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# The Limitations of the Role of Majelis Ta'lim in Resolving Conflicts Regarding Husbands' Maintenance for Wives in the City of Cilegon

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**Abstract**

This article examines why Majelis Ta'lim has not yet functioned effectively as a forum for resolving disputes concerning a husband's obligation to provide maintenance in Cilegon City. The study begins by addressing the persistent gap between the recognition of maintenance rights in Islamic family law and Indonesian positive law and the continued vulnerability of wives when such rights are neglected in everyday marital life. Employing a descriptive qualitative field research approach, the study finds that Majelis Ta'lim primarily serves as an initial complaint forum due to its social trust, emotional closeness, and moral authority within the community. Nevertheless, its practical contribution remains limited. The main obstacles include the predominance of female congregants, the limited integration of fiqh teachings with legal literacy, and the absence of continuous assistance and referral mechanisms to formal legal institutions. Therefore, this article argues that strengthening the role of Majelis Ta'lim requires moving beyond spiritual reinforcement toward the development of community-based mediation and legal literacy programs that can more effectively support and protect wives' financial rights

**Keywords:** Maintenance Rights; Majelis Ta'lim; Family Dispute; Resolving Conflicts

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## INTRODUCTION

The discussion regarding a husband's maintenance (*nafkah*) for his wife must be situated within the context of the interplay between religious norms, state law, and concrete family experiences. In Islamic family law, the obligation of maintenance is inherent in the husband's position as the economic head of the household. This identical provision is also affirmed in Indonesian law through Law Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage and the Compilation of Islamic Law. Consequently, maintenance is not merely understood as an ethical appeal, but rather as a legal obligation that entails legal protection consequences for the wife (Bahri, 2015; Hudaya, 2013).

Nevertheless, the strength of these normative regulations is not always followed by the fulfillment of rights in practice. In reality, there are still wives who must support the household's needs because their husbands are unemployed, employed but withhold their income, or assume that the wife's income substitutes their obligation to provide maintenance. Normatively, such assumptions cannot be justified, as a wife's income does not nullify the husband's responsibility to provide maintenance (Niffilayani, 2025; Rufaida & Nuryati, 2022).

From a sociological perspective, maintenance conflicts cannot be simplified merely as a consequence of poverty. This issue frequently arises from an ambiguous division of roles, weak legal literacy regarding family law, and unequal power relations between husband and wife. When maintenance is neglected, wives face not only material deprivation but also psychological pressure, social burdens, and the compulsion to remain silent to protect the family's reputation. Therefore,

maintenance conflicts must be understood simultaneously as issues of rights, access to justice, and legal awareness (Adeney-Risakotta, 2016; Curnow, 2015; Nurlaelawati, 2013).

Under such circumstances, the Majelis Ta'lim often emerges as a space that is closer and more accessible to women. As a non-formal Islamic educational institution, the Majelis Ta'lim does not merely convey religious teachings; it also fosters congregation solidarity, provides social support, and offers consultation spaces grounded in Islamic values. This proximity allows the Majelis Ta'lim to potentially serve educational and mediatory functions when maintenance issues have not yet been escalated to formal institutions or are intentionally kept away from official channels (Fitri, 2020).

This context becomes increasingly significant in Cilegon City. The transformation of Cilegon from an agrarian region into an industrial city has impacted family relations, the division of economic responsibilities, and the pressure of household living costs (Wiryono, 2009). Simultaneously, previous research has discussed maintenance from a normative-fiqh perspective, Muslim women's access to religious courts, and the Majelis Ta'lim as a space for non-formal education and family guidance. However, there remains a scarcity of research specifically examining how the Majelis Ta'lim practically operates when confronted with maintenance conflicts at the community level, while concurrently assessing the limits of its effectiveness. Addressing this gap, this article focuses on two central questions: what are the limitations of the functional role of the Majelis Ta'lim in handling conflicts regarding husbands' maintenance for wives in Cilegon City, and what factors limit the effectiveness of this role? (Seff, 2025; Saputra et al., 2024).

The novelty of this research lies in its empirical examination of the Majelis Ta'lim's practices regarding maintenance conflicts at the community level. This study does not stop at a normative description of maintenance obligations or the general function of the Majelis Ta'lim as a *da'wah* institution; rather, it highlights the structural obstacles that render its contribution limited. Consequently, this research offers directions for strengthening the Majelis Ta'lim as a community mediation space connected to legal literacy and formal referral systems.

## METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach in the form of field research. This approach was selected because the issues examined concern not only legal norms but also lived experiences, social interactions, and conflict resolution practices taking place within community religious spaces. The research focus is directed toward the role of the *Majelis Ta'lim* in responding to conflicts regarding husbands' maintenance (*nafkah*) for wives in Cilegon City, specifically in the Cibeber District (Lyman et al., 2024).

