

Women's Religious Empowerment in Pesantren: Developing the Institutional Religious Empowerment Cycle

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Received: 18/02/2025

Revised: 04/08/2025

Accepted: 30/12/2025

Abstract

Women's participation in Islamic da'wah has expanded significantly, yet the institutional mechanisms through which religious authority and empowerment are socially constructed remain insufficiently explained. This study examined how women's religious empowerment was developed within the Jamaah Santri Putri (JAMMSANTRI) community at Pondok Pesantren Hudatul Muna Jenes, Indonesia, by analysing the social construction of religious agency and identity. A qualitative case study was conducted using in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, with Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality serving as the analytical framework. The findings revealed that women's empowerment evolved through four interconnected processes: collective religious participation, institutional reinforcement, identity reconstruction, and social reproduction that generated wider community transformation. Rather than functioning as isolated stages, these processes formed a recursive institutional cycle in which organizational participation continuously reinforced religious identity, leadership, and community engagement. The study further refined Berger and Luckmann's framework by demonstrating that religious institutions actively mediated and reproduced women's religious agency through structured programmes, participatory leadership, and recurring organizational practices. It consequently proposed the Institutional Religious Empowerment Cycle (IREC) as a process-oriented model explaining how pesantren-based women's organizations simultaneously preserve religious traditions and generate sustainable social transformation.

Keywords

empowerment-based da'wah; social construction theory; women's roles;

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1. INTRODUCTION

The transformation of women's roles in Islamic da'wah has emerged as one of the most significant socio-religious developments in contemporary Muslim societies. Increasing educational attainment, broader participation in Islamic organizations, and the rapid expansion of digital communication have enabled women to move beyond their traditional roles as recipients of religious instruction to become religious educators, community organizers, social activists, and producers of Islamic knowledge (Subchi et al., 2022). This transformation has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of contemporary da'wah, where religious authority is no longer monopolized by formal religious elites but is increasingly



negotiated through collective participation and community engagement (Mokodensoho et al., 2025). Nevertheless, this expansion of women's religious agency has also generated substantial controversy and epistemic tension. While many Muslim communities acknowledge women's strategic contribution to religious education, social welfare, and community empowerment, debates concerning the legitimacy, limits, and institutional recognition of women's religious authority remain unresolved (Nasution & Tumanggor, 2025). Consequently, contemporary da'wah has become a contested arena in which gender, religious knowledge, institutional authority, and social legitimacy continuously interact and compete (Uyuni & Adnan, 2021). The central issue is therefore not simply whether women participate in da'wah, but how their religious authority is socially produced, legitimized, institutionalized, and reproduced through everyday religious practices. This unresolved tension demonstrates that the transformation of women's roles represents not merely a changing social phenomenon but also an important theoretical challenge requiring a more comprehensive sociological explanation of how religious authority is collectively constructed within contemporary Islamic communities (Habeebullah et al., 2026).

The increasing complexity of women's participation in Islamic da'wah has stimulated extensive scholarly attention across Islamic studies, sociology of religion, gender studies, communication studies, and religious education. However, existing scholarship remains fragmented into several relatively independent research traditions (Hidayah et al., 2025). The first cluster predominantly examines women's historical and theological contributions to Islamic civilization, emphasizing their roles as scholars, educators, and transmitters of religious knowledge while reaffirming the normative legitimacy of women's participation in Islamic learning (Tasnim & Amin, 2026). The second cluster focuses on women's involvement in contemporary da'wah movements, Islamic organizations, and community empowerment, demonstrating that women increasingly contribute to religious education, social development, and faith-based activism. Nevertheless, these studies generally evaluate participation through organizational representation or empowerment outcomes rather than explaining the mechanisms through which religious legitimacy is socially constructed (Effendy et al., 2024). The third cluster investigates pesantren as institutions of religious education, moral formation, and community development, highlighting their capacity to preserve Islamic traditions while adapting to social transformation. Yet women are frequently positioned as participants within pesantren rather than as collective actors capable of reshaping institutional authority and producing new forms of religious leadership (Srimulyani, 2025). Although these three streams have substantially enriched contemporary understanding of women, da'wah, and pesantren, they rarely intersect within a single analytical framework. As a result, the relationship between women's collective agency, institutional religious authority, and the social construction of religious reality remains theoretically fragmented, creating the need for a more integrated sociological explanation that connects these dimensions into a coherent analytical perspective (Ahmed et al., 2025).

Despite the substantial advancement of previous studies, an important theoretical limitation remains unresolved. Existing scholarship has successfully documented women's expanding participation in Islamic education, community organizations, and pesantren-based activities; however, it has largely treated such participation as an empirical outcome rather than as a dynamic social process. Consequently, current research provides limited explanation of how women's collective religious authority is produced, institutionalized, and sustained through continuous interaction between religious actors, organizational structures, and community practices (Kloos & Künkler, 2016). Studies on pesantren generally emphasize institutional adaptation and educational reform, whereas research

on women in da'wah predominantly measures participation, leadership, or empowerment without examining the mechanisms through which these processes acquire social legitimacy. Likewise, studies applying the theory of the social construction of reality frequently analyze identity formation or organizational culture independently, leaving the dialectical relationship among externalization, objectivation, and internalization insufficiently operationalized in explaining women's collective da'wah (Malicha et al., 2026). This fragmentation creates an epistemic tension because contemporary scholarship acknowledges the increasing visibility of women in religious life but still lacks a comprehensive explanation of how religious authority is socially constructed, negotiated, and reproduced within pesantren communities (Bestari, n.d.). Addressing this theoretical insufficiency therefore requires an integrated analytical perspective capable of connecting gender, institutional culture, religious authority, and social construction within a single explanatory framework.

