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ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY EQUITY FOR WOMEN: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION, RELIGIOSITY, AND SOCIAL STATUS IN LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

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Gender equality; education; religiosity; social status; multinomial logistic regression; World Values Survey

ABSTRACT

Persistent gender gaps in economic opportunity remain a global concern. This study examines how education, religiosity, and social status shape individual preferences regarding equal work opportunities for men and women. Using individual-level data from World Values Survey Wave 7, covering 96,484 respondents across 66 countries on five continents, this study employs multinomial logistic regression to model preferences toward prioritizing men's employment, with neutral attitudes as the base outcome. The results show that higher educational attainment, particularly college education, significantly reduces the likelihood of endorsing men's employment priority and increases the likelihood of rejecting it. Religiosity shows a more complex pattern: greater importance attached to religion is associated with stronger support for prioritizing men, while the behavioral dimension of religiosity is associated with holding a more definite stance overall rather than remaining neutral. Meanwhile, being married, having more children, and holding a higher social class are associated with stronger endorsement of men's employment priority. These findings suggest that economic opportunity equity for women is shaped not only by human capital but also by religious values and role expectations embedded in family and social structures, with implications for gender-responsive education and labor policies.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender equality in employment remains an unresolved structural problem at both global and national levels. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2025, the global economic gender gap has narrowed by only 5.6 percentage points since 2006, and at the current pace, full parity is projected to be achieved in 135 years (World Economic Forum, 2025). Indonesia occupies a relatively lagging position within Southeast Asia, with a Gender

Gap Index score of 0.692 and a global ranking of 97th in 2025, trailing the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand (World Economic Forum, 2025). This condition confirms that the gender gap in economic opportunity is not merely a normative concern but a measurable reality that warrants in-depth academic examination.

In response to this gap, the Indonesian government ratified CEDAW through Law No. 7 of 1984 and issued Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000 on Gender Mainstreaming in Development, which requires ministries and institutions to integrate a gender perspective into planning and budgeting. Women's economic empowerment has also been promoted through microfinance programs, including collaboration between the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (Kemen PPPA) and PT Permodalan Nasional Madani (PNM), which reaches more than nine million underprivileged female customers, as well as gender-mainstreaming strategies focused on women-led MSMEs (Kemenko PMK, 2024). Nevertheless, policy outcomes are not yet fully reflected in employment data. Based on the August 2024 National Labor Force Survey, the female labor force participation rate (LFPR) was 55.42 percent. In August 2025, the male LFPR was 84.40 percent, compared with 56.63 percent for women (BPS, 2025). This gap of approximately 28 percentage points has persisted, despite a recent decline in male participation and an increase in female participation.

Women's economic participation presents a challenge of quality as well as quantity. BPS data show that female workers are concentrated in agriculture and trade, sectors in which informal employment is prevalent. An ILO survey in 2023 found that 79.3 percent of female respondents carried a double burden, combining domestic responsibilities with productive work, compared with 61.6 percent of male respondents who reported that their wives or female relatives bore this burden. Inequality also extends to career advancement: the glass-ceiling phenomenon—an invisible barrier that prevents competent women from reaching strategic positions—has been documented in Indonesian bureaucracy and the formal sector (Septiana & Haryanti, 2023). Patriarchal culture has been identified as a major factor behind perceptions that women are unsuitable for structural positions (Azwar, 2023), meaning that women's growing presence in employment has not translated into proportional representation in top positions.

Education is widely regarded as a key determinant of women's labor force participation. Using 2020 Sakernas data covering 399,935 female respondents, Permatasari and Ariusni (2026) found that education, marital status, region of residence, and job training significantly affected participation in the formal sector. Syafika and Marta (2025) showed that diploma and bachelor's degree holders have better employment opportunities than those with junior-high education or below, although higher education reduces the likelihood of working in the informal sector. Sasmitaningroh and Wasil (2026) emphasized education as a factor that

broadens women's social roles and narrows the gender gap, while Handayani and Aisyah (2026), in a panel study of 27 districts and cities in West Java from 2020 to 2024, found that women's education also shapes the structure of the informal labor market.

