

## Post-Divorce Spirituality and the Renewal of *Tawhid* Among Muslim Women in Pekanbaru, Indonesia: A Path to a Contextual Theology of Islamic Family Law

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**Abstract:** This study explores the contextual interpretation of *tawhid* as an epistemological and ethical framework within the post-divorce experiences of Muslim women in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. It does so by uncovering the theological and practical dimensions that are often overlooked in Islamic family law discourse. The study begins with the understanding that divorce is an existential moment that demands a profound reconstruction of the meaning of faith, not merely a legal or social event. Using a qualitative, phenomenological, and hermeneutic approach, the study involved six purposely selected key informants. Data analysis integrated the lived religion framework, *tawhid* as a structure of meaning, and the theory of spiritual agency. Epistemologically, the study positions *tawhid* as an ethical and practical lens through which to interpret life crises, grounded in the *Kalam* tradition. The findings reveal that core *tawhid* concepts, such as *qadar* (divine decree), *sabr* (patience), *tawakkul* (dependence on God), and *ridā* (willingness), undergo a renewal of meaning, actively and contextually interpreted by the informants. These concepts are no longer merely understood as theological doctrines; rather, they are envisioned as ethical sources, spiritual mechanisms, and expressions of moral agency that help people reconstruct their lives, heal wounds, and make decisions after divorce. In this context, *tawhid* serves as a living epistemology that shapes women's spiritual resilience and religious autonomy. This study paves the way for developing a more ethical, empathetic, and experience-based theology of Islamic family law by positioning women's spirituality as an epistemic subject that actively interprets religious law to achieve substantive justice.

**Keywords:** *Tawhid*, Divorce, Lived Religion, Spiritual Agency, Muslim Women, Theology of Islamic Family Law

### Introduction

Divorce is a crucial issue in contemporary Islamic family law studies. Although divorce is normatively permitted by Sharia law, it often has complex social, psychological, and spiritual consequences, particularly for women (Al-Shahrani & Hammad, 2023). In Muslim societies like Indonesia, divorced women face social stigma (Ayuni & Purnairawan, 2025; Meryaniwal & Talwasa, 2021) and experience religious dynamics requiring adjustments to their faith, especially regarding divine concepts like *tawakkul* (Alifatuzzahroh & Tasman, 2023). These findings demonstrate that divorce is not merely a legal event but a multidimensional crisis affecting social relations, religious identity, and spiritual beliefs. Therefore, adequately studying this issue requires an approach that goes beyond normative readings and delves into the subjects' religious experiences empirically and reflectively.

Several previous studies have examined the issue of divorce using various approaches, reflecting the diversity of scholarly traditions within contemporary Islamic studies. In the realm of Islamic family law, the primary focus tends to be on the legal aspects of divorce, including its construction (Ahmad, 2003; Azwir et al., 2022; Nasir et al., 2024; Setiyawan et al., 2024). Other studies have examined the underlying reasons for divorce, such as domestic violence (Jaliansyah, 2021; Yusuf et al., 2023), the immorality of husbands, and economic issues in divorce lawsuits filed by working wives (Badri et al., 2024; Nelli et al.,

2023). Additionally, some studies have examined the legal consequences of divorce, particularly the neglect of women's and children's rights (Athief & Juwanti, 2020; Hidayat et al., 2022), divorce outside of court (Nursaidah et al., 2020), and the need for ijтиhad to strengthen women's protection (Shesa et al., 2024). Another discussed dimension is the dialectical relationship between Sharia norms and state regulations in divorce practices (Faiz et al., 2022). Several studies have identified factors contributing to divorce based on empirical field data (Afandi et al., 2023) and legal considerations in judges' decisions (Devy et al., 2023; Makinara et al., 2023). These studies highlight the dynamics of legal implementation, including the use of the active judge principle and *ex officio* authority to ensure women's rights post-divorce (Susylawati, 2019; Yuni, 2021), the difficulties of achieving justice in different geographic areas (Lisnawati et al., 2024), and the importance of reinvigorating ethical principles in *verstek* or default judgment (Izzuddin et al., 2021).

