

Family Development Strategies of Ibn Sina: A Thematic Analysis on Contemporary Muslim Family Well-being

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Ibn Sina's family development strategies as articulated in *al-Siyāsah* and examines their contemporary relevance to Muslim family well-being in Terengganu, Malaysia. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through document analysis of *al-Siyāsah* and in-depth semi-structured interviews with nine married couples who had been married for more than ten years. The data were analysed using thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach. The findings revealed seven core themes that underpin Ibn Sina's family development model: the selection of a righteous spouse, the establishment of a peaceful and comfortable home, moral leadership and spousal partnership, the pursuit of lawful income, ethical financial management, the cultivation of moral virtues within the family, and the fulfilment of reciprocal family responsibilities. This study contributes to Islamic family studies by recontextualising Ibn Sina's thought into a holistic conceptual framework for modern family well-being, integrating spiritual, moral, and socio-economic dimensions with implications for Islamic family education, counselling practices, and family policy formulation.

Keywords: Ibn Sina, Islamic family development, Muslim well-being, qualitative study, family ethics

INTRODUCTION

This study examines Ibn Sina's family development philosophy as articulated in *al-Siyāsah* and its relevance within contemporary Muslim family life in Malaysia. Family well-being in Islam is inseparably linked to moral integrity, spiritual discipline, and responsible socio-economic conduct.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Muslim Family Well-being in Contemporary Scholarship

Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasised family well-being as a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional stability, economic security, moral integrity, and spiritual resilience (Chen et al., 2025; Sabah et al., 2025; Raesi et al., 2025). Within Muslim societies, family well-being is inseparable from religious values that shape marital roles, parenting practices, and economic ethics (Wan Abdullah & Khudzri, 2018; Mohd Rasydan & Mohd Norsuhairi, 2024). Studies conducted in Malaysia consistently demonstrate that marital instability is often associated with financial stress, weak religious commitment, ineffective communication, and fragile moral discipline (Fadillah, 2016; Shafiyah Iqlima, 2020; Mohd Rasydan & Mohd Norsuhairi, 2024).

Islamic family studies further highlight that the household functions as the primary institution for moral and spiritual socialisation. Parents serve as the earliest role models for children, transmitting religious norms, ethical values, and behavioural discipline (Al-Ghazali, n.d.; Al-Attas, 1991). This aligns with empirical findings showing that strong religious commitment within families enhances marital satisfaction, emotional security, and resilience against social crises (Aman et al., 2019; Raesi et al., 2025).

Classical Islamic Perspectives on Family Development

Classical Muslim scholars have long outlined structured frameworks for family development grounded in Islamic ethics. Al-Ghazali (n.d.), for instance, emphasised marriage as a spiritual partnership aimed at preserving

faith, disciplining the soul, and ensuring social stability. Al-Attas (1991) further conceptualised education within the family as an integrated process of instilling adab, positioning the household as the foundational space for civilisational development.

Despite these contributions, much of the existing literature focuses predominantly on scholars such as AlGhazali, Ibn Qayyim, and contemporary Islamic jurists, while Ibn Sina's contributions to family development remain marginalised. Although Ibn Sina is widely celebrated for his works in medicine (*al-Qanun fi al-Tibb*) and philosophy (*al-Shifa'*), his socio-ethical treatise *al-Siyāsah* has received comparatively little scholarly attention, particularly in the context of family development (Idris, 2012).

Ibn Sina's *al-Siyāsah* and the Neglected Dimension of Family Ethics

Ibn Sina's *al-Siyāsah* presents an integrated vision of human development that extends from individual selfdiscipline to family governance and ultimately societal leadership. Within this work, the family is positioned as the microcosm of civilisation, where moral leadership, economic discipline, and spiritual integrity are cultivated (Idris, 2012; Zainal Abidin, 1974). Ibn Sina outlines explicit strategies concerning spousal selection, household management, moral education of children, lawful economic activity, and ethical financial planning.

However, a critical gap remains in contemporary scholarship: while Ibn Sina's political philosophy and medical ethics have been extensively analysed, systematic empirical studies that examine the practical relevance of his family development framework within modern Muslim societies are still scarce. Most existing studies rely heavily on theoretical exposition without grounding these ideas in lived family experiences.

