The Leadership and Role of Sabah Muslim Women in Various Dimensions of Life

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Abstract
There is no denying that women have a huge role in the history of Islam. The glorious history of Muslims has shown how women have such a noble and high position in society. According to the Islamic perspective, the role of women and men is the same where they have responsibilities that need to be fulfilled before Allah SWT whether in special worship or general worship. Thus, this study aims to look at the roles and responsibilities of women especially in the family and society, as well as the role of women in politics in Sabah. This study uses the method of document analysis study which refers to the interpretation of the Quran and snippets of hadiths as well as past studies related to the role and responsibilities of women in Islam as well as their involvement in politics. The results of this study found that Islam did not prevent the people of Eve from engaging in any work except in matters reserved for the people of Adam to lead it. However, in the political aspect the role of the woman is permissible if their roles and responsibilities as a wife and mother are not neglected. Islam suggested that the people of Eve be more concerned and priorities the responsibility of being a wife in safeguarding the harmony of the household and would be able to produce a civil society in line with the religious requirements.
Keywords: Family, Islam, Politics, Roles and Responsibilities, Women

Introduction
Women play a crucial role in the formation and development of both the family institution and Islamic society. Since the early days of the Islamic revival, women have shown significant involvement, particularly through the contributions of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the female companions in supporting the Islamic missionary mission (da'wah). This involvement ultimately led to the establishment of a strong Islamic society in Madinah (Zainal Abidin, 2011). In today's era of modern development, the role and position of women have become increasingly important. The changes in the

socioeconomic structure after independence have opened various job opportunities for women, thereby expanding their roles beyond the domestic sphere as mothers or wives. Today, women are also active in informal economic sectors as well as in professional and specialized fields (Abdullah, 2004). However, this development has raised questions about the balance of women's responsibilities within the family institution from the Islamic perspective.

Islam emphasizes the concept of family life that is rooted in love, mutual respect, and a high sense of responsibility. Malik bin Nabi asserted that the building of a great civilization begins with the creation of a cultured society, and the development of such a society starts from a strong family institution (Malik Bennabi, 2006). Islam has provided a comprehensive guideline concerning marriage and family through legal systems as well as religious education that instills spiritual awareness. A sense of responsibility and respect for Islamic moral values can only flourish in individuals who possess strong faith and religious consciousness (Husin, 2012).

From the Islamic sociological perspective, a society is a group of people bound by a divine legal framework (*syariah rabbaniyyah*) with the aim of establishing a peaceful and harmonious life. It encompasses social relationships that are interdependent and interactive based on Islamic values. The first Islamic society formed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Madinah serves as an ideal example of a community built upon the principles of justice, transparency, and honesty in fulfilling leadership and social responsibilities (Ibn Ishaq, 2001). Although the Islamic society comprises various races, ethnicities, and tribes, such differences do not hinder the establishment of harmonious and meaningful interactions among people. This is emphasized in Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 13, which means:
"O mankind! Indeed, we have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Truly, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware" (Surah Al-Hujurat: 13).

Literature Reviews
The role of Muslim women in Sabah has become increasingly prominent across various dimensions of life, including leadership, da'wah (Islamic missionary work), socioeconomic development, and family responsibilities. Research on women's leadership indicates that internal factors such as leadership style, educational level, and personality influence women's leadership capabilities, while external factors like government policies and community support play a crucial role in sustaining their involvement in public and institutional leadership (Stephen, 2023). A study by Jidwin et al. (2023) further reveals that most women holding managerial positions in Sabah are highly educated, Muslim, and aged between 50 and 55. This indicates that Muslim women in Sabah have great leadership potential when given appropriate opportunities and support. Stephen (2023) highlights that personal motivation, character, and effective leadership styles are key internal factors contributing to women's leadership engagement in Sabah. External support such as organizational support and the state government's 30% gender quota policy also accelerates women's participation in leadership roles (Stephen, 2023).

Samsidar's (2019) study focuses on the role of women within the household. She asserts that there is no inherent superiority between men and women. From the perspective of human creation, Allah SWT created men and women as equals. In terms of household responsibilities, both husbands and wives are given freedom to contribute, although the primary financial responsibility lies with the husband. Islam does not prohibit women from earning an income, if it aligns with Islamic principles. In terms of leadership practices, transformational and transactional leadership styles have been identified as the main approaches used by female leaders in Sabah, depending on organizational context and needs. The study also emphasizes that women's leadership is not limited to formal sectors like government administration but extends to education, NGOs, and entrepreneurship (Borneo International Journal, 2023). This increasing participation reflects the rise of women's roles across various layers of Sabah society.

