

Khadijah Binti Khuwaylid: Intelligence, Character, and Her Role in Strengthening Islam through the Family Institution

Nur Bakri Abd Hamid¹, Muqarrabah Labiibah Sadini., Hazrul Hizam Karim., Muhammad Izzul Syahmi Zulkepli., Ahmad Tarmizi bin Zakaria

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Open University Malaysia

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90200022>

Received: 24 June 2025; Accepted: 04 July 2025; Published: 12 September 2025

ABSTRACT

Khadijah bint Khuwaylid RA was a remarkable figure whose intelligence, character, and unwavering support played a pivotal role in the early development of Islam. As a successful entrepreneur and the first wife of Prophet Muhammad SAW, her influence extended beyond personal devotion, shaping the moral and economic foundations of the early Muslim community. This article examines her contributions through the lenses of leadership, business ethics, and socio-religious influence. The study adopts a qualitative, phenomenological methodology to explore Khadijah's legacy and its relevance to contemporary Muslim women, particularly within the context of family institutions and empowerment. Data are collected from classical Islamic texts and biographies such as *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum*, alongside secondary sources including academic works and case studies. In-depth interviews with Muslim women leaders in Malaysia further enrich the findings. Thematic analysis is employed to identify key themes related to Khadijah's economic wisdom, moral strength, and emotional support during the early revelations. These findings are then contextualized within modern discussions on ethical leadership, women's empowerment, and faith-driven social responsibility. The study concludes that Khadijah's legacy offers timeless insights into balancing career, faith, and family life. Her example challenges common misconceptions about gender roles in Islam and highlights the critical role of women in shaping both historical and contemporary Muslim societies.

Keywords: Character, Intelligence, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid RA, Prophet Muhammad SAW, Woman-Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

The role of women in early Islamic history was not merely supplementary to the social narrative but formed the foundation for strengthening the Islamic mission and establishing a stable family institution. Within this framework, Khadijah binti Khuwaylid RA emerged as an exemplary figure whose direct support for Prophet Muhammad SAW significantly contributed to the formative development of Islam, through her intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and economic contributions (Al-Mubarakfuri, 2002).

As the first individual to embrace Islam and the wife of the Prophet SAW, Khadijah RA demonstrated remarkable intellectual qualities and noble character. Her wisdom in decision-making, refined manners, and steadfast moral and material support rendered her an exceptional companion (Lemu, 1990). She did not only play the role of a wife within a domestic scope but also served as a trusted adviser, a source of confidence, and a key contributor to the psychological and emotional stability of the Prophet SAW during the early and challenging stages of his prophethood (Ramadan, 2007). This clearly indicates that her intellectual capacity and personal traits were instrumental in effectively supporting the Islamic mission.

Within the family institution, Khadijah RA also played a pivotal role in instilling Islamic values in their household. The home she and the Prophet SAW built, founded upon mutual trust, compassion, and support, provided a strong internal foundation that contributed to the Prophet's SAW inner resilience and balance in fulfilling his duties as the Messenger of Allah (Stowasser, 1994). This underscores the significance of the

family as a primary institution for nurturing and preserving Islamic teachings. Furthermore, the values and actions demonstrated by Khadijah RA as a wife, mother, and companion formed an influential model for Islamic family principles and women's contributions within the community. Through her multifaceted role, she exemplified how women could meaningfully contribute to the development of the ummah, not only through public influence but also from within the structure of the family itself (Stowasser, 1994). Accordingly, this study aims to analyse Khadijah RA's intellectual traits and personal character, explore her role in shaping and sustaining the Islamic message through the family institution, and examine how her values and actions informed Islamic family principles and the broader role of women in Muslim society.

