

CAREER ADVANCEMENT AND CHALLENGES OF SAUDI WOMEN GRADUATES

Alawiya Allui, Prince Sultan University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Kamilah Kamaludin, Prince Sultan University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the views that woman graduates have about their career prospects, and the expectations and challenges they experience between their work and personal lives. The purpose of this paper is to address the research gap on Saudi women graduates and to demonstrate how gender, work, and family factors influence the career advancement of these graduates. In order to explore and describe these factors a structured survey was conducted using a random sample from a database of the Alumni of one private university in Saudi. By exploring and describing the destination of female graduate leavers and understanding the reason for women's (un)employment, we aimed to unfold the underlying challenges, constraints and barriers for Saudi women to enter the workforce.

JEL: M0

KEYWORDS: Career Development, Culture, Work, Family Life, Gender, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

Several studies and report have noted the level of highly skilled qualified women in the GCC far exceeds the level of employment. Extensive education has been made available to women in Saudi Arabia though these skills are not fully utilised in the workforce. However, despite the increasing enrolment rates in tertiary education in the Kingdom, women graduates are failing to achieve the same levels of success in career progression as their male counterparts. Women constitute 49.1% of the total population (Alsaleh, 2012) and latest statistics show that and women make up 58% of college students yet women compose only 15% of the Saudi workforce (Doumato, 2010). Saudi females' work activities have carried out in exclusively women circumstances, as it maintains a strict code of gender segregation in public places (Guthrie, 2001). Barriers, such as gender discrimination, continue to keep women numbers stagnating at lower levels in the labor force (Metcalf, 2006, 2007, 2008; Moghadam, 2004). In addition, women who aspire to career progression are also constrained by family and work-related issues. Not only is the status of women in the labor force at an extreme disadvantage, it has also been neglected in terms of research. Thus, the paucity of studies on the position of women graduates in this region underscores the very limited knowledge available on the experiences women graduates face in their career development (Metcalf, 2007, 2008). Specifically, studies addressing the impact of the role of the family and gender stereotypes have been minimal and largely theoretical, with little diversity or depth (El Ghannam, 2002; Hamdan, 2005). The aim of this paper is to explore some of the issues surrounding women graduates in Saudi labor force and the perceptions of these graduates regarding gender stereotyping in terms of education (MENA, 2007); their personal aspirations regarding careers, marriage, and having children (The World Bank, 2006); and how these factors may hinder their career progression. Specifically, we aim to explore how women graduates perceive their educational attainment, experiences and career aspirations, and family responsibilities and their impact on their career progression.

The scarcity of research addressing gender issues in the Saudi labor force makes it particularly important to explore the socio-cultural and religious contexts in relation to the different perspectives in the extant literature. We aim to provide a more clear-cut explanation and understanding of the gender inequities facing women graduates in Saudi labor force as well as the impact of work and family roles on women's career progression. In doing so, we aim to extend the literature by contributing to this debate. As a result, this research is helpful in determining the great connection between Saudi women graduates and the challenges they face in their career progression. The information obtained will be helpful for policymakers, women interest groups and all Saudi citizens who are more than ever interested in the issue of gender inequities. The rest of the article is organized as follows: first, the literature review section reviews the relevant literature regarding women employment in Saudi Arabia. The second section discusses the research methodology employed in this study. The subsequent section presents the research findings in the results and discussion section. Finally, we conclude the article by recommending some practical suggestions to improve women employment in the Saudi Arabian context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research Background and Context: Saudi Arabia

The opening up of economies in the Arab region to foreign investments has created a need for skilled labor, which has transformed the composition of the workforce and the nature of women's employment in this region (Benson and Yukongdi, 2006). Saudi Arabia is considered as a major player in today's economy and its nations reflect great economic, political, and social diversity (Abuznaid, 2006). Thus, significant advancements have taken place in recent years, including the eradication of gender discrimination and the empowerment of women in various facets of social life (MENA,2007), which has led to increased education (World Bank Report, 2003; Weir, 2003) and an increase in women's economic activities. The government has implemented a range of new development plans aimed at expanding female education and employment opportunities. Government funds and initiatives have been allocated to support female economic and human capital in all spheres of life (AlMunajjed, 2010; Dahlan, 2007). It is clear that the Saudi government is serious about improving the quality of girls' education and has started to implement new reform policies. These reforms are still at an initial and exploratory stage and it may take a few years before their impact is evident.

