

The Practice of Marriage Delay: A Socio-Legal Analysis of Muslim Youth in Aceh

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Abstract

The postponement of marriage among Muslim youth reflects a growing tension between normative principles in Islamic law and the evolving realities of social life. The core issue lies in the gap between the normative encouragement to marry early and the empirical trend of delayed marriage driven by economic constraints, educational pursuits, and shifting social values. This study aims to analyze in depth the factors influencing the delay of marriage and to examine its relevance within the framework of contemporary Islamic law. The research employs an empirical juridical method with a qualitative approach, focusing on the analysis of social practices and behaviors among Muslim communities in Aceh. Data analysis is conducted descriptively and analytically to identify patterns in the relationship between normative expectations and social practices. The findings indicate that delayed marriage is not merely a deviation from religious norms but rather a reflection of the social rationality emerging among youth. The concept of marital readiness has been redefined into a multidimensional construct that includes economic stability, psychological maturity, and social preparedness. In addition, social constructions of an "ideal marriage" have reinforced the tendency to delay marriage. From the perspective of Islamic law, this phenomenon can be understood as a contextual adaptation that remains within the broader objectives of the law. The study underscores the need to reconstruct normative understandings in a way that is more responsive to contemporary social dynamics.

Penundaan perkawinan di kalangan pemuda Muslim menunjukkan adanya problematika antara norma dalam hukum Islam dan realitas sosial yang terus berubah. Permasalahan utama terletak pada kesenjangan antara dorongan normatif untuk menyegerakan perkawinan dan praktik empiris yang menunjukkan kecenderungan penundaan akibat faktor ekonomi, pendidikan, serta perubahan nilai sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara mendalam faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi penundaan perkawinan serta mengkaji relevansinya dalam perspektif hukum Islam kontemporer. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah yuridis empiris dengan pendekatan kualitatif, yang menitikberatkan pada analisis terhadap praktik dan perilaku masyarakat muslim di Aceh. Analisis data dilakukan secara deskriptif dan analitis untuk mengidentifikasi pola hubungan antara norma dan praktik sosial. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penundaan perkawinan bukan semata-mata bentuk penyimpangan terhadap norma agama, melainkan refleksi dari rasionalitas sosial yang berkembang di kalangan pemuda. Kesiapan menikah mengalami redefinisi menjadi konsep multidimensional yang mencakup

stabilitas ekonomi, kematangan psikologis, dan kesiapan secara sosial. Selain itu, konstruksi sosial tentang standar pernikahan ideal turut memperkuat kecenderungan penundaan. Dalam perspektif hukum Islam, fenomena ini dapat dipahami sebagai bentuk adaptasi kontekstual yang masih berada dalam kerangka tujuan hukum. Penelitian ini menegaskan perlunya restrukturisasi pemahaman normatif yang lebih responsif terhadap dinamika sosial kontemporer.

Keywords: delayed marriage, Muslim youth, Islamic law, maqashid al-sharia

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INTRODUCTION

The wave of social transformation in the modern era has reshaped patterns of marital decision-making among Muslim youth, as expanding access to education, increasing economic mobility, and the rapid development of digital technology have encouraged a more deliberate and systematic tendency to postpone marriage (El-Mubarak & Ogunbado, 2017).. From the perspective of Islamic law, marriage does not carry a single legal status, as it may be classified as obligatory (wājib), recommended (sunnah), discouraged (makrūh), or even prohibited (harām), depending on an individual's circumstances, needs, readiness, and capacity. In Islamic teachings, the attainment of puberty (bulūgh) is regarded as one of the fundamental indicators of a person's eligibility to enter into marriage. This phenomenon is not merely a demographic issue but has also evolved into a multidimensional concern within the discourse of Islamic Law and the Sociology of Law (Ramadhan, 2024). In a global context, an increase in the age at first marriage has been recorded across various Muslim-majority countries as a consequence of modernization, urbanization, and the transformation of family values (Dommaraju & Tan, 2023). This situation generates an academic urgency to re-examine the relationship between religious norms and contemporary social realities, particularly in regions that formally implement Sharia, such as Aceh. Recent studies indicate that changes in marriage patterns are no longer solely a matter of individual choice but rather the result of a complex interaction between economic structures, state policies, and emerging social constructions (Geist, 2017).

