

## EFFORTS TO BUILD A WOMEN- AND ELDERLY-FRIENDLY MOSQUE: A CASE STUDY AT MASJID AGUNG DARUL FALAH PACITAN

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the initiatives undertaken by Masjid Agung Darul Falah (MADF) in Pacitan to develop a mosque that is inclusive and accommodating for women and the elderly. In communities where religious spaces often marginalize vulnerable groups, mosque-based empowerment models are highly relevant. A mosque should not only serve ritual purposes but also function as a center of social transformation for all members of society. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study method, data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with mosque administrators and congregants, as well as documentation of community activities. The findings indicate that MADF has implemented inclusive programs such as regular religious classes, Qur'anic literacy training, the Bina Lansia (Bilas) initiative, group health exercises, and daily charity activities managed by female congregants. Youth-oriented programs, including weekly discussions, Ngopi Hijrah sessions, and certified Qur'anic literacy (BTA) training, also play a significant role in engaging young women. These results highlight that participatory approaches and collective awareness are crucial in fostering mosques that are friendly to both women and the elderly. The study recommends that this model be replicated in other regions, supported by policy frameworks and institutional capacity development.*

**Keywords:** inclusive mosque, women empowerment, elderly, religious space, case study

### INTRODUCTION

Mosques are religious institutions that play a central role in the spiritual, social, and cultural development of Muslim communities. As places of worship, mosques should ideally accommodate all segments of society without discrimination, including women and the elderly. In this context, a mosque should not only function as a place for congregational prayers but also serve as a center for empowerment, education, and social services that are inclusive and welcoming to all. However, the reality on the ground shows that many mosques in Indonesia are still not fully inclusive toward women and the elderly. This is evident in two main aspects: limited physical facilities and the lack of religious programs specifically designed for these groups. A study by Adha (2024) found that women continue to face limitations in space, access, and participation in mosque activities, especially in areas with conservative religious perspectives (Adha, 2024, repository.ptiq.ac.id). In addition, research by Nisa and Rofiq (2023) revealed that most mosques in both urban and rural areas still lack elderly-friendly facilities such as ramps, prayer chairs, or accessible restrooms (Nisa & Rofiq, 2023, Jurnal Sosial Keagamaan UIN Walisongo).

This condition is further exacerbated by structural biases in mosque management, which often position women merely as complements to religious activities. Women are rarely involved in decision-making and program planning. The elderly are also frequently regarded as passive participants, despite their significant spiritual and social potential. According to Hasanah (2022), elderly individuals who actively engage in religious activities show higher levels of psychological

well-being and serve as spiritual role models for the younger generation (Jurnal Psikologi Islam UIN Sunan Kalijaga).

In response to the need for more inclusive worship spaces, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs launched the Inclusive Mosque Revitalization Program in 2023. This initiative focuses on five key aspects: being friendly to women and children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, environmentally friendly, diversity-friendly, and welcoming to the poor and travelers (Kemenag RI, 2024). The initiative encourages mosques across Indonesia to transform into worship and community spaces that are adaptive to the needs of worshippers across ages and genders. Masjid Agung Darul Falah (MADF) Pacitan is one such mosque that has taken concrete steps toward becoming more inclusive for women and the elderly. In addition to providing proper physical facilities, the mosque has implemented religious and social programs specifically designed for these groups. The Bina Lansia (Bilas) program, for example, includes activities such as: Qur'anic studies after Asr prayer, religious lectures after Fajr prayer, Qur'an recitation after Maghrib, daily rotating Subuh alms donations, Friday charity, daily mosque cleaning duties, thrice-weekly fitness sessions, and charitable support for the underprivileged.

For female youth, MADF organizes activities such as: weekly youth religious study groups, the "Ngopi Hijrah" (Intellectual Talks on Spiritual Transformation) program, Qur'anic learning (TPA) after Maghrib from Monday to Thursday, and certified Qur'anic literacy (BTAQ) training sessions held twice a year. These activities not only strengthen the spiritual capacities of women and the elderly but also foster social solidarity among congregants. The inclusiveness of these programs indicates that the mosque provides space for women and the elderly to actively engage in religious, social, and even managerial aspects of mosque life.