Empirical Studies on Islamic Family Resilience and Economic Ethics

Recent empirical research demonstrates that economic stability and ethical financial management are central predictors of marital satisfaction and household resilience (Conger & Elder, 1990; Fadillah, 2016). In the Malaysian context, financial mismanagement has been identified as a significant contributor to marital conflict and divorce (Shafiyah Iqlima, 2020; Mohd Rasydan & Mohd Norsuhairi, 2024). These findings resonate strongly with Ibn Sina's emphasis on lawful income and prudent financial planning as moral obligations rather than purely economic practices.

Similarly, studies on Islamic parenting highlight that early moral and religious education shapes children's emotional stability, social responsibility, and spiritual discipline (Adlina, 2011; Al-Ghazali, n.d.; Asmawati et al., 2015). This empirical evidence supports Ibn Sina's longstanding assertion that moral cultivation must begin in early childhood under direct parental guidance.

Research Gap and Contribution of the Present Study

Based on the foregoing discussion, three critical gaps may be identified. First, although family well-being has been widely examined in contemporary social science literature, Islamic classical frameworks, particularly those of Ibn Sina, remain underutilised as analytical models. Second, most studies on Muslim family resilience focus on legal, psychological, or economic dimensions, while holistic ethical-philosophical frameworks receive limited empirical validation. Third, empirical research that integrates classical Islamic thought with lived family experiences within the Malaysian Muslim context remains limited.

This study addresses these gaps by empirically examining Ibn Sina's family development strategies through qualitative thematic analysis of contemporary Muslim families in Terengganu. By aligning classical Islamic philosophy with present-day family practices, this research contributes a holistic, faith-based conceptual framework for understanding Muslim family well-being that is grounded in both textual tradition and empirical reality.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the relevance of Ibn Sina's family development strategies within contemporary Muslim families. A qualitative approach was selected as it enables an in-depth

understanding of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes regarding family well-being within an Islamic framework.

Data Sources

Data were collected through two primary sources:

a) Document Analysis

A systematic textual analysis was conducted on Ibn Sina's *al-Siyāsah* to extract core principles related to family development, moral leadership, economic ethics, and parental responsibility.

b) Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine married couples (18 individuals) residing in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. All participants had been married for a minimum of ten years, ensuring that they had passed the critical early stage of marital adjustment and were able to reflect on long-term family dynamics.

Sampling Strategy

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the following inclusion criteria:

- (i) legally married Muslim couples,
- (ii) marriage duration of more than ten years,
- (iii) residence within Kuala Terengganu, and (iv) willingness to participate voluntarily. This sampling strategy ensured that participants possessed relevant experiential knowledge regarding long-term family development and resilience.

Interview Procedure

Each interview session lasted between 45–75 minutes and was conducted in a private and comfortable setting or via secure online platforms. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed verbatim. Interview questions focused on spousal roles, leadership, financial management, parenting practices, moral education, and family responsibilities in relation to Ibn Sina's proposed framework.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-phase procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2018): (i) Familiarisation with the data, (ii) Generation of initial codes, (iii) Searching for themes, (iv) Reviewing themes, (v) Defining and naming themes, and (vi) Producing the report.

The analysis was guided deductively by Ibn Sina's family development strategies derived from *al-Siyāsah*, while allowing inductive patterns to emerge from the interview data. To ensure the rigour of the qualitative findings, several trustworthiness strategies were employed: (i) Triangulation between textual analysis and interview data, (ii) Member checking, where selected participants verified the accuracy of interpretations and (iii) Peer debriefing, involving two senior academic reviewers in qualitative research. These strategies strengthened the study's credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

RESULTS

Seven major themes emerged from the analysis, reflecting strong convergence between Ibn Sina's classical framework and contemporary Muslim family practices.

Theme 1: Selection of a Righteous Spouse

Participants unanimously agreed that selecting a partner based on religious integrity and moral character is critical for long-term family harmony. One participant stated:

“We did not prioritise wealth when choosing a partner. What mattered most was religious commitment and responsibility.” (Participant 2, Wife) Another participant explained:

“If faith is strong, everything else can be built gradually. Without faith, even wealth cannot save a marriage.”
(Participant 6, Husband)

This finding strongly supports Ibn Sina’s view that moral character forms the foundation of marital stability.

