Raising Boys to be Men: Indonesian Muslim Single Mothers’ Perspective

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ABSTRACT: Due to the pressure of society on boys as the future heads of households, in addition to the trend of masculinity crisis and male underachievement in education, single parents bear the massive burden of parenting, educating and nurturing boys without the presence of their fathers. Single mothers must prepare specific strategies to fulfil their boys’ need for a father figure. This study aims to provide an overview of single mothers’ strategies for parenting their sons. This study uses a qualitative method. The phenomenological approach is used in this study. Researchers used purposive sampling in selecting informants, 5 informants were single mothers, 3 were due to the death of their husbands, and 2 were due to divorce. Data collection was carried out using in-depth interviews and documentation techniques. The analysis uses NVivo software. The findings of this study imply that to build the character of boys, apart from religious education and leadership, it is necessary to teach responsibility and train entrepreneurship skills so that they can stand on their own. To anticipate the father’s absence, he can be replaced or rely on close relatives such as uncles, grandfathers and ustads or teachers as a filler for the male figure. Besides, being a single mother due to divorce does not cut off the child's communication with his biological father. This paper sheds light on cross-gender parenting practices among Muslim single mothers. As a policy maker or social institution, it is appropriate to provide programs that help single mothers care for and educate their sons.

mengantisipasi ketidakhadiran sang ayah, maka ia dapat digantikan atau mengandalkan kerabat dekat seperti paman, kakek dan ustadz atau guru sebagai pengisi sosok laki-laki. Selain itu, menjadi single mother akibat perceraian tidak memutus komunikasi anak dengan ayah kandungnya. Makalah ini menyoroti praktik pengasuhan lintas gender di kalangan ibu tunggal Muslim. Sebagai pengambil kebijakan atau lembaga sosial, sudah selayaknya memberikan program yang membantu ibu tunggal dalam mengasuh dan mendidik anak laki-lakinya.

Keywords: Single Mother, Parenting, Boys, Islamic Education.

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I. INTRODUCTION

From the child development perspective, the involvement of both father and mother is significant (Piotrowska et al., 2017). Up to recently, fathers' involvement in parenting is still considered very limited (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). However, in the last decade, many studies have emphasized the importance of fathers' presence in parenting, such as (Vitz, 2013);(Kalil et al., 2016);(Bocknek, 2020);(Pablo et al., 2021);(Wei et al., 2023).

Globally, the academic underachievement of male students has been the topic of discussion among educators since the mid-2000s until now. Some academic journals are featured with discourses on the male crisis or masculinity crisis, which many researchers, journalists, academicians, and educational practitioners address as male underachievement (Siegle, 2018). Michael Kimmel, a professor in Sociology at the State University of New York, summarized that achievement disparity between two genders in education in developed countries is a systemic phenomenon which does not accidentally occur as an episode of life.

Female supremacy in education achievement can also be viewed in Indonesia. The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) report shows that female students achieved better results in Mathematics than their male counterparts (Lee, 2020). A study conducted by the World Bank involving 10,000 children aged between 6 and 9 revealed that girls achieved better results in cognitive skills, languages and Mathematics than boys. In addition, the national education statistic data issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology shows the dropout rate of male students is higher than their female counterparts in addition to the student failure rate.

The absence of a father figure in parenting and education at home is still seen as an inevitable problem for single mothers, as their expectation to rely on schools to fulfil the need for a father figure remains unrealized due to the lack number of male teachers to be made role model for boys (Zuhdi, 2021). (Ullah & Ullah, 2019) pointed at the phenomena of feminization of the teaching profession as the cause of the lack of role models for male students. The wonders of the feminization of education can also be seen in Indonesia, as the Indonesia Statistic Bureau 2020 data records 1.730.505 female teachers compared to 983.112 male teachers.

The unavailability of male role models for boys in school has given more burdens on single mothers in raising their boys. Hence, single mothers cannot rely on schools to
fulfil the need for a father figure. On the other hand, their social status as ‘widower’, whether due to divorce or death, creates more problems for them to move on and adjust to their new lifestyle. In addition, the stigma of being a widower has put additional pressure on single mothers (Nurwahidin et al., 2019). Due to this situation, children of single mothers are vulnerable to face well-being problems.

The national social economic survey conducted by the National Statistics Body of Indonesia recorded 11.5 million single mothers in 2020 in Indonesia. This number equals 15.7% of total households in Indonesia, which indicates the seriousness of the issue (Biro, 2020). The parenting process is problematic for single mothers when gender difference becomes a source of misunderstanding in communication. On the other hand, in a patriarchal culture, boys are set to become future leaders, whilst single mothers are facing difficulty in finding role models for their boys.