Given the importance of the mosque's role in building an inclusive society that upholds gender and age justice, this study aims to analyze in depth the efforts made by Masjid Agung Darul Falah Pacitan in creating a mosque environment that is friendly to women and the elderly. A case study approach is employed to explore best practices that could be replicated by other mosques across Indonesia. Considering the various programs and activities implemented by Masjid Agung Darul Falah (MADF) Pacitan, it is evident that this mosque functions not only as a formal place of worship but also as a social and educational space open to women and the elderly. However, these achievements are certainly not without challenges, both internally (management and congregant participation) and externally (community and governmental support). Therefore, it is essential to examine in greater depth the strategies applied, the obstacles faced, and the extent to which these programs contribute to the empowerment of women and the elderly within the mosque environment. Based on the above background, the research questions for this study are; What kinds of programs and activities are implemented by Masjid Agung Darul Falah Pacitan in its efforts to become a mosque that is friendly to women and the elderly?, What are the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of women- and elderly-friendly mosque programs at Masjid Agung Darul Falah Pacitan?

## METHODS

### The Mosque as a Center for Community Development

The mosque is a religious institution with a strategic function in nurturing the spiritual, social, and intellectual life of the Muslim community. Historically, the mosque has served not only as a place for performing religious rituals but also as a center for education, social consultation, and community decision-making (Djamil, 2003). Therefore, the mosque is ideally expected to carry out multidimensional functions that are responsive to the needs of congregants from diverse backgrounds.

In the context of contemporary society, the function of the mosque has expanded to become a space for empowerment and social services. This transformation requires mosques to adopt inclusive, adaptive, and just approaches, particularly in serving vulnerable groups such as women and the elderly.

### Gender Perspective in Mosque Management

The concept of gender equality in Islam has a strong normative foundation. The Prophet Muhammad SAW stated, *"Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim, male and female"* (HR. Ibnu Majah). However, in religious practices across many regions, women's access to mosques remains limited, particularly in terms of space, roles, and participation in decision-making processes. According to Syarha (2022), a women-friendly mosque is a place of worship and da'wah that provides appropriate physical facilities, ensures comfort, and allows active participation of women in mosque activities and management. This approach aligns with the principle of *justice-based inclusivity*, which advocates that the management of public spaces, including mosques, should not marginalize any group based on gender. By adopting a gender-equality-based approach, the mosque does not merely function as a place of worship, but also as a platform for women's empowerment in the domains of knowledge, social engagement, and spirituality.

**Inclusive Services for the Elderly in Islamic and Social Perspectives**  
The elderly hold a vital position within the structure of society. In Islam, honoring parents and elders is a noble act that is highly emphasized, as stated by the Prophet Muhammad SAW: *"He is not one of us who does not show mercy to the young and does not honor the elderly"* (HR. Ahmad). Moreover, the elderly have the potential to serve as spiritual mentors and sources of wisdom whose roles should be optimized. Services for the elderly within the mosque context should include the provision of age-friendly physical facilities, the design of activities suited to the physical and psychological conditions of the elderly, and recognition of their existence as integral members in the development of the mosque community. Nasution (2021) explains that active participation of the elderly in social and religious activities significantly enhances their quality of life and psychosocial well-being. Therefore, an elderly-friendly mosque is one that can adjust to the needs of its senior congregants and empower them in social and spiritual spaces on a continuous basis.

### Inclusive Mosques and Social Justice Theory

The concept of an inclusive mosque is grounded in the theory of social justice, which emphasizes the importance of equitable and equal access to public spaces and services. This principle asserts that every individual, without exception, has the right to equally benefit from social and

religious institutions, including mosques. In this context, the mosque is not only a symbol of worship but also a medium for realizing human values and social justice. The *Inclusive Mosque Revitalization Program* initiated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2024) is a concrete effort to integrate inclusivity principles into mosque management. The program focuses on five key indicators: being friendly to women and children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, environmentally friendly, inclusive of diversity, and supportive of the poor and travelers. This model of mosque development aligns with the spirit of Islam as a religion of mercy for all (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*) that is inclusive and transformative.

### Research Objectives

This study aims to describe the types of programs and activities carried out by Masjid Agung Darul Falah Pacitan in its efforts to create a mosque that is welcoming to women and the elderly. Additionally, it seeks to analyze the supporting and inhibiting factors in implementing these inclusive mosque programs.

