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Relationships between Islamic ethical behavior and Islamic factors among Muslim youths in the three southern border provinces of Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the relationships between Islamic ethical behavior and Islamic factors (Islamic way of upbringing, knowledge of the religion, participation in Islamic activities, and practicing Islamic principles) among Muslim youths in the three southern border provinces, Thailand. A cross-sectional study was conducted in which 2,160 Muslim youths were surveyed and relevant data collected. They were recruited using multi-stage sampling methods. The data were analyzed with the R program to calculate Pearson's product—moment correlation coefficients and multiple linear correlation coefficients. The study found that there were statistically significant correlations between Islamic ethical behavior and the Islamic way of upbringing, knowledge of the religion, participation in Islamic activities, and practicing Islamic principles ($R^2 = .474$, $p < .001$). Practicing Islamic principles clearly had the strongest correlation in explaining Islamic ethical behavior ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$). The Islamic way of upbringing, knowledge of the religion, and participation in Islamic activities also made some contribution in explaining the variance in the Islamic ethical behavior ($\beta = .34$, $.17$, and $.09$, respectively, all with $p < .001$).

Introduction

A lack of Islamic ethics is a common behavioral problem occurring within Muslim societies, and is well known among all parties concerned such as among Muslim youths themselves, parents, religious leaders, and local leaders. It is a problem that affects Muslim youth's way and quality of life, that makes them deviate from the right way of life, weakens their faith, makes them misbehave and commit sins as a habit without shame, and even commit sins openly. Such problems have accumulated in a circle with no exit (Anmunajid, 2010; Annadwee, 2004). Islamic ethics is one of the cornerstones of Islam and is one of the fundamental sources of a community's strength. Islam has established universal fundamental Islamic ethics that have provided not only legal safeguards, but also a very effective ethical system. Thus, whatever leads to the welfare of the individual or the society and does not oppose any maxims of the religion is ethically good in Islam, and whatever is harmful is ethically bad. Given its importance in a healthy society, Islam supports an ethical way of life and matters that lead to it, and is the path followed by the best Muslims along with all matters that lead to it. The guiding principle for the behavior of a Muslim is "Virtuous Deeds". This term covers all deeds, not only acts of worship. The Guardian and Judge of all deeds is God Himself. The most fundamental characteristics of a Muslim are piety and humility. A Muslim must be humble with God and with other people (Hesamifar, 2012; Latif, 2008). Islamic ethics is the ethical system formed by the teachings of the Quran and explained

by the Prophet Muhammad through action and words. Islamic ethics deals with those standards that prescribe what Muslims ought to do. It also addresses the virtues, duties, and attitudes of the individual and the society (Hashi, 2011; Zaroug, 1999).

There are many causes that influence at a high level Islamic ethical behavior among Muslim youths. However, the causes of Islamic factors are highly correlated with Islamic ethical behavior among Muslim youth, such as the Islamic way of upbringing, knowledge of the religion, participation in Islamic activities, and practicing Islamic principles. This is consistent with the studies of Khagphong (2004), Laeheem (2014a, 2015a), and Mahama (2009) who all reported that Islamic factors that contribute the most are Islamic ethical behavior among Muslim youths, Islamic upbringing, the study of Islam, religious practice and participation in religious activities. Muslim youths who practice religious activities well, who routinely and strictly practice the religion, who are in families that bring up their children in the Islamic way, and who have studied Islam well, tend to have highly ethical Islamic behavior. Chaiprasit, Chansawang, and Pergmark (2005), Khagphong (2004), Laeheem and Baka (2010), and Laeheem (2013) found that Islamic upbringing results in understanding and acceptance of the values and social norms of the society in which they live, and the upbringing influences their Islamic ethical behavior. Islamic upbringing reflects the truth of living and can lead Muslim youths to true happiness based on Islamic morals and ethics, and upbringing is important and has a positive influence on behavior among Thai youths.

