

# The Application of Islamic Laws in Different Dimensions of Women's Empowerment: A Narrative Review

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## ABSTRACT

**Background & aim:** Women's empowerment is the process of enabling women to actively and creatively participate in all aspects of their lives. Despite its importance, misunderstandings persist globally regarding women's empowerment, especially in the Islamic context. This study aimed to review the application of Islamic laws in different dimensions of women's empowerment.

**Methods:** This narrative review, based on the SANRA scale, examined Persian and English articles indexed in Scopus, PubMed, Web of Science, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and Iranian databases including SID, Magiran, and IranMedex. Articles were included without a time limit up to March 2022 and updated until 2024. Studies addressing educational, economic, social, political, and sexual and reproductive health dimensions of women's empowerment were analyzed.

**Results:** Out of 728 retrieved articles, 9 met the inclusion criteria. Findings highlighted that women's empowerment plays a crucial role in improving women's lives. The Qur'an addresses most aspects of empowerment, including education, economy, social and political participation, and sexual/reproductive health. However, in many Muslim societies, women do not fully enjoy the rights granted in Islam. Cultural norms, patriarchal structures, and political oppression often limit women's opportunities and autonomy.

**Conclusion:** The practical implementation of Islamic teachings and Qur'anic guidance across multiple dimensions of women's empowerment can provide an effective framework to enhance women's status. Promoting education, economic participation, social and political engagement, and sexual/reproductive health according to Islamic recommendations can support women's development and equality within socio-cultural contexts shaped by Islamic values and traditions.

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## Introduction

Women's empowerment is a vital concern around the world. Especially in developing countries (1). As stated by the World Health Organization, empowerment is a process through which people have more control over their decisions, lifestyle, and activities that are effective for their health (2). Empowering women to be able to choose and pursue goals and control over individual lives and resources is essential in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) (3).

Women's empowerment is the increase of women's ability to make strategic choices in their lives, which can have a variety of meanings and can be different from one society to another. Also, empowerment is defined as a process of awareness that leads to greater participation, enabling one to make effective decisions, control, and thus take transformative action. In addition, economic, social, political, religious, cultural, and psychological factors impact empowerment (4-6).

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Insufficient women's empowerment can cause many problems in their lives, both individually and socially. At the psychological level, it can lead to a decrease in quality of life and marital satisfaction and an increase in depression (7).

In addition, factors affecting women's empowerment are age, social support, family support, personal and psychological traits, government regulations, education, cultural factors, financial resources availability, national economic development, gender discrimination, political situation, and religious factors (8-10).

Religion can influence women's empowerment, rights, and policy development in diverse ways. Overlap between religious communities, traditions, institutions, and governments is inevitable. Religion can affect women's empowerment (11-12).

Even though Islam gave recognition to women's rights, Muslim women today are subject to all kinds of speculations, stereotypes, and generalizations (13). Also, there are a lot of misconceptions about Islam and women's empowerment. For example, all Muslim men marry four wives, and Islam oppresses women. Islam is also misconstrued as opposing science and technology, and their progress and development. Misconceptions about Islam are caused by a variety of factors. Islam may be misconstrued due to unawareness among Muslims, a false assumption by Muslims or non-Muslims, stereotyping, misrepresentation, and sensationalism in the media (such as in films, news reports, etc.) that associate fear-evoking characters and acts with Islam (16).

1400 years ago, Islam was the religion that offered the world an example of a society in which women had access to all basic human rights (17). But currently, in numerous Muslim societies, women are not regarded by the rights granted to them in Islam. In many societies, Muslims treat women according to their cultures and customs, and women are exposed to cultural problems, patriarchal characteristics of their society, as well as political oppression (18).

