

Gen-Z Muslims and Interfaith Interaction: An Exploratory Study Among Youth in Rante Besi Village, Dairi

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Abstract

This research aims to explore social interactions among Gen-Z teenagers in Rante Besi Village, Gunung Sitember Sub-district, Dairi Regency. The method used in this research is a case study with a qualitative approach. Primary data was obtained from interviews with a number of religious leaders, teenagers, and the local community, while secondary data was collected through literature review. The results show that social interactions between teenagers, especially those involving friends from different religious backgrounds, have an influence on the understanding and practice of religion among teenagers. The implication of this finding is the need for families and schools to play a more active role in providing attention and support for the practice of religion among adolescents, as well as creating space for strengthening spiritual values.

Keywords: *Gen-Z Muslim; Association; Interfaith; Among Youth Rante Besi*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi interaksi sosial di kalangan remaja Gen-Z di Desa Rante Besi, Kecamatan Gunung Sitember, Kabupaten Dairi. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah studi kasus dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Data primer diperoleh dari wawancara dengan sejumlah tokoh agama, remaja, dan masyarakat setempat, sedangkan data sekunder dikumpulkan melalui kajian pustaka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pergaulan sosial antar remaja, terutama yang melibatkan teman-teman dari latar belakang agama berbeda, memiliki pengaruh terhadap pemahaman dan praktik agama di kalangan remaja. Implikasi dari temuan ini adalah perlunya peran keluarga dan sekolah yang lebih aktif dalam memberikan perhatian dan dukungan terhadap pengamalan agama di kalangan remaja, serta menciptakan ruang untuk penguatan nilai-nilai spiritualitas.

Kata Kunci: *Gen-Z Muslim; Pergaulan; Lintas Iman; Among Youth Rante Besi*

Introduction

In an increasingly complex multicultural society landscape, the piety of the Gen-Z generation is an important issue that needs to be examined. Gen-Z lives in an era of information disclosure and cross-cultural interaction that is more fluid than previous generations. In the midst of the current of religious, ethnic, and global values pluralism that continues to shape their social identities, the practice of piety is no longer an exclusive domain constructed only through formal religious institutions, but also through associations, digital communities, and lifestyle trends. In a multicultural society, the space of Gen-Z's piety is not monolithic, but is formed through dynamic social relations. Righteousness is not only understood as a vertical dimension between humans and God, but also a horizontal dimension related to how individuals interact socially in diversity (Hasanah & Huriyah, 2022).

Associations and social environments have proven to have a great influence on the formation of religious values and the expression of piety. A multireligious and heterogeneous environment allows for the assimilation of values that sometimes do not fully support the continuity of religious practices consistently. It is in this context that a new challenge arises for Gen-Z Muslims in maintaining the integrity of their piety in the midst of a very fluid and egalitarian social interaction. When religious values are no longer the only moral reference in society, there is a shift in the meaning of the practice of worship and piety itself. Not infrequently, religious values are considered a personal choice, not a collectively binding spiritual obligation (Imam Rodin et al., 2023).

This phenomenon is evident in the social reality of Gen-Z in Rante Besi Village, Gunung Sitember District, Dairi Regency, North Sumatra Province. In this region, social interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim adolescents takes place intensely, especially in social spaces in multicultural community interactions. The impact of this interfaith association often causes a decrease in awareness of the obligation of worship among Gen-Z Muslims. Some of them often abandon prayer, have a low understanding of religion, and are not even able to distinguish between religious values and popular culture that they consume on a daily basis. This phenomenon shows a shift in values that demand a more contextual analytical approach in understanding the piety of the younger generation in the midst of a plurality of society.

A number of previous studies have discussed the dynamics of adolescent piety in the context of a pluralistic society, such as Nurhayati's (2020) research which examines the transformation of religious values in the millennial generation in the context of social media, or the study of Syamsul Huda (2022) which highlights the shift in religious practices of young Muslims in big cities. However, studies that specifically raise the local context of rural areas, especially in areas such as Rante Besi with distinctive multicultural patterns, are still minimal. Therefore, this study aims to describe how the piety and social interaction of Gen-Z Muslims are

formed in the multicultural society in Rante Besi Village, as well as identify the social factors that influence their religious understanding and practice.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type. This approach was chosen because it was able to reveal in depth the phenomenon of piety and social interaction of Gen-Z Muslims in the context of a multicultural society in Rante Besi Village, Gunung Sitember District, Dairi Regency. Case studies allow researchers to understand the social dynamics, symbolic meanings, and subjective experiences of individuals in culturally and religiously specific environments.

