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Women Spring: Empowering Saudi
Working Women

By

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“Our aspirations are many, and the challenges that we face are more.”

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Women Spring: Empowering Saudi Working Women

Dania Al-Sulaimani

Abstract

Despite major leaps in global economic integration, technological advancements, and modernization women status in Arab society is still subject to traditional cultural barriers. Surge in Saudi Arabian women joining entrepreneurship as well as the Shura Council remains limited to confined economic and political sectors. This thesis seeks to identify the specific variables that can serve as the foundation for empowering Saudi workingwomen while taken social and cultural practices into considerations. A survey of 120 Saudi workingwomen was carried out in order to determine women's views on obstacles, challenges, and opportunities for own empowerment. Relevant data was also compiled from secondary sources in order to map empowerment variables. The findings point out to important variables in different developmental areas, particularly in education and professional career advancement opportunities. Critically important is the fact that most workingwomen interviewed expressed optimism about improving their status in light of changes emerging out of the Arab Spring. Current reforms undertaken in the Kingdom is another source for confidence. Contemporary reforms, women enthusiasm, and family support for economic advancements are identified as strong motivations for working women empowerment in Saudi Arabia. Yet, significant structural and interpersonal barriers in the workplace remain among the major challenges to overcome. Specific changes in labor laws and women mobility are recommended.

Keywords: Empowerment, Saudi Arabia, Workingwomen, Structural barriers, Interpersonal barriers

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Women's inequality has long been a subject of concern in both theory and practice. Although women continue to be marginalized in many developed and developing nations, Coleman (2004) has asserted that some recognition has occurred around the role and importance of women in society, reporting, "Women are critical to economic development, active civil society, and good governance, especially in developing countries" (p. 80). Despite this reality, Coleman has argued, women living in areas such as Southern Asia, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa continue to face challenges with regard to their empowerment and advancement. Coleman has further contended that, in many instances, the challenges women face in these regions result from the juxtaposition of liberal democratic thinking and staunch religious values. Although those in power may acknowledge the role and importance of women in society, adherence to well-defined and established religious and moral codes that favor patriarchal societies continue to dictate both policy and practice.

Over the last 15 years, the debate over the role of women in Saudi society has captured the attention of both scholars and policymakers. Hamdan (2005) has acknowledged that although many of these scholars and policymakers understand the role and importance of women in Saudi society, debates over changing, augmenting, and altering these roles persist. Consequently, policies established to improve outcomes for society and women have—to some extent, provoked a new set of problems; among them

that women are assuming precarious positions in being able to become leaders and entrepreneurs without all of the rights and privileges granted to men in similar situations. Generally speaking, the situation is unique and requires a deeper understanding of what can be done to empower Saudi workingwomen to help them achieve the additional supports and resources needed to attain equality with their male counterparts.

1.1.1 General Social Conditions

The position of women in Saudi Arabian society is exceptional in the context of modern society. Unfortunately, the general social environment in which Saudi women live remains quite oppressive overall. Epatko (2011) has illustrated this point, noting that Saudi women have only recently been granted the right to vote and seek office in national elections. Epatko further noted that women in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to drive. Although no specific laws banning women from driving exist, local authorities will not grant women licenses, thus making it illegal for them to drive. In June of 2011, several dozen women protested this unwritten policy by driving in cities around the capital. The women were arrested for their actions (Epatko, 2011). Given these issues, notable barriers for women's social, economic, and political advancement continue to exist in the country.

In the context of employment and labor, women's position in Saudi society is also notably challenging. Mansour and Achoui (2009) have contended that whereas Saudi women comprise 51% of the total population in the state, they comprise only 7% of the total workforce. Additionally, these authors reported that when women are employed in Saudi society they typically hold jobs in female-dominated fields such as education and healthcare. Although women's direct participation in the labor force in Saudi Arabia is

quite low, women have found a niche in entrepreneurship. Al Tamimi (2010) has asserted that Saudi businesswomen are more likely to be the sole owners of their businesses compared with business owners in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. In addition Al Tamimi has argued that female business owners in Saudi Arabia are often more educated than their MENA region counterparts. Statistics indicate that 58% of Saudi businesswomen have pursued a postsecondary degree, with many completing their degrees abroad (Al Tamimi, 2010).

Despite the challenges women face in Saudi Arabia, research provided by Ghafour (2007) has indicated that women have made some progress toward equality. Specifically, this author noted that as a result of increased effort by the government to improve economic opportunities for Saudi women, hundreds of schools and colleges for girls have been established. These efforts have changed the trends in education, with female graduates comprising 56.5% of all graduates (Ghafour, 2007). Further, in 2007, the government also announced plans to set aside one-third of all government jobs for Saudi women. Saudi Arabia earmarked 25.5% of its budget for 2010 for education and—training, up from 13% in 2009 (GCC women: Challenging the status quo, 2011).

(GCC women: Challenging the status quo, 2011). has also noted advancements made by women in Saudi culture. According to statistics provided by the Sayyida Khadija bint Khuwaylid Centre of the Chamber of Commerce in Jeddah, Saudi business women have cash savings of more than SAR45 billion (USD11.9 billion) in Saudi banks, and SAR8 billion (USD2.1 billion) of funds in investments; in addition, their total real estate investments stand at around SAR120 billion (USD31.9 billion). One reason is that females own around 40% of the family-run companies, though mostly as sleeping

partners. Additionally, due to the absence of most woman-specific services in Saudi Arabia— such as ateliers, workshops, and beauty centers—savings are high among females. These statistics make evident that even though challenges continue for women in Saudi society, some notable progress has been reported (GCC women: Challenging the status quo, 2011).

1.1.2 Women as Leaders and Entrepreneurs

Women as leaders and entrepreneurs are topics that have been well examined in the current literature. Sadi and Al-Ghazali (2010) have maintained that scholars have long recognized the challenges that exist when it comes to women initiating and operating their own businesses. Specifically, these authors have argued that the challenges for female business owners include “acquiring appropriate training, obtaining capital and gender discrimination” (p. 2). Sadi and Al-Ghazali further argued that a lack of support from family members as well as challenges of overcoming cultural conditioning remain obstacles to women’s ability and willingness to engage in entrepreneurship. These issues are salient in developing nations such as Saudi Arabia, where women continue to confront stereotypes regarding their roles as wives and mothers (Sadi& Al-Ghazali, 2010). Maternal identities in these cultures continue to shape how women perceive their roles and fuel society’s interest in ensuring that women fulfill these roles.

Although the general issues facing women in business represent common variables that impede the success of women in all nations, research regarding women’s participation in business in Saudi Arabia indicates unique barriers to women’s success

(Ahmad, 2011). Minkus-McKenna (2009) highlighted this point by noting, “Islamic women entrepreneurs attribute success and failure in different terms than do their western counterparts, and identify a wider set of obstacles and unique strategies to function well” (p. 2). Further the International Finance Corporation (International Finance Corporation & The Center of Arab Women for Training and Research, 2007) has outlined some of the specific challenges faced by female entrepreneurs in the Middle East. According to this organization, women business owners working in the Middle East have reported ongoing challenges with regard to setting-up and expanding businesses. Among the most pertinent challenges facing female entrepreneurs are difficulties in accessing capital, time and cost involved in initiating a business, restrictive employment laws and regulations, and business infrastructure costs.

Women seeking employment and business opportunities in Saudi Arabia also face difficulties with regard to policies that foster segregation of the workforce. Bortot (2012) noted that the low number of women in the workforce in Saudi Arabia is due, in part, to the segregation of women into specific occupations such as health care and education. The impact of segregation on women, the workforce, and the economy has not gone unnoticed by the government. Bortothas asserted that recent moves made by the Saudi government indicate that efforts are underway to stop segregation of the workforce. Although these efforts theoretically should improve opportunities for women, cultural challenges regarding women’s labor participation may remain, impacting women’s ability to actually acquire positions in male-dominated industries and organizations.

Clearly, structural barriers in the work fields and business play a dominant role in shaping outcomes for women. However, as noted by Fatany (2007) other micro level and

cultural variables influence women's success in business. Specifically, Fatany noted the reluctance of women to support each other so that opportunities afforded to women could be expanded. To illustrate this point, Fatany cited the case of the refusal of women to vote for female candidates in a recent election. This situation resulted in women failing to obtain important political positions. Fatany claimed that instances where women were elected were due primarily to male voters—"not the limited support of their sisters" (p. 18).

In spite of formidable barriers to women's labor participation and business success, Zeidan and Bahrami (2011) contended that some progress is being made. Specifically, these authors reported:

The most recent regional reports published at the end of 2010, indicate that due to technological advances and availability of information at their fingertips, some women are showing tenacity in making efforts to surmount the barriers. As more successes by female entrepreneurs are reported, more and more women are encouraged to get on board.

Zeidan and Bahrami(2011) proceeded to argue that the actions of individual women have prompted recognition by government and nongovernmental organizations of the need to provide support to women such that they can improve career and business opportunities and outcomes.

Synthesis of the research provided here indicates that even though general barriers to women's participation in the labor force and business continue to shape outcomes, instances exist in which women have become empowered enough to make strides toward advancing their careers and opportunities for all women living in Saudi Arabia. Even

though the data indicate that empowerment is occurring, the existing research does not provide a clear understanding of the forces directly motivating and empowering women to surmount existing barriers to achieve desired career and entrepreneurship outcomes. If Saudi women in the labor force require a greater voice and more activism to achieve better outcomes, there is motivation to consider what specific factors contribute to the empowerment (or disempowerment) of workingwomen in this culture. Only by determining the variables that lead to empowerment will it be possible to create a foundation upon which to facilitate change in Saudi culture and provide women the supports they need to more successfully engage in the labor force.

1.2 Purpose of the Research

With the realization that the empowerment of Saudi workingwomen is an issue of concern, the current investigation seeks to identify the specific variables that empower and disempower working Saudi women. Identifying these variables will make it possible to recommend changes in various areas of women's educational and career development. Further, the identification of variables that empower women should enable us to determine policy implications for improving outcomes for Saudi women such that women can take advantage of the opportunities that Saudi women's work provide for individuals, families, communities, and society.

1.2.2 Research Questions

Several research questions guided the investigation; however, the principle research question posed was:

- What variables serve as the basis to empower Saudi workingwomen?

To answer this question, additional sub questions that must be answered; these include:

- What motivates women to enter the workforce?
- What structural barriers (e.g., policy, cultural norms, access to education, etc.) support or impede women's ability to work in Saudi Arabia?
- What interpersonal variables (e.g., family support, social relationships, etc.) support or impede women's ability to work in Saudi Arabia?

1.3 Significance

The significance of the current research lies in the ability to identify and understand underlying factors that may be contributing or detracting from the ability of Saudi women to successfully engage in labor force. This issue is of utmost concern given the potential of women to contribute to the economic, social and political development and success of Saudi Arabia and other developing nations in the Middle East. Women are vital components of the workforce, especially in developing nations (Coleman, 2004). If the governments of developing nations are not willing to take advantage of this natural resource they will continue to struggle to compete in a global environment.

The significance of the current research is its capacity to identify and understand underlying factors that may be contributing to or detracting from the ability of Saudi women to successfully engage in labor force. This issue is of utmost concern given the potential of women to contribute to the economic, social, and political development and success of Saudi Arabia and other developing nations in the Middle East. Women are vital components of the workforce, especially in developing nations (Coleman, 2004). If

they are not willing to take advantage of this natural resource, the governments of developing nations will continue to struggle to compete in a global environment.

In addition, the current research contributes to a broader understanding of women's role in Saudi society. Hamdan (2005) has argued that the role of women in Saudi society is one that is complex, giving rise to a plethora of paradoxes. Specifically, Hamdan argued that the advances made by women in Saudi society have created a situation in which women are granted all of the tools and resources needed to ensure that they are competent leaders. Despite these supports Hamdan asserted, "Women do not have power in any position and are subordinate in both the private and public sector to male individuals who may often have inferior qualifications to their female counterparts" (p. 46). This situation will have notable implications for the success of the Saudi economy over time. If women's capabilities and skills are not used for the betterment of society, economic inferiority make it difficult, if not impossible, for Saudis to achieve collective goals needed for global success.

Examining the factors that empower Saudi workingwomen also has implications for the development of policy that could serve as the foundation for further improving women's participation in the labor force. As noted by Zeidan and Bahrami (2011), the empowerment of some women in the Saudi labor force has captured the attention of government and nongovernmental organizations. These organizations have, in turn, begun developing programs and policies aimed at improving outcomes for working women in Saudi Arabia. Understanding the factors that empower women is critical to creating the environment in which these variables can be fostered, more women can become empowered, and government agencies have no choice but to respond by

developing policy to aid women as they work toward achieving career and business goals. In this context, the results of this investigation may be essential to generating a foundation for initiating empowerment and further empowering women to spur advancement and improvement in policy creation.

Finally, the results of this investigation may have significance for helping women advance their careers and enter into top leadership and management positions in various industries. Bahkali (2010) has argued that women in many developing nations have made notable strides in entering top management and leadership positions. In Honduras, for instance, 47% of managerial positions are held by women; in Colombia and Bermuda, this total is 40% (Bahkali, 2010). The success of women in entering into top-level management and leadership positions in developing nations suggests that goal achievement in this area is possible. Fostering the empowerment of Saudi women in the workplace may serve as the foundation for creating the needed supports to advance female workers into these positions in Saudi companies.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORY AND CONTEXT

2.1 Overview: Theoretical Debate

The above discussion evidences that Saudi women confront a difficult reality that often presents some notable challenges to their advancement. Although Saudi women are granted important rights and privileges in terms of education and autonomy in Saudi society, they continue to be bound by restrictive religious and cultural traditions that impede their ability to make progress in the labor force. Le Renard (2008) has noted these issues, reporting, “In Saudi Arabia, women have constituted a separate category, legally discriminated against and spatially segregated” (p. 610). Le Renard asserted that this separation continues to be based on the view that the barriers that exist in society are traditional and therefore must be preserved in order to maintain social discourse.

Although the traditional status quo of modern Saudi society continues to pervade beliefs, values, norms, and practices, changes in the cultural, social, and political environment of Saudi Arabia have occurred in recent years. Dekmejian (2003) has conceptualized this change as rooted in the September 11th terrorist attacks against the United States. According to Dekmejian (2003), in the wake of the terrorist attacks, Saudi Arabia became the primary target of global criticism, with a focus on the religious establishment in the country, which pervaded some of the most fundamental political needs of citizens. The criticism of religious order in the state not only served as the foundation for weakening this fundamental position, but also offered a pivotal point for liberals to promote their agenda in the political arena (Dekmejian, 2003).

Providing a review of the liberalist agenda as it has evolved in Saudi Arabia, Dekmejian (2003) has argued, “Liberalism in the Saudi context should be understood as a relative term to denote a reformist ideology derived from the practice of Western liberalism, although without reference to its foundational philosophical principles” (p. 401). As a result of this environment, Dekmejian has posited, the liberalist tradition in Saudi Arabia has evolved to include reforms that seek to alter the monarchial order through such actions as establishing human rights for all, including women in all aspects of society, and relaxing religious control to ensure that a higher degree of equality can be achieved (Dekmejian, 2003).

Even though liberalism has a long history in Saudi Arabia, Dekmejian (2003) has contended that not until the September 11th terrorist attacks did liberalism experience a rebirth there. Because criticism of traditional religious values threatened to undermine international relations between Saudi Arabia and Western nations including the U.S., the Saudi government had little choice but to reconsider its response to various national and international issues. As a result, liberals found it easier to promote their agenda and refocus policy and practice to achieve change.

The movement toward more liberalism in the development of political and cultural discourse in Saudi Arabia has been more extensively addressed through research conducted by Zuhur (2005). According to Zuhur (2005), whereas the September 11th terrorist attacks brought to light the international community’s battle with Islamic extremists, the event also served as a flashpoint for the Saudi government to recognize its own national battle with Islamic extremism. As reported by Zuhur (2005), the terrorist attacks have served as the foundation for the government to set a new liberal agenda.

Although many of its citizens—and the international community—have applauded the government for its efforts, Zuhur contended that the Saudi government has been widely criticized for “setting too narrow an agenda and too slow a pace for change” (p. v).

Despite this criticism, members of the Saudi government continue to defend their choices and their actions; specifically, members of the Saudi government have argued, “As their entire state structure and society is founded on religious principles, they must move cautiously” (p. v).

Whereas the September 11th terrorist attacks clearly provide an identifiable event for recognizing change in political and cultural discourse in Saudi Society, Zuhur (2005) has also argued that changes to a higher level of liberalism are also rooted in the evolution of the country’s changing demography and economic climate. Although the government has refuted estimates, regarding population trends for Saudi Arabia, Zuhur(2005) argued that available data indicate that the population of the country is quite young, and that the median age of 21years with high birth rate for women has markedly increased the number of youth in the country (Zuhur, 2005). Rapid increases in the population have become the impetus for the government to build and grow the economy such that future generations of Saudis can be sustained.

The evolution of the economy in Saudi Arabia has given rise to greater class divisions. Zuhur (2005) has pointed to a growing underclass that continues to be marginalized by policies that promote the interests of the wealthy and ruling classes. The young are now challenging traditional social and economic structures that once served as a mainstay for perpetuating culture.

Bronson and Coleman (2006) have considered the synthesis of these cultural, social, economic, and political forces, noting that the current leader of Saudi Arabia—King Abdullah bin Abdel Aziz—has recognized the need for change and is pursuing modest alterations in policy, including those regarding the rights and status of women, to advance the country's development. Bronson and Coleman (2006) have argue that although the actions taken by King Abdullah will not immediately liberate women in Saudi society, these moves will create a foundation from which the government will have no choice but to move forward.

In spite of the infusion of a liberalist agenda into the political and cultural sphere of Saudi Arabia, the reality for women in the country remains quite bleak in many instances. Rouleau (2002) has provided some insight into the challenges facing women in Saudi Arabia, noting that Saudi women are banned from public spaces unless they are covered from head to toe. Additionally, Rouleau noted that even as women have made inroads toward working in various professions, these advances are often made as a result of the separation of male and female workforces. The barriers to employment have resulted in a situation in which “tens of thousands of female university graduates do not work outside their homes” (p. 83).

Although these issues have notable implications for all generations of Saudi citizens, Rouleau (2002) contended that these challenges are particularly problematic for young adults who want to expand their horizons and enjoy the benefits of modern society. The frustrations of the younger generation, according to Rouleau, have prompted engagement in a variety of deviant and illegal behaviors. Alcohol consumption and illicit drug use have become rampant among the young in Saudi Arabia (Rouleau, 2002).

Bronson and Coleman (2006) also contended that the frustrations of the young often fuel interest in Islamic extremism. Thus, liberal policies aimed at improving society also have implications for reducing citizen participation in terrorist activities. By building a social and cultural foundation for citizens to live like their counterparts in other developed nations, the Saudi government is protecting itself from the repercussions of Islamic extremism while markedly altering the religious foundations that have served as the principle framework for the development of its society.

