Toxic Femininity and Competition Among Women in the Workplace: Phenomenological Study of Islamic Ethics, Gender Communication, and Work Psychology

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Abstract: *This study examines the phenomenon of toxic femininity and unhealthy competition among professional Muslim women in the workplace, focusing on its manifestations, causal factors, psychological impacts, and coping strategies. using a phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with four Muslim women informants and analyzed using nvivo software. The results show that toxic femininity manifests in the form of symbolic sabotage, gossip, social exclusion, hierarchical domination, and the misuse of religious symbols. Triggering factors include insecurity in professional competence, patriarchal culture, and the absence of fair and inclusive organizational policies. impacts experienced by informants include chronic stress, psychosomatic symptoms, decreased motivation, and social isolation. Coping strategies found tend to be personal and spiritual, such as prayer, dhikr, and building informal support from family or alumni networks, while collective approaches often fail due to a lack of structural support. this study offers an integrative 3p model psychology, communication, Islamic ethics as an intervention framework, which includes building psychological safety, ethical communication training, and Islamic leadership based on maqashid al-shariah. this model is proposed as a transformative strategy to create a work culture that is fair, collaborative, and aligned with Islamic values.*

Keywords: *Islamic ethics, gender communication, organizational psychology, queen bee syndrome, toxic femininity.*

A. Introduction

The dynamics of the modern work environment have brought various challenges to professional interactions, particularly in the context of competition among women in the workplace. The phenomenon of unhealthy competition, often referred to as "queen bee syndrome," has become

a serious concern in studies of workplace toxicity[1]. Data from the Workplace Bullying Institute (2022) shows that 58% of workplace bullying cases involve female perpetrators, with 67% of the victims also being female. This unhealthy competition manifests in various forms, from the undermining of professional credibility and verbal bullying such as gossip and slander, to non-verbal acts such as social exclusion and work sabotage. A study conducted,[2] revealed that phenomenon is increasingly complex in the digital era, where bullying can occur through digital communication platforms and social media.

The impact of this unhealthy competition is very significant on work productivity and mental health. Longitudinal research conducted by.[3] Studies have shown decreased productivity among victims of workplace bullying, along with an increased risk of depression and anxiety. Furthermore, organizations experience financial losses due to high turnover rates and costs associated with conflict management.[4] The complexity of this issue requires a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach. An Islamic perspective is crucial, given that religious values can serve as a foundation for building a work ethic and healthy interpersonal relationships. Psychological studies are needed to understand the behavioral roots and mental impact of unfair competition, while communication studies provide insight into the dynamics of gender communication in an organizational context.

In the context of this research, understanding rivalry among professional Muslim women needs to be situated within a theoretical framework that can explain the relationship between social structure, psychological pressure, and religious values. Several relevant theories below provide a foundation for interpreting the competitive behavior that develops in the modern workplace.

Toxic femininity refers to a pattern of relationships between women that is manipulative, passive-aggressive, and exclusive, often manifested through symbolic sabotage and the formation of informal alliances.[5] Toxic femininity emphasizes women's silence, submission, nurturing, and feminine appearance. This creates a shallow definition of femininity, thus objectifying and harming women. This phenomenon overlaps with Queen Bee Syndrome, where senior women tend to hinder the advancement of other women in order to maintain symbolic dominance. The queen bee phenomenon refers to the tendency of successful women in masculine-oriented organizations to maintain the status quo and distance themselves from other women.[6] Several

[1] daRocha Grangeiro, R., Gomes Neto, MB, Silva, LEN, & Esnard, C. (2024). The triggers and consequences of the Queen Bee phenomenon: A systematic literature review and integrative framework. In Scandinavian Journal of Psychology (Vol. 65, Issue 1, pp. 86–97). John Wiley and Sons Inc. https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12957

[2] Sobieraj, S. (2018). Bitch, slut, skank, cunt: patterned resistance to women's visibility in digital publics. Information Communication and Society, 21(11), 1700–1714. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1348535

[3] Baykal, E., Soyalp, E., & Yeşil, R. (2020). Queen bee syndrome: A modern dilemma of working women and its effects on turnover intentions. In Contributions to Management Science (pp. 165–178). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50131-0_9

[4] Baykal, E., Soyalp, E., & Yeşil, R. (2020). Queen bee syndrome: A modern dilemma of working women and its effects on turnover intentions. In Contributions to Management Science (pp. 165–178). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50131-0_9

[5] Shrivastava, M. (2018). Vikram Rana at Margot financial securities. Asian Journal of Management Cases, 15(2), 103–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/0972820118780744

[6] Sterk, N., Meeussen, L., & Van Laar, C. (2018). Perpetuating inequality: Junior women do not see queen bee behavior as negative but are nevertheless negatively affected by it. Frontiers in Psychology, 9(SEP). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01690

studies have shown that compared to men, women in high-ranking positions tend to be less supportive of their colleagues' career advancement, have biased perceptions of other women's professional commitment, and are less supportive of gender equality programs as they move up the organizational ladder.[7]

This phenomenon is understood as a form of intra-gender rivalry that hinders collective solidarity and women's structural progress.[8] Queen bees typically emphasize masculine traits such as dominance and independence, while asserting their differences from other women, thus reinforcing individualism rather than solidarity among female professionals. In an organizational context, this inequality is reinforced by gender-based communication biases. Muted Group Theory (MGT). In this theory, Shirley Ardener introduced the concept of Muted Groups, which questions whether certain individuals or communities must modify their language or ideas to remain socially acceptable.[9]

This concept was later expanded upon by Cheris Kramaraein (1974), who emphasized that dominant communication systems are structured around male experiences. Her research found that women are often portrayed as emotional, overly apologetic, or indecisive, reflecting a form of male dominance that suppresses women's voices in society.[10] Verbal bullying also reflects how closed-off women are, and it often occurs among women.