The data collection techniques in this study were carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were made to see firsthand the patterns of social interaction of Gen-Z Muslim adolescents with the surrounding environment, including their involvement in religious and social activities. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with a number of key informants, consisting of religious leaders, community leaders, and Muslim teenagers living in Rante Besi Village. This interview aims to gain a first-hand perspective on the changing patterns of piety and the influence of interfaith associations on their religious practices. Meanwhile, documentation is carried out on various written sources such as records of village religious activities, religious education documents, and social media used by teenagers as a space for their religious expression.

Primary data in this study was sourced from direct interviews with informants in the field, while secondary data was obtained through literature studies that included theses, journal articles, and books relevant to the topics of piety, social interaction, and multicultural society. The collected data was analyzed through three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction is done by filtering the information that is most relevant to the focus of the research. The presentation of data was carried out in the form of a descriptive narrative that described the patterns of findings in the field. The final stage is the drawing of conclusions, where the researcher identifies the main findings and provides an interpretation of the meaning that emerges from the data.

This qualitative approach with the design of this case study allows researchers to dive into the complexity of the social realities faced by Gen-Z Muslims in a multicultural environment, while describing the transformation of their religious values in the context of interfaith association (Jamaludin et al., 2024).

Results and Discussion

Environmental Conditions of Rante Besi Village, Dairi

The environment is an important element in shaping a person's religious character and behavior, including among teenagers or known

as Generation Z. In Rante Besi Village, Gunung Sitember District, Dairi Regency, the surrounding environment plays a significant role in influencing the religious practices of adolescents. This village is located in a cool and beautiful mountainous area, with a natural scenery that is still preserved and the majority of people work as farmers. This natural beauty, philosophically, can actually be the entrance for the growth of spiritual awareness and ecological piety. However, the reality is that the piety of the young generation in this village has not developed optimally (Mutaqin et al., 2024).

The main factors that affect the weak religious practice among Gen-Z in Rante Besi Village are the lack of attention from family, especially parents, and the lack of support from the surrounding social environment. Adolescents in this village tend to be more interested in non-religious activities such as playing outside the home, interacting freely on social media, or engaging in activities that are considered personally enjoyable, but not necessarily in line with the religious values they adhere. This shows that unsupportive parenting and social environment can hinder the growth of good religious understanding and practice.

One of the concrete obstacles faced by Muslim teenagers in this village is the distance of their residence which is quite far from mosques or other means of worship, thus affecting their level of participation in religious activities. This geographical condition is exacerbated by the lack of initiative of the adult community and religious leaders in embracing and fostering adolescents in religious activities. On the other hand, social interaction between adherents of different religions in a multicultural society such as Rante Besi Village demands tolerance, but it can also give rise to the dilemma of religious identity, especially for Muslim teenagers who do not have a strong understanding of religion.

In the context of a multicultural society such as in Rante Besi Village, harmonious social interaction is very important to be maintained. But this harmonization should not blur the boundaries of each individual's religious identity and responsibility. Collective awareness to respect each other's differences in religion and belief must be accompanied by efforts to strengthen the understanding and practice of religion among adolescents, so that piety is not only personal, but can also form constructive social ethics in a pluralistic society.

The norms and values that apply in the community of Rante Besi Village have an important role in shaping the religious orientation of adolescents. However, the reality shows that some people have not shown collective concern for the religious development of the younger generation. When the community does not provide real support for religious activities, adolescents lose motivation and tend to stay away from religious practices (Aprilianto et al., 2025).

Some informants said that the community in Rante Besi Village consists of various religious backgrounds, where Muslims are a minority group. This condition indirectly affects the religious spirit of Muslim teenagers. In this environment, teenagers are more likely to blend in with

friends who do not have interest in Islamic religious activities, so they also become less interested in participating in recitations, congregational prayers, or other spiritual activities.

