

Examining the Role of Religion in Increasing the Quality of Life of Women in the Muslim World in the Tanggulangin, Sidoarjo

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Abstract: This research aims to investigate the interplay between Islam and women's empowerment, specifically examining how Islamic teachings and interpretations shape the social, economic, and political roles of women in Muslim societies. The primary objective of this study is to determine whether Islam functions as a barrier or a catalyst for women's empowerment in contemporary contexts. By analyzing classical Islamic texts and modern interpretations, the research seeks to uncover how religious discourse aligns with or contradicts principles of gender equality and women's rights. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study utilizes a diverse array of scholarly sources, case studies, and empirical data to explore the complex relationship between Islamic principles and the evolving roles of women. The findings reveal that, although certain traditional interpretations of Islam have been employed to justify gender-based restrictions, there is substantial evidence that progressive contextualized interpretations of Islamic teachings can serve as a powerful advocacy tool for women's empowerment. This study contributes to the larger discourse on religion and gender by presenting a nuanced perspective that neither glorifies nor condemns Islam but instead highlights the significance of interpretation, context, and socio-cultural dynamics in shaping gender roles. Ultimately, the research emphasizes the necessity for inclusive and reformative approaches to Islamic thought that advocate for justice and equality for women.

Keywords: Empowerment of Women, Quality of Life, Education, Economy, Gender Equality

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki interaksi antara Islam dan pemberdayaan perempuan, khususnya meneliti bagaimana ajaran dan interpretasi Islam membentuk peran sosial, ekonomi, dan politik perempuan dalam masyarakat Muslim. Tujuan utama dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menentukan apakah Islam berfungsi sebagai penghalang atau katalisator bagi pemberdayaan perempuan dalam konteks kontemporer. Dengan menganalisis teks-teks Islam klasik dan interpretasi modern, penelitian ini berupaya mengungkap sejauh mana wacana keagamaan selaras dengan atau bertentangan dengan prinsip-prinsip kesetaraan gender dan hak-hak perempuan. Dengan

menggunakan metodologi kualitatif, penelitian ini memanfaatkan beragam sumber ilmiah, studi kasus, dan data empiris untuk mengeksplorasi hubungan yang kompleks antara prinsip-prinsip Islam dan peran perempuan yang terus berkembang. Temuan-temuan tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa, meskipun interpretasi tradisional tertentu tentang Islam telah digunakan untuk membenarkan pembatasan berbasis gender, ada bukti substansial bahwa interpretasi kontekstual progresif dari ajaran-ajaran Islam dapat berfungsi sebagai alat advokasi yang kuat untuk pemberdayaan perempuan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap wacana yang lebih luas tentang agama dan gender dengan menyajikan perspektif yang bernuansa yang tidak mengagungkan atau mengutuk Islam, tetapi justru menyoroti pentingnya interpretasi, konteks, dan dinamika sosial-budaya dalam membentuk peran gender. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menekankan perlunya pendekatan yang inklusif dan reformatif terhadap pemikiran Islam yang mengadvokasi keadilan dan kesetaraan bagi perempuan.

Kata Kunci: Pemberdayaan Perempuan, Kualitas Hidup, Pendidikan, Ekonomi, Kesetaraan Gender

Introduction

Islam, as a religion that teaches universal values, has a comprehensive view of life for humans, including matter empowerment of women. In the context of the Muslim world, there are various interpretations and understandings about the role of women who are strongly influenced by local culture, customs, and understanding of religion alone. One of Islam's important roles is empowering women in various aspects of life, including social, economic, political, and education. In Islamic society, especially in big cities like Sidoarjo, empowering women is very important to increase their quality of life.

The concept of women's empowerment in Islam is not a new idea. Many Muslim scholars and thinkers highlight that Islam recognizes the dignity and rights of women as equal to those of men, including the right to education, work, and participation in social life. However, various cultural and social challenges often obstruct the implementing of these values. In Sidoarjo, a city with a predominantly Muslim population, it is important to investigate further the understanding of women's empowerment in Islam, particularly in the context of how religion can enhance the quality of life for women.

