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Complete Family Construction for Working Wives in Indonesia and Australia

Khoiruddin Nasution

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kajijaga, Yogyakarta, and
Universitas Islam Indonesia

Ocktoberrinsyah Ocktoberrinsyah

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kajijaga, Yogyakarta

Syah Muhammad Mousa Alzaki

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kajijaga, Yogyakarta

Email: khoiruddin@uin-suka.ac.id

Abstract: Traditional norms in households often assign domestic roles to wives. However, as more wives enter the workforce, these traditional norms must be restructured to foster family resilience. This article presents field research involving 100 working wives in Indonesia and Australia, supplemented with in-depth interviews and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with 20 working wives and husbands. The collected data were analyzed descriptively using structural-functional theory. The study reveals contrasting dynamics in family responsibilities and the treatment of working wives in Indonesia and Australia. In Indonesia, traditional norms often confine wives to domestic roles, resulting in double burdens and systemic inequality, including domestic violence. In contrast, Australia promotes a more egalitarian approach, supported by strong legal frameworks and a social culture that encourages cooperation in balancing domestic and professional obligations. The study emphasizes that for family balance and stability, both working husbands and wives must respect and collaborate in fulfilling all family roles and functions. These roles should be carried out flexibly, free from rigid gender stereotypes, which is a key to the success of families with working wives. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of legal reforms and cultural shifts in promoting family equality and preventing domestic violence.

Keywords: Complete Family, family resilience, Indonesia, Australian, working wives

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Abstrak: *Norma tradisional dalam rumah tangga sering kali memberikan peran domestik kepada istri. Namun, seiring dengan banyaknya istri memasuki dunia kerja, norma tradisional ini perlu direstrukturisasi untuk menumbuhkan ketahanan keluarga. Artikel ini menyajikan penelitian lapangan yang melibatkan 100 istri pekerja di Indonesia dan Australia, dilengkapi dengan wawancara mendalam dan diskusi kelompok terfokus (FGD) dengan 20 istri dan suami pekerja. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis secara deskriptif menggunakan teori struktural-fungsional. Studi ini menemukan dinamika yang kontras antara tanggung jawab keluarga dan perlakuan terhadap istri pekerja di Indonesia dan Australia. Di Indonesia, norma-norma tradisional sering kali memberikan peran domestik kepada istri, yang menyebabkan beban ganda dan ketidaksetaraan sistemik, termasuk kekerasan dalam rumah tangga. Sebaliknya, Australia mempromosikan pendekatan yang lebih egaliter, dengan kerangka hukum yang kuat dan budaya sosial yang mendorong kerja sama dalam menyeimbangkan kewajiban domestik dan profesional. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa untuk keseimbangan dan stabilitas keluarga, baik suami maupun istri pekerja harus menghormati dan bekerja sama dalam memenuhi semua peran dan fungsi keluarga. Peran dan fungsi tersebut harus dijalankan secara fleksibel, tanpa stereotip gender yang kaku, yang merupakan kunci keberhasilan keluarga istri pekerja. Penelitian ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya reformasi hukum dan perubahan budaya dalam mempromosikan kesetaraan keluarga dan mencegah kekerasan dalam rumah tangga.*

Kata Kunci: *Keluarga lengkap, ketahanan keluarga, Australia, Indonesia, istri pekerja*

Introduction

The division of rights and responsibilities between husband and wife, particularly when the wife is employed, is a complex issue with implications for marital satisfaction and family stability.¹ Generally, the concept of role division in Indonesian families continues to position the husband as the head of the household and primary breadwinner, working in the public sphere, while the wife is seen as the homemaker who stays at home and manages all domestic affairs. Over time, many wives have taken up employment to support the family economy, even assuming the role of co-breadwinner.² In such situations, wives often bear dual responsibilities to maintain family stability. In some cases,

¹ Marianne Bertrand, et.al., "Gender Identity and Relative Income within Households," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 130, no. 2 (2015), p. 571–614. Melissa Ruby Banzhaf, "When It Rains, It Pours: Under What Circumstances Does Job Loss Lead to Divorce," *Southern Economic Journal* 85, no. 2 (2018), p. 349–77.

² Agus Hermanto and Habib Ismail, "Criticism of Feminist Thought on the Rights and Obligations of Husband and Wife from the Perspective of Islamic Family Law," *Journal of Islamic Law* 1, no. 2 (2020), p. 182–99.

husbands have taken over domestic roles from their working wives.³ However, not all families with working wives succeed in maintaining harmony, and some end in divorce.⁴

Previous studies on this topic reveal a transformation from traditional models towards more egalitarian role-sharing, though the dynamics vary depending on cultural and social contexts. Normatively, several scholars argue that Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) does not explicitly prohibit women from working or mandate that wives must obtain their husband's permission to work.⁵ Instead, husbands are obligated to support their wives financially and have no claim over their wives' earnings without explicit consent.⁶ With the increasing participation of wives in the workforce, dual-income roles have become more common, necessitating renegotiation of household and childcare responsibilities.⁷ Even when both spouses work, wives often spend more time on household tasks, which can affect marital satisfaction. This satisfaction often correlates with perceptions of fairness in task division and the husband's involvement in domestic work.⁸ In some cultures, traditional gender norms continue to influence marital dynamics, where dissatisfaction arises if the wife earns a higher income.⁹ Conversely, couples with egalitarian perspectives tend to adopt shared roles, balancing paid and unpaid tasks more equitably.¹⁰ In households where both partners work,

³ M.A.E. Martín Padilla and N.S. Echavarría de Uribe, "Narratives on Family Prization during Male Unemployment," *Interdisciplinaria* 34, no. 2 (2017), p. 275–94.

