

## **Women's Agency in Action: Higher Education and Career Paths for Young Muslim Women in Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

This article is an analysis of narratives of young Indonesian Muslim women to explore their behavior and thoughts on being well-educated women in their chosen career path. It examines women's thoughts on completing higher education and their lifelong study; whether pursuing a career or being a full-time mom. Having the capability to choose the career they want and implementing the beliefs of Islam's teaching are attributed as their main responsibilities for being a real woman in this world and hereafter. The biographical interpretive method is engaged in this study to more deeply explain and explore the main idea selected. The research findings show that higher education allows women to become a new version of themselves. Obviously it can be said that education is the key for the next, better, future generations of Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *higher education, Islamic teaching, women's career paths, Muslim women*

### **Introduction**

Women's empowerment is a multifaceted concept referring to a process of change in which women gain the freedom to control their own lives in a way that enhances their well-being (Le & Nguyen, 2021). Indonesia, a developing country, still has several problems in the social life of its people. Women who should be part of the intellectual generation have to accept the bitter reality of their patriarchal culture, especially for those who live in rural areas. Many countries show that education for a woman is considered futile. A study done by Truehill (2022) showed that black woman scholars often experienced unwelcomed contact, discrimination, and lack of advancement in academic institutions. Islamic feminists see education

as a fundamental tool to eradicate situations of oppression and ignorance, promoting instead the autonomy and freedom of Muslim women (Carmona, 2018).

**Table 1.** *Increase in the Number of People Studying in Indonesia*

Time	No schooling		Bachelor's or equivalent level		Master's or equivalent level		Total Number of Inhabitant
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
2011	3277	6883	3362	3026	358	163	172888
2012	3320	7052	4149	3586	445	186	176290
2013	3209	6768	4463	4036	463	256	179049
2014	3013	6400	4753	4516	534	262	182081
2015	2781	6000	5437	5293	630	332	185350
2016	2418	5221	5953	5981	587	326	188349
2017	1753	849*	6215	6333	665	382	191334
2018	1961	2428*	6716	6946	676	410	195836
2019	2303	4158	6960	7305	664	416	200485
2020	1553	2891*	3952	4205	3976	4002	203285

Note: \*the data is unreliable

Source: *International Labor Organization*

Table 1 shows that in the last decade the number of women who are not familiar with education has decreased significantly. This is fully supported by the increase in the number of women pursuing higher education. The difference between the number of men and women in exercising their right to continue their higher education should no longer be a big problem. However, the issue of women's rights does not stop here. A woman's higher education will be undoubtedly noble in the eyes of religion when she dedicates it to her family in the future.

Indonesia, one of the countries with the largest population in the world and with the majority of people who embrace Islam, has a story that cannot be ignored. The issue of gender equality in Indonesia began to emerge with the arrival of Ibu Kartini, a women's activist during the Dutch colonial period. Kartini is known as a pioneer in the revival of women's rights in the archipelago. She was a prominent Indonesian activist who advocated for women's rights and women's education. Now, the results of her hard work are starting to be felt by today's generation of women. The issue of gender equality in the field of education has given rise to various criticisms of Islamic teachings which were considered to not provide space for women in the world of education, because most Islamic teachings were considered too masculine and biased towards men (Abidin, 2015). Through the belief that humans, both male and female, are created equally by God, with the responsibility to dedicate themselves to Him, Islam emphasizes egalitarian teachings and equality

without any discrimination between different sexes so that men cannot be superior to women (Novianti, 2008).

Muslim families in reality have frequently been seen as nuclear family groups regarded as being strict and placing patriarchal constraints on women (Al-deen, 2019). It cannot be denied that in truth, the family is the place of learning and the formation of a child's identity. It is important to recognize women's efforts to increase their visibility and open doors for them as future leaders (Nakitende, 2019). Previous studies are able to show a strong impetus for women to continue their higher education and fulfill their dreams. However, sometimes their hopes are hindered by their parents and/or those closest to them.