Islamic teachings, through the approach of Maqasid al-Sharia, position marriage as a fundamental institution for safeguarding morality, social stability, and the continuity of generations (Laluddin et al., 2013). The concept of istithā'ah (capability) in classical Islamic law is understood as a minimum level of readiness rather than a standard of economic perfection (Hulaify & Syahrani, 2018). National regulations also reinforce this institution by establishing a minimum age for marriage as a form of protection (Zainuddin et al., 2024). This ideal reflects a balance between religious norms and social protection (Djawas et al., 2024). Theoretically, the integration of religious law and state law is expected to create stability in social behavior, including in the practice of marriage (Sumardi, 2016).

Empirical realities in Aceh indicate a tendency that diverges from the concept within Islamic teachings, which encourage marriage once an individual is capable of undertaking it. Statistical data and social observations point to an increasing number of unmarried youth. Aceh ranks second with a percentage of 75.94%, following DKI Jakarta at 80%, and is followed by North Sumatra in third place at 75.43% (Agustin et al., 2025). This phenomenon is influenced by rising wedding costs, economic uncertainty, as well as shifting aspirations among the younger

generation, who increasingly prioritize career stability before marriage (Juliadi et al., 2025). In addition, there has been the emergence of non-marital social relationships in the form of dating, in the long term, which socially gives rise to problematic implications from the perspective of Islamic law, as it is feared to lead to acts of *zinā* (adultery/fornication) (Mansari et al., 2020).

The discrepancy between normative principles and actual practices carries serious implications for the social structure of Acehese society. The postponement of marriage has the potential to increase the risk of social deviance, alter patterns of gender relations, and lead to behaviors that are prohibited under Islamic law (Nafi'atin & Ngazizah, 2025). In the long term, this phenomenon may affect social stability and the effectiveness of sharia-based policies. From a legal perspective, the lack of synchronization between norms and practices risks undermining the legitimacy of the law itself. In the context of development, changes in marriage patterns are also correlated with demographic dynamics, including birth rates and the structure of the productive-age population.

These conditions indicate a gap between what is ideally expected and the reality shaped by various structural and cultural factors. Economic factors serve as a primary determinant, particularly in the context of rising social standards surrounding the notion of an “ideal marriage.” In addition, the reinterpretation of religious values by the younger generation influences their perception of the urgency of marriage. From an analytical perspective, the Sociology of Law approach provides a framework for understanding the interaction between legal norms and social realities. This approach enables the identification of patterns in how society adapts to norms, while also opening space for reconstructing a more contextual concept of marital readiness.

A number of previous studies have examined the phenomenon of delayed marriage from demographic, economic, and gender perspectives. Nella Agustin, however, only analyzes the postponement of marriage among female lecturers, focusing solely on women and not examining the reasons among non-lecturer youth, nor analyzing the impact of delayed marriage on public welfare (Agustin et al., 2025). Milad Bagi analyzes the reasons for delayed marriage in Iran, highlighting the concrete factors behind this phenomenon in that context (Bagi, 2023). Mastur H. Rehim tends to examine the causes of why Muslim youth do not marry at a young age, using Al Ain University as the research setting (Rehim et al., 2023). General findings indicate that higher levels of education and labor force participation are key factors contributing to the delay. Other studies point to a shift in family values within urban Muslim societies. Nevertheless, these studies tend to be partial in nature and have not comprehensively integrated the normative analysis of Islamic law with empirical realities, particularly in the context of Aceh, which has a distinctive implementation of sharia. This limitation opens up space for more integrative and contextual research.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study seeks to contribute to the socio-legal scholarship on marriage by examining how Muslim youth in Aceh construct and negotiate the meaning of marital readiness within a rapidly changing social environment. Rather than assuming the existence of a conflict between Islamic legal norms and contemporary social practices, this research explores the ways in which religious understandings of marriage are interpreted, adapted, and applied in the context of educational advancement, economic aspirations, and evolving life trajectories. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the socio-legal construction of marital readiness, particularly how young Muslims reconcile normative religious teachings with contemporary expectations regarding personal, social, and economic preparedness for marriage. This study therefore aims to analyze the interaction between Islamic legal understandings and social practices related to delayed marriage, as well as to identify the considerations that shape marital decision-making among Muslim youth in Aceh. Such an approach is expected to enrich socio-legal discussions on Islamic family law and provide a contextual basis for formulating policies and programs that are responsive to the lived realities of Muslim youth.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative socio-legal research design that combined normative analysis of Islamic legal principles concerning marriage with empirical analysis of social practices among Muslim youth in Aceh (Mansari, 2026). Empirical data were collected through in-depth interviews with six informants selected purposively, consisting of three male and three female Muslim youths aged between 22 and 35 years who had not yet married. The informants were drawn from Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, allowing for the exploration of diverse social and cultural backgrounds within the Acehnese context. Their occupational backgrounds included university students, civil servants, private-sector employees, entrepreneurs, teachers, and freelance workers. Their educational attainment ranged from senior high school graduates to holders of bachelor's and master's degrees.

