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Reconstructing Nafaqah (Living) in the Sandwich Generation: A Madhhab-Based Analysis of Gender Justice and Economic Burden

Ahmad Alamuddin Yasin^{1*}, Osamah Naufal Rahman², Abdul Hayyaqddhan Ashufah³,
Mohammad Ali Hibatulloh Faletahan⁴

¹STIT Buntet Pesantren, Indonesia. E-mail: alamuddinyasin@stit-buntetpesantren.ac.id

²UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon, Indonesia. E-mail: osamahnaufal@gmail.com

³Université Hassan II, Casablanca, Morocco. E-mail: abdul.ashufah-etu@etu.univh2c.ma

⁴Al-Azhar University, Egypt. E-mail: alihibatullah23@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract

This study examines the transformation of *nafaqah* practices among Muslim sandwich-generation families and their implications for the normative understanding of financial maintenance in classical Islamic family law. It addresses the gap between classical *fiqh* doctrines, which generally position husbands as primary breadwinners, and contemporary realities characterised by flexible, intergenerational financial responsibilities. Using a qualitative socio-legal approach informed by grounded theory, the study draws on in-depth interviews with sandwich-generation families. The data were analysed through systematic coding. The findings reveal two principal models of *nafaqah*: single-breadwinner and shared-breadwinner arrangements involving husbands, wives, children, or combinations thereof, depending on household economic capacity. The scope of financial responsibility has also expanded to include parents and elderly relatives, intensifying intergenerational financial obligations. Furthermore, women increasingly assume dual roles as income earners and caregivers, while education and healthcare have become integral components of household maintenance. These findings reveal tensions between contemporary family practices and classical *fiqh* doctrines across Islamic legal schools. The study's principal contribution is the conceptualisation of "adaptive *nafaqah*" as a middle-range theory of Islamic family law. This framework bridges classical jurisprudential principles and contemporary family realities through a welfare-oriented, relational model of financial responsibility. It also provides an analytical framework for examining family law reform across Muslim-majority societies, contributing to broader debates on legal adaptation, gender relations, and the evolving objectives of Islamic law.

Keywords: Adaptive *nafaqah*; Islamic Family Law; Sandwich Generation; Intergenerational Financial Responsibility; Gender Relations.



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source are properly credited.

Introduction

The reality of human life is fundamentally inseparable from issues of money and income (Sulaeman, 2018; Yasin, 2023). In daily life, the fulfillment of basic and supplementary needs is always closely related to the economic capacity of an individual or a family (Astuti & Triayunda, 2023; Muzamzil & Hermawan, 2023; I. P. Sari et al., 2020). Technological developments and the tide of modernity have indeed brought various conveniences to human activities, but at the same time, they have also triggered an increase in living needs that are increasingly diverse and complex (Assagaf, 2022; Hoang & Lascaux, 2026; Masullo et al., 2020; Mick & Fournier, 1998; Park & Zhang, 2022). In the past, human basic needs were relatively simple and limited to clothing, food, and shelter, but in modern society, these needs have shifted and expanded in meaning (Hasmiyati, 2020; Yasin et al., 2023). Life needs are no longer just about survival, but also include access to transportation, communication, education, health services, and various other social needs, all of which require adequate financial support (Felman et al., 2025; Jarvenpaa & Lang, 2005; Strengers & Nicholls, 2017). The complexity of these basic needs has direct implications for increasing economic demands within the family (MR & Noor, 2020; Sobah & Rifai, 2020). Families, as the smallest social unit, are faced with the reality that a single source of income is no longer sufficient to meet all the needs of family members. This condition encourages more family members to be actively involved in economic activities, including women (Nida, 2023; Yaddi et al., 2018). Moreover, in the modern era, the role of women has undergone significant dynamics. Women are no longer solely positioned as recipients of income, but also appear as economic subjects who contribute directly to meeting family needs (Brizi, 2024; Gervais & Millel, 2026; Liu et al., 2025).

This phenomenon is increasingly evident among a group known as the sandwich generation, namely individuals who simultaneously bear economic responsibility for dependent children, spouses, and elderly parents who are no longer economically productive (Manor, 2021; Noor & Isa, 2020; Steiner & Fletcher, 2017). In this situation, the economic burden on families becomes layered and demands greater financial capacity. Not infrequently, women take on the strategic role of being the main economic pillar of the family across generations. This role ultimately shapes the pattern of dual-income families, which not only reflects changes in the economic structure of the family, but also shows the transformation of gender roles in modern Muslim family life (Amir, 2023; Silverstein et al., 2020; Syufa'at et al., 2023). Previous studies have examined the issue of child support in Islamic family law, particularly after divorce. The main focus of these studies generally revolves around the fulfillment of child support by the father, the legal status of past support (nafkah/nafaqah māḍiyah), and the mechanism for enforcing support obligations through the judicial system. Although they make an important

contribution, these studies still leave a number of research gaps, especially when faced with the dynamics of contemporary Muslim families.

