

# تشغيل المرأة في الشريعة ودراسة مقارنة لإحصائيات المرأة العاملة في المهن الصناعية والزراعية والخدماتية في إيران وعدة دول أخرى

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## الملخص

تحظى المرأة في الثقافة الإسلامية بمكانة سامية وأهمية بالغة، لدرجة أن عبء تنشئة الجنس البشري يقع بالدرجة الأولى على عاتقها، كما أن لها الأثر الأكبر في تشكيل شخصية أبنائها الذين يمثلون الجيل التالي للمجتمع. ومن ثمَّ كان سلوكها وتصرفاتها محط اهتمام، وأصبحت دراسة القضايا المتعلقة بها ذات شأن بالغ، اعتمد البحث الحالي على منهج تحليل الوثائق في البحث المكتبي، مع الاستقصاء الأقصى للكتب والرسائل العلمية والمقالات ذات الصلة بالموضوع، وقد تناول - مع الالتفات إلى المفاهيم الضرورية للمناقشة - تاريخ عمل المرأة في المجتمعات الإيرانية والعربية والغربية منذ العصور السابقة حتى الوقت الراهن. وتشير النتائج المستخلصة من هذه الدراسة إلى أن التشريعات الإسلامية والثقافة القرآنية لا تمنع في عمل المرأة إذا ما راعت الالتزامات الشرعية. كما يُظهر التحليل المقارن للإحصائيات أن نسبة عمل النساء في إيران في القطاع الزراعي لعام ٢٠١٩ بلغت ١٨,٨٪. أما حصة النساء العاملات في القطاع الصناعي من إجمالي النساء العاملات في البلاد لنفس العام فقد بلغت ٢٦٪. في حين كانت حصة النساء العاملات في القطاع الخدمي من إجمالي النساء العاملات في البلاد لعام ٢٠١٩ نحو ٥٤٪. وبلغت نسبة العمل الحر بين النساء العاملات في إيران لعام ٢٠١٩ ما نسبته ٤٣٪. ويأتي معدل بطالة النساء كمؤشر أخير تمت دراسته في هذا القسم، حيث يتبين أن قيمة هذا المؤشر في آخر عام تم حسابه له (٢٠١٩) قد بلغت ١٨٪، وهي تمثل وضعاً أفضل مقارنة بالمملكة العربية السعودية حيث بلغ المعدل ٢٣٪ وبمتوسط العالم العربي الذي بلغ ٢٠٪.

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## ١. المقدمة

تحظى المرأة في الثقافة الإسلامية بمكانة رفيعة، وتؤدي دورًا محوريًا في تنشئة أجيال المستقبل وبناء المجتمع. وفي المجتمعات الإسلامية، ورغم أن مسؤولية الإعالة المالية للأسرة تقع أساسًا على عاتق الرجل، فإن عمل المرأة يُعدّ حقًا طبيعيًا لها يمكنها ممارسته متى رغبت في ذلك. تهدف هذه المقالة إلى تقديم دراسة متعددة الأبعاد لموضوع عمل المرأة، من خلال بيان المنظور الديني والتشريعي لهذا الموضوع، ومقارنة الوضع الوظيفي للمرأة في إيران إحصائيًا بعددٍ من الدول الأخرى. وتتركز الدراسة بصورة رئيسة على التحليل التاريخي لمسيرة عمل المرأة في المجتمعات الإيرانية والعربية والغربية، إلى جانب تفكيك البيانات الإحصائية ذات الصلة في القطاعات الاقتصادية المختلفة، بغية تقديم صورة شاملة وواضحة عن مكانتها الراهنة ومسار تطورها.

## ٢. منهجية البحث

أُنجز هذا البحث باستخدام منهج تحليل الوثائق والمراجع. ولهذا الغرض، جرى دراسة وتحليل محتوى مصادر واسعة النطاق شملت الكتب المتخصصة والأطروحات الجامعية والمقالات العلمية والنصوص التاريخية والدينية الموثوقة. في الجانب الديني والتاريخي، وبالرجوع إلى آيات القرآن الكريم والروايات وأراء الفقهاء والمفكرين الإسلاميين (مثل الإمام الخميني، وسماحة قائد الثورة الإسلامية، وآية الله السيستاني، والعلامة الطباطبائي)، تم استنباط رؤية الإسلام حول عمل المرأة. أما في الجانب المقارن-الإحصائي، فقد تم استخراج بيانات موثوقة من البنك الدولي لعام ٢٠١٩، ومقارنة وضع العمالة النسائية في إيران في قطاعات الزراعة والصناعة والخدمات مع دول مختارة ومتوسطات إقليمية وعالمية.

## ٣. نتائج البحث

يمكن تصنيف نتائج البحث في قسمين رئيسيين: "الرؤية الدينية" و"الدراسة الإحصائية المقارنة":

### (أ) النتائج الدينية والتاريخية:

-من منظور التشريعات الإسلامية، لا إشكال في عمل المرأة ويُعدّ جائزًا بشرط مراعاة الشروط والضوابط الشرعية (كالحفاظ على الحجاب والعفة وعدم التعارض مع المسؤوليات الأسرية الأساسية).

