

PAPER • OPEN ACCESS

Woman Friendly Mosque, Features and Facilities: A Case Study on Masjid Sultan Ibrahim, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia

To cite this article: A Suratkon *et al* 2017 *IOP Conf. Ser.: Mater. Sci. Eng.* **291** 012019

View the [article online](#) for updates and enhancements.

Related content

- [The most common problem facing by the maintenance department: A case Study between Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia \(UTHM\) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia \(UTM\)](#)
Mohd Norazam Yasin, Rosli Mohamad Zin, Abd Halid Abdullah et al.
- [Baseline for food waste generation – A case study in Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia cafeterias](#)
A R Alias, N A Mohd Mokhlis and N Y Zainun
- [Exploring Learners' Mental Health Profile: A study in Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia](#)
M.F. Lee and C.S. Lai

Woman Friendly Mosque, Features and Facilities: A Case Study on Masjid Sultan Ibrahim, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia

A Suratkon¹, N N Abd Salam², M H Rahmat³, A S Mohd Arhan⁴, I Abd Wahab⁵, and S A. Ghaffar⁶

Department of Architecture and Design Engineering, Faculty of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Malaysia.

E-mail: nurnasuha@uthm.edu.my

Abstract. Mosque has gone through a long and complex development throughout the Muslim's history which involved the interrelation between its functions and its design. During the process, many aspects of its design were reconfigured including the female facilities in the mosque. In Malaysia, there is a progressive movement to transform the roles and functions of the mosque from exclusive place for prayers and seclusion to a community center. Nevertheless, there are still a numbers of muslim women voices their frustration towards the facilities provided to them in the mosque. Indirectly, this has discourage participation of women in the mosque. The objective of this paper is to investigate the opinions and needs of muslim women in a mosque and to propose appropriate features and facilities for a female-friendly mosque. The study explored through a field observation and a set of questionnaires, which involves a case study of Masjid Sultan Ibrahim in Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia. The field observation was carried out to analyze its current conditions, facilities, design and features. On the other hand, a set of questionnaire was distributed to the women visitors who were mainly students and staffs as to get their insight on this issue. From the field observation and the survey distributed, it was clearly seen that the facilities provided for the female users were still not up to the standard of a 'women-friendly mosque'. Some proposals were provided to improve on the current condition and to be taken into consideration by future designers in designing a mosque.

Keywords: Female friendly mosque, mosque design, Masjid Sultan Ibrahim

1. Introduction

A mosque or masjid (in Arabic) is a place where muslim prostrate and perform their obligatory prayer. The word masjid in Arabic comes from the verb 'sajada' which means to prostrate [1]. In the earliest day of Islam, the roles and functions of the mosque is much wider than it is today. It was not only a place of prayer, but also the center for the Muslim community were religious instruction, political discussion and schools were indispensable appendage to the mosque [2]. When prophet Muhamad and his companion migrated to Madinah, one of the first thing that they did were establishing a mosque. Once the mosque is established, it became the center of Muslims activities for every level of community, being it a man, women or children [2].

1.1 The Development of Mosque's Functions and Its Design

Mosque as a center for Muslim community has become a tradition for centuries, since its foundation by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) until Muslims civilization reached their peak of excellence during Fatimiyyah Era [3]. The idea of a mosque as the center for the community has been reflected architecturally in its design and its development is paralleled to the rapid expansion of Islam. For example, during the Makkan and Madinan periods, there were no barriers between men and women



praying area and no separate entrances which appear to support full female access to the mosque [4]. Furthermore, there was a designated space for children which was attached to the prophet mosque as to encourage children participation without compromising the sacred rules and courtesies of the mosque [5]. During Fatimiyyah era, mosque institutions such as the Al-Azhar mosque in Egypt becomes the education hub for the Muslims world by the 10th century AD [3]. An exemplary effort during this period is the idea of student accommodation in the mosque for students who are pursuing their studies which was known as Khan [3]. From these records, the early mosques in the Muslim world unwaveringly retained its role as the center of Muslim life and supports full participation from every level of community [6].

