

# **RETHINKING FEMICIDE: ANALYZING *DA'WAH* NARRATIVES AND HARMFUL PRACTICES AGAINST WOMEN IN INDONESIA**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted to the Master's Study Program at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Arts (M.A.)**



by:

**Putri Jannatur Rahmah**

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**UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNASIONAL INDONESIA**

**DEPOK**

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## ABSTRACT

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This study rethinks the concept of femicide beyond the narrow definition of the physical killing of women. It explores how certain harmful practices, such as early marriage, pronatalist pressure (the pressure on women to have many children), and female genital mutilation, can also be considered as forms of femicide when viewed through a broader lens. These practices, while not always immediately fatal, can endanger women's lives. They are often legitimized through cultural norms and certain religious interpretations that continue to shape everyday realities for many women in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach, this study employs Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and Johan Galtung's theory of cultural violence to see how religious discourse contributes to the normalization of such practices. The primary data consists of *da'wah* narratives from four prominent Islamic preachers in Indonesia, including Dr. Syafiq Riza Basalamah, Dr. Khalid Basalamah, Dr. Firanda Andirja, and Buya Yahya, whose content is widely viewed on YouTube and reflects a strong influence in shaping public opinion. While acknowledging the diversity of views among preachers in Indonesia, this research focuses on those who support such practices to analyze how certain religious discourses may indirectly legitimize violence against women. The analysis focuses on the language used in sermons, the socio-religious context, and how these discourses interact with societal norms and expectations. This research argues that femicide should not be understood only as an act of killing but as a broader spectrum of violence that includes structural and cultural factors that put women at risk. By referring to Galtung's theory of cultural violence, this thesis argues that those practices that endanger women's lives can be categorized as femicide, as based on current definitions of femicide, that femicide is not only about physical killing but also about conditions in which women live in perpetual fear, lack autonomy, or experience the slow erosion of life, a phenomenon described as "death in life." In this case, women are placed on "death row," a bubble of situations that make them insecure, vulnerable, and at risk of losing their lives.

Keywords: *Femicide, Cultural Violence, Da'wah Narratives*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Research Background

*Indonesia Darurat Femisida* (Indonesia's Femicide Emergency), a hashtag symbol which gains attention in the mass media reflects a public outrage at the increasing incident of gender-based violence targeting women. It represents a collective demand for justice in cases of femicide, especially those involving intimate partners. The warning is triggered not only without reason. According to media reports a woman from Banten, SA (19) recently died mutilated by her boyfriend, ML (23). The murder happened after SA asked for responsibility for her pregnancy. The perpetrator became angry because of the request for responsibility and took the victim to a quiet forest far from the village, then killed his girlfriend.<sup>1</sup> In 2021, Indonesia was also shocked by the case of Sarah (21) who died after getting assaulted and showered with acid by her husband, Abdul Latif (48), a Saudi Arabian citizen.<sup>2</sup> According to the National Commission on Violence Against Women (*Komnas Perempuan's* media monitoring) in order to gather accurate statistics on femicide incidents, the two cases listed above meet under the category of intimate partner femicide.<sup>3</sup>

Not only the two cases above, unfortunately, femicide cases in Indonesia have increased annually. According to the National Commission on Violence Against Women (*Komnas Perempuan's* monitoring) of online media news in femicide cases shows an alarming number, there were 95 cases in 2020, 237 cases in 2021, in 2022 it increased to 307 cases, and 159 cases in 2023. Recently, the National Commission

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<sup>1</sup> CNN Indonesia, "Pria Mutilasi Pacar Hamil Di Banten, Korban Dibunuh Usai Makan Bakso," accessed July 23, 2025, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20250420145308-12-1220547/pria-mutilasi-pacar-hamil-di-banten-korban-dibunuh-usai-makan-bakso>.

<sup>2</sup> BBC News Indonesia, "Kasus penyiraman air keras di Cianjur – 'kawin kontrak' dan kematian yang jadi 'terapi kejut,'" *BBC News Indonesia*, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-59379830>.

<sup>3</sup> Komnas Perempuan, "Siaran Pers," Komnas Perempuan | Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan, 2024, <https://komnasperempuan.go.id/siaran-pers-detail/siaran-pers-komnas-perempuan-tentang-fenomena-femisida>.



on Violence Against Women reported that femicide cases in 2024 had grown to 290 cases.<sup>4</sup>

Referring to the definition formulated by *Komnas Perempuan*, the official state institution responsible for responding to and addressing issues of violence against women in Indonesia, femicide is the direct or indirect killing of women because of their sex or gender, which is motivated by superiority, dominance, hegemony, aggression or misogyny towards women, as well as a sense of belonging to women, unequal power relations, and sadistic satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> This definition reflects a broader understanding of femicide beyond individual intent, which points to deeper structural and cultural roots. However, while *Komnas Perempuan* has clearly defined and categorized certain acts as femicide, there remains a lack of clarity regarding other gender-based practices that endanger women's lives but are often normalized or culturally justified. This raises a critical question, which practices are recognized as femicide, and which are not and why?

This growing awareness and documentation of femicide in Indonesia aligns with global conversations around the term. Femicide is conventionally defined as the misogynous killing of women by men. The term was first introduced into academic and activist discourse by feminist researcher Diana E.H. Russell, who used it in public speech at the First International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Brussels in 1976.<sup>6</sup> While the term was initially popularized in English-speaking feminist circles, it gained renewed global traction in the early 2000s through feminist activism in Latin America, particularly in response to the wave of killings of women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.<sup>7</sup> Latin American feminists emphasized femicide not only as individual acts of gender-based murder but as part of a broader system of structural and institutionalized violence against women,

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<sup>4</sup> Komnas Perempuan, "Siaran Pers."

<sup>5</sup> Komnas Perempuan, "Femisida Tidak Dikenal: Pengabaian Terhadap Terhadap Hak Atas Hidup Dan Hak Atas Keadilan Perempuan Dan Anak Perempuan," Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan, 2021, <https://komnasperempuan.go.id/download-file/791>.

<sup>6</sup> Diana E. H. Russell, "Report on the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 2, no. 1 (1977): 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3346102>.

<sup>7</sup> Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, eds., *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas* (Duke University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822392644>.

shaped by impunity, patriarchy, and state neglect.<sup>8</sup> This concept emerged in response to the limitations of generic homicide data, which commonly failed to capture the gendered motivations and sociocultural conditions behind such killings.<sup>9</sup>

In Muslim-majority countries, patriarchal culture and religious practices have a significant impact on women's life, including their health, autonomy, and mortality<sup>10</sup>. These acts are often legitimized by particular interpretations of Islamic texts and are embedded in patriarchal systems.<sup>11</sup> Practices such as early marriage, pronatalist pressures and female genital mutilation (FGM), continue to exist in several contexts and tend to be neglected as forms of violence legally or socially.<sup>12</sup> For instance According to a 2023 study in Nature Scientific Reports, female genital mutilation is a life-threatening practice that causes an estimated 44,320 excess deaths of girls and young women each year in countries where it is still being practiced, making it one of the leading causes of death beyond common infectious diseases.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, Early marriage puts young girls at serious risk during pregnancy and childbirth because their bodies are often not physically ready, making them at higher risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth, such as hypertensive disorders and obstructed labor, which are significant contributors to maternal deaths.<sup>14</sup> In the context where women's reproductive fertility is a necessity that is socially constructed and legitimized by certain religious beliefs,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Paulina García-Del Moral and Pamela Neumann, "The Making and Unmaking of *Femicidio/Femicidio* Laws in Mexico and Nicaragua," *Law & Society Review* 53, no. 2 (2019): 452–86, <https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12380>.

<sup>9</sup> Consuelo Corradi et al., "Theories of Femicide and Their Significance for Social Research," *Current Sociology* 64, no. 7 (2016): 975–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392115622256>.

<sup>10</sup> G. Sen and P. Östlin, "Gender Inequity in Health: Why It Exists and How We Can Change It," *Global Public Health* 3, no. sup1 (2008): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441690801900795>.

<sup>11</sup> Abdulmumini A. Oba, "Female Circumcision as Female Genital Mutilation: Human Rights or Cultural Imperialism?," *Global Jurist* 8, no. 3 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.2202/1934-2640.1286>.

<sup>12</sup> Leila Jahangiry, Tahereh Pashaei, and Koen Ponnet, "Attitudes toward Female Genital Mutilation/Circumcision: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Healthcare (Basel, Switzerland)* 9, no. 9 (September 8, 2021): 1184, <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare9091184>.

<sup>13</sup> Arpita Ghosh et al., "Estimating Excess Mortality Due to Female Genital Mutilation," *Scientific Reports* 13, no. 1 (2023): 13328, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-38276-6>.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah Neal et al., "The Causes of Maternal Mortality in Adolescents in Low and Middle Income Countries: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth* 16, no. 1 (2016): 352, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-016-1120-8>.

<sup>15</sup> Iim Halimatusa'diyah et al., "Do Religious People Have More Children? The Effect of Religious Affiliation and Religiosity on Fertility," *Journal of Population and Social Studies* 29 (June 2021): 479–99, <https://doi.org/10.25133/JPSSv292021.030>.

fertility-related health risks become life-threatening.<sup>16</sup> The phenomenon of high fertility among Muslim communities can put social pressure on women to have many children, often at the sacrifice of their health and autonomy.

These practices, although not commonly classified as femicide, raise a critical question “Why are cultural and religious practices that indirectly lead to women’s deaths not conceptualized as femicide?” and “What constitutes certain practices as femicide?”. This study aims to explore this question by investigating how certain practices in Muslim societies, often permitted or encouraged by specific interpretations of Islam, contribute to conditions of mortal risk for women. This study proposes that femicide should be rethought not solely as an act of direct killing, but should be viewed as a “process” established in structural and institutional frameworks that legitimize and perpetuate gendered violence. Meaning that femicide is the “process” leading to death and the creation of a situation in which it is impossible for the victim to “live.”<sup>17</sup> That is, femicide is all of the hegemonic masculine-social settings used to destroy females’ rights, potential ability, and power to live safely. It is a form of abuse, threat, and assault that degrades and subordinates women. It leads to continuous fear, frustration, isolation, exclusion, and harm to females’ ability to control their personal lives.<sup>18</sup>

In this context, the term “femicide” functions not only as a descriptive category but also as an analytical lens to exploring the interaction of culture, religion, and gender-based oppression.<sup>19</sup>

In Muslim societies, religious beliefs are not only personal spiritual guidelines but also often serve as powerful tools in shaping social norms and legal frameworks. When these beliefs are interpreted in patriarchal ways, it creates

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<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Cresswell, *Trends in Maternal Mortality 2000 to 2020: Estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNDESA/Population Division*, 1st ed (World Health Organization, 2023).

<sup>17</sup> Corradi et al., “Theories of Femicide and Their Significance for Social Research,” 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Consuelo Corradi et al., “Theories of Femicide and Their Significance for Social Research,” *Current Sociology* 64, no. 7 (2016): 975–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392115622256>.

<sup>19</sup> Fregoso and Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women*.

legitimacy for practices that harm women's rights and even threaten their lives.<sup>20</sup> Interpretations of sacred texts, when dominated by patriarchal interests, are often used to justify practices such as early marriage, pressure to have many children, and even harmful practices such as female genital mutilation. These practices are often sustained through religious discourses that frame them as moral obligations or virtues. This dynamic makes it difficult to question such practices, as they are deeply ingrained in religious authority and community identity.<sup>21</sup>

By examining these questions, this study seeks to expand the definition of femicide beyond direct acts of killing to include structural processes that create conditions in which women's lives are systematically endangered.

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

This research expects to see how far the concept of femicide can be applied to capture culturally specific practices, such as early marriage, pronatalist pressures, and female genital mutilation, that are legitimized through certain religious interpretations and take on significant risks to women's mortality, raising the question of whether these practices can also be understood as forms of femicide.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

Based on the data above, this research seeks to answer the following question “In what ways can harmful practices against women that are legitimized by cultural and religious norms be conceptualized as forms of femicide?”

To address this question, I will explore three culturally embedded practices, like early marriage, pronatalist pressure, and female genital mutilation, that are often legitimized through certain religious interpretations within Muslim societies. While these practices can be normalized or even idealized in certain contexts, they

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<sup>20</sup> Cemal Öztürk, “Revisiting the Islam-Patriarchy Nexus: Is Religious Fundamentalism the Central Cultural Barrier to Gender Equality?,” *Zeitschrift Für Religion, Gesellschaft Und Politik* 7, no. 1 (2023): 173–206, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41682-022-00130-3>.

<sup>21</sup> Abdulrahim A. Rouzi, “Facts and Controversies on Female Genital Mutilation and Islam,” *The European Journal of Contraception & Reproductive Health Care* 18, no. 1 (2013): 10–14, <https://doi.org/10.3109/13625187.2012.749982>.

can lead to serious risks for women's health, autonomy, and, in some cases, their lives. By critically analyzing these practices, this study seeks to explain how deeply rooted norms, if unexamined, may contribute to forms of gender-based violence that connect with the wider concept of femicide.

#### **1.4 Literature Review**

I divide this issue into two research maps to identify the gaps in previous studies. First, research on gendered violence, and femicide. Second, research on Islamic cultural practices that contribute to women's health risks and mortality. This division helped me to bridge the theoretical discussion from gender studies within Islamic studies to find the gap that this thesis aims to fill.

To capture the urgency of this research, it is important to highlight a key gap in previous studies. On one hand, many studies have discussed gender-based violence, and femicide. On the other hand, there is a lot of research that explores religious and cultural practices, such as early marriage, pronatalist pressure, and female genital mutilation, especially within Islamic contexts. However, these two areas of research often stand apart. Studies on religious or culture-based practices rarely connect their analysis to the concept of femicide, while feminist scholarship on femicide often overlooks how such practices contribute to the indirect, or structural killing of women. This thesis seeks to bridge that gap by connecting cultural and religiously justified practices to broader conversations on femicide, showing how these practices can endanger women's lives both physically and mentally.

##### **1.4.1 Research on Gendered Violence, and Femicide**

Feminist studies have long questioned the limitations of common definitions of femicide. Originally created to address the gendered aspect of homicide, the term "femicide" was popularized by feminist activists in Latin

America to highlight systemic violence against women.<sup>22</sup> In gender-based violence literature, the term femicide is still seen as a concept that will evolve, Bueno Hansen refers to it as “still under construction”.<sup>23</sup> Referring to the Fregoso & Bejarano (2010) the term femicide beyond direct and intentional killing to also cover indirect or structural forms of violence that may result in women's deaths.<sup>24</sup>

This structural interpretation of femicide refers to institutional neglect, cultural practices, and state policies that put women at fatal risk. Scholars like Lagarde (2006) argue that the state and social institutions, when complicit in maintaining unequal gender structures, become perpetrators of structural femicide. This includes failing to provide safe reproductive healthcare, enforcing discriminatory laws, or upholding religious and cultural norms that harm women. In this context, femicide becomes not only an individual crime but a societal failure.<sup>25</sup>

Related studies explore how structural violence and gender norms contribute to women's deaths in quiet and often socially acceptable ways. Farmer (2004) explains how “structural violence” refers to the systematic ways in which social structures disadvantage or disfavor individuals. In the case of women, these include poverty, lack of access to medical care, legal impunity, and religious or cultural ideologies that perpetuate women's subordination. True (2012) extends this analysis in the context of peace and security, showing how gender inequality and violence against women are built into state and institutional systems.<sup>26</sup>

Despite there is a growing research on gender-based violence and femicide, many of these studies tend to focus on the immediate forms of

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<sup>22</sup> Jill Radford and Diana Russell, *Femicide: The Politics of Women Killing* (The New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/224985305?sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>.

<sup>23</sup> Fregoso and Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Fregoso and Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women*.

<sup>25</sup> Fregoso and Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women*.

<sup>26</sup> Jacqui True and Jacqui True, *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*, Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relations (Oxford University Press, 2012).

physical or sexual violence, without questioning how cultural and religious practices may contribute to long-term harm against women that can lead to the femicide. This raises an important question: Why are these harmful practices not being analyzed through the lens of femicide, especially when they can lead to psychological trauma, or even death? These unanswered questions show that there is a gap in the way scholars connect cultural-religious practices with structural forms of femicide, which is something this thesis aims to address.

#### 1.4.2 Research on Islamic Cultural Practices and Women's Mortality

In Muslim societies, practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), early marriage, and pressure to give birth to lots of kids are often considered cultural issues<sup>27</sup> or interpreted as religious traditions.<sup>28</sup> FGM, in particular, is prevalent in some Muslim-majority countries, although it is not mandated in Islamic scripture. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that FGM causes severe bleeding, infection, infertility, childbirth complications, and an increased risk of newborn mortality. Despite this, FGM continues to be practiced due to deeply held beliefs about purity, marriageability, and religious obligations.<sup>29</sup>

Shell-Duncan and Gruenbaum show how FGM is maintained by social norms and reinforced by community expectations, usually with the supporting of religious leaders.<sup>30</sup> Although some Islamic academics consider FGM to be un-Islamic, the practice is always popular in countries where specific interpretations of Islam are prominent. Local religious

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<sup>27</sup> Oba, "Female Circumcision as Female Genital Mutilation."

<sup>28</sup> Mohamad Rana et al., "WHEN RELIGION AND CULTURE MEET ECONOMY: Socio-Legal Factors for the Early Marriages of Muslim Families in Cirebon," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 15, no. 1 (2022): 1, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2022.15105>.

<sup>29</sup> "Female Genital Mutilation," accessed May 6, 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>.

<sup>30</sup> Bettina Shell-Duncan, "From Health to Human Rights: Female Genital Cutting and the Politics of Intervention," *American Anthropologist* 110, no. 2 (2008): 225–36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2008.00028.x>.

leaders often play an essential role in legitimizing or opposing the practice of FGM.<sup>31</sup>

Early marriage is another common trend in many Muslim societies. While Islam encourages marriage and family life, opinions on the ideal age to marry are diverse. According to some opinions, marriage can begin as soon as a girl reaches puberty.<sup>32</sup> The consequences for young females are dangerous: early marriage typically disrupts education, decreases autonomy, and increases maternal mortality from early pregnancy.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, religious justifications are commonly utilized to encourage child marriage, despite its damaging consequences.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, pronatalist pressure (the attention to women's reproductive roles) are often seen in Islamic teachings, particularly traditional interpretations.<sup>35</sup> In certain cultures, having a lot of kids is a religious and social requirement for women. This pressure, along with limited access to contraception and reproductive healthcare, can be potentially fatal. Nagi and Stockwell showed that Muslim-majority societies have high fertility rates,<sup>36</sup> which are associated with maternal mortality and women's restricted reproductive autonomy.

While these studies clearly demonstrate that such practices are harmful to women, they often miss extending the analysis to the realm of femicide, in which how these harms reflect systemic cultural and institutional norms that restrict women's autonomy and may lead to life-threatening

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<sup>31</sup> Ellen Gruenbaum, *The Female Circumcision Controversy: An Anthropological Perspective* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812292510>.

<sup>32</sup> Andrian Liem et al., "Factors Associated with Child Marriage during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 18, no. 3 (2024): 457–78, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-023-00545-6>.

<sup>33</sup> "UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage Annual Report 2020," accessed May 6, 2025, <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/unfpa-unicef-global-programme-end-child-marriage-annual-report-2020>.

<sup>34</sup> Qodariah Barkah et al., "The Manipulation of Religion and The Legalization of Underage Marriages in Indonesia," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 1 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i1.13316>.

<sup>35</sup> Zeynep B. Gürtin, "Patriarchal Pronatalism: Islam, Secularism and the Conjugal Confines of Turkey's IVF Boom," *Reproductive Biomedicine & Society Online* 2 (May 2016): 39–46, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rbms.2016.04.005>.

<sup>36</sup> M. H. Nagi and E. G. Stockwell, "Muslim Fertility: Recent Trends and Future Outlook," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 6, no. 2 (1982): 48–70.



consequences. This thesis seeks to address that gap by positioning early marriage, FGM, and pronatalist pressure as more than isolated harmful acts, instead understanding them as part of a broader continuum of structural violence that may culminate in femicide.

The above literature shows two main gaps. First, while the literature on femicide has expanded to include structural forms of violence, it rarely discusses how religiously or culturally permitted acts in Muslim societies contribute to this phenomenon. Secondly, while many studies address inappropriate behaviors such as early marriage, FGM, and pronatalism, these practices are often not considered part of the concept of femicide, and are rarely critically examined as structural factors to female mortality.

This thesis aims to fill this gap by examining how certain religious practices in Muslim societies can be viewed through the lens of femicide. The thesis aims to contribute an extends understanding of femicide beyond the direct act of killing, to the systemic practices embedded in religious, cultural, and political institutions that collectively cause women's deaths.

## **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

This research relies on Johan Galtung's theory of cultural violence to understand how certain culturally and religiously legitimized practices, such as early marriage, pronatalist pressures, and female genital mutilation, may contribute to forms of gender-based violence that threaten women's lives. Galtung defines cultural violence as any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form.<sup>37</sup> In the context of this research, cultural violence functions as a lens to see how these harmful practices are normalized and even rewarded within certain religious and cultural contexts in Muslim societies. By applying this theory, this research aims to uncover how embedded cultural beliefs and interpretations, especially those rooted in patriarchal readings, can invisibly

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<sup>37</sup> Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 291–305.

support and legitimize practices that endanger women's health, autonomy, and lives.

In this study, I will use Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore how early marriage, pronatalist pressure, and female genital mutilation, are distributed through the discourse in Muslim societies. According to Fairclough, CDA is more than just an analysis of discourse “in itself”, but also an investigation into the dialectical relationships between discourse and other elements of social life, such as power, and ideology.<sup>38</sup> This approach helps me understand how language contributes to shaping and maintaining social practices that may endanger women’s lives. In particular, I will analyze the speech and preaching of religious figures documented on platforms like YouTube, where these preachers often argue that practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, and pronatalist pressure are legitimized and even commanded by religious teachings. By analyzing their discourses, I aim to uncover how religious language and authority are used to normalize these harmful practices. CDA allows me to uncover the ways in which such narratives sustain gender-based systems of control, and to connect these discourses to broader concepts of femicide. Ultimately, CDA enables me to uncover how power operates through language, and how certain traditions, when left unexamined, may perpetuate structural violence against women.

