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Unveiling *Fiqh Munakahat* in Mandailing Natal *Pesantren*: Exploring Gender Awareness and Women's Marital Rights

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana *fiqh munakahat* diajarkan di pesantren dan implikasinya terhadap pemahaman gender serta hak-hak perempuan dalam pernikahan. Fokus penelitian adalah tiga pesantren di Mandailing Natal: Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, dan Ma'had Darul Ulum Muara Mais dengan mengambil sampel secara purposive terhadap tiga guru fiqh, 15 santri, pimpinan pesantren, dan lima alumni. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus multisitus, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengajaran *fiqh munakahat* di pesantren masih didominasi oleh interpretasi tradisional yang cenderung patriarkal, kurangnya eksplorasi kritis terhadap hak-hak perempuan. Namun, di tengah dominasi narasi ini, muncul benih-benih transformasi, terutama di kalangan generasi muda pesantren yang mulai membuka diri terhadap perspektif progresif tentang gender. Resistensi terhadap modernitas, keterbatasan kapasitas intelektual pengajar, dan pengaruh budaya lokal menjadi tantangan utama dalam mempromosikan kesetaraan gender. Meskipun demikian, perkembangan teknologi informasi dan meningkatnya kesadaran kritis santri memberikan peluang besar untuk reformasi. Penelitian ini menegaskan urgensi bagi pesantren untuk memasukkan perspektif gender ke dalam kurikulum *fiqh munakahat* sebagai langkah menuju keadilan dan kesetaraan.

Kata Kunci: *Pesantren, Gender, Munakahat, Hak Perempuan*

Abstract

The present study showcases the teaching of *fiqh munakahat* in *pesantren* and its implications for gender understanding and women's rights in marriage. The research

focuses on three *pesantren* in Mandailing Natal: Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, and Ma'had Darul Ulum Muara Mais, with purposive sampling of three *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) teachers, fifteen students, *pesantren* leaders, and five alumni. Designed in a qualitative approach with a multisite case study design, data were garnered through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The study findings demonstrate that the teaching of *fiqh munakahat* (Islamic law of marriage) remains dominated by traditional, patriarchal interpretations, with limited critical exploration of women's rights. However, amidst this prevailing narrative, endeavors of transformation are emerging, particularly among the younger *pesantren* generations, who are beginning to embrace progressive gender perspectives. Resistance to modernity, educators' limited intellectual capacity, and local culture's influence pose significant challenges to promote gender equality. Nevertheless, advancements in information technology and growing critical awareness among students offer substantial opportunities for reform. This study underscores the urgent need for *pesantren* to integrate gender perspectives into the *fiqh munakahat* curriculum as a vital step toward justice and equality.

Keywords: *Pesantren, Gender, Munakahat, Women's Rights*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Islamic studies, discourse on *fiqh munakahat*—the Islamic law of marriage—has become an intellectual battleground laden with social, cultural, and gender dynamics (Hikmatullah, 2018). As a central institution in human life, marriage is not merely a legal contract between two individuals but also a reflection of moral values, social norms, and power structures that shape societal gender relations (Jackson, 2012). In Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, religious education through *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) plays a crucial role in shaping the understanding of marriage laws, including women's rights within this institution (Aziz et al., 2024). However, research on how *fiqh munakahat* is taught in *pesantren*, particularly in the context of gender understanding, remains underexplored (Marhumah, 2015; Nuroniyah, 2023; Smith, 2013). This lack of exploration creates a significant knowledge gap, especially in understanding how *pesantren* traditions may contribute to either the transformation or reproduction of patriarchal views that often disadvantage women.

Pesantren, traditional Islamic educational institutions that have existed for centuries, strategically shape religious discourse among Muslim communities (Isbah, 2020; Hussin et al., 2017). In the context of Mandailing Natal, a region in North Sumatra, Indonesia, known for its strong Islamic traditions, *pesantren* are not only

places for studying classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) but also spaces where Islamic values are practiced and internalized by *santri* (students of Islamic boarding schools) (Ikbal et al., 2021; S. Nasution et al., 2021). The three *pesantren* examined in this study—Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, and Ma'had Darul Ulum Muara Mais—are representative of Islamic educational institutions that not only teach religious knowledge but also shape societal perspectives on marriage and gender roles. Amidst the deeply rooted customs and patriarchal values of Mandailing Natal (Nasution, 2019), how these *pesantren* understand and teach *fiqh munakahat* becomes an urgent question to address: Do *pesantren* act as agents of transformation toward gender equality, or do they reinforce entrenched structures of inequality?

