

# **The Consequences of Women’s Employment: Social, Psychological and Economic Aspects Between Sharia Guidelines and the Reality of Positivity and Claims of Negativity**

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**Abstract---**Work brings dignity, honour and virtue; it combats boredom and idleness, and prevents excessive talk. It is required of both men and women equally. As social theorists have said, ‘If you want to destroy someone, leave them without work.’ God despises the idle servant because He loves to see His servants proving themselves, being productive and benefiting themselves and their society. He dislikes laziness and neglecting life’s obligations. The era of developments and new demands has brought many new issues and problems to families and communities that were not previously addressed. One of the most important and prominent issues is women’s employment, which has become a hot topic with everyone having their own view on it. Conferences, seminars, lectures and publications have been organised to study this phenomenon, mitigate its risks, regulate it and eliminate its negative aspects. Our research is a small contribution and an attempt to propose some solutions that may be accepted and considered.

**Keywords---**developments, self-assertion, productivity, idleness, social theorists.

## **Introduction**

Praise be to God, who honoured the children of Adam, elevated their status, addressed them, facilitated their affairs, distinguished them and recognised their patience. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, alone with no partner. He created men and women for noble purposes and great goals, giving

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each what they deserve within a comprehensive system of rulings covering all fields: doctrinal, political, economic and social. You will find an appropriate Sharia ruling for almost every issue.

Life is divided into roles for men and women. Men have their duties as fathers, husbands, sons, brothers and relatives. In contrast, Islam clarifies the rights and obligations of women as mothers, wives, daughters, sisters and relatives. This leads to the desired integration necessary for building a strong and sound society and nation.

The family institution enjoys a wide array of general and detailed rulings in Islam, covering all stages of family formation and care. This is because the family is the building block of society: a healthy family leads to a healthy society, while a dysfunctional family leads to societal decay. Women are said to constitute half of society because they are mothers, wives, daughters, sisters and relatives. They nurture, educate, and care for future generations, raising heroes and cultivating leaders, scholars, and advocates. However, numerous problems and issues have emerged for discussion, research, and review in this modern era of civilisations, events, developments, and expanding demands. The contemporary world is filled with various human conflicts and ideological oppositions, with some matters even regressing to the ignorance of ancient times. One of the most prominent of these is the participation of women in the workforce.

**The problem statement is as follows:**

To what extent does women's employment impact and influence family life, causing an imbalance in economic and social life?

**The following questions arise from this problem statement:**

What is the legal status of women's employment and its regulations? What are the most significant negative and positive consequences of women's employment?

This problem statement must be addressed in the following research paper.

**Research Plan:**

Section One: The Ruling on Women's Employment and its Regulations

Subsection One: The ruling on women's employment outside the home

Branch One: Women's employment as a collective obligation (Fard Kifaya).

Branch Two: The ruling on women's employment as forbidden (tahrīm).

Subsection Two: Regulations for women's employment

Branch One: Regulations specific to the woman herself.

Branch Two: Regulations related to others.

Section Two: The negative and positive consequences of women's employment

Subsection One: Negative effects of women's employment

Branch One: The impact of work on the working woman herself.

Branch Two: The impact of women's employment on the family.

Branch Three: The impact of women's employment on society.

\*Subsection Two: Positive Effects of Women's Employment

Branch One: The impact of women's employment on their psychological, physiological and physical well-being.

Branch Two: The impact of women's employment on economic activity.

Branch Three: The impact of women's employment on social activity.

Conclusion

Recommendations

List of Sources and References

**Section One: The Ruling on Women's Employment and its Regulations**

**Subsection 1: The ruling on women's employment outside the home.**

The fundamental principle regarding women's employment is that it is permissible and legitimate. What is permissible for men is also permissible for women, since women are the counterparts of men, unless there is specific evidence to the contrary. Women constitute half of society, and their integrity contributes to the community's strength. Conversely, their corruption leads to its downfall. Throughout history, women have participated in struggles and supported the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) at the beginning of his mission. They provided him with emotional support, stability and wisdom, which contributed significantly to the success of his mission.

Islam grants women the right to work in fields in which they can excel, particularly in areas that align with their nature and instincts. Examples include hospitals, schools for children and girls, nursing homes, and various aspects of cultural, social, economic and political life. All women's activities should serve the public interest without neglecting household duties, child-rearing, marital obligations, or putting themselves at risk of temptation or inappropriate socialising, which could damage their reputation and standing in the community. Women's employment should not result in the neglect of family life, disintegration, or moral decay<sup>1</sup>.