⁴ Lynn Prince Cooke. et. al., "Labor and Love: Wives' Employment and Divorce Risk in Its Socio-Political Context," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 20, no. 4 (2013), p. 482–509. Thomas K. Kelemen, et. al., "Understanding the Relationships Between Divorce and Work: A Conceptual Framework and Research Agenda," *Journal of Management* 51, no. 1 (2025), p. 427–63.

⁵ B. Syafuri, "Nafkah Wanita Karier dalam Pespektif Fikih Klasik," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 13, no. 2 (2013), p. 201–8.

⁶ Jihad Hasan Salama and Muhammad Karrat, "Husband's Rights on the Working Wife's Income (An Economic Study in Islam)," in *Contemporary Business Research in the Islamic World*, ed. John Fraedrich et al. (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2024), p. 257–76.

⁷ Sharon J. Bartley, Priscilla W. Blanton, and Jennifer L. Gilliard, "Husbands and Wives in Dual-Earner Marriages: Decision-Making, Gender Role Attitudes, Division of Household Labor, and Equity," *Marriage & Family Review* 37, no. 4 (2005), p. 69–94. Matthew W. Carlson and Jason D. Hans, "Maximizing Benefits and Minimizing Impacts: Dual-Earner Couples' Perceived Division of Household Labor Decision-Making Process," *Journal of Family Studies* 26, no. 2 (2020), p. 208–25. Karel Karsten Himawan, et.al., "Negotiating Indonesian Married Women's Agency in a Career: Work from Home Arrangement as a Possible Solution," *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Organizational Studies* 16, no. 2 (2021), p. 15–22.

⁸ Sayaka Kawamura and Susan L. Brown, "Mattering and Wives' Perceived Fairness of the Division of Household Labor," *Social Science Research* 39, no. 6 (2010), p. 976–86.

⁹ Yunsi Chen and Dezhuang Hu, "Gender Norms and Marriage Satisfaction: Evidence from China," *China Economic Review* 68 (August 2021), p. 101627.

¹⁰ Fatemeh Torabi, "Life-Course Variations in Spouses' Division of Roles in Urban Areas of the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 57, no. 5 (2022), p.

Elizabeth Kiewisch's research highlights that male income is often allocated to personal expenditures, raising challenges for families in achieving economic resilience.¹¹

Based on these social realities and existing literature, this article seeks to explore the ideal family structure for working women to maintain their family's stability and achieve a happy (*sakinah*) household. Therefore, this research employs fieldwork methods, including survey data from 100 working wives in Indonesia and Australia. Based on the survey results, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 20 key informants. In addition to interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in Pekanbaru, Indonesia, and in Melbourne and Sydney, Australia. The in-depth interviews and FGDs involved eight working wives in Indonesia, seven working wives in Australia, four working husbands, and a professor from Australia who had successfully maintained family harmony. Most of the working wives living in Sydney were Indonesian nationals, with many married to Australian citizens, while the working wives living in Melbourne were Australian nationals, including Turkish-origin couples who had lived in Australia for a long time. The data collected were analyzed interactively using structural-functional theory.

Experiences of Working Wives in Indonesia: Inequality in Responsibilities and Domestic Violence

In terms of the economic role as a provider within the family, approximately 72% of working wives reported that their husbands did not contribute sufficient income. In some cases, husbands provided no financial support at all, despite having a steady income. For instance, PP shared,¹² "My husband never provides a decent living for me even though he has a job and steady income. He solely relies on me as the backbone of the household economy." Similarly, AD stated,¹³ "My husband does not provide for me properly. Even with a stable job and income, he depends entirely on me to sustain the family financially." YT echoed this sentiment:¹⁴ "Husbands often fail

982–96. Minako Sakai and Amelia Fauzia, "Performing Muslim Womanhood: Muslim Business Women Moderating Islamic Practices in Contemporary Indonesia," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 27, no. 3 (2016), p. 229–49.

¹¹ Elizabeth Kiewisch, "Looking within the Household: A Study on Gender, Food Security, and Resilience in Cocoa-Growing Communities," *Gender & Development* 23, no. 3 (2015), p. 497–513. Tri Wahyu Hidayati, et.al., "Dynamics of Family Fiqh: The Multiple Roles of Women in Realizing Family Resilience," *Ijtihad: Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam dan Kemanusiaan* 22, no. 2 (2022), p. 219–38. Filda Rahma Saidah and Muhammad Zaki Fahmi, "Management of Long-Distance Marriage for Overseas Female Worker Profession on Family Resilience in Kendal Regency," *El-Mashlahah* 13, no. 1 (2023), p. 93–106.

¹² Interview with PP, May 4, 2022.

¹³ Interview with AD, May 2, 2022.

¹⁴ Interview with YT, April 20, 2022.

to provide for their wives despite having a steady income. They even neglect to contribute to their children's educational needs."

