

**Are Dayak Moslem Women Dependent?:  
A Study of Dayak Moslem Women Work Ethics**

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**Abstract**

*This study challenges the dominant assumption that women in traditional societies are economically dependent, unproductive, and confined to domestic roles. Focusing on the Dayak Moslem women in Tangkaben village, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, this research aims to reveal a contrasting reality that defies such generalizations. Situated within the broader discourse on gender, labor, and work ethics, the study explores how socio-cultural and religious values influence women's roles in sustaining family economies. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, prolonged observations, and documentary studies. Findings indicate that the women of Tangkaben perform dual roles—managing household duties while actively participating in income-generating activities such as farming, trading, and rubber tapping—without compromising their domestic responsibilities. These roles are deeply rooted in cultural, spiritual, and economic motivations and are perceived not as burdens but as expressions of agency and social identity. The study concludes that women's work ethics in traditional societies are contingent upon embedded social norms, religious beliefs, and local gender constructs. Thus, the generalized negative perceptions about women's work ethics in traditional communities are not universally valid and must be reassessed through culturally grounded and context-sensitive inquiry.*

**Keywords:** *Work Ethics, Gender Roles, Dayak Women, Economic Participation, Double Burden*

**INTRODUCTION**

Family law in Egypt, much like in many other societies, serves as a battleground for gender-based power dynamics. The persistence of structural gender inequalities in Egyptian family law—manifested in issues such as polygamy, male-dominated divorce proceedings, male guardianship, and inequitable inheritance—necessitates deeper scrutiny. Numerous studies have explored the discriminatory tenets embedded within these legal codes. Yet, only a few have explicitly centered feminist thinkers, such as Nawal El Saadawi, who courageously

deconstructed these power relations and challenged the institutionalized patriarchy. Given the enduring marginalization of women's voices within legal discourse, it becomes imperative to foreground Saadawi's contributions in reimagining a more gender-equitable family law structure.

This study contends with both the persistent gender biases in Egyptian family law and the radical intellectual resistance initiated by Nawal El Saadawi. It reveals the discriminatory legal mechanisms that obstruct women's rights in the domains of divorce, polygamy, obedience clauses (*bait at tho'ab*), spousal maintenance, and child custody. Importantly, it also elucidates Saadawi's strategies as a writer, physician, and activist in unearthing the ideological foundations of these legal inequalities. Her work stands as a critical intervention in the struggle for legal reform, not merely as a critique but as a visionary praxis toward an inclusive jurisprudence.

The novelty of this research lies in its dual emphasis: first, on exposing the gendered dimensions of Egyptian family law, and second, on elevating Saadawi's theoretical and practical resistance as a case study of feminist legal agency (Baroud & El-Alayli, 2018). While prior research tends to isolate Saadawi's activism from the specific institutional constraints of Egyptian law, this study foregrounds her thought within the broader trajectory of Islamic legal reform. In doing so, it expands the analytical lens from feminist critique to the possibilities of transformative jurisprudence grounded in gender justice.

The genealogy of family law reform in Muslim-majority societies dates back to the early 20th century, initiated by reformist scholars such as Sayyid Ameer Ali, Muhammad Abduh, and Qassim Amin, and later expanded by figures like Thahir Haddad, Fatima Mernissi, and Amina Wadud (Khoiruddin, 2001; Jambunanda, 2023). These thinkers laid the groundwork for reinterpreting Islamic texts and advocating for gender egalitarianism through diverse methodologies—from legal pluralism and hermeneutical critique to grassroots mobilization. Their cumulative efforts have influenced ongoing debates and reforms, though resistance from conservative circles and systemic inertia remain potent obstacles (Noviana, 2021).

Despite such reformist momentum, Egyptian family law remains tethered to patriarchal norms, thus revealing a disjuncture between progressive discourse and lived legal realities (Htun & Weldon, 2011). Nawal El Saadawi's interventions, therefore, emerge as

both a continuation and a rupture within this reformist lineage. Her critique not only confronts religious and cultural patriarchies but also proposes emancipatory alternatives through secular feminist reasoning, freedom of thought, and the promotion of women's economic autonomy. In this regard, Saadawi's legacy transcends activism; it represents an epistemic shift in conceptualizing law as a site of gender struggle and reform.