Most of these studies are based on classical Islamic jurisprudence or modern family law formulations. These formulations focus on the validity of the divorce procedure, fulfillment of post-divorce rights, and legal dynamics faced by women within the legal system. Beyond this normative approach, several sociological studies have begun to shift their attention to the experiential social dimension of the divorce process. This approach understands divorce not merely as a legal decision, but also as a social event with broad impacts on women's psychological, economic, and spiritual well-being (Musaddad et al., 2025). These studies depict women as individuals with complex experiences who face legal vulnerability, social pressures, and identity crises after divorce (Hasanudin et al., 2023). This approach aligns with the traditions of lived Islam and everyday theology, which emphasize religious aspects as they are experienced in real life. Saba Mahmood (2005) and Meredith McGuire (2008), among others, developed this idea and combined it with the criticism of formalism in Islamic family law voiced by Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2006) and Khaled Abou El Fadl (2014).

However, an empirical approach to the study of Islamic theology (*tawhīd-kalām*) remains relatively undeveloped. Though the *tawhīd* paradigm has begun to be integrated into environmental studies to develop an ecological fiqh framework (Muliati et al., 2025), its application to family law is still limited. Islamic theological literature predominantly positions concepts such as *al-īmān bi al-qadar* (faith in destiny), *ṣabr* (patience), *ridhā* (acceptance), and *tawakkal* (reliance on God) within a normative-conceptual or doctrinal-metaphysical framework (Louw, 2024). *Tawhīd* is often treated as an abstract, universal system of faith rather than as a lived, internalized structure of meaning in the concrete experiences of Muslim women, especially those undergoing divorce (Suri & Tacap, 2025). Thus, the relationship between spiritual experience and theological structures in the context of everyday life remains a primary focus in contemporary *tawhīd* studies. Several studies have begun demonstrating a link between religious understanding and household dynamics, including the influence of theology on perceptions and decisions about divorce (Abdullah et al., 2024). However, most of these studies remain within the scope of Islamic psychology or Sufism without addressing tawhid as an epistemological framework or a reflective structure of religious experience (Faqir et al., 2025; Sadati & Mahdavi, 2023; Sedighi, 2025). There is a dearth of studies specifically examining how Muslim women interpret tawhid in the face of personal crises such as divorce. One relevant example is the research by Wafa Alifatuzzahroh and Alfadhl Tasman, which highlights the role of *tawakkul* (religious obedience) in fostering optimism after divorce. The study shows that belief in God's decree strengthens resilience, increases faith, and fosters positive mindsets for women experiencing divorce (Alifatuzzahroh & Tasman, 2023). While these findings reflect the importance of the spiritual dimension, the approach remains within the scope of practical Islamic psychology and has not addressed tawhid as an epistemological framework or reflective structure of faith. Therefore, studies that specifically explore how Muslim women formulate and reinterpret core tawhid concepts when facing personal crises such as divorce remain rare.

This study aims to address this gap by examining how Muslim women in Pekanbaru interpret *tawhīd* concepts, such as destiny, *ṣabr*, *ridhā*, and *tawakkul*, in relation to their experiences of divorce. Using a qualitative approach, the study positions women's spiritual narratives as a structured theological space where divine meanings are processed and reflected upon through real experiences, not merely believed in. The conceptual question answered in this study is as follows: How do divorced Muslim women reinterpret *tawhīd* concepts (*al-īmān bi al-qadar*, *ṣabr*, *tawakkul*, and *ridhā*) to rebuild their faith and identity

after divorce, and what implications does this have for Islamic family law theology? This research aims to contribute twofold. First, it enriches the discourse on *tawhīd* by taking an empirical approach based on the lived experiences of the Muslim community. This paves the way for a renewed understanding of *tawhīd*. Second, it promotes a more integrative study of Islamic family law that incorporates a theological dimension. Specifically, by centering reflection on *tawhīd* on women's spirituality, this study seeks to develop a theological hermeneutic that connects Islamic family law and theology based on experience, formulating an ethical and contextual theology of family law.

## Literature Review

### *Tawhīd* as the Epistemology of Spirituality and Religious Agency: Theoretical Foundations of Post-Divorce Interpretation in the Religiosity of Muslim Women

This research begins with a theoretical framework integrating the doctrine of *tawhīd* in Islamic theology with the lived religion approach in religious studies and the notion of spiritual agency in Muslim studies. In kalam scholarship, *tawhīd* is a primary principle affirming the oneness of God in terms of *dzāt* (essence), *sifāt* (attributes), and *af'āl* (actions). *Tawhīd* is interpreted not only as a metaphysical doctrine of the oneness of God but also as an epistemological principle shaping a believer's perspective on understanding reality, responding to crises, and constructing structures of meaning from life experiences, including those related to divorce. Within this epistemological framework, *tawhīd* is understood as an integrative principle between knowledge and action. As several thinkers have emphasized, *tawhīd* functions as a moral-theological unity, which is a foundation that unites fundamental beliefs with ethical and practical applications in everyday life (Rahman, 1982). Therefore, *tawhīd* can be positioned as a knowledge structure that guides reflection and decision-making rather than as a transcendent teaching separate from concrete experience.

