



Developing a Policy Framework for the Observance of Ihdad Among Muslim Working Women in Malaysia

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Abstract. The observance of *ihdād* during a mandated mourning period for Muslim women following the death of a husband presents unique challenges, particularly for women who are actively engaged in the workforce. While *ihdād* is regulated within Islamic tradition, its application in the modern workplace raises important questions regarding religious obligations, employee rights, and institutional support. To date, there are no specific policies, laws, or guidelines that support the observance of *ihdad* for Muslim working women in Malaysia. This paper explores the need to develop a comprehensive policy framework to support working Muslim women in Malaysia during their *ihdād* period. It examines existing legal and organisational provisions, analyses gaps in current workplace practices, and highlights the lived experiences of women who are affected. Using a qualitative approach that includes document analysis and semi-structured interviews with ten female employees who experienced the death of their husbands, as well as nine employers from both the public and private sectors, the study identifies key areas where policy intervention is needed. Findings reveal several aspects that need to be considered in developing the policy framework for the observance of *ihdad* among Muslim working women in Malaysia, which include the provision of paid *ihdad* leave, flexible working hours and work arrangement, exemption from attending social or celebratory events or any external assignments, and notification of the *ihdad* period. The study proposes an inclusive policy framework that harmonises Islamic requirements of *ihdad* in employment settings. This research also highlights the importance of integrating religious observance into labour policies, whether at the federal, state or organisational level. Finally, it is not only to uphold the rights and dignity of Muslim women but also to promote a more compassionate and equitable working environment in Malaysia.

Keywords: Employment policy, Muslim Working Women, Mourning, Religious Obligations, Workplace Support System.

1 Introduction

Iddah denotes the prescribed mourning period of four months and ten days that Muslim women are religiously obligated to observe following the death of their husband, as stipulated in Surah al-Baqarah, verse 234 which reads, “As for those of you who die and leave widows behind, let them observe a waiting period of four months and ten days”. During this period, women are required to comply with specific restrictions under Islamic law, known as *ihdad*, which include abstaining from adornments, remaining within the marital home, and refraining from travel except when necessary [1],[2]. The observance of *ihdad* signifies the way of honouring the sanctity of the marital bond and acts as a transitional phase that provides widows with space to adapt to profound life changes [2]. Nevertheless, many women experience feelings of disorientation and uncertainty when navigating life after their husband’s death [3]. Despite these challenges, widows are often compelled to manage numerous responsibilities simultaneously, including the administration of the deceased’s estate, the education and care of children, the maintenance of household expenses, and the continuation of their professional duties [2].

The challenge of balancing religious obligations with professional responsibilities during *iddah* has become more complex among working women [4]. The demands of employment, coupled with personal responsibilities, often create dilemmas for women seeking to fulfil the religious requirements of *ihdad*. The lack of comprehensive institutional support from employers exacerbates this tension, potentially resulting in heightened stress among Muslim working women during the mourning period [5],[6].

In the present time, there are no specific policies, laws, or guidelines in Malaysia that address the observance of *ihdad* within the workplace. The Employment Act 1955, which governs employer–employee relations in the private sector, does not provide for *ihdad* leave. In practice, employees in the private sector who experience the death of an immediate family member, such as a spouse, are generally granted leave in accordance with the precedent established in the public service through *Pekeliling Perkhidmatan Bilangan 10 Tahun 2002* (PP Bil. 10/2002), which allows three days of unrecorded leave. However, this entitlement is inadequate to meet the religious and emotional needs of Muslim women during the *ihdad* period [6].

The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) issued the *Garis Panduan Ber`Iddah Bagi Wanita yang Bercerai atau Kematian Suami* in 2015, which provides clarification on the legal rulings (*hukm*) of *iddah* based on authoritative Islamic sources. The guideline explains the rationale behind the rulings, outlines the calculation of the duration of *iddah* according to its different categories, and specifies the restrictions (*ihdād*) to be observed. However, it primarily addresses the religious dimensions of *iddah* without extending to its practical application in contemporary workplaces or addressing the welfare needs of Muslim women in employment.

