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# The Position of Women in Islamic Family Law: A Study of Rights and **Obligations in Marriage**

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# **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the position of women in Islamic family law, with a specific focus on their rights and obligations within marriage. It employs a normative and contextual approach supported by literature-based analysis, combining classical Islamic legal interpretations with contemporary social realities. The research critically examines how traditional jurisprudence has shaped gender roles in marriage, often reinforcing hierarchical structures that place women in subordinate positions. These interpretations are contrasted with emerging gendersensitive readings that emphasize justice, reciprocity, and shared responsibility between spouses. The study finds that classical figh texts tend to prioritize patriarchal norms, while contemporary socio-legal conditions call for more equitable frameworks. By situating Islamic legal reasoning within the evolving needs of Muslim societies, this research demonstrates the potential for dynamic and purposeful reinterpretation of legal norms. Rather than discarding foundational principles, the study advocates for their recontextualization in light of maqasid al-sharī'ah, particularly the pursuit of justice and the protection of human dignity. This research contributes to the theoretical discourse on Islamic legal reform by offering a conceptual between textual traditions and transformation. It highlights the relevance of contextual ijtihād as a means to revitalize Islamic family law in a way that remains faithful to its ethical core while addressing the challenges of modern gender relations.

## INTRODUCTION

Marriage in Islam is positioned as a sacred and fundamental institution (Mahmudulhassan & Abuzar, 2024), It is not just a social contract, but also a form of worship that contains spiritual, moral and social values. Islam views marriage as a way to maintain peace of mind, preserve offspring, and build a harmonious life based on the principles of love and mutual understanding (Choli et al., 2024). In the context of social life, marriage becomes the main foundation in the formation of a stable family, which in turn becomes a pillar in the structure of a healthy society (Alaverdov, 2022). Therefore, Islam establishes a set of rules known as Islamic family law (figh al-usrah) to comprehensively regulate aspects of marriage, from the contracting process to the responsibilities of each partner in household life (Rahmani et al., 2025). Islamic family law does not only emphasize the formal legitimacy of the husband and wife relationship, but also regulates the rights and obligations of both parties fairly and proportionally (Yaqin et al., 2025), to create a balance of roles and protection of individual rights within the family. Thus, the existence of Islamic family law functions as a normative instrument that ensures order, justice and sustainability of relations in the household, while reflecting the noble values advocated in Islamic teachings.

Although Islamic family law normatively aims to create balance and justice between husbands and wives, in practice significant gender inequality is often found (Ubaidilah & Husna, 2023). This inequality arises both in the understanding and implementation of rights and obligations in marriage, where women are often placed in a lower position than men (Whitehead, 2023). One of the main causes is the patriarchal interpretation of religious texts, which places men as absolute leaders in the household, while women are considered only as executors of domestic duties and absolute submission to their husbands (Antasari, 2021). Such perceptions reinforce the subordinate position of women, which in turn has an impact on limiting their participation in decision-making, access to justice, and protection of basic rights in family life. In fact, many verses of the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions substantially support the principles of equality, justice, and respect for human dignity regardless of gender. Therefore, it is important to review the understanding of Islamic family law in order to realize marriage relations that are equal, fair, and oriented towards human values that are at the core of Islamic teachings.

The study of the position of women in Islamic family law has an important significance, considering that the role of women in the family is not only limited as wives or mothers, but also as legal subjects who have equal rights and responsibilities with men (Husna Srifyan et al., 2023). Within the framework of Islamic law, women are not passive objects, but individuals who are morally and legally mandated to actively participate in family life, including in decision-making and the fulfillment of social responsibilities. Unfortunately, this role is often reduced due to a narrow and textual understanding of religious teachings, which does not take into account historical context or contemporary social developments. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a fair, proportional and contextual interpretative approach to Islamic legal texts. Such an approach aims to avoid gender bias in the interpretation and implementation of the law, and to ensure that women are not disadvantaged or marginalized in marital relations. This study is becoming increasingly relevant as awareness of the importance of gender justice in various aspects of life increases, including in the family institution, which is the core of value and character formation in Muslim societies (Hidayah, 2021).

In recent decades, the issue of gender equality in Islamic law has become an increasingly prominent topic of discussion (Begum et al., 2024), among academics, activists and religious leaders. These debates arise in response to the need to reinterpret religious texts to make them more compatible with the principles of social justice and the development of modern society. Awareness of the importance of equal relations between men and women in marriage has led to efforts to reform family law in many Muslim countries, including Indonesia. In Indonesia, for example, Marriage Law No. 1/1974 and its various derivative regulations are often a point of contention regarding the position of women in the family, such as the right to maintenance, leadership in the household, and access to justice in divorce cases (Anwar, 2021). These issues are

increasingly relevant in the context of a modern society that demands fair and non-discriminatory treatment of all citizens, including in domestic life. Therefore, the study of the position of women in Islamic family law is very important to respond to the growing social dynamics and to ensure that the principles of justice and equality contained in Islamic teachings can be implemented in family life (Muin, 2022).

