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**From Equality to Androgyny:
The Dynamics of Husband-Wife Relationships in Progressive Muslim Families
in Indonesia**

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of husband-wife relationships in progressive Muslim families in Indonesia, focusing on the transition from the principle of gender equality to the practice of relational androgyny. Employing a qualitative research design grounded in feminist theory and the sociology of family and law, this study utilizes in-depth interviews with three informants selected through purposive criteria to capture lived experiences of egalitarian Muslim households. The findings reveal that progressive Muslim families construct fluid, negotiated, and participatory relational patterns in parenting, decision-making, and economic roles, moving beyond formal equality toward contextual and practice-based relational arrangements. The main driving factors include increasing socio-cultural transformation, relative autonomy from traditional familial structures, and reflective religious consciousness, while the primary obstacles arise from the persistence of patriarchal cultural internalization, dominant conservative religious interpretations, and gender-biased socio-political frameworks. This study further demonstrates that the integration of relational androgynous values is actively cultivated through family-based education, role modeling, and the reinterpretation of Islamic teachings toward gender justice. These findings confirm the significance of relational androgyny as a praxis-oriented and contextually grounded framework in Islamic gender and family studies, contributing to the development of a more equitable, adaptive, and sustainable Muslim family model in contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: Relational Androgyny, Gender Equality, Progressive Muslim, Islamic family law, Gender Relations

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji dinamika relasi suami-istri dalam keluarga Muslim progresif di Indonesia, dengan fokus pada pergeseran dari prinsip kesetaraan gender menuju praktik androgini relasional. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif yang berlandaskan teori feminis serta sosiologi keluarga dan hukum, penelitian ini memanfaatkan wawancara mendalam terhadap tiga informan yang dipilih melalui kriteria purposif untuk menangkap pengalaman hidup dalam rumah tangga Muslim yang egaliter. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keluarga Muslim progresif membangun pola relasi yang bersifat cair, negosiatif, dan partisipatif dalam pengasuhan anak, pengambilan keputusan, serta peran ekonomi, yang melampaui kesetaraan formal menuju pengaturan relasional yang kontekstual dan berbasis praktik. Faktor pendorong utama meliputi meningkatnya transformasi sosial-budaya, otonomi relatif dari struktur keluarga tradisional, serta kesadaran keagamaan yang reflektif. Sementara itu, hambatan utama muncul dari masih kuatnya internalisasi budaya patriarkal, dominasi tafsir keagamaan konservatif, serta kerangka sosial-politik yang bias gender. Penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bahwa integrasi nilai-nilai androgini relasional secara aktif dikembangkan melalui pendidikan berbasis keluarga, keteladanan, serta reinterpretasi ajaran Islam menuju keadilan gender. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya androgini relasional sebagai kerangka yang berorientasi praksis dan kontekstual dalam studi gender dan keluarga Islam, serta berkontribusi pada pengembangan model keluarga Muslim yang lebih adil, adaptif, dan berkelanjutan di Indonesia kontemporer.

Kata kunci: *Androgini Relasional, Kesetaraan Gender, Muslim Progresif, Hukum Keluarga Islam, Relasi Gender*

Introduction

The development of Islamic thought and social dynamics in Indonesia has encouraged the emergence of progressive Muslim families that seek to build domestic relationships based on the values of reciprocity and gender justice. In this family model, the roles of husband and wife¹ are no longer rigidly divided between domestic and public spheres; rather, they are negotiated, flexible, and contextually determined based on mutual agreement and capacity.² This transformation reflects a significant shift from a formal gender equality paradigm toward relational androgyny, understood as the practice of sharing fluid and complementary roles in husband-wife relationships.³

¹ Muslim Zainuddin et al., "Protection of Women and Children in the Perspective of Legal Pluralism: A Study in Aceh and West Nusa Tenggara," *Samarah* 8, no. 3 (2024), p. 1948–73.

² Aslati et al., "The Role of Women in Politics in Indonesia: Critical Review of Islamic Law," *Samarah* 9, no. 2 (2025), p. 1108–29; Mohammad Noviani Ardi et al., "Family Harmony and Quality of Life," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 9, no. 3 (2025), p. 1416–38.

³ E R Bunnett, "Androgyny, Expression Of," in *The Wiley Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences: Model and Theories: Measurement and Assessment: Personality Processes*

The concept of androgyny in psychology was initially developed to explain the balance of masculine and feminine characteristics in individuals. Sandra Bem's⁴ theory of psychological androgyny highlights that individuals with both masculine and feminine traits tend to exhibit higher role flexibility and adaptability in responding to life demands. In the context of Muslim families, this perspective is relevant for understanding how couples negotiate roles beyond patriarchal gender binaries.⁵ Recent developments indicate that some educated and urban Muslim families in Indonesia have begun to practice more fluid divisions of labor, including in childcare, decision-making, and economic contribution.⁶

However, resistance to the equal relations model is still strong. Entrenched patriarchal cultures, conservative social structures, textualist interpretations of Islamic teachings continue to reinforce hierarchical gender relations within households.⁷ At the same time, recent studies⁸ demonstrate that egalitarian domestic relationships significantly to reducing divorce rates and enhancing family well-being.⁹ This tension between normative equality discourse and lived relational practices highlights the need to critically examine not only the implementation of

and Individual Differences: Clinical, Applied, and Cross-Cultural Research: vol. 1–4, 2020, p. 25–30; B M Woodhill and C A Samuels, “21st Century Neo-Androgyny: What Is Androgyny Anymore and Why We Should Still Care,” *Psychological Reports* 126, no. 5 (2023), p. 2322–44.

⁴ “The Measurement of Psychological Androgyny,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 42, no. 2 (1974), p. 155–62.

⁵ Mohamed Sulthan Ismiya Begum et al., “Gender Equity in Muslim Family Law: Modern and Contemporary ‘Ulamā’s View,” *Al-Ahkam* 34, no. 2 (2024), p. 221–56.

