

**Curtin Graduate School of Business**

**Increasing Saudi Women's Participation in Professional Occupations: A  
Saudi Perspective**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration  
of  
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# DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Raneem Alselaimee

14 March 2014

# DEDICATION

*I dedicate this thesis  
to my Mama, Afaf Nassar,  
my Father, Abdul-Wahab Alselaimi,  
and to all the women of Saudi Arabia.*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This doctoral study has been undertaken under very difficult personal circumstances. Therefore, my first and foremost sincere thanks and praise go to Allah for giving me the opportunity, knowledge, strength and patience needed to complete this doctoral journey.

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# ABSTRACT

In times like these, many countries have suffered periods of increasing unemployment rates. While male and female nationals of many countries may have to face unemployment equally, this is not the case in Saudi Arabia. Although Saudi Arabia has rocketing rates of unemployment similar to other countries, females in Saudi Arabia, however, face a greater challenge in finding professional work opportunities in the Saudi workforce.

Highlighting cultural, religious, political and gender order systems, this study establishes the setting to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of Saudi Arabia, as a country, as a system and as a nation.

In response to the scarcity of knowledge behind the phenomenon of the lack of female participation in the Saudi workforce from a national perspective, this thesis aims to link the Saudi answers of why, what and how to the known Western feminisation. This research endeavors to provide a deeper understanding of the Saudi male-dominated system that is embedded in the Saudi social and cultural spheres. This thesis first examines western feminism to gain an experienced perspective which helps to identify the areas that may influence female participation in general. In particular, the thesis examines the different layers of meaning interconnected to each other which affect the Saudi system and the system's ability to provide equal opportunities for both male and female nationals.

A qualitative approach was taken to explore real experiences and gain deeper understanding of female participation in the Saudi workforce. In this study, it was important to hear from educated unemployed females to understand why they did not join the workforce, and what they think would be useful to help them to join it. Moreover, it was important to hear from educated females who are employed and fully engaged in the workforce, to understand their experiences in a male-dominated workforce and to learn what may help create a better work-life experience towards a successful and fair career. Equally importantly, this study aimed to listen to highly educated men who held high positions in the workforce, to gain a deeper understanding of barriers and enablers from the perspectives of experienced males.

Guided by a phenomenological perspective in its exploration of data, this research draws on radical feminism in that it is conducted by a female researcher to help improve the lives of other females by suggesting radical changes to offer them equal opportunities in the male-dominated workforce. Undertaking this research in an Islamic context, Islamic implications are also seen as equally important to guide this study in proposing radical changes that are seen to fit in an Islamic context.

The findings are presented to capture the layers of meaning that play a role affecting female participation. The discussion aims to link between learned experiences, academic perspectives and collected data. It provides arguments that help to answer two questions: what are the barriers that face female participation in the Saudi workforce, and how can we relax these barriers?

Finally, based on the attributes of this study, the research provides specific details of actions that should help in creating equal opportunities in the male-dominated Saudi workforce, touching on major influences such as cultural and structural implications.

This study makes three main contributions. Firstly, it aims to utilize untapped female potential that is wasted. Secondly, it addresses the gap in the literature that documents the status of educated Saudi females in the professional workforce from a theoretical perspective. Thirdly, in a sensitive area like this, where the study of female participation sits on cultural and religious grounds, the study provides national insights regarding the phenomenon, rather than suggesting approaches characteristic of Western feminism that may not fit in the conservative Saudi context.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## *1.1 Background to the Research*

This research grew from an interest in women's experiences of their economic participation in the Saudi workforce. From a personal perspective, job satisfaction with regards to my career had become a terrifying nightmare. My own experience in the Saudi workforce made me aware that there are few opportunities for which to apply. The challenge of joining the workforce is ongoing for women facing the male-dominated world in Saudi Arabia.

From a global perspective, females in Saudi Arabia are stereotyped as unfortunate individuals. This has made me even more interested in female development in the Saudi workforce. This stereotype has led some Western media to state that Islam is behind the lack of female presence in the Saudi workforce. This has driven me to conduct this research to explore more deeply the relationship between Islam and women's employment. Through this research, a picture has emerged of the impact of cultural implications and male-dominated systems which interact in ways that bind with cultural structures to emphasize gendered roles in society and in employment.

International development and global integration indicate the need to welcome diversity in the Saudi workforce. However, we are left with the unanswered questions: how and why is it important to help facilitate female participation in a conservative society?

This chapter briefly outlines the background to this research, its significance, the research approach that has been used and the key findings. The structure of the thesis is then explained.

## ***1.2 Research Aims and Objectives***

There is a lack of literature by Saudi researchers that examines what feminism means for women in Saudi Arabia. Feminism in Saudi Arabia is both an important and a highly sensitive issue. There is a lack of literature by Saudi researchers that examines what feminism means for women in Saudi Arabia. However, the culture, traditions and societal values provide valuable insights regarding female participation in Saudi Arabian society.

Research has shown that female education in Saudi Arabia has developed tremendously over the last 10 years. Female students are welcome to enrol in various majors. With high rates of female graduates, it would be reasonable to expect that women in Saudi Arabia would be participating equally in professional occupations as they make up more than half of the number of university students (Hausmann, Tyson, and Zahidi 2012).

Focusing on capturing Islamic cultural identity from a Saudi perspective and reflecting upon Saudi nationals' views and lifestyle are essential if we wish to gain greater clarity regarding the barriers to women's participation, in particular, in professional occupations in Saudi Arabia.

Developing the Saudi economy depends on utilizing all human resources (Achoui 2009; Al-Dosary, Rahman, and Aina 2006). However, through the Saudi culture, women in Saudi society have been publicly absent figures for generations and have not fully participated in contributing to economic growth through employment. Hence, the research question is: *How can female participation in professional occupations in the Saudi Arabian workforce be increased?*

Recently, the government has placed great emphasis on Saudization (Mellahi 2007b; Abdul Ghafour 2013) and has restricted foreign labour entry (*Saudi Gazette* 2013). In response to the efforts of the Ministry of Labour to increase national employment and job creation, this study aims to look at professional opportunities for women, and to help ease many unemployed female university graduates into the professional workforce which may increase economic growth and stability. This research may recommend future directions for the Ministry of Labour to consider in employing Saudi female graduates into the workforce.



The objectives of this research are to understand the barriers that stand as brick walls keeping women from participating in paid employment. Moreover, to accommodate female participation in the Saudi workforce, it is essential to understand the enablers that will facilitate women's increased participation in the Saudi workforce.

### *1.3 Significance*

This study is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, it aims to help increase female participation in professional occupations in the Saudi workforce which will boost the Saudi economy. Secondly, and importantly, this study aims to be a voice for various groups of thought in Saudi Arabia in relation to women's employment. The researcher aims to present their concerns and does so as a Saudi citizen who does not want to be part of one group and excluded by another group. As a researcher, a Muslim, a Saudi citizen and a woman, my wish is that the various groups of thought can join together and work as one in the nation's best interest. This study has uncovered, through the views of interviewees and focus group participants, and their stories, the pressures and 'what ifs' that all swim together in one big bowl. It is this mix of stories and views that leads to some suggested ways forward for professional women in Saudi Arabia.

This study also aims to fill the gap in the literature: most writing on women and employment is Western-centric and therefore lacks a full understanding of the cultural context. Al Rasheed has noted that "despite the growing literature, the Saudi 'women question' has not attracted sufficient academic attention due to the difficulty of accessing the country" (Al Rasheed 2013a, 32). Metcalfe (2008) also agrees that there is very little research from a national perspective that contributes to women's employment in the Middle East. Hence, this study contributes to this scarce knowledge from a Saudi context on the lack of Saudi females in the paid workforce. Additionally, much of the current research on women's employment status in neighbouring countries focuses at the macro level, through collecting data via quantitative methods. Hence, female voices and the factors that play major roles in shaping their individual decisions relating to a career are not taken into consideration. Finally, this study approaches female participation through a lens that cuts through different layers of meaning that directly and indirectly influence female participation in the Saudi workforce, giving these various layers a voice that is heard.

At a personal level, being a Saudi female growing up in Saudi Arabia, I am excited to help women such as myself who have the potential to reach higher levels of participation and to engage in professional careers. I believe that the Saudi society and the country in general could benefit if all citizens of the society have an opportunity to engage according to their willingness, values, expertise, knowledge and experience. Appreciating our differences in gender and understanding the values we hold as Muslims can help the Saudi community achieve its potential.

However, as a Muslim, I am aware that some people in Western societies look at Islam as being a religion that discriminates against females. The aim of this thesis is not to correct this view as such; rather, it is about defining an alternative view which deepens our understanding of both religion and culture. This thesis provides the opportunity for Muslim women and men to explain their views regarding the impact of Islam on women's employment. The lack of female participation does raise the simple question of why, and this question has become the main purpose of this study to understand why and to investigate what may work to overcome the barriers.

#### ***1.4 Methodology***

Given its interest in women's experience of female development in the Saudi workforce, the research used methods that enabled the phenomenon of female participation in professional occupations to be examined from a range of perspectives in order to determine the essence of the experience. A phenomenological approach informed by feminist perspectives was adopted, enabling the essence of the phenomenon, "the lack of female participation in the Saudi workforce", to be understood. Phenomenological studies' emphasis is on describing peoples' experiences (Patton 1990). Further detail regarding the methodology and design for this research is explained in Chapter Four.

The research data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups. Both are considered appropriate data gathering methods for phenomenological studies (Patton 1990; Denzin and Lincoln 2003a).

Data analysis was guided by Tesch's (1990) steps for managing unstructured data with regards to analysis and coding (Creswell 2003). NVivo software was used as a data management tool (Jones 2007).

## ***1.5 Key Findings***

The research highlighted key findings regarding female participation. Five important findings have been identified:

- Female participation is a sensitive cultural issue;
- The impact of the ‘Western eye’ regarding Islam;
- Islam as an enabler of women’s participation in employment;
- Segregation as a social preference;
- Organizational changes are required to address gender diversity in the Saudi workforce.

The findings tell the story but provide different perspectives. Lack of female participation in the Saudi workforce has been lingering between layers of meaning that are tangled between cultural implications regarding female empowerment, traditional organizational systems, gendered roles and family responsibilities. The themes emerging from these key findings are explained in detail in Chapter Five.

## ***1.6 Thesis Outline***

The thesis is structured as shown in Figure 1.1. As this study is about female participation in the Saudi workforce, it is essential to set the context. Therefore, Chapter Two outlines the context for this research. An overview of Saudi Arabia’s history, cultural identity, governmental regime, and business networks and systems are presented to create a holistic view of the country.

Understanding a realm behind a country and its nation requires drawing linkages of true meanings with specific logical cultural dimensions that make up a certain country. Chapter Two provides the reader with the foundation of the Saudi cultural identity and how it impacts on female employment. Moreover, the ‘Western eye’ which depicts Islam as the main reason for discrimination against females is discussed to present a more holistic view regarding the impact of religion on female participation in the Saudi workforce.

This research is guided by feminist perspectives. Therefore, Chapter Three reviews literature that is relevant to women’s experiences in the workforce in general. Related issues such as feminism, gendered workplaces, and women and careers are

also reviewed. This chapter also examines literature that focuses on women in selected Muslim countries to determine points of similarity and differences in differing cultural contexts. The female development in the Saudi workforce is explained in detail to underpin the identified gap in gender economic status in the Saudi workforce. Hence, through this chapter, the barriers and enablers of female participation in the workforce as identified in the literature have been reviewed and are presented firstly in general, and then specifically by looking at the barriers and enablers to provide the framework for examining female participation in the Saudi workforce.

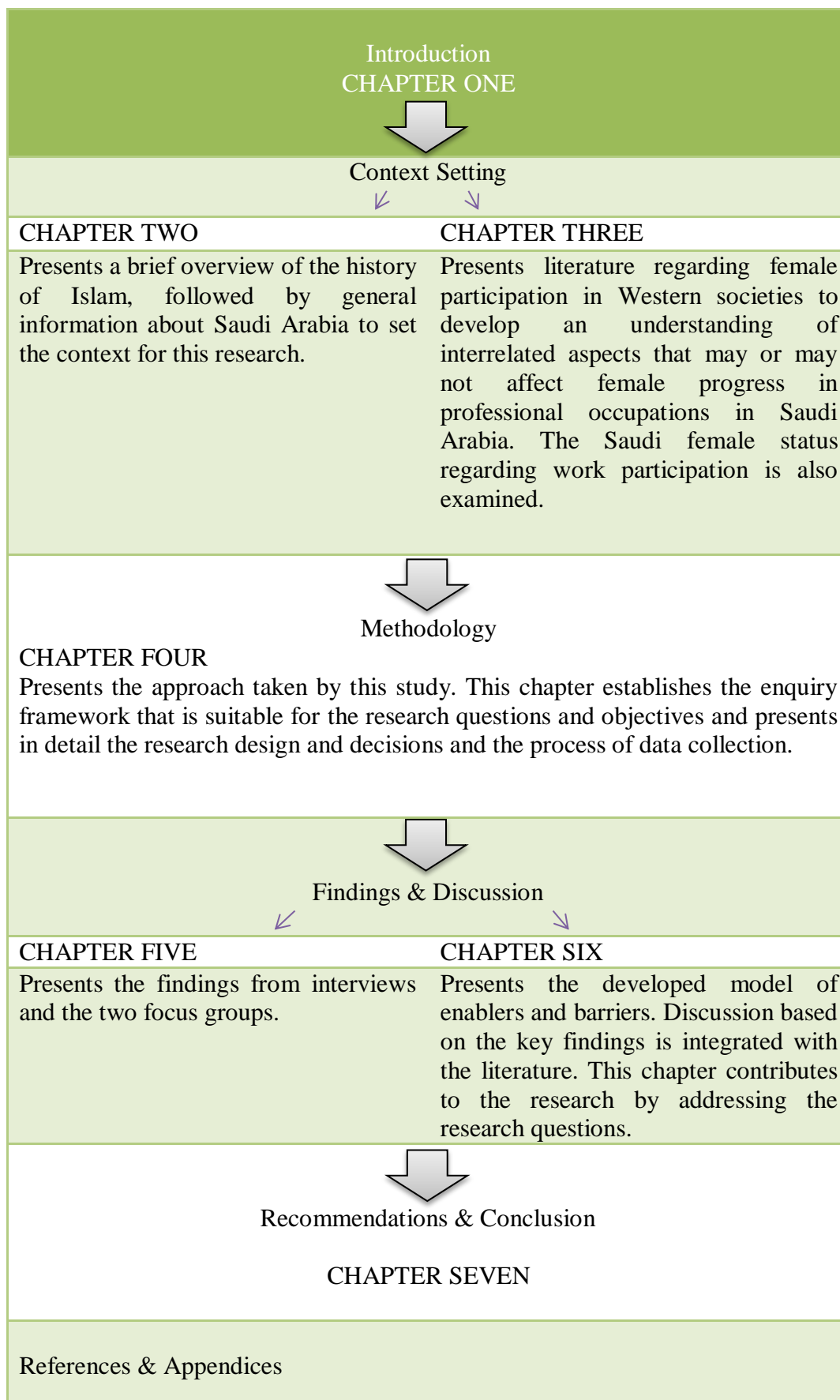
Chapter Four details the methodological issues and choices related to the research. As this study is guided by a feminist approach, feminism and the reflection of gender on a specific phenomenon are discussed. The research design, preliminary study, interview process, reflective practices and data analysis are all discussed.

Chapter Five presents the findings of 28 interviews and two focus groups. The focus of the data analysis was to establish the essence of the experience of both male and female nationals regarding female participation in the Saudi workforce. This chapter details the work barriers, the cultural concerns and the enablers that create the layers of meaning regarding female participation in the Saudi workforce. Through this chapter, the voice of participants is revealed as they tell their stories and experiences regarding female participation.

After presenting the participants' voices in a manner that captures the essence of meanings relating to female participation, Chapter Six presents a formal discussion that integrates the research findings with the literature to gain a deeper understanding of the enablers and barriers to women's participation in professional occupations in Saudi Arabia. Chapter Six follows this with the development of the model, 'A Framework for Female Employment in the Saudi Workforce', that conceptualizes both the layers of meaning and the methods to increase further female participation.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis with a summary and suggested actions regarding facilitating further female development in the Saudi workforce. This chapter starts with an overview of female progress over time to indicate that cultural implications have impacted on female participation and progress rates. Females and males in Saudi society are optimistic regarding progress towards more integrated work

systems that promote equity regardless of gender. Highlighted in this chapter is the point of possibility model introduced in Chapter Six. The point of possibility model through the suggested actions and implications opens up blocked opportunities for women. The data presented have identified essential facilitators that need to be considered to maintain progress. The maintenance of the cultural identity of the Saudi society is a key factor in both promoting change and as a barrier to change. The limitations of the study are discussed and possible areas of future research are identified.



**Figure 1.1 Thesis structure**

# CHAPTER TWO: SETTING THE CONTEXT

## *2.1 Introduction*

Women in Saudi Arabia have high educational rates but low employment rates (Hausmann et al. 2012). However, in order to answer the question why females in Saudi Arabia are not as active in employment as females in other parts of the world, it is important to highlight the issues that are related to such delays in economic growth.

This chapter aims to give the reader a better understanding of Saudi Arabia by providing a brief overview of the history of Islam, followed by more general information about the development of Saudi Arabia. One must consider that female participation is influenced by the Saudi social structure which is directly connected to and influenced by both religion and cultural aspects.

Despite governmental efforts to address unemployment by utilizing national human resources, the lack of female participation remains unaddressed (Al-Munajjed 1997). This chapter concludes by taking the reader to the level of the researcher herself to understand her motivation for this study. Therefore, the reader will have a clear understanding of some of the key motivations for this study.

## *2.2 Saudi Arabia*

In 1902, King Abdul-Aziz bin Abd Al-Rahman Al Saud captured Riyadh and, after 30 years, unified most of the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia is an important nation both as a global centre of Islam and as a major global oil distributor (Al-Dosary and Rahman 2005; IHS 2012; Index Mundi 2012b). Today, Saudi Arabia is made up of 1,960,582 square kilometres of land (Index Mundi 2012b). As can be seen by the map in Figure 2.1, the neighbouring countries are Yemen, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq and Jordan. The land is divided into the central, western, eastern, southern and northern provinces. Major cities are as follows:

Riyadh, the capital, is located in the central province; the western province is known for the Islamic holy mosques located in Mecca and Al-Medina. Mecca is perhaps the most well-known city in Saudi Arabia. It is considered the holiest place for all Muslims and should be visited, if possible, at least once in their lifetime (AlBukhary 1959). Currently, around 2.7 million pilgrims visit Mecca each year as part of the Hajj religious pilgrimage (CDSI 2011). Towards Mecca is also the direction faced by all Muslims when praying anywhere in the world (AlFaraj 2008; AlBukhary 1959). The western province is also the location of both Jeddah and King Abdullah, the new economic city. Al-Dammam, known for its role in the oil production industry, holds one-fifth of the world's oil reserves and is located in the eastern province (EIU 2011; AlFaraj 2008).



Figure 2.1 Map of Saudi Arabia (Encyclopedia Britannica 2010)



The Saudi Arabian demography profile reported that the population for year 2012 was 26,594,504 which included 5,576,076 non-nationals (Index Mundi 2012b) Females make up half of the Saudi society (EIU 2011). Table 2.1, as cited by the Central Department of Statistics and Information (CDSI) on the Saudi Arabian CDSI governmental website (CDSI 2012), estimates the total number of employed and unemployed nationals in most Saudi cities.

**Table 2.1 National employment rates**

City	Total			Out of the Labour Force		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
Riyadh	5,128,352	1,989,001	3,139,351	2,145,741	1,521,180	624,561
Mecca	5,193,083	2,161,062	3,032,021	2,475,240	1,791,601	683,639
Medina	1,261,089	544,181	716,908	634,084	443,982	190,102
Qassim	902,066	366,292	535,774	434,897	288,744	146,153
Easte.Pro	3,123,060	1,207,247	1,915,813	1,389,141	964,277	424,864
Asir	1,378,281	614,301	763,980	708,839	495,968	212,871
Tabuk	534,674	228,516	306,158	274,087	192,493	81,594
Hail	444,935	195,168	249,767	211,526	155,086	56,440
North.	223,084	99,259	123,825	112,379	75,722	36,657
Jazan	961,373	435,370	526,003	521,941	360,971	160,970
Najran	350,877	152,465	198,412	174,650	124,540	50,110
Al-Baha	304,344	140,575	163,769	146,460	112,037	34,423
Al-Jouf	314,350	129,200	185,150	138,941	93,462	45,479
Total	20,119,568	8,262,637	11,856,931	9,367,926	6,620,063	2,747,863

The above table shows that females in all cities of Saudi Arabia are under-represented in the workforce. The table also indicates that about 71% of the unemployed nationals are females. Maintaining stability has become very challenging to many Saudi nationals who are currently out of employment. In an interview, the former Minister of Education, Prince Faisal bin Abdullah, emphasized that Saudization alone will not be enough to address the rocketing rates of unemployment, and he continued by highlighting the need for job creation and investing in economic projects (Abdul Ghafour 2013).

The following section will present the country's structure which should give a broad understanding of its culture, religion, and legal and business systems.

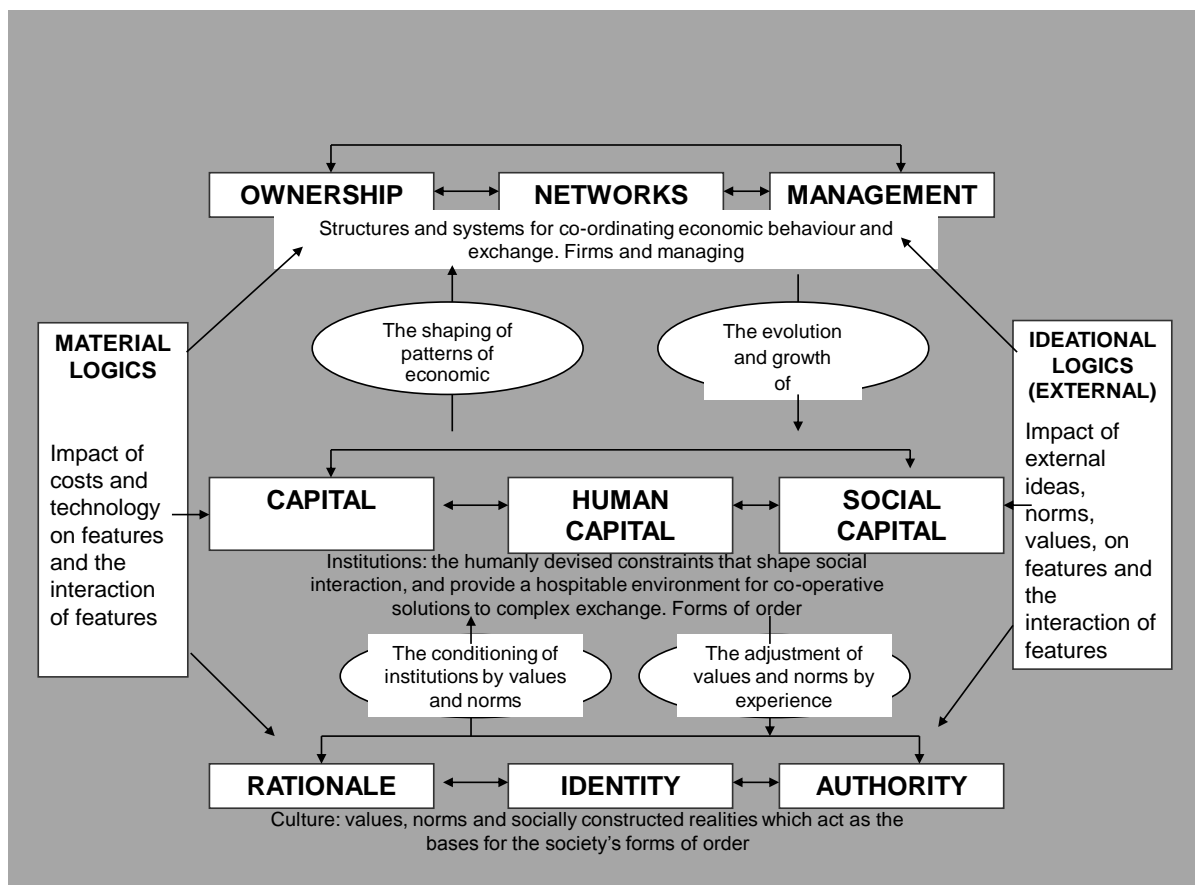
### ***2.3 Country Structure***

Every country in the world is unique in its tradition, culture and social norms (Cameron and Freeman 1991; Snyder 2004). The business and management patterns of each country are shaped accordingly. There may be similarities in the countries from a specific region; for example, Asian countries may share similar traditions with each other just as Arab countries from the Arabian Peninsula share similar traditions. The Redding (2005) model provides an approach for understanding how social and economic systems differ from one country to another. According to Redding (2005), one must have an appreciation of a country's structure in order to understand the basic institutional factors that link together the levels of a certain society.

In addressing the problem of reconciliation between social science disciplines, sociology has the potential to fill in certain important gaps in the accounts given by economics. These gaps are firstly the understanding of the institutional supports of a market, and secondly an appreciation of the limits of rational choice analysis. Sociology works by arguing for the existence of different social realms, each with its own social logics, and the boundaries of which require defining via a process of interpretation. These realms provide different contexts for action. The most obvious realm is that of a society, usually overlapping with a state/language/culture, and the strength of this case comes from the number of determinants of the economic order that derive from state action, either directly via regulation or indirectly by the institutionalising of norms historically shaped within a society. Identity given by a social group determines behavioural realms in order to be apart or a member of that social group (Redding 2005, 126).

Therefore, sense-making of regulations and norms “comes about via the direct interactions of people in a social setting as, for instance, in a market. This is also a

world of shifting and evolving meaning, similar in some ways to language itself” (Redding 2005, 126). Hence, the constant sense-making of frameworks appears to be achieved through social approval (Piore 2002). As seen in Figure 2.2, Redding proposes that, for one to understand the realm behind a country and its nation, it is essential to link meanings with specific logical cultural dimensions. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that institutional frameworks are made coherent with the inclusion of certain interest groups. Historical acknowledgment is required in order to understand the identity of the nation under examination.



**Figure 2.2 Redding’s (2005) structure analysis of business systems model**

Hence, cultural values, norms, history, rationale and authority create a country’s sense of identity. Behind the realm of the meaning of activities comes culture which explains why a society does things in a particular way. Hence, identities are created through history and culture. On that basis, those in authority recognize the society’s cultural identity and build systems and practices that align with this social cultural

identity. Through this lens, it is clear that culture and history create the base that lies beneath and supports the human and social capital. The human and social capital relies on the concept of trust in setting social patterns. The middle section of the model focuses on forms of capital that are constructed from legal, educational, religious and other institutional systems that shape the society's environment. Institutions trust in the authority to gain justice and therefore trust the social fabric that is created. Finally, the third layer consists of networks, management and ownership which are constructed in a manner that is coherent with a country's social sphere. In this sense, according to a specific cultural and historical background, the society will establish appropriate legal systems and create appropriate educational institutions that serve its beliefs and interests. Management styles, business methods and networks are created in the same manner to align with the society's cultural identity and legal system.

This model is used as a lens to capture the essence of how culture and social identity play major roles in making sense of the Saudi structure. Also important to underline in sense-making is the fact that religion in some countries is embedded with historical implications and that this too is reflected in the basis of the country's nation and structure (Redding 2005). The reason behind the lack of female participation in the Saudi workforce lies within the story of sense-making of the norms and regulations in Saudi Arabia. **Hence, Redding's model is used only as a lens to understand how the Saudi structure is put together thus establishing the cultural implications that set its gender roles that, in turn, impact on female employment in professional positions.**

In this sense, the researcher found Redding's (2005) 'Structure Analysis of Business Systems' model a useful way for setting the context for the reader through painting a comprehensive appreciation of Saudi Arabia in terms of female participation in public life. Hence, the next section will discuss Islam in the early days briefly explaining how Islam started in the Arabian Peninsula. Afterwards, a brief overview of the establishment of Saudi Arabia is discussed which, together with Islamic history, supports Redding's basis of rationale and identity. This is followed by an examination of how Saudi Arabia's identity is reflected in the social sphere and the managerial and networking structures that have been created.

## *2.4 Islam in the Early Days*

The Arabian Peninsula is the birthplace of Islam (Al-Krenawi 2014): more specifically, it was introduced by the Prophet Mohammed in Mecca. Islam is considered the third and last religion that descended to all humanity after Christianity (AlBukhary 1959). Islam in English means “peace”. The main belief of Islam is that there is no God other than Allah the Mighty and that his messenger is the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him).<sup>1</sup> Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was the main teacher of Islam and the Holy Qur’an is the Holy book of Islam. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was born in 570: he was seen as a remarkable man and was known as a man of patience, courage, wisdom, generosity, intelligence and magnitude who inspired millions of lives throughout the world (AlBukhary 1959). Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was very detailed in teaching his Muslim followers and thus Islam was not a just a religion but a lifestyle. The behavioural concepts of being good and kind to one another (Muslim or non-Muslim) and positive personal attitudes were taught and preached by Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). He talked to his followers about every aspect of life in the name of Islam, for example, on medicine, business, finance, family matters, social matters, educational matters, law and politics, and even on women’s rights (Al-Hashimi 2003; AlBukhary 1959).

Women in Islam at that time were very active in terms of economic participation. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) encouraged female participation, education and respect. Most importantly, he did not differentiate between women and men in terms of intellectual capabilities and economic performance. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) first married Khadeja Bint Khowalid, a very well-known wealthy businesswoman. His daughter Fatima is cited in many historical Hadith<sup>2</sup> documents for her wisdom and as an active political figure. Sukaina, a granddaughter of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), was known to be a great mathematician. Many famous females made and sold goods in the marketplace during this time.

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<sup>1</sup> Muslims, when speaking of Prophet Mohammed, follow with the statement of “peace be upon him” and, as a practising Muslim and researcher, I follow this convention. However, to avoid repetition of words in this thesis, this statement will be bracketed as PBUH.

<sup>2</sup> Hadith scripts are the documented sayings of Prophet Mohammed.

In the Al-Bayruni, Al-Aathar BNF manuscripts<sup>3</sup>, female participation is illustrated through drawings of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) together with his followers. These show that females were not excluded in his teachings. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) emphasized and encouraged all Muslims regardless of gender to seek knowledge through education (AlBukhary 1959). Females participated in wars when needed, nursed and were even assigned to make weapons of war (AlBukhary 1959).

Shortly after his death, Aysha, Prophet Mohammed's wife (PBUH) and the daughter of the first chief khalifa Abu Bakur Al-Sadeeq who was responsible for the Muslim Empire, led an army of 30,000 soldiers against those who thought Islam had died with the Prophet. In another example that shows female leadership and empowerment in those days, the second chief khalifa assigned a female to be the marketplace manager looking after product conditions and trade regulations for trustworthy business relations. Other females did labour-intensive work such as farming. Some females were consulted on law and political issues owing to their respected knowledge. The above examples indicate that females in the early times of Islam were socially and economically active. The examples also suggest that females participated in all types of positions, without apparent discrimination. It could be concluded from these early indications of Islamic teachings that women were not excluded from economic activity or from decision making.

## ***2.5 Authority and Systemic Structure of Saudi Arabia***

After the Ottoman Empire fell, in the 1700s (Al-Krenawi 2014) , Islam was barely visible in parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Many regional tribes went back to previous forms of worship, as tribes around the Arabian Peninsula had different traditions.

Before 1932, nobody in the interior of Arabia imagined a Saudi nation or narrated its origins, characteristics and aspirations ... no group had a project to homogenise culture, define its contours, or articulate its future in the form of state, thus inhibiting the development of a Saudi nationalism ... in the absence of unifying national narrative and against the background of fragmented primordial identities, after 1932 the Saudi state transformed the eighteenth-century Wahhabi religious revival into religious nationalism (Al Rasheed 2013a).

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<sup>3</sup> A collection of ancient texts

When the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932 by King Abdul-Aziz (Mellahi et al. 2001; Al Nafjan 2011), he reintroduced Islam to the lands (Al-Krenawi 2014). Nyrop (1984) describes the role of the King by saying:

The Saudi King is not a figurehead; he is clearly the leading political figure, but by no means is he an absolute monarch. The first restriction on his power is that he must adhere to tenets of the Sharia, which lie at the heart of the legitimacy of the House of Saud. This yields power to the senior Ulama, who interpret the king's decisions by the standards of Islamic law. The political guidance in the Qur'an calling on leaders to 'take council among yourselves' has contributed further to the dispersal of power from the monarch. As an adjunct to this Qur'anic injunction, Saudi decision-making has been guided by the principles of Shura (consultation) and ijma (consensus). Accordingly, the King's proper role is to guide consultations in order to reach a consensus on which to base decisions (Nyrop 1984, 217-218).

The above shows the extent to which Islam is seen as a guide for the King and his authority towards his country and the Saudi nation. Hence, the legal system is derived from the Holy Qur'an which is the formal source of the constitution as it was in the early days of Islam (Wahab, Lewis, and Hassan 2007; Niblock 2006). Law, politics, education, networking and even family structures are based on the Islamic fundamentals as detailed in the Holy Qur'an and in Hadith scripts<sup>4</sup> (AlBukhary 1959).

The Council of Ministers and the Consultative Council are the central figures of the government and are charged with all high-level governmental activities. According to Alfaraj (2008), "the current basic governmental structure of Saudi Arabia which can be classified into the following organisational settings: (a) the Council of Ministers, (b) the Consultative Council (Shura), and (c) the regional councils" (Alfaraj 2008, 39).

The Council of Ministers acts as the powerful body of authority in handling all public affairs in the country. The Council of Ministers is scheduled to meet weekly to develop and improve all services. However, religious implications play a major role in their authority. As a result, some cases are not handled without additional advice from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (AlFaraj 2008).

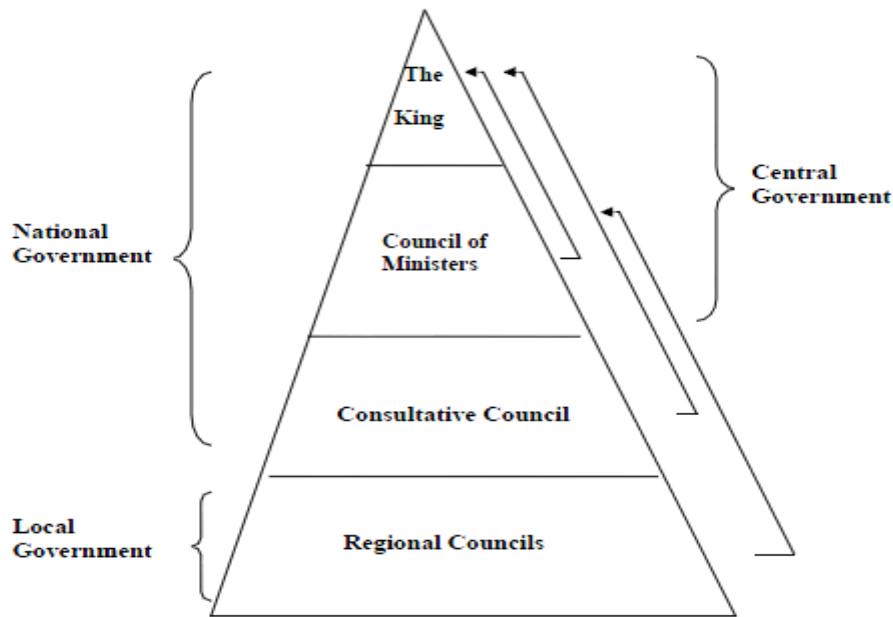
A consultative council is selected from the elite nationals who gather weekly to discuss all issues concerning the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its citizens. Known as

*Majlis AlShura*, this is a democratic concept developed in Islam that the one responsible (the King) must consult with knowledgeable selected people to advise him on all issues concerning the people. Hence, any matter would be discussed and voted on. Therefore, this council assists the King with a normative role in making basic choices for his nation's well-being (AlFaraj 2008; Moussalli 2009).

Thirteen regional councils represent the cities throughout all regions. Each region is categorized into governorates (of class A or class B), and districts and centres (of class A or class B), regarding its location, general services available, security, transportation facilities and environmental conditions (Khashogji 2002; AlFaraj 2008). Under the Article related to regional law, the council of each region is responsible for general improvement plans in its region, determining the region's necessities in order for them to be included in the following year's budget. Each council is also expected to study useful projects and their outcomes and implement suitable means of communication. Thus, each region must make note of the facilities offered to the public of that specific region as to whether they are sufficient or need development by providing basic facilities such as constructed roads, schools, hospitals and telecommunication networks. Additionally, creating job opportunities and communicating with local citizens to encourage them to become active participants of regional development programs is expected (AlFaraj 2008).

Finally, all levels of government have basic communication means through meetings to discuss relevant matters. Figure 2.3 explains the Saudi governmental structure.





**Figure 2.3 The Saudi governmental structure as found in AlFaraj (2008, 40)**

## **2.6 Social Capital and Institutions**

Family ties and tribes are considered to be the source of social face and identity (Al-Gahtani, Hubona, and Wang 2007). According to AlFaraj (2008):

Before the unification of the country by King Abdulaziz, Saudi society mostly consisted of tribesmen and a few urban dwellers, with each tribe having its own territory and form of government. King Abdulaziz designed a plan for establishing settlements for the people. He helped in keeping peace and security, and in improving the socio-economic standards of the people. The King also introduced effective educational systems. Saudis became assimilated and accustomed somewhat to modern way of life. In other words, ‘How many camels do you have?’ became ‘What grade are you in?’ (28).

Soon after King Abdul-Aziz established the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, tribes all over the lands trusted in him to bring peace and justice. The Saudi social life is now divided into two: public and private social groups or spheres. The public sphere is known for all public activities such as business, economics and politics. This sphere was an exclusively male-dominated world for generations, until recent changes which have seen more women in public life (Al Nafjan 2011; Al-Munajjed 1997). Females in most parts of the land were only visible in private spaces (the private sphere). They were only seen indoors in family households and were responsible for household chores. For example, 30 years ago, females were not expected to be seen in restaurants alone without their male family relatives whereas now it is normal in

major cities to see women alone in public spaces. Women can connect with other female friends in public at social events, conferences, shopping malls, health clubs, spas, coffee shops and restaurants.

Importantly, from a cultural perspective, the social structure has excluded females from most public spaces as this was seen as necessary to protect their honour and to keep females secure from foreigners (Al-Munajjed 1997). Protecting one's honour is vitally important in the Saudi social sphere. However in King Faisal's era (1964-1975), female education was introduced to the Saudi society. As a result, gender segregation in the public sphere was officially introduced. Female education was introduced under the Department of Religious Guidance, to ensure females received an education that was considered suitable to make them a good Muslim mother and wife (Hamdan 2005; Jamjoom and Kelly 2013). In 2002, the Department of Religious Guidance passed responsibility for female education to the Ministry of Education. This opened up educational fields and educational opportunities for Saudi females (Hamdan 2005; Jamjoom and Kelly 2013).

As a sign of respect for cultural values and Islamic regulations, schools in Saudi Arabia are segregated. As a result, females have the freedom to dress without needing to wear their hijab<sup>5</sup> while learning. As a result of the development of educational fields, more female doctors, nurses and physicians are competing with males for employment in hospitals (Vidyasagar and Rea 2004). In 2008, law and industrial fields opened up as areas in which females could learn and participate, even though these are considered through society's eyes to be a man's world. In April 2013, as reported in news articles, the Justice Ministry licensed Arwa al-Hujaili as the first female lawyer (Human Rights Watch 2013b).

Thus, education, along with family support and motivation, has meant that highly dedicated females can hold their heads up high to prove that they can participate across the full range of professions.

Despite the slow rate of change, it is recognized that some females in Saudi Arabia have started to pursue their individual rights for participation and changes to social restrictions. This was noted by Keyes (2013) in an article titled "Saudi Arabia's

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<sup>5</sup> The Islamic hijab is a veil used to cover females' hair. According to different schools of thought, some females cover their whole face and other females cover only their hair.

Feminist Revolution Has Begun” published as news in 2013 by *Women in The World*.

## **2.7 Managerial Style and Networks**

Turning to the final layer of Redding’s model as shown in Figure 2.2, networks, ownerships and business systems in Saudi Arabia are a cohesive part of the national identity. For example, businesses and organizations usually and generally consist only of men. To increase female employment, creating additional separate spaces for females emerges as a new issue. This requires the expenditure of additional money to create working spaces for females, and thus can discourage organizations from employing females. The majority of organizations in business fields remain male dominated (Omair 2008; Meijer 2010; Metcalfe 2008; Al-Lamki 2007).

However, in response to pressures to increase women’s participation in employment, more organizations are employing females and have started to create female sections (Achoui 2009; Al-Ahmadi 2011). Although not intended to change the company’s culture, this may make organizations aware of Saudi females’ rights to equal opportunities in the workforce and thus, potentially, it may make them become more socially responsible.

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions in relation to Saudi Arabia complement Redding’s model. In Saudi Arabia, organizations have similar trends to the cultural values of the society (Hofstede 1998). According to Hofstede (1992), power distance and masculinity are considered very high in the Saudi managerial network: a masculine atmosphere is dominant in most organizational cultures as they are male-dominant workplaces with a long-term orientation that values loyalty (Hofstede 1992; Al-Krenawi 2014). Power distance adds emphasis to respect for age, knowledge, hierarchy and gender. From a managerial and business perspective, high power distance may “explain the power differentials between men and women, bosses and subordinates and the relevance of seniority” (Rao 2012, 234).

In terms of networking and socializing, people tend to be guided by the Islamic encouragement to be good to one another. Hence, business networks are professional in their manner with respect to business (Williams 2008). People tend to be very kind and generous which is an Islamic cultural norm. Management in Saudi Arabia is also

seen through an Islamic cultural perspective. Thus, management follows Islamic principles in business methods and finance, and structures are set up in accordance to Islamic teachings (Spierings, Smits, and Verloo 2010; Al- Krenawi 2014).

Islam is considered as a system in itself. It provides laws (Al-Sharia), a societal framework, an economic structure, and behavioural and scientific teachings. Mellahi states that: “Saudi Arabia is governed by an Islamic monarchy in which Islam makes up the civil, cultural, economic, legal, political and social fabric of the country” (Mellahi 2007a, 88). Thus, the Saudi Arabian structure is based on its historical religious roots which are embedded into the culture to create the rationale behind the Saudi societal identity. In this sense, systems, institutions and the public sphere are also structured in a manner that respects the Saudi cultural identity. Finally, the social sphere reflects these cultural and Islamic concepts, governing the ideas behind their choices of actions and attitudes towards networking, ownership and management systems, which include female employment.

Having provided the reader with a general understanding of Saudi Arabia, the following section creates further understanding of the female situation, in particular, female economic participation in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the following section will touch on employment issues and then, specifically, on female employment.

## ***2.8 Segregation and Politics***

Research suggests that Islamic teachings do not exclude females from public spheres or economic development. Rather, it is suggested that gender segregation was introduced through Wahhabism (Al Rasheed 2013a; Lopez 2013)<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, Alyami, in his interview with Lopez (2013) titled “Critical Changes in Saudi Arabia”, explains that segregation was introduced along with the foundation of Saudi Arabia as at that time it was seen fit to protect females and family honour.

Hence, as a result of gendered roles, females stayed indoors and undertook typical female-like chores such as cooking, raising children and household responsibilities. It is important to note that Mecca, known as the Muslim city for pilgrims, gave local women an opportunity to be socially active. Females who lived in Mecca were required to help travelling pilgrims with accommodation and by teaching some

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<sup>6</sup> AlRasheed and Alyammi are social activists living in western societies.

religious rituals. Hence, one can assume that living in the city of Mecca had a great influence on the female lifestyle. However, other women who lived in small towns or tribal gatherings remained secluded from public life. Such a big difference between traditional norms has had the impact of differentiating regions by customised norms. Hence, customs differ from region to region based on their social activities. According to Meijer (2010):

Gender segregation, the forbiddance of ikhtilāṭ (mixing of sexes) has been one of the defining features of Saudi Arabia. Saudi law enforces the separation of men and women in the public sphere, with the result that women have their own exclusive public spaces in schools, universities, charitable organizations, hospitals, restaurants, and government offices. As several researchers have pointed out, this is partly an invented tradition. Since the 1970s conservatism has actively been promoted by the state ... most liberals pointed out that prohibition of ikhtilāṭ is not Islamic and that it did not exist during the time of the Prophet and is “tarnished by our local culture”. Along that line of reasoning, Turkī ‘Abdallāh al-Sudayrī, editor-in-chief of al-Riyāḍ, asked whether the rest of the Islamic world, who do not know of the practice of the total separation of men and women, hold the same view of the deviant al-Shithrī? He also asked whether the portrayal of women as “temptations” and sources of sin and deviation was not an insult to human values and their rationality? He argued that these extremist ideas will isolate Saudi Arabia not just from other religions but also from the majority of other Muslims (2, 15).

Meijer (2010) agrees with Al Rasheed (2013a) and Alyami (in Lopez 2013) that segregation is a socio-cultural tradition, not an Islamic requirement. As seen in the above quote, people are being labelled according to how they think, that is, whether they are too conservative or too Western-like. Similarly, Sidani (2005) states that cultural norms have created confusion in matters of Islamic fundamentals and traditional aspects of the Arab lifestyle. He also agrees that the society has been divided into groups of conservatives delaying female participation and development, and pro-female participation groups comprising modernist Islamic individuals who understand the economic necessity of female participation and feminist groups. The debate between the two groups is ongoing and is far from being resolved.

Although change is occurring, segregation is being tackled in a cautious manner in some public places. For example, men were not allowed to enter the main shopping centre complexes in Riyadh without a family. However, in early March 2012, according to a report in the *Saudi Gazette*, Prince Sattam Bin Abdul-Aziz, Chief of Riyadh, decided to not prevent single men from entering shopping complexes and centres which are mainly filled with females during peak hours on evenings and on

weekends. This change has not applied in other cities in Saudi Arabia as norms differ from one city to another (*Saudi Gazette* 2013), for example, in Jeddah men were not prevented from entering shopping malls in peak hours.

## **2.9 *Employment in Saudi Arabia***

One must bear in mind that when King Abdul-Aziz established the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, not many modern living facilities were available. Most modernization was seen in the western province, where pilgrims came from various parts of the world once a year to visit the holy cities Mecca and Al-Madina. Thus, it was necessary to welcome foreign assistance to build cities, and to introduce technologies and other forms of modernization into the kingdom. At that time, Saudi Arabia was seen as a land of opportunities where most foreigners were welcome to benefit. Similarly, in neighbouring countries, the need for foreign labour was seen as important to build their communities (Al-Dosary et al. 2006).

However, times have changed and many Saudi nationals are well educated and motivated to search for available opportunities to achieve higher economic goals (Al-Dosary et al. 2006). Educational progress and development have surpassed expectations (Looney 2004; Al-Munajjed 1997; Al-Ahmadi 2011). Moreover, educational development has opened up educational opportunities outside the kingdom giving students the opportunity to study in various countries. Thousands of Saudi students are sponsored to study abroad either by their work or by the King Abdullah Sponsorship Program (Alhazmi and Nyland 2010; Jamjoom and Kelly 2013). The Ministry of Higher Education reported that, in 2010, the number of sponsored Saudi students studying abroad was approximately 80,500 and they expected the number of students to increase to reach approximately 140,000 students by 2014 (Ministry of Education 2010; DFAT 2010; Alhazmi and Nyland 2010). The number of Saudi students studying in Australia reached approximately 12,500 in 2010 (Alhazmi and Nyland 2010).

Unfortunately, it is a disappointment for many graduates to watch skilled foreign labour take employment that some would see as rightfully theirs (Al-Dosary et al. 2006; Al-Dossary, Vail, and Macfarlane 2012; Bosbait and Wilson 2006; Sullivan 2012; Islam 2014). The expectation is that dependence on foreign labour should be lessening, as increasing numbers of qualified nationals who wish to work become

available in the labour market. Unfortunately, some organizations do not want to train nationals as they consider this a waste of money and time because foreign skilled expertise is already available for lower wages (Al-Dosary et al. 2006; Bosbait and Wilson 2006).

National development should emphasize the utilization of national human resources. This is one of the major pillars in developing a country through economic growth. As stated by Al-Dosary et al. (2006):

It is a general phenomenon that nationals must participate and share in development. This was, and probably will continue to be, the problem with capital-rich countries like Saudi Arabia. These countries want rapid growth and development, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, they want the non-national labour force to leave their country. Indeed, it is the responsibility of these governments to maintain the balance between foreign labour and the actual need for such labour in the industrialization process. However, in the meantime, these governments must realize that national human resources are the ultimate source of power and wealth of the nation. As research implies, human resources are the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations (Al-Dosary et al. 2006, 402).

In the 1970s, Riyadh's population was approximately 50,000 which increased to 370,000 by the 1980s. This growing population continued to expand until today there are over 5 million people (*World Gazetteer* 2012). As seen in Table 2.1, the figures probably still underestimate the number of women seeking employment. Unfortunately, this has created a lack of competency and high unemployment of Saudi nationals. Statistics show that in 2009, the employment rate amongst nationals was 33.9% and the unemployment rate amongst graduate students was 55.9% (El-Khoury 2013). According to Showail, McLean Parks and Smith (2013), 90% of the Saudi workforce in the private sector consists of foreign workers. In 2009, the World Bank reported that Saudi Arabia ranked second amongst other countries in transferring funds to other countries (Flanagan 2011).

Consequently, technological expertise development and improved labour skills are vital for this shift to take place. The Saudi population totalled 26,534,504 million people in 2012 (*World Factbook*, 2012) while, in other reports, the Saudi population was stated as totalling 28.6 million. This includes 7.2 million legal non-Saudis, who make up the majority of the private sector workforce (EIU 2011). The percentage of illegal working non-Saudis is not given (Achoui 2009; Gallarotti 2013). The growing Saudi population does not mean that they are all Saudi citizens. In fact, Saudi Arabia

depends largely on foreign labour (Manpower Research Bulletin 2012; Al-Dosary et al. 2006; Alajmi 2010; Achoui 2009).

The Index Mundi reports the unemployment rate among Saudis as being 10.7% in 2012 (Index Mundi 2012a), while statistics found in McDowall (2013) report that unemployment in the national labour force is estimated at 36%: one would ask if the presented statistics are accurate (McDowall 2013). This implies that the actual figures of the Saudi unemployment are somewhat disputed: it is reasonable to assume that they may be higher than actually stated especially in relation to women's unemployment. As Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2010) state, "most of those who write on the subject of GCC<sup>7</sup> labour markets point to the paucity of consistent and reliable data. We do not consider it likely, however, that such data is being purposely hidden from public scrutiny" (39).

Although the Saudi government continues to push for Saudization and has done for more than 10 years, the public sector has not changed significantly. Also nationals themselves remain uncooperative in terms of lowering the need for foreign workers, with many nationals depending largely on foreign workers. Unfortunately, in business fields, foreign labour is cheaper and, as a result, "during Saudi Arabia's five-year development plan spanning 1991–95, which set out to reduce the number of expatriates in the kingdom's workforce, they actually grew considerably" (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010, 39).

The lack of utilization of Saudi human capital has the potential to limit such growth and diversification which will potentially impact on long-term economic sustainability.

### *2.9.1 Governmental efforts to increase female participation in the paid workforce*

Metcalf (2008) notes that:

The Arab Human Development Report 2003 argued that the full empowerment of Arab women, recognizing their right to equal participation in education and other means of building capabilities was a significant aspect of the region's future development in a global society (83).

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<sup>7</sup> GCC is short for the Gulf Cooperation Council.



While women comprise almost half of the Saudi population (EIU 2011), only 14% of the labour force is women (World Bank 2014) who are mostly employed in the education sector (Al-Khalaf 2009).

King Faisal bin Abdul-Aziz has ordered that women would have equal individual rights in learning at schools and receive a proper education. Although permission to learn is required from a legal guardian such as a father, a husband or a direct male relative, obtaining a guardian's permission is not an issue for most women accessing education women in Saudi Arabia. Recent statistics (Hausmann et al. 2012) confirm that there is no gap between the numbers of men and women in education even though women in the Saudi society are generally seen to be submissive and almost invisible in professional public spaces (Elamin and Omair 2010). Interestingly, some research states that education has spread confidence among women in Saudi Arabia. Further educational development and the opportunity for Saudi females to study abroad have increased their motivation to prove themselves capable of challenging the male-dominated workforce in Saudi Arabia. Saudi females have come a long way, with females now continuously attempting to push forward but struggling to accomplish their goals due to the lack of opportunities (Al-Munajjed 2010; Al-Khalaf 2009; Al Rasheed 2013a; Achoui 2009; Sullivan 2012).

There have been governmental efforts to promote Saudization policies to help decrease unemployment rates (Al-Dosary and Rahman 2005). Looney (2004) explains that Saudization is a governmental program that has three main goals: firstly, to increase employment opportunities for Saudi nationals across all sectors of the domestic economy. The second aim is to reduce the over-inflated expatriate workforce. And finally, the third aim is to recapture national and foreign investment, which otherwise would have flowed overseas to foreign workers' home countries. Although Saudization has been discussed for almost three decades, it was not officially implemented until 1999 (Al-Dosary and Rahman 2005). Unfortunately, progress in job creation for Saudi nationals has not been successful in the private sector (Ianchovichina et al. 2013; Shehadi et al. 2013; Abdul Ghafour 2013). As Harry (2007) states: "it is unlikely that the GCC states will succeed in creating 5 per cent more jobs each year until 2020" (134). According to Al-Johani (2010), the Saudi Ministry of Labour has fixed a rate of Saudization at 30% for the private sector and

15% for all hospitals in attempt to address the problem of high rates of use of foreign labour.

