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Negotiating gender roles in *pesantren* family: A phenomenological study of husband-wife relationships in traditional Madurese *Pesantren*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how gender roles are negotiated within traditional pesantren families within the Madurese pesantren cultural context, with particular attention to husband-wife relationships as a central site of social and religious dynamics. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study involved three key informants from pesantren caregiver families, selected purposively based on their positions and experiences within pesantren family structures. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were recorded with informants' consent and supported by field notes. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis with an interpretative phenomenological orientation by identifying recurring themes and interpreting informants' meanings concerning roles, authority, decision-making, and gender negotiation within social, cultural, and religious contexts. The findings show that gender relations in pesantren families are not static but are continuously negotiated through dialogue, functional role-sharing, and adaptation. Although patriarchal values remain influential, women are found to play important roles in female student education, household management, and pesantren economic activities. Gender relations are therefore shaped by the interaction of religious values, local culture, practical considerations, and individual interpretations. Practically, these findings suggest the importance of culturally sensitive efforts to strengthen collaborative family decision-making and recognize women's educational and economic contributions within pesantren institutions.

Keywords: Gender; Pesantren Family; Role Negotiations; Phenomenology; Madura.

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana peran gender dinegosiasikan dalam keluarga pesantren tradisional dalam konteks budaya pesantren Madura, dengan perhatian khusus pada relasi suami-istri sebagai ruang utama dinamika sosial dan religius. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologi dengan melibatkan tiga informan kunci dari keluarga pengasuh pesantren yang dipilih secara purposif berdasarkan posisi dan pengalaman mereka dalam struktur keluarga pesantren. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur yang direkam atas persetujuan informan dan dilengkapi dengan catatan lapangan. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik dengan orientasi fenomenologi interpretatif melalui identifikasi tema-tema yang berulang dan interpretasi terhadap makna yang diberikan informan mengenai peran, otoritas, pengambilan keputusan, dan negosiasi gender dalam konteks sosial, budaya, dan religius. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa relasi gender dalam keluarga pesantren tidak bersifat statis, tetapi terus dinegosiasikan melalui dialog, pembagian peran yang fungsional, dan proses adaptasi. Meskipun nilai-nilai patriarkal masih memiliki pengaruh, perempuan ditemukan memiliki peran penting dalam pendidikan santri putri, pengelolaan rumah tangga, dan aktivitas ekonomi pesantren. Relasi gender dalam keluarga pesantren dibentuk melalui interaksi antara nilai agama, budaya lokal, pertimbangan praktis, dan interpretasi individual. Secara praktis, temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan pentingnya penguatan pengambilan keputusan keluarga yang kolaboratif serta pengakuan terhadap kontribusi pendidikan dan ekonomi perempuan dalam institusi pesantren dengan tetap mempertimbangkan sensitivitas terhadap konteks budaya dan religius lokal.

Kata Kunci: Gender; Keluarga Pesantren; Negosiasi peran; Fenomenologi; Madura.

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies on gender in the context of *pesantren* in Indonesia have seen significant development over the past two decades (Smith-Hefner, 2025). This development aligns with the growing attention to gender equality issues within religious institutions (Nuroniyah, 2023), including *pesantren* which have long been perceived as conservative spaces (Achmadin, Asrori, Barizi, Amrullah, & Nafis, 2024). *Pesantren*, particularly those of a traditional (Salafi) nature, not only function as centers of Islamic education but also play a crucial role in shaping the social structure of society, including values, norms, and gender relations within family life. In the Indonesian context, a number of studies have highlighted the role of women in *pesantren* from various perspectives. For example, studies by Hastuti Dewi and Khoirul et al. show that nyai not only fulfill domestic roles but are also involved in educational leadership, da'wah, and the *pesantren*'s economic activities (Dewi, 2015; Khoirul Mudawinun Nisa', Nabila Arqis Risqiya, & Chairin Najwa Alifiansyah Putri, 2022). These studies indicate that women in *pesantren* have space for agency and role negotiation, although this remains within the constraints of strong traditional values.

