



Criteria for Selecting a Life Partner among Muslim Adolescents: A Mixed Methods Analysis

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Abstract

One of the challenges faced by Muslim teenagers today is the advancement of time and technology, which also affects changes in people's mindset and behavior. This study aims to analyze the mindset of Muslim teenagers in choosing life partner criteria in the modern era. The method used in this research is mixed methods design with concurrent embedded strategy model. The research informants consisted of sixteen santri in one of the Islamic boarding schools in West Sumatra, Indonesia, in 2024, who were selected using purposive sampling method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and questionnaires. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, presentation, and verification. The results of qualitative data analysis were combined with the results of quantitative data analysis to produce more in-depth findings. The results showed that religious factors are the main consideration in choosing a life partner for students of Islamic boarding schools, with various supporting reasons. The second dominant factor is employment, followed by fertility factors and the status of a girl or virgin.

INTRODUCTION

Determining criteria in choosing a life partner is very important. This is because marriage is a sacred matter in Islam. Marriage in Islam is considered a solid bond and a comprehensive commitment to life, society and humans to become someone honorable. Marriage is often called the longest act of worship, so no human being wants their marriage to end in failure with divorce. That is why Islam provides guidelines for choosing the right mate to marry (Atabik, 2014; Jamshidi et al., 2019; Jawad & Elmali-Karakaya, 2020; Najwah, 2018).

According to Yusuf al-Qardawi, as quoted by Rossa, marriage is like a person having two wings: the wing of *athifah* (love) and the wing of reason. The lowest level of the *athifah* wing is *qabul* (acceptance), which refers to the ability to accept a proposal without rejecting the suitor. The highest level of *athifah* involves feelings of attraction or inclination toward the opposite sex. On the other hand, the wing of reason includes *takafu'* (compatibility) in areas such as social status, economy,

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education, psychology, and lineage. It even extends to physical traits such as skin Color, height, and body build (Jannah et al., 2021; Nurjanah et al., 2024; Saguni & Syandri, 2018).

Islam emphasizes great care when selecting a woman to propose to, providing several criteria for those who will become wives. In Islam, a wife is described as a source of comfort for her husband, a partner in life, a caretaker of the household, a mother to her children, a confidante for his secrets, and a companion to share his burdens. Given these significant roles, Islam strongly advises its followers to carefully evaluate prospective spouses before making a decision (Chadijah, 2023; Trianasari & Ekawardhani, 2021).

Choosing a partner carefully according to religious teachings is crucial to avoid making the wrong choice and to build a lasting, divorce-free household (Cantika et al., 2018; Indra et al., 2023; Umah, 2020). One common cause of divorce is choosing a partner with an incompatible character, as evidenced by cases where domestic violence leads to separation. Recent data from BPS RI highlights a consistent increase in divorces due to domestic violence in Indonesia, with cases decided in Religious Courts rising steadily from 3,271 in 2020 to 5,174 in 2023. Furthermore, social media has emerged as a contributing factor to rising divorce rates, as noted in recent studies (Buchori et al., 2024; Darmawati & Haddade, 2020; Najmuddin et al., 2023; Razak et al., 2024; Wahyuni & Rasyid, 2022).

In this day and age, there is rapid development in various aspects, such as technology and communication. These advancements trigger changes and shifts in life patterns and social interactions. Technology shapes how individuals think, behave in society, and act. Similarly, advances in communication technology influence human life socially and culturally, shaping thoughts, behaviors, and responses to subsequent technological changes. Ultimately, communication tools created by humans significantly affect human life itself (Al'Alim et al., 2023; Fauziah et al., 2024; Monalisa et al., 2021; Rafi, 2020; Setiawan, 2018; Yoga, 2019).

