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Embracing halal: Unraveling *Muallafs'* dietary transformation in Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract

With the increasing number of apostasies among *Muallaf*, driven by challenges in transitioning to devout Muslims and sudden shifts to halal dietary lifestyles, detrimental impacts on their social circles and relationships emerge. This qualitative study aims to analyse *Muallafs*' halal food practices, challenges, and adaptation. While respondents could adopt basic halal food practices, gaps in halal food consumption education persist among *Muallaf*, compounded by social challenges and a lack of support and awareness within their close social circles. Challenges include difficulties obtaining halal food while travelling abroad and *Muallafs*' vague understanding of Islamic teachings on halal food. Thus, challenges in halal food consumption among *Muallaf* in Brunei Darussalam predominantly arise during social eating with non-Muslim family and friends, during travel abroad, and regarding halal food issues.

1. Introduction

Corresponding to the increasing number of apostasies among the *Muallaf* due to their difficulties transitioning to become devoted Muslims indicates the importance of assisting them as new Muslims (Muhammad *et al.*, 2018; Majid & Muhammad, 2018). The predicament of the *Muallaf* does not improve, considering that most of them have arguments with their family members due to a sudden shift in their daily routine, such as changing their food consumption (Sintang & Hambali, 2018; Abdillah & Sjafe, 2019). Moreover, considering that the *Muallaf* are new to the concept of halal, it is evident that one of the challenges they face is revamping their dietary habits (Paolielli, 2019; Abdillah & Sjafe, 2019).

Supported by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, food and beverages are the most fundamental human needs in their daily lifestyle, categorising food as the first and most crucial stage of human necessity (Hopper, 2020). Equally, in Islam, halal is considered a ground rule for a Muslim. The *Muallaf* would need to preserve both their family ties and their faith in Islam to mitigate the problem of apostasies among the *Muallaf* and the detrimental impact on their social circle (Sintang & Hambali, 2018; Suki & Salleh, 2018; Abdillah & Sjafe, 2019). They need to be vigilant and willing to take appropriate action on the food they wish to consume.

As a consequence of an individual converting to Islam (*Muallaf*), they are expected to revamp their whole life, including necessities such as their daily consumption (Awang, *et al.*, 2017). Despite the widely held view that the event of a non-Muslim converting to Islam in Brunei Darussalam is not something out of the ordinary, there is little research about the Muallafs' behaviour towards halal food consumption. Even if there is, it is mainly conducted outside of Brunei Darussalam, such as the study done by Awang *et al.*, (2017) in Malaysia along with Lon and Widyawati (2019) in Indonesia. Furthermore, most studies in Brunei Darussalam, such as Hashim (2021), focus solely on customers' attitudes towards purchasing halal food.

How the *Muallaf* in Brunei Darussalam deals with the difficulties of implementing their halal food consumption practices into their daily life is a matter of concern. This paper aims to examine their halal food practices, evaluate the difficulties they have experienced, and investigate how they responded to the difficulties of implementing their halal food consumption practices. By obtaining a thorough understanding of how the *Muallafs* practice their halal food intake as recent converts, the researchers hope to contribute to the development of the halal food curriculum for the *Muallaf*, facilitating their dietary transition.

2. Materials and methods

Due to the nature of the research, which aims to understand better the phenomenon of the dietary transition of the *Muallaf* towards halal food consumption implementation, a qualitative research approach was chosen. The researcher managed to recruit five respondents for the research by utilising purposive sampling. The researcher gathered the respondents by

contacting the *Muallaf* Development Division (*Muallaf* Welfare) under the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre to obtain a list of *Muallaf* in Brunei Darussalam that fit the criteria of this research.

Referring to Table 1, the respondents consisted of two female converts, Naimah and Aisyah (pseudonyms used for this paper), and three male converts, Rasyid, Rawi, and Zaid (pseudonyms used for this paper). All respondents live in Brunei Darussalam, qualifying them for this research.

Table 1: Background of the respondents

Name of respondent	Previous religion	Duration of conversion
Naimah	Christianity	18 years
Rasyid	Buddhism	6 years
Aisyah	Christianity	27 years
Rawi	Free thinker	4 years
Zaid	Free thinker	4 months

The interview sessions were conducted between January 31, 2022, and February 10, 2022. Due to a surge in COVID-19 cases in Brunei Darussalam at the time of the interviews, most respondents preferred online interviews. Only one respondent agreed to a face-to-face interview.

