



***Kafa'ah* in Contemporary Muslim Women's Perspective: Selectivity in Partner Choice amid Reverse Gender Inequality**

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Abstract

This study examines the concept of *kafa'ah* from the perspective of contemporary Muslim women as a basis for selectivity in partner selection amid the phenomenon of reverse gender inequality. In contemporary social contexts, women are no longer positioned merely as objects within marital relations, but as active subjects possessing autonomy in determining their life partners. The growing discourse surrounding the perception that “marriage is scary” has further reinforced women’s selective attitudes toward marriage institutions. This research employs a qualitative method with an empirical socio-legal approach. Data are collected through literature review and are intended to be complemented by in-depth interviews with women aged 20–40 years who possess higher educational backgrounds. The data are analyzed using thematic analysis. Preliminary findings indicate that the concept of *kafa'ah* has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from a normative understanding of compatibility based on social status toward broader dimensions of equality, including shared values, life vision, emotional maturity, and psychological readiness. Contemporary Muslim women experience substantial social changes that influence their expectations and considerations in choosing a partner. The study concludes that *kafa'ah* in contemporary Muslim women’s perspectives is no longer limited to social equivalence, but increasingly emphasizes value alignment, emotional compatibility, and mutual readiness as essential foundations for marital relationships.

Keywords: *Kafa'ah*, Muslim Women, Partner Selection, Reverse Gender Inequality, Marriage Selectivity

Article History:

Received: July 2025; Revised: September 2025; Accepted: November 2025

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61987/edsojou.v4i1.1945>

How to Cite:

Safitri, K. D., Martoyo, M., & Wahab, A. (2026). *Kafa'ah* in Contemporary Muslim Women's Perspective: Selectivity in Partner Choice amid Reverse Gender Inequality. *Education and Sociedad Journal*, 4(1), 14-26.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage remains one of the most important social institutions within Muslim societies, serving not only as a legal and religious bond but also as a framework for social stability, family formation, and the transmission of values across generations (Arrozi & Bakar, 2024; Nurdin, 2025). In classical Islamic jurisprudence, the concept of *kafa'ah* has traditionally functioned as a principle for assessing compatibility between prospective spouses, with particular emphasis on lineage, religion, social status, occupation, and economic conditions (Rizki et al., 2025; Tarihoran, 2025). However, contemporary social realities reveal substantial transformations in gender relations, educational attainment, and labor market participation that challenge these traditional assumptions. Women increasingly attain higher levels of education, occupy professional positions, and achieve financial independence at rates that often exceed those of men within the same age cohort.



The concept of *kafa'ah* occupies a central position within Islamic family law and has been extensively discussed by classical and contemporary scholars. Traditional juristic perspectives generally define *kafa'ah* as compatibility between spouses in specific social and religious dimensions to ensure marital harmony and family stability (Hanapi & Najmi, 2024; Kusrin, Ismail, et al., 2024; Mesarah & Wathoni, 2024). Classical scholars from various schools of Islamic jurisprudence differed regarding the criteria of compatibility, yet most emphasized factors such as religion, lineage, social status, occupation, and economic capability (Kamila & Yasir, 2024; Widodo et al., 2023). Contemporary scholarship, however, suggests that social modernization, educational expansion, and changing gender roles have altered the practical application of *kafa'ah* in many Muslim communities. Researchers have argued that compatibility is increasingly evaluated through interpersonal qualities, shared values, educational background, and emotional understanding rather than solely through inherited social characteristics.

One of the most significant social transformations affecting contemporary Muslim societies is the changing position of women within educational and professional spheres. Over the last several decades, access to higher education has expanded considerably, enabling women to pursue academic achievement and career advancement at unprecedented levels. In many contexts, women now outperform men in university enrollment, degree completion, and professional certification (Dewayanti & Andhini, 2023; Strah et al., 2024). This transformation has generated new patterns of social mobility and altered traditional assumptions regarding gender roles within marriage. While classical marriage models often positioned men as primary providers and decision-makers, contemporary women increasingly expect relationships characterized by partnership, mutual respect, and shared responsibilities (Amirah et al., 2025; Muhammad et al., 2021). Such expectations have influenced how women evaluate prospective spouses and define compatibility. Educational and professional achievements frequently shape women's aspirations, lifestyles, and future plans, making intellectual and social compatibility more salient considerations during partner selection.