Many steps were made towards Saudization when such initiatives were first introduced in the 1990s. Unfortunately, in 2009, although 674,000 new jobs were created in the private sector and 42,189 in the public sector, these jobs were mostly given to foreigners while the unemployment rate among Saudi nationals increased to 10.5% from 9.8% within a year. Hence, in 2011, the Ministry of Labour created a new system named “Nitaqat” to help increase Saudization. Nitaqat means categories: thus companies will be divided into groups of premium, green, yellow and red. The companies classified into premium and green are companies which have complied with the requirements of the Nitaqat system and, as they have fulfilled the requirements, they will receive special benefits. On the other hand, companies classified as yellow and red have not fulfilled the requirements and are subject to various sanctions. The main objective of this program is to lower the rate of foreign employees and increase the rate of hiring nationals. In this sense, both genders are considered equal as both are national employees.

In order to encourage further female professional employment, the Saudi government has taken significant steps towards equal opportunities in the workforce. At a global level, the government has ratified the United Nations Equal Remuneration Convention which calls for equality in wages. Similarly, the Saudi government signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which calls for equal economic opportunities (Keating 2010; Al-Munajjed 2010).

On a national level, in 2011, King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud himself allowed female participation in the Consultative Council, the legislative body that advises the King on important issues concerning Saudi Arabia (Fatany 2011). More recently, women have been given the right to vote (Said 2011). Such reinforcing strategies are considered a clear message from the King to all citizens that female participation should be promoted at all levels and in all sectors. The government recently changed a range of laws to promote female contribution: for example, females can now represent themselves personally in governmental affairs when

requesting simple citizen requirements without the need for a legal guardian to be present.

Moreover, many governmental sectors now have female sections where females can pursue equal rights which are the same as those of male citizens without the need to be represented by a male guardian. In 2006, to discuss matters concerning females, the Consultative Council appointed six Saudi academic females to represent the country in international forums (Muzaffar 2006; Dahlan 2007).

Moreover, in 2004, the Council of Ministers Decision No. 120 increased employment opportunities for women. This Act was an attempt to help women buy female necessities from females instead of men, thus providing greater freedom for women (Dahlan 2007). In accordance with the United Nations Development Plan, the Ninth National Development Plan of Saudi Arabia (2010-2014) acknowledges the importance of a comprehensive balance towards sustainability as social development and emphasizes the necessity of effective female participation in the paid workforce. Aligned with this, an approach has been launched to increase the number of female graduates with the skills needed for successful integration in the workforce. As a result, the Prince Sultan Fund for Women's Development was founded to support increased levels of female participation. The fund aims to achieve female development through training facilities and workshops, to provide financial support for female entrepreneurs and, finally, to empower females to levels of decision making and leadership (UNDP 2010; Al-Munajjed 2010).

Another governmental initiative created to support female participation is the Human Resource Development Fund (HADAF) which aims to create female opportunities in the workforce by telecommuting arrangements with the private sector (Al-Munajjed, 2010). These efforts are being made to increase the country's economic status by tapping into the potential of motivated educated Saudi females. Recognizing that females are equal and independent citizens who want to participate in the economy, the government has taken a further step by advising the private sector to create more childcare services and centres that could cater for all working mothers (Al-Munajjed 2010).

Recently in 2013 (HADAF) launched important steps in making the Saudi female visible as workforce participators in public, by allowing females to work in sales, as

cashiers in supermarkets and shopping malls. Although this has caused a big controversial argument in the Saudi society but it has served many ungraduated females. In 2014, (HADAF) announced their continuous efforts to prepare ungraduated females and males with skilful training to maintain productivity in the workforce (Hadaf, 2014). However, Jifri (2014) reports that female unemployment rates has increased a further 2%, although about 450000 females were hired in 2013 in private sectors where this may be a result that university female graduates are mainly not offered fair opportunities in the workforce.

Despite the governmental efforts to promote female employment in professional occupations, it is important to note that the government has the dual responsibilities of introducing legislation that supports employment and offering solutions towards job creation and employment. Hence, it is important to allocate a division that specializes in providing female policies and legislation to offer educated women professional working opportunities in a male-dominated workforce (Annesley and Gains 2013).

### 2.9.2 *Educational attainment*

*The Global Gender Gap Report* (Hausmann, Tyson, and Zahidi 2010) quantifies the magnitude of gender-based disparities and tracks their progress over time. It reports the gender-based gaps in terms of access to resources and opportunities in a specific country. Thus, the report shows the gender-based gaps in that specific country rather than the actual level of resources. The Global Gender Gap Index (Hausmann et al. 2012) which forms part of the report examines the gap between males and females in four fundamental categories: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. Each of these has its own sub-components. In order to get the final gender gap score for each country, the sub-indexes are calculated based on the weighted average of the variables. The final score is an un-weighted average of each sub-index score which varies from 0 (inequality) to 1 (equality). The following discussion focuses on the gender-based gap for the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Hausmann et al. 2012).

The overall Gender Gap Index score of Saudi Arabia is 0.571. As the score may vary from 0 (inequality) to 1 (equality), Saudi Arabia's score represents more than the mid-point. This means that the gender gap is larger in some sectors but smaller in

others. Probing more into the components of the index, it is found that a gender gap does not exist in educational attainment and health as the score is 0.974 and 0.976, respectively. On the other hand, the gender gap is large in the other two components: economic participation and political empowerment as the score is 0.335 and 0.00, respectively. The performance of Saudi Arabia is extremely poor in the case of political empowerment. The scores for all three of the sub-components of political empowerment (women in parliament, women in ministerial positions and years with a female head of state during the last 50 years) are zero. Regarding economic participation and opportunity, severe inequality exists in two major sub-sectors – economic participation as legislators, senior officials and managers, and estimated earned income as the scores are 0.09 and 0.16, respectively. This means that female participation in senior government and management roles is very low in Saudi Arabia. The earning potential of females is also much lower than that of males owing to their absence from many occupations and professional settings. A gender gap also exists in labour force participation, and in participation in technical and professional occupations. Wage equality has a better result than the other sub-elements of the economic participation component as its score is 0.60. The overall position of Saudi Arabia is 129 out of the 134 countries of the world that are ranked in this report. This means that compared to other countries of the world, Saudi Arabia in terms of gender equality is close to the bottom of the list.

Highlighting this issue, the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), as cited in *The Saudi Women: A Catalyst for Change* (BTI 2010), states that the rate of unemployed educated females is four times greater than for men, and that 78.3% of unemployed females are university graduates (Al-Yousef 2009).

The next section explains women's lack of participation in public life in Saudi Arabia in more detail.

### *2.9.3 Female professional participation in Saudi Arabia*

Unfortunately, the male-dominated ultra-conservative mindset may have negative influential impacts on female participation in the Saudi workforce. The following quote explains how some of the arguments against female participation are framed. To some groups, women's work is seen as having lower value. Such comments help to reinforce discrimination against women.

In these ignorant un-Islamic societies, men are pleased with this situation as this gains for them greater gratification with women and drops from them a considerable amount of the responsibility of working and supporting her and her children. This obviously is a selfish attitude on the part of men. Sadly many women are pleased with this situation, I mean gathering between working outside the house to support herself and her natural duties of pregnancy and child birth and breast feeding. This is because of her desire for amusement and to boast; not because there is any real human or moral value in her working outside the home. Unlike what is claimed, women's work has no real value boosting the economy. Rather the truth is that by competing with men for jobs outside the home, women are a cause in the spread of unemployment and an increase in the useless consumption of cosmetics, clothes, and perfumes that have all become necessary items for women working outside the home. Furthermore every woman that works outside the home is in most occasions a cause for denying an opportunity for a man who could work in her place. Again this is one factor in unemployment. Moreover the man who takes the place of a woman in the household cannot substitute her in her natural duties (Abdul-Khalig 1995, 18).

So says Abdul-Khalig in a paper written for the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China and published in the Islamic Assembly of North America, 1995. Statistics and academic studies show that economies greatly benefit from having an equal approach to male and female participation in the workforce. Female inequality around the world stems from females being absent and silent figures in a society as they are taught to accept the role of being subordinate to men and not challenging them (Hamdan 2005; Smith 1987; Doumato 1999). Such gender ideologies are also rooted in the socio-economic traditions in Saudi Arabia (Hamdan 2005).

Littrel and Bertsch (2013) categorize societies that emphasize values such as early age arranged marriages, dutiful daughters and obedient wives as the patriarchal belt societies. In these societies, law reinforces discrimination against females by limiting their freedom of choice and speech. Littrel and Bertsch (2013) explain masculine societies as follows:

societal practices institutionalise negative discrimination concerning women, often codified in laws that prohibit women from participating in much of public life or fully competing in the labour market ... The patriarchal belt is characterised by extremely restrictive codes of behaviour for women, such as the practice of rigid gender segregation and a powerful ideology linking family honour to female virtue. Men are entrusted with safeguarding family honour through their control over female members; they are backed by complex social arrangements that ensure the protection, restriction, and dependence of women" (311-315).

Recently airport authorities in Saudi Arabia started to send message alerts to men once their wives had left the country (Gayathri 2012) even though females already require an official document issued from their male guardians as an approval for them to leave the country. Such authoritarian acts reinforce gender order.

As discussed in Littrel and Bertsch (2013), female development in male-dominated societies is slow. However, the male-dominated Saudi society differs from most other male-dominated societies due to the high levels of female educational attainment. Female participation in the Saudi workforce has increased, causing a ripple effect. Whilst conservative groups may find female participation unnecessary, to others it is a social political movement to express female liberty from socially restricted traditions. Jamjoom and Kelly (2013) explain that the rise of the Saudi female in public life has somehow forced society to face the current wave of change.

The rise of Saudi women as a social power is considered across Arab society to be the most vital among the social changes currently taking place. About 30 years ago, it was possible to describe Saudi Arabia as ‘the society of men’ because men monopolised professional work, as well as all kinds of political, economic and social authority. But now this image has started to change, and women are carrying out important roles across all of these spheres. There are female doctors, female university lecturers and professors and female businesswomen. Today’s Saudi women work in scientific laboratories, in the press and other media and in factories (Jamjoom and Kelly 2013, 118).

Saudi Arabia has seen extraordinary development through the last decade or so. Females are showing that, despite the misgivings of some, they are capable of handling both family and working responsibilities in various fields that were once male-dominated including law, business and even industrial fields.

Recently, in many national international reports and in social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and other websites, many Saudi women are calling for their freedom to be able to drive in Saudi Arabia. Women driving on the streets as a way of defying the ban has caused a big debate in Saudi Arabia, where many oppose moves for this ban to be lifted (Knickmeyer 2013; Al-Shihri and Batrawy 2013; Human Rights Watch 2013a; Al-Sharif 2012). These issues are linked to the Saudi culture and thus can be seen as a breakthrough with regards to the traditional cultural norms and gender ideologies set by society. As has been seen elsewhere, unusual non-familiar activities are usually aggressively attacked in any culture (Zárate et al.

2012). More importantly, female participation, especially in a mixed gender workforce, results in strong and often opposing viewpoints.

The liberals do however accuse the conservatives of derailing the debate on the future of the country by elevating non-issues such like ikhtilāf, forbidding women to drive cars ... over the “real problems” that exist in the country like poverty, drug abuse, unemployment and nuclear threat. However, the liberals are not averse to the use of religious terms against their opponents, accusing them of promoting fitna (dissension) or promoting “innovation” (bid‘a) (Meijer 2010, 10).

Unfortunately, female progress is seen as an unusual activity to some in the Saudi society. Although it may be normal for change to result in opposing views, in the case of females, in particular, this issue has caused divisive debates (Meijer 2010). Although, as previously mentioned, Islam does not in any way hinder females from joining the workforce and despite the Saudi governmental efforts to increase female participation over the last decade, some people continue to see the calls for more female rights as a sudden social change that is a Western intellectual war against their identities and their culture.

Unfortunately, people have begun to categorize ‘others’ as being extremists either too conservative or liberal and too Western-minded. Such debates being handled in a manner of right and wrong tend to have negative outcomes which may cause the society to be divided and result in delays in progress. It could also result in division between females of the Saudi society and their families preventing their further development (Sidani 2005).

Those who are seeking female development and progress in a manner that is in line with the development of a Western civilization may lack cultural knowledge. Such demands that tend to ask for open workplaces with both females and males working together without segregation are not in line with the cultural implications. Regardless of whether Islam permits it or not it, this is against the prevailing Saudi culture and may potentially cause deep inner conflicts and cultural clashes (Sidani 2005; Moussalli 2009). The expectation of Saudi females in the mixed workforce is made in line with females of other non-conservative countries. The conservative groups however, see that females and males working together is an offence to the Saudi culture.



Without losing focus on the main issue which is increasing female participation in professional occupations, it is important to understand the pressures regarding female participation in a manner that is acceptable to their society and in which females of that society will happily join. Cultural insensitivity may cause damage and therefore cultural traditions should be treated with respect (Sidani 2005). Hence, female participation and progress as proposed by some groups is not seen through the eye of development; instead, it may be viewed as a Western invasion of the society's values and therefore will not be tolerated by conservative groups. On the other hand, educated females and females who need to work to help with their family's financial needs should have the right to work, achieve, develop themselves and contribute to their society. It is essential, if female participation in professional occupations is to increase, to find ways of debating these issues such that the need for change is recognized as is the need to understand and respect the religious and cultural implications.

### ***2.10 The Western Eye and Islam – a Phobia***

As a global media event, 11 September marked the beginning of an era of unprecedented media focus, both internationally and locally, on the issue of terrorism. The developing media discourse on terrorism has evolved into a discourse that inadvertently implicates debates on the status and role of Islam and Muslims around the globe ... The underlying assumption in the media discourse on the so called 'War on Terror' is that Islam is backward, secular resistant and incompatible with the ideals and values of Western liberal democracy ... Such responses effectively corroborate the discursive construction in the popular media where religion is the sole characteristic by which Muslims are recognised (Aly 2007, 28).

After the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre towers in New York, the Western media have generally portrayed Islam as an aggressive and terrorist religion (Elia 2006). However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Islamic ideologies and principles are against terrorism, and Islam means "peace". Unfortunately, the terrorist attacks came from extremist groups who linked their actions to Islam. The resulting negative stereotypes continue. In this sense, Islamophobia as mentioned by Elia (2006) results in negative views of Muslim communities, and Muslim women's image in Western societies is questioned and is typically viewed negatively (Elia 2006; Aly 2007; Islam 2014).

In a range of literature and through the Western media, Islam is seen as harsh towards females by asking them to cover their hair and wear modest clothes. Laws in some countries have banned Muslim females from entering universities and public schools if they wear a scarf to cover their hair (Smith 2004). Smith (2004) states that the racial Act of law against Muslim females that was implemented in France in 2004 has “inspired lawmakers in Belgium and Germany to consider following suit. On April 1, the conservative state of Baden-Wurttemberg in Germany banned Muslim public school teachers from wearing headscarves” (Smith 2004, 1). Unfortunately, Muslim females in these countries have to choose whether to honour their Islamic principles by covering their hair or receive an education. Recently, the *German Marshall Fund (GMF) Blog* published an article titled “The French and the Hijab. The Never-Ending Story” which tells the story of a Muslim female who wishes to wear her hijab at work but is asked not to by the French law:

... leading President Hollande to call for a law that would extend restrictions on wearing “prominent religious symbols” not only to all public institutions, where they are already banned, but to the private sector as well ... Very often missing in all these interpretations are the young girls’ and women’s own voices. While undoubtedly, sometimes the hijab is a manifestation of female oppression, imposed on girls and women without their voluntary choice, often the hijab itself is an ambivalent sign of struggles around ethnic and gender identity. Many French pupils and students consider themselves proud French citizens and defy their parents’ wishes by wearing the hijab; others, from more conservative background, use the hijab to prove to their families that they can go to school, hold a job and become “modern Muslim” women while being pious (GMF 2013).

Similarly, there have been calls in Australia to ban Muslim females from wearing their hijab:

In 2005, Liberal backbenchers Sophie Panopolous and Bronwyn Bishop called for a ban on the wearing of headscarves in public schools, drawing explicitly on the image of Islam as a violent, backward and oppressive ideology that had no place in Western liberal democracy. In Parliament, Panopolous asked, ‘Why should one section of the community be stuck in the Dark Ages of compliance cloaked under a veil of some distorted form of religious freedom?’ (Comments made by Sophie Panopoulous MP in Parliament on 5 September 2005. Available from <http://www.aph.gov.au.hansard>) (Aly 2007, 29).

Siraj (2012) states that female Muslims face identity clashes with Western feminist identities.

there is no ‘monolithic or homogeneous femininity’ ... assumptions ‘underpin many dominant ideals about normal adolescent femininity – against which Muslim and other minority ethnic group girls are often judged to be different or

abnormal' (Archer 2005, p. 60). Women face a deluge of messages concerning appropriate feminine behaviour, appearance, dress and demeanour from religion, society and the media (Siraj 2012, 186-187).

Hence, as Siraj (2012) explains, females shape their femininity according to their society and culture. Modern views of the modern Western female as the role model for females around the world do not require Western females to break their customs. Meanwhile, asking females from different ethnic cultures to be guided by the Western feminist movement towards a more "civilized Western lifestyle" might imply that females from different cultural backgrounds should abandon their culture and customs. Siraj also explains that Muslim females wear their hijab and modest clothes out of honour and respect to Islam which is linked to their identity as virtuous females.

Similarly, as stated in the article "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others" in the *American Anthropologist* (2002), liberals were surprised when Afghanistan was liberated from the Taliban that the women remained covered up in burqas<sup>8</sup>: "did we expect that once "free" from the Taliban they would go "back" to belly shirts and jeans, or dust off their Chanel suits? (Abu-Lughod 2002, 785). Abu-Lughod explains that the Western thinking that aims to save Muslim females from oppressive cultural traditions is in itself an act of ignorance. Instead, Abu-Lughod suggests stepping away from confusing cultural relativism and its religious implications within politics and applying Western help when needed to make the world a just place (Abu-Lughod 2002).

In all three major religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), there is an indirect principle that females cover their hair but it remains an issue of personal choice. Mohamad (1995) agrees that wearing head scarves is not a principle practised by Muslim females only. He notes that Christian nuns have had the tradition of covering their hair. Also, in the Christian tradition, until recently, females would wear something on their heads out of respect when attending church. Covering the head in temples in the Jewish religion is equally important. Some Hasidic Jewish women choose to cover their heads with hats or scarves. Rao (2012) argues that:

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<sup>8</sup> The burqa is a face cover that is used in some Muslim countries.

Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and Confucianism all assign women to nurturing, family primary and career secondary roles, allowing for power differentials between men and women at work. For example, in the U.S. the Southern Baptist Convention declared that wives should be submissive to their husbands (Orlando Centennial, 1998). More subtly, the family primary role advocated for women by religions has translated into societal norms limiting their career choices, and business practices such as unequal pay for equal work. While women hold key positions in U.S. business, they still “pay” for using initiatives like flexitime (Rao 2012, 234).

Islam does prescribe certain ways for women to dress and behave as do other religions. Through Islamic principles, women are asked to wear clothes modestly and cover their hair. This has led to established behaviours and norms of conversations between the two genders to establish respect. Islam has promoted the understanding that a healthy society needs well-educated women to participate equally in contributing to society’s needs and development.

However, some Western-centric media have made the claim that Islam is against females participating equally in society (Goodwin 2004; Vidyasagar and Rea 2004). Unfortunately, some people fail to differentiate between Islamic rules and cultural norms. Therefore, much of the “western scholarship on women and Islam has tended to depict Muslim women, especially those from the Middle East, as victims to Islam equated with an oppressive culture” (Falah and Nagel 2005, 129). For example, Goodwin (2004) states:

In Saudi Arabia women are raised to be mindless, like babies. Even the most intelligent women is told she cannot take care of herself, she isn’t able. They just want to control people through religion. And if a woman disobeys, they treat her like a bug, and wouldn’t think twice before placing a foot on her to kill her (Goodwin 2004, 206).

According to Scott (2008), after visiting Jeddah, he thought that females in Saudi Arabia are vocally restricted owing to their clothes (wearing the abaya<sup>9</sup>) but then he continued by saying that Western females wear clothes that are attractive to males. A reader may conclude that females in Saudi Arabia should look fashionably similar to Western women in order to be heard in public. Scott, like many Western centric-focused individuals depicts Islam as an anti-female religion, assuming that females in Saudi Arabia have no voice due to their dress code. This implies that Islamic cultural aspects reflect on women and covering up is the reason that keeps them from being heard. Many vocal women in the Saudi society offer a different view (Lopez 2013;

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<sup>9</sup> The abaya is a black long dress that a female wears in public to hide her female features.

Fatany 2007). Hence, it can be stated that dressing modestly did not restrict women in earlier times from participating nor does it now.

Such types of comments entrench negative views against any Western influence, and specifically against views that influence females to break Islamic rules and forget their culture in order to become a respected female to the Western eye. In this sense, asking to have unsegregated workforces is seen as the first step towards a Western society and is resisted by many (Al-Hashimi 2003).

Similarly, Moussalli (2009) states that Islamic Ulama<sup>10</sup> view Western attempts to modernize Arabic societies as an attempt to break cultural traditions and, more importantly, to break and loosen Islamic fundamentals that govern the legal systems:

In response to American efforts to bring democracy to the Arab world, salafists, neo-salafists, and Wahhabis and neo-Wahhabis contend that democracy is not only a heresy, but is also an integral part of the new “crusader” campaign of colonialism and the historical conspiracy against the Muslim world. Even more moderate Islamic elements in the Arab world, especially mainstream Saudi and Egyptian clerics and scholars, support this view (Moussalli 2009, 22).

Although some may think that Western influence is taking away their cultural identity, in some situations, not responding to global demands may result in the failure to grasp global financial opportunities. For example, in regard to moving towards a global world and to align with Gulf countries, the King has switched the days that comprise weekends starting from 29 June 2013 (BBC 2013). This will open up further foreign investment: “taking the biggest Arab economy a step closer to opening its \$400 billion stock market to foreign investors” (Potter and Carey 2013). As Fridays are considered a blissful day in Islam, similar to the Christian context where Sundays are religiously important (Williams 2008), Fridays will remain a public day off. However, instead of having weekends on Thursdays and Fridays, they will be on Fridays and Saturdays.

When female rights are discussed, it is important to note that Islam gave females rights to learn, work, own properties and even inherit long before this was achieved by Western females (Al-Munajjed 1997; Yamani 1996; Hamdan 2005; Badawi 1995). In Saudi Arabia where women recently joined the workforce, statistics show

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<sup>10</sup> Ulama are religious researchers.

that unlike most other developed economies, there is no wage gap between the genders. However, few opportunities are available to them (Tlaiss and Kauser 2011).

Metcalf (2008) states that women in Saudi Arabia are invisible in all senior executive positions, public administration, legal systems and the private sector. Females recently are more visible than ever before in the marketplace, and although participation rates are lower than in the West, they are not totally absent. There are examples of women in Saudi Arabia who have developed their business from scratch and have competed in male-dominated workforces and achieved recognition and governmental awards. Alyami interviewed by Lopez (2013) comments that female development in Saudi Arabia has seen a big leap of cultural defiance stating that:

Saudi women are becoming more assertive, defiant and vocal. This is due to their education, access to communication tools such as the social media and their ability to travel to other countries. As tragic as it was, the vicious attack on the U.S. on September 11, 2001, by mostly Saudi nationals helped the Saudi people, especially women, immensely. The global media's focus on Saudi Arabia exposed the system's atrocious treatment of its people, especially women. Like Saudi pro-democracy men, Saudi women took advantage of the world's attention and began to demand their citizenship rights. This has worked successfully and there is no going back (2013).

Similarly, Areej Al-Ibraheem, Lubna Al-Olayan, Madawee Al-Saud and many others are amongst other famous businesswomen who are successful women in business markets. Recently, Saudi businesswomen on a visit to Hong Kong helped achieve diplomatic benefits and international trade between Saudi Arabia and China (Fatany 2007). Although the majority of women in the Saudi society do not have the privilege of the empowerment to successfully enter the market and compete in the male-dominated marketplace, females in Saudi are looking for more opportunities to join the workforce. With more development taking place within the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, women are becoming more aware of their rights, status and needs. Scholars have noticed this change in women's thoughts, needs and perspectives (Al-Ahmadi 2011; Keyes 2013; Fatany 2011).

Well-educated females within Saudi Arabia are looking for suitable working conditions that are in alignment with their cultural values. Unfortunately, the society has little to offer due to the influence and impact of foreign labour; thus, the remaining positions are categorized through gender social structures as jobs that prefer men as men are considered the main breadwinners.

## ***2.11 Conclusion***

In summary, through this chapter, the reader has had a glimpse of general information on Saudi Arabia as a country. A holistic view of the country through its history and culture has taken the reader to a greater understanding of the Saudi social structure. The chapter then touched on important factors of employment such as decreasing the amount of foreign labour and increasing the rate of Saudization through governmental efforts.

Acknowledging that female employment in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is still developing, this remains a sensitive issue in the Saudi society. Change is happening quickly and is reflecting on the Saudi cultural norms thus creating conflicting views between different groups. Western pressures which suggest that Islam is the cause of low female participation in the Saudi economy are resulting in defensiveness with leading conservative Muslims seeing feminism as a Western liberal invasion. Therefore, it can be assumed that Western mindsets that aim to free Muslim cultures from religious implications or from their cultural identities will not be tolerated.

The researcher by explaining the history and culture of Saudi Arabia has attempted to take the reader to a deeper level of understanding regarding her motives for this study.

Thus, this study aims to look beneath the popular explanations relating to the lack of female participation in the Saudi workforce and to understand what can be addressed to help promote further female participation. Permitting and encouraging women to pursue their needs equally as an individual will clearly push for more public participation and economic growth. The advantages are self-sufficient, independent individuals who through inspiration, motivation and the sense of equality will challenge and prove themselves as hard-working participants in helping to develop the Saudi economy. This study in part examines Western views of Islam as a harsh religion discriminating against females from the perspective of Saudi women and men. Thus, it helps both Saudi and Western audiences to understand more clearly the range of issues relating to the lack of female participation and how to address this dilemma.

Therefore, this study aims to explain how attitudes towards Saudi women's participation in public life may impact negatively on opportunities for women and to also show that these attitudes are being challenged. It is challenging to demand change through equal participation while gender ideologies rooted in the Saudi social traditions do not see women as equal citizens of the country.

Despite the social conflicts regarding female empowerment, the government has already taken various steps to promote female participation in professional opportunities. However, it may be noted that most female employment currently is within governmental institutions, hence the government has the opportunity to become the state model for the private sector in providing the best practices in female opportunities and empowerment.

Having provided the Saudi context, the next chapter explores the relevant literature to gain further insights into barriers and enablers of women's employment more generally.



# CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

## *3.1 Introduction*

This research examines female participation in professional occupations in the workforce in Saudi Arabia. This chapter explores how contemporary literature documents female participation in the Western world. It is important to appreciate the Western framework as both a foundation for examining key writings on women's employment and to explore differences between the West and Saudi Arabia. The literature acts as a history book helping us to understand world events, factors that influenced them and emergent outcomes. **This approach may act as a deliberative strategy to highlight the hegemony of the organisational feminist lens in the West.** Although the Western approach may not be appropriate in the conservative society of Saudi Arabia, it can be appreciated and used as a method for observing and learning.

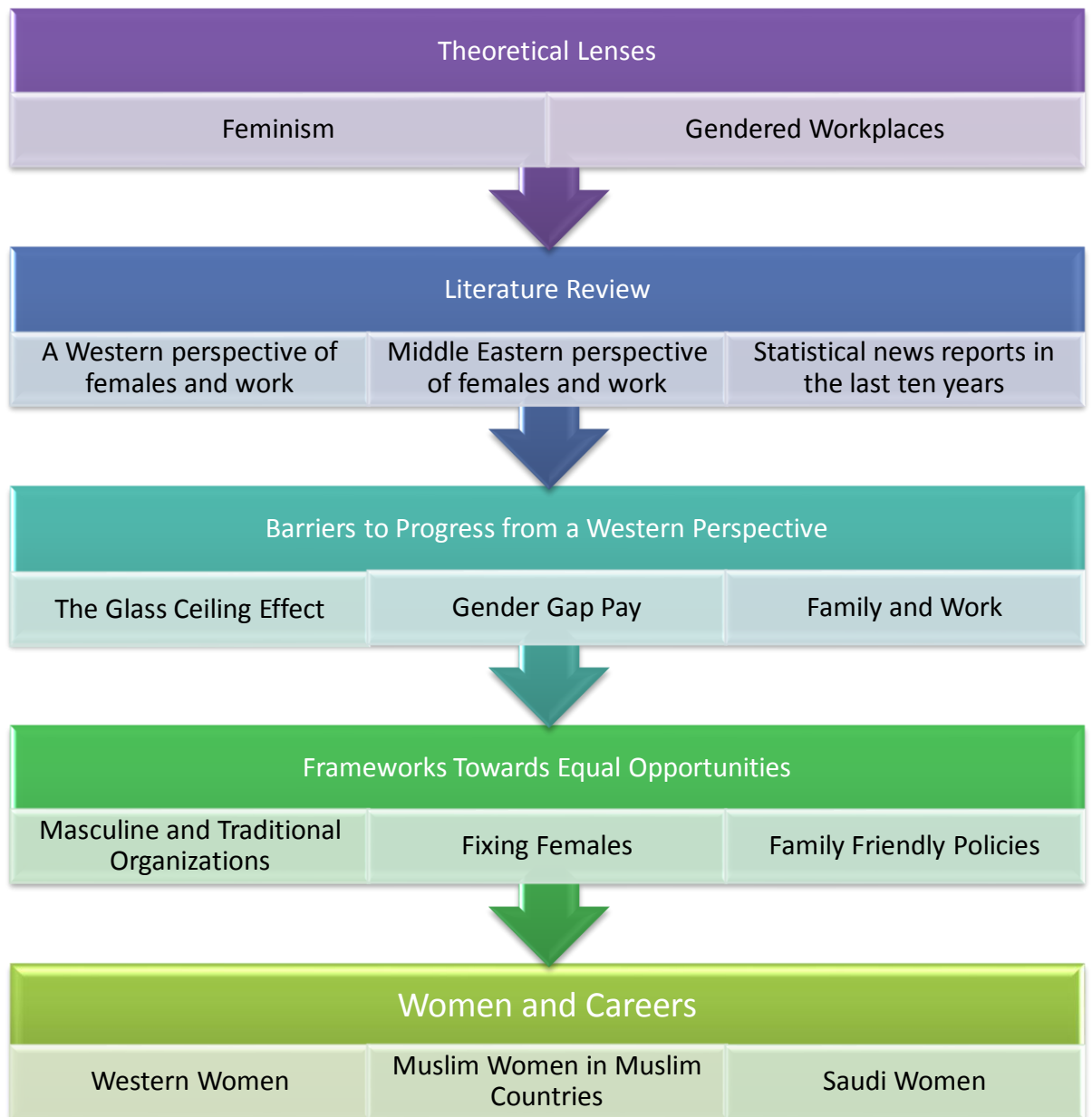
There is a paucity of academic literature about female participation in the workforce in Saudi Arabia and especially from a Saudi perspective. Moreover, the literature available that provides a Saudi perspective on female participation in the Saudi workforce does not take a feminist approach nor does it position itself within theory. Therefore, much of the literature reviewed for this study including studies of women's employment in Saudi Arabia is from a Western perspective. This is considered as one of the main challenges of this research. However, the fact that there is little literature to be found on the topic of female participation in Saudi Arabia tells us two things. Firstly, this topic is under-researched and this research will fill a gap in the literature by portraying a holistic understanding from the perspective of an insider who understands the culture and can reach the people of the society itself. Secondly, the topic is sensitive coming from a very conservative society that directly relates itself to religion and that has a strong cultural framework which has to date not been the subject of much academic research.

In this chapter, the literature regarding female participation in Western societies has been analysed to develop an understanding of interrelated aspects that may or may not be relevant to female progress in the paid workforce in Saudi Arabia. Data for this review were gathered using published data with an emphasis at least for the Western literature on refereed journal articles focusing predominantly on those published in the past 10 years.

Scholarly databases including Emerald, Factiva, Proquest, Business Source Premier, Business Source Complete, JSTOR and Wiley online library were the main databases used. Key words used in database searches included: women and professional occupations, equality, feminism, gender roles, retention, work and family, female empowerment, women and Islam, employment in Saudi Arabia, and female employment in Saudi Arabia.

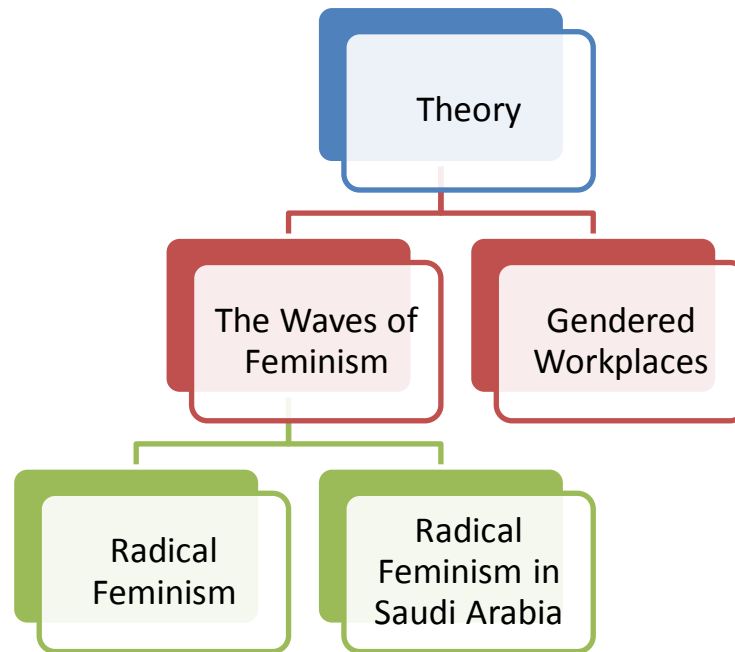
A specific focus was the literature that related to female participation in the workforce with a particular emphasis on employment in the professions. A lack of Saudi research regarding female participation in the Saudi workforce has necessitated the use of available frameworks, as presented in Western literature, to explore concepts related to female participation in the Saudi workforce. Also discussed are aspects of feminism, gendered workplaces, women and careers, barriers to progress, and frameworks and enablers of female participation. These are essential topics that hold great meaning for female workforce participation.

As part of this discussion, an overview is also presented of literature pertaining to females in the paid workforce in a number of different country contexts. The focus has been on research undertaken in Muslim countries as this may provide further insight regarding women in Saudi Arabia. This provides a basis for taking a more focused look at females in the paid workforce in Saudi Arabia. The aim is to provide the reader with an understanding of the current situation for Saudi females in the paid workforce as compared to those in other neighbouring countries. Moreover, this highlights the assumed obstacles, specifically explores the factors of Islam and culture and provides a view on what is perceived as the more influential factors. The following chart is an overview of this chapter:



**Figure 3.1 Overview of the literature review chapter**

### 3.2 Theory



**Figure 3.2 Theory**

As seen in Figure 3.2, this section provides an overview of key feminist theories. The three waves of feminism are briefly discussed, with this followed by a brief explanation about why the researcher finds radical feminism applicable to the Saudi context. Finally, a discussion of gendered workplaces explores female experiences in the workplace which aims to reveal common issues faced by many Western women at work. These theories relate to women's experiences and to the achievement of equality. This section mainly explores Western influences with a particular emphasis on workplace equality.

#### 3.2.1 Feminism

This section discusses feminism and begins the discussion by highlighting its different phases through time. Given Saudi Arabia's long history as detailed in the previous chapter and the changes that have occurred in women's roles over that time, it seemed appropriate to examine the history of Western feminism. Feminism according to Jenainati and Groves (2010) is an interactive act against female discrimination and sexist behaviour that started formally in the 1880s. There have been three major waves of Western feminism. The first wave of feminism focused on issues of civil rights such as legal obstacles facing females, for example, lack of

voting rights, property rights and educational rights. The second wave, with its concern for oppressed groups of women, was the Women's Liberation Movement which started in the United States in the 1960s. This movement took a more radical stand in increasing the demands by women for access to employment opportunities and education and tackling further discriminatory issues against female rights as individuals including violence against women and changes to divorce laws. Significantly, the effects of this movement rippled across Europe (Jenainati and Groves 2010). In the 1990s, the third wave arose, in response to the remaining oppressed groups of women globally shown through their race, colour and ethnicity. This feminist wave embraces the notion of “universal womanhood” fighting for women’s rights everywhere (Tong 1998; Jenainati and Groves 2010; Krolokke and Sorensen 2005).

Looking at feminism from a Western Anglo perspective, discrimination against females has been passed on from generation to generation. Prior to feminism’s first wave, females were rarely publicly visible without a male relative, were not allowed to own properties or businesses and did not have any representation by law. This is shown through various literature from the days of Aristotle to the late 1900s (Jenainati and Groves 2010). Females in early modern times had no rights, being seen as objects owned by their husbands. They often received no formal education and when they were educated, it was not recognized or they were refused the right to practice (Xinari 2010).

### ***3.2.1.1 Suffragettes of the first wave***

Female rights were called for in many civilized Western countries such as Britain, the United States of America (USA) and France. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), an English feminist influenced by the American and French revolutions, said that: “the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband” (Krolokke and Sorensen 2005, 6). She also called for female participation and equal rights: “I don’t wish women to take power over men but over themselves” (Jenainati and Groves 2010, 27). Female activists in those times were seen by many men as displaying inappropriate masculine behaviours, such as public persuasion (Campbell 1989; Krolokke and Sorensen 2005).

Susan B. Anthony was one of the first radical liberal feminist American reformers who in the 1850s stood up for female rights over their reproduction and divorce, and their legal rights. Anthony together with Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized the National Women's Suffrage Association. They published a weekly newspaper, *The Revolution*, which focused on women's suffrage. Anthony became an international female activist and, in 1888, was one of the women who formed the International Council of Women. The Council consisted of nine countries: USA, Canada, France, Ireland, Britain, India, Finland, Norway and Denmark. Then, in 1896, she also helped to establish the first National Council of Women of Australia (Jenainati and Groves 2010).

Anthony knew that the day would come when women could vote: as she said:

it will come, but I shall not see it ... It is inevitable. We can no more deny forever the right of self-government to one-half of our people than we could keep the Negro forever in bondage. It will not be wrought by the same disrupting forces that freed the slave, but come it will, and I believe within a generation (Harper 1908, 1259).

Although there was considerable opposition to women's demands with much of the popular press opposed to such changes, women's right to vote in the USA was declared on 26 August 1920, 14 years after Anthony's death. Parallels can be noted between these early suffragette struggles and the current situation of Saudi females.

Many of the systemic changes towards female development and rights within the legal, organizational and educational systems in the West have been credited to the liberal feminist movement (Xinari 2010). Liberal feminism challenges old traditional structures and considers new structures that emphasize justice and fairness to all. Individualism in the 18th and 19th centuries encouraged the liberal thought that individuals despite their colour, gender or religious beliefs had the right to live the life of their choosing. Liberal feminists fought for equal education, and political and legal rights. In other words, they were seeking the right to be seen and heard as equal participants in society. As cited in Arya (2012), Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), in 1851, in her speech "Ain't I a Woman?" at a Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio captured this powerfully when she said:

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I

a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man can head me! And ain't I a woman? (Arya 2012, 560).

Sojourner Truth faced her society and highlighted the gendered ideologies that were stereotypes. The image of women being treated like royalty was available only to some. While some women were invisible, they shared a lack of control over their lives and the freedom to live how they might want. Women were constrained by their status. Although this quote by Sojourner Truth is old, it is not dated. It acts as a reminder that women do not share equal fates. Many women remain constrained in their choices and for women in some societies such as in Saudi Arabia, women's choices remain limited.

### ***3.2.1.2 Radical political women from the second wave***

In the 1960s, radical feminism emerged. Radical feminists also fought for female rights standing against gender roles and socio-cultural discrimination against white middle-class females in the developed world (Arya 2012). Radical feminism opposes cultural representations and structures set by men, hence female roles defined by traditional masculine worlds were rejected and reviewed (Jenainati and Groves 2010). In a motivational speech in 1973, Eddy, an educator and commentator on women's education stated:

The young woman of today is intent on seeking self-fulfilment and being independent and self-directed ... thus more and more young women are looking for careers in business, government social agencies, the arts and the professions as their way of making it in a world of work which is still a man's world (and if you have any doubt about the man's world, glance around you and count the number of women who are here today) ... of course "work" for many of these women means employment in a menial, low paying, and usually, dead-end job ... every working organization has one over-worked, underpaid woman in the middle of things carrying most of the load. In all likelihood, on her mantelpiece at home is the silver ashtray – she probably doesn't smoke and never did – with the message that in 1950 she was named secretary of the year in her division ... radical feminists held that women through history had been oppressed and dehumanized, mainly because man chose to exploit his wife and the mother of his children. Sometimes it was deliberate exploitation and sometimes it was the innocence of never looking beneath the pretensions of life (Eddy 1973, 274).

According to Tong (1998), there are two types of radical feminism, radical-libertarian and radical-cultural feminism. Radical libertarian feminism takes a stand against female discrimination in the workforce. Where organizations are male-dominated and culturally masculine, female participation becomes a challenging

task. Hence, gender roles generated by masculine views do not welcome professional females in an organization. On the other hand, radical-cultural feminism emphasizes the importance of different natural characteristics.

### ***3.2.1.3 The 'grrl' feminists in the third wave***

After years of struggling towards equal female rights in Western societies, females have seen great development. Tenzer (2009) explains that whilst gains have been made, full equality is yet to be achieved:

Women have largely been absorbed into this market, making social adaptations such as long-distance motherhood and women as breadwinners commonplace across the economic spectrum. Yet wages have not translated into independence for women, especially where family microeconomics trap them between inexorable demands and responsibilities (Tenzer 2009, 127).

Tenzer (2009) notes areas such as wage equality have yet to be achieved. The third wave of feminism started in the late 1990s taking the female fight against discrimination from Western societies to all oppressed women around the world. Globalization through media and internet connections has given female activists the opportunity to demand female rights everywhere. Feminism has now become a global concern where feminists fight an international battle for human rights to achieve female equality in developing and developed countries, and to gain self-recognition and identification of women's educational and legal rights (Arya 2012). For example, recently a feminist group named the Femen protested in Berlin seeking the right to drive for Saudi females (Bacchi 2013).

### ***3.2.1.4 Critical thinking of feminism***

It is important to note that feminism has lived for centuries and in many forms, as reported through the waves of Western feminism or through other historical accounts. Females in different times and places have opposed their oppression and wished for change. Whilst change has been achieved at least for some women, criticism of feminism and the range of theoretical perspectives that have been developed to explain the current situation and what is needed for it to change is a starting point for examining the Saudi context.

Some critics of the radical feminist approach say that radical feminists fall into the trap of becoming essentialist, accusing all men as corruptors and portraying all



women as innocent victims (Mandell 1995; Tong 1998). According to Jean Elshtain, an American political philosopher and public intellectual, essentialism in radical feminist theories is wrong because it argues that things belonging to a certain group should never evolve out of that group (Tong 1998). The meaning is that women are known to be caregivers and men are known to be powerful decision makers and thus women should just accept who they are. It is an oppression of itself to be forced to become what society and gendered roles have decreed for all women. Hence, it is important to not take an essentialist view, and to note that radical feminism as mentioned earlier aims to free women from discriminatory gendered roles set by men to deprive women of their rights.

Despite these criticisms, feminists in Saudi Arabia can use these established frameworks. It is important to highlight that there is a gap in the literature regarding feminism in Saudi Arabia. The limited literature that discusses female participation in the paid workforce does not position itself within a feminist framework.

### *3.2.2 Radical feminism and the Saudi context*

Since the call for equal rights for women in the late 1800s, various ideologies have arisen. As noted, liberal and radical feminism are two main ideologies of feminism that gained prominence in the second wave of feminism. According to Aikau, Erickson and Moore (2003):

In the case of feminism, waves seem to be a metaphor for the displacement and relocation not just of people, but also of theories, methods and ways of knowing. Just as waves are influenced by winds and currents in the fluid seascape of the ocean, we look broadly at structural forces in order to place the wave metaphor and our individual stories within larger contexts (399).

Aikau et al. (2003) argue that the feminist movement has been metaphorically described as a wave that can impact everywhere; however, the wave's impact affects female development differently according to place and culture.

Women have been oppressed in many if not most societies. The liberal feminist movement aimed towards equal rights as citizens. Hence, it took as its challenge the fight against traditions that oppressed women in general. Through the liberal feminist movement, women focused on rights and justice that were equal to those of men.

On the other hand, radical feminism, as the name suggests, took a rather more drastic approach seeking social, political and economic reform to achieve equality. It was the “long rooted mindset of male superiority that has plagued the human race since the beginning of time” (Neff and Meyers 2012) that they wanted changed, setting aside traditional gendered structures that favoured men. To radical feminists, achieving equality requires fundamental change in structures and values towards recognizing women as equal to men. Hence the radical feminist approach aims to change both negative gender stereotypes and the systems that promote and support them.

Radical feminism has what may be particularly relevant to the Saudi system. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Saudi system focuses on patriarchal power systems and authority, bearing in mind that females in Saudi have limited access to power even over themselves. Hence, this research has chosen a radical feminist approach to challenge negative social stereotypes and gendered roles that restrict female rights that have been passed through generations.

This study is guided by feminist theory with a focus on helping to improve the Saudi female status in professional occupations. It thus draws on the insights from radical-cultural and radical feminist literature. However, the researcher is mindful of cultural differences between Western societies and the Saudi Arabian society, where values and gender roles vary from context to context. Therefore, it should be noted that this research is not rigidly guided by a specific type of Western radical feminism. **Rather, this study is informed by the radical feminist principles within the context of a conservative Islamic society.**

The literature review next examined the key factors that have been identified as facilitators or barriers for increasing women’s employment in the Western context and whether these key factors would provide a guideline for a healthier working environment for both genders (Acker 1991).

### *3.2.3 Gendered workplaces*

Women in Western societies as noted above have gained more equality since the battle for equal rights began (Tenzer 2009). However, women in Western cultures continue to battle for equality in many areas. For example, women continue to earn

less than their male counterparts and females continue to face discrimination in a range of organizational settings (Aikau et al. 2003; Edelstein 2007). As shown by the Catalyst Census (2013) and Equal Opportunity for Women Agency (EOWA) (Australian Census of Women in Leadership 2012), women remain under-represented in senior levels of organizations (Catalyst Census 2013). A census of women in leadership roles in listed organizations continues to show that women are under-represented at senior levels.

Female under-representation in senior roles, ongoing discrimination and a continuing gender pay gap are some of the issues confronted by women that can push them out of the workforce (Adams 2002; Barreto, Ryan, and Schmitt 2009). Females have been stereotyped as too emotional and sensitive, and this can be seen as impacting on their ability to make tough decisions. Decision making in organizations can be as Maringe (2012) points out: “characterised by ‘interrogation rather than discussion’, interspersed with masculine banter often related to a ‘sickening footballing culture’ which tends to exclude rather than include females” (Maringe 2012, 19).

It has long been a male-dominated world, as highlighted throughout the history of religions, humanity, societies and institutions (West and Zimmerman 1987; Acker 1991; Anderson 2009). Acker (1991) indicates that organizations are assumed to be gender neutral; however, female workers through their experience, find themselves facing daunting pro-masculine stereotypes that label females as not macho enough to do certain things (Acker 1991; Adams 2002; Anderson 2009; Haney 2009). Studies show that females in the Western workforce still find themselves discriminated against in terms of senior positions (Lord et al. 2013). Females in the Western context still suffer from the glass ceiling effect and the “maternal wall” (Catalyst Census 2006); that is, they remain under-represented in senior roles, and childbearing and child-raising responsibilities continue to often impact negatively on women’s careers.

Some feminist researchers argue that frameworks may not progress fully in understanding why equality between genders has not been achieved as they may fail to address the issues of gendered organizations as seen, for example, in Acker (1991) and Ely, Scully and Foldy (2003). Acker’s article “Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations” (cited by Ely et al. 2003) shows that gendered

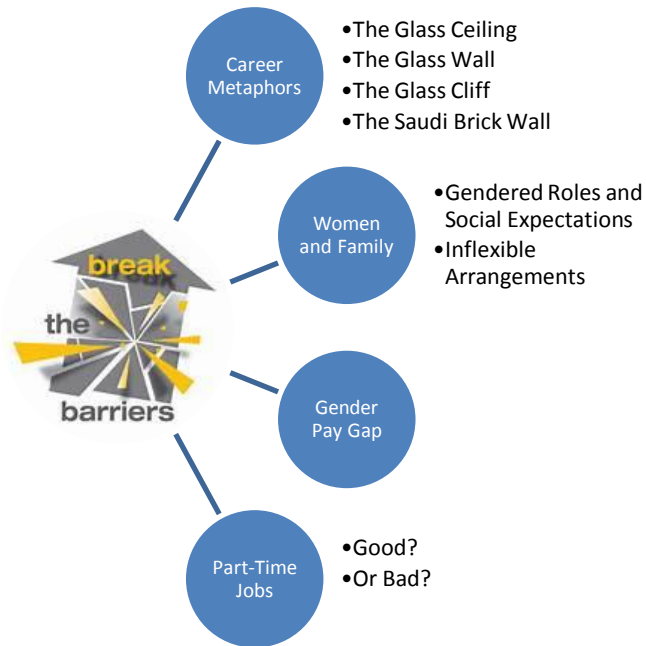
workplaces are the problem that women face in the workforce. Acker argues that the “masculine ethic”-structured principles are the structural base of organizations. This means that organizations consist of masculine principles which hold the organization together. This, by itself, stands against equal female opportunities in the workforce. Acker continues to explain the meaning behind gendered organizations as the: “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine” (Ely et al. 2003, 52).

Hence, masculinity appears to control the business sphere or the workforce environment in several ways. Divisions of business systems, power distribution and even appropriate behaviours are constructed through masculine perspectives. Masculinity appears dominant in symbols of appearance such as language, dress codes, ideologies, psychological behaviours and reproductive functions (Acker 1991; West and Zimmerman 1987). For example, successful managers normally appear forcefully masculine. Masculinity also appears to control simple conversational structures and conveys conversational rules as seen in Hochschild’s (1983) study. Men are seen as the actors, while women are the emotional support (Bowles 2012).

Moreover, masculinity also appears to influence employee character. The preferred employee presents him/herself as a masculine character through choice of language, clothes and presentation (Acker 1991). Hence, the overall picture of a social structure also enforces gendered views. In addition, job opportunities and hierarchies are also filled in accordance with gender preferences. In other words, the positions should concur with what is relevant and suitable for the gender that fills them (Kolb et al. 1998). For example, organizations tend to pick men over women to fill “more serious” positions such as financial management or risk assessment, while women are chosen or seen fit for task positions such as secretaries and support roles, with these jobs also attracting lower wages. Finally, the fact that females have dual responsibilities as mothers and workers is seen by organizations as another barrier that prevents them from climbing up the hierarchal ladder. In summary, Acker proposes that feminist theories set to fix women are not focusing on the greater picture, that is that the system of gendered organizations is what needs to be fixed (Ely et al. 2003).

The above discussion shows that gender implications have negatively impacted on the progress of women in their working careers. Unfortunately, female discrimination in the workforce manifests itself in various ways. The following section discusses common barriers that female employees face in Western societies.

### 3.3 *Barriers to Progress from a Western Perspective*



**Figure 3.3 Barriers to women and work in Western workplaces**

When the topic of barriers to female participation is discussed, common issues include sexual harassment, gender discrimination, the need for workplace flexibility and the glass ceiling. The list may go on and on; however, this section will discuss the most common barriers to women and work found in the literature as shown on Figure 3.3.

Gender inequality and discrimination remain the greatest barriers against female retention and promotion in the labour market (Anker 2004). Female discrimination in the workforce has been and remains one of the major barriers for women. Organizations have the tendency of deciding that women are less capable of handling senior roles than men due to their female/mother/household responsibilities. Hence, organizations blame gender differences for keeping their female employees out of

senior roles as they assume that women are better homemakers than career builders (Smith, Caputi, and Crittenden 2012; Anker 2004).

The following section discusses the relevance of the metaphors related to female career development.

### *3.3.1 Career metaphors*

Smith et al. (2012) in their article “A maze of metaphors around glass ceilings” describe more than 20 different metaphors that show discrimination at work against female employees. Many of these metaphors were coined during the past two decades and describe female under-representation in the workforce, encouraging continuous feminist calls towards ending female discrimination in employment (Catalyst Census 2006, 2011; Barreto et al. 2009; Smith et al. 2012).

Female career metaphors grasp a particular image of the female employee. Despite the differences in the images presented in each metaphor, they all show conscious or unconscious discrimination against female employees as being different from men. According to Inkson (2004), many people consciously or unconsciously identify others with where they assume those people may fit in. This comes from the matching metaphor or fit metaphor. As described by Inkson (2004): “you can’t put a square peg in a round hole” (102). This implies that many organizations think that many women do not have the characteristics that will allow them to fit in the hole (position) unlike men who fit in perfectly (Ryan et al. 2011). In the next section, three career metaphors seen as most relevant to this study will be discussed.

#### *3.3.1.1 The glass ceiling*

The US Glass Ceiling Commission (1995, 10-11) found that:

Equally qualified and similarly situated citizens are being denied equal access to advancement into senior level management on the basis of gender, race, or ethnicity. At the highest levels of corporations the promise of reward for preparation and pursuit of excellence is not equally available to members of all groups.

The metaphor “glass ceiling” became popular in 1986 as an explanation for why female employees were prevented from reaching senior roles (Smith et al. 2012). An invisible barrier of gender kept female employees from equally competing with male employees for a senior role, hence the glass ceiling metaphor was coined. Female

employees were able and, in many places, remain able to see roles available for them in senior management but are never allowed the opportunity to achieve them (Adams 2002).