فآيات القرآن وسيرة المعصومين تبين أن النساء في صدر الإسلام كن يعملن في مهن متنوعة مثل التجارة (كما في حالة السيدة خديجة) والتمريض والطب.

-آراء الفقهاء تؤكد هذا الأمر أيضاً. فقد أكد الإمام الخميني على حق المرأة في اختيار مهنتها، واعتبر سماحة قائد الثورة الإسلامية عمل المرأة ضرورياً إذا لا يتنافى مع كرامتها الإنسانية ومسؤوليتها الأسرية. كما أجاز آية الله السيستاني والعلامة الطباطبائي عمل المرأة مستندين في ذلك إلى آيات القرآن الكريم.

-يُظهر المسح التاريخي أن النساء في إيران القديمة (العصر الساساني) وتحديداً في عصر القاجاريين كن نشطات في المهن الصناعية مثل حياكة السجاد. وفي المجتمعات الغربية، بعد الثورة الصناعية، توسع وجود المرأة في سوق العمل بسبب الحاجة إلى الأيدي العاملة الرخيصة، وهو ما صاحبَ تشكّل الحركات النسوية. كما وُجدت أمثلة على عمل المرأة بين عرب الجاهلية، وإن كانت حقوقهن الاقتصادية والاجتماعية قد أُعيد إحيائها بعد الإسلام.

## (ب) النتائج الإحصائية (استناداً إلى بيانات عام ٢٠١٩)

-قطاع الزراعة: بلغت حصة العمالة النسائية في إيران في هذا القطاع ١٨.٨٪، وهي تشهد مسازاً تنازلياً، وهي أقل من المتوسط العالمي (٢٤.١٪) والصين (٢٧٪) والعالم العربي، لكنها أعلى بكثير من الدول المتقدمة مثل الولايات المتحدة (أقل من ١٪) والاتحاد الأوروبي (حوالي ٣٪).

-قطاع الصناعة: بلغت حصة النساء الإيرانيات العاملات في القطاع الصناعي ٢٦٪، وهي أعلى من المتوسط العالمي (١٦٪) ودول مثل الصين (٢٣٪) وماليزيا (٢٠٪) وتركيا (١٦٪) وروسيا (١٥٪) والولايات المتحدة (٨٪).

-قطاع الخدمات: يعمل ٥٤٪ من النساء الإيرانيات العاملات في قطاع الخدمات. هذا الرقم يعادل تقريباً المتوسط العالمي، لكنه أقل من دول متقدمة مثل ماليزيا (٧٤٪) وروسيا (٨٠٪) والولايات المتحدة (٩٠٪) والاتحاد الأوروبي (٨٣٪).

-العمل الحر: يبلغ معدل العمل الحر among النساء في إيران ٤٣٪، وهو مشابه للمتوسط العالمي، وأقل مقارنة بشرق أفريقيا والسودان (٧٨٪) وإندونيسيا (٥٨٪)، ولكنه أعلى بشكل ملحوظ من الولايات المتحدة وروسيا والاتحاد الأوروبي.

-معدل البطالة: سُجِّل معدل بطالة النساء في إيران ١٨٪، ورغم أنه أفضل من السعودية (٢٣٪) والعالم العربي (٢٠٪)، إلا أنه يعتبر مرتفعًا مقارنة بالمعدل العالمي (٥٪) والولايات المتحدة (٣.٦٪) وروسيا (٤.٤٪). ويرجع هذا الأمر في الغالب إلى الظروف الاقتصادية الكلية وظاهرة الركود التضخمي في البلاد.

#### ٤. الخاتمة

تُظهر نتائج هذا البحث بوضوح أنه من منظور الإسلام، ليس عمل المرأة محظورًا فحسب، بل يمكن أن يكون أولوية اجتماعية في بعض المهن الضرورية (مثل طب النساء). الشرط الأساسي هو مراعاة الأطر الشرعية والحفاظ على كرامة المرأة وعدم الإخلال بمسؤوليتها الجلية في تربية الجيل وتعزيز مؤسسة الأسرة. ومن منظور إحصائي، فإن حصة المرأة الإيرانية في القطاع الصناعي ملحوظة مقارنة بالعديد من الدول، وحضورها البارز في قطاع الخدمات يسير بالتوازي مع المتوسط العالمي. ومع ذلك، يشير ارتفاع معدل البطالة النساء إلى وجود تحديات هيكلية في سوق العمل الإيراني، مما يتطلب سياسات هادفة للاستفادة المثلى من هذه الثروة البشرية الهائلة. وفي الخلاصة النهائية، يمكن القول إن عمل المرأة في إيران له إطاره الديني الواضح والمقبول، وتشير الإحصائيات إلى حضورها الفاعل في مختلف المجالات الاقتصادية. ومع ذلك، للوصول إلى وضع أفضل، يبدو من الضروري بذل جهد متزامن في مجالين: "رفع المعوقات القانونية والثقافية بالاعتماد على التعاليم الإسلامية الأصيلة" و"إصلاح الأطر الاقتصادية لخلق فرص عمل أكبر ومستدامة".

