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Determinants of female labor force participation: implications for policy in Qatar

Noora Lari^{1*}, Amal Awadalla¹, Mohammad Al-Ansari¹ and Engi Elmaghraby¹

Abstract: The aim of this study was to examine the microlevel factors affecting women's participation in the Qatar workforce, as the gender gap in employment is still wide, and addressing this issue remains an essential item on the government's policy agenda. Data were collected via a national telephonic survey of a representative sample of Qatari nationals, chosen using simple random sampling. A regression analysis was performed with women's employment, individual-level characteristics (e.g., age, education, and marital status), and household-level factors (e.g., number of children below 18 years of age and household monthly income) as the variables. The analytical model highlighted the microlevel predictors at the individual level as well as the public attitudes toward societal obstacles that have adverse effects on female labor force participation. The results revealed several indicators that affect women's participation in the labor force, including education level, marital status, and age. These constructs were found to have the strongest (direct or indirect) effects in terms of pushing Qatari women into the labor market. The originality of this study lies in its ability to explain how state-directed initiatives can encourage women to participate in the labor market and thus facilitate a rapid increase in the number of employed women in Qatar. A methodological limitation of the cross-sectional survey design used in this study is that it limits the causations

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Understanding the relevant impacts of socioeconomic factors on female labor force participation (FLFP) provides considerable insights in the context of the Arab Gulf region. Empirical research that can be used to guide policy in this region is limited. To further investigate the socioeconomic dynamics in the State of Qatar, the present study was conducted using original national survey data to determine the implications of microlevel determinants (i.e., individual- and household-level characteristics) influencing women's participation in the workforce and to provide potential policy responses. The results indicate that socioeconomic and familial structures within Arab societies have undergone rapid changes in recent decades. In addition, government-sponsored initiatives in Qatar are undergoing a set of reforms that aim to expand women's roles in the labor market and in public life and provide them with the voice, agency, and resources required for further economic participation.

between the government interventions and the research outcomes. The findings indicate the need for further improvement in welfare regimes at the intrastate level.

Subjects: Gender Studies - Soc Sci; Women; Work; Gender Studies; Gender Inequality; Women; sStudies; Quantitative Methods

Keywords: women's labor force participation; qatar; gender; family-friendly policies

1. Introduction

A close look at the globalized labor market scenario in the Arab Gulf region, which comprises Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, reveals the phenomenally rapid growth of the expatriate population (Buttorff et al., 2018), where a significant proportion of the labor force consists of noncitizens. According to Kamrava and Babar (2012), the Arab Gulf states spend extensive amounts on managing migrant laborers—as they greatly influence the economy and hydrocarbon investments—with a gross domestic product (GDP) of USD 3.655 trillion and a GDP per capita of more than USD 71,205 (Charfeddine & Barkat, 2020). Nevertheless, labor absorption is largely influenced by the demand of the labor market (Buttorff et al., 2018; Starnski & Hing, 2015).

The female labor force participation (FLFP) rate is miniscule and exhibits flat trends in the Arab Gulf region compared to the male labor force participation rate (Assaad et al., 2020). In the Arab Gulf states, the number of women in the labor market is about half the global average, despite the remarkable progress made by these states in recent decades to reduce gender disparities in areas such as education, health, and mortality (Ganguli et al., 2014). According to Mansour et al. (2020), the labor markets of the Arab Gulf states can be broadly categorized into three groups in terms of FLFP. The only country in the first group, which is Kuwait, has an FLFP rate of around 50%. The second group comprises countries that have relatively limited FLFP rates (about 30–35%), such as Qatar and Bahrain. The third group consists of three countries—Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—with low FLFP rates.

Understanding the relevant impacts of socioeconomic factors on labor force participation provides considerable insights in the context of the Arab Gulf region (El-Kassem et al., 2022; Lari, 2021; Majbouri, 2020). Although policies have been implemented to address FLFP low rates based on these considerations, empirical research that can be used to guide policy in this region is limited. To further investigate the socioeconomic dynamics in the State of Qatar, the present study was conducted using original national survey data to determine the implications of microlevel determinants (i.e., individual- and household-level characteristics) influencing women's participation in the workforce and to provide potential policy responses.

2. Societal expectations and traditions in the Arab gulf states

The socioeconomic and familial structures within Arab societies have undergone rapid changes in recent decades, particularly due to the ongoing transformations of gender discourse. Given the international evidence linking FLFP rates to increased economic growth in the Arab Gulf region (Gaddis & Klasen, 2013), government-sponsored initiatives are undergoing a set of reforms that aim to expand women's roles in the labor market and in public life. In nontraditional family contexts, the transformation from single- to dual-earner families has expanded women's access to employment (Lari & Al Emadi, 2021; Malit & Ghafoor, 2014) and provided them with the voice, agency, and resources required to make decisions within the household (Karshenas & Moghadam, 2021).

