

Public Perception of the Role of Muslim Chaplains in Government Hospitals

Ismail Ibrahim¹, Noor Syazwani Ishak², Noor Syamimi Ishak³,
Amal Hayati Ishak⁴

^{1,2}Sunway College Kuala Lumpur, ³SEGi University, ⁴UiTM Shah Alam
Email: ismailibrahim93@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This study examines public perceptions of the role of Muslim chaplains in Malaysian government hospitals, focusing on the spiritual and emotional support provided to patients. Muslim chaplains play a crucial role in assisting Muslim patients with their religious practices, providing spiritual support, and offering emotional guidance during treatment. This study employs a quantitative approach by analyzing descriptive data from 80 respondents in the Klang Valley area. The findings indicate that most respondents (86.3%) have a positive perception of Muslim chaplains and are willing to seek spiritual support from them. However, several challenges faced by Muslim chaplains were identified, including a lack of specialized training in chaplaincy and insufficient collaboration between chaplains and healthcare professionals. Misconceptions about the role of Muslim chaplains also contribute to the lack of support for these services. The study emphasizes the importance of specialized training and collaboration between chaplains and healthcare professionals to enhance the services provided by Muslim chaplains. Overall, the presence of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals has a significant positive impact on the overall experience of Muslim patients, improving their spiritual and emotional well-being. Efforts to raise awareness, provide specialized training, and foster collaboration between chaplains and healthcare professionals are essential to ensure that Muslim chaplains can effectively provide spiritual and emotional support to patients.

Keywords: Perception, Chaplain, Muslim, Hospital, Chaplaincy

Introduction

Public Perception of the Role of Muslim Chaplains in Government Hospitals. In the field of healthcare, the duties of a Muslim chaplain or religious officer are often associated with the Christian tradition known as a pastor. From a terminological perspective, the Muslim chaplain acts to provide spiritual support to Muslim patients throughout their stay in the hospital.

Muslim chaplains are not only bound to provide spiritual support but also act as individuals who offer emotional support to patients and their families.

The role of the chaplain in the Western world has a long history and is more commonly known as chaplaincy. The concept of chaplaincy began in a religious context where chaplains served as spiritual leaders in churches and religious communities. The word chaplain comes from the Latin *cappellanus*, which refers to the priests who kept the sacred cloak (*cappa*) of St. Martin of Tours, a Catholic priest renowned for his charitable deeds in the 4th century AD. In the Middle Ages, chaplains began to serve in royal courts, assisting with religious matters and advising the rulers. They also often served as spiritual advisors to the military in times of war. Later, chaplains began to develop in the military field where they played an important role in providing spiritual and moral support to soldiers going to war (Grimell, 2024). Chaplains will help soldiers who are facing mental and emotional stress while on the battlefield. In addition to providing counselling to soldiers, chaplains also assist in burying the bodies of fallen soldiers. The role of chaplains in hospitals began in the 19th century when health institutions in Europe started to be managed by religious groups such as the Catholic and Protestant churches. The chaplain exists between two worlds, namely the religious and medical sectors (David, 2025). Hospital chaplains serve as providers of spiritual support to patients and their families, helping them cope with illness, pain, and death.

In the United States, the concept of chaplaincy in the field of healthcare rapidly developed in the 20th century. The chaplaincy program in hospitals is increasingly developing with the existence of professional training in this field. Chaplains also play an important role in the prison system in Europe and the United States. They are responsible for providing spiritual guidance to inmates as well as assisting in rehabilitation programs (Manuella, 2024; Judy, 2002).

Meanwhile, at Western universities, chaplains play a role in providing religious guidance and counselling to students and staff. Chaplains at Western universities play a role in providing spiritual support and counselling to the campus community, helping individuals face personal and academic challenges, and promoting holistic well-being (Angela, 2020). The role of chaplains in Western history began as spiritual advisors in the government and military before expanding to other institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and universities. Until now, chaplains continue to serve as providers of spiritual and emotional support in various sectors of society in the West. This situation is seen to be somewhat different from the role of chaplains in Malaysia, which is more specifically focused on the health aspect.

In government hospitals, Muslim Chaplains are not only responsible for spiritual aspects but also play a role in ensuring that Muslim patients can perform their worship perfectly. This includes providing prayer spaces, assisting patients with ablution, and ensuring that the food provided is halal. In addition, Muslim chaplains also serve as a liaison between patients and the hospital, helping to resolve any issues related to the spiritual and religious needs of the patients (Shariff, 2021).