⁶ Holan Riadi, “Hukum Keluarga Islam Dan Kesetaraan Gender: Kajian Atas Pengalaman Masyarakat Muslim Di Indonesia,” *Modeling: Jurnal Program Studi PGMI* 11, no. 1 (2024), p. 1174–84; Vanina Farber and Patrick Reichert, *The Gender Inequality Index Through the Prism of Social Innovation, Modern Indices for International Economic Diplomacy*, 2022; I Malik, S S Karimullah, and H Okur, “Gender Analysis in the Islamic Law-Based Ecofeminism Movement for Ecosystem Protection,” *El-Mashlahah* 15, no. 1 (2025), p. 101–24; Mohammad Ala-Uddin, “The Paradox in Discourse and Praxis of Gender Equality: A Communicative Framework for Sustainable Development,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of International Communication and Sustainable Development* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), p. 235–57.

⁷ R W Connell and J W Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005), p. 829–59; Susan Blackburn, *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia, Women and the State in Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁸ Ulin Na'mah et al, Reducing the Divorce Rate in the Religious Courts Through Cultivating Egalitarian Relationships,” *Khazanah Hukum* 6, no. 1 (2024), p. 81–97.

⁹ Fajri M Kasim et al., “The Protection of Women and Children Post-Divorce in Sharia Courts in Aceh: A Sociological Perspective,” *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 22, no. 2 (2022); Mohd. Kalam Daud and Rahmatul Akbar, “Hareuta Peunulang: Protection of Women in Aceh According to Customary and Islamic Law,” *SAMARAH: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 4, no. 1 (2020), p. 259; Muslim Zainuddin, Mansari, and Nadhilah Filzah, “Divorce Problems and Community Social Capital in Realizing Family Resilience in Aceh,” *Samarah* 6, no. 2 (2022).

gender equality but also the emergence of relational androgyny as a more dynamic and practice-oriented framework in progressive Muslim families.¹⁰

In Indonesia, progressive Muslim families are increasingly found among academics, activists, and professionals who combine strong religious commitment with sensitivity to contemporary socio-cultural changes.¹¹ Despite the growing body of literature on gender equality and Islamic family law, most studies remain focused on normative or legalistic frameworks and have not sufficiently explored lived relational practices within households. Specifically, the shift from gender equality toward relational androgyny as an empirical and experiential pattern remains underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining (1) the forms of relational dynamics, (2) the driving and inhibiting factors, and (3) the transformative strategies that shape fair and participatory household relationships.

This research is based on three main arguments. *First*, progressive Muslim families tend to construct fluid, collaborative, and adaptive relationship patterns compared to more traditional family structures. *Second*, the shift from the gender equality to relational androgyny is not merely ideological, but emerges from ethical reflection and practical negotiation in everyday life. Third, the flexible division of roles in parenting, decision-making, and economic contribution is driven primarily by the internalization of contextual and reflective Islamic values, rather than purely economic necessity. Accordingly, this study argues that relational androgyny represents a form of socio-religious transformation oriented toward justice, reciprocity, and the sustainability of marital relationships in contemporary Muslim society. *Third*, the flexible division of roles in parenting, decision-making, and economic contribution is driven primarily by the internalization of contextual and reflective Islamic values, rather than purely economic necessity. Accordingly, this study argues that relational androgyny represents a form of socio-religious transformation oriented toward justice, reciprocity, and the sustainability of marital relationships in contemporary Muslim society.

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in feminist theory and the sociology of family and law. The primary focus is to explore the dynamics of marital relations in progressive Muslim families in Indonesia, particularly the shift from gender equality toward relational androgyny. This approach is appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of subjective meanings, values, and lived

¹⁰ Abidin Nurdin et al., "Tujuan Hukum Islam Untuk Kemaslahatan Manusia: Penerapan Kaidah Fiqhiyah Dalam Bidang Ekonomi Dan Hukum Keluarga," *El-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 5, no. 1 (2022), p. 41.

¹¹ H R Syamsuni et al., "Integrating the Values of Islamic Religious Education in the Daily Lives of Rural Families: A Gender Study," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 15, no. 1 (2025), p. 57–83; Rezky Firmansyah, "Islam and Women's Emancipation: Initiating Progressive Steps Towards Muslim Gender Equality in Indonesia," *Journal of Feminism and Gender Studies* 4, no. 2 (2024), p. 115–24; Siti Nurjanah and Agus Hermanto, *Hukum Perkawinan Islam Progresif Di Indonesia* (Malang: CV. Literasi Nusantara Abadi, 2022).

practices within domestic relationships that are inherently fluid, negotiable, and context-dependent.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with three informants identified as progressive Muslim couples, selected using purposive sampling. The criteria for selecting informants include: (1) Muslim spouses who demonstrate practices of gender equality and justice in the household; (2) active in religious or social communities with a progressive orientation; and (3) open to reflecting on their gender role relationships. All informants have higher education backgrounds and reside in urban areas, providing greater exposure to modern and progressive values.

The interviews focused on three main research questions: (1) how role-sharing in parenting, decision-making, and the domestic economy is practiced in a fluid and flexible manner; (2) how couples interpret and experience the transition from equality-based relationships to relational androgyny; and (3) what cultural and religious challenges they encounter in realizing a participatory and gender-equitable family model.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, including systematic processes of transcription, open coding, theme identification, and contextual interpretation of narratives within socio-religious frameworks. The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation and member checking, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the findings.

Gender Equality

Gender equality is a fundamental principle of social justice that emphasizes that every individual, both male and female, has equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities in all aspects of life.¹² This includes access to education, employment, power, and decision-making, both in public and domestic spheres.¹³ In contemporary gender studies and Islamic family law discourse, equality is understood not merely as formal legal parity, but as a transformative process aimed at dismantling structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that perpetuate gender inequality.¹⁴

A systematic study conducted by Martínez García¹⁵ identified eight essential dimensions of gender equality: equality in the world of work and professions, balance of family responsibilities, access to education, emotional health and well-being, cultural and social challenges, economic independence, protection from

¹² M Gupta and A Devi, "Dynamics of Linkages between Gender Equity and Economic Growth: A Case of Selected Economies," in *Gender Issues in Government and Management*, 2024, 1–28; B Harry, "Gender Equality in Politics," in *Gender Issues in Government and Management*, 2024, p. 139–64.