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However, previous studies have tended to focus on *pesantren* women as individuals or public figures—such as nyai or female teachers—while the dynamics of gender relations within the *pesantren* family, as a space for social interaction, have received relatively little attention. Yet, the family of the *pesantren*'s spiritual leader is a crucial space where religious values, culture, leadership, and gender role divisions are shaped and passed down. Research on the families of kiai and nyai has been conducted, such as Yuliatin's (2019) study discussing the domestic roles of women in *pesantren* and Huda & Dahliana's (2024) study on the division of roles between kiai and nyai in children's education (Huda & Dahliana, 2024; Yuliatin, 2019). However, research on how gender role negotiations unfold within *pesantren* family life—including how authority, decision-making, communication, and the division of responsibilities are negotiated across generations—remains limited, particularly in the context of *pesantren* rooted in Madurese culture.

Madura, as one of the key centers of traditional *pesantren* in Indonesia, offers a distinctive social context for understanding gender relations. Madurese culture is known for its strong, hierarchical value system that highly values honor and respect for family authority and religious figures (Azhari, 2024). Within this social structure, women's positions in the family often confront traditional norms that place men as the primary figures in family leadership. Nevertheless, the practices of family life in *pesantren* reveal spaces for women's participation through their involvement in students' education, *pesantren* management, economic activities, and family decision-making. This phenomenon means that gender relations within *pesantren* families cannot be understood merely as a reproduction of patriarchal structures but also as a process of negotiation influenced by individual competencies, practical needs, and social change.

Based on this gap, this study proceeds from the assumption that gender relations within *pesantren* families are not static but are continuously negotiated through the interaction of religious values, local culture, family structures, and individual experiences. This study employs a phenomenological approach to understand how members of *pesantren* families interpret practices of leadership, role division, decision-making, and changes in gender relations within *pesantren* family life. By exploring the perspectives of informants with direct experience within the family structures of *pesantren* caregivers, this study seeks to explain how gender negotiations unfold within the unique context of Islamic tradition.

The novelty of this study lies in its effort to understand the *pesantren* family not only as a space for the reproduction of gender norms but also as a space for negotiation where religious values, local culture, individual competencies, and intergenerational changes interact to shape gender relations. This study offers insights into how *pesantren* families maintain traditional values while adapting to social changes in their daily lives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender relations are not merely determined by biological differences but are socially and culturally constructed through everyday practices, institutional arrangements, and symbolic meanings. Contemporary gender scholarship emphasizes that gender should be understood as a dynamic process through which individuals negotiate identities, responsibilities, and social expectations within particular historical and cultural contexts (Connell & Pearse, 2015). Rather than viewing individuals only as subjects constrained by gender norms, recent gender studies

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highlight the importance of examining how individuals actively interpret and negotiate those norms through everyday practices. In this perspective, agency does not necessarily emerge through direct resistance to existing structures, but may also appear through adaptation, reinterpretation, and strategic engagement with established social systems.

This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding gender relations in religious communities, where the interaction between religious interpretation, cultural traditions, and institutional expectations shapes social roles and responsibilities. In Muslim family contexts, gender relations are frequently negotiated through the intersection of religious values, family responsibilities, economic conditions, and local cultural norms. This interpretative dimension is especially important in traditional Islamic communities, where understandings of gender roles and leadership may vary according to different approaches to religious interpretation and responses to social change. Recent studies on Islamic institutions demonstrate that debates regarding women's leadership are not determined by a single religious perspective but are shaped by diverse methodologies of interpreting Islamic sources, institutional contexts, and contemporary social realities (Hannan, Huda, Firdaus, Afabih, & Musthofa, 2024). These variations indicate that gender relations within Islamic communities should be examined as dynamic processes involving negotiation between religious traditions, institutional structures, and changing social conditions.

