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USERS' PERCEPTION ON CHILDREN AT MASJID – PLANNING FOR CHILDREN FRIENDLY MASJID

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Abstract

Masjid is an important institution to know Allah SWT, empower, and unite society. Early exposure of children to masjid is crucial as nurturing them to love masjid is a process towards loving the creator, strengthening their faith, and improving *akhlaq* (behaviour) towards becoming a good Muslim and eventually forming a stable society and nation. However, there have been some negative perceptions on the presence of young children in masjid among the *jamaah* (congregational members). This discourages families in engaging their young children with masjid as early as possible. Eventually, it would hinder them from learning high values of Islam that would strengthen their faith, shape good character, and *akhlaq*. This study aims to identify the perception of the parents or guardian that bring children to masjid as well as other *jamaah* on the presence of children at masjid through a structured questionnaire survey with random sampling approach. Eight masjids within the urban area of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor were involved with the target of fifty respondents each. 55.2% of the 400 respondents were parents/guardians that bring children to the masjid. The findings suggest that respondents welcome the presence of children at masjid as it is deemed suitable as a place for children's education and that masjid should provide educational programmes for them. Crying and playing children seem to distract the *jamaah*. Hence they feel designated spaces for children is deemed necessary.

Keywords: children-friendly masjid, *jamaah*, perception, space for children at the masjid, children's activity

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'masjid' originates from the word '*masajid*' which is the plural of '*sajada*' – which brings the meaning of prostration with full respect and obedience (Abd Wahab, Ab Hamid and Che Man, 2016). In the Al-Qur'an, the word 'masjid' is mentioned twenty-seven times. Masjid is also referred to as the House of God – the place where only Allah SWT is worshipped. A *hadith* narrated by Abu Hurairah: Allah's Apostle said, "*The reward of the prayer offered by a person in congregation is twenty-five times greater than that of the prayer offered in one's house or the market (alone). And this is because if he performs ablution and does it perfectly and then proceeds to the mosque with the sole intention of praying, then for every step he takes towards the mosque, he is upgraded one degree in reward and his one sin is taken off (crossed out) from his accounts (of deeds). When he offers his prayer, the angels keep on asking Allah's Blessings and Allah's forgiveness for him as long as he is (staying) at his Musalla. They say, 'O Allah! Bestow Your blessings upon him, be Merciful and kind to him.'* And one is regarded in prayer as long as one is waiting for the prayer." (Sahih Bukhari, n.d). Masjid is the best place to perform the congregational prayer, and its role goes beyond this as it functions as the centre of administration, marketplace and others particularly during the era of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his companions. Hence, establishing masjid was among the essential tasks of the Prophet SAW, and the practice continues until today.

In Malaysia, the establishment of the masjid is in line with the Federal Constitution provision as Islam is the official religion of the country. The diverse roles of masjid reflect its inclusiveness of all walks of life. Everyone is welcome to the masjid, particularly in the remembrance of Allah SWT and to strengthen their faith. Hence, masjid has an exceptional place in the heart of the Muslims.

On the inclusiveness, children are no exception. The following *hadith* is referred to. "*The Messenger of Allah (SAW) came out to us for one of the evening prayers (Maghrib or 'Isha'), carrying Hasan or Husayn. The Messenger of Allah (SAW) came forward, put the child down and said takbeer ("Allahu Akbar") to start the prayer. Then he prostrated during the prayer, and his prostration lasted for a long time. My father said: I raised my head and saw the child on the back of the Messenger of Allah (SAW), so I went back to my prostration. When the Messenger of Allah (SAW) finished praying, the people said to him: 'O Messenger of Allah, during your prayer you prostrated and it took a long time, until we thought that something had happened, or that you were receiving revelation.' He said, 'Nothing happened, but my son was riding on my back, and I did not want to hurry him up until he had had enough'*" (Sahih Bukhari and Muslim, n.d). This *hadith* reflects the tolerance level that adults should have when it comes to dealing with young children as the incident took place while the Prophet Muhammad SAW was performing prayer.