Leila Ahmed, in her book (Women and Gender in Islam), states that Muslims in the early days had no problem putting women in

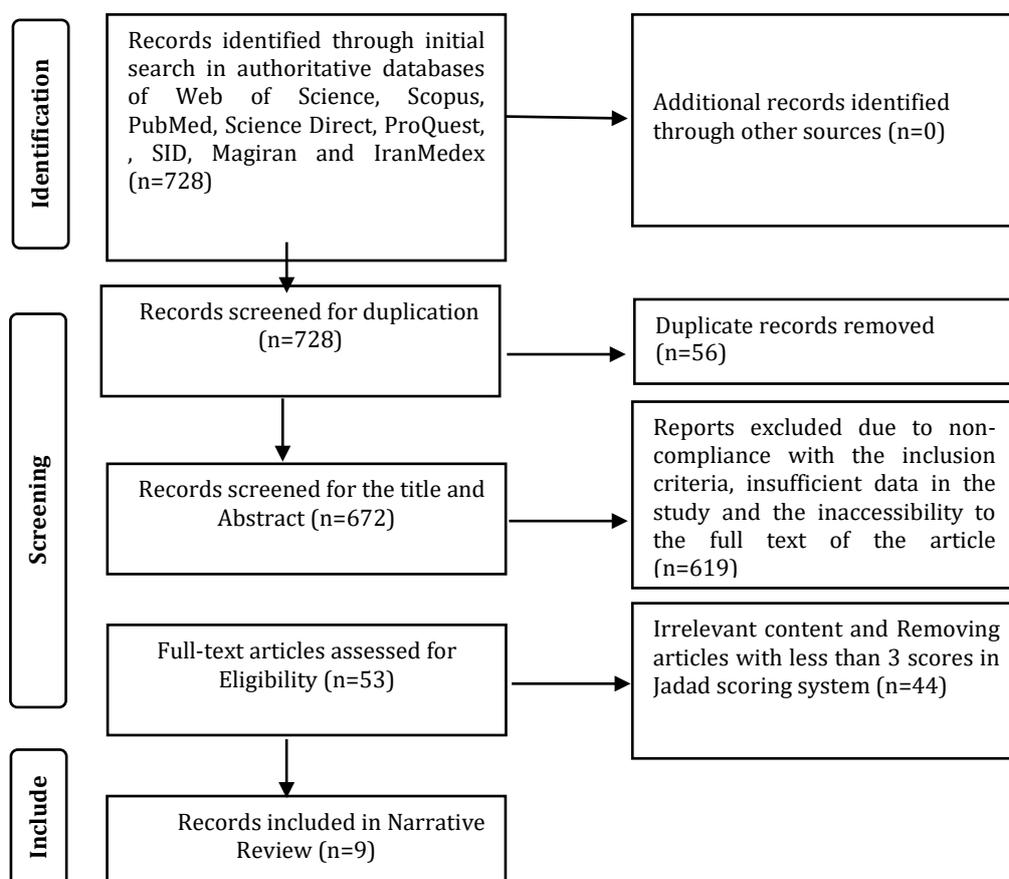
power (19). Fatima Umar Naseef, in Women in Islam, states that Islam is the just religion that has claimed respect, freedom, and humanity for women from the burdens of man-made degradation (20).

Given that more than half a billion Muslim women are living in 45 Muslim majority countries, and more than 30 countries have a significant Muslim minority population, it is noticeable that Muslim women can play an important role in the economic, social, and cultural development of their communities (21). Therefore, this narrative review was conducted to investigate the application of Islamic principles across various dimensions of Women's empowerment.

## Materials and Methods

This study is a narrative review based on the six steps of the Narrative Review Articles Evaluation Scale (SANRA), including 1) Explaining the importance of the study, 2) Determining the purpose of the narrative review, 3) Full description of the search strategy, 4) Referencing, 5) Synthesis of evidence relevant and 6) appropriate presentation of data.

Persian and English articles indexed in valid databases, including Scopus, PubMed, SID, Magiran, Iranmdex, ProQuest, and Web of Science, were examined without a time limit up to March 2022 and updated till 2024. Related articles on different aspects of women's empowerment (educational, economic, social, and political, as well as sexual and reproductive health) were reviewed. The search keywords were women's empowerment, Islam, women's rights, marriage, educational, economic, social, political, sexual, reproductive health, and female genital mutilation. Manual searches of other related journals (Journal of Islamic Studies, Islamic Law and Society, Journal of Qur'anic Studies, Muslim World, and so on) and reference lists of primary articles found from initial searches were also performed.



