

The Practice of *al-Ta'awun* in the Wedding Expenditure of Malay-Muslims in Malaysia

Syh Noorul Madihah Syed Husin^{1*}, Raihanah Azahari² and Asmak Ab Rahman³

¹*Department of Shariah, Faculty of Islamic Contemporary Studies, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Kuala Nerus 21300, Terengganu, Malaysia*

²*Department of Fiqh and Usul, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

³*Department of Shariah and Economics, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

Al-ta'awun is a concept regarding mutual help and cooperation in Islam, which is advocated in the al-Quran and Sunnah. Its role in defraying wedding expenditure is seen as a solution to the huge budget incurred when preparing for a wedding reception. Contemporary societies are increasingly faced with the burden of costly weddings, and this can have adverse effects, especially on the Malay-Muslim community in Malaysia. This study examined the application of *al-ta'awun* to supplement wedding expenses. This qualitative study involved 30 married couples, who were selected for face-to-face interviews comprising semi-structured interviews. The results were arranged and analysed according to themes relevant to this study. Data were examined, coded and categorised based on emerging themes. The ATLAS.ti version 7.5.6 software was used for analysing data, which involved five steps, namely transcription, compilation, coding, categorisation and drawing

inferences. The findings indicate that three forms of *al-ta'awun* are practised, namely monetary donations, payment for goods and services, and contributions to defray the cost of wedding arrangements. The involvement of family, neighbours, friends and the local community helps to defray the overall wedding expenses.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 30 January 2018

Accepted: 18 December 2019

Published: 26 June 2020

E-mail addresses:

madihah@unisza.edu.my (Syh Noorul Madihah Syed Husin)

raihan@um.edu.my (Raihanah Azahari)

asmak@um.edu.my (Asmak Ab Rahman)

* Corresponding author

Keywords: *Al-ta'awun*, Malay-Muslim weddings, marriage expenses, wedding expenditure

INTRODUCTION

One characteristic of many traditional societies, including Malaysia, is the exorbitant cost incurred for throwing a wedding reception. Although compulsory wedding expenses usually refer to the dower (*mahar*) and wedding feast (*walimah*), other marriage customs often lead to exorbitant expenses (Syh et al., 2014). According to Jalila (2008), Muslim wedding preparations in Morocco typically involve an expenditure of 50,000 NOK to over 80,000 NOK (5,139 USD to over 8,223 USD). Large-scale wedding events are seen as significant symbols of status. Jane (2007) explained that wedding celebrations involving the Muslim community in the United Arab Emirates required a plethora of preparations, in which a hotel wedding package typically cost up to 400 dirhams per person or a total of 400,000 dirhams (108,903 USD) for 800 guests.

Such luxurious weddings are also common among non-Muslims, like the Chinese in Hong Kong. On average, each couple spends approximately US\$28,570 on a wedding. Expensive items include the banquet, furnishing for a new home, and the bride's price. These three items together account for about three-quarter of the total wedding expenses (Chan & Chan, 2002). According to Otnes and Pleck (2003), luxurious spending is a common practice among middle-class families. According to Boden (2003), those who spend on a luxurious wedding hope to ensure a memorable marriage. Francis et al. (2004) found that despite the state of poverty faced

by indigenous people in India, most families tended to hold large receptions due to the influence of urban wedding practices. Tan and Mialon (2015) studied 3,000 US citizens and found that those who spent less on engagement rings were at a higher risk of divorce, compared with those who bought expensive rings.

Luxurious weddings are also common in the Malay-Muslim community. In the 1980s, the cost of a wedding ceremony was between RM 4,000 to RM 6,000 (Consumers Association of Penang, 1987). Today, costs are usually in the tens of thousands of ringgit and involve elaborate Malay customs (Fatimah, 2009). According to Fatimah et al. (2017), increasing wedding costs can be attributed to many factors such as an increase in the current cost of living due to increases in the cost of wedding materials, high demand for wedding packages, holding a high status or position in society. Couples usually begin their spending by buying rings for the initial visit and observation (*merisik*) ceremony (Karafi, 2010), the proposal (*melamar*) (Amran, 2002) and the engagement (*meminang*) (Heather, 1981). The bridegroom must also prepare a sum for the "*wang hantaran*". Raihanah et al. (2009) found that the usual expected sum among Malays was between RM 5,000 and RM 8,000. This is much higher compared to the dower, especially in states with minimum rate guidelines. Social norms also add to the cost of weddings. The location of the wedding ceremony has moved from the family yard to luxury hotels or large halls (Fatimah, 2009). Fatimah et al. (2016)

found that almost 90% of respondents chose to use a catering service for their wedding reception. This would surely add-on to the overall cost because wedding receptions are becoming ever more commercialised. (Fatimah, 2009).

The change in trend is seeing the Muslim community showing off during wedding ceremonies rather than spending based on their capability, especially if they do not have enough money to host a luxurious wedding ceremony. According to Mohd and Mohamad (2016), the perception held by the Malay community about wedding ceremonies is always changing. Current desires and wishes of couples wanting to celebrate their wedding differs drastically compared to how the Malays celebrated it at one time. He explained that humans played a role in managing a wedding ceremony; hence, the ringgit played a major role in the success of that ceremony. The influence of the mass media also adds to this issue. His study found that magazines concerning wedding ceremonies were so dominant and influential as sources of information or reference for couples who intended to get married or when consuming commodities or services related to weddings offered by the marriage-related industry.

