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Embracing Piety: Unraveling the Experiences of Urban Salafi Women in Pursuit of Devotion

Diah Ayu Agustina

Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia (UIII), Depok
Contributor e-mail: diah.agustina@uiii.ac.id

Abstract: *This study aims to shed light on piety cultivation among Salafi women through their engagement in studies hosted by the Nurul Iman Mosque in Blok M Square. This study investigates Salafi women's experiences after attending regular studies at Nurul Iman Mosque as a center for spirituality and Sunnah studies for urban areas in nurturing Salafi women's piety. This study argues that Salafi women who actively participate in mosque studies have a profoundly positive impact on their own piety, spirituality, and overall well-being. The study reveals that mosque studies act as a catalyst for change, nourishing the soul and creating a strong bond with the God. These women receive comfort, inspiration, and information that strengthens their religious commitment through the numerous studies offered. Mosques serve as social gathering places that promote a sense of sisterhood and belonging while providing a safe area for spiritual inquiry and self-improvement. This study also emphasizes the value of mosque studies in motivating urban Salafi women to reflect on and enhance their lives. Through sermon teachings and reminders, women are encouraged to evaluate their behavior and strive for ongoing growth in pursuing piety*

Keywords: *Piety, Salafi Women, Devotion, Nurul Iman Mosque*

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan tentang penanaman kesalehan di kalangan perempuan Salafi melalui keterlibatan mereka dalam kajian-kajian yang diselenggarakan oleh Masjid Nurul Iman di Blok M Square. Penelitian ini menyelidiki pengalaman perempuan Salafi setelah mengikuti kajian rutin di Masjid Nurul Iman sebagai pusat kajian spiritualitas dan Sunnah di daerah perkotaan dalam menumbuhkan kesalehan perempuan Salafi. Studi ini berpendapat bahwa perempuan Salafi yang secara aktif berpartisipasi dalam kajian masjid memiliki dampak yang sangat positif terhadap kesalehan,*

spiritualitas, dan kesejahteraan mereka secara keseluruhan. Studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa kajian masjid bertindak sebagai katalisator perubahan, menenangkan jiwa dan menciptakan ikatan yang kuat dengan Tuhan. Para wanita ini menerima kenyamanan, inspirasi, dan informasi yang memperkuat komitmen agama mereka melalui berbagai kajian yang ditawarkan. Masjid berfungsi sebagai tempat berkumpul yang mendorong rasa persaudaraan dan rasa memiliki serta menyediakan area yang aman untuk penguatan spiritual dan peningkatan diri. Studi ini juga menekankan nilai kajian masjid dalam memotivasi perempuan Salafi perkotaan untuk merenungkan dan meningkatkan kehidupan mereka. Melalui khotbah dan pengingat, para perempuan didorong untuk mengevaluasi perilaku mereka dan berusaha untuk terus berkembang dalam mengejar kesalehan.

Kata Kunci: Kesalehan, Perempuan Salafi, Ketaatan, Masjid Nurul Iman

INTRODUCTION

On a Saturday afternoon, thousands of people crammed into the Nurul Iman Mosque area at Blok M Square and spilled out onto the courtyard. As far as I could tell, the mosque was packed with people thrilled to participate in this study. Some came in groups with friends and family, while others came alone. The back of the women's area appeared to be dominated by wives who accompanied their children. While listening to the preaching, they took care of their children. In contrast, the front and center areas are populated mainly by young people. Most female attendees wear a black gown and veil nearly completely encasing their bodies. Several wear colorful dresses that cover their body without face coverings, while few wear suits that look trendier. Almost everyone in the assembly closely listened to the lecture and took notes on the explanation given by the preacher. While some of them used their cell phones to take notes throughout the preacher's presentation, others appeared to have specific notebooks with them. This is the setting for the study the Nurul Iman Mosque at Blok M Square Mall, the hub of *sunnah* studies in the capital city. Housed in a mall, this mosque regularly organizes studies virtually attended to and crowded by Muslims from metropolitan populations who wish to learn further about their beliefs.

The Muslim community's desire to attend various religious assemblies can be seen in nearly every region. People not only gather to participate in recitations in rural places, but comparable studies have also exploded in metropolitan areas, spawning a plethora of religious gatherings. Islam is increasingly popular among urban Muslims. Religion gains momentum and flourishes in modern society. As a result, urban piety (Bryner, 2013; Heryanto, 2011) and urban Sufism (Darmadi, 2000) became a phenomenon and impacted the morals and behavior of Indonesian society.

Indonesia's democratic system has demonstrated consistency by giving its citizens the most incredible opportunity to express their opinions on any subject, including religion. This reformation era has turned into an opening faucet for the influx of numerous religious sects from the outside, notably the Salafi sect, particularly with the fall of the New Order in 1998. According to multiple experts,

Salafism spread throughout Indonesia as Indonesia's political history changed, taking advantage of the opportunity (Hasan, 2006; Hasyim, 2018).

