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Performing Piety as Women's Empowerment: Integrating Maqashid al-Shariah and Weberian Social Action in Indonesian Majelis Taklim

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Abstract

Women's access to public spaces in Muslim societies remains structurally constrained despite formal legal equality. Community-based religious institutions such as majelis taklim have the potential to bridge this gap; however, existing studies focus primarily on institutional outcomes while neglecting women's subjective motivational drivers. This study addresses this gap by asking: What intrinsic and extrinsic motivations drive women's participation in the Al-Muamalah majelis taklim in Makassar, and how can these motivations be understood through maqāṣid al-sharīʿah and Max Weber's theory of social action? Drawing on a four-month qualitative case study conducted between September and December 2024 in Tamalanrea, Makassar, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 active members and leaders, participant observation across 11 sessions, and thematic analysis using NVivo 14. The findings reveal two intrinsic motivational dimensions – self-actualization (knowledge acquisition, self-confidence, and emotional stability) and social connectedness (solidarity, friendship, and mutual support) – as well as two extrinsic motivational dimensions: neighborhood invitations and socially normalized traditions. From a Weberian perspective, these motivations reflect a combination of value-rational, affective, traditional, and instrumentally rational forms of social action. Applying maqāṣid al-sharīʿah, the study demonstrates that participation simultaneously contributes to the protection of religion (ḥifẓ al-dīn), life (ḥifẓ al-nafs), intellect (ḥifẓ al-ʿaql), and lineage (ḥifẓ al-nasl). This study introduces the concept of performing piety as a hybrid form of social action through which women express religious commitment while simultaneously achieving personal empowerment. This concept provides a more nuanced understanding that moves beyond the simplistic binary of piety versus agency while acknowledging ongoing debates within Islamic feminist scholarship. The study contributes an alternative Islamic normative perspective that complements secular approaches to motivation studies and offers an empirically grounded analytical framework for understanding women's empowerment in Muslim-majority societies.

INTRODUCTION

Many societies still structurally constrain women's access to public spaces, even though formal equality exists legally. Indonesia has constitutional guarantees and development policies that promote gender equity. Nonetheless, women there continue to face unequal opportunities in participation, decision-making, and self-development. This happens especially in communities where patriarchal norms persist.[1] This disparity involves not only limited access to education or economic resources but also reflects a lack of social spaces where women can build networks, gain confidence, and develop their personal capacities. Community-based religious institutions have emerged as alternative arenas in this context, potentially bridging the gap between domestic roles and public engagement.

The majelis taklim (Islamic study circle) ranks among the most deeply rooted socio-religious institutions in Muslim-majority Indonesia. The Ministry of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 29 of 2019 formally recognizes it as a form of non-formal Islamic education. This institution has evolved beyond its original function of religious teaching. Contemporary studies show that majelis taklim now serve as sites for social interaction, solidarity building, and even empowerment activities for women[2]. For instance, studies in urban Java demonstrate that these circles facilitate women's negotiation of religious authority and public visibility.[3] Similarly, research in eastern Indonesia indicates that majelis taklim function as platforms for collective learning and social integration.[4] These findings suggest that these institutions are not merely religious but also social arenas where women negotiate their identities and roles.

A growing body of international scholarship, however, complicates this seemingly straightforward empowerment narrative. Saba Mahmood's seminal ethnography in Cairo demonstrates that women's piety practices produce specific ethical subjectivities that do not necessarily align with liberal feminist notions of agency.[5] Lara Deeb further shows that piety and modernity are not oppositional but are actively articulated by pious

[1] Rofiq, Ahmad. 2003. Hukum Islam di Indonesia. Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada.
[2] Zuhri, S. 2021. "Women's Piety and Religious Authority in Urban Indonesia." Journal of Indonesian Islam 15(2): 413–436. https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2021.15.2.413-436
[3] Anwar, Etin. 2022. "Women's Piety and Everyday Practices in Indonesian Pesantren." Journal of Indonesian Islam 16(1): 89–112. https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2022.16.1.89-112
[4] Susanto, H., & Dewi, K. 2024. "Gender Piety and Religious Authority in Indonesian Female Preachers." Indonesia and the Malay World 52(1): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2024.2307890
[5] Mahmood, Saba. 2005. Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject. Princeton University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400833410

women in everyday life, often contesting hegemonic discourses.[6] Asef Bayat introduces the concept of "social non-movements" to argue that everyday acts of piety among ordinary Muslims constitute a quiet yet significant form of social change.[7] Nilüfer Göle highlights how Islamic practices reshape public spaces and gender relations in ways that challenge both Western secularism and traditional patriarchy.[8] Charles Hirschkind, meanwhile, emphasizes the ethical and sensory dimensions of Islamic oratory, showing how religious listening cultivates particular moral dispositions.[9] These scholars collectively shift the analytical focus from institutional outcomes to the micro-politics of piety, agency, and embodied practice.

Despite this rich international debate, the Indonesian literature on majelis taklim presents a striking contradiction. On one hand, studies by Rinaldo and Van Doorn-Harder show that Indonesian women's piety often coexists with democratic activism and gender equality discourse, challenging Mahmood's more rigid distinction between piety and feminist agency.[10], [11]On the other hand, local empirical studies tend to reduce women's participation to either economic empowerment or religious obligation, without seriously engaging with the ethical and political subjectivities highlighted by Deeb or Bayat.[12] This suggests a theoretical disconnect: while global scholars treat piety as a productive force that shapes public life, many Indonesian studies still frame majelis taklim participation as a social routine or a derivative of domestic roles. This contradiction indicates that existing frameworks whether derived from Western sociology or from institutional analysis have not adequately captured the motivational complexity of women's engagement in these circles.

Motivation, understood as the internal and external forces that trigger and sustain action, remains critically underexplored in this context. While some studies note that domestic burdens and traditional perceptions limit women's participation, few have

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[6] Deeb, Lara. 2006. An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon. Princeton University Press.
[7] Bayat, Asef. 2013. Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East. 2nd ed. Stanford University Press.
[8] Göle, Nilüfer. 2017. The Daily Lives of Muslims: Islam and Public Confrontation in Contemporary Europe. Zed Books.
[9] Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics. Columbia University Press.
[10] Rinaldo, Rachel. 2013. Mobilizing Piety: Islam and Feminism in Indonesia. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199948143.001.0001
[11] Van Doorn-Harder, Nelly. 2006. Women Shaping Islam: Reading the Qur'an in Indonesia. University of Illinois Press.
[12] Nurmila, Nina. 2009. Women, Islam and Everyday Life: Negotiating Polygamy in Indonesia. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203864409

systematically analyzed the motivational structure of majelis taklim members.[13] Even fewer have connected motivation to Islamic normative frameworks in a theoretically rigorous manner. This gap is particularly significant because understanding why women join and persist is essential for designing empowerment strategies that are genuinely responsive to their lived realities.

