

## ISLAM, EDUCATION, AND MIGRATION: Religiosity of Left-Behind Muslim Migrants' Children in East Java, Indonesia

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### Abstract

*This article examines the religiosity of Indonesian left-behind children due to their parents' migration to other cities or abroad. While several studies on Indonesian migrants primarily highlight their religious activities abroad, this study focuses on the religiosity of left-behind children in Jember, East Java, to understand the impact of migration on the religiosity and education of children. Left-behind children refer to those whose parents migrate for work, education, or other reasons, leaving them behind in their home countries with relatives or guardians. This situation can have a significant impact on the psychological and developmental well-being of children. The data were collected with participatory observation in informal Islamic education institutions and in-depth interviews with several education facilitators for children under 18 years old. To understand the religious dynamics among these children, this research employs El-Menouar's dimension of religiosity as an analytical framework. The results identify two main issues appeared within the fields of Islamic education and migration studies including the conditions of children's religiosity in the context of parental separation and the absence of informal education within the family, and the proposal of the concept of Religiosity Left-behind as a new category to understand*



*the spiritual and religious challenges encountered by children of the migrants. This result emphasizes the urgency of strategic interventions from educational stakeholders including higher religious education institutions and civil mass organizations to design a sustainable program for the development of religiosity at enhancing the quality of Islam and spirituality among left-behind children's circumstances.*

*[Artikel ini mengkaji tingkat keagamaan anak-anak yang ditinggalkan di Indonesia akibat migrasi orang tua mereka ke kota lain atau ke luar negeri. Meskipun beberapa penelitian tentang migran Indonesia lebih banyak menyoroti aktivitas keagamaan mereka di luar negeri, penelitian ini fokus pada tingkat keagamaan anak-anak yang ditinggalkan di Jember, Jawa Timur, untuk memahami dampak migrasi terhadap keagamaan dan pendidikan anak-anak. Anak-anak yang ditinggalkan merujuk pada mereka yang orang tuanya bermigrasi untuk bekerja, pendidikan, atau alasan lain, meninggalkan mereka di negara asal bersama kerabat atau wali. Situasi ini dapat memiliki dampak signifikan pada kesejahteraan psikologis dan perkembangan anak-anak. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif di lembaga pendidikan Islam informal dan wawancara mendalam dengan beberapa fasilitator pendidikan untuk anak-anak di bawah 18 tahun. Untuk memahami dinamika keagamaan di antara anak-anak ini, penelitian ini menggunakan dimensi keagamaan El-Menouar sebagai kerangka analisisnya. Artikel ini mengidentifikasi dua masalah utama yang muncul dalam bidang pendidikan Islam dan studi migrasi, termasuk kondisi keagamaan anak-anak dalam konteks pemisahan orang tua dan ketidakhadiran pendidikan informal dalam keluarga, serta usulan konsep "Religiusitas yang Tertinggal" sebagai kategori baru untuk memahami tantangan spiritual dan keagamaan yang dihadapi oleh anak-anak migran. Hasil ini menekankan urgensi intervensi strategis dari pemangku kepentingan pendidikan, termasuk lembaga pendidikan agama tingkat tinggi dan organisasi masyarakat sipil, untuk merancang program berkelanjutan dalam pengembangan keagamaan guna meningkatkan kualitas Islam dan spiritualitas di tengah kondisi anak-anak yang ditinggalkan.]*

**Keywords:** *Islam, Migration, Left-Behind Children, Informal Islamic education*

## **Introduction**

Migration can have a complex relationship with child religious education, especially within Muslim communities. While migration

may initially present challenges to accessing education, it can increase educational attainment for the children of the migrants. In Muslim societies, Islam emphasizes the importance of education. This can play a significant role in how families approach their children's education, whether in their home or destination country.<sup>1</sup> The opportunity to grow with parent support has become a desire for many children of the migrants. Left-behind children in this article are defined as children and adolescents under the age of 18 who have been left behind by one or both parents in their hometown to work abroad or outside their place for a particular period.<sup>2</sup> Recent studies conducted by UNICEF indicate that by mid-2020, more than 4.6 million Indonesian citizens had chosen to become legal international migrant workers.<sup>3</sup> The primary destinations of Indonesian migrants are East Asian countries, particularly Taiwan and Hong Kong, and the Middle East, notably the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.<sup>4</sup> This figure does not include undocumented migrants. Meanwhile, according to a feasibility study by UNDP branch in Indonesia released in 2024, over 9 million Indonesian citizens (nearly 7%) were

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<sup>1</sup> Suciati Suciati, "Islamic Education of Children with Parents as Indonesian Migrant Workers (Case Study in Karangwotan Village, Pati, Central Java)," *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 4, no. 2 (2016): 137–51, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v4i2.1767>.

