

Received: December 2023 Accepted: January 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58262/ks.v12i2.002>

## Architectural Standards for the Mosque Female Sections

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### Abstract

*Female worshippers (sisters) are not forbidden to attend mosques, as a religious facility for the entire Muslim community; a right that is confirmed by the Prophet S.A.S. In the early Prophet mosque of Medina, which is considered a reference practice, a special gate was called the Gate of the Women (Bab an-Nisaa), and they used to occupy their positions inside the main chamber, which is practiced until recently. Accordingly, we wonder how the female facilities in the mosque have developed, recalling that the mosque has not even been standardized properly. Lately, formal and informal efforts proposed various mosque standards, which included discussions about women's access, spaces, and services. Although such works deserve credit, they should become more consistent with Islamic jurisprudence rather than common views. Therefore, a professional effort to standardize the female sections within the mosque is highly inevitable, which should consider the fair distribution of the male/female spaces, circulation, and services. It should refer to the related literature and universal principles rather than being trapped within any certain culture of a given community or a given age. This research is an attempt to identify design criteria and standards for the female sections of the mosque, that would recognize the Islamic resources, previous best practices, and the rights of women.*

**Keywords:** Mosque Design, Female Standards, Mosque Building Codes, Women Facilities at Mosques, Sacred Architecture, and Women.

### Introduction

Islam is a religion with codes for worship, and it sets instructions for performing ritual prayers correctly; otherwise, it would be invalid to the measurements of that religion. If a pious person accepts Islam, he/she would be accepting its instructions regarding prayer and the mosque, which are explained in a vast Islamic jurisprudence literature (*fiqh*) that follows methodologies depending on the Quran and correct Prophetic traditions. The mosque is a prime building that reflects the Islamic community, where women's ritual prayer is one of its positive manifestations. They and the mosque architects should learn about the spatial organization of the mosque to avoid threats to the validity of their prayers and to socialize as per Islamic instructions.

### Background

#### Ritual prayer (salah) in Islam

Salah (prayer) is the ritual prayer of the Muslims, mentioned plenty of times in the Quran, like, "Perform *salah* at the two ends of the day and in some hours of the night" (Quran 11 (Hud)/ 114) [1].

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Every Muslim person, whether a male or a female, is obligated to perform prayer five times a day, as soon as he/she is adult and sane, like saying, “Guard strictly the prayers, especially the middle prayer” (Quran 2(Baqara)/238) [1]. Most prayers could be performed (1) individually or in the congregation, (2) in or outside a mosque. We have to consider that these two topics are not the same; however, they are mixed by many because they share some aspects.

### **Prayer in Congregation**

All Muslims of both genders are encouraged to perform their prayer in congregation, as the Prophet SAAS considered that performing the prayer in congregation is like performing twenty-five ones by an individual. Abu-Huraira reported that the Prophet SAAS said: “Congregational prayer is equivalent to twenty-five prayers alone”, narrated by (n.b.) Muslim [2].

All of the Muslim jurisprudence schools encouraged congregational prayer. Hanbali scholars considered it a personal obligation for each, some Shafi'i scholars considered it preferable, while others considered that it is enough to be attended by part of the community.

The scholar Jaafar Al-Talhawi wrote: “The *hadith* on the virtue of congregational prayer includes the congregation in the mosque and elsewhere... Praying in a congregation outside the mosque has its merit” [3], which allows women to get the reward of the congregation while worshipping at their houses, for instance.

### **Performing Prayers in the Mosque**

A mosque is a structure that requires special rules to attend congregational prayers. "The convention specified the mosque as the prepared place for the five prayers," Zarkashi explained." Mosques are explicitly referenced as buildings in the Quran and in the traditions of the Prophet SAAS [4]. As a result, the argument that the mosque does not require a structure [5] [6] [7] can be ignored because regulations cannot be applied without a structure, and that proposal does not meet the roles of linguistic derivation in Arabic.

Participating in mosque prayers yields significant rewards, as emphasized in prophetic traditions. The Prophet SAAS said: “Allah will prepare for him who goes to the mosque morning and in the afternoon an honorable place in Paradise with good hospitality for every morning and afternoon goings.” (n.b. Bukhari and Muslim) [2]. So, male Muslims are highly encouraged to attend mosques, and each is obligated to attend the mosque once a week, at least, for the Friday congregational prayer. The Quran reads: “O you who believe (Muslims)! When the call is proclaimed for Friday (*Jumu'ah* prayer), come to the remembrance of Allah and leave off business.” (Quran 62(Jumu'ah)/ 9) [1].

Concerning women, it is rather permissible than obligatory for them to attend mosques. This is agreed upon by the four schools of jurisprudence. The same consensus also agrees that women are better to pray at home. The prophet SAAS said: “It is more excellent for a woman to pray in her house than in her courtyard, and more excellent for her to pray in her private chamber than in her house.” (n.b. Abu Dawud) [2]. However, they generally instruct not to prevent women from attending mosques; the Prophet SAAS said, “Don't prevent your women from going to the mosque when they seek your permission.” (n.b. Muslim) [2].