The concept of femicide is critical to this research due to its functions not just as a type of violent death, but also as an analytical lens to examine the continuum of violence that women experience within patriarchal systems. Femicide is commonly understood to be the intentional killing of women because of their gender. However, this study contends that femicide is a broader social and growing phenomenon that can occur through discourse-based violence, in which language and narratives create environments that facilitate or normalize harmful practices such as early marriage, FGM, and forced reproduction. By adopting femicide as both a concept and an analytical tool, the research critiques how certain cultural and

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<sup>38</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, 2. ed., [Nachdr.] (Routledge, 2013).

religious practices that contribute to women's mortality can be considered as a femicide.

## **1.6 Research Significance**

The current research is significant for several reasons. First, by applying Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, this study contributes to the growing field of multidisciplinary research that examines the relationship between language, ideology, and gender-based violence. It expands on the theoretical and methodological engagement of Islamic studies and gender discourse by investigating how systemic violence is portrayed in religious and cultural narratives. Second, this study broadens the discourse of femicide by understanding it not just as a killing act but also as a "process" perpetuated by systemic, accepted norms such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, and pronatalism. This rearrangement provides a significant contribution to femicide study, in which emphasizing gradual and systemic forms of violence. Third, by focusing on case-specific discourse within Muslim societies (particularly those that derive legitimacy from certain religious texts and traditions) this study provides a perspective on how religious interpretation can either maintain or challenge gendered violence.

## **1.7 Methods**

In this study I use a qualitative methodology, incorporating Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary analytical approach. The qualitative approach is used to explore the evolving concept of femicide, as this method allows for a comprehensive understanding and explanation of phenomena. In qualitative research, data is gathered through observations or document analysis and subsequently analyzed in a descriptive and interpretive manner.<sup>39</sup>

To analyze these practices, I collected primary data from the YouTube channels of several prominent Islamic preachers in Indonesia. I focused on webinar

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<sup>39</sup> John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, Fifth edition (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018).

document, sermon clips, and Q&A sessions that discuss issues such as early marriage, the encouragement to have many children, and female genital mutilation. These videos provide an important starting point for understanding how certain religious narratives are constructed and disseminated in the public sphere. I used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to identify the messages in these *da'wah* documents. Specifically, I applied Norman Fairclough's three dimensional framework of CDA.<sup>40</sup> The first is description, which means looking closely at the text itself, including its grammar, syntax, vocabulary, sound patterns, and the use of literary techniques like rhetorical questions and imagery. The second step is interpretation, which looks at how the discourse is produced, shared, and used by people, at this stage, the discourse is treated as a discursive practice. The third part is explanation, which looks at how discourse connects into the bigger social picture. It sees discourse as a type of social practice that both reflects and strengthens the power structures and ideas of society.<sup>41</sup> This approach allows me to understand how everyday religious language can function as a tool for sustaining gendered norms that may, directly or indirectly, contribute to harm against women.

According to Fairclough, discourse is not natural or neutral, but is influenced by the values, interests, biases, and ideologies of the discourse's makers. Fairclough distinguishes between text and discourse, viewing the text as a product, while discourse encompasses the broader process of social interaction, of which the text is only a component.<sup>42</sup>

The secondary data source in this study consists of supporting documents that help me better understand about the discourse of early marriage, female genital mutilation, and pronatalist pressure. To complement the primary data, I will conduct a literature review of documents such as journal articles that discuss these practices. These materials are important for exploring how certain narratives are reinforced in both formal and informal settings, and how religious justifications for

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<sup>40</sup> Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*.

<sup>41</sup> Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*.

<sup>42</sup> Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*.

these practices are framed in the digital public sphere. By combining these sources, I hope to gain a broader and more grounded understanding about the issue.

### **1.8 Thesis Outline**

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one is the introduction. It explains the background of the study, research objectives, research questions, literature review, research significances, theory, method, and the structure of the thesis. This chapter also introduces the concept of femicide briefly, a term that is still developing and often debated. Because it is a complex and timely issue, femicide is especially interesting to study, particularly when it is linked to specific social and religious practices.

Chapter two focuses on the definition of femicide. It looks at how the idea of femicide first appeared, how it has changed over time, and how people understand it today in different contexts.

Chapter three discusses how certain practices, such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, and pronatalism, are explained and justified through religious discourse. And also offer alternative perspective about the issue from the Islamic feminist.

Chapter four presents the findings of this research. By using Johan Galtung's theory of cultural violenc, this chapter shows how some religious discourse, public speeches, may support or hide violence against women. It also explores whether some of these practices can be considered aa a form of femicide.

Chapter five is the conclusion. It summarizes the research findings.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF FEMICIDE: HISTORICAL EMERGENCE, CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT, AND CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDINGS

In this chapter, I will discuss the concept of femicide, starting from its early emergence to how the idea has developed over time. I will then explore how femicide appears in Muslim-majority countries, paying attention to the case of “honor killing” as an issue that is prevalent in that context. Furthermore, I will look at how the concept of femicide is positioned and interpreted in the Indonesian context.

#### 2.1 Femicide in History: The Emergence of the Term

The term femicide was first used in 1801 by John Corry in his book “A Satirical View of London at the Commencement of the Nineteenth Century”, where it referred to the killing of a woman.<sup>43</sup> Later, the term was also found in 1848, femicide word emerged in Wharton's Law Lexicon and was integrated into legal terminology, briefly described as the killing of women.<sup>44</sup> In both literatures, the term was used to denote the killing of a woman, without the specific gender-based connotations it carries today.<sup>45</sup> In the first case, femicide simply means homicide of a female, it does not imply any syndication of causes, forms, or context of the murder. Rather, it only exposes the sex of the victim's subject, while the crime can be committed by either males or females.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> M. Kouroutsidou and S. M. Kakarouna, “The Phenomenon of Femicide and the Greek Experience,” *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, no. 5 (2021): 5, <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejsocial.2021.1.5.130>.

<sup>44</sup> J. J. S. (John Jane Smith) Wharton, *Wharton's Law-Lexicon : Forming an Epitome of the Law of England ; and Containing Full Explanations of the Technical Terms and Phrases Thereof, Both Ancient and Modern. Including the Various Legal Terms Used in Commercial Business ; Together with a Translation of Latin Law Maxims, and Selected Titles from the Civil, Scotch, and Indian Law*, with Cornell University Library (Boston : Soule and Bugbee, 1883), <http://archive.org/details/cu31924021688555>.

<sup>45</sup> Tameshnie Deane, “Towards an Understanding of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide,” in *Gender-Based Violence and Femicide in South Africa*, ed. Tameshnie Deane (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-61053-0\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-61053-0_4).

<sup>46</sup> Daniela Bandelli, *Femicide, Gender and Violence: Discourses and Counterdiscourses in Italy* (Springer International Publishing, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-47785-5>.

The political use of femicide can be traced back as early as 1976, in a speech by feminist social psychologist Diana Russell at the first International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Brussels.<sup>47</sup> It was a four-day radical feminist women's conference attended by over 2,000 women from 40 different countries, which Simone de Beauvoir marked as “the beginning of the radical decolonization of women.”<sup>48</sup> Russell’s objective was to demonstrate the “sexual politics of murder”<sup>49</sup> of women in particular, from the burning of witches in the past to the more modern widespread custom of female infanticide in many civilizations, to the killing of women for “honour”.<sup>50</sup> In other words, femicide is discussed as the murder of women simply because they are women: as murders committed because of the inferior position of women in patriarchal society.<sup>51</sup>

Building on this foundation, Russell's introduction of the term “femicide” was inspired by the political goal of highlighting discriminations, inequalities, and systematic violence against women, which, in extreme situations, leads to their death.<sup>52</sup> The official discourse on female homicides began with Russell's work and has continued to grow over the past few decades. Femicide was further defined by Radford and Russell as “the misogynous killing of women by men”,<sup>53</sup> Radford claims that Femicide occurs in patriarchal societies, characterized by male dominance and female subordination, through social and political construction of masculinity as active and aggressive and the social construction of femininity as receptive and passive.<sup>54</sup> Caputi and Russell further developed the term femicide as “the misogynous killing of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership over women, rooted in historically unequal power relations between women and men.”<sup>55</sup> In one of the chapters of their book titled, “Femicide:

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<sup>47</sup> Jill Radford and Russell, Diana E. H., eds., *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (Twayne Publ. [u.a.], 1992).

<sup>48</sup> “Defining Femicide,” accessed November 11, 2024, <https://www.dianarussell.com/defining-femicide-.html>.

<sup>49</sup> It describes the belief that killing women is not merely a spontaneous or personal act, but deeply connected to power, control, and societal inequity between men and women.

<sup>50</sup> Diana E. H. Russell and Nicole Van de Ven, eds., *Crimes against Women: Proceedings of the International Tribunal*, International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women, East Palo Alto, CA (Frog in the Well, 1984).

<sup>51</sup> Bandelli, *Femicide, Gender and Violence*.

<sup>52</sup> Kouroutsidou and Kakarouna, “The Phenomenon of Femicide and the Greek Experience.”

<sup>53</sup> Radford and Russell, *Femicide*.

<sup>54</sup> Radford and Russell, Diana E. H., *Femicide* (Twayne Publ. [u.a.], 1992).

<sup>55</sup> Jane Caputi and Diana Russell, *Femicide: Speaking the Unspeakable*, no.2 (Ms.:The World of Women 1, 1990).

Sexist Terrorism Against Women”, Russell and Caputi identify and furthermore define femicide as a form of anti-female terrorism. According to them: Femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of anti-female terror that includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse, such as rape, torture, sexual slavery (particularly in prostitution), incestuous and extra familial child, sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, sexual harassment (on the phone, in the streets, at the office and in the classroom), genital mutilation (clitoridectomies, excision, infibulations), unnecessary gynaecological operations (gratuitous hysterectomies), forced heterosexuality, forced sterilisation, forced motherhood (by criminalising contraception and abortion), psychosurgery, denial of food to women in some cultures, cosmetic surgery, and other mutilations in the name of beautification. Whenever these forms of terrorism result in death, they become femicides.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, since that statement makes it clear that the essence of femicide is linked to male dominance and female subordination, we can conclude that femicide is a deeply rooted structural problem and inadequacy. Simply put, femicide is a product of sexism, prejudicial conditions, gender systems, misogyny, patriarchy, and abusive acts and behaviors committed by men.<sup>57</sup>

Nine years later in 2001, she redefined femicide in her book, *Femicide in Global Perspective*, as “the killing of women by men because they are women”. This remains her definition of femicide to this day.<sup>58</sup> In her book, she expanded on the concept of femicide to represents the extreme end of a spectrum of sexist terrorization of women and girls. This continuum includes rape, torture, mutilation, sexual slavery, incestuous<sup>59</sup> and extrafamilial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional violence, and serious incidents of sexual harassment. When these acts of sexist terrorism result in death, they are classified as femicides.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Radford and Russell, *Femicide*.

<sup>57</sup> Aastha Mishra, “Conceptualising the Phenomenon of Femicide as an Embodiment of Symbolic Violence,” *Artha Journal of Social Sciences* 21, no. 1 (2022): 1, <https://doi.org/10.12724/ajss.60.1>.

<sup>58</sup> Diana E. H. Russell, ed., *Femicide in Global Perspective*, Athene Series (Teachers College Press, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> Sexual abuse committed by a family member; for example, a parent, sibling, uncle, or other close relative. It involves a violation of both the child's bodily autonomy and the trust within the family unit.

<sup>60</sup> Russell, *Femicide in Global Perspective*.



However, according to Russell's definition, murders or killings that are not perpetrated by males because of gender are not femicides: for example, accidental killings of women or girls by men, murders of women by men in which the victims' gender is irrelevant, such as during a robbery, or murders of women by their female partners; she refers to these crimes as common murders or homicides.<sup>61</sup>

## 2.2 Femicide: The Evolutionary Concept of Femicide

Femicide is a relatively new notion. It is the most commonly used term in official reports and studies.<sup>62</sup> During the 1990s, the names “femicidio” and “femmicidio” were used to discuss the idea of femicide in Italy.<sup>63</sup> In feminist groups and some scholarly publications, these phrases were mostly used to highlight that crimes against women, which are commonly referred to as uxoricide (the killing of a wife) or simply homicide in legal and public discourse, were actually a significant gender-based aspect. However, in public or media discourse, those earlier terms did not become widely used or visible.<sup>64</sup>

At the same time, in the 1990s, Latin American activists popularized the term “femicide” by translating the Spanish word “*feminicidio*” (feminicide in English).<sup>65</sup> Discussions concerning gender-based violence frequently use the terms “femicide” and “feminicide” interchangeably. Both terms describe the killing of women due to their gender, but in Spanish-speaking contexts, feminicide provides more accurately reflects the political and structural dimensions of gender-based violence against women.<sup>66</sup> Specifically, while *femicidio* generally refers to the act of killing a woman because of her gender, *feminicidio* goes further by highlighting the broader social and institutional failures that enable such violence to occur, such as impunity, state negligence, and systemic inequality.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Caputi and Russell, *Femicide: Speaking the Unspeakable*, no.2.

<sup>62</sup> Consuelo Corradi, *Femicide, Its Causes and Recent Trends: What Do We Know?*, n.d.

<sup>63</sup> Bandelli, *Femicide, Gender and Violence*.

<sup>64</sup> Bandelli, *Femicide, Gender and Violence*.

<sup>65</sup> Fregoso and Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women*.

<sup>66</sup> Fregoso and Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women*.

<sup>67</sup> Fregoso and Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women*.

Furthering this perspective, Angela Hefti's book "Conceptualizing Femicide as a Human Right Violation" advances the concept of femicide as a female-specific international human rights violation. She reveals the various aspects of femicide, which is a pattern of multiple acts targeting a female social group based on their gender, with the effect of objectifying, subordinating, humiliating, or instilling fear in women, ultimately placing women and girls in a subordinate social status where this kind of abuse remains unpunished by the State.<sup>68</sup> In line with radical feminist theory, the main root cause of violence against women is unequal power between men and women.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, femicide is a product of deeply rooted systemic misogyny that is further shaped by intersections of class and race; it is not just an act committed by people with psychological disorders.<sup>70</sup> In particular, in the Caribbean context, there are specific cultural and historical roots that contribute to femicide but are rarely talked about because they are seen as a "normal" aspect of life. These include histories of slavery and plantations, unequal family systems where one man can own multiple housewives, and the ongoing pressure these structures put on women. Colonial and neocolonial systems, religious beliefs, economic crises, and rigid gender roles all combine to create an environment where violence against women can continue.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, understanding femicide requires looking at wider systems, not just individual actions, since these factors provide insight into why this violence repeats.

Additionally, the concept of the right to life is designed to accommodate instant killings rather than slow-death practices commonly used against women in femicide (such as female genital mutilation and significant psychological pain).<sup>72</sup> This form of violence, while not immediately fatal, can result in tragic deaths years later, for example, as a result of (complications from) injuries caused by rape or

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<sup>68</sup> Angela Hefti, *Conceptualizing Femicide as a Human Rights Violation: State Responsibility Under International Law* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803920443>.

<sup>69</sup> Nancy Levit et al., *Feminist Legal Theory: A Primer*, Second edition (New York University Press, 2016).

<sup>70</sup> Nalini Natarajan, ed., *Confronting Femicide: Multidisciplinary Perspectives From Puerto Rico* (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71135-0>.

<sup>71</sup> Natarajan, *Confronting Femicide*.

<sup>72</sup> Hefti, *Conceptualizing Femicide as a Human Rights Violation*.

FGM. Consequently, if we limited femicide to killings, other forms of violence would be neglected, feminist critique that women must adapt to male standards and fit into a system that was mainly created for men.<sup>73</sup> In short, if we focus only on killings, we fail to capture the bigger picture of how unfair the system is for women.

Today, many news reports are spreading that the term femicide is commonly used to refer to the murder of a woman because she is a woman. However, the concept of femicide should extend beyond the killings of women and girls as the reality is more complex than that. In many cases, the victim is often raped and abused before she is killed.<sup>74</sup> Over the last ten years, numerous local community groups (known as grassroots movements) have begun to track and report incidents of femicide.<sup>75</sup> These activities serve to raise awareness, advocate for justice, and demand improved protection for women.

Femicide is, above all, a lethal crime perpetrated against a woman or girl. Different institutions around the world (the United Nations, World Health Organization, Council of Europe, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, to mention but a few) are now striving to combat this terrible phenomenon, in its local and global dimensions.<sup>76</sup>

A notable development occurred in November 2012, when the Vienna Declaration on Femicide was presented at the United Nations in Vienna, in collaboration with many organizations including UNODC and the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, proposed a broad definition:

That femicide is the killing of women and girls because of their gender, which can take the form of, inter alia: (1) the murder of women as a result of intimate partner violence; (2) the torture and misogynist slaying of women; (3) killing of women and girls in the name of “honor”; (4) targeted killing of women and girls in

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<sup>73</sup> Levit et al., *Feminist Legal Theory*.

<sup>74</sup> Hefti, *Conceptualizing Femicide as a Human Rights Violation*.

<sup>75</sup> Catherine D’Ignazio et al., “Femicide and Counterdata Production: Activist Efforts to Monitor and Challenge Gender-Related Violence,” *Patterns* 3, no. 7 (2022): 100530, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.patter.2022.100530>.

<sup>76</sup> Chaime Marcuello-Servós et al., “Femicide: A Social Challenge,” *Current Sociology* 64, no. 7 (2016): 967–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116639358>.

the context of armed conflict; (5) dowry related killings of women; (6) killing of women and girls because of their sexual orientation and gender identity; (7) the killing of aboriginal and indigenous women and girls because of their gender; (8) female infanticide and gender-based sex selection foeticide; (9) genital mutilation related deaths; (10) accusations of witchcraft; and (11) other femicides connected with gangs, organized crime, drug dealers, human trafficking and the proliferation of small arms.<sup>77</sup>

### 2.3 Femicide in Muslim Majority Countries

Islam was the first religion to formally provide women the position and dignity that they never had before, giving them the right to life, property, and participation in society. The Holy Quran, Islam's sacred source, offers hundreds of teachings which emphasize that men and women are equal in God's eyes.<sup>78</sup> The value of human life is one of the most fundamental concepts in Islam. The Quran explicitly prohibits unjust killing, stating that taking one innocent life is equal to killing the entire human race (Quran 5:32).<sup>79</sup> This fundamental teaching prohibits any act of femicide, including so-called “honor killings,” since they go against the Islamic values of justice, mercy, and respect for human dignity. Accordingly, Islam's fundamental teaching clearly opposes violence against women and says that killing them for whatever reason is wrong.<sup>80</sup> However, violence against women is more prevalent in countries where Islam is the foundation of legislation.<sup>81</sup> This contradiction can be seen in the Middle East, which is often viewed as the cultural centre of “honour killings,” and this crime (Female honour killing) is a specific type of femicide.<sup>82</sup> These kinds of violence happen more often in countries with strong

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<sup>77</sup> Elena Dimushevskia, “ANALYSIS OF CASES OF FEMICIDES MURDERS OF WOMEN IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA,” National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, *Woman in Islam* (Islam International Publications Limited, 1991).

<sup>79</sup> “Surah Al-Ma'idah - 32,” Quran.com, accessed July 01, 2025, <https://quran.com/al-maidah/32>.

<sup>80</sup> Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (University of Texas Press, 2019).

<sup>81</sup> Moamen Gouda and Niklas Potrafke, “Gender Equality in Muslim-Majority Countries,” *Economic Systems* 40, no. 4 (2016): 683–98, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecosys.2016.04.002>.

<sup>82</sup> Hava Dayan, “Female Honor Killing: The Role of Low Socio-Economic Status and Rapid Modernization,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 36, nos. 19–20 (2021): NP10393–410, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519872984>.

political Islam; however, religious leaders deny that such violence against women has roots in Islam.<sup>83</sup>

Honor killings are defined as the killing of a woman perpetrated by a member or members of her family who do not approve of her social behavior in general and her sexual behavior in particular.<sup>84</sup> Honor killings punish women for bringing disgrace and shame upon their families, for example, by rejecting forced marriage, being the victim of rape, getting divorced, having sexual relationships, or committing adultery.<sup>85</sup> The social construction of honor as a system of values, norms, or traditions is a major justification for violence against women.

When we look closely, we see that the idea of “honor” is flexible, it changes depending on the culture, time period, and location. Also, the men who commit these acts are usually the ones who define what counts as an “honor crime,” which helps them justify violent actions like killing, beating, or imprisoning women at home. One scholar, Lama Abu-Odeh, defines honor crimes as when a father or brother kills a woman because she had sex, or was suspected of it, outside of marriage.<sup>86</sup> But another scholar, Shahla Haeri, points out that some women are punished even if they were raped. In these cases, the woman is treated as guilty just because of what happened to her.<sup>87</sup> Because the concept of honor is vague and based on cultural expectations, almost anything a woman does can be labeled shameful, making it a powerful tool to justify abuse and keep women under strict control.<sup>88</sup>

Also, in some cultures, a woman’s virginity is considered extremely important. If people think a bride is not a virgin, her life may be at risk because both families fear public shame or scandal. In short, this kind of violence against women

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<sup>83</sup> Bijan Pirnia et al., “Honour Killings and Violence against Women in Iran during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *The Lancet Psychiatry* 7, no. 10 (2020): e60, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30359-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30359-X).

<sup>84</sup> Dayan, “Female Honor Killing.”

<sup>85</sup> Pirnia et al., “Honour Killings and Violence against Women in Iran during the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

<sup>86</sup> Lama Abu Odeh, “Honor Killings and the Construction of Gender in Arab Societies,” *American Journal of Comparative Law* 58, no. 4 (2010): 911–52, <https://doi.org/10.5131/ajcl.2010.0007>.

<sup>87</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Suhad Daher-Nashif, “Femicide and Colonization: Between the Politics of Exclusion and the Culture of Control,” *Violence Against Women* 19, no. 3 (2013): 295–315, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801213485548>.

