

Gender Relations in Negotiating the Roles of Husbands and Wives in Career Women in the Era of Flexible and Remote Work

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Abstract

The transformation of digitally-based work systems and the emergence of flexible working patterns after the COVID-19 pandemic present new opportunities and dilemmas for working women. On the one hand, flexibility in working hours and locations provides women with the space to balance their professional careers and domestic responsibilities. However, on the other hand, entrenched patriarchal norms mean that they continue to bear a double burden. This study aims to reveal the mechanisms of role negotiation between husbands and wives in families where the wife has a career in the context of flexible and remote work. This study uses a phenomenological qualitative approach with data collection techniques through literature study, document analysis, and observation of developing social dynamics. The results show that remote work encourages a more equal division of roles, both in household responsibilities and emotional support between spouses. However, traditional gender norms remain a major obstacle, causing women to often face psychological and social pressure. Education and gender awareness have been proven to influence a couple's ability to adapt. This study emphasizes the need for policies that promote gender equality in flexible work systems as an effort to achieve a balance of roles in modern families.

Keywords: *flexible work, remote work, role negotiation, working women, gender equality*

Abstrak

Transformasi sistem kerja berbasis digital dan munculnya pola kerja fleksibel pasca pandemi COVID-19 menghadirkan peluang sekaligus dilema baru bagi perempuan pekerja. Di satu sisi, fleksibilitas waktu dan tempat kerja memberi ruang bagi perempuan untuk menyeimbangkan karier profesional dan tanggung jawab domestik. Namun di sisi lain, norma patriarki yang masih melekat menjadikan mereka tetap menanggung beban ganda. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkapkan mekanisme negosiasi peran antara suami dan istri pada keluarga dengan istri berstatus wanita karir dalam konteks kerja fleksibel dan jarak jauh. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif fenomenologis dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui studi pustaka, analisis dokumen, serta pengamatan terhadap dinamika sosial yang berkembang. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa sistem kerja jarak jauh mendorong pola pembagian peran yang lebih setara, baik dalam tanggung jawab rumah tangga maupun dukungan emosional antara pasangan. Meski demikian, norma gender tradisional tetap

menjadi faktor penghambat utama, sehingga perempuan kerap menghadapi tekanan psikologis dan sosial. Faktor pendidikan dan kesadaran gender terbukti memengaruhi kemampuan adaptasi pasangan. Penelitian ini menegaskan perlunya kebijakan yang berpihak pada kesetaraan gender dalam sistem kerja fleksibel sebagai upaya mewujudkan keseimbangan peran dalam keluarga modern.

Kata Kunci: kerja fleksibel, kerja jarak jauh, negosiasi peran, perempuan pekerja, kesetaraan gender

INTRODUCTION

Technological developments and changes in the global work system have created a new form of flexible and adaptive working relationships. The phenomenon of flexible working and remote working is a trend that accelerates changes in professional and domestic lifestyles, especially for women who play a dual role as workers and household managers. According to a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021), a flexible work system can improve work and family life balance for women, but on the other hand it also strengthens the domestic burden if it is not balanced by partner support (Driyantini dkk., 2020a). Globally, before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were around 147 million women (11.5%) working from home compared to 113 million men (5.6%), indicating that women are more often involved in household-based work (González Ramos & García-de-Diego, 2022).

A number of studies show different views on the influence of flexible working on gender equality. Van der Lippe found that a flexible work system can support egalitarian relationships if it is accompanied by communication and support from the partner. However, remote work can actually reinforce domestic biases because women often bear a greater household burden when working from home. Studies in Indonesia so far have mostly focused on the issue of work-life balance, not on the mechanism of negotiating roles between husband and wife, which is actually the core of gender relations in the family of career women. Thus, there is a research gap on how domestic and professional role negotiations take place in the context of flexible and remote work in Indonesia (Setyonaluri & Utomo, 2024).

Gender relations in the families of career women who undergo a flexible work system reflect the process of adaptation to new social values and structures. On the one hand, flexibility provides space for women to be economically empowered without leaving their families. On the other hand, the boundaries between the public and private spaces have become blurred, thus demanding a fairer division of roles and responsibilities through the negotiation process. Based on this context, this research focuses on an in-depth understanding of the form of gender relations in the negotiation of the role of husband and wife in the career women's family in the era of flexible work and remote working, the social and cultural factors that influence these dynamics, and strategies that can be used to build more equitable, adaptive, and gender-equitable relationships (Burchi & Samuk, 2021).