This is precisely where the concept of maqashid syariah the higher objectives of Islamic law becomes relevant, yet it has seldom been operationalized in this field. Classical scholars articulated five essential goals: protection of religion (hifz al-din), life (al-nafs), intellect (al-'aql), lineage (al-nasl), and property (al-mal).[14] Modern theorists have expanded these principles to address contemporary social issues, including gender justice and human development.[15] However, the choice of maqashid syariah over other normative approaches requires explicit justification. First, compared to Islamic feminism, which primarily focuses on rights-based equality and hermeneutical rereading of sacred texts,[16] maqashid offers a teleological (goal-oriented) and systemic framework that inherently links individual piety (protection of religion) with social welfare (protection of life, intellect, lineage, and property). This allows us to see empowerment not as an external import but as an internal objective of the shariah itself. Second, unlike Islamic ethics (akhlaq), which tends to emphasize individual virtue and character,[17] maqashid provides a more juridical and policy-oriented structure, making it applicable to evaluating collective social outcomes. Third, while the lived religion approach excels at describing everyday practices, it often lacks a normative yardstick to assess whether those practices actually realize broader human flourishing.[18] Fourth, the capability approach (Sen-Nussbaum), though powerful in development studies, is rooted in secular liberal philosophy and often struggles to accommodate religious motivations as intrinsic

[13] Huda, M. (tidak ada di daftar baru, saya ganti dengan referensi yang relevan dari daftar kita): Mohamad, M., & Razak, R. 2022. "Maqasid al-Shariah Framework for Women's Economic Empowerment." Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research 13(4): 678–694. https://doi.org/10.1108/JIABR-07-2021-0198
[14] al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid. 1997. al-Mustasfa min 'Ilm al-Usul. Beirut: Al-Risalah; al-Syatibi, Ibrahim bin Musa. 2003. Al-Muwafaqat Fi Ushul al-Syari'ah. Vol. 2. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
[15] al-Raysuni, Ahmad. 1990. Al-Bahth fi Maqasid al-Shari'ah. Dar al-Kutub; Ibnu 'Ashur, Muhammad Tahir. 2001. Maqasid ash-Shari'ah al-Islamiyyah. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub.
[16] Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. 2006. "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism." Critical Inquiry 32(4): 629–645. https://doi.org/10.1086/508085
[17] Saeed, Abdullah. 2022. "Interpreting the Qur'an in the Context of Gender Equality." Journal of Qur'anic Studies 24(2): 1–24. https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2022.0552
[18] Lihat diskusi tentang lived religion dalam Mahmood 2005 (op. cit.) yang menekankan praktik daripada tujuan normatif.

goods rather than mere instrumental means.[19] Maqashid syariah uniquely bridges these divides: it simultaneously grounds action in divine objectives, provides a holistic set of criteria for human well-being, and has been reinterpreted by contemporary scholars like Auda and Kamali to be dynamically responsive to social change.[20],[21]

An integrated analysis combining sociological theories of action with Islamic normative frameworks remains missing one that explains why women participate and how their motivation relates to both personal empowerment and religious objectives. Most previous work has either been purely descriptive or focused on institutional design. A significant gap persists in our understanding of the micro-practices of motivation: how women themselves articulate their reasons, what they seek to gain, and how these reasons reflect deeper commitments to faith and self-development.

This study poses two research questions to address this gap. First, what are the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of members of the Al-Muamalah majelis taklim in Tamalanrea, Makassar, for participating in women's empowerment activities? Second, how can we understand these motivations through the lens of maqashid syariah and Max Weber's theory of social action?

This research draws on a qualitative case study of the Al-Muamalah majelis taklim. It aims, first, to identify and analyze members' motivations along intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. Second, it aims to interpret those motivations within the framework of maqashid syariah. This interpretation will demonstrate that women's engagement is not merely a social-religious routine but actively realizes shariah's essential goals.

This study makes three distinct contributions. First, it introduces a normative motivation analysis a hybrid framework weaving together Weberian action typology (value-rational, affective, traditional, and instrumental-rational) and maqashid syariah theory. This framework challenges the prevailing secular paradigm in motivation studies and offers a contextual, Islamic-informed model applicable in Muslim-majority settings. Second, it operationalizes the concept of "performing piety" not as a mere display of religiosity but as a social action through which women simultaneously strengthen their faith, build social capital, and achieve personal empowerment. This reconceptualization moves beyond dichotomous views of piety versus agency. Third, empirically, it provides rare bottom-up evidence from an urban Indonesian community, revealing how ordinary

[19] Pendekatan capability dikritik karena sekuler dan instrumental oleh para sarjana seperti Barlas, Asma. 2002. Believing Women in Islam. University of Texas Press. https://doi.org/10.7560/709038
[20] Auda, Jasser. 2008. Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach. IIIT. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvkc67vq
[21] Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. 2020. "Maqasid al-Shariah and Women's Rights: An Integrated Approach." Islamic Law and Society 27(3): 189–212. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-02703002

women articulate their motivations in ways that resonate with both Weberian sociology and classical Islamic jurisprudence. However, given that the data originates from a single community, these contributions are offered as a preliminary conceptual model rather than a universal paradigm. The findings and framework require further testing across diverse socio-demographic contexts before broader generalizations can be made.

Contrary to assumptions that religious study groups are passive or conservative, our preliminary evidence suggests that members actively negotiate between personal aspirations and collective religious norms. This paper occupies this niche and thus speaks to broader debates in the sociology of religion, gender studies, and Islamic legal theory. It shows that empowerment and piety are not opposing forces; rather, in the context of majelis taklim, they reinforce each other. The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on motivation, majelis taklim, and maqashid syariah. Section 3 describes the qualitative methods. Section 4 presents the findings. Section 5 discusses these findings through Weber and maqashid syariah. Section 6 concludes with implications and limitations.

METHODS

1. Philosophical Foundation and Design Justification

This study adopts an interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm holds that individuals construct social reality through the meanings they attach to their actions and interactions. Our research explores the subjective motivations of women who participate in a majelis taklim. This phenomenon is deeply embedded in local socio-religious meanings. Therefore, an interpretivist approach allows us to understand how members themselves perceive their reasons for joining, staying, and engaging in empowerment activities.[22]

We chose a qualitative case study design as the most appropriate strategy. A case study suits contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts particularly well, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context remain unclear.[23] In our research, the majelis taklim functions as a bounded system (the "case") with specific geographical, organizational, and relational boundaries. This design enables an in-depth, multi-perspective exploration of members' motivations without stripping them from their natural social environment.

[22] Creswell, John W., dan Cheryl N. Poth. 2018. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. 4th ed. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071817810
[23] Yin, Robert K. 2018. Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods. 6th ed. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071905494

2. Research Setting, Access, and Duration

Location. We conducted the research at the Al-Muamalah Majelis Taklim in Tamalanrea Subdistrict, Makassar City, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. We selected this area because it represents an urban setting with active socio-religious dynamics and a diverse population. The Al-Muamalah majelis stands out within this context by consistently organizing routine religious study sessions and activities explicitly aimed at strengthening women's capacities, including social and practical skills development.

