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## Gendered division of domestic labour: Indonesian Muslim Men's perceptions, participation and experiences in housework and childcare

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



# Gendered division of domestic labour: Indonesian Muslim Men's perceptions, participation and experiences in housework and childcare

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## ABSTRACT

Research on gender inequality in Indonesian Muslim contexts has primarily focused on women, with limited exploration of men's roles in domestic labour. This article addresses this gap by examining how Islam and culture shape men's perceptions, participation and experiences in domestic labour. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines a time-use survey of 250 couples (500 individuals), and semi-structured interviews with 10 couples (20 individuals), and with two Islamic scholars (*imams*). The findings show that while men view their primary role in Islam as being the family's provider, they are also encouraged to participate in domestic labour. However, cultural norms often reinforce their breadwinner role, leading to a highly gendered division of domestic labour, with women handling most household chores and childcare. Men's involvement is often framed as 'helping' rather than fully sharing responsibilities, with some receiving appreciation for their contributions while others face criticism. Nevertheless, evolving interpretations of the Quran are advancing a more egalitarian understanding of gender roles, leading some men to increase their participation in domestic labour. This study provides new insights into domestic labour dynamics in Indonesian Muslim families, contributing to the broader discourse on gender roles, religion and cultural norms.

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## Introduction

The division of domestic labour has long been a subject of sociological research, particularly in examining the persistent gender disparities in men's and women's involvement in domestic activities (Chapman, 2004; Garcia & Tomlinson, 2021). While there has been extensive research on men's and women's participation in domestic labour in Western societies (Bianchi et al., 2000; Craig et al., 2014; Hook & Wolfe, 2012; Kan & Laurie, 2018; McHale et al., 2016; Vagni, 2020), studies on domestic labour allocation in Muslim countries, and specifically focusing on men's participation, are limited. Research on Muslim men often overlooks their roles and engagement within the home, focusing instead on their public responsibilities and neglecting the complexities of their private lives (Britton, 2019). This research gap is particularly evident in Indonesia, where studies on the gendered division of domestic labour remain limited. One of the earliest studies examining gender differences in time-use was conducted by Sajogyo et al. (1979) between 1977 and 1978, focusing on the division of paid and unpaid labour among Indonesian agricultural families in Java. Later, the Indonesian government

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launched a pilot time-use survey in rural areas, covering 100 villages between 1998 and 1999. This was followed by a survey in urban areas in 2004, focusing on five municipalities, and another in 2005 (Charmes, 2015). A recent study by Simulja et al. (2014) compared middle-class, working married men and women in Japan and Indonesia, also contributing to the discussion on the division of domestic labour. However, access to detailed Indonesian time-use findings remains a challenge. While time-use surveys have been conducted, key information – particularly regarding methodology and findings – is unavailable through Indonesia's National Statistics Office. This lack of accessible data limits a comprehensive understanding of men's participation in domestic labour and the factors influencing their involvement. Moreover, research by both Sajogyo and Simulja understudied men's experiences, motivations and participation in domestic tasks. Therefore, as this aspect is often overlooked in existing research, this article highlights the importance of examining Muslim men's perspectives on domestic labour in Indonesia, focusing on their responsibilities, participation and lived experiences.

Research suggests that gender equality can only be achieved when women have equal access to public life and men share responsibility for domestic labour (Breen, 2005). Thus, examining the issue of gendered division of domestic labour from men's perspectives is crucial because men play a significant role in either perpetuating or transforming traditional norms surrounding domestic responsibilities (Kiram, 2020a). Furthermore, understanding men's perspectives on domestic labour can reveal the social, cultural and most importantly, religious factors that shape their attitudes and behaviours regarding domestic responsibilities. To investigate how Islamic teachings and cultural norms influence men's perceptions, participation and experiences in domestic labour, I address the following research questions: How do Islamic teachings and cultural norms shape Indonesian Muslim men's perceptions and participation in domestic labour? and what are the lived experiences of Indonesian Muslim men who participate in domestic labour? By addressing these aspects, I aim to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on religion, culture, gender roles and the division of domestic labour. Additionally, I seek to uncover what motivates or discourages Muslim men from engaging more in household work and childcare, ultimately advocating for a more inclusive approach to understanding domestic responsibilities in Muslim contexts.

## Literature review

### *Explanations for men's and women's involvement in domestic labour*

Domestic labour refers to unpaid tasks and responsibilities such as cleaning, cooking, laundry, do-it-yourself (DIY) activities and childcare (Chapman, 2004; Walby, 1989). Various international theories have examined the factors at play in determining who takes care of these domestic duties in the family, such as specialization theory, relative resources theory, time availability theory and gender ideology theory (Bianchi et al., 2000). The specialization theory suggests that efficiency in a marriage is achieved through the division of labour, where one partner (typically the man) specializes in market work, while the other partner (typically the woman) specializes in domestic labour (Becker, 1998; Oláh et al., 2023). The second set of ideas focuses on how the couples' relative resources such as income and occupational status affect their roles and responsibilities within the family. In households where one partner earns an income or has a higher occupational status than the other, bargaining power tends to be stronger leading to a greater say in decision making and distribution of household chores. This often leads to a division of labour that reflects and reinforces traditional gender roles (Aassve et al., 2014). The argument regarding relative resources is closely linked to theories centred on time availability. These theories suggest that the completion of household responsibilities is impacted by the time allocation of both partners. Men typically spend time on paid work compared to women; therefore, women often have more time available to handle a greater portion of domestic labour (Lyonette & Crompton, 2015). Lastly, also another most often cited theory to explain the division of domestic labour is gender ideology theory. Studies

consistently show a connection between gender beliefs and the division of labour within households. Women with more egalitarian beliefs tend to take on fewer domestic duties and are more engaged in paid work, and men who hold egalitarian views typically engage more in household chores (Aassve et al., 2014; Brewster & Padavic, 2000; Carriero & Todesco, 2018). In this article, while my primary focus is on the impact of religion and culture on men's perceptions, participation and experiences in domestic labour, I also use these theories to explore additional factors that shape Muslim men's involvement in domestic labour.

