

Original Article

Structural Aspects of *Shariah*-Compliant, Women-Friendly Mosques: Towards a Generalizable Design Framework

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Abstract

Mosques function as vital spaces for sustained worship and community engagement; however, structural provisions for women's religious and communal activities are often inadequately addressed or insufficiently aligned with Shariah requirements. This inadequacy constitutes a core problem, as non-compliant or poorly designed architectural features may hinder women's participation and compromise adherence to Islamic legal principles. Accordingly, this study addresses the problem by systematically examining structural design aspects and synthesizing them into a generalizable framework for Shariah-compliant, women-friendly mosque design. This article analyzes mosque design features that fulfill Shariah requirements for women, particularly regarding the preservation of modesty and privacy, 'awrah, and the practical needs of women's religious activities. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach comprising document analysis and observation, complemented by semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders from mosque institutions. The findings indicate that improving mosque design toward outcomes that are women-friendly and Shariah-compliant requires the development of dedicated guidelines specifying spaces for worship and women's religious and community activities, thereby aligning mosque environments with Shariah obligations for women.

Keywords: Mosque, Mosque Design, Women Friendly Mosque, *Shariah* Compliant Design.

Introduction

The mosque institution plays a vital role in shaping Islamic civilization and disseminating the message of Islam. A mosque is not only a place of worship but also serves as a social institution that connects the local community. This function can be observed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), when the mosque acted as the center of governance, judiciary, consultation, *da'wah*, education, and moral development.¹ Such a role demonstrates that the function of the mosque during the Prophet's era brought significant transformation to the Muslim community following the *Hijrah*.² In the contemporary context, mosques must continue to play a crucial role in community development, as they did during the golden age of Islam.³ The revitalization of mosque functions includes the establishment and reform of mosque activities to attract congregants to

¹ Zawin Hannan Sofea Shahbudin & Setiyawan Gunardi, 'Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis Terhadap Peranan Institusi Masjid Di Malaysia', *Journal of Islamic Social Sciences and Humanities*, 29 (2023), 54–71 <<https://doi.org/10.33102/abqari.vol29no1.508>>.

² Mohd Idris Moh Yusoff & Syarul Azman Shahrudin, 'Kajian Terhadap Aktiviti-Aktiviti Di Masjid Al-Hasanah Bandar Baru Bangi Ke Arah" Masjid Mesra Remaja"', *Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 7.2 (2020), 161–75.

³ Mohamad Sabri Harun & Abdull Rahman Mahmood Mohd Rofaizal Ibhraim, 'Pengurusan Dana Khairat Masjid Daripada Perspektif Perlembagaan, Undang-Undang, Sains Sosial Dan Syarak', *Journal of Muwafaqat*, 4.2 (2021), 51–61.



perform worship and enliven the mosque through spiritual and educational programs.⁴ Within the scope of this study, examining women's religious activities associated with mosques becomes a significant issue. A *Shariab*-compliant, women-friendly mosque is a concept that prioritizes women's religious needs, comfort, safety, and dignity in both worship and social contexts. In present-day Malaysia, mosques are often architecturally beautiful; however, their structural designs frequently fail to address the architectural elements necessary to preserve women's modesty (*'awrah*). This shortcoming compromises both comfort and inclusivity for female congregants. Therefore, mosque architectural designs that cater to women's religious activities should emphasize physical facilities, accessibility, and privacy, ensuring that women can worship and participate in religious programs in a manner consistent with *Shariab* principles.

Historically, women's roles in mosque management have received less attention compared to those of men. Islam, however, elevates the status of women and grants them rights equal to those of men in many aspects of life, except in certain matters explicitly stipulated by divine revelation, including aspects of mosque engagement. The special rights granted to women do not imply gender sameness but rather affirm Islam's recognition of women's dignity while reminding believers to embody humility and noble character.⁵ The origin of both men and women is rooted in the purpose of worshipping Allah SWT, as stated in Surah al-Nisā' (4:1)

Allah SWT records in this verse that the creation of men and women originated from Prophet Adam and Hawa (Eve), with Hawa being created from the rib of Adam.⁶ This verse also signifies that there is no distinction between men and women in their origin, as both were created from the earth. Therefore, men and women hold equal status before Allah SWT, especially in matters related to worship and piety. Women's participation in religious activities at the mosque such as attending religious lectures, particularly on obligatory knowledge (*farḍ 'ayn*), performing congregational prayers, and engaging in communal events like food preparation, recitations of *salawat*, *qasidah*, and spiritual retreats (*i'tikaf*) illustrates their significant contribution to mosque life.⁷ These activities highlight the importance of examining women's needs concerning religious obligations, comfort, privacy, and accessibility within mosque spaces.⁸ The establishment of women-friendly and *Shariab*-compliant mosque spaces should include facilities that ensure cleanliness, comfort, segregation from men, and convenient accessibility. In general, mosque architectural aspects play a vital role in encouraging participation among children, youth, adults, women, senior citizens, and individuals with disabilities in mosque-based activities.⁹ These groups collectively represent the Muslim community, whose rights to engage in mosque activities should not be discriminated against.¹⁰ Furthermore, Islam places great emphasis on the preservation of women's modesty and privacy. The concept of *'awrah* the parts of the body that must be covered and concealed from non-mahram individuals distinguishes Muslim women from the practices of the ignorant (*jahlīyyah*) society.¹¹ This serves as a divine means of honoring women, marking them as devout servants obedient to Allah's commands. The obligation to cover the *'awrah* is a divine injunction imposed on every Muslim, whether male or female, as affirmed in the following verse (Surah al-A'raf, 7:26).