This article seeks to interrogate the following research questions: (1) How has Nawal El Saadawi's critique of Egyptian family law—particularly regarding polygamy, divorce, obedience clauses, maintenance rights, and *hadhanah* (child custody)—influenced contemporary legal thought and reformist discourse? (2) How do other scholars interpret and respond to Saadawi's feminist interventions, and what counter-proposals or complementarities do they offer? (3) In what ways did Saadawi's advocacy for epistemic freedom, reinterpretation of religious doctrines, and women's economic independence contribute to the broader feminist jurisprudence in Egypt? These questions structure the trajectory of the analysis.

Saadawi's intellectual and activist contributions remain under-theorized in existing literature, which often focuses on her literary productions while neglecting her critical engagements with legal reform (Kamis, 2015; Syah & Ainusyamsi, 2021). This article repositions her work within legal feminist theory, arguing that Saadawi's critiques function not only as narrative devices but also as juridical interventions. Furthermore, by deploying a qualitative methodology grounded in textual and contextual analysis, this research navigates the entanglement between legal structures, gender norms, and activist epistemologies.

By highlighting the structural inequalities perpetuated by Egyptian family law and the ideological contestation advanced by Nawal El Saadawi, this research contributes to broader debates on gender justice in Muslim societies. It proposes that enduring patriarchal structures can be challenged through critical feminist jurisprudence that draws upon local intellectual legacies. Ultimately, this study seeks to inform policymakers, scholars, and activists on the transformative potential of feminist critique in reshaping legal landscapes toward greater equity and inclusiveness.

## DISCUSSION

### **Working Patterns of Dayak Moslem Women**

The Portrait of working pattern of Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan can be viewed from various aspects. On this theme, the aspects that were discussed include types of work, work routines, work motivation, and contribution of the work results to their family. Those aspects are able to provide a clear picture about work patterns that can represent work ethics and domestic responsibilities of Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan.

Dayak Moslem women of Tangkahan have big responsibilities in their household life. In general, the domestic responsibilities of Dayak moslem women cover all kinds of domestic household matters that include bed, well, and kitchen. At this point, these domestic responsibilities become a major priority that is done every day by Dayak moslem women in Tangkahan.

Although domestic responsibilities become a major priority, it doesn't mean that Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan do not care and are not involved in improving the prosperity of the family. To find more facts about this, the observation data were strengthened by data given from interview revealing that in genera Dayak moslem women in Tangkahan, they have other jobs besides domestic matters. Although it is not the main major the income their work results in gives a positive contribution to the family's prosperity.

The works that are chosen by Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan are mostly related to farming, gardening, trading, making rattan crafts, fishing, even gold mining. This was as the MI informant stated that:

*Silebu tub nah mamanta jadi andalan iki bawi hatue, bawi hatue si lebu tub rata-rata bagawian sandeha, karna jite mun pagi uluh si lebih sepi, rami waktu sanja dengan hamalem". Gawian iki nah macam-macam, ada ji menoreh karet, tulak kan tana, manggau lauk, pokoknya are be hindai jibeken."* (In this village, cutting rubber is our mainstay, both men and women. All of them work on average, so in the morning people in our village are quiet. Meanwhile, in the afternoon and at night it is quite busy. Our work also varies, such as tapping rubber, going to the fields, fishing, and many others)

The responsibility to do domestic work and work for income keeps the Tangkahan Moslem Dayak women very busy. This busyness even causes them to feel that 24 hours in a day were not enough. This is as the AN informant stated that:

*Hampir-hampir bagi iki bawian si lebu tub nah pa waktu dia cukup, pagi-pagi tulak mamantat, sambil mempersiapkan tulak mamantat, membereskan gawian si huma akan anak bane, gawian bawian si Tangkaben tub macam-macam ada ji manggaduh anak, kan tana, kerajian mawi wadai*

*akan nambah ongkos andau-andau, maggau lauk umbu bane, are kia ji beken hindai. Mun hamalem ada kia ji bagawi ringan, ada kia hiburan.* (Almost all of us women in this village feel that time is not enough because in the morning we go to cut rubber. Before leaving home to cut rubber, we clean the house for our children and husband. The daily work of women, such as making cakes to increase the family's daily income, fishing, and many others. At night, there are also those who perform activities; while others use it for entertainment or watching TV).

