The Actualization of Islamic Communication in Muslim Families: Perspectives from Exemplary Households and the Practice of Polygamy

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Abstract

Communication within the family constitutes a fundamental pillar in fostering domestic harmony, particularly within Muslim households that are grounded in Islamic values. This article aims to analyze how the principles of Islamic communication are actualized in family life, focusing on two central themes: the ideal model of a family and the practice of polygamy. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach based on Islamic literature and family sociology, this study explores key principles of Islamic communication, such as qawlan sadīdan (truthful speech), qawlan ma'rūfan (kind speech), and qawlan layyinan (gentle speech), within the relational dynamics of spouses and family members. In examining the case of polygamy, the article addresses the tension between normative religious teachings and practical realities, highlighting the communicative challenges that often arise in such familial contexts. The findings suggest that the effective actualization of Islamic communication is significantly influenced by the level of religious understanding, local cultural norms, and gender sensitivity. In conclusion, Islamic communication within the family is not merely rhetorical; it is an ethical praxis capable of shaping the family into a harmonious, just, and spiritually enriched social institution.

I. Introduction

Communication is the basic foundation of human interaction, especially in the family environment. In Islam, communication is not only a technical issue of message delivery, but is also an integral part of morals, ethics, and social manners. The Qur'an and hadith regulate how Muslims should speak, listen, and respond, especially in the context of relationships between family members. So it is not surprising that communication in the family is the main indicator of domestic harmony in the Islamic view (Suryandari, 2019).

The importance of Islamic communication in the family can be viewed from various dimensions. Spiritually, good communication is a medium for channeling affection, strengthening faith, and the process of forming children's character. Socially, healthy communication in the family is a deterrent to conflict, a means of problem resolution, and a bridge between different points of view. In the Islamic perspective, this ideal form of communication is embodied in a number of Qur'anic principles such as *qawlan sadidan* (QS. An-Nisa: 9), *qawlan ma'rufan* (QS. Al-Baqarah: 235), *qawlan layyinan* (QS. Thaha: 44), to *qawlan kariman* (QS. Al-Isra': 23) which generally teaches honesty, gentleness, and respect in speech (Sarnoto, 2022).

Reality doesn't always work as ideal as text. In practice, Muslim families face communication challenges, one of which is in the context of polygamy. Polygamy, even though Islamic law has a certain legitimacy (QS. An-Nisa: 3), remains a controversial issue, both from a social, psychological, and gender perspective. Many studies say that communication is a crucial point in determining whether the practice of polygamy can run fairly and harmoniously or actually causes conflict, jealousy, and rifts (Ulfiah, 2021).

On the other hand, the concept of the exemplary family in Islam also provides a reflective space to understand how communication should be conducted. The family figures of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and his wives are often used as ideal references, where communication between husband and wife, parents-children, and between wives (in the context of polygamy) is shown with good manners, patience, and moral example. For example, in the hadiths narrated by Aisha RA, it can be seen how the Prophet conveyed criticism in a subtle way, educated wisely, and responded to conflicts with empathy (Kusairi

& Thabrani, 2022).

Nonetheless, not all families are able to replicate this exemplary model. Factors such as a superficial understanding of religion, patriarchal culture, low education, and social pressure often hinder the process of Islamic communication. This is exacerbated when communication in the family is not built on equality and mutual understanding, but on power relations and gender dominance. In the context of polygamy, for example, communication is often monopolized by men as the head of the family, while women are required to be obedient without equal space for dialogue (Azra, 2020).

This issue is also interesting when viewed from the perspective of the sociology of communication. According to Habermas (2004) In *the Theory of Communicative Action*, the ideal communication is communication that is free from domination and based on the equality of participants in the discourse. If this principle is adopted in the context of Islamic communication in the family, then the Qur'anic values should encourage equal, dialogical, and anti-authoritarian relations. This means that communication in a Muslim family should not only emphasize the obedience of the wife or child to the husband or parents, but also open up space for criticism, clarification, and deliberation.

