NEEDS ANALYSIS OF HALAL MATCHMAKING FOR MUSLIM MARRIAGE IN JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

Today, halal matchmaking services, such as halal apps and halal speed dating have appeared in many Muslim and non-Muslim countries. It is important that Muslims not only marry in a halal manner but also maintain a healthy family life after marriage. However, in Japan, where Muslims are an almost invisible minority, there are no services that provide halal matchmaking including pre-marriage education based on *Maqasid al-Shariah*. The purpose of the research is to analyse the need for halal matchmaking services in Japan. Halal matchmaking needs of single and divorced Muslims are to be determined. The researcher recruited potential participants for halal matchmaking through the social media of Chiba Islamic Cultural Center from 25 July to 21 August 2022. Single and divorced Muslims living in Japan who were able to communicate adequately in Japanese were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. Feedback was obtained through in-depth interviews with all the participants after the halal matchmaking. One hundred and eleven people registered their profiles. There were 109 valid answers (98.1%). Forty-one people responded to the preliminary interviews. Twenty people who attended the matchmaking were invited for feedback in-depth interviews. Barriers to finding a potential marriage partner among Muslims in Japan include the rarity of Muslims as a user of Japanese matchmaking services, time and money-consuming efforts and anxiety for marriage due to the lack of trust or assurance of individualistic marriage compared to that of communal marriages. Thus, community effort to develop halal matchmaking is needed for Muslims in Japan.

Keywords: *Halal Matchmaking, Muslims in Japan, Needs Analysis*

1.   Introduction

Today, halal matchmaking services, such as halal apps and halal speed dating have appeared in many Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Muslims need to use halal methods in finding a marriage partner to ensure that they do not commit haram (unlawful) acts which include premarital sex, cohabitation and free dating. The Qur'an commands, "Do not approach fornication" (17:32). In addition, Muslims may not, as a rule, marry non-Muslims except in the case of wives who are the People of the Book (Jews and Christians). In the past, Muslim marriage was not only the responsibility of young people but also of their families, relatives, local communities and workplaces. In other words, when the young people reached the right age but could not find partners, adults close to them would introduce them to a succession of potential mates, and halal matchmaking was done to ensure that they would not commit haram acts. Today, however, the spread of individualism has been weakening the communal marriage system in Muslim and non-Muslim communities; we see a decline in the number of arranged marriages (Abdur Rahman, 2019, p. 61-62).

For example, Japan is one of the top countries in the world where the number of unmarried and late married people is rapidly increasing since the 1970s. One of the major reasons for this is the decline in communal marriages such as arranged marriages and workplace marriages due to the spread of individualistic ideology (Kato, 2011: Arakawa,

2019). Private and public sectors actively developed marriage services. However, marriage services have not been arranged for Muslims. How can a Muslim find a marriage partner when Islamic law prohibits free dating between man and woman when no one arranges a marriage for him or her in Japan? The purpose of the study is to analyse the need for halal matchmaking among Muslim marriage seekers in Japan. Halal matchmaking needs of single and divorced Muslims are to be determined. This research is guided by the following questions: (a) What are the main characteristics of Muslims interested in a halal matchmaking event? (b) Why are they interested in the halal matchmaking event? These findings enable religious leaders and service providers to better understand the matchmaking needs of Muslims in Japan.

2.   Literature Review

Ali et al. (2020) discovered that young British Muslims have different interpretations of halal (lawful) or haram (unlawful) in offline dating events. Some British Muslims perceive dating to be halal under certain conditions/situations: when accompanied by a chaperone, physical intimacy is avoided, and the intention of marriage is present. Some allow themselves to meet in person, while others keep their dates to phone calls or online contacts only. Some feel that dating is always unlawful and traditional arranged marriages can and do work for them. But, it is not clear how many Muslims in the study are in favour of halal dating and how many are totally against it. Billaud (2018) attended a halal speed-dating in London and observed the processes of how the event was organized to help 20 Muslims find ideal marriage partners. At this event, all the men take their places on one side and all the women on the other. Relatives and friends accompany them and watch the event in the back. The matchmaker helps facilitate the search for an ideal marriage partner by giving the participants a guide to create an effective profile that will appeal to their marriage partner. Groups are formed at each table, with the men moving from group to group and the women remaining seated. After the self-introductions, participants write down the number of people they are interested in and would like to talk to later.

