

Conservative, pragmatic, and progressive ulama: religion-based gender ideology and intimate partner violence in Indonesia

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Abstract

Religious beliefs can shape personal values and behaviors, and in some contexts, certain interpretations or practices may be associated with increased risk of intimate partner violence (IPV), particularly against women. This study explores how Muslim religious leaders interpret and represent religion in the context of IPV. The research is based on qualitative data collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) with 12

Muslim religious leaders from Jakarta, Central Java, and Yogyakarta Provinces. The participants were divided into three groups, and the discussions aimed to understand their perspectives on IPV and gender roles. The findings reveal diverse interpretations of religious teachings, leading to varied attitudes toward IPV. Based on their views, the religious leaders were categorized into three typologies: conservative, pragmatic, and progressive. The conservative group upheld traditional gender norms and showed limited advocacy for female victims. The pragmatic group expressed more egalitarian views but demonstrated tolerance toward some forms of violence, indicating passive stances. In contrast, the progressive group contextualized Islamic teachings in a gender-equitable way and strongly opposed any form of IPV, actively supporting victims. The study found that most participants belonged to the conservative and pragmatic categories, suggesting that religious interpretations may reinforce IPV risk. These findings highlight the subjective nature of religious interpretations and the need for promoting progressive religious values. Strengthening such values may help reposition religion as a protective factor rather than a risk factor in cases of IPV.

Keyakinan agama dapat membentuk nilai-nilai dan perilaku pribadi, dan dalam beberapa konteks, interpretasi atau praktik tertentu dapat dikaitkan dengan peningkatan risiko kekerasan pasangan intim (IPV), khususnya terhadap perempuan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana para pemuka agama Islam merepresentasikan ajaran agama dalam konteks kekerasan dalam hubungan intim. Data diperoleh melalui diskusi kelompok terfokus (FGD) yang melibatkan 12 pemuka agama Islam dari Provinsi DKI Jakarta, Jawa Tengah, dan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. Peserta dibagi ke dalam tiga kelompok FGD untuk menggali pandangan mereka terkait kekerasan dan peran gender. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya keragaman dalam penafsiran ajaran agama yang berimplikasi pada sikap mereka terhadap kasus IPV. Berdasarkan pandangan mereka, para pemuka agama diklasifikasikan ke dalam tiga kelompok: konservatif, pragmatis, dan progresif. Kelompok konservatif cenderung mempertahankan norma gender tradisional dan menunjukkan dukungan yang rendah terhadap korban perempuan. Kelompok pragmatis memiliki pandangan yang lebih egaliter, namun masih menunjukkan toleransi terhadap kekerasan, dengan sikap yang kurang tegas. Sementara itu, kelompok progresif menafsirkan ajaran Islam secara kontekstual dan egaliter, serta menolak kekerasan dalam bentuk apa pun dan mendukung korban secara aktif. Mayoritas peserta termasuk dalam kategori konservatif dan pragmatis, menunjukkan

bahwa interpretasi agama dapat menjadi faktor risiko dalam kasus IPV. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya mendorong nilai-nilai progresif dalam agama agar agama dapat berfungsi sebagai faktor pelindung bagi korban kekerasan.

Keywords: *intimate partner violence, gender ideology, violence and religion, religious leaders*

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) remains a global issue, particularly affecting women. According to WHO (2021), 1 in 3 women—approximately 736 million—experience physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner, a figure that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade.¹ In Indonesia, IPV persists as a major concern. The National Commission on Violence Against Women (2023) reported 5,526 domestic violence cases in 2022, reflecting a decline from previous years but still indicating a significant issue.

Studies on attitudes toward IPV in Indonesia reveal mixed perspectives. Hayati et al. (2011) found that women with traditional gender roles are more likely to justify domestic violence and experience abuse,² while men often minimize or justify IPV³. Religious and activist groups differ in defining IPV, depending on their experiences with victims.⁴ However, increasing rejection of IPV has been observed, particularly among

¹World Health Organization (2013). *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence*. World Health Organization

²Elli N Hayati, Ulf Högberg, Mohammad Hakimi, Mary C Ellsberg & Maria Emmelin, "Behind the Silence of Harmony: Risk Factor for Physical and Sexual Violence among Women in Rural Indonesia", *BMC Womens Health*, Volume 11, Number 52 (2011).

³Pam Nilan, Argyo Demartoto, Alex Broom, & John Germov, "Indonesian Men's Perceptions of Violence Against Women", *Violence Against Women*, Volume 20, Number 7 (2014): 869-888.

