

Qiwamah Challenges in Fatherless Muslim Households

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Received: 23-02-2026

Revised: 28-03-2026

Accepted: 26-04-2026



Abstract: *The phenomenon of fatherlessness in modern Muslim families, particularly among commuter fathers in Desa Kesuma, Pelalawan Regency, Indonesia, warrants scrutiny under Islamic family law. Fathers employed as palm oil plantation drivers reside far from home, curtailing daily interactions and paternal roles. This study analyzes the factors prompting such decisions, their effects on family dynamics, and fiqh al-munakahat implications. Adopting a qualitative field research design, primary data were derived from semi-structured interviews and observations with 15 commuter fathers, 15 mothers, and 15 children. Secondary data included inputs from parents-in-law and the village head. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's framework: reduction, display, and verification via source triangulation. Key findings identify internal drivers (limited education and skills) and external ones (economic pressures and lucrative opportunities). Positively, commuter work fulfills nafaqah obligations; negatively, it weakens tarbiyah, emotional bonds, and child education. From a Sharia viewpoint, this constitutes a valid hajjah (necessity), permissible if non-material rights such as moral upbringing and supervision are secured through familial consensus and qiwamah principles. This research advances discourse on reconciling economic hajjah with Islamic family responsibilities in agrarian communities.*

Abstrak: Fenomena fatherlessness dalam keluarga Muslim modern, khususnya pada keluarga ayah komuter di Desa Kesuma, Kabupaten Pelalawan, Indonesia, perlu dikaji dalam perspektif hukum keluarga Islam. Ayah yang bekerja sebagai sopir di perkebunan kelapa sawit tinggal jauh dari keluarga, sehingga membatasi interaksi sehari-hari dan mengurangi peran pengasuhan. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis faktor pendorong keputusan kerja komuter, dampaknya terhadap dinamika keluarga, dan implikasinya dalam fiqh al-munakahat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode field research. Data primer diperoleh melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan observasi terhadap 15 ayah komuter, 15 ibu, dan 15 anak. Data sekunder diperoleh dari mertua dan kepala desa. Analisis data dilakukan melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan dengan triangulasi sumber untuk menjaga validitas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa faktor internal yang mendorong kerja komuter adalah rendahnya pendidikan dan keterampilan, sedangkan faktor eksternal meliputi tekanan ekonomi dan peluang pendapatan yang lebih tinggi. Secara positif, pekerjaan ini memenuhi kewajiban nafkah, tetapi secara negatif melemahkan tarbiyah, ikatan emosional, dan pendidikan anak. Dari perspektif syariah, kondisi ini termasuk hajjah yang dibolehkan selama hak-hak nonmateri anak tetap dipenuhi melalui kesepakatan keluarga dan prinsip qiwamah.

Keywords: *Fiqh Al-Munakahat, Fatherlessness, Hajjah, Qiwamah, Nafaqah*

Introduction

Family structures and relational patterns in Indonesia have undergone substantial transformation in response to social, economic, and cultural change (Nurhaliza & Savandha, 2025). These shifts have altered the distribution of parental roles within the household, particularly the role of fathers. Increasing labor mobility, economic necessity, and the redefinition of fatherhood from a caregiving figure to a primary breadwinner have contributed to reduced paternal involvement in child-rearing, thereby generating a growing concern in both family sociology and developmental psychology. In this context, the concept of fatherlessness or father absence has emerged as a critical analytical category to describe the limited presence of fathers in children's lives, whether physically, emotionally, or psychologically (Ćeriman et al., 2025). Importantly, fatherlessness is no longer understood solely as the consequence of divorce or death. Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that it may also occur in families where the father is biologically and legally present but functionally absent from the processes of nurturing, educating, and emotionally supporting the child. This condition is often referred to as functional fatherlessness, namely a situation in which a father continues to fulfill the economic role of provider yet minimally participates in moral formation, supervision, and affective bonding. Such a phenomenon is particularly significant because it challenges narrow assumptions that paternal responsibility is satisfied through financial provision alone (Zahra et al., 2024).