The changing character of teenagers in Indonesia is evident across generations, particularly in generation Z Research by Harmadi et al., (2022); Hinduan et al., (2020) highlights significant differences in the characteristics of generation Z compared to previous generations. One of the main distinguishing factors is their mastery of information and technology. For generation Z, information and technology are integral aspects of their lives. This is because they were born into an era where access to information, particularly the internet, has become a global norm. Consequently, this has influenced their values, perspectives, and life goals (Szymkowiak et al., 2021). It is important to examine how Muslim teenagers perceive and choose the character of their prospective life partners, especially considering the significant shifts in values and thought patterns, as discussed earlier (Rachmawati & Purwaningrum, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Choosing a life partner is an important decision that significantly affects the sustainability of family life, especially in Muslim societies that uphold religious values. Several studies have demonstrated that religious piety is a major factor in determining life partners (Carol, 2018; Pazhoohi et al., 2017). Padila, (2022) found that Shari'ah students at the Institut Agama Islam Negeri Palopo generally chose partners based on religious observance, as recommended by the Prophet Muhammad. Similar findings were revealed by Haekal & Permana, (2024), who

showed that alumni of Islamic boarding schools tend to prioritize religious factors in choosing a life partner. The role of religion as the main foundation in building a harmonious family life.

Apart from religion, education and economic stability are also significant considerations in choosing a life partner (Azmi & Anzaikhan, 2022; Najwah, 2018; Sassler & Lichter, 2020; Van Hook & Glick, 2020; Wahyuni & Rasyid, 2022). The education provides an essential intellectual foundation for effective communication in marital relationships. Similarly, David & Stafford, (2015); Tavakol et al., (2017) revealed that economic stability is often regarded as a benchmark for ensuring a well-established home life, though it is usually considered secondary to religion. Education and economic stability are viewed as complementary factors in realizing a prosperous family (Handayani et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2021; Marpaung, 2021; Syarifah, 2017).

Social and cultural norms also play a significant role in influencing mate selection preferences. According to Accordini et al., (2018); Chebotareva & Volk, (2020); Locke et al (2020), many Muslim adolescents consider the compatibility of a potential partner's cultural background to ensure alignment with family values. These norms serve as a social framework that shapes individuals' expectations and decisions when choosing a life partner (Frye & Trinitapoli, 2015; Willoughby et al., 2015). This highlights that while religion remains a dominant factor, cultural influences and family expectations continue to hold relevance.

However, most previous studies have focused more on millennials, while research targeting Generation Z is still limited. To fill this gap, the authors' research adopts a mixed methods design approach, which allows for a more holistic exploration. This approach incorporates quantitative data to identify preference patterns, as well as qualitative insights to understand the motivations behind those choices. As such, this study not only complements the existing literature but also provides a new, more comprehensive perspective on life partner selection criteria among Muslim youth, particularly Generation Z.

METHODS

This research uses qualitative and quantitative mixed methods with an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. Merging the two methods in this study could give a chance to researchers to get more data which were deeper, comprehensive, robust and high quality (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016; Edmund, 2009; Elkhaira et al., 2020; Engkizar et al., 2018; Wilkinson & Staley, 2019; Zafirah et al., 2018).

The first stage of qualitative method used was case study approach, data sources were taken through deep interviews for sixteen informants from Islamic boarding school in west sumatera. All informants were active students selected by using purposive sampling technique. All interview data obtained were analyzed thematically by using technical Analysis Interactive Model Milles & Hubberman (Bourque & Bourdon, 2017; Dodds, 2022; Fauzi & Darajat, 2022; Marshall et al., 2020; Pranansa et al., 2021; Pranansa et al., 2022; Saprun, 2020; Zamawe, 2015; Engkizar et al., 2024).

The second stage of quantitative method used survey approach, data taken using a questionnaire taken based on results findings as the first stage of qualitative study. The questionnaires contained fifteen indicators related to Criteria for Choosing a Life Partner for Muslim Teenagers as found in the first research stage.

