Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender – Vol 21, No 2 (2026): 193-220
DOI: 10.21580/sa.v21i2.33074
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Reproduction of Gender Inequality in Islamic Philanthropic Institutions in Indonesia

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Abstract: Gender inequality persists and is reproduced in Islamic philanthropic institutions. This reproduction is carried out through institutional structures and gender-neutral policies. This study examines how Islamic philanthropic institutions reproduce inequality and the extent of gender inequality's impact on women. This study used qualitative methods, collecting data through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation in three Islamic philanthropic institutions in Indonesia. The results show that the reproduction of inequality occurs through gender-neutral policies and the attachment of gender to existing jobs within the institutions. Gender-neutral policies result in low female participation in Islamic philanthropic institutions at the top. Thus, inequality is repeatedly reproduced legally within institutions through unfair regulations.

Keywords: gender neutral; inequality; Islamic philanthropy; leadership gap

Abstrak: Ketidaksetaraan gender masih terjadi dan direproduksi di lembaga filantropi Islam. Reproduksi dilakukan dengan cara terstruktur melalui kebijakan netral gender. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkap cara yang digunakan lembaga filantropi Islam dalam mereproduksi ketidaksetaraan gender, serta bertujuan mengetahui dampak dari ketidaksetaraan gender pada perempuan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan penggalian data menggunakan wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi pada 3 lembaga filantropi Islam di Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa, reproduksi ketidaksetaraan gender terjadi melalui kebijakan netral gender dan pemelekatan secara gender pada pekerjaan yang ada di lembaga. Kebijakan netral gender menyebabkan partisipasi perempuan di lembaga filantropi Islam kecil di bagian puncak. Ketidaksetaraan gender di lembaga filantropi Islam yang direproduksi secara sistematis melalui kebijakan yang tampak netral gender dan pembagian kerja berbasis gender menjadikan perempuan terbatasi aksesnya pada posisi kepemimpinan. Ketidakadilan gender juga melegitimasi ketimpangan secara berkelanjutan melalui regulasi organisasi.

Kata Kunci: netral gender; ketidaksetaraan; filantropi Islam; kesenjangan kepemimpinan

A. Introduction

In the 21st century, gender inequality persists in various areas of society, including politics,[1] education,[2] business,[3] media, [4] and religion.[5] The problem is that women are the ones most disadvantaged by gender inequality. Women experience higher domestic burdens than men, such as housework and work-family conflict.[6] In Germany, women largely shoulder parenting responsibilities, even as they continue working.[7] It is also experienced by women in China. Inequality in care work reinforces inequalities in formal employment and income.[8]

Gender inequality stems from various and interconnected forms of injustice, [9] such as those experienced by women during COVID-19. During that time, women suffered burdens many times greater than men.[10] Women faced the heaviest burdens in both formal and domestic work.[11]

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[1] Dawn Langan Teele, Joshua Kalla, and Frances Rosenbluth, "The Ties that Double Bind: Social Roles and Women's Underrepresentation in Politics," *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 3 (2018): 525–41, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000217.

[2] David K. Evans, Maryam Akmal, and Pamela Jakiela, "Gender Gaps in Education: The Long View," *IZA Journal of Development and Migration* 12, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.2478/izajodm-2021-0001.

[3] Suci Ramadhani Putri, "Masculinity in Legal Structures and Women's Digital Economic Access: A Reflective Critique Based on the Gender Inequality Index (IKG) 2024," *Digibiz: Journal of Digital Business* 1, no. 1 (2026): 32–42, https://ejournal.akbil.ac.id/index.php/BDP/article/view/30.

[4] Benjamin Toff and Ruth A Palmer, "Explaining the Gender Gap in News Avoidance: 'News-Is-for-Men' Perceptions and the Burdens of Caretaking," *Journalism Studies* 20, no. 11 (2019): 1563–79, https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1528882.

[5] Saskia Glas, Niels Spierings, and Peer Scheepers, "Re-Understanding Religion and Support for Gender Equality in Arab Countries," *Gender & Society* 32, no. 5 (2018): 686–712, https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243218783670.

[6] Javier Cerrato and Eva Cifre, "Gender Inequality in Household Chores and Work-Family Conflict," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018): 1–11, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01330.

[7] Lena Hipp and Mareike Bünning, "Parenthood as a Driver of Increased Gender Inequality during COVID-19? Exploratory Evidence from Germany," *European Societies* 23, no. sup1 (2021): S658–73, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1833229.

[8] Yingchun Ji et al., "Unequal Care, Unequal Work: Toward a More Comprehensive Understanding of Gender Inequality in Post-Reform Urban China," *Sex Roles* 77, no. 11–12 (2017): 765–78, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0751-1.

[9] Amartya Sen, "The Many Faces of Gender Inequality" (The New Republic, 2001).

[10] Serena Clark et al., "'You're a Teacher You're a Mother, You're a Worker': Gender Inequality during COVID-19 in Ireland," *Gender, Work & Organization* 28, no. 4 (2021): 1352–62, https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12611.

[11] Alexandra N. Fisher and Michelle K. Ryan, "Gender Inequalities during COVID-19," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 24, no. 2 (2021): 237–45, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430220984248; Lídia Farré et al., "Gender Inequality in Paid and

Research on gender inequality has been extensively conducted. Unfortunately, most studies stop at the level of problem identification, such as employment discrimination, patriarchal culture, and domestic burdens.[12] So far, research examining and evaluating the effectiveness of policies made by institutions or work agencies remains limited. The research that has been conducted mostly sees gender inequality as a result of the patriarchal system,[13] masculine culture,[14] traditional division of labor,[15] and organizational structures that favor men.[16] Women are in conditions that experience the greatest burden, both in formal work and domestic work; especially during COVID-19, gender inequality is not caused by biological factors,[17] but rather by