From the perspective of Islamic family law, the issue is closely linked to the father's status as *qawwam*, a role that entails not only maintenance but also protection, guidance, and responsibility for the moral and spiritual welfare of the family. In parallel, Indonesian child protection law affirms that both parents are obligated to care for, educate, and protect their children, while the state bears a complementary responsibility to ensure that these rights are fulfilled (Laman et al., 2023). Accordingly, a father who is physically present yet largely detached from the educational and emotional development of his children may be considered to have only partially discharged his obligations (Almunawar et al., 2024). This concern is increasingly visible in rural settings shaped by extractive and plantation-based economies. In Desa Kesuma, Pelalawan Regency, preliminary field observations indicate the presence of 15 families experiencing functional fatherlessness, with fathers working as commuter drivers transporting palm oil. Their employment requires prolonged separation from home, often with irregular return patterns determined by harvest cycles and cargo availability. As a result, direct communication and daily interaction with children are substantially limited, and paternal engagement in child upbringing becomes sporadic rather than continuous. This occupational arrangement illustrates how economic necessity can intensify the gap between material provision and non-material parenting responsibilities.

Although prior studies have established that fatherlessness may contribute to emotional insecurity (Devi et al., 2025), reduced self-esteem (Marssel M. Sengkey et al., 2025), weak self-regulation (Dhea Sintamaharani et al., 2025), and impaired identity formation among children (Yupi Anesti & Mirna Nur Alia Abdullah, 2024), most of these studies remain concentrated on fatherlessness caused by divorce, death, or neglect. Research on functional fatherlessness arising from commuter work, especially within the framework of Islamic law and rural Indonesian family life, remains comparatively limited. This gap is important because it leaves unresolved the question of how Islamic family law evaluates paternal absence when it results not from abandonment, but from structurally induced labor mobility and economic necessity. Against this backdrop, the present study examines functional fatherlessness in commuter-father families in Desa Kesuma through the lens of Islamic family law. Specifically, it investigates the social and economic factors shaping fathers' commuter work, the implications of such work for paternal responsibilities, and the extent to which this condition may be reconciled with the principles of *nafaqah*, *tarbiyah*, and *qiwamah* within Islamic jurisprudence. By doing so, the study contributes to the growing

discourse on family resilience, children's rights, and the reconfiguration of fatherhood in contemporary Muslim societies.

Literature Review

Fatherlessness as a Contemporary Family Phenomenon

The concept of fatherlessness or father absence has been widely discussed in family sociology and developmental psychology as a condition in which the father's role is absent from a child's life in physical, emotional, or psychological terms. This concept underscores that fatherhood cannot be reduced to biological presence alone, but must also be understood as a set of relational, educative, and affective responsibilities within the family (Musthofa & Arfensia, 2025). Early discussions tended to define fatherlessness narrowly as a condition arising from death or divorce, both of which produce a structural absence of the father in the child's daily life. However, more recent scholarship has expanded the term to include situations in which the father remains legally and biologically present but is functionally absent from parenting processes. In this sense, functional fatherlessness refers to a condition in which a father does not optimally perform his roles in care, supervision, moral formation, and emotional bonding, even though he remains formally part of the family structure (Abdulah Pakarti et al., 2023). Within developmental psychology, paternal involvement is considered important for the formation of identity, emotional security, and social adjustment in children (Juliana Sinaga & Rosramadhana Rosramadhana, 2025). Fathers are not merely economic providers; they also function as sources of authority, protection, discipline, and role modeling (Silpiani & Wahyudin, 2024). When paternal involvement is weak or inconsistent, children may experience emotional insecurity, lower self-esteem, difficulty in self-regulation, and weakened social confidence. In more severe cases, prolonged paternal absence may generate feelings of loneliness, anger, loss, and instability that affect both personality formation and interpersonal relationships. Accordingly, fatherlessness should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by social, economic, cultural, and psychological factors (Wibiharto et al., 2021). This broader framework is especially relevant in contemporary settings where labor mobility and economic pressures increasingly reshape patterns of fatherhood.