The Salafists recognize that Indonesian Muslims are deeply religious. The numerous spiritual manifestations presented in public demonstrate their completeness in practicing spiritual teachings. Indonesia is regarded as a lucrative market for fostering religious piety and the ideal location for commodifying spirituality in its different manifestations (Fealy, 2008). Salafi groups are growing more assured that their understanding of religions will be widely embraced due to this fact. With straightforward arguments and slogans like "return to the Qur'an and hadith," "Islam is a religion of evidence, so all religious practices must have support in the Qur'an and hadith," and "if it is not in the Qur'an or hadith, then certainly religious activities are rejected," and so on. They are thus referred to as Salafis, a group that advocates for a return to and adherence to the beliefs or practices of the Salaf generation (Meijer, 2009).

Salafi groups concentrate on bringing their religious understanding to urban neighborhoods due to their precision reading, such as socio-religious maps. This is supported by Alvara's research, which discovered that roughly 22.5% of urban Muslims, particularly the younger generation under the age of 30, are not affiliated with traditional Islamic groups like NU and Muhammadiyah (Ali et al., 2015). Even though these two organizations share a sociological affinity with the majority of the urban community, Salafi organizations have always targeted young people, leading to the "*hijrah*" movement, a transfer from bad religious practices to better ones (Rahman et al., 2021).

The *hijrah* movement is mainly associated with Indonesia, but the concept of a Muslim becoming more religious is not exclusive to that country. It is a worldwide phenomenon known variously as "born-again" Muslims, a term borrowed from "born-again" Christians, a similar phenomenon in the United Kingdom. "Born again" refers to "someone who unexpectedly makes their faith the central tenet of their entire life." (Roy, 2004) Many researches have been undertaken on the *hijrah* movement, defined as the process of becoming a good Muslim and applying Salafist beliefs in all parts of life (Lyansari, 2019; Rahman et al., 2021; Rijal & Masturi, 2022; Sunesti et al., 2018).

This trend assumes that urban communities are eager to increase their religiosity. Salafi groups' earnestness in using *hijrah* as a vehicle for propagating their religious doctrine has also given rise to a symbolic representation of this movement, beginning with changes in appearance through body covering and adhering to prescribed spiritual teachings like maintaining beards and wearing short pants. 'Active piety' is what Asef Bayat refers to (Bayat, 2013). This phenomenon prompts Azyumardi Azra to coin the phrase "new attachment to Islam" (new Islamic orientation), which refers to the totality of upholding Islamic teachings by not only increasing the ritualistic component of required worship but also by leading a more Islamic lifestyle, such as donning a headscarf, veil, or robe, among other things (Azra, 2019). Such a Salafi theological concept is a way to assert one's identity. They wish to give a fresh option for following religious laws as the belief of their group (Ricardo, 2010).

Many urbanites, especially youths who frequently serve as the primary target, have become attracted to Salafis, who promote a conservative and rigid way

of life. Their desire to leave the glittering world behind is considered satisfied by this way of living (Sunesti et al., 2018). Their goal is to influence Muslims, particularly urban youth, to live more pious lifestyles and become more devoted to Islam. Being more devout entails practicing Islam, where some organizations cite the teachings of Salafism while others follow a Salafism that is more tolerant of urban culture and materialism (Hasan, 2007; Jahroni, 2015).

In the past nearly two decades, there has been a drive to "Islamize" cities due to this intense desire to live according to Islamic principles. This effort has ranged from the most widespread activity, such as Islamic sermons, to developing Islamic venues in Indonesian metropolitan areas. (Weng, 2014) The sermons on the streets, open fields, offices, and shopping malls are just a few examples of how religious rituals that transcend sacred spaces have become a frequent phenomenon. Additionally, people make an effort to visit these places to develop their piety and deepen their spirituality. The Nurul Iman Mosque in Blok M Square is a prime example of how religious practices have penetrated into public areas. Even though this mosque is amid a mall, regular religious activities such as lectures are constantly held there. The studies here attract a lot of enthusiasm.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study aims to shed light on embracing piety among Salafi women in a mosque setting. This study will detail the experiences of Salafi women who actively engaging in Salafi-based religious studies and activities at the Nurul Iman Blok M Mosque. The main argument built in the study is that these women's involvement actively contributed to the growth of their spirituality and personal development by providing them with life-changing experiences. While trying to uphold their piety, they frequently encounter several challenges, making reconciling religious beliefs with social expectations worthwhile. On the one hand, they try to live up to their learned values, but on the other hand, they must deal with the realities of life. They finally agree to negotiation.