⁴ al-Qāḍī Abū Ya'la al-Farrā' Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Baghdādī al-Ḥanbalī, *Al-Ta'liqah Al-Kabirah Fi Mas'ul Al-Khilaf 'ala Madhhab Aḥmad* (Beirut: Dār al-Nawādir, 2010).

⁵ al-Qāḍī Abū Ya'la al-Farrā' Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Baghdādī al-Ḥanbalī.

⁶ Ibnu Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Azim* (Kaherah: Maktabah Aulad Al-Sheih li Turath, 2000) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-26487-2_14>.

⁷ Tutin Aryanti and others, 'Gender and Socio-Spatial Assemblage at Masjid Al-Irsyad Kota Baru Parahyangan, Indonesia', *Journal of Islamic Architecture*, 8.2 (2024), 371–79 <<https://doi.org/10.18860/jia.v8i2.23476>>.

⁸ Juliane Hammer, 'Gender Justice in a Prayer: American Muslim Women's Exegesis, Authority, and Leadership', *Hawwa*, 8.1 (2010), 26–54 <<https://doi.org/10.1163/156920810X504531>>.

⁹ Samsu Hendra Siwi, 'Private in Public Space: The Needs of Muslim Women in Mosque Spaces Case Study: Al-Barkah Mosque, Bekasi, Indonesia', *ARTEKS: Jurnal Teknik Arsitektur*, 10.2 (2025), 409–20 <<https://doi.org/10.30822/arteks.v10i2.4409>>.

¹⁰ Siti Fatimah Salleh, 'Muslimah Dan Masjid Dari Perspektif Aktiviti Ibadah', *Jurnal Islam Dan Masyarakat Kontemporari*, 2011, 71–81.

¹¹ Aniza Abu Bakar & Nur Ayuni Mohd Bohari, 'Children Friendly Masjid: Physical Layout and Perspective of Children and Families', *Journal of Architecture, Planning & Construction Management*, 9.1 (2019), 1–22.

¹² Ibnu Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Azim*.



This verse conveys Allah's mercy in granting humankind clothing and adornment.¹³ The term *libās* in this verse refers to the covering of the body (*'awrah*), while *riyāsh* signifies adornment or beautification. This distinction implies that clothing serves as a primary necessity, whereas adornment is secondary and complementary. Allah SWT reminded Adam and Hawa of His signs and blessings, urging them to maintain piety.¹⁴ Classical exegetes offer varying interpretations of the phrase *libās al-taqwā* some interpret it as the clothing of the righteous, while others equate it with faith itself.¹⁵ This indicates that modesty (*'awrah*) represents an essential form of personal dignity that must be preserved at all times. Hence, it is an obligation for every individual to safeguard their modesty under all circumstances. A mosque design that incorporates women-friendly and *Shariab*-compliant architectural features is crucial to ensure that women can maintain their modesty and perform religious activities with comfort and confidence. Moreover, the presence of such thoughtfully designed spaces encourages women's participation in mosque-based religious and educational programs.¹⁶ Active female involvement in mosque institutions yields positive impacts on family structures, communities, and the nation as a whole, as women are the primary educators and nurturers of future generations.¹⁷

Method

This study adopts a qualitative explanatory design through field observations conducted in selected mosques across various districts in Terengganu.¹⁸ The explanatory design in qualitative research involves utilizing qualitative methods to provide deeper insights and interpretations of the observed phenomena.¹⁹ Mosque selection was based on strategic location, congregation density, and women's space availability. Fieldwork included structured observations and photographic documentation of women's architectural sections within the mosques. The collected data were then thematically analyzed and organized into ten key themes encompassing architectural features, spatial arrangements, and women's religious activities in the mosque.²⁰ All findings were documented in detail.²¹ The thematic results of this study form the foundation for proposing architectural improvements and developing a framework for *Shariab*-compliant, women-friendly mosque practices.

