

Public Space and Women: A Case Study of Mosque Friendliness Towards Women in Ambon City

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Abstract: *Changing times require women to do outdoor activities, so women must look for alternatives to carry out their worship comfortably. However, what happens is that there are still many mosques as public spaces that are not friendly to the presence of women, both in terms of infrastructure and service facilities. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method, taking the research location in Ambon City. Ambon was chosen as the research location because it is the centre of the Maluku community's government, education, and economy, with a population of 1,031,587 Muslims. The research results found that many mosques in Ambon City were unfriendly and exclusive for women. This mosque's lack of friendliness is caused by several factors, namely the mosque planning process that does not involve women, men dominating the mosque too much, and there is still a negative stigma towards women who do activities outside the home. To be able to realize a mosque as a public space that is friendly and accessible to all groups requires efforts from all parties.*

Abstrak: Perubahan zaman mengharuskan perempuan untuk beraktivitas di luar ruangan, sehingga perempuan harus mencari alternatif untuk selalu melakukan ibadah dengan nyaman. Namun yang terjadi, masih banyak masjid sebagai ruang publik yang tidak ramah terhadap keberadaan perempuan, baik dari segi prasarana maupun sarana pelayanan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus dengan mengambil lokasi penelitian di Kota Ambon. Ambon dipilih sebagai lokasi penelitian karena merupakan pusat pemerintahan, pendidikan, dan perekonomian masyarakat Maluku yang berpenduduk 1.031.587 jiwa beragama Islam. Hasil penelitian menemukan banyak masjid di Kota Ambon yang tidak ramah dan eksklusif bagi perempuan. Kurang ramahnya masjid ini disebabkan oleh beberapa faktor, yaitu proses perencanaan masjid yang tidak melibatkan perempuan, laki-laki terlalu mendominasi masjid, dan masih adanya stigma negatif terhadap perempuan yang beraktivitas di luar rumah. Untuk dapat mewujudkan masjid sebagai ruang publik yang ramah dan dapat diakses oleh semua kalangan memerlukan upaya dari semua pihak.

INTRODUCTION

Public space in a democratic society influences the quality of life of citizens and is an indispensable infrastructure (Bagheri 2014). Public spaces are regulated and normative, with certain values often put forward to make them easily accessible (Khemilat 2021). Public spaces must also be universally accessible to everyone (Moreira, Rezende, and Passos 2021). However, public space is often considered a space of conflict

because it is only open to certain entities, especially men, and closed to other entities (women) (Khemilat 2021). Women are very vulnerable to crime when in public spaces (Tandogan and Ilhan 2016). In addition, perceptions of insecurity are reinforced by cultural factors such as public spaces being dominated by men (Mahadevia and Lathia 2019).

Mosques as public spaces must be accessible to everyone and must accommodate the needs of all gender groups (Fadlia, Ramadani, and Zalikha 2021). Mosques are places of spiritual growth and development for all Muslims and should be accessed equally by men and women. However, mosques are not only centers of spiritual activities but also centers of social (public space) and religious education. Mosques are also places where Muslims from various cultural and ideological backgrounds (*mazhabs*) worship, meet and interact. The diversity of interpretations of Islamic sources and practices has created tension. There is a trend in organizing places of worship (mosques) and the role of Muslim women in the world (Safi 2006).

The Al-Qur'an has clearly and firmly established the spiritual and moral equality of men and women, as stated in Surah Al-Ahzab verse 35. According to Hamka in Al-Azhar's commentary, men and women carry out these practices and deeds then Allah SWT. has given forgiveness for all the mistakes he committed (Saipon 2019). For both men and women, the Qur'an has emphasized that both have moral obligations and social responsibilities. Mosques as public spaces have always been centers of learning and moral and spiritual growth. The Qur'an also explains the equality of women's commitment to developing public welfare as stated in the Qur'an, Surah At-Taubah, verse 71.

Campaigning for goodness and peace and fighting evil is a shared task (men and women). Therefore, mosques become comfortable public spaces for meeting and planning community development as well as strategies for campaigning for the common good (Safi 2006). Kindness is an effort to strengthen religious values and how humans live side by side and have concern for fellow humans (Suherman et al. 2019).

