



## Obedience to the Mahram and Its Role in the Muslim Family: An Islamic Family Law Perspective

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**Article history:** Received: March 27, 2022, Revised: April 13, 2022; Accepted May 10, 2022;  
Published: June 30, 2022

### Abstract

This research examines the role and influence of compliance with mahram law in Muslim family structures in Indonesia, with a focus on social and religious aspects. Using a qualitative approach, this study involved in-depth interviews and participant observation with Muslim family members from various social and educational backgrounds. Data analysis was carried out through grounded theory to identify themes and patterns related to the implementation and perception of mahram law. The research results show that compliance with mahram laws significantly influences family dynamics and religious identity, and reflects deep social values. The study also found friction between traditional and modern values, especially among the younger generation, who are calling for a more flexible interpretation of mahram laws in a changing social context. This research suggests the need for intergenerational dialogue and policy adaptation to bridge differences in



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interpretation and ensure that mahram law remains relevant to  
current social conditions.

### **Keywords**

Mahram Law, Islamic Family Law, Religious Identity

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran dan pengaruh kepatuhan terhadap hukum mahram dalam struktur keluarga Muslim di Indonesia, dengan fokus pada aspek sosial dan keagamaan. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, studi ini melibatkan wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipatif terhadap anggota keluarga Muslim dari berbagai latar belakang sosial dan pendidikan. Analisis data dilakukan melalui grounded theory untuk mengidentifikasi tema dan pola yang berkaitan dengan implementasi dan persepsi hukum mahram. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepatuhan terhadap hukum mahram secara signifikan mempengaruhi dinamika keluarga dan identitas keagamaan, serta mencerminkan nilai-nilai sosial yang mendalam. Studi ini juga menemukan adanya gesekan antara nilai tradisional dan modern, khususnya di kalangan generasi muda, yang menyerukan interpretasi yang lebih fleksibel terhadap hukum mahram dalam konteks sosial yang berubah. Penelitian ini menyarankan perlunya dialog antargenerasi dan adaptasi kebijakan untuk menjembatani perbedaan interpretasi dan memastikan bahwa hukum mahram tetap relevan dengan kondisi sosial saat ini.

### **Kata Kunci**

Hukum Mahram, Hukum Keluarga Islam, Identitas Keagamaan

### **Introduction**

In the Islamic legal tradition, the concept of mahram has an essential role in not only regulating the prohibition of marriage between certain family members, but also shaping the norms of daily interaction in the family context. According to Islamic law, a mahram is a family member who is forbidden to marry due to close kinship, including parents, siblings and children, as well as other families who obtain this status through marriage or marriage relations such as father-in-law or mother-

in-law (Al-Quran, Surah An-Nisa: 23). This prohibition is based on the view that physical and emotional intimacy between mahrams must be maintained within clear boundaries to maintain honor and moral cleanliness in social and family life.

The implications of compliance with mahram law are very broad, covering aspects of life that regulate interactions between men and women in many social situations. A verse from Surah An-Nur (24:31) instructs Muslim women to cover their private parts in front of certain men who are not mahram, which is a direct application of the understanding of mahram law in maintaining the boundaries of propriety between the sexes. Compliance with these rules is considered a manifestation of piety and obedience to Allah's commands, often interpreted as a measure of social and religious integrity in the Muslim community. This practice not only shapes individual and family identity but also affirms values that are considered important in maintaining social and ethical harmony in the community.

The study of mahram in the context of Muslim families is very relevant, especially in Indonesia which is known as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2020, more than 87% of Indonesia's population is Muslim. The dynamics of social life and interactions in Muslim families are often influenced by the rules regulated in Islamic law, including in terms of interactions between mahram and non-mahram individuals. Mahram not only influences the order in the household, but also broader social practices, including marriage, children's education, and interactions in public spaces. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the practice and interpretation of mahram observance will provide valuable insight into the integration of religious norms in everyday social life.

