

REFRAMING FATHERLESSNESS IN THE DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERE: A *Maqāsid*-Based Reconstruction through *Qawā'id Fiqhīyah*

M. Sa'ad Alfanny, Ach Badri Amin, Ahmad Sholakhuddin Al Af Ghoni

Abstract: The phenomenon of fatherlessness has shifted from the domestic sphere to the digital public space, where social media serves as a medium for articulating personal experiences and fostering collective solidarity. This article analyzes this phenomenon through the lens of *Qawā'id Fiqhīyah* to offer a normative framework that transcends the dominance of conventional psychological and sociological approaches. This study argues that the absence of the father's role can be understood as a non-material social harm (*ḍarar*) that has an impact on the protection of the soul (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) and reason (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*). The results of the analysis show that applying the principles of *al-ḍarar yuzāl* and *dar' al-mafāsīd muqaddam 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ* confirms the urgency of mitigating and providing psychosocial support, including through digital platforms, as part of efforts to reduce harm. At the same time, the principle of *al-'ādah al-muḥakkamah* provides legitimacy for the practice of digital solidarity as a form of contemporary social adaptation. However, this legitimacy remains limited by the principle of non-maleficence (*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*) to prevent the commodification of trauma and the reproduction of new harm. This article concludes that *Qawā'id Fiqhīyah* provides a contextual and comprehensive ethical framework for responding to family crises amid an ever-evolving digital ecosystem.

Keywords: *Fatherlessness*; *Qawā'id Fiqhīyah*; *Maqāsid al-Shari'ah*; Digital Public Space; Islamic Family Law.

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Introduction

The phenomenon of fatherlessness has developed beyond the domestic sphere and has become a complex social problem in modern society. Conceptually, fatherlessness does not only refer to the physical absence of a father due to divorce, death, or work migration, but also includes the weakening of a father's emotional, moral, and social functions in the parenting process.¹ Shifts in family relationship patterns and global economic pressures have contributed to a decline in the intensity of fathers' involvement in their children's lives.² This condition has implications for increased psychological vulnerability, identity crises, and weakened social control within the family unit as the primary institution of society.³

The urgency of this issue is further heightened by rising divorce rates and labor mobility, which have resulted in many children growing up without adequate emotional involvement from their fathers.⁴ From

¹ Michael E. Lamb, *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2004); Leah East, Debra Jackson, and Louise O'Brien, "Disrupted Relationships: Adult Daughters and Father Absence," *Contemporary Nurse* 23, no. 2 (2007): 252–61, <https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.2006.23.2.252>.

² David S. Green, "Fatherlessness: Black Jamaican Mothers' Perspectives," *Journal of Family Issues* 46, no. 10 (2025): 1515–43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X251356263>.

³ Campion Zharima et al., "To Have a Father, Maybe I Was Going to Be a Better Person": A Qualitative Study Exploring the Effects of Biological Father Absence on Young Men in South Africa," *Journal of Applied Youth Studies*, ahead of print, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-025-00181-2>; Paul R. Amato and Cassandra Dorius, "Fathers, Children, and Divorce," in *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (Hoboken, NJ, US: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010), 177–200.

⁴ Nele Havermans, Sarah Botterman, and Koen Matthijs, "Family Resources as Mediators in the Relation between Divorce and Children's School Engagement," *The Social Science Journal* 51, no. 4 (December 2014): 564–79, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2014.04.001>; David S. Green et al., "Multidimensionality and Complexities of Fathering: A Critical Examination of Afro-Jamaican Fathers' Perspectives," *Sex Roles* 81, nos. 9–10 (November 2019): 576–93, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-019-1012-2>.

the perspective of family resilience, this situation poses a serious challenge to the quality of future generations, as the family is the primary foundation for character development and the internalization of moral values.⁵ Thus, fatherlessness can no longer be positioned as a private matter, but rather as a public issue with widespread impact that requires a multidisciplinary approach.⁶

In the contemporary context, the visibility of this phenomenon has been amplified through the development of social media, which functions as a digital public sphere, a space for the articulation of personal experiences and the formation of collective solidarity. The digital space provides a new arena for moral discourse that was previously fragmented in the private sphere.⁷ This shift indicates that the issue of fatherlessness has entered the public discursive domain, demanding normative and structural responses.

