

Parenting Strategies and Adaptation among Muslim Families in the Prostitution-Affected Area of Samas Beach, Yogyakarta

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Abstract

This study examines how Muslim families manage parenting in the prostitution-affected area of Samas Beach, Yogyakarta, where social and economic risks shape everyday life. Using a qualitative case study design, the research draws on in-depth interviews and participant observation with four families living in this unique context. The results reveal a spectrum of parenting strategies, from structured routines and active communication to more permissive patterns influenced by limited resources and parental absence. Parental backgrounds, especially experiences with past risk and hardship, often led parents to become more protective and intentional in raising their children. Economic pressures and irregular work schedules contributed to increased reliance on older siblings and less consistent daily supervision. Religious knowledge and community involvement sometimes supported families in guiding their children's behavior, but could also present challenges when routines were disrupted. The findings highlight that parenting in a prostitution-affected environment requires ongoing adaptation and negotiation. These insights point to the importance of context-sensitive support systems for strengthening resilience among children and parents living in similar high-risk communities.

Keywords: *Parenting, Adaptation, Muslim Families, Prostitution-Affected Community*

A. Introduction

The environment in which children are raised exerts a significant influence on their development and behavior. Multiple environmental factors—cultural context, socioeconomic status, and family dynamics—shape parenting practices and, consequently, child outcomes (Var et al., 2015). These parenting behaviors are themselves subject to change, influenced by cultural and ethnic norms that highlight the sociocultural impact on caregiving styles. For instance, Roubinov and Boyce (2017) found that a family's socioeconomic position can affect parental mental health and access to resources, which in turn shapes parenting approaches. Similarly, Var et al., (2015) reported that mothers with different socioeconomic backgrounds often exhibit distinct caregiving strategies, closely linked to their status. Thus, parental relationships, economic

circumstances, family health, and sociocultural context all play pivotal roles in shaping both parenting and the parent-child relationship.

The connection between parenting practices and the surrounding environment is central to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which provides a comprehensive paradigm for understanding the multitude of influences on family life. This theoretical perspective holds that human development is shaped by interconnected environmental systems (Bettis et al., 2020; Fulantelli et al., 2021). Five such systems are identified: the microsystem (immediate contexts such as family and school), the mesosystem (interconnections among microsystems), the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem.

Within the microsystem, direct interactions—such as those within families—have been shown to foster children's self-efficacy when characterized by warmth and structure (Bahrami et al., 2017). The mesosystem, which encompasses relationships among home, school, and peers, can improve parenting outcomes when communication is consistent and effective (Lickenbrock & Braungart-Rieker, 2015). Households with higher socioeconomic status often exhibit more collaborative rule-setting and emotional support, correlating with family harmony (Roubinov & Boyce, 2017; Var et al., 2015). The chronosystem adds a temporal dimension, acknowledging that life transitions such as parental employment changes can alter parenting practices and child development trajectories over time (Fulantelli et al., 2021). Understanding Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems thus offers insight for interventions aimed at promoting healthy developmental environments by addressing negative influences at multiple ecological levels and encouraging positive parent-child interactions.

The relevance of this framework is evident in communities such as Samas Beach in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Once a thriving tourist destination in the late 1980s, this area is now stigmatized for its concentration of karaoke venues and commercial sex work (Amalia, 2018; Daniello Rudolf Laukon et al., 2024). Observations and interviews in August 2024 documented nine karaoke bars, massage parlors, and several houses operating as brothels. The presence of empty liquor bottles further indicates problematic behaviors within the local community.

The impacts of these activities are multifaceted, affecting economic, social, and religious life. Economically, the decline in tourism since the 1990s has forced many families to abandon traditional businesses and seek alternative livelihoods. Socially, the mixture of locals and newcomers engaged in sex work and related enterprises has exposed children to moral degradation—including foul language, inappropriate dress, and even early sexual activity. Such issues are often normalized or dismissed by residents, compounding the problem.