Scholars of various jurisprudence schools added practice conditions to how this instruction should be implemented (Table 1). It is exaggerated to state that the “later jurists literally excluded women from the practice of congregational worship” [9], although it talks about “congregation” whether in a mosque or anywhere else. Additionally, such statements should have consulted the authoritative jurisprudence literature, which is plenty and available.

**Table 1:** Mosque Attendance for Women Upon the Verdict of Jurisprudence Schools.[8] [10] [11] [12].

Prayer Time	Hanafi School	Maliki School	Shafi'i School	Hanbali School
Fajr (dawn)	disliked, better home	permissible even if attractive, better not	disliked unless aged	permissible, better home
Zuhur (noon)	disliked, better home	permissible even if attractive, better not	disliked unless aged	permissible, better home
Aser (afternoon)	disliked, better home	permissible even if attractive, better not	disliked unless aged	permissible, better home
Maghrib (sunset)	disliked, better home	permissible even if attractive, better not	disliked unless aged	permissible, better home
Ishaa (dark)	disliked, better home	permissible even if attractive, better not	disliked unless aged	permissible, better home
Jumu'a (Friday noon)	disliked, better home	- for aged women only - permissible if attractive	disliked unless aged	disliked if attractive

### Prohibition From Attending the Mosque

As aforementioned, “attending the mosque” and “the congregational prayer” are two concepts to distinguish when dealing with genders. We indicated the latter as preferable for both genders, however, no Muslim is prohibited from attending mosques unless they are obligated to purify themselves by ritual wash (Table 2). Therefore, women were never principally prohibited from attending the mosque. The Prophet SAAS said: “Do not obstruct Allah's women-slaves from attending Allah's Mosques”, n.b. Bukhari and Muslim [2].

**Table 2:** Situations Require Obligatory Wash in the Islamic Practice [8].

Situation	purified by (Male)	purified by (Female)	Remarks
Infidelity	Islam+ ritual wash	Islam+ ritual wash	
Sexual intercourse	ritual wash	ritual wash	
Ejaculation	ritual wash	ritual wash	
Wet dreaming	ritual wash	ritual wash	
Menstruation		Absence of blood + ritual wash	- Natural, beyond control. - Not applicable for aged women
Postpartum		Absence of blood + ritual wash	- Assumably 25% of the female community have menstruation simultaneously.

### Fihi (Islamic Jurisprudence) Discussions

This chapter provides an expert review of the relevant Islamic jurisprudence discussions on specific concerns concerning women's congregational prayers. It discusses opinions of the four major Sunni schools (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'I, and Hanbali), compares them, and concludes the most prevalent approaches among them.

#### A Woman's Prayer at Home is Superior to her Prayer in the Mosque

Ibn Qudamah (Hanbali school) stated: “It is permissible for women to attend the congregation with men, because they used to pray with the Prophet SAAS. Aisha reported: "The women used to pray with the Messenger of God SAAS and then they would leave, wrapped in their cloaks, unrecognized for the poor light" (agreed upon), and the Prophet SAAS said, "Do not prevent God's female-servants from entering God's mosques, being unperfumed when out," (n.b. Abu Dawud).

Nonetheless, a woman's prayer at home is better for her. Ibn Omar reported that the Prophet SAAS said: "Do not prevent your women from going to mosques, and their homes are better for them." (n.b. Abu Dawud), and he also stated: "A woman's prayer in her section (*bayt*) is better than her prayer in her house (*hujra*), and her prayer in her bedroom (*makhda*) is better than her prayer in her section." (n.b. Abu Dawud). [10]

Abu-Da'iqqa stated that it is disliked for the women to attend congregations and mosques depending on the Hanafi school, and commented: "that is because the prophet said: "Their homes are better for them" [11], and because of the fear of temptation for young women. But as for the old women, they go out at dawn, sunset, and evening" [13].

For the Shafi'i doctrine as well, it distinguishes between a young woman and an aged one in attending congregation in the mosque [12].

According to the Malikis, it is permitted for a woman to go to a mosque if she is probably desired, however that is not the most appropriate choice.

### **So, The Conclusion of Jurisprudential Schools Is**

- Early jurisprudence: Young women do not go to mosques, but the aged do. [14]
- Contemporary jurisprudence: Women's contribution in the public life and experiencing modern life affairs, made mosques the most dignified sites for her to go. So, her participation in congregations and preaching courses in mosques would improve her capacity to withstand suspicions and desires.

### **Issues Generated by Separating the Women's Prayer Space from the Men's Rows**

#### ***1- The Imam's Voice Might Get Blocked Off from The Rows of Women***

For instance, if there is a power outage while women's rows are segregated from the imam, current jurists suggest worshippers can either:

- disengage from the assembly and complete the prayer alone, or
- a substitute imam (female, in the case of a women's group) might lead the remaining part to ensure the congregation's reward is preserved (this solution is preferred). [14]

#### ***2- The Disconnection of the Women's Prayer Rows from the Main Congregation***

The common contemporary fatwa, although controversial, is that this is permissible citing the Shafi'i verdict [2] and others. That responds to the present architectural challenges posed by the vast expanses of most mosques, and the quest for ways to leverage the spaces therein.