Unfortunately, females remain constrained by the glass ceiling and the “maternal wall”. The US Department of Labor acknowledged the existence of the glass ceiling in 1991 when it defined it as “artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions” (US Department of Labor 1991, 1).

Unfortunately, for black ethnic women, discrimination against them in senior roles may be even greater. Davidson (1997) coined the term the “concrete ceiling” to describe black ethnic female employees being kept on the “sticky floor” for both gender and ethnicity reasons.

#### ***3.3.1.2 The glass wall***

In addition to the glass ceiling, a range of metaphors have been identified to explain barriers to women’s careers: these metaphors include the “maternal wall”. The maternal wall describes the discrimination faced by female employees in the workplace when organizations assume that they will have greater caring responsibilities than their male counterparts. Similarly, the metaphors, the “sticky floor” or the “sticky ladder”, both describe the way in which female employees are forced to stick to low-paid roles throughout their careers. The emphasis behind these metaphors is that women stick to low-paid roles owing to their responsibility as mothers.

Meers (2010) suggests that sharing childcare responsibilities equally between parents can help in “dismantling the maternal wall” (Meers 2010). By this means, working mothers have proven the stereotypes against them to be wrong.

#### ***3.3.1.3 The glass cliff***

By the late 1990s, some women started to break through the glass ceiling. However, some females in leadership positions were likely to be tricked into “glass cliff” positions (Ryan and Haslam 2007; Ryan et al. 2011). This occurs when female employees are finally promoted into leadership roles but only when the organization

is facing difficult circumstances and the female leader will most likely fail in delivering her tasks.

As mentioned above, there are many metaphors that describe female discrimination and under-representation in the Western workforce. In the above section, the choice has been made to discuss the glass ceiling, the glass wall (also known as the maternal wall) and the glass cliff. Many of the metaphors relate to a glass barrier of some sort. Women can see but not obtain opportunities for career advancement. Although useful in the Western context, glass metaphors are inadequate in the Saudi context.

#### ***3.3.1.4 The brick wall***

In the case of discrimination and under-representation of Saudi females in the Saudi workforce, the phrase “brick wall” is suitable to describe the very visible wall that prevents women from seeing what is happening in the male section, as demonstrated in the concept “out of sight, out of mind”. Maithree Wickramasinghe and Wijaya Jayatilaka (2006:101) also note the concept of brick walls. They define it as the ‘ideological and structural barriers preventing the horizontal and divisional mobility of women in the workplace

In some organizations, segregation situates female employees in “sticky floor” roles.. Similarly, women in the Saudi workforce find themselves deprived from senior positions or career development as they cannot see what happens behind those brick walls, nor are they made aware of such positions because organizational structures have been created to develop male employees. With respect to cultural segregation in Saudi networks, it is important to investigate how organizations in Saudi Arabia avoid creating brick walls as barriers for female employees in competitively climbing the career ladder. Later in this chapter, the brick wall will be explained in further detail.

#### ***3.3.2 Women and family***

Gender order (also known as gender role and gender display) “is the activity of managing situated conduct, in the light of normative conceptions of attitudes and



activities appropriate for one's sex category" (West and Zimmerman 1987, 125) Societal structures, hierarchies and power systems around the world have set different gender typology activities and behaviours that suit their cultural norms and political goals (Nentwich and Kelan 2014; Walby 2009; Walby, Armstrong, and Strid 2012). Although, in most cultures, men have been seen as superior to women, the severity of gender inequality varies from one society to another, depending on social structures, culture, laws and global interference. Since the waves of feminism have struck many countries, globalization has also impacted on different

... regimes of inequality based on systems of social relations including gender and relates them to categories of difference and major institutional domains of economy, polity, violence, and civil society within two competing modernities: neoliberalism and social democracy ... while gender and class are related and both change in the global context, they do not necessarily change at the same rate or time (Segal and Chow 2011, 5).

Females in the past have often had to choose between a career or focusing on their household and traditional roles. Similarly, career goals have been seen as conflicting with marriage and work (Fels 2004; Crompton and Lyonette 2011). Many examples of gender order may be seen in job allocations and job distributions since the 1970s and these continue today.

The conflict between home responsibilities and building a career can create anxiety (Crompton and Lyonette 2008, 2011; Shapiro, Ingols, and Blake-Beard 2008). According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), role conflict occurs when two or more sets of responsibilities are required to be taken care of and where both tasks need the time and effort to do so. They explain that females are likely to experience role conflicts because they "are faced with simultaneous (work and family) demands" (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985, 84).

In many societies, societal expectations regarding the role of women continue to pressure women to be the primary caregiver. Juggling career demands and childbearing and caring for others is not a simple task (Shapiro et al. 2008). Family responsibility is therefore seen as a barrier, especially when females lack support that might help them to juggle both responsibilities. Women in Western societies can find it hard to cope with work-related demands and family needs (Gerstel and Clawson 2000).

Research shows that female employees seek family friendly policies, in order to achieve healthy working arrangements and to achieve work–life balance (Crompton and Lyonette 2011; Clark, Ramsbey, and Adler 1991).

Shapiro et al. (2008) suggest that women should look for creative solutions including self-employment. Women are being encouraged to become responsive to a: ““self-employed” model that women are no longer acting as employees working to mandates of their employer but as “career self-agents”, setting their own terms of employment” (Shapiro et al. 2008, 310). However, applying creative self-employment strategies in the current state of the market may seem challenging (Fall, Goulet, and Vézina 2013). Research has shown that this approach may be a healthy attitude in facing economic downturns (Vinogradov, Kolvereid, and Timoshenko 2013) and developing the economy (Orser, Elliott, and Thompson 2012).

Female participation in employment in Western economies has increased with more women moving to top management and senior levels. As a result, the literature on female house/family-related responsibilities has increased dramatically (Sipila 2010). Thus, research continues to show that females continue to carry the major burden of family responsibilities (Gerstel and Clawson 2000; Greenglass, Pantony, and Burke 1988).

Research also indicates that women continue to struggle to reach their highest potential owing to the lack of flexible working arrangements (Crompton and Lyonette 2008, 2011; Adams 2002; Shapiro et al. 2008). Lack of available and affordable childcare can impact on women’s ability to combine work and family responsibilities. Non-work demands relating particularly to young children often require flexibility but this is not offered by all employers (Allen 2001). Lack of flexible arrangements also works as brick walls against female participation (Graf 2007; Sipila 2010; Stone and Lovejoy 2004; Williams 1985; Crompton and Lyonette 2011; Williams 2014). Research indicates that part-time jobs, or working less hours in general, may decrease work–family conflicts (Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness 1999).

Research highlights that organizations that create family friendly policies are likely to retain their female employees. However:

... employees who perceived that the organization was less family-supportive experienced more work–family conflict, less job satisfaction, less organizational commitment, and greater turnover intentions than did employees who perceived that the organization was more family-supportive (Allen 2001, 429).

### 3.3.3 *Gender pay gap*

There is considerable research regarding the gender pay gap in Western cultures. Female wages are lower compared to their male counterparts (EBSCO 2010; Adshade 2012; EOWA 2010). In terms of the Australian gender pay gap, statistics show that the gap has changed little over the past decade. It currently shows an 18% difference in average weekly earnings (EOWA 2010). Thus, Australian females need to work 66 extra days to reach equal pay. Such differences can discourage participation (Adshade 2012; Levin-Epstein 2007; Catalyst Census 2007; Haney 2009).

Discrimination against females in the workforce in Western societies could be demonstrated through the gender wage gap. An alternative view is presented by Babcock et al. (2003): they suggest that women struggle to achieve wage equality because they are unlikely to seek higher wages. They propose that female characteristics such as being too friendly and cooperative prevent women from negotiating within male-dominated environments. Rubin, Brown and Deutsch (1975) suggest that men and women negotiate differently according to their personal gendered interpretations. Men are seen as competitive negotiators, while women are more sensitive with the tendency of being more cooperative negotiators.

However, in their more recent study, Stuhlmacher and Linnabery (2013) suggest that whether or not women display gendered negotiation stereotypes will depend on what is being negotiated. With gendered roles being driven from the social role theory, many women are raised to not negotiate for their personal needs; however, being appointed as an advocate to speak on someone else's behalf will see women then display more assertive behaviours (Amanatullah and Morris 2010). Hence, women display different negotiating behaviours according to the matter on which they are negotiating. Research suggests that gender differences in negotiation disappear when women negotiate on behalf of others in their care. Similarly, in workplaces, many female leaders display assertive and competitive behaviours when negotiating.

Labelling and generalizing female behaviours into categories based on social role theory and gendered roles may not be relevant to all females. Limited research has generalized that all females are alike and that they are from one homogenous group and males are from another (Tong 1998). Assumptions that suggest that all women are too shy to negotiate their pay might need further examination.

Stockdale and Nadler (2013) and Lips (2013) suggest that discrimination in the workforce, especially as seen through the pay gap, is a problem that stems from the choices made by professional females in their careers. They suggest that gendered ideologies play a major role in directing people in choosing gendered jobs. For example, females tend to choose opportunities that show their care and compassion in roles such as caregivers, teachers and nurses, while men tend to look for managerial and competitive positions. This implies that men tend to look for male-dominated higher paying occupations while women prefer female-dominated occupations. Similarly, Huppatz and Goodwin (2013) explain that gendered ideologies cause some men to suffer social unacceptability if they choose female occupations such as nursing.

In 2002, a study undertaken in Australia by Preston and Whitehouse (2004) found that 62% of women worked in female-like jobs and 65% of men in the workforce were found in male-dominated jobs.

More recent research indicates that some men have begun working in occupations that are not male-dominated and women also have joined the male-dominated industries such as mining, agriculture and construction. Although gendered occupations still exist, research indicates that many people are moving away from traditional gendered jobs (Cross and Bagilhole 2002; Huppatz and Goodwin 2013; Nurse Uncut 2011; ABS 2010). It remains to be seen if this will help close the gender pay gap.

As noted earlier, women working in Saudi Arabia do not experience the same levels of gender pay discrimination. However, women in Saudi Arabia do not negotiate over terms and conditions of employment.

### 3.3.4 *Part-time: a helper or a glass ceiling effect too?*

Part-time jobs create opportunities for women and especially for those who are mothers. Part-time jobs are also important as they offer a transitional bridge between motherhood and employment (Booth and van Ours 2013) that will assist with caring responsibilities. Part-time jobs can play a major role in maintaining a sustainable income.

However, part-time work is also

associated with lack of career opportunities, even for the well qualified ... Qualified women who take advantage of flexible work opportunities such as part-time work, often do so in the full knowledge that their employment careers will be negatively affected (Crompton and Lyonette 2011).

Studies have shown that part-time opportunities place women at a disadvantaged position in terms of performance when compared to full-time workers (Moen and Roehling 2005; Kalleberg and Reskin 1995). Part-time jobs are also seen as a waste of educated human capital (Kalleberg and Reskin 1995) and a gendered tool that keeps the wage gap valid (Webber and Williams 2008).

Unfortunately, females find themselves faced with two options: the first is to work in full-time jobs to develop their career but to potentially suffer from self-guilt, family stress and be overloaded with caring responsibilities. The second option is to settle for part-time jobs that will limit their career development but allow family responsibilities to be more easily met (Crompton and Lyonette 2011).

Interestingly, Laura Vanderkam, in an interview, convincingly makes an argument that mothers who give birth to their children in their twenties and maintain a full-time job will find themselves happier in the long run (Graham 2012). She explains further that females working full-time get paid twice as much those working part-time and, by the time these women have reached the end of their thirties, their children would no longer be as dependent. Through Vanderkam's books, *168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think* published in 2010 and *All the Money in the World: What the Happiest People Know About Getting and Spending* published in 2012, she convinces the reader that through time management and clever spending, you can buy happiness. Although she presents a compelling argument that suggests such choices are simple, a range of societal expectations and structural barriers continue to limit women's choices.

This section has told the story of female barriers to employment from a Western perspective. The key barriers continue to be discrimination, lack of access to senior roles and caring responsibilities. Women are still expected to choose between career and family in ways that their male counterparts are not. The following section will discuss some of the suggested frameworks that have assisted women in the West to address barriers in the workplace.

### ***3.4 Frameworks towards Equal Opportunities***

Women around the world face difficulties in the workforce. Cultural and traditional implications together with the legal and business systems either make these difficulties easier to overcome or add further worries. Feminist movements have resulted in a range of approaches to overcome barriers that face working women. The following section examines key frameworks that were found helpful in advancing gender equality in the workforce.

#### *3.4.1 Masculine and traditional organizations*

In the 1960s, the radical feminist movement, through its impact in workplaces and research, provided frameworks that sought to achieve a more integrated workforce.

Ely et al. (2003) proposed a four-frame model that identifies the approaches to gender equity used in organizations. The first frame assumes that females have equal opportunities; however, females lack the necessary skills and experiences. This stage promotes the idea that women require “fixing” in order to fit into the existing structures. The second frame is an approach where organizations celebrate differences. Organizations, in this stage, acknowledge and value gender differences created through feminine and masculine approaches. Such differences are seen as being able to promote organizational achievements and outcomes, encouraging organizations to embrace gender to achieve higher production. The third frame encourages organizations to create equal opportunities. This frame holds the view that differences in evaluation and segregation are caused by discrimination against females, leading to uneven outcomes for women. Therefore, this stage works to promote female career advancement in the workplace and sets in place strong guidelines against discrimination and sexual harassment. Finally, the fourth frame is considered as a complementary frame that adds to the above frames. Assuming that

organizations are masculine-based, this frame states that organizations too need fixing. This means that organizations should look at changing their culture and structures to create diverse and inclusive workplaces. This is a challenging task because it suggests that new visions should be implemented in order to help achieve better strategies that recognize employees as important resources to organizations. Hence, changes, such as the introduction of family friendly policies and flexibility, can be achieved through such cultural change (Ely et al. 2003).

As seen through Ely et al.'s (2003) model, there are two main areas of focus for change to occur (fixing females and fixing the masculine system in organizations). They also suggest that the focus needs to shift from changing or fixing females to changing or fixing organizations instead.

The following section will also discuss issues relating to females, followed by examining how organizations participate to provide equal opportunity for participating females.

There is some dispute regarding whether females show feminine characteristics in the workforce or whether these are simply stereotypes attached to weigh women down when attempting to climb the ladder as has been suggested by Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001). However the main issue behind this problem is looking at female characteristics as a barrier in the workplace. Interestingly, Mueller and Conway Dato-on (2013) believe that females choose styles of management according to the gender roles by which they have been influenced through their social spheres, rather than just based on their gender. This may be seen as a normal outcome of the social identity theory in which men and women's knowledge base is from their social groups. Thus, both men and women are driven to hold a positive relationship with their social memberships that will satisfy their self-esteem to remain accepted within their social groups (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Consequently,

the individual is motivated to maintain a positive social identity by engaging in social comparisons that preserve the favourability and distinctiveness of the in-group relative to relevant out-groups (Cameron and Lalonde 2001, 60).

However, gender roles derived from social identities may stand in conflict to each other in females (Cadsby, Servátka, and Song 2013). For example, this may happen to many women who face socio-emotional stress or family role pressures but remain

devoted to their work obligations. Through this important observation, it is found that employees may strongly identify themselves with their organizations. As has been proposed by Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994), when an employee identifies her/himself as a member who is more prominent than an alternative member and has adopted characteristics that are the same as her/his organization, then this employee has powerfully identified her/himself with the organization, and this is called organization identification. Marique et al. (2013) propose that there is a stronger relationship between organizational support that increases organizational identification than to that which increases organizational commitment.

Therefore, as suggested by Ely et al. (2003), managers and organizational leaders need to focus their attention on changing systems to create appropriate methods of providing equal opportunities. In this way, organizations are supporting their female employees and are strengthening their female employees' commitment. Research (Acker 2006; Ely et al. 2003; Metcalfe and Woodhams 2012) has found that organizational sustainability is enhanced with a diverse group of employees. Diverse organizations are more likely to succeed when organizations provide equal opportunities to employees regardless of their gender. The point that these authors make is that masculine organizations with gendered ideologies are what is in need of "fixing".

#### ***3.4.1.1 Family friendly policies***

Research indicates that organizations that provide family friendly conditions such as work-life balance are more attractive to mothers and, in general, to all employees. Family friendly policies offer flexible and desirable alternatives for employees. Moreover, they can help break glass ceilings and maternal walls helping to create an inclusive workforce (Ely et al. 2003; Catalyst Census 2006).

Similarly, Shapiro et al. (2008) suggest that organizations should move away from traditional headcount practices, old norms should be challenged and part-time jobs should be available. These strategies, together with supportive career counselling and feedback, could create high potential for both employees and the organization.

Recent research indicates that family supportive supervisors arrange for these types of flexible working arrangements (Greenhaus, Ziegert, and Allen 2012; Hammer et



al. 2009). Sympathetic managers understand the efforts of female employees to meet both work and family responsibilities (Greenhaus et al. 2012). They suggest that supportive managers and female career candidates need to participate in programs to learn how to work together towards a smooth transition into senior levels: thus, these programs help to mediate issues that arise in relation to flexible working arrangements. Ibarra, Carter and Silva (2010) similarly state that organizations have the power to help women's career development through understanding their circumstances and through coaching and sponsoring programs. They explain that, for female employees to reach senior levels, this requires managerial support including opportunities for females and their managers to be coached towards a goal of advocate advancement. Such programs they suggest should offer performance evaluation; training and development; succession planning; leadership workshops; and flexible timing schedules. Through such programs, organizations and female employees should both learn the "hows" and "whats" towards achieving "a fair go" for all (Ibarra et al. 2010).

Alternative work arrangements can offer more opportunities and flexibility. With these in place, employees are able to manage times according to their preferences. New technology offers a range of solutions, for example, email, telecommunicating facilities and virtual teams, creating time-efficient alternatives for employees and potentially increasing organizational productivity (Valcour and Hunter 2005; Haney 2009; Sipila 2010).

Despite the benefits of increased flexibility and alternative ways of working, accessing flexible work arrangements remains a challenge for many women (Pocock, Charlesworth, and Chapman 2013). For example, Marissa Mayer, CEO of Yahoo, and the mother of one child recently banned telecommunication. Many employees at Yahoo depend on telecommunicating to help balance career and caring responsibilities. This ban impacted particularly on female employees. The irony is that Mayer herself has the power and finances available to build a nursery for her child next door to the office and so can be close to her child while she works (Guynn 2013).

Childcare facilities, nurseries and after school care provide help for working mothers. Such facilities help decrease issues that arise from childcare responsibilities and

work (Berger 2013). Family leave and other personal leave for temporary circumstances can also attract women with caring responsibilities to working in these organizations and thus improving employees' quality of life (Pitt-Catsouphes and Smyer 2006; Haney 2009; Sipila 2010).

Other research indicates the importance of offering educational and training programs, for example, in management, stress management and professionalism with these also being productive methods of enhancing employee knowledge and competencies. Health clubs, health insurance and children's education support have also been offered by employers to attract and retain working mothers (Catalyst Census 2006). Such initiatives help address family–work conflicts and are one way that an organization can show appreciation to its female workers and their concerns. Studies show that work–life policies and practices offered by organizations improve career progression for females (Graf 2007; Stone and Lovejoy 2004). Such initiatives act as supporting strategies and provide the opportunity for women to develop the skills and experiences needed for more senior roles. Thus, family friendly work conditions help employees to remain productive because their caring responsibilities and work responsibilities are more easily met.

#### ***3.4.1.2 Implementing a quota strategy***

Cultural norms, values, assumptions and stereotypes that are deeply rooted in patriarchal and religious traditions; arguably, constitute the most fundamental barrier to utilization of female talent (Tatli, Vassilopoulou and Özbilgin 2012, 9).

It has been suggested that one way to tackle female discrimination in a historical socio-cultural value system that promotes male privilege in the workplace is by adding a female employee quota (Tatli et al. 2012; Syed and Ozbilgin 2009; Acker 2006). The aim of female quotas in organizations is to force organizations to recognize and promote female talent. This will create organizational change and increase diversity through the recognition of female labour as potential talent (Acker 2006; Tatli et al. 2012; Syed and Ozbilgin 2009). Gender quotas that must be met can act as a facilitator or a strategy to change existing processes and structures in organizations.

However, such an approach has been subject to considerable criticism (Cahn 2002; Pojman 1998). Not everyone finds implementing a quota strategy to be a fair

employment strategy. They argue that such an approach does not fit within the principle of equal opportunities. The key criticism is that more qualified male candidates may be set aside to maintain the quota strategy, and this is seen as neither productive nor fair (Dahlerup et al. 2008). Others argue that quotas lead to tokenism (Dahlerup 2013; Smith 2013). However, where quotas have been introduced, for example, in Norway in relation to women on corporate boards, substantial increases in female representation have been achieved (Browne 2013; Torchia et al. 2010; Nielsen and Huse 2010).

However, it can be argued that, in many instances, women are as qualified as men but are discriminated against even when they have the same qualifications and experience (Fine 2010, 2011). Quotas may therefore be a useful approach in addressing male-dominated workplaces that tend to discriminate against women (Tatli et al. 2012).

#### *3.4.2 Fixing females' perceptions of skills and qualities*

Women in Saudi Arabia are seen as lacking many of the skills required for senior roles and are encouraged to develop the skills in order to challenge men who it is assumed already have these skills (Achoui 2009; Al-Ahmadi 2011; Omair 2008). However, challenging men in their field of expertise requires significant effort.

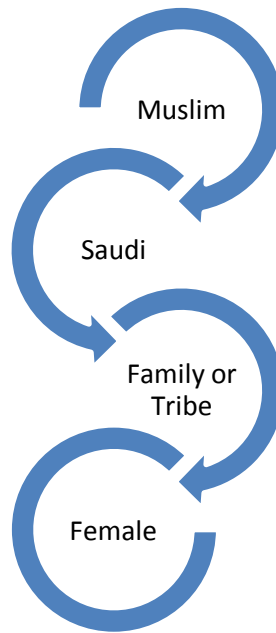
Moreover, in Western societies, women also seem to lack some male qualities, according to some. An interesting article by Fels (2004) suggests that females lack ambition. Fels explains that one must master a skill to gain recognition by appreciation, honour or even approval. Some females, according to Fels, lack the drive to master a specialized skill. Fels suggests other females may lack the need to be recognized for their achievements. This is a motivational engine towards career development as appropriate recognition encourages employees to achieve better results. Another issue that Fels raises is that females themselves show gendered behaviours. This depends on the cultural background. For example, women are often socialized to be cheerful, compassionate, sensitive and tender. That is they exhibit communal behaviours: as a result, many women tend to put other's needs ahead of their own. Similarly, men are socialized to be independent, reliable, rational, forceful, dominant, competitive and ambitious: that is, they behave in a more empowered fashion. Thus, Fels suggests that females influenced by cultural views

and their socialization are reluctant to claim recognition for their career achievements. She suggests that organizational attainment has to provide structures of recognition that appreciate the efforts of female employees.

Females are increasingly pursuing careers and may have broken through the glass ceiling. Although women remain under-represented at senior levels in most economies (Hausmann et al. 2012), they are encouraged to compete with confidence and continue to be ambitious to remain an active professional player in the workforce.

In addition, leadership and professional skills to productively compete in the workforce, such as social identity awareness where females are expected to grow more confident in contributing to their work and to society as a whole, are seen as enablers of female participation (Blanchard 2005; Haney 2009). Research suggests that a person recognizes or classifies him/herself according to the group of people to which he/she belongs and with whom he/she works (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Hogg, Terry, and White 1995; Dutton et al. 1994; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Cameron and Lalonde 2001). Hogg and Terry define social identity as meaning that “to varying degrees, people derive part of their identity and sense of self from the organizations or workgroups to which they belong” (Hogg and Terry 2000, 121).

More importantly, recognizing the importance of one’s social identity in some societies like the Saudi society is highly valued (Al Rasheed 2013b). Thus, social emphasis on identity, classifications and affiliations causes social pressure and awareness among people to become a part of or to belong to a respective group (Achoui 2009; Al-Munajjed 1997, 2010; Al-Dossary et al. 2012; Al Halawani 2002). Having said this, Saudi women tend to identify themselves through four categories as shown in the following diagram:



**Figure 3.4 Layers of social identity influencing female empowerment**

Tempered radicals, according to Meyerson (2003),

are people who operate on a fault line. They are organizational insiders who contribute and succeed in their jobs. At the same time, they are treated as outsiders because they represent ideals or agendas that are somehow at odds with the dominant culture (Meyerson 2003, 5).

Meyerson highlights the strategies used by tempered radicals that put their values into action to achieve change. This is done in a manner that does not disrupt what is seen as the appropriate balance of organizational norms and it allows them to maintain their social identities whilst still bringing about change (Meyerson 2003). Meyerson explains that insiders who are made to feel like outsiders due to their gender struggle in two ways: firstly, they struggle to maintain their identities and beliefs and, secondly, they struggle to challenge the system towards change in order to be included or to be seen by peers as an insider.

In line with the above, Blake-Beard and Roberts (2004) explain the importance of tempered visibility, especially for female employees. Tempered visibility describes how individuals choose the way that they want to represent themselves to others. This awareness is interlinked with one's social capital (Higgins and Kram 2001; Thomas and Inkson 2004). According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998):

We define social capital as the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of

relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. Social capital thus comprises both the network and the assets that may be mobilized through that network (243).

This means that an individual's tempered visibility is an influence towards achieving and gaining social exchange within his/her identified groups (Higgins and Kram 2001).

Females in Saudi Arabia face gender order ideologies that place them in subordinate dependent positions and thus they are treated differently to their male counterparts. Hence, Saudi females coming from a society that has very traditional roles for both genders and that highly values prescribed identities may face three challenging scenarios when participating in the workforce. Saudi women who wish to join the workforce may struggle to maintain and stay true to their traditional norms and identity while they work. In addition, they challenge male-dominated organizations by seeking to be accepted the same as their male peers and to have equal rights. Finally, they may struggle to change themselves in order to fit in as insiders who are capable of handling their responsibilities in a manner that will not disrupt the balance of norms in both their households and their work responsibilities.

#### *3.4.3 Research development*

The above frameworks provide useful ways for thinking about gender discrimination and how it might be addressed. Research indicates that frameworks may become more useful once they are communicated with other institutions (Eaton 2003; Rapoport 2002). Therefore, implementing this type of change to encourage female participants to join and stay in the workforce requires knowledge and communication between organizations and government labour institutions to be effective (Eaton 2003; Rapoport 2002). This implies that organizations should be connected with governmental institutions that can help with implementation and offer guidelines. Those at the level of top management need to be fully supportive in order to address gender equality issues and they need to endorse action (Eaton 2003; Rapoport 2002). Governments help by creating the policies and regulations needed to assist both companies and employees with such changes (Levin-Epstein 2007; Rapoport 2002). In addition, the government can set organizational standards and help implement and monitor programs that increase female participation (Levin-Epstein 2007; Gornick 2007; Pitt-Catsouphes and Smyer 2006).

Creating shared knowledge and communication channels that prioritize female participation between organizations and governmental institutions may highlight the weaknesses that need to be addressed to further increase female participation.

The above discussion illustrates the experiences encountered by working females in the West and the frameworks that have helped to identify and to understand the impact of barriers and enablers.

After this brief discussion of the common frameworks that have helped Western females into the workforce, the next section compares female development in professional occupations between Western countries and selected Muslim countries.

### ***3.5 Women and Career***

In this section, the effects and influences of feminism in general in Western societies are further explored in relation to women and careers. After discussing professional females and careers, in general, this section will examine female employment progress in selected Western countries and in other Muslim countries. Finally, this section will examine Saudi female employment progress and development.

Current research suggests that females around the world are motivated to participate in their countries' workforces (Hausmann et al. 2012) with female participation rates having increased over the last 10 years (Euwals, Knoef, and Vuuren 2011). Research suggests that many educated females are moving away from traditional female household roles (Shapiro et al. 2008).

A study of female graduates from Harvard University confirmed that females are turning away from traditional roles such as housewives to pursue professional careers. Since the 1990s, less than 9% of female graduates married within the first two years of their graduation (Goldin and Katz 2008) while, in the 1970s, around 36% of female graduates would be married by the second year after their graduation (Goldin and Katz 2008). Goldin and Katz (2002) also measured the declining rates of childbearing of university females shortly after the Food and Drug Administration issued their approval to use the contraception pill. Their study shows that fewer females chose to marry and more females were choosing to undertake professional careers (Goldin and Katz 2002).

Even though women around the world have different sets of values (Shapiro et al. 2008; Siraj 2012; Calvini-Lefebvre et al. 2010), there are various motivators that drive their hunger towards professionalism and away from traditional lifestyles (Shapiro et al. 2008). Females holding educational qualifications are increasingly likely to pursue professional careers. Females have become more aware of the lifestyles they wish to lead and this is pushing female development forwards, University female graduate rates continue to increase which has resulted in increasing female employment (Crompton and Lyonette 2011).

The second wave of feminism has effectively influenced women to become independent and to seek professional careers. Females are graduating from various fields including areas such as law and medicine which were previously very male-dominated. Females are entering most fields and industries and even though the progress in some areas is somewhat slow, female graduates have broken through some of the key areas of the male-dominated labour force (Shapiro et al. 2008).

Despite the advances of Western females in the past two decades or so, with respect to professional careers, around 40% of females at the mid-stage of their career leave work to achieve a more balanced life (Lyonette, Kaufman, and Crompton 2011; Shapiro et al. 2008; Ridgeway 2000).

Career development for educated and qualified women in Western societies has had success; however, challenges remain. There are different challenges for women in different cultural settings. Therefore, what follows will outline key challenges and opportunities that have been identified for females pursuing professional careers in Western countries and in Muslim countries, to provide the opportunity for some comparison.

### *3.5.1 Western women and work in professional occupations*

This section aims to examine female employment in different developed countries. The findings may shed light on the differences between cultures and how they impact on female participation in the developed world.

Workforce participation reflects the composition of a workforce in a particular country in terms of gender, age groups, pay equity and other related variables. It refers to the proportion of the working age population engaged in full-time or part-



time jobs (Abhayaratna and Lattimore 2006). The workforce participation rate refers to the share of different age groups within 15-64 years who are working or are able and willing to work (Department of Training and Workforce Development (DTWD) 2010).

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013), in 1980, the percentage of males in the total yearly workforce was 64% whereas female participation was only 36%. In 2009, male participation had reduced to 54% whereas female participation increased to 46%.

Similarly, a study by Abhayaratna and Lattimore (2006) states that female participation in Australia has increased positively through the years compared to other countries. Thus, female participation has been increasing over the last three decades. Moreover, statistics also show that part-time jobs are rapidly increasing through that time. This suggests that perhaps there is more awareness of the value of flexible arrangements offered to women in the Australian workforce. In addition, females have recently started to join top management levels and leadership positions. Australia had its first female prime minister in 2010. The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) now known as the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) continues to push to achieve further progress towards equality in both wages and opportunities. Statistics presented by EOWA shows that under-representation of Australian females in senior levels remains an issue despite the continued development over the last three decades (EOWA 2012).

In addition, studies on European countries also show that women have achieved much in the past 20 years (Eurostat 2011). Women continue to join higher levels of management. The European CEO estimates about 16% of directors are females and predicts that the number of females on company boards will increase to 30% by 2015 (European CEO 2013); however, the rate of progress remains slow. Hence, the majority of females continue to battle for senior positions, equal pay and increased opportunities (Liebert 2002).

Increasingly, women are being considered for global and expatriate roles. Researchers such as Clover et al. (2011) suggest that women are better global managers than men, owing to their nature and personal qualities, and characteristics such as being good listeners, valuing differences, having a spirit of adventure, cross-

cultural mindfulness: they can also easily adapt to new environments. Similarly, Selmer (2010) suggests that “women still represent a relatively untapped source of human talent for expatriate assignments. The number of female business expatriates lags far behind that of men” (1117). Despite the positive views of women as expatriate leaders, others argue that the reason why women lag behind men is because they are seen as expensive expatriates who might fail to accomplish their assignments (Linehan and Scullion 2001; Paik and Vance 2001; Linehan 2000). Others (Linehan, Scullion, and Walsh 2001) suggest that women are as successful as their male counterparts but are not given the opportunity to succeed.

Fitzenberger, Schnabel, and Wunderlich (2004) used the Micro-Census data to investigate the increase of female participation in the labour workforce in Germany. The studies show an increasing rate of female participation throughout the last decade. However, the increase differs between females with low or medium skills and highly skilled females. Interestingly, females with high skills did not increase their participation rate as much as lower skilled females did. This raises some interesting questions for Saudi Arabia where the education rates are high.

Canada has seen considerable progress in terms of female participation since the 1960s, when Canada committed to equal rights and favourable working conditions for both men and women (Falkenberg and Boland 1997). However, Canada, as in many developed countries, is still not fully satisfied with the changes achieved to date. Equality in higher levels of management and equal pay have not been achieved. Moreover, females continue to experience sexual harassment and discrimination (Kay and Brockman 2000).

According to Euwals et al. (2011), female participation in the labour market in both the United Kingdom (UK) and USA increased about 10% in the last decade. They agree that the rise of wages has a direct link to increasing female participation in the paid workforce. Moreover, they suggest that attitudes towards female participation have changed tremendously since the late 1980s. Birth control has been a great door opener for successful working females (Goldin and Katz 2002). Some, however, would argue that whilst change has occurred, it is not necessarily dramatic (Hopkins 2013).

Although the battle continues for true equality, the development of feminist theories and frameworks has assisted in increasing awareness of female participation, identifying the enablers and understanding the barriers. It is also important to note that while feminists in the developed world may be disappointed with the rate of progress, it is well ahead of many developing countries and conservative cultures. Therefore, the following section looks at selected Muslim countries to compare the differences.

Before exploring career development in Muslim countries, the fact that countries have different socio-cultural principles that reflect their nationals' lifestyles and their approach to gender roles (Clark et al. 1991) needs to be emphasized. Similarly, Adler (1987) states:

Reasons for the paucity of women in management are fairly similar worldwide: cultural sanctions, educational barriers and women's disinterest in pursuing traditional managerial careers. Only the relative importance of each varies from one country to another. Given the dominance of American assumptions and United States-based research, however, a number of factors tended to be overlooked or under researched (25).

Porta and Keating (2008) acknowledge that:

Christianity and Islam are contested in modern politics, with multiple systems within both, each with its own historic reference points. Both conservatives and modernizers can find material and justification in the tradition. Nationalism has proved a more resilient form than many modernists anticipated, not because people have inherent national identities, but because it provides a powerful set of symbols for redefining and closing political communities ... This shows the need for deep investigation and knowledge of the culture in order to show how these stories are generated (116).

### *3.5.2 Other Muslim countries*

It is important to note that before the Arab Spring in 2012, female participation rates were at higher levels than they currently are in the Middle East. In 2013, in many Middle Eastern countries, female participation rates have decreased especially during times of protest. Unfortunately, in some parts of Turkey, Egypt and in many parts of Syria which are experiencing civil wars, people have faced difficult times. Such wars against governmental regimes impact on female participation rates.

Often in Western-centric research, Islam is portrayed as a major obstacle to female participation in public life including employment. However, one may argue, many of the world's religions have or have had somewhat similar views on gender roles.

Thus, many different religions may influence people's choices of lifestyles, and may also influence females' decisions with respect to paid work (Amin and Alam 2008; Lehrer 2004; Omair 2008).

Muslim females' participation rates in employment vary according to their countries (Sechzer 2004). In some countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt, Muslim females' participation in paid employment is or has been until recently at similar rates to that of Western women. In other parts of the world such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Yemen, females are less active publicly (Elamin and Omair 2010; Sechzer 2004; Foroutan 2008). Females in Afghanistan were prohibited from engaging in any public activity (Bahramitash 2003). More recently, females have begun to participate in public life. Such differences could be linked to the different socio-cultural influences embedded in each country and not just to the dominant religion.

According to Bahramitash (2003), females in Iran are rapidly increasing their participation in the labour market. Even in Pakistan, females are not left out of the market. According to Ambreen and Humera (2009), females in Pakistan are considered religiously faithful; however, this does not prevent them from joining the workforce, and female workforce participation rates are rapidly increasing. Moreover, education has boosted female participation to a higher level where women are able to challenge men for top management positions (Ambreen and Humera 2009). Females have been able to participate in building a better economy. For example, in 1988, Benazir Bhutto became the first female in Pakistan to become a prime minister at the age of 35 (Ambreen and Humera 2009).

Studies on women in Malaysia show that Muslim females in Malaysia are not restricted by their religion from participating in the workforce. In this study, Muslim females were compared to Buddhist and Hindu females. The results showed no significant differences between these groups of females with respect to paid employment (Amin and Alam 2008). However, Malaysian females, similar to other females in many developing countries, face significant pay inequity (Lee and Nagaraj 1995; Sechzer 2004).

Males remain the main breadwinners in most of the developing world including Islamic countries. However, female awareness and demands for better economic

participation in paid employment have increased dramatically in various Muslim countries in recent times (Karam and Afiouni 2013; Metcalfe 2011).

Focusing more on Arab countries, such developments or awareness could be attributed to Western feminist frameworks and achievements, even though such frameworks may not apply across cultural contexts. They have, however, made Muslim females more aware of their rights and their societies more aware of the concepts of gender equality. Research on female participation in Arab countries indicates that there has been a rapid growth in female rates in the employment sector in the past 10 years (Metcalfe and Woodhams 2012; Mellahi et al. 2001; Al Halawani 2002; Al-Lamki 2007).

Despite the rapid growth, participation rates remain low, as indicated in Table 3.1 below (Metcalfe 2008; Achoui 2009; Tatli et al. 2012; Karam and Afiouni 2013). Most research that focuses on female development in Arab countries agrees that cultural implications and gendered ideologies seem to be main cause of the low rates of female participation compared with other countries that offer similar educational opportunities (Metcalfe 2008; Al Rasheed 2013a; Achoui 2009; Al-Munajjed 2010; AlYousef 2009; Fatany 2011; Lopez 2013; Meijer 2010; Al-Ahmadi 2011; Keyes 2013; Kauser and Tlaiss 2011; Karam and Afiouni 2013). Table 3.1 highlights female development in Arab countries in 2012.

**Table 3.1 Female development in Arab countries (Karam and Afiouni 2013)**

Country	Annual population growth (%)	Female labour force participation (%)	Educational attainment (rank/135)	Political empowerment (rank/135)	WEOI
Bahrain	4.8	32.4	0.9862 (81)	0.0376 (122)	49.0 (78)
Egypt	1.7	22.4	0.9081 (110)	0.0311 (126)	48.7 (80)
Iraq	2.9	13.8	N/A	N/A	N/A
Jordan	2.2	23.3	0.9869 (79)	0.0558 (113)	45.9 (93)
Kuwait	2.9	45.4	0.9834 (84)	0.0435 (116)	49.9 (76)
Lebanon	0.7	22.3	0.9773 (90)	0.0282 (128)	48.7 (79)
Libya	1.1	24.7	N/A	N/A	N/A
Morocco	1.0	26.2	0.8653 (115)	0.0672 (102)	47.0 (20)
Oman	2.3	25.4	0.9412 (99)	0.0256 (129)	48.2 (37)
Palestine	2.9	16.5	N/A	N/A	N/A
Qatar	6.1	49.9	0.9924 (57)	0.0000 (132)	N/A
Saudi Arabia	2.3	21.2	0.9646 (92)	0.0000 (132)	39.7 (38)
Syria	1.8	21.1	0.9135 (109)	0.0603 (110)	35.9 (31)
UAE	4.9	41.9	0.9914 (59)	0.1394 (62)	50.8 (72)
Yemen	3.1	19.9	0.6420 (134)	0.0164 (131)	24.6 (126)

Note: UAE is United Arab Emirates; WEOI is Women's Economic Opportunity Index

A comparison of the above participation rates of female labour to the rates presented in Metcalfe's (2008) report shows that female participation has increased in most Arabian countries by around 2%. It can be inferred from the above statistics that Islam does not prevent Muslim females from participation in labour markets. Rather, it shows that where conservative cultures exist, female participation rates are low. The Women's Economic Opportunity Index (WEOI) shown on the table presents a global measurement that aims to allocate effective solutions to position women so they can access economic opportunities (*The Economist* 2012): this recognizes that women remain the largest untapped resource in the global economy.

One could conclude that feminism has been of great value to females in the Western world compared to females from non-Western backgrounds and especially in some Muslim countries. Feminism in these contexts has had a different impact to date.

As this research aims to focus on female employment in professional occupations in Saudi Arabia, it is important to examine the Saudi female development in-depth. The following section will look more specifically at females in Saudi Arabia.

Much of the research regarding women and work has been done in the Western context and may not be transferable to a Saudi context. As one of the objectives of this study is to understand the barriers facing Saudi females wishing to join the professional workforce, the following literature will focus on the barriers from a Saudi perspective.

### 3.5.3 *Females in Saudi Arabia*

The female economic activity rate is only 28 per cent of the male rate for those aged 15 and above, and there are very few opportunities for women given the sexual segregation in the workplace that is the social norm throughout the Kingdom. Women work in girls' schools, and there are some opportunities in back-office jobs in sectors such as banking, but having women dealing directly with male clients in retail establishments is regarded by many Saudis as embarrassing for the women as well as being socially unacceptable (Bosbait and Wilson 2006).

Thus write Bosbait and Wilson in their article, "Education, School to Work Transitions and Unemployment in Saudi Arabia", cited in *Middle Eastern Studies* (2006). The Saudi society through its cultural traditions and conservativeness has made female participation difficult. The Arab Human Development Report (2003) states that full empowerment of Arab women, and recognizing their right to equally participate in education and other means of building capabilities through the workforce, is a significant indicator of the region's future development as a global society.

As seen in Chapter Two, educational statistics show that there is no gap in educational attainment in Saudi Arabia (Hausmann et al. 2010). Therefore, lack of education is not the reason that female participation is low in Saudi Arabia. Similar to the West, the rate of female university graduates in Saudi Arabia is overtaking that of male university graduates (Al-Yousef 2009). However, economic opportunities and participation in employment are much lower for women in Saudi Arabia (Hausmann et al. 2010, BTI 2010). Unfortunately, this indicates that a large proportion of educated females are unemployed (Sidani 2005; Elamin and Omair 2010; BTI 2010; Saudi Arabia Defence 2011; Moghadam 2013). For a country

seeking to become a competitive global economy, full use of all of its educated citizens would appear to be an important step forward.

Unfortunately, finding job opportunities can be extremely difficult in Saudi Arabia, especially for young Saudi women. The private sector tends to recruit foreign workers. One-third of the Saudi population are not Saudi nationals and nine out of ten employees are foreign. According to Bosbait and Wilson (2006):

There is much confusion as to exactly how many Saudi citizens are unemployed, with different figures cited. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Central Department of Statistics provided an estimate of 8 per cent male unemployment for 2002 ... whilst the Saudi American Bank cited the male unemployment rate as 11.9 per cent for 2002 rising to 12.5 per cent in 2003, and Abdulmajeed Fayezi, an independent economic researcher, estimated male unemployment at 30 per cent in 2003, a figure that has been widely quoted and discussed in the media in Saudi Arabia, but rejected by the authorities as a gross overestimate. Most educated females never enter the workforce despite women accounting for the majority of graduates (Bosbait and Wilson 2006, 535).

Whilst there is debate and discussion regarding male unemployment, there is very little discussion regarding female unemployment rates. The following section will explore possible barriers that keep females in Saudi Arabia from joining the professional paid workforce.

### ***3.5.3.1 Barriers for female participation in Saudi Arabia***

The key issues that directly and indirectly influence female participation in professional occupations in the Saudi workforce are discussed below.

#### ***3.5.3.1.1 Expatriate labour***

As noted earlier in Chapter Two, many organizations find expatriates cheaper and more productive. Thus, training nationals might be considered a waste of time and money. According to Wahib Binzagr, a well-known businessman in Saudi Arabia, the problem is:

We have in Saudi Arabia jobs that are filled by non-Saudis ... this is a wealth of expertise; they are being paid for the work they do and it would be a pity for this body of human beings to be lost. Having said that, there are many Saudis coming from the schools and colleges ready to work but without the right skills (Washington Post 2010).



According to Al-Munajjed (2010), educated females in Saudi Arabia are suffering from a lack of professional opportunities in the workforce. Most female graduates join the education sector; however, there are now not enough places available. It has been estimated that more than 1,000 Saudi females holding doctorate degrees remain jobless (Al-Munajjed 2010; Al-Khalaf 2009). This indicates that, despite high educational levels, women are less likely to gain employment than their male counterparts.

The battle for equal employment opportunities is hard to win in Saudi Arabia because competition for jobs is against both skilled cheap foreign labour and male nationals (Achoui 2009; Al-Wakeel 2001; Alajmi 2001; Harry 2007; Tlaiss and Kauser 2011). Metcalfe (2008) suggests that labour market policies including Saudization have created job opportunities for women (Moghadam 2003). Saudi Arabia is generating money and is stable in terms of business; however, unemployment particularly of women remains an unresolved issue (Alajmi 2010; Sullivan 2012). This has the potential to affect the economy by creating a gap between the social classes (Hill 2009).

As Harry (2007) states: “Unemployed workers (or potential workers) are a waste of a nation’s resources, a drain on the taxpayers (or informal support networks) and a pool of possible or actual troublemakers” (Harry 2007, 135): this increases governmental challenges to create more jobs for nationals.

This particular barrier highlights the vital necessity of further governmental support towards job creation (Abdul Ghafour 2013) and, in particular, female job creation (Avdeyeva 2010).

#### *3.5.3.1.2 Cultural restrictions*

Cultural values, social implications and gendered stereotypical viewpoints towards women in Saudi Arabia impact on the business and managerial environments. This has an effect on the structures and methods of organizations that employ women (Kauser and Tlaiss 2011). Unfortunately, a more pronounced barrier is that some men believe women should be focused on domestic tasks and not participating in the workforce. According to Elamin and Omair, 2010:

Saudi male participants strongly believed in the premise that men are dominant, independent, competitive and capable of leadership and women are submissive, dependent, caring and good for domestic tasks and childrearing (Elamin and Omair 2010, 9).

Gender order as identified earlier is a set of acceptable behaviours, attitudes and jobs that are put in place for people of a certain society to operate within that society (Nentwich and Kelan 2014; Walby 2009; Walby et al. 2012). From the above quote, we can emphasize that the strength of gender order embedded in the Saudi culture is what has restricted women from empowerment. In such traditional gendered ideologies, many people confuse cultural impact on gender order with the effect of Islam.

Al-Ghazali (1990) criticized the traditions that exist in Arab societies which inhibit women's mobility. Those traditions are typically blamed on Islam, while in reality they have nothing to do with Islam. He indicated that Islam provided a significant sense of equity between the two genders. Any differences are related to the nature of the human instinct and the different roles assigned to each gender. He maintained that there are certain traditions put by people and not by God which cripple women's development, keeping them in Jahiliyah (ignorance) ... Fatima Mernissi criticizes the frame of mind that denies women their full enjoyment of human rights labelling people of such mentality as being ignorant of their past, ignorant of their Islamic history and ignorant of the scholarship of Islam. She remarks that "if women's rights are a problem for some modern Muslim men, it is neither because of the Koran nor the Prophet, nor Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of male elite (Sidani 2005, 506).

Previously, the financial situation of most working men in families in Saudi Arabia provided a reasonable standard of living so that female employment was not required to contribute to the family's welfare. This was seen as providing greater options to Saudi women than to their Western counterparts:

With the improvement of standards of living, the fact that women did not have to work has been considered a marker of both richness and moral distinction in the context of the oil boom, a privilege protecting them from outside dangers, as opposed to foreign women who have to work (Renard 2008, 613).

This notion has strengthened the traditional context of the lack of female employment opportunities. Hence, families were not encouraged to support female public development and employment. Men were taught to be the independent figures that should support the entire family in all circumstances. Hence, it can be assumed that gender order embedded in socio-cultural values strengthens the male-dominated workforce.

Charlebois (2012) argues that men were and remain the main breadwinners. Although the feminist movement in the West pursues female equality, this has not prevented men from being seen as the main breadwinners. Charlebois terms this “bounded masculinity” for men who are bound by their nature to provide, and “unbounded femininity” for females who are not bound by their nature to provide but rather to nurture. Charlebois (2012) provides the example of collectivist communities such as Japan where:

Boys are expected to excel in school and eventually marry and support a family, so men can be seen as bound to perform in a breadwinning role. In contrast, girls experience less pressure to perform well in school because they are not expected to financially support a family, but instead are expected to manage all aspects of domestic life (Dasgupta 2009, Taga 2010, Tokuhiko 2010). Therefore, femininity can be seen as unbounded since women are able to avoid academic and work-related stress (Charlebois 2012, 202).

The above discussion aims to explain the situation in Saudi Arabia. Men are obliged by Sharia to be the main breadwinners and to provide for all necessities while females are not obliged to provide.

Whether females wish to work for self-fulfilment or owing to the necessity to contribute to family incomes, they are seen as unbounded and this impacts on employment opportunities. As a result of parochial gender order, little progress in female participation in Saudi Arabia has been seen. As noted earlier, increases in the rate of working women in Saudi Arabia are found in three main areas: the medical, educational and financial sectors (Alajmi 2001; Al-Khalaf 2009; Sechzer 2004) all of which are considered suitable areas for women.

However, Al-Mahmoud, Mullen and Spurgeon (2012) report that:

despite nursing’s long and respected history during the period of Prophet Mohamed, in more recent times it has not been considered a respectable profession for women in Saudi Arabia ... concern over their reputation and labour honour limits participation of Saudi women in nursing (370).

Thus, cultural constraints and concerns of social identity, honour and social respect have slowed the rate of female development in various fields including medicine.

#### *3.5.3.1.3 Brick walls*

Much of the literature on women’s participation and advancement in paid employment uses glass metaphors which discuss an invisible and impenetrable barrier which prevents women from a range of career moves that would be

advantageous for them. They can see the opportunities offered to their male counterparts but cannot access them. Women in Saudi Arabia are more likely to be confronted by brick walls. Not only are these walls impenetrable, they also prevent women from seeing the opportunities available to men that helps build male careers.

Another issue facing females in Saudi Arabia is where to look for jobs (Fatany 2007; Hamdan 2005). To an optimistic female graduate, this seems like a puzzle as it shows that the obvious options are taken and the remaining ones are unknown. Thus, females face a great challenge in looking for organizations who are hiring females.

#### *3.5.3.1.4 Family responsibilities*

For women, family responsibilities and commitments by far surpass work commitment according to Saudi cultural norms. Saudi females, like other females, struggle to juggle family responsibilities and work, especially as family responsibilities and housework are expected to be a female's first priority (Metcalf 2008; Elamin and Omair 2010). Although most females have the opportunity to rely on relatives and nannies to help with household and family responsibilities, family responsibilities clearly remain an important issue (Achoui 2009). The main conflict as in Western societies is managing time so that both work and family responsibilities can be accommodated.

Recent negative publicity in Saudi Arabia regarding neglect and mistreatment of children by domestic help has further impacted on women's desire to work and on expectations relating to women's primary caring responsibilities. Working women want to feel relaxed knowing that their children are being well cared for while they are at work. However, few childcare facilities are available in Saudi Arabia and they are very expensive (Al-Arabiya 2012).

As seen from the above discussion, cultural norms have a significant impact by defining gender order in a way that the culture finds acceptable (Clark et al. 1991; Amin and Alam 2008; Omair 2008; Al Saleh 2011). Thus, certain behaviours or decisions, made either by an individual or by a society, are connected to the cultural background of that individual or society (Porta and Keating 2008). Having said this, if females cannot secure help within the domestic sphere, then looking for further responsibilities outside the house is a difficult option. Thus, female participation,

views and interactions are impacted by the country's cultural values of what is considered acceptable behaviour for women in relation to family and work (Fatany 2007).

#### *3.5.3.1.5 Professional skills and experiences*

Current educational development is not in line with the labour market demands in Saudi Arabia. This has caused university graduates especially those who gained qualifications overseas to look for jobs elsewhere (Achoui 2009).

Iqbal (2011) states that Saudi employees do not have the skills required to fit specific positions in the current labour market. He suggests developing training facilities to equip nationals with skills necessary for the rapidly growing workforce. In addition to developing training facilities, mentorship, as is the case elsewhere, has been found to be important for the career development of females in Saudi Arabia (Fatany 2007; Gallant and Pounder 2008; Syed 2011; Achoui 2009; Al-Ahmadi 2011). Given the cultural context, females need access to training and programs that will empower them to develop their professional careers.

However, training facilities to improve educational attainment may not be enough (McDowell 2013). Firstly, business and opportunity creators should identify sectors with the greatest potential for economic sustainability, and then strategic investment in employee training is needed. This may be achieved through partnerships with organizations, universities and even trade unions to invest in skill development (McDowell 2013).

Interestingly, McDowell (2013) suggests that shortages in employment skills may be connected to cultural attitudes and stereotypes embedded in some workforces. She suggests that it is important to raise aspirations through challenging stereotypical attitudes in the workforce to help meet skills gaps. Hence, traditional approaches that may negatively affect female employment in the workforce should be challenged and addressed to build a skilled female labour force (Achoui 2009; Al Halawani 2002).

#### *3.5.3.1.6 Traditional male-dominated working systems*

According to Achoui (2009), people without university qualifications who are holding senior positions is a typical dilemma in Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, in some

sectors, the human resource (HR) development when undertaking recruitment favours hiring relatives and is not based on educational backgrounds and competencies (Achoui 2009). Achoui (2009) explains that female development in the Saudi workforce, like male recruitment, requires HR programs that challenge and evaluate traditional systems, to move away from traditional hiring practices to a more professional occupational system.