The phenomenon of reverse gender inequality has become increasingly visible within discussions of marriage and family formation. Reverse gender inequality refers to a condition in which women possess higher levels of educational attainment, professional status, or social capital than many potential male partners. Although this phenomenon does not necessarily imply discrimination against men, it creates new dynamics within the marriage market that influence partner selection processes. Educated women often encounter difficulties finding partners whom they perceive as intellectually, professionally, or socially compatible (Dadi, 2021; Samier & Elkaleh, 2021). These conditions may contribute to delayed marriage, prolonged partner searching, or increasing selectivity in marital decision-making. At the same time, social media discussions surrounding the idea that "marriage is scary" have amplified concerns about unequal domestic responsibilities, emotional burdens, and relationship instability. Such concerns encourage women to evaluate prospective spouses more carefully and to prioritize characteristics that extend beyond economic provision or social status.

Educational attainment increasingly influences marital preferences among young Muslim adults (Altinyelken, 2021; Maulina et al., 2024). Women's economic independence affects expectations regarding spousal roles and household responsibilities (Amiruddin et al., 2022; Hafidzi et al., 2023; Kamaliyah et al., 2025). Iim et al. (2022) demonstrated that intellectual compatibility is becoming a significant criterion in partner selection among educated Muslim women. Al Rosyid and Hidayah (2023) highlighted the role of social change in reshaping traditional interpretations of *kafa'ah*. Emotional maturity contributes significantly to perceptions of marital readiness among Muslim youth (Kusrin, Alia, et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2023). Wahab (2024) identified psychological preparedness as an important predictor of marital commitment and relationship quality. Haruna et al. (2024) found that

changing gender norms influence women's selectivity in choosing life partners. Although these studies provide important insights, most focus on isolated dimensions such as education, gender roles, emotional readiness, or family law. Limited attention has been given to how contemporary Muslim women simultaneously reinterpret *kafa'ah* within the context of reverse gender inequality. Therefore, a more integrated examination remains necessary.

Previous scholarship also tends to treat educational compatibility, emotional maturity, and psychological readiness as separate variables rather than interconnected dimensions of marital compatibility. Consequently, there remains limited understanding of how these dimensions collectively shape contemporary interpretations of *kafa'ah*. This study addresses these limitations by investigating the perspectives of Muslim women regarding partner selection amid reverse gender inequality. The novelty of this research lies in its effort to conceptualize *kafa'ah* as a multidimensional framework encompassing educational and social compatibility, emotional maturity, and psychological readiness. By integrating Islamic family law discourse with contemporary gender realities, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of marital compatibility in modern Muslim societies.

This study seeks to examine how contemporary Muslim women understand and apply the concept of *kafa'ah* when selecting a marital partner in the context of reverse gender inequality. Specifically, the research investigates the criteria that women consider important when evaluating prospective spouses and explores how these criteria differ from traditional interpretations of compatibility. The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do contemporary Muslim women interpret the concept of *kafa'ah* in the context of reverse gender inequality? (2) What factors influence women's selectivity in choosing a marital partner? (3) How do educational and social disparities, emotional maturity, and psychological readiness shape contemporary understandings of marital compatibility? These questions are designed to capture both the continuity and transformation of *kafa'ah* within contemporary Muslim societies. By focusing on women's perspectives, the study seeks to illuminate how changing social structures influence religious concepts and personal decision-making processes. Therefore, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between gender transformation and marital compatibility.