Furthermore, the attitude of some people who are less active or not even involved in religious activities has weakened the spiritual atmosphere in the village. This creates a domino effect: when the community is not present as role models or supporters, adolescents lose their role models and feel that they do not get a social space that supports the practice of their religion.

The Interaction of Righteousness in the Family

The family environment in Rante Besi Village, Gunung Sitember District, Dairi Regency, shows a role that is still minimal in the formation of adolescent piety, especially among Gen-Z Muslims. Many families tend to give their children too much freedom without strong supervision or direction in religious aspects. As a result, adolescents grow up in an atmosphere that is less conducive to the formation of religious character. The neglect of family responsibilities as the primary center of education makes adolescents more vulnerable to external influences, especially from popular culture and the free lifestyle they access through social media.

In observations and interviews conducted, it was found that most parents are not actively involved in guiding their children in religious activities, such as attending recitations, participating in mosque activities, or simply accompanying children in understanding Islamic values. Some of the speakers admitted that parents prefer to let their children busy with activities outside the home, even when these activities are not in line with Islamic values. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the distance from home to a place of worship that is quite far away, which further reduces the enthusiasm of adolescents to engage in religious activities.

The lifestyle of teenagers in this village also reflects the influence of a very strong foreign culture. Many of them are more concerned with appearance and trends of modern lifestyles than practicing religious teachings, such as closing the awrah or keeping prayer times. In practice, the permissive attitude of families toward the freedom of their children accelerates the process of weakening piety. Religion is no longer a priority in the family, and this has an impact on the mindset of teenagers who consider religion as a personal matter that does not need to be supervised or directed.

The Interaction of Piety in the School Environment

The influence of the school environment and peers on the religious practices of Gen-Z adolescents in Rante Besi Village is very significant and is one of the main factors that shape—or even weaken—their piety. Findings in the field show that many Muslim teenagers in the village live and interact in a social environment, the majority of whom are from non-Muslim circles. This situation makes them more likely to be influenced by

the values and lifestyle of their friends, which do not always support the spirit of religiosity.

Teenagers at this age are indeed in the phase of finding their identity, so the desire to explore, try new things, and be accepted by social groups is very strong. In conditions like this, peers become the main reference, often even exceeding the influence of family and teachers. When their friendship environment does not emphasize religious values, the practice of worship such as prayer, reciting, and participating in Islamic activities tends to be neglected. Some of the speakers mentioned that many teenagers prefer to play or gather with non-Muslim friends, so they forget to carry out religious obligations.

This phenomenon was strengthened by the confession of one of the teenagers who admitted that he often missed prayer time because he was too engrossed in playing with his non-Muslim friends. He also said that the lack of encouragement from the family and the weak attention to religious education are additional causes that make them not feel important to practice Islamic teachings consistently. This situation illustrates how vulnerable adolescents' faith is when they are in a social environment that does not support religious practices (Smith, 2022).

Analysis of the Piety of Gen-Z Muslims

The condition of religious practice of adolescents in Rante Besi Village, it can be concluded that there are two main categories that affect the weak religious awareness among adolescents, namely internal factors and external factors. These two factors interact with each other and strengthen each other, resulting in social dynamics that help shape the religious character of the adolescents in the village (Hidayat et al., 2023).

Internally, teenagers in Rante Besi Village are in a phase of searching for their identity, a period of psychological transition in which they question many things, including religious values that have been introduced since childhood. They do not have a complete and deep understanding of the teachings of Islam and its role in daily life. This lack of a strong understanding causes their motivation to carry out religious practices to be weak, even tending to ignore them.

In addition, the unstable emotional state of adolescents and high curiosity drives make them easily influenced by things that are contrary to religious values. When they see that their peers do not practice religious teachings, or even when they feel that their surroundings do not consider religion important, they tend to follow the trend. This phenomenon shows that adolescents do not have enough spiritual resilience and critical reasoning to sort out positive and negative influences in their social lives (Hasanah & Huriyah, 2023).

