of peace and non-violence. However, the expected harmonious relationships are in turmoil when the views of different communities about each other are negative. Therefore, to it is advisable to educate about different religions. Islamic da'wah is one of the ways that fulfills this need. As for the case of Seremban, in order to make religious harmony and peaceful co-existence in an apt manner, it is important to identify the Non-Muslims' views of Islam and Muslims in Seremban, obstacles and challenges for Religious harmony among Muslims and Non-Muslims there. This will eventually yield ideas as to how religious harmony, co-existence and inter religious dialogue among Muslims and Non-Muslims in Seremban can be promoted. Religious vandalisms, bigotry and misconceptions, in return might ignite more hatred and antagonism towards another religion. Therefore, a study investigating the views of one community about another community and its religion, and the challenges for the co-existence of the people is essential to device an effective method to eradicate misconceptions and overcome the challenges for the co-existence of these religious groups.

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Therefore this study seeks to answer the questions as follows: What are non-Muslims' views on Islam and Muslims in Seremban? This research will cover non-Muslims including Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Sikhs in Seremban. As this study investigates the views of non-Muslims, the sample includes the responses from the multi-ethnic community in Seremban and its surrounding areas.

Literature review

In the study conducted by Ushama and Motein (2006), they explore the general view of Non Muslims' views of Islam and Muslims in Malaysia. However, this discussion focuses on Muslims in Malaysia in general. The non-Muslims in Seremban are not discussed here. Using surveys and interviews, this study found that majority of the non-Muslim Malaysian hold positive views about Islam and Muslims in Malaysia while a good number of people expressed their negative comments too. Another work which speaks in a similar vein is that of Rahman, Nur Farhana & Khadijah (2013). This study speaks about how Non-Muslims observe Halal foods and products in Malaysia. It reveals dimensions of the individual's experience. In addition to the individual and organizational dimensions explored, this study also gives insight into the Non Muslims' perception of Muslims in Malaysia. Nevertheless, this discussion is still insufficient to this study since the features of religious harmony and co-existence in Seremban are not discussed. It seems that further study to analyze Non Muslims' perception of religious harmony in Seremban is utterly needed.

Amini Amir Bin Abdullah (2003) in his article entitled *Islamic Revivalism, Religious Freedom and the Non-Muslims in Malaysia: A Preliminary Discussion*, examines the relationship between Islamic revivalism and Non-Muslims. He traces the encounter between Muslims and Non-Muslims, examining the impact of Islam on Muslims and Non-Muslims in Malaysia. It concludes by explaining possible features of Islamic revivalism both in the Muslim World and in Malaysia. Although the work shows only a superficial approach to the issue, it does not include the analysis of Seremban and its Non-Muslims.

In the same vein, the article of Abdul Aziz Abdullah, Rokiah Sidek, and Ahmad Azrin Adnan (2012) entitled *Perception of Non-Muslims Customers towards Islamic Banks in Malaysia* is another example that provides the descriptive analysis of Non Muslims' views of Islamic Banks in Malaysia. The study dwells upon many relevant topics like Non Muslims' views of Islamic economy, *riba* and Islamic ethics. However, it does not make any analysis of Non-Muslims in Seremban. Religious violence and vandalism of places of worships have been reported from several parts in Malaysia including Seremban. Seremban has been noted for several incidents of attacks on churches and vandalism of masjids and other crisis situations related to religious unrest. In 2010, surau in Taman Pulai Impian, Sikamat was vandalized by splashing paint. This caused displeasure and condemnation of the Muslims (Nathan, 2010). However, motive behind this vandalism was unknown. In the same year, two churches were attacked after the high court rulings pertaining to the use of the word Allah. The Sidang Injil Borneo church's door was partially burnt on the 11th of January 2010 (Malaysiakini, January 11, 2010). Recent attack on the two nuns on the grounds of the Church of Visitation in Seremban that took one's life is a much talked

