

CHAPTER FOUR

Why do the women have to stay at home and can't go out to work?

Another common misconception regarding women not allowed to work will now be discussed.

The Prophet's followers accepted his teaching and brought about a revolution in their social attitude towards women. They no longer considered women as mere possessions, but as a vital part of society. In the new social climate women rediscovered themselves and became highly active members of society rendering useful service. It became a common sight, from the 7th century to the present day to see women scholars and teachers, trading and running their businesses independently, and going about their daily life with unprecedented freedom and choice.

To pursue skills, crafts and professions

Al-Bukhari records the following tradition from Sahl ibn Sa'd (may Allah be pleased with him) who said, "A woman once came to us with a burdah. 'Do you know what a burdah is?' he asked his listeners. 'Yes,' they said, 'it's a cloak with embroidery around the edges.' the woman then said, 'O Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) I made this myself, and I want you to wear it.' So the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) took the garment, which he was in need of. He then came out wearing it, and a man said to him, 'O Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) put it on me!' 'Very well,' the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) replied. Then, after sitting with the others, he went and took off the garment and sent it to the man who had thus spoken. Others who were present rebuked the man, saying, 'You shouldn't have asked for it when you knew that he would never refuse such a request of anyone!' in reply, the man said, 'I swear to Allah (The Exalted) I only asked him for it so that I can be wrapped in it after I die.' And in fact, it served as that man's shroud upon his death."

Al-Bukhari records the following tradition from Jabir (may Allah be pleased with him) who said, "A woman who was one of the Helpers once said to the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) 'O Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) I have a slave boy who is a carpenter, and I want to make something for you to sit on.' 'You may do so if you wish,' the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) replied. So the woman had a pulpit made for the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace).

Ibn Majah relates in his Sunan, and ibn Sa'd in his Tabaqat that Zaynab, wife of 'Abd-Allah ibn Mas'ud (may Allah be pleased with him) was a skilled craftswoman. She told the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) "I am a woman with a craft which allows me to sell my products. Apart from the income that this brings, my husband and son have nothing. So is it permissible for me to support them?" The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) replied, "Not only is it permissible, but you merit reward for every cent you spend on them."

We are likewise told by ibn Sa'd that during the caliphate of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) a man by the name of 'Abd-Allah ibn Rabi'ah (may Allah be pleased with him) used to send perfume from Yemen on his mother, al-Rubayyi' Bint Mu'awwidh. She made it her profession to sell the perfume on credit and, once the buyers had received their salaries, she would collect what they owed her. In the same manner, we find that the well-known Helper Umm Sharik (may Allah be pleased with her) used to open her home to emigrants and others who had no place to stay, and thus she made her living by making use of her home as a travellers' inn.ⁱ

Not also forgetting that the Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her) the wife of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) was a very successful business women and the first person the accept Islam.

Islam opened the way equally for men and women to offer social services and to pursue skills, crafts and professions. Moreover, whenever such opportunities expand for men, Islam allowed them to expand for women as well. However, work by women can be done as long as responsibilities are not neglected and the Islamic law is observed, which will be mentioned.

Responsibilities

One application of this ruling as it applies to men is illustrated in the words spoken by the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) to a man who came requesting his permission to go out on jihad (for defending Islam). In response, the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) asked, "Are your parents alive?" "Yes," the man replied. "So then," he (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) told him, "Your jihad consists in serving them."ⁱ

As for the waiver of the woman's obligation to take part in jihad, it is not based on her feminist as such, but rather, is simply another application of this same principle, since her going out for jihad could, in some situations, require her to neglect the more important duty of providing nurture and care for her children.

The most sacred of all social functions, namely, that ensure that young children receive nurture and a sound upbringing, would be left unfulfilled.

A further expected result of this state of affairs is that children are left, at best, at the mercy of nurseries and educational institutions which are expected to take mothers' places. However, no sensible person, not to mention, well educated people and those with even a modest degree of experience and knowledge of educational psychology, can fail to recognise that no nursery, school or any other mere agency is capable of standing in for a mother in the varied tasks she performs or the instructional influences she exercises.