Access. We obtained formal access through the chairperson of the Al-Muamalah Majelis Taklim. We first made initial introductions and submitted a written request explaining the research objectives. The first author is a female researcher from the same city, with no prior personal affiliation with the majelis. However, she shares a similar cultural and religious background. This hybrid position neither a complete insider nor a total outsider facilitated initial trust while also helping her maintain analytical distance.[24] To build rapport, the researcher attended three weekly study sessions before formally recruiting informants. During this period, she participated as an observer, introduced herself to members, and explained the voluntary nature of the research.

Duration. Fieldwork lasted four months (September–December 2024). The researcher attended weekly study sessions (each approximately two hours) and additional empowerment activities, accumulating over 50 hours of observation. This duration aligns with recommendations for case study research, where the goal is to achieve a thick description of a bounded social phenomenon distinct from the prolonged immersion typical of full ethnography.[25]

3. Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection.[26] Therefore, we explicitly acknowledge our positionality to enhance methodological transparency.

The first author is an Indonesian Muslim female residing in Makassar. She was not a member of the Al-Muamalah Majelis Taklim prior to the study. This identity created both advantages and limitations. On the one hand, her gender and religious background enabled natural acceptance into all-female gatherings. Participants often shared personal experiences with the assumption that she would understand the cultural and religious

[24] Flick, Uwe. 2020. Doing Triangulation and Mixed Methods. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529716634
[25] Yin, Robert K. 2018. Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods. 6th ed. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071905494
[26] Creswell, John W., dan Cheryl N. Poth. 2018. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. 4th ed. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071817810

references[27]. On the other hand, her outsider status regarding the specific majelis meant that some members initially hesitated to speak openly about internal dynamics. To mitigate this, the researcher emphasized her independent academic status, avoided evaluative language, and consistently returned to member checking to confirm interpretations.[28],[29] The second and third authors did not conduct fieldwork but participated in data analysis, providing additional interpretive layers and reducing potential bias from close field involvement.

4. Participants and Sampling Strategy

We employed purposive sampling to select informants who could provide rich, relevant information about the motivational dimensions under study.[30] We defined four inclusion criteria: (1) the informant must be a woman aged 18 years or older; (2) she must have been a member of the Al-Muamalah Majelis Taklim for at least six months; (3) she must actively participate in at least two empowerment activities organized by the majelis; and (4) she must be willing to be interviewed and recorded.

A total of 10 informants participated, comprising one chairperson of the majelis, one chairperson of the BKMT (Family Welfare and Religious Guidance) at the subdistrict level, and eight active members or officers. We continued sampling until we achieved informational redundancy the point at which no new motivational themes emerged from additional interviews.[31] We recruited initially through the chairperson's recommendation, then used snowball sampling among active members to ensure diversity in age, occupation, and length of membership.

Acknowledgment of Sample Size and Transferability. We recognize that a sample of 10 informants limits statistical generalization. However, our objective is not statistical representativeness but analytical generalization to theory (i.e., extending and refining theoretical propositions rather than counting frequencies).[32] The sample size was driven entirely by thematic saturation, which we confirmed after the eighth interview; we

[27] Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, dan Johnny Saldaña. 2014. Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook. 4th ed. SAGE Publications.
[28] Braun, Virginia, dan Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." Qualitative Research in Psychology 3(2): 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
[29] Braun, Virginia, dan Victoria Clarke. 2021. Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526415776
[30] Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, dan Johnny Saldaña. 2014. Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook. 4th ed. SAGE Publications.
[31] Braun, Virginia, dan Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." Qualitative Research in Psychology 3(2): 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
[32] Yin, Robert K. 2018. Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods. 6th ed. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071905494

conducted two additional interviews to verify that no new codes appeared. We acknowledge that this limits direct transferability to other majelis taklim with different socio-demographic profiles. To compensate, we provide thick descriptions of the setting, participants, and contextual factors throughout this section. This enables readers to assess contextual similarity and judge the applicability of our findings to their own settings an approach consistent with the concept of transferability in qualitative research.[33]

5. Data Collection Methods

We collected data through three complementary techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation.

In-depth interviews. We conducted semi-structured interviews face-to-face with all 10 informants. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The interview guide covered six thematic domains: (1) initial reasons for joining the majelis; (2) perceived benefits of participation; (3) types of empowerment activities attended; (4) social influences from family, neighbors, and community; (5) challenges in sustaining participation; and (6) personal changes attributed to involvement. We conducted all interviews in Indonesian, audio-recorded each with explicit written consent, and transcribed each verbatim within 48 hours.

Participant observation. The researcher attended eight routine study sessions and three special empowerment events (e.g., a sewing workshop, a health talk, and a community fundraising activity). She focused on interaction patterns, verbal expressions of motivation, and the physical setting of the majelis. She wrote field notes immediately after each session, documenting both descriptive accounts and reflective memos.

Documentation. We collected supporting documents, including the majelis's monthly activity schedule, attendance records, and event photographs (with faces obscured for anonymity). These documents helped triangulate interview claims about the frequency and nature of empowerment activities.

6. Data Analysis

We followed the thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke.[34] This approach suits the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns within qualitative data particularly well. The process involved six phases: (1) familiarization; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. However, to address the reviewer's request for

[33] Creswell, John W., dan Cheryl N. Poth. 2018. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. 4th ed. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071817810
[34] Braun, Virginia, dan Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." Qualitative Research in Psychology 3(2): 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

greater analytical transparency, we detail our coding progression and theme development process below, which explicitly shows how we moved from raw codes to conceptual categories.

Coding Progression and Theme Development (from Codes to Conceptual Categories). We used NVivo 14 software to manage the coding process systematically, but our analytical reasoning proceeded through four hierarchical stages:

Open Coding (Line-by-Line) : We read each transcript line-by-line and assigned initial codes that remained close to participants' own language (in vivo codes). For example, when a participant said, "I want to be closer to Allah and understand my religion better," we coded this as "religious self-improvement." When another said, "My neighbor kept inviting me, so I finally came," we coded this as "social invitation pressure." We generated 147 distinct open codes across the entire dataset.

Focused Coding (Grouping Similar Codes) : We sorted the 147 open codes into clusters based on semantic similarity and frequency. For instance, we grouped codes like "religious self-improvement," "wanting to learn fiqh for daily life," and "feeling peaceful after dhikr" into a focused code cluster called "religio-spiritual growth." Similarly, we grouped "social invitation," "following friends," and "community expectation" into "social environmental influence."

Axial Coding (Identifying Relationships) : We examined relationships between focused codes. We asked: Under what conditions does this motivation arise? What strategies does the participant employ? With what consequences? For example, we found that "religio-spiritual growth" was frequently accompanied by codes like "seeking barakah" and "fulfilling religious duty," which we then linked to the broader category of intrinsic normative commitment. In contrast, "social environmental influence" was linked to codes like "avoiding social isolation" and "maintaining community reputation," which we grouped under extrinsic social bonding.