The efforts made to move beyond societal values and cultural barriers and reduce the limitations to women's career progression, which arise due to household responsibilities, have been widely debated in the Arab Gulf region (Elshenawy, 2017; Hendy, 2017; Lari et al., 2022; Abdul Razak, 2011). Scholars such as Kaufman and Williams (2010) and McRae (2003) have reported that traditional gender ideologies are still prevalent in Arab societies and that several societal

constraints hinder women's transition into the labor market, discouraging them from pursuing career advancements. Karshenas and Moghadam (2021) highlighted the negatively correlated impacts of conservative cultural norms, which lead to the continued association of women with family-centric roles, and the influence of religion and religiosity on FLFP in the Arab region.

Studies have also addressed issues related to tribal family structures as determinants of women's career experiences and opportunities in the Arab Gulf context. These issues have emerged from the traditional gender roles of women and men typified in the region by the breadwinner model (Hutchings et al., 2010; VM Moghadam, 2013). Others have pointed to societal expectations defined by the prevailing socially constructed concepts of male chauvinism and female subordination (Van Osch & Schaveling, 2020). For instance, women are primarily viewed as caregivers and may be less likely to be seen as potential employees (Spierings et al., 2010).

In this context, a woman's decision to participate in the labor force is usually the product of a joint decision-making process in her household (Korotayev et al., 2014; Moghadam, 2005). According to Majbouri (2020), a husband (or male guardian) has the power to veto a woman's decision to work, which is the biggest hurdle a woman must overcome to enter the job market. As breadwinners, men are expected to handle the financial responsibilities in their families, whereas women are considered fully responsible for household tasks, including cleaning, washing, and cooking, and thus lag behind in job applications (Lari, 2022). This societal model controls the extent and nature of women's employment and inhibits their employment opportunities (Fortin, 2005), as men are deemed to have authority over the family unit, and explains the low participation rates of married women in the labor market (Fernández, 2013; Pfau-Effinger, 2004).

2.1. Microlevel predictors of FLFP

Research has addressed the individual characteristics and family-level determinants that influence women's transition to work outside the home (Clark et al., 1991; Desai & Jain, 1994). Scholars have reported on the link between demographic and socioeconomic factors, including gender, age, education, marital status, family size, and the presence and number of children, that emerge as predictors of FLFP outcomes in the context of the Arab Gulf region as well as other regions (Al-Ammari & Romanowski, 2016; Spierings & Smits, 2007).

Unsurprisingly, women's education outcomes determine their ability to meet the requirements of suitable jobs and enter the workforce (Moghadam, 1998). This is of particular importance in the Gulf states, where women have long outnumbered men in the higher education system; indeed, female enrollment is almost double that of male enrollment at the university level (Al-Ammari & Romanowski, 2016). Marital status has been found to influence FLFP trends: FLFP is higher when women are either unmarried or lack the presence of a male head of household, whereas it is lower when job tradeoffs are imposed on married women who are burdened by household responsibilities (Foroutan, 2008; Haller & Hoellinger, 1994). Amin and Al-Bassusi (2004) found that married working women are likely to be impacted by marital conflicts related to spousal roles/expectations, housework duties, and parental responsibilities and thus face many challenges in balancing their careers with their household responsibilities.

These marital issues are seen as turnoffs among married women who wish to be employed and create the most prevalent barrier to FLFP, constituting an "obstacle to making full use of the region's human resources in a context where women's education is catching up with, if not surpassing, that of men" (Assaad et al., 2020, p. 3). Such issues also influence women's market behaviors and fertility preferences following marriage and childbirth. Al-Asfour et al. (2017) found that highly educated women in Saudi Arabia struggle to pursue careers outside the home due to their roles as homemakers, mothers, and wives, which require them to sacrifice their careers for their families. In Oman, although women are increasingly likely to enter the workforce, retaining married women remains a central challenge (Belwal & Belwal, 2014).

Overall, working women tend to be highly educated and have fewer children, and childfree women exceed mothers in the likelihood of holding a paid job (Kaufman & Williams, 2010). Using a microlevel approach, Hafeez and Ahmad (2002) found that the continuity of a woman's employment is significantly impacted by the birth of her first child. However, Karshenas and Moghadam (2021) stated that the "correlation between the number of young children and nonparticipation does not necessarily imply a one-way causality from fertility to labor force participation" (p. 97). Moreover, Majbouri (2020) claimed that there is no statistically significant relationship between a mother's participation in the workforce and the presence or number of children.

Under specific household circumstances, household financial discretion (i.e., a woman's income contribution to the average monthly expenditures of the family and control over spending expenses) has a significant influence on the expansion of a family's financial sources, especially among working-class and low-income households. It may affect FLFP and lead to a shift from a single-earner family structure to a dual-earner family structure, with the husband no longer being the sole financial provider for the family. Studies have shown that a woman's decision to join the labor force is negatively correlated with household income (Hafeez & Ahmad, 2002; Klasen & Pieters, 2012). In a low-income household, women participate in the labor force to increase family income by establishing a second source of income (Tsani et al., 2012), whereas, in wealthy households, women tend to be economically inactive and exhibit low productivity (Kapsos et al., 2015).

2.2. The Qatari setting

Qatar is among the high-income countries and has the third-largest oil and natural gas reserves in the world. As a result, Qatar's GDP per capita from hydrocarbon revenues is among the highest globally. According to Tok et al. (2020), hydrocarbon revenues account for 70% of total government revenue and 85% of export earnings. In terms of the distribution of economic activity, Qatar nationals make up only 10–15% of the entire population due to the vast presence of expatriates. A substantial increase in the recruitment of foreign white-collar employees and low-skilled construction workers has enabled infrastructure investments (Bel-Air F, 2018), leading to greater cultural diversity in the labor market as well as diversity in ethnic background, nationalism, and multicultural religious contexts.