This reality showed that the Tangkahan Moslem Dayak women were faced with two burdens at once. On the one hand, they had full responsibility for all domestic matters such as taking care of children, cleaning the house, and cooking. However, on the otherhand, they also played an important role in improving the economy and family welfare by working. The phenomenon found in the Tangkahan Moslem Dayak women was an antithesis of the negative stigma that was often attached to women as lazy and economically unproductive. In addition, the findings in the Dayak community in Tangkahan were a portrait of the dual role of women, which was often found in traditional societies.

This was in line with the findings of Tyagi et al. (2021), which stated that in traditional societies, women were given full responsibility for household affairs. But at the same time, they also contributed to helping husbands in the economic aspect. Mclellan and Uys (2009) mentioned this reality with the term dual-career. It was a condition where women were faced with the situation to be able to balance the need for work and domestic responsibilities in the family.

The double roles of women are not unique to Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan. They are quite common among women in all kind of societies, ranging from traditional societies to more modern ones, among those who belong to modest background to that of a privilege one. However, in some communities, the double roles of women are perceived in a negative light. This is attributable to the effect of the double roles of women, namely women's limited time to carry out both their domestic responsibilities and income generating activities. In addition, women who play double roles are more likely to experience psychological pressure due to their multiplied responsibilities (Abeysekera & Gahan, 2019; Kwatra et al., 2012; Zaikman et al., 2016). Regardless of the negative stigma about the double roles of women working experience may give valuable meaning to women's lives. Through working, women are given opportunities to fulfil their personal satisfaction, especially in financial aspect from income they gain. The income they earn indirectly contributes

positively to their welfare. Besides, working women are also allowed to have interactions to fulfil their needs of socializing for a woman (Barnett, 2004; Bosch et al., 2012; Locker, 2014; Reeves & Darville, 1992).

The above topic of debate is triggered by the implications of double roles that are played by women. The group that gives negative stigma to working women is provoked by the fact that women are placed as a second class in relation to men (Behdad & Nomani, 2012). Due to this fact, women are only given the opportunity and responsibility to handle domestic matters or their household chores, meanwhile, responsibilities in relation to financial aspects are accorded to men. There is a concern in some quarters of society that allowing women to carry out their double roles will result in their neglect of their major role. When women are allowed to play double roles, it is a worry that they will forget about their major role. On the contrary, some groups who give freedom to women to play double roles believe that men and women have equal rights and responsibilities to work and express something. Thus, Cox et al. (1984) point out that there will be no problems for women to work as long as they have good management of time, physic, and skills.

The double roles played by Dayak moslem women in Tangkahan are basically done based on their skills, as suggested by Cox et al. (1984). The skills involved two aspects. First, it is related to the time management dimension. Time management skill of Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan can be seen from their daily routines, proving that they are able to finish a number of jobs in a day systematically and all day long. The cycle of their activities begins with preparation of their family needs, such as making breakfast at 4 a.m, followed by their work activities, such as extracting rubber trees from 5 a.m. until 12 a.m. In the middle of extracting rubber trees, they do their regular household chores such as cooking, cleaning the house, washing, and taking care of their children. In the afternoon, they help their husbands on the farm while also socializing with their neighbours. In the evening, they accompany their children to study, and after that they take some rest. Second, multitasking skill is highly needed. This study found that the women have skills in doing a large number of tasks at the same time in competently. Comparatively speaking, men are unable to perform multiple jobs at the same time as effective as those of women.

Women are often viewed as having limited physical strength, making them unfit to carry out heavy. Due to this view, the quality of jobs and the productivity of women are

frequently regarded as not good. This negative sentiment further affects appreciation of women's work as not women tend to have lower salaries than men although they have the same job descriptions. This inequality gets stronger the lower the level of education and gender awareness among women (Christie & Gordon, 1992; Elveren, 2014).

This negative sentiment about women's ability does not align with the empirical evidence in the life of Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan. In reality the psychological condition of Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan enables them to do various jobs at the same time. Pitts (2000) asserts that from physical appearance, women may look weak, but psychologically, women tend to have better potency, intelligence, and skills compared to men in doing multitasking jobs. This better skill of women allows them to earn money from multiple sources. This view is supported by data from a study by Behdad and Nomani (2012) as well as Sun (2008), showing that in some countries such as China and Iran, some women tend to have bigger incomes and greater prestige than men do. In addition, they are also able to handle their household chores at the same time successfully. Furthermore, Coche and Blond (2018) state that in certain jobs, women can beat men's domination in terms of the jobs' masculinity label.