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with purposively selected informants, namely wives who are active in the *Majelis Ta'lim* and have consulted or participated in forms of religious mediation regarding maintenance issues. This data is supplemented by participant observation of the dynamics of religious gatherings (*pengajian*) and social interactions within the *Majelis Ta'lim* environment, as well as a documentary study of laws and regulations, *fiqh* texts, and other relevant written materials.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Data validity was tested using source triangulation and method triangulation. The researcher also conducted limited member checking to ensure that the resulting interpretations remained aligned with the informants' experiences. From an ethical standpoint, this research prioritizes informed consent, identity confidentiality, and sensitivity toward narratives that potentially evoke trauma as its primary foundation (Mendrofa & Susilowati, 2024).

The data were analyzed thematically. All data were first transcribed, read repeatedly, coded, and then categorized into themes relevant to the research focus. From this process, three major themes emerged that explain the limitations of the *Majelis Ta'lim*'s role in maintenance disputes: the limited reach of education due to the dominance of female congregants, the weak connection between *fiqh* materials and formal legal literacy, and the absence of assistance leading to formal resolution stages.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Social Proximity of Majelis Ta'lim as an Initial Grievance Channel

This field research is built upon the author's experiences interacting with several *Majelis Ta'lim* in Cilegon City during their tenure at the Islamic Community Guidance (BIMAS Islam) office

of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Cilegon from 2019 to 2021. Intensive data collection for this study was conducted over a six-month period from November 2025 to March 2026, primarily in Cibeber District, including at the AN-Najihah *Majelis Ta'lim*.

One informant explained that through these religious gatherings, she understood that maintenance is a wife's right and a husband's obligation. However, in her domestic life, her husband has failed to provide adequate maintenance and does not view this situation as a fault. This situation indicates that the religious understanding possessed by the wife is not automatically accompanied by similar awareness from the husband. Consequently, religious education within the family remains one-sided and has yet to effectively encourage a change in the husband's attitude toward fulfilling his obligations (Informant, 2026).

Field findings demonstrate that the *Majelis Ta'lim* occupies a significant position as a safe space for female congregants to report domestic issues, including maintenance conflicts. The emotional proximity among congregants, the intensity of recurring meetings, and the presence of the *ustazah* (female religious teacher) as a trusted figure make this forum more accessible than formal institutions. In the eyes of informants, the *Majelis Ta'lim* is viewed not only as a place for religious learning but also as a space for seeking spiritual strength when family issues are difficult to discuss openly in a broader environment (Pulungan, 2014).

From a sociology of law perspective, this situation reflects the operation of "living law" at the community level. The search for justice does not always begin at state institutions; it often moves first toward social spaces that feel familiar, legitimate, and aligned with the values living in society. In the religious context of Cilegon, the *Majelis Ta'lim* performs this function by translating domestic issues into a moral-religious language understood by the congregation (Merry, 1988).

This initial function is crucial as it reduces the psychological isolation of the wife and provides social support that is not always available within the nuclear family. In this space, the wife receives affirmation that maintenance is a right that should not be ignored. Religious materials regarding the husband's responsibilities, the *sakinah* (tranquil) family, and domestic justice provide a moral foundation for the wife to understand her position with greater dignity (Merry, 1988).

Nevertheless, the function of the *Majelis Ta'lim* as an initial grievance channel does not automatically transform into an effective dispute resolution mechanism. While social proximity facilitates the expression of problems, effective mediation requires more than just empathy and advice. At this point, the first limitation of the *Majelis Ta'lim*'s role becomes apparent.

**2. Dominance of Female Congregants and Limited Reach of Normative Transformation**

The next most prominent finding is the dominance of female congregants within the *Majelis Ta'lim* forum. The researcher's observations show that the majority of participants are wives, while husbands are almost never present. Consequently, materials regarding maintenance obligations, wives' rights, and the responsibilities of the head of the household are received more by the recipients of maintenance than by those obligated to provide it.

This situation creates a paradox. On one hand, the gatherings strengthen the wife's awareness that maintenance is a legitimate right. On the other hand, the forum is not strong enough to change the husband's behavior because the primary subjects intended for transformation are not present in the same educational space. In other words, religious education is one-sided: the wife gains moral legitimacy for her grievances, while the husband does not receive direct normative pressure (Rufaida & Nuryati, 2022).

In a broader social context, the dominance of women in the *Majelis Ta'lim* is not surprising. Various studies indicate that religious gathering forums in Indonesia have developed into important social and religious spaces for Muslim women, facilitating the exchange of experiences, strengthening religious identity, expanding social networks, and even articulating specific interests. However, when these forums are expected to help resolve maintenance conflicts, this imbalanced congregation composition turns into a structural obstacle (Zamhari, 2022b; Hana & Oktaviyanti, 2023; Fadillah, 2023).

