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Livelihood Responsibility Shifting to Migrant Worker Wives; A Reading of Qur'an and Hadith in Muslim Community

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the shifting of livelihood (nafaqah) responsibilities to wives in the contemporary context while looking at the Muslim community's reading of relevant Qur'anic verses and hadith. Wives who work as migrant workers tend to serve as the main breadwinner in providing income for a household, including those from Kediri and Tulungagung, East Java. Livelihood itself is a common topic in the Islamic law discussion, mainly about who provides for whom and its quantity criteria. Based on this problem, we portray the phenomenon and then present a reading of relevant Qur'anic verses and hadith within the community. The qualitative method was used to conduct interviews with

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husbands situated in that specific type of household. Data collection was also carried out by a review of relevant verses and hadith on family life followed by an analytical approach using content analysis to identify how they are perceived by the Muslim community. This study offers insights into Islamic family law in contemporary society, linking religious teachings to modern realities and providing a deeper understanding of this complex issue. The result shows that despite the phenomenon, the husbands still play their role as breadwinners, namely the secondary one. This stems from how they understand the rule of each in a family, implying how religious teachings interplay with modern realities.

Keywords:

Family livelihood; Shifting responsibility; Female migrant workers; Qur'an; Hadith

Introduction

Migrant workers are a worldwide phenomenon. It is said to account for more than 70% of international migration among productive ages people starting from 15 years old.¹ The Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI) noted that in 2024, 25.273 migrant workers were sent centered in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapura, Jepang, and others. Mostly, they are concentrated in the informal sectors, such as housemaids, plantation workers, caregivers, workers, and domestic workers. East Java is recorded as the top 2nd province that contributes the most BMI (*Buruh Migran Indonesia*, Indonesian Migrant Workers),² namely 32 thousand migrant workers a year from several cities, including Kediri and Tulungagung. The recent data from July 2024 also noted that 923 future female migrant workers from the District of Kediri applied for a working visa. This certainly excludes those who already work overseas or those who choose illegal working procedures. Meanwhile, in the City

¹ C. Cindy Fan, "Migrant Workers," in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (Second Edition)*, ed. Audrey Kobayashi (Los Angeles: Elsevier, 2020), 73–80, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-102295-5.10286-0>.

² Pusat Data dan Informasi Kementerian Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia, "Data Layanan Penempatan dan Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia" (Jakarta, 2024), <https://bp2mi.go.id/statistik-detail/data-penempatan-dan-pelindungan-pekerja-migran-indonesia-periode-januari-desember-2024>.

of Kediri, the number of existing female migrant workers overseas is 156.641. Tulungagung even contributes to the higher number. Every year, it sends about 4000-6000 female migrant workers abroad, so that the remittance is almost as much as the annual district revenue (APBN). Furthermore, the total number of female migrant workers abroad from this district is approximately 19.000. This number increases year by year partly because there are some villages as the central senders of migrant workers.³

The presence of women as migrant workers has become an intriguing phenomenon within the context of family life. Traditionally, the responsibility of providing livelihood for the family is the husband's obligation solely as the head of the household, while the wife takes on domestic roles.⁴ It aligns with Article 31, paragraph 3 of Law Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage. Similarly, the wife's role is affirmed in Article 79, paragraph 1 of the Compilation of Islamic Law, which states a similar view. Accordingly, as per Law no. 1 of 1974, Article 34, Paragraph 1 and Article 80, Paragraph 2 of the Compilation of Islamic Law, with a detailed explanation in Paragraph 4, the provisions mentioned above outline the obligations and responsibilities of the husband. The responsibilities encompass the obligation to safeguard the spouse and meet all domestic requirements following financial power, which entails providing a living, attire, and a suitable house for the wife. These costs also encompass household expenses, healthcare for the spouse and children, and education expenses.⁵ In comparison, according to Law No. 1 of 1974, Article 34, Paragraph 2, and further explained in Article 83, Paragraph 1 of the Compilation of Islamic Law, the wife is required to fulfill their household responsibilities diligently. It includes demonstrating utmost dedication to their spouse as per the

³ Sylvia Yazid, "Indonesian Labour Migration: Identifying the Women," *Jurnal Global & Strategis* 9, no. 1 (2018): 49, <https://doi.org/10.20473/jgs.9.1.2015.49-62>.

⁴ A. Kumedi Ja'far and Agus Hermanto, "Reinterpretation of the Rights and Duties of Contemporary Husbands and Wives," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 5, no. 2 (2021): 648-67, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v5i2.9124>.

⁵ Firdaus et al., "Perempuan Bekerja dalam Pemenuhan Nafkah Keluarga," *Jurnal Kajian dan Pengembangan Umat* 3, no. 2 (2020): 1-15, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31869/jkpu.v3i2.2327>.

norms prescribed by Islamic law⁶ and efficiently managing all daily necessities. The wife therefore ensures optimal daily functioning within the household.

However, in recent years, economic challenges have caused shifts in these roles, particularly in regions like Tulungagung and Kediri, East Java. Many men working as laborers with unstable incomes compelled their wives to contribute financially to support the family. In those areas, the phenomenon of wives working outside the home has become increasingly common due to the regions' economic realities. Labor-intensive industries, such as agriculture and textiles, dominate these regions but offer low wages and unstable employment conditions. As a result, many families cannot rely solely on the husband's income. Wives, who traditionally did not participate in economic activities, are now engaging in various forms of work, from small-scale businesses to factory jobs, including working abroad as migrant workers. This shift raises questions about the balance of family responsibilities and how it aligns with Islamic legal principles.