Theories on gender in Islam have advanced significantly in recent decades. Sara Ahmed, a feminist philosopher, emphasizes that power structures in society are often reproduced through religious narratives conveyed in educational spaces (Ahmed, 2010; Tuori & Peltonen, 2007). In the context of Islam, Asma Barlas argues that interpretations of religious texts are frequently influenced by historically and culturally patriarchal contexts, resulting in perspectives that tend to disadvantage women (Adam, 2016; Mafumbate et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Fatima Mernissi emphasizes the importance of critically re-examining hadith and Quranic texts to uncover principles of gender equality often obscured by traditional interpretations, wherein religious precepts are interpreted from a male perspective, such as those concerning marriage, divorce, age of marriage, marital rights, and inheritance. In the context of *pesantren*, Azyumardi Azra asserts that *pesantren* possess great potential to serve as agents of social change; however, this potential is often hindered by resistance to modernity and gender equality (Azra, 2015; Azra et al., 2007).

The social reality in Mandailing Natal shows that local communities remain heavily influenced by patriarchal values, often legitimized by religion. Women's rights regarding inheritance, divorce, and decision-making within households frequently struggle against systemic injustices, and these issues are often overlooked (Nasution, 2020). This phenomenon reflects not only gender inequality but also demonstrates how the interpretation of *fiqh munakahat* taught in *pesantren* can influence social realities in the community.

This study offers significant contribution by focusing on *pesantren* as the setting for shaping *fiqh munakahat* discourse within the context of gender. Most previous research on *fiqh munakahat* has tended to focus on textual analysis or case studies at the national level without specific attention to how these teachings are imparted at the local level, particularly in *pesantren* settings. Additionally, this study seeks to connect theories of gender in Islam with the social realities of Mandailing Natal, providing new insights into how religion and culture interact in shaping gender relations. To fill this gap, the present study aims to address is the lack of exploration into how *pesantren*, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, can serve as agents of transformation toward gender equality or, conversely, as tools for reproducing patriarchal values.

The urgency of this research lies not only in its academic significance but also in its social impact. By understanding how *fiqh munakahat* is discussed in *pesantren*, where religious education can be improved to support gender equality can be promoted. This becomes increasingly important given that *pesantren* are not just places for learning religion but also centers for developing character and moral values among young Muslims. If *pesantren* can teach *fiqh munakahat* from a more inclusive and equitable perspective, it could contribute to broader social transformation at both local and national levels. Conversely, if *pesantren* continue to uphold rigid patriarchal views, the risk of perpetuating gender inequality will grow, ultimately hindering societal progress as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multisite case study design to explore in depth how *fiqh munakahat* was taught at three *pesantren* in Mandailing Natal, North Sumatra, Indonesia: Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, and Ma'had Darul Ulum Muara Mais. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aimed to investigate complex social phenomena, particularly in the interaction between religious texts, educational practices, and gender realities in society (Debout, 2016). The multisite case study design allows the researcher to compare and identify common patterns and differences in how *fiqh munakahat* is understood and taught across the three *pesantren* (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Data collection techniques included participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation was conducted by observing the teaching and learning activities related to *fiqh munakahat* in the *pesantren* classrooms, including the teaching methods used by the *ustadz* or *kiai* (Walsh, 2009). In-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholders, including *pesantren* leaders, teachers, students (*santri*), and married alumni, to understand their perspectives on *fiqh munakahat* and its implications for gender understanding. The analyzed documents included classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) used in teaching, the *pesantren* curriculum, and supplementary materials such as sermons or writings on marriage and women's rights.

The data were garnered by observing three Islamic boarding schools, with purposive sampling conducted on three *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) teachers, 15 students, the boarding school leaders, and five alumni. Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis, where the collected data were categorized based on emerging key themes, such as gender concepts in *fiqh munakahat*, views on women's rights, and marriage practices in society (Amro et al., 2022). The analysis process began with the transcription of raw data, initial coding, and the development of broader thematic categories. To guarantee the trustworthiness and verification of the collected data, the study adapted triangulation of sources, methods, and theories, ensuring the research findings were scientifically robust. This study also adopts an educational ethnographic perspective to understand how Islamic values and local norms influence each other within the *pesantren* context.