In the context of Indonesia, the statement "why should women have higher education if they end up in the kitchen?" seems very familiar to the ears. Not a few Indonesian people are consumed by this statement that discourages many women (especially in rural areas) from continuing their higher education. In this study almost all of the women who have succeeded in continuing their education to a higher level come from families that actually have fully supported them. Only a few women were determined to continue their education even though they did not get the blessing of their parents in the first step. However, the main reason parents do not allow their daughters to continue their education is due to the family's economic problems. Fortunately, there are many scholarships available that women can use to continue their education amidst the difficulties of the family economy. Yin (2021) found in her study that there is a close connection and interaction between education and the economy.

Indonesian women make up more than half of the national population, yet their representation in the national parliament has been unsteady and low (Prihatini, 2019). There are many reasons why women are not interested in dedicating themselves to parliamentary seats. One of the biggest factors is the lack of knowledge and education about the world of politics. Even women who have been active in an organization during their education do not necessarily have sufficient insight into the world of parliament. However, like many other countries in Asia, Indonesia is experiencing a gradual growth in terms of women's political representation (Prihatini, 2019).

Career orientation is the readiness of individuals in making the right career decisions (Nurak et al., 2018). At the same time women who choose to have higher education are often associated with women who marry late. The gender gap is a reality that must be faced by women in almost all parts of the world (Nurak, et al., 2018). This gender gap also occurs in some jobs that only accept male employees even though women who have the capability in that field are available and able to carry out the work.

“In some societies, religion is infused into their cultures, making it difficult for the people to determine the difference” (Sanni et al., 2021) and give impact to community. In the humanist and individualistic model of the person, individuals are seen as existing in relation to something external to themselves, a system/structure/society, which constitutes a powerful actor upon them and against which they act (Al-deen, 2019). It could be markedly seen that agency is totally a part of the representation of the individual's capacity to take an action and make a choice in life. However, calling for women's agency in action, where women change their behaviors to achieve greater goals, may be valued negatively by others.

Due the direct effects of greater knowledge and awareness, female education has an enormous social impact (Skjortnes & Zachariassen, 2010). There are many challenges that every Indonesian woman faces when she wants to continue her education at college. For example, parents who should have a role in supporting their children's education sometimes do not realize their biggest mistake when they do not give this support. Women who receive substantial family support, including financial and emotional support, as well as parental advice and “effective” involvement in their education will have a greater chance of seizing opportunities in their education (Al-deen, 2019). Other challenges include family economic problems, the parents' educational background, early marriage, lack of a role model for a woman in higher education and the negative environment of society that does not support education at all. Nevertheless, women's higher education will be part of the change to a greater society in the future and have a beneficial effect on the country and the next generation.

Islam, women and higher education are phrases that cannot be separated one by one ideally. These three concepts are related to each other where women in Islam are obligated to have higher education. Mendoza, Bertran and Pàmies (2021) in their study argue that Islam clearly legitimizes the education of a woman. A woman's higher education is not only to obtain an honorary degree in the eyes of society or her family, it is also needed to educate, protect and direct the steps of women themselves. Accordingly, if education is an Islamic right and virtue for all, then Muslim women deserve education, including at the university level, and hence, it is only natural that Muslim societies and their governments provide equal access and opportunities to all levels of education (Aminnuddin, 2020).

Although ethnic social capital provides a good explanatory framework, its focus on the social capital of the family and the ethnic community neglects the agency of young people and, relevant for this study, particularly young women (Al-deen, 2019). This study seeks to present a new insight for the ongoing and highly polarized debate that surrounds Muslim women's agency in action through their higher education and keeping in mind their next career path. Higher education for a

woman is a must, as well as choosing the next career level whether as a career woman or full-time mom. In this study, the author takes the points of view of persons from various circles of women choosing a career which has been planned. It is hoped that every woman will find it easier to choose the career path she wants regardless of whether she has a higher education degree attached to her name. Skjortnes and Zachariassen (2010) state that a focus on higher education needs to have a “women’s life perspective” and not only focus on what conditions have to be in place in order for women to succeed in higher education.

