

The Islamic Way of Youth Care by Muslim Leaders in the Three Southern-border Provinces of Thailand

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the Islamic way of youth care by Muslim leaders in the three southern-border provinces of Thailand, namely Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. The data was collected through brainstorming and critique meetings with 18 Muslim leaders, 18 youth representatives, 6 Muslim academicians, and 8 people from related local organizations. The data was analyzed using logical comparison with concepts, theories, and research reports while the context was analyzed through the grounded theory method. The results revealed that the Islamic way of youth care should be conducted with cooperation from all organizations and people who are concerned; youth should be given opportunities to participate in every step of the process; Muslim leaders should be encouraged to realize the importance of their roles and responsibilities for youth care; and a "Village Youth Club" should be established by using local a masjid as the center of operation. The club should have an administrative structure, concrete roles and responsibilities, and activities both in the religious and the social sectors that correspond with needs of the Muslim youth and are in line with Islamic principles.

Keywords: ways of caring, Muslim Thai youth, Islamic way, village youth club, three southern border provinces

1. Introduction

Muslim Thais lead a unique way of life just as other Muslims do around the world. In the past, Muslims always led strict lifestyle following Islamic principles specified in the Koran and the model set by the Prophet Muhammad through religious teachings and trainings. Nevertheless, fast-paced development around the world has both directly and indirectly affected the Muslim Thais' way of life. For example, parents nowadays do not have time to care for their children as closely as they did in the past owing to the competitive economy, which requires them to work more hours. Youth are not interested in religious activities as they are in the media-related activities, which are deemed more exciting and fun. In addition, community leaders neglect their responsibilities and let all vices take place as if they are commonplace. Consequently, Muslim Thai youth today are deviated from the correct way of Islamic life and cannot distinguish good from bad nor can they choose to do things that are suitable for their age. They are obsessed with the modern way of life and so become slaves to the western values and culture that have infiltrated into the Muslim society and cannot seem to be stopped (Anmmajid, 2004; Laeheem & Baka, 2010). Islam has principles for all the details of life, that are believed to be the regime of God, including humans' acceptance and surrender to God and also the right attitude that humans should have for themselves, the world, and all things (Anmunajid, 2004).

Traditionally, Muslims' lives were molded with a unique vision framing relationships between genders that were concretely and completely in congruence with nature. The social atmosphere was arranged so that males and females were not freely mixed and their dress codes were thus designated by gender, for instance. In today's Muslim society, there are almost no traces of the Islam way, perhaps only beliefs and rites still practiced among the older generations. Problems and changes in Muslim society are commonly seen. For instance, the way Muslim girls wear their scarves with their faces showing, have boyfriends, are addicted to drugs, deviate from their own gender roles, do not pray, cannot read the Koran, they study but do not absorb the lessons, etc. It seems that every problem has been repeated over and over in a vicious cycle with no way out (Laeheem & Baka, 2010). Muslim youth's behaviors nowadays have weakened their faith. For example, they commit sins and taboos so often that these become their habits for which they feel no shame. They commit sins openly though pray casually and carelessly showing lack of concentration, contemplation, especially consideration for the teaching in the

Koran (Anmunajid, 2004). These are the causes of Muslim Thais turning away from the correct Islamic way of life through behaviors that are not according to the social norms and religious principles. Laeheem and Baka (2010) claimed that most Muslim youth lead their life against Islamic principles; their way of life is not in congruence with Muslims' expectations nor with the social norms. Mahama (2009) stated that the problems of Muslim youth deviating from Islamic principles are considered repeated, chronic and cannot be solved by any one person or an organization alone but by all people and organizations involved.

Therefore, people who are responsible for how youth live in Muslim society must realize the importance of the problems. People who should be responsible are religious leaders – Toh Imam, Toh Kru, Toh Bilal, Khateeb, and the committee of the masjid – and local leaders – Kamnan, associate Kamnan, village headmen, assistant village headmen, members of the Municipal Committee, members of Sub-district Administrative Council, etc. These individuals are well-respected and play essential roles in the citizen's thoughts and feelings as well as the Muslim way of life (Chaiprasit, Chansawang, & Permark, 2005; Baka & Laeheem, 2010). Muslim leaders must play an important role in training and teaching as well as encouraging Muslims to strictly follow Islamic principles and know how to use the masjid as a place to correct youth's behaviors. They should also survey and pay attention to living conditions of Muslims residing in the areas around the masjid, help solving social problems, promote unity in the community, instill in Muslim youth constructive habits of reading, writing, speaking and working according to Islam (Baka, 2010). Religious leaders working in religious institutions are agents of socialization who can provide mental refuge to problem youth and enable them to hold on to good things, develop good morals, keep good conscience, know what right from wrong, conduct themselves in good ways, and be determined in leading their lives following the Islamic way and according to the social norms (Thepsitha, 1998; Boonyasith, 1988). Moreover, socialization in Islam begins the development for human personality and characteristics so that they live according to Islamic teaching and principles, which will result in their ability to live peacefully and happily in the society (Khagphong, 2004; Chaiprasit, Chansawang, & Permark, 2005; Mahama, 2009).