As mentioned above, the reality of hosting a wedding today is faced with a huge expenditure. In fact, according to Nurul and Sanep (2016), marriage today is a form of *ibadah* that is becoming a burden. The burden of marriage expenses that couples and family members must bear may have negative implications on their social life

and may result in a significant debt even before marriage (Fatimah et al., 2019), delays in marriage (Qurratul, 2011) and an unwillingness to marry (Al-Nawwab, 1995; Muhammad, 1981). The burden of a costly wedding reception should not be encouraged since it may discourage a young couple from intending to marry and starting a family as encouraged by Islam (Al-Asqalani, 2001).

Among the steps that could reduce the burden of marriage is to apply the concept of *al-ta'awun* (mutual assistance) by family and friends to help with marital preparations. *Al-ta'awun* is an Islamic concept meaning mutual assistance. It is part of human life (Al-Haddad, 2015) and should form the basis of behaviour for every Muslim (Muhammad, 2014). According to Zar'um (2016), *al-ta'awun* is the cornerstone of efforts at global peace, especially helping those who are facing various hardships and need assistance. The basis of *al-ta'awun* is contained in the Quran and Hadith. According to Isbindari (2010), there are ten verses in the Qur'an that talks about *al-ta'awun*, based on the noun [*a'-wa-na*]. Some refer to *al-ta'awun* in an abstract sense (*al-ma'nawi*), such as asking for help from Allah (SWT) in prayer and also in a concrete sense (*al-maddi*) when asking fellow humans for assistance in some regard.

Islam advocates the practice of *al-ta'awun* to achieve social harmony and unity amongst the ummah. It is quite an appropriate method for managing wedding expenses. The benefits of this concept are apparent as communities in China, the

Arabic Peninsula and Indonesia (Java) still practice it. Charless (2018) stated that among the type of cooperation practiced by communities in China was the willingness of parents to help prospective couples to manage their wedding expenditure by creating a special saving fund before the wedding. Sa'id (2012), in a study on the Saudi Arabian community, found that a solution to the current burden of huge marriage expenses was mass weddings (*haflat al-zifaf al-jama'i*). As for the Javanese community, Zainorinyana and Vivien (2017) found that although there were various changes due to development and modernisation, the culture of '*rewang*' or the traditional system of communal service, was still practiced by that community. Therefore, this study intended to examine the practice of the *al-ta'awun* concept to defray wedding expenses by the Malay-Muslim community in Malaysia.

METHODS

Informants and Sample Size

A total of 30 married couples, whereby one of the partners must be from Selangor, Johor, Kelantan or Kedah, were chosen as informants through a purposive sampling method. This sample size is appropriate because in qualitative studies, the size of the sample should not be too large because this would make it difficult to obtain useful data. It should not be too small to as it will not achieve a desired saturation level (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The total number of samples for this study followed the number suggested by several researchers

in order to meet data saturation. Bailey (2007) suggested that the sample size for an interview should begin with 20 individuals.

This selection was justified based on the value of the dower (*mahar*) set by the local community, which is one of the compulsory expenditures in a wedding according to Islam. Although the dower is only part of other expenditures involved in a Muslim-Malay wedding; however, the differences in value show that each individual will end up paying a different total amount. Therefore, by examining differences in the community's wedding expenditure, this study was able to evaluate the effectiveness of applying the *al-ta'awun* concept on the rate of expenditure. The four states were chosen according to various zones in Malaysia, namely north, south, east and west. Kelantan and Kedah represented the two states mentioned in a study by Zurita (2008), as states that do not have a fixed value for the dower. As for states that endorse a minimum value guideline for the dower, this study chose Selangor because its guidelines for minimum rates is the highest, which is RM 300.00 (Selangor State Department of Mufti, 2010). Meanwhile, Johor was among the two states with the lowest rates (Zurita, 2008).

Although the selection of married couples (informants) was based on where either partner originated from or where, in one of the four states mentioned, did they have their feast; however, it does not mean that all the informants originated from one of these four states. This is because they might not have married someone from the

same state. The location of the interview might not be in one of these states because it depends on the location of the informant's area of domicile after marriage.

Data Collection

This study utilised a face-to-face interview approach using semi-structured questions. The set of semi-structured questions were validated by two specialists, namely Prof. Dato' Dr. Yaacob Harun, Director for the Centre for Excellence in Malay Studies, University of Malaya, and Prof. Dr. Ramle Abdullah, Director for the Centre for Science Studies, Sultan Zainal Abidin University, was developed to guide the interviews. These interviews were conducted between May and September 2015, and the duration of each interview was between 40 and 60 minutes.

Data Analysis

The interviews were arranged and analysed using a data-classification process according to themes identified in a phenomenon. Data obtained through this method were examined, coded and categorised based on the data's characteristic themes (Bowen, 2009). It was analysed with the help of ATLAS.ti version 7.5.6 software. This analysis involved five steps, namely transcription, compilation, coding, categorisation and formulation. First, the completed interview was transcribed. Data were then compiled, arranged and labelled with specific coded numbers based on the interview date. It was then coded, which is essential for the

analysis of qualitative data as it facilitates the retrieval of required data (Earl, 2005). In the fourth step, coded data were structured and categorised based on a more general theme arising from the needs of the study.

RESULTS

This section discusses findings from interviews with 30 married couples. Interviews labelled "HW" represent responses from both husband and wife. If the response is solely from the husband, then it is labelled "H", while "W" represents the findings from wives.

Findings indicate that the concept of *al-ta'awun* is present in the management of marriage expenses of informants who collaborated with family members, friends and neighbours. However, such collaboration was not experienced by all informants. This paper focuses solely on the forms of *al-ta'awun* mentioned in the interviews. Three forms of *al-ta'awun* were utilised for informal marriage expenses, such as monetary donations, contributions in the form of goods and services and helping out (mutual help or '*gotong-royong*') with the wedding feast. These three concepts are explained below.

Monetary Donations

Many informants admitted that they had received monetary donations to help manage their wedding expenses. While the most important contribution came from their parents, others were from local community members and this helped reduce expenses.