The presence of children in the masjid in Malaysia has been discussed by the members of the society and expert at official and unofficial platforms. Mainly the issue is on the unsuitability of their presence at masjid as the children's activities are said to disturb others (Jupiter, 2019). Harsh action such as preventing young children from entering the main prayer hall of the masjid is also reported, while some signs show children are prevented from coming to masjid. Thus, the Mufti of the Federal Territory, Datuk Dr Zulkifli bin Mohamad Al Bakri gives a lengthy explanation on this through his article entitled "*Masjid dan Kanak-Kanak*" in *Bayyan Linnas* number 63 (Mohamad Al Bakri, 2016).

This study aims to identify the perception of the parents or guardian that bring children to masjid as well as other *jamaah* (congregational members that do not bring children to the masjid) on the presence of children at masjid through a structured questionnaire survey. It is deemed crucial to establish this issue from the perspective of those that go to the masjid with and without children, towards identifying the solutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Masjid has been an important institution since the era of Prophet Muhammad SAW. Islam is manifested to be a complete code of practice, and a masjid plays a vital role to signify it (Imam, 2000). As a centre of spiritual contents and a platform of communication, it develops the unity and brotherhood among the Muslim communities. The primary activity of masjid is to facilitate congregational *solat* (prayer). Many other events in favours of the daily life of an individual Muslim or a Muslim community are accomplished through a masjid. Thus, masjid has become an indispensable part of the Muslim.

The History of Masjid

The *hijrah* (migration) of Prophet Muhammad SAW with his companions and follower from Makkah to Madinah marked the beginning of the Muslim calendar. On their arrival at Quba - the outskirt of Madinah, they spent a few days there, and the Prophet built the first masjid SAW known as Masjid Quba. When Prophet Muhammad SAW arrived in Madinah, the first task that he embarked on was building a masjid known as Al-Masjid An-Nabawiy or the Prophet's mosque (Omer, 2010). The practice of Prophet Muhammad SAW since the *hijrah* movement continues, and masjid becomes the core element and symbolic feature in Muslim society.

Masjid as Place to Worship Allah

According to Hizan, Ismail and Ispawi (2017), and supported by Laugu (2007), the word 'masjid' in Arabic means a place of worship or a place of doing ritual activities to God. Since the early years of Islam, masjid has been used as a place to worship and perform religious-ritual activities. The meaning is shown by the

Qur'an in Surah At-Tawbah: 19 – “Have you made the providing of water for the pilgrim and the maintenance of al-Masjid al-Haram equal to [the deeds of] one who believes in Allah and the Last Day and strives in the cause of Allah?”

Masjid as a Learning Centre

The Prophet SAW used masjid as the centre to spread Islamic knowledge, and he was the first teacher. The basics of the *aqeedah* (belief system), the acts of worship, and the *shari'a* rules (political, economic, social, and judicial) and others are being taught in the masjid. The Prophet SAW also asked Abdullah ibn Sa'īd to teach the Muslims the skills of reading and writing, and within a brief period, some Muslims became literate and so could read and write the Qur'an. The Prophet SAW also took another step to make the Muslims literate by making the literate captives of war gain their freedom by instructing reading and writing to ten Muslim children. Due to the efforts made by the school of Islam to increase people's awareness, masjids which had already been the primary place for worshipping were used as the first base for learning knowledge, and the Qur'an was considered as the first book and text for teaching the Muslims (Oloyede, 2014).

Educating Children as Young *Khalifah*

According to the Oxford dictionary *Khalifah* means 'Deputy or steward; sometimes translated as vicegerent'. According to the teachings of Islam, each individual is a *khalifah* on earth. Muslims, in particular, must strive to adhere to and advance God's will by establishing a society that reflects human dignity and justice. Rahmat and Fahrudin (2018) explained that Prophet Adam AS and his grandchildren act as earth's controllers, and it was also mentioned that among them, there are Prophets, Apostles, Guardians, *Siddiqin* (people who witness the truth), pious people, and worshipers; these people act as God's representative on earth. “I will create a vicegerent on earth.” (Al-Baqarah, 2: 30). From this Quranic verse, it can be seen everyone is created to worship Allah SWT and carry out his task as a *khalifah* on earth.

