



## THE WIFE AS THE PRIMARY BREADWINNER OF THE FAMILY: PERSPECTIVES FROM CLASSICAL FIQH, GENDER STUDIES, AND CONTEMPORARY FIQH

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### ABSTRACT

*Husband, in classical fiqh is the main breadwinner in the family, but as time changes, the wife also supports the family's income, even the wife becomes the main breadwinner. This shift in role raises the question of how contemporary fiqh accommodates this change without abandoning the basic principles. This study aims to examine the role of the wife as the main breadwinner of the family from two perspectives, gender theory and contemporary fiqh. These two perspectives will provide an overview of women as the main breadwinner in the framework of Islamic Law and gender studies. The method used is qualitative research with a comparative analytical approach. Data sources come from classical fiqh texts, academic literature from a gender perspective, and contemporary fiqh that reinterprets classical texts according to the modern social context. The analysis was carried out comparatively to compare the gender perspective and contemporary fiqh so that the dynamics and conceptual changes are visible. The results of the study show three different views. According to classical fiqh, the wife plays a greater role in the domestic sphere and household management, while the husband is the main breadwinner. From a gender perspective, the role of the wife as the main breadwinner is seen as a manifestation of gender equality and the advancement of women's emancipation. Meanwhile, in the view of contemporary Islamic jurisprudence scholars, wives are allowed to be the main provider of the family if this is done on the basis of willingness and does not cause harm, although in principle the responsibility for maintenance remains on the husband.*

**Keywords:** Wife, Primary Provider, Classical Jurisprudence, Gender, Contemporary Jurisprudence

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The role of the wife as the main breadwinner of the family is an increasingly common phenomenon in modern society, especially amidst dynamic social and

economic changes and increased access to education for women. However, this phenomenon gives rise to different discourses when viewed from three perspectives, classical fiqh, gender, and contemporary fiqh. These different views reflect not only the normative interpretation of religious texts, but also the ever-evolving social dynamics in understanding gender roles in the family.

Traditionally, classical fiqh places the husband as the main breadwinner in the family, with the wife focusing on domestic affairs and household care. However, in the context of current socio-economic developments, this position has shifted significantly, requiring contemporary fiqh studies to provide legal and ethical views that are relevant to this reality. One of the most striking changes is the increasing phenomenon of the wife as the main breadwinner in the family.

This concept is based on the interpretation of the Qur'an Surah An-Nisa verse 34 which states that men are leaders for women because Allah has made some of them excel others and because they (men) provide a living from their wealth. This places the husband as the party who is obliged to provide for his wife and children. The modern social and economic context gives rise to a phenomenon where the wife can become the main breadwinner, either due to economic conditions, job opportunities, or contemporary family dynamics.

In contrast to classical fiqh, the gender perspective that has developed especially in the Western world views the phenomenon of the wife as the main breadwinner of the family as a manifestation of gender equality and liberation from traditional gender determination. Contemporary gender theory developed by figures such as Judith Butler emphasizes that gender identity and roles are not fixed biological constructs, but rather the result of social construction that can change according to context. This paradigm views women's financial capabilities and professional careers as important components in women's empowerment and the achievement of substantive gender equality. Consequently, the wife who becomes the main breadwinner is seen as a form of expression of equality that is legitimate and equal to the traditional family model.

Contemporary fiqh is present as a bridge that seeks to create a dialogue between the basic principles of sharia and changing social realities. Contemporary scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Muhammad Shahrur, and Khaled Abou El Fadl have developed a more contextual approach in understanding religious texts related to family sustenance. Reinterpretation of the concept of *qiwamah* in QS. An-Nisa' 4:34 is done by considering the socio-economic context when the Qur'an was revealed and significant changes in gender and economic relations today.

Although still based on the basic principle that the obligation to provide sustenance is imposed on the husband, contemporary fiqh opens up space for flexibility through the application of the principle of *maslahah* and contextualization of the text, recognizing that in certain situations, the wife can be the main provider if it brings benefits and is done voluntarily. This shows a shift in the paradigm of fiqh that is more adaptive to today's social reality.