Clearly, the changes occurring in Saudi Arabia are complex and deeply rooted in the social, economic, and political challenges that face the country. Understanding these issues makes it possible to demonstrate that women's rights are being redefined beyond the influence of including liberalist paradigms in government policy. Society as whole in Saudi Arabia is evolving dramatically, prompting many to react violently to the changes in an effort to preserve conservative cultural discourse. Discontent on the part of younger citizens will continue to shape the political and cultural milieu as the government attempts to balance the needs and desires of all citizens in creating a country capable of being a world power that does not pose a significant threat to the international community. Overall, these issues have widespread implications for women and, indeed, all citizens in the country.

Arguably the expansion of liberal ideology provides a stronger foundation for women to seek and attain various career and business successes. However, the movement toward a more liberalist agenda has left Saudi Arabia in the middle of an ideological shift from traditional religious behavior to a liberal state in which equality is within reach. This ideological debate underpins how women working in Saudi Arabia view their roles

and their opportunities. As such, any examination of the variables that empower women must be framed in this theoretical context. Clearly, Saudi Arabia is undergoing significant cultural and social change—change that will forever alter the ways that both men and women live.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations

The general focus of this investigation is to explore factors contributing to the empowerment of Saudi workingwomen. Although this topic suggests the need to focus on Saudi workingwomen, the reality is that this topic cannot be explored without some understanding of the social, political, cultural, and economic discourse that is currently shaping outcomes for women in the Saudi workforce. The need to examine context is based on the realization that the history and maturation of Saudi society, its labor force and women, have evolved in a much different manner than what has occurred in other Islamic countries. Only by exploring the context in which Saudi women live will it be possible to provide a succinct framework for examining empowerment issues related to the development of Saudi women in the workforce.

2.2.1 Cultural and Social Issues in Saudi Arabia

As noted at the outset of this investigation, the September 11th terrorist attacks provided a flashpoint for examining political, social, and cultural discourse in Saudi Arabia. As noted by Dekmejian (2003), in the wake of the terrorist attacks, Saudi Arabia became a primary target of global criticism. Zuhur (2005) argued that whereas many in the Saudi government denied these criticisms, government officials soon became the targets of a spate of national terrorist attacks undertaken by Al-Qaeda, changing the

viewpoint of the government. This shift, according to both Dekmejian (2003) and Zuhur (2005), has provided a foundation on which to develop more liberal policies regarding various facets of society, including the role that women could play in everyday life and the labor force.

The efforts employed by the government to shift the social and cultural climate of the country were geared toward the larger objective of reducing the attractiveness of terrorist organizations for young people (Bronson & Coleman, 2006). The idea was that by addressing some of the more restrictive aspects of Saudi society and providing new foundations for social, cultural, and economic growth, the government could create a society that had no use for Islamic extremism (Bronson & Coleman, 2006). Although the changes that have been created as a result of a political shift to more liberalism have produced definitive alterations in Saudi society, critics have argued that the initiatives either go too far—violating the basic religious principles of society (Bronson & Coleman, 2006)—or do not go far enough—thus continuing to impede growth from within various social groups in the nation (Zuhur, 2005). Frustration with the initiatives taken by the Saudi government clearly manifested in the Arab Spring movement and the Saudi government’s response to this cultural and social upheaval.

2.2.2 Regional Differences

Although Saudi Arabia continues to maintain definitive positions on specific cultural, social, and political issues, in reality, there is little precedent for the country to maintain its current position on many issues. Baskan and Wright (2011) illustrated this point in examining differences in social, cultural, and political practices between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. According to these authors, Qatar and Saudi Arabia are both Islamic

states that employ the Hanabli School. Whereas the foundations for social and political development in both states are the same, Baskan and Wright (2011) have contended that notable differences exist in the way each state operates. In an effort to illustrate this point, Baskan and Wright (2011) have noted that Qatar does not have a religious police force responsible for evaluating and enforcing rules of morality in public places. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, continues to employ the “*mutawwa'in*,” which scrutinizes the behavior of men and women in public to ensure that they act in a morally respectful manner.

Similar issues regarding differences in how Islamic traditions are applied in various countries have been noted by Esfandiari (2004). According to Esfandiari (2004), “The Islam practiced in Indonesia is not the Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia or Bosnia or Nigeria” (p. 57). Although unique historical and cultural issues have clearly shaped the development of Islam in Saudi Arabia, there is a growing realization that Saudi Arabia could maintain religious order in the context of a more permissive social and cultural environment. (Baskan & Wright, 2011) Despite this realization, however, leaders of Saudi Arabia continue to avoid rapid change, creating notable challenges for the country, its economy and its citizens. In terms of impact, women have clearly been placed in a precarious position, somewhere between revolutionary advancement and continued oppression.

Challenges to effecting change have fostered women’s growth in many areas even as continued restrictions have occurred in others. As such, despite a shared history of social, religious, and cultural development, many of the Gulf States have surpassed Saudi Arabia in various areas of social, cultural, economic, and political liberalization, especially with regard to the advancement of women in society. Given that other Gulf

States such as Qatar have been successful in promoting the advancement of women in various social and economic domains, one could reasonably posit that Saudi Arabia could make similar changes and improvements if it so desired. In spite of what appears to be strong regional evidence of the positive power of social and cultural change, conditions in Saudi Arabia remain resistant to revolutionary change, making it difficult for women to achieve important advancements needed for achieving equality in all domains. These broader challenges must be taken into consideration when examining the variables that impact the empowerment of Saudi women in the workforce.

2.2.3 Other Issues to Consider

Although the larger social, political, and cultural environment for women in Saudi Arabia provides an important foundation for understanding the challenges to empowering working Saudi women, additional issues continue to shape outcomes that require assessment. In particular, Fatany (2007) has asserted that women as a group are often their own worst enemies when it comes to making progress toward social and cultural change. As Fatany (2007) has argued, “Across the range of reforms sought to empower women and to give Saudi Arabia a much-needed competitive edge in the global marketplace, from schools and workplaces to hospitals and highways, women often are the ones raising the roadblocks to change” (p. 18). In an effort to illustrate her point, Fatany (2007) has noted relevant examples, including a women’s movement to stop the government from allowing women to obtain identity cards as well as the unwillingness of women to vote for female candidates seeking public office in chamber elections. Fatany(2007) has contended that this conflict among women continues to create barriers to unification, which could be used to further advance women’s rights.

Although these issues have direct implications for women's ability to advance in Saudi society itself, Fatany (2007) has also noted that the situation has drawn criticism from women worldwide, especially those living in neighboring Gulf States. Fatany(2007) has contended that Muslim women view the actions and behaviors of conservative Saudi women as a detriment not only to the advancement of Saudi society but also to “the ability of women throughout the Arab world to move forward and do the best for their families and themselves” (p. 19). Given the economic power and size of Saudi Arabia, Fatany (2007) has maintained, women in Saudi Arabia should be leading the call for change in the Muslim world. Instead, this group is limiting the social and cultural progress of Muslims from all areas of the globe. Al-Hazzani (2013) has also considered these issues, noting that even among workingwomen the term “empowerment” is rarely used in the advancement of women—as if women themselves are afraid of their own power and capabilities.

Other barriers to women's participation in the labor force extend from policies that have favored the use of foreign workers in the development of Saudi Arabia's economy (Al-Asmari, 2008). Although this situation has evolved as a result of historical patterns of oppression of women in the country, the outcomes demonstrate the integration of a number of different issues that have shaped Saudi society, beginning in the 1970s. Specifically, Al-Asmari noted that, in 1970, the Saudi government put its First Development Plan in place, requiring a highly skilled, educated, and trained workforce. Without enough people in the country to meet the human resources demand for labor, the Saudi government quickly adopted policies that enabled expatriates to acquire employment there (Al-Asmari, 2008). In short, Saudi Arabia had few options for meeting

its labor needs and needed to recruit external labor to achieve desired social and economic goals.

Today, however, the country boasts one of the most highly educated groups of citizens in the Middle East. Reform policies designed to increase women's access to education have resulted in many women seeking postsecondary and advanced degrees (Hamdan, 2005). Hamdan argued that since the 1980s, the Saudi government has widely supported initiatives to educate women. And yet, despite advancement in women's education, the social and cultural restrictions placed on women continue to adversely impact their ability to enter into the workforce. Al-Asmari (2008) has argued that efforts to replace foreign workers with Saudi nationals is now a possibility, one that could enhance the country's economy and provide a needed foundation for building Saudi society. Given the large pool of educated women living in Saudi Arabia, the government has access to the human resources needed to support its economy. However, current roadblocks associated with policy governing social and cultural development continue to impede the Saudi government from taking advantage of one of its most prominent resources.

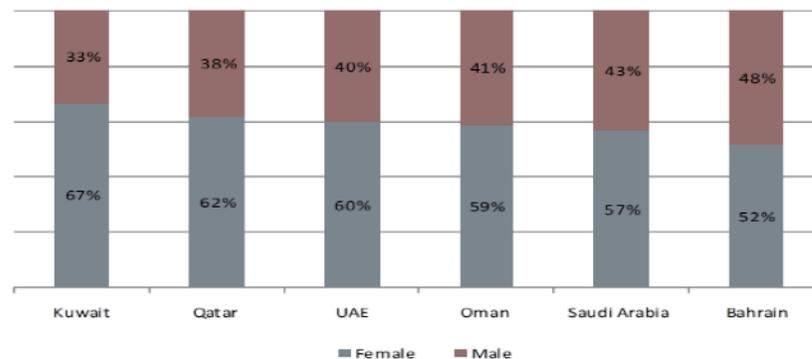
2.3 Literature Review

2.3.1 Macroeconomic Trends

With the context of women's labor in Saudi Arabia clarified, it is now possible to consider the current status of women's labor force participation and the specific challenges faced by women along with the successes they have achieved as a result of the changes that have occurred in Saudi Arabia. A recent report by Aguirre, Hoteit, Rupp,

and Sabbagh (2012) regarding Saudi women’s education and participation in the labor force highlights the true challenges faced by women in this country. Although they constitute more than half of all university graduates in Saudi Arabia (52.8%), according to Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency — 48th Annual Report, women continue to be significantly underrepresented in the labor force. In particular, Aguirre and coworkers (2012) noted that the participation rate of Saudi female nationals is only 12%. Although this number is low, Wilcke (2012) has argued that the number has almost tripled in the last two decades.

Figure 2.1: Female and Male College Graduates in GCC Countries, 2011

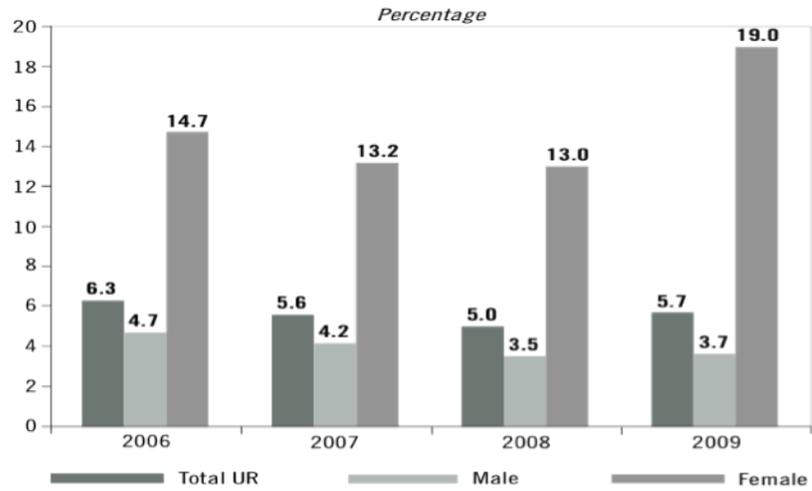


Source: the World Bank, Al Masah Capital Research, 2011

In addition to the low labor force participation rate, statistics indicate that the unemployment rate for women is quite high, at 28%, compared with only 7% for men (Aguirre et al., 2012). Trends in unemployment rates for men and women have followed similar patterns over the last several years. Data provided by the International Labor Office (Saudi Arabia, 2009) indicate that between 2006 and 2008, female unemployment was three times higher than male unemployment. The organization goes also noted that beginning in 2009, female unemployment jumped to five times the unemployment rate

for males. The International Labor Office further reported that in 2009, Saudi women comprised 8% of the population whereas foreign females comprised 7% of the population. In comparison, Saudi males comprised 42% of the labor force whereas foreign males comprised 43% of the labor force (Saudi Arabia, 2009). These statistics clearly demonstrate the challenges that face women when it comes to achieving parity in the labor force.

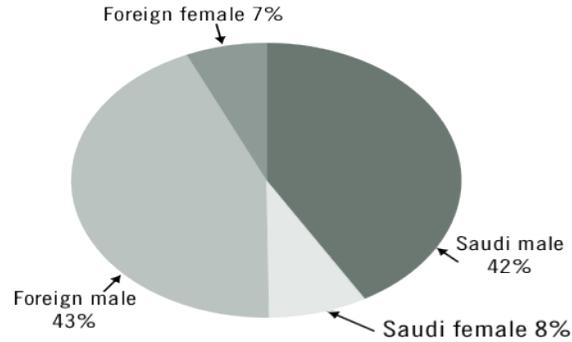
Figure 2.2: Total male and female unemployment rates, 2006-2009



Source: Central Department of Statistics of Saudi Arabia. Annual data for 2006 and 2009. First semester (first round) data for 2007 and 2008.

Source: Central Department of Statistics of Saudi Arabia, 2009

Figure 2.3: Structure of the labor force 2009

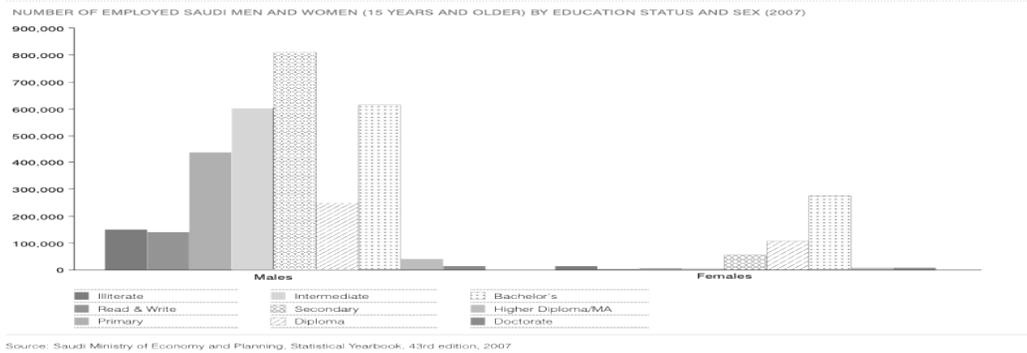


Source: Central Department of Statistics of Saudi Arabia.

Source: Central Department of Statistics of Saudi Arabia, 2009

Perhaps most interesting about the unemployment rates for men and women in Saudi Arabia is that statistics now demonstrate that women represent a more highly educated talent pool in Saudi Arabia compared to men. Specifically, data presented by Al-Masah Capital Limited (GCC women, 2011) indicate that educated females in the country outnumber men by a ratio of almost 1.5:1. Data provided by Al Munajjed (2010) have further demonstrated the differences in men's and women's education in Saudi Arabia through a comparison of education levels for unemployed men and women. Specifically, Al Munajjed reported that "78.3% of unemployed women are university graduates, and more than 1,000 have a doctorate degree. By contrast, 76% of unemployed men have only a secondary education or less" (Al Munajjed, 2010).

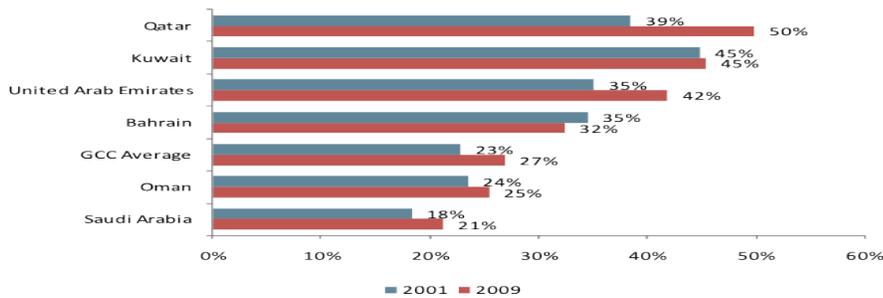
Figure 2.4: Educated women in the labor force 2007



Source: Saudi Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2007

Despite having such an educated group of women, Saudi Arabia continues to have the lowest rate of female labor participation among the Gulf States. Qatar currently has a 50% rate for female participation in its labor force, followed by Kuwait (45%), the United Arab Emirates (42%), and Bahrain (32%). GCC women: Challenging the status quo, (2011), reported that the average participation rate for women in the Gulf States is 32%. Based on the 21% participation rate noted by GCC women, (2011), Saudi Arabia clearly lags far behind other Gulf States in women’s labor force participation.

Figure 2.5: Labor participation rate for GCC Countries: 2001-2009



Source: The World Bank, Al Masah Capital Research

Source: the World Bank, Al Masah Capital Research, 2011

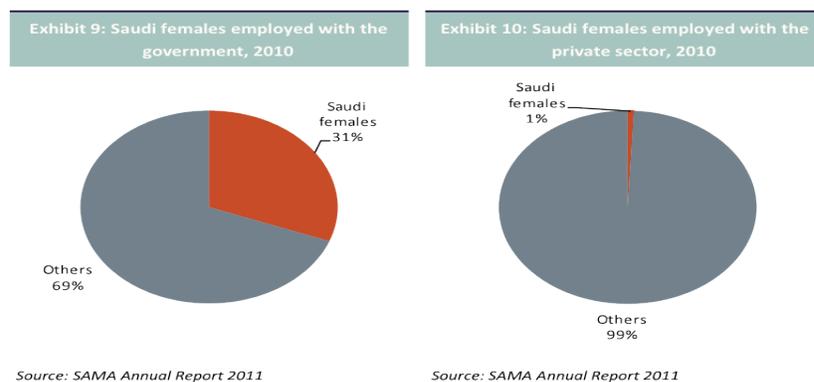
2.3.2 Public vs. Private Sector

Information regarding women's participation in the labor force indicates that although women have made some advances, considerable barriers continue to impact women's participation in the world of work. One specific area that has received attention in recent years is the difference between the public and private sector employment of women (Al-Jeraisy, 2008). Data provided by Al-Jeraisy indicate that even though women have made notable progress in the public sector, private sector barriers to women's participation in the labor force continue to markedly restrict the ability of women to acquire employment. Al-Jeraisy(2008) has provided some insight into the differences, noting that women are commonly employed in the public sector as educators: "Official statistics estimated the number of Saudi women working in education jobs to be some 180,122 or 84 percent of the total Saudi women working in the public sector." (p. 54).