### Literature Review

Several previous studies have made important contributions to the understanding of this topic. Research by Zulfikar (2022) in the *Al-Qalam Journal* shows that women's participation in mosque activities is still limited due to non-inclusive space design and minimal involvement of women in mosque management structures. A similar concern was raised by Rohmah (2023) in her undergraduate thesis at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, which emphasized the need for mosques to provide empowerment programs tailored to the needs of women and the elderly, including da'wah activities, skills training, and basic health services. Meanwhile, a study by Sari and Aminah (2023) in the *Sosialita Islamika Journal* found that mosques that provide dedicated spaces and activities for the elderly—such as health exercises, regular religious study, and counseling services—tend to form cohesive and harmonious congregational communities.

Another study by Wahyuni (2024) examined the *Bina Lansia* program as a model of spiritual and social development for the elderly in urban mosques across East Java. Her findings indicate that consistent and structured activities for the elderly significantly contribute to increased happiness and emotional well-being among participants. These studies highlight the urgent need to develop mosque models that are inclusive of women and the elderly as part of the broader transformation of mosques into public spaces that are inclusive, participatory, and human-centered.

### Conceptual Framework

This research is built on the understanding that the mosque holds a strategic role not only as a place of worship but also as a social institution capable of addressing contemporary challenges, including gender justice and the protection of vulnerable groups such as the elderly. The approach to creating a women- and elderly-friendly mosque combines Islamic theological perspectives with theories of social justice and inclusive public service. Conceptually, a women-friendly mosque should provide appropriate prayer spaces, religious programs that actively involve women, and opportunities for participation in mosque governance. Meanwhile, an elderly-friendly mosque is characterized by safe and comfortable physical access, age-appropriate developmental activities, and

appreciation of the elderly's existence as bearers of spiritual values.

Masjid Agung Darul Falah (MADF) Pacitan serves as a relevant object of study due to its role as a religious center that actively involves women and the elderly. Activities such as *Bina Lansia* (elderly development), *Kitab* study sessions, *Sedekah Subuh* (pre-dawn charity), health exercise programs, and certified Qur'anic literacy training (BTA) for young women reflect real efforts to create a more inclusive religious and social space. This research aims to understand the extent to which these programs are designed, implemented, and received by the mosque community, as well as to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in their successful implementation. Therefore, the conceptual framework of this research is based on the relationship between the social function of the mosque, the principles of inclusivity, and efforts to empower the community through the active participation of women and the elderly in mosque life.

### Research Design

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study type. The qualitative approach is chosen to explore an in-depth understanding of the efforts made by *Masjid Agung Darul Falah* (MADF) Pacitan in creating a mosque that is friendly to women and the elderly. A case study type is selected because the research focuses on understanding a phenomenon occurring in a specific location, namely MADF, as a representation of mosque management that accommodates the needs of vulnerable groups in society, particularly women and the elderly. Using this approach, the research aims to uncover the experiences, understanding, and challenges faced in the implementation of gender- and age-friendly mosque programs. This approach is based on qualitative research design theory as described by Creswell (2018), who states that qualitative research provides a deep understanding of the phenomena being studied.

### Research Location

The research is conducted at *Masjid Agung Darul Falah* (MADF) Pacitan, located in the city center of Pacitan, East Java. MADF is chosen as the research site because it offers various religious and social programs involving women and the elderly, such as *Bina Lansia* (Elderly Guidance), *kitab* studies, *taklim* (Islamic teachings), healthy exercise, and Qur'anic literacy training. Its role as a center of religious and social activities that engages both groups makes it a representative site for analyzing the implementation of inclusivity practices within the mosque space.

### Research Subjects

The research subjects consist of three main groups of informants; Mosque Management: Including daily administrators and program coordinators who are involved in designing and managing programs for women and the elderly. Female Congregants: Women who are actively involved in mosque activities, such as religious studies, *taklim*, and other social programs. Elderly Congregants: Elderly individuals who participate in the *Bina Lansia* (*Bilas*) program and other religious activities held at the mosque. Participants are selected using purposive sampling, selecting informants who have direct knowledge and relevance to the programs being studied. The estimated number of informants is around 15–20 people, including mosque staff, female congregants, and elderly congregants.