Studies have reported that one way to promote and support Muslim youths to have Islamic ethical behavior at a high level is to encourage them to gain knowledge and understanding of Islamic principles and to encourage them to strictly practice the religion (Chaiprasit et al., 2005; Mahamad, Thongkum, & Damcha-om, 2008). There are four factors that significantly result in the Islamic way of life: the level of knowledge of the religion, the level of Islamic upbringing, participation in Islamic activities, and training in Islam (Laeheem, 2014a). Promoting Muslim youths to have knowledge and understanding of Islamic teaching, practice, and strict adherence to religious activities can result in Islamic ethical behavior among youths. Therefore, religious factors can make individuals behave in accordance with Islamic ethics and help individuals to recognize right from wrong because the individuals socialize and develop personality, habit, morality, ethics, and manners corresponding to religious principles (Khagphong, 2004; Laeheem, 2014a; Mahama, 2009; Thepsitha, 1998).

Thus, the researcher was interested in exploring the relationships between Islamic ethical behavior and Islamic factors (Islamic way of upbringing, knowledge of the religion, participation in Islamic activities, and practicing Islamic principles) among Muslim youths in the three southern border provinces of Thailand. The Islamic factors in this study were adopted from Khagphong (2004), Laeheem (2014a, 2015a), and Mahama (2009). The results of the study would be useful for related individuals and organizations in forming policy for preventing and solving the problem of unethical behavior or poor Islamic ethical behavior among Muslim youths before it becomes more severe and develops into social problems that are difficult to solve in the future, and in seeking ways to solve the problem in a timely manner.

Literature Review

Superb Islamic ethical behavior is the main goal of the Islamic principles which is an important base used as the Islamic way of life and Islamic behavior among Muslim.

Meanings of Ethics

The word "ethics" originates from the Greek word "ethos", which means "character, spirit and attitude of a group of people or culture" (Aidaros, Mohd. Shamsudin & Mohd. Idris, 2013; Loeb, 1971). Ethics represent a set of moral principles, rules of conduct or values and the issue of ethics arises when a person has to make a decision from various alternatives relating to moral principles, and is concerned with the good worth sought in life and with the rules that ought to govern human behavior and human interaction (Al-Aidaros et al., 2013; Burks, 2006; Delaney, 2005; Rachels & Rachels, 1993). Ethics is reflected in the principles that a person uses in governing his/her actions and the personal standard by which a person distinguishes right from wrong, as it is the mission for, and the understanding of, the good life, living well—a life worth living. Thus, ethics is largely a matter of perspective by putting every action and goal in its place, knowing what is important to do and what is not (Al-idaros et al., 2013; Elegido, 2000; Ogbonna & Ebimobowei, 2011).

Categories of Ethics

Ethics is generally divided into three main categories and each of these categories deals with a different facet of ethics. (1) Meta ethics is the closest attempt to understand the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological presuppositions and pledges of moral thought, talk, and practice. It is the association between beliefs, causes for action, and human motivation, it might provide us with reasons to do or abstain from doing as it demands (Abbas, Gondal, Junaid, Rana, & Aslam, 2012; Ayer, 1946). (2) Normative ethics involves interpreting the word normative as a derivation of the word 'norm'. In its pure philosophical context, a norm generally exemplifies a standard, rule, or principle, in opposition to what is "normal" for people to do, in contrast with what they really do. Normative ethics is related to moral norms in the sense of being a regulator with which moral agents should comply (Abbas et al., 2012; Rawls, 1975). (3) Applied ethics deals with ethics specifically as a concrete code which affects human conduct and behavior, while 'conduct' is a collective recognition for voluntary actions. It can be viewed as any action of a being that transforms and re-defines its relationship to its environment; on the other hand, behavior provides outputs from the organism to the environment (Dusenbery, 2009). A voluntary action is that course of an action that a person could have done differently if there had been the option to do so. Our principal concern is human conduct that shows an extreme in the will, wish, and direction which it has

taken; it is certain that human behavior is reactionary, and most of time our actions are parallel and planned reactions which justify our presence and state of mind (Abbas et al., 2012). This study focused on Islamic ethics consisting of four components: ethics in faith, interaction with friends of other faiths, socializing the Islamic way, and morality to oneself. These Islamic ethics were adopted from three main categories; meta ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics.