Improvements for women in the public sector have been widely attributed to actions taken by the government to advance women's employment in the country. In particular, a recent report issued by Al-Masah Capital Limited (GCC women, 2011) shows that, in 2011, the Saudi government issued a royal decree to create 52,000 new educator positions at government schools; of these jobs, 75% was reserved for women. Additionally, the Saudi government announced a plan to offer one-third of all government jobs to women beginning in 2007 (GCC Women, 2011). The government has also taken steps to ensure that women are provided maternity leave, vacation, and pensions—workplace benefits that are commonly offered to men working in similar positions (GCC Women, 2011).

In the private sector, the statistics are not as robust. As Al-Jeraisy (2008) has asserted, “The number of Saudi women working in the private sector is still very small and does not exceed 11,142 or 0.68 percent of the total workforce in this sector” (p. 55). Al-Jeraisy further noted that women comprise only 4% of all employees employed in the banking sector and 4.7% of all private companies registered with the Chambers of Commerce in the Kingdom. Barriers to women’s participation in the private sector continue to stem from laws that require female employees to be separated from male employees in the workplace (Al-Jeraisy, 2008). These laws hinder the ability of private companies to offer employment opportunities for women. A recent report released by (Human Rights Watch, 2010) has noted that although rigid gender segregation has relaxed in many public places, it is still the norm in the workplace. Additionally, Al-Jeraisy maintained, “One of the most important reasons for the failure of the private sector to attract women is the lack of training and qualifications needed to join this sector” (p. 55).

Figure 2.6: Employment of Saudi Women in Public/Private Sectors, 2011



Source: SAMA Annual Report, 2011

In spite of the challenges faced by women in acquiring positions in the private sector, research indicates that Saudi women control a significant amount of business

assets in the country. Data indicate that, as of 2010, 40% of family-owned business were operated by women; women owned 30% of all brokerage accounts; and women owned 10% of all real estate management in major cities as well as 20% of all commercial businesses (“Advancement of,” 2010). Additionally, studies indicate that at the present time 40% of the country’s wealth is controlled by women, making this group wealthy and in no need of assistance from men (Aljazeera jobs, 2011, June 28).

Table 2.1: *Commercilay registered enterprise owned by women: 2010*

Activity	Number	%
Agriculture, Fishery, and Forestry	585	1.23
Mining, and Petroleum	120	0.25
Industry	1060	2.23
Power Generation and Water Extraction	1044	2.20
Construction and Contracting	8528	18.00
Wholesale and Retail Trade and Commercial Services	22835	48.15
Business and Finance Services	23	0.04
Transport, Refrigeration and Storage	610	1.28
Community and Personal services	2968	6.26
Other Activities	9655	20.36
Total	47428	100

Source: MOCI.

Source: millennium development goals 1432 H/ 2011G – ministry of economy and planning

2.3.3 Success and Challenges for Women

The data provided thus far evidence that the progress of Saudi women in the workplace has been limited to some degree. Despite these limitations, however, Saudi women have had significant successes noted. As Assad (2012) has reported, “Although women as a group face hurdles in finding jobs, there are Saudi women who are now doctors, nurses and bankers. And, for the first time, a Saudi woman has attained one of the highest government positions, deputy minister of education” (“Innovation”).

Furthermore, King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz took greater strides toward liberating and empowering Saudi women by issuing an historic decree allowing women to be members of the Saudi Shur'a Council for the first time. The decree introduced a 20% quota for women in the country's 150-member Shur'a Council, and the king appointed 30 women to join the consultative assembly. The assembly, whose members are appointed by the king, works as the formal advisory body of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the USA (Achievements of, 2006) further noted that in the private sector, women have made inroads by acquiring jobs in "agriculture, banking, real estate, interior design, pharmacology, biology and biochemistry" (p. 1).

Despite successes noted for women in Saudi Arabia, a plethora of challenges preventing women from expanding their participation in the labor force have also been reported. For instance, Grey, S., Al-Dabbagh, M., & Brannon, S.(2010) have noted that an examination of barriers to women's labor force participation in Saudi Arabia found that "women face obstacles stemming from government regulations, limited access to and use of formal capital, the need for integration of more sophisticated marketing and technology tools, and a lack of support services" (p. 12). Vaid (2011) further noted some of the structural barriers that make it difficult for women to acquire and maintain employment. In particular, Vaid(2011) has argued that transportation issues (women are not allowed to drive) coupled with laws requiring the segregation of men and women at work continue to limit women's participation in the labor force. Similar issues are highlighted in the work of Minkus-McKenna (2009), who has asserted that women often require guardian permission to work, have minimal support from other women, and do not have as much experience as their male counterparts.

Interpersonal barriers to women's participation in the labor force have also been noted in the literature. Specifically, Sadi and Al-Ghazali (2010) reported that a lack of family support for employment is often one of the most significant obstacles for women seeking work. In developing nations such as Saudi Arabia family, support is often shaped by gender stereotypes and roles, as Sadi and Al-Ghazali (2010) have explained, "A woman's primary role is as a wife and mother and traditional practices still restrict women to their maternal role and other family bound tasks" (p. 2). Al-Ahmadi (2011) has further considered these issues, noting that in the workplace negative attitudes toward working women can make it difficult for women to integrate into the workplace. These attitudes can also impact perceptions of female managers. Al-Ahmadi argued that many Saudi workers perceive female managers as untrustworthy, which can limit women's entrance into certain fields as well as their ability to move up the career ladder.

2.4 Model of a Process

Based on the literature reviewed and the theoretical foundations established for this investigation, a model of a process can be created that reflects a synthesis of information while establishing an important framework for justifying and developing research. Examination of the data regarding the theoretical foundations for the study indicates that a plethora of larger social and cultural issues have shaped the development of Saudi society. These issues are transposed against a more evolved environment in the Gulf States, where many Muslim countries have been able to balance the need for progress with strict religious traditions. These issues can also be transposed at the micro-level, reflecting the conflict and differences of opinion that have occurred within the female population living in Saudi Arabia. Integration of the macro- and the micro-levels

is necessary to creating a complete understanding of the variables impacting women in Saudi society including those currently participating in the labor force.

Using this integration as a foundation to develop a model for research, this study shows two areas that must be explored in order to understand the empowerment of Saudi working women: structural barriers and interpersonal barriers. Structural barriers refer to the social, cultural, and legal challenges that limit women's ability to participate in the workplace. The inability for women to drive, the need to acquire permission from guardians in making employment decisions, and the separation of genders in the workplace are among the most notable structural issues identified for evaluation. Interpersonal barriers refer to support (or lack thereof) offered by friends, families, and coworkers with regard to women's participation in the labor force. Clearly, the literature indicates that family support and professional support in the workplace have notable implications for Saudi women's employment. Evaluation of these issues is essential to acquiring a comprehensive understanding of what shapes empowerment for Saudi workingwomen.

The identification of structural and interpersonal barriers is necessary to establishing a framework for the current investigation; it is also necessary to consider whether overlaps exist among these barriers or if one type of barrier or variable is more prominent than others in shaping empowerment for Saudi working women. Structural and interpersonal variables both have implications for women and impact women in a continuous manner; thus, understanding how each type of barriers influences the lives of Saudi working women is essential to acquiring a better understanding of how Saudi women's empowerment is shaped.

2.5 Hypotheses and Propositions

The topic of empowerment for Saudi workingwomen has not been widely explored in the literature. The scarcity of empirical research examining the experiences of Saudi women in the context of the labor force indicates the need for explorative and descriptive investigations to better understand the variables influencing outcomes for this group. Given this dearth of research, the development of hypotheses that predict the outcomes for empowering Saudi workingwomen was not feasible. Rather, this research study required a set of questions or propositions that could facilitate a broader understanding of phenomenon under investigation—that is, the empowerment of Saudi workingwomen. As stated previously, the principle research question posed for this investigation was the following: “What variables serve as the basis to empower Saudi working women?” Research regarding empowerment in Saudi women has shown that women often do not use this term when referring to their own progress (Al-Hazzani, 2013). As a result, this research posited the necessity to explore women’s understanding of their participation in the labor force to uncover or identify the variables that shape their empowerment. Only by exploring this topic it was it possible to determine the underlying factors that serve as the impetus for empowerment.

Although the principle research question provided a general framework for developing the research, the literature review and theoretical background offered important support for directing the research. In particular, the literature has shown that both structural and interpersonal barriers can impede the ability of women to achieve occupational and career goals. Setting these realities against women’s motivation for seeking employment makes it possible to fit various pieces of the puzzle together and

acquire a comprehensive picture of empowerment (or lack thereof) for Saudi workingwomen. Thus, to construct a foundation for investigation, sub questions directed the current research; they were as follows:

- What motivates women to enter the workforce?
- What structural barriers (e.g., policy, cultural norms, access to education, etc.) support or impede women's ability to work in Saudi Arabia?
- What interpersonal variables (e.g., family support, social relationships, etc.) support or impede women's ability to work in Saudi Arabia?

2.6 Scope of the Study

In general, the scope of the study was quite broad, with an effort made to understand the phenomenon of empowerment for Saudi working women and to apply this knowledge to making recommendations that will advance women's position in society and facilitate improvements in women's ability to fully participate in the labor force. Whereas the research questions provided a foundation for directing data collection and analysis for the investigation, the results will be part of a broader effort to understand what steps are needed to effectively empower Saudi workingwomen. More precisely, data collected in this study were used as a broader foundation to answer the following questions:

- What reforms would be necessary to bring Saudi women into the workforce such that number of women in the workforce would be equal to the number of working women in other Islamic countries?
- What programs and methodologies have worked in other Muslim countries to integrate women workers into their economies?

- What is the impact of rising ultra-conservative interpretations of both Saudi law and religious analyses on the ability of women to move forward in society as workers and as equal members of society to achieve modernization equal to other nations?

2.7 Theoretical Assumptions and Limitations

This study examined empowerment as it related to Saudi working women; the aim of the study was to discern the factors that contribute to and detract from that empowerment. In developing this proposition for research, several theoretical assumptions were made that placed limitations on the study. First, this investigation of empowerment for Saudi workingwomen assumed that most of the impediments or support for empowerment could be found in the context of structural or interpersonal variables related to women's employment in Saudi Arabia. Second, the research assumed that the experiences of women with regard to empowerment would be similar. Third, the sample in the survey and the interview did not represent all Saudi workingwomen, and their experiences might have been unique to them. Finally, the research assumed that women had enough insight into their employment situation to assess the issues that were fostering or impeding their empowerment.

These assumptions created some limitations that had relevance given the lack of empirical research on the topic. For instance, assuming that most of the impediments to and supports for empowerment could be found in structural and interpersonal barriers limited the opportunity to uncover variables outside of these two areas. Additionally, the assumption that some uniformity in responses of women regarding their empowerment would exist prompted the researcher to identify similarities in the research, rather than

highlighting differences. Differences may be significant, however, and indicative of the spectrum of opinions regarding women's participation in the labor force. Further, the assumption that all women would have insight into issues that were impacting empowerment in their employment may have made it difficult to identify those women who did not fully understand the concept and its implications for their work lives.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design selected for this investigation was a descriptive and exploratory case study. The design was selected in an effort to comprehensively acquire and review data to better understand empowerment as it relates to Saudi workingwomen. A review of the case study approach in research revealed that this process involves an “in-depth study of one or more individuals, groups, social settings or events in the hope of revealing things that are true of all of us” (Jackson, 2011, p., 87). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) have further argued that the case study focuses on a bounded system to provide “a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply presenting them with abstract theories or principles” (p. 253).

Case studies are unique in allowing for the collection of data from a wide range of qualitative and quantitative sources (Buchanan & Bryman, 2009). Using a number of different resources to examine the same phenomenon enables the researcher to cover and explore the issue under investigation (Willis, 2008). Although the case study methodology presents some challenges with regard to overall structure, Swanson (2005) has identified six attributes to all case studies, which provide a foundation for grounding these approaches. According to Swanson (2005), all case studies are bounded, embedded, multivariate, multi-method, multidisciplinary, and multisite. Utilizing this foundation, case studies provide a means to

cope with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence . . . and as another results benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (Yin, 2003, p. 13-14)

In the current investigation, an effort was made to understand the issue of empowerment as it related to Saudi workingwomen. Research has consistently demonstrated a contradiction between the ability of Saudi women to acquire postsecondary education and the opportunity to apply their education and experience in practice (Le Renard, 2008). Despite these challenges, numerous examples of success for Saudi workingwomen do exist (Ahmad, 2011; Minkus-McKenna, 2009). Given the reality that Saudi working women can achieve success in the workplace, understanding what motivates and empowers this group must be considered if future generations of Saudi working women are to achieve higher levels of penetration in the workforce and higher levels of professional success. Thus, this study investigated a wide range of variables that could not initially be outlined for measurement and required a comprehensive approach for evaluation to make recommendations for improvement.

3.1.1 Data Collection

The case study methodology is unique in affording the researcher the ability to collect both qualitative and quantitative data for the study of a specific phenomenon (Rubin & Babbie, 2009). For the purposes of this study, several different qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. Each is reviewed briefly hereto provide both a theoretical justification for their use in the research and an overview of the procedures utilized for collecting data for the investigation.

3.1.2 Literature Review

To build the current case, the literature review presented in Chapter Two was utilized as a resource for informing the investigation. Williams and Vogt (2011) have argued that in the case study methodology, literature reviews are commonly used to provide a theoretical/conceptual foundation for building the research. The literature review undertaken for this investigation focused on current research and information regarding Saudi workingwomen. The focus of the literature review was not to specifically examine the issue of empowerment, but rather to acquire a broader picture of the conditions that exist for Saudi workingwomen. The literature review thus enabled the researcher to build a foundation for specific areas of data collection, including the development of the survey and the schedule for in-depth interviews.

3.1.3 Analysis of Secondary Data

Analysis of secondary data was also employed in order to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of Saudi workingwomen. Secondary data analysis is a common technique that can be utilized in case study research to bring together various types of data collected in the research (Farquhar, 2012). For the purposes of this investigation, secondary data regarding women's participation in the labor force in Saudi Arabia were acquired and utilized to inform a broader understanding of the topic. In addition, secondary data regarding women's participation in the labor force in the Middle East and outside of Saudi Arabia were utilized to find areas of divergence and to make recommendations for change.

3.1.4 Analysis of Documented Studies

In-depth analysis of documented studies was also an integral component of constructing the case study. Content analysis was utilized to compare and contrast investigations examining women's labor participation in Saudi Arabia. Silverman (2010) has provided a review of content analysis, noting that this approach requires the investigator to identify a unit of analysis to be uniformly applied across all information to determine the presence of specific themes in resources. In this study, the units of analysis identified from the literature review (e.g., structural and interpersonal barriers) were utilized for content analysis of existing studies on the topic of Saudi workingwomen. The content analysis was used to provide more depth to the units of analysis identified through the literature review.

3.1.5 Survey

A survey questionnaire was constructed to acquire basic data from Saudi women involved in the workforce at the time of the study. Surveys are a common data collection tool for acquiring quantitative data that can be both descriptive and correlational (Punch, 2003). For the purposes of the current investigation, the survey data collected were obtained in an effort to provide a descriptive overview of Saudi workingwomen. The survey was constructed based on pertinent issues identified in the literature review, which indicated specific types of barriers to Saudi workingwomen's empowerment (e.g., structural and interpersonal variables).

The sample for the survey was acquired through a snowball sampling procedure. A snowball sample requires the identification of an initial group of subjects for the investigation. These subjects are, in turn, utilized as a basis for referrals of additional

subjects that fit the inclusion criteria and may be willing to participate in the study (Babbie, 2011). An alumni contact sheet from different universities was used to identify women who had graduated and were employed in a wide range of fields. Referrals were made for additional Saudi workingwomen agreeing to participate in the survey. This effort yielded a total sample of $n = 120$. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

3.1.6 Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews were also utilized in this study. Qualitative interviews in case studies can provide more depth to variables identified through other data collection methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this investigation, qualitative interviews were conducted with 15 of the women who had initially participated in the survey. Following completion of the survey, all women were asked if they would like to participate in an in-depth interview about their experiences in the labor force. Thirty women agreed to participate in the interview. Given time constraints for data collection and analysis, 15 women were randomly selected for participation.

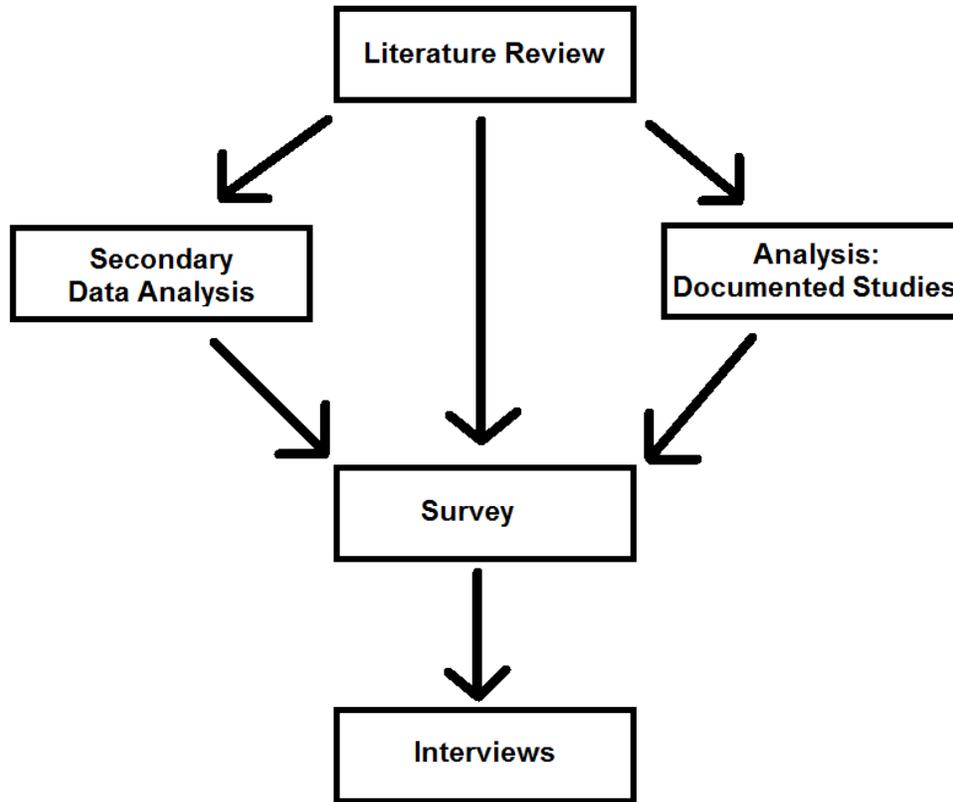
The interviews were transcribed within 48 hours of completion. The interview question schedule is provided in Appendix B. Questions for the interviews were based on findings from the literature review, content analysis of published studies, analysis of secondary data, and results from the survey.