Problem Statement

Women have long played a crucial role in strengthening Islam through the family institution, with their intelligence and character serving as key components in the development of early Islamic society. However, contemporary challenges persist in fully realizing their potential, especially in areas such as financial literacy, leadership, and digital engagement in religious discourse. A significant issue in the modern context is the gender gap in financial literacy, which can undermine women's ability to manage family resources effectively. Despite the critical role Muslim women play in ensuring the financial well-being of their families, studies show that many still face barriers in gaining financial knowledge, which hinders their economic independence and their contributions to the family institution (Isa et. al, 2023). Moreover, societal perceptions continue to limit women's leadership roles in some regions. For example, research from Jordan shows that female leaders often face cultural stereotypes that constrain their ability to lead both in the family and community, despite their potential to guide and strengthen Islamic values (Koburtay et. al, 2023).

Additionally, the rise of digital technology presents opportunities and challenges for women in Islamic societies. Female ulama in Indonesia have leveraged digital platforms to overcome patriarchal barriers, expanding their reach in teaching and religious discourse. This digital engagement allows women to disseminate Islamic teachings more effectively and reinforces their pivotal role in the family institution (Qoirunnisa et. al, 2023). To fully realize women's potential in strengthening Islam through the family institution, addressing these challenges is crucial. Enhancing financial literacy, challenging stereotypes, and fostering digital engagement are essential steps in empowering women to contribute more effectively to the Islamic mission.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this review, we will segregate the literature into three components which consist of The Role of Women in Early Islamic History, Islamic Perspectives on Women's Intelligence and Wisdom, Character Building and Emotional Strength in Islamic Marriages, Partnership and Equality in Marriage According to the Prophetic Model, Economic Empowerment and Contribution of Women in Islam, and Contemporary Challenges of Muslim Wives in Malaysia.

The Role of Women in Early Islamic History

In the early days of Islam, women played a crucial role in supporting Prophet Muhammad and helping to spread his message. After the first revelation, when the Prophet was deeply shaken, he returned home to seek comfort from his wife, Khadijah RA. He asked her to cover him, and in that moment, Khadijah offered him more than just physical comfort. She reassured him with unwavering faith, reminding him that he was chosen to guide his people from ignorance to truth. Khadijah was the first to believe in him (Riyadi, Saerozi & Savitri, 2021). From that moment, she stood by his side through every challenge. Even when the Prophet faced opposition and threats from his own people, Khadijah's support never wavered.

Khadijah's role in the early days of Islam was nothing short of foundational. She wasn't just the Prophet's wife; she was the first person to truly believe in his message, and she played an active role in helping Islam grow, both spiritually and socially. Her emotional, moral, and financial support gave the Prophet the strength to continue his mission, even when the community was under threat. Khadijah used her wealth and influence to

back the growing Muslim community, ensuring that the Prophet's message could take root. She proved that Muslim women have always been key players, both in the family and in society. And this legacy continues today. In Malaysia, many wives, like Khadijah, are strong, active contributors to both their families and their communities. Women such as Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, who advocates for women's rights and social justice, show just how much of an impact Malaysian wives can have on society (Wain, 2021). Many women in Malaysia also lead by shaping their children's values or running family businesses while balancing their roles at home. These modern examples reflect Khadijah's spirit strong, capable women who are not only the backbone of their families but also agents of positive change in their communities.

Islamic Perspectives on Women's Intelligence and Wisdom

Khadijah RA is a shining example of the wisdom and strength women possess. As the first to believe in Prophet Muhammad's message, she demonstrated not only remarkable insight but also a sharp, strategic mind. Her success as a businesswoman was evident in how she expertly managed her wealth, becoming a successful entrepreneur (Tashgheer, 2021). But Khadijah's contributions went beyond just managing finances. In the early days of Islam, she played a key role by offering not only emotional support but also wise counsel, helping the Prophet navigate the challenges they faced together. Khadijah RA was more than just a supportive wife. She was a key figure in the early spread of Islam (sbaihat, 2022). Her wealth and business expertise were vital in sustaining the Prophet and his companions, particularly during their persecution by the Quraysh in Makkah. Her contributions weren't limited to emotional support, she provided both strategic guidance and material assistance, helping the Muslim community survive and grow. This challenges the traditional stereotype that women's roles are merely supportive. Khadijah proved that women can be powerful agents of change, shaping both their families and society.

