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WOMEN FRIENDLY MOSQUE: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract:

Mosque is a place where people prostrate to Allah S.W.T and Islamic religion greatness symbol, that stand firm in every corner of the world. The mosque is also a place for muslims gather with no differences in gender, ethnicity and status. In the time of Prophet Muhammad, peace upon him, has raised awareness of the mosque's role as community builder without ignoring the women. In Malaysia, some mosque designs less emphasize the need for woman comfort and this raises problems towards women while in the mosque. Prayer area, ablution area, toilet and safety which are the main components that are needed to be emphasized in designing a mosque. Nevertheless, there are still a numbers of muslim women voices their frustration towards the facilities provided to them in mosque. Therefore, this research identifies the problems faced by women using the secondary data which is media content analysis. Besides that, field observation which involved some mosques in Johor to identify issues in facilities and design of mosque. From the field observation, it was clearly seen that the mosques' facilities provided for the women users still do not comply with 'women-friendly' mosque. Some suggestions were provided to improve the mosque's design and to act as reference by future researchers, architects and designers in designing a mosque.

Keywords:

Women, Friendly, Mosque

Introduction

The root of 'masjid' is 'sajd' which means 'to prostrate'. Each mosque has the same components and this can be identified by the congregation that this is a building used to perform prayers or religious programs. The components area divided into two parts which is mosque's element and the mosque's space. Elements of the mosque consist of a dome, pulpit and tower. While the components of the mosque are the main prayer hall, the women's prayer room, the hallway, the ablution hall and toilet, the *mihrab*, the priest's room and utilities space. According to Hasjmy. A (1993) the mosque generally has four main types of space which are the main prayer hall, the women's prayer hall, '*serambi*' space, ablution space and toilet. In addition to this space there is a support space for completing the main hall such as *mihrab*, priest's room and utility room. The spaces for women are provided shows that women and men have the same access to and must feel equally welcome to participate in mosque. Besides that, not only men are involved in the mosque's institution, women are also participating in programs or activities that are held in the mosque.

Nowadays there are a lot of mosques that are built with huge and beautiful designs. Unfortunately, some of the mosques are still not women-friendly. Some of the problems that are faced by women can be recognized in the media mass which are from blogs, facebook, newspapers, etc. Besides that, there are also issues that are discovered throughout the field observation on some mosques in Johor. Field observation on some mosques will produce some issues in the design of mosque. All the results are to be tabulated in the next sub topic (main result).

Women's Space in Mosque

Nowadays, most mosques are active with programs and activities beside congregational prayers. Not only men involved, women are also participating in programs or activities that are held in mosque. In addition, most mosques provide spaces for women such as prayer space, ablution space and toilet. For prayer space, women are in the back row of men and there which separates women and men. Some facilities at prayer space such as hangers and cupboards which can be used to keep *telekung*, *sejadah* and Al-Quran also be provided. Besides that, cleanliness such as the condition of *telekung*, *sejadah* and carpet in the prayer hall also should be considered to ensure that the prayer hall is always clean and odourless. Users will be comfortable in a good condition of prayer space.

Ablution is one of the prerequisite activities and needs to be done before we pray. Without ablution, prayer is invalid and unaccepted by Allah (to Him belongs all Dignity and Glory). Therefore, ablution space is one of important spaces to be considered in any mosque. Therefore, ablution area for women also be provided either it is an outdoor or indoor space. As it is an important space, this space should provide clean and comfortable space by considering facilities such as compartments, lockers or cupboards to place women's belongings (bag or hijab). Maintenance of ablution space should be monitored to ensure this space is always clean. If the area is always good, users will be comfortable and ease them to go through the ablution process.

Besides that, a walkway from space to another space is also important. Nowadays, most mosques provide walkways which are used by users to move from space to another space. This shows that women also will use the walkway while they are in the mosque.

Most of the mosques will provide a main entrance which will involve women and men. There are quite a few mosques that provide entrances that are separated for women and men. The main entrance also provided signage that made it easy for users to find the spaces.

Toilet is one of the spaces that are provided in the mosque. Most of the toilets will be placed nearby or together with ablution space. Some facilities should be considered in this space as a hanger where women need to hang their handbag or hijab. Besides that, a basket for garbage and a mirror are also important in the toilet. Cleanliness of the toilet also needs to be concerned by the mosque's management, therefore the toilet is always in clean and good condition.

