

Evaluating the Concept of Gender Equality in the Islamic Perspective and SDG: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In 2015, United Nations (UN) has implemented 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where the fifth goal aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls all over the world. The efforts of promoting gender equality are not new, yet it is a continuous mission as a global concern from one generation to another. Islam is one of the religions which attempts to emphasize equality for all mankind. Unfortunately, there are claims that gender inequality and injustice are being justified in the name of Islam. Islamic texts are blamed for having deliberately encouraged gender bias and have shown a preference for males over females. The stereotype image of the female role is continuously portrayed as a symbol of the oppression of Muslim women, even though in the present-day women have been given other significant roles in society. Therefore, this study aims to remove any accusation that claims Islam is an unjust religion towards gender equality and analyse its value within the current context. Applying the qualitative design, this study collects and analyses related verses from the Quran and selected hadiths from six canonical books of hadith known as Kutub Sittah. As a result, the study found the similarity and differences on the concept of gender equality in SDG and the Islamic texts from the Quran and hadith. However, eliminating injustice and discrimination towards women should be significantly continued as a global and humanitarian mission.

Keywords: Gender Equality; Gender Equity; Islamic Perspective; SDG

1. Introduction

In reality, women, regardless of their religions, experienced bias and discrimination in many areas. Unfortunately, male domination and chauvinism still exist today (Goh, 2015). Women around the world

undergo discrimination in the private and public sectors, whether directly or indirectly, even though modernity and globalization took over in various aspects of human life. However, many efforts have been made to provide a solution for issues plaguing women worldwide (Bucheli-Rotter, 2017). One of the solutions was an initiative from the United Nations (UN) in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where the fifth goal aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (United Nation, 2015).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, is a set of 17 aspirational goals with 169 targets adopted by the 193 member states of the United Nations in 2015. It is to provide a forecast of the future of every nation in the development trajectory as a commitment to realizing human rights and an acknowledgment of the links between inequality, marginalization, and poverty (Esquivel and Sweetman, 2016). From the 17 goals, there is one goal to advocate gender equality along with the women's empowerment at all levels in all sectors. The fifth goal emphasized that women could also play their essential roles in the realization of the goals. The concept of equality does not necessarily concern the problem of achieving equal status and position between men and women. Still, it aims to the achievement of equal roles, in order to reduce the rate of gender differentiation in participating in the development of nation (Husein, Herdiansyah, and Putri, 2021).

The goal to achieve gender equality is not newly introduced in the millennial era. Yet, it is a continuous mission as a global concern from one generation to another since a decade ago. Islam is one of the religions which attempts to emphasize equality for all mankind, but unfortunately, there are views claim that gender inequality and injustice being justified in the name of Islam (Hong, 2006). Islamic texts are blamed for deliberately encouraging a gender bias and showing a preference for males over females. The stereotype image of the female role is continuously portrayed as a symbol of the oppression of Muslim women, even though in the present-day women have been given other significant roles in society. The discrimination comes in many forms whether women are full-time staying at home or full-time working in public space (Parker & Cary, 2017).

Therefore, this study comes with two important objectives. First, to remove any accusation that Islam is an unjust religion towards gender equality by referring to the Quran and the Prophetic traditions. Many previous studies have been conducted in discussing gender equality with this similar objective, for example, Fatma Osma Ibnouf (2015) and M. Naeem-ul-Haq Chishti (2012) highlighted that the Quran and Hadith have emphasized concerning gender equality and women's human rights. Raihana Abdullah et al., (2015) also discussed the concept of gender equality from the Islamic perspective and its subsequent applicability

within the framework of Islamic Family Law. However, this study discovers that there are relevant Quranic verses as well as the hadiths based on the specific themes designed to the gender equality comprehensively.

Second, this study aims to analyze the understanding of gender equality as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the perspective of the Quran and Hadith. The fifth goal of SDGs aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (United Nation 2015). Therefore, it is significant to make comparison by highlighting the differences and similarity between these two contexts.

