

Challenging Patriarchal Norms: A Critical Documentary Analysis of Gender Discourse in 'Aisyiyah'

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Abstract

This article examines how 'Aisyiyah's official gender discourse has challenged, revised, and selectively retained patriarchal norms across four authoritative texts: *Adabul Mar'ah fil Islam* (1982), *Pokok Pikiran 'Aisyiyah Abad Kedua* (2015), *Tuntunan Menuju Keluarga Sakinah* (2016), and *Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan* (2022). Rather than reviewing secondary literature, the study treats these documents as primary qualitative data. It combines qualitative document analysis with feminist critical discourse analysis to trace changes in the construction of women's dignity, religious agency, family authority, public leadership, economic autonomy, and exposure to structural violence. The findings reveal a clear diachronic movement. The 1982 text combines theological equality with biological essentialism, wife-centered obedience, and a strongly maternal allocation of domestic responsibility, even while opening education, politics, and judicial authority to women. The 2015 and 2016 texts recast equality as the absence of superiority and subordination, define women as *khalifah* and transformative leaders, and normalize participation in public institutions. The 2022 *Risalah* explicitly names misogyny, patriarchy, discrimination, violence, unequal wages, and barriers to political participation, while grounding reform in *tajdid* and interconnected *bayani*, *burhani*, and *irfani* reasoning. Nevertheless, gender-differentiated family scripts remain: the husband is still described as the principal bearer of *qiwwamah* and economic responsibility, and women's care obligations retain exceptional weight. The article conceptualizes this pattern as negotiated progressive egalitarianism: an Islamic gender-reform project that expands substantive equality and institutional agency while continuing to negotiate inherited hierarchies within the family. The study demonstrates that official religious texts can function as original empirical material and provides a reproducible model for textual research in Islamic studies.

Keywords: *'Aisyiyah; gender discourse; patriarchy; documentary analysis; feminist critical discourse analysis; Progressive Islam; family; women's leadership.*

INTRODUCTION

Debates on women and Islam in Indonesia are often organized through an unproductive binary. Religious organizations are described either as conservative custodians of patriarchal norms or as progressive actors whose educational and welfare achievements demonstrate gender equality. Both descriptions capture part of the reality, but neither adequately explains how gender norms are produced, revised, and authorized inside a long-lived Islamic movement. 'Aisyiyah is a particularly important site for addressing this problem. Established in 1917 as the women's organization of Muhammadiyah, it has developed schools, health services, social-welfare institutions, religious education, economic programs, and civic initiatives while maintaining an explicit attachment to Islamic sources and Muhammadiyah's reformist tradition. Its significance therefore lies not only in what women do through the organization, but also in how the organization defines womanhood, family, authority, piety, and legitimate public action.

Much scholarship has documented 'Aisyiyah's contribution to women's education, social welfare, religious authority, and public participation. Historical and ethnographic research has shown that Indonesian Muslim women's agency cannot be reduced to resistance against religion; it is frequently produced through disciplined piety, organizational participation, and reinterpretation from within Islamic traditions (Rinaldo, 2013; Robinson, 2009; van Doorn-Harder, 2006). Research focused on Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah likewise demonstrates that organizational structures can create unusual spaces for women's learning and leadership while continuing to carry gendered assumptions about domesticity, authority, and respectability (Dzuhayatin, 2015; Qibtiyah, 2012, 2020; Syamsiyatun, 2007). These studies provide essential context, but they usually examine people, institutions, or movements. Less attention has been given to the official documents themselves as a primary, diachronic corpus through which the changing grammar of gender can be reconstructed.

Documents are not passive containers of ideas. They select categories, establish legitimate vocabulary, distribute obligations, define social problems, and authorize certain kinds of action. Organizational texts are especially consequential because they translate theological claims into guidance for members, cadres, families, educational institutions, and public programs. A policy or ideological statement may not describe practice accurately, but it reveals what an institution is prepared to recognize, recommend, prohibit, or leave unresolved. Qualitative document analysis therefore treats documents as situated social products whose authorship, authority, audience, terminology, and silences are analytically significant (Bowen, 2009; Scott, 1990). In religious movements, this approach is especially useful because textual formulations can become reference points for sermons, cadre training, family counseling, curricula, and institutional decision-making.

The concept of patriarchy also requires precision. It should not be used as a general accusation directed at men or at religion. Patriarchal norms refer here to recurring arrangements that privilege masculine authority, define women through dependency or service, naturalize unequal divisions of labor, or restrict women's access to interpretation, resources, leadership, and public voice. Such arrangements can operate through law, organizational routines, moral expectations, and seemingly benevolent protection. Acker's (1990) account of gendered organizations directs attention to how apparently neutral institutional roles can presuppose gendered bodies and responsibilities. Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of patriarchal bargaining further suggests that women's agency may develop through negotiation with existing norms rather than through their immediate abandonment. These insights are useful for studying 'Aisyiyah because the organization has historically widened women's agency through religious legitimacy and collective institutions, not by separating emancipation from Islam.

