



DYNAMICS OF WIVES' SOCIAL ROLE ADAPTATION IN MARRIAGE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON IDENTITY NEGOTIATION AND HARMONY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAMIC FAMILY LAW

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ABSTRACT

Islamic marriage aims to manifest a sakinah family, yet high divorce rates and contemporary gamophobia phenomena necessitate a new understanding of relational resilience. This phenomenological study explores wives' subjective experiences in character adaptation and highlights its novelty in reinterpreting the concept of qiwamah (husband's leadership) and family harmony in contemporary marriage. Through in-depth interviews with six female informants, this study found that character adaptation is not passive submission, but an active and dialogical identity negotiation strategy. The novelty of this article lies in the finding that wives' subjective experiences directly deconstruct rigid textual understandings; qiwamah is no longer interpreted as absolute patriarchal dominance but reinterpreted as an egalitarian consultative mechanism to achieve harmony. In conclusion, Islamic Family Law texts are practically operating as a flexible living law. The main contribution of this research theoretically offers a new paradigm of egalitarian husband-wife power relations, and practically recommends the revitalization of pre-marital guidance at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) focusing on conflict resolution and role negotiation.

Keywords: Character Adaptation, Phenomenology, Islamic Family Law, Living Law, Identity Negotiation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage under Islamic law is fundamentally a noble bond oriented toward the formation of a family that is peaceful, loving, and compassionate. This normative ideal is designed to create pillars of stability, love, and peace within the household. However, the high rate of disputes and divorces in practice demonstrates that a rigid textual understanding of religious dogma often fails to address sociological realities (Firmansyah et al., 2022; RI, 2019).

Departing from this fundamental problem, this article specifically focuses its primary study on the urgency of reinterpreting Islamic Family Law. Religious law is required to

restore its dignity as a living law in society. The demand for this reinterpretation of law does not arise in a vacuum but is driven and empirically explored through the practice of character adaptation and identity negotiation undertaken by wives in the domestic sphere (Sri Astuti, 2021).

The need for this legal reinterpretation is increasingly pressing amidst the maelstrom of sociocultural transformation and the massive exposure to digital media. The emergence of pessimistic narratives about the family institution, such as the "marriage is scary" trend, has sparked real collective anxiety. This has even begun to foster symptoms of gamophobia, or a psychological reluctance to build a family, among the younger generation of Muslims (Gejala et al., 2025; Wulandari, 2025).

This phenomenon of collective fear is a warning that the contemporary institution of marriage is facing a crisis of confidence. In response to this critical situation, a purely black-and-white approach is no longer sufficient. Islamic Family Law is required to engage in a dialectical process, revealing a more adaptive, inclusive, and accommodating face, rather than simply appearing as a set of formal rules that restrict and dominate through rigid structures (Nasir et al., 2022).

Sociologically, the primary driver forcing this role negotiation and legal reinterpretation is rooted in the shifting economic role of women. The involvement of wives in the public sector to help support the family economy is an unavoidable reality. Unfortunately, this active involvement has created a new dilemma in the form of a double burden on the wives' shoulders (Amalia & Rohman, 2024; Bawono & Santosa, 2020).

Faced with such demanding roles, the wives apparently do not respond with resignation. Instead, they proactively adapt their character and negotiate to maintain the integrity of their relationships. This daily dialectic of compromise—from the flexibility of managing emotions to crafting communication patterns—is slowly beginning to deconstruct the traditional role divisions rigidly standardized in Islamic jurisprudence texts (Afifah & Savira, 2023).

So far, various psychosocial studies have confirmed the crucial role of mental resilience and flexible negotiation skills on the part of wives in maintaining household stability (Alicia et al., 2021; Oktavianingtyas & Amri, 2025). Unfortunately, the literature in the field of Islamic Family Law has generally remained stagnant and stuck in a doctrinal approach. This delay is most evident in the concept of husbandly leadership (*qiwamah*), which is still often interpreted as a form of patriarchal hegemony, even though in the reality of modern families, this authority is operationalized in an egalitarian manner through deliberation (Jafar & Soleh, 2025).

