

## **Negotiating Women's Agency in Marriage Choice: A Case Study of Muslim Society in Kerinci**

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### **Abstract**

Arranged marriages remain significant in Muslim Kerinci society, where cultural traditions and Islamic values shape family life. This study explores the factors sustaining marital harmony and how women negotiate agency within family expectations and religious norms. Using a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews involving community leaders, scholars, and couples in Air Hangat Barat District, the research highlights the interplay between structural norms and individual choices. Findings show that shared religious values, moderation in household management, tolerance of shortcomings, supportive parental roles, and affection rooted in Islamic teachings are key to harmonious families. While cultural and religious frameworks function as structural constraints, women exercise agency by negotiating their roles and influencing marital outcomes. The study's novelty lies in integrating Islamic perspectives with sociological and gender theories to explain how tradition, faith, and agency interact to sustain arranged marriages in contemporary Muslim contexts.

**Keywords:** Arranged Marriage; Marital Harmony; Women's Agency; Kerinci Society.

### **Abstrak**

Perjodohan masih memegang peranan penting dalam masyarakat Muslim Kerinci, di mana tradisi budaya dan nilai Islam membentuk kehidupan keluarga. Penelitian ini mengkaji faktor-faktor yang menopang keharmonisan rumah tangga serta bagaimana perempuan menegosiasikan agensinya di tengah harapan keluarga dan norma agama. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif melalui wawancara mendalam dengan tokoh masyarakat, ulama, dan pasangan di Kecamatan Air Hangat Barat, penelitian ini menyoroti interaksi antara norma struktural dan pilihan individu. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kesamaan nilai keagamaan, sikap moderat dalam pengelolaan rumah tangga, toleransi terhadap kekurangan pasangan, dukungan orang tua, dan kasih sayang yang berlandaskan ajaran Islam menjadi kunci terciptanya keluarga harmonis. Meskipun kerangka budaya dan agama berfungsi sebagai batas struktural, perempuan tetap memiliki ruang agensi dengan menegosiasikan peran dan memengaruhi hasil perkawinan. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi perspektif Islam dengan teori sosiologi dan gender untuk menjelaskan bagaimana tradisi, iman, dan agensi berinteraksi dalam menopang praktik perkawinan yang diatur di masyarakat Muslim kontemporer.

**Kata Kunci:** Perjodohan, Keharmonisan; Agensi Perempuan; Masyarakat Kerinci.



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## Introduction

Marriage is a fundamental social institution universally aspired to across ages and genders, representing a meaningful milestone in human life. Studies show that middle-aged women, in particular, often experience a strong need for companionship and mutual support, perceiving marriage as crucial for emotional well-being, social stability, and long-term commitment (Solikhah & Hanurawan, 2021).

Despite social change, arranged marriage remains prevalent in many cultural and religious communities, including Muslim societies. Often rooted in tradition, this practice is socially accepted as a way to initiate marital unions, especially among families that regard marriage as a collective rather than individual decision. Parents and relatives typically play a central role in spouse selection, believing that their involvement contributes to moral foundations and marital stability. Examining how women experience and interpret such arrangements provides critical insight into evolving notions of commitment and harmony in contemporary marriage.

In Muslim communities of Air Hangat Barat District, Kerinci Regency, arranged marriage continues to play a significant role in marital decision-making. The process is rarely the sole prerogative of the prospective bride or groom; rather, it is shaped by parents and extended family who act as primary decision-makers or exert substantial influence. Considerations such as religious compatibility, social background, family status, and cultural values strongly inform these decisions. While prospective spouses may participate to some degree, the final choice usually reflects family consensus. For women, this creates a critical dilemma: balancing personal preferences with obedience to parental authority (Iskandar, 2023). This tension is further reinforced by cultural and religious values that emphasize filial piety and collective harmony.

The central issue, therefore, lies in how individuals—particularly women—navigate the tension between pursuing personal desires and complying with familial expectations. Such choices carry not only emotional and social burdens but also long-term consequences. The negotiation between parental strategies in arranging marriages and individual preferences raises essential questions of autonomy, consent, and the meaning of marital commitment within the framework of Islamic family law and local traditions (Yusuf Khummaini & Ma, 2019).