### *Islam, culture, gender roles and domestic labour*

In Islamic teachings (Quran 4:34), it is believed that men should be breadwinners and heads of families whereas women are viewed as caregivers (Eger, 2021). However, this teaching is not rigid, as in Islam, men are also encouraged to participate in domestic labour. Similarly, while women are primarily responsible for household duties, they are permitted to work with their husbands' permission (Ghodrati, 2020). This explains why some Muslim men engage in housework, and some Muslim women participate in paid work, as demonstrated in this study in later sections. These variations show that gender roles in Muslim families depend on how Islamic teachings are interpreted and practised, making it essential to consider different interpretations of Islamic teachings when analysing gender inequality in Muslim contexts. For example, previous research on the gendered division of domestic labour in various Muslim families, including Malay, Chinese, Turkish and Bangladeshi households, has shown that religious beliefs significantly influence the reinforcement of traditional gender roles within the home. While men in all these communities, including Bengali and Malay families, contributed to domestic labour, particularly childcare, women still spent more time on these tasks than men (Boo, 2018; Dildar, 2015; Hatun, 2013; Hossain, 2013). This pattern reflects traditional gender roles, where women are often expected to handle most of the domestic responsibilities, while men are seen as the primary breadwinners.

In addition to religion, cultural factors have also been observed to play a critical role in contributing to the development of inequality in early human societies and are often viewed as a major factor driving gender disparities (Fernández, 2007; Giuliano, 2020). Cultural norms and values influence gender roles within families, including the division of domestic labour. Research on immigrant populations in Europe indicates that when one partner in a couple adheres to traditional gender norms from their cultural background, women often undertake a larger share of housework (Carriero, 2021). Studies examining immigrant populations in Italy also found that immigrants from countries with lower levels of gender equality are more likely to display less equitable distribution of routine household and childcare responsibilities (Brini et al., 2022). The influence of culture on the division of domestic labour has also been observed in multicultural families in the UK. On average, men spend around 6 hours per week on housework, with Black Caribbean, Black African and Other Asian men contributing more housework hours than Pakistani men. Women, on the other hand, devote an average of over 14 hours per week to domestic tasks, with Pakistani and Bangladeshi women spending nearly 24 hours, compared to 13 hours among Chinese and mixed-background women. In terms of gender attitudes, Pakistani men and women held the most traditional views, whereas Black Caribbean men had the least traditional perspectives, influenced by the strong workforce participation of Black Caribbean women. Similarly, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women spent more time on housework than their White British counterparts (Kan & Laurie, 2018).

### *Methods*

The article draws on some findings from a study for which I carried out all data collection through mixed methods (time-use diaries and semi-structured interviews) in achieving comprehensive and profound results (Creswell, 2013) to address gender inequality issues and the division of domestic labour in Indonesian Muslim families. I conducted this research in Java, home to the largest Muslim

population in Indonesia, and Aceh, the only province in the country practicing Sharia law (Statistic Office, 2023). To ensure a well-balanced representation across geographic and demographic factors, I employed a stratified random sampling strategy, taking into account different residential areas (Howell et al., 2020). The study focused on households where Indonesian Muslim couples had cohabited for at least 6 months, were aged between 20 and 65, and either had or did not have children. A six-month cohabitation period was deemed sufficient for couples to establish shared household routines. The selected age range (20–65 years) covered individuals in their productive years, allowing for an analysis of both paid and unpaid work dynamics. Additionally, I considered whether couples had children to examine variations in domestic labour arrangements.

I collected diary data using the ‘today’ method, which allows participants to record activities in real-time, reducing recall errors and overestimation. In time-use research, data can also be gathered through ‘yesterday’ or ‘tomorrow’ diaries, but these approaches have limitations – ‘yesterday’ diaries may lead to recall inconsistencies, while ‘tomorrow’ diaries risk overestimating activity durations. The ‘today’ diaries mitigate these issues by ensuring more accurate reporting (Gershuny & Sullivan, 2019; Pentland & Harvey, 1999). The time-use diaries were administered to 250 couples (500 individuals), with two diary days per respondent, one weekday and a weekend, resulting in 1,000 diaries across the sample. Differentiating between weekdays and weekends is important as daily activities often vary depending on the day of the week. Weekdays are usually associated with work, while weekends are more about entertainment and family or social interactions (Sullivan et al., 2020).

Participants for the interviews were drawn from those who had completed the time-use survey. I incorporated a question into the time-use surveys, inquiring about the couples’ willingness to participate in further involvement in the study through a subsequent semi-structured interview. A total of 73 couples agreed to take part in the interviews, and from this group, I randomly selected 10 couples (20 individuals). The couples were deemed eligible if both the husband and wife consented to participate. In this study, I conducted separate interviews with the participating couples as this approach allows participants to freely express their personal opinions without the influence of their partner’s presence, creating a safe space for candid discussions (Taylor & De Vocht, 2011). To deepen my understanding of the role of Islam in shaping gender roles, I also interviewed two *imams* (Islamic scholars) with expertise in Quranic interpretation, one graduated from a traditional Islamic school (*pesantren*) in Aceh, and the other held a master’s in Islamic family law from an Indonesian university.

The process of time-use data analysis involved a descriptive analysis where I calculated the mean and differences for each activity to investigate the amount of time couples spend doing domestic labour. I also conducted descriptive and inferential analysis (chi-square test) on the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. The analysis of the interview data involved multiple steps, transcribing and translating the audio files using NVivo software. To ensure confidentiality, transcripts were anonymized, and pseudonyms were assigned. The data was then analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this research, I developed a total of 26 thematic components concerning gender roles, household duties and interactions within a family. Some of these central themes included evolving gender identities, men’s and women’s roles in domestic labour, as well as cultural and religious influences on these roles. The most relevant themes were then presented in this article.

