



Interfaith Parenting: Understanding the Experiences and Challenges of Children Following One Parent's Religion

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges experienced by children who affiliate with the religion of one parent in interfaith families within Jose Rizal, Makilala, North Cotabato. It aims to understand how these children navigate their religious identity, the emotional and social effects of choosing one religion over another, and the influence of interfaith dynamics on their personal development, beliefs, and cultural integration within family and community contexts.

Methodology: This qualitative research utilized a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of children from interfaith families. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews (IDI) with five participants and one focused group discussion (FGD) with another five participants. Using purposive sampling, the study was guided by two primary research questions, allowing participants to share personal reflections on their religious identity and family experiences.

Main Findings: The study revealed that children from interfaith families experience challenges such as confusion in religious identity, pressure to choose one religion, and conflicts arising from differing religious and cultural practices. Despite these struggles, participants demonstrated autonomy and resilience in navigating their personal beliefs and values. Their experiences highlight the importance of open communication, acceptance, and understanding within families to reduce emotional distress and promote mutual respect for diverse faith traditions.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study provides new insights into the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of interfaith parenting from the perspective of children who affiliate with one parent's religion. It emphasizes the unique process of identity negotiation and emotional resilience among these children. Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on parental perspectives, this research amplifies the children's voices, illustrating how they reconcile interreligious tensions while maintaining familial harmony. The findings contribute to the discourse on interfaith family dynamics, promoting respect, empathy, and inclusive understanding within multicultural and multireligious contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Religion has long served as a cornerstone of family life, offering moral guidance, emotional support, and a shared sense of purpose. Within many societies, faith not only provides spiritual meaning but also shapes familial values, cultural identity, and social belonging. It strengthens unity and offers resilience during adversity, fostering

harmony and continuity across generations. However, when families are formed between parents of differing religions, the household may face unique challenges in maintaining unity and transmitting shared values [1]. Interfaith parenting can create confusion, conflict, and negotiation in determining how children are raised in terms of religious beliefs and practices. Children born into such families often struggle to identify with a single faith, facing questions such as which religion to follow [2], how to reconcile parental differences, and how to develop a coherent sense of identity amid contrasting spiritual traditions. This internal negotiation may lead to emotional strain, feelings of divided loyalty, and potential alienation from one or both parents.

Globally, numerous studies have explored interfaith family dynamics, revealing both the strengths and struggles associated with religious diversity within households. A study emphasized that interfaith families must balance respect for both traditions while maintaining stability in the home environment [3]. Similarly, [4] found that interfaith couples often experience tension in deciding which religious customs to transmit to their children, with disagreements potentially leading to confusion in the child's moral and spiritual development. In a Western context, Colaner et al. [4] observed that children from interfaith unions frequently negotiate faith identities in ways that reflect both personal choice and familial influence. Other research, such as that of Eteng [5], underscored the agency of children in shaping their religious identity, noting that many selectively adopt beliefs aligned with their lived experiences and peer interactions.

In the Southeast Asian region, religion plays a significant role in social and familial cohesion, yet interfaith marriages are becoming more visible due to globalization, migration, and interethnic interaction. Studies in Myanmar, Malaysia and Indonesia have shown that interfaith couples often face both societal and institutional challenges, such as limited recognition of mixed-faith marriages and social pressure to conform to one dominant faith [6]-[9]. In Singapore, Thio [10] documented how open communication and mutual respect enable interfaith couples to raise children who understand and appreciate both faiths without feeling compelled to choose one exclusively. Meanwhile, in Vietnam and Cambodia, Kane et al. [11] found that children in Buddhist-Christian families often exhibit hybrid forms of spirituality, blending rituals and beliefs to maintain family harmony.

In the Philippine context, where religion is deeply intertwined with national identity and cultural traditions, interfaith families face unique challenges. The country's religious landscape—dominated by Catholicism yet home to vibrant Muslim and Protestant communities—creates a backdrop where interfaith relationships can be both enriching and complicated [12]. As Dorias et al. [13] reported that interfaith families in Bukidnon promote “everyday peace” through mutual respect and dialogue, while Jocson and Garcia [14] found that religiosity among Filipino parents significantly influences their parenting approaches, moral expectations, and emotional relationships with their children. Despite these insights, few studies have focused on the experiences of children who choose or are guided to affiliate with one parent's religion. Understanding their struggles, coping mechanisms, and emotional journeys remains a largely unexplored area of research in the Philippine setting.

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to examine the lived experiences of children raised in interfaith families who have chosen or were influenced to follow one parent's faith tradition. Specifically, it seeks to understand the emotional, psychological, and social implications of their religious affiliation decisions and how these affect family relationships and identity formation. This inquiry provides an opportunity to understand not only how these children construct their faith identity but also how they cope with potential conflicts, pressures, and expectations from both parents and extended family members.

The study is anchored on Social Identity Theory [15] which posits that individuals derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from their membership in social groups. Applied to interfaith families, this theory helps explain how children identify with one parent's religious group and how this choice influences their self-concept, relationships, and coping behaviors. Social Identity Theory also provides a framework for understanding intergroup dynamics, as children may experience tension when the beliefs of one group (religion) conflict with those of another. In this context, adopting one parent's religion can create both a sense of belonging and an emotional challenge, particularly when the child's decision is perceived as favoring one parent over the other.