¹³ R Stoilova, E Boeren, and P Ilieva-Trichkova, "Gender Gaps in Participation in Adult Education in Europe: Examining Factors and Barriers," in *Palgrave Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning*, vol. Part F3438, 2023, p. 143–67.

¹⁴ Nian Ruan and Li Tang, "Gender and Higher Education Research: An Interdisciplinary Review," in *Palgrave Studies in Global Higher Education*, vol. Part F1303, 2026, p. 169–92.

¹⁵ Aroa Martínez García and Iratxe Suberviola Ovejas, "Revisión Bibliográfica Sistemática de Las Principales Dimensiones de La Igualdad de Género Desde Una Óptica Coeducativa," *European Public & Social Innovation Review* 9 (2024), p. 1–18.

gender-based violence, and personal freedom and autonomy.¹⁶ To analyze these dimensions, several theoretical approaches are relevant.¹⁷ Gender structure theory explains how gender relations are produced and reproduced across individual, interactional, and institutional levels.¹⁸ Feminist legal theory critically examines how legal systems may perpetuate women's subordination¹⁹ through seemingly neutral norms. Meanwhile, intersectionality theory emphasizes that gender inequality cannot be understood in isolation, but must be analyzed in relation to class, ethnicity, religion, and other axes of power.²⁰

While many countries have implemented policies and programs to promote gender equality, significant challenges remain.²¹ Deeply rooted patriarchal norms, gender bias within legal and institutional frameworks, and weak policy enforcement continue to hinder the realization of substantive equality,²² particularly within family institutions. Therefore, strategies to advance gender equality include inclusive legal reform, gender-sensitive education from an early age,²³ the application of intersectional approaches, and collaborative efforts among the state, civil society,²⁴ and religious institutions.²⁵ In the context of Muslim societies, these efforts also require the reinterpretation of religious texts to align with principles of justice and

¹⁶ Erie Hariyanto and Moh. Hamzah, "Bibliometric Analysis of the Development of Islamic Economic Dispute Resolution Research in Indonesia," *Juris: Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah* 21, no. 2 (2022); Erie Hariyanto, "Public Trust in the Religious Court to Handle Dispute of Sharia Economy," *AHKAM : Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 22, no. 1 (2022).

¹⁷ Ismail Anshari et al., "Understanding 'Service Learning' in a Traditional Islamic Boarding Schools in Aceh, Indonesia," *Qualitative Report* 28, no. 7 (2023).

¹⁸ Dounia Bourabain, "Everyday Sexism and Racism in the Ivory Tower: The Experiences of Early Career Researchers on the Intersection of Gender and Ethnicity in the Academic Workplace," *Gender, Work & Organization* 28, no. 1 (2021), p. 248–67; Ruan and Tang, "Gender and Higher Education Research: An Interdisciplinary Review."

¹⁹ M H Dang and D T P Diep, "The Integration of ILO Convention C111 into Vietnamese Labour Law and Its Implications for Genderbased Discrimination: A Feminist Legal Critique," *Journal of East Asia and International Law* 17, no. 1 (2024), p. 87–108; M H Dang and D T P Diep, "Deconstructing the 'Man' in Vietnamese Labour Laws to Achieve Gender Equality," *Griffith Law Review* 33, no. 3 (2024), p. 294–318.

²⁰ L A Machado and E C de Negreiros, "Intersectionality Theory and Contemporary Feminism: A Critical Analysis of Women's Complex Experiences," *Revista Direito e Sexualidade* 2, no. 1 (2024), p. 26–45.

²¹ Aniek Rahmania et al., "The Movement of Muhammadiyah Women: Religious Values, Culture, and Gender Equality," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13, no. 1 (2025), p. 669–94.

²² S Ertan, "The Impact of Regional International Parliaments on Governments' Policy Frameworks for Gender Equality," *Politics and Gender*, 2021; Ala-Uddin, "The Paradox in Discourse and Praxis of Gender Equality: A Communicative Framework for Sustainable Development."

²³ R Shrivastava et al., *Thriving Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies: Ways of Perceiving*, 1st ed. (Canada: Apple Academic Press, 2025).

²⁴ L Gartzia, "Gender Equality in Business Action: A Multi-agent Change Management Approach," *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 2021.

²⁵ Nofialdi et al., "Urf, Gender, and Customary Law: Negotiating Women's Participation in Boar Hunting in Minangkabau, Indonesia," *Ijtihad : Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam Dan Kemanusiaan* 25, no. 2 (2025), p. 279–303.

equality, making gender equality a multidimensional and context-dependent project.²⁶

Relational Androgyny

Relational androgyny is a concept that integrates the notion of androgyny with a relational approach to understanding gender identity and expression.²⁷ In general, androgyny refers to the presence of both masculine and feminine characteristics within an individual, transcending rigid binary classifications of male and female.²⁸ In this perspective, individuals are not confined by fixed gender categories, but are able to negotiate and express gender roles flexibly according to social context and relational needs.²⁹ Thus, androgyny encompasses not only physical attributes but also psychological dispositions and social practices that enhance adaptability in role performance.

Long before contemporary formulations of relational androgyny, many strands of feminist thought emphasized that substantive equality cannot be achieved without transforming gender norms toward more androgynous orientations. Androgyny, in this sense, represents a psychological and social condition in which individuals integrate positive attributes traditionally associated with both masculinity and femininity, thereby challenging hierarchical gender binaries. This ideal resonates with broader humanistic principles that emphasize dignity, equality, and the full development of human potential regardless of gender.³⁰

The relational approach to gender emphasizes that identity and expression are shaped not only by biological or internal factors, but also by social interactions, cultural norms, and institutional structures. In this framework, relational androgyny refers to a flexible and context-sensitive form of gender expression that evolves through continuous interaction with social expectations and relational dynamics.³¹ This perspective aligns with the concept of gender fluidity, which allows individuals

²⁶ Kurniati Abidin et al., "Determinants of Domestic Violence in Indonesia from a Gender and Sociology of Law Perspective," *El-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 8, no. 2 (2025), p. 701–23; Darmawan et al., "Marriage Dispensation and Family Resilience: A Case Study of the Bener Meriah Shariah Court, Aceh Province," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 22, no. 2 (2022).