Furthermore, this reflects the social reality that silencing does not only occur from dominant groups against minority groups. Silenced groups are considered less articulate by the dominant group's language system. Silenced groups arise from pressure and oppression against a group, whether based on race, gender, occupation, or other factors. This dominant group occurs between dominant groups (men or bourgeois capitalists) and minority groups (women or the proletariat). However, silencing now occurs not only from the dominant group but also from fellow minorities, women, and the proletariat due to certain factors that make them want to silence women in the public sphere. These factors can be psychological or social.

Chronic interpersonal conflict in the workplace has a significant impact on mental health and productivity. Karasek's Job Demand-Control Model explains how high pressure and low control in a toxic work environment trigger stress, psychosomatic disorders, and a loss of work motivation. In the context of professional Muslim women, responses to these pressures are often individualized through spiritual coping mechanisms. A prominent model in the study of work stress is the Job Demand-Control (JD-C) Model, developed by Karasek (1979) and refined by Karasek and Theorell (1990). This model explains that the primary psychological stress in the workplace stems from two core characteristics of the job: psychological job demands and job

[7] Sterk, N., Meeussen, L., & Van Laar, C. (2018). Perpetuating inequality: Junior women do not see queen bee behavior as negative but are nevertheless negatively affected by it. Frontiers in Psychology, 9(SEP). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01690

[8] Sterk, N., Meeussen, L., & Van Laar, C. (2018). Perpetuating inequality: Junior women do not see queen bee behavior as negative but are nevertheless negatively affected by it. Frontiers in Psychology, 9(SEP). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01690

[9] Herlita Setyaningrum, A. (2025). Reproductive Control And Female Subordination In Batak Culture: A Muted Group Theory Analysis Of "The Diary Of A Sinting Son-in-Law." INJECT (Interdisciplinary Journal of Communication), 10(1), 343–360. https://doi.org/10.18326/inject.v10i1.4419

[10] Herlita Setyaningrum, A. (2025). Reproductive Control And Female Subordination In Batak Culture: A Muted Group Theory Analysis Of "The Diary Of A Sinting Son-in-Law." INJECT (Interdisciplinary Journal of Communication), 10(1), 343–360. https://doi.org/10.18326/inject.v10i1.4419

decision latitude. Psychological demands include mental workloads such as time pressure, high work pace, and cognitively challenging task complexity.

Furthermore, decision-making discretion refers to the extent to which an individual has control over their work activities and the use of their skills. This concept consists of two elements: skill discretion and decision-making authority. Theoretically, this dimension reflects job control or autonomy, as recognized in the tradition of studying job stress and job redesign. However, in practice, the measurement of this variable often also includes other aspects such as skill level, task variety, and job scope and complexity, thus creating a mismatch between the theoretical construct and the operational instruments used in many JD-C studies.

Studies have shown that long-term exposure to high workloads accompanied by low levels of job control is consistently associated with an increased risk of psychological disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and burnout.[11] Working conditions with high demands but low flexibility are considered highly detrimental, increasing vulnerability to mental distress and stress-related health disorders, as explained in the job demand-control model. Empirical findings indicate that individuals with low levels of autonomy in carrying out tasks are more susceptible to mental health disorders, while high levels of job control actually play a protective role, even under conditions of high workloads. Despite increasing awareness of the importance of this issue, the prevalence of mental health disorders due to work stress remains relatively high. A 2020 WHO report states that stress and stress-related disorders are the leading causes of absenteeism, presenteeism, and decreased productivity in various countries. The impact is felt not only individually but also results in economic losses, organizational inefficiency, increased burden on health services, and broader societal consequences.

In sociological studies, the concept of feminine toxicity refers to forms of negative behavior that arise in relationships between women, such as gossip, emotional sabotage, social exclusion, and unhealthy competition in the work environment.[12] This phenomenon is often rooted in patriarchal social structures that limit women's space to compete openly within a masculine system, so that latent conflicts are expressed more through symbolic and covert means. This concept aligns with the view.[13] which defines hegemonic femininity as feminine characteristics that legitimize hierarchical and complementary relationships with hegemonic masculinity, and thus contribute to the maintenance of male dominance and female subordination. This means that the distinction between masculinity and femininity does not automatically mean equality. Instead, hegemonic femininity (the social construction of male characteristics, behaviors, and roles that are most valued and considered "normal" or "superior" in society, which simultaneously enforces male dominance over women and other men who do not meet these standards) serves to conform to and serve male interests. Women who display masculine characteristics such as

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[11] Lee, W., Yragui, N.L., Anderson, N.J., Howard, N., Lin, J.H., & Bao, S. (2022). The job demand-control-support model and work-related musculoskeletal complaints in daytime and nighttime janitors: The mediating effect of burnout. Applied Ergonomics, 105. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apergo.2022.103836

[12] Brownlee, K. E. (2013). Gossip, Exclusion, Competition, and Spite: A Look Below the Glass Ceiling at Female-to-Female Communication Habits in the Workplace [University of Tennessee]. https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/159

[13] Schippers, M. (2007). Recovering the feminine other: Masculinity, femininity, and gender hegemony. Theory and Society, 36(1), 85–102. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-007-9022-4

assertiveness, physical strength, or sexual freedom are considered threatening to male dominance and are therefore often stigmatized as pariah femininities.

In contrast to Connell's emphasized femininity, this new form rejects subordination to one's own gender and is no longer based on male interests. Scholz questions whether women's involvement in this power structure can change the established logic of hegemonic masculinity, and whether women's participation in a hegemony that is no longer entirely masculine contributes to the formation of a new type of hegemonic femininity. From a gender communication perspective, feminine toxicity can be seen as a failure to build supportive and empathetic communication between women. Deborah Tannen, in her book You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in conversation,[14] introduced the term rapport talk to describe a communication style commonly used by women, namely communication that focuses on building emotional closeness, empathy, and togetherness through personal and expressive language. This style contrasts with the report talk more often used by men, which emphasizes the direct and competitive conveyance of information, status, and expertise.

