

Fulfilling Children's Nutritional Rights: An Islamic Family Law Analysis of Indonesia's Free Meal Program

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Abstract

This article examines state responsibility in fulfilling children's nutritional rights through the Free Nutritious Meal Program (Makan Bergizi Gratis/MBG) from the perspective of Islamic family law in Sidenreng Rappang Regency. The study departs from the dual structure of responsibility in meeting children's basic needs: Islamic law assigns primary responsibility for child maintenance (nafkah anak) to parents, particularly the father, while the state is constitutionally and socially obliged to protect public welfare. This research aims to analyse the legal position of the MBG Program within the framework of Islamic family law and to explain the form of synergy between parental obligations and state intervention. The study uses a normative-empirical approach with a descriptive-analytical qualitative design. Normative data were obtained from Islamic legal sources, statutory regulations, and relevant literature, while empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews, field observation, and documentation involving family, school, health, program-management, and local-policy actors. The findings indicate that the MBG Program does not replace parental maintenance obligations; rather, it complements and strengthens family capacity in meeting children's nutritional needs. The program also contributes to children's health, learning readiness, and school participation. The study concludes that the relationship between parental responsibility and state intervention is complementary, not substitutive. This synergy reflects the principles of maqasid al-shari'ah, maslahah, and social solidarity (takaful ijtimai'), thereby positioning public policy as a form of contemporary ijtihad aimed at advancing social welfare.

Keywords: Islamic Family Law; Child Maintenance; Free Nutritious Meal Program; State Responsibility; Social Welfare.

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Introduction

The fulfilment of children's basic needs is a fundamental aspect of family life that has social, legal, and religious dimensions. In Islamic family law, the duty to provide child maintenance is explicitly imposed on parents, particularly the father as the primary provider within the family (Faiz and Khasyi'in 2026). Maintenance is not limited to material needs such as food, clothing, and housing; it also includes care, education, and the physical and psychological welfare of children. This obligation is rooted in the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the Compilation of Islamic Law (Kompilasi Hukum Islam/KHI) applied in Indonesia (Safitri and Ahmad 2024).

Social reality shows, however, that not all families possess adequate economic capacity to fulfil these obligations optimally. Poverty, economic inequality, and other social dynamics place some children in vulnerable conditions, particularly in relation to access to proper nutrition (Awalokita, Hariansah, and Marhayani 2025). In this context, the state bears a constitutional responsibility to guarantee the welfare of its citizens, including children, through social policies. One concrete form of state intervention is the Free Nutritious Meal Program, which seeks to improve children's nutritional quality, especially within the school environment.

The program is important to examine because it brings together private responsibility, represented by parents, and public responsibility, represented by the state. On the one

hand, Islamic law affirms that the obligation to provide child maintenance cannot be transferred entirely to another party. On the other hand, the state, through public policy, seeks to play an active role in ensuring the fulfilment of children's basic needs as part of social protection (Indrajaya 2025). This situation raises conceptual and practical questions concerning the position of state intervention within Islamic family law and the extent to which the program shapes parental understanding of maintenance obligations.

From the perspective of Islamic family law, an ideal family is not only determined by the legal validity of the marriage contract, but also by the physical, mental, and economic preparedness of the parties involved. Such preparedness is essential for ensuring that the family functions properly, including in fulfilling children's basic needs as part of the duty of maintenance. Factors such as economic condition, educational level, and community mindset influence family dynamics, including the practice of early marriage, which may reduce parental readiness to fulfil family responsibilities. Therefore, in a complex social context, synergy between family responsibility and the role of the state through public policy is required to ensure the fulfilment of children's basic rights, including nutrition and overall welfare (Syamsir and Abidin 2022).

Previous studies on maintenance in Islamic family law have tended to focus on normative aspects, such as legal foundations, types of maintenance, and parental

responsibility within the family. Meanwhile, public policy studies have more frequently discussed the effectiveness of government programs in improving social welfare, including social assistance and nutritional intervention programs. Nevertheless, there remains a lack of scholarship that integrates these two perspectives comprehensively, especially through a normative-empirical approach that connects Islamic legal provisions with the realities of policy implementation in the field.