Concept of Islamic Ethics

Conceptually, Islamic ethics include two meanings, where the first is the science that deals with the standards of the right and wrong of human conduct, particularly "what humans ought to do". Ethics as science refers to the study of the ethical conduct and behavior; and in this case, ethics means the human effort of studying moral standards and conducts to ensure that a person possesses the right understanding of moral behavior. The second interpretation means 'good character' or good human behavior. In this understanding, ethics is the human character that pre-scribes refraining from immoral conducts such as cheating, corruption, discrimination, lying, stealing, murder, assault, slander, rape, and fraud, and enjoins the virtues of honesty, compassion, sincerity, and loyalty. As such, Islamic ethics are those universal standards of right and wrong that pre-scribe what humans ought to do as taught by the Quran, and demonstrated in the exemplary life (actions and words) of the Prophet Muhammad. In this sense, ethics "subsumes all actions that are characterized as virtuous deeds in the ter-minology of the Quran" (Haneef, 2005; Hashi, 2011; Zaroug, 1999). Islamic ethics is related to several terms. These terms are: approved, goodness, truth and right, righteousness, equity, equilibrium and justice, and piety. However, the term that is most closely related to ethics in the Quran is *akhlaq*—an Arabic term referring to the practice of virtue, morality, and manners in Islamic theology and philosophy. It is most commonly translated in English dictionaries as disposition, nature, temper, ethics, morals, or manners (Al-idaros et al., 2013; Beekun, 1996). The concept of Islamic ethics in this study is universal standards which are based on the Quran and demonstrated by the actions and words of the Prophet Muhammad.

Source and Origin of Islamic Ethics

In Islam, while the Quran lays the foundation of ethical concepts and standards, the way of life of the Prophet Muhammad contains the actual practice of such concepts. As ethical concepts taught by the Quran are embodied in the way of life of the Prophet Muhammad, both the Quran and Sunnah (the verbally transmitted record of the teach-ings, deeds, and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as various reports about Muhammad's companions) are the source of Islamic ethics. Various Quranic verses and a number of Prophetic narrations provide a code of ethics, which covers the dimensions of human behavior. Islamic ethics is grounded in the Quran and Sunnah and especially on Quranic concepts like faith, piety, and obedience, and the Quran and Sunnah are often quoted in support of the moral and religious ideas of a Muslim (Ali, 1989; Hashi, 2011; Hesamifar, 2012).

Islam offers an ethical system which is unique. In Islam, ethics and religion are rooted to primordial human nature which is innocent and good unless it is corrupted. Similarly, ethics, religion, and law are complementary and do not contradict each other. In this case, what is morally wrong is also illegal, and the law permits only what is moral. Like-wise, in Islam, both morality and law are derived from religious sources and religious teachings are practiced through morality and law. Second, the Islamic ethical system is unique, because its value judgments transcend all worldly gains and relativistic interpretations. Transcen-dentalism, universalism, and normative character are among the building blocks of Islamic ethics (Hashi, 2011; Kaypan, 2012). The source of Islamic ethics in this study was from both the Quran and Sunnah (demonstrated by the actions and words of the Prophet Muhammad).

Methods

This study involved quantitative research which used a cross-sectional study design.

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 2,160 Muslim youths in the three southern border provinces of Thailand recruited using multi-stage sampling. In stage 1, districts were selected using stratified sampling divided into three strata consisting of districts with high and very high levels of population loss (red ones), districts with a moderate level of population loss (pink ones), and districts with a low level of population loss (green ones). These levels were deter-mined using the data and trends of violence provided by the Center of Deep South Watch (2015). Then, one district from each stratum was selected using simple random sampling to obtain nine districts. In stage 2, two sub-districts were selected from each district through simple random sam-pling to obtain 18 sub-districts. In stage 3, three villages were selected from each sub-district to obtain 54 villages. Finally, in stage 4, 40 youths (2,160 in total) were selected from each village to represent Thai Muslim youth. Selection of individuals was undertaken with cooperation from local Muslim leaders in the target areas.