By exploring the lived experiences of children who affiliate with one parent's religion, this research highlights the emotional and cognitive processes that influence faith development, family relationships, and self-concept. It offers valuable insights for parents navigating interfaith dynamics, helping them foster environments rooted in acceptance, empathy, and open communication. Moreover, the findings will benefit educators, guidance counselors, and religious leaders by providing data-driven understanding of how to support children in their spiritual exploration and identity construction. Ultimately, this study seeks to promote mutual respect, cultural sensitivity, and family harmony—core values essential for sustaining unity and understanding in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically the phenomenological approach, to explore the lived experiences of children raised in interfaith families who affiliate with one parent's religion. Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell and Creswell [16], and Maher and Dertadian [17] focuses on non-

numerical data such as interviews and observations to provide an in-depth understanding of people's experiences, perceptions, and meanings. The phenomenological approach was deemed appropriate for this study because it aims to describe and interpret the essence of participants' experiences as they live through a particular phenomenon. In this case, it allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding of how children from interfaith families navigate challenges, emotional conflicts, and coping strategies while shaping their religious identity within a dual-faith environment.

The researcher served as the primary instrument in collecting and analyzing the data, ensuring ethical integrity, confidentiality, and neutrality throughout the process. The participants consisted of ten individuals aged 18 to 24 years old from Barangay Jose Rizal, Makilala, North Cotabato, all of whom came from interfaith families and identified with one parent's religion. The selection of participants was done through purposive sampling to ensure that only those with direct experiences relevant to the research topic were included. These individuals came from various Christian denominations such as Catholic, Baptist, Foursquare, and Apostolic, and were considered suitable respondents because they could provide rich, detailed insights about their personal experiences.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions using a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researcher [18]. Each interview session was conducted with the participants' consent and was recorded to ensure the accuracy of responses. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to express their thoughts freely, providing a holistic view of their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. The gathered data were then transcribed, organized, and analyzed thematically following the process described by Castleberry and Nolen [19]. Through thematic analysis, recurring patterns and meanings were identified, categorized, and interpreted to derive insights about how interfaith upbringing affects children's identity and adjustment.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study observed credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability [20]. Ethical principles such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and transparency were strictly followed to protect the rights and welfare of all participants throughout the research process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Challenges Faced by Children Affiliated with the Religion of One Parent

The first research question explored the challenges faced by children who affiliate with the religion of one parent in an interfaith family. Based on the participants' shared experiences, it was found that growing up with parents of different faiths often leads to emotional and social struggles as children navigate loyalty, belief, and belonging. The differences in religious teachings and practices between parents create confusion and pressure for the child to make choices that may affect family harmony.

Participants expressed that while interfaith families may encourage respect for both religions, children still encounter difficulty reconciling their personal faith with the expectations of each parent. From the data gathered, three key themes emerged: (1) the *pressure to choose one religion over the other*, (2) *identity confusion among children*, and (3) *cultural conflicts between religious practices*. These themes highlight the complex journey of forming one's religious identity amid differing parental beliefs.

Pressure to Choose One Religion Over the Other

The first theme that emerged from the study, *Pressure to Choose One Religion Over the Other*, revealed that children from interfaith families often experience significant emotional strain when expected to align with one parent's religion. Participants expressed feeling torn between two belief systems, perceiving that embracing one faith could mean rejecting the other parent or part of their identity. This situation creates a sense of divided loyalty and internal conflict, as they fear disappointing either parent or being judged by their extended family and community. The pressure is not solely about religious choice but also about maintaining familial harmony and cultural belonging. Many participants reported delaying or avoiding the decision to commit to a single faith to prevent conflict, demonstrating the depth of emotional burden associated with religious identity in interfaith families.

This finding emphasizes that religious affiliation within such families is a complex negotiation rather than a simple matter of tradition. External expectations—from family members or religious groups that demand conformity—often exacerbate the child's internal struggle. As a result, children may experience confusion, guilt, or frustration, which can hinder the healthy formation of their personal identity and spiritual growth. These pressures may also influence their emotional well-being, self-esteem, and sense of social belonging. Therefore, parents and religious communities play a crucial role in creating an open and accepting environment that allows children to explore their beliefs without fear or coercion.

Several studies support these findings. Research in Indonesia has shown that children from interfaith families often encounter pressure from both parents and religious institutions to choose one religion, resulting in stress and confusion. Similarly, studies by Hanley et al. [21] explain that forming a stable religious foundation

becomes difficult when parents have different faiths, as children are torn by dominant parental influences. As Goodman and Dyer [22] also emphasized that an imbalance between physical and spiritual needs leads to inner pressure and confusion. Other studies, such as those by Bengtson [2], and Aisyah [23] reveal that children frequently adopt the more dominant parent's faith to maintain harmony, even at the expense of suppressing their own religious inclinations. These findings underscore the need for empathy, dialogue, and inclusivity in interfaith parenting to support children's emotional and spiritual well-being.

