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RECONSTRUCTING THE CONCEPT OF ISTITĀ'AH AL-NIKĀH: A MAQĀSID AL-SHARĪ'AH RESPONSE TO FEMALE WAITHOOD

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ABSTRACT

Marriage postponement (*waitthood*) among educated Muslim women in Indonesia has increasingly challenged conventional understandings of marital readiness rooted in biological maturity and domestic competence. This study aims to examine how Muslim undergraduate women in Jember reconstruct the concept of *Istitā'ah al-nikāh* within the socio-religious pressures of Pandalungan culture and pesantren traditions. Existing studies largely interpret *Istitā'ah* through material and legal dimensions, while limited attention has been given to women's reflective experiences in redefining marital readiness through intellectual and psychological capacities. This research employed a qualitative phenomenological approach using *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA). Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation involving ten Muslim female undergraduate students aged 20–25 in Jember, and analysed using a contemporary *Maqāsid al-sharī'ah* framework. The findings revealed a process of deconstruction toward traditional standards of marriage based on chronological age and domestic readiness, followed by the reconstruction of *Istitā'ah* as holistic preparedness grounded in intellectual sovereignty, emotional maturity, and reflective responsibility. *Waitthood* was interpreted as an ethical and preventive strategy (*sadd al-dharī'ah*) to safeguard the intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*) and self (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) before entering the *mīthāqan ghalīzā*. This study demonstrates that modernity within the Pandalungan-pesantren context generates a reflective negotiation between religious commitment, women's autonomy, and substantive marital readiness.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT (if applicable)

The authors employed the Gemini generative AI model (Google) and Chat GPT to refine the linguistic precision and stylistic clarity of this manuscript. Notwithstanding this technical assistance, the authors conducted a rigorous review of the final output, assuming full accountability for the intellectual integrity, factual accuracy, and originality of the research presented herein.

A. INTRODUCTION

The shifting pattern of marriage timing among Indonesian youth reflects a strategic adaptation to structural uncertainty, particularly in reconstructing the meaning of *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ*, which has traditionally been understood in predominantly biological and material terms.⁹¹ National data indicate a significant surge in the unmarried population from 59.17% in 2019 to 69.75% in 2024, with regional patterns in Jember confirming that marital transitions now dominantly occur in the 25–29 age bracket.⁹² Although marriage in Indonesian Muslim society continues to be positioned as a moral, social, and religious obligation, younger generations, especially Muslim women, have increasingly redefined *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ* through the framework of intellectual readiness, psychological stability, and self-capacity development.⁹³ This transformation generates tension between inherited expectations embedded within Pandalungan-pesantren culture and modern orientations that place higher education and personal autonomy as the primary basis of marital legitimacy.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, a significant academic gap persists within contemporary Islamic family law scholarship, particularly regarding how young Muslim women construct religious reasoning to postpone marriage in pursuit of a more holistic and substantive form of *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ*.⁹⁵

Contemporary academic discourse conceptualizes *waitthood* as a protracted and negotiation-laden transition toward adulthood.⁹⁶ Globally, this phenomenon is driven by

⁹¹ Premchand Dommaraju and JooEan Tan, “Going against Global Marriage Trends: The Declining Age at First Marriage in Indonesia,” *Asian Population Studies* 20, no. 2 (May 2024): 144–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441730.2023.2193488>.

⁹² BPS, “Persentase Penduduk Perempuan Usia 10 Tahun Ke Atas di Jawa Timur yang Pernah Kawin Dirinci Menurut Kabupaten/Kota, Umur Kawin Pertama, 2023 - Tabel Statistik,” 2023, <https://jatim.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/1/MzEwNSMx/>.

⁹³ Lisa Cameron, Diana Contreras Suarez, and Susan Wieczkiewicz, “Child Marriage: Using the Indonesian Family Life Survey to Examine the Lives of Women and Men Who Married at an Early Age,” *Review of Economics of the Household* 21, no. 3 (September 2023): 725–56, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-022-09616-8>.

⁹⁴ Chensi Zhong and Jennifer Wilkinson, “The Paradox of Women’s Marital Freedom: Nonlinear Individualization in Post-Reform China,” *Theory and Society* 54, no. 1 (February 2025): 119–38, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-025-09591-w>.

⁹⁵ Matthew T. Saxey et al., “Do Financial Barrier Beliefs About Marriage Predict Building Wealth? Latent Growth Curves of Emerging Adults’ Financial Barrier Beliefs, Assets, and Debt,” *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 46, no. 2 (June 2025): 331–43, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-024-09955-x>.

⁹⁶ N. Smith-Hefner and Marcia C. Inhorn, “Introduction: Waitthood, Gender, Education and Global Delays in Marriage and Childbearing,” *Waitthood: Gender, Education, and Global Delays in Marriage and Childbearing*, 2020, 1–28.

various adaptive factors, ranging from agency-driven dynamics in Africa⁹⁷ and labor market uncertainties in Japan,⁹⁸ to familial dependencies in Qatar and Pakistan.⁹⁹ Within the Indonesian context, this trend is propelled by demographic shifts and intense marital pressures.¹⁰⁰ While urban-centered research has predominantly emphasized economic strategies,¹⁰¹ studies in rural-urban fringe regions such as Jember highlight 'quiet negotiations' facilitated by access to higher education. Although multidisciplinary perspectives have affirmed the multidimensionality of *waithood*, a systematic theoretical gap persists in integrating gender-based agency with the framework of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*.

This research addresses this void by examining how Educated young Muslim women in Jember navigate marriage postponement at the intersection of gender power dynamics and the ethical horizons of Sharia. Far from being a mere deviation from tradition or an act of secularization, this phenomenon represents a strategic reconciliation between modern autonomy and religious identity. Through this lens, *waithood* is positioned as a conscious effort to reconstruct the concept of *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ*, ensuring that marital bonds are not predicated solely upon chronological age, but are instead constructed upon a foundation of comprehensive readiness that is dignified and consistent with the Islamic principles of human dignity.

The selection of Jember Regency as the research site is predicated on sociological and anthropological considerations that underscore the region's relevance in examining the transformative meaning of *istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ* among contemporary Muslim women. Anthropologically, Jember is a *Pandalungan* region characterized by an agrarian-

⁹⁷ Nothando Ngwenya and Eleanor Ross, *Living in 'Waithood': Perceived Impact of Socio-Economic Conditions on Quality of Life of Youth in Zandspruit Informal Settlement, South Africa*, *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, February 1, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1332/17598273Y2023D000000007>.