Therefore, this research will be held and the aim for this paper is to discover women's problems in some of the existing mosque. Two methods are being used in this research. There are media content analysis and field observation that are held in three mosques in Johor. Both of the methods are to provide the outcome of this research.

Main Result

Data From Mass Media

Table 1 shows the sample of problems that women faced in mosque which were collected from mass media. Blogs, Facebook and newspapers are the references for this research.

The results are tabulated. They are divided into five spaces. Five spaces are prayer space, ablution space, walkway, main entrance and toilet. Table 1 shows the problems faced by women in five spaces in mosque.

Table 1: Problems Faced by Women in Spaces of Mosque

Space	Problems	Reference
Prayer space	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some mosques provide a women's prayer hall that is not the same level as the ablution area. 2. Some mosques provide a women's prayer hall at level 2 and it is difficult for older women to use the stairs to this prayer's hall. 3. Women's prayer is far from the ablution area and women need to use the open walkway. This open walkway can allow the exposure of women's <i>aurat</i> 	Newspaper: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Akhbar Utusan, 28 Mac 2012 • BH Online, 12 Julai 2015
Ablution space	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some mosques provide women's ablution at ground level while women's prayer area at the first level which women feel uncomfortable with. 2. Circulations from the women's prayer hall to the ablution's space need to use an open walkway and also need to pass through the men's area. 	Blogs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BH Online, 12 Julai 2015 • Intanizani.blogspot, Mac 2011 • IIUM Conference, Jun 2017

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Women's ablution space and toilet are far from the women's prayer space. 4. Safety of women also not be considered as the ablution area and toilet are far from the main prayer hall and entrance. 5. Ablution area (Level 2) that is provided is open and near to the gazebo (which always be used by visitors either men or women). 6. Besides that, the ablution area (level 2) is also nearby the door to the men's prayer area. 	
Walkway	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A long distance of space to another space which women need to use the walkway. Besides that, the walkway is open. 2. Besides that, the walkway provided is to be used by women and men which lacks privacy for women. 3. Some mosques lack signage throughout the walkway which is difficult to use to find certain space. 	Facebook Blogs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● IIUM Conference, Jun 2017
Main entrance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of signage from the main entrance to other spaces. 2. Most mosques provide main entrances that are shared by men and women. 	Facebook Blogs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● IIUM Conference, Jun 2017
Toilet	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There are some women's toilets nearby the men's toilets and at the same time the toilet is far from the women's ablution space and prayer space. It is quite weak in terms of safety. 2. Some of mosque do not provided facilities such dustbin, mirror, racks in toilet 	Facebook Blogs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● IIUM Conference, Jun 2017