Theme 2: Establishment of a Peaceful and Comfortable Home

Participants viewed the home not only as a physical shelter but also as an emotional and spiritual sanctuary:

“A house is not only a place to sleep. It is where emotions grow, children learn manners, and hearts feel calm.”
(Participant 1, Wife)

Several participants highlighted environmental factors such as safety, cleanliness, and proximity to the mosque as determinants of spiritual well-being.

Theme 3: Moral Leadership and Spousal Partnership

All participants affirmed that the husband holds the leadership role, but emphasised consultation and compassion:

“My husband is the leader, but he always asks for my opinion before making decisions.” (Participant 4, Wife)

“Leadership is not about control; it is about responsibility and fairness.” (Participant 8, Husband)

This reflects a balanced leadership-partnership model, aligned with Ibn Sina’s ethical governance principles.

Theme 4: Pursuit of Lawful Income

Participants consistently associated halal income with family tranquility:

“Even if the salary is small, if it is halal, our hearts feel peaceful.” (Participant 5, Husband)

“We believe that haram income destroys family blessings.” (Participant 7, Wife)

Theme 5: Ethical Financial Management

Couples emphasised budgeting, saving, and charity as key survival strategies:

“We only spend based on necessities. If we cannot afford something, we wait.” (Participant 3, Wife)

“Saving is compulsory for emergencies, but we never forget zakat and infaq.” (Participant 9, Husband)

Theme 6: Cultivation of Moral Virtue Within the Family

Participants stressed parents as primary moral educators:

“Children learn not from what we say, but from how we behave.” (Participant 6, Wife)

“Religion must be introduced since childhood, not when they grow rebellious.” (Participant 1, Husband)

Theme 7: Fulfilment of Reciprocal Family Responsibilities

Shared responsibility was repeatedly emphasised:

“Everyone in the house has duties. If one neglects it, the balance collapses.” (Participant 2, Husband)

This directly parallels Ibn Sina’s assertion that leadership necessitates responsibility, justice, and accountability.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine the contemporary relevance of Ibn Sina's family development strategies through an empirical qualitative investigation of Muslim families in Terengganu. The findings demonstrate a strong convergence between Ibn Sina's classical ethical framework and modern lived family practices, affirming the continued validity of his insights across time and context.

Righteous Spousal Selection as the Moral Foundation of Family Stability

For Ibn Sina, having a righteous spouse is essential for building a happy and harmonious family. In *al-Siyasah*, Ibn Sina describes the qualities of a virtuous wife, emphasizing her role as a partner in managing her husband's property and safeguarding his wealth. She is also entrusted with maintaining the household in his absence, which reflects the moral excellence expected of a good wife.

Ibn Sina also emphasized the significance of maintaining the dignity of both spouses. He asserted that a husband should first preserve his own honour to serve as a moral example for his wife, as doing so is crucial to gaining her respect. At the same time, he is responsible for safeguarding and upholding his wife's dignity.

When this strategy was presented to the participants, they shared similar views. All participants agreed that the foundation of a harmonious family lies in choosing a spouse based on religion and character, consistent with Ibn Sina's moral teachings. Their selection was based on religious commitment and moral character. They referred to the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who advised choosing a spouse for their faith rather than for wealth or appearance.

The findings reveal that the selection of a righteous spouse remains the most fundamental predictor of long-term family harmony. Participants prioritised religious commitment, moral conduct, and responsibility over material attributes. This aligns closely with Ibn Sina's assertion that moral character is the primary safeguard of marital stability.

This finding is also strongly supported by contemporary Islamic family scholarship, which consistently identifies religiosity as a central protective factor for marital satisfaction, emotional stability, and conflict resolution. The present study thus reinforces the enduring relevance of Ibn Sina's moral criterion for spousal selection as a cornerstone of family resilience.

Home as a Spiritual and Emotional Sanctuary

Ibn Sina emphasized that a home serves not only as a physical shelter but also as a space for nurturing family relationships and cultivating moral values. He described an ideal home as the center of family life — a place that encourages the husband to return promptly after work, allows the wife to manage household affairs and safeguard her husband's property effectively, and provides children with an environment that fosters respect for their parents and prepares them to support them in later life.

