

CONCEPT OF GENDER EQUALITY IN ISLAM (PART 1 OF 2): PHYSIOLOGY

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Description: To be treated equally, or justice, does not always mean that each is the same. This article sheds some light on the differences between men and women found by modern science, and how these results reflect the way justice is met to each of the two sexes in various realms of modern day life.

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Before discussing the concept of equality and how it relates to men and women in Islam, we need to make an important distinction. Many people who speak about equality presume that this should be reflected in treating two groups exactly the same. However, this is manifestly not always the proper thing to do. People's needs, strengths, abilities and disabilities need to be accommodated and considered as opposed to subjecting all to a single standard that may only be suitable for a few.



Thus we need to make a distinction between the superficial procedural equality and the substantive equality, which is justice. Most societies recognize that the important thing is not to focus on superficial procedural equality but to provide substantive equality for all its citizens, which treats them justly according to their needs and circumstances. Human beings favor substantive equality over procedural equality on a daily basis because we recognize that the former allows for justice. We accommodate in our workplaces, schools, and commercial areas, those with disabilities. We recognize the need for social services to take care of the impoverished in the society, while the wealthy are subject to taxes. We give extra attention and consideration to those experiencing emotional, psychological, or physical difficulties in their lives. All of this is substantive equality, equity and justice.

Men and Women

When it comes to men and women, everyone recognizes that there are inherent indisputable differences between men and women. They are not identical; men and women are naturally different in many ways. As a result, it does not follow logically to neglect those differences and advocate a single standard in matters where they are not

the same. That may be procedural equality, but it is not substantive equality. For example, it would be unjust for a husband to suggest that his wife work equally as hard as he does when she is pregnant. Justice is served by recognizing the burden of pregnancy and the need for the husband to adjust accordingly. There are obvious biological differences - men experience neither menstrual periods nor childbirth while women generally live longer and have less health problems at an elderly age. The AARP Bulletin published [\[1\]](#) an article on 8 health differences between men and women:

When it comes to health, differences between men and women extend well beyond their attitude toward getting annual checkups and needed treatment. In case men need a few reasons to make a doctor's appointment, they should consider the following:

- The life expectancy for men in the United States, 74.4, is a little more than five years shorter than for women, 79.8.
- Cancer kills men at a higher rate than it kills women.
- Of those killed by heart disease before age 65, 70 percent are men.
- Sleep apnea, a potentially serious disorder that causes breathing to stop and start repeatedly during sleep, is more common in men than women.
- Four times as many men die by suicide, the number-eight cause of death among men.
- Men are 50 percent more likely than women to develop coronary heart disease after age 40.
- Men have fewer infection-fighting T-cells than women.
- By the age of 100, women outnumber men eight to one.

In the Olympics, men and women compete separately because of physiological differences. At the age of 18 years, the average male is 70.2 inches tall and weighs 144.8 pounds, while the average female is 64.4 inches tall and weighs 126.6 pounds. On the basis of weight, men have 50% greater total muscle mass than women. The average woman's heart is 25% smaller than that of the average man. Women carry about ten percentage points more fat than men. [\[2\]](#)

In academics, women generally score higher than men in subjects such as languages and humanities while the opposite is true for mathematics and sciences. Both genders have unique strengths and capabilities. Concerning the psychological differences between men and women, an article entitled Men and Women Really Do Think Differently quotes a recent neurological study:

Psychology professor Richard Haier of the University of California, Irvine led the research along with colleagues from the University of New Mexico. Their findings

show that in general, men have nearly 6.5 times the amount of gray matter related to general intelligence compared with women, whereas women have nearly 10 times the amount of white matter related to intelligence compared to men. [...]In human brains, gray matter represents information processing centers, whereas white matter works to network these processing centers.

The results from this study may help explain why men and women excel at different types of tasks, said co-author and neuropsychologist Rex Jung of the University of New Mexico. For example, men tend to do better with tasks requiring more localized processing, such as mathematics, Jung said, while women are better at integrating and assimilating information from distributed gray-matter regions of the brain, which aids language skills.[\[3\]](#)

Another article published in *Psychology Today* describes the differences between men and women as 'inescapable':

When it comes to speaking and making hand movements that contribute to motor skill, the brain seems to be very focally organized in women compared with men. This may relate to the fact that girls generally speak earlier, articulate better and also have better fine motor control of the hands. Also, a larger proportion of women than men are right-handed, and unequivocally so. But when it comes to certain, more-abstract tasks, such as defining words, women's brains are more diffusely organized than men's, although men and women don't differ in overall vocabulary ability.

[...] Neuropsychologist Marian Diamond of the University of California at Berkeley, comparing cortical thickness in male and female rats, did find that the right cortex is thicker in males at most ages, while the left cortex is thicker in females but only at some ages (see "A Love Affair with the brain," *Psychology Today*, November 1984). [...]The fact seems inescapable that men and women do differ genetically, physiologically and in many important ways psychologically.[\[4\]](#)

Modern psychological research continues to unveil differences in men and women from the most obvious in behavioral patterns to those as trivial as picking out an angry face in a crowd. In light of such manifest differences between the two genders, it is unsuitable for men and women to assume identical roles. As mentioned in a *New York Times* article on Women's health:

In contrast to the feminist premise that women can do anything men can do, science is demonstrating that women can do some things better, that they have many biological and cognitive advantages over men. Then again, there are some things that women don't do as well.[\[5\]](#)

God created us with different but complementary strengths and capabilities. A man does not need to become a woman nor vice versa in order to be successful.

Footnotes:

[1] *8 Health Differences Between Men and Women*, Gaby Gollub. (<http://www.aarp.org/bulletin/yourhealth/Articles/a2004-02-17-8diff.html>)

[2] Performance Moderator Functions for Human Behavior Modeling in Military Simulations (ADDENDUM) Adrenaline – Khat – Exertion, Chang Y Chung, Dr. Barry G. Silverman, Jason Cornwell. (http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:OYtYvD7FS3QJ:www.seas.upenn.edu/%7Ebarryg/PMF_Addendum1.doc)

[3] *Men and Women Really Do Think Differently*, Bjorn Carey, LiveScience. (http://www.livescience.com/humanbiology/050120_brain_sex.html)

[4] Male Brain, Female Brain: The Hidden Difference, *Psychology Today* Nov, 1985

[5] *The New York Times*. (<http://www.nytimes.com/specials/women/nyt98/21saga.html>)

The web address of this article:

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