Within Muslim family contexts, concepts such as male leadership (*qiwamah*) and female responsibilities are also interpreted differently across social and cultural settings. Therefore, Muslim family relations cannot be understood solely as the direct implementation of religious norms but as lived experiences shaped through communication, negotiation, and practical circumstances within households. Islamic family practices are influenced by diverse scholarly interpretations of religious texts, which may produce variations in the understanding and implementation of family-related norms, including marriage, household responsibilities, and relational obligations (Afabih, Roziqi, & Maulana, 2025). Consequently, examining Muslim family relations requires attention not only to social structures but also to the processes through which religious meanings are interpreted and applied within specific communities.

The concept of negotiation is important because it allows researchers to move beyond binary perspectives that position religious families either as spaces of gender inequality or as sites of complete transformation. Instead, family relations are understood as dynamic processes in which husbands and wives continuously construct meanings regarding authority, responsibility, and cooperation. Through communication, decision-making practices, and role adjustments, family members negotiate the relationship between inherited traditions and contemporary social realities.

To examine these processes, this study employs social role theory developed by Eagly and Wood (2012), which explains that social expectations attached to particular positions influence individual behaviour and responsibilities (Eagly & Wood, 2012). In traditional *pesantren* families, husbands and wives occupy roles that are not only private but also social and symbolic. The kiai often occupies a central position as religious authority and institutional leader, while the nyai has historically been associated with domestic responsibilities and support roles. However, empirical studies on *pesantren* communities indicate that nyai frequently participate in educational leadership, religious teaching, and institutional

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management, demonstrating that gender roles within *pesantren* are continuously negotiated rather than completely fixed.

In addition to social role theory, symbolic interactionism provides an important framework for understanding how gender meanings are produced through everyday interactions (Blumer, 2009). Gender roles within families are not only maintained through formal structures but also through language, rituals, habits, and interpersonal relationships. In the *pesantren* context, meanings of leadership, obedience, responsibility, and cooperation are shaped through religious symbols and cultural practices. Therefore, the relationship between husbands and wives in *pesantren* families need to be understood as an ongoing process of meaning-making rather than merely as a reflection of predetermined social categories.

Pesantren leadership provides an important institutional context for examining these gender negotiations. Traditional *pesantren* are not only educational institutions but also family-based religious organizations in which leadership authority is closely connected to genealogy, religious knowledge, and social legitimacy (Fatmawati, Amir, Alamsyah, & Ilham, 2024). The kiai often occupies a central symbolic position, while family members—including nyai and other relatives—may contribute to educational, administrative, and social functions within the *pesantren* (Humaidi, Fadhliyah, & Sufirmansyah, 2024). Previous research on *pesantren* leadership suggests that authority is not formed solely through formal hierarchy but also through trust, social recognition, and the ability to maintain relationships with the wider community. Consequently, the family dimension of *pesantren* leadership becomes an important space for examining how authority and gender roles are negotiated in everyday life.

The Madurese cultural context further shapes these dynamics. Madurese society is often characterized by strong values related to honour, loyalty, kinship, and respect toward religious figures and family authority. These cultural values may reinforce hierarchical relationships and traditional expectations regarding gender roles. However, culture should not be understood as a fixed structure that determines individual behaviour completely. Families within Madurese communities also reinterpret cultural values in response to education, economic changes, and evolving social conditions. Therefore, gender relations in Madurese *pesantren* families should be examined as the result of interaction between inherited cultural traditions and ongoing processes of adaptation.

Based on these theoretical perspectives, this study integrates gender theory, social role theory, and symbolic interactionism within the broader contexts of Muslim family relations, *pesantren* leadership, and Madurese cultural values. This framework enables an understanding of *pesantren* families not merely as spaces where gender norms are reproduced, but also as spaces where religious authority, cultural traditions, and individual agency interact in shaping everyday gender practices. Through this perspective, the study examines how gender roles are negotiated, interpreted, and adapted within traditional *pesantren* families.

3. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with an interpretative phenomenological orientation to explore how gender roles, marital relationships, and leadership practices are understood and negotiated within traditional *pesantren* families. A phenomenological approach was selected because it allows researchers to examine how individuals interpret their experiences and construct meanings regarding roles, authority, decision-making, and gender

relations within specific social, cultural, and religious contexts (Hasbiansyah, 2008). The research was conducted in the setting of a traditional *pesantren* in Madura, Indonesia. The choice of research context was based on the characteristics of *pesantren*, which are still family-run, exert strong social influence in the surrounding community, and are situated in a cultural environment that upholds patriarchal values and traditional religiosity.(Anhary, 2023).

The study involved three key informants selected through purposive sampling based on their positions, experiences, and knowledge of *pesantren* family structures. The informants were members of *pesantren* caregiver families who possessed direct knowledge of household relationships, leadership practices, institutional management, and intergenerational changes within *pesantren* communities. To maintain confidentiality and ethical considerations, the identities of the informants are anonymized and represented using informant codes in the presentation of research findings.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The first interview was conducted with Informant A on 25 February 2025 through a telephone conversation lasting approximately 60 minutes. The second interview was conducted with Informant B on 26 February 2025 through telephone communication for approximately 60 minutes. The third interview was conducted with Informant C on 20 September 2026 through a face-to-face interview lasting approximately 50 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the informants' consent and supported by field notes. The interview questions focused on several themes, including the division of husband-wife roles, family leadership, decision-making processes, women's involvement in education and *pesantren* management, economic responsibilities, intergenerational changes, and the influence of religious and local cultural values on gender relations.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis with an interpretative phenomenological orientation. The analysis process consisted of several stages: (1) transcribing and repeatedly reading the interview data to gain an overall understanding of informants' narratives; (2) identifying significant statements related to gender roles, authority, communication, leadership, and negotiation processes; (3) organizing recurring patterns into broader thematic categories; and (4) interpreting the meanings of these themes within the social, cultural, and religious context of *pesantren* families. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through comparison across informants with different family backgrounds and positions within *pesantren* structures, allowing the study to identify both shared patterns and variations in gender negotiation practices.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Negotiating Gender Roles in Leadership within Pesantren Families

Leadership in traditional *pesantren* families is not only built upon formal structures that define the roles of husbands and wives, but also through a process of negotiation that takes place in daily life. Research findings indicate that authority within *pesantren* families exists in a tension between hierarchical structures—which position the kiai as the central figure—and daily practices that create space for the involvement of other family members.

In an interview with Informant A, it was revealed that leadership patterns within *pesantren* families are not always inherited absolutely but rather through a process of family deliberation that takes into account the experiences and positions of family members. This

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indicates that although the *pesantren*'s leadership structure tends to be hierarchical, there is a space for deliberation that allows for a more flexible distribution of authority.

This finding is reinforced by Informant B, who explained that the process of passing down *pesantren* leadership is carried out through family deliberation and takes into account input from the community and *pesantren* alumni. In this context, *pesantren* leadership is determined not only by genealogical ties but also by the social legitimacy that has developed around the *pesantren*.

The process of negotiating leadership is also evident in the division of roles between the kiai and the nyai. In *pesantren* family practices, women do not merely perform domestic functions but are also involved in education and the management of the *pesantren*. Informant B explained that women in his family play a role in offering advice at certain times and are involved in managing educational units, such as the Qur'an memorization program. This indicates that women's positions within *pesantren* families can be part of the internal leadership structure, even if they are not always reflected in formal positions.

From the perspective of social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012), this situation indicates an expansion of women's roles from the domestic sphere into broader social spheres. However, this expansion does not necessarily mean the elimination of traditional role divisions; rather, it occurs through a process of adaptation to the needs of the family and the *pesantren* institution.