Faith in destiny (*al-īmān bi al-qadar*) is an integral part of *tawhīd*, as discussed in classical texts such as *al-Tawhīd* by al-Māturīdī (Maturidi, n.d.) and *al-Ibānah* by al-Ash'arī (Ash'arī, 2011). In *al-Iqtisād fi al-I'tiqād*, al-Ghazali (1995) explains that *al-qadā'* (determination) and *al-qadar* (measure) are manifestations of divine wisdom that organize human life within the network of God's will and wisdom. However, the deterministic view of destiny that denies human agency has been widely criticized in modern Islamic theology, particularly by thinkers such as Muhammad 'Abduh and Taha 'Abd al-Rahman. These thinkers advocated for a more dynamic and contextual interpretation of destiny (Imran & Taib, n.d.; Şahin & Çifçi, 2024).

In the context of contemporary life, understanding *tawhīd* and destiny within only a doctrinal-formalistic framework is no longer sufficient. This is where the lived religion approach plays a crucial role. As Meredith McGuire explains, lived religion emphasizes how individuals experience, internalize, and express their faith through concrete, everyday experiences, especially in situations that challenge established boundaries, such as divorce (McGuire, 2008). It rejects the dichotomy between normative and popular religion and opens a hermeneutic space for reflective, personal, and transformative religious experiences. Concepts such as *ṣabr* (patience), *tawakkul* (reliance), and *ridā* (acceptance), which have been institutionalized within the *fiqh* and ethics framework, are understood in the context of lived religion as active mental structures. *Ṣabr* is not a passive attitude toward suffering but an existential practice that fosters resilience. *Tawakkul* is not merely surrendering to destiny but rather a trusting surrender after making every effort (*badzl al-sabab*). *Ridā* is not only open acceptance but also a mechanism of reconciliation between wounds and spiritually processed meanings (McGuire, 2008).

This theoretical framework is enriched by the concept of spiritual agency – the ability to use religious values as the basis for decision-making and self-development. Saba Mahmood popularized this concept by refusing to measure women's agency solely through indicators of resistance to patriarchal structures. Instead, Mahmood demonstrates that agency can emerge from religious belief in the form of the capacity to endure, select, and react to life based on personal and reflective faith (Mahmood, 2005). This perspective is strengthened by studies linking gender analysis, Islamic law, and the *khalifah* concept, which emphasizes women's role as agents of change, including in ecological contexts (Malik et al., 2025). In this study, spiritual

agency serves as an interpretive framework for understanding how divorced Muslim women navigate their spiritual experiences and life choices within the context of *tawhīd*. This approach is not a passive response to social structures but an active expression of faith.

Contemporary studies in the psychology of religion support this approach, showing that significant life events such as divorce often trigger religious coping. This involves using faith structures to interpret, soothe, and reconstruct life (Hashas, 2021). However, most of these studies focus on Christian or Buddhist contexts (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003). Studies linking *tawhīd* in Islam to the lived experiences of Muslim women after divorce are limited, particularly in the Indonesian social landscape. To transform this theological-empirical perspective into the domain of Islamic law, this study positions the results of interpreting lived *tawhīd* within the ethical constraints of *maqāṣid al-shārī‘ah*. In the tradition of *maqāṣid* as the general goal of sharia (*al-Shārī‘ah al-‘Āmmah*), principles such as *al-musāwah* (egalitarianism) and *al-hurriyyah* (freedom of action) are considered human rights that promote substantive justice for women (Umami & Ghofur, 2022). The practical and dynamic interpretations of *qadar*, *ṣabr*, and *ridā* by Muslim women are seen as substantive manifestations of protecting *al-nafs* (soul/personality) and *al-din* (faith integrity), the core objectives of sharia (Auda, 2010). Thus, *tawhīd* is positioned as an essential ethical framework for developing a more just and empathetic theology of Islamic family law.