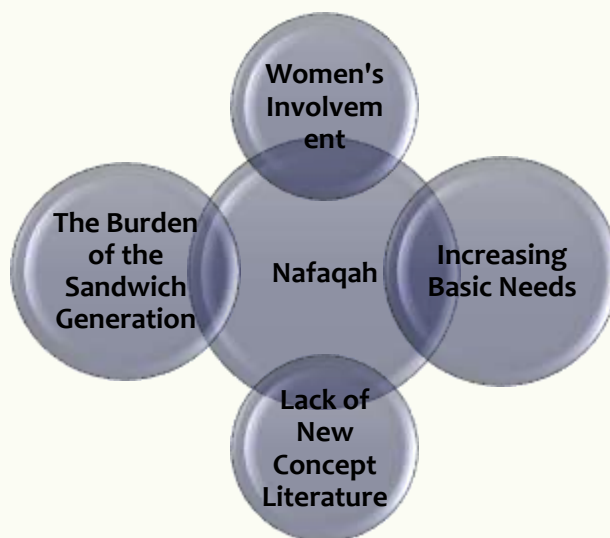
The research conducted by Nasution et al. (2024) examines the fulfillment of māḍiyah child support by Religious Courts in Indonesia after the issuance of Supreme Court Circular Letter Number 2 of 2019. By analyzing ten Religious Court decisions, this study found inconsistencies in judges' decisions in granting māḍiyah maintenance claims filed by mothers. These inconsistencies were caused by differences in the legal basis used by judges and considerations of the father's economic capacity. This study sharply reveals the conceptual debate between *li al-intifā'* and *li al-tamlik* in judicial practice. However, this study still limits its analysis to the legal relationship between father and child after divorce and does not relate it to changes in the economic structure of the family, including the involvement of mothers as breadwinners or the economic pressures typical of sandwich generation families (Bao et al., 2026). Meanwhile, the research by Hussin and Fauzi (2023) raises the issue of child support neglect from the perspective of payment mechanisms. By examining deductions from the Employees Provident Fund (KWSP) as an alternative means of paying child support in the Malaysian Sharia Court, this study offers concrete and applicable policy solutions. The main contribution of this study lies in strengthening the role of the state in guaranteeing child support rights. However, this study focuses more on technical and administrative aspects and does not touch on conceptual issues of support in modern families, such as shifting gender roles, fairness of support in dual-income families, and intergenerational support burdens. The study conducted by Firdaus et al. (2023) moves into the conceptual realm by offering a reconstruction of the child maintenance paradigm through a shift from the concept of *li al-intifā'* to *li al-tamlik* using the *istiḥsān* approach.

This research provides a significant theoretical contribution in addressing the injustice of Religious Court decisions that reject claims for māḍiyah child support. However, because it is normative and based on literature review, this research has not tested the extent to which the concept is relevant and operational in the socio-economic practices of contemporary Muslim families, especially in conditions of economic limitations of fathers and the increasing economic contribution of mothers. Different the three previous studies, the study by Ngema and Iyer (2023) discusses the right to child support for children born out of wedlock (*walad al-zina*) using a comparative approach between Islamic law and South African positive law. This study criticizes the exclusion of children born out of wedlock from the right to maintenance from their biological fathers in classical fiqh by emphasizing the principles of the best interests of the child, equality, and human dignity. Although important in the discourse on child protection and human

rights, this study does not directly discuss the practice of maintenance in normative Muslim families or the dynamics of maintenance in intact or post-divorce families.

Based on a critical review of these studies, it appears that most studies still focus on child maintenance in divorce, the legal status of *māḍiyah* maintenance, or mechanisms for enforcing maintenance. There has been no research that comprehensively examines the practice of *nafkah* in sandwich generation families, taking into account the economic role of women, the burden of intergenerational *nafkah*, and its implications for the normative construction of *nafkah* in Islamic family law. This gap is what this study aims to fill. However, this social reality does not fully align with the normative construction of the concept of maintenance as formulated in classical *fiqh*. In *fiqh*, maintenance is understood as the obligation of a husband towards his wife and children, which includes the fulfillment of basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, in accordance with the husband's economic capacity. The formulation of this concept of *nafkah* did not arise in a vacuum, but was developed within a specific social and geographical context. Environmental conditions, differences in climate (cold, hot, or tropical), also influence the type, form, and standard of basic needs that are considered appropriate.