### **Current Excuses to Isolate the Women's Rows from the Men's Congregation**

#### ***1- The Degradation of Time***

The rows in the mosque behind the imam are organized basically so that the men follow him and the boys stand behind them, with the women's rows in the back. All rows are on the same level with no separation. Women have had a distinctive means of egress since the Prophet's time, called the (women's door), and Omar disallowed male worshippers from entering via it.

The *hadith* states: "The best rows for men are the first and the worst are the last, and the best rows for women are the last and the worst are the first." (n.b. Muslim) [2].

#### ***2- A woman's voice reciting the Qur'an***

Most jurists do not consider a woman's sound to be illicit; nonetheless, singing with her voice and beautifying it when reading the Qur'an, is regarded as a form of submission in speech that may entice

some men. The Qur'an prohibits this: "And do not be submissive in speech, lest someone who has an evil heart might convey." (Qur'an 33(Ahzab)/32)

According to Zuhayli, "If a woman prays in the presence of stranger men, she should lower her voice so that they would not hear her, to avoid temptation". [12]

### **Conclusion of the Islamic Jurisprudence Study**

The scholars suggest that preventing women from attending mosques will not rectify the degradation of time.

Alternatively, to stimulate constructive prayer activity among women, it may be an appropriate architectural solution (among other non-architectural procedures) to designate prayer rooms for women to protect their privacy and prevent prohibited behaviors.

Because jurisprudence conservation and environmental concerns (as outlined below) are inevitable, these solutions may be introduced as brief and temporary as possible, subject to the community's moral status. Accordingly, such temporary solutions cannot be considered original features of the mosque's architecture.

### **Female Issues Considered for Mosque Design**

As women are special in dealing with the mosque building, they consequently require attention when developing the architectural features that are more related to them.

Calculate the Female Worshippers attending the Mosque

Reviewing the situations abovementioned, it is agreed that no woman is prohibited from attending the mosque. However, part of any given female community should be absent from the mosque every given time for natural/uncontrolled circumstances, which are menstruation and postpartum.

A random sample of female worshippers may be divided into mature and aged, with an assumption that the division line is menopause, which is common to occur at the age of 50 [15]. The numbers in each rank vary depending on the population age structure of the group, where the median age is rarely around the age of 50.

This paper conducted an estimate of the proportion of the female community that has no natural/uncontrolled factors to obstruct them from attending mosques, determined for several regions (Table 3). By the estimated conclusion, 55-70% of a given female community are subject to these circumstances, provided to exclude the aged and assume that 25% of women have them simultaneously. Accordingly, 82.6-86.3% of the female community have no such obstructions to attending mosques (Table 3). That means that the ratio of females/total in the mosque is up to 46% (almost a Female-to-Male ratio (F/M) of 84%) ignoring other factors.

Added to this obstruction there is the cultural influence. Traditional communities are usually more conventional than the westernized ones, and more connected to their norms and habits. If we recall that the prophetic traditions encourage women to pray at home and that the scholars were usually conservative about attending mosques [10] [11] [12] [13], female numbers would meet further decrease in mosques. We could not attain any statistical figure to indicate the decrease rate, and any figure we might provide would be speculative. However, note that 15% is the Female-to-Total (F/T) mosque space required by the Abu-Dhabi ADMDR standard, yet its publication provides a model mosque illustration with a percentage of 25% for the same [17]. Within a close culture, the Saudi MDC proposes a lesser standard of 5% [18]. As for the western practice, there is a jump onto 30-40% and maybe 50% in a contemporary study [9]. Apparently, the latter figure (50% of F/T) can be considered unaware of the natural/uncontrolled issues of the female community.

As for the universal standard handbooks, they do not provide such an estimate [5] [7].

**Table 3:** An Estimate of the Percentage of the Female-Worshipper Audience that Should Be Absent from Mosques for Natural/Uncontrolled Factors [16].

Region	(A) % Age (15-65) (W.B. presumed)	(B) % Age (<50) 75% x (A)	(C) % Age (<50) has natural hindrance 25% x (B) presumed	(D) % Aged (50-65) 25% x (A) presumed	(E) % Aged (>65) (W.B.)	(F) % Aged Sum (>50) (D+E)	(G) % F. excluding (<15) age (A+E)	(H) % (G) F. excluding the absent (G-C)	F. Max. mosque-attendance to the F. community (H/G)
Arab World	62	46.5	11.625	15.5	5	20.5	67	55	82.6%
E. Asia+ Pacific	68	51	12.75	17	13	30	81	68	84.3%
E. U.	62	46.5	11.625	15.5	23	38.5	85	73	86.3%
S. Asia	66	49.5	12.375	16.5	7	23.5	73	61	83.0%
N. America	64	48	12	16	18	34	82	70	85.4%
Average									84.3%

Source: 2020-statistics [16], and author’s presumptions for some variants. (W.B.= World Bank, F.=Female)

We surveyed a randomly selected sample of mosques (Table 4) [5] [7] [17] [18], to conclude that a female section, when provided, has an F/T that ranges between the percentages of 8% (Abu-Dhabi) to 41% (Indonesia). Our observations on the newly built mosques and the mosque standards in the same table show an average F/T ratio of around 25%. As women are 50% of the community and 17% of them do not attend mosques for natural/uncontrolled factors, we conclude that around 33% of the female worshippers do not attend mosques for cultural factors.

