

The Empowerment of Women: Eliminating Communication Inequality based on Islamic Perspective

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Abstract— According to Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics, there were 347.256 divorce cases during 2015. The number tends to increase annually. Allegedly, communication disharmony is the major factor causing divorce. In fact, communication is essential for a family. Most of Indonesians, based on the culture and religious factors, still believes that husband holds the position of decision makers; and wife shall obey husband. The deeply rooted patriarchal culture indicates that some Indonesian women are lack of opportunities to speak up. It seems that there is an inequality between husbands and wives to express opinions or arguments. This paper has explored Islam’s view on the empowerment of communication between husband and wife. The study employed a qualitative approach and a case study method. The data were collected through an in-depth interview, a focus group discussion, and an analysis of documents. The study took place in Desa Cilame where a group of women becomes the head of households. The women were subjects of empowerment programs provided by some Muslim scholars. The results of the study reveal the concept of women empowerment in Islam. Firstly, women are “the gate of heaven” for their parents and the heaven for their children. Secondly, Islam gives freedom for women to actualize themselves by taking part in social activities so they can be knowledgeable and skilled. Thirdly, Islam perceives that husband-wife relationship is not superordinate-subordinate one, but it is a relationship of love and affection where the basic convention is peace and tranquility. In communication, Islam regulates that wife and husband must use their “heart” (slowly, clearly, and well arranged) when they talk to each other.

Keywords— *Inequality, empowerment, Islamic View, Communication*

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender equality still endures. This social phenomenon has been going on for a long time. Women sometimes feel that they have no right to express their desires, opinions, or choices freely. This has become a polemic in Indonesia. Many women feel the effects of gender inequality that has lasted for years.

Gender inequality mainly occurs in married life. It emerges as a prolonged conflict involving husband and wife. Since it occurs continuously, it may lead to domestic violence. Domestic violence is a social phenomenon that has been taking place for a long time in the world, including in

West Java, Indonesia. It is barely heard due to the assumption that it is too taboo to be discussed openly. Central Data of the Integrated Service Center for Women and Children Empowerment (P2TP2A) in West Java shows that the rate of violence in West Java is still relatively high. Most violence cases in West Java have been dominated by cases of sexual and domestic violences, especially in Bandung (the Capital City of West java) and its surroundings. The Chairperson of P2TP2A West Java, Netty Heryawan, reveals 160 cases of child abuse and 168 cases of violence against women during 2017.¹

According to the Law Number 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence, Article 5, everyone is prohibited from committing violence against persons in their household by any means of physical, psychological, sexual violence, or domestic neglect.

The 1945 Constitution states “*All citizens shall be equal before the law and the government and shall be required to respect the law and the government, with no exceptions*”. The provision substantiates that men and women are equal before the law. Women are equal partners for men, they have the equal rights, obligations, and opportunities in every field of life, including in the household.

The main cause of domestic violence in most part of Indonesia is due to the perspective that men have higher position than women do. Due to this perspective, there is a gender inequality. Gender inequality is the difference between the roles and rights of men and women within society, which place women in a lower status than men. The main factor is the imbalance power relations between women and men. Therefore, men mostly feel more powerful. They have rights to regulate, to direct, and to control women. The one with power will exercise the power.

Islam strongly opposes violence in any forms, including in domestic life. The principle of Islamic household is *sakinah, mawadah, wa rahmah* (safe, affection, and compassion). The Holy Quran states “*And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought*” (Ar-Ruum: 21).

Based on the backgrounds above, this study is intended to observe program to empower the women in Desa Cilame. It is to eliminate communication inequality based on Islamic perspective. In short, the study reveals the empowerment of the women in Desa Cilame to eliminate communication inequality, obstacles of communication, and the importance of inequality elimination based on Islamic perspective to empower the women in Desa Cilame.