Both the Qur'an and hadith serving as the main foundation for Islamic law, including provisions in the family, do not regulate the division of labor in detail. They emphasize that husbands are the ones to be responsible for fulfilling the family's needs. Meanwhile, there is no clear indication that wives are not allowed to do the same. Some verses, such as Al-Baqarah 233, An-Nisā' 34, and Aṭ-Ṭalāq: 6, indicate the husband's responsibility in both specific and general situations to fulfill the family's needs.⁷ As for hadith, considered more practical than the Qur'an, tend to accentuate the issue in a general tone. Some relevant examples are Prophet's guidance about superiority for those who earn (money to get) the food autonomously,⁸ good example of the Prophet David who never ate except coming from his own effort,⁹

⁶ Asman, "Hak dan Kewajiban Perempuan dalam Perspektif Syariah Islam," *Borneo: Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2020): 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.37567/borneo.v3i2.259>.

⁷ Nimat Hafez Barazangi, *Woman's Identity and Rethinking the Hadith* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), 195.

⁸ Mouez Khalifaoui, "Work Between Obligation and Right in Muslim Culture: Is There a Paradigm Shift?," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 121, no. 3 (2021): 1-22, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-12340064>.

⁹ Muhammad ibn Isma'il Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997).

motivation to earn money so that one can give charity to others,¹⁰ and so on. This topic in the hadith discussion is intriguing since it assumes that women should not labour outside the home¹¹ and or in the trades.¹²

Upon reviewing the delineation of responsibilities for husbands and wives mentioned above, it becomes apparent that the husband assumes a position of authority, possesses power, and exerts substantial influence over the wife.¹³ It is even mentioned that when the husband turns out not to have ability to provide physical and mental maintenance, there is still no obligation for wife to replace his position.¹⁴ However, it is crucial to understand that this analogy reflects certain cultural contexts and interpretations of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings. In fact, the Prophet emphasized mutual respect, kindness, and shared responsibilities between spouses, and any comparison should be understood within the broader framework of Islamic values on marriage and partnership.¹⁵

There have been many studies related to the focus of this study, namely wives' new role as the (main) breadwinner in a household. They typically have three focuses. *First*, it is observed from

¹⁰ Fathul Mu'in et al., "Reinterpretation of Livelihoods in Marriage Law and Its Implications on Family Resistance in the Time and Post Covid-19," *SMART: Journal of Sharia, Traditon, and Modernity* 1, no. 2 (2021): 113-27, <https://doi.org/10.24042/smart.v1i2.10965>.

¹¹ Tarmizi M. Jafar and Arifah Fitria, "Understanding Multiple Interpretations on the Hadith That Husbands Allow Wives to Have Outdoor Activities: A Study of Islamic Law Perspectives," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 5, no. 1 (2021): 210-31, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v5i1.9106>.

¹² Muhammad Ulul Albab, "Application of Ibn Hazm's Textual Method in the Hadith on Working Woman" (Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, 2018), <https://eprints.walisongo.ac.id/id/eprint/9198>.

¹³ Moh Hafid and Umi Sumbulah, "Living Hadith: The Role of Husband and Wife in Family Law," *Legal Brief* 11, no. 3 (2022): 1580-88, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.35335/legal.v11i3.322>.

¹⁴ Uswatun Hasanah, "Rescue Strategy for Covid Heroes in Households: Reconstructing the Meaning of Hadith Ahkam in Sunan Abū Dāwud," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 2 (2023): 1037-53, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i2.10159>.

¹⁵ Saqib Hussain, "The Bitter Lot of the Rebellious Wife: Hierarchy, Obedience, and Punishment in Q. 4:34," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 23, no. 2 (2021): 66-111, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2021.0466>.

a psychological perspective, such as self-concept,¹⁶ behavior,¹⁷ and motives as well as experiences. *Second*, it is portrayed from the perspective of hadith and Islamic Law.¹⁸ *Third*, it reviewed the phenomenon using a jurisprudence lens through the concepts of *maṣlaḥah*,¹⁹ *'urf*,²⁰ *maqāṣid asy-Syari'ah*,²¹ and *qirā'ah mubādalah*.²²

¹⁶ Dera Anggiarani, Aan Widodo, and Wa Ode Sitti Nurhaliza, "Fenomenologi Konsep Diri Istri Pencari Nafkah Utama (Studi tentang Deskripsi Identitas Diri dan Pengalaman Komunikasi Para Istri Pencari Nafkah Utama di Kelurahan Cikiwul Kota Bekasi)," *Verba Vitae Unwira* 2, no. 2 (2021): 121-40, <https://www.journal.unwira.ac.id/index.php/VERBAVITAE/article/view/1165>.

¹⁷ Asman, "Hak dan Kewajiban Perempuan dalam Perspektif Syariah Islam."

¹⁸ Lilis Handayani, "Peran Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam (Studi Kasus Desa Harum Sari Kecamatan Tamiang Hulu Kabupaten Aceh Tamiang)," *Journal of Legal and Cultural Analytics* 1, no. 3 (2022): 191-98, <https://doi.org/10.55927/jlca.v1i3.981>; Mujur Pangidoan Siregar, Fatahuddin Aziz Siregar, and Zulhammi, "Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama Pada Keluarga Parengge-Rengge (Pedagang Eceran Dipasar) di Kecamatan Angkola Muaratais Kabupaten Tapanuli Selatan) di Tinjau dari Kompilasi Hukum Islam," *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai* 7, no. 2 (2023): 14699-709, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31004/jptam.v7i2.8720>; Bambang Ismanto, Muhammad rudi Wijaya, and Anas Habibi Ritonga, "Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama dan Dampaknya dalam Keluarga Perspektif Hukum Islam (Studi Kasus Kehidupan Keluarga TKW di Kabupaten Lampung Timur)," *Fitrah: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 4, no. 2 (2018): 397-416, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.24952/fitrah.v4i2.950>; Suharna Ismail, "Tinjauan Hukum Islam Terhadap Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama dalam Keluarga PNS di Kecamatan Enrekang Kabupaten Enrekang," *Jurnal Al-Qadau Peradilan dan Hukum Keluarga Islam* 5, no. 1 (2018): 49-58, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24252/al-qadau.v5i1.5658>.

