

## The Role of Power Inequality in Gender Relations as a Factor Causing Domestic Violence

**Erfandi Hasan**

Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia  
[10100123059@uin-alauddin.ac.id](mailto:10100123059@uin-alauddin.ac.id)

**Nur Alim**

Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia  
[10100123063@uin-alauddin.ac.id](mailto:10100123063@uin-alauddin.ac.id)

**Kurniati**

Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia  
[kurniati@uin-alauddin.ac.id](mailto:kurniati@uin-alauddin.ac.id)

### Abstract

*Domestic violence (DV) is a form of human rights violation that continues to occur frequently in various levels of society. One of the factors underlying domestic violence is the power imbalance between men and women in domestic relationships. From an Islamic legal perspective, the relationship between husband and wife should be based on the principles of equality, compassion, and justice. However, patriarchal culture often places men in a dominant position, creating an imbalance of power and opening up opportunities for violence. This article aims to analyze the influence of power imbalance in gender relations on domestic violence and to seek solutions to reduce this inequality in accordance with Islamic values.*

**Keywords:** *Gender Equality, Gender Relations, Power Imbalance, Domestic Violence, and Islamic Law.*

### Abstract

Kekerasan dalam rumah tangga (KDRT) merupakan salah satu bentuk pelanggaran hak asasi manusia yang masih sering terjadi di berbagai lapisan masyarakat. Salah satu faktor yang melatarbelakangi terjadinya KDRT adalah ketimpangan kuasa antara laki-laki dan perempuan dalam hubungan rumah tangga. Dalam perspektif hukum Islam, relasi antara suami dan istri seharusnya didasarkan pada prinsip kesetaraan, kasih sayang, dan keadilan. Namun, budaya patriarki sering kali menempatkan laki-laki pada posisi dominan yang memunculkan ketidakseimbangan kuasa dan membuka peluang terjadinya kekerasan. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh ketimpangan kuasa dalam relasi gender terhadap terjadinya KDRT serta mencari solusi untuk mengurangi ketimpangan tersebut sesuai dengan nilai-nilai Islam.

**Kata Kunci:** Relasi gender, ketimpangan kuasa, kekerasan dalam rumah tangga, hukum Islam.

## INTRODUCTION

Gender is a behavioral difference between men and women that is socially constructed, namely differences that are not God's decree but are created by humans (not nature) through a long social and cultural process. Gender problems in society have existed since humans began to appear on this earth. However, at the beginning when science and technology were not as advanced

as they are today, gender issues did not receive attention and were not discussed either by society in general or by feminists. This is because the cultural values that developed related to the role or division of labor, responsibilities and standard images of men and women at that time were considered as something natural and legitimate along with the development of the times followed by the advancement of science and information technology, the attention of the public, especially feminists, to social phenomena related to gender issues began to become the focus of attention (Sari & Hidayati, 2022).

Power inequality in gender relations is one of the main factors that cause domestic violence (KDRT). In many societies, patriarchal culture is still deeply rooted that places men as the dominant party and women as subordinate groups. This condition of inequality causes men to tend to have greater control over decisions in the household and economic resources, while women are in a more vulnerable position and have limited rights. This power imbalance creates an imbalance in social relations and can trigger various forms of violence, both physical, psychological, sexual, and economic against women (Saputra et al., 2024).

A strong patriarchal culture, in which male dominance is considered an accepted social norm, reinforces the occurrence of gender-based violence in the household. Power inequality that is internalized in husband-wife relations and in the social pattern of society creates a hierarchy that places women in a lower position, so that women are vulnerable to subordination and violence. In addition, low public awareness of women's rights and the impact of gender-based violence have also strengthened permissive attitudes towards these acts of violence (Aryana, 2022).

From a gender perspective, domestic violence is not only an individual problem, but also a reflection of an unequal social structure and patriarchal system that forms a family structure in which men have greater power than women in domestic life. This inequality causes women to become objects of violence because it is a symbol of resistance to the dominance of male power that they want to maintain.

