

Career Facilitators and Barriers of Arab Women Senior Executives

Ikhlas A. Abdalla¹

¹ Department of Management and Marketing, College of Business Administration, Kuwait University, Kuwait

Correspondence: Ikhlas A. Abdalla, Department of Management and Marketing, College of Business Administration, Kuwait University, P. O. Box 5486 Safat 13055, Kuwait. E-mail: iabdalla@cba.edu.kw

Received: March 3, 2015

Accepted: May 19, 2015

Online Published: July 22, 2015

doi:10.5539/ijbm.v10n8p218

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v10n8p218>

Abstract

This study aims to assess the perceived facilitators and barriers of high profile Arab women executives throughout their careers. A questionnaire was administered to 99 women executives from Kuwait, Tunisia and Sudan. These countries capture some of the diversity of women's opportunities and challenges in the Arab region. The findings of the three samples were essentially similar and generally support Western findings barring the impact of patriarchy. The main career facilitators were self-efficacy, hard work and social support. The main barriers were lack of culture-fit and exclusion from networks. Compared to Western findings, the present sample assigned more importance to lack of culture-fit and less importance to work/family conflict and lack of mentoring as barriers. The findings were discussed within the Arab sociopolitical context. Given the scarcity of research on the careers of Arab women and paucity of Arab research with regional perspective, the value added of this research is addressing the literature gap.

Keywords: Arab, women, executives, career, facilitators, barriers

1. Introduction

The Arab region, like other developing regions, is attempting to respond to a rapidly evolving, fast-paced technological world order that requires political, economic, and social modernization, stability and efficiency. However, the region as a whole faces daunting challenges, most notably lack of freedom, lack of women's empowerment and underdeveloped human capacities and knowledge relative to income. United Nations Development Program ([UNDP] 2005) and Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development ([AFESD] 2012) indicated that overcoming those three challenges would determine the future of the region. UNDP (2013) noted that barriers to communities' empowerment, especially women's empowerment, had relegated the region to a position far behind others, in spite of relatively high economic growth in several Arab countries. With respect to women empowerment, available data - albeit inadequate - revealed disappointing progress in most indicators, particularly in female human capital utilization. In fact, many studies (e.g., UNDP, 2005, 2013; AFESD, 2006; Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2013) suggested that most Arab women were economically, socially and politically disempowered.

World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (Hausmann et al., 2013), which utilizes four sub-indices-economic participation, education attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment, showed that the Arab region had the world's largest gender gaps in economic and political participation. Also, the region has the largest mismatch between levels of women education and work participation in the world (e.g., UNDP, 2013). Arab women have achieved much better progress in health and education domains, yet economic returns on their education and work experience have been persistently low. These results were often attributed to dominant gender prejudices about women's role in the public realm (Metcalf, 2007; Karam & Afiouni, 2013).

Most of the scant research investigating Arab women economic and political empowerment used surveys to track the numbers of women in various kinds of employment (AFESD, 2006), and facilitators and barriers of women's careers were seldom studied (Kausar & Tlaiss, 2011; Karam & Afiouni, 2013). The majority of the research on Arab women career advancement, according to recent literature reviews (Omair, 2008; Kausar & Tlaiss, 2011), was from 2000 onwards; it was concentrated on few broad topics explaining societal norms that were responsible for women's economic status in some Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Egypt, and Lebanon. Very little data is available on low-income Arab countries and Arab Maghreb region. Available data suggested that

most of Arab women's career barriers (socio-political, organizational and personal barriers) arose from patriarchal culture-based gender roles and status (e.g., Metcalf, 2006, 2007), and they were similar across the Arab regions but with different nuances from one country to another due to gender ideology variances between and within Arab countries (AFESD, 2006). As to women career facilitators, the few available studies revealed that family background and support, education, inner drive for success and self-confidence had positive effects on women's careers (e.g., Wilkinson, 1996; Omair, 2008); and that family background seemed to override the negative influence of patriarchy on women career progress (Omair, 2008; Karam & Afiouni, 2013).

Studies concerning the determinants of Arab women career advancement used samples of professionals, lower-level managers and micro enterprise entrepreneurs, and omitted women executives of medium and large organizations. This may be due to scarcity of women at the executive suite. Kausar and Tlaiss (2011), based on a comprehensive literature review concluded that there were insufficient studies on Arab female managers; that studies of female senior executives were virtually nonexistent and that research was needed to probe in more depth the determinants of Arab women economic status. Hence, given the theoretical shortcoming of gender and management in this region, Jamali, Sidani and Safieddine (2005) and Alami (2013) indicated that there was a need to continue to seek, at individual country and regional levels, more appropriate explanations for the token representation of women in executive positions—despite significant progress in their qualifications - so that the gender imbalance in management levels can be addressed.