In the realm of da'wah and spiritual development, Muslim women in Sabah play a vital role in spreading Islamic messages within a pluralistic society. According to Saari et al. (2025), professional women actively involved in da'wah demonstrate an ability to balance professional responsibilities with religious outreach. They are also seen to effectively face postmodern challenges using holistic approaches involving emotional regulation, intellectual and spiritual growth, and time management efficiency. Atang et al. (2015) call for strengthening integrity within the family, noting that both homemakers and career women contribute to economic stability and social values in the household as caregivers, educators of children, and financial managers in alignment with Islamic perspectives (Colonius et al., 2015). In Sabah, Datin Seri Juliah Salag emphasized the importance of homemakers in ensuring family well-being and serving as role models for children, advocating that they acquire knowledge in financial and family management as preparation for domestic responsibilities (Salag, 2023).

Historically, Muslim women in Sabah have long been involved in community development through volunteer organizations. Lukin and Noor (2018) highlight the roles of NGOs such as the Sabah Women's Association (PPS) and the Sabah Women's Organization (PEWASA), which have uplifted women's status through entrepreneurship, education, and welfare programs since the 1960s. These organizations serve as vital platforms for women's voices and help strengthen their social and economic networks. From an Islamic perspective, women's leadership has been discussed within the framework of *siyasah sharʿiyyah* (Islamic political jurisprudence), which emphasizes public interest (*maslahah*) as the basis for the legitimacy of women in leadership. Al-Qudsy (2021) asserts that Islam does not reject female leadership as long as specific conditions are met and Shariah principles are upheld. This view is supported by scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Wahbah al-Zuhayli, who state that women's leadership depends on cultural context and individual capability. Therefore, the involvement of Muslim women in Sabah in leadership should be seen as a timely necessity aligned with the dynamic needs of modern society.

The study by Ab Rahman et al. (2010) examines the status and roles of women within contemporary Islamic society by referring to Sayyid Qutb's interpretations in *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*. It discusses the position of women in early Islamic generations, their contributions, the challenges they faced, and the forms of support they provided in family and societal development as explained in the work. Awang et al. (2019) explore the awareness of Muslim

working women at UNITEN and UPNM regarding their rights and responsibilities within the family and career. The study found that these women had a high level of awareness, though several areas still require attention, particularly regarding legal and policy provisions related to women in the workforce.

Research by Saari, Ambo, Sabri & Hassan (2025) emphasizes that career women in Sabah have become central to the development of Islamic da'wah, especially in confronting postmodern ideologies. These women are not only professionals but also intellectual and spiritual drivers in the Muslim community, leading efforts in organizational planning, da'wah strategy, time management, and emotional leadership (Saari et al., 2025). Additionally, Norsah Bongsu, Head of the PAS *Muslimat* in Sabah, explains that mothers are agents in shaping a civilized society by educating their children from an early age, ensuring that Islamic faith and morals are instilled from a young age (Bongsu, 2023). Hassan & Mat Tuah's (2022) research aimed to examine the role of women in sustaining da'wah efforts within Malaysia's multicultural society. Their findings confirm that women's involvement in da'wah today is a key contributor to Islamic propagation. The presence of female preachers raises the notion that every woman involved in da'wah must understand her role in promoting the religion within both family and society. Women play an important role in addressing women's and societal issues based on the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Abdullah & Abdullah (2019) explore the roles that female preachers can perform within their families and communities. The study concludes that women have clear responsibilities: as daughters, to obey their parents; as wives, to honor their husbands by preserving themselves and their household assets; and as mothers, to provide comprehensive religious education to their children, including faith (*aqidah*) and moral conduct (*akhlaq*). In the broader community, women contribute primarily through charitable work, as well as through roles in education, economics, and politics positively impacting the development of families, communities, and the nation.

From a statistical perspective, women's involvement in Sabah's political landscape remains low. Based on the Malaysia Gender Gap Index 2022, the political empowerment score for women was just 0.102. Only about 18% of women hold seats in Local Authorities, and 26% serve on the boards of government-linked companies. Women's representation in state political parties ranges from just 4% to 13% (Mohd Dun, 2025). Historically, only 7–8 out of 60 state assembly members (about 13%) were women in the 15th term, dropping to 9.6% after the 15th General Election (*Wikipedia, Women in state legislative assemblies of Malaysia*, 2025). However, the state government's quota policy has led to progress. Juliah Salag reported that as of August 2023, women held 33.3% of Deputy State Secretary positions, 40% of Deputy Permanent Secretary posts, and 30.23% of Department Head roles showing advancement, though further efforts are needed (Salag, 2023).