Results and Discussions

The architectural aspect of women-friendly mosques refers to spatial elements and physical details designed specifically to support women's worship, safety, dignity, and overall well-being within mosque structures. This includes considerations of purification (*tabarah*), preservation of modesty (*'awrah*), gender segregation (*ikhtilat*), and physical comfort.²² Generally, mosques in Malaysia are not

¹³ Wahbah ibn Muṣṭafā ibn Muḥammad al-Zuhaylī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Munīr Fī Al-'aqīdah Wa Al-Sharī'ah Wa Al-Manhaj* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1991).

¹⁴ al-Qāḍī Abū Ya'la al-Farrā' Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Baghdādī al-Ḥanbalī.

¹⁵ Ibnu Kathir, *Al-Misbahul Munir Fī Tabzīb Tafsīr Ibnu Katsīr* (Sine Loco: Darussalam, 2000).

¹⁶ Faradilla Fadliā, Ismar Ramadanī and Siti Nur Zalikha, 'Women Friendly Mosque in Banda Aceh: A Study of the Concept of Gender Justice and Gender Planning Perspective', *Samwa: Jurnal Studi Gender*, 16.1 (2021), 101–20 <<https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v16i1.6330>>.

¹⁷ Nazneen Ismail and others, 'Peranan Muslimat Dalam Menjadikan Masjid Sebagai Pusat Khidmat Sosial', *International Journal of Mosque, Zakat And Waqaf Management (Al-Mimbar)*, 2023, 13–26 <<https://doi.org/10.53840/almimbar.v3i2.74>>.

¹⁸ Jan Kraner, 'Methods', 2018, pp. 55–75 <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74926-6_3>.

¹⁹ Devi Sekar and Mohanraj Bhuvanewari, 'Exploring the Depths', 2024, pp. 267–92 <<https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-1726-6.ch014>>.

²⁰ Valdez Marina do Rosário Lima, Marcelo Prado Amaral-Rosa and Maurivan Güntzel Ramos, 'Análise Textual Discursiva Apoiado Por Software: IRaMuTeQ e a Análise de Subcorpus', 2021, pp. 1–9 <<https://doi.org/10.36367/ntqr.7.2021.1-9>>.

²¹ David J. Clarke, 'Using Qualitative Observational Methods in Rehabilitation Research: Part Two', *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation*, 16.8 (2009).

²² Aryanti and others.



designed to be women-friendly or fully compliant with *Shariab* requirements.²³ Common issues include the distant or poorly located ablution and restroom facilities, long walking distances between the ablution area and the main prayer hall, partially or fully open women's prayer spaces, women's sections positioned behind or on upper floors, and shared or intersecting pathways between men and women from ablution areas to prayer spaces.²⁴ This study examines these issues through nine thematic dimensions as follows.

Mosque Architectural Aspect Related to the Ablution Area

The ablution area is essential for completing worship activities within mosques. The design of this area is critical as it enables ritual purification before performing prayers. Ablution (*wudu*) is a religious obligation for all Muslims before engaging in prayer. Therefore, the ablution spaces must be designed to ensure privacy and gender separation, protecting both modesty and dignity. The *Guidelines for the Planning of Islamic Houses of Worship* specify that prayer halls, ablution areas, toilets, and changing rooms must be segregated for men and women.²⁵ However, in some mosques, women's ablution facilities are located on open lower floors, compromising privacy and modesty²⁶. Such architectural design does not ensure the preservation of their *'awrah* (modesty). This creates difficulty and discomfort for women who strive to observe the *Shariab* requirements of modesty.



Figures 1: women's ablution areas



Figures 2: women's ablution areas

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate women's ablution areas with perforated decorative panels that are visually permeable from the outside, especially under bright interior lighting at night.²⁷ Such designs compromise women's privacy and modesty, as body parts may become visible when washing or adjusting clothing.²⁸ From a *fiqh* perspective, ablution is an act of worship that requires *sitr al-'awrah* (concealment of the body) and *hijz al-'ird* (protection of dignity).²⁹ An open ablution area that exposes body parts such as the arms when sleeves are rolled up or the head when the hijab is removed directly contradicts the principle of maintaining *'awrah*.³⁰ In several mosques, women's ablution facilities are also located on open lower levels, leaving them exposed to public view.³¹ Such

²³ Nangkula Utaberta and others, 'An Analysis of Women's Access and Participation in the Mosques in the Contemporary World', *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, 401.1–22 (2018) <<https://doi.org/10.1088/1757-899X/401/1/012032>>.

²⁴ Siti Rokyah Md Zain and others, 'Prasarana Masjid Mesra Wanita Islam: Satu Tinjauan', *E-Proceeding of the 4th International Conference on Masjid, Zakat and Waqf Management 2017 (IMAF-2017)*, 2017.December (2017), 266–75.

²⁵ Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa Semenanjung Malaysia, 'Garis Panduan Perancangan Rumah Ibadat Islam', 2023.

²⁶ Nur Farah Atikah Mohd Razif, Norliza Mohd Isa and Raja Nafida Raja Shahminan, 'Women Friendly Mosque: An Overview', *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Environment Management*, 7.27 (2022), 121–29 <<https://doi.org/10.35631/jthem.727011>>.