This is the evident in the statements, which they narrated. Based on the conducted in-depth-interview, Blue stated that:

One of the things that made it difficult was because I was very close to my mother and then I followed my mother's path. Then my father also encouraged me to go to catholic church. that's why it's very hard for me to choose. It's confusing because I don't want to let the other one down or make my one parent feel unfair. Blue_idi

Yellow and maroon also felt the same to blue response. Yellow stated:

It was difficult at first, so sometimes I wouldn't go to church, or I would try to do a lot of things so that they wouldn't feel bad for me. Yellow_idi

Maroon added:

It caused me to stay away from my church. Sometimes I don't worship so I don't feel bad about my father or mother. Maroon_idi

The two participants in the focus group discussion faced the same challenge. They said that:

We were pressured because we went to church in the catholic religion then we stopped going to church there because my mom didn't like it. Violet_fgd

In addition to violet's response, Pink added

It's very difficult because you have to weigh both. That's why we go back and forth to church here in foursquare and then to my father's religion which is catholic. Pink_fgd

Identity Confusion among Children

The second essential theme identified in the study, Identity Confusion Among Children, highlights the internal struggle experienced by those growing up in interfaith families. Many participants reported feeling uncertain about their religious identity, often describing a sense of being "in-between" two faiths. They expressed difficulty in explaining their beliefs to peers or members of their community, which sometimes led to feelings of isolation, exclusion, and self-doubt. The findings reveal that this confusion arises not only from having parents of different religions but also from the competing expectations and values that each faith imposes. Children find themselves navigating a delicate balance between loyalty to both parents and the need to develop a coherent sense of self. This internal conflict can hinder their ability to commit to a particular belief system, especially during adolescence—a critical stage for identity formation and self-definition.

The study further shows that identity confusion is intensified when both parents are equally committed to their religions, or when one faith dominates family life. In such situations, children may feel pressured to conform to the more visible or socially accepted faith, even if it does not align with their personal beliefs. The ambiguity surrounding their religious belonging can result in emotional distress, uncertainty, and a weakened sense of spiritual stability. The lack of a unified family religious practice also limits opportunities for consistent moral guidance, making it difficult for children to establish a firm foundation of faith and values.

Existing literature supports these findings. As Colaner et al. [4] emphasizes that open communication within families strengthens emotional bonds and prevents confusion, particularly in interfaith homes. When children feel heard and understood, they are less likely to experience identity fragmentation. For Goldman [24] also notes that as children reach adolescence, they become more aware of religious differences around them, and these differences can trigger anxiety and internal conflict if not properly guided by parents. Similarly, Le et al. [25] stresses that spiritual imbalance and lack of clarity in religious upbringing can contribute to emotional instability. Studies Colaner et al. [4] further affirm that children in interfaith families often face identity struggles when societal and familial expectations clash with their emerging personal beliefs. These findings underscore the importance of parental openness, dialogue, and acceptance in helping children develop a stable sense of religious identity and emotional well-being. This is evident in their statements.

Maroon shared,

I'm really saddened because I can't stand the scrutiny that is being given to me. And I wonder what's wrong with the Lord, who is believed to be the same; why are they making such a big deal with them? Then people scrutinize me; that's why I sometimes decide not to go to church anymore. Blue_idi

Yellow and maroon also agreed to the blue's statement. Yellow stated that:

It took a long time to finish the baptist church service unlike the catholic. That's why sometimes my father yells at us for coming at home late. Father said what kind of church it is. I feel bad about what my father is saying to our religion. Yellow_idi

Maroon idi added:

Because of people, I lose the consistency of going to church. Because I chose mom's side and then dad strongly encouraged me. That's why my consistency in going to church is getting weaker and weaker. Sometimes I don't go to church because I have two choices. Maroon_idi

The two participants in the focus group discussion faced the same challenge. They said that:

There are many questions about why my mother and I have different religions. My mother also says, why do you go to church there when you were baptized in the Catholic Church. Violet_fgd

In addition to violet's response, Black added:

There is time that there is a youth gathering in Catholic and it is is where I felt like I don't belong because when i get along with my cousins they talked about joining and they told me that "you are not catholic yang, right" that's why I feel that there are boundaries. Black_fgd

Cultural Conflicts between Religious Practices

The third and final theme identified in the study, Cultural Conflicts Between Religious Practices, highlights the struggles faced by children growing up in interfaith families when navigating differing religious and cultural expectations. Many participants shared that they experienced tension and confusion when the religious beliefs of one parent clashed with the cultural values or traditions of the other. For instance, a child raised in a conservative religious environment may be taught modesty and obedience, while the other parent's culture may emphasize independence and self-expression. These opposing values can create inner conflict, as children try to reconcile what behaviors are considered acceptable or appropriate in each context.

Interviews revealed that participants often faced challenges during family celebrations or religious observances, where traditions from both faiths were practiced. They reported feeling uncertain about which customs to follow or feeling emotionally divided when observing holidays from two religions. This often resulted in confusion and a sense of detachment, as they tried to balance participation in both without favoring one parent over the other. For many, the inability to fully integrate into either religious or cultural community led to feelings of alienation. Children who followed one religion but were still exposed to the cultural practices of another sometimes felt they did not fully belong in either world, developing what they described as a "fragmented sense of cultural identity."