⁹⁸ Shigeki Matsuda and Takayuki Sasaki, "Deteriorating Employment and Marriage Decline in Japan," *Comparative Population Studies* 45 (November 2020), <https://doi.org/10.12765/CPoS-2020-22>.

⁹⁹ Rahat Shah, Imran Sabir, and Adeela Zaka, "Interdependence and Waithood: Exploration of Family Dynamics and Young Adults' Life Course Trajectories in Pakistan," *Advances in Life Course Research* 63 (March 2025): 100660, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2025.100660>.

¹⁰⁰ Premchand Dommaraju and JooEan Tan, "Going against Global Marriage Trends: The Declining Age at First Marriage in Indonesia," *Asian Population Studies* 20, no. 2 (May 2024): 144–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441730.2023.2193488>.

¹⁰¹ Jacobo Núñez-Martínez, Laura Rodríguez-Fernández, and Luisa Fernanda Rodríguez, "The Proximity of Hybrid Universities as a Key Factor for Rural Development," *Social Sciences* 14, no. 8 (July 2025): 467, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14080467>.

patriarchal structure and a pervasive *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) culture that steadfastly maintains norms of early marriage based on biological maturity. Conversely, from a sociological perspective, preliminary observations indicate a rising trend among educated young women to postpone marriage in favor of academic completion, psychological readiness, and personal autonomy. Academic discourse within the region further reflects a shift in the conceptualization of marital readiness, moving from a domestic orientation toward intellectual and emotional preparedness. This condition fosters a dialectic between local tradition and modernity, positioning Jember as a vital empirical space for understanding how Muslim women reconstruct *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ* within the contemporary *Pandalungan-pesantren* cultural context.

This study posits that the phenomenon of *waithood* demands a deconstruction of Islamic family law frameworks, which have historically remained formalistic and centered solely on age.¹⁰² The urgency of this research lies in dissecting how young women execute symbolic resistance against the stigma of being “*Tak Pajuh*” (unsold/unmarried)¹⁰³ by reinterpreting the responsibility of marriage through a Maqāsid lens.¹⁰⁴ Without this discursive redefinition, the postponement of marriage is frequently misinterpreted as moral decline, whereas empirically, it represents a mature ethical deliberation to protect the quality of the family unit.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, this study reconstructs *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ* into a substantive paradigm encompassing mental sovereignty and intellectual capacity that is responsive to human dignity and gender justice.

This study advances the central argument that marriage postponement among young women in Jember represents a form of reflective agency, conceptualized in this

¹⁰² Dörthe Engelcke, Dominik Krell, and Nadjma Yassari, “Underage Marriage: Legal and Social Practice in Muslim Jurisdictions,” *Arab Law Quarterly*, March 26, 2025, 1–49, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15730255-bja10184>.

¹⁰³ Swayamshree Mishra and Ravinder Kaur, “‘If I Cannot Give Birth to a Child, Why Would Anyone Accept Me?’: Menstrual Anxieties, Late Marriage, and Reproductive Aging,” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 27, no. 4 (October 2021): 535–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2021.1995154>.

¹⁰⁴ Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach*, Revised Edition (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2022), <https://iiit.org/en/book/maqasid-al-shariah-as-philosophy-of-islamic-law/>.

¹⁰⁵ Narxoz University et al., “Analysis of Socio-Economic Factors of Delayed Marriage in the Context of Globalization,” *BULLETIN OF L.N. GUMILYOV EURASIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY. PEDAGOGY. PSYCHOLOGY. SOCIOLOGY SERIES* 148, no. 3 (2024): 340–57, <https://doi.org/10.32523/2616-6895-2024-148-3-340-357>.

study as “*Life Ijtihad*,” through which women consciously negotiate religious values, intellectual maturity, and personal readiness in responding to the responsibilities of marriage. In this regional context, the findings suggest that *waitthood* functions as a deliberate religio-ethical strategy to reconcile the gravity of *mīthāqan ghalīzā* with the need for comprehensive maturity, particularly through safeguarding the intellect (*ḥifẓ al-‘aql*) and the self (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) as integral dimensions of marital readiness.¹⁰⁶ By integrating *waitthood* theory into the framework of *Maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*, this study seeks to provide a more contextual understanding of how contemporary Muslim women negotiate marital readiness within the intersection of religious values, gendered social expectations, and personal autonomy.¹⁰⁷ The use of *waitthood* theory enables the analysis of marriage postponement as a socio-cultural and gendered experience, while *Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah* offers a normative framework to examine how such decisions may reflect the protection of intellect (*ḥifẓ al-‘aql*) and self (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) within contemporary Muslim life. Therefore, this study becomes important for re-examining *Istiṭā‘ah al-nikāḥ* within contemporary Islamic family law by understanding *waitthood* not merely as marriage delay, but as a reflective religio-ethical process through which Muslim women negotiate intellectual maturity, personal autonomy, and the protection of intellect (*ḥifẓ al-‘aql*) and self (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) as integral dimensions of marital readiness.

B. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach using *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) developed by Jonathan A. Smith to critically examine the lived experiences of Educated young Muslim women in Jember in negotiating marriage postponement (*waitthood*).¹⁰⁸ IPA was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of how individuals interpret and give meaning to their personal, social, and religious

¹⁰⁶ Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach*.

¹⁰⁷ Arifah Millati Agustina, “Contestation between Fiqh and Culture in Indonesia: The Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah Paradigm in Dangers of Forced Marriage against Women,” *Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender* 18, no. 2 (October 2023): 147–68, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v18i2.17280>.

¹⁰⁸ Lucy Tindall, “J.A. Smith, P. Flower and M. Larkin (2009), *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* .: London: Sage,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 6, no. 4 (November 2009): 346–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780880903340091>.

experiences, particularly within contexts shaped by cultural pressure and gender expectations.¹⁰⁹ Through purposive sampling and criterion-based selection, this study involved Muslim women aged 20–25 who consciously postponed marriage while actively pursuing higher education and intellectual self-development. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In the observational phase, the researcher directly examined gender negotiation dynamics within academic and social spaces, particularly how women articulated resistance, autonomy, and marital responsibility amid Pandalungan-pesantren cultural expectations.