¹⁹ Lia Noviana and Salma Dewi Faradhila, "Problematika Dominasi Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah (Studi Kasus di Desa Joresan Kec. Mlarak Kab. Ponorogo)," *Al-Syakhsyiyah: Journal of Law & Family Studies* 2, no. 1 (2020): 93-111, <https://doi.org/10.21154/syakhsyiyah.v2i1.2162>.

²⁰ Ahmad Agung Kurniansyah, "Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama Perspektif Urf dan Akulturasi Budaya Redfield," *EGALITA: Jurnal Kesetaraan dan Keadilan Gender* 14, no. 1 (December 2019), <https://doi.org/10.18860/egalita.v14i1.8360>.

²¹ Siti Djazimah and Ihab Habudin, "Isteri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama: Studi Terhadap Perajin Kapuk di Desa Imogiri, Bantul, Yogyakarta," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 9, no. 1 (2016): 47-66, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2016.09104>.

²² Dede Al Mustaqim, "Peran Perempuan Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Keluarga Perspektif Qirā'ah Mubādalah dan Maqāshid Syariah: Peran Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah dalam Kesejahteraan Ekonomi Keluarga Perspektif Qirā'ah Mubādalah dan Maqāshid Syariah," *Jurnal Sipakalebbi* 6, no. 01 (2024): 114-32,

This paper differs from previous research because it focuses specifically on the shifting livelihood responsibilities of working wives within the context of Islamic law, choosing two specific locations that have not been explored in detail in previous research. In fact, these locations are easily accessible and are among those that send a large number of female migrant workers. The purpose of this study is therefore to examine the phenomenon while relating it to how Islamic law, mainly from its two main sources, says about the issue, particularly how it is perceived and believed among those who experience the shifting.

Methods

This field study employed a qualitative methodology focusing on the phenomenon of shifting economic responsibilities to migrant working wives in Tulungagung and Kediri and its Islamic law standpoint. The qualitative approach²³ was chosen to explore the intricacies of both phenomenon and reading interpretation of Islamic law, mainly the Qur'an and hadith as its sources. The research therefore integrates contextual analysis resulting from interviews and observation with textual analysis of the Qur'an and hadiths about livelihood, legal maxims, and other relevant sources.

Data collection involved in-depth interviews with five husbands in Tulungagung and Kediri whose wives have assumed main breadwinning roles as migrant workers and observation of their current situation. The sampling method relies on consent and availability of the informants and spreadability regarding the location, in addition to their variety of backgrounds and current situations. Their identity and relevant information are provided in the following Table 1.

<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24252/sipakallebbi.v8i1.46284>; Dwi Aprilianto et al., "The Controversy of Child Marriage Culture in the Perspective of Maqāṣid Al-Urah: A Case Study of The Authority of Lebe' in Brebes," *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 18, no. 2 (2024): 199-218, <https://doi.org/10.24090/mnh.v18i2.11554>.

²³ Haradhan Mohajan, "Qualitative Research Methodology in Social Sciences and Related Subjects," *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People* 7, no. 1 (2018): 23-48, <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=640546>; Iskandar, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Jakarta: Gaung Persada, 2009), 11.

Table 1. The Respondent Data

Informant Code	Marriage Status	Occupation	Origin	Duration of Wife's Employment
Sy (1)	Married	Farmer	Badal Pandean, Ngadiluwih Kediri	5 years (active)
US (2)	Married	Farmer and Transportation Business Owner	Badal Pandean, Ngadiluwih Kediri	2 years (active)
Ny (3)	Married	Farmer	West Talun, Bandung, Tulungagung	5 years (active)
Ha (4)	Married	Wedding Organizer Business	Bulus, Bandung, Tulungagung	6 years (returned home in 2023)
Mu (5)	Married	Freelancer	Singgit, Bandung, Tulungagung	6 years (active, divorced but with children)

Along with observation results, interview excerpts from those informants are displayed and analyzed to find tendencies, map the pattern, and figure out common things among one another or differences, if any. The result of the mapping is then integrated alongside religious texts using a contextual interpretation approach. This process seeks to understand how Islamic teachings on livelihood apply to and are perceived in contemporary socio-economic conditions in these regions. Combining empirical and textual analysis, this dual approach provides a comprehensive framework to explore how the situation takes place and how Islamic law accommodates shifting gender roles in response to economic pressures. The findings are then positioned within the broader context of Indonesia's socio-cultural and legal landscape.

Result and Discussion

Shifting Responsibilities for Livelihoods in Migrant Families

Although commonly believed to earn money, working abroad not only costs high investment in terms of energy and time but also sacrifices to separate from family members. This also means more varied risks to mitigate, such as the issue of legal and job protection, security, mental health, physical safety, cultural shock,²⁴ to household resilience. In this context, working wives abroad is not only deemed to take over husbands' responsibility in providing livelihood but also leaving their obligation to take care of the household behind, including raising children. On the other hand, it is known that women working abroad assuming the role as the primary breadwinner becomes a trend in a degree that it precedes the number of male migrant workers.²⁵

There are three factors beyond the situation that puts the wife as the main breadwinner when playing a role as a migrant workers: economic, social, and lifestyle with the first being the most dominant one.²⁶ Meanwhile, the husband's primary motive to agree with their wives working abroad as migrant workers is found to be the same, namely economic condition. In addition, it is known that decisions or initiatives likely come from the wives themselves. In other words, they are not coerced into choosing their paths. On the other hand, husbands are found to have limited skills, so they are failed to maintain the role as the main breadwinner. Meanwhile, the necessity to finance children's tuition and afford the living cost makes the wife's expertise worth using to for a job abroad.²⁷

²⁴ Yahya Thamrin, "A Literature Review of Migrant Workers' Health and Safety," *Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat Maritim* 1, no. 2 (2019): 244-53, <https://doi.org/10.30597/jkmm.v1i2.8721>.