²⁷ Jerzy Kociatkiewicz and Monika Kostera, "Androgyny," in *Elgar Encyclopedia on Gender in Management* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2025), p. 31–33.

²⁸ Tingshu Liu and Rodica Ioana Damian, "Are Androgynous People More Creative than Gender Conforming People?," *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 19, no. 2 (April 2025), p. 257–69; J Gosling, "Gender Fluidity Reflected in Contemporary Society," *Jung Journal: Culture and Psyche* 12, no. 3 (2018), p. 75–79; E Van Caenegem et al., "Prevalence of Gender Nonconformity in Flanders, Belgium," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 44, no. 5 (2015), p. 1281–87.

²⁹ Ivan Danyliuk et al., "The Impact of Gender Identity on In-Group Trust," *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology* 9 (2022), p. 604–13.

³⁰ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974), 338–340; Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1970), p. 33–58.

³¹ F Vandenberghe, "The Relation as Magical Operator. Overcoming the Divide between Relational and Processual Sociology," *Sociologia e Antropologia* 7, no. 2 (2017), p. 341–70; P Donati, "Fluxes and Structures: Which Relational Gaze? A Comparison between Relational Sociologies," *Polish Sociological Review* 210, no. 2 (2020), p. 179–97.

to adapt their roles and expressions beyond rigid binary classifications.³² Consequently, masculine and feminine expressions become intersecting, dynamic, and situationally contingent, depending on time, space, and social context.

Furthermore, relational androgyny highlights the dialogical nature of gender construction, where identities are continuously formed, negotiated, and transformed through social interaction. Power relations, cultural expectations, and institutional influences, including family, community, and religious authorities, play a crucial role in shaping gender expression.³³ In this sense, androgyny is not merely a blending of identities, but a strategic and adaptive response to complex relational demands. This concept is particularly relevant for analyzing husband–wife relationships in progressive Muslim families, where traditional gender divisions are increasingly replaced by principles of reciprocity, flexibility, and functional justice grounded in both social practice and evolving interpretations of Islamic values.³⁴

Progressive Muslim Families

Progressive Muslim Families The concept of the Progressive Muslim Family refers to a model of family life in Islam that is oriented toward gender equality, social justice, and human dignity within marital and household relations. Rooted in progressive Islamic thought, this framework critically challenges patriarchal domination often reinforced by conservative and textualist interpretations of religious teachings.³⁵ Instead, it promotes a reconstructive approach to Islamic family law (*fiqh al-usrah*), positioning all family members as equal subjects in terms of rights, responsibilities, and participation. Furthermore, the Progressive Muslim Family emphasizes the collective and non-hierarchical distribution of authority, including in religious leadership, thereby enabling women to actively participate in both spiritual and social domains.³⁶ This reflects an ongoing reinterpretation (*ijtihad*) of Islamic teachings to align with universal ethical values such as justice (*‘adl*),

³² D Joel et al., “Queering Gender: Studying Gender Identity in ‘Normative’ Individuals,” *Psychology and Sexuality* 5, no. 4 (2014), p. 291–321.

³³ M Barreto, D M Doyle, and M Maes, “Researching Gender and Loneliness Differently,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1544, no. 1 (2025), p. 55–64; Laing de Villiers et al., “HIV and Gender Identity Expression among Transfeminine People in the Western Cape, South Africa – a Thematic Analysis of Data from the HPTN 071 (PopART) Trial,” *BMC Public Health* 24, no. 1 (2024), p. 1807–21.

³⁴ Xisha Liu and Weijun Liu, “Using Network Analysis to Identify Central Facets of Androgynous Development Between Sexes in Chinese Adolescents,” *Behavioral Sciences* 15, no. 10 (2025), p. 1–13.

³⁵ Yusdani, “Building Civilised Family Relations: Towards a New Discourse of Family Fiqh in the Millennial Era,” *Al-Shajarah* 2019, no. Special Issue Shariahand Law (2019), p. 25–37; A Duderija and A O Zonneveld, “Transnational Progressive Islam: Theory, Networks, and Lived Experience,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives*, vol. 2, (2021), p. 1189–1210.

³⁶ Lisa Worthington, “Progressive Islam and Women ’ s Religious Leadership : Analysing the Emergence of New Models of Shared Authority” 2 (2016), p. 167–81.

equality (*musāwah*), and mutual consultation (*shūrā*) in the context of contemporary society.³⁷

In practice, progressive Muslim families may be understood through a continuum of relational models, ranging from traditional to fully egalitarian forms. The traditional model maintains a patriarchal structure characterized by rigid gender roles and, in some contexts, the acceptance of polygamy. The transitional or modern model reflects partial transformation, with more balanced domestic roles and increased support for women's participation in public life. Meanwhile, the egalitarian model represents a more advanced stage, where women's leadership is recognized in both religious and familial decision-making processes.³⁸ Typical characteristics of progressive Muslim families include the internalization of gender equality values, engagement in pre-marital and family education, active social participation, adaptability to technological and social change, and recognition of women's economic agency.³⁹ These characteristics demonstrate that progressive Muslim families are not only grounded in inclusive interpretations of Islamic teachings, but also shaped by broader processes of globalization and socio-cultural transformation.⁴⁰

However, this transformation does not occur without tension and resistance. Progressive Muslim families operate within a negotiated space between enduring traditional norms and the demands of modern socio-cultural realities. In Indonesia, despite increasing advocacy for men's involvement in domestic labor, the dominant cultural construction of men as primary breadwinners continues to shape expectations and practices within households.⁴¹ Moreover, processes such as globalization and migration further influence these dynamics, as seen in Muslim communities in Europe, where second-generation Muslims tend to adopt more

³⁷ Siti Dian Natasya Solin et al., "Batak Customary Marriage: A Study of the Prohibition of Same-Clan Marriage and Its Relevance in the Contemporary Era," *El-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 7, no. 1 (2024), p. 62; Muslim Zainuddin, Mansari, and Nadhilah Filzah, "Permasalahan Perceraian Dan Modal Sosial Masyarakat Dalam Mewujudkan Ketahanan Keluarga Di Aceh," *Samarah* 6, no. 2 (2022).