Their children need fathers’ presence as sustainers and family protectors. In 1930, Freud realized that fact as he said: I cannot think of such a strong need in the childhood of a person, such as the need to feel protected by a parent (Susilowati et al., 2018). Children, especially boys who grow up without fathers, tend to find problems in identity, achievement, school, psycho-social adjustment and aggressivity control ability. (Paquette et al., 2013) suggest that children, especially boys, need moral guidance, gender-role and role models from their fathers. Father’s involvement positively affects his children (Ramchandani et al., 2012). In a big-scale review of the father’s involvement in child development, (McKelley & Rochlen, 2016) found that there are seventeen positive implications associated with the father’s involvement in parenting, such as a decrease in behavioural problems, an increase in cognitive and a decrease in delinquencies in boys.

There are many children in the world who grow up without a father. The data indicates that in the last decade, the number of fatherless children has increased (East et al., 2014). Many studies have found the negative impact of growing up with a single parent. (Molina, 2018) stressed children’s health, while (Gardner, 2011) observed the possibility of a lack of children's social and cognitive skills due to the absence of a father. Further, they justify that the absence of a father causes a loss of control over aggression, which links to children's decrease in social and cognitive skills. Meanwhile, (Abushaikha & Massah, 2012) added that the absence of a father figure eliminates the sense of security and support, considered essential elements of children’s emotional development.

The absence of a father in a household does not only affect the children. Furthermore, it also burdens the mother as she must play the role of both father and mother, in addition to the pain she suffers from the loss. (Matlakala, 2019) added that the problem of single mothers is that they must struggle to meet the basic needs of the family. Therefore, Single mothers with children tend to suffer from mental illness more than mothers with spouses, especially when they face financial and social problems and other obstacles. Single mothers with preschool children are reported to have the risk of suffering depression and anxiety symptoms twice as much as mothers who have spouses due to parenting stress (Liang et al., 2019). A study conducted in Sweden finds that single mothers’ children risk suffering from mental illness, tendency to commit suicide and drug addiction (Goodman et al., 2011). Due to all the obstacles faced, a negative parenting style seems to be dominantly practised by single mothers (Daryanani et al., 2016).
Previous studies on single mothers and parenting have been conducted over the years. A quantitative study by (Liang et al., 2019) involving 6925 single mothers from 271 paediatrician clinics in Germany finds that 30% of single mothers reported suffering from depression and symptoms of anxiety, while 37% of them suffered stress twice as much as mothers who have a spouse.

(Irianti, 2020) finds that optimism and subjective welfare of middle-aged single mothers are achievable through 4 ways: community support, daily routine and activities that positively affect their emotional condition, children as the centre of pride and achievement of single mothers and income or profession is not the main factor of subjective welfare.

(Clarisa & Hedi, 2018) find that although there is a low intensity of contact and communication between children and single mothers, relations between single mothers and children are still strong due to openness, trust and each other’s optimistic views. Besides, the communication process that single mothers do in giving their children freedom and responsibility to their children has indirectly shaped their futuristic and self-criticism attitudes.

A study on single mothers in Lombok Barat (Paramita, 2019) suggests that single mothers use three parenting styles with teenagers: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Meanwhile, (Nur, 2021) finds that single mothers apply democratic and authoritative parenting styles. She adds that single mothers who apply a democratic parenting style show traits that reflect the aspects of social intelligence, such as responsibility, warmth, and academic achievement. On the other hand, children who are raised with an authoritarian parenting style tend to have stagnancy in terms of social development.

Hence, the researchers summed up that although many studies involving single mothers have been carried out with a focus on well-being, stress, parenting styles and child-single mother relations, a specific study on single mother-son relations is hard to find. Hence, the researchers attempted to explore the experience of Indonesian Muslim single mothers in parenting their boys.

II. METHOD

This study employed qualitative methods, which generally aim to understand the experiences and behaviours of participants. The phenomenology approach was used in this study to examine how humans conclude the experience, sounds in words and meanings attributed to their experiences. The researchers used purposive sampling in selecting informants, with the pre-assumption that the individuals involved in the study represented people who experienced the same phenomenon. The informants were selected to be interviewed based on their experience, not their social variable (Cuesta-Benjumea, 2015). Patton suggested that this technique can improve the effectiveness of information taken from a relatively small number of samples. Hence, Five Muslim single mothers with experience raising boys were selected. The data collected through interviews were analyzed using NVivo software (Patton, 2014).
III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After the process of coding the data, five themes emerged. The themes are mental health, boys’ character building, communication, father figure for boys and single mothers’ expectations.