As mentioned above, Muslim leaders play a major role in solving today's social problems and facilitating youth care. This is because it is their responsibility that is believed to be tested in the world after this life, as Laeheem and Baka (2010) suggested. Therefore, Muslim leaders must jointly instill in Muslim youth the conscience of leading their lives according to the Islamic way and the model set by the Prophet Muhammad. Moreover, the training on Islamic morality must be organized regularly throughout the three provinces and more importantly youth must be encouraged to receive both religious and mainstream education.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Muslim leaders in the three southern-border provinces care for youth according to the Islamic way. The results of this study could be used as a guideline in forming sound policy regulating Thai Muslim youth's behaviors so they would be more consistent to Islamic principles and the social norms. The results could also be used in helping youth whose behaviors are not corresponding to Islamic teachings so that they are redirected toward Islamic way.

2. Methods

2.1 Key Informants and Data Collection Methods

This study is a qualitative study for which data was collected through brainstorming sessions to create youth care guidelines and through critique meetings to consider guidelines for youth care the Islamic way so that they are concrete and applicable. The data was collected in the three southern-border provinces of Thailand, namely Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat from the following four main groups of key informants:

- 1) Representatives of Muslim leaders, such as Imam, Bilal, Khateeb and Islamic committee members of the local masjid, and local leaders, such as village headmen, assistant village headmen, Municipal Council members and Sub-district Administrative Organization, etc. There were 18 key informants in this group.
- 2) Youth representatives who played important roles in conducting youth activities. There were total of 18 representatives serving as informants.
- 3) Muslim academicians from Islamic private schools and Yala Islamic University, total of 6 key informants.
- 4) People from related local organizations – namely two representatives from the Young Muslim Association of Thailand, one representative from Community Organizations Development Institute, one official from Office of Tak Bai Sub-district Municipality, one from Narathiwat City District Community Radio Station, two officials from Sub-district Administrative Organizations, and one official from the Center for Promotion of Rights and Freedom. There were 8 key informants in this group.

In order to select the key informants to participate in the brainstorming and the critique meetings, the research

team contacted and requested the Provincial Islamic Committee to coordinate with District Masjid Committees of each target village to nominate one Muslim leader and one youth leader to take part and also to select representatives in the areas.

2.2 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by classifying them into categories and then comparing them using logic along with the context, concepts, theories and research. The grounded theory method was employed in data analysis with the following steps:

- 1) Open coding the data collected from the knowledge management stage, brainstorming, and criticizing stage. The data, as many as possible, were coded which could be sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph. The coding was divided into two levels. Coding of the data collected from verbal statements, arguments, supportive statements and exchanged statements. The data were broken or grouped according to their content and topics made by key informants. Then, coding of the data according to theoretical indicators where knowledge from related documents, concepts, and theories were connected to the content and topics obtained from key informants.
- 2) Categorizing the data. The data were grouped according to their similar codes or their shared attributes whether in context, conditions, or consequences. The data were analyzed based on the clear process of phenomena, data, content, and topics obtained from key informants.
- 3) Axial coding. The relationships between the categories and context were analyzed to obtain the categories and sub-categories as well as the core concept.

3. Results

3.1 People and Organizations Caring for Youth the Islamic Way

People as well as social and religious organizations involved in caring for youth the Islamic way at the village level, both from government and private sectors, worked and coordinated in an integrated way in order to care for youth using a system that was clear, efficient and effective. Some participants in the brainstorming process mentioned that:

“...Religious leaders and local leaders must cooperate to care for Muslim youth so that they lead their lives the Islamic way. They have to join hands to work and it is important not to work separately in religious and social activities as we did in the past...”

