



SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE NECESSITY OF STRUCTURAL REFORMATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

Afaf Awad Alsubhi

Faculty of Education, University of Malaya
50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Kazi Enamul Hoque*

Faculty of Education, University of Malaya
50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Ahmad Zabidi Abdul Razak*

Faculty of Education, University of Malaya
50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to shed light on the socioeconomic implication of women's empowerment by placing them in the leadership position. Due to new economic policy, Saudi women are nowadays remarkably joining in the education sector. But they are facing various challenges while performing leadership roles. Presumably, these challenges appear to be the major barriers in women's empowerment. In order to better understand the socioeconomic implications of women's engagement in leadership and the contributing factors against empowerment this paper reviews the relevant literature published in recent years. Most of the contemporary scholarly works highlighted that Saudi women in higher education face familial, social and organizational barriers in pursuing their duties in the management. These barriers turn them into less productive as well as minor economic contributors. In order to gain greater economic benefit by women's empowerment, the government of Saudi needs to reshuffle the organizational setup while changing political, cultural and socioeconomic policy. This paper could be useful for policy development and conducting further research in this very front.

Key words: Women's Empowerment, Higher Education, Saudi Women, Educational Leadership.

Cite this Article: Afaf Awad Alsubhi, Kazi Enamul Hoque and Ahmad Zabidi Abdul Razak, Socio-Economic Impacts of Women's Empowerment in Higher Education and the Necessity of Structural Reformation in Saudi Arabia, *International Journal of Management*, 11(7), 2020, pp. 880-893.

<http://www.iaeme.com/IJM/issues.asp?JType=IJM&VType=11&IType=7>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

In current world, women's empowerment as is considered as one the most vital objectives of sustainable development as well as protecting human rights. Hence, women's empowerment is regarded as the freedom and power that enable women to make choices and decision, practice common human rights, control resources, receive opportunities, participate in politics and live a social life free from violence and discrimination (Sharma, 2014). Empowering women more likely enhance child welfare while promoting human capital accumulation. Thus, women empowering accelerate economic benefits as well as household wellbeing. That is why, women's empowerment has been in the focal length of the development policy in the very recent years. World bank has launched a comprehensive Gender Action Plan in 2006 that is explicitly justified with the female empowerment as well as economic development. (Doepke & Tertilt, 2014). However, this issue has also been a part of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals with the view to "putting resources into poor women's hands while promoting gender equality in the household and society results in large development payoffs. Expanding women's opportunities [...] accelerates economic growth (The-World-Bank, 2018)."

In Saudi Arabia, women's empowerment is a critical issue. But, economic, cultural, familial, social and even personal factors have stood against women to be economically empowered. It is noteworthy, this Kingdom is an economically nourished country. Abundant production of natural oil has placed Saudi's economy among the wealthiest nations in this planet. This economic enrichment has almost faded off poverty incidence and unemployment (specially for men). Enormous household income and government subsidy for the underprivileged people overshadowed the necessity of involving women in the labour force [Arguably, oil-driven economy may also encourage women's participation in the workforce (Buttorff & Welborne, 2015)]. Besides, Saudi society is abided by the extreme Islamic rules as well as tribal cultural norms that disallow women to be in the public place or the chief bread earners for the family (Neale & Özkanli, 2010). Furthermore, conservative Islamist political party claims that women's empowerment can tarnish the reputation and values of this kingdom. Thus, so long they have been denouncing women to be in the economic activities (Hamdan, 2005).

But ample changes have taken place in contemporary Saudi Arabia. Government could realize perishability and uncertainty of oil-based income. Besides, negative changes in the environment, global warming, carbon emission etc. are negatively impacting on petroleum production. The whole world is seeking for the alternative energy sources rather than the fossil fuel. Besides, alternative energy with zero carbon emission is becoming more available and affordable too. That indicates, Saudi economy may encounter a major financial shock and volatility in near future. Based on this realization, government of this kingdom has envisioned a knowledge-based economy by empowering its people with education, profession and outlook. Almost a half of Saudi's population are women. Therefore, participation of women in the job sector will bring greater efficacy in building a sustainable economic infrastructure. Thus, the concept of women's empowerment has come into importance.

Recently, Saudi authority has segmented works for women. Islamic social scholars in Saudi has recommended a set of jobs as suitable professions for the women, such as nursing, midwifery, teaching, social services, medicine (Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004). Among these selected job sectors, education has become the most attractive as well as favourable to the women. Therefore, teaching profession is being greatly feminized in Saudi Arabia. By virtue, significant number of women are ascending leadership position in education, which is more than ever in the history of Saudi Arabia (Oplatka & Herts-Lazarovits, 2006). But women are facing numerous obstacles too. Hence, women's empowerment in education sector is being stumbled and the trait of empowerment in this section is fading up at its onset. Therefore, it is important to literally scrutinize the current scenario of women's empowerment in education. Nevertheless, this paper confines its investigation to the higher education sector.

1.2. Objectives

Based on the above discussion this paper delineates three specific objectives as mentioned below:

1. To Identify the Extent of Women's empowerment in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia.
2. To Identify the Problems in Women's empowerment in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia.
3. To Delineate a Proposal for Structural Reformation in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia.