The sources of research data are divided into two categories, namely primary and secondary data. Primary data are obtained through in-depth interviews with informants selected purposively, consisting of Muslim youth aged 20–35 years. The criteria for selecting informants are based on their direct experience or substantive knowledge regarding the practice of delayed marriage. Secondary data are derived from legal documents, such as statutory regulations, Aceh qanun, as well as relevant academic literature. Data collection techniques are further complemented by limited participant observation to capture social dynamics that may not be revealed through interviews.

The data analysis technique is carried out in a gradual and systematic manner using an interactive analysis model (Mukti Fajar, 2015). The first stage involves data reduction to identify key themes, such as economic factors, social constructions of “marital readiness,” and the reinterpretation of religious values. The second stage consists of categorization and thematic coding using a grounded approach to uncover patterns of relationships between social and normative variables. The third stage is a normative analysis of concepts within Maqashid al-Sharia to assess the compatibility between social practices and the objectives of Islamic law. The final stage is a dialectical synthesis that integrates empirical and normative findings to construct a conceptual model of delayed marriage within the context of Acehnese society.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, triangulation techniques are employed across data, methods, and sources (Ali, 2021). Validation is conducted through cross-checking interview results, legal documents, and field observations. In addition, member checking is carried out with key informants to ensure the accuracy of data interpretation. Research ethics are upheld by ensuring informed consent, maintaining the confidentiality of informants' identities, and demonstrating sensitivity to the social norms and religious values of Acehnese society. With this comprehensive and operational methodological design, the study is expected to produce in-depth, valid, and academically as well as practically relevant analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Practice of Delayed Marriage among Muslim Youth

The practice of delaying marriage among young Muslims is still evident in the realities of Acehnese society. Some young people remain unmarried between the ages of 20 and 25, despite Islamic teachings encouraging marriage when they are able. Interviews indicate that most informants recognize the importance of marriage from a religious perspective; however, there is a tendency to prioritize economic readiness before marriage (Sayed, 2026). Male informants predominantly stated that employment remains a non-negotiable prerequisite (Khaidir, interview, 2026). Meanwhile, female informants emphasized the importance of emotional stability and mental readiness (Fitriani, interview, 2026). The data demonstrate a common pattern of perceptions regarding “readiness for

marriage" as a condition that must be achieved first. This perception contributes to delaying marriage. This finding is consistent with global trends in studies of contemporary Muslim families (Das & Rout, 2023).

The interviews also revealed that families tend to be more flexible in allowing their children to postpone marriage. This shift is reflected in the growing social acceptance of individuals who remain unmarried into their thirties. Some informants even stated that marrying too early is often perceived as economically risky (Khaerani, 2019). One informant explained: "I understand that Islam encourages marriage. However, I also believe that *istithā'ah* (marital capability) is not merely a matter of age, but also the ability to fulfill the responsibilities that come with marriage." This statement indicates that the decision to postpone marriage is not rooted in a lack of understanding of Islamic teachings regarding marriage. Rather, it reflects a greater emphasis on achieving financial stability and psychological maturity before entering married life. Another informant similarly stated "Our generation is different from our parents' generation. We do not reject marriage, but we want to ensure that such a decision is made at the right time." This perspective suggests that marriage is increasingly viewed as a carefully considered life decision requiring multidimensional readiness rather than simply compliance with social expectations or age-related norms.