The role of religion in empowering women in the Muslim world, including Sidoarjo, extends beyond individual aspects to encompass collective dimensions within society. Religion can motivate women to actively participate in economic and social development while providing a strong moral foundation for empowerment efforts. Observations in Sidoarjo reveal that many women are involved in various sectors, such as education, business, and social organizations, indicating a positive impact from religious teachings that support women's empowerment.

According to various experts, Islam provides a strong foundation for women's empowerment. For instance, Suriansyah (2017) states, "Islam has a very strong principle of equality, but the problem lies in the patriarchal interpretation. Therefore, re-examining religious texts from a gender justice perspective is crucial." She argues that the differences observed in various aspects of life do not constitute discrimination, but rather reflect an arrangement of roles based on biological and social factors. This concept is relevant in studying women's empowerment within the Muslim world, particularly in the Tanggulangin District, Sidoarjo Regency, which upholds strong Islamic values in daily life.

Alternatively, the perspective offered by Syafiq Hasyim (2010) suggests that "Islamic feminism in Indonesia seeks not only equality in rights but also justice in religious interpretation, social roles, and legal practices." He highlights that the Qur'an affirms equal standing for both women and men, citing various historical figures of women who played significant roles in Islam. According to Wadud, empowering women does not involve altering religious texts but rather entails a deeper understanding of the Qur'an's inclusive messages. This study examines how Islamic teachings empower women in the Tanggulangin District of Sidoarjo Regency, specifically in education, economics, sociopolitical participation, and community leadership. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach and drawing on gender role theory in Islam (Hasyim, 2010) and power relation theory, this research investigates how religious interpretations intersect with socio-cultural structures to influence women's societal positions.

In Sidoarjo, the phenomenon of empowerment of women in the Islamic context can be seen through involvement in various activities, preaching, and religious studies. Activities: This is a religious ritual and a means to build awareness of women's rights in Islam. According to Aisya, S, et al, (2020), "Empowerment of Muslim women must be contextualized through the lens of local religious culture, which means understanding how religious teachings are lived and interpreted by women themselves in daily life.". The challenges facing women's empowerment in the Muslim world, including Sidoarjo, stem primarily from the strong influence of patriarchal culture that persists in social life. This patriarchal power is deeply embedded in cultural norms and is often reinforced by narrow interpretations of religious texts. There is a need for theological reform and inclusive education to disrupt this power dynamic. Such factors contribute to the existing imbalance in women's empowerment across many Muslim countries, including Indonesia. This study aims to contribute to the discourse on Islamic gender studies by supporting the argument that progressive and contextual interpretations of Islamic texts can lay a foundation for women's empowerment. Hasyim (2010) emphasizes that gender justice in Islam is achievable when religious teachings are interpreted through egalitarian perspectives.

According to research conducted by the Indonesian Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection in 2018, women in the Sidoarjo area demonstrate significant potential across various economic sectors despite social and economic obstacles. One effective method to address these challenges is to leverage religious teachings to encourage business development. Faith-based

programs designed to empower women financially have shown positive results in Sidoarjo. The findings emphasize that faith-driven activities, such as majelis taklim, community preaching, and sharia-based entrepreneurship training, effectively enhance women's agency, leadership skills, and economic resilience. These community-led initiatives, underpinned by inclusive religious education, enable Muslim women to access public spheres while preserving their religious and cultural identity (Hasyim et al., 2023).

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that Islam can function as a moral foundation and a practical instrument for gender empowerment when interpreted inclusively and contextually. It advocates for the ongoing development of empowerment strategies that integrate progressive Islamic values with community-based actions to enhance the quality of life for women. The study's primary objective was to explore how Islam can be harnessed as a positive force for transforming gender relations and fostering equitable social change within Muslim communities.

Methods

This study aims to explore the role of Islam in women's empowerment, with a particular focus on improving the quality of life for women in the Tanggulangin District of Sidoarjo Regency. A qualitative approach has been employed to understand the social phenomena occurring within the Muslim community in Sidoarjo. The research method utilized is a case study, which seeks to delve deeper into how Islam contributes to women's empowerment in the region. This qualitative research method was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena, especially examining the relationship between Islam and women's empowerment in Sidoarjo. The descriptive-analytical approach enables the researcher to depict the current situation, analyze influencing factors, and identify emerging patterns in women's lives in Sidoarjo.