Rochadiat et al. (2018) found the advantages and disadvantages of 16 Muslim American women in using online dating. They increased control over selective self-presentation and strategic self-disclosures in online dating. It allowed women greater freedom to initiate contact with men. They also felt confidentiality and privacy afforded by the online matchmaking websites saved them from embarrassment. In the past, when disclosing personal data to third parties, such as community matchmakers, there was a risk that their personal data would be released to an unspecified number of men at their discretion, but with online matchmaking, the women can select people they want to disclose their personal information. Their access to a large pool of potential romantic partners is also an advantage. On the other hand, online dating cannot control others' misrepresentation: online personal data may be fake.

Al-Saggaf (2013) found that 10 male users of Muslim Matrimonial Sites (MMS) showed three signs of lack of trust in MMS. For example, they expressed concerns over a large number of members' profiles being fake, they appeared suspicious about these sites and approached them with caution, and felt intimidated by the unrealistic expectations that members placed on them. But the same users adopted several strategies to handle the lack of trust in MMS, which include using their communication skills to study others carefully, doing police work to uncover inconsistencies in their statements, interrogating them using a pre-developed list of questions and involving their family members in their negotiations. This study conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 participants, who are all males

living in different locations such as the USA, the UK, the UAE, Australia and Bahrain. But, the cultural attributes of the participants have not been revealed in this study; and it is unknown whether they are Muslim immigrants who migrated to those countries or their second-generation or third-generation Muslims.

Some Muslims living in the West believe that it is forbidden to physically meet face-to-face between non-mahram[1] man and woman and freely associate with each other, but others believe that it is permissible for them to go on a date under certain conditions. Online dating, on the other hand, has the advantage of allowing women, in particular, to interact with men while maintaining a proper level of hijab (segregation), since they are meeting in a virtual space. Sotoudeh et al. (2017) reported that the odds of women living in the West using the Internet both for arranging dating and for online dating increase by 360% and 560% relative to men. The reason why immigrants use the Internet to find a future marriage partner is that informal social networks which exist in Muslim-majority countries are absent in the non-Muslim majority West. But, the difficulty of discerning fake information always comes with it when using online matchmaking sites and applications. Since lying is haram or unlawful, the role of the matchmaker is important to verify the authenticity of the personal information.

What the preceding studies revealed is that there are different views of halal dating. Some consider the presence of a chaperone, no physical intimacy, and the intention to marry to be the requirements of halal dating when a man and a woman meet in person. Others are of the opinion that it is not halal for a man and a woman to date in person in the first place. Some say that even in such cases, telephone or online contact is permissible. Caution must be exercised when using online. Of course, for Muslim women, there are many advantages of online to have privacy and not divulging more of their personal information than necessary. There is always a risk that the information on online sites may be false. They should pay extra attention to the inconsistency of their conversations and have a hard time using family and friends to find out their true identity. To marry someone who gives false information in the first place, one might be exposed to marriage fraud and would not be likely to have a healthy marriage.

3.   Methodology

The method of this research is qualitative method. The researcher recruited participants for a halal matchmaking event through broadcasting on the social media (e.g. Facebook and Instagram) of Chiba Islamic Cultural Center (CICC) from 25 July 2022 to 21 August 2022.

3.1   Participants

The inclusion criteria of the participants are 1) Muslims or non-Muslims with a good interest in Islam, 2) living in Japan, 3) seriously looking for marriage partners, 4) unmarried (married people are not allowed to participate because of the legal ban on polygamy in Japan), and 5) able to communicate adequately in the Japanese language.

3.2   Procedure

Single and divorced Muslims were purposefully selected for online in-depth semi-structured interviews. The event feedback was also obtained through online in-depth interviews with all the participants after the matchmaking. The research focuses specifically on the participants' perceived internal conflicts in identifying compatible marriage partners in the

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[1] Mahram, literally means something that is prohibited whereas mahram in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) refers to a person with whom marriage is prohibited (because of their close blood relationship, because of breastfeeding, etc.).

past and their experiences of the halal matchmaking event. The researcher kept the personal information of the participants completely private so as not to create an opportunity for the two of them to meet alone after the event. Qualitative data were also collected on the extent of participants' knowledge of the purpose of marriage and the roles of husband and wife.