<sup>88</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, “Reexamining Femicide: Breaking the Silence and Crossing ‘Scientific’ Borders,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 2 (2003): 581–608, <https://doi.org/10.1086/342590>.

often comes from abuse of power, and it's often seen as acceptable in certain communities, even though it seriously harms women.<sup>89</sup>

According to some women's rights activists, honor killing is rooted in patriarchal law.<sup>90</sup> For instance, Article 630 of the Iranian Penal Code allows a man who witnesses his wife in the act of having sexual intercourse with another man to kill both of them if he is certain that his wife is a willing participant. Article 301 of the Penal Code declares that the father and paternal grandfather cannot be prosecuted for killing a child.<sup>91</sup>

In the West Bank, Palestine, things are even more extreme. If a man kills a woman in an "honor crime," he can sometimes avoid punishment by using a legal excuse called "exonerated excuse."<sup>92</sup> Tribal leaders even believe that women seen as dishonoring the family should be "buried" (silenced or killed). A study of 234 women killed between 1996 and 1998 showed that officials often closed the cases by blaming the deaths on "fate and destiny" instead of calling them murders. But the phrase "fate and destiny" here isn't a legal term, it's just a way for powerful people to cover up and silence these crimes against women.<sup>93</sup>

Using the word "femicide" instead of "honor killings" is significant because it helps challenge the unfair and one-sided way people often talk about these crimes. In Arab societies, for instance, femicide is sometimes described as a result of Arab culture, it is a stereotype. In this sense, the term "honor killing" has been criticized for being overly broad. Some scholars argue that the term combines different types of killings, including those that involve men as victims, and ignores similar concepts of controlling women's sexuality that also exist in Western societies. Moreover, calling it an "honor killing" can actually be racist and xenophobic as it unfairly labels certain cultural or religious groups (especially Muslim, Middle

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<sup>89</sup> Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Reexamining Femicide," 2003.

<sup>90</sup> Dayan, "Female Honor Killing."

<sup>91</sup> Pirnia et al., "Honour Killings and Violence against Women in Iran during the COVID-19 Pandemic."

<sup>92</sup> Exonerated excuse (sometimes called a "mitigating excuse" or "extenuating excuse") refers to a legal loophole that allows men who commit "honor crimes" to receive a reduced penalty or sometimes avoid punishment altogether, for the sake of protecting family honor.

<sup>93</sup> Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Reexamining Femicide," 2003.

Eastern, and South Asian communities) as backward. This labeling can dehumanize these groups and reinforce negative stereotypes, instead of helping us understand the deeper social and gender issues that lead to these killings.<sup>94</sup> These arguments are frequently affected by Orientalism, a school of thinking that incorrectly portrays Arab or Eastern cultures as backward, violent, misogynistic, and barbaric while presenting Western cultures as neutral or superior.<sup>95</sup>

Even though there is a lot of controversy about the term “honor killing”, scholars believe that its most important characteristics are that it is agnatic<sup>96</sup>, familial, collective, and linked to honor.<sup>97</sup> In many Middle Eastern societies, family honor is seen as extremely important, and this idea comes from a patriarchal (male-dominated) society. Families are often led by men, and inheritance rules usually favor sons over daughters, making women financially and socially dependent on male relatives. Because of this, women are expected to act in ways that protect the family's honor, and their choices and freedom are tightly controlled. Men hold authority and provide for women, but in return, they demand loyalty and obedience. Sadly, this system reinforces the idea that women need to be “protected” and that their main role is to serve and uphold the family's reputation, even at the sacrifice of their own rights and safety.<sup>98</sup>

The killing of women by their relatives is not only widespread in Muslim majority countries. A study that analysed homicide statistics from 66 nations confirmed the trend of men being more likely to be murdered than women. The number of male homicides was always higher than the number of female homicides. However, the pattern is different when looking at intimate partner homicide. The total number of intimate partner homicides was almost always higher among

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<sup>94</sup> Dayan, “Female Honor Killing.”

<sup>95</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kervorkian and Suhad Daher-Nashif, “Femicide and Colonization: Between the Politics of Exclusion and the Culture of Control,” *Violence Against Women* 19, no. 3 (2013): 295–315, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801213485548>.

<sup>96</sup> Agnatic comes from the word agnate, which in anthropology and sociology refers to family relationships traced through male lineage (the father's side).

<sup>97</sup> Odeh, “Honor Killings and the Construction of Gender in Arab Societies.”

<sup>98</sup> Anahid Devartanian Kulwicki, “THE PRACTICE OF HONOR CRIMES: A GLIMPSE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE ARAB WORLD,” *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 23, no. 1 (2002): 77–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840252825491>.

women than men.<sup>99</sup> This reminds us that femicide isn't just about violence in general; it's about violence that comes from an imbalance of equality and authority between men and women. The evidence shows that these killings aren't random or merely “crimes of passion.” They're part of a stronger pattern where men think they have the right to control or even “punish” women because they think women’s lives are less valuable. It hurts to realise that home isn't always a safe place for women, and femicide is a brutal kind of misogyny that still exists in many cultures.

## 2.4 Understandings Femicide in Indonesia

When a complex phenomenon is given a name, it starts to become more visible in our regular observations and understanding.<sup>100</sup> As a result, people start noticing it more and taking it seriously. For instance, the word “genocide” was created during the trials after World War II. Since then, killing specific groups of people has been recognized as a serious international crime.<sup>101</sup> A similar development occurred with the term “sexual harassment” in the 1970s. Previously, people did not always realize how awful it was to treat women harshly at work.<sup>102</sup> However, once it had a name, people start to recognize it, discussed it, and created regulations to stop it.

The same thing occurred with the term “femicide”. Since the term femicide was publicly stated by Russell, the term femicide has been widely discussed by academics and researchers from various fields of scientific disciplines,<sup>103</sup> leading to its broader acceptance and growing interest from governments and grassroots groups in recent years.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Heidi Stöckl et al., “The Global Prevalence of Intimate Partner Homicide: A Systematic Review,” *The Lancet* 382, no. 9895 (2013): 859–65, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(13\)61030-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)61030-2).

<sup>100</sup> Ashley Rogers, “Naming ‘Femicide,’” in *Leading Works in Law and Social Justice* (Routledge, 2021).

<sup>101</sup> “Defining ‘Genocide’ After World War II,” The National WWII Museum | New Orleans, May 1, 2025, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/defining-genocide-after-world-war-ii>.

<sup>102</sup> “Document 15: Lin Farley, Sexual Shakedown: The Sexual Harassment of Women on the Job, 1978 | Alexander Street Documents,” accessed May 19, 2025, <https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1000674410>.

<sup>103</sup> Roxane Perrin-Plouffe, “Understanding Femicide and Feminicide as a Global Phenomenon,” *Academic Journal of Criminology X Journal Universitaire de Criminologie* 1, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.21428/58a8fd3e.b0c46702>.

<sup>104</sup> Perrin-Plouffe, “Understanding Femicide and Feminicide as a Global Phenomenon.”



*Naming an injustice, and thereby providing a means of thinking about it, usually precedes the creation of a movement against it (Russell, 1992)<sup>105</sup>*

In Indonesia, the term femicide first appeared officially in 2017, which was published by The National Commission on Violence Against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*)<sup>106</sup> in a press release entitled “Alarm for the State and All of Us: Stop Femicide”. This statement did not come out of nowhere, but was a response to the high number of murders against women that continue to repeat and show a very worrying pattern, for example, the escalation of domestic violence that leads to death, sexual violence that ends in murder, wounded male ego or threatened masculinity, jealousy, unregistered marriages that the perpetrator wants to hide, avoiding responsibility for a pregnancy, and violence within dating relationships.<sup>107</sup> *Komnas Perempuan* found that many of these murders are committed by people closest to the victim, spouses, ex-husbands, and boyfriends. But what is more concerning is how these cases are often reduced to “domestic violence” or “personal conflicts,” thus obscuring the real root of the problem, which is gender-based violence.<sup>108</sup>

Recognizing the urgent need to address violence against women, *Komnas Perempuan* in 2020 formulates the definition of femicide as “the killing of women directly or indirectly because of their sex or gender, which is driven by superiority, dominance, hegemony, aggression, or misogyny towards women as well as a sense of belonging to women, unequal power relations and sadistic satisfaction”.<sup>109</sup> Referring to the *Komnas Perempuan* report, femicide is divided into 2 types (based

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<sup>105</sup> Radford and Russell, *Femicide*.

<sup>106</sup> Komnas Perempuan is an official, independent state institution established by a Presidential Decree (Keputusan Presiden No. 181/1998). It was created in response to mass sexual violence against women during the 1998 reformasi (political reform movement).

<sup>107</sup> Komnas Perempuan, “Siaran Pers Komnas Perempuan Alarm Bagi Negara Dan Kita Semua: Hentikan Femicide (Pembunuhan Terhadap Perempuan),” Komnas Perempuan | Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan, November 13, 2017, <https://komnasperempuan.go.id/pernyataan-sikap-detail/alarm-bagi-negara-dan-kita-semua-hentikan-femicide-pembunuhan-terhadap-perempuan-jakarta-13-november-2017>.

<sup>108</sup> Komnas Perempuan, “Siaran Pers Komnas Perempuan Alarm Bagi Negara Dan Kita Semua: Hentikan Femicide (Pembunuhan Terhadap Perempuan).”

<sup>109</sup> Komnas Perempuan, “Siaran Pers Komnas Perempuan Tentang Femicide,” Komnas Perempuan | Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan, 2020, <https://komnasperempuan.go.id/siaran-pers-detail/siaran-pers-komnas-perempuan-tentang-femicide>.

on killing intent), namely direct femicide and indirect femicide. Direct femicide is murder based on the intention to kill from the beginning; on the other hand, indirect femicide is a killing that results from an act of violence that is not intended to kill at the beginning.<sup>110</sup>

The 2021 report from *Komnas Perempuan*, Indonesia's National Commission on Violence Against Women, highlights nine types of femicide:<sup>111</sup> First, Intimate Femicide is when a woman's partner, like a boyfriend or husband, kills her. Second, Cultural Femicide, which has a number of subcategories:

- a. Honor-based femicide, which is when a woman is killed to "protect" the family's honor. Women are killed for things like cheating, being raped, breaking social norms, or getting pregnant outside of marriage.
- b. Dowry-related femicide, when women are murdered because of problems with the groom's family within dowry or marriage payments that don't fulfil expectations.
- c. Femicide based on race, ethnicity, or tribal identity, where women are killed because they are part of a certain minority group.
- d. Femicide associated to witchcraft, in which women are killed after being reported of practicing witchcraft or having harmful supernatural powers.
- d. Femicide related to female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), which is when girls or women die because of harmful cutting techniques done to restrict their sexuality or reproductive functions.
- e. Killing infant females because they are thought to be less valuable than boys. This can happen to female fetuses, babies, or toddlers. This is often the result of very strict views of patrilineal societies that put a higher priority on boys because they are expected to continue on the family line.

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<sup>110</sup> Komnas Perempuan, "KAJIAN AWAL & KERTAS KERJA Femisida Tidak Dikenal: Pengabaian Terhadap Terhadap Hak Atas Hidup Dan Hak Atas Keadilan Perempuan Dan Anak Perempuan," Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan (Komnas Perempuan), 2021.

<sup>111</sup> Komnas Perempuan, "KAJIAN AWAL & KERTAS KERJA Femisida Tidak Dikenal: Pengabaian Terhadap Terhadap Hak Atas Hidup Dan Hak Atas Keadilan Perempuan Dan Anak Perempuan."

Third, Femicide in Armed Conflict, which is when women are killed after being physically abused. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) says that sexual assault and rape are often used as weapons of war that weaken social institutions, which makes survivors rejected by their own communities. Fourth, Femicide in the Sex Industry, where women who work as sex workers are murdered because they fight with customers over payment or because groups of people hate them. Fifth, Femicide of Women with Disabilities: This occurs when women with disabilities are killed because of their physical condition or because they were raped and got pregnant. Sixth, Femicide based on sexual orientation and gender identity is when women are killed because they hate their sexual orientation or gender identity. Seventh, Femicide in Prisons, where women die in prison because the system doesn't keep them secure or protect their life. Eighth, Non-intimate or Systematic Femicide, where women are killed randomly without specific targeting, and the perpetrator has no intimate relationship with the victim. And the last, Femicide of Human Rights or Humanitarian Activists, where women activists are killed because their work is seen as threatening or harming the interests of certain groups.

Despite the National Commission on Violence Against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*) actively voicing the urgency of femicide, the term femicide has not been recognized in legislation in the country and therefore segmented data on the killing of women as a femicide crime is not available at the Police Criminal Investigation Unit and the Supreme Court of Indonesia.<sup>112</sup> Although the term femicide isn't yet formally recognized in law, Indonesia still uses the following legal rules to handle and punish acts of violence and femicide:<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan (Komnas Perempuan), "MENATA DATA, MENAJAMKAN ARAH (Refleksi Pendokumentasian Dan Tren Kasus Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan 2024)," Komnas Perempuan | Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan, 2025, [https://komnasperempuan.go.id/catatan-tahunan?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://komnasperempuan.go.id/catatan-tahunan?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>113</sup> Komnas Perempuan, "Femisida Tidak Dikenal: Pengabaian Terhadap Terhadap Hak Atas Hidup Dan Hak Atas Keadilan Perempuan Dan Anak Perempuan."

|                   |                   |                   |                   |                           |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Pasal 338<br>KUHP | Pasal 285<br>KUHP | Pasal 380<br>KUHP | Pasal 64<br>KUHP  | Pasal 347<br>KUHP         |
| Pasal 339<br>KUHP | Pasal 363<br>KUHP | Pasal 170<br>KUHP | Pasal 81<br>KUHP  | Pasal 302<br>KUHP         |
| Pasal 340<br>KUHP | Pasal 362<br>KUHP | Pasal 440<br>KUHP | Pasal 76D<br>KUHP | Pasal 240<br>KUHP         |
| Pasal 351<br>KUHP | Pasal 291<br>KUHP | Pasal 353<br>KUHP | Pasal 287<br>KUHP | Pasal 335<br>KUHP         |
| Pasal 365<br>KUHP | Pasal 55<br>KUHP  | Pasal 390<br>KUHP | Pasal 531<br>KUHP | Pasal 53<br>KUHP          |
| UU No.<br>23/2002 | UU No.<br>23/2004 | UU No.<br>35/2014 | UU No.<br>17/2016 | UU Darurat<br>No. 12/1951 |

Image 1. Legal Basis for Criminalization of Violence and Femicide Cases

Indonesia still doesn't have strict or specific laws that clearly address femicide. Many cases that actually show strong signs of femicide are still treated as general criminal acts, so this has an impact on the compilation of data on femicide cases that occur from time to time. On the other hand, several nations have already made bolder moves by making femicide a crime in their legal systems. These countries include Costa Rica, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Peru, El Salvador, and others. This indicates that Indonesia still has a long way to go in identifying femicide as a serious and separate type of violence against.<sup>114</sup>

Even though the term "femicide" is not officially recognized in Indonesia's legal system, it has become increasingly visible in mainstream media and on social media platforms, especially Instagram. We can see many webinars, online discussions, and content pieces dedicated to raising awareness about femicide. The Instagram account @IndonesiaHapusFemisida is one example; which focuses entirely on this issue. This account shares media reports on femicide cases, educates the public about what femicide really is, and provides important information to help people better understand and recognize this form of violence.

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<sup>114</sup> Dinda Sabrina, "Perempuan Indonesia Dalam Pusaran Kekerasan Dan Ancaman Femisida," *J-CEKI : Jurnal Cendekia Ilmiah* 3, no. 6 (2024): 6, <https://doi.org/10.56799/jceki.v3i6.5646>.



Image 2. Femicide education poster on instagram @indonesiafeminis and @jakpostimages

From the narratives circulating on mainstream social media like Instagram, femicide is generally understood as the killing of women simply because they are women, rooted in patriarchal cultures that position women as weak and lacking control over their own lives. The spreading of this narrative through webinars, educational content, infographics, and Instagram visual campaigns shows the critical role social media plays in increasing public awareness of femicide. Instagram has emerged as an alternative platform for bringing these important issues closer to the wider community, particularly younger generations, due to its more accessible, relatable, and personal communication style. Through dedicated accounts like @IndonesiaHapusFemisida, people are encouraged to understand that femicide is not just an ordinary crime but a form of systemic gender-based violence.<sup>115</sup> These contents not only provide factual information but also push audiences to speak up, join the conversation, and advocate for justice for the victims.

This social media campaign to raise awareness of the issue clearly shows that combating femicide is a collective effort. It points out how crucial community

<sup>115</sup> Aulia Hafidz Azzahra et al., “Strategi Instagram @indonesiahapusfemisida Dalam Membangun Kesadaran Followers Sebagai Upaya Pencegahan Femisida,” *SOSIAL : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan IPS* 3, no. 3 (2025): 181–93, <https://doi.org/10.62383/sosial.v3i3.1047>.

involvement and shared responsibility are to changing attitudes and cultural norms. This is in line with the statement that to overcome the problem of femicide is not only the responsibility of the authorities or the government, but the responsibility of all elements of society to work together to raise awareness that violence against women is not something that is normal and can lead to the crime of murder. In order to break the cycle of violence against women and minimize the danger of femicide, the government needs to make clear regulations and support the protection of victims by providing appropriate sanctions so that the perpetrators can feel deterrent because the suffering does not only stop at the victim but also reaches the people closest to the victim. Without concrete steps from the government and society in general, violence and femicide will continue to terrorize Indonesian women until the next generation.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Sabrina, "Perempuan Indonesia Dalam Pusaran Kekerasan Dan Ancaman Femisida."

### CHAPTER III

#### **CULTURAL VIOLENCE IN RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF EARLY MARRIAGE, PRONATALISM, AND FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION**

In this chapter, I will present an analysis of the discourses surrounding early marriage, pronatalist pressure, and female genital mutilation (FGM) within Muslim societies, especially in Indonesia, using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Johan Galtung's concept of cultural violence. This chapter serves as the core analytical section of the thesis, where I discuss how these practices, which are frequently framed as religiously and culturally legitimate practices, contribute to systemic forms of gender-based violence that can lead to femicide or conditions that endanger women's lives and well-being.

To analyze these practices, I examine how some Islamic preachers in Indonesia address early marriage, female reproductive expectations, and female genital mutilation in their sermons and online da'wah content. I do this by focusing on four prominent Indonesian Islamic preachers such as Dr. Syafiq Riza Basalamah, Dr. Khalid Basalamah, Dr. Firanda Andirja, and Buya Yahya on their YouTube videos and webinars, such as "Nikah Muda: Antara Cinta dan Realita," "Banyak Anak Itu Salah Satu Tujuan Pernikahan," "Jangan Takut Punya Banyak Anak," "Benarkah Banyak Anak Banyak Rezeki?," and several sermons that talk about the ruling on female genital mutilation.

These preachers have a big impact on how people express their religion. Dr. Syafiq Riza Basalamah is a well-known Salafi scholar who is recognized for his literalist reading of Islamic texts and his rhetorical style of preaching.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, Dr. Khalid Basalamah is a member of the Salafi movement and has achieved a lot of online popularity by advocating traditional religious values, especially when it

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<sup>117</sup> Fathia Roifah, "Power of Language Style Ustaz Syafiq Riza Basalamah Based on Sentence Structure:," paper presented at The 3rd International Conference on Language, Literature, and Education (ICLLE 2020), Padang, Indonesia, *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Language, Literature, and Education (ICLLE 2020)*, Atlantis Press, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201109.009>.

comes to family and gender issues. This is shown by discourse research on how he talks about women's piety and sexuality.<sup>118</sup> Dr. Firanda Andirja, who is also a Salafi and studied in Saudi Arabia, often talks about fiqh-based issues in his sermons and encourages women to take on household tasks.<sup>119</sup> On the other hand, Buya Yahya is a traditionalist scholar who is part of the pesantren culture and the Nahdlatul Ulama principles. His sermons are more moderate, persuasive, and context-sensitive style, combining religious guidance with community wisdom.<sup>120</sup> I selected their sermons because they share similar views in legitimizing practices such as early marriage, pronatalist pressure, and female genital mutilation.

In their sermons, they often use religious vocabulary and phrases that aim to persuade people, including "fitrah perempuan," "*pahala besar bagi ibu*," "tujuan syar'i dari pernikahan," "banyak anak banyak rezeki," and "*khitan sebagai syariat Islam*." Preachers typically frame the conversation by quoting the Prophet's sayings, classical Islamic jurisprudence, and emotionally driven advice for obedience and blessing.

These phrases show a certain moral and spiritual of being an ideal Muslim woman, which is based on obedience, fertility, and body control. I use Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to look at how these religious messages contribute to shaping gender norms and moral expectations in women's lives. Galtung's theory of cultural violence becomes significantly relevant in this topic, where discourse is connected to certain religious beliefs that justify these practices. Here, I look at how religious justification is an example of cultural violence: it makes harmful actions seem normal or even good by integrating inequity into "sacred" language and regular moral standards. In this approach, the

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<sup>118</sup> Zufrufin Saputra et al., "Discourse of Women's Sexuality in the Lecture of Ustaz Khalid Basalamah," *Journal of World Science* 2, no. 2 (2023): 2, International, <https://doi.org/10.58344/jws.v2i2.225>.

<sup>119</sup> Made Made, "DOMESTIKSASI PEREMPUAN DALAM CERAMAH USTAZ FIRANDA ANDIRJA: KAJIAN WACANA FAIRCLOUGH," *Sarasvati* 2, no. 2 (2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.30742/sv.v2i2.1079>.

<sup>120</sup> Kelaut Dia and Sri Wahyuni, "Teknik Komunikasi Persuasif Buya Yahya Pada Ceramah 'Apa Dan Bagaimana Hijrah Itu?'," *Realita: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Kebudayaan Islam* 19, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.30762/realita.v19i1.3411>.



discourse reinforces systems that endanger women's physical and psychological well-being, often without visible or direct violence.

### **3.1 Descriptive Overview of the Practices: Early Marriage, Pronatalist Pressure, and Female Genital Mutilation.**

The phenomena of child marriage (marriage under the age of 18) have become international concerns in recent years. Ending of child marriage is one of the target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aims to eliminate child marriage by the year 2030. Indonesia has officially adopted this target and committed to working toward achieving it.<sup>121</sup> The Government of Indonesia shows its commitment through formulating a national target of reducing child marriage in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) from 11.2 percent in 2018 to 8.74 in 2024.<sup>122</sup>

Child marriage in this case is defined as “marriages conducted through civil, religious, or customary law, and with or without official registration where one or both partners are children under the age of 18 years.”<sup>123</sup>

The global community's concern about the practice of child marriage relates to the fact that it violates children's human rights, limits their choices and opportunities, and makes them vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse.<sup>124</sup> Child marriage ends a girl's adolescence, which should be a time for physical, emotional and social development before entering adulthood.<sup>125</sup>

Child marriage also has a number of negative effects, such as growing poverty, dropping out of school, divorce at a young age, increasing the risk of maternal and infant mortality, stress in carrying out new roles as husband/wife and

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<sup>121</sup> Diana Teresa Pakasi, “Child Marriage in Indonesia: Practices, Politics, and Struggles,” *MASYARAKAT: Jurnal Sosiologi* 24, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.7454/mjs.v24i1.10956>.