<sup>2</sup> M. Shuang et al., "Relationship between Parent–Child Attachment and Depression among Migrant Children and Left-behind Children in China," *Public Health* 204 (March 2022): 1–8; Gracia Fellmeth et al., "Health Impacts of Parental Migration on Left-behind Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *The Lancet* 392, no. 10164 (2018): 2567–2582, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)32558-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32558-3); United Nations Children's Fund, "Situation of Children Affected by Migration in ASEAN Member States," *Country Brief: Indonesia* (Bangkok: UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional, 2023), 3.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, "Situation of Children Affected by Migration in ASEAN Member States," 1.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, "East Asia and Pacific – Situation of Children Affected by Migration in ASEAN Member States," *Regional Situational Analysis* (Bangkok: UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional, 2023), 14–15.

classified as international migrant workers.<sup>5</sup>

According to data collected by the Nuruzzahro Foundation, 19 parents of children in Paluboto are who are migrant workers engaged in international migration in the Gulf region, specifically in Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia. Others have chosen to work in Asian countries such as Hong Kong and Malaysia. Consequently, 41 children of migrant workers are separated from their parents due to domestic migration outside their province, including locations such as Jakarta, Atambua, Bandung, and several cities in Kalimantan. Meanwhile, 19 children from this data set are known to have separated from the parents, who are local and international migrant workers.<sup>6</sup>

Living far from one or both parents, according to Lam and Yeoh, forces left-behind children to miss opportunities for learning and development with their parents' support.<sup>7</sup> Left-behind children of migrant workers are compelled to live independently, under the care of friends, caregiving institutions, the community,<sup>8</sup> or family members such as grandparents,<sup>9</sup> or are cared for by one of their siblings.<sup>10</sup> Madhavan, et al. and UNICEF also categorize children whose parents enter

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<sup>5</sup> *Empowering Migrant Workers: Feasibility Study of Innovative Financing Mechanism on Labour Migration* (Jakarta: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Indonesia, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> Yayasan Nuruzzahro, "Data Collection of Children of Migrant Workers at the Nuruzzahro Foundation," June 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Theodora Lam and Brenda S. A. Yeoh, "Parental Migration and Disruptions in Everyday Life: Reactions of Left-behind Children in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45, no. 16 (2019): 3097, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1547022>.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF, "UNICEF Working Paper: Children 'Left Behind'" (UNICEF, n.d.), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Rachel Marcus et al., "Children Who Stay behind in Latin America and the Caribbean While Parents Migrate" (Panama: UNICEF LACRO, 2023), 10; Bittiandra Chand Somaiah and Brenda S. A. Yeoh, "Grandparenting Left-behind Children in Javanese Migrant-Sending Villages: Trigenerational Care Circuits and the Negotiation of Care," *Geoforum* 143 (2023): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2023.103767>.

<sup>10</sup> Marcus et al., "Children Who Stay behind in Latin America and the Caribbean While Parents Migrate," 5 and 8.

forested areas or plantations for periodic work as falling within this category.<sup>11</sup> Migration that involves leaving children in their hometowns has resulted in numerous issues. Studies on children of migrant workers have reported the impacts of migration on child development, including health disorders, low weight, depression, and unhappiness. Left-behind children of migrant workers have been reported by Beazley et al. to experience profound feelings of longing.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Zheng et al. reported that children of migrant workers in China face various health problems, unhappiness, depression, and chronic illnesses.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Wan et al. confirmed that left-behind children in China are at a higher risk of experiencing stress and trauma compared to children who receive informal education from both parents in their hometowns.<sup>14</sup>

Sun et al. also reported that left-behind children in China face emotional adjustment challenges such as lower life satisfaction and self-esteem and higher levels of depression.<sup>15</sup> Similar findings were reported by Türker & Çimşir, who revealed that left-behind children in Turkey experience sadness, exhibit jealousy towards their peers, feel alienated,

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<sup>11</sup> Sangeetha Madhavan, Nicholas W. Townsend, and Anita I. Garey, “Absent Breadwinners’: Father–Child Connections and Paternal Support in Rural South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, no. 3 (September 2008): 647–663, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070802259902>; UNICEF, “UNICEF Working Paper: Children Left Behind,” 1.

<sup>12</sup> Harriot Beazley, Leslie Butt, and Jessica Ball, “Like It, Don’t like It, You Have to like It’: Children’s Emotional Responses to the Absence of Transnational Migrant Parents in Lombok, Indonesia,” *Children’s Geographies* 16, no. 6 (2018): 591–603, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2017.1407405>.

<sup>13</sup> Xiaodong Zheng et al., “When Left-behind Children Become Adults and Parents: The Long-Term Human Capital Consequences of Parental Absence in China,” *China Economic Review* 74 (2022): 101821.

<sup>14</sup> Gouwei Wan, Chen Deng, and Chang Li, “Adverse Childhood Experiences and Depression: Do Left-Behind Families Place Children at Higher Risk in Rural China,” *Journal of Family Violence* 40 (2025): 13–26.

