

## Equality in Saudi Arabia Workforce

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### **Abstract**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has adopted a long-term strategy for the development of Saudi human resources and the creation of a national workforce to promote the development of the national economy. The Kingdom's interest in human resources development included both men and women, which opened the opportunity for women to join the Saudi workforce without interfering with religion and in the context of customs and traditions. Companies in the public or private sectors must comply with legislative requirements that ensure both diversity and equality of their workforce. There are still administrative, regulatory, and social obstacles that prevent women from joining the labor market. Saudi women, who account for 51 percent of the total population, account for 16 percent of the total workforce, mainly in the education and medical sectors, as the educational options available to Saudi women are limited to specific areas. Equality in the Saudi workforce has a long way to go, but there are encouraging signs that the issue is now gaining momentum in the Kingdom, in this paper the author is highlighting the challenges faced by Saudi Arabia women and the equality situation nowadays.

**Key words:** Diversity, equality, workforce, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

## Introduction

Patterns of the gender division at work that might appear normal to ordinary observers are a result of historical processes linked at their core to the industrial revolution and the current organization of labor (Padavic & Reskin, 2002). Although much improvement has been achieved in recruiting more women in the workforce (European Commission, 2011), still many problems exist, such as limited job opportunities, gender discrimination, social and cultural barriers, unequal work practices, and lower wages (McLoughlin, 2013). Furthermore, other demographic characteristics including age, relationship status, ethnicity, education level, employment, residency place, and spouse support could also impact the female participation in the workforce (Kharouf & Weir, 2008; Verick, 2014).

The radical initiative Saudi Arabia, increasing rapidly from only a petroleum-based economy has required the divergent skills, participation, and commitment of the Saudi citizens. Doing such a thing, the government has put emphasis on the supreme significance of women's role when it comes to the nation building process. The current scenario in the labor market of the kingdom resulted from the progress over the decades (Varshney, 2017). In modern times, the country has seen reforms take place in education and labor laws, promoting the involvement of Saudi women. Introducing sweeping reforms in the national education system majorly paves the way for preparing Saudi women for competitive jobs. As a matter of fact, such employment gendering in Saudi Arabia has cascaded in significance over the past few years, and the Saudi government has been putting emphasis and overt efforts towards the introduction of Saudi women in the workforce. The situation of Saudi Arabia, differs from other nations in the region, in the way, where the localization issue is dealt with. The stringent policies and measures undergo

alterations in a continuous manner. A volatility sense continues firmly among the diverse forces of orthodox religious undercurrents and the motives of change (Varshney, 2017).

In a traditional state, the center of Saudi women's lives has been their chores and household affairs, while on the other hand, Saudi men have been a financially supportive pillar for the family. The last few years have seen the Saudi women emergence take place, stepping in paid employment and in a consequent manner coming across challenges in connection with the current traditional, cultural, and religious values (Bahkali, 2012). The modern Saudi Arabian society is open when it comes to women's education, however, in deep comparison, women are differently perceived in the work sphere.

The Saudi culture primarily focused on 'family', in which a woman being a wife and a mother is the most crucial priority. Therefore, in the event that a woman has the urge to work, she is obligated to balance work and family responsibilities effectively, most significantly, drawing her attention more to family life. Thus, a Saudi woman deciding to take part in the workforce is more of a joint decision in the family instead of a personal one. Usually, for the females to leave jobs and look after the family, due to the fact that the family bonds are greatly coherent and deemed further significant in contrast to individual interests for them. Cases, in which some females have a tendency to stay at home even after graduation are present, due to the fact that they perceive work of less importance in comparison to the family (Al-Harhi, 2000).

A frequent problem when it comes to the Saudi labor force is the decreased female involvement in all fiscal sectors as Fakeeh stated (2009). Even though the government has offered different sectors incentives to employ women, a low percentage of participating in employment is still there (Alsulami, 2014). Most Saudi women are employed in the public sector organizations, particularly, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Social Affairs (Fakeeh, 2009). Saudi women's involvement in the private sector is pretty restricted because of social and

cultural limitations, preventing women from working in the same place as men (Achoui, 2009). In 2012, the Ministry of Labor put limits on particular occupations in the retail sector to be for women exclusively, like that of women's apparel and beauty (Fakeih, 2012).