Data analysis was conducted systematically through several IPA stages, including repeated reading of interview transcripts, initial noting, development of emergent themes, thematic categorization, identification of experiential patterns across participants, and interpretative integration within the framework of contemporary *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*.¹¹⁰ The thematic categories focused on intellectual sovereignty, reinterpretation of *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ*, ethical dimensions of *waithood*, emotional maturity, and negotiations of religious and cultural authority. This analytical process not only interpreted participants' narratives phenomenologically but also contextualized them within theological discussions concerning the protection of intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*) and self (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*).¹¹¹ Through this integrative approach, the study reconstructs *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ* from a predominantly biological-domestic framework into a holistic paradigm grounded in intellectual, emotional, and ethical readiness.

To ensure research credibility, this study employed source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and prolonged engagement with participants, while maintaining ethical principles through the use of pseudonyms and confidentiality

¹⁰⁹ Jose Luis Tapia, "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," in *Issues of Equity*, 1st ed., by Johanna Creswell Báez (London: Routledge, 2025), 17–21, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003560128-5>.

¹¹⁰ Samiaji Sarosa, *Analisis Data Penelitian Kualitatif* (Pt Kanisius, 2021), https://books.google.com/books?hl=id&lr=&id=YY9LEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=analisis+data+kualitatif&ots=gAzb9SV4Mi&sig=VbU9_J3ZFx0_-dfyzkI6AK6WpCo.

¹¹¹ Jonathan A. Smith and Mike Osborn, "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," in *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods*, by Jonathan A. Smith (1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road London EC1Y 1SP United States: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781036232764.n3>.

procedures.¹¹² This methodological design enables the study to balance interpretative depth with analytical rigor, positioning the research not merely as a descriptive account of social change, but as a critical contribution to the development of contemporary Islamic family law discourse in dynamic Pandalungan Muslim society.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Beyond Biological Maturity: The Shift from Domestic Readiness to Intellectual Sovereignty

Empirical findings in the field indicate a conceptual transformation in the understanding of readiness for marriage, integrating the deconstruction of *Istiṭā'ah* and the reinterpretation of the ideal age within a single holistic framework. The data indicates that *Istiṭā'ah* is no longer understood within domestic-biological boundaries such as the ability to manage a household or reaching puberty but is redefined as the capacity for intellectual autonomy, independent thinking, and mental resilience, which enables women to be equal partners in marital relationships. At the same time, the ideal age is no longer interpreted as a rigid chronological number as defined by tradition or formal regulations, but rather as a process of self-maturation encompassing emotional stability, completion of education, and mental readiness. In this context, the attainment of *al-ba'ah* is understood holistically as the primary prerequisite for readiness, so that marriage is no longer positioned as a race against time, but as the result of fulfilling the substantial capacity to carry out household responsibilities consciously and rationally.

IF (24 years old) stated:

“In my family, if a girl has graduated from high school and can help out in the kitchen, she’s already considered ‘capable’ or *Istiṭā'ah* to be proposed to. But in my opinion, that’s a very narrow view. For me, *Istiṭā'ah* is when I have a strong set of life principles through education, so that later I won’t just blindly follow my husband’s words without reason.”

¹¹² Wiyanda Vera Nurfajriani et al., “Triangulasi Data Dalam Analisis Data Kualitatif,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan* 10, no. 17 (September 2024): 17, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13929272>.

AR (23 years old) emphasized:

“Readiness isn’t about being 19 years old as the law states, but about intellectual readiness. I feel I’ll never be *Istiṭā’ah* if I haven’t finished my studies. Because for me, the main asset in an Islamic marriage isn’t just money, but the intelligence to manage responsibilities.”

LZ (23 years old) also shares:

“People in Jember often say that 19–20 is the golden age for marriage so you don’t get left behind. But for me, that number guarantees nothing. I feel the ideal age is when I’ve ‘finished’ my education and my emotions are stable. It’s better to marry at 27 but have complete *al-ba’ah* than to marry at 19 but still have a childish mindset.”

KM (24 years old) added:

“The term *al-ba’ah* in religion is often misunderstood as merely a man’s material capability. In reality, for women, *al-ba’ah* refers to the readiness to bear the emotional burden. The ideal age for marriage is when we are able to stand on our own two feet. Marrying young without emotional maturity actually risks undermining the sanctity of marriage itself.”

The interview data reveal a recurring pattern in how informants reconstruct the meaning of marital readiness, although such reconstruction emerges through diverse personal experiences and socio-cultural negotiations. Informants consistently reject external indicators such as age and domestic competence, yet the ways in which they articulate readiness vary according to their educational background, emotional experiences, and interactions with local cultural expectations. This indicates that *Istiṭā’ah* and *al-ba’ah* are no longer understood as fixed and isolated concepts, but are dynamically reinterpreted as holistic constructs integrating intellectual, emotional, and psychological dimensions. In this context, the ideal age of marriage is no longer positioned as a rigid numerical threshold, but as a fluid process of self-maturation shaped by individual trajectories and social realities. These findings suggest an ongoing epistemological shift from a normative framework toward a more reflective understanding of marital readiness, in which women increasingly position themselves as active moral agents in negotiating the meaning, quality, and timing of marriage within contemporary Muslim society.

The researcher’s observations within female student discussion forums in Jember demonstrate a recurring yet dynamic pattern in the reinterpretation of marital readiness and the ideal age of marriage. Although participants share a consistent tendency to reject chronological age and domestic competence as primary indicators of readiness, their perspectives are shaped by diverse educational trajectories, emotional experiences, and socio-cultural negotiations. In academic and community discussions, women increasingly prioritize thesis completion, intellectual development, emotional stability, and personal independence before entering marriage. This shift indicates that readiness is no longer defined through external social expectations, but through reflective self-maturation and holistic *al-ba’ah*. Consequently, delaying marriage is understood not as social deviance, but as a conscious strategy for achieving intellectual and psychological preparedness. The findings further suggest that academic spaces in Jember function as sites for the production of new meanings, where *Istiṭā’ah* and the ideal age are reconstructed through the framework of women’s intellectual autonomy.

