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Interpersonal Communication Between Parents and Children Regarding *Kafa'ah* Standards in the Selection of a Life Partner

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Abstract

This study aims to describe patterns of interpersonal communication between parents and their daughters when defining kafa'ah standards for prospective spouses within pesantren environments. This focus emerged from a research gap in previous studies, which emphasised the normative dimension of kafa'ah rather than the communicative dynamics within santri families. A qualitative approach was adopted, involving field research and the collection of primary data through in-depth interviews and observations with four families of female students (santri) from Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Kediri. Secondary data were obtained from relevant books, journals and other documented sources. Both types of data were analysed using in-depth analytical techniques, revealing that open and persuasive communication is the dominant pattern through which parents and children negotiate and align their views on kafa'ah standards. Mutual understanding is further reinforced through two-way interactions grounded in pesantren moral values and shared spiritual experiences. These findings contribute to the discourse on interpersonal communication in pesantren settings by demonstrating that religiosity functions as both a value system and a communicative framework that mediates family decision-making processes.

Keywords: *Communication, Family, Kafa'ah*

Abstrak

Penilitan ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan pola komunikasi interpersonal antara orang tua dan anak dalam menentukan standar kafa'ah calon pasangan hidup di lingkungan pesantren. Fokus ini berangkat dari kesenjangan peneliitan sebelumnya yang lebih menenkankan aspek normatif daripada dinamika komunikasi keluarga santri. Melalui metode penelitian lapangan dengan pendekatan kualitatif, data primer dikumpulan

melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi empat keluarga santri Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Kota Kediri. Data sekunder didapatkan melalui dokumentasi sumber-sumber lain yang relevan seperti buku dan jurnal. Kedua jenis data tersebut dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis mendalam yang menghasilakan temuan bahwa komunikasi persuasif dan terbuka menjadi pola yang dominan dalam proses menyelaraskan pandangan tentang standar kafa'ah. Kesaling pahaman juga diperkuat dengan interaksi dua arah yang berlandaskan nilai moral pesantren dan spiritual bersama. Sehingga, temuan ini memperluas kajian komunikasi interpersonal dalam konteks pesantren, religiusitas bukan hanya sekedar nilai, namun juga kerangka komunikasi yang bisa memediasi proses pengambilan keputusan keluarga.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi, Keluarga, Kafa'ah

INTRODUCTION

In Islam, marriage is not just the union of two individuals; it is also the foundation of a family based on religious values. In the context of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), selecting a life partner is more complex as it involves multiple parties, including parents, students (santri) and the kiai, who is a spiritual authority figure (Atabik Ahmad, 2014). Creating a harmonious and enduring family based on faith in God Almighty is considered a noble objective of marriage. This aligns with the principles stated in Law Number 1 of 1974 (Syahraeni Andi, 2017).

Attaining a marriage that embodies sakinah, mawaddah and rahmah is certainly not simple. The Qur'an highlights that one of the signs of God's power is His creation of spouses from your own kind, so that you may find comfort and tranquillity in them, and His instilling of affection and compassion between you. Indeed, in this creation are signs for those who reflect, as stated in Surah ar-Rum, verse 21. The Qur'an emphasises that each partner is created to complement and fulfil the needs of the other. Men are drawn to women, and women originate from men; thus, the root and its branches remain interconnected. Likewise, God states: 'He created you from a single soul and created its mate from it so that he might dwell in tranquillity with her' (Al-A'raf: 189) (Siti Fatimah, 2018).

Therefore, choosing a prospective spouse is the foundational step in building a family, one that is crucial and central. However, many individuals encounter challenges related to kafa'ah (compatibility) when selecting a life partner. The concepts of equality, compatibility, harmony and comparability are all used to describe kafa'ah. In the context of marriage, kafa'ah is the idea that a man and his

prospective wife should be comparable in terms of religious commitment, social standing, morality, and economic capacity (Sayyid Sabiq, 1993).

However, Zainul and Siti argue that kafa'ah should emphasise balance, harmony, and alignment, particularly with regard to religion, including worship and ethical conduct. As social categories are formed based on the belief that all humans exist under God's authority, kafa'ah should not be understood merely in terms of material equality or noble lineage. It is only one's piety that truly distinguishes individuals, and it is considered inappropriate to marry someone whose religious life is not commendable (Zainul Mustofa, 2020).