<sup>15</sup> Xiaojun Sun et al., “Psychological Development and Educational Problems of Left-behind Children in Rural China,” *School Psychology International* 36, no. 3 (2015): 227–52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034314566669>.

and worry about the safety of their parents.<sup>16</sup> Other studies have also shown differences in the life orientation and future perspectives of children left-behind. Bunga et al. indicate that left-behind children from Indonesia are compelled to shift their focus from education to work due to economic challenges. This study also reports that support from their school friends can enhance their empowerment.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, Fatimah & Kofol highlight that local migrant workers' children in Indonesia, whose fathers leave behind as migrant workers have a higher likelihood of experiencing intergenerational mobility in the future compared to those left behind by their mothers.<sup>18</sup> In the context of informal education for children of migrant workers in their hometowns, Somaiah and Yeoh report that caregiving by grandparents can serve as an alternative form of care for children left-behind who are compelled to grow up away from their biological parents.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Antia et al. reported that teachers play a crucial role as primary supporters in the caregiving of left-behind children who face challenges related to academic performance, well-being, and mental health due to their parents' migration. Teachers also observe that some substitute caregivers are caring, while others are unhelpful and destructive. They also found that educational institutions provide counseling services and tutoring for children left-behind.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Duygu Türker and Elif Çimşir, "The Impact of Fathers' Overseas Employment on Left-behind Children in Turkey: A Phenomenological Exploration," *Family Relations* 74, no. 2 (2025): 870–90.

<sup>17</sup> Beatriks Novianti Bunga, Juliana Marlin Yusrianty Benu, and Indra Yohanes Kiling, "Left-behind Children in West Timor, Indonesia: A Brief Report," *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies* 17, no. 1 (2022): 55–60.

<sup>18</sup> Alfariyani Milati Fatimah and Chiara Kofol, "Migrating for Children's Better Future: Intergenerational Mobility of Internal Migrants' Children in Indonesia," *Journal of Asian Economics* 86 (2023): 101618.

<sup>19</sup> Somaiah and Yeoh, "Grandparenting Left-behind Children in Javanese Migrant-Sending Villages," 103767.

<sup>20</sup> Khatia Antia, Astrid Berner Rodoreda, and Volker Winkler, "Parental Migration and Left-behind Children in Georgia—School Teachers' Experience and Perception: A Qualitative Study," *BMC Public Health* 22, no. 2077 (2022): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-022-02077-1>.

Generally, the studies reveal that children of migrant workers left in their hometowns face various difficulties. In addition to being at risk of becoming child laborers, they also do not receive comprehensive informal education from their parents and have limited prospects for economic improvement in the future. Furthermore, other studies related to the caregiving of left-behind children indicate that grandparents can assume the role of substitute caregivers. However, they will encounter various challenges related to cognitive development, socio-emotional health, mental well-being, and overall welfare. Beyond the family, community support, such as educational institutions, also has the potential to help left-behind children meet their psychological needs. It appears that there are still a few studies that explore the conditions of religiosity among students in Islamic educational institutions with a background of children of migrant workers who experience left-behind situations.

Thus, this study offers novelty in the fields of Islamic education and migration studies by revealing the detailed conditions of religiosity among left-behind children who study in Islamic educational institutions. In this respect, this study also proposes new terminology that can be used to classify left-behind children facing issues related to religiosity. However, this article contributes to filling the gap in the absence of studies concerning the religiosity of children of migrant workers left behind

This qualitative case study examines the religiosity of left-behind children of migrant workers in Paluboto, East Java, using Yin's framework for in-depth social context exploration.<sup>21</sup> Data were collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews from July 2023 to September 2024, supported by the researcher's ongoing involvement since 2019 as a community learning facilitator in Lembabhoto, which

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[doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14516-8](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14516-8).

<sup>21</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Method, Third Edition, vol. 5, Applied Social Research Method Series* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2003), 1–2.



facilitated access.<sup>22</sup> Following Lahman et al., pseudonyms are used to protect participant confidentiality.<sup>23</sup> The study involves five children—Ambar, Arsan, Risal, Virman, and Sidqi—left in Paluboto by one or both parents working as international or domestic migrants. Ambar is raised by her grandmother, Sidqi by his mother, Risal by his sister-in-law, Arsan by his cousin, and Virman in a safe house (*rumah aman*) by his *ustaz* and *ustazah*. Risal and Sidqi are children of international migrant workers with different caregivers, and Sidqi has experienced two extended periods of paternal absence.

Additionally, this article also explores data from informants, including the subjects' teachers at Islamic educational institutions, their parents, and community members who engage in collective caregiving for left-behind children of migrant workers. The literature data reviewed, and the field data obtained by the authors were subsequently analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al.<sup>24</sup> The authors employed the five dimensions of religiosity proposed by El-Menouar,<sup>25</sup> 'basic religiosity, central duties, experience, knowledge, and orthopraxis'—to examine the religiosity conditions of children of migrant workers and to position them within UNICEF's framework regarding the criteria for left-behind children.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Since 2019, the first author has been involved in a program to facilitate local ulama and female ulama to detect and prevent violence and extreme violence.

<sup>23</sup> Maria K. E. Lahman, Rowen Thomas, and Eric D. Teman, "A Good Name: Pseudonyms in Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 29, no. 6 (2022): 678–85.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook, Third Edition* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2014), 12–14.

<sup>25</sup> Yasemin El-Menouar, "The Five Dimensions of Muslim Religiosity. Results of an Empirical Study," *Methods, Data, Analyses* 8, no. 1 (2014): 67–69, <https://doi.org/10.12758/mda.2014.003>.