### Data Collection Techniques

Data for this study is collected using three main techniques; In-Depth Interviews. Interviews are conducted with mosque management, program coordinators, as well as active female and elderly congregants. The aim is to explore their understanding regarding the goals, implementation, challenges, and impacts of the mosque's women- and elderly-friendly programs. Semi-structured interviews are used, allowing flexibility for deeper exploration of experiences and perceptions. This technique refers to the method discussed by Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey (2020), which emphasizes the importance of informant engagement in providing rich insights into social phenomena.

Participant Observation. The researcher observes mosque activities such as *kitab* studies, healthy exercise sessions, Qur'anic literacy training, and *Bina Lansia (Bilas)* programs. A participatory observation approach is used, where the researcher not only observes but also interacts directly with participants in some of the activities to gain a deeper understanding of the social dynamics and the participation of women and the elderly. This method aligns with the reflective and in-depth observational approach described by Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2020).

Documentation. The researcher collects documents related to mosque activities, such as activity reports, meeting minutes, study materials, and photo/video documentation of programs for women and the elderly. Documentation supports interview and observation data by providing further context on program implementation. Sugiyono (2019) explains that data collection through documentation can provide strong and objective information in qualitative research.

### Data Analysis Techniques

The data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation are analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis process consists of several stages; Transcription and Coding: Transcription of interviews and observational notes is conducted to facilitate data analysis. The data is then coded based on themes relevant to the research objectives, such as women-friendly programs, elderly programs, and the challenges and supports in their implementation. Theme Identification: Main themes emerging from the data will be identified, such as types of activities, encountered obstacles, and factors influencing the success or failure of program implementation. Interpretation: The grouped data will be further analyzed to identify emerging patterns. This analysis is carried out by comparing the findings with the theories discussed in the literature review and previous research results. This thematic analysis approach follows the framework described by Creswell (2018). The results of this analysis will be presented in the form of descriptive narratives, offering a clear picture of MADF's efforts to create a mosque that is inclusive for women and the elderly, as well as the factors influencing its successes and challenges in implementation.

### Data Validity and Reliability

To ensure data validity and reliability, this research uses several strategies; Source Triangulation: To ensure data accuracy and reliability, information gathered from interviews is verified with various informants and data sources, including observations and documentation. Hennink et al. (2020) recommend triangulation to ensure consistency in findings. Member Check: After interviews are conducted, the transcribed results will be returned to the informants for

confirmation to ensure the information provided is accurate and reflects reality. Procedural Rigor: All data collection procedures are carried out systematically and in a structured manner to avoid bias in the research process. Every step in this research is documented in detail to ensure consistency and transparency.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Description of Women- and Elderly-Friendly Programs at Masjid Agung Darul Falah (MADF) Pacitan

Masjid Agung Darul Falah (MADF) Pacitan has implemented various programs aimed at creating an inclusive mosque environment for women and the elderly. These programs encompass religious, social, and empowerment activities, such as Bina Lansia (Elderly Guidance), *kitab* studies, *taklim* (Islamic teachings), healthy exercise sessions, dawn charity (sedekah subuh), and Qur'anic literacy training. The Bina Lansia program focuses on religious studies and physical exercise, helping to improve the physical and mental well-being of elderly participants.

According to the mosque administrators, one of the key efforts in making the mosque women- and elderly-friendly is providing dedicated spaces that allow both groups to actively participate in various activities without feeling marginalized. For instance, in the Bina Lansia program, elderly participants not only receive religious lessons but are also engaged in physical activities such as healthy exercise, which is held three times a week.

### Participation of Women and the Elderly in Mosque Programs

The participation of women and the elderly in mosque programs shows a significant level of engagement. Based on interviews with several female congregants, the majority of them feel that they have been given space to contribute to *taklim* and religious study sessions. The Qur'anic literacy training program, held twice a year, is also highly favored by women at MADF, as it aims to enhance their Qur'anic reading and writing skills.

Meanwhile, the elderly who participate in the Bina Lansia (Elderly Guidance) activities show high enthusiasm, particularly in the healthy exercise sessions. Although some of them face physical limitations, they feel more motivated to maintain their health through the activities organized at the mosque. According to participatory observation, most elderly participants believe they gain substantial benefits both physically and socially. They expressed that through these activities, they are able to maintain their health and interact with fellow seniors, which helps strengthen their social bonds.

