

QATARI FEMALE MANAGERS IN A WORLD OF PATRIARCHY

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Abstract

Purpose: The State of Qatar has widely sought to include women in public life and has implemented several policies in order to improve gender equality in the workforce and fair distribution of development benefits. This study establishes how far the State of Qatar has achieved the equality of women in the workplace, since the initiation of new reform policies and agendas of modernisation in 1995. Qatari women in leadership positions still face major challenges in relation to cultural limitations and organisational constraints; these areas need to be further developed to improve the degree of gender equality and close the wide gap between the two genders in terms of economic rights and equal opportunities in the labour force.

Methodology: This paper uses semi-structured interviews which were conducted with twenty-five women aged all of whom held senior management positions in a range of civil society and public sector organisations in Qatar at the time of the interview. The twenty-five participants who participated in the study ranged in age from 34 to 61 years.

Main Findings: The findings suggest that Qatari women are helped by two forces: the support they are getting from the ruling family and the impact of reforms and social change in surrounding regions. Indeed, the slow pace of social reform is one of the common complaints of progressives.

Implications/Applications: Therefore, focused, procedural steps should be taken to enforce adherence to frameworks by governmental institutions and to amend existing legislation to tackle the challenges faced by women. These steps include implementing some social policy recommendations in terms of establishing and funding women's civil society organisations, integrating an evaluation and monitoring system in governmental organisations, promoting work/family policies, and initiating a feminisation policy in government organisations.

Keywords: *Patriarchy, women empowerment, leadership, Qatar, gender equality.*

INTRODUCTION

This small but wealthy and strategically vital country is a captivating example of modernisation in the Middle East. Qatar is considered a place where conservative traditions encounter modernity and where growth is rapid. With major restructurings commenced as early as 1995, the government leaders aimed to improve the conditions of Qatar family, especially women, to go in line with the global commitment to stimulate their equal rights. Previous studies have demonstrated that gender equality is essential for the development and enhancement of a nation ([Coleman, 2004](#), [Grown, Gupta, & Khan, 2003](#)) and it remains pivotal in implementing economic and cultural transformations within a social context ([Embassy of the State of Qatar in Washington, D.C, 2011](#), [Bahry & Marr, 2005](#), [Ball, 1990](#)). A change in women's status worldwide has come about through a combination of long-term macro-level processes (industrialisation, urbanisation, proletarianisation, education, and employment) and collective actions (social movement activism and revolutions). The upsurge in demonstrations in countries such as Tunisia, Iran and Egypt (e.g., the Arab Spring), has made Arab governments realise that its citizens are capable of revolting against poor governance and oppressive traditions ([Pappe, 2005](#)).

Qatar government realizes that 'there is much more than women can contribute to society apart from their role in the home' ([Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2011](#)). In particular, women are equal partners in national development and are valuable form of investment; and policies of empowerment is directly linked with sustaining high economic performance as well as increased ranking in national league performance metrics. The primary objective of the empowerment strategy is to increase numbers of women in managerial positions in an organization where they can give direction on policies and decisions. More encourage from government organizations, and non-profit associations should help increase the same desire in women to getting educated reflected in the job industry. At the same time, women are still significantly underrepresented in top-management roles in Qatar labor market because this conventional, gender-segregated tribal society, which is governed by Islamic (Sharia) Law, maintains honour by keeping strong associations with its past.

In Qatar, the structure of the 'labour' market is visible both in the increasing presence of Qatari women in the workforce and the clear causal link between women's employment and reduced gender inequality. The number of Qatari women entering new professions has substantially increased in recent years as increasing numbers of Qatari females have started to pursue occupations such as lawyers, agents, and police officers. In response to labour market needs, different universities across Qatar have opened programs such as architecture and chemical engineering to women ([Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008](#)).

However, there is an obvious absence of women in senior positions of managerial control. Women still carry out core domestic chores and childcare, which may restrict their presence in either the workforce in general or in senior management positions in particular, thus creating limitations to the progress of Qatari women in the workplace. The historical ‘drag’ of culture and tradition back tith the ‘domestic hearth’ remains a barrier to employed women’s equality. Although Qatari women obtain better educations than Qatari men, which has received attention recently, the former is still limited in demonstrating their leadership skills to their fullest potential ([Henderson & Rajakumar, 2010](#)).