I came across an article in the Asian Image, June 2004, titled 'Trial date confirmed':

"The date has been set for trial of a Bolton childminder accused of killing a baby in her care. The case will be heard at Liverpool Crown Court, starting on January 11. R W¹, aged 33, of Willows Close, Bolton, denies the manslaughter of five-month-old Anil Joshi in January last year. She also denies assault causing actual bodily harm. Mr Justice Morland, sitting at Liverpool, renewed R W's bail until her trial, which is expected to last at least three weeks."

This is just an example of what can go wrong when the parents delegate the care of their child to someone else.

Cheating

Today's workplace has become the Number 1 spot for married individuals to meet affair partners. More men and women are breaking their marriage vows by engaging in office friendships that slowly become romantic relationships — relationships that would have been socially impossible just over 20 years ago. As the boundaries that once separated the sexes crumble, so do the boundaries that protect marriage.

In her book 'Not Just Friends', Dr. Shirley Glass says, "The new infidelity is between people who unwittingly form deep, passionate connections before realising that they've crossed the line from sociable friendship into romantic love. Eighty-two percent of the 210 unfaithful partners I've treated have had an affair with someone who was, at first, 'just a friend.'" From 1991 to 2000, Glass discovered in her practice that 50 percent of the unfaithful women and about 62 percent of unfaithful men she treated were involved with someone from work. "Today's workplace has become the new danger zone of romantic attraction and opportunity," Glass writes.

Today's careers offer more opportunity for extramarital affairs. Group interaction in workplaces, frequent travel and long hours create more opportunity and temptation than ever. Glass writes, "All of these changes and others allow individuals to mix freely where once they were segregated and restricted." Studies published in the American Sociological Review and the Journal of Marriage and Family show that before 1985, divorce rates were about equal among working and homemaking women; however, "between 1985 and 1992, the annual probability of divorce among employed wives exceeded that for non-employed wives by 40 percent."

We will discuss more in chapter four: Women at work; regarding the affairs that take place at work.

Web site carrying information regarding infidelity statistics said: 'Look at the numbers from an issue of Playboy Magazine:

- 2 out of 3 women and 3 out of 4 men admit they have sexual thoughts about co-workers.
- 86% of men and 81% of women admit they routinely flirt with the opposite sex.
- 75% of men and 65% of women admit to having sex with people they work with.'ⁱⁱⁱ

¹ I have purposely left the names and written the initials.

In the old days

In the past, women everywhere looked after their home and family. Arnold j Tonybee, the author of the famous "Study of History", said: "Certainly our recent efforts to solve our problems in strictly materialist terms have failed and made sketches of all our brave plans. We have made enormous strides in the development of labour-saving machinery but one of the odd results of this progress is that women today are overworked as never before. Wives in America can no longer get household help or afford to devote themselves exclusively to the home. As a result, the woman of today does two jobs: one as a wife in the home; and the other as employed in the office or factory. In fifth century Greece, the high point of classical history, women stayed in the home. But after Alexander's time when the city states were breaking up, there was a feminist movement like our own."^{iv}

Islam does not compel women to participate in trade, the vocations or professions unless it is very necessary. If she needs income in addition to her husband's earnings, there is no objection in Islamic law if she goes out to work, but only with the consent of her husband.

Bertrand Russell confirmed: "The family has disintegrated because of women working in public. Real life shows us that women rebel against the traditions of good morals, and refuse to stay faithful to their husbands when they become financially independent."

Bargaining for Work and Family Benefits

More and more, working families are struggling to balance their responsibilities on the job and at home. People are working longer hours, affordable child care is hard to find and more working families are caring for older relatives than ever before.^v

Standard of modesty

Allah (The Exalted) has required the woman to exercise modesty, while He has forbidden her to enter situations in which she would be alone with a strange man and vice versa. Consequently, it would not be permissible for a woman to undertake jobs that would require her to enter potentially compromising situations or to abandon the type of attire that ensures the required standard of modesty.

Islamic priorities gives consideration first to what are referred to in Islamic jurisprudence as 'the five fundamentals' namely:

- 1) The protection of human life,
- 2) The well-being of the Islamic religion and all it stands for by way of guidance to truth, proper belief, and righteous conduct and dealings with others,
- 3) Adherence to sound reason and judgment,
- 4) The preservation of human dignity, and
- 5) The preservation of material wealth.

A married woman with children, for example, is called upon by society to perform a long, varied list of tasks which, in most cases, are more than she can handle. In addition to her responsibility to care for her husband and provide for his comfort and happiness, she is expected to care for and raise her young children; then depending on her educational background and profession, she may be called upon to serve society as a teacher or in some other professional capacity.