The findings of this study are consistent with existing literature. As Bengtson [2], and Marks et al. [26] noted that religious differences within families often lead to disputes over family traditions and celebrations, which can extend to the children's sense of belonging. Similarly, Keung and Chan [27] found that interfaith families frequently face emotional tension when negotiating holiday observances, with family members feeling a sense of loss or disconnection from their cultural roots. As Santagati [28] also pointed out that children raised in interfaith settings may experience cultural dissonance, particularly when parental expectations conflict. In addition, Keung and Chan [27] emphasized the importance of open dialogue and shared understanding between parents to help children navigate these tensions constructively. Lastly, highlighted that interfaith children often occupy a liminal space—caught between two faith communities—which can both enrich their worldview and challenge their sense of identity.

Overall, these cultural conflicts illustrate the delicate balance that interfaith children must maintain as they attempt to honor both parents' traditions without losing their own sense of belonging. The findings underscore the need for interfaith families to foster mutual respect and open communication, helping children embrace diversity while developing a coherent sense of self within their dual heritage.

This is true to the statement which they narrated. Blue from IDI group shared his experiences. Blue stated that:

Because I had an old belief and then it changed because I joined a different church. Then it is new for me to meet new people. It really affected me for what I really wanted to be. Knowing the different customs and traditions of each religion, there are practices that are forbidden in this religion but are allowed in other religions. Blue_idi

In support to blue's response, yellow stated that:

There are times when we don't understand each other in our different beliefs. There are conflicts between us. Especially when it comes to our forbidden food, which is cooked by my father example like bloodysoup (dinuguan). Yellow_idi

White also shared her experiences by saying:

Yes, we do have a problem with time. Where my father and I finished our Catholic church very quickly, we can go home around 10am. But in my mother side the service is finished around 12pm sometimes it is late in the afternoon. That is why we can't eat together because we are not complete. Since it is Sunday, it's family day. White_idi

The FGD participants also suffered from the same problem. Violet stated that:

It's also the same as what they said that in Catholics, we do the sign of the cross, then when we get to foursquare, it's not allowed. There are many taboos in our church that are done by the Catholics. There are a lot of adjustments because we are used to being Catholic. Violet_fgd

Pink added:

Because I had an old belief and then it changed because I joined a different church. Then it's new for me to meet new people. Pink_fgd

Table 1. Challenges Encountered by Children Affiliated with the Religion One Parent

Essential Themes	Thematic Statements
Pressure to Choose One Religion Over the Other	<p><i>Isa sa mga naka palisod gyud kay akong kasing kasing duol kay mama tapos im following the path ni mama. tapos si papa pud ga awmag sa akua nga mag simba sa catholic. mao nay lisud kayo gyud ug aha akong pillion, libog gyud kay para dili malain ang isa ba, dili unfair</i></p> <p>[One of the things that made it difficult was because I was very close to my mother and then I followed my mother's path. Then my father also encouraged me to go to catholic church. That is why it's very hard for me to choose. It's confusing because I don't want to let the other one down or make my one parent feel unfair.] Blue_idi</p> <p><i>Nag lisud gyud sa una, maong panagsa dili ko mosimba, or tuyoon nako nga daghang kog buhaton para walay malain. Lain kaya kayo. [It was really difficult at first, so sometimes I wouldn't go to church, or I would try to do a lot of things so that they wouldn't feel bad for me.] Yellow_idi</i></p> <p><i>Ga cause sya ako nga molayo nalang gud ko sakong church. Like dili nalang ko mo simba oy para dili malain akong papa ba or mama. [It caused me to stay away from my church. Sometimes I don't worship so I don't feel bad about my father or mother.] Maroon_idi:</i></p> <p><i>na pressure pud kay naka simba na baya mig catholic no then nag skip mig simba didto para mag simba diri kay mao may ano ni mama ug dili sya gusto didto mi mag simba. [We</i></p>

were pressured because we went to church in the catholic religion then we stopped going to church there because my mom didn't like it.] Violet_fg

Lisud jud kayo kay kailangan nimo I timbang pareho. Ang gina himo namo kay kung mag simba mi sa foursquare, mag simba sad mi sa catholic which is sa akoang papa na religion. [It's very difficult because you have to weigh both. That's why we go back and forth to church here in foursquare and then to my father's religion which is catholic.] Pink_fg

Identity
Confusion
Among Children

Sakong sorrounding gyud kay dili nako ma dare ang mga gina hatag nga ga scrutiny sa akoo. And akoo is unsa diay mali ani nga pareha raman tag Ginoo nga ginatuohan nganong big deal man kayo sa inyuha. Tapos gina scrutinize ko sa mga tawo like murag silay ga buot maka ingon nalang kog dili nalang ko mosimba oy! Samoka. [I'm really saddened because I can't stand the scrutiny that is being given to me. And I wonder what's wrong with the Lord who is believed to be the same, why are they making such a big deal with them. Then people scrutinize me, that's why I sometimes decide not to go to church anymore.] Blue_idi