MM recounted her experience:¹⁵ "My ex-husband stopped allowing me to work in 2015. He felt it was unimportant to provide for me as his wife, forcing me to become the breadwinner. Ironically, he didn't want me to work without valid reasons, yet he also didn't have a steady job or the motivation to find one. Consequently, he couldn't provide for me or the children." EY added,¹⁶ "My husband does not provide adequately. Sometimes, he gives money, but only when asked." Similarly, YA stated:¹⁷ "My husband never provides sufficiently for the family because he lacks a steady job and income. Even when he had a business funded with capital, he mismanaged it, leading to continual losses." DI shared,¹⁸ "Although my husband has a stable job, he provides sporadically, offering money at his convenience in terms of both amount and timing."

The data indicate that husbands of working wives often neglect their responsibilities to contribute to the family's finances. This behavior seems to stem from the belief that the wife's income is sufficient to meet the family's needs, absolving the husband of his financial responsibilities.¹⁹ Based on this data, three typologies of husbands with working wives can be identified. First, husbands with income who stop contributing financially, arguing that the wife's earnings are sufficient. Second, husbands without a job who are unable to provide for the family. Third, husbands who oppose their wives working to earn a living but lack the financial means to support the family, leaving their wives with no choice but to work. These typologies demonstrate that the primary reason some husbands neglect their financial obligations is the belief that the wife's income adequately supports the household.²⁰

Regarding the division of labor, around 54% of respondents reported that their husbands allowed them to manage all household chores without assistance, viewing these tasks as the wife's sole responsibility. YT explained,²¹ "My husband only helps when I'm sick. Otherwise, household chores are considered the wife's obligation. For him, men doing housework is 'taboo' because it's not a man's job." DA shared a similar experience:²² "My husband

¹⁵ Interview with MM, April 25, 2022.

¹⁶ Interview with EY, April 20, 2022.

¹⁷ Interview with YA April 25, 2022.

¹⁸ Interview with DI, April 25, 2022.

¹⁹ Jing Zhou and Tianhua Xiao, "Analyzing Determinants of Household Financial Decision-Making: Household Stock Investment in China," *Emerging Markets Finance and Trade* 54, no. 15 (2018), p. 3385–3400.

²⁰ Marianna Brunetti, et.al., "Who Holds the Purse Strings within the Household? The Determinants of Intra-Family Decision Making," *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 101 (2014), p. 65–86.

²¹ Interview with YT, April 20, 2022.

²² Interview with DA April 20, 2022.

doesn't help with household matters at all. He says his parents never allowed boys to do chores, as his father was always served by his mother. He believes that a wife who asks her husband to help with household work is not fulfilling her role as a proper wife." MA's husband reportedly said,²³ "I allow you to work, but don't neglect the household chores. If you complain later, just stay at home." This reflects the notion that housework is not a man's responsibility. Consequently, working wives are expected to handle dual responsibilities—balancing their jobs and household duties. Moreover, husbands often stop contributing financially, leaving the wife entirely responsible for both earning a living and managing the household, even if the husband has an income.

In terms of work permits, it remains customary in Indonesia for a wife to seek her husband's permission before working.²⁴ This requirement stems from the husband's perceived role as the head of the household. In some cases, this dynamic contributes to domestic violence.²⁵ MA's husband stated,²⁶ "I allow you to work, but household chores must remain your responsibility. If you can't manage both, stay home." This underscores that permission to work is conditional on the wife maintaining her household responsibilities.

Domestic violence persists among working wives, taking both physical and psychological forms. Nearly 60% of working women reported experiencing such violence. Physical violence ranged from slapping, punching, and kicking to more severe actions like strangulation, being scalded with hot liquids, or being struck with objects. Psychological violence included verbal abuse, humiliation, neglect, and abandonment, such as a husband prioritizing personal leisure over family responsibilities. For example, AD recounted,²⁷ "My husband poured hot coffee on my face out of anger after I accidentally spilled some on him. He grabbed the cup and threw the remaining coffee at me, narrowly missing my face. Later, he hurled an ashtray at me in front of the children." Similarly, EY

²³ Interview with MA April 25, 2022.

²⁴ L. Cameron, "Gender Equality and Development: Indonesia in a Global Context," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 59, no. 2 (2023), p. 179–207. Sakai and Fauzia, "Performing Muslim Womanhood," 229–49.

²⁵ Dedisyah Putra and Nuriza Acela, "Human Rights Protection in the Islamic Family Law: A Case Study Concerning Domestic Violences," *El-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 6, no. 1 (2023), p. 1–16. Kutbuddin Aibak, "Implementation of Maqāsid Shari'ah in Reform of Case Management of Violence against Women and Children," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum dan Syar'iah* 15, no. 1 (2023), p. 82–98. Hasanudin Hasanudin, et. al., "Phenomena of Domestic Violence Against Women and Divorce in 2020-2022 in Indonesia: An Islamic Perspective," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam*, (2023), p. 137–52. Triannah Sofiani, et.al., "Violence Against Women in Pre-Marital Relationships: The Ngemblok Tradition among the Muslim Community in Rembang," *Journal of Islamic Law* 5, no. 2 (2024), p. 147–69.

²⁶ Interview with MA, April 25, 2022.

²⁷ Interview with AD, May 2, 2022.

shared,²⁸ “My husband is temperamental and emotionally abusive. He often uses harsh language, lies to me, and is secretive. He cares only about himself, neglecting me and the children.” MA added,²⁹ “My husband frequently insults me, scolds me regardless of the situation, and forces himself on me even when I’m exhausted after work.”

