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## Relation between Religious Understanding and Women's Life

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### Abstract

*This study examines how religious understanding and women's life are in Kahayan riverside, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. This study aims to see whether there is a relationship between the religious understanding and women's social life. The research method used is naturalistic qualitative by taking purposive samples; there are 12 participants consisting of 5 male laborers or private company workers and 5 housewives, added by supporting informants namely Rukun Warga (RW) and one leader of an equally-sub district area namely RT as participants who understand the pattern of life in the community. Data were obtained through observations for two months in May - June 2019. The data analysis was done by collecting daily records every week and then they were evaluated based on needs. This study found out that a religious doctrine that is textually normative is very influential on the mindset among women/mothers so that it is shaped in their social life.*

### Keywords

religious understanding; social life; women



### I. Introduction

The Kahayan riverside is located in one of the cities in Palangka Raya, Indonesia (Gunawan, 2014), having people from different ethnic groups, namely the Dayak, Banjar, Madura, and Javanese tribes (Oesterheld, 2016). Most of the people who live Kahayan Riverside area embrace Islam and Protestant Christianity (Gepu et.al, 2018). Although the social, economic and educational strata of the population are low, their diversity is very dynamic (Durkheim & Swain, 2008; Erawati, 2017). Routine religious activities include the Islamic discussion forum, habsyian (Muhammad's commemoration prophet forum using traditional musical instrument namely rebana), manaqib (Islamic historical discussion through melodic words) and burdah (Muhammad's commemoration forum through melodic words) ( Erawati, 2016). The four religious activities were followed by mothers in Kahayan Riverside area. Routine activities with religious nuance, more or less, shape women's mindset in understanding their religious values and lives. They explore many religious values in the form of normative texts. The meaning of normative religious texts really determines a person's mindset or understanding from various aspects of social life (Knott & Khokher, 1993). In Kahayan Riverbank area, religious activities are always dominated by women, this is an interesting phenomenon for researchers to explore how Muslim women understand their religion that is associated with the construction of their social life. Muslim women always try to live up to the religious lessons in their daily behavior and have an impact on the patterns of social humanist behavior in society (Repo, 2017). Their various efforts include attending discussion forums, reading various Islamic material, listening to Nasheeds, and learning to read Quran (Bhimji, 2009). These efforts can be seen in the dominant attitude about obedience and adherence to the family (Johnson, 1985). Another attitude which is seen in Muslim women is that in social life they respect other people despite of different beliefs (Es, 2017). Muslim women feel that by

attending many religious activities, physically and psychologically, they get peace of mind and obey the true lessons of Islam (Khan et al., 2015; Berghammer & Fliegenschnee, 2014).

Several studies that have been carried out are related to the religious activities of Muslim women. Meanwhile, this study looks more at how religious understanding of women (mothers) and the construction of social life, and whether there is a relationship in it.

## **II. Research Methods**

The naturalistic qualitative in this study was carried out on the people of a city in the province of Central Kalimantan, Indonesia in 2014. This study took a natural setting according to the actual conditions because with the naturalness of the community, phenomena can be seen clearly. Informants 12 participants consisting of 5 male laborers or private company workers and 5 housewives, plus supporting informants namely leader of an equally-district area called RW and one leader of an equally-sub district area namely RT as participants who understand the pattern of life in the community.

The characteristics of the informants from this study are the people who come from low social class with the salary ranging from IDR one to two million. In terms of educational background, most of them merely graduate from junior and senior high school with limited access to either education or health. This phenomenon surprisingly happens in a downtown yet their lifestyle is considered traditionalist with limited access to good economy, education, and health.

A semi-structured interview technique was employed directly to all the respondents in this study in relation to relation of religious understanding and the life of women. To complete the data collected, this study administered a documentation survey local government office. In addition to interview and document survey, and observation of the women's daily life in the research site was also carried out from 24 May to 4 June 2014. The results of the observation were then analyzed through a daily journal evaluated at the end of every week. The focus of the evaluation was their thoughts/ opinions and implementation regarding their understanding of the role of women in religion towards their social life.

