



www.mecsj.com

Multi-Knowledge Electronic Comprehensive Journal For
Education And Science Publications (MECSJ)

Issues (64) 2023

ISSN: 2616-9185

Impact of policies and programs on gender inequality: A study in Saudi Arabia

A Scientific Paper

Submitted by:

Senior Social Service Specialist /Abeer Awad Aljohan

Hospital Director / brig. Gen. Doctor Zain Al-Shafei

X-ray technician/ Alyan Saad Mohmad laslom

2023



Abstract

Gender inequality represents a problematic issue in the society at present, especially in the Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia. That women are facing a lot of challenges in health, education, public services, and political among others. This issue of gender discrimination has been given attention through various international committees since 1980's. In Saudi Arabia, there are multiple gaps in the women participation either in workforce and politics, and even more women have limited access without a guardian to the public services like education and health.

This paper was undertaken with the aim of understanding the situation of gender bias in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the effectiveness of government policies and programs in mitigating it. Applying the quantitative approach, this research aims to look at the problem of gender inequality in Saudi Arabia and how this issue is perceived by citizens. It also reviews some of the governmental first steps to improve their degree of effectiveness. A Likert scale questionnaire was designed and electronically circulated to social workers working in different organizations: education, hospitals, and social affairs.

Results affirmed that gender inequality is a problem in Saudi Arabia as perceived by respondents of the study (N=91). Though most women are not ready to align with such positioning directly, yet their opinion on elements contributing to gender gap proves that they are discriminated in society. They are discouraged from joining male dominated work environments and rarely promoted to senior managerial positions. Though the government has taken certain policies and programs to mitigate this issue, like allowing women to drive, yet they seem to have lesser than expected impact. Many of the discriminating practices still continue with traditional and religious interpretations being offered as explanations for the same. While it is required that government adopted policies and programs to attain gender inequality, strict legal provisions also need to be implemented. Strict legal procedures are needed people who deviating from regulations or overlooking.



1. Introduction:

This paper presents the degree of effectiveness of governmental policies and programs in restoring gender inequality, particularly in the Middle Eastern region. It is not common to come across reports detailing how women are discriminated against in these countries. Hence this region was chosen for this study, and given Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's strategic importance it was selected as the case country.

The broad objective of this study is to understand the scenario of gender bias in the country and evaluate the effectiveness of governmental interventions in minimizing it.

Setting the context, this chapter provides an overview of importance of sustainable development and the role of women in ensuring the same. As nations and economies are realizing the positive and negative fallouts of globalization, pursuing sustainable development is becoming priority. This cannot be achieved without greater involvement and contribution of women. This chapter discusses the various facets of sustainable development and outlines the importance of contribution of women for each facet. Additionally, the chapter also refers to the need for this study along with specific objectives and research questions arising from it.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Gender equality is a reality in most countries, and gender gaps exist in both economically wealthy and poor nations. A recent World Economic Forum report ranked Finland as the most and Yemen, Chad and Syria as the least gender balanced countries (Clement, 2017). The report estimated that if countries continue to tackle gender problems at the current pace, it will take consequentially long to achieve gender balance.

Middle East and North Africa countries will need the maximum number of years to wipe out the gender gap, 580 years. Even East Asia and the Pacific and North American regions are forecasted to achieve gender equality earlier than MENA countries. Interestingly, even Sub-Saharan Africa will achieve gender balance in 66 years compared to 580 years of MENA countries. This reflects the expanse of gender disparity in Middle East and North Africa and also the turtle pace at which governments of nations within the region in addressing the issue. Relevantly, in this context, Chamlou (2017) reported the wide prevalence of gender discrimination in MENA region. Though women are being allowed to enrol in educational



institutes and avail healthcare benefits, several issues continue to disturb empowerment and emergence of opportunities (Chamlou, 2017, *ibid*). Nations are suffering due to surging economic costs resulting from their inability to tackle gender issues systematically (Chamlou, 2017, *ibid*). This can be linked to conservative societal structures and systems gaining strength from the penetration of fundamentalism (Chamlou, 2017, *ibid*).

1.2. Research questions

The specific research questions this study endeavors to explore are as follows:

- 1- Does the target sample consider gender bias as an issue within KSA?
- 2- What strategies, policies, and programs have KSA adopted to nullify gender inequality and what is the perception of effectiveness of such policies and programs?
- 3- Does the target sample consider Islam, as a religion, is imposing restrictions on women? What is the finding of studies about Islam, as a religion, being truly gender biased?

