

## Women's Empowerment in the Workplace from a Qur'anic Perspective: A Prophetic Gender Equilibrium Framework and Implications for Madrasah Education

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### ABSTRACT

Women's participation in the workforce has expanded, yet unequal remuneration, career barriers, occupational segregation, and disproportionate care responsibilities continue to limit substantive gender equality. In madrasahs, which function both as educational settings and professional organizations, gendered expectations may also shape learning, employment, career development, and leadership. This study analyzes Qur'anic ethical foundations relevant to women's agency and workplace participation, situates them in dialogue with contemporary evidence on structural gender inequality, and proposes a Prophetic Gender Equilibrium framework with implications for gender-responsive madrasah education and governance. The study employed qualitative-conceptual library research using thematic Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr mawdū'ī*) and a gender-ecological perspective. The Qur'anic corpus comprised QS. An-Nisā' 4:1, QS. At-Tawbah 9:71, QS. Āli 'Imrān 3:35–37, QS. Al-Qaṣaṣ 28:23 and 28:26, and QS. An-Naml 27:23–44. Interpretations were examined through Indonesian thematic exegesis, Tafsir Al-Mishbah, and relevant scholarship, while contemporary workplace evidence was treated as secondary contextual material rather than as a direct Qur'anic finding. The analysis identifies shared human dignity (*nafsin wāḥidah*) and reciprocal social partnership (*awliyā'*) as ethical foundations directly traceable to the selected corpus. Three Qur'anic narratives provide complementary models of women's agency: Maryam represents spiritual autonomy and personal development; the two women of Madyan illustrate professional responsibility, competence, and integrity; and the female ruler of Saba' illustrates deliberative leadership. Khadijah is treated separately as a historical exemplar of economic agency. These elements are synthesized into the proposed Prophetic Gender Equilibrium framework across micro, meso, and macro levels. The proposed framework provides a structured conceptual bridge between Qur'anic ethics, contemporary workplace gender justice, and gender-responsive madrasah education. Its institutional and policy implications are normative-contextual applications rather than direct textual prescriptions. Because the framework remains conceptual, its dimensions and operational indicators require empirical validation before claims about effectiveness or generalizability can be made.

**Keywords:** *Women's Empowerment; Workplace Gender Justice; Prophetic Gender Equilibrium; Gender Ecology; Qur'anic Exegesis; Madrasah Education*

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## A. INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in paid employment has expanded, but increased access to work has not produced equitable conditions. Women continue to face unequal remuneration, occupational segregation, barriers to promotion, and disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care. These inequalities arise not only from individual choices but also from organizational cultures, gender norms, and economic arrangements that shape opportunity and the valuation of work (International Labour Organization, 2019). Federici (2014) locates the devaluation of women's reproductive labor within the historical development of capitalist accumulation, while Unger (1979) and Lips (1993) show how socially constructed gender expectations associate leadership and independence with men and care, emotionality, and passivity with women. Such expectations can affect judgments of competence, professional roles, and access to authority.

The interaction between employment and family responsibility further complicates women's workplace participation. Pandemic-era arrangements made the overlap between paid work and domestic responsibilities particularly visible. Research on nurses during COVID-19 lockdowns found that work-family management strategies were associated with individual health and family relationships (Zhao et al., 2023). Although this evidence cannot be generalized to all women or forms of employment, it illustrates how workplace arrangements may intensify pre-existing inequalities in care responsibilities.

Qur'anic and Islamic gender scholarship has increasingly addressed these concerns through contextual and gender-sensitive interpretation. Fitriyah and Rahman (2024) call for interpretations that respond to patriarchal bias and contemporary demands for inclusion. Muqtada et al. (2024) examine feminist interpretive practices among activists in Indonesia and Malaysia, while Aisyah and Kusmana (2025) analyze how Ngaji KGI connects Qur'anic interpretation with women's lived experiences and gender justice. More directly related to employment, Fitriansyah et al. (2026) reconstruct Qur'anic values of justice, dignity, and protection in relation to women in the workplace. These studies establish the relevance of Qur'anic interpretation to contemporary gender issues but do not yet integrate workplace structures, multilevel institutional analysis, and madrasah education within a single framework.