The double jobs that are played by Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan is practiced consistently without any pressure. Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan tend to do all of their responsibilities with fun and sincerity. This disposition is attributable to several motives of Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan who work.

There are three main motives that drive Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan to work. First, they have the awareness of the importance of improving the family's economic condition. Family life for Moslem Dayak society in Tangkahan is like a large ship where husband and wife are the captains. To ensure that the ship sail smoothly, they have the same tasks and responsibilities to keep the ship or family balanced by equally giving positive contributions. In this context, the wife's income is regarded as an endeavor to keep the balance of the family life among Moslem Dayak society in Tangkahan.

Second, the women need to fulfil their need to socialize with other women. The socialization among Dayak moslem women Tangkahan is carried out by conducting routine social gathering or *arisan*. *Arisan* is a rotating saving which is held at a fixed interval, from daily, weekly or the most common time is monthly. It is also a means for women to get

together, socializing and relaxing. Most women in Tangkahan belong to more than one arisan which means that they need more money to join those rotating savings. Third, they need to create their self-image as a diligent and a good wife. The third motive is closely related to social and cultural norms that are embedded within the society of Tangkahan which look down upon lazy wife and “the not so good wife”. Those labels are usually attached to women who are not willing to work and who don’t have any skills in doing various work. The motives of Dayak moslem women in Tangkahan to work are based on two aspects, namely economic and social aspect. In an attempt to to fulfil their financial needs, plenty of women choose to work as laborers, abroad (Mee, 2015). The intertwining aspects generally become a major factor that leads women o choose to work abroad. In some countries, such as Bangladesh and other countries in Africa, financial difficulties oblige women to play double roles as housewives and also as person who earns a living for the family (Heintz et al., 2018; Ragoobur, 2020). In Australia, the dissatisfaction of women towards their roles as housewives, which are regarded as monotonous, becomes a trigger for most women to work outside their domestic roles (Ford, 2005).

Although income generating activities are viewed as an attempt to create a balanced family life, not all kinds of jobs are appropriate for Moslem Dayak society in Tangkahan. There are some job categorizations, especially based on gender, in Tangkahan. Although it is not written, this categorization becomes a social guide to determine the appropriateness of jobs that is done by men and women. Some jobs for men are regarded as hard, requiring physical strength, and are even extreme, such as making goods, gold mining, and making fishing equipment. Meanwhile, jobs that are considered appropriate for women are jobs that tend to need accuracy and tidiness and don’t really need physical strength, such as weaving rattan and other household chores.

There are also types of jobs that are considered normal to be done by both men and women based on the social norms. This kind of job is usually done in a group, such as extracting rubber, farming, fishing, and making fishing equipment.

The above empirical data show that gender can become an unwritten indicator in categorizing type of jobs among Moslem Dayak society. This categorization then allows women to have double roles in some certain communities. Furthermore, this also allows the manifestation of domestification or feminization within the world of work. The term

domestication or feminization of work refers to an attempt to specialize some kinds of jobs to improve women’s participation in work and increase their income (Beneria et al., 2016; Elveren, 2014). Elveren et al. (2017) state that the feminization of work can become a determining factor that may affect income or benefits that can be gained from certain works.

The working pattern, as discussed above, shows that from a work ethics perspective, Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan are basically not lazy. Moslem Dayak society in Tangkahan is generally open to gender equality, especially to women who are willing to work. This can be seen from the large number of Dayak moslem women in Tangkahan that successfully earn a living from their work. This reality does not align with the finance