However, in a competitive work context, this pattern can transform into relational aggression a form of indirect aggression aimed at damaging social relationships or a person's reputation through methods such as the silent treatment, teasing, gossip, or spreading rumors. Indirect communication strategies like the silent treatment, teasing, or spreading rumors are used to maintain social standing. When communication is dominated by status anxiety and performance evaluations between women, healthy communication patterns shift into covert competition that undermines gender solidarity.

Islamic ethics places justice, deliberation, and trust as the main principles in establishing professional relationships, as emphasized in QS An-Nisa: 58 which commands people to fulfill trusts and make decisions fairly.

> "Indeed, Allah commands you to convey trust to its owner. When you determine a law between people, you must determine it fairly. Indeed, Allah gives you the best teaching. Indeed, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing." (QS. An-Nisa: 58)

The principle of deliberation, an integral part of organizational ethics in Islam, is also emphasized in Surah Asy-Shura, verse 38, which praises believers as those who resolve their affairs through deliberation. This verse emphasizes the importance of participatory and collective decision-making, rather than based on structural domination.

$$ وَالَّذِيْنَ اسْتَجَابُوْا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَاَقَامُوا الصَّلٰوةَ وَاَمْرُهُمْ شُوْرٰى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنٰهُمْ يُنْفِقُوْنَ ۚ $$

> "(it is also better and more lasting for) those who accept (obey) God's call and perform prayers, while their affairs are (decided) by deliberation between them. They spend part of the sustenance that We have bestowed upon them;" (QS. Ash-Shura: 38)

These values form the foundation of the Islamic Work Ethic (IWE), namely a set of moral principles that distinguish between right and wrong in the context of Islamic teachings.(Ahmad et al., 2016)[15]. This work ethic is rooted in the Qur'an, which serves as the primary guideline for Muslim behavior in all aspects of life, including the workplace. IWE emphasizes the importance

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[14] Tannen, D. (1990). You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation. Social Interaction in Everyday Life

[15] Ahmad, S., Rofie, MK, Owoyemi, MY, & Yatiban, A. Bin. (2016). Extrinsic and intrinsic principles of Islamic work ethics: An analysis of Malay literature in Malaysia on Islamic work ethics. Social Sciences (Pakistan), 11(24), 5845–5854. https://doi.org/10.3923/science.2016.5845.5854

of collaboration and consultation in completing professional tasks, with deliberation seen as a strategic tool for avoiding errors and overcoming collective obstacles.

However, these values are often not implemented in patriarchal and oligarchic organizational cultures. Critical Organization Theory framework highlights how such structures can stifle conflict and perpetuate power imbalances. This symbolic and structural domination often leaves female employees without the space to voice their aspirations or access strategic positions.

Islamic ethics views workplace relations as a platform for upholding the values of ukhuwah (brotherhood), *'adalah* (justice), and amanah (responsibility). In the context of women in the workplace, the Qur'an and Hadith encourage the establishment of relationships of mutual support and respect among women as part of the principle of ta'awun (mutual assistance). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "A believer is a mirror for another believer" (Narrated by Abu Dawud). Therefore, any form of emotional sabotage, slander, or unhealthy competition is contrary to basic Islamic values. Islam emphasizes that true success does not lie in defeating others, but in building togetherness based on noble morals.

Furthermore, in the contemporary work environment, Muslim women are not only required to be professionally competent but also to navigate social dynamics that often give rise to destructive forms of competition. Islam, through its normative sources, offers an ethical framework that places sincere intentions (*ikhl*) within the context of the work *US*) and professional ethics as the foundation of work behavior. The Prophet's hadith states, "Verily, deeds depend on intentions" (Narrated by Bukhari & Muslim) and "Allah loves someone who, when doing a job, does it perfectly" (Narrated by Thabrani). This concept aligns with the construction of the Islamic Work Ethic proposed by[16], which encompasses four main dimensions: dedication to business, healthy competition, transparency, and moral integrity. Thus, the ideal work orientation of Muslim women should be directed toward optimizing contributions, not toward bringing down others[17].

The principle of avoiding reprehensible behavior such as envy (*Hasad*), backbiting, and slander are also central elements. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) reminded us: "Do not hate one another, envy one another, or turn your backs on one another. Be servants of Allah as brothers" (Narrated by Bukhari & Muslim). Applying this principle in the workplace means refraining from destructive communication, building a culture of positive speech, and positioning competition as a means of self-improvement. The Qur'anic value of fastabiqul khairat (QS. al-Baqarah: 148) serves as a foundation for shifting competitive energy into collaboration based on ethical and professional excellence.

In addition, justice (*'adl*) and openness (*shafafiyyah*) is an essential prerequisite for creating a healthy work climate. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized that "Those who act justly will be with Allah on pulpits of light" (Narrated by Muslim). This can be practically implemented through recognizing colleagues' achievements, distributing job

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[16] Sharabi, M., Shdema, I., Manadreh, D., & Tannous-Haddad, L. (2025). Muslim Working Women: The Effect of Cultural Values and Degree of Religiosity on the Centrality of Work, Family, and Other Life Domains. World, 6(2), 43. https://doi.org/10.3390/world6020043

[17] Makrufi, A. (2018). The Role of Career Women in Islamic Education in the Digital Era. Vicratina: Journal of Islamic Education, 2.

opportunities proportionally, and enforcing rules without bias. This model not only prevents personal friction but also strengthens team cohesion in the long term[18].