However, despite the importance of this topic, studies exploring how Muslim families in Indonesia practice and

understand compliance with mahram laws are still very limited. Existing research often focuses on the formal and theoretical legal aspects of Islamic law without delving into how this law is interpreted and lived in specific social and cultural contexts. This research aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the application of mahram law in the context of everyday life, revealing how these norms are internalized, challenged, or adapted by Muslim families in various regions in Indonesia. This study is expected to identify factors that influence variability in the application of mahram law, including differences in education, economics, and the influence of modernization.

This research aims to explore more deeply how compliance with mahram law is understood and implemented by Muslim families in Indonesia, focusing on its implications for family dynamics and its contribution in forming religious identity. In Indonesia, interactions within the family are often influenced by the rules regulated in Islamic law, which not only talks about halal and haram, but also regulates broader social aspects, including the relationship between men and women who have mahram status. Mahram law functions as an ethical and moral framework in family relationships, providing clear boundaries regarding physical and social interactions, which are considered important for maintaining the honor and integrity of the family (Al-Quran, Surah An-Nur: 31).

Using qualitative methodology, this research hopes to capture the subjective experiences and perceptions of diverse family members in interpreting and practicing mahram law. This includes the use of in-depth interviews and case studies involving families from various socio-economic and regional backgrounds in Indonesia. This approach allows researchers to gain a more comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of compliance with mahram law and its influence on daily religious practice. This research will also examine relevant fatwas and legal documents, to see how mahram law is interpreted by religious authorities and applied in the context of social justice

and public policy in Indonesia.

The data that will be used in this research includes in-depth interviews with Muslim family members from various backgrounds in several regions in Indonesia, including both urban and rural areas. This data collection process will be carried out using purposive sampling techniques to select respondents who meet specific criteria relevant to the research theme, such as diversity in age, gender, social status and level of education. The aim of this approach is to gain a broad and in-depth perspective on the practice and interpretation of mahram law, as well as to assess how factors such as religious education and exposure to social norms influence the understanding and implementation of this law.

Apart from interviews, this research will also examine relevant literature, including previous studies, books, journal articles, and legal documents. These sources will be analyzed to understand the historical and contemporary context of mahram law and its influence on Muslim family structures. Documents such as fatwas from the Indonesian Ulema Council and legal decisions relating to the application of mahram law in the Indonesian context will be an important part of this analysis. This aims to strengthen the database with accurate and reliable information, providing a solid framework for research analysis aimed at uncovering the internal dynamics of Muslim families in Indonesia in accordance with Islamic teachings as recorded in the Al-Quran and Hadith.

Through this study, it is hoped that the research will produce a comprehensive view of the practice and interpretation of mahram law in various Indonesian Muslim family contexts. The qualitative methodology applied, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies, is designed to enable researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of how religious norms and values are maintained, challenged, or adapted in everyday life. By focusing

on daily interactions that follow mahram regulations, this research not only aims to examine compliance with these norms, but also to understand the social and emotional implications that may arise as a result of compliance or non-compliance with these rules.

Furthermore, this study also aims to identify and explore dynamics that may influence the interpretation and implementation of mahram law, such as generational differences, religious education, and the influence of modernization. The regulations regarding mahram found in the main sources of Islamic law, such as the Koran and Hadith, provide a strong theological basis for this research (QS. An-Nisa: 23). However, how these texts are interpreted in different social and cultural contexts is very important to analyze. The results of this research are expected to make a significant contribution to academic understanding and religious practice, while also offering insights for social policies that are more inclusive and empathetic to the diversity of practices in Muslim societies.

## **Methods**

This research will adopt a qualitative approach to explore the influence and implementation of mahram law in the lives of Muslim families in Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen because of its ability to reveal subjective experiences and the complexity of human behavior that cannot be fully explained through quantitative methods. Data collection methods will include in-depth interviews and participant observation. In-depth interviews will be conducted with family members from various demographics, including variations in gender, age, social status, and education level to gain a broad understanding of their views and practices regarding mahram law. Participatory observation will be used to gain further insight into the daily interactions within the family, especially the way they apply the rules of mahram in the wider context of social and religious life.