# Women's Employment in Religious Laws and a Comparative Statistical Analysis of Employed Women in the Industrial, Agricultural, and Service Sectors of Iran and Several Other Countries

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## ABSTRACT

Women occupy an exalted and significant position in Islamic culture, as the primary responsibility for nurturing the human generation rests upon their shoulders. They exert the greatest influence on their children, who constitute the next generation of society. Therefore, women's behavior and conduct have always been of special concern, and the study of issues related to them holds great importance. The present research, employing a documentary-analytical method through an extensive review of books, theses, and academic articles related to the subject, examines the history of women's employment in Iranian, Arab, and Western societies from past to present.

The findings of this study indicate that, according to Islamic laws and Qur'anic teachings, women's employment is permissible provided that religious principles and ethical considerations are duly observed. A comparative statistical analysis further reveals that, in 2019, women's employment in the agricultural sector in Iran accounted for 18.8%, in the industrial sector 26%, and in the service sector 54% of the total employed women in the country. The percentage of self-employed women among all employed women in 2019 was 43%. The final indicator examined is the female unemployment rate, which stood at 18% in the most recent year of measurement—lower than that of Saudi Arabia (23%) and the Arab world average (20%), indicating a comparatively more favorable situation for Iranian women.

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## **Introduction**

The smallest social unit within any society is the family, which, from the Islamic perspective, is regarded as the most sacred institution in human community life. The family consists of at least two essential pillars—man and woman—each entrusted with specific responsibilities to preserve and sustain their small social system. The most important duty of men toward other family members in Islamic societies is the provision of financial support (nafaqah) and the supply of the family's material needs. Conversely, in these societies—where women bear no financial obligation and their own expenses are also the responsibility of the male head of the family—their essential and fundamental role within the family structure is that of marital companionship and the upbringing and moral education of children.

In contemporary times, however, women's employment in our society is no longer viewed as a familial obligation but rather as one of their natural rights, which they may pursue if personally inclined. Therefore, it is necessary to examine women's employment in Iranian, Arab, and Western societies both from historical and statistical perspectives.

## **A Comparative Study of Women's Employment in Iran, Western, and Arab Societies**

For the economic growth and development of a country, natural resources such as land, water, minerals, and raw materials play a significant role. Nevertheless, economists maintain that more than natural resources, it is human resources that drive economic growth and development; natural resources and national capital are considered secondary factors in this process.

Half of these human resources—those who have a profound impact on a nation's economic development—are women. Their proper and effective employment not only facilitates the achievement of developmental goals but also contributes positively to the fairer distribution of income, increased welfare, and improved household living standards. Conversely, disregarding women's work and economic participation means excluding half of the active population from the spheres of production and activity, which in turn hinders economic growth and development.

In other words, neglecting the participation of women in economic and social arenas renders the flourishing and advancement of a country unattainable (Amin Jafari, 1994). This view of women as half of the population and an essential force in national development has taken shape only in recent decades and is gradually being implemented in various societies, whereas in the past, in most societies, women had limited public roles, and their activities were confined largely to domestic household tasks.

### **A Comparative Historical Analysis**

Throughout history, different societies have held varying perspectives toward women. Contrary to the contemporary view mentioned earlier, in the past, many societies trained women primarily for domestic responsibilities and effectively blocked their access to the public sphere. Sociological and historical studies indicate that women have always played a significant role in economic activities. V. Gordon Childe, for instance, argues that certain early sciences and crafts—such as pottery and weaving—emerged as a result of women's domestic and economic contributions in ancient times (Childe, 1967, p. 53). Similarly, Will Durant attributes much of humanity's early economic progress to women's domestic labor, maintaining that from the earliest periods women worked alongside men in various fields, including agriculture, pottery, and cotton cultivation (Durant, trans. Ahmad Aram, 1991, pp. 42–43). However, despite their essential contributions, women themselves did not enjoy the fruits of their labor, as these activities were regarded merely as household duties.

To clarify this point, it is necessary to briefly outline the history of women's participation in public and economic life in both Eastern and Western societies. If we define “work” as an economic activity that results in the production of goods or services and yields income or material benefit to the worker—thus excluding purely domestic labor from this definition—then the historical study of women's employment should begin in the late eighteenth century, following the Industrial Revolution in Europe. According to Dr. Ali Shariati, women's social and economic emancipation belongs to the post-Renaissance era, which brought about a profound intellectual and spiritual transformation, altering the moral and cultural values of human societies (Kasama'i, 1980, p. 82).