It has been indicated that Qatar women tend to perceive their identity as deeply embedded in the family and religion, particularly Islam ([Golkowska, 2014](#)). Despite the fact that Qatari women recognise the importance of various educational and professional opportunities, they might not be ready to give up the security of their home and religious beliefs. The idea of private patriarchy may be considered a protective mechanism that helps women feel secure in their home environment. The notion of private patriarchy in the Qatari case seems interrelated to the impact of religion. The latter is perceived as protecting Qatari women. Therefore, the common attitude shared by contemporary Qatari women is associated with the dialectic of tradition and modernity ([Golkowska, 2014](#)).

However, the shift from ‘private to public patriarchy’ follows a top-down model rather than a bottom-up model in the country. The empowerment projects of women were initiated because of governmental commitments to improve the status of women in the labour force which are also related to the core societal settings in Qatar (e.g., extended family dimension, the recruitment of domestic help, etc.). From this perspective, placing Qatari women in the context of a decision-making hierarchy could not be used as a decisive factor in determining their overall level of participation in leadership positions in the modern workplace ([ESCWA, 2006](#)). Even though women in Qatar have started participating actively in different organisations, they may remain subordinated within those organisations.

LITERATURE

Managerial Positions

The representation of Qatari women in decision-making positions in governmental and private institutions has increased because of the leadership’s vision. The government’s commitment to establishing a women’s leadership center to ‘build women’s capacity and increase the number of women in political, organisational and business-related decision-making positions’ ([Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2011](#)). This program aims to be implemented properly across all sectors through conducting gender research and studies aimed at removing the social and cultural obstacles that women face in trying to obtain a leadership position.

Public sector jobs have been occupied by women but not at gender parity, as men continue to hold the executive-level positions in both public and private sectors. Statistics showed that in 2009, only 3% of economically active Qatari women held leadership posts. Over the past ten years, this number has ranged between 2% and 4% of the total Qatari female labour force and 9% of the total female labour force in the governmental sector. The women empowerment program aims to increase the number of women in leadership positions by 30% in 2016.

The appointment of women in leadership positions began with the first generation of female graduates, who witnessed both the old and new regimes of political leadership in Qatar (i.e. pre-1995 and post-1995). The women who have been appointed to decision-making positions include the appointment of the first female Minister of Education and Higher Education in the State of Qatar from 2003 to 2009 and the Minister of Health from 2008 to 2009 ([Supreme Council for Family Affairs, 2010](#)).

Additionally, senior positions of leadership have been assumed by Qatari women, such as the President of Board of Directors of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QFESCD); the President of Supreme Council for Family Affairs; President of the Board of Trustees of Qatar Museums Authority; Vice-President of Supreme Council of Health; Vice-President of the Supreme Education Council; President of Qatar University; the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Communications and Information; and the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs. Moreover, many women are members of boards of directors of higher councils, institutions and government bodies, in addition to participating as members of permanent committees that set policies and strategies, such as the Permanent Population Committee, and interim committees that set various legislations ([Supreme Council for Family Affairs, 2010](#), [Altantsetseg, Chen, & Chang, 2017](#), [Anggadwita & Dhewanto, 2016](#), [Bo Shing, & Xiaodie, 2017](#), [Rijal, 2016](#)).

[Felder and Vuollo \(2008\)](#) stated that the increase in the number of women graduates from the world’s best colleges and universities is an important factor in the appointment of women to leadership positions. Women made outstanding achievements in academia compared to their male counterparts, which means more female graduates participate in the labour market, but they have limited access to leadership roles. Hence, the criteria of appointment in leadership positions do not necessarily depend on employee’s qualification but other factors that are mainly related to cultural and societal constraints that currently prevent women from being regarded as suitable leaders.

[Al Ghanim \(2008\)](#) examined the extent of women’s appointments in specific working fields, providing important information to identify individual views about women occupying leadership positions in public life and determining the social and cultural challenges affecting such views. [Abdalla \(2015\)](#) was also concerned about the high number of Qatari

men occupying senior management positions in comparison to women. Similarly, [Al Muftah \(2010\)](#) questioned the extent to which Qatari women are enabled to progress to the top in the economic and educational spheres and examined the challenges faced by Qatari women.

Women's representation in leadership positions is mainly concentrated in the ministries and institutions that are social in nature. There is a high concentration of women in the education sector, healthcare system and administrative field, which are perceived as acceptable roles for women in Qatar society. In her study, [Al Ghanim \(2008\)](#) found an increase in the number of women appointed to leadership positions. However, her study also demonstrated that Qatari women have been slow to enter many working fields and to hold managerial positions in specific industries for several reasons that are related to social constraints. She found that many well-educated women managers tended to be appointed to leadership positions in fields that did not match their qualifications.