Responding to this theoretical gap, the present study aims to examine how women's collective da'wah is socially constructed within the Jammsantri community at Pondok Pesantren Hudatul Muna Jenes. Rather than describing women's participation as an indicator of organizational success, this study seeks to explain the social mechanisms through which religious authority emerges, becomes institutionalized, and influences community empowerment. Specifically, the research addresses three interrelated questions. First, how are pesantren values externalized through the collective religious practices and organizational activities of Jammsantri? Second, through what institutional processes do these practices become objectified as legitimate organizational norms, religious authority, and collective identity within the pesantren community? Third, how are these institutionalized values internalized by members, and what implications do these processes have for women's religious leadership and community transformation? These questions shift the analytical focus from descriptive participation toward the dynamic interaction between individual agency, institutional structures, religious knowledge, and social legitimacy. By investigating these interconnected processes, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how women's religious authority evolves within contemporary pesantren and why this transformation has broader implications for the sociology of religion and Islamic education.

This study argues that women's religious authority within pesantren is not a fixed institutional status or a direct consequence of increased participation, but a socially constructed reality emerging through continuous interaction between actors, institutions, religious knowledge, and collective practices (Zaen & Hulwana, n.d.). The transformation of women's roles in Jammsantri reflects a dialectical process in which religious values are externalized into organizational activities, objectified through institutional norms and collective recognition, and subsequently internalized as shared identities that shape future religious practices (Berger & Luckmann, 2023). This perspective demonstrates that community empowerment and religious authority are mutually constitutive rather than independent social phenomena (Azizah, 2023). Based on this argument, the study makes three principal contributions. Theoretically, it operationalizes Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality as an integrated analytical framework for understanding women's collective da'wah within pesantren. Empirically, it provides in-depth evidence of how Jammsantri functions as a women-led religious community that simultaneously strengthens institutional legitimacy and community empowerment. Analytically, the study advances a process-oriented explanation linking gender, pesantren institutional culture, religious authority, and social construction into a coherent sociological model. These contributions establish the theoretical foundation for the following literature

review, which further elaborates the concepts and debates informing the analytical framework of this study.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case-study design to investigate how women constructed social identities through empowerment-based da'wah within the Jamaah Santri Putri (JAMMSANTRI) community at Pondok Pesantren Hudatul Muna Jenes, Ponorogo. A qualitative approach was selected because the research sought to understand socially constructed meanings, institutional interactions, and identity formation rather than to measure causal relationships or test predetermined hypotheses (Suciati et al., 2021). The case-study design enabled an intensive examination of a bounded socio-religious community in which women's religious participation, leadership, and community engagement evolved through everyday organizational practices (Wulandari et al., 2023). Rather than treating women's da'wah as an individual religious activity, the study examined it as a collective social process embedded within pesantren culture. This design therefore provided the most appropriate methodological strategy for answering the research question concerning how religious identities were socially produced, negotiated, institutionalized, and reproduced through community-based da'wah.

The study was grounded in an interpretivist epistemology informed by social constructivism (Gillani, 2021a). This philosophical position assumed that social reality was continuously created through human interaction rather than existing as an objective entity independent of social actors. Because the research examined how women interpreted, negotiated, and reproduced religious meanings within their community, interpretivism provided an epistemological framework consistent with Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 2023). Knowledge was therefore understood as contextually situated, historically embedded, and collectively produced through interaction among community members. This philosophical orientation also aligned with the research objective of exploring the dialectical relationship between institutional structures and individual agency in shaping women's participation in da'wah. Consequently, participants' narratives, experiences, and interpretations constituted the primary source of analytical evidence throughout the research process.

The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Hudatul Muna Jenes, Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia, where the Jamaah Santri Putri (JAMMSANTRI) has developed into a community-based movement integrating Islamic learning, women's leadership, and social empowerment (Hasanah, 2022; Syaroh, 2022). The site was purposively selected as a critical case because it represented an institutional setting in which women's da'wah was systematically organized through educational, social, and community development programmes. Unlike conventional women's religious gatherings that primarily emphasize ritual activities, JAMMSANTRI combined religious instruction with leadership development, economic empowerment, and public engagement. Fieldwork was undertaken between January and April 2024, allowing prolonged engagement with routine religious studies, organizational meetings, community outreach programmes, and pesantren activities. This context provided rich empirical opportunities for examining how women's social identities emerged through continuous interaction between religious traditions and contemporary community practices (Interview with Nyai Siti Roudlotun Nikmah, September 21, 2024; Rambah Desa, Jammsantri Perkuat Gerakan Kultural NU, 2020).