Beyond education, religiosity and religious norms have also been identified as influences on women's employment decisions, although empirical findings remain mixed. Ratnamaya et al. (2026) found that the religiosity of husbands or wives had no significant effect on the labor force participation of married Muslim women, with education playing a more decisive role. By contrast, Kasmiarno and Susamto (2024), using Waves 6 and 7 of the World Values Survey and data from 30,440 Muslim respondents across 34 countries, found that religiosity and gender-role attitudes significantly shaped views on women's right to work. Another study based on the World Values Survey in Indonesia found that active participation in religious activities positively affected the likelihood of Muslim women working part-time or in agriculture, suggesting that religious organizations may provide a channel for supporting women's labor force participation. These divergent findings underscore the need for further research into the interaction between religiosity and other factors in Indonesia.

Social status and social norms also shape women's employment decisions. Social norms influence married women's decisions to work in the informal sector (Musniasih et al., 2026). The concept of the glass ceiling, introduced by Marilyn Loden in 1978, refers to invisible barriers that prevent women from reaching the highest levels of the career hierarchy. This phenomenon remains relevant to the social status of Indonesian women.

These findings reveal a gap between continuing policy efforts to empower women and the reality of labor force participation, which remains unequal and concentrated in the informal sector or in non-strategic positions. Few studies have simultaneously examined education, religiosity, and social status as determinants of equity in economic opportunities for women in relation to labor force participation. This study therefore seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of factors that facilitate or hinder such equity and to offer more targeted policy recommendations.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Data

This study uses individual-level data from World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 7. The survey was conducted among households between 2017 and 2020 across 66 countries spanning five continents: Asia, the Americas, Australia, Europe, and Africa. The WVS dataset was selected because it is relevant to the topic under investigation and has been widely used

in social science, economics, and psychology research (Sholihin et al., 2023; Mustofa et al., 2023; Kasmiarno & Susamto, 2024).

The variables used in this study refer to questionnaire items included in WVS Wave 7. The dependent variable is work equality. The independent variables comprise education (elementary school, middle school, high school, and college); religiosity (importance of God, importance of religion, belief in life after death, belief in hell, belief in heaven, worship intensity, and obedience); and social status (marital status, number of children, and social class). Further details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Data and Data Sources

Variable	Definition	Source
Work equality	Men are given priority in obtaining employment; 0 = neutral, 1 = disagree, 2 = agree	WVS = Q33_3
Elementary school	Highest educational attainment is elementary school: 1 = elementary school, 0 = other level	WVS = Q275
Middle school	Highest completed education is middle school: 1 = middle school, 0 = other level	WVS = Q275
High school	Highest completed education is high school: 1 = high school, 0 = other level	WVS = Q275
College	Short-cycle tertiary education, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree: 1 = applicable, 0 = other level	WVS = Q275
Importance of religion	Importance attached to religion: 1 = not at all important, 2 = not very important, 3 = rather important, 4 = very important	WVS = Q6
Obedience	Religious self-identification: 3 = religious person, 2 = not	WVS = Q173

	a religious person, 1 = atheist	
Marital status	Marital status: 1 = yes, 0 = no	WVS = Q273
Children	Number of children	WVS = Q274
Social class	Perceived social class: 1 = lower class through 5 = upper class	WVS = Q287

Estimation Method

The hypothesis is derived from questionnaire item Q33_3, which measures individuals' preferences regarding the prioritization of men over women in employment. Such preferences may be influenced by several factors. This study uses education, religiosity, and social status as independent variables. Multinomial logistic regression is employed to examine the relationship between the dependent variable and the explanatory variables (Liu, 2022). This model extends the study by Kasmiarno and Susamto (2024), which examined the relationship between religiosity and women's right to work, by adding education and social status to assess other factors shaping public preferences regarding equal employment rights (Bussemakers et al., 2017; Mat et al., 2017).

The neutral response is treated as the base outcome. The model estimates separate logit coefficients for the disagree and agree categories relative to this base category.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Variance	Std. dev.
WOW	96,484	1.245056	0.478798	0.691953
Elementary_School	96,484	0.115729	0.102337	0.319901
Middle_School	96,484	0.147289	0.125596	0.354395
High_School	96,484	0.254799	0.189878	0.435750
College	96,484	0.330749	0.221356	0.470485
Importance_of_Religion	96,484	2.964315	1.468488	1.211812
Obedience	96,484	4.078479	6.405582	2.530925
Married_Status	96,484	0.554216	0.247063	0.497055
Children	96,484	1.493159	4.370246	2.090513
Social_Class	96,484	2.434829	2.801314	1.673713

Source: Authors' calculations (2026).