However, academic studies on fatherlessness are still dominated by psychological and sociological approaches that focus on the impact on individual development.⁸ There is a gap in the literature linking this socio-digital reality to the normative framework in Islamic legal thought. As a phenomenon with the potential to threaten social stability and mental well-being, fatherlessness requires an analysis grounded in legal principles that can offer a preventive orientation. In this context, the *Qawā'id Fiqhīyah* perspective is relevant to use as a

⁵ Green et al., "Multidimensionality and Complexities of Fathering."

⁶ Leah East, Debra Jackson, and Louise O'Brien, "Father Absence and Adolescent Development: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Child Health Care* 10, no. 4 (December 2006): 283–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367493506067869>.

⁷ Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2013), 182.

⁸ Sara McLanahan, Laura Tach, and Daniel Schneider, "The Causal Effects of Father Absence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 39, no. 1 (July 2013): 399–427, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071312-145704>; Mary K. Shenk et al., "Does Absence Matter?: A Comparison of Three Types of Father Absence in Rural Bangladesh," *Human Nature* 24, no. 1 (2013): 76–110, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-013-9160-5>.

methodological tool for analyzing and formulating a comprehensive normative response.⁹

Within the framework of Islamic law, the absence of a father's role can be categorized as a form of non-material *ḍarar* that has implications for the disruption of the basic objectives of Sharia (*Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*), particularly the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-naḥs*) and reason (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*). The rule of *al-ḍarar yuzāl* affirms the principle that harm must be eliminated, thus opening up space for the legitimacy of social intervention, including through digital support, as a form of mitigation.¹⁰ The principle of *dar' al-mafāsīd muqaddam 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ* prioritizes the prevention of destructive impacts in social policy.¹¹ Meanwhile, the rule of *al-'ādah al-muḥakkamah* provides a normative basis for the adaptation of social media as a supporting instrument in the contemporary social context.¹²

This article aims to fill this academic gap by analyzing the *Qawā'id Fiqhīyah's* response to the phenomenon of *fatherlessness* in the digital public sphere. By integrating sociological realities and Islamic legal principles, this study seeks to offer an adaptive ethical-normative framework to address the family crisis amid the transformation of the digital ecosystem.

The Phenomenon of Fatherlessness in Contemporary Social Dynamics in Indonesia

The phenomenon of fatherlessness in Indonesia reflects the increasingly complex transformation of family structures in the contemporary social landscape.¹³ Conceptually, fatherlessness is no

⁹ Muḥammad Ṣidqī b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Būrṇū, *Al-Wajīz Fī 'Iḍāḥ Qawā'id al-Fiqh al-Kullīyah* (Beirut: Muassasah al-Risalah, 1996), 35.

¹⁰ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Ashbāḥ Wa al-Nazā'ir* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 1983), 83.

¹¹ Wahbah al-Zuḥaylī, *Uṣūl Al-Fiqh al-Islāmī* (Damaskus: Dār al-Fikr, 2006), 124.

¹² al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Ashbāḥ Wa al-Nazā'ir*, 91.

¹³ Evi Muafiah et al., "Discovering the Presence of Fathers: A Study on Fathers' Involvement in Childcare in Madiun Residency," *Ascarya: Journal of Islamic Science, Culture, and Social Studies* 5, no. 2 (December 2025): 237–47, <https://doi.org/10.53754/2ftev555>.

longer understood solely as the physical absence of a father figure due to divorce or death, but also includes psychological absence and a decline in the quality of paternal engagement in the process of shaping a child's character.¹⁴ In the context of accelerated modernization, this condition is a consequence of structural differentiation that separates the economic function of the father from the functions of affection and emotional support.¹⁵ As a result, fathers are often administratively present in the family structure, but not substantively in their children's daily experiences.¹⁶