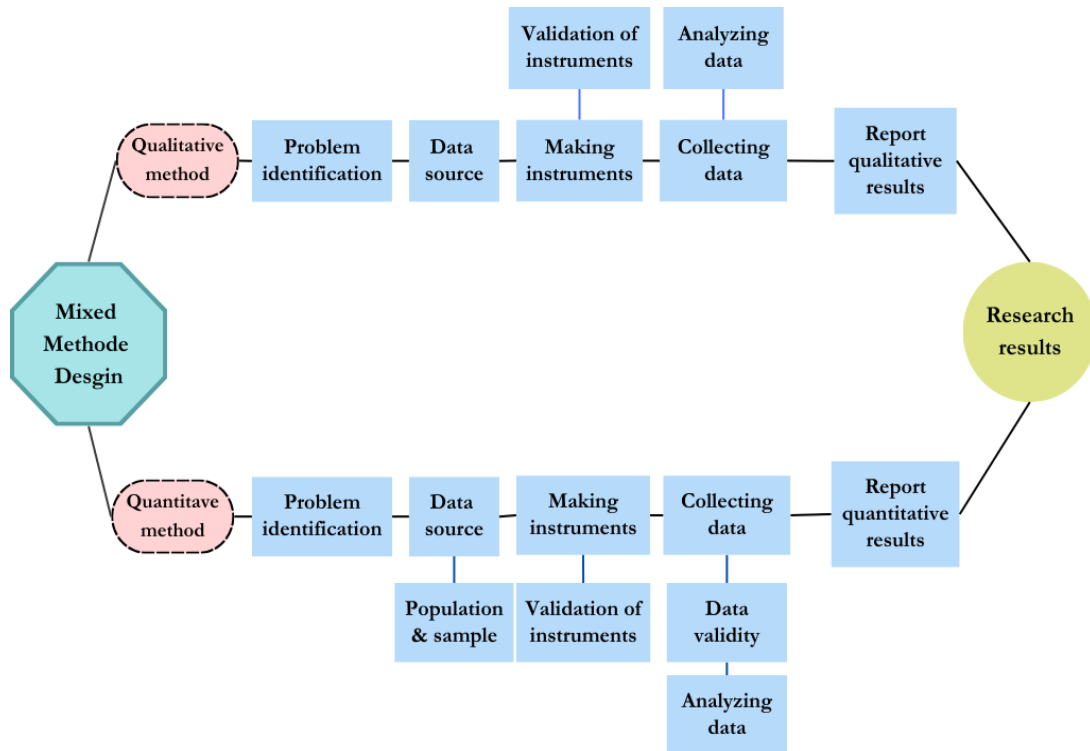


Fig 1. Research thinking framework

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the following, the author presents the results of both studies, both qualitative findings (case study) and quantitative findings (survey). To make it easier to understand, the author will explain the qualitative results first and followed by the quantitative results.

Qualitative Results

Based on the interviews with the informants, the analysis found five themes related to the factors considered in choosing a partner according to religious guidance. The five factors are: i) religious factor, ii) physical factor, iii) marital status factor, iv) fertility factor, v) wealth factor. As shown in Figure 2 below.

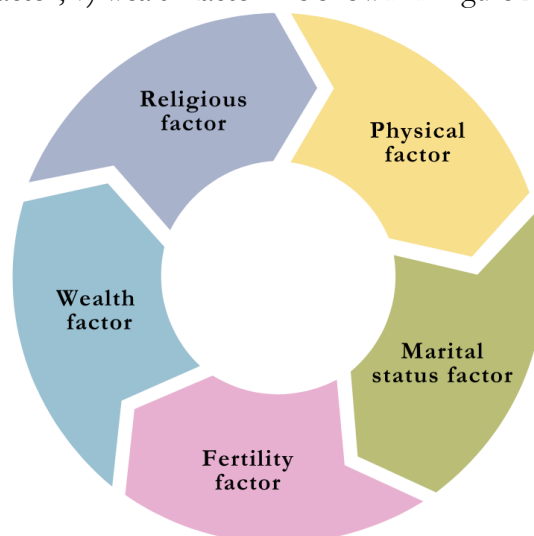


Fig 2. Criteria for choosing a spouse according to religious guidance

Religious factor

The religious factor is the main factor as taught by Allah SWT and Rasulullah SAW in choosing a prospective wife or husband. Based on the results of research that the author has conducted, religious factors are the most dominant factors or the most important factors in choosing a partner. Namely, as many as five informants made this factor the biggest consideration in choosing their future life partner.