A feminist critical discourse perspective adds a second analytical layer. Feminist critical discourse analysis examines how language normalizes or contests gendered power, how social actors are assigned agency, and how public and private spheres are discursively organized (Lazar, 2007). Applied to official 'Aisyiyah texts, the central issue is not whether a document uses contemporary feminist terminology. The more important questions are: Who is represented as a complete religious subject? Who interprets, decides, leads,

provides, cares, and obeys? Which inequalities are individualized as moral weakness, and which are identified as structural problems? What forms of difference are considered divinely fixed, socially constructed, or open to *tajdid*? These questions allow change to be evaluated within the movement's own theological vocabulary while retaining a critical concern with authority and material consequences.

The article analyzes four texts that form a strategically bounded corpus. *Adabul Mar'ah fil Islam*, published by the Majelis Tarjih of Muhammadiyah in 1982 after deliberations during the 1970s, offered a comprehensive guide on women's conduct, education, politics, jihad, and judicial authority. *Pokok Pikiran 'Aisyiyah Abad Kedua*, adopted at the 2015 Mukhtar, formulated women as agents of enlightenment and transformative leadership. *Tuntunan Menuju Keluarga Sakinah*, published in 2016 from the 2014 Tarjih decision, reconstructed family relations around *rahmah*, justice, equality, and mutual assistance. *Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan*, adopted at the 2022 Mukhtar, explicitly systematized an ideological perspective on women in response to contemporary discrimination, violence, economic inequality, and patriarchal structures. These documents are not identical in genre, authorship, or immediate purpose, but together they permit a focused examination of discursive continuity and transformation over four decades.

The study asks four questions. First, how do the documents define women's theological and moral status? Second, how do they distribute authority and responsibility in family, religious, economic, and public life? Third, what discursive changes occur from the 1982 text to the 2022 *Risalah*? Fourth, which patriarchal assumptions are challenged, reformulated, or retained? The purpose is not to rank the documents on a simple conservative-progressive scale. Such a scale would miss the coexistence of expansion and constraint within the same text. The analysis instead identifies the mechanisms through which reform occurs and the boundaries that remain.

The article makes three contributions. Methodologically, it demonstrates how official Islamic documents can be analyzed as primary empirical data, offering an alternative to systematic literature review for text-based fields. Substantively, it traces a movement from protective equality toward structural and institutional agency. Conceptually, it proposes negotiated progressive egalitarianism to describe a reform project that grounds women's equal dignity, knowledge, and public leadership in Islam while continuing to negotiate gender-differentiated family authority. This formulation avoids two opposite errors: celebrating official discourse as completed equality and dismissing religious reform because it does not reproduce secular feminist vocabulary.

Patriarchy is analytically useful only when it is connected to specific arrangements. In this study, four dimensions are distinguished. The first is epistemic authority: whether women are recipients of rules or recognized producers of religious knowledge. The second is relational authority: whether family leadership is unilateral, complementary but hierarchical, or mutually negotiated. The third is material authority: whether women have access to education, income, organizational resources, and decision-making. The fourth is public authority: whether women are recognized as legitimate leaders, political actors, judges, professionals, and interpreters of collective interests. A discourse may be egalitarian in one dimension and hierarchical in another. Theological equality, for

example, does not automatically redistribute domestic labor or organizational authority. Kandiyoti's (1988) idea of patriarchal bargaining helps explain why reform may be uneven. Existing gender arrangements offer certain securities and identities while limiting other possibilities. A discourse that emphasizes women as morally authoritative mothers can legitimate education and social leadership, yet it may also intensify expectations of unpaid care. Likewise, a model that protects marriage through male economic responsibility can support women materially, but it may institutionalize the husband as the default authority. The question is therefore not whether 'Aisyiyah simply accepts or rejects patriarchy. It is how inherited norms are renegotiated, which elements are reinterpreted, and whether the resulting bargain expands women's durable capacity to decide and act.

Feminist critical discourse analysis focuses on the linguistic and institutional production of these arrangements (Lazar, 2007). The analysis attends to nomination, agency, modality, evaluation, and problem definition. Expressions such as must obey, may participate, has equal responsibility, is a partner, and becomes an actor indicate different distributions of legitimacy. The move from permission to entitlement, from individual morality to structural diagnosis, and from domestic service to shared responsibility marks a significant transformation. Conversely, recurring descriptions of women as naturally gentle, principally maternal, or dependent on male provision can reproduce gender hierarchy even when accompanied by affirmations of equal dignity.

The framework does not impose a single external model of emancipation. It evaluates the internal coherence and social implications of the documents' own claims. Muhammadiyah's concepts of *tajdid*, *khalifah*, *rahmah*, *mu'asyarah bil-ma'ruf*, and *Islam Berkemajuan* are treated as interpretive resources. The central analytical issue is whether these concepts are mobilized to widen women's agency, challenge domination, and reorganize responsibility. In this sense, the study examines reform from within a religious tradition while remaining attentive to unresolved power asymmetries.

METHOD

This research employed qualitative documentary analysis with a diachronic comparative design. The documents were treated as primary data rather than as literature to be summarized. The analytical procedure followed the principles of document analysis: establishing provenance and authority, reading texts iteratively, extracting relevant units, coding patterns, comparing formulations across documents, and interpreting both explicit statements and meaningful silences (Bowen, 2009; Scott, 1990). Feminist critical discourse analysis provided the interpretive lens for examining how language allocated agency, authority, obligation, and social value (Lazar, 2007). The study was therefore neither a systematic literature review nor a content-counting exercise.