Before the interview sessions, the respondents were briefed on the research objectives and purposes, and their consent was obtained. The researcher assured them their details and information would remain anonymous, confidential, and unpublished. Once consent was obtained, the researcher requested approval to record the interview sessions for research purposes, such as transcription and translation (Stausberg & Engler, 2021). Once approved, the semi-structured interviews were conducted in both English and Bruneian Malay.

Since this study focuses on examining subjective experiences and opinions about a sensitive matter, the respondents were interviewed individually to obtain data, allowing the researcher to gain new perspectives on their dietary transition towards halal food consumption (Milena *et al.*, 2008). Overall, the duration of the interview sessions ranged from approximately thirty to forty-five minutes, fulfilling the criteria for qualitative research as published by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), which states that interviews should be conducted for at least thirty minutes to more than an hour.

Among the questions included to analyse halal food practices were: "Can you define what halal food means to you?", "Is consuming halal food entirely your choice?", "Do you ensure your food is halal before purchasing?", and "Do you feel secure eating halal food without a halal logo provided by another Muslim?".

To assess the challenges faced by the *Muallaf* regarding their implementation of halal food consumption, questions included were: "Did you have any habits of consuming non-halal food before converting to Islam?", "Were there any moments where halal dietary concerns made you hesitant or worried before converting to Islam?", "What dietary challenges have you faced as a *Muallaf*?", "Was your family supportive of your implementation of halal dietary practices?", "Are there specific situations that make halal consumption a challenge for you?", "Is it easy for you to obtain or consume halal food?", "Is knowledge or understanding the *hukm* of food a challenge for you?", and "If you were confused about the halal status of food, is it easy for you to obtain information about the *hukm*?".

To investigate how the *Muallaf* adapted to halal food consumption, the question was, "Based on the challenges mentioned, how did you overcome or adapt to them?".

During data processing, any identification of personal information was discarded and not published. The next section of this paper will disseminate the results using thematic analysis to convey the data collected from the interview sessions.

3. Results and discussion

This section of the paper thoroughly extracts the data gathered during the interview sessions. Readers will be able to understand the respondents' halal food practices, challenges, and adaptation to these challenges. As a result, this section will be divided into three subtopics to elucidate each research objective.

3.1 *Muallafs'* halal food practices

The respondents believed that they had begun practising halal food consumption even before converting to Islam (Ramadhan, 2018; Yulita & Ong, 2019). However, they admitted to not inspecting the ingredients of products or the slaughtering process of the meat they consumed. Consequently, most claimed to face little to no challenges in implementing halal food practices in Brunei Darussalam. This ease of dietary transition may be influenced by the country's national principles of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay *et al.*) and Brunei Darussalam's strong image as a *'Negara Zikir'* (Ahmad Kumpoh, 2011).

When asked about the definition of halal, all respondents were able to provide an answer, which is crucial for identifying halal food when purchasing products. Their responses focused on describing halal in the context of halal meat, which involves animals slaughtered in accordance with *hukm syara'* (Yusoff *et al.*, 2015). Aisyah further defined halal by mentioning its benefits for human health and spiritual well-being (Kawangit & Guleng, 2016; Nazihah & Ariffin, 2020).

Despite Zaid converting to Islam in less than 5 months and Rawi in less than 5 years, they could identify that consuming flowing blood is prohibited and *syubhah* matter should be avoided (Regenstein *et al.*, 2006). This indicates their knowledge of halal food, especially since research by Rahman *et al.* (2021) found that Muslims in Malaysia are unfamiliar with the term *syubhah*.

When questioned whether consuming halal food was a personal choice, all respondents except for Zaid stated that apart from being mandated by religion, consuming halal food is entirely their choice, and they do not feel pressured. Their response aligns with the findings of Vanany *et al.* (2019), who concluded that respondents believed halal food was the most perfect and the best choice.