Nevertheless, this division of roles continues within the framework of deeply rooted Islamic values, including the understanding of *qiwamah* as the concept of male leadership within the family. Informant B explained that the husband's leadership is understood through his roles as the provider and the spiritual leader (imam) of the family. However, this leadership is not always exercised as sole authority. Informant B also described how communication within *pesantren* families is flexible, and family members have the freedom to carry out activities in accordance with their respective roles.

In this context, leadership in *pesantren* families can be understood as a practice negotiated through interaction, experience, and individual competence. Informant C noted that there have been changes in leadership patterns across generations. In the early generations of *pesantren* families, important decisions were largely made by the kiai as the husband, and the wife's space for dialogue remained limited. However, in subsequent generations, opportunities for discussion between husband and wife began to emerge, both regarding household matters and *pesantren* policies.

These changes indicate that gender relations within *pesantren* families are not entirely fixed structures. Rather, they undergo adjustments through changes in education, experience, competencies, and social needs. Informant C even explained that the decline in patriarchal dominance is linked to the increasing competence of the nyai (the kiai's wife) within the *pesantren* family. This suggests that gender negotiations in *pesantren* families do not always occur through a rejection of traditional structures, but rather through women's ability to secure a place based on their capabilities and contributions.

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 2009), this practice demonstrates that the meaning of leadership is not fixed but is shaped through ongoing social interaction. Authority within the *pesantren* family is understood not only as a vertical relationship between the leader and family members but also as a process of shared meaning-

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making influenced by religious values, local culture, and personal experiences. Ultimately, although the kiai retains a symbolic position as the leader of the family and the *pesantren*, day-to-day leadership practices reveal a form of co-leadership that is implicit and functional.

Table 1.
Negotiating Gender Roles.

No.	Aspect	Field Findings	Theoretical Interpretation
1.	The Process of Leadership Succession	Leadership in the *pesantren* is passed down through family deliberation, taking into account experience, family status, and social legitimacy from the community and alumni	*Pesantren* leadership is a blend of family authority and social legitimacy
2.	Family Decision-Making	Earlier generations tended to leave decisions to the kiai as the husband, while subsequent generations began to open space for dialogue with the wife	Gender relations have evolved through intergenerational negotiation
3.	Women's Roles in Leadership	Nyai plays a role in the education of female students, providing guidance, and managing *pesantren* units	Women exercise agency through their competencies and social contributions
4.	Basis for Role Division	Role division is influenced by religious values, *pesantren* culture, and the capabilities of each individual	Gender is negotiated through the interaction between social structures and personal capacities

4.2. Husband-Wife Relationships and the Meaning of Leadership in the Household

Husband-wife relationships in *pesantren* families are not only related to the division of domestic responsibilities but also reflect how religious values, family culture, and social experiences shape the way couples understand leadership and cooperation within the household. Research findings indicate that husband-wife relationships in *pesantren* families unfold within a space of negotiation between the concept of male leadership as head of the household and the need for communication and shared involvement in addressing family issues.

Based on an interview with Informant A, spousal relationships in *pesantren* families are not entirely built through a one-way pattern of instruction but through communication and mutual consideration in managing household life. This communication process serves as a space for family members to express their views, weigh options, and adjust their roles based on the family's needs.

This finding is reinforced by Informant B, who explained that communication within *pesantren* families occurs flexibly. Although there are role divisions and differences in authority within the family, family members still have the freedom to carry out activities in accordance with their respective positions and responsibilities. This communication pattern indicates that leadership in *pesantren* families is not always manifested as domination but also through mechanisms of coordination and role adjustment.

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 2009), he husband-wife relationship can be understood as a process of co-constructing meaning through daily interactions. The husband's role as family leader is not defined solely by social status or

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religious norms but also by how that leadership is exercised in practice. This authority is continuously produced through communication, trust, and the ability to fulfill responsibilities.