Saleh et al. (2021) note that economic transformation has shaped women's roles to be more holistic and flexible in the workforce. Their research found multiple causes behind work-life imbalance among career women. Therefore, working women must ensure that their family responsibilities remain fulfilled based on religious principles. A balanced approach to work and family enhances women's well-being and sustains performance and commitment in both domains. These studies demonstrate that, from an Islamic perspective, women in

Sabah play a crucial role in shaping families and communities through education, religious teaching, da'wah, and integrity. At the same time, structural and social challenges such as stereotypes and limited political opportunities hinder their full engagement in the political arena. However, quota policies and institutional support can help strengthen their presence. Overall, this literature highlights the need for synergy between Islamic values, inclusive policymaking, and leadership training to enhance women's roles comprehensively in Sabah. Muslim women in Sabah play a significant role across various aspects of life, both in formal and informal sectors. Their participation is influenced not only by government and institutional policies but also by religious understanding, local culture, and personal resilience in facing contemporary challenges.

Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the leadership and roles of Muslim women in Sabah across various dimensions of life, including social, economic, religious, and administrative spheres. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the meanings and interpretations of women's experiences within the unique cultural and religious context of Sabah (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data was collected using two primary methods: field observation and library-based document analysis. Indirect observation was conducted on the activities of Muslim women in community organizations, mosques, da'wah centers, and community programs involving female leadership. These observations helped the researcher identify leadership patterns, forms of participation, and the social dynamics present in real-life settings without direct interference.

In addition, this study utilizes secondary sources through content analysis of documents and library research, including official reports from the Sabah state government, archival materials related to Islamic women's organizations, academic journals, scholarly books, and local media articles relevant to the research topic. This approach enables systematic data triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Bowen, 2009). The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, based on the approach by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves identifying key themes, coding data, and constructing narratives based on emerging patterns and meanings within the study materials. The researcher also employed a field reflection journal as a supplementary tool to record observations, initial impressions, and any ethical issues that arose during data collection. Ethical considerations were also observed by ensuring the confidentiality of the organizations being studied and adhering to non-intrusive ethnographic observation guidelines, so as not to disrupt the natural activities of the communities involved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Overall, this approach allows the study to be conducted in a real-world context, emphasizing the social and cultural meanings experienced by Muslim women in Sabah as they fulfill their leadership roles.

Results and Discussion
The History of Women, Family, and Society in Islam

Before the arrival of Islam, women were viewed with great disdain. They were not given a special position in the family or society as men were. Islam corrected many immoral behaviors and views of the *Jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic ignorance) period toward women. At that time, women were considered inferior, treated as objects of lust, and had no place in society.

The behavior of the Quraysh disbelievers towards women was particularly vile women were not even allowed to live. Parents who gave birth to daughters would often bury them alive. Additionally, during the *Jahiliyyah* era, women were denied the right to inheritance, regardless of their hardship, as wealth was believed to belong solely to men. Women were also treated like property that could be bought, sold, or inherited men would pass on their wives as part of their estate, just like possessions. The history of women in Islam began in the pre-Islamic period, when women had no political, educational, or economic rights. However, the arrival of Islam initiated a social revolution by elevating the status of women granting them rights to education, inheritance, financial support, and legal protection (Zakaria, 2021). Figures like Khadijah Khuwaylid became symbols of empowerment; she was a successful merchant who supported the Prophet Muhammad's mission before Islam was widely accepted (Spierings, 2015).

The light of Islam transformed the status and dignity of women. Islam honored women by assigning them important roles suited to their physical capabilities and strengths. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Muslim women gave unwavering support to their husbands, families, and the Muslim ummah. They also took part in major battles as nurses to injured Muslim soldiers and as sources of motivation and encouragement. In the Islamic family institution, women play a crucial role as wives and mothers, which includes educating children in Islamic faith and ethics, supporting their husbands, and caring for the welfare of the family (Abdullah & Syed Ismail, 2021). The Prophet's wives, such as Aishah (RA) and Khadijah (RA), are primary examples of how women contributed intellectually and emotionally within the household and in the mission of Islamic propagation (Atikah & Abdullah, 2019; Abd Rahman et al., 2010). At home, they supported their husbands in managing household affairs. If we examine the involvement of women in the workforce during the rise of Islam, we find that women were permitted to work in various fields within or outside the home provided that the work was carried out with dignity, modesty, and in a way that upheld religious principles and avoided negative effects on themselves or their surroundings.

