

## IS OUR CHILD TOO YOUNG TO LEARN GENDER EQUALITY? AN INTERPRETATION OF GENDER EDUCATION IN ACEH FAMILIES

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### Abstract

*This study aims to reveal the forms of gender education, and to describe the importance of gender education in Acehese families. This study was conducted by using the method of descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques through interview and library research. The primary data obtained through interviews with 10 parents with different backgrounds and 10 students. The researcher used an unstructured interview method which allows informants to provide the information and in-depth answer freely, and the researcher has no control over the response of the informants. The result of this study demonstrated that the factor causing the absence of gender education in Acehese families is lack of parents understanding about gender equality. As a result, gender education is not given to children in the family. Gender education in the family is important because children acquire gender stereotypes at an early age, and they learn about gender equality from their family for the first time. Teaching gender equality for children is never too early, and they never too young to learn about it. In fact, they would come out and bring the gender equality in the family and society in general as they will be the pioneer of gender equality when they reach adulthood.*

**Keywords** ; Gender Education, Gender Equality, Children, Family & Aceh.

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkapkan bentuk-bentuk pendidikan gender, dan mendeskripsikan pentingnya pendidikan gender dalam keluarga masyarakat Aceh. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara dan studi pustaka. Data primer diperoleh melalui wawancara dengan 10 orang tua dengan latar belakang berbeda dan 10 siswa. Dalam penelitian ini, peneliti juga menggunakan metode wawancara tidak terstruktur yang memungkinkan informan memberikan informasi dan jawaban yang mendalam secara bebas, dan peneliti tidak memiliki kendali atas tanggapan informan. Informan dipilih secara random setelah mempertimbangkan pemahaman mereka tentang sebuah budaya dan masyarakat di tempat mereka tinggal. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa faktor penyebab tidak adanya pendidikan gender dalam keluarga masyarakat Aceh adalah kurangnya pemahaman orang tua tentang kesetaraan gender. Akibatnya, pendidikan gender tidak diberikan kepada anak-anak dalam keluarga. Pendidikan gender dalam keluarga sangat penting karena anak-anak memperoleh stereotip gender sejak usia dini, dan mereka belajar tentang kesetaraan gender dari keluarga untuk pertama kalinya. Memberikan pendidikan kesetaraan gender kepada anak pada usia dini sangat penting, karena pendidikan gender diusia dini akan mengarah kepada terciptanya kesetaraan gender dalam keluarga dan masyarakat pada umumnya. Selain itu anak-anak ini akan menjadi pelopor kesetaraan gender ketika mereka mencapai usia dewasa.*

**Kata Kunci** : *Pendidikan Gender, Kesetaraan Gender, Anak-Anak, Keluarga & Aceh.*

## **A. Introduction**

Since it was declared as one of the crucial issues in the Sustainable Development Goals agenda by the United Nations, gender equality has been discussed globally including in Aceh province, Indonesia. The issue has not only taken scholars' attention but also the international organizations, social workers, volunteers, and stakeholders of the nation. In responding to the international demand to achieve gender equality, the government of Indonesia has shown their support through the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Children Protection which has responsibilities to protect women and children from domestic violence and other discriminations. In the context of Aceh, efforts to protect women's and children's rights and empowerment are regulated in Qanuns (Aceh's regional regulations). One of them is Qanun Number 11 (2008) concerning Child Protection, Qanun Number 6 (2009) concerning Empowerment and Protection of Women, and Qanun Number 9 (2019) concerning Handling Violence against Women and Children (PPPA, 2020).

However, in Aceh province, for all the regulations that has been made, the elimination of discrimination against women has not been achieved completely. In Aceh's communities, people resist gender equality due to the contradicting value of religion and culture. In Aceh, the term of gender equality does not receive a warm welcome from the communities. There are some problems and challenges to achieve gender equality, including lack of understanding of people about the gender equality, limited attention to neglected groups and issues, and rejection from some groups (usually happen in rural and strong culture groups) and lack of education about gender equality (EIGE, 2016).

When it comes to the discussion about education and gender equality, it is not only about how women can access education as equal to men, but also how we educate the young generation about gender equality because it will enable all children to understand that they should have same opportunities, and it will also empower children to be more tolerant of differences. In the family, children learn to do physical activities, talk, get to know something, imitate, as well as other activities. Furthermore, in the family, parents are the first educators to conduct educational foundation once the primary educator in the family. Through family education, children begin to recognize a variety of symptoms, they are heard, seen, and felt. Similarly a character in family education, morals, manners, cognitive abilities, attitudes, and various other aspects began to form. Therefore, family education is the foundation for further children's education, both formal and non-formal education (Rahman, 2015).