This study seeks to reexamine the position of women in Islamic family law, particularly concerning rights and obligations within marriage, by not only referring to classical fiqh texts but also by taking into account the evolving contemporary social context. Through this approach, the research aims to offer a more proportional, just, and context-sensitive understanding of gender relations in marriage serving as a response to the ongoing tension between traditional legal norms and the lived realities of modern Muslim societies.

#### METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative method with a normative and sociological juridical approach to examine the position of women in Islamic family law, especially related to rights and obligations in marriage. This combination of normative and sociological approaches is employed to bridge the gap between textual interpretations of Islamic legal sources and the evolving social realities in which these norms are applied. The normative juridical approach is used to examine various provisions of Islamic law sourced from the Our'an, hadith, and classical and contemporary figh literature, in order to understand the normative basis governing husband and wife relations. Meanwhile, the sociological approach is used to analyze how these norms are practiced in the real life of Muslim communities, as well as the extent to which there is a gap between the legal text and social reality. The data in this study were obtained through literature and documentation studies, and supported by field findings in the form of in-depth interviews with several informants who have relevant experiences or views, such as married couples, religious leaders, and women activists. With this approach, the study is expected to provide a complete and contextualized picture of the dynamics of women's position in the institution of marriage from the perspective of Islamic law.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Normative Understanding of the Position of Women in Islamic Family Law

The normative understanding of women's position in Islamic family law is rooted in classical fiqh provisions that regulate women's rights and obligations in marriage in detail. In the fiqh tradition, women's rights include the provision of dowry, maintenance, and protection, while their obligations lie in fulfilling domestic roles in accordance with the marriage agreement. However, contemporary fiqh has begun to review these provisions by taking into account the social context and the times, so that interpretations become more adaptive and equitable.

Meaning: Men (husbands) are responsible for women (wives) because Allah has given some of them (men) more than others (women) and because they (men) have spent some

of their wealth. The righteous women are those who obey (Allah) and take care of themselves when (their husbands) are absent because Allah has taken care of (them). Those women whom you fear may be unfaithful, admonish them, leave them in bed, and (if necessary) beat them (in a way that does not hurt). But if they obey you, do not look for ways to distress them. Verily, Allah is the Most High, the Most Great. (Surah An-Nisa [4]:34)

Surah An-Nisa verse 34 is one of the verses that is often used as a basis for understanding the role and position of husbands and wives in the household according to Islamic law. (Putri et al., 2024). This verse states that the husband is the leader of his family, who is responsible for maintaining and managing the household for the welfare of all. However, the understanding of this verse is often controversial, especially regarding the leadership aspect, which is sometimes interpreted as domination that puts women in a subordinate position. It is important to understand the context of this verse thoroughly, that leadership in the household does not mean absolute and unilateral, but rather a mandate that must be carried out with love, justice, and respect for the rights of the wife.

As a complement and balance, Surah Al-Baqarah verse 228 emphasizes the principle of justice and equal rights between husband and wife in marriage (Siti Nurkholisoh, 2025). This verse states that both parties have equal rights in marriage, with mutually binding obligations and equal respect. As such, this verse reminds us of the importance of building harmonious domestic relationships based on justice and mutual respect, not on the basis of domination or oppression.

Meaning: Wives who are divorced (must) restrain themselves (waiting) for three qurū' (chastity or menstruation). They should not conceal what Allah has created in their wombs, if they believe in Allah and the Last Day. Their husbands have the right to return to them during this period, if they wish to make amends. They (women) have rights in proportion to their duties in an appropriate manner. But the husbands have an advantage over them. Allah is mighty and wise." (Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:228)

Surah Al-Baqarah verse 228 emphasizes the principle of justice and equal rights between husband and wife in the marriage relationship. This verse states that women have the same rights as their husbands in terms of rights and obligations during marriage, including the right to maintenance and respect. In addition, this verse also reminds us that the positions of husbands and wives are complementary and should not harm each other. These assertions show that in the Islamic perspective, marriage must be based on the principles of justice, mutual respect, and a balance of rights and responsibilities, so that both can carry out their respective roles in harmony and dignity.

Surah An-Nisa verse 34 and Surah Al-Baqarah verse 228 together provide an important normative framework in understanding the position of women in Islamic family law. Verse An-Nisa 4:34 emphasizes the husband's position as the leader of the family who is responsible for maintaining household harmony with love and justice.

