

Between Adat, Social Practice and Islamic Law: Marital Rights and Obligations of Career Wives in Aceh, Indonesia

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 <https://doi.org/10.32505/lentera.v7i2.11835>

Submitted: June 23, 2025

Accepted: December 01, 2025

Published: February 13, 2026

Abstract

The increasing participation of wives in professional and economic activities has become a significant phenomenon in contemporary Muslim society, including Langsa City. A career wife refers to a married woman who works outside the home to support family income, develop personal potential, and apply her skills and knowledge. This study addresses the issue of how the rights and obligations of career wives are fulfilled in family life and examines these practices from the perspective of fiqh munakahat. This research aims to analyze the implementation of marital rights and obligations toward career wives and to assess their conformity with Islamic family law principles. The study employs a normative-empirical research method. The normative approach examines Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and classical juristic opinions related to fiqh munakahat, while the empirical approach explores social realities through the lens of family sociology within the community of Gampong Paya Bujok Seulamak, Langsa City. The findings indicate that wives' participation in work is largely driven by the husbands' insufficient income to meet household needs. However, the practice of financial maintenance (nafkah) often deviates from Islamic legal provisions. Many husbands cease providing nafkah due to the wives' independent income and higher earnings. Such practices demonstrate a misunderstanding of Islamic legal norms, as fiqh munakahat affirms that the obligation of nafkah remains with the husband regardless of the wife's employment status. Economic limitations do not nullify this obligation but require adjustment according to the husband's financial capacity. This study highlights the need for strengthening public understanding of marital responsibilities to ensure household harmony based on Islamic legal principles.

Keywords: Career Wife, Fiqh Munakahat, Nafkah, Marital Rights and Obligations

Abstrak

Meningkatnya partisipasi istri dalam kegiatan profesional dan ekonomi telah menjadi fenomena yang signifikan dalam masyarakat Muslim kontemporer, termasuk di Kota Langsa. Istri berkarir merujuk pada perempuan yang telah menikah dan bekerja di luar rumah untuk membantu pendapatan keluarga, mengembangkan potensi diri, serta mengaplikasikan keterampilan dan pengetahuan yang dimilikinya. Penelitian ini membahas persoalan bagaimana pemenuhan hak dan pelaksanaan kewajiban istri berkarir dalam kehidupan keluarga serta mengkaji praktik tersebut dari perspektif fiqh munakahat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pelaksanaan hak dan kewajiban suami istri terhadap istri berkarir serta menilai kesesuaiannya dengan prinsip-prinsip hukum keluarga Islam. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah normatif-empiris. Pendekatan normatif dilakukan dengan mengkaji ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an, hadis, dan pendapat ulama klasik yang berkaitan dengan fiqh munakahat, sedangkan pendekatan empiris dilakukan dengan menelaah realitas sosial melalui perspektif sosiologi keluarga pada masyarakat Gampong Paya Bujok Seulamak, Kota Langsa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan istri dalam aktivitas kerja sebagian besar didorong oleh rendahnya pendapatan suami yang tidak mencukupi kebutuhan rumah tangga. Namun demikian, praktik pemenuhan nafkah seringkali menyimpang dari ketentuan hukum Islam. Banyak suami yang tidak lagi memberikan nafkah kepada istri dengan alasan istri telah memiliki penghasilan sendiri atau berpenghasilan lebih tinggi. Praktik tersebut menunjukkan adanya kesalahpahaman terhadap norma hukum Islam, karena fiqh munakahat menegaskan bahwa kewajiban nafkah tetap berada pada suami tanpa memandang status kerja istri. Keterbatasan ekonomi tidak menghapus kewajiban tersebut, melainkan menuntut penyesuaian sesuai dengan kemampuan finansial suami. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya penguatan pemahaman masyarakat mengenai tanggung jawab perkawinan guna mewujudkan keharmonisan rumah tangga berdasarkan prinsip-prinsip hukum Islam.

Kata Kunci: stri Berkarir, Fiqh Munakahat, Nafkah, Hak dan Kewajiban Perkawinan

Introduction

In modern Muslim societies, the presence of career wives is generally not viewed as a significant issue and therefore rarely becomes a subject of serious debate (Jamilah et al., 2025). However, within the context of Acehnese Muslim society, career wives tend to face more complex responsibilities. On the one hand, they are positioned as wives and homemakers, while on the other hand, they function as working women bound by professional obligations to external institutions (Utomo, 2012; Kutsiyah et al., 2019).

