
Analysis of Parental Intervention as a Contributing Factor to Marital Breakdown

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ABSTRACT

Marriage is a sacred covenant that establishes a family between a man and a woman. Within Islamic law and social norms, marriage represents the foundation of human life, forming a household built on harmony, affection, and mutual responsibility. However, the stability of a family can be disrupted by third-party intervention, particularly from parents or in-laws. Such intervention often arises from economic concerns, cultural expectations, emotional attachment, or cohabitation, which blur the boundaries between the newly formed household and the parental home. This study examines the forms, causes, and impacts of parental intervention on marital relationships. Findings indicate that parental involvement may appear in various forms such as giving advice, providing financial support, influencing decision-making, or intervening in childcare. Although often motivated by goodwill, excessive involvement can undermine the couple's autonomy, trigger conflicts, create emotional pressure, reduce independence, and in severe cases, lead to marital breakdown or divorce. From the perspective of Islamic legal sociology, parents indeed hold a moral responsibility to guide their children. However, Islamic teachings emphasize the balance between parental guidance and respecting the independence of the married couple. Therefore, maintaining healthy communication and clear boundaries is essential to prevent conflicts and preserve marital harmony.

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a sacred covenant that establishes a family between a man and a woman. It is a binding agreement between the bride's guardian and the groom through specific utterances, fulfilling the necessary pillars and conditions. Marriage plays a fundamental role in human life as it legitimizes the relationship between men and women within an honorable framework. Married life is ideally built upon peace, affection, and a sense of mutual responsibility that nurtures emotional security for both spouses. As a primary social institution, the family forms the first environment in which individuals develop social, moral, and psychological foundations. Every family aspires to achieve stability and happiness, which can only be maintained through honesty, openness, cooperation, and shared responsibility in sustaining the marital bond.

In this context, both husband and wife carry essential roles. The husband, as the head of the household, is expected to uphold commitment, loyalty, and provide guidance, while the wife is expected to create emotional balance and support the overall well-being of the family. These roles, however, can be disrupted

when external parties especially parents or in-laws intervene in the couple's personal affairs. Family resilience can weaken when boundaries between generations are not well established, particularly in cultural settings where parental authority remains strong even after the child enters marriage.

Third-party intervention poses a significant challenge to family stability. This interference may stem from cultural expectations, emotional attachment, financial dependency, or traditional perceptions of parental responsibility. In societies where familial ties are highly valued, parents might feel obligated to supervise or guide their married children, even when such actions diminish the autonomy of the new household. When guidance turns into control, intervention becomes a source of conflict. Continuous interference may lead to discomfort, emotional pressure, stress, and loss of independence for the couple. Over time, this dynamic can result in marital disharmony, communication breakdown, and even divorce.

Moreover, excessive involvement from parents or in-laws often influences decision-making processes, parenting styles, household management, and financial arrangements. These interferences not only create tension between spouses but also have the potential to develop long-term psychological impacts. Thus, understanding the forms, causes, and consequences of parental intervention is essential to promote healthy family boundaries and protect marital harmony.

Furthermore, the issue of parental intervention in the marital life of adult children has become an increasingly relevant topic in contemporary family studies. As society undergoes rapid social and economic changes, the structure and dynamics of families also evolve, influencing how roles and responsibilities are distributed among family members. In many communities, especially those upholding strong kinship values, marriage does not merely unite two individuals but rather two families. This cultural framework often reinforces the perception that parents retain moral authority over their children's livelihoods even after marriage. Such expectations can unintentionally position parents as silent decision-makers within the couple's home.

In addition, the shift from traditional extended families to nuclear family systems has not entirely reduced parental influence. Instead, modern challenges such as financial instability, increased living costs, and employment pressures create circumstances where couples may remain dependent on parental support. Although this dependence may be practical, it frequently comes with psychological and emotional implications. The inability to establish clear boundaries can make it difficult for newly married couples to exercise independence, making them vulnerable to external pressures that disrupt marital harmony.

From a sociological perspective, the balance between autonomy and familial connectedness is essential in maintaining a healthy marital environment. When one side—particularly parental dominance—outweighs the other, it distorts the couple's ability to negotiate conflicts, make decisions, and grow together. Such imbalance can diminish mutual trust and create a climate of uncertainty, where partners may feel restricted, undervalued, or overshadowed by external authority figures.

This issue becomes even more complex in the context of Islamic legal principles, which emphasize respect for parents while also asserting the autonomy and independence of a married couple. Islamic teachings recognize that, although parents have moral responsibilities toward their children, marriage marks a new phase where couples must manage their own household decisions. Excessive intervention contradicts the concept of *sakinah*, in which tranquility and mutual contentment can only be achieved when both partners share control over their own family structure.