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Unpaid Work during COVID-19 Times," *Review of Income and Wealth* 68, no. 2 (2022): 323–47, https://doi.org/10.1111/roiw.12563; Christian S. Czymara, Alexander Langenkamp, and Tomás Cano, "Cause for Concerns: Gender Inequality in Experiencing the COVID-19 Lockdown in Germany," *European Societies* 23, no. sup1 (2021): S68–81, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1808692; Liana Christin Landivar et al., "Early Signs Indicate that COVID-19 Is Exacerbating Gender Inequality in the Labor Force," *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 6, no. 1 (2020): 1–3, https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023120947997; Hai-Anh H. Dang and Cuong Viet Nguyen, "Gender Inequality during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Income, Expenditure, Savings, and Job Loss," *World Development* 140 (2021): 105296, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105296; Hipp and Bünning, "Parenthood as a Driver of Increased Gender Inequality during COVID-19? Exploratory Evidence from Germany"; Malte Reichelt, Kinga Makovi, and Anahit Sargsyan, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Inequality in the Labor Market and Gender-Role Attitudes," *European Societies* 23, no. sup1 (2021): S228–45, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1823010; Ana-Catarina Pinho-Gomes et al., "Where Are the Women? Gender Inequalities in COVID-19 Research Authorship," *BMJ Global Health* 5, no. 7 (2020): e002922, https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-002922.

[12] Jackie Ford et al., "'You Just Had to Get on with It': Exploring the Persistence of Gender Inequality through Women's Career Histories," *Work, Employment and Society* 35, no. 1 (2021): 78–96, https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017020910354.

[13] Andrey Shastri, "Gender Inequality and Women Discrimination," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19, no. 11 (2014): 27–30, https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-191172730.

[14] Marta Choroszewicz and Fiona Kay, "Understanding Gender Inequality in the Legal Profession," in *Lawyers in 21st-Century Societies*, ed. Richard L Abel et al., vol. 18 (Oxford UK: Hart Publishing, 2022), 113–130, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781509931248.ch-006.

[15] Clark et al., "'You're a Teacher You're a Mother, You're a Worker': Gender Inequality during COVID-19 in Ireland."

[16] Bettina J Casad et al., "Gender Inequality in Academia: Problems and Solutions for Women Faculty in STEM," *Journal of Neuroscience Research* 99, no. 1 (2021): 13–23, https://doi.org/10.1002/jnr.24631.

[17] Reichelt, Makovi, and Sargsyan, "The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Inequality in the Labor Market and Gender-Role Attitudes"; Fisher and Ryan, "Gender Inequalities during COVID-19"; Czymara, Langenkamp, and Cano, "Cause for Concerns: Gender Inequality in Experiencing the COVID-19 Lockdown in Germany"; Landivar et al., "Early Signs Indicate that COVID-19 Is Exacerbating Gender Inequality in the Labor Force"; Dang and Viet Nguyen, "Gender Inequality during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Income, Expenditure, Savings, and Job Loss"; Hipp and Bünning, "Parenthood as a Driver of Increased Gender Inequality during COVID-19? Exploratory Evidence

social and cultural constructions that are continuously inherited.[18] Most studies stop at the level of identifying problems such as job discrimination, patriarchal culture, and domestic burdens. Still, few studies examine and evaluate the effectiveness of policies made by work institutions or agencies.

The above studies show that gender inequality experienced by women is understood as a cultural issue. In reality, gender inequality experienced by women is a structural issue. For example, although women's participation in scientific publications has increased, they remain underrepresented as senior authors.[19] In the legal profession, women are widely involved, but struggle to reach the highest positions.[20] It is also true in sports. Although women's presence has increased, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions.[21] This inequality experienced by women tends to be caused by *the glass ceiling*, gender segregation, and male dominance in elite positions.

This research highlights the existence of gender-neutral institutional policies, a topic that has not been widely studied by previous researchers. This issue is crucial to investigate, as it is a significant cause of gender inequality.

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from Germany"; Farré et al., "Gender Inequality in Paid and Unpaid Work during COVID-19 Times"; Pinho-Gomes et al., "Where Are the Women? Gender Inequalities in COVID-19 Research Authorship"; Grace Etim-James, "The Influence of Culture and Religion on Gender Inequality and Its Implications on Women's Empowerment," *Wukari International Studies Journal* 8, no. 5 (2024): 145–153, https://wissjournals.com.ng/index.php/wiss/article/view/421; Swati Sharma, "Relationship between Culture and Gender Inequality in India," *IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* 22, no. 10 (2017): 30–35, https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol. 22 Issue10/Version-6/D2210063035.pdf; Sourabh Batar, "Concept of Gender Inequality," *Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities* 11, no. 11 (2021): 171–76, https://doi.org/10.5958/2249-7315.2021.00197.0; Emmanuel Chukuka Odishika, "Cultural Communication, Gender Inequality and Sustainable Development in Africa: A Re-Appraisal," *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 9, no. 8 (2021): 1–10; Maria Nardone, "The Powerful and Covert Role of Culture in Gender Discrimination and Inequality," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 54, no. 4 (2018): 747–62, https://doi.org/10.1080/00107530.2018.1540258.

[18] Etim-James, "The Influence of Culture and Religion on Gender Inequality and Its Implications on Women's Empowerment"; Sharma, "Relationship between Culture and Gender Inequality in India"; Batar, "Concept of Gender Inequality"; Odishika, "Cultural Communication, Gender Inequality and Sustainable Development in Africa: A Re-Appraisal"; Nardone, "The Powerful and Covert Role of Culture in Gender Discrimination and Inequality."

[19] Junming Huang et al., "Historical Comparison of Gender Inequality in Scientific Careers across Countries and Disciplines," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 9 (2020): 4609–16, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1914221117.

[20] Choroszewicz and Kay, "Understanding Gender Inequality in the Legal Profession."

[21] Hebe Schaillée et al., "Gender Inequality in Sport: Perceptions and Experiences of Generation Z," *Sport, Education and Society* 26, no. 9 (2021): 1011–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2021.1932454.