Integrating *tawhīd* as an epistemological framework, lived religion as an interpretive lens, and spiritual agency as a force for religious transformation provides an adequate theoretical tool for understanding the spirituality of Muslim women after divorce. This approach enables us to explain not only women's responses to crisis events, but also how they navigate the relationship between faith, experience, and life choices holistically and meaningfully. Furthermore, this integration aims to transform the paradigm of Islamic family law studies. Various practical challenges, such as the ineffective fulfillment of women's rights and low public legal awareness (Fadil et al., 2024; Syukrawati et al., 2024), demonstrate the urgency of this shift. Islamic family law must transition from a purely legalistic approach to a theological-anthropological perspective that considers faith experiences. By making women's spiritual agency the source of *tawhīd*'s meaning, this study establishes a theoretical basis for developing a more ethical, contextual, and compassionate theology of family law.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative, phenomenological-hermeneutic approach to explore the spiritual experiences and religious interpretations of post-divorce Muslim women in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. Pekanbaru was chosen as the location because it represents a dynamic urban Malay Muslim community. It is an ideal location for observing how the concepts of *tawhīd*, which are rooted in Malay-Islamic culture and characterized by strong social harmony and the cultural concept of disgrace, undergo transformation amidst social complexities and modern existential crises, such as divorce. Pekanbaru was deliberately selected as the research location to capture the dynamics of women's spiritual struggles when facing divorce while simultaneously navigating additional social pressures inherent in Malay cultural norms, such as the demands of maintaining communal harmony and avoiding social stigma. Thus, this context provides a rich empirical field for observing contextual interpretations of *tawhīd*.

This study employs Max van Manen's phenomenology to capture the essence of experience and Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics to interpret theological meaning. Six key informants were objectively selected through purposive sampling for this study: divorced Muslim women aged 25 to 50. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data, focusing on interpreting *tawhīd* concepts such as *al-īmān bi al-qadar*, *ṣabr*, *tawakkul*, and *ridā*. Data analysis was carried out sequentially and recursively, following the reduction-to-interpretation stages. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and member checking techniques (Creswell, 2013). Participant identities were kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms to ensure psychological safety and adhere to research ethics (Huda, 2021). It should be noted that the primary goal of this study is not to generalize the findings, but rather to provide a thorough description of the theological interpretation process undertaken by the informants. The limited number of informants (six) was part of the research design that emphasized spiritual depth over the analysis of broad

social variables. Consequently, these findings pave the way for more diverse and representative follow-up studies in the future.

## Results and Discussion

### The Spiritual Meaning of *Tawhīd* in the Divorce Experiences of Muslim Women in Pekanbaru

The results of this study suggest that, for Muslim women in Pekanbaru, divorce is not merely a legal status or social decision; rather, it is an existential event that prompts the reconstruction of spiritual meaning. These women did not experience divorce in a vacuum, but rather within an intensive dialogue with their beliefs in God, destiny, and the principles of faith in *tawhīd*. Concepts such as *sabr* (patience), *ridā* (acceptance), *tawakkul* (reliance on God's will), and *al-īmān bi al-qadar* (faith in God's will) were not mere theological terms, but rather a vocabulary of lived experiences within their bodies and consciousness.

The informants' narratives suggest that the decision to divorce is rarely sudden. They explained that they underwent a lengthy process of contemplation marked by emotional turmoil, social pressure, religious dilemmas, and an internal conflict between preserving the marital bond and protecting one's soul. During this time, the concept of *sabr* emerged as a multifunctional value, serving as both a form of resilience and a space for negotiation between hope and reality. One informant said, "I was patient for seven years, not because I was stupid, but because I needed time to ensure that this was not a fleeting decision. Allah knows, I tried" (Siti, 2025). It is clear here that *sabr* is not silent resignation but rather an ethical consideration that allows women to gauge when patience is noble and when it becomes harmful.

For most informants, patience is closely linked to the practice of *mujahadah*. This practice involves training oneself to avoid impulsive reactions to verbal abuse or emotional neglect while maintaining routines of worship, such as prayer, and seeking guidance through *istikhara*. Interestingly, several informants stated that *istikhara* does not provide "direct answers," but rather provides inner space and clarity in determining one's course of action. "I didn't get the answer in a dream, after performing *Istikharah*, I knew Allah would free me," said one informant who had divorced two years previously (Rina, 2025). In this context, *sabr* is a lengthy process involving the body, emotions, and spiritual submission. It is not a passive concept, but rather a dynamic awareness that guides action. Patience also transforms into an inner migration, moving from a space of emotional attachment to a space of spiritual freedom.