## Method

The method used in this research is a qualitative approach. This method is appropriate for a study that needs an in-depth explanation in discussing each topic raised, like the method applied by Mendoza, Bertran and Parmis (2021). In their research, young women were approached in a direct and honest way, explaining the aims of the research and asking for their permission and opinions on the topic. Deliberating the experience of being a well-educated woman and the way women choose their next career path is the focus for this study.

The biographical interpretive method is employed to explore more deeply the historical background of participants related to their struggles in attaining higher education. The biographical narrative interpretive method interview technique and analytic framework are useful tools to help with an in-depth qualitative exploration of life stories in context (Corbally & O’Neill, 2013). In line with the project explored by Mendoza et al., (2021) who investigated feminism, Islam and higher education for women using the biographical interpretive method, interviewing seventeen women to capture information through this approach, the author applies the same method for collecting the whole story of the participants in this study. Similarly, Al-deen (2019) recruited twelve young women aged between 19 and 24, with all but three being interviewed at least twice, and data collected through audiotaped, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews.

In this present study, in total, fourteen informants were interviewed with the biographical interpretive method with two parts of interviews. The first part of the interview was focused on investigating their personal views of their higher education, career and Islamicity and the second part of the interview covered the topics of their support system related to their parents, society and their self-motivation and determination. This paper was designed to examine the experiences of Indonesian Muslim women and the age range recruited was 19–33 years old. They represent several careers; three undergraduate students, two housewives, two persons who were both undergraduate students and employees, two postgraduate

students, four employees, and one business owner. Two of them chose to continue their study overseas and one of them is working overseas.

All participants interviewed have consistently adopted hijab in their daily life, with one person wearing niqab. All interviews were conducted through online video call applications via Zoom and WhatsApp (related to connection issues). Online interviews were chosen due to the pandemic and the far distance for each respondent, making it difficult to meet in a face-to-face interview. During the interviews, a range of stories were explored including family background, family support and parental involvement related to their higher education and their chosen career path. Moreover, religious background, cultural understanding and family building are the most important parts in supporting women's education.

The interviews were divided into two sections. The questions were flexible as the aim was to obtain the real experience of women as much as possible. The first part of the interview was more casual where there were no specific questions prepared beforehand. A question was asked about "how important is education for you?". The following questions responded to the way they answered this question in order to dig deeper for all parts of their experience. The second part of the interviews was based on structured questions linked with several topics about parliament, the surrounding community and their career dreams.

Respondents involved in this study came from various regions and family backgrounds in Indonesia. In addition, the researcher also took a broad perspective by involving respondents from the age range of 19 years, who incidentally are still in college, to those who are 33 years old and who have a pretty good career. Of the fourteen respondents involved, two of them are married, but one of those has become a single mom. The other twelve respondents are still focused on their career paths, either those who are still struggling at the undergraduate student or master's level, or those who are already successful in their careers and businesses.

Data collection is done by the purposive sampling method because the author wants to open up details from their lives that can be investigated later, and implemented and applied by readers, and also to give this research higher weight to be taken into account in the world of research. The following Table 2 shows the data of the sources involved in this research, all names are pseudonyms (not their real name);

**Table 2.** *The List of Participants*

NAME	EDUCATION BACKGROUND	MARITAL STATUS	PROVINCE	CURRENT JOB
IZAH	Undergraduate student	single	East Java	Assistant -

DIANA	Undergraduate student	single	East Java	Collecting Data Center
SINDI	Undergraduate student	single	East Java	-
TISYA	Employee	single	East Java	Staff
DINA	Undergraduate student and employee	single	East Java	Tutor
AYU	Undergraduate student and employee	single	East Java	Tutor
LINA	Employee	single	East Java	Freelance
WATI	Postgraduate student	single	South Sulawesi	Entrepreneur
VIVIN	Housewife	married	East Java	Housewife
IRMA	Business owner	single	East Java	Entrepreneur
RESA	Postgraduate student	single	Scotland	Content Creator
IDA	Housewife	a single mom	Central Sulawesi	Teacher
YUNI	Employee	single	East Java	English tutor
DESI	Employee	single	Central Java	Medical Personnel