3.1.7 Data Analysis

Figure 3.1, below, provides a schematic overview of how data analysis for this investigation was undertaken. Data analysis in case studies requires the coordination of a

number of different data sources that may not all be compatible (Swanborn, 2010). Data analysis for case studies also often involves using one data source to inform the development of another (Creswell, 2010). Figure 7 shows that data acquired from the literature review provided the basis for the study, informing analysis performed on secondary sources and documented studies. Insights garnered from the literature review, secondary sources, and analysis of documented sources allowed the construction of the survey questionnaire. Results from all of the data sources were then used to inform the development of the qualitative interview schedule.

Figure 3.7: Overview of Data Analysis Procedures



CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The data collected for this investigation are quite extensive and include information from multiple sources. Utilizing the diagram for data analysis provided in the previous chapter (Figure 7), the current chapter is organized based on the flow of the data collection process. Presentation of the results in this manner provides a structured method for understanding the development of the case study. This structure will also be important for reviewing propositions and conclusions presented in Chapter Five.

4.1 The Debate

The results of the theoretical debate and literature review in Chapter two are organized based on the research questions posed in Chapter One. These research questions provide a focus for the information such that salient aspects of the literature can be identified. Generally speaking, the literature review conducted for this investigation suggested that Saudi women face a notable paradox. On one hand, women have been given extensive privileges by the government when it comes to increased access to education (Al Munajjed, 2010). On the other hand, social and cultural norms deeply entrenched in the Shari'a and law continue to make it difficult for women to apply their education in the labor force (Al-Jeraisy, 2008). In spite of this contradiction, evidence suggests that many women have been successful in their efforts to advance in the labor force (Assad, 2012). When synthesized, the picture of Saudi workingwomen provided by the literature reveals notable challenges.

4.1.1 Motivation for Women to Enter the Workforce

Despite the scarcity of empirical research that effectively evaluates women's motivation for entering the workforce in Saudi Arabia, the literature reviewed in this investigation provided some important insights into why women in Saudi Arabia seek employment. For instance, the literature clearly indicates that a general spirit of liberalism in the country is giving way to new ideas and efforts to improve the status of women (Zuhur, 2005). This environment has produced social and political uprisings by women that have resulted in debates over their role in society (Bronson & Coleman, 2006). This process is meaningful as social and political discourse continues to evolve allowing women to embrace the potential for change.

The push toward a more liberal culture in Saudi Arabia has given rise to substantial changes in law, which can be viewed as having a positive impact on women's motivation to enter the workforce. Specifically, research indicates that over the course of the last three decades, the government has created extensive initiatives to educate women (Hamdan, 2005). This progress, coupled with economic conditions in the country (e.g., the growing population), has created a situation in which female employment has become viewed as an essential component of economic expansion (Al-Asmari, 2008). This support appears to provide a broad foundation upon which to encourage women to seek education and employment. Education serves as an additional foundation for liberating women and moving them toward work. But structural barriers in both government and culture continue to negatively impact outcomes for women seeking employment in Saudi Arabia.

4.1.2 Structural Barriers to Employment

The literature on structural barriers to women's employment in Saudi Arabia made clear that laws and cultural attitudes toward women's employment continue to create significant challenges for employment. The literature on women's participation in the labor force continues to acknowledge the structural barriers faced by women (Le Renard, 2008). Despite improvements in educational opportunities for women, government restrictions on employment continue to have notable implications for women seeking and acquiring employment. One specific example provided in the literature regards laws that require men and women to be physically separated in the workplace (Al-Jeraisy, 2008). Scholars have argued that these laws prevent many private companies from offering employment to women (Al-Jeraisy, 2008).

Perhaps most interesting about laws governing male and female behavior is that whereas the rigidity of law persists in the workplace, in other social spheres the laws have been notably relaxed (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Clearly, the liberalist agenda that has been established in the political sphere is having a positive impact on cultural views of gender. Still, changes in these areas have not widely translated into employment for women. As a result, the structural barriers that impede their advancement, are, to some extent, confined primarily to the world of work. Persistent social barriers (e.g., the inability of women to drive) have direct implications for women seeking and maintaining employment. Given the advancements made by women in the social and political spheres, women are—not surprisingly—challenging the status quo in the workplace to seek greater advancement, economic freedom, and professional success.

4.1.3 Interpersonal Barriers to Employment

Whereas the structural barriers to women's participation in the labor force indicate some of the challenges faced by women, they only reveal part of the picture regarding women's employment. The literature reviewed for this investigation also indicated significant interpersonal barriers that impact the ability of women to seek employment, even after acquiring a college education (Sadi & Al-Ghazali, 2010). A lack of family support in seeking and maintaining employment (Sadi & Al-Ghazali, 2010) coupled with negative and hostile attitudes toward women in the workplace (Al-Ahmadi, 2011) can make it difficult, if not impossible, for women to seek employment outside of the home.

Although the literature regarding interpersonal barriers to employment faced by Saudi women is not as robust or extensive as research regarding the structural barriers facing women, this dimension of the research is important. Clearly, interpersonal barriers will have a psychological impact on women, bearing on their ability and willingness to seek employment or to advance in their careers. Considering interpersonal barriers in the context of structural barriers allows us to understand the dynamic interaction of each of these sets of variables. Overcoming the interpersonal barriers to employment can be challenging for women in Saudi Arabia; however facing the structural barriers may help them defeat these variables and achieve progresses.

Changes in government policy and law regarding women's ability to access physical resources (travelling without permission, transportation, etc.) are essential to improving women's participation in the labor force. Although a more liberal cultural and social environment have resulted in the relaxation of social customs in domains outside

of the workplace, formal changes and mandates through law are necessary to forcing changes in employment practices regarding women.

Changing the interpersonal variables impacting women's employment may present a more intimidating challenge. Even if laws are established that enable women to drive and to work in the same physical space as their male counterparts, many members of society will not embrace these changes. As a result, women may still face negative attitudes from male coworkers and family members who want to preserve more traditional roles for women. Although interpersonal barriers may endure in spite of structural changes, women may be better able to cope with these interpersonal barriers with the structural barriers removed. Social changes and changes in individuals' attitudes toward women will require time. Women's ability and willingness to push for change in social norms is thus critical to overcoming these interpersonal barriers.

4.2 Secondary Data Analysis

Secondary data collected for this investigation were acquired from specific sources, and provided statistical insight into the economy of Saudi Arabia as well as data regarding labor force participation. Additionally, secondary data collected for this investigation included comparative data that provided insight into how Saudi Arabia varies in comparison to other Gulf Nations. The data captured were used to identify current trends and solutions based on outcomes achieved in neighboring Gulf Nations. The first data set includes information about Saudi Arabia's economy and its workforce participation "See Table 4.2, below".

Table 4.2: Key Economic Indicators for Saudi Arabia

Indicators for 2012	Result
Total Population	29,195,895
Saudi Population	19,838,488
Population Growth Rate	2.90%
Saudi Population Growth Rate	2.21%
GDP Growth Rate	6.81%
Total Unemployment Rate	5.5%
Saudi Unemployment Rate	12.10%

Data courtesy of: <http://www.cdsi.gov.sa/english/>.

Table 4.3: Quarterly Employment Rate by Sex (15 Years and Above), 2012

	Total			Non-Saudi			Saudi		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
First Quarter	94.3	80.2	96.8	99.5	99.1	99.6	87.8	66.0	93.1
Second Quarter	94.4	79.2	97.2	99.8	99.7	99.8	87.9	64.9	93.6
Third Quarter	94.5	78.7	97.3	99.9	99.9	99.9	87.9	64.3	93.9
Fourth Quarter	94.6	78.8	97.4	99.9	99.8	99.9	88.0	64.3	94.0

Data courtesy of: <http://www.cdsi.gov.sa/english/>.

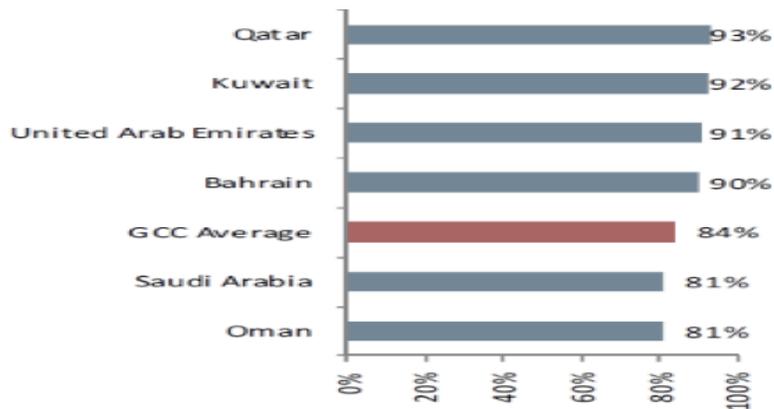
Table 4.4: Quarterly Unemployment Rate by Sex (15 Years and Above), 2012

	Total			Non-Saudi			Saudi		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
First Quarter	5.7	19.8	3.2	0.45	0.88	0.40	12.2	34.0	6.9
Second Quarter	5.6	20.8	2.8	0.20	0.34	0.18	12.1	35.1	6.4
Third Quarter	5.5	21.3	2.7	0.08	0.07	0.08	12.1	35.7	6.1
Fourth Quarter	5.4	21.2	2.6	0.08	0.18	0.07	12.0	35.7	6.0

Data courtesy of: <http://www.cdsi.gov.sa/english/>.

The second set of data presented for this investigation were compiled by Al-Masah Capital Limited (GCC women, 2011) and provide an overview of women's advancement in countries that belong to the Gulf Cooperation Council. These data demonstrate how Saudi Arabia fits into the larger context of the Gulf Nations in terms of employment, education, and the advancement of women. This information will be helpful not only for providing a more integral understanding of the position of women in Saudi Arabia but also for identifying specific states that have made progress advancing women's participation in the labor force. Thus, when combined with other data from this investigation, this secondary information will be helpful for identifying potential solutions to improve outcomes for workingwomen in Saudi Arabia.

Figure 4.8: Adult Literacy Rates among Women in the GCC, 2011



Refer to:

- Figure 1- Chapter II
Female and Male College Graduates in GCC Countries, 2011
- Figure 5- Chapter II
Labor Force Participation Rates for GCC Countries: 2001, 2009
- Figure 6- Chapter II
Employment of Saudi Women in Public/Private Sectors, 2011

Additional statistics pulled from the literature provide further insight into the status of women in the labor force in Saudi Arabia and are worth noting here; specifically, statistics indicate that:

- 57% of all university graduates in Saudi Arabia are women; however, women constitute only 12% of the labor force (Aguirre et al., 2012).
- Trends in female employment have been stable over the course of the last decade, with women consistently having an unemployment rate three times that of men (Saudi Arabia, 2009).
- Saudi males compose 42% of the labor force whereas foreign males compose 43% of the labor force (Saudi Arabia, 2009).

- “78.3% of unemployed women are university graduates, and more than 1,000 have a doctorate degree. By contrast, 76% of unemployed men have only a secondary education or less” (Al Munajjed, 2010).
- Most of the jobs held by women in Saudi Arabia are in education, with 180,122 women filling these positions (Al-Jeraisy, 2008).
- The total number of women working in the private sector in Saudi Arabia is 11,142 or 0.68% of the total workforce (Al-Jeraisy, 2008).
- In 2010, 40% of family-owned companies were operated by women; women owned 30% of all brokerage accounts; and women owned 10% of all real estate management business in major cities as well as 20% of all commercial businesses (Advancement of, 2010).

4.3 Analysis of Documented Studies

Although empirical data on Saudi workingwomen are limited, a handful of studies published in the several years provide some insight into the topic. Drawing on these studies and the issues noted from the literature review (e.g., structural and interpersonal barriers), Table 4.5 shows basic information about each study and the insights garnered with regard to barriers to women’s work as they relate to the literature review and to new information on the topic.

Table 4.5: Information from Documented Studies

Authors (Year)	Subject of the Study	Structural and Interpersonal Barriers	Other Insights
Al-Ahmadi (2011)	The subject of this investigation was an examination of challenges facing female leaders working in Saudi Arabia. The study included a survey of 160 women working in leadership positions in the country to understand key issues that make it difficult for them to advance in their careers.	This study suggests that the structural barriers to employment (e.g., centralization of decision making and the lack of authority in decision making in society and the organization) were noted to be more significant barriers to women's advancement than interpersonal barriers. Women noted having considerable support from their partners and families when seeking to advance their careers.	Other barriers to women's advancement in their careers were also noted in the study. In particular, a lack of preparation for the world of work (e.g., a lack of empowerment to handle the work environment) as well as a general lack of experience also contributed to problems experienced by women. A lack of role models, mentors, and organizational supports for advancement were also noted as barriers. These issues were ranked above interpersonal barriers to advancement.
Baki (2004)	This empirical investigation included a case study examining the current methods of education in Saudi Arabia and their effects on the development of employment for women. The author drew information from a wide range of sources to demonstrate that government efforts to improve education for women are being circumvented as a result of the maintenance of segregation in education.	Structural barriers noted in this research relate directly to the law and cultural views on women's participation in society. The author argued that although the government has taken some steps to empower women, the process is being undertaken in a context that limits the ability of women to become fully integrated members of society. What occurs in education and employment in the public sector is still focused on segregation, creating a general cultural environment that continues to support the segregation of women in employment.	The results provided by Baki demonstrate how endemic trends in government policy and practice continue to shape cultural, and social outcomes for women. Despite ongoing efforts to improve the status of women, the government continues to carry this process out in a controlled manner, which continues to have implications for how individuals, companies, and women view employment.

Authors (Year)	Subject of Study	Structural and Interpersonal Barriers	Other Insights
Calvert, J.R., & Al-Shetawi, A.S. (2002)	The focus of this study was to understand the barriers to women's participation in the private sector of Saudi Arabia. To explore this topic, the authors surveyed private sector business managers in four large cities in Saudi Arabia.	Pressures from society and existing government policy regarding the employment of women were noted in this study; however, the results suggest that these issues played less of a role in shaping decision making for private sector organizations when it came to hiring women.	The most notable issue impacting women's employment in the private sector is a lack of skills and training to acquire jobs in private companies. As reported by the authors of this study, "Government efforts to train and educate Saudi women have been considerable, however, female education has lacked the specialization required by the private sector" (p. 121).
Hutchings, K., Metcalfe, D., & Cooper, B.K. (2010)	The authors of this study examined barriers to women's participation in international management opportunities. The authors argued that although considerable research has been conducted examining why Western women do not choose international management assignments, there is a dearth of research that examines this issue in Saudi Arabian women. A survey of 97 midlevel female managers working in Saudi Arabia was employed.	Structural barriers noted in this research included a lack of opportunities for women to engage in this type of work, a lack of organizational supports to enable women to seek these positions, and prejudice against female leaders. Experience and education to fill these roles was also noted as a significant issue of concern. Respondents believed that more training and education programs to prepare women should be provided by the government.	Although structural barriers to seeking international management jobs was clearly an issue of concern, the results provided in this research also indicate a general lack of desire on the part of women to seek these positions. Although this lack may indicate that women have no desire to fill these jobs, it may also mean that women face so many barriers that this work appears undesirable to them. Clarification of these issues is important; however, the authors did not provide the needed information to make the distinction.

Authors (Year)	Subject of the Study	Structural and Interpersonal Barriers	Other Insights
Omair, K. (2008)	The current study utilized a thematic and meta-analysis of existing research on women and management in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of the paper was to provide an overview view of women in the labor force and in management positions in Saudi Arabia, identifying common trends and the need for further research on the topic.	In this investigation, current government policy was noted to be a significant barrier to the advancement of women working in the labor force. Omair argued that the current research does suggest that society and men, in general, have exhibited a more favorable attitude toward women, making it easier for them to advance in their positions.	Summarizing the wide range of variables that were noted to contribute to the success of women in the labor force, Omair made the following observation: "Women who have successfully reached top management positions stated that the driving force behind their success included family support, educational opportunities, academic success, job opportunities, determination, inner drive for success, qualities and attributes conducive to successful management, the ability to handle multiple tasks and self-confidence" (p. 115).
Ross, M. (2008)	In this investigation, the author took a critical look at the structure of society in Saudi Arabia, noting the participation of women in the political sphere. The author utilized qualitative and quantitative data to demonstrate that oil continues to drive society in Saudi Arabia, limiting women's participation in all spheres of life. This reality, in turn, negatively influences the ability of women to have a marked impact on society, politics, and culture.	Structural barriers to women's participation in the labor force noted by this author stem from government policies, that impact women's ability to be autonomous. However, the author was able to demonstrate that change does not occur because of an economy, which makes it easier for women to stay at home. Without the economic impetus to work outside of the home women are not participating in vital spheres of influence, which could improve outcomes for them.	The insight provided in this investigation makes it possible to understand a cyclical pattern of women's participation in politics and the economy and the negative influence that these factors have had on changing discourse with regard to current policies that limit women's participation in the labor force and advancement in their careers.

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Authors (Year)	Subject of the Study	Structural and Interpersonal Barriers	Other Insights
Sadi, M.A., & Al-Ghazali, B.M. (2009)	This investigation sought to examine the particular motivations of and challenges facing women operating their own businesses in Saudi Arabia. The researchers surveyed 350 participants to acquire a basic understanding of women's perspective on entrepreneurship.	Structural barriers to owning a business were noted by women and included the following: a lack of market information, lack of government support, and lack of coordination among government departments. The authors also found that women faced difficulties in their businesses because of negative attitudes on the part of society and oligopolistic attitudes of investors.	Although this study highlights many of the barriers that exist for women business owners in Saudi Arabia, it also elucidates some of the personal and intrinsic variables that motivate women to pursue these opportunities. In particular, the authors reported that self-achievement is a significant motivator for many female business owners. Although self-achievement is the central issue noted, the authors tied it to a number of other variables, noting, "These relate to independence, self-fulfillment, autonomy and self-achievement, being one's own boss, using creative skills, doing enjoyable work, entrepreneurial drive and desire for wealth, social status and power" (p. 4).

4.4 Survey Analysis

A survey was formulated based on insight gained from the literature review, analysis of secondary data, and in-depth analysis of published studies. The results of the survey are presented here in narrative and graphic format. The survey included a total of 120 women employed in the labor force in Saudi Arabia. Mean age for the group was 31.3 with a majority (97.5%) reporting having a bachelor's degree or higher. Profile for field of work included the following: medical (30.8%), banking and finance (26.7%), education (22.5%), sales and marketing (10.8%), other (7.5%) and business (7.5%). A majority of respondents (59%) reported working in the public sector and 40% had more than seven years of experience in their field.