Participants were selected through purposive sampling because the study required information-rich cases capable of explaining the processes of social identity construction (Gillani, 2021b). Inclusion

criteria consisted of active membership in JAMMSANTRI for at least two years, direct participation in organizational or da'wah activities, and willingness to participate voluntarily (Interview with Nyai Siti Roudlotun Nikmah, September 21, 2024; Rambah Desa, Jammsantri Perkuat Gerakan Kultural NU, 2020). Individuals who attended religious activities only occasionally or had no organizational involvement were excluded because they could not provide sufficient experiential insights into identity formation. Eighteen participants were ultimately recruited, comprising female religious leaders, organizational administrators, senior members, and pesantren managers representing different institutional responsibilities. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, indicated by the absence of substantially new categories emerging from subsequent interviews. This strategy ensured analytical diversity while maintaining close alignment between participant experiences and the research objectives.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to facilitate methodological triangulation. Semi-structured interviews lasting between sixty and ninety minutes explored participants' experiences regarding religious learning, organizational participation, leadership, and community engagement (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Participant observation was conducted during Qur'anic study sessions, public da'wah events, leadership meetings, educational programmes, and community empowerment activities to document naturally occurring interactions and organizational practices (Uwamusi & Ajisebiyawo, 2023). Documentary evidence included organizational statutes, educational materials, institutional reports, meeting records, photographs, and social media publications produced by JAMMSANTRI. Data collection followed four sequential stages: preliminary institutional access, participant recruitment, field observation and interviewing, and documentary verification. Combining multiple sources enabled the research to capture both participants' subjective interpretations and observable institutional practices within the pesantren environment.

Data analysis was conducted through theoretically informed thematic analysis guided by Berger and Luckmann's social construction framework (Byrne, 2022). First, all interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials were read repeatedly to achieve data familiarization (Williams & Moser, 2026). Second, open coding identified meaningful statements related to women's participation, religious learning, organizational practices, and identity formation. Third, axial coding connected these initial categories by examining relationships among institutional structures, symbolic practices, and individual experiences. Fourth, selective coding integrated these categories into broader analytical themes corresponding to externalization, objectivation, and internalization while remaining open to emergent patterns beyond the theoretical framework. Finally, interpretations were continuously compared across different data sources to ensure conceptual consistency and theoretical coherence (Saldaña, 2024). Each analytical stage was explicitly linked to the research question concerning how women's religious identities were socially constructed within the institutional setting of JAMMSANTRI.

Several procedures were implemented to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Keith et al., 2022). Methodological triangulation compared evidence obtained from interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis, while source triangulation incorporated perspectives from participants occupying different organizational roles. Member checking was undertaken by returning preliminary interpretations to selected participants for confirmation and clarification. Peer debriefing with researchers experienced in qualitative sociology of religion provided additional critical reflection regarding coding decisions and theoretical interpretation. An audit trail documenting analytical memos, coding revisions, and theme development was maintained throughout

the research process to improve dependability and confirmability. Thick description was employed when presenting contextual information and empirical findings, enabling readers to assess the potential transferability of the study to comparable pesantren-based communities (Birt & Wilson, 2025).

Ethical principles were applied throughout the research process to protect participants and maintain research integrity. Prior to data collection, all participants received detailed explanations regarding the research objectives, interview procedures, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Written informed consent was obtained before interviews and observations commenced. Participants' identities were anonymized through pseudonyms, while all digital recordings, transcripts, and field notes were securely stored using password-protected electronic files accessible only to the research team. Because the study involved a religious community, particular attention was given to maintaining cultural sensitivity, respecting institutional norms, and minimizing disruptions during religious activities. These procedures ensured that the research complied with established ethical standards for qualitative social research (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022).

The selected methodology was considered more appropriate than quantitative or mixed-method approaches because the research sought to explain complex processes of meaning-making rather than measure behavioural variables or establish statistical relationships (Pitsoe & Vlăduțescu, 2025). A qualitative case study enabled the integration of participants' lived experiences, institutional practices, and contextual dynamics into a coherent analytical framework capable of capturing the dialectical processes proposed by Berger and Luckmann. Nevertheless, the study acknowledged limitations associated with single-case research, particularly regarding statistical generalization (Tisdell et al., 2025). These limitations were mitigated through prolonged field engagement, multiple sources of evidence, theoretical triangulation, and transparent analytical procedures. Consequently, the methodological design prioritized analytical generalization over statistical inference, allowing the findings to contribute to broader theoretical discussions concerning women's religious agency, social identity construction, and empowerment-based da'wah within contemporary Islamic communities (Berger & Luckmann, 2023).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Women's Religious Agency Was Initiated Through Collective Religious Participation

The findings revealed that women's religious agency within JAMMSANTRI initially emerged through collective participation in religious and community-based activities rather than through individual religious learning alone (Interview with Nyai Siti Roudlotun Nikmah, Chair of JAMMSANTRI, 21 September 2024). Interview, observation, questionnaire, and documentary data consistently showed that participants joined the organization with the intention of strengthening their Islamic knowledge, expanding their religious networks, and participating in community service. These motivations were translated into sustained involvement in weekly Qur'anic study circles, manakiban, Arba'in programmes, religious education, charitable activities, and community outreach. Rather than functioning as isolated devotional practices, these activities provided structured opportunities through which women repeatedly engaged with fellow members and gradually assumed broader organizational responsibilities. The convergence of multiple data sources demonstrated that collective participation constituted the primary entry point through which women began expressing their religious commitment within the institutional setting of JAMMSANTRI (Interview Data; Observation Data; Questionnaire Data; Organizational Documents).