After passing through this crucial phase, the informants admitted to finding new meaning in the concept of destiny (*al-īmān bi al-qadar*). They did not understand destiny as a justification for enduring torturous situations. Rather, they interpreted it as a collaboration between God's will and human endeavor. In Dewi's words: "I'm sure God wrote this from the beginning. But I'm also sure God wanted me to get out. I was given reason, feelings, and courage. Destiny is not a reason to remain silent, but a bridge to be crossed," (Dewi, 2025). This view suggests that *al-qadar* is not understood deterministically but rather as a spiritual energy that strengthens self-agency when making difficult ethical decisions. Destiny becomes a theological mechanism for constructing meaning, not stifling choice. In another narrative, an informant said: "Maybe God didn't change my destiny because I hadn't made a move myself. But after I did, it turned out God opened all the paths" (Lina, 2025). This confirms that belief in *qadar* is understood progressively, actively, and transformatively.

The lives of the informants did not immediately become easier after the divorce decision was made. Many of them faced social pressure and stigma from their extended families, as well as economic anxiety. At this time, *tawakkal*, or religious obedience, became a spiritual anchor. *Tawakkal* did not emerge as a cliché but as a deep conviction that, despite the uncertainty of the future, God would be with them. Aisyah, a mother of three, stated: "I was confused about where to start. But I reassured myself that God, who gives children, will surely provide a way" (Aisyah, 2025). In this experience, *tawakkal* was inseparable from hard work. Some informants revived old skills, such as sewing or online trading. Others took short training courses from local religious institutions. *Tawakkal* presented itself as an inner energy to survive and thrive, not merely as rhetoric of faith. Lina emphasized, "I have *tawakkal*, but that doesn't mean sitting still. I continue to work and learn. I believe that God will help me through my hard work" (Lina, 2025).

The meaning of "*ridā*" grows over time. It does not happen instantly, nor is it easily achieved. Some informants could only say the word "*ridā*" a year after their divorce. They had gone through inner conflict, guilt, and longing for the past. However, when acceptance finally came, they described it as complete peace. "I used to cry a lot, feeling like a failure. But now I know I did my best. I'm sincere. *Ridā*," said Farah in a soft voice (Farah, 2025). Here, *ridā* is not just a feeling of peace, but also a form of spiritual closure. It is an inner resolution of past wounds and an acceptance of ongoing life. Siti found peace in simple moments: seeing her children laugh, buying her own necessities, and experiencing Ramadan with renewed reverence after her divorce (Siti, 2025). In moments like these, *tawhīd* comes alive again as a strengthening and guiding inner structure. The following will present a summary of the dimensions of *tawhīd* spirituality found in interviews with six key informants to support the narrative above.

**Table 1.**  
**Summary of the Findings on the Spiritual Meaning of Divorce**

Name	The meaning of destiny	The meaning of being patience	The meaning of <i>tawakkul</i> (surrender)	The meaning of <i>ridā</i> (acceptance)
Siti	Divorce is God's way of educating and strengthening.	Patience is fortitude in the face of injustice.	Trust after all efforts have been made.	<i>Ridā</i> means full acceptance of the past.
Rina	Embrace the reality of divorce as a profound lesson in wisdom.	Patience does not remain silent, but continues to try and pray.	Believe that your fortune and future are in the hands of Allah.	<i>Ridā</i> after going through a phase of anger and sadness.
Dewi	Viewing divorce as part of God's plan.	Patience as a reflective process before making a decision.	<i>Tawakal</i> is calm after making a big decision.	<i>Ridā</i> becomes the strength to start a new life.
Aisha	Divorce as a path to a more blessed life.	Be patient in a painful relationship before breaking up.	<i>Tawakal</i> when raising children alone.	Accept the results of destiny with an open heart.
Lina	Destiny is a form of God's love, even though it can be painful.	Patience, effort, and consultation with scholars.	<i>Tawakal</i> as a Way to Find Strength After Divorce.	<i>Ridā</i> did not give up, but made peace with the decision.
Farah	Divorce is the path He has outlined.	Go through a long internal process before daring to get a divorce.	After making maximum effort, leave the final results to Allah.	<i>Ridā</i> is a form of acknowledgment of his decree.

