

JULY - AUGUST
2026 VOL. 16

CENTRIS E-BULLETIN

The official bulletin of CENTRIS, IIUM



VISION

CENTRIS aims at becoming a leading international centre of excellence in Islamisation among the Muslim organisations and nations. In particular, it aspires to become the International Islamic Centre for Islamisation of Human Knowledge (IOHK).

MISSION

CENTRIS is a centre which plans, coordinates, monitors and implements various Islamisation projects and programmes within IIUM and with the community.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

- The Prophetic Model for the Head of the Family 3

CURRENT AFFAIRS

- The Architecture of Digital Dependency: Applying Malek Bennabi Theory of Colonisabilty to the Modern Muslim World 5
- Ali Shariati's Views on Iraq 11
- Conflict Related to Polygamy 17
- Challenges of Early Marriage 22
- Financial Mismanagement By The Husband 28
- Interference Of In-Laws In Marital Life 35
- Unequal Distribution Of Household Responsibilities 42
- Wife Working Without Mutual Agreement 48
- Disagreement Over Children's Education 54

EVENT

- CENTRIS ACTIVITIES 60

Q

×

Centre for Islamisation (CENTRIS)
Level 3 Administration Building
International Islamic University Malaysia,
Jalan Gombak 53100 Kuala Lumpur
Email: zahidzamri@iium.edu.my/
centris_reception@iium.edu.my
Phone: (+603) 6421 6797

CENTRIS E-bulletin is published bimonthly (bimestrial).

Q

EDITORIAL

×

Director: Prof. Dr. Akram M Z M Khedher
Editor: Dr. Zahid Zamri
Co-editor: Dr. Nur Jannah Hassan

Graphic Designer:
Sr. Aisyah Natasya Mohd Zaharami
Sr. Siti Aisyah Nabilah Zolkarnin

UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

BY MUHAMMAD HAZIQ BIN MOHD FAROUK, AMMAR BIN ADIB, AHMAD NAQUIB
ARSYI BIN GHAZALI, DR. FATIMAH KARIM

INTRODUCTION

The family institution in Islam is built upon the beautiful principles of *mawaddah* (love), *rahmah* (mercy), and *sakinah* (tranquility), as clearly emphasised in Surah Ar-Rum verse 21, where Allah states that He created spouses for one another so that they may find peace and compassion in their relationship. However, contemporary Muslim families face numerous challenges that threaten this ideal, and one of the most pressing yet often overlooked issues is the unequal distribution of household responsibilities. In many households today, wives find themselves overwhelmed with domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and childcare, while husbands refuse to assist, claiming that their only obligation is to provide financial maintenance or *nafaqah*. This misunderstanding of Islamic roles has created tremendous tension within marriages, leading to emotional distress, resentment, and even divorce. This article aims to analyse this family dispute from a classical and contemporary fiqh perspective, identify relevant Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions, apply the framework of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, and propose practical Islamic solutions that can restore justice and harmony within the household.

UNDERSTANDING THE DISPUTE: THE WIFE'S DOUBLE BURDEN

The dispute begins with a very common scenario in modern Muslim households. A wife works full-time outside the home, contributing financially to the family's expenses. After a long day at work, she returns home only to begin her "second shift" of domestic labour. She cooks dinner, cleans the kitchen, helps the children with their homework, does the laundry, and prepares everything for the next day. Meanwhile, the husband comes home, eats the food that has been prepared for him, and spends his evening resting, watching television, or scrolling through his phone. When the wife politely requests assistance with washing the dishes or putting the children to bed, the husband refuses, often saying something like, "It is not my job. I am the provider. I bring the money. Housework is the wife's responsibility."

This scenario is not merely an issue of convenience or personal preference; it has real and serious consequences for the marriage. The wife experiences physical exhaustion, emotional burnout, and growing resentment towards her husband. She begins to feel that she is married to an unhelpful partner rather than a loving companion. The husband, on the other hand, feels unappreciated because he believes that his financial contribution should exempt him from all domestic work. The children grow up observing this unhealthy dynamic, learning that men do not help at home and that women must bear all domestic burdens alone. Over time, arguments become more frequent, the emotional distance between spouses widens, and the very *sakinah* that Allah wants for marriages begins to disappear.

THE PROPHETIC EXAMPLE: A HUSBAND WHO SERVED HIS FAMILY

Before examining the scholarly positions of Islamic jurisprudence, it is essential to look at the best example for all Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. When Aisha radiallahu 'anha was asked about what the Prophet used to do in his house, she gave a very simple but powerful answer. She said that he used to serve his family, and when the time for prayer came, he would go out for prayer. In other narrations, we learn that the Prophet ﷺ would mend his own clothes, repair his own sandals, and help with household chores alongside his wives. He never considered himself too important or too busy to assist with domestic tasks.

Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ said in a famous hadith narrated by Imam al-Tirmidhi that the best of people are those who are best to their families, and he emphasised that he himself was the best to his family. This statement is extremely significant because it directly links excellence in faith with excellence in treating one's family members. If a husband refuses to help his tired and overwhelmed wife, can he truly claim to be among the best to his family? The answer is clearly no. The prophetic example teaches us that helping at home is not a weakness or a loss of authority; rather, it is a sign of noble character and a direct path to earning Allah's pleasure.

CLASSICAL FIQH POSITIONS ON HOUSEHOLD WORK

Many Muslims are surprised to learn that the classical schools of Islamic jurisprudence do not actually consider housework to be a mandatory legal obligation upon the wife. In fact, the majority of scholars from the Hanbali and Hanafi schools explicitly state that a wife is not legally required to cook, clean, do laundry, or perform any domestic work unless she voluntarily agrees to do so or unless such a condition is included in the marriage contract. The only obligatory duties of a wife are those directly related to the marriage itself, such as allowing the husband intimacy, not leaving the home without permission, and protecting his property. Housework, according to these classical scholars, is considered an act of *tawaddu'* or humble generosity, not a legal duty that can be enforced.

This position is based on the understanding that the marriage contract is primarily about companionship and mutual rights, not about hiring a domestic servant. If a wife chooses to do housework out of love and kindness, she is rewarded for it, but she cannot be forced or blamed for refusing. Now, what does this mean for our dispute? It means that a husband who insists that his wife must do all the housework alone is actually contradicting the majority position of classical Islamic scholarship. At the same time, these scholars also emphasise that the husband is required to provide a servant or helper if the wife is unwell, pregnant, nursing, or if the local custom expects such assistance. In modern times, where many wives work outside the home and where the cost of living requires dual incomes, the argument for the husband's assistance becomes even stronger.

CONTEMPORARY FATWA BODIES AND THE PRINCIPLE OF CUSTOM

Contemporary Islamic scholars and fatwa councils have revisited this issue in light of changing social and economic conditions. They recognise that *'urf* or custom plays a significant role in determining what is considered fair and kind within a marriage. In many traditional agrarian societies, wives did not work outside the home, and their primary occupation was managing the household. In such a context, it was reasonable for them to take on most domestic tasks. However, in modern urban societies, the majority of wives work outside the home, often for the same number of hours as their husbands. In this new context, the custom or *'urf* has shifted, and it is now widely expected that husbands and wives share household responsibilities.

Many contemporary fatwas therefore state that a husband is religiously and morally required to assist his wife with housework, especially when she is also working outside the home or experiencing hardship. Some scholars go further and argue that refusing to help in such circumstances constitutes a violation of *mu'āsharah bil ma'rūf*, which is an obligation upon the husband. Several fatwa bodies have also invoked the legal maxim *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysir*, meaning that hardship brings ease. When a wife is suffering from exhaustion and stress due to her double burden, Islamic law requires that the husband step in to ease her hardship.

APPLYING MAQASID AL-SHARIAH TO THE DISPUTE

The objectives of Islamic law, known as *Maqasid al-Shariah*, provide a powerful framework for understanding why unequal household responsibilities are not merely a matter of convenience but a serious issue that affects the very purposes of marriage. The first and most important *maqasid* is *hifz al-nafs*, or the protection of life and human dignity. When a wife is constantly exhausted, sleep-deprived, and stressed, her physical and mental health deteriorates. Chronic stress can lead to anxiety, depression, and even physical illness. A husband who refuses to help his wife is indirectly contributing to the deterioration of her health, and this is a clear violation of *hifz al-nafs*.

The second *maqasid* is *hifz al-nasl*, or the protection of lineage and family. Children who grow up in a household where parents constantly argue about chores, where the mother is always tired and resentful, and where the father is absent and unhelpful do not experience the stable and loving environment that Islam desires for families. These children may grow up with distorted views of marriage, and they may carry unhealthy patterns into their own future relationships. Thus, helping with housework is actually an act of protecting the next generation.

The third *maqasid* is *hifz al-‘aql*, or the protection of the intellect. Stress and exhaustion impair a person’s ability to think clearly, make good decisions, and maintain emotional balance. When a wife is overwhelmed, her capacity for patience, wisdom, and sound judgment diminishes. This can lead to poor decisions, increased arguments, and further deterioration of the marriage. By sharing responsibilities, the husband helps preserve his wife’s mental clarity and emotional well-being, which benefits the entire family.

CONTEMPORARY FATWA BODIES AND THE PRINCIPLE OF CUSTOM

Contemporary Islamic scholars and fatwa councils have revisited this issue in light of changing social and economic conditions. They recognise that ‘urf or custom plays a significant role in determining what is considered fair and kind within a marriage. In many traditional agrarian societies, wives did not work outside the home, and their primary occupation was managing the household. In such a context, it was reasonable for them to take on most domestic tasks. However, in modern urban societies, the majority of wives work outside the home, often for the same number of hours as their husbands. In this new context, the custom or ‘urf has shifted, and it is now widely expected that husbands and wives share household responsibilities.