Responding to the widening gap between rigid normative understanding and fluid sociological reality, the urgency of this research lies in the urgent need to formulate a formula for family resilience amidst high divorce rates and a crisis of confidence among the younger generation in the institution of marriage. If Islamic Family Law is not immediately brought into dialogue with the reality of women's social roles today, the religious text risks losing its solution-oriented function. Therefore, the focus of this research is directed specifically at exploring the subjective experiences of wives in adapting their character and negotiating their identities in the domestic sphere. Through this study, the authors empirically analyze how these daily practices of compromise lead directly to a reinterpretation of the concept of rights, obligations, and authority of *qiwamah* to be more collaborative and egalitarian. Practically, these findings are projected

as a strategic reference for updating the premarital guidance curriculum at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), in order to equip prospective brides and grooms with conflict resolution skills that are relevant to the times (RI, 2019).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to deeply explore the meaning of individuals' lived experiences based on their subjective daily realities (Niam et al., 2024). Through a phenomenological lens, the primary focus of analysis is directed sharply at the reinterpretation of Islamic Family Law as a living law within the domestic sphere (Jafar & Soleh, 2025; Sri Astuti, 2021). Within this framework, the wives' character adaptation and identity negotiation processes are positioned as two supporting material-empirical variables to uncover how these religious legal norms are understood, deconstructed, and re-operationalized in real life.

Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with specific criteria: women who had been married for at least three years and had significant experience with adaptation and role negotiation. Overall, this study involved six wives with varying demographic characteristics to obtain a rich and robust data representation to support the legal reconstruction analysis. The informants' ages ranged from 21 to 64, with marital age ranging from an early transitional phase (3 years) to a very established phase (40 years). Their educational backgrounds varied from high school to undergraduate degrees, with socioeconomic statuses ranging from middle to upper-middle class. To capture the double burden phenomenon underlying the need to negotiate these private rules, the selected participants had diverse employment statuses, including full-time housewives, elementary school teachers, kindergarten teachers, accountants, and entrepreneurs.

The primary data collection process was conducted continuously until data saturation reached, at which point the extracted narratives demonstrated a consistent pattern (Niam et al., 2024). The primary instrument was a semi-structured in-depth interview. Technically, the interviews were conducted comprehensively, with an average duration of 45 minutes for each informant. To facilitate flexibility and comfort for the informants, the majority of interviews (five individuals) were conducted via hybrid video calls, while one interview session was conducted face-to-face. Primary data collection on the wives' psychosocial aspects was then intensively combined with documentary studies of Islamic jurisprudence and legislation as a secondary normative framework to formulate patterns of legal reinterpretation occurring in the field.

Operationally, data analysis was conducted using rigorous and systematic phenomenological analysis to establish chronological relationships between variables. The first stage began with data reduction, which involved filtering interview transcripts to eliminate narratives not directly related to the research focus. The second step was the identification of meaning units, in which the researcher selected and highlighted key quotations from the informants' statements that reflected their character adaptation and identity negotiation variables. The third step is thematic categorization, which involves mapping and grouping these related units of meaning into key themes that directly lead to the concept of legal reinterpretation, such as the redefinition of rights and obligations and the transformation of the meaning of obedience (Oktavianingtyas & Amri, 2025).

This analysis phase then culminates in extracting the essence of experience, namely formulating the essence or deepest meaning of all the wives' subjective experiences to produce a comprehensive theoretical construct regarding the repositioning and reinterpretation of Islamic Family Law in the modern era. Finally, to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, this study employed a member check method, where the initial interpretations were reconfirmed with the informants to ensure that the meaning of private law captured by the researcher truly aligned with their authentic experiences in the dynamics of married life.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The findings of this study confirm that marital relations in Islamic Family Law are dynamic, negotiative, and highly contextual social practices. The reality on the ground demonstrates that normative legal texts never operate in a vacuum, but rather are constantly in dialectic with the dynamics of everyday life. Harmonious marital relationships are not built on blind obedience, but rather through a series of consciously agreed-upon adjustments. In this context, the resilience of contemporary Muslim families depends heavily on the couple's ability to navigate religious rules in a more grounded and flexible manner (Sri Astuti, 2021).