In Islam, women are encouraged to use their intellect and strategic thinking in all aspects of life, whether it be in personal decision-making, business, or social leadership. Today, this is reflected in the increasing number of women in Malaysia excelling in various fields, from business and politics to education and social activism. One notable example is Siti Nurhaliza, a famous singer, entrepreneur, philanthropist, wife, and mother. Beyond her music career, Siti has skillfully expanded into business with her cosmetic line, SimplySiti, all while maintaining a strong family life. Her success shows how women can excel in both their professional and personal roles, embodying the Islamic teachings that empower women to be proactive, wise, and influential in all areas of life.

Character Building and Emotional Strength in Islamic Marriages

Khadijah RA embodied qualities of loyalty, trustworthiness, patience, and empathy throughout her life. She was the first to believe in Prophet Muhammad after his first revelation, standing by him with unwavering support. Her trust in him was clear when she handed over her wealth and business, fully confident in his integrity. Even as the early Muslim community faced intense hardship, including the Quraysh boycott, Khadijah remained calm and resolute, offering both emotional and practical support (Muhammad, 2021). Her deep empathy allowed her to comfort the Prophet during his most challenging times, helping him stay focused on his mission.

These same qualities of loyalty, trust, patience, and empathy are essential for building strong, resilient families. Khadijah's life serves as a powerful example of how these values strengthen relationships, particularly in marriage. Her steadfast support of the Prophet through tough times sets a timeless example for Muslim families today. Her actions continue to inspire, fostering love, trust, and resilience within the home. In today's world, the same principles can be applied to strengthen marriages and handle family responsibilities with dignity. A modern example of this is Siti Nurhaliza, a renowned singer, entrepreneur, wife, and mother. She has successfully balanced her professional career with a deep commitment to her family. Siti's ability to manage both her personal and professional life with grace reflects the power of faith in guiding one's responsibilities. Like Khadijah, she demonstrates that loyalty, trust, and patience are the foundation of a stable, loving marriage.

Partnership and Equality in Marriage According to the Prophetic Model

The marriage between Prophet Muhammad SAW and Khadijah RA was a beautiful example of mutual respect, trust, and support. They worked as partners, both in their personal lives and in their shared responsibilities. Despite Khadijah being a successful and powerful businesswoman (Anis, 2019), her role as an equal partner in her marriage to the Prophet was never diminished. She stood by him through thick and thin, offering not only emotional support but also wise counsel, particularly during the early, challenging days of Islam. Her insight was vital when the Prophet faced opposition from his own community. Their relationship was built on open communication and mutual support. Both of them contributed intellectually and emotionally to their shared mission (Bahri & Batoebara, 2020). Khadijah brought her wisdom and business experience to guide the Prophet, while he shared his vision for Islam, allowing her to actively help shape its growth. Their marriage was based on collaboration, not submission or dominance. It showed that Islamic marriages are meant to nurture both partners, fostering emotional and spiritual growth together.

This kind of partnership is not just a thing of the past. Today in Malaysia, women like Neelofa, an accomplished entrepreneur, actress, and television personality, embody the same values of mutual respect and shared responsibility. Neelofa, known for her successful fashion brand Naelofar, has built a thriving career while maintaining a strong, supportive relationship with her husband, Haris Ismail. Their marriage, based on collaboration instead of control, mirrors the same principles seen in the marriage of Prophet Muhammad and Khadijah. Neelofa's ability to balance her career, philanthropy, and family life shows that, just like in early Islam, a healthy and successful marriage today is rooted in equality, respect, and teamwork.

Economic Empowerment and Contribution of Women in Islam

Khadijah RA is a powerful example of economic empowerment for women in Islam, showing that women can excel both in business and in their spiritual lives. As a successful businesswoman, she broke societal norms by proving that women could engage in economic activities without compromising the ethical values rooted in Islam. Her wealth was not only a personal achievement but was also used to support Prophet Muhammad SAW and the early Muslim community, particularly during times of hardship and persecution. She is one of the women who made significant contribution to Islam (Bahri & Batoebara, 2020). Khadijah's financial support of the early Islamic mission shows just how crucial women can be in helping both their families and society move forward.