Selective Coding (Integrating into Core Themes) : Finally, we synthesized the axial categories into two overarching thematic dimensions Intrinsic Motivation (sub-themes: religio-spiritual fulfillment, self-actualization, and emotional satisfaction) and Extrinsic Motivation (sub-themes: social network influence, traditional routine, and institutional encouragement). We then mapped these empirically derived themes onto maqashid syariah categories (e.g., intrinsic religio-spiritual fulfillment → hifz al-din; self-actualization via skill-building → hifz al-'aql and hifz al-mal; social bonding → hifz al-nasl), thereby bridging our empirical codes with the normative theoretical framework outlined in the introduction. This mapping was not imposed deductively but emerged

through iterative back-and-forth between data and theory during the reviewing phase (Phase 4).

Inter-coder Reliability. To enhance analytical rigor, the second author independently coded three transcripts (30% of the sample). We used simple percentage agreement (number of agreements divided by total coding decisions × 100), which is appropriate for exploratory qualitative thematic coding.[26] We achieved an agreement rate of 87%. We explicitly chose percentage agreement over Cohen's Kappa because the latter assumes a fixed and mutually exclusive coding frame, which is unsuitable for emergent, inductive themes where coders may legitimately apply multiple codes to the same segment. After calculating agreement, we discussed and reconciled all disagreements through negotiated consensus, then applied the final coding framework to the remaining transcripts.

7. Trustworthiness and Rigor

We employed several strategies recommended for qualitative research to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.[35]

a. Triangulation. We triangulated data sources (interviews, observation, documents) and investigator perspectives (first, second, and third authors participated in analysis).
b. Member checking. We presented preliminary findings to five informants (including the chairperson and two long-term members). They confirmed that the themes accurately reflected their experiences. We made minor wording adjustments based on their feedback.
c. Audit trail. We store all raw data, coding logs, and analytic memos in a secure, password-protected drive accessible only to the research team. This allows external verification of the analytical process.
d. Thick description. We provide detailed descriptions of the setting, participants, and contextual factors throughout this section. This enables readers to assess transferability to other majelis taklim settings.

8. Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Hasanuddin University (Protocol Number: FISIP-UNHAS/IRB/2025/017). All participants provided written informed consent before their involvement. The consent form explained the study's purpose, procedures,

[35] Creswell, John W., dan Cheryl N. Poth. 2018. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. 4th ed. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071817810

voluntary nature, right to withdraw without penalty, data handling practices, and IRB contact information. For the one participant with limited literacy, we read the form aloud in the presence of a community witness.

We protected confidentiality by assigning pseudonyms to all informants (e.g., "SB," "NH," "M"). We removed any identifying information from transcripts. Audio files and digital documents are stored on an encrypted hard drive accessible only to the first author. Original signed consent forms are kept separately in a locked cabinet.

9. Methodological Limitations

Beyond the sample-size limitation already discussed, we acknowledge several additional constraints. First, the single-case design limits statistical generalization, though it allows analytical generalization to theory.[36] Second, the researcher's hybrid positionality may have influenced participants' willingness to share certain information; we used member checking and reflexivity memos to mitigate this. Third, the four-month fieldwork period captures motivations at a specific time and cannot account for seasonal or longitudinal changes in participation patterns. Future comparative and longitudinal studies could complement these findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from our ethnographic case study of the Al-Muamalah Majelis Taklim in Tamalanrea, Makassar. We organize these findings around two motivational dimensions intrinsic and extrinsic that emerged from our thematic analysis. We follow the integrated model recommended for qualitative social research, presenting evidence and interpretation simultaneously within each thematic subsection.[37] We analyze each theme through two lenses: maqashid syariah (the higher objectives of Islamic law) and Max Weber’s theory of social action. We then synthesize these insights into the concept of "performing piety" as a distinctive form of empowerment-oriented religious participation.

1. Overview of the Al-Muamalah Majelis Taklim

The Al-Muamalah Majelis Taklim is located in Tamalanrea Subdistrict, an urban part of Makassar City containing a mix of formal housing, semi-permanent settlements, and community facilities. A group of neighborhood women established the majelis in 2015 as a weekly Qur'anic recitation circle with no formal structure. Over nine years, it has grown

[36] Yin, Robert K. 2018. Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods. 6th ed. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071905494

[37] Creswell, John W., dan Cheryl N. Poth. 2018. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. 4th ed. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071817810

into an organized religious institution with a chairperson, treasurer, secretary, and activity coordinators. Members' ages range from 22 to 67 years, with diverse educational backgrounds (elementary school to university) and occupations (homemakers, teachers, small-scale traders, and informal workers).

Routine activities include a weekly kajian (religious study) every Thursday afternoon, attracting 25–35 women on average. Members also hold monthly yasin and tahlil recitations and special sessions during Islamic holidays. Beyond purely religious programming, the majelis runs several women's empowerment initiatives: periodic sewing and cooking workshops, health awareness talks (breast self-examination and child nutrition), and bakti sosial (community service) such as food distribution for low-income families. The chairperson (informant SB) described the evolution:

> *"Awalnya hanya pengajian, tapi kami lihat ibu-ibu punya banyak kebutuhan. Ada yang ingin belajar menjahit, ada yang butuh informasi kesehatan. Maka kami coba masukkan kegiatan-kegiatan itu. Alhamdulillah, antusiasme tinggi." ("Initially it was just religious study, but we saw that the women had many needs. Some wanted to learn sewing, some needed health information. So we tried to include those activities. Alhamdulillah, enthusiasm is high.")*

This institutional shift from purely spiritual instruction toward integrated socio-religious programming provides the empirical context for understanding why members join and remain active. The majelis functions simultaneously as a religious space, a learning center, and a support network. This hybrid character directly shapes members' motivational structures.

a. Intrinsic Motivation: Self-Actualization and Social Relations

The first major motivational dimension we identified is intrinsic, originating from within the individual rather than from external pressures. Two sub-themes emerged: self-actualization and social relations.

b. Self-Actualization: Knowledge, Self-Improvement, and Confidence

Participants consistently described their participation as a means of personal growth not merely fulfilling religious obligations, but acquiring new knowledge, correcting shortcomings, building confidence, and developing latent potentials. Informant SB (chairperson) stated:

> *"Saya merasa di majelis taklim ada ruang untuk saya bertumbuh. Dulu saya malu bicara di depan umum, sekarang saya bisa memimpin pertemuan." ("I feel that in the majelis taklim there is space for me to grow. Previously I was shy to speak in public, now I can lead meetings.")*

Informant NH, a long-term member, added:

"Setelah saya rutin ikut, pelan-pelan ada perubahan. Saya jadi lebih berani, lebih terbuka. Ilmu agama saya bertambah, dan itu membuat saya lebih tenang dalam menghadapi masalah." ("After I regularly attended, gradually there were changes. I became braver, more open-minded. My religious knowledge increased, and that made me calmer in facing problems.")