Because of people I lose the consistency nga mosimba. Kay napili nako ang side ni mama tapos si papa kusog mo awthag sa akoo. Maong to akong consistency nga mosimba is mo hinay nga mohinay. Usahay dili nako mosimba kay naa koy duha ka choice nga mosimba. [Because of people, I lose the of consistency of going to church. Because I chose mom's side and then dad strongly encouraged me. That's why my consistency in going to church is getting weaker and weaker. Sometimes I don't go to church because I have two choices.] Yellow_idi

naa gyuy times ,mga youth gathering sa catholic is maka feel ko usahay nga dili diay ko belong kay mag sabot-sabot sila akong mga pinsan . moingon gud sila nga "dili man diay ka catholic yang no" naa gyuy boundaries ba. Pero gina respito nako sila ug gina respito man pud ko nila. [There are times that there is a youth gathering in Catholic and it is where I felt like I don't belong because when i get along with my cousins they talked about joining and they told me that "you are not catholic yang, right" that's why I feel that there are boundaries.] Maroon_idi

There are many questions about why my mother and I have different religions. My mother also says, why you go to church there when you were baptized in the Catholic Church. Violet_fg

Dugay man gud mahuman among simba tapos sila papa kay dali ra kay catholic. Mao to una-una kay mag yawyaw si papa kay unsang oras wala pa kauli, unsang klase daw nga simbahan. Ma offend ko usahay sa maingon ni papa samong religion. [It took a long time to finish the baptist church service unlike the catholic. That's why sometimes my father yells at us for coming at home late. Father said what kind of church it is. I feel bad about what my father is saying to our religion.] Black_fg

Cultural Conflicts
Between Religion
Practices

naka apekto gyud sa akoo ug unsa gyud akong gusto nga religion. Kay Knowing the different customes and traditions of each religion, naay mga practices na bawal sa kani na religion pero pwede ra sa lahi na religion [Because I had an old belief and then it changed because I joined a different church. then it's new for me to meet new people. It really affected me for what I really wanted to be. Knowing the different customs and traditions of each religion, there are practices that are forbidden in this religion but are allowed in other religions.] Blue_idi

Akong nasinati na akong pamilya lahi lahi ug religion is naay isa nga dili mi magka sinabot sa among nagkadaiyang tinuohan naa conflicts between sa amoa. samot na ug pag abot sa pagkaon namo nga bawal na gina luto ni papa nga pwede man sa iyaha. Pero mag dala man gihapon sya ug solusyon pud nga lahion among pagkaon mao ng daghan kayog conflicts, naay mga problema gihapon. [There are times when we don't understand each other in our different beliefs. There are conflicts between us. Especially when it comes to our forbidden food, which is cooked by my father example like bloodysoup (dinuguan).] Yellow_idi

Oo, samot na sa oras. Kay kami nila papa dali ra mahuman ug simba sa catholic mga 10 makauli nami tapos sila mama kay maabtan pa ug udto. Panagsa dili nami maka sabay ug kaon kay dili paman mi kompleto. Embis nga domingo, kauban pamilya kay family day pero sige lang para man pud sa Ginoo, sabton nalang pud. [Yes, we do have a problem with time. Where my father and I finished our Catholic church very quickly, we can go home around 10am. But in my mother side the service is finished around 12pm sometimes it is late in the afternoon. That's why we can't eat together because we are not complete. Since it's Sunday, it's family day.] White_idi

Same pud sa gi ingon nila nga dira sa catholic kay manguros tapos pag abot namog foursquare kay bawal. Samot na kay daghan bawal sa amoa ng gina buhat sa catholic. Kuan kayo sya sa amoa nga mag adjust. Samot na kay nasanay mi nga buhatan na catholic tapos sa kuan kay bawal diay. [It's also the same as what they said that in Catholics, we do the sign of the cross, then when we get to foursquare, it's not allowed. There are many taboos in our church that are done by the Catholics. There are a lot of adjustment.] Violet_fgd

Because I had an old belief and then it changed because I joined a different church. then it's new for me to meet new people. Pink_fgd

Tong bata pako kay yes! Kay naa nako daan nga paniniwala ba unya nabag-o kay lahi napud nga simbahan akong gi sudlan. tapos bag-o napud nga ma encounter nimu nga mga tawo. Pink_fgd

3.2 Strategies or Coping Mechanism of Children's Experiences in Dealing with the challenges

The second research question explores the strategies or coping mechanisms used by children who are affiliated with one parent's religion in managing the challenges of interfaith upbringing. Based on the results of the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, three key themes emerged: maintaining open and honest communication, developing a strong personal identity, and understanding cultural differences. These themes reveal how children actively navigate emotional, social, and spiritual complexities, striving to achieve balance, acceptance, and harmony within their interfaith families.

Maintaining Open and Honest Communication.

The first essential theme that emerged as a coping strategy among children was maintaining open and honest communication. This study found that open dialogue with parents and religious peers serves as a crucial means of coping with the pressures of interfaith upbringing, especially when a child affiliates with one parent's religion. Through honest communication, children feel understood, supported, and respected, which helps establish trust and emotional security within the family. This openness allows children to express their thoughts and emotions about their faith without fear of criticism or rejection. Moreover, clear communication helps clarify parental expectations about religious practices and values, providing children with a stronger sense of direction and identity within their family's diverse religious context.

