

# The Challenges Saudi Women Faced at the Workforce

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**Abstract--***In this paper, investigation was done on the different challenges faced by the Saudi working women in the private sector of the Saudi workforce. A qualitative research was done based on phenomenological methodology; where observations and in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews included a sample group of fifteen Saudi workingwomen at the National Commercial Bank in four different branches located in north Jeddah. The findings of the study indicated that different challenges were faced by the working women and these challenges were categorized into two categories, challenges within the work itself, and non-work related challenges. Results showed that balancing family duties and work responsibilities was one of the challenges faced. In addition, lack of job opportunities, religious influence, stereotypes and gender roles were among the challenges faced. Furthermore, results have found that the requirement of higher education at work place and family regulation were stated as external challenges that were faced by Saudi Arabia's working women.*

**Keywords--***Woman; Work; Saudi Arabia; Challenge; work related issues; non-work related issues*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and social improvements in Saudi Arabia demonstrate the solid conviction among representatives that extensive and feasible advancement would not be possible without initiating every performing personal in the society [1]. It is very certain that Saudi Arabia is grasping another vital course to enlist qualified women into places of administration at the highest point of the chain of command out in the open and private sections [2].

In spite of the worldwide intrigue that women's employments have pulled in, information with respect to the professions of woman in the Arab world is insignificant. Indeed, even in the midst of developing enthusiasm for Arab women, most evaluation focus around explicit nations, for example, Lebanon [3] and the United Arab Emirates [4] with insufficient research explicitly on women in Saudi Arabia. This research gap averts understanding, the encounters of Arab women as well as the exchange between women's professions, the social procedures and authoritative structures. Fostering an understanding of the work environment and business challenges faced by women in Saudi Arabia could empower human resource managers to advance more women in well-disposed workplaces, approaches and strategies[5].

As indicated by Al-Ashour et al. [6], Saudi women battle to seek after professions outside the homes in the midst of far reaching sexual orientation generalizations that place an incentive upon their jobs as homemakers, moms, and spouses.

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Moreover, in this collectivist society, which makes bunch of congruity principles and anticipates that people should alter their own and vocation goals to keep up social request, women who seek after professions outside the house are frequently seen as socially miscreant who challenge social conventions.

Tlaiss [7] stated that these social qualities and social assumptions about what women ought to and ought not to do influences their advancement and growth. Tlaiss and Elamin [8] reported that Saudi Arabia holds an exceptionally moderate way to deal with social and sexual orientation issues as women keep on bunching in customarily "female" zones of training and the economy, for example, the humanities, expressions, educating, and medicinal services.

Alselaimeet al. [9] stated that preservationist bunches in Saudi Arabia prohibit the blending of the genders and bolster isolated working environments trying to keep Saudi women from being impacted by the ways of life of their western partners who have diverse qualities and needs. As indicated by Ramady et al. [10], Saudi society and culture revolve inside associations as authoritative standards and culture disallow people from blending over the span of work. Sexual orientation imbalances are vigorously systematized in Saudi associations.

For example, despite the fact that women make up 50% of the workforce, they are considered unequipped to perform the jobs of the executive and are prohibited from basic leadership positions and deanship by ideals of their gender orientation [11]. Alhejjiet al. [12] studied gender inequalities in the workforce in Saudi Arabia and discovered that for females, cultural and traditional practices are significant in hindering the development of females in the workforce.

Despite the activities of progressive Saudi governments to expand ladies' instructive dimension and workforce interest, Saudi work law has no control system in supporting sexual orientation equity [13]. As asserted by Tlaiss [3], the non-attendance of administrative help fortifies associations' unfair practices and impedes women's professional success.

As indicated by Shaya et al. [14], these difficulties are generally identified with working environment culture and incorporate organization predisposition, segregation, stereotyping, biased hierarchical approaches and practices. Another arrangement of difficulties originates from general societal factors and incorporates work-family job clashes, male centric frameworks, social and religious gender codes, restricted professional success openings, social boundaries faced by ladies in administrative jobs, rejection from casual systems administration forms, and an absence of family backing and worry for equivalent chance, among others [15].

Numerous specialists have discovered that the present frameworks utilized in associations overall block women progression inside them [16]. In spite of worldwide endeavors to take out gender orientation segregation, extra effort is required, particularly in the Arab world when ladies face a large number of boundaries [17]. In addition, it was reported that Arab women must have economic wellbeing and family associations with development of their expert vocations [16,17].