Nevertheless, as time passed on, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has witnessed development that consequently has marked the start of immense scope for women in different disciplines (Alsaleh, 2012). Research makes an indication that Saudi females have the ambition to be accomplishing in their careers when it comes to entrepreneurship (Al-Ahmadi, 2005; 2011; Abdalla, 2015). In a simultaneous state, they look forward to being employed in positions of direction and control in various sectors (Gazzaz, 2017). Prior research has been carried out on the females of the Arab world (Al-Lamki, 2007; Abdalla, 2015). Nevertheless, a paradigm shift has occurred, and the policy-makers have begun advocating gender equality in some manners, such as taking part in municipal elections. Comparably, Saudi women are still denied a more extensive, thorough role in the different spheres (Tucker, 2015).

Islam has a pervasive impact on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as per Geel (2016), Islam has a deep-rooted impact on gender and incorporates occupations, academics, socio-cultural aspects and standards of the Saudi context. However, King Abdullah's decree has been a blessing in favor of the Saudi women, due to the fact that it facilitated higher education pursuit from the Western world and ingested the distinctive cultural and social dimensions of the West (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). Although religion has been regarded as the fundamental driving force of the orthodox and rigid framework of the Saudi society, it is a further broadly accepted notion that culture is the primary reason (Agarwal, Lim & Wigand, 2012).

Noteworthy strides put in action have occurred in recent times, at the same time as the government announcing the famous Saudi Vision 2030, which has the purpose of shaking up the status quo of the cultural and socio-economic fabric of the country (Spitler, 2017). This paper would highlight

the challenges faced by women in the Saudi labor market, as well as, changes happened in the Saudi labor market in terms of gender equality.

In addition, there is deep-rooted gender segregation. Saudi females do not possess the authority in any position in the actual sense of the term and are placed in lower positions in the two public and private sectors in comparison to men (Hamdan, 2005). In the private sector as well, Saudi women are employed in a compacted scope of jobs, like those of private businesses and banking. Somehow, Saudi women, whether at home or the workplace, are exercised control over and overpowered by men. They promptly have the belief that acquiring equality in all spheres, like those of the home, workplace and other designations remains an enormous challenge (Inglehart and Norris, 2004). Therefore, gender inequalities are commonly present in different walks of Saudi life and are far down ingrained, institutionalized, and structured in society. Gender segregation has been in connection with Islamic principles for a long time. Several studies that centered on the way religion, in particular Islam, had led to gender inequality in the MENA region took place (Schmitt-Thiel, 2003). Women's rights advocates and analysts made a note that the present position of women in the Middle East has been mainly established by religious misinterpretation of Islam (Mir-Hosseini, 2006) and legal and political discrimination (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). When it comes to what's real, Islam offers men and women equal treatments in many things. As a matter of fact, a fair reading of the Quran and Hadith offers a proof that the problem is not with Islam, however in the cultural stereotypes that have been the dominant factor in the Saudi society for decades. The absence of a plain boundary between religious and secular thinking has ensued in the taking advantage of wrong habits and traditions by men and, by extension, the entire society. Even though professing to be established upon Islam, men have used Islam as an instrument to degrade the role of women in Saudi society. Although women get employed, they remain isolated and dominated when it comes to all of their actions and behavior by men, and the Saudi society is still split into two categories, male and female, deeply comparing to all other

societies in the world, even though Islam has neither excluded nor limited women from working.