Despite this, women in Saudi continue to suffer from discrimination in admittance to employment, prejudice in salary distribution, and obstacles in career progression (MENA, 2007). Despite the expansion in female education initiatives and opportunities Saudi Arabia also continues to have one of the lowest female workforce participation rates in the GCC countries (AlMunajjed 2010). With many developments made to eradicate discrimination, there is still a lot that needs to be done to ensure that the success of women's education is not only measured by the number of enrolments, but on the appropriate career opportunities and environments offered to them. As a matter of fact, opportunity and conducive environments are two areas of great hindrance to the learning of women in the kingdom despite the fact that it may have come a long way in the advancement of the empowerment of the girl child. The fact that problems in the education sector are often institutionalized, and hence not easy to eliminate, is a disturbing reality to many.

Socio-cultural, Family and Work-Related Issues Facing Saudi Female Graduates

Although several factors are likely to influence the perceptions of women graduates in terms of their career success, previous research suggests that gender, family, and work-centered factors can strongly influence the career advancement of women graduates. There is much evidence that socio-cultural inequities exist in place and a number of different views have been asserted to explain why women do not progress as far as men (Spector et al., 2005). Studies by Metcalfe (2011) and Hausmann (2010) show that

even with increase in access to education and economic opportunities, women participation in the workforce remain constrained in Saudi Arabia. Other studies by Sidani (2005) and Elamin 2010 show that many of Saudi Arabia's educated women are unemployed because of a range of obstacles, including the regulatory environment and access to finance. Cultural values may influence the strength or the direction of the relationship between work-family conflict and its predictors and outcomes. Studies found that women experience several challenges when they enter the workforce including long working hours, schedule inflexibility, work-related travel, and job insecurity which result to work family conflict (Yang, 2005, Spector et al. 2005). Of course, the extent to which they are experienced may depend on the cultural and the socio-economic context (Aycaan et al., 2004). Charlebois (2012) provides an interesting insight on some of the parallels in views expressed by Saudi men and views held more broadly about expected roles of women and men. He draws on Sunderland's notions of bounded masculinity and unbounded femininity (Charlebois, 2012) to argue that in spite of the feminist movements being successful in many parts of the world, women are still viewed as subordinate to the male in many roles inside and outside the home. Men are bound to provide, that is they are expected to be the breadwinners and to pursue careers. Women on the other hand can be considered as unbounded, with fewer expectations placed on them to excel and to pursue careers.

A study by Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley (2005), findings have also shown that age and number of children, occupational status of the spouse or partner, and care of elder parents are the main demands in the family domain which might affect a woman to pursue employment. In order to overcome some of these challenges, a study by Adams, King & King (1996), observed that the most frequently discussed support mechanism in the family domain is the emotional and instrumental support from the spouse. Opportunity and conducive environments are two areas of great hindrance to the learning of women in the kingdom despite the fact that it may have come a long way in the advancement of the empowerment of the girl child. Saudi women however, face some minor problems along the options of opportunities available to them. The first reason is misunderstanding of what the job entails. The second reason is the social stigma and lack of familial support that Saudi women get when they decide to enter many new fields (Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency [SAMA], 2010).

Oxford Strategic Consultants (2010) performed an empirical study to identify the barriers and solutions for more women to work. The authors made an extensive research by interviewing employers and employees of leading private and public sector companies across the GCC. The authors identified thirteen pertinent factors which act as barriers for more women to work. The following Figure 1 shows the major barriers that could act against women participating in the workforce, as defined by their interviewees. The authors reported that several of these thirteen factors are found to hinder the career progression of women in other parts of the world, and therefore the remedies to these obstacles could be somewhat similar.