³⁸ G I Galieva and M R Gibadullina, "Premarital Strategies Of Young Muslim Women the Materials of Sociological Research in the Republic of Tatarstan," *Woman in Russian Society*, no. 3 (2022), p. 143–59; Mark Bratton, "Shari'a Law and Modern Muslim Ethics," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 33, no. 2 (2018), p. 358–60; Kari Vogt Mir-Hosseini and Lena Larsen and Christian Moe, "Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law Justice and Ethics in the Islamic Legal Tradition," in *American Journal of Islam and Society*, vol. 31, 2014, 118–20.

³⁹ Y Fitriyati et al., "Reconsidering Inheritance Equality: Gender Justice in Religious Court Decisions through the Lens of Maqashid Al-Shariah," *Nurani* 25, no. 1 (2025), p. 122–40.

⁴⁰ Mursyid Djawas et al., "Creating Family Resilience in Indonesia: A Study of 'Marriage Guidance' Program in Aceh and South Sumatera," *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 17, no. 1 (2022), p. 299–324.

⁴¹ Muhammad Zawil Kiram, "Gendered Division of Domestic Labour: Indonesian Muslim Men's Perceptions, Participation and Experiences in Housework and Childcare," *Journal of Gender Studies* 35, no. 1 (2026), p. 174–91.

egalitarian gender values compared to previous generations.⁴² These conditions illustrate that progressive Muslim families are part of a broader socio-religious transformation, in which Islamic discourse is continuously reinterpreted to integrate spiritual commitments with contextual principles of justice, equality, and reciprocity.

Dynamics of Husband and Wife Relationships from the Perspective of Relational Androgyny

This study finds that marital relationships in progressive Muslim families demonstrate a significant shift from a formalistic paradigm of gender equality toward a relational androgynous model, characterized by reciprocity, role flexibility, and an ethical commitment to constructing a just and participatory household. This transformation is not merely normative, but is empirically reflected in the lived experiences of all informants, and is further reinforced through both reflective and theological reasoning, particularly by informants 2 and 3.

Informant 1, a husband from a Muslim family in Surakarta, Central Java, described daily practices that illustrate active male involvement in domestic labor, such as shared cooking and household responsibilities. He emphasized that tasks are performed based on capability rather than gender assignment, indicating a departure from rigid role divisions. Furthermore, he described a transparent and participatory model of financial management, stating that major and minor financial responsibilities are divided, yet fully accessible to both partners through shared information systems such as mobile banking.⁴³ This practice reflects a non-hierarchical distribution of authority, aligning with feminist perspectives that emphasize negotiation, transparency, and shared agency within the household.

Meanwhile, Informant 2, a religious figure and women's rights activist, emphasizes the normative and theological foundation of an egalitarian marital relationship. He argues that equality and justice are the central principles governing husband–wife relations, not only in social roles but also in spiritual and moral status before God.⁴⁴ This perspective reflects a reinterpretation of Islamic teachings that situates gender equality within the framework of ethical piety (taqwa), rather than merely functional role distribution, thereby aligning with contemporary Islamic feminist thought.

Informant 2 further critiques traditional textual interpretations that have historically legitimized women's subordination, arguing that such readings are contextually biased and no longer relevant. He asserts that men and women are

⁴² K U Ng, "Are Muslim Immigrants Assimilating? Cultural Assimilation Trajectories in Immigrants' Attitudes toward Gender Roles in Europe," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 15 (2022), p. 3641–67; S A Shaikh, "Women in OIC Countries: State of Participation, Freedom and Supportive Legislation," in *Economic Empowerment of Women in the Islamic World: Theory and Practice*, 2020, p. 509–21.

⁴³ Interview with Hasan Ubed, husband from a Muslim family in Surakarta, Central Java June, 2024.

⁴⁴ Interview with Nahe'i, a religious figure and women's rights activist, July, 2024.

fundamentally equal in their humanity, thereby rejecting literalist and patriarchal interpretations of religious texts.⁴⁵ This position reflects a sociology of law perspective, where religious norms are reinterpreted through contemporary social realities to promote substantive justice and equality.

Regarding the division of domestic and public roles, all informants emphasized that household responsibilities are not inherently gendered, but should be distributed based on principles of fairness and mutual agreement. Informant 2 supported this view by referring to Islamic narratives that illustrate shared parenting responsibilities, arguing that both men and women are equally capable of caregiving.⁴⁶ This interpretation challenges dominant gender norms by re-reading religious sources in a way that legitimizes shared domestic roles, reinforcing the concept of relational androgyny within an Islamic framework.

From the narrative of the informants, it can be concluded that the practice of relational androgyny in progressive Muslim families is not only practical and adaptive, as in the lives of all informants. Husband–wife relationships are no longer understood as a rigid division of labour, as a dialogical and reflective arena where the values of justice, humanity, and reciprocity are the main foundations.

Factors Driving and Inhibiting Relational Androgynous Relationships in Progressive Muslim Families

The findings indicate that the emergence of relational androgynous relationships in progressive Muslim families is shaped by complex interactions between social transformation, spiritual reflection, and cultural negotiation, rather than occurring in isolation.