It is worthy of notice that female space should be flexible, as it varies according to events and seasons, and the mosque classification. In the season of Ramadan, for example, women become so concerned to attend the *Tarawih* (voluntary) that their numbers usually exceed the capacity of their prayer area, while they barely attend other daily obligatory prayers.

Regarding mosque classification, the most helpful classification for the female sections is submitted by MDC, where it classified some mosques as residential mosques, corporate mosques, educational mosques, and roadside travel mosques [18]. It is noticed among these variations that the female section would be profoundly influenced. The residential mosque, either local or central, is the model that we usually examine. Yet, in corporate or educational environments, women are confined for an elongated period, so we may expect that the utmost number of the female community (~ 84%) would attend the mosque, to imply the maximum measures of the female space. In the roadside model, it is not about capacity only, it is also about security. In that sense, it is better to apply the single-chamber model, where women share the same hall with men for more security, even without any partitions [20].

**Table 4:** Female Sections in Sample Mosques (Location, Shape, %) [5] [7] [17] [19].

Mosque	Location	Year	Area	Female Section	Shape	F/M ratio	F/T ratio
1 Sari Ash Karawaci	Indonesia	2017	1,200	mezzanine	U-shape	69.1%	40.9%
2 Delgosha	Iran	heritage	4,000	mezzanine	U-shape	61%	38%
3 KAPSARC	Riyadh	2014	NA	mezzanine	rectangle	50%	33.3%
4 Esra & Me’raj	Khobar	2018	2,772	upper floor	rectangle	50%	33%
5 Al-Aemah Al-Rabah	Egypt	2012	1,500	mezzanine	U-shape	51%	33%
6 Yasamkent	Turkey	2015	2,800	mezzanine	rectangle	47%	31%
7 Siddiqa Fatima	Kuwait	2011	3,136	mezzanine	U-shape	41.6%	29.4%
8 Alacaatli	Turkey	2016	3,355	mezzanine	rectangle	38%	27%



9 Refiye Soyak	Turkey	2004	6,500	mezzanine	U-shape	36.5%	26.7%
10 Al-Warqaa	Dubai	2016	1,400	mezzanine	rectangle	31%	24%
11 Fatih University	UK	2013	15,000	mezz.+ court	rectangle	30.7%	23.5%
12 Dogramacizade Ali	Turkey	2007	NA	mezzanine	U-shape	30.4%	23.3%
13 Al-Rawda	Jordan	2011	184	mezzanine	rectangle	29.6%	22.9%
14 Hamshari	Jordan	2012	NA	back separate	rectangle	24.4%	19.6%
15 Crystal	Malaysia	2008	946	G.F. corner	rectangle	14%	12.3%
16 Al-Aziz	Abu-Dhabi	2016	5,100	mezzanine	rectangle	8.5%	7.8%
17 Shafi'i	Jeddah	heritage	1,803	main hall	shared	--	--
18 Mohor Para	Bangladesh	2014	477	main hall	shared	--	--
19 Faid	Hail, KSA	heritage	398	main hall	shared	--	--
20 Al-Hussaini	KSA	heritage	385	main hall	shared	--	--
21 Al-Jo	KSA	heritage	383	main hall	shared	--	--
22 Al-Maarek	KSA	heritage	300	main hall	shared	--	--
23 Al-Sakhra	KSA	heritage	280	main hall	shared	--	--
24 Amir Shakib Arslan	Lebanon	2016	100	main hall	shared	--	--
25 Al-Khabra	KSA	heritage	NA	main hall	shared	--	--
26 Al-Dwaihra	Ad-Diriya	heritage	NA	main hall	shared	--	--
27 Model Mosque	[17] (2/17)	n.d.	NA	mezzanine	rectangle	32.2%	24.4%
28 Model Mosque	[5] (27/17)	1999	NA	side, daily hall	rectangle	16.1%	13.9%
29 Regent's Park	[7] London	1969	NA	mezzanine	rectangle	29.8%	22.9%
30 Prince Hasan	Jordan	1976	575	back separate	rectangle	13.9%	12.2%

These discussions would show that indicating a given percentage for the mosque female sections is more sophisticated than what is thought by mosque standards, and needs more flexibility in dealing with its issues. Here we might appreciate the approach of the MDC, who insisted that the female section should be on the ground level within the main hall of the mosque [18]. Hence it allowed that space to extend when needed although it estimated that the area needed is 5% of the total.

