



Are women still facing challenges in working after empowerment? An applied study in public education in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)

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Abstract

The advancement and civilization of a culture are reflected in the empowerment of women. It is essential and necessary for the overall growth of civilization to succeed. This study tries to provide a response to the topic, Do Women Still Face Workplace Challenges After Empowerment? In the context of examining the contribution made by the "Kingdom's vision 2030" to Saudi women's empowerment.

The objective of this study is to shed light on the role of Saudi women working in community development, to identify the most significant challenges and issues facing Saudi women generally and those working in the public educational sector, and to offer solutions. The researcher used qualitative research techniques and a descriptive-analytical strategy (semi-structured interviews). Thirteen Saudi women who are working in public education administration in Jeddah and Riyadh cities were subjected to interviews. The study's factors were divided into three categories: organizational challenges, societal challenges, and family challenges.

The study concluded that the Saudi leadership has increasingly acknowledged the value of Saudi women. The administration made improving the position of women in several growth sectors, especially economic growth, a top priority. Saudi society continues to disapprove of Saudi women's employment and participation in the labour force. The Saudi family is crucial in supporting working Saudi women and assisting them in excelling in their careers and professions.

The researcher suggested that Saudi society's perception of working Saudi women must be changed. Moreover, it is important to implement numerous radical changes in hiring practices and to attain gender parity in job chances.

Keywords: *Saudi Women, Challenges, Working, Empowerment.*

Introduction

Women make up over half of the human capital, hence it is crucial that they take an active role in economic activities to increase their expertise and competitiveness and lessen the country's reliance on foreign labour. Women now make up a greater percentage of management and leadership positions than they did during the last two decades. (Broadbridge, 2010; Davidson and Burke, 2011; Powell, 2010). However, due to obstacles including a lack of mentors and networks (Bagilhole and White, 2011; Kanter, 1977), work-life conflict (Broadbridge, 2009; Lewis, 2002), organizational systemic challenges (Kanter, 1977), and there is strong evidence that women's career advancement to leadership positions seems to be challenging due to preconceptions of gender norms. (Davidson and Burke, 2011; Fagenson, 1990).

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Women's participation in senior management positions and the decision-making process has increased over the past ten years in Saudi Arabia as a result of increased female enrollment at all educational levels, in a variety of occupations, and in various facets of public life. Recent developments have demonstrated that Saudi Arabia's development plans and policymakers have a solid strategic roadmap for an even greater role for women in public life and leadership roles in the public sphere. Although women play a prominent role in Saudi society, evidence suggests that women in leadership positions face different challenges than their male counterparts because of institutional, familial, personal, and cultural barriers that limit their effectiveness as leaders. (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

Women make up about half of the population or human resources of Saudi Arabia. (Alkhateeb & Sultan, 2020). Today, more than 90% of Saudi women who work actively hold secondary or tertiary degrees; in 2016, 57% of Saudi Arabia's university graduates were female; and this rising level of education is the primary contributor to rising female employment. This isn't to imply that just getting a degree makes it easier for Saudi women to find employment; sadly, it doesn't. Nevertheless, 78.3% of the homeless women are university graduates, according to Abdul Wahid Al-Humaid, deputy minister of labour. In contrast, 76% of unemployed men have only completed high school or less. (AlMunajjed, 2010).

The Saudi government's adoption of the UN Charter will support women politically, create a safe environment for them to work in, construct a women's office in the labour divisions under the Ministry of Labor, and promote women's skills and participation in economic activities. Saudi women have fewer opportunities than other women due to cultural socialization and cultural beliefs; they only recently started working in a number of fields that had long been dominated by men after King Abdullah Bin Abdelaziz ruled in 2011 that Saudi women are permitted to work in establishments that sell women's necessities. But when the system doesn't support these women, society marginalizes and fails to support them. (Hakem, 2017).

Theoretical framework and Literature Review

Theoretical framework

For Saudi women, the educational system and cultural values have the biggest effects on their career-related self-efficacy. It keeps individuals from achieving extraordinary levels of advancement in some industries, from being successful in or making unique professional choices. The majority of the earlier studies that were taken into account for this research, despite their numerous contributions, did not incorporate the scientific theories that underpin the work of women. Despite the abundance of these theories, the implementation of this research will be based on a number of scientific theories, the most significant of which are:

1- Social cognitive career theory (SCCT):

The Social Cognitive Career Theory literally has its roots in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory from 1986. (SCCT). The central tenet and definition of the theory place particular emphasis on the relationship between individual, cognitive, and environmental factors when deciding outcomes. Social cognitive theory emphasizes the role of cognitive parameters, and Lent 21 et al. (1994) assert that the three social assessments of self-efficacy confidence, performance expectations, and target choice have a remarkable influence on the SCCT.

This theory was developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett in 1994 and concentrated on three key areas: (a) how to develop fundamental educational and career interests; (b) how to make educational and career decisions; and (c) how to attain educational and career achievements. The researchers consider three factors for career growth: (a) motivation; (b) a process for choosing a career that includes choosing a target; and (c) career achievement success and persistence (Lent et al., 1994). The self-efficacy and result views of a person have an impact on these three metrics.

In this career model, the importance of self-efficacy as a predictor of career advancement is emphasized. Self-effectiveness develops from life experience (gender, race, disability, personality, and predisposition). Nevertheless, a person's profession decision may be significantly influenced by external factors. According to Lent et al. (1994), contextual affordances such as perceived difficulties or benefits may also contribute to an individual's decision not to take on a challenging task (Lent et al., 1994; Swanson & Fouad, 2010).