Economic factors emerge as a dominant variable in nearly all interviews. Mutia identifies the high cost of marriage as a primary obstacle to entering into marriage (Mutia, Interview, 2026). In addition, social expectations regarding what constitutes a "proper" wedding further complicate the decision to marry. Male informants highlight the demands of dowry and wedding reception expenses as financial burdens (Zulkifli, Interview, 2026). Female informants add that a partner's economic stability is a key consideration in deciding to marry (Suci, Interview, 2026). These conditions indicate that economic factors are not only structural but also cultural in nature. The data suggest the emergence of a new social construction regarding marriage standards.

In addition to economic factors, education also plays a significant role in delaying marriage. Female informants, in particular, expressed a desire to complete higher education before getting married (Khoiriah, Interview, 2026). This is closely related to career aspirations and financial independence. Male informants showed a similar tendency, although with varying intensity (Rizki, Interview, 2026). The data indicate that education functions both as a delaying factor and as an empowering means to prepare individuals mentally in striving to achieve well-being in marriage (Agustin et al., 2025). Education has become a higher priority than marriage. This phenomenon demonstrates a close relationship between education and changes in lifestyle patterns.

Within the context of social relations, the findings reveal the existence of long-term non-marital relationships. Informants noted that dating is considered a normal phase prior to marriage. The duration of these relationships varies from two to five years. Some informants view such relationships as a form of "preparation" for marriage. However, not all relationships culminate in marriage. The data indicate the presence of complex relational dynamics among Muslim youth. This practice has become part of an evolving social reality.

Other findings indicate the presence of ambivalence between religious values and social practices. Informants generally stated that delaying marriage is not considered an ideal choice within religious teachings. However, they perceive current conditions as necessitating adjustment. This view emerged consistently across various interviews. Informants acknowledged a tension between norms and reality. In some cases, this gives rise to personal dilemmas. The data point to an ongoing negotiation of values in everyday life. One informant stated, "I view marriage as a religious obligation. However, I do not yet

feel economically prepared to undertake it; therefore, I choose to postpone it until my circumstances become more stable” (Rizki, Interview, 2026).

Similarly, other informants stated that their decision not to marry is due to economic factors, noting that the cost of marriage today is very high; therefore, they must save for a long time in order to get married. If forced, there are concerns about being unable to meet family needs (Rizki, Interview, 2026). Meanwhile, another informant stated, “I want to complete my studies first. Career is also a priority before marriage. Marrying too early could hinder those plans” (Ade, Interview, 2026). The interview data show a relatively consistent pattern of responses among informants. The majority associate the decision to delay marriage with rational considerations. The reasons presented tend to be practical and contextual, and there is no indication of rejection toward the institution of marriage itself. Rather, the delay is understood as an adaptive strategy in response to prevailing conditions. This is reflected in the structure of the informants’ narratives. The data reveal a homogeneity in patterns of thought among the respondents.

The findings also indicate differences in perspective between men and women. Men tend to emphasize financial aspects as the primary reason, while women are more likely to include psychological factors and emotional readiness. However, both share a common tendency to delay marriage. These data point to variations in the dimensions of consideration. Nevertheless, the outcome remains similar: delaying marriage becomes the choice made by both groups. In terms of family dynamics, it was found that parental influence is not dominant. Most informants stated that the decision to marry is left to the child. Parents generally offer advice without exerting pressure. This differs from earlier traditional patterns. The data indicate a shift in authority relations within the family, with decisions becoming more individualistic. This change, in turn, affects the dynamics of marriage.

The research findings indicate that the delay in marriage is a systemic phenomenon. Economic factors, education, and shifts in values emerge as the primary determinants. The data reveal a consistent pattern across different groups of informants. No single variable is found to be absolutely dominant. Rather, the phenomenon results from the interaction of multiple factors. These findings provide a comprehensive empirical overview. All data are presented as a basis for further analysis in the discussion section.

