



ANALYSIS OF THE TOLERANCE ATTITUDE OF CENTRAL ACEH SOCIETY TOWARDS RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

Muhammad Riza¹, Syibrán Mulasi²

¹IAIN Takengon, Aceh Tengah, Aceh, Indonesia, ²STAIN Teungku Di Rundeng Meulaboh, Indonesia

Email: rizajundana@gmail.com¹, syibrán@staindirundeng.ac.id¹

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the attitude of Central Aceh society towards religious differences. Central Aceh is a region with significant religious diversity, with the majority of the population adhering to Islam. However, religious differences can also be found within the Central Aceh society, such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. This study employs a quantitative approach by collecting data through a survey conducted among 300 respondents representing the Central Aceh community. The survey instrument used is a reliable measurement scale of tolerance attitudes. The obtained data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The analysis results show that, overall, the Central Aceh society exhibits a relatively high level of tolerance towards religious differences. The majority of respondents express respect for the right of every individual to choose and practice their own religion. However, there are several interesting findings regarding the factors influencing tolerance attitudes. Factors such as education, interreligious interaction experiences, and understanding of human rights significantly influence the tolerance attitudes of the Central Aceh society. This research contributes significantly to the understanding of tolerance attitudes in the Central Aceh community and provides insights for stakeholders, including the government and educational institutions, in developing programs that promote more inclusive and respectful tolerance attitudes among communities with different religious backgrounds. The policy implications derived from this research are expected to enhance harmony and inter-religious coexistence in Central Aceh, as well as foster sustainable social development processes.

Keywords: Tolerance Attitude, Central Aceh Society, Religious Differences

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis sikap toleransi masyarakat Aceh Tengah terhadap perbedaan agama. Aceh Tengah merupakan daerah dengan keragaman agama yang signifikan, dengan mayoritas penduduk yang menganut agama Islam. Namun, perbedaan agama juga dapat ditemukan di dalam masyarakat Aceh Tengah, seperti agama Kristen, Hindu. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan mengumpulkan data melalui survei yang dilakukan kepada 300 responden yang mewakili masyarakat Aceh Tengah. Instrumen survei yang digunakan adalah skala pengukuran sikap toleransi yang telah teruji keandalannya. Data yang diperoleh dianalisis menggunakan metode statistik deskriptif dan inferensial. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa secara umum, masyarakat Aceh Tengah menunjukkan sikap toleransi yang cukup tinggi terhadap perbedaan agama. Mayoritas responden menyatakan bahwa mereka menghormati hak setiap individu untuk memilih dan mengamalkan agamanya sendiri. Namun, terdapat beberapa temuan menarik terkait faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi sikap toleransi. Faktor-faktor seperti pendidikan, pengalaman interaksi antaragama, dan pemahaman tentang hak asasi manusia memiliki pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap sikap toleransi masyarakat Aceh Tengah. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi penting dalam pemahaman tentang sikap toleransi di masyarakat Aceh Tengah dan memberikan wawasan bagi pihak terkait, termasuk pemerintah dan lembaga pendidikan, dalam mengembangkan program-program yang mempromosikan sikap toleransi yang lebih inklusif dan saling menghormati di antara masyarakat dengan latar belakang agama yang berbeda. Implikasi kebijakan yang dihasilkan dari penelitian ini diharapkan dapat meningkatkan harmoni dan kerukunan antaragama di Aceh Tengah, serta mendorong proses pembangunan sosial yang berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Sikap toleransi, Masyarakat Aceh Tengah, Perbedaan Agama

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INTRODUCTION

The community in Central Aceh lives in a significant reality of diversity, both in terms of ethnicity and religion (Riza, 2019). In terms of ethnicity, the Central Aceh community is predominantly composed of the Gayo ethnic group, who are the indigenous people of this region, while also encompassing other ethnic groups such as Acehnese, Javanese, Minangkabau, Batak, Sundanese, and others. Demographic data on religious affiliation indicates that the majority of the population practices Islam, with 204,853 individuals, followed by approximately 400 Christians, 157 Hindus, and 319 Catholics among the total population of 205,730 individuals (Dukcapil Aceh, 2015).