Table 1. Reconstruction of the Meaning of *Istiṭā’ah al-Nikāh* and the Ideal Age

Dimensions of Comparison	Traditional Construction / Formal Regulations	Informant Reconstruction (Holistic Readiness)	Implications
The Meaning of <i>Istiṭā’ah</i>	Domestic and biological readiness, and physical readiness for marriage	Intellectual autonomy, self-control, and intellectual maturity	<i>Istiṭā’ah</i> shifts to a rational, reflective capacity
Indicators of Readiness	Age of puberty, household skills	Education, emotional stability, mental readiness	Readiness for marriage is based on personal qualities, not physical indicators
The Concept of the Ideal Age	Age 19–20 as the normative and legal standard	Age as a process of self-maturation (not based on numbers)	Age becomes a flexible variable dependent on readiness
The Meaning of <i>Al-ba’ah</i>	Material capacity, especially for men	Holistic readiness (intellectual, emotional, mental)	<i>Al-ba’ah</i> is expanded into a multidimensional capacity
Sources of Legitimacy	Social norms, family, and state regulations	Internal authority and individual reflective awareness	Women have the autonomy to determine when to marry
Responses to <i>Waithood</i>	Viewed as a delay or social deviation	Understood as a strategy for self-maturation	<i>Waithood</i> becomes a rational and valuable practice

Marriage Orientation	Fulfillment of social and reproductive obligations	Equal relationships based on readiness and responsibility	Marriage is positioned as a conscious and meaningful commitment
The Position of Women	Subject to social norms and pressure	Active subjects who determine standards of readiness	There is a transformation of women's agency in social relations

The concepts of deconstruction and reconstruction in these findings constitute an interconnected epistemological process. Deconstruction refers to the critical process through which informants dismantle the conventional meanings of *Istiṭā'ah*, the ideal age of marriage, and *al-ba'ah*, which have long been legitimized by social norms, Pandalungan-pesantren culture, and formalistic interpretations of Islamic family law. At this stage, informants question the dominance of biological indicators, domestic competence, and chronological age as the sole standards of marital readiness. However, this process does not end with the rejection of traditional constructions. The data presented in the table demonstrate that, after dismantling these normative frameworks, informants simultaneously reconstruct new and more substantive meanings of readiness based on intellectual sovereignty, emotional maturity, and personal reflexivity. Thus, reconstruction in this study represents a continuation of the deconstructive process, namely the effort to formulate an alternative paradigm of *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ* that is more holistic and contextually grounded. Consequently, deconstruction functions as a critique of inherited meanings, while reconstruction operates as the production of new meanings that position women as active moral subjects in determining the readiness and timing of marriage.

The Ethics of Delay: Marriage Postponement as an Expression of Marital Responsibility

Empirical findings indicate that marriage postponement (*waithood*) among young women in Jember cannot be understood as a form of fear toward the institution of marriage, but rather as an expression of ethical awareness regarding marital responsibilities. *Waithood* is interpreted as a reflective process aimed at achieving full readiness before entering into the *mīthāqan ghalīzā* bond. In this context, postponement is not positioned

as a deviation from social norms, but as a conscious strategy to ensure that the individual has achieved intellectual maturity, emotional stability, and mental readiness. Thus, the decision to postpone marriage represents an effort to preserve the quality and sanctity of the marital relationship as a long-term commitment that cannot be undertaken prematurely.

AN, 23, stated:

“I’m not putting off marriage out of fear, but because I realize that marriage is a huge responsibility. I don’t want to enter into marriage before I’m mentally ready.”

RM, 24, emphasized:

“For me, marriage is a *mīthāqan ghalīzā*, a very strong covenant. So it can’t be taken lightly. I want to be truly ready before entering into it.”

Meanwhile, DF, a 25-year-old graduate student, stated:

“I want to get myself together first, both in terms of education and mindset. If I’m not settled with myself, I’m worried I’ll bring problems into the marriage.”

The interview data show that the informants consistently cited normative and reflective reasons behind their decisions. One informant stated that they were not delaying marriage out of fear of marriage itself, but because they were worried they would not be able to fulfill the responsibilities inherent in marriage. Another informant emphasized that marriage is a “sacred promise” that cannot be entered into on a trial basis, thus requiring thorough preparation. Other statements indicate an orientation toward “getting one’s life in order first” before marrying, so as not to bring personal unpreparedness into the relationship.

In fact, there is an assertion that marrying without emotional maturity risks shifting the purpose of marriage from a sacred act to a burden. As expressed by SN, 25 years old, as follows:

“Marrying without emotional maturity is risky. It might not be a form of worship, but rather a burden. That’s why I’ve chosen to postpone it until I’m truly ready.”

A similar sentiment was echoed by KM, 24, who stated:

“I’ve seen many troubled marriages because they were rushed. So I’d rather postpone it than risk not being able to uphold the marriage commitment properly later on.”

The interview results indicate that informants view postponing marriage as a rational decision stemming from an awareness of the risks of emotional unpreparedness in married life. SN’s statement emphasizes that emotional maturity is a fundamental prerequisite for maintaining the orientation of marriage as a form of worship, thus, unpreparedness has the potential to shift this sacred function into a psychological burden. Meanwhile, KM’s statement reinforces the empirical dimension of this awareness through observations of social reality, where marriages entered into hastily tend to be prone to conflict and failure in maintaining commitment. These two pieces of data indicate that the informants act not only based on personal preferences but also on critical reflection regarding the social experiences around them. Thus, postponing marriage can be understood as a preventive strategy aimed at preserving the quality of the marital relationship, as well as a form of moral responsibility in ensuring that marriage is entered into with adequate emotional readiness.

This data indicates a shift in the religious understanding of marriage. The informants do not reject the normative values of marriage in Islam rather, they internalize the concept of *mīthāqan ghalīzā* as an ethical foundation for decision-making. Marriage is understood as a sacred commitment that demands multidimensional readiness, so that postponement becomes part of the effort to preserve that sacredness. In this case, *waitthood* is not a form of resistance to religious teachings, but rather a form of actualizing religious values within a more substantive and reflective framework.

The meaning of being “rushed” into marriage emerged consistently throughout the informants’ narratives. For them, the term does not merely refer to marrying at an early age, but rather to entering marriage without reflective readiness and personal maturity. This perspective is reflected in the following statements from several informants RM, 24 years old:

“For me, being ‘rushed’ into marriage is not merely about marrying at a young age, but about entering marriage when one is not genuinely prepared. Many

women marry simply because they fear being labeled as ‘late’ or because of family pressure, even though they are still emotionally and personally uncertain about themselves. I do not want to enter marriage merely to comply with age expectations.”

SN, 25 years old:

“I see many people getting married because they feel that it is already the ‘right time’ to marry, not because they are truly prepared. That, in my view, is what it means to be rushed into marriage. As a result, after marriage they become overwhelmed by domestic responsibilities, their emotions remain unstable, and they have not even resolved their own personal issues.”