More specifically, studies examining the Free Nutritious Meal Program from the perspective of Islamic family law remain limited, particularly those highlighting the synergistic relationship between parental maintenance obligations and state responsibility. Such integration is important for understanding how Islamic law may respond to modern policy dynamics without neglecting its foundational principles. Accordingly, the research gap addressed in this article lies in the limited integrative analysis between Islamic family law norms and public policy practices in the fulfilment of children's basic needs.

The novelty of this study lies in its simultaneous examination of the normative and empirical dimensions of child maintenance and state intervention through the Free Nutritious Meal Program. This study not only analyses how Islamic law regulates maintenance obligations, but also explores how these principles are implemented and interact with state policy in society, particularly in Sidenreng Rappang Regency.

The research questions are formulated as follows: (1) how is the concept of child maintenance understood from the perspective of Islamic family law; (2) how is the Free Nutritious Meal Program implemented in Sidenreng Rappang Regency; and (3) how do parental maintenance obligations and the role of the state synergise within the program?

This study aims to analyse the concept of maintenance obligations in Islamic family law, examine the empirical implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program, and explain the form of synergy between parental and state responsibility in fulfilling children's basic needs. The study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of Islamic family law scholarship and practically to the formulation of public policies that are more responsive to community needs.

Research Methods

This study employs a normative-empirical approach with a descriptive-analytical qualitative design. The normative approach is used to examine the construction of child maintenance obligations in Islamic family law through the Qur'an, hadith, fiqh, the Compilation of Islamic Law, and national regulations concerning child protection, social welfare, and nutrition policy. The empirical approach is used to understand the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in Sidenreng Rappang Regency, particularly in relation to the perceptions, experiences, and roles of the actors involved in fulfilling children's nutritional needs.

The research was conducted in Sidenreng Rappang Regency because the area is one of the locations where the Free Nutritious Meal Program has been implemented and because it reflects diverse socio-economic family characteristics. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, field observation, and documentation. The study involved ten informants, consisting of two parents or guardians of beneficiaries, five informants from school elements including teachers, supervisors, students, and/or school program coordinators, one program manager or field implementation unit, one health worker or related party, and one local government or policy stakeholder. This composition was designed to obtain balanced perspectives from family actors,

educational units, technical implementers, health personnel, and policy stakeholders.

To maintain research ethics and protect informant confidentiality, the identities of all informants are anonymised using informant codes. The use of codes clarifies the origin of empirical data used in the analysis, especially when interview findings are linked to family maintenance obligations, the role of the state, program benefits, implementation barriers, and inter-actor synergy. The informant codes were arranged according to each informant's category of involvement in the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in Sidenreng Rappang Regency.

Table 1: Informant Code

No.	Code	Category	Informant Position	Data Focus
1	OT-1	Parent/guardian	Guardian of MBG beneficiary student	Perceptions of child maintenance, program benefits, and the economic burden of the family.
2	OT-2	Parent/guardian	Guardian of MBG beneficiary student	Views on the role of the state and the limits of parental obligations in fulfilling children's nutrition.
3	SK-1	School element	Teacher/homeroom teacher	Program impact on students' learning readiness, concentration, and attendance.
4	SK-2	School element	Teacher/supervisor	Student responses, school involvement, and technical constraints in program implementation.
5	SK-3	School element	Beneficiary student	Students' experience of the meals received and their effect on learning activities.
6	SK-4	School element	School activity supervisor/assistant	Assistance, distribution monitoring, and regularity of program implementation.
7	SK-5	School element	School program coordinator	School coordination, beneficiary data collection, and program evaluation.

8	PP-1	Program implementer	Field implementation unit/program manager	Implementation mechanisms, meal distribution, service standards, and field barriers.
9	TK-1	Health personnel	Health worker/related party	Nutritional adequacy, food standards, child health, and implications of nutritional fulfilment.
10	PK-1	Policy stakeholder	Local government/policy stakeholder	Policy basis, cross-institutional coordination, government support, and program sustainability.