**Figure 1.** Flowchart describing the study selection process based on PRISMA 2020

Inclusion criteria were as follows: All (Persian or English language) quantitative or qualitative articles related to women's empowerment and Islamic laws. Exclusion criteria were considered insufficient data in the study or duplication of studies, articles with no access to the full text, case report studies, or letters to the editor

728 articles were found in the primary search. After removing duplicate articles, 672 articles were evaluated by the inclusion criteria. 663 articles lacking inclusion criteria were excluded from the study. Finally, 9 articles were included in the present study. The steps of selecting studies according to the PRISMA 2020 flowchart are specified in Figure 1.

First, the retrieved articles were screened based on their titles, abstracts, and keywords to select the eligible ones. At this stage, some articles that did not match the entry criteria

were excluded. Then, the full text of the selected articles was evaluated by two independent reviewers. In case of disagreement, the reviewers discussed it until a consensus was reached.

Ethical considerations related to review studies including accuracy in the evaluation process, participation of all authors in the review process, clarification of the role of study authors, protection of the intellectual property of studies through correct citation and avoiding data fabrication or bias in selection, removal or interpretation of the results of the evaluated articles were observed were taken into account.

## Results

### Educational Empowerment in Islam

Education is one of the most effective foundations for women's empowerment, as educated women contribute significantly not

only to a nation's economic development but also to the cultivation of informed citizens, responsible parents, and family members. Education requires both the acquisition of knowledge and the transformation of that knowledge into application through professional training and skill development. Lack of education is the main reason for women's exploitation and negligence (22). Traditional concepts identify higher education as a tool of personal development that helps in the growth of intellectual horizons, well-being, and the empowerment potential of people. Education is also considered the most important instrument of social, political, and economic transformation (23).

The level of education of Muslim women is particularly important because of its important role for women's independence, economic opportunities, and health outcomes, as well as because of the key role that mothers play in the education, socialization, and well-being of their children (24).

The Qur'an places the highest attention on the value of acquiring knowledge, for instance, it states: "Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?" Moreover, it encourages the believers to pray for the advancement of science and emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge even in critical times. In Islam, all sciences are considered religious, whether rooted in social, physical, professional, or theological sciences. This is demonstrated in a great many verses that order, guide, alert, and motivate people to notice the phenomenon of nature, to focus on everything in the universe, to travel, analyze, investigate, and realize it (25).

Acquiring knowledge is the duty of both men and women. The Prophet Muhammad emphasized, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim." No gender distinction is made here.

Nevertheless, many local customs and national laws in predominantly Muslim countries are restrictive regarding the education of females, or are biased in ways that result in greater educational attainment of males. Laws may indirectly affect the educational attainment of the genders differently, whether or not such effects were intended (26).

Results from a cohort study showed that young Muslim women (born 1976-1985) spent an average of 6.1 years in school. The increase in years of schooling among Muslim women, both absolute and relative, is greater than the increase in years of schooling among young Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and non-religious women. As a result, the educational gap between young Muslim women and those of other faiths has narrowed across age groups. (27).

Educational policies targeting girls represent one of the most effective strategies for increasing female literacy. Complementing these policies, literacy training for women can yield short-term improvement in labor market participation while also fostering long-term empowerment for both women and their daughters. For instance, in Iran, these goals have been considered in existing legislation. Article 3 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (General Principles) emphasizes the importance of universal and free education at all levels, along with the facilitation and expansion of higher education. (Article 3, 1928). Similarly, Article 1 of the Law of the Women's Social-Cultural Council (1997) is focused on improving public knowledge and literacy among women by adopting appropriate policies in the fields of higher education. Moreover, in the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the employment of women, Principle 7 (1992), emphasis is placed on enabling the effective use of the capabilities of educated and expert women by providing the necessary facilities (28).

