

WOMEN'S ISSUES

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES

Edited By

Zaleha Kamaruddin

Zeenath Kausar



Women's Affairs Secretariat
International Islamic University Malaysia

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CONTENTS

About Contributor	iv
Acknowledgement	v
Preface	vi
The Status And Role Of Women in Feminist Political Theory and Islam	1
<i>Dr. Zeenath Kausar</i> <i>Department of Political Science</i>	
Couples' Preferences for Employment, The Division of Family Labour and Women's Distress	17
<i>Dr. Noraini Mohd. Noor</i> <i>Department of Psychology</i>	
Women and Divorce: Legal Response	37
<i>Dr. Zaleha Kamaruddin</i> <i>Kulliyah of Laws</i>	
Malaysian Women in the Performing Arts and the "Non" - Issue of Female Stereotyping	75
<i>Dr. Nur Nina Zuhra and Janet Pillai</i> <i>Department of English Language and Literature</i>	

COUPLES PREFERENCES FOR EMPLOYMENT, THE DIVISION OF FAMILY LABOUR AND WOMEN'S DISTRESS

Introduction

This study describes the home lives of employed women and their partners/husbands in terms of the division of labour (household chores and child care) and congruity between the couple with regard to their preferences about the women's employment status (i.e., whether or not the women worked outside the home), in relation to women's levels of psychological distress. In the sample of 120 English couples, the results showed considerable inequality in the division of labour within the home between the women and their partners. Regardless of their occupational status, the women reported spending significantly more time on household chores and child care than did their partners. Greater inequality predicted greater distress among the women at Time 2 (a period of 8 months from the first assessment) relative to Time 1. The findings also demonstrated that women who preferred to be employed and stayed in full-time employment despite their husbands preferring them not to work (giving rise to incongruence) had significantly higher symptoms of psychological distress at Time 2. The women's own preference for working, however, was not predictive of their levels of distress. These findings suggest that one partner's behaviour may spill over to affect the well-being of the other.

With more couples adopting life-styles in which both members have jobs outside the home, the traditional model of co-ordinating work and family life, with the husband as breadwinner and the wife as home-maker, may no longer be viable. As men become more involved with their families and women with job-related demands, increased levels of conflict between work and family may result. Researchers have begun to examine the work-family conflict as a source of stress that may influence well-being (e.g., Bacharach, Bamberger and Conley, 1991; Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992; Voydanoff, 1987). Work-family conflict may also function as an intervening pathway through which conditions at work affect the quality of family life and vice versa (Bacharach, Bamberger and Conley, 1991; Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992).

One important area of the work-family relationship is the home lives of families in which both partners are employed. Thus, one objective of the present