Parental Contribution

Some parents helped allay the cost of their children's marriage. They paid the cost of the most important element in a wedding reception, which is cost of preparing meals and the banquet on the wedding day. Findings show that this type of *al-ta'awun* depends on the financial capability of parents and that of their children. This practice was carried out by informants (men or women) whose parents are financially sound, those who are still studying or those who have just entered the employment world. This means that the first type of *al-ta'awun* is not related to the informant's demographic factors, such as location and gender.

Many female informants (wives) said that their parents took care of the entire cost of the wedding feast, as explained by W-01 (personal communication, May 10, 2015), "Daddy is fully responsible for the marriage expenses. He took care of 90% of the cost of the wedding feast." W-01's parents contributed money to cover most of the cost of their child's wedding feast because she was unemployed and pursuing higher education. Parental contribution to their unemployed children's weddings is common in the Malay community.

Some male informants (husbands) also indicated that their parents donated money to cover the cost of certain elements. Informant H-05 (personal communication, May 30, 2015) acknowledged that his parents bore the cost of the wedding banquet during his wedding, "For the feast, my mother was responsible. This was the largest cost at RM 12,000."

There were also parents who donated money to cover expenses that were part of their son's marital responsibilities. Informant H-23 (personal communication, August 29, 2015) described his dower spending:

I'd just started working in November, meaning that I had saved money for four months and had collected less than RM 10,000 (the agreed rate of dower) to settle the expenses for dower. I had saved about RM 3,000 to RM 4,000, and the rest was topped up by my parents.

This informant explained that he was only able to provide around RM 4,000 to meet the agreed dower of RM 10,000. The remainder was contributed by his parents.

Group Savings Fund

Group savings refers to money collected by local communities to partially defray the cost of wedding expenses. This is a form of cooperation practised by several Malay communities. This study found that this practice is only carried out by 3 communities, whereby two of them are rural communities in Kedah and one by an urban community in Selangor. Informant H-21 (personal communication, August 15, 2015) used the savings, known as '*pakat money*', which was collected from the members of his village to defray the cost of the wedding feast:

In Kedah, we have the concept of 'pakat money'. This 'pakat money'

is like a mutual fund. Whenever someone wants to have a feast, all the villagers who participate will have equal rights to the money for those who want to get married. This is the practice in Kedah. The money to buy meat and the cost of cooking amounted to RM 7,000; I used the group money. It is not a monthly payment method, but when a person wants to hold a feast, then everyone pays RM 200.

Based on the above statement, informant H-21's village community, which is situated in Kedah, had practiced a planned system of collecting money aimed at helping each individual who wanted to hold a wedding ceremony. The informant stated that the 'pakat money' concept has long been practiced by his village folks. Besides informant H-21, this method was also used in informant H-04's wedding ceremony, which was held in a rural community in Kedah. Hence, this fund is not used for the feast but rather for covering other expenses, including buying cutlery and gifts for guests. Informant H-04 (personal communication, May 19, 2015) said, "I used the group saving to hire a canopy, so I did not run out of money. 'Pakatan money' is payable once a year. It is not expensive and is only between RM 10 and RM 20."

Next, the only informant from the state of Selangor who mentioned about being involved in the group saving fund concept was W-30. However, the fund only covered some minor expenses such as the cost of preparing the '*bunga telur*', which is a gift

for guests. Although her wedding ceremony was held at her parent's apartment in Selangor, the cooperation and understanding showed by other apartment tenants had created a harmonious atmosphere. She (W-30, personal communication, September 20, 2015) further explained:

The money for 'bunga telur' (among the forms of donation provided by the Malay community) we collect from every home in the flats where we live. We collected RM 20 from every home for the purchase of 'bunga telur'. Every time there is a feast in the flats, such a collection is performed.

What happened at the wedding preparation of the three informants mentioned above did not happen to the other 27 informants, regardless of whether they come from rural or urban areas. This shows that the practice of creating a group savings fund is a unique feature of each community.

Contribution of Goods and Paid Services

The concept of *al-ta'awun* in the management of wedding expenses also comes in the form of donations of paid goods and services by family members, friends and neighbours. Findings shows that 30 married couples (informants) from various locations admitted the existence of contributions from close family members, relatives, neighbours or even close friends of the couples or their parents. The value of the contribution was not very high and some even gave sweets and cakes, nevertheless, it is presumed to be

a form of cooperation or assistance offered by the Muslim community.

As for the rural community, especially from the East Coast and North of the Peninsula, contributions were more in material form, such as cooking materials for the wedding feast, goodies for guests and cutlery. These are elements in the traditional wedding expenditure of the Malay community. H-04 (personal communication, May 19, 2015), who hails from a village in Kedah, stated that the local community provided different forms of donations for the wedding feast, "When it's time, there's an uncle giving a few kilos of sugar. There were ten bags of rice. Besides that, the community also brings sugar."

W-25, who got married in Kelantan, said that contributions came in the form of goodies and gifts for her. She (W-25, personal communication, August 31, 2015) said, "Some door gifts were bought while some were sponsored. The door gifts for the village folks were in the form of foodstuffs, which were also sponsored together with the goodies bag." What was initiated by family members and village folks mentioned by H-04 and W-25 is actually a tradition practiced by the Malay community, which emphasises the concept of cooperation by giving assistance in the form of raw materials and necessities for the feast according to each individual's capability (Amran, 2002).

Next, the *al-ta'awun* concept in relation to contributions does exist in the urban community. This form of contribution focuses on the current wedding expenditure

trend, which includes contributions for entertainment during the feast, photo booths and supplementary menu in the form of food stalls. These types of expenditure are becoming popular these days, especially for informants who are getting married in the West Coast and South of the peninsula. W-12 (personal communication, June 8, 2015), who hails from Johor, mentioned about contributions for entertainment purposes made by a relative (auntie), "My wedding ceremony included entertainment. An aunt sponsored RM 700 to cover the complete cost."

