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**THE WELL-BEING OF A CAREER WOMAN BASED ON THE  
WASATIYYAH CONCEPT**

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***Abstract***

The number of career women is increasing. This is in addition to the various policies that are inclined to direct women to a career life. Realistically, contemporary women have to juggle various roles in life. Thus, in line with these developments, numerous aspects should be considered to strike a balance between these roles played by a career woman. This includes physical health, mental alertness and spiritual well-being needed when shouldering the responsibility of a career woman. Hence, what are the basis? In Islam, *wasatiyyah* is a concept of mediocrity in every human. The next question is how is this *wasatiyyah* concept-based manifests itself in the well-being of a career woman in order to ensure a holistic well-being? What are the elements? This paper endeavored to elaborate this issue by outlining two objectives. First, to identify the *wasatiyyah* concept in a career woman context based on the main texts in Islam and discourses by Muslim intellectuals from various perspectives. Second, to suggest the basis for the measurement of a contemporary career woman's well-being based on the *wasatiyyah* concept. The research design for this study is a qualitative interpretive design using textual data from both classical sources and contemporary literature. Then, the authors analysed the findings using the qualitative content analysis method to elucidate both, manifest and latent contents, regarding the basis for the well being of a career woman according to Islamic perspectives.

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**Keywords:** Career Woman's Well-being, Women in Islam, *Wasatiyyah*, Quality of Work-life", "Women career.



## 1. Introduction

The involvement of women in the work-place and professionalism is becoming increasing significant in contemporary global development. This has been evident since the 1980s when the industrial sector was at its peak and when various incentives and policies were introduced since 2000 to ensure the involvement of women in the employment sector was facilitated and supported by various parties. However, the increasing involvement of women in the employment sector, especially in the higher ranks, had created an issue pertaining to a women's quality of well-being when carrying out daily employment tasks besides shouldering other tasks such as responsibilities within the family. This becomes critical when the challenges and pressures at the work place begins to mount until it creates numerous issues that tamper with the well-being of employed women. Among the issues that hinder well-being that are frequently related to a woman's career is family-work conflicts, work-life balance, stress, depression, sexual harassment, gender harassment, safety issues at the work place, rigid working hours etc. (Hamilton, Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2006). Among the factors that could assist in solving most of the issues that hinder well-being is the achievement of a balance in the actual context, being holistic and comprehensive. Thus, what kind of balance should be the basis? Towards this purpose, this working paper looked into how the well-being of career women could be achieved by adapting the mediocrity concept from an Islamic perspective. Based on this intention, the *wasatiyyah* concept was chosen and the elements needed for its implementation were analysed in the context of achieving a quality of well-being in career women.

## 2. Problem Statement

In Malaysia, the participation of women in development is seen as very significant based on the yearly increase in the percentage of working women. The 10th Malaysia Plan Achievement Report (2010-2015) mentioned that the participation of women's work force had increased from 46.8% in 2010 to 55.0% in 2015. Besides that, according to the Research Guide to Asian Income 2015, Malaysia recorded 34% for women's achievement in the highest employment post category (HAYS: Recruiting Experts Worldwide, 2016). The government had implemented various initiatives, including the drafting of the National Women's Policy 2009, in order to encourage the potential of women in national development (Selvaratnam, Padmini, & Kaw, 2011). One of the objectives of the National Women's Policy 2009 was to ensure the enhancement of the prestige and well-being of women in all aspects, including the physical, economic, political, health, psychological and spiritual aspects.