Social Change: Patriarchal Beliefs and its Implications in the Workforce

Qatari Women are experiencing a gradual change in the patriarchal discourse while maintaining Islamic principles and social norms. They view themselves as strong, competent and capable of finding different activities within the restrictions of their male-dominated society ([Fincher, 2014](#)). For instance, it has become a standard for Qatari women to include the consent to pursue study, find work or travel abroad in their marriage contracts, which clearly illustrates the shift towards their emancipation in the contemporary society. In a recent empirical study conducted by [Al-Attayah and Nasser \(2014\)](#), four dimensions have been developed to measure women's perception of their civic rights, wellbeing, legal rights and economic and educational rights. The study adopted a quantitative strategy method by taking a random sample of one hundred and forty university female students. These female students were enrolled in the national public university of Qatar. It has been determined through outcomes that women believe they have rights across educational, economic, social, cultural, civil, and fundamental freedoms on the basis of sex.

Hence, women's participation in politics has become a reality, and their involvement in the democratic process has developed through the high participation of women voters in 2007 compared to 1999. However, not many Qatar women are allowed to be members of the Municipal Council elections or work as diplomats in the Foreign Service ([Felder & Vuollo, 2008](#), [Bilal & Zia-ur-Rehman, 2017](#), [Pimonratanakan, Intawee, Krajangsaeng, & Pooripakdee, 2017](#), [Sejera, 2018](#)). Moreover, some conservative groups in society still consider that the issue is sensitive and that these are inappropriate fields for women, adhering to the stereotypical gender perception that women are too emotional to hold such positions.

Patriarchal views of gender roles and cultural limitations, which were shaped by Islamic religion may affect the implementation of gender equality policies in Qatar labour market. These aspects are considered as barriers to women's equality in the workforce, including their appointment to senior management positions. The influence of the Islamic religion in the Arab world, of which Qatar is a part, is obvious in terms of behaviour, social interactions and social relations ([Madsen, 2010](#)). It has shaped cultural and social interactions in the Arab context; it gives women equality in education and employment and highlights their important role in society and their families. However, differing interpretations of Islam are deployed by different Arab societies regarding the roles of women and their equal rights in the areas of inheritance, divorce, marriage, child custody, and nationality. In addition, patriarchy traditionally has been built on a hierarchy of roles and responsibilities for men and women in the Arab world ([Said-Fogahaa & Maziad, 2011](#), [Anggraini, Hereyanto, & Bhakti, 2017](#), [Hairudinor, Hidayati, Muspiron, Tampubolon, & Humaidi, 2017](#)).

In Qatar, it has been argued that the forces of change in women's position in Qatar society were mainly initiated by political leadership rather than women's feminist movements. The role of the state in initiating certain forms of women's empowerment, the changes brought about by social and economic changes, and the affluence and education of women has influenced societal attitudes towards women and their activities. Qatar has increasingly incorporated new gender roles into its culture. [Sobh, Belk, and Gressell \(2010\)](#) noted that the desire for modernisation among Qatari leaders has resulted in openness to the adoption of these values. As a result, traditional practices are being replaced in the process of modernisation. Hence, the modernisation process in Qatar positively influences the way in which women are perceived in the country. Improving the public perceptions of women and loosening the grip of tradition could be an important step towards the achievement of equality and empowerment of Qatari women.

Qatar society has indeed made progress in terms of gender equality compared to twenty years ago, but as a country under Islamic (Sharia) Law, the patriarchal mindset is still the norm. It is essential to stress that Qatari women, like many other Arab women, have been traditionally regulated by patriarchal views of gender roles, such as in the domestic sphere where women are expected to be wives and mothers. The most fundamental family principle in Qatari society is that of the clear division between gender roles. Traditionally, strict segregation has dictated the roles of husband and wife: men must earn money for household expenditures, and women must be in charge of household work and childcare. In other words, the gender division is based upon the distinction between the public and private spheres. Men occupy the public world of work, and women occupy the private domestic sphere.

Moreover, the notion of extended families is a popular trend in Qatar. This trend creates further social obligations for women, in addition, their household work and childcare responsibilities. These social obligations include planning social events and organising family gatherings. Consequently, Qatari women experience numerous dilemmas in balancing

traditions, customs and family roles with individual aspirations (for education, employment etc.). According to [Sharabi \(1988\)](#), there is still ‘a conservative relentless male-oriented ideology, which tends to assign privilege and power to the male at the expense of female’ (p. 33). In a male-dominated society, family norms regulating family life maintain a male-centered and female subordinated structure. Women’s rights are seen from male perspectives, which is apparent in the process of subordination of women to men.