In relation to this matter, all participants agreed that a comfortable home is a basic necessity and a symbol of the husband's responsibility. A home is not merely a physical space, but also an emotional and spiritual environment that fosters love and nurtures children in tranquility. The majority of informants emphasized safety, cleanliness, good neighborhood relations, and proximity to the mosque or surau as key features of a harmonious home. This theme reflects the Islamic view that the household serves as the first *madrasah* (school) for the development of values and moral character.

From a contemporary perspective, this finding also resonates with modern theories of family systems, which conceptualise the home as a primary micro-environment shaping emotional regulation, behavioural patterns, and interpersonal attachment. In the Islamic worldview, the home further functions as the earliest *madrasah*, where values of *adab*, discipline, and *taqwa* are cultivated. The convergence of classical Islamic philosophy and modern family psychology strengthens the theoretical robustness of Ibn Sina's domestic model.

Leadership as Ethical Governance and Spousal Partnership

Ibn Sina viewed the husband as the leader of the household, responsible for providing for and guiding his family. He emphasized the need for moral leadership, urging husbands to uphold their own honour and dignity to gain respect. At the same time, he urged the wife to serve as the most loyal and supportive assistant to her husband.

When the participants were asked about Ibn Sina's view, they agreed that the husband is the primary leader in the family as stated in the Quran. Although participants affirmed the husband's role as the family leader, leadership was consistently interpreted through the lens of justice, consultation (*shura*), compassion, and accountability. This interpretation significantly nuances Ibn Sina's leadership model, demonstrating that contemporary Muslim families do not equate leadership with authoritarian control, but with ethical governance and collective decision-making.

This balanced leadership-partnership model reflects the Quranic ethic of *mawaddah wa rahmah* and aligns with modern Islamic family counselling approaches, which emphasise relational equity, emotional intelligence, and shared responsibility. The findings therefore extend Ibn Sina's leadership philosophy into a relationally dynamic framework compatible with contemporary family needs.

Lawful Income as a Spiritual-Economic Foundation

Ibn Sina emphasised the importance of seeking lawful (*halal*) sustenance to fulfil one's needs in life. He asserted that any occupation undertaken should not contravene the commands of Allah nor involve activities that are prohibited (Ibn Sina, 2007; Idris, 2012). This recommendation is fully consistent with the fundamental principles of Islam, which place strong emphasis on the pursuit of lawful livelihood. Ibn Sina further reminded individuals that every occupation should be carried out with diligence and commitment until one attains a level of competence and expertise in the chosen field (Ibn Sina, 2007; Idris, 2012).

All participants unanimously agreed on the necessity of earning *halal* income as a fundamental requirement for sustaining life and ensuring overall well-being. The data demonstrate that *halal* income is perceived not merely as an economic necessity, but as a spiritual condition for family tranquility. Participants strongly associated illicit income with moral corruption, emotional unrest, and family instability. This empirically substantiates Ibn Sina's insistence that lawful livelihood is inseparable from ethical family survival.

Ethical Financial Management as a Mechanism of Family Resilience

Income derived from lawful (*halal*) sources must be managed prudently. For the head of a family, this matter warrants serious attention, as family well-being largely depends on his efficiency in managing household finances. Ibn Sina advised that a person's income should be allocated into three main categories: (i) expenditure for oneself and one's family (*al-nafaqat*), (ii) expenditure for charitable causes, including almsgiving and *zakat* (*al-sadaqat wa al-zakawat wa arbab al-ma'ruf*), and (iii) savings (*al-dhakhirah*) to be utilised in the future and during times of hardship or calamity.

Ibn Sina further recommended that a portion of one's wealth should be set aside as savings to be used during difficult periods in life. He emphasised that human life is constantly changing and exposed to various uncertainties and unforeseen events. Therefore, the practice of saving was strongly stressed by Ibn Sina to the extent that he asserted that "a rational person should not neglect this matter." According to Zainal Abidin Ahmad (1974), Ibn Sina highlighted the concept of saving, which is often overlooked.