## Findings

### *Socio-demographic characteristics of Indonesian Muslim couples*

Understanding the social and economic background of the participants is crucial, as it informs the discussion in the upcoming sections. In this study, I gathered various data on the participants’ backgrounds, including education, occupation and income level. Table 1 shows the educational attainment,<sup>1</sup> which reveals distinct patterns for men and women across various levels of education.

**Table 1.** Men’s and women’s education level.

Education Level	Men		Women	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1. Prefer not to answer	4	1.6	3	1.2
2. Primary School	29	11.6	26	10.4
3. Junior High School	30	12	30	12
4. Senior High School	98	39.2	86	34.4
5. College	16	6.4	22	8.8
6. Undergraduate	62	24.8	75	30
7. Masters	8	3.2	8	3.2
8. PhD	3	1.2	0	0
Total	250	100	250	100

Chi-Square test value:  $p = 0.509$ .

The distribution indicates that most participants have completed at least a high school education, with 39.2% of men and 34.4% of women attaining a senior high school diploma. This level represents the highest concentration for both groups, underscoring its central role in their educational trajectories. The difference is observed at the undergraduate level, where a notably higher percentage of women (30%) hold undergraduate degrees compared to men (24.8%). This suggests that women in this sample are more likely to continue their education beyond high school. Conversely, the percentage of men with postgraduate degrees (master’s and PhD combined) marginally exceeds that of women – 4.4% compared to 3.2% for women. Educational disparities are less pronounced at the lower levels. The percentages for primary and junior high school completion are relatively similar, indicating that differences in educational attainment emerge more prominently during and after high school. Although some differences exist in the level of men’s and women’s education, the Chi-Square test result ( $p = 0.3122$ ) shows that the difference in the distribution of education levels between men and women in this sample is not statistically significant at the 0.05 significant level.

In this research, I used the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero (EGP) class schema, which is a widely used classification system in sociological research for categorizing individuals into social classes based on their occupations (Smallenbroek et al., 2024). Table 2 highlights notable gender disparities across various employment categories. A stark finding is that 65.6% of women in this sample are out of work or seeking employment, compared to 23.2% of men. This significant gap points to gendered disparities in workforce participation and access to job opportunities. Among employed groups, men are more frequently represented in self-employment (30.4% vs. 6.8% for women) and skilled or semi-skilled working-class roles (14.4% and 4.8%, respectively, compared to 4.8% and 1.6% for women). Conversely, women show higher representation in the lower-grade service class (16.8% compared to 12.8% of men), reflecting gendered occupational clustering in service-related jobs. Men’s stronger presence in the intermediate and higher-grade service classes further underscores the gender differences in occupational status. Only 0.8% of women occupy higher-grade service roles, compared to 4% of men, while men also hold more positions in the intermediate class (10.4% vs. 3.6% for

**Table 2.** Men’s and women’s occupation based on EGP class schema group.

Categories	Men		Women	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1. Service Class (Higher Grade)	10	4	2	0.8
2. Service Class (Lower Grade)	32	12.8	42	16.8
3. Intermediate Class	26	10.4	9	3.6
4. Working Class (skilled)	12	4.8	4	1.6
5. Working Class (Semi-skilled)	36	14.4	12	4.8
6. Self-employed	76	30.4	17	6.8
7. Out of work/looking for a job	58	23.2	164	65.6
Total	250	100	250	100

Chi-Square test value:  $p = 0.000$ .

**Table 3.** The interview participants and their characteristics.

Participants	Name	Age	Education	Occupation	Income	Number of Children
Couple 1	Hamza	44	Secondary school	Construction worker	IDR 2.000.000	Two (14, 7 years old)
Couple 2	Zahra	38	Secondary school	<i>Unemployed</i>	–	One (8 months old)
	Umar	29	Undergraduate	Manager	IDR 5.000.000–10.000.000	
Couple 3	Zeynep	25	Undergraduate	<i>Unemployed</i>	–	One (1 year old)
	Andi	30	Senior High School	Private Sector	IDR 5.000.000–10.000.000	
Couple 4	Mutia	26	Senior High School	<i>Unemployed</i>	–	One (6 year old)
	Ahmet	29	Undergraduate	Private Sector	IDR 5.000.000–10.000.000	
Couple 5	Fatima	28	Undergraduate	<i>Unemployed</i>	–	Three (10,4,3 years old)
	Arman	32	Undergraduate	Gadget Service	IDR 16.000.000–20.000.000	
Couple 6	Nur	36	Undergraduate	<i>Part-time freelancer</i>	IDR 2.000.000–4.000.000	Two (15, 9 years old)
	Sami	36	Elementary School	Private Sector	IDR 1.000.000–2.000.000	
Couple 7	Vena	33	Senior High School	<i>Part-time teacher</i>	IDR 1.000.000	Two (19, 15 years old)
	Nadim	46	Elementary School	Construction worker	IDR 2.000.000–4.000.000	
Couple 8	Maya	44	Senior High School	<i>Unemployed</i>	–	One (1 year old)
	Ali	36	College Degree	Private Sector	IDR 5.000.000–10.000.000	
Couple 9	Rosa	30	College Degree	<i>Unemployed</i>	–	One (3, 1 year old)
	Salman	33	Senior High School	Sales	IDR 2.000.000–4.000.000	
Couple 10	Tina	30	Senior High School	<i>Unemployed</i>	–	Three (8,4-years old, 11 months)
	Fatih	39	Senior High School	Fisherman	IDR 2.000.000	
	Silvia	36	Undergraduate	<i>Part-time Teacher</i>	IDR 1.000.000	
Imam 1	Hasan	37	Master's degree	Teacher	IDR 2.000.000–5.000.000	–
Imam 2	Usman	50	Traditional Islamic School Graduate	Teacher	IDR 2.000.000–5.000.000	–

women). The Chi-Square test result ( $p = 0.000$ ) indicates that the distribution of occupations differs notably between men and women in the sample, where men are more likely to be self-employed or in various levels of the working class, while women are more frequently out of work, which is quite interesting, as a high percentage of women possess a university degree. All the men who took part in the interviews were also employed, while most of the women were unemployed or in part-time job (see Table 3, the interview participants and their characteristics).