The empirical evidence further indicated that participation progressively expanded beyond routine religious gatherings into wider forms of public engagement. Members actively contributed to educational programmes, social assistance, neighbourhood visits, and collaborative economic initiatives, including the organization's online marketplace that facilitated communication and mutual economic support among members (Interview with Nyai Siti Roudlotun Nikmah, Chair of JAMMSANTRI, 21 September 2024). Participants consistently described these activities as inseparable from their religious obligations because community service was understood as a practical expression of Islamic values rather than an additional organizational responsibility. This pattern demonstrated that religious participation was continuously translated into observable social action, allowing women to develop confidence, organizational experience, and stronger social relationships while maintaining their commitment to collective religious learning. Consequently, religious agency was manifested through sustained participation in interconnected religious, social, and community activities instead of remaining confined to personal spirituality (Participant Observation during JAMMSANTRI Religious Activities, 20 September 2024).

The first finding suggests that women's religious agency develops through sustained collective participation that enables individual religious commitment to acquire social meaning and organizational legitimacy (Castellón, 2024). Rather than emerging solely from personal devotion or doctrinal understanding, religious agency is constructed through repeated interaction within institutional environments that encourage collaboration, mutual learning, and shared responsibility. The findings indicate that collective participation functions as the principal mechanism through which women gradually negotiate new religious roles while simultaneously expanding their involvement in community affairs. This interpretation explains why participants increasingly perceive themselves not only as learners but also as contributors to religious education, charitable initiatives, and local social development. The transformation therefore reflects an interactive social process in which participation continuously reshapes both individual identity and collective organizational life (Clarke, 2022).

This interpretation is consistent with Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality, particularly the concept of externalization, whereby individuals project subjective meanings into collectively shared social practices (Berger & Luckmann, 2023; Sherkat, 2023). The evidence demonstrates that participants' personal religious aspirations become socially recognized only after they are repeatedly enacted through institutional activities such as Qur'anic learning, manakiban, charitable programmes, and community outreach. However, the findings extend this theoretical perspective by showing that externalization within a pesantren-based women's organization is not simply an individual act of expressing belief. Instead, it is institutionally coordinated through recurring organizational programmes that provide structured opportunities for women to transform private religious commitment into collectively recognized religious action. This institutional dimension highlights the active role of religious organizations in facilitating the construction of women's religious agency (Groeninck, 2026).

The findings also contribute to ongoing scholarly discussions regarding women's participation in Islamic organizations (Interview Data; Observation Data; Questionnaire Data; Organizational Documents). Previous studies generally conclude that religious organizations enhance women's spirituality, strengthen social solidarity, and increase community engagement. The present findings support these observations but further demonstrate that collective participation constitutes the mechanism through which religious authority and social legitimacy are gradually produced rather than automatic outcomes of organizational membership. Unlike perspectives that primarily associate

women's empowerment with increased religious knowledge, this study shows that empowerment is generated through continuous participation in institutional practices that integrate religious learning with community service and organizational responsibility. Accordingly, the findings refine existing understandings of women's religious agency by demonstrating that collective participation is not merely an expression of religiosity but the foundational process through which religious identity, organizational legitimacy, and sustained community engagement are simultaneously constructed (Steeves et al., 2025).

3.2. Institutionalized Religious Practices Legitimated Women's Collective Identity

The findings revealed that women's religious participation became sustainable because repeated religious activities were gradually institutionalized into stable organizational practices that defined collective identity within JAMMSANTRI. Evidence from interviews, observations, questionnaires, and organizational documents demonstrated that regular Qur'anic study circles, manakiban, Arba'in programmes, leadership meetings, charitable activities, and annual religious commemorations were implemented systematically rather than sporadically (Interviews with JAMMSANTRI Members, 20 September 2024; Interview with Nyai Siti Roudlotun Nikmah, Chair of JAMMSANTRI, 21 September 2024; Questionnaire Survey of JAMMSANTRI Members, 17 September 2024). These recurring activities established shared organizational norms that regulated participation, mutual responsibility, and collective decision-making. Participants consistently perceived these practices as integral components of organizational life rather than optional religious events, indicating that repeated interaction had transformed collective religious values into stable institutional realities. Consequently, women's participation became socially recognized and organizationally legitimized through institutional routines that continuously reproduced the community's religious identity (Participant Observation during JAMMSANTRI Religious Activities, 20 September 2024; JAMMSANTRI Organizational Documents, 2024).

The data further demonstrated that institutionalization was reinforced through inclusive leadership and shared organizational traditions (Interview with Nyai Siti Roudlotun Nikmah, Chair of JAMMSANTRI, 21 September 2024). Members described the leadership model as participatory, allowing women from diverse educational and social backgrounds to contribute to planning, coordinating, and implementing religious and community programmes (Interviews with JAMMSANTRI Members, 20 September 2024). Observation data similarly showed that organizational meetings and religious gatherings encouraged collaborative decision-making and distributed responsibilities among members instead of concentrating authority within a limited group of leaders. In addition, longstanding religious traditions such as collective dhikr, Qur'anic recitation, manakiban, and pilgrimage activities functioned as institutional mechanisms through which organizational values were transmitted to new members and reproduced across generations. These patterns indicated that collective identity was maintained through the continuous interaction between organizational structures, leadership practices, and shared religious traditions rather than through individual commitment alone (Participant Observation during JAMMSANTRI Religious Activities, 20 September 2024; JAMMSANTRI Organizational Documents, 2024).