Factors Influencing the Delay of Marriage Among Youth

The data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews and field observations involving 10 informants consisting of Muslim young men and women aged 20–35 across several regions in Aceh. The informants come from diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds, allowing for a range of perspectives in understanding the practice of delaying marriage. Observations were conducted in social contexts such as village (gampong) activities, family interactions, and workplace environments. The interviews employed a semi-structured guide to explore the factors influencing the decision to postpone marriage. All data were recorded, transcribed, and categorized based on emerging empirical themes. The findings are presented descriptively to illustrate factual patterns identified in the field. This approach follows contemporary qualitative research practices.

The research findings indicate that economic factors constitute the primary consideration in the decision to delay marriage (Andika, Interview, 2026). Informants stated that income instability and limited employment opportunities pose significant

obstacles (Rijalul Fikri, Interview, 2026). Field observations reveal that many young people are still engaged in informal or contract-based work. This condition influences their perception of readiness for marriage. In interviews, informants consistently emphasized the need for stable employment. The data show that economic standards serve as the main indicator in decision-making. This pattern aligns with global findings regarding the transition to adulthood.

The cost of marriage also emerges as an important variable in the research data. Informants noted that expenses related to wedding receptions, dowry, and post-marital needs are increasing (Ridwan, Interview, 2026). Observations indicate the presence of high social standards regarding the conduct of weddings. In some cases, families also set expectations for the form of the wedding ceremony. This further intensifies the financial burden on prospective couples. The data show that perceptions of an “ideal marriage” contribute to the delay. This phenomenon is consistently observed across different groups of informants.

Education emerges as a significant factor contributing to the delay of marriage in this study. Female informants predominantly expressed a desire to complete higher education before getting married (Fitriani, Interview, 2026). Male informants also showed a similar tendency, although with differing priorities. Observations indicate an increase in youth participation in formal education. This, in turn, affects the postponement of the age of marriage. The data show that education plays a role in determining the timing of decisions to marry. These findings are consistent with modern demographic research.

In addition to education, career aspirations were also identified as an important variable in determining marriage postponement. Informants stated that job stability had become a priority before marriage (Vijay, 2024). Observations indicate that young people tend to focus on career development during their early productive years. This condition contributes to delays in marriage planning. In interviews, informants mentioned that marriage is regarded as a major responsibility. Therefore, career readiness becomes a primary consideration. The data further demonstrate a relationship between career orientation and the postponement of marriage.

The subsequent findings indicate the existence of changes in social norms within society. Informants stated that the pressure to marry at a young age has gradually diminished. Observations reveal that families now provide greater freedom in determining the appropriate time for marriage (Muntasir, interview, 2026). This reflects a shift in societal values. The data indicate that decisions regarding marriage have become increasingly individualistic in nature. This pattern differs from that of previous generations. Such changes were consistently identified across various research locations.

In terms of social relations, non-marital relationships were found to persist over a certain period of time. Informants stated that such relationships are considered part of the process leading to marriage. Observations indicate that this practice is socially accepted to a certain extent. The duration of these relationships varies from two to five years. Not all relationships ultimately lead to marriage. The data reveal the existence of complex relational dynamics. This phenomenon has become part of the social reality experienced by young people.

Family factors also emerged in the research data, although with varying degrees of intensity. Informants stated that parents no longer exert strong pressure to marry immediately. Observations indicate that families now function more as providers of advice. The final decision ultimately remains with the individual. This reflects a transformation in the structure of family authority. The data further demonstrate a shift in patterns of family relations. This phenomenon was identified across various groups of informants.

In terms of religiosity, informants demonstrated a commitment to religious values. They recognized the importance of marriage within Islamic teachings (Aulia, interview, 2026). However, the implementation of these values was adjusted to actual circumstances. Observations indicate that religious practices continue to be maintained. The data do not suggest a rejection of religious norms; rather, what emerges is an adaptation in practice. This has become part of the evolving social dynamics within society. Social environmental factors also influence the decision to postpone marriage. Informants stated that peers exert a significant influence (Fatimah, interview, 2026). Data obtained through observation reveal similarities in behavioral patterns within friendship groups. This condition contributes to the formation of new norms within the community. The data indicate that marriage decisions are influenced by social environments in which peers within a community have not yet entered into marriage. This phenomenon was consistently identified throughout the study.