2. Gender equality and sustainable development

2.1. Economic, social and environment perspectives

According to Demeke and Gebru (2015) the economic considerations, strongly justifying why gender equality must be prioritized for attaining sustainable development. They emphasize that adequate involvement of both males and females is essential for fulfilling financial requirements associated with development. Similarly, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2008) noted that the countries aiming to attain tenable economic elevation must ensure balanced contribution from both males and females for that end. This has not been the case with the KSA, where female participation in the work force continues to lag behind male (The Global Economy, 2018). From 1990 to 2017, the average participation rate of women in workforce has been recorded at 17.3%, which for men stood at 76.21% (The Global Economy, 2018, *ibid*). While the KSA has been economically successful in many ways, questions can be raised about the sustainability of its success. Saudi Arabian economy is largely oil dependent and, therefore, vulnerable to adverse fallouts of volatile oil prices (Black, 2016). Since 2014, the oil prices have declined and resulted in a record budget deficit of \$100 billion in 2015 (Black, 2016, *ibid*). Hence, the government is aggressively pursuing its Vision 2030 plan, which aims to increase the percentage of women in the workforce and diversification of the national economy (Black, 2016, *ibid*).



If economic sustainability and contribution of women were not linked, surely such emphasis on encouraging women to take up employment would not have been given.

On the different link between gender balance and economic development, (Goldin 1994) said that the early phase of agricultural development generates higher income for women. Although the individual income remains low, higher percentage of women gets employed. However, the industrial or manufacturing phase reduces the women employment opportunities (Goldin, 1994, *ibid*). The lack of requisite education and skills, and dominant attitude against women performing heavy work are plausible reasons (Goldin, 1994, *ibid*). Yet, the boom in the service sector, which is the third phase of development, opportunities for women increases again. There are no social sanctions associated with service sector employment, as it does not entail heavy shop floor activities (Goldin, 1994, *ibid*). Therefore, Eastin and Prakash (2013) suggested that the relation between gender equality and economic development resembles an 'S' rather than a 'U' as was suggested by earlier researchers.

Hoseini (2014), quotes that there was at the Beijing Platform for the Action that governments reached a consensus about considering gender equality from the human rights perspective and an essential prerequisite for the social justice. Through the Initiation of the gender equality, it was felt that it would make sustainable development truly people-centric and immensely advantageous (Hoseini, 2014, *ibid*). This aspect was further reiterated during the Rio Conference, with the UN acknowledging the role of women in achieving holistic development (Hoseini, 2014, *ibid*). In addition, it was acknowledged that the women have potential to lead sustainable development initiatives, therefore, the women empowerment and gender equality should be prioritized (UN, 2012). Creating conducive environment and opportunities for women to productively contribute to sustainable development policies and programmed formulation and decision-making were also harped upon (UN, 2012, *ibid*). This philosophy is reflected in the motto of Sustainable Development Goals of United Nations, "*Leave No One Behind*" (Kim, 2017). Specifically, the relevant is the fifth Sustainable Development Goal of accomplishing gender equality through empowerment of all girls and women globally (Kim, 2017, *ibid*). The empowerment of women, thus, emerged as a crucial aspect of the social dimension of sustainable development.

Also, Low level of health awareness renders women vulnerable to certain diseases which could reduce their productive capacities (ECA, 2015). Whereas the education of women will stay aware about their own as well



as their family's health and well-being, which will help control outbreak of diseases (OECD, 2008). Moreover, this will extremely reduce the loss of productive manpower and the medical expenses of families and the foster social well-being (OECD, 2008, *ibid*).

Al Quaiz et al. 2014) reported that the high vulnerability of Saudi women to cardiovascular diseases and diabetes due to the obesity. If female increasingly become educated, they will become more aware about the dangers of the obesity and, then find ways to tackle the problem.

The principle 20 of the Rio Summit declaration which highlights that the environmental protection and the maintenance cannot be achieved without the involvement of women (Bayeh 2015).

Similarly, Alvarez (2013) indicated that the environmental protection and the conservation efforts will fail when women are not involved. Naganag (2014) linked this to the nature of the domestic activities that women undertake like fetching drinking water, gathering fire woods and fuel, cleaning and cooking.