### Challenges in Implementing Women- and Elderly-Friendly Programs

Although the existing programs have shown positive outcomes, there are several challenges faced by the mosque administrators in implementing women- and elderly-friendly initiatives. One of the main challenges is the limited physical facilities at the mosque, particularly spaces designated for women's and elderly activities. Some women and elderly participants have expressed that the available space is still insufficient, making it difficult at times to accommodate all participants comfortably, especially during large gatherings. Another challenge is the limited human resources available to manage and coordinate these activities. Programs such as Bina Lansia (Elderly Guidance)

and women-focused initiatives require facilitators with expertise in working with elderly and female participants. As a result, not all programs can be run optimally due to a lack of qualified instructors or administrators. Nevertheless, the mosque administrators continue to strive to overcome these challenges by collaborating with the local community, improving facilities, and involving more volunteers to support the implementation of the programs.

### **Success of Women- and Elderly-Friendly Programs at MADF Pacitan**

Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that the women- and elderly-friendly programs at Masjid Agung Darul Falah (MADF) have successfully created an inclusive environment that supports the active participation of both groups in religious and social activities. One of the most significant achievements is the increased engagement of women and the elderly in religious activities, such as Islamic study circles (*kajian kitab*) and Qur'an recitation sessions, which ultimately strengthen their religious understanding and foster social bonds among them.

For example, the Bina Lansia (Elderly Guidance) program not only helps elderly participants maintain their physical health through regular exercise but also provides opportunities for them to engage in other religious and social activities, thereby strengthening relationships among elderly community members. This program reflects the mosque's recognition of the role of the elderly in the community and appreciates their contributions to social life. In addition, the Qur'anic literacy training program held annually has also shown a positive impact, especially for women, by enhancing their Qur'anic reading skills and religious knowledge. This finding aligns with the research of Sitti Nurul Adha (2021), which shows that empowering women in the mosque setting can significantly improve their religious understanding and active participation in the community.

Based on the findings, this study confirms previous research on the importance of mosques as inclusive spaces for women and the elderly. As stated by Maftuhin (2021), mosques play a significant role in the empowerment of women and the elderly, particularly through the development of programs that are tailored to their specific needs and challenges. The success of MADF Pacitan in implementing women- and elderly-friendly programs reflects mosque management that is responsive to the needs of its congregation, and highlights its contribution to strengthening both the social and religious aspects of the community. However, this study also reveals that the challenges faced by mosques in creating inclusive programs for women and the elderly—such as limited facilities and human resources—need to be addressed in order for these programs to run more effectively and optimally. As emphasized by Alvesson & Sköldberg (2020), regular evaluation of program implementation and improvements in management quality are crucial to ensure sustainability and maximize positive impact.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study reveals that Masjid Agung Darul Falah (MADF) Pacitan has initiated and implemented various significant programs aimed at creating a mosque environment that is welcoming to women and the elderly. Programs such as Bina Lansia (Bilas), Qur'anic studies, religious talks (*taklim*), health exercises, Qur'anic literacy training, and the strengthening of women's roles in socio-religious activities reflect a genuine commitment by the mosque's management to establish the mosque as an inclusive and transformative public space.

Substantively, MADF not only facilitates ritual worship, but has also transformed into a center of socio-religious activity that addresses the physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being of its congregation—especially for groups often marginalized in religious public spaces, namely women and the elderly. This aligns with the concept of the mosque as a *center of empowerment*, a notion widely discussed in contemporary studies on progressive and gender-just religious spaces (Adha, 2021; Maftuhin, 2021).

However, this study also found that despite many positive achievements, several challenges remain, such as the lack of adequate physical space for women and elderly groups, and limitations in human resources to implement the programs. These challenges require immediate response through long-term strategic planning, including active involvement of the local community and stakeholders in mosque management. Thus, it can be concluded that MADF Pacitan's efforts in building a women- and elderly-friendly mosque serve as a practical model worth replicating in other mosques, especially in regions with similar socio-religious characteristics. Empowering vulnerable groups through the mosque not only enhances their participation in worship and religious studies but also strengthens their social roles in community life more holistically.

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