(Mrs. Khodiyah, a women’s group leader)

“...The masjid should be the center for conducting youth care work because [it] is the center where the heart of every Muslim is in the village. Local government organizations such as Sub-district Administrative Organizations or the Municipal Council can support in terms of materials, equipment, personnel and budget...”

(Mr. Abdullaman, a religious leader)

Thus, all the organizations and people involved must integrate, coordinate, cooperate to do the work and provide opportunities for youth to participate in all the processes in order to respond to their needs and to receive cooperation from them. This will build youth care that does not only cover all ages of youth but also operate efficiently, effectively, and concretely. What is important is that the Muslim leaders must be encouraged and guided to realize the importance of their roles and responsibilities for youth care, as reflected in the following:

“...organizations involved must have guidelines for promoting and supporting Muslim leaders in the religious and social sectors to see the importance and realize their responsibilities for youth care so that their way of life corresponds to what is required by Islam or as expected by Muslim society...”

(Mrs. Usani, a women’s group leader)

“...Imam, the Islamic Committee of the Masjid, village headmen, village committee and members of the Sub-district Administrative Organization must be aware of their duty to care for youth in the way that is required by Islam and should not neglect or refusing to do the work thinking that it is other people’s or organizations’ responsibility...”

(Miss Sarina, a youth group member)

From the above excerpts, it can be seen that it is necessary to raise awareness, realization and spirit of sacrifice

in all people and organizations involved whether they are the municipality, Sub-district Administrative Organization, Imam, Islamic Committee of the Masjid, the village headman, the village committee, or members of the Sub-district Administrative Organization. They can be assigned a role in which they have to strictly play as it is important to have cooperation from all involved in caring for youth according to the Islamic way. The masjid can be designated as the center for the work while Muslim leaders in the religious sector and the local sector can participate to work closely. Opportunities should be provided for youth representatives or youth leaders to actively participate in the operation as well.

3.2 Methods and Activities of Youth Care the Islamic Way

Youth care the Islamic way requires appropriate methods and activities that meet the needs of youth and are not against Islamic principles. There must be clear goals, which are care, promotion, support and direction for youth to become good Muslims who practice religion and carry out religious activities according to the requirements of Islam. They also have to refrain from all things that are taboos to Muslims. They should strictly follow Islamic principles that are considered the best way of life that give the community peace, happiness and discipline, as mentioned by participants during the brainstorm:

"...Every village must organize a youth group and clearly designate the administrative structure, roles, responsibilities, and activities. Religious leaders and local leaders can act as advisors who closely provide advice..."

(Mr. Abdullah, a youth group leader)

"...Youth should be encouraged and supported to organize a village youth club in which they can share responsibilities concretely. Community leaders can participate in the work of the club..."

(Mr. Hamdan, a youth group member)

Therefore, it is evident that the Muslim community in every village must give importance to youth care the Islamic way by organizing a Village Youth Club using the masjid as the center of the club. The administrative structure, responsibility and activities of the club should be clearly designated. Responsibilities should be concretely assigned. Religious leaders and local leaders should closely participate in the operations of the club functioning as an advisory board that supervises the club. It is important that the emphasis should be on activities or projects that meet the needs of youth and benefit the community as a whole and most importantly do not violate Islamic principles.

In order to operate the club or care for youth so that they lead their lives in accordance with Islamic principles, emphasis should be placed upon the activities in the religious and social sector concurrently, as stated in the following excerpts:

"...The youth club must have a project to teach the Koran in Qura-ati which is the original version, to provide knowledge about the daily religious practice to youth as well as to offer training in doing independent occupations..."

(Mr. Kholed, a youth group leader)

"...The youth club must assign people to be responsible for giving warnings and inviting youth to do religious activities and to have a way of life that is in accordance with Islam, for example, dressing, religious study, making friends of the same or different sex, and avoiding all vices and drugs..."

(Mr. Affan, an occupation leader)

From the reflections above, it is clear that youth care the Islamic way needs to be carried out in the form of youth club which offers various methods and activities that must be done both in the religious and social sectors, for example, providing knowledge, training, warning, inviting, giving advice, and practicing, etc. The purposes are to enable youth to practice the religion correctly, to be able to read the Koran, to have knowledge and understanding of Islamic teaching and principles, to follow the rules and to strictly refrain from doing taboos in the eye of Islamic religion. The other purposes are for youth to be able to lead their lives correctly, to contribute to peace of the community, to be happy and to cooperate with Muslim leaders, both in religious and social sectors. These goals will likely enable youth care to be successful and to achieve the expected goals.