Design Research

The approach used in this study is a case study method, which investigates a specific phenomenon or problem within a particular context—in this case, women's empowerment through Islam in the Tanggulangin District of Sidoarjo Regency. The researcher will select several relevant cases or events to examine how the empowerment process for women through Islamic teachings occurs in Sidoarjo.

Data Collection

Qualitative data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and the examination of relevant documentation. The data analysis utilized a thematic approach to identify significant patterns related to women's empowerment. The study focused on Muslim women living in the Tanggulangin District of Sidoarjo Regency, including those engaged in socio-religious, educational, and economic activities. Five key informants were involved in the study: caretakers of Islamic boarding schools, women entrepreneurs in the Tanggulangin sub-district, the head of the Tanggulangin sub-district, and two stakeholders who have executed

women's empowerment initiatives in the community. Informants were selected purposefully, based on their direct involvement and comprehensive understanding of the women's empowerment process in the Tanggulangin sub-district. The samples selected:

1. Active women in social and religious organizations in Sidoarjo participate in religious studies, preaching, and other religious functions.
2. Women are involved in the economic sector as entrepreneurs, workers, or participants in religion-based economic empowerment programs.
3. Community figures and leaders are crucial in promoting women's empowerment through Islamic teachings.
4. The sample selection is conducted using purposive sampling, where informants are chosen based on their knowledge or relevant experience related to the study topic.

To obtain comprehensive and in-depth data, research use several techniques for data collection, as follows: Interview- In-depth interviews:

1. This interview is conducted with women directly involved in empowerment through religious activities and with local religious figures and leaders. This interview aims to gain insights, experiences, and an understanding of the role of Islam in empowering women in Sidoarjo.
2. Participatory Observation: The researcher will engage in direct observation of activities involving women in Sidoarjo, such as religious studies, training sessions, or faith-based social gatherings. This observation will allow the researcher to see the social dynamics in the field and understand how religious teachings are applied in the context of women's empowerment.
3. Documentation Study: The researcher will collect related documents concerning women's empowerment programs based on religion, including reports of activities, preaching materials, relevant books or articles, and documents that support policies promoting women's empowerment in Sidoarjo.

Data gathered from interviews, observations, and documentation will be analyzed using thematic analysis. This process includes the transcription of interviews and notes collected during observations, followed by categorizing data based on key emerging themes. These themes may include the role of religion in empowering women, the challenges they encounter, and the impacts experienced by women.

Data analysis

This study employs the Miles and Huberman approach to data analysis, comprising three primary stages: data reduction, data presentation, and concluding/verification. Data reduction involves sorting relevant information gathered from interviews and observations. Data presentation is organized in the form of narratives and thematic matrices, which aid in identifying

patterns and relationships among categories. The final stage entails drawing conclusions based on key findings verified through data triangulation across various sources (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2018).

This study will be implemented in several stages, according to the following timetable: Preparation (September 2024): Literature collection and instrument compilation for interviews. Data Collection (October 2024 – November 2024): Conducting in-depth interviews, observations, and gathering study documentation in Sidoarjo. Data Analysis (December 2024 – January 2025): Transcription, processing, and analysis of data. Final Report Writing (February 2025): Compiling the research report and concluding the results.

This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how Islam contributes to women's empowerment in the Tanggulangin District of Sidoarjo Regency. It will also explore how religious teachings are applied daily to enhance the quality of women's lives. Utilizing a qualitative approach and thematic analysis techniques, this research is expected to yield valuable insights for developing a theory regarding religion-based women's empowerment in the Muslim world.

Results and Discussion

Based on data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies, several significant findings emerged regarding the role of Islam in empowering women in the Tanggulangin District of Sidoarjo Regency. Below are the main findings derived from this study:

The Role of Religion in Women's Empowerment

Islam plays a significant role in empowering women in the Subdistrict of Tanggulangin, Regency of Sidoarjo. Through a correct understanding of Islamic teachings, women feel encouraged to be active in various aspects of life, including social, economic, educational, and political spheres. Many women participate in study groups, preaching activities, and social-religious organizations, providing opportunities for community development. These activities allow women to broaden their horizons, enhance their skills, and strengthen their social support networks for empowerment (Maula et al., 2025).