In addition to cultural factors, women's economic dependence on their husbands also contributes to this power imbalance. Women who are not economically independent tend to find it difficult to resist violence or get out of such situations due to limited access to and control over family economic resources. The practice of violence is also one way for men to maintain power and control over women in the household.

The rate of domestic violence (KDRT) in Indonesia continues to creep up from year to year. GoodStats data noted that as of September 4, 2025, the number of domestic violence cases has exceeded 10,240 cases.

Domestic violence cases are stable at more than 1000 cases every month, even in July 2025 the highest record was recorded with 1,395 new cases. This figure invites concern from a number of parties because it is increasingly worrying. A number of women activists urged serious attention from the community and the state.

In research conducted by Sulaeman (2022), it was explained that domestic violence (KDRT) is influenced by various factors, including patriarchal culture, wife's economic dependence on her husband, low level of education, and weak legal understanding in the family. The study explained the factors that cause domestic violence in general and saw violence as a social and legal problem that is influenced by many interrelated aspects.

Domestic violence prevention needs to be encouraged through cultural change that supports gender equality, women's economic and social empowerment, and strict law enforcement against perpetrators of violence. Public education and gender awareness campaigns are important steps to change the paradigm and break the cycle of violence caused by gender power inequality.

In addition, the results of a case study at the Rifka Annisa Women's Crisis Center revealed that power relations inequality has a great influence on violence against women and children in Indonesia. This inequality creates a hierarchy of power that places women in a structurally and culturally inferior position, which is the basis for the emergence of violence against them. Women who have this inferior position often find it difficult to resist the dominance of existing power, so violence becomes a recurring and difficult act to avoid (Alam & Alfian, 2022).

Based on this description, domestic violence can be understood as a structural problem rooted in the inequality of power relations between husband and wife which is influenced by patriarchal culture, social norms, and economic dependence, thus opening up space for various forms of violence. Therefore, this study aims to examine power inequality in domestic relations and its implications for the occurrence of violence, with the formulation of problems including: (1) the influence of power inequality between husband and wife on the occurrence of domestic violence, (2) the use of power by perpetrators in committing domestic violence, and (3) efforts that can be made to reduce power inequality to prevent domestic violence.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative method with the type of library research (Rismawan et al., 2023). Data were obtained through a literature review of primary and secondary sources relevant to the theme of power inequality in gender relations and domestic violence. Primary data sources include laws and regulations, especially Law Number 23 of 2004 concerning the Elimination of

Domestic Violence. Secondary data sources were obtained from books, scientific journals, and previous research results.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Power inequality between husband and wife in the household affects the occurrence of domestic violence**

The power imbalance between husband and wife in the household is one of the main causes of Domestic Violence (KDRT). This inequality arises due to the husband's stronger dominance in economic, social, and cultural aspects, thus placing the wife in a lower position and vulnerable to violence. In Indonesian society that is still influenced by patriarchal culture, men are often considered as the head of the family and the holder of control, while women are positioned as the party who must be obedient and economically dependent on their husbands. This condition creates social and economic dependence for wives, which makes it difficult for them to resist or get out of the violent situation they experience (Mandel et al., 2020).

Power inequality in the household is not solely related to physical strength, but also includes control over various aspects of the wife's life, such as decision-making in the family and individual freedom. This form of domination can manifest in physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence. Based on data, most victims of Domestic Violence (KDRT) are women, and the root of the problem lies in the power imbalance between husband and wife. When the wife is in a position of economic and social dependence, the husband who has control more often feels entitled to regulate and control his wife's life, even in violent ways (Sari & Putri, 2020).

National Commission on Violence against Women and a number of studies show that Domestic Violence (KDRT) cannot be understood as a purely individual problem, but as a social problem rooted in gender inequality and the distribution of power within the family itself. The imbalance of roles and power between husband and wife is often the source of violence. Therefore, creating an equal, mutually respectful, and complementary relationship between husband and wife is very important in efforts to prevent domestic violence.