This condition indicates the fragility of family functions amid the pressures of globalization and economic mobility. Interregional labor migration has led to the emergence of a pattern of long-distance parenting, in which the father-child relationship is mediated by digital communication technology. Although digital media provides a space for virtual interaction, research shows that this mediation is not fully capable of replicating the depth of face-to-face relationships that are essential for the transmission of values and moral authority.¹⁷

In a digital society, paternal relationships risk being reduced to functional communication devoid of affective dimensions.¹⁸ Empirically, this trend shows an increase in the number of children

¹⁴ Yulinda Ashari, "Fatherless in Indonesia and Its Impact on Children's Psychological Development," *Psikoislamika: Jurnal Psikologi dan Psikologi Islam* 15, no. 1 (June 2018): 35, <https://doi.org/10.18860/psi.v15i1.6661>; Michael E. Lamb, *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 15.

¹⁵ Marsel M. Sengkey et al., "Figur Yang Hilang, Keyakinan Yang Terganggu: Tinjauan Literatur Tentang Kepercayaan Diri Anak Fatherless: Penelitian," *Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Dan Riset Pendidikan* 3, no. 4 (June 2025): 5835–40, <https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v3i4.1505>; Sara McLanahan, Laura Tach, and Daniel Schneider, "The Causal Effects of Father Absence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 39, no. 1 (July 2013): 403, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071312-145704>.

¹⁶ Amato and Dorius, "Fathers, Children, and Divorce," 510.

¹⁷ Gonzalo Bacigalupe and Iris Bräuninger, "Emerging Technologies and Family Communication: The Case of International Students," *Contemporary Family Therapy* 39, no. 4 (December 2017): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-017-9437-7>.

¹⁸ Fuchs, *Social Media*, 185.

growing up without active involvement from their fathers, either due to divorce or the degradation of parenting functions.¹⁹

The discourse on “Indonesia as a fatherless country” that has developed in the digital public sphere reflects not only a domestic problem, but also a crisis of collective identity among the younger generation.²⁰ Through social media, the experience of losing a father figure is constructed as a shared narrative that gives rise to digital solidarity and demands a redefinition of men's roles in the family institution to be more responsive to children's emotional needs and psychosocial development.²¹

Narrative of *Fatherlessness* in the Digital Public Sphere: Articulation of Pain and Collective Solidarity

The phenomenon of *fatherlessness* has gained significant visibility on social media in recent years, marking the transformation of a domestic issue into a structured public discourse.²² Social media no longer functions solely as a medium of communication, but as a discursive arena where private experiences are reconstructed into collective issues. In this context, fatherlessness is not only understood as the physical absence of the father figure but also as the weakening of protective functions, moral authority, and affective guidance due to

¹⁹ Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, “Profil Migran Hasil Survei Sosial Ekonomi Nasional 2024,” accessed February 24, 2026, <https://www.bps.go.id/id/publication/2025/10/24/377adcf24286b49052c0fd20/pr ofil-migran-hasil-survei-sosial-ekonomi-nasional-2024.html>.

²⁰ Iryna Culpin et al., “Father Absence and Trajectories of Offspring Mental Health across Adolescence and Young Adulthood: Findings from a UK-Birth Cohort,” *Journal of Affective Disorders* 314 (October 2022): 105, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2022.07.016>.

²¹ Tshogofatso Pearl Ramatsetse and Eleanor Ross, “Understanding the Perceived Psychosocial Impact of Father Absence on Adult Women,” *South African Journal of Psychology* 53, no. 2 (June 2023): 14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463221130194>.

²² Noor Bloemen and David De Coninck, “Social Media and Fear of Missing Out in Adolescents: The Role of Family Characteristics,” *Social Media + Society* 6, no. 4 (October 2020): 2056305120965517, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120965517>.

economic pressures, labor migration, and excessive work intensity.²³ Modernity, with its economic rationality, tends to reduce the father's role to that of a material provider, thereby creating an emotional void in the father-child relationship.²⁴

In Indonesia, accounts such as @fatherless.care, @bicara.project, and Context ID have become platforms for articulating traumatic experiences and spaces for digital solidarity. Through the practice of digital storytelling, the experience of losing a father figure is presented as an "inner wound" that requires social recognition and collective support.²⁵ This process forms a *collective safe space* that functions as a coping mechanism and an arena for the formation of a shared identity.