As a first step in this dialectic, this study found that the early stages of marriage represent a crucial psychological transition for a wife. During this stage, the process of melding personal egos (me-centric) toward the formation of a collective family consciousness (we-centric) occurs. This finding was clearly confirmed by Sarah (26), who reflected on her shift in priorities: "Before marriage, women sometimes focus more on themselves, such as wanting to look good or be free to go out. However, after marriage, self-prioritization is lowered because focus and attention are divided between caring for their husband, children, and extended family." Through this awareness, the restrictions on personal freedom experienced by wives after marriage are no longer interpreted as a form of physical restraint, but rather as a new commitment to maintaining the integrity of the relationship. This process forms an important foundation for the formation of character adaptation variables, where wives are required to begin aligning their old habits with the presence of their husbands by their side (Afifah & Savira, 2023).

This shift in character from singlehood to marriage is clearly illustrated by the narrative of one informant, Teh Mimi (30). Teh Mimi reflected on how her self-centered girlhood had to undergo a major transformation to accommodate her partner's needs. She admitted that this change required a great deal of forbearance to suppress personal desires that had previously been freely fulfilled: "Before marriage, I was more indifferent. When I was a girl, I had more freedom, I thought more about my own body... In the beginning, I was often indifferent. I only thought about my own body, my own clothes, my own cell phone, and my own wallet. But I didn't remember Mang Opik's wallet at first."

Another informant, Aisyah (21), shared a similar experience regarding character maturation. She explained that marriage automatically triggered a new awareness of her role and social responsibilities as a wife. This instinct to nurture and adapt occurred naturally without any external structural coercion: "Besides being emotional and independent, for some reason, a motherly or wifely spirit suddenly emerged after

marriage. I didn't know what a wife and mother were like before, but after marriage, I realized it and changed and adapted."

From a legal sociology perspective, the character adaptation process demonstrated by the informants represents an initial internalization of the burden of taklif (sharia responsibilities) within the institution of marriage. The quality of long-term relationships within Muslim households has been shown to be highly determined by the effectiveness of this adaptation process during this initial transition period. The wife's awareness of setting aside personal interests demonstrates that the implementation of Islamic legal obligations is not always carried out rigidly based on doctrine, but rather thrives through mature emotional maturity (Afifah & Savira, 2023; Hadi et al., 2023).

After the character adaptation phase, the relationship dynamics continue to the next variable, namely the practice of identity negotiation and conflict management in the private sphere. In the face of daily friction or differences of opinion, the wives have been shown to avoid destructive open confrontation. They tend to develop subtle communication strategies to maintain relationship stability. This negotiation mechanism is described in detail by Sarah (26 years old) who chose to withdraw for a moment to evaluate herself before finally taking the path of open dialogue with her husband: "Usually I keep quiet or pout to calm myself down. After that I have to think and evaluate the truth and the reasons for the anger. The next step is to sit down together, discuss the problem slowly (tabayun), find a solution together, and end with mutual forgiveness."

The strategy of delaying emotions by providing a "timeout" was also a private rule negotiated early on by Aisyah with her husband. The silence she adopted during conflict was deliberately communicated so that her husband understood that she was introspecting, not rejecting or defying his authority: "I've told my husband that when I'm angry, I only need about 15 to 20 minutes to be quiet. In my silence, I can introspect, control my emotions, and give myself some time alone... So this really needs to be discussed from the beginning of the marriage about how we handle emotions."

On the other hand, a more senior informant, Umi Yuni (43), emphasized that negotiating roles in the household often requires the wife's willingness to give in first. This act of giving in is positioned respectfully as a form of respect for the husband's position as head of the family, with the caveat that evaluations or discussions about improvement will still be conducted rationally at a calmer time: "The key is to avoid egos wanting to win and to avoid blaming each other. We must be open, respectful, and seek solutions. Usually, the wife gives in first to respect her husband's decision. Giving in doesn't mean losing, but rather that the matter can be discussed and corrected with the husband at the right time..."

Conceptually, the acts of silence and yielding practiced by wives in the field cannot be categorized as forms of nusyuz or absolute submission under the shadow of patriarchy. Rather, they are highly intelligent instruments of identity negotiation for resolving disputes or syiqaq peacefully. Modern couples utilize this private space to mitigate each other's egos, allowing for fluid resolution of marital conflicts through a healthy psychological approach, rather than using rigid legal sanctions (Nashrullah & Hidayat, 2026; Oktavianingtyas & Amri, 2025).