3.3 Data Analysis

The research used content analysis (Hseieh & Shannon, 2005) and thematic analysis (Patton, 2015) to allow for an inductive exploration of common themes and experiences across all the participants. This approach ensures that the knowledge gained is based on the unique personal experiences of the participants instead of preconceived theories. Content analysis and thematic analysis involve a systematic classification process to code qualitative texts for patterns and themes that share similar meanings (Hseieh & Shannon, 2005; Patton, 2015).

4. Results

4.1 Participant Demographics

One hundred and sixty-six people showed interest after social media (e.g. Facebook and Instagram) advertisement (filled up participation form from 25 July 2022 to 21 Aug 2022) to attend the Muslim matchmaking event at the Café of Chiba Islamic Cultural Center. One hundred and eleven people registered their personal profiles. There were 109 valid answers (98.1%). Muslim women accounted for 68.8% of the registration (Table 1). Half of the registered individuals identified as Indonesian (n = 60), followed by Japanese (n = 19), Malaysian (n = 10), Pakistani (n = 4), Egyptian (n = 4), Bangladeshi (n = 2), Syrian (n = 2) and Others (n = 8). Most of the registered individuals (75.2 %) have either an undergraduate or graduate degree (Table 2). It should be noted that 20% of men are willing to marry even if their income is less than 2 million yen (Table 3). The weighted average age is 31.3 years old (Table 4).

Table 1. Nationality of the Registered Individuals (n = 109)

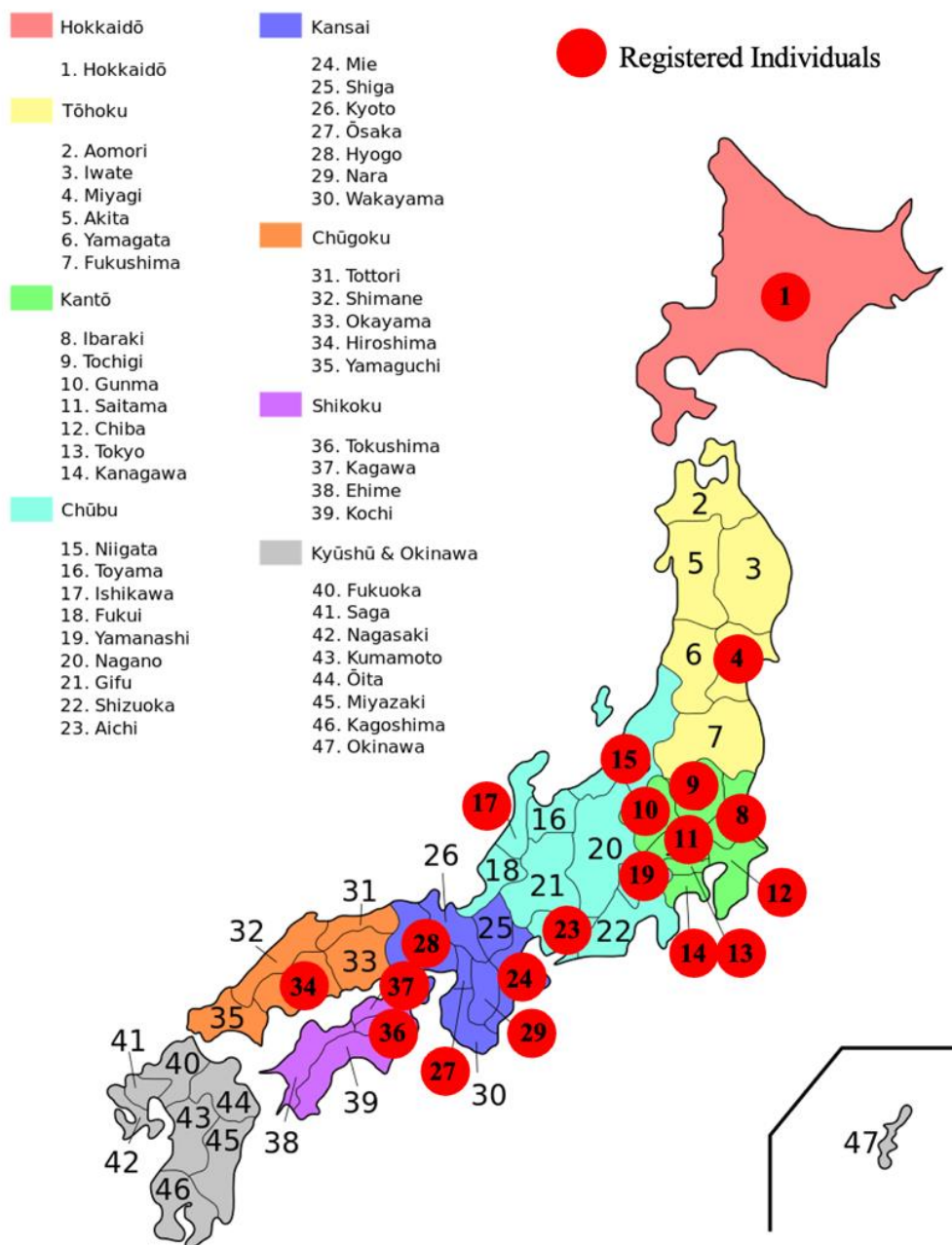| Nationality	Male	Female	Total	%	Male	Female
Indonesian	12	48	60	55.0%	11.0%	44.0%
Japanese	4	15	19	17.4%	3.7%	13.8%
Malaysian	8	2	10	9.2%	7.3%	1.8%
Pakistani	2	2	4	3.7%	1.8%	1.8%
Egyptian	2	2	4	3.7%	1.8%	1.8%
Bangladeshi	2	0	2	1.8%	1.8%	0.0%
Syrian	1	1	2	1.8%	0.9%	0.9%
Others	3	5	8	7.3%	2.8%	4.6%
Total	34	75	109	100.0%	31.2%	68.8%