Table 1. Raising boys to be men: Indonesian muslim single mothers’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Mental health</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Building boys’ character</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Father figure for boys</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Single mothers’ aspirations</td>
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Mental Health

A father's death impacts his children and wife, who suddenly assumes a new status as a single mother. The haste to struggle to meet the family's living needs is a big deal (Matlakala, 2019) as a big deal. Many parents face this problem because they have to meet their family's needs. Many play dual roles as father and mother at the same time. The situation experienced by single mothers increases the risk of mental health problems, especially when they have financial and social problems. Single mothers with children reported suffering twice as many symptoms of depression and anxiety as single mothers with partners, in addition to the stress of parenting. To prevent mental illness and increase calm, single mothers need 'me time' to calm their minds and hearts (Rima, 2023).

In addition to the fatigue experienced by single mothers, children's mental health must also be considered. The fact that children of single mothers grow up without a father present raises even more problems that need to be addressed by experts. It is not uncommon for single parents to take their children to psychologists who say that as a single parent, they must accept that their child, who happens to be an orphan, will not be cared for perfectly. As compensation, she regularly visits her counsellor, asking for help raising her child. The absence of a father figure makes children more sensitive. This makes single mothers face many difficulties in making decisions about disciplining their children (Rima, 2023).

Regarding children's sensitivity, several parents were sad after being scolded by the teacher because of an incident involving a boy playing prayer who the teacher thought was involved, even though he was not (Rima, 2023). This hypersensitivity may be caused by the absence of the father in the family, which can lead to social pressure. As summarized, the absence of the father causes mental disorders (pathology) such as depression, which can hurt parenting patterns and parent-child relationships and disrupt parent-child communication. All informants in this research were aware of this fact. Therefore, they tend to be careful in communicating with boys and have difficulty disciplining boys.

Building Boys’ Character

The upbringing of boys and girls must be done differently. (APA, 2022) argue that parents tend to treat boys and girls differently because meta-analyses conducted in Western countries other than North America show that parents use physical punishment more against boys than girls.
As a mother, it is easier to raise girls than boys. Girls are handled more by their mothers, unlike boys, who need more effort because they need the father's role in caring for them. Differences in controlling boys and girls are caused by different perspectives in caring for boys and girls. Research found that boys are likelier to have disruptive behaviour problems in childhood and adolescence than girls. Therefore, (Wasserman, 2020) suggests that children raised by single parents are more likely to experience behavioural problems than children raised in nuclear families.

Several informants stated that differences in parenting styles for boys and girls were caused by different goals in caring for boys and girls. Therefore, most informants believe that male characters in boys must be developed because they believe that boys must be prepared to become men and leaders, at least for their families. Parents are obliged to raise their sons to be ready to become leaders in the future. He was sure God would hold him accountable if he did not do that (Rima, 2023); (Saputri et al., 2022).

The same concern is acknowledged by some parents who emphasize the position of men in Islam appointed as leaders. Becoming a future leader requires long-term preparation, not a short preparation of one or two years. Therefore, he believes religious knowledge and practice are the keys to good leadership. Apart from being educated to be competent in religious knowledge and responsible for practising religion, boys are also expected to obey their parents and pray for their children when they die.

Parents highlight entrepreneurial education for their sons besides spiritual and religious education. Therefore, as a single mother, Rima, who also runs an online shop to meet the needs of her family, has indirectly taught her son how to do business. When explaining the importance of entrepreneurship to his son, he emphasized that trading is a noble profession. He gave the example that Khadijah Bint Khuwailid, wife of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, was also a merchant. This reminds his son that he does not need to be ashamed of being a trader (Rima, 2023).

In addition to responsibility, religiosity and leadership, boys must be trained to protect and avoid violence. Boys must be trained to have self-discipline, endurance, and good academic abilities. There are many habits that children can do with outdoor activities and sports not only to maintain health but also for character-building purposes. Apart from that, he added that independence is essential to cultivate in boys (Apaydin Cirik et al., 2023).

In terms of forming a boy's character, a father plays a vital role, as stated by (Birhan et al., 2021) in research, which proves that a father's involvement in raising children significantly influences character strength. Therefore, in the absence of a father, a single mother requires more effort to realize the formation of a son's character (Winarti & Astuti, 2022).

**Communication**

Communication problems are experienced by many parents with sons. It can be seen that there are differences in communication styles between boys and girls because of the physical differences inherent in each of them. In addition, communication problems, the generational gap between mother and son coupled with interpersonal communication challenges between them as a gender factor in parent-child relationships were suggested by (Suitor et al., 2015).
Single mothers who have sons experience difficulties in communicating due to gender differences. This results in the son's refusal to follow directions given by his mother (Rima, 2023). Therefore, mothers must learn to understand their children's verbal and nonverbal communication patterns. This is in line with the findings of (Aressa et al., 2016) regarding significant differences in interpersonal communication from the perspective of parents and children of the opposite sex.