Figure 1: Factors That May Hinder a Women’s Career

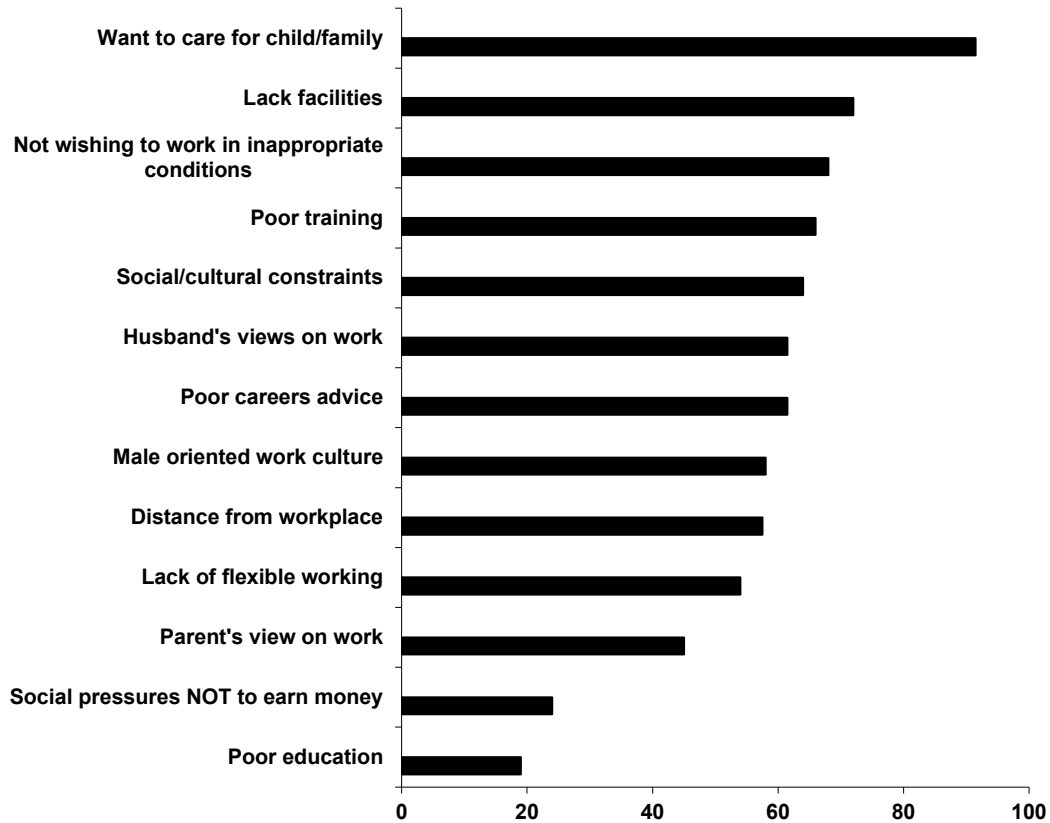


Figure 1 identifies the major barriers that could act against women participating in the workforce, as defined by their interviewees. The authors suggest thirteen pertinent factors, which act as barriers for more women to work, and at the top of the list is the need to care for child/family as the main obstacle.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this study was to see if anything has changed in recent times for the women graduates at one Saudi university as a result of the huge educational investment and changes in the country. We also wanted to look at a relatively neglected area: the conflicts that women graduates experience between their home and family lives and the possible effects of this on their career progression. The questionnaire was divided into four sections and contained single-item standardised five-point Likert measures. Section A asked questions about work and career progress (such as employment status, type, salary band). Section B looked at further study information and reasons why. Section C looked at attitudes towards equal opportunities, personal and family issues and domestic responsibilities. Section D elicited general biographical information (such as age, and marital status).

The questionnaires were piloted with some Alumni at the university then distributed around 100 questionnaires in two different methods across the period of two years. In the first year, the University organized its alumni event and during this occasion we sought out alumni’s contact number and e-mail address. We set up a database and send the questionnaire through emails to all alumni’s within our database. The email explains the purpose of the study and the notion of confidentiality that we strictly adhered to for our research. Due to low response rate, we tried different methods. We contacted our alumni’s through email and social media to encourage their response. The first method engenders around 10% response rate. In the second occasion, the University organized another meeting with its alumni, and

this time we changed our strategy to enhance response rate. There was a booth that was set up for registration and we set around 100 questionnaires at the booth. Everyone who registered for the event would be encouraged to fill in the questionnaire. The purpose of the study was explained and around 30 questionnaires were filled in. In total, 27 usable questionnaires have been received and analyzed. The cut off period for this study is at December 2014. Our response rate is around 25% of the total population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Profile and Employment Information

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of our respondents. It details the status and type of employment, age, marital status, annual pay, degree specialization and some information related to the alumni's careers. Around 78% of the alumni are in employment; 63% are in full-time employment, 7% are employed part-time, 4% are self-employed and another 4% are doing voluntary work. 22% of the respondents are not in active employment; in particular, 11% are in further study, 7% are temporarily sick or looking after home and family and remaining 4% are taking time out from work to travel. Our graduates' unemployment rate of 22% appeared lower than the findings by AlMunajjed (2010) and McKinsey & Company (2015), which suggested that women unemployment rate in Saudi Arabia, is around 26.9% and 33% respectively.

