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## Building a culture of peace in Muslim community in Southern Thailand through family communication

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### Abstract

This study is to examine role of family communication in Muslim community in southern Thailand in making a culture of peace. Specifically, the objectives are (1) to examine the significance and the role of family communication in the conflict area of southern Thailand; (2) to analyze what type of issues Muslim parents in the area communicate with their children and family members; (3) to examine communication patterns in Muslim families to build a culture of peace; and (4) to analyze how family communication can prevent children from getting involved in violence acts. It is based on interviews with members of families in the southernmost provinces in both Thai language and Melayu dialect. Purposive sampling is used to select the samples of key informants. They are members of seven families; a private Islamic school administrator, an Islamic teacher, a religious leader, a community leader, a government official, a former local politician, and a villager. The findings reveal that selected families improve good lines of communication in family by (1) creating time for talking through meal times, *halaqah*, a gathering in a circle where people sit and come to learn about Islam and Islamic ways, and family activity; (2) being an active listener, the most important skills for parents to get along with children and to improve positive relationships, (3) paying attention to non-verbal messages to get through children feelings and needs, and (4) greeting any members with the Islamic greeting; “*Assalamu Alaikum Wa Rahmatullah*”, peace and God’s mercy be upon you. Most selected parents talk with their children about daily experiences, what is going on, and personal problems to share and to guide children in accordance with real teachings of Islam and Islamic principles. This is the most proper way to build peace environment in family. Effective family communication is an essential factor in guiding children toward proper Islamic principles and avoiding being susceptible to movement in the on-going conflict in the south.

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## 1. Introduction

The security situation in Thailand's southernmost provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and some parts of Songkhla has been deteriorating after separatist insurgents attacked the army's Fourth Engineering Battalion in Narathiwat on January 4, 2004. Around 400 weapons were stolen, and four Thai soldiers were killed. In addition, 20 schools were torched in simultaneous arson attacks across the province on the same day. It is believed that the National Revolutionary Front-Coordinate (Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Coordinasi, BRN-C) was involved in this deadly. Due to these groups' clandestine and decentralized nature, there was a lack of information concerning their political demands because it has never openly articulated its political objectives [1]. However, based on existing evidence, it was clear that they were trying to achieve independence, or at least some form of autonomy from the Thai state. Toward this goal, the armed insurgency groups have used violence aimed at Thai authorities, Thai-Buddhists, and Melayu-Muslims who were suspected of cooperating with Thai authorities. In their mobilization efforts, armed insurgency groups have infiltrated elementary Islamic schools (*tadika*), traditional ponoh and private Islamic schools to recruit the foot soldiers that sustain the insurgency [1]. Disguised religious teachers, who functioned as interpersonal media, persuaded young people to accept distorted principles of Islamic teachings and ultra-nationalist versions of Melayu-Muslim history.

Over the past years, the Thai government has tried to solve the problems in the South by cooperating with people in both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Many development projects were carried out to improve the quality life of people. Some of which were targeted at children and youth by giving them opportunities to learn and share their experiences with those from other parts of Thailand through cultural exchange programs in order to broaden their minds and horizon. This helped create an atmosphere of better understanding to one another and finally peace among them. These youngsters, therefore, will expand this to others to help bring peace to today's society, or at least share better understanding to their family and friends.

The conflict in the South has been complicating and threatening the lives of the people in the region. Over the years, this on-going conflict has made people in the southernmost provinces feel unsecured and concerned about their security. In fact, they wanted to live peacefully in their homeland. Peace belongs to individuals; everyone can make it real and tangible in everyday lives and conversation. A culture of peace could be possible, starting from family, the smallest unit in society, where a group of people should be able to communicate to each other through effective family communication. It, thus, is in everybody hands.

## 2. Why study family communication

Individuals cannot deny the importance of family communication in today's society. This is a means through which verbal and non-verbal messages and information are exchanged between parents, children and other family members to express their needs, feelings, love, admiration, and concerns to one another. It creates an atmosphere of better understanding among family members, which will eventually bring about a strong, healthy, and peaceful relationship [2]. Furthermore, good communication between parents, children, and family members is a key to build a culture of peace.

According to the 1978 UN Declaration on the Preparation of Societies for Life in Peace, a culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior, and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups, and nations.

In the conflict area of southern Thailand, we can create and expand a culture of peace in small ways in our everyday lives, starting from communication within family, especially through effective communication, most particularly face-to-face communication, which is the most powerful interaction in family. This particular model of communication occurs in everyday family conversation, and it is not only a relationship but also an atmosphere that creates better understanding and peaceful relationship among family members.

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