
The Role of the Salimah Organization in Women's Empowerment: A Multidimensional Study in Banyumas Regency

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the role of the Salimah organization in women's empowerment in Banyumas Regency through a multidimensional approach, covering economic, educational, spiritual, and socio-cultural aspects. The study employs a qualitative method and case study approach, focusing on various programs run by Salimah, such as economic skill training, family education, and spiritual reinforcement. Economic programs include skill training, cooperatives, and shops that help women achieve financial independence, while family education programs aim to build family resilience through premarital and parenting guidance. The spiritual programs enhance women's understanding of religion and confidence in their social roles. The study's findings indicate that Salimah's comprehensive approach effectively improves the well-being and active role of women in local development. These programs also strengthen women's position within the family and community, promote gender equality, and build social solidarity. Additionally, Salimah has gained community recognition as an organization advocating for women's empowerment based on religious values. This empowerment model by Salimah can be adapted by other organizations within communities of similar context. The study suggests that women's empowerment programs should emphasize a holistic approach to produce sustainable, positive impacts in community-based empowerment.

KEYWORD: Organizational Role; Religious Organizations, Women's Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is a critical agenda in Indonesia's national development, especially in the context of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Faith-based community organizations play a strategic role in women's empowerment efforts, particularly at the grassroots level (Setiawan et al., 2023). Although various empowerment initiatives are carried out by government and non-government organizations, the role of religious organizations holds a unique position due to their ability to integrate religious values with modern empowerment principles (Jannah, 2020). This approach is significant given the strong influence of religious interpretations in shaping social perceptions and practices regarding women's roles and status in Indonesian society (Pakarti et al., 2023). One active organization in this field is Salimah, officially known as Persaudaraan Muslimah. In Indonesia, Islamic women's organizations like Salimah have long contributed to women's empowerment through various programs encompassing social, economic, and spiritual dimensions (Puspawati et al., 2020).

According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the labor force participation rate of women in Indonesia remains at 54.5%, significantly lower than that of men, which reaches 84.2% (BPS, 2023). This gap is exacerbated by the fact that 64.25% of women work in the informal sector with minimal social protection (BPS, 2023; Putri et al., 2024). Furthermore, the Annual Report from Komnas Perempuan notes that gender-based violence accounts for 75.5% of all reported complaints (CATAHU Komnas Perempuan, 2024). Religious organizations, with their socio-religious legitimacy, have the potential to become catalysts of change through a multidimensional approach in women's empowerment (Syafar, 2018). This approach includes spiritual-religious, economic, educational, socio-cultural, and health dimensions, integrated within a comprehensive empowerment framework. The uniqueness of this approach lies in its ability to address cultural-religious resistance, which often hinders conventional women's empowerment programs.

Salimah's mission is to build women's independence by promoting Islamic values aligned with efforts to strengthen family and community resilience. Haeba et al. (2024) highlight that Islamic women's organizations have a distinctive approach to empowerment, combining religious values with contemporary needs (Haeba et al., 2024). This aligns with Wulandari's (2024) findings, which identify the effectiveness of empowerment programs that integrate religious values with capacity building (Wulandari, 2024).

However, there is still a knowledge gap regarding how religious organizations implement a multidimensional approach to women's empowerment, particularly in Indonesia's socially and culturally diverse context. Previous studies tend to focus on single

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aspects, such as economics (Habib, 2021) or education (Laksono, 2019), without deeply exploring how various empowerment dimensions are integrated and holistically implemented.

In Banyumas Regency, Salimah plays an important role in encouraging women to be more active in social activities while enhancing their capacity to carry out roles within family and community environments. Through skill training and educational programs, Salimah strives to improve women's economic capabilities and access to valuable information. These programs include training in sewing, cooking, and starting small businesses that support family finances, which not only enhance economic welfare but also reduce dependence on male income as family heads.