So that, this problem can be illustrated in the visual diagram below:



The urgency of this research arises from the gap between the normative concept of *nafkah* in classical *fiqh* and the socio-economic realities of contemporary Muslim families. Traditionally, *nafkah* has been understood as the fulfillment of the basic needs of wives and children, with husbands acting as the primary providers. However, this concept is increasingly difficult to apply to sandwich generation families, who face multiple financial responsibilities. In many cases, women play a significant, and sometimes primary, role in supporting the family economy while still being regarded normatively as recipients

of nafaqah. Another issue is the lack of a clear and contextual classification of primary, secondary, and tertiary needs in the provision of family support. This situation creates legal uncertainty in both family practices and Religious Court decisions. Judges are often confronted with complex social realities without a fiqh framework that adequately reflects contemporary social and economic changes. Consequently, decisions regarding nafkah may become inconsistent, partial, or insufficient in achieving substantive justice, particularly for women and children.

In response to these challenges, this study seeks to reexamine the concept of nafkah in Islamic family law through the perspectives of gender justice and the realities of sandwich generation families. Specifically, it aims to remap the categories of primary, secondary, and tertiary needs in family maintenance based on empirical evidence from the lived experiences of contemporary Muslim families. These findings will then be analyzed using a fiqh framework to evaluate whether the current concept of nafkah remains relevant, adaptive, and capable of addressing the economic dynamics of modern families, particularly those characterized by women's dual roles and intergenerational financial responsibilities.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design within a socio-legal approach (Creswell, 2018). This approach is adopted to position Islamic family law not only as a set of normative and doctrinal texts but also as a living social practice that interacts with the socio-economic realities of contemporary Muslim society. The study focuses on examining the gap between the normative construction of Nafaqah in classical fiqh and its contemporary practices within sandwich-generation families, particularly in relation to changing gender roles and increasing intergenerational economic burdens.

The data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from informants drawn from Muslim sandwich-generation families, including women who actively contribute as breadwinners and married couples in dual-income households. Secondary data were derived from classical and contemporary fiqh literature, studies on gender justice in Islamic law, Indonesian Islamic family law regulations, Religious Court decisions, and relevant academic publications (Ammaniti, 2024; Creswell, 2018; Halton-Hernandez, 2023).

Respondents were selected using snowball sampling, as sandwich-generation families are not always easily identifiable through formal administrative categories. The recruitment process began with key informants who met the research criteria and expanded through participant referrals. A total of 200 respondents were included to

capture diverse patterns of economic responsibility and intergenerational support within Muslim families.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews and literature review. Interviews were used to explore empirical practices of nafaqah provision, perceptions of fairness in the distribution of economic responsibilities, and women's experiences in performing dual roles. The literature review was conducted to examine the normative framework of nafaqah within classical fiqh and contemporary Islamic legal discourse.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis began with systematic coding to identify key themes, including categories of nafaqah needs (primary, secondary, and tertiary), patterns of economic role distribution, and forms of intergenerational financial burden. These empirical findings were then interpreted through a normative fiqh framework and a gender justice perspective to assess the relevance and limitations of existing doctrines.

This analytical process ultimately aims to reconstruct the concept of nafaqah in Islamic family law so that it becomes more adaptive and responsive to the socio-economic realities of contemporary Muslim families, particularly within the sandwich generation context.

Result and Discussion

Dynamics of Nafaqah Provision in Sandwich Generation Families

The analysis focuses on four main aspects, namely the role of the provider, the recipient, the dynamics of dual roles in nafaqah, and the allocation of nafaqah. This focus was chosen to capture more sharply the relationship between the normative construction of nafaqah in Islamic family law and the socio-economic realities of contemporary Muslim families. The following is a description of the table:

Tabel 1. Matrix of Maintenance Practices in Sandwich Generation Families

No	Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Purpose of Data Collection
1	Role of Breadwinner	The party who acts as the main breadwinner in the family	Identifying the main actor responsible for providing financial support in family practices
		The party acting as the additional breadwinner	Exploring joint provider patterns in dual-income families
		Basis for determining the role of breadwinner (normative, economic, situational)	Assessing factors that influence the division of breadwinning roles between religious norms and economic realities

2	Who Receiving Alimony	Dependents in the nuclear family (wife/husband, children)	Mapping dependents in contemporary family structures
		Intergenerational dependents (parents, in-laws, other family members)	Identifying sandwich generation dependency practices outside the nuclear family
		Priority of dependents when resources are limited	Assessing the logic of fairness and hierarchy of dependents in family practice
3	Dual Roles in Financial Support	Women's dual role as breadwinners and providers	Examining the transformation of gender roles in family breadwinning practices
		The impact of dual roles on economic and psychosocial burdens	Assessing the economic and non-economic consequences of dual breadwinning roles
		Normative and social recognition of dual roles	Exploring the gap between economic contributions and normative recognition
4	Use of Alimony	Fulfilling basic family needs (food, shelter, clothing)	Mapping alimony practices in fulfilling basic needs
		Fulfilling non-basic needs (education, health, transportation)	Examining the expansion of the meaning of alimony in modern life
		The use of alimony for intergenerational needs	Assessing the allocation of alimony in intergenerational responsibilities
		The use of alimony for social needs and supporting modern life	Identifying the boundaries between normative alimony and contemporary socio-economic needs