Owing to social stigma towards low income positions or labouring jobs, young unqualified nationals refuse to work in such jobs. Hence, Achoui (2009) suggests that the educational refinement happening now in Saudi Arabia should not start at university levels. To help change negative social influences, change should start from the early stages of education:

There is no coherence between the strategies of these countries, which aim to be developed/manufacturing countries, and their unbalanced educational systems, which produce more graduates in humanities and religious studies. Therefore, any serious reform in these countries should start by developing the family structurally and functionally, and by developing elementary and vocational education instead of starting educational reform from the university level (Achoui 2009, 37).

Moreover, females face traditional male-dominated systems that are culturally not welcoming to females. These socio-cultural values embedded in the business-organizational systems create difficulties for females who wish to pursue careers. Restrictive structures and the lack of female development programs and female empowerment contribute to women's under-representation in employment. Thus, females find themselves restricted to a certain level of opportunities (Al-Munajjed 1997; Al-Ahmadi 2011; Achoui 2009; Al-Yousef 2009; Omair 2008; Al Halawani 2002). To address this, organizations will need to address their cultural values.

After looking at both Western and Islamic countries, the researcher found that, although cultural applications are different, there are similar barriers. Females around the world are under-represented as a result of male-dominated systems. Family responsibilities remain a female's expected priority. Females continue to battle for top positions everywhere although the battle in some countries seems to be tougher than in others.

Although the above issues and points have been discussed for years, and may seem obvious in the Western context, it is important to note their application is not

universal. How these points may or may not relate to the Saudi context is part of the exploratory nature of this research.

Understanding the differences between females through their cultural identities is important. Thus, the following section examines the literature that suggests what may work for females in Saudi Arabia.

### ***3.5.3.2 Enablers suggested for Saudi working females***

Cultural norms are different between a Western and a Saudi context. It must be noted that these may not be transferable to the Saudi context. Hence, the following discussion has focused on research that has looked specifically at promoting female participation in Saudi Arabia.

The following section examines a suggested philosophy hypothesized as being a good approach to increasing female participation in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This philosophy was tested in this study, and will be discussed later through the findings and discussion chapters.

#### *3.5.3.2.1 Metcalfe's philosophy – a framework?*

Beverly Metcalfe's work contributes to the academic literature that explores female participation in the Middle East and in other places of the world. Her work gives a Western academic view regarding female employment in Arab countries. Metcalfe (2008) explains the reasons why females in Middle Eastern parts of the world are lagging behind in economic participation, and thus her work also offers a suggested philosophy that might play a role in increasing female employment rates in a socially accepted manner. Most Western academic literature depicts females in the Middle Eastern region as being subject and dependent figures owing to Islam and the cultural system. Writing from a Western perspective, Metcalfe acknowledges the importance of Islam in Middle Eastern countries. She suggests solutions that she believes will work within such cultural constraints and policies that will increase female participation.

Gender, work and social relations are governed by a traditional patriarchal structure in ME states ... The role of Islam plays a significant role in shaping

economic and social and identity relations. The importance of Islam as a social and organizing influence is shown in research which examines how the Qur'an and Hadith provide a moral framework which guides the behaviour of all men and women. The concepts of unity (*itihad*), justice (*adalah*) and trusteeship (*khilafah*) have a significant bearing on ethical behaviours in management and organization relations (Metcalf 2008, 90).

Metcalf (2008) acknowledges the surrounding pressures that have resulted in national identities created by conservative collectivist groups. Metcalf suggests that Islam may not be the only source of the problem and cites Badran (2005, 22) who states: "women's rights are human rights are Islamic rights" (Metcalf 2008, 91). Metcalf recognizes the younger educated females as the voice of movement in Middle Eastern regions (Metcalf 2008). Moreover, she acknowledges the governmental efforts to increase female participation. However, she notes that females in Saudi Arabia lack sufficient knowledge of their rights as citizens (Metcalf 2008). Investigating women in management, she acknowledges that women are under-represented due to a lack of opportunities: she also acknowledges the need for a more integrated workforce that looks at both genders with equality. For example, part-time jobs have to be found to be helpful in transitional times to accommodate working mothers (Booth and van Ours 2013). Unfortunately, the male-dominated workforce in Saudi Arabia does not consider offering part-time jobs to accommodate females (Al-Menkash et al. 2007). Hence, organizations in Saudi Arabia do not offer part-time jobs because it is not the way that work is seen and there is a little appetite for change with respect to increasing opportunities for women (Metcalf 2008).

After examining various levels of the social sphere of Middle Eastern women, Metcalf suggests that, to address current inequalities faced by women in Saudi Arabia, women should have equal rights as individuals and should be "treated differently not unequally" (Metcalf 2008). Metcalf names this the "equal but different" philosophy:

The commitment to difference as a social and organizing principle is perhaps best encapsulated by reviewing the status of Arab countries ... Arab states argue that they are not against the principles of CEDAW [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women] but wish to maintain their commitment to Islamic Shar'ia. This stresses that men and women be treated differently, not unequally (Metcalf, 2008, 91).



Metcalfé adopts this philosophy and draws on Acker's (2006) theoretical framework of inequality regimes that studies the regulations, networks and systems that hinder gender equality in organizations. Hence, Metcalfé (2008) suggests "acknowledging that men and women may require different policy frameworks to enable equal participation" (Metcalfé 2008, 96). Thus, a way forward could be different treatment in employment for women and men.

Metcalfé attempts to help her readers understand the logic behind females being equal but different to men by stating that gender roles normal to the Middle Eastern societies attribute:

higher value to job roles and abilities to dominant masculinities ... Women's most important role, according to the society, is as a homemaker and mother, while the man's responsibility is to support and protect the wife and the family. The man is considered the head of the household even in cases where the woman makes large contributions to the family's income (Metcalfé 2008, 90).

Metcalfé (2008) therefore suggests that because the Middle Eastern societies see women as being different then it is best to empower them but in a different manner. She states that "different" should not imply "unequal". Rather, it means that for women in Middle Eastern countries to gain empowerment, they need different policies with different management systems to govern them (Metcalfé 2008). Metcalfé views this philosophy as offering a guide to Middle Eastern females towards empowerment. If carefully adopted, she suggests that it may be the most suitable for Middle Eastern females and their societies. Metcalfé (2008) also suggests that females in Saudi Arabia need to be involved individually in social and political forums within community networks, as a way to increase their public participation, and thus paid employment.

Finally, Metcalfé (2008) suggests that future research related to female Saudization may offer great advantages if handled appropriately. Importantly, Metcalfé states that there is little research available when discussing women in Saudi Arabia. More research is required in respect to Islam and cultural values by examining the socio-cultural and political processes. As a Muslim Saudi female researcher, I aim to contribute to filling the gap by considering Islamic socio-cultural influences within a Saudi context. This research will also investigate from a Saudi perspective what it might mean for professional women to be treated differently not unequally.

The above literature regarding female participation in the Saudi workforce provides insightful data and statistical information. However, women's voices are largely absent from the majority of the literature provided. Therefore, through the data collection for this research, it is essential to hear the stories told by both men and women regarding female participation. Through this research, making sure female voices are heard is important in filling this gap in the literature.

### ***3.6 Conclusion***

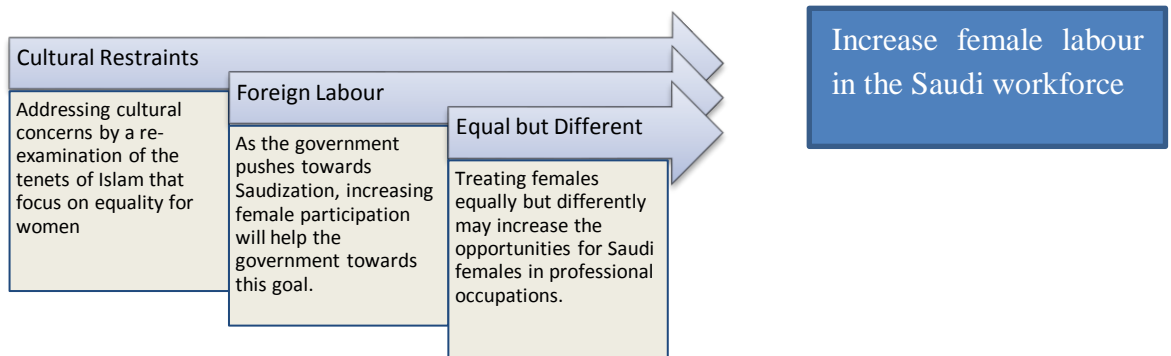
In this chapter, I started by providing an overview of female participation in employment, with a particular emphasis on professional occupations. Then, in a more general way, I explored some of the key approaches regarding women's participation. The chapter focused firstly on the Western world and women's achievements in relation to participation in employment. Following that, the Muslim world and female achievements were also covered to give a sense of comparison. Finally, this chapter narrowed its focus to the Saudi female in paid employment, at a more micro level. Thus, this chapter showed both the lack of research from a Saudi perspective and that females in Saudi Arabia compared to females in many parts of the world are less active in the paid workforce. Some of the key barriers that may cause this phenomenon were examined. Family traditions, the working environment and social networks are governed by socio-cultural traditional patriarchal structures that keep women in subordinate positions away from power in Saudi Arabia (Metcalf 2008, 2011). The lack of economic opportunities available to Saudi females resulting from socio-cultural influences may negatively affect women's reputation (Al-Lamki 2007; Al-Munajjed 2010; Elamin and Omair 2010; Gallant and Pounder 2008; Al-Mahmoud et al. 2012) which is a further barrier for women's employment.

Research emphasizes that discrimination against professional female employment is strengthened by negative gender order stereotypical attitudes (Kauser and Tlaiss 2011; Davidson and Burke 2004). Fatany (2007) suggests that female participation in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia should reflect on the teachings of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). She places responsibility on the media for not portraying true Islamic values as preached to Muslims by Mohammed the Prophet. This she believes is a

way to ease unnecessary cultural restrictions and to stop hostile Western media negative stereotypes against Islam.

This chapter also provided the reader with an explanation of Metcalfe's (2008) equal but different philosophy which was examined as it suggests a way to help increase Saudi female participation in the Saudi workforce.

Hence, Metcalfe's philosophy of treating females equally but differently in the workforce might be seen as an enabler. Therefore, in this early stage of the study, the following model based on insights from the literature review presents the main areas to be addressed to encourage further female participation in the Saudi workforce.



**Figure 3.5 Barriers and enablers to female participation in Saudi Arabia**

The above model works as a starting point to summarize what may work as an approach to increase female participation in the Saudi workforce. The situation in Saudi Arabia has similarities to what happened over 40 years ago in Western societies, when the second wave of feminism occurred. Women in Saudi Arabia have started joining the workforce, mainly in three sectors: educational, banking and hospitals. This potentially makes it easier to progress and expand to other business fields where women are barely visible.

When thinking about increasing female participation in the Saudi workforce, there are some important issues that should be highlighted. Firstly, although the Western approach is appreciated, it may not be directly applicable to the Saudi cultural context. However, learning from a Western perspective may help to overcome some barriers and may be encouraging as it was to females in the West who were under-represented and discriminated against in the workforce. Identification of the enablers of women’s increased employment in the Western context may similarly act as an encouragement for women in Saudi Arabia. Hence, whilst we can learn from these approaches, their application must differ in accordance with the cultural norms and country context.

# CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of much research at Masters or Doctoral level is not so much to prove things, but more to investigate questions, enquire into phenomena and explore issues. Many researchers either want to understand a situation more clearly or to change things by virtue of their research or to do both (Clough and Nutbrown 2012).

## *4.1 Introduction*

This chapter provides the “whats”, “hows” and “whys” related to this study. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to explore the theoretical perspectives related to the study in order to explain decisions relating to the methods used in conducting this research. This chapter is organized as follows: firstly, an overview of the research approach is presented, followed by a discussion of theoretical views related to this study. This chapter then provides in detail the steps taken and decisions made. Finally, the chapter concludes with a descriptive analysis of how the method was applied in this research.

### *4.1.1 Overview of research approach*

As discussed in Chapter Two, females in Saudi Arabia have been largely economically invisible in the workforce, despite their high level of educational attainment. This has created the motivation behind this study to understand from a Saudi perspective what causes this phenomenon and how it might be addressed. Thus, the phenomenon being explored is Saudi female participation in professional occupations in the Saudi workforce. Female participation in public life in Saudi Arabia is very low compared to other countries, despite statistics that show that educational attainment between genders is equal (Hausmann et al. 2012; Al-Munajjed 2010). As shown in Chapter Three, there is little research from a Saudi perspective regarding women’s professional participation in employment. The knowledge of female economic participation in Saudi Arabia is scarce, compared to the global context.

This study aims to encourage greater female participation by understanding what is needed to accomplish such goals. Thus, investigating the enablers that may push Saudi females forward, such as Saudization, is as important as understanding the barriers. Thus, this investigation may recommend additional enablers that are seen as important. However, highlighting the sensitivity of this study is critical: the researcher acknowledges the conservative nature of the Saudi culture and the authoritative Islamic legal system. This researcher takes the view that differences in female progress around the world are interlinked with cultural influences.

The literature review identified key barriers and enablers of female participation particularly from a Western perspective. However, there are various differences between Western-centric structures and the Islamic Saudi structure which may impact on the generalizability of the Western-focused research to the Saudi context. Thus in framing this research, it was acknowledged that cultural structures create different idealistic views of what is acceptable and what is not (Clark et al. 1991). Although Western feminist frameworks have had a major influence on female participation in the Western context, it is important to note that such frameworks are not universal. Such frameworks may or may not relate to the Saudi context. For example, women in Saudi Arabia may not find it as difficult to juggle work and family due to the Saudi cultural norms and strong gender order values, where families depend on maids and close relatives for help, care and support. However, without organizational cooperation, women might not feel encouraged to participate.

Hence, this study will investigate what factors are important in and to the Saudi context. This research is designed to elicit deeper responses from participants in relation to enablers and barriers to women's participation in professional employment.

The significance of the study is generated from the desire to utilize an untapped resource of educated Saudi females. Moreover, this study will fill existing gaps in the literature about female participation in professional occupations in Saudi Arabia from a Saudi perspective, rather than repeating the overlay of Western feminism that has characterized many studies to date.

As a Saudi female and as a researcher, I understand Islamic teachings and cultural aspects related to the Saudi society. Therefore, I believe that the study will be able to

present new insights into female unemployment issues, within the context of women in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, being a female, I have better access to other Saudi females who are able to provide quality information and who are willing to recommend other females or males who would be willing to participate in this study. In addition, being a Saudi Muslim, I have a better opportunity to interview important and influential figures who have Islamic backgrounds thus adding value to the knowledge gathered.

#### **4.2 Research Question**

Developing the Saudi economy depends on utilizing all human resources. As stated by the government as its goal, this will require the use of less foreign labour and more national workers. However, women have not fully participated in paid employment. Hence, the research question is: *How can female participation in professional occupations in the Saudi Arabian workforce be increased?*

#### **4.3 Objectives**

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- To understand the barriers that stand as brick walls keeping women from participating in paid employment
- To identify the enablers that will facilitate women's increased participation in the Saudi workforce.

#### **4.4 Qualitative Research**

This research seeks to understand the Saudi perspective regarding the lack of female participation in professional occupations in Saudi Arabia. This is expected to result in greater understanding of what may work as enablers to increase female participation and to provide deeper understanding of the barriers that are currently in place. A qualitative approach was seen as appropriate to gather personal reflections on what for some could be seen as a sensitive topic.

According to Byrne-Armstrong, Higgs and Horsfall (2001), the research method is decided by the question of the research itself. A simple definition of qualitative research is research that does not rely on mathematical numbers for data collection

(Byrne-Armstrong et al. 2001). Marshall and Rossman (1995) indicate that qualitative research is distinctive owing to its natural setting rather than it being artificially constructed. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, a natural setting was seen as having greater potential to elicit views, feelings and opinions relating to women's employment in Saudi Arabia. Qualitative methods enable researchers to gain a deeper understanding of issues of culture, religion, gender, race and feminism (Denzin and Lincoln 2003b). These are key areas to be explored in this research. In this sense, rather than adding numbers together to calculate assumptions through generalized observations, qualitative methods focus on social construction and qualitative research emphasizes the understanding of reality through the social and viewed experience of the participants (Higgs and Cant 1998; Denzin and Lincoln 2003b).

#### ***4.5 Establishing an Enquiry Framework: Ontology, Epistemology and Theoretical Perspectives***

According to Babbie (2013), a researcher's beliefs and assumptions influence the way that the researcher thinks about the phenomenon being studied. Understanding the research paradigm guides research to produce valuable and accurate data (Creswell 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2003a) identify four main interpretive paradigms that structure qualitative research. These paradigms are as follows: positivist, post-positivist, constructivist-interpretive and critical theory.

Table 4.1 briefly explains the paradigms as found in Denzin and Lincoln (2003b, 256).



**Table 4.1 The four paradigms of qualitative research**

<b>Paradigm</b>	<b>Positivism</b>	<b>Post-positivism</b>	<b>Critical Theory</b>	<b>Constructivism</b>
<b>Ontology</b>	Naïve realism – “real” reality but apprehendable	Critical realism – “real” reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendable	Historical realism/virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural and gender values over time	Relativism, constructed realities
<b>Epistemology</b>	Dualist/objectivist; findings true	Modified dualist/critical tradition/community; findings probably true	Transactional/subjective; value-mediated findings	Transactional/subjectivist; created findings

According to Byrne-Armstrong et al. (2001),

Research needs to be embedded in a (meta-)framework comprising a congruent, coherent dynamic matching of research goals/questions/intended product, research paradigm and its philosophical framework, the conceptual or theoretical framework which informs the research and the strategies (the general approach and the specific methods of data collection and analysis (56).

Detailed below is the framework that has guided this research to provide coherence to the research process. This research is guided by the principles of an interpretive ontology and epistemology. Ontology is the question: “what is the nature of reality?”, assuming that there are dynamic realities and each reality depends on a certain context (Klenke 2008). Interpretive ontology brings with it the idea that the researcher and reality are inseparable, implying that realities are constructed through the process of human beings and their reactions to life situations (Klenke 2008).

Epistemology addresses the question: “how is knowledge constructed?” There are various ways of gathering data, and every researcher is guided by his/her beliefs in choosing the best method of gathering the data (Klenke 2008; Symon and Cassell 1998; Carter and Little 2007; Byrne-Armstrong et al. 2001). Interpretive

epistemology holds that knowledge is based on personal descriptive meanings and experiences transmitted through social context (Klenke 2008). Hence, knowledge is created through the interaction between the researcher and the selected participants and their reflections on their experience of the reality, in this case, lack of female participation in professional occupations in the Saudi workforce. Interpretivism relies on the researcher's ability to interpret the knowledge into descriptive analysis of the social phenomena without relying on generalized rules or applicable laws (Klenke 2008). Hence, knowledge in this case is not objective. Instead, the study will focus on the essence of viewing the world from participants' points of view (Smith 1987).

Building on the interpretive ontology and epistemological approach, this research is guided by a phenomenological perspective and informed by feminist perspectives. Through a phenomenological lens, the use of interviews and focus groups gathers the lived experience from Saudi nationals regarding the phenomenon of the lack of female participation in paid employment in Saudi Arabia. The dynamic reality of females in the Saudi context is thus understood through females' experiences of the male-dominated world in Saudi Arabia. This research also explores the perspectives of men who are in positions of authority to determine how they perceive women's absence in public life. Hence, the knowledge interpreted will be appropriately constructed for the Saudi context. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, this study is interlinked to socio-cultural issues. Socio-cultural aspects, experiences, differences and gender are better understood as knowledge when using a feminist paradigm (Babbie 2013; Porta and Keating 2008). Feminist theoretical perspectives imply that every social construction dictates gender roles (Lorber and Farrell 1991; Acker 1991). Hence, gender views interpreted through a feminist lens regarding the female situation in the Saudi workforce will add great knowledge to address this phenomenon.

The research approach draws on radical feminism in that it is female empowerment to increase authority and autonomy that is being examined. Additionally, it is a feminist approach because it is a research study done by a woman researcher for women, to bring about change that will result in improvement in women's lives.

#### **4.6 Gender**

The purpose of affirming a sex/gender distinction was to argue that actual physical or mental effects of biological difference had been exaggerated to maintain a patriarchal system of power and to create a consciousness among women that they were naturally better suited to domestic roles (Pilcher and Whelehan 2010, 56).

Power and authority are concepts that are usually interlinked with masculinity (Acker 1991). As some may see men as being fit for anything in the workforce whilst women are fit for childbearing and housework (Fine 2010), introducing females to a male-dominated workforce in a segregated society, such as in Saudi Arabia, where institutions, organizations and systems are created on a masculine basis, is likely to present a range of challenges. Although there has been little progress towards increased female participation, this study attempts to address the masculine gendered systems in order to increase women's participation in professional occupations. Thus, taking a gendered view (Acker 1991) of the current organizational and social structures will provide deeper insights into the social structures that has privileged one group over the other.

#### **4.7 Feminism**

Feminism means essentially that a woman's or gender perspective is applied to a variety of social phenomena. These are often critically explored for the sake of promoting the interests of women, based on the assumption of gender being a dominating organizing principle in society, discriminating or in other ways disadvantaging females, in public and private spheres (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009, 236).

According to Ridgeway and Correll (2000), societies normally create clear cognitive frameworks that define gender roles. Traditional views of male-dominated societies or more radical feminist societies all have their different gender frameworks that suit their lifestyles. As discussed previously, different forms of feminism have been identified (Acker 2006; Eddy 1973; Pilcher and Whelehan 2010; Jenainati and Groves 2010).

The aim of feminist research on women is to understand how females are seen and treated in a certain social structure (Jaggar and Young 1998; Olesen 2003; Harding 1987; Hughes 2002). Research conducted through a feminist perspective must take into account females' experiences and thoughts to recognize their knowledge as feminist (Harding 1991). Establishing a non-exploitative relationship between the

participant and the researcher is seen as a feminist principle and has the potential of offering transformative knowledge (Olesen 2003; Creswell 2003).

Because society has the false belief that women are by nature less intellectually and physically capable than men, it excludes women from the academy, the forum, and the marketplace. As a result of this policy, of exclusion, the true potential of many women goes unfulfilled (Tong 1998, 2).

Liberal feminists argue that if there is equal access to education then this indicates that there should be equal access to societal institutions (Pilcher and Whelehan 2010). A call for female rights to participation in general is a feminist act by itself. Thus, this research which is seeking to explore women's participation in paid employment in Saudi Arabia is placed as a feminist study. A feminist view takes us through the thoughts of the respondents, enabling the researcher to understand the stories and emotions behind situations (Denzin and Lincoln 2003b).

Western radical feminist approaches in the 1960s achieved great outcomes regarding female employment, education, citizenship and rights. However, as has been noted, adopting a Western feminist approach without regard to the Saudi context may be problematic.

This research therefore draws on Western feminist frameworks, in particular, on radical feminism (Calvini-Lefebvre et al. 2010; Krollokke and Sorensen 2005) due to its focus on challenging power and the social structure but it is also guided by an Islamic perspective (Al-Hashimi 2003; Syed 2010; Sharify-Funk 2008; Meijer 2010; Sechzer 2004; Sidani 2005). In the Saudi context, for this research a radical feminist approach means recognizing the wasted human potential of female labour and recognizing the Islamic female as positive and able to participate in public life. Hence, this study seeks to understand how to encourage female participation and is mindful of the Saudi context. The research question is understood through the necessity of continuously highlighting the significance of gender relations as a basic feature of the Saudi social life. The feminist lens is essential to connect both the social and structural issues. A feminist approach enables the researcher to understand the stories and emotions behind situations (Denzin and Lincoln 2003b).

Through a feminist lens, understanding this research and drawing on Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality leads to an exploration of meanings (religion/history/power/culture/gender/race/class) as a mode of analysis which as

shown in the analysis that each has an invisible but direct influence on female work in the Saudi workforce.

Women are not seen as powerful individuals who contribute equally to the Saudi society; therefore, they do not share equal work opportunities. Seeking to identify the reality behind the phenomenon of the lack of female participation in professional occupations in the Saudi workforce challenges the assumption that the conservative cultural restrictions that shape social gender roles in the Saudi society are fixed and unchangeable.

Listening to insights from both females and males, and their perspectives on the lack of female participation in the Saudi workforce, recognizes the power of the Saudi social structure. Hence, it also opens doors and opportunities in ways and methods that are likely to be seen as acceptable within the Saudi social norms. This makes the researcher proud to declare this study as feminist research.

#### ***4.8 Semi-Structured Interviews***

Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) said: “the only cure for ignorance is to ask” (AlBukhary 1959).

Jong et al. (2008) suggest that recorded interviews are a means of providing oral history. In this sense, social interviews gathering information regarding a social phenomenon play a valuable part in the social cultural heritage.

According to Yates (2004), the best way to know about people is to ask people. In this sense, conducting semi-structured interviews and focus groups to gather information from nationals of both genders to create a better understanding of the layers that play a role in holding back female participation is considered the most appropriate method to gather data. Semi-structured interviews are seen as an appropriate data collection method in social research (Barriball and While 1994). However, it has been argued that there are limitations to the data collected through interviews. They can be guided by the interviewees’ perspectives regarding the topic discussed. People have different views regarding any topic. Therefore, establishing a number of semi-structured interviews with people of different class, gender and age should provide the researcher with various aspects and viewpoints on a selected topic (Wengraf 2001; Creswell 2003).

Interviews are a social encounter not just a random conversation or an integrative session (Klenke 2008; Fontana and Fery 2003; Oakley 1999). The researcher, guided by their will to understand and learn from participants, generates active conversation through a series of questions. Semi-structured interviews through questions, gestures, socially fabricated talk, jokes and personal stories unfold meanings that construct knowledge (Warren 2001). This approach was adapted to the Saudi context where a more formal approach was expected with some participants.

From a feminist perspective, Finch (1999) argues that female interviewers in feminist research are possibly better in terms of gathering data from other females. Hence, female-to-female interviews create interesting conversations that for several reasons hold great meaning because females generally are more relaxed than men to open questions relating to their personal experiences. Informal conversations conducted in the respondent's house helped to create the intended atmosphere where the respondent felt relaxed to share openly to a sympathetic understanding ear. Securing a quiet place for the interview is important in avoiding distractions and/or background noises that might affect the recording process. This gives the interviews a more intimate and interactive conversation (University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) 2012).

As the researcher was female and had come from a segregated conservative society, this made it much easier to interview most of the participants. The relationship between me, as the researcher, and my female participants was friendly as would normally be expected in Saudi Arabia when females talk to each other. The conversations were not influenced by gendered implications. If the researcher was a male, interviewing females from a segregated conservative society such as Saudi Arabia may have presented serious complications. In a segregated society where men and women do not meet or interact, it would be very difficult for a male researcher to interview women. In addition, gendered implications emphasize that females when approached by unknown men should not be friendly and sharing. This is not the case if females are talking together. Moreover, the sensitive topic of female participation would probably hold back some female participants from sharing personal details regarding their emotions and experiences. Hence, if the interviewer was a man, the data gathered would have been impacted by gender implications.

Similarly, when I interviewed the men, at first, I was not as relaxed as I was when interviewing the women. This was because I made sure that I was trying to maintain the expected relations. However, seeing that men were very interested and willingly shared information made me interested to hear more and interact with them as a researcher. It may also be noted that, if the interviewer was a man, some men also influenced by cultural implications may have held back with personal information regarding female employment. It is expected between men in the Saudi culture that personal information and especially anything regarding their women is not for discussion between men. Because the researcher was female, the male participants appeared to feel very comfortable sharing their views, experiences and personal stories of either their female relatives or their female employees. They appeared to feel that they could express their feelings and views regarding women in the workforce more freely. They felt I understood their stories, could relate to them and would respect the cultural implications. If I was a male researcher the male participants might have held back their personal stories or may have been worried about being judged negatively for their views. In many ways, being a female served this research well especially in conducting the interviews, where I found that my participants both men and women felt relaxed talking to me. This added richness to the data that were gathered.

#### ***4.9 Research Design and Decisions***

In line with undertaking a qualitative approach, this research aimed to explore essential meanings through participants' descriptions of their experiences regarding the phenomenon of women's participation in professional occupations. This section presents the research design and the steps taken to conduct it.

Table 4.2 below details the initial steps taken for the research including the development of the research objectives, questions for the pilot study and identification of possible respondents.

**Table 4.2 The preliminary approach of the research design**

<b>Process</b>	<b>Action taken</b>
<b>Development of the objectives</b>	The objectives of this study were developed after examining statistical rates of female education and employment in

	<p>Saudi Arabia and the move to Saudization. The lack of literature from a Saudi perspective resulted in the Western perspective being taken into consideration.</p>
<p><b>Development of interview questions</b></p>	<p>Initial literature review, developing appropriate questions that are informal, sensitive and respect culture and religious aspects of the study.</p> <p>Questions developed were checked by supervisors to ensure relevance. Questions were piloted before the main study was undertaken.</p>
<p><b>Identification of the participants</b></p>	<p>This study has various levels of meaning, including culture, religion, gender, femininity and family issues. Participants were required to have sufficient experience and a university degree to be able to respond to the questions. Interview participants were categorized into three different groups to capture the meaning from different perspectives. Group A consisted of highly educated men in fields of religion, education, government and public–private enterprises. Group B consisted of females with university educated backgrounds who were in the workforce. Group C consisted of females with university education but who were not employed. Targeted participants were all Saudi nationals from five major cities in Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>There were two focus groups conducted. This was to compare new female university graduates and older females who have graduated approximately 10 years ago. The first group consisted of five women in their early twenties. The second group consisted of five women in their thirties.</p>
<p><b>Interviews and focus groups</b></p>	<p>The overall goal was to reach data saturation.</p>
<p><b>Transcription</b></p>	<p>The researcher was mindful of the importance of accurate translation of interviews done in Arabic. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Where an Arabic term did not have an English term, the closest term to accurately convey the meaning was used.</p>
<p><b>Coding</b></p>	<p>NVivo was chosen as the data management tool for coding.</p>



I travelled to Saudi Arabia to undertake the interviews. The interview questions were initially in English; thus, I had the questions professionally translated into Arabic to ensure appropriate and professional language and presentation of the questions. I pilot tested the questions to gather feedback on clarity and coherence from three university educated women. I also volunteered as a conference coordinator at an international e-learning conference held in Riyadh, as I saw this was an essential step to expand my network which helped in identifying professional respondents for the study.

#### *4.9.1 Who to interview?*

Choosing interviewees required planning and scheduling. Prior to the actual dates of data collection, I first contacted 10 people via emails and phone calls to gain approvals for interviews. I first approached selected high-profile men and women in Saudi Arabia. I used a snowball technique (Denzin and Lincoln 2003a) to identify subsequent participants. Hence, I used a mixture of theoretical and purposeful sampling which has given me the advantage of reaching important participants and influential figures. Participants offered a list of contacts who they believed would be interested in participating in the study. This approach allowed me to reach a number of well-respected influential figures in Saudi Arabia.

To gather a variety of views regarding female participation in the Saudi workforce, I visited six different cities located in three different regions to gather data. Makkah, Jeddah and Al-Madina are three major cities located in the western region. I undertook 11 interviews from this region. From the central region, only two cities were visited, which were the capital Riyadh and AlQassem. In this region, I undertook 15 interviews. Finally, in the eastern province, I visited Al-Damam and AlKhobar and interviewed two participants.

I have easily recognized through the interviews that participants showed different cultural implications. All participants living in the western province and most participants from the eastern province showed more enthusiasm towards female empowerment whereas participants located in the central region showed more cultural and traditional concerns regarding female empowerment.

#### 4.9.2 *The two phases of the data collection*

My data collection process was undertaken in two phases. A total of 28 face-to-face interviews were conducted as shown in the following chart.

**Table 4.3 The phases and the interviews**

Phase One (1/4/2011-20/7/2011)			Phase Two (1/1/2012-1/3/2012)		
A (6)	B (6)	C (4)	A (4)	B (4)	C (4)
<b>Total of 16 face-to-face interviews</b>			<b>Total of 12 face-to-face interviews</b>		
			<b>2 focus groups</b>		
<b>Total of one-to-one interviews in both phases:</b>				28	
<b>Total focus groups:</b>				2	
<b>Total of transcribed interviews:</b>				30	

As shown in Table 4.3, the first phase focused on one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The participants were divided into three major groups as mentioned earlier in this chapter in Table 4.2. Group A initially targeted 10 highly respected influential men; however, only seven were available to be interviewed in this phase. In Group B, which targeted 10 educated working females who held professional positions in the workforce, six were interviewed. Group C targeted 10 educated non-working females, with four participants interviewed in this phase. Due to the limitations of time and the availability of interviewees, I was only able to gather 16 interviews over this three-month period. This initial phase led me to review and modify some questions for the second phase of data collection which is explained below.

Once I arrived back in Australia, I transcribed and translated Arabic interviews and arranged for further interviews for a planned return visit to Saudi Arabia. Through initial analysis of transcripts from the first phase of interviews, it was noticeable that despite the range of questions there was some repetition of information. To gain deeper insight into participants' views of barriers and enablers, it was decided to add a further question to explore in more detail female appearance in the working environment as this appeared to be an issue that had emerged in the first phase of interviews. (Interview questions for first and second phases are presented in the appendices.)

Moreover, it was decided to add further depth and richness to the data collection by exploring the responses between different age groups as it appeared that younger

women were more likely to challenge existing conventions. Therefore, I conducted two focus groups. One focus group comprised five recent university graduate females who were in their early twenties: the second focus group was with six university graduate females who were aged 29 or above. The aim was to explore whether differing attitudes to employment and careers were starting to emerge.

After returning to Saudi Arabia, I found the second phase of data collection to be smoother as respondents had been previously contacted and an interview date had been set for most of the interviews. The second phase focused on completing the data collection. In addition, I arranged the two focus groups. As explained above, the first focus group was made up of five recently graduated females: they were aged 22 or younger and they had not yet joined the workforce. The second focus group was made up of six university graduates some of whom had joined the workforce and others had not. They were aged between 29 and 33 years old. In this phase, the researcher interviewed a further four Group A categorized participants, another four Group B participants and four Group C categorized participants to reach data saturation.

#### 4.9.3 *Actions taken in research design for the main study*

The important decisions and key actions taken in designing the research as highlighted above are summarized in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4 Research design for the main study**

Process	Actions Taken
Identifying the respondents	Networking through business managers and university professors, I created a list of contacts. A snowball technique was then used to identify further participants.
Making contact	Most interview arrangements were initially made through phone calls then confirmation of time and date and consent letters were sent via email.
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviews were mostly outside of work for working females. I gave all working and non-working females the choice of where the interviews took place. Most females preferred their house while others preferred to meet in coffee shops. Two of the working females had no time outside their work hours, and found it best to</li> </ul>

	<p>conduct the interview at their offices. In contrast, most interviews with men took place at their offices as from a cultural perspective that was the most appropriate place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were two phases of data collection. In the first phase, 16 interviews were undertaken. In the second phase, 12 interviews and two focus groups were conducted.</li> <li>• Field notes were written after each interview to record impressions and things of note relating to the context of each interview.</li> </ul>
<b>Transcripts</b>	Data from interviews and focus groups were translated, transcribed and checked.
<b>Coding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcribed interviews were entered into NVivo for data management.</li> <li>• Paper coding was done through mapping techniques and revisiting the interviews and field notes.</li> <li>• This was then returned to NVivo for a holistic approach to the coding.</li> </ul>
<b>Expert checking</b>	Codes were discussed with supervisors and refinement took place.
<b>Checking for phenomenological nod (approval)</b>	Presentation of key findings and submission of papers at conferences.

#### ***4.10 The Interview Process***

Interviews were arranged prior to the meeting time either by phone or email. All participants received an official invitation to participate in the study. This letter included the thesis title and the objectives of this study. It was important to reassure respondents that their personal details would be excluded from the study. Attached to the invitation letter was the interview guide for respondents. This provided them with the opportunity to think about the areas of research interest. Interviews commenced with some general background information being gathered. This information was made optional as some respondents might not have found that it was important to provide this information. Finally, the invitation letter also included the consent form that sought permission for interviews to be tape recorded for reasons of data collection only, and clearly stated that participants would receive a copy of the transcribed interview for checking and that they may at any time withdraw from the

study. All respondents replied by sending back the signed forms and appointed the time and location of the interview (the invitation letter is shown in the appendices).

Group A participants were high-profile men so the interviews took place at their workplace early in the morning. Most participants from Groups B and C chose to meet at their house for the interviews, except for two Group B participants who asked me to come to their workplaces for the interview. Most interviews took approximately 35 to 45 minutes in time. Interviews took the pattern of a friendly conversation rather than a formal question and answer format. The same areas of enquiry were covered with all participants. First, the interview started with demographic questions. Interviewees felt comfortable sharing personal information about their current status and some general information about themselves. The main questions were related to the objectives of this study. Hence, participants were asked three main direct questions: the first question asked them to provide their point of view regarding why they thought women in Saudi Arabia were lagging behind in the workforce. The second question asked them to provide their point of view on what they believed had a stronger influence in keeping females out of professional occupations, culture or Islam, and why. Finally, participants were asked to give their suggested enablers for female participation in the workforce. I used follow-up questions where necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the points made by the participants.

Although most interviews took about 35 to 45 minutes, some exceeded 90 minutes. Each interview was tape recorded. The interviews started with me welcoming the interviewee and giving a brief overview about my interest in this topic, introducing the research title and the main objectives: I then collected some demographic data when appropriate. Due to cultural norms of appropriate questions to ask between genders, when interviewing a man, I tended to omit most of the demographic questions except for the ones regarding his career. However, when I was interviewing a female, I asked for all the demographic information regarding age, marital status, number of children, educational area of expertise and career path.

All interviews were recorded; however, it was interesting to note that several respondents continued the conversation further after the recorder was turned off (Warren 2001). In most cases when the interview had ended and the recorder was

off, the participants were curious and wanted to make sure that they had provided me with all the information I needed for my research. In some cases some of the female participants, continued speaking, restating their points and emotionally spoke again about some of their experiences that had been mentioned during the interview.

Kvale's (1996) tips for conversations with the interviewee were my guide through the interviews. Thus, I maintained eye contact and used interested facial expressions to demonstrate I was listening eagerly. During the initial interviews, I referred regularly to the interview questions. However, I referred to them less as I started to enjoy the process and learned to become more relaxed and gained confidence in myself as a researcher. Notes were only taken when needed, for example, when a participant gave titles of books to read or contact details or referred to certain incidents. However, I felt it was better to stay visually focused when listening to the interviewees and to be fully engaged with what they shared.

#### *4.10.1 Demographic data*

Participants felt free to share their demographic data but as noted, given the cultural protocols, there were certain areas where I did not ask male participants to provide data. Participants from Group A were all married, over the age of 40 and had high-profile positions. Eight were governmental figures and two were from the banking sector.

Participants of Group B ranged from the ages of 30 to 50 and all possessed high-profile positions; six were in the educational sector. Four of the female participants were not currently married. Participants of Group C were between the ages of 25 and 35 and were not working.

All participants had university-level education. Two of the females had doctoral qualifications and five had a Master's qualification: meanwhile, seven of the male participants had doctoral qualifications and only two held a Master's qualification. Table 4.5 shows the participants' educational qualifications.

**Table 4.5 Participants' educational qualifications**

Groups	Bachelor Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degree
<b>Group A</b>	1	2	7
<b>Group B</b>	3	5	2
<b>Group C</b>	8	-	-

#### *4.10.2 Experience of the interviews*

Nine of the men were very interested and there was great need for the study. One participant, however, thought that this topic was socially complicated and advised me to be cautious because not everyone agrees that females need to be more visible in the workplace. However, as a feminist researcher, I had already made the decision to invest my own identity in the research process as I was encouraged that the majority of the men who I was interviewing were supportive. Doing research about female employment in a conservative society such as Saudi Arabia, being a Saudi female researcher, my gender served me well in collecting the data from both men and women. If the researcher was a foreigner then she would not have had the same cultural identity and thus she might have not understood the traditional or religious implications that were being made. Additionally someone who is a foreigner who is asking about a sensitive topic such as the Saudi perspective of female employment in the workforce may have not understood some of the nuances of the data given by participants. Social identity plays a major role in understanding one another and relating to one another and as a Saudi national I was seen by the respondents as someone who understood their story.

My relationship with the male respondents took a professional/hierarchical stand, for two reasons. Firstly, due to cultural implications, men are seen as superior to women in Saudi Arabia and unfamiliar relationships should be based on respect. Secondly, the male respondents were high-profile figures, aged over 40, who I highly respected for giving me the opportunity to interview them. Overall, the interviews with male respondents were very successful. All of them indicated that they understood the



importance of this study and thus they greatly contributed by providing answers without appearing to hold back from providing information regarding their views.

The male respondents were selected from various backgrounds to add depth and breadth to the study. First, I interviewed two men in the banking industry who already worked with females, as I believed that their views would be interesting given their experience.

I also interviewed a Minister and two of his managers. They showed interest in the study as they thought females of our society were moving towards economic participation. This is in line with governmental policies relating to Saudization. Three other men who were members of the king's Consultative Council also offered valuable information. One of them was greatly interested in my research because he considered himself a pro-female advocate and has tried to push female participation forward in Saudi Arabia. One male participant was seen as an influential religious figure. Through these interviews, I gathered information from various men across different sectors with a range of views regarding female participation in Saudi Arabia.

Most of the interviews with female respondents took a more casual/friendly conversational approach. Most were delighted to respond to the interview questions. They were open to sharing their experiences despite the fact that Saudi nationals tend to be conservative about their private life. I felt the females too were very interested in change and so did not hold back in replying to the questions.

Only one female respondent was sceptical of my intentions. She was worried that I was too Western-minded as I was undertaking this study while a student in Australia. She thought that I, like much of the Western media, just wanted to portray the Saudi female as a mindless dependant. In this case, I saw that the participant grew defensive in relation to cultural and Islamic implications and gave responses indicating that, from her viewpoint, the employment market was perfect and no one had a problem finding employment. She questioned the accuracy of the statistics that I had quoted in relation to the study. Hence, I switched off the tape recorder and asked her if she felt comfortable with me interviewing her. She then told me her feelings and worries. At that point, I reassured her that I was a Muslim Saudi female just like her, and clarified that my intentions were to understand why females lagged

behind in the workforce, and how this study could offer to help females find professional opportunities. I further added that I had no ill intentions to victimize females in Saudi Arabia: instead, I hoped that this study would show the reality of females in Saudi Arabia as educated strong women who want to make a difference by helping to build their communities. I explained to her that there is an issue with female employment in Saudi Arabia, and I am interested in addressing the problem. I then added that I was aware that the Saudi society and Islam in particular have often been portrayed with misleading images and thus I understood and respected her feelings. After having a short conversation about how Islam has become a victim and an umbrella for everything wrong, she decided herself that she wanted to continue with the interview. As a researcher who was taking a radical feminist perspective, my conversation with her was aimed at ensuring that she was aware that my research was about and for women in Saudi Arabia. The explanation of my standpoint helped ease tensions because I clearly stated my intentions in relation to this research. This approach helped reassure the participant that I was interested in, understanding the barriers and drivers of increasing female employment in the Saudi workforce, and how this may link to Islam and culture with respect to female development. Thus, I again switched on the tape recorder and went back to the previous question. The respondent engaged fully in the interview process and provided her views and ideas in relation to the interview questions. After finishing the interview, I thanked her for the opportunity and reassured her that I, like other Saudi Muslim females, want the outside world to respect us for who we are. I also assured her that her concerns would remain in my consciousness. This interview in particular made me even more eager to undertake this study to identify barriers and enablers for women and to provide an alternative view to the Western images or stereotypes of Islam and Saudi cultural values.

Most of the respondents expressed concerns regarding the question relating to Islam. This is reflected in their answers in which most were defensive. Respondents covered a range of areas during the interviews including: cultural levels, religion, female empowerment, historical stories, governmental development, educational contributions, organizational contribution, financial status, family responsibilities, and a traditional female identity and relationship to male members of their society. This provided rich data for analysis.

#### *4.10.3 Field notes*

As interviewees were not asked to talk about their particular workplaces (for those working), they generally appeared not mindful of or worried about saying things that they felt were not appropriate according to their current working arrangements. However, some interview participants were mindful of their phrases and some details regarding their views and were afraid about their personal identification due to their professional backgrounds and potentially being easily identified. This indicated the sensitive nature of this issue.

Others, on the other hand, were eager to achieve equal opportunities for women in the Saudi workplace and gave me permission to mention their names in this study, even though they had high-profile governmental positions. I was thankful for their offers and respectful of their contributions, and I was highly appreciative of their enthusiasm and their support. However, I kindly declined and advised them that I was bounded by the research ethics approval I had received for this research project which meant that the data would be reported in aggregate form only and I would not refer to any names or other easily identifiable characteristics in my study. The participants understood and respected this approach which emphasized the aggregated data rather than particular individuals who provided the data and were happy to proceed with the interview.

The interviewees indicated a social clash regarding female empowerment and participation: with more development taking place to promote further female participation, the tension between social groups regarding female participation has become more intense. Most females were eager to participate and saw the importance of the study as they added critical information. You can sense from the above that our Saudi society is cut in half: some are concerned about losing our traditional essence while others are accepting the idea of change and are eager for a better and healthier workforce. Participants noticed that even though the government promotes female development, it cannot simply force it upon society as such enforcement may upset a group of conservative and traditional groups and tribes. Hence, the burden falls on new generations to take actions into their hands by proving that they are ready to challenge the workforce and add value to it.

As a researcher, I was excited to be connected to important figures in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They were proud to participate and some, as noted earlier, did not mind me mentioning their names while others were very private about their names. One participant was not comfortable with the tape recorder as he asked me to take notes, which I was happy to do; however, he then found me struggling to write as quickly as he was speaking and thus he gave me his permission to tape the conversation.

I noted a couple of things in the first phase of data collection. Some information was repetitive and standardized in relation to the question: “does Islam hinder female participation in the workforce?” Thus, I decided in the second phase to stop asking the question in that way and to instead ask participants what they thought were the Islamic implications regarding female participation. Most participants were defensive of Islam in the first phase of data collection. However after changing the question, participants in the second phase offered more views and stories of Islam and female participation. Thus changing the question stopped the negative or defensive responses, and generally resulted in broader more detailed and positive responses even when expressing any concerns.

Many participants hinted at the social tension regarding female participation with most participants noting that new generations are more realistic and bold in their approach and thus change will be made through them. This made me eager to hear from the younger graduates as to whether they had different views from older females. Thus, during the time I spent in Australia before going back for the second phase of data collection, I discussed with my supervisors the option of conducting two focus groups to be able to compare the views of younger and older females. Given cultural constraints, it was not possible to include men together with women in the focus groups. I noted that the focus groups conducted added further critical information to the study. Compared to the older graduate females, the younger generation of participants appeared more enthusiastic about challenging the male-dominated systems that currently exist in the workforce. They appeared less concerned with cultural restrictions or marital status. Instead, they were up to challenging men in all fields. This was really interesting because older females took things more seriously regarding traditional and social influence: they especially had

concerns that not all jobs are socially approved and some jobs may hurt their reputations and create social stigma.

#### ***4.11 Transcription***

Some interviews conducted in Arabic were professionally translated into English by an external experienced translator and were checked by myself to make sure that meaning was not lost. Interviews done in English were transcribed by me. I have listened to each interview while reading from the transcripts to make sure every word was there and that translated Arabic interviews had not lost any meaning through translation. Through checking the transcripts, some errors were found that were mainly in grammar and sentence structures. Hence, I made such changes to keep the transcription clear and omitted the names of people or institutions when these were used.

Listening to the interviews took me back to the interview time and space which is particularly important for this research where the focus is on the Saudi context. Gathering the data was for me a great experience to listen to what others have to say about female participation in Saudi Arabia and what they recommended. Listening again and again to the interviews also helped underline the main issues. Although there remains some lost emotions of laughter, reflective moments or even moments of confusion that are not felt from reading the transcripts alone, the words remain to capture the meaning and the intentions behind them (Hyams 2004).

##### ***4.11.1 Bracketing and excluded parts of the interviews***

During the preliminary process of conducting the interviews, I briefly shared with the respondents my research interests and the main objectives of this study in which they were about to participate. I also gave a brief introduction about my educational background. I politely asked demographic questions about the respondents' personal achievements and goals, if they were happy to share, before starting the interview questions. Such introductions are excluded from the interview, for confidentiality reasons.

I was conscious of my own feelings and views regarding the research and so took care that I did not try to conclude what the participants were trying to say nor to

influence their views in any way (Janesick 2003). I made particular effort to ensure the respondents felt relaxed and important: I listened intently, nodding my head and showing interest as they shared their stories. This enabled me to listen carefully to the participants' shared knowledge without adding myself and my views into that knowledge. Some interviewees asked me to share my views and this was only done at the end of the interview. Such self-awareness enabled me to set aside or bracket my own experiences (UCLA 2012; Janesick 2003) and helped to minimize any influences I might have had on the data gathered. This process of bracketing my feelings and views was continued throughout the data analysis approach and is in line with phenomenological approaches.

#### ***4.12 Data Analysis and Coding***

Data analysis in a qualitative study requires flexibility and creativity. According to Creswell (2013):

Data analysis requires that the researcher be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts. It also requires that the researcher be open to possibilities and see contrary or alternative explanations for the findings (Creswell 2013, 153).

This advice from Creswell (2013) guided my approach to data analysis. According to Mayring (2000), deductive content analysis is an application of the data analysis that works with the available context and transcribed collected data in a framework that allows the researcher to bring them together in a manner to comprehend each other to develop a logical sequence from the data.

The interviews were analysed using deductive content analysis with the coding done through NVivo (Jones 2007). In coding, I cut and reorganized the data into pieces to visually map out a holistic model that tells a story (Ryan 2006; Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong 2011; Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Creswell 2013).

Descriptive coding looks at meanings thematically to describe a situation or a phenomenon and gives the reader the ability to answer “who”, “why” and “how” questions (Porta and Keating 2008). Thematic coding is a process of identifying themes from word-to-word analysis, through engaging with the assumptions and consequences linked to those words. Finding themes starts from basic meanings to

which other meanings are added as you go along (Creswell 2013; Denzin and Lincoln 2003a, 2011).

Analysing and coding was undertaken in light of Tesch's (1990) framework. When coding, I sensibly read and examined the transcripts. Each transcript was first individually analysed in detail. This process highlighted interesting transcripts and important meanings generating nodes and allowing new themes to be recognized. Moving on to other transcripts, I was able to evaluate text as new themes or pre-existing ones. Once all transcribed text was set into categorized themes, it was easy to find the emphasis on important themes that showed repetition. Revisiting the transcripts to evaluate categorized codes is important in ensuring that meanings are all included. This process also highlights the possibility of the emergence of new categories or codes. Using descriptive words taken from transcripts to name codes gave originality to the emerging meanings of the themes. During this process, I was able to map out themes relevant to each other, as seen in overlapping text that could be categorized into more than one theme. In finalizing the coding process, I established a recorded tree of super-categories and categories of codes that highlighted the linkages in between. This creating a mapped structure of key findings and the sub-roots that were created from the main findings (Tesch 1990; Creswell 2013). This is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Finally, I constantly reviewed the data, and the interview transcripts were revisited many times in order to evaluate the outcome of the themes and to make sure nothing has been missed out. Ongoing checks were made to identify the similarities and differences between themes.

Figure 4.1 below shows the steps that I took in the coding and descriptive thematic analysis process.



**Figure 4.1 Steps taken in data analysis**

As expected, the coding and modelling took most of the effort to capture a holistic view. Supervisors provided support by checking and guiding me through this process. Labelling themes and linking them together to present all respondents' views in a model was my way of looking at the data and the story being told. The interviews provided a great deal of information regarding participants' views of the forces for and against female participation in the Saudi workforce. Initial findings were reported at the Australian New Zealand Academy of Management (ANZAM) conference in December 2012 (Alselaimi and Lord 2012a) and at the International Studying Leadership Conference in Perth (Alselaimi and Lord 2012b). This provided



the opportunity to test preliminary views on what the data meant and to receive feedback that helped to refine the analysis process.

#### ***4.13 Rigour and Validity***

According to Golafshani:

This relates to the concept of a good quality research when reliability is a concept to evaluate quality in quantitative study with a “purpose of explaining” while the quality concept in qualitative study has the purpose of “generating understanding (Golafshani 2003, 601).

Rigour keeps the study valid in terms of utility, truth and reliability (Morse and Richards 2002). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in the case of qualitative research, the researcher needs to prove validity through gaining trustworthiness by offering transferability and conformability as a visible step-by-step research process (Rolfe 2006; Long and Johnson 2000).

According to Whiteley (2002), achieving rigour in phenomenological studies means that the reader must be able to recognize the respondents’ words from the researcher’s words. The reader must also be able to be appreciative of the respondents’ contributions by finding that the data gathered are meaningful to the study. An open-ended perspective in the constructivism of the research presents the validity and reliability by allowing participants in a research to assist the researcher with the data collection. Moreover, recording the interviews will lead to more valid and reliable data (Golafshani 2003).

According to Morse et al. (2008), there are five main steps that must be shown in a research to give it rigour and validity.

Firstly, to consider a research as interdependent, this “demands that the question match the method, which matches the data and the analytic procedures” (Morse et al. 2008, 18). This means that within the process of identifying the question and method of collection, the research must prove to have taken the right decisions in evaluating the data: does it fit to answer the question? Or should there be modifications and alterations?

Secondly, the research must show that the participants chosen are credible in offering knowledge regarding the topic. Hence, giving credibility to the participants “ensures

efficient and effective saturation of categories, with optimal quality data and minimum dross” (Morse et al. 2008, 18).

Thirdly, the research must show that the data analysis process took high levels of evaluation, coding linking meanings and themes together, checking and rechecking. This process should be done with a passion to bring about new knowledge from what already exists through recognizing “what is known and what one needs to know ... is the essence of attaining reliability and validity” (Morse et al. 2008, 18).

Fourthly, “thinking theoretically” by in-depth building of data, the researcher has to think in terms of what has this data offered. Are there new ideas? And how do these new outcomes fit within existing knowledge?