1.3. Methodology

This paper adopted general literature review method to better understand the women's empowerment issues in the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia. In order to achieve three objectives as mentioned above, relevant scholarly articles were synthesised and rigorously cited (Salkind, 2010). Based on the available literature, at the end a proposal has been made for the structural reformation to empower women who are involved in higher education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the concurrent literature published on women's empowerment and women leadership. In this regard, priority was given to those scholarly works that are constructed with Saudi issues.

2.1. Women's Empowerment

The world is witnessing a progressive trend in women's empowerment. But, the overall advancement is so far, very minimal. Women only hold 1% share of the world's wealth although they represent 40% of the global population (World Bank, 2011). That delineates an extreme disparity between men and women in terms of empowerment and wealth distribution. However, women's empowerment is an issue that can neither be achieved overnight nor be imposed from outside. It must go through an evolving process by building awareness and the sense of self-power. In this case, power implies the exercise of power and convictions that supports equitable distribution in the various levels such as social, interpersonal and collective actions (Kesby, 2005). Basically, women's empowerment generally measured quantitatively where the primary considerations are schooling, mobility, access to economic resources (for instance, credit, earnings and assets) and partaking in decision making or autonomy (Schuler & Nazneen, 2018). Ewerling has developed a survey based women's empowerment index that included the fundamental parameters such as women's living status, employability, level of education, frequency of reading newspaper or listening to the radio or media exposure, decision making authority etc. (Mason & Smith, 2003; Richardson, 2018). In a broader sense, women's empowerment is regarded as the freedom and power that enable women to make choices and decision, practice common human rights, control resources,

receive opportunities, participate in politics and live a social life free from violence and discrimination (Sharma, 2014).

2.2. Socioeconomic Implication

Women's empowerment has significant socioeconomic implication. Empirical evidences suggest that societies with higher gender equality experience higher economic growth. So, empowering women by letting them engage in public and private institutions can enhance productivity and representativeness. In this case, women's education and access to resources can play important roles in women empowerment (Sharma, 2014). There is an urgent need for women's empowerment in order to reduce gender-based discrimination and violation of human rights. Women's empowerment has positive impacts on the family, society and country as well. In this regard, socio cultural constraints and other obstacles need to be resolved (Al-Zoubi & Rahman, 2014).

An extended research in India showed that women's empowerment reduced intimate partner violence (IPV) (Sabarwal, Santhya, & Jejeebhoy, 2014). Proper understanding of gender equality mostly decreases IPV. Arguably it may increase IPV risk as well. Women may overreact towards men's dominance and in egalitarian gender and patriarchal norms (Schuler & Nazneen, 2018). Though, there is no specific statistics on the domestic violence in Saudi Arabia published by the government agency. But, according to the US State Department report 16-50% Saudi wives encounter some kind of abuse, such as inflammatory verbal exposure and so that causes mental agony and psychological depression (Rios, 2013). However, these statistics seem somewhat ambiguous. Presumably, there must be some kind of disharmony in the domestic life that Saudi women endure due to lack of empowerment. A recent study has reported that domestic violence in Saudi family differs between employed and unemployed women. Women who have income experience less domestic violence in this country (Shiraz, 2016).

2.3. Women's Empowerment in Saudi

Global Gender Gap Index which was introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2016 outlined that among 144 countries Saudi's overall rank was 141. Wherein, Economic Participation and Opportunity Sub-index (142), Educational Attainment Sub-index (105), Health and Survival Sub-index (128), Political Empowerment Sub-index (121) (World-Economic-Forum, 2016). This scenario demonstrates that Saudi women are utterly underprivileged as well as underrepresented in education, health and political empowerment. But, in some cases Saudi women had exemplified tremendous leadership skills even in extreme unsupportive situation. Presumably, they might exhibit even better performance in decision making in private and public sector in a favourable environment (Rodolfo & Estimo, 2017). In this regard, a renowned *Shoura* council member Haya Al-Munea delivered her views to the press, as "Women are more careful about accuracy in work and integrity. They hold positions and are untainted by any manifestation of corruption". Notably, at present 10 women out of 30 retained their position as *Shoura* members. Besides, 113 women are working in the Saud Foreign Ministry as diplomats according to Osama Nugali (Rodolfo & Estimo, 2017).

Prominent Lawyer and arbitrator Ibrahim Al-Hakmi stated that Saudi women are deprived of senior position in the management and administration. He further mentioned, "When a woman holds a leadership position, she is more afraid of responsibility than men. It's because there are only a few women leaders and she's careful because she wants to keep her position and preserve her reputation". In the similar voice, Halima Muzaffar, a prominent Saudi

poetess stated, “There is no woman in a circle of corruption,”. She also added, “women are more active and more honest.” (Rodolfo & Estimo, 2017).

A study discovered that more than 60 thousand businesses are now belong to the women and 40% of the private properties belong to them (Nisreen & Nadia, 2011). Furthermore, Saudi women have achieved the right to vote at Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2004 (though they are facing pressing challenges in Jeddah). It is worth mentioning, 2750 women entrepreneurs participated in last voting in Riyadh and another 600 business women, who were the members of the Chamber of Commerce took part in vote in the Eastern region (Danish & Smith, 2012). The kingdom has articulated vision 2030, which is a long term economic development goal that envisions 30% women participation in the overall workforce. In fact, the private sector in Saudi has already accommodate 30% women in their workforce. Furthermore, work from home project is going to create 140,000 jobs for women by 2020 (Saud-Mohammed-Al-Sati, 2017).

