

How Feminism Fractured the Family

PART 4

The Destructive Impact of Feminism and Gender Equality on Marriage, Motherhood and Family Life

The final part of this series of articles, “How Feminism Fractured the Family” will address the hugely detrimental impact that feminism, and in particular gender equality, has had on marriage, motherhood, and family life as well as on the lives of women, men, and children and society overall.

Reduction in Marriage Rate and Increased Extramarital Relationships:

Feminism created an aversion towards marriage amongst many women due to viewing it as an oppressive and patriarchal structure which was more advantageous to the man than the woman and where as a wife, she would be in servitude and enslaved to her husband. It also resulted in many women viewing the status of being a wife and mother as a second-class role, inferior to pursuing a career and employment. Alongside this, the feminist philosophy created suspicion towards men and a fear that upon marriage they would be treated unjustly with regards to their rights. All this led to a significant number of women delaying or rejecting marriage or motherhood, and hence, a drop in marriage and birth rates within populations, causing social and demographic problems for various states, including creating a ‘baby gap’ and fewer individuals to care for ageing populations. In Egypt for example, the marriage rate has decreased by 70% between 2004 and 2016 (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in Egypt); in Palestine the marriage rate has decreased by 8% just between 2015 and 2016 (Statements by the President of the Supreme Council of Forensic Justice); and between 1965 and 2013, the crude marriage rate in the EU-28 countries declined close to 50% in relative terms (Eurostat).

The aversion to marriage, alongside feminism’s promotion of personal and sexual freedom for women, also spurned a huge rise in extramarital relationships and a higher number of children born out of wedlock as well as an increase in abortions within states. Many women preferred to stay ‘free and single’ and pursue different relationships rather than to commit to marriage. The call for female sexual liberation to match male sexual freedoms also led to a rise in adultery, which served as a major causal factor in the epidemic of broken marriages and broken homes afflicting many states with countless numbers of children being brought up in single parent families. All this, far from being liberating for women, left them and their children with huge emotional turmoil and heartache. This is alongside causing a plethora of family and societal problems.

Confusion and Conflict in Marriage:

The ideas of feminism, in particular gender equality, also resulted in confusion and discord with regards to marital and parental responsibilities. The erosion of clearly defined roles and duties within marriage for the man and the woman with regards to providing for the family, domestic chores, and looking after the children led to frequent disputes within many family units. Furthermore, with the man removed as the head of the family due to ‘equalizing gender’ positions within the family structure, there was no organized way to resolve these disagreements. Marriage therefore became an institution dominated by competition between

the genders over roles and duties rather than a harmonious union shaped upon the husband and wife fulfilling their defined and complementary marital and family obligations. It also became a battlefield over personal choices and rights rather than a bond of companionship defined by love, mercy and responsibilities of the spouses towards one another. Feminism also made women believe that they could take on the roles of the husband and father, and hence, had 'no need for a man' in the home. This took away the drive of many women who faced marital problems to resolve the difficulties and challenges in their marriage, preferring instead to turn more quickly to the option of divorce. Furthermore, with many men and women working often long and demanding jobs, there were less time and energy spent on making marriages work, weakening the marital bond. For example, in a PEW Research Centre survey on the US published in 2013, half of the adults surveyed said that the increasing numbers of women working had made marriages harder to succeed.

This marital discord also increased violence within marriages, undermined the harmony of family life and led to a rise in divorce. For example, in Egypt, the divorce rate has increased from 7% to 40% during the past 50 years (UN and the Central Agency for Public Mobilization); in Lebanon, it has increased by 55% between 2000 and 2013 (UN's Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia); and in Turkey it has increased a shocking 82% between 2006 and 2016 (General Directorate of Criminal Records and Statistics).

Pressuring Women into Employment:

The feminist 'gender equality' narrative that the roles of men and women in life should be the same and that the value of women comes from work and financial independence from men has created societies where women no longer have the option to work but are expected to due to social or economic pressures. This is the case even if they are single mothers with sole responsibility for the care and upbringing of their children. This situation was exacerbated by capitalist and socialist systems within states which saw women as a tool to generate more wealth for the nation. Women were therefore often forced to adopt the man's role as the breadwinner for their family, becoming slaves to the market, even if they wished to stay at home and look after their children. The employment rate of married mothers in the US, for example, is around 65% and women make up almost half (47%) of the US labour force (PEW, 2011 statistics).