The context in Indonesia shows a similar trend. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2024 recorded that the female Labor Force Participation Rate (TPAK) reached 55.41%, with 36.32% in the formal sector, but the average wage of women (IDR 2.61 million) is still lagging behind that of men (IDR 3.37 million). This fact indicates a structural gap rooted in patriarchal culture in the world of work and home life. According to R.W. Connell (1987), gender relations are formed through hegemonic masculinity of social structures that place men as the dominant party in the division of roles and decision-making. Meanwhile, Sylvia Walby (1990) asserts that the

patriarchal system works through six structures, one of which is the unequal division of domestic labor, which continues to be reproduced even when women contribute to the family economy (Utami dkk., 2018).

The study of gender relations in the division and negotiation of roles between husband and wife is increasingly relevant to be studied in the era of flexible and remote work. This new pattern of work carries significant social implications, especially for career women who are faced with the challenge of balancing professional and domestic roles. Based on a report by Komnas Perempuan (2021), around 96% of working women experience an increased household burden during the working from home period, including the obligation to accompany children to study online and manage domestic affairs. This phenomenon shows that even though the work system has become more adaptive, gender role inequality still persists due to the influence of patriarchal values that place women as the main bearers of household affairs (Setia dkk., 2021).

From a legal and social perspective, the division of traditional roles listed in Law Number 1 of 1974 Article 31 paragraph (3) still affirms the position of men as the head of the family and the main breadwinner. The context in Indonesia shows a similar trend. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2024 recorded that the female Labor Force Participation Rate (TPAK) reached 55.41%, with 36.32% in the formal sector, but the average wage of women (IDR 2.61 million) is still lagging behind that of men (IDR 3.37 million). This fact indicates a structural gap rooted in patriarchal culture in the world of work and home life. According to R.W. Connell (1987), gender relations are formed through hegemonic masculinity of social structures that place men as the dominant party in the division of roles and decision-making. While Sylvia Walby (1990) asserts that the patriarchal system works through six structures, one of which is the unequal division of domestic labor, which continues to be reproduced even when women contribute to the family economy. Puspitawati and Gunawan (2023) assessed that the concept no longer fully reflects the needs of the modern family based on equality. Meanwhile, Nugraha (2024), emphasizes the need to restructure gender relations towards fair partnerships so that women do not continue to be trapped in double burdens that have the potential to reduce mental well-being and work productivity.

The Islamic perspective provides a normative foundation for a balanced relationship between men and women. The principle of deliberation and 'adl (justice) as affirmed in QS. At-Taubah [9]:71

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلَيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيَقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَةَ وَيُطْعِنُونَ
اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَلِلَّهِ كُلُّ سَيِّرَةٍ حَمْمُمُ اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ اللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

Translation:

"The believers, men and women, some of them are helpers to others.328) They command (to do) makruf and prevent (to do) disobedience, to enforce prayers, to pay zakat, and to obey Allah and His Messenger. They will be blessed by Allah. Indeed, Allah is Mighty, Wise." (Qur'an of the Ministry of Religion).

The meaning of the above verse is to place men and women as partners who help each other in social and moral responsibility. Thus, family relations in Islam should be built on the basis of partnership and shared responsibility, not the dominance of one party.

Several previous studies have addressed similar themes but in different contexts. Ma'ruf (2021), highlights the conflict between domestic and professional roles in achieving work-life balance. The study is important, but it has not specifically explored the dynamics of negotiation of the role of husband and wife in the era of flexible and remote work that has characterized post-

pandemic society. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how the form of gender relations is formed, the factors that affect role negotiation, and the strategies used by couples in creating a balance of roles in the household.

With a descriptive-analytical approach, this study is expected to be able to provide a comprehensive overview of the communication process and adaptation of roles between husband and wife in the modern work system. Academically, this research enriches the literature on gender relations in contemporary Indonesian families. In practical terms, the results can serve as a reference for families and policymakers in building a work system that supports gender equality. Theoretically, this research is based on the gender role theory of Sandra Bem (1981), which views gender roles as the result of a negotiable social construction, and the role negotiation theory of Scanzoni and Szinovacz (1980), which emphasizes the importance of communication, agreement, and the mutually beneficial distribution of responsibilities in the household. Based on these two theories, the hypothesis of this study states that the higher the gender awareness and open communication between couples, the greater the chance of creating a balance of domestic and public roles for career women (Ajizah & Khomisah, 2021).