Furthermore, Azmi et al. [18] stated that Saudi Muslim ladies' responsibility to family, restricted access to proficient preparing and improvement openings, absence of casual systems, tutoring frameworks, and hierarchical

help, alongside sexual orientation predisposition and male representatives' inability to pay attention to ladies are vital variables that affects women's professional success.

Thus, accordingly, researchers have called for increasingly exact examinations investigating women's challenges at workforce over the individual, authoritative, and social dimensions within the Saudi background[6]. As it is well established, this study focused on exploring the internal and external factors that challenged the Saudi workingwomen and their performance at the work place. The internal factors are challenges exist within the work itself the external factors are broader issues like cultural influence, family issues, or others.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

This work was done to explore the internal and external factors that challenged Saudi workingwomen. The internal factors are within the work itself or work related issues; and the external ones are broader issues that create different challenges in performing at work.

### **Research Design**

For this work, phenomenological design was used. This method was used due to the qualitative nature of this work. This method was preferred for explaining in depth on how each challenge affected the work performance of Saudi workingwomen, in both aspects (internally and externally).

### **Population and Sampling**

This work has targeted Saudi working women in the age range between 23 to 50 years old, in private sector. These women were from the western region of Saudi Arabia. The sample included 15 Saudi workingwomen in the National Commercial Bank (NCB) in Jeddah. Their work experiences were more than 2 years long. Samples were selected randomly from different branches in North Jeddah. In addition, participants were given a statement that described the extant of the confidentiality of this work.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected for this work was done through interviews and observations. The interviews were direct interviews. Participants were encouraged to give full explanation and description of their experiences with the different challenges they faced individually. Participants were asked to provide full description for their thoughts, reflections, and maybe some memories that could be related to the obstacles. The interviews were done on 8 working days, 2 days for each one of the 4 branches.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was done using few steps. First, the text provided by the participants was analyzed descriptively. Next, it was translated into elements and the abstract theme based on the participants' description attained.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the presented research paper was to investigate what are the challenges Saudi workingwomen are facing in the work force that are affecting their work performance. The responses from the respondents revealed significant outcome and were categorized into two main categories, the internal factors and the external factor.

#### General Information

The first section of the interviews was to gather general information about the social status of the participants. The responses of the first question of the interview, which is “*Are you married or not?*” revealed that 11 out of the 15 participants are currently married, 1 out of 15 was a single mother; and 2 out of 15 were never married. Regarding the second question, “*Do you have children? If yes, how many.*” 12 participants stated that they do have children, including the single mother. The highest number of children that participants had was 5 children. However, the average number of children among the participants was 3 children with 42 percent.

Regarding the work experience section in the interviews, 60 percent of the participants did work in somewhere else before NCB, where 22 percent of them worked at Hospitals administrations, and 78 percent of them worked previously in other banks. The work experience years varied between 2 years to 16 years, but 40 percent of the participants have 5 years of working experience on average. However, 80 percent of the participants (12 out of 15) stated that their work experience started after the college years. The other 20 percent (3 out of 15) did start working during college years, where one of them worked as a kindergarten teacher for 3 years; the other 2 worked in marketing department in different companies for 2 years.

In the educational background section, all the 15 participants graduated with Bachelor Degrees from Business and Administration colleges. 4 participants majored in Accounting, other 5 in Marketing, 1 had her degree in Human Resources major, and 5 studied General Administration. When they were asked why did they choose these majors, their answers were either, based on personal interest; based on studying the market needs; family requests and wishes; or it was a job requirement.

Furthermore, 47% of the participants said that the majors from which they graduated were their first choice, and 53% explained that their majors were not their first choice.

#### Internal challenges

Table 1 shows the internal challenges faced by the working women. Based on Table 1, 14 participants clarified their intention to leave work, because they think of banking work either as temporary job; and contributing to the financial needs of the family, or because they need work experience in order to apply for another job they desire. Three participants stated that they were offered job opportunities in another company and they are seriously considering it. The second internal challenge for them was the lack of job opportunities for females in the Saudi market; which is due to many factors such as gender segregation in Saudi Arabia. Sexual harassment was another challenge or issue which Saudi workingwomen stated; where 6 of the participants reported that, they were sexually

harassed by male supervisors in their previous jobs in order for them to either earn promotions or get things done at work.