Sample size calculations followed the study of Laeheem (2015b), who found that the proportion of Muslim youths having Islamic ethical behavior was .59. This information was then used to calculate the required sample size for this study, obtaining an estimate by substituting α = .05, $1-\beta$ = .2, OR = 1.26 so $Z_{\alpha/2}$ and Z_{β} were 1.96 and .84 respectively, r = 1, p_2 = .59 (proportion of having Islamic ethical behavior), p = .617, p_1 = .645, into a formula for sample size given by McNeil (1996), namely:

$$n_1 = \frac{\left(Z_{\alpha/2} \sqrt{\left(1 + \frac{1}{r}\right) \frac{1}{p(1-p)}} + Z_{\beta} \sqrt{\frac{1}{p_1(1-p_1)} + \frac{1}{rp_2(1-p_2)}} \right)^2}{(\ln OR)^2}$$

This gives $n_1 = n_2 = 1,080$. It was thereby concluded that a minimum sample size of 2,160 was required for this study.

Research Instrument

The research instrument was a questionnaire consisting of three parts: 1) general information on the subjects, 2) four Islamic factors from a study by Laeheem (2014a), and 3) Islamic ethical behavior applied from questions in a study by Rimpeng (2008) with a 7-point rating scale: 7 = Highest, 6 = High, 5 = Fairly High, 4 = Moderate, 3 = Low, 2 = Fairly Low, and 1 = Lowest. The internal consistency reliability test indicated that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .872.

Data Collection

This study used a cross-sectional study design involving surveys of Muslim youths in the three southern border provinces in Thailand in a sample selected from the target population studied. Verbal consent to participate in the study was obtained from Muslim youths after an assurance of confidentiality was given to individuals. The data for this study were collected by the researcher and research assistants who, even though they had experience in data collection and were locals of the target areas, were retrained in order to have the same data collecting methods and the same understanding about data collecting methods and details of questions.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the R program. All the determinant variables of interest and the outcome variable (Islamic ethical behavior) were continuous variables. Descriptive statistics was used to describe the main variables of the study. Pearson's product−moment correlation was conducted to test the correlations between Islamic ethical behavior and Islamic factors (Islamic factors; Islamic way of upbringing, knowledge of the religion, participation in Islamic activities, and practicing Islamic principles). Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to investigate any independent correlations between Islamic ethical behavior and various determinants linked to Islamic factors, and variables were eliminated from the model using a stepwise method.

Criteria and Interpretation of Means and Correlations

The mean score of Islamic ethical behavior (outcome variable) and Islamic factors (determinant variables) was interpreted based on guidelines from Laeheem (2014b) which suggested mean values of 1.00−1.49 scored as lowest, 1.50−2.49 scored as low, 2.50−3.49 scored as fairly low, 3.50−4.49 scored as moderate, 4.50−5.49 scored as fairly high, 5.50−6.49 scored as high, and 6.50−7.00 scored as highest. The interpretation of correlations was based on guidelines from Laeheem (2014b) which suggested r = .01−.19 as smallest, r = .20−.39 as small, r = .40−.59 as medium, r = .60−.79 as large, and r = .80−1.00 as largest.

Results

General Data on the Subjects

Most of the Muslim youths who were the subjects in this study were males (55.74%) with an average age of 19.27 years (the youngest was 15 years old, and the oldest was 24 years old), with a bachelor's degree (43.61%), and with married parents (80.00%). In addition, most of the Muslim youths were single (70.58%), still in school (41.85%), and unemployed (36.25%).

Descriptive Statistics of Islamic Ethical Behavior and Islamic Factors

The results revealed that the Islamic ethical behavior among Muslim youths in the three southern border provinces, Thailand was at a fairly high level ($\overline{X}$= 5.08). The mean scores (Table 1) of the three of predictor variables—Islamic way of upbringing, participation in Islamic activities, and practices that adhered to Islam principle—was fairly high ($\overline{X}$= 5.03, 5.27, and 5.13, respectively), while knowledge of the religion was moderate ($\overline{X}$= 4.36).