Given these complexities, the problem of parental intervention requires serious academic attention. It is not merely a domestic issue but a social phenomenon that affects family resilience, generational relationships, and even community stability. Understanding the forms, motivations, and impacts of such intervention allows scholars and practitioners to propose effective strategies to strengthen marital harmony, set healthy boundaries, and promote communication that honors both cultural values and marital independence.

This study is therefore significant as it sheds light on the nuanced relationship between parental influence and marital stability. By analyzing the factors that lead to third-party intervention, the research contributes to a broader understanding of how families can navigate intergenerational relationships in ways that prevent conflict and preserve the sanctity of marriage.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the forms, causes, and impacts of parental intervention in the marital life of adult children. The qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of social interactions, cultural values, and emotional dynamics that influence family relationships. Data were collected through literature review, document analysis, and examination of relevant Islamic legal texts, sociological theories, and previous research. The primary sources include textbooks on family law, Islamic jurisprudence, and sociological studies discussing family harmony, intergenerational relationships, and conflict within households. Secondary sources consist of journal articles, legal provisions, and scholarly interpretations related to marriage, parental authority, and marital rights.

The data analysis procedure involves three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, the researcher identifies themes related to forms of parental intervention, contributing factors, and resulting impacts on marital relationships. Data presentation organizes findings into categories that illustrate how parental involvement manifests within households and how such involvement is influenced by economic, cultural, emotional, and psychological factors.

The final stage involves interpreting the data using the perspective of Islamic legal sociology, which provides a framework for understanding the moral, social, and religious dimensions of family interactions. This approach highlights the balance required between parental responsibility and the autonomy of the married couple. Validity is ensured through source triangulation, where findings are compared across multiple references to maintain accuracy and consistency. The qualitative method enables the researcher to capture the complexity of parental intervention and its consequences, offering a comprehensive understanding of how such involvement shapes family dynamics and contributes to either harmony or conflict within marriage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Forms of Parental Intervention in the Household

Parental intervention within the household of a married child occurs in diverse forms and intensities, often shaped by cultural expectations, psychological dynamics, and patterns of family relationships. The first and most common form is advisory intervention, where parents provide suggestions regarding financial planning, childcare, household management, or conflict resolution. In many cases, this type of involvement stems from parental affection and a genuine desire to guide their children through life experiences. When delivered respectfully and without coercion, such advice may strengthen the couple's confidence, offering emotional reassurance and moral support. Married couples may benefit from experience-based perspectives, particularly in navigating the early stages of household management.

However, advisory intervention can shift into directive or controlling intervention, which occurs when parents begin to impose decisions on the couple. This includes dictating how household affairs should be arranged, influencing financial choices, or determining parenting styles. Many couples perceive this as intrusive, limiting their autonomy and preventing them from making independent decisions. When parents insist that their preferences are superior due to age, experience, or traditional norms, the emotional independence of the married couple diminishes. Over time, this undermines the couple's ability to build their own household identity and fosters dependency on parental approval.

Another form of intervention emerges when parents take part directly in day-to-day domestic roles, such as caring for grandchildren, preparing meals, or participating in household routines. While this may appear supportive, particularly for working parents, it can inadvertently weaken the couple's sense of responsibility and create psychological dependence. When the grandparents' methods conflict with the preferences of the parents, tension arises. This is especially pronounced in childcare practices, where generational differences often produce disagreements over discipline, education, and daily routines.

The most harmful form of intervention is emotional or psychological interference, characterized by subtle pressure, guilt induction, emotional manipulation, or frequent reminders of past mistakes. Parents may unintentionally use emotional leverage to influence decisions, expecting compliance based on gratitude or filial duty. These behaviors create emotional strain for the couple, who may feel burdened or obligated to prioritize parental desires over their own needs. Over time, this emotional tension disrupts marital communication and increases vulnerability to conflict.

Healthy parental involvement should be bounded by mutual respect and understanding of generational boundaries. From the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence and social ethics, parents are encouraged to provide guidance without compromising the autonomy of married children. Interventions that nurture independence rather than control contribute to stronger family resilience and healthier household dynamics.

2. Factors Contributing to Parental Intervention

Parental interference is influenced by multiple interconnected factors. Economic instability is among the primary triggers, as parents may feel concerned about their children's financial capabilities. When parents

perceive the couple as not yet financially independent, they tend to intervene in budgeting, spending decisions, and long-term planning, believing they are safeguarding their children's future. Cohabitation is another major factor. Living together with parents or in-laws creates physical and emotional proximity that often leads to blurred boundaries. Parents may feel entitled to shape daily routines, discipline grandchildren, or regulate household activities. The lack of a clearly defined private space intensifies intervention and increases the likelihood of conflict.