In Islamic history, women were not only active in domestic roles but also as educators and scholars. Since the time of the Sahabah (Companions), women like Aishah (RA) were among the most prominent transmitters of hadith, spreading Islamic teachings with authority (Alwani, 2013). In *Al-Muhaddithat*, Akram Nadwi highlights that more than 10,000 women served as hadith scholars throughout classical Islamic history (Nadwi, 2007). Women also played vital roles in social and community services. A study by Alotaibi (2021) notes that women were central to social welfare and charitable work, including waqf (endowments), education, and healthcare all aligned with Islamic principles of justice and civility, established since the 6th century CE. Other studies have emphasized how women balanced professional and domestic roles. For example, research on working women in Putrajaya demonstrated that achieving a balance between family responsibilities and professional contributions has had a positive impact on the Muslim community in Malaysia (Ismail & Abdullah, 2010).

In Islam, women are permitted to work and engage in economic transactions, so long as it does not interfere with family obligations or Islamic ethics (IKIM, n.d.). Organizations such as Musawah take a contemporary approach, advocating for gender justice in Muslim families in line with progressive interpretations of the Qur'an and human rights (Musawah,

2009). This demonstrates a continuity of transformation from early female preachers and activists in Islamic history to today's social leaders and reformers. Based on current literature, women in Islam from the earliest period to the present have played diverse roles within the family and society: as educators, preachers, spiritual leaders, and contributors to communal well-being. Education and religious knowledge have been the foundation of their involvement, while the family remains the core institution for nurturing future generations. Islam has provided a fair framework for women's rights and roles from the very beginning, laying the groundwork for ongoing social transformation.

Rights and Responsibilities of Women, Family, and Society in Islam

Rights are naturally possessed by every human being, while responsibilities are duties that are obligated and commanded to be fulfilled. Every person on earth has their own rights and responsibilities. In Islam, the rights and responsibilities of every individual whether ruler or servant are clearly defined. Islam also affirms that the status of men and women is equal in accordance with the rights and duties prescribed by Islamic law (*Shariah*). Therefore, despite differences in status, personality, or gender, each has their own rights and responsibilities that have been divinely determined. The word *woman* refers to the female gender, the opposite of man (Kamus Dewan, 2015). In Islam, terms like *al-Mar'ah*, *al-Untha*, and *al-Nisa* are used to describe women, each based on specific concepts such as softness, gentleness, attractiveness, or charm whether physical or through pleasant speech (Ismail, 1997). Women have their own specific rights and responsibilities in Islam. One of these is in worship, which reflects obedience to Allah SWT. It is commonly misunderstood that Islamic preaching (dakwah) is solely the domain of men; however, Islam declares that dakwah is both a right and a duty for every Muslim, regardless of gender. Allah SWT says (interpretation of the meaning):

"The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong..." (Surah At-Tawbah, 9:71).

Additionally, women have rights and responsibilities within the household, particularly in their roles as women and as mothers. Islam encourages women to seek knowledge religious or worldly for the sake of personal and communal development. According to Ismail (1997), it is only through knowledge that women can engage in various fields and uplift their socio-economic status. Furthermore, women also have rights and responsibilities in politics. Even though Islamic teachings assign leadership roles in the nation to men, this does not mean women have no political rights (Ismail, 1997). Women are entitled to speak out against wrongdoing by leaders or other members of society and have a duty to raise political awareness.

The Islamic family institution is a divine (*Rabbani*) system suited to human nature and needs. Marriage between a man and a woman forms a family structure in which both husband and wife have rights and responsibilities. A wife's duty is to obey her husband, while the husband is responsible for providing both physical and emotional support (Setyawati, 2014). Islam also outlines economic responsibilities within the family. The husband is accountable for earning lawful sustenance for his wife and children, while the wife is expected to assist and support the husband in maintaining and protecting the household.

Another right and responsibility in the Islamic family system is the joint duty of spouses to build a family based on Islamic teachings and to instill those values in their children. An Islamic family that achieves tranquility (*sakinah*), love (*mawaddah*), and mercy (*rahmah*) will consistently nurture faith and raise children with good character. Thus, it is the responsibility of both husband and wife to guide their children to become righteous (*salih* and *salihah*) and to carry forward the mission of Islamic propagation (*dakwah*). According to Nur (1993), both husband and wife are obligated to behave kindly toward one another to foster love and harmony in the household. They must work together to preserve each other's dignity, complement one another's needs, and offer mutual support.