METODE PENELITIAN

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a type of field research combined with library research. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on understanding the meaning and dynamics of negotiating roles between husband and wife in the families of career women who undergo flexible work and remote working systems. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to understand the participants' experiences contextually, while the literature study is used to reinforce the theoretical foundation with academic references and empirical data (Sari dkk., 2023).

The data source of this research consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structural interviews with married couples who both worked flexibly or remotely in urban areas of Indonesia. Interviews were conducted both online and offline with open-ended questions guidelines that included the themes of domestic role-sharing, spousal support, household communication, and remote work experience. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from the results of previous research, scientific journal articles, official reports from institutions such as BPS, ILO, and the Ministry of PPPA, as well as gender theory literature from figures such as Connell and Walby (Syamsiyatun, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Form of Gender Relations in Negotiating the Role of Husband and Wife in Career Women in the Era of Flexible and Remote Work

The transformation of the world of work marked by the advent of flexible and remote work systems has changed the way modern Muslim families divide roles and responsibilities. In the Indonesian context, this change is even more pronounced after the COVID-19 pandemic, when the work from home and remote working systems became a permanent part of the work patterns of many professional sectors (Driyantini dkk., 2020).

Research shows that flexible working systems provide opportunities for women to balance

domestic and professional roles without reducing productivity. Work flexibility allows women to manage the balance between work and family (Mahajan & Khandagale, 2025). Some have also found that work flexibility increases the husband's participation in household activities and childcare (Guo dkk., 2025).

However, despite indications of equality, practice on the ground shows that women still bear greater domestic responsibilities than men. In remote work practices, women continue to bear a heavier domestic burden. Professional Muslim families in Indonesia find that many women feel they have to "negotiate twice," namely at work and at home (Guo dkk., 2025).

This phenomenon reflects that gender relations in the family of career women in the era of flexible working are transitional, moving between traditional roles and more egalitarian partnership models. Connell's (1987) theory of hegemonic masculinity and Walby's (1990) theory of patriarchal structure explain that gender relations are the result of power negotiations that continue to change according to social and economic conditions (Yusuf, 2023). In the Indonesian context, this negotiation process is influenced by religious values, social norms, and cultural perceptions of the "ideal woman."

From an Islamic perspective, the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of mu'asyarah bil ma'ruf (QS. An-Nisa: 19),

يَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَجْلِلُ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَرْثِيَ النِّسَاءَ كَرْهًا وَلَا تَعْضُلُوهُنَّ لِتُنْهِيُّوْا بِمَنْصَرٍ مَا أَتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتُيَنَّ بِفَاجِحَةٍ مُّبِينَةٍ وَعَالِشُرُورُهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ فَإِنْ كَرْهُنَّ فَعَسَى أَنْ تَكُرْهُوْا شَيْئًا وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا

"O you who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit a woman by force. Do not trouble them because they want to take back some of what you have given them, unless they commit a real heinous act. Treat them in an appropriate way. If you don't like them, (be patient) because you may not like something, but Allah has done a lot of good in it."

The meaning of the above verse is that the relationship between husband and wife is based on affection, justice, and mutual respect. This principle is in line with the spirit of shura (deliberation), which demands shared participation in household decision-making. In this case, it shows that couples who practice communication based on Islamic values tend to have more equal relationships than families who only follow traditional role structures (Putri (2018).

In addition to spiritual factors, social context also greatly influences the form of gender relations. The Ministry of PPPA noted that although women's labor participation has increased, the difference in wages and non-wage burdens (housework) is still significant. This shows that structural change has not been fully followed by the transformation of social values. Therefore, the form of gender relations that emerged in the era of flexible work is an adaptive partnership, where equality grows through communication, education, and the progressive application of religious values (Elizabeth dkk., 2023).

In the perspective of maqāṣid al-syarī'ah, the balance of the husband-wife relationship is part of the effort to maintain the welfare of the family (hifz al-nasl) and social justice (hifz al-'adl). Ideal gender relations do not mean eliminating differences in biological roles, but rather managing them so that they become a source of harmony and shared responsibility, which supports the creation of a prosperous and just family.

