

Gender Relations in Modern Households: Domestic Labor Divisions in Working Married Couples

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Abstract

This study discusses gender relations in modern households, focusing on the pattern and factors of domestic labor division between dual-earner couples. The research is motivated by the persistence of patriarchal culture that causes unequal domestic roles despite women's increasing participation in the public sphere. The aim of this study is to analyze the forms of domestic labor division, the influencing factors, and the efforts to achieve equality within modern households. Using a qualitative descriptive approach through a literature review of academic sources and statistical data, the results indicate that domestic work division is influenced by economic factors, working hours, cultural norms, education level, presence of children, and power relations in the family. Efforts to promote equality include fostering awareness and communication, utilizing household technology, and providing emotional support between partners. In conclusion, gender equality in domestic life can be achieved when husbands and wives build cooperative relationships grounded in justice and compassion as taught in Islam.

Keywords: *Gender Equality, Domestic Labor Division, Dual-Earner Couples, Modern Household, Family Relations.*

Abstract

Penelitian ini membahas tentang relasi gender dalam rumah tangga modern dengan fokus pada pola dan faktor pembagian kerja domestik antara suami dan istri yang sama-sama bekerja. Latar belakang penelitian ini berangkat dari masih kuatnya budaya patriarki dalam masyarakat yang menyebabkan ketimpangan peran domestik, meskipun perempuan telah turut berkontribusi dalam ranah publik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bentuk pembagian kerja domestik, faktor-faktor yang memengaruhinya, serta upaya untuk mewujudkan kesetaraan peran dalam rumah tangga modern. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif melalui kajian pustaka terhadap berbagai sumber akademik dan data statistik, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembagian kerja domestik dipengaruhi oleh faktor ekonomi, jam kerja, norma budaya, tingkat pendidikan, kehadiran anak, serta relasi kuasa dalam keluarga. Upaya yang dapat dilakukan untuk menciptakan keadilan domestik antara lain melalui kesadaran dan komunikasi yang setara, pemanfaatan

teknologi rumah tangga, serta dukungan emosional antara pasangan. Kesimpulannya, kesetaraan gender dalam rumah tangga dapat terwujud apabila suami dan istri mampu menumbuhkan kerja sama yang adil dan berlandaskan nilai-nilai Islam tentang keadilan dan kasih sayang.

Kata Kunci: Kesetaraan Gender, Pembagian Kerja Domestik, Suami Istri Bekerja, Rumah Tangga Modern, Relasi Keluar.

INTRODUCTION

The existence of men and women is a necessity. The biological differences and characteristics inherent in the two naturally give birth to natural obligations that must be carried out by each. Beyond that, there are also obligations that are formed through social construction, so that there are different roles and consequences for men and women (Darmawati, 2015).

In the social context, these differences are even more pronounced when humans live family life through the bond of marriage. At this stage, men and women take on new responsibilities in order to achieve their marital goals. The position of the family, which is the benchmark for society's happiness, makes the relationship between husband and wife more complex. However, the patriarchal culture that is still strong in the social structure places women's position in a weak situation, so the division of roles in the household tends to be biased and limits the role of wives only to the domestic realm (Widyasari & Suyanto, 2023).

The role of men as breadwinners for the family while women stay at home to care for children and take care of the household has been going on for centuries. The outbreak of World War II brought major changes to work and family relationships. Hayghe states that at the end of the 20th century, dual earning families replaced the traditional family pattern of breadwinners and breadwinner-homemakers as the dominant family model. In line with this, Cinamon and Rich affirm that changes in the nature and composition of the workforce have increased women's participation in the labor force, which in turn has increased the number of families with dual incomes (Nurmayanti, 2014).

This development marks the beginning of a shift in family structure and function towards a more dynamic pattern. Not only in the economic aspect, changes are also seen in the division of roles in the household. In the modern era, family roles and duties are increasingly flexible, where each family member can perform more than one role. The father, for example, not only plays the role of breadwinner, but can also share domestic responsibilities with the mother. This shift is influenced by a change in the mindset of people who are increasingly open to social and cultural developments, so that the role of the family is no longer viewed rigidly (Al Azra et al., 2025).

According to BPS data as of February 2024, the number of workers in Indonesia consists of 43,598,794 men and 21,983,670 women, so that the proportion of female workers is only around 33.52% of the total national workforce. This condition reflects a significant gap in economic participation between men and women in addition to the fact that many women still face a double burden (formal work and domestic work) (Rahmatillah, 2024).