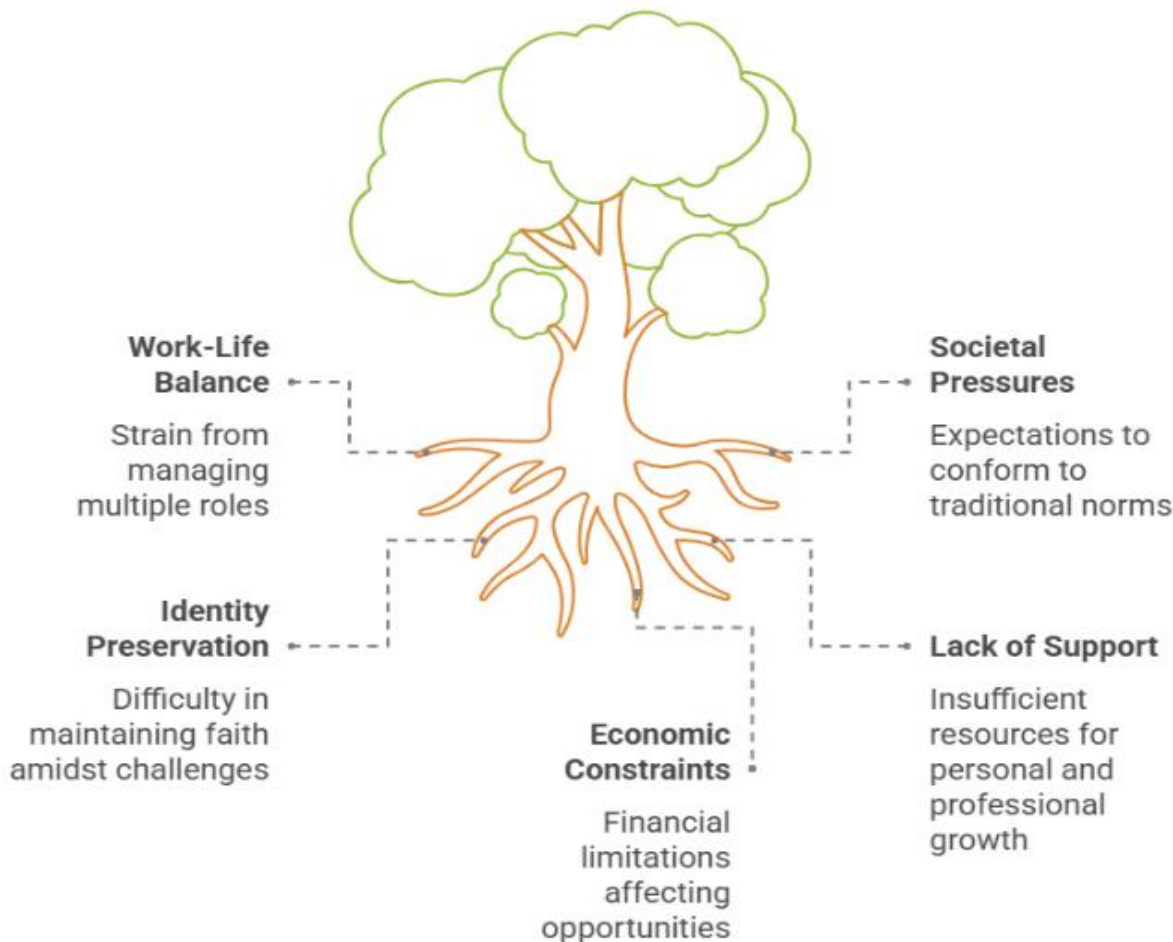
Islam strongly supports women's involvement in economic activities, encouraging financial independence while ensuring that ethical principles are upheld. Women in Islam are empowered to engage in business, trade, and entrepreneurship, as long as they do so with honesty, fairness, and integrity values that are central to the Qur'an and Sunnah. Islam teaches that women should use their financial resources not just for personal gain but to benefit their families, communities, and the wider ummah, all while maintaining a commitment to justice and morality. For Muslim women in Malaysia, economic empowerment provides the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to both their families and society. A prime example is Puan Sri Zeti Akhtar Aziz, the former Governor of Bank Negara Malaysia. As the first woman to hold this prestigious position, she skillfully balanced her career with her responsibilities as a mother and wife. Zeti's success in the financial sector, combined with her unwavering commitment to Islamic values and ethical governance, demonstrates how Muslim women can excel in their careers while simultaneously making significant contributions to their families and communities. Her leadership in economic policy, along with her dedication to social responsibility, reflects the Islamic ideal of women as active participants in society—empowering them to play an essential role in the economy and society while remaining steadfast in their values of fairness, justice, and integrity.