incident. Although the objective of this brutal attack is believed to be robbery, some assume that it might have been for inciting hatred, antagonism and inter religious conflicts (The Malaysia Insider, 14 May 2014). A political leader Badrul Hisham Shaharin stated that as Seremban has a mixed population, it can be used as a launching pad for igniting religious violence (Malaysia Chronicle Monday, August, 23, 2010). Although the reasons behind such incidents might have been created to cause religious intimidation and fear creation, its consequences might lead to misconceptions about religions. In the light of the above literature, it can be concluded that there has been no previous attempt to examine Non Muslims' views of Islam, religious harmony and Muslims in Seremban. Therefore, this research attempts to fill this gap that left vacant in the fields of *da'wah*, Comparative Religion and Islamic revival in contemporary Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is a qualitative and quantitative in nature. The data for the purpose of this study was collected using simple random sampling method. Hence, this study is based upon data obtained through self-administered questionnaires, along with personal interviews and observations. One hundred questionnaires were distributed randomly to selected respondents from different backgrounds such as the professionals, businessmen and students among non-Muslim Chinese, Indians and other races in Seremban. The research objective was achieved through quantitative and qualitative methods using the likert scale questionnaire findings and the follow up interviews for triangulization. For the quantitative part of the analysis, the statistical software SPSS version 22 was utilized and for the qualitative part of the analysis open ended questions in the questionnaire and the interviews were used. The mean scale interpretation was adapted from Panji Hidayt bin Mazhisham (2015). The following table lists the different levels of mean scale.

Table 3. The mean scale interpretation of the non-Muslims perception towards Islam and Muslims

Mean Scale	Mean Scale Interpretation
1.00-2.33	Negativity
2.34-3.67	Medium positivity
3.68-5.00	High positivity

As the above table describes the different levels of mean scale include negativity as the lower level (1.00-2.33), medium positivity (2.34-3.67) as the medium level and high positivity (3.68- 5.00) as the high level. As for the individual statements, percentages will be utilized. For the ease of analysis, strongly agree and agree were put together into one category "agree" and strongly disagree and disagree were collapsed into one category "disagree" giving three columns namely 'Agree',' Neutral/I don't know' and 'Disagree'.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings on Islam (in general)

There were ten items about Islam in general to examine the perception of the non-Muslims in Seremban. The following table presents the frequencies of the five responses for each statement. Table 4 shows that 65% of the respondents which is the highest of all do not know or not sure about the statement "Islam is a religion of justice".

Table 4. Percentage of 5 Responses for the Statements about Islam

Statements about Islam	%						
	1	2	1+2	3	4	5	4+5
1. Islam is a rational religion	9.0	18.0	27.0	34.0	35.0	4.0	39.0
2. Islam is practical and pragmatic religion	6.0	18.0	24.0	47.0	25.0	4.0	29.0
3. Islam is a religion of progress and development	5.0	20.0	25.0	41.0	28.0	6.0	34.0
4. Islam is a complete code of life	11.0	22.0	33.0	42.0	22.0	3.0	25.0
5. Islam is not a mythological religion	5.0	26.0	31.0	39.0	27.0	3.0	30.0
6. Islam is a religion of tolerance	7.0	17.0	24.0	37.0	37.0	2.0	39.0
7. Islam is a religion of peace	7.0	28.0	35.0	28.0	35.0	2.0	37.0
8. Islam is a religion based on monotheism	3.0	11.0	14.0	37.0	44.0	5.0	49.0
9. Islam is a religion of justice	3.0	11.0	14.0	65.0	18.0	3.0	21.0
10. Islam is a religion of mercy	9.0	18.0	27.0	34.0	35.0	4.0	39.0

For the most of the statements (Statements 2-6 and 9) under the section 'Islam', the majority has answered "I don't know". For the rest (Statements 2, 7, 8 and 10) 'Agree' has been opted which are not much less than the 'I don't know'. Comparatively, 'Strongly Agree' and 'Strongly Disagree' are the least opted responses. Around half (49%) agreed with "Islam is a religion based on monotheism". "Islam is not a mythological religion" is a statement almost equally agreed (31%), disagreed (30%) and unsure (39%) among the respondents. Nearly half (49%) agreed with "Islam is a religion based on monotheism".

Findings on Islamic Issues

The following table illustrates the responses and their percentages to the statements related to Islamic issues. All 10 statements state about well-known Islamic issues propagated by the media and common public.

Positive Statements about Muslims

The following table shows the findings of the section "Positive statements about Muslims" which consists of ten positive statements about Muslims in general. According to Table 6 for almost all of the statements nearly half of the respondents have showed neutral responses. Except for the statement, "Muslims are open-minded" (36%), more respondents have agreed to the statements compared to the percentage of people who disagreed. Around 45% which is nearly half of the participants agreed with "Muslims are generous". Except for the statements 5(Muslims are open minded), quarter (25%) and more than quarter (25< %) agreed with the rest of the positive statements.