These provide women to display greater understanding for grave environmental issues like climate change, global warming and depletion of resources (Naganag, 2014, *ibid*). Additionally, the (OECD 2008, *ibid*) mentioned that women being eco-friendlier, display greater propensity in recycling waste products and purchasing organically produced items. A study which further validates this aspect was conducted in India, where bio fuel is used for domestic purposes across 74% of households (Shailaja, 2000). Having to shoulder domestic responsibilities, women are directly involved in management of biomass, its production and consistent usage (Shailaja, 2000, *ibid*). Thus, their insights into energy usage and conservation cannot be overlooked or dismissed.

2.2. Gender equality in Saudi Arabia

In the context of gender equality as its contrasting social dynamics, that Gorney (2016) pointed out that the deep running conservatism and traditionalism have not been able to protect women from the influences of the modern lifestyle. In spite of gender bias, women are not entirely covered from the modern lifestyle and the financial empowerment (Gorney, 2016, *ibid*). The intertwining of religion and gender politics are highly visible (Al-Rasheed and Azzam, 2012). Shannon (2014) admitted that the government is taking initiatives to grant women their rightful place in society, economics and politics. However, the still rules and laws, which curbs rights and privileges of women, continue to be in force (Shannon, 2014, *ibid*). Therefore, the KSA continues to be ranked among countries



where gender segregation is dominant. This section explores the issue of gender in KSA.

2.3. Gender gap

The Saudi administration needs to spare substantial time and attention to study existing gender gaps and how they can be addressed (Shannon 2014). The Global Gender Gap Report puts Saudi Arabia at 141th position out of the 144 nations researched about gender equality (WEF, 2016). The worst still, among the 18 MENA countries, the KSA ranks the third lowest (WEF, 2016, *ibid*). It has been indicated that the irrespective of several areas where gender gap needs to be nullified, a start has been made. For example, the KSA ranks the fifth for improving the education for women, but the ranks 105 when number of women opting for education, primary and upwards, are considered (WEF, 2016, *ibid*). It ranks among the lowest when opportunities for women and their involvement in economic activities are considered. Even for the earning level of women, the KSA is among the lowest countries (WEF, 2016, *ibid*).

The study underlines the degree of gender inequality in the Kingdom state. According to (OECD, 2016) women, with different educational qualifications, have the lowest employment opportunities in Saudi Arabia, when compared with OECD and its associated nations.

2.4. Women and healthcare and education

In 2016, Human Rights Watch revealed that women in Saudi Arabia, are subordinated to male guardianship. They are headed by fathers, brothers, husband or even sons. Institutionalization of this system makes it difficult for women to overshadow it. Human Rights Watch (2016, *ibid*) elaborated that woman, irrespective of age, must produce permission of male guardian for education, travel, marriage, employment or facilities from government institutes. Revealing the inherent mindset, Aldosari (2017) claimed that male guardian permission is demanded by authorities even when not statutorily mandated. For instance, a female student of a Riyadh based university had to deliver a baby on campus, as hospital transfer was denied due to the absence of male guardian.

From the public health perspective, Keleher (2009) discussed the violence against women as a result of the imposition of traditional gender principles. Violence compels women into following established gender-oriented practices like not arguing with the husband or expressing interest to work in male dominated environments. Keleher (2009, *ibid*) stated that the



education makes women question gender bias, increasing tension and escalation of violence and oppression

Educational deprivation of women was prevalent in Saudi Arabia until 1956. It was under the King's insistence that schools for girls were setup, though educational differences between genders was maintained (Alsuwaida, 2016). This practice is often linked to positioning of women in Sharia Law and The Quran, as homemaker and wife (Alsuwaida, 2016, *ibid*). International institutions and organizations, from the mid-1900s, have been emphasizing about criticality of gender equality for development. They preferred overlooking women rights and privileges (Green, 1956). Hence, women's education levels remained pathetically low, irrespective of UN drive for equal treatment for all (Green, 1956, *ibid*). In addition, there was lack of educational infrastructure for women and lack of interest in education among women. As reported above, although the government has since then developed primary, secondary and higher education infrastructure and offered financial assistance to girl students wishing to pursue higher education, interest continues to be low among women.