2- Super's developmental theory:

In 1953, Super created one of the 20th century's most well-known work theories (as quoted in Swanson & Fouad, 2010). This theory was based on the idea that a person's self-concept is important since it changes through time as a result of experiences. Super contends that factors like mental and physical development, life experience, and social learning opportunities shape how people perceive themselves. Super suggested five life stages that people often experience, including characteristics during each stage.

The phases are self-concept creation and behaviour formation during the growing period (ages 4 to 13). Exploration (14–24 years old): gaining knowledge and experience in making career decisions. Age 25–44: Establishment: Stabilize, consolidate, and advance the career path while achieving a work-life balance. Maintenance (ages 45–65): ongoing professional advancement. Over 65s: disengagement with increasing productivity.

The theory also used the definition of career maturity to assess a person's capacity to carry out the career development activities anticipated at each level. Foreign technical practitioners and academics have used Super's theory because it takes into account concepts like career maturity, developmental stages, and role in life. Current theoretical research focuses on how social and cultural norms affect individual choices. Self-perception and career preferences are influenced by cultural norms and expectations (Leung, 2008; Swanson & Fouad, 2010).

According to Super's theory, which combines the theories of level development and social roles (Super et al., 1996), persons go through five stages during the career development phase: development, discovery, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. It is important to understand that the theory of Super does not follow a fixed system of stages in which a person's age controls how they advance from one stage to the next (a process known as max cycling).

Super suggested that the five phases might be moved through fluidly, with people moving back and forth through them at various points throughout their lives. Super refers to this process as "micro cycling." The development level will be thoroughly examined for the objectives of this essay within the framework of its typical occurrence during adolescence (Kosine, & Lewis, 2008).

Literature Review

The difficulties women encounter at work and in their careers have received little attention from studies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Hakem (2017) examined Saudi women's status in regard to the job market, taking into account social injustices, religious perspectives, the role of the government, and complicated cultural factors.

In-depth research was done on the viewpoints of working Saudi women by Al-Asfour et al. (2017). On the basis of 13 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Saudi women, the researchers used qualitative research methods. The findings revealed numerous significant systemic, attitudinal, social, and organizational barriers that Saudi women must overcome in order to advance in their careers. Lack of mobility, the prevalence of gender stereotypes, workplace gender discrimination, limited opportunities for expansion, development, and career advancement, an imbalanced workload brought on by a lack of family-work balance, and gender-based pregnancy management challenges are just a few of the challenges.

The viewpoints of Saudi university students on changing gender roles as they are influenced by women's rights, education, employment, and engagement in the public sphere were examined by Al-bakr et al. (2017). Results from a survey given to 4,455 males and females show that students are enthusiastic and supportive of changes promoting gender equality, but there is still resistance from individuals with conventional beliefs.

Al-Rasheed (2013) notes that the condition is changing. Saudi women are becoming more involved in public life as a result of King Abdullah's approval of the settlement between society and Islam (Fatany, 2013). He supported women's freedom by expanding employment opportunities and electing women to the Shoura Council in January 2013. (Jordan, 2013). Women began voting freely in local elections later in 2015, indicating that the perspectives of both men and women were important for the development of Saudi Arabian society.

Despite the significant role that women play in Saudi society, according to Alahmadi (2011), there is evidence to suggest that women in leadership roles experience the world differently than their male counterparts due to organizational, individual, and cultural barriers that limit their ability to lead effectively. This study used a questionnaire to gather information from 160 female leaders about the challenges they faced in Saudi Arabia's government agencies. Contrary to common belief, the results showed that systemic challenges, a lack of cash, and a lack of confidence are the three main problems, with personal and cultural issues coming in third.

People are segregated based on gender in Saudi Arabia, where this culture is reinforced by social, religious, and cultural norms. Sani (2018) studied the participation of women in STEM fields of study and employment. A mixed-method approach that takes into account the participants' real-world experiences is used in this study to investigate the factors that influence girls' decisions to pursue STEM education and careers. 352 people who attended a public university received questionnaires. In the foundation year, 312 of these were STEM track students (FYS), 30 were STEM students (TYS), and 10 were faculty members from the institution (FM). The results of the survey's analysis revealed that students' aspirations for STEM careers begin as early as grade 4; mathematics is their preferred academic field, while medicine is their top career choice. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 35 participants, including FYS (20), YYS (10), and FM (5).

According to an analysis of the qualitative data, girls in public schools are not subjected to gender stereotypes. Even though they have the ability to acquire all science-related subjects, only the brightest students in high school and university can choose to major in science. It was also evident that there is a lack of professional education in Saudi Arabian schools and that kids rarely receive career assistance while in school, but their parents and extended families frequently do. The findings of this investigation provided evidence in support of Giddens' Structuration Theory. It demonstrates how social and cultural shifts in the family and women's-only spaces are typical, allowing for girls' agentic actions and ultimately fostering their strength within those spaces.

According to Alsharif (2019) Women are still underrepresented in the workforce in the private sector, despite encouraging improvements over the past few decades. Based on the fact that Saudi women are now very well educated and that women from lower social strata who have access to higher education have acquired a variety of skills that can provide access to various maritime sectors thanks to the help they have earned, the goal of Vision 2030 is to make it possible for FLFP to increase from 10% to 30% by 2030.

Studies on the consequences of allowing Saudi women to drive have shown a general level of contentment among women as they can now realize their aspirations of freedom. Women were discovered to be more enthused than men about freedom. (Al-Ghalib et al, 2018). Additionally, Vision 2030 contributes to improving possibilities for women in a variety of fields, including nursing. Foreigners have historically performed a wide range of jobs to meet the demands of home and hospital care. However, the advent of the

2030 vision has provided Saudi women the chance to seek an education in this area and play a significant part in advancing the nation's economy. (Al-Dossary, 2018).

Significance of the current study: the research reflected in the studying and analyzing challenges facing working women after empowerment and highlighting the role that women play in national economy. Also, this research introduces suggestion major pillars underpinning improved levels of Saudi women's employment acceptance and empowerment.