In the workforce, Qatari women are at a disadvantage because of discriminatory patriarchal practices. It has been observed that customs and traditions have a negative influence on women’s participation in the labour market ([Al Muftah, 2010](#), [Al Muhannadi, 2011](#), [Berrebi, Martorell, & Tanner, 2009](#), [Williams, Bhanugopan, & Fish, 2011](#)). The patriarchal practices that discriminate against women working outside the home include limiting women’s choices to traditional ‘female’ roles, limiting the access of women to higher and managerial opportunities, as well as unequal pay, lack of training, limited promotions, exclusion, and occupational segregation.

Some factors also hinder women’s participation and efficiency in the labour force. Traditionally, biological sex determines the nature of the work performed by both genders. Consequently, men participate in the public sphere and women participate in the private sphere. Restrictions also exist regarding how successful an individual could be in a job depending on his or her gender ([Richardson, 1993](#)). For instance, the increased participation of married females in the workforce could have many consequences, including less time for their families and different ambitions for the future ([Macionis, 1995](#)). Because long working hours rob women of the time spent with their families, therefore they may not be willing to take jobs with long working hours ([Berrebi, Martorell, & Tanner, 2009](#)). These issues can have a negative influence on marital relations and contribute to the growing divorce rate, as some Qataris may be reluctant to change their conventional beliefs concerning the roles that women and men ought to perform.

This means that because of social norms, women remain underrepresented in certain areas of work. Although governmental efforts are aimed at expanding women’s preparation to work in sectors, which are traditionally dominated by men, and despite the change in women’s work distribution over different professions such as security, communications, economy, media and politics, the number of women in leadership positions in these fields is almost zero ([Al Ghanim, 2008](#)).

Therefore, the leading factors that greatly hinder women’s equality in education and employment (i.e., restricting women’s choices in education and job sectors and preventing women from occupying leadership positions) are related to patriarchal practices and cultural limitations. For instance, traditional ties prevent women’s socialisation with men at universities or in the workplace. Furthermore, woman’s role in the household (i.e., childcare and marital responsibilities) might be affected by their absence from home and thus prevent women from participating in jobs that require long working hours, such as managerial positions. Thus, the traditional ties of creative women to their families hinder them from mingling with other creative minds in the public domain ([Bradley, 2005](#)).

DATA AND METHOD

This paper uses semi-structured interviews which were conducted with twenty-five women aged all of whom held senior management positions in a range of civil society and public sector organisations in Qatar at the time of the interview. The twenty-five participants who participated in the study ranged in age from 34 to 61 years. There were four single women, fifteen married women, five divorced women, and one widowed woman; all participants were born in Qatar. They had a wide range of education levels: ten held doctorate degrees, seven held a master’s degree in their field, and the rest held bachelor’s degrees. The participants were employed as managers in different fields, including business, sociology, arts and humanities, media, health, education, and psychology. All participants were engaged with both male and female employees at the time when the interview took place. However, the participants who managed professions that were dominated by women, such as social work or education, tended to supervise more female staff than male staff.

These women are well known in Qatar society; for example, they appear in media and newspapers. I found their personal contact information and biographies in web sources. In this project, snowball sampling was employed to identify the research participants who met the criteria of this paper. The initial contact was by phone or by email, and the interviews were employed to ‘snowball’ further informants. The number of interviews was not determined at first because the employed sample was limited to a group of Qatari women managers, which is a category that is meaningful to people in Qatar.

Purposive samples are often used in semi-structured interviews when there is a lack of time available to conduct a second interview with the participants or to take a larger random sample. Purposive samples prioritise qualitative findings from particular perspectives within the population rather than quantitative findings from larger populations. The sampling strategy combines purposive and theoretical sampling, the latter because the framework informs both the sample to be accessed and the themes to be explored and the former because although the sample to be accessed is a specific cultural domain, the purpose of the research is explicit in the research questions. It also enables the analysis of ‘critical cases’, which in epidemiological or randomised research is regarded as unrepresentative ‘outliers’ (see, [Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007](#), [Bernard, 2000](#), [Barbour, 2001](#)), but in this paper, it provides an illuminating context for a qualitative study.

Notably, my choice of participants was influenced by the purpose of the research, which was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of 25 Qatari women managers. Criteria were used to recruit the participants were mainly because the results of a qualitative study cannot be 'generalised' to the wider population. Therefore, it was reasonable to expect that Qatari women managers share similar circumstances and experiences and make plausible connections to reflect and measure how far the State of Qatar has progressed towards achieving the gender equality and economic empowerment of women since 1995 when new policies and modernisation agendas were implemented.