Factors Influencing the Negotiation Process of the Role of Husband and Wife

Gender relations in the family of career women are formed through a complex negotiation process between domestic and professional responsibilities. The success of these negotiations is

influenced by the interaction of internal family factors, social norms, religious values, and broader external structures. This process is dynamic, as each factor influences each other and can change according to social, cultural, and occupational contexts.

a. Education and Gender Awareness

Education levels and gender awareness form the cognitive and normative foundation in role negotiation. Couples with a high understanding of equality tend to adopt a dialogical strategy to divide roles, so that patriarchal bias can be minimized. Families with higher education are better able to build a role sharing agreement dialogically and reflectively, rather than based on dominance or coercion (Nugroho & Setyawan, 2025).

Gender awareness not only influences the division of tasks, but also directs negotiation mechanisms: couples can assess domestic workloads, adjust work schedules, and allocate child responsibilities proportionately. In the Islamic perspective, the principle of al-ta'awun 'ala al-birr wa al-taqwa (QS. Al-Māidah: 2) affirms cooperation in goodness as the foundation of domestic harmony. Thus, education and gender awareness play a role as determinant variables that allow negotiations to run more fairly and productively.

QS. Al-Māidah: 2

يَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تُحِلُّوا شَعِيرَ اللَّهِ وَلَا الشَّهْرُ الْحَرَامُ وَلَا الْهَذِي وَلَا الْقَلَبِيْدَ وَلَا أَمِينَ الْبَيْتِ الْحَرَامِ يَتَبَعُّونَ فَضْلًا مِّنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَرَضُوا نَّارًا حَلَّتْمُ فَاصْطَادُوا وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَانُ قَوْمٍ أَنْ صَدُّوكُمْ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ أَنْ تَعْدُوْنَ وَتَعَاوِنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالنَّقْوَىٰ وَلَا تَعَاوِنُوا عَلَى الْإِنْمَ وَالْغُنْوَانَ وَلَا تَقْوَى اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

"O you who have believed, do not violate the sharia (holiness) of Allah, do not (violate the honour) of the haram months. do not (disturb) hadyn (sacrificial animals)¹⁹⁵ and qala'id (marked sacrificial animals), and do not (disturb) the visitors of Jerusalem while they seek the bounty and pleasure of their Lord! When you have done tahalul (completing ibram), hunt (if you want). Do not hate a people, for they hinder you from the Haram Mosque, pushing you to go beyond the limits. Help yourselves in righteousness and piety, and do not help each other in sin and enmity. Fear Allah, for Allah is very severe in His punishment."

b. Communication and Emotional Support

Healthy communication is a control and coordination mechanism in role negotiations. Couples who practice mutual respect-based communication find it easier to reach a fair decision. Husband's emotional support also affects women's ability to cope with stress due to dual roles. Households that understand each other reduce psychological stress and strengthen collaboration, making the negotiation process more participatory and effective (Mariyanti dkk., 2024)

Communication and emotional support serve as moderator variables: even if couples have high gender awareness, without good communication, negotiations can fail or be inconsistent. This interaction emphasizes that role negotiation is not just a division of tasks, but also a strategic process that requires interpersonal coordination and emotional empathy.

c. Social Culture and Patriarchal Structure

Patriarchal culture remains an external factor that moderates the effectiveness of negotiations. Social pressures that emphasize women as the main caretakers of the household can suppress equality, even when couples have agreed to divide the duties equally. Women in Southeast Asia spend nearly twice as much time on housework as men, including in full-time work conditions (Jasmiarto & Ridwan, 2025).

This phenomenon confirms the existence of a conflict of internal and external norms: gender awareness and (internal) partner communication can collide with patriarchal (external) social and cultural expectations. From an Islamic perspective, the values of *rahmah* (compassion) and *'adl* (justice) can be used as moral guidelines to balance cultural pressures, so that the role of husband and wife becomes complementary, not affirmative.

d. Work Systems and Technology Adaptation

Flexible working policies and digital technologies are structural factors that influence role negotiations. Wulandari & Ahmad, (2025), show that work flexibility is effective in promoting equality when couples have a clear agreement on responsibilities limits, working hours, and domestic priorities. Without clear arrangements, flexibility can widen the conflict between professional work and household responsibilities, resulting in women losing personal space and time off.

The principle of *tawazun* (balance) in Islam provides a normative framework for reorganizing the rhythm of life: couples can adjust work schedules, division of domestic duties, and childcare so that differences in roles become a source of synergy, not conflict. Thus, work systems and technology serve as contextual variables that can strengthen or weaken the outcome of negotiations.

