The Well-Being of Working Couples: A Sociological Study Grounded in Islamic Values

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the well-being of working couples in the Klang Valley by focusing on the clarity, involvement, and balance of dual roles, as well as their relationship with household well-being. Employing a mixed-method approach in two phases, the first phase involved an online questionnaire (N = 119), while the second comprised interviews and focus group discussions. Findings indicate that dual-role involvement and work-family balance are significantly correlated with well-being, whereas role clarity alone is insufficient. Five core components were identified—belief, moral values, communication, relational strength, and management—organised into two skill dimensions: intrapersonal and managerial. An initial review of Islamic values underscores the importance of applying knowledge through practice and achieving internal-external balance as normative guidance aligned with the natural order (sunnat al-kawn). Islamic teachings emphasise that knowledge must be accompanied by action, and that inner transformation is the foundation of outward well-being. The strength of the heart and intrapersonal values such as faith, sincerity, and responsibility serve as key determinants of marital harmony. The study also highlights that household well-being is rooted in the integrity of internal values, which subsequently shape communication, relationships, and shared life management. This study offers both empirical and spiritual foundations for the development of holistic family well-being policies, although it is limited by sample imbalances in terms of gender, socioeconomic status, and education level.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasises the importance of social harmony and individual well-being. SDG 3, in particular, focuses on "good health and well-being," which extends beyond physical health to encompass psychosocial balance and life satisfaction (Sachs et al., 2020; Ismail et al., 2020). In this context, community well-being cannot be realised without stable household institutions.

The household is the foundation of the social structure. When this unit functions harmoniously, it contributes to the formation of a prosperous family and, consequently, strengthens society as a whole (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rohana & Azlan, 2021). However, contemporary changes in social structure have reshaped the traditional roles between husband and wife. Women are no longer confined to domestic duties alone; they are increasingly contributing to the economy through their careers outside the home.

While this shift brings recognition and opportunities, it also presents challenges in the form of role conflict and imbalance in responsibilities (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Yusof & Hassan, 2019). If not managed well, these issues may undermine household stability. The situation is especially challenging for dual-role couples (dual-earner couples) living in urban areas, where work-related stress is typically high (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

Therefore, achieving a balance between work and family roles becomes crucial to maintaining household harmony. A clear understanding of responsibilities and cooperation rooted in empathy can contribute significantly to the psychosocial well-being of both partners (Noraini et al., 2022). In the long run, household well-being will directly impact the broader success of sustainable development goals.

Accordingly, this article seeks to fulfil the following objectives:

1. To measure the level of role clarity, role involvement, and work-family balance among working couples;
2. To examine the extent to which these three dimensions—role clarity, role involvement, and work-family balance—contribute to household well-being;
3. To analyse the relationship between these role dimensions and household well-being among working couples;
4. To identify other contributing factors that support the well-being of dual-role households;
5. To propose strategies for strengthening the well-being of Muslim working couples (dual-role) in the Klang Valley; and
6. To explore Islamic perspectives, based on the Qur'an, Hadith, and traditional Arab wisdom, in understanding household well-being as normative guidance toward building a prosperous family.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, comprising two complementary phases to obtain a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The first phase involved quantitative data collection through an online survey, while the second phase focused on qualitative methods through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

In the first phase, a total of 119 datasets were collected and analysed using descriptive statistical methods. The second phase involved ten participants selected through purposive sampling, based on specific criteria aligned with the objectives of the study. This combined methodological strategy enabled the researcher to triangulate findings to enhance the validity and reliability of the results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Sidek Mohd Noah, 2016; Hussein, 2009).

In line with the interdisciplinary nature of the research, the study also incorporated an axiological Islamic inquiry into the subject matter by examining religious sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and traditional Arab wisdom and proverbs. This element provided not only an empirical reflection of social realities but also strengthened the argument from the perspective of Islamic values, offering a normative dimension relevant to the formulation of policies for family well-being (Abdullah, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results from the first phase of the study revealed that all four main constructs recorded relatively high levels. The mean scores and standard deviations obtained were as follows: role clarity (M=4.70, SD=0.32), role engagement (M=4.71, SD=0.35), work-family balance (M=4.42, SD=0.46), and household well-being (M=4.58, SD=0.50). While all three constructs related to dual-role dynamics scored highly, work-family balance recorded the lowest score among the four.

In the analysis of relationships between constructs, it was found that role clarity did not show a significant relationship with household well-being. In contrast, both role engagement and work-family balance showed significant positive relationships with household well-being. These findings suggest that clarity of roles alone is insufficient to guarantee well-being; rather, active engagement and balanced management of work and family responsibilities play more crucial roles. Detailed results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Regression Analysis Results – Relationship Between Role Clarity, Role Engagement, and Work-Family Balance with Household Well-being

Predictor Variable	**Adjusted R^2**	**Beta Coefficient (B)**	**Standard Deviation (SD)**	**p-value**	**Hypothesis Outcome**
Role Clarity → Well-being	.642	-0.01	0.071	.886	Not Supported
Role Engagement → Well-being		0.301	0.086	.000	Supported
Work-Family Balance → Well-being		0.562	0.092	.000	Supported

Meanwhile, the second phase of the study identified five key components emerging from qualitative analysis: beliefs (*pegangan*), core values (*nilai murni*), communication, relational strength (*kekuatan hubungan*), and management (*pengurusan*). These components were further grouped into two skill-based dimensions: **intrapersonal skills** and **management skills**.

