

## The Engagement Tradition within the Perspective of Maqasid al-Shariah: A Case Study of Karangnangka Village, Raas District, Sumenep Regency

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**Abstract:** This study examines the practice of *bhekalan anak ghik dhalem kandungan*, a tradition of matchmaking during pregnancy that is still practiced by some people in Karangnangka Village, Raas District, Sumenep Regency. The focus of the research is directed at the socio-cultural background, the dynamics of implementation, and its relevance in the perspective of *Maqāṣid al-Syarāh* Imam al-Ghazali. This study uses a qualitative case study approach with interview, observation, and documentation techniques, which are analyzed descriptively-interpretatively. The results show that the practice is understood as a symbolic agreement between families that is not legally binding and still provides space for autonomy for children. From the perspective of *Maqāṣid al-Syarāh*, this practice is considered legitimate as long as it is oriented towards the welfare and does not contain elements of coercion, especially in protecting offspring and property without neglecting the protection of children's rights.

**Keywords:** Engagement Tradition, Islamic Law, Local Custom, Maqasid al-Shariah

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini mengkaji praktik *bhekalan anak ghik dhalem kandungan*, yaitu tradisi perjodohan sejak masa kehamilan yang masih dipraktikkan oleh sebagian masyarakat di Desa Karangnangka, Kecamatan Raas, Kabupaten Sumenep. Fokus penelitian diarahkan pada latar belakang sosial-budaya, dinamika pelaksanaan, serta relevansinya dalam perspektif *Maqasid al-Syariah* Imam al-Ghazali. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kasus melalui teknik wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi, yang dianalisis secara deskriptif-interpretatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa praktik tersebut dipahami sebagai kesepakatan simbolik antar keluarga yang tidak bersifat mengikat secara hukum dan tetap memberikan ruang otonomi bagi anak. Dalam perspektif *Maqasid al-Syariah*, praktik ini dinilai sah sepanjang berorientasi pada kemaslahatan dan tidak mengandung unsur paksaan, khususnya dalam menjaga keturunan dan harta tanpa mengabaikan perlindungan terhadap hak-hak anak.

**Kata Kunci:** *Tradisi Pertunangan, Hukum Islam, Adat Lokal, Maqasid al-Syariah*

## **Introduction**

Marriage is not only understood as a personal relationship between a man and a woman, but also as a socio-religious institution influenced by cultural values, family structures, and religious interpretations that exist in society (Makin & Hidayati, 2025; Syahrizan & Siregar, 2024). In traditional communities, the practice of arranged marriages is still maintained as a means of maintaining family honor, continuity of lineage, and stability of kinship relations (Faruq & Solehodin, 2025; Puspita, 2025). The concept of wali mujbir is often used as normative legitimacy in this practice, namely the authority of a father or grandfather to marry off a daughter under certain conditions (Saputro & Kalamiah, 2025). Conceptually, this concept is intended to protect the welfare of the daughter.

However, in social practice, the interpretation of wali mujbir often ignores the aspects of the child's willingness and psychological condition, thus giving rise to ethical and legal issues. In the social reality of Madurese society, particularly in Karangnangka Village, Raas District, Sumenep Regency, the practice of child matchmaking from the womb, known as *abhekal ghik dhelem kandungan*, is still found. This tradition is carried out through an agreement between families who have kinship or social closeness from the time of pregnancy. This agreement is then institutionalized in the form of an engagement (*abhekalalan*), which is binding until the child reaches adulthood and is followed by marriage. This practice structurally blocks children's participation in choosing their life partners. Thus, matchmaking from the womb is not merely a tradition, but a social mechanism that directly impacts children's rights and future.

The practice of *abhekal ghik dhalem hamil* is generally based on several social considerations considered important by the local community. These include the desire to maintain the continuity of friendships between families, uphold the family's good name and honor, and, in some cases, the continuity of property ownership. These considerations indicate that arranged marriages are oriented more toward the collective interests of the family than the individual interests of the child (Gusti, 2024). As children grow and develop different preferences, this situation has the potential to cause psychological distress and relational conflict within the family. This situation demonstrates the tension between parental authority and the child's right to determine their own future.