2. The Concept of Gender Equality

In general, the struggle for gender equality began in the 17th century and became popular after the French Revolution in 1789. The term 'equality' itself originated in French as 'égalité' and later became egalitarianism or equalitarianism which refers to "the doctrine that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities." In the late of the 18th century, the definition of gender equality became tensed with the first proclamations of women's rights in Western Europe. Still, this concept has been recognized universally by Olympe de Gouges who believes that all laws must be equally applied to both men and women. Similarly, Mary Wollstonecraft who wrote *Vindication of the Rights of Women* also framed gender equality as a universal cause (Stanton, 2020). In the 21st century, the universal definition of gender equality has been adopted by inter-governmental organizations, beginning with the Declaration on the Equality of Women (1975) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 (Kurzman et al., 2019).

In fact, gender egalitarianism is not a new notion because its element has been included in the Quran and the Prophetic Sunnah (M. M. Hasan, 2012). However, although there is no exact term to give a clear worldview of gender terms specifically in the religious texts (Mohd Anuar Ramli, 2012), it does not indicate that gender is not widely discussed textually and contextually in the Islamic discourse. The relationship between male and female was acknowledged clearly in the Islamic texts without specifically addressing the term gender. Gender has been given the abstract meaning that can be socially constructed between men and women. It refers to "the roles, behaviors, activities, and characteristics that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women" (Macmillan Dictionary, 2009). Many kinds of research have differentiated between gender and sex because the former is used to identify differences between men and women in terms of socio-cultural aspects. The latter is used to determine their differences in terms of biological anatomy (Muhdina,

2017). Both terms are inter-related and have been occasionally used interchangeably.

In contrast, Islam discussed gender issues as the existence of two equal partners which comprises males and females where each complement another. Both are remaining equivalent even they are different in terms of their biological and anatomical aspects. There is also a difference in natural identity, bodily delicacy, sexual urge and reaction, functions and implications of reproduction, and hormones. There is also a discrepancy in the ability to influence others, in the response to stimuli, flexibility, degree of dependency, interest to surrender, receptiveness, and concentration (Ahmad Shehu Abdulssalam, 2006). Therefore, their differences do not determine the equality of both genders, for men are no more because of their masculinity, whereas women are no less because of their femininity.

In other words, the term gender equality in the sense of “sameness of rights” would not be agreed upon from the Islamic perspective (Arafa & El-Ashry, 2018). The value of equality is not to be mistaken for a term like sameness, identicalness, or stereotype. Although Islam emphasized that all people are equal several times, they are not necessarily identical. There are differences in abilities, potentials, ambitions, wealth, qualities, and so on. Then, the concept of gender equity is more approachable because the equality aimed is defined more by equitability rather than sameness (Bayefsky, 2018). Besides, the principles of gender equity can be achieved through spiritual, economic, and social aspects, as have been highlighted in the Quran as well as in the Prophetic traditions (Jamal Badawi, 1995).

Unfortunately, Islam has been blamed for gender bias and discrimination due to many arguments in which the majority came from feminists. For example, Fatima Mernissi (1991) blamed the male, particularly those who hold the authority on the religious narratives, promoting misogyny traditions. Sisters in Islam (SIS) also used the same debate on questioning the hadith that claimed to promote gender bias particularly disregarding the woman’s status in Islam. One of the big misunderstandings from them is the differences of men and women existed by Islam are a form of patriarchy because they believe that the religion which gives equality is the religion that is no longer used to practice patriarchy (A. Harris & Muhtar, 2019). In fact, patriarchy had an enormous impact on women in Islam even though there is no inherent or logical link between patriarchy and Islam (Mir-Hosseini 2003), and it has been claimed to be the practice among tribes in the pre-Islamic era. These patriarchal cultures and misogynistic practices were also believed to have originated from other cultures, such as Persian, Byzantine, and Greek, but later was embedded in the social practices of Muslims (Mohammad Ali Syed, 2004).

3. Method and Materials

The methodology of this research is qualitative by applying textual and analytical approaches. In order to achieve the main objectives, selected Quranic verses and the Prophetic traditions from six authentic collections of hadith, also known as *Kutub Sittah* will be comprehensively analyzed based on one important theme: gender equality. From the main theme, other sub-themes are identified on the concept of equality within the relationship of men and women in general, husband and wife, sons and daughters, as well as the male and female companions.

This study clarifies the concept of gender equality from the Quran by collecting related verses which are based on four important themes: equality as a human, equality between children, equality for both to engage in public activities, and equality of being rewarded and punished. This process was done with the thorough reading the Quran and its translation supported with the explanation from the Quranic exegesis.