Table 2: List of respondents' halal food practices

Respondent/Questions	Naimah	Rasyid	Aisyah	Rawi	Zaid
Practiced consuming halal food prior to converting	✓	✓	✕	✓	✓
Knowledgeable in the definition of halal food	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Consuming halal food is their personal choice.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕
Ensures the product is halal before purchasing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Consuming halal food is essential to them.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
They felt secure consuming food without the halal logo given by another Muslim.	✓	✕	✓	✕	✓

Considering the importance of consuming halal food, respondents would not only inspect the halal logo but also check product ingredients (Shaari & Mohd Arifin, 2009; Kawangit & Guleng, 2016). Naimah only purchases brands she is familiar with, while Rawi inspects the product's origin (Kawangit & Guleng, 2016; Raffi *et al.*, 2022; Ahmad *et al.*, 2023). All respondents emphasised the importance of consuming halal food, consistent with the findings of Vanany *et al.* (2019).

Lastly, after gaining insights into their halal food practices, the researcher presented a scenario asking whether they would feel secure consuming halal food without a halal logo provided by a Muslim. All respondents except for Rasyid and Rawi indicated they would consume halal food given by another knowledgeable Muslim, even without a halal logo, based on specific personal principles. For instance, Zaid mentioned he would eat if "that person is wearing *topi haji* and *jubah;* I will think that they are doing it for alms, so I will just eat it". Naimah, Aisyah, and Zaid felt secure in consuming food without a halal logo, as they were not doubtful of food given by another Muslim. According to Ramli and Aminuddin (2017), food only becomes Syubhah if there is doubt, which was not the case for Naimah, Aisyah, and Zaid.

3.2 *Muallafs'* challenges to implementing halal food consumption

The challenges can be categorized as factors contributed by their social circle, difficulty obtaining halal food while travelling abroad, and halal food issues, along with the unconscious challenges that the *Muallaf* face. The researcher identified these unconscious challenges as the *Muallafs'* vague understanding and lack of access to resources in Islamic teachings.

3.2.1 Social circle

The challenges caused by their social circle can be categorised into two categories: those from their family members and their friends (Sintang & Hambali, 2018; Abdillah & Sjafe, 2019). The challenges from family members can be further divided into two categories: deceitful behaviour and a lack of awareness regarding halal food practices, especially concerning food and utensil contamination.

Beyond the expected dissatisfaction with her conversion, Naimah recalled a situation with her parents (Yusif, 2004; Sintang & Hambali, 2018; Paoliello, 2019). She mentioned, "My parents are aware of the concept of halal and knowledgeable about halal dietary practices, but sometimes they would purposely claim food is halal when it is not." Additionally, Naimah explained the challenges she faced living with her parents, cooking in her room and purchasing her equipment due to the absence of a separate kitchen. This intense challenge arose because she converted to Islam individually.

Similarly, Rasyid, who also converted individually, faced a similar situation where "my father understands, but the rest of my family does not fully grasp halal dietary practices, so if I wash my dishes, they still use them." This lack of understanding aligns with the findings of Rahim *et al.* (2011).

Regarding family members' lack of understanding, Aisyah faced the challenge of rejecting her family's home-cooked meals to avoid consuming contaminated food. During a celebratory party upon returning to her home country after getting married to a Bruneian, she had to explain to her disappointed mother that they did not need to prepare food for her.

Table 3: List of respondents' challenges to halal food consumption

Respondent/Challenges	Naimah	Rasyid	Aisyah	Rawi	Zaid
Social circle	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕
Difficulty of obtaining halal food abroad	✕	✕	✓	✓	✕
Halal food issues	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vague understanding and lack of resources in Islamic teachings	✓	✕	✓	✓	✓

Table 4: List of respondents' challenges caused by social circle

Respondent/Challenges	Naimah	Rasyid	Aisyah	Rawi
Challenges related to family members				
Deceitful behaviour	✓	✕	✕	✕
Lack of awareness of halal food practices	✓	✓	✓	✕
Challenges related to friends				
Being persuaded to consume non-halal food	✕	✕	✕	✓

Apart from challenges with family members, Rawi mentioned non-halal food, not taking their conversion seriously. Such situations made Rawi uncomfortable, consistent with Yusif's (2004) assertion that pressure to consume non-halal food leaves *Muallaf* feeling vulnerable and pressured during gatherings with friends and family.