3.3 Budgets for Youth Care the Islamic Way

There are three sources of budgets for youth care the Islamic way: budgets provided by the Zakat Fund

Committee, budgets from donation, and budgets from governmental organizations, as participants of the brainstorm stated:

“...The budget used for the work of the youth club can partially be allocated from the Zakat Fund. Therefore, if it is not sufficient, then all committees involved should join hands in raising fund to support the club and requesting for more budgets from governmental organizations...”

(Mr. Ismail, a religious leader)

“...The youth club should request for financial support from different private and governmental organizations. Sometimes, they can ask for support from people and organizations inside and outside of the community...”

(Mr. Faisol, a member of a youth group)

“...The youth club should organize activities to raise fund and seek income to carry out activities. For some projects, they can request financial support from governmental organizations such as Sub-district Administrative Organizations and the Provincial Administrative Organization, etc. If the activities are about youth and health, they can ask for budget from the Thai Health Promotion Foundation...”

(Mr. Abdullah, an academician)

Based on the above statements, it can be seen that the budgets that can be used to operate the youth club should be Zakat money allocated by the Zakat Fund Committee of the Masjid; budgets from fundraisings such as donation from people who come to pray on Fridays or money raised from organizing tea parties or Khao Yam parties, selling clothes, opening a weekly flea market at the masjid, collecting market stall fees, and selling books and VCDs about the religion, etc. In addition, proposals requesting for donations should be made while letters requesting for funding from private and governmental organizations, such as Sub-district Administrative Organizations, Provincial Administrative Organization, Municipal Council, factories, shops, and others, would also be beneficial.

3.4 The Structure of Youth Care the Islamic Way

From the brainstorming and the critique meetings about the guidelines for youth care the Islamic way of Muslim leaders, it was found that there should be support for every village to establish a “Village Youth Club” with the masjid as the center of operation. There should also be youth representatives or youth leaders taking part in every process of operation. Moreover, there should be religious leaders and local leaders to give advice and oversee the club. The administrative structure of the club should have the following components.

1) Advisory Board

The advisory board should consist of Muslim leaders, such as Imam, Khateeb, Billal, Islamic Committee of the Masjid, and local leaders, such as the village headman, the assistant village headman, the village committee members, members of Sub-district Administrative Organization or members of the Municipal Council, and others. The advisory board members must jointly select and designate individuals to be responsible for the operations of the club. The structure of the advisory board should be in accordance with the administrative structure of the youth club. However, the advisory board structure could be adjusted as deemed appropriate from village to village.

2) President of the Youth Club

The president of the youth club can come from either a selection, an election or a suggestion by the advisory board. The term of office for being the president of the club can be four years or less and the president can remain in office for any number of terms. Nevertheless, criteria and methods of all the processes should be stated clearly in the club operations manual.

3) The Youth Club Committee

The youth club committee should be in accordance with the above-mentioned administrative structure of the youth club which consists of three vice presidents, one vice president for each of the three sections – administration, activities and public relations. Each section is responsible for 4-6 projects, with a chairperson assigned to each project. This chairperson is the key person who works with the committee to ensure that everyone’s performing their roles and responsibilities as follow:

Vice President of Administration is responsible for finance and accounting, fundraising, budgeting, welfare, supplies and buildings, and data and information.

Vice President of Activities is responsible for academic affairs, religious activities promotion, health and sports promotion, occupational promotion, social work, and follow-up and evaluation.

Vice President of Public Relations is responsible for community relations, youth networks, public relations, and publications.

Secretary of the club has the authority and responsibility equal to that of the vice presidents.

The structure of the village youth club committee mentioned above presents a broad scope of how a “youth club” can be established in each village. The said structure can be adapted or improved as deemed appropriate to fit the dynamic and culture of the target area as well as the characteristics of the local Muslim leaders and youth and ultimately to make youth care the Islamic way efficient and effective. The structure of the youth club is illustrated in Figure 1.