Abuse of working women

The idea of working women is so much of a trend in the Western world, has created the problems of sexual abuse in offices. There is frequent incidence of sexual harassment, either through the threat of dismissed or allurements and promises of promotion given by the boss. It is a common scene in offices, factories and work places that co-workers and bosses make off-colour jokes and at times there are incidents of direct interference. As Newsweek put it in its detailed study of "Abusing Sex at the office" in its issue of 17th March 1980, it is done in a manner as subtle as a leer and a series of off-colour jokes, or as direct as grabbing a woman's breast. It can be found in typing pools and factories, army barracks and legislative suites, city rooms and college lecture halls. It is fundamentally a man's problem and exercise of power almost analogous (similar) to rape, for which women pay with their jobs and sometimes with their health.^{vi}

I came across another article on the front page of the 'Independent on Sunday'^{vii} titled 'Revealed: half of RAF women are victims of sex harassment'. We find living examples of the things that Islam wanted to save women from and give them dignity and status. However, it is the West who shouts out 'Freedom & Democracy' etc. that has degraded the status of women and it is Islam that has raised the status of women.

Problems caused...

The other evil consequence of women going out to work and leaving their children, home and family uncared-for is that it ultimately results in the disintegration of their families. According to Dr Sullivan, the author of the book, 'Alcoholism,' he writes "...*the employment of women in ordinary industrial occupations not only involves a disorganisation of their domestic duties if they are married, but it also interferes with the acquisition of the knowledge of household duties in girlhood. The result is that appalling ignorance of everything connected with cookery, with cleanliness, with the management of children, which makes the average wife and mother in the lower working classes in this country one of the most helpless and thriftless of beings, and which therefore implies that the workman, whose comfort depends on her, not only spends his free time in public houses, but also tends to make him take to alcohol. The types of employment that draws women from domestic pursuits are likely to increase alcoholism and, it may be added, to the health of the stock.*"^{viii}

Another reason which has and is destroying families and societies is workplace relationships. Twenty seven per cent of UK workers have admitted to having either a full blown affair or a fling with a fellow employee, according to a survey of 250 firms by OfficeSmart.^{ix}

WORKPLACE ROMANCE: THE NEW INFIDELITY

How budding workplace relationships are causing a "crisis of infidelity"

Today's workplace has become an ideal venue for married individuals to meet affair partners. More men and women are breaking their marriage vows by engaging in office friendships that slowly become romantic relationships — relationships that would have been socially impossible just 20 years ago. As the boundaries that once separated the sexes crumble, so do the boundaries that protect marriage.

In her book *Not 'Just Friends'*, Dr. Shirley Glass says, "*The new infidelity is between people who unwittingly form deep, passionate connections before realizing that they've crossed the line from platonic (non physical) friendship into romantic love. Eighty-two percent of the 210 unfaithful partners I've treated have had an affair with someone who was, at first, 'just a friend.'*" From 1991 to 2000, Glass discovered in her practice that 50 percent of the unfaithful women and about 62 percent of unfaithful men she treated were involved with someone from work. "*Today's workplace has become the new danger zone of romantic attraction and opportunity,*" Glass writes.

Today's careers offer more opportunity for extramarital affairs. Group interaction in coed workplaces, frequent travel and long hours create more opportunity and temptation than ever. Glass writes, "*All of these changes and others allow individuals to mix freely where once they were segregated and restricted.*" Studies published in the *American Sociological Review* and the *Journal of Marriage and Family* show that before 1985, divorce rates were about equal among working and homemaking women; however, "*between 1985 and 1992, the annual probability of divorce among employed wives exceeded that for non-employed wives by 40 percent.*"

New Kind of Affair

A different work environment has spawned a different kind of affair. Glass says the old idea of workplace romance between a powerful company executive and his single young secretary no longer reflects today's office relationship. The new infidelity occurs between peers who first become emotionally attached, having no thought of physical involvement. Men and women who work closely together under stressful conditions can quickly become attracted to each other. They often share interests and think nothing of spending time over coffee or lunch getting to know one another. Nevertheless, lunch between married friends, no matter what their intentions, can have unanticipated and dangerous consequences.