At the national level, the Qatari government is attempting to localize its workforce through human resources laws and a Qatarization policy (Sayre et al., 2015). Qataris are employed almost exclusively in the public sector, while expatriate workers dominate the private sector (Berrebi et al., 2009). Simultaneously, Qatar provides a unique setting for investigating FLFP trends because the government has adopted several national policies aimed at women's empowerment and engagement in the labor market (i.e., the Qatar National Vision 2030 [QNV] and Qatar Second National Development Strategy [NDS] 2018–2022). The complete inclusion of women in the economy is a desirable aim for equality and efficiency (Pollert, 2003). However, "whilst the legal door is open, other barriers remain" (Felder & Vuello, 2008, p. 6), and the overall participation of Qatari women in the workforce remains low.

Despite the presence of state-directed initiatives to increase women's participation in the labor force, the gender gap in employment remains wide and a matter of concern in Qatar. Qatari women's unemployment rate was 0.9% in 2020 (Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority, 2020), and married women represent almost half of the economically inactive population in Qatar (Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority, 2018). There is a significant difference between married and unmarried women's labor force participation rates, with married women representing almost half (47%) of the economically inactive population in the Qatari labor market (Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority, 2018).

2.3. Integrating work and family responsibilities

Several studies have examined how work–family conflicts (WFCs) reduce women's overall productivity outcomes (Klasen, 2019; VM Moghadam, 2013; Pfau-Effinger, 2004; Spierings, 2014). Women

who are inclined to work may be prevented from entering the labor market because their receptiveness to family responsibilities is seen as an obstacle to success in the labor market. Working women who marry and have childcare responsibilities start juggling their work and household tasks (i.e., chores, childcare duties, etc.) and may be unable to cope with work pressure (Said-Foqahaa & Maziad, 2011); the more time they dedicate to family matters, the less time they have for work responsibilities, and vice versa.

To address the family's needs and manage childcare duties, members of the extended family (e.g., grandparents or siblings of parents) may help the mother with child-rearing (Majbouri, 2020). There is also a high dependency on outsourced domestic employees (who live with the family and help with childcare and household duties) in the Arab Gulf region, "where care is traditionally the responsibility of the family and where intergenerational households are replaced by nuclear households" (Tayah & Assaf, 2018, p. 3). In Qatar, female migrant domestic employees (including housekeepers, maids, cooks, caretakers, and babysitters) account for 62% of the total domestic workforce (Tayah & Assaf, 2018). Thus, the presence of extended family members and domestic employees in the household enables dual-earner families to outsource their household and childcare tasks, providing more opportunities for mothers to work.

In the case of nuclear families, inadequate paid maternity leave policies, inflexible working hours, and a lack of childcare arrangements restrict mothers' opportunities to seek employment outside the home. Therefore, working women are more likely than men to face work-family conflicts. Hafeez and Ahmad (2002) hypothesized that institutional factors, such as a country's welfare regime and family policies, as well as individual factors, specifically childcare, significantly impact women's employment in labor markets and that the extent to which FLFP is impacted depends on how progressive a country's maternity and labor activity policies are.

In Qatar, limited family-friendly legislation, inflexible job opportunities, excessive workload, and pregnancy-related challenges leave mothers with little support in ensuring work-life balance (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Qatar labor law provisions have yet to overcome several institutional hurdles and consist of limited family-friendly work policies, making it challenging for mothers to participate in the workforce. This eventually reduces the level of female employee absorption in the labor market. Therefore, microlevel relationships within the Qatari setting need to be consistently examined against a wide range of countries worldwide.

3. Theoretical considerations

By adopting various structural, institutional, and cultural frameworks (Mansour et al., 2020; Metcalfe, 2011), influential studies have revealed several micro and macro predictors that shape FLFP at the individual, societal, and institutional levels and that have profound effects on women's employment (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004; McRae, 2003). These predictors include several factors related to economic and labor market scenarios (such as unemployment rate, economic growth, and urbanization), socioeconomic status (such as age, educational status, occupation, and household income), and social expectations and gender roles (Korotayev et al., 2014; Moghadam, 2005).

Several approaches can be taken to studying FLFP rates. The institutional approach investigates factors that are likely to induce variations in FLFP rates in modern states (VM Moghadam, 2013; Pfau-Effinger, 2004). The cultural approach is a particularly suitable choice for explaining variations in FLFP rates in developing countries (Klasen, 2019). The structural model explains FLFP dynamics resulting from everyday technology use, female educational attainment rates, and fertility rates across cultures (Mammen & Paxson, 2000).

