

EMPOWERING MUSLIM WOMEN THROUGH ZAKAT FITRAH: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTHERN THAILAND

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Paper was presented at the 9th International Conference on Zakat (ICONZ)

9 – 12 December 2025, Jakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how Zakat Fitrah contributes to empowering women and strengthening community resilience in Southern Thailand. The study was conducted using a qualitative case study approach through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The study reveals that Zakat Fitrah is not only a religious duty for Muslim women in Southern Thailand but also a significant tool for promoting community unity, social equity, and women's empowerment, especially among marginalized groups. The study is limited by its small sample size of only three participants, which calls for further research with a larger and more diverse group to gain a deeper understanding of Zakat Fitrah's impact on women across various contexts. The findings suggest that integrating women more actively in the administration and distribution of Zakat Fitrah could improve both their empowerment and the overall efficiency of zakat practices within Muslim communities. This research underscores the potential of Zakat Fitrah to foster greater gender equality, social solidarity, and community resilience, particularly in marginalized Muslim communities in Southern Thailand. This study offers a unique perspective by showing how women in Southern Thailand perceive Zakat Fitrah as an action to support and empower their community, which is still rarely discussed in existing studies.

Keywords: Muslim Women, Socio-Religious Values, Southern Thailand, Women Empowerment, Zakat Fitrah

I. INTRODUCTION

Islam has taught that a good deed is to be kind to other people, since others also have rights to receive the beneficence from each other (Putri et al., 2025). This principle needs to be followed in order to achieve a peaceful life and generate harmony for the surroundings (Hayeeharasah et al., 2013). Zakat is one of the pillars in Islam, and its implementation drives empathy and sympathy, as well as cleanses people's property so that it becomes a blessing (Omar & Hajimin, 2023). This action also serves as a crucial part to promote economic well-being, universal brotherhood, and equal revenue distribution among Muslim communities based on the Islamic economic system (Ali et al., 2024). Zakat is not just about charity, but also a fundamental way to strengthen the bonds between individuals, together with creating a sense of responsibility to share a portion of sustenance for those in greater need. According to At-Taubah verse 60, people who are able to receive Zakat are divided into 8 categories, known as Ashnaf Tsamaniyah, which include: 1) Fakir, those without wealth or stable income; 2) Miskin, those with insufficient income for daily needs; 3) Amil, those responsible for collecting and distributing Zakat; 4) Mu'allaf, those newly embracing Islam and in need of support to strengthen their faith; 5) Riqab, slaves or captives to be freed; 6) Gharim, those burdened with unpayable debts; 7) Sabillilah, those who fight for the cause of Allah without seeking compensation; and 8) Ibnu Sabil, travelers who are stranded and in need of assistance

during their journey (Wahyuni et al., 2017). Through this practice, Muslims are reminded of the importance of giving, which ultimately leads to a more just and compassionate society.

Zakat Fitrah has usually been implemented in all muslim countries across the globe. In the context of Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Malaysia are two of the most visible cases where zakat management has been formalised massively from region to region (Purwatiningsih & Yahya, 2020). In addition, Singapore also has its official institution to manage the progress of Zakat Fitrah by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), also known as the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapore, by applying a technologically advanced approach (Hadijah et al., 2024). Talking about the Indonesian context, nowadays, the implementation of Zakat Fitrah is not necessarily limited to social justice, but also as a strategy to accelerate economic gain (Kailani & Slama, 2020). Furthermore, in Malaysia, the State Islamic Councils (MAIN) have also developed efficient zakat administration systems that focus on community economic support (Harun et al., 2019). Notably, people are not required to pay through traditional rice-based payments; instead, they can make a payment through monetary contributions; hence, it becomes more flexible and adaptable in the advancement of the digital era (Zulhendra, 2017). From these approaches, it has been proven that Zakat Fitrah, in a nutshell, not only helps to tackle poverty but also keeps up with modern ways of handling money and makes it useful for today's muslim communities.

