

The Absent Father across Three Normative Orders: Legal Pluralism, Maqasid al-Shari'ah, and Meaning-Making in an Indonesian Pesantren

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Abstract: This article reports a single-site qualitative case study of fatherlessness, the absence of the father's role in physical or psychological terms, among the santri of one Islamic boarding school, Pondok Pesantren Darunnajah 1 in South Jakarta. Its scope is deliberately bounded: the findings describe this institution and are not advanced as conclusions about father absence in Indonesia generally, whose national scale remains contested. The study uses maqasid al-shari'ah deductively, as an a priori coding framework that organizes both the interview instrument and the analysis. It pursues three aims: to describe the role of the father as idealized in Islamic and Indonesian positive law; to analyze the positive and negative effects of father absence in a balanced rather than uniformly pathological way; and to map those effects across the five objectives of the shari'ah. Drawing on observation, semi-structured interviews with six santri who had experienced father absence, and documentation analyzed through the framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, the study finds that the father's role extends well beyond provision to leadership, motivation, spiritual guidance, and modeling; that the effects of father absence are not inherently negative but appear to be shaped by the individual's capacity for meaning-making and by the socio-spiritual environment of the pesantren; and that father absence touches all five objectives to varying degrees and directions. In this bounded setting, perspective and meaning-making emerge as decisive.

Keywords: Father Absence, Pesantren, Meaning-Making, Resilience, Maqasid Al-Shari'ah



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Introduction

Indonesia faces serious and well-documented challenges to family resilience. Official figures compiled by Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS]) recorded more than four hundred sixty thousand divorces in 2023, each carrying direct consequences for the care and upbringing of children. Father absence, the condition in which children grow up without the presence of a father in physical or psychological terms, has frequently been described in Indonesian public discourse as unusually prevalent, but a nationally representative estimate of its incidence is lacking, and the

widely repeated claim that Indonesia ranks among the highest in the world is not supported by an identifiable primary survey but is instead traced to a non-peer-reviewed index reproduced in popular media; the present study therefore treats such figures with caution and does not rely on them (Fitri & Damaiyanti, 2025). What is better established is that father absence has been linked in the empirical literature to a range of difficulties, from juvenile delinquency to involvement in violence and substance use (Hanifah et al., 2024; Kucukkaragoz, 2025).

The father's role in the family is, in the Indonesian setting, a matter governed simultaneously by religious norm, state codification, and social expectation, which places the question squarely within the field of plural family law. By plural family law is meant the coexistence, within a single jurisdiction, of more than one normative order regulating the family, here the codified law of the state, the rules of Islamic fiqh, and customary (adat) expectation, a coexistence that scholarship on legal pluralism takes as its proper object of study (Moore, 1973; Griffiths, 1986; Salim, 2015). State law assigns the husband the position of head of the family and the duty of protection and provision under Article 34 of Law Number 1 of 1974 on Marriage, and the Compilation of Islamic Law restates and elaborates this duty in Article 79, while the classical fiqh frames the father's responsibility in terms that extend to the religious and moral formation of the child. When the father is absent, the gap that opens is therefore not only economic but normative and spiritual, and the several orders that ordinarily define the father's role must each reckon with its absence. Reading fatherlessness through this plural lens makes clear that the phenomenon engages the whole architecture of family obligation rather than any single dimension of it.

Prior scholarship can be read as three strands. A first and dominant strand frames father absence through a deficit lens that foregrounds its harms, linking it to deficits in children's character formation and academic achievement, to weaker language development and to vulnerability in matters of personal safety, and to adolescent delinquency. More recent Indonesian studies extend this deficit account to the socio-emotional and relational adjustment of adolescent girls in particular (Sengkey et al., 2021; Wahyudi et al., 2024; Putry et al., 2025; Fitri & Damaiyanti, 2025), and a recent synthesis aligns the documented harms with the Sustainable Development Goals (Kucukkaragoz, 2025). A second, smaller strand attends to context and to the conditions under which children adapt; it resonates with the international literature that treats resilience not as a fixed individual trait but as a process embedded in social and cultural ecologies (Ungar, 2011; Masten, 2014; Walsh, 1996), and with work on post-traumatic growth, in which adversity can become an occasion for the positive reconstruction of self and meaning (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). A third strand reads the family through Islamic normative frameworks, including the maqasid al-shari'ah (Zahrotun, 2023; Wardi et al., 2023; Mohammed, 2024). The present study works at the intersection of the second and third strands, asking how a religiously structured setting shapes the meaning a young person makes of father absence.