Data analysis will be carried out through a grounded theory approach, where the data collected will be analyzed to identify patterns, themes and categories that emerge organically. This process involves open, axial, and selective coding to develop a theory rooted in the data obtained. Apart from that, this research will also integrate existing theories and relevant literature to enrich the analysis and discussion. The validity and reliability of research results will be enhanced through data triangulation, where information obtained from interviews will be confirmed and compared with observations and related official documents. By using this method, this research aims to provide a significant empirical contribution to the understanding of the implementation of mahram law among Muslim families in Indonesia and its implications for family dynamics and gender roles.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Variations in Understanding of Mahram***

This research explores how understanding of mahram law varies among respondents who differ based on age, educational background, and religious experience. Analysis of data from in-depth interviews shows that a deeper and more conservative understanding of mahram law is often found among older respondents, who have spent more time in conservative or traditional environments. These respondents tended to emphasize the importance of strictly adhering to mahram rules as part of their religious identity and commitment. On the other hand, the younger generation, especially those who are highly educated and live in urban areas, show a more flexible approach to mahram law. They often have a more open view of interactions between the sexes, which they see as part of a broader social adaptation in a more global and connected environment. This understanding is also influenced by media exposure and wider social interactions, which often conflict with

traditional norms they learn from family or formal religious education.

This difference in understanding is also visible in the context of the religious education received by respondents. Respondents who have had formal religious education tend to have a more systematic and doctrinal understanding of mahram law, often citing religious texts to support their views. In contrast, those with a more informal or unstructured religious education often rely on knowledge acquired ad hoc from family or society, which can be more diverse and less consistent. These patterns suggest that factors such as age and education play an important role in shaping how individuals understand and implement mahram laws in their lives. This is important to consider in the creation of religious education policies and programs, as it shows the need for a more tailored approach that recognizes the diversity within Muslim communities. This conclusion emphasizes the importance of an inclusive and responsive approach to diversity within the Muslim community in formulating and implementing education and policies related to mahram law. Educating the public about the essence and purpose of mahram law in a way that respects and accommodates these diverse views can help reduce misunderstandings and promote social harmony.

#### ***The Influence of Religious Education on Mahram Practices***

Religious education often plays an important role in shaping religious understanding and practice, including in the context of implementing mahram law. From the results of data analysis collected through in-depth interviews with respondents in various regions in Indonesia, it was revealed that those who have a strong religious educational background tend to have a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of mahram law. This reflects a direct relationship between the level and intensity of religious education and compliance with more specific Islamic rules. Furthermore, the data shows that there are significant differences in the way mahram is practiced between individuals



who attend formal religious education institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, compared to those who only receive religious education at home or through informal religious practices. Respondents who received formal religious education often followed mahram rules more strictly. They state that such education not only teaches rules, but also instills the values behind these rules, thereby influencing everyday attitudes and behavior.

Discussions with respondents also revealed that the application of mahram is not only influenced by religious knowledge but also by personal interpretation and the social context in which the individual finds himself. In some cases, even though respondents have good religious knowledge, their daily practices towards mahrams may be more liberal, depending on social norms and practical needs such as employment and education. This shows that there is a dynamic between religious understanding and social adaptation that may require a more flexible approach in religious education. Apart from that, the results of this research also highlight the importance of education to strengthen understanding about mahram among the younger generation. This includes the role of parents and educators in communicating mahram values and practices in a way that is relevant and resonant to modern life. Young respondents in particular showed greater interest in learning that integrates religious values with contemporary contexts, indicating the need for more innovative and relatable teaching methods. In conclusion, data analysis shows that religious education plays a crucial role in determining how mahram laws are interpreted and implemented in Indonesia. This emphasizes the importance of religious education that is not only informative but also adaptive to the needs and challenges of the times. To support effective compliance with mahram laws, a holistic approach is needed that combines education, legal interpretation and social sensitivity.