## Results and Discussion

### *Support System*

Muslim girls wishing to pursue higher education face more challenges than their male counterparts (Al-deen, 2019). Most of the respondents have a good support system from their family, especially parents and the surrounding environment. The families have a relatively stable economic background and are able to encourage each of their daughters to continue on to college. This situation is contrary to the section of society which is categorized as lower-middle class. Instead of continuing their daughters' education, these people are concerned about their daily needs. Such is education in Indonesia, especially for a woman. Wati tells the story of herself and her surroundings where she has experienced the privilege of education craved by others. She has finished her master's degree in accounting and is now establishing her business.

*Talking about my family and education, I can say that the relationship is very close. My family 100 percent supports education. In my case, if I did not want to continue to higher education then it is purely up to me. This is based on the background of my parents who happen to have both graduated with bachelor's degrees and they already feel the pleasure of being educated people. In addition, in terms of the surrounding environment, my village is known as the village of education. No matter how poor the families in my village are, they will definitely prioritize education for their children. For example, there is a neighbor who is also a classmate of mine. She has seven siblings, whose parents are only farm laborers, but all of whom have graduated from undergraduate education.*

On the other hand, Sindi and others who do not have family support like Wati, have to pursue their education by other means. The difficulties they face can only be understood by someone experiencing them.

*The beginning of my journey to be able to set my feet to this point was not easy. This trip was not accompanied by good support from my family. Concerns about tuition fees made them feel that working was the best option for me at that time. There is an implied gratitude because in the midst of the conflict there is still a cousin who continues to support me in continuing this education. He showed me several scholarships that I could take to keep studying. Beginning from this, my heart that had begun to waver became stronger and I tried to convince myself again that the path I was taking was the right one. Until, there was a point when I had to make an agreement with myself: "if I get a scholarship I must be allowed to go to college, but if I fail to get a scholarship, I will give myself up to work". Not many know I have failed in several scholarships before, but I know that back then it was not my fortune.*

It is as if being a business owner is the last resort to be able to channel her talents. Women with better careers should continue to invest in their personal development to contribute to the satisfaction of career success (Nurak, et al., 2018). In fact, in the end, being an intelligent Muslim woman means knowing what to prioritize and what to leave behind. In the case of Lina, she is concerned about how she will make a decision related to the next career she builds. An entrepreneurial woman who has a big dream for establishing her own hydroponic business, Lina states that family is the most important thing to be chosen as well. In the future, when the day of choosing either continuing her business and being a mom or fully



dedicating herself to her family comes, she decides to be a mom. This shows how an educated woman can choose her priority.

*My goals are both, bismillah, as a career woman who also wants to prioritize family and later I will become a mother who will be a good educator for my children. A mother who will be the main and closest source of education for my children. So far I want to try to be able to run both. However, if I was asked to choose, I would choose to focus on my child's growth and development. When it comes back to talk about business, I can turn my business over to people I can trust, so I just have to do some supervision.*

The human capital theory which is based on neoclassical economic theory suggests that gender discrimination in the workplace puts women at work in low-paid positions associated with rational financial choice (Nurak et al., 2018). It seems that the outside world has never been friendly to women. When a woman decides to work outside the home, the factors she faces are still diverse, ranging from traditions, norms and stereotypes to laws. Women's lives in the outside world can never be completely safe. In the context of Indonesia, low women's empowerment attributable to patriarchal norms potentially leads to a reduced ability of women to express their opinions (Putra, et al., 2021).

Those who decide to work outside the home are often subject to physical abuse in both verbal and non-verbal forms in the sense that they are seen as flirts. It feels like this world really is not fair to women. To have the opportunity in higher education alone is hard enough, let alone to get the career she wants. A woman must be very strong and tough. An undergraduate student, Diana, tells of her experience when she was doing an internship and getting her freelance job. What shocked her was how she was treated just because she is a pretty woman.

