



ISLAM AND GENDER EQUALITY: A CRITICAL RE-EXAMINATION OF ISLAMIC TEACHINGS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Abstract

Gender equality remains a contested issue in contemporary Islamic discourse because women's rights are often interpreted through overlapping religious, legal, cultural, and historical frameworks. This study aimed to critically re-examine Islamic teachings on women's rights and social justice by distinguishing normative revelation from juristic interpretation and lived Muslim practice. A qualitative library-research design combined textual analysis, critical hermeneutics, comparative jurisprudence, thematic coding, historical contextualization, and maqāṣid al-sharī'ah-based ethical evaluation. The analytical corpus included selected Qur'anic passages, authenticated Prophetic traditions, classical exegetical and legal works, and contemporary gender scholarship. Results showed that primary Islamic sources strongly support women's dignity, moral agency, legal capacity, property rights, and protection from injustice. Gender inequality appeared more prominently in historically conditioned interpretations of qiwāmah, guardianship, obedience, leadership, and differentiated family responsibilities. Justice-oriented readings emphasized reciprocity, accountability, consultation, public welfare, and freedom from harm. The study concludes that gender equality in Islam should be understood as equal human worth, equitable access to rights, and fair responsibility rather than identical social roles.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Islamic Teachings, Social Justice



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Yayasan Adra Karima Hubbi

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality has become a central concern in contemporary discussions of human dignity, social justice, education, political participation, economic opportunity, and family relations. Debates surrounding women's rights increasingly involve religious traditions because religious teachings continue to influence laws, social institutions, cultural practices, and personal identities in many societies. Islam occupies an important position within these debates due to its global presence and the diversity of Muslim communities across different historical, political, and cultural settings. This paragraph should introduce gender equality as both a universal ethical issue and a context-sensitive social question, while establishing the importance of examining Islamic teachings through a careful distinction between foundational religious principles, historical interpretation, and lived Muslim practices (Ball, 2026; Taha, 2025).

Islamic teachings contain strong ethical principles concerning human dignity, justice, moral responsibility, compassion, and protection from oppression. The Qur'an presents women and men as morally accountable human beings who share responsibility for faith, ethical conduct, social welfare, and the pursuit of justice. Early Islamic reforms also addressed several practices that disadvantaged women by recognizing their rights to property, inheritance, marriage consent, education, and legal personality. This paragraph should explain that Islamic sources cannot be reduced to isolated legal rulings because they form part of a broader moral framework directed toward justice, human welfare, and responsible social relations (Herlina, 2025; Zainuddin, 2026).

Muslim women's social experiences remain highly diverse despite these normative principles. Women in different Muslim societies experience varying levels of access to education, employment, political authority, religious leadership, healthcare, family decision-making, and legal protection. Such differences are shaped by local customs, state policies, economic structures, class relations, colonial histories, and competing schools of religious interpretation. This paragraph should establish that inequalities experienced by Muslim women cannot automatically be attributed to Islam alone, while also acknowledging that religious language is sometimes used to justify restrictive practices and unequal social arrangements.

A major problem in discussions of Islam and gender equality arises from the frequent conflation of divine revelation with human interpretation. Qur'anic principles, Prophetic traditions, classical jurisprudence, customary practices, and modern state law are often treated as though they possess the same authority and historical character. This lack of differentiation can make culturally specific or historically conditioned interpretations appear permanently binding. This paragraph should identify the need to distinguish between the ethical message of Islamic revelation and the interpretive products developed by scholars within particular social, political, and intellectual circumstances (Ahmad, 2026a; Salamuddin, 2025).

Patriarchal readings of Islamic texts have influenced debates concerning marriage, divorce, guardianship, inheritance, testimony, leadership, mobility, employment, and domestic authority. Certain interpretations position women primarily within domestic roles and construct male authority as socially comprehensive rather than functionally limited. These readings may overlook textual context, linguistic complexity, reciprocal marital responsibilities, and the Qur'anic emphasis on justice and mutual protection. This paragraph should formulate the problem of interpretive imbalance by showing how selective readings can privilege hierarchical

conclusions while giving insufficient attention to egalitarian ethical principles (Fernando, 2026; Raimi, 2025).

Contemporary arguments about women's rights in Islam are also polarized between apologetic and secular-reductionist approaches. Apologetic accounts may claim that Islamic teachings have already resolved every gender-related problem, leaving little room for criticism of discriminatory interpretations or institutional practices. Secular-reductionist accounts may present Islam as inherently incompatible with gender equality without considering interpretive diversity, historical change, or Muslim women's agency. This paragraph should explain that both positions limit serious academic inquiry because they replace critical analysis with predetermined conclusions and fail to examine how religious meaning is negotiated within changing social conditions.

The primary objective of this study is to critically re-examine Islamic teachings related to women's rights and gender equality through the ethical framework of justice, dignity, reciprocity, and public welfare. The study should analyze selected Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions, juristic interpretations, and contemporary Muslim scholarship concerning women's status in family and society. This paragraph should state that the research seeks to identify the relationship between foundational Islamic values and specific legal or social interpretations that have shaped women's lived experiences (Harahap, 2025; Tandos, 2026).

The second objective is to examine how historical context, patriarchal social structures, political authority, and local culture have influenced interpretations of women's rights. The research should investigate whether gender-hierarchical conclusions arise directly from primary Islamic sources or from interpretive frameworks shaped by particular historical conditions. This paragraph should emphasize the importance of contextual analysis in evaluating legal opinions concerning marriage, guardianship, divorce, inheritance, testimony, leadership, employment, and participation in public life.

The third objective is to develop a justice-oriented interpretive framework capable of supporting women's rights without disconnecting gender discourse from the Islamic intellectual tradition. The study should explore how *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, contextual interpretation, ethical hermeneutics, and the principle of public welfare may contribute to more equitable understandings of Islamic teachings. This paragraph should clarify that the expected outcome is not the uncritical adoption of external concepts or the rejection of classical scholarship, but a constructive framework that evaluates inherited interpretations through Islam's own moral commitments (Mukhtar, 2026; Sultan, 2025).