Previous research has largely focused on the negative consequences of prostitution on children, such as trauma, mental health issues, and the tendency for rescued children to return to exploitative situations (Petrocchi, 2016; Sibanyoni & Olofinbiyi, 2020; Hounmenou, 2017; Reed et al., 2019). Factors including peer influence, family relationships, substance abuse, and poverty are cited as drivers of continued risk. However, there remains a significant gap in understanding the parenting strategies employed by Muslim families in these challenging environments. Such knowledge is essential for informing interventions that protect children and support their moral and emotional resilience.

In Islam, parenting is rooted in religious principles that emphasize exemplary conduct (*uswatun hasanah*) and humane behavior (Rouzi et al., 2020). The Prophet Muhammad taught that “no parent can give a better gift to a child than good manners” (At-Tirmidhi). The Qur’an (Luqman:14) also instructs children to treat their parents with kindness, reinforcing the reciprocal nature of ideal Islamic parenting. These teachings underscore the need for role modeling, moral education, and balanced discipline in childrearing (Syamsuddin et al., 2024). This study aims to analyze the specific parenting strategies adopted by Muslim families living in the prostitution zone of Samas Beach, Yogyakarta, and to identify the factors influencing their caregiving practices. By focusing on this unique context, the research seeks to inform community interventions and offer practical guidance for parents seeking to foster positive child development amid social adversity.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach to explore the parenting strategies of Muslim families residing in a prostitution-affected area along the coast of Samas Beach, Yogyakarta. The case study method was selected to allow for a thorough and nuanced investigation of parenting practices within a highly specific social context characterized by unique social and cultural challenges. Unlike broader qualitative methods that may focus on more generalized phenomena, this approach enables detailed contextual analysis and highlights the interplay of various factors influencing family life in this setting. The research was conducted over an eleven-month period, from August 2024 to June 2025. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the data collected would be highly relevant and reflective of the research objectives (Mardhiyah et al., 2025). Four Muslim families met the following inclusion criteria: (1) adherence to Islam, (2) residence in the prostitution zone of Samas Beach, and (3) willingness to participate in the study.

Data collection utilized several methods. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture the lived experiences, viewpoints, and parenting practices of each family. This format provided the flexibility to explore emerging themes while maintaining consistency with the study's aims. In addition to interviews, participant observation was carried out to directly observe daily family activities, rules implementation, and the dynamics of parent-child interaction. Anecdotal records were kept to document significant behaviors and incidents in a detailed and factual manner immediately after observation, ensuring that the resulting data were descriptive and naturalistic. Thematic analysis guided the data processing. This involved transcribing interviews and observations, reading and familiarizing with the data, identifying and organizing major themes, and constructing narratives and interpretations based on the findings.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Results

Four Muslim families participated as key informants in this study. Each family lived in the prostitution-affected area of Samas Beach and represented diverse backgrounds. The families included parents working as a karaoke venue guard, fisherman, preschool teacher, homemaker, snack vendor, and laundry service provider. Some parents had unique life experiences, such as previous involvement in sex work, substance use, religious leadership, and religious conversion. The number of children in these families ranged from two to four, with a mix of sons and daughters. The variety of these family profiles provided a factual basis for understanding the parenting practices and challenges encountered in their daily lives.

1) Parenting Strategies among Muslim Families

The families in this study demonstrated a range of parenting strategies shaped by their backgrounds and daily life in the prostitution-affected area of Samas Beach. Two families practiced an authoritative approach, reflected in the presence of clear household rules, regular communication between parents and children, and active involvement in the children's development. In one such family, the mother, who previously worked as a sex worker, and her husband, a karaoke venue guard, were both committed to setting boundaries at home while also fostering open dialogue with their daughters. They included religious activities such as prayer and discussions about Islamic values in their daily routines and tried to support their children emotionally, particularly when they faced pressures from peers or difficulties at school.

A similar pattern emerged in another family, where the father, a fisherman with a history of alcohol use and street racing, and the mother, a preschool teacher, divided responsibilities in raising their two sons. The father took the

initiative to establish religious study sessions in the neighborhood due to the absence of such activities in the local mosque. Both parents encouraged open discussions about school and friendships, implemented discipline in a flexible and non-punitive way, and routinely taught their sons to take responsibility for their actions. Solutions to problems were sought collectively as a family, and the mother also integrated advice and moral guidance into everyday life at home and through her work with neighborhood children.