From overall responses we find 19% of the respondents are unemployed and actively looking for employment, further study or training, 5% are unemployed but not looking for employment, while remaining 76% are employed either in for-profit organizations (52%), not-for-profit organizations (19%) or operating their own business (5%). Interestingly, according to Welsh et al. (2014), 97% of women in KSA are employed in the government or public sectors with majority in higher education and schools. Thus, our findings suggest that, women graduates from PSU prefer to work in private for-profit companies rather than not-for-profit organizations.

In general, the age distribution is between 22 to 39 years old with a mean average of 26 years. This is because the cohort of students' graduates at the women's college is fairly recent. For example, the business department only had three batches that had graduated from its programs. Around 74% of the respondents earn less than SAR 24,000 per year or less than SAR2000 per month. We strongly feel that this was not the case in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and there had been confusion amongst respondents in answering this question. If this data is representational of current situation, then excluding 5 respondents who are unemployed and studying, the remaining 15 respondents (56%) had significantly earned below the national wage average of the Kingdom. And in one occasion, when one respondent were interviewed about her pay, she realized that she made a mistake in selecting the right answer as she thought SAR 24,000 was the salary earned per month.

The respondents are well distributed from every department. Notably, most of the respondents were graduates from the English Department (36%), followed by Business Administration (20%), Information Systems (12%), Law (16%), Interior Design (8%) and Computer Science (8%). Most respondents (70%) who are employed suggested that their academic qualification was a formal requirement to land them their job and the remaining 26% suggested that their academic qualification was not the formal requirement but certainly gave them an advantage in getting the job.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Employment Status of Alumni	Frequency	%
Employed full time	17	63%
Employed part-time	2	7%
Self-employed/freelance	1	4%
Voluntary work/other unpaid work	1	4%
Temporarily sick or unable to work/looking after the home or family	2	7%
Taking time out in order to travel	1	4%
Further study	3	11%
Type of employment		
Unemployed and looking for employment, further study or training	4	19%
Not employed but not looking for employment, further study or training	1	5%
Employee of a for-profit company or business or of an individual, for wages, salary, or commissions	11	52%
Employee of a not-for-profit, tax-exempt, or charitable organization	4	19%
Self-employed in own incorporated business, professional practice, or farm	1	5%
Age distribution		
Less than 25	11	42%
26-30	13	50%
31-35	1	4%
36-40	1	4%
Marital status		
Married	11	41%
Never married	16	59%
Annual pay		
less than SAR24,000	20	74%
Between SAR 24,001- 48,000	3	11%
Between SAR 72,001- 96,000	3	11%
Between SAR 144,001-168,000	1	4%
Specialization		
English	9	36%
Interior Design	2	8%
Computer Science	2	8%
Information Systems	3	12%
Law	4	16%
Business Administration	5	20%
Did you need the qualification to get the job		
Yes: the qualification was a formal requirement	16	70%
Yes: while the qualification was not a formal requirement it did give me an advantage	6	26%
Don't know	1	4%
How did you find about this job?		
Your university/college (e.g. Careers Service, lecturer, website)	2	10%
Professional networking	3	14%
Speculative application	1	5%
Already worked there (including on a coop)	3	14%
Personal contacts, including family and friends	12	57%

This table presents the descriptive statistics of our respondents. It details the status and type of employment, age, marital status, annual pay, degree specialization and some information related to the alumni's career. Their responses were recorded in form of frequency and percentage.

Around 4% did not know whether their qualification get them the job. Respondents were asked on important factors that employers considered for employment. 29% of the respondents suggested that the subject studied was an important factor while 29% felt that the level of study was more important. 19% of respondents suggested that having work experience is equally important for employment. Nevertheless, 14% were not certain of the factors that were important to employers. And remaining 19% suggested that no one thing was important but rather a combination of many reasons altogether. Most respondents came to know about their job through personal contacts, including family and friends (57%). This further reinforces the close-knit society embedding the Saudi culture where even during digital-age, personal

contacts and word of mouth are still an important means to look for jobs. Other respondents found out about their job from their internship and COOP experience (14%), professional networking (14%) and the remaining respondents suggested that they first learn about their job through their university (10%).