Dominant Narratives of *Fiqh Munakahat* in *Pesantren*

The education of *fiqh munakahat* in *pesantren* often becomes a battleground between universal Islamic values and local patriarchal norms. In Mandailing Natal, North Sumatra, a region deeply rooted in Islamic traditions and customs, the three *pesantren* studied—Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, and Ma'had Darul Ulum Muara Mais—exhibit teaching patterns that systematically reinforce imbalanced gender power structures. The narratives conveyed in these educational spaces are not merely interpretations of religious texts but also reflections of societal ideologies that subordinate women. In this context, *fiqh munakahat* is no longer about

inclusive marriage laws but rather a tool to legitimize long-entrenched gender hierarchies.

One central theme in the teaching of *fiqh munakahat* is the concept of male leadership (*qiwamah*) (Mahmudah, 2015). At Pesantren Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, for instance, *qiwamah* is often understood as the absolute right of men to lead the household without space for dialogue or collaboration. The *ustadz* (Islamic teachers) tend to emphasize that male leadership reflects the inherent role of men as both spiritual and material leaders of the family. However, this narrative rarely explains the accompanying moral responsibilities, such as the husband's obligation to act justly and in the family's best interest (Observation, September 2024). Consequently, female *santri* tend to internalize the view that obedience to their husbands is an absolute duty, even if the husband's actions contradict principles of justice.

Teaching about polygamy emerged as one of the most provocative aspects of this research. At Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, polygamy is explained as a "right" of the husband, provided certain conditions are met, including the ability to treat all wives fairly. However, in practice, these conditions are often downplayed to justify the general practice of polygamy. A senior *ustadz* even referred to polygamy as a "test of patience" for the first wife, a narrative that reinforces a culture of silence regarding gender injustice (Interview, September 2024). Polygamy is not only seen as a husband's right but also as a solution to social problems, such as the high number of unmarried women or divorce. Although the interviews with the *pesantren* students revealed that the *kiai* (ulama or leaders in *pesantren*) had mentioned the historical aspect of pre-Islamic marriage practices that permitted more than four wives, the concept of polygamy was ultimately interpreted as a form of permissibility (Interview, September 2024). This view overlooks the psychological and social impacts experienced by the first wife, who often feels marginalized or demeaned. In other words, polygamy is no longer about justice but about legitimizing male power over women (Mubarok et al., 2022).

At Pesantren Ma'had Darul Ulum Muara Mais, although there are attempts to discuss the concept of fairness in polygamy, such discussions often conclude with the statement that "perfect justice belongs only to Allah." While this statement originates from religious texts, it is used to shut the door on critical evaluations of

polygamous practices. Female *santri* who question the fairness of polygamy are often directed to accept their fate as a divine test. This reflects how religion is used to subjugate women rather than as a source of inspiration for creating justice (Nasoha et al. 2024).

Another prominent theme in the teaching of *fiqh munakahat* is the concept of *mahr* (dowry) and *nafaqah* (financial maintenance). In all three *pesantren*, *mahr* is often understood to symbolize a woman's dignity rather than an acknowledgement of her inherent worth. Excessive *mahr* is frequently regarded as an indicator of social status, making marriage more of a material transaction than a spiritual bond. Meanwhile, *nafaqah* is often explained as the husband's duty without emphasizing the wife's right to receive adequate maintenance. Some female *santri* even mentioned being taught to accept whatever economic condition their husband is in, even if it means living in poverty (Iqbal, 2015). This perspective not only reduces women to being dependent on men but also reinforces an unjust economic structure.

Teaching about *talaq* (divorce) and *iddah* (the waiting period) also reflects significant patriarchal bias. *Talaq* is often explained as the husband's right to terminate the marriage, while the wife has little or no right to initiate divorce. Although *khulu'* (wife-initiated divorce) is discussed, the procedure is often presented in a complex and burdensome manner, discouraging women from pursuing it. At Pesantren Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, for example, *khulu'* is often referred to as a "last resort" that should only be pursued if all reconciliation efforts fail. However, in practice, the reconciliation process is often exploited by the husband to prolong the wife's suffering. This demonstrates that *fiqh munakahat* not only reinforces male dominance but also limits women's access to legal justice. Table 1 below is an overview of the *fiqh munakahat* materials taught at the three *pesantren*.