Gender-neutral policies often fail to accommodate women's needs. Gender-neutral policies are generally based on male work standards and mindsets.

B. Methods

This study uses a qualitative method with a feminist approach by Shulamit Reinharz and Lynn Davidman,[22] in three Islamic philanthropic institutions in Indonesia: philanthropic management institutions that are government-affiliated, BAZNAS (Badan Amil Zakat Nasional), philanthropic management institutions that are non-government-affiliated, LAZISMU (Lembaga Amil Zakat Infaq dan Shadaqah Muhammadiyah), and Rumah Zakat. The three institutions were selected because they represent three distinct types of Islamic philanthropic organizations. BAZNAS represents a zakat management institution established and managed by the government. LAZISMU represents a non-governmental zakat management institution affiliated with a religious organization, while Rumah Zakat represents a non-governmental zakat management institution that is not structurally affiliated with any religious organization. Selecting these three institutions enables this study to examine the dynamics of gender and women's agency within Islamic philanthropic institutions with diverse organizational structures and management foundations.

The feminist approach is used within an epistemological framework that is sensitive to the power relations that shape women's experiences.[23] Reinharz and Chase emphasize that interviews must be conducted with sensitivity to the power relations women experience and respect for their lived experiences.[24] Interviews in this study were conducted not only with policymakers—who are generally male—but also with women at all levels within philanthropic institutions.

The study included 22 informants: 11 women and 11 men. The informants were selected based on their involvement and positions within the institutional structures, particularly those holding authority in policy formulation,

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[22] Shulamith Reinharz and Lynn Davidman, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[23] Marianna Fotaki and Alison Pullen, "Feminist Theories and Activist Practices in Organization Studies," *Organization Studies* 45, no. 4 (2024): 593–616, https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406231209861.

[24] Shulamit Reinharz and Susan E. Chase, "Interviewing Women," in *Handbook of Interview Research*, ed. J F Gubrium and J A Holstein (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States of America: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2001), 220–38, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412973588.n15.

organizational management, and the implementation of institutional activities. They included members of advisory boards, institutional heads, the head of distribution and utilization, division heads, the head of archives and public information and documentation (*Pejabat Pengelola Informasi dan Dokumentasi*-PPID), managers, and staff members.

Data collection was conducted through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Data analysis was conducted using Joan Acker's gendered organization theory,[25] which critiques gender-unequal organizational structures. There are two fundamental things that Acker believes are inherent in organizations. First, modern organizations are never gender-neutral. Organizational structures contain gender biases that are hidden in formal and informal rules; and second, gender is a social structure produced within organizations.

C. Results and Discussion

Gender Neutral Policy in Islamic Philanthropic Institutions

The three institutions consider the policies they have issued on managing philanthropic organizations to be neutral. Neutral here means that the language used in the policies is general, without naming subjects based on a specific gender. It signifies that everyone, both men and women, has an equal opportunity to be the target of the policies. Within the formal framework, the wording of these policies builds on the assumption of equal opportunity for all parties.

Neutrality is also reflected in the institution's failure to mention any particular gender in its policies. Both women and men are viewed based on their abilities. Institutional policies do not allocate special roles to either gender. Gender neutrality is defined as involving women, although the exact percentage of women's involvement is difficult to determine.

The gender-neutral policy of Islamic philanthropic institutions can be seen in three aspects—first, the employee recruitment policy. BAZNAS's recruitment announcement posted on its website does not specify requirements limited to one gender. BAZNAS welcomes both male and female applicants, as per its

[25] Joan Acker, "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations," *Gender & Society* 4, no. 2 (1990): 139–58, https://doi.org/10.1177/089124390004002002.

criteria. Similarly, LAZISMU's recruitment announcement also indicates a need for employees who are not gender-specific. It is also evident in recruitment at Rumah Zakat. As stated by A1 below:

> "So far, there are no specific differences except for clothing. So far, we do not differentiate, meaning these women are in special conditions; no, once again our recruitment process is according to needs. Whether it must be women or men depends on the needs. If certain things are specific to women, maybe we will convey women, but if the field requires men, we will convey men. Overall, we do not differentiate whether this must be women or men... In the implementing unit *amil* there is no specific policy (related to having to be filled by women), but so far we have not differentiated; *the point* is only according to needs. So the main *point* of the recruitment process is according to the needs required by the work unit."[26]

Second, the leadership requirements policy. The three Islamic philanthropic institutions say there is no difference in treatment between men and women in meeting leadership requirements. The institutions apply the principle of equal opportunity. Gender is not a selection variable. Competence and fulfillment of formal requirements are the primary factors. The institutions claim to be gender-neutral and inclusive, emphasizing that leadership legitimacy is determined by competence and administrative requirements, not gender. As stated by the Head of the Archives and PPID (Information and Documentation Management Officer) Division of BAZNAS on March 22, 2024.

> "... the requirements are also open starting from Indonesian citizens, and so on up to the number 12, there is no gender difference, so that means as long as they meet the requirements, whether male or female, they have the right to become the leader of BAZNAS, whether BAZNAS provincial, district/city, even if we look at BAZNAS RI, it is the same, the opportunities are equally big."[27]

C-1, Head of the People & Culture Division at Rumah Zakat, echoed this sentiment. In an interview on May 21, 2024, he said BAZNAS (Badan Amil Zakat Nasional) mandates gender neutrality in leadership selection.

> "We focus more on qualifications, not on whether they are male or female. The qualifications, which coincidentally currently apply to the highest leadership, the CEO, are men with competence. In fact, none of our documents stipulates that the CEO must be male. By law, our documents do not stipulate that certain positions must be male or female, not even top management."[28]

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[26]Interview with A-1, March 13, 2024

[27]Interview with A-2, March 22, 2024

[28]Interview with C-1, May 21, 2024.