Within a phenomenological framework, the term “rushed” cannot be understood merely as the acceleration of time toward marriage, but rather as a subjective experience in which the decision to marry is made without sufficient reflective consideration of the emotional, intellectual, and social consequences of married life. Interview data indicate that informants interpret being “rushed” as a condition in which women enter marriage primarily due to age-related pressure, family demands, or the pursuit of social legitimacy, while their mental readiness and personal capacities remain insufficiently developed. Through this process of mental negotiation, informants deconstruct the meaning of being “rushed” from a purely temporal issue into a symbol of reflective unpreparedness that may potentially produce unequal relationships, emotional conflict, and the loss of personal autonomy within marriage.

At the same time, informants reconstruct the meaning of postponement not as delay, but as an ethical and rational space for self-maturation. Consequently, the opposition between “early marriage” and “late marriage” is no longer understood in terms of temporal quantity, but rather in relation to the quality of readiness. In this context, being “rushed” is redefined as entering the *mīthāqan ghalīzā* without holistic preparedness, while *waitthood* is understood as a reflective process aimed at attaining a more substantive form of *Istiṭā’ah al-nikāḥ*. This phenomenon demonstrates that women are not merely postponing marriage, but are engaging in an existential negotiation concerning the meaning of responsibility, autonomy, and the sacredness of marriage within their lives.

Findings from observations within academic circles and young women's communities in Jember reinforce these results. The emerging discourse indicates that delaying marriage is viewed as an indicator of intellectual maturity and responsibility, rather than as a social failure. Women who delay marriage tend to gain social legitimacy as individuals who are seriously preparing themselves whether in terms of education, career, or personal maturity. This shift indicates a change in the structure of social values, where the quality of readiness is prioritized over the speed of entering marriage.

That *waithood* among women in Jember is an ethical practice oriented toward the quality and responsibility of marriage. Delaying marriage is no longer interpreted as a delay, but as a reflective strategy to ensure comprehensive readiness before entering a sacred and long-term relationship. Thus, women are not merely objects of social norms, but also active subjects who consciously determine the quality and timing of marriage.

These findings indicate a tendency toward the ethicalization of delayed marriage among undergraduate Educated young Muslim women in Jember, in which postponing marriage is increasingly understood as a reflective and responsible practice rather than merely a social delay. Within the context of the participants involved in this study, women who are actively engaged in higher education and intellectual development tend to interpret marital readiness through emotional maturity, psychological preparedness, and self-capacity development. This tendency suggests that educational experiences and academic environments may contribute to shaping more reflective perspectives on marriage and personal responsibility. Although these findings are limited to undergraduate women aged 20–25 and therefore cannot be generalized to all women in Jember, they nevertheless demonstrate an emerging shift from a predominantly normative understanding of marriage toward a more substantive orientation among educated young Muslim women in contemporary Pandalungan society.

Table 2. Delay of Gratification and Emotional Maturity

Key Findings	Indicators	Implications
Emotional Maturity as a Prerequisite	Emphasis on emotional readiness before marriage	Marriage is viewed as a form of worship, not a burden

The Risks of Early Marriage	Awareness of the negative consequences of marrying without being ready	A preventive approach to domestic conflict emerges
Delaying Marriage as a Rational Strategy	Decision to postpone marriage until optimal readiness is achieved	Remaining single becomes a conscious choice, not a result of fear
Social Reflection as the Basis for Decision-Making	Learning from the marriage experiences of others	The decision to marry is based on empirical evaluation, not social pressure
Commitment to the Sacredness of Marriage	Maintaining the quality of the <i>mīthāqan ghalīzā</i>	Marriage is seen as a long-term moral responsibility

This table shows that the empirical findings center on one main pattern: the positioning of emotional maturity as the foundation of readiness for marriage. The indicators that emerge confirm that the informants are aware of the risks associated with marriage entered into without readiness, leading them to choose postponement as a rational strategy. Consequently, *waithood* is no longer understood as a form of passive unpreparedness, but as an active choice grounded in reflection and responsibility. This decision is also influenced by observed social experiences, thereby reinforcing a preventive orientation in safeguarding the quality and sustainability of marital relationships.

Reconstructing Istīṭā’ah al-Nikāḥ: Integrating Hifẓ al-‘Aql and Hifẓ al-Nafs into Marital Readiness

Muslim women in the Pandalungan community¹¹³ in Jember occupy a unique position, situated at the intersection of a religious pesantren culture, agrarian-patriarchal traditions, and increasing access to higher education. On the one hand, women still face family and social pressures that encourage marriage as a form of moral and social legitimacy, particularly once they reach their early twenties. These pressures generally manifest through expectations regarding readiness based on technical-domestic concerns, such as the ability to manage a household, adherence to family norms, and reaching an age considered ‘ideal’ for marriage. However, on the other hand, data from research participants Muslim female students aged 20–25 indicate a shift in perspectives regarding

¹¹³ Ramadhina Qurrota Ayun et al., “Islam Dan Budaya Lokal: Analisis Metodologis Terhadap Tradisi Keagamaan Masyarakat Jawa,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin Ilmu* 2, no. 6 (December 2025): 49–55, <https://doi.org/10.69714/qrqc6d06>.

readiness for marriage. Academic experiences and social interactions within the university environment foster a reflective awareness that readiness for marriage is not solely determined by biological maturity or domestic competence, but also requires intellectual, emotional, and psychological readiness. In this context, the identity of Pandalungan women no longer fully reproduces traditional norms, but rather begins to renegotiate the meaning of *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ* through educational experiences and personal awareness.

The coherence of these findings is reflected in the recurring pattern through which informants reinterpret marital readiness despite the diversity of their lived experiences and negotiation processes. This coherence is maintained through a shared orientation among informants in rejecting chronological age and domestic competence as the sole indicators of *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ*. Nevertheless, dynamism emerges through the different ways each informant constructs her understanding based on personal experiences, family pressures, social expectations, and academic encounters. Within this process, being “rushed into marriage” is no longer understood merely as marrying quickly, but as entering marriage without sufficient intellectual, emotional, and reflective preparedness. Consequently, deconstruction occurs when informants critically dismantle inherited norms that prioritise age and domestic readiness, while reconstruction takes place through the formulation of a more holistic understanding of *Istiṭā'ah* grounded in intellectual sovereignty, emotional maturity, psychological preparedness, and reflective responsibility towards the *mīthāqan ghalīzā*.