According to W-26, who had her wedding feast in one of the towns in Selangor, said that one of the contributions by her family was in the form of a photo booth. She (W-26, personal communication, September 4, 2015) said, "My auntie had sponsored the photo booth. I did not ask her to sponsor it but she wanted to do it anyway."

Among other forms of donations from family members were simple meals served as a side menu at a special booth during the banquet. W-27 (personal communication, September 5, 2015) explained, "There are brothers who support by donating food. One family provided *laksa* and another cake." What is described by W-27 is a recent trend of diversifying side dishes in the dinner menu according to the Manager of Issyaz Wedding Enterprise, Mr. Azrin, (personal communication, December 31, 2015). These side dishes are provided by neighbours and family members.

Mutual Preparation of the Wedding Feast

Preparations for a wedding feast is the costliest element of a wedding. The overall budgeted expenditure for this event is summarised in the following table:

Table 1 indicates that there were 24 wedding banquets (10 females and 14 males) costing less than RM 10,000. This differed greatly with some of the wedding feasts that reached up to RM 10,000, with some even reaching RM 20,000 for one wedding feast.

Most of the feasts costing less than RM 10,000 in some places had local community support through a practice known as '*rewang*'. The interview indicated that organising a feast through communal volunteerism ('*gotong-royong*' or '*rewang*') frequently occurred to informants who lived in rural areas or villages, especially those from the East coast and northern areas. Out of the 8 informants (married couples) from Kelantan, 5 couples mentioned about

'*gotong-royong*', which involved village folks or family members. W-02 (personal communication, May 13, 2015), who hails from Pasir Puteh in Kelantan, explained how the concept of '*rewang*' was applied during his wedding feast.

We cooked ourselves and did not order from outsiders. Such is the culture of the local community. When there is a feast, the villagers agree to assist. The host simply prepares the cooking ingredients. Usually, we pay a little wage for those who come to help.

The same matter was mentioned by HW-23. The couple, who were Kelantanese, stated that each individual who helps in preparing the feast is given a token, either in material or monetary form. HW-23 (personal communication, August 29, 2015) explained that:

The feast on my side (wife) was carried out in 'gotong-royong' fashion. My mother invited her

Table 1
Estimates of expenditure for wedding banquets

Budget	Groom's Feast		Bride's Feast	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
RM 4,999 and below	3 people	10.0	4 people	13.3
RM 5,000 to RM 9,999	7 people	23.3	10 people	33.3
RM 10,000 to RM 14,999	8 people	26.7	8 people	26.7
RM 15,000 to RM 19,999	3 people	10.0	2 people	6.7
RM 20,000 and above	5 people	16.7	None	0
Joint male and female event	1 person	3.3	1 person	3.3
Complete package including all elements	2 persons	6.7	5 people	16.7
No budget	1 person	3.3	None	0
Total	30 people	100	30 people	100

Source: Interviews

friends and aunties to help in the cooking. So, there was no expenses involved in preparing the food. My mother just gave a piece of 'kain sarong' and special goodies to them as a gift. The feast on my side (husband) did the same too. Mama herself was head of the cooking group because she also cooks for her small-time catering business. Mama gave some money to those who came to help out.

According to H-07 (personal communication, May 31, 2015), who comes from a village in Kedah, in order to ensure that the feast takes place, each member of the village who contributes is given a specific task, "We make a banquet like a 'gotong-royong'. We don't book a caterer. Before the banquet, we made the meeting first for the part-time work. Who's the dishwasher... who supplies the food ..."

Although the majority of informants admitted the existence of the *al-ta'awun* concept or 'gotong-royong' practiced by those living in rural areas or villages, however, this does not mean that urban folks do not implement this concept. This was evident when two informants from Pulau Pinang and Kuala Lumpur talked about carrying out their wedding feast through 'rewang'. The informant from Pulau-Pinang (W-04, personal communication, May 19, 2015), W-04 said:

The cost for food is RM 7,000. We cook at home by ourselves. We make crabs, 'cendol' and rice with various dishes. This cost was only

for cooking materials. There were no fees for cooking because this was done in a 'gotong-royong' fashion involving my mother's siblings. There is no such thing as catering of meals.

Based on the statement by W-04 above, it is understood that the practice of 'rewang' carried out during his wedding feast had involved only family members and not the village community. This could be because the neighbourhood living culture among the urbanites differs from the village living culture. A similar situation was explained by H-27, who was one of the informants who celebrated his wedding feast in the middle of Kuala Lumpur. He (H-27, personal communication, September 5, 2015) said:

Banquets are not catered, so we cooked ourselves. Mum's siblings came home to help in the cooking. Although my home is in Kuala Lumpur, but my mum is a Kelantanese. My mum really likes to cook and prepare a feast. The neighbours also helped, but usually only one or two.

H-27's testimony confirms the existence of *al-ta'awun* participated by immediate family members. When looking at the location of the informant's wedding reception, which was in the town area, it is difficult to hold a feast applying the 'gotong-royong' method. However, with a strong spirit of cooperation amongst his family members, they managed to organise the feast. Organising the event was made

easier since the informant's family is from Kelantan. The Kelantanese are famous for having a well-knit familial relationship.