Central Aceh has its specificity as part of the Aceh province, which implements Islamic Sharia-based on Law No. 11 of 2006 (Riza, 2020). However, regions with a dominant Islamic population are often associated with low religious tolerance indices, leading to stereotypes that may influence perceptions of the Central Aceh society (Tohri et al., 2021). Several cases of religious intolerance have occurred in Aceh, such as the burning of Christian places of worship in Aceh Singkil (Setiawan & Amal, 2016). Such cases raise concerns and questions regarding the general tolerance attitude of the Aceh society and Central Aceh as an inseparable part in terms of religious differences.

Nevertheless, previous studies have indicated the existence of harmonious social relations among religious communities in several areas of Central Aceh. For instance, a study conducted by Amrita (2020) titled "Beware of Intolerance Threats: Interreligious Relations in Central Aceh" found that social relations among religious communities in Takengon were harmonious, characterized by associative relationships that foster cooperation and mutual assistance among individuals of different religious backgrounds. Furthermore, a study by Sari (2020) titled "Interreligious Social Interactions in the Lut Tawar District of Central Aceh" demonstrated that interfaith relations in the Lut Tawar district of Central Aceh were amicable without conflicts.

However, these two studies were limited to specific areas such as the Lut Tawar District. Therefore, there is a need to involve other regions in Central Aceh to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of tolerance attitudes within the entire Central Aceh area. Additionally, other studies have focused on interfaith interactions and positive social relationships. However, it is important to expand the research variables by considering other factors that can influence the tolerance attitudes of the Central Aceh community, such as education level, religious understanding, interfaith interaction experiences, and socioeconomic factors.

By incorporating these variables, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of tolerance attitudes within the broader context of Central Aceh. This is crucial to identify potential conflicts or obstacles that may arise and to design effective strategies for strengthening tolerance attitudes within the community. The objective of this research is to analyze the tolerance attitude of the Central Aceh society towards religious differences. With a deep understanding of existing tolerance attitudes, it is expected to identify influencing factors and formulate effective measures to strengthen tolerance attitudes within the Central Aceh community. This research holds significant value as it offers new insights into interreligious harmony and the level of religious tolerance within the Central Aceh society. The findings of this study are expected to

contribute to efforts in building a harmonious society that respects and upholds religious tolerance values in Central Aceh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tolerance in the Context of Religion and Society

Definition of Tolerance

Tolerance is a concept that refers to an open-minded attitude, appreciation, and recognition of differences, whether in terms of religion, ethnicity, culture, or political views (Setyabudi, 2020). In a social context, tolerance involves the ability to coexist peacefully, respect individual freedoms, and acknowledge the rights of every individual to hold different beliefs and values (Nugroho, 2016). Furthermore, tolerance is a mindset that is inclusive, appreciative, and accepting of differences as an inseparable part of human life (Machali, 2013). Tolerance is based on the understanding that pluralism is inevitable in an increasingly global and complex society (Dzakie, 2014). Tolerance is not just passive acceptance but also includes an active stance in promoting social harmony and preventing conflicts (Atmanto & Muzayanah, 2020).

In the context of religion, religious tolerance refers to the ability of individuals or groups to respect and honor the beliefs, practices, and religious freedoms of others without considering them as threats or enemies (Sumbulah & Nurjanah, 2013). Religious tolerance involves a willingness to share common space and interact with people of different religious faiths while showing mutual respect and appreciation (Djollong & Akbar, 2019).

The importance of tolerance in a multicultural society lies in its ability to create harmony, reduce conflicts, and build cooperation among individuals and groups with diverse backgrounds (Eko & Putranto, 2019). Tolerance plays a crucial role in fostering mutually beneficial relationships and creating an inclusive and just environment for all members of society (Harto, 2014). However, tolerance does not mean disregarding differences or homogenizing all beliefs and values. True tolerance involves open dialogue, mutual understanding, and appreciation of differences while upholding fundamental human values such as justice, equality, and respect for human rights (Baidhawiy, 2005).