Living a married life reflects the inherently social nature of human beings. Mature santri often view marriage as a means of building a family and transitioning into the next phase of adulthood. It is not uncommon for students in Islamic boarding schools to enter into marriage contracts for various reasons, including to avoid morally inappropriate behaviour, or to respond to social pressures and community discussions regarding a woman's perceived readiness for marriage. In some cases, parents may arrange their daughters' marriages due to concerns about social scrutiny, and the wali often sees this as a protective measure (Fairuzah, 2021).

Within the pesantren tradition, students are taught religious knowledge and the Qur'an, and are encouraged to practise what they have learnt and take responsibility for it. Values such as sincerity, self-reliance, cooperation and independence are emphasised. Additionally, the kyai, as the spiritual and educational leader, constantly monitors and guides students to ensure they uphold moral and religious values in their social interactions. As such, the pesantren serves as a guardian of ethical and spiritual integrity. The kyai's educational approach, which integrates theory and practical example and is closely followed by his students, consistently reinforces the preservation of pesantren traditions by upholding values of exemplary conduct (Abdul Adib, 2021).

As an independent institution, the pesantren selects and instils particular ideological principles in its students. This includes guiding students through arranged marriages or structured matchmaking processes overseen by the institution. In this context, the pesantren is often perceived as limiting students' autonomy. However, a more constructive view is that such practices form part of a broader system through which pesantren traditions adapt to contemporary developments. As the institution ensures that marriages are not forced, these practices do not contradict the values upheld in Islamic education within the boarding school environment. Instead, they modernise the lived Islamic educational experience, reflecting the pesantren's active role in the moral and administrative development of its students (Muhammad Fahmi, 2022).

As a standalone organisation, the pesantren imparts revised philosophical foundations to its students, including guidance on student life through structured relationships and customary supervisory systems. From a religious standpoint, these processes contribute to the recognition of pesantren as institutions that can engage with modernity while preserving their core traditions. In this regard, pesantren practices may appear to restrict certain forms of individualism among students. However, as students enter marriage voluntarily and without external pressure, these practices do not undermine the essence of Islamic education within the boarding school system. In fact, they help to shape a more modern pesantren educational framework, while also reinforcing the institution's commitment to student guidance and administration (Nur Zulaili Iin, 2020).

To facilitate matchmaking and marriage, some pesantren organise large collective wedding ceremonies for their students. These mass weddings are considered sacred events involving couples who have undergone an extensive matchmaking process, often without prior personal acquaintance, based on the intention of forming harmonious and prosperous families (Efendi Saparudin, 2022).

Furthermore, parents who choose to send their children to a pesantren typically have specific expectations regarding the selection of a future spouse. As well as seeking advice from the kyai (the spiritual leader of the boarding school), parents often set criteria for prospective partners, such as having studied at the same school or pesantren. In these settings, some students live in the boarding school, some are married with families of their own, and others continue their education while living on pesantren grounds (Muhammad Fahmi, 2022).

A similar situation can be found at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Puteri Islamiyah, where relationships often develop between male and female students studying within the Darussalam academic units. In 2023, the number of female students in the Darussalam Unit reached 260. In this pesantren environment, students generally marry at the age of 20 at the earliest, and as a result, most choose to marry only after completing their education, typically after approximately six years of study. Nevertheless, not all students marry peers from the same institution or alma mater.

With the rapid development of technology and communication tools, new social issues frequently emerge. Many students now choose to find their own partners, and in some cases, marriages occur without parental or kyai approval, a phenomenon increasingly observed among santri. Frequent and open communication between parents and children is essential to navigate such situations, avoid mistakes when choosing a spouse, and reduce the risk of future marital problems.

Communication is one of the most fundamental aspects of human relationships, especially within the family environment. Family unity and mutual understanding can be nurtured when all family members communicate effectively. Family relationships

are inherently enduring, and families must work together harmoniously. A family can also be viewed as individuals coexisting within a shared structure. Therefore, effective communication is crucial in strengthening these bonds, particularly between parents and children (Nita Indriani, 2017).