Table 2. Educational Background of the Registered Individuals (n = 109)

Gender / Education	High School (General)	High School (Vocational)	Junior College	University (Undergraduate)	University (Postgraduate)
Male	6	4	0	10	14
Female	5	6	6	40	18
Subtotal	11	10	6	50	32
Grand Total	109				

Table 3. Annual Income Amount of the Registered Individuals (n = 109)

Gender / Japanese Yen	0-2 million	2-4 million	4-6 million	6-8 million	Over 8 million
Male	7	15	9	1	2
Female	34	26	12	2	1
Subtotal	41	41	21	3	3
Grand Total	109				

One hundred and nine registrations came from all over Japan. For example, they were from Tokyo (n = 27), Chiba (n = 20), Kanagawa (n = 11), Saitama (n = 9), and 16 other prefectures in Japan (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Present Address of the Registered Individuals (n = 109)

Kyoichiro Sugimoto et.al., (2023). Needs Analysis of Halal Matchmaking for Muslim Marriage in Japan, Journal of Halal Science and Technology, 2(1):1-10.

Table 4. Age of the Registered Individuals (n = 109)

Birth Year	Male	Female	Total	Age
2004	0	1	1	18
2003	1	0	1	19
2002	0	0	0	20
2001	0	1	1	21
2000	0	0	0	22
1999	0	2	2	23
1998	1	1	2	24
1997	1	2	3	25
1996	4	5	9	26
1995	1	4	5	27
1994	5	6	11	28
1993	3	3	6	29
1992	4	4	8	30
1991	0	9	9	31
1990	4	7	11	32
1989	4	8	12	33
1988	2	2	4	34
1987	2	3	5	35
1986	0	2	2	36
1985	0	2	2	37
1984	1	2	3	38
1983	0	2	2	39
1982	0	4	4	40
1981	0	1	1	41
1980	1	0	1	42
1977	0	2	2	45
1976	0	1	1	46
1965	0	1	1	57
Total	34	75	109	Weighted Ave. Age: 31.3

Forty-one single and divorced individuals out of 109 individuals responded to preliminary in-depth interviews. Twenty people (10 men and 10 women) out of 41 people were selected according to the inclusion criteria and invited to the matchmaking event on 21 August 2022. The 20 selected nationalities were 8 Japanese (3 males and 5 females), 5 Indonesians (3 males and 2 females), 2 Malaysians, and 5 others (Bangladeshi, Canadian, Chinese, Egyptian, Syrian) (Table 5). Most of the participants (85.0 %) had an undergraduate or postgraduate degree (Table 6). Half of them (55.0 %) had less than 4 million yen and more than 2 million yen (Table 7). According to the Statistical Survey of Private Sector Salaries 2021 by the National Tax Agency of Japan, the average annual salary for those aged 25-29 years old was 3.7 million yen and 4.1 million yen for those aged 30-34 years old. 70.0 % of the participants were company employees. The average age of the participants was 31.4.

