

# Patriarchal Culture as the Cause of Gender Inequality in Indonesia

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## Article Info

### Artikel History

Received : 26 June 2025

Reviewed : 23 July 2025

Accepted : 01 October 2025

### Keywords:

Discrimination against Women

Feminism

Gender Equality

Islam

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the main causes behind gender inequality issues in Indonesia and analyze the efforts made by the government to address these problems. Specifically, it seeks to identify cultural and structural factors that lead to discrimination against women, examine the Islamic perspective on gender and feminism, and evaluate government programs promoting gender equality. The study adopts a qualitative approach using a literature review (library research) that draws upon academic literature, laws, and secondary data. Findings indicate that gender inequality in Indonesia is mainly rooted in patriarchal systems deeply ingrained in social culture and customs, which place men as superior and women as subordinate. Moreover, Islam itself does not teach women's subordination; instead, it promotes equality between men and women. Therefore, gender discrimination stems largely from cultural interpretations rather than religious doctrine. The study concludes that achieving gender equality in Indonesia requires structural reforms, cultural transformation, and synergy between religious values and state policies.

### Please cite this article APA style as:

Murwanti, M. (2025). Patriarchal Culture Causes Gender Inequality in Indonesia. *JOELI: Journal of Educational and Learning Innovation*, 2(1), pp 9-14

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the issue of gender equality has increasingly become a central topic of discussion across various domains, including economics, politics, social life, and religion. Moreover, gender equality significantly influences national development. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), Indonesia ranks 87th out of 146 countries worldwide in terms of gender equality, with a Global Gender Gap Index score of 0.697. This index measures progress in education, health, political participation, and economic engagement.

Finance Minister Sri Mulyani emphasized that achieving gender equality is essential for promoting sustainable social, political, and economic growth,

considering that nearly 50% of Indonesia's population consists of women (CNBC Indonesia, 2020). This highlights the crucial role of women in driving the nation's overall development. Gender equality is explicitly guaranteed by the Indonesian Constitution. Article 28I paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD 1945) affirms that every person is free from discrimination on any basis and is entitled to protection against such treatment. This provision ensures that no one may violate another's human rights or discriminate based on race, skin colour, language, religion, political belief, or sex.

However, gender-based discrimination remains prevalent in Indonesia. In the economic sector, for instance, 55% of women are employed in informal sectors and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Additionally, women earn on average 23% less than men (CNBC Indonesia, 2019). This disparity is largely influenced by persistent perceptions that men are more suitable for formal employment, thereby limiting women's access to such opportunities. These perceptions stem from a deeply rooted cultural belief that men hold authority over women, resulting in unequal access and opportunities for women's advancement. This belief system, known as patriarchy, is described by Spradley (2007: 34) as a social order in which men occupy dominant roles and are regarded as central figures in maintaining social stability. Consequently, women are perceived as responsible for nurturing and supporting men, which perpetuates individual and collective behaviours that discriminate against women.

## **2. Method**

This study employed a qualitative research design aimed at understanding the phenomena experienced by the research subjects, particularly their behaviours and actions. Such understanding was achieved through descriptive analysis using words and language within a natural context, supported by various scientific approaches (Creswell, 2010: 20).

To obtain relevant data, this study utilized a literature review method, drawing upon previous studies, journal articles, credible online sources, and other secondary materials. The references selected focused primarily on topics related to gender inequality, discriminatory behaviour against women, and the development of gender equality in Indonesia.

The collected data were then carefully sorted and analysed. Verification was conducted by comparing the data with findings from other relevant studies to ensure validity and reliability. The verified data were subsequently interpreted and presented in a systematic scientific report.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **Patriarchal Culture as a Major Factor**

Patriarchy positions men as dominant figures over women in various aspects of life social, cultural, economic, and political. It functions as an ideology that legitimizes male dominance within a particular social system. In patriarchal societies, men are perceived as the central actors who determine the functioning of social structures. According to Goode (2007:18), patriarchy represents a paternalistic system in which men hold authority and power in maintaining social order. Similarly, Pinem (2009:42) explains that patriarchy is a social system where men

possess the main authority and control, while women occupy subordinate positions, resulting in inequality between the two genders.

Patriarchal culture has long shaped societal mindsets and behaviours, fostering gender-based inequalities. Muhadjir (2005, in Susanto, 2015) notes that the cultural view of men as superior and women as inferior has contributed to an unjust, discriminatory, and exploitative system in the distribution of resources. Generally, discrimination is defined as restrictive attitudes, harassment, or exclusion directed toward individuals or groups based on religion, ethnicity, race, social class, economic status, gender, language, or political beliefs. Such acts lead to the reduction or denial of human rights and freedoms in political, economic, legal, social, and cultural life, as stipulated in Article 1 paragraph (3) of Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights (Eddyono, 2011 in Kasim, 2022:273).

Discrimination against women manifests in several forms, including stereotyping, subordination, and marginalization (Apriliandra & Krisnani, 2021:6).