Domestic violence is often justified under the notion of the husband’s authority as the household leader. In some cases, husbands use the concept of *nusyūz* (disobedience) to legitimize physical abuse. Approximately 30% of respondents reported that their husbands had extramarital affairs, including secret marriages (*sirri*) without the wife’s knowledge. DI shared:³⁰ “I was devastated when I discovered my husband was secretly married and even had a child with his other wife. He acted as though nothing was wrong, coming home every day as usual. I only found out by chance while checking his phone during a family trip.” Another respondent, MM’s mother, said:³¹ “My husband has cheated on me multiple times. Infidelity seems to run in his family, as all five of his brothers also cheat. Every time he’s caught, he apologizes and promises to change, but it’s always the same. I stay with him for the children’s sake and because I fear becoming a widow.” These cases highlight that even when wives contribute financially to the household, some husbands fail to honor their commitments or show gratitude. Moreover, many women remain in such marriages out of fear of divorce³² and societal stigma, despite enduring infidelity and abuse.

Experiences of Working Wives in Australia: Equality in Rights and Flexibility in Household Responsibilities

Regarding responsibilities for providing for the family and the division of labor between husbands and wives, Australian families generally do not separate the roles of breadwinner and homemaker.³³ Both husband and wife share the economic responsibilities and household duties. Tasks are divided

²⁸ Interview with MY, April 20, 2022.

²⁹ Interview with MA April 25, 2022.

³⁰ Interview with DI, April 25, 2022.

³¹ Interview with MM, April 25, 2022.

³² Syukrawati Syukrawati et al., “Post-Divorce Rights of Women and Children in Pekalongan City, Central Java: Challenges in Islamic Law Analysis,” *Al-Ahkam* 34, no. 1 (2024), p. 121–46.

³³ B. van Wanrooy, “Couple Strategies: Negotiating Working Time over the Life Course,” *Life Course Research and Social Policies* 1 (2013), p. 175–90. Heejung Chung and Cara Booker, “Flexible Working and the Division of Housework and Childcare: Examining Divisions across Arrangement and Occupational Lines,” *Work, Employment and Society* 37, no. 1 (2023), p. 236–56.

flexibly based on the couple's living arrangements and circumstances.³⁴ Additionally, all income earned by both spouses is used collectively for family life. This conclusion is supported by statements from informants. For instance, A noted:³⁵ "I think it depends on each individual. In my case, my husband spoils me. He goes to work, but he also makes coffee for me early in the morning. At home, he sometimes sweeps at night, and sometimes he just tells me to rest. It's different for everyone."

Another informant, B, emphasized the importance of setting an example of mutual cooperation in front of their children. She explained:³⁶ "Indonesian women serve men, but here, men serve women too. I've taught my children, including my sons, to do all kinds of housework. In our household, there is no distinction between boys' and girls' responsibilities. From a young age, we've instilled this balanced approach to gender roles. I tell my children, 'There are no helpers here—everyone helps each other so that they grow up to be independent, regardless of gender.'" Similarly, Ms. D explained:³⁷ "Family life here is built on mutual understanding and cooperation between husband and wife to create a happy family. My husband always spends quality time with me and the children. During holidays, we vacation together as a family. Spending time together is a habit here, and most families prioritize this."

When asked about financial arrangements, M and her husband B shared:³⁸ "We work and earn money together for the family. My husband sometimes works in Doha for months, where the salary is higher than in Australia. But everything he earns is for the family, including the children's needs." M added:³⁹ "We do all the housework together, without a specific division of tasks. Both of us work and leave for the office early in the morning, returning together in the afternoon. Before and after work, we share the responsibilities, from preparing breakfast to managing household chores." M recounted a particular instance:⁴⁰ "Last year, I returned to Turkey because my parents were ill. During that time, my husband managed everything at home—preparing breakfast, handling the children's needs, dropping them off and picking them up from school, and even cooking dinner. For us, this is normal; there are no tasks specifically designated for men or women. We share everything."

³⁴ B. Pocock, et.al., "Work-Family and Work-Life Pressures in Australia: Advancing Gender Equality in 'Good Times'?" *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 33, no. 9–10 (2013), p. 594–612.

³⁵ Focus Group Discussion and Interview, (Sydney, March 8, 2023).

³⁶ Focus Group Discussion and Interview, (Sydney, March 8, 2023).

³⁷ Focus Group Discussion and Interview, (Sydney, March 8, 2023).

³⁸ Focus Group Discussion and Interview, (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).

³⁹ Focus Group Discussion and Interview, (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).

⁴⁰ Focus Group Discussion and Interview, (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).

Another informant, R, a musician and music teacher, confirmed the cooperative nature of her household:⁴¹ “We’ve never had any issues with the division of labor. It’s all done together based on our situation. Sometimes I cook, other times my husband does. I might wash the clothes one day, and he does it another day. The same applies to other chores like washing dishes or cleaning the house.” She continued: “I teach music in schools during the day and privately at night. My husband also works odd hours. Sometimes, we have dinner separately because of our schedules, but we are used to sharing all tasks.” When asked about the division between domestic and public work, many respondents shared similar sentiments. For example, one informant explained:⁴² “We no longer distinguish between housework and outside work. My husband and I share everything—cooking, cleaning, and even managing administrative tasks like renewing vehicle papers. When my husband works abroad, I handle everything at home, and when he’s home, we split the responsibilities.”