<sup>122</sup> Pakasi, “Child Marriage in Indonesia.”

<sup>123</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik, “Pencegahan Perkawinan Anak Percepatan Yang Tidak Bisa Ditunda,” 2020.

<sup>124</sup> Anshana Arora, “Child Marriage: Latest Trends and Future Prospects,” *UNICEF DATA*, July 5, 2018, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-latest-trends-and-future-prospects/>.

<sup>125</sup> Plan International, “Because I Am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls 2012: Learning for Life,” 2012, [https://plan-international.org/uploads/2022/01/because\\_i\\_am\\_a\\_girl\\_2012\\_-\\_executive\\_summary\\_english.pdf](https://plan-international.org/uploads/2022/01/because_i_am_a_girl_2012_-_executive_summary_english.pdf).

parents, and domestic violence.<sup>126</sup> Given these facts, efforts to prevent child marriage continue to be pursued by various international organizations, governments, and non-governmental organizations in Indonesia.

While child marriage remains a concern globally, Indonesia continues to face persistent challenges despite legal reforms. The history of legislation related to the age limit for marriage in Indonesia reflects a long and dynamic journey, dating back from Law No.1 of 1974 to its revision through Law No.16 of 2019. Initially, Law No. 1 of 1974 set the minimum age limit for marriage to be 16 years for women and 19 years for men. This reflected the social and cultural norms at the time, where women were considered ready for marriage at a younger age than men. However, as awareness of women's and children's rights increased, this age limit began to be seen as problematic and irrelevant to the shifting conditions of the times.<sup>127</sup>

Reactions to the minimum age limit in Law No. 1 of 1974 began to emerge from various circles, particularly child and women's rights activists. They consider that the age of 16 for women is too young and has the potential to cause negative effects on physical and mental health, as well as hinder their chances of obtaining a proper education. UNICEF reports show that child marriage globally, including in Indonesia, has serious consequences for girls' reproductive health and quality of life. In addition, there are also cultural and customary pressures that reinforce this practice in some regions.<sup>128</sup>

In 2019, a major change occurred with the enactment of Law No. 16 of 2019, which revised the terms on the age limit for marriage. One of the most significant changes was the equalization of the minimum age of marriage for women and men to 19 years old. This revision was the outcome of the Constitutional Court's decision, which states that the difference in the marriage age limit between men and

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<sup>126</sup> Pakasi, "Child Marriage in Indonesia."

<sup>127</sup> Siti Kafidhoh et al., "Dynamics Of Legal Politics Regarding Marriage Age Limits In Indonesia: Between Religious Norms And Social Change," *Jurnal Hukum Islam* 22, no. 2 (2024): 2, Indonesia, <https://doi.org/10.28918/jhi.v22i2.06>.

<sup>128</sup> Lauren Rumble et al., "An Empirical Exploration of Female Child Marriage Determinants in Indonesia," *BMC Public Health* 18, no. 1 (2018): 407, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5313-0>.

women is discriminatory and contrary to the principle of gender equality regulated in the 1945 Constitution.<sup>129</sup>

Early marriage typically means that a girl has to start taking on adult responsibilities, but it can also lead to another expectation: having a lot of kids. This is called pronatalist pressure, which is a cultural and religious force that values high fertility and often links the value of a woman to her ability to have children.<sup>130</sup> In many Indonesian communities, especially those influenced by conservative religious norms, see the large family as something valuable and worthy of praise.

The goals of Indonesia's longstanding family planning program (KB), which began in the 1970s under the “Two Children Enough” campaign, sometimes run contrary to this pronatalist view. The program successfully reduced the fertility rate from around 5.6 to 2.3 children per woman. This was largely done through a collaborative effort between National Family Planning Coordinating Board (BKKBN) and leading Islamic groups such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah.<sup>131</sup> However, this success has declined in recent years due to rising religious conservatism, some critics consider parts of the KB program un-Islamic.<sup>132</sup>

In term of fertility rate. the findings from Toyibah (2021) showed that Muslims are more likely to have higher fertility by 0.56 points than people with another religion.<sup>133</sup> There are several possible explanations for why Muslims are likely to have more children. First, although contraception is acceptable, many Muslims might still be hesitant to use prophylactics. Some Muslims might think that limiting the number of children might be considered as rejecting Islamic religious doctrines.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Kafidhoh et al., “Dynamics Of Legal Politics Regarding Marriage Age Limits In Indonesia.”

<sup>130</sup> Juan Schoemaker, “Contraceptive Use Among the Poor in Indonesia,” *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 31 (September 2005): 106.

<sup>131</sup> Jeremy Shiffman, “Political Management in the Indonesian Family Planning Program,” *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 30 (March 2004): 27.

<sup>132</sup> Halimatusa'diyah et al., “Do Religious People Have More Children?”

<sup>133</sup> Halimatusa'diyah et al., “Do Religious People Have More Children?”

<sup>134</sup> Kevin McQuillan, “When Does Religion Influence Fertility?,” *Population and Development Review* 30, no. 1 (2004): 25–56.

Second, women's low level of autonomy in Muslim societies might keep women from deciding to use contraception and determining how many children they want to have. In this case, patriarchal culture has limited women's autonomy and increased the demand for more children.<sup>135</sup> Fourth, Islam views life, including a child's life, as sacred and the greatest gift and blessing from God, which should be appreciated and protected.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, this belief encourages some Muslim societies to have more children in order to receive more blessings from God.

However, there is a reformist view of Islam, which means a way of understanding Islam that adapts to modern times and globalization. People who follow this view are more open to interpreting Islamic teachings in a contextual or flexible way, depending on the situation today.<sup>137</sup> Muslims in this group value personal choice and using reason (thinking critically for themselves). Because of this, they might interpret Islamic teachings on family planning differently, for example, they might decide to limit the number of children they have, and see that choice as still in line with their faith.<sup>138</sup>

This flexible, reformist approach has also helped change gender roles in Islam, giving women and men more freedom in making personal decisions (like about family size) in a way that fits modern life.<sup>139</sup>

In Indonesia, female genital mutilation (FGM), which is also known as *sunat perempuan*, is still prevalent. As of 2024, about 51.2% of girls aged 0–11 experienced some form of it.<sup>140</sup> These procedures range from symbolic rituals to

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<sup>135</sup> S. Philip Morgan et al., "Muslim and Non-Muslim Differences in Female Autonomy and Fertility: Evidence from Four Asian Countries," *Population and Development Review* 28, no. 3 (2002): 515–37.

<sup>136</sup> Mohamamd Ali Shomali, "Islamic Bioethics: A General Scheme," *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine* 1 (October 2008): 1.

<sup>137</sup> Marziyeh Bakhshizadeh, *Changing Gender Norms in Islam Between Reason and Revelation* (Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.3224/86388735>.

<sup>138</sup> Bakhshizadeh, *Changing Gender Norms in Islam Between Reason and Revelation*.

<sup>139</sup> Bakhshizadeh, *Changing Gender Norms in Islam Between Reason and Revelation*.

<sup>140</sup> Fatmawati Dama, *Fenomena Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Benturan Tradisi, Agama dan Hukum Positif di Indonesia*, 2024.

minor cutting, The World Health Organisation (WHO) refer them Type I and Type IV.<sup>141</sup>

There are different types of female genital mutilation (FGM), ranging from mild to very severe. The mildest form is to remove the clitoris cap, which is somewhat similar to male circumcision, but this is rare and difficult to perform on girls. More severe forms include cutting off part or all of the clitoris, and even removing the inner and outer vaginal lips. The most extreme type is called infibulation, where most of the genital area is removed and the hole sewn up, leaving only a small hole. This is found in some parts of Africa such as Sudan. In Southeast Asia, a much milder version is practiced, more symbolic, such as small pricks or scraping.<sup>142</sup>

FGM happens a lot in all provinces in Indonesia. Prevalence rates range from 38.9% in Java-Bali to over 81% in Sulawesi. Most of the procedures, about 70% happened before the kid turned one, and they were commonly done by midwives or traditional birth attendants.<sup>143</sup>

FGM is a very traditional and religious practice. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) officially supported the practice in a 2008 fatwa, calling it mandub (recommended). It was then made into a medical procedure, even if it was banned again later. Even if medicalisation was later limited, symbolic and minor forms of FGM still happen, often because they are seen as an Islamic practices or a symbol of purity.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Rafidha Nur Alifah et al., "Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Indonesia: Systematic Review," *Media Publikasi Promosi Kesehatan Indonesia (MPPKI)* 7, no. 11 (2024): 11, <https://doi.org/10.56338/mppki.v7i11.6165>.

<sup>142</sup> Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*, Reprint (Oneworld, 2012).

<sup>143</sup> Alifah et al., "Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Indonesia."

<sup>144</sup> Lucke Kharimah Pamungkas Saputro and Najamuddin Khairur Rijal, "THE URGENCY TO RE-EVALUATE FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION PRACTICE AMONG MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN INDONESIA," *SANGKÉP: Jurnal Kajian Sosial Keagamaan* 5, no. 2 (2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.20414/sangkep.v5i2.6454>.

Traditionally, FGM is seen as an attempt to preserve women's honor, chastity, or cultural identity.<sup>145</sup> Looking at the results of the 2021 National Women's Life Experience Survey (SPHPN), data shows that 55% of girls in Indonesia experience the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), making Indonesia one of the three countries with the highest prevalence rate based on UNICEF 2015 data. This practice, often based on religious reasons (68.1%), cultural traditions (40.3%), or health myths (40.3%), has been declared a human rights violation because it risks damaging women's health and well-being, even leading to death.<sup>146</sup>

Internationally, FGM is recognized as a human rights violation and is included in Target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a demand for the end of harmful practices by 2030.<sup>147</sup> Even though Indonesia has officially committed to the SDGs, FGM still happens. This shows that there is still a conflict between global human rights rules and strong cultural practices.

The types of FGM performed in Indonesia are milder (less severe) than the worst types performed worldwide, but still cause serious health problems and promote social norms of female purity. FGM in Indonesia is therefore a culturally accepted way to organize people based on their gender. It is deeply embedded in customary, religious and medical institutions.<sup>148</sup>

### **3.2 The Stated Word: Exploring Vocabulary and Religious Messages in *Da'wah* Sermons**

Religious discourse plays a pivotal role in shaping societal norms, particularly in contexts where religion is tied to cultural identity and social practices.<sup>149</sup> In

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<sup>145</sup> Sofyan Alhadar et al., "ANALISIA KEBIJAKAN PERMENKES NOMOR 6 TAHUN 2014 LARANGAN MONGUBINGO: PERSPEKTIF TRADISI MASYARAKAT ADAT DI KABUPATEN GORONTALO," *Publik: Jurnal Manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia, Administrasi Dan Pelayanan Publik* 9 (August 2022): 536–45, <https://doi.org/10.37606/publik.v9i3.436>.

<sup>146</sup> Humas, B. H. D., Perempuan, K. P., & Anak, D. P., "55% Perempuan Jalani Sunat Perempuan, Kemen PPPA Evaluasi Rencana Aksi Nasional Pencegahan Praktik Sunat Perempuan," 2024, <https://www.kemenpppa.go.id/page/view/NTQwNQ==>.

<sup>147</sup> "– FGM/C Research Initiative," accessed July 06, 2025, <https://www.fgmcri.org/>.

<sup>148</sup> Saputro and Rijal, "THE URGENCY TO RE-EVALUATE FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION PRACTICE AMONG MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN INDONESIA."

<sup>149</sup> Eva Leiliyanti et al., "Patriarchal Language Evaluation of Muslim Women's Body, Sexuality, and Domestication Discourse on Indonesian Male Clerics Preaching," *Changing Societies & Personalities* 6, no. 3 (2022): 634, <https://doi.org/10.15826/csp.2022.6.3.193>.

Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim society, religious teachings delivered through sermons, social media, and other mainstream platforms frequently address sensitive issues such as marriage, gender roles, and societal expectations.<sup>150</sup> In the current context of Indonesian Islam, the discourse on early marriage, is significantly shaped by cultural and religious narratives disseminated by prominent preacher, Dr. Syafiq Riza Basalamah, LC, M.A. His webinar “*Nikah Muda, Antara Cinta dan Realita*”.<sup>151</sup> The 90-minute webinar is for young Muslims who want to have moral and spiritual guidances on marriage at a young age.

The textual component of Dr. Syafiq Riza Basalamah's webinar, “*Nikah Muda, Antara Cinta dan Realita*”, exposes a well created conversation that connects religious teachings with current social critiques. Through the means of rhetorical questions, analogies, and semantic choices, the speaker criticizes contemporary social norms and advocates early marriage as an approach to solve current moral dilemmas.<sup>152</sup>

The preachers often use rhetorical questions in their speeches to make the audience think more deeply. These questions are usually used to gently criticize modern views that are seen as not in line with Islamic teachings. For instance, the question “*Why? What’s the problem?*” questions the justification for Indonesia's legal change in the marriage age to 19 years old. By questioning the urgency and legitimacy of this regulation, the speaker positions it as an arbitrary action and not in accordance with Islamic teachings. In the same pattern, the expression “*Do people who married at 25 not get divorced? They do*” questions the presumption that postponing marriage guarantees marital success. These rhetorical choices challenge the audience's acceptance of present regulatory systems and inspire them to reconsider their relevance with Islamic values. Moreover, the question “*Does studying oppose with marriage?*” clearly addresses the society prioritizing of education over marriage, therefore portraying it as a false dichotomy. By use of

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<sup>150</sup> Leiliyanti et al., “Patriarchal Language Evaluation of Muslim Women’s Body, Sexuality, and Domestication Discourse on Indonesian Male Clerics Preaching.”

<sup>151</sup> *Nikah Muda, Antara Cita Dan Realita - Ustadz Dr Syafiq Riza Basalamah MA*, directed by Syafiq Riza Basalamah Official, 2023, 01:33:55, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frzSCgu8qJ0>.

<sup>152</sup> *Nikah Muda, Antara Cita Dan Realita - Ustadz Dr Syafiq Riza Basalamah MA*, 2023.

such questions, the preacher successfully frames early marriage as not only acceptable but also as a moral defense against social degeneration. This connects more general criticisms of modernism in Islamic debate, in which secular ideas can be seen as destroying traditional family structures.<sup>153</sup>

The prophetic message “*Whoever hates my sunnah is not of my community*”<sup>154</sup> also used by the preacher to support his sermon. This hadith is narrated by al-Bukhari and often cited by Islamic preachers to promote the encouragement of marriage, including early marriage, as part of the Prophet’s Sunnah that should be followed.<sup>155</sup> Here, the sunnah or the Prophet’s way of life is positioned symbolically as a separating line between those who follow the road and those who depart. This metaphor emphasizes the need of following traditions and frames separation as a kind of spiritual and communal isolation. Additionally, the hadith “*Manistato ‘a minkum al-ba ‘ah fal yatazawwaj*”<sup>156</sup> (whoever among you can afford it, let him marry), is used by the preacher to emphasise that marriage is a religious requirement, especially when young men are financially and socially ready. This hadith, quoted from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari and Muslim, and often framed as a command of early marriage rather than a choice, it used to support the idea that postponing marriage is discouraged, particularly for young people.<sup>157</sup> Using this narrative, preachers legitimize early marriage as a way to avoid premarital sex and as a means of fulfilling prophetic guidance. Religious-legal critiques show how these traditions are used to make child marriage seem like a religious obligation.<sup>158</sup>

In one part of the sermon, the preacher quotes to a well-known hadith of the Prophet Muhammad: “*I have not left a trial more severe for men than women, and*

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<sup>153</sup> Amina Abdullah Abu Shehab, “WOMEN, ISLAM AND MODERNITY,” *Submitted for Award of Master of Philosophy, Department of Anthropology, London School of Economics, University of London*, 1992.

<sup>154</sup> *Nikah Muda, Antara Cita Dan Realita - Ustadz Dr Syafiq Riza Basalamah MA*, 2023.

<sup>155</sup> Annisa Az Zahra et al., “PERNIKAHAN USIA DINI DALAM PERSPEKTIF HADIS: TELAAH KONTEMPORER MELALUI PENDEKATAN PSIKOLOGI,” *Canonica Religia* 2, no. 1 (2024): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.30762/cr.v2i1.1817>.

<sup>156</sup> *Nikah Muda, Antara Cita Dan Realita - Ustadz Dr Syafiq Riza Basalamah MA*, 2023.

<sup>157</sup> Barkah et al., “The Manipulation of Religion and The Legalization of Underage Marriages in Indonesia,” 2023.

<sup>158</sup> Zahra et al., “PERNIKAHAN USIA DINI DALAM PERSPEKTIF HADIS.”



*the greatest trial is named women*”<sup>159</sup>. These phrases often appear in religious sermons to remind men of the challenges they may face when interacting with women. This hadith is also framed to show women as both a test and a responsibility for men. These opinions present two different points of view: women are presented as a divine test, a test of men's loyalty and strength; on the other hand, they are shown as a source of moral temptation that needs to be watched and controlled. This dynamic is in line with a more general cultural pattern of gender objectification, where women are often reduced to a position of having to fulfill male expectations, and limiting their autonomy.<sup>160</sup> As Mernissi (2002) argues, such representations are not merely incidental, but deeply established in systems of power that seek to regulate women's bodies and behavior, often under the guise of moral or cultural preservation.<sup>161</sup>

The preacher's linguistic choices greatly influence the discourse's construction. It can be seen from the religious roots of the preacher's arguments; religious vocabulary such as “*shariah*” (Islamic law), “*sunnah*” (prophetic tradition), and “*taqwa*” (piety) gives the narrative a sense of authority and legitimacy. The repeated use of words like “*ujian*” (trial) and “*syahwat*” (lust) highlights the moral issues of gender relations and marriage, portraying them as tests of faith. Using religious language frequently supports the preacher in establishing authority by situating their thoughts within familiar cultural and religious frameworks.<sup>162</sup> This intentional use of language legitimises the speaker's perspective and engages the listener by appealing to common values, creating a feeling of communal identity and moral alignment.<sup>163</sup> Norman Fairclough says that there is a close relationship between critical discourse analysis and the element of “power.” A text is valued because of the power behind the discourse production

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<sup>159</sup> *Nikah Muda, Antara Cita Dan Realita - Ustadz Dr Syafiq Riza Basalamah MA*, directed by Syafiq Riza Basalamah Official, 2023, 01:33:55, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frzSCgu8qJ0>.

<sup>160</sup> Fabrizio Santoniccolo et al., “Gender and Media Representations: A Review of the Literature on Gender Stereotypes, Objectification and Sexualization,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 10 (2023): 5770, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20105770>.

<sup>161</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, 2. repr (Kali for Women, 2002).

<sup>162</sup> Belinda Marie Balraj et al., “The Relationship Between Language and Religion,” *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 10, no. 11 (2020): Pages 1217-1224, <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v10-i11/8198>.

<sup>163</sup> Balraj et al., “The Relationship Between Language and Religion.”

that makes discourse consumers interested in consuming the discourse. In this sense, religious discourse plays a significant role in shaping societal norms and influencing behaviour because it draws on strongly rooted cultural narratives and symbols.<sup>164</sup>

The perspectives of religious preachers in Indonesia regarding the practice vary widely. Some sermons explicitly legitimize early marriage, while others, especially those delivered by prominent religious figures, advocate a more moderate stance. Rather than directly promoting or prohibiting these practices, they often acknowledge their potential negative consequences. For instance, Ustadz Abu Qotadah argues that Islam does not prohibit early marriage and does not set a minimum age for marriage. However, he emphasizes that human development evolves, and as such, the appropriate age for marriage may differ among generations.<sup>165</sup> Similarly, Quraish Shihab critically discusses the justification of early marriage as a way to avoid *zina* (premarital sex), likening it to treating one disease with another. He warns that marriages undertaken without adequate preparation can result in outcomes more damaging than *zina* itself, such as unprepared childcare, increased risk of divorce, and neglected children. For him, the ideal solution lies in comprehensive education and fulfilling the role of the family, nurturing, educating, and instilling religious values in children as a more sustainable way to prevent premarital sexual behavior.<sup>166</sup>

In examining the topic of pronatalist pressure, I refer a sermon by Ustaz Dr. Syafiq Riza Basalamah that I found on YouTube, in which he articulated, “*Banyak anak itu salah satu tujuan pernikahan, untuk memperbanyak umat Nabi Muhammad SAW*”.<sup>167</sup> One of the reasons for marriage is to have numerous children, which will be beneficial to the followers of Prophet Muhammad. This

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<sup>164</sup> Dale F. Eickelman and James P. Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 2. ed, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>165</sup> *Bagaimana Pandangan Islam Dan Masyarakat Mengenai Pernikahan Dini? - Ustadz Abu Qotadah*, directed by RIYADHUL JANNAH CHANNEL, 2021, 33:50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iAmghvRdCQ>.

<sup>166</sup> *Menikah Muda Karena Takut Berzina? | Shihab & Shihab*, directed by Najwa Shihab, 2021, 11:58, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVfTxizY750>.