3.2.2 Difficulty of obtaining halal food abroad

Due to the ease of searching for and obtaining halal food in Brunei Darussalam, two respondents stated that they only encountered difficulties in finding and obtaining halal food while travelling abroad. Aisyah, who migrated to Brunei Darussalam after marrying a Bruneian, noted the contrast in obtaining halal food between Brunei Darussalam and her home country, stating, "It is difficult to obtain halal food in my home country except in some parts where there are Muslim majorities" (Yulita & Ong, 2019).

Similarly, Rawi had the opportunity to travel outside of Brunei Darussalam. He recounted his experiences in two places: Shanghai and Singapore. Rawi mentioned, "Even if there were halal food available in those countries, which Bruneians, Malaysians, and Indonesians often visit, I was still doubtful of the source of the food." This scepticism arose, especially when he encountered places serving halal food alongside non-halal food. Such perspectives are common, as Lon and Widyawati (2019) mentioned the Woni tradition, where Indonesian families from Manggarai would have communal meals, offering non-pork food separately from pork dishes.

3.2.3 Halal food issues

Interestingly, all respondents pointed out a similar challenge they faced regarding halal food issues. They noted instances where foods they had consumed for an extended period, even since childhood, suddenly became subject to claims of being non-halal following a press release from authorities (Zaharan, 2020). This situation mirrors the findings of Anir, Nizam, and Masliyana (2008), who illustrated how food manufacturers would fake halal certification to attract Muslim consumers.

Naimah expressed her disappointment "when a presumed halal food becomes viral for its uncertainty in halal integrity." This is particularly concerning for *Muallaf*, who are new to halal food, as some may struggle to differentiate between genuine and counterfeit halal logos. In a study by Shafiq *et al.*, (2015), it was found that most consumers lack knowledge about the genuine halal logo issued by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM).

Additionally, Rasyid pointed out, "When you talk more in-depth about the ingredients, like all those scientific terms, I am not really aware of it and I do not really understand about it," expressing confusion about the scientific terminology used in food product ingredient lists (Hussain-Gambles, 2020).

3.2.4 Vague understanding and lack of resources in Islamic teachings

There are several hidden challenges faced by the respondents that were identified by the researcher but not directly stated during the interviews. These challenges include misconception

Table 5: List of respondents' challenges due to difficulty of obtaining halal food abroad

Respondent/Challenges	Aisyah	Rawi
Lack of availability of halal food because Muslims are a minority in the area	✓	✕
Doubtful of the source/ingredients	✕	✓
Contamination of halal and non-halal food	✕	✓

Table 6: List of respondents' challenges related to halal food ıssues

Respondent/Challenges	Naimah	Rasyid	Aisyah	Rawi	Zaid
Presumed halal products are rumoured to be non-halal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scientific ingredients terms are confusing	✕	✓	✕	✕	✕

about the term *"murtad,"* the assumption that everything sold in Brunei Darussalam is halal, the mixing of utensils used for halal and non-halal food, and the prohibition of consuming medium-rare meat. The respondents' unawareness of these challenges could be attributed to their vague understanding and lack of access to resources about Islamic teachings in general.

Naimah had a misconception about the term *"murtad,"* also known as apostate. The simplest explanation of *"murtad"* is when a Muslim has left Islam after previously embracing it (Muhammad *et al.*, 2018). Naimah recounted an incident in her family, stating:

> "There was an incident that happened in my family. My aunt converted to Islam and married a born Muslim. After they got married, the husband apostatised (*murtad*) from Islam. **He chose to consume haram substances**. When I arrived at their house, the husband said, 'You can eat this meat because I slaughtered it myself.' After that, my parents said to me, **'Do not eat that because your uncle is no longer a Muslim since he consumed haram substances and stopped praying.'**"