The first chapter of this study covers the motivation for Salafi women's active engagement in the studies organized by Nurul Iman mosque. Their motivation is frequently a desire for purity and a relationship with God. The chapter goes through their preferences and motivations for participating in the study. The third chapter examines their transforming experiences due to regular participation in studies and mosque activities that promote spiritual and personal growth. The final chapter discusses how they deal with challenges while sustaining their piety.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Attending Sermons: In Search of Sacred Guidance

The current surge of spirituality in urban populations is an intriguing phenomenon. It is a movement to restore the ideals of the spiritual vision that the march of modernity has lost. Modernity, whose emergence was marked by the Renaissance in the 17th century, brings at least two sides: on the one hand, it hastened the advancement of science and technology, and on the other, it lulls humans into such progress that they do not realize they are enslaved by modernity that imprisons their souls. The void of meaning in urban culture causes people to

seek a thirst quencher for a thirsty soul, resulting in a wave of spirituality in urban society today.

Due to its sacred status, religion is viewed as God's blueprint, designed to be utilized as a guide to address all of life's issues (Rahmat, 1998). As a result, religion is widely accepted and practiced as the foundation of life. According to Milton Yinger, religion is a cultural understanding of the supernatural that people employ to solve numerous critical daily concerns (Yinger, 1969). Furthermore, it is consistent with Geertz's definition of religion as a symbol system serving social, cultural, and psychological purposes. When a modern man seeks a fundamental explanation for his existence amid urban dynamics, as well as the effects of protracted crises and moral decline that impact urban residents' quality of life, it appears that the spiritual route has emerged as a viable option. One of the manifestations of spirituality in urban areas is the growth of religious assemblies, such as the study held at the Nurul Iman Mosque, which piques the curiosity of modern educated urbanites. Its existence is more than a ceremony; it is a spiritual force that may raise awareness.

The fact that participants in the study were aware of religion's role as a foundation and life-guiding principle was mentioned in several informant narratives. After growing weary of the hustle and bustle of city life and various obstacles, religion becomes a source of serenity and peace for them. This is consistent with Suzanne Langer's assertion that faith results from human reaction to chaos (Langer, 1957).

Seli has consistently engaged in weekly study sessions in Blok M. She began participating in the study in 2019. Her need for serenity and peace in the middle of the chaos of metropolitan life is the main driver behind her attendance at the gathering. She believes that by attending the study, she will be able to recharge her energy, which has been depleted after a week of seeking a career and dealing with numerous challenges. She feels a renewed spirit and vitality after attending the study, which gives her more strength to tackle the day ahead. (*Interview with Seli, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 20, 2023*)

Silva, who routinely attends the study at least twice weekly, made the same claim. She participates in the study because she believes that sometimes some issues she encounters cannot be resolved merely by sharing with humans but occasionally by listening to religious lectures. Coming to the study can offer her tranquility and keep her from overthinking. (*Interview with Silva, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 17, 2023*)

Exploring religious knowledge is another motive for attending studies, as other accounts demonstrate. For instance, Puspita has only recently begun participating in religious studies regularly. She never had before studied religion. She only knew that she had to pray, and that was it for religion. She claimed that this ignorance of religion persisted up until the point at which she enrolled in college and declared Statistics as her major, a subject that did not allow for sufficient discussion of religion and spirituality. She did, however, become more religiously aware with time. She began to believe that religion is self-reflection and life guidance. Thus, she began to think that knowing religion was crucial. She was inspired to attend religious lectures after coming to this revelation. (*Interview with Puspita, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 21, 2023*)

From the different stories that have surfaced above, it is clear that some of the congregants who attend the study at the Nurul Iman Mosque claim that religion is the cornerstone and the ideal place to turn to when they have difficulties. As a result, they come to the sermons.

Preferences for Participating in Studies

An analysis of Salafi women's preferences in attending sermons in mosque programs reveals a wide range of motivations and preferences. The daily sermons at the Nurul Iman Mosque ensure that there is always a horde of people intending to participate in the studies. This scenario supports the diverse desires of the congregants because they can attend the study according to the time they have available or the topic of study they wish to pursue. In this section, I shall discuss the patterns and preferences of people who participate in the study. They can be classified into three types as follows:

Compatibility of Manhaj

The Nurul Iman Mosque has been converted into a *sunnah* study center for the metropolitan neighborhood. The preachers also belong to Salafi organizations with a similar outlook to the mosque, and the studies are always based on Salafi principles. Several interviewees claimed that the manhaj's compatibility with their beliefs inspired them to participate in the mosque's studies. Most of them are Salafi converts.