The cost of the feast, as mentioned above, is rarely incurred by those organising a feast using the catering method, either it is held in the West or East Coast as well as whether it's the feast on the bride or bridegroom's side. The cost is far higher compared to a feast organised using the '*gotong-royong*' method. For example, H-30 (personal communication, September 20, 2015), had celebrated his wedding feast in Selangor by using a catering service that cost him RM20,000, whereas W-17 (personal communication, July 10, 2015) from Kelantan had spent approximately RM 19,000. This case clearly shows the difference in costs when most informants who organised their wedding feasts using the *al-ta'awun* concept had accumulated costs of under RM 10,000.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that the concept of *al-ta'awun* affects Malay wedding preparations. Family members, especially parents, and the local community, offer assistance in the form of monetary donations to cover wedding expenses and alleviate their burden. In Islam, the surrounding community, especially family members, neighbours and friends, are encouraged to help those who wish to marry and reduce the burden of their wedding expenses (Husayn, n.d.). *Al-ta'awun* in the form of donations from parents is included in the category of charity within the family.

Charity among family members is highly encouraged in Islam because its reward (*pahala*) is double compared to charity to others (Al-Nawawi, n.d.a). Abi Asma al-Rahabiyy of Thawban reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said:

“The most excellent dinar is one that a person spends on his family, and the dinar which he spends on his animal in Allah's path, and the dinar he spends on his companions in Allah's path.” (Hadis narrated by Muslim, 2000, Kitab al-Zakah, Bab Fadl al-Nafaqah ala al-Iyal wa al-Mamluk, wa Ithm Man Dhayya'uhum aw Habas Nafaqatihim anhum, no. 2310)

The above hadith encourages spending for family members. According to Al-Basyuni (1988), the call to spend on family members is *sunat* in nature, but compulsory in some situations.

A unique form of *al-ta'awun* practiced by the local community occurred to three informants. The collaboration shown by these three community groups was in the form of group savings known as '*pakat* money' or '*pakatan* money'. Every member of the community agrees to contribute money to the informant to help manage the wedding expenses. This practice focuses on village folks who still place importance on the concept of social unity, neighbourliness and Rukun Tetangga, which is a unique practice that exists in each village folk. Moreover, this study has shown that urban dwellers who live far from a village surrounding and

in multi-storey apartments can apply the *al-ta'awun* concept by collecting money for a fund. The busy schedule of an urban dweller does not stop him or her from practicing noble neighbourliness values that is encouraged in Islam.

Such monetary donations are partly intended to assist in the banquet, and partly for the provision of supplies and gifts for guests. This is a local community initiative intended to reduce marriage costs, which is consistent with the recommended practice of Islam. Islam encourages the provision of assistance to those who wish to have a wedding reception (*walimah*) (Al-Nawawi, n.d.b) and a part of the Sunnah (Al-Basyuni, 1988). Allah (SWT) mentions in Holy Quran, "Help one another in righteousness and piety, but do not help one another in sin and transgression..." (Quran, 5: 2). On this basis, aid provided by the family and community is a virtue. Such assistance not only assists fellow Muslims but also cultivates a spirit of belonging in the community.

In reality, the concept of adopting the '*pakat money*' or '*pakatan money*' practice has existed in the Malay-Muslim culture for centuries. This is evident in the practice of '*khairat kematian*', which is a periodic collection of funds by a community to be used for burial purposes. According to Nasreen et al. (2019), the traditional practice of '*khairat kematian*', which is managed by the surau or mosque committees, has long existed in the Islamic community. Each participant and his/her family members are entitled to free burial expenses because

burial costs are accrued to the '*tabung khairat*'. This practice is also enjoyed by the working community and academicians, as practiced in an Institute of Higher Learning in Malaysia. Hasan and Rawi (2015) found that university staff and their family members had enjoyed benefits when the university management had introduced the '*khairat kematian*' scheme for all staff (Hasan & Rawi, 2015). The practice of '*pakat money*', '*pakatan money*' and '*khairat kematian*' by the Malay community is seen as a noble gesture in Islam because this gesture highlights the *al-ta'awun* concept.

This study also found that the *al-ta'awun* concept had motivated people to extend help by providing such wedding necessities as cooking ingredients and side dishes for weddings. It is not just goods that are contributed but services or their costs are also sometimes defrayed, such as payment for entertainment during the feast. Although the contribution is often only a fraction of the total cost, the *al-ta'awun* initiative by family members and neighbours reflects the spirit of mutual assistance. The entertainment component usually comprises wedding-theme music played by a male deejay, karaoke sessions for guests as well as musical, *nasyid* or *qasidah* performances. Even though *al-ta'awun* can be used to defray entertainment costs, Islam only allows entertainment that is halal in nature. Hence, if the performance comprises a mix of males and females or a female singer only, then this kind of performance is prohibited, and any related cost paid towards *al-ta'awun* is also prohibited.

The practice of *al-ta'awun* is consistent with the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH). One of his female companions once donated a meal to celebrate the wedding reception of the Prophet (PBUH) when he married Sayyidatina Zaynab bint Jahsh RA. This was narrated by Anas bin Malik (RA), who iterated that Prophet (PBUH) contracted to marry Zaynab bint Jahsh. Anas said:

‘My mother, Umm Sulaym prepared *hais* and placed it in an earthen vessel and said to me: “O Anas! Take it to Prophet (PBUH) and say to Him: ‘My mother has sent this to you. She is sending her kindest regards to you and says that it is a humble gift for you on our behalf, O Prophet (PBUH).’” So, I went along with it to Prophet (PBUH) and said: “My mother offers you salutations and says that it is a humble gift for you on our behalf.” He said to me: “Put it there!” He also said: “Go and invite Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali and everyone you can find!”” (Hadis narrated by Muslim (2000), Kitab al-Nikah, Bab Zawaj Zaynab Bint Jahsh, wa Nuzul al-Hijab, wa Ithbat Walimat al-Urs, no. 3507).