This ethical framework is strengthened by the perspectives of contemporary Muslim feminist figures. Zainah Anwar, through Sisters in Islam (SIS), founded in 1988, emphasizes the importance of gender equality and substantive justice in the public sphere, including the workplace.[19]Other feminist figures include Amina Wadud and Kecia Ali,In their view, discussions about women in Islam cannot be separated from two important issues: feminism's historical engagement with Western hegemony and the existence of competing discourses regarding the position of women in Islam. Both demonstrate an awareness, albeit limited, of the dominance of Western discourse and seek to interrupt the androcentric and misogynistic biases within Muslim societies. Ali, in particular, offers a more critical hermeneutical approach to Islamic sources. She rejects casual claims of authority and interprets sacred texts with great rigor to challenge unequal gender positions. Through this approach, Ali not only questions the claims of feminists and reformists who advocate apologetics but also asserts that an apologetic approach to texts can actually mask or even justify gender injustice. Thus, both Wadud and Ali strive to present a more just and reflective interpretation of the values of equality in Islam without becoming trapped within the framework of hegemonic Western discourse.[20]

The Musawah Movement, a global movement focused on equality and justice within Muslim families, was launched in 2009 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It advocates reinterpreting religious texts to eliminate discriminatory practices and build a space for equal competition.[21] The thinking of academics such as Fatima Seedat and Riffat Hassan expands this discourse by emphasizing that the application of Islamic ethics must be intertwined with the principles of honesty, empathy, and respect for human dignity in professional interactions.[22]

Thus, ethical strategies for addressing unfair competition among Muslim women workers are not only normative but also applicable. The integration of sincere intentions, professionalism, avoiding destructive behavior, upholding justice, and reimagining competition as a catalyst for self-improvement form the foundation for creating a harmonious, productive, and Islamically sound work environment.

Although there is a lot of research that discusses the tendency for competition among working women, some studies actually show that cultural factors such as social norms that emphasize collaboration and harmony rather than competition, especially in collectivist societies, cause working women to choose to cooperate[23]. The above studies do not explicitly

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[18] Makrufi, A. (2018). The Role of Career Women in Islamic Education in the Digital Era. Vicratina: Journal of Islamic Education, 2.

[19] Kamaruddin, Z., Yunus, S., Embong, R., & Hashim, HA (2018). The History of Sisters in Islam. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 8(11). https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v8-i11/4929

[20] Wadud, A., Ali, K., & Esack, F. (2012). UJ Press History and Politics of Islamic Feminism: A Comparison of the Works on Islam and Gender by. In Source: Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa (Vol. 18, Issue 2)

[21] Johonnudottir, S. (2024). Women's Rights Advocacy Within a Religious Context; the Case of Musawah. Malmo University.

[22] Hassan, R. (2007). Religion, Ethics and Violence: Developing a New Muslim Discourse. Religion, Ethics and Violence: Developing a New Muslim Discourse, 161–185.

[23] Belwal, R., Al Fazari, M., & Mansour, S. (2025). Women working in public and private sector organizations in Oman: are they free to glide? In An International Journal.; Suzuki, T., Sasayama, K., Nishimura, E., Yamaji, N., Ota, E.,

state that there is no competition among women working in their research, but they do indicate that social barriers, discrimination, and dual role pressures shape the dynamics of women's work that are less competitive. The studies by Suzuki et al. and Belwal et al. provide highly relevant cultural and structural context for further analysis.

Given the discrepancies in previous research findings on the phenomenon of unfair competition among working women, there is limited research specifically examining the perceptions of Muslim women in the workforce. The researchers aimed to answer several interesting questions, including: Manifestations of unhealthy competition among Muslim women in the workplace; Factors causing the emergence of toxic femininity among working Muslim women; The impact of competition on mental health and productivity; and Effective treatment and prevention strategies.

B. Method

This study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the subjective experiences of professional Muslim women in navigating the dynamics of feminine toxicity and unhealthy competition in the workplace. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to interpret the hidden meanings behind the personal and social experiences of the informants, as well as to uncover the structures of consciousness that underlie their behavior and adaptive strategies. [24]Data analysis was conducted using NVivo software, which assisted researchers in coding data into several key nodes.

C. Results and Discussion

In analyzing interpersonal conflicts and toxic femininity among professional Muslim women in the workplace, this study uses NVivo software and then categorizes the data into four main top nodes that represent the problem formulations obtained from the interview results: (1) Manifestations of Unhealthy Competition among Muslim Women in the Workplace; (2) Factors Causing the Emergence of Toxic Femininity; (3) Impact of Competition on Mental Health and Productivity; and (4) Effective Handling and Prevention Strategies. The four top nodes are further elaborated into a number of thematic sub-nodes to capture the diversity and depth of meaning of the informants' experiences.

The first Top Node, Manifestations of Unhealthy Competition among Muslim Women in the Workplace, consists of six sub-nodes: (a) Forms of Competition, which include actions such as sabotage, exclusion, and negative labeling; (b) Religious-Based Conflict, in the form of symbolic manipulation of religion to justify unethical actions; (c) Toxic Femininity, namely passive-aggressive, manipulative behavior, and exploitation of social relationships; (d) Hierarchical Competition among Women, which shows the dominance of seniority or differences in academic levels; (e) Symbolic Tension, namely the inconsistency between symbolic religious expressions and substantial ethical values; and (f) Gender and Power Relations, which highlights gender bias in the distribution of power in organizations.

Saito, E., & Yoneoka, D. (2025). Association Between Income and Well-Being Among Working Women in Japan. Healthcare (Switzerland), 13(3). https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare13030240

[24] Suriandjo, HS (2024). The Role of Grounded Theory in Understanding Urban Society and Design: A Review Based on Creswell and Poth. In Global Science (Vol. 5, Issue 2).

The second Top Node, Factors Causing the Emergence of Toxic Femininity, consists of six sub-nodes as well: (a) Professional Insecurity, namely the feeling of being threatened by the superiority of colleagues; (b) Personal and Social Motives, such as envy, jealousy, or personal relationship conflicts; (c) Abuse of Religion and Power, namely the instrumentality of religious symbols and structural positions for personal or group interests; (d) Patriarchal and Oligarchic Organizational Culture, which strengthens structural loyalty instead of values; (e) Lack of Inclusive Gender & Religious Education, which is seen from misconceptions about Islamic values and the role of women; and (f) Non-Transparent and Competitive Environment, which gives rise to suspicion, mutual undermining, and closed communication channels.

The third Top Node, Impact of Competition on Mental Health and Productivity, has five main sub-nodes: (a) Stress and Mental Disorders, (b) Physical/Psychosomatic Disorders, (c) Decreased Productivity and Motivation, (d) Social Isolation in the Workplace, and (e) Ongoing Discomfort. All of these sub-nodes capture the psychosocial impacts of poorly managed conflict, particularly in work contexts that are normatively supposed to support Islamic values.