In this paper, the use of semi-structured interviews provided the interviewer with the ability to remain flexible and engaged throughout the entire process. Therefore, the sequence and content of the questions changed, the interviews were adapted to particular individuals and the interviewer probed further to elicit complete and exhaustively explained responses. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Arabic. The length of the interviews ranged from one hour to ninety minutes. All interviews were carried out in one session, as the participants had dedicated one hour of their time to be interviewed. Twenty of the twenty-five interviews took place in the participants' workplaces. Of the five remaining interviews, four were held in public places, and one took place in the participant's household.

An audio recording device was used to record the interviews to collect data for subsequent analysis. I initially informed the participants that the interview would be recorded, and I asked for their permission to record. All participants agreed, but in some cases, they politely asked why the interview had to be recorded.

The semi-structured interviews included a sequence of topics to be covered. A detailed sequence of questions was prepared and derived from the reviewed literature and my background as a Qatari woman. The researcher read the questions, recorded the responses, and asked for clarification and elaboration of the answers given, which added value to the research objectives.

Data analysis of the interviews was conducted by transcribing the semi-structured interviews and translating and analysing the data with the assistance of NVivo software. The computer program NVivo was used to assist and facilitate the analysis of the qualitative material. The program structured the interview transcripts for analysis and my further interpretation of the data. It also enabled concentration on meaningful interpretations of the interview texts. The programme allowed for various operations, such as writing memos, writing reflections on the interviews for later analyses, coding, searching for keywords, doing word counts, making graphic displays and note taking while reading the transcripts.

The interviews were transcribed in Arabic (i.e., oral conversations were translated into written Arabic texts) and then translated into English. This process was complex because it involved translating from Arabic oral conversation with a set of linguistic rules to the English language with another set of linguistic rules. However, I tended to emphasise the exact meaning of the interviewee's answers and limited my interpretation of the data, in order to produce coherent written texts. The translation from oral conversations to written texts made the interview conversations accessible for analysis. Although this seems an apparently simple and reasonable procedure, the transcriptions involved a series of methodical and theoretical problems. The quality of the transcriptions was improved by checking their validity. It gave an impression of the time and effort the transcription of an interview requires.

Each interview transcript was analysed using the NVivo programme and then categorised into corresponding cross-cutting main findings, which resulted in six sub-findings. The thematic analysis of the interview transcripts led to the main findings, which are mainly related to gender equality in the workplace.

FINDINGS

The study has interviewed 25 female leaders who were sampled from different sectors in order to identify supporting factors and obstacles they faced in their professional life until reaching their current positions. The experiences of participants were examined in relation to their performance at work and home as well as in relation to the state's role and cultural influences.

The findings showed that most participants had encountered several opportunities and barriers in their households, in their workplaces and in the wider community, which called other aspects into question. Nevertheless, these obstacles did not prevent them from succeeding as managers. However, their experiences indicate that the process of women's empowerment is not progressing as rapidly as might be hoped.

The following section shows the main findings of the study. It will note how patriarchy is played at the workplace from Qatari women managers' point of views.

Women's Socio-economic Development

The Home and Social Arena

Several participants could not maintain the demands of home and career demands. They felt that their professional success as leaders was not easy because it required much time and effort to manage commitments at home and in the workplace. However, although some women leaders were unable to achieve a well-balanced life because of home/work conflicts, their self-motivation and ability to overcome these social and personal obstacles were major steps towards achieving their ambitions.

Thus, participants reported experiencing significant conflicts in managing career and home demands because of their positions as managers. They indicated that they were overwhelmed by their double burden and could not create the required balance between work and family domains because of their dual responsibilities. Participant S faced the challenges of long work hours and the pressure of completing job tasks because of the difficulty of balancing work and family life. Therefore, she had to minimize her personal and social events and modify her activities.

Patriarchal attitudes towards and expectations of gender roles persist. For instance, some conservative individuals still consider that home is the women's place because women are not able to reconcile the responsibilities of home and work. They believe that women's empowerment will lead to liberation, changing family dynamics, and altered social traditional values. Women, therefore, are taught to be submissive housewives, submit to the domination of male relatives, carry out domestic chores and refrain from socialising with men in public.