This story illustrates how Umm Sulaym helped the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) when he wanted to hold a wedding feast for his marriage with Sayyidatina Zaynab RA. Her assistance was not rejected but was accepted. Al-Nawawi, commenting on the above narrative, stated that the companions used to offer food for wedding

feasts (Al-Nawawi, n.d.b). Such aid is a symbol of compassion and sharing of joy with the newlyweds (Ulwan, 1983). Apart from the event narrated by Ummu Sulaym, the concept of *al-ta'awun* is evident in the marriage of his daughter, Sayyidatina Fatimah (RA) and Sayyidina Ali (RA). In Ibn Sa'd's book *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, Abu Buraydah narrates that a friend named Sa'd had given them a goat. In addition to Sa'd, other companions also donated corn flutes (Ibn Sa'd, n.d.). The surrounding communities were very helpful in assisting them in their daily activities, including practice, during the wedding feast.

This study also found that the practice of '*gotong-royong*' by the local community, as described by the informants, is a form of *al-ta'awun* modelled after the marriage of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions. The Prophet (PBUH) indirectly invited his companions to cooperate in holding his wedding feast. In the case of the Prophet's (PBUH) marriage with Sayyidatina Safiyyah bint Huyayy (RA), Anas (RA) reported that the Prophet (PBUH) set out on an expedition to Khaybar. Thabit said to him:

‘O Abu Hamza, how much dower did he (the Prophet) give to her?’ He said: ‘He granted her freedom and then married her.’ On the way, Umm Sulaym embellished her and then sent her to him (the Holy Prophet) at night. The Prophet (PBUH) appeared as a bridegroom in the morning. He (the Prophet) said: ‘He who has anything (to eat)

should bring that.' Then the cloth was spread. A person came with cheese, another came with dates, and still another came with refined butter, and they prepared *hais* and that was the wedding feast of Prophet (PBUH). (Hadis narrated by Muslim (2000), Kitab al-Nikah, Bab Fadilat al-I'taqih Ammatah thumma Yatazawwajuha, no. Hadis 3497).

This hadith shows the practice of *al-ta'awun* ('*gotong-royong*') when preparing a wedding feast (Al-Nawawi, n.d.b), just like the Prophet (PBUH) who sort his companions to assist him in preparing the wedding feast. The companions brought food to be cooked and spread the mats for the feast. Although the Prophet (PBUH) was their leader, he was not reluctant to seek help from his companions. Moreover, the '*gotong-royong*' concept was also present during the marriage of Rabi'ah al-Aslami. The Prophet (PBUH) ordered the companions to help each other in meeting the wedding expenses of Rabi'ah al-Aslami, who was his personal assistant.

In reference to this story, Imam Ahmad (1978) said that Rabi'ah al-Aslami was in a sombre mood when he met the Prophet (PBUH) to talk about the '*mas kahwin*' and '*walimah*' expenses. To relieve his anxiety, the Prophet (PBUH) ordered Buraydah al-Aslami to find and collect date palm seeds as dower, as well as a goat for Rabi'ah al-Aslami's wedding feast. He also asked Rabi'ah al-Aslami to meet Sayyidatina A'ishah (RA) and request some food ration.

Finally, the gold collected by Buraydah al-Aslami was handed over to Rabi'ah al-Aslami's wife as dower. Whereas food stock in the form of wheat was given by Sayyidatina A'ishah (RA) to be turned into bread by Rabi'ah al-Aslami's wife, and the goat brought by Buraydah al-Aslami was slaughtered and cooked by Rabi'ah al-Aslami, assisted by some of the Bani Aslam. This interesting story illustrates how the Prophet (PBUH) applied the concept of *al-ta'awun* ('*gotong-royong*') among his companions. The distribution of tasks to each companion alleviated the burden of marriage expenses incurred by Rabi'ah al-Aslami.

In addition, findings that show the existence of the '*gotong-royong*' concept in some of the informant's communities also supports previous studies. According to Syed (1980), the '*gotong-royong*' concept applied during wedding receptions is a traditional practice among the Malay community. The distribution of tasks before the '*gotong-royong*' begins, as mentioned by the informant, is a method that has existed in Malay customs and culture. Amran (2002) stated that to successfully organise a wedding reception, some village heads were appointed to define the work and distribute tasks. Previous studies have also included the volunteerism concept in this practice. Amran (2002) further explained that the '*gotong-royong*' initiative carried out by the Malay community was voluntary. Those involved do not receive any wages unless it is a small amount of rice, drinks, cookies or eggs to take home.

CONCLUSION

Al-ta'awun is an Islamic concept and should be applied to defray wedding expenses and alleviate the burden of incurring huge wedding expenses by marrying couples. The findings of this study have proven that a community can realise this concept and its application has a positive impact on allaying wedding expenses. As mentioned above, by applying the '*pakat* money' concept, the bride and groom can reduce their overall wedding expenses. Its application also strengthens relationships among those who provide this assistance because they have a mutual understanding that they will help each other when they or their family members get married one day. For example, if the wedding cost, including food, entertainment and other expenses, is RM 20,000, the married couple must pay RM 10,000, whereas RM 10,000 comes from the '*pakat* money' or donations from family and friends. This would really be a relief for the marrying couple and their family because donations and contributions come collectively from many donors.

From an Islamic perspective, Muslims are a brotherhood, and thus, should be willing to help one another in times of need. Based on the Tauhidic belief regarding the Muslim brotherhood, this willingness to help and contribute is not only due to sharing a sense of human kindness but also the belief in Allah SWT. However, it should not solely be seen as a means to help people meet their marital expenses since *al-ta'awun* is a means of expressing obedience to Allah (SWT). More importantly, *al-ta'awun*

should be emulated by Muslim societies from diverse backgrounds, and act as a catalyst for encouraging marriage among the young, as recommended by the Prophet (PBUH).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article is part of a PhD research entitled "Gelagat Perbelanjaan Perkahwinan Masyarakat Melayu Muslim Menurut Perspektif Syariah" (Marriage Spending Behavior among Malay Muslim Community from Shariah Perspective) submitted to University of Malaya supported by The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) and Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA) under Higher Learning Academic Training Scheme (SLAI).