Role of Higher Education in Preparing for Employment

Table 2 describes the respondents’ perception on the role of higher learning institution in preparing our graduates for their respective employment. 80% of the graduates believed that their experience in higher education had prepared them for their employment. However, 20% of respondents respectively disagree to this claim or suggested that they can’t tell if their higher education had prepared them for employment. With respect to self-employment, freelance and starting their own business, only 52% believed that the higher education prepared them for this and the remaining 24% respectively disagree and cannot tell the difference. The questionnaire further reiterates to what extent does PSU, College of Women (PSU-CW) contribute to their personal success and 88% of respondents feel that PSU-CW had contributed very well (36%) or well (52%). Nevertheless, 4% disagree and remaining 8% cannot tell whether PSU-CW contributed to their success or not. Around 60% of the respondents suggested that they decided to take on the current job because it fitted with their career plan or it was exactly the type of work they are interested in. Another 20% suggested that because that was the only job being offered; and the remaining 20% wanted to explore whether the job may interest them.

Table 2: Higher Learning Institution’s Role in Preparing for Employment

	Can’t Tell	Not Very Well	Well	Very Well
How well did you overall experience in higher education prepare you for employment?	8%	12%	48%	32%
How well did your overall experience in higher education prepare you for being self-employed/freelance or starting your own business?	24%	24%	40%	12%
How did PSU- College for Women experience benefited and/or contributed to your success?	8%	4%	52%	36%

This table presents the respondents’ perception on the role of the higher learning institution in preparing the graduates for their respective employment. It requires respondents to rate how well their experience prepares them for their career. In general most respondents feel that the higher learning institution has prepared them well and very well as shown in the table above.

Government Policy

Table 3 presents the respondents’ perception about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s government recruitment, promotion, selection and training policies in general and towards women. 28% of the respondents suggested that the government policy is fair to all staff whether they are male or female. Nevertheless, this does not reflect the majority’s opinion of 40% who disagreed that the government’s recruitment policy is fair. And remaining 32% stated neither disagreement nor agreement. Our finding is rather consistent with extant literature about prevailing gender disparities in the Kingdom (Thompson, 2015; Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2014). Women in KSA has long accepted gender inequalities arise from the close application of traditional social values and misrepresentation of the Islamic law (Thompson, 2015). While Islam does not oppose to emancipation of women (Thompson, 2015; Vidyasagar and Rea, 2004), strict Saudi cultural norms engendered women inequality in the public sphere and in workplace (Vidyasagar and Rea, 2004). As a result, despite of high literacy levels and education attainment, Saudi women are restricted in the types of subjects and jobs they can choose from (Thompson, 2015; Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2014). The next question asks about the fairness of the promotion policy that applies to women. Respondents share equal agreement and disagreement to this question. 40% of the respondents felt that the promotion policy is fair to women while the remaining 40% suggested otherwise.

Even though, there is no restriction for women to take position of leadership in the society; in fact, KSA sign a declaration with the United Nations against women discrimination; the principle problem for

women to climb the leadership position is dependent to the attitude of those in powerful position within organizations (Vidyasagar and Rea, 2004). As such, our result is consistent with this findings where the opinion on the issue of fairness of promotion policy is largely dependent on the organizations they worked in. Respondents were then asked about their opinion whether the Kingdom’s monitoring of selection, training, promotion and career development policies is rigorous. Respondents appeared to be equally divided in their opinion between agreeing, disagreeing and taking the middle stand regarding this statement. This is consistent with Thompson’s (2015) mixed findings regarding the support received by Saudi women in the workplace. On one hand, he suggested that women are getting more support and backing from key high-profile figures and were given a chance and representation in the society and workplace but on the other hand, many are still un-reluctant and do not want to risk as being un-conservative and regards women representation merely as ‘decorative nature’.

