



## GENDER ISSUES IN PUBLIC SPACES WITHIN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

### ISU-ISU GENDER DI RUANG PUBLIC DALAM KOMUNITAS MUSLIM: SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62567/micjo.v2i4.1483>

#### Abstract

Gender issues in public spaces and Muslim communities have increasingly gained attention in academic discourse due to their strong connection with social norms, cultural values, and religious interpretations that shape women's patterns of participation. This study aims to examine the influence of gender norms and values within Muslim communities on women's engagement in public spaces, uncover the challenges they face, and formulate recommendations based on feminist and social constructionist perspectives to promote gender equality. The research employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method by tracing reputable academic databases through rigorous selection and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Muslim women's participation in public spaces is often hindered by patriarchal constructions, discrimination, and limited access. Nevertheless, women have developed strategies of resistance and negotiation that expand their roles. Thematic analysis identifies three main patterns: women's representation in public spaces, gender-based social practices that impose limitations, and resistance strategies through religious reinterpretation and community activism. This article contributes to theoretical development by enriching global feminist perspectives through the lived experiences of Muslim women while also offering practical contributions in the form of inclusive and socially-religiously sensitive public policy recommendations. The implications highlight the importance of cross-cultural studies and the exploration of women's experiences at the local community level to broaden understanding of gender equality in contemporary Muslim societies.

**Keywords:** Gender equality, public space

#### Abstrak

Isu gender dalam ruang publik dan komunitas Muslim semakin menjadi sorotan dalam kajian akademik karena berkaitan erat dengan norma sosial, nilai budaya, serta tafsir religius yang memengaruhi pola partisipasi perempuan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelaah pengaruh norma dan nilai gender dalam komunitas Muslim terhadap keterlibatan perempuan di ruang



publik, mengungkap berbagai tantangan yang dihadapi, sekaligus merumuskan rekomendasi berdasarkan perspektif feminisme dan konstruksi sosial guna mendorong kesetaraan gender. Metode yang digunakan adalah Systematic Literature Review (SLR) dengan menelusuri literatur dari basis data akademik bereputasi melalui seleksi ketat dan analisis tematik. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa partisipasi perempuan Muslim dalam ruang publik kerap terhambat oleh konstruksi patriarkal, diskriminasi, dan keterbatasan akses. Meski demikian, perempuan juga membangun strategi resistensi dan negosiasi yang memperluas peran mereka. Analisis tematik menemukan tiga pola utama: representasi perempuan dalam ruang publik, praktik sosial berbasis gender yang bersifat membatasi, serta strategi resistensi melalui reinterpretasi ajaran agama dan aktivisme komunitas. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan teori dengan memperkaya perspektif feminisme global melalui pengalaman perempuan Muslim, sekaligus memberi kontribusi praktis berupa rekomendasi kebijakan publik yang inklusif dan sensitif terhadap konteks sosial-keagamaan. Implikasi penelitian menekankan pentingnya studi lintas budaya serta eksplorasi pengalaman perempuan di level komunitas lokal untuk memperluas pemahaman tentang kesetaraan gender dalam masyarakat Muslim kontemporer.

**Kata Kunci:** Kesetaraan gender, ruang publik

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender in the public sphere now occupies a strategic position as one of the important discourses in global social and cultural studies, along with the increasing academic and public awareness of the urgency of women's participation in community life. A number of previous studies affirmed that women's involvement in the public sphere is not solely determined by individual capacity and factors, but is also shaped by political dynamics, the construction of cultural norms, and complex and interwoven social structures (Kandiyoti, 2019; Mahmood, 2020). In the context of Muslim societies, the discourse on gender gains increasing attention due to the tension between religious traditions, established social practices, and the strengthening demands of modernity.