This research aims to explain the forms of gender education and seeks to describe the importance of gender education in the family as it is the first educational institution for children. Family is one of the basic institutions in which open children's eyes to the world and make them who they are. Mankind learns within the family the first values of life that leave the deepest traces in their personality, and a significant part of them lasts until the end of their life.

The biggest concern of this research is the parent's role related to gender education in the family. In many ways, this is the challenge in building bridges between parents and children who do not know about gender issues. To find out how gender equality is applied in Acehnese families, the following research will discuss aspects of culture and gender equality, and education about gender in the family as an effort to encourage children to remove gender stereotypes, empathy and care for others, understand, demonstrate and promote equal opportunities.

## **Method**

In order to find the understanding about the forms of gender education, and the importance of gender education in the Acehnese families, the researcher used qualitative study method with descriptive analysis. In this study, the researcher use primary and secondary data as data source. The primary data obtained through interviews with 10 parents with different backgrounds (6 of them are academicians and 4 of them are blue-collar workers), and 10 students (5 boys and 5 girls). The informants were chosen randomly after making consideration whether they have knowledge about a particular culture or members of a group and who have been a member of culture for some time, and are knowledgeable about what other members may think, feel, and believe. The researcher used an unstructured interview method in which there were in-depth interview techniques. In this in-depth interview, the researcher has relatively no control over the response of the informants. The informants are free to provide complete, in-depth answers, by making the interview take place informally like in a conversation. Meanwhile, secondary data obtained through library research with a comprehensive secondary source review that have relation to the study.

## **B. Discussion**

### **1. Gender Education in Acehnese Family**

In our life, we cannot be separated by gender, gender is an important factor in children's development (Helgeson, 2009). Gender education is considered extremely important in family and parents can play an important role in promoting gender equality and building children's resilience to rigid gender stereotypes in early childhood. Early

childhood is a key developmental period when children begin to learn about gender (Santrock, 2010).

Gender is different from a person's biological sex. A person's sex is based on physical features such as anatomy, hormones and reproductive organs. Their gender is the way they think and act based on learning roles and social expectations. From birth, children learn about gender-appropriate attitudes and behaviours through gender socialisation. They learn to "do" gender through internalising gender norms and roles as they interact with people around them. Families are primary agents of gender socialisation, and often provide children's first sources of information and learning about gender. Children begin to understand and act out gender roles and stereotypes at an early age (Hamilton, 2018).

In the Acehnese family, gender education is rarely to be found. The researcher found that the factor causing the absence of gender education in Acehnese society is lack of parents understanding about gender equality. Every child both who live in rural or in city in Aceh province will get a good education about Islam and general lessons in their family. In some cases, parents teach the children reading Qur'an by themselves at home in the evening while the other learn about the Islamic lesson at *Balai Pengajian* (the traditional education place where children usually learn Islamic lessons such as Al-Qur'an and Hadith). However, it is difficult to find gender education for children in Acehnese society. To understand more about the gender education in the family, the researcher interviewed Muhammadiyah who works as a teacher and lecturer at a Modern Islamic School in North Aceh.

*Actually, it is almost never, I never teach my kids about gender and we never discuss about it at home. We teach our children about Islam lessons and send them to school because we think it is important for them to get an education. I never think about gender education, we learn Islam and we practice it in our lives and that is enough. What else could the children learn about it? They will understand when they grow up later (Interview with Muhammadiyah June 2020).*

After examining the interview above, it can be concluded that gender education (to share the same responsibilities of housework for example) is never discussed in the family. They do teach the girls by asking them to clean the dishes, washing clothes while boys do not do the same things as girls do. Many Acehnese still refer to culture when dealing with life which is patriarchal culture. For example, in Aceh, women are considered to be only housewives who carry out domestic chores and nurture their children.

The researcher also found that within the Acehnese family, there are differences in the treatment of boys and girls, from the selection of toys to the division of labour in the

household. For instance, boys will be given toys in the form of cars or robots while girls will be given dolls or cooking tools. Furthermore, boys are also more often assigned to do more masculine activities such as repairing electronic materials than doing activities in the kitchen. If there are boys and girls in the family, it can be guaranteed that the girls will do all the household chores, from washing the clothes of the whole family to cooking (Kiram, 2020).

As the consequences, the children grew up with patriarchal ideology because of the culture that has been passed from their parents for decades. The gender inequality is continuously occurring in Aceh society because the younger generation grew up in the same culture as their parents. In order to get more data about gender education in the family, the researcher also interviewed 10 students (5 boys and 5 girls) whether they get gender education at home and some forms of answers to the results of the interview are as follows.