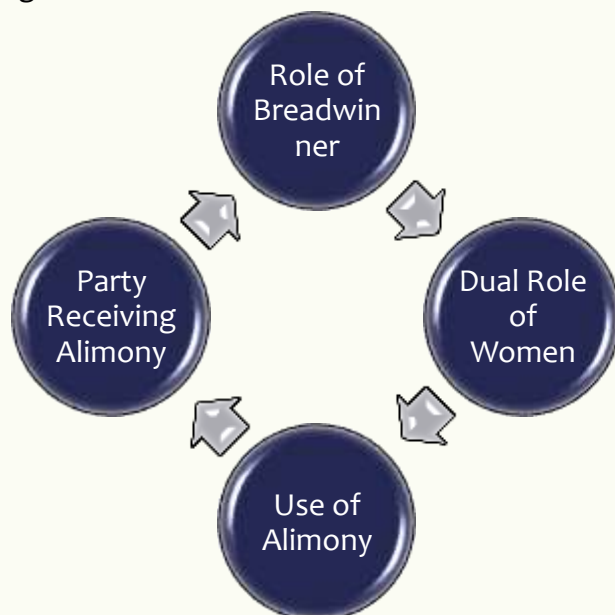
Source: Primary data, processed (2026)

The interview synthesis matrix used in this study was compiled based on preliminary findings from a review of fiqh literature, Islamic family law, and preliminary observations of family life practices. The matrix was used to identify the actors involved in nafaqah, the recipients of nafaqah, and the categories of needs financed, thereby forming the basis for a thematic analysis of gender justice and intergenerational economic burdens in sandwich generation families.

To maintain academic ethics and data confidentiality, the identities of all informants in this study were concealed. The informants came from Muslim families in the sandwich generation category, with diverse occupational backgrounds and economic levels. In

presenting the interview results, the informants were given alphabetical codes (Informant EEI, AS, FBR, and so on) without mentioning specific names, addresses, or institutions.

These findings show a division of the research results, which are illustrated in the following visual diagram:



The Role of Breadwinners in Sandwich Generation Families

The interview results show that the practice of providing for the family in Muslim sandwich generation families can no longer be understood in a singular way as assumed in classical fiqh constructions. Although normatively most informants still understand that the husband is the party responsible for providing for the family, in daily practice there are far more diverse and situational patterns of breadwinners. The research findings identify two main patterns of breadwinners, namely single breadwinner and shared breadwinner.

In the single breadwinner pattern, the responsibility for providing for the family is predominantly borne by one party (Kustati et al., 2024; Nadim, 2016; Pfau-Effinger, 2004). However, that party is not always in the same position. In some families, the position of single breadwinner is held by the husband as the head of the family. In other cases, this role is taken over by the wife, especially when she has a more stable or higher income than her husband. In fact, in a number of sandwich generation families, adult children who are already working become the single breadwinner for parents who are no longer economically productive.

Informant EEI, a wife who works in the formal sector, said:

“Religiously speaking, I know that the husband is obligated to provide for the family. But in reality, my husband’s salary is not enough for our children and parents. So, whether I like it or not, I have to help support the household.”

Meanwhile, Informant AS, a working adult living with their parents, explained:

“Now my parents are no longer working. So I am responsible for household needs, electricity, food. It has become my responsibility as a child.”

These findings show that the position of the single breadwinner in sandwich generation families is dynamic and greatly influenced by actual economic conditions, not solely by the normative role as formulated in classical fiqh.

In addition to the single breadwinner pattern, this study also found a shared breadwinner pattern, which is the division of financial responsibility carried out jointly by two or more parties. This pattern is most commonly found in the form of cooperation between husband and wife in meeting the needs of the nuclear family and parents. However, in some cases, the shared breadwinner pattern also involves children and parents, especially in the case of the " " when parents still have limited income or certain assets that can partially support the family's needs (Friedman et al., 2017; Kalmijn, 2025).