**Table 4.** Men's and women's income level.

Income Categories	Men		Women	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
0. No Income	2	0.8	95	38
1. No Answer	13	5.2	51	20.4
2. Less than IDR 2.000.000	83	33.2	50	20
3. IDR 2.000.000–4.000.000	81	32.4	33	13.2
4. IDR 5.000.000–10.000.000	49	19.6	13	5.2
5. IDR 10.000.000–15.000.000	5	2	3	1.2
6. IDR 16.000.000–20.000.000	2	0.8	0	0
7. Others	15	6	5	2
Total	250	100	250	100

Chi-Square test value:  $p = 0.001$ .

This gap in employment participation also leads to substantial differences in earnings. Table 4 captures the income<sup>2</sup> distribution among the participants. The most notable disparity is found in the category of no income, where 38% of women report earning nothing compared to only 0.8% of men. Men also lead in higher income categories, with 19.6% earning between IDR 5,000,000 and 10,000,000 compared to just 5.2% of women. Similarly, men dominate the IDR 2,000,000–4,000,000 bracket (32.4% vs. 13.2% for women) and show representation in the highest income brackets, where no women are present. Conversely, women are more likely to provide no answer or report lower incomes. For instance, 20.4% of women did not disclose their income, compared to 5.2% of men. Chi-Square test shows a substantial link between gender and income distribution ( $p = 0.001$ ). The data suggests that men not only out-earn women across most categories but also dominate higher earning brackets, while a large proportion of women have no income at all. All the men in the interviews also possessed different levels of income, while most of the women had lower or no income.

### ***The influence of Islamic teachings and cultural norms on Muslim men's perceptions of domestic labour***

In this section, I elaborate on how Islamic teaching and culture shape men's perception of their responsibilities in the family and highlight how these either reinforce or challenge traditional gender roles. In this study, the concept of breadwinning refers to the role of providing the main portion of the household income and ensuring the protection of the family. In every interview, couples expressed that men are traditionally expected to be the primary financial providers. The responsibility for ensuring the family's financial stability and security is emphasized in Islamic texts and teachings, shaping the expectations of a husband's role within the family structure (Tucker, 2008). The husband's obligation to financially support his wife and children is based on the Quran and is considered a binding responsibility for men (Quran, 4.34). The interviews also highlight that the husband's responsibilities extend to supporting his parents and, in some cases, his in-laws. This reflects a broader view of family obligations, where the husband is expected to take care of his extended family members as well, ensuring that they too are provided for. This aspect of the role emphasizes the husband's duty to uphold familial ties and contribute to the welfare of both his immediate and extended family.

The husband's duties are clearly defined: providing for the family, ensuring a decent livelihood for the wife and children, including providing for his parents and in-laws. (interview with husband, Arman)

According to my understanding as a wife, the role and responsibility of a husband are to lead the family, provide for them, and protect the family. (interview with wife, Zahra)

The interviews with *imams* also outline a comprehensive view of the husband's role as the head of the household, emphasizing both the material and emotional responsibilities that come with this position. The husband's primary duty is to provide protection and comfort to his wife, ensuring that her needs are fully met in various aspects of life. This includes securing a suitable place for the family to live, and ensuring that the environment is safe, comfortable, and conducive to their well-being. Beyond the material needs, the *imams* highlight the importance of emotional sustenance in the husband's role. The husband is also expected to nurture his wife's emotional well-being. This can include offering knowledge and guidance, which helps her grow and feel supported within the marriage.

The role of the husband as the head of the household primarily involves providing protection and comfort to his wife. He provides a suitable place to live and clothing and ensures her sustenance both physically and emotionally. (interview with *Imam*, Hasan)

In Islam, the husband's primary responsibility is to act as the provider, ensuring the family's financial needs are met. This duty is emphasized regardless of the wife's income. Alongside providing, the husband is expected to

treat his wife kindly, protect the family, and foster a harmonious household based on mutual respect and Islamic values. (interview with *Imam*, Usman)

In some instances, participants' views on their family responsibilities reflect a culturally ingrained understanding of the husband's role within the household, rather than a deep religious or theological interpretation, as articulated by Ali. For him, the expectation that the husband provides for his family is seen as a standard or 'normal' aspect of family life, rooted in societal norms rather than a strict adherence to religious teachings. In his view, it is simply customary or expected that the husband takes on the responsibility of being the primary provider. This role is not necessarily tied to a conscious understanding of religious doctrine but is more about fulfilling what is commonly accepted in the community or culture as the husband's duty. For Ali, the husband's role as the provider is less about religious duty and more about conforming to cultural norms. This suggests that everyday practices shape perceptions of family roles, even if religious teachings are not explicitly emphasized.

Well, I'm not very knowledgeable about religion and such. It's more about what's considered normal. By normal, I mean that it's understood that the husband is responsible for providing for his family. (interview with husband, Ali)

In addition to discussing the role of men as providers, I explore the participant's views on men's involvement in domestic labour to understand their perspective on the idea of men actively participating in domestic responsibilities. All participants acknowledged that while the primary role of men in Islam has been to provide for the family, this does not exclude them from participating in domestic labour, rather, they emphasized the importance of mutual support and cooperation within the family. Islamic teachings encourage such involvement, viewing it as virtuous and beneficial for the family dynamic. By contributing to household chores and childcare, the husband fosters a sense of partnership and equality, which strengthens the marital relationship and enhances the overall harmony of the household. This perspective aligns with a more modern and inclusive interpretation of Islamic values, where the roles of husband and wife are seen as complementary rather than rigidly defined.