⁴Siti Aisyah, Rereading Patriarchal Interpretations on the Qur'an from Hadith Perspective in the Eve of Law No. 23/2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence. *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Volume 6, Number 1 (2012): 48-75.

financially independent women and dual-career families.^{5, 6} Legal reforms, such as the 2004 Anti-Domestic Violence Law, have contributed to this shift, though enforcement remains inconsistent.⁷

As a deeply religious society, Indonesia grants religious leaders significant authority. They are often sought out by IPV victims for guidance and support.^{8, 9} In the Muslim community, imams serve not only as spiritual guides but also as mediators in family conflicts, including IPV cases.¹⁰ While some victims find solace in religious counseling, others report receiving judgmental responses that worsen their situation.^{11, 12} Prior research highlights the dual role of religion in IPV: it can offer victims resilience and meaning¹³ but may also reinforce patriarchal norms that trap women in abusive relationships.¹⁴ This suggests that religious leaders'

⁵Moemi Noda, Akira Ishida, "Changes in Attitude toward Intimate Partner Violence in Rapidly Developing Countries: The Case of Indonesia", *Administrative Sciences*, Volume 14, Number 5 (2024): 100.

⁶Siti Mas' udah, "Resistance of Women Victims of Domestic Violence in Dual-Career Family: A Case from Indonesian Society", *Journal of Family Studies*, Volume 28, Number 4 (2022): 1580-1597.

⁷Dina Afrianty, "Agents for Change: Local Women's Organizations and Domestic Violence in Indonesia." *Bijdragen tot de taal, land-en volkenkunde/Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia*, Volume 174, Number 1 (2018): 24-46.

⁸Olubunmi Basirat Oyewuwo-Gassikia, "American Muslim Women and Domestic Violence Service Seeking: A Literature Review", *Affilia*, Volume 31, Number 4 (2016): 450-462.

⁹Nancy Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.

¹⁰Shahina Siddiqui, "A Professional Guide for Canadian Imams." Winnipeg, MB, Canada: Islamic Social Services Association Inc, 2004.

¹¹Alison Clare Gregory, Emma Williamson, and Gene Feder. "The Impact on Informal Supporters of Domestic Violence Survivors: A Systematic Literature Review", *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, Volume 18, Number 5 (2017): 562-580.

¹²Ingrid Diane Johnson, and Steven Belenko, "Female Intimate Partner Violence Survivors' Experiences with Disclosure to Informal Network Members", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Volume 36, Number 15-16 (2021): NP8082-NP8100.

¹³Nathaniel M. Lambert, and David C. Dollahite, "How Religiosity Helps Couples Prevent, Resolve, and Overcome Marital Conflict", *Family Relations*, Volume 55, Number 4 (2006): 439-449.

¹⁴Leonie Westenberg, "'When She Calls for Help'—Domestic Violence in Christian

responses to IPV are influenced by their ideological beliefs.

Given the complex role of religious leaders in IPV cases, this study explores how Indonesian Muslim leaders' interpretations of Islam shape their responses to IPV victims. The research assumes that (1) religious authority has political, sociological, and cultural significance in Indonesia¹⁵; (2) religious gender ideology influences leaders' attitudes toward IPV; and (3) conservative gender norms continue to disadvantage victims. The central research question is: How do religious leaders' interpretations of Islam shape their attitudes and responses to IPV victims? By examining their ideological positions, this study aims to inform more effective advocacy and intervention strategies in addressing IPV. For this research, "religious leaders" refer to Muslim scholars with formal Islamic education who have the authority to interpret religious texts and are recognized by their communities. Their perspectives hold weight in shaping social attitudes toward IPV, making their role critical in both perpetuating and addressing domestic violence.

Indonesia, religion and the role of ulama (Muslim religious leaders)

Indonesia is known as a country with a majority Muslim population. According to RISSC (The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center) in its report entitled *The Muslim 500: The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims 2024*, Indonesia ranks first as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. The number of Muslims in Indonesia reaches 240.62 million, overwhelming Pakistan, India, and other Muslim countries in the world. However, despite the large Muslim population in Indonesia, it does not make Indonesia a country that implements Islamic law or sharia

Families", *Social Sciences*, Volume 6, Number 3 (2017): 71.

¹⁵Najib Kailani, Munirul Ikhwan, & Suhadi. (2019). Fragmentasi Otoritas Keagamaan di Kota-kota Indonesia. In *Ulama, Politik, dan Narasi Kebangsaan: Fragmentasi Otoritas Keagamaan di Kota-kota Indonesia*.

in it. Indonesia has a legal basis that embraces all recognized religious communities, the legal basis is Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution.