Several contemporary scientific studies reinforce the importance of examining this type of arranged marriage practice. Susanti & Rochma (2024) show that marriages not based on full individual consent tend to result in lower marital satisfaction and increased domestic conflict. Research by Susanti & Rochma (2024) confirms that cultural and religious legitimacy are often used to maintain marriage practices that are detrimental to women and children. Meanwhile, Suhaili (2025) emphasized that marriage practices need to be evaluated based on the objectives of the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, particularly the protection of human life and dignity. However, these studies

have not specifically examined arranged marriages from conception in the context of local Indonesian traditions.

Based on this review, a significant research gap is evident. Previous studies tended to discuss forced marriage in general or normative-conceptual terms, without examining the practice of prenatal matchmaking empirically and contextually. Furthermore, the *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* approach has not been widely used to assess local traditions still prevalent in society. Therefore, this research is crucial to fill this gap. It seeks to more proportionally link the social realities of society with the substantive objectives of Islamic law.

The novelty of this research lies in its study of the practice of *abhekal ghik* in the womb using the *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* perspective as the primary analytical framework. This research not only describes the tradition but also assesses its compatibility with the goals of marriage in Islam, such as protecting children's rights and fostering family harmony. Furthermore, this study positions children as legal and moral subjects in marriage, not simply objects of parental agreement. This approach provides a new perspective in the study of Islamic family law that is more contextual and humane.

This study aims to analyze the practice of *abhekal ghik* in the womb in Karangnangka Village, Raas District, Sumenep Regency, and assess it from the perspective of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*. This objective is crucial to provide a fairer understanding of the balance between preserving tradition and protecting children's rights. Academically, this research is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic family law studies that are responsive to contemporary social realities. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reflection for the community and policymakers in addressing traditional matchmaking practices.

## Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a sociological-juridical design, aiming to understand the practice of child matchmaking from conception as a social phenomenon with legal and religious dimensions (Ardi et al., 2024; Hamdani & Wijayanto, 2025; Maula, 2023). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to examine law not only as a written norm but also as a lived practice in society. Qualitative methods are considered more appropriate than quantitative methods because the research focuses on exploring the meaning, social rationality, and value construction underlying this customary practice. The analysis was conducted using the *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah* perspective as a theoretical framework to assess the relevance and implications of this practice in the context of protecting rights and public welfare (Jasmin et al., 2025).

Data collection was conducted in Karangnangka Village, Raas District, Sumenep Regency, East Java, which was selected purposively because the practice of child matchmaking from conception still persists. Data were obtained through field observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Research informants included religious leaders, traditional leaders, and community members with direct

understanding and involvement in the practice. The number of informants was determined based on the principle of data sufficiency. Primary data was obtained directly from the field, while secondary data came from scientific journals, books, legal documents, and relevant Islamic jurisprudence literature. This combination of data sources was used to strengthen the validity of the findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the study object.

Data analysis employed the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). Data reduction was carried out by selecting and focusing data relevant to the research objectives. The data was then presented in an analytical narrative to identify emerging patterns, relationships, and meanings (Sahlan & Khoir, 2025). The conclusion drawing stage was carried out iteratively by linking empirical findings with the Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah framework to obtain consistent and scientifically justifiable conclusions.

## **Results & Discussion**

### **Results**

#### **Practice of the Tradition of Bhekalan Anak Ghik Dhalem Konten**

Research results indicate that the practice of child matchmaking during pregnancy in Karangnangka Village, Raas District, Sumenep Regency, is a social tradition that has been passed down through generations and is still maintained by some members of the community today. This tradition is understood as an initial agreement between families made during pregnancy and reinforced after the birth of a child of a different gender. Ahmad Sahuri, a community leader, stated that this tradition has existed since ancient times, from our ancestors, and is considered a way to maintain family ties. The agreement is verbal and not formalized in a legal contract, so it is not legally binding. Therefore, these matchmaking arrangements do not always result in marriage but rather depend heavily on the development of the relationship between the two children as they grow older.