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the data used in the multinomial logistic regression. The analysis includes 96,484 observations. The obedience variable has the highest mean, variance, and standard deviation, while the elementary-school variable has the lowest values across these measures.

Multinomial Regression Results

Outcome (base: Neutral)	Independent variable	Coefficient	p-value	Sign
Disagree	Elementary_School	-0.180	0.000	Negative
Disagree	Middle_School	-0.071	0.052	Negative
Disagree	High_School	-0.041	0.195	Negative
Disagree	College	0.192	0.000	Positive
Disagree	Importance_of_Religion	-0.052	0.000	Negative
Disagree	Obedience	0.015	0.000	Positive
Disagree	Married_Status	-0.218	0.000	Negative
Disagree	Children	-0.017	0.002	Negative
Disagree	Social_Class	-0.076	0.000	Negative
Disagree	Constant	1.505	0.000	Positive
Agree	Elementary_School	0.193	0.000	Positive
Agree	Middle_School	0.185	0.000	Positive
Agree	High_School	-0.060	0.062	Negative
Agree	College	-0.342	0.000	Negative
Agree	Importance_of_Religion	0.419	0.000	Positive
Agree	Obedience	0.016	0.001	Positive
Agree	Married_Status	0.247	0.000	Positive
Agree	Children	0.044	0.000	Positive
Agree	Social_Class	0.012	0.086	Positive
Agree	Constant	-0.574	0.000	Negative

Source: Authors' calculations (2024).

Table 3 reports the multinomial logistic regression results, using neutral responses as the base outcome. The disagree category represents rejection of the view that men should be prioritized in employment. A positive coefficient indicates a higher relative likelihood of selecting disagree rather than neutral, whereas a negative coefficient indicates a lower relative likelihood. For education, elementary-, middle-, and high-school indicators have negative coefficients, while college has a positive coefficient. For religiosity, importance of religion has a negative coefficient, whereas obedience has a positive coefficient. Marital

status, number of children, and social class have negative coefficients for the disagree category.

The agree category represents support for prioritizing men over women in employment. For this category, elementary and middle school have positive coefficients, while high school and college have negative coefficients. Both importance of religion and obedience have positive coefficients. Marital status, number of children, and social class also have positive coefficients. The odds ratios provide an additional way to interpret the relative magnitude of these associations.

Odds Ratios

Independent variable	Disagree: odds ratio	Agree: odds ratio
Elementary_School	0.836	1.213
Middle_School	0.931	1.203
High_School	0.960	0.942
College	1.211	0.710
Importance_of_Religion	0.950	1.520
Obedience	1.016	1.016
Married_Status	0.804	1.280
Children	0.983	1.045
Social_Class	0.927	1.012

Note: Base outcome = Neutral. Source: Authors' calculations (2024).

An odds ratio above one indicates higher relative odds of selecting a category (disagree or agree) rather than neutral, while a value below one indicates lower relative odds. For the disagree category, the odds ratios are 0.836 for elementary school, 0.931 for middle school, 0.960 for high school, and 1.211 for college. The importance-of-religion ratio is 0.950, while obedience is 1.016. The ratios for married status, children, and social class are 0.804, 0.983, and 0.927, respectively.

For the agree category, the odds ratios are 1.213 for elementary school, 1.203 for middle school, 0.942 for high school, and 0.710 for college. The odds ratio for importance of religion is 1.520 and for obedience is 1.016. The corresponding ratios for married status, children, and social class are 1.280, 1.045, and 1.012. These are relative odds ratios, not direct percentage changes in predicted probability.

Probability of the Dependent Variable Categories

The manuscript reports the following linear predictor totals based on the multinomial regression coefficients: 1.057 for the disagree category and 0.138 for the agree category. It

reports the estimated category probabilities as 0.676 for disagree (67.6%), 0.088 for agree (8.8%), and 0.235 for neutral (23.5%). These reported probabilities sum to approximately 100 percent, subject to rounding.

Goodness-of-Fit Test

Test	Value
LR Chi-square	11,638.02
Probability	0.000

Source: Authors' calculations (2026).