Some of them consider that the most important criteria when choosing a woman to be a wife is a *sholeha* woman who diligently carries out daily worship, because basically a wife must obey her husband, and a *sholeha* woman is everyone's dream. This is as the result of the author's interview with one of the informants who stated that;

... .. building a household is not for a few days but for a lifetime, therefore if someone manages to have a sholeha wife, his household will certainly be calm (Informant 1)

In line with this, one informant also stated that;

... he prefers a woman who is good in terms of her morals even though she is not too beautiful in terms of her looks (informant 2).

Similarly, another informant also stated that;

... an ideal woman should be able to protect herself in the sense of keeping herself from the sin of adultery and not even approaching adultery, which in this day and age is very difficult to find such a woman, because according to him many women today are involved in promiscuity. She also said that women should stay at home and not like most women who like to wander around without a clear purpose out there (informant 3).

Furthermore, another informant also argued that according to him;

... the ideal wife must have a gentle attitude in front of her husband and have a good attitude because she will make her husband calm (informant 4).

Based on interviews with other informants, the religious factor was identified as an important requirement in selecting a life partner. This is as the result of the author's interview with one of the informants who stated that;

... A man is the leader in the household so a leader must be good at guiding his wife and even his children, especially in carrying out God's commands. This is very important for them in seeing the nature and character of men, for them how a man will lead his wife while his religious knowledge is still lacking (informant 5).

Physical Factors

As the author has described above, one of the other factors in determining life partners is physical factors or beauty and good looks. It turns out that based on the results of the author's research, there is one santri who makes this factor the most dominant factor in determining prospective wives;

...Physicality is very important because it will determine whether or not her husband feels at home. It does not mean that you have to be beautiful like an artist, beautiful is relative, the important thing is that you are comfortable in the eyes (informant 7).

Meanwhile, one informant who did not make physical factors a dominant factor stated that;

...although a beautiful wife will make her comfortable and make her husband feel proud, if he has to choose between beauty and religious observance, he prefers a woman who is simple in appearance but good in terms of religion (informant 8).

This criterion is very logical and reasonable, because every man certainly craves

a beautiful wife, so that it can be pleasing to the heart when viewed. However, beauty is relative, with each man having different tastes and definitions of beauty. However, beauty remains one of the criteria recommended by religion to prevent men from being tempted to turn to other women. This does not only refer to physical beauty, but also beauty that is able to captivate the heart of her husband. In addition to the factors previously described, there are two other factors that are also taken into consideration, namely girl/virgin status and type of work (Alam et al., 2019; Fathony et al., 2021).

Marital status factor

In terms of whether the prospective spouse should be a virgin or a virgin, there was one informant who made it the main factor, he said that;

...it is very important to have a wife who has not been touched by other people, besides that he has also heard that the Prophet once recommended to marry a virgin. In addition, he thinks that other factors are supporting factors (informant 6).

Meanwhile, another informant argued that;

...not too concerned about it. What is important according to him is that one must try his best to find a mate, but if it is destined to marry someone who has failed in the household, it is a destiny that must be accepted (informant 9, 14).

Fertility factor

Of all the informants, only one informant considered fertility to be the main factor in choosing a potential partner. According to him, one of the goals of marriage is to have offspring.

...If there are no children, of course a marriage will be empty. Because children will be an encouragement to run life. Just like my brother who is married but has no children, it feels like there is no meaning to a lot of money (informant 13).

Choosing a partner based on fertility is one of the recommendations that is in line with the purpose of marriage in Islam, which is to have offspring. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) even expressed his pride in his Ummah before other nations because of its large number of offspring. In one of his sayings, he encouraged his followers to marry women who have fertility potential.