While there is an emphasis on providing financial support, Islam also appreciates the importance of maintaining the household and participating in childcare for overall family well-being. (interview with husband, Nadim)

The main duty of a husband is indeed to provide for the family's needs. However, according to Islamic teachings, it would be very good if the husband also helps with household chores and takes care of the children. (interview with wife, Zahra)

While his role as the provider is central, shared domestic responsibilities are encouraged, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). (interview with *Imam*, Usman)

The findings show that while men understand that Islam designates them as breadwinners, it also encourages their involvement in domestic labour. However, the extent to which Islamic teachings shape men's participation in household tasks remains questionable. For instance, if men believe that housework and childcare should be shared between spouses, as emphasized by Islamic principles, does this translate into greater participation compared to those who see domestic labour as solely their wives' responsibility? The reality is that, although men recognize Islam's encouragement of shared domestic labour, their actual engagement remains low. The next two sections delve into men's participation and experiences in domestic labour in details and explain why men's involvement in domestic labour remains limited compared to women.

### ***Indonesian Muslim men's participation in domestic labour***

After exploring how Islamic teachings and cultural norms influence men's perceptions on domestic labour, here, I delve into a more specific and practical aspect of this issue. I collected time-use data on how much time men and women spend on domestic labour and in the interviews, I asked the

participants to describe the distribution of domestic labour within their family. This helps to understand who primarily handles these tasks and the reasons behind this arrangement and reveal whether men’s understanding of Islamic teaching about equal participation in domestic labour aligns with actual practices within their household. By examining who takes on most of these responsibilities and why, I present insights into the real-world application of gender roles, and identify any factors – such as religious beliefs, personal preferences, or practical considerations – that influence this division of labour in their family life.

Table 5 provides a detailed analysis of the average daily time spent by Indonesian Muslim men and women on housework and childcare during weekdays and weekends. The data highlights significant gender disparities in the distribution of domestic responsibilities, emphasizing the gendered division of labour within households. On weekdays, women spend an average of 251.34 min on housework, while men allocate only 40.34 min to the same task, resulting in a mean difference of 211 min ( $t=-14.87, p = 0.001$ ). A similar disparity is evident in childcare, with women devoting 223.14 min per day compared to just 26.44 min for men. The mean difference of 196.7 min is also statistically significant ( $t=-15.97, p = 0.001$ ). At weekends, men’s contributions to housework and childcare increase slightly, yet the disparity remains evident. In terms of housework, men spend an average of 101.42 min, whereas women allocate 249.90 min, with a mean difference of 148.48 min ( $t=-7.92, p = 0.001$ ). A similar pattern emerges in childcare, with men spending 54.64 min compared to women’s 109.92 min, leading to a mean difference of 55.28 min ( $t=-5.55, p = 0.001$ ). The time-use data underscore the highly gendered division of domestic labour within Indonesian Muslim families. Despite a modest increase in men’s participation at weekends, women continue to shoulder the majority of domestic responsibilities.

The interview findings further strengthen the time-use data. In the interviews, all participants emphasized that while men are expected to be breadwinners, they are also encouraged to contribute to domestic tasks. However, most participants acknowledged that, in practice, their wives handle the majority of domestic responsibilities. This arrangement reflects religious interpretations of their role as breadwinners, as well as practical considerations and time availability, since most men are employed, while the majority of women are either not working or engaged in part-time employment, as indicated in the sociodemographic data.

Definitely my wife. Because as a husband, and the head of the family, I am usually working. So, my wife is the one who usually does all the household chores. (interview with husband, Sami)

That would be my wife. Because I spend more time at the office and come back home in the evening. (interview with husband, Andi)

Similarly, wives such as Mutia and Rosa described their primary role in managing the household.

When it comes to domestic labour, I handle them entirely, but my husband is willing to help if I’m tired. (interview with wife, Mutia)

I do all the domestic labour, I’m the one at home 24/7. Because my husband is working everyday. (interview with wife, Rosa)

**Table 5.** Average daily time spent by Indonesian Muslim couples on housework and childcare at weekdays and weekends (in minutes).

Categories	Activities	Men	Women	Mean Diff (M-W)	t-value for difference
Weekday	Housework	40.34	251.34	-211	-14.87***
	Childcare	26.44	223.14	-196.7	-15.97***
Weekend	Housework	101.42	249.90	-148.48	-7.92***
	Childcare	54.64	109.92	-55.28	-5.55***

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Mean difference = Men’s mean time spent – Women’s mean time spent.

Housework: Includes activities such as cooking, laundry, cleaning, Maintenance of the house, DIY, gardening, shopping and other household responsibilities (including pet care).

While the majority of Indonesian Muslim men focus more on their public responsibilities, some are increasing their involvement in domestic labour, as demonstrated by Umar. Despite the demands of his job, he is committed to contributing at home and fulfilling his household duties to the best of his ability. However, he recognizes that his efforts may often go unnoticed or seem inadequate due to the long hours he spends at work, which limits his availability for household tasks. Nevertheless, Umar remains dedicated to supporting his family in every aspect, actively seeking to balance his breadwinning role with responsibilities at home, including housework and childcare, whenever possible.

Because what I understand earlier is that it's a husband's main responsibility to earn a living, however, it also includes cleaning up the house and taking care of the children. That's why I'm trying to do what I can to take care of the family, even though it may not be recognised by people, it's probably still very lacking because I spent a lot of time stuck at work. (interview with husband, Umar)

A key finding in this research is that participants reported no instances of marital conflict or disharmony, despite the highly gendered division of domestic labour. Most couples expressed contentment and satisfaction with how household responsibilities are managed, even when recognizing existing imbalances. These perspectives suggest that marital harmony is maintained despite the unequal distribution of domestic labour, largely because both partners accept and adapt to their roles. While some women acknowledge the physical and emotional strain of managing household tasks, they also emphasize the presence of mutual support within their families. Similarly, men who contribute less to domestic work still express awareness of the imbalance and a willingness to adjust where possible. This dynamic highlights how gendered expectations remain deeply embedded in household arrangements, yet they do not necessarily lead to dissatisfaction or conflict within marriages. For example, Hamza acknowledged that while his contribution to domestic tasks is not entirely equal, he is still comfortable with the current arrangement.