According to Mrs. Lilik, a businessman and member of a religious-based social organization in the District of Tackle, "I am actively engaged in various religious study activities and preaching initiatives in Sidoarjo. Additionally, I am involved in a group of female entrepreneurs where we share information and provide mutual support, particularly concerning business capital and product marketing."

The intertwining of religious and economic activities among individuals and communities today increasingly highlights the close relationship between cultural preaching and social empowerment. Mrs. Lilik's active participation in religious studies and preaching in Sidoarjo exemplifies the application of participatory preaching, which is characterized by a dialogical and contextual approach. According to Zarkasyi (2017), contemporary preaching has evolved beyond

mere monologue to empower communities by addressing their genuine needs. He emphasizes that effective preaching must engage with Muslims' social, economic, and cultural dimensions, particularly at the grassroots level. In this regard, your involvement in a group of small entrepreneurs, predominantly comprised of women, exemplifies the integration of religious values with the local economy. This approach aligns closely with the Gender and Development (GAD) theory that has emerged over the past decade, which views women not merely as objects of development but as active agents in driving social and economic change (Moser, 2012; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). In these small business groups, women gain access to vital resources such as capital, market information, and social support—elements that have historically acted as structural barriers for women in the business world. Moreover, the patterns of cooperation and solidarity within these groups foster the development of social capital, including values like trust, networks, and norms that promote collective cooperation for mutual benefit. From an Islamic perspective, this approach aligns with the principles of Islamic Social Entrepreneurship, a concept that has garnered increasing attention from academics over the past decade. According to Hidayat and Yusoff (2018), social entrepreneurship in Islam is not solely focused on economic objectives but also emphasizes spiritual values such as justice, blessings (*barakah*), and mutual assistance (*ta'awun*). Consequently, your engagement in *da'wah* activities and the empowerment of women's small businesses not only strengthens individuals but also fortifies the social and economic fabric of the community, rooted in Islamic values.

According to Ustadz Salim Imron, "Alhamdulillah, Islam has a very supportive view on women's empowerment. In Islamic teachings, women are granted equal rights with men in numerous areas, including education, work, and social life. In Sidoarjo, we observe many women who are actively engaged in recitations, assisting in preaching, and managing their businesses. This is a concrete example that religion encourages women's empowerment." This statement reflects a contestation against conservative interpretations that marginalize women from public spaces. From the perspective of gender role theory in Islam (Hasyim, 2010), it illustrates the efforts of Muslim women to establish equal social roles while adhering to religious values. Concurrently, this can also be examined through the lens of power relations theory (inspired by Foucault), highlighting that women are not merely subjects of societal norms but also active agents who reinterpret the meaning of religion within their communities.

Education and Economy

Education is a key factor in empowering women in Sidoarjo. Many women pursue formal education through religious institutions, such as madrasas and Islamic boarding schools. Additionally, they participate in religiously based economic training programs that teach entrepreneurial skills. Empowerment initiatives that include sewing, handicraft training, and micro-sharia-based enterprises allow women to achieve economic independence. This, in turn, allows them to improve their quality of life and contribute positively to their family's economy.

According to Mrs. Lilik, a local businesswoman, "Islam is very supportive of women's empowerment. Numerous women in Sidoarjo actively engage in social and economic activities thanks to a proper understanding of their faith. For instance, recitation sessions focus on worship and emphasize the importance of women playing an active role in society and the economy. Religion gives us a strong moral foundation, enabling us to be independent."