Hence, every child is a young *khalifah* who will eventually grow into an accomplished *khalifah* when he is an adult. All parents have the responsibility to ensure the upbringing of their children shall lead towards achieving this purpose by cultivating them with the right *aqeedah* that is, building and strengthening their faith and belief to the oneness of Allah. Thus, parents have to prepare their children with the proper knowledge that will allow them to know and obey the commands of Allah SWT. After the basics of *aqeedah*, they need to be taught and trained to practice good deeds. One of these obligatory deeds is the establishing of prayer - the act that connects the young *khalifah* to his God and is also a form of protection against disobedience (Hassan, 2007). One of the perfect ways to foster these values is by exposing the children to masjid.

Today's Scenario on Children and Masjid

Children may not have been welcomed inside the masjid as they are said to disturb the concentration of some *jamaah* in their *ibadah* among others. Some *jamaah* also may perceive that masjid is supposed to be a place of tranquillity that particular loud sound is taken negatively. A case which was reported in Malaysia by Azmi (2019) where a mother and her children were cast out by a member of the *jamaah* because that person personally felt children is not allowed to be in masjid assuming that they were not clean. A similar case was reported in another country too according to the report by Ghafar (2018) where Mrs Gheny Purbo from Indonesia complained that her three year old son was lifted and placed outside the prayer hall by other *jamaah*. The child was said to disturb other *jamaah's* focus. Such behaviour must not be continued. Masjid should be an inclusive place that all including parents and their kids have the chance to meet the community, learn new things, and build friendship with others. If the society keeps on side-lining children from the masjid, familiarising masjid to them at a later stage would not be effective (Toorawa, 2015).

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

In getting the opinions of the congregational members of masjid on the presence of children at the masjid, a structured questionnaire survey was conducted at eight selected case study masjids, namely:

- i. Masjid Al Akram, Kg. Datuk Keramat, Kuala Lumpur
- ii. Masjid Ar Rahimah, Kg. Pandan, Kuala Lumpur
- iii. Masjid Jamek Kampung Baru, Jalan Raja Alang, Kuala Lumpur
- iv. Masjid Abu Ubaidah al-Jarrah, Taman Sri Rampai, Kuala Lumpur
- v. Masjid Imam Al Ghazali, Bandar Menjalara, Kepong, Kuala Lumpur
- vi. Masjid Muadz bin Jabal, Taman Setiawangsa, Kuala Lumpur
- vii. Masjid Saidina Abu Bakar As-Siddiq, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur
- viii. Masjid al Khairiyah, Taman Sri Gombak, Batu Caves, Selangor

The Jabatan Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan (JAWI) or the Islamic Department of the Federal Territory was approached to identify active masjids (*immaratul masjid*) within the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. These masjids are located in urban area and adjacent to the community/residential areas, and have consistent activities such as talks, program for the community and so on apart from the five congregational prayers, and can cater for over 2,000 congregational members at a time.

By adopting a random sampling approach for each masjid, 50 sets of questionnaire were distributed, resulting in 400 respondents in total. The two primary targeted respondents are parents or guardians that bring their children to the masjid, and congregational member without children/do not bring their children to the masjid. The survey questionnaire has four sections:

- Section A: background of respondents (parent, guardian and other *jamaah* members);
- Section B: opinions of parents/guardian that bring their children activities and spaces at masjid ;
- Section C: views of parents/guardian and other *jamaah* members on educational activities of children at the masjid; and
- Section D: opinions of parents/guardian and other *jamaah* members on the needs of physical space for children at the masjid.

The parents/guardian are expected to answer all sections, except for Section B for other *jamaah*. All these masjids are active in organising programmes for the community. Hence, their schedules of activities were identified to get the respondents from a good crowd in distributing the survey questionnaires. SPSS software was used to analyse the survey data.

ANALYSIS ON JAMAAH PERCEPTION TOWARDS CHILDREN IN MASJID

The presentation of the analysis and discussion is structured following the sequence of the sections in the survey questionnaire.

Respondent's Profile (Section A)

Based on the eight masjids studied, 254 (63.5%) of the respondents are male, while 146 (36.5%) are female (figure 1). This could be due to most of the *jamaah* members that attended the masjid during the study is male.