For the time being, I'm content with how we divide the household chores, although I know my contribution isn't quite as balanced as I'd like it to be. (Interview with husband, Hamza)

Similarly, Maya expressed overall satisfaction with the division of household labour but highlighted the occasional challenges she faces, particularly with childcare.

I'm quite satisfied with the division of household chores, although sometimes I get tired, I struggle with my kids, I face difficulties; it's not a one-person job, but in the end, we all always try to support each other and work together. (Interview with wife, Maya)

The domestic labour arrangement among Indonesian Muslim couples is largely a result of the couples' differing roles, with men focusing on work commitments, as their primary duty according to religious teachings, it is necessary for the wives to oversee the household. This results in disparities in the time men and women spend on domestic labour. Practical considerations also play a role; since husbands spend most of their time working, their availability for domestic labour is limited, necessitating the unemployed or part-time working wives to take the domestic duties, as suggested by time availability theory. Another factor contributing to men's lower participation is the resources they control, particularly their income, which gives them greater bargaining power. Since the majority of men are breadwinners, domestic responsibilities often fall more heavily on women, as explained by relative resources theory. However, some Indonesian Muslim men do attempt to engage in domestic labour although their involvement is often limited.

### *Indonesian Muslim men's experiences in domestic labour*

To understand men's experiences with domestic labour, I asked them to describe how their family members, friends and neighbours typically react to their involvement in household tasks. They shared both positive and negative experiences when participating in domestic labour. On the positive side, family members, relatives, neighbours and friends appreciate men's involvement in

domestic labour and perceive it as an indication of evolving gender roles and shared responsibilities. However, men's involvement in domestic activities remains largely confined to tasks traditionally viewed as more masculine, such as home maintenance or gardening. When men participate in cooking, cleaning, or childcare, it is often framed as merely 'assisting' their wives, rather than taking on these responsibilities as their own. As Hamza stated, men's participation in domestic labour is acceptable if it does not undermine their primary role as breadwinners. This view holds that while men can assist with household tasks, their main responsibility remains financial support. It reflects a commitment to traditional gender roles, where men contribute to domestic work in a supplementary capacity, participating in household without shifting their core duties.

I've noticed a positive response in our community where many men are actively involved in domestic tasks, for example, we will see a husband gardening and maintaining their homes. It's quite common to see men around here taking care of their gardens/mowing the lawn. (interview with husband, Umar)

It's not necessary for cooking to be exclusively a woman's task. Besides enhancing creativity in cooking, it can also be enjoyable and a way to help the wife lighten her load, promoting teamwork. So, the response is generally positive. But the principle is, as far as it doesn't reverse the responsibilities. (interview with husband, Hamza)

In other contexts, men receive negative comments for engaging in domestic labour, leading to unpleasant experiences. Traditional views on gender roles can lead family members, relatives, neighbours and friends to question or criticize a man's active participation in domestic labour, seeing it as unusual or contrary to established norms. This variation in response highlights the diverse attitudes towards the ongoing shift in societal expectations regarding household responsibilities. People often criticize men who engage in tasks typically associated with women's work, such as cleaning or cooking. Some may even perceive these men as being subservient or afraid of their wives. The negative perception surrounding men's participation in domestic labour extends beyond its impact on the men themselves; it also subjects their wives to scrutiny and negative judgement. Given that societal norms often dictate women's primary responsibility for household tasks, involving husbands in domestic work may be viewed as a failure on the part of women to fulfil their expected roles. However, in Indonesia, men are generally not criticized for their lack of participation in domestic labour, as they are primarily expected to provide financially rather than manage household tasks. As a result, their limited involvement is tolerated and accepted in exchange for their financial contribution. On the contrary, men face criticism and pressure when they fail to fulfil their financial responsibilities (Kiram, 2024). This underscores the multifaceted nature of issues related to the division of domestic labour, which is shaped by complex intersections of traditional gender norms, societal expectations and cultural pressures. Such deeply embedded beliefs not only dictate the distribution of responsibilities within households but also frame the social consequences faced by both men and women who deviate from these established norms.

Based on my experience, many people may gossip behind your back, questioning why a man is involved in tasks traditionally seen as women's work. They might express disapproval, suggesting that such responsibilities should be left to his wife. (interview with husband, Arman)

I've noticed that when a husband helps with domestic tasks like cooking or cleaning, there can sometimes be comments from family members. There seems to be a perception that if the husband is pitching in, it must mean the wife is lazy or not doing her part. (interview with wife, Nur)

The experiences of Indonesian Muslim men in domestic labour offer valuable insights into how religious beliefs and cultural norms can either reinforce or challenge traditional gender roles. In the Indonesian Muslim context, while Islamic teachings encourage men to participate in domestic labour, the prevailing societal belief remains that a man's primary role is to provide financially for the family, with domestic responsibilities still largely viewed as women's duties. This evidence suggests that societal expectations and cultural norms can sometimes outweigh religious values, often due to the interpretation and practice of Islamic teachings that tend to emphasize the role of men as breadwinners and women as domestic caregivers. The exploration of Indonesian Muslim

men's experiences in domestic labour gives a fresh understanding of why men are most likely to engage less in domestic labour, as they may face criticism from their surroundings, especially if the community practises strict traditional gender roles. In this situation, participating in domestic labour can be considered a deviation by the community, resulting in men focusing more on their roles outside the household, which also leads to them having limited time to spend and use the financial resources to bargain their involvement in domestic labour. The tendency of men to prioritize their responsibilities as breadwinner is clearly reflected in the time-use data, reinforcing traditional gender roles in which household tasks are largely managed by women. Nevertheless, some men choose to adhere to religious teachings that promote sharing household responsibilities. Despite facing criticism for engaging in domestic labour, they perceive this as acceptable within the household, highlighting that some Indonesian Muslim men aspire to more egalitarian relationships.