One researcher calls this new kind of affair the "cup of coffee" syndrome. Men and women begin with safe marriages at home and friendships at work. As they regularly meet for coffee breaks and lunch, these relationships develop into deep friendships. Co-workers come to depend on these coffee meeting, and soon they have emotional work friendships and crumbling marriages.

Oddly, men and women in these workplace romances believe it is wrong to have an affair. According to Glass, affair partners are usually happy in their marriages and have no plans to leave their spouses. Because of the gradual slide toward infidelity, partners do not pay attention to their behaviour until they have already damaged their marriages, and sex is often the last sign that the marriage partner has been betrayed.

Protecting the Marriage

Though today's workplace offers more opportunity for extramarital relationships, it is not opportunity that is causing the workplace to become such a hotspot of infidelity. Healthy marriages must have proper boundaries. "In a committed relationship, a couple constructs a wall that shields them from any outside forces that have the power to split them," Glass writes. Referring to a particular couple, she adds, "The problem wasn't that they were attracted, but that they began to act on their feelings as if they had no other primary commitments."

Good intentions are not enough to protect a marriage from the temptations in today's workplace, to which both men and women fall prey. It is natural to feel an attraction toward the opposite sex, even in happy marriages.² But when a man/woman neglects his/her primary responsibility and allows him/herself to act on an instinctive attraction — even in his/her thoughts — he/she has already violated his/her marriage vows.

Though many factors can play a role in causing infidelity, it always requires attraction, opportunity, and failure to follow precautions.

What do Western women say?

Women's work in the West has resulted in the disintegration of the family and the unsettled home of children. This is what has led Western academics and thinkers to raise their voices to warn their societies against the risks of women working outside the home.

Anna Rhode said: "*Finding her daughters work in the houses of others as servants and the like is better and less trouble than finding them work in factories where they are contaminated with the dirt and lose their beauty for ever. Would that our country was like the Muslim countries! It's a shame that England has made its daughters an example of immorality (corrupted) and promiscuity (shameless). Why do we not strive to find our daughters work that suits their nature?*"

Alexis Carrel said: "Modern society has made a huge mistake by replacing the teaching of the family completely with the teaching of the school."

Dr. Wayne Dennis said: "The child's intelligence and ability to speak develop and become strong when he grows up among his parents and is not left to the care of educators, servants and teachers."

Here are some statistics x

Islam does not prohibit working women. However, at the same time they need to observe modesty and use their skills appropriately. When the mothers go to work leaving their children in the care of others, the following could be the result:

1. Each week at least one child will die as the result of adult cruelty.xi
2. A quarter of all recorded rape victims are children.xii
3. Most abuse is committed by someone the child knows and trusts.xiii
4. The abuse is often known about or suspected by another adult who could have done something to prevent it.xiv
5. Three-quarters of sexually abused children do not tell anyone at the time. Around a third are not able to tell anyone about the experience later.xv
6. Government figures show that around 80 children are killed every year, mostly by parents and carers in England and Wales. These rates of child abuse deaths have gone unchecked for almost 30 years.xvi
7. More than 30,000 children are on child protection registers.
8. Each week over 600 children are added to the child protection registers.xvii
9. Recent NSPCC research involving 2,869 young adults revealed that 1 in 10 of them had suffered serious abuse or neglect during childhood.xviii

² Narrated 'Ali bin Al-Husain: "The Prophet replied, "Satan circulates in the human being as blood circulates in the body..."²

The current cost of child abuse to statutory and voluntary organisations is one billion pounds a year. Most of this is spent dealing with the aftermath of abuse rather than its prevention.^{xix}

Majority of the Muslim Schools of Thought consider domestic chores, outside the scope of a woman's legal responsibilities towards her husband. Contrast that with US polls showing that working women still do 80% of domestic chores.^{xx}

In conclusion Islam does not prohibit women from working, as proven by the women companions (may Allah be pleased with them) at the time of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) however, their priority is the upbringing and looking after the needs of their children and husband. Some scholars expand on the idea of role differences by suggesting that as women's unique role is motherhood, so men should provide for women in order to free them from the burden of having to earn a living, thereby facilitating her devotion of time, energy and intellect to the sound rising of healthy, intelligent, committed Muslim children.