This paper attempts to fill this gap by exploring the career barriers and facilitators of the abovementioned group of Arab women who made it to the very top of organizational echelons. The study covers three Arab countries, namely Sudan, Tunisia and Kuwait which are strikingly different in their economic wealth, population size and education opportunities however, like the other 19 members of the Arab League, they share common language, region, culture and a sense of belonging to one nation. Yet, our samples are not representative of the whole Arab region which is often described as a mosaic collection of economic and socio-political conditions (Hutchings, Metcalfe and Cooper (2010). According to regional and international reports (e.g., UNDP, 2013; Hausmann, 2013; World Bank, 2014) there are regional variances in GDP, social liberties and women empowerment opportunities. For example, women in Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Somalia are the least empowered and those in Lebanon and Tunisia are the most empowered. Due to the heterogeneity of the countries involved, the study follows the approach of (UNDP, 2005; Hutchings et al., 2010) and others, in first discussing the roles of socio-political and economic patterns and organizational practices in impairing or improving the careers of Arab women. This approach is needed to gain a holistic understanding of the issues in question (Karam & Afiouni, 2013). Thus, the paper will start by providing a feel of the contextual setting encompassing Arab working women via elaborate review of the literature pertaining to the environmental factors shaping the interplay between gender and women economic status; and in the second part of the paper the empirical findings are presented and discussed within the abovementioned context and international research findings. The general aim of this study is to contribute to the wider discourse of gender-equity and women career development which is considered an essential requirement for social and economic development (Karam & Afiouni, 2013).

2. The Contextual Environment

Education achievements vary widely across the Arab region depending on the level of GDP, population size and political stability (UNDP, 2005). Wealthier and smaller countries such as GCC countries, which started their first boys' schools in 1936-1950s, have caught up with Lebanon and Jordan and surpassed Egypt which started educating males and females since the beginning of the 20th century. Now, the highest female educational achievements are in Kuwait, United Arabs Emirates, Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan (average years of female schooling is 6.2), while conflicts, high military expenditure or economic hardships have taxed education in other countries—such as Somalia, Sudan and Yemen—resulting in average years of female schooling of 2.3 (AFESD, 2013; UNDP, 2013). Thus, the regional ratio of female literacy lags behind other regions at 50% and over 70% of Arab males' ratio (AFESD, 2013). Despite low average female education, the region exhibits bias towards secondary and tertiary education and keenness among many girls who enter high secondary education to finish it (AFESD, 2009). This has increased female-to-male ratios in secondary and tertiary education (reverse gender-gap) in several Arab countries, e.g. Kuwait and Tunisia (Table 1; UNDP, 2013).

Despite their increasing education, Arab female labor force participation rate (LFPR) improved by only 3 percentile points during 1990-2010 (Alami, 2013). The regional female workforce ratio stands at 26% which is half the world average of 51% and one-third of Arab males' rate (AFESD, 2013). Yet, the regional female unemployment rate (17.7%) is double that of men. Interestingly, the largest gender-gaps in LFPR were in countries with higher women education and GDP, revealing poor return of female education and that female economic activity seemingly driven by economic need (UNDP, 2013) and not skill utilization. For example, the

Kuwaiti female-to-male ratio among college graduates is 2.3:1 and in the workforce 1:4 (Table 1). These disparities were attributed mainly to the general structure of the Arab culture and inadequate economic and human resource policies (Metcalf, 2007). Alami (2013) commented that the significant employment gender-gap, despite comparable-if not better-education of women to men, had high toll on Arab economies and demonstrated significant barriers to the realization of women's rights.

As to Arab women occupational structures, they are similar to Western women's in that they are strongly gendered with the majority of women employed in health, education and social services (Metcalf 2007; UNDP 2009). But, unlike Western societies, Arab women are barred from night work in most countries, and excluded from certain professions such as judges and general prosecutors (e.g., Kuwait and other GCC countries), engineering/architecture (e.g. KSA), and diplomatic service in several GCC countries (Moghadam, 2005; UNDP, 2005, 2006; Metcalfe, 2007). Also women account for only 8% of Arab parliaments-compared to the world average of 20% (UN, 2014)-and equally low ratios of business ownership and senior management (AFESD, 2012). Interestingly, women in GCC countries have the least political rights and lowest female LFPR in the region despite having higher education than men. Kuwaiti women got their political rights in 2005 becoming the only such GCC country (Table 1), while in many Arab countries (e.g., Egypt, Sudan, & Tunisia) women had their political rights in the 1950s/60s but they trail behind GCC countries in education indicators (Table 1).

Generally, higher education is considered a pre-requisite for Arab women's and not for men's access to leadership positions. But, in reality Arab women improved human capital has not eliminated gender disadvantages in the public sphere, (WB 2003; Al-Lamki, 2006; Hausmann et al., 2013). The studies of Metle (2001) on Kuwait, El Ghannam (2002) on all Arab countries, Jamali et al. (2005) and AFESD (2006) on Lebanon and Tunisia-the most socially liberal countries - indicated that most women managers were clustered at low-level positions with very few reaching senior management positions. For example, there was only one senior executive in Egypt's five largest commercial enterprises, Elena Shmatova, who was neither Egyptian nor Muslim (Orascom Telecom, 2011). However, this does not eliminate the fact that a few qualified women have been able to penetrate senior executive echelons (Kausar & Tlaiss, 2011), though they may face more challenges with the decline in state-owned enterprises-where women gravitate (Alami, 2013; Karam & Afiouni, 2013).