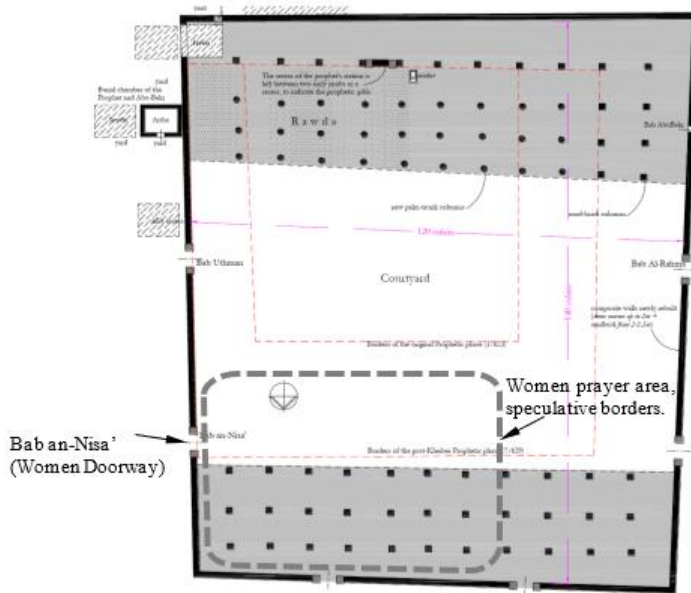
### Access Points

In the early Medina Mosque, the Prophet SAAS observed that there was a need to separate the genders' doors, so he proposed to attribute a special doorway for women: “(I wish) if we reserve this door for women”, n.b. Abu Dawud [2]. Semhoudi argues that in the days of the Prophet SAAS there was only one doorway on that side; Bab Uthman and the women's doorway should have been indicated by Caliph Umer bin al-Khattab (624-644), who was highly praised by the prophet. When Umer expanded that mosque, he signified that gate by name: Bab an-Nisa’ (~Door of Women) (Figure 1), and he forbade others from using it [21].

We expect the prophet SAAS did not want such a doorway to be obligatory and preferred to leave its application subject to the case circumstances and its special needs. So, Umer decided to add that doorway upon convenience, while he himself is not reported to provide a similar one in any other mosque [4]. That mosque after Umer’s expansion became extensive with a prayer hall measuring about 4,200 m<sup>2</sup> [4], that could host around 7,500 worshippers (the average space needed to perform prayer within a congregation is around 0.54 m<sup>2</sup>) (Figure 1). Mosque pre-design programs may consider this capacity as the threshold to obligate access separation. That door was and still is exposed to the outdoor area, even it is reported that it was topped by a mosaic Quranic verse (Al-Kursi) [1] [21], apparently a lavish colorful one from the days of the Umayyads [4]. Providing that particular door with that very verse is a delightful gesture because it was recommended by the prophet SAAS for protection from evil, as the tradition said: “recite the Verse of Al-Kursi for then a guardian from Allah will be guarding you”, n.b. Bukhari [2].

In the concurrent attempts to create criteria for mosque architectural design, some agree that the separation of access should be dictated in all mosques. ADMDR stated: “safe and independent access shall be provided for female worshippers” [17]. Metric Planning states: “Male and female entrance/exit ... must be separate” [5].

**Figure 1:** The Medina Mosque After Umer’s Expansion In 634, Where the Doorway of Women Appears (Al-Hamad 2006).



Security is a priority. Access points in the mosque should not look suspicious, especially when they lead to separate female chambers where their male escorts are forbidden, physically and visually. Upon a survey of authoritative mosques from 622-720 [4], these provided open entrances and prayer sections while the current practice usually provides separate ones. To indicate the security issues, MDC shares the same view as ADMDR who stated: “female access point should be located along a street edge”, however, some codes promote segregation [17] [18].

**Female Space Within the Mosque**

At the turn of the new millennium, the widespread arrangements of the female space at mosques were either segregated from male spaces, incorporated within the main prayer hall or provided with a partition or a screen that has built-in flexibility [9].

**Table 5:** At the Mosque, A Survey Where Women Should Pray [22].

	Separately from Men	Not Separately			
	(%)	Behind Men %	Alongside Men %	Other %	DK %
U.S. Muslims	48	25	20	8	100
Men	51	25	17	7	100
Women	45	24	22	8	100
Born Muslims	51	24	17	9	100
Convert	36	29	33	2	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding

This discussion is directly connected with a basic question: what is the allowed location of women worshippers in a mosque? A simple question that was the center of the intensive debate, mostly within the Muslim communities in the West.

The segregation choice has been examined for decades. Separate female galleries were reported in the late 1960s, since the design of Regent's Park Mosque of London was approved (1969) and the opening of Birmingham Central Mosque (1973). In Jordan, Prince Hasan Mosque (1976) provided an early example of a separate space for female worshippers, albeit at the same floor. Nonetheless, female



galleries did not start to appear until the 1980s, such as the University of Jordan Mosque (1982) and Yarmouk University Mosque (1983). However, this newcomer became so popular, that around 50% of the US Muslims preferred it in 2011 (Table 5). Furthermore, the recent Muslim practice almost completely provides a separate scheme; (Table 4) shows that out of 29 mosques, ten incorporated the female space within the main prayer hall, and only two of them were recently designed.