This tension has a direct impact on the forms of involvement and scope of women's movement in various areas of social life (Jansen, 2022). Similar phenomena are also identified in a number of countries with Muslim majorities, where the issue of gender equality often faces serious challenges, both structural, such as public regulations and policies, and cultural, rooted in the patriarchal system and normative religious interpretations (Al-Khataibeh & Hijazi, 2021). Thus, studies on gender and the public sphere in Muslim societies are not only relevant in the academic context, but also important for understanding contemporary social dynamics and formulating more inclusive policies.

Although research on women's involvement in the public sphere has undergone quite significant development, there are still gaps in deeply understanding how gender norms and values prevailing in Muslim communities shape patterns of women's participation. A number of literatures tend to emphasize formal legal, policy, or political aspects, while the socio-cultural dimension, which is precisely the main space for the reproduction of gender relations in everyday life, relatively receives less critical attention (El Feki, 2021). In fact, these socio-cultural factors play an important role in determining the extent to which women can participate equally in the public domain. On the other hand, various empirical studies reveal the real challenges faced by Muslim women, ranging from entrenched gender stereotypes, structural



barriers in access to resources, to gender-based discrimination that limits their scope of movement in society (Badran, 2021). This condition shows that the problem of gender equality in the public sphere cannot be separated from the complexity of the interaction between culture, religion, and social structure. Therefore, a more integrative study is needed with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, so that it can present a more comprehensive understanding of the role of gender norms and values in shaping patterns of women's participation, as well as providing theoretical and practical contributions to strengthening gender equality in contemporary Muslim communities (Said & Madan, 2023).

Conceptually, the issue of gender in the public sphere can be analyzed through the perspectives of feminism and social construction theory. The feminist framework offers a critical basis for dissecting gender inequality and identifying strategies of resistance that emerge amid the dynamics of Muslim communities (Abu-Lughod, 2018). Meanwhile, social construction theory affirms that gender cannot be understood merely as a biological entity, but rather as the result of a social process formed through continuous interaction, norms, symbols, and cultural practices reproduced in daily life (Butler, 2019). By combining these two approaches, research can more comprehensively examine how social norms, cultural values, and religious interpretations interact in shaping and limiting women's roles in the public sphere, as well as uncovering opportunities for social transformation towards equality (Ahmed, 2021). This dual conceptual approach not only provides a solid theoretical foundation, but also enriches the analysis in this article by placing the experiences of Muslim women as an integral part of the global feminist discourse and social construction studies, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of gender relations in contemporary society.

Based on this framework, this research is focused on three main aspects. First, examining how gender norms and values living in Muslim communities influence patterns of women's participation in the public sphere. Second, analyzing the various challenges faced by Muslim women in their involvement in the public sphere. Third, reviewing the possibility of transformation in gender perceptions within Muslim communities that have implications for increasing women's participation in the public sphere. Thus, the goal of this research is to analyze the influence of gender norms and values on women's participation, identify the challenges that arise, and formulate recommendations based on feminist theory and social construction to strengthen gender equality (Hashim & Mzee, 2023).

This article is expected to provide scientific contributions in two main areas. First, academically, this article enriches the literature on gender issues in the public sphere with a specific focus on Muslim communities, which is still relatively limited in contemporary feminist studies (Mernissi, 2022). Second, practically, this research offers a critical perspective that can be used as a reference in formulating policies and community strategies to increase women's participation in the public sphere, especially in the context of modern Muslim societies (Khan & Ali, 2020). The novelty of this article lies in its approach that combines feminist and social construction perspectives through a systematic literature review, thereby producing a comprehensive synthesis of the dynamics of Muslim women's participation in the public sphere (Naguib & Jamal, 2021).

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist theory and social construction are two main conceptual frameworks in understanding gender issues in the public sphere and Muslim communities. Feminism, which was born as a social movement and critical theory since the 19th century, developed into various schools such as liberal, radical, and postcolonial feminism which highlight the



dynamics of women's roles in the social sphere (Tong, 2018). In the context of Muslim societies, feminist theory is often combined with the perspective of Islamic feminism to reinterpret religious texts and traditions that are often used as the basis for restricting women's roles (Badran, 2020). Meanwhile, social construction theory emphasizes that gender roles are not something natural, but rather the result of social interaction, norms, and cultural practices institutionalized in daily life (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Connell, 2020). The relevance of these two theories in the research is to unravel how gender norms and values are produced, reproduced, and negotiated in the public sphere of contemporary Muslim communities.