Career Path and Leadership Experience

Education and Career Alternations

The data shows a collective recognition of woman's qualification to practice leadership positions. The traditional image of work opportunities appropriate for the woman is still prevailing over the society, which preferred educational, administrative and clerical professions. However, in fact, this type of professions is commonly practiced by woman.

Recalling their education and first job, some participants reported that they were influenced by traditional views in their study and career choices (i.e., their university degree majors and career), which were limited to women's traditional fields, such as education, social sciences, and medical sciences. Other participants were fortunate to overcome these societal limitations and obstacles because they were part of the very first influx of Qatari women who were able to enjoy career opportunities. They were part of the force that led to societal changes in the country during the 1990s. In Qatar society, a huge cultural shift has taken place over the past twenty years although the participants indicated that their generation has struggled in the past in terms of career opportunities in comparison to contemporary Qatar, where women enjoy a wide range of career opportunities created by Qatar's economic development.

Twenty-one participants of twenty-five (N = 25, 84%) reported that the permission of parents and/ or male family members or other relatives was critical in their decisions about education, further education, employment perspectives, and even business travel. Despite their ability to perform and accomplish job tasks properly in other fields, qualified women's study and career opportunities are limited to 'women's fields' because of gender stereotypes. The lack of career choices and the hindrance of cultural expectations can negatively influence the development of many women who are not able to make brave decisions and fight for the disciplines that they want to study or work in because it is regarded as contrary to cultural and social practices. This exclusion from certain sectors and professions can reduce promotion opportunities for leadership positions. Most Qatari women lead education committees, health care committees, childcare committees, and women's rights organisations that influence local public policymaking. Notably, this finding indicates that a typical image is perpetuated by the social norms and principles that challenge women's suitability for certain educational and professional fields. This image leads to women's confusion: a woman cannot attain her ambition if she accepts some cultural norms. Each woman, however, has her own priorities in life, and she can either fight for her decisions or choose the stability of her family life and follow society's norms.

Behaviour in the Workplace

The cultural attachments shape the social behaviour and attitudes of employed women and heavily affect their conduct at work, especially in their dealings with male colleagues, which is regarded as a challenge for most women. According to Islamic principles, the working relationship between men and women should be based on respect and professionalism. In this study, the participants described their experiences in mixed-gender workplaces and their behaviour when they interacted with the opposite sex.

Some participants admitted that traditional values influenced the way they set boundaries while co-working with male employees. Meaning that most employed Qatari women preserve social principles and maintain their personal values in accordance with Islamic rules.

Motivation for Leadership

There are some supports and barriers that have motivated ambitious women to advance in the organisational hierarchy pre- and post-1995. Old and modern regimes either impeded or supported participants to move up the organisational ladder. Most participants assumed that who or what supported them in achieving leadership positions and helped them in progressing up the leadership ladder in contemporary society post-1995 were the following: 1) familial individuals; 2) Qatari women role models; (3) professional and governmental support resources in organisations that implement equal opportunity legislation aimed at increasing women's participation in higher-level management roles.

The findings showed that the participants' family members were a source of motivation. For instance, Participant M asserted that her mother played a great part in her early life and influenced her to be a leader. She recalled that her mother was a real leader in both the household and the workplace. Other sources that motivated participants to progress to their

senior management roles included organisational support resources at work (i.e., equal training opportunities and recruitment strategies for men and women employees). Participants R, S T, and Q, for instance, observed that they had received several organisational rewards and promotions and accordingly were designated by their managers to be leaders based on entirely meritocratic and fairgrounds alongside male staff (i.e., according to their academic qualifications, scientific expertise and work experience).

The participants were motivated and charged with these leadership roles based on their highly distinguished qualifications and high-quality work performances. These findings indicate that although the sources of leadership motivation vary, women should obtain the qualifications necessary to reach leadership positions because the rate of women in leadership positions in Qatar remains low.

Leadership Behaviours and Styles

Participants suggested two simultaneously interacting attributes that described their leadership philosophies: 1) the extent of individual and organisational characteristics and a non-gender linked leadership style; 2) the degree of gender differences in leadership styles while performing ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ leadership approaches in their management roles. Generally, the ‘masculine’ leadership approach is a ‘command and control’ style, whereas ‘feminine’ leadership pattern includes ethics of care, nurturance, and communication.

The ‘women in management’ literature focus on gender differences in management styles, arguing that women’s ways of managing are particularly appropriate to contemporary work organisations and that women’s skills in multitasking and in interpersonal communication are ideally suited to management ([Abbott, Wallace, & Tyler, 2005](#)). For instance, key management writers such as ([Davidson & Cooper, 1992](#), [Fondas & Wiersema, 1997](#), [Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010](#), [Rosener, 1990](#), [Sturges, 1999](#)) focused on the differences between male and female management styles in work orientations and commitment as well as on ‘the ways in which women managers are controlled and marginalised’.