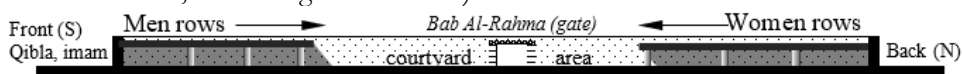
Also, the universal standard handbooks are pro-separation. The Metric Handbook, for example, obligates prayer hall separation between the genders [5], and Neufert considers that mosques are exclusively for a male if they do not include women's galleries [7]. Added to the aforementioned impression that the early models were mostly erected in the West, this position by the western standards consolidates an impression that prayer hall segregation was promoted by the western architectural proposals.

In a reversal by the U.S. Muslim women in 2011, 46% were unhappy with segregation and requested to share the main prayer hall with men (Table 5). That is not an exclusive issue for the westernized communities, by the way, the verdict of Bin Baz was requested about a separate female quarter set alongside the male prayer hall in Hadramout, Yemen [23].

Concerning the traditional practice, women had a single choice; to congregate with the male in a shared prayer hall (Figure 1). Sahl b. Sa'd reported: "I saw men ... offering their prayers behind the Messenger of Allah SAAS. One of the proclaimers said: O women folk, do not lift your heads till men rise", n.b. Muslim [2].

As per our survey (Table 4), all traditional mosques incorporated the female space within the main prayer hall without traces of partitions. This incorporation possesses the advantage of re-organizing the main prayer-hall space subject to any instantaneous needs. Additionally, it improves security in female zones, it keeps them connected to the *imam* (prayer leader) and the front rows of worshippers, and both genders equally enjoy the services and artistic quality of the main prayer hall, if any. After the first prophetic expansion of the Medina Mosque in 629 CE (Figure 2), when poor companions left the back of the mosque, the shade they dwelled was mainly left to women who started their rows from the back onwards. It is noted how the courtyard could function as a soft separation component.

**Figure 2:** NS Section of the Medina Mosque After the Prophet Expansion 629, Looking West. (After Al-Hamad 2006, With Heights Distorted).



### Female Rows of Prayer and their Reward

It was reported by Abu Huraira that the Messenger of Allah SAAS said: "The best rows for men are the first rows, and the worst ones are the last ones, and the best rows for women are the last ones and the worst ones for them are the first ones", n.b. Muslim [2]. There is a scholarly consensus about the advantage of the back rows for women in mosque congregations, however, Bin Baz considered women's prayer zone alongside men's zone acceptable, but inferior in reward [18].

That means that the reward for females praying in the last row is the highest, compared to the high reward of the male worshippers of the first row. The reward for attending the correct row is described in several traditions, like Abu Hurairah's report that the Prophet SAAS said: "Were people to know the blessing of pronouncing Adhan and the standing in the first row [for men], they would even draw lots to secure these privileges", n.b. Bukhari and Muslim [2]. It could be expected that women have the same privilege in the last rows so that they would compete to attend them.

It is common in most mosques to utilize the last row as a store for mosque chairs, a seat zone for men,

drink water fridges, or other services and luggage, and certainly the wall is usually punched to create the mosque frontal gateway.

The architect here has an important role, which is to design the back row of the mosque and its adjacent wall with the same elegance and care as the first one, as both share the same significance and value for either gender. Consequently, using side entrances becomes critical, saving most of the back wall to host the party that needs it the most, the female Muslims.