The next question seeks opinion whether respondents think that the government support and policies for women employment are merely rhetoric rather than reality. 18% did not think it was rhetoric. 39% agreed to this statement and majority of the respondents (44%) preferred to take the middle stand. From these four questions above, we found that majority of respondents prefer not to express their agreement nor disagreement. It had also been noted, on average 14% of the respondents omitted answering these questions completely. Our findings about government policy towards women employment are consistent with previous findings that suggested lack of government support (Welsh et al. 2014), ambiguous policies and regulations (Alturki and Braswell, 2010) and dealing with bureaucratic procedures (Ahmad, 2011) were barriers to success of Saudi women specifically women entrepreneurs.

Table 3: Government Employment Policies

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The government’s recruitment policy is fair to all staff	16%	24%	32%	24%	4%
The country’s promotion policies are fare to women	16%	24%	20%	32%	8%
The country’s monitoring of selection, training, promotion and career development policies is rigorous	8%	25%	33%	29%	4%
The country’s policy is rhetoric rather than reality	9%	9%	44%	35%	4%

This table presents the respondents’ perception about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s recruitment, promotion, selection and training policies in general and towards women. Respondents rate their opinion on 5-point scale between strongly disagree to strongly agree. The respondents in general disagree that the government employment’s policy are fair. Respondents however provided a balanced view regarding the rigorousness of the country’s monitoring of selection, training, promotion and career development policies. Lastly, most respondents feel the country’s employment policy is rhetoric than reality.

Work-Family Influences

This section explores how work and family relations influence Saudi women’s career. In particular, we seek to clarify whether or not the women’s career in Saudi have been affected by their household responsibilities, as a wife, mother or carer. Our first analysis looks at the first breakdown on their marital status. Although few alternatives were listed including divorced, widowed and separated but the breakdown is clearly separated into two categories. All respondents fall under married or never married category. No respondents indicated otherwise. The respondents represented a good sample of being married (41%) and never married (59%). One respondent did not indicate her marital status. Table 4 below looks at the work-family issues that may make or break a women’s career. Some of the factors include a husband’s support (or lack thereof), family and social commitments, childcare responsibilities and household chores.

Role of a Husband in a Women’s Career

From the tables above, majority of the respondents did not agree that having a partner or husband is a deterring factor for their career. 54% of the respondents did not think they had to sacrifice their career for the sake of their husbands. Only 9% of the respondents had to sacrifice their career for the sake of their husband. And the remaining 36% chose the middle stand. The next question looks at whether the husband also had to make some compromise for the sake of their working wives. It was found that 18% of the respondents felt that both parties had made sacrifice of their careers for the sake of their relationship. And another 23% suggested otherwise. And majority of respondents (59%) neither agree nor disagree on this matter. The final question on this issue seeks out respondents’ opinion whether supporting their husband’s career affected their own career. It was found that 41% of respondents did not think supporting their husband’s career had forsaken their career in anyways. Only 10% stated that supporting their husband’s career had caused problems for their own career. And majority refuse to take a stand on this issue (50%).

Table 4: Work-family Influences on Women’s Career

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have compromised my career for the sake of my husband’s career	27%	27%	36%	9%	0
We have both made compromises in our careers for the sake of our relationship	18%	5%	59%	18%	0
Providing support for my husband’s career has caused problems for my own career	23%	18%	50%	5%	5%
I have sacrificed my personal time to get where I am today	4%	13%	13%	46%	25%
I have sacrificed social time/friendships to get where I am today	4%	26%	30%	30%	9%
I have sacrificed time with my husband to get where I am today	23%	0	64%	9%	5%
The right husband is the secret of a successful career	14%	5%	32%	27%	23%
My husband is supportive of my career	10%	0	43%	24%	24%
A career break for women can damage their future career prospects	4%	30%	26%	35%	4%
A delay in starting a family until a career is established is beneficial to my career development	17%	9%	26%	43%	4%
The absence of family demands is beneficial for my career	13%	4%	22%	57%	4%
The majority of working women are unable to move due to family commitments	9%	17%	13%	43%	17%
Successful women tend not to have families	23%	41%	14%	23%	0
Women still retain most of the responsibility for the care and wellbeing of children	0	0	14%	36%	50%
Lack of adequate child-care is an obstacle to women’s careers	0	9%	4%	57%	30%
Household chores are mainly my responsibility	9%	43%	9%	35%	4%
We organize domestic tasks on an equal footing	9%	17%	52%	22%	0
Family responsibilities have interfered with my career	13%	43%	9%	30%	4%
Women can successfully combine a career and a family	0	0	23%	50%	27%
Family considerations affect career to a greater extent than career affects family	0	17%	22%	61%	0

Table 4 looks at the work-family issues that may make or break a women’s career. Some of the factors include a husband’s support (or lack thereof), family and social commitments, childcare responsibilities and household chores. Respondents rate their opinion on 5-point scale between strongly disagree to strongly agree. Generally, respondents disagree that a husband is a deterring factor in one’s career. Respondents believe career break damages career prospects and family and household commitments may hinder a women’s career. In general, most respondents agree that women can successfully combine a career and family but if they have to choose, many believe family considerations affect career to a greater extent than vice versa.