²⁵ Pusat Data dan Informasi Kementerian Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia, "Data Layanan Penempatan dan Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia."

²⁶ Suharna Ismail, "Tinjauan Hukum Islam Terhadap Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama dalam Keluarga PNS di Kecamatan Enrekang Kabupaten Enrekang the Overview of Islamic Law Towards Wife as a Breadwinner in Civil Servant Family in Enrekang."

²⁷ Egis Febriyanti, Wahyu Utamidewi, and Luluatu Nayiroh, "Motif dan Pengalaman Komunikasi Para Suami dengan Istri Bekerja Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama dalam Keluarga di Kecamatan Cikampek," *Nusantara: Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial* 9, no. 4 (2022): 2924-31, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.31604/jjips.v9i8.2022.2924-2931>.

Interestingly, informants engaged in this research show different situations from one another. It turns out that out of financial necessity, other situations are coming up. Some husbands eventually agreed for their wives to go abroad and work as migrant workers for diverse consideration. Table 2 presents the results of interviews with some husbands dealing with the situation.

Table 2. The Situation within Family with Wives Working as Migrant Workers

Informant Code	Reason to Work Abroad	Survival Strategy	Current Situation
1	The wife has worked abroad before they get married. The wife is planning to come home once they think the investment is sufficient.	Using remittance from the wife's salary, the husband runs the farming and livestock business.	The husband manages the household while raising a 1-year child along with the assistance of his sister.
2	He initially hoped to extend his permit as a migrant worker, but it turned out that his wife got the opportunity instead. The wife is planning to come home once they think the gain is sufficient.	The husband manages the family business by purchasing a piece of land for farming, raising livestock, and providing transportation services.	Communication with the husband and the child is still maintained despite infrequent physical meetings.

3	The wife had prior work experience abroad before marriage, and based on family considerations, it was decided that she would go abroad again with the hope of having a double income.	The husband can still earn income through farming and gardening while preparing business capital from the remittance of his wife.	Communication with the husband or child continues to go well despite rarely physical meetings.
4	The agreement was made to improve economic conditions.	Leaving a 2-year-old child for 6 years, the wife sent her subsequent remittance so that the husband could manage it to meet living needs and save for the future. Communication runs smoothly even though it takes time for the child to get close to the wife.	Their saving has been deemed sufficient to start a business. The wife returned home. Currently, this couple is starting a wedding organizer business, makeup artist, and wedding decoration rental in their hometown.
5	The couple wanted to build a house. This situation is common	Leaving an 8-years-old child, their initial communication went well	Currently, his ex-wife is still abroad, and their child is entrusted to his ex-wife's sibling. The

because many women in Singgit Village work as migrant workers abroad.	before problems arose leading to their separation in 2020.	former husband has been doing odd jobs and has remarried. ²⁸
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Based on table 2, it can be underlined that it is agreed that wives work abroad as migrants mainly to provide income. It does not always mean that the husbands can not earn money. However, the common occupation of the husband, namely in farming, results in income which is likely subject to fluctuations, vulnerability, and seasonality.²⁹ Therefore, this is more about the division of labor in which the wives collect and provide the capital, while the husband at home manages it by running several types of business in addition to taking care of the household and children. Furthermore, most of the informants were prepared to build a new business while one of them aimed for consumptive use, namely building a residential house. This does imply how working abroad becomes a temporary choice while implying how job with high incomes is rarely found in home countries so people would like to look for it in neighboring countries.

In addition to the economic situation, another common factor beyond the decision for wives to work abroad as migrant workers is the former experience of working abroad, either by themselves or of their relatives and neighbors. The following extract, for example, describes what occurred to the wives of informants 1 and 3.

“My wife works in Hong Kong because of the need for better economic opportunities. She had previous experience working abroad before we got married, so it

²⁸ Sobardo Hamonangan, “Custody and Obligations of Parental Alimantion of Children After the Breakup of Marriage Due to Divorce in Terms of Law Number 1 Of 1974 Concerning Marriage,” *Pena Justisia: Media Komunikasi dan Kajian Hukum* 23, no. 1 (2024): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.31941/pj.v23i1.4094>.

²⁹ Choon Yen Khoo and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, “Responsible Adults-in-the-Making: Intergenerational Impact of Parental Migration on Indonesian Young Women’s Aspirational Capacity,” *Geoforum* 85 (2017): 280–89, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.08.005>.

made sense for her to take this opportunity. Actually, I did not evade my responsibility as the leader of my family. We were actually doing the test together, however, unluckily, I did not pass it while my wife passed it. Therefore, we agreed to manage our such livelihood even though it is not an ideal one”³⁰

The testimony shows how working experience makes them sure to apply for the same job as before. Certainly, they know quite well about procedure, flow, and how it feels like to work abroad, so they have no hesitation to make the choice. This might also be a direct consequence of the increasing number of Indonesian female migrant workers from time to time in addition to the growing number of legalized bureaus to distribute the workers. Moreover, there was so-called the feminization of labor migration, particularly in Southeast Asia, where the gendered regime and domestic workers motivated women more to work overseas.³¹ These factors inevitably lead to the increasing number of women migrant workers.