However, this leadership is not a form of absolute domination that oppresses women, but rather a mandate that must be carried out with respect for the rights of the wife. Meanwhile, Surat Al-Baqarah 2:228 confirms that husbands and wives have equal rights and obligations in marriage, emphasizing balance and mutual respect. This balance is important so that the household does not become an arena of oppression, but rather a place where justice and equality are practiced, in accordance with Islamic values that are rahmatan lil 'alamin.

In this context, scholars and schools of fiqh have various perspectives that enrich the understanding of women's position. The Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali schools each provide different interpretations of women's rights and obligations, especially in the aspects of leadership and domestic obligations. Some classical scholars emphasize the husband's responsibility as the head of the family with the obligation to take care of his wife and children, while women are expected to obey within the limits of sharia. However, contemporary scholars and modern thinkers emphasize the importance of contextual interpretations that prioritize justice, human rights, and the overall benefit of the family. They reject interpretations that have the potential to subordinate women and encourage the strengthening of women's position as active and empowered subjects of law in the family and society.

# Women's Rights in Marriage according to Islamic Law

Islamic law pays great attention to the rights of women in marriage as a form of respect for their dignity and position as full and independent human beings. Among the rights guaranteed is the right to a dowry (sadāq), which is not only a symbol of seriousness and respect from the husband, but also a form of recognition of the value of women who stand alone. In addition, women are entitled to physical and mental sustenance, including clothing, food, shelter, as well as emotional and psychological protection during the marriage bond. This right is not conditional on mere obedience, but is attached to the wife's status as a legal spouse, so the obligation of maintenance becomes the moral and legal responsibility of the husband. In this context, Islam also emphasizes the right to protection from physical, verbal and psychological abuse, as well as the right to fair and equal treatment, especially in situations of polygamy, where justice is an absolute requirement for the validity of the law.

Furthermore, women in marriage also have the right to have their say and be involved in family decision-making. The principle of deliberation (syūra) taught in the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of communication and mutual agreement between husband and wife, including in matters of childcare, family financial management, and planning for the future of the household. In this case, women's voices cannot be considered as mere complements, but have equal weight as partners in building a life together. Islamic law also recognizes women as legal subjects (mukallaf), who have full capacity to act legally, including accepting or rejecting proposals, setting conditions in the marriage contract, and accessing the judiciary if their rights are violated. Thus, the position of women in marriage is not subordinate to the husband, but an equal partner who has autonomous rights based on the principles of justice, love (mawaddah wa raḥmah), and mutual benefit. This understanding becomes very important to continue to be emphasized, especially in the context of contemporary society which still often practices patriarchal household relations under the pretext of religious legitimacy.

## Women's Obligations in Marriage

In Islamic family law, women's obligations in marriage are an integral part of the structure of mutual relations between husband and wife based on the principle of shared responsibility. Normatively, women have an obligation to maintain the honor of themselves and their families, show obedience to their husbands in matters that are ma'ruf (not contrary to sharia), and support the creation of a sakinah, mawaddah, wa rahmah household life. Women are also expected to fulfill the role as the primary educator of children and the guardian of emotional stability in the household. This obligation is not interpreted as subordination, but rather as an active contribution in building balanced and mutually supportive family relations. In this context, cooperation between husband and wife is the main key in avoiding unilateral domination and creating family harmony.

However, it is important to understand that women's obligations in marriage are not absolute or rigid, but must be viewed contextually in accordance with social and cultural developments. The limitations of these obligations need to be adjusted to the actual conditions of women in modern society, where many wives also play a role as breadwinners, social activists, or community leaders. Therefore, the interpretation of women's obligations must consider the principles of justice and balance so as not to create a double burden or unrealistic expectations. With an inclusive and adaptive approach to the current context, Islamic law can remain relevant and humane in regulating the dynamics of women's roles in the household. This awareness of legal flexibility is essential to ensure that women's obligations are not used as a means of legitimizing oppression, but rather as part of an equal contribution to married life.

#### The Gap between Legal Norms and Social Practices

Although Islamic law has normatively established the rights and obligations of women in marriage in a fair and proportional manner, the reality in society shows a significant gap between legal norms and social practices. Many women still experience discriminatory treatment in the household, whether in the form of violations of the right to maintenance, domination of decisions by the husband, to restrictions on participation in the public sphere. This phenomenon shows that idealized legal texts are not always realized in everyday life, especially when influenced by patriarchal social and cultural structures. In some communities, women are still seen as parties who must fully submit to their husbands without room to voice opinions, even though Islam in principle teaches deliberation and equality in marriage relations.