However, from another perspective, the increase in the involvement of women in national development, in general and the national labour market, in particular, has created various challenges, including the challenge to ensure a balance between family and vocational responsibilities (Ismail & Abdullah, 2010; Selvaratnam, Padmini, & Kaw, 2011; Grönlund, 2017). For example, a study by Thomson Reuters and the Rockefeller Foundation involving 9,500 women showed that the dilemma between work and family commitments was the greatest challenge faced by 44% of the respondents, especially respondents from Russia, South Korea, India, China and Japan (Hutt, 2015). In addition, according Polat, Kutlu, Ay, Erkan and Doğrusöz (2018), challenges and demands of work and career that are increasing together with the pressure to implement various responsibilities and tasks could create

disharmony in a person. This disharmony could create numerous issues including stress, depression, pressure, lack of focus and efficiency when carrying out work and other commitments, behaviour related to affected work as well as various health problems (Doepke, Tertilt, & Voena, 2011; Azami, Shaarbafchizadeh, Mokhtari, & Maher, 2017). Besides that, numerous health problems are frequently related to disharmony in humans, especially psychological and mental disharmony, such as stress, chronic headaches, chest pain, heart ailments, obesity or anorexia nervosa, too much or too little sleep (insomnia), alcoholism, nicotine addiction, substance abuse and nerve problems.

Meanwhile, in reference to psychological disharmony such as stress for example, a study by The American Institute of Stress (2011) and Shepherd-Banigan, Bell, Basu, Booth-LaForce, and Harris (2016) found that female employees suffered greater stress than male employees. The same study also showed that stress among female employees was due to a big commitment laid upon their shoulders (The American Institute of Stress, 2011; Shepherd-Banigan, Bell, Basu, Booth-LaForce, & Harris, 2016). This matter was highlighted by previous researchers. For example, Carnes (2017) as well as Hochschild and Manchung (1989) stated that the high level of stress among female employees was due to the competitive demand between the responsibility at home and the workplace. More worrying were the studies by Carnes (2017), Grzywacz, Almeida, and McDonald (2002) as well as Haynes, Eaker, and Feinleib (1983), which showed that working women were prone to exhibit pressure and behavior culminating from stress towards their family members. According to studies, this situation also leads to negative familial relations (Polat et al., 2018; Crouter, Bumpus, Head, & McHale, 2001). A similar trend is also seen in Malaysia. Studies on 541 female employees in the Klang Valley found that 95.2% of them experienced stress at the moderate and high levels (Ortega, Abdullah, Ahmad, & Ibrahim, 2013). In a study by Ortega et.al (2013), the respondents chosen were from various races and religions as well as from various sectors, including public, private and self-employed sectors.

There has yet to be any discussion on female human resources management that looks at the well-being of female employees. Moreover, there is no holistic human management model that considers employee well-being, especially women, based on the balance of elements important to humans – physical, mental and spiritual elements as well as the relationship between humans and the Creator, Allah SWT. Models and theories on human management have thus far been based on the West and formulated outside the Islamic paradigm. For example, motivational theories intended to increase the motivation to work such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, behavioural theories such as the McGregor Theory and Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy (Ahmad, 2012). Contemporary models and theories focus more on productivity aspects, humans and knowledge that is related to production (Ahmad, 2012). Thus far, there has not been any human management model in the human well-being context, more so in the female employee context.

### **3. Research Questions**

This study have two research questions.

- 3.1.** What is the *wasatiyyah* concept in a career women context based on the main texts in Islam and discourse by Muslim intellectuals from various perspectives

- 3.2.** What is the basis for the measurement of a contemporary career women's wellbeing based on the *wasatiyyah* concept.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

This study is aimed to analyse and explain the causal relationship between the issues of wellbeing in career women and the *wasatiyyah* concept. The lack of wellbeing may result in physical and mental illness, so the paper also aims to examine how the concept of justly balanced quality in Islam – *wasatiyyah* could make an impact on the issues of wellbeing in a career women context.

## 5. Research Methods

Various published and not published documents were collected and vetted based on a qualitative interpretive design that used document analysis in order to identify the contents and important academic facts pertinent to a woman's career, quality of employee's well-being and the *wasatiyyah* concept. For this, documents from both classical sources and contemporary literature were used. These documents were then classified according to several segments and subjected to a qualitative content analysis – both manifest and latent in order to structure the jest as mentioned in the literature as well as achieve the objectives.