The corpus was selected purposively according to four criteria. A document had to be issued or formally adopted by Muhammadiyah or 'Aisyiyah; contain substantive guidance or ideological formulations on women and gender relations; represent a distinct historical moment or institutional arena; and be available in a sufficiently complete version for close reading. Four documents met these criteria. *Adabul Mar'ah fil Islam* was selected as an early comprehensive *Tarjih* formulation that simultaneously addressed domestic conduct

and women's participation in knowledge, politics, and the judiciary. Pokok Pikiran 'Aisyiyah Abad Kedua was selected because it defined the movement's second-century vision, including women as public leaders. Tuntunan Menuju Keluarga Sakinah was included because the family is a principal arena where patriarchal norms are reproduced or challenged. Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan was included as the most systematic recent ideological statement on women.

The unit of analysis was a proposition, paragraph, or coherent section that defined women's identity, rights, duties, capacities, relationships, or social problems. The coding frame combined deductive and inductive categories. Deductive categories were derived from gendered-institutional theory: theological status, epistemic authority, domestic labor, economic responsibility, leadership, political participation, bodily and moral regulation, violence, and structural discrimination. Inductive categories emerged during reading, including khalifah, tajdid, rahmah, mu'asyarah bil-ma'ruf, qiwamah, family resilience, economic independence, transformative leadership, wasatiyah, and public benefit. Coding was performed at the level of meaning rather than isolated words, because identical terms can carry different implications in different contexts.

Analysis proceeded through four stages. First, each document was read as a self-contained institutional text, recording its purpose, audience, historical context, and dominant vocabulary. Second, passages were coded according to how women were positioned: object of guidance, moral subject, family partner, mother, worker, interpreter, leader, political actor, or agent of structural change. Third, a diachronic matrix was developed to identify continuity, expansion, reversal, and unresolved contradiction. Fourth, the themes were interpreted through a feminist discourse lens, with particular attention to shifts from equality before God to substantive social equality, from moral protection to institutional capacity, and from individual conduct to structural analysis.

Several procedures were used to strengthen trustworthiness. Provenance was verified by comparing titles, organizational authorship, Mukhtamar or Tarjih status, and publication information across official organizational pages and available editions. An audit trail linked each analytical claim to a passage or section in the corpus. Negative-case analysis was used to prevent celebratory interpretation: passages that retained male-centered qiwamah, wife-centered obedience, or asymmetrical care responsibility were analyzed alongside egalitarian formulations. Cross-document comparison reduced the risk of treating a single phrase as representative of the entire movement. Finally, conceptual claims were calibrated. The documents show official discourse, not direct implementation; therefore the article distinguishes textual authorization from actual organizational or household outcomes.

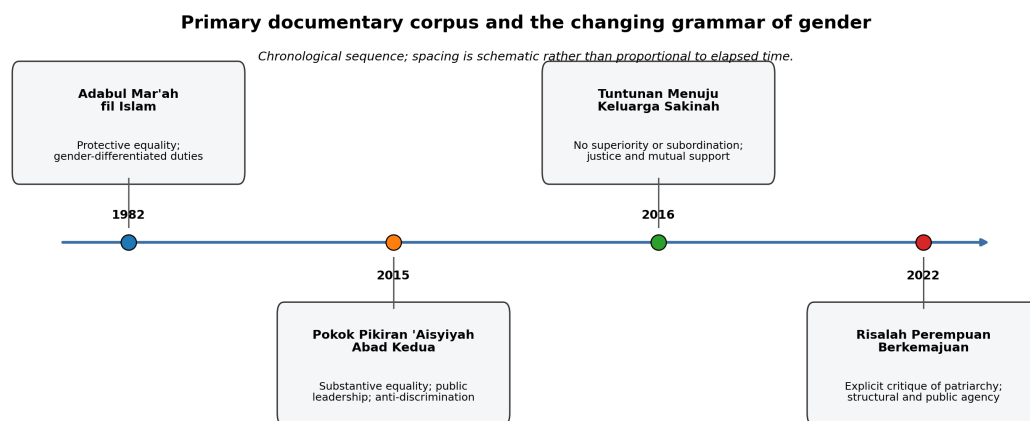
Table 1. Primary documentary corpus

Document	Institutional status and context	Analytical relevance
Adabul Mar'ah fil Islam (1982)	Majelis Tarjih PP Muhammadiyah; published from deliberations conducted during the 1970s.	Comprehensive regulation of women's conduct, family obligations, education, politics, jihad, and judicial authority.

Document	Institutional status and context	Analytical relevance
Pokok Pikiran 'Aisiyyah Abad Kedua (2015)	Decision of the 47th 'Aisiyyah Mukhtar in Makassar.	Defines women as equal khalifah, agents of enlightenment, and transformative leaders in public institutions.
Tuntunan Menuju Keluarga Sakinah (2016)	PP 'Aisiyyah publication based on the 28th Tarjih National Deliberation, Palembang, 2014.	Reframes family relations through rahmah, justice, equality, and the rejection of superiority and subordination.
Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan (2022)	Decision of the 48th 'Aisiyyah Mukhtar in Surakarta.	Explicitly addresses patriarchy, misogyny, violence, public participation, economic independence, and contextual Islamic reasoning.