Gender-ecological and Islamic educational scholarship provides further conceptual resources. Febriani et al. (2023) develop a model of Qur'anic integral ecofeminism centered on relational balance and resistance to domination. In educational settings, Makruf et al. (2022) connect women's education at Madrasah Mu'allimat with competency development and prophetic leadership. Siagian (2023) and Sholeh (2023) examine gender-responsive learning and institutional practices in madrasahs, whereas Sakdiah et al. (2024) identify cultural, seniority-based, and social barriers encountered by female madrasah principals. This literature positions madrasahs not only as sites of instruction but also as professional organizations in which gendered expectations may

shape employment, career development, authority, and the institutional messages communicated to students.

A conceptual gap nevertheless remains between these bodies of scholarship. Studies of Islamic feminism and gender-sensitive hermeneutics primarily address interpretive method and gender justice; gender-ecological studies emphasize relational balance; workplace studies document structural inequality; and madrasah research examines educational practice or female leadership. Less attention has been given to a framework that begins with a defined Qur'anic corpus, distinguishes textual interpretation from historical exemplification and secondary empirical evidence, translates ethical principles across individual, institutional, and public-policy levels, and then considers their relevance to madrasahs as educational and professional institutions. This integration matters because Qur'anic interpretation continues to interact with the social categories through which gender, education, and participation in public life are evaluated in Muslim contexts (Ayoub, 2012).

The present study addresses this gap through the gender-ecological perspective developed by Nur Arfiyah Febriani. This perspective approaches relations between women and men through mutual support, balance (*mīzān*), shared responsibility, and collective well-being rather than inherent hierarchy. Gender injustice can therefore be examined not only as a violation of individual rights but also as a disruption of social relationships and shared welfare (Febriani, 2017a). In this article, gender ecology functions as an analytical lens rather than as evidence derived directly from the selected Qur'anic verses.

The study has two related objectives. First, it synthesizes secondary literature to examine how patriarchal norms and economic arrangements contribute to women's disempowerment in contemporary workplaces. Second, and more centrally, it analyzes selected Qur'anic principles and narratives concerning shared human dignity, reciprocal social partnership, spiritual autonomy, professional responsibility, integrity, and leadership. It then considers how these ethical categories may inform gender-responsive education and organizational governance in madrasahs.

The article proposes the Prophetic Gender Equilibrium framework as a structured conceptual synthesis rather than an empirically validated intervention. It distinguishes four forms of evidence: Qur'anic textual interpretation, Islamic historical exemplification, contemporary empirical context, and normative application. The framework connects two ethical foundations—shared human dignity and reciprocal social partnership—with the Qur'anic narratives of Maryam, the two women of Madyan, and the female ruler of Saba', as well as Khadijah's historical example of economic agency. These dimensions are organized across micro, meso, and macro levels to clarify how spiritual autonomy, professional competence, deliberative leadership, and economic agency may be related to individual capacity, institutional arrangements, and broader policy conditions. The contribution lies not in claiming previously unknown Qur'anic principles, but in developing a traceable multilevel synthesis for examining workplace gender justice and its possible application in madrasah education and governance.

## B. METHODS

This study used a qualitative-conceptual library research design, with thematic Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr mawdū'ī*) as the principal interpretive method and gender ecology as the analytical lens for examining balance, partnership, shared responsibility, and social well-being. The thematic approach was used to assemble and interpret Qur'anic passages around a defined analytical problem and to examine their interrelationships within a coherent thematic structure (Azizy et al., 2022). Qur'anic passages were selected when they addressed shared human origin and dignity, reciprocal social partnership, women's agency or participation in public and productive life, or narratives relevant to spiritual autonomy, professional responsibility, leadership, and economic agency. The resulting corpus comprised QS. An-Nisā' 4:1 on shared human origin; QS. At-Tawbah 9:71 on reciprocal social partnership (*awliyā'*); QS. Āli 'Imrān 3:35–37 on Maryam; QS. Al-Qaṣaṣ 28:23 and 28:26 on the two women of Madyan; and QS. An-Naml 27:23–44 on the female ruler of Saba'. Khadijah was examined separately as a historical exemplar from early Islam rather than as a Qur'anic figure. The primary textual sources were the selected verses and the official Indonesian Qur'an translation published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). The principal exegetical source was *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik: Kedudukan dan Peran Perempuan* (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2009), read alongside *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* (Shihab, 2002). The Arabic verses retained in this English manuscript are accompanied by the Saheeh International translation, whereas the interpretation remains based on the specified exegetical sources.