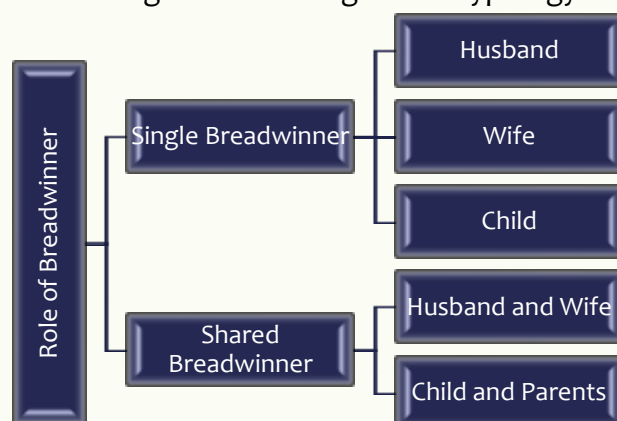
Informant FBR described this situation as follows:

"My husband and I both work. We combine our salaries for the needs of our children and parents. Sometimes our parents also help a little from the proceeds of their farm."

This shared breadwinner pattern shows that the obligation to provide for the sandwich generation family is carried out collectively and through negotiation. Economic responsibility is no longer understood as a rigid individual obligation, but rather as a shared responsibility that is adjusted to the capacity of each family member (Arsal et al., 2026; Edlund & Öun, 2023).

This finding challenges the classic assumption that the obligation to provide for the family is always directly proportional to gender or a certain family position, especially the husband as the sole breadwinner. On the contrary, the practice of providing for the family in the sandwich generation shows flexibility and adaptation to economic pressures, while also opening up space for a reinterpretation of the concept of providing for the family in Islamic family law to be more responsive to contemporary socio-economic realities.

For clarity, the following is a visual diagram of Typology of Breadwinner Roles:



Parties Receiving Maintenance and Intergenerational Burdens

From the perspective of the recipients of nafaqah, the interview results show that the subjects of nafaqah extend to parents and elderly family members, not limited to wives

and children. This condition is a key characteristic of sandwich generation families, where informants simultaneously bear the economic needs of two dependent generations.

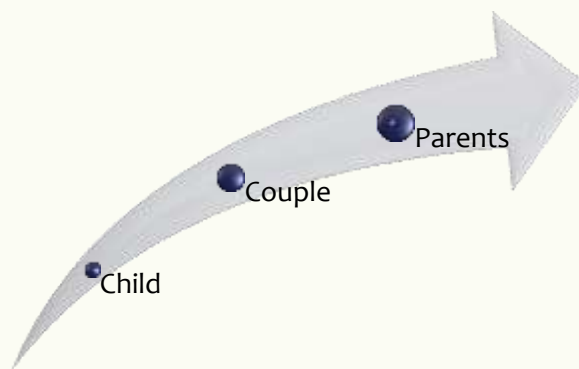
Informant AS stated:

“Every month, there is a specific allocation for the parents. Although it is small, it has become a responsibility that cannot be abandoned.”

In situations of limited resources, informants mentioned that there are situational priorities for nafaqah. The needs of children and parents are often considered more urgent than the personal needs of the husband and wife. This practice is not explicitly formulated in classical fiqh, which generally focuses on the discussion of nafaqah in the context of husband-wife and father-child relationships.

Analytically, these findings indicate that the practice of nafaqah in sandwich generation families develops through internal family negotiations, not solely based on the normative hierarchy of fiqh. This signifies the need for a re-reading of the concept of nafaqah that is more sensitive to the reality of intergenerational responsibilities.

The following is a visual diagram:



The Dual Role of Women in the Practice of Nafaqah

One of the most prominent findings in this study is the strengthening of women's dual roles in family nafaqah practices, namely as breadwinners and as the main managers of domestic affairs, i.e., as housewives. In sandwich generation families, women are in the normative position of being entitled to receive nafaqah while also playing an active role as providers for their immediate families and parents. However, this dual role is not always accompanied by normative recognition or an equal division of domestic responsibilities.

The interview results show that women's involvement in economic activities is driven by various reasons. In some families, women take on the role of breadwinner because their husbands are sick or have economic limitations, making them unable to fully meet the family's needs. In other situations, women choose to continue working even though the family's economic needs are already met by their husband's income, because they are driven by self-actualization or boredom with repetitive domestic roles. In addition, there are also women who work because they want to utilize their potential and capacity, especially their higher education background.

Informant FBR, a woman with a bachelor's degree, said:

"I work full-time, contribute to household expenses, pay for my children's schooling, and help my parents. But household chores remain my sole responsibility."

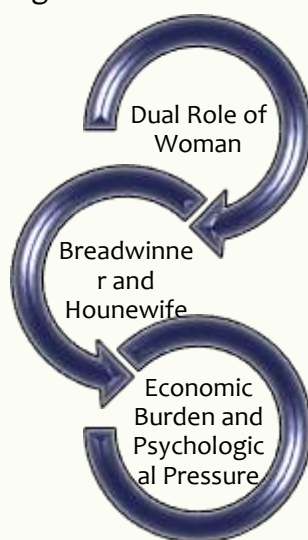
Meanwhile, Informant NF explained her motivation for continuing to work even though her husband's income is relatively sufficient:

"If I just stay at home all the time, I feel bored. I studied for a long time and have skills, so it would be a shame not to use them."