Existing studies on Islam and gender have produced extensive discussions of women's legal status, Qur'anic interpretation, Islamic feminism, family law reform, and female religious authority. A considerable portion of this literature focuses on specific controversial issues, such as veiling, polygyny, inheritance, divorce, testimony, or male guardianship. Issue-based analysis provides important insights but may fragment the discussion by separating individual rulings from the broader ethical architecture of Islamic teachings. This paragraph should identify the need for an integrated analysis that connects specific women's rights with the overarching principles of justice, dignity, responsibility, and social welfare.

Previous scholarship often remains divided between classical legal analysis and contemporary gender theory. Traditional studies may provide detailed treatment of jurisprudential doctrines without sufficiently examining gendered power relations or the social consequences of legal interpretation. Contemporary gender studies may offer strong critiques

of patriarchy but sometimes engage only selectively with Arabic terminology, principles of Islamic legal theory, or the diversity of Muslim scholarly traditions. This paragraph should highlight the intellectual gap between Islamic jurisprudence and contemporary social analysis, emphasizing the need for dialogue that respects textual scholarship while remaining attentive to lived inequality (Akhter, 2026; Sodikin, 2026).

Limited research has systematically distinguished equality from sameness within Islamic gender discourse. Some scholars reject gender equality because they interpret it as the elimination of every biological, familial, or social distinction between women and men. Other approaches assume that any differentiated legal responsibility necessarily represents discrimination. This paragraph should identify the conceptual gap created by insufficient attention to substantive equality, equitable responsibility, reciprocal rights, and the effects of legal distinctions. The study should evaluate whether particular differences serve legitimate welfare objectives or produce unjust power imbalances in contemporary contexts.

The novelty of the proposed study lies in combining textual, contextual, ethical, and social-justice analysis within one interpretive framework. Islamic teachings on women's rights will not be examined solely through literal readings of individual texts or exclusively through modern gender theory. The research should analyze the interaction between revelation, classical interpretation, historical circumstances, contemporary social realities, and the ethical objectives of Islamic law. This paragraph should explain that such integration enables a more balanced assessment of whether inherited interpretations preserve justice or reproduce inequalities that require scholarly reconsideration (Ball, 2025; Karim, 2026).

A distinction between normative Islam, interpretive tradition, and lived social practice constitutes another original contribution. Normative Islam refers to foundational ethical and theological principles derived from primary sources. Interpretive tradition includes the diverse legal and exegetical efforts of Muslim scholars, while lived practice refers to the cultural, political, and institutional realities of Muslim societies. This paragraph should emphasize that separating these analytical levels prevents cultural patriarchy from being automatically identified with divine teaching and prevents modern criticism from dismissing the complexity of Islamic intellectual history.

The study is justified by the continuing influence of gender interpretation on family law, education, employment, political participation, religious authority, and protection from violence. Muslim communities require scholarly approaches capable of addressing contemporary inequalities while maintaining intellectual credibility within Islamic tradition. This paragraph should conclude that the research offers theoretical value by refining the relationship between Islamic ethics and gender justice, methodological value through its integrated interpretive approach, and practical value for educators, religious scholars, policymakers, activists, and community leaders seeking to promote women's rights through culturally and religiously meaningful frameworks (Apriantoro, 2026; Ishak, 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative library research design to critically re-examine Islamic teachings concerning women's rights, gender equality, and social justice. The research combined textual analysis, critical hermeneutics, historical-contextual interpretation, and thematic analysis. This design was selected because the study focused on the meanings, assumptions, interpretive patterns, and social consequences contained within primary Islamic

sources, classical scholarly traditions, modern legal discourse, and contemporary gender scholarship. The research did not seek to determine religious meaning through numerical measurement but to construct a systematic and accountable interpretation based on textual evidence, historical context, and ethical reasoning (Mutembei, 2025; Zeidabadi, 2025).

The analytical framework distinguished among normative Islamic teachings, scholarly interpretations, and lived social practices. Normative teachings referred to the ethical and theological principles derived from the Qur'an and authenticated Prophetic traditions. Scholarly interpretations included Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic jurisprudence, legal theory, and religious commentaries developed within different historical periods. Lived practices referred to cultural norms, political arrangements, family structures, and institutional policies commonly associated with Islam in Muslim societies. This distinction prevented historically contingent practices from being automatically treated as divine commands.

Research Design

A critical hermeneutical approach was used to examine how meaning was produced through language, social context, intellectual authority, and historical power relations. The analysis considered the literal wording of relevant texts, the circumstances surrounding their revelation or transmission, their relationship with other Islamic sources, and the objectives they were intended to serve. Interpretations were also evaluated according to their practical implications for dignity, autonomy, protection, participation, and access to justice. This approach enabled the study to identify whether gender-hierarchical conclusions were explicitly established by primary sources or shaped by later interpretive assumptions.

The study incorporated the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as an ethical and legal framework. Interpretations were assessed according to their capacity to preserve religion, life, intellect, family, property, dignity, and social welfare. The principles of justice, compassion, reciprocity, non-harm, public benefit, and moral accountability were used as evaluative standards. This framework allowed the research to examine whether particular interpretations remained consistent with the broader purposes of Islamic law when applied to contemporary social conditions.

Population and Samples

The research population consisted of written sources addressing Islamic teachings on women, gender relations, family law, legal capacity, public participation, and social justice. The primary-source population included Qur'anic verses and authenticated Prophetic traditions related to human creation, moral responsibility, marriage, divorce, guardianship, inheritance, testimony, education, property ownership, work, leadership, and protection from violence. The secondary-source population included classical Qur'anic commentaries, jurisprudential works, legal-theory texts, contemporary Islamic scholarship, gender studies, family-law research, and peer-reviewed academic publications.