Connecting to the southern provinces of Thailand, especially Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, the socio-religious landscape is unique in the Thai context. In these areas, Malay-Muslim communities are the most predominant in a country where Buddhism remains paramount (Liow, 2011). Although they share Thai nationality, their language and culture are very much on par with neighboring Malaysia, compared to the Siamese region located in central Thailand, despite on their daily basis, they also use the Thai language to communicate with a bunch of people (Chalermripinyorat, 2021). In accordance with this identity difference, these regions have faced socio-economic challenges, such as lower average incomes, longer infrastructure, and a longer history of marginalisation within the Thai state (Payo & Askandar, 2024). As a result, Zakat Fitrah, in turn, can be a bridge for underprivileged individuals to upgrade their social standing and provide them with the necessary resources to improve their living conditions and integrate more effectively into the community.

Building on the insights from the previous paragraphs, the general objective of this study is to contribute to the broader understanding of zakat's role in promoting gender equality and community development in minority Muslim societies. The specific objectives are as follows: first, to explore Muslim women's perceptions and practices of Zakat Fitrah in Southern Thailand; and second, to analyze how Zakat Fitrah empowers Muslim women and strengthens community resilience. This study will contribute to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by addressing barriers to women's participation in zakat administration, particularly in minority-Muslim contexts like Southern Thailand, as well as SDG 1 (No Poverty) to fulfill individuals' basic needs. By focusing on zakat practices in a minor community, this research will expand the global understanding of zakat's impact and highlight how it can be adapted to support women's empowerment and community development in the diverse socio-religious setting.

Afterwards, the study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I introduces the topic, highlights the research gap, and connects the study to the context of Zakat Fitrah practices in Thailand, especially in the southern provinces. It also outlines the objectives and significance of the study. Chapter II presents the literature review, where a trend analysis is conducted using VOSviewer to understand the current research on Zakat Fitrah. Chapter III explains the methodology, including the data collection process, selection criteria, and data analysis techniques. Chapter IV presents the results and discussion based on the interviews conducted with participants. Lastly, Chapter V concludes the study and provides

recommendations, including an overall summary of the research findings and suggestions for future studies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To provide a clearer picture of how implementing Zakat Fitrah can alleviate individuals' circumstances by empowering a group of people, the authors employed two foundational theories: Social Capital Theory by Dubos (2017) and Women's Empowerment by Richardson (2018). Social Capital Theory refers to a vital element, the "social network," which connects the particular population and shapes social structure through collective dynamic processes. This theory was chosen due to the fact that in a community, there would be relationships, trust, and shared values that enable society to collaborate, share resources, and support each other, which is essential for strengthening community resilience in the scope of marginalized groups. On the other hand, women's empowerment theory complements social interaction day by day. It completes the target of achieving SDG 5 to ensure that there will be no discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, ensuring they can unleash their potential, as well as equal leadership opportunities. The following theory was also inspired by Kabeer (1999), which describes three empowerment processes, starting from *Resources* (gaining the opportunity), then continuing to *agency* (autonomy to manifest goals), and *achievements* (outcomes/realization of goals). This framework complements Social Capital Theory by focusing on how women, through Zakat Fitrah, can gain the resources and autonomy needed to achieve empowerment and contribute to their communities.

In this particular discourse, women are subjected to be the main viewpoint of the study. When we look at the real-life experience, men usually manage all of the delivery practices in Islamic Countries. Although women also assist in some ways, such as domestic roles, the administration or decision-making of zakat by them is still not presented equally. For example, one study observed that despite Muslim women in the border provinces being able to gain religious education, they rarely participate in a formal situation when it comes to Zakat Fitrah administration (Dorloh et al., 2021). Concurrently, the implementation of Zakat Fitrah may lead to male-led mosque committees, religious councils, and local amils who collect the Zakat from the givers (Firdaus et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to explore this research further to understand why this phenomenon is significant, particularly in the context of Southern Thailand.