<sup>26</sup> UNICEF, "UNICEF Working Paper: Children 'Left Behind,'" 1.



## Islamic Education of Left-Behind Children

As children of migrant workers who experience left-behind, Ambar, Arsan, Virman, Sidqi, and Risal, are forced to go through their development without the support of one or both of their parents, left in their hometown with a substitute caregiver. Ambar, Arsan, and Risal are left-behind children of migrant workers who are enrolled as students in an Islamic educational institution. They do not receive adequate Islamic education from their substitute caregivers, whether it be their grandmother, cousins, or siblings, particularly in terms of religious habituation. Ambar is a student at Madrasah Diniyah Nuruzzahro and participates in the Mengaji Langgeran program.<sup>27</sup> This 11-year-old girl is being cared for by her grandmother after her mother became a migrant worker in Singapore and her father left to work in Bali, following their divorce.<sup>28</sup> Her grandmother often asked her to take care of her younger siblings and do housework because her grandmother was sick.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, Arsan is a left-behind child of migrant workers who is enrolled as a student at Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an Nuruzzahro, participating in the Mengaji Langgeran program and the Tahfiz Subuh sessions. This 8-year-old boy does not receive informal education from his parents after both left Arsan in his hometown. He is compelled to be cared for by Labib, his cousin. He receives periodic support from Moklas, his uncle, after his mother, Mursidah, decided to become a migrant worker in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Arsan is also deprived

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<sup>27</sup> The Mengaji Langgeran program involves the study of the Qur'an preserved from the traditional recitation organized by Kiai Langger in Langger (*Musala*/Prayer Room). Instruction at Madrasah Diniyah Nuruzzahro and Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an Nuruzzahro takes place in the afternoon, prior to the Ashar prayer. Meanwhile, the Mengaji Langgeran program are conducted after the Maghrib prayer until the time of the Isya' prayer. The Tahfiz Subuh sessions is held after the Subuh prayer until sunrise.

<sup>28</sup> Muhammad Alvan, Interview with Muhammad Alvan regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Ambar, Arsan, and Other Children of Migrant Workers, July 25, 2024.

<sup>29</sup> Siti Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Conditions of Children of Migrant Workers Ambar, Risal, and Others, August 14, 2024.

of informal education from his father, Satrio, who works in Surabaya and rarely returns to care for him.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, Risal is a left-behind child of migrant workers who is enrolled as a student at Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an Nuruzzahro, participating in the Mengaji Langgeran program and the Tahfiz Subuh sessions. This 10-year-old boy must navigate life without informal education from his mother after she decided to become a migrant worker in Malaysia. Each day, he is entrusted to the care of his brother-in-law. According to Queen,<sup>31</sup> Risal also does not receive adequate informal education from his father, who works as a laborer in a coffee plantation and often does not return home for days. When he does come home, his father arrives at night and only stays for a few hours before returning to the plantation. Based on UNICEF's classification, children of parents who work periodically in the agricultural sector and frequently do not return home, like Risal, can also be categorized as left-behind.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, Virman, a left-behind child of migrant workers, is enrolled as a student at Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an Nuruzzahro, participating in the Mengaji Langgeran program and the Tahfiz Subuh sessions. This 12-year-old boy is compelled to reside in a safe house under the responsibility of his teachers, Latvia and Alvan, after he did not receive informal education from either of his parents. His father left him to work as a domestic migrant worker in Atambua, East Nusa Tenggara, and his mother also abandoned him to work in Kalimantan due to their divorce. His parents have neglected Virman since he began his education at a pesantren in Madura, which led to a temporary interruption in his schooling.<sup>33</sup> The roles of Latvia and Alvan in filling the caregiving void

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<sup>30</sup> Alvan, Interview with Muhammad Alvan regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Ambar, Arsan, and Other Children of Migrant Workers.

<sup>31</sup> Queen, Interview with Queen regarding the Role of Shared Parenting for Children of Migrant Workers, September 4, 2024.

<sup>32</sup> UNICEF, "UNICEF Working Paper: Children 'Left Behind,'" 1.

<sup>33</sup> Muhammad Alvan, Interview with Muhammad Alvan about student who stay overnight in the Langger and participate in the Tahfiz Subuh session, September 5, 2024; Siti Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia about Parenting for 3 Children of Migrant

experienced by Virman are relevant to Antia's findings, which report the role of teachers caring for left-behind children of migrant workers.<sup>34</sup>

Ambar, Arsan, Risal, and Virman are children of migrant workers who do not receive adequate informal education from their parents, including in terms of religious habituation. However, unlike the previous four left-behind children, Sidqi is a male student enrolled at Madrasah Diniyah Nuruzzahro and participating in the Tahfiz Subuh sessions. This 11-year-old boy is compelled to live solely under the care of his mother, Farinda, after his father left him twice to work as a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia since he was 3 years old.<sup>35</sup> At Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an Nuruzzahro, the children of migrant workers are guided in reading the Qur'an using the Tilawati method, in addition to receiving other Islamic educational materials. Meanwhile, at Madrasah Diniyah Nuruzzahro, the students study topics such as theology from the book *'aqīdatu al-'awām*, ethics from the book *tarbiyyatu al-ṣibyān*, jurisprudence from the book *safīnatu al-najā*, and grammar from the book *al-amthilatu al-taṣrīfīyah*, as well as practical worship. In contrast, during the Mengaji Langgeran sessions, the students are assisted in learning to read the Qur'an, reciting *salawat*, practicing worship, and performing *tablīl*. In the Tahfiz Subuh sessions, they are supported in memorizing the Qur'an.