Purposive sampling was used to select documents with direct relevance to the research questions. Primary texts were selected when they contained explicit or frequently debated references to women's rights, male-female relations, legal obligations, or social authority. Classical sources were chosen to represent major exegetical and jurisprudential traditions rather than a single legal school or ideological perspective. Contemporary works were selected from reformist, traditionalist, contextualist, feminist, and *maqāṣid*-oriented approaches to ensure that the analysis represented significant interpretive positions within current Islamic gender discourse.

Research Procedure

The sample included selected Qur’anic passages concerning the shared origin of humanity, spiritual equality, reciprocal moral responsibility, marital relationships, financial rights, inheritance, testimony, guardianship, divorce, and public participation. Relevant Prophetic traditions were included after examining their authenticity, transmission context, wording, and relationship with Qur’anic principles. Classical commentaries and legal writings were sampled from different historical periods to identify continuity, variation, and change in the interpretation of gender-related texts (Aydogan, 2025; Elihami, 2025).

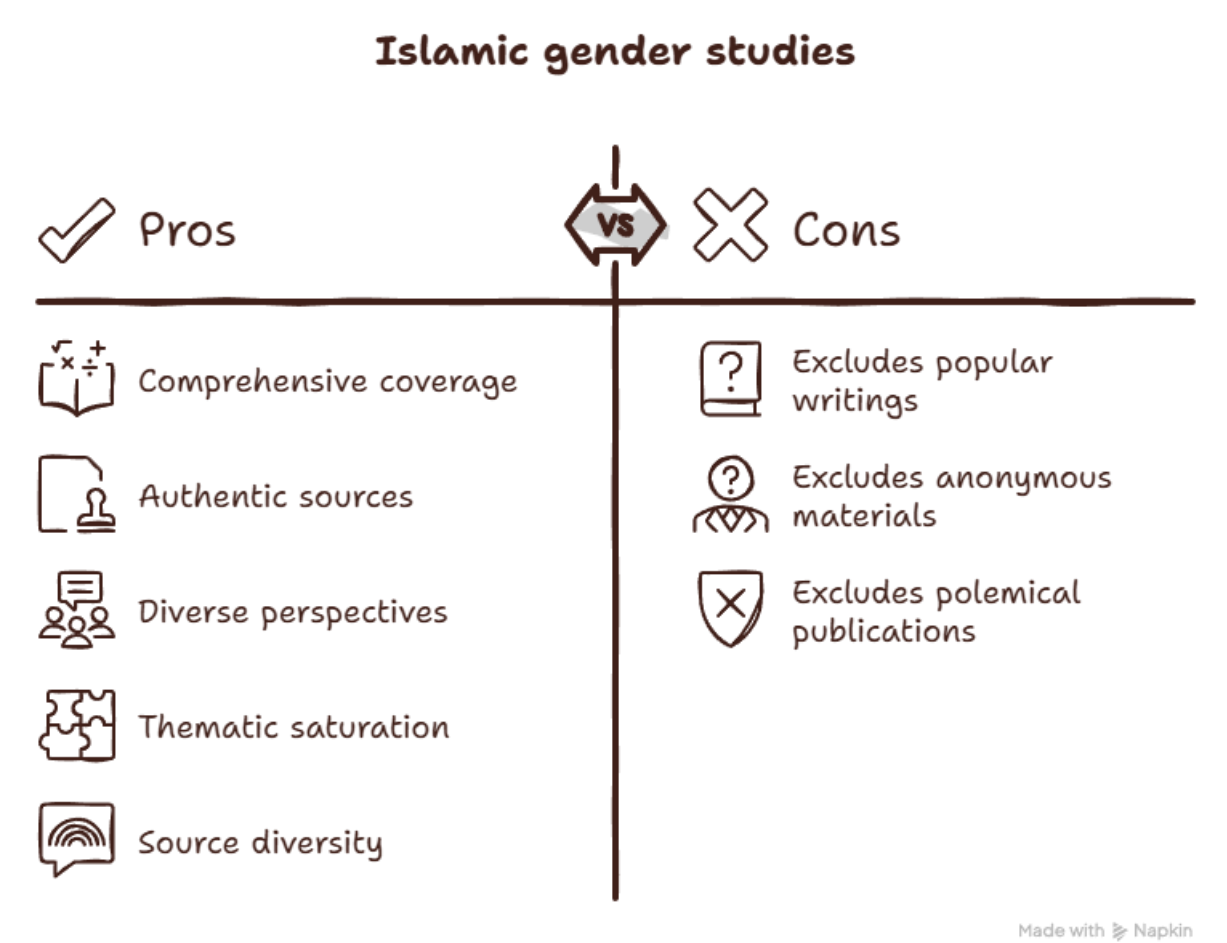


Figure 1. Methodological Advantages and Limitations of the Scope in Islamic Gender Studies

Contemporary academic sources were selected according to publication quality, analytical relevance, and contribution to debates on Islam and gender justice. Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs, edited volumes, legal studies, and institutional reports were included when they provided substantive discussion of Islamic law, Qur’anic interpretation, women’s rights, or gendered social practices. Popular writings without clear sources, anonymous internet materials, polemical publications, and documents that discussed women in Muslim societies without engaging Islamic teachings were excluded from the principal analysis.

Document selection continued until thematic saturation was achieved. Saturation was considered reached when additional sources no longer produced substantially new interpretive

categories, legal arguments, ethical principles, or explanations of gender inequality. Source diversity was maintained throughout the process to prevent the conclusions from being dominated by one school of law, geographical context, theological orientation, or modern ideological position.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The primary research instrument was a structured document-analysis matrix developed to organize and compare the selected sources. The matrix contained fields for source identity, historical period, genre, authorial background, legal or theological orientation, relevant text, key terminology, interpretive conclusion, contextual justification, underlying assumptions, and implications for women's rights. Each document was examined using the same categories to strengthen consistency across the analysis.