When asked about reasons for participation in the labor force 46.6% noted a need to prove self-reliance whereas 41.6% indicated the need for a secure source of income. The three most frequently cited challenges in the workplace included: social and cultural barriers (49.2%), government regulation (48.3%), and a lack of time for social responsibilities (40.8%). These challenges were attributed to gaps in the Saudi labor law (43.3%), a conservative perspective (33.3%), and society's denial of rights for women (20.8%). When asked whether recent government reforms had improved outcomes for women in the workplace, 66% responded affirmatively, and 76% reported feeling that women's participation in the workforce was effective.

Additionally, 64% believed that other fields needed to be opened up to women in Saudi Arabia; for example, judiciary, law, politics, and international affairs. Whereas 70% disagreed that the experience of Saudi women was immature because of its timeliness. Most of the women surveyed (95%) argued that women's work in Saudi

society was a pressing matter at the present time. Further, 87% of those surveyed believed that women's employment would help bridge the current gap of unemployment among Saudis in the country. Finally, 84% of women surveyed noted that they felt fulfilled as a result of the current work. Graphic representations of the data are in Charts 4.1–4.15.

Chart 4.1: Age of Survey Respondents (n = 120)



Chart 4.2: Level of Education for Respondents (n = 120)

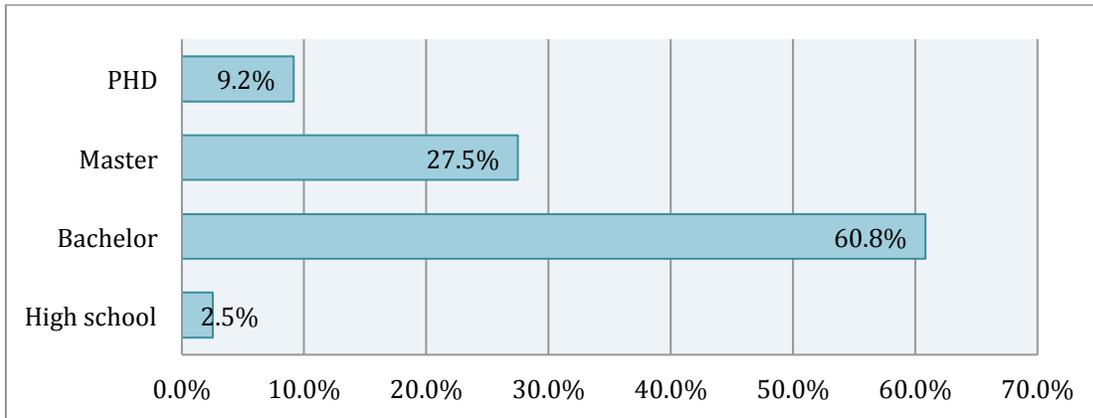


Chart 4.3: Field of Work for Respondents (n = 120)

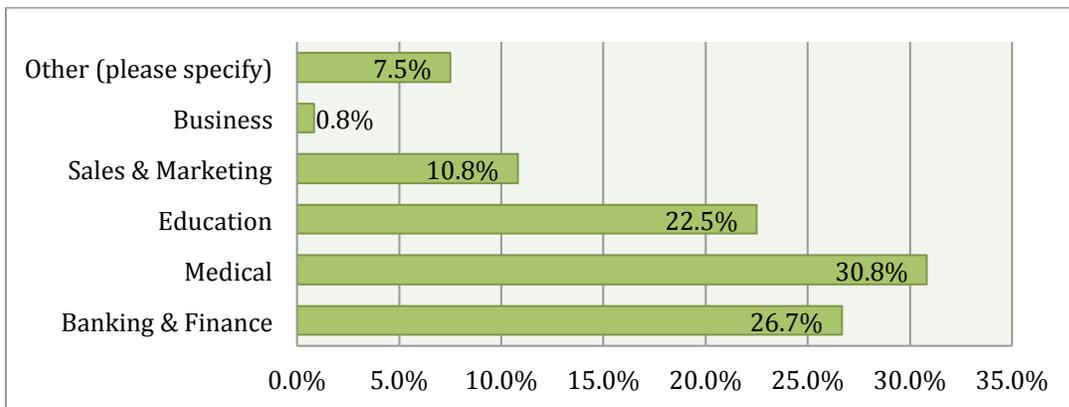


Chart 4.4: Work Sector of Respondents (n = 120)

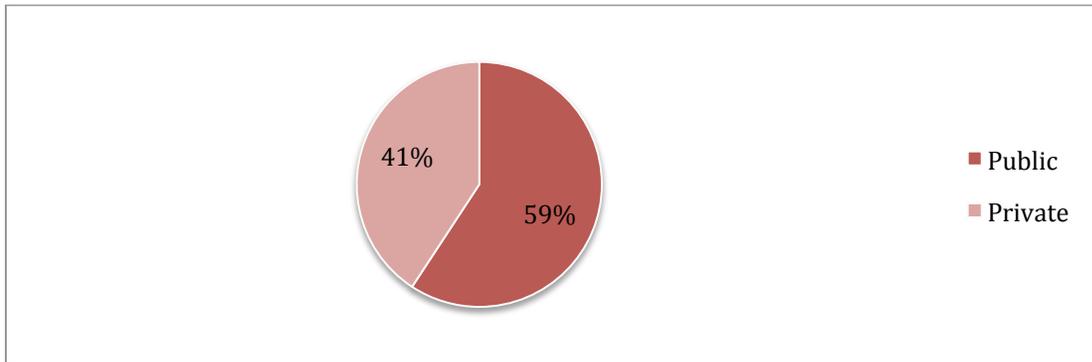


Chart 4.5: Years of Experience for Respondents (n = 120)

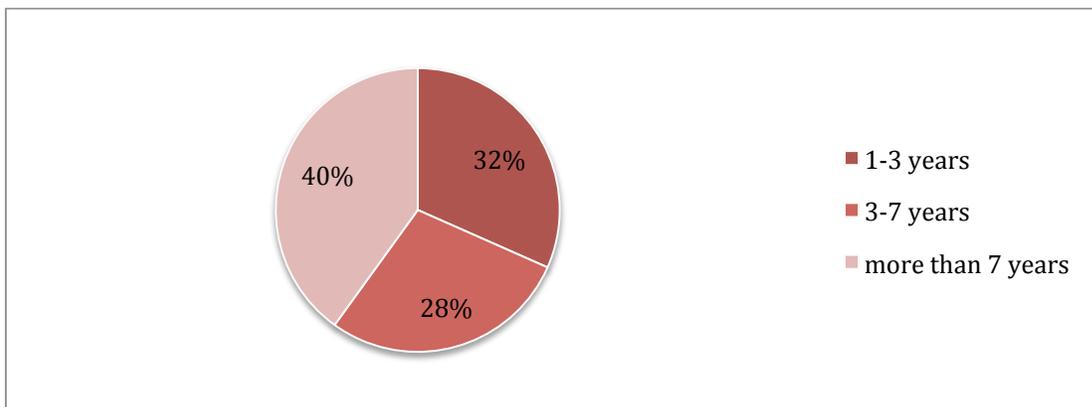


Chart 4.6: Primary Reason for Participation in the Workforce

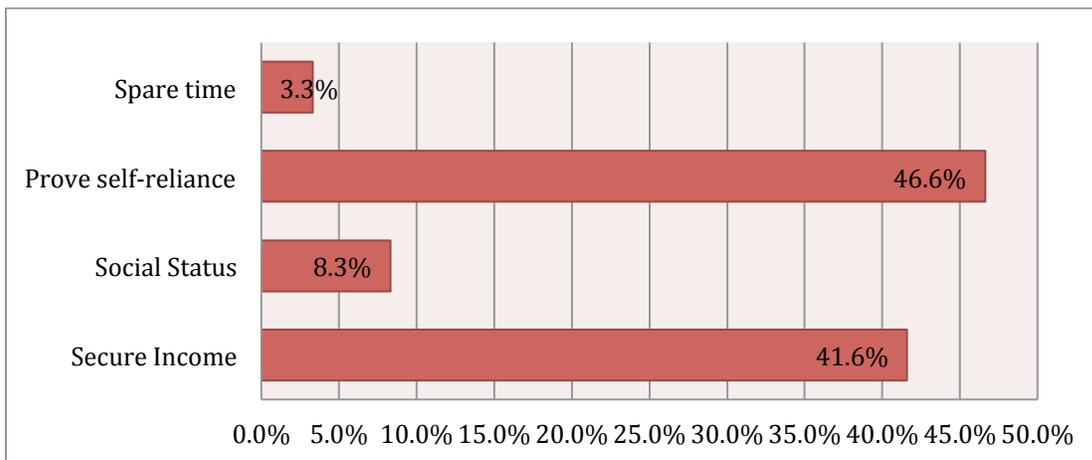


Chart 4.7: Top Three Challenges Faced at Work

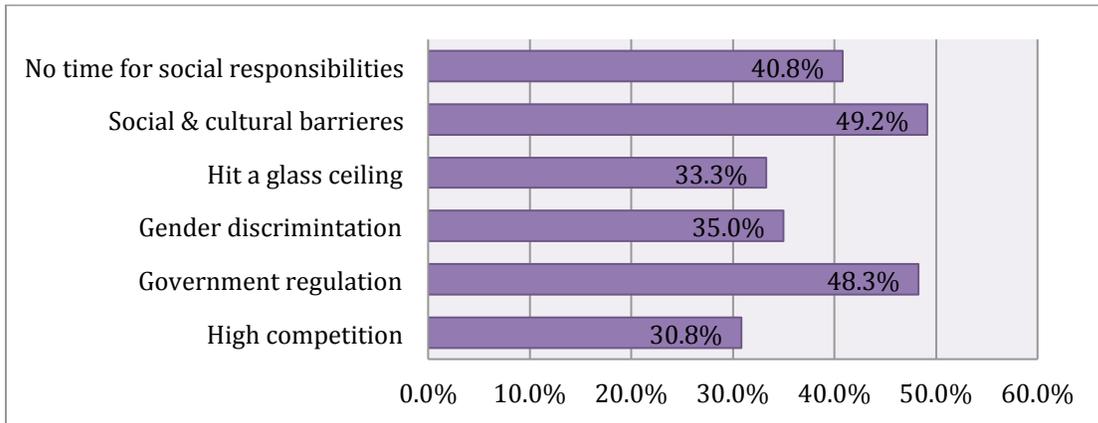


Chart 4.8: Reasons for Work Challenges

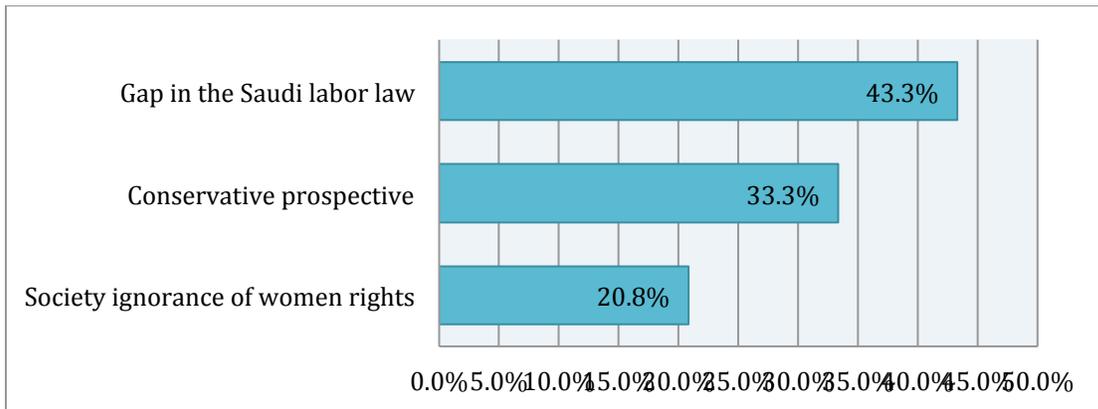


Chart 4.9: Effect of Recent Government Reforms

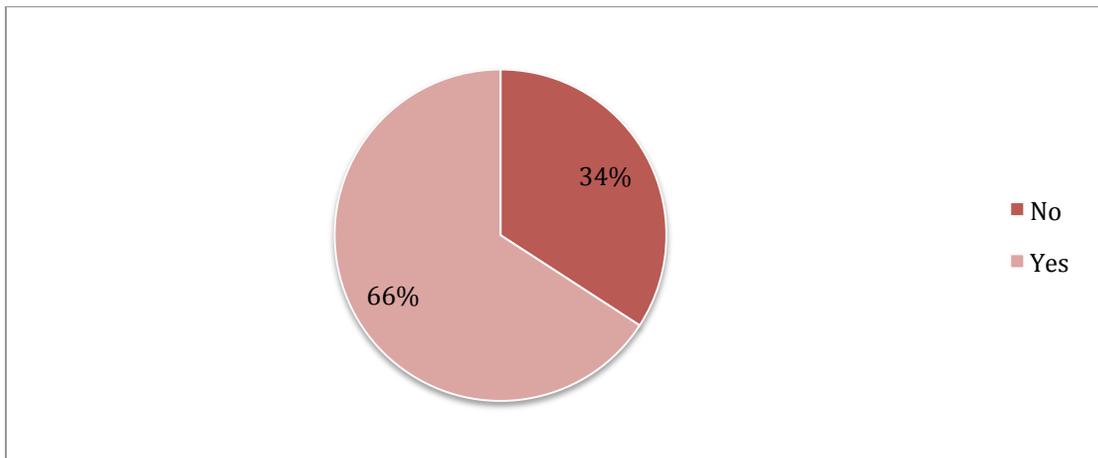


Chart 4.10: Thoughts about the Participation of Women in Saudi Workforce

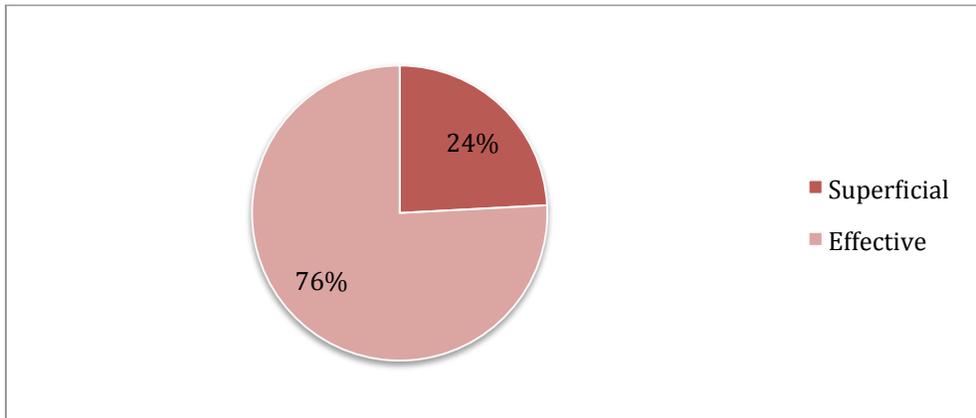


Chart 4.11: Need for Other Fields to be Open

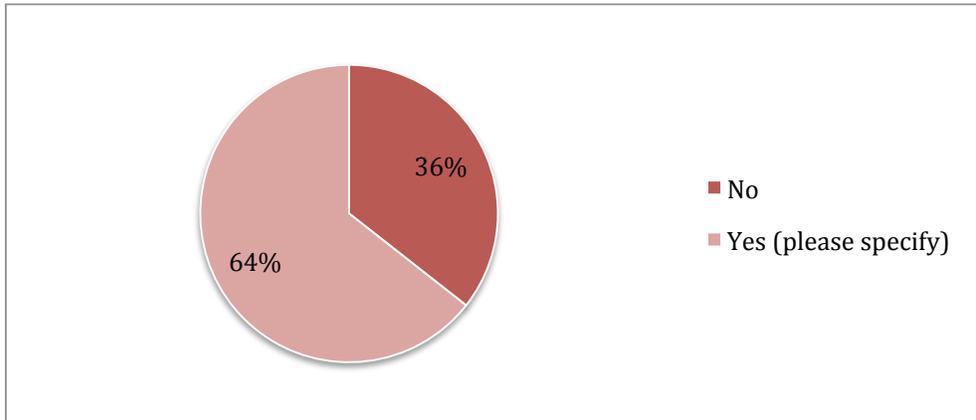


Chart 4.12: Experiences of Saudi Women Immature because of Timeliness

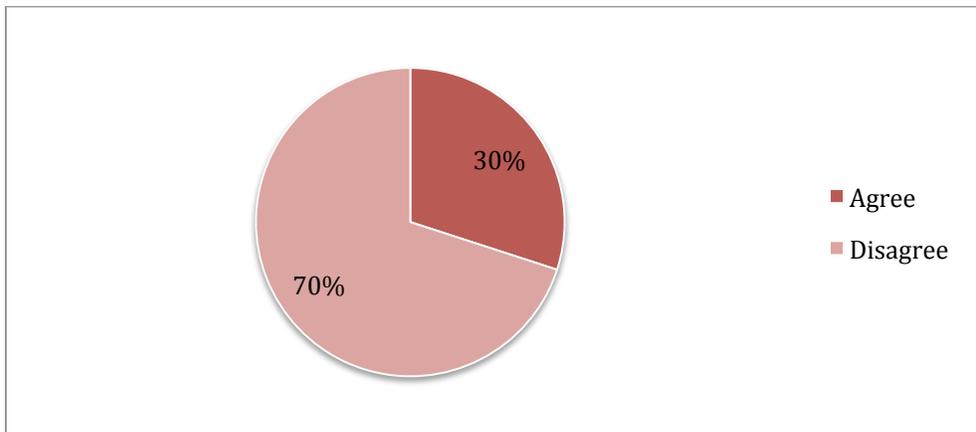


Chart 4.13: Urgent Need of Women's Work

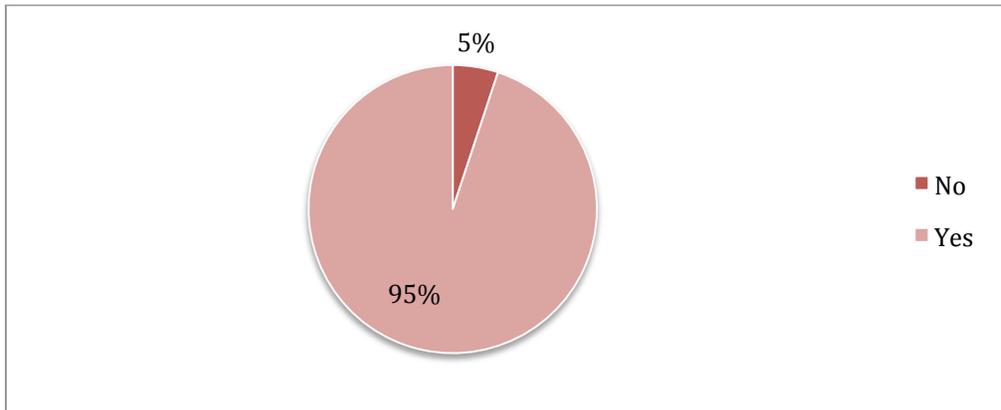


Chart 4.14: Women's Work to Fill Gap in Unemployment

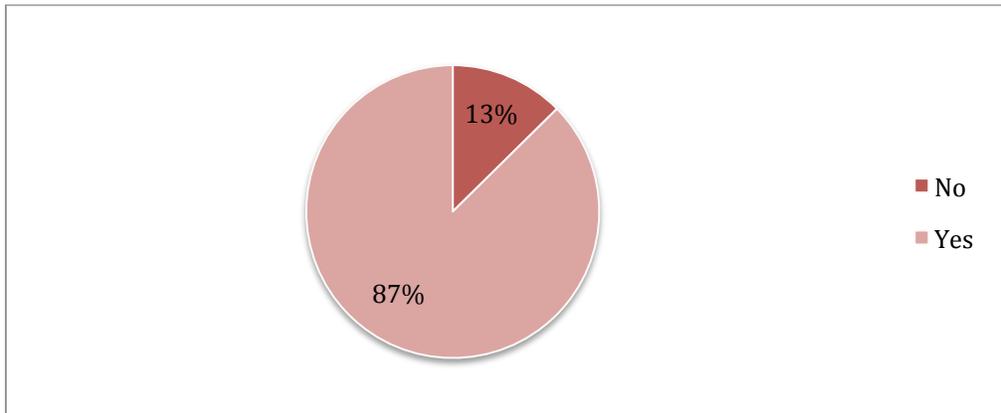
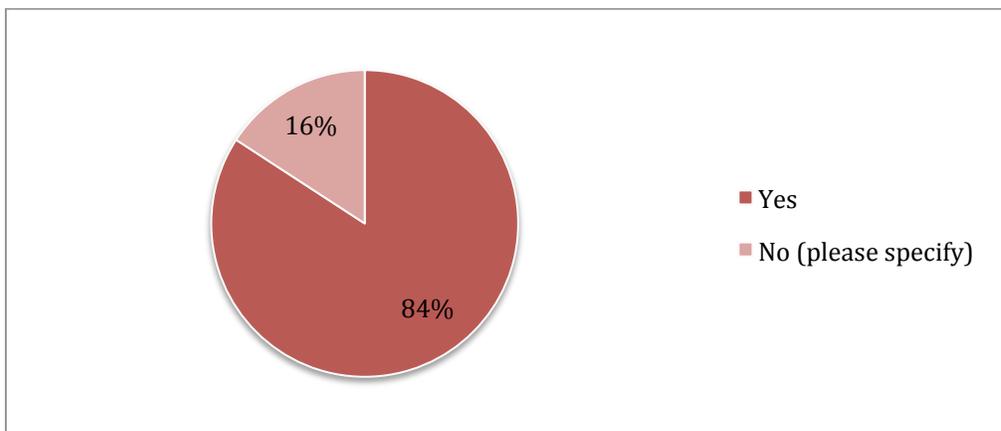