## Discussion

This study demonstrates that in Indonesian Muslim families, religious teachings and cultural norms play an important part in shaping gender roles. The participants emphasized that men's main duty in Islam is the breadwinner, but they are also encouraged to participate in domestic labour. However, in practice, cultural expectations often reinforce the prioritization of the breadwinner role, resulting in most Indonesian Muslim men focusing predominantly on paid work, with only a few striving to increase their contribution to domestic labour. However, despite the highly gendered division of domestic labour, Indonesian Muslim couples do not express conflict or marital disharmony. Instead, they report being satisfied and content with their family arrangements. My research reflects the results from previous studies, which have highlighted that religion significantly influences the values and expectations regarding the gender roles within the household, with men becoming the primary breadwinner while women manage the home and family (Kulik, 2002; Wilcox, 2006). The influence of religion on gender roles is not limited to Muslim-majority countries only; it has also been observed among immigrant Muslim couples across Europe. Traditional gender roles assign the responsibility of financial support primarily to men, while women are expected to handle childcare and house-keeping duties (Diehl et al., 2009; Lehrer, 1995), thus perpetuating unequal power dynamics rooted in these roles (Rogers & Amato, 2000). This suggests that much of the research on religion's impact on gender roles in work and family life highlights its significant role in shaping traditional perspectives and reinforcing gendered divisions of labour. Islam, in particular, is often linked to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles (Heath & Martin, 2013; Lindley, 2002; Predelli, 2004).

In Indonesian Muslim households particularly, men and women allocate their time to domestic tasks in ways that reflect longstanding religious and societal expectations. Men are typically expected to fulfil the role of primary breadwinners. As a result, Indonesian Muslim men spend more time engaged in paid work, leaving them with limited time to spend in domestic labour. Women, on the other hand, are generally seen as the primary caregivers for the home and children, leading them to spend considerable time on these activities (Bianchi et al., 2000; England & Farkas, 2017; Kiram, 2020b). Additionally, men often use their relative resources, such as income, to negotiate the division of domestic labour within the family, compensating for their lower involvement. This dynamic helps explain why Indonesian men typically dedicate less time to domestic tasks compared to their wives. However, it is important to note that while time availability and relative resources help explain the division of domestic labour in Indonesian Muslim families, they alone cannot fully account for the observed patterns. In Muslim families, in addition to religious teachings, cultural norms continue to play a fundamental part in defining the different roles of men and women.

Although men's participation in domestic labour has received some appreciation and encouragement from family, friends and neighbours, such positive reinforcement remains limited and varies depending on social expectations and cultural norms. In Indonesia, men are widely regarded as the primary breadwinners, those who deviate from this expectation by engaging

in domestic labour often face negative consequences (Vandello & Bosson, 2013), and can negatively impact their wives as well, who may be perceived as failing in their domestic responsibilities and subsequently judged as incompetent (Brines, 1994; Thébaud et al., 2021). As found in this study, some Indonesian Muslim men who participate in domestic labour are often labelled with derogatory terms, such as ‘henpecked man’. These terms reflect the cultural stigma attached to men who deviate from traditional gender roles, reinforcing societal pressure to adhere to conventional masculine expectations. As a result, if an individual resists or goes against the societal expectations associated with their gender role or engages in behaviour considered atypical for their gender, they may be perceived as committing an act of social deviance. This can influence how people perform gender differently (Smith & Smith, 2017). Furthermore, societal expectations of men as primary breadwinners often push them into rigid, full-time jobs, leaving little room for flexibility. As this study demonstrates, all employed men worked full-time, reflecting the structural constraints that reinforce men’s financial role over their domestic responsibilities. This finding is relevant to the previous research which has also reported the significant challenge that men encounter when trying to balance their professional obligations with their duties towards family (Poelmans & Caligiuri, 2008). For men, seeking more flexible job situations, unique challenges may await. Men who seek flexible work arrangements may face penalties, being perceived as less masculine or productive (Coltrane et al., 2013; Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Vandello & Bosson, 2013).

The cultural and societal expectations can discourage men from prioritizing carework or work in the home, as it conflicts with traditional gender norms. Thus, although Islamic teachings encourage men to participate in domestic labour, societal norms and traditional gender expectations often lead them to prioritize their breadwinning role instead. The result is a noticeable gap in the time men and women spend on domestic labour, which manifests in the significantly higher amount of time women devote to household chores and childcare compared to their husbands. Men’s focus on breadwinning often stems from traditional views that see providing financially for the family as their primary duty, reinforced by societal and cultural norms. The extent to which men adjust their behaviour to align with socially prescribed norms varies as they seek to affirm their self-worth. For instance, Indonesian Muslim men generally participate as ‘helper’ in domestic labour. Such participation is typically minimal, aimed more at providing occasional assistance rather than shifting the balance of domestic labour. Thus, men’s involvement in domestic work is often structured in a way that allows them to maintain their dominant position in the family, without fully challenging the traditional gendered division of labour. This limited involvement, particularly in childcare, has led to Indonesia being characterized as a ‘fatherless country’, emphasizing the minimal role fathers typically play in day-to-day parenting (Ashari, 2018).