Negative Statement about Muslims

The following table depicts the percentage sof the responses to the negative statements listed under the section 'Negative Statements about Muslims'.

Table 5. Percentage of Responses for the Statements about Islamic Issues

Statements about Islamic Issues	%						
	1	2	1+2	3	4	5	4+5
1. Islam presents a picture that is dynamic, balanced and relevant to the problem of contemporary word.	3.0	26.0	29.0	51.0	20.0	0	20.0
2. Islamic dress code is a good solution to solve the many social problems.	19.0	32.0	51.0	35.0	14.0	0	14.0
3. Islamic penal code is most suitable to eradicate crimes from the society.	13.0	29.0	32.0	49.0	9.0	0	9.0
4. Islam is not anti – western but anti westernization	2.0	18.0	20.0	45.0	33.0	2.0	35.0
5. Islam advocates promotion of women's rights	21.0	26.0	47.0	38.0	15.0	0	15.0
6. Islam was not spread by force	5.0	31.0	36.0	47.0	16.0	1.0	17.0
7. Jihad (holy war) is a last option for self-defence	17.0	16.0	33.0	56.0	11.0	0	11.0
8. Extremism is not produced by Islamic teachings but emerged from contemporary propaganda	1.0	15.0	16.0	57.0	26.0	1.0	27.0
9. The people who use Islam to justify violence are misinterpreting its teaching	1.0	13.0	14.0	56.0	24.0	6.0	30.0
10. West is fighting a war on Islam	18.0	27.0	45.0	52.0	3.0	0	3.0

As Table 5 illustrates, for all the statements, 'I don't know' has been majority's response. Among these statements, about eight statements (statements: 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) have been opted by approximately half of the participants as 'I don't know. Only a very few agreed with the statements, "Islamic penal code is most suitable to eradicate crimes from the society" (9%) and "West is fighting a war on Islam" (3%). And only 30% and less than it agreed with the other issues. Slightly more than half of the population (51%) disagreed with the statement "Islamic dress code is a good solution to solve the many social problems". Similarly almost half of the respondents disagreed with the statements "Islam advocates promotion of women's rights" and "West is fighting a war on Islam". Slightly more than the quarter (35% and 30%) of the population agreed with "Islam is not anti – western but anti westernization" and "The people who use Islam to justify violence are misinterpreting its teaching."

As shown in Table 7, for each statement under the section 'Negative Statements', the majority has neither agreed nor disagreed, but they showed neutral response which range from 45% ('Muslims are selfish') to 66% ('Muslims are narrow-minded'). Comparing the percentage of the people who agreed and disagreed with the ten statements, except for 'Muslims are narrow-minded', more respondents have agreed with the negative statements about Muslims. Nearly quarter and slightly more than quarter of the respondents agreed with the negative statements about Muslims out of which the least is 24% and the highest is 37%. Only 8-19% of the respondents have disagreed with the negative statements about the Muslims.

Relationship between Muslims and Non-Muslims

The fifth section of the questionnaire consisted of ten statements that describe the relationship between Muslims and Non-Muslims in a positive way. The following table summarizes the findings.

Table 6. Percentages of the responses for the Positive Statements about Muslims

Positive Statements about Muslims		%						
		1	2	1+2	3	4	5	1+2
1.	Muslims are generous	1.0	10.0	11.0	44.0	43.0	2.0	45.0
2.	Muslims are hospitable	0	7.0	7.0	51.0	40.0	2.0	42.0
3.	Muslims are honest	1.0	22.0	23.0	44.0	31.0	2.0	33.0
4.	Muslims respect other religions	2.0	16.0	18.0	50.0	30.0	2.0	32.0
5.	Muslims are open minded	6.0	30.0	36.0	44.0	19.0	1.0	20.0
6.	Muslims are friendly	0	11.0	11.0	52.0	35.0	2.0	37.0
7.	Muslims are cooperative	0	21.0	21.0	46.0	31.0	2.0	33.0
8.	It is safe to live among Muslims	1.0	13.0	14.0	57.0	26.0	3.0	29.0
9.	Muslims have favourable attitude towards non-Muslims	1.0	14.0	15.0	59.0	25.0	1.0	26.0
10.	Muslims know how to behave with non-Muslims	1.0	14.0	15.0	60.0	22.0	3.0	25.0