## **Literature Review**

### **Saudi Arabia overview**

From the 18th century, religion and government have been unable to be separated in Saudi Arabia. The country's deeply instilled roots in religious and tribal history went back to the time when Mohammad Al-Saud, the ruler of the central region of the Arabian Peninsula, allied with the religious scholars of Islam in 1765 (Al-Hefdhy, 1994). Such association between religion and government was obvious in the way the country was ruled. In 1932, under King Abdulaziz Al-Saud's rule, the Arabian Peninsula was united and denominated the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Cordesman, 2003). Such an independent Muslim Arab country was situated in southwest Asia and covered roughly 2,240,000 square kilometers (865,000 square miles) (Mengash, 2001). Borders were set in the country by the Arabian Gulf, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates to the east; Yemen and Oman to the south; the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba to the west; and Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait to the north (Mengash, 2001). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a monarchy that the Al-Saud royal family rules, with political decisions taken by the king and a council of Ministers who governed the country in accordance with the principles of Islam (Baki, 2004). King Abdulaziz Al-Saud, following the unifying of the country, announced the Islamic Shari'ah law to be the constitution for all the country's laws of governance (Rashwan, 2015). The Islamic Shari'ah law was established upon the Qur'an and the Prophet Mohammad's (Peace Be Upon Him) Hadith (Baki, 2004). There were other Arab parts of the world that, as well, adopted parts of such law, however, the case of Saudi Arabia was in particular important. Among Muslim parts of the world, Saudi Arabia is regarded as the keeper of the Islamic religion and had a distinctive place in Muslims' hearts, due to the fact that it incorporated the two holy mosques in the cities Makkah and Al-Madina. The country was proud of such responsibility and happy to protect the Muslim religion (Baki,

2004). Overall, the Islamic Shari'ah is dominant in every aspect of Saudi life, having as a part culture and traditions (Baki, 2004).

The population of Saudi Arabia is 34.14 million with a population density of 16 per Km<sup>2</sup> (42 people per mi<sup>2</sup>), 2017-2018 data revealed that more than 30% of Saudi population are expats and the number is estimated to be 10,736,293 (GIM, 2020). About 51% of the population is under the age of 25 (Murphy, 2012). Until the 1960s, most of the population was nomadic or semi-nomadic, however, due to rapid economic and urban growth, more than 95% of the population were now settled. 80% of Saudis live in the three major urban centers - Riyadh, Jeddah, or Dammam (House, 2012). Some cities or oases have populations of more than 1,000 people per square kilometer. The Saudi population is characterized by high birth rates and a young age profile. The Saudi community consists of three distinct communities: Bedouin, Rural, and Urban, where the Bedouin category represents 21.77%, the Rural 26.87%, and the urban 51.36% (Al-Tuwaijri, 2001).

Geographically, Saudi Arabia is located in western Asia (the Middle East) and is dominated by the desert climate. Drought prevails on the country's which is free of rivers or permanent surface waters, although most of the dry valleys are flooded during the limited rainstorms, the actual value of surface water is poor, either because of the high evaporation rates. The country's surface features can be divided into four major natural geographical regions. The Hijaz and Asir Mountains, the Najd Plateau, the Sand Deserts, and the Eastern Coastal Plain. The Najd plateau is the main topographical feature of Saudi Arabia (<http://web.archive.org/web/2013>).

Riyadh is the capital city and its currency is the Saudi Arabian Riyal. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy. According to the Basic Law of Saudi Arabia (approved by Royal Announcement in 1992), the king must act in accordance with Islamic law (Sharia), the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet Mohammed (Sunnah), which are confirmed in the country's constitution. Among the governments of 167 countries worldwide,

the Saudi Arabian government is rated as the seventh most authoritarian (Velez-Calle, Robledo-Ardila & Rodriguez-Rios, 2015). No political parties, individual or collective bargaining, or national elections are allowed; however, in their absence, politics in Saudi Arabia occurs in two distinct areas. One is within the royal family of Al-Saud and between the royal family and the Saudi community. The other occurs outside the royal family's contribution in the political process and is limited to a small section of the population with whom the royal family consults on major decisions: the Al-aimaor Sheikhs, religious leaders or members of important commercial families (Crooke, 2015).