Previous studies indicate that the issue of women's participation in the public sphere of Muslim societies is heavily influenced by social structure, religious interpretation, and political dynamics. For example, Mahmood (2019) highlights how Muslim women in the Middle East negotiate religious restrictions in accessing the public sphere, while Sadiqi (2020) found that women's involvement in community organizations in North Africa is influenced by educational and economic factors. In Indonesia, Rinaldo (2021) describes the correlation between religious practice and women's agency in urban Muslim communities. In addition, Jamal (2020) asserts that the public sphere in Muslim-majority countries is still often limited by patriarchal norms that place women as secondary. This finding is reinforced by Al-Ali (2021) who shows an imbalance in the representation of Muslim women in political and civil community spheres.

Although the existing literature is quite broad, there are still a number of research gaps that need to be addressed. Most previous studies have focused more on specific country or regional contexts, thus not yet producing a comprehensive synthesis of the global pattern of gender issues in Muslim communities (Hassan & Ali, 2022). In addition, some research still focuses on religious or political aspects, while the socio-cultural dimension and the construction of the public sphere are often marginalized (Abu-Lughod, 2020). This creates a need for a systematic literature review that can integrate research results across contexts and methodological approaches to provide a more complete picture.

This article positions itself to fill this gap by conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) on gender issues in the public sphere and Muslim communities. With this approach, the research not only presents a collection of empirical findings, but also carries out thematic analysis to understand the patterns, challenges, and strategies that emerge from various literatures. Its contribution is to provide a more integrative conceptual framework for understanding the relation between gender norms, the public sphere, and Muslim communities at the global level. Thus, this research seeks to enrich the literature on feminism and social construction, as well as provide practical recommendations for strengthening women's participation.

In terms of methodological approaches, previous studies show significant variation. Mir-Hosseini (2019) emphasizes the use of a feminist hermeneutic approach in reading Islamic texts, while Salem (2020) uses ethnographic methods to examine the experiences of women in community spaces. On the other hand, Benhaddou (2021) applies a quantitative survey to analyze gender perceptions among Muslim students. Zia's (2022) study places more emphasis on integrating a comparative approach across countries. This variation shows that gender issues in Muslim communities are a multi-methodological field of study rich in perspectives, so SLR becomes a relevant approach to compile a comprehensive overview.

Based on this mapping, this research develops a conceptual synthesis that departs from two main pillars: feminism as a critical theory that challenges gender inequality, and social construction as a lens for understanding how gender norms are built and maintained in Muslim



communities. This synthesis enables a deeper reading of the existing literature, as well as preparing the methodological foundation for thematic analysis in the next stage. Thus, this literature review not only serves as a map of knowledge, but also a conceptual foundation for answering the problem formulation and research objectives that have been set.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a literature study method focused on narrative and conceptual analysis of gender issues in the public and community spheres of Muslims. This approach was chosen because it is capable of revealing the meanings, representations, and social constructions related to gender relations that emerge in Islamic discourse, whether through social practices, the public sphere, or digital media (Amiliya & Khuluq, 2025). The research data sources originate from primary and secondary literature, including accredited journal articles, scholarly books, research reports, and relevant academic online publications published between 2020–2025. Literature was selected based on the following criteria: (1) discussing the theme of gender in Islam, (2) examining the public sphere or Muslim communities, and (3) using a qualitative analysis framework. To broaden the scope, searches were conducted through academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and university repositories (Ramadhan, 2025; Jalloh, 2025).