In 2013, the UK *Guardian* published an article under the title, "*The rise of 'breadwinner moms' is less a win for equality than it looks*". It cited statistics from a report by the PEW Research Centre that in 40% of all US households with children, mothers are the sole or primary breadwinners. The share was just 11% in 1960. The article described how the majority of the 40% - two thirds – were single mothers, many of whom were struggling with the task of juggling home and childcare responsibilities, such as preparing family meals or having time to play with the children, with long working hours. It stated, "*For single moms, in particular, the reality of primary breadwinner status feels like less of a feminist victory than simply being overworked, under-supported and broadly stigmatized.*" The English author and feminist, Fay Weldon, also admitted that feminism has harmed women because some suffer due to having to work now when they don't want to, and being a mother was now hard due to this huge pressure. She stated, "*Feminism has made us all go out to work and made us earn a living, and the male wage is no longer, because of feminism able to support a family, so women have to work which is very tiring.*"

The championing and idolizing of gender equality within societies, and the equating of women's success with employment have also resulted in many women delaying or avoiding having children in order to pursue a successful career, or even keep a job. There are now more women than ever, especially in the West, having higher risk pregnancies by having their first child at 40 years old or more from fear that they would face a 'fertility penalty' – a

reduction in their earnings or loss of their career for taking time out to have babies. For many women, delaying having children to such a late age often means losing out on children altogether due to reduced fertility, increased miscarriages or pregnancy-related complications. All this caused a lot of heartache for women as well as contributing to the 'baby gap' population crisis in many European countries caused by a reduced birth rate.

Feminism and gender equality have therefore cheated many women out of motherhood, and nations out of a well-populated, strong future generation! Its definition of women's empowerment as economic independence and its call for 'equal representation of women in the workforce' ignored the reality of women's lives which includes pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, and other general responsibilities of motherhood which all impact the woman's participation in the workplace.

Furthermore, the idea that employment would bring the woman a higher status in society and economic security was an illusion, for many women entered low paid, poor quality, and often exploitative jobs – a situation that continues today. In addition, a large proportion of a working mother's salary today is often eaten up by high child-care costs. Hence, the promises heralded by gender equality policies for which women sacrificed motherhood and valuable time with their children, in the belief that this would elevate their status, did not even deliver in the economic sphere of their lives. Large numbers of women were not more well-off, rather, they were working simply to pay for others to look after and raise their children in order to feed the economy.

In relation to this, it is important to understand that the drive of states to push women out of their homes and into the workplace did not have its origins in the 'emancipation of women' or in improving the quality of their lives or even their standard of living. Rather, it was a goal of Western Capitalist governments, born out of securing economic gain for the country. This capitalist agenda of striving to increase female employment for the sake of financial interests rather than the betterment of women is exemplified by the words of the former US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, who stated in a speech at a conference in Peru in 2012 entitled, "Power: Women as Drivers of Growth and Social Inclusion" that, *"Restrictions on women's economic participation are costing us massive amounts of economic growth and income in every region of the world. In the Asia Pacific for example, it's more than \$40 billion in lost GDP every year"*. In truth therefore, the Capitalist System exploited the language of feminism and equality, promoting narratives such as 'female empowerment through employment' for pure financial benefit. This narrative has been nothing but a capitalist and feminist lie that has cheated women of motherhood, robbed children of their rights, and had a heavy cost on the wellbeing of women and society overall. It is the mark of an ideology that systematically and consistently places wealth creation above other important human needs and values.

Rights of Children were Neglected:

Feminism's drive to push mothers into the workplace in the name of gender equality disempowered women to fulfil their vital role as mothers and ignored the needs of children, leading to their rights to be neglected. With both parents as breadwinners, it impacted the ability of many to effectively raise their children with inevitable consequences. In fact, in the same 2013 PEW Research Centre survey on the US cited above, almost 75% of adults said that the increasing numbers of women working have made it harder for parents to raise children, while over half of the respondents stated that children are better-off with mothers who don't hold jobs and are at home full-time.