Regarding the materials in collecting hadith based on the similar themes, the six books that this study refers to *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* and *Sunan Ibn Mājah*. However, there is an additional theme which is related to how the Prophet gave equal treatment to his wives and practiced justice in his polygamous marriage. This addition is due to describe the meaning of equality and its practice as performed by the Prophet which was only recorded in the Hadith collection and could not be found in the Quran. The process of collecting the related hadiths was done with the assistance of a digital web www.sunnah.com for its reliability in referring the original source of the Hadith collections.

4. Findings and Discussion

From the compilation of the related Quranic verses and hadiths of the Prophet, three issues are discussed as the main findings of this study. The first finding is understanding the concept of gender equality in the Quran – whether directly or indirectly mentioned. The second finding is the importance of the traditions and words of the Prophet in strengthening the value of gender equality in all kinds of relationships. Finally, the third finding is the analysis on the comparison between gender equality promoted in the Quran and hadith and gender equality as one of the important objectives in the SDGs.

4.1 The Quranic Approach of Gender Equality

Islam believes that there is no difference between men and women as both share their respective rights, roles, and responsibilities. Particularly, the Quran with its egalitarian message mentioned several aspects that show the equality of man and woman in addition to the equitability between these two genders (Muhdina, 2017).

First, the Qur'an has mentioned that all human is equal in the sight of God irrespective of gender, color, or race, and has emphasized that any difference existed among human is a sign of His power and to be a mean of recognition of one another. Both men and women have the same purposes in their lives: to worship God and obey His commandment, and the only way to differentiate mankind is based on their piety and forbearance of God. It is mentioned in the Quran that says: *"O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may 'get to' know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware"* (al-Hujurat, 49: 13).

Many of the language used in the Quran refers to all mankind which covers both men and women. It is the highest level of equality to indicate that men and women are equal as a human being. In the Quran, there are more than 830 indications of the word 'human' in different forms (Elshahat et al., 2019). Among them are the term '*al-ins*' (human) (al-Dhāriyāt, 51: 56), '*al-insān*' (human) in (al-Aḥzāb, 33: 72; al-Ḥijr, 15: 26; al-Mu'minūn, 23: 12; al-Raḥmān, 55: 3), '*khalīfah*' (successors) (al-Baqarah, 2: 30; al-An'ām, 6: 165), and the word '*al-nās*' (human) in more than 200 verses, which all indicate to all mankind equally regardless of their gender. Other terms used to refer to mankind found in the Quran are also '*al-bashr*' and '*banī ādam*' (Nurdin, 2013; Solehah Yaacob & Baharuddin Yaacob, 2006). Please refer to Table 1 on the terms used in the Quran referring to all human is equal.

Table 1: The Quranic Terms on the Equality of Human

| Arabic Term | English Translation | The Quranic Verses |
|-----------------|---------------------|--|
| <i>al-ins</i> | human | 4 verses found in the Quran, for example: al-Dhāriyāt, 51: 56; al-Raḥmān, 55: 39, 56, 74, and others. |
| <i>al-insān</i> | human | 91 verses found in the Quran, for example: al-Aḥzāb, 33: 72; al-Ḥijr, 15: 26; al-Mu'minūn, 23: 12; al-Insān, 76: 1; al-Raḥmān, 55: 3, and others. |
| <i>unās</i> | human | 5 verses found in the Quran, for example: al-A'rāf, 7: 82, 160; al-Baqarah, 2: 60; al-Naml, 27: 56, and others. |
| <i>al-nās</i> | human | 241 verses indicated this term referring to human being, for example: al-Baqarah, 2: 8, 13, 21, 24, 44, 94, 96, 102; Āli Imrān, 3: 9; Saba', 34: 28; al-Nās, 113: 1-6, and others. |
| <i>khalīfah</i> | successor | 2 times found in the Quran, for example: al-Baqarah, 2: 30; |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---|
| | | al-An`ām, 6: 165. But verses derived from the word <i>khalafa</i> in various forms and its meaning repeated as much as 127 times in the Quran. |
| <i>al-bashr</i> | human | 37 verses found in the Quran, for example: al-An`ām, 6: 91; Ibrāhīm, 14: 11; al-Shu`arā', 26: 186; al-Rūm, 30: 20; Fuṣṣilat, 41: 6; al-Muddaththir, 74: 25, and others. |
| <i>Ādam & banī Ādam</i> | Ādam & sons of Ādam | 25 verses referring to the Prophet Ādam as the father of all human beings and his offspring, for example: al-Baqarah, 2: 31, 37; Āli Imrān, 3: 33, 59, al-A`rāf, 7: 31; Tā Hā, 20: 121; Yā Sīn, 36: 60, and others. |