Table 1 Women’s Empowerment in Saudi Arabia from 1999 to 2014

	1999-2001	2002-2004	2005-2007	2008-2010	2011 -2014
Female Population (in millions)	44.80	44.85	44.05	43.76	43.53
Female Employment Rate (%)	45.2	60.23	85.70	84.33	79.66
Fertility Rate (%)	4.21	3.98	3.46	3.24	3.03
Literacy Rate (%)	65.25	76.45	82.56	89.33	91.84
GDP Growth Rate (%)	1.53	5.67	6.27	5.00	4.50

Source: (Saqib, Aggarwal, & Rashid, 2016)

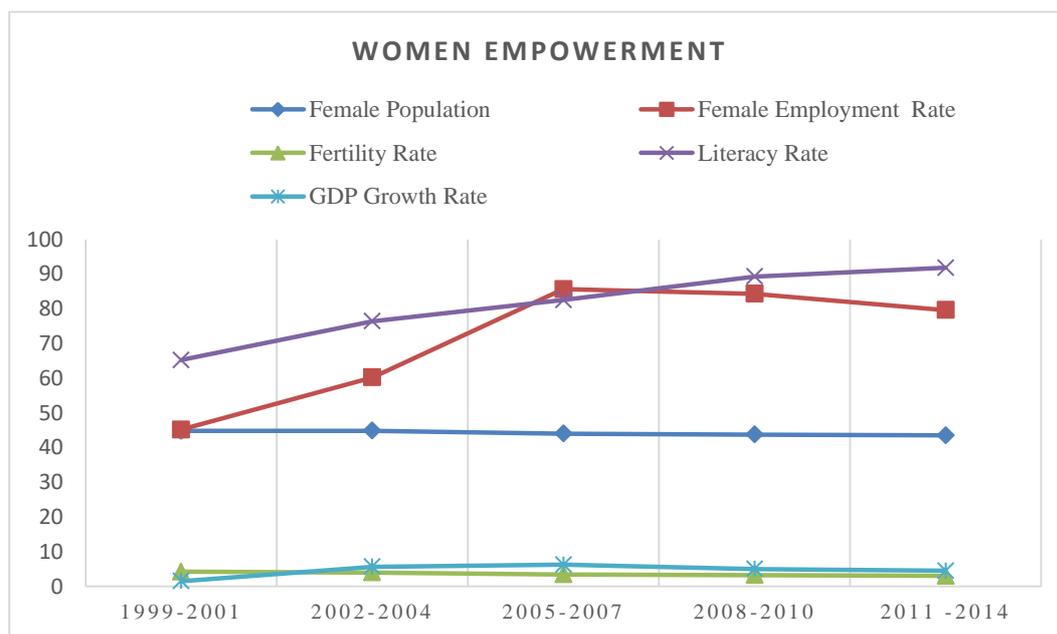


Figure 1 Women’s empowerment in Saudi Arabia

It is noteworthy, a number of government and non-government organization in Saudi Arabia are providing services for women’s empowerment in economic and social domains including “Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundations, Sultan Bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud Foundation, Saudi Industrial Development Fund, Abdul Latif Jameel Fund, Suleiman Bin Abdul Aziz Al Rajhi Charitable Foundation, and Cooperative Associations”. Most remarkably, “Princess Seetah Bint Abdul-Aziz Award for Excellence” in Social Work has greater impact on women’s empowerment (Al-Zoubi & Rahman, 2014).

It would be worth outlining that, the recent policy on allowing women to drive has made a breakthrough. In this regard, Faruk Soussa, Chief Middle East Economist at Citigroup Inc said, "the most important near-term impact will be from a reduction in Saudi women's reliance on drivers. This will not only mean greater access to the economy, including the retail sector, but will also mean a reduction in a large component of highly unproductive foreign labour drivers. This, in turn, will mean a decline in outward remittances and more money 'staying home' to circulate in the economy". In the same vein, Dima Jardaneh who is the head of Middle East and North Africa research at Standard Chartered in Dubai said, "A key impact of eliminating the ban (on driving) would be a boost to household consumption, including from the potential purchase of a second vehicle for some households and the easier mobility of women." (Halawi, 2017). "Independent mobility for women would definitely ease their entry and participation into the workforce, particularly as they would not have to secure a mode of transport to come to work. This would also reduce the cost of employment for women particularly if they do not have a private means of transport," she added. She also highlighted that "given the low participation of Saudi women in the workforce, a meaningful change in this would require a host of other structural measures, such as a change in social norms and readiness of work places to accommodate female employees." (Halawi, 2017).

2.4. Current Scenario

As a result of economic reformation and modernization, women in Saudi Arabia are gradually participating in the job market which is greater than any time in the national history (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Women's access to the public domain has recently been comparably easier due to favourable government policy and changing social norm. Due to policy reformation, educated women in Saudi are mostly involved in education leadership (Akram, Murugiah, & Arfan, 2017).