Children's Rights in Legal Perspective

The issue of fatherlessness is also closely related to the fulfillment of children's rights. In the Indonesian legal framework, children are recognized as rights-bearing subjects who are entitled to protection, care, education, and optimal development (Hartati et al., 2021). The Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasizes every child's right to survival, growth, development, protection, and participation (Jeni Fadhila et al., 2025). These international principles are reinforced in Indonesian child protection law, which affirms that children have the right to live, grow, and develop optimally. More specifically, Article 26 paragraph (1) of Law No. 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection states that parents are obliged to care for, maintain, educate, and protect their children. This provision indicates that parental responsibility is not merely moral but also legal in nature. Father and mother are equally bound to ensure the fulfillment of children's rights, and this obligation cannot be transferred entirely to one parent alone. When a father is physically present but minimally involved in caregiving, education, and emotional support, the fulfillment of children's rights becomes incomplete. In such circumstances, the child may still receive material support, yet lose important non-material dimensions of parental care (Habib Nur Muhammad Taufik & Yessi Sri Utami, 2025). Therefore, father involvement must be understood as an integral part of children's rights protection, not as an optional element within family life. The state, moreover, shares responsibility in ensuring that children's rights are protected through legal, social, and welfare-oriented mechanisms (Andri et al., 2024).

Father's Responsibility in Islamic Law

In Islamic family law, the father occupies a central position as *qawwam*, a role that is commonly understood as leadership within the family (Mohd Hafizal et al., 2023). However, this leadership is not synonymous with authority in the narrow sense; rather, it is a moral and spiritual responsibility to protect, guide, and sustain the family. The Qur'anic conception of family responsibility emphasizes that parents are accountable for safeguarding themselves and their families from harm, which implies that paternal responsibility extends beyond financial provision. Consequently, *nafaqah* in Islam encompasses not only material support but also the broader responsibilities of education, moral formation, and religious guidance. Within *fiqh al-usrah*, the father is responsible for providing livelihood, ensuring protection, and participating in the upbringing of children. This includes not only formal education but also moral example, religious habituation, and character formation (D. Putri et al., 2024). A father's engagement in these dimensions is therefore part of a *syar'i* obligation and cannot be neglected without consequence (Alif & Resdati, 2024). At the same time, Islamic law does recognize the legitimacy of working to meet family needs. Nevertheless, earning a livelihood must not eliminate the father's primary responsibilities toward the family. When occupational demands cause neglect of caregiving and educational duties, a balance must be sought between economic obligation and moral responsibility. From this perspective, the fulfillment of material and non-material obligations must proceed in harmony. The ultimate aim of paternal responsibility in Islam is the realization of a family that is *sakinah, mawaddah, wa rahmah* (Aisyah Rahmaini fahma, 2024). Accordingly, fatherlessness in families where fathers work as commuters deserves careful legal and moral scrutiny. Such a phenomenon raises important questions regarding the extent to which occupational mobility may be reconciled with the father's religious duties as provider, educator, protector, and emotional anchor within the family.

Method

This study employed an empirical qualitative field research design to examine functional fatherlessness in commuter-father families in Desa Kesuma, Pangkalan Kuras District, Pelalawan Regency. The qualitative approach was used to capture the social realities, lived experiences, and family dynamics associated with fathers' prolonged work-related absence. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and direct observation involving commuter fathers, mothers, children experiencing fatherlessness, and parents-in-law as supporting informants. These participants were selected purposively because they were directly involved in or knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation. The data were analyzed descriptively by organizing, reducing, interpreting, and presenting the information to describe the social phenomenon in a systematic way. This method enabled the study to explore the implications of commuter fatherhood for child care, family relations, and Islamic family law.