Chaplains play an important role in providing spiritual support to patients in their healing and well-being process. Chaplains help patients and their families face the emotional challenges that arise from illness by providing spiritual guidance, counselling, and religious rituals that

can offer peace and inner strength. Study by Joseph (2020) shows that hospital chaplains play an important role in providing holistic care to patients. They help in reducing spiritual and emotional stress, as well as supporting the overall well-being of patients and their families. Continuous education and training are essential to ensure that chaplains and other members of the interdisciplinary team can collaborate effectively.

Patients who receive spiritual support tend to have better mental well-being, which can indirectly contribute to their physical recovery. Attention to the spiritual needs of hospitalised patients is an important aspect but often overlooked in patient care. The chaplain serves as a spiritual care expert who can enhance the hospital experience, improve patient satisfaction, and help bridge the gap between patients and healthcare providers (Robert, 2021; Kirchoff, 2021).

Although there has been an increase in awareness regarding the importance of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals, there is still a lack of understanding in society about their roles. Studies show that Muslim patients often do not receive adequate spiritual support while in the hospital. This may be due to the lack of trained Muslim chaplains or the lack of cooperation between chaplains and healthcare professionals (Suleimen, 2022). In addition, there are also challenges in ensuring that Muslim patients can perform their daily worship, such as prayers, while in the hospital.

One of the main challenges faced by Muslim chaplains is the lack of specialised training in the field of chaplaincy. Most Muslim chaplains do not have a formal educational background in this field, which can affect their ability to provide effective spiritual support. In addition, there is also a lack of cooperation between chaplains and healthcare professionals, which can result in patients not receiving the support they need (Ashaari, 2020).

Furthermore, there are also issues related to the public's perception of Muslim chaplains. Some members of the community may not understand the role of Muslim chaplains and assume they are only responsible for religious aspects. This can lead to a lack of support from the community for the role of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals (Shariff, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to examine the public's perception of the role of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals and identify the challenges and opportunities to improve this service.

Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach that analyses data descriptively to examine the level of public perception regarding the role of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals. A total of 80 respondents from the Klang Valley area answered the survey questions distributed using Google Forms. The descriptive statistics used in this study are to determine the percentage and mean for the relevant variables. To achieve the objectives of the study, the questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A is the demographic part that involves the respondents' background, namely age, gender, ethnicity, religion, level of education, and experience visiting government hospitals. Section B, on the other hand, is a construct to examine the public's perception of Muslim chaplains, which contains 6 questions. The questionnaire has been designed to assess the levels of public perception regarding the role of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals. Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The Likert scale is used to measure all the provided constructs. The mean

score obtained from each dimension of the study will determine the level of each dimension based on the mean range, as shown in Table 1. The interpretation of this mean value study has been adopted by Abdullah and Darusalam (2018, p. 24).

Table 1
Levels According to Mean Score Values of the Study

| Mean Value | Stage Interpretation |
|-------------|----------------------|
| 1.00 – 1.80 | Very Low |
| 1.81 – 2.60 | Low |
| 2.61 – 3.40 | Simple |
| 3.41 – 4.20 | High |
| 4.21 – 5.00 | Very High |

Research Findings

The findings of this study will be divided into two parts: the demographics of the respondents and the Public Perception of the Role of Muslim Chaplains in Government Hospitals.

Respondent Demographics

The majority of respondents are in the age range of 26–35 years (58.8%), indicating that this age group is the most dominant in the sample. Next, the age group 36–45 years is the second largest with 27.5%, while the younger age group (18–25 years) and the older age group (56 years and above) have smaller percentages, at 3.8% and 1.2% respectively. In terms of gender, there were slightly more male respondents (52.5%) compared to female respondents (47.5%), indicating a nearly equal balance between genders in this sample. In addition, the majority of respondents have a Bachelor's degree (43.8%), followed by a Diploma (23.8%) and a Master's degree (21.3%). No respondents had only primary or secondary education, indicating that this sample consists of highly educated individuals. In conclusion, this data shows that the majority of respondents are individuals aged 26–35 years, with a nearly equal gender balance and a high level of education, reflecting a younger and more educated population in the context of your study. The summary of the demographic findings can be summarised as Table 2 below:

Table 2
Demographics of Respondents Who Answered the Questionnaire

| Item | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Age | | |
| 18–25 years old | 3 | 3.8% |
| 26–35 years old | 47 | 58.8% |
| 36–45 years old | 22 | 27.5% |
| 46–55 years old | 7 | 8.8% |
| 56 years and older | 1 | 1.2% |
| Gender | | |

| | | |
|----------------------|----|-------|
| Man | 42 | 52.5% |
| Woman | 38 | 47.5% |
| Education Level | | |
| Primary school | 0 | 0% |
| Secondary school | 0 | 0% |
| Diploma | 19 | 23.8% |
| Bachelor's Degree | 35 | 43.8% |
| Bachelor's Degree | 17 | 21.3% |
| Doctor of Philosophy | 1 | 1.2% |

Public Perception of the Role of Muslim Chaplains in Government Hospital

Overall, the results of the descriptive analysis on the community's perception of Muslim Chaplains in government hospitals show a very high level, with a mean score of 4.34. Table 3 shows in more detail the items of the questions used in this study.