The Responsibilities of Women in the Family Institution in Islam

Women play a crucial role in both the family institution and society. This recognition has existed for centuries, evident through the growing awareness of women's importance and their contributions in various forms. In today's context, a woman's responsibility in the family is one of the key pillars in ensuring family harmony. Similarly, women have important responsibilities within society. Within the family, a woman takes on the role of a mother to her children, responsible for nurturing and educating them, as well as meeting the needs of her husband and the entire household. Generally, a woman's family's responsibilities, especially as a wife, include managing the affairs of the home and the well-being of the family. However, a woman's responsibilities are not limited to just providing food, health care, and comfort for her husband and children. The most important role lies in educating, nurturing, and guiding her children. This is because the education imparted to children will ultimately benefit the individual, the family, the community, and the nation. Furthermore, women are responsible for ensuring the health of their family members. The care of sick, disabled, or elderly family members typically falls on women more than men.

In today's modern era, new lifestyles have emerged that have expanded the roles of women in Islam, where they are not only responsible within the household but also take on professional roles outside the home. This shows that women carry their responsibilities regardless of their setting. Although women are free to carry out their duties in various spaces, their central role especially those with families is to help shape a family, community, and nation rooted in Islamic education. This is because Islamic education serves as the foundation for developing a strong ummah and contributes to national development as the country progresses toward becoming a developed nation.

Another role of women is their responsibility as daughters, where they are obligated to be kind and respectful toward their parents. This is stated clearly in the Qur'an, in Surah Luqman (31:14) and Surah Al-Isra' (17:24), which emphasize the importance of loving and being attentive to one's parents. Daughters must care for their parents' well-being, monitor any physical or emotional changes, provide proper treatment and care, and increase their own acts of devotion to benefit their parents in the Hereafter. A daughter can open the gates of Paradise for her father; as a wife, she completes half of her husband's faith; and as a mother, Paradise lies beneath her feet.

The Responsibilities of Women in Society According to Islam

Islam has clearly aligned the responsibilities and rights of both men and women when it comes to community involvement especially in the field of dakwah (Islamic propagation). Dakwah is the noblest and most honored mission, a task inherited from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to all his followers' men and women alike. Allah SWT states in Surah At-Tawbah (9:71) that both believing men and women are allies, commanding good and forbidding evil. This verse proves that the responsibility of dakwah is shared between the genders. If this duty were given only to men, it would cause the mission of dakwah to be imbalanced and fail to achieve the intended divine goals. It would also contradict Islamic teachings and principles. Therefore, it is evident that Muslim women have a vital and unique role in performing dakwah and completing the responsibilities of their male counterparts. In fact, in some situations, a woman's role is even more important than that of men especially in female-dominated areas due to their unique qualities, such as emotional intelligence, nurturing instincts, and spiritual sensitivity that differ from men.

Women's responsibility in society also includes education. Today, women have advanced in various fields including academics, professional skills, leadership, and more. Their progress is significantly more visible than it was fifty years ago. It is important to correct the misconception that women are secondary to men in development efforts. Building future generations and a strong ummah is no longer solely the man's burden it requires the support and involvement of women as well. When we say that women are important in society and the nation, it reflects the idea that men and women are complementary partners.

If we isolate ourselves from society, we risk becoming disconnected from it, which means society will not be exposed to or understand Islamic values. Therefore, we must engage with the community by manifesting Islamic practices and principles in public life. This way, people will witness and learn Islam through observed behavior and action. We must strive with dedication to uphold the truth of Islam in society. We should not fear threats or pressure in this effort, as trials are inevitable when pursuing the truth.

In the effort to rebuild an Islamic society, the struggle of Muslim women is essential and deeply significant. They must understand Islamic thought (*fikrah Islamiyyah*), live by it, and convey it to others. Women must be actively involved in Islamic dakwah. Today, there are many women who identify as Muslims but lack proper Islamic understanding. We need committed Muslim women to spread correct Islamic knowledge within society. At the same time, these women should not fear the threats or intimidation of the ignorant instead, they must remain steadfast in their mission.

The Special Status of Women, Family, and Society in Islam

Women, family, and society each hold distinct and valuable roles in Islam. These three institutions womanhood, family, and community are crucial in shaping individual character and building the foundations of religion, nationhood, and civilization. Women hold a high position in Islam. The status of a woman who is a mother is elevated three times above that of a father. Islam greatly honors and appreciates the sacrifices of women, so much so that when a woman becomes a mother, her position is higher than that of a father (Rusli, 2019). This is because mothers endure the hardship of childbirth and raise their children from infancy

to adulthood. A mother's sacrifice is difficult to repay, and thus she rightfully deserves honor and the best treatment from her children.