Finally, the research should show meaningful conceptual and comprehensive understandings of the research outcome. By this means, the research develops further understanding to existing theory or knowledge rather than simply analysing it.

Drawing on the above interpretation of rigour and validity, Table 4.6 presents the approach taken for this research in terms of achieving rigour and validity.

**Table 4.6 Elements of rigour**

Elements of rigour	Condition	Action taken in research
<b>Interpretive constructivism</b>	Phenomenology	Based on the question of the research topic “what are the barriers and enablers that influence female participation in the Saudi workforce?” the decided method was to conduct semi-structured interviews. In the first phase of data collection, it came to the researcher’s attention that some modification of research methods would be appropriate. Hence, questions were modified after the completion of the first phase to avoid repetition of gathered data and to explore themes that surfaced from the phase one data collection. Also, it was decided that adding focus groups would increase the richness of knowledge gathered and allow comparison of different thoughts

		based on age differences.
<b>Data gathering</b>	Semi-structured interviews Focus groups	<p>Questions were designed to explore the participants' feelings, meanings through their personal experiences and stories in regard to female employment.</p> <p>The researcher aimed to interview participants who could offer further knowledge through their personal experiences. A few held high levels of power and authority in political and structural positions; others were religious and social figures: these in particular were approached to offer the study a strategically structured voice that complies with policies and norms. Participants from both genders with practical workforce experience were approached to offer the study a practical voice. To understand the impact of the phenomenon on unemployed females, unemployed graduated females from different classes were approached to offer the study a voice of realism. To evaluate the impact of age and cultural attachment on the phenomenon, focus groups were conducted. To hear the voices of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the research approached nationals of different regions and cities.</p>
<b>Giving voice</b>	Recoding and transcription	All interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded. All recorded interviews were carefully transcribed using respondents' words to represent their thoughts.
<b>Constant comparison and triangulation</b>	Ongoing review of data and secondary data sources	<p>Continuous checking of the data collected with existing data to compare meanings. Written sources of feminism in the West and feminism in Middle Eastern countries.</p> <p>Female employment rates and development reports in Saudi Arabia.</p>

<b>Expert checking</b>	Critical readers and discussants	Ongoing discussion regarding research decisions, findings and process. Supervisors constantly checked and supported in evaluating decisions taken towards research design, data analysis, checking and rechecking of developing further meaning to existing knowledge.
<b>Importance of data</b>	Data evaluation and relevance to existing data	Findings were compared with existing theories and data to extract and develop further knowledge; new ideas and interesting models were developed that aimed at answering the research question. Suggested actions were presented towards practical change to increase female participation in the Saudi workforce. Presenting preliminary findings at national and international conferences.

#### **4.14 Conclusion**

*The Feminine Mystique*, a book by Betty Friedan (2009) published in the early stages of the liberal feminist movement, gave females a voice and highlighted the structural discrimination that underpinned the society at that time. The book explored the various types of dependence on male figures. It painted a picture of females in American society at that time suffering with depression and loss of identity (Napikoski 2010; Woodward and Woodward 2012). Similarly, many educated females suffer from discrimination in the male-dominated Saudi workforce that depends heavily on foreign workers. Conservative cultural implications also keep female participation to the minimum. Although Betty Friedan was free to express details of the suffering of females in American society at that time, unfortunately, in a conservative society, females' experiences and sufferings are barely heard.

Through this research, I hope that some of those under-represented female voices within the conservative Saudi society can be heard as well as exploring how Saudi men and women in senior positions view the issue.

Through this chapter, as detailed in the methodological steps, a reader can recreate this study by repeating the 'recipe' for this research. This chapter links the research

questions to the objectives and presents the reasons for decisions that guided this research and the methods used. The steps taken and techniques used in the data analysis are also detailed. Although this chapter is presented in an early stage in this thesis, it was written in the final stages of this research journey, so there has been the opportunity for reflection and to test the preliminary analysis in a range of public fora.

# CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

Analysis is necessary because findings require evidence. Evidence is something that is able to convince us of the existence of a certain kind of knowledge, or a certain phenomenon. You need to be clear about what constitutes evidence within your epistemological framework ... The evidence that you are putting forward for certain claims should be clear. It should let your readers see how you have fitted your explanation together. The quotes bring you back to the individual or collective and real experiences of the research participants or document writers. Their words provide the evidence and the analysis frames their experience ... Your reader needs some path through all of this data, which will provide, for example, a psychological, sociological, pedagogical, social change or cultural interpretation (Ryan 2006, 94-95).

## *5.1 Introduction*

Chapter Four outlined the research methods chosen for this study. It described the research goals, design and approach. In this chapter, I will present the findings of the qualitative approach taken. Therefore, data are presented in order to share the participants' views and experiences. Dominant themes will be highlighted in the light of the phenomenological and feminist approaches used for this research (Creswell 2012, 2013; Suddaby 2006). The hermeneutical tradition of data analysis puts the political interpretation at the centre to expose the hidden meanings within the context (Kincheloe and McLaren 2003). Raw data were transcribed then organized into categories of meanings. Coding the transcripts helped interpret and filter the categories further into meaningful themes. Having visual themes helped to theorize and to shape and design a model to reflect the interlinked themes that were directly connected to the research objectives of this thesis. This chapter provides comments by the participants as evidence supporting the themes (Ryan and Bernard 2003). The participants' comments are shown in italics. Comments by two or more participants on the same point are separated by double forward slash (/). Normal text between brackets indicates that I have written these words to connect meanings. Different interviewee comments are indicated according to the following coding.

**Table 5.1 Coding participants**

<b>Group of Participants</b>	<b>Group Initials</b>	
<b>Males</b>	M	M1,M2,M3,M4,M5,M6,M7,M8,M9,M10
<b>Employed Females</b>	FE	FE1,FE2,FE3,FE4,FE5,FE6,FE7,FE8,FE9,FE10
<b>Unemployed Females</b>	FU	FU1,FU2,FE3,FU4,FU5,FU6,FU7,FU8,FU9,FU10
<b>Focus Group 1 Females aged (22-24)</b>	FG1	FG1-1, FG1-2, FG1-3 ,FG1-4, FG1-5, FG1-6
<b>Focus Group 2 Females aged (30-40)</b>	FG2	FG2-1, FG2-2, FG2-3, FG2-4, FG2-5, FG2-6

## **5.2 Overview of Findings**

This findings chapter presents data in an organized way to explain why Saudi females are under-represented in economic participation in the paid workforce. It also highlights the ideas and recommendations suggested by participants regarding how to create acceptable professional methods that may help welcome females into the Saudi workforce. Females and males of various ages in the society were interviewed to gather in-depth knowledge in order to understand how they feel and what they experience in these developing times where females are becoming more aware of their rights to pursue a career. Pressures from the Saudi society and the impact of globalization are seen as obstacles. Participants also provide views on what they think might work as enablers to increase women’s participation.

Moved by the respondents’ insights, I find that a great responsibility has fallen upon me to take the reader from where she or he is sitting into another dimension to where the interviews took place in order to grasp their stories, understand their knowledge and values and finally, with meanings gathered together, to draw a pattern forming a comprehensive built foundation.

This chapter is divided into five main themes. The first theme is “culture”. Respondents had conflicting views of the cultural restraints regarding female participation. Each respondent reflected his or her social background. Although their

views differed from one another, the interviewees touched on many of the same points in terms of culture and its impact on female participation. Interviewees were eager to discuss social identity and where females sit within the Saudi social sphere. Interviewed participants indicated that discussing female status and how to address it was, in many ways, new and should be approached with delicacy due to what they saw as the sensitive nature of this issue. Interviews showed that attitudes towards female development and participation differ from region to region depending on the predominant cultural norms for that area. All interviewees acknowledged that female development is viewed differently from region to region and that this influences the rate of female empowerment in the various regions.

The second theme is “Islam”. When questioned about the possible impact of Islam on women’s participation, interviewees became defensive of Islam. All respondents showed enthusiasm especially when reflecting upon historical religious stories and Hadith scripts to show that Islam encourages female development and does not prevent females from participating in the workforce. Participants tried to untangle what they saw as a common confusion between Islamic implications and cultural implications. Finally, this theme became more sensitive to the majority of respondents when they reflected on the pain felt at attempts in some Western media to present highly negative views of Islam.

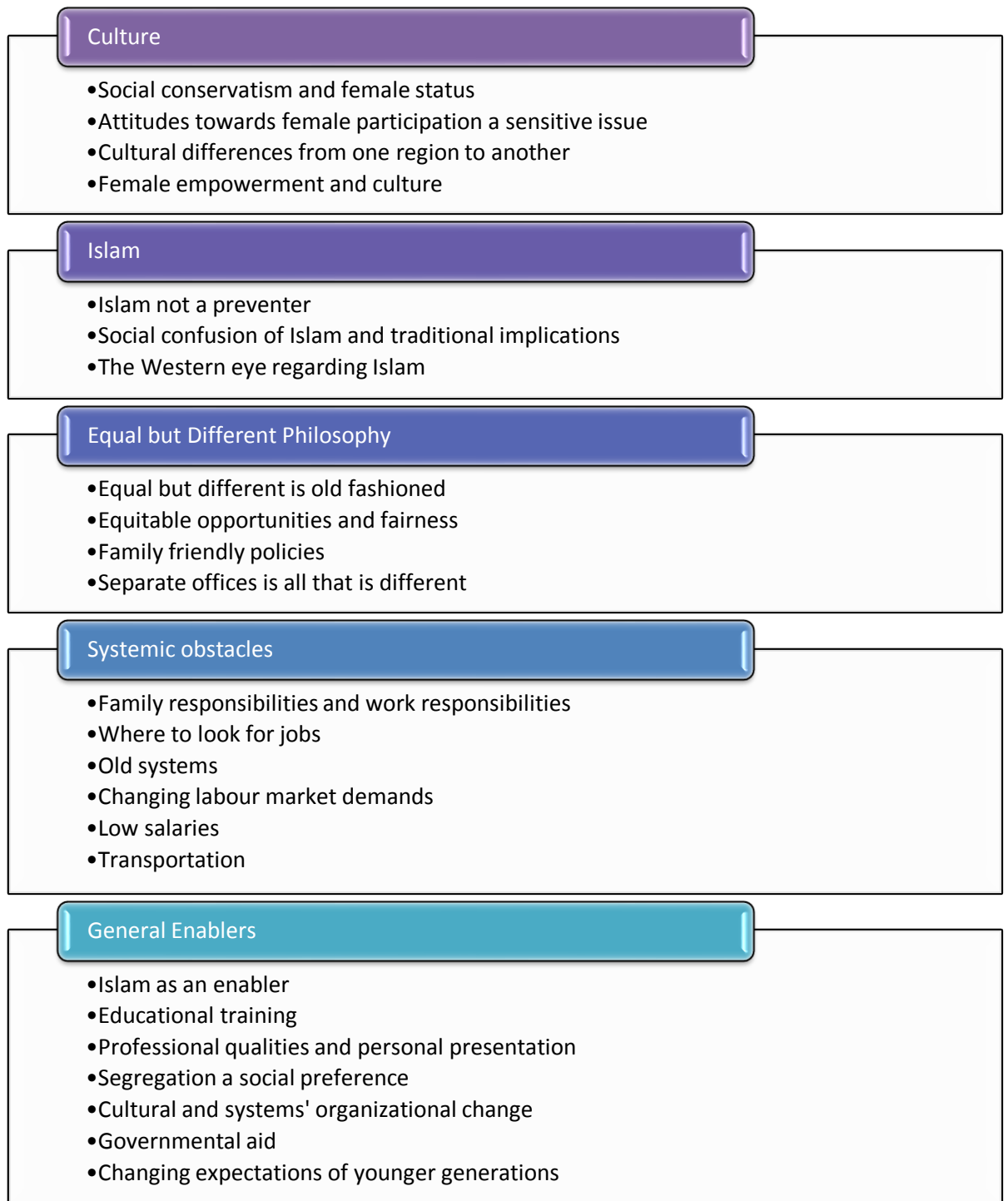
The third main theme emerges from testing the “equal but different” philosophy (Metcalf 2008). This theme explores participants’ views of the obstacles and enablers towards increasing female participation in the Saudi workforce. Most participants saw this philosophy as having unintended consequences that may encourage further unwanted traditional conservativeness towards female employment and development. Thus, this philosophy, in their view, may worsen the issue. Respondents were happy to suggest alternatives and thought that equity and fairness alone were the challenges. Other respondents explained that working females were already being treated equally, but family friendly policies were missing from the picture. Other respondents indicated that females in their view were not different to males but, given the cultural constraints, they required a separate office which is in line with Metcalfe’s view.



The fourth theme covers the “systemic obstacles” that females face when joining the workforce. This theme explores issues regarding family and work responsibilities, finding work and transportation. Female participants showed considerable concern regarding how and where to look for jobs as they were not easy to find. Females cannot simply walk alone from organization to organization looking for jobs and opportunities. Most organizations do not work with universities to identify future career options for graduates. Old systems were also mentioned as an obstacle as were human resource (HR) departments which have neither an open door approach towards job applications nor fairness in opportunities particularly for women. Participants also suggested that a majority of females have degrees that are not relevant to the demands and directions of the current labour market. Some participants suggested that some opportunities offered to women had low salaries and, as a result, females lost their motivation to work. Finally, and most commonly, the ‘elephant in the room’ was addressed and participants expressed that transportation is a major problem that needs to be addressed.

In the final main theme, participants addressed the issue of obstacles by suggesting what they thought could work as “enablers” to help increase female participation in the workforce. As the interviewees had a great connection with Islam, participants suggested that it was logical to use Islamic stories to encourage female development in a Muslim society and thus use Islamic implications as a guide to inform more inclusive cultural norms. Participants also highly recommended the implementation of educational and training programs to ease the transition of having more women in organizations. Almost all participants commented that because the Saudi society is a conservative segregated society, both genders needed to learn how to communicate with one another on a professional basis. Hence, professional qualities and presentation were an important factor to increase female development in the workforce. Participants thought it was important to note that female development could be influenced by societal values. They felt that it was important to acknowledge that in some regions segregation in workplaces is a current social preference. Interviewees also realized that organizations need to welcome females and thus need to address the male-dominated cultural approach. Moreover, participants were appreciative of the support of the government. However, they also suggested that further support may be needed to contribute to female participation,

such as adding incentives to encourage organizational support. Finally, the focus groups and some interviewees were very optimistic that younger generations are bolder in terms of challenging cultural restraints, and are eager to challenge and participate in the male-dominated workforce. Figure 5.1 shows the five main themes and their sub-nodes. These are discussed in more detail in the next section.



**Figure 5.1 General themes**

### 5.3 *Culture*

This theme underpins the importance of cultural implications and tradition regarding females in the Saudi society. Participants constantly reflected on their culture discussing respect and whether or not such boundaries are necessary. Through this theme, participants reflected on how females are portrayed in their society in general.

### 5.3.1 Social conservatism and female status

A majority of participants emphasized the importance of explaining to the rest of the world that the Saudi culture is a very conservative culture before giving their views on barriers or enablers. They explained that being a conservative society meant that the females within a family should be always hidden in private spaces away from public talk or the public eye. A male participant shared a personal story to show how conservative the society is:

*I can give you a very personal tale that explains to what extent we are a very conservative society. When I went to my wife's family to ask for her hand, I was expecting to see her and have a look at the woman I will be living with for the rest of my life. Of course Islam gives me the right to see her and she to see me before we tie the knot, but her conservative family didn't allow it and I was too shy to ask to see her. This is normal in our society to go through people like this. Although Islam says the opposite but we as a society still think in a so conservative way. And it's wrong (M4).*

It is clear from the comment above that not all cultural aspects or views are necessarily seen as right but there is still a high level of respect for these aspects of culture. Female participants also made the point that they respect their culture:

*Some families are more conservative than others does not mean that they are right and others are wrong; it means that cultural implications are different. Wherever you go in Saudi, you will find that some things are done in a certain way and people respect those ways even though it might not seem so productive, but it is their way (FE6).*

Although some regions are more conservative than others, being a conservative and private nation greatly influences personal identity. One's name or family in the Saudi society is of great importance and participants attached great importance to respecting and protecting their name and their family's name. Nationals place great emphasis on their tribes and families and on honouring their names. This suggests that social stigma can impact on female participation in public life and in social presentation. However, there was acknowledgment that changes need to occur. As a participant said:

*People here link their family activities to social respect. For example, some people say that female doctors don't have a good opportunity in marriage, because Saudi men hate the fact that doctors regardless of gender mix together and are constantly in need of each other's help. This means there is a social stigma towards female doctors. Another thing, in some non-segregated workplaces, females face social*

*disappointment and some to an extent think that if they work in such places this may affect their family's name. People seriously need to move away from fear of what others will think. Females should stop surrendering to such social barriers. The more women and their families start ignoring such restricted nonsense the development will be unstoppable (FU6).*

Learning how to deal with culture was considered very important regarding female participation. Thus, participants were very concerned about learning how to work within cultural constraints whilst, at same time, working towards establishing a fair and female-welcoming workforce. This creates a level of tension between maintaining the current system and knowing that the current system itself needs to change.

Participants in general expressed concerns regarding how females who wanted to achieve senior positions in the workforce would be able to do so without losing their cultural identity. Hence, participants emphasized ways and methods that they saw as allowing females to grow as productive individuals without breaking their cultural norms:

*Our new generations think that modernization is to let go of our identity and become like them. This type of thinking and understanding is making us fall victims and separate into groups. I believe we lack the vision to make it possible for women of our society to participate without being held back by our society. As long as we have the will to provide the right atmosphere for our ladies then our society will have nothing to complain about (M7).*

Participants also emphasized that companies must offer opportunities which are socially approved. The importance of social approval of a woman's lifestyle especially in relation to female participation was emphasized. As a male respondent noted:

*This brings the topic that the companies offering such available offers to females are not respecting the culture and expect all females out there applying for these opportunities to adapt, not caring for their self-respect and how they are viewed through our society's eye. To be frank, if my daughters were offered good opportunities in mixed work environments where they will be subject to a lesser view of society, I would never accept to put them in such a corner and for what? I already give them all that they need (M4).*

Thus, social implications may have great impact on female participation if workplaces are not in line with socio-cultural structures.

### 5.3.2 The Saudi female status

Females in the Saudi society were generally described by the respondents as subordinate, caring and emotionally dependent:

*Social barriers projected on females dictate that they are dependent figures in our society. The society here still finds it difficult to accept female participation in important positions. This comes through the history of man–female relationship. Man is superior to the female and they still can't accept that the lady would make decisions and take decisions (M6).*

Hence, men were seen as strong leading figures bound by their nature and Islam to be the financial provider and the main breadwinner. Another male participant made the point that:

*Men are financially responsible as mentioned in Sorat Taha verses (118,119,120): Allah was saying that Satan is an enemy of both Adam and Eve equally, but then Allah said if you are removed from paradise then you will suffer in providing the following responsibilities: food, clothes, water and shelter. This indicates that it is man's responsibility to provide those things; it's not the female's responsibility. Although she was excluded from this responsibility, this does not mean that she is prohibited from helping to share this responsibility on her free will ... I am not against female participation in the workforce, nor was that an implication of Islam, but it's a note that men are the main bread providers. So if females wish to work, it is not a sin or a taboo but it shouldn't be because her husband is sitting around the house while she goes to provide for him (M3).*

Participants reflected on this view of Saudi women as one of the causes behind the lack of female participation. Most participants commented that females from financially stable households tend to be more relaxed towards working opportunities as they see economic participation as a burden rather than a healthy lifestyle. Thus, the majority of participants concluded that these females feel that there is no need to double the burden of family concerns by working if they are financially relaxed. Moreover, participants noted that some organizations tend to think in line with this: as men are obliged to provide for their females, then work opportunities should be created for their benefit:

*In Islam if the female doesn't want to work, her father or spouse and any male in the family should support her financially. For example, if a woman in the West has reached thirty years of age and hasn't married, do you think she will still remain under her father's financial support? Most commonly not, where females in Islam should remain financially supported at all stages of her life by her male relative.*

*Although this is considered a great way to honour us females, this by itself may make females lazy to participate because they know they don't need to (FU1).*

Most participants thought that families with financial difficulties need their females to help although it might not be what they want to do. Participants thought that the wealthy part of the country does not speak on behalf of the majority of citizens as they are less than 30% of the whole population. Hence, the majority of participants appeared to concur that females may need to help in improving their family's financial status.

### *5.3.3 Attitudes towards female participation is a sensitive cultural issue*

As noted above, participants spoke of cultural differences and how this led to what they termed “*dangerous accusations and segregation of thought*”. For example, people who were seen as being more liberal in their attitudes towards women's participation in employment could be subject to negative comments by those who are more conservative and vice versa.

*Unfortunately we don't have an average Saudi man; instead there are two different schools of thought. There is the liberals' school of thought and then there is the ultra-conservative school of thought and some ultra conservatives are against dealing with women to the extreme: this differs from place to place of course, but basically conservatives and liberals define themselves quite clearly (M5).*

Many participants saw themselves as being out of the loop, where they did not want to be seen as liberals nor did they want to be seen as ultra-conservative people against female development. However, a participant noted that, although most people are just watching from the distance while this aggressive fight goes on and on, the majority of people are unconsciously taking a conservative stand as projected by statistics of female participation; “*the female participation and unemployment rates speak for themselves*” (M5). This particular participant, although he felt himself to be a pro-female development individual, still categorized himself as a conservative person:

*Now in Saudi Arabia we are living in a controversial era where our society is being halved into two, either extremists and very conservative or too open and Western-like, where people in the middle are being hated by both sides. And if you ask me where I stand, I would answer like many people would. I am behind the conservative side where I prefer to know my family is well respected and protected. When I say protected, I mean look at the Western communities where females are victims of*

*harassment and gender conflicts causing families to break. So if we have opportunities for women giving them their freedom to work without fear of society, we will finally be able to take a step forward. Now we have potential but we are not helping them to participate because of our societal structures (M5).*

In a more optimistic view of change, younger participants pointed out that controversy and different thoughts regarding female development indicate that change is just a step away. As an optimistic young female participant said:

*Unfortunately there is a huge contradiction in our society, because most of our society wouldn't have reached where we are now regarding progress and development in various fields if it were not for those studying abroad and getting exposed to different cultures and traditions and being more open minded and doing things in a different way, and imposing the fact that we must accept change, and stop smudging Islam into everything as we used to mistake Islam with what is not socially acceptable (FE5).*

Hence, many participants felt that change could be good, but for society to accept change, it should not be done all at once. A male participant thought that change towards an integrated workforce the values female participation may be done gradually to maintain a balance in social reaction.

#### *5.3.4 Attitudes towards female participation different across regions*

Saudi Arabia is a big country and the history of the land differs from one region to another. The central region contains the capital city, Riyadh: religious scholars are mostly from there. Participants reflected on the collectivist societal value of teachings and highly respected them. These traditions have been handed on with high respect from one generation to another as the righteous way of living. Hence, a female only being perceived as a housewife and a mother was the common image and remains so in some parts of the country.

Findings emphasized the differences in culture from city to city and region to region. Cultural implications identified through the collected data emphasized that people from different regions think differently about female participation. Participants commented that people in the west of Saudi Arabia are generally more open to various cultures, understand various languages and welcome people from various places of the world. There is less focus on gender issues and less segregation of males and females in the western region.



However, in the central region, it was noted that people are more conservative about female issues and gender segregation issues. Participants noted that people from the central region view people from the west as too open, while people from the west view people from the central region as too strict and conservative. Hence, attitudes regarding female participation are reflected differently from region to region. As one female interviewee clearly explained, the differences that occur can act as a barrier as areas view each other's practices as potentially problematic:

*Each city has its own culture; Saudi Arabia is a big country with different regions; each of these regions has its flavour of culture depending on exposure and history of these regions. The most open-minded region is the western region, why? Because of the exposure over the years of history, pilgrims, educators and traders. And the more you go into cities and villages who have no exposure, the more culture is concentrated, focused, and conservative and fears the idea of change. The Saudi Kingdom is in evolution, we are changing. Within each city, the family has a complicated culture, but in Jeddah they are commonly open-minded. So culture is complicated. A mootawaa is a governmental employee; he is told to promote anything good and demote anything bad and that is left to his judgment. What's good and bad is different from one person to another; they have different pictures set in their minds of what is good and what isn't. If he lives in a society where his mother, grandmother, sisters and wives cover their faces, then he goes out in the streets and sees a woman not covering her face; he will see that as bad because he never saw anything else than what he is used to see; he has a certain image of what a woman should be and other than that is odd. This depends on the culture of each city. The city council, the government in each city, decides for example what time the shops close at night. So each city has its own flavour. In Jeddah, restaurants stay open until four o'clock in the morning, but in Riyadh 12 o'clock, 12:30 am, it's closed. In Dammam, it closes 11 pm. So each city developed its own rules and cultural norms. Of course there are common values that are everywhere in the country but when it comes to sensitive issues like females, every region has its own common norms towards the subject. Lots of people who live in Riyadh hate to live in Jeddah because they think it's too open, and vice versa. Although it might seem nice to have a rich culture but such cultural differences cause cultural clashes between regions (FE8).*

A participant added that the majority of Saudi nationals living in Mecca were accustomed to hosting pilgrims in their houses. Pilgrims travelled into and out of the country to visit the holy mosques and the western community looked after them with welcoming arms. In this sense, females were actively helping around the city. Females helped by accommodating the pilgrims, offering them meals and beds, and coordinating with the mosques' guides to help pilgrims around the cities while some even taught the pilgrims the right way of reciting the Qur'an and doing their prayers.

Females were very interactive, approachable and well educated. However, in more conservative parts of the country, this was not to be seen anywhere. Hence, views regarding female participation vary from region to region and differ tremendously. Unfortunately, this has caused cultural clashes between communities: people from the central region view people from the west as too open and sinful, while people from the west view people from the central region as too strict and harsh.

### 5.3.5 Female empowerment and culture

Previously families had little trust in their females as they thought that females needed help in everything. A female participant attempted to explain that cultural norms had a lot of say in female empowerment as these are basis on which the Saudi society unconsciously raises their children:

*Most women are afraid and that is the biggest barrier ever. They have fear of exposing themselves to experiences; this is because we raise them in an overprotected manner. They have fear of working with men. There is a concept in society that is embedded in our society that women are useless ... her only way in contributing to society is to be able to raise her children in a well-behaved manner so that they will raise her head high in society. Otherwise females are an odd number which has no effective outcomes. Unfortunately females are raised like this; they are raised to be dependent on men and their worst nightmare is not getting married. Because men are the ones who should provide everything you need, so this concept emphasizes that females are useless and they are not good enough to provide for themselves. This has made females choose to sit at home and relax. Now most females actually believe that they don't want to work because they are scared they will be embarrassed by their achievements. Haven't you ever heard the phrase, she is a woman, at the end she is a mother and she needs to stay home? (FE1).*

Another participant shared the view that the Saudi culture continues to hold to concepts of a male-dominated world where gender roles are deeply embedded and women are invisible in society:

*Traditional thinking underlines that females are obedient to their male relatives; it is considered rebellious to act as your own decision maker without the permission of your men relatives. There are some fortunate and lucky women who have educated men as their relatives who encourage them to become their best and prove themselves to society as powerful achievers. But maybe the majority of men wouldn't want their females to become better than them; this is a man's ego. Our traditional thinking is what keeps us behind, and we don't have the courage to say enough, or I know what's best for me ..., females don't have the support to tell their families I think I can handle doing this on my own. It's because we are used to being behind our men, and we need their permission. For example, my father has been dead now*

*for five years and my younger brother is just 16 now but he acts like he is the man of the house and his orders must never be broken. This means if he is not in the mood to take me to visit my sister who lives across the neighbourhood, I can't force him to: More importantly, if a man comes to ask for my hand in marriage and my brother does not approve of him, I will most likely have no say in this. Such dominant king of the house behaviour is there because we raised our young men to be responsible and in charge. It's the way we choose to raise our children; these small things are blended into our society: no one can stand against it, so even though I am 27 years old, I can't just tell my younger brother to let me be ... if he doesn't think I should do something, I can't do it and that is it (FU4).*

The quotation from the following participant shows that female empowerment is linked to cultural sensitivity:

*In areas here in the southern part of the kingdom, women go out with their sheep. She drives her own car and takes the sheep to feed them when her husband is working in a nearby city. She milks them and takes the milk in her own car, Bedouins [nomads]. I have a picture of a lady wearing her abaya in her own jeep driving with her sheep, implying that in rural areas where Bedouins live, it's normal for females to guide the sheep with her jeep, while in the cities it's not acceptable. I am trying to explain that female empowerment comes from your cultural norm; where females come from various backgrounds in Saudi so they show various levels of female empowerment (FE6).*

Similarly, a participant noted that female empowerment has a lot to do with female under-representation. Females are generally considered very private figures within a family in the Saudi society: as noted above, this is influenced by the region in which a woman lives. One of the male participants made the observation that:

*The Saudi society is very different from other societies. Men are the decision makers; females are the submissive wives that need their husband's approval ... Maybe things are changing; females now are more aware of their rights and are not as surrendering to these cultural norms especially if they are educated and come from open-minded families. However, to men in general, female empowerment is something deeply complicated in our culture. The Saudi culture in my view is very masculine and this contradicts female empowerment if you can understand me. For example, the Saudi national TV conducted a funny program where a young male interviewer went to popular places like Al-tahliya Street and other famous streets to randomly interview men walking around: the interviewer asked the men two simple questions, the first was "what's your name?" The participant excitedly replies; then the interviewer would ask the second question "What's your mother's name?" About 70% of the interviewees refused to answer the question and thought that it was somewhat culturally unacceptable to say your mother's name out loud in public; the interviewer asked: but we all know Prophet Mohammed's female relatives' names and he didn't hesitate to mention them or speak to them publicly, but most of the interviewees would just stand tall with a grin on their faces and be incapable of moving their lips. I think if the interviewer was asking for the names of their wives, I*

*think he would have gotten himself into big trouble! (Laughter). One guy drew a clever cartoon in the papers: one man is the cashier and the lady is paying him, and then in the other cartoon, the man is paying and the lady, meaning the cashier, is a female. Underneath it says: "what is the difference?" In my point of view, people who are refusing to see women holding such normal jobs or even more sophisticated, I think these are people who are not educated and just can't bear the idea that females can surpass them in skills other than house responsibilities. Unfortunately it is not in their capacity to accept that a woman can do better or can perform a man's job. This is linked to a traditional concept embedded into our society that emphasizes fear towards female empowerment (M8).*

However, other views were also expressed which indicate a different view about women's roles. For example, another participant reflected through her personal experience that female empowerment is something given to you from your parents and becomes a part of who you are:

*My father will not accept the thought that I might not get accepted in a high ranking university. He has refused some relatives who asked my hand in marriage because he only wants me to grow first then the rest will come later. I love my father for believing in me and pushing me forwards ... he says that the man who comes to marry you after you become a well-established businesswoman or a professional worker should know that you are a strong educated woman who deserves to be treated with respect ... while societal values emphasize which tribe you come from, my family values education and achievements (FU7).*

Participants indicated that the younger generations are more open to new creative ideas and are cultural challengers. Younger females are seen as not being afraid to have political stands against cultural constraints.

Interesting information provided by the younger participants from the younger focus group showed that even in Riyadh, the capital located in the central region of Saudi Arabia, progress is occurring. People are starting to change and female participation is not something that is seen as causing problems:

*I don't mind working in an environment that includes dealing, meeting and working with men. I don't see anything wrong in it, I am working; it is my right to work and not to stay unemployed just for the sake of not communicating with men. Why didn't 'Omar bin Alkhatib' put a man in charge of the market? She was responsible for product control and general management; this for sure needed active communication between her and the men selling in the market ... In these days you create your own respect and image, your reputation exceeds you ... If I am happy with what I am doing, why should I care what others think of me? As long as I am not doing anything wrong, I aim to get a Master's degree then secure a job then marry ... because a good job in my point of view is better security than a husband especially in these days (FG1-3).*

Some participants have more faith that the younger generations will be able to defeat restrictive norms and, over time, everything will change to increase women's participation in employment.

*The new generations are tremendously different from what we are used to. They are more impulsive, motivated to prove themselves and in creative ways. Females 20 years ago are very different from females these days, don't you think? I think the credit goes to the educational developments and modern media influences that are charging our new generations to defeat unnecessary customs, and they are cautious not to offend Islam too ... I myself think it's a huge jump to see knowledge and courage being put together in these young adults (FE10).*

Other participants noted that the media and the internet now play a tremendous role in motivating and modernizing families. Hence, females are not viewed as poor dependants on everyone as they were once before. Female empowerment is the main ingredient that will help increase female participation, whether it comes from the families or the companies.

*Knowledge alone is empowerment so it's really easy to get through to people especially nowadays where we can receive and transmit in seconds to millions of people either by Facebook, Twitter and a lot of other channels. Another thing is through city councils where we can make an influence. People need to commit more to city councils and get their voices heard. Of course, let's not forget the educational system and the general media. After all these educational developments and internet services, females have equal power in their hands but the majority are afraid to use it, because they live in societies where men are the leaders and they need their permission or approval for most of their decisions. So if you come from a conservative society, your fate is in your husband's hands: if you come from an open-minded society, your husband respects your decisions and will encourage you to reach your highest potential. It depends on the family how they view female empowerment (M5).*

Regarding socio-cultural notions and female participation, it can be summarized that participants noted that although females might still remain subordinate dependants, change is occurring. In light of the view that males are interdependent figures and are obliged to financially support their women, some may think that organizations should secure opportunities for men. However, many respondents felt that females need to be given fair opportunities to help achieve financial security.

However, some participants expressed concern regarding regional cultural differences and its impact over female empowerment. Other participants emphasized the importance of maintaining respected relationships between families. By this, it

was meant that people should accept and respect one another with their differences in lifestyle choices to maintain peace and balance.

Finally, participants noted that females' development in the workforce was lagging behind due to discriminating socio-cultural implications that have begun to fade away within homes. More families have started to encourage their women to pursue careers and from there, female empowerment will start.

In the focus groups, respondents were very optimistic for female participation in the Saudi workforce to increase. However, the level of seriousness towards the sensitivity of the topic varied between the two groups.

#### **5.3.5.1 Younger generations**

Participants noted that the tables are turning in various ways. They explained that many culture-related issues that were once very important to the Saudi society are slowly fading away. One male participant cited statistical counts of female nationals exceeding the number of men in the country: he then cited statistical counts of divorcees and how shocking these counts are considering the level they were at 20 or 30 years ago. He believed that many families are being impacted upon by changes in their living circumstances and are forced to think of what is best for them as a family rather than what works for society.

In a discussion, females in a focus group (FG1) explained that some conservative implications that kept females from their rights as citizens are being challenged. Many females, due to the pressure of feeling let down by cultural constraints, have started to simply let go of these constraints and challenge them. These participants noted that their families encourage them to pursue educational development and employment with a priority over marriage. One participant said:

*I believe we live in a huge contradiction; mindlessly we think we are protecting women, but in reality our women are miserable: in many families women are forced to accept their lives with all its pains and sorrows because they are afraid to be denied justice. But more women are caring less for rigid norms, asking for their rights to make decisions concerning their lives. Many men too are trying to support their women to seek happiness. Women today are not similar to women 20 years ago and men too are not the same. Baba out of fear for me and my sisters will not allow any of us to marry before we have secured a good job. Islam has nothing to do with this matter and now we know we have been doing the opposite of what Mohammed (PBUH) was calling for. Families, tribes and most importantly women are recognizing their rights through Islam and will stand for them (FG1-1).*

Both men and women, younger and older participants are aware that younger generations hold different priorities. Not all participants agreed that younger generations should challenge traditions, but many have an optimistic view that things will turn around for women in the workforce.

*I do want females to progress in jobs and reach to high levels of achievements, but we must be aware of the circumstances around us; we must accept that we are dependants supported by our men; we must be aware that we do not live in an open society, and society is based on family relations and respect of identity. Before facing socio-cultural barriers without full empowerment and support from family might cause personal-family clashes. Women should be supported by their families, fathers, husbands, brothers, to avoid causing family problems. I do wish that my daughters once they grow they will be able to work, and lead a happy, healthy lifestyle that they are pleased with; this is why I and their father together will support them. Unfortunately in many cases females are not supported from their families, and are expected to accept the role given to them by society, meaning that norms and family traditions have decided their lives for them and career development might not be a possibility. In cases like these, I do not encourage females to stand against their families. I don't recommend females to lose the ones who support them: if they did, no one will! (FG2-4).*

In both focus groups, respondents were optimistic that sooner or later radical changes towards female employment in the Saudi workforce will happen. However, in FG-1, most participants were newly graduated from prestigious universities. Respondents in this group thought along the lines that cultural norms no longer can define their lifestyles. They gave examples that many of their friends have travelled alone overseas to continue their studies abroad: even though society might have another view of this, many of their female relatives and friends are looking to apply for well-paying jobs regardless of social approval. As they have consciously proven from plenty of stories, younger women are determined to achieve career progress. They have unconsciously proven that their power is really given to them from their male supporters like their fathers or husbands. However, respondents of FG2, who were older than respondents of FG1, were more cautious and aware that not all families or tribes are alike in terms of female empowerment: thus female motivation towards work, if not supported by family, might become a source of social disapproval.

#### **5.4 Islam and Female Participation**

According to all interviewee participants, Islam actually encourages females to help develop their economic welfare. Participants were asked whether they thought Islam

has hindered female participation in the workforce. Participants' responses to this question followed three major themes: Islam is not a preventer; the social confusion between Islamic implications and traditional implications regarding female participation; and the Western eye regarding Islam. Most participants found it shocking to hear a Muslim Saudi female asking whether Islam may be responsible in holding female participation back. This question triggered all interviewees to defend Islam. This raises some interesting challenges. It is important to understand participants' views; thus, careful questioning was needed in order for participants to feel comfortable in expressing their views.

#### *5.4.1 Islam not a preventer*

All interviewees aggressively indicated that Islam is not holding females from participating in the workforce. All 10 men thought it was dangerous to imply that Islam has any role in preventing females from participation. Almost all participants referred to the times of the Prophet Mohammed, the messenger and teacher of Islam. The Islamic community back then depended on females' help in various fields. Females were not shy nor held back with respect to helping or contributing to the growth of their economies. All participants were offended by the question that suggested that Islam may be against females. They linked this to Western negative views about Islam. Participants explained that society and cultural norms are the reasons for this gap, not religion. One participant explained:

*Islam is far from such accusations. Islam since the day we knew it has always been calling and guiding us to work. We can see that in the events that occurred in the life of our prophet Mohammed – peace be upon him – women participated in a lot of fields of work, for example, participating in the fields of battle, nursing the wounded and even in Iftaa [which is giving legal verdicts using Islamic laws. A scholar or a group of scholars issue a fatwa when they reach a verdict on an issue and then their followers comply with their verdict]. Aesha – may Allah bless her – the wife of our Prophet Mohammed – peace be upon him – was a grand mufti, and the Prophet allowed her to do that and she was giving fatwas to men and women. Islam has never prevented women from work. A lot of the verses in the Qur'an have always called for seeking education and work ((Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?)) verse 9 surat Alzumar, this is an ongoing invitation to learn and get educated. Islam is not a barrier between women and work, but the social status in Saudi Arabia was one of the main reasons for this situation but these barriers have been decreased increasingly (FE6).*



#### 5.4.2 *Social confusion of Islamic implications and traditional implications regarding female participation*

Despite their strong views that Islam does not prevent female participation, interviewees noted that some people in the Saudi society tend to use Islam as a way to say what is or is not acceptable. Some participants implied that when any argument happens in our Saudi society, some groups who are against the topic would play the card of Islam. Other participants explained that some groups within the society may confuse religious with cultural issues. The quotation below shows these points of view which indicate that Islamic roles may be interpreted differently from group to group or from one school of thought to another.

*It's an umbrella, and has nothing to do with this. It is just politics or a social fabric notion to put everything under Islam. I think that today in general everyone is using Islam the way they want to use Islam. If they want to say that Islam is progressive, they give all these examples how Islam is progressive. If they want to say that Muslim countries are backward, they give all these examples showing Muslim countries are backward. So I really think Islam is in the mix just to confuse the picture; it's an umbrella for everything. To blame anything on Islam or to praise Islam to be the saver of women or to denounce Islam for pulling women back is not useful ... And what's going on is that everyone is using Islam as a tool in the way they tend to (FE5).*

*//No it's not Islam, it is the social interpretation of Islam. If you go back to the stories of Prophet Mohammed and years after that you will find that women were great figures and had great roles. But what we have here, let me say, is a kind of a filtered type of Islam that goes parallel to social trends and ideas so they choose what suits them and their mentality and put it under the umbrella of Islam to have people accept it. But now I think things are changing (FE7.)*

*//You and I know that Islam has promoted female rights in all aspects of life. They were mothers who had total freedom to work, learned or do nothing. Unfortunately, not everyone knows to differentiate between Islamic implications and cultural ones. More dangerously, Western media that aims to condemn Islam feeds on our ignorance and cultural conservativeness (M10).*

Other participants thought that segregation in the workforce may help address any Islamic and cultural implications towards female participation. The reason is that Islam has allowed females to participate freely; however, Islam has also made it clear that women when mixing with men should appear modestly to maintain a healthy professional atmosphere. Hence, the custom has become that working females, when they are subject to a mixed environment, should be well presented by wearing their

hijab. Participants indicated that a proper implementation of work behaviour ethics, codes of conduct and communication methods between genders should create productive workplaces.

*In terms of Islamic implications towards Iktilat, working together, there is nothing wrong with it if both genders work professionally, meaning that women must appear modestly and both genders use a professional manner in communicating with each other. This emphasizes that working relations should strictly remain in a professional manner (FE8).*

In regard to non-segregated workforces, participants indicated that they thought that men would prevent their female relatives from working in such an atmosphere simply because it is different from the societal conventions that they experienced when they were growing up.

*In Islam, we females must always look respectfully, modestly, to avoid sinful relations. This means that females will only communicate with men on the basis of a valid relationship. Men in our society have always been so protective of their females, so if a woman would appear in work looking attractive, they would unfortunately immediately think that she is a sinful woman who is inviting men to build a sinful personal relationship. Although this might not be her intentions at all, but they don't know how to differentiate between what a professional female looks like and one who is looking for something else: this is because they have never seen professional females anywhere before. So what happens in most houses is that females are told not to participate in a mixed workforce, because men assume they know how other men will think of females in general. This underlines the importance of achieving the correct image of an Islamic professional female, where she projects Islamic guidelines in her appearances and her communication approach (FE7).*

As indicated earlier in cultural implications regarding female participation, many Saudi nationals think along the lines of protecting their honour which is by protecting their females from other men. However, Islamic implications are clear that female/male relationships in work should be based on work productivity by appropriate methods. However, many who are constrained by socio-cultural fears may reject female participation. From the above quotation, this particular female participant suggests an important issue: society needs a realistic image of a Saudi Muslim professional female to which to relate and to use her image as a role model for other women. Once men of the Saudi society relate to a professional female image that is purely guided by Islamic implications of modesty in appearance and professional communication skills, then this may advance female participation into all levels.

### 5.4.3 *The Western eye regarding Islam*

Participants noted that views of modern Western females are projected as the role model for females around the world. They saw this as inappropriate for women in Saudi Arabia as Western females are not seen to be breaking their own cultural customs but it would require Saudi women to do so if they were to behave in that way. Participants noted that asking Saudi females with conservative ethnic norms to be guided by the Western feminist movement towards a more “civilized Western lifestyle” is considered as a Western invasion against the Saudi cultural identity. They noted that some Western media criticize the way females cover themselves in Saudi Arabia as a harsh traditional method in discriminating against females. The Western media see this as implying that females should grow out of their religious implications, culture and customs in order to become more civilized by following a Western perspective. The majority of participants were unhappy with Westernized media that depicts how the Saudi females wear their hijab and abayas.<sup>11</sup> This was seen by respondents as offensive behaviour against all females and against Islam and Saudi culture.

Another important comment was that Western societies are always eager to change everyone according to their liking by suggesting that the Western ways are the ways to modernization. However, many participants noted that Western ways were not applicable in the Saudi context just as the Saudi ways might not be applicable in the Western context:

*Lots of Western people believe all that Western societies apply is righteous and civilized and anything different is wrong, incomplete or needs to be fixed. Learning from what they have isn't a bad thing as they learned from our Muslim scientists in the old days in Spain or as they call it the Dark Ages. Knowledge wherever it is, is valuable. However, thinking that Islam is unjust to females is just ridiculous as our traditions and restricted culture is a huge difference from religion. Some cultural norms in the Western side of the world are not acceptable through our Islamic rules and of course not acceptable to our highly conservative society. Answer me this: why don't they learn from us? Look how Islam made it clear that men are responsible for all financial needs, why don't they apply such rules that would be beneficial to females and families? As I said, some people hate Islam and just want to be against it for the sake of making Islam look bad: others are just ignorant and some just believe that copying the Western cultures is the way to modernization (FU2).*

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<sup>11</sup> Abaya refers to the traditional black formal robe, worn by women in public in Saudi Arabia.

*//The international arena always mixes up or links our cultural problems with Islam, and you really need somebody that is really an open-minded person to differentiate between both who needs to live here in Saudi Arabia for a long time and study Islam to be able to differentiate between cultural issues and Islamic issues (M6).*

Another participant commented that cultural differences between Saudi nationals and Western people should not invite criticism and disrespect of lifestyles:

*We take care of our mothers until they die; however, they throw both their parents in elderly homes. Why didn't we say to that, this is uncivilized and inhumane and Western societies are inhumane to their parents? Every society has their own values and we respect their values even if we don't agree to them. Instead of respecting our values and trying to accept us as we are, they want to change us, to modernize us, in their way of thinking (M4).*

Participants reflected that aggressive Western media comments further complicate female progress. The more there is a Western focus on female development in Saudi Arabia, the worse this issue is handled by the Saudi society, because it makes any development seem to be a Western-centric pressure and thus it is hated by much of the society.

### **5.5 Equal but Different and Family Friendly Policies**

Metcalfe's (2008) "equal but different" philosophy was tested with participants. This philosophy did not resonate at all. They saw it as having potentially negative impacts on women as it would entrench rather than challenge differences between men and women. Participants thought that females were already treated equally in terms of those who joined the workforce who they saw as facing no discrimination as they receive equal pay and the same contracts as their male colleagues. In some organizations, female development has opened up senior positions for female employees. Participants did not agree with categorizing Saudi females as different: instead, they recommended using Islam as an enabler. According to the participants, labelling women as different could lead to different and therefore less equal treatment in employment.

#### *5.5.1 Equal but different, out of date*

The younger participants thought that females are under-represented in the Saudi society because females have not stood up for themselves: they have not challenged for opportunities to become available to them. The participants also rejected the

equal but different philosophy owing to women's significant under-representation in employment. They saw the need to increase professional opportunities and agitate for change. They promised to change that and promised that females, at least those who are newly graduated, will not keep quiet.

*I would like to add that there is no equality between men and women at work. In most companies, females don't exceed 8% of the company's employees. Women are not only for house workers, delivering babies and raising them. Life is being more expensive; women need to work to support their families. Females need to start making a fuss for their rights or else no one will give them a chance. I believe that we let them overlook us, but believe me not for long ... females are more heard through the media and their educational accomplishments now; I don't think they just want to hang them on the walls for decoration?! It's a matter of time and I hope soon (FG1-5).*

A senior female participant thought treating females equally but differently was just another method of keeping power and work authority in the hands of men. Treating females equally but differently further represents the concept that females are dependent and incapable of the challenge. This participant was very open about her idea that male-dominated traditional attitudes towards bringing up females in our Saudi society is an old method of keeping the females of a society as silent figures so that men can keep the power in their hands:

*Females need to stop depending on others for help. This concept of treating them differently by itself reinforces traditional habits of overprotecting our females to an extent that we treat them as the disabled. This only gives men the power to think on our behalf, and of course this also means that all life decisions and turns are only made by them, because we are incapable of thinking ourselves, because we are different, we are good for the household. NO. This is exactly what men in our society who are against female empowerment and development in the workforce would want. They want us always labelled to be underneath them in power and authority. Our females don't need any protection, and she should learn to protect herself because we are asking for equal treatment rights, so we should be equal in all areas. I think overprotecting her is a discrimination against men and is an insult to all females! We are already doing nothing but spoiling women in our society. My 22-year-old daughter doesn't know how to make a hotel booking; sometimes, if she is riding in the car with a new driver, she gets lost on her way home, put in mind she lived here all her life. We should stop being overprotective of them; they need to be treated like their male siblings in order for us to demolish this bad habit. Do you think That Alnitagain, Aisha, Khadeeja, Fatima – peace be upon them – were scared to speak up? Or to help build their cities in all sorts of ways? I am sure you know all the stories of them, and how they had a positive and very active hand in everything, and they were respected for it! Females must fight for their needs without being afraid. Females should have equal qualification and fight for their rights; females*

*shouldn't take advantage of the concept that she is a female so she should have the opportunity to get what she wants without real qualities and working skills, as some managers may say, give the females a chance, NO, GIVE ME A QUALIFIED FEMALE, THEN I WILL GIVE HER A CHANCE! It's very challenging to help females understand that they need to have real-life experience and skills to be treated with respect (FE1).*

*//Females are already being treated equally; no need to reintroduce new ideas that we are different because of our traditions, as it wasn't there in the first place, so you don't change things taking a different direction! Look everywhere in the kingdom; all governmental and private sectors give female employees the same pay as male employees. Even when they climb up the ladder in some positions, the men take a car, the female in that case takes a car with a driver! Because of course, females don't drive here. We also give females three-month vacation with pay when she gives birth. The King recently obliged all the private sector in the educational sector to give 5600 SR as a minimum to every teacher, female or male. So, in terms of equality, it's very well achieved but in terms of equal opportunities available, then I would sadly say that we still need to work on that as we need further development and CSR [corporate social responsibility] and HR organizational training ... However, to treat them different is by itself a way of discrimination! Why take females backwards? Regarding the cultural boundaries, females and males might prefer to work separately according to their cultural norms so having them in separate offices is ideal. But not to treat them differently; I think this notion might just be a step back (FE7).*

*//Both genders in our society find it better to work separately. This doesn't interfere with work nor does it mean they can't meet in meetings. So why treat them differently? Once you introduce the idea of being different then you're just complicating things. There is nothing to complicate; females have equal pay and equal working guidelines. So I don't think we should introduce the concept of being different. More applicable is introducing friendly working arrangements for both genders. This is a great change that companies here in the kingdom don't have (M2).*

Conversely, only one male participant thought that females should not be treated equally because he thought that it was too much to ask of females. This participant, in particular, felt that females were very precious, fragile human beings and they should be treated with honour towards their freedom of will to contribute to their society. Hence, he saw treating females equally to men meant an overload of work which he saw was unfair for the females.

*First of all I think it is unfair to ask of a female what I ask of a male. Meaning that a male may be able to handle something that might be too much for a female to handle. For example, in our educational system, a female teacher is treated equally as a male teacher where they are both supposed to serve until they reach the age of 60, but how could we compare them equally? So, in this sense maybe treating them*

*differently in respect of their fragile figures and in respect of their overload responsibilities in my point of view is the right thing to do. However, treating them equally in the sense that they are expected to challenge men towards high positions is also in my point of view a little too much specially now! I don't really think it's appropriate that females at this stage would fight and compete with men in board meetings and be aggressive in such positions. At the moment, opportunities available for women in the workforce are already an issue but racing men to higher positions will make a bigger fuss females are not ready for. Nor in my opinion do I see such high-profile jobs fit for a lady (M3).*

Female participants thought that females are females everywhere regardless of their religious ethnicity: they are mothers, wives and hold dual responsibilities when participating in the workforce. This view is not in line with Metcalfe's view of equal but different treatment but it does help the range of views regarding how women should be treated in the Saudi workforce.

#### *5.5.2 Equitable opportunities*

Another participant suggested a sounder concept to equal but different. He suggested that it was only fair that females and males be treated with equity instead of being equal but different:

*I think they should be treated like males because introducing the concept of treating them differently would then limit the area females can advance into, and so you are limiting their working fields and closing opportunities instead of opening them. Females are already suffering from really limited options and by this philosophy you will create further under-representations. Using Islamic scripts to reinforce female empowerment in a way that she is not superior to men but only in a way that she has equal respect and opportunities means instead of treating them equally but differently you should consider treating them equitably as it sounds much more reasonable. In Islam, females and males all together are treated by Allah if they are either good Muslims or sinful Muslims. There is no difference as we are both mature and responsible. It sounds fair to treat females with the same respect that they are mature responsible independent individuals in the workforce. By this, equitably just means that both genders are alike and differ from one another by their achievements and skills. It's only fair to promote a female worker if she has better productivity and the same goes for the male worker. So I suggest that organizations and managers shouldn't be looking at genders when making working decisions; instead, they should be looking at productivity which also should sound more reasonable for the organizations themselves. This points out that females also need to look out for themselves in the workforce; they need to be prepared for the challenge and prove themselves worthy of the chances in order to be recognized (M2).*

### 5.5.3 Family friendly policies

Despite deep concern regarding the way the Western media depict Islam, it was acknowledged by participants that some Western organizational practices could be usefully implanted into Saudi organizations to enhance female work–life qualities. The more pressing need was seen as the need for flexibility. As one female participant stated:

*... we are females; like all females around the world, we just need flexibility. Instead of treating us differently, why not implement family friendly policies like normal socially responsible organizations would do? (FU7).*

Other participants added that further training for both female employees and their organizations might be useful especially as organizations have been for many years male dominated. However, now, with further female employment, organizations need to be aware that women employees as in the Western world need to find productive methods that will allow them to work while at home when necessary.