Table 5 reports an LR chi-square value of 11,638.02 and a probability value reported as 0.000 (typically interpreted as $p < 0.001$). This indicates that the model containing the nine predictors fits significantly better than a model without predictors.

Discussion

Education

The multinomial logit results show that respondents whose highest educational attainment is elementary, middle, or high school are less likely to select the disagree category, while college-educated respondents are more likely to do so, relative to the neutral category. The reverse pattern is observed for the agree category. Overall, higher educational attainment is associated with a greater likelihood of rejecting, and a lower likelihood of endorsing, the view that men should be prioritized over women in employment. This finding is consistent with literature identifying education as a robust predictor of egalitarian gender attitudes. Using instrumental-variable estimates based on compulsory-schooling reforms in Europe, Deole and Zeydanli (2021) report a causal effect of an additional year of schooling on more egalitarian gender-role attitudes, equivalent to 0.1–0.3 standard deviations. Using WVS Wave 5 data, Soboleva (2014) finds that education is a stronger predictor of work-related gender attitudes than occupational characteristics, particularly in countries with lower female labor force participation. Higher education may broaden social networks, expose individuals to diverse role models, and increase the visibility and perceived legitimacy of women's labor market participation (Shu & Zhu, 2025). However, cross-regional evidence from Pavelea and Matysiak (2026) indicates that gender gaps persist in attitudes toward men's primacy in the labor market, suggesting that education may narrow but not eliminate support for prioritizing men in employment.

Religiosity

The results show a more nuanced pattern for religiosity. The importance-of-religion measure is negatively associated with the disagree category and positively associated with the agree category. Respondents who attach greater importance to religion are therefore more likely to endorse, and less likely to reject, men's employment priority relative to a neutral position. This finding is consistent with the argument that religiosity continues to influence attitudes toward the division of labor between men and women, particularly paid work (Inglehart & Norris, 2003), and with Kasmiarno and Susamto (2024), who find that stronger religious identification is associated with more conservative views on women's employment rights.

The obedience variable, which captures religious self-identification as a religious person, a non-religious person, or an atheist, has a positive coefficient in both the disagree and agree categories relative to neutral. This suggests that the variable is associated with a lower likelihood of remaining neutral and a greater likelihood of taking a definite position, either in favor of or against men's employment priority. This divergence between the importance attached to religion and the self-identification measure is consistent with Mustofa et al. (2023), who find that education and religiosity can operate through distinct, and sometimes offsetting, channels in shaping socioeconomic preferences. Religiosity should therefore not be treated as a single, uniform construct; its components may relate to attitudes in different ways.

Social Status

Being married, having more children, and reporting a higher social class are associated with a lower relative likelihood of selecting the disagree category and a higher relative likelihood of selecting the agree category. This pattern aligns with Desai et al. (2014), who show that individuals embedded in traditional marital and household arrangements, where breadwinning responsibilities are gendered, tend to hold less favorable workplace attitudes toward women and are more likely to support decisions that limit women's career advancement. Marriage and parenthood may reinforce a household division of labor in which men are expected to be primary earners, potentially strengthening support for prioritizing men's employment. The positive association between social class and support for men's employment priority also suggests that such preferences may reflect role expectations embedded in family and social structures, consistent with evidence that economic and cultural contexts jointly shape the relationship between women's education, employment, and egalitarian work norms (Bussemakers et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

This study examines how education, religiosity, and social status relate to individual preferences concerning equal employment opportunities for men and women, using WVS Wave 7 data from 96,484 respondents across 66 countries. The findings indicate that college education is associated with a greater likelihood of rejecting the prioritization of men in employment and a lower likelihood of supporting it. Religiosity is multidimensional: greater importance attached to religion is associated with stronger support for prioritizing men, while the self-identification measure is associated with taking a more definite position rather than remaining neutral. Being married, having more children, and reporting a higher social class are associated with stronger support for men's employment priority. These results highlight the importance of considering educational attainment, religious values, and family and social-role expectations in efforts to promote equitable economic opportunities for women.

The findings should be interpreted in light of the study's cross-sectional, observational design: the estimated associations do not by themselves establish causality. In addition, the operationalization of the obedience variable and the coding of the dependent variable should be checked against the original WVS questionnaire and statistical output before submission.

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