Secondary materials included peer-reviewed articles, academic books, and official institutional reports on patriarchy, capitalism, workplace inequality, unpaid care, gender-sensitive Qur'anic interpretation, Islamic feminism, madrasah education, women's leadership, and economic empowerment. Sources were identified purposively through Google Scholar, official journal and publisher websites, and institutional repositories maintained by the International Labour Organization, UN Women, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and the United Nations Statistics Division. Searches combined Indonesian and English terms, including “tafsir gender Al-Qur'an/Qur'anic gender interpretation,” “Islamic feminism,” “women workplace/gender justice,” “unpaid care work,” “female leadership madrasah,” and “gender-responsive Islamic education.” Recent peer-reviewed studies published between 2022 and 2026 were prioritized, while earlier works were retained when they provided foundational theoretical, exegetical, historical, or institutional material. Sources were included when they directly addressed the analytical focus and their bibliographic metadata or institutional provenance could be verified. Duplicative, unverifiable, indirectly relevant, and derivative materials lacking an identifiable original source were excluded. Because the search was purposive, this contextual literature corpus was used for conceptual synthesis rather than treated as an exhaustive systematic review.

The analysis proceeded in seven stages. First, the study defined the analytical relationship among women's empowerment, workplace gender justice, and madrasah

education. Second, it assembled the Qur'anic corpus using the stated selection criteria. Third, each passage was examined in relation to linguistic meaning, narrative context, *munāsabah*, and the selected exegetical interpretations. Fourth, the textual analysis was organized into five categories: shared human dignity, reciprocal social partnership, spiritual autonomy, professional responsibility, and deliberative leadership. Fifth, these Qur'anic findings were distinguished from Khadijah's historical exemplification and from contemporary empirical evidence. Sixth, the resulting categories were brought into dialogue with scholarship on gender, political economy, workplace inequality, and madrasah education. Finally, the textual, historical, and contextual materials were synthesized into the proposed Prophetic Gender Equilibrium framework across micro, meso, and macro levels. Interpretive consistency was supported by cross-checking the Qur'anic text, translations, exegetical sources, peer-reviewed studies, and institutional reports. Throughout the analysis, Qur'anic textual findings, historical exemplification, secondary empirical evidence, and normative application were treated as distinct evidentiary categories. Accordingly, equal remuneration, merit-based advancement, workplace protection, access to leadership and economic resources, and gender-responsive madrasah governance are presented as contextual applications rather than policies directly prescribed by the selected verses. As a conceptual and library-based study, the analysis does not test the effectiveness, measurement properties, or generalizability of the proposed framework.

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Results

The results presented in this section are limited to the thematic analysis of the selected Qur'anic verses and narratives. Accordingly, shared human dignity, reciprocal social partnership, Maryam, the two women of Madyan, and the female ruler of Saba' are treated as findings derived from the Qur'anic corpus. Khadijah is retained separately as a complementary historical exemplar and is not presented as a figure mentioned in the Qur'an. Contemporary evidence concerning gender pay inequality, the glass ceiling, unpaid care work, and patriarchal-economic structures is reserved for the Discussion as secondary empirical context rather than treated as a direct result of Qur'anic interpretation.

The thematic analysis first identifies two ethical foundations that are directly traceable to the selected corpus: shared human origin and dignity in QS. An-Nisā' 4:1 and reciprocal social partnership between believing women and men in QS. At-Tawbah 9:71. These principles challenge interpretations that treat women as morally or socially secondary and provide an ethical basis for understanding women as responsible participants in social life.

#### 1) Qur'anic Ethical Foundations

##### a. *Nafsin Wāḥidah*: Shared Human Origin and Dignity

The first foundation is expressed through the concept of *nafsin wāḥidah*, or 'a single soul.' QS. An-Nisā' 4:1 presents humanity as originating from a shared source.



Within the thematic interpretation used in this study, this principle challenges constructions that position women as secondary human beings and instead places women and men within a common framework of human dignity and moral responsibility (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2009).

This reading is particularly significant in relation to patriarchal interpretations that have sometimes treated women's human status as derivative of men's. The term *nafs*, as interpreted in the thematic exegetical source used in this study, emphasizes a common human origin rather than a hierarchy of human worth based on sex (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2009). The analytical implication is therefore not that biological differences are denied, but that such differences cannot in themselves establish unequal human dignity or moral capacity. When this principle is brought into contemporary workplace contexts, discrimination based solely on sex—including restrictions on access, professional advancement, or recognition—can be evaluated critically against the ethical principle of shared human dignity. This is a normative contextual inference rather than a claim that QS. An-Nisā' 4:1 directly regulates modern wage systems, career structures, or employment policies.