In contrast, the other two families displayed a more permissive parenting style. Economic demands meant that both parents in one family, where the father was a local religious figure and the mother a snack vendor, had to work long hours, often leaving the four daughters to manage themselves. The parents rarely imposed strict rules or structured schedules, and religious practices were encouraged but not consistently enforced, often depending on the availability of the parents. The care of younger children was sometimes entrusted to their older siblings.

The final family included a father with a background of gang involvement, substance use, and previous associations with sex work, and a mother who converted to Islam in 2018 and worked in laundry services. Their three children experienced less organized routines and inconsistent supervision. The eldest son developed a habit of consuming alcohol, influenced by his father's earlier lifestyle. The mother faced challenges in maintaining discipline, particularly as she was still adapting to Islamic practices, and often found that her children made their own decisions regarding daily activities. Both parents expressed concern about negative influences from the surrounding environment but struggled to provide consistent oversight due to their work schedules and other pressures. These findings show how parenting strategies varied from family to family, with authoritative approaches marked by clear rules, shared responsibilities, and regular communication, while permissive approaches were characterized by greater autonomy for children and less consistent supervision. The approaches adopted reflected the parents' personal histories, economic circumstances, and the challenges of living in an environment with high social risk.

2) Factors Influencing Parenting Practices

The parenting practices adopted by Muslim families in the prostitution-affected area of Samas Beach were shaped by a complex interplay of parental backgrounds, economic hardship, time constraints, religious experience, and exposure to the neighborhood's social environment. The stories of these families reveal how each of these factors became both a challenge and a resource in their daily parenting.

Parental background emerged as a major influence. One mother, who had previously worked as a sex worker before marrying her current husband,

described her motivation to prevent her daughters from experiencing the kind of difficulties she faced in her youth. She was especially vigilant about her daughters' social circles, often asking them to come home directly after school and to report if any unfamiliar men tried to interact with them. She insisted that her daughters help with chores and participate in family prayer at home, believing that religious routines and open communication could keep them anchored. The mother acknowledged that her own experiences had made her more cautious and protective, sometimes causing tension when her daughters wanted more independence. Nevertheless, she felt these measures were necessary, especially given the environment where sex work and alcohol consumption were visible daily realities.

Similarly, a father who had once struggled with alcohol and a lifestyle centered on street racing tried to redirect his own sons away from those influences. This father, after leaving his past behind, established a Qur'an study group in the neighborhood. He explained that the mosque in their area did not offer regular religious classes for children, so he began inviting neighborhood children, including his own, to recite and discuss religious teachings at home every evening. The family often discussed daily events together, and the father encouraged his sons to share any problems they encountered at school or with friends. Both parents believed that close supervision and collective discussion were important to counteract the risk of their children being drawn into negative peer groups.

Economic hardship was a shared reality for all informants and played a central role in shaping parenting practices. Most parents worked outside the home, sometimes leaving early in the morning and returning late at night. In the family of a fisherman and a snack vendor, this routine meant their four daughters had to manage themselves for hours after school. The eldest daughter, though still in junior high, was responsible for preparing simple meals and making sure her younger sisters did their homework and stayed indoors. The mother explained that while she trusted her daughters, she sometimes worried that without direct parental oversight, they might be influenced by their surroundings. She recalled occasions when her children had come home late after playing near the karaoke venues or had been given small gifts by adult visitors passing through the area, raising her concern about safety and boundaries.

Time constraints also affected how rules were implemented and supervision maintained. In the household of a recent convert to Islam who worked at a laundry, routines were often inconsistent. The mother wanted to introduce more structured prayer and study times for her three children but found it difficult to keep a regular schedule because of her unpredictable working hours. When both parents were away, the children decided for themselves when to eat, when to do homework, and how to spend their free time. The mother

noted that her eldest son, now a teenager, had begun to spend more time outside the home and had started drinking alcohol with friends, a habit she traced back to her husband's earlier lifestyle. She expressed frustration at not being able to monitor him more closely and sometimes felt at a loss for how to intervene, especially since her own religious knowledge was still developing.