In Australia, obtaining a husband’s permission to work is no longer a social or legal expectation.⁴³ Working is seen as an inherent right for both men and women, protected by state law. One informant commented:⁴⁴ “We worked before we were married, and we’ve never thought about needing permission to work. It’s absurd to imagine that a husband could deny his wife the right to work. In Australia, work is a right guaranteed by law, and no one, including a spouse, can hinder it.” Mrs. N echoed this perspective:⁴⁵ “For women in Australia, working is no longer an option contingent on their husband’s permission. It is strange for a husband to even consider denying his wife the right to work. Employment is a basic right for everyone.” Another informant, R, added:⁴⁶ “We’ve been working together since before marriage, and we never think about permission. Working is a necessity here, not just for earning money but also for self-actualization.”

One informant mentioned that working in Australia is not only a right guaranteed by the state but also a necessity. She added that living in Australia without work could lead to mental distress. “If you don’t work and just stay at home, there is no place to socialize, and you end up living in solitude. At work, you can interact and engage with others,” she explained.⁴⁷ This informant, C, is an Indonesian woman who has lived in Australia for 15 years. She elaborated,

⁴¹ Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).

⁴² Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).

⁴³ Anna Chapman, “The Continuing Resonance of Breadwinner Norms: The Australian Labour Law Experience,” *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations* 34, no. 4 (2018), p. 351–72.

⁴⁴ Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).

⁴⁵ Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Sydney, March 8, 2023).

⁴⁶ Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Sydney, March 8, 2023).

⁴⁷ Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).

“For women in Australia, working is no longer a matter of whether it is permissible; it is a necessity. Unlike in Indonesia, where neighbors often chat, in Australia, there is little communication with neighbors. So, if we stay at home all day and night without work, we can become stressed or even go crazy. Therefore, working is essential for women in Australia.”⁴⁸ She expressed surprise at the notion that women still need their husbands’ permission to work outside the home, adding, “Here, we no longer think about needing permission from our husbands to work. Australian state law guarantees work as a right for both men and women, so no one should forbid us from working.” R and P shared similar views:⁴⁹ “In Australia, husbands and wives complement and support each other. Women work to contribute to the family’s needs. Given the high cost of living, both husband and wife are responsible for the family’s economy. Women’s work is a need and a right that does not require the husband’s permission. Household responsibilities are shared by both partners. Though in some families, when an urgent situation arises with a child, women often have to give in, but it’s not a strict requirement. It’s more of a maternal instinct since young children tend to be closer to their mothers.”

When asked about the possibility of a husband committing violence against his wife, an Australian informant was perplexed and asked how such a thing could happen. “Husband and wife are partners who love and protect each other,” she said. M, in her response to husbands who commit violence, questioned, “How could a husband abuse his wife? If a husband does abuse his wife, it may be due to alcohol or drunkenness. We love each other. I truly love my husband, and he loves me deeply. We care for each other’s needs.”⁵⁰ R expressed a similar sentiment, saying,⁵¹ “Why would a husband commit violence against his wife? We love each other. I love my husband, and he loves me. We care for each other’s well-being. In Australia, domestic violence is rare, whether perpetrated by the wife or the husband.” Mrs. W shared her experience: “My husband treats me very well. We are partners in everything, even preparing breakfast together. He wakes me up and tells me breakfast is ready. In our household, all family members, both men and women, share the household chores. We teach our children the same values.” In contrast, Khalid expressed disappointment with Australian laws, which he believed favor women. “Australia is biased toward women,” he said, adding, “Based on my experience, after I divorced my wife, all my assets were transferred to her and my children as part of the divorce settlement.” Khalid, a Minang man who has lived in Australia for decades, appeared to be protesting against what he perceived as

⁴⁸ Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).

⁴⁹ Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).

⁵⁰ Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).

⁵¹ Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).

discriminatory laws.

According to AS, a lecturer at the University of Melbourne, the notion of requiring a husband's permission for his wife to work is no longer relevant in Australia. He noted that the division of labor based on gender between husbands and wives has essentially disappeared. Both partners share household duties, and instances of domestic violence are rare. If such violence does occur, it can be reported to the police. He explained, "While some Muslim communities in Australia still hold conventional views about the relationship between husband and wife, where wives need permission to work, outside these groups, Australians no longer require a husband's permission for a wife to work outside the home. Similarly, the distinction between domestic and external tasks, and the traditional gender roles associated with them, no longer exist. Husbands and wives now share all tasks related to family life, both domestic and external, according to their circumstances." Regarding domestic violence, Professor Saeed added, "In Australia, this is no longer an issue because of the laws in place. If a husband commits violence against his wife, he can be reported to the authorities."⁵²

Complete Family Construction for Working Wives

In Indonesia, the belief that a husband's permission is required for a wife to work can foster discrimination. In many cases, husbands grant permission only under the condition that the wife completes all household duties before being allowed to work outside the home. This situation places a dual burden on women.⁵³ Some husbands permit their wives to work from home and earn a full salary to support the household, effectively shifting the financial responsibility entirely onto the wife. Others allow their wives to work outside the home, but only with the understanding that this would not have been possible without the husband's permission. The phrase "must know yourself" is often used, which carries implications that reinforce the wife's subordination. Contrary to these perspectives, there is no explicit argument in the Qur'an or the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad requiring a husband's permission for a wife to work. Scholars like Syafuri have noted that neither Islamic scripture nor jurisprudence prohibits men or women from working, nor do they firmly mandate that a wife must seek her husband's approval to pursue a career.⁵⁴

⁵² Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).