Finally, the fourth Top Node of Effective Handling and Prevention Strategies includes seven sub-nodes: (a) Spiritual and Personal Strategies, such as prayer and patience; (b) Non-Formal Support Systems, such as husbands or students who act as informal companions; (c) Collective and Critical Action, in the form of deliberation or advocacy; (d) Proposals for Organizations, related to systemic improvements; (e) The Role of Inclusive Leadership, namely how leaders should be fair mediators; (f) Institutional Solutions, such as regulations or training that can prevent latent conflicts; and (g) Gender-Perspective Islamic Leadership Model, namely the integration of Islamic justice values with gender sensitivity.

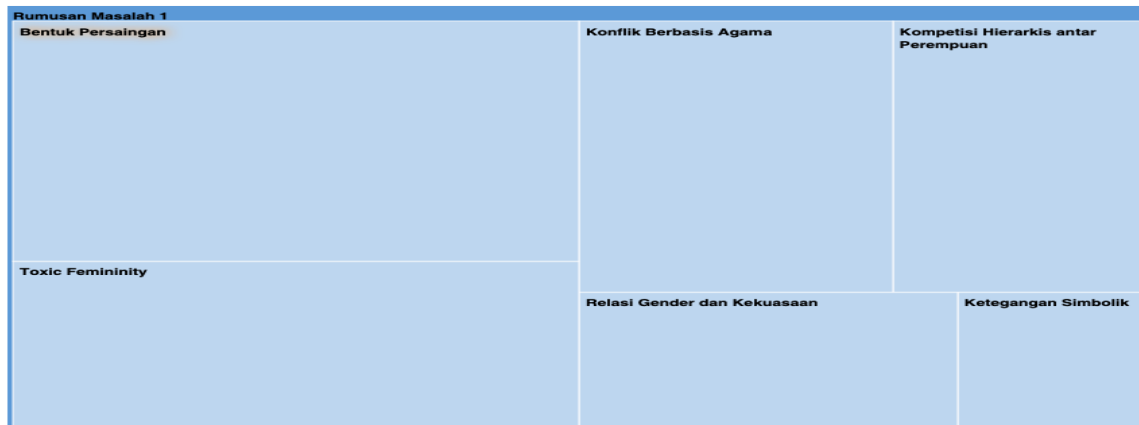**Manifestations of Unhealthy Competition among Muslim Women in the Workplace**

Based on an analysis of NVivo data from four informants, it was found that manifestations of unhealthy competition among Muslim women in the workplace emerge in complex and multidimensional forms. This competition is not always overt, but rather manifests in symbolic sabotage, neglect of achievements, and the dominance of non-verbal communication that weakens the opponent's position. Informants like Ms. Fia experienced extreme actions such as being expelled from meetings and being prohibited from sitting in their own work positions, indicating a form of position-based social exclusion. Meanwhile, Ms. Vivi and Ms. Rina experienced excessive supervision, negative labeling, and obstacles to participating in academic activities such as research and training.

This form of conflict becomes more complex when religious symbols are used to legitimize relational violence, as revealed by Ms. Fia. The parties concerned appear symbolically religious, but instead use religious narratives to subtly harm others. Ms. Yuni highlighted how campus environments that claim to be "Islamic campuses" are actually spaces lacking substantial Islamic values such as justice, respect, and honor for fellow women. In this context, symbolic Islamic values become a source of symbolic tension, rather than a bond of solidarity.

Forms of toxic femininity identified in the data include passive-aggressive and manipulative behavior, as well as a tendency to build self-image through rumor-spreading and informal coalition formation. Competition also occurs hierarchically, particularly between women with different educational backgrounds or structural positions. Ms. Rina and Ms. Yuni,

who have both completed doctoral degrees, experienced strong resistance from colleagues who did not yet have doctorates, who felt threatened by their approach and intellectual capacity.

In many cases, seniority hierarchies, whether based on age or length of service, are prioritized over work quality and innovation. As a result, collaboration is hindered because seniors tend to reject input or changes from juniors. Gender relations are also a significant dimension of this conflict. Several informants stated that even though their leaders are women, the policies they implement favor male colleagues or maintain certain power groups.

Picture1NVivo Analysis Results on Problem Formulation 1

Findings on manifestations of unhealthy competition among Muslim women in the workplace demonstrate passive-aggressive, manipulative, and symbolic relationship dynamics—key characteristics of toxic femininity. Patterns such as exclusion, subtle sabotage, and non-verbal domination reflect intra-gender rivalries exacerbated by hierarchical power structures, as seen in resistance to women with doctorates.

This phenomenon reinforces what is described in Queen Bee Syndrome, where women who succeed in patriarchal organizational structures tend to distance themselves from other groups of women and display masculine characteristics to maintain their position. Click or tap here to enter text.[25]. This inequality cannot be separated from the context of gender communication formed by the dominant symbolic system. Within the framework of Muted Group Theory [26]. Women often do not have equal language space and are even silenced by their peers due to psychosocial and systemic pressures.

The fact that religious symbols are used to perpetuate exclusion or cause spiritual harm demonstrates the symbolic tension between religious expression and substantive Islamic values. This is ironic in an institution that is supposed to uphold Islamic ethical values such as justice and deliberation.

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[25] Baykal, E., Soyalp, E., & Yeşil, R. (2020). Queen bee syndrome: A modern dilemma of working women and its effects on turnover intentions. In Contributions to Management Science (pp. 165–178). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50131-0_9

[26] Herlita Setyaningrum, A. (2025). Reproductive Control And Female Subordination In Batak Culture: A Muted Group Theory Analysis Of "The Diary Of A Sinting Son-in-Law." INJECT (Interdisciplinary Journal of Communication), 10(1), 343–360. https://doi.org/10.18326/inject.v10i1.4419

This is where the relevance of Islamic ethics as a normative framework becomes crucial. The teachings of justice, trustworthiness, and deliberation, as outlined in QS An-Nisa: 58 and QS Asy-Shura: 38, provide a moral foundation for upholding fair and collective professional relationships. However, as explained in Critical Organizational Theory, oligarchic and patriarchal organizational cultures often normalize inequality and silence conflict through mechanisms of collective silence.[27]

Thus, the issue of rivalry between women cannot be separated from organizational structures and ideologies that are gender- and symbolically unequal. Progressive, just, and gender-sensitive Islamic leadership is needed as a solution, one that not only upholds the principles of shura (law and justice) but also actively reforms unequal relational structures to build authentic professional solidarity.