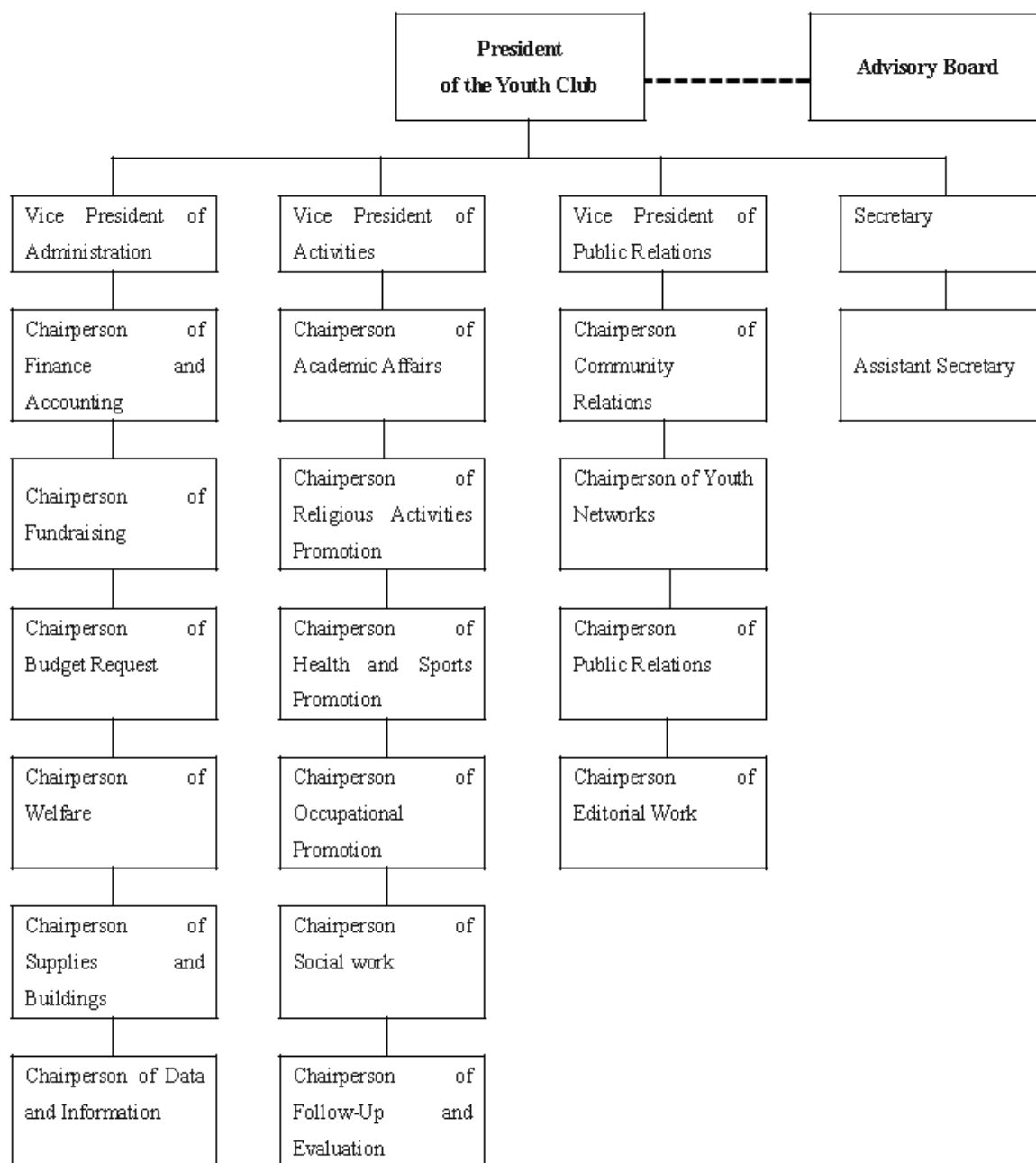


Figure 1. The structure of the youth club

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Youth care the Islamic way for Muslim Thai youth in the form of a “Village Youth Club” allows all parties involved, namely, organizations and people in the government and the private sectors to work together and provides opportunities for youth to actively participate in every step of the process. This is one way to solve and prevent inappropriate behaviors and behaviors that are against Islamic principles. The club is operated systematically and requires cooperation from all levels of personnel and organizations from religious leaders and local leaders to parents and youth. Charoenwongsak (2006) stated that in solving problems of inappropriate behavior, various methods and systematic operations should be used, along with cooperation from all sectors in society. The Committee of Education, Religion, Art and Culture (2003) proposed a way to prevent and solve behavioral problems through ways in which youth are trained correctly using creative teaching methods and positive models. It is also important to teach them about religion by training and disciplining and organizing special training projects for groups of youth with problems.