On the other hand, it is also clear that working abroad for wives is not an easy decision to make, let alone the situation in which there is a child to take care of. However, as the economic consideration is put as a priority, it is decided to make the choice by negotiating the situation, such as asking a relative to take care of the child like in the case of informant 1 and limit the working period until any specific target is achieved. The latter is even found, either directly or indirectly in the whole sampling informants. Working abroad, therefore, becomes a temporary choice as happened to the 4th informant whose wife has returned home and currently runs a new business. Certainly, during the process, changes of plan might happen, like what occurs at Informant 5 in which they decided to separate or get divorced after the wife, holding the mission for the good of the family, went to work abroad.

Another factor beyond the phenomenon of working wives as migrant workers is surrounding habits. The success of other people working abroad, such as neighbors or relatives, is clearly another

³⁰ Mr. Sy, *Interview*, March 23, 2024.

³¹ Khoo and Yeoh, “Responsible Adults-in-the-Making: Intergenerational Impact of Parental Migration on Indonesian Young Women’s Aspirational Capacity.”

factor beyond the huge migration of working wives overseas, like what occurs in the case of the last informant. Moreover, Kediri sends a large number of female migrant workers annually while Tulungagung is noted as one biggest sending districts of migrant workers overseas.³² Once they see the success in people of their surroundings, they likely think to do the same so that they can get big income as well. This tendency is also clear from a choice to take legal procedure by holding official visa and working permit. Therefore, they do not have any issues with legal requirements and threats of punishment or extradition. This furthermore can be inferred from the following excerpt;

“Allowing my wife to work in Taiwan is difficult, especially since our child is only 2 years old. I had also applied to work abroad, but I didn't pass the selection process, while my wife did. So, now I'm the one staying behind, managing and saving her income. Once we've saved enough, she will come home.”³³

What the husband tells strongly indicates how they need to pass through some tests or selection process before going overseas as migrant workers. Only did they use any illegal provider, for instance, it is likely that there would not be such a selection process, at least not that tight. Commonly, illegal workers tend to be put within three D-jobs, namely dirty physically demanding, and dangerous which do not require any advanced soft skills.³⁴ Based on it, the case above is highly likely to imply legal work with protected and well-paid workers.

The regular residence or working permit becomes an important issue because generally, there are many cons of working abroad, let alone to women. In addition to threatening marriage like what occurred to the 5th informant, working abroad also risks many

³² Sukawarsini Djelantik, “The Indonesian Women Migrant Workers: Redefinition and Termination of Sending Them Abroad,” *International Relations and Diplomacy* 7, no. 4 (2019): 139–49, <https://doi.org/10.17265/2328-2134/2019.04.001>.

³³ Mr. As, *Interview*, March 25, 2024.

³⁴ Maurizio Ambrosini and Minke H. J. Hajer, *Irregular Migration: IMISCOE Short Reader, Politics of Migration: A Survey* (New York City: Springer Nature, 2023), 19, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315728285-4>.

things, such as soul safety, bad parenting style, unhealthy communication with family members, mental health,³⁵ as well as bad stigma within society. Certainly, it does not only happen to wives or women deciding to work abroad. However, it becomes riskier when it comes to women since the very step of work placement³⁶ to relatively lower wages.³⁷ In a general context, despite any anticipation or prior information, they might already get to know, they are often put in fragile positions from both social and religious perspectives. This then turns us into the second discussion of this article.

Reading on the Qur'an and Hadith about Wives as Main Breadwinner

The closest concept in Islamic law that can be well related to this issue is so-called *nafaqah*, living or livelihood. Etymologically, the term "*nafaqah*" comes from the Arabic word "*nafaqah*", which means successful sale, depletion, and destruction. Then, "*nafaqah*" developed into "*anfaqah*", which includes the meaning of donation or expenditure for the welfare of the family and oneself.³⁸ In addition, livelihood can be understood as the resources needed for daily life or allocating funds to support life. Thus, livelihood requires individual responsibility to meet their dependents' primary, secondary, and tertiary needs.³⁹ Livelihood itself is defined not quite differently by scholars of schools. Imam Malik bin Anas defines it as sustenance that

³⁵ Kelly Ann Zainal and Joanna Barlas, "Mental Health, Stressors and Resources in Migrant Domestic Workers in Singapore: A Thematic Analysis of in-Depth Interviews," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 90 (2022): 116-28, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2022.08.004>.

³⁶ Isnaini Rodiyah and Jusuf Irianto, "Gender-Based Affirmative Policy for Female Migrant Workers," in *International Conference on Engineering, Management and Social Sciences* (Banyuwangi: ICEMSS, 2019), 1-8, <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.7-12-2018.2281775>.

³⁷ Siti Nur Azizah, Abdul Qoyum, and Prasojo, "Islam, Women Labor and Economic Development," in *Conference on Islamic Management, Accounting, and Economics (CIMA-E)*, vol. 2 (Yogyakarta: Pusat Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Ekonomi Islam, 2019), 221-34.

³⁸ Muhammad bin Idris As-Syafi'i, *Al-Umm* (Bairut: Daar al-Fikr, n.d.).

³⁹ Abd Syakur et al., "Tata Kelola Wakaf dalam Meningkatkan Kesejahteraan Masyarakat di Kabupaten Jember," *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum dan Pranata Sosial* 13, no. 1 (2018): 73, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-ihkam.v13i1.1187>.

fulfills human needs within reasonable limits.⁴⁰ Imam Hanafi, meanwhile, asserts that livelihood includes expenses required to support an individual including food, clothing, housing, and similar needs. Meanwhile, Imam Syafi'i and Imam Hanbali define livelihood as a means to fulfill the primary needs of individuals, including food, clothing, housing, and basic things related to them.⁴¹ Those schools of thought scholars generally characterize livelihood as basic needs instead of secondary or tertiary ones.