The case of arranged marriage in Air Hangat Barat also resonates with existing theories of marital harmony. Many families in the region achieve stable unions by prioritizing cultural compatibility, social background, and familial expectations in matchmaking. This reflects the theory of homogamy, which posits that marriages between individuals with similar values, socioeconomic status, and cultural background are more likely to be stable (Pandu Kusumaningtyas & Ikram Hakim, 2019). Likewise, parental strategies in arranged marriages are often

influenced by pragmatic considerations (Nur, 2021). The filter theory developed by Kerckhoff and Davis further explains how partner selection operates through successive stages of screening, with criteria such as personality and financial stability shaping compatibility (Nuroniya, 2023; Rosyidi, 2008).

Beyond sociology, Islamic jurisprudence provides additional guidance. Surah An-Nisa (4:19), as interpreted by Ibnu Katsir (2015), highlights the principle of *mu'āsharah bi al-ma'rūf*—mutual understanding, tolerance (*tasamuh*), and moderation (*tawassut*)—as the basis for marital harmony (Adjeng Rizka Suwarnoputri, 2024). Empirical research also enriches this discourse. For example, studies in Nepal found that arranged marriages can foster marital quality depending on the degree of personal involvement, education, and marital duration (Akhtar et al., 2017). Similarly, Epstein et al. (2013) argue that love can develop within arranged marriages through shared commitment and sacrifice, suggesting that such unions may also serve as a foundation for stability and fulfillment.

While marriage has been widely studied, a critical gap remains in understanding subjective experiences—particularly how women negotiate between parental arrangements and personal preferences in specific cultural and religious settings. This study seeks to address that gap by examining the lived experiences of women in the Kerinci Muslim community. Rather than assuming that arranged marriages inherently produce disharmony, this research aims to uncover the factors that contribute to both success and harmony in such unions. By integrating sociological theories (homogamy and filter theory) with Islamic family law principles (*mu'āsharah bi al-ma'rūf*), this study provides a nuanced perspective on marital commitment, harmony, and individual well-being in contemporary Muslim societies.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative method with a phenomenological design, focusing on capturing individuals' subjective experiences and the meanings they attach to them (Yakhsyallah, 2024). The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provide flexibility while maintaining focus (Kamaria, 2021). Informants included Islamic scholars, community leaders, and family representatives who had direct experience with arranged marriages. To enrich the findings, observations were also conducted, offering contextual insights into practices that contribute to marital harmony in arranged unions.

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (Endarto, 2022). The first stage, data reduction, involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing information from interviews as the primary source, alongside supplementary data from journals, articles, and written documents. Relevant quotes and information directly related to the research focus were retained, while unrelated material was excluded. The second stage, data display,

presented the reduced data in descriptive narratives, tables, and thematic matrices, enabling the identification of relationships and patterns across categories. The final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, entailed interpreting the displayed data to uncover meanings and tendencies. These conclusions remained provisional and were continuously tested through triangulation, member checking with informants, and discussions with supervisors and experts to ensure validity and consistency.

## Result and Discussion

### The Phenomenon of Arranged Marriages in the Air Hangat Barat Subdistrict

Arranged marriage derives from the concept of *jodoh*, meaning compatibility that unites a man and a woman. In this form of marital bond, the match is facilitated by a third party rather than personal choice, often involving parents, relatives, or trusted community members (Sukri, 2019). Field interviews reveal that in Air Hangat Barat, arranged marriage is not only a long-standing cultural tradition but also considered a form of parental responsibility for their children's future.

The relevance of this practice can be analyzed using the filter theory of Kerckhoff and Davis, which suggests that individuals select partners through specific criteria to find a suitable match (Resi, 2021). Interviews with community leaders (Hatirman, 2024) revealed that there are at least seven factors influencing arranged marriages in this region. First, customs and culture are viewed as an ancestral legacy that must be preserved in order to maintain social harmony. Second, social status plays a significant role, as parents often seek partners of equal or higher standing to safeguard family dignity. Third, economic considerations are central, with marriages arranged to secure better prospects for children's future. Fourth, religion becomes an important filter, where parents emphasize compatibility in faith and good character, in line with Islamic teachings. Fifth, kinship ties are also a determining factor, since marriages with close relatives are considered a way to strengthen family bonds (Nurhasanah et al., 2023). Sixth, educational parity is valued, as parents tend to prefer partners with equal or higher education (Putri et al., 2020). Finally, social pressure contributes to the practice, as traditional expectations encourage families to arrange early marriages to prevent the stigma associated with remaining unmarried (Panggabean et al., 2024).