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, I. H. (1978). *Musnad al-Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal wa bi hamishih muntakhab kanz al-ammal fi sunan al-aqwal wa al-af'al* [Musnad of Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, with the margin of *muntakhab kanz al-ummal* in the sunan of words and deeds.] (Vol. 4). n.p.: Dar al-Fikr.
- Al-Asqalani, A. I. A. I. H. (2001). *Fath al-Bari* [Victory of the Creator] (Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz and Muhammad Fu'ad Abd al-Baqi, Ed.) (Vol. 9). Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat al-Misr.
- Al-Basyuni, S. A. A. M. (1988). *Al-hurriyyah al-iqtisadiyyah fi al-Islam wa atharuha fi al-tanmiyyah* [Economic freedom in Islam and its effects on development]. Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Wafa'.
- Al-Haddad, B. K. (2015). Qawa'id al-salam wa al-ta'awun fi al-nizam al-Islami [Method of peace and cooperation in Islamic system]. *Journal of Humanity Sciences*, 19(5), 85-102.

- Al-Nawawi, A. Z. M. A. I. S. (n.d.a). *Al-Majmu'* by al-Nawawi commentary on Shirazi's Muhadhdhab, (Muhammad Najib al-Muti'i, Ed.) (Vol. 6). Mecca, Saudi Arabia: Maktabat al-Irshad.
- Al-Nawawi, A. Z. M. A. I. S. (n.d.b). Sahih Muslim with the full commentary by Imam al-Nawawi (Vol. 7 & 9). Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Taqwa.
- Al-Nawwab, A. R. N. A. (1995). *Ta'akhkhir sinn al-zawaj* [Delay in marriage]. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Dar al-Asimah.
- Amran, K. (2002). *Perkahwinan Melayu* [Malay wedding]. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Bailey, C. A. (2007). *A guide to qualitative field research* (2nd ed.). California, USA: Pine Forge Press.
- Boden, S. (2003). *Consumerism, romance, and the wedding experience*. New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40.
- Chan, K., & Chan, S. F. (2002). Love and money: Chinese couples' decisions on wedding expenses. *Asia Pacific Advances in Consumer Research*, 5, 224-230.
- Charless, S. (2018). Kin and non-kin cooperation in China. In S. Charless, J. Ellen & B. Eona (Eds.), *Cooperation in Chinese Communities: Morality and Practice* (pp. 1-18). New York, USA: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Consumers Association of Penang. (1987). *Anda dan wang anda: Bagaimana menyimpan dan berbelanja dengan bijak* [You and your money: How to save and spend wisely]. Penang, Malaysia: Author.
- Earl, B. (2005). *The basics of social research* (3rd ed.). USA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Fatimah, A. (2009). Dari halaman rumah ke Dewan Merak Kayangan [From home yard to Dewan Merak Kayangan]. *SARI Jurnal Alam dan Tamadun Melayu*, 27(1), 97-107.
- Fatimah, S. A. H., Mohd, Y. M. H., Fidlizan, M., Azila, A. R., & Nurhanie, M. (2019). Bank loan or financing for weddings ceremonies: Causes and reasons. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business & Social Sciences*, 9(1), 950-958.
- Fatimah, S. A. H., Mohd, Y. M. H., Fidlizan, M., Azila, A. R., Nurhanie, M., Choong, F. Y., & Mohamad, A. A. (2017). Analisis perbelanjaan perkahwinan Muslim dan bukan Muslim [Analysis of Muslim and non-Muslim marriage expenditure]. *Journal of Islamic Social, Economics and Development Academic Research in Business & Sciences*, 2(6), 46-55.
- Fatimah, S. A. H., Nurhanie, M., Fidlizan, M., Mohd, Y. M. H., Normala, Z., Norimah, R. R., & Mohamad, A. A. (2016). Analisis corak perbelanjaan perkahwinan dalam kalangan graduan [Wedding expenditure among graduates pattern analysis]. *Management Research Journal*, 6(1), 22-31.
- Francis, B., Vijayendra, R., & Sonalde, D. (2004). Wedding celebrations as conspicuous consumption: Signaling social status in rural India. *Journal of Human Resources*, 39(3), 675-695.
- Hasan, B., & Rawi, N. (2015). Dana khairat: Pengalaman institusi pengajian tinggi [Welfare funds: Experiences of higher education institutions]. In H. Bahrom, S. S. Suyurno, A. Q. A. Razak (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 1st International Islamic Heritage Conference* (pp. 515-519). Alor Gajah, Malaysia: Akademi Pengajian Islam Kontemporari (ACIS), UiTM Melaka.
- Heather, S. (1981). *Rural Malay women in tradition and transition*. New York, USA: Praeger.