⁵³X. Liu and S. Dyer, "Revisiting Radical Feminism: Partnered Dual-Earner Mothers' Place Still in the Home?," *Women's Studies International Forum* 47, no. PA (2014), p. 1–10. Muhammad Shakil Ahmad, et.al., "Working Women Work-Life Conflict: A Case Study of Banking Sector in Pakistan," *World Applied Sciences Journal* 13, no. 3 (2011), p. 623–31.

⁵⁴ Syafuri, "Nafkah Wanita Karier dalam Perspektif Fikih Klasik," 201–8. Wahyu Akbar et al., "Reposition of Ihdad Women's Multi-Career Perspective: Philosophical, Historical, Juridical, and Sociological Studies," *El-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 7, no. 1 (2024), p. 372–

In Australia, two main conclusions can be drawn regarding breadwinning and women's work. First, legally, working is a right guaranteed by the state for all individuals, including women, which eliminates the need for a wife to obtain her husband's permission. Second, socially, work is viewed as a necessity, not merely a right or obligation. Muslim families in Australia benefit from laws that promote equality in domestic life, where discrimination between husband and wife is minimal. These laws, which uphold the right to work for both men and women, serve as a mechanism to prevent gender-based discrimination. This legal framework has three significant implications. First, it establishes the wife's right to work alongside her husband, creating equality in professional contributions. Second, it allows wives to work without being dependent on their husbands for approval. Third, it reduces instances of domestic violence, as laws clearly protect wives and punish abusive husbands.

For Australian Muslims, breadwinning has become a collaborative effort between husband and wife to meet family needs. Both spouses consciously contribute to household income. In contrast, among Indonesian Muslims, even when financial realities demand cooperation, there is still a tendency to assign full responsibility for family maintenance to either the husband or the wife. Research by Shoviana and Zahrotun in Tempur Village, Keling District, Jepara Regency, illustrates this point. Their findings show that, in many Indonesian families, effective cooperation between husband and wife is essential for economic stability.⁵⁵ While this example is localized, it reflects a broader reality: the majority of Indonesian households would benefit from stronger spousal cooperation in managing family finances.

Domestic violence is a significant issue in Indonesia.⁵⁶ Despite laws prohibiting violence, weak legal awareness hinders their enforcement. Wives who experience violence often refrain from reporting these incidents to authorities due to cultural norms or fear of retaliation. Research suggests that this traditional behavior must change, and victims of domestic violence should

89. Norcahyono Norcahyono and Muhammad Arni, "Strategies of Career Women at Islamic Universities in Kalimantan in Carrying Out Household Obligations from the Perspective of Maqashid as-Syari'ah," *Syariah: Jurnal Hukum dan Pemikiran* 21, no. 1 (2021), p. 88–102.

⁵⁵ Luluk Shoviana and Zahrotun Navish Abdillah, "Peran Wanita sebagai Pencari Nafkah Keluarga dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam," *Islamic Review: Jurnal Riset dan Kajian Keislaman* 8, no. 1 (2019), p. 86–109. The focus of the research is not to show the need for husband-and-wife cooperation to be able to support the family properly, but to review Islamic law, whether the wife can work as a worker. The normative answer may be in order to meet the needs of the family.

⁵⁶ Mulida Hayati and Nuraliah Ali, "Husband's Sexual Violence: Protection Rights for Wives in Terms of Islamic and Indonesian State Law," *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 21, no. 1 (2021), p. 65–81. Fajri M Kasim, et.al., "The Protection of Women and Children Post-Divorce in Sharia Courts in Aceh: A Sociological Perspective," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 22, No. 2 (2022).

report incidents to law enforcement.⁵⁷ Legal action against abusive husbands can act as a deterrent and promote the effectiveness of anti-violence laws.⁵⁸ Economic violence is also prevalent, particularly among wives whose husbands practice polygamy.⁵⁹ Nina Nurmila's research highlights the financial strain on wives in polygamous households.⁶⁰ Before polygamy, husbands often fully supported their wives. However, after taking additional wives, financial support for the first wife often diminishes, forcing her to work to meet her needs, despite lacking prior experience or training to enter the workforce. In contrast, domestic violence is rare in Australia, where robust laws and a supportive legal culture prevent such incidents. Laws explicitly prohibit violence, including domestic abuse, and violations are met with swift and decisive action by authorities. The effectiveness of these laws is further reinforced by the general public's awareness and commitment to upholding them. Domestic violence is no longer considered a private family matter but an immoral act that society condemns.

The structural-functional analysis shows that Australian Muslim families have successfully developed a cooperative model of income generation and household management. The shared responsibility between husband and wife fosters mutual love and respect, reducing the likelihood of domestic violence. This cooperation can be attributed to the effectiveness of Australia's legal system, which combines robust enforcement with a strong legal culture. In Indonesia, the legal framework (substantive law) supports joint spousal responsibility, but weak enforcement and limited public awareness hinder its effectiveness. Religious interpretations often perpetuate traditional roles, assigning financial responsibility solely to the husband and domestic duties exclusively to the wife. When husbands fail to fulfill their financial obligations, it sometimes leads to domestic violence, especially when wives demand sufficient family income. Religious interpretations in Indonesia also justify

⁵⁷ Khoiruddin Nasution, "Menghapus Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga dengan Kajian Normatif-Yuridis: Analisis Interdisipliner dengan Pembedaan Nash Objektif dan Temporal," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 17, no. 1 (2018), p. 35. Agung Budi Santoso, "Kekerasan Dalam Rumah Tangga (KDRT) terhadap Perempuan: Perspektif Pekerjaan Sosial," *KOMUNITAS* 10 (2019), p. 39-57.