Effective communication within a family is inextricably linked to the responsibilities of both parents, who are jointly committed to providing guidance, education and exemplary conduct to ensure the safety and well-being of their children. This is reflected in Surah At-Tahrim, verse 6, in which Allah commands believers to protect themselves and their families from wrongdoing. This verse emphasises that parents must show deep care and attention to their children, thereby fostering mutual understanding between parents and children. This mutual understanding enables children to grasp their parents' expectations and helps parents to appreciate their children's needs and aspirations (Fabinus Fensi, 2017).

Effective communication within a family is inextricably linked to the shared responsibilities of both parents, who are jointly committed to providing guidance, education and exemplary behaviour to ensure the safety and well-being of their children. This principle is reflected in Surah At-Tahrim, verse 6, where Allah instructs believers to safeguard themselves and their families from wrongdoing. The verse emphasises the importance of parental care and attentiveness in cultivating mutual understanding between parents and children. Through this understanding, children become aware of their parents' expectations, and parents, in turn, are better able to understand the needs and aspirations of their children (Alex Sobur, 1993).

Previous research has largely focused on the normative aspects of kafa'ah and general family communication patterns. However, no existing studies have specifically explored interpersonal communication between parents and children when determining kafa'ah standards within the pesantren context. Consequently, this study aims to describe the patterns of interpersonal communication between parents and female santri when defining kafa'ah criteria for a prospective spouse. This research is expected to enrich the study of interpersonal communication by incorporating religious and cultural dimensions into the understanding of kafa'ah. In practice, the findings could be used as a valuable reference by parents, pesantren caregivers and Islamic educational institutions to help them develop open, empathetic communication patterns grounded in religious values to guide students in selecting a life partner.

RESEARCH METHOD

This method was chosen to obtain direct data from respondents who are actively involved in the daily life of the pesantren. Sutopo explains that the aim of field

research is to gather substantial information about past conditions and how social units interact with current situations. Field visits may target individuals, groups, institutions, or communities (Sutopo, 2022).

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation. The interview guidelines took the form of open-ended questions to allow respondents to answer freely, since the research criteria were partly shaped by the unique characteristics of each participant's lived experience (Sayidah, 2018). In line with this, purposive sampling was employed as the most appropriate sampling technique for this study (J. Smith, 2009). Secondary data were also collected using documentation techniques, drawing from relevant literature such as scholarly journals, books, conference proceedings and news sources.

In-depth analysis was the technique used to process the data obtained from the interviews and observations. When conducting the analysis, the researcher carried out data reduction, presentation of the data, and verification or drawing of conclusions. The subjects of this study were parents and their daughters, who were students at Pesantren Darussalam. The study examined the interpersonal communication patterns of families with daughters aged between 25 and 35. Data were collected from four families of santri. The first informant was NL (age 35), the second informant was RT (age 28), the third informant was HL (age 31), and the fourth informant was ZN (age 30). All four informants were alumni of the Darussalam Islamic boarding school for girls in Kediri. Additional data were also obtained from their respective parents as supporting sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dalam memilih pasangan hidup, seorang anak sering kali belajar dari pengalaman di lingkungannya. Seperti kebanyakan dari santri putri di pondok pesantren Darussalam. Banyak dari mereka yang memilih pasangan hidup dengan menentukan standar *kafa'ah* tertentu. Bahkan tidak jarang yang standar *kafa'ah* tersebut ditentukan oleh Kiai ataupun orang tua.

Tentunya hal tersebut membutuhkan pemahaman yang mendalam agar mudah disampaikan pada anak. Untuk itu, beberapa pola komunikasi yang sering diterapkan oleh orang tua dan anak diantaranya adalah : When choosing a life partner, children often learn from the experiences of those around them. This is also true for many female students at Pondok Pesantren Darussalam. Many of them select a spouse based on specific kafa'ah standards. In some cases, these standards are determined by the kyai or their parents.

Naturally, such processes require a deep understanding in order to communicate the guidance clearly to the children. For this reason, several communication patterns are commonly employed by parents and children, including:

1. Persuasive Communication

In this pattern, parents provide guidance and explanations gradually, with the intention of persuading the child to follow the given direction. As expressed by the mother of one of the informants:

> *"As a parent, I always encourage my child to talk to me. If I don't initiate the conversation, my child will close off. This approach encourages my child to open up and share what he experiences." (Wawancara, 2023a)*

Parents' persuasive communication with their children can be categorised into two forms: verbal and non-verbal. Verbal communication involves conveying messages through spoken words and can be done at any time. When delivering messages or advice verbally, parents must pay careful attention to the language they use to ensure that children can easily understand and interpret what is being conveyed. This includes small invitations to discuss common and recurring issues.