Differences in communication styles between men and women also emphasize that gender differences between mothers and sons affect communication patterns (Rima, 2023). Men speak less than women, which is in line with research (Wisnuwardani & Mashoedi, 2012), which emphasizes that men can use around 12,500 words a day, while women generally use more than 25,000 words a day. Therefore, a mother of a son should be able to communicate with her son more simply, using fewer words and to the point.

**Father Figure for Boys**

The father figure is significant in raising children, especially for boys, although in some families, mothers are more dominant in raising children than fathers. Although there is an opinion that the mother is considered the first madrasah (school) for her child, the father's role as a role model is undeniably essential. It is found that many studies show that mothers play a more significant role in raising children than fathers. However, fathers' contribution to raising children is increasing and raising children cannot be considered as one parent's work alone.

There are many stories about father figures who are often left behind because they work outside the city. However, even though the husband is out of town, the relationship between the sons and their father remains good, as they often communicate by telephone (Rima, 2023). The importance of a father figure for sons. A mother sometimes worries that her son will be influenced by his mindset as a mother because of his daily life with his mother. For him, fathers must be role models for boys in practising their religion and playmates and advisors on matters relating to male sexuality.

When asked by single mothers about father substitutes, mothers who are widowed due to the death of their husbands tend to use their sons' uncles and grandfathers as substitutes. Apart from that, the religious education teacher was also replaced by his late father. The replacement of the same sex is expected to expedite the communication process because the language used in conversations between men is different from that used in conversations between women and men, so it is hoped that it will be easier to accept good advice given by adults of the same sex.

Meanwhile, single mothers who are widows due to divorce require their sons' fathers to be actively involved in replacing the father's role. Whatever happens between parents, sons have rights over their fathers. Therefore, single mothers should not be selfish by creating a distance between ex-husbands and their children, let alone badmouthing them in front of their children (Rima, 2023).

The importance of a father figure for boys nurtured by single mothers is parallel with the findings of (Paquette et al., 2013), who suggest that children, especially boys, need moral and gender-role guidance from their fathers. In the less ideal situation, uncles, grandfathers, religious teachers, and biological fathers who have already remarried...
other women must make themselves available to substitute the father role for boys single mothers raise.

**Single Mothers’ Aspirations**

The support system for single mothers must be robust. Many parents hope that more aid will be provided through mental health services for trauma healing and counselling for children from troubled families. Free courses for single mothers should be organized. These courses aim to maintain single mothers’ mental health and spiritual well-being and equip them with the competencies to be independent.

The importance of government and the environment in shaping the characteristics of boys who become single mothers. It is widely hoped that the government will be more sensitive to the care needs of boys by providing more activities that can build boys' character so that boys grow up with a healthy and straight sexual identity without deviation (Rima, 2023).

Community involvement and government support are essential elements in the welfare of single mothers, as stated by (Muarifah et al., 2019). Therefore, public services in the form of group psychoeducation are needed by our society to increase social support for single mothers who have problems with their past. In addition, these activities can help them prepare for their future in raising and educating boys.

**Table 2. Single mothers’ strategies**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>To take care of mothers’ mental health before the children by providing 'me time' to get tranquillity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To seek to consult a psychologist and religious teacher (ustadh) for preventive or curative measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Building Boys’ Character</td>
<td>To inculcate religious and spiritual education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To nurture self-discipline and responsibility through assigning tasks.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To train the boys to be young entrepreneurs by training them to sell things in the market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>To learn to understand boys’ communication patterns better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To narrow the mother-son communication gap by using fewer words while communicating with boys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Father Figure for Boys</td>
<td>To connect the boys with their paternal relatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To allow ex-husband to get connected with his boy.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To involve local religious teachers in educating the boys.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**IV. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study imply that in raising and educating sons, single mothers face many challenges and obstacles. The absence of a husband as a partner in caring for and educating, in addition to the importance of the father’s role and the existence of gender differences between single mothers and sons, can lead to misunderstandings in communication and difficulties in forming male characteristics. Single mothers must ensure that they have time to maintain their mental health. In building the character of
boys apart from religious and leadership education, it is necessary to learn responsibility and entrepreneurship to help them to be able to stand upright. The father figure is significant in parenting. One can rely on an uncle, grandfather or teacher to replace a father's absence. In addition, single mothers who are separated from their partners due to divorce allow their ex-husbands to interact with their children.

V. REFERENCES


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