⁵⁸ Khoiruddin Nasution, "Implementation of CEDAW in Indonesian Marriage Laws," in *International Law between Translation and Pluralism: Examples from Germany, Palestine and Indonesia*, ed. Noorhaidi Hasan and Irene Schneider, Studies on Islamic Cultural and Intellectual History 4, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2022), p. 117-28.

⁵⁹ The correct term for a husband who has more than one wife is polygyny. However, this term is not popular, so the term polygamy is used since it is more popular. Polygamy is a person who has more than one partner. So neutral terms. While a wife who has more than one husband is called polyandry.

⁶⁰ Nina Nurmila, "Polygamous Marriages in Indonesia and Their Impacts on Women's Access to Income and Property," *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 54, no. 2 (2016), p. 427-46.

certain forms of violence. For example, some interpretations assert that a husband has the right to discipline his wife, including physical punishment, and that a wife must seek her husband's permission to work outside the home. These interpretations reinforce selfish or abusive behavior among husbands. Addressing these issues requires strengthening the enforcement of laws and raising public awareness about legal rights and gender equality.⁶¹

The concept of responsibility for providing for the family is evolving. Traditionally, scholars have held that the husband is solely responsible for family provision, as prescribed in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (*hadith*). However, contemporary scholars increasingly assert the opposite that the wife can also bear the responsibility of supporting the family. According to these scholars, the texts of the Qur'an and *hadith* are not always prescriptive, normative, theological, or transcendental but are often contextually descriptive. Therefore, changes in context can warrant changes in the legal status of familial responsibilities.

Traditional scholars, such as al-Ṭabarî, emphasize the husband's obligation to provide dowry (*mahr*) and subsistence (*nafaqah*) for the family, as derived from Surah al-Nisā' (4: 34).⁶² Al-Jaṣṣāṣ concurs, asserting that the husband's financial responsibility is rooted in his superior reasoning and decision-making abilities (*ra'y*).⁶³ Similarly, al-Rāzī shares this view.⁶⁴ Other notable Islamic jurists, including Imam Mālik, place providing for the family as the husband's third most critical obligation after paying the dowry and ensuring fairness to his wife.⁶⁵ Abū Ḥanīfah identifies financial support as the husband's second obligation after the dowry,⁶⁶ and Imam al-Shāfi'ī affirms that maintenance is a fundamental right of the wife, owed by the husband.⁶⁷

In contrast, contemporary scholars argue that the livelihood responsibilities outlined in the Qur'an and *hadith* are descriptive and contextual rather than prescriptive. They divide Qur'anic and *hadith* texts into two

⁶¹ Busran Qadri and Ihsan Mulia Siregar, "Islamic Renewal in the Field of Family Law: A Historical Analysis of Gender Equality," *El-USrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 6, no. 2 (2023), p. 444–55; Achmad Mudhofar 'Afif, et.al., "Gender Equality in Islamic Sharia (The Study of Bisri Mustofa's Thought in al-Ibrīz li Mari' fah Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīz)," *Syariah: Jurnal Hukum dan Pemikiran* 22, no. 1 (2022), p. 69–88. Shamila Dawood, "Islamic Law and Gender Equality: Challenges and Reforms in Sri Lanka's Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act," *Journal of Islamic Law* 5, no. 2 (2024), p. 288–305.

⁶² Abī Ja'far ibn Jarīr al-Thabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fi Tafsīr al-qur'ān* (Beirūt: Dār al-Ma'rūfah, 1972), p. 37–8..

⁶³ Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2 (Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), p. 188.

⁶⁴ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 3 (Beirūt: Dār al-Fikr, 1978), 215.

⁶⁵ Al-Imām Muḥammad Saḥnūn bin Saīd al-Tanūkhī, *Al-Mudawwanah al-Kubrā*, vol. 3 (Dār Sādir, n.d.), p. 267.

⁶⁶ Shams al-Dīn al-Sarakhsī, *Al-Mabsūṭ*, vol. 5 (Beirūt: Dār al-Ma'rūfah, 1989), 181.

⁶⁷ Muḥammad bin Idrīs Al-Shāfi'ī, *Al-Umm*, vol. 5 (n.d.), p. 78.

categories. First, normative-universal texts, which are prescriptive, theological, and transcendental in nature. Second, contextual-descriptive texts, which are practical and temporal, requiring reinterpretation to align with changing social contexts. Family support obligations, as described in Islamic texts, fall into the second category. This reinterpretation leads to the conclusion that the wife can also assume responsibility for maintaining the family, either individually or in partnership with her husband.⁶⁸

Contemporary scholars use various terminologies to describe this distinction, all emphasizing similar principles. Fazlur Rahman categorizes Islamic texts as texts containing general principles (few in number) and texts with specific teachings (casuistic), which are far more numerous. Asghar Ali Engineer differentiates between normative texts (general principles) and contextual Nash (practical verses).⁶⁹ He observes: “Emphasizing the universal values of the Qur’an does not mean ignoring the historical realities during the time of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, who applied these values in context-specific ways.”⁷⁰ Engineer suggests a dialectical relationship between empirical realities and ideological principles, viewing shari’ah as a synthesis of normative and contextual elements.⁷¹

