

Wife As A Breadwinner For Family
(A Sociology of Law Study of Bulu Mario Village Society,
Pasangkayu)

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Abstract

This article discusses a phenomenon increasingly common as a social fact, the wife takes on the role of the main breadwinner in the family. Social and economic changes have caused a shift in the traditional role of the family, which places the husband as the main breadwinner. This study analyzes the impact of these changes on family and marital dynamics. This study uses observations and interviews with several families in the Bulu Mario community, Pasangkayu. As a result, when the wife becomes the main breadwinner, there is a change in the dynamics of power in the husband-wife relationship. Some couples face challenges in navigating these changing roles and in balancing family responsibilities with career demands. In addition, this article also discusses several social and cultural factors that influence people's perceptions of the wife's role as the main breadwinner. Stigma and pressure from the surrounding environment often become obstacles for couples who experience this change. This study concludes that these changes can have both positive and negative impacts depending on how couples manage their roles and responsibilities. Social support and changes in cultural norms are needed to accommodate this new role in the family.

Keywords: Wife, Breadwinner, Family, Socio-legal.

A. Introduction

Family is the earliest known social institution. The growth and development of human aspects both physically, psychologically or mentally, socially and spiritually, which will determine the success of their lives, is largely determined by the family environment. One person who has a strategic role in the family is a wife. The wife plays a multitasking role in the family. A wife is a strong support for her husband and children. They provide emotional support, motivation, and encouragement to achieve

their goals. By providing this support, the wife helps build strength and stability in the family.

Studies of the wife's role in the family have been common. These studies fall into three categories. *Firstly*, studies discussing wife as a partner and companion¹, *secondly*, wife as a household manager², and *thirdly*, wife as a parenting and caregiving.³ These studies, however, have not discussed how wife runs her dynamically role as a breadwinner for family.

This article is intended to explore the challenges faced by wives as breadwinners for family who maintain their family as strong as possible when her husband was completely in a condition that could not support the family's economy. It seeks to understand how wives have worked for the sake of building the family economy, at the same time, continuing to carry out her role as a housewife.

As part of its exploration, this article seeks to answer three questions. *First*, what is the reality of a wife who is the backbone of the family in Bulu Mario Village Society, Pasangkayu. *Second*, what is the sociology of law review of the wife as the backbone of the family and its implications in Bulu Mario Village Society, Pasangkayu. This question is closely related to the challenges faced by women in the family, particularly a wife, as a housewife with all her roles and sometimes conflicting values. This article departs from two assumptions. First, the main task of a wife is as a housewife. Second, *vis a vis* to the first, legally normatively, the wife is not

¹ Owosini Olabisi Olamande, "A partner as a Companion", <https://medium.com/@owoseniolabisi01> (01 Juni 2023); Sherif Stritof, "What Is Companionate Marriage and Is It Right for You?", <https://www.brides.com> (01 Juni 2023); Jahrine Okutsu, "What's the Difference Between Companionship and Relationship?", <https://enlightio.com> (01 Juni 2023).

² Curious Soul, "Isn't 'Home Manager' a more appropriate designation than 'house wife'?", <https://loveyourspouse.org> (01 Juni 2023); Lisa Hodgson, "The 'invisible load' and why it's time you quit your role as the household manager", <https://www.heartofhuman.com> (01 Juni 2023); Shikha Gandhi, "Let's get rid of the moniker 'housewife' and bring in 'house manager' instead", <https://www.linkedin.com> (01 Juni 2023).

³ David Rodriguez, "How to Help Parents Who are Caregiving for Their Spouses", <https://www.tapestryseior.com> (01 Juni 2023); Richard Schulz and Jill Eden (eds.), *Families Caring for an Aging America* (Washington DC: National Academies Press, 2016); Melinda Smith, "What is family caregiving?", <https://www.helpguide.org> (01 Juni 2023).

burdened with the obligation to earn a living, because that obligation rests on the shoulders of the husband as the head of the family.

