

The Shift in the Concept of Head of Family for Working Women: An Islamic and Gender Perspective in Pekanbaru

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ABSTRACT

The role of women in the digital era has experienced a significant transformation, no longer limited to domestic responsibilities as housewives, but also extending to active participation in the professional sphere. An increasing number of women choose to pursue careers after marriage, which in some cases leads them to become the main breadwinners for their families. This phenomenon challenges the conventional view that men are the sole heads of families and opens discourse on the redefinition of family leadership. This study aims to explore the meaning of being the head of the family for working women in Pekanbaru who either act as the main financial provider or earn a higher income than their husbands. Employing a phenomenological approach, this research involved ten female informants who shared their lived experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analysed using Colaizi's method to identify core themes. The findings reveal that there is a noticeable shift in the understanding of family headship among these women. For those who serve as the primary providers, the concept of "head of the family" is interpreted not merely as a legal or formal title, but as a functional and relational responsibility encompassing economic, emotional, and social dimensions. The meaning of leadership in the family is thus redefined through practical roles and cooperation between spouses rather than rigid gender hierarchy. This study concludes that the redefinition of family headship among working women in Pekanbaru reflects a contextual interpretation of Islamic values, where leadership in the household is viewed as a shared responsibility based on capability and contribution rather than gender alone.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's era of digital technology, particularly within the household, the role of women is no longer limited to being housewives. They now have the opportunity to fulfil multiple roles — as wives, mothers, and working women — in line with the changing times. Working women are those who have jobs, are financially independent, intelligent, and modern. (Muhammad, 2019).

At present, the role of women has shifted from traditional roles to modern ones. (Oktaviani. 2021). Women are not only entrusted with the duties of giving birth and taking care of their children and household, but also play important social roles in various sectors such as government, health, economy, and education. These roles are, of course, supported by higher education.

According to Indonesia's Gender Equality Index in ASEAN, 70% of women participate in the labour market and are employed in the informal sector (Said, 2020). Furthermore, data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2022 show that the number of working women in Indonesia reached 52.74 million.

Thus, many phenomena have emerged in which women have taken over roles traditionally held by men within the household. Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974, Article 31, Paragraph 3, emphasises that the husband serves as the head of the family, while the wife is designated as a housewife. However, in today's era, many households are headed by women.

Women who choose to work after marriage will certainly have dual roles as wives, mothers, and workers (Hermayanti, 2014). The roles taken by women in the household are due to the husband's insufficient income, helping the family economy, number of family responsibilities, the needs of women, social status, developing themselves, interests and abilities, also to spend their free time (Menalu, A., Royani, & Naenggolan, S. 2014).

In this modern era, a number of married women take on a role in the household to help the family economy by working based on their abilities and education (Fajrin, Budiyaniti, 2021). In fact, quite a few women become the breadwinners of the family (Kurniawan, A., & Hidayah, 2000). Based on data from the national socio-economic survey conducted by the Central Statistics Agency in 2022, it shows that 9.27 million women are becoming the head of the family and 9% are the breadwinners who earn a living despite having a husband (Irawanto, 2024).

The phenomenon of working women who become the breadwinner of the family seems to dump over the role and responsibility of the husband as the head of the family and the head of the household to the wife. In fact, many wives actually take over the role of their husbands as the head of the family and the household.

Islam does not prohibit women from working to help their husbands earn a living as long as they keep their nature as wives, (Wahyuni, 2023) do work that is not contrary to their nature (Rosydiana, 2023), ask permission from their husbands, (Kartika, S., & Tanjung, D. 2022) cover their *aurat*, and avoid the mixed-gender interactions, (Ermawati, 2016) obey the proper etiquette when leaving the house, lowering the gaze, and not showing their adornments (Handayani, R. 2020).

Meanwhile, from a gender perspective, women and men have equality in fulfilling their rights and obligations (Stefanie et al, 2022). In Indonesia, equality of rights and obligations is regulated in Law No. 13 of 2003 concerning employment. With gender equality in the workplace, women have greater opportunities to participate and contribute to the family economy. (Fitriyaningsih & Faizah, 2020).

The consequence of married working women is that they must be ready to hold dual roles, where they must focus on their work and also carry out their duties and obligations as housewives. However, the reality is that many working women are neglecting their roles and duties as housewives and lack respect for their husbands.