With respect to the influence of patriarchal norms, institutions, and household composition on women's employment in Muslim-majority countries, Spierings (2014) drew upon the multilevel framework of needs, opportunities, and values at four major levels—household, community, country, and global—to "conceptualize the complexity and multitude of factors influencing

women's employment" (p. 90). In addition, Spierings (2014) analyzed this multilevel framework to identify the interrelated aspects of the various levels. For example, economic development can have a "direct top-down influence in the form of labor demand, an indirect top-down influence through human capital investments, and an embedding effect whereby having children is less restricting due to economic development" (Spierings, 2014, p. 53). An individual woman is the primary agent in a multilayered context, with different structures and agents at each level shaping her initial participation decision and, thus, her level of success in finding a job in the market.

People "construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and their social circumstances" (Gebel & Heyne, 2014, p. 27). That said, Gebel and Heyne (2014) also acknowledged the problematic nature of assuming that women make their own decisions, considering that decision-making tends to be the responsibility of women's fathers and/or husbands in Arab Gulf contexts. Therefore, social expectations place a heavy responsibility on women to abide by their male family members' decisions. However, the suppressing influence of patriarchal ideologies that tend to confine women to the private domain is gradually diminishing. According to Smits et al. (1996), the traditional family pattern—in which the husband is the breadwinner and the wife is responsible for the household and children—is being replaced by the dual-earner family structure.

Nevertheless, institutional challenges still affect women in the workplace, partly because gender profiling and stereotyping remain dominant (Willea et al., 2018). Studies have indicated that women in the Arab region are restricted to professions that are considered socially acceptable and are mostly in the public sector, such as teaching and nursing (Assaad & Krafft, 2015; Majbouri, 2020). Salem and Yount (2019) reported that women in Qatar prefer to work in gender-segregated environments. As such, the structure of the labor market favors potential male employees at the expense of female workers (Stamarski & Hing, 2015).

In assessing these theoretical foundations, studies have addressed the factors that influence women's employment in Muslim-majority countries (e.g., Gebel & Heyne, 2014; Spierings, 2014). While we acknowledge that these frameworks are insightful, the individual level is what affects women's employment opportunities the strongest and is largely responsive to women's individual and familial characteristics in the Arab Gulf region.

Our conceptual framework is that an investigation of microlevel effects can provide deeper insights into the individual and familial factors contextualized to explain women's positions in the Qatar labor market. This can contribute to understanding how determinants of FLFP, including socioeconomic characteristics (e.g., education, age, marital status, and household income), have prevailing impacts in a region where patriarchal ideals persist (Fernández, 2013; Pfau-Effinger, 2004) and help shape related state policies to facilitate women's labor market access.

This framework builds on Majbouri's (2020) assertion that socioeconomic factors present at the individual level must be considered when analyzing women's labor force participation as an individual choice. The framework also questions the different ways in which women are influenced to join the labor market based on their socioeconomic characteristics, as they are more susceptible to bottom-up influences (i.e., within the family setting). Spierings and Smits (2007) examined the different levels, domains, and conditions of FLFP and found that macrolevel factors mostly work through microlevel characteristics, which differ by context across the MENA region.

For instance, microlevel factors such as education, age, marital status, urban vs. rural living, the presence of children, and economic needs (indicated by household income level) are important in determining women's chances in the formal labor market (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004; McRae, 2003). Although our framework cannot address all FLFP determinants, microlevel factors are repeated in multiple settings, particularly when theorizing the conditionality of individual-level factors and family-level constraints. The conceptual framework has enabled the formulation of expectations

regarding the specific interactions that affect women's socioeconomic characteristics (e.g., age, education, and marital status) and household characteristics (e.g., household income and children), which play comprehensive roles in expanding or shrinking FLFP. In the subsequent sections, the methods used to collect data and investigate these individual and family determinants are presented. In the discussion of the study results and policy response, we focus on microlevel theoretical orientations.

4. Materials and methods

4.1. Sample selection

Data were collected via a telephonic survey of a representative sample of Qatari nationals from December 2019 to January 2020. The participants were recruited through list-assisted random digit dialing using a cellular frame obtained from the largest telecommunications provider in Qatar. The participants' demographic profiles by gender and employment status are shown in Table 1. A total of 660 Qatari participants completed the survey questionnaire; 51.36% were female, and 48.64% were male. There were significant demographic differences between working and nonworking individuals, particularly in terms of age group, marital status, and education level. The majority of working participants were between 18 and 39 years of age, and 75.5% of the total sample had ever married. 36.1% of working women had two or three children, and approximately 61% of nonworking women had more than three children. However, there was no significant difference in the number of children among male participants based on employment status. In terms of educational level, about 44.91% of working men held a secondary or diploma degree, whereas 58.03% of working women held a university degree or higher qualification.

4.2. Variables and their measures

A 13-item questionnaire was created based on the Qatar Semi-Annual Survey 2020. This survey covered the impact of individual-level factors (e.g., age, gender, education, employment status, and income) and the sociocultural attitudes, values, and beliefs of Qataris on FLFP across three themes: a) attitudes toward the view that women should work outside the home (labeled as "support FLFP"), b) attitudes toward obstacles encountered by women who work outside the home (labeled as "obstacles"), and c) attitudes toward FLFP state-directed policies (labeled as "policies"). The conceptual model included a set of FLFP indicators, as illustrated in Table 2. All items corresponding to the studied indicators for each latent variable were measured using four-point Likert scales that ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* and *strongly oppose* to *strongly support* (See Table Appendices 1, 2 and 3).