Contemporary Challenges of Muslim Wives in Malaysia

Khadijah RA continues to serve as a timeless role model for Muslim wives (Rahemtulla & Ababneh, 2021), offering valuable insights on how to navigate the personal and social challenges of contemporary life. Her strength, resilience, and unwavering support for Prophet Muhammad SAW during the early days of Islam

provide a powerful example for women today who are balancing work, family, and faith. In modern society, many Muslim women face numerous pressures, from the demands of their careers to managing family responsibilities, all while striving to preserve their Islamic identity. Khadijah's life shows that it is possible to excel in multiple roles while staying true to one's faith and values (Soim et. al, 2024). With determination, strategic thinking, and mutual support, women can overcome the challenges they face and continue to make meaningful contributions to their families, communities, and society.

Figure 2.0: Challenges Faced by Muslim Wives in Malaysia



Today, Muslim women are confronted with the challenges of balancing work and family life, meeting societal expectations, and maintaining their Islamic identity. These pressures can sometimes make it difficult to stay true to one's faith while managing various roles. However, Khadijah RA's example of skillfully balancing her business, family life, and support for the early Islamic mission proves that it is possible to thrive professionally while remaining deeply committed to spiritual responsibilities. By embracing Islamic values and drawing inspiration from Khadijah's legacy, Muslim women today can successfully integrate their faith into every aspect of their lives, achieving personal success without compromising their beliefs.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach to explore the role of Khadijah binti Khuwaylid in early Islamic history and her impact on contemporary Muslim women, particularly in the context of family institutions and empowerment. The study is guided by a phenomenological framework, aiming to understand and interpret the lived experiences and legacy of Khadijah as a model for modern Muslim wives. Data will be collected from a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include classical Islamic texts, biographies, and historical accounts of Khadijah's life, such as Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum and The Sealed Nectar. Secondary sources will include academic articles, books, and contemporary case studies that examine the role of Muslim women in family and society today, especially in Malaysia.

Thematic analysis will be used to identify and analyses recurring themes and patterns in the data. This method allows for an in-depth understanding of Khadijah's intelligence, character, and economic empowerment, while also connecting her historical role to the challenges faced by contemporary Muslim women. Ethical approval will be sought from the relevant academic bodies, ensuring that participants' privacy and confidentiality are respected. The findings will provide a comprehensive view of how Islamic teachings, particularly the example of Khadijah, continue to shape the roles of Muslim women in balancing career, family, and faith in modern societies like Malaysia.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The Dual Roles of Contemporary Muslim Women in Family and Career

Muslim women in Malaysia today are taking on dual roles as wives, mothers, and professionals. A study by Awang et al. (2019) found that 30.5% of women work to support their husbands, while 32.9% are the main breadwinners, meaning over 62% of women are employed due to family responsibilities (Awang et al., 2019).

Islam permits women to work, provided their familial obligations are not neglected. This is supported by the Qur'anic verse in Surah Al-Qasas (28:77):

“Seek the life to come through what God has granted you, but do not forget your share of the present world...”

This suggests that Islam encourages balance between worldly matters and spiritual life, including work and family responsibilities.