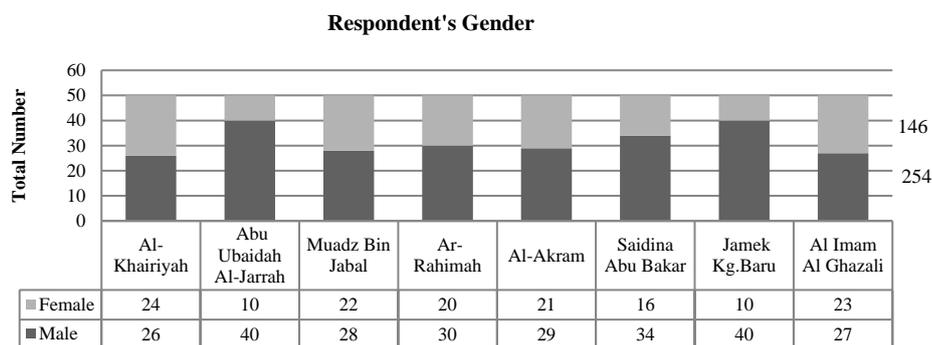


Figure 1 Respondent's gender distribution by masjid

Referring to figure 2, slightly above 55% of the respondents are parents/guardian that bring their children to the masjid, and the majority of them are Malay (91%).

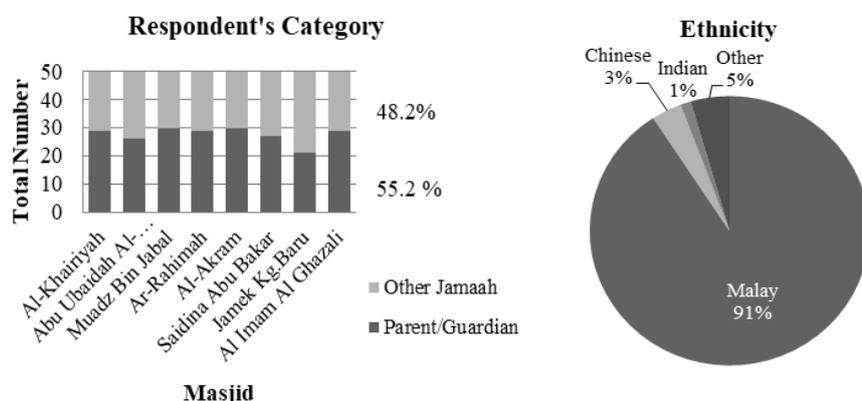


Figure 2 Respondent's Category & Ethnicity

Referring to figure 3, it can be seen that about 64.1% of the respondents are highly qualified with diploma, bachelor degree, master and PhD. 68% of the respondents are employed. They are either working in the public sector, private sector, or self-employed.

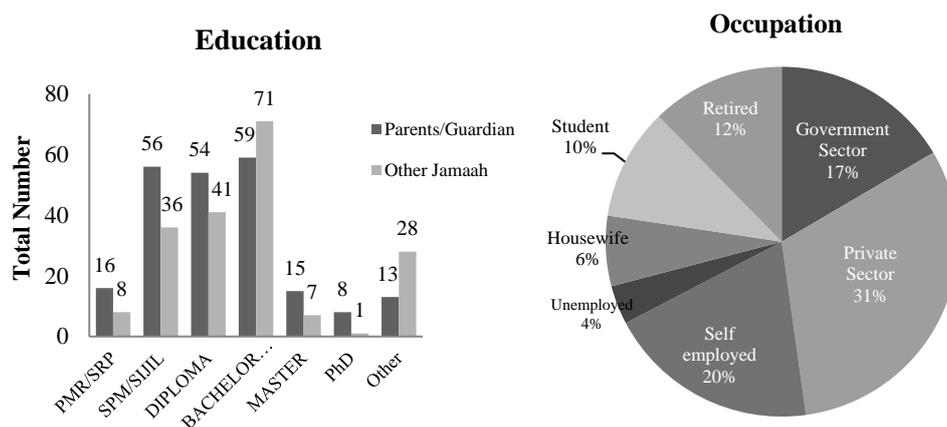


Figure 3 Respondent's educational background and occupation

About 50% of the respondents stay within walking distance from masjid of less than a kilometre (Figure 4). These could be the factor that also encourages the parents/guardian to bring their children to the masjid. From the pie chart, it seems that about 45% of the respondents are reluctant to reveal their household income. Based on those who responded (55%), 33% can be categorised as the