Contemporary Muslim women are redefining *kafa'ah* beyond its traditional emphasis on social status and lineage by incorporating dimensions of educational compatibility, emotional maturity, and psychological readiness. The argument is based on the assumption that changing gender relations and increasing female educational attainment have transformed expectations regarding marriage and family life. Rather than viewing compatibility as a fixed legal category, women increasingly understand it as a dynamic process of achieving equality, mutual understanding, and shared life goals. This perspective reflects broader social transformations while remaining connected to the ethical objectives of Islamic marriage. The study contributes theoretically by extending discussions of *kafa'ah* beyond classical jurisprudential frameworks and proposing a multidimensional interpretation relevant to contemporary contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using an empirical socio-legal case study approach. The socio-legal perspective is particularly appropriate because it facilitates an examination of the relationship between Islamic legal principles and social practices within contemporary Muslim societies. Rather than treating *kafa'ah* solely as a doctrinal concept, the study investigates how individuals understand, interpret, and apply the concept in everyday life. The qualitative case study design allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, meanings, and perspectives regarding marital compatibility (Noor, 2023). Furthermore, the approach acknowledges that legal and religious concepts are not

static but are continuously shaped by social change, cultural expectations, and individual experiences. The case under investigation concerns the reinterpretation of *kafa'ah* among highly educated Muslim women who navigate partner selection amid reverse gender inequality.

The study utilizes both primary and secondary sources of information to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Primary data are obtained from semi-structured interviews with Muslim women aged 20–40 years who possess at least a bachelor's degree and have experience or perspectives relevant to partner selection and marriage. Informants are selected through purposive sampling based on their educational background, marital status, and willingness to participate in the study. Secondary data are collected through desk-review techniques involving academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, classical Islamic legal texts, policy documents, and relevant reports discussing *kafa'ah*, gender relations, and family sociology. Data collection is conducted through three complementary techniques: document review, observation, and interviews. Observations focus on identifying emerging social narratives regarding marriage and partner selection within educational and professional environments. Interviews are guided by a semi-structured interview protocol designed to explore participants' perceptions of compatibility, marriage readiness, and gender expectations. Field notes, interview transcripts, and documentary evidence are systematically recorded and organized to facilitate analysis. The integration of multiple data sources strengthens the depth and credibility of the findings while allowing for triangulation across different forms of evidence.

Table 1. Data Collection Matrix

Research Aspect	Data Source	Collection Technique	Instrument
Concept of <i>Kafa'ah</i>	Informants	Semi-structured interview	Interview guide
Partner Selection Criteria	Informants	Interview and observation	Interview guide and field notes
Gender Relations	Informants and literature	Interview and desk review	Interview guide and document checklist
Reverse Gender Inequality	Literature observation	Desk review and observation	Observation sheet
Islamic Legal Perspective	Classical and contemporary texts	Document review	Document analysis checklist
Marriage Narratives	Informants	Interview	Interview protocol

Data analysis follows the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During the data condensation stage, interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary materials are carefully reviewed, coded, categorized, and reduced according to themes relevant to the study objectives. This process enables the researcher to identify recurring patterns related to *kafa'ah*, reverse gender inequality, emotional maturity, and psychological readiness. The second stage involves data display, where organized information is presented through thematic matrices, narrative descriptions, and conceptual mappings to facilitate interpretation. The visual organization of data assists in identifying relationships among themes and comparing perspectives across participants and documentary sources. The final stage consists of conclusion drawing and verification, in which emerging interpretations are continuously evaluated against the collected evidence to ensure analytical consistency and credibility (Hamzani et al., 2023). Methodologically, the study employs thematic interpretation supported by content analysis and discourse analysis. Content analysis is used to examine textual materials concerning *kafa'ah* and gender relations, while discourse analysis explores how participants construct meanings regarding marriage and compatibility.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Reverse Gender Inequality