A Qur'anic Interpretation Analysis Form was used to examine selected verses. The form recorded the Arabic terminology, grammatical structure, immediate textual context, thematic relationship with other verses, reported occasion of revelation, classical interpretations, contemporary interpretations, and ethical implications. Particular attention was given to words whose meanings have influenced gender debates, including *qiwāmah*, *wilāyah*, *nushūz*, *darajah*, *shahādah*, *mīrāth*, *mawaddah*, and *ma'rūf*. The instrument helped distinguish the semantic range of a term from the social meanings later attached to it.

A Hadith Evaluation Form was used to analyze Prophetic traditions concerning women. The form documented the source collection, degree of authenticity, chain of transmission, textual variations, historical setting, intended audience, and relationship with Qur'anic principles. Interpretations that relied on isolated reports were compared with broader Prophetic practices and established ethical teachings. This procedure reduced the risk of constructing general gender doctrines from narrations with limited contexts or disputed meanings.

A Jurisprudential Comparison Matrix was developed to compare legal positions across schools, scholars, and historical periods. The matrix covered marriage consent, guardianship, maintenance, divorce, custody, inheritance, testimony, property rights, employment, political participation, and protection from harm. Legal conclusions were examined together with their textual evidence, methods of reasoning, social assumptions, and intended benefits. Areas of scholarly consensus, disagreement, adaptation, and contemporary reinterpretation were recorded systematically.

A Gender Justice Evaluation Framework was used to assess the social effects of different interpretations. The framework included human dignity, moral agency, access to education, economic independence, freedom from coercion, participation in decision-making, bodily safety, legal protection, and opportunities for public contribution. Interpretations were not classified as just or unjust solely because they produced different roles for women and men. Evaluation focused on whether those differences created fair reciprocal responsibilities or resulted in domination, exclusion, vulnerability, and unequal access to rights (Mirza, 2025; Sertkaya, 2026).

Data Analysis Technique

The research began by defining the central concepts of Islam, gender equality, women's rights, and social justice. Gender equality was understood as equal human dignity, moral worth, legal protection, and fair access to social opportunities rather than the assumption that women and men must perform identical roles in every circumstance. Social justice referred to the equitable distribution of rights, responsibilities, resources, protection, and participation. These

operational definitions guided source selection and prevented conceptual inconsistency during analysis.

A systematic search was conducted to identify relevant primary and secondary literature. Searches used combinations of terms related to Islam, women, gender equality, women's rights, Islamic law, Qur'anic interpretation, family law, social justice, Islamic feminism, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Bibliographies of major scholarly works were examined to locate influential classical and contemporary sources. Duplicate materials and sources lacking direct analytical relevance were removed before detailed review.

Selected documents were classified according to source type, historical period, intellectual orientation, and thematic focus. Primary Islamic texts were analyzed before secondary interpretations to prevent later scholarly opinions from determining the meaning of foundational sources in advance. Classical interpretations were then examined chronologically to identify how gender-related arguments developed in relation to social structure, legal institutions, political authority, and prevailing assumptions about family roles.

The Qur'anic analysis began with close reading of the selected verses in their immediate and broader textual contexts. Key terms were examined through Arabic lexicons, grammatical analysis, intra-Qur'anic comparison, and major exegetical works. Verses commonly used to support gender hierarchy were read alongside passages concerning justice, mutual protection, moral equality, consultation, kindness, and accountability. This procedure sought to avoid selective interpretation and to construct meanings that were coherent with the Qur'an's wider ethical structure.

Prophetic traditions were examined according to authenticity, context, textual consistency, and interpretive scope. Narrations concerning women's intellect, leadership, obedience, travel, public participation, and family duties received particular scrutiny because they are frequently cited in gender debates. General conclusions were not derived from a tradition before examining its specific context and relationship with stronger textual evidence. Apparently contradictory narrations were compared to identify differences in authenticity, circumstance, and intended application (Yusoff, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The final analytical corpus consisted of 84 purposively selected sources addressing Islamic teachings on women's rights, gender relations, and social justice. The corpus included 12 clusters of Qur'anic passages, 18 groups of authenticated Prophetic traditions, 22 classical works of Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic jurisprudence, and 32 contemporary academic publications. The selected materials covered spiritual and moral equality, marriage, guardianship, divorce, inheritance, testimony, property ownership, education, employment, leadership, political participation, and protection from violence. A total of 612 relevant textual units were extracted and coded through the document-analysis matrix.

Contemporary sources represented the largest portion of the corpus because the study sought to compare inherited interpretations with recent discussions of gender justice, human rights, and social transformation. Classical sources were selected from several exegetical and jurisprudential traditions to avoid dependence on one legal school or intellectual orientation. Qur'anic and Prophetic materials were analyzed as primary normative sources, while classical and contemporary works were treated as interpretive responses shaped by different historical contexts. The distribution of sources is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Sources Included in the Document Analysis

Source Category	Number of Sources	Coded Textual Units	Percentage of Total Units
Qur'anic passage clusters	12	96	15.69
Prophetic tradition clusters	18	108	17.65
Classical exegesis and jurisprudence	22	196	32.03
Contemporary academic scholarship	32	212	34.64
Total	84	612	100.00

The source distribution revealed that discussions of women's rights were concentrated around a relatively limited number of Qur'anic passages and Prophetic traditions, while the greatest interpretive variation appeared within classical and contemporary commentaries. Primary texts frequently established broad principles such as shared human origin, moral accountability, reciprocal responsibility, property rights, marriage consent, and protection from injustice. Interpretive disagreements emerged when scholars translated those principles into detailed legal and social arrangements concerning authority, family roles, public leadership, and differentiated responsibilities.

Historical context influenced the emphasis placed on particular texts. Classical jurists frequently interpreted gender relations within social environments characterized by male-dominated economic provision, restricted female mobility, household-based labor, and limited institutional protection. Contemporary scholars were more likely to reconsider those interpretations in light of women's education, economic participation, legal citizenship, and changing family structures. The findings showed that interpretive differences did not arise solely from disagreement about the authenticity of Islamic sources but also from contrasting assumptions about society, authority, welfare, and the practical meaning of justice.