Field findings identified several key factors underlying the continued practice of child matchmaking during pregnancy. The first factor is kinship considerations, where parents match their children with relatives or close family members to maintain ties and maintain the continuity of the lineage. Jumari, a local resident, said that if the match is made with someone from one's own family, we feel more at ease because we already know their background and behavior. The second factor is the parents' social relationships, especially long-standing friendships, both in the context of work and daily social life. Furthermore, economic factors are also an important consideration, as expressed by one of Mila Mikasi's parents, who said that their parents want their daughters to have a comfortable life, so they look for candidates with clear financial standing. Another factor is reciprocity, where the match is carried out as a form of appreciation for the moral and material support the family has received.

Table 01. Factors Influencing Child Arrangements While in the Womb

No.	Factor	Description
1	Kinship	Maintaining family ties and the continuity of lineage within the family circle
2	Parents' Social Relations	Strengthening long-standing friendships or cooperative relationships
3	Economic Considerations	Ensuring economic stability and securing the child's future
4	Reciprocity	A form of appreciation for moral and material assistance received

In practice, child matchmaking in Karangnangka Village, which begins in the womb, does not necessarily lead to marriage. Most relationships only progress to the engagement stage, known as *bhekalan*. This *bhekalan* period lasts for a relatively long period, ranging from two to five years. Ahmad Sahuri emphasized this, explaining that the *bhekalan* period is crucial for assessing the compatibility of the children, as they grow up to have their own ideas. During this phase, the terms *bhekalan tolos* (successful) and *bhekalan burung* (failed) are used, indicating that the success of the matchmaking is largely determined by the psychological readiness, education, and individual awareness of each party.

Table 02. Forms of Continuity of Child Arrangements Since In the Womb

<i>Stage</i>	Description
<i>Bhekalan</i>	An engagement period intended to assess compatibility between prospective partners
<i>Bhekalan tolos</i>	A matchmaking process that proceeds to marriage
<i>Bhekalan burung</i>	A matchmaking arrangement that is terminated due to incompatibility
<i>Time Frame</i>	Approximately ± 2–5 years

From an Islamic legal perspective, parents in Karangnangka Village understand that they have the right as guardians to find a match for their children, which is often associated with the concept of *ijbar wali* (guardian consent). However, interviews indicate an awareness that this right should not override the child's well-being. Ahmad Sahuri emphasized that if a child shows discomfort or expresses a firm refusal, parents should not force them, as the primary purpose of marriage is to bring happiness and peace to both parties. This view suggests that the practice of arranged marriages in the village has socially adapted to the values of child protection and the principle of welfare.

This study also found that the household outcomes resulting from this arranged marriage practice exhibit diverse dynamics. Some couples who marry through arranged marriages are considered capable of building harmonious households, while others experience conflict influenced by economic factors, differences in education levels, and a lack of emotional readiness. Jaunuri stated that some marriages work well, but many are often marred by conflict due to incompatibilities only realized after entering married life.

These findings show that even though early matchmaking is seen as a tradition with positive values by society, the success of marriage is still determined by the quality of the relationship and the readiness of the couple. Overall, the practice of matchmaking children from the womb in Karangnangka Village is understood as a tradition that is flexible and conditional, and is directed at achieving benefits as long as it does not cause harm to the child being matched.

### **Maqashid Syariah Imam al-Ghozali**

The research results show that the practice of matchmaking children from the womb in Karangnangka Village, Raas District, Sumenep Regency is understood by the community as a tradition that does not conflict with Islamic teachings. This understanding, if read from the perspective of Imam al-Ghazali's *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah*, departs from an orientation towards *maslahah* as the main goal of the Shari'a, namely efforts to realize benefits and avoid harm. In al-Ghazali's view, a socio-religious practice is not judged solely by its outward form, but by the extent to which the practice is able to maintain the goals of the Shari'a intended for humans.