The specialization of mosques from its role as the center of community to exclusive place for ritual prayer and seclusion has started during the ‘Abbasid’ period. The Abbasid period saw the establishment of Dar al Hakam as a special courthouses and *madrasas* as a formal educational institutions. On the other hand, the palace and governor’s residence became the administrative and political centers [3]. These places stripped the role of the mosque as a holistic institution to an exclusive place for ritual prayers and seclusion only [6]. In Malaysia, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1924 and the influence of secularism by British colonialism has further witnessed the reduction of roles and functions of the mosque. The British colonialism policy was to separate administrative and legal system of the states from Islamic belief [7]. Furthermore, the direct involvement of British education policy has caused the Islamic Education in *pondok*, *madrasas* and mosque to deteriorate gradually [8]. The role of religion becomes only limited to private matters and the mosque institution becomes exclusive to ritual and congregation prayers which is usually dominated by man. These policies might indirectly influenced the limitation of female excess thus results in the inadequacy of their facilities in the mosque.

Today, there has been a rise of Islamic understanding on the true roles of mosque in Muslim community. Islamic Centre and Human Development of Universiti Malaysia Pahang suggests that the mosque should be an institution that encourage the development and wellbeing of the Muslim community [9]. The Department Of Town And Village Planning Peninsular Malaysia, under the Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government also shows considerable support to this movement. They formulate a planning guide to ensure that the planning of mosque by the state, local and religious authority, developer and architect in Malaysia is in line with the aspiration to make the mosque as a center of Muslim life [10]. Architecturally, the planning guide focuses on two scopes which are the location of the mosque and also the space layout of the mosque. The space layout of the mosque can be divided into two parts, the external space such as green landscape, resting area and parking and the internal space compromising the *mihrab*, main prayer area, supporting facilities, the tower, ablution area and toilet [10].

The objective of this paper is to evaluate the current condition of one of the central mosque in Parit Raja, Batu pahat – Masjid Sultan Ibrahim, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, in regards to the comfort of female visitors to the mosque. The evaluation was done through a field observation towards the female facilities and by identifying female user’s needs and expectations through a set of questionnaire. The findings from these evaluations were summarized and analysed in order to gain more understanding in the subject matter and hence a comprehensive proposal for appropriate features and facilities for a female-friendly mosque can be justified.

2. Field Observation

The purpose of the field observation is to evaluate the ‘female friendliness’ of the female facilities inside the mosque. The areas that were observed are the circulation area, women prayer area, women ablution area, and women waiting area. The findings from the observations are as follow:

The circulation area for the female visitors (i.e. route to the entrance, stairs connecting the prayer space to the ablution area and toilet) were considered ‘women-unfriendly’ as they were not fully-covered and resulted in distressing feeling to the women as their aurah might be seen by the public while passing through these areas (Figure 1).



Figure 1 – Non-fully enclosed circulation route and ablution room

The women praying areas are located on the first floor and mezzanine floor. On the first floor, the space is located at the back of the main praying area and segregated from the men's praying area by removable partitions (Figure 2). On the other hand, the prayer space on the mezzanine level is fully dedicated for the women (Figure 3) and can be considered as wide and comfortable space. However, due to its location on the highest level, it is inaccessible to people with difficulties, especially for those who have knee-problems which are typical to old women.

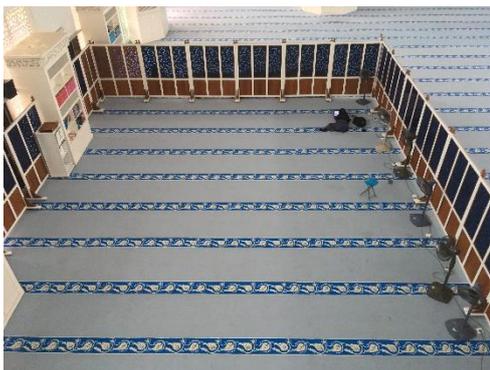


Figure 2 – Women's praying area



Figure 3 – Women's praying area on mezzanine level.

The women ablution room is located on the ground floor which is quite far from the main praying area. The ablution room is not fully-enclosed as it is open at the top and could be clearly seen by the people walking up the stairs next to the ablution area (Figure 1). It causes uneasiness feeling as again, the *aurah* of the female visitors will be exposed while doing the ablution. Apart from that, they had to immediately put on their hijab and unfold their shirts' sleeves right after finishing the ablution without having time to keep themselves dry from the ablution process.

The women waiting rooms are located on the ground floor which are visually and physically disconnected from the main praying area. One room is located in front of the women's ablution area (Figure 4) and the other is an enclosed room which also functions as Fardhu Ain Room (Figure 5). Both of the rooms were not well maintained and had defeated its main purposes. If there is an event occurring in the main praying area, people in those two spaces automatically disconnected and omitted from that event. These places ended up as abandoned places and less utilized by the visitors.