### **Women's Employment in Iran**

In Iran, as in many other parts of the world, women have played a vital and decisive role in managing family affairs and nurturing future generations. Imam Khomeini (RA) regarded women's role in society as superior to that of men, arguing that women not only constitute an active segment of society but also bear the responsibility of educating the next generation (Khomeini, 2011, p. 207). Moreover, the education of women is essential for national development, as women constitute half of the country's population. Their education not only enhances their potential participation in the labor market but also contributes to the better upbringing of their children.

This view, however, has become dominant in Iranian society only in recent decades. Until the Qajar period, Iranian society maintained a traditional-religious structure in which women's activities were largely confined to domestic tasks, agriculture, and weaving. Gainful employment in the modern sense dates back to the Sassanid period and afterward. Prior to the Sassanid era, Iranian women held no property rights, and all matters of life were controlled by men. During the Sassanid dynasty, however, society became stratified into social classes, and women in each class undertook occupations corresponding to their social and cultural position. For instance, women from royal families held positions of authority, while others were engaged in spinning, farming, and similar occupations, earning independent incomes and exercising control over their earnings (Farhang, 1993, vol. 1, p. 22).

During the Qajar period, due to increased contact with the West and cultural transformations - especially in major cities - the social status of women began to change. Women worked in various industries, and some industries were heavily dependent on their labor. For example, the majority of the workforce in carpet-weaving and textile factories consisted of women (Mozaffari, p. 121).

### **Women's Employment in Western Societies**

In ancient Rome, women were deprived not only of economic rights but of all legal and social rights; they were treated as property and could even be bought and sold. Consequently, women in ancient Rome held no occupational status whatsoever (Durant, trans. Ezzat Safari, 1974, vol. 2, p. 126).

In medieval Europe, women similarly lacked proper legal status and were excluded from both economic and social rights. Some served as serfs engaged in agricultural labor without receiving any personal income. Following the Industrial Revolution and the rise of industrial societies, new labor markets emerged, and women began entering the workforce in the industrial sector. Their participation expanded rapidly because, compared to men, women represented a cheaper labor force, and employers seeking greater profits preferred to hire them (Lenski, 1990, pp. 467–468).

Western theorists have proposed various explanations for the transformation of women's roles and their increasing participation in the labor market. The most influential among these is feminist theory. Feminists argue that in patriarchal societies, men occupy the dominant position while women are treated as the "second sex." The feminist movement therefore seeks to challenge gender stereotypes and achieve equal educational, occupational, property, and political rights for both sexes—including the rights to education, work, property ownership, and suffrage. The term feminism first appeared in the French language in 1837 (Michel, 2004, p. 11).

Feminism, as a social movement, has evolved through four waves:

The First Wave (19th–20th centuries): Centered on women's property rights and political freedoms, particularly the right to vote.

The Second Wave (1960s): Advocated for complete gender equality in all social, cultural, and legal domains under the slogan "Women Without Men."

The Third Wave (around 1992): Emphasized individuality and the acknowledgment of differences among women.

The Fourth Wave (2012–present): Focuses on combating sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and rape culture, symbolized by the #MeToo movement.

The major strands of feminist thought include liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, and postmodern feminism.

Liberal feminism is the most well-known branch, founded on the principle of equality between men and women (Rudgar, 2009, p. 70).

Marxist feminism, which emerged in Germany after liberal feminism, seeks to defend women's economic and labor rights within capitalist systems (Masoumi, 2008, pp. 36–37).

Radical feminism represents the most extreme and expansive current, aiming to dismantle the social perception of women as a secondary sex or class (Hamm, trans. Firoozeh Mohajer & Noushin Ahmadi, 2003, p. 362).

Socialist feminism, sometimes referred to as dual-systems theory (Dowlaty, 2009, p. 56), combines elements of radical and Marxist feminism, asserting that women's subordination results both from patriarchal gender systems and capitalist economic structures (Masoumi, 2008, p. 48).

Postmodern feminism approaches the issue primarily from an epistemological perspective, rejecting the notion of a fixed or universal female identity, and instead viewing womanhood as fluid and context-dependent (Bostan, 2003, p. 68).

Despite their internal differences, all feminist perspectives share a common focus on women and their social position. Feminists maintain that women, by virtue of their gender, occupy a subordinate status in male-dominated societies and are victims of systemic injustice (Sobhani, 2000, p. 5). Consequently, their condition in society remains unsatisfactory, and they have not yet attained their full rights. Feminists thus advocate for the realization of an ideal state characterized by gender equality—or, in some interpretations, female superiority—arguing that in Western culture, equality is understood as the uniformity of men's and women's rights (Masoumi, 2008, p. 32).

### **Employment of Women among the Arabs**

An examination of the surviving records from the pre-Islamic Arab era reveals that women at that time fell into two general categories. One group lived with a certain degree of freedom (Saleh, 1981, p. 140) and were engaged in various professions. For example, some women were active in trade, such as Lady Khadījah (peace be upon her), who was a wealthy merchant employing men to conduct business on her behalf (al-Ṭabarī, 1387 AH, vol. 2, p. 280). Others worked as perfume sellers—such as a woman named Mansham in Mecca, whose perfumes were

used by warriors before battle. This practice became so common that it turned into a proverb: when someone said, "I have used So-and-so's perfume," it meant he was ready for combat (Kahālah, 1402 AH, vol. 5, p. 11).