Accordingly, the reconstruction of the meaning of *Istiṭā'ah* in the findings of this study reveals a significant shift from the classical fiqh understanding, which has traditionally been dominated by financial (*al-ba'ah*) and biological dimensions, towards the integration of the protection of the intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*) and the self (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) as central pillars of marital readiness. While conventional literature, such as *Ibanatul Ahkam bi Syarh Bulughil Maram*,¹¹⁴ often emphasises *Istiṭah* in terms of the capacity to provide financial maintenance and dowry, field findings among the Pandalungan-pesantren community in Jember, without negating these aspects, demonstrate that educational

¹¹⁴ Hasan Sulaiman al-Nuri and Alawi Abbas al-Maliki, *Ibanat Al-Ahkam Syarh Bulugh al-Maram*, vol. 2 (Bairut, Libanon: Dar al-Fikr, 2006).

attainment and mental maturity constitute concrete manifestations of safeguarding the intellect in order to shoulder the responsibilities of the *mīthāqan ghalīzā*. This finding resonates with the contemporary thought of Jasser Auda, who argues that *maqāṣid* should move beyond mere protection towards capacity development. The fundamental distinction lies in how informants perceive marriage postponement (*wait hood*) not as a neglect of the Sunnah, but rather as a preventive measure intended to avoid harm to the intellect and self that may result from marriage undertaken without sufficient intellectual and emotional preparedness.

From the qualitative perspective of the minimum marriage age standard, the informants' perceptions further reveal that marriage postponement in Jember represents a tangible deconstruction of patriarchal hegemony, which has historically exercised authority over women's bodies through the standardisation of marriageable age. While classical sociological perspectives often position women in agrarian societies as passive subjects within collective family structures, these findings correspond with the agency theory of Saba Mahmood, in which Muslim women utilise religious structures and ethical reasoning as instruments for negotiating autonomy and self-determination within contemporary social life.¹¹⁵ The theological foundation of Muslim women's agency in this study is rooted in the principle of individual sovereignty affirmed by Allah SWT in QS. al-Nisā' [4]: 32:

لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَتَبُواْ وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَتَبْنَ

*"For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned."*¹¹⁶

This verse affirms that women possess authority over their intellectual achievements and existential selfhood. Within the context of Pandalungan educated young Muslim women in Jember, this principle is manifested through the decision to prioritise the completion of higher education, the strengthening of intellectual capacity, and mental preparedness before entering married life. The field findings indicate

¹¹⁵ Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Agency, and the Liberatory Subject: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival in Egypt," *Temenos - Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 42, no. 1 (January 2006), <https://doi.org/10.33356/temenos.4633>.

¹¹⁶ Departeman Agama RI, *Al-Quran Dan Terjemahannya* (Semarang: PT. Intan Sari, 1997). hal.112

that the informants no longer interpret *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāh* merely as biological or material capability, but rather as a holistic readiness encompassing intellectual maturity, emotional stability, and reflective capacity in bearing the responsibilities of the *mīthāqan ghalīzā*. This reconstruction constitutes a progressive reinterpretation of the Prophetic tradition:¹¹⁷

يَا مَعْشَرَ الشَّبَابِ مَنِ اسْتَطَاعَ مِنْكُمُ الْبَاءَةَ فَلْيَتَزَوَّجْ

“O young men, whoever among you has *al-bā'ah* (ability/readiness), then let him get married” (HR. Bukhari no. 5066 & Muslim no. 1400),

In classical interpretations, *al-bā'ah* is generally understood as biological and financial capability. However, based on the lived experiences of Muslim women informants in Jember, the concept is reconstructed into intellectual and psychological preparedness as substantive prerequisites for marriage. Consequently, *Istiṭā'ah* is no longer positioned reductively as sexual or economic capacity, but rather as the ability to maintain the quality and sustainability of marital relationships consciously and responsibly. These findings demonstrate that marriage postponement (*waithood*) is not perceived by informants as a neglect of the Sunnah, but as a preventive measure (*sadd al-dharī'ah*) aimed at avoiding psychological harm, relational conflict, and domestic inequality resulting from marriage undertaken without sufficient intellectual and emotional preparedness.¹¹⁸

The urgency of intellectual preparedness in these findings is closely related to the principles of safeguarding the intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*) and the self (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) within the framework of *Maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Allah SWT states in QS. al-Isrā' [17]: 36:

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ

“And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge.”

This verse emphasises that every major decision in life, including marriage, must be grounded in intellectual awareness and reflective consideration rather than mere social

¹¹⁷ Imam Abi Abdillah Muhammad bin Ismail Ibnu Ibrahim bin Maghirah bin Bardazibah Al-Ja'fi Al-Bukhari, *Shahih Al-Bukhari*, Juz I (Beirut-Lebanon: Darul Kitab al-'Ilmiyah, 1992).

¹¹⁸ Wahbah al-Zuhaili, *Ushul al-Fiqh al-Islāmiy* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2005).hal. 175

pressure or age expectations. Accordingly, the informants perceive being “rushed into marriage” as a form of reflective unpreparedness that may generate unequal relationships, emotional violence, and even the loss of women’s autonomy within domestic life. This perspective is further reinforced by QS. al-Tahrīm [66]: 6:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا

“O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from the Fire.”

Within the context of this study, this verse is interpreted not merely as a spiritual obligation to protect one’s family, but also as an imperative to cultivate mental preparedness and intellectual capacity before assuming marital responsibilities.¹¹⁹ This interpretation resonates with the contemporary thought of Jasser Auda, who argues that *maqāṣid* should not be confined to passive protection, but must also encompass human capacity development.¹²⁰ Thus, higher education pursued by educated young Muslim women in Jember is not understood as a manifestation of secularisation or rejection of marriage, but rather as an ethical strategy to strengthen *ḥifẓ al-‘aql* in order to fulfil marital responsibilities maturely and responsibly. The findings also demonstrate that marriage postponement is positioned as a form of safeguarding the self (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) against psychological pressure and destructive relationships. This principle is strongly grounded in the Prophetic tradition:

The Prophet said:¹²¹

لَا ضَرَرَ وَلَا ضِرَارَ

“There must be no harm (to oneself) and there must be no harm to others” (HR. Ibn Majah no. 2341).

This hadith serves as a normative basis for women to engage in reflective deliberation before entering marriage, particularly when emotional and psychological readiness has not yet been fully established. Informants perceive entering marriage in a psychologically fragile condition as potentially creating *ḍarar* not only for themselves, but

¹¹⁹ Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2012).

¹²⁰ Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach*.