Thus, this study seeks to explore the need to develop a comprehensive policy framework in order to support Muslim working women in Malaysia during their *ihdād* period, incorporating perspectives from both employers and employees. It also evaluates existing legal and organisational provisions, identifies gaps within current

workplace practices, and foregrounds the lived experiences of affected women. In light of the rising participation of women in the labour force reflected in Malaysia's female labour force participation rate (LFPR) of 56.2 per cent in 2024, the formulation of such a policy framework is both timely and essential [7].

2 Literature Review

A number of scholarly works have examined the concepts of *iddah* and *ihdād* in the context of widowed women. These studies have primarily focused on their foundations in Islamic teachings, the legal rulings derived from Sharī'ah, and the practical implications of these obligations [1], [8], [9], [2]. *Iddah* denotes the obligatory mourning period observed by Muslim women following the death of their husbands, while *ihdād* refers to the restrictions imposed during this period. Some researchers like Abidin, N. N. Z et al. (2023) emphasise that *ihdād* is mandated by authoritative sources in the Qur'ān and Sunnah. Surah al-Baqarah (2:234) and the hadith narrated by Umm Ḥabībah in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (5339) establish that the prescribed duration of *iddah* for widows is four months and ten days [8].

The literature further notes that Islam prescribes specific prohibitions for women during *ihdād*. These include abstaining from adornments, refraining from remarriage, and remaining within the marital home unless circumstances of danger or harm necessitate relocation [1],[2]. Travel is similarly restricted but permitted only when necessary, for example, for employment, medical treatment, or obtaining essential goods, and in the absence of alternative support, such as assistance from family members[10], [2]. With regard to employment, the Selangor Mufti Department, through *Taudhih al-Hukmi* issued on 31st January 2023, clarified that widows may leave their homes for work, when necessary, provided they comply with the regulations and etiquettes prescribed by Islam. Although jurists differ in certain details of interpretation, they concur on the obligatory nature of *ihdād* [11].

The prescription of *ihdād* is not intended as an undue burden upon women; rather, it provides a space for emotional transition, safeguards women's dignity, and preserves their welfare [2]. However, one of the researchers argues that this obligation also requires supportive mechanisms from families, communities, and institutions to ensure its effective and compassionate implementation [12]. Several studies have examined the challenges faced by women during the *iddah* period [5],[3],[6],[2]. Women who experience the death of a husband often confront a combination of emotional and financial hardships, compounded by the social stigma or negative perceptions associated with widowhood [3]. Women feel disoriented or lacking direction in life after the loss of their spouse [3]. One of the researchers further highlights that grief in this context extends across multiple dimensions, including emotional distress, financial obligations, prioritisation of children's welfare, the burden of multiple responsibilities, persistent memories of the deceased, health-related challenges, and an intensified reliance on religious devotion [13].

More recent studies have extended the discourse on *ihdād* to include the experiences of Muslim working women, examining both their awareness of religious rulings and the challenges of fulfilling these obligations while employed [5],[14],[4].

A study by some researchers involving 364 women in Bandar Dungun, Terengganu, including 165 working women, revealed that a higher proportion of non-working women demonstrated a high level of understanding (61.8%) compared to their working counterparts (52.7%) [15]. By contrast, a recent study conducted by other scholars reported a high level of awareness among Muslim working women in Selangor, with a mean score of 4.49, indicating that most respondents understood the prohibitions and obligations of *iddah* [16].

Contemporary debates often centre on the dilemmas faced by working women in reconciling religious requirements with professional demands, as well as the concessions or accommodations provided by employers [6], [5]. For many women, the need to balance emotional struggles, childcare responsibilities, and estate management with ongoing work commitments creates significant strain, often affecting job performance [5]. One of the researchers identified four key challenges faced by career women observing *ihdād*; the need to eat out during working days, work-related outstation travel, participation in workplace events and celebrations, and working overtime beyond regular office hours.