The findings also reveal differences in perspectives between men and women. Men tend to place greater emphasis on economic factors, while women additionally consider psychological factors and emotional readiness (Tahir et al., 2013). Observations indicate that both groups continue to postpone marriage. The data demonstrate variations in the underlying reasons, yet lead to the same outcome. This reflects the complexity of factors influencing such decisions. These findings were consistently observed across all informants.

Observations also indicate that this phenomenon occurs across various regions. Both urban and rural areas exhibit similar patterns. Although the intensity differs, the direction of change remains the same. The data show that the postponement of marriage has become a widespread phenomenon. This reflects the diffusion of new social values within society. The process occurs gradually over time. These findings further strengthen the validity of the study. In terms of technology, informants highlighted the role of social media in shaping perceptions of marriage (Sandy et al., 2024). Observations reveal that digital content influences standards and expectations regarding marriage. This, in turn, affects individual expectations. The data indicate that technology functions as an indirect contributing factor. Such influence emerged consistently throughout various interviews. This phenomenon demonstrates the role of digitalization in driving social change.

The findings of the study indicate that the postponement of marriage is influenced by various interconnected factors, with no single dominant factor operating independently. The data reveal interactions among economic, educational, social, and cultural factors. This pattern was consistently identified across all informants. The research findings provide a comprehensive empirical overview of the phenomenon. All findings are presented as a basis for further analysis. This approach ensures objectivity in the presentation of the data.

Analysis of Marriage Postponement Among Muslim Communities

The principal findings of this study demonstrate that the postponement of marriage among Muslim youth cannot merely be understood as an individual phenomenon, but rather as a social construction formed through the interaction of economic rationality, educational aspirations, and the transformation of cultural values. The conceptual meaning of these findings points to a shift in the orientation of marriage, from a normative obligation toward a rational choice based on risk calculation. Young people do not reject the institution of marriage; instead, they position it within a framework of strategic timing. This condition signifies a redefinition of the meaning of marital readiness that is more complex and multidimensional in nature. Readiness is no longer understood in minimal terms as reflected in classical constructions, but has expanded to include economic stability, psychological maturity, and social preparedness. This shift indicates an epistemological transformation in the way young people perceive marriage. Accordingly, the postponement of marriage reflects a rational adaptation to changes in the social structure.

Economic factors function not only as structural barriers, but also as symbols of social legitimacy in shaping marital readiness (Dew & Price, 2011). The construction of a “proper marriage” that has developed within society demonstrates that economic standards have undergone social inflation. In this context, young people are not merely confronted with economic limitations, but also with pressures that are cultural in nature. This phenomenon illustrates how economic and cultural dimensions are intertwined in shaping social behavior (Alzudy, 2024). The postponement of marriage therefore becomes a strategy for fulfilling such social expectations. Accordingly, the decision to delay marriage should not be interpreted as a form of deviance, but rather as a response to increasingly elevated social standards. This reinforces the argument that changes in social behavior are often driven by transformations occurring within the broader community structure.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings are closely related to the Sociology of Law approach, which emphasizes that law cannot be understood separately from its social context. Normative legal principles concerning marriage in Islamic Law textually encourage the acceleration of marriage for individuals who are already capable. However, social realities demonstrate that the definition of being “capable” has undergone reinterpretation within the modern context. The Maqashid al-Sharia approach provides space to understand this phenomenon as a form of social *ijtihad*. Economic and psychological readiness may therefore be regarded as part of safeguarding the very objectives of the law itself. Within this framework, the postponement of marriage is not necessarily contrary to the principles of sharia. This condition illustrates the flexibility of Islamic Law in responding to social change.