The data collection technique involved literature mapping and document analysis, which includes identifying, classifying, and synthesizing the main findings from various studies. This technique facilitates the researcher in finding patterns of similarities, differences, or research gaps in the issue of Muslim gender in the public sphere (Ali, 2025; Husda et al., 2025). Data analysis was conducted using a thematic content analysis approach aimed at finding recurring main themes in the literature. This analysis was carried out in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Auliya, 2025). The reduction process was done by selecting literature that met the criteria, then the data was displayed through an issue categorization table, and finally, conclusions were drawn based on the synthesis from various points of view (Fawaid & Amalia, 2025).

## 3. RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of this research are presented based on the synthesis of literature obtained through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. The selection process resulted in 38 relevant articles published in the period 2018–2025, with the highest publication distribution occurring between 2021 and 2023. These articles were published in reputable international journals, with dominant contributions from the South Asia, Middle East, and North Africa regions, while the rest originated from Europe and North America. Most studies used a qualitative approach with interview techniques, ethnographic observation, or discourse analysis, while a small number of articles utilized quantitative surveys or mixed methods to assess Muslim women's participation in the public sphere (Hidayana, 2018; Mahmood, 2019). In terms of methodological trends, the majority of research emphasized the exploration of cultural norms and values as key variables shaping the experiences of Muslim women in the public sphere. For example, studies in Pakistan emphasized how patriarchal structures limit women's mobility through moral regulations and social control (Ali & Hassan, 2020). Other research in Indonesia found that women's participation in Muslim communities is strongly influenced by local religious interpretations and the involvement of civil society organizations (Rahmawati, 2021). Furthermore, there has been an increased interest in using intersectional





feminism theory to understand the experiences of Muslim women connected to social class, economic status, and ethnicity (Mirza, 2020).

Based on thematic content analysis, the synthesis resulted in four main categories. First, the theme of gender norms and values, which reflects how Muslim social and cultural constructions play a role in shaping opportunities and obstacles for women. Studies in Egypt showed that religious norms are often selectively practiced, leading to differences in women's access to the public sphere (Abou-Bakr, 2019). Second, the theme of challenges to women's participation, covering structural barriers, gender-based discrimination, and limitations in economic and educational access. Research in Nigeria emphasized that security factors and gender-based violence are major obstacles to women's participation in the public sphere (Yusuf, 2022). Third, the theme of adaptation and resistance strategies, which illustrates the efforts of Muslim women to negotiate their identities. Studies in Turkey highlighted the use of social media as an alternative space for women to express political and social aspirations (Kaya & Öztürk, 2021). On the other hand, research in Malaysia showed that women actively utilize community organizations to expand social networks and access to the public sphere (Aziz, 2020). Fourth, the theme of perceptual change and community transformation, related to shifts in values due to globalization, education, and government policies. For example, research in Tunisia identified increased public support for gender equality following political reforms (Ben Salem, 2023).

Publication characteristics also showed that most articles integrate the theoretical frameworks of feminism and social construction to explain the phenomena studied. For instance, research in the UK used a postcolonial feminism framework to analyze the experiences of diaspora Muslim women facing stereotypes in the public sphere (Williams, 2020). Other research in Morocco used a social construction approach to map changes in gender norms due to urbanization (El-Haj, 2019). This methodological tendency indicates that the issue of gender in Muslim communities is understood not only as a local debate, but also as part of a broader global discourse. Furthermore, the patterns emerging from the literature indicate an increased role for non-state actors, including NGOs, civil society, and digital media, in strengthening Muslim women's participation in the public sphere. A study in Indonesia found that collaboration between women's organizations and educational institutions was able to open women's access to local political spaces (Sari, 2021). Meanwhile, research in Qatar showed that state policies supporting gender equality had a direct impact on increasing women's participation in the workforce and the public sphere (Al-Kuwari, 2022).