This community view is reflected in the information of the informants, especially Ahmad Sahuri, who stated that the practice of arranged marriage does not conflict with Islamic teachings as long as it is not accompanied by elements of coercion and still gives children the freedom to make choices when they grow up. In al-Ghazali's perspective, this statement shows the public's awareness that coercion of the will has the potential to cause *mafsadat*, especially regarding the protection of children's souls and minds. Therefore, matchmaking is not understood as a binding Islamic obligation, but rather as an initial, optional and contextual parental endeavor.

Furthermore, social reality shows that the practice of matchmaking children from infancy is not universally applied to the entire Karangnangka Village community. This tradition is only practiced by certain families who still strongly uphold customary and kinship values. Within al-Ghazali's framework, this flexibility indicates that the practice of matchmaking is not positioned as an absolute necessity (*al-ḍarūriyyāt*) that must be implemented universally, but rather as a social agreement whose validity depends heavily on considerations of *maslahah* (benefit) and *mafsadat* (benefit).

Field findings also indicate that local religious leaders do not explicitly prohibit the practice of child matchmaking from infancy as long as it does not harm the child. Jauhari stated that children retain the authority to continue or cancel matchmaking when they reach adulthood, while parents' role is limited to initiating the intention without imposing a decision. This view aligns with al-Ghazali's principle, which

emphasizes that upholding the objectives of sharia must be prioritized, even if it sometimes conflicts with individual desires or long-standing traditions.

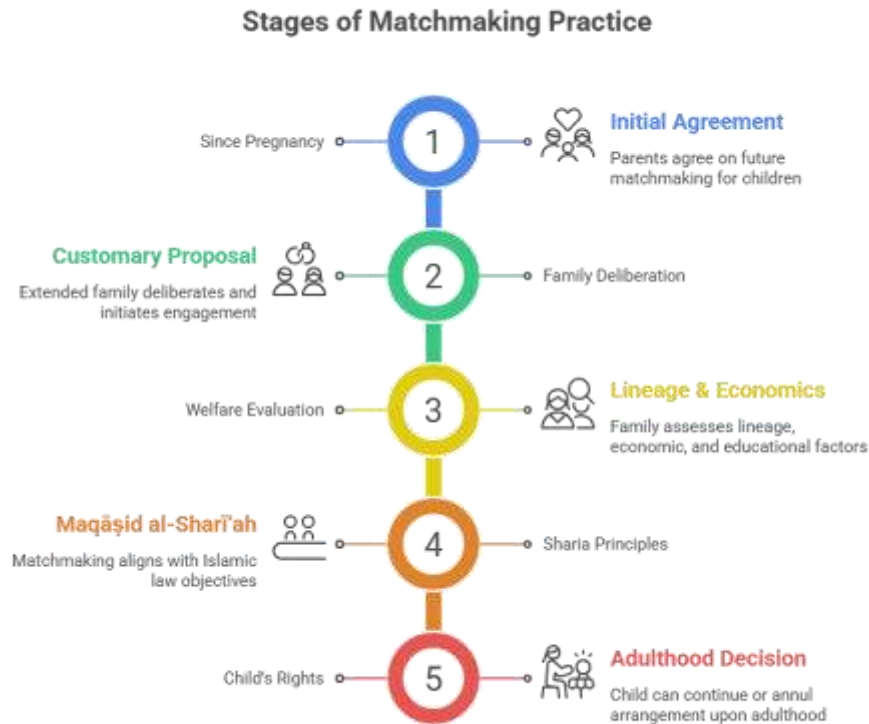
From the perspective of Imam al-Ghazali's Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah (the principles of Islamic law), the practice of child matchmaking from infancy by the people of Karangnangka Village is primarily understood as an effort to preserve offspring (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*). Clarity of lineage is seen as a crucial foundation for maintaining social order and community morals. Therefore, early matchmaking is considered a preventative measure to avoid potential social breakdown that could threaten the sustainability of families and communities.

