

Women's Initiative in Proposing Marriage to Righteous Men: A Normative and Empirical Analysis through the Concept of Iffah

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Abstract

This study examines the Islamic legal standing of women who take the initiative to offer themselves in marriage to righteous men, viewed through the concept of iffah (self-purity). Although social tradition in Indonesia often regards this practice as taboo, Islamic jurisprudence normatively permits it, provided women observe modesty, proper etiquette, and Shariah boundaries. Using a descriptive quantitative design, data were collected through questionnaires administered to 40 purposively selected respondents with a basic understanding of Islamic teachings. Item validity was assessed using Pearson's product-moment correlation, reliability using Cronbach's alpha, and the relationship between variables was tested through linear regression (t-test). The results show that women's initiative to propose significantly affects the preservation of iffah ($p = 0.003 < 0.05$), whereas the prospective husband's religious righteousness has no statistically significant effect ($p = 0.332 > 0.05$). These findings suggest that public acceptance of a woman's marriage initiative depends more on how the act is conducted within the boundaries of chastity than on the man's piety alone. The study highlights the need for broader public education on the Islamic legal principles governing marriage proposals, so that women's rights to take initiative in marriage can be exercised without compromising personal purity, particularly in the contemporary digital era.

1. Introduction

Discrimination against women remains a structural problem that manifests across various dimensions of social life [1], [2]. In Indonesia, women have historically been confined to domestic roles [3], [4], and although prevailing gender stereotypes have gradually given way to greater emancipation, its implementation remains far from optimal. As a religion intended for all of humanity, Islam offers a normative framework for addressing such global concerns, one that prioritizes justice for both men and women [5]. Within the marriage process, *khitbah* (proposal) functions merely as the gateway to marriage rather than marriage itself: an introductory stage in which prospective spouses become acquainted with one another [6].

Convention generally attributes the initiative to propose to the man's side; nevertheless, the practice of women openly expressing their intention to marry, while uncommon, is not without precedent [7], [8]. Islamic law permits a woman to express her desire to marry a particular man directly [9], a position supported by the hadith narrated by Imam al-Bukhari describing a woman who offered herself in marriage to the Prophet Muhammad SAW [10]. Such a proposal need not originate from the woman alone; it may also be conveyed through her guardian, provided the prospective husband is righteous and religiously sound [11]. The motivations underlying this practice may be spiritual or pragmatic, yet it is not free of tension: it requires balancing a woman's freedom of expression with her obligation to preserve iffah (self-purity), a cornerstone of Islamic moral values. Within Islamic family law, iffah extends beyond physical chastity to encompass moral integrity, modesty, and the avoidance of slander, obliging women to remain mindful of boundaries such as improper seclusion (*khalwat*) and unrestricted mixing with men.

This issue takes on added complexity in the digital era, where social media provides women with a direct platform to express romantic interest. Without a firm grounding in the principle of chastity, such technological affordances risk blurring the boundaries of Islamic law. In social practice, women perceived as overly forward or bold in offering themselves to men are frequently stigmatized as transgressing religious norms [12], [13]. This study responds to that tension by examining, through the

lens of *iffah*, the legal standing of women offering themselves to righteous men, combining a conceptual review of Islamic legal sources with an empirical investigation of community perceptions via a descriptive quantitative survey. The urgency of this study lies in its potential to clarify public understanding of the relevant Islamic legal parameters and to provide guidance that safeguards both women's rights and the integrity of chastity within contemporary social practice.

2. Method

The method used in this study employs a quantitative approach to generate objective and measurable data capable of answering research questions that require statistical analysis [14]. This approach is applied to gain empirical insight into public perspectives on the social phenomenon of women offering themselves in marriage to righteous men, evaluated through the lens of *iffah* (self-purity). Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire developed from conceptual indicators of *iffah*, gender perspectives on marriage, and Islamic legal rules concerning marriage proposals (*khitbah*). The questionnaire was distributed online to a sample of 40 respondents selected through purposive sampling, based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) active participation in online Islamic media platforms or local religious communities, (2) a verified basic understanding of Islamic marital jurisprudence (*fiqh munakahat*), and (3) a minimum age of 18 years, to ensure a mature assessment of legal and social ethics.

