

## CHILDREN FRIENDLY MASJID: A GLIMPSE ON *JAMA'AH'S* PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS CHILDREN AT MASJID

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### ABSTRACT

The role of the masjid was diverse during the era of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, and it continued for decades by his (SAW) companions and the following caliphs. The diverseness of masjid's role reflected the people that were being served by this institution and reflected the criteria of inclusiveness. As time goes by and as the government developed, various ministries were established. This establishment witnessed the taking over of various roles by masjid to the people by these ministries and their agencies. Thus, masjid seems to be seen as a sacred place to perform specific *ibadah* and that it should pose a tranquil environment to the effect that children may not be welcome as they are seen as the 'agent' that 'disrupt' the tranquillity and sacredness of masjid. This initial study is carried out to identify the public's perception towards the presence of children at the masjid. An online survey form was distributed via the social media that is the WhatsApp application to various groups established by the administration of Masjid Al Ridhuan, Hulu Kelang. Based on the response of 90 respondents, the result reveals the excellent level of acceptance of children at masjid among the *jama'ah*. They also provided their opinion on the spaces where they felt would be suitable for children based on their age range. Children between the age of 7 to 9 years old seemed to be well accepted in the main prayer hall while the rest are perceived to be more suitable to be at other sub-spaces of the masjid.

**Keywords:** Children Friendly Masjid, Perception of the Jama'ah, Spaces for children at masjid.

### INTRODUCTION

Children in the masjid can be a 'favourite' topic of the society from time to time, particularly among the *jama'ah* (congregational members). The issue can be said as getting the most attention during the Ramadhan (the month where the Muslims are obligated to perform fasting for one month) as more children can be seen at the masjid. Various perspectives can be observed in the presence of children at masjid – be it positive or somewhat negative. Thus, this study is intended to get a glimpse of the *jama'ah's perceptions* and the general public towards children at masjid as the initial steps towards the study on children-friendly masjid. “Masjid” generally means a place for Muslims to worship (The Oxford dictionaries - online). The word “masjid” originated from the term *sajada* in Arabic, which means prostration. Thus, it reflects the specific function of masjid that is for the Muslim to worship Allah SWT. Worshipping Allah SWT can be further translated by various good deeds that are done to please Allah SWT. Thus, masjid can be said as an institution for all walks of life to be part of it in performing good deeds. Professor M. Kamal Hasan in his keynote speech at the Second International Conference on Mosque Architecture, emphasised on the needs to expand the spiritual-social functions of masjids in the Southeast Asian cities facing the scenario of acute civilisational-environmental crises beyond the typical and conservative functions which are as places of *'ibadah* (worship proper), *da'wah* (spreading the message of Islam), *ta'lim* (teaching religious knowledge), or *tarbi'ah rūhiyyah* (spiritual education). He came up with three proposals (Hasan, 2019):

- i. As temporary centres for climate refugees or victims (including non-Muslims) of major environmental catastrophes or disasters;

- ii. As temporary emergency shelters for the homeless urban poor and street dwellers (including non-Muslims); and
- iii. As inter-religious and inter-civilisational harmonisation activity centres cum Islamic reference centres meant to be non-Muslim friendly or foreign tourist-friendly for Non-Muslim locals or foreigners.

This great Islamic scholar envisions for more extensive and comprehensive roles of masjids within urban areas, precisely due to the current needs of the people and the environment. Thus, masjids in terms of their design and management must be prepared to play these more significant and divine roles. From these proposals, it can be seen that masjids must be inclusive in order to embark further in this great mission. Inclusivity of children and their families would be part of this. In moving forward to diversify the role of masjids, the jamaah's and public's perception of children in the masjid is investigated. The *jamaah* would be part of the mechanism in realising the success of masjids in achieving its optimal if not maximal potentials/functions in the society. Thus, it is imperative to identify their perception in order to analyse the current situation before planning further what is needed to prepare the *jamaah* and the society as a whole to be receptive to the changes needed. Welcoming children or families with children in masjids is a 'challenge' that our society needs to strategise in facing it to be able to play more significant roles as envisioned by Professor M. Kamal Hasan. Full of enthusiasm, passion, and energy – these are the nature of children for which Allah SWT has created them to be. They are still progressing physically, morally, and spiritually. They are not matured enough to differentiate between right or wrong, thus making mistakes is normal. They are yet able to control their behaviour and to evaluate the situation of how to behave. These nature of children seem to be perceived negatively by adults in the masjid that may hinder children from coming masjid. Inability to comprehend the nature of children and the needs of families with young children may lead to a non-children friendly environment in the masjid that may cause children and their families feeling uncomfortable and not welcome. Hence, inclusivity will not succeed.