Despite the government established schools for girls, it kept under its control the academic curriculum (Mills, 2009), where several subjects were studied exclusively by male students while they were not taught in girl's schools (Mills, 2009, *ibid*). For example, women could not major in journalism, law or engineering at the university level (Alamri, 2011). Subsequently, women were permitted to enroll for law degrees, but the others are still restricted (Meijer, 2010). Moreover, the physical education was missing from the curriculum of girl schools, as societal tradition bars women from getting involved in sports and physical activities outside the home (Amorim *et al.*, 2007). Also, women are not allowed to enroll for medical education because of as doctors or nurses they might have to work night shifts.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Approach

Saunders et al. (2009) identified deductive and inductive as two approaches that research works can follow. In the deductive approach, researchers examine available literature and pullout relevant theories and concepts which are relevant to the study topic. These theories and concepts are then verified using data collected by the researcher (Saunders et al., 2009, *ibid*). In the inductive approach, researchers focus on gathering and analyzing data to infer specific theories and conclusions, identifying theories from



literature review is not prioritized in the inductive approach. Inductive approach is therefore relevant for this study, as the focus is on analyzing primary and secondary data and arriving at specific conclusions.

3.2. Research Strategy

Among the different research strategies, the grounded theory strategy has been applied for this study. According to Broido and Manning (2002), historically grounded theory has been closely associated with objectivism. It manifests the epistemological underpinning that there is a purposely system between occurrences, even if it is not perceivable by knowledge or experience. Hence there is truth and implications in occurrences, which a researcher must try to comprehend and interpret in a neutral, un-biased way (Broido & Manning, 2002, *ibid*).

3.3. Research Method

The core objective of the current study is to elucidate the perceptions of the gender inequality issue in KSA, given that the social phenomenon of gender discrimination has associated sensitivities and complexities, following the quantitative approach was deemed appropriate for this study. The use of the questionnaire format was decided for this study, as it enables the inclusions of different types of questions relating to different types of aspects (i.e., education, health, politics, etc.). As per Johnson and Christensen (2008), when a researcher uses the qualitative method, it enables him or her to describe and explore the situation or event being studied. On the other hand, when a researcher opts for the quantitative approach, it enables him or her to describe and explain any occurrence or situation.

3.4. Questionnaire Development

A detailed questionnaire in both English and Arabic (respondents' first language) was developed containing questions related to different aspects of gender discrimination. A mix of open and closed ended questions were included with the aim of extracting maximum information possible about the subject. Since data about the subject is not available in abundance, open ended questions were included to generate as much descriptive data as possible. Questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first section presented details explanation of the study main objectives, i.e., the information sheet, and the consent form (refer to Section 3.7). The second section required respondents to provide personal details like age, gender, educational qualification and profession. This section was meant to provide a holistic profiling of respondents, to which final findings could be related. The third section contained questions related to gender segregation. This



section contains statements that examines the three main research areas of interest: the perceptions of gender bias in KSA, the perceptions toward the policies and programs that encourage gender equality in KSA, and perceptions about the involvement of Sharia law in encouraging gender bias in KSA. Each of these aspects were examined through a main more direct statement. Further, the first two aspects (gender bias in KSA and policies and programs encouraging gender equality in KSA) were examined through several suppurative statements.

3.5. Selected participants

The questionnaire was uploaded in an online hosting site (Survey Monkey). A link of the online questionnaire was circulated to individuals who works as social workers in either schools or social homes. Thus, some respondents who works as social workers in hospitals were approached personally.

Initially, 115 social workers completed the questionnaire of the current study. One of the challenges was that the questionnaire was completed by some respondents who they did not give their consent to use their responses but answered the questions anyway. Thus, twenty-four respondents were eliminated from the final sample. The final sample of respondents were ninety-one respondents; fifty in hospitals, twenty in schools, and twenty-one in social homes.

3.6. Research Limits

The research undertaken had following limitations.

- 1- There is always a lack of available data when talking about Middle East countries. Hence limited secondary data has been used. Some aspects might have not been undertaken due to unavailability of data. Moreover, access to public data is either denied or limited in some ways thus limiting the scope.
- 2- There was time and cost limitation.
- 3- Government policies and programs were found as an interesting angle with subsequent and in-depth research on the topic which was more on the line of argument. Initially the need of role of social workers was felt needed and hence the questionnaire was designed in such a way. Later, social workers aspect could not be connected with the study and hence the questions relating to social workers have not been considered in the analysis.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

This study had set out to evaluate the effectiveness, or otherwise, of social work policies and programs introduced by the government in establishing



gender equality in Saudi Arabia. Aligned with this objective, questions were meant to record opinion of respondents about gender equality being a problem within KSA; patriarchal interpretation of Islam and Sharia Law being detrimental to gender balance; educational, healthcare, workforce and political issues faced by women and ways in which gender imbalance can be addressed. Based on inputs received the analyzed and summarized findings are presented herein.