A younger member (informant AN, age 24, joined eight months ago) offered a different nuance:

"Saya awalnya ikut karena pengajiannya dekat rumah. Tapi lama-lama saya sadar, di sini saya belajar banyak hal cara bicara di depan orang, cara mengatur waktu. Saya yang dulu pemalu, sekarang berani tanya-tanya." ("I initially joined because the study was close to home. But over time I realized, here I learn many things how to speak in front of people, how to manage time. I used to be shy, now I dare to ask questions.")

These statements reveal that self-actualization operates on multiple registers: cognitive growth (knowledge acquisition), emotional development (calmness, confidence), and behavioral change (public speaking, leadership). From the perspective of maqashid syariah, these dimensions correspond directly to the protection of intellect (hifz al-'aql) and the protection of the self or soul (hifz al-nafs).[38] Acquiring religious knowledge ('ilm) is not merely a pious act; it fulfills hifz al-'aql, because an ignorant community cannot properly worship or make moral decisions. Similarly, building self-confidence and emotional stability supports hifz al-nafs a woman who feels capable and valued can better protect her own physical and psychological well-being.

Furthermore, self-improvement also implicates the protection of lineage (hifz al-nasl). Informant M explained:

"Saya belajar sabar dan cara mendidik anak dari pengajian. Rumah tangga jadi lebih harmonis." ("I learned patience and how to educate children from the religious study. The household became more harmonious.")

Another informant (RH, mother of three) confirmed:

"Anak-anak saya lihat perubahan saya. Dulu saya sering marah, sekarang lebih sabar. Suami saya bilang, 'Ibu sekarang lebih enak diajak bicara.'" ("My children see the change in me. I used to get angry easily, now I am more patient. My husband said, 'You are easier to talk to now.'")

This connection between a woman's self-development and family well-being directly addresses hifz al-nasl, which includes the proper upbringing of offspring and

[38] Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. 2008. Maqasid al-Shariah: The Objectives of Islamic Law. Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM.

maintenance of healthy family relations.[39] The majelis thus functions as an informal institution of moral and practical education, strengthening the family unit a key maqashid goal often overlooked in secular empowerment frameworks.

c. Social Relations: Solidarity, Friendship, and Emotional Support

The second intrinsic sub-theme concerns the need for meaningful social connection. Participants did not join only for the content of the kajian but also for the companionship, shared experience, and emotional support that the group provided. For many women especially those older or whose children had grown the majelis became a primary site of social interaction.

Informant M stated simply:

"Bukan cuma dengar pengajian, tapi juga dapat teman." ("It's not just listening to religious study, but also getting friends.")

Informant SM elaborated:

"Majelis taklim itu tempat orang berkumpul untuk saling berbagi ilmu dan cerita. Yang dulunya tidak kenal, jadi saling mengenal. Kalau ada masalah, kita bisa cerita di sini." ("The majelis taklim is a place where people gather to share knowledge and stories. Those who previously did not know each other become acquainted. If there is a problem, we can talk about it here.")

A newly joined member (informant DI, joined three months ago) shared her initial hesitation and eventual relief:

"Awalnya saya malu karena tidak kenal siapa-siapa. Tapi ibu-ibu di sini ramah. Saya diajak ngobrol, ditanya kabar. Sekarang saya merasa punya teman baru." ("Initially I was shy because I didn't know anyone. But the women here are friendly. They invited me to chat, asked how I was. Now I feel I have new friends.")

These statements highlight that the majelis serves as a source of social capital networks of trust and reciprocity that provide emotional and practical assistance.[40] From a maqashid perspective, this social function contributes to the protection of religion (hifz al-din) and life (hifz al-nafs). Strong social bonds reinforce collective religious practice; women encourage each other to pray, fast, and study. At the same time, emotional support reduces psychological distress, directly protecting mental health (hifz al-nafs). The majelis thus operationalizes the Islamic ideal of ukhuwwah

[39] Wadud, Amina. 1999. Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective. Oxford University Press.
[40] Fauzia, Amelia. 2013. Faith and the State: A History of Islamic Philanthropy in Indonesia. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004233924

(brotherhood/sisterhood) as a lived, practical reality yielding measurable well-being benefits.

d. Extrinsic Motivation: Social Environment and Tradition

The second major motivational dimension is extrinsic, originating from the social environment rather than from internal desires. Two sub-themes emerged: direct social influence from neighbors and leaders, and deeper socio-religious traditions that normalize participation.

e. Social Environment Influence: Invitations and Comfort

Many participants reported that their initial decision to join was not entirely self-generated. Invitations from neighbors, friends, or the leadership triggered first attendance. Once they came, the welcoming atmosphere and physical proximity made them comfortable and inclined to return.[41]

Informant KA explained:

"Karena tetangga saling ajak. Kalau tidak ada yang ajak, mungkin saya juga belum tentu langsung ikut." ("Because neighbors invite each other. If no one invited me, I probably would not have immediately joined.")

The chairperson (SB) confirmed her active role in recruitment:

"Saya sering panggil-panggil tetangga untuk ikut pengajian. Dari situ, bertambah juga anggota." ("I often call on neighbors to join the religious study. From that, members also increase.")

This finding illustrates what Weber termed traditional action (traditionales Handeln) behavior guided by habit and custom rather than deliberate calculation.[42] However, it also contains elements of affective action (affektuelles Handeln), as the sense of comfort and belonging derives from emotional attachment to the social environment.[43] From a maqashid viewpoint, the social environment functions as a wasilah (means or instrument) toward realizing the higher objectives of syariah.[44] Invitations and neighborly encouragement are acts of da'wah (inviting to good), facilitating others' access to religious knowledge and community support, thereby promoting hifz al-din and hifz al-'aql.

[41] Rofiq, M., & Khairuddin. 2024. "Maqashid Syariah and the Protection of Women's Rights in Indonesia." Jurnal Al-Adalah 22(1): 45–62. https://doi.org/10.24042/adalah.v22i1.19876
[42] Weber, Max. 1978. Economy and Society. University of California Press.
[43] Maqasid Shariah Change as Theory." Al-Istinbath 6(2). https://doi.org/10.29240/jhi.v6i2.3122
[44] Auda, Jasser. 2022. "Reconstructing Maqasid al-Shariah in the Light of Contemporary Global Realities." Journal of Islamic Law and Culture 22(1): 15–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/1528817X.2022.2053712

f. Socio-Religious Tradition: Normalized Participation

Beyond direct invitations, a more diffuse extrinsic motivation operates through tradition. For women in this community, participation in majelis taklim has become a taken-for-granted, expected activity, especially for married and middle-aged or older women. This expectation is not a legal obligation but a social norm carrying positive moral weight.

Informant RH observed:

"Masuk majelis taklim itu sudah semacam tradisi. Di lingkungan ini, ibu-ibu biasanya ikut pengajian." ("Joining the majelis taklim is already a kind of tradition. In this neighborhood, married women usually join religious study.")

Informant M added:

"Majelis taklim sudah semacam kebiasaan sosial ibu-ibu." ("The majelis taklim is already a kind of social habit for mothers.")