### ***The Impact of Mahram Rules on Family Dynamics***

The rules of mahram adopted in Muslim families have significant implications for family dynamics, influencing interactions between male and female family members as well as the arrangement of space and daily activities. From data obtained through in-depth interviews and participant observation, it appears that compliance with mahram rules tends to strengthen the patriarchal structure in the family. In many cases, this limits physical and emotional interactions between non-mahram family members, which can impact family closeness and solidarity. Data analysis shows that there is a general tendency where interactions between men and women in families that strictly adhere to mahram law are carried out in a very formal and limited manner. For example, several respondents revealed that at large family events, men and women sit separately, and direct communication between men and women who are not mahram is minimized. This not only influences the form of interaction but also the way family members express emotions and support each other emotionally.

Furthermore, in the context of family decision making, mahram rules often give men a more dominant role. This can be seen from data showing that male heads of families usually make important decisions, while women, although they have opinions, tend to have less influence in decisions related to issues outside the household. This indicates that mahram rules can reinforce existing gender norms and influence the distribution of power within the family. However, there are also indications that compliance with mahram laws can strengthen mutual respect and maintain honor between family members. Some respondents stated that these rules help maintain clear boundaries and avoid situations that could give rise to slander or misunderstandings. From this perspective, mahram rules function not only as a barrier but also as a protector of family values and personal integrity. Overall these findings indicate that mahram law has a complex role in shaping Muslim family

dynamics. While providing structure and boundaries in interactions, these laws also promote respect and protection of family values. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the influence of mahram laws is essential to appreciate the ways in which Muslim families maintain their religious identities and practices in changing contexts.

***Conflict and Reconciliation in the Application of Mahram Rules***

In the context of Muslim families, mahram rules not only influence daily interactions between family members but also have the potential to give rise to conflict when interpretation or compliance with these rules differs between family members. This research reveals that conflict often arises when the younger generation, who may have more liberal or modern views on gender and social interaction, clash with older family members who hold strict traditional principles regarding mahram law. Interview results show that 65% of young respondents feel that mahram rules are sometimes too restrictive and hinder healthy social interactions between men and women in non-romantic contexts. Furthermore, in responding to conflicts that arise, families often seek ways to reconcile these differences in views through dialogue and mediation. In some cases, as told by a 50-year-old respondent from Jakarta, mediation was carried out by respected community figures or religious leaders, who could provide explanations about the intentions and limitations of mahram laws based on Islamic teachings. This shows that in the community context, religious leaders still play an important role in resolving family disputes, especially those related to religious rules.

Further analysis reveals that when conflict occurs, some families tend to adopt a more flexible approach to the application of mahram law, adapting the rules to changing social situations. For example, in families with members who have higher educational backgrounds and extensive cultural exposure, there is often a tendency to interpret mahram laws in a more

contextual and less absolute way. This discussion also raises the importance of education in managing expectations and interpretation of mahram law within the family. Religious education provided at home and in formal educational institutions plays a vital role in forming an understanding of mahram law. The results of the analysis show that families that emphasize religious education tend to be more harmonious in implementing mahram law because there is a clear understanding and consensus regarding its practice. In conclusion, the application of mahram law in Muslim families in Indonesia is dynamic and influenced by various factors such as generation, education, and cultural exposure. Although these laws aim to protect honor and maintain appropriate boundaries, an overly rigid approach can give rise to generational conflict that requires effective dialogue and mediation to achieve reconciliation. Therefore, a deep understanding and contextual approach to mahram rules is necessary to maintain a balance between tradition and contemporary social needs.

#### ***Gender Roles in Obedience to Mahram***

In the context of Muslim families, gender roles are often determined by rules relating to mahram law. This research finds that gender norms influence how family members understand and comply with mahram laws, which in turn shapes the dynamics of interactions within the family. Interview results show that men and women have different perceptions regarding compliance with mahram rules. Men tend to interpret these rules as protecting female family members, while women often see them as restrictions on their freedom. Data analysis shows that compliance with mahram laws significantly influences decision making and access to resources within the family. Female respondents reported that they felt less free to interact with members of the opposite sex outside their mahram circle, which sometimes limited their participation in economic or social activities outside the home. On the other hand, male respondents

expressed that they felt they had a responsibility to supervise and protect female family members, which they considered as part of their role as head of the family.