Research Problem

Female labour force participation (FLFP) is a key factor in economic growth. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is a developing economy that relies more on males than women to achieve its growth objectives. Saudi FLFPs are incredibly modest over a 50-year period. (Naseem & Dhruva, 2017). Men and women have markedly varied earnings, rates of labour force participation, and employment opportunities; they also favour concentrating on specific industries and professions. Despite recent advances, FLFP is still very bad in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, as employment has struggled to keep up with rising FLFP, participation increases have made the situation for women in the labour market worse. Saudi women who do get jobs tend to work in a few specific industries. (Naseem & Dhruva, 2017).

Despite the attention that women's professions have received on a worldwide scale, the Arab world has little understanding of women's employment. Women in the emerging nations of the Arab region receive no attention in the academic research and studies of a number of academics, which focus only on the careers of women in the US and Europe. Additionally, in light of the increased interest in Arab women, the majority of research concentrate on specific nations like Lebanon. United Arab Emirates (Tlaiss and Dirani, 2015; Tlaiss, 2014b) (Tlaiss, 2013, 2014a), With little work specifically for women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Despite the commonalities among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, each country has unique structural realities and characteristics that necessitate separate studies in order to gain insight into country-specific settings, particularly women's experiences in each country (Sidani and Gardner, 2000).

The researcher therefore made the decision to conduct this study in order to shed light on the role of Saudi women working in community development, to identify the most significant challenges and issues facing Saudi women generally and those working in the public educational sector specifically, and to discuss strategies that can be used to mitigate these challenges and issues.

Research Questions

What difficulties and problems do Saudi women have at work when they are assigned to demanding, high-level positions? is the key question that frames the current research issue. The following are the most crucial of the several sub-questions that will be covered in the current study:

- What are the steps that may be taken to solve the difficulties that working Saudi women face?
- How do working Saudi women contribute to the cultural and economic advancement of their society?
- What are the elements influencing Saudi women's acceptance of new, unusual jobs?
- What part does the family play in helping Saudi women who are employed in new, nontraditional jobs?

Research Objectives

The current study aims to address the difficulties and problems Saudi women encounter at work. It also aims to accomplish the following objectives:

- Outlining the steps that can be taken to get over the difficulties associated with dealing with Saudi women.
- An explanation of the contribution made by Saudi women to the cultural and economic advancement of their society.
- Talk about the variables influencing Saudi women's employment acceptance.
- The family's support and encouragement of Saudi women working in sensitive environments is disclosed.

Research Design

Methodology

The goal of this qualitative study was to examine the difficulties and problems Saudi women encounter at work. After the issue was recognized and comprehended in the context of previous researchers' lived experiences, potential factors and difficulties that may affect Saudi women's appointment were identified from a scientific perspective, thereby enhancing Saudi women's empowerment and minimizing gender inequality and gender bias in Saudi society.

Investigating the difficulties and problems Saudi women face at work is consistent with the use of phenomena as a methodology for qualitative research. The transcendent events allowed us to concentrate on the core of the experience and to clearly define the difficulties and fundamental problems facing Saudi women. Based on the key objectives, the research questions that drove the study allowed the participants to discuss different elements of their experiences and perceptions linked to the study's issue. The participants were able to tell their experiences in a way that respected their thoughts and perspectives in relation to the study questions due to the form and scope of the narrative questions.

A descriptive-analytical methodology and qualitative research methodologies such as interviews will be employed to attain the study goals and to solve the research problem, which focuses on the difficulties and problems faced by Saudi women. Several in-depth personal interviews with Saudi women employed in public education administration were done, to ask about a variety of challenges they encountered both before and during their current positions.

There are three main types of interviews: semi-structured, unstructured, and structured. Semi-structured interviews were the primary method used in this study for gathering data. In order to validate research domains and establish causes, variables, and variables' items or qualities for review or usage in the survey, semi-structured interviews are conducted with a representative sample of respondents.

Interviews also place a strong emphasis on using natural language as information. Interviews may be sufficient if a complete awareness of the setting is necessary and the study's main objectives are to develop insight and understanding. (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 138; Gillham, 2000, p. 11) Because of this, the interviewees had enough room to explain and give examples of their typical workdays, as well as to follow up on and talk about any newly presented issues.

Sample and Data Collection

In scientific investigations and research, data are frequently divided into two categories: primary data and secondary data. These two categories differ in the approaches and techniques used to obtain the data.

- **Primary data:** Saudi women employed in Saudi Arabia's public education administration were interviewed for this study's primary data.
- **Secondary data:** will be gathered by conducting a theoretical and methodical review of past research, studies, literature, journals, and books pertaining to the topic of the current study.

The research is based on a series of semi-structured interviews with a range of participants: Saudi women who are working in public education administration in Jeddah and Riyadh cities.

The key findings of the study are presented in this section, which were extracted from data collected from ten Saudi women working in public education administration. The interviewees' answers to the semi-structured questions asked in the interviews are recorded in this section. Through first reading the interview questions and then discussing the answers, the researcher works through the interview questions in a structured manner. The results of the interviews are then accompanied by concrete findings. The researcher aims to summarize the overall results from these interviews in the final discussion of this research.

Each interview transcript underwent two stages of analysis. The interview was conducted in Arabic. Then, the transcripts were first translated into English, and the translations were checked for correctness before being used. In order to code the information and find pertinent themes, the transcripts were read several times. The interviews were systematically coded and recoded using a theme analytic approach, paying attention to specifics concerning the difficulties and problems Saudi women experienced. To find recurring themes that arose from the data, content analysis based on the frequency of recurrence of topics was carried out.