This paradigmatic difference has significant implications in understanding and responding to the reality of the wife as the main breadwinner of the family. Classical fiqh tends to view it as an anomaly or exception that does not change the husband's principal obligation as the person responsible for the livelihood. The gender perspective sees it as a manifestation of equality and liberation from traditional gender determination. Meanwhile, contemporary fiqh tries to find common ground between the basic principles of sharia and changing social realities, recognizing the economic role of the wife as a form of ta'awun (mutual assistance) in the family without shifting the fundamental responsibilities of the husband. This study aims to examine the phenomenon of the wife as the main breadwinner of the family from two main perspectives: gender theory and contemporary fiqh. This approach is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the role of women as the main breadwinner understood and positioned within the framework of Islamic law and modern gender studies. This study also seeks to answer the question of whether contemporary fiqh can accommodate changes in the role of women in the family without abandoning the basic principles of sharia.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research type with a comparative analytical approach. This approach was chosen to explore in depth and explain the phenomenon of the wife as the main breadwinner of the family by comparing it from the perspective of classical fiqh, gender theory, and contemporary fiqh.

The data sources used in this study consist of primary legal materials in the form of classical texts of Islamic fiqh, such as *Bidayatul Mujtahid wa Nihayatul Muqtashid* from Ibn Rusyd Al-Hafid, *Al-Majmu' Syarh al-Muhadzdzab* from An-Nawawi, the book *al-Mughni* by Ibn Qudamah and other fiqh books that discuss the obligation of living in the family. From a gender perspective, *Qur'an and Woman* from Amina Wadud, *Gender Trouble* from Judith Butler. While from contemporary fiqh, *Hadyu al-Islam Fatawa Mu'aşirah Yusuf al-Qaradawi* and *Jasser Auda with Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law*. Secondary legal materials in the form of academic literature and contemporary research results that discuss the gender perspective from Western theory, especially studies that discuss the social construction and economic role of women, including books and journal articles from gender experts. Such as *The Gender Revolution* by Frances Goldscheider.

As well as from the classical fiqh literature of Al-Ghazali, in his book *Ihya Ulumuddin*, and contemporary Fiqh that reinterprets classical texts according to the modern social context, such as Muhammad Syahrur, in *al-Kitab wa al-Qur'an*, Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*. Other supporting materials, either in the form of books, scientific journals, or documents from the latest research results that contain the views of modern scholars and fiqh experts. Data collection was carried out through a systematic

literature review, namely by identifying, collecting, and selecting relevant and credible literature. The analysis was carried out comparatively to connect the gender perspective and contemporary fiqh so that the dynamics and conceptual changes that occurred could be seen.

### 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

#### *Wife as the Main Provider in Classical Fiqh*

The husband's obligation to provide a living is a logical consequence of the husband's role and responsibility as the head of the family who maintains and looks after the economic needs of the household. This concept is deeply rooted in the interpretation of the Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah verse 233, which indicates that men are responsible for providing a living for their wives and children according to their abilities.

The role of the wife in classical fiqh is more emphasized on domestic duties and household management, while economic sustenance is the husband's obligation. The wife has no obligation to provide for her husband or family, but if the wife has her own property and gives it for the family's needs, then it is a form of kindness and is not obligatory according to sharia.

From the perspective of classical fiqh, the obligation to provide a living is fundamentally the husband's responsibility towards his wife and family. Classical scholars, both from the Hanafi, Maliki, Syafi'i, and Hanbali schools, mostly place the husband as the party who is obliged to provide for his wife and family.

Imam al-Kasani al-Hanafi explained:

ونفقة الزوجة واجبة على زوجها بالنص والإجماع، لقوله تعالى: (لِيُنْفِقَ ذُو سَعَةٍ مِّن سَعَتِهِ) [الطلاق:7] وقوله تعالى: (وَعَلَى الْمَوْلُودِ لَهُ رِزْقُهُنَّ وَكِسْوَتُهُنَّ) [البقرة:233]، فهذا يدل على وجوب النفقة من الزوج لزوجته بالمعرو

The wife's support is the husband's obligation, based on the texts and ijma' (the agreement of the ulama, as stated by Allah SWT (Q.S. At-Talaq: 7): Let the person who has the freedom to provide a living according to his ability. and in Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 233: And it is the father's obligation to feed and clothe the mothers in a virtuous manner). These verses show that a husband is obliged to provide for his wife.

Ibn Abdil Barr al – Maliki explained:

أجمع العلماء على أن الزوجة تجب نفقتها وكسوتها على زوجها، بشرط التمكين والطاعة، وهذا لا خلاف فيه بين أهل العلم

The wife's sustenance and clothing are the husband's obligations on the condition that the wife submits herself to live with and obey her husband. This is not a difference of opinion among scholars.