*With my internship and part-time work, I do not just apply what I have learned. I also learn other things that I did not learn in class, such as respect for others and how to behave towards those who are my seniors. My mindset is more open. I also realize that there are still many people who use physical standards to judge. In my internship, those who have physical advantages (beautiful, good looking) will be appreciated more and others will be ignored. From this experience, in my opinion, in Indonesia there are still many who treat and judge people by using physical standards rather than skills.*

### **Islam, Education and Women**

Religion plays an important role in the lives of individuals and it most especially highlights the dictates of the good and bad for people through its

scriptures (Sanni, et al., (2021). Indonesian women think that seeking knowledge is only part of getting a good career. It is as if they ignore that being a mother also requires knowledge. Being the first madrasa (educator) for her children also requires knowledge. Women are the conceptors of civilization and from women the education of a child begins, behaviour and mindset are formed. From the womb of a woman, great children will be born for the next generation who will continue the struggle of Islam and this nation, therefore a woman must have the knowledge that is capable of shaping her generation into a great generation. It is undeniable that great children are born of great people. Many fears are pinned on women about higher education in the form of the fear of losing the nature of a woman when she is highly educated, a nature that has been associated with the noble task of being a mother. Izah is an undergraduate student coming from one of the rural areas in East Java Indonesia. In her opinion being a *hafidzah* (memoriser of the Qur'an), winning many competitions, higher education will give unexpected benefits in regard to being a mother.

*I think it is totally important, firstly education is an obligation, it is clearly stated in the hadith "Tholabul Ilmi Faridhotun Ala Kulli Muslimin Wal Muslimat" [seeking knowledge is obligatory for each male and female Muslim]. So from a young age, my clerics and teachers always said that seeking knowledge was important and obligatory for all Muslims. By seeking knowledge, our degree in the eyes of Allah is different. Next, by getting married, we will complete half of our religion. I also learned this from my teachers and my mother that for a woman who is going to become a mother, her life before becoming a mother and after becoming a mother must be filled with knowledge. The first madrasa of a child is a mother. How to be a good madrasa for quality children starts from ourselves, improving ourselves, improving our quality and gaining knowledge wherever it is. So that the first students we raise wholeheartedly will get knowledge that is truly valid. If indeed we are not able to transmit our knowledge to others around us, then that knowledge will be eagerly awaited by our children.*

### **Self-motivation and Determination**

It is natural to have doubts because women's decisions are usually based on a more complex conflict. The more complex the situation, the less able a woman is to take an independent stand. Many women may have independence, but there are also many other women's worlds that are still completely closed, completely restrained, and also completely limiting. The task of women who are blessed with

sufficient independence is to encourage other women to be more courageous in showing their attitudes. The characteristics of a strong woman are those who are confident and dare to show their abilities. Women are hard workers wherever women are and strive even in male-dominated environments.

There is no need to be wracked with worries and feelings of guilt when we succeed in our work. It is believable that if every woman has a dose of freedom to act and create, the world will feel a truly real change. Women, as one of the basic pillars of a social system, play a fundamental role in development and environmental conservation, which depends on empowering women (Ghasemi, et al., 2020). A medical professional, Desi, said that the most important part of life is education where the education she is talking about is not only formal education but also informal education. Mastering each is part of completing one another to grow bigger together.

*For me myself, education is number one, the most important part of life, no question. As a human, study is a must. As a child we learn in an area of limited scope. The interesting thing about study, basically, for me, when we are moving from that situation and grow more mature, we will improve as a human being. Contributions to society will be made differently by us according to our fields of learning. We complement each other. It will be impossible for someone to have expertise in almost all sectors. To survive independently is totally ridiculous.*

There is a lot to improve, but let's start with the woman herself. No one knows more about woman than herself. Self-esteem is not determined by other people, but comes from knowing yourself, knowing your own strengths and weaknesses and, most importantly, understanding what you want to pursue and realize. The definition of self-confidence is knowing each other's dreams. Those who fail to respect themselves do not have a second chance to judge others, let alone judge their fellow women. Women should join hands instead of bringing each other down. Maybe it is because women see life as a competition arena, because women have limited space, which is dominated by men, so without realizing it women easily worry. Everything is never enough for herself, as a result anyone can feel like a threat. Peer gestures can be suspected of being a challenge. Resa, a master's student pursuing her dream to complete her degree in the United Kingdom, a well-educated woman who discusses her own life experience during her study in the UK, stated that confidence is something that must be dealt with in women's lives.