The table above summarizes the spiritual experiences of six informants and illustrates how their perception of concepts such as *qadar* (destiny), *ṣabr* (patience), *tawakkul* (trust in God), and *ridā* (willingness) changed over time. The table confirms the study's main finding that post-divorce religiosity is not static, but rather undergoes reimagination and refunctionalization to serve as an inner compass for healing, moral judgment, and identity reconstruction. It is at this point that the hermeneutic dimension becomes evident. The experiences of *ṣabr*, *tawakkul*, *qadar*, and *ridā* are not passive reflections on religious teachings; rather, they become interpretive acts—efforts to reinterpret these teachings in light of lived experiences. These efforts enable women to construct new meanings and affirm their agency. In other words, lived *tawhīd* (practiced *tawhīd*) acts as a bridge between experience and meaning, transforming crises into opportunities for self-reconstruction. This process shifts *tawhīd* from a dogmatic concept to an epistemic structure, enabling women to make moral decisions and face legal consequences with greater reflection. *Tawhīd* is no longer seen as a theological teaching separate from life; rather, it becomes a living epistemological foundation that guides women in making ethical choices about their life's direction.

These findings demonstrate the emergence of a lived feminine theology—a form of religiosity arising not from the systematic thought of theologians but from the inner struggles of women directly confronted with issues of personal safety, self-respect, and survival (McGuire, 2008). Through a phenomenological and hermeneutic examination of these experiences, this study reveals that spirituality is an epistemic

foundation that shapes how women understand, assess, and navigate Islamic family law structures, rather than merely a companion to legal dynamics. Thus, these findings demonstrate how women experience divorce religiously and open up new insights into how lived *tawhīd* shapes their legal consciousness and moral choices and how they position themselves as ethical subjects within the Islamic family law system. The theoretical implications of these findings will be further elaborated on in the following section.

### ***Tawhīd* as a Structure of Meaning in the Spiritual Reality of Post-Divorce**

The findings of this study suggest that divorce for Muslim women in Pekanbaru is not merely a life episode of suffering, but an existential event that forces them to reimagine their meaning. In this context, *tawhīd* does not function as an abstract dogma but rather as an epistemic structure that guides their understanding of suffering, their ability to make moral decisions, and their process of reconstructing a spiritual identity fractured by relationship failure.

At this level, *tawhīd* shifts from a mere doctrine in *kalām* to a framework of knowledge that guides humans in managing emotions, reading destiny, and weighing ethical choices in boundary situations, such as divorce. This shift transforms the metaphysical principle of the oneness of God into a practical approach to life. This shift opens up two mutually reinforcing layers of *tawhīd*'s functions: first, *tawhīd* as an epistemological framework that structures human thought about the relationship with God and the world, and second, *tawhīd* as a living epistemic mechanism that explains how these teachings are experienced, negotiated, and reinterpreted in everyday reality. This view aligns with Khaled Abou El Fadl's thinking. He emphasized that *tawhīd* demands recognition of the oneness of God and carries ethical implications in complex moral decision-making in everyday life (Fadl, 2014). The informants in this study do more than cite concepts such as *qadar*, *sabr*, and *tawakkul*; they also bring these concepts to life as a mental framework for interpreting the effects of trauma. Thus, *tawhīd* exists simultaneously as a mode of knowing and a mode of living.

Within this framework, the concept of agency undergoes a shift in meaning. Although the concept of agency developed by Saba Mahmood is rooted in moral discipline and piety in a postcolonial context, it cannot be applied unconditionally to describe the experiences of women in Pekanbaru. In this study, agency manifests as moral resilience, economic independence, ethical courage to escape dangerous situations, and spiritual capacity to redefine identity after a relationship ends. This articulation is not a direct transposition of Mahmood's theory but rather a contextual reinterpretation that views agency as a woman's ability to reinterpret *tawhīd*, making it the foundation for moral choices and life vitality after divorce.