Imam An – Nawawi as – syafi'i stated:

نفقة الزوجة واجبة بالكتاب والسنة والإجماع، قال الله تعالى: (الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ) [النساء:34]، ولأن المرأة محبوسة لحق الزوج، فوجبت عليه نفقته

Husbands are required to provide for their wives based on the Quran, Sunnah, and Ijma'. The Word of Allah SWT in QS. An-Nisa: 34: (Men are leaders for women, because Allah has made them superior to others, and because they have spent part of their wealth). Because the wife is bound to her husband, the wife has the right to receive maintenance from her husband.

Meanwhile, Imam Ash-Syirazi as-Syafi'I stated:

تجب نفقة الزوجة على الزوج بشرط تمكينها له من نفسها، لأن النكاح استحقاق منافع الزوجة، فوجب عليه القيام بما تحتاجه

The husband is obliged to provide for his wife on the condition that the wife submits herself to her husband. Marriage is a contract to obtain goodness from the wife, so the husband is obliged to fulfill the wife's needs.

In line with this explanation, Ibn Qudamah al Hanbali describes:

نفقة الزوجة واجبة بالكتاب والسنة والإجماع؛ قال تعالى: (لِيُنْفِقُوا ذُو سَعَةٍ مِّن سَعَتِهِ) [الطلاق:7]، وعن جابر

رضي الله عنه قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في حجة الوداع: (اتقوا الله في النساء، فإنهن عوان

عندكم أخذتموهن بأمانة الله، واستحللتم فروجهن بكلمة الله، ولهن عليكم رزقهن وكسوتهن بالمعروف

Husbands are obliged to support their wives based on the Koran, Sunnah and ijma'. The Word of Allah SWT in Q.S. At-Talaqayat 7: Let those who provide a living according to their ability], and based on the hadith of Jabir ra that Rasulullah SAW said in the hajj wada' sermon: (Be fearful of Allah in matters of women, verily they are under your protection. You marry them with the trust of Allah, and you justify their honor with the word of Allah. They have the right to receive adequate living and clothing.

According to Ibnu Qudamah, maintenance is the husband's obligation based on his position and responsibilities as family leader. The obligation to provide maintenance is an absolute requirement for husbands in the household leadership structure. If you ignore your responsibilities, your wife has the right to sue and even ask for a divorce (khulu'). However, Ibn Qudamah still maintains the principle that men are the leaders of the family, even though the breadwinner function is not fulfilled ideally.

The husband is obliged to provide for his wife based on ijma', because the wife has surrendered herself to her husband, so the husband is obliged to provide for her in a ma'ruf manner.

All of the above opinions are the main references in classical fiqh works that emphasize the different roles between husband and wife in the context of living. This concept is based on the interpretation of the Qur'an Surah An-Nisa verse 34 which states that men are leaders for women because Allah has made some of them superior to others and because they (men) provide living from their wealth.

This verse was revealed in the context of regulating husband-wife relations in Islam, especially regarding the roles and responsibilities of each party in the household which is the main basis in classical fiqh that the responsibility for living lies with the husband who must economically meet the needs of his wife and

family. Classical fiqh scholars based on the verse above emphasize that the status of a man's *qiwamah* in the family is determined by two things, virtue (physical, psychological, and social) and responsibility for living. If one of these conditions is missing, especially the matter of living, some scholars open up discussion space regarding the validity of the *qiwamah*. This is where the idea of the wife as the main provider emerged.

In line with the views of the *fuqaha* above, Imam Al-Ghazali emphasized that the main task of the wife is to take care of the house and family, while the provision is the responsibility of the husband as the head of the family. Meanwhile, Imam Abu Hanifah, quoted from *Al-Mabsut* by Al-Sarakhsi, emphasized that if the husband fails to provide a living, the wife can file for *fasakh* (annulment of marriage). According to Al-Sarakhsi, *qiwamah* is not merely a right, but an obligation and responsibility supported by a financial role. This emphasizes the close relationship between the role of the provider and the structure of authority in the household. In the Hadith narrated by Bukhari, the Prophet Muhammad SAW emphasized the obligation of the husband to provide for his family. This hadith emphasizes the position of the husband as the head of the family who is responsible for the family's livelihood.