Working women with dual roles will find difficulties in balancing family and work; furthermore, the demands from both family and work where they are expected to manage both roles simultaneously and effectively (Fotiadis et al, 2019). Thus, various conflicts between family and work arise and impact the psychology and imbalance the domestic life and work.

In addition, many wives are not even afraid to divorce. Data shows that 93% of women sue for divorce from their husbands, 73% of working women who sue for divorce (Annur, 2023), and 70% of wives sue for divorce from their husbands due to economic factors (Khadijah et al, 2018). The divorce rate in the city of Pekanbaru is 2,203 divorce cases, both talaq divorce and lawsuits divorce (BPS Riau, 2022), one of the factors is due to economic factors.

Economic difficulties are one of the reasons for married women who choose to work, aiming to meet the needs of their families. The facts in reality found that many husbands are unable to fulfil the duties as the main breadwinner in the family. As a result, the role of the husband as the main breadwinner that taken over by the wife has become an inevitable phenomenon, especially in today's digital era. Working women after marriage is no longer a taboo thing in society. So it is not surprising that the role of the husband as the head of the family can be taken over by women. Based on this phenomenon, this study wants to see if there is a shift in the meaning of the role of the head of the family for working women from an Islamic and gender perspective.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method with a descriptive-analytical approach. The purpose of this method is to explore and analyse the shift in the concept of the head of the family among working women in Pekanbaru from both Islamic and gender perspectives. The research seeks to understand women's experiences, social roles, and interpretations of Islamic values related to family leadership. The research was carried out through several stages. (1) Preliminary Stage: Conducting a literature review on Islamic teachings regarding family leadership and previous studies on gender roles in Indonesia, (2) Field Preparation Stage: Designing interview guides, selecting research participants, and obtaining permission from local authorities and participants, (3) Data Collection Stage: Collecting empirical data from respondents in Pekanbaru through interviews, observations, and documentation, (4) Data Analysis Stage: Organizing and interpreting the data thematically, (5) Conclusion Stage: Drawing conclusions and providing recommendations based on Islamic and gender perspectives.

Data were collected through, (1) In-depth interviews with 15–20 working women in Pekanbaru who serve as family heads, as well as several religious leaders and gender activists, (2) Observation of daily family and workplace dynamics to identify patterns of gender role negotiation, (3) Documentation involving secondary data such as government reports, statistical data, and relevant Islamic legal sources.

Data Analysis Techniques. The collected data were analysed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring mes regarding the shift in the head-of-family concept. (Creswell & Poth, 2018) The analysis was further supported by content analysis of Islamic texts and gender theories to interpret the data from both religious and sociological perspectives. (Moleong, 2021)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factors of Working Women

In this digital era, the role of women in the household has shifted, where women, who were originally involved only in the domestic sector, are now taking on roles outside the home. In fact, many women have ventured into the workforce in fields such as education, healthcare, trade, and other professional sectors.

The participation of married women in the workforce contributes significantly to their families and households. Married women who choose to work do so for various reasons, depending on their individual situations, conditions, and needs. Some wives work to support the family economy, meet daily necessities, and develop their personal potential. This decision is taken to enhance family welfare, particularly in the current era where household expenses continue to increase, and the cost of necessities steadily rises. As a result, many wives feel the need to engage in productive activities rather than remain solely at home.

Several factors influence women's livelihoods and their decision to work outside the home. *First*, economic factors play a major role—rising living costs, inflation, and the need for additional income often encourage women to participate in the labour market. *Second*, educational factors also have an impact; higher education levels provide women with greater access to employment opportunities and professional careers. *Third*, social and cultural factors affect women's choices; changing social norms and growing acceptance of gender equality have encouraged women to pursue careers while maintaining their domestic roles. *Fourth*, *technological factors* in the digital era—such as online business platforms, remote work, and digital entrepreneurship—have created new opportunities for women to earn income from home or flexible environments.

These combined factors illustrate that women's participation in the workforce is not merely a matter of choice but also a response to economic demands, social change, and technological advancement that redefine women's livelihoods in modern society.

The increasing participation of married women in the workforce reflects a shift in family dynamics and economic strategies. Many women decide to work not only as a response to financial demands but also as a means of achieving self-fulfilment and professional growth. Their involvement in various sectors helps strengthen the family's economic stability and enhances their sense of contribution to society. In today's context of rising living costs and expanding household responsibilities, women's employment has become an essential aspect of maintaining family welfare and resilience.