B40 group – with household income below RM3,860 per month as classified by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

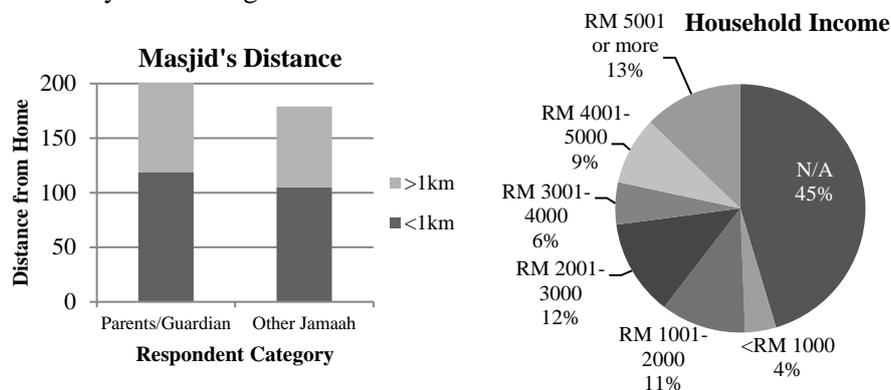


Figure 4 Distance of masjid from home, and household income of the respondents

The Responses from Parents/Guardian on Children and Masjid (Section B)

Based on figure 5, only 1% of the parents/guardian often bring their children to the masjid, 32% stated quite often, while 60% said they occasionally do so. About 65% of the parents with children spent their time in the masjid for less than 2 hours. When investigated further, the month of Ramadhan seems to be their most favoured time to bring children to the masjid. They also seem to choose to bring the children for the five obligatory congregational prayers more than during other activities conducted at the masjid such as the *kulliyah* (religious talk).

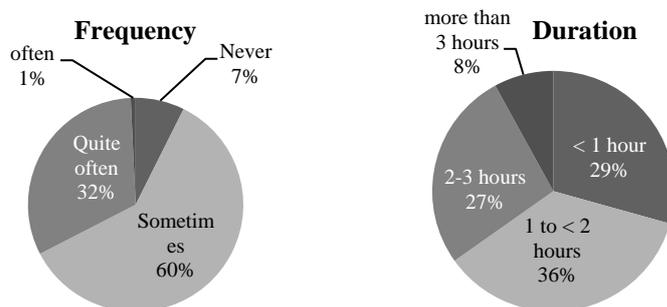


Figure 5 Frequency of bringing children to masjid and duration of stay

The Perceptions of all *Jamaah* towards Children and Masjid (Section C)

There are two parts in the analysis of Section C. The first part is on the perceptions of respondents (parents/guardian and other *jamaah*) on the effect of children's

activities on the *jamaah*; and space for children at the masjid. The second part is on the specific functions of the masjid to children.

Referring to Table 1, 49.3% and 59.5% of the respondents agreed that playing and crying children do distract their focus in the masjid. Hence, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents are in agreement that specific space for children is needed in the masjid (refer to item 4, 5, and 6 of Table 1). Sufficient facilities are deemed crucial to accommodate children while they are in masjid. Nursery seems to be more preferred as the designated space for children (78.6%). 88% of the respondents agreed that *jamaah* comfort is important despite having children together at the masjid.

Table 1 The perceptions of respondents regarding children's presence on their focus and space for children at masjid

No	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Children playing at masjid is distracting the focus of <i>jamaah</i>	9.5%	23.3%	18%	39.8%	9.5%
		32.8%			49.3%	
2	Crying/tantrum children is distracting the focus of <i>jamaah</i>	6.3%	18%	16.3%	45.3%	14.2%
		24.3%			59.5%	
3	Sufficient facilities for children shall ease them while in Masjid	2.8%	3.3%	11.3%	46.8%	36.0%
		6.1%			82.8%	
4	Designated play space for children would ease them while in Masjid	3.0%	6.3%	11.3%	48.3%	31.3%
		9.3%			79.6%	
5	Outdoor play area for children is needed at Masjid	4.3%	18%	15.3%	35.3%	27.3%
		22.3%			62.6%	
6	Nursery at masjid is very helpful for children	3.3%	6.0%	12.3%	47.3%	31.3%
		9.3%			78.6%	
7	The comfort of other <i>jamaah</i> with the presence of children at Masjid is important	2.0%	2.5%	7.5%	48.0%	40.0%
		40.5%			88%	

For the second part regarding specific functions of the masjid to children, based on the analysed responses, it can be seen that more than half of the respondents agreed on the following statements:

- i. Masjid is deemed suitable to function as a place for children's education;
- ii. Masjid should provide educational programmes for children; and
- iii. Children's engagement with activities at masjid can help shape the *akhlaq* (good moral) of the children.