Table 2. Analytical dimensions and discourse indicators

Dimension	Questions and indicators
Theological subjectivity	Are women described as full moral subjects, khalifah, and recipients of equal divine reward?
Epistemic authority	Are women learners, interpreters, producers of knowledge, and participants in religious decision-making?
Family authority	How are obedience, qiwamah, partnership, household labor, parenting, and economic responsibility allocated?
Public authority	Are women permitted, encouraged, or institutionally prepared to lead, judge, organize, and participate politically?
Material autonomy	How are education, work, property, income, wages, entrepreneurship, and access to resources represented?
Structural diagnosis	Are inequality and violence defined as individual misconduct, cultural practice, institutional discrimination, or patriarchy?
Mechanism of reform	Does change occur through moral advice, reinterpretation, tajdid, organizational programs, law, policy advocacy, or collective action?

**Figure 1.** Primary documentary corpus and the diachronic development of gender discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. From Protective Equality to Structural Critique

The earliest text in the corpus contains a foundational ambivalence. *Adabul Mar'ah* fil Islam affirms that women and men possess rights and obligations and that moral reward is available equally to believers of both sexes. It invokes shared human creation and the task of cultivating the earth. These propositions prevent the text from being reduced to a doctrine of female inferiority. Yet the equality is framed through an essentialist anthropology. Women are described as physically and emotionally more delicate and as created in a complementary relation to men. Difference is presented as natural, purposeful, and socially organizing. The result is protective equality: women are morally valuable and entitled to guidance and protection, but their social identity is interpreted through gender-differentiated characteristics and duties (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, Majelis Tarjih, 1982).

Protective equality does not mean total confinement. The table of contents itself is revealing: the document addresses women and science, jihad, politics, and the possibility of serving as judges. Such topics demonstrate that public participation was institutionally thinkable within Muhammadiyah's Tarjih discourse well before contemporary gender terminology became common. However, the text's domestic sections distribute obligations asymmetrically. The wife is instructed to obey and honor her husband, maintain an attractive and orderly household, master cooking and sewing, and bear a particularly strong responsibility for children's daily education. The husband is framed as family leader and provider. Women's public capacity therefore coexists with a domestic grammar that treats service, obedience, and maternal responsibility as primary markers of proper womanhood.

The 2015 core mind changes the level of analysis. Women are no longer discussed mainly through personal conduct; they are positioned within structures of discrimination and public leadership. The document defines *Perempuan Berkemajuan* as women whose lives advance without structural or cultural barriers and who receive the same dignity as men. It explicitly states that biological differences such as pregnancy and breastfeeding do not prevent women from acting in public space or occupying leadership positions. The text normalizes women as leaders in government, political parties, business, professions, and civil society, and calls for cadres prepared for executive, legislative, judicial, and community leadership (Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, 2015). The grammar shifts from whether women may participate to how institutions should expand their leadership.

A Guide to a Harmonious and Peaceful Family deepens the shift by placing equality inside the household. Its formulation is categorical: relations between women and men are equal, without superiority and subordination, and both possess capacities and possibilities for self-development. *Rahmah* is linked to justice, equality, and mutual assistance rather than to benevolent hierarchy alone (Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, 2016). This is significant because family discourse often becomes the point at which public equality is restricted. By rejecting superiority and subordination, the *Tuntunan* provides

an internal Islamic basis for evaluating family practices, not merely a general statement about spiritual equality.

The 2022 Risalah makes the structural diagnosis explicit. It names misogyny and patriarchal domination as historical products of negative cultural, religious, and political interpretations. It identifies discrimination, violence, unequal access to technology, political barriers, wage inequality, and restrictions on women's economic autonomy. This vocabulary marks a major discursive development. Inequality is no longer explained principally as failure to behave morally within prescribed roles; it is also located in structures that constrain women's capabilities. The document further states that religion should not become an obstacle to women's advancement and that prior organizational formulations must be contextualized in response to changing conditions (Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, 2022).

2. From the Object of Guidance to an Epistemic and Organizational Actor

A second transformation concerns who produces legitimate knowledge. *Adabul Mar'ah* fil Islam is written primarily as guidance addressed to women. Women are the objects of prescriptions regarding behavior, dress, domestic relations, education, and public participation. Yet the document's institutional history complicates this one-directional model: the Majelis Tarjih obtained contributions from PP 'Aisyiyah and other actors before deliberation. Women's experience thus entered the process, although the final textual voice remained impersonal and authoritative. The document also affirmed women's access to science and considered their participation in politics and the judiciary. These openings established a basis for later claims, but they did not yet clearly represent women as collective producers of religious interpretation.

By 2015, 'Aisyiyah's official discourse positions women as actors who develop knowledge, lead institutions, and shape social transformation. *Pokok Pikiran 'Aisyiyah Abad Kedua* places the development of a knowledge movement among its strategic agendas and treats women's leadership as necessary for the progress of the ummah and nation. Leadership is described as transformative: it mobilizes potential, organizes change, and projects a future. Women are not simply beneficiaries of organizational services; they are cadres expected to influence government, professional environments, political institutions, and Islamic public life (Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, 2015).