The dependent variable, labor force participation, was dichotomously coded, taking the value of 1 for individuals who participate in the labor force and 0 otherwise. Additionally, the independent demographic variables, namely age, marital status, number of children, education level, and monthly income, were categorized as shown in Table 1. Bivariate analyses were performed to examine the associations between the selected demographic variables and labor force participation. An exploratory factor analysis was used to identify related indicators under the "obstacles" theme. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett tests were used to determine whether the data could be grouped into various factors. The KMO score measure of sampling adequacy was 0.634, which was well above the recommended level of 0.50. The Bartlett test of sphericity was significant (chi-square = 491.18, $P = 0.00$), indicating a sufficient level of intercorrelation between the indicators.

Therefore, a factor analysis test was performed. Two rotated factors were retrieved using oblique rotation and an eigenvalue criterion greater than one. The two-factor solution accounted for 41.08% of the total variance, as illustrated in Tables 3–5. The two indicators in the first theme—"Fear that others will view the woman/family negatively" and "Fear that it will become more difficult to get married"—were termed societal obstacles, while the rest—"Lack of available jobs," "Low wages compared to men," "Inflexible working hours," "Insufficient educational

Table 1. Profiles of the respondents by gender and employment status

Demographics Variables	Males				Females				Total					
	Working		Not working		Working		Not working		Working		Not working		P-value	
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	P-value
Age Group														
18-29	87 (32.95)	39 (55.13)	0.0000	46 (30.18)	93 (51.72)	0.0000	133 (31.93)	132 (52.7)	0.0000					
30-39	76 (28.83)	3 (3.248)		58 (33.92)	26 (12.89)		134 (30.69)	29 (10.13)						
40-49	49 (19.39)	4 (4.565)		39 (24.12)	19 (9.727)		88 (21.12)	23 (8.247)						
50 +	35 (18.83)	21 (37.06)		15 (11.77)	44 (25.66)		50 (16.25)	65 (28.93)						
Marital Status														
Never married	72 (24.47)	36 (50.27)	0.0001	47 (24.5)	75 (38.26)	0.0064	119 (24.48)	111 (41.69)	0.0000					
Ever married	175 (75.53)	31 (49.73)		111 (75.5)	108 (61.74)		286 (75.52)	139 (58.31)						
Number of Children														
0-1	32 (19.2)	5 (14.81)	0.3805	21 (20.49)	26 (25.79)	0.0176	53 (19.68)	31 (23.1)	0.0200					
2-3	54 (29.6)	7 (25.04)		40 (36.1)	20 (18.57)		94 (31.99)	27 (20.16)						
4-5	53 (29.97)	8 (24.17)		33 (27.53)	30 (26.93)		86 (29.07)	38 (26.25)						
≥6	35 (21.23)	11 (35.98)		17 (15.88)	31 (28.7)		52 (19.26)	42 (30.49)						
Education Level														
Vocation or less	33 (16.13)	17 (27.94)	0.0455	9 (6.46)	44 (25.72)	0.0000	42 (12.58)	61 (26.35)	0.0000					
Secondary/ diploma	112 (44.91)	33 (47.15)		58 (35.51)	98 (52.47)		170 (41.45)	131 (50.97)						
University/ Graduate	102 (38.97)	16 (24.91)		92 (58.03)	41 (21.81)		194 (45.97)	57 (22.68)						
Monthly Income (in US Dollars)														
<\$14,000	102 (45.57)	24 (42.00)	0.6314	70 (48.12)	78 (48.94)	0.8894	172 (46.5)	102 (46.94)	0.9196					
≥\$14,000	131 (54.43)	36 (58.00)		78 (51.88)	85 (51.06)		209 (53.5)	121 (53.06)						

*Percentages are weighted to the population; frequencies are not.

Table 2. Conceptual model: FLFP indicators	
Items	Statements
Support FLFP	(1) Women should be allowed to work outside the home if they wish.
	(2) I would support my own daughter/ wife working outside the home if she wished.
	(3) A woman working outside the home is sure to cause problems.
Societal obstacles	(1) Fear that others will view the woman/family negatively
	(2) Fear that it will become more difficult to get married
Work obstacles	(1) Lack of available jobs
	(2) Low wages compared to men
	(3) Inflexible working hours
	(4) Insufficient educational qualifications
	(5) Lack of agreement from family
Policies	(1) To what extent would you support or not support a law in Qatar that guarantees a certain proportion of places for women in the government?
	(2) To what extent would you support or oppose a law in Qatar that guarantees a certain proportion of executive positions in the public and private sector for women?
	(3) To what extent would you support or not support a law in Qatar that promotes equal salaries for men and women working in the same position?

qualifications,” and “Lack of agreement from family”—were termed work obstacles. Following this, a binary logit model was developed to identify the factors that influence labor force participation in Qatar.