#### **b. *Awliyā'*: Reciprocal Social Partnership**

A second foundation emerges from QS. At-Tawbah 9:71, which describes believing men and women as *awliyā'* of one another. The verse presents women and men within a reciprocal relationship of moral and social responsibility, including their shared commitment to promoting what is right and preventing what is wrong.

The thematic exegesis published by the Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an interprets this relationship as supporting active cooperation between women and men in social life, including participation in public affairs (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2009). In this sense, *awliyā'* does not construct women as passive beneficiaries of male responsibility but positions believing women and men as participants in a reciprocal moral partnership.

For the purposes of this study, this principle provides an ethical basis for understanding women's participation in professional and public life as compatible with shared social responsibility. Its contemporary implications must nevertheless be distinguished from the textual finding itself. The verse establishes reciprocal moral partnership; specific institutional arrangements concerning employment, leadership, or division of responsibilities constitute later contextual applications of that principle.

### **2) Models of Women's Agency**

#### **a. Maryam: Spiritual Autonomy and Personal Development**

Maryam represents spiritual autonomy, moral integrity, and the capacity for personal development. In QS. Āli 'Imrān 3:35–37, she is depicted as a person whose dedication is accepted, who receives care and sustenance, and who occupies the *mihrab* as a space of worship and devotion. The narrative places her spiritual standing within a relationship with God that is not dependent on male moral status.

كَلَّمَآ دَخَلَ عَلَيْهَا زَكَرِيَّا الْمِحْرَابَ وَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا رِزْقًا قَالَ يَمْرِئُؤْمُؤْ اِنَّ لَكَ هَذَا هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ  
اللّٰهِ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَآءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

“Every time Zechariah entered upon her in the prayer chamber, he found with her provision. He said, ‘O Mary, from where is this [coming] to you?’ She said, ‘It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account.’” (QS. Āli ‘Imrān 3:37)

Within its immediate Qur’anic context, the mihrab is a space of worship and Maryam’s religious devotion. The present study does not interpret this space literally as evidence concerning women’s access to contemporary workplaces. Rather, the narrative is read as affirming Maryam’s spiritual subjectivity, moral worth, and capacity for growth.

At the level of normative inference, these values can inform contemporary arguments for women’s access to education, competency development, and opportunities to earn trust on the basis of ability and integrity. In workplace and educational contexts, this interpretation supports competency-based development rather than restrictions derived solely from gender stereotypes. Such implications remain contextual extensions of the narrative rather than employment or career policies explicitly contained in the Qur’anic passage.

#### **b. The Two Women of Madyan: Professional Responsibility, Competence, and Integrity**

The two women encountered by Musa in Madyan provide a second model, centered on work-related responsibility, agency, and ethical judgment in public interaction. Importantly, the Qur’an does not identify their father as the Prophet Shu‘ayb; that identification derives from some later exegetical traditions. The present analysis therefore does not treat it as a Qur’anic textual fact.

وَلَمَّا وَرَدَ مَاءَ مَدْيَنَ وَجَدَ عَلَيْهِ أُمَّةٌ مِّنَ النَّاسِ يَسْقُونَ ۖ وَوَجَدَ مِنْ دُونِهِمُ امْرَأَتَيْنِ تَذُودَنِ قَالَ مَا  
خَطْبُكُمَا قَالَتَا لَا نَسْقِي حَتَّى يُصْدِرَ الرِّعَاءَ وَأَبُونَا شَيْخٌ كَبِيرٌ

“And when he came to the well of Madyan, he found there a crowd of people watering [their flocks], and he found aside from them two women driving back [their flocks]. He said, ‘What is your circumstance?’ They said, ‘We do not water until the shepherds dispatch [their flocks]; and our father is an old man.’” (QS. Al-Qaṣaṣ 28:23)

The statement that their father was elderly (wa abūnā shaykhun kabīr) explains the circumstances surrounding their participation in the family’s productive activity. Within this narrative, the division of responsibility responds to family conditions rather than to an inflexible assumption that economic activity belongs exclusively to men. Their presence in this setting is narrated without condemnation, while their conduct indicates responsibility and restraint in public interaction.