*Fuqaha* hardly discuss the conditions in which the wife becomes the main provider of the family as an acceptable norm. However, some scholars such as Ibn Abidin from the Hanafi school of thought admit that in emergency situations such as a sick or disabled husband, the wife can contribute to the family's livelihood, but it is not a sharia obligation. Even in such conditions, the wife's contribution is considered a form of charity or debt that can be reclaimed when the husband's condition improves. The *fuqaha* agree that the level of livelihood is measured based on the husband's ability and the wife's needs by considering the '*urf*' (customs) that apply in the local community. Livelihood includes basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, as well as other needs according to the husband's ability and the family's social status.

The shift in the role of the wife to become the main breadwinner in the modern family has become a global phenomenon that has changed the dynamics of the traditional family. From a gender theory perspective, this phenomenon can be understood as the result of changes in the social construction of gender roles and efforts to achieve gender equality. This arises from various factors, including the advancement of women's education, changes in economic structures, and shifts in social norms that support women's active participation in the world of work. The theory of gender equality developed by contemporary Muslim feminist thinkers such as Amina Wadud highlights the importance of rereading religious texts by paying attention to their historical context and ethical goals.

According to the theory, gender roles are not a fixed biological construct, but rather the result of social construction that can change according to social, cultural, and economic contexts. Judith Butler, one of the main figures in gender theory,

states that gender identity is performative and continues to be reproduced through everyday actions, so that gender roles can be modified and adjusted to the needs of the times. In this case, the wife who becomes the main breadwinner is not only a matter of economy, but also the adjustment of identity and social roles attached to her.

The phenomenon of the wife as the main breadwinner of the family is a manifestation of gender equality and the progress of women's emancipation. This perspective is strongly influenced by the feminist movement that began in the 18th century and experienced significant development in the second wave in the 1960s and 1970s. This movement emphasizes the freedom of individuals to determine their social roles without being limited by gender. The wife who becomes the main breadwinner is seen as an expression of equality and liberation from traditional gender determination. Contemporary sociological studies note that this change in role is the result of complex social dynamics, including increased access to education for women, changes in economic structures, and transformations in social values.

Families with wives as the main breadwinners according to gender represent one form of contemporary family that is legitimate and equal to the traditional family model. Financial ability and professional careers are seen as important components in women's empowerment and achieving substantive gender equality.

The role of the wife as the main breadwinner has various social implications in the modern family structure, including: First, there are new dynamics in power relations and the division of domestic tasks. Recent studies have shown that when women take on the main economic role, husbands often experience a shift in roles that can cause tension or redefinition of the role of masculinity in the family. Second, social implications are also seen in the perception of society and the stigma that is sometimes still attached to traditional gender roles. Although increasingly accepted, women as the main breadwinners sometimes experience social pressure in the form of negative stereotypes or challenges to balance work and domestic responsibilities.

Third, this shift opens up a new space for dialogue within the family regarding gender equality and the redistribution of domestic and economic roles, which ultimately contributes to the formation of a more egalitarian family. This equality is supported by many Western feminist theories that emphasize the importance of dismantling patriarchal structures and encouraging a fair division of roles between men and women.

In this context, the role of the wife as the main breadwinner can be seen as a form of deconstruction of traditional gender roles that have been considered standard in society. The phenomenon of the wife as the main breadwinner in the family represents a significant shift in the social construction of gender and the dynamics of the modern family. From a gender perspective, this phenomenon can

be understood as the result of a complex interaction between the advancement of formal equality, economic change, and the ongoing evolution of gender. The social implications of this shift are multidimensional, affecting power dynamics within the family, the division of domestic labor, psychological well-being, and social perceptions.

These changes demonstrate progress in gender equality, but also present a double challenge for women, the rejection of traditional gender norms, and the ability to survive in alternative family arrangements.

These various patterns of women's economic participation show that the role of the wife as a breadwinner is not a monolithic phenomenon, but varies according to social, cultural, and economic contexts. This variation is evidence that gender roles are dynamic and constructive, not fixed and biologically determined.

### ***Wife as the Main Provider of the Family: Contemporary Fiqh Perspective***

The phenomenon of the wife as the main breadwinner of the family, in the review of contemporary fiqh based on the principles of Islamic law rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, with a contextual approach that takes into account modern social realities. Contemporary scholars realize that some of the provisions of classical fiqh regarding sustenance were formulated in a social context that is different from the current reality. Here there is recognition of the flexibility of Islamic law in responding to changes in gender roles and economic responsibilities in the family.