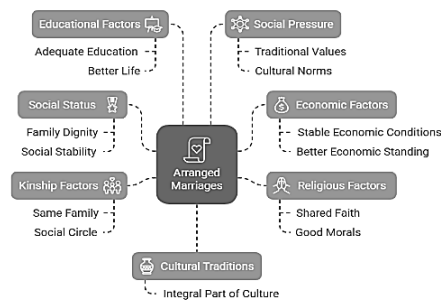


Figure 1. Factors influencing arranged marriages in Air Hangat Barat.

Interviews with respondents highlight that arranged marriages are generally accepted, even if initially perceived as coercive. For instance, Desty Nora Sivik (2024) shared that although she was unprepared at first, her arranged marriage has lasted 13 years, demonstrating that such unions can succeed with mutual understanding. Similarly, Gusdar Taher (2024) emphasized that marriages among relatives foster harmony due to cultural closeness. These findings align with mate selection theory, particularly homogamy, which suggests that similarity in values and background contributes to marital stability.

The legal framework further supports this practice. According to Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage, marriage is defined as a spiritual and physical bond between a man and a woman, aimed at forming a happy and eternal family based on faith in God. In arranged marriages, these principles are achievable if both partners and families maintain respect, communication, and understanding. Interviews indicate that many families in Air Hangat Barat involve children in discussions, even if parents retain decisive influence.

Moreover, cultural traditions and Islamic values remain central. Respondents noted that arranged marriages are often sustained by patience, gratitude, and mutual support (Ganda et al., 2024). Even when children initially accept their parents' decisions reluctantly, they often find marital happiness through good communication and trust (Widiawati, 2024). Thus, arranged marriage continues to be perceived as a socially legitimate pathway to marital harmony (*sakinah, mawaddah, rahmah*).

Nevertheless, generational shifts are evident. Parents largely view arranged marriage as the best safeguard for their children's future, while younger individuals increasingly value personal choice. Yet, they continue to respect parental advice, seeking a balance between autonomy and tradition (Wulandari, 2023). This suggests that although the practice persists, it is evolving into a more dialogical model where negotiation between parents and children plays a greater role.

### Factors Affecting Marital Harmony

Based on research conducted in the Air Hangat Barat District, the findings highlight that the matchmaking process generally begins with the initiative of the extended family or parents. Some couples do not have the opportunity to get to

know each other before the match, which initially creates feelings of awkwardness and uncertainty. However, gradual communication and support from the family help the couples overcome this phase. The biggest challenge in arranged marriages lies in the differences of character and habits between spouses (Kaur et al., 2021). Since couples often do not know each other well before marriage, the adaptation period becomes crucial. Communication and patience are key strategies for navigating these uncertainties.

The research further indicates that several main factors contribute to marital harmony among couples in arranged marriages. Open communication emerges as a fundamental element, enabling couples to address differences and resolve issues effectively. Honest and open dialogue provides the foundation for harmony. Trust also plays a central role, as it fosters security and comfort within the relationship. Many respondents noted that even though they did not know each other prior to marriage, trust and effective communication were successfully built afterward. This resonates with the Qur'anic metaphor of marital partnership: *hunna libāsun lakum wa antum libāsun lahunna* ("They are clothing for you, and you are clothing for them," Surah al-Baqarah 2:187), which underscores the ideals of mutual protection and covering each other's shortcomings.

Another crucial factor is adherence to religious teachings. Couples who uphold Islamic principles—such as praying together and maintaining pious conduct—gain spiritual strength in facing challenges (Rosyidana & Sanah, 2024). In Air Hangat Barat, arranged marriages are often motivated by the parents' desire to ensure that their children marry partners of the same faith and good morals. This principle aligns with the Prophet's hadith: *tunqahu al-mar'ah li-arba'in: limāliha, wa liḥasabihā, wa jamāliha, wa lidīnihā, faẓfar bidhāt al-dīn taribat yadāk* ("A woman is married for four reasons: her wealth, her lineage, her beauty, and her religion. Choose the one with strong faith, and you will prosper") (Fauzan et al., 2023). Such emphasis on religious commitment is intended to secure a blessed and harmonious marital life.