The way to solve behavioral problems as aforementioned places emphasis on the socialization process that benefits the mind, emotion, intelligence, and spirit based on Islamic principles. Hirschi (1982)’s theory explains that wrongdoings committed by children and youth are caused by weak or broken bond between the adolescents and the society. Therefore, the feeling of attachment, dedication, and beliefs linking an individual to society should be used in solving the problems. Feeling of attachment is the feeling that binds oneself to what is right or wrong or the feeling that takes into account benefits of others or of the society as a whole rather than oneself. This is how a person accepts the social norms. Dedication means being obsessed with something or to give one’s entire time or energy to particular activities. Thus, if a person dedicates to activities or doing something that are acceptable to society, he will have less opportunities to commit wrongdoings or will probably stop the wrongdoings. The level of beliefs in ethics, rules, regulations or social norms vary from one individual to another. Hence, if a person has a high level of belief in the social norms, it is unlikely that he will commit wrongdoings. On the contrary, if he has a low level of belief in the social norms, it is likely that he will commit wrongdoings or violate social rules. Previously mentioned concepts and theories illustrate that the more youth feel attached to society or social institutions, especially the religious ones, the less they commit wrongdoings or it is quite possible that they would not commit any misconducts at all. In other words, children and youth are likely to commit wrongdoings when their attachment to social rules is destroyed. Violent behavior is a result of negative family relationship, i.e. if children lack support from their family, it is likely that they will act against the law which means they would commit wrongdoings and associate with people who have deviant behavior.

Another factor emphasized by the above-mentioned way of solving behavioral problems is teamwork. It is significant to promote and support youth to work as a team and share common goals as they will be forced to come to an agreement and jointly plan their operation. Teamwork is thus an important factor that can influence efficiency and effectiveness of their operations so that they will achieve the goals that have been set as a group. This concept corresponds with Mapobsuk (2000), Tansakul (2004) and Spector (2006)’s claim that working together or interaction among groups of people who have the same goals under the same leader and with clear responsibilities is a working technique that is likely to achieve the goals. DeLamater and Myyers (2007) stated that working in groups is an incentive for members to work and helps developing the work process together to reach the goals. This way of solving problems also places emphasis on youth’s active participation in every step of the process from thinking, planning, decision-making, implementing, following up, and evaluating. This provides opportunities for youth to take responsibility in looking after one another which is a youth-centered approach. Keawhawong (1999), Patanapongsa (2004) and Bureekul (2005) stated that participation provides opportunities for individuals to freely and equally take part in decision-making from the first to the last step of the operations – participation in identifying the problem and its causes, planning the operations, working and following up, volunteering with enthusiasm and determination to achieve the goals that have been set.

The results of this study can help people and organizations involved in youth care in the three southern-border provinces of Thailand in forming sound policy and concrete strategies to support Muslim leaders to care for Muslim Thai youth so that their behaviors are in congruence with the Islamic way of life. In particular, Islamic religious organizations and other organizations in the public sector should make use of the results of this study in forming good policies and concrete strategies that support and encourage Muslim Thai youth to have behaviors that correspond with the Islamic way of life. For example, a policy related to instilling awareness in youth so that they lead their lives the Islamic way and follow the model set by the Prophet Muhammad, a policy related to organizing Islamic ethics camps in different communities regularly and continually, a policy related to organizing activities and training to provide knowledge about Islam and promote practice according to Islamic principles among youth and parents, and finally a policy on promoting and developing the family institution so

that it is strong and able to control and care for children so that they behave according to Islamic principles. Furthermore, the results of this study can provide important data to promote and support the work of social institutions, such as family institution, educational institution, and religious institution, in order for them to care for Muslim Thai youth, who have risky behavior, in a more concrete way. This is to make youth better their behaviors so to be in line with the Islamic way of life. This method is also a socialization process in which parents, teachers and Muslim leaders can teach, train, advice, and instill in youth moral awareness that is according to the social norms and Islamic principles.

In addition, people and organization involved in youth care in the three southern-border provinces should provide help to youth with at-risk behavior or behavior that is not in congruence with Islamic principles so that they improve their behaviors to be more in tune with Islamic way, especially by means of socialization. Socialization the Islamic way for youth care can be conducted in various ways, for example, guiding youth to strictly conduct religious activities, providing them knowledge and understanding about Islamic principles, raising them the Islamic way, and encouraging them to participate in Islamic activities and training programs about Islam. The results of this study illustrate that all of the aforementioned methods can provide Muslim youth with care that will make their behavior in accordance with the Islam way of life.

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