These issues underscore the necessity of re-examining *iddah* in the contemporary context, as women today are active participants in the workforce, in contrast to the past when they largely remained at home [4]. A significant gap persists in terms of holistic support systems and workplace policies to address the needs of Muslim working women during *ihdād* and it requires broader institutional support for an effective observance of *ihdād* among Muslim working women. Some of the researchers and scholars argue that a comprehensive policy framework is essential to assist women in coping with bereavement while fulfilling their religious obligations [5],[14]. Comparative insights further reveal that certain Middle Eastern countries, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar, have introduced policies enabling women to continue their careers during *iddah* within more adaptable frameworks that balance religious observance with workplace protection [14].

3 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design that combined document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The document analysis examined academic literature, statutory provisions, and organisational policies to identify existing frameworks governing the observance of *ihdād*.

A total of 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposefully selected participants. The first group comprised ten widowed women from Kelantan, Terengganu, and Selangor, selected based on the following criteria: widowed for between nine months and five years, employed, not remarried, and having dependent children. These criteria ensured authentic insights into the lived challenges of *ihdād*. The second group consisted of nine employers from public and private sectors in the same states, all of whom supervised Muslim employees. The states were chosen as each had introduced a 30-day leave facility for public servants in the case of a husband's death.

The interview protocol was validated by subject-matter and language experts. All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed thematically using ATLAS.ti version 8.4.15. Themes were categorised into key domains, including challenges faced and welfare support required. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants.

4 Findings And Discussion

4.1 Demographic Background of Employee Informants

Table 1 presents the demographic background of ten working women from Kelantan, Terengganu, and Selangor who participated in this study. All of them met the criteria established through purposive sampling

Table 1. Demographic Background of Employee Informants.

Informants	State	Age	Job	No. Children	Duration Since Husband's Death (Years)	Cause of Husband's Death
W1	Selangor	49	Private Officer	5	3	COVID-19
W2	Selangor	50	Teacher	7	3	COVID-19
W3	Selangor	41	Private Officer	5	5	Heart Disease
W4	Terengganu	48	Teacher (Private School)	8	1	Heart Failure
W5	Terengganu	54	Teacher (Govt. School)	2	4	Diabetes
W6	Terengganu	54	General Cleaning Staff	5	4	Severe Fever
W7	Kelantan	52	Teacher (Govt. School)	5	1	Diabetes, Kidney Failure, and Heart Disease

W8	Kelantan	45	Lecturer	4	1	Kidney Failure
W9	Kelantan	52	Teacher (Govt. School)	4	5	Hypertension
W10	Kelantan	48	Teacher (Govt. School)	11	2	Lung Failure

The demographic characteristics presented in Table 1 detail the profiles of ten Muslim working women who had experienced the death of a husband and subsequently observed the *ihdād* period. These participants were drawn from three states, namely Selangor, Terengganu, and Kelantan, with ages ranging from 41 to 54 years. This age distribution indicates that most participants were in mid-life, balancing professional responsibilities with the demands of child-rearing and household management.

A majority of participants were employed in the education sector, particularly as teachers (W2, W4, W5, W7, W9, W10), reflecting the strong representation of women in this profession. Others held positions as private sector officers (W1, W3), a lecturer (W8), and a general cleaning staff member (W6). This occupational diversity illustrates that the experiences of *ihdād* intersect across multiple employment hierarchies, ranging from professional and managerial roles to service and support-level positions.

Family structures varied considerably among participants, with the number of children ranging from two to eleven. This variation highlights the significant caregiving and financial responsibilities shouldered by widows in managing households. The duration since the husband's death ranged from one to five years, enabling the study to capture both immediate experiences of grief and longer-term reflections. Causes of death included both chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, kidney failure, heart disease, and hypertension, as well as acute conditions, including COVID-19 and severe fever.

Overall, the demographic profile reflects the diverse realities of Muslim working widows, shaped by differences in age, family responsibilities, and occupational roles. These variations provide crucial context for understanding the multifaceted needs and challenges associated with *ihdād*, underscoring the importance of tailored support mechanisms for women in different circumstances.