(Source: Nur Saadah et al., 2021)

Second, the Quran did not differentiate between son and daughter, for if the term '*al-atfāl*' means children (e.g.: al-Nūr, 24: 59) or '*al-yatāmā*' means orphans (e.g.: al-Nisā', 4: 2) are mentioned, it covers both without any discrimination. In fact, the term 'child' is explicitly mentioned in the Quran for 238 times which expressed in various terms (Nasution, 2020). However, all terms did not differentiate the preference for son or daughter because both are equally important and have their own rights and roles in the family. Both are also equally entitled to inherit the property of the deceased relations but the portions they get may vary. Still, it is not a sign of giving preference or supremacy of man over woman (Ibnouf, 2015). Furthermore, the Quran elevates the position of daughters by rejecting the tradition of killing daughters as practiced in the pre-Islamic era (al-Takwīr, 81: 8-9). The Quran also emphasizes that "*your properties and your children are but a trial*" (al-Anfāl, 8: 28; al-Taghābun, 64: 15) to remind that both son and daughters are trust for the parents, therefore, there is no indication to say that son is better than daughter or vice versa.

Third, both men and women have equal rights and duties to engage in public activities. As God's vicegerents, both are obliged to strive for a virtuous life and to prevent sins and evildoings. In terms of civic duty, the Quran says: "*And the believers, men and women, are protectors of one another. They enjoin good and forbid evil and keep up the prayer and pay the zakāh (charity tax)*" (al-Tawbah, 9: 71). Both men and women also shared similar responsibilities, as the Quran says: God says: "*For Muslim men and women, - for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in God's praise, - for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward.*" (al-Aḥzāb, 33: 35). Another example is the equal rights and duties for both men and women to pursue knowledge as the command to read and learn was applied to both.

Fourth, there is no difference between a sin committed by a woman and a sin committed by a man. Many Quranic verses explicitly guarantee equal rewards and punishment to women and men for their good and bad deeds. Among the Quranic verses in this matter are: *“There is no one in the heavens and earth but that he comes to the Most Merciful as a servant. He has enumerated them and counted them a [full] counting. And all of them are coming to Him on the Day of Resurrection alone.”* (Maryam, 19: 93-95), *“Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.”* (al-Nahl, 16: 97), and *“And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer - those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed.”* (al-Nisā’, 4: 124). These verses show the similarity of status between men and women for both equally easy to earn rewards. Islam does not differentiate between the deeds of men and women because all the good deeds performed in this world are not in vain. Similarly, the punishment for the wrong deeds will be evaluated accordingly which is not related to one’s gender. Due to that, the Quran says: *“And do not wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others. For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned...”* (al-Nisā’, 4: 32). If the deeds are good, then the rewards are good; if the deeds are bad, then the rewards are also bad.

This finding shows that the Quran emphasizes the equality of rights for men and women because many of the verses support the concept of gender equality either in a direct or indirect approach. However, it is vital to emphasize that the Quran also assigns different rights to men and women in some matters, for instance, marriage, divorce, and inheritance (Arafa & El-Ashry, 2018; Chishti, 2012). But these differences do not indicate that the Quran was being unequal to women, with the understanding that equality in Islam cannot be perceived as sameness.

4.2 The Prophetic Approach of Gender Equality

The gender issues also have been addressed by the Prophet PBUH which all has been recorded in Hadith literature. Many of the Prophet’s teachings do not degrade women in the second place but elevate women in conducive and supportive positions in society as equals. The Prophet personally respected women and recognized their rights as well as the great contributions that women had given especially during his time. There are many authentic hadiths mentioned on how he treated women kindly and did not discriminate against them as weaker or lower than men. The encouragement to do good taught by the Prophet generally involves all human beings regardless of age, rank, religion and gender. Therefore, this study found that there are five

themes that can be identified from gathering related hadith on the concept of gender equality.