## **III. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1 Religious Understanding of Women in Kahayan Riverside Area**

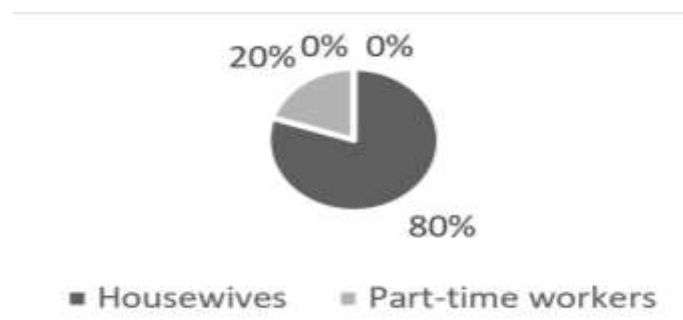
Based on the observation related to women's understanding of religion, all of the informants implicitly show the same understanding as each other. This is due to the similar understanding of both male and female informants that the main role of women are primarily in domestic areas (doing the chores, taking care of the children, and serving the husband). The fact was also confirmed with the results of the interview to one of the representatives of the heads of the local people, 1 male participant, and one female participant. All agreed that the role of women was primarily in the domestic areas. The observation showed that the understanding was acquired from the doctrines in the majlis taklim and their lack of education (most of them only graduated from junior or senior high school).

The religious activities (majlis taklim) were regularly attended for three to four times a week by all the female informants. Most of the contents were taken from such kitab as Fathul Qarib, Syarasittin Masalah, Uquduluja'in, Akhlak Lil Banin, dan Riadhus Shalihin

whose focus of the materials was related to the duty of female Muslims as a mother or wife, and discussion on how to build a good family. This, to certain extent, emphasized the domestic role of women and highlights that their understanding of religion influenced their thinking and doing that women play the most important role in domestic areas. Thus the religious understanding of women (mothers) has more or less influenced their mindset that women are identical with the domestic realm. This has an impact on women's access to social construction.

### 3.2 The Construction of Social Life in Kahayan Riverside

Social life, which is related to domestic duties, education, family, economy, intrapersonal and interpersonal relation, is the focus of the study. Based on the data from observation and interview, 80% of the female participants were housewives. The rest of the participants actually work; however, their types of job are also related to domestic areas such as doing chores (becoming part-time house servants, farming, etc). The illustration of the profession is shown by Figure 1.



*Figure 1. Types of profession of the Female Informants*

Either housewives or part-time workers show typical domestic works, as shown by the observation. In the morning, they all prepare everything for the breakfast and walk their children to school. In the afternoon, their routine is to go to majlis taklim. Even those who took part-time job, they actually did it in leisure time among their domestic routines. For activities that are public, it is very rarely found, considering the majority of mothers are housewives.

It is clearly reflected that in the context of social construction, women in this area do not have responsibility for the finance of the family. All of them believed that it is actually the duty of men. Limited educational background, in addition to their understanding of religious teachings, is also believed to be another factor triggering them (both men and women) to have such understanding.

### 3.3 Relation between Religious Understanding and Women's Life in Kahayan Riverside Area

The relation between religious understanding and women's life in Kahayan Riverside area can be seen clearly from several observations and interviews conducted that the religious understanding of the local community is still classified as traditionalist, seen in the style of the dai's doctrine that seems textual in the interpretation of religious normative texts and most use one-way lecture methods. From several observations and interviews with the local community, it was seen that the intense women/mothers attending the recitation had a profound effect on their understanding of religious doctrines which strengthened a matter or problem. Next from the interviews it was said that most mothers

think education for women is important but the domestic realm is a necessity, because a woman (mother) provides child safety, comfort and development, this statement is often conveyed by the local dai, implicitly a woman/a good mother should be more at home than outdoors.

The role of dai can be seen from the results of observations in the field that most of the Muslim scholars in the area went to traditional pesantren (Islamic boarding school). Consequently, the kitab they learned were categorized into classisal whose contents do not follow the modern era. This significantly affects their materials of majlis taklim which only focus on the role of women in the domestic areas such as doing all the house chores and taking care of the children.

The lecture material presented by the dai such as about the domestic obligations of a mother/woman, reward as collateral according to the normative religious text. Domestic work for women is reinforced by the perception of the local community that the woman should take care of her household and the development of her children, because that has become her nature. The relationship between the two can be seen in Figure 2 below:



**Figure 2.** Relation of religious understanding with women's lives

The dynamics of urban life are very complex and synonymous with progress, modern, individualistic and so forth, as said that urban society belongs to gesellschaft where social relations are based on rational will to achieve goals. The rational will is created by partial, transactional, and neutral affection relationships (Indrayani, 2017, p. 72).

The religious activities of the community in Kahayan Riverside area are dominated by women, it is proved by the frequent activities of the majelis taklim that are held two to three times a week (Wu & Liu, 2014). This recitation routine is usually filled with the reading of the yasin letter (one of the letters in the Qur'an), followed by the mauid habsyi, the religious lecture ends with the Ashar prayer in congregation, with the place to move, can be in one house or in mosques and mushalla (small prayer places) (McKenna & Francis, 2018). Religious lectures are usually filled by religious teachers (who convey religious messages and invite kindness), where themes are adopted such as the laws of worship (thaharah (purification), prayer), virtues in worship and around the household (Cush & Robinson, 2014).