4.2 Demographic Background of Employer Informants

Table 2 presents the demographic profiles of nine employers who participated in this study. All informants fulfilled the criteria established through purposive sampling

Table 2. Demographic Background of Employer Informants.

Code	Informant	Sector	State
M1	SUK	Government	Selangor
M2	MAIN	Government	Selangor
M3	Islamic Higher Education Institution	Private Company	Selangor
M4	SUK	Government	Kelantan
M5	MAIN	Government	Kelantan
M6	Travel Agent Company	Private Company	Kelantan
M7	MAIN	Government	Terengganu
M8	Islamic Private School	Private Company	Terengganu
M9	SUK	Government	Terengganu

The demographic characteristics of the nine informants in this study were drawn from Selangor, Kelantan, and Terengganu. Collectively, these informants represented both government and private sectors, thereby offering a comprehensive overview of organisational practices and responses concerning women employees undergoing *ihdād*.

Six of nine informants were employed in the government sector (M1, M2, M4, M5, M7, M9). This representation is particularly significant, as public sector policies often function as benchmarks for employment practices nationwide. The remaining three informants were from private companies (M3, M6, M8), ensuring the study also captured perspectives from diverse organisational structures where policies may differ and be less formally regulated.

Geographically, the distribution of informants was balanced, with three participants each from Selangor (M1, M2, M3), Kelantan (M4, M5, M6), and Terengganu (M7, M8, M9). This selection allowed the study to account for regional nuances in employer practices. In particular, Kelantan and Terengganu are characterised by strong Islamic cultural and legal frameworks, while Selangor represents a more urbanised, industrialised, and socio-culturally diverse context.

By incorporating employers from both sectors across states with varying socio-religious landscapes, the study ensured that its findings reflect a broad spectrum of organisational perspectives on *ihdād* support. This purposive sampling strategy strengthens the analysis by situating employer perspectives within Malaysia's heterogeneous employment landscape, thereby enabling a critical evaluation of existing gaps and informing the development of a policy framework that is both practical and contextually relevant.

4.3 Employee Issues, Needs, and Support Requirements

The studies highlight the key issues and challenges encountered by women employees during the *ihdād* period. A predominant concern raised by most informants (W1 till W10, except W4) was the inadequacy of leave allocation. Notably, W4 was the only informant entitled to the full *iddah* leave of four months and ten days, provided under her organisation's internal workplace policy. Informants W1 till W10, except W4 explained that existing leave provisions did not sufficiently accommodate the multiple responsibilities widows must manage during this period, which include emotional adjustment, childcare arrangements, estate administration, and the observance of religious obligations. They felt pressured to return to work prematurely, before achieving adequate emotional and physical readiness. This situation not only compromised their personal well-being but also posed potential repercussions on work performance and overall organisational productivity [6],[5].

The study also revealed the forms of support required by widows during *ihdād*. These included the provision of additional leave, flexible work arrangements, temporary exemptions or leniencies in job responsibilities, adaptable working hours, and the availability of clear policy guidelines (W1 till W10). Such measures were viewed as essential to enable widows to fulfil their religious duties while simultaneously sustaining their employment. In the absence of a formal policy framework, widows face significant difficulties in balancing religious, emotional, and professional demands [5], [14]. Accordingly, workplace policies must incorporate both welfare considerations and religious sensitivity to better support affected employees [5], [14].

The necessity of developing structured policies and workplace guidelines tailored to the needs of Muslim women in *ihdād* is therefore obvious. Some of the scholars and researchers emphasise the crucial role of supportive employment policies in mitigating grief-related challenges and sustaining women's participation in the workforce [13], [5], [14].

4.4 Employer Issues, Needs, and Support Requirements

The studies also presents the issues, needs, and forms of employer support for Muslim working women during the *iḥdād* period. The findings highlight the absence of standardised procedures or guidelines responsive to the needs of women observing *iḥdād* (M1–M9). The challenges identified include reconciling religious obligations with workplace demands, particularly difficulties arising from outstation duties, overtime work, and compulsory participation in workplace events. These are compounded by the lack of specific organisational provisions (M1 till M9).