Religious experience and engagement served as both a protective factor and, at times, a limitation. Families with established routines around prayer, Qur'an study, and attendance at community religious events found it easier to keep their children involved in positive activities. Parents believed that participation in religious gatherings, such as evening recitations or mosque-based programs, created a sense of belonging and offered role models beyond the family. In contrast, those still learning religious practices or whose daily routines were highly fragmented found it harder to set expectations or maintain consistent boundaries.

The broader social environment in Samas Beach posed ongoing risks that complicated parenting efforts. All parents described the ever-present influence of the surrounding prostitution venues, frequent alcohol consumption among neighbors, and the visibility of adult entertainment. Several families reported that children had encountered adults using inappropriate language or had witnessed arguments and drunken behavior outside their homes. In some cases, older children became curious or even attracted to the activities happening nearby, and parents struggled to keep them focused on schoolwork and home life.

Parents expressed a shared sense of vulnerability in the face of these challenges. Some found strength in mutual support with neighbors or by involving children in community-based religious groups. Others relied on older siblings to help monitor the younger children's behavior and safety. Despite their varied backgrounds and resources, all families demonstrated ongoing efforts to adapt their parenting to the realities of their environment, drawing on whatever experience, faith, and support they could muster. These narratives reveal that parenting in the prostitution-affected area is shaped by a continuous process of negotiation—between past and present, between economic survival and moral aspiration, and between the boundaries set at home and the influences encountered outside.

2. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal the complex and dynamic processes underlying parenting practices among Muslim families living in the prostitution-affected area of Samas Beach. The data show that both authoritative and permissive parenting strategies were practiced, each shaped by family history, economic hardship, time constraints, religious experience, and daily exposure to a challenging social environment. Through the stories of the four families, it

becomes clear that the parenting process in such a high-risk environment is never static, but rather involves constant negotiation, adaptation, and compromise.

Authoritative parenting emerged among families where parents—often those who had experienced personal hardship or risk—chose to be actively involved in their children’s lives. These parents set clear household rules, encouraged open communication, and were deliberate in integrating religious routines into the daily schedule. For example, one mother who previously worked as a sex worker, reflected on her journey to reshape her life and her commitment to ensure her daughters would not face similar dangers. She insisted on direct communication with her children, encouraged them to be home immediately after school, and required their participation in prayer and family chores. The father, who worked as a karaoke venue guard, also contributed to discipline and emotional support. Both parents tried to foster resilience and self-confidence, believing that giving children a voice in family discussions would help them resist negative outside influences. This approach aligns with Bahrami et al. (2017), who note that positive family relationships and supportive parenting strengthen children’s self-efficacy, especially in high-risk environments. Additionally, Shubert et al. (2022) emphasize that consistent modeling and civic-oriented family dialogue contribute significantly to the development of moral and responsible children, especially when parents exemplify the behaviors they expect.

A similar pattern was observed in the family of a fisherman and a preschool teacher. The father’s history of alcohol use and street racing motivated him to redirect his energy toward building a safe and supportive home for his sons. He initiated a Qur’an study group in the neighborhood, filling the gap left by the local mosque, which did not offer such programs. Together with his wife, he shared household responsibilities, kept discipline flexible but present, and emphasized the importance of religion in everyday life. This resonates with the findings of Kumandas, Kilic, and Var (2015), who observed that parenting strategies in families with different socioeconomic backgrounds are strongly influenced by the parents’ experiences and status. Moreover, research by Nurjanah et al. (2022) supports the idea that equitable partnership and shared responsibilities between spouses in Muslim families contribute to greater balance in child-rearing and help parents adapt to contemporary family dynamics.