Many contemporary fatwas therefore state that a husband is religiously and morally required to assist his wife with housework, especially when she is also working outside the home or experiencing hardship. Some scholars go further and argue that refusing to help in such circumstances constitutes a violation of *mu‘asharah bil ma‘rūf*, which is an obligation upon the husband. Several fatwa bodies have also invoked the legal maxim *al-mashaqqah tajlib al-taysir*, meaning that hardship brings ease. When a wife is suffering from exhaustion and stress due to her double burden, Islamic law requires that the husband step in to ease her hardship.

PROPOSED ISLAMIC SOLUTIONS FOR A HARMONIOUS HOUSEHOLD

1. Based on the Qur'an, the Sunnah, classical fiqh, contemporary fatwas, and the framework of *Maqasid al-Shariah*, several practical solutions can be proposed for couples facing this dispute. The first and most important solution is changing the husband's mindset. Many men have been raised with the false belief that housework is beneath them or that helping their wives somehow diminishes their authority. This belief must be unlearned. Husbands need to be taught that the Prophet ﷺ helped his family and that doing so brought him closer to Allah. Helping at home is an act of worship that carries rewards, not a loss of dignity.

3. The third solution involves spiritual motivation. Husbands should be reminded regularly of the hadith that the best among them are those who are best to their wives. They should also be reminded that every act of service to the family is considered charity or sadaqah that is rewarded by Allah. Washing the dishes with the intention of easing the wife's burden becomes an act of worship. Putting the children to sleep so that the wife can rest becomes a source of divine reward. When husbands understand this, helping at home transforms from a chore into an opportunity for spiritual growth.

2. The second solution is the practice of *musyawarah* or mutual consultation. Instead of following rigid roles, couples should sit down together and discuss the division of household tasks based on each person's abilities, work schedules, preferences, and energy levels. For example, if the husband is stronger, he can handle tasks that require physical strength, such as carrying groceries or moving furniture. If the wife is better at organising, she can manage schedules and planning. If both work outside the home, they can alternate cooking and cleaning duties. The key is fairness and mutual agreement, not rigid gender-based assignments.

4. The fourth solution applies when a husband stubbornly refuses to help despite the wife's exhaustion and repeated discussions. In such cases, the wife may seek mediation from trusted family elders, community leaders, or Islamic counsellors. If the husband's refusal causes significant harm to the wife's physical or mental health, she may even involve an Islamic judge or arbitrator. However, the preferred path is always kindness, patience, and education before taking more serious measures.

CONCLUSION

The unequal distribution of household responsibilities is not a minor issue but a serious family dispute that violates multiple principles of Islamic law and ethics. When a wife is overwhelmed with domestic duties while her husband refuses to assist, the marriage suffers from resentment, emotional distance, and eventual breakdown. Islam, however, provides a clear and beautiful solution. The Prophet ﷺ showed us through his own example that husbands should help their wives at home. The Qur'an commands kindness, cooperation, and justice in marriage. Classical fiqh teaches that housework is not a mandatory duty of the wife but rather an act of mutual goodwill. Contemporary scholars remind us that custom and hardship must be considered. The Maqasid al-Shariah framework also demonstrates that sharing household responsibilities protects health, preserves family, and maintains intellectual well-being. A happy Islamic marriage is not built on rigid gender roles or the exploitation of one spouse by the other. Rather, it is built on mutual mercy, cooperation, and the shared goal of creating a *sakinah* family that pleases Allah. Helping one's wife with housework is not a weakness; it is following the Prophet, upholding justice, and walking the path towards a blessed and harmonious home.

REFERENCES

- Repetti, R. L., Taylor, S. E., & Seeman, T. E. "Risky Families: Family Social Environments and the Mental and Physical Health of Offspring." *Psychological Bulletin*, 2002, 128(2), pp. 330-366.
- Umberson, D., & Montez, J. K. (2010). Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health policy. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 51(1_suppl), S54-S66.
- Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003, pp. 326-330.
- Duderstadt, K. "Work-Family Balance and Health in Working Parents." *Journal of Family Nursing*, 2017, 23(3), pp. 367-389.
- Hamid, Abdul Monir. "Family Dispute Resolution in Islam." *Journal of Islamic Law Review*, 2015, 11(2), pp. 155-172.
- Hassan, Mohd Roslan & Hasbullah, Muhammad. "Mediation in Islamic Family Law: Practices in Malaysia." *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, 2019, 16, pp. 45-58.

This article is part of the Synergized Academic with Student Activities (SAA) initiative.

Muhammad Haziq bin Mohd Farouk

Ammar bin Adib

Ahmad Naquib Arsyi bin Ghazali

Dr. Fatimah Karim an Assistant Professor of Department Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh, AHAS IRKHS IIUM.