With respect to leave, most organisations grant only three days of unrecorded leave, with any additional absence deducted from annual leave entitlements (M2, M3, M5, M6, and M7). An exception is observed in M8, which, through its internal guideline *Buku Panduan Tugas dan Takwim Guru dan Anggota Kumpulan Pelaksana MTT Darul Iman*, provides a special paid leave of four months and ten days. As M8 is operating within the private sector, it possesses the flexibility to issue its own internal service circulars, enabling the organisation to adapt policies more swiftly and responsively compared to the public sector. This autonomy allows for tailored provisions that can address the specific needs of employees, including widowed women.

M1, M4, and M9 have introduced an additional 27-day unpaid leave facility for public servants in the event of a husband's death, as stipulated in *Pekeliling Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Selangor Bilangan 1 Tahun 2009*, *Pekeliling Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Kelantan Bilangan 5 Tahun 2013*, and *Pekeliling Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Terengganu Bilangan 5 Tahun 2019*. However, this provision has seen little to no uptake, as female officers seek to extend their leave beyond the three-day unrecorded leave (CTR) on their annual leave entitlement instead (M1, M4, M9). This limited utilisation may be attributed to the fact that the facility is optional, classified as unpaid leave, and does not contribute towards qualifying service for retirement benefits.

In addition to leave arrangements, some employers (M2, M3, M6, M7) reported providing discretionary supportive measures in the absence of formal policies, such as flexible working hours and arrangements. These measures included remote work options like working from home, exemptions from participating in mass gatherings, relief from overtime, assignment to essential tasks only, and relocation closer to the employee's residence. Employers, however, also acknowledged the operational challenges of balancing workflow efficiency with accommodation of *iḥdād* observance (M2, M3, M6, M7). Such arrangements often required the redistribution of tasks among other employees and the rescheduling of work assignments (M2, M6, M7, M9).

This study also highlights the essential forms of support required from employers, which encompass flexible work arrangements, compassionate leave, job protection, and the development of clear workplace guidelines sensitive to the

requirements of *ihdād* (M1 till M9). Finally, the implications underscore the critical role of employer awareness and institutional support in ensuring that widowed Muslim women are able to manage both their religious obligations and professional responsibilities. Overall, the study demonstrates the need for structured policies and organisational practices that integrate sensitivity to religious requirements with effective employee welfare measures.

4.5 Proposed Elements of a Policy Framework

Paid Iddah Leave. The introduction of paid '*iddah* leave is not only a form of religious accommodation but also a social protection mechanism that shields widows from economic vulnerability during one of the most emotionally and financially challenging periods of their lives [12]. The provision of paid leave reflects broader principles of workplace justice, gender equity, and welfare protection. Most of the researchers noted that bereavement undermines both emotional stability and financial security, particularly for women reliant on dual incomes [1],[12],[17]. Thus, paid leave ensures that widows are not compelled to choose between fulfilling religious duties and securing their livelihoods. Since Islam strongly encourages Muslims to care about widows, institutionalising paid *iddah* leave brings this ethical principle into employment policy [18].

Currently, the Employment Act 1955 contains no provisions for *iddah* leave. Employers in the private sector adopt the practice applied to public servants by granting three days of unrecorded leave in accordance with *Pekeliling Perkhidmatan Bilangan 10 Tahun 2002* (PP Bil. 10/2002). This approach reflects a minimal standard, as it merely replicates existing provisions without addressing the specific religious and socio-emotional needs of women during *iddah*. While this provision recognises the immediate impact of spousal loss, it falls short of accommodating the extended mourning period prescribed by Islamic law.