Islam strongly advocates for women's empowerment, as evidenced by the many women in Sidoarjo involved in social and economic initiatives rooted in a correct interpretation of religious principles. Religious study activities not only teach worship practices but also educate women about the vital roles they should fulfill in society and the economy. According to Kabeer (2016), women's empowerment is a process that enables women to make strategic choices in their lives, encompassing both economic and social dimensions. Within this framework, religious studies serve as a space that enhances women's self-awareness and capabilities. Furthermore, Cornwall and Rivas (2015) highlighted the necessity for women's empowerment to challenge structural barriers that have historically constrained their roles, particularly in economic and social development. Badran (2017) also emphasized the importance of a progressive understanding of religion, noting that an inclusive interpretation of Islam supports gender equality and reinforces women's societal roles. Additionally, women's participation in mutual support through business groups and social activities fosters social capital, which, as Putnam (2015) asserts, is a crucial asset for building solidarity and enhancing collective capacity for economic survival and development. Thus, religious and socio-economic-based women's empowerment in Sidoarjo reflects the integration of spiritual and practical values that encourage women's independence and positive contribution to society.

This illustrates that religion serves as a source of spirituality and a legitimizing instrument for women's economic empowerment. Through the lens of gender role theory within Islam, it highlights a reinterpretation of religious principles that advocates for equal access to economic resources. From the perspective of power relations, religion-based programs establish new avenues for women to obtain "social and economic capital" in ways that are deemed acceptable within a patriarchal society.



Picture 1. Socialization of Improving the Quality of Women's Development at the Nur Hidayat Tanggulangin Mosque

According to Ustadz Salim Imron, "The obstacles to understanding Islamic teachings often stem from misconceptions about the role of women. Some circles may perceive this role as limited. Yet, if we examine Islamic history, we find many women who played significant roles, such as Khadijah, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, who was actively involved in business and social activities. Therefore, we must continue to educate society to realize that Islam offers substantial opportunities for women. We aim to create a platform for learning that not only teaches worship but also imparts knowledge about women's rights in Islam and how they can engage in social and economic activities. It is hoped that girls can fully develop their potential with a better understanding."

Strengthening Social and Political Roles

In Sidoarjo, women have begun to play a more active role in social and political life. Interviews with local religious and community leaders reveal that women are engaged in social organizations supporting community welfare, including religious-based programs that assist needy families. While their political participation remains limited, some women are also involved in political activities. The influence of religion in this context is significant, as it provides a strong moral foundation for women to engage in public life, which has traditionally been viewed as a male domain.

Mrs. Lilik Businessman, states, "One of the biggest challenges is the cultural view that women should only be at home. Although religion does not impose this limitation, some people still believe that women should not be active outside the home, particularly in social or economic activities. We need to continue fighting to change this perspective."

This illustrates the prevailing influence of patriarchal discourse on people's perceptions, even though Islamic teachings do not explicitly restrict women's freedom of movement. In the framework of power relations, this phenomenon is known as "normative power," which operates through social and cultural narratives rather than direct coercive measures. Nonetheless, women like Ibu Lilik are actively renegotiating their social positions, demonstrating that power within society is both constructive and negotiable, rather than merely repressive.



Picture 2. Socialization to stakeholders in the Tanggulangin sub-district in the women's sector

According to Mrs. Lilik, a businessman, "Absolutely, there is a growing number of women who are starting their businesses independently. They follow entrepreneurship training grounded in religious principles and actively participate in outreach activities. We learn about our faith and acquire practical skills that help us achieve independence. I believe this represents a positive step toward women's empowerment."

Challenges Faced by Women

While there has been significant positive development, women in Sidoarjo still face major challenges in terms of empowerment. Among the biggest barriers are the patriarchal social and cultural norms that continue to view women as having limited roles in social and economic life. In some communities, even though Islamic teachings advocate for gender equality, conservative interpretations of these teachings still influence women's roles in society. Therefore, the role of religion in empowering women must be supported by a shift towards more inclusive thinking and policies. This transformation involves fostering awareness of gender issues within a religious context, which aligns with the Islamic gender role theory approach, where a reinterpretation of Islamic history is utilized to strengthen women's roles in an egalitarian manner. Regarding power dynamics, progressive religious education serves as a tool to challenge the dominant narratives that restrict women, creating a space for developing alternative knowledge.



Picture 3. Socialization to Stakeholders in The Women's Sector Together with District Stakeholders

Mrs. Lilik Businessman, stated, "I hope that more women recognize their potential and actively engage in social and economic activities. Islam teaches equality, and we should utilize these teachings to build a better life for ourselves, our families, and society."