4.1 Main demographical findings

This section presents the demographical information gathered about the respondents of the current study. Vitality of knowing about those who responded to the survey stands enhanced because of the kind of responses that some subsequent questions generated. Of the ninety-one respondents, sixty-three were females and the remaining twenty-eight were males. Thus, women constituted nearly 70% and men nearly 30% of the total sample.

The age of the respondents ranged from 18 to over 50 years, and most participants hailed from the 31-40 years age group. Participant over 50 years comprised the least one of sample population. Relatively similar number of respondents constitute the other two age groups 18-30 and 41 to 50 years.

The distribution of the educational levels of the respondents in the current study. On the educational parameters, none of the respondents belongs to the primary level. Most of the respondents have completed their undergraduate studies while only small numbers of the sample indicated that they have finished only secondary school or they pursue their study to postgraduate studies.

4.2. Key findings

4.2.1. Perceptions of gender inequality existence as a problem in KSA

The perceptions whether gender discrimination is a problem in KSA were examined directly by asking the respondents whether it is existed or not and provide their explanations for how it or it does not exist. The majority of respondents did not agree that gender discrimination is a problem in KSA. About 73.6% did not agree with the statement, while only 26.4% agreed to it. The majority of respondents were women which heightens the significance of this finding. It implies women denying gender discrimination is a problem in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In other words, though review of the literature in the previous chapter indicates a high level of gender discrimination in KSA, this is not the perception of women themselves. Those respondents who disagreed, which were higher than the others as mentioned above, only responded stating that such



problem actually does not exist and even if it exists, it is merely related to the traditions and habits of the society not the country or the Sharia law.

4.2.2. Education and healthcare access

When asked if limited access to education and healthcare was hindering progress of women, about 15% strongly agreed and about 40% agreed. Over 18% strongly disagreed and over 17% disagreed (see Figure 8). Though women did not agree that gender discrimination is a problem in KSA, most of them did state that women access to education and healthcare is limited. Thus, a difference between the two opinions becomes evident.

Respondents do believe that lack of access to education and healthcare facilities is hindering progress of women without viewing it from the perspective of gender discrimination. Table 3 shows that majority of those between 18-30 years and between 41-50 years felt that women have limited access to education and healthcare facilities. For both age groups, number of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement was higher than those disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. However, within the 31-40 years group, opinion was divided with equal numbers agreeing or strongly agreeing and disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Thus, on this parameter those aged between 18 years to 30 years and between 41 years and 50 years seem united in opinion than those between 31 years to 40 years. This is similar to the finding reported above in which respondents in this age group showed divided opinion.

4.2.3. Workforce related issues

The majority of respondents agreed to the statement that women should get promoted to senior managerial positions in both public and private sector companies. Over 90% of participants strongly agreed or agreed to this statement with just over 2% strongly disagreeing or disagreeing. This is lowest percentage of disagreement recorded for all questions. An equivalent percentage of participants remained neutral and just over 5% reported not having an opinion. This result is somewhat surprising given that around 51% had agreed to the earlier question about marginalization of women at the workplace. That this 51% will agree to women being given more responsibilities is understandable. But those who had disagreed with that statement or had neutral opinion also support women elevation to higher positions. Thus, it can be said that even if women participation is not immensely confined to certain roles, their absence from higher ranks of managerial and leadership ladder is recognized as being a reality.

4.2.4. Perceptions about Islam, as a religion, imposing restrictions on women



On being asked whether patriarchal interpretation and implementation of Sharia Law is imposing restrictions on women, most respondents answered in the negative. Nearly 42% strongly disagreed and almost 22% disagreed. Combining this with the above finding, it can be said that most respondents did not agree that gender discrimination is a problem or that the current interpretation of Sharia Law was truncating opportunities for women. This is indicative of two scenarios. First, gender discrimination is not as acute in KSA as it is made out to be. Second, women are not willing to openly admit about them being discriminated against or that patriarchal interpretation of Sharia influences it.