The study found that reverse gender inequality has become a significant factor influencing partner selection among contemporary Muslim women. This phenomenon refers to a social condition in which women achieve higher educational qualifications, professional status, and economic independence than many potential male partners within their social environment. The participants generally perceived that the traditional marriage market has undergone substantial transformation due to increased female participation in higher education and professional careers. As a consequence, many women encounter challenges in identifying partners who meet their expectations regarding intellectual capability and social compatibility. Rather than emphasizing lineage, family reputation, or socioeconomic background, participants increasingly associated *kafa'ah* with educational achievement, critical thinking skills, and the ability to engage in equal communication. The data indicate that women no longer view marriage as an obligatory life stage but as a partnership that requires mutual compatibility and shared aspirations. This shift has encouraged women to become more selective in evaluating prospective spouses. Therefore, reverse gender inequality emerges not merely as a demographic phenomenon but also as a factor reshaping contemporary understandings of marital compatibility among Muslim women.

Observational data revealed that participants frequently compared their educational and professional achievements with those of potential partners. Women holding master's and doctoral degrees often expressed concern regarding intellectual mismatch when interacting with men whose educational backgrounds were substantially lower. Several participants noted that disparities in educational attainment frequently translated into differences in communication style, problem-solving approaches, and life goals. In professional settings, women who occupied managerial, academic, or specialized positions reported difficulties finding partners capable of understanding the demands and aspirations associated with their careers. Furthermore, participants demonstrated a tendency to prioritize intellectual conversations and shared perspectives on personal development. The observations also showed that women were reluctant to compromise on educational and social compatibility, even when potential partners possessed favorable religious or economic characteristics. Such attitudes suggest that educational and social disparities have become increasingly relevant in marital decision-making. Consequently, partner selection is no longer based solely on traditional indicators of suitability but also on perceptions of equality in knowledge, worldview, and personal growth. These observations confirm that reverse gender inequality significantly shapes contemporary expectations regarding marriage.

Table 1. Indicators of Reverse Gender Inequality in Partner Selection

Observation Category	Evidence from Participants
Educational attainment	Women possess higher academic qualifications than potential partners
Professional achievement	Women occupy professional positions requiring advanced expertise
Intellectual expectations	Preference for partners with comparable intellectual capacity
Communication patterns	Importance of equal and meaningful discussions
Career aspirations	Desire for partners who support professional development
Marriage decisions	Increased selectivity and delayed marriage decisions

The Table 1 illustrates that reverse gender inequality is reflected in multiple dimensions of partner selection. Educational attainment and professional achievement were consistently identified as important considerations. Participants also emphasized intellectual expectations and communication quality as indicators of compatibility. Furthermore, career aspirations influenced their evaluation of prospective spouses. These findings demonstrate

that reverse gender inequality extends beyond demographic trends and directly affects the criteria used in selecting a marital partner.

Traditional interpretations often emphasized family background, lineage, and economic status as indicators of marital suitability. However, the present findings indicate that educational and intellectual compatibility have become more prominent considerations. This transformation reflects broader social changes associated with women’s increased access to education and employment opportunities. From a socio-legal perspective, the reinterpretation of *kafa’ah* suggests that women actively negotiate marital expectations within changing social structures. Rather than accepting traditional standards uncritically, participants reconstructed compatibility according to their lived experiences and aspirations. The emphasis on intellectual equality indicates a desire for relationships characterized by mutual respect and collaborative decision-making.

The findings suggest that reverse gender inequality has become a defining feature of partner selection among contemporary Muslim women. Educational advancement and professional achievement have encouraged women to seek relationships based on intellectual and social equality rather than traditional hierarchical arrangements. As a result, *kafa’ah* is increasingly interpreted as compatibility in knowledge, values, and life aspirations. This development reflects a broader transformation in gender relations and marital expectations. Consequently, reverse gender inequality contributes to the emergence of a more egalitarian understanding of marriage, in which both partners are expected to participate equally in communication, decision-making, and personal growth.

