92978 - Boss choosing a female secretary for the workplace

the question

My question is: is it permissible for a woman to work as a secretary for a service company, knowing that the company’s office consists of two rooms and a reception area, and the owners of the company are of good character and religiously-committed. Their reason for choosing a girl to work there is that this is the custom in our country, in addition to the fact that she is more capable in secretarial skills and using the computer.
Is there any sin on the company owners because of this, and is it permissible to work so long as they adhere to modesty and religious dictates? Is it permissible for them to employ a female worker to clean the offices etc?
I hope that you can explain, with evidence: is there a difference between khulwah (being alone with a member of the opposite sex) and ikhtilaat (free mixing)?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

It is not permissible for a woman to work in a place where she will mix with men, because of the bad consequences and haraam things that this leads to, such as khulwah (being alone with a member of the opposite sex), looking, shaking hands and becoming attached to bosses and colleagues, and other things that are well known. Hardly any mixed workplace is free of these haraam things.

We have already quoted the evidence for mixing being haraam in the answer to question no. 1200.

Secondly:

It is not permissible for bosses to employ a woman to work among men, whether as a secretary, cleaner, or anything else, because that is helping in haraam mixing.

The fact that this is the prevalent custom in a country does not serve as a justification for it in terms of sharee'ah, rather customs must give way to shar'i rulings and are subject to them .

The claim that women are better at secretarial skills and at using the computer is not true. There are also men who are good at these skills, and the matter depends on making a good choice. Men are more entitled to jobs because it is the man who takes care of the family and he is the one who is required to spend on them according to sharee'ah. If a woman is able to find work that is free of haraam things, she may do that, otherwise her house is better for her.

Thirdly:

It is haraam for a man and woman to be alone together, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "No man is alone with a woman but the shaytaan is the third one present." Narrated by al-Tirmidhi (2165); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Tirmidhi. And he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "No man should be alone with a woman without there being a mahram present, and no woman should travel unless she has a mahram with her." A man stood up and said: O Messenger of Allaah, I have enlisted for such and such a campaign and my wife has set out for Hajj. He said: "Go and do Hajj with your wife."

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (3006)and Muslim (1341).

What is meant by "being alone" is that they are together in a place where no one else can see them.

With regard to mixing: it may be without khulwah (being alone together), such as when a number of men are together with a number of females. What is haraam is that which leads to any of the haraam things mentioned above, such as looking, touching, speaking in a soft alluring voice, and forming attachments. This – as stated above – is hardly absent in any mixed workplace, because people meet so often and sit together for lengthy periods. This breaks down all barriers, especially

in small or confined spaces with a limited number of people, as in the case mentioned in the question. In this case the opportunities to get to know one another and become attached are even greater.

Mixing may be free of khulwah, but it does not prevent making appointments to meet elsewhere, and things that are worse than that.

Whoever studies the evidence for mixing being haraam – which is quoted in the answer referred to (no. 1200) – will understand the wisdom behind Islam closing the door to it, and will understand that this command is based on an understanding of the nature of both sexes and what results from their being close together. Islam is keen to protect both of them.

It says in Fataawa al-Lajnah al-Daa'imah (12/156): Mixing between men and women in schools and elsewhere is a great evil and adversely affects religious commitment and worldly interests. It is not permissible for a woman to study or work in a place where men and women mix, and it is not permissible for her guardian to allow her to do that.

May Allaah help us all to do that which He loves and which pleases Him.

And Allaah knows best.