However, this dynamic also gives rise to the phenomenon of "physical presence, emotional absence," which indicates a crisis of paternal authority in the family. When the moral function of the father is delegitimized, this space tends to be filled by alternative authority figures, including influencers, online communities, and even social media algorithms that construct the value preferences of the younger generation.²⁶ This shift in authority has the potential to lead to the internalization of instant, pragmatic values, thereby creating tension with social norms and religious moral principles.

Thus, the narrative of fatherlessness in the digital public sphere cannot be reduced to a mere expression of individual emotion. It represents a symptom of the legitimacy crisis in contemporary family

²³ Abdul Wahab et al., "Praktik Fatherless Dan Kaitannya Dengan Pengasuhan Anak Dalam Fikih Islam Dan Hukum Perkawinan Di Indonesia," *Mitsaqan Ghalizian* 4, no. 2 (December 2024): 117–25, <https://doi.org/10.33084/mg.v4i2.9042>.

²⁴ Joseph H. Pleck, "Paternal Involvement: Revised Conceptualization and Theoretical Linkages with Child Outcomes," in *The Role of the Father in Child Development, 5th Ed.* (Hoboken, NJ, US: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010), 67.

²⁵ Yuliana Kamalia Putri and Agustina Kusuma Dewi, "Potensi Kampanye Media Sosial Dalam Meningkatkan Pengetahuan Masyarakat Tentang Dampak Fatherless Di Era Transformasi Digital," *CITRAWIRA: Journal of Advertising and Visual Communication* 5, no. 2 (December 2024): 178–84, <https://doi.org/10.33153/citrawira.v5i2.6447>.

²⁶ Sonia Livingstone and Amanda Third, "Children and Young People's Rights in the Digital Age: An Emerging Agenda," *New Media & Society* 19, no. 5 (May 2017): 663, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816686318>.

structures and demands a reconstruction of the father's role that is adaptive to the digital transformation, without losing its ethical and pedagogical functions in shaping the character of the younger generation.

***Qawā'id Fiqhīyah* Analysis of the Phenomenon of Fatherlessness in the Digital Space**

The transformation of the family crisis from the private sphere to the digital public sphere demands a reading of Islamic law that goes beyond classical texts. Fatherlessness in the current era can no longer be reduced to a mere sociological anomaly; it has become a complex contemporary phenomenon. In this context, *Qawā'id Fiqhīyah* (jurisprudence principles) is operationalized not merely as a derivative set of halal-haram laws, but as a normative methodology oriented towards *jalb al-maṣāliḥ* (achieving benefit) and *dar' al-mafāsīd* (preventing harm).

Based on the *Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah* framework, fatherlessness is substantively the loss of paternal functions, which triggers systemic impacts on the psychological stability, moral integrity, and social cohesion of the younger generation. The following analysis examines this phenomenon through five fundamental principles of Islamic jurisprudence:

First, Fatherlessness as a Systemic Threat and the Right to Psychosocial Substitution (*al-Ḍarar Yuzāl*). The principle of *al-ḍarar yuzāl* (all forms of harm/danger must be eliminated) provides the ontological basis that the psychological suffering resulting from the loss of a father figure is a *ḍarar* that demands intervention. From a social fiqh perspective, fatherlessness is classified as a non-material *ḍarar* that directly threatens two main pillars of the *maqāsid* (protection of the soul) and *ḥifẓ al-'aql* (protection of the mind).