The main driving factors include: first, rapid socio-cultural transformation, which encourages a shift away from rigid and binary gender roles toward more adaptive relational patterns. Second, relative autonomy from extended family structures, allowing couples to independently negotiate household roles and values. All informants said living away from extended family made them free to choose relationship patterns, as affirmed by informant 3: *"We live far from extended family; this position makes us more independent in choosing how to manage the household"*.⁴⁷ Third, higher levels of education and reflective spiritual awareness, which enable couples to reinterpret religious teachings in a more egalitarian manner. Informant 2 said: *"When all these (religious) opinions are carried out, the burden on the wife is huge. The benefits in the family are based on the facilitation of all the needs of family members in proportion and the implementation of all responsibilities equally"*.⁴⁸ These findings demonstrate that relational androgyny is closely linked to processes of modernization, individual agency, and critical engagement with religious knowledge.

⁴⁵ Interview with Nahe'i, a religious figure and women's rights activist, July, 2024.

⁴⁶ Interview with Nahe'i, a religious figure and women's rights activist, July, 2024.

⁴⁷ Interview with Nurun, Principal in Ponorogo, East Java, June 2024.

⁴⁸ Interview with Nahe'i, a religious figure and women's rights activist, July, 2024.

However, significant barriers remain. First, the internalization of patriarchal cultural norms, which manifest through social stigma toward men participating in domestic work and persistent expectations of traditional gender roles. Informant 1 shared his experience of receiving negative comments from his family; “why does husband dry his own clothes?”.⁴⁹ Second, dominant conservative religious interpretations, which continue to legitimize gender hierarchy within the household. Third, gender-biased socio-political structures, including legal frameworks and institutional practices that have not fully accommodated egalitarian values. These findings illustrate that the realization of relational androgyny is constrained by both cultural hegemony and structural limitations, as emphasized in feminist and sociology of law perspectives.

Overall, the findings affirm that progressive Muslim families are capable of constructing relational androgynous patterns through the interplay of social openness, educational exposure, and reflective religiosity. However, these practices remain contested and require broader structural transformation, including legal reform, cultural change, and the continued reinterpretation of Islamic teachings toward gender justice, to be sustainably realized.

Integration of Relational Androgynous Values Through Family Education and Islamic Discourse

The implementation of relational androgynous relationships in progressive Muslim families does not occur merely as a spontaneous social practice, but is systematically shaped through educational processes within the family as well as through broader social and religious institutions. All informants emphasized that equality-based family education, parental role modeling, and the reconstruction of gender-equitable Islamic discourse are central to developing a contextual and just household. This finding highlights the importance of integrating micro-level practices (family) with macro-level structures (education systems and religious institutions), as emphasized in feminist and sociology of law perspectives.

Family Education as an Initial Foundation

All informants emphasized the importance of responsibility-based and non-gendered education from early childhood, where children are trained to develop independence regardless of gender. Practices such as managing personal tasks, including cleaning, organizing, and preparing daily needs, are deliberately applied to avoid gender-based dependency.⁵⁰ From a sociological perspective, this early socialization process plays a crucial role in constructing egalitarian gender consciousness, which becomes the foundation of relational androgyny. This is

⁴⁹ Interview with Hasan Ubed, husband from a Muslim family in Surakarta, Central Java.

⁵⁰ Interview with Nahe'i, a religious figure and women's rights activist; Interview with Hasan Ubed, husband from a Muslim family in Surakarta, Central Java; Interview with Nurun, Principal in Ponorogo, East Java.

further reinforced by the visible practice of flexible role-sharing between parents, which serves as a lived model of non-hierarchical gender relations.

Role Models of Parents, Especially Men

The informants agreed that transformative change within the household requires consistent and visible role modelling, particularly from men. When men actively engage in domestic labour and childcare, such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving, they challenge entrenched gender norms and redefine masculinity within the family context.⁵¹ From a feminist perspective, this practice functions not only as practical involvement but also as a symbolic act that disrupts patriarchal assumptions about domestic work being exclusively feminine, thereby contributing to the normalization of egalitarian roles.

The Role of Religious Institutions and Curricula

One of the primary challenges in integrating relational androgynous values lies in the limited incorporation of gender equality perspectives within formal education systems and religious institutions. Informants emphasized the need for curriculum reform, teacher reorientation, and parental education programs that promote egalitarian values.⁵² From a sociology of law perspective, this reflects the need to transform not only legal norms but also epistemological foundations of religious knowledge, so that Islamic teachings are interpreted in ways that promote justice and reciprocity. In this context, religious discourse should function as a transformative and emancipatory framework, rather than reinforcing existing structural inequalities.

The findings suggest that the integration of relational androgynous values in progressive Muslim households is shaped by three interrelated dimensions. First, non-discriminatory family education based on responsibility and equality plays a foundational role in cultivating gender awareness from an early age. In such environments, children are not socialized into rigid gender roles, but are encouraged to develop shared responsibility and mutual cooperation, thereby facilitating the internalization of relational androgynous values. Second, parental role modelling, particularly by men, serves as a critical mechanism of value transmission. When men actively participate in domestic responsibilities and childcare, they not only dismantle gender stereotypes but also provide tangible and experiential learning for children, reinforcing the principles of justice and equality in everyday life. This experiential dimension makes such practices more impactful than purely normative or discursive approaches. Third, the transformation of Islamic values through educational curricula and religious discourse is essential for constructing a just and

⁵¹ Interview with Nahe'i, a religious figure and women's rights activist; Interview with Hasan Ubed, husband from a Muslim family in Surakarta, Central Java; Interview with Nurun, Principal in Ponorogo, East Java.

⁵² Interview with Nahe'i, a religious figure and women's rights activist; Interview with Hasan Ubed, husband from a Muslim family in Surakarta, Central Java.

context-responsive household. The incorporation of gender justice perspectives within teaching methods strengthens the ideological and spiritual foundations of progressive Muslim families. Here, religion is reinterpreted not as a restrictive system, but as a source of ethical guidance that promotes liberation, reciprocity, and social justice.