First, the Prophet emphasized that all humans are equal, as has been highlighted in the Quran multiple times. But, he repeatedly mentioned that Muslims' blood are equal to differentiate those who believe and disbelieve in Allah as the only God. For example, *"The Muslims are one hand against others, and their blood is equal."* (Sunan Ibn Mājah, hadith no.: 2683 & 2684), *"The lives of the believers are equal in value, and they are one against others, and they hasten to support the asylum granted by the least of them"* (Sunan al-Nasā'ī, hadith no.: 4739). In another hadith, the Prophet addressed both men and women equally to respect each other's private parts. 'Abd al-Rahman, the son of Abu Sa'īd al-Khudrī, reported from his father: The Messenger of Allah said: *"A man should not see the private parts of another man, and a woman should not see the private parts of another woman, and a man should not lie with another man under one covering, and a woman should not lie with another woman under one covering."* (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, hadith no.: 667). It applies for both men and women because each is responsible on their own bodies equally.

Second, the Prophet encouraged to give equal treatment to all children, either sons or daughters. Historically, people during the *Jahiliyyah* time have more preference towards son compared to daughters, but the tradition of killing daughter was prohibited after the Quran was revealed to the Prophet. He himself was known as the one who love children and encourage to treat sons and daughters equally. The Prophet said: *"Act equally between your children"* (Sunan Abū Dāwūd, hadith no.: 3537). In another hadith, it was narrated from An-Nu'mān that his father brought him to the Prophet to witness a present he gave to him. He said: *"Have you given all your children a present like that which you have given to him?" He said: "No." He said: "I will not bear witness to anything. Will it not please you if they were all to treat you with equal respect?" He said: "Of course." He said: "Then no (I will not do it)."* (Sunan al-Nasā'ī, hadith no.: 3710). Besides, narrated by An-Nu'mān bin Bashir who said: *"My father took me to the Prophet to ask him to bear witness to something that he had given to me. He said: 'Do you have any other children?' He said: 'Yes.' He gestured with his hand held horizontally like this, (saying): 'Why don't you treat them all equally?'"* (Sunan al-Nasā'ī, hadith no.: 3715; Sunan Ibn Mājah, hadith no.: 2375). However, there are few exceptional cases that sons get more than daughters in terms of slaughtering for *'aqīqah* and inheritance, but it does not indicate that any children should be discriminated based on their gender.

Third, the Prophet has no restriction for both men and women to engage in public activities. For example, both genders were allowed to attend his lectures, go to the mosque, participate in the battles, and socialize with society. In one hadith, Narrated Abu Sa'īd al-Khudrī: *"Some women*

requested the Prophet to fix a day for them as the men were taking all his time. On that, he promised them one day for religious lessons and commandments” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, hadith no.: 101). In term of looking for knowledge, the Prophet encouraged that *“Seeking knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim (i.e. both male and female)”* (Sunan Ibn Mājah, hadith no.: 224) and *“Whoever takes a path upon which to obtain knowledge, Allah makes the path to Paradise easy for him”* (Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī, hadith no.: 2646). Besides, the Prophet permitted for women to visit mosque either to perform prayer, to attend class or to celebrate ‘eid, as in a hadith narrated Salim bin `Abdullah: My father said, *“The Prophet said, ‘If the wife of any one of you asks permission (to go to the mosque) do not forbid her.”* (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, hadith no.: 832; Sunan al-Nasā’ī, hadith no.: 707). It shows that women were treated equally like men to join activities outside their home, and that was the reason how the wives of the Prophet could be the best example where women can be successful both inside and outside the home. In addition to being wives and mothers, some women also participated in the battlefield, ran businesses, opened classes, became a reference for knowledge, and were equally involved in the leadership line.