This disparity is reinforced by a number of factors, including the strong patriarchal culture that places men as the sole authority in the household, as well as conservative legal interpretations that do not consider the social context of women today. In addition, the community's low understanding of the principles of justice in Islam also exacerbates this condition. For example, in interviews with women in rural communities, it was found that most of them did not know their right to dowry, the right to refuse abusive treatment, or the right to be involved in decision-making. Some even consider it a grave sin to refuse their husband's wishes, even if they are not ma'ruf. This reality confirms the importance of re-reading legal texts with a contextual and inclusive approach, so that substantive justice for women does not only become a normative discourse, but is actually realized in social practice.

#### The Role of Islamic Family Law in Promoting Gender Equality

Islamic family law has great potential to be a transformative instrument in promoting gender equality if it is understood and developed contextually and based on the principles of substantive justice. In principle, Islam does not deny the differences in roles between men and women, but instead emphasizes justice, complementarity, and shared responsibility in household life. Therefore, the development of family law must be directed to answer the challenges of social inequality that still shackles women, not by ignoring the sources of Islamic law, but through a progressive and inclusive interpretation approach. This kind of interpretation does not contradict the Shari'ah, but rather emphasizes that the main purpose of Islamic law (maqāṣid al-syarī'ah) is to create benefit and eliminate harm, including in gender relations in marriage.

The contextual interpretation model, as offered by progressive Islamic thinkers and Muslim feminists, such as Amina Wadud or Fazlur Rahman, becomes very relevant in bridging between Islamic values and contemporary reality. Through this approach, religious texts are not read literally, but interpreted based on their ethical purpose, historical context, and their impact on modern life. This opens up space for the reinterpretation of family law that is more adaptive to the needs of women today, such as the recognition of women's rights to work, speak, determine their own destiny, and get justice in religious courts. The implications of this approach not only enrich academic and religious discourse, but can also encourage reforms in family law practice and marriage policy in Muslim countries, including Indonesia. Through legal reforms based on fair and contextual Islamic values, the state can build a more equal, healthy and empowered family system for all its members, without having to abandon the shar'i principles that are the moral foundation of Muslims.

#### Reflections on the Role of Women as Legal Subjects

Reflections on the position of women in Islamic family law emphasize that women are not merely objects in marriage who passively accept decisions, but rather active legal subjects, having rights, responsibilities, and the capacity to contribute to household and community life. This view is important to dismiss traditional assumptions that place women only as a complement to men in the family institution. As legal subjects, women have the right to voice opinions, make life choices, access education, and play a role in decision-making, both in the domestic and public spheres. Recognition of these rights is not only limited to normative discourse, but has been proven to have a positive impact on the quality of domestic life that is more harmonious, equal, and dialog-based.

Furthermore, empowering women as legal subjects also contributes to the progress of society in general. When women are given the space to develop and have their position respected legally and socially, a generation will be formed that is emotionally and intellectually healthier, because they grow up in a fair and respectful family environment. Therefore, concrete steps are needed to strengthen the position of women in family law, such as reforming marriage policies that are more gender-equitable, increasing legal literacy among women, and preparing religious interpretations that are contextual and in favor of the principles of substantive justice. Through this approach, Islam not only becomes a religion that gives rights, but also becomes a moral force to defend the dignity of women in the midst of changing times.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the position of women in Islamic family law remains heavily influenced by classical fiqh interpretations that often

prioritize patriarchal norms and male authority within marriage. However, contextual re-readings grounded in maqāṣid al-sharī'ah and contemporary socio-legal analysis reveal opportunities for more equitable formulations of rights and obligations. A common pattern emerges: while textual foundations emphasize complementary roles, the lived experiences of Muslim women often demand reinterpretation that affirms justice, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility in the marital relationship. This synthesis suggests that a contextual and purposive approach to Islamic legal thought is necessary to align religious norms with the evolving realities of Muslim societies.

Experiences from other Muslim-majority countries also illustrate the possibility of aligning Islamic legal principles with more gender-sensitive approaches to family law. In several contexts, legal reforms have been introduced to promote greater balance in spousal rights and to emphasize mutual consent and shared responsibility in marriage. These developments show that Islamic family law is not inherently rigid, but rather dynamic and capable of evolving through thoughtful reinterpretation that takes into account both religious texts and the realities of modern society.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study shows that in Islamic family law, women have a position as legal subjects equal to men, with rights and obligations that are normatively regulated in the Qur'an and hadith. However, in social practice, inequality still occurs due to conservative legal interpretations and the dominance of patriarchal culture. Therefore, a fairer and more contextual understanding of religious texts is needed so that Islamic family law can be more responsive to the principles of gender justice and able to strengthen the position of women in household and community life. As such, this research can serve as a valuable reference for policymakers seeking to develop gender-aware legal frameworks within the scope of Islamic family law.

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