This research aims to analyze Salimah's role in women's empowerment in Banyumas Regency through a multidimensional approach. Fathy (2019) emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive analysis of women's empowerment programs that cover various dimensions to understand the impacts produced holistically. This study will examine how economic, social, spiritual, and cultural dimensions interconnect to shape an effective empowerment model, while also contributing to the development of community-based women's empowerment models applicable to other regions with similar characteristics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology with a case study approach as its analytical framework (Robert V. Kozinets, 2015). The case study approach was selected as it is deemed suitable for uncovering and thoroughly analyzing the implementation of empowerment programs carried out by the Salimah organization for women in Banyumas Regency. The research focuses on aspects of women's empowerment conducted through a faith-based community organization. Data collection involves three primary techniques: field observation, in-depth interviews, and document tracing (Akasse & Ramansyah, 2023; Pritandhari & Ratnawuri, 2018; Setiawati & Aji, 2023). Informants are selected through purposive sampling, where individuals are chosen based on specific criteria and considerations relevant to the research objectives (Matthew B. Miles et al., 2014). The informants include Salimah organization administrators and members.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women's empowerment is a strategic step in enhancing the role and capacity of women in the context of development. As noted by Nur (2019), empowerment serves as an essential tool for optimizing women's potential in various development sectors. Ulpa and Fatmariza (2020) highlight that this initiative aims to create comprehensive gender equality, encompassing decision-making, resource management, and the development of systems and structures that support equality. Winahyu and Rahayu (2024) further elaborate that women's empowerment emphasizes the development of three fundamental aspects: increasing knowledge, skill development, and strengthening self-confidence. These aspects are seen as essential modalities to encourage active female participation in every stage of the development process. In this context, women's organizations are strategically positioned as platforms for independence and gender advocacy. All these efforts aim to eliminate discriminatory practices and achieve justice and gender equality, both in policy and program implementation.

As a concrete step in implementing this empowerment, Salimah Banyumas plays a significant role in empowering women. The organization has shown an important role in women's empowerment efforts in the area. According to Yudiawati, the vice chair of Salimah, Salimah Banyumas implements various empowerment programs and activities, such as economic skill training, the establishment of Integrated Development Posts (Posbindu) for the elderly, community-based empowerment programs, as well as parenting and religious training. Eni Rumijati, the treasurer of Salimah, also states that Salimah Banyumas empowers women by increasing access to resources, providing guidance and mentorship, and developing women's leadership and networks. The positive impacts of Salimah Banyumas's programs can be seen in the increased economic, social, and spiritual capacity of women in the region.

a) Family Education and Development Program

This program aims to improve family quality through education. Activities include parenting for parents, premarital education for youth and couples preparing for marriage, and a special program for the elderly through the "Salsa" elderly school. These programs are designed to equip women with the skills to manage a harmonious family and support the mental and physical well-being of the family.

The Family Education and Development Program conducted by Salimah Banyumas focuses on enhancing the capacity and independence of women in Banyumas Regency. With various activities including economic skill training, such as flower bouquet making, cooperative establishment, and Salimah stores, this program seeks to expand women's participation in the economic sector (Dewanti et al., 2020; Huda in Mayrudin & Godjali, 2020). This program also includes spiritual development through religious studies and special programs, such as the Elderly School (Salsa) and Premarital School (SERASI), providing knowledge for women to support family well-being and prepare youth for healthy, harmonious marriages (Amalliah & Yunita, 2022; Arofah, 2018).

The implementation strategy of the program starts with internal strengthening through member donations, which then extends to broader community participation via WhatsApp networks and cooperative stores (Arifah et al., 2023). The impact of this program is evident in women's increased access to economic resources and their awareness to participate actively in local

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community development (Handayani, 2016). These consistent activities foster community acceptance, further establishing Salimah's reputation in the Women's Organization Coalition (GOW) and earning them opportunities to share insights through local media (Surachman, 2019). In facing administrative challenges and maintaining organizational presence, Salimah Banyumas continues to innovate, focusing on comprehensive empowerment and solid community support to improve women's welfare in Banyumas.

b) Religious Study and Spiritual Program

This program, initiated in 2012, is regularly held to enhance religious and spiritual knowledge. Initially, it was aimed at mothers who had yet to engage in productive activities, offering a space for reflection and personal growth through spiritual understanding. This study program strengthens members' social and spiritual foundations, making them more prepared to contribute actively in society.