Two gaps follow. First, scholarship that brings the maqasid framework systematically to bear on father absence remains very limited; the present study does not claim that it is wholly absent, but that it is sparse and, where it exists, confined largely to scriptural exegesis rather than to empirical inquiry grounded in the accounts

of those who have experienced the phenomenon (Zahrotun, 2023). The framework nonetheless offers a comprehensive normative foundation for analyzing the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, the very dimensions that father absence might be expected to touch (Auda, 2008). Second, studies set specifically within the pesantren, an environment with a distinctive potential to serve as a space of formation and recovery for children who have lost a father's presence, are scarce. The pesantren combines an ordered structure of worship, a supportive peer community, and the presence of teachers who may serve as alternative models, features that may shape how a young person interprets and responds to father absence in ways the deficit literature has not examined.

It is worth being precise about what fatherlessness denotes, since the term covers more than the death of a father. In the literature it refers to the absence of the father's role whether in physical or in psychological terms, so that a child may be fatherless in the relevant sense even where the father is alive and present in the household but emotionally or functionally absent (Wahyudi et al., 2024). This broader definition matters for the present study, which selected informants who had experienced father absence both through bereavement and through the limitation of the father's role. It also explains why the phenomenon is so widespread: it captures not only the children of deceased or divorced fathers but also those whose fathers, though present, do not perform the spiritual, emotional, and educational functions that the role entails. Understood in this way, fatherlessness is as much a question of the quality of paternal engagement as of physical presence.

The framework of maqasid al-shari'ah provides the analytical lens through which this study reads the phenomenon. In the classical formulation associated with al-Shatibi, the law aims to secure five essential interests, the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, ordered into the necessities (*daruriyyat*) on which life depends, the needs (*hajiyyat*) that relieve hardship, and the enhancements (*tahsiniyyat*) that perfect conduct (Auda, 2008). The five essentials are not a checklist but an interlocking system in which the protection of each supports the others, and it is this systemic quality that recommends the framework for analyzing a phenomenon whose effects spread across every domain of a child's development. By reading fatherlessness against these five objectives, the study can assess not merely whether father absence causes harm but which protected interests it engages and how those interests interact. The framework is used deductively in what follows: it functions as an a priori coding scheme that structured both the interview instrument and the analysis, so that the empirical material was gathered and sorted in terms of the five objectives rather than fitted to them after the fact.

This study addresses both gaps. It pursues three aims: first, to identify the role of the father in the family as idealized by Islamic law and by Indonesian positive law; second, to analyze the positive and negative effects of fatherlessness in a balanced manner, attending to constructive as well as pathological responses; and third, to map those effects in a structured way across the five objectives of the shari'ah. The research site is the Darunnajah 1 Islamic Boarding School in South Jakarta, chosen because the pesantren provides a distinctive setting in which santri who have experienced father

absence live within a spiritual community that may influence the meaning they make of that experience.

The central argument is that, in this bounded setting, the effect of father absence is not fixed or uniformly destructive but appears to depend substantially on the individual's perspective and capacity for meaning-making, and that the pesantren environment may contribute to a constructive perspective by supplying interpretive frames and alternative figures. Read through the lens of maqasid al-shari'ah, the study further argues that father absence reaches every dimension of life the shari'ah seeks to protect, and therefore calls for a whole rather than a partial response. Because the design is a single-site case study, this argument is offered not as a generalization but as an analytic proposition whose transferability to other settings is a question for further inquiry.

Method

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative method with a case-study design. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the aim is to understand fatherlessness from the standpoint of those who experience it, including their perceptions, motivations, and the meanings they assign to the experience, dimensions that a purely quantitative design would struggle to reach. The case-study design permits a close and detailed account of a bounded phenomenon within a specific context, here the situation of santri who have experienced father absence within a single pesantren (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The analysis is at once empirical and normative: it reads the santri's accounts against the normative framework of maqasid al-shari'ah and the codified duties of the father, so that description and normative interpretation proceed together rather than in sequence.

The research site is the Darunnajah 1 Islamic Boarding School, located on Jalan Ulujami Raya, Ulujami, Pesanggrahan District, South Jakarta, in the Special Capital Region of Jakarta. The pesantren has one hundred twenty-nine santri, of whom twelve have lost a parent. Fieldwork was conducted from June to August 2024, with the researcher present at the site as the principal instrument, interacting with santri, asatidz, and the pesantren administration. Presence over an extended period allowed the researcher to observe the daily rhythm of the community and to build the rapport necessary for candid interviews on a sensitive subject.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on santri who had experienced father absence, whether through the death of the father or through the limitation of his role within the family. Six santri served as principal informants; throughout this article they are identified only by the codes S1 to S6, since they are minors disclosing sensitive personal histories, and the use of coded identifiers rather than names is a deliberate measure to protect their privacy. The six spanned several levels of the pesantren's curriculum. The number of informants was determined not by a target fixed in advance but by the principle of purposive adequacy and information power: because the sample was narrowly defined, the informants information-rich, and the analysis framed by a clear conceptual structure, a small number of cases can carry sufficient analytic depth (Malterud et al., 2016). Interviews continued until the accounts of later informants no longer introduced new themes within the five maqasid domains,

which was taken as an indication that thematic saturation had been approached for this bounded population. Supporting informants included asatidz and members of the pesantren secretariat, whose accounts provided context and corroboration for the santri's narratives.