In Acehnese society, which largely adheres to patriarchal cultural norms, wives are commonly positioned as domestic workers responsible for childcare, serving their husbands, and managing household tasks. This perspective is

further reinforced by local customs that emphasize an ideal wife's ability to care for children, prepare meals, and perform other domestic duties (Badriah et al., 2023). Consequently, wives who engage in paid work outside the home often experience a double burden, as they are required to fulfill both domestic and public roles simultaneously (Andriana & Asnita, 2021).

Regardless of the diverse views held by the people of Kota Langsa regarding working wives, economic realities frequently compel wives to contribute financially in order to meet household needs (Alimuddin, 2019). From the perspective of Islamic law, the primary obligation to provide for the household rests with the husband, while the wife is not legally required to do so. Based on this understanding, some segments of Acehnese society assume that wives need not work and should focus solely on domestic responsibilities. In practice, however, many wives choose to pursue careers due to economic pressures within the household as well as personal needs that are not fully met by the husband's income (Tamimi & Faruq, 2025).

A number of previous studies have sought to examine the phenomenon of career wives from various perspectives. Existing studies have widely explored the issue of career wives in Muslim families from both normative and socio-legal perspectives. The prevailing view in Islamic family law maintains that the obligation of *nafkah* rests with the husband, irrespective of the wife's employment status, while any financial contribution from the wife is considered voluntary (Rajafi, 2018). Nevertheless, empirical research from various Muslim societies points to an increasing gap between legal norms and everyday practice (Nelli et al., 2023; Nelli et al., 2026). In many cases, wives' independent income is used to rationalize the reduction or even the cessation of husbands' financial responsibilities. This shift has been linked to changing gender relations within the household, the emergence of double burdens for working wives, and growing marital tensions (Khamim et al., 2025). Despite these insights, much of the existing literature tends to remain either largely doctrinal or broadly sociological, offering limited engagement with how Islamic legal norms are actually negotiated and reinterpreted within local settings marked by strong religious authority and persistent patriarchal values (Fadhilah et al., 2025; Nasution et al., 2025).

This study responds to that limitation by adopting a normative-empirical approach to examine the fulfillment of marital rights and obligations of career wives in Acehnese Muslim society, with particular attention to the case of Kota Langsa. The originality of this research lies in its identification of a structural tension between Islamic legal doctrine and lived social practice. While *fiqh munakahat* clearly assigns the responsibility of *nafkah* to the husband, prevailing local norms increasingly normalize the transfer of this obligation to working wives. The findings further demonstrate how patriarchal expectations continue to place domestic responsibilities on women even as households become economically dependent on their income, resulting in layered and unequal burdens. By bringing together doctrinal analysis and empirical evidence, this study offers a more context-sensitive contribution to ongoing

debates on Islamic family law and marital obligations in Muslim societies experiencing socio-economic change.

This study adopts a normative-empirical (socio-legal) research design (Ali, 2021). The normative approach examines Islamic legal principles concerning marital rights and obligations through an analysis of *fiqh munakahat*, drawing on the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical juristic opinions. The empirical approach situates these norms within their social context by exploring how they are understood and practiced in everyday family life, particularly through the lens of family sociology. This combined approach enables an assessment of the relationship between Islamic legal doctrine and lived marital practices (Benuf & Azhar, 2020).

Field research was conducted in Gampong Paya Bujok Seulamak, Kota Langsa, over a seven-month period from October 2023 to April 2024. The research site was selected due to the substantial presence of career wives working in sectors such as education, public service, private employment, and entrepreneurship. This setting provides a relevant context for examining the fulfillment of marital rights and obligations within households where wives actively participate in income-generating activities.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with purposively selected informants who were directly relevant to the research focus (Daruhadi & Sopiati, 2024). These primary data were complemented by secondary sources, including academic literature, prior research, and authoritative references on Islamic family law. Data analysis was carried out using an integrated inductive–deductive approach, whereby empirical findings were first analyzed to identify key patterns and then examined against the normative framework of *fiqh munakahat* to draw analytically grounded conclusions (Farid, 2018).