4.3. Empirical analysis

Table 6 illustrates the logistic regression model of employment status for both male and female participants, which was obtained after the exploratory factor analysis. Male participants in the 30–39 age group had a significant positive association with FLFP (OR = 6.35, P = 0.008). Female participants in the 30–39 and 40–49 age groups were significantly positively associated with FLFP (OR = 3.14, P = 0.002; OR = 3.16, P = 0.009). Ever-married men had significant positive associations with FLFP (OR = 3.28, P = 0.007), whereas ever-married women had nonsignificant associations with FLFP (OR = 1.29, P = 0.419). Women with university and graduate education levels were significantly positively associated with FLFP (OR = 8.9, P = 0.000). Perceived attitudes toward societal obstacles were found to have significant negative associations with working women (OR = 0.62, P = 0.006) and no significant association with working men (OR = 1.22, P = 0.289). Monthly income, working women, and state-directed FLFP policies were not significantly associated with FLFP.

5. Discussion

The results of the present study provide insights into the transformations of the ongoing gender discourse and the claims that FLFP is typically multidimensional and influenced by microlevel

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett tests

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling

KMO	0.634
Bartlett test of sphericity	
Chi-square	491.18
Degrees of freedom	21
p-value	0.000

Table 4. Total variance explained

Factor	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor1	1.75407	0.63225	0.2506	0.2506
Factor2	1.12182	0.13266	0.1603	0.4108
Factor3	0.98916	0.07736	0.1413	0.5521
Factor4	0.9118	0.07885	0.1303	0.6824
Factor5	0.83295	0.08285	0.119	0.8014
Factor6	0.7501	0.11001	0.1072	0.9086
Factor7	0.6401	.	0.0914	1

Table 5. Rotated factor loading

Variable	Factor1	Factor2
Lack of available jobs		0.6634
Low wages compared to men		0.4384
Inflexible working hours		0.4626
Insufficient educational qualifications		0.6491
Lack of agreement from family		0.3815
Fear that others will view the woman/family negatively	0.8015	
Fear that it will become more difficult to get married	0.7939	

factors. The analytical model highlighted the microlevel predictors at the individual level (i.e., age, gender, education, and marital status) and sociocultural level (i.e., attitudes toward FLFP), which were found to have adverse effects on FLFP; these results align with those of existing studies (e.g., Clark et al., 1991; Diwan & Vartanova, 2017; Donahoe, 1999; Haghghat-Sordellini, 2009; Ingelhart & Norris, 2003; Moghadam, 2005; Tansel et al., 2020; Verme, 2014). Considering our theoretical orientation, the factors influencing FLFP were found to differ based on individual characteristics and attitudes toward the societal obstacles encountered by women in the workforce. In particular, the model contained indicators of women’s education levels (i.e., higher education [diploma/university degree]), marital status (i.e., the presence/absence of a spouse), and age (i.e., older age groups [> 30 years]). These constructs were found to have the strongest (direct or indirect) effects in terms of pushing women into the labor market.

The findings from the analysis indicate that age is an influential factor that determines an individual’s support of FLFP. Male participants in the 30–39 age group and female participants in the 30–39 and 40–49 age groups had significant positive attitudes toward women’s labor force participation. These results are consistent with the patterns reported by Lassassi and Tansel (2022), who explored the dynamics underlying the effect of age on FLFP, including life-cycle

Table 6. Logistic regression for the labor market in Qatar

Demographics Variables		Model 1Male			Model 2Female		
		OR	95% CI	P-value	OR	95% CI	P-value
Age Group	18–29	Ref					
	30–39	6.35	(1.64–24.63)	0.008	3.14	(1.52–6.48)	0.002
	40–49	3.9	(0.92–16.55)	0.065	3.16	(1.34–7.46)	0.009
	50 +	0.41	(0.15–1.13)	0.084	0.67	(0.26–1.69)	0.390
Marital Status	Never married	Ref					
	Ever married	3.28	(1.38–7.81)	0.007	1.29	(0.69–2.39)	0.419
Education Level	Secondary or less	Ref					
	Diploma or less	1.68	(0.65–4.38)	0.285	2.35	(0.87–6.33)	0.090
	University/ Graduate	1.83	(0.66–5.11)	0.245	8.9	(3.21–24.64)	0.000
Monthly Income (in US Dollars)	<\$14,000	Ref					
	≥\$14,000	0.9	(0.44–1.85)	0.781	0.71	(0.39–1.31)	0.272
Support FLFP		1.01	(0.61–1.68)	0.957	0.8	(0.4–1.6)	0.531
Society obstacle		1.22	(0.85–1.76)	0.289	0.62	(0.44–0.87)	0.006
Work obstacle		1.21	(0.69–2.1)	0.504	1.31	(0.84–2.05)	0.234
Policies		0.94	(0.64–1.38)	0.74	0.86	(0.61–1.2)	0.374

decisions such as the timing of education, marriage, children, and retirement. In addition, the present study’s results partially support the proposition that participants of higher age groups are more likely to support women’s employment because they would have undergone different life-cycle experiences (Lassassi & Tansel, 2022).

Undoubtedly, higher education plays a central role in women’s labor force participation (Spierings, 2016). In the present study, education level appeared to be an important factor determining one’s support for FLFP, with women being driven by two major factors—necessity or the opportunity to be employed. As evident from the results, educational attainment improves women’s chances of being employed, and those who complete higher education (i.e., a university degree) have odds of employment around nine times higher than those who never attended school, which is in line with the findings of existing studies (Assaad et al., 2016; Assaad & Krafft, 2015; Assaad et al., 2017; Hendy, 2015; Krafft, 2016; Salem, 2016). However, this raises indirect questions about the ratio of female to male labor force participation rates in Qatar. FLFP was just over 30% as of 2018 (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2018), suggesting that female representation in education does not mirror the participation rates in the labor market.