Responses for whether patriarchal interpretation and implementation of Sharia Law is imposing restrictions on women (Q12). The results of the standard deviations presented in Table 19 indicates a higher score similar to previous results reported in the previous section. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient for gender equality being a problem in KSA (Q10) and whether patriarchal interpretation and implementation of Sharia Law is imposing restrictions on women (Q12) shows a negative weak correlation which indicates lack of relation between the gender bias issue in KSA and the involvement of Sharia law in encouraging such bias. The same pattern occurred when examined the relationship between the policies and programs introduced by the government and Sharia law imposing restrictions on women. This affirms the aforementioned findings that respondents disapproved the involvement of Sharia Law in encouraging the gender bias in KSA.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

Summarily, **the study finds that** the leadership of KSA is actively promoting and pursuing its vision of increased involvement of women in all sectors. Through promotion of a gender balanced national vision, the King and the Crown Prince have emphasized the importance of women's involvement and their resolve to heighten it. It has strong social messages and will help in garnering societal support for their initiatives. Not stopping at only promotion, the government has undertaken several policy initiatives which amply showcase their resolve. Facilitation of women education, allowing women to drive and get admitted into hospitals without male guardian, a hefty penalty and one-year imprisonment for perpetrators of domestic violence against women, implementation of international conventions to spur women's entry into the workforce and reserving one third jobs in public sector for women are certainly steps in the right direction. These have triggered encouraging response from women, who are more visible in public sphere now than before.



Still gender bias continues to be a problem in KSA. Segregation in educational campuses is commonplace. Hospitals continue to refuse patients without male guardians and women still are subjected to domestic violence and social stigma associated with women working in male dominated environments exists. Though these are often attributed to tradition and religion, such perceptions may not be entirely correct.

Contradicting these qualitative findings are results of the quantitative analysis. The majority of the women respondents did not support the notion that gender bias is a problem in KSA. It means that gender discrimination is not reality and even if it is, it is certainly is not hindrance creating. Majority also did not support that patriarchal interpretation of the Sharia is responsible for fueling gender segregation. Such majority denouncement of presence of gender bias and wrongful interpretation of Sharia looks feeble when one analyses specific areas where discrimination is reported. The numbers start dwindling and puts to question the veracity of previous inputs. Thus, when respondents were asked directly about gender discrimination they opined in the negative. But when they were questioned on specific areas, they had different opinions. Responses to follow up questions elicited noteworthy positive results. Subgroups like political aspect, public services aspect and work-related aspect was analyzed and studied. It appeared that every subgroup had gender discrimination issues which needed to be addressed. Admitting KSA is gender biased can be perceived as being directly critical of government, tradition and religion and could have made respondents uncomfortable and so the denial. This is not the case when specifics were questioned about. They felt more assured and comfortable and therefore were transparent.

The majority of respondents also opined that government should continue to frame and implement policies and programs that can eliminate gender inequality, thereby offering women more freedom and better life. Therefore, this was selected as a variable and attempt was made to test its correlation with other developmental aspects. But they did not perceive initiatives to reduce gender gap as being governmental interventions.

Government has allowed male nursing staff and doctors to attend to women patients. But if family members of a female patient refuse to let male doctors or staffs attend to the patient or they behave violently, there are no legal provisions to counter that. Probably such lack of legal provisions, which could adequately support policies and programs of the government, has given rise to the perception that the government has not been adequately serious about elimination of gender bias from the country.



The difficulties women continue to face in the country seems to have contributed to women not being able to correlate developmental policies and programs with governmental intention of tackling gender bias.

some recommendations for the government to pursue:

- Introduce strict legal legislations which can ensure that all gender discriminatory practices are brought to a halt. Legal provisions should be introduced to penalize hospitals and doctors refusing admission to single woman patients. Errant individuals or institutions should be punished to set an example.
- Basic education should be made compulsory for girls. Steps should also be taken to ensure every family adheres to it and sends their girl child to school. Those failing to do so should be served a show cause notice and wherever required strict action should be taken.
- Through Royal Decree, government should reserve political positions for women from the basic to the highest levels. Women leaders doing exemplary work should be projected and promoted so that other can get motivated and encouraged. Campaigns about why women politicians are required and how they can contribute to nation's benefit should be devised and conducted. That will dispel any negative notions harbored by females against politics and their presence in it.
- But introduction of reservation of seats for women should be undertaken at the earliest.
- Women entrepreneurship should be encouraged and all support to their growth and development be extended. This will create opportunities for self-employment of women and also open up avenues for women to join the workforce. Government should reserve some leadership positions for women in public sector companies and also compel the private sector to follow suit. This will ensure the entry of women into senior positions, which will do a world of good for them in the long term. Successful women employees, managers and entrepreneurs should be publicly rewarded to send out a strong message to women and to fundamentalists who create impediments. Projection of winners can provide a positive stimulant to women to join the workforce in increased numbers.