Saudi women are getting better opportunities to obtain higher education in the recent decades. As a result, they are being qualified for pertaining job (Faisal, 2012; MOH, 2013). The recent statistics suggest that only 20.1 percent women in Saudi have participated in the work force. But, 18 percent of the working age population are female. The average youth (15-24 year of age) unemployment is 31.2 percent while female (youth) unemployment rate is about 58 percent despite Saudi women opt out the men in educational attainment. Therefore, in can be concluded that the human capital of women is being wasted (Saidi, 2017).

However, the government of this kingdom has taken substantial initiatives to build a knowledge-based economy. In this regard, women education has gained greater priority. Entire education system has been nourished by bringing significant structural changes. As a result, the number of higher educated women is increasing and their participation in the labour market is rising parallelly. This participation has seemingly contributed to the national economy as well as household income (Nisreen & Nadia, 2011).

Saud Mohammed Al-Sati, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to India has recently (17 Oct. 2017) published an article in Hindustan Times on women's empowerment in Saudi. He overwhelmingly mentioned the royal decree of King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud on allowing women to obtain driving licence. This decision is considered as a landmark of 2017. Besides, in the same year Saudi was elected as a member to serve on the UN Commission on the Status of women. Girls are now allowed to receive physical curriculum in public school. On the other hand, justice ministry approved four landmark decisions pertaining women's right, those are protecting minors, divorcees, women in their children custody and the law graduates who are unable to practice their profession due to the arbitration of their male counterparts. Government has also introduced 64 centres as well as 17 committees to safe guard women against violence. Most remarkably, in September 2017 women were present at

the King Fahd International Stadium in Riyadh (Saud-Mohammed-Al-Sati, 2017). Nowadays, a few Saudi women have outranked men. For instance, “Rania Mahmoud Nashar, chief executive officer (CEO) of Samba Financial Group; Latifa Homoud Alsabhan is serving as the chief financial officer (CFO) of Arab National Bank; Sarah Al-Suhaimi is the CEO of the National Commercial Bank, Tadawul, became the first woman to chair of the country’s stock exchange. (Saud-Mohammed-Al-Sati, 2017). But still women in Saudi face multiple barriers to realising their legal, social and economic potential, which include regulations and associated restrictions on travel, access to finance, unequal property and inheritance rights (Saidi, 2017).”

2.5. Reformation of Education System

Significant reformation has been taken place in the education system by focusing women (M. Almunajjed, 1997). The first girls’ college was established in 1970 in Riyadh and 10 other colleges were setup across the country by the 80s in order to enhance women education. So far, there are 38 educational institutes for women including 8 universities. As a result, women are representing 58% of the total number of pupils in this country. Arts, education, general science, mathematics, religion, Arabic, geography, history, English, psychology and home economics were included in the curriculums. (Nisreen & Nadia, 2011). The literacy rate of the male and female is almost same. As of 2012, male youth (15-24) literacy rate was 99% and female youth was (15-25) 97% (UNICEF, 2013). The education system is run under four different entities, such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, General Presidency of Girls’ Education and the General Organization for Technical and Vocational training (Neva, Hala, & Gregory, 2014). Male and female students are separated based on the gender segregation policy (Havril, 2015). For the purpose of improving the quality of women education government is offering financial assistance across the county (Nisreen & Nadia, 2011). The literacy rate of women roused from 2% in 1970 to 97% (Female youth age between 15-25 years) by 2012 (UNICEF, 2013). In this case, University Princes Nora bint Abdul Rahman, which was established in 2009 has played the most important roles (Mohammed, 2013).

2.6. Education and Empowerment

Enhancement of education seems the most effective initiative in empowering Saudi women (Faisal, 2012). Now, women are more interested to participate in the management. Favourable environment as well as government support mostly encourage them to do job in the education sector (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015; Danish & Smith, 2012; Thompson, 2015). The government of has initiated several steps in order to support women so that they can play the roles of leadership. Establishment of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) is one of the remarkable initiatives. The Women’s Brunch of IPA provided training on running administration. This organization also provides computer literacy and household management skills. Besides, Saudi monarchy has established Kind Abdullah University of Science and Technology with mixed gender learning environment with the view to teach women science and technology, engineering and architecture. On the other hand, Women’s Chamber of Commerce, which was founded in 2002 as a semi-autonomous body is now significantly expanding crating partnership with the government agencies (Metcalf, 2011).

It’s a matter of hope that the cultural environment and the perspective of men towards women are getting improved day by day. Saudi government has ratified the United Nations Equal Remuneration Convention and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women (Mona AlMunajjed, 2010). The society seems becoming more open than before. Women also proved their abilities through their achievement in the universities. And thus, Saudi women to some extent could gain leadership

position (Almaki, Silong, Idris, & Wahat, 2016). Thus, women's empowerment is being enhanced and inspired in Saudi society.