Empirically, fatherlessness has a significant correlation with an increased risk of mental disorders, emotional dysregulation, and

deviant behavior in children.²⁷ More specifically, contemporary research shows that adult women who grow up without a father figure are vulnerable to identity crises, feelings of insecurity, and distortions in building interpersonal relationships.²⁸ Therefore, expressing trauma and sharing experiences of fatherlessness on social media should not be immediately judged as acts of spreading shame (*tajassus* or *ghībah*). Rather, normatively, it should be understood as a digital mitigation mechanism. Digital space functions as a catharsis and emotional validation space, oriented toward psychosocial recovery and resilience-building.²⁹ Articulating the wound is the first step in *izālat al-ḍarar* (removing harm).

Second, Evaluative Parameters of Digital Discourse (*Dar' al-Mafāsīd Muqaddam 'alā Jalb al-Maṣāliḥ*). While digital articulation has a cathartic function, public discourse is a double-edged sword. This is where the principle of *dar' al-mafāsīd muqaddam 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ* (repelling harm takes precedence over seeking benefit) operates as a strict evaluative parameter for the direction of digital narratives.

This principle demands that public narratives about fatherlessness focus on preventive efforts against broader destructive impacts (such as clinical depression, juvenile delinquency, and identity crises), rather than on normalizing the neglect of paternal responsibilities. When digital spaces successfully facilitate psychoeducation and prevent adolescents from falling into destructive behavior, they align with the principle of prioritizing the prevention of harm.³⁰ However, this argument also establishes a clear demarcation: if

²⁷ Anna Sarkadi et al., "Fathers' Involvement and Children's Developmental Outcomes: A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies," *Acta Paediatrica* (Oslo, Norway) 97, no. 2 (February 2008): 153–58, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1651-2227.2007.00572.x>.

²⁸ Ramatsetse and Ross, "Understanding the Perceived Psychosocial Impact of Father Absence on Adult Women."

²⁹ John A. Naslund et al., "Social Media and Mental Health: Benefits, Risks, and Opportunities for Research and Practice," *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science* 5, no. 3 (September 2020): 245–57, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-020-00134-x>.

³⁰ Candice L. Odgers and Michaeline R. Jensen, "Annual Research Review: Adolescent Mental Health in the Digital Age: Facts, Fears, and Future Directions,"

digital discourse actually normalizes family dysfunction, justifies narratives of misandry (hatred of men due to paternal trauma), or fuels apathy toward the institution of marriage, then it becomes normatively contradictory. Preventing communal destruction (loss of trust in the family institution) must take precedence over an individual's right to express unbridled anger.

Third, Legitimizing Digital Solidarity as '*Urf Jadid* (*al-ʿĀdah al-Muḥakkama*). Interaction patterns on social media have given rise to forms of kinship and social support that transcend geographical boundaries. The practice of building communities of survivors of dysfunctional families or peer-support groups on digital platforms can be interpreted through the principle of *al-ʿadah al-muḥakkama* (customs can be established as a legal reference).

This principle legitimizes the emergence of '*urf jadid* (new social customs/traditions) in the form of digital solidarity practices. In modern societies where physical kinship (such as the roles of uncles and grandfathers in extended families) is beginning to erode, social media positions itself as an adaptive tool that mediates families' educational and emotional needs. Islamic jurisprudence accommodates this shift in social structure. As long as these digital support practices do not conflict with established Islamic law (*qaṭʿī*), the mutual support interactions among victims of fatherlessness in cyberspace constitute '*urf* (lawful) practices that possess normative power and legitimacy.

Fourth, Technology as a Solution to Limitations (*al-Mashaqqah Tajlib al-Taysir*). The pain of fatherlessness often requires professional psychological intervention. Unfortunately, sociological realities demonstrate the existence of structural barriers: the high cost of therapy, limited geographic access to mental health services, and social stigma against individuals seeking psychiatric help. This situation creates extraordinary hardship for survivors.

In this context, the principle of hardship begets ease (*al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysir*) strengthens the argument that the use of technology—such as online counseling (tele-counseling), anonymous

forums, and access to mental health literacy via social media algorithms—is a legally valid form of *taysir* (ease). The use of technology as a means of support becomes a legitimate form of relief (*rukhsah*) to save the mind and soul when access to conventional support is hampered.