- a. Stereotyping refers to labelling women as weak or emotional beings. This notion, inherited through generations, portrays women as loyal, submissive, nurturing, skilled in domestic tasks, modest, and primarily existing to serve men's needs (Apriliandra & Krisnani, 2021:6). Consequently, women are often perceived as unfit to participate in political decision-making or public leadership, reinforcing their marginal role in society.
- b. Subordination occurs when women are regarded as inferior to men, particularly in leadership or decision-making contexts. This stems from the biased belief that women are emotional and irrational, rendering them incapable of managing authority (Karyawati, 2020:125; Apriliandra & Krisnani, 2021:6).
- c. Marginalization involves restricting women's opportunities to express and actualize themselves. Alison Scott (in Saptari & Holzner, 1997:8) categorizes women's marginalization into four forms: exclusion from employment, occupational segregation through lower wages and undervaluation of skills, feminization of specific job sectors, and economic inequality resulting from limited access to productive resources.

### **Islamic Views on Gender and Feminism**

Based on the literature review, Islamic teachings regard men and women as equally noble beings who hold distinct yet complementary responsibilities. Islam does not intrinsically promote the subordination of women. The term gender literally refers to the social and cultural distinctions between men and women, encompassing differences in values, behaviours, and roles (Umar, 2010:29).

Meanwhile, feminism originates from the Latin word *femina* (meaning "woman") and refers to a social movement advocating for women's rights and rejecting stereotypes, subordination, and marginalization (Ratna, 2004:184). In essence, feminism emerged as a response to patriarchal systems that limit women's opportunities, aiming to ensure that biological differences are not used as justification for social inequality or lower status.

In Islam, the position of women in religious and social life is clearly defined as that of equal partners with men in fulfilling responsibilities and promoting goodness. This is reflected in Q.S. At-Taubah (9:71), which states: "And the believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is

right and forbid what is wrong, establish prayer, pay zakat, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah will have mercy upon them; indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.”

This verse demonstrates that men and women share equal obligations and rewards in faith and righteous deeds. Islam does not differentiate between the two in terms of piety or access to paradise. Thus, the religion does not justify the subordination of women in any aspect of life. On the contrary, Islam honours and elevates women’s status, recognizing their essential roles as mothers, daughters, wives, and members of society (Junaidi & Hadi, 2010:249).

Al-Ghazali (in Aisi et al., 2023:229), in his work *Qadaya al-Mar’ah baina al-Taqaalial-Raakidah wa al-Wafidah*, asserts that discrimination against women does not originate from Islamic teachings but rather from cultural traditions passed down through generations. Islam, in fact, carries a noble mission to uphold equality between men and women. Conversely, patriarchal culture perpetuates social norms that marginalize women and contradict the egalitarian principles of Islam (Aisi et al., 2023:229).

### **Indonesian Government Efforts in Gender Equality**

Gender equality refers to a condition in which men and women possess equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities in political, legal, economic, social, cultural, educational, and other spheres of life (Adriana, 2009:138). Public awareness of gender equality and the pursuit of universal justice has grown significantly in Indonesia. This movement arises as a response to the persistent patriarchal culture that restricts women’s participation, leading to various forms of discrimination in education, employment, health services, reproductive rights, and the prevalence of gender-based violence (Ningtyas et al., 2023:337).

To address these challenges, the Indonesian government has undertaken several initiatives aimed at ensuring women’s rights and promoting gender equality. One major effort was the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) through Law Number 7 of 1984. This convention emphasizes several key principles:

1. Biological differences between men and women should not result in discriminatory treatment. Such differences often lead to limitations on women’s abilities and opportunities to access the same benefits and development outcomes as men.
2. Women are frequently placed in weaker positions due to systemic discrimination or lack of support from their families, communities, and environments, which hinders their independence and participation in public life.

In addition, the government issued Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000 concerning Gender Mainstreaming (PUG) as a strategic commitment to ensure that all citizens men and women, across all ages, regions, and social backgrounds can actively participate in sustainable national development (Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection, 2018).

Under President Joko Widodo’s administration, Indonesia also joined the global HeForShe movement, which advocates for men’s active involvement as agents of

change in promoting gender equality. This initiative underscores the government's mission to increase women's participation in sustainable development and to protect women and children from marginalization and discrimination (Wahyuni, 2020:43).

#### **4. Conclusions**

Gender inequality in Indonesia largely stems from a patriarchal culture that perceives men as stronger and more dominant than women. Consequently, patriarchy remains the primary root of gender disparity despite various efforts and notable progress toward equality. Discrimination against women manifested in the forms of stereotyping, subordination, and marginalization does not originate from Islamic teachings but rather from cultural traditions and social customs that reinforce gender differences. In response to such inequalities, feminism emerged as a movement advocating women's right and challenging all forms of discrimination and injustice.

#### **5. Acknowledgment**

The authors would like to express their deepest gratitude to the University of Muhammadiyah Surabaya for its valuable support and academic resources that facilitated the completion of this research. Thanks, are also extended to the Faculty of Islamic Studies (FAI) for its encouragement in advancing the study of gender equality in education.

The authors extend their deepest gratitude to their colleagues and reviewers of the Journal of Educational Innovation and Learning (JOELI) for their insightful feedback and constructive suggestions that have helped improve the quality of this manuscript. Finally, special thanks are extended to all those whose ideas and discussions have contributed to the development of this research.

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