Appendixes:

The questionnaire



Assessment of perception about social work policies, gender equality and role of social workers

Part I

Background Information

1. Tick the most appropriate box that suits your gender.

A. Male

B. Female

2. What is your age category?

A. 18-30

B. 31-40

C. 41-50

D. Above

50

3. What is your level of education?

A. Primary level

B. Secondary Level

C. Undergraduate level

D. Graduate level

4. Which of the following best describes your profession?

A. Social worker [] B. Other professions [.....] (Specify)

5. What kind of setting do you work in?

Main Section

Perception of Gender Inequality

6. On a scale of 0-5, 0 being strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree, do you think there is a problem of gender inequality in KSA?

0 1 2 3 4 5

Description Strongly Disagree Neutral I don't

Agree Strongly disagree know Agree

7. If you have answered 'yes' to questions 4 or 5, briefly mention the important features you associate with gender inequality in KSA?



www.mecsj.com

Please rank the following issues for women in KSA, where 0 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree.

8. Patriarchal interpretation and implementation of Sharia Law
imposing restrictions on women

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	I	don't	
	Agree	Strongly disagree	know	Agree		

9. Lack of women politicians, lowering chances of women issues
being debated and addressed

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	I	don't	
	Agree	Strongly disagree	know	Agree		

10. Lack of educational and healthcare access for women,
hindering progress and development

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	I	don't	
	Agree	Strongly disagree	know	Agree		

11. Lack of opportunity for women to socialize and network
widely, compromising learning and increased awareness

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	I	don't	
	Agree	Strongly disagree	know	Agree		

12. Women in the workforce being confined to specific roles

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	I	don't	
	Agree	Strongly disagree	know	Agree		

What is your view on the following statements:



13. Issuing driver license to women will strengthen gender equality in KSA

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Neutral	I don't know	Agree	

14. Women should be promoted to senior positions in public and private sector companies

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	I don't know	Agree	Strongly Agree

15. Women representation in politics should be encouraged

		0	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	I don't know	Agree		Strongly Agree

16. Women should be given ministerial responsibilities

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	I don't know	Agree	Strongly Agree

17. Compulsory primary enrollment of girl child should be mandated and parents should be encouraged

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Neutral	I don't know	Agree	



18. Government must continue introducing policies and programs to facilitate gender equality and review implemented policies in context of effectiveness and relevance

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Description	Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	I	don't	
	Agree	Strongly disagree	know	Agree		

List of References

Al-Rasheed, M. and Azzam, M. (2012) *The Prospects and Limits of Women's Mobilization in Saudi Arabia*. Royal Inst. of Internat. Affairs.

Al-Tamimi, D. M. (2004) 'Saudi women in academic medicine. Are they succeeding?', *Saudi medical journal*, 25(11), pp. 1564–1567.

Alamri, M. (2011) 'Higher education in Saudi Arabia', *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 11(4), pp. 88–91.

Aldosari, H. (2017) *Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington | The Effect of Gender Norms on Women's Health in Saudi Arabia - Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington*. Available at: <http://www.agsiw.org/effect-gender-norms-womens-health-saudi-arabia/> (Accessed: 10 September 2018).

Al Alhareth, Y., Al Alhareth, Y. and Al Dighrir, I. (2015) 'Review of women and society in Saudi Arabia', *American Journal of Educational Research*, 3(2), pp. 121–125.

AlQuaiz, A. M. *et al.* (2014) 'Women Health in Saudi Arabia: A review of non-communicable diseases and their risk factors', *Pakistan journal of medical sciences*. Professional Medical Publications, 30(2), p. 422.

Alsuwaida, N. (2016) 'Women's Education in Saudi Arabia.', *Journal of International Education Research*. ERIC, 12(4), pp. 111–118.