Martha Albertson Fineman, an American political philosopher, Professor of Law at Emory University School of Law in the US and one of the most influential figures in feminist legal theory describes liberal feminists who equate mothering with fathering, and who prefer to use

the term 'parenting' - as 'neutering' motherhood, with the result being the creation of the two-parent family, which is, *"an institution with potentially NO available caretakers"*. Brenda Almond, Professor of Moral and Social Philosophy at the University of Hull in the UK, and author of the book, 'The Fragmenting Family', writes that for the majority of working mothers, they have to accept *"the inevitability of the absence of both parents from the home for the whole of the working day, and the financial impracticability of providing a substitute in the home. The feminist movement in both the USA and Europe did a disservice to the vast majority of working-class women in failing to appreciate this fact or to register its implications."*

In the UK, almost three-fourths of mothers with dependent children (4.9 million mothers) go out to work. This number reflects a 1 million rise over the past 2 decades (Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2017 figures) and has in large part been due to successive British governments – both Labour and Conservative – intensively encouraging women with young children back into the jobs market, aided with the offer of 30 hours free childcare a week. Even two thirds of women with three or four-year old children were in employment (ONS). According to the ONS, almost 70% of single mothers are also in employment, and almost a half of single mothers with a child under three are in work. In the US, almost 70% of mothers with children under 6 are in the labour force (Population Reference Bureau).

Furthermore, in many countries, women are forced financially to travel abroad for work, leaving their children behind. For example, in 2016, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (2016) released data that revealed that millions of toddlers have been left behind in Indonesia by mothers working overseas. There are 11.2 million Indonesian children today who are deprived of the parental care from their mother due to work abroad, while 2008 UNICEF data showed that around 6 million children in the Philippines have been abandoned due to their mothers becoming migrant workers. All this has led to many women feeling a deep sense of guilt and heartache over the lack of time spent with their children – a heavy price to pay for the 'gender equality capitalist experiment'. Again, this is far from a liberating experience or a mark of progress for women!

This shortness of time spent by working mothers in nurturing their children has also been attributed by many as one cause of the significant levels of delinquent and anti-social behaviour amongst the youth that plagues many societies today, as well as affecting the mental wellbeing and educational performance of children. In 2011, UNICEF published a report that warned that British parents were trapping their children in a cycle of *"compulsive consumerism"* by showering them with toys and designer clothes instead of spending quality time with them, blaming this for contributing to the riots and widespread looting which gripped the UK in the same year. In Sweden, over 90% of all 18 months to 5 year olds are in day-care. 'Stay at home mothers' has been discouraged, including through a tax system that financially penalizes women if they wish to be the primary carers of their own children. This has been blamed for the rise in psychological, behavioural, and learning problems amongst children, youth, and young adults in Sweden. Swedish schools have among the highest truancy, classroom disorder, and the worst discipline problems in Europe. Again, this is hardly a mark of progress!

Hence, decades of gender equality policies by these governments to 'equalize' the presence of men and women in their workforce has undermined motherhood and effectively forced mothers to hand over their babies and children to nurseries in order to work, resulting in them being raised by strangers rather than their parents. Furthermore, many mothers are paying extortionate prices and a substantial portion of their pay packet for childcare. They are therefore effectively going to work in order to afford to pay others to raise their own children, often for very little economic benefit for their family, and with the knowledge that even the best day care centre will be second rate compared to the one to one attention a

child will get from its own mother at home. Presumably, the UN's vision, "Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step it up for Gender Equality", which asks governments to make national commitments to increase women's participation in the workforce will achieve more of the same with regards to the neglect of children's rights, heartache for women, and detrimental impacts on society.