These three factors do not emerge in a neutral social context, but require continuous awareness, commitment, and structural support from both individuals and institutions. Therefore, the integration of relational androgynous values must be sustained through holistic educational strategies that combine formal instruction, lived practice, and contextual adaptation, in line with the evolving realities of contemporary Muslim societies.

Gender Relations: From Equality to Relational Androgyny

The findings of this study confirm that relational androgynous relationships in progressive Muslim families in Indonesia are not only a response to the dynamics of modern life but also the result of transformative theological, cultural, and social praxis. This concept shows that gender relations do not need to be dichotomous (masculine vs feminine), but can be interactive, flexible, and complementary, as voiced in *the gender fluidity* and *relational sociology approaches* ⁵³.

In contrast to conventional gender equality approaches, which primarily emphasize formal equality in rights and obligations,⁵⁴ relational androgyny offers a more dynamic and process-oriented framework. It conceptualizes gender roles as fluid, negotiated, and context-dependent, shaped by family needs and individual capacities.⁵⁵ Empirical findings from this study show that such values are manifested in flexible role-sharing, participatory decision-making, and non-gendered childcare practices, reflecting a shift from normative equality to lived, relational justice.⁵⁶

This practice aligns with intersectionality theory, which highlights that gender relations are shaped by intersecting factors such as class, education, cultural context, and religious interpretation.⁵⁷ From a sociology of law perspective, these factors also reflect how normative frameworks and social structures interact in

⁵³ Vandenberghe, "The Relation as Magical Operator. Overcoming the Divide between Relational and Processual Sociology"; Joel et al., "Queering Gender: Studying Gender Identity in 'Normative' Individuals."

⁵⁴ Martínez García and Suberviola Ovejas, "Revisión Bibliográfica Sistémica de Las Principales Dimensiones de La Igualdad de Género Desde Una Óptica Coeducativa."

⁵⁵ William J Scarborough and Barbara J Risman, "Changes in the Gender Structure: Inequality at the Individual, Interactional, and Macro Dimensions," *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 10 (2017), p. 58–90.

⁵⁶ Sri Astuti A. Samad, "Kajian Hukum Keluarga Islam Dalam Perspektif Sosiologis Di Indonesia," *El-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 4, no. 1 (2021), p. 138.

⁵⁷ Machado and de Negreiros, "Intersectionality Theory and Contemporary Feminism: A Critical Analysis of Women's Complex Experiences."

shaping family practices.⁵⁸ Consequently, progressive Muslim families exhibit diverse relational configurations, ranging from modern egalitarian arrangements to more transformative models where women actively assume leadership roles, including in spiritual and decision-making domains.⁵⁹

Driving Factors and Obstacles

The formation of relational androgynous relationships is driven by several key factors, including the rise of ethical-spiritual awareness regarding gender justice,⁶⁰ access to egalitarian pre-marital education, and increased participation of women in public and economic spheres.⁶¹ Urbanization and higher educational attainment further facilitate these transformations, as evidenced in contemporary studies showing that urban Muslim communities tend to adopt more flexible gender norms.⁶²

However, structural and cultural barriers remain significant. The internalization of patriarchal values, often reinforced through conservative religious interpretations and socio-cultural expectations, continues to reproduce male dominance in household decision-making. Empirical data from interviews indicate that women frequently engage in strategic negotiation of their roles, balancing domestic and public responsibilities under persistent patriarchal pressures from extended family and community structures.⁶³ This finding is consistent with previous scholarship⁶⁴ indicating that a persistent gap exists between normative discourse on gender equality and its practical implementation, largely due to cultural resistance and weak institutional support.⁶⁵ From a sociology of law perspective, this reflects

⁵⁸Worthington, "Progressive Islam and Women 's Religious Leadership: Analysing the Emergence of New Models of Shared Authority."

⁵⁹ Zulfida Syarifah et al., "Trends In Modern Women's Relations In Social Problems: Islamic Law in Tafsir Al-Qurtubi," *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum Dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 25, no. 2 (2025), p. 218–32; Shamila Dawood, "Islamic Law and Gender Equality: Challenges and Reforms in Sri Lanka's Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act," *Journal of Islamic Law* 5, no. 2 (2024), p. 288–305.

⁶⁰ Yusdani, "Building Civilised Family Relations: Towards a New Discourse of Family Fiqh in the Millennial Era."

⁶¹Shaikh, "Women in OIC Countries: State of Participation, Freedom and Supportive Legislation."

⁶² Burkova S.A., "Student Engagement in the Educational Process at University," *Ogarev-online* 13, no. 3 (2025), p. 248–59.

⁶³ Minh Hoang Dang, "The Impact of New-Generation FTAs on Gender Equality in Vietnam: A Legal Approach to Implementing the ILO Convention No. 111," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2024), p. 1–16; Mir-Hosseini and Moe, "Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law Justice and Ethics in the Islamic Legal Tradition."

⁶⁴Ala-Uddin, "The Paradox in Discourse and Praxis of Gender Equality: A Communicative Framework for Sustainable Development."

⁶⁵ Mohd Norhusairi Mat Hussin et al., "Local Wisdom and Gender Equality in Joint Property Division: An Islamic Legal Perspective from Malaysia," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah* 17, no. 2 (2025), p. 394–416; Doni Azhari and Syihabuddin Qalyubi, "The Rights of Sasak Noble Muslim Women in Choosing A Mate: An Analysis of the Marriage of Noble Women With Jajar Karang Men From the Perspective of Islamic Law," *Al-Adalah* 20, no. 2 (2023), p. 381–404.

the disjunction between formal norms and lived realities, where progressive values are not fully institutionalized within legal, educational, and religious systems.