Murni (21 years old) has attended studies at the Nurul Iman Mosque since 2018. She enrolled in these programs due to her friends' invitations to do so. She is drawn to participating in the studies because this mosque is not associated with groups in the neighborhood, such as NU or Muhammadiyah. Her sister, who initially adopted Salafi as her way of life, was an intermediary for her introduction to the movement. The term "recruitment through a network with interpersonal ties" refers to this type of procedure. (Lofland & Stark, 1965) Since deciding to follow in her sister's footsteps, she has begun to hunt for mosques and religious assemblies that share her viewpoint. Murni claims it is challenging to locate a mosque that adheres to Salafi principles in her area. Her hesitation to visit a non-Salafi Mosque was brought on by disparities in understanding in several areas, including how to perform prayers. She attended classes here frequently once she discovered that the Nurul Iman Mosque's orientation matched the *manhaj* she adhered to. She consistently attended studies three to four days a week while unmarried. (Interview with Murni, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, June 10, 2023)

Rifa (22 years old) recounts a different experience, describing her determination to attend the study at Nurul Iman Mosque as a result of roaming and adventure. She was first exposed to Salafism when she joined the Rohis organization in high school. Da'wah activists use this student organization to transmit their understanding through Islamic mentoring programs. (Hasan, 2018, p. 2) Since becoming familiar with Salafi, Rifa and her friend, Nita (23 years old), have begun actively participating in studies at the Nurul Iman Mosque, the hub of the Salafi study center. (Interview with Nita, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 21, 2023) They continue to study at the mosque regularly.

Rifa embarked on a spiritual odyssey in which she attempted to investigate other religious assemblies and communities that did not conform to her Salafi

beliefs. She had previously tried to attend classes in several locations, including those preached by renowned preachers such as Aa Gym, and frequently attended studies at the Nurul Iman mosque. She also attempted to join a student organization that actively held numerous studies in college. However, after trying to engage in those studies, she believed there was a mismatch, particularly in the student studies, in which she felt there needed to be more emphasis on logic and liberalism. Due to this disagreement, she stopped following those studies since she determined to follow the ones at the Nurul Iman mosque exclusively. She claims that the educational programs at the Nurul Iman Mosque, in which all of the teachings are consistently based on the Qur'an and hadith, are more in line with what she believes and has come to comprehend. As a result, it lends its permanence to the ideals she has nurtured since middle school. (Interview with Rifa, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 21, 2023)

Women who emphasize attending studies in mosques that adhere to their *manhaj* illustrate the significance of sticking to a specific interpretation of Islam. They seek mosques that reflect their view of Salafism, which emphasizes a return to the customs and teachings of the early generations of Muslims. These ladies respect consistency and uniformity in the mosque's rituals and ideas because it enhances their religious convictions and fosters a sense of community that shares a common perspective.

Influence of the Preacher and Topic

The *manhaj* base is one of the most critical aspects of congregants' willingness to attend the study. Nonetheless, several of the women I interviewed acknowledged that their preference for attending sermons at Nurul Iman Mosque stems from the preacher's influence and the issues presented. They are drawn to sermons where they can discover skilled and compelling preachers who provide sermons relevant to their spiritual needs. The sermon content, which frequently touched on topics pertinent to life concerns, provided them practical counsel and insights for daily living. The preacher's ability to reach these women's hearts and minds and the caliber of the sermon delivery is greatly appreciated.

Neli remarked that she enjoys attending studies linked to the issue of ethics and soul purification. She can easily modify the time she comes to the study with the study theme that will be elevated because the study timetable is clearly stated. She claims that participating in studies related to the discussed topic will make it easier to meet her spiritual demands. (Interview with Neli, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 14, 2023) In keeping with the preceding narrative, Fitri also decided to attend studies in Blok M since numerous regular book studies are held there. She admitted that the lecture given by Ustadz Hamid on the concepts of soul purification was her favorite. After learning about the subject, she could undertake more self-introspection and felt better in self-control. (Interview with Fitri, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 14, 2023)

Silva claimed that she was interested in participating in the study at this mosque owing to the preachers' suitability, as opposed to the other two who chose to participate based on topic preferences. She admitted to listening to Ustadz Khalid Basalamah and Ustadz Nuzul Dzikri's preachings. The Nurul Iman Mosque has a weekly study program for these two preachers. As a result, Vina consistently

shows up for their joint study. She is presently a teacher in one of Jakarta's private schools. The constancy of the regular study at the Nurul Iman Mosque allows her to organize her activities for a week easily. She has set a specific timetable to attend the sermons. Thus, she clears her schedule and refuses requests for private teachings on the days she will attend the study. (Interview with Vina, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 14, 2023)

Most informants shared similar narratives about how they felt at ease with the lecturing style and interaction of the preacher who participated in the study. Some devotees who come to hear the lectures are also drawn to the figure of the preacher. As a result, some of them prefer to attend lessons taught by preachers they already know.