The Religious Study and Spiritual Program plays a vital role in building religious understanding and supporting spiritual empowerment for women in the area. The program aims to raise religious awareness and spirituality among women through weekly study sessions, initially targeting those without productive activities (Amalliah & Yunita, 2022; Arofah, 2018). The study sessions cover discussions on the role of women in family and society and the importance of spiritual values as a foundation for daily life.

The program's implementation strategy focuses on strengthening the organization's internal structure and involving active participation from members, initially within Salimah before expanding to the general public. The initial funding for these activities is derived from member donations, which demonstrate members' financial involvement and commitment to advancing the program (Ulpa & Fatmariza, 2020; Diwanti et al., 2019). Achievements from the Religious Study and Spiritual Program include increased confidence among members in public speaking and active community involvement. The impact is visible in members' enhanced religious understanding, speech skills, and communication abilities, supporting increased female participation in social development. Salimah Banyumas has also gained recognition from the community, including the Women's Organization Coalition (GOW), solidifying its position as a leading spiritual-based empowerment organization in Banyumas (Surachman, 2019; Nasith, 2023). This program, aside from serving as a learning platform, fosters social solidarity among women, which is crucial in supporting women's empowerment and community welfare in Banyumas.

c) Economic Empowerment Program

Salimah Banyumas encourages economic independence for women through skills training, such as bouquet making, establishing cooperatives, and opening Salimah stores. The cooperative, known as Kossuma (Salimah Sharia Multi-Purpose Cooperative) and Muslim Entrepreneur (ME), provides a platform for women to market household products. Salimah also runs a unique program called Women's Motorcycle Taxi, managed by Salimah members and the general community. Through this economic program, Salimah Banyumas promotes women's roles in entrepreneurship and strengthens their financial independence.

The Economic Empowerment Program initiated by Salimah Banyumas emphasizes increasing women's economic capacity through various skill training, cooperative establishment, and marketing network formation. This program aims to strengthen the financial independence of women, particularly for housewives who seek to supplement family income (Kasdi, 2019; Dewanti et al., 2020). One form of empowerment is establishing Salimah stores and the Salimah Sharia Multi-Purpose Cooperative (KOSSUMA), providing a platform for women to engage in entrepreneurship based on Sharia principles. The program offers economic skill training, such as flower bouquet arrangement and other crafts, and social media marketing training (Arifah et al., 2023).

The program's implementation strategy begins with internal strengthening through the involvement of members in WhatsApp groups as marketing platforms and initial funding based on donations, which is then expanded to the general public to enhance women's access to broader business networks (Diwanti et al., 2019). Program achievements are evident in women's increased participation in local economic activities and their ability to manage businesses independently. Additionally, the cooperative and Salimah store provide direct access for women to market their products and leverage digital economy platforms through online platforms (Ulpa & Fatmariza, 2020; Handayani, 2016). The Economic Empowerment Program by Salimah Banyumas successfully creates space for women to engage in creative and entrepreneurial activities, not only improving their economic well-being but also strengthening their social standing through significant economic contributions.

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive women's empowerment programs implemented by Salimah Banyumas encompass economic, educational, spiritual, and family development dimensions, synergistically aiming to enhance women's capacity, independence, and participation across various social, economic, and religious aspects of life. In the economic dimension, the program encourages women to pursue entrepreneurship and improve family income through skills training and access to independently managed Sharia cooperatives. The educational and spiritual dimensions focus on strengthening religious understanding and developing social skills through weekly study sessions, which help women comprehend their roles within the family and community from a strong religious perspective. Additionally, the family development and premarital school programs aim to build a solid foundation for youth and couples in fostering a prosperous household.

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The implementation strategy involves strengthening the organization's structure and raising member donation funds, which are subsequently expanded to the general public to encourage women's involvement in Banyumas. The achievements across these program dimensions are evident not only in increased women's economic independence but also in enhanced self-confidence, public participation, and social solidarity—all of which contribute to family welfare and more inclusive community development. Through this holistic approach, Salimah Banyumas has made a significant impact on women's empowerment in Banyumas Regency, reinforcing the role of women in building a fair and empowered society.

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