*The more we mature, the more aware we are. When we are wise, we will change the root of the smallest problem first. One of those really small things is confidence. For example, the girls here, they want to*

*look like how they are, very confident. In Indonesia sometimes we have to think first "I wear this hijab, especially when we are spotty, how I take pictures. In fact, I feel I am not myself". I will be honest, here I am more confident in outfits, I will never worry about others who will judge me when they see me in a bare face and I just feel like I am confident enough to be me here. I realize the interesting side of a girl is in her confidence. When she feels confident with herself, her beauty will naturally come out and when you want to be treated like that, you have to do the same. We have to feel that we do love ourselves. Be confident with what we have now. People see it from that side and no one will mind, maybe it is as simple as that. If in Indonesia maybe I have to think about many things to make myself suitable for hanging out.*

Furthermore, women are used to working harder than men. Many studies show that when women are provided with the opportunities to grow and learn, they are able to optimize their potential (Niswah, 2022). Women are usually more diligent, more determined and more consistent, because the doors that open easily for men still have to be knocked on or pushed down harder by women. Great women are those who are able to voice their opinions. Equality in life between genders does not just mean that women can do men's work or vice versa, men can never be women in many ways. "Equal" here, in the household, in education and/or in work, means being equal in voicing opinions. Women cannot be silent forever, as knowing that a man is the captain of his household, that is the noblest nature for him.

However, it will be better and more focused for a small organization, like a household if women and men are able to express their thoughts, share and respect each other. As happens very often, deliberation in organizations is a necessary thing when a decision will be taken. So how can a woman be able to negotiate and contribute her thoughts well if she does not have enough knowledge? Yuni, a career woman focusing on English teaching, has had a big impact in helping others get their degrees and career learning with her.

*Not only can a woman be a leader, but must be able to! The woman must be able to be a leader. This is motivated by the reason that there are certain conditions where women have more capabilities to be leaders than men. In addition, women must also be able to accommodate other women as well. So in this case, women can actually be said to be very capable of becoming leaders. Basically, if women put all their strength and abilities into becoming leaders, men can be defeated. Many women are multitasking, This is based on my personal experience.*

An undergraduate student in the elementary school education, Dina, said: *Initially I completed this education just to get a bachelor's degree, I had time to think like that. But day by day, I finally found out that college is not only about studying and, after graduating, getting a diploma/degree and finishing it. It turned out from information and experiences from friends who had graduated from the same department that most of them had the same initial intention to go to college. However, they changed when they graduated and realized that skills are truly needed. In this context, because I am majoring in Elementary School Education, it means that we are required to have good teaching skills. Finally, I was able to conclude that learning is not only about degrees and diplomas but about how we behave, make decisions, occupy roles and make the campus a vehicle to continue to improve my teaching skills.*

### **Career Paths**

Many women who take on roles as daughters-in-law, wives, mothers, sisters, neighbors and citizens, and who work outside the home, choose to be empowered voluntarily with all their heart, and these women who contribute to society through various fields and ways are extremely impressive. Interview results from Medoza, et al., (2021) mentioned that the expectations that participants reported expectations from their families—such as to fulfil certain gender roles related to preserving cultural elements and family honor, and the academic expectations of having a professional degree—seem to generate contradictions and conflicts that limit their own personal expectations of social mobility, putting them in situations where they feel they are being subjected to unfair treatment. In this case, some women experience obstacles and even daily criticism from their community. This experience seems to be a familiar one. As if, for women, just making choices isn't already challenging enough.