However, the research findings also indicate that the patterns of husband-wife relationships within *pesantren* families have undergone gradual changes across generations. Informant C explained that in the early generations of *pesantren* families, important decisions were predominantly made by the kiai as the husband. In that context, the space for dialogue for the wife in decision-making was still relatively limited.

Changes began to emerge in the next generation as husband-wife relationships became more dialogic. Informant C explained that space for discussion between husband and wife began to open up, both regarding household matters and in determining *pesantren* policies. This change indicates that gender relations within *pesantren* families are not a static system but undergo transformation through experience, education, and shifting social needs.

Nevertheless, these changes do not mean that traditional structures have been completely abandoned. Religious values regarding the husband's leadership remain an important part of the *pesantren* family's worldview. Informant B explained that the husband's leadership is understood through his responsibilities as the breadwinner and spiritual leader of the family. However, in practice, this concept of leadership can coexist with women's involvement in various aspects of family life.

This indicates that gender negotiations within *pesantren* families occur through a process of adaptation, rather than through direct rejection of traditional structures. Women gain space for participation not merely due to changing norms, but also through their contributions, competencies, and involvement in family life and the *pesantren*. Informant C emphasized that the increasing competence of nyai (the wife of a kiai) has become one of the factors driving the decline in patriarchal dominance within *pesantren* families.

In the author's view, the husband-wife relationship in *pesantren* families can be understood as a dynamic situated between two poles: upholding traditional leadership values while simultaneously opening space for participation and dialogue. This relationship demonstrates that *pesantren* families are not merely spaces for the reproduction of gender norms but also spaces where these norms are negotiated in accordance with needs, experiences, and social change.

Table 2.
Husband-Wifes Relationship.

No.	Aspect	Field Findings	Theoretical Interpretation
1.	Communication Patterns	Family communication takes place through discussion, the expression of opinions, and mutual adjustment among family members	Leadership is built through interaction and communication
2.	Decision-Making	Earlier generations tended to leave decisions to the kiai as the husband, while subsequent generations began to open up space for dialogue	Gender relations have undergone gradual changes
3.	The Meaning of the Husband's Leadership	The husband is understood as the head of the family through	Leadership remains rooted in religious values

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		his responsibility for providing for the family and his religious role	
4.	Scope of Women's Participation	Women are involved in education, the management of Islamic boarding schools, and the family decision-making process	Women's agency emerges through their contributions and competencies

4.3. Distribution of Economic Roles and Household Management

In addition to leadership and family communication, gender negotiations within *pesantren* families are also evident in the distribution of economic roles and the management of household life. Research findings indicate that the division of economic responsibilities in *pesantren* families does not strictly follow a rigid separation between the public sphere for men and the domestic sphere for women. Rather, this division occurs dynamically based on family needs, individual capacities, and the demands of managing the *pesantren*.

Informant A described how women in *pesantren* families are involved in various activities that support the sustainability of both the family and the *pesantren*. These roles are not limited to domestic work but also include productive activities that hold both economic and social value. Women's involvement in these activities demonstrates that the domestic sphere within *pesantren* families can serve as a strategic space for economic contributions and institutional management. This aligns with the findings (Muafiah, Mayasari, Imtihanah, & Yuliani, 2024), which note that *pesantren* women in many places now possess increasing agency in the economy and institutional governance, even though they do not always appear in formal public spaces.

This finding is reinforced by Informant B, who explained that the economic sustainability of the *pesantren* is supported by various internal family enterprises, such as farming and family cooperatives. These economic activities not only serve as a source of financial support but also form part of the *pesantren*'s strategy for self-reliance. This indicates that the economy of a *pesantren* family does not always depend on a single source of income but develops through the management of assets and the family's ability to establish business units.

In this context, the division of economic roles is not based solely on gender categories but is also related to the competencies and responsibilities of each family member. Informant C explained that the distribution of authority within *pesantren* families often depends on who possesses the necessary skills or is directly involved in a particular field. Although the husband is still often viewed as the primary figure in family economic matters, the management of various economic activities may involve contributions from other family members.