A thoughtful examination of women's employment reveals that there is no single ruling on the matter. Thus, those who advocate outright prohibition or permissibility may be mistaken. It is accurate to say that women's employment can fall under five legal categories: obligation, prohibition, permissibility, disapproval, and recommendation. The specific nature of the work, its appropriateness for women, the conditions of the job and the woman's safety must all be considered. Therefore, the ruling on women's work must reflect this nuanced understanding.

#### **Branch One: Women's Employment as a Collective Obligation**

Some tasks are considered a collective obligation (Fard Kifaya) for society, and the community is sinful if these tasks are not carried out by enough people. For instance, educating women in subjects that benefit their worldly and religious lives, such as midwifery, general medicine and dental care, is considered a collective obligation. Also, any task that can only be performed by women, where men would face hardship, embarrassment or exposure to prohibitions, should be regarded as a collective obligation<sup>2</sup>.

#### **Branch Two: The Ruling on Women's Employment Being Forbidden**

This ruling must be considered in light of the practical circumstances surrounding women's work.

1. Jobs incompatible with women's psychology: These are tasks that societal norms deem inappropriate for women, such as street cleaning, shoe shining, working in cafés or slaughtering animals.
2. Jobs that are unsuitable for women's physical nature: Certain physically demanding and exhausting jobs, such as construction work, are incompatible with women's natural strengths and can cause them harm or danger.
3. Jobs forbidden for both men and women: There are professions that are prohibited for both genders, such as working in drug factories, engaging in the drug trade, carrying out activities that involve interest-based lending, or working in nightclubs that undermine both masculinity and femininity. If there is a strong suspicion that a job is intended to humiliate women or violate their dignity, they should not accept such work.
4. Jobs forbidden for women but not for men: God has assigned certain roles specifically to men for reasons known to Him.
5. These include leading the state, holding high offices, administering justice, calling to prayer (adhan) and leading prayers.

<sup>1</sup>- Wahba al-Zuhayli: *The Muslim Family in the Contemporary World*, Dar al-Fikr, Damascus, 1st ed., 2000, pp. 297-298.

<sup>2</sup>- Murad Suhail Matar Mazid: *Women's Work in the Healthcare Sector: Between Necessity and Harm*, Master's Thesis in Comparative Jurisprudence, Faculty of Sharia and Law, Islamic University, Gaza, 2007, p. 27.

6. Ruling on women's employment in other areas (permissibility): Examples of permissible work include trade, agriculture, textile work, sewing, accounting and administrative tasks. While scholars generally agree on the permissibility of women's work, they differ in their specifics. Some restrict it to cases of necessity, while others allow it freely, provided it adheres to Sharia guidelines<sup>3</sup>.

### **Subsection Two: Regulations for Women's Employment**

The fundamental principle of women's employment is that it is permissible, but with conditions. Once these regulations and requirements have been met, work becomes lawful and acceptable. These regulations are designed to protect women's dignity and value. These regulations include:

#### **Branch One: Regulations Specific to Women Themselves**

1. Awareness of God: Women should be mindful that God is aware of their intentions and records every action, large and small. (As stated in the Quran: 'Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.'<sup>4</sup>)
2. Adherence to hijab: The hijab, mandated by God, is a symbol of modesty, protection and honour. It is an act of obedience to God, as indicated in the Quran: 'O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters, and the women of the believers, to bring their outer garments down over themselves. That is more suitable, for they will be recognised and not abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.'<sup>5</sup>

#### **Branch Two: Regulations Related to Others**

1. Avoiding mixing with men: Women should avoid mingling with men as much as possible, as this can lead to evils, harms and dangers. Such interactions can tarnish their reputation and that of their families, undermining their dignity and respect.
2. Responsibility and accountability: work should not cause women to neglect their primary responsibilities. If a job causes them to lose sight of their duties, which are trusts and obligations, they must reassess their situation before it's too late and opportunities are lost.
3. Suitability of work: Employment should align with a woman's nature, creation and inherent qualities, avoiding roles that may lead to corruption or immorality.
4. Permission: This refers to obtaining permission to leave the house for work from someone who has the right to grant it, such as a husband or guardian.
5. Impact on men's livelihoods: The work that women do should not hinder or obstruct men's ability to earn a living, as this can lead to family disruption, scattered responsibilities and social imbalance<sup>6</sup>.