The relevance of modernization theory is also clearly reflected in the findings of this study. Modernization theory explains that increasing levels of education and economic participation contribute to shifts in family life patterns, including the age of marriage (Saardchom & Lemaire, 2005). The findings indicate that young people with higher levels of education tend to postpone marriage. This is consistent with the concept of “life course transition,” which positions education and career development as stages preceding family

formation. The postponement of marriage thus becomes part of a strategy for social mobility. Within this context, marriage is no longer regarded as the starting point of adulthood, but rather as one phase within the broader journey of life. This transformation reflects wider changes in the social structure. Accordingly, this phenomenon cannot be separated from broader global dynamics.

Comparisons with previous studies indicate that these findings confirm the global trend of increasing marriage age. A study conducted by Smith-Hefner (2020) revealed a shift in values among urban Muslim communities, in which education is placed as a primary priority (Smith-Hefner, 2020). This study reinforces those findings within the context of Aceh, a region characterized by a strong religious identity. Furthermore, research by Maulsharif identified economic factors as the principal determinant in the postponement of marriage (Maulsharif & Yerzhankyzy, 2024). The findings of this study are consistent with those results, while also adding a more specific cultural dimension. Accordingly, this research not only confirms previous findings, but also broadens the understanding of the factors influencing marriage postponement. This contribution is significant in enriching socio-legal scholarship.

This study also reveals an important distinction from previous research, which has generally tended to view the postponement of marriage solely as an economic consequence. The findings demonstrate that cultural and symbolic factors play an equally significant role. Social standards regarding the ideal form of marriage emerge as variables that reinforce the postponement of marriage. This indicates that economic analysis alone is insufficient to explain the phenomenon comprehensively. A multidimensional approach therefore becomes essential in understanding such a complex social phenomenon. This study expands the analytical framework by integrating social, cultural, and religious dimensions. Accordingly, the contribution of this research lies in its integrative approach. This perspective offers a new contribution to the study of marriage and family relations.

The strength of this study lies not only in its socio-legal approach but also in its effort to integrate the perspectives of Sociology of Law, Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, and Modernization Theory within a unified analytical framework. Sociology of Law is employed to explain how legal norms concerning marriage operate and are interpreted within everyday social interactions. Modernization Theory provides an analytical lens for understanding the social transformations brought about by expanding educational opportunities, economic mobility, urbanization, and digital technology, all of which influence the way Muslim youth make marital decisions. Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah functions as a normative framework for assessing whether contemporary interpretations of marital readiness remain consistent with the broader objectives of Islamic law, particularly the protection of religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*), lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*), intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), and welfare (*maṣlahah*).

The integration of these three perspectives enables this study to move beyond a dichotomous understanding of law and society by demonstrating how social change reshapes the meaning of marital readiness without necessarily contradicting the objectives of Islamic law. Empirical data obtained through interviews and observations reveal that the postponement of marriage among Muslim youth in Aceh reflects an ongoing process of

negotiation between religious norms, socio-economic realities, and modern aspirations. The Acehese context further enriches the analysis because it represents a region where Islamic law is formally implemented, allowing the interaction between normative religious values and contemporary social transformations to be examined more closely. Through this integrated framework, the study contributes to the development of socio-legal scholarship on Islamic family law by offering a contextual explanation of how the concept of marital readiness is reconstructed within contemporary Muslim society.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its effort to reconstruct the concept of marital readiness from a contemporary perspective. Readiness is no longer understood merely in a normative sense, but also as a dynamic social construct. This perspective opens new avenues for the development of theories within the field of Islamic family law studies. The study also enriches the discourse on the flexibility of Islamic law in responding to social change. Accordingly, this research contributes to the advancement of socio-legal theory. In addition, it also contributes to the study of social demography. This integration broadens the scope of academic analysis.

The practical implications of this study are evident in the fields of education and youth development. The findings indicate the need for a more contextual educational approach in understanding marriage. Premarital education programs need to be adjusted to the social realities faced by young people. The materials should not only focus on normative aspects, but also address economic and psychological readiness. This is important in reducing the gap between norms and social practices. Such an approach can enhance the effectiveness of family development programs. Therefore, the findings of this study possess strong practical relevance. The implementation of policies based on these findings may contribute to improving the quality of family life.