An in-depth analysis of existing research (e.g., Said-Foqahaa & Maziad, 2011) revealed that marital status is a significant variable leading to variations in FLFP support, which is consistent with the findings of the present study. The data from the present study revealed that ever-married men had significant positive associations with FLFP support, whereas ever-married women had nonsignificant associations with FLFP. These findings are in line with Spierings’ (2014) study, which showed that the absence of a partner, husband, or any other adult man has a positive effect on women’s employment. This has further been validated by statistical information indicating that there is a significant level of difference between married and unmarried women’s labor force participation rates in Qatar; married

women represent almost half of the country's economically inactive population (Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority, 2018). However, this theoretical setup does not necessarily present a framework for increasing FLFP, as the absence of a male household head is unlikely in most cases.

Among the other factors at the family level, the presence of children (many or few) was not found to influence women's participation in the workforce (in line with Majbouri, 2020). However, this finding did not reflect the results of previous studies (e.g., Der Lippe T & Van Dijk, 2002; Kaufman & Williams, 2010), which reported that the number of children influences women's participation in the labor market. Furthermore, social class measurements (i.e., measured by Qatari household monthly income) indicated that Qatari families earn more than \$14,000 per month. A woman may choose to be unemployed because of her social class, family background, or wealth or to be employed due to her financial burdens and needs (Assaad et al., 2020). Specifically, the latter involves the need to expand one's financial resources or to seek employment to cover family expenses (Assaad et al., 2020). In some cases, women who have the benefits of social class and wealth may be relieved of their responsibilities because of the presence of extended family members (Majbouri, 2020) or the recruitment of domestic employees. This creates an opportunity for married women to engage in employment and balance their family and work responsibilities. The study participants were not questioned regarding the presence of extended family members or domestic employees. Little is known about these determinants in Qatari households, and more research is needed on their links to FLFP trends.

6. Policy implications and conclusions

A nuanced understanding of the challenges that women face when participating in the labor force is necessary to fully utilize the human potential of Qatar's small yet promising native population. The analytical model in this study revealed that attitudes toward FLFP are influenced by individual-level characteristics and that marital status is a significant variable leading to variations in FLFP support. A high level of educational attainment improves one's chances of finding employment in general, but in the case of women, other individual factors (e.g., age) can support or pose hurdles to employment.

The government's existing policy response to the low FLFP rate features directed efforts to shape public attitudes, particularly a list of mandatory family welfare standards to tackle societal barriers to women's employment. Within this framework of promising government initiatives, measures to improve welfare regimes that provide flexible avenues for married women's access to the labor force have been launched at the intrastate level. When assessing the institutional impediments of FLFP, it is clear that the lack of legislation and family-friendly policies poses a hurdle to female employment, as it is difficult for women to balance family responsibilities, childcare duties, and work (Assaad et al., 2020; Hayo & Caris, 2013; Moghadam, 1998). It has been observed that women in the Arab Gulf states prefer to work in government jobs (i.e., the public sector); this is especially true of married women because the employment benefits include subsidized childcare, allowances, and paid maternity leave. Consequently, labor law provisions that include flexible working hours and incentives such as maternity care and paid maternity leave diminish women's financial burdens and encourage married women to join the labor market.

Although a direct correlation between state-directed initiatives and increased FLFP rates was not found, the present study's results provide insights into the work obstacles that are prevalent in Qatar; understanding these can help in the design of effective policies to boost FLFP. The existing barriers might be attributed to the lack of clear guidance for family-friendly policy standards that can address issues related to WFCs. The implementation of suitable interventions can have a long-lasting impact on the inclusion of married women in the labor market. Modifications in work conditions, such as the introduction of flexible working hours, would allow women to participate in the labor market and also have sufficient time to perform household duties. Strengthening the provisions of paid maternity, subsidized childcare services, and child allowances is likely to increase married Qatari women's participation in the job market.

From the perspective of the ongoing gender discourse, the results are relevant for policymakers: they highlight the importance of modernizing social norms and legal and regulatory codes, particularly codes related to power over a woman's decision to work, through the design of policies to catalyze FLFP. It is also important to reshape social attitudes toward women in professional settings in order to enhance FLFP. This can be achieved by implementing legislative reforms, widening the scope of changes in the paradigm and cultural mindset regarding gender roles through collective efforts and effective tools embedded in educational curricula, and coordinating with national civil society and nonprofit organizations, among other measures. Introducing changes in the educational system with a focus on bridging the gap between university and labor market demands may also be beneficial.

Although this study contributes to a richer understanding of FLFP, several methodological and analytical limitations related to the cross-sectional survey design are present. This design effectively captures factual (i.e., sociodemographic) information rather than experimental measurements or actual behaviors surrounding the barriers to women's participation in the Qatari labor force. Furthermore, due to the closed-ended nature of the survey questions, some nuance would have been lost in measuring the complex decision-making processes related to women's work outside the home. In addition, correlations were drawn from the data but not causations (causal links).