Chart 4.15: Feeling Rewarded in Work



4.5 Qualitative Interviews Analysis

As previously noted, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 15 of the women who completed the survey. The interview question schedule can be found in Appendix B. Information for this section is arranged based on subheadings that reflect the content of the questions posed during the interview.

4.5.1 Government Rules

The first question posed to respondents concerned the government and current laws impacting women in the workplace. All of the women involved in the study agreed that government restrictions on women's participation in the labor force were an impediment to advancing in the workforce. Twelve of the 15 respondents noted feeling overwhelmed by the physical barriers that existed with regard to making it to work each day. As one respondent explained:

Everyday it's something new. I have to make sure that I have transportation for work that all of my family responsibilities are met and I behave properly in the office. And when I say behave properly, I am referring to the fact that what I am allowed to do inside my house and in public are completely different than what I am allowed to do at work. The rules are so hard to follow at times. (Respondent 2)

General themes garnered from coding the interviews regarding this question included frustration, feeling overwhelmed, fatigue, and anger. Eleven of the respondents believed that the government was behind the times and was not being responsive to the changes that had occurred in society. For many, the disconnect between government policy and spheres of women's lives outside of the workplace had created notable conflict when these women were at work.

4.5.2 Family Support

With the exception of two women interviewed for this investigation, all reported significant family support. As one respondent explained, “My husband thinks that it is great that I am working and he does everything that he can to make sure that I am able to get to work” (Respondent 8). Although married women reported the highest levels of support—from their husbands and children, unmarried women noted that their parents were generally supportive of their efforts to seek and maintain employment: “My mom is happy for me because she believes that I am lucky. She wanted to have a job, but was never allowed to do so. My father also supports me, but not the extent that my mother does” (Respondent 10).

In general, most of the respondents believed that their family’s support was essential to their success. “If my father didn’t help me I would never be able to follow my dreams” (Respondent 14). Although many of the women expressed gratitude for the support given to them by their families, five of the women noted feeling like they were continually dependent on someone else for their success. “I just wish I could do this on my own. It seems like something that women in other countries do on their own. I mean its work. I should not need this much help to work” (Respondent 12). Thus, the general themes uncovered from coding indicated that although women felt a high level of support from their family members, their gratitude was mixed with some level of resentment that this type of help was consistently needed just so they could work.

4.5.3 Attitudes of Coworkers

Attitudes of coworkers were another important issue reported in the literature and included in the survey. When asked about coworker attitudes, 11 of the women noted that

feeling generally supported by their male coworkers. The challenge, according to these women, was other females working in the same organization. One respondent reported that women in her organization were very judgmental and often gossiped about other women in the workplace. She stated that if a female in the workplace viewed your behavior as incorrect, she would work on getting all of the other female workers in the organization to shun you (Respondent 6). This process, according to the respondent, had a detrimental impact on moral and psychological well-being, making it even more difficult to go to work. She explained thusly:

It's not enough that we have to be so mindful of our behaviors or that we have to get permission from our father or husbands to work. When we get to work we also have to worry about other women seeing us as a treat and making our lives much more difficult than they need to be. I sometimes think that women are their own worst enemies. (Respondent 15)

Many of those who had not experienced negative attitudes from male coworkers argued that the issue had not caused considerable distress. One simply remarked, "It's like these poor men have not grown-up" (Respondent 1). Women in these positions often viewed men's negative attitudes as an annoyance that was simply part of their jobs. Although the respondents noted that it would be nice not to have to cope with this reality as part of their work environment, women in these positions argued that they were willing to put up with the "antics" of men in order to fulfill their dreams. For these women, the personal satisfaction of having a job and a steady paycheck were more important than the problems encountered as a result of the behaviors of male employees. In general, women

experiencing distress had more difficulty with female coworkers in the workplace than male coworkers.

4.5.4 Needed Skills/Education

Having the needed skills and/or education required for a specific job was noted in the literature as an issue of concern for employers seeking to hire women. When asked this question, 13 of the respondents replied that although they were well prepared through their university education, some challenges had presented themselves as they were making the transition to employment. This issue was particularly important for women who had attempted to advance in their careers. In many instances, the women were told they did not have the right skills for the job; in others, women found it difficult to overcome psychological barriers to advancement because they recognized that they did not have the right skills and would not be able to acquire them.

The results obtained with regard to this question demonstrated a true weakness for Saudi workingwomen. Although many women reported a strong sense of confidence as a result of their education, many believed that some of the more specific skills needed for them to be effective in the workplace had not been fully taught in the classroom. Although some were hopeful that they would be able to acquire these skills as a result of their employment, many women lacked the self-confidence to believe that they had already acquired these skills. One respondent provided a summary of her experiences, highlighting the challenges she felt in this area:

The skills that we need can be developed. However, because we are often segregated from those that have these skills we are never given the opportunity to develop them. How can you learn from your environment when your environment

is filled with women that have the same educational and skill level as you do? It's so frustrating at times because I want to do more, I want to advance; yet I am consistently denied these opportunities because I do not have the specific skills that the organization is looking for. (Respondent 9)

4.5.5 Experience

Similar issues were noted with regard to the issue of experience. Fourteen of the 15 respondents argued that they were unable to acquire the experience that they needed to advance in their careers. Segregation in the workplace and a lack of opportunity to gain experience as part of education were both noted by women completing the interview. In general, women cited the desire to have a broader scope of experiences during both their education and in the workplace. However, opportunities for professional growth were limited. Many women believed that this issue would be an ongoing impediment to their ability to advance professionally. One respondent cited these barriers as the reason she was starting her own business.

Although respondents expressed a need for a broader scope of experiences to advance their careers, many women also noted a desire to expand their range of experiences for personal reasons as well. "Would anyone like to stay in a job where they did the same thing all the time and never had an opportunity to learn? They need to consider this when they make policy" (Respondent 7). Overall, respondents expressed a high level of dissatisfaction and frustration over this aspect of their employment; however, nine of the respondents noted that this would not be enough for them to quit their jobs. Many believed that with enough persistence they could change the status quo

over time, enabling them to move forward in their careers. Optimism and resiliency were thus two themes identified with regard to this issue.

4.5.6 Personal Motivations

Respondents were also asked about their personal motivations for seeking employment. Eight of the women interviewed noted that they sought employment for financial stability, whereas the rest reported that they sought employment in an effort to find a higher level of personal fulfillment. Themes such as independence and autonomy were consistently noted across the interview transcripts. In general, women wanted the ability to work to provide their lives with more depth, to have new experiences, and to have the same opportunities as their fathers, brothers, and husbands. Women believed that education and work would afford them an opportunity to be fulfilled and to experience all of things that men experience each day:

For me, I just wanted more. I love being a wife and mother. I love being at home. But it just isn't everything. I want to know what else is out there. I want to see things. I want to do things. I want to have the same abilities as my husband and I want the opportunity to contribute to my community and my world outside of what my gender says. (Respondent 11)

In general, responses to this question showed considerable hope, as many of the women believed that their employment was a pathway toward a better future. For women seeking employment for financial reasons, the responses were similar. Most of the women believed that they lived very comfortable lifestyles, but they also worried about the changing economic conditions in Saudi Arabia and how those issues would impact them and their families over the long-term. One woman noted that her father had died when

she was 16, which had placed some financial strain on her family. This respondent noted that she was afraid that if something happened to her husband, she would need her job and her income to ensure that her family would not have to struggle.

5.5.7 Other Issues

The final question for the interview focused on any other issues that women wanted to discuss with regard to their employment. Although the answers from each respondent were notably different, six respondents noted organizational barriers to their career success. These respondents believed that their organizations were inherently biased against women and, in fact, worked to ensure that women and men remained segregated in the workplace. In addition, four of these women noted feeling intimidated by their organizations. Specifically, women were afraid of changing norms and views of appropriate behavior: “What is appropriate and acceptable one day may not be appropriate and acceptable the next. This really keeps you guessing when it comes to knowing how to work with others so that you do not lose your job” (Respondent 12).

Table 4.6: Respondents Background from interviews

Respondents	Age	Years of experience	Background	Job position
1	30-40	3-7 years	Master degree	Portfolio manager
2	20-30	1-3 years	Bachelor degree	Banker
3	30-40	More than 7 years	Bachelor degree	Gov. affairs representative
4	20-30	3-7 years	Bachelor degree	HR officer
5	20-30	3-7 years	Bachelor degree	Financial analyst
6	30-40	More than 7 years	Bachelor degree	PR representative
7	20-30	3-7 years	Master degree	Financial auditor
8	30-40	More than 7 years	Bachelor degree	Banker
9	40-45	More than 7 years	Master degree	School principle
10	20-30	1-3 years	Master degree	PR representative
11	40-45	More than 7 years	Bachelor degree	Teacher
12	30-40	More than 7 years	PHD	Dentist
13	30-40	3-7 years	PHD	Psychologist
14	30-40	3-7 years	PHD	Dentist
15	30-40	3-7 years	Bachelor degree	Risk management specialist

CHAPTER FIVE

PROPOSITIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Synthesis/Integration of the Findings

Results of this investigation were provided in Chapter Four; as such, Chapter Five provides some synthesis to the research such that the research questions proposed in Chapter One can be answered. Although various data collection techniques used in the case study were intended to provide a foundation for data collection from the surveys and qualitative in-depth interviews, the data gathered from all areas of the study provide some important insight into the issue of empowerment and Saudi working women. Specifically, the data collected in this investigation indicate the following:

1. There are relevant structural barriers to women's employment that primarily perpetuate restrictions on women's ability to maintain employment (e.g., needing permission from men, not being able to drive a car, etc.)
2. Structural barriers also exist with regard to organizational policies such as maintaining a segregated workplace.
3. Interpersonal barriers also impact women's employment and stem from negative attitudes of family members, male coworkers, and organizations in general.
4. Women's motivation to enter the workforce has been enhanced by efforts to educate women and by a more liberalist social and political agenda that enables women to have more social freedom and autonomy.

5. Women seek employment for a wide range of reasons; most prominent among them are the desire for self-fulfillment and the desire to become financially stable.
6. Women are able to be more successful in employment when they have the support of their families and self-confidence in their abilities.

The impact of these issues can be seen in the larger macro-economic data collected regarding the economy and progress made by women in Saudi society. Despite having a robust population growth rate (2.21% for Saudis; see Table 4.1) and a robust GDP growth rate (8.63%; see Table 4.1), women's employment remains low (64.3%; see Table 4.2) and unemployment remains high (35.7%). Even though the government has made considerable progress for women's education, statistics regarding literacy rates for GCC women indicate that Saudi Arabia (81%; see Figure 4.1) lags behind the average literacy rate for women in the GCC (84%). This finding may suggest that additional efforts are needed to provide women with opportunities for education and, hence, employment. This finding also lends credence to the idea that women may not be fully prepared for their positions in the workforce (Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, 2002).

The statistics regarding employment and unemployment for women are incongruous with what has been noted regarding female and male levels of education in Saudi Arabia (see Figure 2.1). At the time of this study, 57% of college graduates in Saudi Arabia were female, indicating that women have a clear educational advantage over men. Data from the content analysis of documented studies as well as from the interviews suggest that despite having higher levels of education, women may face challenges in acquiring the skills and experiences needed to secure employment and

advance in their careers (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Women continue to make gains in total labor force participation rates (see Figure 2.5); however, women in Saudi Arabia continue to lag behind other nations with regard to this specific issue (see Figure 5). Participation in the private sector is also a concern, as private companies tend to employ far fewer women than public agencies (see Figure 2.6). Given that government policies and practices are responsible for much of what occurs with regard to women's employment, the government's ability to offer jobs to women helps explain why so many women are employed in the public sector.

Data collected for this investigation also indicate a general cyclical trend in which policies adopted by the government have perpetuated endemic cultural and social attitudes toward women. Whereas social attitudes toward women appear to be changing as a result of political efforts to educate women and offer them jobs in the public sector, the expansion of positive attitudes toward women has not been fully embraced by the organization operating in the private sector. These organizations still enforce rigid structures governing the social behavior of women despite the fact that women have more freedom in public spheres. These issues continue to have implications for women seeking to acquire the skills and experiences needed to advance in their careers.

Finally, the qualitative interviews yielded some insights that were not found in other resources regarding Saudi workingwomen. The interviews demonstrated the impact of negative attitudes on women, specifically on their self-confidence. Although women's own negative attitudes have been discussed by one scholar (Fatany, 2007), the issue is not widely examined in the literature. As a result, there is clearly an impetus to examine differences in women's opinions and attitudes. Understanding this information may be

critical to addressing self-confidence issues, which can impact women's ability to seek advancement in their careers.

5.2 Answers to Research Questions

With the findings synthesized, we may now answer the research questions posed at the outset of this investigation. Because the primary research question—What variables serve as the basis to empower Saudi workingwomen? —Was to be answered through three sub questions, answers to these questions will be considered first. By thoroughly exploring each of the questions in the context of the data collected for this study, we may provide a definitive answer regarding the variables that empower Saudi workingwomen and make recommendations for improving outcomes without violating the Shari'a and law in Saudi Arabia.

What Motivates Women to Enter the Workforce?

Data captured in this investigation suggest that there are both push and pull factors that motivate women to enter the workforce. Women are provided with increased opportunities for education (Doumato, 2000). The Saudi government has not only expanded women's access to education but also created policy that allows Saudi women to acquire a large number of positions in the public sector (Alnory, 2000). Although these jobs typically follow gender stereotypes—such as schoolteachers, nurses, and so forth—they have provided a foundation for women to acquire gainful employment (Sekhaily, 2001). These structural factors continue to make it possible for women to seek employment in Saudi Arabia.

Even though women have been given notable opportunities for employment, the reality of this process is that the government has also hindered women's employment

growth to some extent (Gandorah, 1996). Current programs, which favor foreign employment, cannot be overlooked in evaluating government policy (Scully, 2010). However, what appears to be more of an issue of concern are the general social policies regarding women's behavior (Hamdan, 2012). For instance, laws that prohibit women from working or that require women to obtain permission from their guardian to work have had significant implications for the ability of women to seek and maintain employment (Alsuwaigh, 1989). Although some evidence suggests that a more liberalist agenda in the country will eventually give rise to improvements for women (Lidstone, 2005), achieving change remains a notable challenge.

Although some structural supports in place make it easier for women to enter the workforce, interpersonal or intrinsic factors play a role in shaping outcomes in this area. In particular, the current evidence suggests that women's desires to acquire employment along with widespread support from family members provide a vibrant foundation for women to engage in the workforce (Arab, 1999). Women's internal motivation for something outside of their homes clearly shapes how they view the process of employment (Basch-Harod, 2011). It also appears to provide them some degree of resiliency in coping with structural barriers that can make it difficult for them to acquire and maintain employment. These internal motivations must clearly be considered when discussing women's empowerment (Al-Saad, 1982). The internal drive of women to be employed has a significant influence on outcomes in this area (Salti, 2013).

The issue of women's internal or intrinsic motivation for employment is also important because of the role and importance of self-confidence in building women's capabilities for seeking employment and advancing in their careers (Omair, 2008).

Clearly, self-confidence is an important issue for women, as it has been noted to contribute to Saudi women's success in the workplace (Omar, 2008). Self-confidence is both a facilitator of motivation for working Saudi women and a detriment to career advancement (Plompen, 2013). Understanding what fosters self-confidence for women is thus an important issue of consideration for helping encourage women to take an active role in the labor force. Self-confidence, as noted in the interviews, is often eroded by segregation in the workplace, a lack of skill building, and a lack of experiences, all of which are integral to facilitating women's advancement in their careers.

Although it is possible to identify specific variables that contribute to and detract from women's motivation to enter the workforce, the research comprehensively provides an overview of how various cultural, political, psychological, and social factors shape the development of women's attitudes and views toward employment in Saudi Arabia. In short, it is not possible to review the variables as independent constructs unrelated to each other. Women's motivation to enter the workforce is generally impacted by the environment in which the woman exists. If a woman is given access to education and employment opportunities, she may be more likely to seek employment. However, not being provided with the supports she needs (e.g., family encouragement, physical resources such as access to transportation, etc.) may erode motivation and lead to the decision not to seek employment.