According to Ustadz Salim Imron, "I hope that the women of Sidoarjo become more aware of their potential and can develop themselves in line with the true teachings of Islam. They must understand that Islam does not limit them but allows them to play an active role in social and economic life."

The role of Islam in Women's Empowerment

In Sidoarjo, there is an awareness of Islamic teachings that support women's empowerment; however, implementing these teachings still relies on the public's understanding of the religion itself. A deeper and more progressive understanding of Islam, which encourages gender equality and women's empowerment, can accelerate social change within the community. Additionally, the activities of preaching and religious studies in Sidoarjo have proven to play a crucial role in enhancing women's understanding of their rights in Islam. Women who participate in these studies and religious activities often become agents of change, educating other women about their societal rights and responsibilities.

The role of Islam in empowering women in the Tanggulangin District can be observed through various efforts rooted in religious values that promote women's equality and independence. Islamic religious education serves as an essential foundation, instilling principles of gender equality in social life. Research conducted by Ginting and Sihura (2022a) highlights that Islamic education based on *maqashid sharia* can potentially cultivate a more equitable understanding of societal gender roles. This aligns with the emerging initiatives in Tanggulangin, where Islamic educational institutions are beginning to integrate gender justice values into their curricula (Ginting & Sihura, 2022b).

Religious organizations like Muslimat NU are vital in fostering and empowering women. A study by Ulinnuha, E. R., & Mizani, Z. M. (2023) explored how Muslimat NU in Papungan Village, Ngawi, promotes women's empowerment through regular religious studies, skills training, and socio-religious activities. A similar approach was observed in Tanggulangin, an area known for its home industries, where women are empowered through community-based economic training and religious activities that enhance social solidarity.

In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the role of women is becoming increasingly strategic. Nyai at the Nurul Jadid Paiton Islamic Boarding School is a key advocate for women's empowerment, employing an approach rooted in Islamic culture and promoting equal participation. A similar trend is emerging in suburban areas, such as Tanggulangin, where local female leaders leverage their religious influence to inspire other women in various social, economic, and educational aspects.

Waqf-based economic empowerment is an alternative solution within Islam that promotes women's independence. In their study, Rahmania et al. (2024) explored the potential of productive waqf in supporting women's micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in developing countries. This concept is especially relevant when applied to Tanggulangin, a region renowned for its bag and craft industries. Systemic enhancement of women's empowerment can be achieved by optimizing productive waqf and zakat. Consequently, the Islamic approach not only fosters the spiritual development of women but also encourages their social and economic independence through Sharia values.

Education and Economy as Pillars of Empowerment

Education and the economy are fundamental pillars of women's empowerment in the Tanggulangin District of Sidoarjo. Education lays the groundwork for knowledge and skills, while economic independence enables women to stand independently financially. A study conducted by Azizah Shofiatul (2023) reveals that the Independent Women's Business Card (KURMA) program in Kalisampurno Village has effectively enhanced the economic status of women's business groups by facilitating access to capital and providing entrepreneurship training. This program exemplifies the synergistic relationship between education and economic opportunities in women's empowerment.

The Women's Empowerment Program for Local Economic Developers (P3EL), implemented in Medokan Semampir Village, Surabaya, underscores the crucial link between education and economic development. Research conducted by Anggreni et al. (2022) indicates that while the program aims to enhance women's economic prospects through training and the provision of business capital, its effectiveness is hindered by inadequate coordination and communication between program implementers and participants. This highlights the necessity of effective training and mentoring as essential components for the success of women's economic empowerment initiatives.

The Increasing the Role of Women Towards Healthy and Prosperous Families (P2WKSS) program, implemented in Babakan Village, Surabaya, underscores the critical role of education in enhancing family economic welfare. Research conducted by Mela Nurhalim (2021) indicates that this program has successfully boosted family income and improved women's quality of life through skills training and increasing awareness of health and women's rights. The initiative highlights the significance of holistic education that encompasses economic, health, and women's rights dimensions in empowering women. In summary, women's empowerment in the Tanggulangin District can be viewed as a comprehensive approach integrating education and economic development. Education equips women with the necessary knowledge and skills to engage in economic activities, while economic empowerment enables them to apply this knowledge in practical settings. Combining these two essential pillars allows women's empowerment in the Tanggulangin District to be more effective and sustainable (Syamsiyatun, 2022).