The meaning of textual text is also a gender bias, even though in principle gender equality in the holy text exists, for example: equalizing men and women as servants ('abd) of Allah and as representatives of Allah on earth, both are created from the same element,

then involved in cosmic drama (Abukari, 2014). When Adam and Eve were both guilty of causing him to fall to earth (Hussain, 2001), both have the potential to get achievements on earth, and also have the potential to win the pleasure of God in the world and the afterlife (Mubarak, 2006, pp. 51-52). As Muslim families in Indonesia, respect for women is in subordinate positions (Ibrahim & Abdalla, 2010).

Analysis of the social picture of people's religious understanding, in the functionalist opinion, says that religion is the main social control institution in social relations (Turner, 2012, pp. 214-215). Just as Engels expressed in relation to sexuality and family life teachings, religion maintains social conditions where it can remain safe (Sillick & Cathcart, 2014). The point is that through the holy text of religion a marriage is strengthened by religion and law to maintain stability in maintaining marital ties (Sillick & Cathcart, 2014).

Speaking of the religious life of women, it is also inseparable from the pattern of social life (Sahu & Hutter, 2012), where it is seen in the construction of social life of the Kahayan Riverside community, women's duties and functions can be categorized as subordinate (Stapleton & Wilson, 2014), in the domestic realm, and some others participate in the public sphere. Domestic roles run by women become an obligation and specialty (Darakchi, 2018).

The phenomenon of social life in Kahayan Riverside area if analyzed in a social perspective, as practiced by Giddens with structured theory (Kavishe et al., 2018), said that social practices are considered as the basis underlying the existence of community actors. In reality the perpetrator at least knows what he is doing without having to say it, in the context of gender issues, social practices of gender roles and relations without realizing it (Kim et al., 2014). This is because women are imaged lower than men (Elamin & Omair, 2010). Gender stereotypes form the subconscious of both men and women who are brought from birth by their environment (Ch, 2010, pp. 56-57).

According to Giddens, humans always have ideas about the social world, about themselves, about their future, and about their living conditions. Through his idea, humans influence and change it (Santana et al., 2016). The modern world is characterized by the growth and development of reflectivity. Our lives are getting less and less determined by the certainty and provisions of tradition. Decisions based on reflectivity so that risk becomes a necessity, the most important thing is not to avoid risk but to manage risk (Santana et al., 2016).

Gender as a socio-cultural construction is developed by constructionist feminists (Dzuhayatin, 2015, pp. 7-8), emphasized that the reality of gender is shaped by certain belief, social, economic and political structures (Harrison, 2005). From the social reality that exists, especially in Kahayan Riverside area, is the formation of an understanding of the meaning in society that women are identical in their domestic realm (Zubair & Zubair, 2017).

Understanding and assumptions of the Kahayan Riverside community towards women have been formed, maintained and transmitted to a good environment for the community as well as family institutions (Franceschelli & O'Brien, 2014). Indirectly, gender construction has existed by itself without being realized by the surrounding community (Jaschok & Chan, 2009).

Analysis of relations of religious understanding and women's life in Kahayan Riverside area begins with a mindset which was born because of religious understanding then an understanding emerges, and is implemented with social actions, as expressed by Blumer, one of the figures of symbolic interactionism says that society consists of lines of life behavior, the process continues to be shaped by the interpretation of interactions



controlled by particular objects and defined by a particular group of contexts (Wagner, 2007). That is, the community describes a symbol, interaction, interpretation of the process that is placed with the individual, which is not static (Kinloch, 2005, pp. 242–243).

Blumer's concept of social reality on social behavior problems can be described in the community life of the Kahayan Riverside in the process begins with direct interaction and the interpretation of religious texts unwittingly forms a pattern of understanding of women in their roles and duties in the domestic realm, taking care of children and other things, in contrast to men patterned with understanding as the head of the household is sufficiently fulfill financial and security needs (Samani, 2016). Such an understanding also subconsciously is an affirmation in religious studies, so that it is very clear that the view of gender bias exists both through inheritance from ancestors also influenced by old-fashioned traditionalist-textualist religious studies (Jamal, 2011).

#### IV. Conclusion

The meaning of religion for women in Kahayan Riverside area is very influential on the point of view/mindset about their roles and functions as a woman/mother. The role can be seen in the activities of social life of Muslim women who are naturally conscious with their religious identity where the role and function are more dominant in the domestic realm (taking care of the household, serving the husband and educating children). The relation of religious understanding and the women's life becomes a role in regulating the mindset or social actions in social life.

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