Since the Arabian Peninsula is the first Arab homeland, it is natural that the overwhelming majority of Saudis are Arab and belong to Arab tribes. However, there are Saudi citizens belonging to ethnic minorities such as Al-Takarneh who are located in the cities of West Saudi Arabia such as Jeddah, Mecca, Medina, and Taif (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Islam is the dominant religion in the country, accounting for 97% of the total population (Al-Rasheed, 2010). The majority of the Saudis are Sunni, with an estimated 85-90% of the population. Shias account for about 10-15% of the population, and are concentrated in the eastern regions, while Ismaili Shias are present in Najran (Clarck, 2012). The religion domain of Saudi Arabia is Sunni Islam (Clarck, 2012). The majority of Saudi workers are Muslims, with a small number of Christians, Hindus and, Buddhists, and proselytizing in the state by non-Muslims is illegal (Saudi Gazette, 2010). There is no law in the country that protects freedom of religion (Rasheed, 2010).

### **Women Participation in the workforce**

Nations with high levels of female's involvement in the labor force contribute more to economic development (Al-Botmeh, 2013). Organizations play significant parts in fostering on-the-job gender equality. Through taking organizational steps they raise the percentage of women in senior positions. The improvements, however, are slow (Wahl & Höök, 2007). Females often accept unequal treatment in developing countries, while the condition of women in wealthy countries is distinct from those of low-income countries,



which provide opportunities for securing employment or occupations (Pines, Lerner, & Schwartz, 2010).

If we speak about gender and management, the relevance of gender equality cannot really be ignored. Furthermore, although the versatility and flexibility of work may enable women to take up employment, women's employment is commonly linked to fewer wages and fewer promotional opportunities. This resulted in further disparities in organizations' pay and job growth (Gardiner & Tomlinson, 2009). Nonetheless, gender equality is not easily attainable in society and both organizations and other external influences play a key role in fostering it, it is well recognized that legislation is an effective tool for external equality pressures, such as anti-discrimination legislation on age, gender, race, and religion. However, many legislation struggles to reach equality in organizations impeccably (Williams, Heery, & Abbott, 2010).

Gendered organizational theory suggests that gender stereotypes are ingrained in workplace cultures and that companies are built around male stereotypes that make it hard for women to assume legitimate leadership roles (Williams, 2000). Gender organizations, since their strategies are premised on stereotypical gender stereotypes, do not endorse women's progress initiatives (Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002). For instance, not too far in the past, men who think that women's participation would depreciate their salaries, they have barred females from entering domains that are dominated by males (Padavic & Reskin, 2002).

Managers and organizational structures of gendered organizations remunerate those who put aside family and personal obligations and are solely committed to their work (Padavic & Reskin, 2002). Gendered environments create poor expectations of women skills which frequently prevent women from accessing high-level and managerial positions. Furthermore, these variables can also influence the readiness of women to represent any modicum of impairment, panic, or need for help, as this could be seen as a symbol of vulnerability.

A collection of fundamental principles of women's rights was endorsed by the international community (CEDAW, 2014). Nevertheless, several governments in less-developed nations keep on ignoring their fundamental relevance by violating their responsibilities and obligations to women's rights. The advancement of women's rights is not only an indication of recognizing the well-being of any community, but it is also however important for the United Nations and Beijing Platform for Action to achieve their Millennium Development Goals. Women in the Middle East seem to experience political, economic and social constraints, Arab individuals are seeking to preserve their heritage while shaping new common identities after the Arab Spring (Mostafa, 2003; Padavic & Reskin, 2002).

In research throughout the MENA area, some socio-cultural variables have been reported which influence the involvement of women in the workforce. Those have been identified as restricted mobility, no equitable access to education, patriarchal dominance in community, constraints resulting from religion, lack of partner approval and clear separation of personal and professional life (Mcloughlin, 2013; Saadawi, 2006). On the other hand, Mcloughlin (2013) and Saadawi (2006) also drew attention to economic and legal variables that may impact the involvement of women in the labor force. These include gender discrimination, poor enforcement of laws that are supposed to be protecting women's rights, restricted access to information, finance and capital and the sex wage gap.

While many women pursue a college certificate, they are still expected to seek a spouse and start families instead of concentrating on a career (Amer, 2012; Hakki & Somach, 2012). Occasionally cultural restrictions prohibit women from working in environments of low prestige, jobs requiring travel and interaction with members of the opposite sex, and jobs with working long hours. All of these restrictions continue to lay the basis for further workplace gender inequality (Kharouf, 2000).