The second finding demonstrates that women's collective identity acquires legitimacy because repeated religious participation is embedded within institutional structures that normalize participation and sustain organizational continuity. The findings suggest that organizational routines do more than coordinate religious activities; they create socially recognized expectations regarding membership,

responsibility, and leadership. As these routines are reproduced over time, collective participation becomes institutionalized as a legitimate social practice rather than remaining dependent on individual motivation. This process explains why participants continue to identify strongly with JAMMSANTRI despite differences in age, educational background, and previous organizational experience. Institutional stability therefore emerges from the continuous reproduction of shared practices that reinforce collective belonging and organizational legitimacy (Participant Observation during JAMMSANTRI Religious Activities, 20 September 2024; JAMMSANTRI Organizational Documents, 2024).

This interpretation is closely aligned with Berger and Luckmann's concept of objectivation, which explains how repeated human actions become institutional realities that are perceived as objective and socially binding (Ocasio, 2023a). The present findings support this theoretical proposition by demonstrating that recurring religious activities, organizational routines, and shared traditions gradually acquire an existence beyond individual participants and become recognized as legitimate institutional practices (Abrams & Jayasinghe, 2023). Nevertheless, the evidence also refines Berger and Luckmann's framework by revealing that objectivation is actively mediated through organizational leadership and institutional design. Inclusive governance, collaborative decision-making, and structured religious programmes do not merely preserve existing institutional realities; they continuously reproduce and strengthen them by encouraging broad participation and shared ownership among members. This institutional mediation provides a more dynamic understanding of how objectivation operates within contemporary Islamic organizations (Ocasio, 2023b).

The findings also contribute to the broader literature on women's participation in Islamic organizations by extending previous explanations of institutional development (Khan & Sharp, 2025). Earlier studies generally argue that religious organizations strengthen solidarity, preserve Islamic traditions, and facilitate women's participation in religious life (S. Bano, 2024). While the present findings confirm these observations, they further demonstrate that institutionalization constitutes the primary mechanism through which women's public roles become socially legitimate and organizationally sustainable. Rather than functioning solely as custodians of religious tradition, institutional practices actively expand opportunities for women to participate in leadership, education, and community service while maintaining religious continuity (Taufiq & Richtig, 2026a). This finding therefore shifts scholarly attention from viewing institutions as static structures toward understanding them as dynamic social mechanisms that simultaneously preserve collective identity, legitimize women's agency, and sustain long-term organizational transformation.

3.3. Identity Internalization Reconstructed Women's Religious and Social Identity

The findings revealed that continuous participation in JAMMSANTRI gradually transformed collective religious values into enduring personal dispositions that reshaped participants' religious and social identities. Evidence from interviews, questionnaires, observations, and organizational documents consistently indicated that members experienced significant changes in their understanding of religion, self-confidence, interpersonal relationships, and community responsibility after sustained involvement in organizational activities (Interviews with JAMMSANTRI Members, 20 September 2024). Participants reported that regular engagement in Qur'anic study circles, religious discussions, leadership meetings, and community service encouraged them to reinterpret Islamic teachings as practical principles governing everyday behaviour rather than as doctrinal knowledge alone. These experiences progressively strengthened participants' confidence to communicate religious values, coordinate

community activities, and contribute to local social initiatives. The convergence of multiple data sources therefore suggested that religious identity was reconstructed through continuous participation in institutional life instead of through isolated religious instruction (Participant Observation during JAMMSANTRI Religious Activities, 20 September 2024; JAMMSANTRI Organizational Documents, 2024)..

The empirical evidence further demonstrated that identity transformation extended beyond individual spirituality into family and community relationships. Participants consistently explained that organizational experiences influenced parenting practices, family communication, neighbourhood interaction, and participation in local religious programmes. Observation data similarly showed that many members assumed greater responsibility for facilitating Qur'anic learning, organizing charitable initiatives, and supporting community development activities after becoming active in JAMMSANTRI (Participant Observation during JAMMSANTRI Religious Activities, 20 September 2024). Nevertheless, the findings also revealed variation in the pace and intensity of identity reconstruction. While several participants quickly developed confidence to assume public leadership roles, others preferred to express their religious commitment primarily through family education and neighbourhood engagement because of domestic responsibilities, occupational demands, or limited previous organizational experience. These variations indicated that identity reconstruction followed multiple developmental pathways while remaining rooted in shared institutional values and collective religious commitments.

The third finding indicates that identity reconstruction occurs because prolonged institutional participation enables collectively shared religious values to become integrated into participants' personal beliefs, everyday practices, and social relationships. The findings suggest that internalization represents a transformative process through which organizational experiences gradually reshape how women understand themselves, interact with others, and fulfil religious and social responsibilities. Rather than functioning as passive recipients of religious instruction, participants actively reinterpret organizational values within the contexts of family life, community engagement, and personal aspirations. This process explains why identity transformation becomes visible not only through increased religious knowledge but also through greater confidence, stronger civic participation, and broader involvement in community leadership. Internalization therefore constitutes the mechanism through which institutional participation produces sustainable behavioural and social change.