### **Section Two: The Negative and Positive Consequences of Women's Employment**

Scholars and researchers in Sharia, psychology, sociology and medicine have established that any work or activity an individual engages in leaves various effects and clear imprints on their personality and character, regardless of its nature. These effects can be either positive or negative, impacting the individual, their family, and society. This is what we will discuss in this section.

#### **Subsection One: The Negative Effects of Women's Employment**

The employment of women and their engagement in various professions brings several benefits and positive outcomes for themselves, their families and society at large. We summarise these in the following branches:

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<sup>3</sup>- See: Murad Suhail, Matar Mazid: Women's Work in the Healthcare Sector: Between Necessity and Harm, op. cit., pp. 26, 28.

<sup>4</sup>- Surat al-Zalzalah, verses 7, 8.

<sup>5</sup>- Surat al-Ahzab, verse 59.

<sup>6</sup>- See: Faleh bin Muhammad al-Saghir, Muslim Women and Their Responsibilities in Contemporary Reality, Riyadh, 2nd ed., pp. 136, 137. See also: Hind Mahmoudal-Khawli: Women's Work: Its Controls, Rulings, and Fruits, Master's Thesis, Dar al-Farabi, Damascus, 1st ed. 1, 2001, pp. 127, 185. See: Wahba al-Zuhayli: The Muslim Family in the Contemporary World, op. cit., pp. 298, 999.

### **Branch One: The Impact of Work on the Working Woman Herself**

1. Financial independence: Employment provides women with a monthly salary, allowing them to support themselves and others if no one else can provide for them. This secures their present and future.
2. Pursuit of knowledge: work encourages women to seek knowledge and education, enabling them to interact with individuals from a variety of backgrounds and with different skills. This pursuit enhances their academic and cultural levels, allowing them to contribute to the development and progress of their communities.
3. Broadening horizons: Entering the fields of education and work, especially in areas that align with their nature and capabilities, broadens women's perspectives and aspirations regarding the world around them. This engagement enriches their lives and benefits their families and society by promoting prosperity and growth.
4. Protection from temptation: Engaging in work helps women avoid distractions and prevents them from interfering in matters that do not concern them. This serves as a safeguard against sin and misfortune<sup>7</sup>.

### **Branch Two: The Impact of Women's Employment on the Family**

1. Economic improvement: A woman's employment improves the family's economic situation, as having two incomes is better than having one. This financial support strengthens familial bonds and fosters a spirit of cooperation among family members, helping to maintain family unity.
2. Protection against hardship: In certain circumstances, a woman's employment can protect her and her children from loss, hardship, poverty and begging, particularly in the event of the death, illness or incapacity of the husband. When a woman is left to care for young children who cannot work, her employment ensures their livelihood, preserves their dignity and protects them from shame and corruption.

### **Branch Three: The Impact of Women's Employment on Society**

The increased participation of women in the workforce and their involvement in various fields has a positive impact on society as a whole. This can be observed in the following ways:

1. Filling gaps: Women's employment helps to address deficiencies in society that men alone cannot adequately address, particularly in fields such as healthcare and education.
2. Raising living standards: Women's work improves the living, cultural and economic standards of communities, helping to address the challenges posed by civilisation and development.

### **Subsection Two: The Negative Effects of Women's Employment**

#### **Branch One: The Impact of Work on Women's Psychological, Physiological and Physical Well-Being**

Many researchers and doctors claim that employment can hinder women's well-being and have numerous negative effects on women and society. Considering the physical changes women experience, such as childbirth, pregnancy, pain and illness, it is clear that working outside the home has negative impacts.

For example, the menstrual cycle, which women experience monthly from puberty until menopause, can cause pain and discomfort that reduces their ability to work. Studies have shown that these conditions affect most women, including those suffering from:

- Many women suffer from lower back pain.
- Many experience depression and breathing difficulties, particularly during menstruation.
- Many suffer from migraines and are bedridden close to their periods.
- A significant number of women experience anaemia, losing a lot of blood during menstruation.

These factors can result in a drop in body temperature, a slower heart rate, decreased blood pressure, and dizziness, lethargy and fatigue. It is clear that working requires considerable effort and energy to

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<sup>7</sup>- Muhammad Ali al-Bar: Women's Work in the Balance, DPhil, ND, ND, pp. 55, 63.

fulfil their responsibilities competently. Achieving their goals while facing these natural changes can be challenging and may leave them feeling unwell.