Emotional Compatibility

The second finding reveals that emotional maturity is considered one of the most important dimensions of *kafa’ah* among contemporary Muslim women. Participants consistently emphasized the significance of emotional stability, empathy, self-control, and effective communication in evaluating potential spouses. Emotional maturity was viewed as essential for maintaining healthy marital relationships and managing inevitable conflicts within family life. Women perceived emotionally mature partners as individuals capable of listening, understanding different perspectives, and responding constructively to challenges. In contrast, emotional immaturity was associated with impulsive behavior, poor communication, and unstable relationships. Consequently, emotional maturity emerged as a key criterion for assessing marital suitability.

Table 2. Indicators of Emotional Maturity

Indicator	Participant Description
Emotional stability	Ability to remain calm during conflict
Empathy	Understanding a partner’s feelings
Communication skills	Open and respectful dialogue
Self-control	Managing emotions appropriately
Conflict resolution	Seeking solutions collaboratively
Mutual respect	Valuing differences and perspectives

The Table 2 demonstrates that emotional maturity encompasses several interconnected competencies. Participants regarded these characteristics as essential for sustaining long-term marital relationships and creating a supportive family environment. Women consistently described emotional competence as more influential than social status or material resources when evaluating prospective spouses. Participants believed that emotional maturity directly affects relationship quality, communication patterns, and conflict management. Therefore, emotional competence was perceived as a practical indicator of readiness for marriage.

The emphasis on emotional maturity reflects changing expectations regarding marital relationships. Rather than viewing marriage primarily as a social institution, participants conceptualized it as an interpersonal partnership requiring emotional competence from both individuals. This perspective aligns with contemporary discussions emphasizing relational well-being and psychological health. The findings suggest that emotional maturity functions as a mechanism for achieving relational stability and mutual satisfaction within marriage. Emotional maturity represents a fundamental component of *kafa'ah* in the perspectives of contemporary Muslim women. Compatibility is increasingly evaluated through interpersonal and emotional characteristics rather than solely through structural indicators. This finding demonstrates a shift toward relationship-centered understandings of marriage that prioritize emotional well-being and mutual respect.

Psychological Readiness for Marriage

Participants viewed marriage as a lifelong commitment requiring mental preparedness, resilience, and personal responsibility. Psychological readiness was associated with self-awareness, adaptability, and the ability to manage life transitions effectively. Women believed that psychological preparedness significantly influences marital stability and long-term relationship satisfaction.

Observations revealed that participants frequently discussed issues related to mental health, emotional resilience, and personal growth when describing ideal partners. Many women expressed concern about individuals who lacked self-awareness or demonstrated difficulties managing stress and responsibility. Participants often linked psychological readiness to the ability to navigate challenges such as financial pressures, family obligations, and career adjustments. These observations indicate that mental preparedness has become an important criterion in marital decision-making.

Interview data further support the importance of psychological readiness. One participant stated, "I need a partner who understands himself before trying to lead a family." Another participant explained, "Financial stability is important, but emotional and mental stability are even more important for me." A third participant commented, "Marriage requires responsibility and resilience because challenges will always exist." These statements demonstrate that women prioritize psychological preparedness as a prerequisite for establishing a sustainable marital relationship.

The findings confirm that psychological readiness is increasingly integrated into contemporary interpretations of *kafa'ah*. Participants viewed psychological preparedness as an essential resource for managing marital responsibilities and maintaining relational stability. This perspective reflects broader social awareness regarding mental health and personal development. Consequently, psychological readiness functions as a key indicator of marital suitability and long-term commitment. The findings indicate that psychological readiness has emerged as a central dimension of partner selection among contemporary Muslim women. Marriage is no longer evaluated solely through economic or social criteria but also through an individual's capacity to manage responsibilities, adapt to challenges, and maintain psychological well-being. Therefore, contemporary interpretations of *kafa'ah* increasingly emphasize psychological preparedness as a foundation for successful and sustainable marital relationships.