Data were drawn from primary and secondary sources. Primary data came from semi-structured interviews and from documentation gathered directly in the field; secondary data came from journal articles, books, and official pesantren records. Data collection proceeded in three steps: a survey of the literature to construct the conceptual framework; in-depth interviews guided by an instrument organized around the five objectives of the shari'ah; and participant observation within the pesantren environment. An editing stage checked the completeness and coherence of the material before analysis. A representative set of the guiding questions, organized by the five objectives of the shari'ah, is provided in the Appendix so that readers may judge the coverage and the wording of the instrument.

Credibility was supported through triangulation of sources and of techniques, comparing accounts across informants and across interview, observation, and documentation, and through prolonged engagement at the site across the fieldwork period, which allowed repeated observation and the building of rapport. Analysis followed the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion-drawing with verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Coding proceeded in two cycles. A first, deductive cycle assigned segments of each transcript to one of the five maqasid domains, namely religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property; a second cycle sorted the segments within each domain into the sub-themes of loss and of growth, with discrepant or ambiguous segments re-read against the full transcript before assignment and retained, rather than discarded, where they complicated the pattern. As a single-site case study, the design does not claim statistical generalizability; its findings are offered as analytically rather than statistically transferable, and their transferability to other settings is a matter for the reader's judgment and for further research.

One feature of the design warrants particular note. The interview instrument was deliberately organized around the five objectives of the shari'ah, so that the empirical material would be gathered in a form amenable to maqasid analysis from the outset rather than retrofitted to the framework afterward. Each informant was invited to reflect on how the father's absence had touched their religious practice, their sense of self, their thinking and study, their hopes for their own future family, and their material circumstances, corresponding respectively to the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. This alignment between instrument and analytical framework strengthens the coherence of the study, but it also carries a risk that the interpretation should make explicit: by furnishing informants with a shared religious vocabulary, the instrument may have induced a degree of convergence in their accounts. Two steps were taken to limit this effect. The closed mapping questions were followed by open-ended prompts that invited informants to describe their experience in their own terms before any framework category was introduced, and accounts that did not fit the expected pattern, including expressions of unresolved grief and disappointment, were

actively sought and retained. Convergence that survived these steps is reported as a finding to be interpreted with caution rather than as straightforward corroboration.

Because the informants are minors recounting the loss or limitation of a parent, the research was conducted in accordance with recognized ethical principles for research involving children and sensitive disclosure. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the leadership of the pesantren acting in loco parentis, and the participation of each santri was voluntary and based on the santri's informed assent together with the consent of a guardian or of the pesantren leadership. Informants were told the purpose of the study, were free to decline any question, to pause, or to withdraw at any point without consequence, and were assured that their identities would be protected; the coded identifiers used throughout this article are one expression of that assurance. Interviews were held within the familiar environment of the pesantren, and care was taken to avoid distress, including the option to end an interview if a topic became painful. These measures were intended to protect the well-being of the informants and to support the candor on which the quality of the data depends.

As the principal instrument of a qualitative study, the researcher brought a particular standpoint to the inquiry, and reflexivity about that standpoint forms part of the method. The researcher approached the pesantren as a Muslim familiar with, and broadly sympathetic to, its educational tradition, a position that aided access and rapport but that also risked steering interpretation toward religiously congenial readings of the informants' experience. This risk was addressed in three ways: by grounding analytic claims as closely as possible in the informants' own accounts rather than in the researcher's expectations, by deliberately retaining and reporting cases that ran against the constructive pattern, and by peer debriefing with a colleague experienced in qualitative analysis who reviewed the coding and the emerging interpretation. The study did not, however, employ systematic member-checking or independent inter-coder reliability testing, and the implications of their absence are taken up among the limitations discussed below.

Result And Discussion

The interviews with the six principal informants yield three sets of findings, presented in turn: the santri's conception of the father's role, the dual character of the effects of father absence, and the mapping of those effects across the five objectives of the shari'ah. Results and discussion are combined in this section, a format chosen because the study's contribution lies less in isolated empirical claims than in the interpretation of a small set of closely related accounts, so that separating description from interpretation would fragment the argument; to keep the two distinguishable, each analytical claim is tied to the specific informants who support it, and proportions are stated (for example, how many of the six expressed a given response) rather than left implicit. The presentation moves from the santri's own accounts toward their interpretation, taking care to let the empirical material speak before drawing analytical conclusions from it.