Even when challenges arise with regard to securing the resources and supports needed for employment, women can overcome these issues if their internal or intrinsic motivation for employment is high. Some women may believe that they need to work to achieve a higher level of financial security, whereas other women may be motivated to

work because of a deep and personal belief that they must work in order to achieve fulfillment. The challenge in this context is separating out these issues to determine which set of variables will ultimately lead women to seek employment. The decision is notably complex. Thus, although it is possible to identify contributors and detractors, it is impossible to know for certain how each of these variables will impact the individual and what specific decision will be made with regard to the issue.

What structural variables (e.g., policy, cultural norms, access to education, etc.) support or impede women's ability to work in Saudi Arabia?

Some of the structural barriers impacting women's ability to work in Saudi Arabia were noted with regard to the factors that motivate women to seek employment. Structural reform on the part of the government to increase women's access to education is clearly one structural issue that facilitates women's ability to enter into the workforce (Maisel&Shoup, 2009). Data presented in this investigation clearly indicate that Saudi Arabia has one of the most highly educated populations of women. However, data presented in Figure 8 suggest that in terms of literacy for women, other GCC members are outperforming Saudi Arabia. As a result, government leaders may need to revisit these issues and consider why Saudi Arabia lags behind other GCC members. Although the government has made notable strides toward educating Saudi women, more effort may be needed to ensure that optimal success is achieved.

Even though education is clearly a contributor to the expansion of women's employment in Saudi Arabia, some limitations exist with regard to education. One pertinent issue noted in this research regarded the type of education provided to women. Although most women providing data for this study agreed that their educations have

prepared them for their current positions, employment for women in the private sector appears to be limited because women do not possess the skills needed in these areas. Doumato (2009) has argued that certain areas in education such as science and engineering have long been unavailable for women in Saudi Arabia. Gender-specific occupations such as those in education and healthcare (nurses) have been the focus of government reforms in education. This reality allows the government to uphold religious traditions while ensuring that women have more equality in employment (Sabbagh, 1996).

Although education is the most prominent structural issue contributing to women's employment in Saudi Arabia, other government policies are clearly having a negative impact on employment outcomes for women (Ramady, 2010). In all aspects of the data collection process for this investigation, it was noted that government policies and practices as they relate to employment and general social customs in the country have implications for women. Although some of these policies directly impact the workplace, others have implications for the ability of women to seek and maintain employment. These issues are of notable concern and must be comprehensively addressed in order to improve outcomes for Saudi workingwomen.

Closer examination of the issue regarding government policy and practice as it relates to women in the workplace and society indicates that the state-funded religious *ulema* (religious scholars) have been one of the most significant impediments to change for women in Saudi Arabia (Doumato, 2009). Vinkler (2005) has provided an overview of the role and impact of the *ulema*, noting that many of the severe limitations that women face in society are a direct reflection of fears among this group that "large scale

female employment will lead to cultural changes in male-female relationships and thus to a gradual change in the religious-cultural structure of society” (p. 79). Unfortunately, these same views are not held in other Gulf nations, creating more opportunities for women to enter into the workforce (Contessi, Nicola, & Li, 2013).

Although government barriers to women’s employment clearly have implications for the ability of women to seek employment and advance in their careers, another structural barrier was illuminated through this research that was not originally noted in the literature review. Specifically, the literature has indicated that private organizations can be notably restrictive when it comes to the implementation of laws and policies governing men and women’s behaviors. Despite advances that have been made by women in society with regard to mixing men and women, these same provisions have not translated to the workplace. Budhwar and Mellahi (2006) have argued that Saudi Arabia is one of the only countries in the Middle East that continues to maintain strict policies regarding the separation of women and men in the workplace. Although organizations may be prohibited from directly violating law in Saudi Arabia, it seems reasonable to argue that organizations would have some leverage to challenge the status quo.

The challenges that exist with regard to the structural barriers created by organizations in improving outcomes for women’s employment clearly have implications for the ability of women to acquire employment and to seek advancement in their careers. Because of policies that restrict women’s behavior and prevent them from coming into contact with men, women can face notable challenges when it comes to acquiring the skills and experiences needed to assume greater responsibilities in their organizations. This reality has implications for building women’s confidence, an issue that has been

shown to impact Saudi workingwomen's overall success. Thus, the relationship between structural issues and women's motivation for seeking employment or advancement in their careers is clear.

Although acquiring a comprehensive picture of why organizations—especially those in the private sector—have not been willing to challenge the status quo, (Metcalf 2008/2011) provided some important insight into the challenges that exist in this area. According to this author, a general review of women's participation in the administration or development of private organizations in Saudi Arabia indicated a lack of women in leadership and administration roles. This finding mirrors what has occurred in the larger population with regard to the political domain. Without women in these vital organizational roles, (Metcalf, 2008) has argued, policy cannot change. Women are not present to affect change in policy, resulting in maintenance of the status quo. Only by diversifying private organizations, including more women in leadership positions and allowing women to serve on corporate boards, will change be facilitated from the inside, out.

These issues have larger implications for shaping the direction of change in women's employment in Saudi Arabia. Although government reforms in some areas have facilitated a smooth transition for women—for instance, in seeking an education—other areas of discourse in society are being influenced from the inside, out. Gender barriers in society are being slowly eroded because women are being given more freedoms as a result of changes in social attitudes. These same changes may be needed in the organization to help facilitate the ability of women to make greater advances. As private companies begin to challenge the status quo, this effort may place more pressure on the

government to engage in the change required to formally allow women the same rights and privileges as men in the workplace.

The final interpersonal issue of relevance noted in this investigation was that women reported not having enough time for work and home responsibilities as a result of working. This challenge was noted as a barrier to women's employment. Although women were granted permission by their guardians to work, many noted feeling considerable pressure to meet both home and work demands. The challenges of creating a positive work-life balance have clearly not yet been addressed in the context of women's work in Saudi Arabia. In the general literature regarding the challenges facing workingwomen, the work-life balance is a prominent issue of concern (Wattis, Standing,& Yerkes, 2013).

The concept of work-life balance is reviewed by Jyothi and Jyothi (2012), who have argued that "the term describes practices in achieving a balance between the demands of family (life) and work lives" (p. 35). Women, because of traditional views of their roles of wives, homemakers, and mothers, often face considerable strain and pressure as they transition into work and must find a way to balance all of their home responsibilities with the demands of work (Jyothi&Jyothi, 2012). For Saudi workingwomen, the concept of work-life has not been sufficiently explored in the literature to provide an academic understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, although many of the women interviewed for this study reported having considerable support from their family members, the extent to which they were able to achieve a work-life balance was not discussed. As such, it is difficult to know for certain if Saudi men are assuming

more responsibilities in the home or if women have come to accept the simultaneous responsibilities of work and home life.

Based on this analysis, it seems reasonable to argue that change in Saudi Arabia can come from two sources. First, direct change can result from government policy to change barriers to women's employment; for example, giving women the right to drive. Second, evolutionary change can occur in the country as a result of individuals and groups challenging the status quo. This type of change is currently being undertaken by younger members of Saudi society. If a mindset of change is adopted by others—including organizations—it may be possible to precipitate change by placing pressure on the government to make specific, direct changes. In the interim, the process of evolution will encourage a broader liberal environment in which all members of society may potentially benefit.

What interpersonal variables (e.g., family support, social relationships, etc.) support or impede women's ability to work in Saudi Arabia?

At the outset of this investigation, it was argued that interpersonal variables would play a role in shaping outcomes for women in the labor force. In particular, it was argued that women would be hindered in their ability to enter the workforce because of a lack of support from male family members and male coworkers. The results of this investigation indicate that although some prejudice on the part of men in society has contributed to challenges for women to enter the workforce and advance their careers, for the most part, the attitudes of men in Saudi society are positive and supportive of women seeking education and employment. Generally speaking, Saudi men have accepted the advancement of women and have provided significant support for women to maintain

employment. Women who receive this support from their families are grateful; however, many women still believe that they have to seek the support of male family members just to provide for their families.

The patriarchal structure of Saudi Arabia and the Middle East in general has been an overarching theme in the literature examining the culture of this region (Bahramitash, 2003). Westerners considering social discourse about these cultures often conclude that Arabic countries restrict women's rights and remain recalcitrant to change over the long-term (Haghighat, 2013). However, more focused consideration of the history of many Middle Eastern countries evidences that Western views on the entrenchment of patriarchy may not be valid. Although Arab society is not as liberal as society in the West, women have made considerable progress in Arab states, especially since the oil boom (Moghadam, 2005). Weeks (2009) has demonstrated that female entrepreneurs in some Arab states have female employment levels above small firms in the U.S., indicating a more open view of women's role in society. In short, the historical challenges facing women in Arabic countries have contributed—and will continue to contribute—to a higher level of equity between men and women as progress toward change is made (Papps, 1992).

In spite of progress toward women's advancement in Saudi Arabia, negative stereotypes regarding the attitudes and behaviors of males in this society persist. Although discrimination still occurs and impacts women's participation in the labor force, the issue does not appear to be as prominent as it was two decades ago (Alnimer 1988). Perhaps that gender discrimination is not an impediment to women's engagement or advancement in the workforce. Although the issue should be considered, gender

discrimination should not be viewed to be as significant a barrier as some of the current structural barriers that have been noted as having a significant impact on women's labor force participation.

The progress made by Saudi society in accepting women in various spheres of employment is in itself a reflection of the larger progress that women have made in Saudi society. As noted, when examining the structural variables in women's employment, change in the social sphere can have a positive impact on outcomes for women from the inside, out. Although direct action on the part of the government to change policy or advance women's rights will result in revolutionary change for Saudi women and society, gradual change as a result of shifts in the underlying culture also have implications for outcomes. This issue is well demonstrated with regard to men's attitudes toward women. Although some evidence indicates that gender discrimination is still an issue, men's attitudes toward women and toward women in the workplace have changed significantly in recent years.

What is not as clearly delineated from this study is the difference between discrimination and support from family members for women's employment. Although some evidence confirmed that men's support of women was not a barrier to employment, evidence also exists that a lack of support from family members can negatively influence women's ability and willingness to enter the workforce or seek advancement in their careers. Thus, it is important to consider if male family members are providing the right supports to facilitate women's employment. Clearly, negative attitudes of male family members are declining; what remains uncertain is the degree to which family members support women who want to enter the labor force and the extent of support needed for

women to feel comfortable with their choices. Given the deeply entrenched gender roles of women in society (Moghadam, 2003), understanding these nuances is an important issue.

Although negative attitudes of men (both family members and coworkers) were not noted as a significant impediment to women's participation in the labor force, the interviews conducted for this investigation indicated that negative views of other women in society and in the workplace had a substantial impact on women's willingness and ability to participate in the workforce. Although this issue was only briefly noted in the literature reviewed for this investigation (Fatany, 2007), it was not a repeated theme in the literature and thus was not extensively reviewed through additional analysis of the data undertaken for the investigation. Although the issue was not directly addressed through questioning, several participants revealed their views on the subject, suggesting that it had a significant impact on women's psychology.

Understanding the nuances of female discrimination in Saudi society is difficult. Although Fatany (2007) has argued that some women continue to hold traditional views of women in society—believing that a woman's responsibility and duty are to the home and family—this finding does not explain the female discrimination that exists in the workplace. Research has suggested that women who choose to work in the public sector are highly competitive because they must compete against males for similar jobs and for advancement opportunities (Al-Malki, Kaufer, & Ishizaki, 2012). In addition, research on the economy in Saudi Arabia has indicated that women must often compete with foreign men and women for jobs, creating a significant level of conflict as individuals in the workplace become more assertive in their efforts to acquire or protect their jobs (Al

Rajhi, Al Salamah,& Malik, 2012). All of these issues may contribute to a more hostile environment for women at work, which often results in women discriminating against each other, thus producing a more significant interpersonal barrier compared to the negative attitudes of males working in the same organization.

Arguably, female discrimination is a significant issue that must be considered when evaluating the interpersonal barriers related to women's participation in the workforce in Saudi Arabia. General research regarding the success of women in business and leadership indicates that mentors, role models, and networking provide important pillars for women to successfully develop needed skills, build relevant work experience, and advance in their careers (Clarke, 2011; Linehan & Scullion, 2013). If women in Saudi companies continue to compete against one another rather than working cooperatively to achieve change, women will lose a vital support for their advancement. More research to examine these issues is also needed, such that the scope of the problem can be better understood so that recommendations for improvement can be made.

What variables serve as the basis to empower Saudi workingwomen?

This central research question was posed at the outset of this investigation. Synthesizing the results from the three sub questions reviewed above should enable us to answer this question comprehensively. In addition, answering this question should facilitate the identification of solutions upon which to build recommendations for improving empowerment among Saudi workingwomen. Identifying areas for improvement should have important implications in practice, as efforts are needed to ensure that proposed changes do not interfere with the Shari'a and existing law in Saudi Arabia.

Variables serving to empower Saudi workingwomen include intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivations for women come from a wide range of internal beliefs about the nature of work (e.g., that it will provide a woman with fulfillment or a steady income), the role of women in society (e.g., that women have the right to be free and autonomous), and a general desire to achieve beyond the home. The extent of the intrinsic motivators must be quite significant, as women continually utilize the motivations to overcome many of the structural barriers preventing them from acquiring and maintaining employment. Women continue to seek jobs despite the fact that they may have difficulty accessing transportation, may not be supported by other women in the community or in the workplace, and may not have a clear sense of what is expected regarding their behavior in the workplace. In the face of these structural barriers to employment, Saudi women remain resilient and capable of overcoming these issues to retain gainful employment.

Arguably, intrinsic factors that have led to the empowerment of Saudi women have notable salience for overcoming many of the structural and interpersonal barriers presented to women. Even though the current research provides important insight into the structural variables that impede the progress of Saudi workingwomen, some structural variables actually contribute to the ability of Saudi women to participate in the workforce. Specifically, both educational reforms undertaken by the government and the liberalist agenda being pursued in the Saudi government have implications for improving outcomes for Saudi workingwomen. In examining these two variables however, the importance of analysis lies in understanding how each one affects outcomes for women.

Legislative changes that have increased women's access to education have direct implications for women's empowerment. Research regarding the role and impact of education has indicated that the process of education has notable implications for shaping the empowerment of students (Bukhsh, 2007). Dimick (2012) has contended that education exposes individuals to realities such as social justice, creating a foundation for expanding the capabilities of the individual and the individual's role in society. This understanding affords insight into why, in the face of such daunting structural barriers to employment, women remain resilient and continue to seek a pathway to employment. Education has served as the foundation for building a class of women that views its role in society as much larger and recognizes the role and importance of social justice in its efforts to improve their lives, the lives of family members, and society in general.

The liberalist agenda being pursued by the Saudi government also appears to have implications for empowering Saudi women. The liberalist agenda not only has resulted in direct changes for women (including the right to vote), but also has had a significant impact on cultural and social discourse in the country. As a result of these changes, women have been given more freedom and autonomy in society. Although strict barriers still exist in many instances, there appears to be a general recognition that women are autonomous and capable of filling roles outside of the home. The most apparent manifestation of the liberalist agenda is the widespread support that men have for women in society and in the workplace. The women interviewed for this investigation provided a wealth of evidence pointing to the support of male family members. This support continues to expand, despite overarching patriarchal foundations that remain a consistent part of most institutions in Saudi society.

The organizational environment also sustains women's empowerment in labor force participation. Women interviewed for this investigation consistently noted workplace challenges related to acquiring the skills and experiences needed to advance in their careers. Structural barriers, including the segregation of women and men in the workplace, continue to serve as recalcitrant problems for women seeking to acquire some of the basic resources they need to be successful in their careers. These issues are more pervasive in private organizations and have implications for the ability of women to build the self-confidence they need to seek work opportunities and to advance in their careers.

The challenges for women in the workplace appear to establish a competing psychological reality in which women are empowered by intrinsic motivations to seek employment and demotivated by the realities of the workplace. Self-confidence for women is critical for several reasons. First, building self-confidence requires women to have access to critical skills and experiences needed to advance in the workplace. Without these supports, women will continue to lag behind men in the business organizations and in the labor force in general. Second, women need self-confidence to make the decision to pursue difficult challenges. Although many women appear to be quite resilient when it comes to the obstacles that they face in employment, a lack of self-confidence can have a negative impact on a woman's desire to seek additional opportunities for advancement.

Finally, building women's self-confidence has implications for indirectly furthering women's position in society. Throughout this investigation, it has been argued that direct and indirect variables are impacting women's advancement in the labor force. The indirect variables relate to the broader social changes that have occurred because of

liberalist ideologies and a changing view of Saudi society in the roles of women.

Building women's self-confidence will serve as the foundation for helping women to push the boundaries, to seek more opportunity, and to continue to change social and cultural discourse in the country. Although this process is slow and not as direct as changes in law, this process has been proven effective, and thus warrants additional consideration for building a foundation for creating more empowerment for Saudi women.

The findings of this study indicate that the empowerment of Saudi workingwomen is facilitated by a number of interrelated variables. Although it is possible to make some generalizations about variables that positively and negatively influence empowerment, the reality is that the experiences of each Saudi woman will be different. Given this reality, the continued investigation of empowerment for Saudi workingwomen is needed such that an understanding of the topic can continue to evolve. The most important issue that illustrates this point is that of male attitudes toward women in Saudi society. Although some evidence suggests that men have historically held very rigid stereotypes of women and their roles (Aba AlKhail, 1993), this investigation clearly indicates that this view has changed to some degree. Thus, women's empowerment is an evolutionary process—one that will continue to evolve even if additional steps are not taken by the government to directly change the social status quo.

Notably, although the current research provides a broad foundation for understanding the specific issues that impact women's empowerment, it also identifies new issues that need to be more extensively considered in the research. The work-life balance for Saudi working women and the negative attitudes of female coworkers and

community members are two important issues that have not been widely examined in the context of Saudi workingwomen. Although both of these issues have been evaluated in the literature in general, the cultural context of these issues must be addressed through research studies that will enable scholars to better understand how these issues are relevant to the empowerment of Saudi working women. For instance, even though women interviewed for this investigation noted the challenges created as a result of negative attitudes from female coworkers, these issues may actually contribute to women's motivation and empowerment. Thus, evaluating these issues empirically is important to further expanding and extending our understanding of the empowerment of Saudi women.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the information obtained in this investigation, it is possible to make some recommendations for improving the empowerment of Saudi women. These recommendations are based on an effort to ensure that Shari'a and existing law in Saudi Arabia are not violated. Although change in Saudi Arabia is difficult given the legal and cultural constraints, it was noted at the outset of this investigation that the Islamic traditions that are upheld in Saudi Arabia are not the same as those upheld in other Arab nations (Esfandiari, 2004). What this finding suggests is that although some of the changes proposed here may initially raise the ire of religious and political leaders, the government can preserve religious order *and* allowing for more liberalization and empowerment of Saudi women (Baskan& Wright, 2011).