The informant composition was selected to obtain balanced data from the various actors involved in program implementation. Family informants were used to understand how maintenance obligations are interpreted at the household level. School informants provided a description of program implementation in educational settings and its influence on students. Meanwhile, informants from program management, health personnel, and local policy stakeholders were used to assess technical aspects, nutritional standards, institutional coordination, and program sustainability. Thus, the empirical data were not derived from a single informant group, but from mutually complementary perspectives.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: first, direct involvement or relevant knowledge of the Free Nutritious Meal Program; second, experience in observing or experiencing the impact of the program on children, families, or schools; third, representation of different social positions in the relationship among family, school, program implementers, and the

state; and fourth, willingness to provide information openly for academic purposes. Individuals without direct involvement or relevant knowledge of the program were excluded as primary data sources to preserve the validity of information.

Data were collected through three techniques. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore informants' understanding of parental maintenance obligations, the role of the state in fulfilling children's nutrition, program benefits, and implementation constraints. Second, field observation was conducted to examine program practices, particularly meal distribution mechanisms, school involvement, student responses, and technical factors affecting program effectiveness. Third, documentation was used to review supporting documents, such as program guidelines, implementation data, school records, activity reports, and other written sources related to child nutrition policy and Islamic family law.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis combined with thematic analysis. The

analytical process consisted of four stages. The first stage involved transcription and comprehensive reading of interview data, observation notes, and supporting documents. The second stage was open coding, namely the assignment of initial codes to informant statements related to child maintenance, parental roles, state involvement, program benefits, implementation constraints, and forms of inter-actor synergy. The third stage was axial coding, in which initial codes were grouped into analytical categories such as 'maintenance as the primary obligation of the family,' 'the state as a complementary actor,' 'nutritional fulfilment as child welfare,' 'program impact on families,' and 'institutional constraints in program implementation.' The fourth stage was selective coding, which identified the main themes explaining the relationship between parental maintenance obligations and state responsibility from the perspective of Islamic family law.

To ensure traceability in the analytical process, interview and observation data were arranged in a coding matrix containing informant codes, key quotations, initial codes, thematic categories, and normative interpretation. The matrix was used to connect empirical findings with the theoretical framework of the study, namely *maqasid al-shari'ah*, *maslahah*, *takaful ijtimai'*, and living law. Through this process, field data were not treated merely as social description, but as living legal practice interacting with state policy.

Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and informant confirmation. Source

triangulation was conducted by comparing information from parents, schools, program implementers, health workers, and local policy stakeholders. Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing interview, observation, and documentation results. Informant confirmation was used to ensure that quoted and interpreted information did not deviate from the principal meaning intended by the informants. These procedures were intended to produce an accountable analysis both as a normative legal study and as empirical research on local social policy practices.

Results and Discussion

Child Maintenance Obligations from the Perspective of Islamic Family Law

Normatively, maintenance is a binding obligation for parents, particularly the father, as affirmed in the Qur'an and hadith. This obligation is not merely moral but also has a strong legal dimension within the Islamic legal system. The Qur'an, for instance, affirms that a father is obliged to provide food and clothing for his wife and children in a proper manner (*bi al-ma'ruf*), indicating that the standard of maintenance must be adjusted to social propriety and economic capacity (Niffilayani 2025). The hadith of the Prophet Muhammad also states that every individual is a leader and will be held accountable for those under his or her care, including parental responsibility toward children (Rahmat 2025). This confirms that maintenance is not only a recommendation but a

duty with ethical and legal consequences.

In fiqh discourse, maintenance is defined as the fulfilment of basic needs, including food (al-tha'am), clothing (al-kiswah), and housing (al-maskan) (Maghfurrohman, Fajariani, and Mujib 2024). These three components constitute the minimum requirements for ensuring a child's survival. However, the development of Islamic legal thought demonstrates that the concept of maintenance is not static; rather, it is dynamic and evolves in accordance with social change and community needs (Jamil and Ludfi 2023). Contemporary scholars have therefore expanded the scope of maintenance to include education, health, and even children's psychological needs as part of essential welfare. In this sense, maintenance is no longer understood narrowly as the fulfilment of physical needs only, but also as an effort to shape children's quality of life and future holistically.