In the discussion of Islamic Law, two main points of *nafaqah* exist, namely those who provide for whom, and the the nominal or coverage of so-called *nafaqah*. According to classical scholars, such as Hanafiyah, Malikiyah, and Hanbaliyah, the level of living provided by a husband to his wife is determined by the wife's needs.⁴² This means that the husband is responsible for supporting his wife regardless of his financial ability. On the other hand, Shafi'iyah believes that the value of a wife's living expenses should be determined based on the husband's circumstances. In addition, contemporary scholars such as Yusuf Qardhawi and Wahbah Al-Zuhaili also emphasize that medical expenses must also be included in the wife's living expenses, which the husband must bear.⁴³ Those opinions reflect how the husband is the sole party who is deemed to assume the job to provide a livelihood. In practical life, the amount or coverage of livelihood depends quite much on the situation of each family, consideration, and deliberation result of both, as well as who provides the livelihood. In another word, the situation is not as stiff as found in those mentioned opinions because it tends to prioritize good communication and mutual understanding between the spouses. Testimonies from informants also reveal how the role could be exchanged with specific agreements and conditions, including what spending will be covered by the gained remittance.

In the Quran, relevant verses to this issue can be well divided between those which talk about social life, *infahq*, and in family circle so-called *nafaqah*. The latter can be further divided into two, namely

⁴⁰ Abdurrahman Al-Jaziri, *Al-Fiqh 'alā Madhāhib Al-Arba' Ah* (Bairut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, 2022).

⁴¹ Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, *Al-Fiqh Al-Islāmi Wa Adillatuhū* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1989).

⁴² Al-Jaziri, *Al-Fiqh 'alā Madhāhib Al-Arba' Ah*.

⁴³ Az-Zuhaili, *Al-Fiqh Al-Islāmi Wa Adillatuhū*.

mentioning *n-f-q* directly or indirectly. The former, among others, is mentioned in QS. At-Ṭalāq 6-7, although it portrays the situation after divorce and within *'iddah* period. Meaning to say, even after the divorce, a husband is still obliged to provide a living for his ex-wife and the children. Meanwhile, the latter category can be found in some verses, one of which is QS. Al-Baqarah 233 which also talks about the situation after divorce. In those two verses, the obligation to provide livelihood falls to the husband or father of the children without any possibility of sharing the responsibilities or even moving it to the wife or mother of children.

In a general context, the obligation to provide a living is mentioned at QS. An-Nisā'; 34, mainly in the phrase *wa bimā anfaqu min amwālihim*. Using explicit context, the verse noted how Allah Almighty has given advantages (*faḍḍala*) to some creatures over others, implying that these preferences are relative.⁴⁴ The Qur'an outlines that the fundamental leadership principle emphasizes assigning tasks to individuals with the necessary qualifications or characteristics without gender-based restrictions.⁴⁵ The term *rijāl* in the verse is believed to mean masculinity values instead of male as sexual identity. The opposite is An-Nisā' with feminine characteristics instead of solely female as sexual identity. Consequently, livelihood can be given by either husband and wife or even both altogether along with capabilities or masculine character in earning money. It is even made clearer that the exact term referring to men and women sexually are *al-dhakār* and *al-unthā*.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Gisela Webb, "Qur'an and Woman: Rereading The Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective," in *Journal of Law and Religion*, ed. Amina Wadud, vol. 15 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 519–23, <https://doi.org/DOI:10.2307/1051560>.

⁴⁵ Lilis Handayani, "Peran Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam (Studi Kasus Desa Harum Sari Kecamatan Tamiang Hulu Kabupaten Aceh Tamiang)"; Ziska Yanti, "Pendekatan Ma'na Cum Maghza tentang Arrijalu Qowwamuna 'Ala an-Nisa,'" *El-Maqra': Ilmu Al-Qur'an, Hadis dan Teologi* 2, no. 1 (2022): 52–60, <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.31332/elmaqra.v2i1.3990>; Salma Nawaz et al., "The Role of Human Rights and Obligations Toward Cross Gender Empowerment Under the Domain of Islamic Laws," *IRASD Journal of Management* 3, no. 3 (December 2021): 208–17, <https://doi.org/10.52131/jom.2021.0303.0039>.

⁴⁶ Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Jender Perspektif Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001), 143–70.

Meanwhile, in the hadith, there found two seemingly opposite positions dealing with the issue of working women. Although there found no hadith that textually either prohibits or allows women to work for the sake of money gain, some hadith indicate those two perspectives implicitly. The former consists of hadith that put women in a domestic position,⁴⁷ women should not be familiar with tradery things,⁴⁸ and the need for a company when women want to travel, even for *hajj* purposes.⁴⁹ The three imply that women's place is at home and that they are not qualified for working to earn money. Meanwhile, the latter consist of a hadith about a scene in which Prophet pbuh praised Zainab who fed her family⁵⁰ and his permission in another to a divorcee, within her *'iddah* period, to go to the garden so that she could give some of it for charity.⁵¹ Therefore, it is found two types of hadith regarding the issue of working women which could somehow neutralize common assumption about women's perceived position as the one who receives the living and manages it instead of (also) earning it.

While the patriarchal system prevalent in Arab culture at that time may have favored men in familial leadership roles,⁵² it is important to note that this perspective is not always aligned with the teachings of Islam which does not assert that men are inherently superior leaders for all situations. Therefore, a flexible and collaborative approach that adapts to various circumstances is more consistent with the overarching leadership principles espoused in the Qur'an and hadith.⁵³ Consequently, the responsibility of providing for the family can be viewed as a task that can be undertaken by both parties, including the wife, when she becomes the primary breadwinner. Practically, women can become economic contributors while replacing the role of their husbands in some possible situations,

⁴⁷ Imam Abi Abdillah ibn Isma'il bin Ibrahim ibn Mugirah ibn Bardazbah Al-Bukhari Al-Ju'fi, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* (Bairut: Darul Fikr, 2005), 146.