This interpretation strongly supports Berger and Luckmann's concept of internalization, whereby institutional realities become subjectively meaningful through continuous socialization (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2024). However, the present findings demonstrate that internalization is more dynamic than a simple process of adopting institutional norms. Participants do not merely absorb organizational values; they reinterpret and reproduce them through everyday interactions with family members, neighbours, and wider community networks. Consequently, religious identity is continuously negotiated between institutional expectations and lived social experience rather than being determined exclusively by organizational membership (Nurdiana et al., 2026). This finding refines Berger and Luckmann's framework by highlighting the reciprocal relationship between institutional socialization and individual agency, where internalized identities simultaneously sustain and reproduce the institutional environment that originally shaped them.

The findings also contribute to broader debates on women's religious education and empowerment within Islamic organizations (van Doorn-Harder, 2023). Previous studies generally conclude that participation in religious learning enhances spiritual commitment, moral awareness, and

individual religiosity. While the present findings confirm these conclusions, they further demonstrate that identity transformation extends beyond personal piety into broader forms of social leadership and community engagement. Women increasingly perceive themselves as educators, facilitators, organizers, and community actors capable of contributing to collective welfare while maintaining strong religious commitments. Furthermore, the observed variations in identity reconstruction indicate that empowerment is neither uniform nor automatic but is mediated by family circumstances, organizational opportunities, and individual life trajectories. This evidence therefore challenges linear interpretations of religious empowerment and instead supports a process-oriented understanding in which institutional participation continuously interacts with personal experience to reconstruct women's religious and social identities (Taufiq & Richtig, 2026b).

3.4. Religious Empowerment Produced Broader Social Transformation

The findings revealed that the empowerment fostered through JAMMSANTRI extended beyond strengthening individual religiosity and generated broader transformations in social participation, family engagement, community leadership, and local economic collaboration. Evidence from interviews, observations, questionnaires, and organizational documents consistently indicated that members increasingly assumed active roles in organizing religious education, coordinating charitable programmes, facilitating neighbourhood religious gatherings, and supporting community development initiatives after sustained organizational involvement. Participants described these activities as natural extensions of their religious commitment because Islamic values were understood as guiding principles for serving society rather than remaining confined to ritual worship. Consequently, religious empowerment became visible through concrete contributions to collective welfare, demonstrating that participation in JAMMSANTRI encouraged women to translate religious knowledge into sustained forms of social action.

The empirical evidence further demonstrated that social transformation was multidimensional and followed diverse trajectories among participants. Many members became actively involved in educational programmes, family counselling, community assistance, and collaborative economic initiatives such as the organization's online marketplace, which strengthened both social solidarity and household resilience. Others primarily expressed their transformed identities through family education, neighbourhood interaction, and informal religious mentoring because of domestic responsibilities, employment, or limited organizational experience. Despite these variations, all data sources indicated a consistent pattern in which continuous institutional participation strengthened women's capacity to contribute to community life while preserving pesantren traditions and collective religious values. These findings suggested that religious empowerment operated as a gradual and context-dependent process that integrated spiritual development with wider forms of social participation and community resilience.

The fourth finding demonstrates that religious empowerment functions as a catalyst for broader social transformation because institutional participation enables religious values to be translated into sustained forms of community engagement. The findings suggest that empowerment should not be understood merely as increased religious knowledge or expanded organizational membership but as the capacity to apply religious commitments within diverse social contexts. Through continuous participation in educational, charitable, and collaborative programmes, women increasingly integrate spiritual values with practical responsibilities toward their families and communities. This process explains why participants assume broader public roles while simultaneously maintaining strong

commitments to Islamic traditions. Religious empowerment therefore represents an integrated form of spiritual and social development in which faith becomes a resource for collective action rather than remaining exclusively a matter of personal devotion.

This interpretation extends existing discussions of women's empowerment in Islamic organizations. Previous studies generally emphasize that religious education strengthens moral commitment, while community programmes enhance social participation and economic resilience (Yucel & Whyte, 2023). The present findings confirm these relationships but further demonstrate that these dimensions operate through a mutually reinforcing institutional process rather than as independent outcomes. Religious participation legitimizes community engagement, whereas active social involvement deepens religious identity by providing practical opportunities to enact Islamic values in everyday life. This reciprocal relationship explains why participants perceive charitable work, educational initiatives, family mentoring, and community service not as additional organizational responsibilities but as integral expressions of their religious identity. Consequently, empowerment develops through the continuous interaction between institutional participation, religious identity, and community engagement (Jeffery & Qureshi, 2022).

An additional contribution of this finding lies in explaining the differentiated pathways through which empowerment unfolds (Lwamba et al., 2022). Although all participants experienced positive transformation, the degree and form of social engagement varied according to family responsibilities, occupational demands, previous leadership experience, and available opportunities within the organization. These variations indicate that empowerment is not a standardized organizational outcome but a contextually negotiated process shaped by the interaction between institutional resources and individual life circumstances. Rather than weakening the overall argument, this diversity enriches the explanatory power of the study by demonstrating that religious organizations create enabling conditions for empowerment while allowing members to translate institutional values into different forms of community contribution. The findings therefore advance a more nuanced understanding of women's religious empowerment as a dynamic, multidimensional, and socially embedded process that generates sustainable community transformation while preserving the religious traditions upon which it is founded (Subhani, 2025).