However, when we narrow down to the context of Southern Thailand, there are still a few critical points. First, despite zakat institutions remaining, such as mosque committees and provincial Islamic councils, their arrangement are still unsystematic in terms of collection and transparency (Ahmad & Kado, 2019). This lack of institutional presence is also reflected in the study, which implies a broader lack of formalized zakat administration, which may affect the efficiency of zakat distribution, including Zakat Fitrah (Boonyamanond & Chaiwat, 2020). Second, while numerous resources discuss how Zakat can empower women in several countries, there is still limited research exploring how Zakat Fitrah can benefit women in minority-muslim settings (Anis & Kassim, 2016; Kurniawati et al., 2025; Saadah et al., 2024; Saadah & Ghummiah, 2023). In Southern Thailand, particularly, even though women play a pivotal role in their community empowerment, their actions remain underrepresented, as it connects with the reason that most scholarly articles only focus on the general phenomenon of zakat, especially in majority-Muslim countries, rather than in the minority (Weeke et al., 2021). Thus, the gap in understanding how Zakat Fitrah empowers women in minority Muslim communities, especially in Southern Thailand, highlights the need for research on how this implementation can help improve women's roles and strengthen their resilience.

III. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study approach was employed to describe information in an interpretive way (Cortés-Capano et al., 2025). Furthermore, it enabled an in-depth understanding of what participants have experienced with the Zakat Fitrah in terms of the socio-religious context. To gain comprehensive data from the women's perspective on Zakat Fitrah as a strategy to empower society, this research was conducted online via Zoom Meetings, with a total of three interviewees from the Southern Border of Thailand, including Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani. These provinces were selected because they represent the Women Muslim Community in Thailand, where Zakat Fitrah is actively practiced and deeply immersed in the local social and religious life (Cheumar et al., 2020). The data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with selected Muslim women residing in Southern Thailand. The interviews were conducted in October 2025, and each interview lasted approximately 30-40 minutes, allowing participants to express their thoughts more freely.

In terms of sampling, the authors applied a purposive sampling technique to ensure that the participants interviewed were only those who had direct experience and understanding of Zakat Fitrah. Purposive sampling was chosen because it allows the researchers to intentionally select participants who possess relevant knowledge and real experiences, ensuring that the data are focused and aligned with the study's objectives (Campbell et al., 2020). All interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed for analysis. Subsequently, the data were analyzed by using the thematic analysis framework adopted by Braun and Clarke (2019). It comprises six steps, such as familiarization with the data, creating codes, finding themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and producing reports (writing the findings section). This method is chosen to identify and interpret key patterns and meanings that reflect how Zakat Fitrah contributes to women's empowerment in the local context.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study included three participants who met the inclusion criteria and could take part in the interviews for the study. All were Muslim women from Thailand's three southern provinces, which are Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani, that reflect places in which Islam exists as a national minority and dominant religious status.

A common theme to emerge from the interviews was Zakat Fitrah as a wajib (obligatory act) and as a means to contribute to a certain type of balance and distribution of resources within the Muslim community. All three participants articulated that by performing Zakat Fitrah, they adhered to a religious obligation while facilitating a life of social unity that diminishes inequality among Muslims.

Respondent 1, Yala, described "I grew up with the idea that Zakat Fitrah is a wajib, so all Muslims have to do that, and I'm a girl, a female, so when I was young, my dad is the one who represented Zakat for me, and then I know that...we have to do it because it is a wajib, and it is a good thing that Allah gives the opportunity, not only for us to be a giver, but for the seven types of people to be a receiver, and to make it like.. The society is more equal."

Her statement highlights that Zakat Fitrah is not only about obedience to Allah but also about creating a balance between those who give and those who receive. She further added that some people in her community "give a Zakat...not only because they want to give it, but because they gain something from that." Nothing that, "*They buat untuk... die rase nak besar, rase die kaye... the more they give, the more, like, people think that, oh, their family is rich and, like, superpower.*" This observation illustrates

that while Zakat Fitrah is spiritually motivated, it can also be tied to social image and local politics in some areas.

Respondent 2, Narathiwat, similarly emphasized Zakat Fitrah as an obligation that promotes compassion and equality among Muslims, stating, “I have been told that Zakat Fitrah is like the things that we have to do since I was born... we have to pay because we are Muslims. So that is the thing I understand in the part of Zakat Fitrah. It’s like the thing that we have to do. And I think it’s good because we can help poor people too.” She also reflected on the social meaning of the practice, saying, “Zakat Fitrah is the part that makes Muslims help each other, like around the area, around the community.”