### **Economic Empowerment of Women in Islam**

Human development and human welfare are important goals of Islamic economic development (29). Economic empowerment of women is one of the effective factors in achieving equality with men. In addition, women's economic empowerment is also in line with advancing women's human rights (30). Economic empowerment means promoting gender equality, providing women with resources, and expanding their horizons and opportunities in different parts of society. An increased economic role may lead to an increased status in gender roles, and a better position in the family and communities (31).

Empowering women through gainful employment is a component and instrument of development in any country (32). There are disparities between men and women working in the health system: unequal representation in leadership positions, persistent wage discrimination, and disparities in scholarly publication and citations. These disparities are often more pronounced among women with intersectional identities (33).

The results of research in some Islamic countries, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, showed that the growth of women's income and resources has played an important role in improving their financial freedom and sense of ownership (34-35).

In Islam, it is believed that both men and women are gifted with thought, will, and authority, so both can work to achieve their needs in life. Like men, a woman can voluntarily work independently and own the result of her work and effort, and the benefits and harms of her work are her own; she can also take possession of her individual and social life. Because Islam gave women the blessing of freedom and independence, women gained independence and took action in the light of divine blessings (15, 36).

Moreover, Islamic law can be used to empower women by recognizing and protecting women's right to inherit property. According to all classical schools of Islamic law, a woman's property is hers alone - no one can claim to own it, even her husband or relatives (37).

Qur'an: For men, it (inheritance) is a share of what their parents and relatives leave behind, and for women, a share of what their parents and relatives spend, whether it is little or much, is a share. There is no restriction on women's property rights in Islamic law. In contrast to many other areas of Islamic law, jurists do not make distinctions between males and females when it comes to buying, selling, investing, or lending properties such as land, real estate, or money (38).

Women's right to inheritance has ever been an important matter which is considered in detail in the Holy Quran in "Surah Nisa", Daughter(s)' right of inheritance: 1. If a daughter(s) has brothers, then she will get half of a brother. 2. If a daughter is the only child of

her decedent, then she will receive half of the inheritance. 3. If there are two or more daughters, having no brothers, then they will get two-thirds of the inheritance(39).

### **Social and Political Empowerment of Women in Islam**

Social empowerment refers to the empowering force that strengthens women's social relations and status in social structures. Social empowerment addresses the current social discrimination based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender in society.

Women's participation in political processes and various decision-making institutions is a crucial tool for empowerment. The contribution of women at all levels of governance structures is currently the highest priority for advancing meaningful women's empowerment. It inspires women to achieve the skills and knowledge that will permit them to overcome hindrances in life or the work environment and ultimately, help them develop themselves or society (40). Although women's access to political power has improved tremendously, women are still nowhere near equal to men in terms of influence and exercise of political authority. Global data on women's political empowerment is usually limited to women's representation in parliament (collected by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and is included in several composite measures of women's empowerment, such as the Gender Inequality Index (UNDP). According to some research, although progress has been made in monitoring gender gaps in political empowerment across common indicators, significant efforts are still required to advance the global measurement of women's political empowerment. (41).

According to UNESCO, political empowerment would encompass the ability to organize and mobilize for change. Therefore, an empowerment process must include not only women's awareness but also collective awareness and collective action. Women's political contribution is a significant issue in the context of empowerment (40).

In Islam, in addition to financial and educational rights, women enjoyed social and political rights and were present in politics and society, as historical evidence suggests. Also, the verses related to enjoining the good and

forbidding the evil, jihad, allegiance, etc., are evidence of women's political activity and participation, which have been accompanied by the approval of the infallible. Therefore, even if the rules and regulations are restrictive, it does not mean reducing the dignity of women and their ability in society and politics. Rather, it is for the sake of observing natural proportions in the area of responsibilities, and not out of discrimination and inadequacy, but to support the essence of a woman's existence (42). For example, laws in Iran have created a new political climate, especially after the end of the Iran-Iraq war, in which women are empowered by training them to negotiate globally, which leads to a resurgence of women's activism (28).