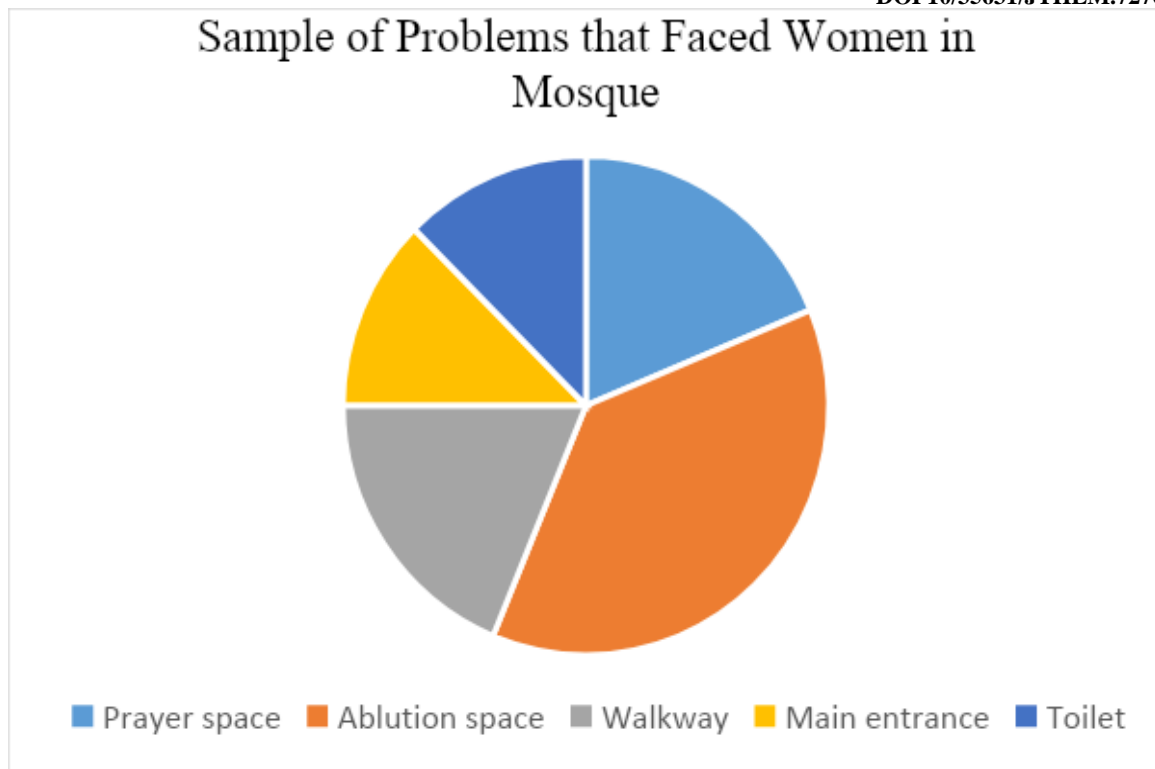


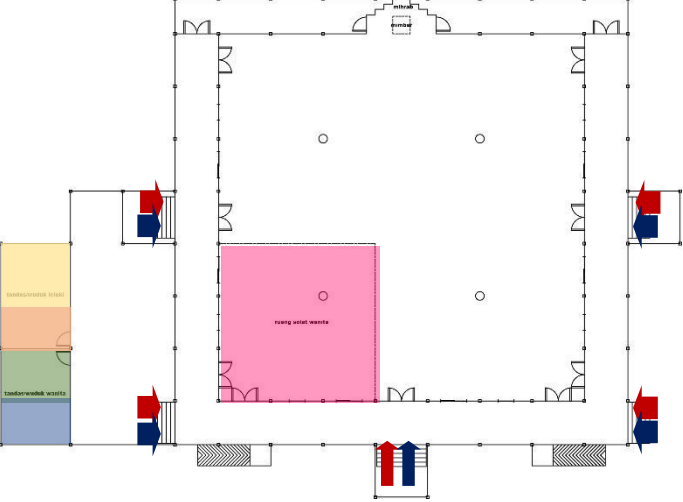
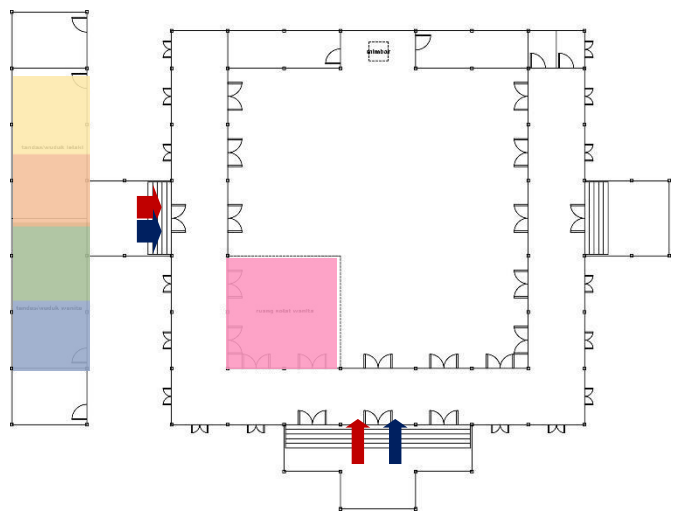
Figure 1: Sample of Problems that Faced Women in Mosque