Figure 4 – Women's waiting room



Figure 5 – Fardhu Ain room

3. Questionnaires Distribution

A set of questionnaires were distributed to the women visitors to identify their needs and expectations. The survey took place for three weeks and the pilot study was conducted in the first week of the questionnaire distributions, specifically to test the competency and effectivity of the questions distributed. The questionnaire was consisted of four parts. Part A and Part B were focusing on the respondent's personal details and background while Part C and Part D were to find out the respondent's respond on the conditions, designs, features and facilities of the mosque. The survey was distributed on Monday and Thursday because the number of women visitors were the highest on those days. A total of 91 respondents have taken the survey.

The result from the survey had shown that 7% of respondents visited the UTHM's mosque every day, 54% twice a week, 22% monthly and 17% yearly (Figure 6). From this result, we can say that the women attendance to this mosque is quite low as only 7% of the respondent comes to the mosque every day. On the other hand, 98% of respondents do not have children and only 2% of respondents bring their children to the mosque and these respondents have experienced difficulties affiliate with children at the mosque.

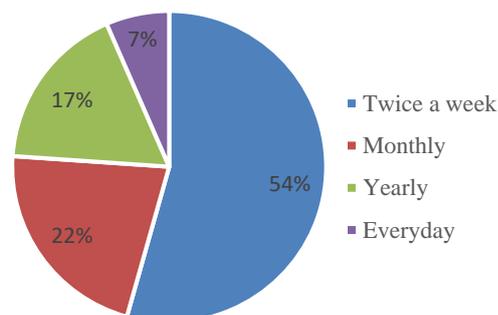


Figure 6: Percentage of the respondents coming to the UTHM Mosque

From the study, it has shown that there were some expectations to be fulfilled in order to make the mosque more women-friendly. 71% of the respondents requested for a children play/waiting area. 63% of the respondents suggested installing LCD screen in the women's praying area so that they could clearly see the person giving the speech in any event organised by the mosque's committee. Graph in Figure 7 and 8 summarised the key to understand women's needs and expectations:

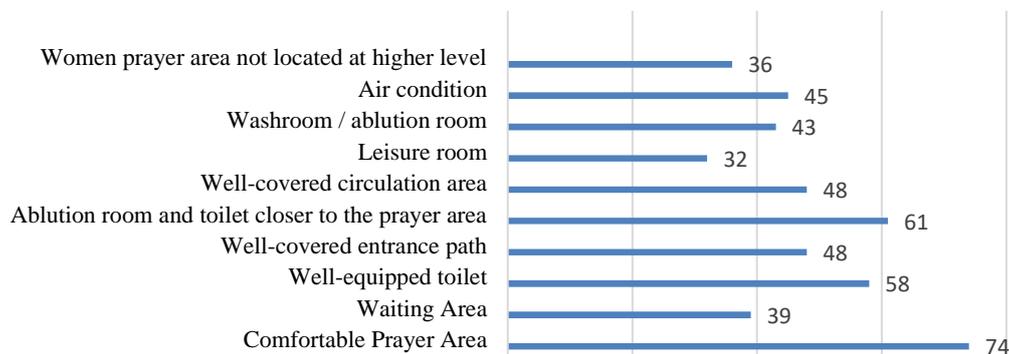


Figure 7: Perception of respondents towards new facilities for a female-friendly mosque (percentage).