²⁷ Dalit Shach-Pinsly, Dafna Fisher-Gewirtzman and Michael Burt, 'Visual Exposure and Visual Openness: An Integrated Approach and Comparative Evaluation', *Journal of Urban Design*, 16.2 (2011), 233–56 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2011.548979>>.

²⁸ Nan-Ching Tai, 'Computational Investigation of the Illusory Depth Effect of Luminance Contrast on a Three-Dimensional Architectural Scene with Binocular Vision', *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering*, 14.2 (2015), 331–38 <<https://doi.org/10.3130/jaabe.14.331>>.

²⁹ Ibrahim Yilmaz, 'Approaches to the Principle of Sitr Al-Awrah in Prayer in the Mālikī School of Law', *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi*, 26.1 (2022), 303–20 <<https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.1079316>>.

³⁰ Edward Wigley and Rashida Bibi, '“Why Has This Guy Got His Foot in the Sink?”: Challenges, Encounters and Everyday Geographies of Practicing Wudu', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 25.9 (2024), 1355–73 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2024.2313479>>.

³¹ Nur Farah Atikah Mohd Razif, Isa and Raja Nafida Raja Shahminan.



architectural designs fail to safeguard women's modesty and privacy.³² This issue becomes more pronounced when some users are less attentive to the requirements of covering the 'awrah, which increases the discomfort and difficulty for women who strive to comply with *Shariah* obligations concerning modesty.

Architectural Aspect of the Pathway from the Ablution Area to the Women's Prayer Space

Findings reveal that pathways connecting women's ablution areas to their prayer spaces in many mosques are often open and accessible to male congregants who may pass through the same route. In some cases, these pathways are long or intersect with routes used by men.³³ This condition obliges women to ensure that their 'awrah is properly covered including their feet, hair, and arms immediately after performing ablution, even when their garments are still damp, as there are often no dry seating areas available for them to dress or put on socks.³⁴ Women who are less mindful of these requirements may not fully cover their 'awrah, which is contrary to Islamic teachings. According to al-Nawawi (1996), women are required to cover their entire 'awrah when outside their homes, particularly when attending mosques. Ibn Qudāmah (1997) similarly emphasized that the preservation of modesty and the hijab is obligatory for women to prevent *fitnah* and to maintain personal dignity. Therefore, the absence of a designated, enclosed passageway between the ablution area and the prayer space undermines this religious obligation, as women must completely re-cover themselves before crossing public areas. The design of pathways from the ablution area to the prayer hall must therefore be carefully considered to ensure *Shariah* compliance for female users. In many mosques, shared or exposed passageways allow men to pass through or see women en route to their prayer space, as there are no proper barriers or partitions. Such designs are not women-friendly and expose female worshippers to the risk of unveiling their 'awrah, especially among those who are unaware or unable to maintain full modesty. This situation can be observed as illustrated in the following figure.



Figure 3: The pathway from the women's ablution area to the prayer hall



Figure 4: The pathway from the women's ablution area to the prayer hall

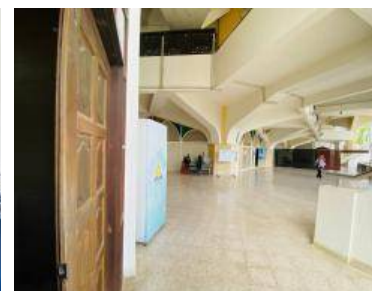


Figure 5: The pathway from the women's ablution area to the prayer hall

Figure 3 illustrates the pathway from the women's ablution area to the prayer hall, which extends approximately 400 meters. Along this route, women must ensure that their 'awrah remains properly covered. The same pathway is also used by male congregants heading to the prayer hall, which further requires women to maintain full modesty throughout their movement. This situation poses significant difficulty for female worshippers in ensuring continuous coverage of their 'awrah. Figure 4 shows the pathway from the women's ablution area to the prayer space, where massage chairs and a public rest area are located for congregants visiting the mosque. This open passageway requires women to fully cover themselves after performing ablution before proceeding to the prayer hall. Similarly, Figure 5 depicts an open pathway from the women's ablution area to the prayer hall that is visible and accessible to male congregants. Such a layout obliges women to completely cover their 'awrah after ablution, as the open design compromises privacy and modesty.

³² Siti Zawiah Md Dawal and others, 'Ablution Workstations Design', *Ablution Workstations Design for Person with Physical Disabilities in Malaysia*, 20.Specialissue1 (2020), 101–7.

³³ In-Ju Kim, Omar Hasan Omar and Rinada Abbas El Deeb, 'Safety Overview of Ablution Spaces in the UAE Mosques: A Randomised Survey in Three Cities', in *2020 Advances in Science and Engineering Technology International Conferences (ASET)* (IEEE, 2020), pp. 1–5 <<https://doi.org/10.1109/ASET48392.2020.9118392>>.