Table 3

Analysis of Mean Scores for the Public Perception Component of Muslim Chaplains

| No. | Items | Mean Score | Stage |
|---------------|--|------------|-----------|
| 1. | I am comfortable consulting with a Muslim chaplain if I become a patient in a government hospital. | 4.21 | Very High |
| 2 | The presence of a Muslim chaplain will have a positive impact on the overall experience of Muslim patients in the hospital. | 4.30 | Very High |
| 3. | Muslim chaplains contribute to a more respectful and inclusive hospital environment. | 4.25 | Very High |
| 4. | It is important for government hospitals to provide religious support services such as Muslim chaplains for patients. | 4.37 | Very High |
| 5. | I believe that the role of Muslim chaplains should be expanded in government hospitals across the country. | 4.44 | Very High |
| 6. | I believe that Muslim chaplains play an important role in helping patients overcome emotional and spiritual challenges in hospitals. | 4.44 | Very High |
| Score Average | | 4.34 | Very High |

Based on the findings of the public perception component towards Muslim Chaplains, it was found that the overall public perception shows a very high level with an average mean score of 4.34. Among the items that were observed to have the highest mean scores were the item "I feel that the role of Muslim chaplains should be expanded in government hospitals across the country" and the item "I believe that Muslim chaplains play an important role in helping patients overcome emotional and spiritual challenges in hospitals," both with a score of 4.44. The second highest mean score was for the item "it is important for government hospitals to provide religious support services such as Muslim chaplains for patients," which scored 4.37, followed by the item "the presence of Muslim chaplains will have a positive impact on the overall experience of Muslim patients in hospitals," with a mean score of 4.30. The item "Muslim chaplains contribute to a more respectful and inclusive hospital environment" recorded a mean score of 4.25. Meanwhile, the lowest mean score was for the item "I am comfortable consulting with a Muslim chaplain if I become a patient in a government hospital" with a mean score of 4.21.

Discussion

Overall, this study shows that the public perception of Muslim chaplains is very positive, reflecting the community's acceptance and appreciation of their roles and contributions within the community. The general public has a positive perception of Muslim chaplains and is willing to seek spiritual support from them. Studies have shown that the general public is comfortable consulting with Muslim chaplains if treated in government hospitals. Factors influencing this positive perception include the importance of spiritual support in the healing process and patient well-being. Muslim chaplains play an important role in providing this support, which is recognized by the majority of respondents (Shariff, 2021). In addition, Muslim chaplains help Muslim patients perform their worship perfectly, including providing prayer spaces and ensuring that the food served is halal. This enhances the comfort and satisfaction of the patients (Shariff, 2021; Abu-Ras, 2011). In addition to spiritual support, Muslim chaplains also provide emotional support to patients and their families, which is important in facing the stress and challenges during treatment (Shariff, 2021; Abu-Ras, 2011).

The results of this study also indicate that the presence of Muslim chaplains can enhance the overall experience of Muslim patients in hospitals. Additionally, this study shows that the presence of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals has a significantly positive impact on the overall experience of Muslim patients. This means that the public believes that the presence of Muslim chaplains can enhance their experience while in the hospital. Factors contributing to this positive perception include the spiritual support provided by Muslim chaplains, which is important in the healing and well-being process of patients. A study by Klitzman (2023) shows that Muslim chaplains play an important role in providing spiritual and emotional support to patients, as well as helping them perform their religious practices perfectly. This includes providing prayer spaces, assisting patients with ablution, and ensuring that the food provided is halal (Klitzman, 2023).

In addition, this study has proven that the presence of Muslim chaplains helps create a more inclusive hospital environment that respects the spiritual needs of Muslim patients. Muslim chaplains also serve as a link between patients and the hospital, helping to resolve any issues related to the spiritual and religious needs of the patients. This can enhance patient comfort and satisfaction, as well as reduce the stress and anxiety they may experience while in the hospital (University of Utah Health, 2023).

The provision of religious support services such as Muslim chaplains in government hospitals is an important step in meeting the spiritual needs of Muslim patients. This shows that religious support services are considered important by respondents for the spiritual and emotional well-being of patients. According to the study, the spiritual support provided by Muslim chaplains can help patients overcome the emotional and spiritual challenges they face in the hospital (Mayberry, 2020).