In addition, Islam protects the dignity of women. Islam upholds the honor and worth of every woman. As evidence, Islam commands every woman to cover her *aurah* (modesty) and dress according to Islamic teachings. This is intended to preserve their dignity, safety, and reputation. The protection afforded to women clearly proves that Islam grants women a special status one of care, respect, and honor. Another unique privilege for women in Islam is that a pious (*solehah*) woman will easily enter Paradise by Allah's permission. A pious woman is one who is obedient and God-conscious. She consistently performs good deeds, engages in worship, and refrains from what Allah forbids. As a reward, Allah promises her entry into Paradise through any gate she desires.

The Special Status of the Family in Islam
In Islam, the family has the special role of nurturing individuals who succeed in both this world and the Hereafter. Every family is expected to live according to the principles of faith and piety (Jaapar & Azahari, 2011). Families are encouraged to hold firmly to Islamic creed (*aqidah*), law (shariah), and morals (*akhlaq*). These principles enable a family to live peacefully and in harmony, as every member guides and educates one another in the best possible way. A family that lives by these values is one that is close to and obedient to Allah. If every family adheres to these principles of faith and piety, society will naturally produce more individuals who are successful in both worldly life and the Hereafter.

Another unique aspect of the Islamic family system is that it cultivates individuals who are trustworthy and responsible. Islam emphasizes the importance of trust in fulfilling duties and responsibilities. Each family member is assigned specific roles, ensuring that everyone is aware of their responsibilities. When each member understands their function, the needs of the family can be met effectively and harmoniously. Islam has clearly outlined the duties of the husband to the wife, the wife to the husband, parents to children, and children to parents. These include financial support, protection of wealth, mutual respect, obedience, nurturing, guidance, and providing religious education (Jaapar & Azahari, 2011).

The Special Status of Society in Islam
Islamic society enjoys the privilege of living in peace and harmony. This is because Islam calls on its followers to live with love and brotherhood. Islam highly values unity among its people, which allows the community to coexist without violence or cruelty. Another distinction of an Islamic society is that it operates under a complete way of life that is firmly rooted in Islamic principles, particularly those that emphasize faith and sound thinking. An Islamic society is one that lives according to the Qur'an, Hadith, scholarly consensus (ijma'), and analogy (qiyas). These foundational sources guide society toward righteous living, offering moral clarity and spiritual guidance. These religious references are what give Islamic society its uniqueness, because they continually steer people toward truth and justice in all aspects of life.

Challenges Faced by Muslim Women in Facing Family and Society
In this era of globalization, Muslims are increasingly exposed to major challenges that are deeply worrying and dangerous. If these challenges are not addressed promptly, they can

become like a cancer that infects and causes negative consequences for the Muslim ummah. The challenge emphasized here is intellectual in nature. Disbelieving factions have developed organized strategies to infiltrate and destroy Muslims through subtle manipulations of thought, often without the victims even realizing it. Intellectual attacks are a powerful and preferred method used by the enemies of Islam because they do not require physical force or violence yet are easily accepted by Muslims.

Various foreign ideologies have poisoned the minds of Muslims and negatively impacted behavior. Among these ideologies are feminism, liberalism, pluralism, and human rights movements. These ideologies originate from secularism, the core of capitalist systems currently in use, even in many Muslim countries. These ideologies are extremely dangerous to the faith of Muslims, slowly undermining Islamic belief systems and weakening the ummah without clear awareness. The targets of these ideological attacks are not limited to women alone, but encompass all levels of society, appearing flawless and appealing on the surface. Therefore, Muslim women must be wise in managing daily life, whether they are young or already married, because challenges within the family also need to be prioritized. Among the challenges faced by Muslim women within family and society are as follows:

Family

One of the main challenges within the family is time management. According to al-Qardawi (1986), there is an Arabic proverb that states: *"Time management is crucial for working women, as they must wisely divide their time between their careers and family responsibilities."* Working women should schedule their tasks wisely. With a structured schedule, tasks can be completed efficiently and systematically. Office work should be done at the workplace so that time at home can be dedicated to strengthening family bonds. Likewise, while at work, they should temporarily put aside family issues to avoid a decline in job performance. Women should also spend quality time with their families, particularly with their children. For example, having meals with their spouse and children, reading prophetic stories before bed, or playing with their kids. These moments are valuable opportunities to build closeness and better understand their children.