## LITERATURES REVIEW

### 1. The Nature of Children

The nature of the children is generally understood to mean the development of physical, morals and spirituals, which also include the behaviour problem of the children, especially the young ones. Young children absorb encountered experience based on their understanding. Therefore, it is crucial to provide proper guidance and knowledge especially moral upbringing to nurture them as a Muslim. A hadith narrated by Tirmidhi stated that "*Among the gifts a father gives his son, none is better than an excellent etiquette and elegant manners*" (Mukhtaar, 2005, p.64). He elaborated that children are treasures from Allah SWT to all parents. Hence, parents should provide proper education and develop praiseworthy sentiments and kindness to their children. Children usually are facing multi-factorial and easily influenced by mostly developmental stage, temperament and adaptive abilities of the family, the natural environment, and the duration of stress.

### 2. Masjid in Islam

The essential function of the masjid is as the place for performing prayers where the main activity is the congregational prayers. Other than that, the masjid also serves as an educational centre for the formal teachings of religious education. Masjid also acts as the administration centre for the masjid officials and caters for Muslim religious celebrations. Masjid might also be the best place for children's upbringing. Looking at the current design guidelines for the masjid in Malaysia, a lot

to be improved to address the comprehensive roles of the masjid as envisioned by Professor M. Kamal Hasan. It can be said that these guidelines might not be focusing on the holistic needs of children and their family yet. Comparing the three guidelines provided for masjids, only in the *Garis Panduan dan Peraturan bagi Perancangan Bangunan 2015* by *Jabatan Perdana Menteri (JPM)*, the design guidelines for Islamic kindergarten was mentioned briefly. In the *Deraf Garis Panduan Perancangan Masjid dan Surau 2009* by *Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa Semenanjung Malaysia (JPBD)*, a few aspects of Islamic kindergarten, and Al-Qur'an classes were mentioned. In the *Architecture and Asset Management of Masjid by Malaysian Standard (MS2577:2014)*, the children's needs such as safety, Islamic kindergarten, and baby's changing room in the guidelines are superficially mentioned.

### 3. Parents and Children Education in Islam

Mohd Hamidin et al. (2017), said in shaping the children's future, early education is vital. Prophet SAW said "*no babe is born but upon fitra. It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Polytheist*" (Sahih Muslim, 33:6426). This means, every child is born in a state of holy soul and free from sins, and it depends on the parent's hand to teach and shape them. Patterning their life and giving excellent education to the children are the responsibility of parents and educators. There are seven aspects of children's education that need to be instilled by every parents and educator towards children which are faith, morality, physical, mental, emotions, social, and sexual (Nasih Ulwan, 2015). Furthermore, Nik Yacoob (2016:21), said that "*Islamic education is intrinsically linked with the objective of producing a good human being, who is successful and happy in this world and the hereafter*". It is the responsibility of the parents to provide an excellent education for their children as the first educator for their children is themselves. The father and the mother are the ones responsible for their child's training and education (Tarazi, 1995). Muktaar (2005), also noted that parents need to ensure the correct rearing of children, which specifically begin at birth. Children friendly masjid is the application of the design concept that is children welcoming and fulfilling the needs of the children in the masjid. Smidt (2006), stated that young children are considered to be blank slate waiting to be written. This is in line with what is being mentioned by Prophet SAW earlier. Positive personality can be created through early childhood education in the masjid.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Survey Method

The objective of the survey method is to identify the jamaah's and public's perception of children in the masjid. The online survey was conducted by applying the Google survey form, and the survey link was distributed among the *jamaah* of Masjid Al Ridhuan, Hulu Kelang society through the WhatsApp groups established by the management of the masjid. The online survey enabled potential respondents to be reached in a quick manner, less cost, and the respondents can respond at their own free time. This masjid is chosen as the case study because it is very active in organising programmes for its *jamaah*. The *jamaah* was also encouraged to distribute the online survey link to their contacts. The survey questionnaires were developed in Bahasa Melayu as all walks of life were targeted, and divided into four categories:

- Category A: The demographic data;
- Category B: The activities at masjid;
- Category C: The education system at masjid; and
- Category D: The physical attributes of the masjid spaces.