These findings indicate that women in *pesantren* families exercise a form of agency that is context-dependent. Women's agency is not always manifested through assuming formal leadership positions, but rather through their ability to manage specific areas, support the family's well-being, and contribute to the *pesantren* institution. From the perspective of social role theory, this situation indicates that changes in gender roles can occur through the expansion of women's activities into various social spheres without necessarily completely eliminating traditional role divisions.

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However, it should be noted that this division of roles remains within the framework of *pesantren* family values, which position the husband as the primary figure in family leadership. Informant B explained that the concept of the husband's leadership is still understood through his responsibility to provide for the family and fulfill his role as the family's spiritual leader. Thus, women's involvement in economic activities and the management of the *pesantren* is not always seen as a replacement for the husband's role, but rather as a form of cooperation in fulfilling family responsibilities.

Based on these findings, it can be understood that the distribution of economic roles within *pesantren* families occurs through a process of negotiation between traditional norms and practical needs. *Pesantren* families continue to uphold the value of male leadership in certain aspects, but at the same time create space for women to contribute through their competencies and experiences. Thus, the *pesantren* family economy becomes an important arena where gender relations are negotiated in daily life.

Table 3.
Economic Roles and Household Management.

No.	Aspect	Field Findings	Theoretical Interpretation
1.	Family economic responsibilities	Husbands are still often viewed as the primary providers for the family	Economic leadership remains influenced by traditional norms
2.	Women's involvement	Women are involved in education, household management, and productive activities at the *pesantren*	Women have room for agency through social and economic contributions
3.	Management of *Pesantren* Enterprises	*Pesantren* develop internal enterprises such as agriculture and family cooperatives	The *pesantren* economy is built through strategies of institutional self-reliance
4.	Basis for Role Division	The division of responsibilities is influenced by abilities, experience, and family needs	Gender roles are negotiated based on competencies and context

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that gender relations within traditional *pesantren* families are not fixed structures but dynamic processes continuously negotiated through interactions between religious values, local cultural norms, individual competencies, and changing social conditions. Based on the perspectives of three key informants from *pesantren* caregiver families, the study shows that leadership, decision-making, and the division of responsibilities within *pesantren* families are shaped through a combination of traditional authority and adaptive practices. The findings indicate that the position of kiai as the symbolic and religious leader of the family remains influential in shaping household and *pesantren* dynamics. However, this authority is not always practiced through unilateral decision-making. Instead, everyday family practices reveal spaces of dialogue, role adjustment, and shared responsibility. Women's roles have expanded through their involvement in female student education, *pesantren* management, family decision-making, and economic activities. These roles demonstrate that women's agency within *pesantren* families often emerges through competence, contribution, and social recognition within existing cultural frameworks.

This study also highlights that gender negotiation in *pesantren* families occurs across generations. While earlier generations tended to maintain more hierarchical patterns of authority, later generations have increasingly developed more dialogical forms of communication between husbands and wives. This transformation does not necessarily represent a complete rejection of traditional values, but rather a process of reinterpretation and adaptation within religious and cultural contexts. Theoretically, this study contributes to gender studies in religious institutions by showing that *pesantren* families should not be understood merely as spaces of gender reproduction or resistance. Instead, they represent negotiated spaces where religious authority, cultural traditions, and individual agency interact in shaping everyday gender practices. This study has limitations. The empirical data were obtained from three key informants representing their experiences and perspectives within *pesantren* family structures rather than from direct interviews with all husbands and wives discussed in the narratives. Therefore, the findings should be understood as an interpretative account of gender negotiation within *pesantren* families rather than a general representation of all *pesantren* communities. Future research may expand the number and diversity of informants by directly involving married couples from different *pesantren* backgrounds to further explore variations in gender relations.

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