This is as conveyed by Buhairi, a resident of Karangnangka Village, who stated that parents hope their children will find partners with clear lineage and who come from a good family environment. In addition to lineage factors, considerations of economic equality and educational background are also strong reasons for arranging marriages from infancy. In al-Ghazali's view, these considerations are related to efforts to safeguard wealth (*ḥifẓ al-māl*), as family economic stability is believed to minimize the potential for conflict and hardship in the future.

Table 02, Field findings and perspectives of Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah Imam al-Ghazali

Field Findings	Informants' Statements	Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah Perspective (Imam al-Ghazali)
<i>Non-coercive matchmaking</i>	Ahmad Sahuri: children are free to make their own choices upon reaching adulthood	Protection of life ( <i>ḥifẓ al-nafs</i> ) and intellect ( <i>ḥifẓ al-'aql</i> ); prevention of harm ( <i>mafsadah</i> )
<i>Child's right to annul matchmaking</i>	Jauhari: parents' role is limited to initiating the intention	Safeguarding the objectives of Islamic law to avoid violations of public interest ( <i>maṣlaḥah</i> )
<i>Emphasis on clear lineage</i>	Buhairi: prospective spouses must have a clear lineage	Protection of lineage ( <i>ḥifẓ al-nasl</i> ) as part of the essential objectives ( <i>al-ḍarūriyyāt</i> )
<i>Economic and educational considerations</i>	Village residents: compatibility helps prevent future conflict	Protection of wealth ( <i>ḥifẓ al-māl</i> ) and family stability
<i>Family deliberation and customary engagement rituals</i>	Ahmad Sahuri: family deliberation and <i>panyengset</i> practices	Ethical efforts to preserve social benefit ( <i>maṣlaḥah</i> ) and family harmony

In terms of implementation, research shows that child matchmaking, initiated during pregnancy, is generally only formalized after the child is born. This process begins with a family consultation from the man's side to confirm the verbal agreement established during pregnancy. From al-Ghazali's perspective, consultation is an ethical mechanism to ensure that decisions taken truly consider the common good and do not cause harm to any of the parties involved.



Gambar 1. Relasi Praktik Perjodohan dan Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah Imam al-Ghazali

Next, the groom's family visits the bride's family to conduct a traditional engagement ceremony. Ahmad Sahuri explained that the engagement ceremony usually includes *panyengset* (a traditional Indonesian word for "wedding") as a symbol of sincerity and the bond of the relationship, according to local customs. Traditional symbols such as betel and areca nut, gambier, lime, and banana milk are understood by the community as a means of strengthening commitment and harmonious relationships between families. As long as these symbols do not conflict with sharia principles and do not cause harm, this practice remains within the bounds of *maslahah* (good) according to al-Ghazali.

Although children have the right to cancel an arranged marriage when they reach adulthood, the reality on the ground shows that most children tend to follow their parents' choices as a form of respect and obedience. From al-Ghazali's perspective, this phenomenon reflects a negotiation between parental authority and the child's rights, whereby a child's obedience can still be considered *maslahah* as long as it is not coerced and does not cause psychological or social harm. Overall, from the perspective of Imam al-Ghazali's *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah*, the practice of child matchmaking from conception in Karangnangka Village is a socio-religious tradition carried out with a focus on public welfare. This tradition is not positioned as an absolute obligation, but rather as a social agreement that is valid according to sharia as long as it upholds the objectives of sharia, particularly protecting offspring and property, and does not negate the child's right to protect their soul and mind.

## Discussion

The practice of *bhekalan anak ghik dhalem kandungan* (prenatal marriage) in Karangnangka Village demonstrates that child matchmaking during pregnancy is a social phenomenon inextricably linked to the cultural value system, kinship structures, and religious interpretations prevalent in the community. This finding aligns with Koentjaraningrat's view, which asserts that marriage traditions in indigenous communities are not merely private matters, but rather part of a social institution that serves to maintain order, continuity of social relations, and cultural stability (Fox, 2024; Koentjaraningrat, 2024). In this context, matchmaking during pregnancy is understood as a symbol of commitment between families to maintain long-term social ties.