Convenience of Timing and Location

The Nurul Iman mosque is appealing due to the availability of daily sermons. Some informants expressed a strong desire to attend the studies, owing to a desire to satisfy their spiritual requirements. Due to their hectic schedules and other daily obligations, it can be difficult for them to attend a class, given their limited spare time. Some appreciate the Nurul Iman mosque's regularity in hosting daily studies since they can fulfill their spiritual thirst by attending classes on their off days.

Some working women can only attend the study on their days off. Seli, a private institution tutor, must work nearly seven days a week. Saturday afternoon is her only spare time. As a result, she can only attend the study on Saturdays after she has completed her teaching duties for the day. Her wish to participate in the study more frequently was brought up throughout the talk, but she can only do so once a week due to her limited free time. (Interview with Seli, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 20, 2023)

Numerous working women encounter similar situations as well. They must perform their responsibilities when strongly compelled to attend their courses. As a result, some of them frequently need help locating religious assemblies that can accommodate them. Those with busy schedules can participate in regular daily lessons at the Nurul Iman Mosque at times that suit them. This flexibility meets their desire for religious intake and guidance because they can attend the study at their most convenient time without feeling constrained by a defined timetable. The regularity of lecturers provides a continual supply of religious education and inspiration, reinforcing their dedication to lifelong learning and spiritual growth.

Other preferences indicate that attending the study is motivated by the mosque's advantageous location. The Nurul Iman mosque is conveniently located amid the city, close to a retail complex, and is reachable by various public transit options. Even though the mosque is in South Jakarta, most of the study congregation is from Jabodetabek and comes from other nearby cities. Women who value convenience in attending classes may select mosques that offer daily classes at various times and strategic places. This investigation emphasizes the significance of temporal flexibility, which allows them to attend based on their availability and meet their hectic schedules. It also highlights the importance of strategic sites in attracting many visitors, given that many city dwellers still rely on public transportation.

The Embodied Practices: Transformative Experiences and Personal Growth

The active participation of Salafi women in several studies and activities hosted by the mosque has influenced their spiritual, personal, and social life. This section will investigate their transformative experiences during their engagement with Nurul Iman mosque, specifically:

Nurturing Spiritual Growth

The mosque has significantly contributed to the spiritual development of Salafi women, who view the mosque as their primary source of religious knowledge. Religious education is crucial for spiritual growth. Participating and attending religious lectures can deepen one's dedication to religion, which in turn can strengthen one's faith. Participation of Salafi women in mosque studies boosts knowledge acquisition. As their understanding of religious doctrine grows, it eventually guides how they ought to lead their lives.

According to Neli's perspective, she engaged in the study at the Nurul Iman Mosque because she required the lessons provided. Furthermore, as she begins her *hijrah* process, she must continue expanding her knowledge to ensure and encourage her journey. Based on this narrative, it is possible to conclude that the role of the studies held at this mosque will contribute to strengthening one's convictions, particularly for women who are undertaking the *hijrah* journey and need to remain steadfast in their beliefs. (Interview with Neli, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 14, 2023)

Attendance at the study also helps to cultivate religious consciousness. Religious awareness refers to a person's inner aspect related to the sacred. Religious attitude is a condition in a person that urges him to act by his holy obedience. Thus, religious attitude is a complex integration of a person's knowledge, feelings, and religious activities. (Oktavia & Mastanora, 2020)

Several informant accounts noted that their engagement in the mosque profoundly impacted them, particularly their spiritual experience. Hanum stated that after taking part in the study, she has been more aware of her role as a creature and servant of God, whose responsibility is to carry out her God's orders and avoid any prohibitions. She is more contemplative about her life's purpose since she understands her status as a creature. Her concern for her mission in life as a servant who must serve his Lord compelled her to keep striving to worship and cultivate higher faith and piety. She further said that her participation in the study contributed to her relationship with God and her interactions with human beings, where she had to behave morally and respect others. (Interview with Hanum, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, June 28, 2023)

Hanum's consideration of her experience is particularly significant since the effects of her regular studies helped her realize that she is a servant of God. Neal asserts that "all spiritual growth processes" depend on one's ability to know oneself. Numerous paradigms of spiritual knowledge have held this idea throughout history.¹ Many spiritual belief systems are founded on the idea of

¹ Judith A. Neal, "Leadership and Spirituality in the Work Place," in *Leadership: Theory, Application, & Skill Development*, In Lussier R, Achua C (ed.) (Cengage learning, 2015), 461–68.

knowing oneself. (Spittles, 2008, p. 8) We can meet our spiritual needs by acknowledging and accepting personal responsibility for the common good, realizing how intertwined all life is, and giving back to others and the environment. As a result, as one progresses along the vertical axis of spirituality and learns to "know oneself as soul," so does one's understanding of the horizontal axis of spirituality of how interconnected one is to others. In other words, the extent to which one knows oneself as a soul corresponds to the area to which one also knows others as oneself.