The dialectic that develops from the wives' character adaptation and flexible identity negotiation ultimately triggers a key variable: the reinterpretation of Islamic Family Law. The informants' empirical experiences demonstrate that normative religious concepts

such as wifely obedience and rights and obligations are no longer understood textually and doctrinally. In the hands of wives, these dogmas are reinterpreted into principles of equal, dialogical partnership, imbued with the values of compassion for the common good (Nasirudin & Multazam, 2025).

The concept of a wife's obedience (ta'ah), for example, is reinterpreted by Umi Yuni not as a form of submission of a woman's sovereignty to a man, but rather as a spiritual bridge and the highest form of worship to attain God's approval. This theological belief makes obedience to one's husband feel light and joyful, as it has a sacred afterlife dimension: "A wife's paradise is with her husband. Love and affection are secondary; the most important thing is to obey her husband's commands and prohibitions, because the husband is the imam of a married woman."

The interpretation of obedience as part of a rational choice that brings great rewards was also emphasized by Amah Dede (40). As a woman who had worked as a kindergarten teacher for five years, she consciously chose to give in and resign to focus all her energy on the domestic sphere after establishing a mature compromise with her husband: "The wisdom of resigning and giving in to teaching is realizing that the rewards of taking care of my husband at home are far greater and I can focus more. In the past, when I was teaching, I was often exhausted, so I had to cook instant meals, but at home, I can really focus on caring for my husband to earn rewards."

In addition to the concept of obedience, the principle of husbandly leadership, or qiwamah, has also undergone a significant reinterpretation in the field. The most senior informant, Enin Heni (64 years old), explained that her husband's leadership authority during more than 40 years of marriage was manifested in the form of religious example and consistent spiritual guidance, not in the form of coercive will or absolute power: "Alhamdulillah, Mbah was able to guide Enin into religion... But because it was based on knowledge and Enin was always given direction and input by her husband, her ego slowly weakened... My husband always taught me goodness and corrected me when I was wrong. So, if Mbah reprimanded us, we had to soften our hearts, correct ourselves, and ask for forgiveness a lot..."

All these empirical facts serve as authentic evidence that Islamic Family Law continues to operate as a living law within society. The application of contemporary Islamic law requires flexible interpretations to ensure that past Islamic jurisprudence texts do not become too disparate from the realities of their subjects' lives in the modern era. Husbandly authority in the modern household is no longer practiced as hierarchical domination, but has shifted to an egalitarian, consultative mechanism in which the wife's voice is equally heard (Nasir et al., 2022; Sri Astuti, 2021).

In conclusion, the theoretical contribution of this discussion has successfully deconstructed rigid understandings of the wife's role, which has often been portrayed as subordinate in traditional family law texts. The high sociological dynamics in the field demand reform of the premarital guidance materials provided by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (RI, 2019). The emphasis of education for prospective brides and grooms should no longer be limited to memorizing rights and obligations textually, but rather should begin to touch on providing skills in character adaptation, identity negotiation, and applicable conflict resolution to be able to reduce the divorce rate in the modern era (Agama, 2023). This harmony is summarized very well in Aisyah's final

reflection, which emphasizes the egalitarianism of Islamic marriage law: "The key to harmony lies in both, not only the husband for the wife but also the wife for the husband."

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the character adaptation and identity negotiation of wives constitute a process of emotional maturation that actively reinterprets Islamic Family Law as a living law in the domestic sphere. The main theoretical contribution of this article is to deconstruct the rigid understanding of the husband's leadership, demonstrating that this authority is actually exercised in an egalitarian manner through deliberation and mutual agreement for the benefit of all. Practically, these findings have implications for the urgency of reforming premarital guidance materials at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). Education for prospective brides and grooms cannot simply rely on a textual approach regarding rights and obligations; it must also be supplemented with conflict resolution skills and role negotiation skills that are responsive to the dynamics of modern life.

This study has limitations due to its exclusive focus on the wife's subjective perspective, thus not fully and equally depicting marital dynamics. Therefore, further research is recommended to develop a comparative phenomenological study that directly involves the husband's narratives and experiences. In addition, expanding the variables by involving participants from more diverse social, economic, and cross-generational backgrounds is very necessary to enrich academic analysis regarding the variety of negotiations of Islamic Family Law doctrine in the broader societal landscape.

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