In the practice of polygamy, Islamic communication is tested at the most fundamental level. Honesty, fairness, empathy, and emotional management are aspects that cannot be avoided. Many conflicts in polygamous families start from lame, non-transparent, or emotional communication. In research by Ritonga et al. (2024), It was found that polygamous families that consistently applied Islamic communication principles tended to be more emotionally stable, although they still faced severe psychological challenges.

Exemplary families in Islam can be used as inspiration and guidelines. However, the challenge is how to reconstruct these examples in a more complex modern context. Exemplification is not just a retelling of the historical narrative of the Prophet and his family, but a reinterpretation of the spirit of communication they built: communicative, gentle, inclusive, and just. For example, how the Prophet dialogued with his children, such as Fatimah RA, showed loving communication without verbal or physical violence. Even in critical situations, the Prophet still maintained communication manners (Sugitanata & Aqila, 2023).

This article is important to delve deeply into how the actualization of Islamic communication in the family is not only theologically relevant, but also socially and culturally significant, especially in the midst of contemporary challenges such as rising divorce rates, crisis of parental authority, and resistance to the practice of polygamy. If Islamic communication can be revived in the family in a contextual and wise way, then it will be the foundation for a more civilized and just society.

To analyze how Islamic communication can be actualized in the family, especially in the context of exemplary families and polygamy practices, a strong conceptual understanding is needed. The theoretical framework in this article is built from three main approaches: (1) Islamic communication theory, (2) interpersonal communication approach in the family, and (3) normative-theological approach to polygamy and exemplary families in Islam. Each approach complements each other in explaining how Islamic values are transformed into ethical, humane, and contextual communication practices (Islami, 2022).

1. Islamic Communication Theory

Islamic communication is not only understood as a process of conveying messages, but also as a reflection of Islamic morals and values that govern relationships between individuals. According to Mowlana (2007), Communication in Islam is transcendental and ethical, because it is directly related to human moral responsibility towards Allah SWT and others. In this paradigm, communication is not a neutral activity, but is loaded with spiritual values and social responsibility.

There are five principles of Islamic communication that are often referred to in the literature, namely:

- Qawlan sadidan (the true word – QS. An-Nisa: 9),
- Qawlan ma'rufan (good words – QS. Al-Baqarah: 235),
- Qawlan balighan (a touching word – QS. An-Nisa: 63),
- Qawlan layyinan (a gentle word – QS. Thaha: 44),
- and Qawlan kariman (the noble word – QS. Al-Isra': 23).

These five principles are not just rhetorical, but become moral standards in establishing communication—including in the family realm. In this context, communication is a means of building affection (*mawaddah wa rahmah*) between husband and wife (QS. Ar-Rum: 21), as well as educational instruments and character development of children (Sakir et al., 2025).

2. Interpersonal Communication in the Family

In the perspective of sociology and communication psychology, the family is seen as the most basic and complex communication system. According to DeVito (2013), Interpersonal communication in the family is the process of exchanging messages that take place in relationships that have high emotional closeness, with a continuous pattern of interaction. This theory emphasizes the importance of *effective listening*, *empathy*, *assertiveness*, and *feedback*. A healthy family is one that is able to facilitate the expression of emotions, differences of opinion, and constructive conflict resolution. When interpersonal communication in the family is disrupted by the dominance of one party, passive-aggressive attitudes, or verbal violence, family relationships will be systemically disrupted.

This is crucial in the context of polygamy. Communication between husbands and wives and children is determined not only by power structures, but also by the ability to convey messages fairly, empathize with complaints, and manage conflicts productively. Therefore, interpersonal communication in Muslim families must rely on the principles of ta'awun (help), shura (deliberation), and birrul walidain (devotion to parents), as a form of application of Qur'anic values in a relational context (Rahmawati, 2023).