Women's Lives Became Strained:

Gender equality's irrational ideal of equalizing two beings who by their nature are physically different, and that forced women to adopt the roles of men, has acted as a form of oppression upon them. This is because it ignored, undermined and undervalued their nature as the ones who are the child-bearers of society and generally the primary caretakers of children as well as those who have the main responsibility for domestic chores. The strain of having to struggle the pressures of work with the responsibilities of home and family life has been attributed to the significant rise in anxiety and depressive disorders in women. In a study of 30 European countries, published in 2011 by the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology, researchers found that depression amongst women in Europe has doubled over the last 40 years due to the 'tremendous burden' of having to juggle family duties with the demands of work. In 2009, the UK National Health Service Information Centre reported that there was a significant rise in women being referred for extreme stress due to the pressures of keeping a job, raising children, and looking after elderly parents. And in 2015, figures published by the UK's Health and Safety Executive showed that middle aged women in Britain are almost 70% more likely to suffer work-related stress than men of the same age. The study also revealed that cases of work-related stress amongst women in their late 30's to early 40's has increased by almost a third in 4 years. These soaring levels of stress amongst working women was also attributed to the pressures of juggling careers, children and often caring for elderly parents. Dr. Judith Mohring, a leading psychiatrist based in the UK's re-known Priory wellbeing clinic in central London, stated that the spike in cases of workplace stress amongst women in their 30's and 40's underlined the pressure on the so-called "do-it-all" generation of women.

The call for gender equality therefore acted as a form of injustice, as the dream of the 'have it all woman' became the nightmare of the 'do-it all woman', who suffered the stress of being both homemaker and wage-earner with inevitable consequences. This is far from being a paradise of fairness and justice for women. One journalist, Caron Kemp, once wrote in an article in The Independent regarding how working mothers can't have it all, *"Sadly there is a common uncomfortable thread that ties at least most mums together. They feel torn, think they're getting motherhood wrong somehow and feel like they're doing a disservice to their career, their children, their partners or all of them."*

Erosion of the Man's Responsibility over the Family:

Feminism's equalization of the roles and duties of the genders, its attempt to remove men as the head and protector of the family, and its drive to push women to adopt the man's traditional responsibility as breadwinners for the family eroded men's understanding of their role in the family. Society's view of the father and husband's position and duties in the family unit also became ill-defined, confused and obscure. Furthermore, feminism's toxic idea that women did not really need men and that they could fulfil all their children and family needs without a husband, if need be, nurtured a mentality of indifference amongst many men towards their responsibility to their family. Many felt that their contribution to the care, protection and financial maintenance of their children and family was not important, or that they were not needed, as the woman could do it all. This, therefore, undermined men's sense of responsibility as the guardians and caretakers of their families, causing many to

abandon their children and absolve themselves of providing for their family. Consequently, many women and children were left with no financial security, and mothers were abandoned to fend for themselves, often struggling to survive financially alone, within societies where even the state gave them little or no economic support. Significant numbers of women, therefore, turned to exploitative jobs or even begging to provide for themselves and their children.

It is bizarre, therefore, that Islam's prescription of gender roles in family life is labeled as unjust to the woman, and its obligation upon men to be the breadwinner for the family described as backward and at odds with women's liberation, while abandoning her under the guise of 'Gender Equality' to earn for herself is hailed as fair and liberating. It's an irrational view that ignores the real injustice placed upon women and children by this feminist ideal.

The Devaluing of Motherhood:

Feminism and capitalism worked hand in hand to systematically deconstruct motherhood. For example, Nancy Chodorow, an American feminist sociologist, wrote in her influential book, 'The Reproduction of Mothering', *"If our goal is to overcome the sexual division of labour in which women mother, we need to understand the mechanisms which reproduce it in the first place. My account points precisely to where the intervention should take place. Any strategy for change whose goal includes liberation from the constraints of an unequal social organization of gender must take account of the need for a fundamental reorganization of parenting, so that primary parenting is shared between men and women."*

Feminism's promotion of the idea that women's domestic duties and childrearing were a waste of their talents and that they were holding women back from achieving their real potential within society and true aspirations in life, as well as its claim that motherhood alone could not offer self-fulfillment, and that full respect was not compatible with full-time domestic responsibilities and childrearing, all led to the devaluing of motherhood. In addition, the feminist view that employment and a career are what gave women value, success and empowerment, and its placing of the role of breadwinner above that of mother and homemaker also lowered society's view and valuing of the vital importance of the role of motherhood. Derogatory language such as – reducing women to 'baby-making machines' – was used to describe those who supported the idea of the primary role of women as being a wife and mother. This is despite the fact that successfully caring for and raising a child is one of the most valuable assets of a society.