Ninety respondents were obtained within seventeen days. These respondents could be parents/guardians who bring or may not bring their children to masjid; and also non-parents/guardian. Although it was easy to distribute the survey form via the online platform as it can reach various online groups, it was still challenging to get the attention and cooperation of the public. Within that duration, periodical reminders were sent.

**ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

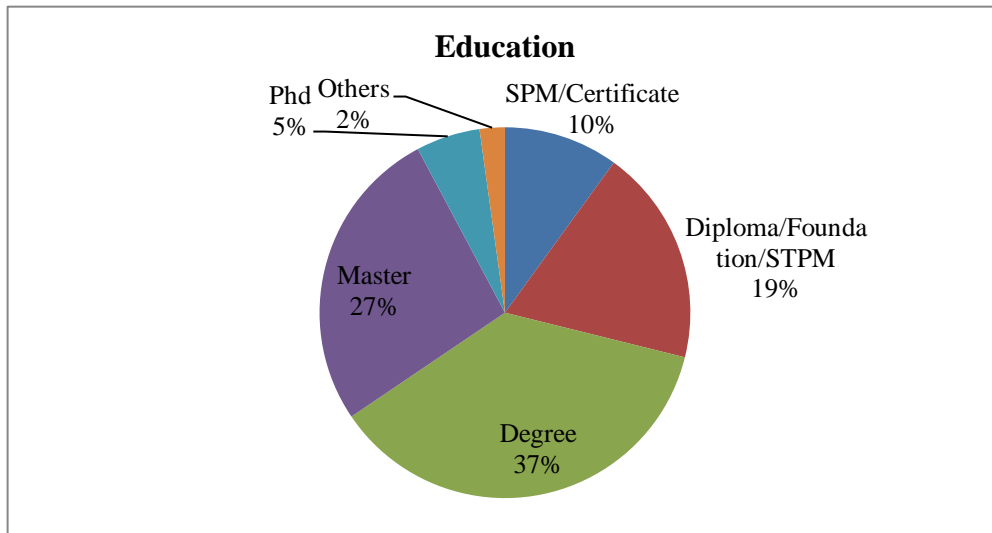
The presentation of the analysis and discussion is structured following the sequence of the sections in the survey questionnaire.

**i. Respondent’s Profile**

**Table 1** Respondent’s profile – gender distribution and age categories

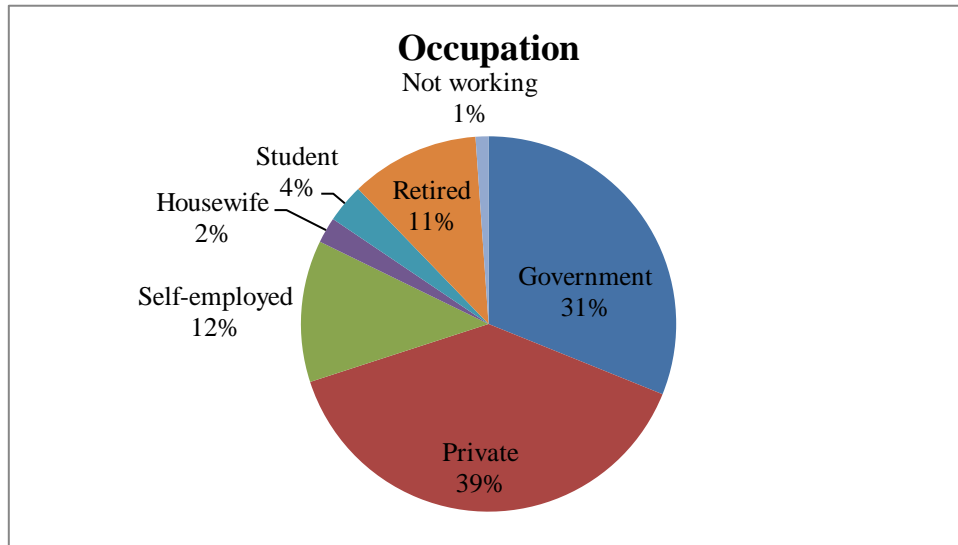
		Age categories										
	No	%	20-29	%	30-39	%	40-49	%	50-59	%	60-69	%
Male	41	45.6	4	10	8	22.2	13	33.3	9	23.3	7	11.2
female	49	54.4	5		12		17		12		3	