With the latest development as pursuant to *Pekeliling Perkhidmatan Bilangan 1 Tahun 2024 – Pelaksanaan Sistem Saraan Perkhidmatan Awam (SSPA) Bagi Pegawai Perkhidmatan Awam Persekutuan*, effective 1 December 2024, the entitlement to unrecorded leave (CTR) for the death of immediate family members has been revised from three days to a maximum of 20 days per calendar year but this provision extends not only to bereavement involving spouses, parents, in-laws, children, siblings, and grandparents, but also to other purposes such as childbirth, caring for sick family members, performing *umrah*, or fulfilling other religious obligations. Only when the CTR is not utilised for these purposes, the officers may claim up to the full 20 days' entitlement in cases of bereavement.

Meanwhile, the states of Selangor, Kelantan and Terengganu have introduced a 30-day leave facility for public servants in cases of a husband's death as stated in *Pekeliling Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Selangor Bilangan 1 Tahun 2009*, *Pekeliling Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Kelantan Bilangan 5 Tahun 2013* and *Pekeliling Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Terengganu Bilangan 5 Tahun 2019*. However, this facility is optional and categorised as unpaid leave, which does not contribute towards qualifying service for retirement benefits (M1, M4, M9).

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) provides a notable example of progressive adaptation. Muslim female employees are entitled to *iddah* leave, a fully paid leave of four months and ten days upon the death of a husband, as stated in Article 76, Federal Law by Decree No 11 for 2008. This provision directly aligns with the Qur'anic requirement of *iddah*, making the UAE one of the first states to legally and explicitly embed religious observance into paid employment rights. The UAE model demonstrates how Islamic principles and modern labour law can be reconciled to create a system that supports both religious fidelity and worker protection. Similarly, the Kingdom of Bahrain grants one month of *iddah* leave to a Muslim woman employee upon the death of her husband, as according to Article (63) (c) of Law No. 36 of 2012 Promulgating the Labour Law for the Private Sector. The woman is further entitled to complete the prescribed *iddah* period of three months and ten days by utilising her annual leave. In cases where she has insufficient annual leave balance, she is eligible to take the remaining period as unpaid leave.

Furthermore, in countries like Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, the bereavement leave policies provide between three to ten days of paid or unpaid leave [19]. Canada, for instance, provides up to ten days of bereavement leave in the event of the death of a family member, in accordance with Section 210(1) of the Canada Labour Code. At present, the United Kingdom law allows employees to take reasonable unpaid time off to deal with emergencies, including bereavement. However, there is no statutory right to paid bereavement leave, except in the case of parents who lose a child under the age of 18, who are entitled to two weeks, as per to Parental Bereavement (Leave and Pay) Act 2018. Even those countries that do not tie to religious obligations reflect a recognition of the profound impact of spousal loss. It highlights the global recognition of bereavement as a legitimate cause for extended leave.

Hence, a key question arises: what should be considered as an appropriate duration for paid *iddah* leave in Malaysia? In considering the proposal for paid *iddah* leave, several models may be examined. The first model is to grant four months and ten days (approximately 130 days) of paid leave, in line with the *iddah* period prescribed in the Shariah. This approach has been adopted in countries such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and by one private organisation in Malaysia (M8). Within the Malaysian context, precedents for extended paid leave already exist, such as ninety-eight days of maternity leave provided under Section 37(1)(d)(i) of the Employment Act 1955.

The second model proposes paid *iddah* leave ranging from 27 to 30 days. In Malaysia, the states of Selangor, Kelantan, and Terengganu have introduced a provision of 30 days' leave in the event of a husband's death (M1, M4, M9). A comparable example can be found in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which grants one month of paid *iddah* leave to a Muslim woman employee upon the death of her husband, with the option to extend the remainder of the prescribed *iddah* period of three months and ten days as unpaid leave.

Lastly, a third model suggests paid *iddah* leave of between seven and fourteen days, drawing reference from existing provisions under the Employment Act

1955, such as the minimum entitlement of fourteen days paid sick leave (Section 60E) and seven days of paternity leave (Section 60FA). Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom also provide paid bereavement leave ranging from three to fourteen days.