Indonesia has a complex legal system that includes Islamic law, state law, and customary law, especially in the area of family law such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.^{16,17} Islamic law significantly influences family issues in Indonesia, especially for Muslims.¹⁸ The 1974 Marriage Law and the 1991 Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) are the main legal documents governing marriage, divorce, and inheritance for Muslims.¹⁹ The KHI is a collection of Islamic legal regulations applied in Indonesia and covers matters such as marriage, inheritance, and divorce. Although Indonesia adheres to the principles of Islamic law in family matters, its interpretation and application are influenced by regional autonomy, local clerics, and cultural practices.²⁰ For example, Schenk's study in Aceh shows how Islamic figures shaped family law reform by balancing traditional interpretations with diverse legal reasoning to address modern issues.²¹ Another example is the marriage tradition in Bugis, which is deeply rooted in both Islamic

¹⁶Erman Rajagukguk, "Legal Pluralism and the Three-Cornered Case Study of Women's Inheritance Rights Changing in Lombok." *Legitimacy, Legal Development, and Change: Law and Modernization Reconsidered*, Volume 213 (2016).

¹⁷Agus Suharsono, Nanik Prasetyoningsih, and Sunyoto Usman. "Women's Inheritance Rights in Indonesia from the Perspective of the Triangular Concept of Legal Pluralism." *El-Mashlahah*, Volume 14, Number 2 (2024): 259-280.

¹⁸Ahmad Fuad Fanani, "The Implementation of Sharia Bylaws and Its Negative Social Outcome for Indonesian Women." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Volume 7, Number 2 (2017): 153-174.

¹⁹Theresia Dyah Wirastri, and Stijn Cornelis van Huis. "The State of Indonesia's Marriage Law: 50 Years of Statutory and Judicial Reforms." *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah*, Volume 24, Number 2 (2024): 215-232.

²⁰Fatun Abubakar, Euis Nurlaelawati, and Ahmad Bunyan Wahib. "Interpreting 'Bulugah': Enhancement of Women's Right Through Management of Marriage within Salafi Community in Wirokerten Yogyakarta." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Volume 12, Number 1 (2022): 139-163.

²¹Christine G. Schenk, "Islamic Leaders and the Legal Geography of Family Law in Aceh, Indonesia." *The Geographical Journal*, Volume 184, Number 1 (2018): 8-18.

values and local customs.²² Religious courts in Indonesia apply Islamic law to handle cases on marriage, inheritance, wills, and the sharia economy.

The government itself has advocated to minimize or eliminate the prevalence of IPV, by passing the Domestic Violence Law in 2004. However, research studies show there are still limitations in implementing this law.^{23,24} There have also been several efforts to eradicate intimate partner violence, both by the government and others. Regional apparatus organizations and university groups also participate in community service activities to empower the community and disseminate knowledge.²⁵

Indonesia has many faith-based organizations or religious organizations. Such organizations in Indonesia play multifaceted roles that significantly impact various aspects of society. These roles can be broadly categorized into social services, education, political influence, disaster response, and maintaining religious orthodoxy. Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) guards Sunni orthodoxy and influences local contexts through its semi-official and semi-representative nature. It addresses issues related to deviant beliefs and religious innovations, intertwining religious and political authority.²⁶ Besides the Indonesian Council of Ulama, prominent organizations like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul

²²Wardana Said et al. "Marriage Traditions and Family Resilience in Bugis Bone Society: A Study of Islamic law and Islamic Education." *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam*, Volume 8, Number 3 (2024): 1372-1390.

²³Elli N. Hayati et al. "Behind the Silence of Harmony: Risk Factors for Physical and Sexual Violence among Women in Rural Indonesia." *BMC Women's Health*, Volume 11 (2011): 1-8.

²⁴Alfitri. "Protecting Women from Domestic Violence: Islam, Family Law, and the State in Indonesia." *Studia Islamika*, Volume 27, Number 2 (2020): 273-307.

²⁵Ani Agus Puspawati, Bambang Utoyo, and Yudha Suchmasasi. "Analysis of The Implementation of Domestic Violence Prevention in Indonesia." *Sosiohumaniora*, Volume 25, Number 3 (2023): 379-392.

²⁶Moch Nur Ichwan, "Towards a Puritanical Moderate Islam: The Majelis Ulama Indonesia and the Politics of Religious Orthodoxy." *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the Conservative Turn*, (2013): 60-104.