In addition to cultural and economic factors, power inequality in the household is also strengthened by a low understanding of gender equality and women's rights in the family. Social norms that place the wife as a party who must be completely submissive to her husband make violence often not recognized or considered a natural thing, making it difficult to prevent. In some cases, the husband even abuses religious teachings or cultural values as a justification for his domineering and violent actions (Istratii & Ali, 2023).

In our opinion, the power imbalance between husband and wife influenced by patriarchal culture, economic dependence, and social norms puts wives in a vulnerable position to various forms of Domestic Violence (KDRT). Efforts to overcome domestic violence are not enough only from a legal point of view, but also must overcome cultural values that cause inequality and build equality in the household so as to create a balanced power relationship and can prevent violence.

### **Use of Power by Perpetrators to Commit Domestic Violence**

The use of power by perpetrators in committing domestic violence is an effort to control a spouse or family member through physical, psychological, economic, or social domination. The perpetrator uses the position or authority he has to intimidate, coerce, or control the victim, so that the victim becomes dependent and difficult to resist the violence experienced. This power is often disguised by reasons of tradition, family responsibilities, or the right to be the head of the household, so that violence is difficult to detect and victims tend to hold back.

There are several ways for perpetrators to use their power:

#### **1. Physical power (control through bodily power)**

The perpetrator uses his physical position or dominance, such as greater bodily strength or access to weapons, to intimidate or commit violence against the victim. This physical power can be in the form of punches, kicks, pushes, or threats with dangerous objects. Victims often feel afraid to fight back or seek help because they feel they don't have the strength to fight back. In addition, physical violence is often a means for perpetrators to assert dominance and control the victim's behavior directly in daily life. This makes the relationship very unbalanced, as the victim lives in constant fear and pressure.

#### **2. Psychological or emotional power (manipulation, isolation, threats)**

Perpetrators use non-physical power in more subtle but still destructive ways, such as insulting, threatening, degrading, or isolating the victim from family and friends. This control can also be in the form of strict supervision of the victim's communications, such as calls, messages, or social media, as well as regulating daily activities. As a result, the victim becomes emotionally dependent, feels helpless, and often finds it difficult to make decisions on their own. This psychological power can last a long time, and its effects can be more severe than physical violence because it erodes the victim's confidence and makes him feel that his or her life is always controlled by the perpetrator.

#### **3. Economic power (control over finances, jobs, access to resources)**

Perpetrators use economic power by limiting or controlling the victim's access to money,

work, or other important resources. For example, the perpetrator may prohibit the victim from working, taking the victim's money, or withholding basic needs such as food, clothing, and transportation. In this way, the victim becomes very financially dependent on the perpetrator, making it difficult to get out of the relationship or fight the violent treatment. This economic power also influences important decisions in the victim's daily life, making him lose his independence, and increasing the risk of constant violence.

#### **4. Social power or tradition (cultural norms, social status as a justification for dominance)**

Perpetrators take advantage of social norms, patriarchal traditions, or social status, such as the head of the household, to justify acts of control and violence. The perpetrator can claim that controlling or violent behavior is his "right" or part of a culturally or traditionally regulated role. This strategy makes victims often feel that violence is natural and cannot be resisted, because it is supported by the social environment. This social power reinforces patterns of violence and makes it difficult for victims to seek support or report perpetrators, so that perpetrators maintain dominance in the long run.

Domestic violence occurs because perpetrators use various forms of power to control victims, either through physical force, psychological pressure, economic control, and social norms and traditions that support domination. As a result, victims often feel afraid, dependent, and have difficulty fighting. Therefore, prevention efforts must be comprehensive, including legal protection, equality education, economic empowerment of victims, and changes in social norms that have been justifying violence.