Responsibility is also a vital component. The study shows that marital harmony is sustained when both partners are aware of their roles and responsibilities. In Islamic teaching, the husband is responsible as the breadwinner, while the wife is entrusted with managing the household (Purbasari et al., 2015). This role division reflects Qur'anic guidance: *al-rijālu qawwāmūna 'ala al-nisā' bimā faḍḍalallāhu ba'dahum 'alā ba'din wa bimā anfaqū min amwālihim* ("Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given some of them more strength than others and because they support them from their wealth," Surah al-Nisā' 4:34). In this sense, responsibility is not about dominance but about complementarity and balance between husband and wife.

Patience and mutual respect also emerge as decisive factors in sustaining harmony. Couples who are patient and respectful toward one another are better able to resolve conflicts and prevent disputes from escalating (Zuliana & Kumala, 2020; Latifa, 2015). Islam strongly emphasizes patience in family life. As narrated

by Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet said: *khayrukum li-ahlihi wa-anā khayrukum li-ahli* (“The best of you are those who are best to their families, and I am the best among you to my family”). This teaching underscores the importance of kindness, respect, and good treatment toward one’s spouse. Several respondents similarly affirmed that patience, supported by effective communication, helped them navigate conflicts in their marriage.

Altogether, the findings suggest that religion, communication, trust, responsibility, patience, and mutual respect constitute the key pillars of marital harmony in the Air Hangat Barat District. When practiced with sincerity, these values foster what respondents described as *baiti jannati*—a home akin to paradise—where love, tranquility, and comfort prevail (Damanhuri, 2016).



Figure 2. Building blocks of marital Harmony in Air Hangat

"The factors mentioned above indicate that religion, communication, responsibility, patience, and love are the main foundations in building a harmonious household in the Air Hangat Barat District. The Qur'an and hadith provide strong guidance on the importance of choosing a partner with a good religious background, maintaining open communication, being responsible in one's role, and practicing patience and mutual respect in facing challenges. By following these principles, families can achieve true happiness in this world and the hereafter.

### Islamic Family Law Analysis

This discussion elaborates on the findings from interviews by analyzing the factors that contribute to marital harmony among couples in arranged marriages. The data reveal several key points that provide a foundation for understanding how Islamic values and principles of communal life shape a harmonious husband–wife relationship. This perspective is also rooted in the Qur'an (4:19), which, through various interpretations, emphasizes the importance of living together in goodness.

One of the central aspects that emerged from the interviews is the significance of a similar religious background and shared core values. Ibn Kathīr (2006) in his tafsir explains the phrase *wa 'aasyiruhunna bil ma'ruf*, which

commands husbands to treat their wives in a good manner. This encompasses proper communication, respect, and the fulfillment of the wife's rights within marital life. The husband is expected to be gentle and patient in dealing with his wife, avoiding hasty decisions that could harm the household. The findings indicate that harmony in the vision and mission of the household is strengthened when couples share religious backgrounds and values inherited from their families. As noted by Ardi et al. (2024), such similarities provide a solid foundation for aligning life goals, such as raising children in an Islamic environment. This corresponds to the concept of *kafa'ah* in Islam, which stresses equality between spouses in religion and morals, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflicts caused by fundamental differences. As the Qur'an instructs, *wa 'aasyiruuhunna bil ma'ruf*—"and live with them in a good manner" (Qur'an 4:19). In this context, shared values serve as an initial step in creating a unified vision, allowing couples to manage small differences in daily life more effectively.

The principle of moderation in household life also plays a crucial role. Ibnu 'Asyur (1984) emphasizes the importance of balance in the rights and responsibilities of husband and wife. A husband is not to act unjustly, but at the same time should not be excessively passive in exercising leadership. The principle of *tawassuth* (moderation) becomes particularly evident in financial management. Couples reported that they agreed to live simply, avoid wastefulness, and manage finances proportionally, reflecting the Prophet's teaching that "the best of matters are those that are moderate" (Muhammad Ulinnuha, 2023). Proportional financial arrangements foster mutual trust and minimize conflicts, especially since financial issues are a common source of marital disputes. Moderation also extends to managing feelings of jealousy, as couples emphasized mutual trust—for instance, wives not suspecting their husbands when working away, and husbands reciprocating the same trust. Such moderation prevents suspicion from overwhelming the relationship and helps sustain a healthy emotional balance.