Third, the institution's division-of-labor policy. Women are involved because their circumstances align with the institution's criteria. For example, to fill a vacant position, the institution establishes appropriate, non-gender-specific criteria for eligibility. It creates a free competition, with both women and men gaining positions. As stated by the Head of the BAZNAS Personnel Division to us on March 13, 2024, as follows:

> "... if what is needed is IT, or what is needed is the distribution department, usually the distribution person says, 'Sir, we need someone who will travel everywhere' and so on, and maybe if possible, men are prioritized. Oh, that's fine, but in our HR provisions, in our recruitment decree, we don't specify that women must be here and men here. Because in the field, there are women too; it just depends on the need. So, for example, if 'Sir, all the field people are already here, but they are men, we need a woman because they are related to cooking,' or something like that, that can also be a woman. So there is no specific distinction."[29]

In a different expression, the Staff of the Rural Economic Program Division at BAZNAS, said:

> "There's nothing specific; our requirements state that both men and women are eligible. So, for example, if we want to open recruitment for a position, whether it's a director or below, a general manager, a manager, or an officer, there's no specific requirement that the position must be male or female... And every term, there's always a female representative. But there's no specific criterion that says the director must be male, or that the director must be female, or that the director must be male. That's not true."[30]

More firmly, the People and Culture Division Head of Rumah Zakat, said:

> "So far, there's nothing specific. So, for all positions, we're listing both men and women. The requirements are for both men and women, and there will be educational requirements and a maximum age. But there are no specific requirements for men and women."[31]

The three conditions above demonstrate that the three Islamic philanthropic institutions employ a paradigm of formal and administrative equality in their institutional governance. Everyone within the philanthropic institutions is considered to have equal opportunities to participate, regardless of gender-based circumstances, needs, and experiences. Policymakers within the philanthropic institutions view women and men as individuals competing in the same arena. Gender differences are viewed as individual, not structural, issues.

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[29] Interview with A-1, March 13, 2024.

[30] Interview with C-1, May 21, 2024.

[31] Interview with C-1, People & Culture Division Head of Rumah Zakat, May 21, 2024.

In some countries, gender-neutral policies are actually needed. For example, in countries that recognize gender diversity beyond just women and men, many genders other than women and men are discriminated against due to the absence of third-person pronouns. Gender-neutral pronouns that challenge binary gender norms, such as "hen" in Sweden, often generate initial resistance. Inclusive language initiatives in various contexts—such as replacing the terms "chairman" or "fireman"—can be socially successful despite initial resistance.[32] Similarly, public facilities such as toilets require gender-neutral policies. In primary and secondary schools in Perth, Western Australia, in an effort to create a more inclusive and safe environment for students, schools have implemented gender-neutral toilet policies as part of a strategy to prevent bullying and protect students, especially those who are non-binary or transgender.[33]

In the health sector, to move toward gender-neutral donor deferral, Argentina issued a policy stating that blood donor eligibility criteria consider only individual risk practices, not the donor's gender or sexual orientation. This policy is implemented without discrimination against certain groups such as homosexual men or women. The results of this gender-neutral policy have been proven to maintain the security of the blood supply without increasing the risk of HIV.[34] On the other hand, medical professionals remain influenced by gender stereotypes, where being a doctor is often associated with masculine attributes, not gender-neutral. The ideology of androcentrism makes male professional standards "normal," while women and other gender identities are considered deviant or other. Rejecting claims that medicine is gender-neutral, doctors are still shaped by androcentric values, practices, and institutional cultures.[35]

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[32] Marie Gustafsson Sendén, Emma A. Bäck, and Anna Lindqvist, "Introducing a Gender-Neutral Pronoun in a Natural Gender Language: The Influence of Time on Attitudes and Behavior," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6, no. 893 (2015), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00893.

[33] Jacinta Francis et al., "Gender-Neutral Toilets: A Qualitative Exploration of Inclusive School Environments for Sexuality and Gender Diverse Youth in Western Australia," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 16 (2022): 10089, https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191610089.

[34] Sebastián Blanco et al., "Gender-neutral Donor Deferral Policies: Experience in Argentina Implementing Individual Risk-assessment Policies," *Vox Sanguinis* 115, no. 7 (2020): 548–54, https://doi.org/10.1111/vox.12933.

[35] Kiki M.J. Lombarts and Abraham Verghese, "Medicine Is Not Gender-Neutral — She Is Male," ed. Debra Malina, *New England Journal of Medicine* 386, no. 13 (2022): 1284–87, https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMms2116556.

Although Islamic philanthropic institutions claim to be gender-neutral in recruitment, leadership selection, and employee placement, some statements demonstrate that gender considerations persist. For example, statements like "fieldwork is more suitable for men" or "cooking or mentoring is more suitable for women." According to Acker, this is referred to as inequality regimes.[36] These are patterned and organized inequalities based on gender, race, and class. Inequality within institutions stems not only from gender bias but also from the intersectionality of social factors operating simultaneously. It is where power within institutions operates.

The workings of the three philanthropic organizations mentioned above are also evident in AI technology. What was initially designed to be gender-neutral, however, is not guaranteed to be so in practice. This technology reflects gender stereotypes attached to AI-based technologies, particularly virtual assistants and robots, shaped by perceptions of tasks and roles associated with that gender. Technology, especially AI-based technology, is not gender-neutral. The design of the technology often promotes gender stereotypes, which reinforce already biased social structures.[37]

Gender-neutral policies and practices that seek to be gender-neutral within Islamic philanthropic institutions can actually reinforce existing inequalities. Gender neutrality attempts to treat everyone "equally" without considering gender identity. It can erase the specific experiences of certain groups, such as women, transgender people, or non-binary people. For example, in attempts to be "neutral," women's biological and social experiences, such as menstruation, pregnancy, and breastfeeding, may be downplayed.[38]

Organizations that appear gender-neutral in formal policies often hide deeply gender-biased work structures. The reality often considered normal in gender-neutral organizations is actually structurally oppressive. Organizations often state policies that explicitly do not differentiate between genders, such as

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[36] Joan Acker, "Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations," *Gender & Society* 20, no. 4 (2006): 441–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206289499.