In short, migrant workers' children who are cared for by substitute caregivers such as Ambar, Arsan, Risal, and Virman do not receive proper informal education from their parents, including in the habit of religiosity, while Sidqi, a migrant worker's child who receives care and gets learning to read the Qur'an and worship from his mother. However, the migrant workers' children also learn the Qur'an and Islamic knowledge from several Islamic educational

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Workers, July 23, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Antia, Rodoreda, and Winkler, "Parental Migration and Left-behind Children in Georgia – School Teachers' Experience and Perception," 1–11.

<sup>35</sup> Farinda, Interview with Farinda regarding the Parenting of Sidqi, September 9, 2024.

institutions such as the Nuruzzahro Al-Qur'an Education Park, Madrasah Diniyah Nuruzzahro, Mengaji Langgeran, and Tahfiz Subuh.

### **Locating Muslim Migrants' Children in Islamic Education Institutions**

After being left behind by one or both parents who migrated from their hometown, the students in Islamic educational institutions for children of migrant workers in Paluboto face challenges regarding their religiosity. The first challenge is the habit of neglecting obligatory prayers. At the beginning of his parents' absence, Ambar continued to participate in Qur'an study and religious education at Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an Nuruzzahro and the Mengaji Langgeran program, although he often did not attend. The demands from his grandmother to care for his younger sibling and perform domestic tasks, such as cleaning the house, frequently prevented him from attending Islamic education, resulting in a loss of opportunities to engage in the practice of obligatory prayers at the Islamic educational institution. This has led Ambar to neglect his obligatory prayers frequently.<sup>36</sup> A similar pattern is observed in Arsan, the child of a migrant worker who is cared for by his cousin. He frequently misses the Subuh prayer because he wakes up late after staying up late playing on his smartphone.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, Virman, when first entrusted to a safe house after his mother became a migrant worker in Kalimantan, lacked the awareness to perform obligatory prayers, particularly on Sundays. This is because there is no practice of congregational obligatory prayers on Sundays due to the break in Qur'an study activities, according to Tunik.<sup>38</sup> Virman often

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<sup>36</sup> Alvan, Interview with Muhammad Alvan regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Ambar, Arsan, and Other Children of Migrant Workers.

<sup>37</sup> Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Conditions of Children of Migrant Workers Ambar, Risal, and Others.

<sup>38</sup> Tunik, Interview with Tunik regarding Virman's Condition Before Parenting and the Parenting Process, September 3, 2024.

neglects the Zuhur prayer. A lack of awareness regarding the performance of worship is also experienced by Risal, the child of a migrant worker who is cared for by his brother-in-law, and he is frequently noted to miss the Subuh prayer. Additionally, when he does not attend Qur'an study at Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an and the Mengaji Langgeran program, he often fails to perform the Ashar, Maghrib, and Isya' prayers because he does not participate in the prayer practices at these institutions.<sup>39</sup>

From El-Menouar's perspective, when Ambar, Arsan, Virman, and Risal neglect social-collective piety such as prayer, they are abandoning the central duties of religion, which serve as one of the parameters of religiosity. The habit of neglecting prayer, as a component of the pillars of Islam, reflects individual noncompliance with obligatory worship that is typically performed communally or collectively.<sup>40</sup> The care provided by substitute caregivers has not been able to accustom migrant workers' children to performing obligatory prayers. The habit of neglecting obligatory prayers, which are a pillar of Islam, suggests that these children have not yet developed a sense of religiosity in terms of the central duties of the religion.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, Sidqi, a migrant worker's child who is raised by his mother, has been accustomed to performing the obligatory Maghrib and Isha prayers every day in their family's prayer room.<sup>42</sup>

The second is the delay in learning Islamic materials. Some children lack the skills to perform religious worship and experience a decline in their ability to read the Qur'an. Ambar, a child of a migrant worker who is cared for by his grandmother, has reportedly experienced a regression in his Qur'an reading skills due to frequent absences from Qur'an study sessions at Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an Nuruzzahro in the afternoons, as well as from religious education sessions at Mengaji

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<sup>39</sup> Siti Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Issues and Parenting of Children of Migrant Workers, August 11, 2024.

<sup>40</sup> El-Menouar, "The Five Dimensions of Muslim Religiosity. Results of an Empirical Study," 67–68.

<sup>41</sup> El-Menouar, 67–68.

<sup>42</sup> Farinda, Interview with Farinda regarding the Parenting of Sidqi.