The latest BPS data (release of Statistical Data Stories for Indonesia, March 2025) shows the phenomenon that around 14.37% of female workers in Indonesia hold the status of female breadwinners, namely women who are the main breadwinners or largest contributors to income in

households. Of these, the majority work in the private business sector, and most contribute between 90–100% of household income (Central Statistics Agency, 2025).

Research conducted by Elisabeth Henderika Dua Neang, Trisnawati Bura, and Fathia Aulia Mutmainnah (2023) in the journal WISSEN: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities states that women's domestic roles still dominate even though they also work outside the home. In modern households, wives are still considered to be primarily responsible for household chores such as cooking, washing, and childcare. This shows that the social construction of gender roles is still strong, where women are identified with the domestic sphere and men with the public sphere (Neang et al., 2025).

From an Islamic perspective, the ideal family is not only formed from the traditional division of roles between husband and wife, but also from cooperation, deliberation, and mutual responsibility. The Qur'an provides guidance on marital relationships based on the principles of justice ('adl) and affection (mawaddah wa rahmah). Thus, the division of domestic labor in the household should be based on the principles of justice and mutual agreement, not on gender stereotypes alone.

However, previous studies still show that there is an inequality of domestic roles in the modern family. A study by Fitriani and Putra states that even though many couples work together, household tasks are still dominated by women because of social norms that place women as "housekeepers" (Fitriani & Putra, 2022). Meanwhile, research by Qonita Imamia and Syaifatul Jannah found that couples who have egalitarian gender awareness tend to have a fairer and more harmonious division of domestic labor (Imamia & Jannah, 2024).

From these various studies, it appears that research on the division of domestic labor in working married couples still has room for development, especially in terms of analyzing the factors that cause inequality and strategies for realizing domestic justice seen from the perspective of Islamic family law. Therefore, it is important to examine more deeply how the division of domestic labor is formed, what factors affect equality, and how efforts can be made to create justice in the modern household.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a library *research* method (Creswell, 2014). Research data was obtained through a critical review of various scientific sources such as academic journals, books, official reports of the Central Statistics Agency, and online publications relevant to the theme of gender equality and domestic division of labor in working married couples (Zed, 2018; Central Statistics Agency, 2025). Data analysis is carried out by *content analysis* by interpreting the meanings and tendencies that appear in the literature to find patterns, causal factors, and strategic efforts in realizing equal division of labor (Krippendorff, 2019). This approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives that focus on conceptual understanding, social values, and the principle of justice in Islam as the normative foundation of gender relations in the household (Quraish Shihab, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Patterns and Factors That Affect the Division of Labor Between Husband and Wife When Both Work

1. Domestic Labor Distribution Pattern

a. Childcare and Education

In households where husband and wife work, it is not uncommon to experience obstacles in completing household tasks, including childcare and education (Widysari & Suyanto, 2023). If the married couple is coercive or in working conditions with longer working hours, the childcare will be neglected or only handled by the wife herself (Rahmah, 2024). Basically, childcare and education are shared responsibilities, both must cooperate with each other in providing children's education (Widysari & Suyanto, 2023). In addition to working together in providing education outside the home, the duties of parents, namely providing child assistance such as supervising, giving advice, instilling good values, husband and wife must also remind each other not to be too hard in educating children and discuss problems in childcare and education (Saidah & Hariyanto, 2018).

The division of duties in the care and education of children that both parties between husband and wife complement each other and work together to provide attention, namely accompanying the child when at home such as when playing, watching television, accompanying the child when studying or doing homework, taking or picking up the child to school or to the tutoring place, giving advice, instilling values and culture (Widysari & Suyanto, 2023). This shows that there is awareness of the duties of fathers and mothers in caring for and educating children by involving husbands as well (Rahmah, 2024).

b. Home Maintenance

Women can be said to have a very important role in the domestic sector, including the task of housekeeping (Widysari & Suyanto, 2023). Home maintenance is an activity carried out in the household that aims to maintain and care for the environment of the house where it is lived (Ramadhania & Utami, 2018). This activity is a daily activity that is carried out at home such as sweeping and mopping the floor, cleaning the bedroom, caring for plants, cleaning home furniture, etc. (Saidah & Hariyanto, 2018).

Usually for career women they do this activity three in the morning before leaving for work or after work, and holidays (Novita, 2022). Home cleaning activities do not require special skills or techniques so that basically anyone can do them, whether they are men or women (Widysari & Suyanto, 2023).