The predominance of kinship as a background for matchmaking corroborates findings from anthropological studies that suggest that traditional societies tend to prioritize endogamous marriage as a social strategy (Muda, 2025). Lévi-Strauss's theory of marital alliances explains that marriage functions as a mechanism for the exchange of women to build and strengthen social networks between groups (Ulum & Khasanah, 2022). In practice in Karangnangka Village, child matchmaking with close relatives is perceived as a way to maintain family honor, clarify lineage, and avoid social uncertainty that might arise from marrying outsiders.

In addition to kinship, factors such as parental social relations and reciprocity indicate that matchmaking also operates within the logic of social exchange. This aligns with the social exchange theory proposed by George C. Homans, which states that social actions are often based on the principles of reciprocity and social benefit (Enayat et al., 2022). Matchmaking, even in the womb, serves as a symbolic means of repaying favors, strengthening loyalty, and maintaining long-standing social ties between families.

Economic factors as a consideration in matchmaking demonstrate that traditions are not static, but rather adaptive to the socio-economic realities of society (Handayani, 2024). Becker, in his theory of family economics, emphasized that marriage decisions often involve rational considerations regarding future well-being and stability. The findings of this study indicate that parents seek to ensure the well-being of their children by selecting potential partners who are deemed financially prepared. However, this economic orientation has the potential to shift the meaning of marriage if not balanced with the child's psychological and emotional readiness.

Interestingly, the existence of the *bhekalan* phase as an engagement period demonstrates the flexibility of tradition in responding to changes in individual values and awareness. The concepts of *bhekalan tolos* and *bhekalan burung* reflect a social recognition that parental agreement is not absolute. This aligns with Berger and Luckmann's view of the social construction of reality, where traditions undergo a process of internalization, objectification, and reinterpretation according to the social

dynamics of society (Ramadhani et al., 2025). Thus, the practice of matchmaking from infancy does not always culminate in marriage, but rather depends on the child's acceptance and readiness as an adult.

From an Islamic legal perspective, society's understanding of the guardian's right to consent demonstrates a dialectic between classical Islamic jurisprudence and the principle of public interest (Hakim, 2022). Classical scholars such as Imam Shafi'i did provide some legitimacy to the guardian's role in marriage, but contemporary scholars such as Wahbah az-Zuhaili and Yusuf al-Qaradawi emphasized that the right to consent must not conflict with the interests and willingness of the prospective bride and groom (Tashfia, 2022). Field findings showing that parents do not impose their will when their children reject an arranged marriage indicate the internalization of the principle of *lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār* in the socio-religious practices of society.

The dynamics of household outcomes resulting from this arranged marriage practice also reinforce previous research findings, which suggest that marital success is not determined by the matchmaking mechanism, but rather by the quality of the relationship and the couple's readiness. Gottman, in his study of family psychology, emphasized that communication, emotional readiness, and the ability to manage conflict are key factors in marital harmony (Hannani, 2023). The fact that some couples experience conflict due to differences in education and economic status demonstrates the limitations of the arranged marriage tradition in ensuring marital happiness.

Overall, the practice of *bhekalan anak ghik dhalem kandungan* (child-rearing) in Karangnangka Village can be understood as an adaptive and conditional socio-religious tradition. This tradition is not strictly enforced but has been adapted to reflect child protection values, Islamic principles of welfare, and modern awareness of individual rights. Thus, arranged marriages in this context are not merely a representation of local culture but also a reflection of the negotiation process between tradition, religion, and social change.