Cosmetology was another common occupation among women ('Asqalānī, 1415 AH, vol. 8, p. 390). Midwifery and nursing were also among the professions practiced by women (Kahālah, 1402 AH, vol. 1, p. 254). Another prevalent occupation at that time was wet-nursing and child-rearing, the most famous example being Ḥalīmah al-Sa'diyyah, who nursed and cared for the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) during infancy (Ibn Hishām, vol. 1, p. 185).

However, a tragic and degrading practice also existed, in which some women were forced into prostitution by their masters, who profited from their exploitation (Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Baghdādī, p. 340). Regarding this, the Qur'an explicitly prohibits such coercion:

"And do not compel your slave-girls to prostitution, if they desire chastity, seeking the fleeting goods of this worldly life. But if anyone should compel them, then surely Allah, after their compulsion, is Forgiving, Merciful." (al-Nūr 33)

In contrast to the relatively free women mentioned earlier, another group lived under extremely oppressive conditions and were deprived of all rights, including economic ones. They were treated as property and commodities. Daughters from such groups were often buried alive after birth, and those who survived were sold as slaves. The Qur'an refers to this appalling condition in several verses. For instance, verses 58–59 of Sūrat al-Naḥl address the burial of newborn girls and condemn this abhorrent act:

"When one of them is given the glad tidings of a daughter, his face darkens, and he suppresses his grief. He hides from the people because of the bad news he has received. Shall he keep her in humiliation or bury her in the dust? How evil indeed is what they decide." (al-Naḥl 58–59)

Historical sources report two major forms of economic deprivation suffered by pre-Islamic women. The first was exclusion from inheritance, as only men inherited wealth, while women and children were entirely deprived of it (ibid., p. 324), the justification being that

women did not participate in warfare. The second was the denial of dowry rights, whereby a woman’s guardian would seize her dowry, or if it was given to her, he would reclaim it by compelling her to use it for household furnishings (Jawād, 1976, vol. 5, p. 531).

With the advent of Islam, these injustices were abolished, and the human dignity of women was restored. Islamic teachings recognized women as constituting half of society and granted them social and economic rights. Following the rise of Islam, women’s participation in professional life became increasingly visible, and they were engaged in a variety of occupations, including some industries such as weapon manufacturing (Kahālah, 1402 AH, vol. 1, p. 447).

### Comparative Statistical Analysis

In this section, women’s employment rates are compared across selected countries—including Turkey, Russia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the United States, as well as the Arab world, the Middle East and North Africa, the European Union, East Africa, Sudan, and globally—with the corresponding figures in Iran. To reduce data congestion, the figures are presented in two separate charts. The data used in this section have been extracted from the World Bank’s Time Series Database.

#### Percentage of Women Employed in Agriculture (as a share of total female employment)

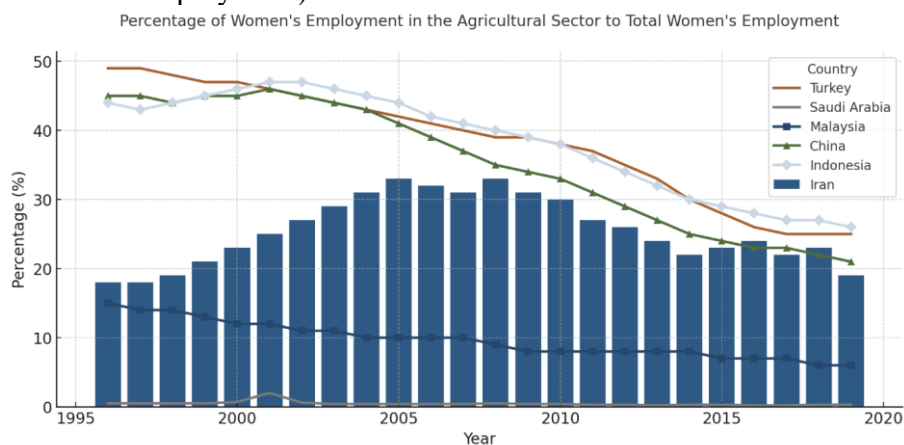


Chart 1 - Percentage of women's employment in the agricultural sector to total women's employment - Part One