These findings show that women's dual roles are not solely driven by economic factors, but also by psychological, social, and cultural factors. However, in practice, women's involvement in productive work is not necessarily accompanied by a redistribution of domestic work. As a result, women bear a double burden, both in the public and domestic spheres.

This situation causes significant economic and psychological pressure, especially in families with limited resources. Conceptually, these findings reveal a tension between the seemingly egalitarian economic practice of nafaqah and the normative construction of nafaqah, which still places women in a subordinate position in the division of domestic roles. From a gender justice perspective, this situation shows an asymmetry between economic contributions and socio-normative recognition, which has the potential to perpetuate injustice in modern Muslim family relationships.

The following is a visual diagram:



The Use of Nafaqah and the Expansion of the Meaning of Needs

The interview results show that the use of nafaqah in sandwich generation Muslim families can no longer be understood narrowly as the formulation of basic needs in classical fiqh. Nafaqah is not limited to the fulfillment of clothing, food, and shelter, but includes various other needs that are essential in modern life. Based on empirical findings, the use of nafaqah in sandwich generation families can be classified into three main categories, namely primary, secondary, and tertiary needs.

1. Primary Needs

Primary needs are ongoing needs that cannot be postponed. In sandwich generation families, primary needs extend to education and health as basic needs inherent to the family's survival, not just clothing, food, and shelter (Cheng & Santos-Lozada, 2024; Sommer et al., 2024). Informants consistently placed daily food expenses, housing, clothing, children's education, and health services for children and parents as the top priorities in the allocation of nafkah.

In addition, primary needs also include various household furnishings and means of supporting domestic life, such as cooking equipment, cleaning tools, basic household furniture, and electricity and water costs. In practice, these needs are understood as an integral part of livelihood because they are directly related to the family's quality of life.

Informant NF explained:

"Nowadays, needs are not just food and shelter. Children's schooling, parents' healthcare costs, phone credit, internet, all of these are mandatory needs."

This statement shows that education and health have undergone a shift in meaning from secondary to primary needs, especially in families that bear the burden of intergenerational livelihood.

2. Secondary Needs

Secondary needs in this study are understood as needs that are not daily in nature but relatively frequently arise in family life. These needs are generally related to improving the quality of life and efficiency of family activities. Based on the interview results, secondary needs include transportation costs, vehicle maintenance, the purchase or repair of household electronic devices, additional communication needs, and social expenses such as family activities, celebrations, or other social needs.

In sandwich generation families, secondary needs are often adaptive and contextual. For example, transportation costs are an important secondary need for families with high mobility, while technological devices such as cell phones or computers are supporting needs for children's education and parents' work.

Informant DY said:

"We don't buy things every day, but there's always something every month. Whether it's servicing the motorcycle, buying a cell phone for school, or helping with family events."

These secondary needs are generally met after primary needs are fulfilled, but in practice, they often become a source of economic pressure due to their high frequency.

3. Tertiary Needs

Tertiary needs are infrequent and arise from time to time, and are generally not directly related to the survival of the family. Based on the interview results, tertiary needs include family recreation, vacations, purchases of non-essential items, certain

celebrations, and unexpected needs such as emergency costs due to disasters or special events.

Although not a top priority, tertiary needs are still considered important by some informants as a means of maintaining mental health and family harmony. However, in sandwich generation families with economic limitations, tertiary needs are often postponed or even eliminated altogether.

Informant LRB stated:

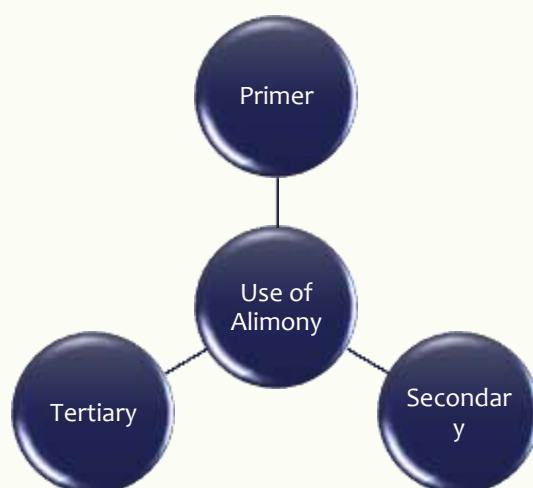
“If it’s a vacation or buying something that isn’t a necessity, it’s usually postponed. Our focus now is on the children and parents first.”

These findings indicate that tertiary needs are the main area of compromise in managing the livelihood of sandwich generation families, while also reflecting the hierarchy of needs formed based on intergenerational economic pressures.