3.5. Toward an Institutional Religious Empowerment Cycle

Integrated Discussion

Taken together, the four findings demonstrate that women's religious empowerment within JAMMSANTRI develops through an interconnected institutional process rather than through isolated religious participation or individual spiritual development. The empirical evidence consistently indicates that collective religious participation initiates women's engagement in organizational life, repeated participation becomes institutionalized through stable organizational practices and shared religious traditions, institutional experiences are subsequently internalized into enduring religious and social identities, and reconstructed identities ultimately generate broader contributions to family, community, education, and local social development (Jadoon et al., 2022). These findings reveal a cumulative pattern in which each stage continuously reinforces the others, producing a self-sustaining cycle of religious and social transformation. Rather than representing independent empirical observations, the findings collectively explain the mechanism through which religious organizations cultivate women's agency while preserving institutional continuity and strengthening community resilience (Jahani & Parayandeh, 2024).

The integrated findings further demonstrate that organizational participation functions as the central mechanism linking individual religiosity with sustainable social transformation. Collective religious activities provide opportunities for women to establish social relationships and organizational legitimacy, while institutional routines stabilize these relationships into enduring organizational structures. As institutional values become internalized through continuous participation, women increasingly reinterpret religious commitment as a responsibility extending beyond ritual observance toward community leadership, family education, and social service (Atabik & Fian, 2026). The recursive interaction between participation, institutionalization, identity formation, and social engagement therefore explains why empowerment within JAMMSANTRI is sustained over time rather than remaining dependent on temporary organizational programmes. The evidence thus suggests that women's religious empowerment should be understood as an institutional process through which individual agency and collective organizational structures continuously reproduce one another.

Theory Refinement

The findings generally support Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality by confirming that religious identities emerge through the dialectical relationship among externalization, objectivation, and internalization (Berger & Luckmann, 2023). Women's religious aspirations are initially expressed through collective participation, repeated participation becomes institutionalized through organizational practices and shared traditions, and institutional realities subsequently become integrated into participants' subjective identities (M. Bano & Kalmbach, 2011). The study therefore confirms the explanatory relevance of Berger and Luckmann's framework within the context of contemporary Islamic women's organizations.

However, the findings also indicate that the classical formulation requires theoretical refinement to explain the institutional dynamics observed in this study. Berger and Luckmann primarily conceptualize institutions as outcomes of repeated social interaction, whereas the evidence from JAMMSANTRI demonstrates that institutions actively organize, accelerate, and sustain the dialectical relationship between individuals and society. Inclusive leadership, structured religious programmes, participatory governance, and recurring organizational traditions do not simply preserve socially constructed realities but function as active mediating mechanisms that facilitate identity transformation and long-term organizational continuity. Consequently, institutional mediation should be understood as a dynamic explanatory component within the social construction process rather than merely as its consequence (Risi et al., 2023).

The findings additionally refine contemporary understandings of women's religious agency. Existing studies often conceptualize religious agency as either an expression of personal religiosity or an outcome of organizational participation (Dale, 2022). The present study demonstrates that these perspectives remain analytically incomplete when considered independently. Religious agency develops through the reciprocal interaction of institutional participation, organizational legitimacy, identity reconstruction, and sustained community engagement. This refinement shifts analytical attention from static individual characteristics toward the relational institutional processes through which women's agency is continuously constructed, reproduced, and expanded.

Theoretical Contribution

The principal theoretical contribution of this study lies in advancing a process-oriented explanation of women's religious empowerment that integrates institutional sociology with the

sociology of religion and Islamic education. Previous studies have generally examined religious participation, institutional development, leadership, and community empowerment as relatively separate analytical domains. The present findings demonstrate that these dimensions operate as mutually reinforcing components of a single institutional process through which religious identity and social agency are simultaneously constructed (Arslan-Erbaş, 2024). This integrated perspective broadens the explanatory capacity of Berger and Luckmann's theory by illustrating how religious organizations actively mediate the continuous production of women's agency within contemporary pesantren communities.

More specifically, this study introduces the concept of an Institutional Religious Empowerment Cycle, which extends Berger and Luckmann's dialectical model by identifying institutional reinforcement as the central mechanism connecting externalization, objectivation, and internalization with sustainable community transformation. While classical social construction theory explains how social realities become institutionalized, it offers less explicit attention to the organizational mechanisms through which institutions intentionally reproduce identity transformation (Dibben & Wood, 2024). The present findings demonstrate that structured religious programmes, participatory leadership, and recurring organizational practices continuously regenerate both institutional legitimacy and individual agency. This conceptual extension provides a more comprehensive theoretical explanation of how religious organizations simultaneously preserve tradition and generate social change.