3. The Normamatic-Theological Approach: The Exemplary Family and Polygamy

In Islam, the exemplary family model refers a lot to the life of the Prophet PBUH and his family, both with Khadijah RA, Aisyah RA, and other wives. This context is important to illustrate that the ideal family in Islam does not have to be perfect, but puts forward the principles of compassion, respect, and meaningful communication. The figure of the Prophet PBUH shows how communication is carried out patiently and humanely, even in complex household situations. In the hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim, for

example, Aisha RA once said that the Prophet PBUH never hit his wives and always spoke softly. This signifies that communication is not just a tool, but part of a Muslim's morals (Limantara & Oetomo, 2016).

Regarding polygamy, Islam normatively does not advocate, but provides limited legal space with strict conditions: justice (QS. An-Nisa: 3), which even in the next verse (QS. An-Nisa: 129) is referred to as something that is difficult to achieve. Thus, from a theological perspective, polygamy is rukhshah (dispensation) and not an ideal norm. In this context, communication becomes the main instrument to test whether the values of justice, honesty, and responsibility are truly applied in polygamous households.

This normative approach can also be analyzed from a hermeneutic lens, where the interpretation of religious texts must take into account the social, cultural, and psychological context of modern society. Contemporary scholars such as Shihab (2002) emphasizing the importance of interpreting polygamy texts with moral prudence and sensitivity to maqashid al-shariah (sharia goals), i.e. the protection of human dignity and the integrity of the family (Lestari et al., 2024).

2. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach with the library *research method* to explore and analyze the actualization of Islamic communication in the context of Muslim families, especially in two main domains, namely the exemplary family model and polygamy practice (Moleong, 2019). Data were obtained from a variety of primary and secondary sources and were combined such as scientific journal articles, books on the theme of family sociology, and contemporary academic works that discuss interpersonal communication within Muslim families. The analysis is carried out with a thematic and interpretive approach, connecting the normative values in Islamic texts and the social realities that emerge in modern family life.

The selection of this approach is based on research objectives that are reflective and exploratory. The author does not intend to provide quantitative generalizations, but rather to open up a space for a deep understanding of the dynamics of communication in Muslim families, as well as to develop thematic categories that can be used to understand how the principles of Islamic communication are brought to life or are challenged in daily practice,

especially in the context of polygamous families. Thus, the results of this study are conceptual and can be the basis for further studies that are more applicable and empirical.

3. Results and Discussion

In Islamic teachings, the family is a sacred social institution, the first place where the education of values and character takes place. Communication in the family is not only a means of conveying messages, but a vehicle for creating affection (*mawaddah*) and mercy (*rahmah*), as explained in QS. Ar-Rum verse 21. Principles such as *qawlan sadidan, qawlan layyinan*, and qawlan kariman are communication ethics that function to prevent family members from verbal violence, conflicts, and unfairness in relationships.

The results of the literature study show that Muslim families who consistently apply the principles of Islamic communication tend to be better able to build internal harmony. For example, in husband-wife interactions, communication that is built on mutual understanding, not demeaning the couple, and the existence of deliberation space in decision-making, are indicators of a healthy relationship. Children in such families also grow up in an environment that supports their emotional and spiritual development in a balanced manner (Karimullah, 2021).

In families where this principle is ignored, symptoms of unequal communication are found: dominance of one party (generally male), lack of empathy, or destructive delivery of criticism. Poor communication is often a gateway to domestic conflicts, even to divorce. In this context, Islamic communication becomes not just a normative ideal, but a practical necessity that, if applied, can become a mechanism for conflict prevention.

Exemplary Family: Reconstructing the Communication Model of the Prophet PBUH

The family model of the Prophet PBUH offers a rich source of inspiration in building loving, dialogical, and educational communication. One of the important examples is his interaction with Khadijah RA which is based on trust and open communication. Khadijah was the first place where the Prophet expressed his anxiety after receiving the first revelation. This shows that there is an intimate and supportive communication bond in their household (Tumilo et al., 2024).