Although she personally has not taken the lead in paying Zakat, as her father is responsible for it, she expressed hope to perform it independently in the future, explaining that she has “been used to it since I was born” but would “try to do Zakat Fitrah by my own” one day. Respondent 3, Pattani, offered a deeply spiritual view of the practice, calling it “one of the pillars in Islam” and emphasizing that everyone in her community performs it voluntarily: “In my community, I can see, like, everyone active doing Zakat Fitrah, like, when it’s time for Zakat Fitrah, nobody has to pay it, but everyone, like, suddenly, automatically do it.” She also expressed the emotional fulfillment that comes with giving, saying, “At first, when I was young, I thought being the one who gained something from others was like a good thing... but when I grew up, being the one who giving to others is like a good thing... but when I grew up, being the one who giving to others, the giver is more fulfilled than the receiver.”

In discussing local practices, all participants confirmed that men are generally responsible for delivering Zakat Fitrah to the mosque or imam, while women tend to assist in supportive roles. Respondent 1 explained, “We can Zakat by our own self, or we can give it to Imam, and then Imam will give it to the seven types of people” Respondent 3 also shared that in her family, “men, ayah, is the one who hold this responsibility... but for me, I give it for myself... basically, I give Zakat Fitrah to my teacher because she is one of the ones that deliver our deen”

Regarding Recipients, all three mentioned that Zakat is commonly directed to the poor and to muallaf. Respondent 1 gave a personal example: “My mom is Muallaf, she is Chinese, and then she married my dad... so she have to begin her life again as a Muslim girl. So, in three provinces of Thailand, if the girl move for the province or the hometown to this area, we do the Zakat Fitrah...and we give anything that is a basic needs to that girl, like pakaian, makanan, duit, anything.”

Respondent 3 shared a similar perspective, stating, “If we know that my friend is like Muallaf, I can give to her specific too. But if I don’t know who is one of ashnaf delapan, I can give to masjid, because they already know who is.. The members in our village ”While respondent 2 noted she has not seen Zakat given to muallaf in her area, she observed that “they will give to the poor people.. Like the rice that hasn’t been cooked yet”

Despite differences in local application, all participants agreed that the Thai state allows Muslims to freely observe Zakat Fitrah. Respondent 1 reflected that “Thailand is kind of free.. We also have rights to do Islamic traditions,” though she added, “there’s a lot of Islamophobia in Thailand”, especially regarding social misunderstandings rather than legal restrictions.

Overall, the findings show that Zakat Fitrah is widely recognized as both an act of worship and a social mechanism for compassion and equity. Across the three provinces, participants shared a common understanding of Zakat Fitrah as a religious obligation that strengthens spiritual connection, enhances mutual care, and sustains community harmony, demonstrating how this practice maintains its significance among Muslim minorities in Southern Thailand.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of this research indicates that Zakat Fitrah has a very significant impact on both the spiritual and social sides of Muslim women living in Southern Thailand. In line with teaching in Islam, it has been found that Zakat Fitrah is a wajib act of worship for all Muslims. In line with the teaching from Islam, all participants consider Zakat Fitrah as a wajib act of worship for all Muslims. The result supports Putri, Rochijuni, & Astuti, 2025, which states that teaching from Islam teaches mankind to treat others kindly because they have a right to be treated kindly from others. This teaching is implemented in the form of Zakat Fitrah as a manifestation of kindness.

All three participants have conveyed the idea that the process of paying Zakat Fitrah is more than just following a religious instruction. It is also a tool of social equilibrium, whereby the fortunate people within a society are responsible for assisting those who are not as fortunate. Sundear from the state of Yala as well as Jamilah from Pattani explained this notion of Zakat Fitrah as a means to achieve oneness as well as satisfaction. The response provides insight into the fact that charity not just satisfies a person's burden to Almighty God, but it also gives a person a feeling of satisfaction as well as peaceful living, as explained by Hayeeharasah et al. in 2013. Ninada from Narathiwat, though not much involved in the distribution of Zakat, shared a common view.

Gender roles are also an essential consideration in the practice of Zakat Fitrah. In the three provinces, it has been noted that it is mainly men who have the obligation to make payments as well as distribute the Zakat on behalf of their families, while women contribute to it, directly or indirectly. But there have been some changes, especially within the younger generation of Muslim women, as in the cases of Jamilah and Sundear, as they have begun to take matters into their own hands, making it a point to do the Zakat on their own. In this matter, it can be recognized that women are being empowered to be more involved in their religion.