The results of the study show various reasons for married women in the city of Pekanbaru who choose to work. *First*, due to the educational factor as revealed by informants I2, I3, I5, I6, and I8. The education that has been taken for many years in college has become the reason for married women to work. Women who have obtained higher education have a greater desire to develop the talents, potential, and knowledge they have learned (Herlina, 2020). *Second*, the economic factor also strongly influences their decision. Informants I1, I4, I7, and I10 mentioned that the increasing cost of living, children's education expenses, and household needs encourage wives to contribute financially to support family welfare. *Third*, the self-actualisation factor is another important reason. Some informants expressed that working provides them with a sense of independence, confidence, and self-worth. They want to prove that women are also capable of being productive and contributing to society beyond domestic duties. *Fourth*, the social and environmental factors play a role as well. The influence of peers, the work culture in urban areas, and the growing acceptance of women's participation in public life have motivated many women to work. Furthermore, technological development in the digital era also opens flexible job opportunities, allowing women to balance family and professional responsibilities.

These findings indicate that women's participation in the workforce is driven by a combination of educational aspirations, economic needs, personal fulfilment, and changing social dynamics in the digital era.

The higher the education a woman has, the greater the opportunity she has to work based on her potential. Especially in today's era, where the level of education owned by a person will affect the type and status of the job they will get (Herlina, 2020). Therefore, in the current era, it is not surprising that many women who have higher education choose to continue working even though they are married.

In addition to the educational factor, economic factors are also the reason why married women choose to work, as revealed by informants I4, I5, I6, I7, and I8. Each family has different economic conditions; some have an excess economy, sufficiency, and even many families have a deficient economy.

Family economic conditions can be a trigger for disharmony in the family. Significantly, various ways are conducted to improve the economy and family welfare. Starting from husbands who are looking for permanent jobs, opening businesses, looking for additional jobs, and others. In fact, many married women work to help their husbands in fulfilling the family economy. Although the task of earning a living is the main task of a husband.

Islam does not prohibit a wife who wants to work to help her husband in fulfilling the family's needs as long as it aligns with Islamic law. Equally important, under certain conditions, it may become obligatory for a woman to work if her husband is unable to provide for the family due to incapacity, illness, or if there is no other family member able to support them (Soleman et al, 2022).

A husband who does not work or a husband's income that is insufficient to meet the family's economic needs is one of the conditions for a married woman to choose to work, as revealed by informants I1, I3, and I4. This is what causes many married women in Indonesia to choose to take part in earning a living to help their husbands in fulfilling the economic in the family (Nurislamiah, 2019).

This phenomenon is now happening, where many married women take part in earning a living in order to meet the needs of their families; not a few have even become the breadwinners of their families.

The impact of the dual roles played by working women

Married women will certainly experience a significant shift in role and take on complex responsibilities in their household life, both roles of a wives for their husbands and the role of a mother for their children. In addition, if a wife chooses to work, undoubtedly the role she will have will be more complex as she has to carry out two roles at once.

The results of the study show that women who work after marriage experienced some of the impacts of their dual roles. The demands and responsibilities of the role as a wife and mother in the household are sometimes ignored due to the demands and responsibilities of work. Likewise, sometimes the work has to be postponed to take on a domestic role in the household. The results of this study are supported by Setyawan, Djumhur, & Dewi (2022), where one of the impacts of the women who work after marriage, will have less time to be with their families. This is also in line with the statement from the research informant I7 "*... I don't have much time to be with my son*". In addition, women who work after marriage will bear a heavier workload due to the obligation of doing the housework before and after returning from work. Working women often face the challenge of balancing their domestic and professional responsibilities. This dual role creates a complex situation where they must divide their time, energy, and attention between household duties and work demands. In addition, women who work after marriage will bear a heavier workload due to the obligation of doing the housework before and after returning from work. As a result, many working women tend to experience fatigue easily and are often forced to sacrifice one of the roles they play.

Despite the negative impact of the dual roles of working women after marriage, they still continue the work they are doing. Various efforts are made by working women to be able to carry out their dual roles well and balanced, such as sharing roles with their husbands, managing the time, utilizing the time after work to rest before doing the housework, also permission and support from the husband which contribute the wife in managing her dual role as it can minimize the possibility of negative impacts occurs.