Another major challenge is emotional management. Emotions are powerful expressions of human instincts such as love, joy, shame, sadness, fear, etc. These emotions affect physical responses by some controllable (like facial expressions), others not (like sweating due to fear). For women juggling careers and family, emotional regulation is key to fulfilling their duties as employees, wives, and mothers. Stress triggers the production of adrenaline and cortisol, leading to rapid heartbeat, fast breathing, and increased blood pressure. It becomes more challenging when a husband fails to understand his wife's fatigue and doesn't help with household duties. Some husbands still hold outdated beliefs that house chores are exclusively the wife's responsibility, even after her long day at work. This not only harms the wife's well-being but also the entire family dynamic, potentially leading to divorce or heightened stress. Therefore, women must be emotionally intelligent to avoid taking out stress on their children.

Another challenge comes from mass media. In the digital age, parenting becomes increasingly difficult with the widespread exposure to advanced technology at children's fingertips. Although beneficial in some ways, these technologies also introduce moral

degradation, often without parents realizing it. When parents are too busy working, they tend to flood their children with money and luxuries instead of attention. This results in children becoming dependent on screens TV, computers, smartphones, and the internet. Foreign cultures can easily infiltrate through websites, films, and online platforms. The content children consume greatly influences their behavior, especially since they have not yet developed strong internal values. Hence, parents, especially mothers, must act as moral agents by instilling solid values and firm religious foundations in their children.

Society

As a Muslim woman, social etiquette, especially with men, must be observed. Matters related to family life such as marriage, spousal responsibilities, parent-child relationships, and extended kinship must be maintained with care. Muslim women must also pay attention to personal appearance, including modest dress, conduct, work ethics, financial management, and so on. Muslim women must prepare themselves spiritually, mentally, and physically to face external threats and to fulfill their roles efficiently and effectively. Three key aspects that must be emphasized in a Muslim's life are faith (*iman*), knowledge (*ilmu*), and character (*akhlak*). Strong faith instills confidence, purpose, and self-motivation, allowing individuals to perform their duties without fear, anxiety, or excessive concern about world gain. With firm belief, any temptation or challenge can be overcome without hesitation.

There are two types of knowledge every Muslim must pursue: *fardhu 'ain* and *fardhu kifayah*. *Fardhu 'ain* is essential for spiritual sustenance and strengthening faith such as understanding Islamic laws, Sunnah, scholarly consensus (ijma'), and independent reasoning (ijtihad). *Fardhu kifayah*, on the other hand, is practical knowledge to navigate world life and prepare for the afterlife such as medicine, agriculture, business, cooking, sewing, etc. Women must engage with society by being aware of their surroundings and willing to invest time and energy for the community's well-being. The Islamic principle of "minding others' affairs" must be understood wisely. Correcting others gently is an act of wisdom-based da'wah. For example, if a woman sees another's child behaving improperly, she should correct them, with the hope that others would do the same if her child were in the wrong.

At the same time, women must be not only reactive but proactive in voicing concerns about family and ummah issues. For instance, women should be courageous in expressing their views or lodging complaints to authorities when television programs or advertisements conflict with Islamic values and morals. The ideological attacks launched by Islam's enemies are forms of psychological warfare a strategy to distance Muslims from shariah and weaken their faith, without needing them to convert or renounce Islam outright. The goal is to make Muslims act purely based on logic and desires, rather than referring to the Qur'an and Sunnah. As Allah says in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 120: *"The Jews and the Christians will never be pleased with you until you follow their religion. Say: Indeed, the guidance of Allah is the only guidance.' If you follow their desires after the knowledge has come to you, Allah will no longer be your Protector or Helper"* (Qur'an 2:120).

One of the most dangerous ideological attacks is feminism, which often poisons the minds and behavior of Muslim women. In Malaysia, many NGOs promote feminist ideals, such as demanding absolute gender equality and "liberating" women from so-called oppression in the name of religion and Islamic law. Some even claim that Islam is unjust to women, restricts

their freedoms, and prevents them from participating in social life. This ideological attack has spread into Muslim countries including Malaysia where enemies of Islam have successfully sown dangerous seeds that drive Muslims away from shariah.