II. THEORETICAL BASE

A. Empowerment

This study follows the definition of World Bank (2001, 39) that Empowerment means “*enhancing the capacity of poor people to influence the state institutions that affect their lives, by strengthening their participation in political processes and local decision-making*”. Adam points out that empowerment is the capacity of individuals, groups and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power, and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives (Nurmandi, 2015)

In academic literature, the word empowerment first came onto the scene concerning civil rights. In 1983, the Women’s Studies International Forum discussed empowerment of women in “Power and Empowerment” (Moglen, 1983). Up to now, the literature has increasingly been focused on these issues. In 2010, Augustine (2010) demonstrates a few ways of empowerment discussion in the academic community. The term empowerment refers to designed measures to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and in communities to enable them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, as well as to act on their own authority. It is the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights. Empowerment as action refers both to the process of self-empowerment and to professional support of people, which enables them to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence, and to recognize and use their resources. Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland, define empowerment as the process of enhancing an individual’s capacity to make choices and then transforming those choices into the sought after outcome (World Bank, 2006). Similarly, Narayan mentions the definition of empowerment as increasing poor people’s freedom of choice and action to shape their own lives (World Bank, 2002).

From some definitions, it can be concluded that empowerment is very multidimensional and it can be exercised on many different levels and domains. Empowerment is also relational since it occurs in relation to whom a person interacts. Empowerment is not a zero-sum game, but it is the types of power, such as power over, power to, power with, and power within. Empowerment is also extremely culturally specific. It is related to norms, values, and beliefs of a society (such as Islam). Therefore, empowerment can be revealed differently in different societies.

B. Husband and Wife Relationship

The Qur’an (49:13) describes clearly the process of how human beings were created that God created a man from a couple of a man and a woman. From a couple, it will born some other couples. This shows that a human being is a family. The “uniform” creation process is a proof that all humans are the same. Therefore, humans should have the same position. There is no difference between one human being and another except in his devotion to God.

Islam shows that women and men are equal in terms of rights and responsibilities in Al-Hujurat: 13 and Ali Imran: 195 of the Holy Quran, the position of both women and men are equal before God in terms of their good faith. Therefore, they must obtain equal status and both have been declared equal by God. Indeed, Islam puts a husband as head of family, as stated in the following Quranic verse.

The men are leaders for women, because Allah has overestimated some of them (men) over the others (women), and because they (men) have given up some of their possessions (An-Nisaa: 34)

Interpreting this verse, al-Alusi, an Islamic scholar, states that job of husbands is to take care of wives as the authorities take care of the people with orders, prohibitions, and so on. Therefore, the position of the husband is to reach the limit, which is to take care and to the wife and the wife must obey and accept her husband’s orders as long as it is not immoral.

In conducting his obligation and rights in his family, a husband must do in balance between assertiveness and tenderness, if he uses the assertiveness without tender, he might create a domestic violence. Therefore, Islam teaches its adherents to remind each other, to exhort each other, and to pray.

Islam is a peaceful religion and forbids husbands to (1) make a blow or *hajr* as the first way to solve a household problem; (2) take out words that are not good, like *qabbahakillah* (may Allah make you bad); (3) leave the wife outside the house without necessity; (4) hit on wife’s face; and (5) hit beyond reasonable limits.

Islam also respects and glorifies women. God gives the virtue of mother over father. A wife will easily reach God’s love as the reflection of her devotion to God if she obeys her husband.

God provides men with the power of reason, rational, not easily driven by feelings. However, women are sensitive and irritable. Women’s feelings are too easily disturbed by the atmosphere and surroundings. Women are provided with nine passions and one sense is compared to men who are created with only one passion and nine senses. It was also said that the nine-tenths of the woman’s self was feeling and only one-tenth of reason was reason. That is why women must be guided by men so that their actions do not follow feelings solely.

Obedience of wife to husband is a guarantee of heaven. Husband can be either pathways to heaven or hell for a wife. Husband’s pleasure is God’s pleasure. A wife who is not blessed by her husband for being disobedient is said to be a woman who is ungodly and *kufur* in favor.