<sup>167</sup> *Banyak Anak Itu Salah Satu Tujuan Pernikahan - Ustadz Dr Syafiq Riza Basalamah MA*, directed by Syafiq Riza Basalamah Official, 2020, 03:29, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Md5rkBbcgpA>.

example clearly showed how religious discuss can make having children seem like a spiritual duty.<sup>168</sup> According to Serour (2013), having children is profoundly connected to religion and moral principles, defining childbirth not merely as a personal option but as a spiritual obligation within the institution of marriage.<sup>169</sup> In this context, pronatalist is regarded as a divine blessing and an act for fulfilling religious duties, which can contribute to the leading of societal expectations and hidden pressures for reproduction.<sup>170</sup>

Ustaz Dr. Khalid Zeed Abdullah Basalamah's sermons declare similar things. He says, “*Islam instructs its followers to have numerous children*”<sup>171</sup>. The sermons use authoritative and direct language, such as declarative statements and religious references, to make procreation an ethical obligation. Religious interpretations can influence cultural norms around reproduction, promoting the belief that procreation is both a moral duty and an indicator of piety.<sup>172</sup> Rhetorical questions like “Why fear having many children?”<sup>173</sup> further engage the audience emotionally and diminish space for critical reflection. These linguistic approaches are not neutral,<sup>174</sup> they are part of a larger cultural and religious framework that correlates reproduction with piety and frames alternative choices, such as delaying or limiting childbirth, as morally wrong.<sup>175</sup>

When looking at how religious speech affects ethical standards, the audience, which are mostly devout Muslims, is encouraged to see having many children as a moral duty. In this regard, Dr. Khalid Basalamah's statement that “*Dying in*

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<sup>168</sup> G. I. Serour, “Ethical Issues in Human Reproduction: Islamic Perspectives,” *Gynecological Endocrinology: The Official Journal of the International Society of Gynecological Endocrinology* 29, no. 11 (2013): 949–52, <https://doi.org/10.3109/09513590.2013.825714>.

<sup>169</sup> Serour, “Ethical Issues in Human Reproduction.”

<sup>170</sup> Serour, “Ethical Issues in Human Reproduction.”

<sup>171</sup> *BENARCAH BANYAK ANAK BANYAK REZEKI ? Ini Penjelasan Menurut Islam - Ceramah Ustadz Khalid Basalamah*, directed by Ustadzpedia, 2021, 10:58, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qloWABuJ4Y8>.

<sup>172</sup> Serour, “Ethical Issues in Human Reproduction.”

<sup>173</sup> *JANGAN TAKUT PUNYA BANYAK ANAK | USTADZ SYAFIQ RIZA BASALAMAH*, directed by SAP Channel, 2022, 04:58, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naiCCT1tx-w>.

<sup>174</sup> Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*.

<sup>175</sup> Batula Abdi et al., “‘Children Are a Blessing from God’ – a Qualitative Study Exploring the Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Contraceptive Use in Two Muslim Communities in Kenya,” *Reproductive Health* 17, no. 1 (2020): 44, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-020-0898-z>.

*childbirth is martyrdom, entering paradise without judgement*”<sup>176</sup> purifies the physical dangers of pregnancy, promoting childbirth to an act of worship. This dynamic illustrates Norman Fairclough’s concept of discursive practice, where language consumption not only conveys meaning but also reinforces specific social behaviors and power relations, in this case, by normalizing high fertility as spiritually valorous.<sup>177</sup>

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is still one of the most controversial and sensitive topics in modern Islamic discussion, especially when it is portrayed as a religious duty. In some sermons, the practice is discussed together with male circumcision, often blurring the ethical and medical distinction between the two. Dr. Firanda Andirja said in his sermon, “*When males are circumcised, women are also circumcised*” in response to a question about FGM. This equates male circumcision with female genital mutilation using a parallel structure. FGM is framed as equally accepted by referring to widely accepted male genital mutilation practices.<sup>178</sup> He referred to it as *sunnah* (the way of life of the Prophet Muhammad) and even suggested that “*The person who performs the circumcision should be an expert, because female genital mutilation is not arbitrary, if too much is taken, it will make the woman unable to get sensual, resulting in a lack of harmony with her husband*”<sup>179</sup>. This is a linguistic shift that legitimizes the practice by acknowledging the risks while saying they are manageable. Referring back to that statement, the message defines female genital mutilation as a way to control female sexuality for the husband’s benefit, positioning women’s bodies as tools for satisfying male desire. These thoughts connect with solid field research showing that FGM is culturally justified by claiming that women's sexual passions should

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<sup>176</sup> BENARKAH BANYAK ANAK BANYAK REZEKI ? Ini Penjelasan Menurut Islam - Ceramah Ustadz Khalid Basamalah.

<sup>177</sup> Janette Yael Zupnik, “Reviewed Work: Language and Power by Norman Fairclough,” *Cambridge University Press* 20, no. 2 (1991): 265–69.

<sup>178</sup> Reyhana Patel and Khalid Roy, “FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING IN INDONESIA: A FIELD STUDY,” *Islamic Relief Canada*, 2016 2013.

<sup>179</sup> “(18) Hukum Wanita Dikhitan. Sunnah Apa Wajib? - Ustadz Dr. Firanda Andirja, MA #dikhitan #wanita #shorts - YouTube,” accessed June 12, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/dLVCIfd91pc>.

be controlled and that sexual harmony is vital, thereby turning women into “*pemuas nafsu*” (sexual satisfiers for men).<sup>180</sup>

Ustadz Khalid Basalamah additionally talked about his own experience, saying that he circumcised his daughter when a baby and calling it “very good”.<sup>181</sup> He also used legitimacy by saying that doing it from birth is “far better”, tapping into tradition belief that it is good for health.<sup>182</sup> Buya Yahya, in one of his speech, labeled female genital mutilation as “*an honor for women*”<sup>183</sup> This kind of language doesn't just give information; it also pushes individuals to do so and gives the act a moral value by framing it as something noble and spiritually meaningful. According to Setiati, Muslim, and Sabri (2023), this is a common rhetorical strategy used in communities like Garut, West Java, where emotional language is commonly utilized to make female genital mutilation seem like a morally and spiritually important practices. Instead of allowing for critical discussion, this kind of language maintains societal standards and makes the practice look unquestionable or even commendable.<sup>184</sup> By incorporating emotional and religious meaning to the discourse, the practice is protected from critique and sustained through community identity and perceived virtue.

The characterization of FGM as a “*sunnah*” and a manifestation of “honour” aligns with Johan Galtung’s theory of cultural violence, which clarify how religious teachings are used to legitimize or normalize both structural and direct violence.<sup>185</sup> These preachers use religious language to hide the potential negative consequences of FGM, including as physical and mental trauma, and present it as a moral and spiritual duty. Girls who have been treated with FGM are at danger of serious

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<sup>180</sup> Nurun Sariyah et al., “Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) for The Harmony of Sexual Relationship by Islamic Law Perspective,” *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 34, no. 1 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v34i1.3208>.

<sup>181</sup> *Apakah Anak Perempuan Wajib Dikhitan Disunat* Ustadz Khalid Basalamah, directed by Kajian Sunnah, 2018, 02:31, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OE97pwOuRog>.

<sup>182</sup> *Apakah Anak Perempuan Wajib Dikhitan Disunat* Ustadz Khalid Basalamah.

<sup>183</sup> *Hukum Khitan Bagi Bayi Perempuan - Buya Yahya Menjawab*, directed by Al-Bahjah TV, 2018, 04:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEhElkCIJw>.

<sup>184</sup> Atu Setiati et al., “The Polemic of Female Circumcision in Garut West Java Indonesia: Clash of Culture and Regional Policy,” *Fikri: Jurnal Kajian Agama, Sosial Dan Budaya* 8, no. 1 (2023): 69–81, <https://doi.org/10.25217/jf.v8i1.2672>.

<sup>185</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

physical effects such as severe pain, bleeding, shock, difficulty in passing urine and faeces, and sepsis. Long-term effects can include infections and soreness that won't go away.<sup>186</sup>

Additionally, Buya Yahya's dismissal of anti-FGM advocates as outsiders who “*should not be followed*”<sup>187</sup> establishes a “us versus them” dichotomy. This obvious opposition of us against them not only silences those who disagree, but also isolates FGM from evaluation by showing criticism as a betrayal of Islamic identity.<sup>188</sup> Anthropologists and feminists argue that when religious discourse labels dissenters as outsiders, it reinforces cultural violence by making harmful practices appear natural and God-sanctioned.<sup>189</sup> For example, Gruenbaum et al. (2023) highlight how FGM is enforced through appeals to tradition and religious authority, making it socially risky, if not forbidden to resist without appearing to reject core cultural values.<sup>190</sup> Similarly, Kelleher's analysis reveals that framing resistance as resistance to belief is a classic tactic that embeds patriarchal control in religious narratives, which effectively perpetuates structural violence against women's bodies.<sup>191</sup>

Highlighting the relationship between the speaker and the audience, another component of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on how the discourse is produced, shared, and consumed. The speaker's authority and the context in which the message is presented directly influence the formation of discourse. All of the preachers that I've mentioned before, a well-known Islamic preacher with a strong academic background in Islamic studies,<sup>192</sup> they construct the narratives from a

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<sup>186</sup> Jacinta K. Muteshi et al., “The Ongoing Violence against Women: Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting,” *Reproductive Health* 13, no. 1 (2016): 44, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-016-0159-3>.

<sup>187</sup> *Hukum Khitan Bagi Bayi Perempuan - Buya Yahya Menjawab*.

<sup>188</sup> Rachel Kelleher, “The Cut in Conflict: Female Genital Mutilation and the Concept of Religious Violence in the Western World,” *Journal of the Council for Research on Religion* 1 (December 2019): 45–69, <https://doi.org/10.26443/jcreor.v1i0.5>.

<sup>189</sup> Kelleher, “The Cut in Conflict.”

<sup>190</sup> Ellen Gruenbaum et al., “Reconsidering the Role of Patriarchy in Upholding Female Genital Modifications: Analysis of Contemporary and Pre-Industrial Societies,” *International Journal of Impotence Research* 35, no. 3 (2023): 202–11, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41443-022-00581-5>.

<sup>191</sup> Kelleher, “The Cut in Conflict.”

<sup>192</sup> Naela Salsabillaa and Muhammad Yassir, “Gagasan Syafiq Riza Basalamah Tentang Langkah-langkah dalam Membangun Pernikahan Bertahan Lama,” *Al-'Adalah: Jurnal Syariah dan Hukum Islam* 8, no. 1 (2023): 107–28, <https://doi.org/10.31538/adlh.v8i1.3427>.

rich tapestry of sacred texts, historical events, and modern societal critiques. Their target audience, who are mostly devout Muslims navigating the complexities of modern life, will find substantial relevance in the connection of faith and current situations, further strengthening the legitimacy of the message.<sup>193</sup>

Furthermore, the video format helps to distribute their speech since it uses digital channels like YouTube to reach a large audience throughout Indonesia. This accessibility is crucial since it enables the speaker to interact with Muslims who could be looking for moral and spiritual guidance in a situation of fast changing society. In combination with using Arabic words, conversational Indonesian can help to make the message more relatable and support its religious legitimacy.<sup>194</sup> The preacher's speech is more interesting and powerful since they are skillfully ends the distance between traditional Islamic teachings and contemporary societal issues by using a familiar linguistic approach. When it comes to consuming, the viewers are supposed to take away the lessons from the webinar as guidance for their social and personal life. The rhetorical questions and commands that they used are purposefully designed to provoke introspection and encourage adherence to established social norms. This makes emphasize the fact that discourse is not only a reflection of reality but also a powerful tool for shaping people's attitudes and behavior.<sup>195</sup>

### 3.3 Constructing the Ideal Woman in Islamic Preaching

The third dimension of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) places the sermon in a broader socio-cultural context, thus demonstrating its goal in either preserving or challenging social norms. This discourse matches with Johan Galtung's concept of cultural violence, which refers to the ways in which cultural norms and ideologies justify or legitimize direct and structural violence.<sup>196</sup> In this instance, early marriage became accepted as a religious obligation even if these practices could damage girls'

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<sup>193</sup> Roifah, "Power of Language Style Ustaz Syafiq Riza Basalamah Based on Sentence Structure."

<sup>194</sup> Nasir Razzaq, "Language and Religious Discourse: An Analysis of the Linguistic Features and Persuasive Strategies in Islamic Sermons," *IQAN* 5, no. 02 (2023): 17–34, <https://doi.org/10.36755/iqan.v5i02.427>.

<sup>195</sup> Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*.

<sup>196</sup> Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 291–305, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005>.

general well-being, education, and health.<sup>197</sup> By claiming religious authority, helps the preacher to stand by the acts, hence it becomes challenging to criticize it without seeming to reject Islamic values. This reflects a larger pattern of cultural violence being perpetuated through religious discourse, which frame harmful actions in terms of moral and spiritual legitimacy.<sup>198</sup>

According to Johan Galtung, we can understand violence through three main types, direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. He visualizes these three types as a "triangle of violence," where each corner represents a different kind of violence and each one is connected to the others.<sup>199</sup>

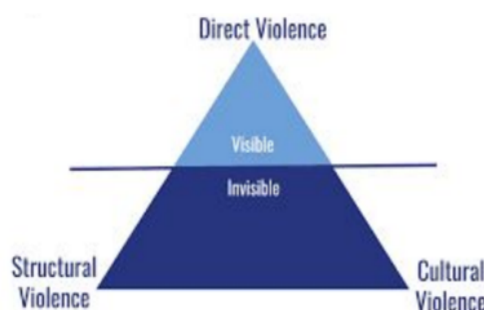


Image 1. Triangle of Violence

Like sudden incidents, direct violence is the most obvious. Among the physical acts that cause harm to others, for example like war, murder, and abuse. A more ongoing process is structural violence. This violence is embedded in systems such as poverty, racism, and injustice that restrict people from meeting their most basic needs. Long lasting and deeply rooted violence is cultural violence. Cultural violence talks about the behaviours, beliefs and practices in society that contribute to violence becoming “normal”, or acceptable.<sup>200</sup>

Starting with cultural violence, the cycle of violence moves through structural violence and ends with direct violence. People's perspectives are largely shaped by their culture; culture teaches and normalizes concepts that make exploitation or

<sup>197</sup> Rifanto Bin Ridwan et al., “Early Marriage in Medical View and Maqashid Sharia,” *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v6i1.2751>.

<sup>198</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>199</sup> Julia Paulson and Leon Tikly, *Reconceptualising Violence in International and Comparative Education: Revisiting Galtung’s Framework*, Zenodo, September 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.7097150>.

<sup>200</sup> Paulson and Tikly, *Reconceptualising Violence in International and Comparative Education*.



oppression seem “natural” or unexplained. People don't even realize that they are being exploited, for example, because cultural standards have convinced them that this is as it really is.<sup>201</sup> In terms of religion, cultural violence is the use of religious texts, doctrines, or interpretations to support and normalize systemic or direct violence.<sup>202</sup>

In many religious contexts, especially in Islamic societies, women are positioned in a subordinate position within the larger social structure because they are not only portrayed as caretakers but also as potential sources of moral dilemmas and temptation for men.<sup>203</sup> When early marriage justified as religious teaching, underlying harm, physical, psychological, and social, is often overlooked. This form of normalization aligns with the idea of cultural violence from Johan Galtung.<sup>204</sup>

The preacher occasionally use the advises against *zina* (fornication) and sexual vulnerability to explain why they should get married young,<sup>205</sup> framing it as moral protection against social and religious violations.<sup>206</sup> This reasoning, however, ignores the underlying consequences of early marriage, which include a higher risk of maternal death, domestic abuse, and a decrease of women's independence.<sup>207</sup> Kidman (2016) argues that early marriage is significantly linked to harmful health consequences, including complications during childbirth due to the physical immaturity of young brides, as well as increased vulnerability to intimate partner violence.<sup>208</sup> Furthermore, early marriage often limits women's

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<sup>201</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>202</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>203</sup> Farid Esack et al., *CULTURE, RELIGION AND GENDER* (Inter Press Service, 2002).

<sup>204</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>205</sup> *Nikah Muda, Antara Cita Dan Realita - Ustadz Dr Syafiq Riza Basalamah MA*, 2023.

<sup>206</sup> Nqobizwe Mvelo Ngema and Desan Iyer, *Penalty for Committing Fornication & Adultery (Zina) in Islamic Law as a Violation of Freedom from Torture*, 2022.

<sup>207</sup> Rachel Kidman, “Child Marriage and Intimate Partner Violence: A Comparative Study of 34 Countries,” *International Journal of Epidemiology*, October 12, 2016, dyw225, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyw225>.

<sup>208</sup> Kidman, “Child Marriage and Intimate Partner Violence.”

access to education and economic opportunities, perpetuating cycles of dependency and inequality.<sup>209</sup>

By applying the speech in the larger socio-cultural context of pronatalist pressure in Muslim societies, the sermons show Johan Galtung's idea of cultural violence, where norms and ideologies make structural violence seem normal or acceptable.<sup>210</sup> These speeches highlight that having children become like a religious duty, which makes it hard to see the negative consequences on it, such as maternal mortality. The preacher's statement, said that "*Family planning is a Jewish project to suppress the Muslim population in Palestine*"<sup>211</sup> politicises reproductive autonomy, illustrating it as an existential threat to Islamic identity, in line with Petchesky's (1980) study of the intersection of religious and political ideologies in regulating women's reproduction.<sup>212</sup> It translates these messages into religious language makes systemic gender injustice seem normal, making it seem like fighting against it is fighting against faith itself.<sup>213</sup>

Lastly, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25 November), the Academic Council on the United Nations System and the Small Arms Survey put together a symposium on femicide. It took place at the United Nations in Vienna on 26 November 2012. During this event, deaths caused by female genital mutilation (FGM) were officially classified as a type of femicide, emphasizing the need to treat cultural practices like FGM as serious forms of gender-based violence.<sup>214</sup> This acknowledgment highlights the profound establishment of patriarchal norms that sustain such behaviors, leading to significant suffering and even fatal accidents for women and girls. However, this

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<sup>209</sup> Muazzam Nasrullah et al., "Knowledge and Attitude towards Child Marriage Practice among Women Married as Children-a Qualitative Study in Urban Slums of Lahore, Pakistan," *BMC Public Health* 14, no. 1 (2014): 1148, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-1148>.

<sup>210</sup> Galtung, "Cultural Violence," 1990.

<sup>211</sup> *BENARCAH BANYAK ANAK BANYAK REZEKI ? Ini Penjelasan Menurut Islam - Ceramah Ustadz Khalid Basamalah.*

<sup>212</sup> Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, "Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction," *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2 (1987): 263, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177802>.

<sup>213</sup> Beth Speake, "Islam and Women's Reproductive and Sexual Rights in the MENA Region," *International Relations*, 2012.

<sup>214</sup> "DCN5: Symposium on Femicide: A Global Issue That Demands Action," United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime, accessed June 10, 2025, [//www.unodc.org/unodc/en/ngos/DCN5-Symposium-on-femicide-a-global-issue-that-demands-action.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/ngos/DCN5-Symposium-on-femicide-a-global-issue-that-demands-action.html).

raises an important and often overlooked question: why are other harmful cultural practices that similarly endanger women's health and lives, such as early marriages, pronatalist pressure, not consistently categorized as femicide? These practices are also culturally rooted and frequently result in harm or death, yet they are excluded from formal definitions of femicide. This gap in categorization reflects broader issues in how femicide is conceptualized and understood. In the chapter V, I will critically examine these inconsistencies, looking at whether those practices are seen as femicide or not, and the implications of these for addressing gender-based violence comprehensively.

### **3.4 Islamic Feminist Readings Against Patriarchal Norms**

We often hear religious sermons or narratives that explicitly position women as second-class beings, framed in subordinate roles. In many of these sermons, women are not addressed as full subjects, but rather treated as objects, often as sources of temptation, trials for men, or symbols of honor that must be guarded. For instance, women value is reduced to their roles as wives and mothers whose primary duty is to serve and obey. These narratives, repeated across religious platforms, smoothly reinforce gender hierarchies and shape how society perceives women's roles.

In this regard, it is important to engage with Islamic feminist thought as an alternative perspective to dominant patriarchal interpretations of religion. Islamic feminism does not oppose Islam itself, but seeks to revisit and reinterpret religious texts in ways that uphold justice, equality, and dignity for women, universal values that are rooted in the Islamic tradition.<sup>215</sup> By doing so, it offers a meaningful contribution to rethinking gender norms within contemporary Muslim societies.

Scholars like Amina Wadud (1999), in her seminal work *Qur'an and Woman*, argue that the Qur'an, when read through a gender-equality lens, offers a radically egalitarian vision. Wadud challenges the male-centric interpretations of scripture

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<sup>215</sup> Nora Jaber, "Beyond International Human Rights: Islamic Feminism as Alternative Rights Praxis," *Feminist Legal Studies*, ahead of print, July 3, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-025-09577-0>.

and proposes that many discriminatory practices are not derived from the Qur'an itself, but from patriarchal readings shaped by socio-cultural contexts.<sup>216</sup>

Such re-readings of Islamic texts are essential when examining how certain harmful practices are often legitimized in the name of religion. One clear example is early marriage, which is frequently defended using religious arguments. However, these justifications often ignore the deeper ethical principles of Islam. While traditional interpretations may rely on tools like *ijma* (consensus) and *qiyas* (analogy), Islamic feminist scholars remind us that these should not be used in ways that contradict the core aims of *maqasid al-shariah*, particularly the protection of life, dignity, and well-being.<sup>217</sup> In this way, scholars like Amina Wadud invite us to critically reflect on how we interpret religious texts and to ensure that our interpretations align with the spirit of justice embedded within the Qur'an.

According to Mir-Hosseini (2006), Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) was historically constructed within patriarchal settings where women's roles were confined to domesticity and reproductive labor. She emphasizes that these interpretations are not immutable and should be revisited in light of current knowledge and gender justice principles.<sup>218</sup> From this perspective, early marriage, especially when imposed, can be viewed as a violation of a girl's bodily autonomy and right to education, both of which are protected under Islamic principles of *'adl* (justice) and *rahmah* (compassion).

Kecia Ali also address how important consent is, especially when it comes to marriage. She connects this idea of consent to sexual ethics and gender equality in Islam. She explains that in older Islamic traditions, fathers might marry off their young girls or boys without asking them first. There was no need for the child's permission. But things are starting to change now.<sup>219</sup> For instance, a new fatwa (religious ruling) in Saudi Arabia advises children should be asked if they want to

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<sup>216</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, 2nd ed (Oxford university press, 1999).

<sup>217</sup> Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari'ah Law: An Introduction*, Reprinted (Oneworld Publ, 2010).

<sup>218</sup> Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (2006): 629–45, <https://doi.org/10.1086/508085>.

<sup>219</sup> Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*.

get married. This fresh perspective is more compatible with what the Prophet Muhammad taught. Ali also links these concepts to real-life court cases, such as the Saima Waheed case in Pakistan, where the Supreme Court said that a woman can marry whoever she wants without her guardian's permission.<sup>220</sup> In general, Kecia Ali's idea advocates a more modern, fair, and thoughtful view of Islam, especially with regard to women's rights and personal choice.