Fourth, the Prophet also stressed that both men and women have equality of being rewarded and punished. As emphasized in the Quran, the Prophet also highlighted that both men and women were accountable for their own actions because their gender will not contribute to any rewards and sins. For example, The Prophet as saying: *“Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock. The ruler who is over the people is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock; a man is a shepherd in charge of the inhabitants of his household and he is responsible for his flock; a woman is a shepherdess in charge of her husband's house and children, and she is responsible for them; and a man's slave is a shepherd in charge of his master's property, and he is responsible for it. So each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock.”* (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, hadith no.: 116; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, hadith no.: 4496; Sunan Abū Dāwūd, hadith no.: 2922). In another hadith narrated by ‘Aishah: Allah's Messenger said, *“Do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately and know that your deeds will not make you enter Paradise, and that the most beloved deed to Allah is the most regular and constant even if it were little.”* (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, hadith no.: 471)

Fifth, in his polygamous marriage, the Prophet did his very best to conduct all his wives equally. This issue has not been described in details in the Quran, but the polygamy is permitted in Islam as Allah says: *“And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among (other) women such as are lawful to you — (even) two, or three, or four but if you reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then (only) one — or (from among) those whom you*

rightfully possess. This will make it more likely that you will not deviate from the right course" (al-Nisā', 4: 3). Although the Quran clearly mentioned the permissibility of polygamy, the Hadith has more explanation of how the Prophet has practiced polygamy. God had arranged the marriage between him and his wives with the purpose to spread Islam, not for his own personal reason as being criticized by the West (Husain et al., 2019). In a hadith, the Prophet has mentioned that the justice in polygamous marriage is highly important, because there will be punishment if the husband has inclination to the favorite wife only. Narrated by Abu Hurairah, The Prophet states: *"Whoever has two wives, and he is prefer to one of them, then he will come on the day of judgement with one of his sides leaning"* (Sunan al-Dārimī, hadith no.: 2252; Sunan Abū Dāwūd, hadith no.: 2133; Sunan al-Nasā'ī, hadith no.: 8831; Sunan Ibn Mājah, hadith no.: 1969).

Due to that, the Prophet shows the best example in treating all his wives equally. 'Aishah narrated that: The Prophet would divide (his time) equally between his wives and said: *"O Allah! This is my division in what I have control over, so do not punish me for what You have control over which I do not have control over."* (Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī, hadith no.: 1140). Narrated by 'Aishah: The Messenger of Allah used to divide his time equally and said: *"O Allah, this is my division concerning what I control, so do not blame me concerning what You control, and I do not."* Abū Dāwūd said: By it meant the heart. (Sunan Abū Dāwūd, hadith no.: 2129). It was narrated that 'Aishah said: *"The Messenger of Allah used to divide his time equally among his wives then he would say: 'O Allah, this is what I have done with regard to that over which I have control, so do not blame me for that over which You have control and I do not.'"* Hammad bin Zayd narrated it in *mursal* form. (Sunan al-Nasā'ī, hadith no.: 3395). 'Aishah, wife of the Prophet reported *"When the Apostle of Allah intended to go on a journey, he cast lots amongst his wives and the one who was chosen by lot went on it with him. He divided his time, day and night (equally) for each of his wives except that Saudah daughter of Zam'ah gave her day to 'Aishah."* (Sunan Abū Dāwūd, hadith no.: 2133). Narrated by 'Aishah: *"The Messenger of Allah used to ask our permission on the day he had to stay with one of his wives (by turns) after the following Quranic verse was revealed: "You may distance those whom you like and draw close to those whom you like" [33:51].* (Sunan Abū Dāwūd, hadith no.: 2131). All these hadiths are among the examples that the wives of the Prophet never complained and felt loved by him, so that he was acknowledged not only as the kindest husband but also the most just husband.

From these five themes, selected hadiths were collected from six books of Hadith: *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* and *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, which all known as *Kutub Sittah*. One of the main reasons of their selections because these

hadiths have been verified as *sahih* (authentic). This finding shows that in addition to the Quran, the hadith of the Prophet also acknowledges the concept of gender equality whether directly or indirectly.

4.3 The Value of Gender Equality in the SDG

In the implementation of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the fifth goal intends to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (United Nation 2015). This goal specifically set a number of targets. First, to end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. Second, to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation. Third, to eliminate all harmful practices, such as early and forced marriage among children and female genital mutilation (FGM). Fourth, to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate. Fifth, to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic, and public life. Sixth, to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (United Nation, 2015). The United Nations keeps updating the information and progress every year since 2017 on the website, and many indicators of gender equality are progressing positively.