The Risalah provides the most explicit epistemological foundation. It explains that Tarjih is not limited to selecting legal opinions but is an intellectual activity for responding to social and humanitarian problems. Its interconnected bayani, burhani, and irfani approaches combine scriptural analysis, rational and scientific knowledge, contextual evidence, and ethical sensitivity. This formulation matters for gender discourse because patriarchal norms are often sustained by presenting one historical interpretation as direct revelation. The Risalah's methodology makes contextual reassessment a legitimate religious task. It states that some past norms in worldly transactions may change when social needs require change and when the revision remains grounded in sharia principles (Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, 2022).

Nevertheless, the corpus does not fully specify how women participate in the highest levels of formal Tarjih decision-making or how disagreements are resolved. The texts authorize women's intellectual capacity and public leadership, but institutional representation remains an empirical question. The important discursive achievement is that women can no longer be treated merely as the population to whom religious rules are applied. They are represented as khalifah, thinkers of tajdid, organizational leaders, and producers of public solutions.

3. Reconstructing the Family: Mutuality with Residual Qiwamah

The family is the most contested arena in the corpus. Adabul Mar'ah fil Islam organizes household relations through a recognizable hierarchy. It cites male leadership in the family, emphasizes the wife's obedience and emotional support, and assigns women extensive responsibility for household management and child education. The text also recognizes affection, mutual benefit, and obligations of men, but the practical detail is concentrated on the wife's conduct. Patriarchal authority is therefore reproduced not through an assertion that women are spiritually inferior, but through an unequal density of moral obligations. The wife becomes responsible for maintaining harmony around a male-centered structure.

This pattern can be interpreted as maternalist protection. Motherhood and domestic competence are elevated as socially indispensable, providing moral authority and institutional justification for women's education. Historically, such maternalism could be enabling: educated mothers, teachers, and health activists became central to 'Aisyiyah's expansion. Yet maternalist legitimacy has a double effect. It creates a public pathway for women while making care appear naturally and primarily female. The result can be a cumulative burden in which public contribution is added to, rather than accompanied by redistribution of, domestic work.

The *Tuntunan* offers a substantial corrective by declaring that there is no superiority or subordination between women and men and by making rahmah, justice, equality, and mutual assistance the ethical foundation of family life. This formulation reframes marriage as a relationship between subjects with equal possibilities for development. It also creates a standard against which coercion, domination, and the suppression of women's aspirations can be criticized from within Islamic family ethics. The language is not merely about kindness from the stronger party; it is about a relational structure without intrinsic superiority (Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, 2016).

The Risalah integrates this egalitarian language with a more detailed account of responsibility. It describes mu'asyarah bil-ma'ruf as mutual respect, appreciation, completion, and encouragement toward achievement. It states that when husband and wife both earn income, they should support one another's development and jointly perform educational and household tasks. This is one of the corpus's clearest recognitions that economic participation requires redistribution of domestic labor. The family is also framed by nonviolence, monogamy, legal marriage registration, and holistic attention to

spiritual, educational, health, economic, and social dimensions (Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, 2022).

At the same time, the Risalah retains a gender-differentiated *qiwamah*. The husband is described as responsible for maintaining the family when he possesses leadership capacity and provides support; if he cannot perform this function, economic responsibility shifts to the wife or the husband's family. The wife is described as *pendamping*. This is not an absolute theory of male superiority, because *qiwamah* is connected to capability and material responsibility and can be transferred. Nevertheless, the default position remains male-centered. The arrangement creates a tension between the document's general claim of equal dignity and its differentiated architecture of family leadership.

The tension should not be concealed by selecting only egalitarian passages, nor should it erase the text's reformist movement. The later documents transform *qiwamah* from an unconditional male status into a functional and accountable responsibility. They also recognize shared labor and women's economic agency. Yet they stop short of defining family leadership as fully co-constituted regardless of sex. The family discourse is therefore best described as negotiated egalitarianism: hierarchy is narrowed, moralized, and made conditional, but not entirely displaced.

4. Public Leadership, Political Participation, and Economic Independence

The public sphere shows the strongest expansion of women's agency. The early Tarjih text's chapters on politics and judicial authority are important because they challenge the claim that women's public leadership is a recent accommodation to external pressure. Even within a document marked by domestic asymmetry, political and judicial roles are treated as legitimate subjects of Islamic reasoning. The opening was therefore embedded in Muhammadiyah's reformist tradition, although it was not yet expressed as a comprehensive institutional strategy.

Pokok Pikiran 'Aisyiyah Abad Kedua turns this opening into a movement agenda. It calls for women to lead at local, executive, legislative, judicial, professional, and entrepreneurial levels. Low representation in political and public office is identified as a problem requiring cadre preparation. The organization is instructed not merely to approve women's participation but to cultivate the capacities and networks that make leadership possible. This is a shift from formal permission to institutional production of leadership (Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, 2015).

The Risalah elaborates participation at both individual and organizational levels. Women may enter politics from neighborhood leadership to village government and higher office. Organizationally, women's movements should promote access to state institutions, government, and political life. The document identifies material constraints rather than blaming women for lack of participation: high political costs, economic dependence, limited family support, and unequal competitive conditions. Political participation is framed as a politics of values directed against corruption, violence, injustice, and policies harmful to public interests (Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, 2022).