The classification of livelihood use into primary, secondary, and tertiary needs as found in this study shows an expansion and shift in the meaning of livelihood in contemporary Muslim families. Education and health, which in classical fiqh are often placed as complementary needs, are in fact positioned as non-negotiable primary needs in the practice of sandwich generation families.

Within the framework of Islamic family law, these findings emphasize the need to remap the categories of sustenance needs to be more contextual and responsive to socio-economic changes. An adaptive understanding of sustenance will provide legal certainty and even open up space for more substantive justice, especially for women and families under intergenerational economic pressure.

The following is a visual diagram:



Final Coding Table and Visual Diagram of Research Findings

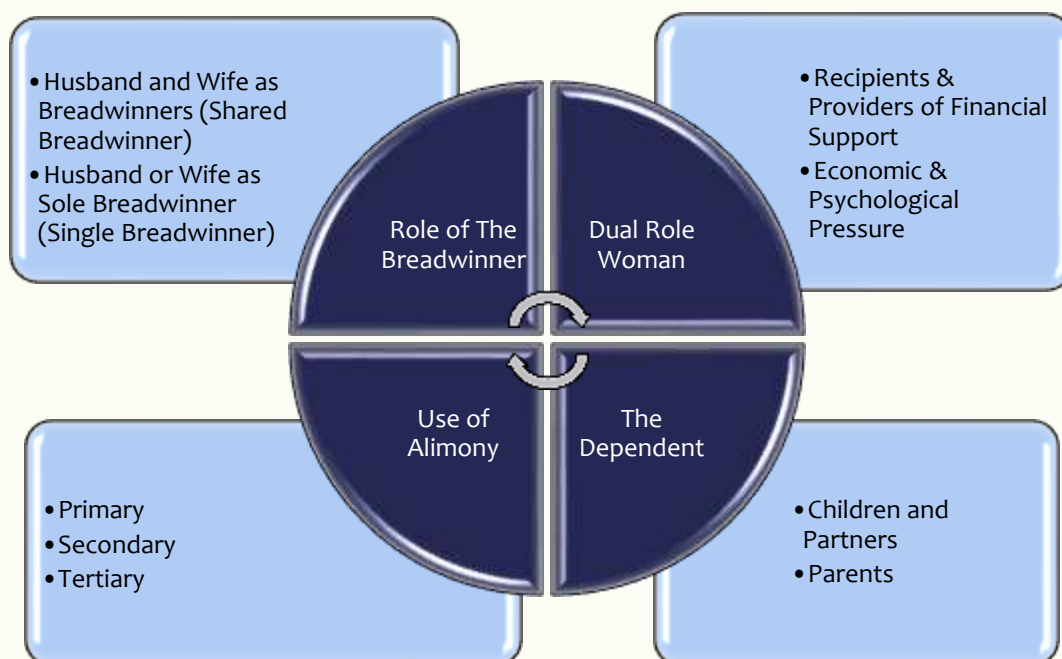
Tabel 3. Final Coding

No	Indicator	Thematic Code	Main Findings
1	The Role of the Breadwinner	KN1 – Functional Support	The role of breadwinner is determined by actual economic capacity, not necessarily

			attached to the position of the husband as head of the family.
		KN2 –Single and Shared Breadwinner Patterns	The practice of providing financial support is carried out through single breadwinner and shared breadwinner patterns involving the husband, wife, children, or a combination thereof.
2	Person Receiving Support	PN1 – Nuclear Family	Financial support is prioritized for spouses and children as the parties most economically dependent
		PN2 Intergenerational Support	Parents and elderly family members become recipients of relatively permanent support
3	Dual Role	PG1 – Women's Dual Role	Women play a dual role as breadwinners and primary managers of domestic work
		PG2 – Layered Burden	Women's dual roles create economic and psychological burdens due to the lack of redistribution of domestic work
4	Use of Alimony	UN1 – Adaptive Primary Needs	Alimony is used for clothing, food, shelter, education, health, and basic household needs
		UN2 – Contextual Secondary Needs	Income is allocated for transportation, communication, technology, and social needs that support family life
		UN3 – Situational Tertiary Needs	Recreational and incidental needs are the main areas of compromise in managing family income

To clarify, here is a visual diagram identifying living expenses:

Visual Diagram 2. Research Findings



Re-construction Analysis of Family Maintenance Practices in the Sandwich Generation

The results of this study show that livelihood practices in Muslim sandwich generation families cannot be fully explained by the normative fiqh framework, which is idealistic in nature. In everyday life, families do not operate based on the logic of "who is obligated according to the text," but rather on the logic of "who is capable and needed at this moment." It is at this point that fiqh comes face to face with complex socio-economic realities.