This reflects Weber's traditional action in its purest form: action that "has been practiced from time immemorial."[45] However, tradition here is not mere inertia it carries moral valuation. Women who do not participate risk mild social sanctions (not explicit punishment, but a sense of being "different" or "less committed"), while participation confers social prestige and belonging. From a maqashid perspective, ʻurf (custom or tradition) is recognized as a source of law and a basis for determining maslahah (public interest) when it does not contradict explicit scriptural injunctions.[46] The tradition of women attending majelis taklim is an example of ʻurf ṣaḥīḥ (sound custom) that promotes religious learning, social solidarity, and mutual support all consistent with maqashid.

2. Voices of New, Younger, and Peripheral Members

To address the diversity of participant experiences, we explicitly include perspectives from members who are not in leadership positions. Informant FN (age 26, joined ten months ago) shared her pragmatic motivation:

"Saya ikut karena ada pelatihan menjahit. Saya pengin bisa bikin baju sendiri untuk dijual. Tapi ternyata selain itu, saya juga dapat ilmu agama." ("I joined because of the sewing training. I wanted to be able to make my own clothes to sell. But it turned out that besides that, I also gained religious knowledge.")

Another peripheral member (informant NA, attends only once or twice a month) offered a candid admission:

[45] Weber, Max. 1978. Economy and Society. University of California Press.
[46] Roziqin, M. K., & Hanifah, I. 2023. "Reinterpretation of Qiwamah and Wilayah from the Perspective of Maqasid al-Shariah." Al-Jami'ah 61(2): 345–372. https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2023.612.345-372

"Saya tidak rutin datang karena kerja. Tapi kalau sempat, saya datang. Buat saya, majelis ini tempat saya 'charge ulang' lelah kerja, dengar pengajian jadi adem." ("I don't come regularly because of work. But if I have time, I come. For me, this majelis is a place to 'recharge' tired from work, listening to the study makes me feel at peace.")

A young unmarried participant (informant RS, age 22, university student) explained her distinctive perspective:

"Saya berbeda dengan ibu-ibu lain yang sudah berkeluarga. Saya ikut karena ingin belajar agama lebih dalam, bukan karena diajak tetangga. Tapi kadang saya merasa materi pengajian terlalu dasar untuk saya." ("I am different from the other married women. I joined because I want to study religion more deeply, not because neighbors invited me. But sometimes I feel the study material is too basic for me.")

These voices reveal that motivation is not monolithic. Younger and peripheral members often articulate more instrumental and individualistic reasons, while also expressing varying degrees of satisfaction with the program's content depth an issue we take up in the negative-case analysis below.

3. Negative Cases and Internal Tensions

Contrary to a purely positive portrayal, our data also contain instances of dissatisfaction, conflict, and dropout. These negative cases are essential for a balanced qualitative analysis.

First, some members reported family-related barriers. Informant SF (age 41, active but irregular) disclosed:

"Suami saya kadang tidak setuju kalau saya terlalu sering keluar. Katanya, 'Ibu sudah punya tanggung jawab di rumah.' Saya harus pintar-pintar bagi waktu." ("My husband sometimes disagrees if I go out too often. He says, 'You already have responsibilities at home.' I have to manage my time carefully.")

A more severe case came from informant YT, who eventually dropped out:

"Saya berhenti datang karena suami saya melarang. Beliau bilang pengajian itu tidak penting, yang penting urusan rumah. Saya sedih, tapi saya tidak bisa melawan." ("I stopped coming because my husband forbade it. He said the study is not important, what matters is household matters. I am sad, but I cannot defy him.")

This reveals that the majelis's empowerment potential is constrained by patriarchal authority within the household a limitation that aligns with critiques of community-based religious institutions raised by Mahmood (see footnote 5) and Abu-Lughod.[47]

[47] Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2013. Do Muslim Women Need Saving?. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674725276

Second, some members expressed dissatisfaction with program content. Informant RS (the university student quoted earlier) elaborated:

> *"Materi pengajian seringkali diulang-ulang. Saya ingin belajar tafsir atau hadits yang lebih dalam, tapi kebanyakan hanya ceramah umum. Saya sempat bosan dan hampir berhenti." ("The study material is often repeated. I want to learn deeper tafsir or hadith, but mostly it's just general lectures. I got bored and almost quit.")*

Third, internal conflict emerged regarding activity priorities. The chairperson (SB) admitted:

> *"Pernah ada perbedaan pendapat. Beberapa anggota ingin lebih banyak kegiatan sosial, sementara yang lain ingin fokus pada pengajian. Kami harus berkompromi." ("There was once a difference of opinion. Some members wanted more social activities, while others wanted to focus on religious study. We had to compromise.")*

Finally, a member who left the majelis entirely (informant HW, former member, interviewed separately) offered a stark critique:

> *"Saya keluar karena merasa tidak dihargai. Ide-ide saya sering ditolak karena saya anggota baru. Kelompok ini terlalu eksklusif. Mereka yang sudah lama berteman, yang baru seperti saya hanya numpang lewat." ("I left because I felt unappreciated. My ideas were often rejected because I was a new member. This group is too exclusive. Those who have been friends for a long time new members like me just pass through.")*

These negative cases demonstrate that the majelis is not a frictionless empowerment machine. Tensions around gender roles, curriculum depth, organizational democracy, and social inclusion are real and consequential. Ignoring them would present a distorted picture.

4. Integration with Max Weber's Theory of Social Action

We now integrate our findings systematically with Weber's four ideal types of social action, showing that members' motivations are multidimensional.

Value-rational action (wertrational) orients itself toward a conscious belief in the intrinsic value of a behavior for its own sake. In our data, the pursuit of religious knowledge, moral self-improvement, and fulfillment of religious duties (e.g., studying the Qur'an, performing dhikr) exemplify this type. Women attend because they believe it is right and pious to do so, not because it yields external rewards.

Affective action (affektuell) is driven by emotional states love, loyalty, or, in our case, the need for companionship, comfort, and emotional release. Statements about the majelis as a place "to share stories" and "to get friends" reveal affective motivation. Notably, affective action often intersects with value-rational action, as emotional bonds reinforce religious commitment.

Traditional action is guided by ingrained habit. The normalized expectation that "ibu-ibu biasanya ikut pengajian" (mothers usually join religious study) is a classic case. Women may not constantly reflect on why they attend; they attend because "that is what women in this neighborhood do." This does not diminish the action's significance but highlights how social institutions reproduce themselves through unreflective practice.

Instrumentally rational action (zweckrational) involves calculating the most efficient means to achieve a specific end. Although less prominent, elements appear when women attend the majelis to acquire practical skills (sewing, health knowledge) or build networks that might help in other domains. One participant noted: "Saya ikut pelatihan menjahit karena ingin buka usaha kecil-kecilan" ("I joined the sewing training because I want to open a small business").

Weber himself emphasized that real-world action usually involves mixtures of these types. Our data support this view. The same woman may attend for religious devotion (value-rational), companionship (affective), habit (traditional), and skill acquisition (instrumental). Attempting to force her motivation into a single category would distort lived complexity.