¹²¹ Abu Abdullah bin Yazid al Qazwaini Ibnu Majah, *Sunan Ibnu Majah* (Dar al-Risalah al Ilmiah, 2009).
hal.784

also for their partners and the continuity of the family.¹²² Consequently, *waitthood* is reconstructed as an ethical and rational space for self-maturation aimed at attaining the condition of *nafs al-muṭma'innah* prior to entering the *mīthāqan ghalīzā*.¹²³ In this context, safeguarding the self is no longer interpreted merely as preserving physical survival, but also as protecting mental health, personal dignity, and women's autonomy within domestic life. This perspective simultaneously reflects a paradigmatic shift among educated young Muslim women in Jember, from marriage orientations driven by social pressure towards readiness grounded in self-quality and moral responsibility.¹²⁴

From the perspective of contemporary Islamic family law, the reconstruction of Istiṭā'ah undertaken by the informants demonstrates that marital readiness constitutes a dynamic concept that must respond to social transformation. Therefore, the standardisation of the minimum marriage age cannot be understood solely as a rigid numerical threshold, but must also consider indicators of emotional maturity, psychological preparedness, and intellectual capacity. This is consistent with the jurisprudential maxim articulated by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti in *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā'ir*.¹²⁵

تَصَرُّفُ الْإِمَامِ عَلَى الرَّعِيَّةِ مَنُوطٌ بِالصُّلْحَةِ

The authorities' policies towards the people must always be based on public welfare.

Accordingly, the orientation of Islamic family law should not remain limited to the legality of marital age, but should move towards safeguarding family quality through the strengthening of intellectual and emotional preparedness among prospective spouses. Within a gender perspective, the phenomenon of *Life Ijtihad* undertaken by educated young Muslim women in Jember represents a negotiation against

¹²² Abdul Aziz Muhammad 'Azzam, *Al Qawaid al Fiqhiyah* (Kairo: Dar al-Hadis, 2005).

¹²³ Muhsan Syarafuddin, Winning Son Ashari, and Siti Nazla Raihana, "Eskalasi Konflik Keluarga Dalam Dinamika Globalisasi Dan Pendekatan Resolusi Berbasis Fikih," *Al-Majaalis : Jurnal Dirasat Islamiyah* 12, no. 1 (November 2024): 30–52, <https://doi.org/10.37397/al-majaalis.v12i1.707>.

¹²⁴ Arif Hidayat, Darodjat, and Sriyanto, "Pesan Pendidikan Pernikahan dalam Q.S Al-Baqarah Ayat 187: (Analisis Kesetaraan Hak dan Kewajiban Suami Istri)," *Al-Majaalis : Jurnal Dirasat Islamiyah* 12, no. 1 (November 2024): 200–226, <https://doi.org/10.37397/al-majaalis.v12i1.725>.

¹²⁵ Jalaluddin Abdurrahman al-Suyuti, *al-Asybah wa al-Nazha'ir li al-Suyutiy* (Kairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1959).

patriarchal stigmas such as *tak pajuh*, which have historically positioned women as objects of social legitimacy based on marital status. Through higher education and self-capacity development, women reclaim authority over their futures as moral subjects possessing the right to determine the timing and quality of their marriages.¹²⁶

Nevertheless, this study also emphasises that *waitthood* among educated young Muslim women in Jember is not synonymous with rejecting marriage or practising *tabattul* (permanent celibacy). Marriage postponement is understood as a measured transitional phase aimed at achieving more holistic preparedness before marriage. The Prophet Muhammad stated:

طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ

“Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim” (HR. Ibn Majah no. 224).¹²⁷

A knowledgeable wife is the primary guarantor of quality *Hifdz al-Nasl* (protection of offspring), because without an educated mind, the education of future generations will be threatened. This pattern indicates that Jember women no longer view their bodies as reproductive commodities, but rather as sovereign intellectual subjects. The alignment between field data and this basis of evidence confirms that Islamic law is dynamic, in accordance with the principle:

لَا يُنكَرُ تَغْيِيرُ الْأَحْكَامِ بِتَغْيِيرِ الْأَزْمَانِ

“It cannot be denied that legal changes can occur in line with changing times.”¹²⁸

The dynamics in Jember demonstrate that *waitthood* is not a defiance of tradition, but rather an ethical evolution to achieve a truly quality family (*sakinah*). Furthermore, *waitthood* is not a sign of moral decadence, but rather a manifestation of deeper religious devotion in preparation for the sacred promise. The intellectual sovereignty acquired

¹²⁶ Misbahuzzulam, Arif Husnul Khuluq, and Muhammad Wahid Abdullah, “Prinsip ‘Mapan Dahulu Baru Menikah’ dalam Perspektif Islam,” *Al-Majaalis : Jurnal Dirasat Islamiyah* 11, no. 1 (November 2023): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.37397/amj.v11i1.462>.

¹²⁷ Ibnu Majah, *Sunan Ibnu Majah*. Juz 1, hal.81

¹²⁸ Abu Abdirrahman Al-Jazairi, *Al-Qawaid al-Fiqhiyyah* (Mekkah: Dar Ibn al-Jauzi, tt.). hal.134

through higher education is the primary asset for women to become equal partners, so that the goals of marriage to achieve tranquility (*sakinah*), love (*mawaddah*), and compassion (*rahmah*) can be optimally achieved. This reconstruction ultimately positions women no longer as objects to be “waited” or “marketed”, but as sovereign, intelligent legal subjects who are fully responsible for their commitments in this world and the hereafter. Thus, *waithood* is no longer seen as a threat to social norms, but rather as a strategy for realizing a family that is *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*, grounded in the sovereign dignity of women as equal partners in a strong sacred bond.