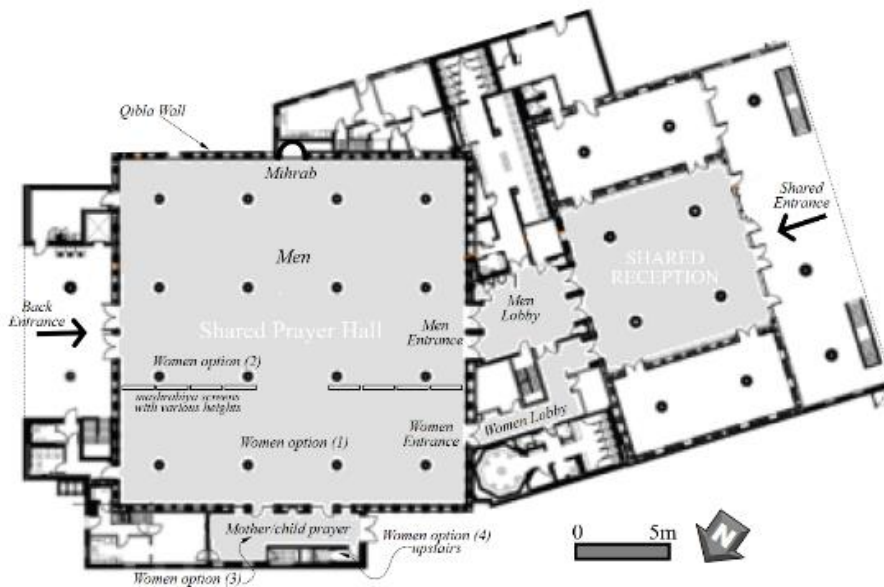
### “Multiple-Choice” Female Sections

The mosque of Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS), for example, was reported to divide women worshippers between the main prayer hall and a separate quarter, on the desire [24]. For the worshipper, it is confusing rather than appreciative to engage a female pious woman in a selection effort between the two female prayer spaces, while the mosque’s administration could not decide what to introduce. Moreover, the prayer validity of all women is at risk, as soon as their congregation could be divided into two, while several jurisprudence verdicts prohibit that.

The other example is in the Cambridge Central Mosque (Figure 3), where all the Muslims enter from the same gateway then divided into separate access points to enter the same prayer hall. The back rows are saved to the female with the ability to follow the Imam and the front rows, and the back wall is almost free of doors. But screens were provided to divide the hall into two sections, which is not the best solution as per jurisprudence scholars, it also creates a non-flexible space. It is not rare to have the male section crowded while the female section is almost vacant so that their children are chasing there (Figure 3).

Additionally, women are given a choice out of four; whether to (1) sit in the back behind the series *mashrabija* screens, (2) in front of the screens, or (3) to join the mother/child space at the rear end of the prayer hall, or (4) to elevate to a third prayer space upstairs [25].

**Figure 3:** Cambridge Central Mosque, UK. Notice the Shared Prayer Hall on the Same Level and the Various Options Provided to Women (The Author).



I think that most women would question the best action she should take so that her prayer would still be valid and receive the maximum reward, which is confusing. If the mosque sponsors and their

architects, who should have hired experts, did not have a decisive answer to such a question, how should every single woman respond? I think this is a significant design setback in that reward-winning building.

We have concluded above that the best option is praying within the main chamber without solid partitions. If partitions are provided women must be visually connected to the front rows and the *imam*, so the screen could be low or provided with latticework, which is the case. We should recall here that praying on a separate floor is disliked by jurisprudence scholars, some even considered the prayer invalid if performed there [12].

As for the unfamiliar facility; the annex called (mother/child space- option 3), which separates mothers behind soundproof glass to prevent the *imam* from hearing babies cry, and “their children can run and shout without disturbing other members of the congregation”, and “also equipped with a wet play area and mini *mibrab*” [25]. Why mums and babies are banned where nobody can hear them? does that comply with safety codes? what sort of prayer they can perform if locked up with children who run, shout, and play wet? In a mother-friendly mosque, the *imam* should consider the baby cries as an alarm to be considerate with babies and their mothers, rather than labeling them as disturbing, and the toddlers should be observed by older relatives during the short prayer time. When the prophet SAAS heard babies cry, he used to hurry in his congregation out of mercy, as narrated by Muslim [2], and he never blamed mothers for bringing their babies to the mosque or banned them out of the main prayer hall.

A third example; is a widespread design solution (20% of the designs as per table 4), which is the U-shape for the female gallery with its tips facing the *qibla*. Again the worshipper will be confused between praying in either of the tips or at the base of the "U", which may create more than one female congregation within the same prayer.

In a conclusion, these multiple-choice designs show failure in understanding the ritual and psychological requirements of the female space in the mosque, and how to provide it with an appropriate design.

## Mosque Amenities

The institutional scope of the mosque sponsors would govern the architectural facilities provided in that building. Essentially, the mosque fulfills its definition by providing the prayer-hall building to resemble the simple model of the early prophetic mosque in Medina, bearing in mind that low-budget mosques still follow this model. Facilities were gradually provided to respond to emerging needs, such as the *minber*, the *maqsura*, and the *shadervan*. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new list of facilities became unavoidable to serve the worshippers of some communities, in addition to a list of unnecessary conveniences. Some of these are shared for both genders, or cannot be shared, or are inconvenient for either of the genders.

**Table 6:** Mosque Amenities Classification Between Male and Female Users.

Facility	Description	Remarks
<b>1. Shared Facilities</b>		
1.1 Children facility/ crèche [17]	it is where toddlers are watched and controlled until the congregation is over	Not traditional. The service required is different from the crèche proposed by ADMDR for females only. Toddlers might be escorted by a female or a male relative, and would usually stay for a brief interval until the prayer concludes. Bringing toddlers below seven to the mosque is disliked by scholars [23], however, we do not find a Qur'anic text or tradition that forbids it plainly.
1.2 Common/lecture room [17]	Not traditional; for public events, multipurpose room	Not traditional. ADMMDR requires efficient access to this facility. Such a facility should not be subject to the mosque regulations (i.e. not considered part of the mosque) and should not be accessed via the mosques space, that is to tolerate the attendance of its female audience at all times.