Table 7. Percentages for the responses for Negative Statements

Negative Statements about Muslims		%						
		1	2	1+2	3	4	5	4+5
1.	Muslims are narrow-minded	1.0	15.0	16.0	66.0	17.0	1.0	18.0
2.	Muslims are extremists	2.0	29.0	32.0	56.0	11.0	2.0	13.0
3.	Muslims are impatient people	1.0	32.0	33.0	55.0	11.0	1.0	12.0
4.	Muslims are antagonistic to non-Muslims	0	30.0	30.0	62.0	7.0	1.0	8.0
5.	Muslims compel others to embrace Islam	3.0	23.0	26.0	65.0	8.0	1.0	9.0
6.	Muslims are discriminative	1.0	23.0	24.0	63.0	11.0	2.0	13.0
7.	Muslims do not respect others feeling	3.0	34.0	37.0	49.0	13.0	1.0	14.0
8.	Muslims are selfish	4.0	32.0	36.0	45.0	19.0	0.0	19.0
9.	Muslims are suspicious of others	4.0	26.0	30.0	53.0	15.0	2.0	17.0
10.	Muslims look down upon other religions	3.0	33.0	36.0	52.0	9.0	3.0	12.0

Table 8. Percentages for the responses on the Relationship between Muslims and Non-Muslims

Statements on the Relationships between Muslims & Non-Muslims		%						
		1	2	1+2	3	4	5	4+5
1.	I like to have a Muslim friend.	0	4.0	4.0	47.0	45.0	4.0	49.0
2.	I feel comfortable to be a neighbour of a Muslim.	3.0	10.0	13.0	47.0	36.0	4.0	40.0
3.	I prefer to do business with Muslims.	0	24.0	24.0	51.0	22.0	3.0	25.0
4.	Muslims respect our rights to practice our religion.	1.0	12.0	13.0	52.0	32.0	3.0	35.0
5.	I like to attend the functions and celebrations organized by Muslims.	1.0	18.0	19.0	41.0	37.0	3.0	40.0
6.	I feel comfortable to work with Muslims in my workplace or other places.	3.0	15.0	18.0	47.0	32.0	3.0	35.0
7.	Muslims allow us to follow our culture and rituals freely.	1.0	20.0	21.0	51.0	25.0	3.0	28.0
8.	Muslims maintain a good relationship with non-Muslims.	1.0	11.0	12.0	54.0	32.0	2.0	34.0
9.	Muslim show concern for solving issues of non-Muslims.	2.0	17.0	19.0	59.0	21.0	1.0	22.0
10.	Muslims handle problems and issues very maturely and sensibly.	7.0	19.0	26.0	58.0	15.0	1.0	16.0

Table 9. Findings on Non-Muslims Views' about Islam and Muslims based on the Types of the Respondents

Categories	Type of the respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Islammean	Monks	1	3.8000 H	.
	Intellectuals	2	2.9500 M	1.06066
	Common Public	97	3.0928M	.76530
Islamicissuesmean	Monks	1	3.4000M	.
	Intellectuals	2	2.7000 M	.70711
	Common Public	97	2.7526M	.52581
Muslimpositivemean	Monks	1	3.6000M	.
	Intellectuals	2	3.1000 M	.00000
	Common Public	97	3.1546M	.57355
Muslimnegativemean	Monks	1	2.9000M	.
	Intellectuals	2	3.3000 M	.42426
	Common Public	97	3.1719M	.55234
Muslimrelationshipmean	Monks	1	3.8000 H	.
	Intellectuals	2	3.2500 M	.77782
	Common Public	97	3.1546 M	.58417

Table 10. Non-Muslims' Views about Islam and Muslims Based On Gender

Categories	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Islammean	Male	44	2.9068 M	.78752
	Female	56	3.2464 M	.71832
Islamicissuesmean	Male	44	2.6182 M	.52574
	Female	56	2.8679 M	.50528
Muslimpositivemean	Male	44	3.0477 M	.61056
	Female	56	3.2446 M	.51871
Muslimnegativemean	Male	44	3.1636 M	.53877
	Female	56	3.1782 M	.55738
Muslimrelationshipmean	Male	44	3.0932 M	.62558
	Female	56	3.2179M	.54908

Table 8 indicates the neutral responses have been opted nearly by half of the respondents and, more than half of which the least is 41% ("I like to attend the functions and celebrations organized by Muslims") and the highest is 59% ("Muslim show concern for solving issues of non-Muslims"). To the statement, "I like to have a Muslim friend", approximately half (49%) of the respondents. Only 16 % (which is the least) agreed to "Muslims handle problems and issues very maturely and sensibly". Similarly the most disagrees is also the same statement. To this statement, 58% has expressed neutral opinion.