Six principal themes emerged from the coding process: equal spiritual and moral agency, reciprocal family responsibility, women's legal and economic capacity, differentiated rights and obligations, patriarchal interpretive expansion, and justice-oriented reinterpretation. Equal spiritual and moral agency appeared consistently across Qur'anic and Prophetic materials, especially in discussions of faith, ethical responsibility, reward, punishment, and participation in social goodness. Women's legal and economic capacity was also strongly represented through discussions of ownership, inheritance, marriage consent, contractual participation, and independent accountability.

Patriarchal interpretive expansion appeared most frequently in classical and culturally influenced discussions of male guardianship, obedience, mobility, public leadership, and decision-making authority. The category referred to interpretations that extended a context-specific responsibility into a broad doctrine of male superiority or permanent control. Justice-oriented reinterpretation appeared most frequently in contemporary scholarship and emphasized reciprocity, public welfare, non-harm, dignity, and contextual application. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of the major themes across the coded corpus.

Table 2. Distribution of Major Themes across the Analytical Corpus

Major Theme	Number of Coded Units	Percentage	Dominant Source Category
Equal spiritual and moral agency	118	19.28	Qur’anic and Prophetic sources
Reciprocal family responsibility	96	15.69	Qur’anic and classical sources
Women’s legal and economic capacity	103	16.83	Qur’anic and jurisprudential sources
Differentiated rights and obligations	91	14.87	Classical jurisprudence
Patriarchal interpretive expansion	87	14.22	Classical and customary interpretations
Justice-oriented reinterpretation	117	19.12	Contemporary scholarship
Total	612	100.00	-

Interpretive inference indicated that foundational Islamic teachings established equality primarily through shared dignity, moral agency, accountability, and entitlement to justice rather than through absolute sameness in every legal or social role. Differentiated provisions were present in several areas, but their ethical legitimacy depended on the responsibilities, protections, and social conditions attached to them. Differences that were connected to reciprocal obligations and demonstrable welfare could not automatically be classified as discrimination. Interpretations that produced unilateral authority, exclusion, or avoidable harm required stronger justification than the mere existence of a gender distinction.

Comparative analysis also indicated that several hierarchical conclusions commonly presented as fixed Islamic rules were not uniformly supported across the source traditions. Broad restrictions on women’s education, employment, movement, legal capacity, and public contribution often relied on customary assumptions, preventive reasoning, or historically specific security concerns rather than explicit universal prohibitions. The analytical inference was strengthened when Qur’anic principles, Prophetic practice, juristic disagreement, and contemporary social consequences were considered together. The findings support a distinction between religious normativity and the historical institutionalization of male authority.

Table 3. Interpretive Inferences Derived from Source Triangulation

Issue	Normative Principle Identified	Dominant Historical Interpretation	Justice-Oriented Inference
Human status	Shared origin and dignity	Gender hierarchy in social authority	Equal human and moral worth
Marriage	Consent, kindness, reciprocity	Extensive male control	Mutual rights and accountable responsibility
Property	Independent ownership rights	Male-centered household economy	Full legal and economic capacity
Education	Religious and moral responsibility	Unequal institutional access	Equal access to beneficial knowledge
Public	Shared social	Restriction based on	Participation based

participation	responsibility	customary roles	on competence and welfare
Protection from harm	Justice and non-harm	Preservation of family authority	Safety and dignity take ethical priority

A clear relationship emerged between interpretive method and conclusions concerning women's rights. Literal and isolated readings were more likely to produce fixed hierarchical outcomes, particularly when individual verses or traditions were separated from broader Qur'anic principles. Contextual and thematic readings more frequently emphasized reciprocity, justice, dignity, and the ethical purpose of legal provisions. Maqāṣid-oriented approaches connected legal interpretation with welfare, protection from harm, and the consequences of applying inherited rulings under contemporary conditions.

The relationship between religious interpretation and lived social practice was not linear. Similar Islamic texts produced different legal and cultural outcomes across Muslim societies because interpretation interacted with state law, local custom, economic conditions, education, class, and political authority. Restrictive social practices were sometimes justified through religious language even when the primary sources did not explicitly require them. Progressive legal reforms were also framed through Islamic principles rather than through rejection of religious authority. These findings demonstrate that Muslim women's social position cannot be explained by scripture alone or by culture alone.

The interpretation of *qiwāmah* in Qur'an 4:34 was selected as a focused case because it frequently shapes discussions of male authority and women's status within the family. Classical interpretations commonly connected *qiwāmah* with men's financial responsibilities, physical protection, household leadership, and authority over marital affairs. Some jurists treated the concept as a functional responsibility conditioned by financial maintenance, while others expanded it into a general principle of male superiority. Contemporary interpreters increasingly examined the term through its linguistic context, economic basis, reciprocal marital ethics, and relationship with justice.

Comparative reading showed that *qiwāmah* was closely associated with responsibility and financial provision rather than an unconditional declaration of superior human worth. Interpretations differed concerning whether the provision established a universal gender hierarchy or described a family arrangement shaped by prevailing economic conditions. Justice-oriented readings treated *qiwāmah* as accountable care, material responsibility, and protection from harm. Such readings rejected its use as a justification for coercion, violence, intellectual superiority, or the exclusion of women from family and public decision-making.