### **Imam Al Ghazali's Perspective**

The research findings indicate that the practice of prenatal child matchmaking in Karangnangka Village is socially constructed by the community as a cultural tradition that is perceived not to contradict Islamic teachings, provided that it is carried out without overt coercion. However, rather than taking this perception at face value, the practice requires critical examination through the framework of *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah*, particularly as formulated by Imam al-Ghazali, who emphasizes that the ultimate purpose of sharia lies in realizing benefit and preventing harm (*jalb al-maṣāliḥ wa dar' al-mafāsid*) (Sholihah, 2023). In this regard, socio-religious practices cannot be evaluated solely based on declared intentions or formal compliance, but must be assessed in terms of their substantive impact on the protection of the five essential objectives of sharia (*al-kulliyāt al-khams*).

The community's emphasis on the absence of coercion reflects a normative awareness of child protection, particularly in relation to *ḥifẓ al-nafs* and *ḥifẓ al-'aql*.

Nevertheless, this understanding remains largely declarative. While al-Ghazali indeed places the protection of life and intellect as foundational *maqāṣid*, Islamic family law literature warns that coercion is not always explicit or physical, but may also operate in latent psychological and cultural forms (Hanif, 2025). In this sense, the claim that prenatal matchmaking functions merely as a non-binding parental initiative must be interrogated more critically, especially considering the power asymmetry inherent in parent-child relations. The reliance on future consent at adulthood, therefore, raises questions about whether such consent is genuinely autonomous or shaped by long-term social expectations and moral obligations.

From a *maqāṣid* classification perspective, the positioning of prenatal matchmaking outside the realm of *al-ḍarūriyyāt* is analytically sound; however, its categorization as either *ḥājīyyāt* or *taḥsīniyyāt* requires stronger substantiation. Al-Ghazali distinguishes these levels based on the degree to which a practice prevents hardship or merely enhances moral and social refinement. Prenatal matchmaking does not appear to remove essential hardship nor guarantee social stability, suggesting that its placement within *ḥājīyyāt* may be overstated. Instead, the practice may more appropriately fall within *taḥsīniyyāt*, contingent upon strict conditions, contextual relevance, and the absence of harm conditions that must be empirically demonstrated rather than normatively assumed.

The position of local religious authorities, who refrain from explicitly prohibiting the practice as long as it does not result in harm, reflects a pragmatic engagement with *maqāṣid* reasoning. This approach resonates with contemporary *maqāṣid* scholars such as al-Shāṭibī and Wahbah az-Zuhaili, who emphasize that the validity of legal practices depends on their contribution to human well-being (*maṣlaḥah insāniyyah*) (Jaafar, 2023). Nevertheless, this permissive stance should not be interpreted as unconditional legitimation. Rather, it underscores the need for continuous evaluation, particularly in light of evolving concerns regarding child protection, individual agency, and the ethical limits of parental authority.

In terms of *maqāṣid* orientation, the practice is predominantly associated by the community with *ḥifẓ al-naṣl*. While the preservation of lineage is undeniably a central *maqāṣid*, a narrow interpretation risks reducing the objective to biological continuity alone. Contemporary *maqāṣid* discourse expands *ḥifẓ al-naṣl* to include the holistic well-being of children, encompassing emotional security, psychological development, and the capacity for self-determination. From this broader perspective, prenatal matchmaking may safeguard lineage symbolically, yet simultaneously raise concerns if it constrains the child's future autonomy.

Economic and educational considerations underlying matchmaking decisions are often framed as efforts to ensure compatibility and stability. Al-Ghazali's conception of *ḥifẓ al-māl* indeed extends beyond material assets to encompass sustainable life arrangements. Empirical studies in Islamic family sociology support the claim that economic and educational disparities can contribute to domestic conflict (Thorik et al., 2025). However, framing such considerations as inherently *maslahah-*

oriented must be balanced against the risk of instrumentalizing children as objects of socio-economic planning, rather than recognizing them as moral subjects with evolving capacities.