A leader practices essential individual characteristics and role requirements that are necessary for leadership in performing a non-gender linked leadership style. Participants B, C, and G shared similar thoughts about the traits that a successful leader exhibits, including cognitive attributes such as patience, wisdom, competitiveness, ambition, dominance, understanding, helpfulness and self-confidence. A leader always identifies personal strengths and weaknesses, which is essential for the development of effective leadership skills. In addition, in order to achieve a high standard of work, Participant F believed that a leader should maintain good managerial skills, such as teamwork, management skills, tackling challenges, problem-solving and assertive decision-making. Hence, these participants perceived successful managers, both male and female, as possessing similar individual characteristics. They did not appear to side with either ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ approaches to leadership.

Other participants focused on gender differences (e.g., Participant S) and the effects of sex stereotyping. Participant S did not deny that she usually follows her natural feminine compassion and empathy in relationships as well as her ability to influence people. She considered these features beneficial for a woman leader who possesses different informational resources and acts according to her feminine values and attitudes.

The findings showed the participants understood that leadership roles have become very competitive in Qatar, and thus they are required to display adequate and clear leadership approaches in performing the required management duties. There was a tendency for the participants to employ both clear individual and organisational principles in their positions, which indicates a link between these two interacting attributes. Both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ behavioural patterns stem from the leader’s personality, values and attitudes but are exacerbated by challenges in the work environment.

Challenges as Women Managers

The emergence of several challenges was identified by the participants, which was caused by an influx of cultural, social and organisational factors relating to gender equality in the workplace. Social norms included patriarchal and cultural influences. Although organisational challenges varied among the participants, several tendencies could be affirmed: long working hours, payment, allowances, promotions and training opportunities.

The findings showed that in Qatar, patriarchal attitudes towards and expectations of gender roles persist. For instance, some conservative individuals still consider that home is the women’s place because women are not able to reconcile the responsibilities of home and work. They believe that women’s empowerment will lead to liberation, changing family dynamics and altered social traditional values. Women, therefore, are taught to be submissive housewives, submit to the domination of male relatives, carry out domestic chores and refrain from socialising with men in public (Participant U).

Accordingly, upholding the social norms would limit the applicability of the process of promoting women to leadership positions. In the Qatari context, a modernisation process as a means to eliminate social and cultural barriers would help to build an egalitarian labour market.

Even though women’s participation in the Qatar labour force has increased greatly, they still do not hold a proportionate share of the top management position, and they do not have access to certain sectors and fields based on gender-role stereotypes. This means that stereotypical masculine and feminine traits have affected the process of gender equality in the

workplace. Participant N responded that many Qatari women are qualified to lead in decision-making roles but sex-role stereotypes play a substantial part in preventing women from accessing leadership roles. This finding strongly echoes Participant F, who observed that Qatari society is male-dominated, and it cannot fully accept the presence of women in leadership positions.

High leadership positions, therefore, are seen as a male prerogative. Several participants had discriminatory acts in nominating managers based on gender preference in some governmental organisations. Participants E, G, I, P, L, and V acknowledged that most leadership positions in governmental institutions are occupied by men and are exclusive to them. Participant E said that in her workplace, the number of Qatari women in leadership positions was low compared to men: 'there is a preference for gender, not efficiency'.

The enforcement of this policy could be done through implementing plans that acts in accordance with the requirements of labour market whereby it would broadly distribute Qatari men and women relatively evenly across all professions and sectors through several significant steps: (1) promoting social benefits and career opportunities for women employees; (2) providing more education opportunities to study in male-dominated professions; and (3) incorporating monitoring system in public/private institutions.

A further organisational obstacle that the participants faced at their workplaces was related to *Wasta*, a local word that means using powerful social connections and nepotism (e.g., to appoint someone to lead a position based on a personal relationship with a key decision-maker). Some male and female candidates lacking the requisite qualifications have employed dubious means to gain their leadership positions. Such corruption exists in some institutions that appoint ineffective individuals because of personal relationships.

Another organisational factor that acts as an obstacle to women attaining management positions is related to the wage gap which is related to differences in earnings between men and women. The most prominent issue apart from sexual harassment is pay stratification (Weichselbaumer & Winter-Ebmer, 2005). In most societies, the gender pay gap is evident through women getting less pay than their gender counterparts do for performing equal tasks. Although the disparities vary by employment sector and the country in question, it is estimated that around 70% of women in formal employment settings earn lower wages (ITUC, 2009). When men and women are equally productive and qualified, then the differences in wages and salaries are not justified and are, therefore, discriminatory (World Bank, 2004).