Many participants shared that their ability to cope improved when both parents encouraged respectful and judgment-free conversations. When parents listened with empathy and refrained from imposing a specific belief, children developed confidence and emotional resilience in navigating their religious identity. This finding aligns with Boloje [29], who emphasized that parents hold a divine responsibility to guide children toward faith with compassion and wisdom, nurturing their pure hearts like unblemished pearls. Similarly, Goshu and Ridwan [30] highlighted that humans possess an inherent religious nature, and harmony between spiritual and physical dimensions must be cultivated through understanding and dialogue. Maintaining such communication helps families avoid conflict and strengthens relationships built on mutual respect [31].

Furthermore, Papen [32] argued that discussing faith openly—such as reading sacred texts together—allows children to process spiritual lessons in a meaningful, personal way. These conversations help children confront fears or confusion about religion while fostering resilience and moral grounding. Thus, maintaining open and honest communication not only reduces interfaith tension but also becomes a vital pathway for children to develop a stable and confident sense of religious identity.

Blue from IDI group, stated that:

Just verbally, I just told mom and dad to respect everyone's beliefs. Don't interfere with what to worship. Blue_idi

Yellow and and Maroon also added:

I just made mom understand that this is the religion I want and that I'm happy here. Until my mom understood Yellow_idi

Just explained to dad that I will go to church here. Is it okay? Then he agreed; that's why our conflicts disappeared because dad accepted and respected what I chose. Maroon_idi

In support to the responses above, two participants from FGD shared. Violet stated that:

To my mother, who consistently imparts the word of God, followed by prayers, so that my father may understand that only faith and the grace of the Lord can help. Violet_fgd

Pink, also added:

I saw improvement in myself. And I'm happy because since I've been going to that church for a long time, my parents don't complain anymore because they see that I've really changed. Pink_fgd

Developing a Strong Personal Identity

Another key theme that emerged from the findings is developing a strong personal identity. For children in interfaith families, this coping mechanism plays a vital role in helping them navigate the emotional and spiritual tension that arises from belonging to two different religious traditions. Many children fear that embracing one faith may be perceived as rejecting the other parent, which can create internal conflict and guilt. Developing a strong personal identity allows them to build confidence in their beliefs and values while maintaining respect for both religions. Through personal reflection, children learn to understand what they truly believe, independent of external expectations, and begin to define their sense of self within a complex interfaith environment.

This process often involves deep self-exploration—questioning beliefs, comparing religious practices, and integrating aspects from both faiths to form a balanced worldview. Some children find role models who share similar interfaith experiences, which helps them feel validated and supported in their journey. Others benefit from the autonomy granted by their parents, who allow them to explore both religious traditions freely without forcing conformity. This independence enables them to develop their own understanding of spirituality, grounded in experience rather than obligation [33]. Over time, such freedom fosters emotional maturity and cultural confidence, helping children establish a cohesive religious and personal identity despite the duality of their background [34].

Supporting this finding, Yulindaputri and Latipah [35], and King and Boyatzis [36] emphasize that children are particularly vulnerable in their spiritual development because of their cognitive and emotional immaturity. They often struggle to control their feelings and behaviors even when guided by moral or religious instruction. Thus, encouraging children to develop self-awareness and personal conviction strengthens not only their faith but also their capacity for independent moral reasoning [37]. By nurturing a strong sense of identity, interfaith children can grow into individuals who embrace diversity, maintain internal balance, and navigate religious differences with confidence and respect. Hence, the children participants respond as follows:

Blue, an in-depth interview participant said that:

I really prayed to the Lord like I said to him "Lord Guide me to where you want me to be, other people can say something else, but we still worship you" and there is nothing wrong with that as long as I worship for the Lord. Blue_idi

Yellow also mentioned that:

That's why I really balanced it right. I listened to the sermons of the priest, he said to just pray and it was right. But I can't force my mother to change her religion to ours, especially since when she was a child, that's the religion she grew up with. Yellow_idi

Moreover, Marron also shared her coping strategy. Maroon said that:

I really prayed, then I assessed, I really evaluated it to where I feel I belong, heard and and accepted in that religion. Where I feel I will grow spiritually, my faith will grow and that is my mother's religion. Because for me it doesn't matter what I worship as long as I worship for the Lord. Maroon_idi

The responses of the in-depth interview participants were supported by the two (2) participants in the focus group discussion. Violet stated that:

Yes, I asked for help, because maybe if you will not ask for help, there's an instance that you will choose the wrong church. And your heart is not happy because you are in the wrong church. Violet_fgd

Pink added to Violet response. Black said:

I pray to the Lord and seek guidance. Praying that he will keep me close to where my heart is. Then I asked the pastors what is good to do then they said it is where your heart is close, where you can feel safe and comfortable with your surroundings. It is because it is not religion that will save us but our faith in the Lord. Black_fgd

Understanding the Cultural Differences

Another essential theme that emerged in the study is understanding the cultural differences. The findings revealed that children from interfaith families often develop resilience and adaptability by learning to appreciate and understand the distinct cultural and religious backgrounds of their parents. This understanding enables them to cope more effectively with challenges that arise from their dual religious exposure. Children who recognize and respect both traditions tend to develop deeper empathy for their parents and a broader worldview that values diversity. Such awareness helps them articulate their identity more clearly, even when confronted with external pressures or judgments from peers, relatives, or religious communities. Rather than feeling compelled to conform to a single faith, these children embrace both sides of their heritage, finding strength in inclusivity and balance.