From the perspective of Islamic family law, child maintenance is a fundamental obligation that is not only individual but also social in dimension. Based on the maqasid al-shari'ah approach, fulfilling children's basic needs, including nutrition, forms part of protecting lineage (hifz al-nasl) and realising welfare (Pangestu and Anshor 2026). In modern society, family economic limitations often hinder the optimal fulfilment of children's rights, thereby opening space for state intervention as a form of collective responsibility. This reflects a harmony between Islamic

legal principles and the national legal system. The Compilation of Islamic Law does not merely adopt classical fiqh norms; it also adapts them to the social context of Indonesian society. Consequently, maintenance is not only normative-theological but also formally juridical and enforceable through legal mechanisms. This strengthens the position of maintenance as an obligation with dual legitimacy, religious and state-based.

Within the maqasid al-shari'ah framework, child maintenance is closely related to the protection of the five universal objectives of Islamic law (al-daruriyyat al-khams), particularly hifz al-nafs (protection of life) and hifz al-nasl (protection of lineage) (Kadarisman, Fedro, and Arifin 2025). Basic needs such as nutritious food and health services are part of protecting human life, whereas education and child development relate to the continuity of future generations. According to Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi's thought, every policy or action that seeks to preserve human life and improve generational quality is part of the realisation of maqasid (Kurniawan and Hudafi 2021). Thus, maintenance should not be understood solely as an individual responsibility within the family, but also as part of a broader social system for safeguarding the continuity of human life.

The concept of maintenance is also connected to the principle of social justice in Islam. Proper maintenance reflects the fair distribution of welfare within the family, preventing children from experiencing inequality in the

fulfilment of basic needs. Failure to provide maintenance affects not only individuals but may also generate wider social problems, such as structural poverty and low-quality human resources (Latif 2024).

Nevertheless, under certain conditions, such as economic incapacity, Islam provides room for other parties to participate in fulfilling maintenance obligations, whether through zakat, infaq, charity, or state intervention. In fiqh literature, such circumstances are often linked to the principle of social solidarity, which emphasises collective responsibility to assist vulnerable groups. This corresponds to the concept of *maslahah mursalah*, namely policy adopted for public welfare without contradicting the foundational principles of sharia (Ys and Fu'ad 2025).

In this context, state involvement in fulfilling children's basic needs can be understood as a form of collective responsibility to ensure public welfare. The state performs a complementary role when families are unable to carry out their functions optimally. Therefore, state intervention is not to be understood as the takeover of parental obligations, but as a manifestation of social justice and *maslahah* in Islam.

Implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in Sidenreng Rappang Regency

Empirically, the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in Sidenreng Rappang Regency demonstrates the presence of the state as a significant actor in

ensuring children's nutritional fulfilment, especially among school-age children. The program is implemented through educational institutions as the primary distribution channel, involving various stakeholders such as local government, schools, educators, and community support (Zr 2025). This multi-actor involvement shows that the program is not merely administrative; it reflects a collaborative approach to public policy in which implementation success depends significantly on inter-institutional coordination.

The findings show that the program has a positive impact on improving children's nutritional quality. Children who previously had limited access to nutritious food now receive more adequate and measurable nutritional intake. This condition directly affects physical health, including stronger endurance and reduced risk of malnutrition. These findings are consistent with social welfare theory, which states that state intervention through public policy seeks to reduce social inequality and improve people's quality of life (Oktavianingsih and Helienastuti 2025). Within this framework, the Free Nutritious Meal Program can be categorised as a social protection policy designed to protect vulnerable groups, particularly children, from socio-economic risks that may hinder their growth and development.

From the perspective of public policy theory, the program also reflects a welfare-state approach, in which the state functions not only as a regulator but also as a provider of basic social

services. This indicates a paradigmatic shift from a minimal state toward a more active state in guaranteeing citizens' welfare. In this context, the fulfilment of children's nutritional needs is no longer viewed solely as a private family matter, but also as a public responsibility requiring state intervention.

Field findings further indicate that the program has a significant effect on education. Improved nutritional intake contributes to better classroom concentration and more stable attendance. Children who receive regular food intake tend to be more focused, active, and energetic enough to participate in learning activities. This supports the argument that the fulfilment of basic needs, particularly nutrition, is closely related to the quality of human resources. In other words, intervention in basic health and nutrition can generate long-term effects on educational quality and the productivity of future generations.