Table 1. Interpretation of *Fiqh Munakahat* Themes and Social Implications
 in *Pesantren*

THEME	PESANTREN	INTERPRETATION	SOCIAL IMPLICATION
<i>Qiwamah</i> (Husband's Leadership)	Ma'had Darul Ikhlas	The absolute right of men to lead the household without room for collaborative dialogue	Internalization of obedience without critique; reinforcement of gender hierarchy
	Roihanul Jannah	Leadership as a moral responsibility but with minimal emphasis on justice	Lack of understanding of wives; rights in leadership
	Darul Ulum Muara Mais	The inherent role of men as spiritual and material leaders	Reinforcement of male dominance over women

Polygamy	Ma'had Darul Ikhlas	A husband's right as long as he is fair, but the fairness condition is often weakened	Polygamy viewed as a general solution without considering the psychological impact on wives
	Roihanul Jannah	Perfect justice belongs only to Allah, so polygamy is generally justified	Passive acceptance of injustice in polygamy
	Darul Ulum Muara Mais	Polygamy as a solution to social problems like single women	Legitimization of male dominance over women
Mahr (Dowry)	Ma'had Darul Ikhlas	<i>Mahr</i> as a symbol of a woman's dignity	Material transactions are more important than spiritual bonds
	Roihanul Jannah	High <i>mahr</i> as an indicator of social status	Reduction of women to material objects
	Darul Ulum Muara Mais	<i>Mahr</i> as a form of respect for the prospective wife	High <i>mahr</i> creates economic pressure on families
Nafaqah (Financial Maintenance)	Ma'had Darul Ikhlas	<i>Nafaqah</i> as the husband's unlimited obligation	Women must accept the husband's economic condition without protest
	Roihanul Jannah	<i>Nafaqah</i> as a moral responsibility but with minimal emphasis on the wife's rights	Lack of understanding of the wife's right to adequate <i>nafaqah</i>
	Darul Ulum Muara Mais	<i>Nafaqah</i> as a symbol of male dominance	Reinforcement of patriarchal economic structures
Talaq (Divorce)	Ma'had Darul Ikhlas	The husband's absolute right to end the marriage	Restriction of the wife's access to legal justice
	Roihanul Jannah	The reconciliation process prioritized before <i>talaq</i>	Prolonging the suffering of wives in unhappy marriages
	Darul Ulum Muara Mais	<i>Talaq</i> as a quick solution to marital problems	Ignoring the psychological impact on wives
Khulu' (Wife-initiated Divorce)	Ma'had Darul Ikhlas	<i>Khulu'</i> as a last resort with complicated procedures	Women are reluctant to file for <i>khulu'</i> due to burdensome procedures
	Roihanul Jannah	<i>Khulu'</i> seen as less ideal	Negative stigma toward women who file for <i>khulu'</i>
	Darul Ulum Muara Mais	<i>Khulu'</i> as a wife's right but rarely discussed in depth	Lack of <i>santri</i> understanding of their rights in divorce
Inheritance	Ma'had Darul Ikhlas	Women's inheritance is half of men's without historical context	Gender inequality in inheritance distribution
	Roihanul Jannah	Inheritance as a reflection of men's inherent role as family protectors	Reinforcement of patriarchal ideology
	Darul Ulum Muara Mais	Inheritance as a religious trust but with minimal discussion of social context	Lack of critique on gender inequality
Iddah (Waiting Period)	Ma'had Darul Ikhlas	<i>Iddah</i> as a waiting period without an explanation of its spiritual purpose	Women viewed as beings that need to be controlled
	Roihanul Jannah	<i>Iddah</i> as a period of relationship evaluation	Minimal emphasis on women's rights during <i>iddah</i>
	Darul Ulum Muara Mais	<i>Iddah</i> as a form of protection for women	Reinforcement of stereotypes that women need male protection
Wali (Bride's Lawful Guardian)	Ma'had Darul Ikhlas	<i>Wali</i> as the absolute right of the father or male relative	Women have no autonomy in choosing their <i>wali</i>
	Roihanul Jannah	<i>Wali</i> as a representation of the extended family	Male dominance in marriage decision-making
	Darul Ulum Muara Mais	<i>Wali</i> as a condition for a valid marriage	Limited space for women to determine their fate
Children's Rights in Marriage	Ma'had Darul Ikhlas	Children's rights as the responsibility of both parents but more dominant on the father	Children often become victims of gender conflict

