



Muznah Madeeha

Title: Reconsidering the relationship between family, motherhood, and gender equality in Qatar

Abstract:

For long, scholars have considered the centrality of the family in Arab Gulf societies and the emphasis on motherhood as obstacles to gender equality. This is because both factors are seen as hindering women's economic independence and their full participation in society. This is also true for Qatar where analysts describe Qatar's support for higher levels of female economic participation on the one hand, and support for high fertility and an emphasis on motherhood on the other, as contradictory goals. Hence, in my research, I examine the impact of family formation (marriage and presence of children) on Qatari women's employment status while controlling for important socio-economic variables such as age, education level, household economic status, and generational changes (birth-cohort effect). Results suggest that Qatari women's education level is the most important determinant of employment status. By considering the role of women's education level vis-à-vis family formation, I argue that we need to reconsider whether an emphasis on family and motherhood should be theorized as obstacles to gender equality. Moreover, numerous studies show that Arab Gulf women themselves consider family and motherhood as integral parts of their societies – hence, resistant to change. I therefore argue that, scholars need to re-theorize family and motherhood as women's tools of advocacy in their struggle for better maternity rights and working conditions. Given that Qatar and other Arab Gulf states are seeking to promote pro-family and pro-women policies, better working conditions for women and working mothers can be sought in the name of family values. Hence, the emphasis on family and motherhood needs to be viewed as gender equity measures and be used as tools for policy changes that facilitate women's employment and advancement.

Bio:

Muznah Madeeha is currently a doctoral student at the School of Social Policy at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom. Her research focuses on the relationship between generational changes and Qatari women's economic participation, viewed through a postcolonial feminist lens. She utilizes a mixed methods approach, drawing from survey data and in-depth interviews with Qatari women for her analysis. Muznah's research interests encompass gender studies, religion, feminist economics, labor market inequalities, and Middle Eastern studies. She is presently residing in Doha, where she is actively conducting her fieldwork. Prior to her doctoral studies, Muznah worked as a research assistant at the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute at Qatar University and at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies.