The systematic gender inequalities in the region were attributed to Islamic teaching and deeply entrenched Urf (societal norms) particularly patriarchal kinship patterns, social subordination and ingrained male dominance (e.g., Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, & Meyer, 2007). Previous findings from conservative Islamic communities (e.g., Egypt, GCC countries, and Jordan), moderately liberal Islamic communities (Lebanon and Tunisia) and Lebanese Christian communities indicated that traditional attitudes towards women were the root cause of discriminatory treatment hindering women's career advancement (Abdalla, 1996; Wilkinson, 1996; Kausar & Tlaiss, 2011). But, due to the variances in gender ideologies within and between countries there is a clear dichotomy between social classes resulting in few communities which have made a large shift towards modernity and thus allow women to freely enter and engage in the labor market and there are traditional communities-the majority-where girls go to school but are discouraged from seeking employment and many other forms of empowerment (UNDP, 2005), consequently the region scored the lowest female economic activity in the world.

While there is an agreement among scholars on the adverse role of Urf on women's economic status, there is an ongoing debate regarding the role of Islamic religion in hindering women careers. For example, Rizzo et al. (2007) and Metcalfe and Mutlag (2011) argued that the main inhibitor of women empowerment is urf which originate from tribal norms and not Islam, and that Islam is not against women economic participation. Bullock (2002) added that some of the traditional customs are even pre-Islamic. Abdul Ghani (2011) and Kausar and Tlaiss (2011) remarked that, it is not Islam that creates limitation but rather the conservative interpretations of Islam. They explained that conservative male dominated politico-religious centers of power-who are strong believers that a woman's place lies within domestic boundaries-recognized the importance of Urf as a mechanism for societal behavior and therefore as a potential source for interpreting Qura'an and establishing Islamic laws (Sharia). According to Elamin and Omair (2010) and Abdalla (1996), Islamic teachings encourage female economic participation, and that women's main problems are due to social, economic and legal practices which are deeply rooted in a culture that is neither Islamic in spirit nor in conformity with ideals. Rizzo et al. (2007) advised that a better understanding of the difference in gender equality in this region needs to consider tribal, Arab and nation-related conservative customs rather than simply relegate to a matter of Islamic conservatism. Based on a literature review, Karam and Afiouni (2013) concluded that there was a clear need to overcome the stereotypical presentation of Islam as a monolithic and oppressive force that subjugate women and to move research in directions that explore both the positive, negative and neutral influence of Islam.

In this regard, Mernissi (1991), Sidani (2005) and Metcalfe (2006, 2008) stated that the Arab gender ideology

was partly grounded on the acknowledgement by the Qura'an of the biological differences between men and women, the notion that men and women are 'different but equal' and that they had complementary roles in life. Consequently, the biological differences notion defined Arab gender relationships (Metcalf 2006, 2007) which assumes that a woman will marry early; her contribution to the family will be as homemaker; the man leads, financially supports and protects his household. Also, there is a code of chastity and prudery of the woman which both men and women must guarantee (Metcalf, 2011). The 'male custodianship', stated in the Qura'an, was seen as justification for the exercise of authority over women in all areas of decision-making that relates to the private and public spheres (Moghadam, 2005), despite the significant strides achieved in females' education, work experience and the region's noticeable social progress (Metcalf, 2011).

In addition to social factors, the most visible constraints enervating women's empowerment are Arab legal systems. Moghadam (2005) argued that, gender discrimination was augmented by interactions of "Urf," with the legal systems, particularly 'Family laws' as they placed women under the guardianship of males and required them to obtain permission from male guardians in matters such as seeking employment, starting a business, traveling or getting married. These discriminatory laws contradict the constitutions of most Arab countries which guarantee equality of all citizens before the law, KSA being an exception (Kelly & Breslin, 2010). WB (2014) confirmed these contentions in a global study on legal gender-differentiations in six areas: accessing institutions, using property, getting a job, providing incentives to work, building credit and going to court. It found that Arab countries (including Kuwait, Sudan and Tunisia) scored the greatest gender-disparity in their laws, and they had made the smallest improvement in this aspect since 1960, with Saudi Arabia having the greatest gender-disparity. It also indicated that for all Arab countries the laws that support legal gender-parity had little value in practice because customary/personal laws were often upheld as valid sources of law, even if they violate other constitutional provisions (such as non-discrimination or equal protection provisions) or any other laws. Thus, family/personal status laws are considered an embodiment of gender discrimination in the region (Metcalf and Mutlag 2011; Alami, 2013) and instigators of a mismatch between the influx of qualified women in the labor market and biased legal/ policy frameworks and governance structures pertaining to employment rights and provisions (Jamali et al., 2005; WB, 2014). Hence, women are forced to accept working conditions and compensations that would not have been acceptable under normal conditions.