Hadith is the second source of reference for Muslims which can be used as a reference in discussing Islamic views on gender regarding the position of women and men. There is no prohibition on female worshipers from visiting mosques. Abdullah bin Umar said that the Prophet Muhammad SAW said: Do not prevent a woman from going to the mosque, even though her house is the best for her (Hadith History by Abu Dawud).

Apart from that, the separation of gender spaces in Islam is often interpreted as limiting women from getting the same information in mosques. Referring to the hadith above regarding women's opportunities to go to the mosque, the Prophet Muhammad SAW did not limit women from coming to public facilities (mosques) if the place and conditions allowed (Aryanti 2006).

Scholars agree that for men, it is preferable to pray together in the mosque compared to praying alone at home. Meanwhile, Abdullah R. Rasulullah said: "A woman who prays in her house is more important than praying in a large field." This hadith means that women can pray in the mosque if there is nothing that causes slander from themselves or others. However, if it causes defamation then it is better for women to pray at home, whereas if they want to pray outside the congregation, they must get their husband's permission (Nurdin 2020).

The changing times require women to do outdoor activities, so they must look for other alternatives to carry out their worship comfortably. However, what happens is that there are still many mosques as public spaces that are not friendly to the presence of women, both in terms of infrastructure and services. Mosques are not close to women because in the construction or planning stages of mosques, women are rarely involved in providing input on how ideally a mosque should be close to women. Data on women's involvement in the public sector in the world averages above 80%, while in Indonesia it reaches 88%. Women are open to participating or being involved in mosques (Hamsah 2017). The completeness of public space facilities and infrastructure that are comfortable for women is one indicator of the success of the public space (Khameneh and Ebrahimpour 2014).

As part of society, women are also significant users of mosques and play an important role in planning and designing mosque space provisions. The presence of women in mosques requires consideration of mosque design to provide comfort, convenience, and privacy for women. Providing access for women through prayer places, ablution places, toilets, and circulation that connects spaces separated from men. This must be carefully considered when designing (Nawawi et al. 2017).

Clarity regarding women's presence in public spaces (mosques) and maintaining the hijab (modesty) from ablution to prayer is needed to maintain women's privacy. Nawawi and his friends in their findings revealed that most mosques were designed by

men. Therefore, although the authorities are still accepting and open to suggestions, it is time to consider the needs of women in society in creating women-friendly mosques (Nawawi et al. 2014). Therefore, mosques as a means for Muslims to carry out their worship are required to pay attention to the needs of women in carrying out their worship in the mosque. Because, if mosque managers ignore the needs of women, then this will have an impact on the difficulty for women to carry out their worship in the mosque.

Ideally, a women-friendly mosque has several criteria. First, a partition, mihrab, or separate room that separates men and women. Second, the availability of worship equipment such as mukenas and prayer mats. Third, access to different mosque entrances to make it easier for women to pray. Fourth, there is a place for ablution which is closed and different from men's so that ablution can be done properly and comfortably without fear of exposing one's private parts (Safi 2006).

However, based on findings when visiting several mosques in Ambon City, it was found that there were no provisions and space designs specifically intended for women. The lack of special rooms for women is proof of this. For example, there are combined abortion sites for men and women. The ablution area is separate, but the women's ablution room can still be seen by men, even though during ablution ideally women should also remove their headscarves to wash their heads properly. Apart from that, the entrance to the mosque is not separate, there are no special toilets for women, and the curtain covering the women's prayer area is not closed completely so that anyone can still see it.

An increasing number of Muslim women complain about arrangements and practices that limit and hinder women's access to full participation in mosque activities (Safi 2006). Many mosques today designate prayer rooms for women. This raises the question: Are mosques only for men? How can a mosque become an ideal public space that can be accessed by all genders without discrimination?

This phenomenon is interesting to research and study more deeply to add to the body of knowledge and to the decision-making process so that all Muslims can access mosques in Ambon without feeling disturbed. Thus, it is hoped that the mosque as a public space for Muslims can be used as well as possible for worship so that the provision of rights to meet the needs of worship between men and women must be given more attention.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. A qualitative approach seeks to understand or interpret phenomena in terms of meaning or understanding (Silverman 2019). Qualitative research involves the use and collection of various empirical discussions (Aspers and Corte 2019). Qualitative research tries to uncover problems from a subjective point of view (Haven and Van Grootel 2019). Meanwhile, the case study method is a qualitative approach that examines a particular case in a contemporary real-life context or setting (John W. Creswell 2015).