However, Al-deen, (2019) stated that the different ways an individual chooses might not be important so long as she can choose from the available means to achieve her goals and act intentionally and with agency, attaining educational goals by refusing to comply with dominant discourses; not necessarily through resistance but through other forms including negotiation and bargaining. In this era of digitalization of technology, women work in various forms and in varied activities and that means that the number of women working in this country is enormous, but the support given to them from both the environment and policy is usually not commensurate with the contribution women make. Irma, a business owner who has started her business of online marketing since sitting on campus, has a better

relationship with her employees since she realized education stands behind her goals.

*Education helps me to behave well when I have to treat the people I work with. If I did not continue my education, perhaps I would not know how to appreciate their work. I realize that they are valuable, in my small company. They must be respected, they are not just subordinates who are free to be ordered around and so on. They have a very important role in the running of this business. All of this I learnt when I was in college, where I met many people with different backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities. I therefore can treat one person to another according to their personality. But this is not enough, I also realized that they are not machines, they are humans who must be treated as humans.*

In the end, many women gave up their good intentions to continue on their chosen path simply because they were afraid of the bullying that would follow. Women are often afflicted with feelings of guilt even though they have noble goals. This causes not a few women to worry about their own abilities and, not infrequently, even underestimate themselves. Nowadays it is frequently heard: "success is positively correlated for men but has negative consequences for women". The statements around us show that sometimes women's ambitions are considered contrary to tradition. Women workers who seek positions are considered to only think about themselves. Those who dare to show themselves are often avoided. Even when successful, even though success brings benefits to many people, ridicule and satire may still come. Being successful for a woman can trigger negative things, like being considered this way, being judged that way, being measured in various ways. Ida, an extraordinary woman from Central Sulawesi, an underdeveloped area, has a big dream to become a well-educated woman for herself and her son.

*Now I am a single-mom who wants to continue my master's degree. Some say why do you have a degree and continue to be a housewife? You should work. For me, a housewife or a career woman still has to have a high education. In the household she will be a companion for her husband. Then it is impossible for the woman to not have an education, which then her husband said "a b c" wife only obeys because of a lack of knowledge which sometimes, in my opinion, is not certainly the truth. Moreover, we are Muslims who do not know whether this is a sin or not. Therefore, a woman must also be educated because she will provide input and suggestions to the Imam. If a household is likened to an organization, there will be a chairman and his subordinates, the husband is the director and the wife is the*

*manager. What is needed in the family is for the husband and wife to work together to create a good organization. Inequality in education will indirectly make the organization chaotic. Therefore, it is not surprising that my mother always said "a woman must be smart, a woman must have a higher education, do not be bored with studying, learning can take place anywhere, study, make friends with anyone, with any educational background, take it. Bring the good, leave the bad".*

In Islam, women are known as equal partners in the protection of humankind so that a woman has an equal share with men in every aspect; she is entitled to equal rights; she undertakes equal responsibilities; and has equal humanity to her partner (Niswah, 2022). The progress that has been achieved by women in the field of education and opportunities to work, still leaves a worrying problem; namely, the participation of women has not been optimized. Various differences in roles, functions, duties and responsibilities, as well as positions between men and women, either directly or indirectly, have given rise to various injustices. One of the reasons is that the differences in roles between men and women are rooted in terms of customs, norms or community structures. Gender is still defined by society as the difference between the sexes. People do not understand that gender is a cultural construction of roles, functions and social responsibilities between men and women. Tisyah's best dream ever has come true since she grabbed her chance to study abroad and now has a job there.

*One of my goals, Alhamdulillah, I have achieved, which is living in the UK. In fact, this can be said to be unexpected, because initially I only wanted to live in Asia, either Japan or Singapore, I did not expect that I would go to a country on a different continent. I cannot believe I have lived in the UK from starting college to the opportunity to work here. There are several other goals that I now want to achieve before I will become a mother, including solo traveling around the world and continuing master's education later on.*

Women who work and have roles in the family cannot be optimal in carrying out their responsibilities because their attention is divided between working and taking care of the household. In fact women face many challenges in many areas such as controls that keep women to be known as weak creatures (Niswah, 2022). In general, the risks faced by married working women are the abandonment of the family, the drain on energy and thoughts, the difficulty of dealing with role conflicts between the position of housewives and unmarried women, frequent occurrence of stress and burdens of thought, and reduced time for oneself.