Many Muslim societies have a strong tradition of glorifying motherhood, which is frequently used to force women into performing reproductive duties against their will. Although mothers are honoured in the Qur'an, Islamic feminists argue that this regard shouldn't be translated into cultural practices or oppressive pronatalist rules. Asma Barlas (2002) criticises the patriarchal use of religious texts to normalise the reproductive roles of women. Islam never reduces women solely to child-bearers. Instead, it acknowledges women's agency and intellect. It claims that both sexes are capable of making moral decisions and are stewards (*khalifa*).<sup>221</sup> Limiting women to their reproductive roles is an incorrect interpretation.

Beyond reproductive expectations, other harmful practices that are also justified in the name of tradition and religion turn women's bodies into the object of control. Female genital mutilation is among the most prominent instances of this (FGM). Although the practice of female genital mutilation earlier than Islam, it has been absorbed and religiously justified in some Muslim-majority societies. Even though it is not mentioned in the Qur'an, many religious leaders use weak Hadiths to support it. Nawal El Saadawi (2007), in *The Hidden Face of Eve*, powerfully narrates how FGM is a brutal control mechanism over women's sexuality masked under the guise of purity and modesty.<sup>222</sup>

According to Kecia Ali (2006) Muslims don't always have to say that female genital mutilation (FGM) is "un-Islamic" to prohibit it. Sometimes, it's better to realize that many religious texts, including hadith and sunnah, were written a long

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<sup>220</sup> Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*.

<sup>221</sup> Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam*.

<sup>222</sup> Nawāl Sa'dāwī, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (Zed Books, 2007).

time ago. In contemporary society, the scriptures might not be meant to be obeyed exactly as they are. Instead of arguing over whether FGM is allowed or not, we should discuss about it in terms of ethics and morality, what's right or wrong based on compassion, health, and human dignity. These kinds of deep, honest discussions are important not just for FGM but for broader questions about sexual ethics in Islam. It would probably be more effective if we just said “Islam does not support this practice”. The goal is to protect women's rights and their bodily autonomy, while respecting their beliefs.<sup>223</sup>

Not all Muslims practice female genital mutilation (FGM), and it's not just Muslims who do it. In reality, most Muslims all around the world are not practicing it at all. In places where it does happen, like Egypt, both Muslims and Christians may perform it, which shows that religion isn't the main reason people do it. Instead, how common or severe the practice is depends more on local culture, education levels, and economic status than on religion. In many Muslim-majority countries, FGM doesn't exist at all, and in places where it does, it often existed even before Islam arrived. For instance, in Southeast Asia (like Indonesia and Malaysia), it was only practiced after Islam came there. This is probably because the Shafi'i school of Islamic law, which commands that FGM is obligatory for females as well as males.<sup>224</sup>

One of the reasons why many people are against FGM is to counter stereotypes that make Islam look cruel or oppressive to women. However, an even stronger reason is the effort to end the practice completely. Asma A'Haleem believes that religious leaders should clearly state that FGM is a form of harm and should be banned in Islam. She states that it is not enough to say that religion does not demand it, religion must be actively used to stop it. A'Haleem's statement raises

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<sup>223</sup> Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*.

<sup>224</sup> Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*.

the crucial question of how Muslim thinkers should engage in public discourse to tackle issues related to women's body-autonomy.<sup>225</sup>

A historian named Jonathan Berkey looked into classic Islamic legal writings and found that, although scholars had slightly different views on the details, most scholars were strongly in supporting female genital mutilation.<sup>226</sup> Some prominent scholars are now rethinking this problem in recent times. Shaikh Tantawi, a former senior scholar at al-Azhar, one of Egypt's most important Islamic universities, argued that it's better to let medical doctors decide whether FGM is harmful or not.<sup>227</sup> Another major scholar, Muhammad al-Ghazali, said that the Prophet Muhammad never circumcised his daughters.<sup>228</sup> But some scholars today still support FGM, saying it is a decent and honourable thing to do. For instance, Gad al-Haq 'Ali considers FGM to be one of the religious fitrahs for both men and women and a noble act, 'If people in a region refuse to practice it, the (Muslim) head of state can declare war on them'.<sup>229</sup>

However, female genital mutilation (FGM) should be rejected because its effects are much more harmful than male circumcision. FGM can cause serious health problems like pain, infections, trouble getting pregnant later in life (infertility), and less sexual pleasure.<sup>230</sup> These effects make it worse to say that the practice is still okay.

The argument say that FGM is wrong because of “changing God’s creation” doesn't work for everyone, especially since most Muslim scholars say that male

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<sup>225</sup> Marion H. Katz, “Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence By Kecia Ali (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2006. 217 Pages.),” *American Journal of Islam and Society* 24, no. 4 (2007): 100–103, <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v24i4.1515>.

<sup>226</sup> Jonathan P. Berkey, “Circumcision Circumscribed: Female Excision and Cultural Accommodation in the Medieval near East,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 1 (1996): 19–38.

<sup>227</sup> Muhammad Munir, “Dissecting the Claims of Legitimization for the Ritual of Female Circumcision or Female Genital Mutilation (FGM),” *International Review of Law* 2014, no. 2 (2014): 6, <https://doi.org/10.5339/irl.2014.6>.

<sup>228</sup> Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*.

<sup>229</sup> Munir, “Dissecting the Claims of Legitimization for the Ritual of Female Circumcision or Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).”

<sup>230</sup> Christina Pallitto et al., “Exploring the Health Complications of Female Genital Mutilation through a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *BMC Public Health* 25, no. 1 (2025): 1387, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-21584-z>.

circumcision is required and is widely accepted in Islam.<sup>231</sup> This strong support for male circumcision in Islamic law and tradition shows how unclear and controversial female circumcision is still, as evidenced by the lack of clarity and debate in Quran and hadith literature.<sup>232</sup>

Finally, Asma Barlas state that the Qur'an does not teach inequality or discrimination. Instead, these ideas come from the tafsīr (Qur'anic interpretation) and the ahādith (sing. hadīth), which are narratives that reportedly portray the life and practices of the Prophet Muhammad. By “returning to a fresh and immediate interpretation of the Holy Book” and “taking a new and critical look at the Hadiths,” in other words, by doing creative ijtihad, modern Islamic authority could be very well adapt to and enhance the stance of Islam on the issue of women's rights.<sup>233</sup> Based on her statement, when patriarchal scholars claim that FGM or child marriage is “Islamic,” they are misreading the Qur'an through a lens of male power. Its justification came from male jurists who read Islam as a system to control women's bodies and sexuality. Barlas repeatedly states that such readings betray the core Qur'anic values of justice, mercy, and human dignity.<sup>234</sup> So, even though some cultures or religions may allow these things, Barlas suggests that they are not based on the Qur'an but on patriarchy.

To conclude this chapter, allow me to share a brief reflection from a casual yet meaningful conversation I had with Muslim feminist and gender activist, Dr. Nur Rofiah, Bil. Uzm, I asked her a question about my thesis: can early marriage, pronatalist pressure, and female genital mutilation be considered forms of femicide? She responded thoughtfully, saying that forced marriage, for example, could be seen as a kind of *mental femicide*, because it causes a girl to lose her sense of self, feel emotionally numb, and lose direction in life. In many cases, she added, this can lead to serious mental health issues, which are deeply connected to non-physical forms of femicide. According to her, all three practices *can* be categorized as

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<sup>231</sup> Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*.

<sup>232</sup> Hossein Dabbagh, “The Ethics of Non-Therapeutic Male Circumcision Under Islamic Law,” *TARBIYA: Journal of Education in Muslim Society* 4, no. 2 (2017): 2, <https://doi.org/10.15408/tjems.v4i2.6017>.

<sup>233</sup> Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam*.

<sup>234</sup> Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam*.



femicide, depending on how we define the term. She referred to the Islamic legal principle “*an-nahyu ‘an isy-syai nahyun ‘an wasailihi*”, which means that if something is forbidden, then anything that leads to it should also be avoided. From this point of view, if femicide is prohibited, then we must also prevent the harmful conditions that can lead to it. She also pointed to the Qur’an’s strong message against the killing of baby girls, reminding us that the Qur’an not only forbids the act, but also insists that women are fully human, spiritually, intellectually, and morally equal. For her, these teachings offer a powerful foundation to challenge the systems and practices that continue to harm women, even in ways that are not always visible.

## CHAPTER IV

### TOWARD A DISCOURSE EXPANSION OF FEMICIDE

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of three cultural practices, such as early marriage, pronatalist pressure, and female genital mutilation, that are considered harmful against women by scholars. By implementing Johan Galtung's classification of violence: direct, structural, and cultural violence,<sup>235</sup> this chapter argues that these practices are not accidental situations, instead, they serve as a component of a more-deep system of authority and control established in structural and cultural forms of power. As explained in the previous chapter, these are culturally embedded practices and also legitimized by certain religious interpretation. People often use interpretations of Islamic teachings to justify these actions and state that they are religious obligations, moral duties, blessings, or acts of devotion. However, behind these so-called common practices, there are continuing harms that limit women's bodily autonomy, reduce their life expectancy, and make it difficult for them to make independent choices and get a proper education.

The purpose of this chapter is to expand the conventional definition of femicide, shifting the focus from only the killing of women to include all forms of harm against women. According to Galtung's theory of cultural violence, he shows that the harm caused by these practices is frequently unnoticeable, yet continues to be real, cumulative, and often fatal. So, by examining the definition of femicide and its correlation to the cultural violence, I will discuss through three steps: first, investigating why it happens; second, how cultural norms or religious belief and physical acts of violence are connected; and third, creating a new perspective that move beyond the common idea that femicide is only a physical killing, and link it with the theory of cultural violence.

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<sup>235</sup> Galtung, "Cultural Violence," 1990.

There are four parts to this chapter. The first is explaining a direct violence as a form of visible kind of harm. The second is structural violence, which includes unfair systems that keep women in unequal positions. The third is cultural violence, which shapes the image of the “ideal” woman. Lastly, the theoretical synthesis connects Johan Galtung’s theory of violence with the concept of femicide, showing how those three practices can be categorized as a femicide.

#### **4.1 Direct Violence: Physical and Psychological Threats to Women’s Bodily Autonomy**

In cases of female homicide, it is often possible to clearly identify the perpetrator, the victim, and the motive behind the killing. The violence that occurs in female homicide is very real and easy to trace. However, violence doesn’t always be defined the same. Galtung (1990) defines direct violence as acts that cause bodily injury or death, it’s a physical or psychological harm where the perpetrator and the victim are clearly identifiable. It is the most visible form of violence, often involving visible acts of harm, such as assault, rape, or murder (any physical act that harms someone).<sup>236</sup>

In the case of early marriage, the act of forcing a girl (often still a child) into marital and sexual relations is a clear instance of direct violence. Although it is often veiled in cultural ideals of protection, honor, or religious encouragement, the physical and psychological consequences are immediate and deeply traumatic. In Indonesia, the minimum legal age for marriage is 19 years old for both men and women, after the amendment of Law No. 16 of 2019, which revised the minimum age of 16 years old for girls under Law No. 1 of 1974.<sup>237</sup> However, exceptions still allow for dispensation in certain circumstances, meaning child marriage still exists in practice. Internationally, organizations such as UNICEF and the UN define child

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<sup>236</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>237</sup> Kafidhoh et al., “Dynamics Of Legal Politics Regarding Marriage Age Limits In Indonesia.”

marriage as any formal or informal marriage that involves a child under the age of 18.<sup>238</sup>

Girls who are married off early are frequently subjected to non-consensual sex, domestic abuse, and maternal health complications from premature pregnancies. Girls under 18 are physically and physiologically immature for childbirth, making them prone to conditions such as obstetric fistula, eclampsia, and severe hemorrhaging, which can be fatal.<sup>239</sup> These experiences are direct, bodily violence committed by identifiable actors, typically parents, husbands, or community elders, acting within systems that permit or encourage such coercion. Thus, while early marriage may be justified through cultural and religious frameworks, it must be recognized as a direct violation of bodily autonomy and childhood rights.

There are many studies showing that early marriage is linked to a number of negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes for young women as well as bad health outcomes for the children they bear, such as unplanned pregnancy, pregnancy-related problems, preterm birth, fetal mortality and violence within marriage.<sup>240</sup> A study in Nepal discovered a direct correlation between age at the time of the marriage and chances of having a unintended pregnancy. The findings found that women who married before the age of 16 were significantly more likely to declare their pregnancy as unplanned (46%) than those who married at 16 or older (36%).<sup>241</sup> Other researchers confirm that the primary cause of high rate of

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<sup>238</sup> Anshana Arora, "Child Marriage: Latest Trends and Future Prospects," *UNICEF DATA*, July 5, 2018, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-latest-trends-and-future-prospects/>.

<sup>239</sup> Anita Raj, "When the Mother Is a Child: The Impact of Child Marriage on the Health and Human Rights of Girls," *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 95, no. 11 (2010): 931–35, <https://doi.org/10.1136/adc.2009.178707>.

<sup>240</sup> K. G. Santhya, "Early Marriage and Sexual and Reproductive Health Vulnerabilities of Young Women: A Synthesis of Recent Evidence from Developing Countries," *Current Opinion in Obstetrics & Gynecology* 23, no. 5 (2011): 334–39, <https://doi.org/10.1097/GCO.0b013e32834a93d2>.

<sup>241</sup> Ramesh Adhikari et al., "Correlates of Unintended Pregnancy among Currently Pregnant Married Women in Nepal," *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 9, no. 1 (2009): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-698X-9-17>.

unwanted pregnancies among young women is due to their inability to use contraceptives effectively.<sup>242</sup>

Studies in Kenya, Tanzania, and Cameroon, and other sub-Saharan African nations, have shown that teenage girls (ages 15 to 19) who are married are more likely to have HIV than girls the same age who are sexually active but not married.<sup>243</sup> At first, this can seem surprising, but there are solid reasons behind it. Girls who get married young tend to have sex frequently and without protection. They are also more likely to have older husbands, who may already have HIV.<sup>244</sup> Additionally, married girls often have less access to sexual health information and less chances to learn how to protect themselves. All of these factors together combined make young married girls much more vulnerable than girls who are unmarried.<sup>245</sup>

In many cases of early marriage, especially in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, young girls are pressured to become pregnant soon after marriage. This expectation is often seen as a way to secure their position in the husband's family and prove their value as a wife.<sup>246</sup> As a result, early marriage leads to childbirth in childhood ages.<sup>247</sup> Globally, girls aged 15-19 are twice as likely to die from childbirth compared to women in their 20s, whereas girls younger than 15 face a risk five times higher.<sup>248</sup> According to studies conducted in Gabon, India, Nigeria, and Turkey, teenage mothers are more likely to give birth prematurely (preterm) than adult moms and have babies with low birth weights.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Anita Raj et al., "Prevalence of Child Marriage and Its Effect on Fertility and Fertility-Control Outcomes of Young Women in India: A Cross-Sectional, Observational Study," *Lancet (London, England)* 373, no. 9678 (2009): 1883–89, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(09\)60246-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(09)60246-4).

<sup>243</sup> Shelley Clark et al., "Protecting Young Women from HIV/AIDS: The Case against Child and Adolescent Marriage," *International Family Planning Perspectives* 32, no. 2 (2006): 79–88, <https://doi.org/10.1363/3207906>.

<sup>244</sup> Clark et al., "Protecting Young Women from HIV/AIDS."

<sup>245</sup> Santhya, "Early Marriage and Sexual and Reproductive Health Vulnerabilities of Young Women."

<sup>246</sup> Santhya, "Early Marriage and Sexual and Reproductive Health Vulnerabilities of Young Women."

<sup>247</sup> Navideh Noori et al., "The Effect of Adolescent Pregnancy on Child Mortality in 46 Low- and Middle-Income Countries," *BMJ Global Health* 7, no. 5 (2022): e007681, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2021-007681>.

<sup>248</sup> Andrea Nove et al., "Maternal Mortality in Adolescents Compared with Women of Other Ages: Evidence from 144 Countries," *The Lancet Global Health* 2, no. 3 (2014): e155–64, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(13\)70179-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(13)70179-7).

<sup>249</sup> Santhya, "Early Marriage and Sexual and Reproductive Health Vulnerabilities of Young Women."

Even though death is the most visible and severe consequence, there are many other serious health problems that can happen when girls have children too young. In developing countries, pregnancy and childbirth complications are actually the top cause of death among girls aged 15–19.<sup>250</sup> Returning to what Galtung conceptualizes about direct violence, it is clear that pronatalist pressure can cause physical or emotional harm. The root problem behind it is not merely because of a cultural norm or moral persuasion causes, but also a direct form of violence, especially when women's reproductive choices are taken out of their hands.

Pronatalist pressure, societal and familial expectations on women to continuously bear children, is another form of direct violence that is often overlooked. While it may not be considered an “attack” on women's lives in the conventional understanding, but, it should be translated into direct violence due to its repetitive nature and the physical risks it causes. High parity (having many children) increases risks of uterine rupture, anemia, postpartum hemorrhage, and maternal death.<sup>251</sup>

In many Muslim societies, the religious or cultural glorification of motherhood forces women to accept repeated pregnancies despite serious health risks.<sup>252</sup> Lack of access to contraception, combined with social stigma against family planning, traps women in cycles of pregnancies. The cumulative impact of these forced reproductive creates direct violence, as women's bodily autonomy is continuously violated.<sup>253</sup>

Gita Sen and Pirooska Ostlin (2008) take this further by showing how this pressure impacts on women's health. When women are expected to have many children without enough time to rest, recover, or even say no, their bodies suffer. They face serious risks like heavy bleeding, dangerous childbirth, and even

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<sup>250</sup> Sarah Neal et al., “Childbearing in Adolescents Aged 12–15 Years in Low Resource Countries: A Neglected Issue. New Estimates from Demographic and Household Surveys in 42 Countries,” *Acta Obstetrica Et Gynecologica Scandinavica* 91, no. 9 (2012): 1114–18, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0412.2012.01467.x>.

<sup>251</sup> Moshood O. Omotayo et al., “Prenatal Anemia and Postpartum Hemorrhage Risk: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *The Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Research* 47, no. 8 (2021): 2565–76, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jog.14834>.

<sup>252</sup> Kathryn M. Yount and H. Rashad, eds., *Family in the Middle East: Ideational Change in Egypt, Iran, and Tunisia*, Routledge Advances in Middle East and Islamic Studies 15 (Routledge, 2008).

<sup>253</sup> Yount and Rashad, *Family in the Middle East*.

maternal death. But the harm isn't just physical, many women feel emotionally drained and unheard. They may love their children deeply, but that doesn't erase the pain of being pushed into pregnancies they didn't fully choose.<sup>254</sup>

In the sense of direct violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) is perhaps the most obvious example of direct violence, recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women.<sup>255</sup> According to the World Health Organization, FGM includes any procedure that intentionally alters or injures female genitalia for non-medical reasons (the procedure has no health benefits for girls and women).<sup>256</sup> A comprehensive review of 288 studies across major academic databases revealed that FGM causes a wide range of lasting harms to women's health, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. The findings confirm that FGM is a practice with serious consequences, including chronic pain, sexual dysfunction, and profound psychological distress.<sup>257</sup> Women who have undergone FGM were found to experience significantly higher rates of anxiety, somatization, low self-esteem, and even clinical psychiatric conditions compared to those who had not.<sup>258</sup> This evidence strengthens the understanding that FGM is a form of direct violence, that leave deep and lasting scars, not only on the body but also on the emotional and mental well-being of women and girls.<sup>259</sup>

The physical dangers of female genital mutilation are also highlighted by Berg et al. (2014), who reviewed 185 studies involving over 3 million women. They show the intriguing fact about how deeply female genital mutilation (FGM) can harm women's physical health. The research found that women who experienced FGM were more likely to suffer from serious problems like urinary tract infections, heavy bleeding, painful and prolonged labor, tearing during childbirth, and even

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<sup>254</sup> Sen and Östlin, "Gender Inequity in Health."

<sup>255</sup> World Health Organization, "Female Genital Mutilation," Department of Reproductive Health and Research, 2014.

<sup>256</sup> World Health Organization, "Female Genital Mutilation."

<sup>257</sup> Khadijeh Sarayloo et al., "Health Consequences of the Female Genital Mutilation: A Systematic Review," *Galen Medical Journal* 8 (January 2019): e1336, <https://doi.org/10.22086/gmj.v8i0.1336>.

<sup>258</sup> Sarayloo et al., "Health Consequences of the Female Genital Mutilation."

<sup>259</sup> Sarayloo et al., "Health Consequences of the Female Genital Mutilation."

complications that required cesarean sections.<sup>260</sup> Some babies also had to be resuscitated at birth due to difficulties caused by their mother's FGM-related injuries. What's especially important is that the more severe the type of FGM, the higher the health risks.<sup>261</sup> This study makes it clear that FGM is a direct and lasting form of violence that affects women's bodies, health, and dignity throughout their lives.

Citing from United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Indonesia, regarding the story of a child who was subjected to FGM, she said;

*"I was about seven years old when my mother organized a female genital mutilation ritual for me. The traditional birth attendant used a piece of bamboo that had been sharpened. I screamed in pain, and I saw blood coming out, I was and still am very traumatized."*<sup>262</sup>

This indicates that the violence extends beyond the physical. A landmark study in Dakar, Senegal, also found that 30.4% of women who'd undergone FGM developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and nearly half (47.9%) suffered from other psychiatric conditions such as depression and anxiety.<sup>263</sup> Many of these women say that they continue to remember the moment they were cut. Some have flashbacks and live with a deep, lasting fear. This shows that the pain stays not only on their bodies, but also in their minds.

In many countries where FGM was once common, improvements have started to take place. Countries like Egypt<sup>264</sup>, and Sudan have created laws that ban FGM

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<sup>260</sup> Rigmor C. Berg et al., "Effects of Female Genital Cutting on Physical Health Outcomes: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *BMJ Open* 4, no. 11 (2014): e006316, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2014-006316>.

<sup>261</sup> Berg et al., "Effects of Female Genital Cutting on Physical Health Outcomes."

<sup>262</sup> "Indonesian Religious Leaders, Health Workers Advocate Female Genital Mutilation's End," accessed June 30, 2025, [https://www.unfpa.org/news/indonesian-religious-leaders-health-workers-advocate-female-genital-mutilation%E2%80%99s-end?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.unfpa.org/news/indonesian-religious-leaders-health-workers-advocate-female-genital-mutilation%E2%80%99s-end?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>263</sup> Alice Behrendt and Steffen Moritz, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Memory Problems after Female Genital Mutilation," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 162, no. 5 (2005): 1000–1002, <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.162.5.1000>.