This research was carried out from January 20, 2023, to August 20, 2023 (7 months). The research location is Ambon City, the capital of Maluku Province. This research involved 33 informants consisting of 3 religious' figures, 10 mosque administrators, five mosque construction committees, and 15 female congregants. The technique for determining informants was determined using a purposive sampling technique, namely a technique for determining informants deliberately by considering informants as research samples (Etikan 2016; Tongco 2007). This technique is based on the consideration that selected informants must know and be directly involved in the mosque construction planning process and be active users of mosques in Ambon.

Meanwhile, data collection techniques are the most strategic step in research. This is because the main aim of research is to obtain data and answer research questions that arise (John W. Creswell 2015). So, the data collection procedure in this research has three types of strategies, namely:

1. In-depth interviews, namely researchers dealing directly with informants in conducting interviews. This is done by researchers as a form of convenience in absorbing information from informants and can be used as follow-up questions to explore detailed information from informants.
2. Direct observation, namely the researcher is directly involved in a non-partisan role. This aims to ask general questions beyond the questions prepared for informants, so that they can be accessed to provide their views.
3. Qualitative documents. In this technique, researchers will review journals, books and other documents related to the research.

After the researcher collects the data, the next step is to check the validity of the data. Data examination is critical in qualitative research (Hayashi, Abib, and Hoppen

2019). In assessing the validity of the data, this research used triangulation techniques. The basic idea is that the phenomenon under study can be understood well so that the truth can be obtained from various points of view. Photographing a phenomenon from different points of view allows a reasonable level of facts to be accepted. Therefore, triangulation is an effort to check the correctness of data or information obtained by researchers from various points of view by reducing bias that occurs during data collection and analysis (Yang et al. 2021) In other words, triangulation is intended to cross-check data findings from various actors, which are then compared with various methods, sources, and theories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ambon City is the capital of Maluku Province and the center of government, education, economy, and politics for the people of Maluku. The number of Muslim residents in Maluku is 1,031,587 people (Ministry of Religion, Maluku Province 2019). According to the Ministry of Religion of Ambon City, the number of mosques and prayer rooms in Ambon City is 179 (Kementerian Agama Kota Ambon 2019). Different data was submitted by the Ambon City Central Statistics Agency (BPS); The number of mosques and prayer rooms in Ambon City is 232 (BPS 2019) Thus, public spaces that are friendly to all groups are important because they are a crucial element of development (Carmona 2015)

Women have special needs and values in any society, including privacy, security, and comfort (Al-Bishawi, Ghadban, and Jørgensen 2017). Providing gender privacy is essential for most Muslim women when preparing for prayer (Mokhtar 2020). Careful and orderly planning in the use of public space must be emphasized in the construction of mosques, especially regarding the separation of space between men and women in several activities (Asif et al. 2021). The presence of women in mosques to carry out worship is regulated in Islam. There is no prohibition on women attending mosques. However, scholars agree that men should pray together in mosques. Meanwhile, women should pray at home (Nurdin 2020).

Apart from the legal debate regarding women praying outside the home, in this increasingly advanced world era, there are many activities that require women to leave the house and must pray wherever they are. However, mosque facilities tend to be less supportive of women in carrying out their religious activities comfortably and safely. Based on mosque standards or typologies that characterize women-friendly mosques,

they are generally divided into several categories. First, the women's and men's prayer rooms are combined but must be separated by a partition or wall, which is adjusted to the typology of each mosque itself. Second, providing private space for Muslim women when preparing for prayer, such as toilet facilities, ablution rooms, and space for taking off or putting on shoes, is very important to maintain women's privacy (Mokhtar 2020).

From interviews with several informants such as religious leaders and mosque administrators, they all agreed that praying at home is the best place for women. This view underlines the differences in the function of mosques for men and women. Meanwhile, the presence of men is based on the idea of religious obligation. The presence of women in public spaces is often considered to attract the opposite sex, thereby arousing men's desires. As the results of interviews with religious figures:

"Psychologically, women have magical powers (attraction) to attract the attention of other people." (Interview with religious figures, January 31, 2023).