Respondents were asked whether they had sacrificed their personal time, or social time/friendships and time spent with their husband to get to where they are now, it was noted that most respondents (71%) had to sacrifice their personal time to achieve what they had now. 39% of the respondents suggested that they had to sacrifice their social time and friendship and only 14% suggested that they had to sacrifice the time spent with their husband. Therefore, it does suggest that husband is not a hindrance for a successful career. The next questions explore whether husband's support enhances their wives' career. 50% of respondents feel that the right husband is the secret to a successful career. And notably, 48% of the respondents also suggested that their husband is supportive of their career. Nevertheless, 19% of respondents did not think husband's support had any effect on their career while 10% strongly disagree that they received support from their husband. And on average remaining 32% did not state their opinion to this statement. Arguably, in KSA, husband's support is very important as they require permission from their husband or male relative to work and continue working (Vidyasagar and Rea, 2004; Welsh et al., 2014; Thompson, 2015).

Family Commitment's Effect on Women's Career

Three questions were asked to explore about the influence of having a family on women's career. The first question seeks graduates opinion whether a career break would damage their future career. Here, career break refers to a women taking an extended leave of absence for maternity, caring for their newborn or young children. 39% of the respondents agreed that taking a career break would damage their future career prospects, while remaining 34% believed otherwise. Remaining 26% did not take a stand on this matter. It is quite common to start family early in Saudi Arabia (Mobaraki and Söderfeldt, 2010). Some college students are married and have children of their own. Nonetheless, 47% of respondents suggested that delaying starting a family until their career is established would be beneficial for their career development. However, 26% did not think starting a family would interfere with their career development. And remaining 26% neither disagree nor agree. The next question further scrutinizes the idea whether the absence of family demands may be beneficial to one's career. Many respondents (61%) agreed that absence of family demands is beneficial to their career which is generally consistent with extant findings about the existence of work-family conflicts among working women and/or mothers. Only 17% feel that family demands is not in the way of their career.

Majority of respondents (60%) indicated that working women are unable to move due to family commitments. According to Powell and Greenhaus (2012), both men and women take family into consideration in their work decisions, including one that involved relocation. Nonetheless, 26% suggested that family commitments are not the reason for not moving elsewhere. 13% did not state their opinion. When asked whether an image of successful women is usually associated with not having any family, majority of respondents (64%) did not think that should be the case. Only 23% agree that successful women tend not to have families. And 14% neither disagree nor agree. One of women's responsibilities in her household is caring for her children. At least 86% of the respondents feel that women still retain most of the responsibility for the care and wellbeing of their children (Stier and Mandel, 2009)

Therefore, finding a right and suitable childcare is an important factor for most working mothers (Stier and Mandel, 2009). Therefore the next question explores whether lack of adequate child-care is an obstacle to women's career. As been expected, 87% of the respondents thought it was a problem. Only 9% of the respondents did not think it was an issue and remaining 4% did not state their preference. Consequently, having an adequate childcare should be on every employer's priority in order to attract highly qualified and outstanding women to the work place since it is an important factor for all working mothers (Stier and Mandel, 2009). In addition to caring for children, women generally are responsible for the household chores. Nevertheless, it is quite common for the Middle-eastern families to employ house help and maids to help with the house chores (Vidyasagar and Rea, 2004; ILO, 2013). Therefore, when asked whether household chore is their main responsibilities, only 39% suggest that was the case.

Majority of respondents (52%) did not think that household chore is their main responsibilities. And when further asked whether the husband is involved in domestic tasks, surprisingly majority of the respondents neither disagree nor agree to this statement. 26% stated their disagreement that their husband was involved in any domestic tasks equally. And remaining 22% suggested that they do share domestic tasks equally which is quite astonishing for a patriarchal society like Saudi Arabia (Thompson, 2015).