Development of Ethical Formations and Moral Decision-making

Increased moral awareness is frequently reported among women who regularly attend classes. Thori knowledge of the ethical standards, obligations, and values imposed by their religious convictions is aided by the lessons and discussions in the sermon. Furthermore, attendance at studies frequently assists in developing self-control in Salafi women. Through the lectures' teachings and reminders, individuals can cultivate self-discipline, regulate their emotions, and adhere to moral and ethical values.

Following her regular attendance at studies at the Nurul Iman Mosque, Raisa saw a favorable change in herself. She laments that she used to be a little temperamental since she was frequently irritable with her parents and was readily roused by emotions. She can better maintain self-control after attending the study and learning about ethics. She thought it would be unfortunate if she knew anything but did not put it to use. Surprisingly, Raisa was only consciously aware of her shift in attitude once several of her friends reacted positively to it. (*Interview with Raisa, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, March 18, 2023*)

Rifa had a different experience when she was fascinated by Salafism. Her youthful vitality made her a powerful Salafi woman. She was eager to bring Salafi's ideas to her family and was passionate about implementing them. She vehemently opposed any customs in her family that she perceived to be against Salafi's beliefs. Tahlil and dhikr after the congregational prayer were topics she openly discussed and even loudly addressed to his family members. Her attitude subsequently led to conflict with her family. After frequently attending the study, Rifa became aware that what she was doing was improper. She insisted that the study had helped her understand the value of morality. She understood that she had been doing things incorrectly and should have acted with noble principles instead of imposing her will. From that point forward, she started to think back and work on herself and his family's relationship. Though she no longer engages in confrontation, she nevertheless places the highest emphasis on ethics and morals. (*Interview with Rifa, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 21, 2023*)

The existence of sermons allows Salafi women to engage in self-reflection and introspection. Individuals can be encouraged to critically evaluate their thoughts, actions, and behaviors and engage in self-reflection as a form of personal improvement through studies. In Islamic teachings, *murāqaba* (self-awareness) emphasizes the necessity of self-reflection and self-awareness in spiritual development.

The Nurul Iman mosque study program may also aid in developing self-control in metropolitan Salafi women. The lectures' teachings and reminders

emphasize the necessity of self-discipline and devotion to moral and ethical ideals. Women who frequently listen to sermons can gain from the advice given in these religious gatherings, enhancing their capacity to practice self-control in various spheres of life.

Beyond religious understanding and emotional well-being, Salafi women's participation in sermons in mosque programs has a significant impact. Regular attendance fosters the establishment of ethics and influences how people make moral judgments. These results underline the tremendous influence of sermon attendance on the moral and ethical aspects of Salafi women's lives, highlighting the transformational power of religious participation in fostering moral development and awareness. They grew personally, gained self-awareness, and improved their general well-being due to this transforming event.

Sense of Community and Sisterhood Support

Attending sermons also promotes a strong sense of sisterhood among women. The mosque becomes a meeting place where they may interact with others who hold similar ideals, discuss ideas, and support one another as they pursue their religion. The women in the mosque have a strong sense of sisterhood, which enables them to develop close bonds, offer emotional support, and participate in religious activities together, all of which contribute to their sense of belonging.

The testimonies of the women I spoke with demonstrate the mosque's transformational impact as a place of support, acceptance, and belonging. According to several interviewees, involvement, and participation in the studies at the Nurul Iman Mosque gave them the impression that they had companions who shared their desire to learn and instill piety in themselves. Most individuals emphasized the importance of constantly living in a setting encouraging them to pursue *istiqāma*. One of the informants even said that when we feel lazy, this environment might help and motivate one another. (Interview with Nadia, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, March 18, 2023)

Attending the study serves as a source of inspiration for ongoing education. Despite the ease with which information can be accessible online, several informants even stressed that they are more willing to attend offline studies than online ones. Mahmood's theory strongly emphasizes the development of ethical subjectivity and social relationships within religious communities. Mahmood's claim that spiritual practice and engagement can build a collective identity and sense of belonging is consistent with the women's experience of a strong sense of community within the mosque. (Mahmood, 2011) These women can meet people with similar religious values and views, creating a sense of community and solidarity. Salafi women who attend sermons report a sense of sisterhood, supporting Mahmood's claim that religious activities can foster environments of gendered solidarity and strength. The mosque offers Salafi women a place to interact, support one another emotionally, and participate in prayer activities. According to Mahmood's study, this sense of sisterhood and support is a significant component of their experience.