C. Women Empowerment In Islamic Perspective

Women's empowerment in the perspective of Islam is an effort to Islam women's intelligence to be able to play a role in perfecting all obligations to Allah, both in the domestic and public spheres. Women's empowerment is based on the vision to be qualified women, the partners of their husbands producing qualified and bright generation, and building strong family. The missions are to (1) strengthen the resilience of Muslim families; (2) give birth to a quality generation of Muslims; (3) build a strong character in the framework of conducting good things and avoiding bad things; and (4) be men's partners in the household and community.

The empowered women have the roles in the family, to become mothers and household managers in resilience. In the community, they are politically intelligent Muslim role models. The success of a woman in the domestic sector (household) is marked by her perfect role as a mother and household manager in accordance with the rules that God has sent down. She becomes good wife for her pious husband. Also, she became an educator of her children, regulator of her household affairs. The typical Islamic personality possessed by women is the main capital to educate the generation they give birth. A woman's primary and first service is to become a mother and generation educator.

A woman is a mother and household manager. This task is only devoted to women and the implementation of this task will be able to guarantee the sustainability of the human generation and ensure the calm of human individuals in their families. To ensure the survival of this generation of humans, Allah has set a number of specific laws for women. The good and bad behavior of children in adulthood is determined by the correctness of education provided by their parents, in this case by women as mothers. Women are called by Allah to create peace in their homes and a sense of affection with their husbands.

Islam also gives a role to women in their position as members of society. Islam allows women to work outside. Even if a woman can work outside the home, she must pay attention that her activities outside the home and do not neglect her basic duties stipulated by certain laws. Islam also stipulates that women must engage in interactions and activities in people's lives to fulfill obligations, namely the obligation to preach. In socio-political life, Islam provides opportunities for men and women to play a role in society. Islam gives the right to choose a leader or choose a representative who will convey his right to vote, or she becomes a representative of another person. Hence, it can be concluded that Islam has given some good roles to women either in the domestic sector or in the community, so that they can be equal with men. With the roles, women can reach high devotion and be blessed by God.

D. Communication in Islam

In the perspective of Islam, communication is to establish communication horizontally with fellow humans, in addition to creating a relationship with God. Communication with God is reflected through the worship (prayer, fasting, charity, and *hajj* pilgrimage) to form piety. Communication with fellow human beings is realized through the emphasis on

social relations called *muamalah* (relationship), which is reflected in all aspects of human life, such as social, cultural, political, economic, artistic, etc.

In a family, communication is the core of the relationship among all members of the family. In conducting communication, Islam has put up some rules, called as principles, or Islamic communication ethics as follows.

The first is *Qaulan Sadidan*. It means speaking and saying correct words only, both in terms of substance (material, content, and message) and editorial (grammar). In terms of substance, Islamic communication must inform or convey the truth, factual, correct, and honest, not lie, nor do they manipulate or manipulate facts.

The second is *Qaulan Baligha*. It means using words that are effective, on target, communicative, easy to understand, straight to the point, and not convoluted or wordy. In order for communication to be right on target, the style of speech and message conveyed should be adjusted to the level of communicant intellectuality and use language that is understood by them.

The third is *Qaulan Ma'rufa*. It means useful and goodness. It is mentioned in Quran that the Muslims must not surrender to those who have not perfected their minds, property that are made by God as the principal of life. (An-Nissa: 5)

The fourth is *Qaulan Karima*. It means a noble saying, respect and glorification, pleasant to hear, gentle, and polite. Noble words must be given when a Muslim speaks to both parents. The Muslims are forbidden to shout at their parents or say words that hurt them. The *Qaulan Karima* must be used especially when communicating with both parents or elderly.

The fifth is *Qaulan Layina*. It means soft talk, with a voice that is pleasant to hear, and full of hospitality, so that it can touch others' hearts. *Layina* can be interpreted as satire words, not with words straightforwardly or straightforwardly, let alone rough. *Qaulan Layina* makes the heart of the communicant (the person who is invited to communicate) to feel touched and his soul is moved to receive our communication message.