Tolerance toward a partner's shortcomings is another vital factor. Al-Qurtubi (2019) stresses that a husband should exercise patience when facing aspects of his wife that he dislikes, as goodness may still reside within her. This attitude of *tasamuh* (tolerance) is key to maintaining marital harmony (Universitas et al., 2023). Couples reported that when mistakes occur, they prioritize self-reflection over blame, acknowledging that no one is perfect. This resonates with the Qur'anic statement, *yuridu Allāhu an yukhaffifa 'ankum wa khuliqa al-insānu da'ifā*—"God intends to lighten your burden, for humankind was created weak" (Qur'an 4:28). Recognizing this inherent human weakness encourages couples to be forgiving, preventing minor conflicts from escalating into serious disputes.

The importance of parental support and advice was also highlighted in the interviews. Ibnu 'Asyur (1984) notes that the family, especially parents, play a decisive role in guiding the couple toward goodness, offering wisdom and counsel



to help sustain the marriage. Participants emphasized that parental guidance helps couples practice *mu'āsyarah bi al-ma'rūf*, adjust their perspectives, and prioritize shared goals. The Qur'an describes the spousal bond as *hunna libāsun lakum wa antum libāsun lahunna*—"they are clothing for you, and you are clothing for them" (Qur'an 2:187). As 'clothing,' spouses are expected to protect one another, cover each other's flaws, and avoid exposing weaknesses to outsiders. This principle was consistently applied by the couples, who expressed a mutual commitment not to reveal their partner's shortcomings to others.

Finally, efforts toward wise conflict resolution were found to be essential for sustaining marital harmony. Couples agreed not to allow conflicts to drag on, instead maintaining open communication and striving to resolve disputes through mutual discussion. This illustrates that marital harmony is an ongoing process of adaptation, in which spouses support each other and prioritize solutions rather than allowing conflicts to escalate. Such practices reflect the Islamic principle of *shura* (consultation), whereby problems are addressed through dialogue and collective wisdom, reinforcing trust and stability within the household.

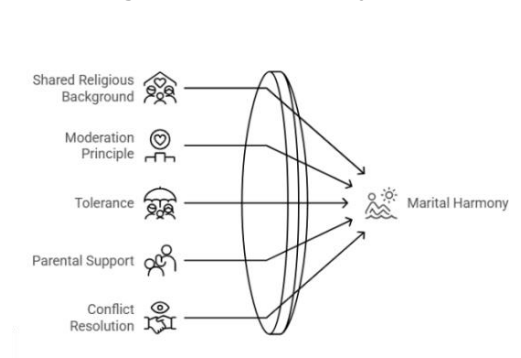


Figure 3. pathways to marital harmony in Air Hangat

Based on research findings in the Air Hangat Barat District, several perspectives from local scholars on the phenomenon of arranged marriages provide valuable insights into how Islam views this practice within the framework of family law. The scholars interviewed emphasized a number of fundamental principles that should be upheld in order to ensure the formation of a harmonious and happy family.

First, the Principle of Equality in Religion and Morality (Kafa'ah). The local scholars agree that equality in religion and morals (kafa'ah) is one of the main principles that must be upheld in arranged marriages. They emphasize that marriage is not just a bond between two individuals, but a form of worship that must be based on faith and good morals. Couples who share equality in religion and morals will find it easier to lead a harmonious and happy marital life. This is where Islam demands that a marriage be based on the best choice and founded on strong principles, which will lead to purity, clarity, harmony, as well as happiness and tranquility (Gustiawati & Lestari, 2016).

From the explanation above, it can be understood that *kafa'ah* is closely related to marriage, where choosing a partner involves specific criteria for entering into a marriage, namely the equality between the prospective husband and wife in several aspects that can prevent a crisis in the household, thus supporting the achievement of a harmonious family.

Second, the Willingness of Both Parties in Marriage. The religious scholars in the Air Hangat Barat District also emphasize the importance of the willingness or consent of both parties in marriage. Although parents play a crucial role in helping choose the right partner, marriage in Islam must be based on the consent of the prospective bride and groom. There must be no coercion in marriage, as this contradicts the principle of individual freedom in Islam. The scholars in Air Hangat Barat state that arranged marriages are allowed as long as both parties, the prospective husband and wife, give their consent voluntarily. This is in line with Islamic teachings, which emphasize that marriage is an agreement between the two individuals involved, and the decision must be based on their mutual consent, not just the family's wishes.

"Parents play a very important role in the arranged marriage process in the Air Hangat Barat District. The scholars explain that in Islam, the role of parents is not limited to giving their blessing but also involves helping to choose a suitable partner based on religion, morals, and a good background. However, the scholars also emphasize that the role of parents should not exceed boundaries, so as to avoid imposing their will on their children.