Ulama (NU) have historically contributed to social reform and national development. They have historically contributed to social reform, including education and healthcare. Their consistent efforts in these sectors have helped develop social reformers and agents of change who advocate for gender equality. They also have women's wings, operate in all regions in Indonesia, and address women's welfare issues, including eradicating IPV.

Religious leaders in Indonesia hold significant responsibilities that span across various aspects of social, political, and environmental domains. Traditional religious leaders, such as the kyai, muballigh, dai, and salafi ustadhs, hold significant influence in guiding the religious practices and beliefs of their followers. They are responsible for maintaining the established religious authority,²⁷ and also trusted figures for mediating conflicts within their communities. They are often preferred over state authorities for resolving IPV cases due to their perceived impartiality and understanding of local contexts.²⁸

In Indonesia, ulamas are seen not only as religious interpreters but also as guardians ensuring that community practices align with Islamic teachings.²⁹ Today, their role extends beyond religion to economic, political, and legal matters, making them influential figures in both religious and social spheres.³⁰ While most prominent ulamas are male, many female ulamas also play significant roles and have their own platforms in contributing to society.³¹

²⁷Din Wahid, "Challenging Religious Authority: The Emergence of Salafi Ustadhs in Indonesia." *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Volume 6, Number 2 (2012): 245-264.

²⁸Pam Nilan et al. "Indonesian Men's Perceptions of Violence Against Women." *Violence Against Women*, Volume 20, Number 7 (2014): 869-888.

²⁹Yusron Razak, and Ilham Mundzir. "Otoritas Agama Ulama Perempuan: Relevansi Pemikiran Nyai Masriyah Amva terhadap Kesetaraan Gender dan Pluralisme." *PALASTREN: Jurnal Studi Gender*, Volume 12, Number 2 (2019): 397-430.

³⁰Setia Gumilar, "The Islamic Scholars' Movement in Garut, West Java, Indonesia, 1998-2007." *Tawarikh*, Volume 11, Number 1 (2019): 29-42.

³¹Hasanatul Jannah, *Ulama Perempuan Madura: Otoritas dan Relasi Gender*. IRCiSoD,

Gender, Intersectionality, and Contextual Islamic interpretation

This study uses gender theory, intersectionality, and contextual Islamic interpretation to examine Muslim religious leaders' responses to intimate partner violence (IPV). Connell highlights how gendered power relations normalize IPV in patriarchal settings, often reinforced by religious traditions.³² Crenshaw's intersectionality shows how overlapping identities—like gender, religion, and class—shape women's experiences and vulnerabilities. Wadud's contextual approach challenges patriarchal readings of Islam, promoting interpretations that oppose IPV and support gender justice^{33,34}. Together, these perspectives offer a strong framework for analyzing the ideological diversity among Indonesian Muslim leaders in addressing IPV.

The Diversity of ideology and attitudes toward IPV of religious leaders

Based on the thematic analysis, it can be explained that there are three ideological attitude categories that emerged. The first category is conservative ideology, whereby religious leaders demonstrate agreeableness toward male leadership in a household. As a consequence of this leadership style, a wife's obedience toward a husband is absolute. The second category is progressive ideology, in which they understand gender roles as more egalitarian, resulting in more constructive and gender-equal attitudes toward IPV. They also stated the need for interpretations highlighting equality and deconstructing society's awareness of gender role attitudes.

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³²Raewyn Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

³³Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *Feminist Legal Theories*. Routledge, 2013. 23-51.

³⁴Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from A Woman's Perspective*. OUP Us, 1999.

The third category is pragmatic ideology, which was shown in this study by some of the female leaders who displayed ambiguity, because on one hand they accept textual interpretations of such gender roles as sourced in the Qur'an and *Hadith* (Prophet's traditions/sayings), but on the other hand they also feel conflicted by the conditions experienced by females. They tend to expect flexibility in interpreting texts so that females are not only passive and accepting of all decisions made by a leader (husband), primarily in contexts where females have better capacities compared to males.

The Conservative Group – Female submission is obligatory

The first group is the group of religious leaders who view husbands as the main authority or leader in a household. Men as domestic leaders are absolute, meaning that they are entitled to all decision-making in familial matters. They stress a wife's obedience toward a husband as a form of implementing religious teachings. To them, the criteria of an ideal wife are determined by such values, whereby wives obey their husbands, are submissive in front of husbands, and are able to perform their household duties.

"A man is a leader in his house, so yes, a family's decision must be in the hands of men (husbands). A wife is expected to submit and obey their husbands. As the Prophet's hadith states, 'If I were to command someone to prostrate to anyone but Allah, I would command women to prostrate to their husbands.'" (MUF, PR, 30).