Economic independence is treated as a condition of public authority. The Risalah names wage inequality, career barriers, and gendered economic gaps. It encourages capacity building, entrepreneurship, access to micro, small, and medium enterprises, and progression to higher economic roles. This analysis links symbolic recognition to material resources. A woman who is praised as morally equal but lacks income, assets, or access to political financing may remain structurally dependent. The document therefore moves beyond empowerment as confidence and identifies economic autonomy as a foundation for decision-making.

Even with this caution, the trajectory is substantial. Women move from being allowed to enter selected public fields to being represented as necessary actors in governance, economy, peace, knowledge, and national life. The discourse does not treat public leadership as an exception to womanhood. It incorporates leadership into the definition of *Perempuan Berkemajuan*.

5. Care, Violence, and the Expansion of Social Responsibility

The 2015 *Pokok Pikiran* describes enlightenment as liberation, empowerment, and advancement in response to poverty, ignorance, violence, ecological damage, and structural injustice. Women's leadership is therefore linked to changing the conditions that generate vulnerability, not only assisting individual victims. The 2022 *Risalah* extends this structural vocabulary. It identifies violence against women and children, cultural and structural violence, discrimination, economic inequality, and unsafe public conditions. Women are represented as mediators, educators, advocates, and peace actors at family, community, national, and global levels.

This anti-violence discourse challenges a central patriarchal norm: the idea that family harmony should be preserved through women's endurance and silence. By making nonviolence a foundational principle and naming women and children as groups especially vulnerable to violence, the later discourse provides an organizational language for intervention. Legal marriage registration and monogamy are likewise presented as protections of justice and accountability. The documents thereby move the family from an exclusively private domain toward an institution subject to ethical and legal scrutiny.

Yet the expansion of care can also conceal labor. The *Risalah* calls women to strengthen families, educate future generations, sustain health, contribute economically, lead organizations, participate politically, protect the environment, and promote peace. These are valuable commitments, but the text gives less systematic attention to how men and institutions must redistribute time and care to make such participation sustainable. The statement that jointly earning spouses should share household and educational tasks is an important corrective, but it appears within a much broader catalogue of women's responsibilities.

The discourse thus transforms maternalism rather than simply abandoning it. Maternal capacities are detached from biological motherhood and projected into public ethics,

allowing women to claim leadership through care, competence, and service. At the same time, the moral centrality of women to family and social reproduction remains strong. This produces what may be called institutionalized care authority: women gain public legitimacy through organized care, but the same legitimacy can normalize disproportionate responsibility.

Table 3. Diachronic transformation of gender discourse

Dimension	1982 formulation	2015-2016 reformulation	2022 formulation
Equality	Equal rights and divine reward within differentiated nature and duties.	Equal dignity; no superiority or subordination; biological difference does not prevent public leadership.	Equal human and khalifah status; explicit opposition to misogyny, patriarchy, discrimination, and structural barriers.
Religious agency	Women primarily receive comprehensive guidance, with openings to education, politics, and judicial roles.	Women become knowledge actors, cadres, and transformative leaders.	Women participate in contextual Islamic reasoning through tajdid and interconnected bayani-burhani-irfani approaches.
Family	Obedience, male leadership, wife-centered household service, and maternal responsibility.	Rahmah, justice, equality, mutual assistance, and rejection of superiority/subordination.	Mutual respect and shared tasks when both spouses earn; qiwamah remains husband-centered but functional and conditional.
Public leadership	Public participation is religiously discussable and partly permitted.	Leadership across government, politics, professions, business, and civil society becomes an organizational agenda.	Individual and systemic political participation, policy advocacy, and women's public leadership are explicit commitments.
Economy	Domestic management and support of family life dominate.	Women's capabilities and entrepreneurship are encouraged as part of advancement.	Wage gaps, career barriers, political financing, and economic independence are treated as structural gender issues.
Violence and inequality	Mainly addressed through moral conduct and household harmony.	Structural and cultural discrimination enters the movement's analysis.	Violence, patriarchy, misogyny, discrimination, and unequal access are directly named and linked to reform agendas.

Discussion

1. Negotiated Progressive Egalitarianism

The findings reveal neither linear secularization nor a static religious patriarchy. 'Aisyiyah's authorized gender discourse develops through internal reinterpretation and institutional experience. Three movements are especially clear. The first is theological equalization: women and men are presented as equally dignified believers, moral agents, and khalifah. The second is institutional empowerment: education, cadre formation, organizational leadership, public service, and economic activity convert theological status

into capability. The third is structural diagnosis: later documents identify patriarchy, discrimination, violence, political costs, and economic inequality as barriers that cannot be resolved through individual piety alone. Together, these movements constitute a significant gender-reform project.

The project remains negotiated because it does not eliminate all inherited hierarchies. Family discourse retains a default male *qiwamah* and gives women's care responsibilities exceptional prominence. The documents reduce the hierarchical implications of *qiwamah* by connecting it to responsibility, capability, and provision; they also affirm mutuality and shared tasks. However, the symbolic center of family leadership is not fully reconstructed as sex-neutral or jointly constituted. The resulting pattern is more than complementarity but less than complete institutional symmetry.

Negotiated progressive egalitarianism names this combination. It refers to a discourse that pursues substantive equality through Islamic categories, organizational institutions, and social reform while continuing to bargain with gender-differentiated family scripts. The term is not intended to excuse remaining asymmetry. Its analytical value lies in showing where change is produced. Reform occurs when theological equality is connected to interpretive openness, material capability, and collective organization. Constraint persists where gender difference is converted into default authority or unequal labor.