B. Research Method

Research into position of women as a breadwinner of the family is important owing to three recent phenomena. Firstly, the number of wives who acts as the breadwinner for family has increased, while their regions of origin have diversified; this also holds true at Bulu Mario Village Society, Pasangkayu, the social situation discussed in this article. Secondly, even though the wife works outside but she does not forget her main role as a housewife, she can still divide their time between work and family matters. Thirdly, the dual role of women as breadwinners has a huge impact, especially in meeting their daily needs, such as food needs, educational expenses and other household needs.⁴

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), in 2015 working women reached 37.78% where there was an increase in 2016, reaching 38.16%. In 2017 it reached 38.63% where this year there was an increase which meant that working women were increasing, then in 2018 it reached 38.10% where there was a decrease but not so much. In 2019 more and more women were working, reaching 39.19%, this figure was the highest compared to previous years, in 2020 it experienced a very drastic decrease, reaching 34.65%. However, in 2021 there will be another increase so that it reaches 36.20%, this percentage is not as high as in 2019.⁵

From these data, it can be concluded that every year there are increases and decreases but the lowest figure is in 2020. Especially during the Covid 19 period when the Indonesian people's economy was declining and made people lack the

⁴ Ari Romdhani Tinjauan Sosiologi Hukum Islam Terhadap Istri Sebagai Tulang Punggung Keluarga (Studi Kasus Di Desa Bagik Polak Kecamatan Labuapi Kabupaten Lombok Barat) UIN Mataram, 2022.

⁵ Akbar Nurfadhillah, Perempuan yang Menjadi Tulang Punggung Keluarga, <https://kumparan.com/akbar-nurfadhillah/perempuan-yang-menjadi-tulang-punggung-keluarga-1z3XgnBEhw9/4>

economy so that women or housewives decided to take action to help raise the economy of his family by working.

This article is an empirical legal research. Data were qualitatively collected through two approaches, namely observation, interview and literature review. Observations were conducted in Bulu Mario Village, Pasangkayu, West Sulawesi. This village was chosen owing to the phenomenon that many wives run their role as breadwinners for family there as well as its significant contribution to family development in the surrounding community. Bulu Mario Village is a transmigration village programmed by the central government since November 19, 1991 which was initially led by the head of the transmigration settlement unit (KUPT) Karossa 1.

Further data were collected through a review of the literature on wife role in family development. Several of the works consulted did not only discuss wives as breadwinners for family, but also their contribution to Indonesian society. This review of the literature showed that they -at this time- play a big role, both as a person, wife, mother, and citizens who are obliged to educate the next generation. This reflects the fact that Indonesian women, especially wives, also take part in improving the welfare of Indonesian society.⁶

Qualitative data were obtained through the above-mentioned approaches and analyzed descriptively and phenomenologically. Data were first classified, then interpreted in accordance with the needs of the researcher. This descriptive–phenomenological approach viewed the working activities of the infowomen as a string of texts that could be explained and signified. To complement and strengthen this analysis, the findings of previous studies have also been utilized as texts.

C. Result and Discussion

Observations showed that a number of wives became the breadwinner of the family in Bulu Mario Village, Sarudu District, Pasangkayu Regency, West Sulawesi, for various reasons. Nurdia Aco explained that she took on a role in earning a living

⁶ Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan, Pentingnya Peran Perempuan Dalam Pembangunan Bangsa Di Era 4.0 <http://ppid.menlhk.go.id/berita/siaran-pers/4676>.

because her husband only worked as a cattle breeder, whose income could not cover his daily needs, coupled with the increasing needs of his family.⁷

Meanwhile, Salmiati, who works as a laying hen farm worker, said that she worked because she felt comfortable with her job, after all, she had been in this job before she got married, so her husband was aware of this situation. It is different from AL, who reasoned that he worked because he did not want to depend on his relatives, considering that her husband was elderly, so that in order to fulfill his obligations as a husband to provide for his wife, it did not work as it should.⁸

AL further explained that as a chicken trader, he collects them from collectors, with a lower buying price than the selling price. It was from that difference that he benefited, with a gross income of 400 thousand. The profit is 100 thousand, every day he goes to the market at 06:30 until his wares are sold out, around 11:00 - 12:00.⁹

This study found that the social reality of the wife who acts as the backbone of the family in the Bulu Mario community, Pasangkayu, is motivated by the inability of the husband to provide for his wife which is based on various factors, ranging from the condition of the husband who is old, sick, missing news, to losing his job. What is the meaning of this reality from the optics of legal sociology?

First, this reality confirms that there has actually been social change, the wife who was previously considered taboo to work as a breadwinner, and spending more time at home to take care of the house and care for her children, is now a common thing. This cannot be separated from social phenomena: the need for life is getting higher. Daily living needs, children's school fees and other economic needs will not be met if the wife does not try to replace her husband's role in earning a living.