Referring to Table 1, from a total of 90 respondents, 49 of the respondents are female, while 41 are male. From that numbers, 54.4% are female, while 45.6% are male. It can be seen that the majority of the respondents are in the category of 40-49 years old (33.3%). They would typically have teen children and looking at the recent trends where people got married quite at a later stage, the tendency of this group to have young children is also there. It can also be said that parents within the age group between 20 to 39 years old would have a higher potential of having young children or toddlers. Moreover, these categories comprise of 32.2% of the respondents.



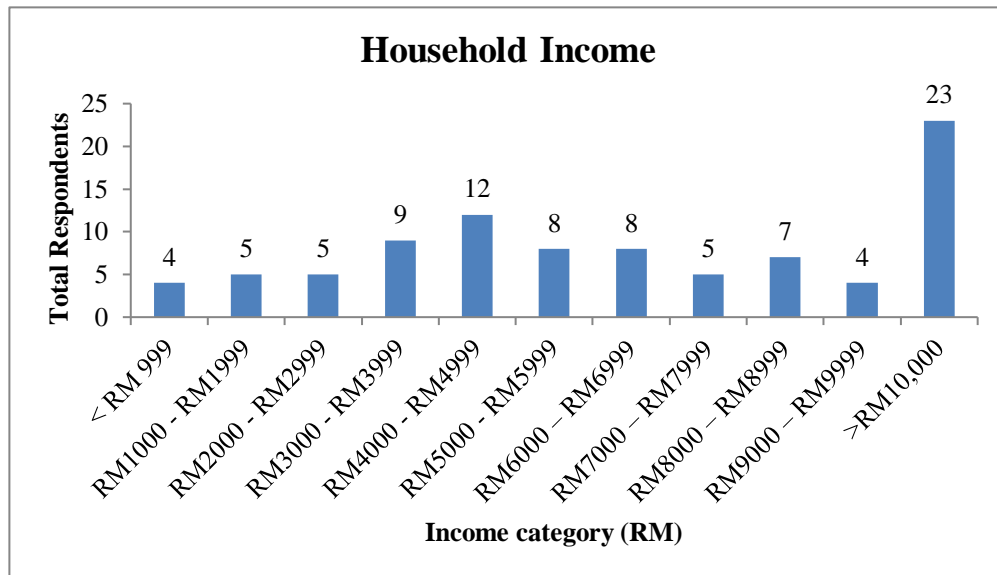
**Fig. 1** Respondent’s educational background

Referring to Figure 1, it can be seen that about 88% of the respondents are qualified with diploma/foundation certificate/STPM, bachelor degree, master and PhD. Degree holders form the majority with 37% out of this category. It can be suggested that people with academic qualification are more inclined to participate in this study.



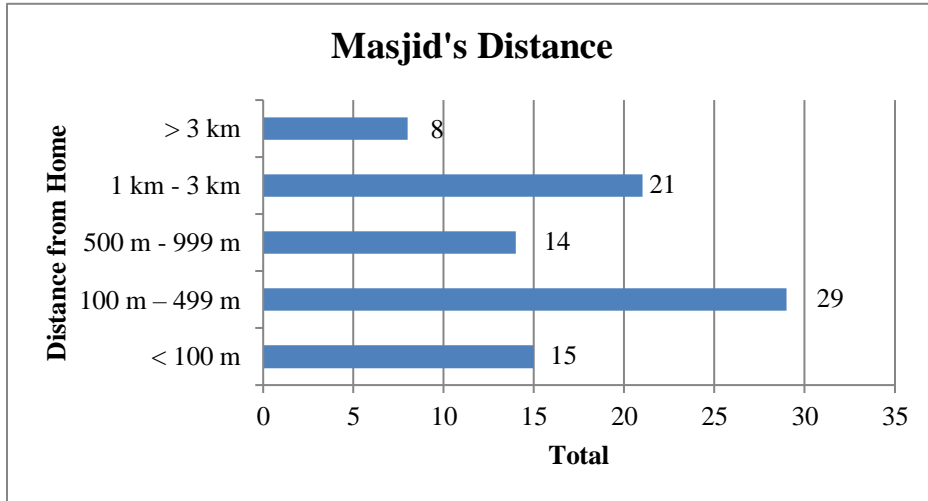
**Fig. 2** Respondent's Occupational background