These components serve as a foundational framework that strengthens the dimensions of role clarity and engagement, while also facilitating a healthier balance between work and family roles — ultimately contributing to the enhancement of household well-being.

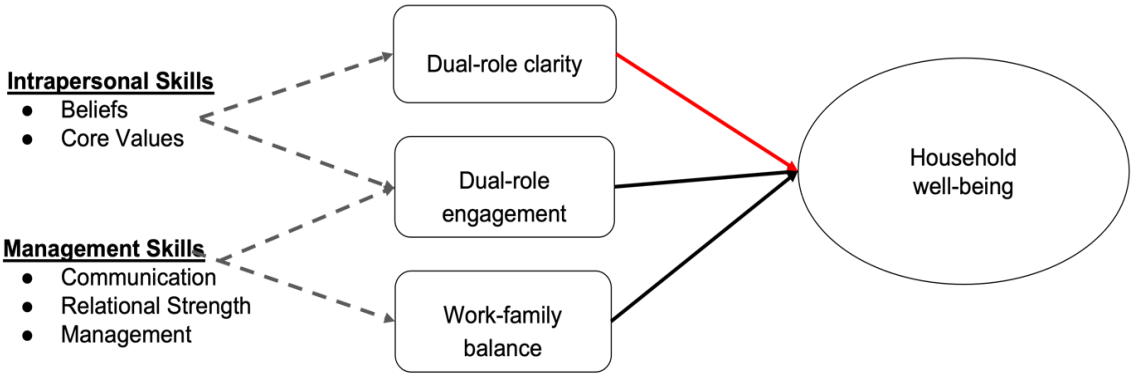

Figure 1: Summary of Findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2

Figure 1 summarises the empirical findings of Phase 1 and the thematic insights of Phase 2. The quantitative phase highlighted the significant influence of role engagement and work-family balance on household well-being, while the qualitative phase reinforced these findings through emergent themes related to intrapersonal and managerial competencies.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge several limitations of this study, particularly in terms of sample distribution imbalance. A significant majority of the respondents were women from the M40 socioeconomic group, highly educated, aged between 30 to 41 years, and had been married for six to fifteen years. This demographic skew may influence the extent to which the findings can be generalised to the broader population.

Table 2: Demographic Summary of Participants

Participant	Gender	Self Age	Spouse Age	Occupation (Self)	Occupation (Spouse)	No. of Dependents	Marriage Duration
Interview 1	F	39	39	Government Sector	Private Sector	3	12 years
Interview 2	M	37	37	Government Sector	Self-employed	2	13 years
Interview 3	M	33	33	Government Sector	Self-employed	2	10 years
Interview 4	M	36	36	Government Sector	Private Sector	3	9 years
Focus Group Discussion (FGD) 1	F	27	33	Private Sector	Private Sector	5	6 years
Focus Group Discussion (FGD) 2	M	43	40	Private Sector	Government Sector	5	12 years
Focus Group Discussion (FGD) 3	F	31	28	Private Sector	Private Sector	1	3 years

M = Male, F = Female

FINDINGS ON THE ISLAMIC VALUE SURVEY

In the first part of this study, the researchers found that, overall, respondents reported relatively high scores across four key aspects explored. These aspects were: the extent to which they were clear about their respective roles as husband or wife (*dual-role clarity*), the extent to which they actively participated in carrying out both roles (*dual-role engagement*), the extent to which they managed to balance work responsibilities and family life (*work-family balance*), and the level of happiness and harmony within their household (*household well-being*).

Although all four aspects showed high scores, achieving a proper balance between work and family remained the most challenging aspect.

When the researchers examined how these four dimensions were interrelated, they discovered that merely understanding one's role as a husband or wife was not sufficient to ensure household well-being. What proved to be more crucial was that both partners actively engaged in fulfilling their respective roles and consistently strove to balance the demands of work with family responsibilities. In other words, household well-being does not rely solely on knowing one's role, but more importantly on how that role is enacted and adapted in daily life.

This insight resonates with a well-known Arabic proverb:

العِلْمُ بِلَا عَمَلٍ كَالشَّجَر بِلَا ثَمَر

which means: ***"Knowledge without action is like a tree that bears no fruit."***

This proverb reminds us that possessing knowledge necessitates the responsibility to act upon it. Otherwise, that knowledge becomes barren—like a fruitless tree—yielding no benefit. In this context, awareness of one's marital role only leads to household well-being when it is consistently translated into everyday practice.