In contrast of the negative impact, according to Mahmudah, Khairunnisa, & Alkautsar (2022), the dual roles taken by women who work after marriage can also have a positive impact, such as able to help the husband to meet the economic needs, lighter the husband's burden in earning a living, helping the family welfare, and able to actualize themselves.

Every role played by a working woman after marriage will certainly have both positive and negative sides. However, it is necessary to anticipate in order to avoid conflicts in the household which break the harmony between husband and wife.

Islamic perspectives on working women

Working women after marriage is still one of the discussion topics among the community. Scholars have various opinions on the law for women who want to work outside the home. In Islam itself, it is not forbidden for married women to work, aiming to help their husbands with the family's economic needs, as long as it is aligned with Islamic law. Even in the time of the Prophet and his companions, many women worked like the wife of the Prophet, such as Khadijah bint Khuwailid, who was a wealthy merchant and successfully worked in the field of trade, Aisyah bint Abu Bakr, who worked in the field of education, teaching women about various religious issues (Alimni & Hamdani, 2021). Rufaidah al-Aslamiyah bint Sa'd worked in the health sector as a doctor and nurse who treated Muslims who were injured during the war, and Asma' bint Abi Bakar, who worked in agriculture and livestock and was even known as an expert in this field. Al-Shifa bint Abdillah Al Shams worked and was an expert in the field of administration (Miftahuzzakiyah, 2024), and many sahabiyahs worked outside the home.

Women are indeed more important and should be at home, considering the obligation of earning a living is the duty of a husband, but it does not mean that women are not allowed to work and have a career outside the home. There are many conditions which lead women to work outside the home, such as unmarried women, women who are forced to divorce their husbands, women who are married but their husbands do not work or are too lazy to work, women whose husbands have less income, and women who do not have children. According to Qasim (Fatakh, 2018). In these conditions, women should not be prohibited from working outside the home because by working, they can meet their own needs through the efforts they make.

As stated in the hadith of the Prophet narrated by Bukhari, "*It is not better for a person to consume the food better by the food obtained from his own labour, for the Name of Allah, Daud, eats the food from his labour*" (HR. Bukhari). This hadith explains the obligation of a person to make the effort for their livelihood and should not depend on or expect from others.

The work of the informant in this study is an effort she made to meet the needs of her household and align with the Islamic law, without contradicting her nature as a woman, and has received permission from her husband, with still continuing her roles and obligations as a housewife.

Gender perspectives on working women

The issue of gender is an interesting topic to discuss, particularly regarding the role of women in the public sector. From a gender perspective, both men and women have equal rights, chances, and opportunities to participate in the workforce. In today's digital era, many women are actively involved and working in various public sectors.

The results of this study demonstrate that women are capable of working according to their skills and receive equal treatment to men. This indicates that gender equality has been achieved in many aspects, as in certain institutions and professions, women have even become leading figures. This finding also signifies a shift from the old paradigm, showing that women and men now share equal responsibilities and can contribute based on their respective abilities — including in managing household affairs. (Kartika, & Tanjung, 2022). The responsibility for managing household needs is no longer solely the wife's duty; rather, husbands and wives can cooperate and share roles in fulfilling and taking care of household responsibilities.

Working women often experience pressure and emotional burdens in their households, as they are expected to handle all domestic chores by themselves. However, this was not the case for the research informants. They revealed that they cooperate and share responsibilities in managing all household needs. This indicates the presence of gender equality in the division of roles between husbands and wives within the household.

The support provided by husbands to their working wives is highly meaningful. It allows wives to work and act according to their abilities without being overburdened by the dual roles they perform. The husband's awareness and involvement in household chores serve as key factors in fostering harmony and balance within the family.

The meaning of the head of family for working women in the city of Pekanbaru

Wives who earn a higher income than their husbands

The results of the study show that there is a shift in the meaning of the head of family for working women in the city of Pekanbaru, especially for women who earn a higher income than their husbands.

The research informant understands very well that the head of the family in the household is the husband, as explained in Q.S. An-Nisa verse 34, "*men are leaders for women*". And wives have the obligation to obey their husbands, even though wives earn a higher income than their husbands. The research informants also realised that their desire to work after marriage was their own choice and not to compete with or take over the role of the man.