[37] Miruna-Valeria Craiut and Ioana Raluca Iancu, "Is Technology Gender Neutral? A Systematic Literature Review on Gender Stereotypes Attached to Artificial Intelligence," *Human Technology* 18, no. 3 (2022): 297–315, https://doi.org/10.14254/1795-6889.2022.18-3.6.

[38] Paige Hall Smith and Ethan T Bamberger, "Gender Inclusivity Is Not Gender Neutrality," *Journal of Human Lactation* 37, no. 3 (2021): 441–43, https://doi.org/10.1177/08903344211023358.

standard work hours, performance requirements, or meritocratic evaluations. However, informal practices and organizational culture demand "extreme adherence" to masculine norms, unlimited flexibility, constant availability, and prioritizing work over family responsibilities, which are more difficult for women. Because a work culture glorifies long hours without compromise, women, who often carry domestic or caregiving responsibilities, feel pressure to balance both. As a result, women are more often excluded from strategic career paths, even when there are no formal gender restrictions. Gender neutrality at the formal policy level does not guarantee substantive equality in work practices. An extreme work culture, which idolizes unlimited work and personal sacrifice, favors those less burdened by domestic arrangements, namely, mostly men.[39]

Gender-neutral policies that rely solely on legal regulations without affirmative action policies are insufficient to address structural barriers. The biggest barriers to women's leadership include non-inclusive corporate policies, unconscious organizational bias, and domestic responsibilities. Policies that fail to consider gender realities only reinforce social barriers.[40] It is also the case in Islamic philanthropic institutions, as stated by C-1:

> "... The management system we currently use is objective… previously we used GPI, we also used BSC, then now we use OQR. Our quickest evaluation is 3 months; we have a mid-semester evaluation for operators, then a semester evaluation (entering the seventh month), and then, at the end of the year (the third quarter), a second mid-semester evaluation; then, at the end, we evaluate. Well, that's where the final results of the human operator are assessed."[41]

The interview results above indicate that the job promotion process begins with establishing a performance management system. Employees work within a performance appraisal system that uses a measurable, work-target-based approach. In this initial stage, each employee is assigned a work target tailored to their job function and the needs of their work unit, thus serving as the basis for measuring individual performance throughout the work period.

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[39] Cherie Duffy, Patricia Jolliffe, and Helen Collins, "'It's down to Hard Work, Lonely Work, Long, Long Hours, and You Have to Be Able to Sacrifice': Removing the Veil of the Gender-Neutral Organisation," *Gender Issues* 41, no. 4 (2024): 21, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-024-09337-5.

[40] Ranjana Sahu, "The Role of Gender-Neutral Policy in Indian Women's Progress and Leadership," *Journal of East-West Thought* 15, no. 1 (2025): 633–37, https://jetjournal.us/index.php/journals/article/view/336.

[41] Interview with C-1, May 21, 2024

Employees then undergo periodic performance evaluations. Job promotions are not awarded directly, but through a tiered evaluation process that emphasizes target achievement, consistent performance, and organizational needs.

The gender-neutral policies mentioned above result in a lack of minimum representation of women in both recruitment and strategic positions. Women are viewed solely as entities whose presence is numerical. Therefore, the career gap between women and men is not only an issue for individual women but also for institutions that are aware of gender perspectives. Gender inequality persists and recurs in institutional practices, even though it is not manifested in formal regulations. Gender neutrality does not automatically result in gender equality.

The Position of Women in Islamic Philanthropic Institutions in Indonesia

The three gender-neutral conditions above impact gender representation at every level within Islamic philanthropic institutions. In general, strategic and top-level leadership in Islamic philanthropic institutions are dominated by men, while women are more numerous at the managerial and staff levels. This indicates that strategic authority and key decision-making are still dominated by men. Women are more present in middle leadership positions, with women appearing in managerial, vice-chairman, and member positions. At the staff level, the gender composition is much more balanced. This indicates that women's access to organizational participation is quite open, but mobility to higher positions remains limited.

In LAZISMU, the institutional structure is divided into two: the board of directors and the executive board. The board of directors is formed and is responsible to the central board of Muhammadiyah. The executive board is formed and is responsible to the board of directors. In the board of directors' leadership, the chairman is a man; women hold only the vice-chairperson position, and all core administrative positions (secretariat) are held by men. In the board of directors, the composition is becoming more balanced, with 7 men and 4 women. Women are present as members but are not dominant in the core leadership.

On the Executive Board, men hold all director positions, indicating male dominance at the highest operational leadership levels. At the manager level, the balance is relatively balanced, with 7 men and 6 women. Women are

beginning to gain space in middle leadership positions. Women are predominantly in administration, accounting, partnerships, and research, while men are more prominent in digital, operations, and fundraising. At the staff level, the gender ratio is relatively balanced, with 20 men and 18 women. Women are involved in research and development, accounting, partnerships, and administration.

The gender-based division of positions at the strategic level is dominated by men, particularly in the positions of chairman of the board, president director, and field director. At the managerial level, the situation is more balanced, with women appearing in managerial and field coordinator roles, particularly in finance, administration, partnerships, and research and development. At the staff level, the situation is almost balanced, with many women serving as operational staff. Women have high participation in staff positions. As positions rise, the composition becomes more male-dominated. The middle level is more balanced, with women occupying more operational positions.

Based on the BAZNAS performance report at the end of 2025, BAZNAS had 478 employees, including 11 leaders, 347 permanent employees, 83 contract employees, 13 support staff, and 24 civil servants from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. In BAZNAS, only the leadership structure is accessible. Of the 14 listed leaders, only 1 is female. This means the BAZNAS leadership structure is heavily male-dominated, with only 7% female representation. Men hold all the highest leadership positions, with no women in key decision-making roles. Women lead Distribution and Utilization. Men lead Technology and Information, Planning, Studies and Development, Collection, HR, Finance, General Affairs, and National Coordination. Almost all strategic positions in BAZNAS are filled by men. Female representation is very limited. This structure shows quite high gender inequality in BAZNAS leadership.