Table 4. Comparative Interpretations of Qiwāmah in Qur'an 4:34

Interpretive Dimension	Hierarchical Reading	Functional-Responsibility Reading	Justice-Oriented Reading
Basis of <i>qiwāmah</i>	Male superiority	Financial provision and protection	Accountable responsibility
Scope	General authority over women	Marital and household function	Context-sensitive family obligation
Decision-making	Predominantly male control	Leadership linked to responsibility	Consultation and reciprocal participation
Economic	Secondary consideration	Central condition	Variable according

condition			to actual provision
Ethical	Preservation of authority	Fulfilment of duties	Justice, dignity,
limitation			reciprocity, and
			non-harm
Contemporary	Continued gender hierarchy	Conditional division of	Negotiated roles
implication		responsibility	based on welfare
			and capability

The case analysis demonstrated how interpretive outcomes change when grammatical meaning, historical context, economic responsibility, and Qur’anic ethics are considered together. A reading focused exclusively on the phrase describing men as *qawwāmūn* could support a broad model of authority. A contextual reading recognized that the verse connected responsibility with financial provision and household protection. A thematic reading further examined marital consultation, kindness, mutual protection, and the prohibition of injustice across the Qur’anic corpus.

The expansion of *qiwāmah* into unrestricted male control appeared to result from the interaction between textual interpretation and patriarchal social structures. Classical households commonly depended on men’s economic provision and public access, making male responsibility socially functional in many historical contexts. Contemporary conditions have altered these assumptions because women may contribute financially, possess advanced education, and share public and domestic responsibilities. The findings indicate that the ethical meaning of *qiwāmah* is better preserved through accountable and reciprocal responsibility than through permanent domination based solely on sex.

Comparative Interpretations of Qiwāmah

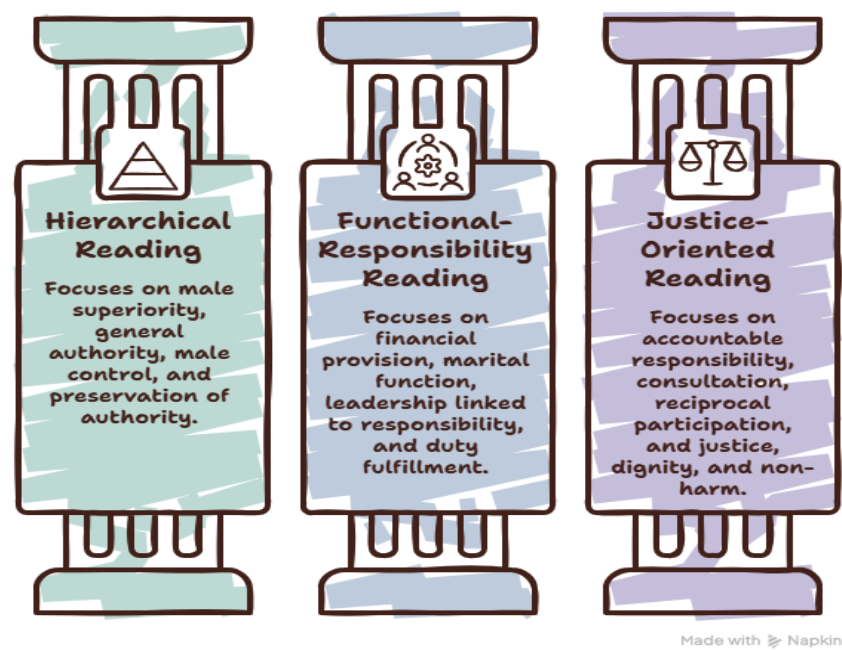


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Interpretive Readings of *Qiwāmah* in Islamic Thought

The results indicate that Islamic teachings provide substantial foundations for women's dignity, moral equality, legal capacity, and protection from injustice. Tensions concerning gender equality arose mainly in the interpretation and institutional application of texts dealing with authority, differentiated obligations, and family structure. The distinction between revelation, jurisprudential interpretation, and lived practice proved essential for identifying which gender arrangements were explicitly normative and which were historically constructed.

The broader interpretation is that gender justice in Islam does not require abandoning the Islamic scholarly tradition or accepting every inherited ruling without criticism. A credible approach must engage primary sources, linguistic evidence, juristic diversity, historical context, and contemporary social consequences. Justice-oriented reinterpretation becomes academically and religiously defensible when it remains grounded in Islamic methods while protecting dignity, reciprocity, welfare, legal agency, and freedom from harm. Islamic gender discourse should consequently move beyond the opposition between uncritical traditionalism and total rejection toward a more contextual, ethically accountable, and intellectually rigorous framework.

The findings indicate that Islamic teachings on women cannot be adequately understood through a simple opposition between equality and inequality. Primary Islamic sources within the analyzed corpus consistently emphasized shared human dignity, moral responsibility, legal accountability, and entitlement to justice. Gender differentiation appeared in several legal and familial matters, yet the ethical meaning of those distinctions depended on their purposes, reciprocal obligations, and social consequences. The results consequently support an understanding of equality that protects equal moral worth and substantive rights without automatically assuming that every differentiated responsibility is discriminatory.

The distinction among revelation, scholarly interpretation, and lived social practice emerged as one of the most important findings. Qur'anic principles constituted the normative foundation, while classical jurisprudence represented human efforts to apply those principles within particular historical environments. Contemporary Muslim practices reflected an additional layer shaped by culture, state law, political authority, economic conditions, and institutional power. Treating these three dimensions as identical obscures the human and historical character of jurisprudence. Recent scholarship similarly emphasizes that the formulation of *sharī'ah* norms involves interpretation and that female scholars possess an equal intellectual claim to engage revelation.

The thematic analysis also revealed that hierarchical conclusions were concentrated in interpretations concerning *qiwāmah*, obedience, guardianship, mobility, leadership, and family decision-making. Such conclusions often extended context-dependent responsibilities into comprehensive doctrines of male authority. Justice-oriented readings interpreted these concepts through financial responsibility, reciprocal care, consultation, dignity, and protection from harm. The findings do not establish that every classical interpretation was unjust, but they show that some applications became detached from the conditions and obligations that originally supported their legal rationale.

The focused examination of *qiwāmah* demonstrated the practical consequences of interpretive method. A hierarchical reading presented Qur'an 4:34 as evidence of a permanent male entitlement to control women, while a functional reading linked authority to economic provision and household responsibility. A justice-oriented reading placed those responsibilities within the wider Qur'anic ethics of reciprocity, kindness, consultation, and non-harm.