The socio-cultural context of Pekanbaru plays an important role in how women interpret *tawhīd*. This city is a meeting point of urban Malay Islam, social traditions that uphold harmony, a culture of shame, and Sufi religiosity (Gustina et al., n.d.). Consequently, women's reinterpretation of *qadar*, *sabr*, *ridā*, and *tawakkul* occurs in dialogue with cultural structures demanding emotional politeness and ethical courage. The *tawhīd* practiced in Pekanbaru is the result of an intersection of theological logic, Malay culture, urban dynamics, household economic conditions, and spiritual solidarity among women. It is at this point that the theological tension between faith and suffering becomes relevant. In the informants' narratives, we encounter a subtle dialectic between "This has been determined by God" and "I must save myself." There is a tension between "Patience is worship" and "Enduring means hurting oneself," and between "Trust in Allah" and "I must work hard to save my life." This tension is not a contradiction but rather a hermeneutic space in which women express the most human form of religiosity: a religiosity that acknowledges God's will and utilizes the reason, courage, and moral choices He has bestowed. *Tawhīd* functions as an ethical structure here, enabling women to maintain their dignity without abandoning their piety. This demonstrates that the spiritual values that seem doctrinal in the text are brought to life by the informants, who use them as symbolic resources to autonomously reconstruct the meaning of life (Grusendorf, 2016).

This *tawhīd* framework also paves the way for reexamining the role of spirituality in Islamic family law. The findings of this study indicate that an active interpretation of *qadar* encourages divorced women to safeguard their lives; that *sabr* is no longer interpreted as a willingness to endure violence, but rather as

a period of moral testing before making a decision; that *tawakkul* becomes an ethical framework for choosing a safe path for themselves and their children; and that *ridā* functions as a mechanism for moral reconciliation after a legal decision is made. These processes demonstrate that Islamic family law operates at formal-legal, symbolic, ethical, and spiritual levels. With this theoretical and contextual reinforcement, it can be emphasized that *tawhīd* is not merely a doctrine about God but also an epistemology of post-divorce life. Muslim women translate teachings into actions, and spiritual agency becomes a bridge between faith and moral behavior. Lived *tawhīd* provides a new, more humane, reflective, and responsive framework for studying Islamic family law that considers the concrete experiences of the community.

### Toward an Ethical and Contextual Theology of Family Law

The findings of this study suggest an urgent need to reform the principles of Islamic family law. Narratives from Muslim women in Pekanbaru who have experienced divorce demonstrate that the existing family law system often fails to capture the depth and complexity of women's inner selves as subjects of faith. In classical Islamic legal logic, divorce is considered a last resort and is disliked (*makrūh*) in domestic conflict (Taymiyah, 2001; Zahroh, 1950). However, in the experiences of the informants, divorce appears to be a conscious choice based on faith. It is a decision made through spiritual contemplation and belief in divine mercy rather than formal legal considerations.

In this context, a paradigm shift is needed that goes beyond mere legal reform. Ongoing issues such as the failure to fulfill wives' maintenance rights during the *'iddah* period (Nurohim et al., 2021), the widespread practice of extrajudicial divorce with negative legal implications (Nursaidah et al., 2020), and the marginalization of women within the existing legal framework—as evidenced by the challenges of reform in various Muslim countries (Dawood, 2024)—underscore the urgency of this paradigm shift. This article introduces Family Law Theology, which is an integrative approach that reinterprets *fiqh* norms through *tawhīd* principles. This makes the spiritual dimension of women's experiences the ethical authority. Family Law Theology considers not only the legal validity of an action, but also its ethical justice, existential liberation, and alignment with the *maqāṣid al-shari'ah*, the ethical and teleological framework of Islamic law.

The informants' interpretations of the values of *sabr*, *tawakkul*, and *ridā* show that spirituality is the meaningful foundation of their decisions, not merely a complement to the law. When women decide to end an emotionally, spiritually, or materially stressful marriage, they do so not in defiance of Islamic law but in the spirit of upholding the noble values embodied in *tawhīd* and Islamic justice. In this context, *sabr* is not an excuse to endure violence; rather, it is a contemplative process toward inner clarity. *Tawakkul* is not an excuse for powerlessness; rather, it is an expression of faith after making every effort. *Ridā* is not a form of passive resignation; rather, it is the result of mentally accepting an unchangeable reality.