During pregnancy, women often experience nausea and vomiting due to essential nutrients being transferred to the foetus, which can have an adverse effect on the mother. This can lead to psychological disturbances and physical ailments. If their work environment does not consider their psychological state, they may be treated merely as tools for a monthly salary, which can lead to a higher incidence of miscarriage.

Numerous medical reports indicate that physiological changes in working women can gradually diminish their femininity, leading some to label these women as 'masculine' or belonging to a third gender.

### **Branch two: The Impact of Women's Employment on Economic Activity.**

Many researchers and experts have concluded that women entering the workforce has several negative repercussions for the economy:

1. Competition with men: women's employment often leads to competition with men for traditional roles, which can result in unemployment among men. This results in wasted potential and underutilised capabilities, as well as an increase in crime rates, including drug abuse and addiction. Unemployment burdens individuals and becomes an unbearable load for their communities.
2. Reduced prosperity: Women entering the workforce can diminish factors that contribute to prosperity and well-being. This is because it deprives men of job opportunities, limiting their ability to provide for their families. Consequently, men may be denied the basic necessities of life.
3. Transportation congestion: The increased number of women in employment leads to overcrowding on public transport and on roads, resulting in insufficient facilities and delays to services.
4. Post-marriage dilemma: After marriage, women face a dilemma. They can either leave the workforce to become homemakers, which undermines economic development by wasting their skills and training, or they can continue working, which poses risks to the economy. This is due to their need for maternity leave, breastfeeding breaks and other rest periods, which can hinder economic progress.
5. Economic drain: Much of the income earned by working women is spent on transport, childcare and takeaway food, as well as unnecessary luxuries. These expenditures have a negative effect on the economy and overall development.

### **Branch Three: The Impact of Women's Employment on Social Activity**

The greatest victims of women entering the workforce are the family and society. This can be seen through the following points:

1. Disruption of family structure: Women's employment can lead to instability within households, undermining the foundations of family life and eroding the sense of security and peace between spouses. Children may become neglected, and husbands' rights can be overlooked. When a husband returns home exhausted from work, he finds no one to alleviate his burdens. Similarly, wives face their own challenges, leading to a loss of compassion, empathy and cooperation within the family.
2. Loss of family harmony: The atmosphere of affection and support diminishes, and responsibilities become blurred. This environment fosters conflicts and problems that weaken the family unit. The monthly salary earned by the wife pales in comparison to the suffering experienced by neglected children, effectively rendering her employment a cause of loss for others.
3. Neglect of responsibilities: Women's employment can lead to neglect of their responsibilities, resulting in children becoming corrupted. Without proper supervision and guidance, children can lose affection, direction and an education. This loss is irreplaceable and creates an insurmountable imbalance<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup>- Hind Mahmoud al-Kholi: Women's Work, op. cit., pp. 303-304.

## Conclusion

The Muslim family adheres to divine law and Islamic ethics, striving for goodness in this world and the next. It works diligently and tirelessly to coexist with society in a cautious and flexible manner, aiming to achieve happiness in this life and honour in the next. Thus, it finds itself navigating between idealism and realism, and between holistic and partial perspectives, while considering stability and development factors.

From our previous study, we conclude that there are five legal rulings regarding women's employment: obligation, prohibition, dislike, permissibility and recommendation. The specific ruling applied in any given situation is determined by the circumstances, conditions, and social and economic contexts of each community.

## Recommendations:

Based on this modest research, we can derive some recommendations that may serve as guiding principles in practical life, including the following:

Working women should adhere to the rulings of Islamic law in all circumstances, avoiding any laxity in God's commands and respecting His prohibitions.

Efforts should be made to separate men's and women's work environments as much as possible, depending on circumstances. Studies have shown that creating suitable work environments yields better results than mixed environments, which often lead to evident moral corruption.

- The principle of necessity or need for work is the general rule. Women are not required to provide for anyone, whether they are mothers, wives, daughters or sisters. It is the duty of their guardians to support them. However, if a woman is in need, whether financially or emotionally — for example, if she is widowed or her husband's income is insufficient — she may engage in permissible work outside the home. This is because necessities permit prohibitions and needs are regarded as necessities, whether general or specific.

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## Index of Verses:

Surah Al-Ahzab, verse no. 59.

Surah Al-Zalzalah, verses 7–8.