Correlations Between Islamic Ethical Behavior and Islamic Factors

Pearson's product−moment correlation was conducted to test the relationships between Islamic ethical behavior (outcome variable) and Islamic factors (determinant variables). The results indicated that Islamic ethical behavior had a statistically significant correlation with Islamic way of upbringing (r = .44), knowledge of the religion (r = .38), participation in Islamic activities (r = .35), and practicing Islamic principles (r = .60), all with $p < .000$ (see Table 1).

Relationships Between Islamic Ethical Behavior and Islamic Factors: Final Model

Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to quantify the relationships between Islamic ethical behavior (outcome variable) and Islamic factors (determinant variables). The results revealed that there were statistically significant correlations between Islamic ethical behavior and Islamic way of upbringing, knowledge of the religion, participation in Islamic activities, and practicing Islamic principles. The residual deviance was .607 on 2,155 degrees of freedom ($p = .000$) and the four determinant variables explained about 47.30 percent of the variance in Islamic ethical behavior.

As depicted in Table 2, the largest beta coefficient obtained was .42 for practices adhering to Islamic principles, which indicated that these practices to provided the

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and correlations between Islamic ethical behavior and Islamic factors

Variable	Mean score	S.D.	Correlation with Islamic ethical behavior		
			r	*p* value	Magnitude
Islamic ethical behavior	5.08	.83			
Islamic way of upbringing	5.03	.64	.44	.000	Medium
Knowledge of the religion	4.36	.73	.38	.000	Small
Participation in Islamic activities	5.27	.97	.35	.000	Small
Practicing Islamic principles	5.13	.88	.60	.000	Large

Table 2
Reduced linear regression model of relationships between Islamic ethical behavior and Islamic factors: Final model

Predictor Variable	B	S.E.	t value	p value	R² change
Constant	.15	.13	2.150	.045	
Practicing Islamic principles	.42	.02	25.404	.000	.361
Islamic way of upbringing	.34	.02	15.476	.000	.077
Knowledge of the religion	.17	.20	8.526	.000	.028
Participation in Islamic activities	.09	.15	5.961	.000	.009

Note: Multiple R-squared: .474, Adjusted R-squared: .473,
Residual standard error: .607, on 2,155 degrees of freedom
F-statistic: 485.1, p-value: .000

strongest unique contribution in explaining Islamic ethical behavior among Muslim youths in the three southern border provinces of Thailand, when the variance explained by all the other determinant variables in the model was controlled. The beta values for Islamic way of upbringing, knowledge of the religion, and participation in Islamic activities were .34, .17, and .09, respectively, suggesting that these three determinant variables also made some contribution to explaining the variance in Islamic ethical behavior among Muslim youths in the three southern border provinces, Thailand.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between Islamic ethical behavior among Muslim youths in the three southern border provinces of Thailand, and four determinant variables linked to the Islamic way of upbringing, knowledge of the religion, participation in Islamic activities, and practicing Islamic principles. The results indicated that Islamic ethical behavior was significantly correlated with all four determinant variables and they accounted for 47.30 percent of the variance explained by Islamic ethical behavior. Therefore, it could be said that all four variables of Islamic factors had a positive influence on Islamic ethical behavior among Muslim youths in the three southern border provinces. The adherence to Islamic principles was clearly the most strongly related determinant in explaining the Islamic ethical behavior among the Muslim youths sampled. The Islamic way of upbringing, knowledge of the religion, and participation in Islamic activities also made some contribution to explaining the variance in Islamic ethical behavior. Thus, all four determinant variables of Islamic factors were positively related to the behavior of Muslim youths; Muslim youths having a higher level in the four determinant variables of Islamic factors were more likely to exhibit Islamic ethical behavior than those who had lower levels of the four determinant variables of Islamic factors. These four determinant variables are related to religious socialization, mainly through the religious institution and the family institution that encourage Muslim youths to follow and exhibit behavior according to Islamic principles.