Contemporary Muslim family-law scholarship and advocacy likewise question whether male authority can remain legally unconditional when women provide economically, exercise full legal capacity, and share responsibility for family welfare.

The distinction between divine revelation and human interpretation is consistent with scholarship arguing that *sharīʿah* should not be reduced to historically produced jurisprudential rules. Recent analysis has emphasized that male scholars dominated major formative processes of interpretation and often read sacred texts through the social assumptions of their periods. The present study supports this critique but avoids treating all inherited jurisprudence as a uniform patriarchal construction. Its comparative approach identified diversity within classical scholarship and evaluated each interpretation according to its textual support, legal reasoning, historical function, and consequences for justice.

The findings also correspond with Islamic feminist scholarship that locates gender justice within, rather than outside, the Islamic intellectual tradition. Muslim feminist thinkers and organizations have drawn on Qurʾanic ethics, legal interpretation, and women's lived experiences to challenge unequal family laws and social practices. Studies of Muslim women's activism in India show that religious and constitutional arguments can be combined in campaigns for family-law reform. The present research extends this perspective by integrating textual, jurisprudential, *maqāṣid*-based, and social-consequence analysis within one evaluative framework.

The interpretation of *qiwāmah* is closely related to Musawah's argument that classical notions of male authority and guardianship have become structurally embedded in many Muslim family laws. Musawah proposes replacing unilateral authority with equality, reciprocal responsibility, and the well-being of all family members. The present study reaches a similar conclusion concerning the need to reconsider unconditional male authority. Its approach differs by retaining the possibility that *qiwāmah* may express an ethically meaningful responsibility when it is conditional, accountable, non-coercive, and connected to actual care rather than biological privilege.

The findings concerning women's economic capacity are compatible with research showing a tension between Qurʾanic recognition of women's ownership and income rights and legal traditions that privilege men as household providers. Recent comparative scholarship notes that Islamic doctrine can simultaneously support women's financial independence and sustain gendered expectations concerning breadwinning and domestic responsibility. The current analysis adds that economic roles must be examined empirically. Male authority cannot remain justified solely through provision when women contribute substantially or independently support their households.

The results signal that debates about Islam and gender equality are fundamentally debates about interpretive authority. Questions concerning women's rights cannot be settled merely by citing a translated verse, an isolated tradition, or a single juristic opinion. Interpretive conclusions depend on decisions about language, context, legal methodology, textual hierarchy, ethical objectives, and social consequences. Women's participation in interpretation is therefore not an optional symbolic gesture but an epistemic requirement for producing scholarship that reflects the experiences and moral agency of the entire Muslim community.

The findings also signal that religious authenticity and gender justice need not be treated as mutually exclusive commitments. Muslim women are sometimes positioned as having to choose between loyalty to faith and support for equality. Such a binary overlooks the

intellectual work of scholars and activists who derive egalitarian arguments from Qur'anic teachings, Prophetic ethics, jurisprudential diversity, and Islamic principles of justice. Philosophical and socio-legal studies demonstrate that Muslim feminist reasoning can remain critically committed to Islam while questioning interpretations that diminish women as moral, political, or legal agents.

The relationship between text and social practice signals that religion does not operate independently from institutions. Identical or similar Islamic sources have produced different legal outcomes across national, cultural, and historical contexts. State codification, judicial practice, customary law, education, political movements, and women's activism influence which interpretations become authoritative. Ethnographic studies of Muslim women's engagement with legal institutions show that women negotiate, reinterpret, and sometimes transform religious norms rather than functioning only as passive recipients of male authority.

The *qiwāmah* findings signal that concepts may retain religious terminology while undergoing substantial institutional expansion. A responsibility associated with provision and protection can become a legal presumption of obedience, restricted mobility, unequal divorce rights, or diminished decision-making power. Such expansion should not be regarded as inevitable merely because it has historical precedent. An interpretation remains ethically credible only when the authority it grants is inseparable from accountability, reciprocal rights, demonstrable welfare, and effective protection against abuse.

The principal theoretical implication is the need to replace binary frameworks with a layered model of Islamic gender analysis. Normative teachings, jurisprudential constructions, state laws, cultural practices, and women's lived experiences should be examined separately before their relationships are evaluated. This model prevents cultural patriarchy from being automatically attributed to revelation and prevents religious language from shielding discriminatory institutions from criticism. Interdisciplinary Islamic legal scholarship increasingly recognizes that constructions of law are influenced by the demands and experiences of particular societies (Ahmad, 2026b; Saifullin, 2026).

The methodological implication concerns the importance of integrating textual interpretation with consequence-based evaluation. Linguistic and historical analysis can explain what an interpretation meant within its original environment, but contemporary application also requires attention to its effects on dignity, safety, legal agency, economic security, and access to justice. A ruling that once reflected a specific distribution of responsibilities may produce different outcomes when social structures change. *Maqāṣid*-oriented scholarship provides a means of relating textual interpretation to fundamental ethical principles and contemporary human needs.

The legal implication is that Muslim family-law reform can be pursued through internal Islamic reasoning rather than presented solely as external pressure. Concepts such as justice, public welfare, non-harm, consultation, contractual consent, and reciprocal obligation can support reforms concerning marriage, divorce, guardianship, custody, and family authority. Experiences in Indonesia, India, Morocco, and other contexts demonstrate that women's movements have combined Islamic arguments with constitutional or human-rights principles to advocate legal change.

The educational implication is that Islamic studies curricula should present jurisprudence as a diverse human scholarly tradition rather than an undifferentiated body of unquestionable conclusions. Students require access to primary texts, legal methodology, historical context,

differences among schools, contemporary scholarship, and women's intellectual contributions. Such an approach does not diminish respect for classical scholars. It strengthens intellectual responsibility by teaching learners to distinguish evidence from assumption, consensus from disagreement, and foundational principles from context-bound applications.