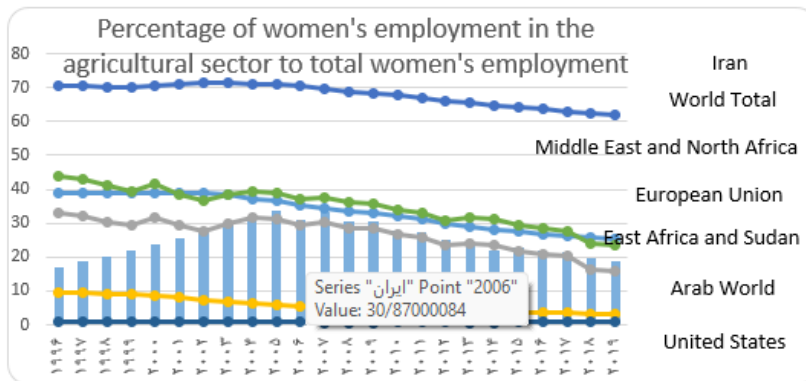


Chart 2 - Percentage of women's employment in the agricultural sector to total women's employment - Part Two

It is observed that the percentage of women employed in the agricultural sector in Iran in 2019 was 18.8%, showing a declining trend since 2007. Throughout the period under review, this figure has consistently remained lower than the global average, as well as below that of China and the Arab world. In contrast, the same indicator for East Africa and Sudan in 2019 stood at 61.8%, which is more than three times higher than Iran's rate. Moreover, the female employment rates in agriculture of less than 1% in the United States and approximately 3% in the European Union may be attributed to the industrialized nature of this sector in developed economies (World Bank, 2019).

Percentage of Women Employed in Industry (as a Share of Total Female Employment)

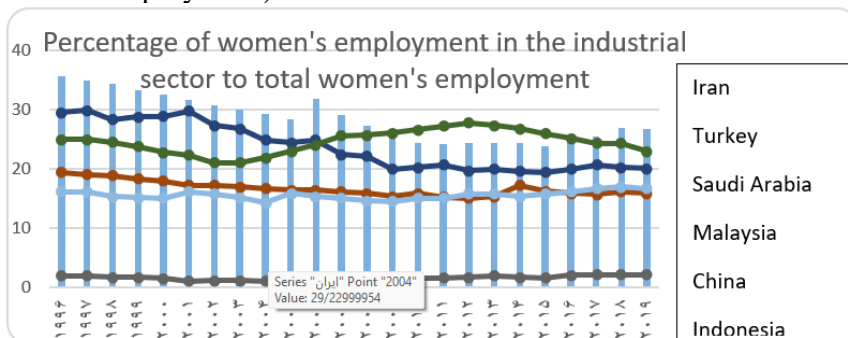


Chart 3 - Percentage of women's employment in the industrial sector to total women's employment - Part One

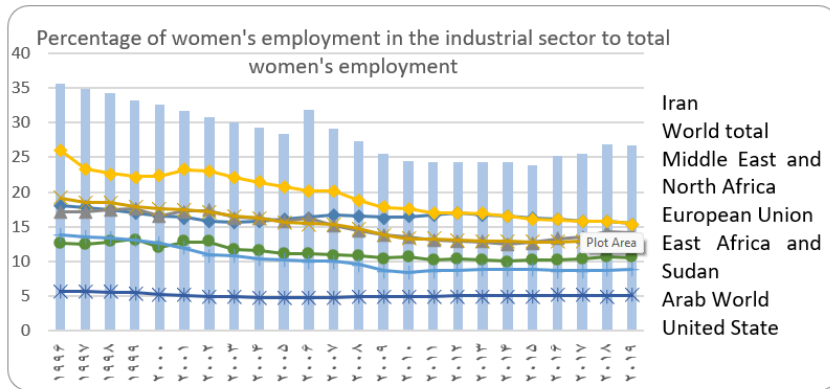


Chart 4 - Percentage of women's employment in the industrial sector to total women's employment - Part Two

It is observed that the proportion of women employed in the industrial sector in Iran in 2019 was 26%, which is higher than in China (23%), Malaysia (20%), Indonesia and Turkey (16%), Russia (15%), the European Union (12%), and the United States (8%). The global average for this indicator in 2019 was 16% (World Bank, 2019).

Percentage of Women Employed in Services (as a Share of Total Female Employment)

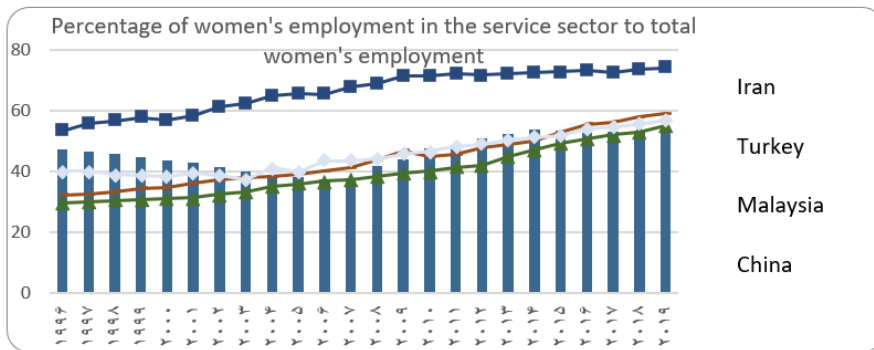


Chart 5 - Percentage of women's employment in the service sector to total women's employment - Part One



Chart 6 - Percentage of women's employment in the service sector to total women's employment - Part Two

Percentage of Women Employed in Services (as a Share of Total Female Employment)

The share of women employed in the service sector in Iran in 2019 was 54%, which is close to the global average (World Bank, 2021). In comparison, Malaysia (74%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020), Russia (80%) (Federal State Statistics Service, 2020), the United States (90%) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), and the European Union (83%) (Eurostat, 2020) all exhibit higher rates than those recorded for Iran.