2.7. Challenges in Higher Education

Women in Saudi Arabia are facing organizational, empowerment, cultural, personal and technical challenges (Al-Jaradat, 2014). The long prevailed patriarchal social norm, man dominated organizational culture and conservative religious belief resist women to perform their duties (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015; Danish & Smith, 2012; Thompson, 2015). They meet organizational challenges in academic leadership and for that reasons the institutional objectives get resisted (Al-Minqash, 2007). Women also experience exclusion from formal and informal network, deprivation of benefits from the corporate developmental assignment etc. (Omair, 2008). Thus, they are facing socio-cultural, organizational, and personal challenges in playing leadership roles (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). They generally lack empowerment. Lack of empowerment cripple them pursuing academic leadership. They fail to taking right decision for bringing necessary changes for the organizational success (Abu-Khader, 2012). In this case, the long prevailed patriarchal social norm, man dominated organizational culture and conservative religious belief are held responsible (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015; Danish & Smith, 2012; Thompson, 2015). Due to cultural norm Saudi men can't accept women working in the public domain (Abu-Khader, 2012). Furthermore, women's personal issues, such as distinguish feminine characteristics sometimes disfavour them too (Al-Shihabi, 2008). In this regard, physical challenges obstruct them due to physical or biological issues. Besides, technical challenges appears from the lack of technical supports that limit the ability of the women leaders to pursue their job (Al-Minqash, 2007). But, women's personal issues were identified as an important obstacle too. They have limited ambition and sometimes unwillingness to carry out the responsibilities of organizational leadership (Al-Ghamdi, 2013).

From the socio-cultural perspective, the obligatory process of having a *wakil* or male guardian in case of women participation in the labour market seems a barrier as well (Mona AlMunajjed, 2010). Economic challenges appeared with the new economic policy of the government, salary structure, financial freedom and financial liabilities etc (Alselaيمي, 2012). Women find difficulties to cope with these opportunities. They need to be family orientated while remaining under religious observation (Almansour & Kempner, 2016). Their limitations start from their individual life since their basic duties are to managing home and raising children (Danish & Smith, 2012). Challenges also come from the family members when they start disliking to see them working in the public sphere (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015).

Then, they meet constraints in socio-cultural environment (Jamali, Sidani, & Safieddine, 2005). Due to the prevailing culture of exclusion it becomes difficult for them to join in the management (Thompson, 2015). Men's negative perception towards women's representation and their (men's) surveillance make women's work environment unfriendly and uncomfortable (Kemp, Angell, & McLoughlin, 2015). Specially, the attitude of less educated aged males are very negative as well as traditional towards the working women (Elamin & Omair, 2010). Besides, Saudi family structure considers men as the household head with the responsibility of bread earning (Al-Lamky, 2007). Previous study found that religion and culture affect women employment. Conservative culture and strict religious practices hold back women from doing professional job (Alselaيمي, 2012). Conservative groups in Saudi based on the Islamic religious norm and social culture, expressed worries about female participation in job. This group of people believe that women employment may negatively affect culture (Alselaيمي, 2012). Even the educated Saudi people are found conservative towards women because of their attachment with the traditional culture (Asadi, 2011). This

statement suggests that women in Saudi are barely empowered. Because, women in this society is neither seen equal nor superior in compare to the men. Young women are kept under their family surveillance until marriage. They also live in a separate dormitory in the corporate compound under proper supervision (House, 2014). These challenges push them into vast difficulties in performing jobs. Therefore, they can't pay optimum efforts in economic performance. So, households as well as the Saudi society are deprived of the economic benefits. Besides, unfavourable environment discourages women to participate in jobs. Their unwillingness somehow produces dissatisfactory results of the initiatives taken by the government. So, in order to gain optimum benefits women's empowerment in higher education is very important.

3. REFORMATION AND CHANGES

Saudi government has made historic reformation in policy changes for women's empowerment. Most remarkably, allowing women to drive is a watershed in the kingdom's history. It shows a clear political will to undertake socio-cultural reforms. In the same vein, vision 2030 and National Transformation programme are inclusively bundled with women's empowerment by enabling their mobility, labour force participation and employment (Saidi, 2017). Several initiatives have already been taken. King Salman issued an order to allow women in government services specially in health care and education without needing male guardians' consent. An exemplifiable event is the Mayor of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, Fahd Bin Mohammed Al-Jubair has recently appointed a woman as an assistant mayor in Al-Khobar municipality. Besides, many women are working in the rapid growing shopping malls. This kind of initiative must encourage Saudi women to participate in economic activities and thus, economic growth of this country must be nourished. In this regard, the director of Geo-economic and Strategy at the International Institute for Strategic Studies affirmatively expressed that women empowerment in this land will bring higher enrichment while putting far reaching impact on the economy by improving household income, educating children, dissolving poverty and scaling up the standard of their livelihoods (Halawi, 2017).

4. IMPLICATION

Previous study suggests that economy with the little demand of human capital doesn't get high efficacy from women participation in the labour force. But, in the advanced economy when human capital is a prerequisite or key driver for economic development and production function, women participation leaves certain impact (Doepke & Tertilt, 2014). High labour participation and employment positively contributes to the national income. It also enhances consumer spending. Empowerment encourages women to start up new ventures that may create employment opportunity. Thus, women's empowerment and their participation in labour force can bring economic advantage as well as economic diversification (Saidi, 2017). Generally, women participate in the job market when the market oriented activities become more rewarding than the opportunity costs of non-marketing familial production (Al-Orabi, 1999).