*//The XXXX institute helps those employees that need more flexible time arrangements by giving them their freedom to work from home especially if their work does not require their presence. We should understand that females are mothers, and housewives. And thus we should look more into her needs. So maybe, as I said earlier, females and males will be happier if they had the flexibility for better flexible working arrangement. I have been the general manager of XXXXX for six years now, and in those years, I found that females are really more dedicated to the work and are always more enthusiastic than our men. I believe creating jobs for females where they can have flexibility in their working arrangements will be very successful especially for companies who can't afford to provide separate offices. By this, females could work from their house in the times that suit them, as long as they achieve their deadlines. Such friendly working arrangements will be helpful for those women who have responsibility for children or who don't have transport arrangements (M8).*

Flexibility is seen as a way of increasing women's participation but without really challenging existing structural barriers that discriminate against females in the workplace. Participants noted that organizations should appreciate female potential and offer equal opportunities and flexible working conditions.

### 5.5.4 Separate offices all that should be different

A male participant shared his view that gender segregation is the only thing that matters to this conservative society:



*... it's a matter of the biggest enabler is promoting this culture, you don't have to break cultural rules for ensuring that women are getting the right benefits or giving them equal opportunity and elevating the importance of the role of women in both private sector and public sector. And this doesn't happen casually or by coincidence: it has to be done in an institutionalized fashion, and this culture must be promoted aggressively (M2).*

The above male respondent was a CEO of a well-known organization. Within his organization, the cultural implications of segregation are effected in strategically planned methods that do not exclude female employees from organizational activities and development in the organization. This will be further explained later in this chapter.

Other male participants, who were already working together with women in the banking industry, thought that mixing on a regular daily basis created too many problems between genders. They advised that mixing should be limited to meetings. This was very interesting coming from the people who were viewed by some as being too open.

Other than socio-cultural views and tradition, there are more visible constraints regarding female participation. The following section will present participants' views regarding what they saw as some of the real obstacles that keep females from joining the workforce.

## **5.6 Systemic Obstacles**

Other than invisible obstacles such as the different cultural implications towards female empowerment from region to region, or family concerns regarding losing social approval, participants made it clear that there were visible obstacles that made female participation even more difficult.

### *5.6.1 Responsibilities towards families and working arrangements*

Females around the world are the main caregivers to children. Although in some other parts of the world, men increasingly are sharing responsibilities with their female partners, this is not the case in the Saudi society. Family responsibilities are seen as females' number one priority. However, females who want to achieve a working career as well as meeting their family responsibilities can suffer from long working hours and exhausting overload due to family demands. The following

participant was employed but decided to leave her career as a therapist because the hours did not suit her motherly, house and social demands:

*Women unlike men have responsibilities at home with their children, attending to house chores and providing home-cooked meals and are expected to respond to social gatherings; all that must be done with a smile! While men just go to their jobs, come back home, relax then go meet his friends. So maybe in return they need flexibility in their working arrangement, this is a necessity that many working mothers lack and end up leaving work like I did (FU1).*

Hence, females tend to become discouraged from participating in the workforce. Female participants shared their views that females without family help cannot find time to balance both responsibilities. As a working mother commented:

*I wake at 5:30 am to help the kids get ready for school: once they are finished from school, my kids are dropped off at my parents' house until I can pick them up after work. Of course, my mother has a cook who does all our meals too. Of course I also have a domestic cleaner that does everything else. In other words, I have time for the kids and my husband as soon as I am home. But this is not the case with everyone. If I didn't have all this help, I would never have time to cook, clean, attend to the kids and work all at the same time. Time, I think time management is a very important aspect that females everywhere around the world need. Unfortunately, countries around the world have part-time jobs which allow females to attend to their family responsibilities. But here maybe because female participation is just new so we don't have that option yet. I think we also need after school childcare facilities especially with all the problems recently happening with the domestic cleaners: it has become very risky to leave your children alone with them for a long time. We also need home-cooked catering for working females. I think in general we need the facilities and services that will help create a welcoming working atmosphere, which should all be either covered by her company or they should be made affordable to her in a manner that she still can enjoy her salary if you know what I mean (FE10).*

### 5.6.2 Part-time jobs

Females in the Saudi society show huge concern in relation to their family responsibilities and social ties. Hence, the need for part-time jobs is seen by many as essential. Unfortunately, part-time jobs catering for graduate females are not available in Saudi Arabia. Most of the unemployed females touched on this theme. The need for flexibility and part-time jobs was a theme that all groups of participants emphasized as a necessity to encourage increasing female participation.

*Many of us females have plenty of family responsibilities; most of us either need extra money or a healthy lifestyle by being productive in times in day hours or for others in night hours. I have my fashion line and I design women's clothes, I*

*maintain business in times I find suitable for myself. I have hired a Saudi female as an assistant to keep a professional business-like profile. She works from her house too; she is responsible for maintaining appointments and reminds me of deadlines and registers my line in fashion shows. My friends are always looking for jobs but are quickly discouraged by the working hours. I think many women in Saudi need part-time jobs that will fit perfectly with their responsibilities (FU5).*

*//I left a banking opportunity which paid very generously, and became a university lecturer just because the hours made a difference. Although the pay is nothing compared to the banking position I had but at least now I can go home, attend to all my family needs and still have time for myself. When I was in the banking position, I came back home around six and had very little time to spend with the kids before they went to sleep, that is, if I didn't sleep before they did! (FE3).*

*//Why can't we give them part-time jobs instead of full-time jobs. I know that female workers still have to go and attend to their house responsibilities so why do we ask of them too much. Part-time jobs with half the salaries are very ideal to females of our society, because it helps females to attend to their family needs and still have a healthy living. Females who work full-time jobs and try to juggle with their other main responsibilities lead very troubled lives: they might have very high levels of stress and this might eventually lead to a broken marriage. But if part-time jobs were available for them, this would give plenty of time to attend to other responsibilities. So first I would think that promoting part-time jobs is a very good start (M3).*

Data indicate that this theme was one of the key reasons given by unemployed respondents regarding why they were not seeking full-time employment. Some of the unemployed females also indicated that they were not pursuing their right to participate in the workforce because the working hours were too much for them to handle and they were financially relaxed because their husbands provided for their necessities as they were obliged to do under the Sharia Law. This indicates that some Saudi females choose to remain unemployed because they cannot find jobs that fit their agenda of requiring less working hours.

*I would love to be productive in morning hours; I usually go back to bed because there is nothing else to do. My day usually starts at 2 pm in the kitchen getting lunch ready for my family, and then I like to pick them up from school myself. After we have lunch together, I help them with their homework then have family activities together before I tuck them in bed. I am not in need of a career for financial reasons; my husband is wealthy and he keeps me financially satisfied. But it would be great to have a part-time job to keep me occupied and useful in morning hours and still be able to be back at home by 12 or 1 pm to cook and attend to my family needs ... Wouldn't that be a delight? (FU2)*

Interestingly, the majority of participants did not see men taking any caring responsibility for children as an option.

### 5.6.3 *Old systems*

Networking, according to some participants, is important to find a job as, from their point of view, if you have good connections, you can easily be recommended anywhere. However, if you lack networking, you might possibly face further barriers in finding opportunities.

*Our society has made invisible restrictions that the majority can't cross; the world is always upside down. Financially stable females can easily find jobs because they are well connected and they have their private cars to take them around. But the majority of females who are really in need of jobs to financially support their families (to put food on the table, or have something warm to cover up the kids in winter or drink something cold in summer...) No, our options just go poof! (FU4).*

*//The main problem here is when I look for a job, I don't find one, why? Because 3/4 of jobs are reserved for the relatives of HR in lots of companies. And notice most of the people working and holding positions are the same people for 20 years and maybe more. Lots of people in good positions have no qualification that is related to their field of work. The insider corruption is a great issue to deal with especially in a huge range of institutes, private or even governmental. A lot is at risk because of the increasing educated unemployed young population that is not given a proper chance to develop. Unfortunately, women are sucked into unemployment for many reasons, where cultural implications do not seem so hard to overcome at this point, as much as it is simply difficult to find a respected job anywhere. That is the issue here. How to address unemployment, fairness towards an equal opportunity is the elephant in the room that needs to be tackled (FG2-6)*

### 5.6.4 *Where to look for opportunities?*

Female nationals, as some participants pointed out, do not know where to look for opportunities or do not have access to the networks that would help them gain employment. Many participants found that the process of looking for employment opportunities was an exhausting one. Women are not welcomed in most male-dominated organizations or in designated men-only buildings. Therefore, at a practical level, this means that even applying for a job can be almost an impossible task. Females suffer from brick walls which create barriers that are both visible and impenetrable, that is, they cannot gain access to the building to even begin the process.

*Another barrier is that we have no establishment that helps females look in the right places for jobs or opportunities, even if these establishments don't have all the private and the public sector offers. So I feel that there are a lot of females who are lost and don't know where to look for jobs, as I used to pass this company a million times a day but never thought that they had a females' section, because all I saw were cars and men, but I was fortunate to be connected to the Dean who suggested me to them! So females who have connections can maybe find jobs easier than the majority of females who don't have good connections and are clueless of the opportunities available to them (FE7).*

*//the challenge I would say is job matching. So when you go and you want to find a job, where do you go and how do you connect the employers with the job applicant? The employer would say: "I looked and couldn't find anyone", and I have friends that would say: "we are looking for this job and it's a great job, do you know anyone?" and we don't really know anyone and that becomes a challenge. So these are the two main challenges that affect women and men (FE5).*

#### 5.6.5 Low salaries offered

Another barrier mentioned by some participants is that the salaries offered in some institutions are not worth the trouble. The following focus group dialogue shows that many female employees are dissatisfied with their salaries:

*– I would like to mention that the jobs I could find in schools offered low salary and long working hours. Why don't they shorten the working hours for those jobs with low salaries? It is frustrating that I am a university graduate and work long hours for just 3500 SR a month. Although most of the companies have huge revenues but when it comes to the salaries of the employees, they are very low. Think of what I really gain in my pocket, I pay a driver to take me to work and back to home 1800 SR a month, and pay a maid to help me with my kids and household another 1000 SR each month. You do the math ... I really don't gain much, do I? (FG1-2)*

*– Why is it that the foreigner's (non-Saudi) salary is much more than the Saudi's? (FG1-1)*

*– They see the foreigner as more efficient and qualified (FG1-2)*

A further concern as highlighted above is that foreign qualified workers are often paid much higher salaries and this acts as a further disincentive.

#### 5.6.6 Changing labour market demands

Some participants noted that students both male and female were not guided by a vision towards their careers. According to participants, this resulted in graduate students with skills that are not useful to the current workforce:

*First of all, students enrol into majors that are not in need now in the workforce. For example, let's say there are some students that enrol into geography, not that it's not a good major but we have no need for it at the moment! Do you know that a lot of employees in Saudi Arabia are employed in a field that really has nothing to do with their educational background? I blame the universities for lack of professional market value guidance. Students need to know their options and what is attractive to the market at the current time (FE7).*

Thus, although there are high rates of university education, it may not necessarily lead to employment opportunities.

### 5.6.7 Transport

As is known in this male-dominated society, females are not allowed to drive. As this law banning females from driving stems from cultural societal traditions of controlling female whereabouts, females who work need personal drivers to take them everywhere as public transport is only for men and taxi drivers are not a societal preference especially for women. Many families depend on personal drivers for logistics.

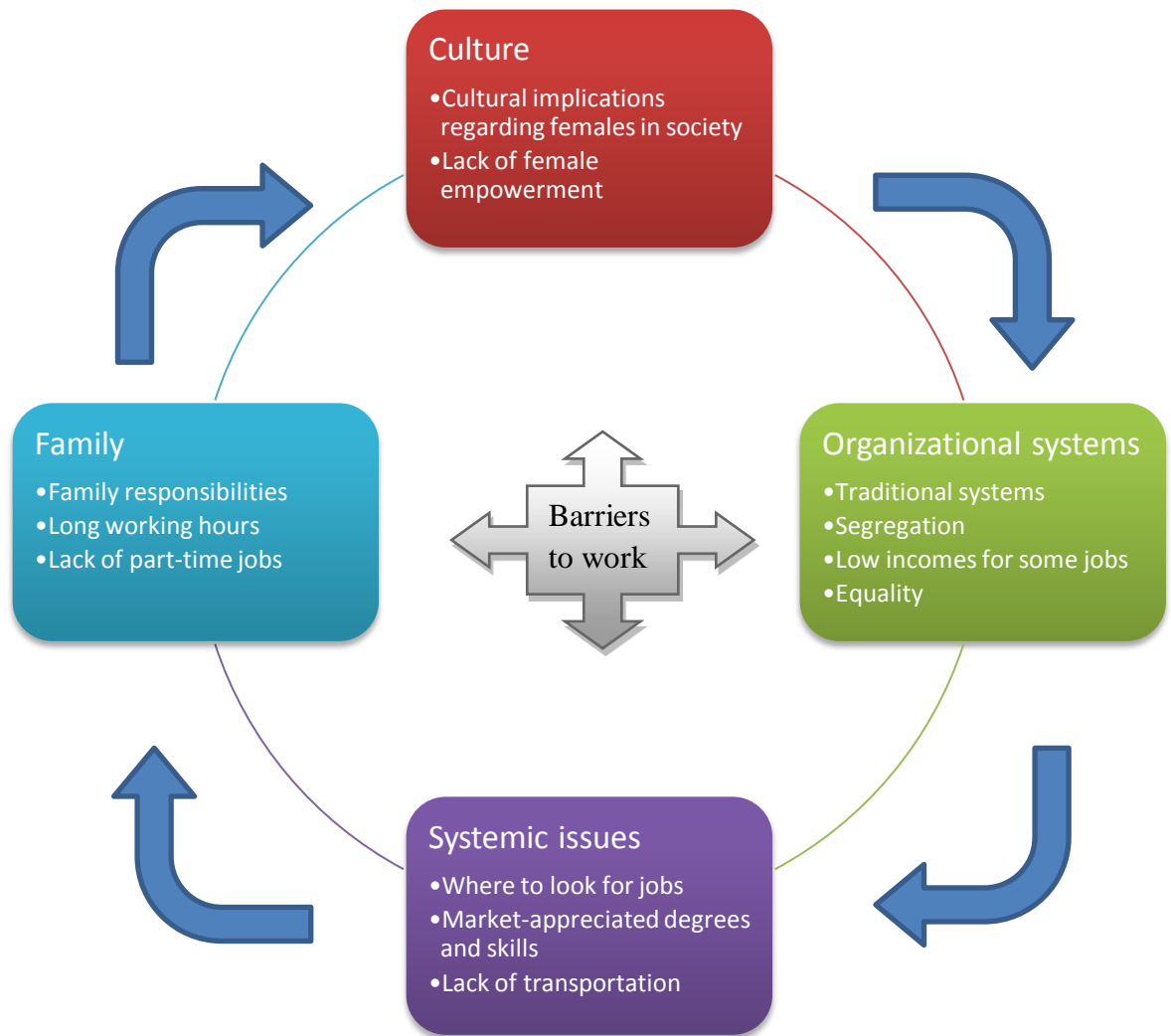
Unfortunately, as mentioned by some participants, not every family has the advantage of being able to afford a personal driver. Thus, many women have no means of transport available to them.

*Well maybe like me they don't have anyone to take them to work; we need the money and we wish to work somewhere for a good salary and with transportation means available ... my sister is a mother of five children, three of them are young, and she too needs to work but she can't because she can't just leave them and go out! And again she has the same problem as mine; we don't have transportation means ... so it is very difficult. At a point, I was seriously thinking not to graduate because I can use my university funds to cover some of the everyday life expenses. We are a big family and we all try our best to not complain but I feel sorry for the kids and for us too (FU4).*

Female participants pointed out that many female employees are tested with working conditions involving long hours. Their family responsibilities towards their house and children become neglected and thus many female employees choose either work or motherly responsibilities, and therefore leave work. For this reason, respondents saw the importance of part-time jobs that offer working mothers the ability to work and care for their children. Moreover, male-dominated systems in organizational structures require change in line with promoting equity in opportunities. Also,

participants noted that job searching becomes a burden to many female graduates who cannot just walk into organizations handing in their curriculum vitae (CV). Female graduates lack knowledge of organizational offers, and how and where to connect with them. In some private sectors, female employees find themselves discouraged from joining the workforce owing to the low salaries that they are offered. Organizations fail to acknowledge with the low salaries offered that many women require a driver for transport, and might need a nanny for childcare responsibilities: females are forced to leave the workforce as their prior motivation to work is mostly spent on securing a driver and a nanny. Also, some participants pointed out that many females enrol in degrees that have little workforce demand. Female students should be made aware of the market demand and directions. Finally, as seen in recent news, female transportation issues are being challenged by female activists in Saudi Arabia. Whether females are allowed to drive or not, organizations should help in securing transportation means for female employees as participants found that many females are forced to accept being left out of the workforce because they have no secure transportation means available to them.

The following model shows the key barriers identified by participants that directly affect female participation.



**Figure 5.2 Barriers according to participants**

## 5.7 Enablers

Participants, after pointing out what they thought kept females from public participation, were asked to suggest what they thought could work as enablers to overcome those barriers. The following section discusses the views of participants as to what might help increase female participation in the Saudi workforce.

### 5.7.1 Islam as an enabler?

As noted earlier, when both male and female participants were asked if they thought Islam hindered women's participation, they became very defensive of Islam. Some participants almost saw the question as an affront. The women who were interviewed saw Islam as being the motivation behind their efforts to grow and achieve their



goals. They reflected upon Islamic stories and Hadith scripts that show female participation. As one participant said:

*Khadijah bint Khuwayled is one of the first governmental organizations that encourage female participation. As you can see, the name of the centre is Prophet Mohammed's wife, as she was a prominent businesswoman; she is the Islamic role model; she is someone who we can say: "You have a problem with us? We are not speaking from a Western perspective; we are speaking from an Islamic perspective from the time of the Prophet Mohammed – peace be upon him. Speaking the language of Islam is speaking the language all Saudis respect and understand. You have to point out that Islam has promoted women and female participation and has appreciated her contributions to society. So we are using Islam as a tool, a political tool or educational tool. Anyone you want to speak to, you speak with their language (FE6).*

As noted in Chapter Two, females in early Islamic times participated in all fields and even in risky fields like battles and in hard work such as farming: as a participant says:

*Do you remember "That Alnitagain"? The daughter of Abu Baker, she used to take the sheep outside Mecca to let them eat from the grass and plants ... she did this alone and without a man helping around. Why didn't they say it's too much for her to handle? Or no, it's too risky she might be attacked? Islam never kept the females locked up indoors (FU7).*

However, it was also noted that while Islam was not seen as a barrier to women's employment, women are required to stay within Islamic rules; otherwise, this might impact on their reputation.

Hence, some participants suggested that if society really puts forward Islamic rules as a guideline for female participation, the issue will no longer be a concern as Islam addresses such professional behavioural implications. One of the male interviewees explained that:

*Islam has a role in moderating it as in putting the guidelines for such working places; for example, females in the Western world remain suffering from the glass ceiling effect and even in a permissive society like the United States, they have a lot of sexual harassment cases and this may be addressed by our Islamic rules and guidelines. If you are able to reach to all workers and students who are getting ready to join the workforce that they are all responsible for applying our Islamic rules through their developing conscience, then we might really grow into a productive Muslim society where females are welcome to work. The media working together with the educational system offering organizational training can all aim to achieve self-awareness of a worker's conscience as a developing human being (M4).*

In this theme, participants noted that if we use historic stories of Islam that indicate female participation in all fields, it will encourage society to accept and welcome female participation. This is the language of reason used in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Taking advantage of these historical well-respected stories is seen as the right way to fight cultural negativity. As one participant said:

*This country and the people here think within the lines of Islam. People understand that Islam doesn't prevent females from working; however, females haven't economically participated for generations so it's best that when she does it, she doesn't break Islamic rules or else the working environment won't be a society's best option for their respected ladies. So, in order to fix the matter, we have to address it in an Islamic matter too. Since Islam asks that males and females must behave in a proper way, then we must have the guidelines to work in such a way. We must not break any Islamic rules and don't necessarily need to break any cultural norms. Allow females to work freely in separate offices and teach both genders to work in a professional way respecting one another when they need to mix. Again, females are the newcomers so to be fully welcomed, they need to be extra careful of their appearances and the messages they send out (M1).*

Education in Islam is prioritized and considered very important. Other participants noted that Islam encourages people to seek knowledge and thus become productive people.

*Islam encourages women to work. And now we see our religious scholars encouraging women to be doctors and to be educated. Because long ago, most doctors were only men: if I was pregnant and I want to deliver, it would be a male doctor who will do the delivery. But now things changed, we see female doctors in different fields. Our religious scholars are encouraging women to be dependent. Islam encouraged women to be teachers, doctors and mothers and help build our society, because an ignorant woman will not be an effective member of society. On the contrary, she must be educated and work, and there are limits that protect her rights as a woman. She should be in an environment suitable to her whereby she feels comfortable working. Islam protects and develops. Islam encourages us to work (FE2).*

*//We hear a lot about sexual harassment in working environments in the Western society. But we are immune from such things when a woman has her private working space: although Islam never implied that females should not work in a professional manner together with men, but for the sake of not breaking any cultural norms, why not work separately? (M7).*

Although Islam is seen as enabling and encouraging women's employment, participants cautioned against challenging cultural norms. Thus, women are expected to behave and appear in public as seen fit within structural and cultural frameworks.

### 5.7.2 Education

Participants saw educational development in various levels as a great necessity for both Saudi females and males. As participants noted, female development is linked to educational attainment with young female students needing to be properly educated with confidence and a sense of achievement and character. Moreover, it was also noted that females are in need of additional educational services such as career counselling and job matching offered by the universities.

*If women really want a job, they need to get out of their way to prepare themselves for that job and they need skills. So enablers are skills training, career counselling from an early age, internships from college days, thinking about your job and what you want to do after you graduate and being realistic and knowing that today it doesn't mean anything that you have a degree because it is about your skills, how you impress on your interview, what you wear on your interview, how you present your CV and yourself (FE1).*

*//In universities, they should offer career path planning so they know what they are good at so they know where to pursue. These career days that happen in many colleges and universities should focus on skills and what to equip those students with: even before they graduate, they guide them where to go, what to do and how to grasp an opportunity because opportunities are rare (FU4).*

*//I am an optimist: my approach is that there are mindsets that are negative but there are mindsets that are positive, so every time a door closes, it opens another one. One of the challenges is women want a job and they don't care or know what job, they just want a job, and when you ask them what do you want to do and what is your aspiration for yourself, they don't have a career mindset, they have a job mindset, so then when you are in a system that isn't working for you, it's very difficult to just have a job mindset because you would say I tried and didn't find myself. But if you have a specific job you want, then you know what type of skills you need to get that job (FE7).*

Participants showed concerns towards the fact that both genders do not know how to professionally interact with one another. This creates further complications in communication skills and progress, and can act as a limiting factor for increasing opportunities for women if it is not addressed. A male participant, who has worked with women in the banking industry, noted that professionalism in the means of communication between men and women must be based on Islamic manners and behaviours.

*From my experience, I prefer segregated workplaces. Men are not all alike and there are some men who may disrespect females. Where are your Islamic manners?! I can't blame the men only; in fact, both genders lack professionalism in the*

*workplace. Once we can teach both men and women ethics of conduct and professionalism maybe then men and women may work together with respect and productivity (M7).*

Another male respondent emphasized the importance of training in communication between the genders:

*Although this might seem old fashioned, our national students need to be coached through gender behaviours and professional communication means, just to create a healthy respectful environment. Our students must be aware of their socio-cultural implications and how to relate to it in a professional manner. Training courses set accordingly to their fields of interest where they should learn how to interact with one another; we must encourage training institutions to create communication courses for both men and women employees (M5).*

*//I think education through training facilities and universities will even help cultural restrictions towards females to ease off if you introduce Islam and how females worked and participated and how Prophet Mohammed appreciated their contributions. Therefore, using Islamic history to encourage and motivate female participation in a professional manner should show great results as a way to sophisticate the majority in a religious manner (M3).*

Participants noted that foreign labour has the right skills and for nationals to become more attractive to the market, they need the right training towards such positions.

*Additional courses should be given to both students about creativity, innovation, thinking out of the box, going beyond expectations (FE7).*

*//Most companies ask for an ICDL [international computer driving licence] certificate and a diploma in English. There is this training centre that brings professional speakers from different countries and companies to give lectures or sessions. I attended one of them: it was about “thinking out of the box” and I was motivated to think differently and see other aspects of anything given to me. I think the universities should provide such courses and sessions to their students (FG1-1).*

According to participants, females must understand how to talk and present themselves in a respectful Islamic manner. Hence, some participants thought self-presentation should be introduced through educational courses as there are professional business implications for females in understanding that their appearances reflect their professionalism rather than just their person. However, participants hoped that colleges and universities would offer students professional training courses about gender communication to enhance their confidence.

*Schools should prepare students to have confidence in themselves when talking and doing presentations. Alyamama University where I graduated; they used this method with us where all students are expected to present seminars and challenge theories*

*and participate in mixed gender debates. This method creates professional and confident methods of communicating with the men and vice versa (FG1-6).*

*//putting some guidelines for working females in mixed environments to appear respectfully as Islam asks her to is actually a very good idea because such guidelines actually originated from Islam so you are not introducing anything new, but to be successful you shouldn't apply these guidelines through the religious groups, but in fact, applying them through education, media and normal work conduct is better because nothing is forced on them: it's just for them to know and learn (M4).*

Participants also thought that training and educational courses should be given to employees as a way of emphasizing that this transition is important and progress must continue.

*For organizations I would say, invest in women working. They are more loyal and give the company much more if the company gives to them. Also, human resources should balance between the expenses and the hassle they go through; they need to have more training in how to manage female HR [human resources], or have their HR manager as a female because they can manage both. There is a story: the ministry of health in Buraidah wanted to monitor and do an inspection in one of the governmental organizations, and who did they send? A woman. Why? Because she can enter both male and female sections. If HR managers are women, they can manage both (M6).*

*//Educational help is a major enabler seen through the participants. Because the society is biased on a gender-segregated system, females and males do not know how to communicate in a professional manner (M10).*

### 5.7.3 Personality building and personal presentation

Participants viewed that female participation in the paid workforce depends on the females themselves and their ability to prove themselves to their society. Participants of both genders and age differences encouraged females to become more vocally, socially and intellectually present. Participants of all ages thought that females need to step up their game in the working environment to prove themselves capable of better positions and more offers. Participants stated that:

*... females should have equal qualification and fight for her rights; females shouldn't take advantage of the concept that she is a female so she should have the opportunity to get what she wants without real qualities and working skills. As some managers may say, give the females a chance: no, give me a qualified female then I will give her a chance! It's very challenging to help females understand that they need to have real-life experience and skills to be treated with respect (FE1).*

*//Ooh, it takes a lot, it takes physically, mentally and sociologically, but because I want to do it I managed: when you are not serious in achieving your goals, you will give up, so you have to be determined. And now I believe I have achieved my perfect dream for me and my family and I think all my hard work has paid up and it was worth it. I was working like a machine just to establish all my needs and now I have all what I wanted ... Second is confidence and understand what you want. Females here in KSA [kingdom of Saudi Arabia] don't know what they want; they are lost; they have degrees but don't know where or what to do with it. Look in foreign countries; how did females achieve their rights? They fought for it, and we need to do the same. Females here are spoiled, they don't want to fight for their rights to work equally; for example, they are always complaining about the long hours of work in the private sector. But if we want to be equal, then we have to have the same time of working hours as males do! Another thing is that females need the skills to work the mentality to achieve and come up with an active mind for solutions and new ideas (FE5).*

*//I would find lots of men who wouldn't respect me for being there but I would never let anyone put me down. I insist on communicating. And if one person doesn't want to communicate with me, I just pass on and go to the other person to communicate with me. It depends how. For example, I was once in the court and one person refused to communicate with me because I didn't cover my face, so I covered my face and communicated with him. The point is communication; how to achieve that, it doesn't matter ... I realized that we talk much about what we can do for women, but why can't women do it for themselves? We did it here in Jeddah, what is stopping women from doing it there in Riyadh? But they need to want to do it and to work for it (FE6).*

Also, participants noted throughout their interviews that a great deal of female development actually starts within the family. Data show that females need similar encouragement from their parents as their male siblings.

*I believe that mothers should implant in their daughters that they are important figures in this society, and she can make a difference. We should stop teaching our daughters that it is very important to grow up and get married; no, because that isn't the most important thing. It is more important to have an education and a career to respectfully present yourself in this society, then marriage may come after that but you make your own identity, not your husband. We should also teach them that you and your male siblings are equal and independent and confident and you need to fight for their dreams. We as mothers should let our daughters, the new generations, work and fail and work again and again until they understand what they like and what they don't like so they can learn from their mistakes and grow better (FE1).*

Participants showed great thought regarding mixed gender atmospheres and how working females should present themselves. According to the data collected, some people did not believe that mixed gender workforces are prohibited in Islam as they

actually used Islamic stories to show that genders mixed together when needed. However, participants noted that females should not cross Islamic boundaries when they work. Hence, interviewees thought that females should always expect others to respect them and, thus, females need to present themselves with modesty in order to gain respect. Participants thought that females who do not present themselves in an Islamic manner honouring their values and Islamic identity are seen as a bad influence that just makes the rest look bad. Aside from appearances, it was also noted that females should learn how to speak professionally with confidence, in order to be taken seriously and without creating any negative reactions.

*But even then I used to go to government organizations or to the industrial area, I was strange, I was an alien. But it's important to know that people meaning "men" will learn to accept this alien meaning me and every working female depending on how we aliens behave and whether we add any benefits or not to the workforce. I tried not to be loud in [gaining] attention; I always wear the proper abaya the proper way and tried my best to not do anything of inconvenience for these organizations. So, in time, I stopped looking like an alien and they accepted me as a part of the family. It's just normal not to trust outsiders: we must understand that we are outsiders and newcomers and so we have to behave in the right way, know when to speak and what to say ... never become too friendly or too loud and stay updated with all that's around you. And most importantly, respect yourself so others will respect you in return (FE6).*

Another participant explained that women have a great responsibility in presenting themselves as Muslim women are expected to:

*It's not a big no-no to work together, men and females, I mean, but there should be regulations and rules towards this. Females need to look and present themselves in an appropriate Islamic fashion as their appearances here really are very important. For example, here in Riyadh, it's preferable if she covers her face and if she doesn't want to, then definitely she shouldn't have any make-up on. Unfortunately, mixed workforces here are brutally attacked and females who work in such atmospheres with no regards to their appearances are hated by the society because the society directly assumes that such females are flirts and disrespect their cultural identity. In fact, females now feel it's a competition who looks more sexy and appealing and that is against our religion. For example, I know a beautiful, smart very well-educated and hard female worker who has reached the age of 35 and still hasn't married. Most people think that because she works in a mixed environment looking stunningly sexy as she is, disregarding our Islamic cultural implications, she has unintentionally built herself a bad reputation in our society: as a result of neglecting society's level of expectations, now no Saudi man wants her hand in marriage ... So to be frank on the subject, the mixing isn't the real problem as much as the way it's approached. Females have just recently started to enter the workforce openly and their mistake is that they entered it giving the wrong impression. So back to the*

*question, I think if females and males are forced to work within our Islamic guidelines, things would go much smoother (FG2-6).*

Thus, females entering the workforce are expected to behave in ways that do not overly challenge the societal expectations regarding female behaviour and personal appearances.

#### *5.7.4 Segregated workforce a societal preference*

Most employed women in Saudi Arabia are teachers and women prefer the educational sector more than any other sector because it is totally secluded from men. Female teachers can always take work home and work with their schedules. There are other opportunities that include having to work together with male colleagues. To most participants, having both genders working in separate offices was seen as the efficient way to adjust with cultural norms. That is why there are less job opportunities due to a social preference for a separated-gender workforce.

Participants commented that in some private sector organizations there was less gender segregation than would normally be expected in Saudi organizations. Moreover, some noted that gender segregation in the workforce depends on the industry sector and the region. For example, in some instances such as the medical field, it would be reasonable to expect that women and men would work together.

*Another barrier is that some institutions have too much mixing between males and females which makes females not comfortable, and steals away a relaxing atmosphere, because this means we need to be wearing our hijab, where if we would have a separate area allows us to relax while working without our hijab and the abaya. So in my point of view, it's better for us: unfortunately, some of the institutions that offer female opportunities in the private sector prefer mixing the genders together (FU4).*

A number of participants showed concerns that non-segregated organizations do not comply with the societal values. Instead, they see that these organizations are in a way challenging them to encourage cultural change and lose their identity.

*Companies offering such gender mix offers to females are not respecting the culture and expect all females out there applying for these opportunities to adapt, not caring for their self-respect and how they are viewed through our society's eye. To be frank if I my daughters were offered good opportunities in mixed work environments where they will be subject to a lesser view of society, I would never accept to put them in such a corner and for what? I already give them all that they need (M4).*



*//Another thing about our culture is that there are restrictions to what exactly females can do and how she is treated and if she is being exposed to male colleagues or not. All these issues are culturally related to our identity and it is not easy to just let go of your identity for the sake of a job opportunity that in some cases you really don't need (FG2-3).*

Another participant thought that non-segregated workplaces were signs that indicated that females are not guided by their social structure and that they are becoming more and more Westernized. He thought that these signs meant that the Saudi culture is weakening as this shows that females who participate in non-segregated workplaces and their male relatives who do not mind this participation have lost their cultural respect and lost the meaning of honouring their cultural identity.

*We don't want our females to lose their identity and become free of our traditions and rebellious of our societal structure. Why make us hate female participation and stand against it? Why not participate in a manner that we can accept without a mixed workforce? It's not that we don't trust our females ... but I can't trust the men themselves especially if both genders meet on a daily basis. However, if meetings are made every month or so, that may keep things in a more professional formal manner and in a culturally respected way. A hard fact is that the mentality of men can't be helped: some disrespectful manager deals with our female staff as if they were his wives or daughters or something like that. And clashes happen between managers like, it's a bad expression, it's like we become bulls. We are facing each other, your female, my female, and people talk about it. Many problems occur between managers or employees because of a female in the middle. Unfortunately, if the female is not nice to her manager, that's it, it's over for her. I am trying to say that sexual harassment is a very big issue in the banking industry, not in an obvious physical manner but in a too friendly way which is against our culture and against our religion. Both genders are not professionally capable of working together without having problems. The environment should have certain rules. Although there are very strict rules but the employees are not taking advantage of it because it's a matter of what will be said about you. Out of my experience, I see separated working places for both genders to maintain a healthy institute (M7).*

One CEO suggested that cultural norms could be maintained and career opportunities still offered to women. Separate workspaces, from his point of view, need not mean that female employees would stop at certain levels of seniority in the organization or would not be able to supervise men.

*... if there is a will, there is a way, so we have the will and we have all communication technologies offered, so they don't need to be physically working together in order to progress. As long as we have dedicated facilities for women, it is perfectly fine. And the reason why we need to dedicate space for women is so they can have their freedom. You can't take off your abaya in a place where men are present, but if there is a women's section, at least you will have your freedom and*

*can function in a much more comfortable fashion. We don't have to break the rules: I think it's an attitude issue and it's a priority issue. If the organization has the right attitude, and recruitment of a woman is a priority, it's not a secondary issue (M2).*

From the same organization, a female participant added:

*As you can see, we have separate offices and we have our freedom while working and even though we have separate offices, we are not separate departments, meaning I manage men and men manage us, so we are not separate in the sense of achievements and tasks. It is the same thing when you have people managing others but they are in different cities; they communicate through Skype, or mail, telephones, or whatever means of communication they use, they manage to reach their goals. Here in XXXX, it is similar: I climb the ladder normally as any male employee. We are all equal in the sense of tasks and achievements. As long as there is a good way to communicate and understand one another, being separated doesn't stand as an obstacle if all institutes worked as XXXXX, having both females and males working together in one department; however, in separate offices makes it easier for us to achieve and climb the ladder normally, so there are girls in HR or in finance, R&D, OSS, where all these girls report directly to male managers or vice versa, so we are not a separate department, all in all (FE2).*

Thus, working together but separately was seen as a way of providing greater freedom for women. It maintains existing cultural structures and, therefore, was seen as a possible enabler for increasing women's employment.

#### 5.7.5 *Changing organizations*

Organizations should be aware of the female situation in the Saudi society. Some participants noted that organizations are only thinking of ways to increase their profit, and they have neglected the social contribution issue. Unfortunately, organizations and the majority of the private sector should be constantly reminded that some females are suffering because of lack of access to employment. Participants thought that some organizations, if not most, must be made aware of unemployment rates and female unemployment rates in particular. Continuous efforts in recognizing the true unemployment rates through statistics are important to increase awareness and to find methods to achieve guidelines to overcome the underutilization of educated Saudi women and unemployment. Participants noted that the private sector should work harder towards facilitating more jobs for the females in the Saudi society.

*For example, now you have Princess Nora University [Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University], the largest female university in the world, can you*

*imagine the maintenance staff? Not the people underground, but on top, the cleaners, this, this and this. From the simplest job, to the Dean of the university, they are all women. It's a perfect society and the private sector should also take some steps: not everything should be set on the lap of the government. No, the private sector should help understand that the society is too protective of their females and that they won't allow females to work in mixed environments. So, do we want to cause marital problems by not helping them have their separate places or do we want them to feel comfortable coming in the workforce? It's a matter of welcoming them and how we do it. In my point of view, the government has done a lot towards setting the scene for female participants; however, the rest really relies on how the workforce itself cooperates towards this (M6).*

Organizations need to have the willingness to welcome female employees to their companies. As another participant explains:

*Obviously there is a culture issue which is that a lot of employers don't have any provision for women workers: maybe they want to hire women especially nowadays; like, in Jeddah, people have hired women; they found that they are really productive, hard workers and want to grow with the company. So they actually want to hire them, but those companies that don't hire women don't have female facilities; they don't have restrooms and separate sections for them. They are scared if they hire them, there will be interference from the religious police and they can shut down their activities (FE7).*

There is an understanding that organizations need to change their structures and policies to offer equitable opportunities that promote female employment that fits within social expectations and promotes female career development. Nearly all participants saw that females' employment should maintain female-only sections which are seen as culturally appropriate.

#### 5.7.6 Governmental aid

Data collected reveal that some participants are aware of the Arab Spring and that any controversial topics such as this may cause matters to worsen if females continue to take a political stand. For example, challenging the culture by driving cars has caused further concerns whether the government should or should not agree to quick changes. Participants thought that the government has done a lot of positive encouragement regarding female development and the rest remains in the Saudi society's hands. One participant noted that:

*With neighbouring countries entering a new phase, the government will not force any unwanted change upon the society. Instead, such matters will be left to society. Now the government when they want to do something, they have to weigh the social*

*reaction and then take their decision: everything they introduce now has become more complicated as you can notice what's going on around us in nearby countries. It has become a mess, so the government is being extra cautious of the social reaction to things introduced ... But the private sector can introduce and work towards this in a much healthier way (M6).*

Another participant stated that this was not a time to agitate for further changes. She explained that although the government encourages the development of female participation in the workforce, small strategic steps are required to slowly gain the nation's acceptance.

*There are several problems that face Saudi Arabia. First of all, changing tribal concepts and cultural traditions is extremely hard even if the government wishes for such change. This is because Saudi Arabia is the only country responsible as the custodians of the two holy mosques. Hence, tribes may create conflicts against the government if change is forced on them. Let's not forget the major issue with the Arab Spring. Things are scary at the meantime and peace and security are a main concern to everyone. So this is a very delicate situation and we must appreciate that the government has already done a lot of efforts towards female participation and we need to help ourselves in terms of pushing female participation forwards. Put in mind it needs time for people themselves to change without the need to force change upon them. As we see, the new generations coming up from the same tribes have different mentalities ... so maybe after 10-20 years, there will be a huge change (FE3).*

Hence, some participants believed that such decisions are better left for the public to decide. In terms of the Saudi society, female participation has become an issue of conflict and a political stand for change. However, the fight to increase female participation needs to address several layers of problems. Therefore, other participants suggested that the government will provide an organized system that can provide the facilities and services required to encourage further female participation. Some participants thought that the government should provide transportation options that will help decrease out-of-pocket expenses for female employees who are currently required to have personal drivers.

*Some females don't have any public transportation. This is truly a problem! This is an issue that the government should help us with; the government should establish public transportation. I am not saying we need to drive, but at least to have public transportation for females, and some females work for about 3000 SR and hire a driver to take her to work for 1500 SR, so why should she work if half her salary is spent on a private driver? (FU4).*

Also, other participants added that the government can also provide guidelines, training facilities, quotas and entry systems that can work for private organizations to smoothly encourage more female participation. It was interesting to note that it was not only females calling for quotas.

*... government policies in which they should empower and provide more and push more at these for female employment, both in the government sectors and in the private sectors. I think the government or at least the government policy should encourage, also should support and maybe should even introduce quotas, which a specific number of females have to be in specific organizations. I think they need it, and it is very important indeed to deal with the unemployment in the female sector to have the government enact quotas in government and also in the private sector and also open other employment opportunity for her in the government sectors. They need to at least be an enhancer, an enabler and at least pushing the social changes and opening opportunities for the females to at least have more opportunity to assume jobs. It is very important; I mean, I think some statistics speak about 40% unemployment of the female side in Saudi Arabia. I think they need at least to address this issue and address it now. And I think those are some of the ideas that might be used and I reaffirm the quotas: it has been successful in other countries. It should be at least introduced here, and I think it's the only and the most important element enhancing female opportunities in Saudi Arabia (M1).*

Other participants thought that female employment would cause private organizations to incur costs in welcoming them on board by providing them with separate offices and separate entrances. Thus, participants thought that the government should address this matter by offering organizations incentives to employ females:

*... additional costs, you have to at least provide separate places, separate entrance, separate facilities, why should organizations lose money to do all that? The government then should address this issue by offering incentives and recognition to those companies who do welcome female employees to their companies. The government already offers incentives for employing people with special needs. Like the Saudization percentage, when employing one person with special needs is like employing two Saudis in the Saudization percentages. There are no incentives for employing women at all. There are a lot of women supporting their families here. It is rare to find large organizations that have a sense of corporate social responsibility: they have it in their agenda to employ a number of women and to empower the families they are supporting. Otherwise I see companies not really looking into it: they talk about it but when it comes to the details and problems, I can understand why they disappear; they don't want to tell you in details that these are the issues. They always mention other issues that are not related to it. But thinking from their point of view, it's an extra effort and extra money. As a company, a profit entity, what motivates them to do so? (FE6).*

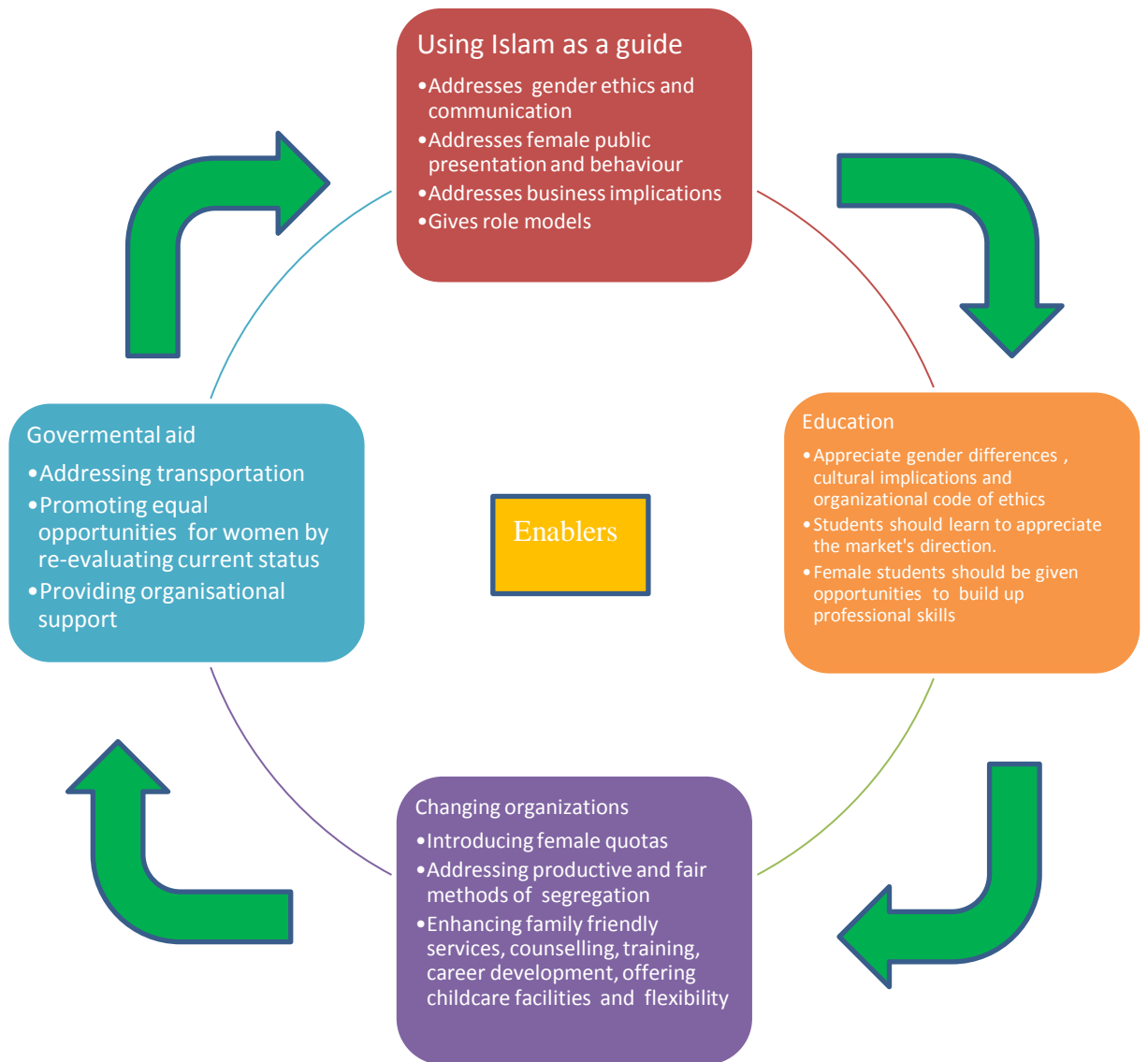
Other participants thought that the government could easily encourage cultural change towards female empowerment and participation by promoting that organizations should treat all employees fairly without gender discrimination, and by providing awareness conferences and learning and improvement programs.

*So it's a matter that the biggest enabler is promoting this culture of you don't have to break the rules to ensure that women are getting the right benefits or giving them equal opportunity and elevating the importance of the role of women in both private sector and public sector. And this doesn't happen casually or by coincidence; it has to be done in an institutionalized fashion, and this culture must be promoted aggressively (M8).*

Finally, a participant summed up her interview with this thought:

*I feel that fairness in opportunity will help, maybe a statistical count of the females who are really in need to work. We need transportation means, buses, private cars from our houses to work and back to our houses. And childcare facilities to all those females who don't have anyone capable of taking care of their children. Or introduce part-time jobs? Some females can work in morning times, others prefer afternoon and most importantly is the appreciation of our status as mothers, wives, daughters and employees. I think it is all possible to be addressed but easier if the government will address it in a manner that organizations can take it seriously (FU7).*

In search of the enablers for female participation, the following figure will assist:



**Figure 5.3 Enablers according to participants**

## 5.8 Differences of Views

Table 5.2 below highlights the differences in the strength of the views regarding the identified key issues from one group to another.

**Table 5.2 Differences in views of groups**

Issues identified	M	FE	FU	FG1	FG2
Female empowerment	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX
Islam an enabler	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX
Segregated workplaces	XXX	XX	XXX	X	XXX
Governmental aid	XXX	XXX	XXX	XX	XXX
Equity in opportunities	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX
Part-time jobs and family friendly policies	XXX	XXX	XXX	X	XXX
Education meets market needs	XXX	XXX	XXX	XX	XX
Using Islamic figures as role models	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX

Note: <sup>12</sup>

From the above table, it can be assumed that the majority of respondents within all groups strongly agreed that female empowerment should be embraced and promoted within the Saudi society. Moreover, all respondents strongly agreed that using

<sup>12</sup> XXX Participants strongly agreed  
 XX Participants showed moderate level of agreement  
 X Participants were neutral.



Islamic guidelines and Islamic female figures as role models to promote female participation in the Saudi workforce was the best approach. Although respondents differed on how the government may assist in providing services to promote female participation, the majority emphasized that change is sensitive and to enforce radical change, governmental assistance is required to achieve equity in opportunities.

Employed females (FE) and young female graduate respondents (FG1) showed that segregation in the workforce, although culturally and socially significant, remains a choice of preference, meaning that some females may not find it as important and may accept working in non-segregated workplaces if they are required to do so. FG1 and FG2 respondents did not emphasize the need to redirect female students to fit within the market needs as did other respondents of other groups.

## ***5.9 Conclusion***

In this chapter, the researcher gave the interviewees the stage from which to speak and be heard. The researcher acted as an event organizer to allow the audience to sit back and hear the real issues regarding female participation in Saudi Arabia.

The findings were presented in such a manner that the reader could understand more about the cultural implications that influence societal expectations. Furthermore, the researcher hopes to have given the reader a realistic view of Islamic implications towards female participation through the eyes and hearts of Muslim Saudi nationals. Moreover, the participants were able to discuss their worries about what they felt made female participation difficult and then to reflect on these barriers by offering what they thought could work as enablers.

From the above key findings, it can be concluded that culture, tradition and norms play a major role regarding female participation in paid employment in Saudi Arabia. Although females show growing efforts in proving that men are not the only potential available in the workplace, some respondents agreed that organizational structures, as with social structures, continue to emphasize male-dominated structures. Due to some socio-cultural confusion regarding Islam and female participation, most respondents emphasized the importance of using Islamic guides, methods and female participation stories from the days of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) to promote female participation.

Although Metcalfe's (2008) "equal but different" philosophy was informed by cultural respect, participants thought that it would not have drastic effects in increasing female participation. The majority of participants saw that working females are already treated equally in terms of their salaries, and are being treated differently in terms of office separation in most workplaces. However, most female participants emphasized the importance of radical change: they felt that highlighting socio-cultural structures that discriminate against females would not help in achieving change towards promoting female participation in the workforce. Other participants suggested methods such as equitable opportunities, and family friendly policies that appreciate the female potential and the differences due to their increased responsibilities as mothers.

In most, if not all, interviews, respondents showed that a level of appreciation and value of social identity is important in keeping the essence of culture. Segregation in offices does not necessarily mean that females would be overlooked in decision making, organizational activities and meetings. Most working respondents, especially those who held high positions, realized that organizational structures should keep female employees in separate offices to maintain cultural norms; however, including females within the same organizational structure and system to maintain equity in opportunities and career development was seen as vital. Therefore, participants thought it was important to maintain segregation in the workforce. However, most male respondents pointed out the importance of addressing segregation methods and approaches that promote female participation and career progress.

Systemic barriers face many graduates when they are seeking to join the workforce. In a male-dominated workforce reinforced with social structures that place emphasis on gender differences, many females face several challenges. Many unemployed and some employed females pointed out that the lack of both part-time jobs and family friendly policies made balancing time between family responsibilities and work a great burden. Many respondents agreed that traditionally operated systems in employment and promotion, and employment methods that discriminate against women within organizations should be addressed. Many female respondents found themselves clueless in terms of "how", "where" and "who" to connect with for job applications. Some participants felt that graduates are offered low pay which forces

females to accept being overlooked in the workforce. Some of the highly positioned respondents pointed out that many females may lack knowledge of market demand and direction, resulting in many graduates with unneeded skills. Many of the unemployed females and some employed females thought that organizations do not take responsibility in securing transportation for their female employees which may cause female potential to continue lagging behind. This chapter hopes that it has made the participants' voices heard.

# CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

How women manage depends far more on the organisation and the task in hand than their gender. How women are judged is another matter (Edwards and Wajcman 2005, 83).

## *6.1 Introduction*

In the preceding chapter through the presentation of the data, participants outlined in detail what they believed to be the barriers and enablers to female participation in the Saudi workforce. This thesis has sought to examine the various ways that the social dimension of female participation in the Saudi workforce is being interpreted, as well as where the drivers and barriers to change lie. In this chapter, the discussion will allow a critical examination of the issues regarding female participation to be presented through the participants' views. Understanding the issues and addressing them from various levels of meaning is by itself an amazing journey. Thus, in this chapter, it is essential to think in the manner of "so what?" in presenting the discussion. "So what?" may answer the question: how can we learn from the participants, and from Western and Eastern literature regarding female participation in the workforce? It also helps us to address the central question of this thesis: how can we develop and encourage female participation in the Saudi workforce in a way that suits the Saudi system in general?

Feminist research has shown that developing gender regimes includes an evaluation of the labour market, institutional domains, equality, justice and democracy (Walby 2009; Segal and Chow 2011; Metcalfe and Woodhams 2012; Acker 2006).

This chapter draws on Fletcher, Bailyn and Blake-Beard's (2009) approach. This approach is seen to be unique as they aim to bring effective practices together with equity in addressing dominant perspectives and discriminatory work behaviours.

Linking equality and effectiveness is a way of operationalizing the goal of creating discursive space in which new ways of doing work might surface. Focussing on work practices that have effectiveness as well as equity implications relaxes the adversarial positioning of marginalized versus dominant perspectives, and also engages a broader constituency (84).

In discussing the assumptions of female participation in Saudi Arabia, this study uses a similar approach to Fletcher et al. (2009) which is to “identify opportunities to interrupt and resist power dynamics embedded in the status quo (87)” through addressing the following two questions:

- What are the barriers that keep and hold females away from employment?
- What can we do to ease and relax these barriers to increase female participation in the Saudi workforce?