In this study, conservative views were shown by 5 of the 12 participants (3 females and 2 males). In the context of violence, a husband's behavior can be categorized as violent when it is in the form of harmful physical violence, such as battery-using instruments that threaten a wife's life. However, if the behavior were verbal or psychological abuse, then it would not be classified as violence.

One participant (RT) stated that when violence occurs, she usually

provides more advice to the wife (who seeks counsel) to be patient and accepting and to resolve the ongoing conflict. Meanwhile for husbands, they tend to ignore the behavior, assuming that it is normal and may occur when husbands are dealing with certain situations. Hence, religious leaders focus more on advising wives who are, in fact, recipients of violence from their husbands.

“Husbands should be able to control their emotions. But wives should be smart enough to act accordingly, so when husbands are angry then they (wives) shouldn’t act out. A wife should be able to restrain their selves to resolve the issue. This seldom happens, because wives are volatile. Wives know their place (their position as subordinates, so they should just obey and concede _author/ researcher), it is ok to be harmed for the sake of saving the marriage” (RT, P, 36)

This type of gender attitude causes them to respond to IPV in a manner or response that does not side with victims, being women in this case. When dealing with a congregation member who experiences IPV, for example, they will say (to the victims) that what they are experiencing is a trial from God, and it is possible that God is raising their status or level of faith. Due to this, religious leaders would recommend such wives to withstand while praying for and awaiting change from the husband’s side, as a result of their surrender and prayers.

Other participants victimize the survivors by suggesting that violence occurs not only from one side but that both sides may be in the wrong. A wife’s mistake is due to her insubordination toward her husband when conflict occurs between them. Even in such conflict, a wife may also be categorized as a perpetrator because she defies her husband, or when she provokes her husband, which causes conflict.

“It usually stems from differences in views, small things at the start. A lack of patience, which turned physical. Both sides are in the wrong, both victim and perpetrator. A wife, on one hand, is also a perpetrator based on the disobedience factor toward the husband when differences emerge”. (TON, LK, 43)

Other participants asserted that when violence occurs, females are more likely to be wrong because they are more emotional than males, making the conflict uncontrollable to the extent of instigating violence. When it occurs, wives should be able to know their place by maintaining such relations in order to uphold the integrity of their marriage and family.

“What frequently happens is that females who are volatile and emotional thus trigger conflict. So when there is tumult, then introspection is a must, so it won’t escalate. Because this is for the sake of marital integrity, right?” (ARJ, PR, 40)

The Pragmatic Group – Mutual but still unequal

The second group of religious leaders comprises leaders who essentially agree with the principles of equality as a basic value in religious teaching. However, males hold a higher status than females in relations, making males in full control of the responsibility as head of the family, by demanding subordination from females or wives.

“Religion becomes the grounds or cornerstone in husband and wife relations. Many verses explicate on this. In religion, a wife and husband complete each other. There is equality, although the final decision for family ordeals rests in the hands of males as heads of families.” (KHL, LK, 35)

An ideal male in their view is a male who can balance assertion and gentleness.

“Men who become ideal husbands are those who put forward compassion, do not commit violence, but when provoked by wives, then it may trigger violence to occur right? So it is reasonable when that happens, but compassion should be put forward first as it is a religious value.” (FH, LK, 45)

Regarding men’s position in families, one female participant illustrated her personal condition whereby she felt ambiguous between having to obey a husband’s decision, yet on the other hand, being aware that she is more competent in resolving the issue at hand and may have different choices with her husband. Such conditions elicit ambivalence as to whether she

must follow scripture or use logic and argumentation. If she leans toward logic, it will cause guilt from setting aside scripture instructing obedience and subordination to husbands. This guilt can be managed by apologizing or compensating for other matters that bring joy to her husband.

“As a woman, we should be very obedient, don’t say ‘no’ at all. But in reality, this is difficult because women have their own views. So we want to abide, but can’t, especially when there is a difference in opinion. Sometimes women feel more right. But in some issues, the situation may be different. If that happens to me, it will also trigger conflict. The resolution: stay composed and briefly introspect. Apologize immediately, although we don’t feel guilty. Find a win-win solution, but if this isn’t possible, then yes, females should follow their husbands because essentially all women must abide. This is what I have also taught the wives here.” (OSN, PR, 36)

This group of religious leaders views that a husband’s assertiveness can be implemented by allowing punishment to wives as an educational means. They allow males to batter their wives as interpreted from Holy Scripture, but it must follow strict prerequisites; among others, battery should not endanger lives, and using instruments is not permitted (permissible only when using hands). They even allow abuse, as long as it is not physical violence.