Examining the collection of verses and hadiths cited by those who believe in the incompetence of women to hold the position of judge showed that such texts not only did not indicate that judgments were not valid for women, but also some of them mean that women's judgment is tolerated. It is also clear from reflection on verse 118 of "Surah Zokhrof", that it cannot be ruled that a woman is not interested in judging because she is interested in jewelry and grooming (43).

### **Sexual and Reproductive Empowerment of Women in Islam**

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are vital factors for empowering women and promoting gender equality (44). Women's empowerment, which refers to the ability to make independent decisions in various situations, including those related to health concerns, is recognized as a personal right. Therefore, the empowerment of vulnerable populations should be given special attention. Many programs of the World Health Organization emphasize reproductive health and its promotion through empowering women concerning reproductive decision-making (45-46). Empowering women depends on protecting their sexual and reproductive health and rights, including access to health care and education, as well as the right to make informed decisions about their bodies (72,45). Women's empowerment is a vital requirement for comprehensive and valid reproductive health (28).

One of the most debated themes in reproductive rights is abortion. In Islam, the rules of biomedical ethics are related to the ethical teachings of the Holy Quran and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This operation (abortion) has ethical complications, which are currently a focal topic for dispute. However, in many countries, abortion on request is accessible, but Islam protects and respects human life in all its phases, and hence Shiite and Sunni authorities propound abortion as a forbidden action after 4 months of conception (47). Women do not have the right to end the pregnancy according to their own will. It does not necessarily mean that Islam is unequivocally opposed to abortion without any question. In contrast, there are different views among Muslim leaders about the timing of abortion and what can be acceptable ethically (48). For instance, some scenarios make abortion ethical, which consist of 1) Abortion is permitted to save the life of a pregnant mother. 2) Abortion is permitted to maintain maternal physical health. 3) Abortion is permitted to maintain maternal mental health. 4) Abortion is permitted in cases of fetal defects. Of course, for cultural reasons in some Islamic countries, these cases are not allowed (49, 50). For example, the law in Iran permits therapeutic abortion after a certain diagnosis is reached by three experts, and its confirmation is done by the Forensic Medicine Organization (FMO) (28).

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is one of the most harmful practices that violates women's human rights. It refers to any procedure that involves the partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injuries to the female genitalia for non-therapeutic reasons. (51). Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a very old, traditional, and cultural ceremony. Policies and strategies have been implemented to prohibit this action. Nevertheless, despite admirable work, it is still commonly performed in Muslim countries. FGM is not mentioned in the Qur'an. Muslim religious leaders agree that all types of mutilation, including FGM, are "convicted sensibility" to cultural customs that are incorrectly associated with Islam. The rule of 'do not harm', affirmed by Islam, surrogates cultural proceedings, in logically eliminating FGM from receiving any Islamic religious

confirmation (52). In addition, Iranian women are protected by regulation from Female Genital Mutilation. Article 479 (1996) of the Islamic penal code affirms: 'if a woman's genitalia is completely cut off, she shall be entitled to her full blood money (Ghesas) and if only half of her genitalia is severed, half of her blood money is due to her.' (28).

There are also specific laws about marriage in Islam. In pre-Islamic Arabia, the bride was considered the husband's and, by extension, the tribe's property. Women failed to have legal rights or the capability to bring claims to alter their status. Instant divorce was a customary observation and was deployed. There have also been alternative abominable establishments and practices, such as unlimited polygamy (53). Marriage in Islam is an agreement between husband and wife. It is like all civil agreements between two parties. What a Muslim man and woman should look for in a wedding is clear within the Holy Quran. A woman may also propose marriage to a man. Compulsory marriage, which implies marriage without the consent of the two parties, is disallowed in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad acted as the 'Forced Marriage Prevention Unit' of his time, and women could appeal to him if they had been forced into marriage (54).