From the family perspective, interview findings show that some parents view the Free Nutritious Meal Program as complementary rather than substitutive assistance. The program is not understood as replacing parents' primary obligation to provide maintenance, but as support that reduces the economic burden on families, especially households with limited financial capacity. This awareness shows that social and legal norms concerning maintenance obligations remain intact.

Parents continue to position themselves as the primary responsible parties, while the state

appears as a supporting actor that strengthens family capacity.

Interviews with beneficiary parents reveal that the Free Nutritious Meal Program is not understood as a substitute for family maintenance obligations, but as supportive assistance that eases household economic burdens. OT-1 stated that the program helps children obtain meals more regularly at school, while the primary responsibility for fulfilling children's needs remains with the family (Interview with OT-1, Ulu Ale', 4 May 2026). A similar view was expressed by OT-2, who considered that meal assistance from school enables low-income families to allocate household resources to other needs without eliminating parental obligations to provide maintenance (Interview with OT-2, Watang Pulu, 5 May 2026).

From the perspective of educational units, the program is considered to influence students' learning readiness. SK-1 and SK-2 explained that students tend to be better prepared to participate in learning when their food needs are fulfilled more regularly in the school environment (Interviews with SK-1 and SK-2, Sidrap, 19 May 2026). The statement of SK-3 reinforces this finding because students directly experience the benefits of the program, particularly in the form of satiety, more stable learning energy, and regular eating while at school (Interview with SK-3, Sidrap, 19 May 2026). These findings show that program benefits are not limited to nutrition but are also related to the quality of children's participation in the educational process.

On the technical side, PP-1 emphasised that program success depends heavily on distribution accuracy, coordination with schools, and consistency in service standards (Interview with PP-1, Sidrap, 11 May 2026). TK-1 added that nutritional aspects need to be monitored continuously so that the meals provided are not only available but also meet children's nutritional quality requirements (Interview with TK-1, Sidrap, 6 May 2026). Meanwhile, PK-1 viewed the program as part of state responsibility in strengthening social protection, particularly for children from economically disadvantaged families (Interview with PK-1, Sidrap, 6 May 2026).

Synergy between Parental Obligations and the Role of the State

The analysis demonstrates a synergistic relationship between parental maintenance obligations and state intervention in fulfilling children's basic needs. This relationship is not contradictory but complementary, as each party plays a distinct yet mutually reinforcing role. From the perspective of Islamic family law, the duty of maintenance remains within the private domain of the family, particularly parents. However, under certain social conditions, the state may appear as a supporting actor to ensure the fulfilment of children's basic rights.

In Islamic legal theory, this relationship can be explained through the concept of *takaful ijtima'i*, or social solidarity, which emphasises collective responsibility in social life. The concept means that individual welfare is not solely the

responsibility of the person or family, but also the responsibility of society and the state as an integrated social system (Lutfi 2025). In this context, the state has legitimacy to undertake social intervention when certain groups are unable to fulfil their basic needs independently.

The state functions here as *al-ra'i*, or guardian-ruler, who is obliged to administer and protect the interests of the people. A hadith narrated by Muhammad states that every leader is responsible for those under his authority, providing a normative basis for the role of the state in guaranteeing social welfare (Naddia 2022). Accordingly, state intervention through the Free Nutritious Meal Program can be understood as a concrete form of implementing that responsibility, particularly in guaranteeing children's right to adequate nutrition.

Furthermore, within the *maqasid al-shari'ah* framework, state intervention has strong justification because it is oriented toward public welfare (*al-maslahah al-'ammah*). The Free Nutritious Meal Program directly contributes to protecting children's health (*hifz al-nafs*) through nutritional fulfilment and supports generational continuity (*hifz al-nasl*) through improved growth and development. From this perspective, state policy is not merely an administrative action but part of the effort to realise the central objectives of sharia in social life.