As can be seen from Figure 2, 82% of the respondents are employed. They are either working in the public sector, private sector, or self-employed. These findings show that masjid is not only occupied by old or retired people but also consumed by the various background of people.



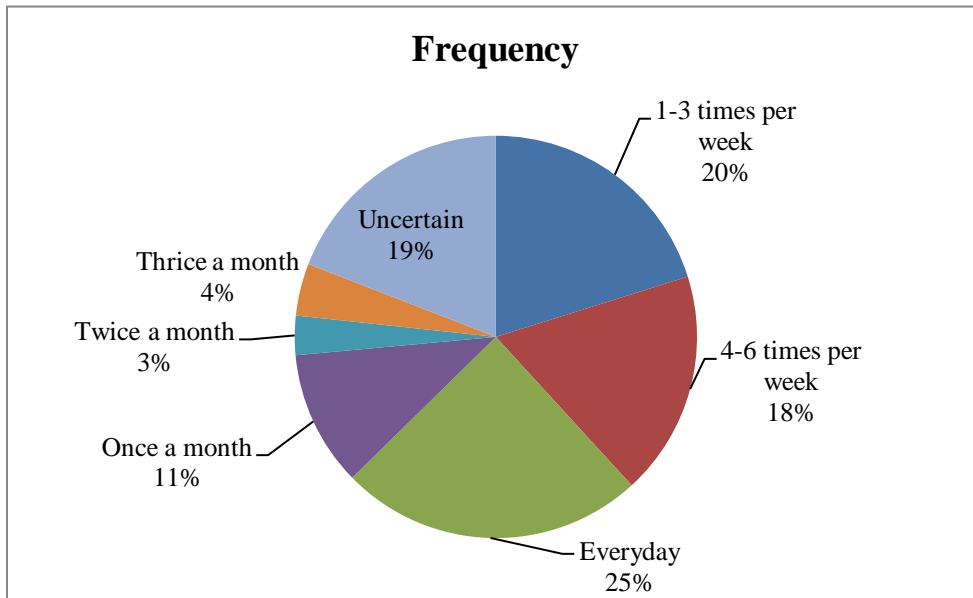
**Fig. 3** Household income of Respondents

According to Professor Jayasooria of the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, "... *the urban poor is people with a family of four, who earn less than RM2,000 a month and have less than RM5,000 in savings – someone who would not be able to survive three months without work*" (Augustin, 2019 – online). Referring to Figure 3, it can be correlated that as about 88% of the respondents are qualified with at least a diploma, the household income of the majority of the respondents can be said as representing the middle-income group and above.