56% of respondents did not feel that family responsibilities interfered with their career. Nonetheless, somewhat 34% agreed that family responsibilities have interfered with their career. Majority of respondents felt (61%) that family considerations often affect career (FIW -family interfere with work) to a greater extent than career affecting family (WIF-work interfere with family). This is rather common amongst female employees to perceive work interfering with family (WIF), as family demand and considerations are often greater for females than males (Byron, 2005; Powell and Greenhaus, 2012, Thompson, 2015). On the contrary, 17% of respondents thought otherwise. Lastly, to conclude this analysis, respondents were asked whether women could successfully combine family and career together. Surprisingly, this is the only question in the entire questionnaire that all women agreed on. 77% of the respondents felt that women can successfully combine a career and a family and remaining 23% prefer not to state their opinion.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this paper, we have explored the experiences of women graduates regarding their views on gender, work, and family-related responsibilities and whether these impact on their career progression. There was an acknowledgment that the current social-cultural and political systems impacts on the opportunities that are available for women. The fact that women face greater barriers than men within the workplace is more to do with cultural and social traditions rather than the capabilities and skills of women. Our study uses questionnaires to gauge the opinion of our graduates on women employment issues. In total, 27 questionnaires were used to form the basis of our findings. Because of the small sample size, our results are not generalizable to the general women employment in KSA. This poses as our main limitation. Nonetheless, PSU is a small university but highly reputable among employers. Most of our graduates receive employment offers prior to graduations. Thus, despite the small number it may actually overstate the general women employment condition in KSA. This in itself is another limitation as the sample data does not reflect general condition elsewhere.

We believed future study should explore women employment issues in general and not focused only on the graduates of higher learning institution. The KSA is currently enhancing their recruitment policies towards local employment (Saudization). Nonetheless, only 14% of women participate in the labor market. Apparent lack of women employment is the main obstacle towards the success of Saudization. Thus, academics and practitioners should join force to uncover the underlying issues hindering women employment and propose suggestions that can help change the labor market in KSA. It appears that the traditional societal beliefs regarding the gender roles are powerful societal factors at play within the Saudi society which effectively act to limit the types of careers seen as suitable for women. Evidently despite the meagre family support structures and high educational attainments women continue to cluster at lower numbers in the labor force. The data also show that some of these women have had to make very difficult decisions about balancing their career and family lives. These findings add weight to a considerable body of previous research on work-family conflicts (see Sinclair, 1998; Schwartz, 1995; Lambert, 1990). Despite the very real advances that women in Saudi have made over the last 20 years in educational attainment, the women in this study continue to take a greater responsibility for domestic responsibilities, even if this slows down or even halts their career progression. There was little evidence that their partners had made career sacrifices in the way that these women have. A discussion of exactly why these women still make these sacrifices is a subject that has received attention in the past (Schein, 1993) but is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it clearly merits further research.

The findings of this study confirm that women, even now, have still to overcome ingrained socio-cultural and structural barriers if they are to achieve equality with men in their career progression. The suggested general strategies to encourage greater equality for women in the work force include 1.) providing all young women graduates with female mentors in order to provide support and guidance within different organisations; 2.) introducing more flexible working hours and encouraging job sharing and part-time work; 3.) giving greater recognition to women's family and domestic responsibilities; 4.) insensitivity to family issues and workplace inflexibility are still major impediments to women in the labor force; 5.) changing organisational cultures to reflect the needs of women career progressions.

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BIOGRAPHY

Dr Alawiya Allui is an Assistant Professor in College of Business Administration in Prince Sultan University. Her research interests have focused on strategic management in general and strategic human resource management, corporate diversification strategies, and policies in specific. Saudi Arabia as an emerging economy has interested her in many areas around strategy of which she has published and presented in local and international conferences. She can be contacted at aallui@psu.edu.sa

Dr Kamilah Kamaludin is an Assistant Professor in College of Business Administration in Prince Sultan University. Her research interests are generally in management accounting, governance and change. However, while working in PSU, she realized that the women graduates generally possess high intelligence and skills but their potential were kept hidden. This has piqued her interest and motivates her in studying the challenges faced by women in this part of the society. She can be contacted at kkamaludin@psu.edu.sa.