Table 5. Nationality and Age of the Event Participants (n = 20)

	Gender	Nationality	Age		Gender	Nationality	Age
1	Female	Japanese (Indonesian)	25	11	Male	Indonesian	27
2	Female	Indonesian	26	12	Male	Japanese (Pakistani)	27
3	Female	Chinese	28	13	Male	Indonesian	29
4	Female	Japanese	29	14	Male	Indonesian	29
5	Female	Indonesian	30	15	Male	Malaysian	30
6	Female	Canadian	33	16	Male	Syrian	30
7	Female	Japanese (Pakistani)	37	17	Male	Japanese (Pakistani)	32

8	Female	Japanese	37	18	Male	Bangladeshi	33
9	Female	Japanese	37	19	Male	Malaysian	33
10	Female	Egyptian	38	20	Male	Japanese	38
	Average Age		32.0		Average Age		30.8

Table 6. Education Background of the Event Participants (n = 20)

Gender / Education	High School (General)	High School (Vocational)	Junior College	University (Undergraduate)	University (Postgraduate)
Male	2	0	0	5	3
Female	0	0	1	5	4
Subtotal	2	0	1	10	7
Grand Total	20				

Table 7. Annual Income Amount of the Event Participants (n = 20)

Gender / Japanese Yen	0-2 million	2-4 million	4-6 million	6-8 million	Over 8 million
Male	0	6	3	1	0
Female	3	5	2	0	0
Subtotal	3	11	5	1	0
Grand Total	20				

4.2   Main Themes

Theme 1: Almost no Muslims are registered as users of Japanese matchmaking services. Most participants claimed that they had few opportunities to meet Muslim marriage seekers in the past.

> *"I did use Japanese matchmaking apps before, but there were almost no Muslims registered. Most probably, one Muslim out of 1,000 people. The first requirement is that my marriage partner should be a Muslim. I was also using matchmaking apps for overseas Muslims such as Muzmatch and Salaams. When I searched for potential partners living in Japan, there were only 30-40 Muslims. I have already finished checking all these profiles. In addition, some women did not seem to be seriously thinking about marriage right now. I was a little surprised that young girls in their early 20s tended to be like that."* *(Unmarried man).*

Theme 2: It takes a lot of time, effort and money to identify marriage partners. Especially many female participants were tired of communicating with the marriage partners they met on the matchmaking apps.

> *"I got a lot of long messages saying that he was a nice guy, but when I met him, he was not, and I got tired of exchanging many messages, so I said I was sorry and stopped our relationship. It was quite exhausting."* *(Unmarried woman)*

> *"I paid a matchmaking app once, but I couldn't meet anyone I liked even though I paid for the service."* *(Unmarried woman)*

> *"I was grateful to have been matched with someone on a matchmaking app, but I received a lot of messages, and some people sent me very long messages every time, and it was quite a mental and physical burden. I felt like I was being stalked and that it was too much for me."* *(Unmarried woman)*

Theme 3: Anxiety for marriage due to the lack of trust/assurance of individualistic marriage compared to communal marriages. Many female participants tended to be cautious to find

and decide on a marriage partner. They did not know how much they could trust the potential partner. They also continued to search for a more suitable partner rather than compromise. They are inundated with information about post-marital problems, and they are constantly worried. When communal arranged marriages were still active, family and community were the guarantees of trust and assurance about the marriage partner. In Japan today, however, the communal arranged marriage has been weakened, so that the individual should bear the full responsibility for deciding on a marriage partner.

> *"I had an impression that many of those who complained a lot tend to get married within about six months of meeting each other. Perhaps they did not know each other's personalities, or they did not understand the culture of the other's country of origin, or there were language problems: he could not understand Japanese well, and her Japanese was good but her English was not good, and she could also not speak the language of her husband's country well. I have heard stories of husbands who, perhaps because of their inability to communicate well with each other, have begun to break things at home. I felt uneasy when I heard that husbands might be committing domestic violence. So, I was afraid to get married within 6 months of meeting someone. If there is someone I like, I would like to marry him, but at the same time, I think it would be safer to take some time to get to know him well before making a decision of marriage."* (Unmarried woman)