From a policy perspective, this study highlights the need for more adaptive interventions in response to social change. Policies related to marriage should comprehensively take economic and social factors into account. Youth economic empowerment programs may serve as one of the potential solutions. In addition, efforts are needed to reduce burdensome social standards associated with marriage. This can be achieved through social campaigns and public education initiatives. Responsive policies will be more effective in addressing this phenomenon. Thus, this study provides a foundation for the formulation of more contextual policies.

This study has several limitations that should be carefully considered. The limited number of informants may affect the generalizability of the findings. In addition, this research focuses only on specific regions in Aceh. Cultural variations across different regions have not been fully accommodated. The qualitative method also has limitations in measuring causal relationships quantitatively. The data obtained depend heavily on the subjectivity of the informants. This may influence the interpretation of the research findings. Therefore, the results of this study should be understood within the context of its limitations. Another limitation lies in the absence of longitudinal analysis. This study captures the phenomenon only within a single period of time. Long-term behavioral changes have not yet been observed. Furthermore, the role of technology has not been explored in depth. In fact, social media plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of

marriage. This remains an area that has not been optimally examined. Future studies may address this gap. Accordingly, there are broad opportunities for further research development.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to employ a broader sample. The geographical scope may be expanded in order to obtain a more representative understanding of the phenomenon. In addition, a mixed-method approach may be utilized to integrate qualitative and quantitative analyses. This would enhance the validity of the findings. Longitudinal studies are also important for understanding the dynamics of behavioral change over time. Accordingly, future research may provide more comprehensive contributions. These recommendations are important for the advancement of scientific knowledge.

In addition, future research may explore the role of digital technology in shaping perceptions of marriage. Social media can serve as an important variable in the analysis. The influence of influencers and popular culture also requires further examination. This would provide a new perspective in understanding the phenomenon of delayed marriage. Interdisciplinary research may likewise be conducted to enrich the analysis. The integration of social sciences, law, and technology has become increasingly important. Accordingly, future studies may generate a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

This discussion demonstrates that delayed marriage is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained through a single perspective. The interaction between economic, social, cultural, and religious factors constitutes the primary determinant. This study provides an important contribution to understanding the phenomenon comprehensively. The socio-legal approach has proven effective in revealing the dynamics between norms and social realities. Accordingly, this research is not only academically relevant, but also carries significant practical implications. This analysis is expected to serve as a foundation for future policy development and further research.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that the practice of postponing marriage among Muslim youth constitutes a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a single variable. The analysis demonstrates that the decision to delay marriage represents a form of social rationality shaped by considerations of economic conditions, educational attainment, psychological readiness, and cultural constructions regarding appropriate standards for marriage. This shift reflects a fundamental transformation in the way young people perceive the institution of marriage, from being primarily regarded as a religious recommendation in Islam to becoming a strategic choice within the life cycle. The postponement of marriage should not be understood as a rejection of religious values, but rather as an adaptation to the realities individuals encounter. This condition illustrates a transformation in the concept of marital readiness, which is no longer viewed in minimalistic terms, but has developed into a more complex and contextualized construct. At the same time, this phenomenon demonstrates that religious norms undergo processes of reinterpretation within social practice. The relationship between norms and social realities therefore becomes dynamic and is not always positioned in direct opposition to one another.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the socio-legal discourse on Islamic family law by demonstrating the transformation of the concept of *istithā'ah* (marital

capability) within contemporary Muslim society. Traditionally associated with the ability to fulfill basic religious and material obligations of marriage, *istithā'ah* is increasingly understood by Muslim youth as a multidimensional construct encompassing economic stability, psychological maturity, educational attainment, and social preparedness. This finding suggests that the meaning of marital readiness is continuously negotiated through the interaction between Islamic legal understandings and changing social realities. From a practical perspective, the study highlights the need for educational and family development policies that promote multidimensional marital readiness among young people. Such policies should move beyond a narrow emphasis on the timing of marriage and instead strengthen economic, psychological, social, and relational capacities, enabling Muslim youth to make informed and responsible marital decisions in accordance with both religious values and contemporary social conditions.

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