It is important to emphasize that while postponing marriage to achieve intellectual maturity and self-sovereignty (*waithood*) is a noble life *ijtihad*, this step must remain within the corridor of *wasathiyah* (middle ground). Intellectual sovereignty does not legitimize excessively postponing marriage beyond productive ages, such as 30 years and above, let alone choosing to remain single for life in the name of religious devotion or career. Islam strongly condemns the act of *tabattul* (celibacy/abandoning marriage) because marriage is a *sunnah* that perfects religion and protects human honor. This was strongly emphasized by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) when responding to a group of companions who wanted to leave marriage to focus on worship:

أَمَّا وَاللَّهِ إِنِّي لَأَخْشَاكُمْ لِلَّهِ وَأَتْقَاكُمْ لَهُ، لِكَيْتِي أَصُومُ وَأُفْطِرُ، وَأُصَلِّي وَأَرْقُدُ، وَأَتَزَوَّجُ النِّسَاءَ، فَمَنْ رَغِبَ عَنِّي
فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي

“By Allah, indeed I am the person who fears Allah the most and is most devoted to Him among you. However, I fast and break the fast, I pray and sleep, and I marry women. So whoever hates my sunnah, he is not among my group.” (HR. Bukhari No. 5063).¹²⁹

This hadith demonstrates that marriage remains the ideal orientation within Islam. However, within the context of this study, the informants perceive preparedness for marriage as an integral part of religious responsibility. Consequently, *waithood* is not interpreted as a form of moral decadence, but rather as a process of “ethical self-development” aimed at ensuring that, once the marriage contract is solemnised, women

¹²⁹ Al-Bukhari, *Shahih Al-Bukhari*, Juz 7.hal.2

possess sufficient intellectual, emotional, and psychological preparedness to establish a *sakinah, mawaddah, wa raḥmah* family. Ultimately, the reconstruction of *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ* in this study positions women no longer as passive objects to be “waited for” or “marketed”, but rather as sovereign, reflective, and responsible legal subjects who determine the quality of marriage and the future of their families.

Waithood among educated young Muslim women in Jember is understood as a reflective transitional phase aimed at attaining intellectual, emotional, and psychological preparedness before entering marriage. The findings indicate that postponement is not perceived as a rejection of marriage, but rather as an ethical effort to ensure readiness for the responsibilities of the *mīthāqan ghalīzā*.¹³⁰ In this context, marriage remains an important life orientation, pursued after achieving sufficient self-capacity and reflective maturity. Therefore, the findings do not support the practice of *tabattul* as prohibited in the Prophetic tradition, but instead demonstrate how contemporary Muslim women reinterpret *al-bā'ah* as holistic readiness grounded in responsibility, self-maturity, and relational stability.

The Prophetic tradition narrated by Anas ibn Malik concerning the prohibition of *tabattul* and the command to possess *al-bā'ah* before marriage should be understood within the broader framework of ethical preparedness rather than merely as a normative injunction to marry immediately. The hadith states:¹³¹

عَنْ أَنَسٍ قَالَ: كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - يَأْمُرُ بِالْبَاءَةِ، وَيَنْهَى عَنِ التَّبْتُلِ نَهْيًا شَدِيدًا، وَيَقُولُ:
تَزَوَّجُوا الْوَدُودَ الْوَالِدُودَ، إِنِّي مَكَائِرُ بِكُمْ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ (رَوَاهُ أَحْمَدُ، وَصَحَّحَهُ ابْنُ حِبَّانَ)

“The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) commanded (his followers) to have the ability to marry (al-ba’ah) and forbade the practice of tabattul (celibacy for the purpose of focusing on worship) with a very strict prohibition. He said: ‘Marry women who are loving (al-wadūd) and fertile (al-walūd), for I will be proud of your numbers before the prophets on the Day of Resurrection.’” [HR. Ahmad]

Within the context of this study, the hadith is not interpreted by informants as an obligation to hasten marriage irrespective of readiness, but rather as an emphasis on the importance of entering marriage with adequate capacity and responsibility. The findings

¹³⁰ Saxey et al., “Do Financial Barrier Beliefs About Marriage Predict Building Wealth?”

¹³¹ al-Nuri and al-Maliki, *Ibanat Al-Ahkam Syarh Bulugh al-Maram*, vol. 2.hal.248

indicate that educated young Muslim women in Jember do not reject marriage as a religious institution; instead, they reinterpret *al-bā'ah* as holistic preparedness encompassing intellectual maturity, emotional stability, and psychological readiness. Consequently, *waitthood* is understood not as a form of *tabattul* or rejection of the Sunnah,¹³² but as a reflective transitional phase intended to ensure that marriage is entered consciously and responsibly.

From a *maqāṣid al-shaī'ah* perspective, this reinterpretation reflects a preventive orientation (*sadd al-dhāī'ah*) aimed at avoiding relational instability, psychological vulnerability, and unequal marital relations resulting from unprepared marriage. Thus, the meaning of *al-bā'ah* within the contemporary experiences of Educated young Muslim women in Jember extends beyond financial capability alone and increasingly incorporates the capacity to sustain emotional resilience, intellectual partnership, and family stability within the framework of *mīthāqan ghalīzā*. In this sense, the findings demonstrate that marriage postponement among the participants is not directed towards permanent celibacy, but towards the pursuit of a more reflective, ethical, and substantively prepared marital life.

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that educated Muslim women in Jember reconstruct the concept of *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ* from a framework previously centred on biological readiness, chronological age, and domestic competence towards a more holistic understanding grounded in intellectual maturity, emotional stability, and psychological preparedness. Within the socio-religious context of the Pandalungan-pesantren community, *waitthood* is not perceived as a rejection of marriage or a neglect of religious values, but rather as a reflective and preventive strategy aimed at ensuring readiness before entering the *mīthāqan ghalīzā*. The findings reveal a process of deconstruction towards traditional standards of marital readiness that have long been legitimised through social pressure and

¹³² Abu al-Husain Muslim bin al-Hujaj al-Qusyairiy Al-Nisaburiy, *Shahih Muslim* (Bairut: Daru al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995).

patriarchal cultural norms, while simultaneously reconstructing *Istiṭā'ah* as a form of intellectual sovereignty and women's moral responsibility in determining the quality of their marital lives. Accordingly, this study confirms that modernity within the Pandalungan Muslim context does not necessarily lead to secularisation, but instead generates new forms of negotiation between religiosity, education, and women's autonomy within the framework of *Maqāṣid al-shaī'ah*, particularly the protection of the intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*) and the self (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*).

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of contemporary Islamic family law by expanding the meaning of *Istiṭā'ah al-nikāḥ* from a predominantly material dimension towards a multidimensional paradigm of marital readiness that is more contextual to the lived experiences of modern Muslim women. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of reformulating premarital education and family law policies so that they address not only legal age requirements, but also the intellectual, emotional, and psychological preparedness of prospective spouses. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its focus on ten Muslim undergraduate women aged 20–25 within academic settings in Jember; therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to all Muslim women within the broader Pandalungan community. Future research is recommended to include non-academic women, traditional pesantren communities, and Muslim men in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the reconstruction of *Istiṭā'ah* across diverse social contexts.

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