Regarding a man’s position as the leader of the family, there are Quranic verses that allow husbands to batter their wives; husbands can perform this punishment. However, the punishment should adhere to strict requirements. One being that the battery should not cause physical injuries to the wife. For example, beating using hands is allowed (without instruments) so it does not induce significant physical pain. So the punishment is more like a warning to wives rather than a punishment.” (KHL, LK, 35)

In this study, these views emerged from 3 participants (2 males and 1 female). The pragmatic group appears to have ambivalent perspectives. On one hand, they prefer to state that husband-and-wife relations should be dominated by compassion, but paradoxically, they also allow violence. The characteristics of the pragmatic group align with Eidhamar’s (2018)

reference to certain classic interpretations provided by classic interpreters, such as at-Tabari, regarding the permissibility of males (husbands) to batter their wives in QS 4:34. In his interpretation, at-Tabari advises that beating is allowed when it is not injurious, such as using a miswak (a wooden stick used as a toothbrush).

The Progressive Group - The best of males are those who dignify females

Four female participants represent the third group in this study. They were progressive religious leaders in the way they had egalitarian views on gender roles. Starting from their interpretations of religious teachings, whereby to them, gender equality is a fundamental value in religion, making males' positions equal to females. Male leadership within a family is not absolute but shared with a female or wife (shared leadership).

"Males and females have equal positions in creation, so in marital relations, there should be principles of equality and balance. There should be no absolute power in such relations, because there should be equality, and each partnership has its own areas of leadership that become their responsibilities" (ISY, PR, 42)

They view religious teachings on relationships more contextually and consider the need to reinterpret such matters with more substantive principles of equality. For example, in texts that discuss a wife's obedience, it should be interpreted not as mere submission but rather based on impartiality.

"There are verses that are misunderstood, regarding qowwam (leadership). This is understood as having more power, when qowwam should be understood as those who are stronger should be more nurturing, so this doesn't mean a wife has no voice. There are also some hadits (traditions) that are misunderstood regarding creation. So it is understood textually, not contextually." (MF, PR, 35)

One participant criticized the other leaders who educated society on inequality. When religious leaders provide marriage advice, they tend to pinpoint a wife's duty to obey their husband without principles of equal

empowerment.

“Marriage advice is mostly addressed to females. Males are educative, so the perception is that males are above wives (dominant). No perceptions on equality are shaped.” (MF, PR, 35)

For this group, violence in any form toward females is an act that is not justified by any single teaching in religion.

“Regarding battery, verbal abuse, or other forms that may be physically or psychologically abusive, are all categorized as violence. Now, Islam does not justify violence in any form, whether physical, psychological, or verbal, as it contradicts the values of compassion in religion.” (MF, PR, 35)

Biased and unequal gender views and interpretations are well established in society's beliefs, making it a challenge to those who strive to educate society further, and they conduct this to the audience or congregation they lead. On the other hand, they also raise various forms of awareness toward perpetrators regarding religion's main values that emphasize treating females as well as possible. The traditions (hadith) that they rely on are the Prophet's statement regarding the best of men, those who dignify females or their wives.

“To change it within one's self and in each congregation. Making study contents and programs more massively. Traditions (hadith) with compassionate and equality tones need to be raised more, such as ones that assert the best of men are those who treat their wives with dignity. But even this is less applied in society.” (EKD, PR, 42)

“This is why I select more progressive verses, and this has to be mainstreamed rather than the others. Sometimes there are also individuals who do not want their views to be corrected, so if they are corrected, they tend not to attend study groups anymore.” (ZUH, PR, 36)

Due to this, they still apply many methods so that the progressive values they instill do not meet rejection. When violence toward females occurs, they first try to provide victims with security, reinforcement, and empowerment.

“We have to reinforce them, to be able to face their family’s condition. But with regard to violence, the treatment would be different. So the victim surely needs support.” (FKD, PR, 42)

The challenge they face when mainstreaming their views is arduous, as they need to dismantle established systems and practices in society. They are also aware that progressive views need to be instilled in the mindsets of the clergy so as to provide better support to victims. Another issue is to educate females in society to better understand their rights so that they are more empowered in their marital relationships.