³⁴ Norwina Mohd Nawawi and others, 'Investigation on Women'S Space in Masjid Architecture: Case Study of Selected Masjids in Malaysia', *ULA2014 DURBAN Architecture OTHERWHERE*, 2014, 657–65.



Architectural Aspect of the Elevated Women's Prayer Area

The architectural design of multi-storey mosques presents challenges, particularly for elderly women, pregnant women, and those with small children, who may find it difficult to use staircases leading to upper prayer spaces. Mosques should therefore provide designated prayer areas on lower floors for these groups, while upper prayer spaces can be used by women without mobility or physical constraints.³⁵ This principle is illustrated in the figure below.



Figures 6: Women's prayer areas located on the first floor



Figures 7: Women's prayer areas located on the first floor

Figures 6 and 7 illustrate women's prayer areas located on the first floor, accessible only by staircases. The staircases provided are steep, making them unsuitable for elderly women and mothers with small children, as the added physical burden can affect balance and stability.³⁶ Pregnant women also face increased strain due to joint pressure and intra-abdominal stress when climbing stairs.³⁷ Furthermore, women suffering from knee osteoarthritis often experience pain, muscle weakness, and *kinesiophobia* a fear of movement that make descending stairs particularly difficult.³⁸ For wheelchair users, such staircases represent a complete physical barrier, necessitating alternative routes or accessibility features.³⁹ In response, some mosques have introduced prayer areas near the main entrance, adjacent to changing rooms, to accommodate these groups. However, these spaces are often open and positioned close to the men's ablution area, compromising women's privacy and potentially leading to negligence in maintaining proper *'awrah* coverage. Therefore, mosque designs should prioritize user-friendly and women-friendly features, such as staircases with lower and wider steps and the installation of safe and accessible elevators.

Architectural Aspect of the Women's Prayer Area

The Guidelines for the Planning of Islamic Places of Worship generally outline the basic components of mosques and the hierarchy of spaces, including the requirement for women's prayer areas. However, the guidelines do not specify a designated size for the women's section.⁴⁰ Similarly, the Draft Guidelines for Mosque and Surau Planning include design principles and construction components but lack specific clauses on the capacity of women's prayer spaces. Consequently, the interpretation is left to architects and local authorities during the planning approval process, resulting in significant variations across projects and local contexts. This observation is supported by empirical

³⁵ Siti Rokyah Md Zain and others.

³⁶ Alejandra Velasco and others, 'The Impact of Carrying Load on Physical Performance during Ascending Evacuation Movement', *Fire and Materials*, 45.4 (2021), 488–97 <<https://doi.org/10.1002/fam.2844>>.

³⁷ Ihssan S. Masad and others, 'Spinal Curvature and Lower Extremities Kinematics of Simulated Pregnancy during Stair Ascending and Descending', *Journal of Biomimetics, Biomaterials and Biomedical Engineering*, 41 (2019), 11–22 <<https://doi.org/10.4028/www.scientific.net/JBBBE.41.11>>.

³⁸ Ann-Katrin Stensdotter, Kjartan Vårbakken and Karin Roeleveld, 'Factors Associated with Self-rated Difficulty to Descend Stairs in Persons with Knee Osteoarthritis', *PM&R*, 15.1 (2023), 9–19 <<https://doi.org/10.1002/pmrj.12698>>.

³⁹ Abhishek Verma, Siddhant Shrivastava and Janakarajan Ramkumar, 'Mapping Wheelchair Functions and Their Associated Functional Elements for Stair Climbing Accessibility: A Systematic Review', *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, 19.1 (2024), 200–221 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17483107.2022.2075476>>.

⁴⁰ Jabatan Perancangan Bandar dan Desa Semenanjung Malaysia.



research conducted by Nawawi et al. (2017), which found that the allocation and size of women's prayer areas vary considerably among mosques.



Figure 8: Women's prayer areas

Figure 8 illustrates that in many Malaysian mosques, the prayer space allocated for women is minimal. Efforts to expand or improve these areas are often restricted to preserve the mosque's original architectural identity. A similar situation occurs in Turkey, where mosque modernization has generated tension between maintaining traditional gender segregation and adapting to contemporary social behaviors.⁴¹ Additionally, issues related to safety, cleanliness, comfort, and inadequate facilities for women remain major obstacles to their active participation in mosque activities^{42 43}. Women who are traveling, working, or not residing near mosques also face difficulties finding appropriate prayer spaces. This is because women's prayer areas are often poorly designed located in basements or confined spaces with insufficient ventilation and maintenance.⁴⁴

Partition in the Women's Prayer Area

The design aspects of mosques related to women's prayer areas must adhere to the principles of *Shariab*. One key requirement is that female congregants should be able to follow the movements of the imam transitioning from one posture to another regardless of their location within the mosque, without a condition of proximity. In alignment with the study by Azizah Adnan et al. (2018), women's prayer areas should incorporate clear visual separation through the use of partitions, half-walls, or frosted glass to preserve modesty and privacy, alongside a well-functioning sound system to ensure proper audibility.⁴⁵ Similarly, Siti Rokyah Md Zain et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of using curtains or partitions to enhance the comfort of female worshippers in mosques.⁴⁶ If the women's area is visible to male congregants, it can cause discomfort and distract from spiritual concentration.⁴⁷ Overall, the integration of *Shariab*-compliant requirements, visual and acoustic considerations, and user-friendly facilities is essential to encourage greater female participation in mosque-based religious activities.