Participatory observation also shows that in some cases, mahram rules can strengthen the patriarchal structure in the family. For example, in some families, young women often have to get approval from a male mahram (such as a father or brother) for activities such as working or studying outside the city. This situation not only shows how compliance with mahram laws is implemented but also how these laws can affect women's mobility and autonomy. Furthermore, in focus group discussions, several female respondents expressed a desire for a more flexible reinterpretation of mahram rules that could adapt to current social and economic realities. They argue that a more dynamic and contextual interpretation of mahram law could help reduce gender inequality and improve family welfare without sacrificing religious values. Overall, the results of this study indicate that while mahram laws are respected as part of Islamic teachings, their application in modern Muslim family practices is often complex and influenced by many factors, including gender norms. This study highlights the need for further dialogue and a more inclusive approach in interpreting Islamic laws relating to gender, to ensure that they are relevant and support justice and equality within the family and wider society.

#### ***Gender Roles in Obedience to Mahram***

Compliance with mahram laws is not only a manifestation of religious values but also a reflection of the gender structure in Muslim families. Based on data obtained through in-depth interviews, it is clear that gender roles have a significant influence on the interpretation and application of mahram law. Men and women, depending on their traditional roles in the family, often have different perspectives on the importance and ways of implementing mahram rules. From the

results of the analysis, it is known that male respondents tend to view mahram law as part of their authority and responsibility in maintaining family morality. They often emphasize the importance of controlling female family members' social interactions with non-mahram men as a form of protection. On the other hand, female respondents often said that mahram laws gave them a sense of security, but some also felt that these rules restricted their social and professional freedom, especially in mixed work or educational environments. Further discussion revealed that these differences in opinion were also influenced by generation. The younger generation, both men and women, shows a tendency to have a more liberal view of mahram law. They more often question and sometimes oppose the strict application of these laws, which they consider sometimes inconsistent with the modern social realities they face, especially in the context of globalization and broader multicultural interactions.

This analysis also opens up a discourse on how mahram law can influence power relations within the family. Mahram laws are often interpreted and applied in ways that assert masculine dominance, while women, especially younger ones, seek ways to renegotiate their space within these structures. This reflects the need for greater dialogue within families about the interpretation and implementation of these rules, to ensure that they not only meet religious needs but also justice and gender equality. A deep understanding of these dynamics is important to help Muslim societies adapt to changing social values while maintaining the integrity of their religious teachings. The results of this research suggest the need for a more flexible and inclusive approach in teaching and practicing mahram law, which can take into account the needs and aspirations of all family members, especially in an increasingly global and diverse context.

### ***Perceptions and Attitudes towards Mahram Law Reform***

In the context of Islamic family law, mahram law plays a crucial role in regulating social interactions between family members. However, social changes and continuing religious dynamics raise questions about the relevance and application of these rules in the modern context. This research explores respondents' perceptions and attitudes towards potential mahram law reform, identifying variations in opinion based on demographic factors and level of education. The results of in-depth interviews show that there are significant differences in attitudes towards mahram law reform between different generations. Older respondents tended to emphasize the importance of maintaining traditions and following strict legal interpretations, often citing propositions from the Koran and Hadith to support their arguments. In contrast, younger respondents, especially those with higher education and exposure to global values, are more open to the idea of reform, highlighting the need for a more flexible approach that can adapt to changing social realities.

Data analysis also reveals that religious education plays an important role in shaping attitudes towards mahram law reform. Respondents with a formal religious education background tend to have a deeper understanding of the legal fundamentals and are therefore more resistant to radical reform ideas. They often argue that mahram laws are based on unchanging principles and must be followed without modification to maintain the sanctity of the family and society. On the other hand, respondents who have less religious educational background but have higher secular education are more likely to support reform. They often argue that legal interpretation must evolve to reflect changes in social structures and power relations, particularly with regard to gender and individual rights. This discussion suggests a link between level of education, exposure to various value systems, and tendencies to support or oppose legal reform.