Roihanul Jannah	Children's rights as a priority in marriage	Minimal discussion of the impact of divorce on children
Darul Ulum Muara Mais	Children's rights as a religious trust	Lack of emphasis on the mother's role in child-rearing

Table 1 reveals systematic patterns in the teaching of Islamic marriage law that explicitly reinforce patriarchal power structures. From *qiwamah* to children's rights, the narratives reflect religious texts' interpretations and mirror societal ideologies that subordinate women. A deeper analysis of this table shows that *fiqh munakahat* in *pesantren* is not merely about marriage laws but also about the reproduction of patriarchal values that disadvantage women.

The concept of *qiwamah* (male leadership) is one of the main pillars in teaching *fiqh munakahat*, reinforcing male dominance. Across all *pesantren*, *qiwamah* is understood as the absolute right of men to lead the household without room for dialogue or collaboration. Although there are efforts at Pesantren Roihanul Jannah to emphasize the moral responsibilities of husbands, this emphasis is rarely accompanied by explanations of wives' rights. As a result, female *santri* tend to internalize the view that obedience to their husbands is an absolute duty, even if the husband's actions contradict principles of justice.

The theme of polygamy is one of the most provocative aspects of these findings. At Pesantren Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, polygamy is explained as a "right" of the husband as long as he is fair. However, the fairness condition is often downplayed to justify the practice in general. Meanwhile, at Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, polygamy is justified with the argument that "perfect justice belongs only to Allah," making this practice an accepted norm without critical evaluation. The social implications are significant: the first wife is often viewed as a test of patience, while their rights to refuse polygamy are ignored. Polygamy is no longer about justice but about legitimizing male dominance over women (Afiah, 2021).

Regarding *mahr* and *nafaqah*, there is evidence of deep materialistic bias. *Mahr*, which should symbolize respect for a woman's dignity, is instead reduced to a material transaction that objectifies women. At Pesantren Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, a high *mahr* is considered an indicator of social status, while at Pesantren Darul Ulum Muara Mais, a high *mahr* causes economic pressure on families. Similarly, *nafaqah* is often explained as the husband's duty without emphasizing the wife's right to receive

adequate maintenance. This not only reduces women to being dependent on men but also reinforces an unjust economic structure.

Regarding the themes of *talaq* and *khulu'*, it is evident how marriage laws are often exploited to restrict women's access to justice. Talak is described as the husband's absolute right, while *khulu'* is complicated by intricate procedures and negative stigma. At Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, for instance, the reconciliation process is taught to students to pacify wives, who are portrayed as women with emotional instability. Customary and familial reconciliation offers are considered prerequisites before pursuing *khulu'*. Custom, as a pillar of the social structure in Mandailing Natal, is reinforced to maintain family ties even in critical situations, particularly considering that children left behind may face potential educational failure. Women often feel reluctant or ashamed at this stage to "announce" their decision to pursue *khulu'* to their extended family, as they may subsequently be stigmatized as disobedient wives.

Meanwhile, the themes of inheritance, *iddah*, *wali* (bride's lawful guardian), and children's rights illustrate how *fiqh munakahat* is used to legitimize deeply entrenched gender hierarchies in society. Women's inheritance being half of men's is often explained without historical context, creating gender inequality. *Iddah* is viewed as a form of control over women, while *wali* becomes a tool to restrict women's autonomy in choosing a life partner. Children's rights are often reduced to the dominant responsibility of fathers, leaving mothers with little space in decision-making (Nasution et al., 2021).

The research data indicate that *fiqh munakahat* in Mandailing Natal *pesantren* is not just about marriage laws but also about the reproduction of patriarchal values that disadvantage women. The narratives conveyed in these educational spaces reflect how religion is used to legitimize gender injustice rather than to create justice and equality.