Likewise, his relationship with Aisyah RA shows a form of educational communication. Aisyah is not only a wife, but also a student and discussion friend. Many hadiths and narrations mention that the Prophet had a dialogue with Aisha with tenderness, even when there was a minor conflict. For example, when Aisha was jealous of another wife, the Prophet responded with a smile and a joke, not with anger or bluntness, according to the hadith narrated by Bukhari (Cahyani, 2018).

This model of communication reflects the three great principles of Islamic communication: equality, respect, and emotional sensitivity. This concept is important to be represented as a counter-narrative to the patriarchal communication culture that still colors many modern Muslim families. The example of the Prophet has become very relevant in shaping family communication ethics, especially in the midst of increasing digital communication challenges that increasingly separate the space for emotional interaction between family members.

Polygamy and Communication: Between Islamic Ethics and Social Complexity

Polygamy has become one of the most sensitive themes in Islamic family discourse. Textually, Islam allows polygamy in QS. An-Nisa verse 3 with the main condition: justice. However, justice in this context is not only about the distribution of maintenance and time, but also about fairness in communication. Many studies show that failure to establish fair and open communication is a major trigger for conflict in polygamous households.

From the results of the literature review, it was found that in polygamous families that managed to maintain stability, there were several communication patterns that stood out:

1. Disclosure of information between husband and wife,
2. Consistency in promises and decisions, and the presence of a dialogue room between family members (Zubair & Azhari, 2025).

On the other hand, in a conflicting polygamous family, there is information inequality, dishonesty, and manipulative or authoritative communication. In some cases, the first wife is not consulted or even told before the husband remarries. This is clearly contrary to the principles of justice and openness in Islamic communication (Siwalette et al., 2024).

This is where it is important to reflect again on the teachings of the Prophet

PBUH, who despite undergoing polygamy, still maintains humane and fair communication. There is even a record that he managed his time and attention in great detail, and when he felt biased in his feelings, he prayed that Allah would not reproach him for what was beyond his control. It confirms that polygamy is not a free passage of conflict, but the highest moral testing chamber in communication.

Relevance of Socio-Cultural Context

In the context of Indonesian Muslims, the practice of polygamy is often associated with religious legitimacy, but there is little reflection on the emotional readiness and communication required. The patriarchal culture makes some men feel the need to involve their first wife in the decision to remarry. In fact, Islamic communication requires deliberation and equality of voices in family decisions.

Research by Sa'adah & Sar'an (2024) shows that most polygamous families in Indonesia experience high emotional distress due to a lack of open communication, both between husband and wife. Even children in such families often experience emotional and identity confusion because the relationship between parents is not harmonious.

Dengan demikian, nilai-nilai komunikasi Islam harus dibawa melampaui teks dan dijadikan kerangka aksi dalam kehidupan sosial. Pembinaan keluarga Muslim ideal tidak cukup hanya dengan ceramah normatif, tetapi juga melalui pembentukan kesadaran kritis tentang pentingnya membangun komunikasi yang dialogis, adil, dan transparan dalam segala bentuk keluarga—termasuk poligami.

4. Conclusion

Islamic communication in the family is an important dimension that unites ethics, spirituality, and social structure. This article examines the actualization of Islamic communication values, especially in the context of exemplary families and polygamous practices. From the results of the analysis, it was found that Islamic communication requires the application of principles such as *qawlan sadidan, qawlan layyinan,* and *qawlan kariman* which are not only moral guidance, but also concrete social practices in domestic life.

The family model of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is an ideal representation of how communication is built on the basis of affection, respect, and dialogue. Meanwhile, in the practice of polygamy, communication is tested in a more

complex way, as it involves emotional distribution, social justice, and conflict management. Communication inequality in polygamous families proves to be a major source of tension, especially if it is not based on openness, honesty, and deliberation. Therefore, the actualization of Islamic communication must go beyond textual narratives and incarnate in practices that are fair, context-sensitive, and build equal relationships between husbands, wives, and children.

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