Failure to achieve gender parity was also attributed to what some described as "state feminism", where states supported women rights programs to serve regimes' political interests of balancing conservative authoritarian rule while maintaining democratic façades (Kandioti, 2011, 2012). That is, 'women's economic rights policies' are linked to regimes' political interests rather than to values of women's empowerment, equality and inclusive development visions (Alami 2013). In fact, beyond aid-funded gender programs, there was little investment in the implementation of laws, national action plans or gender-related sector strategies (Alami, 2013) and even financially supported women NGOs are kept under the governments' radars (UNDP, 2005). Hence, the present national committees for women's empowerment, national action plans, gender-units within ministries and legal reforms related to women's rights were mere attempts to 'technicalize' the work on women's rights for political gains (Alami, 2013). Another example is CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) which was ratified/endorsed by all Arab countries but with specific reservations on articles ensuring gender equality such as 'the realization of the principle of gender equality; the right of women to conclude contracts, administer property and be equal in all stages of court and tribunal procedures; the right of women in marriage, divorce and child custody; and the right of women to acquire, change, retain a nationality and pass it on to their children'.

Other factors that adversely influence Arab women's economic rights are poor governance, structural biases that weighed down on women's access to employment, policy failure and the economies' inability to create jobs (Alami, 2013). For example, development planners habitually assess women's needs on the basis of the traditional gender discrimination of roles; consequently new policies often maintain women at subordinate levels even when the intention is to integrate them in the economy. In this respect, AFESD (2007) cited GCC countries' attempts to restructure the workforce-over 60% of which is expatriate workers-using indigenous women to fill the needs of the services sector (mainly education and social service) without reference to their preferences, ambitions, capacities or skills. These practices not only inhibit women's opportunities but also reinforce conservative gender constructions (Metcalf, 2011). Also, because of poor governance, attempts to infuse better gender parity in existing laws often gave rise to a reaction back to conservative views and positions, resulting in reviews of existing laws or the promulgation of new ones that are less liberal than the 'official' declarations, or emerging social norms and practices (e.g., the Kuwaiti Parliament's rejection of women's political participation in 2004, (AFESD, 2006); call for raising the minimum age for marriage in Yemen from 15 to 17 in 1990s had led

to abolishment of a minimum age altogether in Civil Status Law (Aljazeera, 2013).

On a positive note, major favorable trends affecting gender equality and women's empowerment could be placed within the international context, Islamic modernist crusade, women education as well as local women rights activists. Metcalfe (2008/2011) and Karam and Afiouni (2013) indicated that many Arab countries had been influenced by the 'social globalization' of women issues and the efforts of relevant local and international organizations and civil societies to design strategies on the empowerment of women based on depositions of Beijing Platform, ratified conventions and Millennium Development Goals. Among the accomplishments of Arab NGOs are the success of Kuwaiti women's NGOs in attaining their full political rights and improving women's employment benefits (Al-Kazi, 2011). Women's career facilitators were also attributed to their family background, social support, education, inner drive for success and self-confidence (e.g., Wilkinson, 1996; Omair, 2008, 2010). Omair (2008) remarked that the importance of male support was due to a traditional practice where Arab women are expected to consult with and take permission from their men (husbands/fathers) before making career decisions. Once permission is granted men support their women in any way they can, either directly by giving opportunities or by giving advice and encouragement.

As to the impact of organizational factors on the careers of high potential women, previous findings (see reviews of Kausar & Tliss 2011; Karam & Afiouni 2013) indicated that Arab women managers faced similar barriers to those of Western women-the well documented glass-ceiling phenomenon, Tokenism theories etc. (see review of Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008; Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011)-such as stereotyping, gender discrimination, limited access to organizational social network, significant information, training, mentoring and female role models. However, Arab women's barriers are augmented by the traditional gender relations (Metcalfe, 2006, 2007), cultural perception that women are less capable, more irrational, and better suited for domestic responsibilities (Kandioti, 2012), obsolete human resource management practices which were heavily structured against women (UNDP, 2013; WB, 2014), bureaucratic rigidity, the annexation of different social and civic initiatives (Abdalla, 2006), and a system of "local dignitary" (a man of course) as the sole intermediary between the State and society; a society forbidden from freely engaging in the various forms of civic activity (UNDP, 2005). Further, women are also hindered by wide spread patronage and nepotism (Hutchings & Weir, 2006), and marginalized for their lack of back-door influence of the kind available to men (UNDP, 2005). As a result only 17% of firms in the region have high-level female managers and 13% have female principal owners - less than half the world average - that is because cultural biases make it especially hard for women to run an enterprise outside the family business (WB 2014). Hence, some elite women rely completely on making common cause with authorities, ruling party or their tribes (many political parties view themselves as extensions of tribes). Thus, the present statistics of representation of women in parliaments and Cabinet should not imply that women were democratically represented, (Al-Baz, 2002; ESCWA, 2006). Unsurprisingly, in 2014, decision-making commonly reflects the patriarchal view of the dominant male elite, irrespective of the democratic margins or rights given to women by the political systems or their increasing human capital (WB, 2014).