Resistance to Modernity: The Tension between Tradition and Gender Transformation

Pesantren in Mandailing Natal serve as battlegrounds of ideology, where traditional values meet the challenges of modernity. The three *pesantren* studied—

Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, and Ma'had Darul Ulum Muara Mais—are not merely religious educational institutions but also spaces where religious narratives are used to uphold long-established social structures. In this context, resistance to modernity, particularly regarding gender equality, is not merely a passive rejection of change but an active, systematic, and structured form of resistance. This phenomenon creates complex internal dynamics, balancing efforts to preserve tradition with the push to adopt new perspectives on gender relations.

At Pesantren Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, the leadership often argues that the concept of gender equality is a Western product that contradicts Islamic teachings. This stance is based on a textual interpretation of Qur'anic verses and *hadith*, which tend to be understood literally without historical or social context. For instance, the verse on *qiwamah* (QS An-Nisa: 34) asserts male dominance over women without a deeper explanation of the accompanying moral responsibilities. In informal discussions, a senior *kiai* stated that Islam has provided perfect solutions for all aspects of human life, including gender relations, thus rendering new interpretations unnecessary as they might threaten traditional values (Asrori, 2024).

The teaching of *fiqh munakahat* at Pesantren Ma'had Darul Ulum Muara Mais reflects a similar pattern. Polygamy, for example, is explained as a husband's legitimate right, provided certain conditions are met, such as fairness in providing maintenance and affection. However, in practice, these conditions are often downplayed to justify polygamy as a general norm. A senior *ustadz* argued that polygamy is a solution to social problems, such as the high number of unmarried women or divorce (Karimullah, 2023). This view not only reinforces patriarchal ideology but also ignores the psychological and social impacts experienced by the first wife. Moreover, the first wife is often viewed as a test of patience, a narrative that further strengthens a culture of silence regarding gender injustice.

Pesantren Roihanul Jannah's teachings about *mahr* and *nafaqah* reveal deep materialistic biases. *Mahr*, which should symbolize respect for a woman's dignity, is instead reduced to a material transaction that objectifies women (Azizah et al., 2023). An *ustadz* at this *pesantren* claimed that a high *mahr* indicates a woman's worth, reflecting materialistic bias in society. Similarly, *nafaqah* is explained as the husband's duty without emphasizing the wife's right to receive adequate maintenance. This not

only reduces women to being dependent on men but also reinforces an unjust economic structure.

Despite strong resistance to modernity, there are early signs of transformation worth noting. At Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, some young teachers have begun introducing new perspectives on women's rights in *fiqh munakahat*. For instance, during discussions about *talaq*, a young *ustadz* emphasized the importance of a reconciliation process involving dialogue between husband and wife rather than unilateral decisions by the husband. Although this perspective is rarely explicitly taught in class, it is introduced in informal forums involving *santri*. Specifically, these young *kiai* also describe the formal process regarding women's rights based on existing regulations in Indonesia, ranging from negotiation, mediation, and communication to court proceedings. They also emphasize the importance of family communication to avoid taking unilateral actions when undesirable situations arise. This indicates that the younger generation of teachers intends to understand *fiqh munakahat* more inclusively and equitably.

At Pesantren Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, while resistance to modernity remains strong, there are indications that some female *santri* are beginning to question the narratives they receive. One female *santri*, for example, expressed dissatisfaction with how *fiqh munakahat* is taught, stating that it does not provide adequate answers to the challenges of the modern world. She criticized how polygamy is explained as a husband's right without considering its psychological impact on the first wife. Though this critique was voiced discreetly, it reflects the potential for internal resistance to dominant patriarchal ideologies.

It is worth mentioning to note that resistance to modernity is not inherently negative. At Pesantren Ma'had Darul Ulum Muara Mais, there is an argument that local traditions and Islamic values must be preserved to protect Islamic identity from the influence of materialistic global culture. The problem arises when these traditions are used to legitimize gender inequality. In this context, resistance to modernity is not just about preserving Islamic values but also about maintaining power structures that disadvantage women. This creates a paradox that is difficult to resolve: how to preserve tradition without reinforcing injustice.

Addressing this paradox requires a holistic and inclusive approach. At Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, there is an initiative to introduce modern literature on gender in Islam, such as contemporary concepts about marriage phenomena, to young teachers. This literature broadens perspectives on how religious texts can be interpreted more progressively. Although this initiative is still in its early stages, it demonstrates the potential of *pesantren* to become agents of transformation toward gender equality. However, achieving this goal requires a strong commitment from *pesantren* leaders to support such changes and collaborate with the broader community to transform deeply entrenched patriarchal norms.