The Role of the Father in the Family

Before turning to the effects of father absence, it is necessary to establish what the santri take the father's role to be. This conception is best understood not as a finding about fatherlessness but as the contextual baseline, the normative standard of fatherhood against which the informants register and interpret its absence. The santri describe a broadly consistent conception of that role, one that is multidimensional rather than narrowly economic. S1 described the father as a figure who accompanies the child, teaches recitation, corrects the reading of the Qur'an, leads the family to congregational prayer, and cultivates independence. S2 added an emotional register, emphasizing the father's sensitivity to the child's feelings, his capacity to motivate, and his steady attention to the child's condition. S6, for his part, brought the economic dimension to the fore, noting that his father's departure caused the family's financial situation to decline by degrees.

Taken together, these accounts place the father in a role that is at once spiritual, emotional, educational, and economic. They can be read against the influential developmental account of paternal involvement, which analyzes the father's role into the three components of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility (Lamb, 2010). The santri's descriptions contain all three: engagement in the teaching of recitation and the leading of prayer, accessibility in the steady attention S2 recalls, and responsibility in the provision whose loss S6 describes. What the santri add to that framework is a dimension it leaves largely implicit, an explicitly spiritual responsibility, the duty to form the child's relationship with God, which they place not at the margin of the role but at its centre. Their conception therefore does not so much contradict paternal-role theory as extend it: in a religiously formed family, spiritual formation appears as a constitutive component of the father's role alongside engagement, accessibility, and responsibility rather than an optional addition to them (Mashar et al., 2024).

The convergence of the santri's accounts is worth dwelling on, with the caveat about instrument-induced convergence entered in the Method kept in view. Although the six informants differ in age, family circumstance, and the manner of their father's absence, they describe the ideal father in broadly similar terms, as a figure who guides, motivates, models, and provides. Part of this similarity may be an artefact of a shared religious vocabulary and a common setting; but its persistence even in the open-ended portions of the interviews suggests that it also reflects a genuine shared normative image of fatherhood cultivated within the pesantren and the wider religious culture, an image that aligns closely with the codified duties of the husband as head of the family and with the classical emphasis on the father's responsibility for the child's moral and religious formation (Smith, 2021). That the santri articulate this image even as they describe its absence in their own lives is significant: it indicates that they measure their experience against a clear standard of what a father ought to be, and it is partly against this standard that the sense of loss, and the resolve to supply the lack in the next generation, takes shape.

The Positive and Negative Effects of Fatherlessness

The santri's accounts reveal two poles of response to the experience of father absence. At the negative pole, S2 recounted the depth of her family's grief: a sibling who would not leave his room for a month, and a mother who fainted at the news of the father's death. S1 described the envy she felt as a young child watching peers

escorted to kindergarten by their fathers. These accounts register the genuine loss and pain that father absence can carry, and they should not be minimized.

A second and, in this sample, more frequently expressed response was the construction of a constructive meaning from the same kind of loss. S3 found a substitute model in an uncle who prayed diligently in congregation at the mosque, and took that uncle as an example to follow. S4 understood his father's death as a charge to continue the example his father had set in life, particularly in worship. S5 said that his father's departure motivated him to become a better person than his parents had been. These responses should not be read as marking out a separate group of informants from those who grieved, for the language of two opposed poles oversimplifies the data. Grief and growth are not mutually exclusive; the literature on post-traumatic growth holds that positive reconstruction typically occurs alongside, rather than instead of, continuing distress, so that a single person may register both at once (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Şimşek Arslan et al., 2022; Lundberg et al., 2023). Several informants did exactly this, recalling acute loss and, in the same conversation, a resolve drawn from it. The variation is therefore better understood not as a sorting of persons into the wounded and the resilient but as a difference in how far, and by what means, a loss that is real for all of them has been integrated, a difference shaped substantially by the individual's capacity to make meaning of the experience and, the analysis will suggest, by the environment in which that meaning is made.