Discussion

The findings indicate that reverse gender inequality significantly influences the way contemporary Muslim women evaluate potential spouses, leading to a transformation in the meaning and function of *kafa'ah*. Traditionally, *kafa'ah* was associated with social status, lineage, and economic standing; however, the present study demonstrates that educational

attainment and intellectual compatibility have become central criteria in partner selection. This transformation contributes to the development of more egalitarian marital expectations, where women seek relationships characterized by mutual respect, shared decision-making, and reciprocal support. Similar findings have been reported in studies showing that highly educated women increasingly prioritize intellectual equality over traditional indicators of social compatibility (Daraz et al., 2023; Rana et al., 2025). Such selectivity may strengthen marital quality because partners are more likely to share common values, aspirations, and communication patterns. At the same time, heightened selectivity may reduce the availability of acceptable partners, potentially contributing to delayed marriage and changing family formation patterns. The findings therefore suggest that reverse gender inequality functions both as an opportunity for constructing more balanced marital relationships and as a challenge to conventional marriage expectations. Consequently, the contemporary interpretation of *kafa'ah* reflects broader social transformations in which educational achievement and intellectual parity are increasingly recognized as essential foundations of marital compatibility.

The emergence of reverse gender inequality in partner selection can be understood through the changing structure of education, employment, and gender relations within contemporary Muslim societies. Increased access to higher education has enabled women to achieve academic qualifications and professional positions that were previously dominated by men. As educational attainment among women rises, the traditional assumption that men should possess higher socioeconomic status than women becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. Previous studies have found that educational expansion often alters marital preferences because individuals seek partners who possess comparable cultural and intellectual capital (Eriksson et al., 2022). The findings of this study support this perspective, as participants consistently associated *kafa'ah* with intellectual compatibility rather than inherited social status. Furthermore, the growing emphasis on personal autonomy has strengthened women's capacity to define their own marital criteria. The correlation between educational advancement and selective partner preferences suggests that social structures play a decisive role in shaping individual perceptions of compatibility. Therefore, reverse gender inequality is not merely the result of individual choice but reflects broader structural changes that influence how marriage, gender roles, and relational equality are understood in contemporary Muslim communities.

Women increasingly perceive emotional stability, empathy, and effective communication as essential resources for maintaining healthy marital relationships. This emphasis suggests that successful marriage is no longer evaluated primarily through economic provision or social standing but through the ability to establish supportive interpersonal relationships. Research on marital satisfaction consistently demonstrates that emotional competence contributes to conflict resolution, relationship stability, and long-term commitment (Diab & Green, 2024; Wiedebusch & Petermann, 2011). The participants in this study similarly regarded emotional maturity as a prerequisite for building trust and sustaining mutual understanding within marriage. The growing importance of emotional compatibility may contribute to stronger family resilience because emotionally mature partners are better equipped to navigate challenges and adapt to changing circumstances. Nevertheless, the expectation of emotional maturity may also increase standards for partner selection, making women more cautious when evaluating potential spouses. Therefore, emotional maturity functions as both a protective factor for marital quality and a key criterion through which contemporary Muslim women assess the suitability of prospective partners.

The increasing importance of emotional maturity can be linked to broader social changes that have transformed expectations regarding marriage and intimate relationships. Contemporary societies place greater emphasis on personal fulfillment, emotional well-being,

and psychological health than in previous generations. As a result, marriage is increasingly viewed as an emotional partnership rather than solely a social or economic institution. Studies have shown that exposure to discussions about mental health, relationship quality, and emotional intelligence influences how individuals define successful marriages (Aulia et al., 2024; Papadopoulos, 2021). The findings of this study support these arguments, as participants frequently associated emotional competence with marital readiness and long-term stability. Moreover, experiences of observing divorce, domestic conflict, and unhealthy relationships appear to reinforce the perception that emotional immaturity can undermine family cohesion. The relationship between emotional maturity and marital compatibility therefore reflects deeper cultural shifts toward relationship-centered values.