At Rumah Zakat, the publicly accessible structure consists of six components. First, the Board of Directors. Second, the Board of Trustees. Third, the Board of Trustees. Fourth, the Sharia Council. Fifth, the Sharia Reference. Sixth, the Expert Council. Rumah Zakat's leadership structure is still dominated by men, but women are represented more highly than at the other two zakat institutions. However, all board positions are held by men. No women hold the highest operational leadership positions. Women have access to strategic supervisory positions as members of the Board of Trustees. Women hold religious authority. Women are involved in expert groups, although they

remain a minority: 1 in 4. All strategic operational positions (CEO and Chief Officer) are held by men. Women appear in supervisory and expertise positions, namely on the board of trustees, the sharia council, and the expert council. At the supervisory, consultative, and scientific levels, women are present, but not in key executive positions. See Table 1.

Women's presence in Islamic philanthropic institutions is evident through their active involvement at various organizational levels, particularly in middle leadership, supervisory roles, and expertise-based professional roles. Women's presence in managerial positions, as members of the board of directors, on the advisory board, and on the sharia board reflects a space for participation that allows women to contribute to institutional management and program implementation. Women play significant roles in administration, finance, partnerships, and research, which are crucial to operational effectiveness and organizational development. See Table 2.

Women's involvement at the staff level shows their broad access to organizational participation and provides a basis for strengthening their capacity and professional experience. Through this involvement, women help maintain program sustainability, manage social services, and strengthen institutional accountability.

The relatively high representation of women in Rumah Zakat does not necessarily indicate that the institution is more accepting of women within its organizational structure or that it has implemented more gender-friendly and equitable governance. Further examination is needed, considering the positions women occupy and the functions associated with those positions.

Table 1
Comparison of Leaders of Islamic Philanthropic Institutions based on Gender

Institution	Man	Woman	Total Leadership	Women's Presentation
BAZNAS	13	1	14	7%
LAZISMU	17	4	21	19%
Rumah Zakat	12	3	15	20%

Source: Data Processed from Various Sources.

Table 2
Distribution of Leadership by Gender in Islamic Philanthropic Institutions

Institution	Gender Dominance	Structure Notes
BAZNAS	Very male dominated	Only 1 woman in the leadership field
LAZISMU	Male dominated	Women are present in the management and supervisory sections
Rumah Zakat	Male dominated	Women are present on the advisory board, sharia board, and expert boards.

Based on the data available in this study, the women listed in Rumah Zakat's organizational structure hold structurally important positions but do not directly reflect their involvement in day-to-day organizational management and decision-making. These positions tend to serve advisory or supervisory functions and are therefore not necessarily involved intensively in the institution's operational activities or strategic processes. Consequently, the relatively high number of women listed in Rumah Zakat's organizational structure is insufficient to conclude that women's representation in institutional management has been substantively achieved. In other words, the number of women visible in the organizational structure must be distinguished from the extent to which they are genuinely involved in carrying out institutional functions and exercising authority in decision-making processes.

On the other hand, male dominance in BAZNAS's organizational structure also needs to be understood in light of the limitations of publicly accessible data on its institutional structure. As with Rumah Zakat, the management composition available in the public domain does not necessarily reflect the overall distribution of women and men within the institution. However, the two institutions differ importantly. The positions visible in BAZNAS's organizational structure have significant institutional functions and authority, meaning their occupants are directly involved in organizational management and decision-making. In this context, male dominance in BAZNAS cannot be understood merely as a numerical imbalance; it must also be examined in terms of how men and women are distributed across positions with strategic functions. At the same time, comparing BAZNAS, LAZISMU, and Rumah Zakat cannot rely solely on the number of women listed in their organizational structures. When

the status, functions, and extent of involvement associated with these positions are also taken into consideration, it is not possible to conclude simplistically that one of the three institutions has achieved better female representation than the others.

Nevertheless, another aspect to consider when comparing these three institutions is their formal leadership recruitment mechanisms. In this regard, BAZNAS demonstrates a relatively more open recruitment mechanism than LAZISMU and Rumah Zakat. BAZNAS publicly announces leader recruitment through various channels, including its website and Instagram, giving the public access to information and opportunities to learn about and participate in the selection process. In contrast, based on the data obtained in this study, leadership transitions at LAZISMU and Rumah Zakat take place through appointment mechanisms that are not publicly announced. These differences indicate that BAZNAS has a relatively more transparent formal leadership recruitment procedure in terms of public access to information and opportunities to participate in the selection process. However, the openness of recruitment procedures must be distinguished from women's actual representation in leadership. An open recruitment mechanism does not, in itself, guarantee gender equality in the distribution of strategic positions. Furthermore, the leadership composition identified at BAZNAS in this study is the outcome of this open recruitment mechanism.

The above data can be interpreted as two findings. First, the position of women in Islamic philanthropic institutions above demonstrates that women face invisible, unwritten barriers, known as a glass ceiling. Women face a ceiling on positions within the institutions. Women are prevented from advancing to the highest leadership positions, even though no formal regulations prohibit them.