Meanwhile, from the external side, there are three main dominant factors: family, peers, and community.

First, the family environment is no longer the main place in fostering religious values. Many parents in this village tend to let their children act

as freely as possible without adequate spiritual direction. Parental role models are also minimal, so children grow up without strong religious guidance. In some cases, even families seem apathetic to children's religious behavior, including allowing children to dress openly or not participating in religious activities without reprimand.

Second, peer influence is huge. Because there are fewer Muslim teenagers in this village, the youths are more dominant with non-Muslim friends. Although it is not always negative, in this context, the values of religiosity that should be nurtured together become marginalized. The excitement of playing and interacting interfaith without a solid understanding of Islam actually makes some teenagers neglect worship, such as prayer, or are not interested in attending religious events.

Third, societal norms and values in general do not reflect support for the growth of adolescent religiosity. Village communities do not have a social system or culture that encourages the active involvement of the younger generation in religious activities. The lack of social example, weak spiritual solidarity between citizens, and the lack of interfaith collaboration that encourages active tolerance and religious development among adolescents, are the reasons why adolescents feel that religion is not a priority in their lives.

The religious practices of adolescents cannot be separated from the socio-cultural and spiritual ecological context in which they grow up and interact. In particular, the findings in Rante Besi Village show a disconnect between the normative religious value system and the practical reality of adolescent life. This creates a religious vacuum that is not adequately filled by social actors such as family, school, peers, and society.

The first implication that can be drawn is the need to reconstruct the role of the family as the main agent in religious education. When families are permissive, do not give control, and do not set an example, then adolescents lose their religious orientation. This means that in the context of a semi-secular society such as in Rante Besi Village, the role of the family no longer functions as a source of value, but only as a biological entity. This has an impact on the fading of moral authority in the lives of adolescents.

The second implication touches on adolescents' dependence on the social environment—especially peers and dominant communities—in the process of internalizing religious values. In the context of a religiously and culturally heterogeneous society such as Rante Besi Village, the religious identity of Muslim teenagers has become increasingly vulnerable. Without strong theological debriefing, they are more easily dragged into a lifestyle that does not represent Islamic values. This demands a community-based approach to social intervention, where the formation of active and inclusive groups of Muslim youth is essential to balance environmental influences.

The third implication is related to the absence of the collective role of the community in shaping the religious ecosystem. In Bourdieu's theory

of habitus, a person's social actions are shaped by repetitive social structures and become habits. If society does not build a religious habitus—through the organization of activities, youth empowerment, or social example—then religious spaces in the daily lives of adolescents will be replaced by popular values that are not always compatible with Islamic values.

Therefore, conceptually, this research emphasizes the importance of building a holistic religious ecology—involving the family as the first educator, the school as the former of cognitive structures, peers as spaces for social actualization, and society as an ecosystem of values. Without this integration, the process of internalizing religious values will always be sporadic and easily replaced by external influences.

This implication leads to one important message: that the strengthening of adolescents' religious practices cannot be left to individuals alone, but is a collective responsibility that requires social and policy designs that favor the formation of adolescents' religious character, particularly in areas that are sociologically vulnerable to the marginalization of religious values.

Conclusions

The conclusion of this study shows that interfaith social interaction among Gen-Z adolescents in Rante Besi Village is strongly influenced by social relationships between adolescents. This association is formed through two main factors, namely the family and school environment. A family environment that pays less attention to adolescents' religious practices contributes to a lack of religious motivation in adolescents, while schools and peer environments, especially in multicultural contexts, magnify the impact of interfaith interactions. Most teens tend to be influenced by their friends who have different religious backgrounds, which in turn influences their religious attitudes and behaviors.

The implication of these findings is the importance of the role of family and school in shaping adolescents' religious behavior. The family as the first environment that forms religious values must be more supportive and direct adolescents in carrying out religious teachings. Likewise, schools need to create an atmosphere that supports a deeper understanding and practice of religion, as well as strengthening the values of tolerance between religious communities. Better coaching in these two environments can strengthen the social piety of adolescents and form a generation that is more aware of the importance of practicing religion, even in the context of a multicultural society.

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