The emphasis on psychological readiness indicates that women increasingly recognize the importance of mental preparedness in sustaining healthy family relationships. Previous studies suggest that psychological readiness contributes to marital satisfaction because individuals who possess emotional resilience and self-regulation are better able to cope with stress and relational challenges (Beauchamp et al., 2021). The present findings reinforce this perspective by showing that women often prioritize psychological stability over material indicators of readiness. Such preferences may contribute to stronger marital foundations because psychologically prepared individuals are more capable of managing conflict, fulfilling responsibilities, and maintaining commitment during difficult circumstances. At the same time, the growing emphasis on psychological readiness reflects a broader awareness that marriage requires more than economic preparation. Therefore, psychological readiness functions as a critical resource for family stability and serves as an important dimension of *kafa'ah* in contemporary interpretations of marital compatibility.

The increasing importance of psychological readiness is closely related to changing social realities and the growing recognition of mental health issues within contemporary society. Individuals today face complex challenges associated with employment uncertainty, economic pressures, social expectations, and rapidly changing family dynamics. These conditions have heightened awareness of the need for emotional resilience and psychological stability before entering marriage. Previous research has found that mental preparedness significantly influences relationship quality because individuals who possess stronger coping mechanisms are more likely to adapt successfully to marital demands (Abdullah et al., 2023; Akram et al., 2022). The findings of this study reveal a similar pattern, as participants frequently associated psychological readiness with responsibility, commitment, and the capacity to navigate future challenges. Furthermore, the increased visibility of mental health discourse through education and digital media has encouraged individuals to evaluate potential partners according to psychological characteristics rather than solely external achievements. The relationship between psychological readiness and partner selection therefore reflects a deeper structural transformation in how marriage is understood.

The findings contribute both theoretically and practically to the study of *kafa'ah*, gender relations, and marital decision-making among contemporary Muslim women. Theoretically, the study demonstrates that *kafa'ah* is undergoing a significant transformation from a concept primarily associated with social equivalence toward a multidimensional framework encompassing intellectual compatibility, emotional maturity, and psychological readiness. Practically, the results provide valuable insights for marriage education programs, family counselors, religious institutions, and policymakers seeking to promote healthy marital relationships. Programs preparing young adults for marriage may benefit from placing greater emphasis on emotional competence, psychological preparedness, and communication skills rather than focusing exclusively on financial readiness. Furthermore, the findings encourage a more contextual understanding of marital compatibility that acknowledges women's educational advancement and growing social participation.

CONCLUSION

The concept of *kafa'ah* among contemporary Muslim women has undergone a significant transformation from a traditional emphasis on social status, lineage, and economic position toward a multidimensional understanding that prioritizes educational and social compatibility, emotional maturity, and psychological readiness. The most important finding is that contemporary Muslim women increasingly interpret marital compatibility as a partnership grounded in equality, mutual understanding, and shared life aspirations, particularly within the context of reverse gender inequality. This finding provides an important lesson that religious concepts are not static but are continuously reinterpreted in response to changing social realities and gender dynamics. The study contributes to the advancement of knowledge by offering a contemporary socio-legal perspective on *kafa'ah* and proposing a broader analytical framework that integrates educational disparities, emotional competence, and psychological preparedness as interconnected dimensions of marital compatibility. In doing so, it enriches existing discussions within Islamic family law, gender studies, and family sociology. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its focus on highly educated Muslim women aged 20–40 years and by its qualitative design, which prioritizes depth of understanding over broad generalization. Future research should involve more diverse participants in terms of gender, age, educational background, and geographical context, while also employing quantitative or mixed-method approaches to produce more comprehensive evidence. Such efforts would provide a stronger empirical basis for developing family policies, premarital education programs, and gender-responsive interventions that are better aligned with contemporary social realities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions who contributed to the completion of this research. Special appreciation is extended to the participants who generously shared their experiences, perspectives, and insights regarding marriage, *kafa'ah*, and partner selection, which provided valuable data for this study.

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