## 6. Findings

The term '*wasatiyyah*' is mentioned in the al-Qur'an in surah al-Baqarah verse ayat 143, which refers to "*ummatan wasatan*". In that verse, Allah SWT exhorted, meaning:

"And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you. And We did not make the qiblah which you used to face except that We might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels. And indeed, it is difficult except for those whom Allah has guided. And never would Allah have caused you to lose your faith. Indeed Allah is, to the people, Kind and Merciful"

According to the interpretation of Ibn Kathir (1992), *wasata* means justice and excellence. It refers to the noble characteristics in Islam, which refers to the descendants of the Prophet SAW who are said to be just and chosen. Meanwhile, the interpretation according to that led by Basmeih (2010) had referred to *ummatan wasatan* as being just, not transgressing limits and not over-bearing in matters related to beliefs, morality or practices. The meaning of 'practical' in the interpretation of *wasatiyyah* was interpreted as life that was referred to and experienced by the Prophet SAW Himself.

Wani (2015) interpreted *wasatiyyah* according to the classic Arab dictionary, meaning 'intermediate' and more specifically to mean just, the best as well as chosen among the finest and most noble. Ibrahim (2011) adduced several elements of *wasatiyyah* in the word *ummatan wasatan*. First, subjects who are just and chosen; second, subjects who are in the best system; third, subjects who are balanced, who acclaim worldly as well as after-life matters and lastly, subjects who possess morals and self-identity. The *wasatiyyah* concept according to Aziz (2015) had focused on the definition of *wasatiyyah* according to the experts in interpretation, which is balance, moderation, justice, mediocrity,

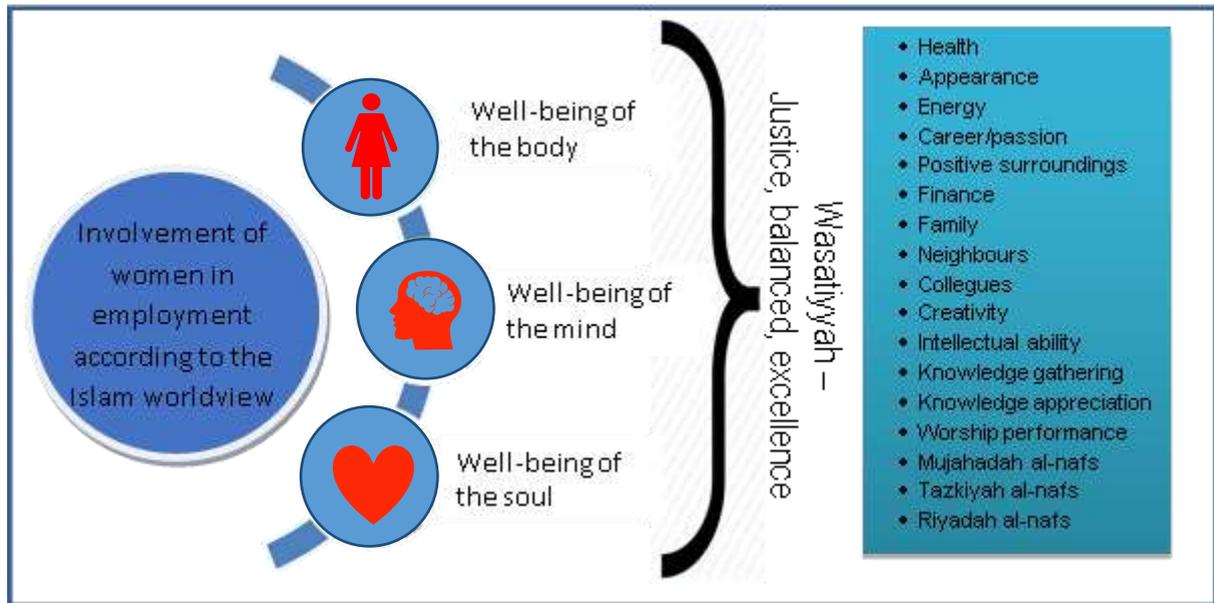
excellence and nobility, not over-bearing as well as the best and the chosen one. As a conclusion based on matters that were discussed earlier, the definition of *wasatiyyah* could lead to three main definitions. First, justice and fairness; second, balanced; and third, best and excellent practices (al-Qudsy, Basir, Azmi, Ahmad, & Nayan, 2015).