This model helps explain why labeling 'Aisyiyah either feminist or non-feminist is insufficient. Qibtiyah's research shows that gender understandings among Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah actors are internally diverse and cannot be mapped through a single ideological category (Qibtiyah, 2012, 2020). Dzuhayatin (2015) similarly describes a gender regime shaped by contestation rather than one coherent doctrine. The official documents participate in this contestation. They provide authoritative resources that local actors can use to challenge exclusion, but their internal tensions also permit more conservative interpretations.

The 2022 Risalah is particularly consequential because it changes the object of critique. Earlier guidance focused heavily on women's behavior and the moral quality of relationships. The Risalah explicitly identifies structures, institutions, and ideologies. Naming patriarchy matters because unnamed inequality can be treated as natural or private. It also allows reform to target wages, political access, violence, technology, and public policy. Yet naming is not the same as institutional transformation. The next research task is to examine whether curricula, cadre materials, leadership selection, employment practices, and family counseling adopt the document's structural commitments.

Organizational structure is another decisive mechanism. Acker (1990) argues that organizations often reproduce gender through supposedly neutral roles and assumptions about the ideal worker. 'Aisyiyah offers a counterexample and a warning. Its women-led institutions enable authority, professional identity, and collective action. However, if female cadres are expected to perform full organizational labor while remaining primarily

responsible for domestic care, the organization may unintentionally rely on an ideal female activist who carries a double burden. Gender reform therefore requires not only women's access to office but also institutional attention to time, care infrastructure, remuneration, and family support.

The movement's use of care as public ethics is nevertheless a major resource. Rather than confining care to private femininity, 'Aisyiyah institutionalizes it through education, health, welfare, philanthropy, peacebuilding, and advocacy. This converts activities historically devalued as women's natural service into professional and civic authority. The critical task is to ensure that care becomes a shared social responsibility rather than a moral obligation disproportionately assigned to women.

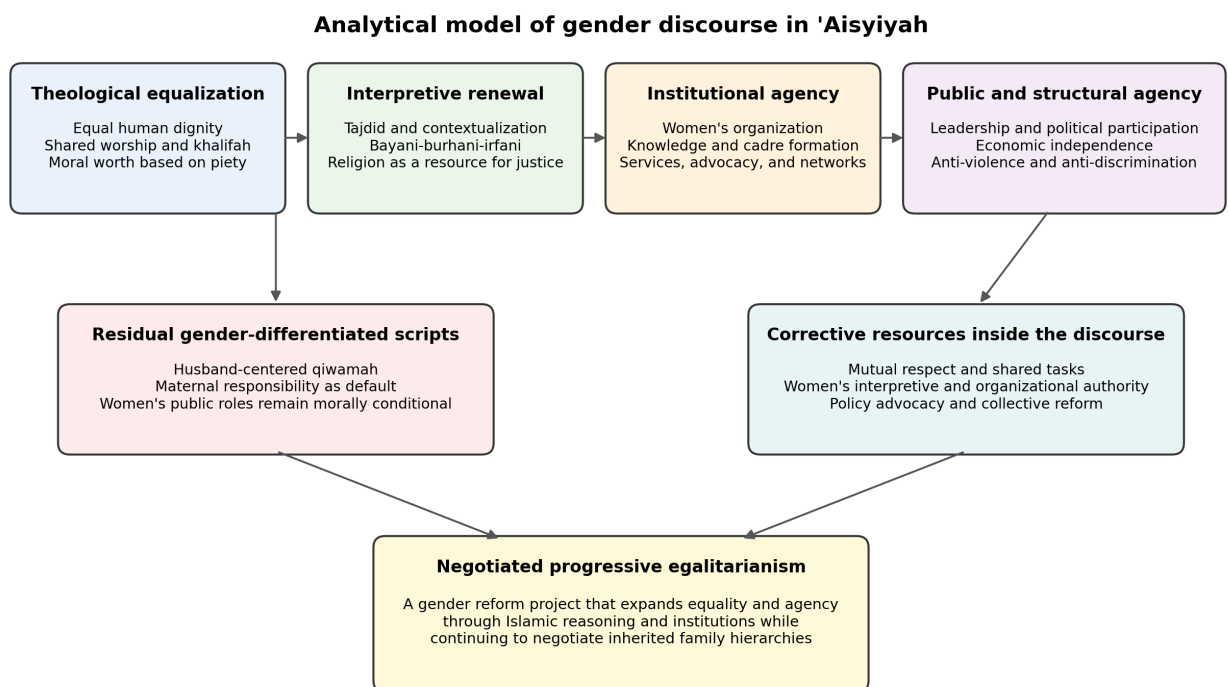


Figure 2. Negotiated progressive egalitarianism in 'Aisyiyah's gender discourse.

Analytical Propositions

Proposition 1. Theological equality becomes socially transformative only when it is connected to material, epistemic, and organizational capacities. Equal reward before God does not by itself redistribute authority or labor.

Proposition 2. Women's organizations can convert pious and maternal legitimacy into durable public authority, but this conversion may reproduce a care burden unless responsibility is explicitly redistributed.

Proposition 3. Tajdid functions as a gender-reform mechanism when contextual and scientific reasoning is applied not only to women's public roles but also to family authority, economic dependence, and unpaid labor.