Here, we can understand that Naimah was informed that her uncle had abandoned Islam because he willingly consumed non-halal food and did not perform the five daily prayers, which she then related to the term *"murtad."* Based on various definitions provided by Muhammad, Siren, and Yusoff (2018), *"murtad"* can be categorised into three cases: due to a person's tampered belief, due to a person's spoken words, and due to their actions. Consuming non-halal substances is not considered *"murtad"* but actions the *hukm syara'* despised (Pejabat *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, according to the *Irsyad Hukm* of Brunei Darussalam, abandoning daily prayers may be considered *"murtad"* only if the person does so due to disbelief in the obligation (not acknowledging the obligation of the law of prayer) (Brunei, 2019). However, in this case, it is unclear if the person mentioned abandoned their prayers due to disbelief in the obligation, if they did so out of laziness, being busy with worldly affairs, or following the lusts and whispers of the devil. If it is only due to the latter, then it is not considered *"murtad."*

The researcher found the second statement when Aisyah stated that all food sold in Brunei Darussalam is halal. Although Brunei Darussalam is a Muslim-majority country with a strong image of being a *'Negara Zikir,'* and non-halal food is rarely sold there, it is still possible to find non-halal food at grocery shops (Ahmad Kumpoh, 2011; Al-Fatih & Esfandiari, 2020). Aisyah's statement was:

> "I do not have to question the halal integrity of the food because most people in Brunei are Muslim, and **all the food sold here is halal**, except for food sold by non-Muslims. However, I have never purchased food from a non-Muslim."

The third statement the researcher wanted to highlight is when Rawi was unaware that utensils used for consuming non-halal food should not be mixed with those used for halal food (Vanany *et al.*, 2019). Rawi shared his harrowing experience of finding halal food in Singapore and Shanghai. While dining at a restaurant in Singapore, he noticed that the "utensils used were mixed" for consuming both halal and non-halal food, remarking that "it looks clean though." This finding is consistent with that of Sintang and Hambali (2018), who discovered that *Muallaf* still does not understand the proper guidelines of Islam.

Lastly, Zaid was unaware that halal meat, which is not cooked well and still has blood on the inside, is actually halal to consume (Al-Bakri, 2022). He stated:

> "My father used to tell me that whenever I find cooked chicken with blood on it, I just dip it in chilli sauce and eat it because the blood will mix with the red sauce, and you will not notice it anymore. However, I am unsure if that is true or if he was too lazy to recook the chicken. **However, now I know that when blood is on the meat, it is haram to consume.**"

Zaid was unaware that if the meat is halal and has been cooked, and the blood is not flowing, then it is halal to consume (Al-Bakri, 2022). This can be supported by a verse from the *Qur'an*, *Surah Al-Anaam*, verse number 145, which states that only flowing blood is prohibited for Muslims:

> "Say, 'I do not find within that which was revealed to me [anything] forbidden to one who would eat it unless it is a dead animal or **blood spilt out** or the flesh of swine - for indeed, it is impure - or it is [that slaughtered in] disobedience, dedicated to other than Allah. However, whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], then indeed, your Lord is Forgiving and Merciful".

Therefore, referring back to the results of halal food practices for Rawi and Zaid, both of them were able to define halal theoretically by stating that *syubhah* should be avoided and flowing blood is prohibited in Islam. However, they were not able to demonstrate consistency in their practical application of halal food knowledge in real-world situations. For that reason, it shows that there is still a need to educate *Muallaf* when it comes to the practical aspect of halal food knowledge (Kawangit & Guleng, 2016). Therefore, it could be said that this paper has similar findings to those of Rahman *et al.* (2021) regarding the respondents' low level of knowledge about *syubhah* food.

According to Kawi *et al.*, (2020), the vague knowledge of Islamic teachings is due to the lack of resources or might be caused by the limited presence of preachers in the *Muallafs'* surroundings. This result complements the statement made by Zaid:

> "As a Muslim, you have your parents to refer to about the *hukm* of something. I only have my friends, YouTube, and Google to refer to for information about the teachings of Islam... I wanted to join the *Muallaf* committee, but it was difficult because there was no information about it. That is why I am unsure if there is any, and it is not easy because I do not have anyone to refer to... It is fun to hang out and tell my experience because my parents would not understand if I were to discuss this (halal food consumption practices) with them. That is why I find it fun to have Muslim friends; it is easy to ask them questions."