Factors Influencing the Emergence of Toxic Femininity Behavior
Unhealthy competition and toxic feminine behavior in the workplace for Muslim women are often triggered by interrelated factors, including professional, social, and ideological factors. Professional insecurity emerges as a primary trigger, particularly for women with higher educational backgrounds or innovative work approaches. This inequality makes colleagues who feel inferior become defensive and fosters destructive competitive attitudes.

Ms. Yuni, for example, stated that her boldness in proposing Islamic psychology as a study program identity was considered disruptive to the stability of the power she had maintained. Similarly, Ms. Rina felt labeled and dismissed by her former superior after receiving her doctorate. Furthermore, social dynamics such as group or gang loyalty, conflicts between leaders' wives, and envy of colleagues' achievements are triggers for latent conflicts that are difficult to address formally.

The misuse of religion is also a very obvious dimension. Religious symbols are used as moral masks to control and judge others, without regard for the ethical values inherent in Islamic teachings. Patriarchal and oligarchic work environments exacerbate the situation, tending to glorify seniority and loyalty to office over integrity and quality. In institutions that should exemplify Islamic values, the lack of education about the roles of men and women and religious inclusiveness actually opens up space for symbolic discrimination, structural domination, and the secrecy of information. Transparency has become a rare commodity, as several informants complained that survey mechanisms or clarification forums are ineffective due to the lack of guarantees of confidentiality and a lack of adherence to justice.

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[27] Las Heras, J., & Messina, I. (2025). Gendering the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Or how organizing an official football team became a strategy of "passive revolution." Gender, Work and Organization, 32(3), 1242–1262. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13207

Picture2.NVivo Analysis Results on Problem Formulation 2

Research findings indicate that toxic femininity behaviors emerging in Muslim women's workplaces are influenced by overlapping professional, social, and ideological factors. One key trigger is professional insecurity, particularly among women with higher education and innovative work approaches. Within the framework of the Job Demand-Control Model, Click or tap here to enter text.[28] Demanding work conditions with minimal control over decision-making create significant psychological stress. When women lack sufficient autonomy within an organization, they tend to channel this stress into dysfunctional relationships, such as building informal coalitions or labeling colleagues they deem "threatening stability." This occurs because the work environment does not provide a healthy space for the expression of ideas and competencies, as experienced by Ms. Yuni and Ms. Rina in this study.

In addition, social factors such as loyalty to a group (gang), dynamics between the leaders' wives, and jealousy over achievements contribute to strengthening latent conflict. In this context, the theory of Organizational Justice.[29] can explain that injustice in the processes and distribution of resources, including access to decision-making and rewards for achievement, contributes significantly to the emergence of interpersonal conflict. When procedural justice is not guaranteed and the system is not transparent, a work culture rife with suspicion, resistance, and repression of change is created.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate the misuse of religious symbols as instruments to maintain moral dominance, rather than as substantive ethical values. This demonstrates a mismatch between Islamic symbols and the implementation of Islamic values in work ethics. Yet, Islamic teachings explicitly emphasize the principles of justice, deliberation, and trustworthiness in professional relationships (Quran 1:58; Surah 1:38).

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[28] Wall, T.D., Jackson, P.R., Mullarkey, S., & Parker, S.K. (1996). The demands-control model of job strain: A more specific test. Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 69(2), 153–166. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8325.1996.tb00607.

[29] Colquitt, J. A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organizational justice: A construct validation of a measure. Journal of Applied Psychology, 86(3), 386–400. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.386

In this context, Islamic Work.[30] has become important as a normative approach that emphasizes collaboration, integrity, and respect for competence, rather than empty seniority or structural loyalty. However, as criticized in Critical Organizational Theory, institutions often silence conflict and maintain the status quo through hierarchical structures and oligarchic cultures that do not allow space for ethical transformation and relational justice.

Thus, toxic feminine behavior is not merely a reflection of interpersonal conflict, but also a result of structural inequality and the lack of an organizational culture that is just, transparent, and based on substantial Islamic values. Islamic leadership that is equitable for both men and women and encourages substantive deliberation is key to breaking this cycle of conflict and reconstructing healthy and transformative professional relationships.

The Impact of Unhealthy Competition on Mental Health and Productivity
The impact of interpersonal conflict between Muslim women extends beyond the social level and seriously impacts mental health and work productivity. Nearly all informants reported experiencing severe stress, anxiety, and even psychosomatic disorders. Ms. Rina said she cried every day and nearly resigned, while Ms. Vivi stopped accessing WhatsApp groups for four years due to social trauma. The stress impacted not only psychologically but also physically. Ms. Yuni experienced a pinched nerve and chronic headaches since becoming a dean in an unsupportive environment. This emotional distress led to decreased productivity, loss of motivation, and even a desire to leave her job.