The data analysis and results of this study are presented and discussed in depth in this section. The researcher takes a structured approach to interview questions, first asking them and then discussing the participants' answers.

This research attempts to analyze the data collected from semi-structured using online zoom meeting interviews conducted with a sample of thirteen Saudi women who are working in public education administration in Jeddah and Riyadh cities. The purpose is to examine and interpret the responses of the interviewed participants to the interview questions in order to obtain the required information that ends with an exploration of the main findings and formulation of the conceptual perspective in order to arrive at appropriate recommendations and suggestions regarding the topic of the study.

The purpose of illustrating the analysis of data and results is to provide a clear understanding of the challenges and issues that Saudi women face in work place. Semi Interviews were conducted with a sample of Saudi women working in public education administration. Therefore, both explanations and quotes from those interviewed were provided to illustrate the study results. Sandelowski (2010) stated that showing citations with descriptions and explanations encourages readers to engage with the interviewees' thoughts and deeply understand their perspectives. Accordingly, Sandelowski's concept of objective qualitative content analysis is followed; Taking, encoding, and grouping important data sets according to themes, each subject conveys a different unit of information.

Interviews were coded and presented in the form of themes to answer the research questions, and the coding framework was developed in a way that allows this. The coding includes coding patterns and themes in such a way to give greater clarity regarding their detailed content. To do this, a distinction was made between the different aspects of the content by organizing data into a group of categories; dividing the questions and their answers into groups (topics) that answer the questions of the study.

Data Analysis

Thirteen Saudi women working in public education administration in Jeddah and Riyadh cities were interviewed individually for approximately half one hour and no more than two hours during this study. All the participants have a master or Ph.D. degree; which means that they have the sufficient qualifications and knowledge to answer the questions of the study.

The interview guide consisted of eleven open questions that gave the respondent the freedom to express his or her opinion/words and mention stories and experiences that support his point of view. The interview questions mainly directed to identify the challenges and issues faced by Saudi women in work place due to organizational, family, and society challenges.

Research Results

Although there are several challenges that facing the empowerment of Saudi women as a leader, there is some consensus among the participants that the most important challenges are organizational, societal, and family challenges.

The thematic analysis of the interviews with female resulted in the development of three main themes: organizational challenges, societal challenges, and family challenges. In this section, themes are thoroughly explored and supported with direct participant quotes. It is important to note that the quotes in this paper were translated from Arabic to English and have been slightly amended so that they would make sense when read by an English-speaking person (Santos et al., 2015).

Organizational challenges:

1- Organizational challenges

One important challenges that prevent qualified women from reaching senior leadership positions are organizational challenges. Many protectants claimed that nepotism is the biggest obstacle that prevent qualified Saudi women from reaching senior leadership positions. one participant reported that the competition with male leaders was unfair because of nepotism, acquaintances, and interests some women do not like to appear knowing that they are capable of leading:

“Most positions have been dependent for a long time on the male element, owing to a lack of confidence in the female element., the lack of powers granted to female cadres, in as well as nepotism and personal interests.”

Other participants emphasized how women are discriminated against when applying for leadership roles, when being promoted, and when getting training and development opportunities. Participants are somewhat in agreement that organizational problems make it difficult for women to hold leadership positions. Both sexes need advanced training for leadership roles; women in particular lack it due to their recent attempts to enter the field. The recruitment of leaders depends on the network of professional relationships which plays a major role in highlighting candidates' names. Women may be a disadvantage in this area due to some structural factors:

“Many female leaders work in the shadows under male administrations, and they are only called upon to lead the women’s branches.”

Another organizational challenge that face Saudi women in work place is lack of confidence in the female. There was a lack of confidence in women's empowerment a few years ago:

“Males dominating higher positions and believing that they were more entitled to them than women, there are some minds that hinder this empowerment.”

Another organizational challenge is that leadership positions are monopolized by seniority rather than competencies. When some departments find qualified competent women for leadership positions, they begin to limit their authority, disempower them, and obstruct them.

Another organizational challenge is the lack of information sharing amongst women's departments. One participant claimed that the most significant of these challenges is the lack of information sharing amongst women's departments, the male leader's monopoly on leadership positions. Also, one of the biggest organizational challenges women in the public sector labor under the supervision of men, which has a detrimental influence on their performance and limits their career mobility. Women need more access to corporate resources, including knowledge, strategic planning, and managerial decision-making:

“The withholding of strategic information from women leaders who are less in administrative roles, and the male leaders’ monopoly on the decision-making process.”

Last but not least, many organizations apply heavy centralization approach in decision taking male leaders use strong centralization, which places women leaders in a constrained position that prevents them from doing work in the required manner. With the national Vision 2030, there is an important support and direction for empowering competent women, but the internal conflict persists within departments that reject and resist change.

“When some departments find qualified competent women for leadership positions, they begin to limit their authority, disempower them, and obstruct them. Strong centralization, which places women leaders in a constrained position that prevents them to from doing work in the required manner.”

Finally, to conclude according to participants the most important organizational challenges the lack of professional communication with senior leaders and exclusion from professional networks include: Opportunism, negligence lack of chances for professional exchange and collaboration with other institutions to learn varied experiences, exclusion of women and male-dominated talent pool.

2- Exclusion from professional networks

Moreover, participants were asked about their experience about the lack of professional communication with senior leaders and exclusion from professional networks as a major challenge in women’s journey towards leadership. One participant argued that the rule of adhering to the administrative hierarchy, increase the gap in thinking and skill between the employee and the direct manager, which causes delays or stumbling in providing solutions and initiatives and delivering them to senior leaders.

“We work in different buildings or branches, but the males govern us from afar and make all our choices. Women are subject to male authority and removed from decision-making positions.”