Another factor that might contribute to vague knowledge of Islamic teachings is the essential syllabus provided to *Muallaf* by the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre when they first converted to Islam in Brunei Darussalam. Aisyah and Zaid support this statement:

> "They did teach us about the halal diet at the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre, but it was just basic knowledge."
>
> (Aisyah)

> "At first, I did my research because I was afraid of accidentally consuming haram food. Later, the people at the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre taught me a bit about it, but they only taught us the basics… If possible, they (the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre) should educate us more because I found most of these things (about halal and haram food) from the translation of the *Qur'an*. I have read it in *Surah Al-An'am* verse one hundred forty-something; I forgot."
>
> (Zaid)

Naimah and Aisyah claimed that although the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre provided them with only basic knowledge about halal dietary practices, they were free to inquire about questions to the authorities at the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre when needed. Aisyah stated, "There are usually forums that we can attend, and the *Ustaz* will answer our questions. I prefer it that way because they have a better experience and know better about the *hukm*" (Abdullah & Sjafe, 2019). Naimah also expressed her preference for obtaining explanations directly from the authorities of the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre because "they explain information that is easier for me to understand," indicating their high dependency on the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre even after completing their mandatory courses.

3.3 *Muallafs'* adaptation to challenges on halal food consumption

The following section of this paper will describe the adaptations made by the respondents to overcome their challenges in implementing halal food consumption. This section is interconnected with the previous sub-topic, which discusses the challenges faced by the respondents in implementing halal food consumption. Therefore, the order of the adaptations will follow the sequence of the previous sub-topic.

3.3.1 Social circle

In dealing with the deceptive behaviour of her family members, Naimah overcame this challenge by stating: "I did not eat because I was full, and I just acted normally". Sometimes, she would say to her relatives, "I will eat it later in order to please them so that it (the problem) will not be prolonged" (Awang *et al.*, 2017). A similar case can be seen in the study conducted by Lon and Widyawati (2019), where some respondents politely rejected eating during communal meals with their non-Muslim families.

Rasyid and Aisyah resolved the challenge of their family members' lack of understanding towards Islamic practices because their families were supportive and open-minded (Lon & Widyawati, 2019). This helped ease their implementation of halal dietary practices. Rasyid mentioned that "my father was the one who educated them (my family members) about it (contamination of utensils) because sometimes, there are times that my family members would unintentionally use my utensils. In the end, they (my family members) are the ones who adapted to my halal dietary practices, *Alhamdulillah*". Meanwhile, Aisyah stated, "My family was very supportive. They understood me. They were delighted because they did not have to cook for us when we came to visit. My mom was disappointed when I came back to my home country because she cooked for us, but she understood after some time. My mother is very open-minded." From these statements, it is evident that they resolved their challenges by communicating with their families regarding the implementation of halal food practices (Awang *et al.*, 2019).

Apart from that, although Rawi was pressured by the statement made by his friend to consume non-halal meat because what is halal and what is non-halal cannot be seen through the naked eye, he managed to overcome the challenge. He would "attend the gathering to keep peace with my family or friends so that I will not be falsely accused of forgetting my origin. I still have to take care of their feelings and my relationship with them even if I have converted to Islam". He maintained a mindset of attending the gathering to maintain his relationship with his family and friends.

3.3.2 Difficulty of obtaining halal food abroad

After Aisyah and Rawi mentioned having difficulties finding and obtaining halal food while travelling abroad, they each have their ways of overcoming this challenge. For Aisyah, whenever she visited her family in her home country, she would "cook fish for her family using different cookware, and I would

Table 7: List of respondents' challenges due to their vague understanding and lack of resources in ıslamic teachings

Respondent/Questions	Naimah	Rasyid	Aisyah	Rawi	Zaid
Misconception of the term *murtad*	✓	✕	✕	✕	✕
Misconception that everything sold in Brunei Darussalam is halal	✕	✕	✓	✕	✕
Misconception that utensils used for halal food can be mixed with non-halal food	✕	✕	✕	✓	✕
Misconception of the prohibition of consuming medium-rare meat	✕	✕	✕	✕	✓

Table 8: List of respondents' adaptation to the challenges caused by social circle