Social isolation was one of the most common coping strategies used by informants, even though it ultimately created distance between colleagues. Some chose to limit communication, withdraw from formal interactions, or only form small networks deemed safe. Discomfort at work persisted even after the conflict had subsided superficially. This indicates that the conflict was not fully resolved, and the organizational structure did not provide a space for effective healing.
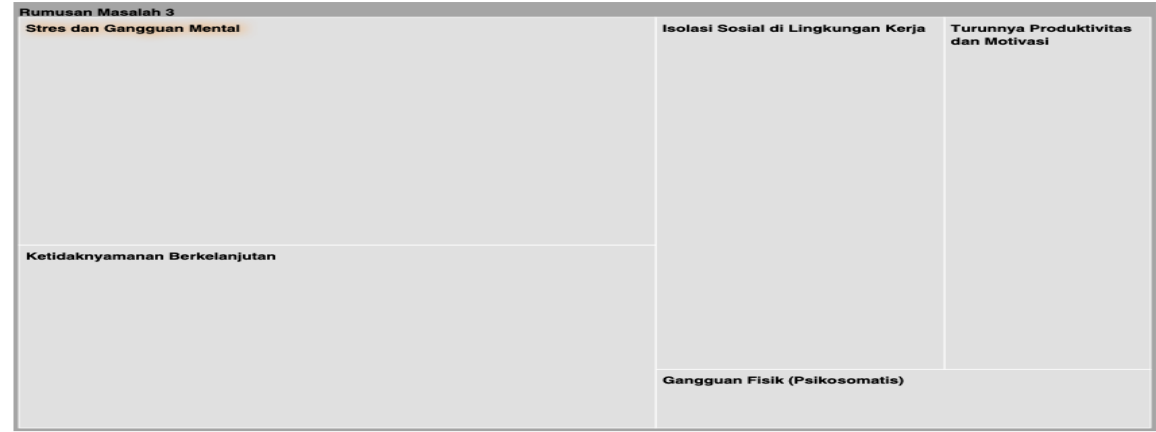
Picture3NVivo Analysis Results on Problem Formulation 3

[30] Ahmad, S., Rofie, MK, Owoyemi, MY, & Yatiban, A. Bin. (2016). Extrinsic and intrinsic principles of Islamic work ethics: An analysis of Malay literature in Malaysia on Islamic work ethics. Social Sciences (Pakistan), 11(24), 5845–5854. https://doi.org/10.3923/science.2016.5845.5854; Sharabi, M., Shdema, I., Manadreh, D., & Tannous-Haddad, L. (2025). Muslim Working Women: The Effect of Cultural Values and Degree of Religiosity on the Centrality of Work, Family, and Other Life Domains. World, 6(2), 43. https://doi.org/10.3390/world6020043

The analysis shows that unhealthy competition among Muslim women in the workplace directly impacts mental health and work productivity. Nearly all informants reported experiencing psychological distress such as chronic stress, anxiety, and even psychosomatic symptoms. This finding is consistent with the Job Demand-Control Model, which states that the combination of high workload and minimal control over the work environment is a key predictor of psychological distress in the workplace.[31]. In this context, persistent interpersonal conflict not only increases the emotional burden but also narrows the space women have to manage this stress healthily.

Informants such as Ms. Rina and Ms. Vivi demonstrated psychosomatic responses and social trauma due to this pressure, leading to a desire to resign or withdraw from work interactions. This aligns with studies confirming that toxic work environments contribute to the high prevalence of depression and anxiety disorders.[32]. This impact is exacerbated by the absence of effective organizational mechanisms for resolving conflict or restoring employee mental health. As stated in Organizational Justice Theory. Click or tap here to enter text.[33]Procedural injustice and the lack of recovery space within the organization are major factors that reduce employee job satisfaction, loyalty, and commitment, while increasing the risk of burnout.

The coping strategies employed, such as social isolation or the formation of informal networks, demonstrate low trust in the organizational system. This reinforces the finding that organizational structures are unsupportive and tend to fail to foster a healthy communication culture. When interpersonal conflicts are not handled fairly and openly, a work culture of fear and alienation is created. Within the framework of Islamic ethics, this contradicts the principles of justice, trustworthiness, and deliberation, as emphasized in Surah An-Nisa: 58 and Surah Asy-Shura: 38. Islamic ethical values require organizations to ensure fairness in professional relationships and provide a collective space that supports spiritual health and work sustainability.

Thus, the impact of interpersonal conflict among Muslim women cannot be separated from organizational structures that fail to uphold the principles of justice and psychosocial support. Organizational policy reforms based on Islamic Work Ethics and structural justice are needed to build a work environment that supports the mental well-being and career sustainability of professional women.

Effective Management and Prevention Strategies
The strategies adopted by Muslim women in dealing with conflict are predominantly spiritual and individual. Prayer, dhikr (remembrance of God), surrender to God, and continuing to work with the intention of worship are the dominant coping patterns among informants. These strategies demonstrate the strength of faith as a psychological resource, but also indicate a lack of structural support from organizations. In more severe situations, some informants, like Ms.

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[31] Fila, M. J. (2016). The Job Demands, Control, Support Model: Where Are We Now? In Job Demands, Control.

[32] Baykal, E., Soyalp, E., & Yeşil, R. (2020). Queen bee syndrome: A modern dilemma of working women and its effects on turnover intentions. In Contributions to Management Science (pp. 165–178). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50131-0_9

[33] Colquitt, J. A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organizational justice: A construct validation of a measure. Journal of Applied Psychology, 86(3), 386–400. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.386

Yuni, rely on informal support systems from their husbands, religious leaders, and alumni students to maintain their work ethic.

On the other hand, collective strategies such as deliberation or approaching leaders often fail. In fact, informants who attempt to clarify or defend themselves are increasingly ostracized or stigmatized. This demonstrates that the organization lacks a fair and reliable conflict resolution system. Harsh criticism is also directed at leaders who are perceived as neglectful, not neutral, or who actually empower certain groups. The absence of specific policies related to gender relations, psychological well-being, and conflict resolution is a major factor in the organization's failure to create a healthy work environment.

Several informants proposed strategic solutions such as providing doctoral scholarships for female lecturers, substantive and reflective Islamic training, and a reward system based on merit, not loyalty. The desired Islamic leadership model is one that balances sharia values and ethical substance, structure and relationships, and power and responsibility. In this context, this research proposes the importance of integrating Islamic approaches, organizational psychology, and gender communication to build authentic solidarity among professional Muslim women.