Regular study attendees report feeling a strong sense of belonging in the mosque. Establishing a close-knit community among the women in the mosque is facilitated by shared religious experiences, prayers, and interactions during sermons. The effects and experiences of Salafi women participating in mosque study

programs go beyond personal spirituality. Regular attendance generates a strong sense of sisterhood and community, with some women treating the mosque as their second home. The results underline the mosque's importance to women's well-being and sense of belonging while highlighting the transforming roles of sisterhood and community.

Religious Convictions vs Life's Realities: Navigating Tensions

A significant increase in persons leaving the so-called "young sparkling world" has been attributed to Salafism, which promotes a rigid and orthodox way of living as a Muslim. (Sunesti et al., 2018, p. 182) Salafi refers to a group of Muslims that promote Puritanism. Maintaining Islam's sanctity requires applying Islamic ideas in their purest form. According to the Puritanization framework, religious activities should be founded on the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, the two fundamental sources of Islam, to purify erroneous Islamic teachings and unauthorized religious innovations (*bid'ah*). To be a devout Muslim, one must undergo this purification to separate Islam from unIslamic elements. (Wahib, 2017, p. 5)

When putting the teachings they acquire into practice, Salafi women who adhere to these conservative interpretations frequently encounter difficulties, mainly when there is a clash between social expectations and their beliefs. It becomes difficult to reconcile their religious practices and ideas with the demands of daily life. These Salafi women could experience pressure to uphold social norms that conflict with their conception of piety. This may result in social exclusion and a sense of isolation—the following lists some of the challenges they encounter and how they navigate them.

Family Dynamics

The initial issue that Salafi women might confront stems from the family dynamic. Some of the accounts from the women I spoke with demonstrate how frequently they experience rejection from their relatives. The story of Murni reveals many conflicts between her and her family. Murni was raised in a sizable, multireligious household. Although several of her relatives are non-Muslims, some have even converted; her parents are Muslims. She tries to interpret the rejection as an expression of parental worry about their kids' potential life decisions, which might differ from their own. Murni claims that her sister, who first decided to convert and don the veil in 2016, went through the most challenging phase of rejection. The veil she was wearing was torn and burned by her father. (Interview with Murni, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, June 10, 2023)

Her fear of conversion stemmed from witnessing her sister's ordeal. *Hijrah* is frequently associated with radical groups and even terrorists, which can lead to widespread prejudice. Murni eventually decided to convert like her sister. She was initially less dedicated than her sister, who wore the veil despite her parents frequently forcing her to take it off. She tried an alternative, taking her niqab off in front of her parents and only taking it on when she was outside. As of the end 2019, Murni had just begun donning the niqab. Along with the forced removal of the veil, her extended relatives frequently scoffed and mocked them. She and her sister are commonly viewed as a terrorist organization because of their veil-wearing. Since both were married to Salafi men who frequently wore short pants, they often received curse words and rude and lewd remarks. They made an effort to be patient

rather than resist. The family slowly started to accept them. Murni claimed that despite frequently receiving expletives, her sister persevered in gently and meticulously teaching her father to read the Koran from scratch to mastery. Her father started to soften and stopped cursing and mocking them through this Koran blessing. (*Interview with Murni, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, June 10, 2023*)

A similar narration also came from Inara, who endured tremendous rejection and insinuation from her family. When she made trivial mistakes, she was constantly undervalued. She must appear perfect to her family since she wears the veil. Her relatives would question her veil and attire if she made a mistake. Inara believes it is unwise to attribute faults to clothing. Additionally, her family frequently questioned her worship practices, which they perceived as odd, and assumed she adhered to unreliable teaching. Nonetheless, she strove to cling to her convictions, ignoring that the concept of piety she understood differed from her family's. She treats every criticism as a challenge to defend her faith. (*Interview with Inara, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 10, 2023*)

Social and Cultural Adjustment

Additionally, it could be difficult for Salafi women to locate social networks that support their practices and beliefs. Navigating social circles that do not share their level of religiosity or have a different understanding of Islam can be challenging. This may result in feelings of isolation or a persistent desire to defend their decisions and opinions to other people.

Shofia used to work as a teacher at a Nature School (*Sekolah Alam*). She encountered several difficulties trying to adhere to what she had learned during her studies at the mosque. She must wear flexible attire when teaching in a Nature School to promote effortless movement. She found it challenging to wear long brackets all the time. Even though there is no set dress code, she frequently feels discriminated against; nonetheless, given the circumstances and the educational atmosphere, she must be able to adapt. However, she finds using music, which is relatively common in the school where she works, to be quite upsetting. She considers it a grave sin when she continues to do something that is clearly against the law. She ultimately decided to retire from her position as a teacher because maintaining her steadfast commitment to her religious practice was more essential than professional. She had become weary of always going through an inner conflict. (*Interview with Shofia, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 17, 2023*)

Ria provided a juxtaposing story of how she experienced alienation from her friends who shared different worldviews. She tried explaining her changes to her friends so they might comprehend, but she did not necessarily remain away from them.