The sixth, the last, is *Qaulan Maysura*. It means easy speech, which is easy to digest and to be understood by the communicant. Another meaning is words that are fun or contain exciting things. The informing party (communicator) carries out communication to the recipient (communicant). Effective communication occurs when something (message) is notified that the communicator can be received well or equally by the communicant, so there is no misperception.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research used a case study approach knowing that in Desa Cilame, the research location, some problems concerning the household cracks relatively highly. The number of divorced couples tends to increase every year, early marriage is still high, and the records of domestic violence cases are also high. Desa Cilame consists of 26 RWs (*Rukun Warga*, equals to hamlet) and 15 of them are poor families. The social background of the society belongs

to middle-low level with low level of education. Most of the people graduated from primary school, especially the women. After graduating, then they got married. They did not have any skills to support.

The subjects of the research are the community of Desa Cilame participating in some Islamic lessons, such as Quran Recitation, Islamic lectures, and Muslim congregation. The Quran recitation is conducted every Thursday night for the men, and Friday afternoon for the women. Men and women at the same time without separation can study Islam lectures. They can select and join the class they are interested in. The Muslim congregation is organized once a month. It is called *tabligh akbar*. The sermons are given by the Muslim scholars either man or woman. The lectures are focused on the three basic Islamic Teaching. They are *aqeeda* (beliefs), *sharia* (principles and laws), and *akhlaq* (moral). The data were collected through in depth interview and participant observation before they were analyzed qualitatively.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. *The Empowerment of Women in Desa Cilame*

The main goal of the empowerment program is to improve the status, position, and condition of women. They are expected to achieve progress that is in line with men, so there will be equality in some ways between men and women. The realization empowerment covers (1) the increase of the position and role of women in various fields of life; (2) the increase of the role of women as decision makers in realizing gender equality and justice; (3) the improvement of the quality of the independence of women's organizations by maintaining the value of unity; (4) the increase of the commitment and ability of all institutions that fight for gender equality and justice; and (5) Developing women's empowerment, family and community welfare and child protection.

The realization of empowerment program is in proportion to the Islamic teachings, knowing that Islam teaches equality in the most essential and perfect form. Islam teaches that all human beings in terms of their dignity are equal before God. There is no difference between one human being and another except in devotion to God. Islam shows that women and men are equal and balanced in terms of rights and responsibilities. Islam also regulates that women can have roles in both domestic and public sector.

In Desa Cilame, in which there are still some serious problems of woman empowerment in education, economy, health, family resilience, and social relation, some Islamic women organizations are collaborated with the local government to conduct some activities. They give the Quranic teachings for the groups of women. The groups decided when they conduct the activities, the recitation is lead by an *ustazah* (a female teacher). The *ustazah* will teach to read the Quran accurately, then discuss the contents and messages from the verses they read. Such the activities are expected to increase those women's knowledge and understanding towards their life.

In improving the moral of the women especially to strengthen the family resilience, the Chairperson of PKK (Group of Family Welfare Fostering) and the *ustazah* conduct some training programs, such as *Cantin* (debriefing for brides), 3 Ends (End Violence Against Women and

Children; End Human Trafficking; and End Barriers To Economic Justice), and Interactive Dialogue about Marriage and Family Household, and Public Speaking. The activities are arranged not only in the form of lecturing, but also in practice. It is to foster the participants to implement their understanding about the materials given. The *ustazah*, who is facilitated by the local government, also provides the women with the consultation clinic called *Rumah Sakinah*. In this clinic, women are actually able to improve themselves to be empowered especially in spirituality and religiosity, which in turn will help them improve the quality of their relation with their husbands and the family members. In the end, the objective to improve the family resilience can be realized.

B. *The Elimination of Obstacles in Empowerment of Women in Desa Cilame*

Empowerment program is not an easy activity to do. It is a long complicated process, which needs some efforts in deed. In conducting the empowerment program for women in Desa Cilame, some obstacles occurs. The obstacles can arise both internally and externally. The obstacles, among others, are (1) lack of relations with the community outside; (2) the traditional attitude of the community; (3) prejudice against new or foreign matters; (4) Traditions/Customs; (5) Dependence; (6) Self-distrust; (7) Insecurity and regression; (8) conforming to norms; (9) Systemic and cultural coherence; and (10) The sacrosanct.