#### **Efforts that can be made to reduce power inequality to prevent domestic violence**

Efforts to reduce power inequality in the household are very important to prevent domestic violence. Power inequality often arises from unequal cultural norms, social structures, education, and gender perceptions. Therefore, the prevention strategy must touch various aspects, ranging from education, law, cultural change, to support for victims.

One of the main steps is education and socialization about gender equality. Research in the journal *Socialization and Campaigns for the Prevention and Prevention of Domestic Violence* explains that counseling and campaigns on equal relationships can change people's perceptions of the positions of men and women in the family. Through this socialization, the community understands that violence is not part of tradition or reasonableness, but a dangerous and destructive act. These findings show that education has a major role in weakening the patriarchal culture that has been strengthening power inequality in the family (Munasaroh, 2022).

Strengthening regulations and law enforcement is also an important aspect in reducing power inequality. The journal entitled *Prevention of Domestic Violence as an Effort to Maintain Harmonious and Prosperous Family Integrity* said that Law Number 23 of 2004 concerning the Elimination of Domestic Violence provides clear limits that protect victims while suppressing the potential for abuse of power in the household. This law emphasizes that all forms of physical, psychological, sexual, and neglect violence are offenses. Firm law enforcement can give courage to victims and prevent perpetrators from using their position to dominate (Putrawan, 2022).

In addition to education and law, violence prevention must also be seen from a systemic perspective. Research in the journal *Musawa* entitled *Domestic Violence: Causative Factors and Efforts to Prevent It Based on the Ecological System Perspective* explains that violence is not born from individuals alone, but is related to the family environment, community, economy, and broader social norms. Understanding that violence is a systemic problem, prevention efforts need to engage communities, social institutions, and governments to build an environment that supports equal relations. This approach helps reduce the likelihood of a person using social or economic power to dominate his or her partner (Farid, 2020).

Patriarchy is the root of power inequality because it places men as the owners of the highest authority in the household. When the concept is socially accepted, unequal relationships are considered natural so that women are more vulnerable to violence (Lomazzi, 2023). Therefore, efforts to change patriarchal culture through education, public discussion, and the formulation of new norms are an important part of preventing violence.

Another effort that is no less important is the provision of support services for victims. Complaints, assistance, referrals to health and legal services, and victim monitoring are forms of real support that can reduce power inequality. When victims gain access to safe and reliable services, they are no longer completely dependent on the perpetrator. This access increases the bargaining position of the victim so that the power relationship becomes more balanced (Rizky et al., 2024).

Based on these findings, it is clear that power inequality can only be reduced through approaches that touch on education, culture, legal structures, social support, and changes in the social system. When gender education is provided, laws are enforced, patriarchal culture is criticized, and victims receive adequate support, relationships within the household can become more equal. This equality then becomes an important foundation to prevent domestic violence.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion that has been described, it can be concluded that the power imbalance between husband and wife has a significant influence on the occurrence of domestic violence. This inequality is born from patriarchal culture, gender-biased social norms, and the economic dependence of wives on their husbands, which puts women in subordinate positions and is vulnerable to various forms of violence. This unequal relationship causes the husband to have greater control in decision-making and control of resources, thus opening up space for physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence in the household. Furthermore, the use of power by perpetrators is the main mechanism in the practice of domestic violence. Perpetrators use physical, psychological, economic, and social power to control and subjugate the victim. This power is often wrapped up in cultural legitimacy, traditions, and misunderstood religions, so that violence is considered something natural and difficult to resist. This condition causes the victim to be in a situation of dependence, fear, and helplessness, which ultimately reinforces the cycle of domestic violence. Efforts to reduce power inequality to prevent domestic violence must be carried out comprehensively and sustainably. Education and socialization of gender equality, firm law enforcement, women's economic empowerment, patriarchal cultural change, and the provision of protection and assistance services for victims are important interrelated steps. When power relations in the household are built on the basis of equality, justice, and mutual respect, the potential for violence can be minimized and a harmonious and just domestic life can be realized.

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