> *"I often invite my children to discuss the problems they are facing. This applies to all of them, not only the eldest. Once they understand the issues, I guide them through the steps they need to take to address them. I also often persuade my children to do good things and listen to me in other activities as well" (Wawancara, 2023c).*

Another informant expressed a similar view:

> *"A simple and easy-to-understand communication style is important, as well as paying attention to whether the child is in a good mood. When the child is in a good mood, that is the best time to start persuading them. I usually invite them to engage in another activity and give advice in between, such as telling them that excessive social media use can have negative consequences"* (Wawancara, 2023a).

Meanwhile, non-verbal communication refers to communication expressed through gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Children tend to interpret messages more easily when they are accompanied by observable movements and expressions displayed by their parents. Simple expressions that children can easily understand can help convey indirect messages.

As one informant stated:

> *"Because I am often too busy with work, I sometimes don't have the opportunity to communicate directly with my child. Before leaving for work, I make time to prepare breakfast for them and kiss them on the*

forehead. I am certain that my child understands what I am trying to convey, and they also respond to these gestures" (Wawancara, 2023d)

Effective communication between parents and children can significantly influence children's thought patterns, thereby contributing to the development of their character and behaviour (Gytha Putri, 2019). It is important for parents to provide advice through persuasive communication aimed at encouraging, influencing or reshaping their child's perspective. It is expected that, through persuasive communication, children will be more receptive to guidance, better understand the distinction between right and wrong when making decisions, and become more aware of potential risks.

2. Open communication

A family environment that cultivates open communication among its members will result in more regulated and well-managed communication (Asmaya, 2016). Each family member has the right and freedom to express their opinions. Such an environment encourages children to become more courageous and independent when making decisions.

"At first, whenever our family got together, my husband and I would try to start small conversations with our children. We wanted to see how they would respond. Over time, this became a habit, and now the children are used to expressing their own opinions" (Wawancara, 2023b)

Menurut para orang tua, dengan menerapkan pola komunikasi terbuka dapat memembuat anak merasa terlibat dalam keluarga, sehingga anak merasa dihargai dalam keluarga. According to the parents, establishing an open line of communication allows children to feel involved in the family, thereby fostering a sense of being valued. Miller argues that adopting open communication within the family can cultivate mutual understanding, trust, and openness. Open communication creates an atmosphere in which each family member can comfortably express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings without hesitation, worry, or fear (Miller, 2001). Open communication creates a pleasant atmosphere in which each family member can comfortably express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings without hesitation, worry, or fear (Johnson, 1981).

Similarly, Pawit M. Yusup explains that open communication is a pattern of communication in which every family member discloses matters that may otherwise lead to ambiguity within the family. This is reflected in the following statement from another informant: (Pawit M. Yusuf, 2009). This is reflected in the following statement from another informant:

"Since my child was young, I have often invited her to have one-to-one conversations. I would ask her about her schoolwork and social life, and

whether she was facing any challenges with her friends or how she was feeling. This continued even after she entered the pesantren. Even now, when we visit her at boarding school, she tends to start sharing stories without being asked. This makes me happy because it shows that she feels comfortable telling me anything" (Wawancara, 2023a).

The opposite of open communication is closed communication. According to Epstein, closed communication is characterized by unclear and indirect message delivery, in which both the sender (communicator) and the receiver fail to obtain clear information. In unhealthy family relationships, communication tends to be highly closed and indirect. When a family adopts a closed communication pattern, misunderstandings are highly likely to occur.

"In the early years after my daughter entered the pesantren, I felt that she became more introverted than before. She rarely shared her daily activities or the problems she was facing. This made it difficult for my husband and me to speak openly with her. Eventually, I had to gradually encourage her again to make her willing to share her stories." (Wawancara, 2023c).

Open communication is recognised as an effective way for parents and children to interact with each other. Message delivery, particularly from the child, becomes much easier because they do not feel worried or afraid to express their feelings. Consequently, parents can more easily understand their child's emotional state.