Ibn Sina's tripartite financial framework consisting of sustenance, charity, and savings was strongly mirrored in participants' financial practices. Budgeting, saving, *zakat*, and *infaq* were consistently identified as essential mechanisms for sustaining economic stability and emotional harmony.

This supports contemporary family resilience theory, which recognises financial planning as a core adaptive strategy in long-term household survival (M. Fazilah, 2006; Conger et. al, 1990). The ethical orientation embedded in Ibn Sina's model further distinguishes Islamic financial management as both a moral and pragmatic system of resilience.

Moral Cultivation and Parental Modelling

Since young children are not yet capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, Ibn Sina emphasized the significant role of parents in cultivating noble character within their children. He reminded parents of their responsibility to protect their children from harmful influences. According to Ibn Sina, young children lack the capacity to resist negative influences that may approach them. Therefore, it is the parents who are entrusted with the duty of safeguarding their children from all forms of immoral and harmful influences (Ibn Sina, 2007).

Participants unanimously affirmed that moral education begins at home and is primarily transmitted through parental example. This finding directly corresponds with Ibn Sina's emphasis on early moral formation and parental responsibility in shielding children from corrupt influences.

From the perspective of developmental psychology, parental modelling remains the strongest predictor of children's behavioural development, moral reasoning, and emotional regulation. The present study demonstrates that Ibn Sina's moral pedagogy remains fully compatible with contemporary developmental science, thus bridging classical Islamic ethics and modern behavioural theory.

Reciprocal Responsibilities and Family Equilibrium

Ibn Sina also discussed individuals who hold positions of authority, such as kings, rulers within the state, and leaders at the district level, extending this notion to heads of families who likewise function as leaders within their households. What Ibn Sina sought to emphasise was their status as leaders who bear the responsibility of fulfilling their obligations towards those under their care.

The participants highlighted shared accountability among all family members—parents guiding with compassion and children showing respect and obedience. Ibn Sina's writings describe this relationship as reciprocal love (*mawaddah wa rahmah*), forming the ethical nucleus of a stable household.

The emphasis on shared responsibility among family members reflects Ibn Sina's philosophy of reciprocal rights and obligations. Participants' recognition that family equilibrium collapses when responsibilities are neglected illustrates the practical manifestation of Ibn Sina's ethical governance model at the micro-level of family life.

This reciprocal framework also aligns closely with Islamic jurisprudential principles that define marital and parental rights as divinely anchored, not socially negotiable. The findings therefore reinforce the sacred-ethical character of family responsibility in Islam as both a moral and structural foundation of domestic stability.

Theoretical and Conceptual Implications

The integration of Ibn Sina's framework with contemporary empirical findings suggests that his family development model constitutes a holistic system of spiritual, moral, and socio-economic integration. Unlike fragmented modern approaches that often isolate psychological, legal, or financial domains, Ibn Sina's framework unifies all domains within a single ethical-philosophical architecture.

This study thus contributes a faith-integrated model of family well-being that may serve as a conceptual reference for Islamic family education, counselling psychology, social policy, and community development initiatives in Muslim societies.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Ibn Sina's family development strategies, as articulated in *al-Siyāsah*, retain profound relevance for understanding contemporary Muslim family well-being. Through qualitative thematic analysis of long-term marriages in Terengganu, the findings confirm that the foundational principles of righteous spousal selection, ethical leadership, lawful income, prudent financial management, moral education, and shared responsibility continue to shape resilient and harmonious family structures.

By empirically grounding Ibn Sina's classical philosophy within modern lived experiences, this study advances beyond theoretical exposition and offers a validated, holistic model of Islamic family well-being. The integration

of spiritual, moral, and socio-economic dimensions underscores the uniqueness of Islamic family philosophy as a comprehensive system of human development. The findings offer important implications for Islamic family education curricula, which may incorporate Ibn Sina's framework as a structured pedagogical model and marriage preparation and counselling programmes, particularly in strengthening financial ethics, leadership balance, and moral parenting.

In conclusion, Ibn Sina's family development philosophy transcends its historical setting and continues to offer a timeless ethical blueprint for family resilience in the modern Muslim world. By bridging classical Islamic wisdom with contemporary empirical realities, this study contributes meaningfully to the advancement of Islamic family studies and the broader discourse on faith-based models of human well-being.

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