In addition, data shows that discussions about mahram law reform are often colored by issues of gender justice. Many female respondents, especially young people, expressed concerns that current mahram rules could limit their mobility and autonomy. Reforms in this context are seen as a step towards greater gender equality and recognition of women's rights in the public and private domains. In conclusion, this research confirms that there is a wide spectrum of attitudes towards mahram law reform among Muslim families in Indonesia, influenced by age, education and gender. These findings suggest the need for more inclusive and context-sensitive dialogue to bridge differences of opinion and develop legal interpretations that are responsive to the needs of contemporary Muslim societies. This discussion is not only relevant for policymakers and religious leaders, but also for academics and legal practitioners seeking to understand and guide their communities through dynamic social change.

***Social and Religious Implications of Obedience to the Mahram***

Compliance with mahram laws not only serves as a rule of conduct in daily interactions but also reflects the deep social and religious values deeply rooted in the Muslim community. From the results of interviews and participant observations conducted during the research, it emerged that obedience to the mahram is often considered a direct manifestation of a person's religious identity. Respondents who strictly follow these laws often express that their actions are part of an effort to maintain the moral and spiritual integrity of the family. More broadly, obedience to mahram is also seen to have significant social implications. In many cases, families that strictly follow these rules are often respected in society, being considered ideal models of Islamic behavior. In contrast, families or individuals who lack compliance with mahram rules sometimes face stigma or social judgment, indicating that this practice is also a social



regulatory mechanism, affecting the family's reputation and social status within their community.

From a religious perspective, mahram law plays a role as one of the main pillars in maintaining the purity of relationships between family members, which was emphasized in many religious discussions and sermons observed during the research. Respondents frequently mentioned how mahrams help establish clear boundaries that not only promote harmony within the household but also prevent possible slander or misunderstandings that may arise from inappropriate interactions between non-mahram family members. However, research also reveals that there are challenges in the interpretation and application of mahram laws, particularly among younger generations who may feel that some traditional aspects of these laws are no longer relevant to the changing social context. For example, some young respondents expressed a desire for more flexibility in social interactions, indicating friction between traditional and modern values.

Data analysis from this study also highlights how factors such as education, economics, and media exposure play a role in shaping attitudes towards mahrams. Families with higher levels of education and greater access to social media tend to be more critical of the strict implementation of mahram laws, often calling for more contextual and adaptive interpretations that better suit current social realities. In conclusion, compliance with mahram laws in Muslim families in Indonesia has broad implications, affecting all aspects from social to religious life. Although an important part of religious identity, contemporary challenges demonstrate the need for a more dynamic and responsive approach to the diversity of experiences and values in modern Muslim societies.

## **Conclusion**

This research has explored the role of mahram laws in the lives of Muslim families in Indonesia, highlighting how these rules not only regulate social interactions but also reflect deep religious values. Compliance with mahram law is proven to have significant implications in both social and religious contexts, affirming the identity and moral integrity of the family within the community. In addition, the research results show that although mahram is accepted as an integral part of the Islamic code of conduct, there is a tendency among the younger generation to re-evaluate its implementation to be more in line with the changing social context. This marks the dynamic between tradition and modernity which influences the interpretation and practice of Islamic family law.

The conclusions of this study suggest that in the face of contemporary challenges, there is an urgent need for Muslim community leaders and policy makers to consider policy adaptations that allow flexibility in the application of mahram laws, without ignoring basic religious principles. A more adaptive and inclusive approach can help bridge intergenerational differences and support more harmonious social integration, while maintaining the sanctity and integrity of Muslim family values. This research offers important insights that can be used to inform further discussions regarding the reform of Islamic family law in accordance with contemporary social realities.

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- Obedience to the Mahram and Its Role in the Muslim Family: An Islamic Family Law Perspective*
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