- Husayn, M. Y. (n.d.). *Adab al-aqd wa al-zifaf fi al-Islam* [Etiquette of marriage contract and wedding ceremony in Islam]. Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-I'tisam.
- Ibn Sa'd. (n.d.). *Al-tabaqat al-kubra* [The book of major classes] (Vol. 8). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Sadir.
- Isbindari, A. A. U. (2010, October). *Mafhum al-ta'awun fi daw' kuliyyat Rasa'il al-Nur li al-Nursi* [The concept of cooperation in the light of the Risale-i Nur collection by al-Nursi]. Paper presented at al-Mu'tamar al-Alami al-Tasi' li Badi' al-Zaman Sa'id al-Nursi in Istanbul, Turkey.
- Jalila, H. (2008). *A Moroccan wedding ceremony between traditions and modernity: The role of women in the preparations* (Unpublished master's thesis), Universiti of Tromso, Norway.
- Jane, B. R. (2007). Weddings, marriage and money in the United Arab Emirates. *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 2(1), 20-36.
- Karafi, S. (2010). *Adat dan pantun perkahwinan Melayu* [Cultural norms and poem in Malay wedding]. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Tinta Publishers.
- Mohd, K. M. S., & Mohamad, F. S. (2016). Impian dan realiti majlis perkahwinan orang Melayu masa kini: Kajian kes di pinggir bandar Kuala Lumpur [Dreams and reality in contemporary Malay wedding ceremonies: A case study from suburban Kuala Lumpur]. *Geografia Online Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*, 12(7), 1-12.
- Muhammad, I. I. (1981). *Min shari'at al-Islam wa sunnatih al-zawaj* [Marriage is part of the Islamic Law and the sunnah of the Prophet]. Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi.
- Muhammad, S. (2014). Penegakan asas ta'awun dalam perjanjian utang piutang di pegadaian Syariah [Strengthening the foundation of cooperation in debt agreement according to Sharia pawnbroking.]. *Majalah Imliah Kultura*, 15(1), 4629-4635.
- Muslim, A. A. M. I. A. I. (2000). Sahih Muslim. In S. I. A. A. Al-Shaykh (Ed.), *Mawsu'at al-Hadith al-Sharif: al-Kutub al-Sittah* (pp. 671-1218). Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Dar al-Salam.
- Nasreen, M. H. N., Maheran, K., Norajila, C. M., & Abd Halim, M. N. (2019). Social entrepreneurs' innovation in Islamic bereavement care services: issues and challenges. *Science International*, 31(3), 409-413.
- Nurul, A. M. A., & Sanep, A. (2016). Skim zawaj: Produk perkhidmatan untuk perkahwinan [Zawaj scheme: Products services for marriage]. *Ulwan's Journal*, 1, 74-87.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. L. (2007). Sampling designs in qualitative research: making the sampling process more public. *The Qualitative Report*, 12(2), 238-254.
- Otnes, C. C., & Pleck, E. H. (2003). *Cinderella dreams: The allure of the lavish wedding*. Berkeley, USA: University of California Press.
- Qurratul, A. F. Y. (2011). Pendekatan as-Sunnah dalam menangani fenomena kahwin lewat di kalangan masyarakat Islam di Malaysia [Sunnah's approach in dealing with the phenomenon of late marriage among Muslim community in Malaysia.]. In F. Deraman, I. Sulieman, F. A. Shah (Eds.), *Sunnah Nabi: Realiti dan cabaran semasa* (pp. 291-302). Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Universiti Malaya.
- Raihanah, A., Khairun N. S., & Raihana, A. W. (2009). Hubungan di antara faktor demografi dengan penentuan kadar hantaran: Kajian di Perlis, Kedah, Pulau-Pinang dan Perak [The relationship between demographic factors and determinants of bride price rates: A study in Perlis, Kedah, Pulau-Pinang dan Perak]. *Jurnal Fiqh*, 6, 107-124.

- Sa'id, I. S. N. H. (2012). Ittijahat al-shabab nahw haflat al-zifaf al-jama'iyah: dirasah wasfiyyah tahliliyyah ala tulab jami'ah al-Malik Khalid bi Madinah Abha – al-Mamlakah al-Arabiyyah al-Sa'udiyyah [Young people's attitudes towards collective wedding ceremony/mass wedding ceremony: Descriptive and analytical study on the students of King Khalid University in Abha]. *Al-Ijtima'iyah*, 5, 10-54.
- Selangor State Department of Mufti. (2010). *Government of Selangor Gazette Administration of The Religion of Islam (State of Selangor) Enactment 2003, Fatwa under Section 47*. Retrieved February 15, 2020, from <http://www.muftiselangor.gov.my/awam/fatwa/fatwa-terkini/186-hukum-penetapan-kadar-maskahwin-bagi-negeri-selangor>
- Syed, A. S. A. (1980). *Adat resam dan adat istiadat Melayu* [Malay customs and traditions]. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Syh, N. M. S. H., Raihanah, A., Asmak, A. R. (2014). The concept of *al-taysir* (facilitation) in Islamic marriage expenses. *Jurnal Syariah*, 22(3), 323-354.
- Tan, A. F., & Mialon, H. M. (2015). 'A diamond is forever' and other fairy tales: The relationship between wedding expenses and marriage duration. *Economic Inquiry*, 53(4), 1919-1930.
- Ulwan, A. N. (1983). *Adab al-khitbah wa al-zifaf wa huquq al-zawjain* [Etiquette of marriage contract and wedding ceremony in Islam]. Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Salam.
- Zainorinyana, J. Y., & Vivien, W. C. Y. (2017). Amalan rewang dalam masyarakat Jawa di Malaysia [The practice of rewang among Javanese community in Malaysia]. *Geografia Online Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*, 13(3), 53-64.
- Zar'um, A. A. M. A. (2016, December). *Al-ta'awun bayn al-thaqafat wa al-adyan: Ru'yah Islamiyyah alamiyyah* [Cooperation between cultures and religion: A global Islamic vision]. Paper presented at al-Mu'tamar al-Dawli al-Awwal Hawl al-Islam wa al-Qadaya al-Mu'asarah fi al-Alam al-Islami: Afaq wa Tahaddiyat al-Mustaqbal, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- Zurita, M. Y. (2008). Amalan pemberian mas kahwin di Malaysia [The practice of giving dowry in Malaysia]. *Jurnal Islam & Masyarakat Kontemporari*, 1, 43-57.