The mechanism by which loss is reframed as motivation deserves to be named precisely, because it recurs across several of the accounts. In each case the santri does not deny the loss but reinterprets it, locating within it a purpose: the continuation of a father's example, the determination to surpass one's circumstances, or the search for a new model to emulate. This is the process the resilience literature calls meaning-making or benefit-finding, a cognitive and spiritual reappraisal through which an adverse event is integrated into a coherent and bearable narrative rather than left as raw injury (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). In this setting the reappraisal draws on specifically Islamic resources, above all the dispositions of *sabr* (patient endurance) and *tawakkul* (trust in God), which furnish a ready interpretive frame in which hardship can be read as trial rather than mere misfortune (Pargament et al., 2000; Graça & Brandão, 2024). It also draws on resources that the pesantren environment makes readily available: a community of peers who have faced similar losses, and the visible presence of devout adults who can stand in, at least partially, for the absent father (Ezadany & Khusumadewi, 2026; Warsah et al., 2024). The finding that the substitute model is often a male relative or teacher within the religious community, rather than an abstract ideal, suggests that the availability of concrete alternative figures is an important condition for the constructive response. Where such figures and frames are present, the same loss that produces withdrawal in one child can produce resolve in another.

The Effects of Fatherlessness across the Five Objectives of the Shari'ah

Mapping the santri's accounts onto the five objectives of the shari'ah reveals a consistent pattern of variation, in which the same dimension is experienced as loss by some and as a spur to growth by others. With respect to the protection of religion (*hifz al-din*), S5 felt the absence of a guide toward closeness with God, whereas S3, S4, and S6 found in their loss a motivation toward more diligent worship. With respect to the

protection of life and the self (hifz al-nafs), S5 described disappointment with his circumstances, while S4, S6, and S3 reported increased confidence and mental resilience. With respect to the protection of intellect (hifz al-'aql), S6 and S5 described a cognitive burden of stress and longing, whereas S3, S4, and S1 reported that the experience clarified their thinking and hastened their maturation.

With respect to the protection of lineage and progeny (hifz al-nasl), the finding was uniform and positive: every informant expressed a determination to become a better parent than circumstances had allowed their own father to be. With respect to the protection of property (hifz al-mal), two patterns emerged. S6 and S5 experienced a decline in the family's financial condition, and S2 faced debts that came to light only after her father's death, whereas S4 and S3 reported relatively stable family finances, attributable to a father who had worked hard and prepared during his lifetime. These findings show that fatherlessness reaches all five objectives in a tangible way, but that the degree and direction of its influence vary considerably across individuals and across dimensions.

A closer reading of the maqasid mapping reveals that the dimensions are not experienced in isolation by the informants but in combination. For S5, the disappointment registered under the protection of life was bound up with the absence of religious guidance registered under the protection of religion and with the stress registered under the protection of intellect; the three formed a single cluster of difficulty rather than three separate problems. For S4 and S3, by contrast, the motivation toward worship, the growth in resilience, and the clarification of thinking likewise reinforced one another, forming a cluster of constructive responses. This clustering, visible across the informants' accounts, anticipates the analytical point developed in the discussion: that the five objectives function as an interlocking system, so that a disturbance or an improvement in one tends to propagate to the others rather than remaining confined to a single domain (Auda, 2008).

To consolidate these findings, Table 1 maps the effects of father absence reported by the six informants onto the five objectives of the shari'ah, distinguishing in each case the dimension of loss from the dimension of growth and noting which informants exemplified each. The table makes visible the central pattern of the study, namely that each objective is touched in both directions rather than uniformly harmed.

Table 1. Mapping the Reported Effects of Fatherlessness onto the Five Objectives of the Shari'ah

Objective of the Shari'ah	Dimension of Loss	Dimension of Growth
Religion (hifz al-din)	Absence of a guide toward worship (S5)	Motivation toward diligent worship (S3; S4; S6)
Life / Self (hifz al-nafs)	Disappointment with circumstances (S5)	Greater confidence and resilience (S4; S6; S3)
Intellect (hifz al-'aql)	Stress and longing (S6; S5)	Clarified thinking and maturity (S3; S4; S1)
Lineage (hifz al-nasl)	—	Resolve to be a better parent (all six informants)
Property (hifz al-mal)	Declining finances; hidden debt (S6; S5; S2)	Stability from prior preparation (S4; S3)

Table 1 shows that, with the single exception of lineage, every objective of the shari'ah is registered by the informants in both a dimension of loss and a dimension of growth. The uniformity of the positive response on the dimension of lineage, the resolve to parent better, is striking, but it should be read with caution. In an interview conducted within an Islamic boarding school and framed by an explicitly Islamic instrument, a resolve to become a better parent is a socially desirable thing to express, and the absence of any countervailing statement, such as a fear of repeating a father's absence or doubt about one's own future fitness as a parent, may reflect the setting and the instrument as much as the informants' inner states. The uniformity is therefore reported as a finding whose interpretation is qualified by the possibility of social desirability bias, and the question of whether fatherless santri also harbor anxieties about their own future parenting is one the present instrument did not adequately probe and that further research should pursue. The variation across the other dimensions, and across individuals within each dimension, is precisely what the discussion seeks to explain.