In this manner, key sections of this chapter will focus on the individual barriers identified and how these barriers may be relaxed or removed to increase female participation. Hence, an overview of the following factors to be discussed in this chapter is shown in Table 6.1:

**Table 6.1 Discussion outline**

Factors discussed	Identified Barriers	Enablers:
Cultural Constraints	Gendered roles. The Saudi female identity mixed with fears of loss.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing socio-cultural boundaries regarding female participation</li> <li>• Female empowerment through Islam</li> </ul>
Facilitating female participation through governmental aid	Systemic procedures that unintentionally reinforce traditional male workforce domination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentives</li> <li>• Childcare facilities</li> <li>• Where to look for jobs</li> </ul>
Facilitating female participation from an organizational perspective	Traditional male-dominated working systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural change</li> <li>• Implementing female quotas</li> <li>• Offering transportation services</li> <li>• Addressing low salaries</li> <li>• Female career counselling</li> <li>• Offering workshops on communication between the genders</li> </ul>
Educational development to increase female participation	<p>Females lack knowledge of the market direction and the skills needed.</p> <p>Females lack knowledge of their rights as employees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting female career counselling</li> <li>• Highlighting the market direction</li> <li>• Employee rights</li> <li>• Professional skills</li> <li>• Using Islam as a guide</li> <li>• Clashes between genders may be guided with an Islamic perspective.</li> </ul>

## 6.2 Cultural Constraints

Culture and traditional implications, as highlighted in previous chapters and through the interviews, has great influence regarding the development of female participation in the Saudi workforce. According to research on female development in neighbouring countries such as United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman and Bahrain, working females face cultural conflicts that result in female discrimination in the

workforce (Wilkinson 1996; Achoui 2009; Al Rasheed 2013b). Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, participants linked female discrimination in the workforce to cultural conflicts within the society. This section will discuss the following:

- Gendered ideologies
- Addressing socio-cultural boundaries regarding female employment
- Female empowerment through Islam

### 6.2.1 *Gendered ideologies*

Research shows that economies have much to gain from equal opportunities for both genders (Smith and Akram-Lodhi 2013; Gupta 2013; Shain 2013).

The enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them: Empowerment of women is the prerequisite to transform a developing country into a developed country. Women's empowerment generally has five components: firstly, women's sense of self-worth; secondly, their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside home; and lastly, their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a just social and economic order nationally, internationally and universally. Educational attainment and economic participation are the key constituents in ensuring the empowerment of women. The economic empowerment of women is a vital element of strong economic growth in any country. Empowering women enhances their ability to influence changes and to create a better society (Singh and Gupta 2013, 54).

However, as seen in the literature and as noted by participants, domestic tasks, childbearing and other submissive roles are reported by participants as gendered roles given to women in Saudi Arabia. Traditional gendered mindsets and attitudes may negatively affect female employment opportunities. Such gendered roles in a society stem from societal traditions that raise females to become dependants, mothers and absent in public life (Hamdan 2005; Smith 1987; Doumato 1999; Tatli et al. 2012; Dasgupta and Sudarshan 2011; Charlebois 2012). Similarly, gender ideologies rooted in the socio-economic traditions of Saudi Arabia have dictated that women are dependent homemakers (Hamdan 2005; Achoui 2009; Akeel 2011; Al-Ahmadi 2011; Al-Munajjed 2010).

Questions are raised regarding why women should work if their financial needs are being met. Although, Islam has encouraged and supported female development in economic opportunities, it has left the decision whether or not to work for females to

decide, and has required that men support their women financially even if their women were financially stable. Although participants from all interview groups (M, FE and FU) reported that education has opened up opportunities for women to develop their careers, they also noted that some women remain driven by traditional restrictions from joining the workforce.

Participants also reported that some nationals believe that females are precious jewels that must be protected, even if this means preventing females from achieving personal career development. Participants reported that, although some may seem to find that preventing their females from gaining employment is the best way to protect them from outside harm, to many others, gendered mindsets that prevent females from personal growth and career development have made females redundant.

Indisputably, a wide gap exists between laws that purport to legislate equality based on sex and the reality of women's lives. The existence of these norms, however, fabricates a myth of equality providing ammunition to the critics of feminist perspectives and maintaining women's status quo. The very documents that supposedly protect women's rights are themselves part of the conspiracy to silence women and render them invisible (Hernandez-Truyol 1995, 239).

Gender order in the Saudi society has made protecting Saudi women a social implication that acts to keep females in dependent positions and best suited to becoming caring mothers. Assumptions of male gender roles state that men are breadwinners and decision makers. Such assumptions limit female empowerment, life choices, opportunities in the workforce and, finally, female possibilities of developing themselves career-wise.

Although there has been some progress in female participation in Saudi Arabia (Alajmi 2001; Al-Khalaf 2009; Sechzer 2004; Elamin and Omair 2010), interviewees interestingly reflected that in times of change such as they believe they are currently experiencing, younger generations give traditional gender roles much thought. Younger generations, according to the participants, are challenging such gender ideologies. Interviewees gave examples such as the ongoing protests seeking to allow women to drive. As stated by Al Nafjan, "the Princess Adelah, Princess Basma bint Saud, Princess Amira Al Taweel and Princess Loloah Al Faisal, royal family members have all advocated lifting the ban on women driving" (Al Nafjan 2011). Recently, with rapid development made in the educational sector, the government's commitment to Saudization and female career funds and supports indicates that the



Saudi society is currently riding the tide of change. Participants agreed that fathers now are actually supporting their daughters to pursue development in their working careers. According to some participants, cultural change is a big word that will scare everyone away; however, it is happening without the need to emphasize it. This approach to quietly changing existing practices is in line with Meyerson's "tempered radical" approach (Meyerson 2003). By this participants felt that the Saudi female may achieve equal participation in the workforce if they utilise a tempered radical approach in managing identity tensions within the conflicting and hegemonic values of their workforce. That is they can operate within the existing system in order to change the system.

Renard (2008) states that females have become less concerned with cultural restraints. Renard reports that, in previous years, major cities have seen increasing numbers of restaurants and cafes that cater to female customers (Renard 2008). Other examples include allowing a Saudi female to participate for the first time in the Olympic Games in 2012 (Gibson 2012). Moreover, Dar Alhikma, a Jeddah-based university, has made tremendous efforts in developing careers for women in Saudi Arabia. It recently celebrated the graduation of the first class of 67 female firefighters (*Arab News* 2012). Through a higher level of empowerment, the King himself has allowed female participation in Al-Shoura Council where previously females did not hold any authoritative positions. Thirty females took an oath in front of the King himself to serve as members of the council commencing on 27 February 2013 (*Al-Arabiya* 2013). Moreover, the female presence in higher leadership positions has begun to be more visible with women holding positions such as deputy minister (*Al Jazeera* 2009), university president and board members of the chambers of commerce (*Al-Ahmadi* 2011). Hence, as seen through the level of female empowerment introduced to the Saudi society, the government has made tremendous efforts in developing female careers and economic participation (*Al-Ahmadi* 2011; *Islam* 2014). It can be assumed, given these developments, that the battle towards a fair opportunity for all in the workforce should not be as hard as it seems because some educated females of the Saudi society do not want to remain as silent dependants sitting in the passenger's seat with education and talent wasted (*Islam* 2014).

However, the literature provides evidence that gendered roles and traditional mindsets cause a major barrier towards female participation (Al-Gazali 2013). Participants noted the need to defy current gender ideologies to achieve equal opportunities but, more importantly, to secure female rights in a male-dominated world.

This type of “one step forward, two steps back” behaviour means that Saudi women are still being denied their full rights as citizens. There are important currents of change and signs of hope for improved women’s rights in Saudi Arabia; however, reform driven by economic necessity and legislative change is not enough. Saudi Arabia requires a shift in the way people think about women (Akeel 2011).

Whilst it is encouraging to see evidence of some change in female participation, in professional occupations, there has been little challenge to current gender ideologies. Women still require male approval to participate actively in public.

Thus, the lack of economic opportunities offered to Saudi females is a problem that possibly stems from the gendered socio-cultural implications that give females a passive role in society (Al-Ahmadi 2011; Al-Lamki 2007; Omair 2008; Gallant and Pounder 2008; Al-Munajjed 2010; Al Rasheed 2013b; Metcalfe 2011; Elamin and Omair 2010).

Answers to the question of “*how may we relax gender role implications embedded in the Saudi society that keep female participation lagging behind?*” are discussed in further detail in the following section.

### *6.2.2 Addressing socio-cultural boundaries regarding female employment*

Concerns were expressed by participants that the Saudi society attached to their culture will not accept Western approaches imposed on their values. They explained that cultural differences and gender roles, if not respected, may result in cultural clashes and increasing conflict (Narayan 2009; Sidani 2005; Moussalli 2009). Such gender roles are seen within the Saudi cultural identity. Some people are afraid that with female progress, females will lose their cultural identity (Meijer 2010; Narayan 2009; Sidani 2005; Moussalli 2009).

Unfortunately, such disputes relating to loss of cultural identity may grow out of proportion and become aggressive resulting in a society that has strong conflicting views (Morley and Robins 2013; Narayan 2009; Cadsby et al. 2013).

According to participants, it is important that female participation is facilitated in a manner that is acceptable to a conservative society where females will be supported by their families in joining the workforce. Therefore, understanding the importance of undertaking matters in a manner that is respectful to the Saudi culture was seen as a better method to approach the issue of female participation (Danish and Smith 2012).

As Renard explains: “state reforms regarding women are not compulsory, but rather depend on the family's choice: in the end, it is the legal guardian who decides to give or withhold consent to his daughter's education, work.” (Renard 2008, 617). Therefore, it is essential that families and specifically male guardians support female development and empowerment as the journey literally starts within their hands. In this sense, organizations that welcome female participation should think of doing so in a manner that can provide opportunities that are, in the first instance, acceptable to most segregated workplaces to maintain family and social consent.

Participants found that there are two important issues regarding female participation. In an Islamic country, when promoting female participation, participants’ advice was to use Islamic guidelines and stories in the approach used and equally important was to maintain the balance of cultural norms, by maintaining the balance of segregation.

### *6.2.3 Female empowerment through Islam*

As seen in the findings chapter (Chapter 5), participants expressed some concern that some people fail to detach Islamic implications from cultural norms. This may lead many to think that Islam has prohibited women from joining or interacting as work colleagues with men in the workforce (Vidyasagar and Rea 2004; Achoui 2009; Elamin and Omair 2010). Participants and the literature both reflect that Islam actually promotes female development, equal economic participation and equal rights as citizens. However, the surrounding cultural context in Saudi Arabia emphasizes conservative traditions about gender roles which are perceived as having become entangled with Islamic requirements and traditions.

Participants saw that one of the key facilitators of female participation would appear to be addressing the strong gender stereotypes held by the Saudi society. Positive Islamic stories highlighting women's contribution may provide a useful way to raise awareness (Fatany 2007).

Looking into Islamic books, Hadith scripts and Qur'an verses provides plenty of examples that women in the early days of Islam were given respect and appreciation.

Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) teachings provide examples of freedom of choice and empowerment. For instance, although men are obliged to pray all five prayers in the mosque, Prophet Mohammed gave women freedom of choice for whether or not they wanted to pray in the mosque because he knew that women had greater responsibilities like childcare. It is important to note that prayers were not the only reason one would go to the mosque: educational lectures and social community meetings were also held in the mosques and were also made accessible to all Muslims regardless of gender. Hence, Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) prohibited men from keeping their wives from attending the mosques. Al-Hashimi (2003) reported that:

... one of Umar's wives used to pray *fajr* and *Isha* in congregation in the mosque. She was asked, 'why do you go out (to the mosque) when you know that Umar dislikes this and is a jealous man?' She said, 'what is stopping him from forbidding me (to do so)?' He said, 'the words of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH): 'If the wife of any of you asks permission to go to the mosque, do not stop her (35).

Making an important point is that females in the days of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) were given more empowerment over their personal choices and public visibility than Saudi females have today.

Women in Saudi Arabia are not able to function without the presence or the consent of a male guardian. In some cases, women have no guardians. An interview filmed by a TV program and named *Nawafith* (2009) which means "windows" captured unfortunate women in distress looking for any opportunities or jobs. The interview, later posted on YouTube in 2009, shows young and older women suffering from being abandoned by their male guardians. In situations like this females suffer from a gendered social trap where men hold the power in their relationship. Others have identified cultural traps; Peredo and McLean (2013) for example speak of "cultural

captivity” in relation to entrepreneurial activities in developing economies. They highlight the importance of power relations and underpinning assumptions.

In such unfortunate cases, social and structural gender order values and procedures victimize some women in Saudi Arabia (Fageeh 2014). Some females suffer due to gender order and from lack of empowerment and self-direction, finding themselves in very difficult situations (Segal and Chow 2011; Walby et al. 2012; Walby 2009; Fageeh 2014).

In such situations, women should be supported by the system and be given opportunities to become productive individuals who may function in the Saudi society without the need of a male guardian. Participants thought that women in the days of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) were treated with much more respect for their individuality. While cultural implications are reinforced, such systemic procedures can become overwhelming for some unfortunate women (Fageeh 2014). Participants showed their concern that all females in Saudi Arabia need family support to live and function; without family support, women are lost in a society that does not offer further support for such women.

Participants indicated that traditional gendered order has resulted in a loss of acknowledgment of female contributions and capabilities to their society and has denied them their rights to be active figures in building their economy. Similarly, Hernandez-Truyol (1995) agrees:

the interplay between cultural notions of inferiority and social structural relationships that predictably have denied women equal participation in the articulation, development, implementation, and enforcement of rights ... the problems of disenfranchisement and invisibility are compounded because these limitations maintain the status quo of subordination and ensure that women will remain ill-equipped to vindicate, let alone assert, their rights (240).

Participants felt sad to have lost their status from being seen as well-respected achievers to just being perceived as housewives. Although no one suggested that being a mother is not a big responsibility, participants believed that females are able to handle responsibilities as both a mother and an employee, if they wished. Thus, participants emphasized that cultural restrictions against female empowerment should be addressed by Islamic values and stories through schools and media, and always be projected to society.

It is important to note that Islamic teachings emphasize that it is equally important that women appear modest to prevent suspicions of lust. Women in Islam are required to always wear their hijab in public, a formal dress that will cover her body and hair. Al-Hashimi (2003) cites the Qur'an:

Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions. That is purer for them. Surely Allah is aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions and do not display their adornments except what appears thereof. And let them wear their head coverings over their bosoms. And they should not display their adornment except to their husbands or their fathers or ... And turn to Allah all, O believers, so that you may be successful (The Holy Qur'an Ch. 24, 30, 31).

The participants discussed that it was important to note that they saw nothing discriminatory about the order. Men are asked to lower their gaze first before the same order is given to women.

As seen in the previous verse, women are asked to dress decently in public places. Relevantly, in other religions too, “modesty is a virtue, women wear loose fitting clothes to work” (Rao 2012, 235). Female professional appearances that comply with religious implications are seen as a mark of faith that symbols purity, dignity, honour and integrity (Rao 2012). As suggested by Rao (2012), managerial implications highlight diversity in a manner that avoids religious-cultural clashes and conflict. Similarly, Rutledge et al. (2011) and Metcalfe (2008) agree that in conservative cultural societies such as Saudi Arabia protecting one's honour is a common tradition. However, this should not be linked as a reason for the low rates of female participation. Female participation can be promoted through encouraging the workforce to promote ethical Islamic conduct and suppress gendered cultural stereotypes that emphasize the suspicion of damaging one's reputation.

This is in contrast to Western views on the subordination of women (Bilge 2010; Goodwin 2004; Abu-Lughod 2002). Although some may see that women in conservative cultures need to be liberalised from cultural norms and religious implications, in conservative cultures, unlike Western society, being a part of the social group is respecting its values. Thus, different socio-cultural norms demand different structures that fall in line with one another (Abu-Lughod 2002; Meijer 2010; Sidani 2005; Achoui 2009; Al-Ahmadi 2011; Al-Munajjed 2010).

Similarly, participants emphasized the importance of maintaining an Islamic dress code. Participants saw that it was necessary that working females looked appropriate and modest to show that their existence in the workforce is only professional. Interviewees reflected that modesty in appearance is an Islamic rule that must be seriously respected, especially in an Islamic society where Islamic values must be addressed (Patel 2012; Al-Hashimi 2003; Sharify-Funk and Haddad 2012).

Although Islamic history presents many female figures who are empowered and supported, many Saudi females today lack such empowerment. This emphasizes the notion that cultural restraints reduce female empowerment. Although there are recognized efforts to change some restrictive cultural restraints, participants believed that the first step to female empowerment should be personal empowerment gained through family support. Similarly, Al-Ahmadi (2011) notes that empowerment as a state of mind remains an issue of growth depending on the level of authority and independence in Saudi females (Al-Ahmadi 2011). Many participants' views were in agreement that female participation on a professional level in the Saudi labour market should be promoted through emphasizing Islamic codes of conduct (Rutledge et al. 2011).

#### ***6.2.3.1 How can we relax gender roles embedded in cultural implications that tend to discriminate against female participation?***

Social awareness of female contributions to the growing economies in the days of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and his followers should stop cultural rejections of female development in the workforce in professional positions. Guided by Islamic implications, the promotion of female participation and development in the Saudi workplace should be advocated through the social media, online channels (Shirky 2011; Masek 2013), universities, schools and common mosque lectures.

Participants expressed the need for females to be treated and raised equally with their male siblings. According to many participants, change starts within our homes. Families are more aware of the need to empower their children equally. Some participants thought that discrimination against females should stop within families first, then it will eventually find its way to the workforce.

Importantly, using Islam as a guide, as suggested by participants, should help new generations in raising boys and girls as equal in achievements and development. This

could be advocated through the media, online channels, social media (Shirky 2011; Masek 2013), educational institutions and common mosque lectures.

Educational methods to facilitate female participation in professional career paths also need to be addressed: this will be further explained later in this chapter. Organizations play a major role in supporting female participation by offering opportunities that will address the traditional male-dominated system: this is also discussed in detail later in this chapter.

From a systemic perspective, governmental aid that sponsors female development ranging from unemployed graduates through to professional career paths may further enhance female opportunities. The following section will discuss strategies that could be presented through governmental channels to enhance female participation.

### **6.3 Governmental Aid**

Hernandez-Truyol (1995) states:

Cultures continue to ignore or deny occurrences of domestic violence ... violations of women's human rights include not only physical abuse, but also extend to the systematic denial and discriminatory restrictions of such fundamental freedoms as voting, marriage, travel, testifying in court ... and obtaining custody of children. The practice of limiting access to education, employment, healthcare ... is shocking in this day and age as we approach the twenty-first century (1995, 5).

The government's effort in constantly developing educational programs and opportunities is an indirect approach in developing the Saudi workforce and enhancing its capabilities. A growing realization among Gulf countries is that there is:

the need to move from a commodity-dependent allocative state economic model to a more diversified and knowledge-based one ... in order for these states to increase the competitiveness of their non-oil sectors as they integrate more deeply into the global economy (Rutledge et al. 2011, 183).

Hence, restructuring the market to increase opportunities for Saudi nationals including females has invited many political, economic, cultural and social challenges.

Females in Saudi Arabia face restrictive systemic procedures that reinforce gender order attitudes and discrimination. The government may play a major role in



amending some systemic procedures that reinforce cultural restrictions, and facilitate changing male-dominated systems in organizations (Avdeyeva 2010; Hernandez-Truyol 1995).

As shown through statistics provided in earlier chapters, most female employees are found in the educational sector, followed by the medical and banking sectors. Participants showed the need to address such gendered opportunities, and to open up opportunities everywhere to create a truly diverse workforce. Participants agreed that female positions should be made available in the police department, the fire department and many other authoritative positions. It was seen that such female workers could help in situations like female-only places. There are many stories and situations where the police department or the fire department was not as successful when approaching female-only places. Meijer (2010) gives an example where female students and teachers were not rescued in 2002 from a fire hazard that took place in their school. In such unfortunate cases, females become victims of cultural implications that are reinforced by law, restricting females from many of their individual rights. Some unemployed female participants noted that females are dependent figures by law, thus making it easy to overlook discrimination against women in Saudi Arabia, as females require male representatives to lodge complaints or to seek justice. Some females find themselves abused by their male relatives. Others are deprived of their rights to seek education, work or socialize. As participants asked themselves: what happens to women who are violated by their male representatives? How can they survive in a conservative society without support if their male supporters no longer exist? In such urgent cases, unemployed female participants suggested that figures with authoritative power such as female police or family aid officers may offer help in case of violence against females. In such cases, the government has the responsibility to reinforce female empowerment through such facilities that can offer female assistance.

In a conservative society, understanding the amount of support that females require as working mothers is essential. Governments can establish practical institutions that aim to achieve gender equality in the workforce (Avdeyeva 2010). Female consultants in gender equality should be included in decision-making groups in such governmental institutions. They can offer a female perspective in facilitating the services that are needed to establish a healthy working lifestyle for the Saudi female

professional worker. The following responsibilities of such governmental institutions could assist in increasing female participation:

- Create comprehensive communication channels regarding female employment
- Incentives towards more female employment
- Address attractiveness in the private sector

It is vitally important to create communication channels between various private sectors and specialized government sectors through which to share knowledge about employment and work and to discuss and address the obstacles such as by offering segregation incentives, higher salaries and training facilities.

### *6.3.1 Establishment of comprehensive communication channels promoting female employment*

Female employment in Saudi Arabia can be considered as something that is fairly new compared to other countries; hence, guidance and continuous evaluation should be in place to maintain a healthy working environment and to provide feedback to improve working qualities.

It is important to compare the country's policy provisions with today's requirements (Avdeyeva 2010). Hence, establishing comprehensive policies could aim to enable and increase female participation and development in the Saudi workforce. Moreover, adapting to a designed blueprint that provides strategies for achieving equity in opportunities between genders is important to maintain progress (Avdeyeva 2010). Organizations may lack awareness of the untapped female resources available to them, or may choose to deny that there is a problem of the increasing rate of unemployment among female graduates.

In a male-dominated workforce, it may be normal to overlook female unemployment rates. This is especially so in a society with strengthened gender inequality which can be seen in many social and traditional behaviours, and in most political and institutional structures. Therefore, specialized labour departments should underline the necessity creating divisions that supervise and guide female employment in public and private workplaces to secure systemic changes in organizational structures and to ensure gender equality in terms of opportunities. Organizations may also lack

knowledge about how to implement strategies that can work as guidelines to establish productive working arrangements with new female employees. Switching from a male-dominated workplace to a diverse workplace may seem challenging without such communication channels between them and the government. The government can encourage organizational participation in learning programs to understand the issues concerning female employment and to work together to tackle these obstacles.

Similarly, the 'dual agenda' identified by Fletcher, Bailyn and Blake-Beard (2009, 2012) is the goal of a feminist work advancement group that aims to improve organizations' attitudes towards gender equity.

We use the term 'dual agenda' to describe the goal of the change effort, because we want to make clear how our approach differs from others ... This bringing together of equity and effectiveness is what makes our approach different, even though the steps in our process are similar to those of any change effort: formation of an internal advisory group, data collection, data analysis, feedback and action planning (84).

Fletcher et al. (2009, 2012) set out three steps towards shifting a masculine-based organization to a neutral organization that values equity and effectiveness. Firstly, to create equity and effective work production, in collaboration with the organization, an internal advisory group is created. Then, interviews are conducted at all levels of management and across all divisions aiming to gather data from all personnel, both females and males. Underlining the importance of change, through these interviews the employees are asked to share their knowledge in three areas:

- Work culture: the normal process of work, the barriers to more effective production, the types of attitudes or methods for getting things done in an appreciative and effective manner.
- Advancement of women: reasons for delaying women's advancement, opinions on how women can advance themselves in leadership, opinions on how the organization may assist in advancing women.
- Strategic challenges: thinking of new productive methods, attitudes and strategies.

Finally, the third step is to interpret the data via themes through a feminist post-structural lens. This brings forth silenced and marginalized voices. By disrupting the

power seen in patriarchal systems, the dominant group is faced with the realities of masculine rules and organizational behaviours that shape barriers towards equity and effectiveness and create subversive stories. Based on feedback, the internal advisory group presents alternative guidelines and action plans towards change. Highlighting effectiveness and equity, the guidelines will offer alternative leadership and strategic approaches, methods for loosening reluctant leadership styles, and finally will provide workshops underlining leadership qualities (Fletcher et al. 2009, 2012).

In this sense, comprehensive communication between organizations and the government can facilitate the addressing of female employment issues such as recruitment, advancement, tackling masculine attitudes in leadership styles, and adding incentives to provide offices, separate work spaces and even professional meeting rooms for all staff. Providing transitional programs and training conferences may cater for both organizations and their female employees. Addressing transportation services and managing childcare facilities are also issues that should be addressed. Thus, governmental assistance may help overcome workforce gender inequality.

Research indicates that implementing such changes to properly encourage female participants to join the workforce requires knowledge and communication to be effective (Eaton 2003; Rapoport 2002). This implies that, organizations should be connected with governmental institutes that help implementation and offers the right guidelines to follow. Active formation demands cultural change within the participating organizations as a step towards gender diversity. Top management levels are required to be fully supportive in order to make work life qualities available for all employees and endorse it (Eaton 2003; Rapoport 2002; Levin-Epstein 2007; Rapoport 2002). Government guidelines work to normalize family friendly opportunities and make female work–life balances accessible for all varieties of companies.

Participants understood that organizations alone may find difficulties in addressing some of these issues as they require additional costs, Hence, it is important to establish such governmental/organizational networks that can assist in addressing female employment issues (Gardiner 2013; Annesley and Gains 2013; Alturki and Braswell 2010).

### *6.3.2 Incentives towards more female employment*

Although not much has been said within the literature concerning organizations that are willing to welcome females, the need to pay additional costs to provide females with separate spaces and entrances in the Saudi workforce has been noted. Female participation in neighbouring Arab countries recommends governmental incentives towards companies willing to welcome female participation (Spierings et al. 2010). Participants found that this issue must be addressed. As companies tend to see such additional costs as a loss of revenue, organizations lack the motive and power to welcome females on board. The participants recommended that the government should encourage organizations by offering incentives and additional points to the Nitagat program that would emphasize increasing national employment through tapping into neglected female labour. According to participants, female talent is not being utilized owing to such additional costs. Moreover, the government can offer incentives to encourage companies to offer work–life balance to further facilitate female participation. In addition, the government needs to set organizational standards and to help implement and monitor programs that increase female participation (Pitt-Catsouphes and Smyer 2006; Gornick 2007; Levin-Epstein 2007).

This may need to include rewards for complying organizations and punishment for non-compliance (Avdeyeva 2010). Similarly, in Western countries, gender equality in the workforce has been facilitated through established governmental parties such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) or Australia’s Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA).

### *6.3.3 Addressing the attractiveness of the private sector*

Encouraging nationals to take up private sector employment requires addressing the reason why the majority of nationals find this sector unattractive. Regarding female participation, some nationals consider private opportunities might be culturally offensive because they offer mixed environments or, in other cases, offer low salaries for long hours (Rutledge et al. 2011; Al-Munajjed 2010; Alturki and Braswell 2010).

Facilities in the workforce that were also considered as needed are childcare facilities, and health and educational insurance: offering such incentives is seen as an attractive quality which will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Employers in the private sector find employment of nationals to be unattractive (Bosbait and Wilson 2006; Al-Dossary et al. 2012). Companies find non-national employment more attractive in terms of salaries and experience (Rutledge et al. 2011; Al-Munajjed 2010).

#### *6.3.4 Establishment of opportunity channels for women*

Another problematic issue facing females in Saudi Arabia is where to look for jobs (Fatany 2007; Hamdan 2005). This, to an optimistic female graduate, seems like a puzzle where the obvious options are taken and the remaining ones are unknown. Females face a great challenge looking for organizations that are hiring females. This too was noted by participants, as they showed confusion regarding how to find opportunities and where to look. According to participants, this matter can be addressed by offering recruitment facilities and career development counselling provided at a university level. Moreover, online applications generated from governmental websites that link to hiring organizations can also be very useful. Hence, participants hinted that governmental aid towards creating communication channels that provide recruitment services should be made easy. Such channels require constant communication between HR departments and governmental departments that are targeting national employment.

In addition, participants also suggested that universities could hold career development programs. Such programs need to participate in the communication channels suggested above to establish networks between students who are expected to graduate soon and companies looking for such expertise. Such career development events could be sponsored by governmental departments that promote Saudization and female participation.

Females face various barriers and working systems that discriminate against them in the Saudi male-dominated workforce. The barriers are similar to many identified barriers in the West; however, different cultural contexts require different approaches. Given the fact that most employed Saudi females are employed in the public sector, this emphasizes the importance of the government's role to act as the state role model in promoting female employment in professional occupations. Underlining this point is the fact that the government already carries the responsibility of job creation and has the power of legislation; therefore, creating

comprehensive female employment strategies that suit Saudi cultural implications falls on the government. This falls in line with Fletcher et al.'s (2009, 2012) 'dual agenda' by collaborating with the organization to create an internal advisory group. Female employment and advancement in professional occupations in the private sector could be advanced through learning from the state role model.

The following section will discuss "how to enhance female employees' experiences in their professional careers from an organizational perspective".

#### ***6.4 Facilitation of Female Employment from an Organizational Perspective***

Organizations have a great contribution to make towards increasing female participation in the Saudi workforce. One of this study's aims was to examine Metcalfe's (2008) "equal but different" philosophy. Metcalfe proposed that organizations should treat females in the Middle East equally but differently, in line with current societal expectations. However, as noted in the previous chapter, participants showed concerns with this approach. Participants noted that working females are treated equally in terms of salary. Participants thought it was important to facilitate female participation within the Saudi workforce without the need to stress the social implications. However, through an organizational lens, there are several layers that must be addressed in relation to welcoming females into organizations. Female discrimination in organizations has indirectly caused a lack of administrative efficiency when hiring female employees, has limited female training opportunities and has caused a lack of cooperation with other institutions to gain diverse experiences (Almenkash et al. 2007; Al-Ahmadi 2011) The steps towards increasing female employment should address the following:

- Traditional male-dominated system
- Implementing female quotas
- Addressing cultural implications towards segregation
- Enforcing new systems that appreciate gender differences and cultural change
- Offering transportation services
- Addressing low salaries in some private sectors

#### *6.4.1 Traditional male-dominated working system*

There are several points to be discussed about the traditional male-dominated working system in Saudi Arabia. The first point to be discussed is that in some organizations traditional hiring of relatives is overlooked. As seen in Achoui (2009), senior positions being held by people without university backgrounds is a typical dilemma in the Saudi workforce. Unfortunately, in some sectors, the human resource development in relation to recruitment is biased towards hiring of relatives and is corrupted with inner connections. Unfortunately, such inner connections, known as “wasta” in Arabic, have deprived many qualified university graduates from opportunities in the labour market (Rutledge et al. 2011; Tlaiss and Kauser 2011; Al-Krenawi 2014). Men and women both find it a challenge in recruitment owing to corrupted systems that use recruitment of relatives and connection-based hiring rather than qualifications, competencies, merit and experience as fair qualities of employment.

Interview participants also expressed negative responses towards HR departments that tend to favour the hiring of relatives instead of qualified personnel. Participants showed that it was a vital necessity to move away from such traditional systems towards a more professional approach that emphasizes fairness.

Moreover, females, in particular, face traditional male-dominated systems that do not prefer female hiring. Such traditional male-dominated systems are culturally not female-welcoming. The socio-cultural values embedded in the business-organizational systems do not give equal gender opportunities and create difficulties that are faced by females who wish to grow. Thus, females find themselves restricted to a certain level of opportunities (Al Rasheed 2013b; Al-Menkash et al. 2007; Al-Munajjed 2010; Al-Yousef 2007; Alselaimi and Lord 2012a; Al Halawani 2002; Al-Ahmadi 2011; Achoui 2009; Mellahi 2007b; Moghadam 2013). According to participants, such restrictive male-dominated structures lack female development programs, and female empowerment needs to be addressed through administrative policies. In this approach, organizations should also need to readdress their cultural values.

Welcoming more females to the workplace requires organizations to provide gender awareness programs through which both genders become more familiar with



appropriate communication that emphasizes productivity and fairness (Catalyst Census 2006; Thompson et al. 1999; Barreto et al. 2009). Fair opportunities promotes a healthy economy and work environment. Organizational behaviour training programs can address cultural gendered roles issues and promote career development and assist both employees and their leaders to avoid gender discrimination and promote female empowerment (Higgins 2001). Al-Menkash et al. (2007) indicates that the lack of female presence in leadership roles in the Saudi workforce is caused by the tendencies of headquarters to not include female participation on administrative committees or at events due to further lack of communication skills (Al-Menkash et al. 2007).

Shapiro et al. (2008) suggest that organizations should move away from the traditional headcount practices, old norms should be challenged and part-time jobs to cover simple tasks should be made available to those who need it. This, together with supportive career counselling and feedback, could create high potential for both employees and organizations.

In line with the above, professional and productive communication skills require the understanding of “cultural intelligence” as introduced by Thomas and Inkson (2004). This can be implemented by understanding the conservative society and the context in which females live: finding appropriate communication channels and promoting strategies that do not discriminate against working females are therefore essential to explore new ideas that put aside gendered stereotypes. In the context of a conservative society, the mutual understanding of “cultural intelligence” is seen as an important area of skill development. According to Thomas and Inkson (2004), cultural intelligence is:

... being skilled and flexible about understanding a culture, learning more about it from your ongoing interactions with it, and gradually reshaping your thinking to be more sympathetic to the culture and your behaviour to be more skilled and appropriate when interacting with others from the culture (14).

They propose that employees should be aware of cultural diversity and have an appreciation towards others. Consequently, employees would be able to work together more effectively. Snyder (2004) suggests that organizations could develop cultural modernization within their existing approach, especially those operating in a global environment. Such an approach should emphasize: low power distance (open

door policies and empowerment); lower uncertainty avoidance (higher risk tolerance); collective teamwork (involvement and shared knowledge); and more femininity behaviours (work–life balance, building relations and flexibility). Similarly, Leung et al. (2005) use the term “universal culture”. Leung et al. suggest that it is harder to have universal cultures in organizations even though it may simplify matters. Such concepts stand for organizational development and, in a filtered way, such approaches indirectly encourage female development and advancement in the workforce. This approach is in line with Acker’s (1991, 2006) framework of making organizations gender neutral to promote gender equality in the workforce.

Equally important when addressing male-dominated systems in a conservative society is the need to make organizations and their employees aware of appropriate gender relations. Organizations that are seeking to be more inclusive often offer workplace programs to increase awareness of appropriate workplace behaviour (Thompson et al. 1999; Barreto et al. 2009). Such courses are considered appropriate to help employees and their leaders avoid gender discrimination and to promote female empowerment (Higgins and Kram 2001). Participants thought that male-dominated systems are considered as one of the major barriers faced by women. As they thought, without the simple realization to change from traditional systems towards fair opportunities to all men and women, organizations will not be helpful in developing female participation. Participants emphasized that organizations continue to show lack of social awareness towards neglected female labour. Many participants agreed that awareness programs should be arranged to keep organizations aware of female career issues in order to tackle female discrimination in the workforce.

The growing body of Western literature concerning female equality in the workforce that is found in management and organizational behaviour literature shows an increasing awareness and practical application at the organizational level. Introducing neutral gender systems or applying four frame thinking (Ely et al. 2003) requires gender integration and implementation. While the literature has reiterated fixing organizations to become gender neutral and promoting women to participate in senior roles (Acker 1991, 2006; Ely et al. 2003; Jeanes, Knights, and Martin 2012), discrimination in senior positions in Western societies has not yet achieved equality, as cited in Appelbaum et al. (2013):

“To put it plainly, if female leaders behave like women, they do not fit the leader’s role. If they are successful leaders, they do not fit their gender role. This means that no matter how female leaders behave, they will always be rated unfavourably” (Heilman, 1983; cited in Schyns et al., 2008, p. 599). Therefore, when women do desire to progress into senior roles and leadership positions in organizations, they are more likely to be evaluated negatively based on ‘lack of person-job-fit’ because senior roles and leadership positions in organizations have been seen as occupations that are a male domain (Appelbaum et al. 2013, 112).

Weighing the bricks in hand, increasing senior positions for women in the conservative male-dominated Saudi workforce might take longer than anticipated.

In light of encouraging organizations towards further gender equality, participants found that implementing a quota strategy could be a successful way to tackle female discrimination in the workforce.

#### *6.4.2 Implementation of a quota strategy to target female participation in the workforce*

As Tatli et al. (2012) explain

Cultural norms, values, assumptions and stereotypes that are deeply rooted in patriarchal and religious traditions; arguably, constitute the most fundamental barrier to utilization of female talent in the region (Tatli et al. 2012, 9).

It has been suggested that enforcing female quotas addresses discrimination in a male-dominated workforce. Normally, historical socio-cultural value systems that promote male privilege in the workplace tend to neglect female career progress (Acker 2006; Syed and Ozbilgin 2009; Tatli et al. 2012). Introducing a female quota in organizations will force organizations to realize the true potential of the female talent in management. This will also drive organizational change through adding brain drills, diversity in organizational culture and recognition of undervalued female labour as lost potential talent (Acker 2006; Syed and Ozbilgin 2009; Tatli et al. 2012). Gender quotas act as a facilitator that forces female development in career and employment through talent recognition and works as an advocate against female discrimination in the workforce.

Despite the arguments opposing quota strategies, namely, that it leads to tokenism and it creates credible staffing (Smith 2013; Dahlerup 2013), Norwegian organizations found substantial increases in female participation in professional

positions after implementing the quota strategies (Browne 2013; Torchia et al. 2010; Nielsen and Huse 2010).

Highly-positioned men from Saudi Arabia who were interviewed touched on the importance of adding female quotas to facilitate further female employment in their workforces. Participants with high authority emphasized the importance of welcoming females to their workplaces. Participants expressed that, although most organizations may understand the necessity to employ females, they might lose focus on such issues if not taken seriously by the implementation of a quota strategy that would succeed in recruiting the targeted amount of employees; otherwise, talk will remain talk.

As Acker (1991) suggests, organizations need to change traditional male-dominated cultural regimes to welcome diversity and appreciate gender differences. One would easily then say that organizations should always act as a member of society through respecting its values. Thus, when employing females, organizations should respect that the genders are segregated in the Saudi society. The following will discuss work segregation.

#### *6.4.3 Addressing the cultural implications of segregation*

As noted earlier, segregation in Saudi Arabia is a social tradition. Within a society with such conservative values, organizations are forced to address such traditions when employing females from a segregated society.

As discussed previously, Lievens and Highhouse (2003) emphasize that organizations need to commit to their social attractiveness (Highhouse, Thornbury, and Little 2007; Rupp et al. 2013; Lievens and Highhouse 2003; DeArmond and Crawford 2011). A Saudi female applying for jobs can easily relate to companies who value their social attractiveness as she and her family might be very cautious of what the society thinks and how she is perceived. Organizations in this case must understand the value of segregation to the Saudi society. They should respect that a female's contribution to work should not disgrace her name nor should it harm her reputation, as this would negatively affect the organization's reputation too (Rutledge et al. 2011). This is called "attaining social approval" (Highhouse et al. 2007; DeArmond and Crawford 2011). Therefore, to welcoming more females into the

workforce, firstly, organizations need to respect the culture in which they exist. In this sense, work does not need to be done in a mixed environment except in some specific fields like medicine where the need to be physically together in one workplace is required to undertake their tasks. However, in business, finance and many other industries, there is less need for both genders to be physically working together. Research confirms that business can be done from separate countries although thousands of miles away without the need to be physically together (Gupta and Govindarajan 2002; Caligiuri 2006). Thus, segregation in the Saudi workforce may be a reasonable approach.

Participants commented that segregation in the workforce should be encouraged to maintain cultural respect and to avoid breaking cultural norms. However, they also emphasized the way in which segregation should be undertaken. Some participants thought that segregation should only underline the fact that females should have their separate offices and workplaces to allow them freedom in their appearance while they are at work. However, females should be given the same opportunities in all roles and positions as men would be given. This implies that there should not be any discrimination of female employment in all levels and departments of an organization.

In most organizations, separate departments are provided in which female employees manage female customers. However, according to participants, female employees in such departments hold low power positions and require constant approvals from male sections to continue with their work. This does not allow female employees to share equal opportunities to climb the career ladder (Doumato 1999). For example, in some banking establishments, the highest position a female employee can reach in a branch is the branch manager where she still may require constant approvals from male managers in similar positions. This implies that positions of higher levels of power and authority that require trust are always given to men. In this sense, discrimination against females in the professional workforce is more visible in senior positions where females are not given equal trust in decision making, authority and power.

While there are some examples of organizations that provide structures that enable segregation but encourage full participation, this is not common. Therefore, participants noted that segregation in the workforce should be made only to allow

females their freedom of appearance, giving them the opportunity to work and share authoritative positions as they grow with experiences just as normal employees would do.

Similarly, research indicates that working women in Saudi Arabia “operate under the umbrella of men, which impacts negatively on the performance of women sections, and that the constant intervention by men restricts their freedom to make decisions” (Al-Ahmadi 2011, 152). Hence, segregation in the workforce is not addressed properly and may set further boundaries and limitations on senior female employees to control their ability to lead and make decisions regarding their departments (Al Halawani 2002; Al-Ahmadi 2005; Doumato 1999). This emphasizes the need to address segregation in a manner that does not isolate female employees from activities such as meetings, events, networking committees and general development (Al-Ahmadi 2011; Al-Menkash et al. 2007) to gain further experience.

Although participants called for greater participation; they saw this occurring in a segregated way. Integration within most occupations was in contrast to women’s increased representation in Western economies, where there has been a focus on integration.

Occupational sex segregation in the Western context may be seen as a symbol of female discrimination and, furthermore, a promoter of gender inequality through the emphasis of gendered work (Stockdale and Nadler 2013). Stockdale and Nadler (2013) states that: “occupationally-relevant actors pursue rational, economically maximizing courses of action in job allocation decisions and instead are subject to the forces of power, patriarchy, and social control” (Stockdale and Nadler 2013, 211). Hence, occupational sex segregation in Western societies is seen as a strategic method to keep power maintained in societies (Stockdale and Nadler 2013).

Although segregation may maintain power in the hands of men in the Saudi workforce and does reinforce female-gendered occupations, it is important to note that it is culturally and socially enforced at all levels of the public Saudi society. Hence, suggesting that segregation is not recommended in the Saudi case of female employment would not fit with the current social structure. Organizations should act as a member of society by operating with methods that fit with the social benefit. In a segregated society where females are seen as a symbol of purity and honour (Al-

Hashimi 2003), having a non-segregated workplace may cause cultural clashes and cultural stress to their employees (Al-Munajjed 2010).

Although occupational sex segregation as anticipated in Saudi Arabia is barely visible in Western societies, women and men in Western societies continue to focus on achieving gendered occupations that are dominated by their own gender (Lips 2013; Stockdale and Nadler 2013; Huppatz and Goodwin 2013).

According to Singhapakdi et al. (2013), female executives in Thailand, although they are not segregated, face cultural implications that limit their organizational socialization which impacts on their job satisfaction compared to that of Western female executives in the USA. This is similar to respondents' observations that excluding females from organizational events and activities will slow down female career development. This underlines the importance of ensuring that segregation does not exclude female participation in organizational events and activities.

According to Lievens and Highhouse (2003), organizations need to commit to their social attractiveness meaning that how they are perceived through the society's eye reflects on them as employers. Hence, they state that employees and job-seekers are much like their normal consumers (Highhouse et al. 2007; Lievens 2003; DeArmond and Crawford 2011). The literature on the person-organization fit "refers to the compatibility between an individual and a work environment that occurs when their characteristics are matched" (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, and Johnson 2005, 281).

Linked to this is social identity consciousness. Highhouse et al. (2007) discuss an individual's "concern of attaining social approval through organizational affiliation" (2007, 138). Highhouse et al. (2007) state that social approval is gained through social adjustment and value expression as two major social identity necessities (DeArmond and Crawford 2011).

Looking back at the Saudi female as a job-seeker, she can clearly relate to Highhouse's study. Saudi females are very cautious of what the society thinks and how they are perceived (Al-Hashimi 2003). This may impact on the social attractiveness of some organizations and on Saudi women's social identity consciousness. Tension exists between maintaining existing social norms and bringing about changes that will facilitate increased female participation in the

workforce. As long as there is a means of communication established, the physical need to be together is diminished and this may help to maintain the social attractiveness of the workplace (Gupta and Govindarajan 2002; Caligiuri 2006).

#### *6.4.4 Enforcement of new systems that appreciate gender differences*

Family responsibilities and commitment to social gender roles in a family by far surpass work commitment according to the Saudi cultural norm. Hence, organizations should understand such cultural influences. Saudi females, as with all females around the world, struggle to juggle family responsibilities and work: Saudi females struggle too, because family responsibilities and housework is expected to be females' first priority (Metcalf 2008; Elamin and Omair 2010). Although most females have the opportunity to rely on relatives and nannies to help with house and family responsibilities, family responsibilities remain an issue (Achoui 2009). The main conflict as with Western societies is managing time to accommodate both the work and family with work–life balance a great issue.

Recently, families in Saudi Arabia have become nervous about leaving their children with domestic help as an increase in violent criminal incidents has been reported to the police. According to some participants, working females would prefer to feel more relaxed that their children are being well cared for while they are at work (Pitt-Catsouphes and Smyer 2006; Haney 2009; Sipila 2010). However, very few childcare facilities are available in Saudi Arabia and they are very expensive (Achoui 2009; 2012).

Participants thought that some females simply cannot join the workforce due to their prior responsibility to take care of their children. Therefore, they suggested that there is an urgent necessity to increase childcare facilities in Saudi Arabia. Organizations should support female employees with financial assistance towards childcare facilities: this could also be addressed through government incentives.

As mentioned previously in the literature review (Chapter 3), health insurance and children's education are very attractive offers preferred by employees in order to enhance work–life qualities (Catalyst Census 2006). Such initiatives address employee life satisfaction working as solutions to family–work conflicts. Work–life balance is a way of expressing the organization's appreciation to their workers and



those workers' concerns. Hence, in return, organizations also benefit. Studies show that work–life qualities within socially interactive organizations create career progression among females (Graf 2007; Stone and Lovejoy 2004). Family friendly work conditions are portrayed as a means of accommodating employees by fulfilling their needs so they are comfortable and remain productive.

Moreover, organizations that respect gender differences by facilitating working arrangements suitable to female schedules are considered very attractive organizations. Research indicates that part-time jobs or less working hours in general decrease work–family conflicts (Thompson et al. 1999). Unfortunately, participants found that the Saudi workforce lacks flexible arrangements and, thus, it shows no appreciation of gender differences. Research indicates that lack of flexibility in the workforce acts as brick walls against female participation (Williams 1985; Stone and Lovejoy 2004; Graf 2007; Sipila 2010; Crompton and Lyonette 2011).

As mentioned by participants, female employees in the Saudi workforce lack the availability of part-time jobs. The lack of part-time offers holds many females as victims working long hours in jobs with this added to their family and social responsibilities. According to participants, lack of part-time jobs is regarded as an act of female discrimination that prepares females to surrender to either too many responsibilities or to manageable responsibilities but difficult financial situations. Both available options when considered to the extreme lead to stressful outcomes.

Research shows that part-time jobs in Western societies have the potential to slow down career development. However, to some participants, achieving sustainability between home and work responsibilities can only be achieved if women were offered part-time jobs in the private sector because governmental sectors close earlier. Thus, female participants expressed the view that the lack of part-time jobs is considered to be a barrier. Promoting part-time jobs should be done as a response to help working mothers; however, organizations should advise female employees who wish to take such opportunities that their career development might be at risk.

Research shows that career counselling and training programs created to help female development in the workforce are an important method for both female employees and their employers. Being able to map out one's professional career encourages females to work on their weaknesses and develop further strengths. By understanding

females' circumstances and allowing their skills to be developed through coaching and mentoring programs, organizations have the power to help female career development. Female development to senior levels requires supportive managerial career mapping where females and their managers work together towards a goal of advocate advancement. Such programs offer performance evaluation, training and development, succession planning, leadership workshops and flexible timing schedules. Through these career counselling programs, sympathetic managers' understanding and appreciation of gender differences and the tremendous efforts that their female employees endure in order to meet all their responsibilities would be emphasized (Ibarra et al. 2010; Hammer et al. 2009; Greenhaus et al. 2012). If organizations in Saudi Arabia were to use such supportive programs that direct management towards new leadership styles to advance women in the workforce, this will enable female career candidates towards a smooth transition into senior levels and will decrease female turnover (Al-Ahmadi 2013).

#### ***6.4.4.1 Transportation and salaries***

Organizations showing appreciation towards female employees must also address raising female wages and providing transportation services. As participants reflected, transportation from their houses to the workplace and back to their houses, in most cases, may be a barrier against female participation. Although most Saudi women depend on personal drivers or their male relatives to offer the means of transportation, the difficulties in maintaining sustainable transportation facilities are a challenge. Depending on the financial circumstances of their family, females may or may not have personal drivers. Lack of sustainable transportation creates a barrier to work. Unfortunately, drivers too are considered an unsustainable means of transportation. As many females struggle to keep drivers satisfied with their busy lifestyles and happy with their monthly pay, depending on personal drivers has become a challenge in achieving sustainable means of transportation. For this reason, participants found it essential that organizations should respond to the frustration of providing transportation means. Participants suggested that organizations should either provide transportation means to accommodate their female employees or increase their salaries so they could maintain personal drivers.

Regarding the female wages provided in the Saudi workforce, research indicates that there are no differences between male and female wages in most of the workforce. However, as participants also commented, although there is no difference, the pay in some private organizations is surprisingly low for both Saudi men and women. Hence, according to participants, leaving their prioritized home responsibilities to participate in the workforce should be worthwhile. Some participants indicated that the pay in some private organizations is very low and will barely be enough to maintain a maid for domestic help and a driver for transportation. According to participants, females who come from a middle-class family and do not suffer financial problems will not find such opportunities worthwhile.

The following section discusses “how the educational system and training systems may assist in creating an integrated working system that promotes professional qualities for both male and female employees”.

### ***6.5 Educational Development towards Female Participation***

Females face various difficulties once they join the workforce. They may lack professional skills: male employees or employers may display discriminating attitudes and inappropriate working behaviours. Females, as reported by participants and suggested in some of the literature (Fatany 2007; Achoui 2009), may find themselves unaware of the market directions in employment. Educational institutions may assist in relaxing these barriers to present confident professional men and women to the workforce.

Educational training is necessary to accommodate the current educated females in the workforce. Understanding employee rights, career development and counselling, communication between the genders, and professional skills and qualities with this all guided by an Islamic approach is an important method by which to prepare both men and women for an integrated workforce that appreciates both men and women as equal employees.

### *6.5.1 University responsibility to increase awareness of employee rights and expectations*

Al-Yousef (2007), in a speech titled “Progress of Women’s Participation in Development in Saudi Arabia” made in the 51<sup>st</sup> Congress Forum, states that most females in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia lack full comprehension of their rights as citizens and as employees. In addressing this, in 2003, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia established the non-governmental organization, Saudi Human Rights, which includes female rights. Al-Yousef continues to state that female participation delays are culturally tied instead of being governmental regulations against females.

According to participants, females in Saudi Arabia lack knowledge of their rights as participants in the workforce. Females are accustomed to being directed and feel that they should accept contracts as they are presented without applying their ability in negotiation. Regarding female participation, females should be made aware of their rights to become confident to pursue promotions, ask for a raise and further their career development (Fatany 2007).

Moreover, lack of acknowledgment of their rights as employees leads to overlooked harassment behaviours. In such cases, both female and male employees should be aware of the consequences of inappropriate relations or harassment.

Having said this, participants believe that universities should hold the responsibility to prepare students of both genders with regards to their rights, to fully understand their responsibilities and expectations and to know how to take action regarding incidents that may occur.

### *6.5.2 Career development addressing the market direction*

As seen from the findings, participants thought that females should acknowledge the market direction before enrolling in specific degrees. Many participants hinted that a common problem with female graduates is that they hold degrees that are currently undesirable in the market. Hence, enrolling in educational degrees such as history, geography or Arabic are the degrees most commonly needed for the teaching professions. However, the educational sector is currently unable to absorb new entry labour. This has caused university graduates to have to look for jobs elsewhere in

private sectors (Achoui 2009). Unfortunately, many graduates find themselves not aligned with the market needs (Rutledge et al. 2011).

Therefore, research indicates that females are best to consult further before enrolling in such degrees. Iqbal (2011) agrees that Saudi employees do not have the skills required to fit specific positions in the current labour market. Iqbal (2011) believes that there is an urgent need to develop training facilities to equip nationals with skills necessary for the rapidly growing workforce. Such training may be introduced through university levels as a method of preparing students and equipping them with the professional technical skill needed in the current labour market direction.

### *6.5.3 Training across genders*

As noted by participants in the findings chapter (Chapter 5), the Saudi workforce has for so long been a male-dominated workforce. Females are seen as the newcomers who lack the skills and qualities. Hence, negative stereotypes immediately emerge. Where social segregation has caused a gap in gender communication skills, females and males lack the skills to maintain a professional respectful communication channel between them. As noted by participants, many females are shy when it comes to making their voices heard, many men lack the courage to speak to women who they do not know, with the reverse also visible. Participants suggested that both men and women should be introduced to skills in communication between the genders in the early stages of training through universities. By such training programs across genders, both men and women would learn how to address one another, what to expect and how to create professional gender relations that can accommodate professional networking.

Gendered strategies according to Bird and Rhoton (2011) are certain behaviours that a person sees fit to use in an organization. These attitudes or behaviours differ from person to person depending on their gender, beliefs and social lives. However, most organizations have masculine structures: “reconciling gaps between career ideologies and career opportunities in the workplace therefore requires developing gender strategies” (Bird and Rhoton 2011, 248).