Based on the description above, the negotiation process of the role of husband and wife in the family of career women is influenced by the interaction between internal and external factors. Education levels, gender awareness, communication patterns, and emotional support form the internal foundation that allows negotiations to run more equally. However, patriarchal culture as well as work systems and technology become external contexts that can strengthen or limit the structuring of these roles. Thus, role negotiation is a dynamic process that requires cooperation, reflection of values, and continuous adjustment in order to achieve a fair and harmonious division of responsibilities within the family.

Strategies to Realize More Equal Gender Relations in Negotiating the Role of Husband and Wife in the Era of Flexible and Remote Work

Equal gender relations in the family of career women are not formed automatically through social change or technological advances, but rather require awareness, education, and real strategies that are implemented in an ongoing manner. In the context of flexible working and remote working, this strategy needs to be rooted in Islamic values that emphasize justice, balance, and shared responsibility in the household.

The first effort that needs to be made is to build an awareness of equality based on spiritual values and social rationality. This awareness requires an understanding that husbands and wives have equal moral responsibilities in upholding family welfare, as well as the principle of deliberation in QS. Ash-Sūrā [42]:38. Communication based on spiritual values is able to encourage partnership relationships and reduce gender dominance in family decision-making. Thus, the initial strategy that needs to be emphasized is not a rigid division of roles, but a value agreement on the meaning of justice, togetherness, and shared responsibility (Marini dkk., 2022).

In addition to value awareness, strengthening gender and digital literacy is the next strategic step. Women who have an understanding of digital technology tend to be better able to manage their work rhythm without sacrificing family time. This literacy not only increases women's independence at work, but also opens up space for collaboration between couples in managing

household activities. On the other hand, digital awareness in husbands is needed so that there is no inequality in the use of domestic technology, such as time management, child responsibility, and online communication.

In addition, the preparation of a fair role and time agreement between husband and wife is the next important strategy. Couples who made daily schedules or work agreements together were shown to have lower rates of role conflict. This agreement must be flexible, but still based on the principle of *tawazun* (balance), where both have room to rest, worship, and develop themselves. This principle is in line with the purpose of *maqāṣid al-syari'ah* in maintaining the welfare of the family (*hifz al-nasl*) and the balance of life (*hifz al-nafs*) (Yazid dkk., 2023).

From the social side, institutional support and gender-sensitive policies are also key factors. Flexible work policies will have a positive impact only if they are accompanied by supporting facilities such as family-friendly policies, paternity leave, and adaptive working hours for breastfeeding mothers. Without structural support, the negotiation of roles in the family will always be burdened by systemic inequality that places women as the more sacrificial parties. Therefore, the synergy between religious values and public policy is an integral part of the strategy to realize substantial gender equality (Badruzaman dkk., 2020).

Finally, strengthening the role of religious communities and family education is also very important. Study forums, taklim councils, and Islamic educational institutions can be a social space to instill the value of equality and shared responsibility. As explained by Alwi and Hasanah, the reinterpretation of the teachings of *qawwamah* as a moral mandate, not a one-sided authority, can foster a new view of just family leadership. When these values are internalized through education and example, harmonious and equal gender relations will become part of the modern Muslim family culture (Zenrif, 2004).

Thus, the strategy of realizing equal gender relations is holistic and sustainable, including structural, cultural, and spiritual aspects. Religious awareness, digital literacy, open communication, role agreements, public policy support, and family education are key pillars that can transform gender relations from a subordinate pattern to a true partnership. In the Islamic perspective, equality is not about eliminating differences, but arranging differences so that they become a source of harmony, mercy, and justice in family life.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the negotiation of the role of husband and wife in the family of career women who undergo a flexible work system and remote working is influenced by various factors, both internal and external. Internal factors, such as education level, gender awareness, and healthy communication, play an important role in creating a balance of roles between husband and wife. However, external factors, such as patriarchal culture and a work system that does not fully support equality, still affect the dynamics of relationships within the family. In the Indonesian context, although women are increasingly involved in the workforce, inequality in domestic roles remains, which indicates the need for changes in the existing social and cultural structures.

Overall, the strategy needed to achieve more equal gender relations is through a holistic approach, which includes gender awareness, open communication, fair timing, and gender-sensitive policy support. By integrating religious values, such as justice and deliberation, as well as the implementation of work policies that support the family, gender relations in career women's families can run more harmoniously and equally. Therefore, this study provides insight into how

equal roles between husbands and wives can be achieved, although cultural and structural challenges still remain.

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