Meanwhile, according to the mosque administrator:

"For women there is no prohibition on praying in mosques, but it would be better if prayers were done at home. This is different from men who are required to pray in the mosque." (Interview with mosque administrators, February 7, 2023).

Nurdin (2020) revealed that in general what women wear, such as perfume, jewelry, clothes, and appearance, as well as the way they talk and move, can stimulate men's desire, including even older women. Based on this, female worshipers occupy smaller or even very small spaces in the mosque. Because there is an opinion that the presence of women in the mosque is not an obligation. On the other hand, it has become an obligation for men to attend prayers at the mosque (Aryanti 2006). This also results in mosques giving birth to a patriarchal gender regime, so that women do not have the same rights and obligations as men. The fact that women do not have an obligation to participate in mosques can in practice be an obstacle, because it sends a signal that it is not important for women to attend mosques (Predelli 2008)

The involvement of women in the mosque design process is still a matter of debate. On the one hand, there are those who argue that women should also be involved in the mosque design process. This aims to ensure that women's rights in mosques in carrying out their worship can be properly considered. Meanwhile, on the other hand, one of the reasons why mosques are less friendly towards women is because mosque

administrators are dominated by men so that their understanding of women's needs often receives little attention. For example, the results of an interview with a religious figure said that:

“There is a lack of friendliness of mosques towards women because most of the mosque takmir administrators are usually men. The result is a lack of understanding of women's needs. Or it could also be because the mosque's ta'mir has a high level of hegemony towards women. fellow men so that men's needs dominate more than women's.” (Interview with Religious Figure, April 31, 2023)

At the same time, some people argue that women should not be included in the mosque design process. The reason is that men's involvement is enough to represent women. This is based on a statement from the mosque management which states that women do not need to be involved in the mosque design process, unless they are women who know architecture. Therefore, men's involvement is sufficient to represent women in the mosque design process. The following is an excerpt from an interview with the mosque administrator:

“...If the woman has a background, for example the woman is an architect, then I don't think it's a problem if women are involved. “However, if we involve women who are not in their field, then it is better not to need to be involved, just men who are involved to ask for suggestions and so on regarding the mosque design process.” (Interview with mosque administrators, June 6, 2023)

Women themselves entrust the construction of mosques to men because they are considered to understand women's needs. Not a single decision in mosque design and mosque planning involved women. The important elements that must be present in a mosque in general are a prayer room as a basic requirement for performing prayers, a place for ablution and a toilet (Al-Mansoor 2018).

The role of religion is only limited to personal matters, and mosque institutions become exclusive for ritual matters and congregational prayers, which are usually dominated by men. These policies can indirectly influence restrictions on women's access, resulting in inadequate facilities for women in mosques (Suratkon et al. 2018).

However, suppose we refer to the principles that make public spaces successful. In this case, one of them is that if the aim of a public space is to create a feeling of safety and comfort for every user, then from the start the design needs to involve active users from all levels of society (Carmona et al. 2019). This is important so that the public space

design process involves joint decisions and can accommodate the interests of various types of users. Women's participation in mosques is still a rare policy. Therefore, the public opinion regarding mosque ownership, especially men, is a wrong condition and harms women (Aryanti 2006). The importance of education and awareness that must be increased by all groups, mosque administrators and imams, regarding the importance of providing separate spaces and facilities for women. Basically, what women need is not involvement in planning the construction of the mosque, but rather support from the committee in building a mosque that accommodates women's needs because the mosque is one of the many public spaces that must be friendly to anyone who uses it. including women.

Based on monitoring at several mosques in Ambon City, it was found that there are still many mosques that are not friendly towards women. This is also supported by the statement of an informant who is a religious figure who stated that the friendliness of mosques in Ambon City towards women is still relatively standard and does not fully accommodate all the needs that should be provided by mosque managers. The following is an excerpt from an interview with one of the religious figures:

“In my opinion, the mosques in Ambon City regarding their friendliness towards women are still at general standards, not the overall standards required by women.” (Interview with religious figures, January 31, 2023).