In the context of Central Aceh society, understanding tolerance becomes crucial given the existing religious and ethnic diversity. It is important for the community to be aware of the significance of a tolerant attitude in maintaining social harmony and preventing potential conflicts arising from religious differences. Thus, understanding and implementing the values of tolerance become integral parts of building an inclusive, respectful, and just society in Central Aceh.

Factors Influencing Religious Tolerance Attitudes in Society

Religious tolerance attitude refers to a positive and respectful view of the beliefs and practices of other religions (Casram, 2016). Understanding the factors that influence religious tolerance attitudes in society is essential for promoting interfaith harmony and minimizing religious conflicts. The following literature review will explore several key factors that influence religious tolerance attitudes in society. The factors influencing religious tolerance attitudes in society are as follows:

1. Education Factor

Education plays a crucial role in shaping religious tolerance attitudes in society. Research shows that individuals with higher levels of education tend to have more tolerant attitudes towards other religions. Inclusive education, emphasizing a deep understanding of various religious beliefs, can help reduce prejudice and enhance interfaith understanding (Supriatin & Nasution, 2017)

2. Personal Experience Factor

Personal experiences also contribute to shaping religious tolerance attitudes. Direct interactions with members of other faiths, such as through friendships, neighbors, or colleagues, can change individuals' perceptions of other religions and foster more inclusive attitudes. Research indicates that positive and sustained interfaith contact can increase the level of religious tolerance in society (Santoso et al., 2022)

3. Media and Communication Factor

Media and communication play a significant role in shaping religious tolerance attitudes. Accurate and positive representations of different religions in the media can reduce stereotypes and interreligious prejudice. Conversely, biased reporting or promotion of religious conflicts can reinforce intolerance. The use of social media can also influence religious tolerance attitudes, as it facilitates dialogue and the exchange of ideas among individuals from different religious backgrounds

4. Social and Contextual Factors

Social and contextual factors, such as population diversity and government policies related to religion, also impact religious tolerance attitudes in society. More multicultural and multi-religious societies tend to have higher levels of religious tolerance. Additionally, policies that support equality and religious freedom are crucial in creating an environment conducive to religious tolerance attitudes (Yunus, 2017).

By understanding these factors, policymakers and stakeholders can develop effective strategies to promote religious tolerance in society. Addressing educational gaps, fostering positive personal interactions, promoting accurate media representations, and creating inclusive social and contextual environments are essential for cultivating a society that embraces religious diversity and fosters harmonious coexistence.

The Importance of Tolerance in Multicultural Society

A multicultural society is a form of society consisting of diverse ethnic groups, religions, cultures, and social backgrounds (Munadlir, 2016). In this context, tolerance becomes crucial in maintaining harmony and balance among the members of such diverse communities. There are several key pillars that underpin the importance of tolerance in a multicultural society. Firstly, mutual respect and appreciation for differences are fundamental in building harmonious relationships among community members. Secondly, understanding and knowledge of the culture, religion, and traditions of others help overcome stereotypes and prejudices that may arise. Thirdly, open communication and constructive dialogue play a significant role in creating an inclusive environment that enables the growth and development of all community members (Sirait, 2017).

Tolerance attitudes in a multicultural society have significant benefits. Firstly, it enhances social harmony and stability because a society that accepts differences tends to avoid unnecessary conflicts and tensions. Secondly, it enriches culture and learning as

interactions with diverse individuals present opportunities to learn about different traditions, languages, cuisines, arts, and values. Thirdly, it promotes cooperation and innovation because an inclusive and tolerant society encourages collaboration among its members, resulting in more creative and innovative thoughts and ideas (Liliweri, 2005).