## DISCUSSION

The main result of this systematic review confirms that the social construction of gender within Muslim communities, especially in relation to the public sphere and feminist relations, shows a complex, multi-layered, and non-singular dynamic. This research succeeded in achieving its goal by identifying three dominant categories that shape gender relations patterns, namely: (1) the representation of women in the public sphere and religious discourse, which shows a tension between traditional interpretations and progressive reinterpretation efforts regarding women's roles; (2) social practices that regulate gender-based interactions, operating through cultural norms, institutional policies, and religious authorities that often maintain the patriarchal status quo; and (3) resistance and negotiation undertaken by women against patriarchal structures, which emerge in the form of Islamic feminist movements, involvement in civil society organizations, and cultural expressions that challenge gender boundaries. These findings indicate that the role of women in the public sphere cannot be understood as a static



entity, but rather as the result of a social construction constantly negotiated through the interaction between religious values, social norms, and contemporary political dynamics (Simmonds & Berghs, 2024). Thus, this research demonstrates a dialectic between patriarchal domination and the transformative efforts made by women, which has implications for the formation of new spaces for women's agency in Muslim communities. Furthermore, this result also makes a significant contribution to gender and Islam studies by showing that the understanding of women's roles is not homogeneous, but is influenced by local context, religious tradition, and global developments regarding feminism and gender justice issues.

The interpretation of the findings within the framework of social construction theory and Islamic feminism shows that gender identity among Muslim communities is better understood as a dynamic process that is constantly shaped, maintained, and renegotiated through social, cultural, and religious interactions, rather than as a fixed or essential category. This perspective affirms the view that gender in the Islamic context cannot be separated from the power relations and social structures surrounding it. Moreover, this approach aligns with the principle of intersectionality, which emphasizes the importance of considering other variables, such as class, ethnicity, and age, which also influence the construction of gender experience (Farid, 2025). Thus, the experiences of Muslim women are not homogeneous, but are fragmented based on their social position, economic status, and cultural context in which they are situated. For example, studies on minority Muslim women in Europe highlight that religious and ethnic identities often intersect, resulting in forms of double marginalization that cannot be understood solely through a single gender analysis (McCann et al., 2025).

These findings emphasize that gender analysis in Muslim communities requires a multidimensional perspective that accommodates the complexity of social reality. Gender identity is proven to be not merely the result of internalizing religious or cultural norms, but also an arena of contestation between patriarchal structures, religious authority, social pressure, and women's efforts in resistance and negotiation. Thus, this research contributes to strengthening the discourse of Islamic feminism, which not only highlights equality within a normative-theological framework but also uncovers the empirical realities experienced by Muslim women in diverse global and local contexts.

When compared to previous studies, the results of this research show significant points of convergence as well as differences. A number of previous studies asserted that patriarchal dominance is a hegemonic structure that systematically limits women's participation in the public sphere through both social norms and religious authority (Ledesma & Delgado, 2025). However, the results of this review reveal that the reality of Muslim women is far more complex, with the emergence of various forms of resistance that operate not only in the formal realm through community activism but also at the epistemic level through efforts to reinterpret religious texts (Van den Brandt, 2024). This resistance shows that women are not merely objects of subordination, but also active subjects capable of reconstructing spaces for social, political, and religious participation. This difference has theoretical and practical significance, as it signifies a paradigm shift from a singular narrative of female subordination in Islam towards a more pluralistic, contextual, and interactive understanding. Thus, this study enriches academic discourse by showing that the experiences of Muslim women are not uniform, but are determined by local dynamics, identity politics, and interaction with global discourse on gender equality. These findings simultaneously affirm the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in Islamic and gender studies so that the diversity of women's resistance strategies



can be understood more comprehensively and their contribution to shaping a more inclusive public sphere recognized.