Langgeran program in the evenings, according to Latvia. This situation has persisted since her grandmother, who was sick, often scolded her and asked her to take care of his younger sibling and perform domestic chores at home. The demands of domestic responsibilities, according to Latifah, have led to her frequent absence from learning sessions at both Islamic educational institutions.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, Virman also experiences delays in reading the Qur'an. At the age of 10, Virman could only spell a few letters from the Qur'an in the Tilawati method book, volume 2, unlike his peers, who were already able to read the Qur'an with proper makhraj and tajwid. He also has not yet learned to perform ablution, is unable to execute the movements of obligatory prayers correctly, and has not memorized the recitations for worship.<sup>44</sup> The inability of Ambar and Virman to read the Qur'an correctly, along with Virman's failure to understand proper worship practices, indicates that they face challenges in religiosity, particularly in the dimension of knowledge from El-Menouar's perspective.<sup>45</sup> Neither can they read the sacred text nor comprehend the procedures for worship as outlined in the Qur'an and hadith.

The challenges faced by Ambar and Virman, who experience cognitive development difficulties due to inadequate informal education resulting from their parents' prolonged migration, particularly in reading the Qur'an, are corroborated by findings from Lu<sup>46</sup> and Nguyen<sup>47</sup> Which

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<sup>43</sup> Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Conditions of Children of Migrant Workers Ambar, Risal, and Others.

<sup>44</sup> El-Menouar, "The Five Dimensions of Muslim Religiosity. Results of an Empirical Study"; Siti Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Ambar, Arsan, and Other Children of Migrant Workers, July 15, 2024.

<sup>45</sup> El-Menouar, "The Five Dimensions of Muslim Religiosity. Results of an Empirical Study," 67–69.

<sup>46</sup> Yao Lu, "Parental Migration and Education of Left-Behind Children: A Comparison of Two Settings," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 76, no. 5 (2014): 230–39.

<sup>47</sup> Cuong Viet Nguyen, "Does Parental Migration Really Benefit Left-behind Children? Comparative Evidence from Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam," *Social Science & Medicine* 153 (2016): 230–39, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2016.02.021>.

reports that long-term parental migration negatively affects the cognitive abilities of their children in their hometowns. Similarly, Virman's delay in understanding the procedures of worship and Ambar's absence from Qur'an study sessions are also relevant to Lu's study, which suggests that domestic migration undertaken by parents can harm the educational continuity of their children in their hometowns. However, this impact is not as pronounced as that caused by international migration.<sup>48</sup>

Thirdly, there is a lack of respect towards teachers and adults who care for them. Virman, a child of a migrant worker placed in a safe house, often exhibits anger towards the teachers and adults responsible for his care. According to Latvia, Virman frequently becomes upset when Tunik encourages him to practice self-care independently. He has also shown anger towards Nadia, the teacher at Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an Nuruzzahro, when she gave him advice. Additionally, he is known to have reacted angrily towards Badriyah when reminded to retrieve his clothes that were drying.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Arsan often throws tantrums and becomes angry when Moklas, his uncle, reprimands him for spending too much time on his smartphone.<sup>50</sup> Virman's anger towards his teacher at the Islamic educational institution, as well as the anger exhibited by both Virman and Arsan towards the adults who voluntarily care for them, suggests that they have yet to understand the importance of respecting teachers and adults. From El-Menouar's perspective,<sup>51</sup> this behavior indicates that neither has demonstrated religiosity in the dimension of knowledge.

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<sup>48</sup> Lu, "Parental Migration and Education of Left-Behind Children: A Comparison of Two Settings," 1082.

<sup>49</sup> Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Issues and Parenting of Children of Migrant Workers.

<sup>50</sup> Muhammad Alvan, Interview with Muhammad Alvan regarding the Issues and Parenting of Children of Migrant Workers, August 11, 2024.

<sup>51</sup> El-Menouar, "The Five Dimensions of Muslim Religiosity. Results of an Empirical Study," 67–69.



Fourthly, there is resistance among the children of migrant workers to the concept of gender role reciprocity (*mubadalah*) upheld by the community in their environment. When first placed in a safe house by his father, he refused to perform domestic tasks. According to Latvia, this attitude is influenced by the patriarchal culture practiced by his father during his upbringing. Due to this patriarchal upbringing, Latvia notes that Virman objected when Badriyah,<sup>52</sup> Encouraged him to lift his drying clothes. He also became angry when Tunik.<sup>53</sup> Tried to teach him to take care of his belongings, such as washing dishes and folding clothes.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, according to Farinda, Sidqi's mother, Virman once expressed to her that he had rejected Latvia's attempts to train him to clean his bedroom.<sup>55</sup> First, a teacher at the same institution also reported that Virman frequently resisted being encouraged to sweep the area in front of his bedroom.<sup>56</sup> The principle of gender role reciprocity practiced by Firsta, Badriyah, Tunik, and Latvia in their daily lives is an effort to instill this understanding in Virman and the students of Madrasah Diniyah Nuruzzahro, Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an Nuruzzahro, and the Mengaji Langgeran program. Virman's rejection of the practice of taking responsibility for cleaning his room, caring for his belongings, and drying his clothes indicates that he lacks religiosity in the dimensions of knowledge and religious practice (orthopraxis), as per El-Menouar's standards.<sup>57</sup> This is evident in his lack of understanding of the principle of *mubadalah* practiced by the community in this area, as well as his refusal to accept the principle of *mubadalah* that is normalized through the implementation of domestic

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<sup>52</sup> Badriyah is a homemaker who also cares for Virman.