Practices of Fulfilling Marital Rights and Obligations among Career Wives in Langsa City

Career women are women who decide to engage in paid work outside the home. In social life, career women generally have the motivation to become economically independent and not rely entirely on their spouses' income (Hasanudin et al., 2023). From a religious perspective, women's participation in work is permissible as long as it remains within their natural roles as women and does not violate religious principles (Hidayati et al., 2022). Along with social development, society has gradually become more open and accepting of the presence of career women as part of the dynamics of family life. Islam teaches that achieving a harmonious family life requires balance, particularly in managing time and fulfilling duties and responsibilities fairly within the household (Norcahyono & Arni, 2021).

Based on the findings of this study conducted in Gampong Paya Bujok Seulamak, most working wives are engaged in employment primarily to support the family economy. The dominant professions among these women include civil servants, teachers, healthcare workers, and office employees. This is evident from interviews conducted with several female informants. Sakena Nurza (36 years old), a medical doctor, explained that her main reasons for

working are her desire to be financially independent, to support her family's economy, and to apply the knowledge she gained through education for the benefit of the wider community. She emphasized that balance between career and household responsibilities can be achieved through cooperation with her husband, particularly in childcare and household management, with additional assistance from a domestic helper. This finding indicates that spousal support and cooperation play a crucial role in sustaining the role of career women (N. Nurza, personal communication, April 11, 2024).

A similar view was expressed by Zuhra Ninda (33 years old), an office worker and mother of two children who has been working for eight years. She decided to work to help support the family's finances and stated that she is able to balance her office work with household responsibilities. In practice, domestic roles are managed flexibly, with her husband taking care of the children when she is busy at work. This finding reflects the existence of adaptive and mutually supportive marital relationships (Z. Zuhra, personal communication, April 24, 2024).

The interview with Cut Aqlima (37 years old), a civil servant, shows that her motivation to work is not only to meet household and children's needs but also to fulfill her personal needs through her own income. Over her seven years of employment, she has made considerable efforts to manage her time effectively so that she can continue to perform her roles as both a wife and a mother (C. Aqlima, personal communication, April 3, 2024). However, in her case, the study found a different condition: her husband does not have a permanent job or stable income, resulting in most household responsibilities and economic needs being borne by the wife. This finding highlights a shift in economic roles within the household, where the wife becomes the primary breadwinner.

Furthermore, Naura (27 years old), a PAUD (early childhood education) teacher, stated that she works to support the family economy because her husband's income is insufficient. She emphasized that despite working, she strives to fulfill her rights and obligations as a wife and mother. Household tasks are shared with her husband, enabling domestic work to be completed without causing conflict (N. Naura, personal communication, January 17, 2024). This finding demonstrates that communication and mutual agreement between spouses play an important role in maintaining family harmony among career women.

In addition to interviewing wives, the researcher also conducted interviews with husbands. David (35 years old) stated that he allows his wife to work because she had already been employed before marriage, and they mutually agreed to share household responsibilities, both in terms of financial provision and domestic tasks (D. David, personal communication, April 11, 2024). Household expenses are divided proportionally based on mutual agreement. This finding indicates the practice of role-sharing and equality based on family consensus.

Fahri (28 years old), a photographer, also supports his wife's decision to work because her income is higher and more stable. He acknowledged that his

ability to provide financial support depends on whether he has work assignments (F. Fahri, personal communication, March 8, 2024). When he is not working, he assists with household chores. This finding suggests that economic factors significantly influence flexibility in both financial and domestic roles within the family.

The interview with Muhammad Iqbal (32 years old) revealed that he permits his wife to work so that she can be financially independent as a precaution for unforeseen circumstances in the future. He emphasized that his wife must remain obedient to religious teachings, respect her husband, and not neglect their children (Muhammad Iqbal, personal communication, January 18, 2024). In practice, the family's income largely depends on the wife. This further confirms the shift in the practical implementation of financial responsibility within the household.

Finally, Ahmad Faisal (36 years old) stated that he allows his wife to work because his income as a motorcycle mechanic is insufficient to meet the family's needs. He views career women as acceptable as long as wives continue to prioritize family interests and fulfill their obligations as spouses (F. Faisal, personal communication, April 24, 2024).