It is crucial to understand that resistance to modernity stems not solely from the *pesantren* themselves but also from the surrounding society. In Mandailing Natal, the community remains heavily influenced by patriarchal values, often legitimized by religion. The Dalihan Na Tolu tradition remains a cornerstone of the community, where the line of existence (descent and power) is traced through men. The view of women as family objects remains paramount, with women being constantly reminded of this as a guiding principle, such as in cases where women possess significant wealth or high education. Therefore, efforts to change how *fiqh munakahat* is taught in *pesantren* must be carried out in parallel with efforts to transform social norms in the community. This requires collaboration among *pesantren*, the government, and civil society organizations to create an environment supportive of gender equality.

This in-depth analysis shows that resistance to modernity in Mandailing Natal *pesantren* creates significant tension between tradition and gender transformation. However, amidst this tension, there are promising early signs of change. If *pesantren* can overcome this resistance and adopt a more inclusive perspective on *fiqh munakahat*, they can become powerful forces driving social progress in Indonesia. If not, the risk of perpetuating gender inequality will continue to haunt future generations.

Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching *Fiqh Munakahat*

The education of *fiqh munakahat* in *pesantren*, although possessing great potential to become an agent of social change, remains trapped in a dilemma between

established traditions and the need for reform. This study found that the teaching of *fiqh munakahat* at the three *pesantren*—Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, and Ma'had Darul Ulum Muara Mais—often takes place in a formalistic and uncritical format. In many cases, *fiqh munakahat* materials are presented as legal rules to be followed without giving *santri* the space to question their implications for gender justice. For example, the concept of “*qiwamah*” (male leadership) is often understood literally as the husband's dominance over the wife without attempting to explore the verse's deeper meaning within its historical and social context. This creates a paradox where *pesantren*, which should be places of community empowerment, instead contribute to reproducing structures of gender inequality through less inclusive teaching methods (Shomad, 2022).

However, amidst this dominance of patriarchal narratives, there are early signs of change worth noting. At Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, female *santri* have begun examining gender issues in informal spaces. These forums often explore family leadership issues, including modern issues trending on social media. Such forums are certainly not conducted in formal settings or supported by the leadership.

One major challenge is the resistance to ideas of modernity and gender equality, which are perceived as conflicting with traditional values. At Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, for example, senior *kiai* tend to reject progressive approaches to *fiqh munakahat* out of concern that they might weaken religious authority in society. They argue that religious education must remain grounded in classical texts such as *Fath Mu'in*, *I'annah Al-Thalibin*, and *Al-Bajuri*, which are considered valid sources of knowledge. While this view is based on good intentions to preserve the purity of Islamic teachings, it limits the scope for developing more inclusive religious discourse. This resistance comes from the *kiai* and the surrounding community, which often views *pesantren* as guardians of tradition that must be preserved. As a result, efforts to introduce gender perspectives into the teaching of *fiqh munakahat* often face significant obstacles.

Another challenge is the limited intellectual capacity among *pesantren* educators to integrate gender perspectives into *fiqh munakahat* materials. Many *ustadz* and *kiai* in *pesantren* lack formal training in gender studies or progressive interpretation methodologies, leading them to rely on established traditional

interpretations (Fodhil & Azizah, 2021). At Ma'had Darul Ulum Muara Mais, for example, one ustadz admitted that he felt unconfident discussing gender issues in *fiqh munakahat* classes for fear of misinterpreting religious texts. This limitation shows that reform in teaching *fiqh munakahat* requires curriculum changes and an enhancement of intellectual capacity among *pesantren* educators. Without adequate training, efforts to promote gender equality through *pesantren* education will be difficult.

Another equally important challenge is the influence of local culture, which often conflicts with the principles of gender equality in Islam. In Mandailing Natal, for instance, practices such as polygamy and unequal inheritance distribution are often legitimized by local customs and then justified through religious arguments (Hannum, 2004). The *kiai* in *pesantren* tend to justify these practices based on "community customs," highlighting how strong cultural influences are in interpreting religious teachings. This phenomenon creates a dilemma for *pesantren*, as they must choose between maintaining social harmony with the surrounding community or promoting universal gender justice values. In many cases, *pesantren* tend to choose the former, ultimately reinforcing entrenched patriarchal norms.