5.3.1 Address the Issue through Economics.

Women's empowerment in the labor market has been primarily conceptualized as a tug-of-war between advancement and the deeply entrenched cultural and religious values that are integral to preserving Saudi society (Cordesman, 2003). Although this dichotomy has notable relevance to understanding the issue, the reality is that economics in Saudi Arabia warrant further expansion of the labor market in order to meet the demands of population growth. Statistics provided in this investigation (see Table 2) show significant population growth among Saudis. Raphaeli (2003) has argued that census statistics indicate an impending population boom that will continue in the country until 2030. Although the current economy can support moderate population growth, Raphaeli(2003) has argued that economists have warned that sustained population growth without improvements to the national economy will present challenges for the country to maintain a high standard of living.

These arguments reveal a clear impetus to reframing the current debate over women's participation in the labor force—from one focused on cultural and religious values to one focused on economic reality. If Saudi Arabia is to meet the needs of its growing population, it must consider women an economic resource capable of positively contributing to the success and growth of the country. Courington and Zuabi (2011) have provided a stark overview of the current economic challenges that face Saudi Arabia, noting that “a demographic shift: a growing youth population, under-employment and unemployment, and a lack of qualified graduates with a private-sector skill set” (p. 137) all threaten to undermine the success of the Kingdom for years to come. Addressing these

issues before they become a detriment to society is thus essential to ensuring the well-being of Saudi Arabia now and in the future.

5.3.2 Organize Saudi Women

In recent years, 2011, women have been given the right to vote in Saudi Arabia (Oates, 2011). Although women will not be able to exercise this right until 2015, providing women with a voice in national politics can and should be used as a foundation for women to organize, such that sustainable change in society can be achieved. One of the most pervasive structural impediments to women's participation in the labor force is Saudi law, which prevents women from engaging in specific behaviors such as working with men in the workplace and driving themselves to work. Women's participation in politics can have a dramatic impact on creating the direct changes needed to government policy to improve outcomes for Saudi workingwomen and for those seeking employment.

This recommendation is based on the recognition that revolutionary change in government policy is essential to empowering Saudi workingwomen. Women in Saudi Arabia are given the opportunity to attend college, to acquire advanced degrees, and to seek employment. These revolutionary changes have been made possible by direct action on the part of the government. Even though government support in these areas have facilitated true change and improvement for women, the initiatives stop short of providing women with many of the vital resources needed to improve their lives. By organizing and spearheading political change in the country, women will be able to work within the law to achieve the direct changes needed to improve their participation and advancement in the labor force.

The organization of Saudi women may also be an important foundation for addressing the current negative attitudes against women that were noted by respondents in this investigation. Organization of women in Saudi Arabia for political causes will provide a basis upon which to build the education of women. Women who view their peers as competitors may come to realize the importance of solidarity and cooperation in building better social and economic outcomes for all women. Thus, the process of organizing has a number of important ramifications, including providing indirect support in changing attitudes and beliefs such that women can support each other rather than serving as their own worst enemies (Fatany, 2007)

5.3.3 Organizational Change

One of the most notable barriers for the empowerment of Saudi workingwomen is organizational rigidity. This research indicated that although social changes in the roles of women have been more widely embraced in the cultural sphere of the country, inflexibility in defining and operationalizing women's roles in private organizations remains a pervasive challenge for the advancement of women. Although organizations must adhere to the law and ensure that specific protections are in place to uphold the morality of women, the reality is that organizations are social institutions that have significant influence over social views and political outcomes (Carlo Borzaga, & Rrmanno Tortia, 2007). Given this reality, an impetus exists for private organizations in Saudi Arabia to assert this power and influence and utilize it for the betterment of women and for Saudi society in general.

Interestingly, some research has suggested that scholars have begun the process of evaluating these issues and examining their implications for the Saudi economy. Al-

Yahya (2009) has noted that public organizations are showing an increasing awareness of how the state of Saudi society as a bureaucracy in transition impacts the role, decision making, and influence that organizations must have. Specifically, Al-Yahya (2009) has argued that the current challenges facing Saudi society and government warrant change in how organizations view specific human capital and decision-making processes: “It is essential for . . . organizations to understand the importance of human capital utilization and complexity of adjusting decision processes, as well as organizational norms at various stages of capacity development” (p. 385).

Actions taken by organizations toward social and economic influence should have direct and indirect implications for empowering Saudi workingwomen. Directly, these changes should result in the ability of organizations to argue in favor of their own interests, demonstrating the need to support female employees in the workplace. Indirectly, organizations should be able to influence social and organizational attitudes toward women, contributing to a general social trend toward the acceptance of women in all spheres of life. The implications of these outcomes are extensive and could provide women with an important foundation for building self-confidence and acquiring some of the structural changes needed to further their participation and advancement in the labor force.

5.4 Additional Research

The final recommendation stemming from this investigation is that additional research must be conducted in pertinent areas, such as the impact of negative attitudes of women on workingwomen’s empowerment and work-life balance. Although both of these issues have been addressed in the general literature regarding women in the

workplace, these issues have a unique cultural context that must be considered when evaluating outcomes. The cultural context will help inform a specific understanding of how these issues impact Saudi workingwomen. The cultural context will also provide a foundation for raising awareness about these issues in Saudi society so that direct and indirect efforts can be made to appropriately address these concerns.

5.5 Conclusion

Arguably, the issue of empowering Saudi workingwomen is notably complex. At the present time, the empowerment of Saudi workingwomen is simultaneously supported and eroded as a result of the dynamic interplay of structural and interpersonal barriers. Although the literature review conducted for this investigation provided a viable foundation upon which to initiate research on the topic, the case study methodology utilized in this investigation clearly provided a much broader foundation for exploring the empowerment of Saudi working women. In particular, prejudices of women toward other women in the workplace and the challenge of work-life balance for Saudi working women are two issues highlighted in this research that have not been extensively reviewed in the current literature.

In addition to highlighting key issues that require further attention in understanding the empowerment of Saudi workingwomen, this research brought to light the reality that some of the basic ideas reported in the current literature are outdated. For instance, the literature cited negative views and a lack of support from males and family to be a significant issue impacting women's empowerment in the labor force. Although men may negatively view women's rights for education and employment, this issue has become less of a concern than the structural barriers that impede women's ability to enter

and advance in the labor force. This revelation clearly has implications for the assumptions made about Saudi culture and society. Although widely held beliefs about Saudi culture suggest that most males have a negative view of women's rights, this belief does not appear to be the reality. These issues should be taken into consideration when constructing future research and when evaluating outcomes achieved by women in Saudi society.

The recommendations made for this investigation focus on concrete changes that can be made without violation of the Shari'a and Saudi law in society. The recommendations take a broader view of the barriers to the empowerment of Saudi workingwomen and attempt to facilitate widespread change to augment outcomes for all women in Saudi society. A broader approach to addressing the challenges faced by Saudi workingwomen will make direct and indirect change possible. Whereas direct change will provide a framework for progressive advancements for women in Saudi society, indirect evolution will be vitally important for creating the supports needed to sustain progressive change prompted through direct action on the part of the government. The combination of change in both areas will thus create a comprehensive foundation upon which to advance women in Saudi Arabia not just in the work force but also in society in general.

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire for Saudi Working Women (n = 120)

1. What is your age? _____
2. What is your highest level of education? (Circle one):
 - a. High School
 - b. Bachelors Degree
 - c. Masters Degree
 - d. PhD
3. What is your field of work? (Circle one)
 - a. Banking & Finance
 - b. Medical
 - c. Education
 - d. Sales & Marketing
 - e. Business
 - f. Other, Please Specify _____
4. In which sector are you employed? (Circle one)
 - a. Public
 - b. Private
5. How long have you been in the work field? _____
6. What is the primary reason for your participation in the workforce? (Circle one).
 - a. Secure Income
 - b. Social Status
 - c. Prove Self-Reliance
 - d. Spare Time
7. What are the top three challenges you face in your work? (Circle 3 choices)
 - a. High Competition
 - b. Government Regulation
 - c. Gender Discrimination
 - d. Hit a Glass Ceiling
 - e. Social & Cultural Barriers
 - f. No Time for Social Interaction
8. What do you think caused these challenges? (Circle one)
 - a. Society's ignorance about the role of women

- b. Conservative perspective
 - c. Gap in Saudi labor law
9. Did the government reforms help women to thrive in the work environment?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
10. What do you think about the participation of women in the Saudi workforce?
- a. Superficial
 - b. Effective
11. Do you think that there are other working fields that need to be open for women in Saudi Arabia?
- a. No
 - b. Yes, Please Specify _____
12. Some consider the experience of women immature because of its timeliness.
- a. Agree
 - b. Disagree
13. Do you think that women's work in Saudi society is an urgent need at the present time?
- a. No
 - b. Yes
14. Do you think that women's work will help in bridging the gap of unemployment in the community
- a. No
 - b. Yes
15. Do you feel fulfilled or rewarded in your work
- a. Yes
 - b. No

Appendix B

Interview Schedule for Working Saudi Women (n = 15)

1. What do you think of current government rules and their impact on women's work in Saudi Arabia?
2. Do you have the support of your family for pursuing employment?
3. What are the attitudes of your coworkers toward you? Toward other women working in the organization?
4. Do you believe that you have the skills and education that you need to be successful or advance in your career?
5. Do you believe that you have the experience that you need to be successful or advance in your career?
6. What motivated you to seek employment or advancement in your career?
7. Are there any other issues that you feel are relevant to women, work and empowerment in Saudi Arabia?

Appendix C

Power Point Slides

Women Spring: Empowering Saudi Working Women

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31-May-2013

Background on the Topic

Women are vital component for the development of any national economy; they are critical to economic development and active civil society, especially in developing countries.

The position of women in Saudi Arabian society is notably unique. Beginning in the 1970s reforms to provide compulsory and post-secondary education for women served as the foundation for changing the way that policymakers view the role of women in society.

Today, Saudi Arabia boasts one of the highest educated female populations. Despite the progress made by women in Saudi Arabia, a traditional undercurrent, continues to impede the ability of women to utilize their education for employment.

Background on the Topic

The general focus of this investigation is to explore factors contributing to the empowerment of Saudi working women.

By determining these variables, it will be possible to create a foundation to facilitate changes and provide women with the support they need to more successfully engage in the labor force.

Indications of Progress

Despite challenges there are numerous examples of success for Saudi women:

- 20 % quota for women in the country's 150-member Shur'a Council.
- women own 40% of family businesses operated in Saudi Arabia.
- there are more than 30,000 businesswomen in major cities.
- women estimated wealth equal to SAR 45 billion (USD11.9 billion) in Saudi banks, and SAR 8 billion (USD2.1 billion) of funds in investments. In addition, their total real estate investments stand at around SAR 120 billion (USD31.9 billion).

Research Questions

- Research questions:

What variables serve to empower Saudi working women?

What motivates women to enter the workforce?

What structural variables support or impede women's ability to work in Saudi Arabia?

What interpersonal variables support or impede women's ability to work in Saudi Arabia?

Theoretical Debate

- Saudi Arabia known for its traditional, conservative politics and social values .
- September 11th terrorist attacks brought liberalist views to the forefront.
- The government embraced modern push toward advancements.
- The debate emphasizes how women working in Saudi Arabia view their roles and their opportunities.
- Saudi Arabia is undergoing significant cultural and social change that will forever alter the way in which both men and women live.

Theoretical Foundation

- Reform policies designed to increase women's access to education have resulted in many women seeking post-secondary and advanced degrees.
- Efforts to replace foreign workers with Saudi nationals is now a possibility, one that could enhance the country's economy.
- Given the large pool of educated women that live in Saudi Arabia the government has access to the human resources needed to support the economy of the country.

Methodology

A schematic overview of how data analysis for this investigation was undertaken



Findings

- The Debate
 - extensive privileges by the government to increase number of educated women
 - social and cultural norms continue to make it difficult for women to apply their education in the labor force
 - women constitute more than half of all university graduates in Saudi Arabia.
 - unemployment rate for women is quite high at 28%, compared with only 7% for men.

Findings (con't)

- Structural barriers to women's employment:
 - Inability to drive
 - permission from guardians
 - Separation of genders in the workplace
- Interpersonal barriers to women's employment:
 - Lack of family support
 - Negative views of coworkers

Findings (con't)

- Secondary Data Analysis
 - 57% women graduate, only 12% in the female labor force and 16.5% of total labor force.
 - 78.3% of unemployed women are university graduates.
 - Women own: 30% of brokerage account, 10% of real estate, and 20% of commercial business
 - Saudi business women have personal wealth estimated at 65 billion Saudi riyals (\$17.33 billion)

Findings (con't)

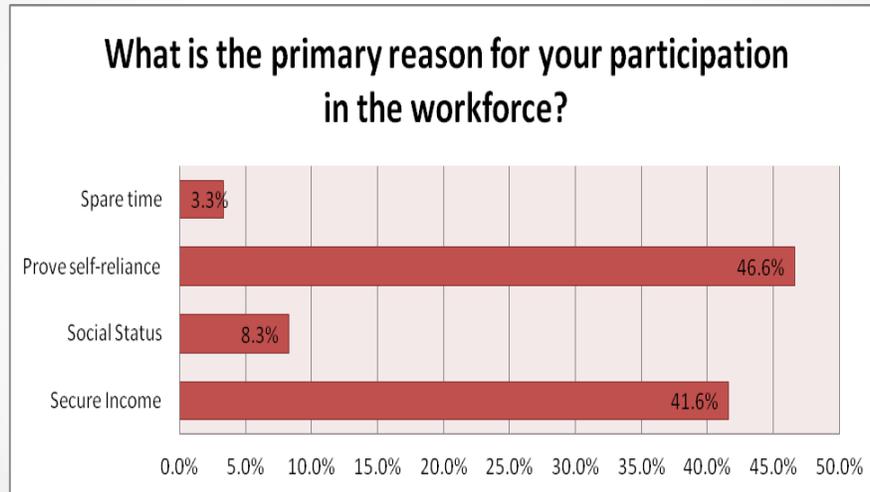
- Qualitative Interviews
 - Additional issues noted in the interviews:
 - Negative attitude of female coworkers or community members.
 - Women face challenges with regard to work-life balance.
 - disconnect between government policy and women's role have created notable conflict.
 - women noted a desire to have a broader scope of experiences both during their education and in the workplace.

In general, women wanted the ability to work to provide their lives with more depth. They believed that education and work would provide them with an opportunity to be fulfilled.

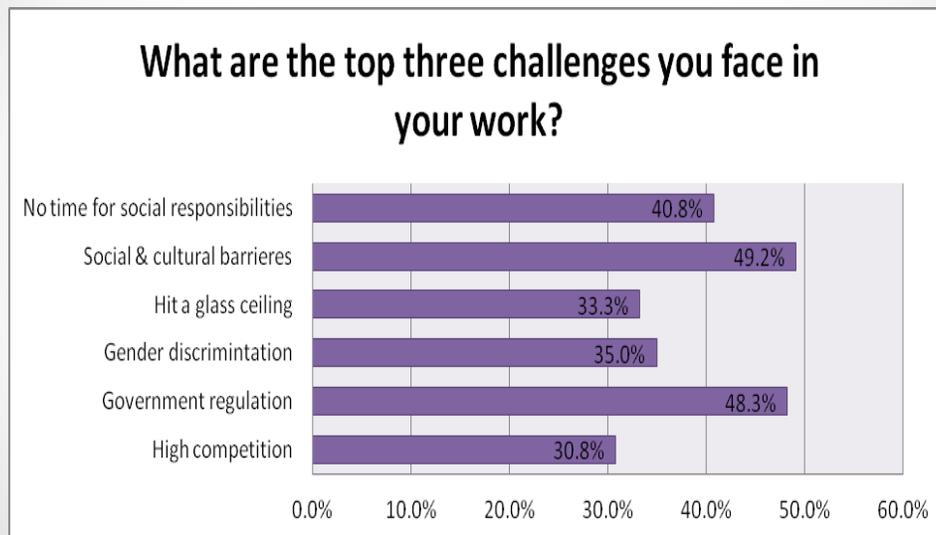
Findings (con't)

- Survey
 - 120 Saudi working women
 - 97.5% had Bachelor's Degree or higher
 - 59% working in the public sector
 - 40% had more than 7 years of experience
 - Work field varies between
 - Banking & Finance (26.7%)
 - Medical (30.8%)
 - Education (22.5 %)
 - Sales & Marketing (10.8 %)
 - Business (0.8 %)
 - Other (7.5 %)

Survey Data: Key Charts

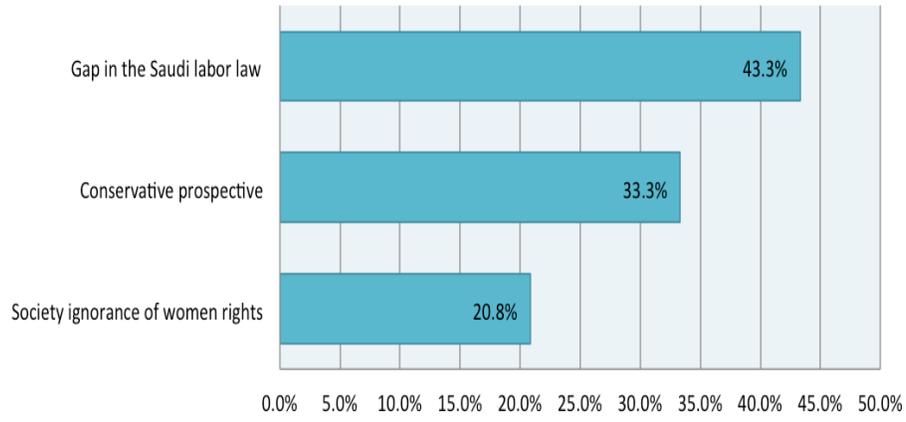


Survey Data: Key Charts



Survey Data: Key Charts

Do you think that these challenges occurred due to?



Survey Data: Key Charts

Do you think there are other working fields need to be open for women in Saudi Arabia?



Do you think that women's work will help in bridging the gap of unemployment in the community?



Propositions

it is possible to make recommendations and identify areas for improving the empowerment of Saudi working women without violating the Shari'a and existing law in Saudi Arabia.

- The variables that serve to empower Saudi working women include:
 - Education.
 - The liberalist agenda being pursued by the Saudi government.
 - Build Self-confidence for women.
 - Changes in government policy and law regarding women.
 - Organizations have significant Direct and indirect influence over social views and political outcomes.

Conclusion

This investigation was carried out in order to determine women's views on challenges and opportunities for empowerment.

The data collected for this investigation indicates that Saudi Arabia is determined to bring women into the mainstream of economic and social activity through political efforts to educate women and offer them jobs.

Contemporary reforms, women enthusiasm, and family support are identified as strong motivations for working women empowerment in Saudi Arabia.



Photos by Manal al-Dowayan