Based on the overall interview results, the findings of this study indicate that wives' decisions to pursue careers in Gampong Paya Bujok Seulamak are generally made with the husband's consent and are driven primarily by economic factors as well as the desire for financial independence. Most career women demonstrate a clear understanding of their rights and obligations and make efforts to balance their public and domestic roles, either independently or through shared responsibilities with their husbands. However, this study also reveals a social reality in which some husbands are unable to fully provide financial support due to limited income, resulting in wives assuming the primary role as economic providers. These findings suggest a shift in the practical distribution of financial responsibilities within households, influenced by economic conditions, spousal agreements, and practical family needs, even though, normatively, the obligation to provide financial support remains the responsibility of the husband.

Career Women, Household Responsibilities, and Economic Shifts in the Perspective of Fiqh Munākahāt

Within the Muslim community of the City of Langsa, which is strongly shaped by customary law and ethical traditional values, women's roles have traditionally been understood as those of household managers and primary educators of their children. For some wives, fulfilling the role of a homemaker and mother is considered personally fulfilling and is viewed as one of the most meaningful forms of devotion within the family. Nevertheless, profound changes in various dimensions of human life—particularly social, economic, and educational developments—have influenced perceptions of wives' roles. Women's roles, which were previously concentrated in the domestic sphere, have gradually shifted in line with increased access to education and employment opportunities.

A perspective that continues to persist in parts of society is the belief that career women are not fully compatible with Islamic teachings. This view is rooted in the assumption that women should primarily engage in domestic activities to care for their families and children. Some scholars have expressed concern that women who work outside the home may neglect their domestic obligations and, in certain circumstances, create marital tension—especially when a wife’s income exceeds that of her husband. Such concerns are often associated with the fear of diminished obedience toward the husband and the weakening of family harmony (Nastangin & Huda, 2022).

Moreover, in the context of modern social life, the phenomenon of career women is accompanied by other concerns, including the tendency to postpone marriage in favor of career advancement, the potential for discrimination against women in the workplace, the occurrence of *ikhtilāṭ* (free mixing between unrelated men and women), and the risk of harassment in professional environments. In extreme cases, poorly regulated workplace relationships are feared to lead to extramarital affairs that may ultimately result in divorce. These concerns are frequently cited as the basis for rejecting the general acceptance of career women.

From the perspective of *fiqh munākaḥāt*, a wife is regarded as the leader in managing her husband’s household and is responsible for safeguarding that trust. She will be held accountable for how she manages household affairs and educates her children. Therefore, Islam emphasizes the importance of observing boundaries and avoiding actions that may compromise personal dignity or family honor. This principle is clearly articulated in Qur’an Surah al-Aḥzāb (33:33), which instructs women to maintain modesty, avoid ostentatious behavior associated with the pre-Islamic era, and uphold religious obligations.

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ ؕ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ
عَنكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

It means “Settle in your homes, and do not display yourselves as women did in the days of ‘pre-Islamic’ ignorance. Establish prayer, pay alms-tax, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah only intends to keep ‘the causes of’ evil away from you and purify you completely, O members of the ‘Prophet’s’ family!

This verse is often interpreted as emphasizing the virtue of women prioritizing domestic roles. However, contemporary scholars argue that it should not be understood in a purely textual or restrictive manner. Rather, it must be contextualized as guidance aimed at preserving dignity, family stability, and social morality, rather than as an absolute prohibition against women’s participation in public or professional life.

In family relations, Islam also designates men as *qawwām* (maintainers or guardians) of women, as affirmed in Qur’an Surah al-Nisā’ (4:34).

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَعُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَنَاتٌ ۖ حَفِيظَاتٌ لِلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ ۗ وَالَّتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَأَهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَأَضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۚ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا

It means “Men are the caretakers of women, as men have been provisioned by Allah over women and tasked with supporting them financially. And righteous women are devoutly obedient and, when alone, protective of what Allah has entrusted them with. And if you sense ill-conduct from your women, advise them ‘first’, ‘if they persist,’ do not share their beds, ‘but if they still persist,’ then discipline them ‘gently’. But if they change their ways, do not be unjust to them. Surely Allah is Most High, All-Great.