To capture both the empirical and normative dimensions of the topic, this study integrates statistical data analysis with normative Islamic legal interpretation. First, the quantitative survey data were analyzed using statistical testing software, comprising Pearson's product-moment validity test, Cronbach's alpha reliability test, and linear regression analysis (t-test), to measure the significance of the relationship between women's initiative, the righteousness of prospective spouses, and the preservation of *iffah*. Second, to contextualize these empirical findings, a normative legal analysis was conducted by interpreting classical and contemporary Islamic texts, including Quranic exegesis (*tafsir*) such as *Tafsir al-Misbah* and *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Hadith collections such as *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Fath al-Bari*, and contemporary *fiqh* works by scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Wahbah al-Zuhaili. This integrated methodological framework ensures that the empirical survey data are rigorously tested statistically while remaining firmly grounded in Islamic jurisprudence.

- 1) *Validity Test (Pearson Product-Moment)*: [formula]. The decision criterion compares the calculated r-value against the r-table value at $N = 40$ and $df = 38$. If $r\text{-calculated} > r\text{-table}$ (0.257), the item is declared valid; otherwise, it is declared invalid.
- 2) *Reliability Test (Cronbach's Alpha)*: [formula]. The decision criterion is that a Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.6 indicates the instrument is reliable.
- 3) *T-test*: [formula]. The decision criterion is that if the significance value (p) < 0.05 , the effect is significant; if $p > 0.05$, the effect is not significant.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. The Law of Women Offering Themselves to Righteous Men

Marriage confers a respectable standing upon both men and women and remains a pressing concern in human life [15]. To establish a stable and enduring family founded upon belief in God, marriage constitutes a physical and spiritual bond between a man and a woman [16]. One stage of the marriage process is *khitbah*, or proposal, which serves to demonstrate the man's sincere intention to marry the woman while granting an equivalent right to the woman's guardian [17]. Traditionally, this intention is conveyed directly by the man's side through a representative or proxy; if accepted, the marriage process proceeds, and if not, it is discontinued at that stage [15]. This stage also allows the couple to become acquainted with one another's personality, temperament, and habits, while remaining within the boundaries of Islamic law.

The question of who may initiate a marriage proposal, whether the man's side exclusively or a woman offering herself as a prospective wife, remains a subject of debate. Such an act by a woman is sometimes

regarded as inappropriate on the assumption that proposing is not consistent with a woman's nature, raising the question of whether this nonetheless constitutes a legitimate right for women as well. Viewed from a gender perspective, a woman's right to propose is valid, although the surrounding social environment is often not receptive to it. Islamic law permits women to express their desire to marry a man, provided that the man in question is righteous and the proposal accords with Sharia principles [18], [19]. This permissibility is grounded in considerations of common good (*maslahah*) and equality within marriage law.

Islamic history provides concrete precedent through Sayyidah Khadijah RA, who took the initiative to send an intermediary to propose to the Prophet Muhammad SAW [20]. This precedent demonstrates that a woman offering herself as a wife in the pursuit of a righteous partner is not contrary to Islamic values, but is instead regarded as an expression of maturity and spiritual awareness. This right, however, is neither unconditional nor without limitation: it must be exercised within defined boundaries, such as minimizing direct communication, avoiding excessive flattery that could provoke desire, and involving a guardian or family member to preserve propriety. The primary objective of this practice should be the noble aim of establishing a household characterized by *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (love), and *rahmah* (mercy), rather than the mere fulfillment of personal desire.

This position is further reinforced by the hadith narrated by Anas ibn Malik, as recorded in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, in which a woman approached the Prophet Muhammad SAW and offered herself to him in marriage; upon witnessing this, one of Anas's female relatives criticized the woman's boldness, to which Anas replied that the woman was in fact better than her, precisely because of the sincerity of her intention [10]. This hadith is significant in that it is recorded under a dedicated chapter addressing women who offer themselves to righteous men, thereby providing normative grounding for the practice. Islam, accordingly, affords women the space to offer themselves as prospective wives in the pursuit of a partner, while still requiring adherence to strict moral guidelines.