Discussion

The discussion takes up the three aims of the study in turn: the role of the father, the dual character of the effects of fatherlessness, and the maqasid analysis of the phenomenon. Throughout, the aim is to interpret the findings rather than to restate them, situating them in dialogue with prior scholarship and with the normative framework that organizes the inquiry.

On the first aim, the findings confirm that the father's role extends well beyond the economic. This accords with the normative framework set out in Article 34 of Law Number 1 of 1974 and Article 79 of the Compilation of Islamic Law, which cast the husband as head of the family, protector, guide, and provider. It also resonates with the classical fiqh emphasis, noted in the introduction, on the father's responsibility for the religious and moral formation of the child. The santri's emphasis on spiritual and educational dimensions enriches the more general account of paternal engagement, accessibility, and responsibility found in the developmental literature (Lamb, 2010). The implication is that, in the Indonesian Muslim family, a full definition of the father's role must place spiritual responsibility alongside economic and psychosocial responsibility as a constitutive rather than incidental element.

This conclusion has a practical edge that is easily overlooked. If spiritual guidance is constitutive of the father's role rather than an optional supplement, then a father who provides materially but neglects the religious and moral formation of his children is, in the relevant sense, partially absent, and his children may experience a form of fatherlessness even within an intact household. The santri's accounts lend support to this reading, since they define the father they miss not primarily as a wage-earner but as one who would have taught the Qur'an, led prayer, and modeled devotion. Recovering this fuller conception of fatherhood is therefore not only an analytical refinement but a corrective to a narrowed cultural expectation that measures paternal adequacy chiefly by provision. A father who is present in the home but absent in formation leaves a gap that the present findings suggest children feel keenly.

On the second aim, the duality the study finds qualifies, rather than overturns, the deficit framing that dominates the prior literature. Studies in the deficit tradition

concluded that father absence leaves children inattentive, poorly adapted, and slow to mature psychologically, and identified a correlation between fatherlessness and weaker language development (Kucukkaragoz, 2025). The present findings do not deny that negative dimension, evident in the experiences of S2 and S1, but they add one the deficit literature tends to miss: many of these santri are able to construct a positive meaning from the experience (Bago et al., 2024). This qualification must, however, be read against a significant feature of the sample. All six informants are currently enrolled and functioning within a pesantren, and so have already demonstrated a degree of stability and coping; children whose response to father absence was more severely disabling might never reach, or remain in, such a setting. The sample is in this sense self-selected toward the more resilient, which very likely inflates the proportion of constructive responses and limits how far the duality can be read as a correction to the deficit literature rather than as a description of a particular, comparatively advantaged population. With that caution in place, the finding still supports a theoretical modification: father absence is not a single determinative cause of harm but a condition whose effect appears to be shaped by context and by the individual's interpretive capacity.

It bears emphasizing that this corrective does not romanticize loss. The danger of a purely deficit framing is that it casts every fatherless child as damaged and forecloses the possibility of growth; the opposite danger, equally to be avoided, would be to treat father absence as harmless because some children flourish despite it. The present account steers between these errors by holding both findings together: the loss is real and can be severe, as the grief described by several informants attests, and yet its long-run effect is not fixed but depends on what the child and the surrounding community make of it. This balanced reading is more faithful to the evidence than either extreme, and it directs attention to the conditions, rather than the mere fact, of father absence as the proper object of concern and intervention.

The pesantren environment may be a central part of that shaping context, though the present design can establish association and plausibility rather than a measured moderating effect. With its ordered structure of worship, its supportive community of peers, and the presence of *asatidz* who can serve as alternative models, the pesantren offers resources for constructive meaning-making that may not be equally available elsewhere (Rusmana, 2024; Khotimah et al., 2024; Hamidiyah, 2024). The case of S3, who found a model in a devout uncle, and of S4, who read his father's death as a charge to continue his father's example, illustrate how a religiously structured community can supply substitute figures and interpretive frames that may channel loss toward growth. This observation connects the empirical findings to the field of plural family law, in which the religious community can be understood as a semi-autonomous social field, a domain that generates its own rules and meanings while remaining open to the law and customs of the wider order (Moore, 1973), shaping how the obligations and absences defined by law and custom are actually experienced and made sense of in daily life.