Proposition 4. Naming patriarchy, violence, and structural discrimination expands the range of legitimate organizational intervention from moral education to policy advocacy and institutional reform.

Proposition 5. Residual qiwamah does not nullify egalitarian reform, but it remains the central site at which the discourse's commitment to non-subordination must be empirically and normatively tested.

Table 4. Residual tensions and empirical implications

Discursive tension	Why it matters	Recommended primary research
Equal dignity versus husband-centered qiwamah	Tests whether functional responsibility becomes practical authority over wives.	Document and interview study of family counseling, marriage courses, and member interpretations.
Public leadership versus concentrated domestic care	May generate a double burden for cadres and professionals.	Time-use study, organizational ethnography, and analysis of care-support policies in 'Aisyiyah institutions.
Women's religious agency versus unclear representation in formal interpretation	Text authorizes knowledge but does not show who decides.	Institutional study of women's participation in Tarjih, fatwa preparation, and curriculum production.
Anti-patriarchal language versus uneven local implementation	National discourse may be selectively adopted at branch level.	Comparative case studies across regions, generations, and urban-rural settings.
Economic independence versus unpaid organizational service	Leadership may rely on invisible or underpaid labor.	Analysis of remuneration, career pathways, volunteer work, and institutional budgets.

Implications

For Islamic studies, the article demonstrates that authoritative texts can constitute empirical data when the research question concerns how a tradition constructs social roles and legitimates change. A rigorous textual study requires a bounded corpus, explicit units of analysis, a reproducible coding procedure, attention to provenance, and a distinction between textual claims and social outcomes. Simply renaming a literature review as document analysis would not satisfy these requirements. In this study, the findings arise from comparison of propositions inside primary documents, not from counting secondary articles.

For 'Aisyiyah and Muhammadiyah, the analysis identifies resources already available for deepening gender justice. The rejection of superiority and subordination, the recognition of women as khalifah and leaders, the call for shared domestic tasks, the critique of

patriarchy, and the emphasis on economic independence provide a strong internal basis for organizational reform. These principles can be translated into cadre modules, institutional employment policies, family education, leadership recruitment, anti-violence mechanisms, and support for women's political participation.

The remaining tensions suggest where institutional clarification is needed. *Qiwamah* should be interpreted consistently with the rejection of subordination, meaning responsibility cannot become unilateral control. Care should be framed as a shared obligation of men, women, families, communities, and institutions. Leadership programs should include care infrastructure and economic support rather than assuming unlimited volunteer labor. Women's participation in religious knowledge production should be made visible through authorship, representation, and decision-making procedures.

For journal publication and academic promotion, the design offers a defensible alternative to SLR for lecturers in Qur'anic studies, Hadith, Islamic law, and Islamic thought. The corpus is primary, the analysis is original, and the contribution is conceptual but empirically grounded in documents. The same model can be adapted to fatwas, tafsir, sermons, curricula, legal decisions, archives, and organizational resolutions.

Limitations and Future Research

The study analyzes national-level authoritative documents and therefore cannot determine how members interpret or implement them. Official discourse may be aspirational, contested, or unevenly circulated. The corpus is also selective rather than exhaustive. Earlier 'Aisyiyah congress decisions, *Fikih Perempuan*, fatwas on specific issues, and local instructional materials could extend the historical analysis. Differences in genre create another limitation: a conduct manual, strategic vision, family guide, and ideological *risalah* do not perform identical institutional functions.

Future research should connect discourse to practice without abandoning textual rigor. Comparative case studies could examine how family counselors, teachers, health professionals, and political cadres use the documents. A critical discourse analysis of AIK curricula and cadre manuals could test whether the 2022 anti-patriarchal vocabulary enters education. Archival research could reconstruct women's authorship in the production of *Tarjih* decisions. Quantitative organizational data could assess leadership representation, remuneration, and career progression. Household and time-use research could evaluate whether shared-task language changes domestic labor among members.

CONCLUSION

'Aisyiyah's gender discourse has undergone a substantive but unfinished transformation. The 1982 formulation combined equal spiritual worth and openings to education, politics, and judicial authority with biological essentialism, wife-centered obedience, and concentrated maternal responsibility. The 2015 and 2016 documents reconstructed women as equal *khalifah*, public leaders, and family partners whose relations should contain neither superiority nor subordination. The 2022 *Risalah* advanced further by explicitly naming misogyny, patriarchy, violence, discrimination, economic inequality, and political barriers, while grounding reform in *tajdid* and

interconnected scriptural, rational, contextual, and ethical reasoning. The trajectory demonstrates that Islamic discourse can generate internal resources for gender justice. It also reveals the boundaries of reform: husband-centered *qiwamah* and the moral concentration of care remain important sites of asymmetry. Negotiated progressive egalitarianism captures this dual movement. It is a project that expands women's dignity, knowledge, material capacity, and public authority through religious institutions while continuing to negotiate inherited family hierarchies. The next stage of scholarship should test how these authorized ideas are translated into curricula, organizations, households, and leadership practices. Methodologically, the study confirms that close, transparent, and comparative analysis of primary Islamic documents can produce original empirical scholarship without relying on SLR or forcing text-based disciplines into survey-centered models of research.

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