<sup>53</sup> Tunik is a former migrant worker who also cares for Virman.

<sup>54</sup> Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Ambar, Arsan, and Other Children of Migrant Workers.

<sup>55</sup> Farinda, Interview with Farinda regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Virman, September 5, 2024.

<sup>56</sup> Firsta, Interview with Firsta regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Virman, September 4, 2024.

<sup>57</sup> El-Menouar, "The Five Dimensions of Muslim Religiosity. Results of an Empirical Study," 67–69.

and public duties assigned to both men and women.<sup>58</sup>

Fifthly, there is a low appreciation for the obligation to learn. After being left by his mother, who became an international migrant worker, Arsan and Risal began frequently missing Islamic education activities. Risal, a child of a migrant worker raised by his sister-in-law, often does not attend sessions for reading the Qur'an and religious studies at the Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an and Mengaji Langgeran program.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Ambar, according to Alvan, a child raised by his grandmother, has also experienced a decline in motivation to learn the Qur'an and religious materials. He frequently misses classes at the non-formal Islamic educational institution because his grandmother often asks him to care for his younger sibling and perform domestic tasks.<sup>60</sup>

Meanwhile, Virman, a child of migrant workers who does not receive care from either parent and is placed in a safe house, according to Latvia, Tunik, and Firsta, also experiences a decline in motivation and concentration in learning to read the Qur'an and various Islamic subjects.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Arsan often does not attend Qur'an reading lessons at Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an Nuruzzahro in the afternoons, although

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<sup>58</sup> Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Ambar, Arsan, and Other Children of Migrant Workers.

<sup>59</sup> Queen, Interview with Queen regarding the Role of Shared Parenting for Children of Migrant Workers; Alvan, Interview with Muhammad Alvan regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Ambar, Arsan, and Other Children of Migrant Workers; Alvan, Interview with Muhammad Alvan regarding the Issues and Parenting of Children of Migrant Workers; Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Issues and Parenting of Children of Migrant Workers.

<sup>60</sup> Firsta, Interview with Firsta regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Virman; Tunik, Interview with Tunik regarding Virman's Condition Before Parenting and the Parenting Process; Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Issues and Parenting of Children of Migrant Workers.

<sup>61</sup> Firsta, Interview with Firsta regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Virman; Tunik, Interview with Tunik regarding Virman's Condition Before Parenting and the Parenting Process; Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Issues and Parenting of Children of Migrant Workers.

he remains active in Mengaji Langgeran program for religious studies.<sup>62</sup> He frequently arrives late to formal madrasah, misses classes at the same madrasah, or attends in an unkempt state due to often waking up late as a result of gadget addiction.<sup>63</sup>

In contrast, Sidqi, who receives sole care from his mother after being abandoned twice by his father, an international migrant worker, does not experience issues with religiosity based on the dimensions proposed by El-Menouar.<sup>64</sup> He studies to read the Qur'an and Saraf daily under the direct guidance of his mother in the family *musala* after Maghrib prayers. In the afternoons, he also participates in Qur'an reading lessons at Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an Nuruzzahro. Additionally, Sidqi receives support from Alvan, his great-uncle, in memorizing the 30th juz of the Qur'an during morning recitation sessions after the Subuh prayers.<sup>65</sup> Ambar, Risal, Virman, and Arsan appear to lack appreciation for the command to seek knowledge that Muhammad mandated for every Muslim. The disobedience of Ambar, Virman, Arsan, and Risal to this religious command indicates that they are not practicing the consequences of religiosity (orthopraxis), one of the dimensions of religiosity outlined by El-Menouar.<sup>66</sup>

In short, some migrant workers' children experience religiosity problems, as standardized by El-Menouar. experiencing religiosity challenges because they abandon the 'central duties' of religion. Migrant

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<sup>62</sup> Alvan, Interview with Muhammad Alvan regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Ambar, Arsan, and Other Children of Migrant Workers; Alvan, Interview with Muhammad Alvan regarding the Issues and Parenting of Children of Migrant Workers; Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Issues and Parenting of Children of Migrant Workers.

<sup>63</sup> Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Ambar, Arsan, and Other Children of Migrant Workers.

<sup>64</sup> El-Menouar, "The Five Dimensions of Muslim Religiosity. Results of an Empirical Study," 67–69.

<sup>65</sup> Farinda, Interview with Farinda regarding the Parenting of Sidqi.

<sup>66</sup> El-Menouar, "The Five Dimensions of Muslim Religiosity. Results of an Empirical Study," 68–69.

workers' children also experience and religiosity challenges in the knowledge dimension because they are unable to understand the correct practice of worship and poor respect for teachers and adults. In addition, some migrant workers' children also do not yet have religiosity in the orthopraxis dimension because they do not respect the command to seek knowledge that Muhammad required of all his followers and refuse to practice the principle of reciprocity between men and women (*mubadalah*) which is respected and implemented by the Paluboto community.