⁴⁸ Imam Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal, *Musnad Imam Ahmad*, ed. M. Sulton Akbar (Jakarta Selatan, 2009), 129-30.

⁴⁹ Al-Ju'fi, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, 219.

⁵⁰ Al-Ju'fi, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*.

⁵¹ Abi Dawud Sulaiman inn Al-Asy'ats Al-Sajastani, *Sunan Abi Dāwūd* (Bairut: Darul Fikr, 2007), 271.

⁵² Ja'far and Hermanto, "Reinterpretation of the Rights and Duties of Contemporary Husbands and Wives."

⁵³ Ja'far and Hermanto.

such as when the husband cannot carry out his duties because of getting sick or dying.⁵⁴ In this case, being a breadwinner is due to partnership and voluntary nature⁵⁵ because Islam highly values the efforts and contributions of men and women who do productive work.⁵⁶

This argumentation, even if it is less popular than those putting men or husbands in leading positions no matter what situation takes place in a household, is partly adapted by those with relevant experience. Husbands whose wives work abroad do not perceive that what they choose is contradictory to Islamic teaching or Islamic law. Instead, they keep believing that staying at home and managing the remittance sent by their wives working abroad is another way to provide a living while preparing for a better life ahead. It appears that they believe that the husband's role as head of the household remains the same, while the wife's role as a housewife is increasingly developing due to their increasing involvement in the public sphere, including in money-earning jobs. This is most clearly obvious for informant 2 who had also applied to work abroad but failed to pass the test or fulfill the qualification. The other 4 informants also show generally the same tendency. In other words, they do not really care about who becomes the primary breadwinner and who becomes the secondary one. As long as they do something useful in terms of providing livelihood, no matter where it takes place, those husbands feel that their responsibilities were fulfilled. Indeed, it is mentioned that religious consideration is less influential rather than social and economic force beyond the decision of women to become migrant workers.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Lukman Budi Santoso, "Eksistensi Peran Perempuan Sebagai Keluarga (Telaah Terhadap Counter Legal Draft-Kompilasi Hukum Islam dan Qira'ah Mubadalah)," *Marwah: Jurnal Perempuan, Agama dan Jender* 18, no. 2 (2020): 107, <https://doi.org/10.24014/marwah.v18i2.8703>.

⁵⁵ Lilis Handayani, "Peran Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam (Studi Kasus Desa Harum Sari Kecamatan Tamiang Hulu Kabupaten Aceh Tamiang)."

⁵⁶ Ismanto, Wijaya, and Ritonga, "Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama dan Dampaknya dalam Keluarga Perspektif Hukum Islam (Studi Kasus Kehidupan Keluarga TKW di Kabupaten Lampung Timur)."

⁵⁷ Azizah, Qoyum, and Prasojo, "Islam, Women Labor and Economic Development."

In fact, the husbands' obligation to provide livelihood is deemed as a natural result of the legal marriage bond because the wife is considered dependent on him. In the traditional reading of the Qur'an and hadiths, it is even deemed as an exchange for the wife's obedience.⁵⁸ However, scholars are typically flexible in this issue considering that social changes might take place and shift the roles between the spouse. Al-Jawwad, for instance, suggests that the level of livelihood provided should be adjusted based on the husband's financial capabilities.⁵⁹ This obviously means flexibility instead of burden. If the husband possesses wealth, the livelihood can align with his financial resources but if he is financially insufficient, his obligation is limited to providing what he can afford. This opinion, although not explicitly made relating to the working wife's phenomenon as migrant workers, is indeed relevant to principles of giving the best for the household as a common task for both husband and wife based on each capability. In a broader concept, it can be well linked to the principle of achieving benefits (*maṣlahah*).⁶⁰ Meaning to say, the obligation for husbands to provide a living is not read as literally as it is written—or traditionally interpreted—because it reflects the situation in which the verse was revealed so it also needs to pay attention to the current situation and location when the verse will be applied and its values manifested.

Accordingly, the wives' willingness and even initiative to work abroad also implies how they perceive what they are supposed to do. It seems that those couples envisage a good family with the division of labor based on each capability and qualification. If it happens to wives who are deemed (more) qualified to work abroad, they tend to compromise many things, such as by making it (wives working abroad) a temporary choice, finding technical solutions for

⁵⁸ Asep Habib Idrus Alawi, "The Concept of Al-Qur'an and Islamic Law in Educating Wife and the Solution for Dispute Settlement in Household Violence," *International Journal of Nusantara Islam* 6, no. 2 (2019): 125-32, <https://doi.org/10.15575/ijni.v6i2.3953>.

⁵⁹ Ibrahim Muhammad Al-Jawwad, *Fiqh Wanita Terj Anshori Umar Sitanggal* (Semarang: CV Asyifa', 1981).

⁶⁰ Djazimah and Habudin, "Isteri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama: Studi Terhadap Perajin Kapuk di Desa Imogiri, Bantul, Yogyakarta"; Ummal Khoiriyah and Fahmi Basyar, "Perspektif Masalah tentang Peran Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama dalam Keluarga," *Istidlal: Jurnal Ekonomi dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 1 (April 2023): 1-13, <https://doi.org/10.35316/istidlal.v7i1.488>.

raising children, and saving remittance while establishing a new business at the same time. More or less, this also reflects how they perceive Islamic law about wives' position as the breadwinners. This perception can rarely be figured out directly through direct interviews or observation regarding their less familiarity with Islamic law concepts and theories. Therefore, their life choice and actions show more about how they believe what Islamic law says about the phenomenon or experience they go through.