Regarding the contextual environments of Kuwait, Sudan and Tunisia - the countries from which the study's samples were drawn - the data in Table 1 shows that these countries differ most in population size, GDP and human development. For example, Kuwait's per capita income was six-times Tunisia's and twenty-times Sudan's, while the Sudanese population is nine- times Kuwait's and three-times Tunisia's. Kuwait and Tunisia are classified as high human development and Sudan as low human development (UNDP, 2013). However, despite these differences and the impressive educational achievements of Kuwaiti and Tunisian women compared to men, the three countries have some of the world's lowest female ratios in the workforce (UNDP, 2013), which was attributed to social barrier and laws (WB, 2010). Kuwaiti women fared worse as they are barred from some professions (e.g. judiciary) and got their political rights fifty years after Tunisia and Sudan. Also, the Tunisian legal system, which is considered the region's best - due to its instituted secular freedoms and women's rights - did not differentiate Tunisia from Sudan and Kuwait in terms of female LFPR (Table 1). UNDP (2013) attributed the difficulty in realizing the instituted freedoms and opportunities in Tunisia to built-in clauses negating the main legislations. For example, a modification to the Tunisian Personal Status Code stated that a wife was not obliged to obey her husband, but required her to "share part of the financial burden of the family" and to "deal with her husband in accordance with customs and traditions". Therefore, it is difficult for Tunisian women to assert their independence because "custom" requires a woman's subservience. Also, certain Tunisian laws restrict the types of work women participate in, the number of hours they work, and require the approval of a woman's husband/father of her job/hours worked or travel far from home for work (UNDP, 2013). Moreover, the reservations shown by Tunisia, along with other Muslim countries, at the signing of the 'Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women' on the ground of their contradiction with Personal

Status Code and the Qura'an suggest that those in power have not yet decided to take the step of equality (UNDP, 2013). In sum, the Tunisian women face roughly similar career realities to those of their Sudanese and Kuwaiti counterparts (WB, 2014). However, they superseded Kuwaitis and Sudanese women in enjoying wider, though not significantly better, spectrum of opportunities. For example, the Sudanese women had much less education and the Kuwaiti women had much less voice than the Tunisians (Table 1). The challenge now is whether or not Tunisian women's gains before the Arab Spring will vanish after the revolution due to the Islamic infiltration of the power vacuum; and thus a risk of Tunisia following Algeria and Iran where women participated in the revolutions to find their voices muted and their opportunities restricted by conservative laws (UNDP, 2013).

Table 1. Basic information about Kuwait, Sudan and Tunisia

Key Indicators	Kuwait	Sudan*	Tunisia
Total population	3.8	35.0	10.8
GDP (PPP) per capita (US\$)	45,539	2,300	7,512
Fertility rate (births per woman)	3.20	4.1	1.90
Life expectancy at birth (years)	75	62	75
% of women in paid labor force (%)	24	29	27
Women unemployment ratio (%)	3.1	26	24
Women estimated earned income (PPP US\$)	23,385	1,286	3,249
Men estimated earned income (PPP US\$)	40,000	4,401	11,731
Gender equity ratio in illiteracy	1.6	2.2	1.9
Mean years of schooling	6.1	3.1	6.5
Gender equity ratio in tertiary education	2.33	0.92	1.50
% of women in ministerial positions	7	9	8
% of under-secretaries or equivalent	5.5	10.0	8.2
% of women legislator, senior official and managerial positions	14	15	19
% of women professional and technical workers	34	34	37
% of women in parliament	2.00	26	26.7
Year women received right to vote	2005	1964	1959

Source: Hausmann et al, (2013) and AFESD (2013).

Note. *Statistics of Sudan before the separation of South Sudan. **Partially due to imported labor. ***Due to high numbers of male expatriates unaccompanied by their families. ****Survey data responses on a 1-to-7 scale (1=worst score, 7=best score). *****Data on a 0-to-1 scale (1=worst score, 0=best score).

Now, women within the 'Arab Spring' revolutions are rebelling not only against dictators but against a traditional, conservative mindset that fears women as agents of change. Yet, after the successful Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions still, simply making a connection between women and freedom provokes controversy in some groups and conflicts with tradition. In this respect, one Egyptian woman protester told Catherine Ashton, the EU Foreign Policy Supremo, during her visit to Tahrir Square: "The men were keen for me to be here when we were demanding that Mubarak should go. But now he has gone, they want me to go home." (The Guardian newspaper, April 23, 2011). In contrast, there are educated women, who strongly support the laws which legitimize restricting women rights claiming to be acting in defense of obedience and "honor". Given the present status of Arab women it is interesting to compare it with their status before the advent of Islam and during early periods of Islam when Arab women owned, ran businesses and even were responsible for managing the market. The first wife of Prophet Mohamed was a prominent business lady.

Within this context this study started to assess the perceived facilitators and barriers of high profile Kuwaiti, Sudanese and Tunisian women executives throughout their careers. They all worked in medium or large organizations, but in different economic, social and legal contexts. The foundation of this research draws its initial focus from the questions: How did some Arab women make it to the executive suite in the most conservative region of the world? What is the perceived relative importance of their career facilitators and barriers? Are there between-country differences regarding the barriers/facilitators? What can we learn from their experiences? Given the findings of previous research which showed that the career barriers of Arab women were mostly similar to those of Western women and that the career determinants of Arab women managers seem to be relatively similar across the region (UNDP, 2013), one could assume that there would be few differences between the work experiences of the Kuwaiti, Sudanese and Tunisian samples used in this study.