In almost all of the Middle East countries, gender inequality continues to prevail, in spite of important enhancement throughout women's status. For

example, in several Arab countries, nationality laws restricted citizenship issuing to children who are born to foreign spouses. In Jordan, economic/legal variables perform a key part in determining women's participation in different types of professions. Since Jordan is an Islamic country, its laws are fundamentally sharia-based, giving men authority over women (Majcher-Teleon & Slimène, 2009).

The employment market poses a number of gender issues as far as legal provisions are concerned, and the public and private sector applications diverge. Males earn almost twice that of women in the private sector, which is why women prefer to work in the public sector, also the public sector is more specified than private-sector regarding working hours (Department of Statistics (DoS), 2008). Many regulations recommend supplementary jobs for women and lower opportunities for married women to work (Majcher-Teleon & Slimène, 2009). For instance, the Labor Ministry makes it possible for women to work late only in certain jobs; otherwise, they are restricted. In Jordan, certain regulations adhere to global standards and are in reality "favor" females. Sadly, the majority of women do not realize or cannot demand those rights because of societal pressure or scare (Majcher-Teleon & Slimène, 2009).

Advocacy groups and analysts for women's rights have come to realize that women's present position in the Middle East is greatly influenced by Islamic faith misinterpretation (Mir-Hosseini, 2006), political and legal inequality (United Nations, 2009), conventional patriarchal laws (Schmitt-Thiel, 2008) and economic drawbacks. A number of studies were carried out in order to determine the impacts of Islam religion on gender inequality in the area of MENA (Schmitt-Thiel, 2008; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). There seems to be evidence to substantiate this perception when analyzing policies in Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran as religious imperatives justify restrictions on women (Schmitt-Thiel, 2008).

For instance, the Religious Police in Saudi Arabia and Iran were pressuring citizens to abide by the rules of Islamic moral codes (e.g., wearing

the veil for females and sex separation) (Moghadam, 2004). Feminist scholars have made the argument that Islamic governments have been hesitant to sign endorse and amend the constitution of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) without any reasonable reservations, as the family rules of their countries, such as marriage codes, child sponsorship, inheritance and divorce in the Middle East, were established upon Sharia (Islamic Law) (Al-Khaldi, 2014).

Clearly, Muslim nations do have some reservations about the items concerning gender equality in the sense that they have been seen as inconsistent with Islamic Law (i.e. the role of women in the family, rights to nationality and freedom, equality before the law and political rights) (Al-Khaldi, 2014). Moghadam (2004) broken down feminist researchers into two classes in her study of feminist activism in the Middle East: (1) secular or nonreligious feminists as Haleh Afshar and Mai Ghousoub, who thought that the absence of adherence to Islamic laws could become a starting point of getting rid of women's oppression in MENA region, and (2) Muslim feminist women along with Amira Sonbol and Azizah al-Hibri who have made it clear that the Qur'ans content is about pertaining to equal rights and granting individuals political freedom and rights something that they hold was infiltrated from early middle ages by patriarchal theologies (Moghadam, 2004). Many scholars have described patriarchy as among the biggest obstacles in the Middle East for women's equality.

A larger number of them have broadly accepted the term "neopatriarchal state" from Sharabi. Sharabi made the argument that "neopatriarchy," under which religious authority and a patriarchal family supported one another, tried to combat modernity and reforms to uphold customs and traditions. Sharabi thus and several people assumed that this opposition bolstered patriarchal traditions like those of tradition of the men being breadwinner and females in need for protection, arranged marriages, and wearing the veil (Schmitt-Thiel, 2008; Moghadam, 2004).

Unlike many other researchers, Ross (2008) clearly indicates that different kinds of economic development may affect females/ males relationships. He made the argument that females in the oil-rich countries like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are less interested in joining the workforce and take an active part in the political arena as a direct consequence of oil extraction revenues as they are financially capable. In comparison, less wealthy countries whose economic growth was focused on industrializations are more prone to have gender-based shifts as women become active and involved in the labor force in large numbers and politics (Ross, 2008).