This obstacle is evident in the accounts of informants who understood the husband's maintenance obligations through the teaching materials but saw no tangible changes in their domestic lives. Husbands continued to feel blameless or were at least not in a social situation pressurized enough to rectify their behavior. This finding confirms that the effectiveness of the *Majelis Ta'lim* depends not only on the content of the material but also on the social architecture of the forum itself (Biddle, 1986).

**3. Maintenance Materials Limited to Classical Fiqh and Moral Advice**

The second limitation is observed in the content and direction of the materials presented. Based on interviews and observations, discussions regarding maintenance in the *Majelis Ta'lim* generally center on classical *fiqh*: the husband's obligation to provide food, clothing, and shelter; the scale of maintenance according to capability; and specific circumstances affecting these obligations. Normative references such as the Qur'an, hadith, and *mu'tabarah* (authoritative) texts, including *Nihāyat al-Zayn*, remain the primary foundation (Niffilayani, 2025; Devy & Suci, 2020a).

Substantively, this orientation is not incorrect. Family *fiqh* teachings are still needed to instill values of justice, responsibility, and the balance of rights and obligations. In the *fiqh* perspective, maintenance is not limited to grocery money but encompasses food, clothing, shelter, and other decent needs suited to the husband's capability. This explanation is vital to affirm that maintenance is a concrete right, not merely a symbol of domestic piety (Bahri, 2015; Ma'arif, 2025; Nilhakim, 2023).

The problem arises when the delivery of material stops at the normative-theological level and fails to progress toward positive legal literacy. Teachers tend to emphasize patience, prayer, and the husband's moral obligations, but they do not adequately explain that the wife also has the right to demand maintenance through available legal instruments. Information regarding Article 34 of the Marriage Law, Article 80 of the Compilation of Islamic Law, procedures for filing lawsuits in Religious Courts, or access to legal aid has not become an integral part of the teaching and assistance.

This disconnect between *fiqh* and positive law makes the *Majelis Ta'lim* strong in the dimension of spiritual affirmation but weak in the dimension of protecting rights. Consequently, when a wife comes with a grievance that her husband has disappeared without word, is withholding income for personal interests, or is failing to provide for household needs entirely, the most frequent response is merely spiritual counsel. Such advice may provide inner peace, but it does not automatically alter the economic condition of the neglected wife (Bukido & Aminah, 2024).

**4. Absence of Assistance Leading to Formal Resolution**

The third limitation lies in the absence of a sustainable assistance system. In the observed cases, a pattern emerged: the wife conveys a grievance to the *ustazah* or the *Majelis Ta'lim* administrators, receives religious advice, is encouraged to be patient, or is urged to communicate with her husband again. Following this, the process usually stops. There is no clear pathway toward further mediation, referrals to the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), consultations with the Religious Court, or connections with legal aid institutions (Informant, 2026; Fathony & Auliah, 2025; Umah, 2025). This aligns with the testimony of an informant who stated that when a wife experiences neglect—whether due to the husband leaving without word or maintenance, or because income is prioritized for personal use—the response is often limited to spiritual advice. The wife is asked to be patient, pray earnestly, and surrender to Allah, while the neglect of maintenance obligations remains substantively unaddressed.

This condition demonstrates that the *Majelis Ta'lim* does not yet possess the institutional tools to move from a consultative function to an advocative one. The forum lacks standard procedures, referral maps, or mediation capacity that would allow cases to be handled progressively until reaching a resolution point. Even when conflicts persist, the *Majelis Ta'lim* remains a space for moral comfort rather than a guide for concrete resolution strategies (Nurdiansyah et al., 2025).

From a family mediation perspective, the lack of follow-up is a serious issue. Mediation cannot be narrowed down to giving advice; it must include efforts to bring the parties together, map the core of the problem, formulate resolution options, and, if necessary, direct the case toward formal channels in a measured manner. Without such mechanisms, the *Majelis Ta'lim* functions only as an emotional vent rather than an instrument for dispute resolution (Ribi, 2025).

Another informant experienced maintenance neglect because her husband was involved with another woman. Due to this infidelity, the husband no longer prioritized family needs and used his income for personal interests and the other woman. This situation created a double burden for the wife: economic pressure and emotional trauma resulting from betrayal (Informant 3, 2026).

These findings also illustrate why the wife's bargaining position remains weak. Although they gain moral justification from the religious forum, they do not receive the procedural support necessary to claim their rights. As a result, after leaving the *Majelis Ta'lim* forum, the socio-economic conditions they face remain essentially unchanged: their hearts may be calmer, but their rights are not yet legally protected (Curnow, 2015).