Another participant confirmed the existence of exclusion from professional networks challenge by telling her story when she was studying for a master’s degree, she was informed that my leave could not be used due to work pressure and that the boss has the authority to withdraw the employee from the study in the case of negligence in work. For the record, there was no negligence on her part, but it was an attempt to destabilize her psychological security at the time of exams”

“I went directly to the Human Resources Department in Jeddah and met the Director of Human Resources - Boys. A letter was sent to allow me to take my existing leave, and I received the highest exam score.”

Some of them agreed about exclusion from professional networks challenge although they didn’t face it; they suggest to Overcoming these challenges requires empowering them – Conducting training seminars and lectures for women leaders – providing women with authentic opportunities.

“I have not encountered this. In the face of these challenges, I believe that guidance is the solution.”

Organizations must implement human resource strategies to transform work cultures through management changes, team development, sensitivity training, and cross-gender communication. It is also necessary to organize conferences, workshops, and meetings to stay up with the evolving roles of women leaders in education and to advance to positions of leadership; women must break through this male-dominated talent pool.

Besides the previously cited women, some reported, this challenge can be overcome by opening communication channels between various administrative levels, transparency in transferring information, discovering talents, appreciating individual efforts, and supporting the distinguished.

3- Lack of comprehensive training policy

Also, participants emphasize that the lack of training comprehensive policy aimed at women weaken their prospects of achieving leadership include: no accredited trainers for female leaders, lack of training for women to increase their leadership opportunities, focus on training women in educational and social fields. The training policy is based on a performance evaluation that is not carried out in accordance with specific data. This, in turn, does not reflect the reality of distinguished leaders and does not demonstrate the true skills that the employee needs for accurate and professional training.

"To improve women leadership styles by providing them with proper tools to learn about her behaviors and personality in order adapt their skills."

Any leadership position without training is a curse for the boss and subordinate. Even the preparation of the teacher requires four years of studying specialized and general subjects, then follow-up from the supervision and administration, and still the teacher makes intentional or unintentional educational errors. Let alone a boss and a leader who holds the reins and make decisions that affect large numbers. He needs courses, follow-up, consultations, and continuous self-evaluation from inside and outside the administration so that he masters the skills of leadership, whether a man or a woman.

One of the most significant challenges to women pursuing leadership positions is a lack of access to leadership training opportunities because of the focus on training women in educational and social fields, as well as limiting leadership training to men.

"The preparation of the second level of leaders should be a priority for the operating leaders, as appointments should only be made after training and evaluation when appropriate."

Another participant denied the existence of this is challenge and argue that the state does not fail to provide all means of training, particularly with free training websites like Ethrai and Dorroob, as well as self-development websites accessible to everyone but the organization must encourage and assist women to participate in training programs that will prepare and develop them for leadership positions.

"There is no lack; On the contrary, there is good training and empowerment"

Another participant believes that the working woman must seek out training and development. It is now offered through a variety of channels, and the arena for gaining knowledge has expanded and is no longer restricted to a training program.

"The sources of knowledge are diverse and many, allowing any employee to expand his knowledge and master the skill required to perform work."

To sum up the lack of professional communication with senior leaders and exclusion from professional networks as a major challenge in women's journey towards leadership factors include: no accredited trainers for female leaders, lack of training for women to increase their leadership opportunities.

4- Fight from men against women's empowerment

Participants were asked if they feel that there is a fight from men against women's empowerment and that men's constant interference diminishes her leadership of the organization. On participant argued that the lack of conviction and trust in women's decisions, there are battles in general in leadership. There is a stronger battle between the sexes, Men are always in charge of making decisions, whilst women are just executive, fear of marginalizing of female roles. she mentions the quote:

"A nation that puts their leader as a woman will go to ruin",

Many male leaders ignore women's capabilities and the fear that they would not fulfill achieve the company's goals and objectives, as well as the prevalent masculine leadership culture that women have no

place among male leaders. Another participant confirm that there are battles in general in leadership, and in turn there are stronger battles between the sexes, she said:

“Men reject women in general, I notice disapproval of women’s empowerment and constant struggles, which frustrates women and weakens their will to show the strength of their leadership of the organization.”

Another participant add unfortunately, men are fighting against women’s empowerment and attempting to exclude and limit their role. Some male leaders’ faulty thinking about women pursuing leadership positions for fear of marginalizing their roles and confining them to women. This fight is because some male leaders are afraid of losing their job status and competition with women for leadership roles.

While another participant share here experience of receiving support from male leaders more than from female leaders.

“In my field of work, women may not pose a challenge or competition to men, so cooperation has grown more comfortable, and there is no conflict in goals. Also, female leaders are easily threatened.”

5- Gender discrimination or inequality

Saudi women suffer from discrimination and inequality in workplace in form of uneven compensation, unequal promotions, instances of sexual harassment, and racism are just a few examples for gender and discrimination. It frequently manifests itself in subtler ways, such as through diminished chances for moms and a rise in female burnout. On participant said that:

“I notice discrimination in terms of place and work environment. The work environment for women, including facilities, maintenance, space of rooms and offices, and tools, does not fulfill equality, resulting in varying motivation for work.”

Other forms of discrimination include that female sometimes are paid less than men, also there are some forms of inequality in hiring and pay decisions. Also there are lack of flexible work and affordable child care. over-representation of migrant and refugee women in low paid and insecure work. Another participant mention here story that happened during a training section for a men’s section. Unfortunately, when the attendees discovered that the trainer was a woman, they all withdrew, except for two people.

“The Director of Education did not react to the employees who withdrew from the course and did not prove to them that the benefit is in the information conveyed, not who delivers it.”

Another participant mentioned an example for inequality where permission is calculated on female by two hours, either in the morning or in the evening, and if an employee requires longer time, it is calculated as delay on her. Another form of inequality in nomination for certain programs or leadership positions, men are given presence over women.