It is undeniable that parents play a significant role in determining an ideal partner for their children in the future. Their role is particularly crucial, as parents serve as the primary gateway for socializing the unique lifestyle and values of the family to their children as they grow into adulthood (Samsu Bahri, 2018)

"This view of the scholars reflects Islamic teachings that acknowledge the importance of the family's role in guiding their children, while still giving the prospective bride and groom the freedom to choose their life partner. Parents should act as advisors and supporters, not as the ones who decide without the children's consent.

Fourth, the Role of Extended Family After Marriage. The local scholars also highlight the role of the extended family in maintaining the continuity of a harmonious marriage. They state that the extended family is often involved in the arranged marriage process, particularly in providing advice and support. However, they also caution that after the marriage, the extended family must limit their involvement in the couple's household affairs. The family serves as a shelter for its members. In this context, it means that the family should provide a sense of security, peace, and tranquility for its members. In Islamic teachings, one of the objectives of marriage is to achieve a sense of security, peace, and tranquility (Adnan, 2020)

The role of the extended family as a wise support system is highly valued in Islam, but it is important not to overly interfere in the couple's household life

so that they can live their lives independently and harmoniously. This balance helps the couple to face challenges with the right support, without pressure from the extended family.

Fifth, the Importance of Love and Affection Based on Religion. Scholars in the Air Hangat Barat District also emphasize the importance of love and affection based on religion as the foundation of a household. They cite the marriage of Sayyidatina Fatimah and Sayyidina Ali as an example of a successful arranged marriage, as it was based on love and devotion to Allah SWT. Aisyah, who was still a child at the time, was engaged and married to the Prophet Muhammad SAW. After reaching maturity, Ummul Mukminin Aisyah lived with the Prophet SAW. In a sahih hadith, a companion asked the Prophet SAW to marry him to a Muslim woman (Mulyati, 2020)

Finally, he was married with the dowry being the memorization of the Qur'an. In this context, the Prophet SAW married this couple of companions based on the request of the male companion. Although it was based on the request, the marriage command came from someone else, namely the Prophet saw. Of course, this was done with the consent of the bride (al-Bukhari, 2020)

Love, piety, and commitment to the teachings of Islam are the keys to building a happy and lasting family. As stated in QS. Ar-Rum: 21: 'And among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, so that you may find tranquility and peace with them, and He has placed between you affection and mercy.' This verse emphasizes that tranquility and happiness in a household come from a relationship built on piety and love. (Haryono, 2024). This story demonstrates that a successful arranged marriage does not solely rely on similarities in social or economic status, but rather on shared spiritual values. Scholars argue that when couples love each other and are committed to following religious teachings, they can create a harmonious, loving, and compassionate household. The perspective of scholars based on findings from the Air Hangat Barat subdistrict emphasizes that arranged marriages in Islam are permissible as long as they adhere to the fundamental principles of the religion, such as equality in character and faith (*kafa'ah*), mutual consent, and the supportive yet non-restrictive role of the family. Parents and extended family play a crucial role in guiding and supporting the matchmaking process.

The key to a successful arranged marriage, according to the author's analysis based on the views of scholars, is maintaining a commitment to religious teachings, fostering good communication between spouses, and prioritizing love and mutual respect. Thus, arranged marriages can serve as a legitimate and effective means of building a harmonious and happy family, in accordance with Islamic guidance.

From a theoretical perspective, this dynamic can be interpreted through the lens of structuration theory (Connell, 1987) which highlights the reciprocal relationship between agency and structure. While cultural and religious norms constitute structural constraints that shape the arranged marriage practice,

individual actors—particularly women—exercise agency by negotiating within these boundaries to assert their preferences and influence marital outcomes. This negotiation reflects an ongoing process of social reproduction and transformation, where traditional practices adapt to contemporary values without losing their foundational religious principles.

Moreover, applying gender and power theory (Connell, 1987) elucidates how power relations within families and communities are negotiated rather than imposed unilaterally. The supportive but non-restrictive role of the family signifies a complex interplay of authority and care, allowing women to engage meaningfully in the selection process, thereby challenging simplistic assumptions of female passivity in arranged marriages. This elaborates the meaning of arranged marriage as not merely an institution of control, but also a social mechanism that fosters collective responsibility and mutual respect among family members.