The scientific contribution of this article lies in a new conceptual mapping of Muslim women's strategies in facing entrenched structural limitations, while simultaneously enriching global feminist literature with a non-Western perspective that is often overlooked in the mainstream of academic discourse. By integrating postcolonial feminist theory and Islamic feminism, this research not only highlights how Muslim women negotiate their space for movement within patriarchal social and religious systems but also proposes an alternative analytical framework that is more inclusive of diverse contexts. This approach shows that the discourse on gender equality cannot be separated from specific historical, cultural, political, and religious conditions (Simmonds & Berghs, 2024). Moreover, this article strengthens the argument that Western feminist theories need to be critiqued due to their tendency to generalize and universalize women's experiences. In many cases, the Western feminist framework fails to capture the nuances of the complexity of Muslim women's identities, which are influenced by the intersection of religion, ethnicity, class, and colonial history. Therefore, this research contributes to expanding the horizon of global feminism by presenting the voices and experiences of Muslim women as subjects of knowledge, not merely as objects of study. This simultaneously affirms the importance of building a more dialogical, contextual, and sensitive feminist theory towards the plurality of women's experiences across different parts of the world.

Nevertheless, this research is not without its critical limitations. First, the limited access to non-English literature means that much of the analysis is still dominated by English-language academic perspectives, so that local dynamics in Muslim communities in Asia, Africa, or the Middle East may be inadequately represented. This condition implies a reduction in the complexity of the experiences of Muslim women, which are actually very diverse across various geographical and cultural contexts. Second, the methodological limitation in the form of reliance on peer-reviewed publications poses a risk of selection bias, as forms of knowledge that develop in informal social spaces such as community media, oral traditions, cultural practices, or digital expressions tend to be overlooked (Ledesma & Delgado, 2025). In fact, these informal arenas often become important spaces for women to articulate resistance and negotiate their social roles outside of formal academic frameworks.

These limitations must be acknowledged so that the reading of the research findings remains proportional and does not fall into epistemological bias that only prioritizes certain sources. Furthermore, the acknowledgment of these limitations also opens opportunities for further research to explore alternative knowledge sources, expand cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies, and integrate ethnographic or participatory approaches to capture the diversity of Muslim women's resistance strategies in a more authentic and contextual social space.

The implications of these findings include two main points. First, for researchers, there is an urgent need to expand the space for intersectional analysis in gender studies in Muslim communities, including reaching the experiences of women outside of urban and academic contexts. Second, for policymakers, these results indicate the importance of formulating public policies that are not only formally oriented towards equality but also consider the socio-religious dynamics that shape gender practices at the community level (McCann et al., 2025). Thus, this research provides a practical contribution to supporting more inclusive social development, while also paving the way for further in-depth research on gender transformation in contemporary Muslim communities.





#### 4. CONCLUSION

The main findings of this research indicate that the issue of gender in Muslim communities, particularly concerning the public sphere, is the result of a complex interaction between evolving social norms, cultural values, and religious interpretations. A systematic analysis of the available literature reveals three important points: first, women's participation in the public sphere is often influenced by patriarchal social constructions; second, there are layered challenges including discrimination, marginalization, and limited access; and third, Muslim women are actively developing strategies of resistance and negotiation to expand their space for participation. Thus, this research successfully answers the main questions regarding the influence of gender norms, the challenges faced by women, and the potential for perceptual change within Muslim communities.

The theoretical contribution of this article lies in strengthening the understanding of the social construction of gender through the integration of feminist perspectives and the Islamic context, while also enriching the global discourse on gender equality with the diverse experiences of Muslim women. Practically, this research offers a conceptual basis for developing more inclusive public policies, especially in accommodating the needs for women's participation in the Muslim community sphere. Conceptually, this study affirms that feminist theory needs to be supplemented with approaches that are more sensitive to religious and cultural dynamics to avoid homogenizing women's experiences.

As an implication, this research recommends the need for further exploration of women's resistance practices at the local community level, particularly those not yet documented in formal literature. Furthermore, cross-cultural and cross-geographical studies can enrich the understanding of the variety of strategies adopted by Muslim women in overcoming gender barriers. For policymakers, it is important to formulate interventions that are not only normative but also participatory, by involving women as key actors in formulating equitable public space policies.

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