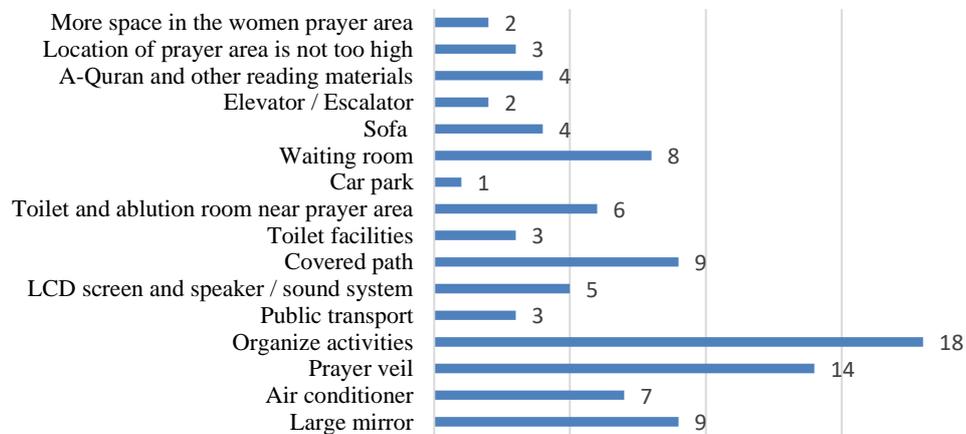


Figure 8: Number of respondents based on their personal opinion

4. Proposal for Improvement for Future Development

From the field observation and survey, suggestions for improvisation can be divided into two parts. The first part is the reconfiguration of spatial layout between the main prayer area and ablution room which ideally should be designed as one unit and attach to each other. These spaces should be fully enclosed, including the route connecting those two spaces. It is important to have a fully enclosed place because the process of doing ablution and getting ready for prayer for women involves uncovering and covering the veil. Furthermore, it is a practical strategy for architects to design an enclosed route between both spaces when the spaces are attach together.

Second is the additional and improvement of supporting facilities that fulfills the need of women and children. Well supporting facilities should be considered in the design of a mosque for the women to have comfortable experience while performing their obligations to the Almighty. One of the facility that should be considered is a well-equipped children area. Usually, the lecture taken place in the mosque takes almost 1 to 2 hours. For the mothers to have a comfortable learning process, a well-equipped children area near the main prayer area should be provided. On top of that, the women waiting area needs a lot of improvement. In Islam, woman who are in their monthly cycle are prohibited from entering the main prayer area but this is not the reason for them to be omitted from the mosque's activities. Installation of better speaker and sound system together with the LCD screen in the women prayer area and waiting area is highly recommended so that they could clearly see the *imam* or speaker during the prayers or any educational events.

5. Conclusion

This paper has elaborated on the requirements needed in implementing a women-friendly mosque. A women-friendly mosque is vital in encouraging women participation to the activities held in the mosque. From the study, four main areas have been identified as the area that needs attention and improvement as to become a female friendly mosque. Therefore, several architectural design proposal have been suggested in regards to those spaces. However, a comprehensive planning guideline should be formulated to guide the state, local, religious authority, developer and architect in designing a mosque that is friendly to women. Therefore, a study on a comprehensive planning guideline that includes female friendly features and design can be a topic of exploration for future research.

Acknowledgments

We thank the Office for Research, Innovation, Commercialization and Consultancy Management and the Registrar Office of Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia for supporting this paper and research.

References

- [1] Abdulaziz A M., Mohamed A K and Nidzamuddin Z 2008 *Fungsi dan Peranan Masjid dalam Masyarakat Hadhari: Kepentingan Dan Peranan Masjid Dari Sudut Pendidikan Dalam Masyarakat Islam* (Johor: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Press) p 61-79
- [2] Zaimeche S 2002 *Education in Islam: The Role of the Mosque* (United Kingdom: Foundation for Science Technology and Civilization) p 3-6
- [3] Haron Z, Ripin M N and Yusof F M 2008 *Fungsi dan Peranan Masjid dalam Masyarakat Hadhari: Masjid Sebagai Institusi Pendidikan, Sorotan Abad Ke-3 H - 5 H* (Johor: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Press) p 2-20
- [4] Reda N Women in the Mosque: Historical Perspectives on Segregation *American J. Islamic Soci. Scie.* **21** 78-97
- [5] Mat Said A H A C H 2008 *Fungsi dan Peranan Masjid dalam Masyarakat Hadhari: Peranan Masjid Dalam Masyarakat Hadhari* (Johor: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Press) p 29-45
- [6] Rasdi M T M 2007 Mosque Architecture in Malaysia: Classification of Styles and Possible Influence *J. Alam Bina* **37**
- [7] Aziz A and Shamsul A B 2004 The religious, the Plural, the Secular and the Modern: a Brief Critical Survey on Islam in Malaysia *J. Inter-Asia Cult. Stud.* **5** 341-56
- [8] Harper T N 1999 *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- [9] PIMPIN 2017 *Kepentingan Masjid Memperkasa Legasi Ummah* (Pahang: Universiti Malaysia Pahang)
- [10] Desa P B D 2011 *Garis Panduan Perancangan Masjid Dan Surau* (Malaysia: Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa) p 1-2