This study also found significant opportunities for reform in teaching *fiqh munakahat*. One such opportunity is the growing critical awareness among the younger generation of *pesantren* students, especially women, about the importance of gender equality. As observed at Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, informal discussion forums formed by female *santri* demonstrate that the younger generation in *pesantren* has great potential to become agents of change. Additionally, advancements in information technology provide *santri* with broader access to new perspectives on gender in Islam. Through social media and digital platforms, *santri* can connect with contemporary scholars who hold progressive views on *fiqh munakahat*, such as Nasaruddin Umar and Amina Wadud. This opens opportunities for *pesantren* to introduce more inclusive and equitable religious discourse.

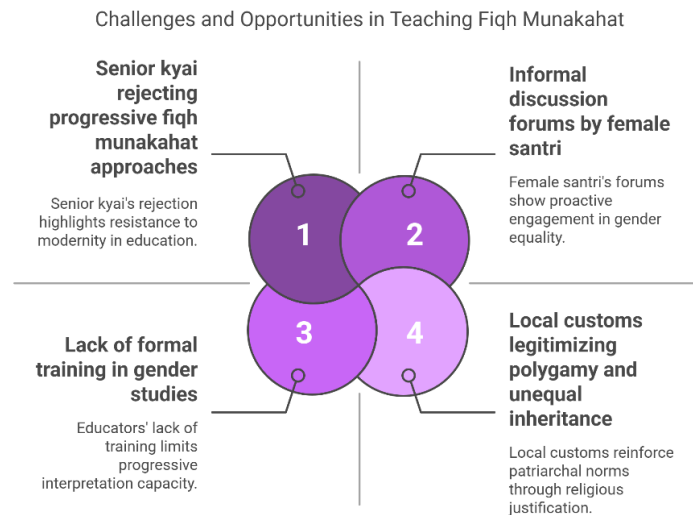


Figure 1. Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching *Fiqh Munakahat*

Figure 1 illustrates that the challenges in teaching *fiqh munakahat* are internal and influenced by external factors such as local culture and technological advancements. Therefore, efforts to promote gender equality through *pesantren* education require a holistic and multidimensional approach.

Pesantren must begin incorporating gender perspectives into their curricula, not merely as an add-on but as an integral part of religious education. In doing so, *pesantren* can transform from institutions that reproduce gender inequality into ones that promote justice and equality. The question remains: Are the *pesantren* in Mandailing Natal ready to take this step, or will they continue acting as guardians of traditions restricting women's rights? The answer to this question will shape the future of gender relations in Indonesian Muslim society.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the teaching of *fiqh munakahat* in *pesantren* in Mandailing Natal is still dominated by traditional interpretations that tend to be patriarchal. However, there are early signs of change toward more inclusive perspectives. The three *pesantren* studied—Ma'had Darul Ikhlas, Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, and Ma'had Darul Ulum Muara Mais—exhibit a common pattern in the teaching of *fiqh munakahat* that lacks critical engagement with gender issues. The materials taught often reinforce patriarchal norms through classical texts such as *Fath*

Mu'in, I'annah Al-Thalibin, Dan Al-Bajuri, with minimal discussion of women's rights in marriage. However, amidst this dominance of traditional narratives, endeavors of transformation are emerging, particularly among the younger generations of *pesantren* students who are beginning to embrace progressive perspectives on gender in Islam.

The findings indicate that resistance to modern ideas, limited intellectual capacity among educators, and the influence of local culture are the main challenges in promoting gender equality through *pesantren* education. Nevertheless, advancements in information technology and the growing critical awareness among female *santri* provide significant opportunities for reform. Informal discussion forums formed by female *santri* at Pesantren Roihanul Jannah, for example, demonstrate that the younger generation in *pesantren* has the potential to become significant agents of social change.

This study also underscores the urgency for *pesantren* to incorporate gender perspectives into the *fiqh munakahat* curriculum as an integral part of religious education. By doing so, *pesantren* can transform from institutions that reproduce gender inequality into ones that promote justice and equality. However, this journey toward transformation requires a strong commitment from *pesantren* leaders, adequate training for educators, and open dialogue between *pesantren* and the surrounding community. The future of gender relations in Indonesian Muslim society largely depends on the ability of *pesantren* to address these challenges with concrete steps that support gender equality without compromising the universal values of Islam.

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