### **Challenges faced by Saudi Women**

Described in general as conservative, Saudi Arabia is a complicated society, in which norms, values, and traditions are impacted by ultraorthodox Islamic teachings, in addition to a highly patriarchal local culture. On the one hand that Islam is the State religion, formal and informal laws and practices are equally influenced by local Bedouin culture and tribal customs. Nevertheless, in spite of some recent changes in legislation and attempts to offer an improvement to gender equality (e.g., with respect to women's right to vote and right to drive), women remain to come across obstacles to equality in employment.

Despite success in getting recruited in many previously unacceptable jobs, social progress is slowly moving for Saudi women to get into leadership positions as it is hindered because of ancient cultural beliefs that resulted in the social practices used nowadays (Hamdan, 2005; Rashwan, 2015). Patriarchy and organizational hierarchies male-dominating is still shaping Saudi corporations which only allows men to recruit in leadership positions (Rashwan, 2015), While schools and universities are genders separated, still men held the top positions (Rashwan, 2015). Resulting in men holding vacant jobs that women could hold, although women can be more capable and qualified for a specific position than men (Rashwan, 2015).

Byrne (1979) had made the argument that girls have always been promoted to study languages, secretarial skills, and arts in comparison to

boys. She had in addition noted that varying qualifications refer to varying opportunities in work, which ensues in pressure or, by the system, to gender inequality. In a natural state, this deep-rooted discrimination has income differences between adult females and adult males as a result (Sowell, 2011). The government's policy, applying sex segregation has made it impossible for Saudi women to engage in any significant public life crucial for their career development and exposure (Rajkhan, 2014). Such practice is, by the Saudi laws and regulations, established upon the Islamic principles, which make it hard for women to work in a limited environment vacant of gender mixing or incurred harassment. Women are geared to specific professions deemed feminine and carry on to be employed in less strong or authoritative positions in comparison to men. Therefore, in spite of some Saudi women having been found to have accomplished a right amount of recognition in the field of academics, literature, business, and other areas, their accomplishments are not pinpointed in an appropriate manner, and they are excluded from the public life (Cole, 2006). In the MENA region whole, Saudi Arabia possesses one of the lowest female employment rates. Such an aspect puts emphasis on the firm fact that there is insufficient use of its human resource. Saudi women are, however, confident and self-assured that somewhere in time they will be offered equal opportunities just like their male counterparts (Rajkhan, 2014).

Although Saudi Arabia's labor law prohibits any discrimination in wages between male and female workers in a job of the same value based on Ministerial Decision No. 2370/1 of 1431, Saudi women ranked last among the Gulf States, Arab countries, in terms of the salary they receive as compared to the salary of their fellow men for their work in the same job. According to the World Economic Forum's 2014 report on the gender wage gap, it was found that the Saudi women employee earns a salary representing 56% of the total salary of her male colleague, the results were based on the gender payment for the same job survey. It worth noting that the average salary of men workers in the social services sector is SR 5139, while the average salary of the women worker is SR 3447. In the financial services and

insurance sector, the average salary of the men employee is SR 8,873, while the average salary of the women employee is SR 5844. In the field of retail trade, the average salary of the worker is SR 3921 riyals and the average wage per worker is SR 2995, according to a statistic issued by the Ministry of Labor in 2016. However, the end-of-service and vacation payment benefits are equal between genders.

Al-Manqash (2006) has listed the main difficulties facing administrative equality between women and men as following;

- The difficulties related to human resources, such as the lack of training and employment opportunities, especially among women.
- Difficulties related to the policies and regulations of the higher education system, which did not include the female component or sections of female students in their subjects and their dependencies.
- Difficulties related to the administrative organization of women's administration and their relationship to men's administration, such as the limited powers granted to women's administrators to manage their departments, the lack of clarity of the organizational relationship between the two administration departments and the poor coordination between them, and the subordination of the women's administrators to the central administration headed by men at the end of the organizational structure and their control over financial and materialistic resources.
- The difficulties related to the lack of cultural awareness of the importance of women's administrative leadership and confidence in their outputs. Some personal variables also played an important role in determining these difficulties.