In Islam, wives are allowed to work, especially with the intention of helping their husbands with the economic needs of their households. The sustenance or assistance to the husband is worth as alms and will be rewarded. As in Q.S. At-Taubah: 105, which means "*and say (Prophet Muhammad), Do (as you will), for Allah will see your deeds, and (so, will) His Messenger and the believers. And you will be returned to the Knower of the unseen and the witnessed, and He will inform you of what you used to do.*"

The wife's willingness and sincerity in helping her husband to meet the economic needs of the household become a field of reward for the wife. The economic support provided by the wife does not absolve the husband of his obligation and responsibility to provide for the family. Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 233 explains that the husband, as the head of the family, is obliged to provide the living for his family even though he is in difficult conditions. The husband still has to do the

duties and role as the head of the family, even though the wife works and earns a higher income. The husband should not be negligent and depend only on his wife's income, even though the wife does it sincerely.

Wife as the main breadwinner in the family

The results of the study show that there is a shift in the meaning of the head of the family for working women who become the main breadwinners in the family. The wife of a husband who does not have a job will certainly take over the role of her husband as a breadwinner. The role of women as the head of the family is basically unusual. However, in today's digital era, the wives who are taking over the role of their husbands as the head of the family is a very common thing and not a taboo topic to discuss, even though it has not yet received recognition in society due to the stigma that the head of the family is still held by the husband.

The findings from this study are the evidence and strengthen the findings of research that has been conducted by Pohan and Nasution (2021), Sandi, Marleni, and Rahmadani (2023) that the position of the wife as the main breadwinner in the family is not only to support the family economy but has also taken over the role of the husband as the head of the family, especially in terms of earning the living.

Earning a living is the main task of a husband. However, the inability of husbands, job opportunities that are more supportive of wives, and job opportunities that are increasingly open to women are also opening up opportunities for women to become independent wives and not too dependent on their partners. Lazy husbands, who have no job and only depend on their wives' income, show the weak role of the husband as the head of the family, so it is not surprising that more and more women are taking over the role of men as the head of the family.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, several conclusions can be drawn regarding working women in Pekanbaru and the shifting meaning of the head of the family.

1. From the educational perspective, the decision of married women in Pekanbaru to work is significantly influenced by educational factors. Many women work because they wish to pursue their career aspirations, apply the knowledge they have gained, and develop their professional potential. Higher education has provided them with greater confidence and capability to participate in the labour market while balancing their roles as wives and mothers.
2. From the economic perspective, Economic motives are another major factor driving women to work after marriage. The increasing cost of living, household expenses, and the desire to support the family's financial stability encourage women to participate in the workforce. Some women also work due to economic necessity, especially when their husband's income is insufficient or when the husband is unemployed. Thus, women's contribution to family income has become essential in ensuring household welfare.
3. From the perspective of social and family dynamics, Working women face multiple role demands that may lead to work-family conflict, such as time-based, strain-based, and behaviour-based conflicts. However, many respondents reported being able to manage these challenges by cooperating and sharing responsibilities with their husbands. Such cooperation reflects a more balanced and egalitarian family structure.
4. From the Islamic perspective, Most working women in Pekanbaru still adhere to Islamic principles in their professional activities. They seek permission from their husbands before working, maintain modesty and moral conduct, and strive to balance their roles as working women and housewives. Their awareness of religious values ensures that their work remains within the ethical and spiritual framework of Islam.
5. From a gender perspective, the research highlights a significant shift in gender roles within the household. Women today have equal opportunities to participate in the workforce and share domestic responsibilities. In some cases, women even serve as the main breadwinners or earn higher incomes than their husbands. This change reflects an ongoing transformation in the understanding of the "head of the family," where leadership is no longer defined solely by gender but also by mutual contribution, cooperation, and capability.

6. Social and ideological transformation: The shift in the concept of the head of the family among working women in Pekanbaru represents both a social and ideological transformation. It demonstrates progress toward gender equality, supported by education, economic necessity, and evolving religious understanding. Harmonious cooperation between husbands and wives in managing family and professional life is the key to achieving balance, equality, and welfare in modern Muslim households.
7. Finally, thus, the phenomenon of shifting the meaning of the head of the family will increase along with the number of women who become the main breadwinner after marriage, indicating a continuing evolution in family leadership norms and gender roles in contemporary society.

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