Challenges in Balancing Career, Life and Religion Among Muslim Wives in Malaysia

Muslim working women face considerable challenges in balancing professional duties, family life, and religious commitments. Salleh & Yunus (2023) noted that work-family conflict contributes to mental stress, declining health, and reduced life satisfaction (Salleh & Yunus, 2023). Similarly, Ismail et al. (2022) reported that public sector women employees struggle to balance work and family due to heavy workloads and lack of institutional support (Ismail et al., 2022).

The Qur'an emphasises proportional responsibility, as stated in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:286):

“Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear...”

This highlights that Islam recognises human limitations and does not impose obligations beyond one's capacity, including in managing family and career.

Shared Responsibility and Equality in Muslim Marriages: Shifting Norms Among Young Couples in Malaysia

Social shifts have led to emerging norms in Muslim marriages in Malaysia, especially among younger couples who practise more equitable sharing of domestic responsibilities. Shamsiah (2023) observed that current lifestyles are challenging traditional expectations, with both spouses actively contributing to household and work obligations. Islam promotes the idea of mutual support and shared responsibility within marriage. This is clearly expressed in Surah Ar-Rum (30:21):

“And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates so that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy...”

This verse underlines that Islamic marriage is based on mutual love, serenity, and shared duties between spouses.

Figure 4.0: Balancing Roles and Responsibilities in Muslim Marriages

Balancing family and career

Demonstrates traditional expectations with high balance.

Traditional Expectations

Overburdened by traditional roles

Highlights traditional roles leading to imbalance.

High Balance



Low Balance

Equitable sharing of responsibilities

Reflects modern norms with balanced responsibilities.

Modern Norms

Neglecting family for career

Shows modern norms causing imbalance due to career focus.

CONCLUSIONS

In modern Malaysia, Muslim women increasingly take on dual roles—as caregivers and economic contributors. Over 62% work primarily to support their families, either by supplementing household income or as main providers (Awang et al., 2019). This shift reflects both economic realities and evolving gender roles. Islam permits women to work as long as household responsibilities are maintained, promoting a balance between personal, professional, and spiritual commitments (Qur'an, 28:77).

Balancing work, family, and religious duties presents ongoing challenges. Mental health issues and burnout are becoming more common, especially among public sector employees who face demanding schedules and limited support (Salleh & Yunus, 2023; Ismail et al., 2022). These pressures highlight the need for flexible work arrangements and shared domestic responsibilities. The Qur'an (2:286) reminds that obligations should align with one's capacity, suggesting the faith-based value of reasonable balance.

Younger Malaysian couples are increasingly adopting more egalitarian marital norms. Shared parenting and household duties are becoming more common, reflecting changing social attitudes and educational exposure. Islamic principles support this shift through the emphasis on mutual compassion and cooperation in marriage (Qur'an, 30:21). This growing trend indicates a transformation in how gender roles are understood and practised, particularly in urban and educated communities. In essence, Malaysian Muslim women are redefining traditional boundaries by integrating faith, family, and career, reflecting a broader societal move towards balance, shared responsibility, and resilience within marriage and daily life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to Open University Malaysia (OUM) for providing the Institutional Research Grant (IRG) under the project title: Integrating Zakat Education through Open Courseware: A Study Amongst Open University Malaysia Learners, Grant No.: OUM-IRF-2024-009.

REFERENCES

1. Al-Mubarakfuri, S. R. (2002). *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum (The Sealed Nectar)*. Darussalam.
2. Anis, R. B. (2019). Asiyah, Maryam and Khadijah as role models for contemporary Muslim women. *IIUM Journal of Human Sciences*, 1(1), 30–42. <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijohs.v1i1.13>
3. Awang, A. H., Ahmad, A., Jusoh, M., Ariff, M., & Nor, N. (2019). Kesedaran wanita Muslim tentang hak dan tanggungjawab dalam keluarga dan kerjaya: Kajian kes di UNITEN dan UPM. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 4(25), 109–120.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370691386>