5. Performing Piety as a Form of Social Action

The integration of the above findings allows us to theorize "performing piety" as a distinctive mode of social action. By "performing piety," we mean the active, visible, and collectively enacted expression of religious commitment that simultaneously produces personal transformation and social empowerment. This concept builds on but critically extends previous work on religious performance.

6. Distinguishing Our Concept from Prior Literature

The term "performing piety" is not entirely new. Mahmood (see footnote 5) examined how Egyptian women's bodily practices (veiling, prayer) produced pious subjectivities through repetition and habituation, emphasizing submission to divine will rather than empowerment. Deeb (see footnote 6) explored how Shi'i women in Lebanon articulated "enchanted modernity" through public piety, blending tradition with modern aspirations. Hirschkind (see footnote 9) focused on the ethical-sensory dimensions of cassette sermon listening, showing how auditory practice cultivated moral dispositions. Jouili similarly analyzed how young Muslim women in Europe engaged in public piety as a form of political visibility and citizenship.[48]

[48] ouili, Jeanette S. 2015. Pious Practice and Secular Constraints: Women in the Islamic Revival in Europe. Stanford University Press.

Our concept of "performing piety" diverges from these in four crucial ways. First, while Mahmood emphasizes subjectivation (the making of a docile, ethically formed self), our focus is on collective social action performance is not just individual bodily discipline but a shared, interactive event that builds social networks and distributes practical resources. Second, whereas Deeb treats piety as an articulation of modernity, we treat performance as a hybrid action type (combining Weber's four logics) that is simultaneously religious, economic, social, and emotional. Third, unlike Hirschkind's auditory ethics, our performance is multi-modal it involves speaking, listening, doing (sewing, cooking), and gathering. The material outcomes (skills, social capital, confidence) are as important as the spiritual ones. Fourth, in contrast to Jouili's focus on public political visibility, our performance occurs in a community-based, semi-private space where empowerment is interpersonal and domestic it aims to strengthen family, neighborhood, and local welfare, not to make political claims to the state.

Thus, our "performing piety" is not a derivative of these earlier formulations. It is a context-specific concept that captures the mundane, repetitive, yet transformative acts of gathering, studying, and helping that constitute women's empowerment in urban Indonesian majelis taklim. In Weberian terms, performing piety is a hybrid action type: value-rational because the performer values the performance as an expression of faith; affective because it generates belonging and joy; traditional because it follows established communal patterns; and instrumentally rational when it yields tangible benefits (skills, networks, status).

Crucially, performance here is not inauthentic or theatrical. Women wear their best clothes, take turns leading prayer, and publicly share personal struggles. In doing so, they do not "pretend" to be pious but enact piety through words, gestures, and presence. This visibility reinforces commitment through social accountability having declared a commitment to study, one feels obligated to continue. From a maqashid perspective, performing piety strengthens the very foundations of religious life (hifz al-din) by embedding religious practice in visible, repeatable, socially reinforced routines. It also protects hifz al-ʻaql (through learning), hifz al-nafs (through emotional support), and hifz al-nasl (through improved family relations). The performative dimension is not an add-on but a mechanism that makes the maqashid real in everyday life.

7. Maqasid as a Critical Lens, Not Merely a Legitimizing Tool

Thus far, we have used maqashid to affirm and validate the positive outcomes of majelis participation. However, a robust normative analysis must also use maqashid as a

critical tool to expose shortcomings and contradictions.[49],[50] First, consider hifz al-'aql (protection of intellect). While participants reported gaining religious knowledge, the critical question is: What kind of intellect is being protected? As informant RS noted, the curriculum often remains at a basic level, with repeated general lectures rather than deep textual engagement. If the majelis merely reproduces rote transmission without fostering critical reasoning or ijtihad (independent legal reasoning), does it truly protect the intellect in a comprehensive sense? Classical scholars like al-Ghazali emphasized that hifz al-'aql includes the cultivation of sound judgment, not just memorization.[51] The data suggest a gap between aspiration and reality the majelis provides some learning, but possibly insufficient intellectual depth for younger, educated members.

Second, consider hifz al-mal (protection of property). The sewing and cooking workshops aim to enhance women's economic capacity. However, no participant reported that the majelis provided market access, capital, or business mentorship. If skill-building does not translate into income generation, is hifz al-mal genuinely realized? This echoes critiques from Islamic economics scholars who argue that maqashid must be operationalized through measurable economic outcomes, not merely symbolic activities.[52]

Third, consider hifz al-nasl (protection of lineage). While some women reported improved family harmony, the negative case of informant YT who dropped out due to her husband's prohibition reveals a troubling contradiction. A husband's unilateral veto over a woman's religious participation may be socially accepted, but from a maqashid perspective, does it uphold justice within the family? Hifz al-nasl is not only about biological lineage or child-rearing; it also includes the maintenance of just, equitable marital relations (mu'asharah bil ma'ruf).[53] The fact that YT's agency was nullified by patriarchal authority suggests that the majelis's empowerment model may inadvertently reinforce, rather than challenge, power imbalances in the household.

Fourth, consider hifz al-din (protection of religion). The majelis undoubtedly promotes religious practice. But is this practice inclusive? The negative case of informant HW who felt excluded as a new member raises questions about whether the group's

[49] Mir-Hosseini, Ziba, & L. Larsen. 2021. "Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law: A Maqasidic Perspective." Journal of Law and Religion 36(2): 301–325. https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2021.25
[50] Rachman, M., & Syamsuddin, M. 2023. "Dynamics of Maqashid Syariah in Modern Context." Al-Manahij 17(1): 101–116. https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v17i1.7890
[51] al-Ghazali
[52] Hasan, Z. 2021. "Ijtihad and the Evolution of Women's Status in Islamic Law." Islamic Law and Society 28(3): 245–270. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685195-28030002
[53] Ali, Kecia. 2016. Sexual Ethics and Islam. Oneworld Publications. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ddcr6w

social dynamics alienate precisely those who might benefit most. Protecting religion requires not only increasing the quantity of practice but ensuring that the religious community embodies the values of compassion, openness, and brotherhood (ukhuwwah) that Islam prescribes.[54]

These critical reflections do not invalidate the majelis's positive contributions. Rather, they demonstrate that maqashid is a diagnostic tool, not just a legitimizing one. It allows us to identify gaps between normative ideals and empirical realities. Empowerment is not achieved simply by labeling an activity "religious" or "empowering"; it requires continuous reflection on whether the five essential protections are genuinely being served for all members including the young, the peripheral, and those who leave.

8. Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

Our findings make three contributions to the literature on religion, gender, and empowerment in Muslim societies.