The narrative subsequently develops another dimension of professional judgment. One of the women recommends that Musa be employed on the basis of two attributes:

قَالَتْ إِحْدَهُمَا يَأْتِيَّ اسْتَأْجِرْهُ إِنَّ خَيْرَ مَنِ اسْتَأْجَرْتَ الْقَوِيُّ الْأَمِينُ

“One of the women said, ‘O my father, hire him. Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy.’” (QS. Al-Qaṣaṣ 28:26)

The terms al-qawiyy and al-amīn foreground capacity and trustworthiness as criteria for evaluating a prospective worker. The narrative therefore portrays a woman not only as participating in productive activity but also as observing competence, making an evaluative judgment, and communicating that judgment within a family decision-making process.

As a contemporary normative inference, the combination of competence and integrity can inform merit-based approaches to recruitment and professional advancement. The study does not claim that QS. Al-Qaṣaṣ 28 prescribes contemporary human-resource systems. Rather, the organizational implication is derived contextually from the ethical criteria expressed in the narrative.

### c. The Female Ruler of Saba’: Deliberative Leadership and Decision-Making

The female ruler of Saba’, commonly identified as Balqis in later tradition, provides the third Qur’anic model. The Qur’an itself does not name her Balqis; it presents her as a woman governing the people of Saba’. Her narrative in QS. An-Naml 27:23–44 provides textual material concerning political authority, deliberation, information gathering, and decision-making.

إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ

“Indeed, I found [there] a woman ruling them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a great throne.” (QS. An-Naml 27:23)

The verse explicitly depicts a woman exercising political authority over a polity. Subsequent passages emphasize the process through which she responds to the message delivered from Sulayman. Rather than acting unilaterally, she consults her advisers and requests their judgment. This aspect of the narrative has also been examined in contemporary scholarship on female leadership in QS. An-Naml 27:23–44 (Az-Zahra et al., 2025). Her consultative approach is particularly evident in QS. An-Naml 27:32:

قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي أَمْرِي مَا كُنْتُ قَاطِعَةً أَمْرًا حَتَّى تَشْهَدُونِ

“She said, ‘O eminent ones, advise me in my affair. I would not decide a matter until you witness [for] me.’” (QS. An-Naml 27:32)

The narrative therefore presents a form of deliberative leadership characterized by consultation, information seeking, and consideration of consequences. When her advisers emphasize their military strength, she considers the destructive consequences of war and adopts a more measured course of action.

For contemporary organizational analysis, this deliberative pattern can be interpreted normatively as supporting leadership that is consultative, responsive to information, and attentive to consequences. The narrative does not itself prescribe a modern organizational governance model. Its relevance lies in demonstrating that the Qur’anic narrative depicts a woman exercising authority and directs analytical attention



to the quality of her decision-making rather than treating gender itself as a sufficient measure of leadership capacity.

#### **d. Khadijah: Historical Economic Agency and Financial Independence**

Khadijah differs epistemically from the preceding three models because she is a historical figure rather than a character in the Qur'anic corpus analyzed in this study. She is therefore included as a complementary example from early Islamic history, particularly for the economic dimension of women's agency.

Historical and contemporary Islamic literature portrays Khadijah as possessing economic resources and participating in commercial activity. In the sources used in this study, her example has also been discussed in relation to Muslim women's entrepreneurship and economic independence (Mujahid, 2012; Wulaningsih et al., 2024). Within the conceptual framework of this study, Khadijah's significance lies in illustrating that women's possession, management, and productive use of economic resources can be situated within the early Islamic historical tradition. Her example therefore complements the Qur'anic models by adding an explicitly economic dimension to spiritual autonomy, professional responsibility, and deliberative leadership.

The historical status of this evidence nevertheless limits the claim that can be made. Khadijah's economic activity should not be presented as a direct Qur'anic textual finding, nor does her historical example by itself establish a complete contemporary model of women's economic empowerment. Rather, it provides an Islamic historical exemplar that can be placed in dialogue with the ethical principles identified in the Qur'anic analysis.

The three Qur'anic narratives then provide complementary dimensions of women's agency: Maryam illustrates spiritual autonomy and personal development; the two women of Madyan illustrate professional responsibility, competence, integrity, and evaluative judgment; and the female ruler of Saba' illustrates deliberative leadership and decision-making. These dimensions constitute the textual and historical basis from which the Prophetic Gender Equilibrium framework is subsequently developed. At this stage, however, the results do not establish specific policies concerning equal remuneration, career advancement, workplace protection, financial inclusion, or gender-responsive madrasah governance. Those institutional and policy implications emerge only when the thematic findings are brought into dialogue with contemporary gender and workplace literature in the Discussion.

