



Working Women in Arab Countries

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ABSTRACT

There has been a lot of research on the role of women and their participation in the workforce. The research is focused and conducted in the west. The amount of research conducted on the Arab region is relatively low. In this region, the proportion of working women is quite low. Moreover there are a lot of cultural and societal challenges faced by these women. This study can help in understanding the position of working women in the Arab region. It is important to pay attention to the factors which are impeding the participation of women in workforce. The identification of issues and barriers will help to find solutions in an appropriate.

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1. Introduction

There has been a lot of research on the role of women and their participation in the workforce. The research is focused and conducted in the west. The amount of research conducted on the Arab region is relatively low. In this region, the proportion of working women is quite low. Moreover, there are a lot of cultural and societal challenges faced by these women. This study can help in understanding the position of working women in the Arab region. It is important to pay attention to the factors which are impeding the participation of women in workforce. The identification of issues and barriers will help to find solutions in an appropriate manner. The participation of women in the workforce can help in social and economic up gradation. This is the reason that trend in the Arab countries about women participation in the workforce is changing. Now women are participating in education and pursuing their careers as well.

In the Arab region, women are not allowed to work specially in the settings where there can be interaction of men and women. The trend is changing to some extent and in some specific countries, still women face certain barriers. In most of the Arab countries, the attitude of society towards fair treatment with women and providing them opportunities is improving. The women are allowed to join certain fields such as teaching and nursing. Apart from these and few other jobs, women are not allowed to work. The current literature review is about the challenges and barriers which women of this region face. The identification of these challenges help in devising future strategies. It will also identify the mitigation strategies for these challenges.(Sidani, 2016).

1.1. Research Questions

Women in the Arab region have to face certain issues. It is important to identify factors which are impeding the advancement of women and their participation in economic activities. Based on the problem, the current literature review attempts to answer following questions:

- What are the key factors impacting advancement of women in Arab region?
- What are the barriers in participation of women in workforce?
- What are the coping strategies?

1.2. Rationale of the Research

The current study aims to answer questions related to the state of working women in the Arab region. This will help in identifying factors which are playing critical role in women participation. It will also help in analyzing the underlying barriers, challenges faced by the women of this region, development in this area and how it can be improved. In order to find answers to all these questions, an exploratory research based on the studies conducted in this field is important. It will provide an overview of the studies conducted in this domain. The result of the study will help in future researches on working women in Arab. It is important to identify the underlying factors involved in this issue. Without gaining extensive review of literature, it is not possible to understand the complexity of the issue.

2. Literature Review

As the world is going through globalization and modernization, the business environment as well as perspective for both men and women is changing. Women are advancing in education and pursuing their career in all fields. The trend for the Arab women is also changing. Despite the fact that change is slow in this region, the transformation process is taking place and representation of women in different fields is quite significant. The trend varies across different Arab countries. The societal and cultural values play a critical role. These values differ from West in many ways. In some Arab countries, not only the participation of women in workforce is quite low i.e. 8% but also women are allowed to work in certain circumstances and conditions. They have to choose sectors such as teaching and nursing. The religious scholars of Islam have allowed women to work in certain fields such as education and medical field.(Omair, 2009).

In every society, there are certain roles assigned to men and women. In Arab society, men are supposed to be sole breadwinners while women have to stay at home. Women are expected to take care of children and other household chores. This is the reason behind the low ranking of Arab countries for women participation. This is the reason of heavy reliance of Arabs on expatriate workforce. The societal, cultural and religious factors are major reasons for low participation of women. Work family balance is another factor. It is believed that if women work then their family life will get disturbed. So they need to remain at home for taking care of their family. If the attitude of males towards women participation in workforce is considered, then it can be seen that single men displayed less traditional attitude as compared to married. The reason can be their unawareness to the responsibilities of married life. In the same way young men were also less traditional as compared to old men. Education also impacts their attitude towards women work.(Elamin & Omair, 2010).