Islamic View on Women's Involvement in the Political Arena in Sabah

Looking at the history of politics in Islam, women's involvement was not detailed because leadership at that time was held exclusively by men. The role and responsibility of women toward the country focused on forming a family based on religious values, which became the main pillar supporting and assisting their husbands. The phenomenon of women's involvement in politics is a trend influenced by the leadership of women in foreign countries. According to al-Atiqi (1997), this phenomenon is essentially one of the influences of Western culture. Western women were still experiencing discrimination by men regarding wages and salaries at that time. However, this phenomenon was welcomed by several Asian countries and eventually spread to the homeland.

According to Ling (2011), after the independence of Malaya, women took bolder steps by involving themselves in elections. This was evident during the first local elections in Kuala Lumpur held in February 1952. In that election, out of 32 candidates contesting for 12 Kuala Lumpur Municipal Council seats, four were women candidates. Based on this event, women's involvement in politics became more widespread, and now there are also women candidates in elections in Sabah. According to Muhammad Ali Qutub in his book *Bai'atun Nisa' li al-Nabiyy*, the right to participate in politics can be described as the right of citizens to engage in state affairs, such as being members of any political organization. In the electoral process, this includes the right to vote, participate in elections, and be nominated for a political party (Abdul Manas, 2008).

Fundamentally, women's involvement in politics is indeed necessary, but not as representatives or leaders. According to Kausar (2008), women's political involvement can be divided into two levels: general and highest. The general level includes the right to vote, participate, campaign for political parties, or support any candidate for any position, represent in legislative assemblies, and to hold ministerial positions except for the highest positions like head of state. The highest level refers to positions such as head of state or head of government. At the general level, women's involvement is not entirely contrary to Islamic law, but it becomes forbidden if women themselves neglect the boundaries set by Shariah in the Quran and Sunnah. This also applies to women at the highest levels of politics. If their involvement does not neglect their responsibilities as wives and mothers and they maintain halal and haram laws, then it is permissible in Islam. As Allah SWT says: *"Their Lord responded to them, 'Never will I allow to be lost the work of [any] worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another... those who emigrated or were expelled from their homes or were harmed in My cause or fought or were killed I will surely remove from them their misdeeds, and I will surely admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow, as reward from Allah... And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful"* (Surah Ali-Imran 3:195).

Based on the above, women's participation in politics and even jihad in the way of Allah is accepted as a trust as khalifah (vicegerents) on earth. Although women are given freedom to leave the house, this should not be used as an excuse to do things that may bring disgrace to themselves. Therefore, women must maintain their dignity and adhere to the

guidelines set in Islam. Meanwhile, the evidence that prohibits women from becoming deeply involved in politics is based on Allah's words: *"Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance advise them; [then] if they persist, forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand"* (Surah An-Nisa 4:34).

However, if a woman wishes to engage in politics, she must follow the guidelines prescribed by Islam. These guidelines for women in politics include:

i) Avoid mixing freely with non-mahram men and limit meetings unrelated to work affairs. Also avoid being alone with men in secluded places.

ii) Dress modestly and cover the '*aurat* (parts of the body that must be covered) without excessive adornment since such beauty is meant only for the husband's view. Failing to do so may lead to immoral acts, which a Muslim woman must guard against.

iii) Obtain permission from the husband or guardian before starting any activity, especially those outside the home, to receive blessings. If the husband does not permit, the woman cannot fulfill her responsibilities as a leader properly.

iv) The role must suit her feminine nature, field of study, and preserve her dignity. If offered a portfolio outside her knowledge or capabilities, it is better for her to voluntarily step down than to accept and be burdened emotionally.

v) The role must not contradict Shariah. A female leader must be firm against clear violations of Allah's laws. Failure to act decisively may damage leadership and Allah's Shariah, inviting Allah's wrath.

May these guidelines provide valuable insights for women who wish to participate in politics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, women are gentle and loving beings, often likened to a bent rib not as a deficiency but rather as a form of perfection. Women also bear significant responsibilities in the formation and development of the family and Islamic society. Women play an important role in shaping the future of the country. Therefore, when examining the role of women as mothers within the family system, it is not merely to provide food, drink, health, and comfort for the children, but most importantly, to educate, nurture, and guide them. This is because the effects of this upbringing on the children will benefit the individual, family, society, and the country. Importantly, modern women today have a crucial duty to educate, nurture, and guide the family and to raise a society that is well-behaved and educated in terms of conduct. In the political field, women's involvement is not prohibited, but it must comply with the requirements of Shariah. Limitations in social interactions, appearance, and movements must be observed carefully as neglect could lead a woman into the trap of slander or scandal. In summary, before stepping into the political arena, a woman must first understand and truly appreciate the demands of religion, and the laws related to her roles and responsibilities in leadership.

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