Kaki (2001) also mentioned that women's administrative work suffers from some challenges, the most important of which:

- Functional environmental stresses that restrict the performance of women in specific types of jobs, tasks and responsibilities that limit their rise to higher administrative levels and their jobs are limited to the implementation of plans and administrative decisions dictated upon them.
- Family and social stresses facing working women and force them to join specific jobs to pursue their duties towards their families.

### **Gender Equality**

Equality is a mindset that condemns gender, color, age, physical capabilities, and ethnicity (Twomey & Harris, 2012). In addition, when individuals talk about gender equality, women are considered to be controlled in a community that gives men more prerogatives and choices, particularly in the work environment. Gender equality, in the meantime, seeks to change and improve the situation of women, rather than men (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Relied on this comprehension gender equality could be regarded as one facet of anti-discrimination, but it is purely limited to sex.

In general human rights researchers and activists have worked on a body of researches on gender inequality, including rights of ethnicity, schooling (The World Bank, 2001), sport and the practice of exercises (Human Rights Watch, 2012), voting (United Nations Development Programme; Regional Bureau for Arab States, 2009), and freedom of movement (The World Bank, 2001). A large number of records in the literature routinely reports of violence and injury to women in the MENA area, including domestic abuse (Human Rights Watch, 2006), sexual abuse (Human Rights Watch, 2003), sex-related segregation (Human Rights Watch, 2008), male custody (Human Rights Watch, 2008), child and enforced marriages (Human Rights Watch, 2012), women's genital cutting (Human Rights Watch, 2010), and honor offenses (Human Rights Watch, 2004).



Particularly in the job environment, the primary reason causing gender inequality is the separation of gender role and labor division and the reaction of male employees to women's competitive challenge (Reskin, 2000). Reskin (2000) adds that companies are to blame for some cases of gender inequality as they do not address the problem, and some companies promote such actions and allow male workers to keep on their discriminative behavior.

Dorius & Firebaugh consider gender inequalities to happen when sex has a dissimilar quantity of some goods, from politics, education, and economic advantages or a long-lifetime. The researchers further clarify their interpretation that the disparity of gender is not only evaluated in the workplace but is also interpreted from another viewpoint, which includes life span, economic benefits, political participation, etc. (Dorius & Firebaugh, 2010). The use by Dorius & Firebaugh is interesting and provides a broader viewpoint on gender inequity and how it is used not only on the job but in various sections of community and life.

Jha and Nagar (2015) also agree with Dorius & Firebaugh in the idea that inequality of gender has not been confined to work primarily, but is also observable in various aspects like those of politics, economics, law, culture, and society. Jha and Nagar have as well noted the mistreatment of a person based on gender can be considered as straightforward as gender inequality. They as well note that the term gender inequality can not only mean a certain gender, but it is entitled to also refer to a gender being treated in an unfair manner.

### **Gender equality in Saudi Arabia workforce**

The country has been, in a steady-state, moving up the United Nations' Development Program's Gender Empowerment Measure Index, and the Saudi government has enacted laws, offering support to women who are employed through provisions in connection with maternity leave, vacation time, and nurseries, among other things (Lippman, 2012). The government has sought to give a boost to the number of women employed in its

administrations as well (Le Renard, 2008). However, doing such a thing, the country is coming across numerous challenges, particularly socio-cultural, religious, and policy problems that have been, in a continuous manner, bringing about hindrances in the process. In spite of such challenges, over the last two years, Saudization (job localization) has adopted a growing gendered dimension in what is on numerous occasions alluded to as the feminization of the labor force (Eldemerdash, 2014). Such a job localization process primarily aims to facilitate Saudi women's Introduction to the workforce and facilitate their economic involvement. In Saudization, the main propulsive force has been to eliminate foreign workers and in a subsequent manner occupy the positions with Saudi males and females. Such a process is in a synonym manner alluded to as job localization, by which the residents of the country are offered sole preference in the public, in addition to private sectors.