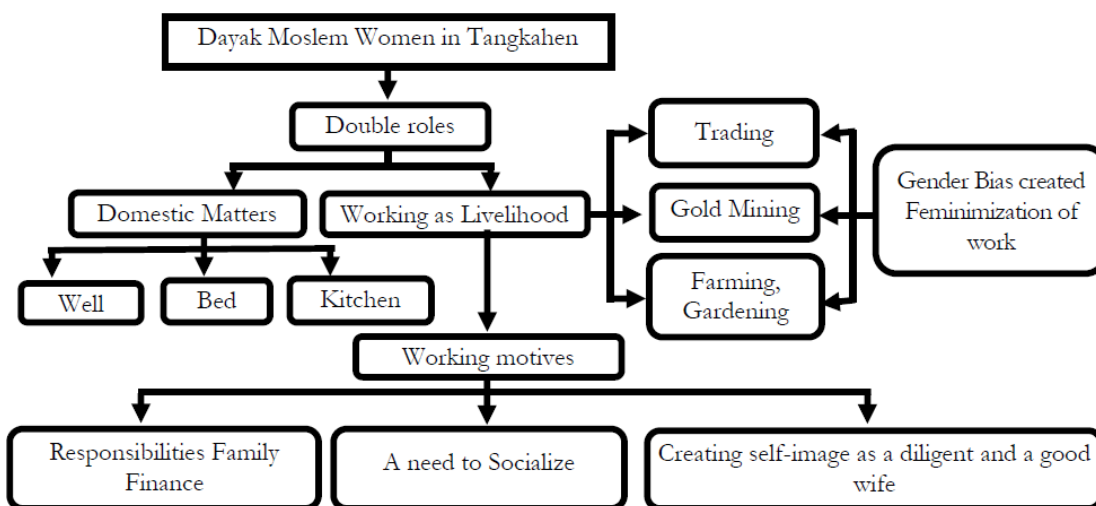


Figure 2. Working Patterns of Dayak Moslem Women in Tangkahan

**Social and Cultural Aspect that Influence Work Ethics Dayak Moslem Women in Tangkahan**

Work ethics has become a part of a culture that is embedded within a society. Work ethic building in a society is closely related to social and cultural systems that are believed by society. Some of the social and cultural aspects are religion, morality, and life satisfaction (Banks, 2016; Fakunmoju, 2018; Höpfl, 2007; Richardson et al., 2014; Yusnita, 2018). Some arguments about work ethic building are actually relevant to the reality found in Dayak. Moslem women in Tangkahan. Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan have played double roles due to their culture that has been existing for centuries within the Dayak Tangkahan society.

There are at least some social and cultural aspects that have some implications to build work ethics among Dayak moslem women in Tangkahan. First, the theology aspect becomes

the foundation of belief and action. Islam in Dayak Moslem society is not only made as guidance to worship, but also is used as glasses to portray and determine the appropriateness of some acts. In this context, Dayak Moslem society in Tangkahan understands and believes that Islam gives guidance to its believers so that both men and women do not become lazy in working. In addition, working is regarded as an attempt to fulfil the need that can easily support the availability of facilities for worshipping. Thus, Moslem Dayak society in Tangkahan believes that working is also whorshipping. This point of view and belief then motivates Dayak moslem women in Tangkahan to have valuable meaning to their working activities. In relation to the theology aspect, there is an analogy of values among Moslem Dayak society in Tangkahan that is the Philosophy of Bird. Every morning, birds fly to look for food and go to their nest in the afternoon after they are feeling full. This bird activity represents the bird's belief that God has prepared everything every creature needs, including human, as long as they work to obtain them.

There was a very close relationship between the theological dimensions and the work ethic of the Tangkahan Moslem Dayak women, as TO, one of the informants, stated:

*Tuhan jadi manantu akan umur itab, jodoh itab, rajaki itab. Namun itab jida batawan sikuweh razaki tanau, pere razaki itab, makae itab harus manggau rajaki itabna lewat bausaba. Ujan jatun manjatu bara langit mun jatun prosese, Tuhan jatun merobah nasib uluh, mun uluh jida maubah nasib itab kabuat Rajaki jatun mungkin dumah kabuat. Bagawipun inyuhu awi Tuhan". (God has determined our age, our soul mate, our fortune. However, because we do not know where our fortune is, or how big the fortune is, then we must obtain it by working. Rain will not come from the sky suddenly without any process. God will not change our destiny before we try to change our destiny by working and our sustenance will probably come by itself. Work is also God's commandment).*

Second, the meaning of natural resources. The life of Moslem Dayak society in Tangkahan is very close to nature. In this context, nature is God's gift that needs to be taken advantages of and to be well managed. Hence, working by managing natural resource is an activity to use them well and an activity to show gratitude to God.