This account also bears on studies that link fatherlessness to delinquency and other adverse outcomes. A substantial body of work documents a real association between father absence and behavioral difficulty among adolescents, and nothing in the present study contradicts it (Hanifah et al., 2024; Kucukkaragoz, 2025). It is

tempting to conclude that the difference between those findings and the present ones lies in context, the absence or presence of a structured spiritual community; but such a conclusion would compare studies with different designs, populations, instruments, and measures, and an inference drawn across them cannot have the status of a finding. The comparison is therefore better stated as a hypothesis than as a result: the divergence may reflect the shaping role of context, a possibility that warrants direct comparative investigation rather than assertion. Framed in this way, it nonetheless carries a hopeful implication worth testing, namely that if the adverse outcomes associated with father absence are conditioned by the absence of supportive context, then strengthening that context may be a tractable point of intervention.

On the third aim, the maqasid analysis provides a comprehensive map of the reach of fatherlessness and, importantly, reveals the interdependence of the five objectives. With respect to the protection of religion, the absence of a father can create a vacuum of religious guidance, yet it can also generate strong internal motivation; this is consonant with the teaching that every child is born in a state of natural disposition and that the parents shape the child's religious direction, a teaching that locates the parents as primary formers while leaving room for other figures to contribute to formation (Smith, 2021). With respect to the protection of life and intellect, the findings echo developmental evidence that the father's involvement bears on children's cognitive and emotional well-being (Lamb, 2010), while also showing that resilience can develop in the wake of loss (Masten, 2014). With respect to the protection of lineage, the informants' uniform resolve to become better parents reflects the classical emphasis on moral and character education as an inheritance of goodness passed between generations. With respect to the protection of property, father absence does shift the economic burden onto one party, as the literature on the family's economic roles emphasizes, yet financial stability is shown to depend substantially on the preparation made beforehand (Zahrotun, 2023).

A significant analytical point follows from this mapping: the five objectives do not operate in isolation but reinforce one another. A disturbance to the self may impair the intellect; a strained intellect may affect the way one will raise the next generation; economic instability may press upon both the self and religious practice. The maqasid framework, by treating the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property as an interlocking system rather than a list of separate goods, captures this interdependence in a way that single-discipline approaches do not. It is this systemic quality that makes the framework especially suited to a phenomenon like fatherlessness, whose effects ramify across every dimension of a young person's life (Mohadi & Tarshany, 2023).

Set against prior research, the study's contribution is twofold. Methodologically and substantively, it brings the maqasid framework to bear on a contemporary social phenomenon that has been studied almost exclusively through psychological and sociological lenses, showing that the framework can complement rather than displace those approaches (Niaz, 2024; Rohman, 2018). Theoretically, it proposes that any adequate account of the effects of fatherlessness must include two variables that the deficit literature tends to omit: the contextual variable of the spiritual community environment, and the individual variable of meaning-making capacity. Together these

variables explain why the same kind of loss produces such divergent outcomes across the informants, and they reframe the policy question from how to prevent harm in the abstract to how to cultivate the contexts and capacities that channel loss toward growth.

The practical implications follow from specific findings rather than standing as general desiderata. Because the informants who reported growth typically identified a concrete substitute figure, most often a male relative or teacher within the religious community, rather than abstract encouragement (the finding reported for S3 and S4), interventions for fatherless children should prioritize the provision of identifiable, present adult mentors over diffuse appeals to community support. Because the santri defined the father they missed chiefly as one who would have taught the Qur'an and led prayer rather than as a wage-earner (the conception described in the first subsection), programmes that strengthen fathers' roles should address their spiritual and educational engagement and not provision alone. And because the constructive responses turned on an act of reappraisal framed by *sabr* and *tawakkul* (the mechanism set out above), support for fatherless children should include resources that actively facilitate meaning-making, rather than treating these children only as cases of presumed pathology to be remediated.

It is useful to locate the study's central claim within a wider understanding of resilience and meaning. The pattern observed here, in which the same objective loss yields divergent outcomes depending on interpretation and context, is consistent with contemporary resilience scholarship that treats resilience not as a fixed individual trait but as a dynamic process distributed across the relationships and resources of a social ecology (Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2014; Ungar, 2011; Seccombe, 2002). On this view, the constructive responses of several santri are not evidence that the loss was minor but evidence that the pesantren furnished the relational and interpretive scaffolding through which a serious loss could be integrated. Situating the study in this way also makes its Islamic vocabulary legible to a wider scholarly audience: the dispositions of *sabr* and *tawakkul* function, in these accounts, not as mere consolation but as an active interpretive resource of the kind this literature describes, giving the young person a frame in which suffering can be assigned meaning and direction (Graça & Brandão, 2024). This reading reconciles the study's two findings, that father absence is genuinely costly and that it can become a catalyst for growth, by locating the difference between the two outcomes in the presence or absence of such scaffolding.