When analysed more deeply, state intervention may also be understood as an implementation of distributive justice in Islam. The state plays a role in distributing

resources to groups in need, thereby creating social balance and reducing economic inequality. Thus, the program affects not only individuals but also overall social stability. It is important to emphasise that the state's role in this context is subsidiary: it complements, rather than replaces, the primary role of the family. This principle of subsidiarity is consistent with the fiqh maxim *al-aslu fi al-nafaqah 'ala al-qarabah*, which affirms that the basic obligation of maintenance rests with the family or closest relatives. Therefore, state intervention should be positioned as temporary or conditional support, particularly when families are unable to fulfil their obligations optimally (Aminah 2023).

A balance between individual responsibility, represented by parents, and collective responsibility, represented by the state, is essential for creating an ideal welfare system. If the state's role becomes too dominant, there is a risk of public dependence on government assistance, which may weaken family responsibility. Conversely, if the state is entirely absent, vulnerable groups may experience injustice in the fulfilment of basic needs.

Integrative Analysis: A Normative-Empirical Perspective

Integratively, this study shows that there is no contradiction between Islamic family law norms and public policy in the form of the Free Nutritious Meal Program. Rather, both stand in a complementary relationship in realising children's welfare as part of the central objectives of Islamic law. The norm of

parental maintenance obligation remains the primary foundation, while state intervention functions as a supporting mechanism to ensure the fulfilment of children's basic rights, especially under certain socio-economic conditions. Therefore, the relationship between the two is not substitutive but synergistic and oriented toward shared welfare (Susilo 2024).

From the perspective of legal theory, this finding reflects the living law approach introduced by Eugen Ehrlich, which emphasises that law should not be understood merely as rigid normative text, but also as social practice that lives and develops within society (Ario, Situngkir, and Situngkir 2025). In this context, Islamic family law demonstrates its adaptive character by responding to social dynamics through the principle of *maslahah*. Legal application, therefore, does not stop at the textual level, but also considers social reality and the evolving needs of society.

The flexibility of Islamic family law in responding to public policy may be understood through the *maqasid al-shari'ah* approach and the principle of *maslahah*. These approaches provide space for policy formulation that may not be explicitly regulated in classical texts but remains consistent with the core objectives of sharia: realising welfare and preventing harm (Zaprul Khan 2020). In this respect, the Free Nutritious Meal Program can be viewed as an implementation of these values because it is oriented toward protecting children's rights and improving the quality of community life.

This finding also reinforces the view that public policy can function as a strategic instrument for realising sharia values in modern life. Through its social policies, the state may become a medium for actualising justice, welfare, and protection for vulnerable groups. In other words, the Free Nutritious Meal Program can be positioned as a form of contemporary *ijtihad*, namely an effort to interpret and apply sharia principles in the present context in order to respond to complex socio-economic challenges.

Sociologically, the integration between religious norms and state policy indicates a harmony between religious value systems and positive law. This is important in the Indonesian context, where law functions not only as a formal rule but also as a reflection of values that live within society.

Conclusion

This study concludes that, normatively, the obligation of child maintenance in Islamic family law remains with parents, particularly the father, as the primary responsibility in fulfilling children's basic needs. However, in a dynamic socio-economic context, the state has legitimacy to participate through public policy to guarantee the fulfilment of children's rights, especially in situations of economic limitation. The Free Nutritious Meal Program in Sidenreng Rappang Regency shows that state intervention can operate synergistically with parental obligations without eliminating the primary role of the family. The program functions as a complementary mechanism that

strengthens family capacity in fulfilling children's nutritional needs while contributing to improvements in children's health and education. Thus, there is no contradiction between Islamic family law norms and public policy; instead, the two relate complementarily within the framework of *maslahah*. Theoretically, the findings affirm that Islamic family law possesses flexibility in responding to social development through *maqasid al-shari'ah* and *maslahah* approaches. Public policy may therefore be positioned as part of contemporary *ijtihad* in realising social welfare. The synergy between parents and the state reflects the principle of collective responsibility (*takaful ijtimai'i*), which constitutes an important foundation in Islamic law. Future research may develop broader inquiries into program sustainability, implementation effectiveness across different regions, and the strengthening of family roles in supporting social policy. Further studies are also needed to examine the integration of other public policies from the perspective of Islamic family law in order to enrich both academic discourse and responsive legal practice.

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