> *"People who married late often advised me to enjoy my time alone, study Islam and get married when I am fully ready, when a really good man comes along, rather than to rush into marriage. If you get married in a hurry and then have children and have a lot of troubles with your husband, you will end up with family discord."* (Unmarried woman)

> *"A married woman said that she married a man because she thought he seemed kind, but after she got married, she found out that he was very strict and nagged her when she overslept a little fajr prayer, etc. In everyday life, if the husband was very picky about keeping their rooms neat and tidy, he would nag them about all the time, and she would get sick."* (Unmarried woman)

> *"I heard the advice from a friend of mine who married a Muslim and found out that he actually had a first wife. I often heard of some trouble cases in their family life."* (Unmarried woman)

> *"There are various types of Muslims. I heard that many of the foreign Muslims who approached Japanese women did so for money or for visas to move to Japan. I was advised by a friend that it would be safer to meet them in Japan if possible."* (Unmarried woman)

Theme 4: Needs for halal matchmaking. Many participants have long sought out events where Muslim marriage seekers could find other Muslim marriage seekers in a halal manner.

> *"If I were married and could afford it, I would love to do it, it is really hard. People in my parent's generation still do not understand the importance of the current situation of second-generation Muslims in Japan. Even though we Muslims grew up in Japan and were educated only basics of deen of Islam, for example, it is still quite a big jihad to protect ourselves from sins. It will only become more difficult as time goes by. The harder halal gets, the easier haram becomes. I looked around me and found that some friends have given up and others were at their limits. This is a big problem in Japan. I asked for my father and my friends to assist me to find a marriage partner. My friend sent me a Facebook link for a halal matchmaking event. I have been shouting about having halal matchmaking for Muslim marriage for the past two years, but there were no such services yet here in Japan."* (Unmarried man)

4.3   How was the halal matchmaking event conducted?

All 20 participants selected attended the halal matchmaking event. Four people per table, male pairs and female pairs sit together and talked freely for 20 minutes each table at the Café of Chiba Islamic Cultural Center on 21 August 2022. However, there was no sharing of personal information such as names, phone numbers, email addresses, social media, homepages, blogs, and current addresses. All the participants were recognized by number.

Each participant was given two sheets of their own profiles to pass to the opposite gender in front of them (they collect their profiles at the end of the meeting). Male pairs rotated through all five tables so that all male and female participants could talk to each other. At the end of the matchmaking event, everyone should select not more than 3 participants out of 10 opposite gender whom he or she would like to have another meeting and write the numbers down on a piece of paper and give it back to the matchmaker. Matchmaking means "the activity of trying to arrange marriages or relationships between other people" (Oxford Dictionary, 2023). Halal means lawful or permissible under the Islamic *Shariah*. The components were that there be no physical contact between the opposite sexes, that the two opposite sexes not be alone, and that contactable information not be shared between the opposite sexes.

4.4   Feedback on the needs of halal matchmaking

"First of all, let me conclude by saying that the event was really, really good. Mashallah[2]. The people I met, including the male and female participants, were all really nice, and I could tell that they were all really passionate about finding a partner, so much so that I wondered why I have not seen this kind of matchmaking event before. Mashallah, I hope this kind of event will be held continuously" (Unmarried man)

"I met seniors and colleagues of my age at the event and had quality conversations with men I had never spoken to before while protecting my personal information. I learned a lot about myself during the process of conversation." (Unmarried woman)

"I am very happy with my impression of the event. Just one word: Excellent. It was very good. I knew that the participants had been interviewed beforehand, and I knew that there would be solid people there, but they were even more solid than I expected. Everyone had their own ideas and opinions, and they spoke about them clearly and so it was easy to imagine what it would be like if I were matched with these participants." (Divorced woman)

5.   Conclusion

This research analyzed the need for halal matchmaking for Muslim marriage in Japan. First of all, Muslims in Japan face difficulty to meet Muslims who have an intention to marry. The research found that when marriage methods based on communal trust such as arranged marriages are weakened and individuals are fully given the decision-making power to decide whom to marry, the number of options increases and at the same time, anxiety grows, leading to a situation in which Muslims are unable to decide whom to marry. Therefore, Muslim marriage seekers, parents and Muslim communities need to work together to organize halal matchmaking services in Japan.

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[2] Mashallah or Masha Allah, literally means "what Allah (One and Only God) has willed," while the usage of it is mainly when someone sees something beautiful or good, or sees someone experience something good.

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