Women in the family usually function as housewives who manage all affairs in the house (Athmainnah, 2015). But they did all of that with pleasure. However, now gender equality in the family has been widely implemented so that all of these activities can be carried out with mutual cooperation by family members who live at home so that wives do not play the dual role of one person (Widyasari & Suyanto, 2023).

c. Decision-making in the family

Decision making is a process by which a person makes a choice from several options to be applied in order to achieve the desired result (Sunarti et al., 2021). Generally, decision-making in the household will be decided together with family members, especially it will be discussed carefully by the husband and wife (Athmainnah, 2015).

However, it is not uncommon to find that women are not seen as themselves but as part of men, therefore it is very important to have gender awareness and equality in the family (Rahmah, 2024). In family decision-making, husband and wife place themselves equally and balanced as partners in the family (Widyasari & Suyanto, 2023).

Thus, the real forms of division of domestic duties between husband and wife include: First, the husband takes a role in heavy physical tasks such as cleaning the yard or repairing household appliances (Widyasari & Suyanto, 2023). Second, husbands participate in daily routine work, especially when the wife is busy or comes home late (Novita, 2022). Third, the wife still bears the core responsibility of childcare and other daily household chores (Saidah & Hariyanto, 2018). Fourth, the division can be flexible based on the couple's internal agreement (Widyasari & Suyanto, 2023).

2. Factors Affecting the Distribution of Domestic Labor in Working Married Couples

The division of domestic labor in households, especially in married couples who work together, is influenced by a number of factors, both structural and cultural (Sunarti et al., 2021). First, economic factors are one of the main determinants. When the husband's income is insufficient, the wife is encouraged to work in the public sector to help with household needs. However, even though wives contribute to their income, the domestic workload is often still more borne by women. This is as found in a study on construction worker families in the Citraland area of Surabaya, where economic reasons such as low income of husbands, debt, and needs after having children encourage wives to work, but domestic responsibilities are still borne by wives (Ramadhania & Utami, 2018).

Second, the wife's working hours and work sector affect the husband's involvement in domestic affairs. Research shows that wives who work in the formal sector with long working

hours are more likely to get substitutions from their husbands in household chores (Novita, 2022). On the other hand, if the wife's job is in the informal sector with more flexible working hours, the husband's involvement tends to decrease (Novita, 2022).

Third, patriarchal cultural factors and traditional gender norms are very influential in shaping domestic labor distribution patterns. Society still considers housework as a woman's responsibility, while men are considered inappropriate to do domestic work because it is considered contrary to the construction of masculinity (Widyasari & Suyanto, 2023).

Fourth, education and religious knowledge also have an effect. A higher level of education and an understanding of religion that emphasizes the value of justice can shape egalitarian consciousness in the household. In research on fishing communities, it was found that educational factors, economic conditions, and religious knowledge play a role in influencing the way husbands interpret their wives' domestic work (Saidah & Hariyanto, 2018).

Fifth, the presence of children and the number of family dependents also determine the level of inequality or equality. The presence of children, especially children under five, increases the workload of household work, and in practice, this additional burden is more often borne by the wife even though she works full-time (Rahmah, 2024).

Sixth, family resource management and work-family conflicts also play a role. Research in Bogor shows that families that have good resource management are able to divide household tasks more fairly, while conflicts between work demands and domestic obligations tend to increase the wife's workload (Sunarti et al., 2021).

Seventh, income management factors and power relations in the household also have an effect. In a study in Mlangi Hamlet, Sleman, although the wife participates in work and contributes income, financial management and decision-making are more held by the husband, while domestic work is still charged to the wife. This shows that there is an inequality in gender relations even though economically both contribute (Athmainnah, 2015).

Thus, it can be concluded that the division of domestic labor in married couples is not only influenced by economic and employment factors, but also by cultural norms, education level, child attendance, resource management, and power relations in the household (Widyasari & Suyanto, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research that has been discussed, it can be concluded as follows: First, the division of labor between husband and wife who work together is influenced by various factors

such as economy, working hours, patriarchal cultural norms, education level, presence of children, and power relations in the family. Although women play a role in the public sphere, domestic work is still largely imposed on wives. However, there is a new trend towards a more egalitarian pattern of cooperation through flexible and complementary division of tasks. Second, equality in the household can be achieved through equal awareness and communication between husband and wife, the use of household technology, and mutual emotional support. A shared commitment to shared responsibilities in childcare, home maintenance, and decision-making is key to creating gender harmony and justice in the modern family.

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