Moreover, fieldwork issues were another problem they were facing. In the banking world, in order to be the best seller for the different bank products, the respondents have to exhibit the best marketing for the products through different marketing ways and fieldwork is one of the good ways to sell the targeted product. 66.7 percent of the interviewed women had issues in doing the fieldwork due to external factors, such as driver issues, and family restrictions. Another challenge mentioned was the lack of work experience in the field where 7 out of 15 participants mentioned this problem. Also, the relationship between the employee and her supervisor is built on mistrust; where for example, one of them does not trust the work qualifications of the other and 7 participants highlighted that issue.

The last internal challenge was the importance of having personal connection in work 9 participants out of the 15 was very upset about the issue. This is because respondents believe it is not fair to give someone a promotion simply because they know socially powerful people who can easily get things done without looking at this person's qualifications or his eligibility for such a position. The overall responses for the internal challenges are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1:**The responses for the internal challenges of the work

<b>Internal challenges</b>	<b>No. Participants Agreeing</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
The aim of work	14/15	93.3%
Lack of job opportunities	13/15	86.7%
Sexual harassment	10/15	66.7%
Fieldwork issues	10/15	66.7%
Personal connections	9/15	60.0%
Lack of work experience in the same field	7/15	46.7%
The mistrusted relationship between employees and supervisors	7/15	46.7%

### **External challenges**

The external challenges Saudi workingwomen facing are more than the internal ones, according to the participants in the interviews. The most common external challenge was finding the balance between the family responsibilities and the work responsibilities. All the 15 participants highlighted this challenge first and without giving it any second thoughts as shown in Table 2. The second important issue was “driving issues”; which is due to governmental policies that forbid women to drive in the country. The next challenged faced was the cultural

definition of each gender's role. Saudi culture as many other cultures around the world believe that the main role of the women is to become a mother and raise children; and that bringing the bread to the table is the man's role.

In addition, another challenge participants mentioned was, the need to have higher educational degrees in order to have higher positions. Family regulations were another issue that was raised by 8 participants out of 15. They mentioned that family sometimes care a little bit too much about their daughters or wives, where they start implementing a lot of rules and restrictions that would interrupt women from advancing in work. Self-independence was another issue that is resulted from the family regulations. 6 participants stated that they feel completely dependent on their families although they are working. Furthermore, 3 out 15 participants have stated that limited college major for women as an external challenge. On the other hand, 3 out 15 participants have stated that in they faced guardian issues as well. Finally, 2 out of 15 participants stated that they faced religious influence that prohibited them from going to work.

**Table 2:**The responses for the External challenges,

<b>External Challenges</b>	<b>No. Participants Agreeing</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Balancing between family and work responsibilities	15/15	100%
Driving issues	12/15	80.0%
Stereotypes and gender roles according to culture	12/15	80.0%
Requiring higher education at work	9/15	60.0%
Family regulations and restrictions	8/15	53.3%
Self independence	6/15	40.0%
Guardians issue	3/15	20.0%
Limited college majors for women	3/15	20.0%
Religious influence	2/15	13.3%

## **Discussion**

The result of this work showed that balancing family duties and work responsibilities was the challenge all fifteen participants agreed that it is a major challenge for working women. Another example was, the lack of job opportunities for the females in the Saudi work labor [6,16]. Another challenge that affected the females' work performance at the Saudi workforce was the religious influence [15]. Islam plays a major role in forming what are the rules and restrictions in the Arab states generally, and in Saudi Arabia specifically, because Qur'an and Hadith

are the main sources for these rules and policies [15,17]. In addition, stereotypes and gender roles according to culture were also a challenge [19]. The Arabic culture believes that women's role is to get married and become a mother, while men should work outside the house to bring the food, money for the family, and also protect the wife and children of his. Furthermore, several researches [6,18,19] have supported and agreed that this issue is affecting not only the working women, but also the society as a whole.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This work has listed the different challenges Saudi working women are facing in the private sector. The issues were categorized under two main categories, which are work-related challenges, and non-work related challenges. The findings of this work have shown that, both external and internal factors have affected the work performance of working women in Saudi Arabia. Solving these challenges will help in economical growth for any country, especially the Arabian Gulf countries in the Middle East as they have shortages in the female empowerment and female participations in the economic.

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