The empowerment program cannot be effectively conducted as long as the obstacles still exist. Therefore, the local government, together with the *ustazah* and the women organizations, pay attention to the programs that may be required to be able to work as a solid team. As the team, they need to have a well-organized structure.

The structural organization makes them easier to coordinate one another. In addition, it can help them to expand the networking. This is completely needed to respond to the lack of relations with the community outside. A relation with the community outside is needed to support the empowerment program. As seen above, the obstacles in the empowerment program in Desa Cilame are concerned to the internal factors of the women themselves, such as traditional attitude, prejudice, dependence, self-distrust, insecurity and regression, conforming to norms, and sacrosanct. To deal with those internal barriers within the women participating the empowerment program needs the socio-psychological approach, so the assistance from psychologists, communicators as well as the Muslim scholars are very helpful. The other obstacles found are related to cultures and traditions. To handle those obstacles the organization collaborates with some customary leaders, so the program of empowerment can be well-conducted.

C. *The Importance of Empowerment of Women in Desa Cilame*

Mubarak (2010) states that community empowerment can be interpreted as an effort to restore or enhance the ability of a community to be able to act in accordance with their dignity to carry out their rights and responsibilities as members of the community. Empowerment is a process and purpose. As a process, empowerment is a series of activities

to strengthen power or empowerment of weak groups in society, including individuals who experience poverty problems. As an objective, empowerment refers to situation or outcome to be achieved by a social change. It covers the people who are empowered, have the power, or have the knowledge and ability to fulfill their physical, economical, and social needs. Therefore, they are expected to have self-confidence, be able to convey aspirations, have a livelihood, participate in social activities, and be independent in carrying out their life duties (Sipahelut, 2010).

The empowerment of women must not be neglected. The role of women in development is very significant as long as they are competent and qualified enough. If women are of good quality, then women can build good household quality. Women are able to empower themselves and their families more independently and are able to improve their lives optimally. The quality of women as mothers greatly determines the quality of their children's growth and development. Women are also very dominant in realizing a Quality Family through maintenance and functions or "caring and parenting". Women, who have high educational achievements coupled with a good personality, will affect the quality of good care for their children. This is in line with Islamic concept stating that a mother is the fundamental and first *madrrasah* (school) in guiding her children. Therefore, a mother needs to be facilitated with good education, personality, skill, moral, strong belief, and communication skill that make her confident and able to manage their household. The concept of empowerment as a process is consistent with Islamic concept about continuous improvement. Islam urges that "*today must be better than yesterday, and tomorrow must better than today*". This means that everybody needs to always make improvement from time to time. It is similar to the concept of life long education. Islam teaches, God will not change the fate of a people unless the people, themselves, change the fate. The self-continuous improvement and sustainable change are completely required to make a women community powerful and autonomous (empowered). Therefore, they can reach their self-esteem and dignity.

V. CONCLUSION

This study provides several conclusions related to the issues addressed.

Firstly, the empowerment of women in Desa Cilame is to eliminate the communication inequality. The empowerment programs are focused on three aspects of Islamic teachings: *aqeeda* (devotion to God and beliefs), *akhlak* (Moral), and *muamalah* (Relations).

Secondly, to eliminate the obstacles of the women empowerment program in Desa Cilame, there are possible solutions: (1) strengthening the organizational structure; (2) developing the networking with community outside; and (3) collaborating with the psychologists and customary leaders.

Thirdly, the women in Desa Cilame needs to be empowered to become qualified persons who have good knowledge, competence, and skill which are supported by good personality and behavior relevant with culture, spirituality and religiosity. Women have to become fundamental school for their children to produce strong and bright generation. They also need to improve the welfare of

their household by getting involved in some development programs.

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