In addition, the empirical study brought to light the significance of Zakat Fitrah to women in precarious circumstances, particularly converts and single mothers. The testimony of Sundear about her mother, a Chinese Muslim convert, highlights the significance of Zakat as a social support system. Similarly, Jamilah explained that many women in Pattani, including those whose husbands have migrated to other countries in search of job opportunities, rely on Zakat Fitrah as it provides support for these women to maintain the family. The importance of Zakat as a means not only of distributing wealth but also of strengthening the position of women both social and economically, can be identified. The contribution made here by Zakat Fitrah can be identified as a form of social protection.

The results also indicate that although the religious significance of Zakat Fitrah is very much ingrained in religion, the practice can be diverse. The point worth noting here is the view expressed by Sundear, as cited in his research on Yala, according to which some people practice Zakat as a means to demonstrate their level of social status or political power. Even though this approach goes against the spirit of modesty practiced in Islam, it is a fact that Zakat Fitrah, along with other religious traditions, is practiced within diverse social contexts where religious, cultural, as well as political elements converge. In contrast, as noted by Putri et al. in 2025, ultimately, the underlying essence of performing Zakat remains the quest to be sincere while assisting others. In the spiritual context, all participants were unanimous about the significance of Zakat Fitrah as it instills faith as well as a deeper connection between a person and God. The feeling of being hopeful, as exemplified by Jamilah, about being a giver versus a receiver, illustrates the psychological high associated with being generous. In a similar fashion, the conviction of Sundear, as exemplified by the notion of "the more you give, the more you get" as a form of

reward from God, illustrates the impact of Zakat on creating lessons associated with kindness as well as sustenance. In short, results from this research have demonstrated the significance of Zakat Fitrah, both religiously and socially, to Muslim women in the provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani. It promotes the ethical value of looking after others, cohesion within the Muslim minority group, as well as inclusiveness of women in supporting religious activities. The implementation of Zakat Fitrah, as a matter of fact, promotes equilibrium within Islam, entailing equilibrium between giving and receiving, as well as a balance between religious adherence and social commitments. According to Hayeeharasah et al. (2013), goodness, such as the implementation of Zakat Fitrah, is a basis for a peaceful society. It means Zakat Fitrah is more than a tenet of Islam; it has become a powerful tool in instilling a sense of compassion within Muslims in Southern Thailand.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results of this study have indicated that Muslim women in Southern Thailand perceive the practice of Zakat Fitrah as a religious obligation as well as a practice of maintaining unity within the Muslim community. The participants perceive the practice of Zakat Fitrah as a wajib act in fulfilling one of the pillars of Islam, as well as cultivating feelings of compassion, equity, and care for other Muslims. Even though it has always been a practice conducted mainly by males, female participants in this study have significantly contributed to supporting roles, as they perceive it as a very important point within their religious life. The participants have demonstrated the practice of Zakat as bringing them closer to God while strengthening their feeling of obligation towards people, which enables creating equality among people within the society where the participants live as a minority.

In addition, it is implied within the study that Zakat Fitrah plays a significant role in the matter of women's empowerment, adding to the resilience of the community. The practice of Zakat Fitrah brings about the improvement of the social-economic condition of the community, as well as instills unity within the members of the community as a result of assisting converts, families, and widows in situations of extreme need. The increasing desire among young women to contribute as well as distribute Zakat indicates a positive development in a perception of personal initiative as well as leadership within the religious context. Zakat Fitrah sustains not only an individual but also the community structure within Southern Thailand as a whole.

For future studies, it would be beneficial to include a higher number of participants to gain a broader range of insights. Since the current study consisted of only three participants, it would be more beneficial to include a higher number of participants to gain a deeper understanding of how Muslim women from Southern Thailand perceive and practice Zakat Fitrah. Having a higher number of participants would also be beneficial in determining the differences in their experiences based on age, level of education, job, and background, enabling a more detailed understanding. Including a higher number of participants would enable a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, and religious practice of Zakat Fitrah, thus adding strength to the findings.

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