“We notice department leaders are usually men, and assistants are women.”

The traditional negative view of society regarding the possibility and effectiveness of women occupying leadership positions, as well as limiting their entitlement to men, stems from the association of leadership with firmness, harshness, decision-making ability, commitment. Men are more likely to be promoted than women. Another participant shared her experience:

I worked in a department with both a women’s and a men’s section, both of which were under the leadership of a man. The administrative organizations in the two departments differed; the women’s section had one organization and the men’s section had another, especially with regard to attendance, office work, training, and so on.

Therefore, rather than leaving it up to a single person to do as they like, elevating women into leadership roles should be approached as a national endeavour. Allowing women to be selected to leadership positions ought to be a top-down choice. Efficiency and skill, not sex or connections, should be the main criteria considered when hiring and choosing candidates for leadership roles.

Societal challenges:

1- Culture challenges

One of the most frequently claimed causes of the glass ceiling “a colloquial term for the social barrier preventing women from being promoted to top jobs in management” in Saudi Arabia is thought to be societal and national culture. Many participants reported that men indicated anxiety about women’s leadership, not just about their personal qualities or leadership styles, but also about the thought of reporting to a female leader due to traditions and customs. One respondent said:

“Women feel pressured to attend mixed professional social events in which many professional relationships are formed, but many customs do not accept them.”

This was not unexpected because Saudi society has a strong male element and women play entirely different social roles than men. In Saudi Arabia, wives are supposed to give their all to their families, while husbands are expected to focus all of their efforts on providing the means of subsistence for their families. another respondent said:

“There is a prevalent culture that women are not good leaders because they are detail-oriented.”

The study revealed that the cultural challenges in society that prevent competent women from advancing to senior leadership positions include: women feel pressured to attend mixed professional social events, many customs do not accept female as professional leader, social imbalance, a prevalent culture that women are not good leaders, a belief that leadership requires certain qualities that women lack but only men possess, prevalent perception that men have greater capacity and managerial skills than women as leaders, negative attitudes regarding women assuming leadership positions, a belief that leadership requires certain qualities that women lack but only men possess”. On the other hand, another respondent said:

“social beliefs and controls began to erode and thus end.”

2- Society vision about women as subordinates

Although women are representing a half of our society, they have less power. Without the involvement of women, an egalitarian society cannot be established. Men and women are discriminated against on a regular basis. Women face obstacles in every area of the workplace. Societies have been attempting to advance without granting women’s rights for ages. The condition of women should be improved for the good of society. The holistic philosophy of “life and let live” must be the main goal of the human being in the twenty-first century because both males and females are components of a community and they are dependent upon one another.

Society still adopts a certain vision about women’s roles and portrays them as subordinates, which impedes their advancement in leadership and one of dimension that shape this vision is tribalism, and fanaticism. One respondent mentions some factors like:

- The inherited culture of women being weak and having limited capabilities.
- The media, which promotes the association of freedom and women’s leadership with liberation and irresponsible behavior.
- Interpreting the concept of guardianship as authority and believing that if a woman assumes a leadership role, she will exert authority and transgress the man’s status and guardianship.
- Tribalism, fanaticism, and the association of the woman’s leadership with infamy.

Another participant argues that the inherited and preconceived ideas in society are a major obstacle to women's career development and advancement in positions until they reach leadership while another participant indicated that she was not exposed to any challenges, as she said:

"Maybe the barrier was broken down by the Crown Prince's vision."

Other participant suggested that this barrier can be broken down by raising awareness in society through all forms of visual, audio, and written media, as well as social media, by sharing success stories of female leaders and influencing society's mental picture with these tales"

3- Society's prejudices

Regarding the question do society's prejudices still control women's career development? Respondents indicate that woman's personality, family habits. The women's personality is essentially that of a mother, which means that tenderness is its source.

"I observe fear and hesitation in making decisions."

While another respondent claimed that perhaps the frustration resulting from the stress of juggling the role of a highly capable working woman and combining the effort she puts into the workplace with the effort she puts into the house as a parent.

"Perhaps in some socially closed Saudi environments, which consider that controlling the specializations of girls and their place of work is a kind of upbringing and protect the daughter from lawlessness and deviating from family habits, it may take time for girls to prove otherwise."

Women were not typically appointed to positions of authority in Saudi culture up until recently because "women are urged to remain at home, their kingdom is their house, and their hijab has veiled them" (Alotaibi et al., 2016: p. 9). As a result, the radical shift from "staying at home" to emerging attitudes like "if they were given the chance to lead, they would lead better than men" indicates that the state's policy on women's empowerment is on the correct track. This result backs up Al-analysis Ahmadi's of the difficulties women leaders experience in Saudi Arabia, which concluded that "cultural difficulties are less significant in comparison to the other difficulties faced by women leaders."

Family challenges:

1- Family duties

The importance of family support plays an important part in preventing women's empowerment in leadership roles. Many participants claimed the most important challenges for women leaders is family duties due to the innate nature of women, choosing jobs that are appropriate to the nature of the woman, jealous husband, women are emotional by nature, and the mother is the family's basis.

Family responsibilities should come first, followed by work duties. But there must be a balance among all women duties. Everyone, from the father to the children, should be cooperative with the woman and introduce a helping hand to the mother. One respondent said:

"Women are emotional by nature, so this may have an effect, but it is necessary to control this aspect."

Another challenge related to the family is the working hours: Some bosses still compel employees to work from home or on official holidays under the pretext that the work is urgent despite the fact that there are instructions not to ask them to do so which greatly affect negatively the capability of women to fulfill her family duties. Another participant added additional theme

"The husband, who is jealous that the wife is higher than him in position and financial income, feels threatened and dispensed by the wife."