4.1. Socio Economic Implication

In the light of above discussion, women's empowerment in Saudi will presumably bring greater benefits for this nation. All most a half of the total educated people in this country are women but only a little percentage of them are involved in economic activities. In the job sectors, women get better access to education sector. So, it can be assumed that Saudi women have greater opportunity to contribute to the socioeconomic front. An educator means a knowledge worker, who enlightens the society by generating and distributing knowledge.

Since, Saudi intends to develop a knowledge-based economy, then, in current circumstances women have the greater roles to play. They can contribute in research and development while teaching and administering. As a result, this country may witness a new phase of progress and prospect. Women's economic empowerment boosts household income as well as welfare. Women are more likely to spend money for children's health and education (Saqib et al., 2016). But, Saudi women's decision to participate in the labour force depends on their family (Alselaimi, 2012).

The above discussion suggests that Saudi women in education sector are not properly empowered. They are facing adverse situation in management. Besides, prevailing social norms and organizational structure disfavour them optimising their contribution.

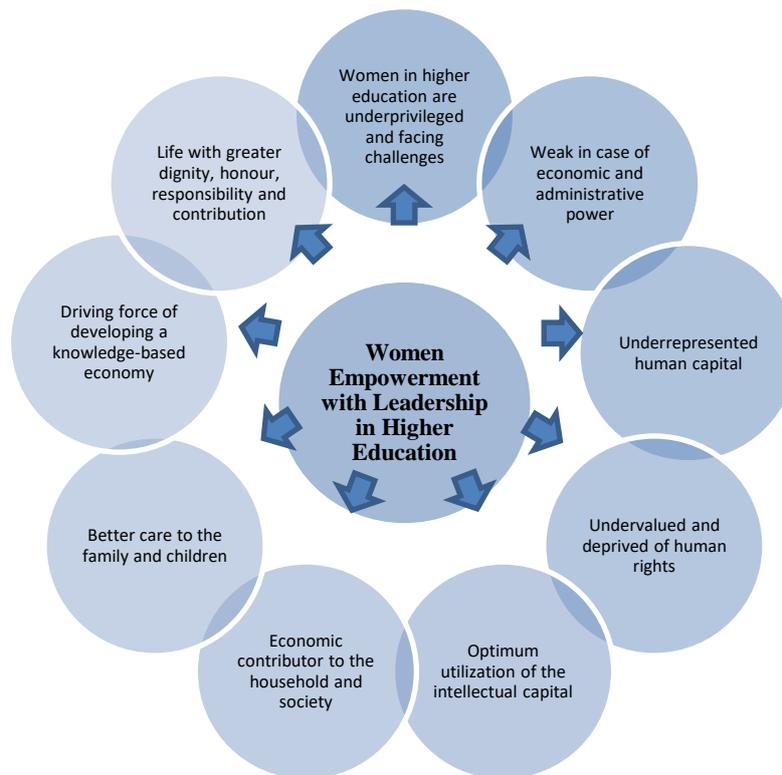


Figure 2 Implication of Women's Empowerment in Higher Education

5. CONCLUSION

Several empirical studies (as discussed in the previous sections) suggest that women like to spend money on their children's education, health and family welfare. That implies, if women are economically empowered household there would be a greater insurance of welfare. A paradigm shift is important in order to empower Saudi women. Changes should be made from four specific perspectives, such as social, political, cultural and organizational. Saudi society still preoccupied with the traditional as well as primitive religious views. The tribal social norm and myopic masculine domination destabilize the practice of gender equity. In this case, an egalitarian social policy should be implemented where men and women can get rational privileges and opportunities. Saudi is a predominating Islamic society. But, the persisting Islamic rules somehow discourage women's empowerment. It is noteworthy, though Islam doesn't treat women equally but it values them differently (Alselaimi, 2012). Islamic *shariah* principle and *fiqh* do not disregard women's participation in senior position (Al-Ghamdi,