However, the implementation of authoritative parenting was not always smooth or without tension. One mother, after leaving her previous life as a sex worker, found herself constantly negotiating boundaries with her daughters. She described how, despite her best efforts to enforce curfews and maintain strict routines, her daughters sometimes resisted, wanting to spend more time with friends or attend social gatherings. This mother would often use family meals or prayer time to open discussions, gently reminding her daughters of the dangers

outside, and reinforcing her hopes for their future. There were moments, she admitted, when fatigue from daily chores and worry about financial security made it hard to maintain consistency, but the desire to break the cycle of vulnerability pushed her to persist. This is consistent with research by Yue et al. (2024), who found that parental mental health—shaped by stress, fatigue, and lack of partner support—has a measurable impact on parenting quality and child well-being. Interventions that address parental mental health could thus enhance parenting outcomes in high-risk environments.

On the other hand, permissive parenting was more commonly found in families constrained by economic pressures and limited parental availability. For example, in one family, both parents worked long hours—one as a fisherman and local religious figure, the other selling snacks—leaving the care of their four daughters to the eldest sibling for much of the day. The mother expressed both pride in her eldest daughter's sense of responsibility and guilt for her own absence. She recalled times when her daughters wandered near the karaoke venues, attracted by music or the curiosity of seeing outsiders. She worried about the gifts her daughters received from passing adults, sometimes suspecting they were attempts to lure the girls into risky situations. In these circumstances, routines were irregular and discipline depended on the children's own initiative. Religious practice was encouraged but not always enforced, and discussions about risky behavior happened only when problems became obvious. This dynamic reflects the patterns described by Li (2025), who notes that permissive parenting, though often rooted in compassion, tends to correlate with increased behavioral problems and reduced emotional discipline in children. Furthermore, research by Erickson (2017) reveals that effective family economic partnership and role-sharing have long been crucial for family resilience, but when these are disrupted by economic hardship, parental presence and discipline are often compromised.

The role of religious knowledge and routine appeared as both a support and a limitation in the parenting process. In families where prayer, Qur'an study, and participation in community religious events were maintained, children tended to follow positive routines and develop stronger moral frameworks. Parents confident in their religious understanding could offer clear guidance and reinforce expectations, in line with the Islamic principle of *uswatun hasanah*, or exemplary role modeling (Rouzi et al., 2020). Conversely, parents who were less familiar with Islamic practices, or still adapting after conversion, often felt uncertain about how to guide their children, particularly in the face of powerful peer and community influences. This is supported by Syamsuddin et al. (2024), who emphasize that successful Islamic parenting depends not only on intention but also on consistent modeling and active engagement. Whitaker (2019) and Vally & El Hichami (2020) confirm that parental involvement in education and

religious development, especially among mothers, enhances both discipline and character development in children.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides a powerful lens through which to understand these family experiences. The microsystem—the immediate context of family—was revealed as the primary arena for negotiating values, routines, and relationships. Here, the quality of parent-child interaction shaped the children's resilience and their ability to navigate outside risks. The mesosystem—interconnections among home, school, and peers—became particularly important in situations where parents were frequently absent. In such contexts, siblings, extended family, neighbors, and religious teachers sometimes filled the gaps left by parental absence, providing additional support or, in some cases, introducing new risks. For example, in one family, the older sister often helped her younger siblings with homework and made decisions about household chores, effectively becoming the *de facto* guardian when parents were away. The chronosystem was visible in stories of parents making major life changes, such as leaving behind harmful behaviors or adopting new religious practices, which led to shifts in household routines and parenting expectations (Bettis et al., 2020; Fulantelli et al., 2021). The importance of ongoing, open communication in family relationships is further affirmed by Sękowski & Gwiazdowska-Stańczak (2018), who found that such communication supports resilience and empathy even in high-risk and high-achieving families. Similarly, Takiedddine & Taqiyeddine (2023) demonstrate that strong intergenerational communication and mutual respect help build family unity and reduce conflict.