Therefore, choosing jobs that are appropriate to the nature of the woman, managing time, and striking a balance between work and family is a key issue to make such a balance between work duties and family responsibilities.

2- Innate nature of women

Moreover, respondents were asked to answer to the question: Does the innate nature of women affect their leadership role? They indicate many factors including giving birth while working specially in private sector and the difficulty of taking a long maternity leave. One participant said that:

"Since I believed in the importance of breastfeeding for two years, I quit from my job and dedicated myself to my daughter until she was two years old. Of course, this resulted in the loss of the job, but this had far less of an impact on me than depriving my child of her natural right."

Another challenge for a working women related to the innate nature of women is the difficulty of taking a long maternity leave, some female spin in a whirlpool between their roles as mother and father affecting her femininity,

"I joined another job, and while the situation was nice at the time, the hours clashed with the start and finish of my children's school day."

Furthermore, the unsuitable conditions for women's work and the time factor one respondent said:

"Female employees have children who need care, particularly those in pre-kindergarten, the lack of support and nurseries from employers, the hours clashed with the start and finish of woman children's school day."

Therefore, many females suffer from the spin in a whirlpool between their roles as mother and father, leader and subordinate, inside and outside the home, affecting her femininity. To overcome these difficulties, women should choose the appropriate work that allows them to reconcile their tasks and responsibilities, such as work close to home or work with a limited number of working hours.

Balance between work and family obligations is another obstacle for women seeking leadership positions in Saudi organizations. One of the most difficult barriers facing women who want to hold leadership positions is this. According to several participants, women either don't apply for top positions or aren't given that much consideration.

3- Family support

Finally, respondents answer to the question: How does your family support you? They list factors include moral encouragement, celebration of achievements, appreciation, cooperating, delegating tasks to family members and constant eagerness for woman to be happy. one respondent said:

"My family is my biggest supporter, with their never-ending encouragement, their belief that I am capable of accomplishing a lot and deserve the best, that I am a role model for them, and their constant eagerness for me to be happy."

Family support help individuals to experience work-life balance and thereby develop a sense psychological availability and positive energy at work.

Discussion

The following are the most significant of the challenges the researcher provided, which will be examined through the application of the current research:

The researcher was able to confirm the accuracy of the initial assumptions established about the validity of gender prejudice and the occurrence of gender discrimination in workplace contexts by the data

collected from the participants throughout the interview. Participants acknowledged that they experience male bias and gender discrimination at work.

According to Gulf News (2017), Saudi women continue to be excluded from full social involvement. Saudi Arabia is still one of the nations that practice gender discrimination. The nation scores extremely well on the worldwide gender gap index.

The study made the assumption that Saudi women do not receive the essential support and assistance from family and coworkers to establish a balance between home and job with relation to the support and assistance they receive from their families. However, it became evident from the findings of the interviews with some of the participants that there are many families who gave Saudi women a lot of support and aid. This is in line with Ibrahim's (2013) claim that Saudi women make up at least half of the country's population. She is a man's social companion. woman is engaged in development, progress, and fostering change and prosperity in society as his mother, sister, daughter, wife, social partner, and financial partner. She appreciates the family's unwavering support and help. Some participants, however, said that they did not receive help and support from their family.

The study also made the assumption that the factors impacting Saudi working women vary according on several demographic parameters, such as age, marital status, and level of education. Through the interviews, it was discovered that each Saudi woman has her own elements and influences that set her apart from the other participants, despite the fact that there are many similar aspects that affect Saudi women's employment.

The study's findings also supported Al-(2005) Yousef's assertion that Saudi women are closely related to policies of economic growth and human resource development when participating in the labour market. These findings are consistent with the fact that Saudi women play an important role in the development of society and its economic and social development.

Conclusion

Despite the widespread interest that women's careers generate, there is little knowledge of women's work throughout the Arab world. With no interest in women in developing Arab nations, academic studies and research focus on women's employment in the United States and other developed European nations. Because Saudi Arabia plainly restricts employment to women, most research on Arab women concentrate on certain nations like Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates. Given the similarities across the GCC nations, it is important to note that each one has unique structural realities and distinguishing traits that need for individual research in order to understand its unique circumstances, notably those of women in each nation.

This research gap affects not just how Arab women perceive life, but also how societal structures and frameworks interact with women's employment. The Saudi leadership has recently come to appreciate the value of Saudi women. Raising the position of women in different sectors of growth, particularly economic growth, was a priority for the government.

Accepting the United Nations Charter, creating a safe atmosphere for women to work in, and forming a women's office in the labour division of the Ministry of Labor are all steps taken by the Saudi government to support women politically and boost their participation in economic activity. The complete and effective utilization of all economic resources, including human capital, is necessary to achieve the targeted high growth rates. Women make up nearly half of the human capital, so it is crucial that they actively participate in economic activities to increase their expertise and competitiveness as well as to lessen the nation's reliance on foreign labour.

Within the context of Vision 2030, Saudi women have a critical role in social and economic reform. A comprehensive initiative to improve the status of women is being carried out by the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Many Saudi families have changed their behaviour as a result of realizing how crucial women's contributions are to the inclusive success of all. In reality, the primary economic indices for Saudi women have improved quickly and visibly during the past few years. Women are now more likely to be employed and their labour force participation rates have increased.

According to the aforementioned, working Saudi women face numerous difficulties and hindrances that impair their ability to do their jobs, some of which have been connected to families, such as the family's financial position. On the grounds that they do not need money, some wealthy families choose not to employ women, whereas other poor families may force women to accept unsuitable occupations due to financial constraints. Additionally, Saudi women's employment is significantly impacted by family support. Some Saudi families actively seek to frustrate and marginalize women rather than offering any type of support or encouragement for women's job.