Studies have identified that the four variables of Islamic factors investigated have direct influence on the behavior of Muslim youths. Muslim youths having a high level of the four variables of Islamic factors also have a high level of desirable behavior and behavior that is in accordance with the social norms and Islamic principles (Laeheem, 2012; Narongraksakhet, 1997). This is due to the fact that the Islamic religion socializes or guides Muslim youths to a goal of behavior and adherence to good deeds with morality and ethics, to know right from wrong, to exhibit good and proper conduct, and to feel embarrassed in committing sins and wrong doings according to Islamic morals and tradition, and to be determined to practice the religion according to its religious principles (Laeheem & Madreh, 2014; Laeheem, 2012). Furthermore, Islamic socialization mostly emphasizes providing knowledge, understanding, and education related to Islamic principles. The process not only transfers knowledge, experience or skills from one generation to the next, but also covers all aspects. The Islamic educational process includes training, mental socialization, transfer of religious and secular knowledge, and instilling morality and ethics (Mahama, 2009; Narongraksakhet, 1997; Yadegarfard & Bahramabadian, 2014).

One way of promoting and supporting Muslim youths to have behavior in accordance with social norms is to encourage them to practice a high level of the Islamic way of upbringing, knowledge of the religion, participation in Islamic activities, and practicing Islamic principles (Chaiprasit et al., 2005; Nabil al-Samalutiy, 1986; Touthern, 2010). Islamic socialization is a process of nurturing and making Muslim youths into complete Muslims, in terms of ethics and religious practice, and their way of living is the key to a good life and to protect them from bad things, no matter what circumstances they find themselves in (Mursiy, 2001; Touthern, 2010; Yaljin, 2007). In addition, this involves training, socialization, and behaving under the protection of Allah by staying away from all sins and taboos, and focusing on doing good things. These are important factors that influence Islamic ethical behavior (Bungatayong, 2009; Nahlawiy, 2003; Touthern, 2010). Moreover, the Islamic socialization process by instilling intelligence that supports Muslim youth to use their intelligence in thinking and reflecting upon practicing good deeds according to Islamic principles is considered as a factor influencing and inculcating Islamic ethical behavior (Abdullah al-Malikiy, 2005; Umarahm, 2000).

Thus, it can be seen that the results of a process of socialization that parents or guardians and Muslim leaders conduct to teach, train, advise, and inculcate in Muslim youths ensures these youths know, understand, and experience correct social norms, as well as behave according to Islamic principles. These are the ways to promote and support youth to display a greater level of Islamic ethical behavior (Laeheem, 2013, 2014a). Promoting Muslim youths to have knowledge and understanding of Islamic principles, strictly practice the religion, participate in activities to develop their souls in the Islamic way, and to be trained according to Islamic principles can result in youths whose behavior is in line with Islamic social norms (Chaiprasit et al., 2005; Khagphong, 2004; Mahama, 2009; Mahamad et al., 2008). Therefore, using Islamic socialization is a factor of great importance and with a direct and positive relationship with the promotion of Islamic ethical behavior because it is a socio-psychological process that can result in youths who have desirable personalities and have changed naturally

through direct and indirect socialization (Khagphong, 2004; Laeheem & Baka, 2010; Laeheem, 2012, 2014a).

The results of this study could help individuals and organizations involved in looking after and promoting Islamic ethical behavior among Muslim youths in the three southern border provinces in forming good policy and concrete strategies for promoting and supporting Muslim youths to have Islamic ethical behavior. In particular, Islamic and state organizations should make concrete use of the findings of this study such as in activities of instilling in youths the Islamic way of life, activities that develop the mind, emotion, intelligence, and society in the Islamic way, activities in training, providing knowledge, practicing according to Islamic principles for Muslim youth, and activities for promoting and strengthening the family institution. By so doing, their children will develop according to Islamic principles. Furthermore, the data are important for promoting and supporting social institutions such as the family, educational institutions, and religious institutions to concretely look after and promote Muslim youths who have at risk behavior to change for the better and to behave more in accordance with Islamic ways, especially through Islamic socialization such as encouraging youths to strictly practice the religion, providing them with knowledge and understanding about Islamic principles, promoting an Islamic upbringing, and encouraging them to participate in Islamic activities and in training related to Islam.

Conflict of Interest

None.

Acknowledgments

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