Similarly, al-Haddad categorizes verses into:⁷² 1) those containing general teachings, such as monotheism (*tawhid*), ethics, justice, and equality; 2) those detailing specific commands tied to the social conditions of pre-Islamic Arabia.⁷³ John L. Esposito offers a similar framework, distinguishing between normative-universal texts (ethico-religious) and practical-temporal texts (socio-economic).⁷⁴ Ismail Faruqi refers to these as ethical orders and cosmic casuistic orders.⁷⁵ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid uses the terms prescriptive texts and descriptive

⁶⁸ Deri Rizal, et. al., “Reinterpreting Religious Texts on Gender Equality: The Perspective of Ahmad Syafii Maarif,” *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 23, no. 2 (2024), p. 327–36.

⁶⁹ Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam* (Lahore: Vanguard Books (PVT) Ltd., 1992). Asghar Ali Engineer, *Problems of Muslim Women in India* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1995).

⁷⁰ Asghar Ali Engineer, *Status of Women in Islam* (New Delhi: Ajanta Publication, 1987), p. 83.

⁷¹ Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur’an, Women and Modern Society* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1999), p. 30.

⁷² Muḥammad Anwar Bū Sunaynah, *Dīwān Al-Ṭahir al-Ḥaddād* (Tunis: al-Aṭlasīyah, 1997). Norma Salem, *Islam and the Status of Women in Tunisia*, ed. Freda Hussain (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1984).

⁷³ Al-Tahir al-Haddad, *Imra`atunā*, (n.d.), 6; Salem, *Islam and the Status of Women in Tunisia*, in *Muslim Women*, edited by Freda Hussain (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 144.

⁷⁴ Jhon L. Esposito, *Women in Muslim Family Law*, ACLS Humanities E-Book (Syracuse University Press, 1982).

⁷⁵ Isma‘il Ragi al-Faruqi, “Towards a New Methodology for Qur’anic Exegesis,” *Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 1962), p. 41.

texts.⁷⁶ Abdul Aziz Sachedina labels them as thick norms and thin norms.⁷⁷ Masdar F. Mas'udi employs *nash qat'i* (definitive texts) and *nash zhanni* (speculative texts), or *nash muhkamāt* (clear texts) and *nash juz'iyah* (specific texts).⁷⁸ Husein Muhammad simplifies the distinction to normative texts versus informative texts.⁷⁹ Using these frameworks, the family livelihood obligations described in the Qur'an fall into the second category of contextual texts. As a result, it is not only the husband who can be responsible for family provision; the wife, or both spouses jointly, can also assume this role.

Conclusion

This research highlights significant differences in the dynamics of family responsibilities and the treatment of working wives between Indonesia and Australia. In Indonesia, the division of family responsibilities is deeply shaped by traditional norms that designate domestic roles to wives, often leading to dual burdens and systemic inequality, including domestic violence. Such violence is further exacerbated by weak legal awareness and enforcement mechanisms. In contrast, Australia demonstrates a more egalitarian approach to family responsibilities, underpinned by strong legal frameworks and a social culture that encourages cooperation and flexibility in managing both domestic and professional obligations. Additionally, an ideal family model for working wives emerges from the contemporary perspective that prioritizes collaboration between spouses in meeting family needs—a concept that holds relevance for both Indonesian and Australian contexts. This suggests that achieving equality and cooperation within families can be facilitated through strengthening legal systems, reinterpreting religious texts in a contextual manner, and fostering greater awareness of the importance of shared responsibilities. Moreover, the construction of a suitable family framework for working wives—one that ensures family integrity is rooted in the principle that family income should be a shared responsibility between husband and wife, rather than the sole burden of one spouse. Sharing financial responsibility promotes a sense of togetherness and mutual cooperation. This cooperative attitude fosters deeper love and care between spouses, which, in turn, nurtures behaviors of mutual protection. Such protective behaviors naturally reduce the likelihood of domestic violence. To cultivate this mutual care and protection, the establishment of effective legal

⁷⁶ Nasr Abu Zaid, *The Nexus of Theory and Practice*, n.d.; M Kamrava, *The New Voices of Islam: Reforming Politics and Modernity: A Reader* (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2006).

⁷⁷ Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Role of Islam in the Public Square* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

⁷⁸ Masdar F. Mas'udi, *Islam dan Hak-Hak Reproduksi Perempuan*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Mizan, 1997), p. 29–30.

⁷⁹ Husein Muhammad, *Ijtihad Kyai Husein: Upaya Membangun Keadilan Gender* (Jakarta: Rahima, 2011).

frameworks is essential. Effective laws not only deter self-serving behaviors but also encourage actions that prioritize collective well-being, contributing to a more harmonious and balanced family structure.

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Interviews and FGD

Interview with MY, April 20, 2022.

Interview with YT, April 20, 2022.

Interview with EY, April 20, 2022.

Interview with MA, April 25, 2022.

Interview with DI, April 25, 2022.

Interview with MM, April 25, 2022.

Interview with YA April 25, 2022.

Interview with AD, May 2, 2022.

Interview with PP, May 4, 2022.

Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Sydney, March 8, 2023).

Focus Group Discussion and Interview (Melbourne, March 13, 2023).