Figure 9: Women's prayer areas



Figure 10: Women's prayer areas

⁴¹ Aysenur Senel, 'The Rise of Feminine in "Patriarchal" Mosques: An Inquiry into The Changing Role of Women in Mosque Architecture', *SPACE International Journal of Conference Proceedings*, 1.1 (2021), 38–46 <<https://doi.org/10.51596/sijocp.v1i1.13>>.

⁴² A. Suratkon and others, 'Woman Friendly Mosque, Features and Facilities: A Case Study on Masjid Sultan Ibrahim, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia', *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, 291.1 (2018), 0–6 <<https://doi.org/10.1088/1757-899X/291/1/012019>>.

⁴³ Ahmed Hanafi Mokhtar, 'Design Guidelines for Female Muslim Prayer Facilities in Public Buildings', *Facilities*, 38.3/4 (2019), 252–67 <<https://doi.org/10.1108/F-04-2019-0052>>.

⁴⁴ Nangkula Utaberta and others.

⁴⁵ Nor Azizah Adnan and others, 'Acoustic Quality Levels of Mosques in Batu Pahat', *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 140 (2018), 012009 <<https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/140/1/012009>>.

⁴⁶ Siti Rokyah Md Zain and others.

⁴⁷ Aryanti and others.



Figure 9 illustrates a transparent glass wall surrounding the perimeter of the women's prayer area, allowing a direct line of sight from the external corridor frequently used by male congregants into the women's section. This design contradicts the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), particularly the requirements to safeguard modesty ('awrah) and control visual exposure, as the women's prayer area becomes directly visible from outside. Transparent glass has a high light transmission rate, which is further intensified at night when the interior lighting is brighter than the exterior environment.⁴⁸ Such a design creates discomfort for female congregants, who must remain vigilant about maintaining modesty, experience distractions that compromise their concentration in worship, and lack adequate privacy within the prayer area.⁴⁹ Figure 10 shows a women's prayer area partitioned by a thin fabric curtain. In general, lightweight fabrics have high light transmission properties,⁵⁰ making the interior brighter than the exterior, especially during nighttime.⁵¹ Furthermore, airflow generated by ceiling fans can cause the fabric to move or lift, exposing partial visibility into the women's space.⁵² These circumstances compel women to constantly ensure that their 'awrah remains properly covered and shielded from the view of male congregants.

Architectural Aspects of the Women's Changing Room

The women's changing room is a crucial element in a *Shariah*-compliant, women-friendly mosque, as it protects *sitr al-'awrah* (the concealment of the body) and upholds dignity. From a spatial planning perspective, the changing room should be strategically located adjacent to the women's ablution area and near the prayer hall. Mokhtar (2019) emphasized that women's changing facilities must be fully enclosed to preserve modesty and privacy when changing clothes.⁵³ The use of opaque construction materials and lockable doors enhances both safety and comfort for users. A secure and private environment reduces anxiety and discomfort among women using these facilities.⁵⁴ Additionally, the room should include seating, mirrors, and sufficient lighting to facilitate prayer preparation.⁵⁵ Cleanliness and comfort are equally important to encourage optimal usage. Mosques that provide well-designed women's changing spaces demonstrate attentiveness to congregants' needs, allowing women to perform worship comfortably and confidently.

⁴⁸ Helenice Maria Sacht and others, 'Specification of Glazings for Façades Based on Spectrophotometric Characterization of Transmittance', *Sustainability*, 13.10 (2021), 5437 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/su13105437>>; Rajaram Bhagavathula, Ron Gibbons and Maury Nussbaum, 'Does the Interaction between Vehicle Headlamps and Roadway Lighting Affect Visibility? A Study of Pedestrian and Object Contrast', 2020 <<https://doi.org/10.4271/2020-01-0569>>.

⁴⁹ Fawzi P. Bayan and others, 'A Systematic Study of Pedestrian Contrast and Detection From Vehicle Headlights', in *Volume 13: Safety Engineering, Risk, and Reliability Analysis; Research Posters* (American Society of Mechanical Engineers, 2021) <<https://doi.org/10.1115/IMECE2021-71215>>.