## **2. Discussion**

The thematic analysis identifies shared human dignity (*nafsin wāḥidah*) and reciprocal social partnership (*awliyā'*) as the framework's two Qur'anic foundations. It also identifies three complementary forms of women's agency: Maryam represents spiritual autonomy and personal development; the two women of Madyan illustrate professional responsibility, competence, and integrity; and the female ruler of Saba' illustrates deliberative leadership. Khadijah adds economic agency as a historical exemplar rather than a Qur'anic figure. These findings address the study's central purpose

without treating the narratives as direct workplace rules. Maryam's narrative, in particular, establishes moral subjectivity and developmental capacity, not empirical evidence of labor-market participation.

With respect to the first research purpose, contemporary evidence indicates that women's workplace disempowerment is sustained by the interaction of patriarchal valuation and economic organization. Using SAKERNAS data for 2018–2023, Ruslan and Sukma (2025) reported an average raw gender wage gap of 30.79%, with a gap of 22.82% remaining after observable wage-related characteristics were considered. This pattern is consistent with earlier evidence on Indonesia's persistent gender pay gap (International Labour Organization & UN Women, 2020). Federici's (2014) analysis helps explain how work associated with women, especially reproductive and care labor, may be economically necessary while remaining unpaid or undervalued. The Qur'anic principle of shared human dignity does not itself prescribe a modern wage regime, but it provides an ethical basis for questioning employment practices that systematically devalue workers because of gender. From the gender-ecological perspective, such devaluation also disrupts *mīzān*, understood as relational balance rather than domination (Febriani, 2017b). Equal remuneration is therefore a contemporary normative implication of the dialogue between ethical principle and empirical evidence, not a literal policy extracted from QS. An-Nisā' 4:1.

The same structural problem appears in leadership and care responsibilities. Women held approximately 30% of managerial positions globally in 2023, with only limited progress since 2015 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2025). Role Congruity Theory explains how stereotypes may produce prejudice when women's expected social roles are perceived as incompatible with leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Evidence from major Indonesian companies likewise shows women's underrepresentation at board level (Indonesia Business Coalition for Women Empowerment [IBCWE] et al., 2018), while occupational and functional segregation can restrict access to career pathways (International Labour Organization, 2019). In this context, the ruler of Saba' supports evaluating leadership through consultation, judgment, and responsibility, while the women of Madyan support evaluation through capability and trustworthiness rather than gender. Employment participation alone, however, does not constitute substantive empowerment when women also bear a disproportionate second shift (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Women perform 76.2% of the world's 16.4 billion daily hours of unpaid care work (International Labour Organization, 2018), a disparity also documented in Asia and the Pacific and across countries (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2021; Ferrant et al., 2014). The principle of *awliyā'* does not specify a contemporary division of domestic labor, but its emphasis on reciprocal responsibility challenges the assumption that care is inherently and exclusively women's work.

The Prophetic Gender Equilibrium framework synthesizes these textual findings, Khadijah's historical example, and contemporary evidence through a three-stage inference: identifying an ethical principle, interpreting it within the wider values of

dignity, reciprocity, balance, responsibility, and social well-being, and then formulating contextually relevant implications. The term prophetic is used in this ethical sense and does not imply that the female exemplars themselves were prophets. Equilibrium denotes relational justice and the removal of unjustified barriers, not fixed gender complementarity or numerical symmetry. The framework operates at the micro level of individual agency, the meso level of institutional practice, and the macro level of structural and policy conditions. Table 1 integrates the four exemplars with these levels.