According to Saudi General Authority for Statistics, working individuals in the third quarter of 2019 reached (12.927.908) from which (3.100.812) are Saudi Arabian, (1.025.328) is the total number for looking for work individuals in the same period, with an unemployment rate of 5.5% (The World Bank, 2020). Gender equality when it comes to employment is a matter of growing interest to researchers and practitioners around the world (e.g., Al Asfour et al., 2017; Teelken and Deem, 2013). Nevertheless, Arab parts of the world have been understudied by a considerable amount ever after carrying out research in the Middle East has been found to be overly hard (Lages et al., 2015), in particular when it comes to closely looking at complicated problems, like that of gender equality (Kalliny and Benmamoun, 2014). Saudi Arabia is within the scope of having primary gender gaps both in the workplace and wider society. As per Global Gender Gap Report (WEF, 2020), Saudi Arabia is one of the most gender unequal parts of the world and is ranked at 138 out of a total of 144 countries that reflect high gender gaps when it comes to economic and political empowerment.

To further explain, wage inequality for comparable work makes an indication that women are less skillfully by at least 40% and women's labor

market involvement is only 21% in contrast to 80% for men (WEF, 2020). On the one hand that the country has come across the improvement of great significance when it comes to female literacy rate in recent decades (96.5% of male and 91% of female adults are literate), progress when it comes to female economic activity has been to a moderate extent sluggish. On the other hand that Saudi women currently have further enhanced qualifications in comparison to men, this has not interpreted women's involvement in paid work. The female to the male ratio when it comes to the labor force participation rate is 0.26 (WEF, 2020).

Saudi Arabia was one of the top 10 countries that improved in terms of equality since 2017, and it achieved the biggest reforms in this matter as it got a score of 70% of Women, Business and the Law (WBL) 2020 with an increase of 38.8 points (The World Bank, 2020). Many changes have been made in terms of equality not only in the labor but in other indicators such as mobility, Saudi Arabian women can move freely with no need for male permission or a male guardian when traveling abroad or issuing a passport. another indicator is the residence as the Civil Status Law has changed, allowing women to select the place of living with the removal of the article that made the spouse house is their default house, additionally, spouses could not anymore sue their wives when they decide to leave their husbands places, as it is not obligatory anymore to obey their spouses (The World Bank, 2020).

Saudi women are getting the chance nowadays to become a part of the economy in 2019, as the new legislation does protect them from discrimination in any employment form (job advertisement and hiring), it also forbids employers from firing women when in during their pregnancy and maternity leave. The retirement age (60) is now equal for men and women in Saudi Arabia, and entrepreneurship is encouraged for women by easing access to financial services (The World Bank, 2020). One of the ways acknowledged by the Saudi government for women to have contributions to the economy while still employed and undergoing societal restrictions is possessing their own business (Sabri, 2001), thus, making it the primary

focus of the government to increase the number of female entrepreneurs (Fallatah, 2012). For instance, King Abdulaziz Women's Charity Association's Al-Barakah Loan Center was set up by dint of the government (Saudi Gazette, 2010), which in turn makes it easier for women to get their initial expenses for their businesses financed (Al Masah Capital Limited, 2010), in addition to the Centennial Fund that was established by the government to provide young Saudi female and male entrepreneurs with financial support (Alturki & Braswell, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

The separation of gender role and labor division and the reaction of male employees to women's competitive challenge are the primary reasons for gender inequality, companies that are built around male stereotypes that make it hard for women to assume legitimate leadership roles, create poor expectations of women skills, which frequently prevent women from accessing high-level and managerial positions. In addition, some companies do not address the problem, and some companies promote such actions and allow male workers to keep on their discriminative behavior. Women in the MENA labor market face many challenges, including restricted mobility, no equitable access to education, patriarchal dominance in community, constraints resulting from religion, lack of partner approval, and clear separation of personal and professional life. Saudi Arabia has been adopting programs aimed to support women, and the Saudi government has enacted laws, offering support to women who are employed through provisions in connection with maternity leave, vacation time, and nurseries, among other things, also, it has sought to give a boost to the number of women employed in its administrations as well. In spite of some recent changes in legislation and attempts to offer an improvement to gender equality, success in getting recruited in many previously unacceptable jobs, facilitation of Saudi women's introduction to the workforce and facilitation of their economic involvement, women remain to come across obstacles to equality in employment and their social progress is slowly moving to get into leadership positions as a result of ancient cultural beliefs.

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