“Clergies also need to have stances that side with females. In society, when conflict occurs to the extent of divorce, it is usually females who are seen as erroneous and with a poor image, when in fact it may not be accurate. So there should be efforts to educate them based on Quranic verses.” (ISY, PR, 42)

The explanation above shows that a majority of religious leaders in this study belonged to the conservative group as they held traditional views on gender roles, whereas a small minority held egalitarian gender role ideologies. This distribution is similar to findings by Eidhamar (2018), in a qualitative study of 28 Indonesian Muslim books and seven web pages on spousal relationships. The study’s findings elucidated on the entire literature and all websites, whereby all (except two) supported male leadership in a family as a harmonious structure established by God. In line with Eidhamar’s findings from in-depth interviews with 35 Indonesian Muslim academicians (males and females), 33 respondents considered husbands’ authority above wives as an Islamic structure.³⁵ They support a patriarchal structure, and all base this attitude on a personal level, on what they consider to be an Islamic norm. Only two academicians (both of whom were females) opposed patriarchal structures in their principles.

³⁵Levi Geir Eidhamar, “‘My Husband is My Key to Paradise.’ Attitudes of Muslims in Indonesia and Norway to Spousal Roles and Wife-Beating.” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Volume 29, Number 2 (2018): 241-264.

These findings align with Ross's report that in Christianity, there are teachings that explain how women are expected to submit to their husbands as they are family leaders and decision/policymakers; even husbands are permitted to punish their wives who are defiant.³⁶ However, this verse is understood textually and literally, so the possibility of a husband's violence toward a wife becomes even greater.³⁷

An article by Salkic explained how several Muslim leaders in North America have become aware of this issue and taken concrete steps to tackle IPV.³⁸ Even in recognition of a wife's limitations, the Prophet advised for people to remember that a wife also has many virtues. They strive to present the arguments on Islamic teachings that marriage is "a share between two parts of society with an aim to not only prolong human life but also emotional welfare and spiritual harmony."³⁹ In prophetic traditions, it has been substantiated that Prophet Muhammad never battered any of his wives. The Qur'an brings forth messages on transformative compassion and spiritual equality; as such, there are no differences between Muslim men and women in the belief system.⁴⁰ In summary of Islamic law's position on IPV, it can be asserted that the current position is that it does not tolerate and prohibits any form of violence toward women.

³⁶Lee E. Ross, "Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: A Double-Edge Sword?" *Catalyst: A Social Justice Forum*. Volume 2, Number 3 (2012).

³⁷Ayesha S. Chaudry, *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition: Ethics, Law and the Muslim Discourses on Gender*. Oxford, UK: University of Oxford Press, 2013.

³⁸Mediha Salkic, *Combatting Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Islam: Muslim Religious Leaders as the Bridge between Misinterpretation and Resolution*. digitalcommons.winthrop.edu, 2016.

³⁹Abdalla Mohammad, Ibrahim, Nada. *A Critical Examination of Qur'an 4:34 and Its Relevance to Intimate Partner Violence in Muslim Families*. Routledge, 2010.

⁴⁰Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, and Homayra Ziad. *The Prohibition of Domestic Violence in Islam*. Washington, D.C.: World Organization for Resource Development and Education, 2011.

Table 1 Description and differences of themes between ideology variations

Ideology Variation	Female’s and Male’s Position	Limits of Violence	Responses Toward Violence
Conservative	Possess an understanding from holy texts	Violence is essentially an ordinary relationship conflict, that is caused by both males and females.	Females as victims, the violence experienced is a test from God so that wives should endure and pray while waiting for a husband to change.
	that state males are unequivocally more dominant than females	Females who provoke their husbands to the extent of battery are also considered perpetrators due to their disobedience to their husbands, which causes conflict.	Other responses are victimizing the victims.
Pragmatic	Agree with the principles of equality as a basic teaching in religion. However, males still have higher positions compared to females, and males are in full control of being head of the household; wives are still expected to obey/submit. Quoting Qur’an verses regarding a wife’s duty to obey her husband (Q.S. 3:34) and the Hadith (tradition) “If I were to command	Differentiate between physical and non-physical violence. Allows battery to wives according to their own interpretations of the holy book but only with the intention to educate and with strict adherence to requirements such as, among others, prohibition to batter that endangers life or using instruments.	Assorted by case. If it entails cases relating to principles or endangerment, leaders may intervene to help, yet if it is mild and non-physical, then attempt to resolve the issue from both sides (husband and wife) with both being subject to error.