Second, women are not represented in strategic positions. This absence is not due to a lack of capacity or a lack of interest in applying. It can be seen in the statement by the LAZISMU Manager in the sentence below:

> "Although I can't say that I don't have that (capacity), because I haven't been given the opportunity to be in the same position."[42]

The absence of women in strategic positions stems from the gender division of labor within the family. Women are the ones responsible for their physical

[42] Interview with B-3, May 14, 2024.

presence within the family, while men are not. It was expressed by several female employees of Islamic philanthropic institutions, as illustrated below:

> "I'm afraid that if I'm given too much responsibility (at the office), I'll forget about my other responsibilities (within my family), so I don't think so."[43]

Women face obstacles in occupying strategic positions, particularly in top leadership, stemming from religious ideological understandings. There's a religious understanding that leaders in Islam are men, as expressed by the Business Research Manager at Rumah Zakat:

> "Because at Rumah Zakat, the culture of leadership prioritizes men. The limit (for women in the institutional structure), as far as I know, is the director, Mrs Murni. It is also the highest achievement at Rumah Zakat. Of course, this also relates to the Islamic *values* we must uphold, that leadership is indeed prioritized for men."[44]

It was also acknowledged by C-7, a member of Rumah Zakat. In an interview with researchers on May 6, 2025, C7 said:

> "Yes. That's the reason; if it's a spiritual reason, it's definitely, what do you call it? Yes, we choose leaders, yes, men, right? Spiritually, it's more like, there are other reasons, managerial reasons, that, on the other hand, can be a consideration, which can limit women's movements."[45]

This fact is further reinforced by Yakar's findings in Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The research showed that before applying for leadership positions, women's legitimacy, both socially and religiously, was questioned. For example, within Islam, there are diverse legal views on women's political leadership. In Saudi Arabia and Turkey, differing fatwas issued by religious institutions demonstrate how the social context and legal system influence the interpretation of Islamic law regarding women as state leaders. Dar al-Ifta', the religious institution that issues fatwas in Saudi Arabia, strictly enforces Sharia law, concluding that women are prohibited from becoming state leaders. In contrast, Turkey, through its Diyanet (Islamic Board of Trustees), applies secular-democratic law, allowing women to openly become political leaders, though they must meet requirements for capacity, competence, and Sharia norms.[46]

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[43] Interview with C-3, May 23, 2024.

[44] Interview with C-2, June 10, 2024.

[45] Interview with C-7, May 6, 2025.

[46] Emine Enise Yakar, "Women's Political Leadership: One Question and Two Divergent Fatwās," *Journal of Law and Religion* 37, no. 2 (2022): 332–62, https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2022.15.

Women in the Arab Middle East view their careers not just as jobs, but as vocations or callings. Religion, patriarchal culture, and family values limit their career freedom. Social norms and religious views (conservative Islam), patriarchy, and the centrality of the family shape strict gender expectations. Cultural standards such as family priority and gender-based role allocation hinder career mobility across organizations or across countries. Their careers are highly structured locally and within organizations, with little room for external or cross-sector mobility.[47]

Not only in Islam, the rarity of women reaching the highest leadership positions is also found in Christianity. This limitation is often seen as a form of support for Christian patriarchy, the result of the assumption that women were 'created as a companion to man' and therefore structurally inferior.[48] The position of women in the leadership of Pentecostal churches in Africa is questioned. By drawing parallels between women's spiritual calling in books like Joel and the stories of female prophets in the Old Testament and ministry in the early church, the text shows that spiritual equality is excluded from gender domination. Women's authority is often limited to symbolic or prophetic ministry, not to ecclesiastical decision-making positions such as pastors or church elders. Women are systematically restricted from reaching the highest positions in the church structure despite having a strong spiritual calling.[49]

Women leaders experience various forms of discrimination, ranging from skepticism about their abilities, limited access to formal leadership opportunities, to stereotypes that women are unsuitable for authoritative roles. This discrimination is often justified by arguments based on narrow Islamic social norms.[50] The "pipeline block" refers to barriers women face in career advancement in the Arab Middle East. Many highly educated women face

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[47] Fida Afiouni, "Women's Careers in the Arab Middle East: Understanding Institutional Constraints to the Boundaryless Career," *Career Development International* 19, no. 3 (2014): 314–36, https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-05-2013-0061.

[48] Elfi Elfi et al., "A Christian Female Leadership Framework: An Insight from Christian Higher Education in Indonesia," *Polyglot: Jurnal Ilmiah* 19, no. 2 (2023): 104–23, https://doi.org/10.19166/pji.v19i2.6120.

[49] Nomatter Sande, "Faith and Equality: Rethinking Women in Leadership Positions in Pentecostalism," *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 23, no. 1 (2017): 50–62.

[50] Tamer Koburtay and Tala Abuhussein, "Normative Islam, Prejudice and Women Leaders: Why Do Arab Women Leaders Suffer?," *Journal of Gender Studies* 30, no. 2 (2021): 177–89, https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2020.1863195.

obstacles in advancing to leadership or managerial positions. Women in the Middle East not only need a good education[51] and skills to become leaders, but also need social networks and the support from existing cultures and norms. Structural barriers exist in leaders' understanding of hiring women, despite government policies that promote gender equality.[52] Family responsibilities are the biggest obstacle to career growth. A male-dominated organizational culture with covert discrimination (covert bias) hinders women.[53] The presence of children affects women's participation in non-formal job training (job-related short courses). Maternal aspirations change (choosing less training due to family focus), and women face a clear training participation penalty after becoming mothers, even in relatively advanced social systems such as Germany. Without employer policies or support (such as flexible schedules, childcare, or guaranteed leave that allows continued training), working mothers are far more likely to miss professional development opportunities.[54] Mothers are less likely to be given the opportunity, or to choose to participate, in training because of time constraints from domestic responsibilities. Women are less likely to participate in employer-initiated training because of domestic barriers and unfavorable working conditions.[55]

The above barriers prevent women from being represented in leadership positions compared to men. Although women make up approximately 70% of the global health workforce, they only fill 25% of leadership roles. Women's career pathways remain hampered by a system biased against women's domestic and caregiving roles.[56]

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[51] Payyazhi Jayashree, Valerie Lindsay, and Grace McCarthy, "Career Capital Development of Women in the Arab Middle East Context: Addressing the Pipeline Block," *Personnel Review* 50, no. 4 (2021): 1253–78, https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2018-0436.