*No, I never learn about gender equality at home and my parents do not mention anything about it and I am sure my parents do not understand it, I heard gender equality when I enter university (Interview with Asya, June 2020).*

*Yes, sometimes my mom tells me men should be able to do anything, including cooking and washing our clothes. She said there is no difference between boys and girls. My mom usually also asks me to help her in the kitchen when she cooks, but I am not sure my mom understands about gender because she did not go to school (Interview with Zami, June 2020).*

Eight out of ten students who interviewed by the researcher said they do not get gender education at home. From their explanation, it can be concluded that the gender education is still not been thought in Acehnesse families because some parents do not understand the term of gender equality which caused by lack of information or socialisation about the gender equality in the province. Some parents practice gender equality at home without knowing the term of gender itself who are called inadvertent actors. They practice the values of gender equality, but they may not know it (an example of this case is Zami's parents).

The lack of gender education in Acehnesse family has led to the gender inequality because the children grow up in a patriarchal culture. As long as the term of gender is not well understood and practiced by all levels of society, especially the younger generation, gender inequality will continue to occur because the growing generation is not equipped with an understanding of gender and they will continue to practice a patriarchal culture.

## **2. Why Is Gender Education in Family Important?**

Education is important in human life and in this case, also related to gender equality. Gender inequality starts with a lack of understanding of the basic values of gender equality. Attitudes towards gender equality are the tendency of individuals to provide cognitive and affective responses to the equality of roles and rights between men and women. Differences in attitudes towards gender equality vary depending on the influencing factors, including knowledge about gender equality. Education on gender equality must start early so that it will provide a good understanding when children grow up. The family as the first agent of socialization in society has an important role in instilling this understanding.

Several, mostly U.S., studies have investigated child gender stereotypes in a family context, and demonstrated that parental gender stereotypes and the presence of siblings play an important role in the development of explicit gender stereotypes. Children acquire gender stereotypes at an early age. U.S study with 10- month-old children found that at this age they can already detect gender-related categories (Levy and Haaf, 1994). In the second year of life preferences for gender stereotypical toys appear, as found in a Canadian study with 12-, 18-, and 24-month-old children. According to another Canadian study explicit knowledge about gender roles emerges between the ages of 2 and 3 years (Poulin-Dubois et al, 2002). Children start absorbing stereotypes by age 3, causing the world to expand for boys and shrink for girls by age 10 (Luscombe, 2017).

This indicates that children learn about gender from their family for the first time. Gender equality begins at home, and families are at the front lines of change. According to the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN), there are eight family functions, one of which is the function of education (BKKBN, 2020). In this case, educating children about gender is one manifestation of family function. So far, what vast majority know as a place to educate children is school. However, some people do not realize that the house as a place for family gathering is also a place for the education. Education that is provided in the family cannot be ignored. Even the success of education in school is largely determined by education in the family.

Gender education should be given to children in their early ages by telling the history of gender equality in Acehnese society, teaching Islamic religious values, and guiding children to practice it in the family. Cooking skills and helping take care of domestic matters also need to be trained early on boys and girls. So they do not consider that housework is only women's work, instead they would understand that it is a shared task in the family. For the next generation, the examples set at home by parents, caregivers and extended family will shape the way children think about gender and equality.

The family can apply the values of gender equality by sharing the care work. All this time from cooking and cleaning, to fetching water and firewood or taking care of children and the elderly, women carry out at least two and a half times more unpaid household and care work than men. As a result, thousands of women and girls miss out on equal opportunities of going to school, or joining full-time paid work, or having enough time to rest.

By involving boys in care work and household chores from an early age, along with girls would create the same responsibilities among the family member. At the same time it would increase the awareness to help each other because there are no specific rules or dividing jobs, and at the end it would be an understanding that housework is not only for the girls but also for boys because they share the same jobs and responsibilities. The family also should be the place to fight stereotypes, gender is not about biological differences between the sexes, rather, it's a social construct – people define what it means to be a boy or a girl, and these social conditionings often expect children to conform to specific and limiting gender roles and expectations from a young age.

Teaching gender equality for children is never too early and they never too young to learn about gender equality. By understanding the value of gender equality (the equal right, and opportunities for both men and women) and accepting the differences the children could remove gender stereotypes, promote equal opportunities, and they would come out and bring the gender equality in the family and society in general as they will be the pioneer of gender equality when they reach adulthood.

### **C. Conclusion**

From the discussion that has been made above, it can be concluded that there is no gender education in Aceh families which caused by the lack of parents understanding about gender equality. The lack of gender education in Acehnese family has led to the gender inequality because the children grow up in a patriarchal culture. Gender education in the family is important because children acquire gender stereotypes at an early age, and they learn about gender equality from their family for the first time. Teaching gender equality for children is never too early and they never too young to learn about gender equality because children who grow up in a family with strong gender equality will be able to end gender-based discrimination in the family or even in the community.

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