3. Two-way communication (dyadic communication)

Two-way communication is crucial when determining kafa'ah standards because it enables parents to provide their children with appropriate understanding and guidance. For this reason, it is highly important to implement a dyadic communication pattern. Dyadic communication refers to direct communication between two individuals, such as a mother and her child or a husband and wife, conducted in close physical proximity (Rahayu Riska, 2020). As one of the informants expressed:

"In addition to spending time together as a family, my husband and I always try to spend time with each of our children individually. Sometimes we simply chat about ordinary things — as long as each child has their own dedicated time with us'"(Wawancara, 2023d)

This aligns with the characteristics of dyadic communication described by Stewart L. Tubbs and Moss (Deddy Mulyana, 2008), Sehingga proses komunikasi dapat berjalan dengan efektif. Ciri lain dari komunikasi diadik yaitu

komunikator menyamaikan pesan baik verbal maupun non verbal secara instan dan komunikan dapat merespon pesan tersebut secara spontan juga.

Penyampaian pesan dengan pola komunikasi diadik ini dapat menjadi langkah yang efektif untuk komunikasi orang tua dan anak dalam berdikusi ataupun menetukan pilihan. Karena proses komunikasi yang berlangsung secara intens dapat meminimalkan gangguan dari luar. who state that dyadic communication can only occur within close physical proximity. Such proximity enables communication to proceed more effectively. Another characteristic of dyadic communication is that the communicator conveys messages — both verbal and non-verbal, instantly, while the interlocutor responds spontaneously.

Delivering messages through a dyadic communication pattern can be an effective approach for parent–child communication when discussing or making decisions. As the communication process is intensive and direct, external interruptions can be minimised.

Kafa'ah standards for female students of Darussalam Pesantren

Kafa'ah is defined as the compatibility or equivalence of a husband to his wife in terms of personal and social standing (Sahroji Muhammad, 2017). Within Islamic law, kafa'ah is an important consideration in marriage, as it constitutes a right possessed by the prospective bride and her guardian. Consequently, they are permitted to annul a marriage if the prospective groom is deemed incompatible or unequal to the bride (Al-Anshari, 2023). Regarding the kafa'ah standards determined by the female students of Darussalam Pesantren, there are several variations. Each student has her own considerations and criteria. Among these are:

1. Lineage (Nasab)

   According to scholars of the major schools of Islamic jurisprudence, nasab refers to familial ties based on blood relations, both upwards and downwards. It is natural for individuals to desire righteous and pious descendants; therefore, many people hope to marry a partner from a reputable lineage and family of religious scholars. This aspiration is reflected in the statement of one informant, who based her kafa'ah standard on lineage:

   > *"Previously, I had no particular view about what kind of person I wanted to marry. But when my parents began discussing marriage, I started thinking that I wanted a husband with a good lineage. If not the son of a kiai, then at least someone whose parents and ancestors understand religion — and alhamdulillah, that wish came true" (Wawancara, 2023a).*

2. Experience studying in a pesantren

It is common for female students to desire a spouse with a pesantren background. This preference is often rooted in the intention to preserve pesantren traditions within married life. Marrying someone with a pesantren education enables them to continue the practices and routines they adopted during their studies. Certain spiritual disciplines or devotional practices (amalan) taught in pesantrens, for example, are easier to maintain when both partners share the same cultural and religious environment.

3. Profession

In the present day, many modern pesantrens have developed rapidly, equipping their students with various skills to support social engagement and future career choices. The profession is a kafa'ah standard that has become relatively common, as many people consider a stable and respectable occupation to be crucial for a secure and fulfilling life.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals that the determination of a prospective spouse based on kafa'ah standards within pesantren-based families is not solely shaped by open and persuasive communication patterns between parents and children. Rather, it is also shaped by forms of religious dyadic communication characterised by emotional and spiritual closeness. This pattern positions family communication among santri as an integration of Islamic values, pesantren experiences and the individual needs of children when choosing a life partner.

Therefore, religious values carried from pesantren life function as both social norms and interpersonal communication mechanisms that foster trust and legitimise family decision-making. Theoretically, this study expands our understanding of value-oriented interpersonal communication in the context of Islamic education. In practice, its findings could inform the development of more adaptive and responsive premarital guidance programmes and family communication initiatives in pesantren environments.

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