Several findings obtained based on research results regarding the friendliness of mosques towards women in Ambon City, include the following:

Access to the Mosque Entrance

Several mosques in Ambon City still do not have entrances that separate access to women's and men's spaces. In several cases, it was seen that several mosques had entrances that were still mixed for men and women. Apart from that, it was also found that mosques in Ambon City had separate entrances for men and women, but only a few mosques in Ambon City had separate entrances.

The entrance and waiting area for women and men are generally not separated, so that male and female congregants can enter simultaneously through the same door. According to several informants, men and women should be separated from the moment they enter the mosque. According to (Carmona et al. 2019), public space must be used in

harmony with reciprocal benefits for each user. Public space is owned not only by one user but also by every user, so that balance in public space can be achieved.

Prayer Area

The presence of women in the mosque influences the structure, essence, and architectural entity of the building in the form of a women's prayer room (Dişli 2015). Various mosque designs are offered to the public to make them comfortable in worship (Suratkon et al. 2018). In several mosques in Ambon City, the women's prayer area is located on the first floor, and the women's prayer area is on the second floor. On the first floor, the women's prayer room is located at the back of the main prayer room and is separated from the men's prayer room by being closed by a curtain. In contrast, the prayer room on the second floor is devoted entirely to women and can be said to be a spacious and comfortable space. However, because it is located on the second floor, it cannot be accessed by some groups, especially elderly mothers, pregnant women who are feared to be endangering themselves and the babies they are carrying, as well as mothers who bring small children, which also impacts the child's safety. This is based on the results of interviews with religious figures:

“... So far, the tendency in mosque designs to be made is for women to be placed on the top floor. For example, if a mosque is built to the 2nd floor, women will be placed on the 2nd floor as a place to pray. Women who pray with their children will also have an impact on the child's safety. Then, mosques must also pay attention to the condition of pregnant women. "If a place for women's prayer is provided on the second floor, it could also endanger pregnant women.” (Interview with Religious Figure informants, July 20, 2023)

Mosque design should include a friendly and welcoming atmosphere for all genders and age groups (Asif et al. 2021). Based on this, mosque administrators should consider the three conditions for women mentioned above so that they can feel the friendliness of the mosque for women and make it easier for them to carry out their worship as they should. Pregnant women are at risk of falling, and even mothers who have children tend to have difficulty focusing on prayer because they are afraid that the child they are carrying will fail. Moreover, the prayer room is on the second floor. Meanwhile, on the first floor it must be tightly closed, using curtains or walls as barriers to maintain women's privacy because women and men are on the same floor and room,

but there are partitions that are tightly closed. One religious figure also said something similar:

"...A mosque can be said to be friendly towards women if the mosque accommodates everything related to women's needs. "This is good for women who bring children to the mosque, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and elderly mothers." (Interview with religious figures, July 20, 2023).

Apart from that, the use of the women's prayer room on the second floor sometimes receives little attention from the mosque management. Findings in several mosques in Ambon City prove this. There are several facilities and infrastructure for the women's prayer room which are damaged and have not been repaired. Among other things, the door to the ablution area is damaged, the roof is damaged and leaking, and at any time it can rain, causing the women's prayer area to get wet. According to Safi (2006), one of the weak factors in a mosque is the availability of adequate prayer facilities and infrastructure for each user. Meanwhile, according to Carmona et al., (2019), comfort is one of the principles of a friendly public space. Comfort in public spaces is highly valued because it is difficult to achieve, and its arrangement tends to be pragmatic.

Prayer Facilities

Based on findings in the field, it was found that between one mosque and another there were differences regarding the use of curtains in women's prayer rooms. Among them, there are several mosques in Ambon City that use curtains above the average human height so that female worshipers are not visible to men, one example is the mosque in the Poka area, namely the Darul Hasanah Mosque (Figure 1). However, there are also several mosques in Ambon City where the curtains for the women's prayer area are not completely closed, there are even mosques that do not have curtains and use barriers in the form of guardrails. So that the activities carried out by female congregants during prayer can be clearly seen by men (Figure 2), for example the Grand Mosque of Al-Fatah Ambon. According to Safi (2006) the first criterion for a mosque as a public space that is considered friendly is the presence of a partition, mihrab or space that separates female and male worshipers. This separation is necessary so that female congregations can worship comfortably.