Third, the applicable social facts aspect. In Moslem Dayak society in Tangkahan, women who work are considered normal. On the contrary, women who are not willing to work will be given negative sentiments by society. The stigma will be given by labelling women as lazy and bad choices of wife to be. This negative stigma indirectly influences the work ethic building of Dayak moslem women in Tangkahan. This was as RU, informant stated:

*Bagawi tub na turun turun mulai babut, apalagi mun tege tanggungan, justru mun jatun bagawi dianggap aneh masyarakat bahkan jadi panderan ulun si lebu tub. Mahamen kia mun ulub bagawi, sementara itah jatun bagawi, kecuali ada hal-hal kilaun baban, memang harus istirahat. (Working has been a routine activity from generation to generation, especially if we already have dependents. When we don't work, the community sees us as strange and can even become the negative talk of the village community. It is shame if other people work and we don't work, unless we are sick we should have a rest).*

Fourth, work is perceived as a means to satisfy someone's soul. The working activities have been a kind of routine among Moslem Dayak society in Tangkahan that make them as if something is missing if they leave some activities even for only a day. There is even a view within the society of Moslem Dayak that doing nothing can make them sick since working can give them a healthy soul and satisfaction. This was stated by informant NI:

*"iki ji desa tub biasa bagawi tiap pagi, buli bentuk andau, justru mun jatun bagawi jadi ida sebat, bawi hatue termasuk para pemuda kia" (We, in this village are used to working every morning, coming home at noon. If we don't work, we, both the old and the young, feel unwell).*

Fifth, the economic aspect. Working for Moslem Dayak society in Tangkahan is done to get a better and more economically secure life. Problems in life, especially in family life, are mostly triggered by unfulfilled life needs. On the one hand, the needs and demands of life keep increasing, while on the other hand, life's needs cannot be fulfilled appropriately. Thus, involving women in earning a living can be a good solution. Sixth, the myth aspect. There is a myth that is believed by Moslem Dayak society in Tangkahan that says that women are fortune-getters, so working women will get more fortune when they work.

These social and cultural dimensions behind the Dayak moslem women's work ethics are basically social values and norms that have been embedded within the society for hundred years. Deviation from these social and cultural dimensions can result in social punishment. With the goal of avoiding this social sanction, the Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahan choose to carry out double roles. In Eastern society, cultural values and norms have a pivotal role in a person's life. Religion as a part of values believed becomes a major trigger in improving work ethic (Richardson et al., 2014).

Various social and cultural backgrounds that influence Dayak moslem women's work ethics in Tangkahan also show that they are open to see the reality of life. This openness can be seen from the freedom of choice given to women to work. This fact also indirectly shows that an acknowledgement to the equality of men and women in Moslem Dayak society in

Tangkahen. Thus, in this context, women are no longer placed as a second group within the society.

This attitude toward understanding the equality between men and women gives positive hope to women who are willing to do activities other than domestic matters. At this level, their willingness may be strengthened by various movements and social acts that emerge to support and campaign for freedom for women to make their life choice.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that contradicts the widespread assumption that women in traditional societies possess low work ethics and are economically dependent on men. Dayak Moslem women in Tangkahen exhibit a remarkable capacity to maintain their domestic responsibilities while actively contributing to household income through diverse forms of labor such as rubber tapping, farming, trading, and gold mining. These women demonstrate strong time management and multitasking skills that enable them to fulfill both reproductive and productive roles effectively. Their dual engagement in domestic and economic spheres does not diminish their performance in either domain but instead reveals a robust ethic of diligence and responsibility rooted in community values.

This study contributes significantly to gender studies by highlighting how work ethics are not biologically determined or uniformly structured across traditional settings but are instead shaped by local sociocultural norms and religious values. In the case of Tangkahen, the intersection of Islamic belief, communal obligations, and gender-inclusive cultural narratives has cultivated an environment where women's labor is not only accepted but expected. Theologically grounded motivations, cultural customs, and collective expectations serve as driving forces that empower women to work while preserving familial cohesion. The research, therefore, challenges the monolithic portrayal of traditional societies as inherently patriarchal and economically restrictive for women, offering a counter-narrative that acknowledges women's agency and ethical labor contributions.

Despite these significant insights, this study is limited to a specific community and cultural context, hence it may not be generalized to all traditional societies. Future research should expand to comparative analyses between various indigenous or rural Muslim communities to examine the diversity of women's labor roles and the structural factors that

facilitate or constrain them. Moreover, interdisciplinary approaches involving economics, anthropology, and religious studies may deepen the understanding of how gendered work ethics are negotiated within dynamic sociocultural systems. From the practical perspective, the findings call for gender-sensitive policy designs that acknowledge women's unpaid and informal labor, especially in rural areas, and advocate for institutional support to further enhance their contributions in both domestic and economic realms.

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