Nevertheless, despite these deeply embedded gender norms, a growing number of Indonesian Muslim men are redefining their roles. An increasing number of Indonesian Muslim men are seeking to contribute more to domestic labour. This shift is influenced by evolving interpretations of the Quran, which encourage a more gender-equitable perspective, urging men not only to fulfil their financial and protective responsibilities but also to engage more fully in household tasks. As discussed earlier, and exemplified by Umar’s perspective, these reinterpretations of religious teachings contribute to a changing perception of men’s roles within the family, fostering a more egalitarian gender ideology. The motivations behind Indonesian Muslim men’s increasing involvement in domestic work present a distinct context when compared to Western societies. In Western countries, feminist movements have long advocated for greater gender equality within the household, influencing laws, policies and social norms (Friedan, 2001; Guillaumin, 2002; Weldon et al., 2023). State interventions, such as parental leave policies and financial support for parents, have been implemented to facilitate a more equitable division of labour within families (Earle et al., 2023; Milner, 2022; Sung & Smyth, 2022). Women have also played a crucial role in demanding male involvement in childcare and household duties (Flèche et al., 2020; Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). Additionally, some men actively challenge traditional gender roles, with concepts such as the Sensitive New Age Guy

(SNAG) and the househusband emerging as recognized social phenomena (Beynon, 2002; Davis, 2007; Rushing & Powell, 2015; Waling, 2019).

In Indonesia, while feminist and gender equality movements have led to greater female participation in public life – such as higher education and political representation (e.g. the 30% quota for women in parliament) – efforts to achieve greater equality within the domestic sphere remain limited (Kiram, 2024). Government policies on parental leave, for instance, reinforce traditional gendered divisions of labour by granting significantly more leave to mothers than to fathers. While maternity leave provisions allow women up to 3 months of paid leave, paternity leave is restricted to only 2 days, providing minimal support for fathers' involvement in childcare and family responsibilities (Wiryawan, 2023). This policy framework reflects the broader societal perception that men's primary role remains centred on economic provision, with domestic responsibilities continuing to be viewed as women's domain. Furthermore, women in Indonesia are generally content with the existing division of domestic labour and do not actively pressure men to participate in household tasks, as evidenced in the interview findings discussed in the previous section.

In Indonesian society, the 'forces of change' driving some men to participate more in domestic labour primarily stem from individual shifts in gender awareness and a growing recognition of gender equality, rather than broader societal or community-level changes. Guided by Islamic teachings that emphasize shared marital responsibilities, these evolving perspectives are reshaping men's roles within the family and fostering a more egalitarian approach to domestic labour. Research indicates that gender beliefs and attitudes are crucial in determining how domestic tasks are distributed, with men who hold egalitarian perspectives more likely to challenge traditional gender norms by actively engaging in household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning and childcare (Aassve et al., 2014). This shift towards shared domestic responsibilities is often driven by a belief in fairness and a commitment to fostering equal partnerships within the home. Men who adopt these perspectives view housework not as a woman's obligation but as a shared responsibility. By taking part in household tasks, men help dismantle gender stereotypes and promote more equitable power dynamics within relationships. Their involvement not only strengthens familial bonds but also enables both partners to better support each other in pursuing personal and professional aspirations.

## Conclusions and limitations

In this article, I have provided a fresh perspective on the gendered division of domestic labour in Muslim families by examining how religious teachings and cultural norms shape Indonesian Muslim men's perceptions, participation and experiences in household responsibilities. I have demonstrated that although men recognize that religious teachings encourage them to participate in domestic labour, most prioritize their financial role, leaving household tasks largely to their wives. This is shaped by strong cultural expectations that reinforce traditional gender roles, with men and women facing criticism if they deviate from these norms. As a result, Indonesian Muslim men engage in domestic labour only occasionally, viewing it as 'help' rather than a shared responsibility. This leads to a significant disparity in the time men and women dedicate to domestic work, reinforcing the highly gendered nature of household roles. However, Indonesian Muslim couples are generally content with these arrangements, as traditional gender roles remain deeply ingrained and widely accepted within society. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that while broader cultural norms continue to reinforce traditional divisions of domestic labour, a gradual shift towards more balanced domestic engagement is emerging among some Indonesian Muslim men. This change is influenced by reinterpretations of Quranic teachings, aligning with evolving gender ideologies that encourage more balanced involvement in both public and household responsibilities.

As a contemporary work on men's involvement in domestic labour in Muslim families, particularly Indonesia, my research offers a fresh perspective on male engagement in domestic labour. It is the most recent study in Indonesia to combine time-use diaries with qualitative method. This approach provides valuable quantitative data on the actual hours spent on

different tasks by Muslim couples, complemented by interviews that explore the motivations and factors influencing domestic labour arrangements in Muslim families. However, it is important to note that the time-use survey is based on a limited sample size due to research funding constraints and is not nationally representative, unlike other large-scale time-use studies. Additionally, as this article is part of a broader study, the discussion primarily explores religious and cultural factors while also considering relative resources, time availability and gender ideology. However, it does not delve into other factors such as the role of education in achieving gender equality in Muslim families. Important unanswered questions are why despite higher educational attainment, Indonesian Muslim women remain unemployed and continue to bear a disproportionate share of domestic labour. Do rigid Islamic interpretations and cultural practices prevent women from more active participation in the labour market? These questions are beyond the scope of this article but will be explored further in my upcoming paper. Moreover, as this research has limited data on unemployed Muslim men and their involvement in domestic labour, further research is necessary to investigate whether these men allocate more time to domestic responsibilities given their increased availability or if their contributions remain limited.

## Notes

1. Primary school/education in Indonesia is similar to the system in the UK, for ages 5–11, 2) Junior high/secondary school equivalent to secondary education in the UK, ages 11–16, 3) Senior high school, equivalent to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), and A-levels, 4) College, where students receive vocational diplomas, but this education level is now less common as many prefer to pursue an undergraduate degree.
2. The average monthly salary of Indonesian people is IDR 3.500.000- IDR 7.000.000 (£200-£350). In March 2024, Indonesia's poverty line was set at IDR 582,932 per person per month. This includes a food portion of IDR 433,906, making up 74.44%, and a non-food portion of IDR 149,026, or 25.56%. As of March 2024, the average poor household in Indonesia comprised 4.78 members, setting the household poverty line at IDR 2,786,415 per month (Statistic Office, 2023).

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## Ethical approval

The research was approved by the Department of Sociological Studies Ethics Review Committee at University of Sheffield (Ethical Clearance Reference Number: 055684) on 1 December 2023. All participants provided written informed consent prior to participating.

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