Picture4NVivo Analysis Results on Problem Formulation 4

When examining how informants interpret their experiences, a relevant psychological approach is needed, including building community-based psychological safety; through peer support groups and religious therapy that avoids spiritual bypassing; and implementing organizational justice to reduce stress and turnover intentions.[34] From a communication perspective, women's rapport talk patterns often shift into relational aggression such as gossip or

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[34] Colquitt, J. A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organizational justice: A construct validation of a measure. Journal of Applied Psychology, 86(3), 386–400. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.386

silent treatment.[35] reinforced by Muted Group theory.[36] Solutions include communication training for working men and women, nonviolent communication techniques, active listening, and transparent and participatory shura or deliberation forums to reduce intra-gender conflict.

From an Islamic ethical perspective, moral dissonance in "Islamic" institutions occurs when symbols of religiosity are not accompanied by core values such as *'adl* (justice), amanah (trustworthiness/reliability), and shura (based on deliberation), triggering toxic religiosity (destructive religiosity). Gender-responsive Islamic leadership must internalize maqashid al-shariah (the primary objectives of Islamic law), avoid queen bee syndrome, and promote ta'awun or mutual assistance. Reform of Islamic curriculum in the workplace needs to prioritize contextual interpretation to distinguish universal values from patriarchal culture. The integration of these three aspects forms a 3P model Psychology, Communication Practice, Islamic Ethical Behavior to create a just, compassionate, and collaborative workplace. QS An-Nahl: 90 emphasizes the importance of justice (*'adl*) and virtue (*ihsan*) as foundations, which must begin in the work environment.

The absence of participatory conflict resolution mechanisms demonstrates that organizations have not fully implemented the principles of maqasid sharia. Instead, a reflective and substantive Islamic approach, one that addresses not only symbols but also structures and relationships, needs to be mainstreamed in organizational governance. Ideal Islamic leadership is one that balances structure and values, power and responsibility, and spiritual vision and human needs.

Several transformative strategies proposed by informants, such as reflective Islamic training, doctoral scholarships, and merit-based reward systems, demonstrate that strengthening women's capacity cannot be done solely on a personal level but must be supported by institutional design that promotes justice and equality. This underscores the importance of integrating Islamic values with modern managerial practices, ensuring that organizations not only convey an Islamic narrative but also deliver real justice.

Concrete solutions to address bullying and interpersonal conflict in the workplace can be divided into short-term and long-term. In the short term (0–3 months), the primary focus is on protecting victims, stopping escalation, and initiating systemic interventions. Victim protection is implemented through an anonymous, app-based emergency reporting system or an internal form that guarantees confidentiality and a rapid response within a maximum of 48 hours. Furthermore, emergency counseling sessions by professional psychologists are held within three days of the report to provide emotional stabilization and develop coping strategies. Neutral support through a safe space buddy helps reduce victims' fear and isolation, in accordance with psychological safety principles.

For perpetrators, initial intervention includes non-punitive, confrontational feedback using nonviolent communication[37], as well as a one-day workshop on self-awareness and impact

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[35] Sharma, S. (2025). Silent Struggles: the untold story of bullying among girls. Cambridge University Press.

[36] Herlita Setyaningrum, A. (2025). Reproductive Control And Female Subordination In Batak Culture: A Muted Group Theory Analysis Of "The Diary Of A Sinting Son-in-Law." INJECT (Interdisciplinary Journal of Communication), 10(1), 343–360. https://doi.org/10.18326/inject.v10i1.4419

[37] Azgın, B. (2018). A Review of "Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life" by Marshall B. Rosenberg. Journal of Historical Culture and Art Research, 7(2), 759. https://doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v7i2.1550

to understand the concepts of toxic femininity and queen bee syndrome and their psychological impacts. From the company's perspective, a neutral ethics team consisting of HR, psychologists, and employee representatives is tasked with handling reports, mediating conflicts, and recommending follow-up actions. The anti-bullying policy is socialized through an official letter from the board of directors, along with access to counseling services.

Long-term solutions (6–24 months) are aimed at changing organizational culture and ensuring sustainable prevention. Survivors are supported through a six-month Women's Leadership Resilience program, which includes training in emotional intelligence, assertive communication, external mentorship, and a peer-recognition-based objective reward system that enhances intrinsic motivation.[38]. For perpetrators, the "ethical leadership" indicator is included in 360-degree feedback-based performance appraisals, accompanied by annual mentorship training, not queen bee, which has been shown to reduce queen bee behavior.[39]

The company strengthened structural reforms through project rotation and transparent promotions to reduce nepotism, in line with organizational justice theory. Mandatory annual training on anti-toxic communication including an introduction to passive-aggressive behavior, nonviolent communication techniques, and the ethics of gossip was introduced (QS. Al-Hujurat: 12). Furthermore, internal doctoral fellowships for female staff with the obligation to mentor juniors helped transform a doctorate from a "threat" to a "mutual investment."

Addressing unhealthy competition and conflict among Muslim women in the workplace requires more than a personal spiritual approach; it requires structural reforms that promote justice and equality. Integrating core Islamic values *adl*, amanah, and shura with organizational psychology and ethical communication is key to building a healthy work culture. The 3P model (Psychology, Communication Practices, Islamic Ethical Behavior) offers a transformative framework for curbing toxic practices, strengthening solidarity, and ensuring that organizations labeled "Islamic" represent true justice.

Picture5 *3P Intervention Model*

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[38] Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. (2000). The "What" and "Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior.

[39] Turner, T. W., & Conroy, R. J. (2021). Identifying blind spots in leadership development. In Research Anthology on Business and Technical Education in the Information Era (pp. 453–474). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-5345-9.ch025

D. Conclusion

This study confirms that the phenomena of queen bee syndrome and toxic femininity in the workplace reflect complex relational dynamics within a patriarchal organizational culture, where some women adopt masculine characteristics and exclude other women to maintain their positions. This condition indicates a weak internalization of Islamic ethical values such as *'adl* (justice), *amanah* (integrity), and *ta'awun* (cooperation) in professional practice. Therefore, an ethical and collaborative approach to women's leadership is needed through strengthening the values of *maqasid al-shariah*, non-violent communication training, and the application of psychological safety principles as a strategy to build a healthy, productive, and gender-equitable work environment.

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