2013). That implies, Islam supports women's empowerment as well as leadership. This religion extends women honour and dignity while giving greater responsibility to build a civilized Muslim *ummah*. It has been documented that an Islamic political group is continuously opposing women access to public domain. They believe that women access to public sphere may violate long-prevalled Islamic cultural norms while tarnishing the reputation of this Kingdom (Hamdan, 2005). It could be argued that if Saudi women are privileged with proper working environment and treated rationally, they must bring greater benefits to the households' economy as well as the society. Besides, women will get proper dignity and respect that they deserve. Saudi possesses a mixed culture that combines, tradition, religion and regional culture. This cultural mix has enriched its cultural context but to some extent backpaddles women's empowerment. So, Saudi needs to embraces world view. The wave of globalization overflows the whole planet. Saudi needs to respond to demands of time. Therefore, cultural reformation is necessary. People mindset needs to be changed towards modernization and progress. At the end, organizational structure should be changed as well. The organizational environment, corporate culture, employee value proposition (EVP) need to be women-friendly. Overall, new policy should be formed addressing persisting social, cultural, political and organizational norms and beliefs so that women can access to the economic opportunities. Notwithstanding, women should prepare themselves to cope with the social, political and economic changes. They need to possess qualities to be engaged with economic performance, innovation, creativity and so on. Since, educated women are mostly joining in education sector, authority may consider the aforesaid suggestion to be implemented in this sector.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abalkhail, J. M., & Allan, B. (2015). Women's career advancement: mentoring and networking in Saudi Arabia and the UK. *Human Resource Development International*, 18(2), 153-168. doi:10.1080/13678868.2015.1026548
- [2] Abu-Khader, S. (2012). Challenges facing the women's academic leaderships in the higher education institutions in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. . *Saudi Higher Education Journal*, 3(7).
- [3] Akram, F., Murugiah, L., & Arfan, A. (2017). Cultural Aspects and Leadership Effectiveness of Women Leaders: A Theoretical Prospective of Saudi Arabia.
- [4] Al-Ahmadi, H. (2011). Challenges facing women leaders in Saudi Arabia. *Human Resource Development International*, 14(2), 149-166. doi:10.1080/13678868.2011.558311
- [5] Al-Ghamdi, F. S. (2013). *The Obstacles that Stan Against Saudi Women to Reach Leadership Position in the Public Sector; A field study of Female Employees at King Abdul- Aziz University- Jeddah*. (Master theses of Sociology, Desertation), King Abdul- Aziz University-.
- [6] Al-Jaradat, M. K. M. (2014). Challenges Facing Women Academic Leadership in Secondary Schools of Irbid Educational Area *International Education Studies*, 7(5). doi:10.5539/ies.v7n5p147
- [7] Al-Minqash, S. A. (2007). Leadership over the group leadership with the group: A comparative study between the two male and women leadership styles at King Saud University. *Education and Psychology Mission Magazine*, 28, 34-45.
- [8] Al-Shihabi, E. (2008). *Methods for activating the administrative Arab woman's role*. Paper presented at the Forum of Role of the Arab Woman in the Sustainable Development and the Civil Society Institution, Doha-Qatar.
- [9] Al-Zoubi, M., & Rahman, M. (2014). The role of governmental and non-governmental institutions and associations on women's empowerment in Najran, KSA. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(3), 93-100.

Socio-Economic Impacts of Women's Empowerment in Higher Education and the Necessity of
Structural Reformation in Saudi Arabia

- [10] Al-Lamky, A. (2007). Feminizing leadership in Arab societies: the perspectives of Omani female leaders. *Women in Management Review*, 22(1), 49-67. doi:doi:10.1108/09649420710726229
- [11] Al-Orabi, H. M. (1999). Attitudes of Saudi Women towards Participating in the Labour Force. *Humanomics*, 15(4), 123-140. doi:doi:10.1108/eb018842
- [12] Almaki, S.-H., Silong, A.-D., Idris, K., & Wahat, N.-W. A. (2016). Challenges Faced Muslim Women Leaders in Higher Education. *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 6(3), 75-86. doi:10.5901/jesr.2016.v6n3p75
- [13] Almansour, S., & Kempner, K. (2016). The role of Arab women faculty in the public sphere. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(5), 874-886. doi:10.1080/03075079.2016.1147723
- [14] Almunajjed, M. (1997). *Women in Saudi Arabia Today*: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- [15] AlMunajjed, M. (2010). *Women's Employment in Saudi Arabia A Major Challenge*. Dubai: Booz & Company.
- [16] Alselaimi, R. (2012). *Female participation in the Saudi Workforce: A Saudi perspective of key barriers*. Curtin Graduate School of Business, Curtin University.
- [17] Asadi, L. (2011). Voices of Saudi Women Bloggers. *Educational Technology*, 18(3), 31-36.
- [18] Buttorff, G., & Welborne, B. (2015). Rethinking Economic Rentierism and Womens Empowerment. *Issue Brief* (09.25. 15).
- [19] Danish, A. Y., & Smith, H. L. (2012). Female entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia: opportunities and challenges. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 4(3), 216-235. doi:doi:10.1108/17566261211264136
- [20] Doepke, M., & Tertilt, M. (2014). *Does female empowerment promote economic development?* Retrieved from 1050 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138 <http://www.nber.org/papers/w19888>
- [21] Elamin, A. M., & Omair, K. (2010). Males' attitudes towards working females in Saudi Arabia. *Personnel Review*, 39(6), 746-766. doi:doi:10.1108/00483481011075594
- [22] Faisal, M. R. (2012). Education and Women Empowerment in Saudi Arabia. *Quarterly Journal of Chinese Studies*, 4(3), 96-110.
- [23] Halawi, D. (2017). 3 big ways Saudi women will contribute to the economy now. *AME Info*.
- [24] Hamdan, A. (2005). Women and education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and achievements. *International Education Journal*, 6(1), 42-64.
- [25] Havril, A. K. (2015). Improving Intercultural Competence of Female University Students in EFL within Saudi Arabia. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 192, 554-566. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.06.091
- [26] House, K. E. (2014, 24 February). Growing up Saudi. *The New York Times*, pp. 14-17.
- [27] Jamali, D., Sidani, Y., & Safieddine, A. (2005). Constraints facing working women in Lebanon: an insider view. *Women in Management Review*, 20(8), 581-594. doi:doi:10.1108/09649420510635213
- [28] Kemp, L. J., Angell, L., & McLoughlin, L. (2015). The symbolic meaning of artifacts for the workplace identity of women in academia. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 30(5), 379-396. doi:doi:10.1108/GM-07-2013-0080
- [29] Kesby, M. (2005). Retheorizing empowerment-through-participation as a performance in space: Beyond tyranny to transformation. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(4), 2037-2065.