This leadership is closely linked to men’s obligation to provide financial support (*nafaqah*) and protection. In the modern context, however, this concept of leadership is increasingly understood as functional rather than authoritarian, grounded in responsibility rather than dominance. Marriage in Islam is fundamentally a partnership (*shirkah*) between husband and wife, in which both parties possess complementary rights and obligations. Mutual consultation (*shūrā*), communication, and consensus form the foundation of family decision-making, even though normatively the final decision rests with the husband when agreement cannot be reached (Rezwandi et al., 2025).

Contemporary social realities indicate that an increasing number of Muslim women choose to pursue professional careers. This decision is not driven solely by economic necessity but also by the desire to actualize their education, knowledge, and personal potential. In many cases, although the husband already fulfills the family’s basic financial needs, women still choose to work as a form of social contribution and self-development.

Historical precedents in Islam demonstrate that women’s employment is not prohibited. The well-known hadith concerning Zainab bint ‘Abdullāh al-Thaqafiyyah, who financially supported her husband and orphaned children, affirms that a woman who spends her wealth on her family receives double reward: the reward of charity and the reward of maintaining family ties. This authentic hadith strengthens the view that women’s economic contributions to the family are not violations of Islamic law but rather virtuous acts when carried out lawfully and with sincere intention (Muin, 2021).

In Islamic jurisprudence, the obligation of financial maintenance remains normatively the responsibility of the husband. Meanwhile, a wife’s financial contribution to the family is considered a voluntary act of charity and a form of worship. Nevertheless, under certain conditions—such as when the husband’s income is insufficient—women are permitted to work to support the family, provided that their primary responsibilities as wives and mothers are not neglected (Nurazis & Anwar, 2022).

The fulfillment of the rights and obligations of career women within marriage is achieved when professional activities are conducted in accordance with Islamic principles. These include maintaining proper conduct when leaving the home, obtaining the husband's permission, avoiding *khalwah* and excessive *ikhtilāt*, preserving personal modesty, and continuing to perform domestic responsibilities in a balanced manner. Ideally, the type of work chosen should align with women's nature and promote benefit (*maṣlaḥah*) for themselves, their families, and society.

Contemporary scholars such as Quraish Shihab emphasize that Islam does not prohibit women from working, whether inside or outside the home, as long as the work is conducted honorably, does not violate Islamic law, and does not produce negative consequences for family life. This view is reinforced by Mutawalli al-Sha'rāwī, who asserted that women may work provided that such activities do not distract them from their primary familial roles or lead to claims of economic dominance within the household (Shihab, 2010).

Thus, it can be affirmed that neither the Qur'an nor the Hadith contains an explicit prohibition against women choosing to pursue careers. The primary emphasis in Islam lies in maintaining balance, clearly defining responsibilities, and safeguarding family harmony. Career women are expected to manage their time equitably between work and family, while husbands are expected to act wisely, responsibly, and communicatively in fostering household cooperation. Imbalances in role distribution and weak communication often serve as the root causes of marital conflict. Therefore, mutual understanding, agreement, and healthy communication are essential to preserving family stability among career women within the framework of *fiqh munākaḥāt*.

Conclusion

This study concludes that wives' decisions to pursue careers in Gampong Paya Bujok Seulamak, Langsa City, are generally made with the consent of their husbands and are primarily driven by economic necessity and the desire for financial independence. Despite engaging in paid work, most career women demonstrate awareness of their marital rights and obligations and strive to balance professional and domestic responsibilities through time management and shared roles with their spouses.

From the perspective of *fiqh munākaḥāt*, women's participation in the workforce is permissible as long as it is conducted with the husband's permission and within Islamic ethical boundaries. However, this study identifies a normative–empirical gap in the fulfillment of *nafaqah*, as several husbands do not provide regular financial maintenance due to limited income. In Islamic jurisprudence, the obligation of *nafaqah* remains the responsibility of the husband, while any financial contribution from the wife is considered voluntary charity and does not eliminate the husband's duty. These findings imply the need to strengthen community awareness and religious guidance regarding marital responsibilities, particularly concerning *nafaqah*, in order to maintain justice, balance, and harmony within Muslim family life.

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