The results of the interviews show that for some individuals, having a baby is one of the most important aspects of a household, as children are regarded as comforters and complements to parents' lives. One interviewee stated that the issue of offspring or fertility is part of God's destiny. He also added that if a couple faces such a situation, then it should be accepted gracefully and support each other in the household (Bornstein, 2015; Fakistania & Fawzi, 2021; Kinase, 2023).

Wealth factor

Based on the results of the study, wealth is the most important factor in choosing a life partner. However, this does not mean that there are no other factors that they take into consideration, but several other factors become supporting factors. This is based on the conclusion of the results of the author's interviews with the five informants, that;

...they consider work to be a very important factor when someone is going to live a household because it is closely related to the needs in terms of finance which is certainly an obligation (informant 10).

More clearly as expressed by one informant who stated that;

...choosing a prospective husband who has a good job does not mean that he does not accept

what he is, but this is closely related to the living expenses that will arise after marriage (informant 11).

The same thing was also expressed by another informant that;

...something that is realistic considering the current difficult times, especially if a husband does not have a job, it will cause problems in their household later (informant 12).

Meanwhile, another informant who did not consider this factor as a dominant factor mentioned that;

...she does not really question what kind of job her future husband should have because the important thing is that he should be responsible. A responsible person will certainly try his best to earn a living. So the matter of work, according to her, is not the most decisive factor (informant 8, 15).

Meanwhile, there was one informant who made work the dominant factor, because according to him;

...although men are obliged to provide for their wives, the wife's role is no less important in supporting the family's finances. Moreover, according to him, a woman today can choose a variety of jobs and can work from home to help the family's finances (informant 16).

Quantitative Results

Religious factor

The questionnaire results also show that there are three questions in the questionnaire related to religious factors, which can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Religious factors in choosing a partner

No	Questionnaire Question about religious factors	Respondent's answer			
		Disagree	Less agree	Agree	Approved
1.	It is better to get a husband/wife who is good in religion even if not yet established	2	5	9	0
2.	Men/women who are not religion are less appropriate as potential partners	2	1	7	5
3.	A partner who is good in religion is more important than a partner who is beautiful / handsome	1	2	5	8

Based on the results of the questionnaire, the following findings can be concluded: For statement number 1, 9 respondents agreed that a prospective partner who is not financially established is not a problem as long as they have good religious qualities. In statement number 2, 7 respondents agreed and 5 strongly agreed that the right partner is a pious partner. Meanwhile, for statement number 3, the majority of respondents, namely 8 people, strongly agreed that a pious partner is preferred over a partner who is only beautiful or handsome. The results of this questionnaire, when examined further, support the results of the interviews conducted earlier. This finding shows that in considering potential life partners, religious factors occupy a very important and dominant position compared to other factors (Handayani, 2023; Leavitt et al., 2024).

Physical factors

The results of the questionnaire also show that physical factors are also not the main determining factor that determines the happiness of married couples. This can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. Physical factor questionnaire results

No	Questionnaire questions about physical factors	Respondent's answer			
		Disagree	Less agree	Agree	Approved
1.	If you want to choose a partner, you must prioritize the physically perfect	5	10	1	0
2.	A person's happiness is very dependent on the good looks/beauty of a husband and wife	3	10	2	1
3	Having a partner who is not physically perfect can make for an unhappy marriage	8	6	2	0

Based on the questionnaire responses, the results obtained show harmony with the interview findings. Although physical factors are considered important in choosing a partner, most respondents do not consider them as the main factor that determines domestic happiness. However, the questionnaire data also noted that there was one respondent who agreed with the statement that one's happiness depends largely on the good looks or beauty of a partner.

Marital status factor

The questionnaire results also show that marital status is also not the main determining factor that determines the criteria of the expected life partner. This can be seen in the following table:

Table 3. Marital status factor questionnaire results

No	Questionnaire questions about marital status factor	Respondent's answer			
		Disagree	Less agree	Agree	Approved
1.	If you want to choose a partner, you must prioritize the physically perfect one	9	5	0	1
2.	Married to a girl/boy is a guarantee to make a happy household	6	8	1	0
3	Having a partner who has never failed in their household is more important than anything else	10	5	1	0

Based on the questionnaire results, these findings support the interview results, which show that the majority of respondents do not consider maiden or widow status as a major factor in choosing a life partner. However, there was one respondent who viewed this factor as an ideal criterion in choosing a partner, as reflected in the answers given by this respondent (Hariati, 2021).