⁵⁰ Amal Ray, Niranjana Bhowmick and Subrata Ghosh, 'Designing of Woven Textile Fabrics for Greenhouse Covering Material', *Journal of The Institution of Engineers (India): Series E*, 103.2 (2022), 179–88 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40034-022-00247-3>>.

⁵¹ Wei Tian and others, 'Study on the Shading Property of the Fabric', *Advanced Materials Research*, 502 (2012), 287–91 <<https://doi.org/10.4028/www.scientific.net/AMR.502.287>>.

⁵² Paul Raftery and others, 'Ceiling Fans: Predicting Indoor Air Speeds Based on Full Scale Laboratory Measurements', *Building and Environment*, 155 (2019), 210–23 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2019.03.040>>.

⁵³ Mokhtar.

⁵⁴ Pablo Navarrete-Hernandez, Arielle Vetro and Paz Concha, 'Building Safer Public Spaces: Exploring Gender Difference in the Perception of Safety in Public Space through Urban Design Interventions', *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 214 (2021), 104180 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2021.104180>>; Victoria Lanteigne, Traci Rose Rider and Peter A. Stratton, 'Inclusive Building Performance: A New Design Paradigm', 2023, pp. 783–91 <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-36302-3_57>.

⁵⁵ Siti Rokayah Md Zain and others.





Figure 11: The women's changing room



Figure 12: The women's changing room

As shown in Figure 11, the women's changing room is located adjacent to the main entrance, with a movable partition on the far left and a perforated grille wall. This layout indicates an open-plan space without enclosed cubicles or lockable doors, as it is situated along a common circulation path. Such an arrangement compromises privacy for women who need to change into prayer garments. Figure 12 further illustrates a narrow changing space separated by a short curtain, which fails to adequately protect modesty due to its tendency to lift or leave openings at the bottom or sides. The lack of privacy causes discomfort, particularly for women who require enclosed areas to prepare for prayer. From a facilities perspective, the absence of supportive features such as seating or mirrors limits functionality and convenience. These observations highlight the urgent need for design and spatial improvements in mosques to create more user-friendly and privacy-conscious facilities for women.

Architectural Aspects Related to the Learning Area

The mosque as an institution plays a pivotal role in education, particularly in Islamic learning.⁵⁶ While the common perception among Muslims associates mosques primarily with acts of worship, they also function as centers for community development, especially in the realm of education. Contemporary practice shows positive outcomes when mosques allocate designated areas for religious classes. However, some mosques still hold educational sessions within the main prayer hall. This arrangement poses challenges for women participating in mosque-based educational activities, either as students or instructors, when they are in a state of menstruation or postnatal bleeding. In such cases, female instructors are compelled to relocate chairs outside the prayer area due to the prohibition for women in this condition from remaining inside the mosque, while students must reposition themselves facing the mosque exit to attend the lesson. Religious activities involving women in mosques require careful consideration, as they are directly linked to the observance of *Shariab* regulations.⁵⁷ Although some mosques provide separate classrooms for women who are ritually impure, these spaces are often physically and visually isolated,⁵⁸ leading to feelings of exclusion and disconnection among women wishing to participate in mosque-based learning.



Figure 13: Dedicated learning space for women



Figure 13: Dedicated learning space for women

Figure 13 illustrates a dedicated learning space for women that accommodates the needs of those in a state of ritual exemption, such as menstruation or postnatal bleeding, as well as elderly women and mothers with young children who wish to attend educational sessions at the mosque. Therefore, the design of such learning spaces must ensure privacy, comfort, and safety, enabling educational programs to continue without compromising the sanctity of the prayer area. At the same time, it helps minimize *ikhtilat* (unnecessary interaction between men and women) and enhances the sense of security among female participants. Figure 14 shows that the women's learning area is located on an upper floor, accessible only by stairs. This raises concerns about accessibility and safety,

⁵⁶ Eka Danik Prashastiwi & Diah Wahyuningsih Ismail, 'Peran Masjid Dalam Pendidikan Ahlak (Studi Kasus Di Masjid Besar Baitus Shomad Tegalombo Pacitan)', *Jurnal Manajemen Dan Pendidikan Dasar*, 2 (2022), 253–62.

⁵⁷ Siti Fatimah Salleh.

⁵⁸ Suratkon and others.



particularly for elderly women, mothers carrying young children, pregnant women, and those with knee-related ailments. Additionally, stair-related activities pose risks of tripping, falling, or slipping, especially when the stairs are steep or slippery. The study also found that some mosques utilize the main prayer hall as a learning space. This arrangement requires careful consideration, particularly regarding whether female instructors or students in a state of *'udbr shar'ī* (ritual exemption) such as menstruation or postnatal bleeding, may continue to participate in learning sessions within such settings.