Thus, institutionalising paid *iddah* leave would not only protect widows from financial distress but also elevate Malaysia's compliance with international labour standards on gender-sensitive workplace policies via Recommendation 169 (R169 - Employment Policy (Supplementary Provisions) Recommendation, 1984 (No. 169)) and ILO Convention No. 122 (C122 - Employment Policy Convention, 1964). Moreover, such reform would affirm Malaysia's role as a progressive Muslim nation that integrates Shariah obligations within a rights-based employment framework.

Flexible Work Arrangements. Flexible Working Arrangements (FWAs) are work practices that grant employees a degree of flexibility and choice regarding the timing, location, and manner in which they perform their duties [20]. Flexible work arrangements are designed to offer employees greater adaptability in terms of workplace location, work schedules, total hours worked, and the flexibility of job roles [21]. The accommodation of flexible working hours and arrangements for women during *ihdad* not only responds to religious obligations but also reflects global best practices in gender-sensitive employment policies.

In Malaysia, the government has introduced the Work from Home (Bekerja Dari Rumah, BDR) initiative through *Pekeliling Perkhidmatan Sumber Manusia (MyPPSM) Ceraian S.R.4.1.2*, which outlines the *Dasar Bekerja Dari Rumah*. Under this policy, officers who have lost a spouse are permitted to work from home immediately following the three-day unrecorded leave (Cuti Tanpa Rekod (CTR)), for a period of up to two weeks, inclusive of rest days, weekends, and public holidays [22]. Recently, the *Pekeliling Perkhidmatan Sumber Manusia Waktu Bekerja Versi 1.0* (2024), effective from 1 December 2024, introduced broader flexible work arrangements in federal government agencies, including Flexible Working Hours (Waktu Bekerja Fleksibel, (WBF)) and the Work from Home policy (Ceraian S.R.4.1.1) [22]. These initiatives are aimed at balancing the employer's need to maintain service continuity with employees' need to manage personal matters.

In addition to the Work from Home directive, female public servants may benefit from permission to leave the office during working hours under *Garis Panduan Kebenaran Untuk Meninggalkan Pejabat Dalam Waktu Bekerja Di Bawah Perintah Am 5 Bab G - Mematuhi Waktu Bekerja* (Ceraian SR.4.2.2). WBF allows officers to determine their arrival and departure within designated times. They may leave the office for unavoidable personal matters with prior approval. Such absence, however, must not exceed four hours or half the daily working hours, whichever is less; otherwise, the officer must utilise annual or other eligible leave. Moreover, employers in the private sector may also adopt Flexible Work Arrangements under Part XIIC, Section 60P of the Employment Act 1955 (Amendment 2022) in order to accommodate situations such as spousal bereavement.

Furthermore, the countries like Saudi Arabia (Article 27 of Executive Regulation of the Labour Law of Saudi Arabia, 2020), the UAE (Article 7 of Federal Decree-Law No. (33) of 2021), Canada (Article 177.1 of Canada Labour Code), New Zealand (Part 6AA of Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007 and the United Kingdom (Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023) recognise flexible work in promoting well-being, productivity, and inclusivity of the employees. It enables widows to maintain income security while reducing workplace stress.

Exemption from Attending Social or Celebratory Events or Any External Assignments. Other elements of workplace accommodation for Muslim women observing *ihdad* are the exemption from attending social or celebratory events and external assignments during the mourning period. The widows are prohibited from engaging in adornment and festive occasions as part of the restrictions of *ihdad*, intended to preserve their dignity and provide space for emotional healing [2]. These restrictions extend beyond personal life into public and social engagements, placing Muslim working women in a vulnerable position if their professional responsibilities include representing their organisations at public functions, corporate celebrations, or external assignments [8]. Since the International Labour Organisation (ILO) emphasises the principle of non-discrimination and the need to accommodate workers' cultural and religious practices within reasonable limits (ILO Convention No. 111, Discrimination in Employment and Occupation, 1958), it aligns with international best practices on workplace inclusivity and religious accommodation [23].