Understanding cultural differences also fosters tolerance and reduces feelings of alienation from the parent whose religion is less practiced in the home [38]. Children become more open-minded and respectful, using this insight to bridge gaps between their parents' beliefs. Many of the informants shared that this understanding allowed them to mediate conflicts and promote harmony within the family. They learned how to celebrate religious traditions from both sides while maintaining a sense of unity rather than division. Over time, this skill helped them form a flexible and inclusive sense of identity, as they recognized that differences in belief could coexist peacefully.

Supporting these findings, Khushvaktovna and Fayzievna [39] emphasized that spirituality and faith, when grounded in mutual respect, strengthen family relationships and create emotional balance. As Niella et al. [40] also noted that children in interfaith families often struggle with exclusion or alienation when they lack cultural and emotional support. Similarly, Ilin [41] found that interfaith families who encourage cultural understanding foster emotional maturity and stronger family cohesion. For Alonge [42], and Dadakhanova [43] highlighted that children raised with awareness of both parents' traditions develop greater tolerance and empathy, which enhances their ability to navigate cultural differences. Lastly, Colaner et al. [4], and Gordon and Arenstein [44] argued that cultural competence within interfaith families allows children to integrate differing worldviews, ultimately leading to better adjustment and stronger intergenerational relationships.

Together, these findings underscore that understanding cultural differences is not only a coping mechanism but also a foundation for empathy, harmony, and self-acceptance in interfaith family life. Participant from IDI group named Blue, stated that:

I adapt all the changes but my confidence in God grew to my chosen religion. I became more devoted to that faith and my parents are fine with that. They honor my desires and my faith. They support it. Blue_idi

Yellow also mentioned that:

I just let them feel that this is the religion I want, and I didn't oppose or fight with them, like I just kept quiet because it's better to keep quiet than to argue about the Lord. Yellow_idi

White added:

Just respect each other and accept what is different in each other's belief. If there is no respect for each other? The family is chaotic, there is no peace. White_idi

The participants from the FGD group also mentioned the way they coped with the challenges of having cultural conflict. Violet stated that:

We practice mutual respect for what we want to worship. Because, like they said, it's still my decision to follow and what I want to worship. Violet_fgd

Pink added:

Just respect and accept but I really stick with what my heart wants. Where I saw that I was comfortable and safe. Pink_fgd

Table 2. Strategies or Coping Mechanism of Children's Experiences in Dealing with the Challenges

Essential Themes	Thematic Statements
Maintaining Open and Honest Communication	<p><i>Verbal lang gyud, ni storya ko ila mama ug papa mga respituhon nila ang matag usa nga ginatuohan. Ayaw nalang but-e ug aha sya gusto mosimba. [Just verbally, I just told mom and dad to respect everyone's beliefs. Don't interfere with what to worship.] Blue_idi</i></p> <p><i>Kadugayan nakog pasabot kay mama nga ani ana akong gusto, nga diri ko kay papa mosabay simba kay nakasabot raman pud sya. Gi dawat ra gyud niya kadugayan bali gi respito nalang pud niya aha akong gusto. [I just made mom understand that this is the religion I want and that I'm happy here. until my mom understood.] Yellow_idi</i></p> <p><i>Gi explain ra nako kay papa nga pang diri ko mosimba, is it okay? Then ni agree man sya mao tong nawala ng conflicts sa amoa kay tungod gi accept ni papa ug respito niya kung aha akong pillion. [I just explained to dad that I will go to church here. Is it okay? Then he agreed; that's why our conflicts disappeared because dad accepted and respected what I chose.] White_idi</i></p> <p><i>Sakong papa gyud kay ug mag hisgot gud mi ana kay naa syay gina hatag nga mga verses, tapos gina sabot pud ni mama kay wala may religion nga makaluwas kundili ang pagsalig ug grasya man nga gihatag sa Ginoo. [To my father, who consistently imparts the word of God, followed by prayers, so that my mother may understand that only faith and the grace of the Lord can help.] Violet_fgd</i></p> <p><i>Nakita nako akong improvement sakong sarili. Ang kabag-uhan gyud. And Im happy kay sa kadugay na nako nag simba nga dira nga simbahan, is wala nay yawyaw akong parents kay nakita nila nga nag change gyud ko. [I saw my improvement in myself. And I'm happy because since I've been going to that church for a long time, my parents don't complain anymore because they see that I've really changed.] Pink_fgd</i></p>
Developing a Strong Personal Identity	<p><i>Mag pray gyud kay Lord like moingon ko sa iyaha "Lord guide me to where you want me to be" makaingon ang laing tawo ug lain, pero ikaw man gihapon among gina simba and wala may mali ug aha ko nga simbahan mosulod. [I really prayed to the Lord like I said to him "Lord guide me to where you want me to be, other people can say something else, but we still worship you" and there is nothing wrong with that as long as I worship for the Lord.] Blue_idi</i></p> <p><i>Gi balance nako una-una Gi try nakog simba ang duha ug nakita gyud nako ang kalahian ba, mao tong gi balance gyud nako ug tarong. Naminaw ko sa mga wali sa pari, nag ingon nga iampo nalang. ug tama gyud. Pero dili man gud pwede nga pugson nako akong mama na mobalhin samot na kay sa iyang pagka bata mao na gyud iyang religion nga nadak-an. Ingon pud perming mama nga wala may relihiyon nga</i></p>

makaluwas mao tong wala nalang pu nako na sya kulita. [That's why I really balanced it right. I listened to the sermons of the priest, he said to just pray and it was right. But I can't force my mother to change her religion to ours, especially since when she was a child, that's the religion she grew up with.] Yellow_idi