Architectural Aspects of Mosques Related to the I'tikāf Area

Regarding mosque design for i'tikāf (spiritual retreat), the practice is considered a recommended (sunnah) act for both men and women, except when it becomes obligatory through a vow.⁵⁹ Women are equally encouraged to engage in i'tikāf, particularly during consecutive vow observances. Juristic consensus holds that a woman who begins menstruating or enters postnatal bleeding during i'tikāf must discontinue her retreat.⁶⁰ as women in a state of major ritual impurity are not permitted to remain inside the mosque. However, the Hanbali School notes that if there is a designated area within or adjacent to the mosque that falls outside the prohibited zone, it is commendable for a ritually impure woman to remain there temporarily. If no such area exists, she must leave and resume her i'tikāf once purified.⁶¹ In most mosques, i'tikāf spaces are designed as open communal areas, which may cause discomfort for women seeking privacy or safety, particularly those fulfilling consecutive vow observances or participating in i'tikāf during Ramadan. Given that women experience regular menstrual cycles, the absence of secure, private, and dedicated facilities complicates their ability to continue their observances without compromising safety, dignity, or personal belongings.

Architectural Aspects of Mosques Related to the Marriage Contract Area

The architectural design related to marriage ceremonies (akad nikah) in mosques must adhere to the principles of adab (proper conduct). Islam permits the solemnization of marriage within mosques, following the practice of the Prophet (peace be upon him), as indicated in the hadith: “*Announce this marriage and perform it in the mosque, and beat the drum (to celebrate) outside it.*” (al-Tirmidhi, 1089).

Based on this hadith, the majority of jurists allow the marriage contract to be conducted in the mosque for the purpose of blessing and public announcement.⁶² Nevertheless, proper etiquette must be maintained during the ceremony, including performing recommended acts of worship such as ablution, making the intention for i'tikāf, and praying two units of *tabiyyat al-masjid* before sitting. Participants should also observe moderation in dress and adornment, refrain from excessive worldly conversations or noise, and respect the sanctity of the mosque. Moreover, the ceremony should not take place directly in front of the pulpit (*minbar*) or prayer niche (*mihrab*)⁶³.



Figure 14: Marriage ceremony held within the main prayer hall

Figure 14 depicts a marriage ceremony held within the main prayer hall. The provision of a designated area for marriage ceremonies, separate from the main prayer space, should be seriously considered. Such an arrangement allows for the participation of women in a state of ritual impurity, including menstruation or postnatal bleeding, without violating the sanctity of the mosque.

⁵⁹ Wahbah al-Zuhayli, *Fiqh Islamiyah Wa Adilatiba* (Damsyik: Dar Fikr, 2008).

⁶⁰ Wahbah al-Zuhayli.

⁶¹ al-Mawardi Abu al-Hasan 'Ali bin Muhammad bin Habib al-Basri al-Baghdadi, *Tafsir Al-Mawardi: Al-Nukat Wa Al-Uyun* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah).

⁶² Ibrāhīm al-Bājūrī, *Ḥashiyah Al-Bājūrī 'alā Sharḥ Ibn Qāsim Al-Ghubẓī 'alā Matn Abi Shujā'* (Beirut: Dar al-Minhaj, 2002).

⁶³ Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (Jakim), 'Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia', <https://www.Islam.Gov.My/Ms/>, 2024.



Conducting marriage ceremonies in the main prayer hall poses a risk of breaching *Shariah* decorum and compromising the mosque's sanctity. While the mosque indeed functions as a center for both worship and community activities,⁶⁴ this study emphasizes the need for mosques to include a dedicated architectural section for marriage ceremonies that ensures comfort for all users⁶⁵. At the same time, such provision upholds the sanctity of the mosque and prevents inadvertent transgressions of religious boundaries.

Conclusion

A *Shariah*-compliant women-friendly mosque must consider essential aspects such as the safeguarding of *'anrah* (modesty and bodily privacy), the quality of worship, the allowance for women in a state of major ritual impurity to remain in designated spaces, personal and property safety, and the provision of separate areas during emergencies, guided by the principle "*al-darurah tuqaddar bi qadariba*" (necessity is assessed according to its extent). The construction of a women-friendly and *Shariah*-compliant mosque is not limited to fulfilling physical or architectural needs but also serves to uphold women's rights to worship, engage in religious activities, and live with dignity and spiritual completeness. A mosque that adequately meets women's needs ensures not only comfort in performing acts of worship but also encourages their active participation in religious and community activities. Therefore, developing and prioritizing women-friendly mosque designs should be a central agenda in mosque construction and renovation efforts to ensure that the mosque functions as an inclusive, community-centered, and *Shariah*-compliant institution.

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⁶⁴ Indri Astrina Fitria Indrarani and others, 'Assessing Social Sustainability in Mosque as Religious Building, Case Study: Al-Lathiif Mosque, Bandung-West Java, Indonesia', *Journal of Islamic Architecture*, 8.3 (2025), 627–42 <<https://doi.org/10.18860/jia.v8i3.26570>>.

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