4. Bahri, S., & Batoebara, M. U. (2020). The position and participation of Khadijah in developing da'wah in Islam at the first period. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI) Journal*, 3, 287–295.
5. Isa, M. Y., Ahmad, N. H., Maamor, S., Ahmad, Z., & Abu Bakar, N. A. (2024). The role of Islamic financial literacy from the perspective of Maqasid al-Shariah: A case study of the community of Naka in Kedah. *International Journal of Islamic Business*, 9(2), 26–42. <https://doi.org/10.32890/ijib2024.9.2.3>
6. Ismail, M., Abdul Rahman, A., & Ahmad, A. (2022). Isu keseimbangan kerjaya dan kehidupan dalam kalangan penjawat awam wanita Islam di Malaysia. *Journal of Governance and Development*, 18(2), 163–176. <https://e-journal.uum.edu.my/index.php/jps/article/view/14487>
7. Jaffar, N., Mohd Faizal, S., Selamat, Z., Awaludin, I. S., & Sulaiman, N. A. (2024). Financial literacy and financial well-being of low-income women in Malaysia: A capability view. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10, 2388826. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2388826>
8. Koburtay, T., Abuhussein, T., & Sidani, Y. M. (2023). Women leadership, culture, and Islam: Female voices from Jordan. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 183, 347–363. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05041-0>
9. Lemu, A. I. (1990). *Khadijah: The wife of the Prophet Muhammad*. Islamic Education Trust.
10. Muhammad, A. A. (2021). Khadijah bnt Khuwaylid (RA) an entrepreneur in the Prophetic house: A lesson to the contemporary Muslim women of Gombe State-Nigeria. *IJUS | International Journal of Umranc Studies*, 4(1), 21–30.
11. Qoirunnisa, F. Z., Kurniawan, A. N., Khalida, F. N., Afriyanto, M., & Mustofa, M. Y. (2023). Peran ulama perempuan dalam pendidikan Islam: Upaya menembus patriarki agama di era digital. *Istifkar: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 3(2), 122–138. <https://doi.org/10.62509/ji.v3i2.91>
12. Rahemtulla, S., & Ababneh, S. (2021). Reclaiming Khadija's and Muhammad's marriage as an Islamic paradigm: Toward a new history of the Muslim present. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 37(2), 83–102.
13. Ramadan, T. (2007). *In the footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the life of Muhammad*. Oxford University Press.
14. Riyadi, A., Saerozi, S., & Savitri, F. M. (2021). Women and the da'wah movement: Historical analysis of the Khadijah RA role in the time of Rasulullah SAW. *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies*, 15(1), 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.15575/idajhs.v15i1.9346>
15. Salleh, M. N., & Yunus, M. H. M. (2023). Cabaran keseimbangan kerjaya dan keluarga terhadap kesihatan mental wanita bekerja. *Jurnal Firdaus*, 2(1), 10–23. <https://ejournal.upsi.edu.my/index.php/firdaus/article/view/9006>
16. Sbaih, A. (2022). Khadijah's image in 19th century Orientalism. *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 60(2), 399–426.
17. Siti Shamsiah Md Supi. (2008). Cabaran institusi perkahwinan hari ini. <https://www.ikim.gov.my/cabaran-institusi-perkahwinan-hari-ini/>
18. Soim, M., Fuady, Z., & Zahid, M. (2024). Masculinity and femininity in the Qur'an: Reflections on the personalities of the Prophet Muhammad and Siti Khadijah. *Yinyang: Jurnal Studi Islam Gender dan Anak*, 19(2), 251–271.
19. Stowasser, B. F. (1994). *Women in the Qur'an, traditions, and interpretation*. Oxford University Press.
20. Tasgheer, T. F. A. (2021). Women entrepreneurship in early Islamic era; A motivation for women in modern age. *Al-Qawārīr*, 2(4), 1–13.
21. Wain, A. (2021). The politicisation of Islam in Malaysia and its opponents. *Islam and Civilisational Renewal*.