The challenges that the participants faced are summarised as follows: there is a significant gap between the percentages of men and women leaders because most institutions privilege their male employees. Officials should change the selection process of leadership, regardless of gender, as talent is not limited to a particular gender. Although the Qatari government is supportive of the women's empowerment scheme through the QNV 2030, the problem is in the application of the policy by some institutions and the lack of regular observance. Other reasons are related to gender stereotypes, which influence how women are treated in the workplace because of family constraints and responsibilities and perceptions that they lack managerial skills. In order to overcome the stereotyped perceptions of women's roles in Qatar society, it is essential to establish a civil society organisation that promotes women's issues and spreads awareness about gender equality.

DISCUSSION

Qatar continues to encourage the active participation of women in the labour market. However, the issue arises some concerns about the ability of women to be employees and fulfill their responsibilities to the family. Qatar is a state in which laws are designed, at least to some extent, in accordance with a traditional religious agenda. The development of the country is supposed to occur with the family at the center. In this context, the participation of women in the labour market should be limited by her duties to the family, such as raising children and promoting traditional values. Therefore, Qatari women face the problem of scheduling and prioritising the tasks related to work and the family.

The household is important for the conduct of relations between men and women. Women's domestic work is seen as 'real work' in the private world. However, the findings showed that significant life experiences affected the careers of the participants (i.e., balancing domestic chores and career responsibilities). Career women face family conflicts caused by their participation in the labour market, or they have to cope with the additional pressure in order to fulfill their family duties (Participants D, E, H, Q, and Y). As managers, they felt the pressures of their workloads, which had affected their family life, time schedule, social communication with others and their future goals and plans. They were overwhelmed by their double burden, and they could not create the required balance between the two domains. Some participants said that the problem could be solved by maintaining a strict balance (i.e., scheduling their time and effort between home and work). Although all the participants considered that the issue might be dealt with, none of them denied its existence.

According to the (Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2011), the government emphasises that it is necessary to ensure a delicate balancing act between household and workplace responsibilities for women in order to: 'preserve and enhance the traditional Qatari family core while empowering women to participate in all spheres of society, especially in economic and political decision-making' (p.174). This means that the government realises that: 'the extent to which women are able to participate and remain in the labour market is intrinsically linked to the support available to help women balance family and professional responsibilities' (p.175). In order to implement this strategy, the government planned to adopt more family-friendly work measures, such as flextime, part-time and special leave. It is essential to take

various measures to maintain a balance in women's personal life and improve their working conditions: 'including provisions for a 60-day maternity leave, allotted time (two hours a day for a year) to breastfeed a baby and extended care leave for women with disabled children under age of 6' (p.175). The target here is to: 'put in place measures that support working women, including revising the current human resources law and maternity leave policy' (p.175).

This outcome should be achieved through implementing two comprehensive factors as follows: (1) raising awareness among the nation regarding the significance of practicing shared responsibility among family members and by updating regulations regarding domestic workers; and (2) providing a childcare social service at the workplace with proper staff qualifications to improve the personal and professional life of women, as it has a positive contribution towards the development of children.

CONCLUSION

Qatari society remains relatively traditional and conservative. The findings suggest that Qatari women are helped by two forces: the support they are getting from the ruling family and the impact of reforms and social change in surrounding regions. Indeed, the slow pace of social reform is one of the common complaints of progressives. The foundations laid in the last two decades in women's education, employment, and civil rights, can be reflected in the next generation?

A combination of social policy recommendations for policymakers could pave the way to create a gender-equal society and provide specific guidelines to reduce barriers to women's access to top management roles. For instance, the Qatari government has implemented several human rights and gender equality document, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and (CEDAW) and its optional protocol. However, it is apparent that there are no clear mechanisms to ensure that government organisations actually implement state policies. This lack does not contribute to the achievement of the long-term gender equality goals stated in the Qatar National Vision 2030 strategy.

Therefore, focused, procedural steps should be taken to enforce adherence to frameworks by governmental institutions and to amend existing legislation to tackle the challenges faced by women. These steps include implementing some social policy recommendations in terms of establishing and funding women's civil society organisations, integrating an evaluation and monitoring system in governmental organisations, promoting work/family policies, and initiating a feminisation policy in government organisations.

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