Percentage of Self-Employed Women (as a Share of Total Female Employment)

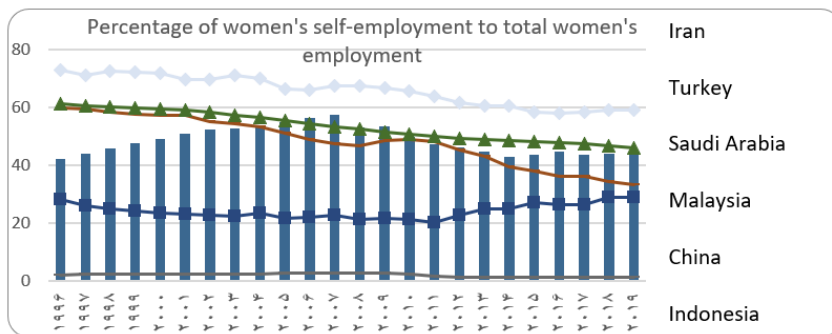


Chart 7 - Percentage of women's self-employment to total women's employment - Part One

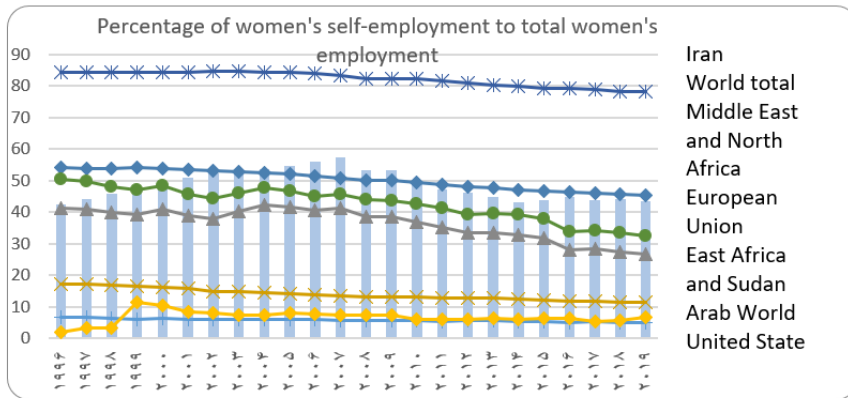


Chart 8 - Percentage of women's self-employment to total women's employment - Part Two

The percentage of self-employed women in Iran in 2019 was 43%, a figure that is roughly similar to the global average (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021). Statistical data indicate that East Africa and Sudan have the highest rates of female self-employment at 78%, followed by Indonesia with 58% (World Bank, 2021). Interestingly, the United States, Russia, and the European Union register the lowest rates for this indicator (Eurostat, 2020; Federal State Statistics Service, 2020; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

Female Unemployment Rate (as a per Percentage of the Female Labor Force)

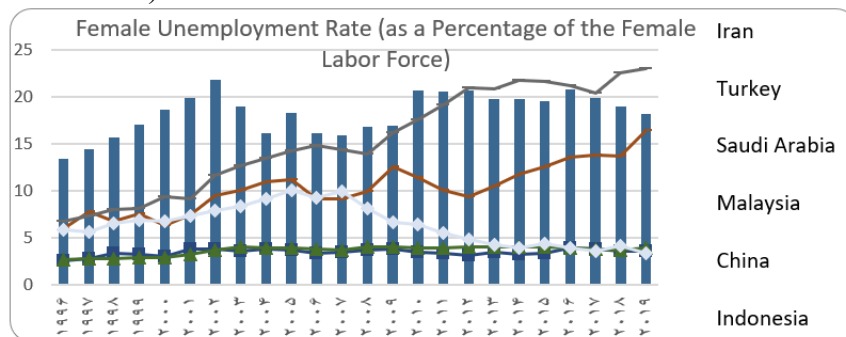


Chart 9 - Female unemployment rate (percentage of female labor force) - Part 1



misconception, to confine women to their homes or deprive them of freedom. Rather, Islam seeks to preserve women's dignity and security by prescribing moral conditions such as modest dress (ibid.). In an Islamic society, both men and women are free and possess the right to choose. Women, too, should participate alongside men in the essential decision-making processes of the country (Khomeini, 2010, p. 67) and cooperate, as much as their other responsibilities permit, in the construction and advancement of society (Khomeini, 1989, Vol. 6, pp. 300–302).