Results and Discussion

Factors Influencing Commuter Fatherhood

The findings indicate that the decision of fathers in Desa Kesuma to work as commuter laborers is not driven by a single cause, but rather by an interaction of economic, structural, and socio-cultural factors. Across the 15 families identified as experiencing functional fatherlessness, all fathers worked as palm-oil transport drivers whose schedules required prolonged and unpredictable absences from home. Their return patterns typically ranged from once a week to once every two weeks, and in some harvesting periods even longer, thereby significantly reducing daily interaction with family members. This pattern confirms that commuter fatherhood in the present study is best understood as a survival strategy shaped by structural labor conditions rather than as deliberate disengagement from the family. Similar studies on father absence have also emphasized that labor migration, patriarchal expectations, and weak social protection are key drivers of reduced paternal presence. Economic pressure emerged as the dominant factor (Azizah et al., 2023). Most households in Desa Kesuma depend on the palm-oil sector, while

alternative livelihoods in the village are limited. Informants consistently explained that working as transport drivers offered more stable income than casual labor or small-scale farming, enabling them to meet essential household needs such as food, education, and healthcare. In this regard, commuter work was perceived as a rational household strategy for maintaining family continuity under conditions of economic constraint. This finding is consistent with broader migration literature showing that labor mobility is often adopted as a livelihood mechanism in low-opportunity rural contexts.

Structural factors further reinforced this decision (Mentari, 2024). The palm-oil transport system is organized around harvest cycles and delivery schedules that do not permit daily return to the household. The distance between work sites and home, combined with irregular loading and delivery times, means that fathers must remain near the workplace for extended periods. As a result, the father's physical presence becomes constrained not by family choice alone, but by the temporal logic of the employment structure itself. Prior research has similarly shown that work intensity and time scarcity reduce fathers' involvement in child education and emotional care. Socio-cultural norms also played a decisive role. In the local patriarchal setting, the father is widely understood primarily as the financial provider, while the mother is viewed as the main caregiver (Nindhita & Arisetya Pringgadani, 2023). This cultural construction weakens expectations regarding fathers' involvement in emotional support, supervision, and day-to-day education. Consequently, as long as economic provision is maintained, limited engagement in parenting tends to be socially tolerated (S. E. Putri et al., 2019). This supports the broader argument that functional fatherlessness is not only an economic issue but also a culturally legitimized redistribution of parental roles. Taken together, these findings show that functional fatherlessness in Desa Kesuma is produced by structural labor demands and economic necessity rather than family dissolution. Fathers remain legally and socially recognized as heads of household, yet the commuter work pattern reduces their day-to-day parenting functions. In this sense, fatherlessness in the present study should be read as a consequence of family survival under constrained rural economic conditions, rather than as explicit abandonment.

Impact on Family Roles and Responsibilities

The data also reveal that commuter fatherhood produces a mixed set of effects on family life. On the one hand, it improves household economic stability. Most informants stated that after fathers began working as palm-oil transport drivers, basic household needs were more consistently met and children's schooling became less vulnerable to financial disruption. From this perspective, the father's role as provider was relatively successful. The economic gains offered short-term security and reduced material uncertainty within the household. On the other hand, the same arrangement weakened the father's role in affective bonding, supervision, and moral formation. Because fathers were away for long periods, direct involvement in child rearing became limited, while mothers assumed the bulk of daily caregiving and discipline. This created an unequal distribution of family labor and frequently placed mothers under dual pressure as both primary caregiver and disciplinary authority. Such a pattern is important because it shows that economic provision alone cannot fully substitute the educational and emotional functions of fatherhood.

The children's experiences further illustrate this imbalance. Several informants indicated that communication with fathers tended to be brief, formal, and task-oriented. Interaction was more often confined to practical matters than to open emotional exchange. Although not all children displayed behavioral problems, the reduced frequency of contact limited opportunities for closeness, guidance, and trust-building (Tata Arbiyana & Syukur Kholil, 2024). This finding aligns with wider evidence that paternal absence, even when functional rather than absolute, may weaken emotional security and social development in children. Accordingly, commuter fatherhood in this context creates a tension between material adequacy and relational presence. Nafkah is increasingly secured, but tarbiyah, emotional attachment, and parental supervision remain uneven. This imbalance is the central social consequence of functional fatherlessness in the families studied (Fajriyanti et al., 2024). It also demonstrates that family

well-being cannot be assessed solely through income-based indicators, since the quality of paternal engagement is equally significant for child development and household resilience.