Other considerations influence women in continuing their careers. From one point of view, being a full-time mom is also a career that has been chosen by a woman. Is not choosing to be a full-time mother also part of a very hard struggle? So how come those who are highly educated are not regarded as having the space to become full-time moms? Basically, all the knowledge she has acquired will be fully implemented for her family, which is a very noble thing. Unfortunately, people even now look down on a housewife, they think that being a housewife with a bachelor's degree is a disgrace. A full-time mom who has a great opportunity to be a business owner is stunted by not having the permission of her husband. She is trying to find other activities to relieve her boredom and craves to continue her master's degree study to be a teacher.

One interviewee explained her reasoning for deciding to be a full-time mom. *Actually, my parents wanted me to go to college, just like parents from Surabaya (one of the big cities in Indonesia) want their daughter to get a higher education, they really want to see their child succeed. So, I was expected to be able to make my parents proud with a good career after graduation. To be honest, I am disappointed with myself for not being able to fulfill the wishes of my parents who had painstakingly paid for me to graduate. However, back then, deciding to be a housewife was not easy but this has become my choice. This decision is not without basis, I saw how the condition of my family used to be when my mother worked. Even though I am seen as unable to make my parents happy with the work my parents want, I try to make them happy with what I can dedicate to them.*

One more opinion related to this is discussed by Ayu, an undergraduate student learning management at Indonesia Open University, who stated that:

*With my education, I want to set an example for my future children, that education is important. So indirectly, I dedicate this education to my children so that they have great enthusiasm and determination to be better than their mother. Moreover, in their mother's struggle to get a bachelor's degree she had to work hard, had to sweat alone and pay for her own tuition, with no support from anyone. My child, who will get full love and support from me, must be able to become better than his mother.*

In discussions about parliament with all the participants, two of the fourteen interviewees showed a curiosity for obtaining a chance in parliament. This supports the results of Prihatini's (2019) study of female politicians where evidence suggests women's interest in joining politics is indeed lower compared to that of men's. One



explanation of women's low political engagement is due to the perception of politics as "dirty" and that it is similar to "domestic responsibilities".

Mendoza, et al., (2021) found an interesting result in a study about feminism, Islam and higher education where evidences indicates that through the reformulation of Islam, in conjunction with a successful academic pathway, women have started to gain a position of authority and recognition within their families, leading to changes in their family roles and relationships. As a woman, making choices is often a challenge. Women are frequently asked if they are you going to work or be a housewife. It was as if choosing one would be at the expense of the other. The choice to work will be seen as a choice against the nature of being a woman, while the choice to become a housewife will make women consider sacrificing their talents. Such dilemmas and judgments that men have never experienced seem always to be faced by women. It does not end there, whenever women hesitate to make a choice, people easily judge that "women are complicated". In fact, if you can draw a straight line, women are not complicated creatures, nor do they want to be complicated. It is just the world view of women that makes women having to fight more when making choices appear to make them complicated. It is natural that women sometimes seem indecisive or complicated, it is just a result, not a trait.

## **Conclusion**

A well-educated woman will be able to help improve the standard of living and social welfare. This is evidenced by the partner she will have later, who will have at least the same or better quality of education. In the midst of the development of globalization, the role of housewives is still often not considered by many people as a job. Other people used to think about how much money they make working in a certain place. Being a housewife is the activity of managing and running the household based on the values of life and religious values.

Whatever work women do outside of being a mother, sometimes it raises the concern of "have you become a good mother?", even though a mother who works, no matter for what time, is clearly still a full-time mother. Indeed, there are challenges but that does not mean women cannot feel happy when doing both. Happy and working mother are words that are in line with their meaning. Being a mother and continuing to work are two roles that women choose to complement each other, not negate each other. Women should not have to choose. Women can choose both and deserve to do that without being overwhelmed with worries and reproaches from all around.

Regardless of whether women work part-time, full-time, combine paid work with caring for their children or are stay-at-home moms, the higher their level of education, the more beneficial they are for society.

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