In the *maqāṣid* tradition, these decisions aim to protect *al-nafs* (body/soul), *al-dīn* (religion and faith), and *al-'ird* (honor) (Auda, 2010; Prabowo et al., 2024). The goal of substantive justice also extends to children's rights. Mediation is often seen as an important means of guaranteeing their protection and interests after divorce (Rumadan & Salamah, 2021). When the legal system fails to ensure women's emotional and spiritual security in marriage, the decision to divorce becomes a substantive manifestation of *maqāṣid*, according to this article. This perspective also criticizes the application of traditional law, such as the continuation of child marriage based on customary legitimacy. This practice is no longer relevant when measured against the noble goals of *maqāṣid al-usrah* (Naimah et al., 2024). This requires Islamic legal thinkers to reorganize how the principle of *maqāṣid* is applied, not only in the form of fatwas or regulations, but also by listening to and respecting women's experiences as a source of moral legitimacy.

Thinkers such as Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2006), Amina Wadud (2013), and Abdullahi An-Na'im (2006) have long criticized the formalist approach to Islamic family law, asserting that classical *fiqh* must be reinterpreted in light of lived experience and principles of justice. This study, however, adds a new dimension: women's experiences of faith after divorce demand legal change and demonstrate the potential of faith as a legal epistemology. Thus, Islamic law could be based not only on texts and the consensus of *fuqahā'*, but also on a reflective understanding of how faith's values are experienced and interpreted in real situations. To avoid deviating from the traditional framework of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, this article does not propose

faith as a new source of law (*nass* or *ijmā*), but rather as Spiritual Epistemology or Experience-Based Legal Hermeneutics. In this context, faith functions as a form of moral knowledge (*ma'rifah*) or ethical authority that corrects the *ijtihād* process so legal interpretation can realize substantive justice demanded by *tawhid*.

This idea also challenges the separation of law and spirituality in contemporary Islamic legal studies. When law only regulates social relations without considering the accompanying spirituality, it loses its ethical foundation. Theology of Family Law offers a middle ground, positioning faith as the spirit that animates law, not as its opponent. From this perspective, divorce is not seen as a disruption to the normative order but as an opportunity to embody *tawhid*, the Islamic principle of unity. In this context, faith becomes the basis for demanding justice, not merely a means of mitigating injustice. Thus, Islamic family law reform involves more than changing the wording of articles. Fundamentally, the epistemological framework of contemporary Islamic family law must be rebuilt. This framework should absorb knowledge from women's faith experiences and engage in dialogue with *maqāṣid* (objectives), reconstructing them into fair, relational, and contextual norms. This reorientation positions women as epistemic subjects who contribute faith experiences as a source of moral legitimacy in Islamic legal discourse, particularly in the realm of Islamic family law, rather than as legal objects.

## Conclusion

This study confirms that, for Muslim women in Pekanbaru, divorce is a pivotal moment in renewing *tawhid*. During this time, the concepts of *qadar*, *ṣabr*, *tawakkul*, and *riḍā* are reinterpreted as an epistemological-ethical framework that guides the reconstruction of life after divorce. Using a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, this study shows that women's religious practices act as a hermeneutics of experience. This is a way of understanding faith that restores resilience and identity, and it forms a critical legal consciousness when assessing justice and protection within the Islamic family law system. Epistemologically, this study contributes to the discourse on Islamic family law reform by showing that women's faith experiences can provide moral legitimacy in legal reasoning. This study also enriches the theological-feminist critique developed by Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Amina Wadud and expands Saba Mahmood's theory of spiritual agency. However, this study has several methodological limitations. These limitations range from the small number of informants and the specific context of urban Malay Islam to the potential for hermeneutic subjectivity. These limitations highlight the importance of further interdisciplinary and comparative research to validate and deepen these findings. Overall, this study encourages reorienting Islamic family law toward a more humane, contextual model based on women's spirituality as the foundation of substantive justice.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors state that they have no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest that could affect the results or interpretations presented in this article. The institutional support received, as outlined in the Acknowledgments section, played no role in the study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or report writing, nor in the decision to publish the results.

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## Interview List

Interview with Siti, a woman who has divorced from her husband, Pekanbaru, 2025

Interview with Rina, a woman who has divorced her husband, Pekanbaru, 2025

Interview with Dewi, a woman who has divorced from her husband, Pekanbaru, 2025

Interview with Aisyah, a woman who has divorced from her husband, Pekanbaru, 2025

Interview with Lina, a woman who has divorced from her husband, Pekanbaru, 2025

Interview with Farah Perempuan who has divorced from her husband, Pekanbaru, 2025