Findings on Non-Muslims' Views about Islam and Muslims Based on the Type of the Respondents

The following table depicts the mean values and the Std. Deviations of all 5 categories based on the 3 types of the respondents. As per Table 9, for the general statements about

Islam, monks show High Positivity while intellectuals and common public show moderate positivity. As for the statements on Islamic issues, positive statements and negative statements, all type of respondents expressed moderate positivity. For the statements on the relationships between Muslims and Non-Muslims, monks stated High positivity while others stated Moderate Positivity.

Non-Muslims' Views about Islam and Muslims Based On Gender

The following table indicates the mean values and Std. Deviation of the responses for all the 4 categories based on Gender.

Findings on Non-Muslims Views' about Islam and Muslims based on the Gender

Table 10 indicates that both male and female have showed moderate positivity for all the four categories. However, for all

Table 11. Findings on Non-Muslims Views' about Islam and Muslims based on their Academic Qualification

Category	Academic Qualification	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Islammean	SPM	32	3.2500 M	.86584
	STPM	16	2.7125M	.77363
	Degree	36	3.2083M	.64647
	Masters	10	3.1100	.78662
	PhD	6	2.6167	.32506
Islamicissuesmean	SPM	32	2.8188	.49542
	STPM	16	2.5688	.67894
	Degree	36	2.8556	.53742
	Masters	10	2.5700	.34010
	PhD	6	2.6667	.26583
Muslimpositivemean	SPM	32	3.2531	.61486
	STPM	16	3.1062	.50129
	Degree	36	3.2444	.50452
	Masters	10	3.2444	.43012
	PhD	6	2.7833	.81588
Muslimnegativemean	SPM	32	3.1344	.54216
	STPM	16	3.2125	.36492
	Degree	36	3.2272	.62398
	Masters	10	3.2200	.39101
	PhD	6	2.8500	.72595
Muslimrelationshipmean	SPM	32	3.1688	.62136
	STPM	16	3.1375	.54145
	Degree	36	3.2750	.55362
	Masters	10	3.0200	.49844
	PhD	6	2.7667	.75542

Table 12. Non-Muslims' Views about Islam and Muslims based on Age Groups

Category	Age Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Islam	20-30	55	3.0182 M	.73563
	31-40	28	3.1500M	.56273
	41-50	8	3.0750M	.93922
	51-60	7	3.9000H	.94163
	60 and above	2	1.8000N	.56569
Islamic Issues	20-30	55	2.7545M	.54359
	31-40	28	2.6964M	.44262
	41-50	8	2.8625M	.56805
	51-60	7	3.0429M	.65792
	60 and above	2	2.3000N	.42426
Muslim Positive	20-30	55	3.0709M	.50942
	31-40	28	3.2964M	.52315
	41-50	8	3.4250M	.74976
	51-60	7	3.2286M	.63696
	60 and above	2	2.3000N	.98995
Muslim Negative	20-30	55	3.1905M	.43331
	31-40	28	3.3143M	.40066
	41-50	8	2.8875M	.86096
	51-60	7	3.2000M	.83267
	60 and above	2	1.7000 N	.42426
Muslim Relationship	20-30	55	3.1000M	.51099
	31-40	28	3.2321M	.44643
	41-50	8	3.4875 M	.92495
	51-60	7	3.4000M	.70711
	60 and above	2	1.8000 N	.14142

the categories females have expressed more positivity than the males.

Non-Muslims Views' about Islam and Muslims based on their Academic Qualification

The following table shows mean values for the responses on Non-Muslims Views' about Islam and Muslims based on their Academic Qualification.As Table 11 shows, respondents with SPM, STPM, Degree, Masters and PhD expressed moderate positivity. They have not shown negativity and High Positivity. Respondents with SPM expressed the highest Moderate Positivity for the general and positive statements on Islam and Muslims. Respondents with degree expressed the highest Moderate Positivityfor the statements on Islamicissues, negative statements and relationship between Islam and Muslims.