<sup>264</sup> "Egypt: Public Awareness Campaign Launched to Promote Law Against Female Genital Mutilation," web page, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, accessed July 15, 2025, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2024-06-26/egypt-public-awareness-campaign-launched-to-promote-law-against-female-genital-mutilation/>.



and launched awareness campaigns to change public attitudes.<sup>265</sup> In Indonesia, the situation is different. Based on Ministry of Health Regulation No. 6 of 2014, states the mandate given to the Health and *Shara'k* Advisory Council is to publish guidelines for the implementation of female circumcision that ensure the safety and health of circumcised women.<sup>266</sup> Permenkes No. 6/2014 by *Komnas Perempuan* is seen as an ambiguous government policy because it only states the cancellation of policy Number 1636/MENkes/PER/XII/2010, about medicalization of FGM, carry out by health workers. In the study by *Komnas Perempuan*, it is questioned whether the government wants to stop FGM or even allow FGM to take place as long as it is in line with applicable religious rules? Even today, based on the results of field findings, FGM is still found and carried out by midwives or traditional healers in various ways.<sup>267</sup>

## 4.2 Structural Violence: Institutionalized Systems Perpetuating Gender

### Inequality

While direct violence leaves visible harm, the damage doesn't stop there. These acts are often just visible symptoms of something deeper and much more ingrained. Behind every instance of physical pain or psychological trauma, there are larger systems that make such violence possible, acceptable, or even unnoticeable. It's not just about individual perpetrators, it's about the structures that silently shape what is allowed to happen to women's bodies, and what is not in question. To truly understand how this harmful practices continue, we must now turn to the section of structural violence.

Structural violence refers to systematic ways in which social structures harm or disadvantage individuals.<sup>268</sup> Unlike direct violence, it is built into the structure of institutions, laws, policies, and economic systems, making it less visible but

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<sup>265</sup> Michela Lugiai et al., "Female Genital Mutilation in Sudan: Is a New Era Starting?," *Sexuality & Culture* 25, no. 4 (2021): 1540–45, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-021-09823-y>.

<sup>266</sup> Menteri Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, "Permenkes No. 6 Tahun 2014," 2014, <http://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/116748/permenkes-no-6-tahun-2014>.

<sup>267</sup> *Komnas Perempuan*, "PERSIMPANGAN ANTARA TRADISI & MODERNITAS Hasil Kajian Kualitatif Pemotongan/Pelukaan Genitalia Perempuan (P2GP) Di 10 Provinsi 17 Kabupaten/Kota," 2018, <https://komnasperempuan.go.id/kabar-perempuan-detail/persimpangan-antara-tradisi-dan-moderenitas>.

<sup>268</sup> Galtung, "Cultural Violence," 1990.

destructive.<sup>269</sup> These structures systematically deny people access to basic needs, opportunities, and protections, often based on their gender, race, class, or social status.<sup>270</sup> Galtung (1990) describes structural violence as the “avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs”.<sup>271</sup> Meaning that harm occurs not because someone is actively trying to hurt others, but because the systems in place are designed in ways that cause suffering or prevent people from reaching their full potential and human needs.

Galtung then lists four basic human needs that must be met to avoid violence: First, Survival needs, staying alive (violence here means death or murder). Second, Well-being needs, health and comfort (violence here means suffering, sickness). Third, Identity and meaning needs, feeling accepted, having a purpose (violence means being alienated or shamed for who you are). Lastly, Freedom needs, being able to choose, express, and act freely (violence means being controlled or oppressed). So, if any of these needs are blocked, either through direct attacks or unfair systems, it counts as violence.<sup>272</sup>

When we correlate the concept above to early marriage, it is well known around the world that girls who marry young lose their childhood and some of their rights as children,<sup>273</sup> such as the right not to be separated from their parents against their will (Article 9), the right to freedom of expression (including seeking and receiving information and ideas, Article 13), the right to education (Articles 28 and 29), the right to rest and leisure and to play and have fun (Article 31), and the right to be safe from sexual exploitation and abuse (Article 34).<sup>274</sup>

Early marriage is upheld by legal loopholes and weak enforcement mechanisms. In many Muslim-majority countries, religious or customary laws allow child marriage under certain conditions, such as parental or judicial

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<sup>269</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>270</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>271</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>272</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>273</sup> Santhya, “Early Marriage and Sexual and Reproductive Health Vulnerabilities of Young Women.”

<sup>274</sup> “Convention on the Rights of the Child Text | UNICEF,” accessed June 20, 2025, <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text>.

consent.<sup>275</sup> In Indonesia, despite its 2019 legal reform, Law No. 16/2019 raised the minimum age of marriage to 19 for both men and women, structural pathways for early marriage remain firmly in place. As Wahyu Prabowo et al. (2023) argue, the law's implementation is riddled with inconsistencies, but is undermined in practice by Supreme Court Regulation No. 5/2019.<sup>276</sup> Courts continue to grant dispensations based on parental requests, weakening the legal barrier against child marriage. This legal workaround allows families, often motivated by economic, social, or moral concerns, to marry off their daughters below the legal age, provided they receive approval from a religious or civil court. While on paper this system appears to balance law with social flexibility, in practice, it disproportionately exposes girls to early marriage, reinforcing a legal environment where formal rights exist but remain functionally inaccessible to the most vulnerable.<sup>277</sup>

This indicates that there is an implementation gap between national regulations and the reality on the ground. Although the revised law is widely known by policymakers, awareness among local officials and communities is limited.<sup>278</sup> As a result, enforcement mechanisms are not only weak but also symbolic, often relying on the discretion of judges rather than standardized legal procedures.<sup>279</sup> In addition, community and religious leaders, whose influence remains central to family decision-making, often prioritize cultural norms over the legal framework, and regard early marriage as a moral protection against premarital relationships or economic hardship.<sup>280</sup> This mismatch between formal law and informal authority is a clear manifestation of structural violence, where institutions enforce laws that fail

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<sup>275</sup> Stephanie Sinclair, "Child Marriage in Southern Asia: Context, Evidence and Policy Options for Action," *Rumble*, 2012.

<sup>276</sup> Wahyu Prabowo et al., "Implementation of the Age Limitation for Marriage from the Perspective of Indonesian Family and Marriage Law," *Journal of Private and Commercial Law* 7, no. 1 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.15294/jpcl.v7i1.43973>.

<sup>277</sup> Prabowo et al., "Implementation of the Age Limitation for Marriage from the Perspective of Indonesian Family and Marriage Law."

<sup>278</sup> Wirani Aisiyah Anwar et al., "Early Marriage in the Modern Era: Analysis of Relevance, Challenges in Setting Minimum Age Limits, and implementation of minimum age of marriage," *DIKTUM: Jurnal Syariah dan Hukum* 22, no. 1 (2024): 1, <https://doi.org/10.35905/diktum.v22i1.10362>.

<sup>279</sup> Anwar et al., "A Perkawinan Dini di Era Modern."

<sup>280</sup> Anwar et al., "A Perkawinan Dini di Era Modern."

to protect those most in need due to entrenched social biases and unequal power relations.

Connecting these insights to the broader structural determinants, Rumble et al. (2018) provide a data-driven perspective by mapping the socio-economic and educational factors behind early marriage. Their empirical analysis of national-level data underscores how poverty, limited access to education, and regional disparities significantly increase the likelihood of early marriage.<sup>281</sup> More importantly, a study highlights that legal age alone is not a protective factor unless accompanied by broader structural change, such as improving girls' access to education, reproductive health services, and socio-economic support.<sup>282</sup> This affirms that law reform without systemic support mechanisms merely shifts the problem into more hidden spaces, where early marriage continues under legal exception rather than transformation. Girls are therefore not only denied autonomy but are structurally positioned into early unions as a default survival strategy in contexts of poverty.

Early marriage should not be seen just as a result of individual failure or parents making poor decisions. Instead, it is often the result of bigger structural problems shaped by culture, laws, and social norms.<sup>283</sup> Even though many countries, including Indonesia, have laws that try to protect girls, in reality, these laws often don't work as intended. Communities still allow early marriages through exceptions.<sup>284</sup> This shows how structural violence works, not through direct force, but by making unfair practices seem normal and acceptable. As a result, laws that are supposed to protect girls can end up supporting the same harmful traditions.<sup>285</sup>

Based on Mendez and Barraza's (2022) interpretation of Galtung's theory, violence always implies three main elements: the subject (the person who commits

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<sup>281</sup> Rumble et al., "An Empirical Exploration of Female Child Marriage Determinants in Indonesia."

<sup>282</sup> Rumble et al., "An Empirical Exploration of Female Child Marriage Determinants in Indonesia."

<sup>283</sup> Sayema Akter et al., "Harmful Practices Prevail despite Legal Knowledge: A Mixed-Method Study on the Paradox of Child Marriage in Bangladesh," *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters* 29, no. 2 (n.d.): 1885790, <https://doi.org/10.1080/26410397.2021.1885790>.

<sup>284</sup> Liem et al., "Factors Associated with Child Marriage during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia."

<sup>285</sup> Jewel Gausman et al., "A Social-Ecological Examination into the Research, Policy and Health Service Delivery Environment Related to Early Marriage and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence among Youth in Jordan," *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 20 (July 2020): 16, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12914-020-00234-y>.

the violence), the object (the person who suffers from the violence), and the action (the way the violence occurs), although this last element can be either an omission or an order.<sup>286</sup> For instance, in the case of femicide, the subject can be a man who kills the woman (object) directly, such as physical violence. But the state or society can also commit violence when they fail to protect women, ignore reports of abuse, or fail to punish perpetrators. Such failure is part of the act. So, violence is not only who and what has done, but also what has not done.

There are many experiences of the female body that are excluded or neglected by the government, especially when it comes to how women's bodies are regulated but rarely protected.<sup>287</sup> This neglect begins with the issue of early marriage and continues in the form of pressure to bear children. Pronatalist pressure is more than just encouragement for women to have children, it is a deeply political and structural often push women into motherhood whether they're ready for it or not. In the Iranian context, Homa Hoodfar and Samad Assadpour (2000) explain that after the Iran-Iraq war, the government's population policies not only aimed to increase population but were also shaped by gender roles. Women's bodies, in particular, became the center of these policies, as their ability to give birth was framed as a national resource. In this way, the state regulates women's reproductive functions, positioning motherhood not as a personal choice, but as a national duty. This shows how women's bodies are controlled by the state for political and demographic purposes, making reproduction a matter of state policy and not personal choice.<sup>288</sup>

What's significant here is that women's roles were not determined by individual choice or medical realities, but by state interests and religious narratives. Fertility became a moral obligation, while limiting childbirth through contraception

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<sup>286</sup> Mariamne Crippa Méndez and Adriana Rodríguez Barraza, "An Interpretation of Femicide in Mexico: Violence and Human Rights," *Advances in Applied Sociology* 12, no. 2 (2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2022.122002>.

<sup>287</sup> Iwu Dwisetyani Utomo and Peter McDonald, "Adolescent Reproductive Health in Indonesia: Contested Values and Policy Inaction," *Studies in Family Planning* 40, no. 2 (2009): 133–46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4465.2009.00196.x>.

<sup>288</sup> Homa Hoodfar and Samad Assadpour, "The Politics of Population Policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Studies in Family Planning* 31, no. 1 (2000): 19–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4465.2000.00019.x>.

or delayed marriage was portrayed as selfish or even sinful.<sup>289</sup> This shows how state-led pronatalism can embed itself in moral, religious, and national discourses.

This pattern is not unique to Iran. In their comparative volume, Kathryn Yount and Hoda Rashad (2008) demonstrate how in Egypt and Tunisia, the family has become a central institution through which women's reproductive lives are governed.<sup>290</sup> Across these contexts, cultural ideals of motherhood and womanhood are strongly linked. Women are often valued most for being good wives and mothers. Having children quickly and lots of child is seen as proof of being a good woman.<sup>291</sup> This cultural logic, although distinct in each country, is shaped and reinforced by state policies, religious teachings, and familial expectations. Even when family planning programs exist, they often operate with contradictory messages: on one hand promoting contraception, and on the other hand, celebrating high fertility and pressuring women to prioritize motherhood over education or career.<sup>292</sup> These pressures are subtle, but powerful, women internalize them as personal duty, many women grow up believing that motherhood is their only role and that belief is shaped by the institutions around them, not just their personal values.

The health consequences of such pressures are not incidental, they are central to what Gita Sen and Pirooska Ostlin (2008) call as “gender inequity in health.” Their work emphasizes that gendered health disparities are not simply a matter of access or resources, but stem from deeper inequalities in power, autonomy, and social expectation. When women are expected to bear many children with little regard for their health, or consent, it leads to real physical harm: anemia, uterine rupture, postpartum hemorrhage, and even maternal death.<sup>293</sup> These are not isolated consequences; they are systemic outcomes of a worldview that treats women’s reproductive labor as limitless and unquestionable.<sup>294</sup> Pronatalist pressure, then,

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<sup>289</sup> Hoodfar and Assadpour, “The Politics of Population Policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

<sup>290</sup> Yount and Rashad, *Family in the Middle East*.

<sup>291</sup> Yount and Rashad, *Family in the Middle East*.

<sup>292</sup> Yount and Rashad, *Family in the Middle East*.

<sup>293</sup> Sen and Östlin, “Gender Inequity in Health.”

<sup>294</sup> Sen and Östlin, “Gender Inequity in Health.”

becomes a form of structural violence, one that is legitimized by tradition and policy but felt most intimately in the everyday lives of women.

Practices like early marriage, pronatalist pressure, and female genital mutilation (FGM), should not be understood merely as acts of direct violence. These practices also reflect structural violence, as described by Johan Galtung (1990), where harm is sustained and normalized through cultural, legal, and institutional systems.<sup>295</sup> As Els Leye et al. (2019) state, the persistence of FGM, especially in its “medicalized” form is not simply the result of tradition but of policy failures. When governments fail to enforce bans or when health professionals are allowed to perform FGM “safely,” the structure of the system itself silently legitimizes the harm.<sup>296</sup>

This contradiction is evident in the work of Shell-Duncan (2001) and Serour (2013), both of whom critique the so-called *harm-reduction* approach to FGM. In some regions, governments and health providers have attempted to “modernize” the practice, removing the most dangerous elements but continuing the procedure under clinical supervision.<sup>297</sup> This medicalization, they argue, is deeply troubling. It gives FGM a false appearance of safety and acceptance while ignoring the core issue, that it violates the physical and psychological integrity of women and girls.<sup>298</sup> Structural violence operates here not just through the act itself, but through a system that rebrands harm as health, erasing the ethical and human rights violations under the guise of cleanliness and professionalism. As El-Gibaly et al. (2019) emphasize in their study from Egypt, even mothers and healthcare workers sometimes believe

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<sup>295</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>296</sup> Els Leye et al., “Debating Medicalization of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Learning from (Policy) Experiences across Countries,” *Reproductive Health* 16 (November 2019): 158, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-019-0817-3>.

<sup>297</sup> B. Shell-Duncan, “The Medicalization of Female ‘Circumcision’: Harm Reduction or Promotion of a Dangerous Practice?,” *Social Science & Medicine* (1982) 52, no. 7 (2001): 1013–28, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0277-9536\(00\)00208-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0277-9536(00)00208-2).

<sup>298</sup> G. I. Serour, “Medicalization of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting,” *African Journal of Urology*, Female genital cutting/mutilation in Africa, vol. 19, no. 3 (2013): 145–49, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.afju.2013.02.004>.

they are doing “the right thing” by choosing a medicalized form of FGM, because the system has normalized it.<sup>299</sup>

One of the most concerning aspects of the ongoing practice of FGM is that many healthcare professionals perform the procedure not only due to personal beliefs, but also because of social pressure, economic need, and the fear of losing their patients or professional status.<sup>300</sup> In communities where FGM is expected, not performing it could mean losing trust, or one’s livelihood. This is where Galtung’s theory becomes even more powerful, structural violence is not just imposed from above by governments, but also enforced from below, when the continuation of social survival and belonging is made dependent on obedience to harmful norms.<sup>301</sup> Practitioners, too, are often trapped in a cycle where they continue this practice not because of cruelty, but because the structures around them provide them with no other way out.<sup>302</sup>

In Indonesia, FGM is increasingly medicalised as well. The practice was allowed to be conducted by health providers in 2010 (Although this regulation has been removed with the Health Regulation No. 6 of 2014, the government did not explicitly prohibit FGM) following a fatwa issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council.<sup>303</sup> This fatwa stated that FGM was considered a rule of Islam and that the membrane covering the clitoris should be removed. Islamic religious discourse, medicalization, and the desire for cultural preservation have shifted the discourse to one focusing on purity.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Omaina El-Gibaly et al., “Health Care Providers’ and Mothers’ Perceptions about the Medicalization of Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting in Egypt: A Cross-Sectional Qualitative Study,” *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 19, no. 1 (2019): 26, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12914-019-0202-x>.

<sup>300</sup> Marie-Hélène Doucet et al., “Understanding the Motivations of Health-Care Providers in Performing Female Genital Mutilation: An Integrative Review of the Literature,” *Reproductive Health* 14, no. 1 (2017): 46, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-017-0306-5>.

<sup>301</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>302</sup> Doucet et al., “Understanding the Motivations of Health-Care Providers in Performing Female Genital Mutilation.”

<sup>303</sup> Tasneem Kakal et al., “What Makes a Woman? Understanding the Reasons for and Circumstances of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Indonesia, Ethiopia and Kenya,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 25, no. 7 (2023): 897–913, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2022.2106584>.

<sup>304</sup> B. D. Putranti, “To Islamize, Becoming a Real Woman, or Commercialized Practices? Questioning Female Genital Cutting in Indonesia,” *Finnish Journal of Ethnicity & Migration*, 2008, 23–31.



### 4.3 Cultural Violence: Constructing the Ideal Woman

The structural violence that has discussed above shows us how systems unwittingly harm women through laws, policy, and unequal access. This section discusses how religious belief and tradition embedded in the society often normalize the practice. These cultural beliefs influences what is deemed “normal,” “moral,” or “divinely right.” Thus, it shapes how the society view particular practices involving women’s body and life as acceptable and, even, norms to follow.

Cultural violence is a component derived from cultural elements that justify and validate both direct and structural violence within society.<sup>305</sup> Galtung claims that cultural violence includes the prejudices, harmful narratives, assumptions, attitudes, and ideas that we internalise.<sup>306</sup> Our perspective and behaviour towards others are shaped by the interconnected elements of culture, including religion, traditional practices, education, language, and politic.<sup>307</sup>

Early marriage, particularly in Muslim-majority societies like Indonesia and Pakistan, is rarely portrayed as a violent act. Instead, it is often seen as moral and religious.<sup>308</sup> In some cases, it is even categorized as affectionate terms, including an act of protection, a path to purity, or a step toward becoming a “good Muslimah.” Referring to Galtung, cultural violence consists of symbolic processes, such as religion, ideology, language, and tradition that justify or normalize direct and structural harm. Eva F. Nisa (2020) examines how the landscape of early marriage in Indonesia is shifting, and she shows us that it’s not as straightforward as we might think. Traditionally, early marriage in Indonesia was tied to rural poverty, low education, patriarchal family structures, and concerns about family honor. In these contexts, marrying off girls early was often seen as a way to reduce the economic

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<sup>305</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>306</sup> João Vicente Ganzarolli de Oliveira, “The Choice of Cultural Violence or Cultural Peace,” *Journal Of Anthropological And Archaeological Sciences* 9, no. 4 (2024): 1264–66, <https://doi.org/10.32474/JAAS.2023.08.000316>.

<sup>307</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>308</sup> Qodariah Barkah et al., “The Manipulation of Religion and The Legalization of Underage Marriages in Indonesia,” *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 1 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjkh.v7i1.13316>.

burden on families or to protect a family's reputation.<sup>309</sup> However, in current context, early marriage is no longer limited to poor, rural, or less educated communities. Instead, it is also being embraced by young, urban, middle-class Indonesians, especially among conservative Muslim youth. These young people, who are often tech-savvy and active on social media, promote early marriage as a form of religious piety. They argue that marrying young is a way to avoid *zina* (unlawful sex) and to live a "halal" life, in other words, they frame early marriage as an ethical and religious solution to modern moral anxieties.<sup>310</sup>

This is similar to the findings of Nasrullah et al. (2014) that in the urban slums of Lahore, Pakistan, the practice of early marriage is also driven by the perceived need to protect girls from the threat of *zina* (premarital sex), which is seen not only as immoral but also as a source of familial shame. Cultural scripts around honor and sexuality thus construct girls' bodies as communal property, fragile things whose purity must be protected at all costs.<sup>311</sup>

In Indonesia, youth-led anti-dating hijrah groups are changing early marriage from a symbol of oppression to a symbol of spiritual empowerment.<sup>312</sup> These young activists are using certain hadiths in their online forums to define "*nikah muda*" as an authentic way to escape moral degradation and follow the Prophet's path of purity. They are making child marriage seem like a brave spiritual decision instead of something that society obligates on people. This understanding not only mislead the conception of marriage, which is considered only as a short-term solution to the sexuality of young people, but also created a lack of comprehensive understanding of the purpose of marriage and adequate preparation for entering a marriage life.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Eva F. Nisa, "Battling Marriage Laws: Early Marriage and Online Youth Piety in Indonesia," *Hawwa* 42, no. 1 (2020): 76–102, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15692086-12341387>.

<sup>310</sup> Nisa, "Battling Marriage Laws."

<sup>311</sup> Nasrullah et al., "Knowledge and Attitude towards Child Marriage Practice among Women Married as Children-a Qualitative Study in Urban Slums of Lahore, Pakistan."

<sup>312</sup> Rahman Rahman et al., "Nikah Muda: The Hijrah Movement of Anti-Dating Communities from Progressive to Conservative in Indonesia (A Critical Study of Hadith)," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*, February 29, 2024, 67–102, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol23.iss1.art3>.

<sup>313</sup> Rahman et al., "Nikah Muda."

This indicates that the religious understanding of society shapes the way they act in real life.