The wider community environment—the macrosystem—presented persistent challenges. The presence of prostitution venues, karaoke bars, and open alcohol use created a backdrop where deviant behavior was normalized. Children were exposed to inappropriate language, public arguments, and, at times, invitations to experiment with alcohol or other risky activities. Parents described their sense of vulnerability and frustration at not always being able to shield their children from these influences. Some tried to compensate by strengthening family routines and turning to community support, while others acknowledged their own limitations due to economic pressures and fatigue. Wohl et al. (2018) describe how major disruptions—such as imprisonment or spiritual crisis—can trigger a nostalgia for a better self and foster personal transformation. This insight is relevant to several parents in this study, who, after experiencing crisis or social stigma, attempted to reform their lives and serve as positive role models for their children. Worthman, Tomlinson, & Rotheram-Borus (2016) further argue that the timing of parental intervention and presence is critical, with certain developmental stages offering more opportunity for positive influence.

These findings offer several practical and theoretical implications. From a policy perspective, there is a clear need for programs that support families in high-risk areas, such as community-based religious education, after-school supervision, and parental support groups. Strengthening the social safety net and providing access to economic opportunities may help reduce the need for both parents to work long hours, allowing for greater parental presence and engagement. From a theoretical standpoint, this research affirms the importance of holistic frameworks, such as Bronfenbrenner's model, in understanding the layered nature of parenting challenges in socially complex environments. The data also reinforce the value of Islamic parenting principles—emphasizing exemplary conduct, moral education, and communication—as tools for building resilience in children. Erickson (2017) reminds us that equitable marital partnership and shared responsibility have been fundamental to the stability of family life across cultures and history, which may provide valuable insights for strengthening contemporary family systems.

The practical reality for these families is that support often comes not from formal programs, but from everyday connections and creative problem-solving. For some, joining or initiating small religious gatherings at home became a way to keep their children engaged in positive activities and build a sense of belonging. Others found help in simple routines, like eating meals together when possible or checking in on each child before bed. Parents shared information about neighborhood risks with one another and sometimes stepped in to help watch a neighbor's children if someone needed to work late. These small acts of cooperation and vigilance helped create a buffer against the daily exposure to risky behaviors outside the home, even when resources were limited and challenges felt overwhelming. As Pavelová (2017) notes, individuals are often more motivated to initiate personal reform when faced with overwhelming relational or identity-based stress, particularly when family cohesion is threatened.

The experiences of the families in Samas Beach show that parenting in this environment is shaped as much by adaptation and persistence as by rules or intention. The daily effort to protect children, encourage their growth, and keep them anchored in shared values is ongoing and often exhausting. Yet in the midst of social pressures and uncertainty, these parents continue to search for what works—sometimes improvising, sometimes relying on faith or the advice of others, always hoping their choices will help their children avoid the dangers they themselves have faced. These stories do not point to easy solutions, but they do offer a grounded understanding of the courage and resourcefulness that define parenting in one of society's most challenging settings.

D. Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth look at how Muslim families living in the prostitution-affected area of Samas Beach navigate the daily realities of parenting in a setting marked by persistent social and economic risk. The experiences of the four families reveal that parenting is shaped by a continuous process of adaptation, as parents try to balance rules and flexibility, religious aspirations and daily constraints, and hope for their children's futures amid the uncertainties of their environment. The research found that families responded to their circumstances through a range of strategies, from establishing clear routines and active communication to granting autonomy when supervision was not possible. Parental backgrounds, especially previous exposure to risk and hardship, often drove parents to become more protective and intentional in their caregiving. Economic hardship and the need for both parents to work outside the home contributed to less structured routines and increased reliance on older siblings, highlighting how financial pressures shape family life at a very practical level. The presence or absence of religious knowledge and community support further influenced how parents set boundaries, coped with challenges, and tried to foster positive values in their children.

The voices and actions of these families show that there are no simple solutions for raising children in environments like Samas Beach. What emerges instead is a portrait of perseverance: parents making daily decisions – sometimes planned, sometimes improvised – in an effort to keep their children safe and guide them toward a better future. Their stories suggest that effective support cannot be reduced to a single program or intervention, but rather must take into account the complex realities and resourcefulness of families themselves. By listening to these experiences, this study hopes to offer insight for those who work alongside families in high-risk communities and for policymakers interested in building more responsive support systems. The resilience and commitment shown by these parents are a reminder that, even under pressure, families remain a vital foundation for children's growth, learning, and hope.

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