Non-Muslims' Views about Islam and Muslims based on Age Groups

The following table shows the findings on Non-Muslims' Views about Islam and Muslims based on Age Groups. It details out the mean values and Std. Deviation for each age group under the 4 categories.As per the findings listed in Table 12, only the respondents from 51-60 age group expressed High Positivity for the general statements about Islam. For the rest of the categories, they expressed moderate positivity. The respondents of 61- above age group expressed negativity for all four categories about Islam and Muslims. The rest of the age groups (20-30, 31-40 and 41-50) also expressed Moderate Positivity to all four categories.

Figure 1. Overall Mean of the Non-Muslim's Views about Islam and Muslims

Figure 2. Overall Mean of the non-Muslims' Views on Islam and Muslims

Overall Mean of the Non-Muslim's Views about Islam and Muslims

The following figure shows the mean values showed by all the respondents for each category of statements about Islam and Muslims.As Figure 1 depicts, non-Muslims views for the statements on all categories were Moderately Positive.Among the 4 categories, they have expresses the highest Moderate positivity for the negative statements and the lowest for Islamic issues.When the mean values are put in ascending order Islamic issues comes first followed by general statements on Islam. Next comes Positive statements followed by relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, and then comes negative statements. The following graph depicts the overall mean for all the categories.Figure 2 illustrates the overall mean of the views of Non-Muslims for all the statements on Islam and Muslims. It shows that the views are moderately positive (M=3.04).

Conclusion

In a multi-religious and multi ethnic country like Malaysia, a very good understanding between two different religious followers is important for a peaceful coexistence. As Islam and Muslims have been subjects for misunderstanding worldwide, it is likely those non-Muslims in Malaysia to have negative perceptions towards them in atleast in a small percentage. The findings revealed that non-Muslims in Seremban have moderately positive views about Islam and Muslims in Seremban. However, there were negative views about certain statements about Islam and Muslims. At the same time, highly positive views were also expressed regarding certain other matters related to Islam and Muslims. In general, non-Muslims' views about Islam is moderately positive. The monks and the respondents from 51-60 age group expressed high positivity for the general statements about Islam. One respondent stated, "Islamis a simple religion and can be accepted by diverse society in Malaysia." Another praised Islam as "The religion that has high value of ethics". Regardless the differences in gender and academic qualifications, for the views about Islam and Islamic issues, the non-Muslims in Seremban expressed moderate positivity. Except for the monks and the respondents from 51-60 age group, all the other categories showed moderate positivity. Taking the statements about Islam and Islamic issues individually, between 21%-49% has agreed with the statements. This shows that nearly quarter to half of the respondents agree with them. However, the rest of the respondents either do not know or do not agree with these statements. This is a proof that positivity about Islam needs to be increased among them. Although, nearly quarter to half of the respondents agree with the fact that Islam is a rational religion, Islam is practical and pragmatic religion, Islam is a religion of progress and development, Islam is a complete code of life, Islam is not a mythological religion, Islam is a religion of tolerance, Islam is a religion of peace and Islam is a religion of mercy, nearly quarter of them disagree with them too. Compared to this study, in Ushama *et al*. (2002)'s study on "Non-Muslim's Perception of Islam and Muslims in Malaysia", the majority of the respondents viewed Islam more positively. A little over 50 percent do not believe that Islamic dress code is a good solution to solve the many social problems (51%) and a little less than 50% also disagrees with the fact that Islam advocates promotion of women's rights (47.0). Another significant finding here is that nearly quarter
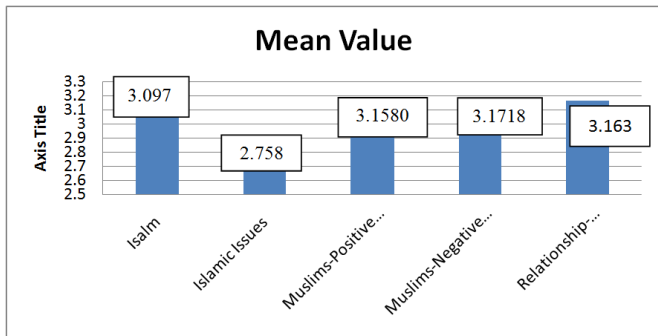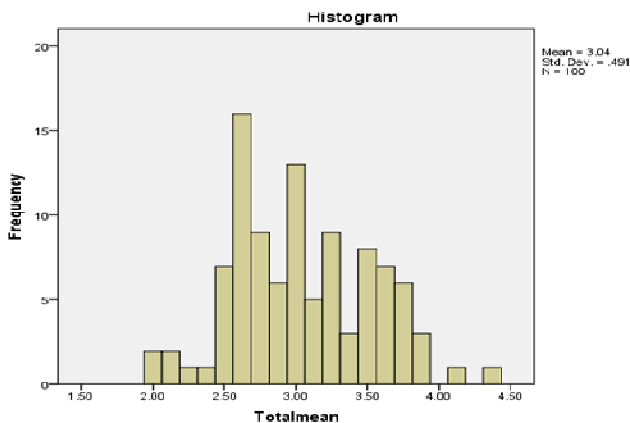
to half of the respondents said that they do not know about most of the statements about Islam and Islamic issues which need to be taken in to consideration. This can be a reflection of their lack of knowledge about Islam. It also can be that they do not want to comment negatively. Ismail and Mujani (2012) argue that many avoid to express their true views fearing emotions and conflicts. Similar findings were seen in Ushama *et al.*(2006)'s study too. This suggests that Muslims need to address these issues in more effective ways.