These issues could also constitute to violence against Saudi women, whether it takes the form of verbal or physical abuse or another type of violence that keeps them from finding employment. Not to mention the severe gender discrimination Saudi women face. Despite the government's efforts to empower women, women still face discrimination in Saudi Arabia since men are allowed to work and hold positions of power that women are not allowed to have due to the country's culture of shame. Shame, customs, and the defect phenomenon nevertheless persist.

Vision 2030, the Kingdom's unstoppable ambition to achieve more, aims to increase Saudi women's participation in the labour force at a high rate, in addition to their holding political positions, their active participation in the Shura Council and the security sector, their assuming senior positions in the education sector, and their putting themselves forward for mayor nominations. Here, we discover that empowering Saudi women and fostering their potential through possibilities for rehabilitation and support has made them a real and useful partner in fostering national progress.

The current study's focus on working Saudi women and their contribution to the country's social advancement and economic growth made it extremely important to conduct. The study provided a scientific supplement highlighting the value of women in the globe, in Islamic, and Saudi society, as well as their contribution to societal development. The study also included a number of findings and suggestions that emphasize the need to alter Saudi culture's perception of women and enable them to collaborate with males in the advancement of society. The survey also stressed how crucial it is to improve Saudi women's status and alter male attitudes toward them.

Human resource management departments will be inspired to improve Saudi women's work experiences by establishing more gender-friendly work environments, policies, and procedures by raising awareness of the workforce and career difficulties women in Saudi Arabia confront.

The researcher consequently carry out this study in order to shed light on the role of Saudi women engaged in community development, to identify the most significant difficulties and problems that Saudi women face, and to discuss strategies for overcoming these difficulties and problems. Semi-structured interviews, a qualitative research technique, were employed to accomplish this. Several interviews were done by the researcher with a sample of Thirteen Saudi women who are working in public education administration in Jeddah and Riyadh cities.

Following the data collection from the participant interviews, the researcher used content analysis to examine the data and drew the necessary conclusions from the participants' responses. The study arrived at a number of conclusions by examining the participant's responses, most notably the following:

- Due to conventions and traditions that mandate women stay at home and take care of their children and families instead of working, Saudi society still disapproves of Saudi women working and participating in the labour market.

- The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and efforts to promote women's empowerment and support make it clear that the country wants to offer Saudi women acceptable employment options and integrate them into the labour force.
- The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its vision advocate for empowering women and improving their status in society through conferences and seminars on the topic and by giving Saudi women leadership positions in governmental organizations.
- The family plays a significant role in encouraging working Saudi women to pursue careers and professional achievement as well as in seeing to it that they fulfil their home responsibilities and obligations to the family.
- Saudi women suffer from many challenges, these challenges are male discrimination, violence, and some challenges related to the family.
- Saudi women are now able to practice a variety of new non-traditional jobs, including driving a car, serving in the military, and many other non-traditional jobs, according to the Saudi government.
- One of the biggest issues Saudi women face, particularly those who work in new, non-traditional jobs, is their fear of society's perceptions, norms, and traditions.
- One of the difficulties Saudi women face is the fear of being unable to balance work and home. When a woman feels she cannot fulfil her obligations to her family and her job at the same time, the family steps in to support and assist the lady by taking on some of her burdens and domestic responsibilities.
- One of the biggest issues Saudi women face is abuse at the hands of male coworkers.
- One of the most significant obstacles Saudi women experience is being subjected to harassment and abuse at the hands of others. Saudi female employees are able to overcome these challenges with the support and assistance of their families.
- Although the difficulties faced by Saudi female employees are a cause of worry and annoyance for them, they also help to develop and refine women's personalities and provide them with the skills needed to handle problems and challenges effectively.
- Saudi women's capacity to manage their time and balance work and home is impacted by the difficulties they face as working individuals.

Recommendations

The researcher makes several of the following recommendations in light of the study's findings:

- The need to alter Saudi society's perception of Saudi women who work.
- The requirement that the family provide support for Saudi women specially working in new, unconventional jobs.
- The requirement for many revolutionary changes in hiring practices and the achievement of equal employment opportunities for both women and men.
- The importance of adopting the Kingdom's vision's axis for the advancement and empowerment of women.
- Giving Saudi women employment options and integrating them into the regional labour market.
- Supporting and developing the role of women in economic, social and political activity as producers, gainers and decision makers, which requires focusing on areas related to women's capacities for education, training and health.
- Increasing opportunities for women to participate in economic activity to achieve sustainable economic development.

- Developing mechanisms for follow-up and implementation of the women component of the plan, evaluating performance and its suitability to face discrimination and inequality.

Research Limitations

There were a number of limitations affecting this study, including:

- 1- One important limitation in this study is that the data collected are based on qualitative research with a relatively small sample of women drawn from within a Saudi educational context. The number of respondents has an estimated thirteen Saudi women who are working in public education administration in Jeddah and Riyadh cities. so the findings may not be generalized to other cultural contexts. Therefore, future research needs to be carried out using quantitative or mixed-methods research based on large samples of women in different contexts, which would allow for more information and add rigor to the results.
- 2- There is a lack of willingness to engage in the interviews, due to the limitation of time during data collection.
- 3- The experiences of Saudi women leaders in the workplace were the exclusive focus of this study.
- 4- It's possible to misinterpret participants' gesture and reactions during the interview by the interviewer as the interviews were conducted through the internet (Zoom online meetings).
- 5- The extent to which the issue can be understood may be limited. Because they have not yet realized the significance of their observations, Saudi women might not want to take part in the study. To overcome this limitation, the researcher must make it abundantly apparent what the goal of the study is and stress how crucial it is for the future development of the community that they are studying.
- 6- The interview was conducted in Arabic. Then, the transcripts were first translated into English, and the translations were checked for correctness before being used.

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