### **Religiosity Left-behind Children of Migrant Workers**

The findings of this study offer novelty in the study of Islamic education, as they detail the religiosity conditions of students in Islamic educational institutions with backgrounds as left-behind children of migrant workers. They face challenges in religiosity across three domains: central duties of religion, knowledge, and the consequences of religiosity<sup>67</sup> which is caused by the absence of religious upbringing from parents who choose to become international or domestic migrant workers, as well as the ineffectiveness of religious guidance from substitute caregivers.

This study also offers novelty in migration studies by providing a new terminology for the criteria of left-behind children, namely 'Religiosity Left-behind,' based on the dimensions of religiosity introduced by El-Menouar.<sup>68</sup> Including those experienced by students in Islamic educational institutions. The findings differ from those reported by Zheng et al., which highlight the physical and psychological health issues faced by left-behind children, including health problems, feelings of unhappiness, depression, and suffering from chronic illnesses.<sup>69</sup>

The findings of this article also differ from the results of the study by Wan et al., which report that left-behind children are more likely to

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<sup>67</sup> El-Menouar, 67–69.

<sup>68</sup> El-Menouar, 67–69.

<sup>69</sup> Zheng et al., "When Left-behind Children Become Adults and Parents: The Long-Term Human Capital Consequences of Parental Absence in China," 101821.

experience stress and trauma compared to children who receive care from their parents.<sup>70</sup> The issues of religiosity among the children of migrant workers in East Java identified by the author were also not reported by Türker and Çimşir, as they focused on the psychological and sociocultural challenges faced by left-behind children.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, this report presents findings that differ from the results of the study by Bunga et al., as although children experiencing Religiosity Left-behind face issues with motivation or concentration in learning to read the Qur'an and Islamic materials,<sup>72</sup> They do not redirect their focus towards work. Thus, this study does not confirm the findings of Bunga et al.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, this article contributes to filling the gap in the absence of studies related to the religiosity conditions of left-behind children, the children of migrant workers whose parents leave their hometowns. This study also contributes by introducing a term to describe the conditions of left-behind children who experience issues with religiosity, designating them as 'Religiosity Left-behind'. Furthermore, this article also recommends the importance of meaningful interventions from educational policymakers to address the religiosity issues faced by children of migrant workers experiencing Religiosity Left-behind. This article recommends encouraging higher religious education institutions and civil society organizations to conduct continuous interventions for migrant workers' children who experience religious left-behind to improve the quality of Islamic learning for them and provide meaningful assistance to improve their religiosity.

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<sup>70</sup> Wan, Deng, and Li, "Adverse Childhood Experiences and Depression: Do Left-Behind Families Place Children at Higher Risk in Rural China," 13–26.

<sup>71</sup> Türker and Çimşir, "The Impact of Fathers' Overseas Employment on Left-behind Children in Turkey: A Phenomenological Exploration," 870–90.

<sup>72</sup> Firsta, Interview with Firsta regarding the Conditions and Parenting of Virman; Tunik, Interview with Tunik regarding Virman's Condition Before Parenting and the Parenting Process; Latvia, Interview with Siti Latvia regarding the Issues and Parenting of Children of Migrant Workers.

<sup>73</sup> Bunga, Benu, and Kiling, "Left-behind Children in West Timor, Indonesia: A Brief Report," 55–60.

## Conclusion

This article reveals the challenges of religiosity of left-behind children who are students of several migrant worker institutions in a village in East Java. They face challenges in religiosity across three domains, ranging from central duties of religion and knowledge to the consequences of religiosity. This study contributes to Islamic education studies within the framework of informal education by providing current insights into the religious conditions of migrant workers' children on the one hand, and to migration studies on the other hand, by introducing a new classification criterion for left-behind children: Religiosity Left-behind. It offers a significant contribution to both Islamic education and migration studies by exploring the often-overlooked religious dimensions of children left behind by migrant worker parents in Indonesia. Using El-Menouar's five dimensions of religiosity as an analytical framework, the research reveals that left-behind children in Paluboto, East Java, experience multidimensional challenges in their religious development, particularly in fulfilling central religious duties, acquiring religious knowledge, and engaging in religious practice (orthopraxis). These challenges stem from the dual absence of parental religious guidance and the limitations of substitute caregivers in fostering religious habituation.

The concept of Religiosity Left-behind, introduced in this study, provides a novel theoretical lens to understand how transnational or domestic labor migration reshapes the spiritual and educational trajectories of Muslim children. Unlike existing literature that primarily emphasizes the psychological, emotional, or developmental impacts of parental absence, this study situates religiosity as a critical and vulnerable domain of child development in migrant-sending communities. Moreover, the study's findings highlight the pivotal role of informal Islamic educational institutions in mitigating the religious deficits experienced by these children. However, the effectiveness of these institutions is uneven and often constrained by the children's household responsibilities, inconsistent

attendance, and the absence of a supportive learning environment at home. In light of these findings, the study urges strategic, multisectoral interventions involving higher Islamic education institutions, civil society organizations, and local religious educators. Such interventions should aim to strengthen informal religious education, enhance community-based caregiving models, and institutionalize support systems tailored to the spiritual needs of left-behind children. Ultimately, addressing Religiosity Left-behind is vital to ensuring that migration, while economically beneficial, does not compromise the spiritual and moral well-being of the next generation.



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