As the Qur'an declares:

(إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ ۗ)

"Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves." *(Qur'an, Surah al-Ra'd, 13:11)*

This verse underlines the principle that internal change must precede any meaningful external transformation.

In the second phase of the study, the researchers identified five important dimensions that contributed to household well-being: worldview (spiritual outlook), moral values, communication skills, strength in the marital relationship, and the ability to manage shared life responsibilities. These five elements were further categorised into two core skill domains:

1. **Intrapersonal skills**, which refer to the capacity to manage oneself emotionally and morally; and

2. **Managerial skills**, which denote the ability to coordinate responsibilities and relationships in daily life.

These five components form the essential foundation that helps married couples understand their roles more clearly, engage more actively in mutual relationships, and better balance the demands of work and family life. When these skills are cultivated and practised, they have the potential to significantly enhance the harmony and happiness of married life.

It is narrated by al-Bukhari (Hadith no. 52) and Muslim (Hadith no. 1599) that the Prophet Muhammad said:

أَلَا وَإِنَّ فِي الجَسَدِ مُضْغَةً، إِذَا صَلُحَتْ صَلُحَ الجَسَدُ كُلُّهُ، وَإِذَا فَسَدَتْ فَسَدَ الجَسَدُ كُلُّهُ، أَلَا وَهِيَ القَلْبُ

"Verily, in the body there is a piece of flesh; if it is sound, the whole body is sound, and if it is corrupted, the whole body is corrupted. Truly, it is the heart."

This authentic hadith highlights the vital importance of nurturing one's **inner life**—namely, one's *faith (iman)* and *Islamic moral character*. When these **intrapersonal aspects** are grounded in sincerity and ethical virtue, they naturally strengthen one's ability to communicate, deepen intimacy between spouses, and inspire more effective management of shared life responsibilities.

This dynamic between inner and outer life is well understood by the Arab intellectual tradition, which expresses it through the wise saying:

كُلُّ إِنَاءٍ بِمَا فِيهِ يَنْضَحُ

translated as: ***"Every vessel spills out what it contains."***

In essence, if a person's inner being is corrupt, it is almost impossible for their speech or actions to be noble. Likewise, if the inner self is virtuous, it is unlikely for their words and deeds to reflect otherwise. Outer conduct is merely a reflection of the inner condition.

That said, the researchers do not suggest that only inward aspects need attention. In Islam, both the inner and outer dimensions of a person are equally emphasised. However, as a point of affirmation, this study underscores the particular importance of **intrapersonal goodness**—as it is this foundation that ultimately supports the flourishing of all other aspects.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of this study reveal several critical issues that affect the well-being of married working couples. [1] There exists a clear challenge in achieving balance between work demands and family responsibilities. [2] The success of a household hinges on a combination of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills possessed by both partners. [3] The study also records a shift in the distribution of roles, whereby husbands are now more involved in domestic tasks when wives also work and contribute to the family economy. [4] Clarity, involvement, and balance in family roles can be achieved when both partners actively engage through access to knowledge, information, and education. [5] Islamic values and practices play a vital role as the foundation in shaping a harmonious system of communication, relationships, and household management — serving as a firm basis for reinforcing clarity and balance of roles between husband and wife. [6] From an Islamic perspective, the equilibrium of household roles is not merely a social ideal, but a moral responsibility that contributes to spiritual well-being, mutual respect, and the fulfilment of divinely ordained duties — thus forming a critical pillar in sustaining harmony within working Muslim families.

The well-known Arabic proverb, *"**Knowledge without action…**"*, illustrates that merely knowing something brings no benefit unless it is put into practice. This aligns with the study's findings that clarity about one's role as husband or wife is not sufficient to ensure household well-being; rather, it is the active engagement in fulfilling these roles and the continuous effort to balance work and family obligations that make a greater impact. Furthermore, **Surah al-Ra'd (13:11)** emphasizes the importance of internal change as a precursor to external transformation. The Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) saying, *"**Indeed, within the body there is a piece of flesh…**"*, referring to the heart as the central organ that governs the entirety of human life — including one's household — reinforces the conclusion that well-being at home greatly depends on strong intrapersonal elements such as faith and virtuous values. These, in turn, give rise to communication skills, intimate marital relationships, and effective shared life management.

In parallel, the Arabic proverb *"**Every vessel spills out what it contains**"* underscores the idea that a person's inner quality will inevitably manifest in their speech and actions. Therefore, household well-being within an Islamic framework is not merely the result of understanding, but the outcome of a sincere commitment to practising values and fulfilling roles in a balanced, sustainable, and faith-guided manner.

In this regard, it is recommended that future research takes into account all the findings, limitations, and

conclusions identified in this study. Such a step will help in formulating a more holistic model or module as a solution towards sustaining household well-being among dual-income couples.

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