According to Islam, marriage has certain requirements. Firstly, the couple must agree to marry. A woman must have a Wali (legal guardian). A Wali must be present throughout the process. If a Wali is not present, then a woman must be over the age of puberty and capable of deciding whom to marry. There are no restrictions on who can propose marriage. This is the most basic form of a marriage contract. Signed in the presence of competent witnesses, it signifies the couple's consent to marriage without duress. Couples are enabled to negotiate major aspects of their marriage before becoming husband and wife, making a legally binding contract. Marriage contracts can include details about where to live or the distribution of finances for children and careers (55). Additionally, the brides have the right to a dowry, which is normally negotiated in conjunction with the marriage contract. Dowries are gifts given to a bride to show love, respect, and devotion, and should not be excessive (56).

In Iran, apart from the Iranian constitution, other laws protect women against violence. Iranian Civil Law and Related Regulations (Physical Capacity for Marriage), Article 1041, affirms that marrying a girl before puberty without the permission of the guardian is forbidden (28).

One other aspect of Islamic marriage that has been highly criticized is polygamy. In the Qur'an, polygamy is permitted on the following basis: "If you fear that you will not treat the orphan girls fairly, then marry those whom you like among [other] women, two or three or four (no more). But if you are afraid that you will not be just, then [marry only] one of those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice]" verse 3 of "Surah al-Nisa" (56). In the pre-Islamic period in Saudi Arabia, polygamy existed without restriction. In Islam, the maximum number of wives is four, and the principles and rules for treating each wife fairly are spelled out. A man who has more than one wife is required to treat each of them with respect and fairly. This fairness is expected regarding finances, emotions, and even sexual relationships. The Quran unequivocally states that if a man is unable to do this and treat his wives fairly, he should not marry more than one wife (55).

In terms of divorce, it is a common misconception that Islam grants all authority over divorce to men. On the contrary, in Islam, there are certain conditions under which the wife can request divorce, including cruelty, abandonment, and when the husband fails to meet his commitment, in which case the wife can refer the request to the court (54).

## Discussion

This study aims to clarify misunderstandings of communities regarding the Islamic conception of women's empowerment and its major aspects.

The authors of this review believe that the rights of Muslim women have been a major topic of discussion not only within Muslim countries but also throughout the world. Islam is a religion in which women gained respect around 1400 years ago. The reason behind the lack of empowerment is not Islamic values but un-Islamic traditions imported from other cultures.

One study indicated that Islam has a potential role in women's empowerment. There is a wide range of Muslim women's education levels around the world, which serves as a significant reminder that Islam is a diverse religious tradition open to multiple interpretations and attitudes to gender equality (57).

Thus, empowerment requires the serious intervention of governments. Therefore, it is crucial to promote education among women to empower them to achieve their goals on par with men in different areas of life (22). Education strengthens women economically, which is the source of other types of women's empowerment, i.e., social, psychological, technological, and political. It enables them to overcome obstacles to women's empowerment, such as violence. Physical, emotional, and mental torture and agony are deeply rooted in societies from ancient times, which was a reason for the decline in the female sex ratio. Another obstacle to women's empowerment is family restrictions, such as illiterate guardians preventing their daughters from being sent to educational institutions. Also, early and forced marriages can cause students to drop out of school. Lack of awareness of women's education is also one of its causes (22,58).

About the shares of the female relatives in the inheritance from the deceased apart from the sociological and economic context of the half shares for women in inheritance, two other arguments have been put forward to justify this discrimination against female relatives. First, a woman must be cared for by her husband, even if he is rich enough to take care of himself. The second justification for a woman's half share was proposed by the tenth and eleventh-century intellectuals of Ikhwanus Safa. They claimed that the share of women received from their inheritance, along with their dowry from their husbands, does not compensate for the loss of their equal share of the inheritance with the men. Nevertheless, the wife's right of mahr (mandatory gift or payment that the groom gives to the bride at the time of marriage) is not enough compensation to receive only a half share of the inheritance compared with her male counterpart (59).