I occasionally find it weird to be with friends (having different beliefs). For instance, we typically have a group or circle of friends when celebrating someone's birthday. I once participated in (the celebration), but over time I started to feel uneasy. I, therefore, decided to contribute but omit the party. Finally, I decided to convey this issue to one of my pals, who tolerated me after some time. Although I felt quite different, I didn't want to be considered disloyal. It seems unwise not to

participate in the event as it is hosted by one of your friends. (Interview with Ria, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 14, 2023)

Gender Roles and Interactions

Regarding gender roles and interactions, Salafi women may have endured challenges. Gender segregation and modest behavior are frequently encouraged by Salafism. Some societies may expect women to work outside the home, participate in public life, or interact publicly with males. Consequently, tensions and conflicts between social expectations and religious commitments could be apparent.

Some women I spoke with declared they felt more comfortable working in a setting where women were the majority of the only employees. They claimed it is required to restrict contact with individuals of the opposite sex.

Izza expressed her gratitude for possibly pursuing psychology at a university in Jakarta. Apart from the fact that it is a subject she is interested in, her university colleagues encourage her efforts to uphold the Salafi principles she has acquired, mainly when dealing with people of the opposite sex. Most female students appear to be keener in psychology. Izza noted that since most of her classmates were female, she was relieved not to engage with the opposing sex. (Interview with Izza, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 10, 2023)

Ningrum, who ultimately decided to resign from her employment, met with another fate. She recounted her professional development before opting to leave her previous employer. She had previously been employed in a Jakarta office. Many duties in her earlier workplace involved interaction with fellow employees of the opposing sex. She initially succeeded in accepting the situation and continued working while establishing rules on how to speak to males, such as speaking must be practical and on topic and refrain from laughing or drawing jokes between interlocutors. (Interview with Ningrum, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, May 21, 2023)

Fira, who works for a company in Jakarta, also shared a story about her struggle to get along with those of the opposite sex. She claimed she might restrict her communication with coworkers by declining to shake hands. It is not allowed to shake hands with who is not her *mahram*. When she is required to deal with her clients, she realizes it is tough to get through this. Even though she must shake hands with her male clients, she is adamant that she is profoundly opposed to what she is doing. (Interview with Fira, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, June 10, 2023)

According to a few of the Salafi women's accounts above, most elected an environment that prevents women from mixing with individuals of the other sex (*ikhtilat*). Some are convinced that a woman should emphasize household duties after marriage. Raisa admitted that she now prefers to remain dwelling with her husband. She was formerly employed as a teacher in a primary school in Tangerang. She is grateful for her decision to focus solely on looking after her household and feels nothing to regret. She firmly believed that caring for the family and being a housewife were honorable jobs for women. It is not only a woman's nature but may also shield her from *fitnah*, mainly if she must go out to work. (Interview with Raisa, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, March 18, 2023)

Despite sharing the same perspective as Raisa, Rahmi contends that women endure the ability to evolve in their unique ways. She established an online fashion and snack business but prioritized caring for her family. In her opinion, a woman's primary responsibility is to care for her family, but it doesn't hinder her from obtaining a career. Additionally, the work does not have to entail her leaving the house. But even at home, she could start a business. (Interview with Rahmi, Nurul Iman Mosque Congregant, personal communication, June 24, 2023)

CONCLUSION

Attending Islamic studies allows Salafi women to cultivate their piety and spirituality. The studies transmit teachings, moral values, and guidances consistent with Salafi beliefs, which enhance their faith and commitment to religious principles. In general, their motivation to attend the studies stems from a desire for spiritual teachings and an understanding of the importance of religion as a foundation and guide to life. They desire to align their life with Islamic ideals because religion provides tranquillity and peace. Their piety and spirituality are cultivated and strengthened in the mosque setting. Preachers, administrators, and other congregants create a community that offers encouragement, guidance, and inspiration, eventually promoting community and sisterhood. This bond also plays a significant role in their spiritual and personal growth.

This study argues that consistent attendance at studies contributes to their transforming journey, particularly in molding their religious subjective and personal development. Their active engagement in various mosque events catalyzes their transformative journey, empowering them to cultivate piety and spiritual growth. However, they frequently have to deal with live realities. Different pressures come from their family, as well as their social and cultural worlds. They must reconcile their commitments and other aspects of their lives. These obstacles offer them chances for empowerment, growth, and self-discovery. It also emphasizes their agency and resilience in nurturing their piety amidst the complexities of contemporary life.

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