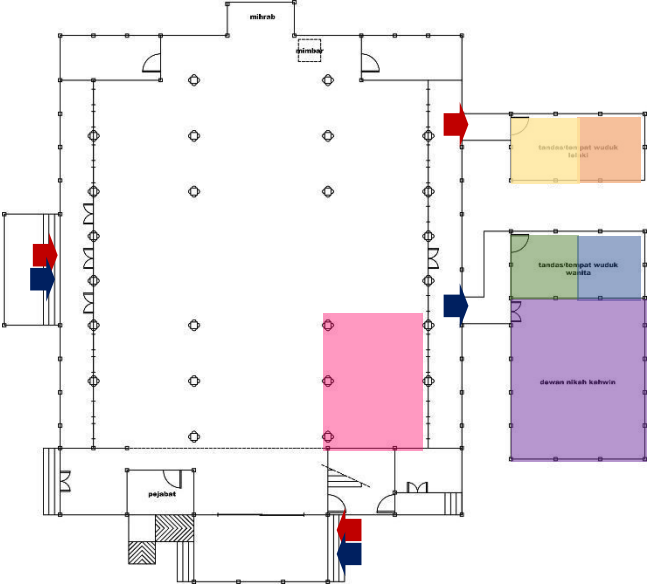
Data in figure 1 from mass media are showing that there are problems that are faced by women in the current mosque. There are few factors of the problems faced by women in mosque. One of them is the design of the mosque.

Design of mosque which is less emphasized as below:

- Lack consideration on women's needs such as women's privacy in space while they in mosque.
- Location of women's space which is not well designed where there is some mosque provided women's area far apart or not in the same level.
- Circulation of space. It is related to location and placement of spaces. If the location of all women's spaces is nearby and far from men's spaces, therefore women's circulation is good because women are less exposed to men as they do not pass through men's spaces. Women will feel comfortable if women's circulation is concerned and spaces in mosque are well designed by considering the location and privacy of spaces.
- Lack of providing facilities which can give comfortness to women.

Table 2: Example of Issues in Design Mosque

No	Name and Plan of Mosque	Issues
1.	<p>Masjid Jamek Rengit, Batu Pahat, Johor</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Women's ablution space and toilet are far from the women's prayer space. b) Women's ablution space and toilet are nearby men's ablution space and toilet. c) Open designed corridor are provided from women's ablution space to women's prayer space.
2.	<p>Masjid Al-Hadi, Kota Tinggi, Johor</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Women's ablution space and toilet are sharing same space b) Women's ablution space and toilet are nearby men's ablution space and toilet. c) Women's prayer space is opposite the ablution space and toilet, women need to use open walkway before to the prayer space.

3.	<p style="text-align: center;">Masjid Jamek Bandar Kota Tinggi, Johor</p> 	<p>a) Women's ablution space and toilet are sharing the same space.</p> <p>b) Women's ablution space</p> <p>c) is nearby to men's ablution space (which is outdoor).</p> <p>d) Women need to cross open-corridor before they arrive at the women's ablution space.</p> <p>e) Open designed walkways are provided in this mosque. It is a lack of privacy and women easily exposed to men while they pass through men's space.</p>
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Legends:

	Women's prayer space		Men's ablution space		Women's walkway
	Women's ablution space		Men's toilet		Men's walkway
	Women's toilet		Seminar room		

Data From Field Observation

Field observation is another method that can be used in this research. Field observation involving 3 mosques located nearby residential areas in Johor. These mosques are not only performing congregation prayers, these mosques are also proactive and have various programs. Most mosques provide spaces and facilities for women but there are some mosques that have less emphasis on women's need and comfort.

Table 2 shows the issues in the design of the mosque. These issues are faced by women. Referring to the result of field observation, there are few factors that contribute to the issues.

Factors as below:

- Location of women's spaces which mosques above do not provide women's space in short distance.
- Most of the spaces are open and this is a lack of privacy for women. It is allowed to expose women's aurat.
- Placement of women's spaces and men's spaces. The spaces provided are nearby and this makes women uncomfortable because they have to care for the aurat at all times.

From the result, this can conclude that the design of some mosques in Johor is still less concerned with the women's need and comfort which contribute to women's issues related to women's circulation in mosque.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this research provides samples of problems faced by women in mosques and also issues in facilities and design of mosque. This research also will produce factors of the problems. Therefore, designers, architects or researchers will be aware of these factors while designing a mosque. So, a women-friendly mosque will be produced in future.

Hopefully, the result of this research also can help researchers, architects and designers in designing mosque which consider women's need and comfort.

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