Social and Political Roles of Women

Women's social and political roles in the Tanggulangin District, Sidoarjo, have significantly transformed over the past two decades. Women in this area have actively participated in various facets of social and political life, although they continue to confront the challenges of a patriarchal culture. Research conducted by Muhammad Faliq Iqbal et al. (2023) indicates that village women have experienced changes in their roles across political, social, economic, and cultural domains, despite facing ongoing economic and cultural obstacles. This demonstrates that women in

Tanggulangun are increasingly willing to engage in public and political life, even as they navigate the complexities of a patriarchal environment.

Conversely, a study by Dwi Koswinarsih (2016) revealed a concerning lack of political participation among the community in Ketapang Village, Tanggulangun District, during the 2015 Sidoarjo Regent Election. This decline was attributed to inadequate socialization and a general distrust of the political process. Nevertheless, women in the village continued to engage actively in social and cultural activities, even though their participation in formal politics remained limited.

In the realm of social empowerment, research conducted by Rr Herini Siti Aisyah and Dewi Amartani (2020) reveals that groups of women embroidery artisans in the Tanggulangun District have successfully expanded their businesses through skills training and mentorship. This initiative not only enhances the economic abilities of these women but also fosters social solidarity among them. Their active participation in these economic endeavors provides a valuable platform for interaction and collaboration, reinforcing their social role within the community.

While challenges posed by patriarchal culture persist, women in the Tanggulangun District have made notable advancements in their social and political roles. Their active involvement in social, economic, and political activities has significantly bolstered their status within the community. Nevertheless, to attain greater gender equality, ongoing efforts are essential to confront the cultural and structural barriers that remain in place (Noorhayati, 2020).

Social and Cultural Barriers

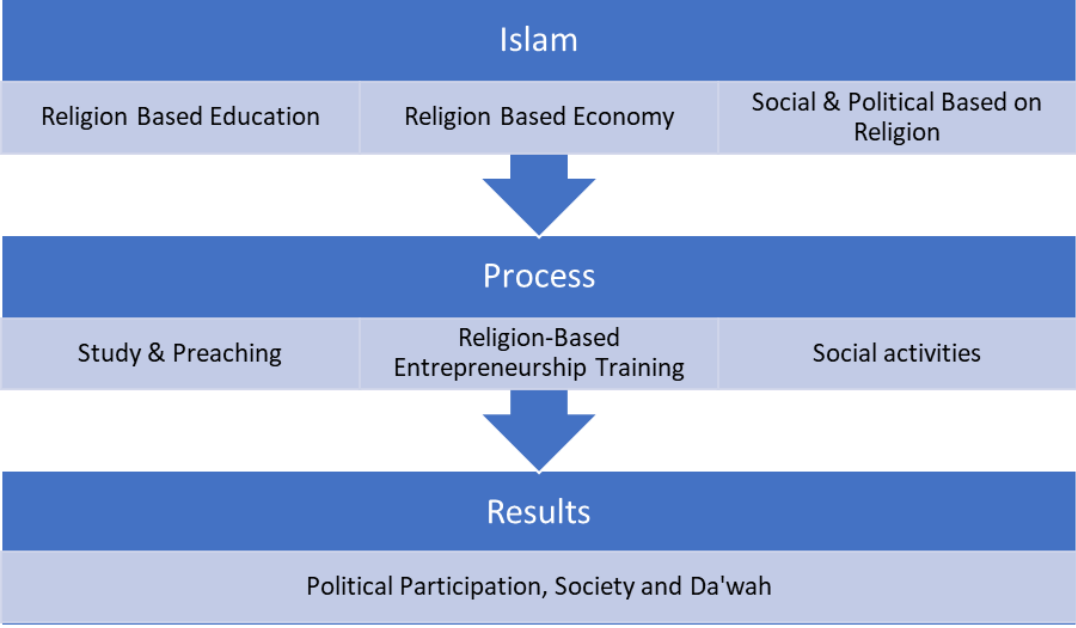
Despite the significant progress in empowering women in Sidoarjo, cultural and social obstacles still exist. Deeply rooted patriarchal practices often limit women's roles in public life. To overcome these challenges, it is essential to foster cooperation among religious leaders, community members, and government entities to promote progressive Islamic teachings on women's empowerment and develop supportive policies ensuring gender equality.