Based on the above targets of gender equality in the SDGs, this study found no contradiction to the Islamic teaching and value that constantly support justice. The Quran and hadith condemned any kind of discrimination and violence against all regardless of gender in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies. Forced marriage is also not permitted in Islam because the consent of a daughter is needed before marriage. For instance, it has been mentioned in a hadith that a woman from the offspring of Ja'far was afraid lest her guardian marries her (to somebody) against her will. So, she sent for two elderly men from the Ansar, 'Abdur Rahmān and Mujammi', the two sons of Jāriya, and they said to her, "Don't be afraid, for Khansā' bint Khidām was given by her father in marriage against her will, then the Prophet canceled that marriage." (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith no.: 99).

Regarding Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), it refers to "*all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or another injury to the female genital organs for non- medical reasons*" as defined by World Health Organization (WHO) (Rouzi, 2013). There are many claims that circumcision has been practiced in Islam was totally different from FGM, and the practice has been permitted as mentioned in the hadith. It is believed that FGM has no relation with the Islamic practice, but

culturally practiced as a social custom by some countries, and its practice is forbidden in Islam (Ali Gomaa, 2013).

There was a debate as well in term of female leadership, particularly on the hadith “*Never will succeed such a nation as makes a woman their ruler.*” (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, hadith no.: 219 and 709). It was only transmitted after the Prophet’s death and after ‘Aishah decided to participate in the battle to seek the truth of Uthmān ibn ‘Affān’s assassination (I. Abdullah, 2012). Besides that, Abu Bakra was the only narrator of this Hadith, and no other Companions were found reporting it. It is one of the reasons that the status of this particular Hadith and its content has received many arguments, and the Hadith has also been interpreted as discouraging women from being a leader (Nik Badlishah & Masidi, 2009).

However, the Hadith should not be interpreted literally, but contextually and historically, because it was proven that not all nations led by women have been a failure. The Quran has mentioned a few examples of women leaders, and many of them succeeded in Islamic history. Furthermore, to maintain the effectiveness and productiveness of any social and organisational structure, many researchers have found that gender is not the main factor, but it will depend on the credibility and capability of a chosen individual to carry the leadership position (A. Hasan & Othman, 2012).

In sum, SDG has certain goals which are in line with the Islamic perspective particularly in honoring women’s rights. However, it did not mention any relation with any particular religion because SDG aims generally to all regardless of religion, ethnicity, and skin color. But, these goals will be pursued differently by each country, and that a key benefit of the SDG approach is a degree of local flexibility (Morton et al., 2017).

Due to the complexity of relationship between religion and gender equality, UN Women have highlighted their collaboration with the UN system and stakeholder to expand opportunities for feminist faith-based organizations, institutions and actors to become an integral voice in the social justice movement to achieve gender equality (UN Women, 2017). However, if there is any of their voice which did not bring any harm to Islam and their efforts of highlighting women’s issues which are not contradicted to the Islamic teaching, that will be acceptable.

5. Conclusion

As a conclusion, gender equality is not a new issue raised by the generation of the 21st century. However, it is not achievable yet, for gender bias and discrimination still have been practiced worldwide until today regardless of race and religion. Women are still viewed obliquely, and their involvements were limited in many sectors and areas. Unfortunately, critics try to link patriarchal practices with religion and culture, particularly the claims that

Islam restricts women's liberties and encourages gender discrimination, which were often discussed in the Western media.

Therefore, this study aims to remove any accusation that Islam promotes neither bias nor discriminatory attitudes towards women because it contradicts the teachings mentioned in the Quran and the Prophetic traditions. The equality emphasized in Islam is not similar to the meaning of sameness, rather it is more towards the equitability between men and women for each have their own roles and responsibilities. The Quran emphasizes that all mankind is equal in many different aspects, but they also have inevitable differences that being a form of uniqueness as the creature of God. The Prophet also highlighted the similar issue that gender equality can be covered in many forms between husband and wives, sons and daughters, male and female companions, and many other relationships between these two genders.

However, it is undeniable that gender inequality occurred among the Muslim society has affected the negative image on Islam. The religion cannot be simply blamed for any discrimination against women. One of the main factors influencing this type of discrimination is a social practice specifically patriarchy which has been practiced for centuries over generations. Therefore, the effort to eliminate injustice and discrimination towards women should be significantly continued as a global and humanitarian mission. Religion might be the solution but not the hindrance to achieving gender equality.

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