Framing the phenomenon within plural family law sharpens the policy significance of this conclusion, and it repays being made concrete. The three normative orders introduced earlier each address the father's role and each leaves a characteristic remainder when the role goes unmet. State law, in Article 34 of the Marriage Law, fixes the husband's duty of protection and provision and supplies, through the Religious Courts, a forum for its enforcement and for the financial consequences of divorce or death (Wirastri & van Huis, 2024; van Huis, 2025); but its instruments are largely material and procedural, and it is poorly equipped to repair the spiritual and formational gap the santri describe most keenly. Islamic fiqh defines the father's responsibility in fuller terms that include religious formation, and so names the gap more completely, yet it assigns the corresponding duty to an individual who is, by hypothesis, absent.

Customary (adat) expectation, finally, distributes responsibility across the extended family and the surrounding community, and it is here, rather than in the codified orders, that the practical provision of substitute figures actually occurs. The pesantren occupies a distinctive position across this configuration, functioning as a semi-autonomous social field that mediates between the normative ideal of fatherhood and the lived fact of its absence: it neither enforces the state's obligations nor replaces the individual father of fiqh, but supplies, in the manner of adat, the models and meanings through which the absence is made bearable. Reading the phenomenon this way shows why a response confined to the legal definition of paternal duty would address only part of it, and why responses are best conceived not as the task of any single order but as a shared undertaking in which the religious community's capacity to supply models and meaning complements the state's capacity to define and enforce obligation.

Several limits of the study should be acknowledged, and they define the work that remains. The findings rest on a single pesantren and six informants, so that the pattern observed cannot be assumed to hold across other settings without further inquiry, and, as noted above, the sample is self-selected toward santri who are functioning within the institution, a skew that very likely inflates the proportion of constructive responses. The instrument, organized around the maqasid framework, may have induced some of the convergence reported, and although open-ended prompts and the retention of discrepant cases were used to limit this effect, it cannot be excluded. The study did not employ systematic member-checking of interpretations with informants, nor independent inter-coder reliability testing, both of which would have further strengthened credibility; their absence is a limitation that future work should remedy. The design illuminates meaning and normative significance but does not measure the strength of any contextual effect, and the decision not to reproduce verbatim interview excerpts, taken to reduce the identifiability of minor participants, necessarily limits the reader's direct access to the informants' words. These are not flaws that vitiate the account so much as openings for the further research the conclusion identifies.

Conclusion

This study set out to identify the role of the father in the family, to analyze the positive and negative effects of father absence in a balanced way, and to map those effects across the five objectives of the shari'ah, drawing on the experience of six santri at the Darunnajah 1 Islamic Boarding School. On the first aim, it concludes that the father's role is not confined to provision but encompasses leadership, motivation, modeling, and, in this religiously formed setting, spiritual formation, which the santri place at the centre rather than the margin of what a father is for.

On the second aim, the study concludes that the positive and negative effects of fatherlessness depend heavily on individual perspective. Many santri at the pesantren prove able to interpret the experience constructively, finding in it a motivation toward worship, resilience, and self-development, even as others continue to face genuine emotional and financial difficulty. The experience is therefore better understood as a variable whose outcome is shaped by context and interpretation than as a fixed determinant of harm.

On the third aim, the study concludes that fatherlessness touches all five objectives of the shari'ah, religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, with varying degrees and directions of effect, and that these objectives reinforce one another so as to require a whole rather than a partial response. The capacity to draw a lesson from each event emerges as the key to transforming the experience of father absence into a catalyst for growth, and the spiritual community of the pesantren emerges as a context that fosters that capacity.

Beyond these specific conclusions, the study advances a portable theoretical proposition. It is that the developmental significance of father absence is not fixed at the moment of loss but is conditioned jointly by two variables the deficit literature tends to omit, the availability of a community that supplies models and meaning, and the individual's capacity for interpretive reappraisal. Stated in this form, the proposition reframes father absence from a determinate cause of harm into a context-dependent variable, and it offers a bridge between maqasid analysis and social-ecological theories of resilience that other researchers can take up and test in settings well beyond the pesantren.

That proposition in turn yields researchable questions for future work, which can be stated as specific propositions rather than as a general call for more study. First, a longitudinal question: do the constructive meanings reported by fatherless santri persist into adulthood and shape their own parenting, or do they attenuate once the supportive environment of the pesantren is left behind? Second, a comparative question: does father absence produce more constructive trajectories in settings that provide identifiable adult substitute mentors than in otherwise comparable settings that do not, holding family circumstance and socio-economic status constant? Third, a mechanism question: among fatherless young people, is the strength of meaning-making, indexed by measures of benefit-finding or of sabr and tawakkul, associated with better socio-emotional outcomes independently of the mere presence of a community? Each of these could be pursued through the comparative or longitudinal designs that the present single-site study cannot supply, and together they would test, rather than merely extend, the reading proposed here.

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