The persistence of hierarchical interpretations can partly be explained by the social environments in which classical jurisprudence developed. Economic production, public authority, formal education, and legal institutions were generally organized through male-dominated structures. Jurists often assumed that men would provide financially while women would remain economically dependent within households. Legal rules developed around those expectations could appear functionally coherent in their original settings while producing inequality when applied without reconsideration under substantially different contemporary conditions (Azizi, 2026; Wahyudi, 2025).

The dominance of male interpretations also influenced which experiences were treated as legally significant. Scholars who did not directly experience pregnancy, domestic vulnerability, unequal divorce procedures, economic dependence, or exclusion from public authority could overlook dimensions of harm visible to women. This observation does not invalidate male scholarship, but it demonstrates why interpretive communities require broader participation. Research on women-led *sharī'ah* institutions shows that female legal actors can introduce different priorities, forms of agency, and understandings of justice into Muslim legal practice.

The expansion of *qiwāmah* occurred because legal systems often transformed reciprocal responsibilities into status-based authority. Financial provision was treated as the basis of male leadership, yet the resulting authority sometimes continued even when men failed to provide or women became primary earners. This separation between responsibility and privilege produced an asymmetrical structure: men retained authority without fulfilling its stated justification, while women assumed economic responsibilities without gaining corresponding decision-making rights. Comparative Muslim family-law analyses identify this inconsistency as a central obstacle to equality within marriage.

Justice-oriented interpretations emerged because contemporary social realities exposed weaknesses in inherited assumptions. Women's education, employment, political participation, legal citizenship, and religious scholarship demonstrate capacities that restrictive interpretations had frequently underestimated. Modern *maqāṣid* approaches also encourage scholars to examine the ethical purposes of Islamic teachings rather than mechanically reproduce earlier applications. The rise of gender-just Muslim scholarship consequently reflects both social transformation and renewed engagement with the moral foundations of revelation (Alizadeh, 2026; Sari, 2026).

Future research should expand beyond library analysis by examining how gender-related interpretations function in courts, schools, mosques, families, universities, and public institutions. Ethnographic studies can reveal whether formal legal reforms alter women's lived access to justice or remain limited by judicial attitudes, economic dependency, and community pressure. Longitudinal research is especially needed to evaluate how reinterpretation affects marital negotiation, divorce outcomes, protection from violence, property ownership, and women's participation in decision-making.

Future scholarship should include more women as producers of Islamic knowledge rather than treating them primarily as research subjects. Female Qur'anic scholars, jurists, judges, educators, activists, and community leaders can contribute interpretive perspectives shaped by

both scholarly training and lived experience. Research on women's social activism and gender-just religious movements shows that female authority already influences policy, legal discourse, and community attitudes in several Muslim contexts.

Future legal research should compare the implementation of Muslim family-law reforms across jurisdictions. Formal equality in statutory language does not automatically guarantee equitable judicial procedures or social outcomes. Comparative studies should examine marriage consent, divorce access, financial rights, custody, guardianship, domestic violence, and evidentiary practices. Attention should also be given to class, disability, rural location, migration status, and economic vulnerability because women do not experience religious law as a socially homogeneous group (Sa'ad, 2025).

Future interpretive work should develop clear standards for determining when contextual reinterpretation is justified. Contemporary relevance alone cannot replace textual and methodological rigor, while historical authority alone cannot establish permanent applicability. Credible reform requires engagement with Arabic language, Qur'anic coherence, authenticated Prophetic traditions, jurisprudential diversity, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, empirical evidence, and the consequences of interpretation. Such a framework can support gender justice without reducing Islam to either an unchangeable patriarchal system or a collection of modern ethical preferences.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is that Islamic teachings provide a substantial normative foundation for women's dignity, moral agency, legal capacity, and protection from injustice, while many persistent gender inequalities arise from historically situated interpretations and institutional practices rather than from revelation alone. The analysis showed that concepts such as *qiwāmah*, guardianship, obedience, and differentiated responsibility have often been expanded beyond their textual and ethical conditions into broader structures of male authority. A justice-oriented reading situates these concepts within reciprocity, accountability, consultation, public welfare, and protection from harm. Gender equality in Islam should therefore be understood as equal human worth, fair access to rights, and equitable responsibility rather than as mechanical sameness in every social role.

The study offers both conceptual and methodological contributions to Islamic gender scholarship. Its conceptual contribution lies in distinguishing normative Islamic teachings, juristic interpretation, state law, cultural practice, and women's lived experiences as interconnected but analytically separate dimensions. This layered framework prevents patriarchal customs from being automatically identified with divine commands and prevents modern criticism from dismissing the complexity of Islamic intellectual traditions. Its methodological contribution emerges from combining textual analysis, critical hermeneutics, comparative jurisprudence, thematic coding, historical contextualization, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*-based ethical evaluation. This integrated approach enables interpretations to be assessed according to their linguistic basis, legal reasoning, historical function, and contemporary consequences for dignity, welfare, autonomy, and social justice.

The principal limitation of the study concerns its reliance on selected textual and scholarly sources, which cannot fully represent the diversity of Muslim communities, legal systems, and women's lived experiences. Interpretive conclusions may also be influenced by the selection of exegetical traditions, jurisprudential schools, contemporary gender theories,

and ethical criteria used in the analysis. Future research should combine library-based interpretation with ethnographic observation, interviews, legal case analysis, and comparative studies of Muslim family-law reform. Further investigations should examine how gender-just interpretations affect marriage, divorce, inheritance, leadership, economic participation, religious authority, and protection from violence across different social contexts. Greater participation by female scholars, jurists, judges, activists, and community leaders is also necessary to strengthen the inclusiveness and practical relevance of future Islamic gender discourse.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used Google Assisted to assist in improving grammar, language quality, and overall readability of the text. After using this tool, the author(s) Carefully reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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