Although the importance of tolerance is acknowledged, there are challenges in its implementation in a multicultural society. One of them is the emergence of prejudice and discrimination due to a lack of understanding and knowledge about specific groups. Additionally, cultural conflicts and differences in values can also be barriers to achieving true tolerance. Therefore, education, awareness, and the promotion of tolerant values become crucial in addressing these challenges (Suryawan & Danial, 2016).

Governments and social institutions play a significant role in promoting tolerance attitudes in a multicultural society. Governments can implement policies that encourage inclusion, combat discrimination, and educate the public about the importance of tolerance. Social institutions, such as non-governmental organizations and educational institutions, can organize programs that build awareness, facilitate dialogue, and foster collaboration among different groups (Malleleang et al., 2022).

In a multicultural society, tolerant attitudes form an essential foundation for creating harmony, understanding, and cooperation among diverse community members. Tolerance plays a key role in respecting differences, overcoming prejudice, and promoting social inclusion. In the efforts to achieve a more tolerant society, education, awareness, and collaboration between the government and social institutions have a vital role. With a strong culture of tolerance, a multicultural society can become an empowered, innovative, and harmonious environment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative approach to analyze the attitude of Central Aceh society towards religious differences. A survey method is used to gather data from respondents who are interviewed using a structured questionnaire. The sample for this study is selected using a simple random sampling technique. The total number of respondents involved in this research is 300 individuals from various ethnic and religious backgrounds in Central Aceh. This sample is considered sufficiently representative to represent the community in that region.

The researchers used a structured questionnaire to collect data, consisting of two main sections. The initial section focused on obtaining demographic information from the respondents, including age, gender, education, and religious background. Randomly selected respondents from the target population were approached in public locations such as shopping centers, places of worship, and government offices in Central Aceh. They were provided with an explanation of the research objectives and invited to participate voluntarily. The questionnaire included a dedicated section aimed at assessing the participants' attitudes towards religious differences. Here, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from "Strongly Agree" (SA) to "Strongly Disagree" (SD), along with "Agree" (A), "Neutral" (N), and "Disagree" (D). To facilitate analysis, scores were assigned to each response category: 5 for SA, 4 for A, 3 for N, 2 for D, and 1 for SD.

This scoring system enabled the researchers to quantify and standardize the collected responses, enabling statistical analysis and comparisons among different respondents and demographic groups. Throughout the data collection process, the researchers visited public locations in Central Aceh, interacting with potential respondents and providing guidance on how to complete the questionnaire. Assistance was offered if required, ensuring clarity and accuracy in the respondents' answers. By incorporating the Likert scale and subsequent scoring system into the data collection process, the researchers gained comprehensive insights into the tolerance attitudes towards religious differences in Central Aceh. This approach facilitated a systematic and in-depth analysis of the data, allowing for meaningful conclusions and recommendations based on the study findings.

The collected data was analyzed using statistical techniques, specifically employing descriptive analysis to provide a general overview of the tolerance attitudes of the Central Aceh society towards religious differences. Descriptive analysis involved summarizing and presenting the data in a way that was easily understood, allowing for the examination of key characteristics and patterns within the data set. This approach provided valuable insights into the attitudes towards religious differences in Central Aceh, using statistical measures such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. Additionally, visual representations were used to depict the distribution of responses. By employing descriptive analysis, the research team aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the tolerance attitudes in Central Aceh towards religious differences, enabling them to draw reliable conclusions and provide informed recommendations based on the findings of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Based on the data obtained from a number of surveyed respondents, it is proven that the majority of Central Aceh society is able to accept the presence of individuals or certain groups that differ from them. This is apparent from the data reflecting the interfaith tolerance attitudes presented in the following chart:

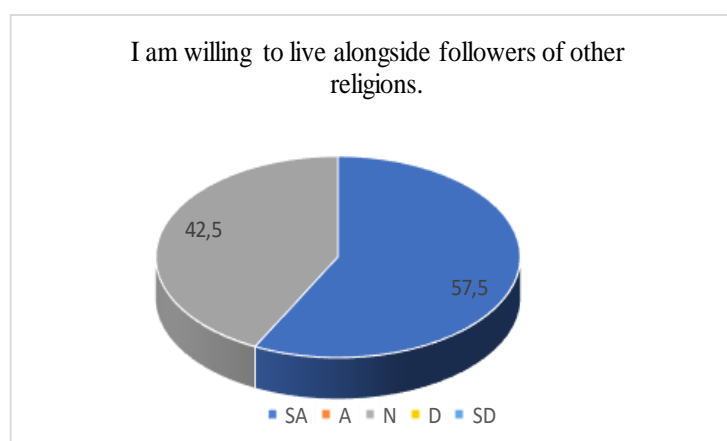


Chart 1. Environmental tolerance

Based on the diagram above, it can be understood that the community in Central Aceh does not have an issue with the religion practiced by their neighbors. They are able to live together harmoniously. Out of the 300 respondents who filled out the

questionnaire, 57.5 percent strongly agree (SA) with the statement "I am willing to live in harmony with people of different religions." Meanwhile, 42.5 percent of the total respondents showed a neutral stance.

Furthermore, the attitudes tested were related to the desire to interact with individuals of different religions. Based on the data obtained, out of the 300 respondents tested in this regard, 50 percent stated a strong agreement (SA) with the desire to interact with followers of other religions, while another 45 percent expressed agreement (A), and the remaining 5 percent remained neutral. This can be seen in the diagram below:

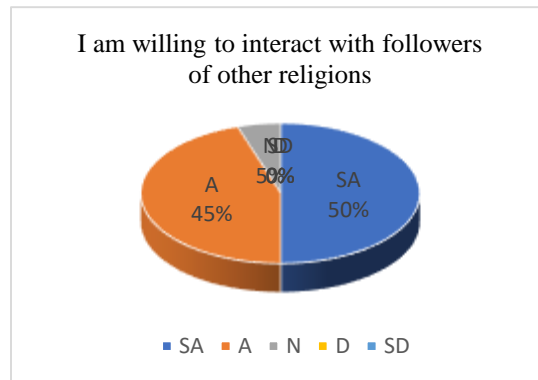


Chart 2. Interfaith interaction

When the respondents were asked about their attitude towards the possibility of befriending people of different religions, in this case, 17.5 percent stated a strong agreement (SA), while another 50 percent expressed agreement (A), 25 percent remained neutral (N), and the remaining 7.5 percent disagreed (D). This can be seen in the diagram below:

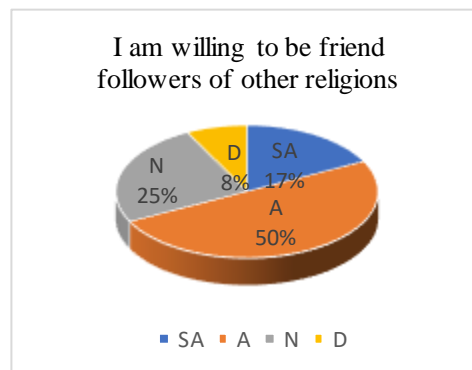


Chart 3. Interfaith friendship

In relation to the respondents' willingness to refrain from discriminatory actions towards individuals of different religions, the data reveals that 30 percent strongly agree (SA), 50 percent agree (A), and the remaining 15 percent remain neutral. This information is illustrated in the diagram below:

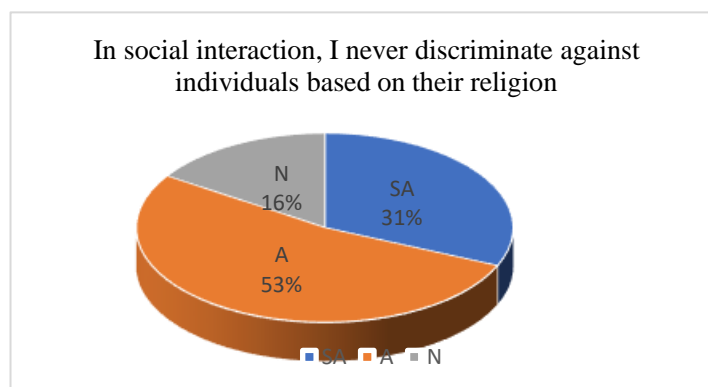


Chart 4. Non-discriminative

When the respondents were asked about the possibility of individuals from different religions establishing places of worship in their residential area, the data shows that 50 percent of the respondents disagreed (D) with this idea. They expressed their opposition to the establishment of such places. Additionally, 45 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed (SD), indicating a strong objection to the presence of other religious places of worship in their neighborhood. On the other hand, 5 percent of the respondents remained neutral (N), neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the notion.

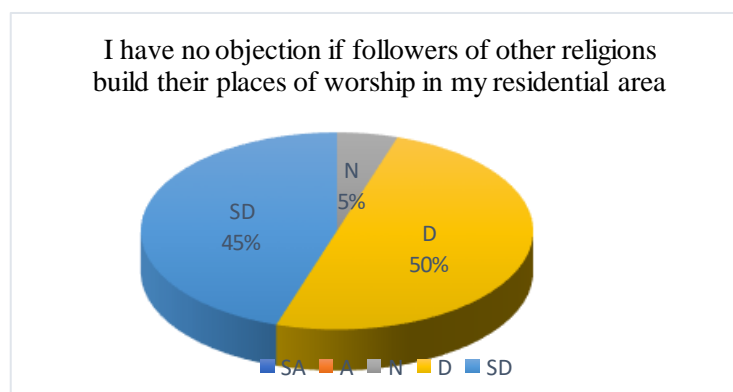


Chart 5. Places of worship

In relation to the respondents' openness to providing space for religious activities of different faiths in their residential area, the data reveals that 65 percent disagreed (D), while 30 percent remained neutral (N), and the remaining respondents strongly disagreed (SD). This indicates that a majority of the respondents (65 percent) expressed their disagreement with the idea of accommodating religious activities of diverse faiths in their living environment. Additionally, 30 percent of the respondents maintained a neutral stance, neither supporting nor opposing the notion, while the remaining 5 percent strongly opposed it.

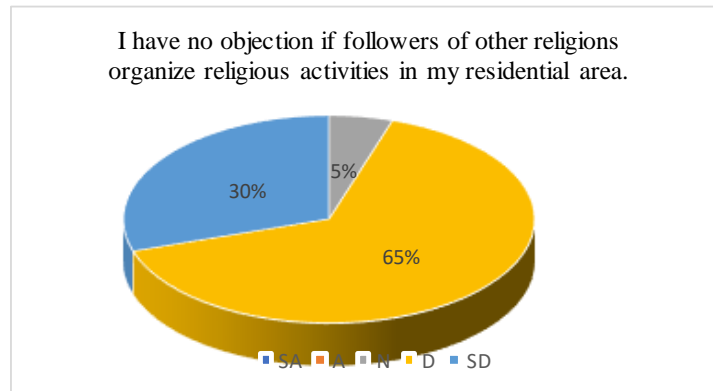


Chart 6. Openness to religious activities

Regarding past experiences of disagreement with followers of other religions, the data reveals that 55 percent of the respondents stated that there had been no instances of disagreement (D). Furthermore, 37.5 percent remained neutral (N), indicating they neither confirmed nor denied such occurrences, while a small percentage of 7.5 percent acknowledged that they had experienced disagreements in the past (A). This information is illustrated in the diagram below:

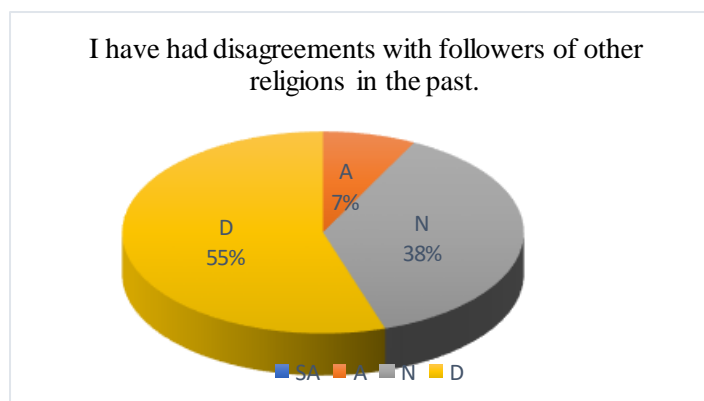


Chart 7. Past religious conflicts

The data indicates that the majority of respondents (55 percent) reported no history of disagreements with individuals practicing different religions. A substantial proportion (37.5 percent) remained neutral, neither confirming nor denying any such experiences, while a minority (7.5 percent) acknowledged previous instances of disagreement.

When asked about their willingness to engage in dialogue with followers of other religions in cases that concern them, the data reveals that 62.5 percent of the respondents expressed agreement (S). Additionally, 25 percent remained neutral (N), indicating neither agreement nor disagreement, while the remaining 12.5 percent strongly agreed (SA). This information is visually represented in the following diagram:

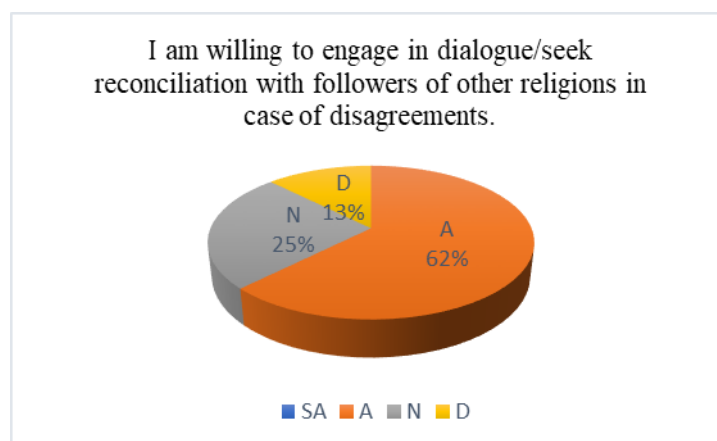


Chart 8. Religious conflict resolution

The data suggests that a majority of the respondents (62.5 percent) are willing to engage in dialogue with individuals of different religious backgrounds in situations that pertain to them. A notable proportion (25 percent) remained neutral, neither expressing agreement nor disagreement, while a smaller percentage (12.5 percent) strongly expressed their willingness to participate in such discussions.

Discussion

Based on the data obtained from a number of surveyed respondents, it can be understood that the majority of the community in Aceh Tengah is relatively accepting of individuals or groups with different backgrounds, including religious differences. This is evident from the data reflecting the tolerance among religious communities. In this context, issues only arise when these established interactions enter the realm of the private. This is possible considering that the community in Aceh Tengah is predominantly followers of Islam. In the teachings of Islam itself, there is a principle that governs the pattern of interaction with communities outside of Islam. Furthermore, in this regard, Muslims are encouraged to do good to others and even protect each other along with non-Muslim society.

However, when it comes to matters of faith and belief, Islam explicitly states, "*Your religion is for you, and my religion is for me.*" Based on this, it is not surprising that Muslims, in this case, do not tolerate interfaith marriages or other private matters. This fact indicates that relationships built on tolerance can only exist in the public sphere, and they become narrower when it comes to personal issues.

According to the theory, positive social interactions between individuals of different religions can reduce prejudice and promote tolerance. In this study, the results showed that respondents who had more interactions with individuals from other religions tended to have higher levels of tolerance. This is consistent with previous research by Majid (2020) which demonstrated that direct contact and mutual acquaintance between religions can reduce stereotypes and strengthen intergroup understanding.

The social identity theory is also relevant in explaining the findings of this research. This theory focuses on how individuals identify themselves within specific social groups. In the context of interreligious tolerance, research by Nimer (2001) showed that individuals with inclusive social identities, which include recognition and appreciation of religious diversity, tend to have higher levels of tolerance. This is in line with previous research linking inclusive social identity with intergroup tolerance.