Another issue discussed in Islam is women's rights in marriage. The image of a typical Muslim woman wearing a hijab and being forced to stay at home and banned from driving is very common in most people's minds. Although some Muslim countries may have laws that oppress women, this should not be attributed to Islam. Many of these countries do not govern under any form of Sharia (Islamic law) and introduce their cultural views on gender equality. Therefore, marriage customs are very different from country to country. According to Islam, a Muslim girl cannot be forced to marry against her will (55, 60-62). Moreover, the general rule in Islam is monogamy, not polygamy. According to the Qur'an, polygamy can only be done on the condition that the husband can treat his wives fairly, which the Qur'an says, of course, he cannot. No woman can be forced into this kind of marriage if they do not wish it, and they also has the right to remove polygamy from their marriage contract. Polygamy is neither compulsory nor encouraged, but merely permitted (63-64).

As mentioned earlier, Female genital mutilation has no place in Islam, but FGM is a widespread tradition since ancient times. Today, it exists mainly in Africa and among small communities in the Middle East and Asia (65). The research findings indicate that the most important reason for FGM in these areas is the poverty of patriarchal culture. Various strategies have been proposed to prevent and combat FGM. These include government recognition of FGM, implementation of legal measures, and the integration of efforts across health, education, and judicial sectors. Building trust through public services, engaging religious leaders to issue anti-FGM fatwas, and using media to raise awareness are also vital. Strengthening NGOs and community-based initiatives is essential for creating a supportive cultural environment and promoting long-term change (66-67).

The next important issue is the laws of abortion in Islam. As discussed earlier, abortion is not permissible in Islam except in cases where it is dangerous for the mother and the fetus, or the continuation of the pregnancy. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, though sharing an

Abrahamic root, illustrate the variety of religious views on abortion. A comparative study of the Abrahamic religions in this context can offer a deeper understanding of their theological approaches. Although Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all originate from a monotheistic and Abrahamic foundation, their interpretations regarding abortion differ significantly. In Judaism, certain schools of thought consider abortion not only permissible but even obligatory if the mother's life is at risk. In contrast, Christianity—especially the Catholic Church—takes a more rigid stance and rarely recognizes exceptions that justify abortion. Islam, while emphasizing the sanctity of human life, adopts a more balanced approach. Under specific medical or emergency conditions, Islamic jurisprudence provides room for legal exceptions to the general prohibition on abortion (66,68).

The strength of this study lies in its structured methodology, the use of diverse and credible sources, and its balanced approach in examining Islamic laws concerning various aspects of women's empowerment, offering a well-rounded and evidence-based perspective. Including only articles in English and Persian is a limitation of the present study.

Islam recognized the rights of women by considering men and women equal in their ability to carry out the wishes of Allah and the teachings of Muhammad. The three main issues that Sharia law introduced were women's rights to marriage, inheritance, and divorce. It is the responsibility of the Muslim community to pass down the customs and traditions that mold a Muslim woman's life. The guidance, Sharia, and Islamic scripture outlined the structure for women education, employment opportunities, rights to inheritance, dress, public appearance, domestic 'duties', age of marriage, freedom to consent to marriage, marriage contract, mahr, permissibility of birth control, divorce, sex outside or before marriage, ability to receive justice in case of sex crimes, It also limited the oppressive privileges of men by restricting polygamy, limiting men to marrying a maximum

of four women only, and requiring the husband to take care of each wife equally and properly. Islam has emphasized the empowerment of women in the fields of education, economics, politics, and society, as well as reproductive and sexual rights. Hazrat Khadijah is a grand example of a powerful woman in early Islam. Women's empowerment is vital for sustainable development and improving the quality of life. Islam, as a comprehensive religion, recognizes the dignity and rights of women, and the Qur'an addresses many aspects of their lives. Drawing on Islamic and Qur'anic teachings can offer valuable insights and culturally appropriate strategies to support women's empowerment in Muslim societies.

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Authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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### **Ethical Considerations:**

All data used in this article were obtained from publicly available and credible sources, with full respect for intellectual property rights.

### **Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used solely for language editing and grammar correction; no AI was employed in data analysis, interpretation, or content generation.

### **Authors' contributions:**

All authors contributed equally to the conception, literature review, analysis, and writing of the manuscript. They have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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