Ultimately, the interplay of religious commitment, communicative openness, and negotiated agency serves as the foundational argument for the sustainability and legitimacy of arranged marriages in the Muslim Kerinci context. This analysis enriches the discourse by moving beyond descriptive accounts to a nuanced understanding grounded in sociological and gender theories, emphasizing how spiritual values and social structures converge to shape lived realities.

Table 1: Analytical Framework of Arranged Marriage in the Muslim Community Air Hangat Barat of Kerinci

Aspect	Description	Theoretical Framework	Analysis and Meaning
Spiritual Values	Love, piety, and commitment as the foundation of family happiness. Based on Qur'an Surah Ar-Rum: 21.	Religious-Social Theory	Religious values form the moral and emotional foundation of marriage, beyond mere social or economic compatibility.
Family Role	Parents and relatives select potential spouses, upholding religious and social norms.	Gender and Power Theory	Family dominance is seen not as pure restriction, but as a form of social and moral protection.
Women's Agency	Women actively engage in negotiations, although limited by norms and social structures.	Structuration Theory (Giddens)	Women's space for negotiation exists, though constrained by religious and cultural expectations.

Islamic Marital Principles	Equality ( <i>kafa'ah</i> ), mutual consent, and family support.	Islamic Family Law	Arranged marriages are valid and socially accepted when aligned with Islamic principles.
Key Factors of Marital Success	Religious commitment, communication, love, and mutual respect.	Interpersonal/Communication Theory	Interpersonal dynamics are essential in sustaining harmony and stability within arranged marriages.

Based on the table above, the analysis of arranged marriage within the Muslim Kerinci community encompasses several interrelated aspects that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. First, spiritual values—such as love, piety, and commitment to Islamic teachings—serve as a strong moral foundation for building a harmonious and fulfilling family life. This is reinforced by reference to Qur'an Surah Ar-Rum, verse 21, which emphasizes the importance of tranquility and affection as core elements of marital relationships.

Secondly, the role of the family, particularly parents and relatives, is highly influential in the decision-making process of partner selection. This role is not merely a constraint on individual freedom but also serves as a form of social and moral protection aligned with local religious and cultural norms. This aspect is elucidated through the application of gender and power theories, which illustrate how dynamics of dominance and negotiation operate within the family's social structure..

Thirdly, despite the presence of social structures and religious norms that impose limitations, women still possess the agency to negotiate and actively participate in the decision-making process. This aligns with the theory of structural agency, which posits that individuals are capable of exercising their freedom to negotiate choices within existing structural constraints.

Fourth, Islamic principles such as *kafa'ah* (compatibility in character and religion) and mutual consent serve as essential guidelines to ensure that arranged marriages are both religiously valid and socially accepted. Finally, the success of arranged marriages largely depends on a shared commitment to religious values, effective communication between spouses, as well as love and mutual respect. These interpersonal elements are key factors in achieving harmony and happiness within families in the context of the Muslim community in Kerinci.

Overall, this analytical framework demonstrates that arranged marriage is not a static practice but rather a dynamic process involving complex interactions between religious values, social norms, and individual agency, particularly that of women, in constructing a happy and harmonious family.

## Conclusion

This study finds that arranged marriage in Muslim Kerinci society continues to function as a legitimate and harmonious practice when grounded in Islamic principles of *kafa'ah* (religious and moral equality), mutual consent, and the supportive yet non-coercive role of family. While cultural and religious norms serve as structural frameworks, individuals—particularly women—exercise agency by negotiating within these boundaries, thereby shaping marital outcomes. This dynamic illustrates that arranged marriage is not merely an instrument of control but a social mechanism that balances tradition, faith, and personal autonomy. Ultimately, the Kerinci experience demonstrates how Islamic values and negotiated agency converge to sustain marital harmony, offering insights into the evolving relationship between structure, gender, and religion in Muslim family life.

Future research on arranged marriages in Muslim societies such as Kerinci should employ a mixed-methods approach that combines ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and quantitative surveys to capture both the subjective experiences of individuals and broader social patterns. Comparative studies across different districts or ethnic groups would also provide a richer understanding of how cultural variations intersect with Islamic principles in shaping marital practices. Furthermore, longitudinal designs are recommended to trace how marital dynamics and agency evolve over time, offering deeper insights into the sustainability of arranged marriages in changing social contexts.

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