Research on religious education is also relevant in this context. Several studies have shown that religious education that promotes understanding of other religions and teaches

values of tolerance can influence individuals' tolerance levels. The findings of this research indicate that respondents with higher levels of education tend to have higher levels of tolerance. This aligns with the theory of education and awareness, which suggests that formal education can enhance understanding and appreciation of religious diversity.

The reference group theory can also be used to explain interreligious tolerance. This theory suggests that individuals tend to adopt the attitudes and values of the social groups they consider as their reference groups (Singer, 2017). In this context, the research findings indicate that the majority of respondents from the majority religion demonstrate high levels of tolerance. This may be because they adopt the tolerant attitudes displayed by the majority group as their reference group.

Interreligious dialogue shows that structured and guided dialogue can promote understanding, cooperation, and interreligious tolerance (Neufeldt, 2011). The findings of this research support the importance of interreligious dialogue in fostering tolerance. Through dialogue, individuals can listen to each other, share perspectives, and strengthen their understanding of different religious beliefs and values (Walsh, 2010).

Research on prejudice and stereotypes is also relevant in the context of interreligious tolerance. Previous studies have shown that negative prejudices and stereotypes towards other religious groups can hinder the formation of tolerance (Rutland & Killen, 2015). In this research, differences in tolerance attitudes were found among religious groups, indicating that some minority religious groups demonstrate lower levels of tolerance. This may be due to existing prejudices or stereotypes in society towards these religious groups.

The theory of social norms can also be linked to the findings of this research. According to this theory, individuals tend to adjust their attitudes and behaviors to the social norms within their groups (Fromkin & Snyder, 1980). In the context of interreligious tolerance, if the prevailing social norm in society is one of tolerance and appreciation of religious diversity, individuals are likely to have high levels of tolerance (Parker, 2014). The results of this research show the presence of positive tolerance attitudes in the community of Aceh Tengah, indicating the influence of social norms that promote tolerance in that context.

The influence of media is also relevant in understanding interreligious tolerance. Mass media, including social media, can influence individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards other religious groups (Slater, 2007). The findings of this research did not specifically discuss the influence of media, but it is important to consider the influence of media in the context of tolerance attitudes, especially in an era where access to and exposure to diverse information and viewpoints is widespread.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted on the Tolerance Attitudes of the Central Aceh Community towards Religious Differences, several important conclusions can be drawn:

1. Positive tolerance attitudes towards religious differences were found in the Central Aceh community. This reflects an understanding of and appreciation for religious diversity in the region. High tolerance attitudes are an important factor in building harmony and inter-religious coexistence in a multicultural society.
2. Demographic factors such as age, gender, and education influence tolerance attitudes. Younger generations, women, and individuals with higher education tend to have higher tolerance attitudes. This highlights the importance of education in shaping inclusive tolerance attitudes and preparing the younger generation to live in a multicultural society.

3. There is variation in tolerance attitudes among religious groups in Central Aceh. The majority group shows high tolerance attitudes, but differences in attitudes are observed among minority religious groups. To strengthen tolerance and overcome potential prejudices and stereotypes, it is important to enhance mutual understanding of beliefs and values among these groups.
4. Factors such as higher formal education, social interactions with individuals from different religions, inter-religious dialogue, and inclusive social identity influence the tolerance attitudes of the community. Religious education that promotes understanding of other religions, open communication, and the development of inclusive social identity can play a crucial role in strengthening inter-religious tolerance.

Moreover, by examining the attitudes and behaviors towards religious diversity, the study contributes to our understanding of tolerance in diverse cultural contexts, potentially informing local policies and interfaith initiatives. However, this research is warranted in generalizing the findings beyond Central Aceh due to potential sampling biases and cultural specificities. Nonetheless, the implications are significant, ranging from guiding interfaith dialogue initiatives and educational programs to aiding conflict prevention efforts by addressing underlying sources of intolerance.

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