#### *The Perspective of His Eminence the Supreme Leader [Ayatollah Khamenei]*

Ayatollah Khamenei states that Islam not only does not oppose women's employment, provided it does not conflict with their fundamental role in child-rearing and preserving the family, but also considers such work necessary. He believes that every country inevitably requires the contribution of women in the workforce; however, this participation must not compromise women's human dignity and spiritual values (Mowghayi, 1994, p. 131). He further asserts that women themselves should strive—within their capacity—for the scientific, social, and constructive progress of the country. In this regard, there is no difference between men and women, just as there is no distinction between them in their ultimate purpose of creation, which is to attain spiritual perfection (Khamenei, 1998, Vol. 3, p. 137).

#### *The Perspective of Ayatollah Sistani*

Ayatollah Sistani holds that women's employment outside the home is permissible, provided it complies with Islamic principles and moral standards. If the work does not require women to compromise their modesty or hijab, there is no objection to their engagement in professional activities.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Official website of the office of the Supreme Authority, Mr. Sayyed Ali Hussein Sistani, questions and answers, jobs

### *Allamah Tabataba'i's View*

Allamah Tabataba'i, based on Qur'anic teachings, regards employment as a legitimate right of women. In his exegesis al-Mīzān, he discusses several verses referring to women's economic activities throughout history. For instance, in interpreting verse 6 of Surah al-Ṭalāq

“...And if they are pregnant, then spend on them until they deliver their burden; and if they breastfeed for you, give them their due payment...” (Ṭalāq: 6)- he explains that this verse indicates that wet-nursing has historically been a recognized profession for women, for which they received payment. The Qur'an, rather than prohibiting such work, explicitly acknowledges and legitimizes it (Tabataba'i, 1997, Vol. 19, p. 531).

Similarly, while interpreting verse 12 of Surah al-Qaṣaṣ

“*And We had forbidden to him [Moses] wet nurses before; so she said, 'Shall I direct you to a household that will rear him for you and will be sincere to him?'*” (Qaṣaṣ: 12)

he notes that the plural term *marāḍi'* (wet nurses) indicates that wet-nursing was a well-established and long-standing occupation for women (ibid., Vol. 16, p. 15).

Allamah further observes that before Islam, despite engaging in various forms of labor such as wet-nursing, midwifery, perfumery, street vending, shepherding, and trade, women were denied any financial rights or benefits, even from their own earnings. Islam abolished such injustices, granting women financial rights and economic independence. A review of women's historical experiences thus demonstrates that female employment has always existed, and Islam not only refrained from opposing it but also affirmed and institutionalized women's economic rights and independence (ibid., Vol. 2, pp. 273–279).

### *The View of Rashid Rida*

Rashid Rida, author of Tafsīr al-Manār, in interpreting verse 228 of Surah al-Baqarah

“And women shall have rights similar to those upon them, according to what is just; but men have a degree [of responsibility] over them, and Allah is Mighty and Wise.” (Baqarah: 228)

argues that God has granted women, in addition to their responsibilities, equitable rights, encouraging them to pursue knowledge not only in matters of faith and worship but also in sciences and skills required by society according to time and place. For example, he asserts that women from affluent families should acquire knowledge of commerce and business management (Rashid Rida, 2005, Vol. 2, p. 375).

He emphasizes that although women are not financially responsible for family expenses—these being the duty of the father before marriage and the husband thereafter—this does not preclude their right to work. Islam, in fact, endorses women’s economic participation, and the Prophet (PBUH) and the Imams (A.S.) facilitated legitimate avenues for such engagement.

Rashid Rida also references verse 234 of Surah al-Baqarah concerning widows’ right to remarry after the waiting period (*‘iddah*), a right denied in pre-Islamic times. He concludes that widowed women or those whose husbands cannot provide may engage in income-generating work, and that women’s participation in economic or social activities is permissible, provided it does not conflict with family dignity or domestic duties (*ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 218).

### **Synthesis of Juristic Views**

The majority of Shi‘i jurists do not reject women’s participation in economic activities. They legally permit women’s employment, though—based on the implicit implications of Qur’anic verses and prophetic traditions—they tend to prioritize family care, marital responsibilities, and child-rearing as women’s foremost duties.

### **Conclusion**

Employment, in its technical sense, refers to participation in an economic activity that results in the production of goods or services and generates income for the worker. Undoubtedly, the most fundamental role of women within the family context is to care for the husband, create a peaceful domestic environment, and nurture righteous offspring, ensuring their physical and emotional well-being.

However, while employment outside the home does not fall within women’s primary religious duties, neither the Qur’an nor the traditions

of the infallible Imams (A.S.) oppose it. In fact, in certain professions such as medicine, nursing, and education in girls' schools and women's institutions, women's employment becomes a social necessity for maintaining Islamic norms. Comparative statistical analyses further reveal that female employment rates in Iran's agricultural, industrial, and service sectors show a favorable and steadily improving trend, placing the country in a relatively acceptable position compared to several other nations.

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