Despite the increasing participation of women in social, economic, and political spheres in Kecamatan Tanggulangun, various social and cultural barriers continue to impede their full empowerment. A significant challenge is the persistence of patriarchal values that assign dominant roles to men in both domestic and public life. These values often restrict women's mobility, decision-making abilities, and access to leadership positions. Research by Muhammad Falih Iqbal et al. (2023) indicates that cultural perceptions regarding women's "appropriate roles" still limit their engagement in politics and community leadership, despite their capabilities and interest in these areas.

Family expectations and traditional gender roles frequently emphasize women's responsibilities within domestic spheres, particularly in child-rearing and household management. These societal norms can hinder women from pursuing careers or engaging in public affairs. A study conducted by Dwi Koswinarsih (2016) on political participation in Desa Ketapang revealed that women's voices are often marginalized in political decision-making due to insufficient support

from their families and communities. Moreover, the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work further constrains women's public involvement.

Religion, while frequently a source of moral support and a means of identity, can sometimes be interpreted in ways that reinforce conservative gender norms. In Tanggulangin, some community members interpret religious teachings to uphold a gender hierarchy rather than promoting equality. However, it is essential to acknowledge that efforts to reinterpret these teachings by progressive Islamic scholars and organizations, such as Muslimat NU, are emerging to challenge these narratives by advocating for a more egalitarian perspective on women's roles within the family and society.



Picture 4. Role of Religion in Increasing the Quality of Life of Women in the Muslim

Islam plays a crucial role in empowering women. Through its teachings, women are granted the right to access education, engage in economic activities, and participate in social and political life. One important aspect of this empowerment is religion-based education, which helps women better understand their rights within Islam. This education encompasses the dimensions of worship and life's social and economic aspects.

Programs such as sharia-based entrepreneurship training in Sidoarjo support women in achieving financial independence and managing small businesses. These initiatives also create opportunities for economic empowerment among women.

Polished version of the text while maintaining the original meaning: Social and Political Engagement through Religion: Organizing public, religion-based activities allows women to

participate in social and political life actively. By facilitating these initiatives, girls can develop into community leaders. With the integration of religious education and awareness of their rights, women in Sidoarjo can begin to engage more broadly in political and social activities, although this role is still evolving. To address the existing barriers, a comprehensive strategy is essential, including gender-sensitive education, community dialogues, and local policy reforms. Empowerment efforts must extend beyond economic initiatives to encompass cultural transformation, involving the active participation of men and religious leaders to reshape perceptions of women's roles. Failing to confront these entrenched cultural norms means that even the most well-designed economic or political programs may fall short of achieving sustainable empowerment for women in Tanggulangin.

Conclusion

This study illustrates that Islam, when interpreted through a progressive and contextual lens, possesses significant potential to positively impact the empowerment of women in Muslim-majority societies, particularly in the Tanggulangin District of Sidoarjo Regency. Theoretically, this research broadens the discourse on Islamic gender studies by presenting an alternative perspective that views Islam not as an obstacle but as a potential catalyst for women's social, economic, educational, and political advancement. It challenges monolithic and patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts, underscoring the necessity of reinterpretation rooted in justice, equality, and contemporary realities.

This study underscores the significant role of religious education, women-led study groups, and faith-based economic empowerment programs in creating opportunities for Muslim women in Sidoarjo to enhance their agency and improve their quality of life. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, religious leaders, and development practitioners aiming to design gender-inclusive programs within religious contexts. The research emphasizes the necessity of incorporating gender-sensitive interpretations of religious teachings into local empowerment strategies, effectively bridging the gap between faith and development. Ultimately, this study advocates for a model of women's empowerment that honors religious values while fostering gender equality and inclusive participation across all areas of life.

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