In some countries such as UAE, the representation of women in education and workplace has been increased. Government is taking actions to improve the situation and enhance women participation. As a result of it, there has been a phenomenal increase in the ratio of women. The quantity as well as quality of employment for women changed with the introduction of governmental policies. Still there are certain issues which women face at the workplace. The barriers for women in excelling to top positions are based on social norms and traditions. These factors discriminate women in recruitment, selection, training and development. There are several kinds of employees and their career depends on how they perceive their organizations. These include both expatriates as well as locals.(Saheem & Brewster, 2017). The organizational structure of the organizations follows the same male dominant concept and hinders the opportunities of growth and development for women. The gender based roles of the women are reinforced in organizations of UAE and on such basis; their advancement to top positions is prohibited. Studies also demonstrated that there is a proportion of women who did not accept this discrimination and adopted a protean career path.(Tlaiss, 2014).

There are different barriers identified by previous researches. These include stereotypes, limited opportunities, lack of mobility and increased workload. First there are limited or no opportunities for women, secondly working women have to face a lot of challenges at their workplaces. There is a need to overcome these challenges and barriers as women participation in the economic activities can be very helpful. It is also very important for developing HRD in organizations. This can be done through training and development of women. They can be trained to become more confident and balance their work along with their family life. Better policies at national level can be introduced. These policies will help women to safeguard their rights. Discrimination can also be controlled in this way. Organizations must be women friendly. There should be policies of flexi time so that women can pay full attention to their families as well. The quality of work life should also be enhanced. There must be balance between work and family life so that women can better perform at work. The carrier opportunities for women should also be enhanced. (Asfour, Tlaiss, Rajasekar, & Khan, 2017).

3. Research Design

The study will be exploratory in nature. In this study the existing literature will be studied in order to explore answers to these questions. Extensive review of literature will help in deep understanding of the issues and underlying causes. The independent variables include the factors and the dependent is the situation of women.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Factors Impacting Advancement of Women

The review of the literature indicates that situation of women in the Arab region is improving. They are taking active part in education and pursuing their careers. This situation varies from one country to the other. The major factors are societal, cultural, institutional and religious. The culture in this region is quite conservative where women are not allowed to leave home for work. They are expected to stay at home and take care of their families. Men are considered to be bread winners. This is the reason of extremely low participation of women in the workforce. The opportunities for women are also limited.

4.2. Barriers

Despite the improving situations, women still face certain challenges and barriers in advancement. These barriers are mostly in the form of cultural and societal norms. Women in these societies are expected to stay at their houses and take care of the families. There are certain professions in which women are allowed to work such as teaching and nursing. So in these regions the mobility of women is also less along with the limited opportunities. The stereotypical views of the people are also another barrier. At the workplace, women have to face certain challenges such as discrimination and barriers to their advancement. Maintaining work family balance is another issue which hinders advancement of women. Women are discriminated on the basis that they will not be able to maintain work-family balance.

4.3. Coping strategies

Studies show that this low participation of women is becoming a concern for government. Government is introducing policies for enhancing women participation in economic activities. Through this the participation of women in the workforce will increase. There must be training and development programs for both men and women in order to demonstrate importance of equal opportunity for all in the workplace. Education is the key factor; it can change the attitude of people to a great extent. So educating the youth will help to bring positive changes for the women at the workplace.

The participation of women in the workforce can be very beneficial for the economy. Better organizational policies needs to be introduced. These must be in the form of flexi time for women, proper leave structure, workload and other policies which can help women to work properly and advance their careers. The policies for advancement of women in such areas should be formulated keeping in view the social and cultural aspects of society. The religious discourse by most of the scholars demonstrated that women can work in certain situations. Some scholars even prohibit the participation of women. It is important to devise policies which

are according to the cultural, religious and societal norms of the region. (Danish & Smith, 2012).

5. Conclusion

Women in the Arab region face a lot of challenges. They have to face issues while pursuing their careers. Studies show that the situation is getting better in some countries with the introduction of better policies by the government. Most of the barriers identified are being overcome through proper policies and planning. Women in the workplace face discrimination of various forms. Still women are trying to overcome these challenges and barriers. Some structural and institutional changes are required for implementation of policies in organizations.

Government is taking initiatives to provide equal opportunities to the women so that they can contribute in the economic activities of a country. Organizations also need to devise policies for encouraging women participation. These policies should revolve around providing better and safe working conditions where women can work. Organizations should be flexible enough so that changes can be made in the policies and procedures. These initiatives will allow maximum participation of women in the economic activity. This will also minimize the barriers and help in advancement of women in the workplace. All the development is enhancing the importance of women for the economic uplift.

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