- [30] Mason, K. O., & Smith, H. L. (2003). Women's empowerment and social context: Results from five Asian countries. *Gender and Development Group, World Bank, Washington, DC*.
- [31] Metcalfe, B. D. (2011). Women, empowerment and development in Arab Gulf States: a critical appraisal of governance, culture and national human resource development (HRD) frameworks. *Human Resource Development International, 14*(2), 131-148. doi: 10.1080/13678868.2011.558310
- [32] MOH. (2013). *The Current Status of Higher Education in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. Retrieved from Ministry of Higher Education, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:
- [33] Mohammed, I. (2013). Kingdom tops world in education spending *Arab News*. Retrieved from <http://www.arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/kingdom-tops-world-education-spending>
- [34] Neale, J., & Özkanli, O. (2010). Organisational barriers for women in senior management: A comparison of Turkish and New Zealand universities. *Gender and Education, 22*(5), 547-563.
- [35] Neva, H. A., Hala, G., & Gregory, P. (2014). Gender Differences of Perceived Leadership Skills among Saudi Students *Advancing Women in Leadership, 34*, 11-18.
- [36] Nisreen, A. B., & Nadia, Y. (2011). Impact of the Demand of Women Higher Education: A New Dimension Case: Saudi Arabia. *GSTF Business Review (GBR), 1*(2), 161-166. doi:10.5176/978-981-08-8957-9_QQE-031
- [37] Omair, K. (2008). Women in management in the Arab context. *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues, 1*(2), 107-123. doi:doi:10.1108/17537980810890293
- [38] Oplatka, I., & Herts-Lazarovits, R. (Eds.). (2006). *Women Principals in a Multicultural Society: New Insights Into Feminist Educational Leadership*: Sense Publishers.
- [39] Richardson, R. A. (2018). Measuring women's empowerment: a need for context and caution. *The Lancet Global Health, 6*(1), e30. doi:[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(17\)30460-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(17)30460-6)
- [40] Rios, C. (2013). Ending domestic violence in Saudi Arabia takes more than this (really great) ad. Retrieved from <https://mic.com/articles/39741/ending-domestic-violence-in-saudi-arabia-takes-more-than-this-really-great-ad#.ystoMF76D>
- [41] Rodolfo, C., & Estimo, J. (2017, 12 November 2017).
- [42] Saudi Arabia: Greater empowerment of Saudi women expected. *Arab News*. Retrieved from <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1192141/saudi-arabia>
- [43] Sabarwal, S., Santhya, K., & Jejeebhoy, S. J. (2014). Women's autonomy and experience of physical violence within marriage in rural India: evidence from a prospective study. *Journal of interpersonal violence, 29*(2), 332-347.
- [44] Saidi, N. (2017). Empowering Saudi women can bring huge economic benefit. *The National*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenational.ae/business/economy/empowering-saudi-women-can-bring-huge-economic-benefit-1.663708>
- [45] Salkind, N. (2010). Literature Review *Encyclopedia of Research Design*. Thousand Oaks, California.
- [46] Saqib, N., Aggarwal, P., & Rashid, S. (2016). Women Empowerment and Economic Growth: Empirical Evidence from Saudi Arabia. *Advances in Management and Applied Economics, 6*(5), 79.
- [47] Saud-Mohammed-Al-Sati. (2017, 17 Oct. 2017). Women are becoming the driving force for Saudi Arabia's progress. *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/women-are-becoming-the-driving-force-for-saudi-arabia-s-progress/story-w8d0IHuHiFKPiJyzlPIyqM.html>

Socio-Economic Impacts of Women's Empowerment in Higher Education and the Necessity of Structural Reformation in Saudi Arabia

- [48] Schuler, S. R., & Nazneen, S. (2018). Does Intimate Partner Violence Decline as Women's Empowerment Becomes Normative? Perspectives of Bangladeshi Women. *World Development*, 101(Supplement C), 284-292. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.09.005>
- [49] Sharma, A. (2014). Realizing Gender Responsive Governance and Gender Equality Representatives in Democratic Society: A Concrete Situation of Women Empowerment and Participation in Politics. *International Journal of Information and Futuristic Research*, 2.
- [50] Shiraz, M. S. (2016). The impact of education and occupation on domestic violence in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 25(4), 339-346.
- [51] The-World-Bank. (2018). Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women by 2015. Retrieved from <http://www5.worldbank.org/mdgs/gender.html>
- [52] Thompson, M. C. (2015). Saudi Women Leaders: Challenges and Opportunities. *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 5(1), 15-36. doi:10.1080/21534764.2015.1050880
- [53] UNICEF. (2013). Saudi Arabia. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/saudiarabia_statistics.html
- [54] Vidyasagar, G., & Rea, D. M. (2004). Saudi women doctors: gender and careers within Wahhabic Islam and a 'westernised' work culture. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27(3), 261-280. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2004.06.008>
- [55] World-Economic-Forum. (2016). The Global Gender Gap Report 2016. Retrieved from <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/rankings/>