The respondent's perception of suitability of masjid as a place for children's education is in line with the suggestion by Nasih Ulwan (2015), who is

a leading scholar on children's early education from the perspective of Islam, where he mentioned that there are three suggested physical places for children's education, namely the home, the masjid, and the school. The respondents were asked to rank activities that can be conducted by the masjid for the children, and the result is shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6 Educational Programmes for Children at Masjid

Learning to perform the *solat* (prayer) followed by learning the Al Quran were deemed as of high importance. Tuition classes that support children academic was ranked as less important. However, based on the visits to the eight masjids involved, five masjids conduct additional tuition classes to support the academic achievement of the children. These classes received good response from the children and their parents. This result in a way reflects that our society may have a strong perception that a masjid must focus on religious activities first and foremost.

The perceptions of parent/guardian and other jamaah on the needs of Physical Space for Children (Section D)

Based on the survey, it seems that the majority of the respondents agreed that children should be at the corridor of masjid rather than in the nursery and main prayer hall (Figure 7). This suggests that children are welcome to masjid, but the main prayer hall may not be the best place for them as their nature as children (being active) would distract the *jamaah*. On top of that, respondents also suggested some other spaces such as at the back of the main prayer hall as a suitable place for the children so that they can be visually monitored by their parents.

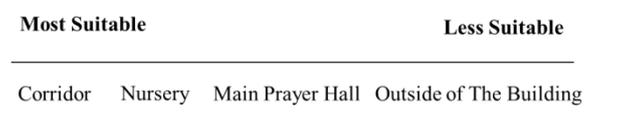


Figure 7 The best place for children in masjid

Looking in general over the eight studied masjids, slightly over 50% of the respondents agreed that the current facilities are sufficient for them to carry any activities together with the children, and 54.3% seem to be satisfied with the facilities (Table 2). It is also interesting to note that about 1/3 of the respondents were uncertain on the sufficiency of the facilities as well as their level of satisfaction as they may not be aware of the said facilities. 56.3% of the

respondents agreed that children should not be in the main prayer hall while *kulliyah* (religious talk) is in progress, while about a quarter of the respondents were uncertain about this. The majority (78.8%) of the respondents agreed that additional space is necessary to be provided for children.

Table 2 The perceptions of respondents on the current facilities and space concerning children at masjid

No	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Facilities provided by the masjid are sufficient to carry out any activities with children	2.3%	14.2%	32.5%	36.3%	14.8%
		16.5%			51.1%	
2	Facilities provided by the masjid are satisfactory to perform any activities with children	1.5%	10.8%	33.5%	41.3%	13.0%
		12.3%			54.3%	
3	Children are less comfortable in the main prayer hall when the <i>Kulliyah</i> is in progress	3.5%	15.5%	24.8%	40.0%	16.3%
		19.0%			56.3%	
4	The masjid has to provide additional space for the children in the masjid	2.5%	8.3%	10.5%	41.8%	37.0%
		10.8%			78.8%	

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study, it can be concluded that the congregational members of masjids are mainly the Malay, with moderate to high academic qualification, employed, and stay nearby masjid. It can also be said that the number of *jamaah* that bring children to the masjid is quite low (when combined between 'occasionally' and 'never' categories, the percentage was about 67%). It would be fascinating to study the reason behind this in order to encourage the provision of children-friendly environment at masjid. Generally, the study found that the presence of children may affect the focus of the *jamaah*. The respondents felt that specific/designated space should be provided for children. Finally, it can be said that the presence of children at masjid is welcome, however particular improvement is needed to ensure the comfort of both children and *jamaah*.

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