1.3	Library [17]	To be isolated	Not traditional. Generally, see my opinion in 1.2 above. Regarding this issue, we consider that Umer kept a tome of the Quran within the main prayer hall in the place of former Hafsa's house after it was joined to the mosque expansion. In the early practice, however, libraries were not recorded as components of the ritual hall. [4]
1.4	Quranic classes [17]	Isolated education area. Could use the crèche space outside prayer time.	Not traditional. Generally, see my opinion in 1.2 above. This activity was encouraged by the prophetic traditions to be conducted within the main prayer hall, provided not to disturb the worshippers as they have the priority. The Prophet SAAS said: "Does not one of you go out in the morning to the mosque and teach or recite two verses from the Book of Allah; the Majestic and Glorious? That is better for him than two she-camels," n.b. Muslim [2]
<b>2 Separated Facilities:</b>			
2.1	Wudou' (ablution) area (common)	Specially designed water tank, tubs, seats, and sink to perform ablution (ritual wash).	Not reported in the very early practice [4]. An example is seen in the Cairene mosque of Ibn-Tulun (Abbasid-879). Developed to be introduced in Mamluk and Ottoman mosques either as a basin (e.g. Al-Aqsa), <i>shadervans</i> (e.g. Sultan Hasan), or within rows (e.g. Sulaymaniyah). We think that such a service was re-flourished in mosques by the westernization of the Islamic city and the gradual absence of <i>sabil</i> . For women, it should be introduced separately, based on fair distribution and equal quality between genders. The number is obtained following the local codes, subject to the number of worshippers and the nature of rituals usually practice. For example, female worshippers usually do not attend <i>i'tikaf</i> (to stay overnight in the mosque).
2.2	Toilets (currently common)		Traditionally submitted in late periods, and not reported for the female [4]. If necessary, it should be introduced separately, based on fair distribution and equal quality between genders. As mentioned above, the nature of rituals practiced by the female should be considered.
2.3	First aid [17]		Equipment must be accessible within a code-accepted range. A special space is not proposed by any available reference.
<b>3 Men-only Facilities</b>			
3.1	Imam's residence (currently common)	For the residence of the imam, which could be single.	<i>Darul-Imara</i> could be considered as one of its forerunners, which appeared in antique examples, like Kufa and Basra [4]. Females are not allowed to lead the mixed-gender prayers as <i>imams</i> , so they cannot get that post in legitimate mosques, accordingly its advantages.
3.2	Adhan equipment (currently common)		Scholar consensus is that <i>adhan</i> is not requested from female Muslims, unlike the male. Performing it by a female is prohibited upon the common verdict, and the <i>adhan</i> itself is considered invalid.
3.3	Showers [9]	To use during <i>i'tikaf</i> to completely wash the body if needed.	Prophetic tradition says: "A woman does not remove her clothes elsewhere than in her husband's house without tearing down the veil between her and her Lord", so such a service is not recommended for women in mosques.
<b>4 Women-only Facilities</b>			
4.1	Female labor residence	If male labor were provided with residence (usually singles), then the female should be provided with equal ones.	Abu Huraira reported that a black woman used to clean the mosque. Then the Messenger of Allah SAAS missed her and asked about her. He was told that she had died. He said, "Why did you not inform me?" (It seemed as if they (the companions) considered the matter insignificant). Then he said, "Show me her grave." When it was shown to him, he offered prayer over it. n.b. Bukhari [2]

## Conclusions

The topic of female sections in the mosque was rarely handled subjectively, some even made it a topic for feminine debate. In our review of the Islamic jurisprudence discussions, the common practice, the published standards, and the way of thinking about the issue, it seems uncomfortable to approximate an agreement between the confronting opinions. Nevertheless, we should assure that any design code for the female section in the mosque should consider a major criterion, which is not to invalidate the prayers of the female by providing solutions unauthorized by the Islamic jurisprudence.

Therefore, some spatial recommendations might be of substantial significance. The mosque is the prime building that reflects the unity of the Islamic community [26], and it deserves to be designed to avoid threats to the validity of the female prayers and considerate of the unity of the community.

Firstly, the main prayer hall is the best location in the mosque for both genders, without partitions of any kind, and the value of the back rows for women equals that of the front rows for men. Further design attention is required to keep the back rows unbroken, decorated, and furnished in an equal manner as the front ones. Other services should be provided with a thorough and considerate appreciation for the natural differences between the genders, and the variety between communities.

Secondly, mothers and children have to be treated mercifully in the mosque's main prayer hall. Mums with babies can join the congregation inside the main chamber, and it is indecent to criticize them. Banishing mothers and babies into separate cloisters does not conform with the Prophetic practice. Regarding toddlers, the Prophet showed happiness with them in the mosque, either praying or not, however they should not be ignored by their relatives.

The basic principles of the topic were discussed thoroughly in this paper. However, further research is still inevitable, especially as part of the efforts to create a satisfactory building code for the mosque.

**Note :** The illustrations and graphics in this document were created or modified using the following software: AutoCAD, Microsoft Word, and Microsoft PowerPoint. The following online tools were used to conduct part of the language review: QuillBot, Grammarly, and ChatGBT.

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