⁷ Nurdia Aco, wawancara. Bekerja sebagai pedagang kios. Sebelumnya, ia sempat menjadi tenaga pengajar pada SMP Trans, sebagai seorang sarjana pendidikan (S.Pd.). pernikahannya sudah berjalan 25 tahun, dan dikaruniai seorang anak yang berusia 11 tahun, dan duduk di kelas 5 sekolah dasar.

⁸ AL, 54 tahun pekerjaan sebagai pedagang dan suaminya atas nama bapak Haji Usman dengan usia 84 tahun dengan keterangan tidak bekerja dikarenakan faktor usia sehingga tidak mampu untuk bekerja lagi.

⁹ Ibid.

It is economic demands that encourage wives to carry out the role of breadwinner. An analogy of social change like this can be found in reference to the obligation to pray. The law of origin of prayer is carried out standing. However, if you are unable to stand, you can do it by sitting. If you can't even sit, you can do it lying down, and so on. It is at this level that the flexibility of Islamic law lies. Therefore, this kind of analogy makes Islamic law more flexible, does not mean changing the substance, just as a wife who is the backbone of the family does not mean replacing the husband's function, but only limited to certain aspects. Where in this aspect the possibility is given for convenience.

Second, the wives in Bulu Mario Village, Pasangkayu have done what in terms of legal sociology is called an instrumentally rational action (zwekrationalitat), namely an action carried out based on conscious considerations and choices in relation to the purpose of an action and the tools used to achieve that goal. In this case, the wife who is the breadwinner of the family has consciously considered before taking over the role as the breadwinner of the family. This is evident from the statements of the informants that it is the responsibility of the husband to provide for themselves and their children, but they realize that the husband is no longer able to work due to rational reasons. The wives have the desired goal. They feel responsible to replace their husbands in earning a living so that they can continue living with their husbands and most importantly to finance the needs of their children, both in terms of education and other aspects.

Third, the wives perform value rational actions (wertrationalitat). An action whose purpose already exists in relation to absolute value and final value to the individual. Actions to become the breadwinner of the family have been considered consciously, and are a tool to achieve the goals of this value action, the wife has given her life to serve her husband and care for her children since the marriage contract took place. Wives also understand that their husbands' ability to provide for themselves and their children is not as expected. For them, the wife's duty is to maintain the integrity

of the family with all her might no matter what the circumstances are, even without support from her husband.

For these wives, being allowed to work by their husbands is already something to be grateful for in order to sustain the survival of the family. In fact, they think that what they are doing is a noble thing from a religious point of view, because it is alms and charity for their husbands.

Fourth, the wives perform affective action, an action that is dominated by feelings or emotions without any conscious reflection or planning. These actions are often carried out without careful planning and full awareness. In carrying out the role as the breadwinner of the family, the wife is dominated by emotions or feelings of wanting to meet their daily needs, especially the needs of their children. Under these circumstances, the wives remain tolerant and do not see this as a problem, while continuing to maintain harmony with their husbands.

The husband's obligation to earn a living is actually very clear in Islam and the law as stated in the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI), Article 80 paragraph (4) concerning the husband's obligation, that according to his income, the husband bears: (a) maintenance, *kiswah*, and residence for the wife, (b) household expenses, maintenance costs, and medical expenses for the wife and children; (c) education costs for children. However, along with the emancipation of women in all fields, there have been social changes involving women's participation in supporting the family. Due to various factors, as stated above, a wife plays an important role in fulfilling the family's maintenance needs.

In the course of the household, the husband is sometimes in a position of not being able to provide for his family, therefore it is appropriate for the wife to participate in helping the husband in meeting the needs of the family. Of course, according to the ability of the wife to her husband.

D. Conclusion

The existence of a wife as the breadwinner of the family (breadwinner) in the community of Bulu Mario Village, Pasangkayu, is inseparable from internal

conditions in their own household, this is caused by various factors, including, her husband does not have a job at all, her husband is chronically ill, and her husband is elderly. However, this has become commonplace because of social changes in society. The wife should have the main role as the person taking care of the house and caring for the children, but social facts show that the husband, who is supposed to provide a living, is unable to carry out his obligations, while the necessities of life continue to increase. In such circumstances, it is the wife who replaces the husband's role, because after all, even though the main task of the wife is to take care of the household and educate the children, she is also responsible for the survival of the family.

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