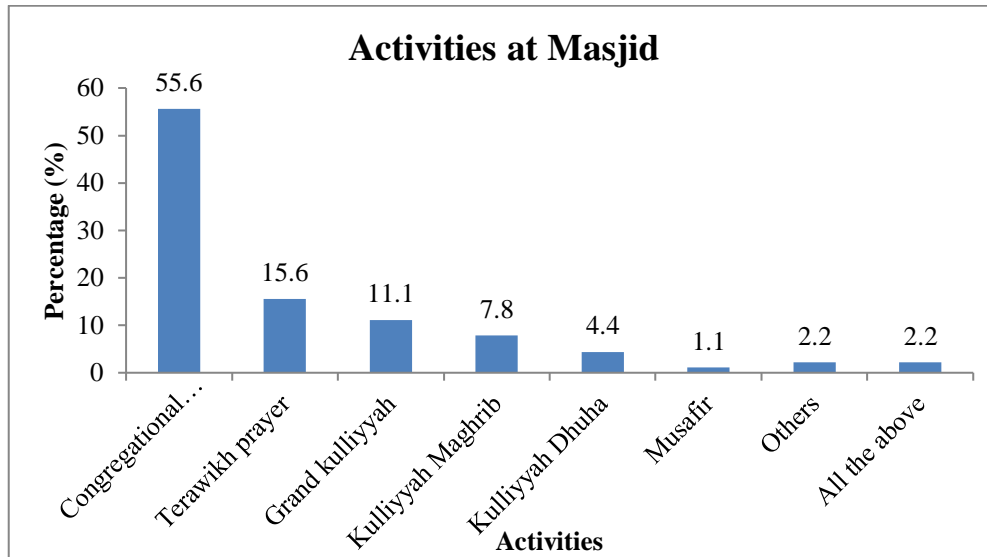
**Fig. 4** Distance of Masjid from Home

About 64.4% of the respondents stay within walking distance from masjid of less than a kilometre (Figure 4). These could be the factor that also encourages the parents/guardian to bring their children to the masjid.



**Fig. 5** Frequency of the *jamaah* that brings their children to masjid

Based on Figure 5, 43% of the respondent bring their children to the masjid almost every day, and this could be a distance from home factor as previous data shows that more than half of the respondents stay within walking distance to the masjid. These could be the factor that eases them in bringing their child to the masjid.



**Fig. 6** The children position and activities in Masjid according to their parents/guardian

Referring to Figure 6, it can be seen that more than 50% of respondents come to the masjid for congregational prayer, including the prayer in the month of Ramadhan, *Terawikh* prayer. This shows that Muslims are indeed chasing the rewards of performing prayer in congregational, which is 27 times better than praying alone. The fact that most of the respondents live near the masjid also can be the contributing factor of them coming to perform the prayer at the masjid.

**ii. The Perceptions of *Jamaah* towards the presence of children at Masjid (according to the statements below)**

**Table 2** The perceptions of *jamaah* towards the statement regarding the presence of children at masjid

No	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Children need to be at masjid at their early years	6.7%	27.7%	4.4%	28.9%	32.3%
		<b>34.4%</b>			<b>61.2%</b>	
2	Crying and disturbance from children has distract me from focusing on my activities in masjid	13.3%	34.4%	4.4%	32.3%	15.6%
		<b>47.7%</b>			<b>47.9%</b>	
3	Children who are playing in masjid can bring a distraction to me	14.4%	38.9%	8.9%	20.0%	17.8%
		<b>53.3%</b>			<b>37.8%</b>	
4	Children can be at the outside of the main prayer hall ONLY	35.6%	41.1%	5.6%	14.4%	3.3%
		<b>76.7%</b>			<b>17.7%</b>	

Based on Table 2, the majority of the respondents agreed that masjid is an essential institution for children's development, as 61.2% agreed that bringing children to masjid needs to be started as early as possible. However, it cannot be taken lightly that the presence of the children at masjid does create distractions to others. This could be due to their activities and behaviour at the masjid. While they agreed that children need to be at masjid at their tender years, the majority of the respondents seem to believe that children should be outside of the main prayer hall only.

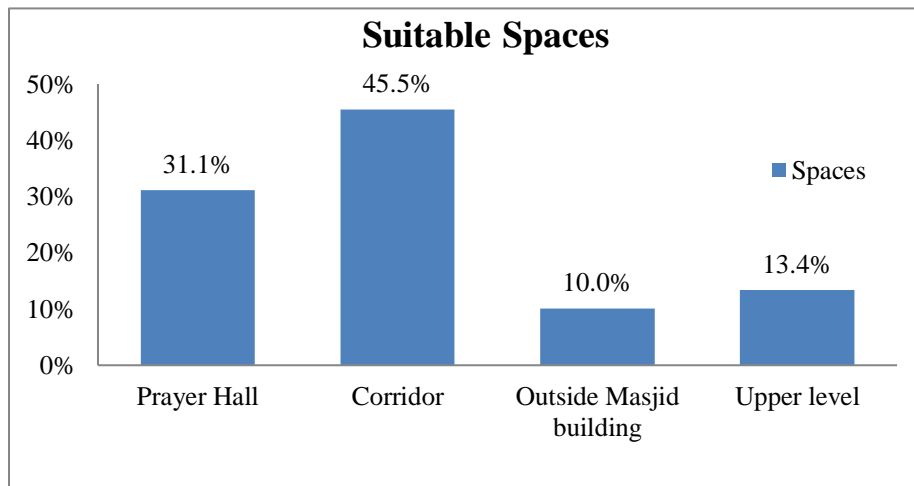
**iii. The Perceptions of Respondents on Children and Masjid**