[52] Sayed Elhoushy et al., "Gender Equality: Caught between Policy Reforms and Manager Beliefs," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 32, no. 7 (2024): 1263–86, https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2023.2218067.

[53] Susan Elizabeth Mate, Matthew McDonald, and Truc Do, "The Barriers and Enablers to Career and Leadership Development: An Exploration of Women's Stories in Two Work Cultures," *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* 27, no. 4 (2019): 857–74, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-07-2018-1475.

[54] Gundula Zoch, "Participation in Job-Related Training: Is There a Parenthood Training Penalty?," *Work, Employment and Society* 37, no. 1 (2023): 274–92, https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170221128692.

[55] Claudia Burgard, "Gender Differences in Further Training Participation – The Role of Individuals, Households and Firms," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, no. 320 (2012), https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2014010.

[56] Sahu, "The Role of Gender-Neutral Policy in Indian Women's Progress and Leadership."

In Islam, scholars have also challenged restrictive textual interpretations of stories of female leadership using scientific and historical approaches. The Hadith, the text that serves as the basis for guidance for Muslims after the Quran, and its relationship to female leadership have been re-examined using social dynamics, individual capabilities, and changing cultural contexts.[57]

Second, gender segregation occurs in the division of labor within Islamic philanthropic institutions. Women are placed in administration, finance, partnerships, research, and oversight, while men are placed in strategic decision-making, fundraising, information technology, national coordination, and key operations. It clearly demonstrates that men are more likely to be at the top of the hierarchy than women. Women's participation is more representative than transformative.

This placement seems to be inherent to women and men. Women are assigned to certain jobs, and so are men. Acker argues that gender is not something individuals bring to organizations but is produced by the organization itself through the division of labor, job definitions, work procedures, and symbols of masculinity and femininity within the organization.[58]

The gender bias in job positions is evident in football clubs in England. Men seem to hold club leadership positions, while women face unspoken barriers to reaching top organizational roles. There's a perception that women are less competent in core organizational roles and are better suited to support roles.[59]

This gender division of labor was also found in John's research, which showed that gender-based placement of women and men was evident.[60]

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[57] Syamsul Bakri, "Womens Leadership in Islam: A Historical Perspective of a Hadith," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society* 5, no. 2 (2020): 219–34, https://doi.org/10.22515/islimus.v5i2.3276.

[58] Acker, "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations."

[59] Amée Bryan, Stacey Pope, and Alexandra J. Rankin-Wright, "On the Periphery: Examining Women's Exclusion from Core Leadership Roles in the 'Extremely Gendered' Organization of Men's Club Football in England," *Gender & Society* 35, no. 6 (2021): 940–70, https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432211046318.

[60] Merida L Johns, "Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Structural, Cultural, and Organizational Barriers Preventing Women from Achieving Senior and Executive Positions.," *Perspectives in Health Information Management* 10, no. Winter (2013): 1e, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23346029.

Women were often placed in human resources, administration, marketing, research, and service. Meanwhile, men were more often placed in key operational positions, core business management, strategic finance, and corporate decision-making. These positions held by men are the primary pathway to leadership. Stojmenovska, Steinmetz, and Volker also found that women can occupy managerial positions, just like men.[61] However, the authority held by women and men remained different. Women were placed in positions of staff management, employee supervision, team coordination, and organizational support. Meanwhile, men were positioned in resource control, strategic decision-making, budget management, and high-level organizational power.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that, first, gender inequality is caused by gender-neutral policies. Policies that prioritize gender neutrality tend to maintain existing structures of inequality, thus perpetuating gender inequality within organizations. It is because gender neutrality is not the same as gender equality. Second, the low representation of women in leadership positions within Islamic philanthropic institutions indicates a glass ceiling for women. It is not due to women's capacity or interest in leadership positions, but rather to gendered divisions of labor and religious ideological understandings of leadership. As a result, women's access to leadership positions is more limited, while male dominance in organizations persists and is reproduced.

This study is limited to philanthropic institutions, so its findings cannot be generalized to all Islamic philanthropic institutions. The availability of gender-disaggregated data on philanthropic institution managers is another limitation, preventing the researcher from comprehensively representing women in each position within philanthropic institutions. Furthermore, this study also lacks a subjective exploration of women's experiences, particularly their perspectives.

This research, in addition to offering implications for broadening gender studies in Islamic philanthropic institutions, further strengthens Joan Acker's theory of gendered organizations. This study extends Acker's Gendered

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[61] Dragana Stojmenovska, Stephanie Steinmetz, and Beate Volker, "The Gender Gap in Workplace Authority: Variation across Types of Authority Positions," *Social Forces* 100, no. 2 (2021): 599–621, https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soab007.

Organization Theory by showing how formally gender-neutral organizational policies may reproduce gender inequality within gendered organizational structures, cultures, and practices. It does not modify Acker's fundamental theoretical assumptions or concepts but rather provides empirical elaboration of how gender-neutral policies interact with existing gendered organizational processes. It also highlights how women exercise and negotiate agency within these organizational conditions.[]

Generative AI Statement

This article is an original research work by the author and was not produced by AI. AI was used solely to locate sources, translate, and read materials, as well as to help compile references.

Acknowledgment

We express our deepest gratitude to all informants who served as data sources for this research. We also thank the extended families of BAZNAS RI, LAZISMU, and Rumah Zakat for granting the researchers access to collect data.

Author Contribution Statement

Usfiyatul Marfu'ah: Conceptualization; Methodology; Investigation; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Writing Original Draft. **J. Mardimin:** Supervision; Validation; Writing, Review & Editing. **Titi Susilowati Prabawa:** Supervision, Validation, and Writing, Review & Editing. **Sri Suwartiningsih:** Supervision, Validation, and Writing, Review & Editing.

Funding

This research was funded entirely by the researcher; there was no contribution from any other party toward the funding of this article.

Conflict of Interest

We declare that there are no conflicts of interest, whether financial or non-financial, related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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