Cultural norms also play a significant role, particularly in societies where respect for elders and extended family involvement are highly valued. Parents may feel obligated to uphold family reputation, enforce traditions, or ensure that marital conduct aligns with cultural expectations. This sense of responsibility is often passed down generationally, making intervention seem justified even when it disrupts harmony.

Emotional factors such as attachment, fear of losing closeness with their adult children, or unresolved issues from the past also shape parental involvement. Parents who feel they failed in certain aspects of child-rearing may attempt to "correct" these shortcomings through the next generation, often through the grandchildren. Although rooted in affection, such behavior can cause tension when it clashes with the couple's own parenting style.

Parental intervention is rarely random; rather, it emerges from a combination of economic, cultural, psychological, and environmental factors that reinforce one another.

a. Economic Factors

Financial dependency remains one of the most influential causes of interference. Parents may intervene when they perceive that their child's household lacks financial stability or fails to manage income effectively. In many cultures, parents view financial support as their responsibility, especially during the early years of marriage. This support, however, often comes with expectations either explicit or implicit that grant parents a degree of influence over household decisions. The belief that "he who pays has the right to control" becomes a justification for parental involvement in budgeting, lifestyle choices, or spending habits. While intended to protect the couple's future, such intervention tends to compromise independence and lead to conflict.

b. Cohabitation and Living Arrangements

Living together with parents or in-laws blurs the boundaries of household authority. Shared living spaces naturally increase opportunities for interference because physical proximity fosters frequent interaction. Parents may feel entitled to guide or correct the couple's behavior due to their ownership of the home or seniority within the household hierarchy. Domestic routines, parenting styles, and even the couple's private matters may become subjects of parental oversight. The absence of clear boundaries in shared homes makes it difficult for couples to establish autonomy, often resulting in emotional strain and recurring tension.

c. Cultural and Social Expectations

In collectivist societies, preserving family honor and fulfilling intergenerational responsibilities are deeply embedded values. Parents often feel morally obligated to ensure that their married children uphold cultural norms, religious practices, and family traditions. This sense of duty sometimes justifies intervention, even when it contradicts the couple's preferences. Additionally, societal pressure encourages parents to remain involved in their children's lives to maintain family unity and uphold communal expectations. In such environments, intervention becomes normalized and rarely questioned, leading couples to struggle between respecting cultural norms and asserting their independence.

d. Psychological and Emotional Factors

Emotional attachment plays a significant role in parental involvement. Parents with strong emotional bonds to their children may struggle to accept the shifting dynamics that marriage brings. The fear of losing closeness or relevance in their child's life may motivate them to stay involved, sometimes excessively. Parents who feel they failed in certain aspects of their child's upbringing may attempt to compensate by intervening in the next generation, particularly in matters of childcare. While rooted in love, these behaviors often disrupt the couple's efforts to build their own parenting identity. On the other hand, children with a high degree of dependency emotionally or financially may unintentionally invite parental involvement because they frequently seek validation or rely on parental guidance. This reciprocal dynamic reinforces a cycle where intervention is perceived as necessary by both parties.

3. Impact of Parental Intervention on Marital Relationships

Parental involvement, when excessive or poorly managed, can produce significant consequences for marital stability. One of the most immediate impacts is the disruption of communication between spouses. When parents become third parties in decision-making processes, the couple may struggle to discuss matters independently. This phenomenon, often termed "triangulation," weakens the marital bond by shifting the locus of authority away from the couple.

Excessive intervention also affects emotional well-being, generating stress, frustration, and a sense of loss of autonomy. Couples may feel their household is no longer their own, resulting in defensiveness, withdrawal, or resentment. Over time, the emotional strain compromises intimacy and trust, which are essential foundations of marital harmony.

In many cases, parental interference becomes a leading cause of prolonged conflict, particularly when spouses take sides one defending the parents, the other defending independence. These conflicts may escalate into recurring arguments, emotional detachment, or silent tension that erodes the relationship.

Childcare is another domain where parental intervention often generates problems. Differences in discipline, educational priorities, or daily routines create disagreements between parents and in-laws. When grandparents dominate childcare decisions, the biological parents may feel excluded, embarrassed, or undervalued.

If left unresolved, these tensions accumulate and may ultimately contribute to marital breakdown. Numerous couples report that unresolved parental interference was a primary factor leading to separation or divorce. From the perspective of Islamic legal sociology, such outcomes conflict with the purpose of marriage, which emphasizes harmony (*sakinah*), affection (*mawaddah*), and compassion (*rahmah*).

CONCLUSION

Parental intervention in a married child's household can produce both positive and negative outcomes. While intended as support, excessive involvement may undermine autonomy, create conflict, and threaten marital stability. In Islamic legal sociology, parents hold responsibilities to guide their children, but Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of balancing guidance with respect for the couple's independence. Maintaining boundaries, open communication, and mutual respect is essential to ensure household harmony.

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