Next, this study also identified the need to expand the role of Muslim chaplains to government hospitals. This indicates that there is a high demand for Muslim chaplain services in hospitals. Studies show that Muslim chaplains play an important role in providing spiritual and emotional support to Muslim patients in hospitals (Laird & Abdul-Majid, 2022).

This study also proves that the role of Muslim chaplains is critical in helping patients overcome emotional stress and spiritual challenges that arise during hospital treatment. This shows that Muslim chaplains are seen as an important source of support for Muslim patients. According to the study, Muslim chaplains help patients overcome emotional and spiritual challenges in the hospital environment (Mayberry, 2020).

Overall, this study shows that the public perception of Muslim chaplains is very positive, reflecting the community's acceptance and appreciation of their roles and contributions. The general public has a positive perception of Muslim chaplains and is willing to seek spiritual support from them. Studies have shown that the general public is comfortable consulting with Muslim chaplains if treated in government hospitals. Factors influencing this positive perception include the importance of spiritual support in the healing process and the well-being of patients. Muslim chaplains play an important role in providing this support, which is recognized by the majority of respondents (Shariff, 2021). Additionally, Muslim chaplains help Muslim patients perform their worship perfectly, including providing prayer spaces and ensuring that the food served is halal.

Conclusion

This study has analyzed the public's perception of the role of Muslim chaplains in Malaysian government hospitals, focusing on the spiritual and emotional support provided to patients. The study findings indicate that the majority of respondents have a positive perception, agreeing or strongly agreeing with the role of Muslim chaplains and are willing to consult with a Muslim chaplain if they become patients in a government hospital. This shows that Muslim chaplains are recognized as important providers of spiritual support in the healing and well-being process of patients.

Although there is positive acceptance, this study also identifies several challenges that need to be addressed to improve Muslim chaplaincy services. One of the main challenges is the lack of specialized training in the field of chaplaincy, which can affect the ability of Muslim chaplains to provide effective spiritual support. In addition, the lack of cooperation between chaplains and health professionals is also an issue that needs to be addressed. The public's misconception of the role of Muslim chaplains, who are often seen as only responsible for religious aspects, also contributes to the lack of support for their role in government hospitals.

This study emphasizes the importance of specialized training and collaboration between chaplains and healthcare professionals to enhance the services of Muslim chaplains. Continuous training and professional development programs can empower Muslim chaplains with the skills needed to provide effective spiritual and emotional support. Additionally, efforts to raise public awareness about the role of Muslim chaplains are crucial to ensuring broader support for this service.

Overall, the presence of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals has a significantly positive impact on the overall experience of Muslim patients. The spiritual support provided by Muslim chaplains not only aids in the process of physical healing but also enhances the emotional and mental well-being of patients. Therefore, it is important to continue strengthening the role of Muslim chaplains in the healthcare system in Malaysia through

specialized training, closer collaboration with healthcare professionals, and increasing public awareness of the importance of spiritual support in healthcare.

The rejection of Muslim chaplains is also very low, indicating that there is still a lack of understanding or awareness regarding the role of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals. This is because there are several challenges faced by Muslim chaplains. One of the main challenges is the lack of specialized training in the field of chaplaincy. Most Muslim chaplains do not have a formal educational background in this field, which can affect their ability to provide effective spiritual support (Shariff, 2021). Additionally, there is a lack of collaboration between chaplains and healthcare professionals, which can result in patients not receiving the support they need (Shariff, 2021; Abu-Ras, 2011). Public perception also plays an important role, where some communities may not understand the role of Muslim chaplains and assume they are only responsible for religious aspects. This can lead to a lack of support from the community for the role of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals (Shariff, 2021; Abu-Ras, 2011).

A recent study by Klitzman (2023) shows that Muslim patients in the United States also face similar challenges, including a lack of adequate spiritual support and misconceptions in society about the role of Muslim chaplains. This study emphasizes the importance of specialized training and collaboration between chaplains and healthcare professionals to enhance the services of Muslim chaplains (Klitzman et al., 2023). Overall, the data shows that the public perception of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals is positive. However, there are several challenges that need to be addressed to improve the services of Muslim chaplains. Further research and efforts to raise awareness and provide specialized training are essential to ensure that Muslim chaplains can offer effective spiritual and emotional support to patients.

Overall, the data shows that the presence of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals has a significantly positive impact on the overall experience of Muslim patients. However, efforts to raise awareness, provide specialized training, and foster collaboration between chaplains and healthcare professionals are essential to ensure that Muslim chaplains can offer effective spiritual and emotional support to patients. Based on the findings of this study, there is a need for more in-depth future research on specialized training and collaboration between chaplains and healthcare professionals, as well as efforts to raise public awareness about the role of Muslim chaplains in government hospitals.

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