The rationale of the unique focus of this study is that it is women who successfully navigated the labyrinth and reached the executive suite who know what it takes to complete the journey within a patriarchal context. Given the fact that the experiences of this group is largely ignored by researchers (Kauser & Tlais, 2011), there is a pressing need to explore it for theory development and practical reasons. Thus, the study is expected to offer information which may be of value to scholars, practitioners and young aspirant women alike. The following sections of the paper will present the research methodology, outline and discuss the findings and present relevant recommendations.

3. Method

Sample: The interest of this study is to examine the experiences of women who made it to the apex of traditional medium and large Arab work organizations. Hence the samples were limited to those in the executive suite in medium and large organizations, specifically those who occupy the positions of minister, deputy minister, undersecretary, deputy undersecretary, president, vice president, CEO, managing director, senior divisional heads, ambassador, senior legislator, supreme and constitutional courts judges and their equivalent (Table 2). Thus, college deans, divisional heads and the like were not included because their experiences were likely to be different, according to previous research. Lyness and Thompson (2000) and Broadbridge (2008) indicated that different factors and more challenging barriers face women who were above middle management than those at lower organizational levels. The chosen members of the samples were found mostly in the government ministries, public corporations, banking and investment sectors. About 24 members of the sample were part of the executive teams of private companies. Almost all of these were members of business families which either owned or had strong links to the companies they were managing. It was also decided to exclude managers and owners of small businesses and small entrepreneurs because their experiences and challenges were partially different from the chosen candidates of this study, as their main challenges are focused on getting access to resources (most importantly finance) and markets within the tough boundaries of the cultural norms and legal system-particularly the restricting Personal Status Code.

Thus, the study was faced with the daunting task of getting a very busy small executive group to respond to the questionnaires. To identify potential participants of the study from the private sector, the researcher relied on records of the ministries of commerce, labor affairs and the stock exchange to trace the identity and number of potential participants. Those in the government and public sectors were generally easy to identify. The numbers of potential participants in the private sector varied from 8 in Kuwait to 11 in Tunisia. The aim was to cover the whole potential group, but due to difficulties in getting access to them the study relied on convenience sampling; that is, purposive and snowball approaches (Bryman, 2004) were used. The questionnaire was administered to those whose initial response to our request to participate in the study was positive. The researcher's use of her professional and social networks was instrumental in getting the 99 responses out of the original 115 administered questionnaires.

All the respondents had Bachelor's or postgraduate degrees, got some training or education in advanced countries and came from middle and upper-middle economic backgrounds. About one-third of them were the first women to occupy the executive position included in the study. More than half the respondents exhibited high job mobility as they worked in different organization/industries. All were over 40 years of age and most have children. The dominant number of children among Tunisians was 2 and among Kuwaitis and Sudanese was 4 children. The respondents' spouses were well educated. More details about the sample are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample profile

Position	Kuwait	Sudan	Tunisia	Age group	Respondents from private sector
Minister	2	2	2	55 and over	N/A
Deputy minister, undersecretary and assistant undersecretary, supreme court and constitutional court judge	5	12	8	40 and over	N/A
Presidents, managing director, board members, senior vice president, ambassador, (banks, universities, medical institutions, industrial, commercial and investment firms, government departments)	8	9	11	50 and over	10
Vice presidents, assistant vice president, senior regional division managers (banks, universities, medical institutions, industrial, commercial and investment firms)	12	13	15	40 and over	14
Total	27	36	36		24

Research instrument: The questionnaire was based on Gupton and Slick (1996), Lyness and Thompson (2000) and Broadbridge (2008) and adapted to suite the Arab situation. The questionnaires allowed for concise and quantitative responses as well as short answer and essay responses that were qualitative in nature. To measure the perceived barriers the respondents were asked to rate the extent to which 28 factors had been a problem in their own career advancement on a scale ranging from 1 (a great deal) to 5 (not a problem at all). The items measure such issues as 'lack of culture fit', 'exclusion from informal networks' 'lack of mentoring', 'poor organizational career management process', 'difficulty getting developmental assignments', 'difficulty obtaining opportunities for geographic mobility', 'lack of awareness of organization politics' and 'balancing family and career'. To measure the perceived facilitators the respondents were asked to rate the extent to which 22 factors had facilitated their own career advancement on a scale ranging from 1 (a very important facilitator) to 5 (not a facilitator). The items measure 'developing relationships', 'social support', 'managing own career', 'mentoring', 'developmental assignments', 'having a good track record' and 'personality traits'. The questionnaire also focused on barriers/facilitators on critical career points: choosing a major area of study or career, obtaining the necessary degree or training, securing a job after college and advancing the career.