3.2. The Law of Offering Oneself to a Righteous Man: The Conceptual Chastity of Iffah

Linguistically, *iffah* is the *masdar* (verbal noun) form derived from the Arabic root 'ain-fa-fa ('*affa* – *ya'iffu* – '*iffatan*), meaning to restrain oneself, to abstain, to exercise self-control, and to protect and maintain one's honor and purity [21]. In this context, the concept of *iffah* rests on ethical principles that cannot be disregarded when a woman expresses her intention to marry [22], [23]. Women are accordingly advised to avoid ambiguous or flirtatious communication, such as the use of emotionally suggestive language or informal correspondence conducted without the presence of a guardian. The process should instead be carried out formally and respectfully, for example through family intermediaries or trusted third parties, in order to minimize the potential for slander and to preserve the purity of intention. Beyond communicative conduct, the underlying motivation must be oriented toward worship and a genuine commitment to religious values; every step taken must therefore be accompanied by sincere effort to safeguard the heart, perspective, and interactions from deviating into sin.

Table 1. Validity Test Results Table

Variable	Question item	Totalscore Correlations/r calculated	R table	Description
X1	F1	0.685**	0.257	Valid
	F2	0.685**		Valid
	F4	0.723**		Valid
	F7	0.728**		Valid
	F18	0.610**		Valid
X2	F3	0.865**	0.257	Valid
	F6	0.774**		Valid
	F15	0.868**		Valid
	F16	0.811**		Valid
Y	F5	0.321**	0.257	Valid
	F8	0.085**		Not Valid
	F9	0.511**		Valid
	F10	0.111**		Not Valid
	F11	0.166**		Not Valid
	F12	0.068**		Not Valid
	F13	1		Valid
	F14	0.181**		Not Valid
	F17	0.397**		Valid

From the validity test results, it is known that the r-table value for 40 respondents is 0.257, and after comparing it with the r-calculated value, there are 5 invalid question items.

Table 2. Reliability Test Results Table

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Rtabel	Description
X1	0.709	0.60	Reliable
X2	0.848	0.60	Reliable
Y	0.775	0.60	Reliable

According to the reliability test table above, the variables in this study are dependable and constant even if the research is repeated because the Cronbach's Alpha value is higher than the crucial value (rtabel). T-test or the test conducted to determine the relationship between variables.

Table 3. Coefficients^a

Unstandardized Coefficients				Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
Model	B	Std. Error		Beta		
1	(Constant)	9.684	4.075		2.376	.023
	Women offer themselves	.934	.291	.556	3.204	.003
	Pious man	.333	.339	.170	.983	.332

a. Dependent Variable: Iffah

The test results above show that the variable of women offering themselves to iffah has a sig value of $0.003 < 0.05$, so it can be concluded that there is an influence between the variable of women offering themselves to iffah. Meanwhile, for the other variable, the sig value obtained is $0.332 > 0.05$, so it can be concluded that pious men do not influence iffah.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that a woman offering herself to a righteous man for marriage is permissible in Islam, as long as it is done while maintaining the principle of iffah or self-respect. The principle of chastity in this context encompasses physical purity, morality, modesty, as well as avoiding potential slander and violations of Islamic law such as seclusion or seductive communication. The results of the study of hadiths and Islamic literature support the fact that this practice has a clear historical and legal basis, as it was done by the female companions during the time of Prophet Muhammad SAW, just as women offered themselves to the Prophet. Thru a descriptive quantitative approach, it was found that most respondents understood and accepted the permissibility, but there was still a social stigma that considered women who offered themselves as inappropriate. The regression test results show that the variable "women offering themselves" significantly affects the concept of iffah (significance value $0.003 < 0.05$), while the variable "pious men" does not have a significant effect (significance value $0.332 > 0.05$). This shows that the assessment of honor is more influenced by the woman's own actions, rather than the character of the man she is involved with. Therefore, it is important to educate and clarify the public's understanding of the boundaries of Islamic law and the concept of chastity so that women can exercise their rights proportionally and remain within the framework of Islamic teachings. In the midst of the digital age, a strong understanding of religious values is key to ensuring this practice does not deviate from the sacred and noble purpose of marriage.

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