As for the non-Muslim counterparts views about Muslims and their relationship with Muslims, most of them opted between agree and disagree which is 'neutral'. However, compared to negative responses, positive responses were more prevalent. A little over 50 percent say that they are unsure or neutral that Muslims are hospitable (51%), Muslims respect other religions (50%), Muslims are friendly (52%), It is safe to live among Muslims (57%), Muslims have favourable attitude towards non-Muslims (59%), Muslims know how to behave with non-Muslims (60%). Similarly, they expressed uncertainty or neutral views for the positive statements, negative statements about Muslims, and the relationship between both parties. Compared to the views about Islam, for the views on Muslims more respondents have chosen to be inbetween agree and disagree. As discussed earlier this can mean that they are neutral and do not have much disagreement about these statements. Or, it can be they try to avoid 'sensitive' issues and refrain from expressing negative views. This differs from Ushama *et al.* (2006)'s study where positive responses about Muslims in Malaysia far outweighed the negative ones. On a special note, the statement "Muslims are open-minded" was disagreed by a little over quarter of them (36%). And nearly half (44%) chose to be neutral on this. Similarly, more than 50 percent stood neutral for the remark "Muslims are narrow-minded". Although they did not speak their mind clearly, the interviews proved that many of the respondents believe that Muslims are narrow-minded. This was a repeated remark in most of the interviews.

The overall mean of the views of Non-Muslims for all the statements on Islam and Muslims suggest that non-Muslims in Seremban stand between positive and negative views which arelabeled as moderate positivity in this research. However, these finding imply that Muslims should toil more to endear themselves to their non-Muslim friends. This study attempted to view the non-Muslims' perception of co-existence with Muslims in Seremban. The findings revealed that majority of the population view Islam and Muslims in a moderately positive manner. This was mostly the same among different demographic categories such as type of the respondents, gender, academic qualifications, and age.Nearly half of them believed that Islam is a religion based on monotheism.Similarly,a little over half do not believe that Islamic dress code is a good solution to solve the many social problems. As for the views about Muslims, they reacted the same way showing moderately positive views. Nearly half said (49%) said that they like to have a Muslim friend for which only 4% disagreed. This shows their liking to interact with Muslims. A Majority ranging between 28 to 65 percent of the population said they do not know much about Islam and Islamic issues. Similarly,a majority ranging from 48 percent to 66 percent opted neutral responses for the views about Muslims which is higher than of Islam. This can be interpreted as 'non-interference' in sensitive matters as Ushama *et al.*(2006) phrases. People tend to stay neutral about certain

matters if these issues do not affect their way of life. Or, this can also mean that they are reluctant to express their negativity. Future studies can explore the perception of Muslims about their non-Muslims counterparts in Seremban to get a wider picture of the issues and solutions. Moreover, further studies on non-Muslims and Muslims perception about each other in other parts of Malaysia are also viable. These studies will pave way to national peace.

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