Apart from what they believe they are supposed to be or to do in relation to complying with Islamic law or teaching, the reality shows that unexpected situations sometimes come up. It could be about following risks of having a long-distance marriage,⁶¹ such as bad comments and stigma for both or each,⁶² potentially increasing deviant behavior among children due to lack of parental attention, infidelity from each or both, misuse of remittance or improper management, and involvement in other unethical practices.⁶³ This more obviously shows that despite positive consequences, wives working as migrant workers are prone to any potential negative consequences, such as family crises and exploitation by husbands, employers, agencies, or others.⁶⁴ This seems to be well-realized by both parties so all sampling informants of this research show how they negotiate the situation by keeping the communication well-kept despite the long-distance relationship they go through while strengthening their commitment and initial purpose.

Furthermore, the case of the last informant vividly shows that it might become irrelevant to relate the wife working as a migrant worker with the manifestation of gaining benefits (*jalb al-maṣāliḥ*) maxim because another concept of avoiding risks (*dar' al-mafāsīd*) might come first. Moreover, it is known that different from the husbands of other informants, only the husband of the last informant

⁶¹ Ismanto, Wijaya, and Ritonga, "Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama dan Dampaknya dalam Keluarga Perspektif Hukum Islam (Studi Kasus Kehidupan Keluarga TKW di Kabupaten Lampung Timur)."

⁶² Febriyanti, Utamidewi, and Nayiroh, "Motif dan Pengalaman Komunikasi Para Suami dengan Istri Bekerja Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama dalam Keluarga di Kecamatan Cikampek."

⁶³ Ismanto, Wijaya, and Ritonga, "Istri Sebagai Pencari Nafkah Utama dan Dampaknya dalam Keluarga Perspektif Hukum Islam (Studi Kasus Kehidupan Keluarga TKW di Kabupaten Lampung Timur)."

⁶⁴ Ismanto, Wijaya, and Ritonga.

did not assume any particular occupation, although he is mentioned as a freelancer rather than unemployed. Therefore, although the initial purpose is for the good sake of family financial stability and fulfillment of family needs, the situation might change so that it could not be made valid for the whole situation and cases. Certainly, again, this maxim might not be familiar at all for those who live the experience although the essence of the maxim might be within their consideration and deliberation before coming into decision. Considering both good and bad consequences beyond the decision for wives working abroad will likely be well conducted before coming into a decision.

Another seemingly relevant maxim is the achievement of public welfare (*al-maṣlahat al-'āmmah*) in family circle. The goodness itself has three parts that can be different within families, namely urgent needs (*darūriyyāt*), important needs (*hājiyyāt*), and needs of advanced improvement (*taḥsīniyyāt*).⁶⁵ In this context, although the main purpose among sampling informants is economic need fulfillment, the specific needs turn out to be different from one another. If the last informant explicitly mentions that they are working abroad so that they can afford to build a house as their currently urgent needs, other families might target to fulfill different types of needs which could be longer in term or more investing in form. The rest seems not that straightforward in expressing the exact purpose beyond the decision for wives to work abroad. They tend to only disclose how they want to have a better living by running a business so they need sufficient capital to start with. It is probable that the remittance from working abroad is also for fulfilling consumptive needs or paying back the debt, if any, though it might not become the primary purpose.

In short, there were diverse negotiations beyond decisions on women migrant workers overseas ranging from economic, social, to religious realms. Despite concerns about physical safety and family resilience, the economic situation likely becomes the most influential driving force beyond the choice. In addition, social demand or prestige is also beyond the huge migration of women as migrant workers. Common wish to follow other people's success in working as migrants throws away any hesitation to choose otherwise,

⁶⁵ Abdul Wahhab Khallaf, *Ilmu Ushul Fiqh* (Kairo: Dar al-Hadits, 1978), 206-7.

strengthened by supporting the provider of a working agency. Meanwhile, existing jobs in the home country cannot give any better hope. Eventually, there also occurred negotiations on how religious norms put working wives abroad considering legal procedure, full protection, friendly women-type jobs, and manifesting mission for the goodness of the family. Accordingly, each would have different stories another. Some might get what they wanted and planned since the beginning, as the 4th informant does, while some others might need to change the plan due to unexpected situations like occurred in the 5th informant.

Conclusion

Beyond all probable benefits mainly in the economic realm, shifting livelihood responsibilities from husband to wife who works as a migrant worker is still fond of challenges. It depends much on the situation of each family, let alone consideration beyond that specific division of labor and readiness of involving parties, ranging from wives, husbands, children, and other family members. Certainly, wives' qualifications and capabilities as well as the legality of the working agencies also matter quite influential. The findings from this study offer significant insights into how Islamic legal thought can adapt to socio-economic changes while maintaining its core principles. In regions like Tulungagung and Kediri, where Moslems are the majority and wives increasingly assume primary breadwinning roles, there found flexible perception of how Islamic law demonstrates flexibility by making such shifts possible without compromising the husband's primary obligation to provide living for the family. This is particularly because there was no clear indication from either the Qur'an or hadith which prohibits women from working to earn money. Therefore, despite their unfamiliarity with those main sources, those who experience the situation imply how they believe that Islamic law acknowledges the wife's right to contribute financially if she has the ability and opportunity. Still, they believe that it is only possible to occur within mutual understanding and voluntariness. Theoretically, this study suggests that evolving family dynamics in Indonesia require an ongoing interpretation of Islamic legal principles to address contemporary challenges. The phenomenon of temporary role reversal, where wives work while husbands manage households, reflects this adaptation which is

subject to evaluation by various parties ranging from religious figures to local and even national government. This study certainly has limitations in terms of research locus, theoretical framework, to analysis. Future research could adopt a cross-cultural approach to investigate variations in couples' involvement in earning a living across diverse social frameworks.

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