Interpretation of Q.S. An-Nisa: 34 is often used as the basis for the obligation of husband's sustenance after the new interpretation. The verse *ar-rijalu qawwamuna 'alan-nisa* which is traditionally interpreted as absolute male leadership over women, in contemporary fiqh is interpreted more on the aspect of protection and care responsibilities that are not always economic. Modern thinkers try to reinterpret Q.S. An-Nisa' verse 34 with a contextual approach. They emphasize that *qiwamah* is not the ontological superiority of men over women, but rather the distribution of roles that can change depending on social and economic situations. Muhammad Shahrur, in *al-Kitab wa al-Qur'an*, proposed that this verse be read as a description of the social conditions of Arab society at that time, not as a fixed norm. If the wife plays the role of the main breadwinner, then the structure of *qiwamah* also needs to be reconstructed fairly, based on the principle of deliberation. The division of roles in the family should be based on mutual agreement that takes into account the abilities and needs of each party, not on rigid gender stereotypes. Muhammad Shahrur offers a more progressive approach by emphasizing the principle of cooperation and mutuality in the household.

Khaled Abou El Fadl who proposed an ethical-hermeneutic approach. *qawwam* does not always have to be interpreted as male domination, but rather as a moral responsibility that can be carried out by anyone, depending on the actual situation. Economic cooperation between husband and wife is an acceptable model as long



as it is based on a fair and mutually beneficial agreement. In line with this, Ziba Mir-Hosseini argues that the concept of *qiwamah* must be understood in the socio-economic context in which the Qur'an was revealed, and that contemporary interpretations need to take into account significant social changes in gender and economic relations. Meanwhile, Yusuf al-Qaradawi is of the view that the obligation to provide for a living is basically imposed on the husband, but this does not mean that the wife is prohibited from contributing or even becoming the main provider if conditions require it, such as the husband's physical inability or the family's economic difficulties. Significant socio-economic changes have changed family dynamics in contemporary Muslim societies. This change has resulted in the phenomenon of wives becoming the main providers for the family.

This condition can be caused by various factors, such as the movement of people from rural to urban areas and the transformation of work from the agricultural sector to industry. Wider access to education for women opens up better career opportunities and encourages participation in the professional workforce. The high cost of living in urban areas and global economic instability require many families to have two sources of income. The influence of globalization has shifted traditional values related to the role of women in the family, including in Muslim societies.

According to the majority of contemporary scholars, the status of a wife as the main breadwinner of the family, the majority of contemporary scholars are justified if it is done voluntarily and does not cause harm. Muhammad Quraish Shihab emphasized that there is no prohibition in Islam for women to work and contribute to the family's livelihood as long as it does not neglect their main responsibilities in the family and does not conflict with Islamic values. In certain conditions, such as when the husband is unable to work due to illness or other limitations, the wife who is the main breadwinner of the family even gets priority. Husein Muhammad stated that women who help the family's economy when their husbands are experiencing difficulties is a form of virtue that is promised a reward by Allah SWT.

Thus, there is no obstacle for a wife to be the main breadwinner of the family as long as it does not violate the provisions of the sharia.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The role of the wife in classical *fiqh* is more emphasized on domestic duties and household management, while economic sustenance is the husband's obligation. The wife has no obligation to provide for her husband or family, but if the wife has her own property and gives it for the family's needs, then it is a form of kindness and is not obligatory according to sharia.

From a gender perspective, the role of the wife as the main provider is seen as a manifestation of true gender equality. This view is rooted in the concept that men

and women have the same capacity and rights to play a role in public and private spaces. There is no obligation for the husband to always be the main provider for the family, because this role can be exchanged based on agreement, capability, and the situation faced by the couple.

Contemporary fiqh provides a new interpretation that is more responsive to socio-economic dynamics, including situations where the wife becomes the main provider. In this approach, qiwamah is no longer understood as the fixed superiority of men, but rather as a role that can shift according to the distribution of functions and responsibilities in the family. Contemporary scholars also remind that the role of the wife as the main provider must still pay attention to the limitations of sharia, such as maintaining interactions that are in accordance with sharia in the work environment and not neglecting responsibilities towards the family. The wife's economic contribution is seen as a form of ta'awun (mutual assistance) in the family, not as a total transfer of the obligation to provide for the husband. Contemporary fiqh sees the condition of the wife as the main provider as an exception that is allowed in certain situations, while the gender view sees it as a normal choice within the spectrum of equal family arrangements.

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