Alvarez, M. L. (2013) 'From Unheard Screams to Powerful Voices: A Case Study of Women's Political Empowerment in the Philippines', *Seoul, Korea: Thesis*.

Amorim, A. R. *et al.* (2007) 'Does excess pregnancy weight gain constitute a major risk for increasing long-term BMI?', *Obesity*. Wiley Online Library, 15(5), pp. 1278–1286.

Bayeh, E. (2015) 'Human Rights in Ethiopia: An Assessment on the Law and Practice of Women's Rights', *Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(2), pp. 83–87.



www.mecsj.com

Multi-Knowledge Electronic Comprehensive Journal For
Education And Science Publications (MECSJ)

Issues (64) 2023

ISSN: 2616-9185

- Black, I. (2016) *Saudi Arabia approves ambitious plan to move economy beyond oil* | *World news* | *The Guardian, The guardian*. Available at:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/25/saudi-arabiaapproves-ambitious-plan-to-move-economy-beyond-oil> (Accessed: 10 September 2018).
- Broido, E. M. and Manning, K. (2002) 'Philosophical Foundations and Current Theoretical Perspectives in Qualitative Research.', *Journal of college student development*. ERIC, 43(4), pp. 434–445.
- Chamlou, N. (no date) *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa* | *Global Policy Journal*. Available at:
<https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/03/10/2017/women'srights-middle-east-and-north-africa> (Accessed: 10 September 2018).
- Clement, M. (2017) *Worldwide Gender Gap Widens for the First Time — Women's Advancement Deeply*. Available at:
<https://www.newsdeeply.com/womensadvancement/articles/2017/11/01/worldwide-gender-gap-widens-for-the-first-time-in-10-years> (Accessed: 10 September 2018).
- Demeke, M. A. and Gebru, S. G. (2015) 'The millennium development goals and the status of gender disparity in Ethiopia: achievements and challenges', *African Journal of Governance and Development*. Sabinet, 4(1), pp. 38–58.
- Eastin, J. and Prakash, A. (2013) 'Economic development and gender equality: Is there a gender Kuznets curve?', *World Politics*. Cambridge University Press, 65(1), pp. 156–186.
- Goldin, C. (1994) 'Understanding the gender gap: An economic history of American women', *Equal employment opportunity: Labor market discrimination and public policy*. Aldine de Gruyter New York, pp. 17–26.
- Gorney, C. (2016) 'The Changing face of Saudi women', *National Geographic February*, pp. 110–133.
- Green, J. F. (1956) *The United Nations and human rights*. Brookings institution.
- Hoseini, N. (2014) 'Gender Inequality and Sustainable Development'.
- Islam, S. I. (2014) 'Saudi women: Opportunities and challenges in science and technology', *Education Journal*, 3(2), pp. 71–78.
- Johnson, B. and Christensen, L. (2008) *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. Sage.



www.mecsj.com

Multi-Knowledge Electronic Comprehensive Journal For
Education And Science Publications (MECSJ)

Issues (64) 2023

ISSN: 2616-9185

- Keleher, H. (2009) 'Gender Norms and Empowerment: "What Works" to Increase Equity for Women and Girls', in *Gender Equity in Health*. Routledge, pp. 183–205.
- Kim, E. M. (2017) 'Gender and the Sustainable Development Goals', *Global Social Policy*. SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England, 17(2), pp. 239–244.
- Meijer, R. (2010) 'Reform in Saudi Arabia: The gender-segregation debate', *Middle East Policy*. Wiley Online Library, 17(4), pp. 80– 100.
- Mills, A. (2009) 'Reforms to women's education make slow progress in Saudi Arabia', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 55(43), pp. 11–15.
- Naganag, E. M. (2014) 'The role of indigenous women in forest conservation in upland Kalinga province, Northern Philippines', *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences*. GreenField Advanced Research Publishing House, 3(6), pp. 75–89.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2009) *Research methods for business students*. Pearson education.
- Shailaja, R. (2000) 'Women, energy and sustainable development', *Energy for sustainable development*. Elsevier, 4(1), pp. 45–64.
- Shannon, K. J. (2014) "'I'm glad I'm not a Saudi woman": the First Gulf War and US encounters with Saudi gender relations', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*. Taylor & Francis, 27(3), pp. 553– 573.
- Watch, H. R. (2016) 'Boxed in: women and Saudi Arabia's male guardianship system'.