Nag ampo gyud ko, gi assess, gi evalaute gyud nako ug where I feel belong, heard and and accepted sa kana nga religion. Where I feel mag grow gyud ko spiritually mag grow akong faith and mao tong religion sakong mama. Kay para sa akoo it doesn't matter aha ko mosimba basta kay mosimba ko para sa Ginoo. [I really prayed, then I assessed, I really evaluated it to where I feel I belong, heard and and accepted in that religion. Where I feel I will grow spiritually, my faith will grow and that is my mother's religion. Because for me it doesn't matter what I worship as long as I worship for the Lord. Maroon_idi

Oo nangayo kog tabang, kay basi man gud ug dili ka mangayo ug tabang kay mali imong gipili nga simbahan ba, ma storyahan tag dili maayo. And dili pud happy imong heart ug naa ka sa dili nimu gusto and mali nga simbahan. [Yes, I asked for help, because maybe if you will not ask for help, there's an instance that you will choose the wrong church. And your heart is not happy because you are in the wrong church.] Violet_fgd

I pray to the Lord and seek guidance. Respect ug acceptance lang. Nag stick gyud ko ug aha duol sa akong kasing kasing. Gipa sabot ra nako nga diri akong ganahan, nga diri gyud ko. Gi balance lang gyud nako. Sa among church pud kay nangutana ko sa iyaha, ingon nila is kung aha imong heart duol, kung asa ka feel safe and comfortable with your surrounding kay didto daw ka. It is because dili man daw religion ang makluwas nimu kundili ang faith nimu sa Ginoo. [I pray to the Lord and seek guidance. Praying that he will keep me close to where my heart is. Then I asked the pastors what is good to do then they said it is where your heart is close, where you can feel safe and comfortable with your surroundings. It is because it is not religion that will save us but our faith in the Lord.] Black_fgd

Understanding the Cultural Differences

I adapt all the changes but my confidence in God grew to my chosen religion. I became more devoted to that faith and my parents are fine with that. They honor my desires and my faith. They support it. Blue_idi

Aside sa naging strong akong faith kay God no. Gi adapt nako tanan, mga changes ug Sa parents' man gyud ka mag grow pero mas nag grow gyud ko sa kato nga religion. And okay man kayo kay wala nay hadlang ba and okay napud sa akong papa and mama ang gipili nako nga religion. Gi respito jud nila ug aha akong gusto nga religion. Gi supporthana jud nila. Blue_idi

Gipa feel lang nako sa ilaha nga diri akong gusto nga relihiyon. Be strong lang gyud and makig duol lang gyud sa Ginoo, wala nako sila gi tubag tubag like hilom lang ko kay best way man gyud nga mag hilom kaysa makipag argument about sa Ginoo. [I just let them feel that this is the religion I want, and I didn't oppose or fight with them, like I just kept quiet because it's better to keep quiet than to argue about the Lord. Yellow_idi

respito lang gyud sa matag-usa and dawaton kung unsa may kalahian sa bawat isa. Kay ug wala na murag mahulog gyud sya nga gubot ang pamilya, walay peace ba. [Just respect each other and accept what is different in each other's belief. If there is no respect for each other? The family is chaotic, there is no peace.] White_idi

Cause we practice mutual respect, respito lang kung aha mag simba kay sama sa gi ingon niya, ako gihapon masunod ug aha ko mosimba. [We practice mutual respect for

what we want to worship. Because, like they said, it's still my decision to follow and what I want to worship.] Violet_fgd

Just respect and accept but I really stick with what my heart wants. Where I saw that I was comfortable and safe. Pink_fgd

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed that children raised in interfaith families face complex emotional and psychological challenges as they navigate the intersection of two belief systems. Among the most prominent difficulties are the pressure to choose one religion over the other, confusion in shaping their religious identity, and cultural conflicts arising from differing traditions and values within the household. These challenges often lead to internal struggles as children attempt to balance loyalty, belonging, and self-understanding while maintaining harmony within their families.

Despite these challenges, the study found that children demonstrate remarkable resilience through various coping strategies. Maintaining open and honest communication with parents and peers fosters mutual respect and emotional security, allowing children to express their beliefs freely. Developing a strong personal identity empowers them to define their own faith and moral principles, while understanding cultural differences nurtures empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for diversity. These coping mechanisms not only help children manage interfaith complexities but also contribute to their personal and spiritual growth.

Overall, the study underscores the vital role of family support, respect for diversity, and open dialogue in shaping children's well-being within interfaith households. By creating an environment that embraces differences rather than suppressing them, parents and communities can help children develop a balanced sense of identity, belonging, and acceptance—qualities essential for thriving in an increasingly multicultural and pluralistic society.

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