Transformation Through Islamic Education and Discourse

One of the most significant strategies identified in this study is the development of education grounded in relational androgynous values. Such education goes beyond theoretical instruction by internalizing reciprocity, mutual responsibility, and gender justice within everyday family practices. This aligns with coeducational and transformative learning approaches, which emphasize the early formation of egalitarian gender consciousness.⁶⁶

In addition, the transformation of Islamic discourse plays a crucial catalytic role. The reconstruction of family fiqh based on *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law) emphasizes justice, welfare, and human dignity.⁶⁷ Strategic initiatives, such as gender-sensitive Qur'anic interpretation, the inclusion of women scholars, and gender training in Islamic educational institutions,⁶⁸ represent important steps toward institutionalizing gender justice within Muslim family life.⁶⁹

This transformation requires multi-level and multi-actor support, including the state, educational institutions, and religious authorities.⁷⁰ A collaborative, cross-sectoral approach is essential to ensure that value transformation is not limited to individual families but becomes structurally embedded within society.

This study offers a distinct and contextually grounded contribution to existing scholarship in several key aspects:

First, it introduces the concept of relational androgyny within the context of Indonesian Muslim families, moving beyond dominant frameworks of gender equality and feminist legal theory⁷¹ that focus primarily on role distribution. This study conceptualizes relational androgyny as a post-dualistic framework, emphasizing fluid, dynamic, and context-sensitive relationships.

⁶⁶ Martínez García and Suberviola Ovejas, "Revisión Bibliográfica Sistémica de Las Principales Dimensiones de La Igualdad de Género Desde Una Óptica Coeducativa."

⁶⁷ Bratton, "Shari'a Law and Modern Muslim Ethics."

⁶⁸ Sri Astuti A. Samad et al., "Islamic Educational Approaches To Stunting Prevention And Child Protection," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 2 (2024), p. 163–74.

⁶⁹ Mursyid Djawas and Sri Astuti Abdul Samad, "Conflict, Traditional, and Family Resistance: The Pattern of Dispute Resolution in Acehnese Community According to Islamic Law," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 4, no. 1 (2020), p. 65; Sri Astuti A. Samad et al., "Teacher's Spiritual Competence and Its Implication in Islamic Religious Education Learning in Pidie, Aceh," *Ulumuna* 27, no. 2 (2023), p. 624–48.

⁷⁰ Gartzia, "Gender Equality in Business Action: A Multi-agent Change Management Approach"; Mujiburrahman Mujiburrahman, "State and Religion in Aceh: The Competences of Religious Education Teachers (Referring to ACT 14, 2005)," *Al-Albab* 8, no. 1 (2019), p. 83.

⁷¹ Minh Hoang Dang, "Applying Feminist Legal Principles to Achieve Gender Equality in Vietnam's Labor Legislation," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2024), p. 1–14; Bratton, "Shari'a Law and Modern Muslim Ethics."

Second, it provides empirical evidence based on in-depth qualitative data, highlighting lived practices of progressive Muslim families. Findings such as shared childcare responsibilities, women's active roles in economic decision-making, and negotiated role flexibility offer concrete contributions to contemporary studies on Muslim gender relations.

Third, it integrates family education and Islamic discourse as complementary strategies for transformation. Unlike previous studies⁷² that focus primarily on legal or theological reform, this research highlights the practical role of parental modeling, value-based family education, and men's involvement as agents of change in realizing gender-just households

Fourth, the use of thematic analysis enables a nuanced understanding of lived experiences, allowing the identification of complex narrative patterns related to the transition from equality to relational androgyny. This methodological approach strengthens the analytical depth by capturing the intersection of social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions.

Thus, this article not only contributes to the discourse on gender equality in Islam, but also offers a practice-based and contextually grounded model of Muslim family relations, which is normatively just, functionally adaptive, and responsive to the socio-cultural dynamics of contemporary Indonesian Muslim society.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that husband–wife relationships in progressive Muslim families in Indonesia are undergoing a significant transformation from a paradigm of formal gender equality toward relational androgyny, characterized by flexible, negotiated, and reciprocal role-sharing in parenting, decision-making, and economic responsibilities. This shift is grounded in the lived experiences of couples who reinterpret Islamic values in a contextual and practice-oriented manner, moving beyond rigid binary constructions of gender roles. These findings further reveal that the successful integration of relational androgynous values is driven by multiple interrelated factors, including socio-cultural transformation in urban and educated contexts, relative autonomy from traditional structural pressures, and openness to egalitarian religious interpretations. In addition, dialogical communication between spouses, parental role modeling, and supportive educational environments play a crucial role in reinforcing these practices in everyday family life. Nevertheless, the study also identifies significant structural and cultural barriers, including the persistent internalization of patriarchal norms, conservative interpretations of religious teachings that reinforce gender hierarchy, and gender-biased socio-political structures. The limited incorporation of gender justice perspectives within formal religious education further constrains the broader institutionalization of egalitarian

⁷² Yusdani, "Building Civilised Family Relations: Towards a New Discourse of Family Fiqh in the Millennial Era"; Worthington, "Progressive Islam and Women's Religious Leadership: Analysing the Emergence of New Models of Shared Authority."

family models. Importantly, relational androgyny emerges not in isolation, but through processes of critical reflection and everyday practice, where individuals reinterpret religious teachings in light of contemporary realities. These values are internalized through both formal and informal educational processes, particularly through lived examples within the family, especially the active involvement of men in domestic and caregiving roles, which function as powerful mechanisms for transmitting egalitarian norms across generations. This study contributes to existing scholarship by moving beyond legal-formal and normative approaches to gender equality in Islam, offering instead a relational and practice-based perspective. It demonstrates that the most meaningful transformations occur at the level of everyday praxis within family life, where Islamic values are enacted through participatory, context-sensitive interactions rather than solely through textual reinterpretation. Therefore, this research not only enriches the field of Islamic gender and family studies but also highlights the strategic importance of integrating relational androgynous values through family education, progressive Islamic discourse, and structural support. Such integration is essential for fostering Muslim family models that are just, adaptive, and responsive to contemporary social realities, while simultaneously challenging entrenched patriarchal norms.

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Interviews

- Interview with Hasan Ubed, husband from a Muslim family in Surakarta, Central Java, June 2024.
- Interview with Nahe’i, a religious figure and women’s rights activist, July, 2024.
- Interview with Nurun, Principal in Ponorogo, East Java, June, 2024.