Applying these principles to the Malaysian context, an *ihdad*-sensitive policy framework could formalise the right of Muslim women to decline participation in celebratory or external events without facing negative repercussions such as loss of promotion opportunities, stigma, or performance penalties. Instead, their responsibilities during the *ihdad* period could be temporarily restructured to focus on internal or administrative tasks, while external representation is delegated to other colleagues. Such arrangements would protect widows from religious conflict and emotional stress while ensuring continuity of organisational functions.

In sum, integrating exemptions from social and external engagements into workplace policies not only fulfils the religious rights of Muslim women in *ihdad* but also situates Malaysia within global best practices on workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion. It demonstrates that respecting religious observance can coexist with maintaining professional standards, ultimately contributing to a more compassionate and socially responsible organisational culture.

Notification of Ihdad Period. A procedural component in implementing workplace policies for *ihdad* is the notification process, whereby Muslim women employees inform their employers of the commencement and expected duration of the *ihdad* period, vice versa. From a religious standpoint, the observance of *ihdad* is mandatory for widows, lasting four months and ten days, as prescribed in the Qur'ān (2:234). However, its accommodation within employment structures requires a transparent

mechanism to ensure that both the employee's religious obligations and the employer's operational needs are respected. The international labour standards emphasise the importance of clarity in communication between employees and employers regarding special leave provisions. The ILO's framework on decent work highlights that predictable and transparent employment practices are essential for both worker protection and organisational efficiency [19].

In workplace practice, the notification of *ihdad* may be modelled on existing procedures for leave application, such as maternity leave or compassionate leave. Clear guidelines are necessary to specify how and when employees should notify their supervisors or human resource departments, what documentation is required, and the protections afforded once notification is given. Any existing service circulars could serve as a reference for formalising *ihdad* notification in the Malaysian procedures for reporting bereavement. Applying this principle to the Malaysian context ensures that employees are protected from discrimination once they notify employers of their *ihdad*, while employers are able to manage staffing or workload redistribution as well the support given, including counselling or briefings on available entitlements.

In sum, the notification of the *ihdad* period is not merely administrative but a crucial step in institutionalising religious sensitivity and gender equity in the workplace. By embedding clear notification procedures into policy frameworks, employers can create a more supportive environment for Muslim women while simultaneously upholding operational stability.

5 Conclusion

In today's context, the practice of *ihdād* may be adapted to align with contemporary realities and circumstances, particularly in relation to the needs of working women. It is important to recognise that the purpose of *ihdād* is not merely strict adherence to the lengthy provisions of *nas*, but rather to uphold the dignity and protection of women after the loss of their husbands [11]. The practice ensures that they are given sufficient time and space to process their grief, reflect on their future, and make well-considered decisions about the next stage of their lives [11].

The multifaceted challenges encountered by Muslim working women during the *ihdād* period show there is an urgent need to prioritise the development of comprehensive workplace policies. At present, the absence of explicit provisions on *ihdād* within Malaysia's employment framework, particularly in the private sector, leaves widowed women dependent on ad hoc employer discretion, often resulting in inconsistencies, inequities, and insufficient protection for employees coping with bereavement. Accordingly, clear policies are essential not only to standardise leave entitlements but also to institutionalise support mechanisms that adequately address the needs of Muslim widows in the workplace.

Employers also face challenges in balancing operational efficiency with the accommodation of religious practices. The absence of clear policy guidelines places

undue pressure on employers to make discretionary decisions, which may inadvertently disadvantage affected employees. A well-structured policy framework would provide clarity for employers, ensure consistency in implementation, and safeguard the rights and welfare of Muslim women employees. This approach aligns with the broader principle of decent work and gender-sensitive workplace policies as promoted by the International Labour Organisation [19].

Finally, the proposed policy and guideline must take into account several aspects, such as specific *ihdād* leave provisions, promote flexible work arrangements, including working from home, and reduced or flexible working hours in order to help widowed employees to balance religious observance, family responsibilities, and work commitments. Ultimately, effective policy development requires collaboration between religious authorities, government agencies, and employer associations to integrate both religious sensitivities and legal protections, thereby establishing a holistic support system for Muslim women during *ihdād* [24].

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