Ideology Variation	Female's and Male's Position	Limits of Violence	Responses Toward Violence
Progressive	someone to prostrate, I would command women to prostrate to their husbands"	They even allow abuse, though not physical violence.	
	Gender equality is a fundamental value in religious teachings, hence the positions of males and females are equal.		
	Quoting the Qur'an verse: Wives are a husband's clothing and husbands are wives' clothing. Are there grounds on which this holy text is retrieved?	Violence in any form toward females is unjustified by any religious teaching.	Provide support and empowerment to females as victims of violence. Husbands and wives are subject to improvement, but with the priority of helping victims.
	Also, the Hadith (tradition) "The best of you are those who are good to their families, and I am the best among you."		

The Spectrum of Tolerance Toward IPV

When illustrated as a spectrum, this study demonstrates that participants' views on IPV is described by the researchers as a continuum in which the far left is forms of violence with the "least endangering" degree such as psychological violence in non-verbal (disrespectful gestures), and verbal forms (threatening, screaming), to the far right end of the spectrum being endangerment or physical violence (assault and battery).

Based on this continuum, the responses given by the religious leaders toward IPV can only be differentiated categorically. In the left continuum,

some leaders were unaware that psychological abuse is considered violence, whether in verbal or non-verbal forms. This view caused them to ignore such violence as they deemed it to be non-endangering and no more than a normal marital fight or conflict.

“Verbal punishment is also allowed as long as it is not physical. So mere words can still be tolerated...”(RT,P,36)

“For types of behavior that don’t endanger life are merely husband and wife conflicts. But when it involves physical violence, that also needs to be examined first, because there are forms of physical violence that don’t induce pain...but when using instruments that are endangering, then that is violence...” (TON, LK, 43)

Self-Regulation Guides for IPV Victims

In dealing with IPV cases, religious leaders are expected to provide guidance based on religious instructions in response to the violence that a victim experiences. In this sense, leaders tend to provide self-regulatory guidance to IPV victims. This means that they often view IPV issues as a mere conflict between husband and wife, so a victim is guided on how to deal with the issue. In this study, self-regulation guides can be classified into passive, stigmatic and active, empowering. In the conservative and pragmatic groups, religious leaders tend to provide guidance that is passive and stigmatic; wives are asked to yield, not fight back and be introspective.

“When violence happens, females should just keep quiet and be patient, until the husband (as a perpetrator) eventually becomes aware. Of course, when this happens, a wife should pray for her husband’s goodwill. This is an opportunity for Godly merits, if she remains patient and prays. And if a wife is more accepting of this situation then God will provide a way out. Nothing is meaningless because this is God’s trial.” (MUF, PR, 30)

Whereas the progressive group is oriented toward the empowerment of wives as victims, and on the other hand, they also raise awareness from

husbands on their issues. This group does not practice stigmatization and blaming.

“Communicate well in good situations. If this doesn’t work, then there should be a mediator. Don’t immediately ask for a divorce. But that can also be a solution when there is no middle ground.” (ZUH, PR, 36)

Both categories above have similarities in not resorting to divorce as a resolution. Aside from this, the degree of severity experienced by IPV victims is also a consideration for religious leaders in providing guidance. For violence that involves physical harm, religious leaders would first identify whether the wife can still withstand the relationship or not. If a victim feels that they are incapable of enduring, then religious leaders would recommend divorce or proceed to legal pursuit. Nonetheless, religious leaders would still encourage their wives to withstand and advise them to pray more while conceding.

“The context of a wife and God’s happiness may not be equal. Who knows a wife can be unhappy, but to God it may be for the best. If we can be strong, it means God is still empowering us.” (MUF, PR, 35)

To them, they strongly avoid advising victims to leave violent relationships, as separations are not commended by religion. On one hand, this may be justified, as they would like to maintain marital integrity and uphold children’s rights, yet on the other hand, they also do not take the victim’s side, who are in greater need of protection from threats and dangers of violence. The solution offered leans more toward the victim’s spiritual empowerment to accept the issue positively.

Based on the findings above, it can be asserted that religious leaders have different understandings of intimate relationship violence as a result of their interpretations of spiritual teachings. This difference plays a role in determining their attitudes when working with IPV victims.

Conclusion

This study identifies three ideological orientations—conservative, pragmatic, and progressive—among Indonesian Muslim religious leaders in responding to intimate partner violence (IPV). It highlights how religious ideology shapes their attitudes, interpretations of Islamic teachings, and support for victims. The findings extend theoretical frameworks on religious responses to IPV and emphasize the importance of integrating belief systems into gender-based violence discourse. Practically, the study recommends tailored interventions, support for progressive leaders, and training for all orientations to encourage victim-centered approaches. Future research should broaden its scope to other faiths and regions, assess impacts on victims, and explore ways to institutionalize progressive religious interpretations.

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