**5. Repositioning the Majelis Ta'lim: From a Space of Moral Strengthening to a Community-Based Mediation Hub**

These limitations do not imply that the *Majelis Ta'lim* has lost its relevance. On the contrary, this study shows that the *Majelis Ta'lim* possesses significant social capital in the form of moral legitimacy, proximity to congregants, community trust, and the ability to discuss family issues using religious language accepted by society. The primary issue is not the existence of the institution itself, but the lack of institutional capacity to bridge *da'wah* (proselytizing), mediation, and the protection of rights simultaneously (Rahmat & Mansur, 2021).

Based on this, the strengthening of the *Majelis Ta'lim* should be directed toward at least three main agendas. First, family law literacy for *ustaz* (male teachers), *ustazah*, and administrators must be strengthened. Materials on maintenance should remain rooted in *fiqh* but also be connected to the Marriage Law, the Compilation of Islamic Law, and resolution mechanisms in the Religious Court. Thus, religious teaching will not stop at moral appeals but evolve into education on rights (Seff, 2025).

Second, basic mediation skills need to be developed more systematically. *Majelis Ta'lim* administrators do not need to become judges or advocates, but they require a minimum ability to facilitate communication, identify the parties' needs, and determine appropriate referrals when conflicts are not resolved at the community level. Such training will help the *Majelis Ta'lim* perform both preventive and curative functions.

Third, referral networks with the Office of Religious Affairs, Religious Courts, and legal aid institutions must be established more purposefully. This cooperation is vital so that the *Majelis Ta'lim* does not operate in isolation. In this model, the *Majelis Ta'lim* remains a humane and low-stigma entry point, while formal resolution paths remain available when the wife's rights require firmer protection. With these steps, the *Majelis Ta'lim* can move from a space of spiritual strengthening toward a hub for community-based alternative dispute resolution.

**Table 1.**
**Power Imbalance, Legal Gaps, and Majelis Ta'lim–Based Responses in Maintenance Conflicts**

| Forms of Power Imbalance in Transactions (Maintenance) | Identified Legal Gaps in Consumer (Wife) Protection | Majelis Ta'lim–Based Normative Response |
|---|---|---|
| **Imbalanced Audience:** Religious education is received almost exclusively by wives, while husbands (as the obligated party) are absent from the forum. | Existing educational mechanisms lack the structural reach to transform the behavior of the party obligated to provide maintenance (*husband*). | **'Adl (Justice):** Requires the strengthening of family law literacy for all parties and rebalancing the "one-sided" educational flow. |
| **Information Asymmetry:** Wives understand their moral rights through *fiqh* but lack knowledge of their legal rights under state law (Marriage Law/KHI). | A disconnect exists between normative religious teaching and positive legal literacy (litigation procedures/legal aid). | **Ḥifẓ al-māl (Protection of wealth/rights):** Integrating *fiqh* with state legal instruments to ensure maintenance is a concrete, protected right. |
| **Weak Bargaining Position:** Wives are often compelled to stay silent due to social pressure or fear of trauma, with no procedural leverage to claim rights. | Absence of a sustainable assistance system or formal referral pathway (KUA/Religious Court) after initial counseling. | **Dar' al-mafāsid (Prevention of harm):** Moving from a purely consultative role to an advocative "community-based mediation hub" to proactively prevent injustice. |
| **Procedural vs. Substantive Justice:** Advice is often limited to spiritual patience (*sabr*), which comforts the heart but does not resolve the economic neglect. | Mediation is narrowed down to moral counseling rather than active conflict resolution or legal advocacy. | **Taḥqīq al-maṣlaḥah (Realization of public interest):** Aligning spiritual strengthening with practical mediation skills and formal referral networks to protect human dignity. |

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the *Majelis Ta'lim* in Cilegon City holds a significant position as the primary entry point for wives to voice maintenance issues, sustained by social trust, emotional proximity, and moral authority within the community. However, its contribution to dispute resolution has not yet moved beyond a symbolic function. These limitations are evident in the dominance of female congregants, the weak bridge between *fiqh* materials and legal literacy, and the absence of sustainable assistance or referral systems to formal institutions. Consequently, in practice, the *Majelis Ta'lim* still functions more as a space for spiritual strengthening rather than an effective mechanism for protecting the maintenance rights of wives.

2. Recommendations The *Majelis Ta'lim* needs to be strengthened as a community-based mediation hub that not only provides moral-religious guidance but also enhances family law literacy. To achieve this, administrators and educators should be equipped with an understanding of positive law, basic mediation skills, and referral procedures to the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), Religious Courts, and legal aid institutions. Through such strengthening, it is expected that the *Majelis Ta'lim* can play a more substantive role in bridging religious values with the tangible protection of wives' maintenance rights.

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