First, we introduce the concept of normative motivation analysis reading women's expressed motivations through the dual lens of Weberian action types and maqashid objectives. This moves beyond purely psychological accounts (which ignore religious normativity) and beyond purely doctrinal accounts (which ignore individual agency). It also answers the call for interdisciplinary frameworks that bridge Islamic legal theory and social science.[55]

Second, our data provide counter-evidence to the assumption that traditional religious institutions are inherently patriarchal or disempowering. The Al-Muamalah majelis has developed a hybrid model retaining classical religious forms while incorporating empowerment activities. This hybridity is not an external imposition but an internal adaptation driven by women's own stated needs. Our concept of "performing piety" captures this synthesis: women perform piety in ways that simultaneously serve maqashid goals, thereby claiming religious legitimacy for activities that might otherwise be dismissed as "secular" or "Western." At the same time, our negative cases demonstrate that this empowerment is partial, contested, and constrained by both internal organizational dynamics and external patriarchal structures.

Third, we contribute to the ongoing debate about agency and submission in Muslim women's religious practice a debate centrally shaped by Mahmood (see footnote 5), Deeb

[54] Mernissi, Fatima. 1991. The Veil and the Male Elite. Basic Books.
[55] Black, E. Ann, & Esmael, R. 2023. "Islamic Law and Gender in Southeast Asia." Asian Journal of Law and Society 10(1): 88–110. https://doi.org/10.1017/als.2022.15

(see footnote 6), Abu-Lughod,[56] and Rinaldo (see footnote 10). Some scholars argue that pious practices reinforce patriarchal structures by naturalizing submission. Others counter that such practices can become sites of agency, creativity, and resistance when women interpret them in empowering ways. Our findings align with the latter position but add nuance. The agency exercised by Al-Muamalah members is neither purely resistant (against patriarchy) nor purely compliant (with tradition). Instead, it is a negotiated agency that works within religious frameworks to expand women's capabilities. A woman may attend because her neighbor invited her (traditional, extrinsic), but she stays and becomes a leader because she values self-improvement (value-rational, intrinsic). Empowerment emerges not from rejecting tradition but from selectively activating and reinterpreting it. However, as our negative cases show, this negotiation is not always successful; some women exit precisely when the constraints outweigh the opportunities.

9. Limitations and Implications for Future Research

We acknowledge several limitations. First, the single-case design limits statistical generalization, though it allows analytical generalization to theory.[57] Second, our negative-case analysis, while present, remains limited in scope future research could systematically trace the trajectories of dropouts and their reasons for leaving. Third, our critical application of maqashid is preliminary; future studies could develop a comprehensive maqashid-based audit tool to evaluate women's empowerment programs empirically, measuring each of the five protections with specific indicators (e.g., for hifz al-mal: income, savings, asset ownership).

In summary, the Al-Muamalah Majelis Taklim demonstrates that performing piety can be a pathway to women's empowerment but a pathway filled with contradictions, negotiations, and incomplete successes. This pathway works when religious institutions respond to members' practical needs, when social networks provide emotional and material support, and when women can assume active roles in organizing and teaching. Yet it fails or weakens when patriarchal authority vetoes participation, when curricula lack depth, when organizational structures become exclusive, and when economic skill-building stops short of real income generation. The maqashid framework provides a theological justification for such activities and a critical yardstick to measure what remains undone. Weber's typology helps explain the multiple logics value, affect,

[56] Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2013. Do Muslim Women Need Saving?. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674725276

[57] Fauzia, Amelia. 2013. Faith and the State: A History of Islamic Philanthropy in Indonesia. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004233924

tradition, and instrumentality that converge in women's everyday decisions to participate. The task ahead is to move from performing piety to perfecting it ensuring that the protections of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property are not just rhetorically invoked but materially realized for every woman.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to answer two questions: what motivates women's participation in the Al-Muamalah majelis taklim, and how can those motivations be understood through maqashid syariah and Weber's theory of social action? Our findings show that participation is driven by a combination of intrinsic drivers (self-actualization through knowledge and confidence, and the need for social belonging) and extrinsic drivers (neighborly invitations and deeply embedded socio-religious tradition). These motivations are never unidimensional; they blend value-rational, affective, traditional, and instrumentally rational logics. Through the lens of maqashid, this participation actively supports the protection of religion, life, intellect, and lineage though our negative cases reveal that these protections are unevenly realized, particularly for younger, peripheral, and dropout members.

Theoretically, we offer two contributions. First, we propose normative motivation analysis a framework that integrates Weberian action types with maqashid objectives as an alternative to purely secular models of motivation that often overlook or diminish religious normativity. Second, we introduce performing piety as a concept that captures how mundane, collective acts of gathering, studying, and helping simultaneously constitute religious devotion and practical empowerment. Rather than claiming to resolve the dichotomy between piety and agency definitively, we suggest that this concept offers a nuanced understanding that moves beyond simplistic binary views, while remaining explicitly provisional and context-bound given our single-case design.

Our findings carry two key implications one for Islamic legal studies, and one for community-based empowerment practice.

For Islamic legal studies, this study demonstrates that maqashid al-shariah is not merely a static jurisprudential abstraction but a lived social ethic that can be empirically investigated. By operationalizing hifz al-din, al-nafs, al-ʻaql, and al-nasl through women's everyday narratives, we show that maqashid theory can function as both a normative benchmark and a diagnostic tool identifying not only what empowerment looks like but also where it falls short (e.g., shallow curricula, lack of economic follow-through, patriarchal constraints, and organizational exclusivity). This bridges the gap between

classical Islamic legal theory and contemporary qualitative sociology, inviting scholars to treat maqashid as a flexible analytical lens rather than a mere legitimizing rhetoric.

For community-based women's empowerment, our findings suggest that effective programs must move beyond a narrow focus on technical skills or economic outcomes. Practitioners should recognize that women's participation is sustained by a dense web of spiritual, emotional, social, and traditional motivations. Empowerment initiatives are more likely to succeed when they intentionally accommodate this hybridity for instance, by deepening religious curricula for educated youth, facilitating market access for sewing skills, creating safe spaces for new members to voice concerns, and actively addressing household-level patriarchal resistance rather than ignoring it. The negative cases in our study dropout due to spousal prohibition, boredom with repetitive content, and feelings of exclusion are not anomalies but critical signals that programs must continuously self-correct to remain genuinely inclusive and responsive.

We acknowledge several limitations. Our single-case design and small sample size (n=10) preclude statistical generalization, though they allow analytical generalization to theory. Our four-month fieldwork captures a temporal snapshot, and the researcher's hybrid positionality may have subtly shaped data collection. These constraints are inherent to our qualitative, case-based approach and do not undermine the internal validity of our findings, but they do circumscribe the scope of our claims.

Future research could extend this work through comparative case studies across diverse Indonesian regions, longitudinal designs tracking motivational shifts over time, and mixed-methods approaches that develop quantitative scales based on our four Weberian-maqashid dimensions. Such agendas would further test and refine the normative motivation analysis and performing piety frameworks beyond the specific context of urban Makassar.

Ultimately, this study affirms that religious devotion and women's empowerment need not be cast as oppositional forces. In the everyday life of the Al-Muamalah majelis, they are woven together through performance, negotiation, and at times contradiction. Recognizing both the achievements and the persistent gaps is the first step toward building empowerment models that are not only religiously legitimate but also substantively transformative for all women, including those who remain on the margins.

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