Fifth, Algorithmic Threats and the Ethical Limits of Trauma Commodification (*Lā Ḍarar wa Lā Ḍirār*). Beyond the significance of mitigation and ease of access, the digital ecosystem is driven by the logic of capitalism and attention algorithms. At this point, the principle of *lā Ḍarar wa lā Ḍirār* (no harm, no harm to others) acts as an emergency brake and an ethical boundary that must not be crossed.

Digital discourses about fatherlessness are particularly vulnerable to the commodification of trauma. Social media algorithms tend to prioritize content that triggers high levels of negative emotions (such as crying, conflict, and anger towards parents) to maximize user retention. This phenomenon is supported by Kramer et al.'s (2014) experiment on emotional contagion, which demonstrated that systematic exposure to negative content can algorithmically reproduce depressive emotions in millions of other users.³¹

Based on the principle of *Ḍarar wa lā Ḍirār*, the legitimacy of digital mitigation is invalidated if it becomes a source of new suffering. Exploiting stories of fatherlessness to gain engagement, monetizing trauma, or allowing mass stigmatization of certain parties are forms of *Ḍirār* (actively endangering others). Therefore, the Islamic legal framework demands strict ethical controls; survivors have the right to seek healing in digital spaces, but neither digital systems nor their users have the right to exploit these wounds for algorithmic gain.

Concluding Remarks

This study confirms that the shift of the phenomenon of fatherlessness from the domestic sphere to the digital public sphere is

³¹ Adam D. I. Kramer, Jamie E. Guillory, and Jeffrey T. Hancock, "Experimental Evidence of Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion through Social Networks," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 24 (June 2014): 8788–90, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1320040111>.

not merely a change in the medium of expression, but rather a transformation of the social structure that affects the construction of identity, solidarity, and collective experiences of trauma. In this context, the absence of the father's role cannot be reduced to an individual psychological problem, but must be understood as a non-material social harm (*ḍarar*) that has a systemic impact on the protection of the soul (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*), reason (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), and the resilience of the family structure. Drawing on *Qawā'id Fiqhīyah*, this article shows that Islamic law has a conceptual toolkit for identifying and responding to this phenomenon as part of contemporary *nawāzil* that require a *maqāsid*-based methodological approach.

An analysis of the fiqh rules reveals a dialectical and proportional normative construction. The principles of *al-ḍarar yuzāl*, *al-'ādah al-muhakkamah*, and *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysir* open up space for the legitimacy of solidarity and psychosocial support practices in the digital realm as a form of hazard mitigation. However, this legitimacy is not unlimited. It is strictly framed by the principles of *dar' al-mafāsīd muqaddam 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ* and *lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*, especially when algorithmic logic and attention capitalism have the potential to commodify trauma, reproduce stigma, or collectively expand social wounds.

Thus, the digital space is understood as an ambivalent arena that demands ethical regulation and social sensitivity. Academically, this article contributes by expanding the function of *Qawā'id Fiqhīyah* from a mere instrument of normative justification to an ethical-regulatory framework that is adaptive to the dynamics of network society. This approach affirms the capacity of Islamic law as a reflective and responsive intellectual tradition in facing family crises in the era of hyperconnectivity. By placing human dignity and the orientation of *Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah* at the center of analysis, this study offers an integrative reading model that connects the dimensions of fiqh, digital reality, and social welfare more comprehensively.

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Author Biography

M. Sa’ad Alfanny is an undergraduate student in Islamic Family Law, Faculty Sharia and Law, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia. E-mail: salafterampil@gmail.com

Ach Badri Amin is an undergraduate student in Islamic Family Law, Faculty Sharia and Law, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia. E-mail: badriansyah733@gmail.com

Ahmad Sholakhuddin Al Af Ghoni is an undergraduate student in Islamic Family Law, Faculty Sharia and Law, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia. E-mail: sholakhuddinalafghoni@gmail.com