Figure 1

The Darul Hasanah Mosque in Ambon City uses curtains that are higher than human height so that the activities of the female congregation are not visible to men.



Figure 2

Al-Fatah Ambon Grand Mosque uses curtains that only reach adult waist height so that women's activities can be seen by men

One of the facilities that mosques must provide for women is mukena. This is because sometimes women travel long distances and do not bring prayer equipment, so they have to give it to the women. Based on the findings, mosques in Ambon City already provide mukena facilities for women. However, unclean mukenas are still used, causing discomfort and a lack of devotion to prayer. This is due to the availability of small cupboards and the absence of doors for placing mukenas, resulting in messy mukena facilities and causing mukenas to get dirty quickly because they are not stored neatly in the cupboard. This was also explained by an informant, a religious figure, who said that it was estimated that several mosques in Ambon City would still be found providing illicit goods.

This makes female travelers uncomfortable and less humble in worship. Therefore, mosque administrators must pay close attention to women's worship facilities such as mukenas. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a religious figure:

"...The availability of facilities in mosques for women such as mukenas must also be considered. This is because mukenas are often found that are not clean, so if there are female travelers who pray in the mosque, it sometimes makes them uncomfortable, resulting in prayers not being as solemn." (Interviews with religious figures, July 12, 2023)

The location of women's ablutions in several mosques does not provide privacy regarding the maintenance of the hijab for women, where there are still ablution areas that are open to the outside so that men can still see them. Some ablution places are

combined for men and women. In other cases, it was found that there was a separate ablution place for women, but the wall used did not cover the entire women's ablution place so that men could see it. This causes feelings of worry because they are afraid that their private parts will be seen during ablution. In another case, it was also found that one of the mosques in Ambon City which uses a women's ablution room, has fully protected women's private parts, and the ablution place is directly connected to the women's prayer room. So there is no need to leave the house to perform ablution. One example is the Jami Mosque in Ambon City which places a women's ablution room near the women's prayer place and is completely closed.

Building and encouraging people to use toilets is very important for health (O'Reilly and Louiss' 2014). A good bathroom provides safety and protects women's privacy (Panchang, Joshi, and Kale 2022). Based on findings from several mosques in Ambon City, several mosques have provided separate toilets for women, making it easier for female congregants to use them. Apart from that, in other cases it was also found that there were still mosques that did not provide toilets for women. This opens enough opportunities for women to come forward.

Toilet insecurity is not solely caused by a lack of adequate sanitation but is caused by gender and social processes that divide men and women into separate and unequal categories. Gender inequality is the reason why toilets are not friendly to women; This can trigger sexualization of them (O'Reilly and Louiss' 2014).

CONCLUSION

Public spaces play an important role in realizing social life. Public spaces must also be universally accessible to everyone. Mosques as public spaces for Muslims to carry out their worship are required to pay attention to the needs of all groups, including women. The completeness of public space facilities and infrastructure as well as comfort are other indicators of the success of the public space. Several mosques in Ambon are considered less friendly towards women. This happens due to several factors; *First*, the mosque design or planning process does not involve women. However, this is a matter of debate because even though it does not involve women in the design process, the mosque management still considers women's rights in the mosque. Community involvement in design aims to create a sense of security for every user.

Second, there is a view that the presence of women in mosques is not an obligation. Some even give a negative stigma to women who do activities outside the home. Based on this, female worshippers occupy smaller or even tiny spaces in the mosque. *Third*, the mosque's facilities and infrastructure are inadequate, such as access to the mosque entrance which is not separated between men and women, the prayer area is inadequate, and the prayer area is located on the second floor, making it difficult to worship. access for some elderly women, and pregnant women who are feared to endanger themselves and their unborn babies as well as women carrying small children which also impacts the child's safety. Apart from that, prayer equipment is also not available, and sometimes there are some women who travel far and don't bring it, so it has to be provided.

Fourth, in several mosque locations in Ambon City they do not provide privacy regarding the management of the hijab for women, so there are still ablution areas that are open to the outside, even ablution areas are combined for men and women. Apart from the ablution area, there are still toilets connected between men and women, so there are concerns that sexual harassment will occur against women.

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