**Table 1.**

**Conceptual Mapping of the Prophetic Gender Equilibrium Framework**

| <b>Textual or Historical Anchor</b>                                                              | <b>Micro Level</b>                                                    | <b>Meso Level</b>                                                | <b>Macro Level</b>                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Maryam (Qur'anic narrative: spiritual autonomy and personal development)                         | Spiritual integrity, confidence, and competency development.          | Equitable access to learning, development, and decision-making.  | Nondiscrimination in public and professional opportunity.             |
| Two Women of Madyan (Qur'anic narrative: professional responsibility, competence, and integrity) | Capability, trustworthiness, responsibility, and ethical interaction. | Merit-based recruitment, workplace safety, and protection.       | Equal remuneration, worker protection, and grievance mechanisms.      |
| Female Ruler of Saba' (Qur'anic narrative: deliberative leadership)                              | Consultation, openness to information, and responsible judgment.      | Transparent governance and participation in strategic decisions. | Reduction of structural barriers to women's leadership.               |
| Khadijah (Historical exemplar: economic agency)                                                  | Financial literacy, independence, and entrepreneurial capability.     | Equitable access to capital, networks, promotion, and assets.    | Financial inclusion and support for women's enterprise and ownership. |

*Note. This table is a conceptual mapping, not a set of validated operational indicators. Meso- and macro-level entries are normative-contextual inferences rather than direct Qur'anic prescriptions.*

Table 1 shows why empowerment cannot be reduced to individual resilience. Competence, confidence, and integrity at the micro level require institutions that apply merit, ensure safety, provide equitable development and participation, and remove gender-based barriers. Institutional change, in turn, depends partly on broader conditions supporting nondiscrimination, worker protection, financial inclusion, and more equitable recognition of care. The meso- and macro-level entries are therefore analytically traceable applications of the textual and historical categories; they are not presented as direct Qur'anic prescriptions or empirically validated indicators.

This cross-level structure is relevant to madrasahs because they are both educational settings and workplaces. Research at Madrasah Mu'allimat links women's education with competency development and prophetic leadership (Makruf et al., 2022). Studies of gender-responsive madrasah education emphasize inclusive learning, equitable classroom participation, nonbiased learning resources, and gender-aware institutional management (Siagian, 2023; Sholeh, 2023). At the same time, female madrasah principals may still encounter barriers associated with seniority, local culture, and social perceptions (Sakdiah et al., 2024). Accordingly, the framework directs attention to learners' and personnel's competence, integrity, confidence, financial literacy, and leadership capacity at the micro level; equitable teaching, recruitment, promotion, protection, professional development, and decision-making at the meso level; and supportive career pathways and gender-responsive educational policy at the macro level. These implications also address the hidden curriculum: institutional practices should not contradict the moral equality taught in formal instruction.

The study's principal contribution is thus a structured conceptual bridge rather than the discovery of new Qur'anic principles or proof of an effective intervention. It connects two Qur'anic ethical foundations and four complementary exemplars to contemporary workplace inequality and madrasah governance while preserving the distinctions among textual interpretation, historical exemplification, empirical context, and normative application. Its limitations follow from the qualitative-conceptual design, purposive secondary literature, selected Qur'anic corpus, and absence of empirical testing. Future studies should operationalize the proposed dimensions and test their relevance across different madrasahs and workplaces before claims of effectiveness or generalizability are made.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

This study shows that women's empowerment can be conceptualized through Qur'anic ethical foundations of shared human dignity and reciprocal social partnership, complemented by narratives that illuminate different dimensions of women's agency. Maryam represents spiritual autonomy and personal development; the two women of Madyan illustrate professional responsibility, competence, and integrity; and the female ruler of Saba' demonstrates deliberative leadership and decision-making. Khadijah, treated explicitly as a historical rather than Qur'anic exemplar, adds the dimension of economic agency. Bringing these textual and historical materials into dialogue with contemporary evidence on wage inequality, leadership barriers, occupational devaluation, and unpaid care work, the study proposes the Prophetic Gender Equilibrium framework as a conceptual bridge linking Qur'anic ethics to micro-level agency, meso-level institutional arrangements, and macro-level structural and policy conditions. In madrasahs, the same framework provides a basis for examining gender-responsive learning, competency-based professional development, equitable leadership opportunities, and organizational practices consistent with the ethical principles articulated in the study.

The framework should not be interpreted as a set of workplace or educational policies directly prescribed by the Qur'anic verses analyzed. Its institutional and policy implications are normative-contextual inferences developed through dialogue between the selected Qur'anic principles, an Islamic historical exemplar, gender-ecological scholarship, and contemporary empirical literature. The principal limitation of the study is therefore its conceptual and library-based design: the Prophetic Gender Equilibrium framework has not yet been empirically validated as a measurement model, institutional intervention, or educational framework. Future research should operationalize its micro-, meso-, and macro-level dimensions and test their relevance across different madrasahs, educational institutions, workplaces, and Muslim social contexts before claims regarding effectiveness or generalizability can be made.

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