Islamic Legal Perspective on Commuter Fatherhood

From the perspective of Islamic law, the father carries comprehensive responsibilities toward the family (Masruroh et al., 2025). His duty is not limited to economic maintenance, but extends to protection, education, and moral guidance. Qur'anic injunctions concerning the safeguarding of one's family underscore that parental responsibility includes religious and ethical formation, not merely material provision. In this framework, the father's role as *qawwam* signifies stewardship and responsibility rather than domination. As such, the fulfillment of *nafaqah* must be understood together with the obligation to preserve the child's moral and developmental welfare. The findings suggest that commuter work, in itself, does not conflict with Islamic law, provided that it is undertaken through lawful means and directed toward family maintenance. Earning a livelihood is a recognized duty and may even constitute a form of worship when performed with sincere intent (Rizal et al., 2023). For this reason, the fathers' choice to work as commuter drivers can be classified as permissible (*mubah*) so long as the work is *halal* and serves the legitimate needs of the household. In this respect, the data support the view that Islamic law acknowledges economic necessity as a valid reason for labor mobility.

Nevertheless, Islamic legality does not end at permissibility. The principle of balance is crucial in evaluating whether the father's obligations are actually fulfilled (Helzi Nurlita Rizqillah et al., 2024). The study shows that some fathers attempted to maintain contact with their children through telephone calls or short messages, yet these efforts did not fully replace physical presence and sustained engagement. In Islamic family law, such partial involvement may satisfy one dimension of responsibility, but not the entirety of paternal duty. The Qur'anic and *fiqh*-based conception of family responsibility requires both material support and active participation in child upbringing (Maulana Achsan Al Farisi et al., 2025). This is where the concepts of *hifz al-nasl* and *hifz al-aql* become particularly relevant. Protecting lineage and intellect entails ensuring that children are not only provided for, but also guided, educated, and emotionally supported (Nabilah & Hayah, 2022). When commuter work significantly reduces the father's ability to supervise, teach, and nurture, the family risks an imbalance between *nafaqah lahir* and *nafaqah batin*. Islamic law therefore permits commuter work, but only under the condition that children's rights are not neglected. The fathers' obligations remain intact even when physical distance makes their fulfillment more difficult. In this sense, the present findings point to a qualified permissibility. Commuter fatherhood may be acceptable when it is necessary for family survival and when the father continues to uphold communication, supervision, and moral responsibility as far as possible. However, when occupational distance leads to sustained neglect of education and emotional care, the arrangement becomes problematic from a Sharia perspective (Warman et al., 2023). The ideal of a *sakinah, mawaddah, wa rahmah* family requires that economic necessity be balanced with moral presence. Therefore, Islamic family law calls not for the rejection of commuter work, but for a careful reconfiguration of paternal responsibility so that material provision does not eclipse the broader duties of fatherhood.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that functional fatherlessness in commuter-father families in Desa Kesuma is not the result of family breakdown, but rather the consequence of economic necessity, labor structure, and socially accepted gender expectations. Although the fathers remain present as legal and financial providers, their prolonged physical absence weakens daily interaction, emotional attachment, and direct involvement in child upbringing. As a result, the family experiences a clear imbalance between material fulfillment and relational presence. From the perspective of Islamic family law, commuter work is permissible so long as it is directed toward lawful livelihood and does not negate the father's broader obligations toward care, education, and moral guidance. The findings suggest that *nafaqah* alone is insufficient to fulfill the full meaning of fatherhood in Islam. A father's responsibility also includes *tarbiyah*,

supervision, and emotional availability, all of which are essential to the realization of *hifz al-nasl* and *hifz al-'aql*. The most important reflection emerging from this study is that a family may survive economically while still facing a gradual weakening of its moral and emotional foundation. Islam does not reject the struggle to earn a living, but it reminds believers that provision without presence may leave a deeper loss in the lives of children. Therefore, the challenge is not to oppose commuter work outright, but to ensure that the pursuit of income never eclipses the ethical and spiritual duties of fatherhood.

Acknowledgement

Thanks are due to all those who have helped in the process of researching and writing this article.

Conflict of Interest

This article has no conflicts of interest.

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