Consequently, full-time mothers became second class citizens and disrespected, and made to feel ashamed as if they were betraying 'women's liberation' and not contributing fully to society. The position of 'stay-at-home mother' also became associated with a meaningless life that lacked purpose. These women were presented as a lower, uneducated class of 'non-persons' who were less skilled, less successful and of less value to society. These views rooted themselves deeply in the consciousness of women – Muslim and non-Muslim – such that today many women feel embarrassed rather than confident and proud to call themselves full-time mothers. Hence, women's natural instinct to be mothers and to give quality time and attention in caring for and raising their children effectively was frowned upon and suppressed, for they were made to feel guilty that they were betraying the feminist cause.

Furthermore, feminism's placing of the man's roles, duties and rights as the gold standard that women were expected to aspire to, in effect, made women devalue and at times even scorn their own unique biological nature and exclusive quality as the child-bearers of the human race, demeaning their status as women. The consequence was that women were not valued and respected as those who had a vital and distinct role and position

to men to fulfil within their societies but rather as those who had to work harder to catch up to the role and responsibilities of men, and whose 'wombs' were holding them back from this

warped feminist gold standard of success. In such an environment, it is hardly surprising that many employers and workplaces failed to appreciate the importance of women's role as mothers, and hence, inevitably failed to accommodate for their family responsibilities, expecting them instead to sacrifice their duties to their children for the sake of keeping their jobs. Feminists, therefore, failed to recognize that their attempts to erase appreciation of gender differences and to push aside as irrelevant the biological nature of women would inevitably lead to disrespect of the distinct qualities of women and lack of recognition and support given to them to fulfil their unique position within the human race. This devaluing of motherhood had a huge detrimental impact on the upbringing of children which inevitably caused a host of problems for societies.

Conclusion:

Feminism, and its ideal of gender equality, is therefore a rationally flawed and socially corrosive concept that has inflicted much damage upon the harmony and unity of family life as well as the wellbeing of children. This is because the myopic individualistic feminist perspective of always looking at what is best for the desires and interests of women often overlooks what is best for a marriage, children, a tranquil family life and society overall. Furthermore, it did not deliver a fair and happy life for women. Rather it burdened them with extra responsibilities, deprived them of the right of financial provision, caused conflict in their marriages and cheated them of motherhood. The idea of women defining their own rights and roles did not liberate them from oppression but rather subjected them to different forms of injustice.

It is ironic, therefore, that while in Western societies, many feminists have redefined their beliefs, seeking to reclaim the importance of motherhood having recognized the severe harm that feminist ideas have had on the family structure, women and children, governments and organisations in the Muslim lands continue to rush towards this disastrous Western-inspired feminist social experiment. They are implementing further laws and policies upon its basis and propagating it intensively amongst their people, claiming absurdly that it is a sign of progress and will deliver a better life for women instead of rejecting this toxic set of beliefs outright.

Surely as Muslims, rather than replicating failed foreign social experiments, we should embrace and promote the Islamic beliefs, values, laws and system that has a sound, time-tested approach to organizing the roles, duties and rights of men and women in the most just way as well as creating harmonious and strong family structures. It is to our Deen, therefore, that we need to look to solve the many problems that women, children and families face today.

﴿أَفَمَنْ أَسَّسَ بُنْيَانَهُ عَلَىٰ تَقْوَىٰ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٍ خَيْرٌ أَمْ مَنْ أَسَّسَ بُنْيَانَهُ عَلَىٰ شَقَا جُرْفٍ هَارٍ فَانْهَارَ بِهِ فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ
وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

“Which then is best? - he that lays his foundation on piety to Allah and His good pleasure? - or he that lays his foundation on an undermined sand-cliff ready to crumble to pieces? and it does crumble to pieces with him, into the fire of Hell. And Allah guides not people that do wrong.” [At-Taubah: 109]

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