**Table 3** The perceptions of *jamaah* towards the statement regarding the presence of children at masjid

No	Statement	Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
1	A special space for children at masjid is needed	80.0%	16.7%	3.3%
2	Masjid is one of the educational institution other than house and school	96.7%	1.1%	2.2%
3	Masjid should emphasize special educational activities for children	97.8%	2.2%	0.0%

From Table 3, it can be said that the majority of the respondents agreed that masjid is vital as an educational institution for children apart from their house and school; that educational activities for children should be emphasised. Thus, a specific space for them in the masjid is needed.

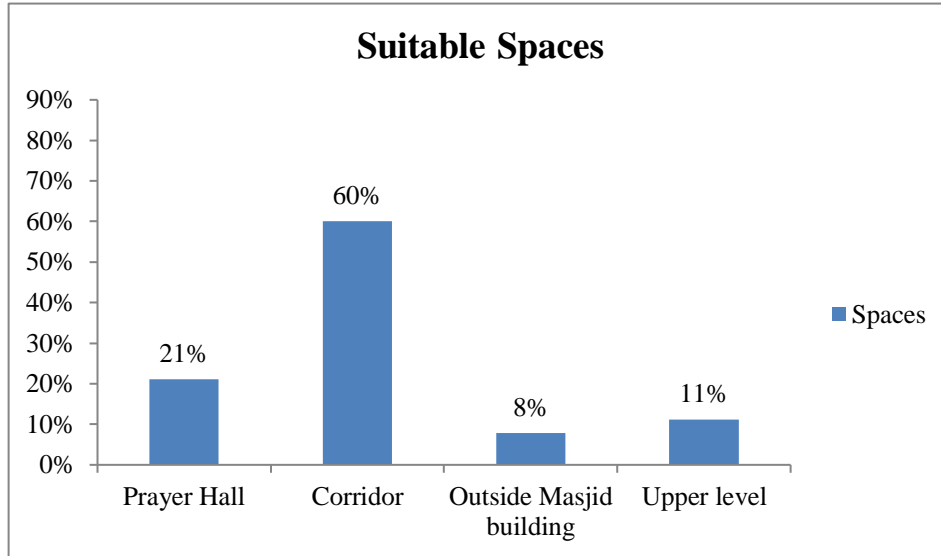
**iv. The Perceptions of Respondents on the Physical Space for Children at Masjid (according to age categories)**