Let me conclude with a final hadith of staying at home and going out working etc. A group of women sent Asma bint Zayd (may Allah be pleased with her) to find out his answer to the problem. She told him: *"I am a representative of a group of Muslim women who are supporting me. All of them hold the same opinion as I hold: that Allah (The Exalted) has sent you to teach both men and women. We all believe in you and followed you. But the state of us women is this: we are tied to our homes; we are the centre of gratification of men's desires and bearers of their children. Men have been given preference in participation in Friday prayers, funerals and jihad. When they go on jihad, we look after their wealth and property, and nourish their children. O Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace)! Do we share in their reward and compensation (thawab)?"* The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) turned towards his companions and asked: *"Have you ever heard a woman asking about her religion better than this woman?"* They said: *"By Allah (The Exalted)! We have not."* Therefore the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), addressing Asma (may Allah be pleased with her) said: *"Go and inform those women that their good treatment of their husbands and seeking their satisfaction and supporting them for the sake of unity and solidarity (in the family), is the equivalent of all the men's services you have just mentioned."*^{xxi}

All praise be to Allah! When a women reads about the reward she gets in looking after the husband, children, wealth, property etc. she will without doubt do these, hence, rewarding herself not only in this world by pleasing her husband, bringing up committed Muslim children but gaining the pleasure of Allah and His Prophet and also getting her reward in the Paradise.

We find that Islam encourages women to work, however, observing certain conditions, such as, ensuring that they do not place themselves in situations in which it will be against the teachings of Islam i.e. being alone with a man (non-mehram), intermixing freely with the opposite sex, attending residential courses, or possibly overloading their responsibilities towards their families etc. all such situations should look to be avoided as far as possible. So it is clear that Islam wishes to ensure the safety and respect of women and also enforce that children are brought up in strong family units, thus further encouraging morality within society.

ⁱ Al-Isabah, Vol. 4, page 445. Umm Sharik is the person on whose authority ibn Majah recorded the Prophet's command that the Fatiha be recited at funerals.

ⁱⁱ Al-Bukhari and Muslim; narrated by 'Abd-Allah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.manhaters.com/infidelity-statistics.asp>

^{iv} Toynbee, A.J. in his article in World review, March, 1949.

^v <http://www.aflcio.org/issuespolitics/worknfamily/>

^{vi} Newsweek, 17th March 1980, page: 49

^{vii} 27th January 2005

^{viii} Sullivan, Alcoholism, quoted in Spectrum Yadqeen international, Vol: 28, No: 24, April 22, 1980, page 275.

^{ix} Affairs in the workplace – results of OfficeSmart survey; 07 Oct 2003. <http://www.hhc.co.uk/pages/news/type/editorial/id/514>

^x <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/html/home/newsandcampaigns/factsandfigures.htm>

^{xi} NSPCC analysis of annual publications: Criminal Statistics England and Wales (1998-2001) and Crime in England and Wales 2001/2002: Supplementary Volume (2003), Office of National Statistics, HMSO

^{xii} Home Office Statistical Findings 1/96 Victims of Violent Crime Recorded by the Police, England and Wales 1990-1994 (1996), Watson, Home Office.

^{xiii} Childhood Matters, The Report of the National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse, The Stationery Office, 1996

^{xiv} ibid

^{xv} Child Maltreatment in the UK: A Study of the Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect, Cawson et al, NSPCC, 2000

^{xvi} NSPCC analysis of annual publications: Criminal Statistics England and Wales (1998-2001) and Crime in England and Wales 2001/2002: Supplementary Volume (2003), Office of National Statistics, HMSO, NSPCC Briefing Paper: Child Killings in England and Wales, NSPCC, 2003

^{xvii} England: Referrals, Assessments, and Children and Young People on Child Protection Registers, England: 2001/2002 (2002), DoH; Scotland: Child Protection Statistics for the Year Ended 31 March 2002 (2002), Scottish Executive; Northern Ireland: Community Statistics (2002) and Key Indicators for Personal Social Services for Northern Ireland (2001), DHSSPSNI;

Wales: Local Authority Child Protection Registers: Wales 2001 (2001), National Assembly for Wales

^{xviii} Child Maltreatment in the UK: A Study of the Prevalence of Child Abuse and Neglect, Cawson et al, NSPCC, 2000

^{xix} ibid

^{xx} Discover Islam. The need to understand other cultures. Articles by Shaykh Hamza Yusuf.

^{xxi} The Muslim women's hand book; Page 30-31.