The deliberative family process and accompanying traditional symbols, such as *panyengset*, function as socio-ethical mechanisms intended to prevent unilateral decision-making. Within al-Ghazali's framework, deliberation (*shūrā*) serves as a safeguard against injustice. Nevertheless, while these cultural symbols may fall within the category of *taḥsīniyyāt* when free from coercive implications, their normative weight may also reinforce social pressure, subtly limiting the child's ability to exercise refusal in practice.

Although children are normatively granted the right to annul an arranged marriage upon reaching adulthood, empirical findings suggest that this right is rarely exercised. This tendency reflects a complex negotiation between filial obedience, cultural expectations, and individual rights. From a *maqāṣid* perspective, obedience may constitute *maṣlaḥah* only insofar as it emerges from informed and voluntary choice. Where compliance is driven by internalized pressure or fear of social sanction, the realization of *ḥifẓ al-'aql* and *ḥifẓ al-nafs* becomes ethically questionable. Consequently, children's agency in this context warrants deeper scrutiny beyond formal acknowledgment.

In conclusion, when examined through Imam al-Ghazali's *Maqāṣid al-Syarā'ah*, the practice of prenatal matchmaking in Karangnangka Village cannot be categorically affirmed nor entirely dismissed. Rather, it should be understood as a contingent socio-religious tradition whose permissibility under Islamic law remains conditional, context-dependent, and subject to critical evaluation. Claims regarding its alignment with *maqāṣid* must therefore be presented tentatively, recognizing both its intended welfare orientation and its potential risks to child well-being and autonomy. This practice ultimately illustrates an ongoing dialectic between local tradition, Islamic legal-ethical principles, and contemporary concerns for the protection of children's rights.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that the practice of *bhekalan anak ghik dhalem kandungan* (prenatal matchmaking) in Karangnangka Village is understood by the local community as a socio-religious tradition that is adaptive, flexible, and conditional. However, this conclusion is not intended as an affirmative normative judgment, but rather as a critical description of how the practice is socially constructed and negotiated within the community. Prenatal matchmaking is not positioned as an absolute bond that must culminate in marriage, but as an initial parental initiative that is claimed to serve the continuity of kinship, clarity of lineage, social stability, and economic considerations. At the same time, the space ostensibly provided for children to make autonomous choices in adulthood must be approached cautiously, given the

potential presence of implicit cultural and moral pressures that may shape consent in less visible ways.

From the perspective of Imam al-Ghazali's *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah*, the practice is commonly associated by the community with the objectives of protecting lineage (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*) and property (*ḥifẓ al-māl*), while being normatively framed as not neglecting the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*) and intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*). Nevertheless, this study emphasizes that such alignment with *maqāṣid* cannot be understood in a conclusive or universal manner. The permissibility of the practice within a *maqāṣid* framework remains highly conditional, dependent on the absence of coercion in both explicit and implicit forms, as well as on the genuine recognition and practical realization of children's agency. Consequently, claims that the practice is oriented toward child welfare should be read as empirically situated and open to critical interrogation, rather than as final normative justifications.

The findings further indicate that the success or failure of marriage is not determined by the matchmaking mechanism itself, but by psychological readiness, relational quality, and individual awareness of the parties involved. In this sense, the *bhekalan* practice may function as a symbolic and evaluative social mechanism; however, it also carries the risk of transforming cultural symbols and familial expectations into moral obligations that constrain children's freedom of choice. This underscores the importance of maintaining analytical distance between community interpretations and scholarly normative assessments grounded in Islamic legal ethics.

In terms of scholarly contribution, this study positions itself within broader debates on child matchmaking, child protection, and *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah*. Its originality lies in moving beyond dichotomous readings that frame prenatal matchmaking either as a straightforward violation of children's rights or as a fully legitimate cultural tradition. Instead, the study conceptualizes the practice as a dynamic arena of negotiation between local customs, religious values, and contemporary normative concerns. Notably, the identification of the *bhekalan* phase as a socially recognized space for evaluation and potential cancellation adds an underexplored dimension to the literature on early matchmaking, which has often treated such practices as linear and deterministic.

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