Practical Implications

The findings have important implications for Islamic educational institutions, pesantren administrators, women's religious organizations, and policymakers seeking to strengthen women's participation in community development. The evidence indicates that sustainable empowerment requires more than expanding access to religious education (Hefner, 2023). Religious organizations should develop institutional environments that combine continuous learning opportunities with participatory leadership, collaborative decision-making, and structured community engagement (Khasanah et al., 2026). Such institutional arrangements enable women to translate religious knowledge into practical contributions while strengthening organizational sustainability and collective religious identity. For policymakers and community organizations, the findings suggest that women's religious organizations should be recognized as strategic partners in promoting social cohesion, civic engagement, and community resilience (Maes et al., 2024). Programmes integrating religious education with charitable activities, family education, social services, and community-based economic initiatives create opportunities for women to contribute meaningfully to local development while maintaining strong religious commitments. Supporting organizational capacity, leadership development, and collaborative institutional networks may therefore generate broader social benefits extending beyond the religious sphere. These implications are particularly relevant for pesantren-based organizations seeking to balance religious continuity with the changing social roles of Muslim women in contemporary Indonesian society (Ahmad, 2023).

Proposed Conceptual Model

Based on the integrated findings, this study proposes the Institutional Religious Empowerment Cycle (IREC) as a conceptual model explaining how women's religious agency is continuously constructed and reproduced within pesantren-based organizations. The model consists of four recursive and mutually reinforcing dimensions.

The first dimension, Collective Religious Participation, represents the initial stage in which women express individual religious commitment through participation in religious learning, charitable programmes, organizational activities, and community engagement. Through repeated interaction, these individual commitments become collectively recognized and establish the social foundation for organizational involvement.

The second dimension, Institutional Reinforcement, explains how repeated participation becomes stabilized through organizational routines, inclusive leadership, participatory governance, and shared religious traditions. These institutional mechanisms transform recurring practices into legitimate organizational realities that sustain participation while expanding opportunities for women's leadership and community involvement.

The third dimension, Identity Reconstruction, describes the process through which institutional values become internalized into participants' personal identities. Continuous participation enables women to reinterpret religious values as enduring personal commitments that influence family relationships, leadership practices, civic engagement, and everyday decision-making. Identity reconstruction therefore represents the mechanism through which organizational participation becomes a stable source of religious and social agency.

The fourth dimension, Social Reproduction and Community Transformation, captures the extension of reconstructed identities into broader educational, social, economic, and community contexts. Women reproduce institutional values through family education, community leadership, charitable initiatives, and collaborative development programmes. Importantly, these expanded forms of participation generate new opportunities for collective religious engagement, thereby initiating another cycle of participation and reinforcing institutional continuity.

Accordingly, the Institutional Religious Empowerment Cycle (IREC) conceptualizes women's empowerment as a recursive institutional process in which Collective Religious Participation → Institutional Reinforcement → Identity Reconstruction → Social Reproduction and Community Transformation continuously interact to reproduce both organizational sustainability and women's religious agency. This model refines Berger and Luckmann's theory by positioning religious institutions not merely as products of social construction but as active mediating structures that continuously organize, stabilize, and reproduce the dialectical relationship between individuals, institutions, and society (Berger & Luckmann, 2023; Ocasio, 2023c). As such, the model provides a transferable analytical framework for future research examining women's religious organizations across diverse Islamic educational and socio-cultural contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that women's religious empowerment within the Jamaah Santri Putri (JAMMSANTRI) community is not merely the outcome of increased religious participation but is a socially constructed institutional process through which religious agency, collective identity, and community transformation are continuously reproduced. Guided by Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality, the findings reveal that women's empowerment evolves through four interconnected processes: collective religious participation, institutional reinforcement, identity reconstruction, and social reproduction within wider community contexts. Rather than functioning as separate stages, these dimensions operate recursively, enabling women's religious commitment to develop into sustained leadership, educational engagement, charitable action, and broader social contribution.

The study further refines Berger and Luckmann's framework by demonstrating that religious institutions do not simply emerge as products of repeated social interaction but actively mediate, stabilize, and reproduce the dialectical relationship between individual agency and collective social reality. Through inclusive leadership, structured religious programmes, participatory governance, and recurring organizational practices, JAMMSANTRI continuously transforms personal religiosity into institutional legitimacy and sustainable community engagement. Accordingly, this research introduces the Institutional Religious Empowerment Cycle (IREC) as a process-oriented conceptual model explaining how religious organizations simultaneously preserve Islamic traditions while generating long-term social transformation through women's collective agency. Theoretically, the study contributes to the sociology of religion, Islamic education, and gender studies by integrating institutional sociology with Berger and Luckmann's dialectical perspective into a unified explanation of women's religious empowerment. Empirically, it provides evidence that pesantren-based women's organizations function not only as spaces for religious learning but also as institutional mechanisms that cultivate leadership, strengthen social cohesion, and enhance community resilience. Practically, the findings suggest that sustainable empowerment requires institutional environments that combine continuous religious education with participatory leadership, collaborative governance, and community-based engagement. Such an approach offers valuable guidance for pesantren, Islamic educational institutions, women's organizations, and policymakers seeking to strengthen women's contributions to religious and social development.

This study is limited to a single pesantren-based organization, and therefore its findings are intended for analytical rather than statistical generalization. Future research should examine the applicability of the Institutional Religious Empowerment Cycle across different Islamic educational institutions, urban and rural Muslim communities, and diverse socio-cultural settings. Comparative and longitudinal studies are also needed to evaluate how variations in organizational governance, institutional culture, and community context influence the sustainability and transferability of women's religious empowerment beyond the pesantren environment.

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