4. Findings

The small sample sizes (27-36 respondents) and the narrative responses did not allow for extensive statistical analyses. For the quantitative data Descriptive Statistics and One-Way Analysis of Variance were used to examine 'between-country- comparisons'. The results revealed few statistically significant differences between the three countries and hence it was decided to base the analysis on the aggregate sample. The results of the three samples supported previous research findings suggesting that patriarchal Arab culture and gender discrimination were entrenched in Arab organizations (e.g., Kausar & Tlaiss, 2011; Metcalf & Mutlag, 2011). They also revealed the differential importance of the perceived career facilitators/barriers, e.g., 'self-efficacy' and 'drive for success' were the main facilitators and 'lack of culture fit' the main barrier. The role of 'mentoring' was minimal. The perceived influences of 'role models' and 'work/family balance' on their career success were moderate (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. Career facilitators of Arab women executives

Perceived career facilitators	Mean	Rank
Having a good track record	1.2	1
Hard work	1.2	1
Being assertive	1.2	1
Self esteem	1.3	4
Certain job moves	1.3	4
Job competence	1.3	4
Strong work ethics	1.7	7
Attracting top level support	1.8	8
Support from family and private networks	1.8	8
Ambition	1.8	8
Assistance and coaching by other inside and outside the organization	1.9	11
Credibility with peers	1.9	11
Being offered key job assignments	1.9	11
Wide span of assignments or experiences	2.1	14
Willingness to take risks	2.4	15
Information about organizational politics	2.7	16
Having role models	3.1	17
Having a mentor or someone who provides good advice on career opportunities	3.2	18
Access to informal networks	3.4	19
Career planning	3.6	20
Help from your mentor in establishing key relationships	3.9	21
Advice from your mentor about how to solve difficult business problems	4.1	22

Note. 1 = a very important facilitator to 5 = not a facilitator.

Drive and Self-efficacy: The respondents attributed their career success mainly to themselves - drive for success, excellent track record portfolio, hard work, assertiveness, credibility with peers and strong work ethics, (Table 3).

The qualitative research findings-based on narratives-substantiated the quantitative ones emphasizing the importance of 'job preparedness, working double as hard as men, successfully balancing family and work, being organized'. They also exhibited very high self-efficacy in several parts of the questionnaire, for example they believed that they were promoted to the leadership positions because "they were the best qualified for the position in terms of experience" (51%), "they had excellent managerial skills" (52%) and/or "the promotion was a reward for very hard work" (49%). They also described themselves as highly assertive, competitive, cooperative, career oriented, organized, and powerful but also compassionate (the scores range from 77% to 93%). This strong feeling of self-efficacy may be justified given the tough weeding process they went through.

When asked about the main reasons behind accepting the promotion to the 'present' executive positions, the main responses were: "to make a positive impact on organization performance" (41% of the respondents), "to work in a challenging job" (40%), "for self-fulfillment and gratification" (40%). In contrast, only 9% and 5% of the respondents, respectively, indicated that they accepted the executive position "for better financial compensation" and/or "as a result of encouragement from others".

Developmental opportunities: Forty three percent of the respondents believed that they got a better competitive advantage due to their early and strong career start which included early promotions to leadership positions and/or access to novel assignment/education/training (Table 3). They acknowledged that women of their age-group faced serious overt and implicit gender-discrimination issues in education (50%) and employment and developmental opportunities (83%); e.g., some Kuwaiti respondents indicated that at their time Kuwaiti girls were not admitted to engineering programs. Also, civil/labor laws and out dated personnel practices were significant career barriers (72%) but these systems were gradually improving and increasingly opening doors for women's career advancement (65%).

Table 4. Career barriers of Arab women executives

Perceived career barriers	Mean	Rank
Feeling like you are held to a higher standard than others	1.4	1
People tend to recommend and select people like themselves	1.4	1
Stereotyping and perceptions of women's roles	1.4	1
Feeling that you can't make mistakes and learn from them without threatening your job or your future	1.7	4
Limited access to informal networks	1.9	5
Difficulty getting access to opportunities	1.9	5
Organizational/internal politics	2.1	7
Not being considered when promotions for bigger jobs arise	2.2	8
Feeling pressure to fit in or adapt to the culture of the executive level	2.4	9
Not feeling comfortable asserting your views because of possible consequences	2.6	9
Blocked career progress	2.7	11
Not being offered stretch assignments	2.8	12
Being unsure about how to initiate a job change	2.9	13
Difficulty getting access to critical developmental assignments (e.g., serving on highly visible task forces or committees)	3.0	14
Poor career plan	3.0	14
Not getting access to the right people (or not knowing the right people)	3.1	16
Not receiving enough meaningful feedback about your strengths and weaknesses	3.1	16
Commitment to family responsibilities	3.1	16
Not knowing what the criteria are for advancement	3.4	19
Not having a senior manager who facilitates your career progress	3.5	20
Not enough mentoring (e.g., counseling about career opportunities)	3.6	21
Being excluded from social events and informal interactions with colleagues during working hours	3.8	22
Feeling like you are an outsider	3.8	22
Not getting the right jobs early in your career (that you need for later advancement)	4.1	24
Difficulty getting international assignments	4.2	25
Lack of opportunities to move across functions or businesses	4.3	26
Needing to obtain international experience/education in order to advance	4.3	26
Not being considered for jobs that require relocation	4.3	26

Note. 1 = a serious problem and 5 = not a problem.