1. A Matter of Ability, Not Just Position

In general religious understanding, husbands are still positioned as the ones responsible for providing financial support. However, field findings show that the role of breadwinner is not always attached to gender or status as a husband (Junaidy et al., 2025; Yodanis & Lauer, 2007). In some families, the husband is indeed the sole breadwinner. In other families, it is the wife who becomes the main breadwinner, or even children who are already working take on this role when their parents are no longer productive (Fu et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2023; Yuliana, 2021).

From a fiqh perspective, this situation does not necessarily mean neglect of obligations, but rather an adjustment of practices to actual capabilities. The obligation of nafaqah in practice appears to follow economic capacity, not merely normative constructs (Al-Jazari, 2021; Az-Zuhaili, 2013). This means that families prioritize survival over consistency with one ideal model.

2. Intergenerational Maintenance and Priority Practices

This study also shows that support no longer stops at wives and children, but extends to parents and elderly family members (Chen & Zhou, 2022; Hämäläinen & Tanskanen, 2021; Lei et al., 2023; Polenick et al., 2017). For informants, helping parents is not an additional option, but a continuous need. As a result, support must be shared among several equally dependent parties.

In such situations, families make practical prioritization decisions. Children and parents are placed as the most needy parties, while the personal needs of spouses are adjusted or even sacrificed.

3. Significant Contribution, Limited Recognition

One important finding is the strengthening of women's dual roles. Women work and contribute economically, while also continuing to bear full domestic responsibilities (Hasanah & Huriyah, 2022; R. Nasution, 2022; R. P. Sari & Agustang, 2021). The reasons behind this dual role are varied: some are due to the husband's illness or limited income, while others are because they want to utilize their education and personal capacity.

Although women's economic contributions are significant, recognition of these roles is not always balanced. The division of domestic labor tends to remain unchanged, as

if women's role as breadwinners does not alter the structure of responsibilities within the household. In this context, fiqh does not directly address this disparity but can be used to analyze the gap between economic practice and the stagnation of domestic relations.

4. Expanding Needs

In terms of usage, nafkah is no longer understood as merely food, clothing, and shelter. Informants include children's education, health costs, transportation, communication, and even the needs of parents as part of non-negotiable nafkah. These needs are perceived as the basic needs of the modern family.

In practice, these needs can be mapped into three categories. Primary needs include clothing, food, shelter, education, health, and daily household items. Secondary needs include needs that are not continuous but often arise, such as home repairs, family social costs, or vehicles. Meanwhile, tertiary needs are situational and incidental, such as recreation or the purchase of certain non-urgent items.

This division shows that the meaning of nafkah changes according to the context of life, rather than being limited to a narrow, classical definition. (Al-Ghazi, 2014; Al-Malibari, 2015; Al-Nawawi, 1996; Al-Bantani, 2016).

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the practice of Nafaqah in sandwich-generation Muslim families has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from a fixed and husband-centered model toward a more flexible and situational arrangement based on economic capacity and intergenerational responsibilities. These findings confirm the existence of a gap between classical fiqh constructions of maintenance and the socio-economic realities of contemporary Muslim families. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic family law by proposing the concept of *adaptive nafaqah*, which reframes maintenance as a contextual and functional obligation rather than a rigidly gendered duty. This concept extends existing doctrinal understandings by integrating empirical realities into the interpretation of legal norms, and aligns with broader principles of justice, balance, and social welfare within Islamic legal thought. In this framework, justice in maintenance is not solely measured by financial provision but also by the equitable distribution of economic and non-economic responsibilities within the family.

From a normative and practical perspective, the findings suggest the need for a more responsive interpretation of maintenance obligations within Islamic family law, including judicial and policy considerations. Religious court practices and family law regulations may benefit from recognizing diverse patterns of breadwinning and intergenerational dependency, particularly in cases involving dual-income households and women's economic contributions. This study is subject to several limitations. First, the

research is based on qualitative data within a specific socio-cultural context, which may limit its generalizability. Second, while this study engages with classical fiqh concepts, it does not provide a systematic comparison across all major madhhab positions, leaving room for deeper doctrinal analysis.

Future research is recommended to expand comparative madhhab analysis on nafkah obligations, explore quantitative measurements of economic burden in sandwich-generation families, and examine the implications of adaptive nafaqah within legal institutions and policy frameworks in different Muslim societies.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could influence this paper.

Declaration of the use of AI

The author declare that no AI assistant technology was used in this research, with the exception of Quilbot and ChatGPT, which were used as language development aids.

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Ahmad Alamuddin Yasin: Conceptualization and Methodology. **Osamah Naufal Rahman:** Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation. **Abdul Hayyaqdhah Ashufah:** Writing and Reviewing. **Mohammad Ali Hibatulloh Faletahan:** Editing.

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