In times of crisis, this culturally rooted reason becomes even more toxic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, early marriage rates in Indonesia increased significantly as families turned to “safe” traditional choices because of its burden on the economy and society. In this context, early marriage was seen as both a divine act and a practical way to deal with uncertainty.<sup>314</sup> Suyanto et al. (2023) address more detail about this subject, revealing that when families are having trouble with money, they feel pressure from patriarchal norms to marry off their daughters immediately. Cultural violence works here by masking desperation and control as responsibility and love. The normalization of this practice, even amid worsening structural conditions, demonstrates how cultural narratives don’t just justify violence, they adapt, evolve, and embed themselves even deeper during times of uncertainty.<sup>315</sup>

The most concerning aspect about this phenomenon is that it causes real and measurable sorrow, such early motherhood, dropping out of school, losing autonomy, and mental distress, but individuals participating rarely consider it as violence. Galtung's cultural violence reminds us why when a society's widespread values, religious beliefs, and moral standards convert injustice into “duty,” it becomes hard to reject and is often perceived as heresy. This is why legal changes or educational efforts often don't work: they deal with structural problems and cultural rooted believe.

However, this culturally rooted ideology doesn’t stop at early marriage. For many girls, being married young is just the beginning of a much longer journey shaped by expectations they never chose. Once married, they’re often expected to prove their worth by becoming mothers, quickly and repeatedly. In some communities, girls grow up hearing that their worth is found in their fertility, to be

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<sup>314</sup> Bagong Suyanto et al., “The Causes and Impacts of Early Marriage: The Ordeal of Girls in East Java, Indonesia,” *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas*, no. 101 (March 2023), <https://doi.org/10.7458/SPP202310126851>.

<sup>315</sup> Suyanto et al., “The Causes and Impacts of Early Marriage.”

a real woman is to be a mother. Yount and Rashad (2008) show how this message is reinforced by religious sermons, cultural rituals, and family elders who teach that bearing and raising children is a sacred obligation, not just a possibility. Over time, this turns motherhood into a moral test, those who can't or don't want to bear children are seen as incomplete.<sup>316</sup> Inhorn (2004) found that women struggling with infertility in the Middle East are often made to feel like they're being punished by God, as if childlessness is not a medical condition, but a spiritual failure. It's even worse because this pressure doesn't simply come from the outside; it also affects how women see themselves.<sup>317</sup>

The urgency behind this pressure becomes even clearer in Bangladesh, if women delaying their pregnancy, often leads to rumors questioning a woman's fertility, it is seen as bringing shame on the family, and even encouraging the husband's family to pressure him to find another wife or pushing women to have children immediately to avoid social stigma.<sup>318</sup> Johan Galtung's idea of cultural violence helps us call this as a "violence". These girls aren't being beaten, but they are losing their freedom, health, and futures while being commended for being obedient. And that's what makes cultural violence so powerful, it makes even the victims think their pain is right.

From the above studies, it shows that even their role in life has already been decided for them: first as obedient wives, then as child-bearers. In many communities, having children is not just encouraged; it's a sign of being an "ideal" woman. This kind of pressure, often supported by cultural and religious beliefs, can feel overwhelming. It's not always forced; sometimes it comes as gentle reminders, family expectations, or religious messages that idealize motherhood.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Yount and Rashad, *Family in the Middle East*.

<sup>317</sup> Marcia C. Inhorn, "Middle Eastern Masculinities in the Age of New Reproductive Technologies: Male Infertility and Stigma in Egypt and Lebanon," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (2004): 162–82, <https://doi.org/10.1525/maq.2004.18.2.162>.

<sup>318</sup> Elizabeth G. Henry et al., "Sociocultural Factors Perpetuating the Practices of Early Marriage and Childbirth in Sylhet District, Bangladesh," *International Health* 7, no. 3 (2015): 212–17, <https://doi.org/10.1093/inthealth/ihu074>.

<sup>319</sup> Barkah et al., "The Manipulation of Religion and The Legalization of Underage Marriages in Indonesia," 2023.

In Indonesia, female circumcision is a widespread practice in many cultures, such as in Sundanese (peoples in Sukabumi District) and Sasak (community in West Lombok). The practice is known in a locally as *coke*, *koet*, *dicongkel*, terms which mean “to scoop out” in Sundanese, and *tesuci* or *tesucian* meaning “to sanctify the female genitals” in West Lombok. It has been reported in 2022 were Ninety-two percent (92%) of young women in Sukabumi and 53% in West Lombok were being circumcised.<sup>320</sup>

In this context, FGM was also believed to control sexual desire in a woman, a perspective particularly prevalent in Sukabumi.<sup>321</sup> Uncircumcised women were considered as having a bigger sexual drive than men in both districts by women and men of all ages. In both districts, there was a common belief, particularly among young men, that FGM would reduce a woman’s sexual desire which would otherwise be nine times that of a man’s. Marriageability was not a major driving force behind FGM. However, in line with the survey data, 63% of young men reported preferring circumcised partners, despite not knowing any specific advantages of the practice. Most participants and a majority of young people did not think that FGM caused menstrual, sexual, fertility or labour-related problems.<sup>322</sup>

In Sudan, FGM is seen as a symbol of belonging to the broader social and religious community. Gruenbaum (2005) explains how girls are raised to believe that being cut is a step into womanhood, something to be proud of. If a girl isn’t cut, she’s often seen as dirty, disobedient, or unworthy of marriage.<sup>323</sup> Families celebrate the act with ceremonies, and girls internalize the belief that this pain is necessary to be respected. In these settings, girls don’t run from FGM, they walk toward it, believing it’s a sign of honor, not harm.<sup>324</sup>

Religious authority also plays a powerful role in keeping the practice alive. Many religious leaders still promote FGM using questionable or weak hadith, even

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<sup>320</sup> Kakal et al., “What Makes a Woman?”

<sup>321</sup> Kakal et al., “What Makes a Woman?”

<sup>322</sup> Kakal et al., “What Makes a Woman?”

<sup>323</sup> Ellen Gruenbaum, “Socio-cultural Dynamics of Female Genital Cutting: Research Findings, Gaps, and Directions,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 7, no. 5 (2005): 429–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050500262953>.

<sup>324</sup> Gruenbaum, “Socio-cultural Dynamics of Female Genital Cutting.”

while acknowledging that the Qur'an does not require it. What makes this dangerous is how confidently it's framed, not as an old custom, but as a sacred duty.<sup>325</sup> Rouzi (2013) warns that this framing robs women of choice.<sup>326</sup> When people believe FGM is what God wants, it no longer feels like violence, it becomes an act of piety. And when violence is seen as devotion, it becomes nearly impossible to challenge. This is the main idea of what Galtung say as cultural violence, when spiritual and social beliefs make harmful acts feel not just acceptable, but holy.<sup>327</sup>

Many women themselves support the practice. In the study by Shabila et al. (2014), women who underwent FGM often said they felt proud, clean, and religiously complete afterward.<sup>328</sup> A common view among these participants was that FGM is a positive cultural aspect and an important part of Kurdish culture and that if someone in Kurdistan does not perform FGM on their daughters, it would be a shame for the whole family.<sup>329</sup> This shows how deep the logic of cultural violence can be ingrained, when people begin to protect practices that harm them. They don't see themselves as victims, they see themselves as people who uphold virtue.

In summary, the biggest influence on why people carry out these three practices is their ideology based on culture, religion, and assumptions that are not clearly proven (scientific reason); this is very much in line with Johan Galtung's concept of cultural violence, where the main root cause of direct violence stems from cultural violence that continues to be internalised in people's minds, legitimised by religion and culture, so that it flows into structural violence, where the authorities normalise it and are not considered a "hidden crime," which in turn

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<sup>325</sup> Hamdia M. Ahmed et al., "Religious Leaders' Position toward Female Genital Cutting and Their Perspectives on the Relationship between the Islamic Religion and This Practice," *Women & Health* 59, no. 8 (2019): 854–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03630242.2019.1584142>.

<sup>326</sup> Abdulrahim A. Rouzi, "Facts and Controversies on Female Genital Mutilation and Islam," *The European Journal of Contraception & Reproductive Health Care: The Official Journal of the European Society of Contraception* 18, no. 1 (2013): 10–14, <https://doi.org/10.3109/13625187.2012.749982>.

<sup>327</sup> Galtung, "Cultural Violence," 1990.

<sup>328</sup> Nazar P Shabila et al., "Women's Perspectives of Female Genital Cutting: Q-Methodology," *BMC Women's Health* 14, no. 1 (2014): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6874-14-11>.

<sup>329</sup> Ahmed et al., "Religious Leaders' Position toward Female Genital Cutting and Their Perspectives on the Relationship between the Islamic Religion and This Practice."

manifests itself in continuous direct violence. When we look at this cycle, it already falls into the category of femicide.

#### **4.4 Expanding the Term Femicide: Refining the Discourse**

Based on previous discussion, I argue that when we look closely at practices like early marriage, pronatalist pressure, and female genital mutilation, we can see how they are not just harmful culture, but they are also forms the tradition of violence that slowly and systematically put women's lives at risk. By using Galtung's idea of cultural violence, these practices that are often justified by culture or religion, actually contribute to the same logic that underlies femicide. Based on this correlation, I propose that these practices should also be recognized as part of a broader, more expanded definition of femicide.

The current definition of femicide which deals only with the actual killing of the victim is indicating that the phenomenon is narrow and not inclusive. Femicide adequately describes the crime of killing a woman, but it fails to cover the complex process leading up to women's death. In this context, death needs to be redefined. Death in femicide is currently defined medicolegally as the inability to breathe.<sup>330</sup> Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2003), in her paper, proposed the new definition of femicide. She stated that death has already occurred by the time a female is put on "death row," that is, when a woman is in a cycle of circumstances that make her feel unsafe or lead to her being in danger of losing her life. Even at this point, she considers her a victim of femicide, and thus Kevorkian redefines death as the inability to live. Although victims of femicide are technically alive, they are in a mode of life that they never wanted and completely reject, a condition that is perhaps best described as "death in life".<sup>331</sup>

Additionally, In the article "From Misogyny to Murder: Everyday Sexism and Femicide in a Cross-Cultural Context", Gilda Rodriguez (2010) state that "femicide is not only related to other forms of explicit violence against women but also to

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<sup>330</sup> Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Reexamining Femicide," 2003.

<sup>331</sup> Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Reexamining Femicide," 2003.

everyday acts of misogyny that contribute to the creation of a culture of sexism and devaluation of women and their lives”.<sup>332</sup> She also argue that femicide not only limit to the direct violence.

The idea of expanding the meaning of femicide is like breaking the usual rules of academic thinking, which often claim to be “scientific” or “objective.” This expansion challenges who gets to decide what counts as “knowledge” and points out that those decisions are often controlled by powerful (usually male-dominated) systems, especially in Asian, African, and Middle Eastern societies.<sup>333</sup>

As I mentioned before, Johan Galtung, in his groundbreaking theorisation, introduces violence as the dimension of violence that legitimizes and creates direct and structural violence acceptable or even invisible within a particular cultural framework.<sup>334</sup> To support Galtung's theory, there are similar theories to show that practices related to early marriage, pronatalist pressure and female genital mutilation can be categorized as femicide, namely the idea of “symbolic violence”.<sup>335</sup> This idea was advanced by French Sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu (1989), the idea of symbolic violence is “a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling”.<sup>336</sup> In simple terms, Bourdieu introduced the idea of symbolic violence to explain how power and control operate in subtle, everyday ways, not just through physical force, but through social norms and ideas that keep certain groups, like women, in lower positions.<sup>337</sup>

Central to Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence, the concept is similar to the Marxist idea of “false consciousness”. This concept refers to the internalisation of dominant discourse, whereby even the most intolerable conditions of existence

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<sup>332</sup> Rodriguez Gilda, “From Misogyny to Murder: Everyday Sexism and Femicide in a Cross-Cultural Context,” *UCLA*, 2010, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5tw6h8nk>.

<sup>333</sup> Aastha Mishra, “Conceptualising the Phenomenon of Femicide as an Embodiment of Symbolic Violence,” *Artha Journal of Social Sciences* 21, no. 1 (2022): 1, <https://doi.org/10.12724/ajss.60.1>.

<sup>334</sup> Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 1990.

<sup>335</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1 (1989): 14–25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/202060>.

<sup>336</sup> Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power.”

<sup>337</sup> Mishra, “Conceptualising the Phenomenon of Femicide as an Embodiment of Symbolic Violence,” 2022.



are perceived as acceptable, or even natural.<sup>338</sup> These beliefs make people accept unfair social systems without questioning them. Basically, victims don't realize they're being treated unfairly because the system teaches them to believe things that aren't really true.<sup>339</sup>

In this regard, reflecting comparatively between Galtung's notion of cultural violence and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence is essential to further sharpen our understanding of the non-physical mechanisms that normalize and perpetuate social harm. While both theorists aim to uncover the invisible, subtle forces that underpin human suffering and inequality, they do so from remarkably different, intersecting analytical trajectories.

Cultural violence, according to Galtung (1990), refers to those aspects of culture, be it religion, ideology, language, art, or science, that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence. The key function here is legitimation. Violence, when covered in cultural symbolism, is no longer called as a violent.<sup>340</sup> The killing of women, for example, may not be considered "murder" in certain societies when it is culturally framed as a matter of "honour". Hence, Galtung attends to the framework that gives moral or social permission for harm to take place, without necessarily naming it as such.

While Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic violence operates with a slightly more different focus, that penetrates deeper into the everyday reproduction of power manifested through socialization and habitus.<sup>341</sup> Symbolic violence, in Bourdieu's theoretical frame, is the kind of gentle, invisible violence that is exerted through language, norms, education, and social recognition, often internalised by both the oppressor and the oppressed. It is a violence that does not require force to be effective, precisely because it is misrecognized as legitimate or natural. Unlike Galtung, who looks outward at how culture justifies external violence, Bourdieu is

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<sup>338</sup> Katie Smith, "Pierre Bourdieu – Challenging Symbolic Violence and the Naturalisation of Power Relations," *Pierre Bourdieu*, n.d.

<sup>339</sup> Smith, "Pierre Bourdieu – Challenging Symbolic Violence and the Naturalisation of Power Relations."

<sup>340</sup> Galtung, "Cultural Violence," 1990.

<sup>341</sup> Habitus is a set of habits that create unintentionally practices and perceptions (internalized habits and beliefs shaped by our environment)

concerned with how domination is inscribed on bodies and minds, thus openly reproducing social hierarchies without coercion.<sup>342</sup>

What both thinkers converge upon is the imperative to deconstruct the invisible mechanisms of power, yet they diverge sharply in methodology and scope. Galtung emphasis on macro-structural and ideological, attending to the ways in which large-scale cultural systems validate injustice. In contrast, Bourdieu analyses the micro-sociological and phenomenological, dealing with how domination is embedded and reproduced within everyday practices and perceptions. Bourdieu is less concerned with the ideological justification of violence, and more concerned with how subjects participate in their own domination, which they are often unaware of.<sup>343</sup>

In sum, both Galtung and Bourdieu challenge us to reconsider violence not as merely physical, but as a deeply rooted, often invisible structure embedded in language, habitus, and cultural logic. However, their respective frameworks enlighten different perspective of the same domination structure, one from the outside-in, and the other from the inside-out.

Everyday socio-cultural interactions and experiences contribute to the fabrication of violent practices. These invisible socio-cultural influences legitimize the visible and tangible practices of femicide. Toffanin (2012), states in this regard “Symbolic violence coexists with other forms of violence, and because symbolic violence sustains these forms of violence, other patterns of violence are legitimized”.<sup>344</sup> Thus, in simple terms, femicide is essentially the physical manifestation of symbolic violence.

Moreover, the phenomenon of femicide (the killing of women) also represents and determines the symbolic image of the entire social setting. For instance, if we re-refer to Radford and Russell’s interpretation of femicide, we observe that they identify femicide as a continuum of systemic male domination

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<sup>342</sup> Beate Kraus, “Gender, Sociological Theory and Bourdieu’s Sociology of Practice,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 6 (2006): 119–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276406069778>.

<sup>343</sup> Kraus, “Gender, Sociological Theory and Bourdieu’s Sociology of Practice.”

<sup>344</sup> Angela Maria Toffanin, *Research on Violence against Women. A Sociological Perspective*, 2012.

and coercive sexual violence. According to them, “The concept of femicide extends itself beyond legal definitions of murder to include situations in which women are permitted to die as a result of misogynous attitudes or social practices”.<sup>345</sup> Hence, all the occasions of femicide ranging from intimate partner femicide, infanticide, foeticide, lesbicide, advertising femicide, other forms of honour killings, etcetera which they have explicitly addressed in their research could be constructively perceived as an expression and continuum of male domination and misogyny.

According to Kevorkian (2003), to understand femicide properly, we must listen to real women’s experiences. But we also have to remember that not all women go through the same things, each has a different background, class, and culture. Interestingly, some women both resist femicide and at the same time accept or justify it as a way to protect their culture or social expectations.<sup>346</sup>

Hence, the main idea is there’s no one single truth or voice. Women’s stories are complex, and cultures are not all the same. We need to approach femicide with an understanding that includes all the differences of conditions.<sup>347</sup> Many interpretations of the Qur’an, proverbs, and sayings in society use language that favors men and puts down women. This kind of language doesn’t give women space to express themselves, it keeps them trapped in a system that men control. When women talk about their experiences with femicide (being killed or threatened because of their gender), they describe deep pain, like feeling dead inside, or being afraid of being killed all the time. But the usual definition of femicide doesn’t include how they really feel. That’s why we need to expand the meaning of femicide to include women’s voices and experiences.<sup>348</sup>

In my view, all this synthesis reveals that femicide is not simply an act of physical violence, but the culmination of long-standing cultural and religious narratives that legitimize harm against women. Direct violence, such as early

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<sup>345</sup> Jill Radford and Russel, Diana E. H, eds., *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (Twayne Publ. [u.a.], 1992).

<sup>346</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, “Reexamining Femicide: Breaking the Silence and Crossing ‘Scientific’ Borders,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, ahead of print, The University of Chicago Press, January 2003, world, <https://doi.org/10.1086/342590>.

<sup>347</sup> Shalhoub-Kevorkian, “Reexamining Femicide,” 2003.

<sup>348</sup> Shalhoub-Kevorkian, “Reexamining Femicide,” 2003.

marriage, pronatalism pressure, and FGM, inflicts physical and psychological wounds on women's bodies. Structural violence, in turn, sustains these harms through legal gaps and institutional neglect. Cultural violence, perhaps the most danger, transforms these practices into moral duties, framing suffering as obedience, and control as protection. This suggests two things: first, that certain cultural and religious frameworks play a powerful role in shaping environments where femicide becomes common; and second, that femicide must be understood as a deeply embedded problem, one that emerges not from individual cruelty alone, but from a broader moral settings that systematically silences, disciplines, and finally disadvantages women.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This study has redefined femicide not only as the act of the physical killing of women but also more widely in terms of practices that put women's lives in danger, even though they might not be immediately fatal. These are practices that control women's bodies and prevent them from achieving their fundamental rights as human beings. To explore this concept, I examine three cultural practices that are often legitimized through specific religious interpretations, those are early marriage, pronatalist pressure, and female genital mutilation (FGM).

At first glance, these practices may seem common or even harmless. However, on deeper analysis, these practices have significant harmful consequences for women's mental health, physical health, or in the worst cases, their lives. A number of health and gender studies have documented how these practices cause serious risks to women. For example, early marriage is associated with higher maternal mortality rates, hindered education, and psychological trauma. FGM can lead to lifelong pain, infection and complications during childbirth. Prenatal pressure often causes repeat pregnancies, damaging women's health and limiting their life choices. All those practices share a common logic, they treat the female body not as her own, but as something to be controlled and prepared to meet the social expectations. These so-called "normal" practices have a long-term impact on women's quality of life.

This raises a critical question, why are these practices considered normal in many Muslim societies? Why are they not seen as problematic? Respond to this question, this research highlights the role of religious authorities, especially prominent preachers, in shaping and spreading these narratives. In Indonesia, for example, many preachers actively promote or normalize these practices in sermons, webinars or online content. They frame early marriage as a solution to avoid premarital sex, encourage having many children as an act of religious obedience and blessing, and portray FGM as a symbol of purity, thus making it a moral and

religious obligation. As such, these practices are portrayed not as harmful, but rather as pious expressions of Islamic faith.

However, when we analyze them through the lens of Johan Galtung's theory of "cultural violence," it becomes clear that these practices represent a form of violence that is not always visible or immediate. A violence that is not directly visible, but this violence is perpetuated by culture and religious belief. Cultural violence refers to systems of meaning, such as religion, tradition, and ideology, that justify or normalize other forms of violence.<sup>349</sup> The three practices examined here fall into the category where they are legitimized through cultural or religious teachings, yet contribute to real harm. This is where the broader framework of femicide becomes relevant. Femicide is not just about physical killing but also about conditions in which women live in constant fear, lack autonomy, or experience the slow erosion of life, a phenomenon described as "death in life." In this case, women are placed in a "death row," a bubble of situations that make them unsafe, vulnerable, and at risk of losing their lives.

The conceptual ambiguity surrounding the term "femicide" is one of the main limitations of this research. This thesis employs a broader, multidisciplinary view by including structural and cultural violence, like early marriage, female genital mutilation, and pronatalist pressure into the framework. It is not just about killing women because of their gender. The extension is based on current feminist research, however it may not fit with how the law or criminology currently defines the issue. Therefore, this research does not try to create legal categories, instead it opens up space for a critical rethinking of how femicide could happen in ways other than physical death.

Understanding gender-based violence requires attention to the diverse cultural, social, and individual factors that shape women's lived experiences. These experiences provide a complex perspective on violence due to dominant cultural or religious norms, some types of violence may be acceptable in certain contexts. As

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<sup>349</sup> Galtung, "Cultural Violence," 1990.

a result, in order to create a more inclusive and context-sensitive framework for understanding and combating gender-based violence, it is crucial to recognize the diversity of women's life situations.

Therefore, for future research, it would be useful to explore how society, especially women, perceives and responds to these practices. This investigation could examine whether women consider these practices harmful or interpret them differently. Listening to women's voices through ethnographic or participatory methodologies could provide a richer and more localized understanding of these practices.

In conclusion, femicide must be seen as a multifactorial phenomenon. It is not merely a physical act of violence, but a process rooted in structural and symbolic systems. The phenomenon of femicide can only be fully understood when we consider the unconscious mechanisms (*habitus*) that shape human behavior as well as the cultural and social context in which these practices occur.

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