Respondent/Adaptation	Naimah	Rasyid	Aisyah	Rawi
Challenges related to family members				
Stating they are "full/they will eat later" to avoid consuming non-halal food	✓	✕	✕	✕
Family members were supportive and open-minded.	✕	✓	✓	✕
Challenges related to friends				
Attended gatherings to maintain relationships with family and friends	✕	✕	✕	✓

Table 9: List of respondents' adaptation to the difficulty of obtaining halal food abroad

Respondent/Challenges	Aisyah	Rawi
Cook for non-Muslim family members.	✓	✕
Brought food from Brunei Darussalam	✓	✕
Eat out to vegetarian restaurants.	✓	✓
Consume halal food by default.	✓	✓

bring my food from Brunei Darussalam. Sometimes, we would go out to eat because there is a specific eating place for vegetarians." Meanwhile, Rawi would consume seafood, vegetables, and fruits when he found it challenging to obtain halal food. Therefore, both of them opt to consume food they know is halal by default. (Yusof & Shutto, 2014, Yulita & Ong, 2019, Said *et. al.*, 2022, & Ahmad *et. al.*, 2023).

3.3.3 Halal food issues

When faced with challenges related to not knowing the *hukm* or understanding the scientific terms of food ingredients, Rasyid turned to find the *hukm* "from a reliable source via the internet." Rawi would "consult a more knowledgeable person about halal and haram. I would ask my friend or *Ustaz*. If they told me not to eat it, then I would avoid it and move on to another food. I would usually refer to the press release from the government." Meanwhile, Zaid would "usually ask my friends because one of my friends owns a convenience store ... Before I eat something and feel doubtful, I will search for it on Google and refer to their (the brand's) official website." Additionally, when Aisyah and Naimah encounter doubt about the *hukm*, they refer to the authorities from the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre for guidance due to their expertise in religious matters. Therefore, most of them would either rely on a reliable internet source or seek guidance from knowledgeable individuals regarding the *hukm* of the food (Yee *et al.*, 2019).

Regarding the issue of consuming presumed halal food only to discover later that it is claimed as non-halal by authorities via a press release, Aisyah expressed that she "could not do anything when I learned of the news. I said, ' Oh well, I have eaten it, but it is not halal.' I told my children about it, and once we were aware, we stopped buying that product." Rawi would also cease purchasing that product upon learning of its non-halal status.

Table 10: List of respondents' adaptation to challenges related to halal food issues

Respondent/Challenges	Naimah	Rasyid	Aisyah	Rawi	Zaid
Referring to reliable internet sources for the *hukm*	✕	✓	✕	✕	✓
Referring to a more knowledgeable person for the *hukm*	✕	✕	✕	✓	✕
Referring to a government press release for the *Hukm*	✕	✕	✓	✓	✕
Referring to their friends for the *hukm*	✕	✕	✕	✕	✓
Referring to authorities from the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre for the *Hukm*	✓	✕	✓	✓	✕

4. Conclusions

This research successfully achieved its objectives of identifying the respondents' halal food practices, challenges, and adaptation strategies. However, despite the respondents' ability to adapt basic halal food practices, the study reveals a gap in providing *Muallaf* with in-depth education on halal food consumption.

Furthermore, although *Muallaf* in Brunei Darussalam reported facing fewer challenges compared to those in Muslim minority countries, the analysis of collected data identified several challenges they encountered, including challenges in their social circle, difficulties obtaining halal food abroad, halal food issues, and vague understanding of Islamic teachings due to a lack of resources.

Regarding their adaptation to these challenges, the respondents found support from their social circles crucial. When facing difficulty obtaining halal food abroad, they opted for default halal options or brought food from Brunei Darussalam. In dealing with halal food issues, they consulted reliable internet sources or knowledgeable individuals and discontinued consuming questionable products.

While the research objectives were achieved, future studies could delve into *Muallafs'* knowledge of halal food consumption, their awareness of halal food products, their pre-conversion dietary habits, and their dining practices within their social circles. Additionally, publishing a book on scientific ingredient terms, including their derivatives and the *hukm* (Islamic rulings) of ingredients, could help educate *Muallaf* and alleviate confusion. The researcher believes this could mitigate challenges related to halal food issues and obtaining halal food while travelling abroad.

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6. Copyright

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