Fertility factor

The results of the questionnaire also show that fertility is not the main determining factor that determines the happiness of married couples. This can be seen in the following table:

Table 4. Fertility factor questionnaire results

No	Questionnaire questions about fertility factor	Respondent's answer			
		Disagree	Less agree	Agree	Approved
1.	Married couples who do not have offspring do not live a happy life	5	10	1	0
2.	Fertility of the couple is the main factor to be considered in choosing a partner	4	8	3	1

3	The most important thing in marriage is to have children	3	12	1	0
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Based on the results of the questionnaire, the majority of respondents, namely 10 people, disagreed with the statement that married couples who do not have children cannot live happily. However, there was one respondent who viewed fertility as the most dominant aspect that should be considered in choosing a life partner.

Wealth factor

The questionnaire results also show that there are 3 questions/statements in the questionnaire related to the wealth factor, which can be seen in the following table:

Table 5. Wealth factor questionnaire results

No	Questionnaire questions about wealth factor	Respondent's answer			
		Disagree	Less agree	Agree	Approved
1.	Someone who does not have a steady job should not get married first	1	10	2	3
2.	The level of stability of the couple will determine the happiness after marriage	5	6	3	2
3	Wealth and work can be found after marriage so there is no need to worry about it	1	2	5	7

Based on the results of the questionnaire, the majority of respondents, namely 10 people, disagreed with the statement that someone who does not have a permanent job should not get married first, while one other person strongly disagreed. This shows that a steady job is not the main factor considered by respondents in the decision to get married. However, there were three respondents who strongly agreed and two respondents who agreed with the statement, indicating a diversity of views.

For the second statement, six respondents disagreed and five respondents disagreed that wealth determines a couple's happiness after marriage. In contrast, three respondents strongly agreed and two respondents agreed with this statement. However, the majority of respondents, seven, strongly agreed that wealth and jobs can be found after marriage, so there is no need to worry too much. This indicates that although wealth and employment are taken into consideration, they are not the dominant factors in marriage decisions according to the majority of respondents.

Based on the research results that have been presented, when analyzed using the theories of *fiqh munakahat*, the considerations made by informants in choosing prospective spouses can be considered as natural. This is because the Sharia, through the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah, provides advice and guidance on how to choose an ideal partner without setting it as an absolute obligation. Thus, the factors used as guidelines in choosing a partner are entirely left to individual desires and preferences, as long as they do not conflict with the purpose of marriage in Islam (Bahrami-Rad, 2021; Jauhari, 2019; Nisa, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Determining criteria in choosing a life partner is very important. It is important to know what kind of criteria are desired by Muslim teenagers today. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that there has not been a

significant shift in the criteria for life partners expected by Muslim teenagers today in the midst of advances in time and technology. The results of this study reveal that there are 5 factors used by Muslim teenagers as criteria for choosing a life partner. The most dominant factor is the religious factor where out of all informants there are 8 informants who make religious factors the most important consideration in choosing a life partner. The interesting thing is that of the 8 people, 6 are male santri informants. Another factor, namely the job factor, ranks second where as many as 5 informants make it the most important benchmark, while the fertility factor and the girl/boy factor are the least factors where only 1 informant makes each of them a factor for choosing a life partner.

There is something very interesting that the author found and can be used as material for future researchers who want to research in the same field, namely the difference between male teenagers and female teenagers in choosing the dominant factor in determining the criteria for life partners. Perhaps it can be studied more deeply with the help of other disciplines that what factors influence the differences in consideration of male and female adolescents in determining their life partners. It is also interesting to further study how religious education can facilitate adolescents' understanding in choosing a partner in accordance with Islamic teachings and family and community values.

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