In the context of career women, in order to realise *wasatiyyah* based on three core pillars; hence, justice, balance and excellence must be ensured before the paradigm or Islamic worldview pertaining to the career women phenomenon is outlined. Therefore, how could the involvement of career women fulfil the characteristics of justice, balance and excellence? In order to ensure this, the involvement of women in employment or careers must be based on Islamic worldview (*tassawur*). When based on Islamic worldview, the excellence of women is characterised into four factors, such as that highlighted by the Hadith as follows:

“When a woman (wife) performs the five compulsory prayers, fasts during Ramadhan, safeguards her dignity and obeys her husband’s commands, then she would be invited in the afterlife to enter heaven according to the door of her wish (according to her wishes).” [Hadith Narrated by Ahmad, Ibnu Hibban and Thabrani].

Hence, it could be interpreted that employed women should be in a honorable situation, their decorum, religion and morality safeguarded as well as hindered from negative elements during employment that might befall the self, family and the environment. All these aspects mentioned above, for example working in a honorable situation, is not only related to the self or a certain individual but one must have a career to ensure the honorable situation effects other Muslims as well. For example, a female doctor for women, or becomes an educator to the ummah, especially to women. This is the main pre-condition that puts career women on a certain level and the question of how a balance or *wasatiyyah* is achieved and lastly, well-being is realised for the career woman. Without fulfilling the pre-conditions set according to Islamic worldview; hence, the question of balance and the objective of achieving well-being is not seen as just, balanced and excellent in the actual context of *wasatiyyah*.

Meanwhile, for every individual, including women, a holistic well-being is necessary to balance all these elements, such as the body, mind and soul. There must be complete emphasizes on all these aspects. The well-being of the body focuses on five tangible aspects, such as physical, career, social, financial and community well-being. All these five aspects are important and are a priority in Islam (McCarthy, 2010). Whereas for the mind, its well-being is achieved by involving oneself in matters that stimulate the intellect as well as creativity and propagate this knowledge, thoughts and creativity to all humans. The well-being of the soul is portrayed by the implementation of worship, whether physically through prayers, tithes, fasting and performing the Hajj or through spiritual means such as performing *zikrullah* (remembrance of Allah), *mujahadah al-nafs* (self-management or control), *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the self) and *riyadah al-nafs* (training the ego). Besides that, the well-being of the soul depends on the acceptance and appreciation of knowledge and rightful guidance as well as the total submission to Allah SWT (*tawakkul*) in every aspect that involves women in employment (Wijayati & Pramesti, 2016). All these well-being aspects are illustrated in the Figure 1 below.



**Figure 01.** The Career Women Well-Being Model based on *Wasatiyyah*

## 7. Conclusion

The involvement of women in careers would become better and effective as well as void of negative aspects if the individual involved in employment achieves a balanced quality of well-being in all aspects such as the body, mind and soul. This aspect could be enlightened by the *wasatiyyah* concept in Islam. The imbalance of any one of these aspects (body, mind and soul) or all of them, could lead to various problems that not only involve women in employment but also individuals that exist around them. Further studies are needed to detail the imbalance of each element in all aspects of well-being outlined earlier in a more specific manner such as developing a certain standard or measurement tools for each elements of the well-being of a career woman.

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