To address these research gaps, future studies on women's positions in the Arab Gulf region should investigate interlinked variables related to family structure and consider macrolevel models to determine the institutional demands that can strengthen FLFP rates. The roles of married men and of extended family and domestic employees in household chores and childcare duties should be investigated through robust experiments or rigorous scientific studies (e.g., randomized controlled trials) rather than self-report evaluations. A comprehensive policy program should also be examined in this manner to highlight the causalities between the intervention and research outcomes. In-depth interviews and focus groups can be conducted to obtain qualitative data, as they would add more granularity to the survey-based findings and provide a deeper understanding of the household division of labor. The insights obtained can help advocate for women's employment prospects and tackle patriarchal dominance in the region

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Appendices

Table 1. Attitudes toward FLFP by gender and work status

Statement	Male		Female	
	Working	Not working	Working	Not working
Women should be allowed to work outside the home if they wish.				
Strongly agree	61.1	48.9	85.1	84.4
Somewhat agree	32.4	42.6	13.7	13.4
Somewhat disagree	3.0	3.2	1.2	0.7
Strongly disagree	3.6	5.4	0.0	1.5
I would support my own daughter/ wife working outside the home if she wished				
Strongly agree	54.6	50.3	83.9	82.5
Somewhat agree	26.2	39.0	14.3	16.2
Somewhat disagree	7.9	4.8	1.1	0.5
Strongly disagree	11.4	5.9	0.7	0.8
A woman working outside the home is sure to cause problems.				
Strongly agree	12.7	17.3	6.1	11.5
Somewhat agree	34.5	28.1	31.5	35.4
Somewhat disagree	27.5	28.3	22.7	19.8
Strongly disagree	25.3	26.2	39.8	33.3

Table 2. Attitudes toward FLP obstacles by gender and work status

Statement	Male		Female	
	Working	Not working	Working	Not working
Lack of available jobs				
An obstacle to a large extent	34.6	38.3	42.0	41.4
An obstacle to some extent	27.1	22.6	33.6	28.4
An obstacle to a small extent	6.4	4.9	4.7	5.1
Not an obstacle at all	31.9	34.2	19.7	25.1
Low wages compared to men				
An obstacle to a large extent	14.1	15.5	18.9	21.4
An obstacle to some extent	29.4	20.0	26.6	27.1
An obstacle to a small extent	5.7	4.3	8.3	5.8
Not an obstacle at all	50.8	60.2	46.2	45.7
Inflexible working hours				
An obstacle to a large extent	32.0	58.7	39.9	53.4
An obstacle to some extent	43.4	20.3	40.8	29.1
An obstacle to a small extent	10.6	6.5	4.6	6.9
Not an obstacle at all	14.0	14.4	14.7	10.6
Insufficient educational qualifications				
An obstacle to a large extent	35.6	38.0	33.3	41.3
An obstacle to some extent	24.3	30.7	37.7	33.7
An obstacle to a small extent	3.1	4.0	5.7	6.2
Not an obstacle at all	36.9	27.4	23.3	18.8
Lack of agreement from family				
An obstacle to a large extent	47.7	39.2	42.4	38.3
An obstacle to some extent	21.4	29.3	28.8	30.1
An obstacle to a small extent	6.1	8.7	5.4	10.3
Not an obstacle at all	24.8	22.7	23.4	21.3
Fear that others will view the woman/family negatively				
An obstacle to a large extent	12.7	13.7	8.8	6.1
An obstacle to some extent	21.6	21.5	21.3	14.6

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

Statement	Male		Female	
	Working	Not working	Working	Not working
An obstacle to a small extent	9.2	7.5	9.5	6.5
Not an obstacle at all	56.5	57.3	60.5	72.9
Fear that it will become more difficult to get married				
An obstacle to a large extent	7.3	15.7	7.3	3.7
An obstacle to some extent	22.8	23.8	28.9	18.9
An obstacle to a small extent	13.0	7.7	11.2	7.4
Not an obstacle at all	56.8	52.8	52.6	70.1

Table 3. Attitudes toward FLP state-directed policies by gender and work status

Statement	Male		Female	
	Working	Not working	Working	Not working
To what extent would you support or not support a law in Qatar that guarantees a certain proportion of places for women in the government?				
Strongly support	34.4	29.6	54.1	45.3
Somewhat support	40.9	42.4	31.2	31.1
Somewhat oppose	5.3	6.6	5.0	10.2
Strongly oppose	19.3	21.3	9.6	13.4
To what extent would you support or oppose a law in Qatar that guarantees a certain proportion of executive positions in the public and private sector for women?				
Strongly support	30.4	26.0	42.4	40.0
Somewhat support	42.9	44.9	43.8	36.5
Somewhat oppose	4.7	11.8	5.8	11.6
Strongly oppose	22.0	17.3	8.1	11.9
To what extent would you support or not support a law in Qatar that promotes equal salaries for men and women working in the same position?				
Strongly support	70.5	60.8	80.6	78.7
Somewhat support	14.7	20.3	13.6	13.2
Somewhat oppose	6.3	10.3	2.5	1.8
Strongly oppose	8.5	8.6	3.3	6.3



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