**Fig. 7** Suitable places for children in Masjid (< 2 years old)

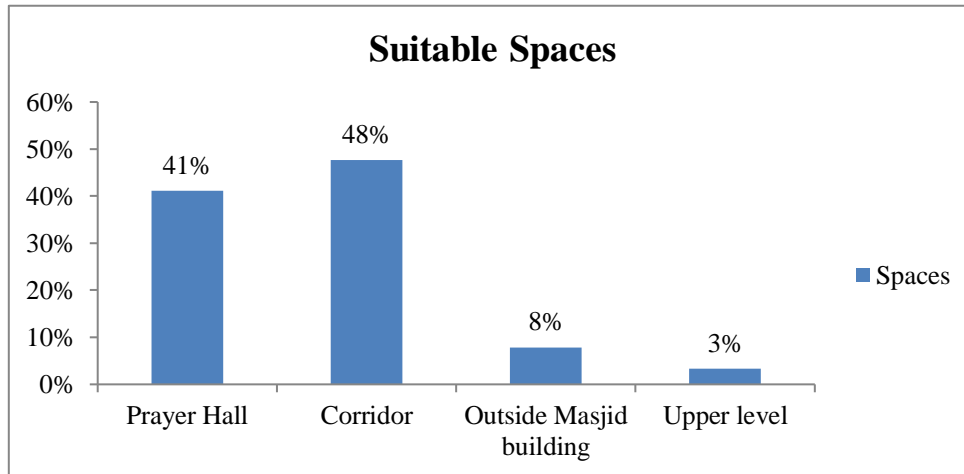


Based on Figure 7, it can be seen that almost half (45.5%) of the respondents suggested that children below two years old should be placed at the corridor of the masjid. This can be correlated with the result shown in table 2, where crying and playing children can cause disturbance to the respondents to be focused on their *ibadah*. Thus, being outside of the prayer hall are deemed to be more suitable for children below two years old. It is also shocking to see that some (although it seems minor – 10.0%) think that children below two years old should be outside of the masjid. This indicates that some quarter of our society may not tolerate young children at all.



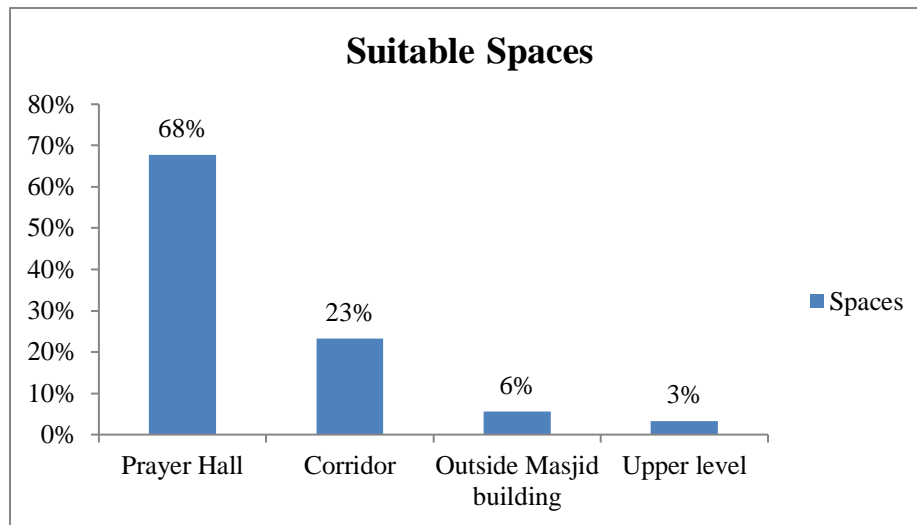
**Fig. 8** Suitable places for children in Masjid (2-4 years old)

As for children between the age of two to four years old, the pattern is almost similar to the below two years old (Figure 8). Up to 60% of the respondents suggested that children of these age range should be at the corridor. Still, a minority (8%) would perceive children of this age range should be outside the masjid.



**Fig. 9** Suitable places for children in Masjid (4-6 years old)

As age is increasing for children, it shows that they are more welcomed at the main prayer hall and the space near it (refer to Figure 9). This may be caused by the maturity of the children which they can understand instructions more; thus, it is easy for the adult to control them inside the prayer hall.



**Fig. 10** Suitable places for children in Masjid (7-9 years old)

Figure 10 shows that children age 7 to 9 years old are highly welcomed at the prayer hall compared to the other younger age categories. This could be because, at this age range, these children can be considered as *mumayyiz*. It is the age at which a child can distinguish between right and wrong (Sulaiman, Jamsari & Che Noh, 2015). They are more matured and can be independent as compared to the younger ages. Seven years old also is the essential age to teach them the proper way and to be consistent in performing the obligated five times prayer a day.

## CONCLUSION

From the survey conducted, it can be observed that the respondents seem to be aware of the importance of children to be at masjid as they also agreed that masjid plays important roles in educating children apart from home and school. The level of acceptance of the respondents towards children at the main prayer hall mainly depends very much on the age range of these children with 7 to 9 years old are most welcome there. This initial study also reveals on the worrying part whereby some respondents although they are representing the minority, seem to feel that children should not be in the masjid as they are suggesting them to be outside the masjid. The safety of the children must be the utmost concern of all as they cannot defend themselves should anything unwanted happened. Thus, initiatives in creating awareness on the safety of children among children themselves and also the rest of the *jamaah* at masjid must be carried out while emphasising the importance of them to be at masjid spiritually.

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