Bird and Rhoton (2011) suggest that there are three gendered strategies. The first gendered strategy is when females act or behave in a manner that fits with

masculinity in order to be accepted as a member of the team. However, over time, many females find that this strategy does not align with their feminine needs and, thus, this strategy becomes unsustainable. The second gendered strategy is when females use their feminine qualities to gain approval. This method too is criticized as it keeps females in the dependent seat as followers not leaders and reinforces discriminatory actions against females with this behaviour not always to be tolerated. The third gendered strategy is when females behave neutrally, encouraging male colleagues to treat them with non-discriminatory behaviours to establish professional, comprehensive communications from person to person rather than man to female. This gendered strategy falls in line with Acker's (1991) recommendation to establish neutral structures in organizations to promote equal opportunities.

As mentioned by participants, in response to the conservative perspectives, some men and women in the Saudi workforce lack professional communications skills and behaviours for working across genders. Hence, the third neutral approach to gendered strategy as suggested by Bird and Rhoton (2011) seems to establish professional comprehensive relations. This may also fall in line with social norms and expectations in maintaining professional relations (Williams 2008).

Therefore, critical consciousness and awareness of behaviours, social reforms, appearances and practices in an organization are crucial in sustaining female development (Meyerson 2003), in particular, in the Saudi workforce, (Metcalf 2008; Meijer 2010; Al Rasheed 2013b; Alselaimi and Lord 2012a; Al-Sharif 2012).

#### *6.5.4 Professional skills and qualities*

As seen in previous chapters, female development in the educational sector has expanded and grown in the past 20 years. Unfortunately, this growth has not been accommodated in the male-dominated workforce. Some research and participants have suggested that because the society has been a segregated society for generations, females lack the characteristic qualities to join the workforce. Females in Saudi Arabia are raised to become housewives and dependent figures in the Saudi society. Hence, females find it difficult to change suddenly into becoming confident professional equal work colleagues in the workforce.

Lack of confidence, fear of responsibility, difficulty of handling housework responsibilities and being physically isolated from administrative roles are factors that play a huge role on a personal level in hindering female abilities in leadership roles and even in more junior roles (Abdullah 2008; Achoui 2009; Al-Ahmadi 2011; Al Halawani 2002; Alajmi 2001). Females themselves require further professional training assistance in organizational performance and the skills required: female development in Western societies provides sponsoring, mentorship and enhancing professional experience programs with females in Saudi Arabia needing similar programs (Gallant and Pounder 2008; Achoui 2009, 2011; Al-Ahmadi 2011; Fatany 2007) to be able to professionally “think out of the box” and make decisions with confidence. Hence, females need training and programs that will confidently empower them to grow into becoming work-ready females.

#### 6.5.5 *Using Islam as a guide*

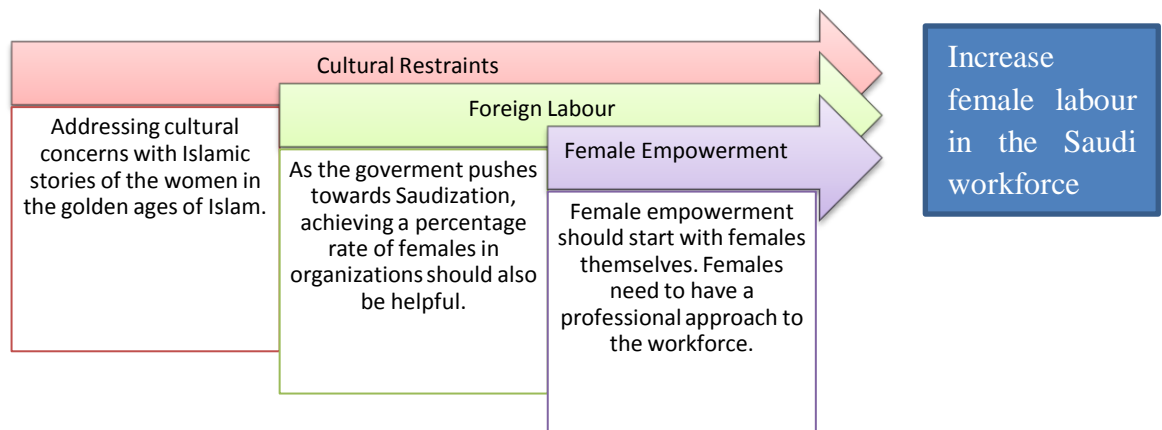
The power of the Saudi system and its twisted interpretation of Islam and institutionalized discriminatory policies against Saudi women are more responsible for women's oppression than Islam itself. Muslim women in most parts of the Muslim world are not as oppressed, marginalized and restricted as Saudi women. It's the system that needs change.

So says Alyami in his interview with Clare Lopez published in *The Clarion Project* (2013). Similarly, participants shared their view that Islam did not oppress female participation as did the restricted system and enforced traditions. Participants continuously highlighted Islam as a promoter of females towards female development. Participants thought that females at university level and in earlier levels of schooling should be reminded of heroic powerful Islamic female figures. Female and male students should be reminded that Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) preached for female rights and dignity, and appreciated the significant contributions of females. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was always considerate of females and their responsibility towards their men and children, and never doubted their ability to participate as they pleased with confidence in building the community and shaping its economic status. Participants thought that it is a vital necessity that both female and male university students must be reminded that such Islamic stories show appreciation of the female contribution. By simply offering fair opportunities and recognition of efforts, it will be shown that Islam stands against female discrimination. Females also should be aware of their appearance in maintaining

respect among others in the workforce. It should also be emphasized that sexual harassment issues and inappropriate behaviours and attitudes are not tolerated within the workforce, and all employees should feel confident in retaining their rights. Such Islamic qualities may lift the motivational spirits in both men and women towards fair opportunities and thus facilitate the means needed to increase female participation.

### 6.6 Redefining the Model

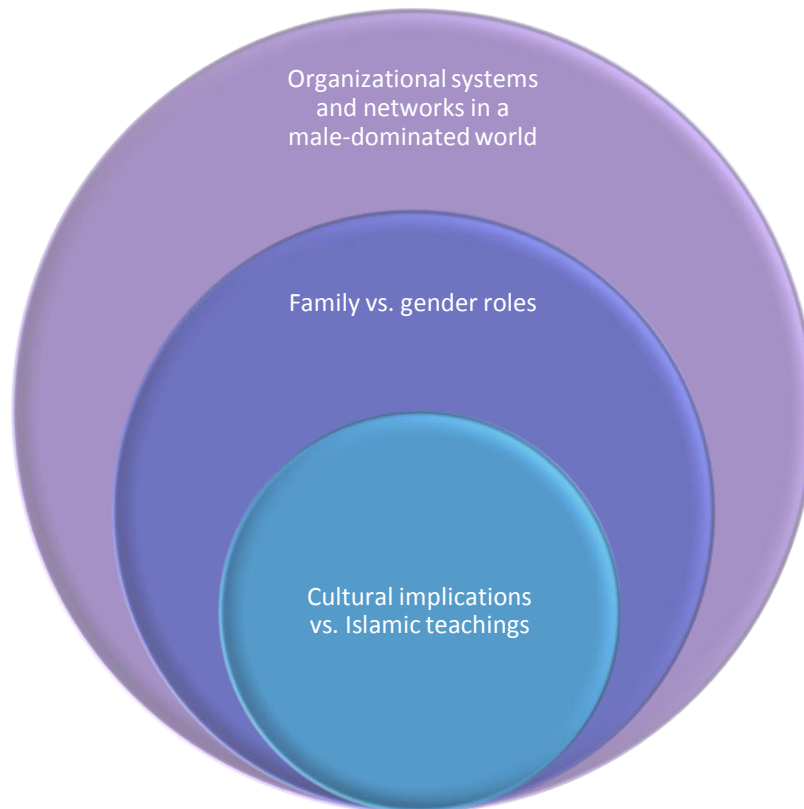
As was mentioned in earlier chapters, the Saudi economy depends heavily on foreign workers: this fact was thought to be one of the main factors that needed to be addressed, together with the obvious conservative cultural restraints and organizational efforts to welcome females into workplaces by treating women employees equally but differently. Thus, at that time, the researcher had the following preliminary model in mind:



**Figure 6.1 Model 1, developed before data collection**

The research design, which emphasized exploring the research question and addressing the objectives through interviews and focus groups, revealed realistic factors behind the low female labour rates in the Saudi workforce. The findings chapter (Chapter 5) showed that female employment in the Saudi workforce is an issue that hangs within layers and layers of meaning. The layers are as follows:





**Figure 6.2 Layers of meaning facing female participation**

As can be seen, females face different layers of meaning that are not necessarily considered as obstacles. Looking at a Muslim society that is governed with an Islamic perspective, it is very important to understand the confusion between Islamic implications and cultural norms regarding female empowerment and participation in the workforce.

Depending on the layer, family traditions and gender roles are made either to encourage female career development and self-empowerment or are made to consider females as respected housewives, mothers and dependent figures. The family is where a female, just as any member, will build her perceptions and expectations. Females from very young ages understand the fact that their gender has made them subject to different roles than their brothers. Through time, a female will understand her duties towards her family and what she may or may not be able to do. Hence, the female empowerment given to females depends on the empowerment that a female receives from her family. For example, in one family, a female is only a family member responsible for home and childcare duties; while in another family, a

female is equal to her brother siblings and is encouraged and supported to build a professional career. Since by law females require their male relatives' approval to attend school or universities and even to participate in the workforce, thus females are empowered through their families. Hence, there is a great emphasis on the ways in which daughters are raised which has great influence in encouraging them like their brothers to pursue career paths. This layer is the starting point, from where females are able to assume whether or not they are able to join the workforce depending on their family traditions.

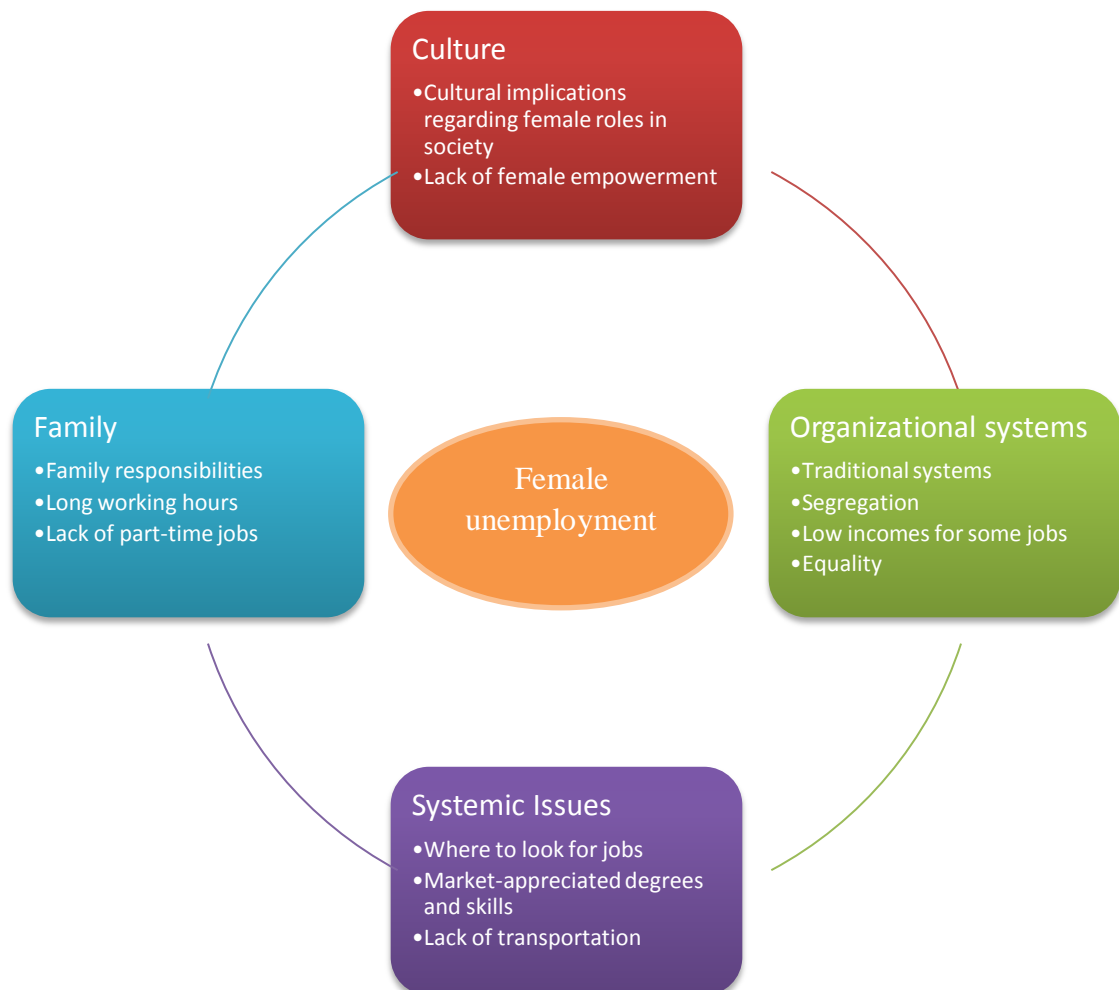
Moreover, as organizations are influenced and structured by male advocates, female experiences within a working career also depend on the organization's approach regarding promoting female empowerment through equal opportunities. If a female is supported by her family to join the workforce, then another layer is introduced, the organizational structure that promotes a male-dominated system. In most organizations where female empowerment occurs through equal opportunity for everyone, female employees might be allocated positions with little or no authority. As the level of authority that females in general have is very limited, most likely, it must be approved by their men colleagues. Female employees face difficulties regarding the male-dominated system and network and, thus, face difficulties keeping up with business methods and managerial implications. Such difficulties keep females behind desks with very limited career progress and authority. Social implications of gender roles are clearly seen in most organizations. Hence, female empowerment is also another challenge within the organization itself.

The necessity to address female empowerment twice holds great meaning. It shows that the Saudi society has made clear gendered ideologies addressing what is expected and allowed: empowerment and decision making are tasks not allocated for females. Societal values and traditions regarding gender roles create a structure that dictates what is acceptable and what is not. Although participants and the data available in this research showed that there are families who do not rely on such societal implications, in such examples, these participants reflected that their families are guided by an Islamic perspective that understands that some social constraints are not forbidden through Islam: thus, those constraints are not greatly emphasized. This states and underlines the importance of clearing the confusion between Islamic

implications and social values. Every Saudi female has a story to tell and each story starts from there.

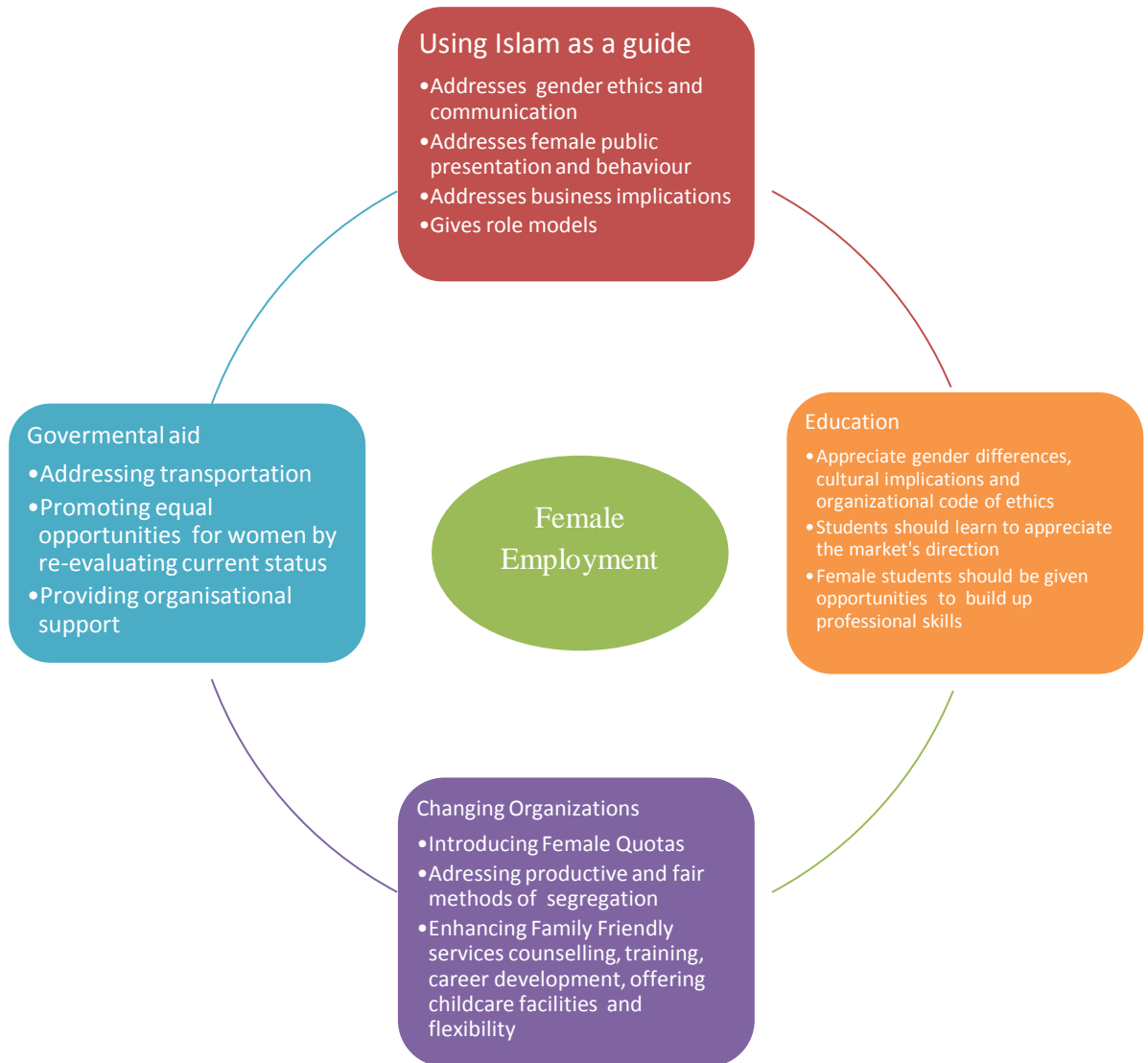
As seen through all the layers of meaning, cultural implications always govern the patterns made out for nationals. This is structured in a manner that emphasizes Islamic values. Hence, as participants pointed out, it is actually a good thing to argue against cultural restraints using Islamic values and stories.

Understanding those layers and comprehending what each layer contributes to the issue of female participation is essential to present a model. Hence, describing the meaning of each layer then defining the barriers related to each layer was a process that eventually presented the following model that describes the barriers to female participation:



**Figure 6.3 Barriers according to participants**

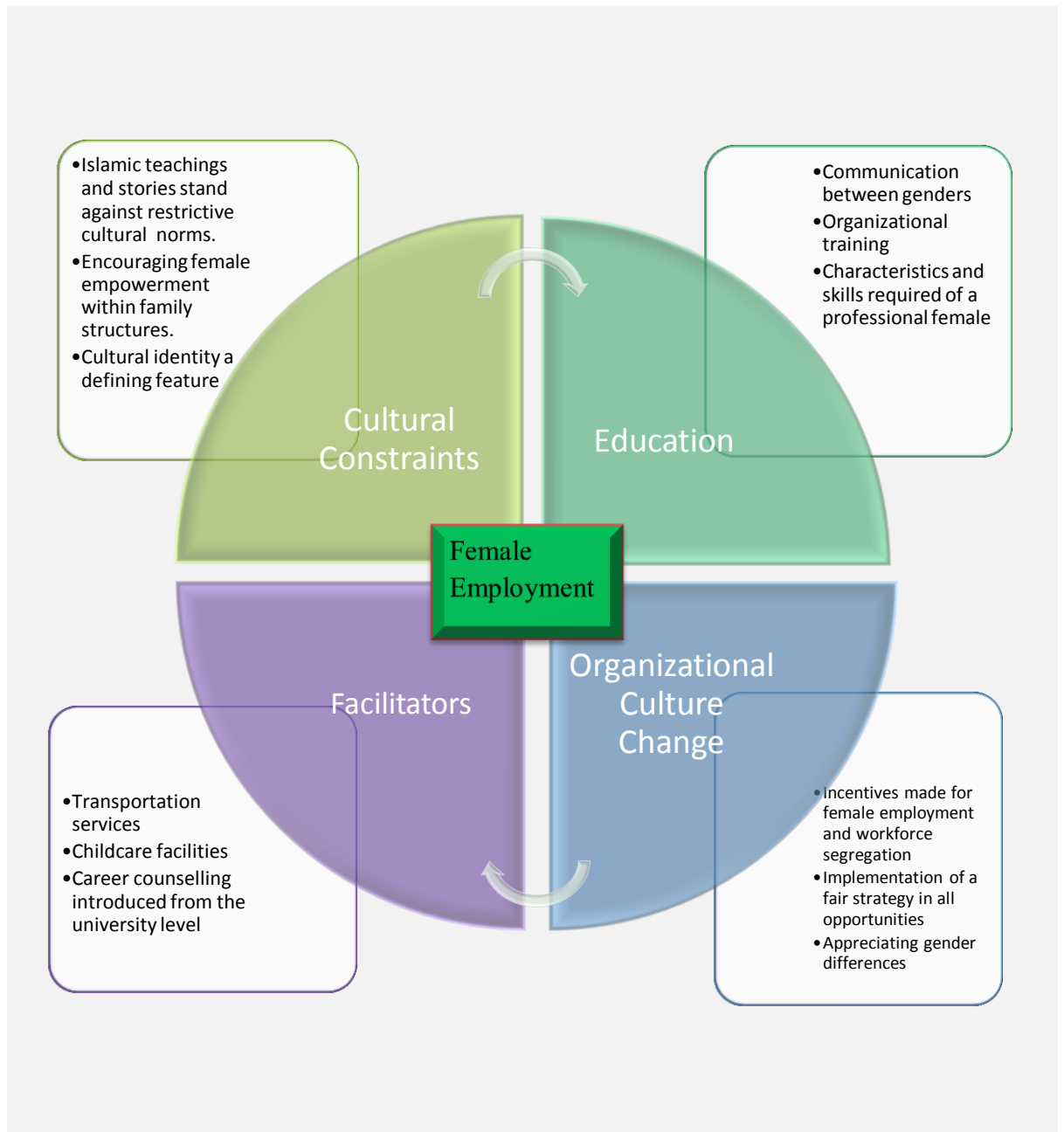
The following model presents what participants thought might help to increase female participation in the Saudi workforce.



**Figure 6.4 Enablers according to participants**

After the integration of the transcripts of collected data together with the gathered sources available from the literature regarding female participation in the Saudi

workforce, the above model was slightly modified in a manner to present the barriers and enablers that will help increase female participation in the Saudi workforce. The following model addresses the factors that act as barriers and enablers to female participation in the Saudi workforce from a holistic view:



**Figure 6.5 A framework identifying issues that inhibit and support female employment in the Saudi workforce**

The above model, in Figure 6.5, shows the four essential areas that play a major role regarding encouraging female development in the Saudi workforce. Underlining the influence of cultural implications regarding gender role expectations and the values of cultural structures is significant and essential to properly address the issue of female participation. Moreover, understanding that organizations play a major role in developing appropriate methods to welcome more females into their workplaces is also seen as vital regarding female participation. Education for all employees regardless of their gender is important to facilitate the means of communication and professionalism. Organizations too need further development in managing female employees and developing their careers. Finally, providing the essential facilitators derived from both the interviews and the research in general is discussed.

Looking at the above framework that identifies the issues, there are strategies or recommended actions that, if implemented properly, may create a point of possibility in changing barriers into opportunities. This model will be presented in the following chapter.

To achieve equal opportunity in the Saudi workforce, it is important to underline the interconnection between each area. Promoting female empowerment in all areas acts as reinforcing loops which together support female employment. This model will be further discussed in the following chapter.

## ***6.7 Conclusion***

This chapter has discussed all levels of meaning regarding female participation in the Saudi workforce. It is important to understand that the layers of meaning influencing female participation are intertwined. Drawing on Fletcher et al.'s (2009) technique of intended and unintended assumptions, we untangled the intertwined levels of meaning that create challenging obstacles such as female characteristics through to families supporting female development, then to systems encouraging female empowerment and to social democracy and religion. All layers are strongly linked to one another and share various connections. Female participation in the Saudi workforce continues to lag behind, not only because there is a significant lack of economic opportunities provided to nationals, but also because such opportunities are gender categorized as male opportunities.

Fletcher et al. (2009) based their discussion on the principle of answering two questions: “what are the barriers of the dysfunctional working systems?” and “how can we fix them?” Hence, this chapter restated the main barriers that were found in the data collected and the literature and thus argued the assumptions that may assist in relaxing them. Cultural implications that emphasize families’ reputations together with known gender roles negatively influence female participation and empowerment. Depending on family traditions regarding female empowerment, females are either given the opportunity to develop careers or they do not receive this opportunity. All this occurs, together with facing more tangible challenges of organizational cultures that support male-dominated systems, and lack of transportation and childcare facilities.

For each key barrier, there are some suggested relaxing strategies. These promoting facilitators work best when they are all in action together. This can start from addressing key issues such as clearing the greyish grounds mixed with confusion between cultural implications and Islamic implications regarding female participation and empowerment, through to facilitating an integrated workforce that is guided with Islamic implications and supports cultural norms. As suggested by participants, when addressing an Islamic society, using Islamic guidance to amend restrictive gendered ideologies is an important strategy. Moreover, given that the majority of females currently participating in the workforce are working within governmental sectors, this gives the government a gateway for acting in a state role to provide the workforce in general with best practices in female employment. Hence, addressing systemic procedures that restrict female empowerment and career development should aim to amend acts of female discrimination in all layers.

Organizations also have a great role in reconsidering the untapped female potential available to them. By accepting changes to the structural and cultural attitudes that discriminate against female career development, organizations then have to establish systems that promote equality in opportunities to achieve and maintain sustainability.

Finally, coping with global economic demands and organizational directions, the educational sector also has a major role in reinforcing both male and female students with the knowledge and skills required to ease a transition from the male-dominated

market to an equitable diverse workforce that promotes merits and credibility regardless of gender.



# CHAPTER SEVEN: SUGGESTED ACTIONS

It is recounted that a man came to Muhammad (PBUH) and asked, "What is knowledge (*ilm*)?" He replied, fairness (*insaf*). The man asked again, "And what more?" He replied, listening (*istima*). The man asked, "And what more?" The Prophet said, keeping in mind (*hifz*). The man asked, "And what else?" He replied, acting (*amal*) in accordance with knowledge. Then the man asked, "And what more?" Muhammad replied, spreading it (*nashru-hu*) (AlBukhary 1959).

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis by considering the implications of this research for policy and practice in relation to increasing female participation in the Saudi workforce. The focus of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of why females are lagging behind in the male-dominated workforce in Saudi Arabia and how the barriers can be overcome to help facilitate an integrated workforce that respects both female contributions and cultural expectations. My interest, as explained in Chapter One, arose from my own experience in the Saudi workforce, where I found myself puzzled by the question of where to apply and how to find an opportunity in which I wished to challenge myself.

This study has greatly contributed to the literature by initially providing a model that explains the driving barriers and the required necessities to address them. Chapter Two outlined the context within which this study took place. Chapter Two aimed to draw a picture capturing the relative realities that influence professional female employment. This chapter also touched on the global influence towards female rights that impacted in various ways on the progress of the female development in Saudi Arabia. The impact of change and female progress in the workforce explored in this study has opened the door to a wide range of emotions and expectations.

The literature review in Chapter Three considered the social construction of feminism, gender, and women and career opportunities. Chapter Three considered the social construction of gender and of leadership. Although cultural implications differ, establishing a framework designed to increase female participation in the

Saudi workforce should appreciate existing frameworks. Through a gender lens, this chapter examined underlying assumptions about structures and processes and how these impact on women in organizations. Females in Western societies first faced female discrimination in the workforce, and challenged the male-dominated workforce. Thus, in this chapter, we explored established Western frameworks which the Saudi society may find useful. Through gender and work theories, we learnt how females battled against discrimination in the workforce by challenging the male-dominated systems that were not designed for them to work in. Similarly, in the male-dominated Saudi workforce where systems were not made for female participation, females struggle. However, as lands change, cultures differ and thus applying feminism should be in a manner that fits within the culture of the people. Hence, this chapter proposes that feminism in Saudi Arabia should develop a method that takes the culture into consideration in order to encourage female professionalism in the Saudi workforce. Thus, this chapter takes us from challenges faced by Western females to challenges faced by Saudi women. Then it explores the suggested frameworks that may be applicable to the Saudi society. Leaping back and forth from the Western female accomplishments to the Saudi female accomplishments, the reader is exposed to the differences of culture and how it affects the outcomes.

Chapter Four explores the theoretical perspectives and the research design. Through gender and feminism, this research takes a qualitative approach, owing to its focus on valuing knowledge presented from the participants.

Chapter Five presents the findings of a total of 28 interviews and two focus groups. Participants were grouped into three categories: Group A comprised highly positioned men in Saudi Arabia. Group B were working females, four of whom were also highly positioned females in the workforce, and Group C was made up of eight educated non-working females. Finally, in the interest of comparing between newly graduated females and females aged 29 and above, two focus groups were conducted to present their different perspectives of female empowerment in Saudi Arabia. The phenomenological approach (Higgs and Cant 1998; Smith 1987) that was taken in this research focused on gaining deeper insights into barriers and enablers of female employment in Saudi Arabia.

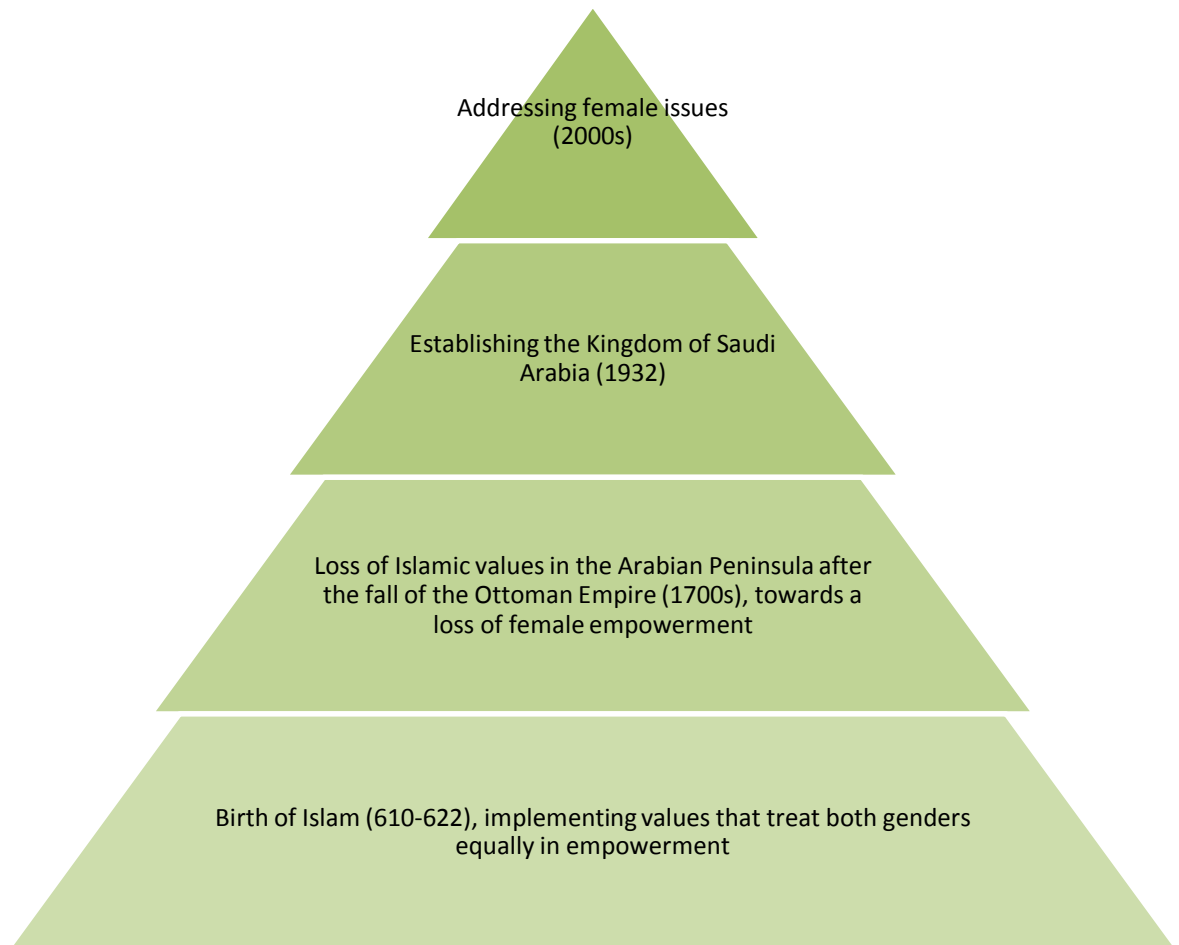
Chapter Six entrenched all layers of meaning in the findings and linked them to the related literature, realizing that each layer of meaning holds both a barrier and its solution. The discussion chapter addressed the barriers and aimed to find methods for relaxing these barriers.

In this chapter, Chapter Seven, a model is presented in Figure 7.2 that highlights the importance of the suggested actions to achieve higher rates of female participation in the Saudi workforce.

## **7.2 Research Focus and Key Findings**

The objectives for this research were to explore the reasons behind the low rates of female participation in the Saudi workforce and how to help overcome the barriers faced by females looking for opportunities. These objectives supported the research question which asked: *How can female participation in professional occupations in the Saudi Arabian workforce be increased?*

In order to create a comprehensive consistent flow of the discussion, a time frame would assist in keeping the reader cautious with regard to the level of empowerment that females have had since the early days of Islam through to today. Therefore, the following time frame might be useful to consider:



**Figure 7.1 Female empowerment timeline**

As seen through the previous chapters, Islam guided by Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) embraced female empowerment. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) taught his followers to respect women's contributions towards their families and their communities. Females are the mothers of our generations and through them we become who we are today. The Prophet (PBUH) gave females the right to learn, participate, own and decide for themselves. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was always mindful of men's controlling nature over their families, and thus he always preached for females' rights and emphasized their contributions through appreciation.

Times and years have passed, and now many females in Saudi Arabia suffer gendered discrimination in accordance with their family and cultural backgrounds. However, female discrimination is an issue that is being addressed by some by referring to Islamic teachings. For example, the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce named their female section after Prophet Mohammed's wife, the Khadija bint

Khowailid Center for Women, to show the importance of women's participation. Females in Saudi Arabia today have seen tremendous progress in the workforce since the Saudi kingdom was established. The Saudi government through a range of supporting programs and projects is trying to push female empowerment through a professional level into the workforce. Nevertheless, many obstacles remain as brick walls keeping female participation lagging behind, as detailed in the findings and discussion chapters.

As the findings point out, cultural implications are linked to the female dilemma regarding brick walls in the Saudi workforce. However, the findings together with the relevant literature also highlight how to navigate and change such male-centric systems. With full recognition of this phenomenon, society, in many ways, is ready for the forecast change towards fair opportunities regardless of gender.

The key findings highlighted that female empowerment differed from one region to another in Saudi Arabia according to the regions' cultural implications. Moreover, key findings also emphasized that cultural conservatism could be addressed through using Islamic teachings and Islamic historical stories as a guide to progress and further develop female professionals in the Saudi workforce.

Equally important, participants suggested that organizations should acknowledge that female development is lagging behind due to the systems that they follow. Female professionalism may be developed and enhanced significantly once these male-dominated systems are addressed within each organization. Although facilitating female employment through quotas for senior positions is seen by some at least as a step forward, integrating females into all levels of management was seen as a greater step towards equal opportunities.

The layers of meaning behind the phenomenon of low rates of female employment in the Saudi workforce are intertwined. All layers play their significant role in keeping a male-dominated workforce as it is; however, positive optimistic change as indicated by the respondents in this research comes from within people themselves and change begins within them and spreads across the society to bring about change.

### 7.3 Implications for Practice

... the focus becomes hearing individual women's stories with the explicit aim of connecting them to the organisational context with a view to make visible the invisible, taken-for-granted practices as a first step towards changing gendered cultures (Lord 2007, 214).

The model presented in Chapter Six, Figure 6.3, combines all the barriers found in Figure 5.2 with the opportunities found in Figure 5.3 that linger between the layers identified in the model in Figure 6.2. Moreover, the following eight-shaped figure highlights the critical sensitivity of adopting methods and strategies to open up a possibility point in changing the barriers to opportunities.

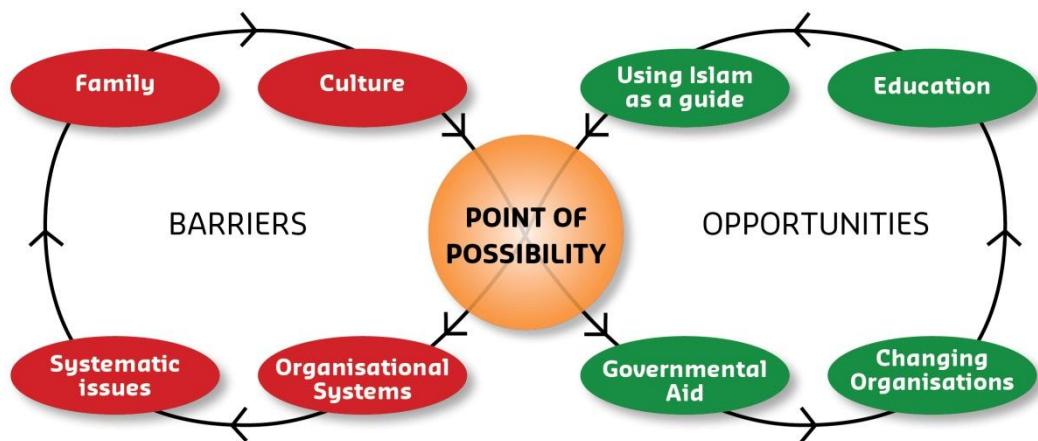


Figure 7.2 Point of possibility model

This model highlights the importance of implementing the suggested actions that focus on addressing the barriers by turning them into opportunities. Each barrier has ways to address its negative impact on female participation. Finding and implementing strategies that aim to solve these barriers to increase female participation creates a gateway: this gateway is highlighted in the above model in orange and is called the point of possibility.

The crossing-over point in this model is the suggested actions that may assist in achieving equity in employment.

First, it is important to look at the social base that energizes female discrimination. Gendered ideologies that restrict female empowerment and career development should be minimized through social media, educational lectures and female empowerment events. Saudi nationals must be given the opportunity to evaluate the unconscious negative implications of gendered ideologies that keep some unfortunate females victims to social structures.

Revisiting the image of female empowerment found in Islamic female figures and supported by Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), recognizes its various benefits that are found in economic growth and social strength. Learning from previous mistakes is important through emphasizing social change to achieve true Islamic social spheres that promote equity, fairness and social strength. In understanding that females are the mothers of the future generations, there is recognition that their inner and social strength is passed on to their children giving the nation intellectual strength that can serve in a global economy. “That nation which doesn’t respect women will never become great now and nor will ever in future” stated Vivekananda (cited in Singh and Gupta 2013, 62). There is acknowledgment that there are different interpretations of the word “respect”: the Saudi female to some is a respected piece of jewellery that needs protection but this is not the kind of respect that is needed. The respect that women need is to be seen as equal individuals of the society who can serve their country in growth and be rewarded according to their merit and contributions.

The educational sector can add gender courses where both male and female students can create a comprehensive understanding of their labour rights and how to establish professional communication channels with the other gender. Female education should also address professionalism in the workplace, where females are provided with information regarding the expectations within professional environments. In establishing professional communication between the genders, it is important to compare and contrast between gendered strategies and to emphasize the benefits of using a strategy that is applicable in an Islamic conservative context such as the neutral strategy (Bird and Rhoton 2011) in disregarding gender in professional communication.

The private sector will need to adapt to new systems that welcome more female participants in various levels: this can be facilitated by the introduction of targets or quotas. Females are not included in organizational activities and, thus, female participation is not seen in most organizations. Female participation within organizations should address the brick walls that create gendered professions and limit females' abilities for growth and career development. Segregation is embedded through the Saudi society's norms, thus, in most companies, having female employees means that there is a female section that only attends to female services. Such systems emphasize gendered professions and this limitation should be addressed. Female participation within a segregated workforce can be rewarding if female employees are recognized the same as male employees working under the same department rules regardless of their gender. Male and female employees should have same targets and progress regardless of where they are located. Some organizations have female sections like those in the banking sector, where female sections serve female customers; however, this should not be a necessary method for all organizations. Some organizations do not employ females as their business does not have female customers. Practices such as these limit women's employment opportunities as this underlying assumption holds that women's employment is dependent on female clients and customers.

If organizations recognize the necessity of employing females as an untapped labour force regardless of the necessity to provide them with separate offices, and they implement a suitable strategy of communication, female employees can achieve and develop in the same way as their male colleagues. Moreover, social responsibility creates an awareness regarding female employees' families and responsibilities. If organizations address female employees' responsibilities towards their families, this would only increase their profitability and enhance their name as a respected business establishment. Addressing the invisible and making it visible as Lord (2007) suggests can be a first step towards tackling the lack of female employment in Saudi Arabia.

In taking on a state role, the government has an opportunity to reinforce best practices and methods in promoting professional female employment. Hence, organizations that aim to offer equitable opportunities in career development



regardless of gender should cooperate with governmental institutions that offer additional support that could cover office costs, and provide guidelines and policies.

#### ***7.4 Suggested Actions***

In this section, the implications for practice are summarized into some specific suggestions that may assist in reinforcing female empowerment and equitable opportunities for women.

Suggested actions for government:

- Create specific governmental departments that have targets to increase female participation and appreciation in the Saudi workforce and to achieve a smoother transition from male-dominated workforces to gender equal opportunities. Such responsibilities include:
  - Organizing official communication channels and advisory groups to discuss equality in female opportunities, and develop research agendas to evaluate status of female employment and development as employees.
  - Establish a blueprint to maintain progress and further research in promoting female opportunities and empowerment.
  - Creating new jobs in needed areas and fields. Evaluating current social status and especially looking at areas in which females are invisible, such as the need for female police, female firefighters, female rescue teams, female lawyers, female engineers and technicians, and female agriculturalists.
  - Sponsor orientation events for female university students that provide information on labour market projections and potential employment opportunities.
  - Sponsor university graduation events that invite official stands and posters of organizations to promote female employment opportunities.
  - Sponsor knowledge sharing conferences and symposiums that promote female employment. Such events should start with honouring female achievements in the workforce, and rewarding organizations which honour female development. Sharing knowledge is vital to encourage organizations to increase female participation. Such knowledge should include methods of how to effectively change male-dominated organizational structures and systems to achieve systems that evaluate employees on merit and

productivity rather than gender. Also it should address progressive methods in developing female decision makers and board members.

- Social media is encouraged to reinforce respect to Islamic female figures, respect and appreciation towards mothers, wives, daughters and sisters. Reflect on famous Saudi female role models should become visible and be seen everywhere in media to overcome overlooking females.
- Providing social interactive events that promote female appreciation is recommended to create an effective awareness as known in Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) calls to remind all Muslims to be righteous.
- Through collaboration with schools, universities, organizations and social events, females should be invited to volunteer in events that may raise funds, reinforce awareness, and support social, childcare, health and global needs. Encouraging females to participate in social public life will offer public recognition of female achievements and capabilities. Having visible achievements may assist in reinforcing respect and appreciation towards Saudi females.
- Address transportation problems for female employees.

Suggested actions for educational facilities to assist in creating graduate students who are ready to work in a professional workplace:

- Schools should reinforce appreciation of female contributions and use Islamic female figures as role models.
- Offer compulsory units that promote cultural intelligence, professional communication between genders, Islamic appreciation of female contributions and labour rights.
- Offer female students training opportunities to advance skills required in the workplace.
- Provide students with information on market directions, and offer connecting channels to promote possible employment opportunities.

### Suggested actions for organizations:

- Organizations are encouraged to analyse the current strategy and highlight their gendered behaviours, norms and policies. It is important to evaluate their systems through a non-gendered lens to improve the culture. Such audits will expose practices that disadvantage women in the organization.
- Within the process of systematic analysis of the culture and practices, leaders and HR should focus on gaining gender equality. This may be achieved by creating teams that work together to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the male-dominated systems and brick walls on female participation: setting targets or quotas could assist in breaking the male-dominated workforce traditions.
- Understanding that segregation in the workplace is the Saudi way to respect cultural traditions and not to be used to discriminate against promoting female career development. Hence, revisiting organizational structures that promote fairness to employees regardless of gender; by making female employees structurally, systemically and productively visible while they are physically invisible.
- Provide opportunities for women to share their needs and expectations and how the organization may assist in overcoming their barriers.
- Acknowledging females' dual responsibilities of their family and work is a step towards female appreciation in the workforce. Appreciating their contributions may be seen by sharing some of their responsibilities through providing part-time jobs, childcare facilities, health insurance and transportation means.
- Understanding that the main objective is not only to achieve equal numbers of men and women in the Saudi workforce. More importantly, it is to create professional environments for working women to grow and develop their careers. Organizations are encouraged to support their female employees by providing them with administrative support, through offering them opportunities of leadership training, decision making and managerial opportunities to develop.

Most of the above suggestions for actions have been identified in many research studies (Bowles 2012; Allen 2001; Acker 1991; Kolb et al. 1998) and organizational behaviour

books and by organizational practitioners. However, the Saudi workforce has for so long been male dominated and guided by masculine systems that exposure to female participation is a cause of concern in many organizations. Thus, organizations must rethink gender, and break through the brick walls to make spaces for professional females guided by new systems that are female-welcoming and that offer fair opportunities regardless of their employees' gender.

### **7.5 *Some Limitations***

The stories provided by the participants and their insights on female empowerment in Saudi Arabia are retrospective and through this qualitative methodological approach, limitations to the generalizability of the findings are unavoidable. However, the findings provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from different perspectives and the wider views of Saudi nationals. Gender ideologies, feminism, culture and religion discussed together in one interview can create a very interesting topic that has been silent but rumbling in many hearts. The sensitivity of these issues may also have limited some participants' willingness to share their views beyond what is the accepted cultural response in relation to these issues.

Bryman (2004) suggests that context-dependent findings may provide opportunities for generalizations through other similar views regarding the discussed topic. However, in the case of this thesis, there is a gap in the literature regarding female participation in Saudi Arabia.

As the researcher aimed to collect data from different segments and regions of the Saudi society with various backgrounds however, twenty eight interviews may be considered as a limitation as some segments of society remain unheard, for example many women living in rural areas. Learning from females living in rural areas can be a very interesting area for further research.

### **7.6 *Further Research***

This research looked into various dimensions of the phenomenon of the lack of female participation in the Saudi workforce. There are many layers of meaning that cause this phenomenon. Cultural implications, as indicated by participants and other research (Achoui 2009; Al Rasheed 2013a; Al-Munajjed 1997; Metcalfe 2011), are

the major reason for the slow progress of female development in the workforce. Further research may assist in offering suggestions of how to overcome such restrictive cultural implications.

Moreover, further research evaluating the Saudi females' journey in the professional workforce is also needed and is important to assist further future development.

Future research in methods and organizational approaches also may provide a window of opportunity in gaining a deeper understanding of what may be the best way to increase the participation of Saudi professional females in the workforce.

### ***7.7 Conclusion***

This research, through a phenomenological lens guided with an Islamic perspective and utilizing a feminist approach, aimed to offer a model to increase the participation of female professionals in the Saudi workforce. In this case, there is low female participation in the Saudi workforce with a market of unemployed nationals. More than 70% of unemployed university graduate students are females: understanding the barriers is vital to address this issue. Twenty-eight in-depth semi-structured interviews and two focus groups were conducted and led to the development of a model that offers suggestions for improving female opportunities in the workforce. Insight has been gained regarding the context within which this engagement and enactment needs to occur. As a result of this deeper understanding of the lived experience of male and female Saudi nationals, implications for educational institutions and organizational practices, and administrative recommendations have been identified. The central theme of the suggestions for action is to place gender firmly on the organizational agenda. How women experience their careers is an organizational issue. Understanding and effectively addressing cultural issues is the challenge ahead if Saudi Arabia is to take full advantage of its highly educated but underutilized females. In response to some Western views linking the lack of Saudi females in the labour market to Islam, this study agrees with other research that Islam is a promoter of female participation in economic development and personal development. Saudi Arabia holds conservative norms that restrict female empowerment causing the above barriers. The various levels of female participation documented in other Muslim countries act as evidence that culture plays a major role in female empowerment and development.

Finally as a Saudi female student holding a responsibility to seek knowledge and share it, I learned that females around the world may look different, think differently, be treated differently and speak different languages. However, we share similar thoughts as mothers, sisters and daughters: we want nothing but the best for our children and family members and that is our personal empowerment. Taking away intellectual and personal power from mothers is like taking away light from a family: everyone will try to find their way in the darkness. However, living in the light may prevent us from bumping into each other.

In the first pages of this research I have acknowledged that there is a lack of Saudi research that examines what feminism means for Saudi women, and thus by the end of my thesis journey I conclude that feminism for Saudi women means to regain self-fulfilment, in their life, opportunities and choices. Thus feminism for Saudi females means many things and for the Saudi nation feminism can be a reminder of the Islamic female image that was recorded into history and carved into our hearts with pride.

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# APPENDICE

## *Appendix 1: Invitation Letter*

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“Female Participation in Paid Employment in Saudi Arabia”

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear Participants,

A research project is currently being undertaken by Curtin University's Graduate School of Business. The research is being undertaken as part of the Doctor of Business Administration Program at Curtin University of Technology.

The thesis title is: Female Participation in Paid Employment in Saudi Arabia, and the research objectives are:

- To understand what are the barriers that stand as brick walls keeping women from participating in paid employment?
- To identify the enablers that will facilitate women's increased participation in the Saudi workforce.

As a Curtin University student, I invite you to participate in the project. The aim is to gain a clear understanding and gather perceptions of Saudi participants to understand the female participation situation in the Saudi Context. The data collection will be through face to face semi-structured in-depth interviews. It is expected that the interviews would take between 40-60 minutes. Some demographic data would be sought as well as insights into the day-to-day experience of the participants in relation to the topic.

Interviews will be recorded (provided written permission is received prior to the interview) and accompanying notes may be taken if required. Please note that participants would be identified by code and real names and institutions will not be used in the final report. Data will be reported in aggregate form and direct quotations will not be attributable to an individual or an institution. You will be given a copy of the interview to check and make changes after transcription. You will also receive a summary of the results of the study at the conclusion of the study.

Attached is consent form indicating willingness to participate in this research. Please return the signed form to me if you would like to be involved in this project. Setting a time and location of the interview, will be arranged after you agree to participate and sign the consent form.

If you would like any further information about the project please do not hesitate to contact either myself or my principle supervisor, Dr. Linley Lord, Director, Maureen Bickley Cente for Women in Leadership Women in Social & Economic Research, Graduate School of Business; or my co-supervisor, Professor Alistair Rainnie Chair, CGSB Research and Development Graduate School of Business.

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## Appendix 2: Interview Guide

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The interview will comprise the following questions:

1. Can you give a Brief overview Career to date?
2. Can you tell me about your current role?
3. From your point of view, what do you think acts as a barrier to women's participation in the Saudi workforce?
4. What can help increase female participation in the Saudi labor market?
5. Some research implies that the Saudi socio-cultural structure influences the female participation, while others argue that Islam forbids female participation, from your point which has the stronger influence? If neither then what does?
6. It has been suggested that women in Arabic nations should be treated differently but not unequally in terms of job opportunities, what are your views on this?

GENERAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION (your personal information will not be stated in the research in any way)

1. Participant's \_\_\_\_\_ name
2. Organisation \_\_\_\_\_ name
3. Job \_\_\_\_\_ title
4. Interview \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Time
5. Interview \_\_\_\_\_ location
6. Age Group  
A, 23-30   B, 30-40   C, 40-50   D, 50-60
7. Gender  
Female                      Male
8. If I need to clarify something I have asked you about, may I contact you again?  
Yes                              No



9. Contact

Tel

No:

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#### *Appendix 4: Questions*

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1. (A) Can you explain what you do in your current role? (tasks)
  
2. (A) The Global Gender Report indicates that females in Saudi Arabia are graduating from universities or colleges but the majority ends up staying home without participating in the paid workforce. From your point of view, what do you think acts as barriers preventing women from participating in the workforce?  
  
(B) Various research, state that Islam plays a role in this current situation, from your point of view, does Islam play a role in preventing women from participation? (yes/ why) (no/ what does)  
  
(C) Which in your point of view has a stronger influence on this situation, Islam or society and why?  
  
(D) It has been suggested that Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia could adapt easily to a framework that emphasizes that females should be treated differently but equally. Do you agree, explain why?
  
3. Through knowledge of others' experience what would you think can act as enablers to help increase females participation in Saudi Arabia?
  
4. Would you like to add anything else that you find important to this research?

## *Appendix 5: Interview Questions (Phase Two)*

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1. Demographic Details:
  - Highest qualification
  - Previous positions or career paths
  - Current position
  - Length of time employed
  - Length of time employed in current position
2. Questions:

1. (A) Can you explain what you do in your current role? (tasks)

2. (A) The Global Gender Report indicates that females in Saudi Arabia are graduating from universities or colleges but the majority ends up staying home without participating in the paid workforce. From your point of view, what do you think acts as barriers preventing women from participating in the workforce?

(B) Some non-Muslim societies think that Islam plays a role in this current situation, from your point of view, does Islam play a role in preventing women from participation? (yes/ why) (no/ what does)

(C) Which in your point of view has a stronger influence on this situation, Islam or society and why?

(D) It has been suggested that Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia could adapt easily to a framework that emphasizes that females should be treated differently but equally. Do you agree, explain why?

3. Through knowledge of others' experience what would you think can act as enablers to help increase females participation in Saudi Arabia?

4. Through Islamic teachings females are expected to look modestly, Do you think it is appropriate to suggest using Islam as a guide for female employment in mixed working places?

5. Would you like to add anything else that you find important to this research?