Relationships: The following tactics seemed to have worked for the respondents: ‘developing relationships with senior managers’, ‘their credibility with peers’, ‘support of strategic sponsors’ and ‘private sources of support’ (Table 3), with family support, particularly male members support, playing vital roles in their success (65%). However, having unsympathetic fathers/husbands were major hindrances to the education and/or career development of some respondents; e.g., “father’s decision to arrange her marriage before completing her education”; “father not allowing her to have higher education because it was not gender-segregated or it required travel but she managed to continue her education after marrying a supportive husband”. Inadequate social networking with peers was seen as the second most important career barrier; e.g., they reported difficulties in accessing essential informal networks due to conservative cultures, boys’ clubs and shortage of time to socialize with peers due to pressures of family commitments. However, they perceived the challenge of balancing family-work commitments to be moderate due to availability of house-help and the extended family support.

Lack of culture fit: Stereotyping, gender discrimination and aggression were considered the most important barriers and created a feeling of “culture misfit at the executive suite”. Among the relevant items were: “Held to a higher standards than men”; “Seniors tend to recommend and select people like them”; “Cannot make mistakes and learn from them without risking one’s job or future”; and “Sometimes felt that people were waiting for me to make a mistake and fall” (Table 4). Also, 41% of the respondents reported that they were ‘hitting the glass-ceiling’ and having blocked careers; for example, a Kuwaiti banker stated, “Because of my gender there is no hope for me to be a board member”. However, despite the obstacles, hostilities and the substantial personal sacrifices made (65%), most respondents were comfortable with their level of power in the organization (77%), highly contented with their careers and had no major regrets (69%). Only 7% felt alienated or psychologically separated from the rest of the immediate group.

Mentoring: ‘Formal mentoring’ systems are yet to be introduced in Arab organizations. In fact there is no Arabic equivalent for this term (Abdalla, 2006). Hence, formal mentoring was not offered to the respondents but obviously they pursued/accepted guidance by seniors/peers (i.e., a sort of informal/unstructured mentoring). Interestingly, lack of formal mentoring was not perceived as a serious career barrier or facilitator (Tables 3 and 4).

Role Models: The respondents perceived the influence of ‘role models’ on their career success as moderate, at the same time they did not consider the scarcity of role models as a serious career barrier (Tables 3 and 4). Most of the respondents (87%) had people in their lives that they admired and tried to emulate (i.e., positive role models) and also had ‘negative role-models’ whose characteristic/behavior they tried to avoid (74%). Earlier in their lives, the respondents’ role models were mostly their parents and teachers; however, at this advanced stage of their career the role models were mostly persons from corporate, professional and political spheres. Most of the role models were men who were personally known to them. Generally, they drew on partial role models; none of them sought ‘total role models’, i.e., single ‘idealized’ person.

Career planning: ‘Formal career planning’ is not practiced in Arab organizations. Most of the respondents did not have career plans, but they appreciate its value now. Usually, they used approaches based on self-trust, optimism and a conviction of destiny.

5. Discussion

The factors perceived as facilitating or hindering Arab women leaders’ career advancement were very similar to those reported in previous studies in other regions in addition to patriarchy and overt or legalized discrimination (e.g., Lyness & Thomposon, 2000; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004; Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008; Kauser & Tlaiss, 2011; Metcalfe & Mutlag, 2011). However, the relative importance of some of those factors in the Arab world was different from that reported in Western studies. For example, ‘lack of culture fit’ at the executive suite was the main career inhibitor in the Arab world while it was of moderate importance in the West, ‘work/family balance’ was a main hindrance in the West and it was of moderate significance in the Arab women; ‘formal mentoring and career planning systems’ do not exist in Arab organizations and ‘role models’, although they were very scarce, were not perceived as major career barriers.

Women executives depicted semi-hostile work environments caused by stereotyping, gender discrimination and social exclusion. The findings indicated that as a result of succeeding in their leadership positions they endured negative feelings, attempts of cognitive distortion and lack of sympathy. A Kuwaiti respondent indicated that, “While my performance quality was proven, I still find my competence and achievements devalued”. A Tunisian woman executive (cited in Dubai Women Establishment [DWE] 2009) stated that, “If you are a man you can fail, if you are a woman you are not allowed to”. Karman said, after receiving 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, “The way I feel about it is that people are not taking us seriously as women in the Middle East. This is the rest of the world

taking us seriously. Now the world is watching” These results are consistent with the literature, (e.g., Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008), which stated that non-communal behavior needed at the executive suite got positive results for men but got negative outcomes for women. The “one best way” of leadership makes anyone who is different “can only be worse”, and hence people might resist women’s overt influence, particularly if they were forceful, assertive and working in a conservative environment (Rudman & Glick, 2001; Budworth & Mann, 2010). Another challenge was the ‘old boys’ networks which were considered a primary reason why women were ignored and indeed discouraged from seeking top jobs (Metcalf & Mutlaq, 2011). The negative effects of the abovementioned factors were augmented by the dominance of ‘Wasta’ (an Arabic term for nepotism), patriarchy and the overtly sexist laws and HRM practices. These practices have led to a culture which encourages men not only to recruit/promote men like them but to give preference to their friends and relatives (Abdalla, 2006; Hutchings & Weir, 2006; Tlias, 2010).

The ‘perceived exclusion from networks’ was ranked the second most important hindrance to the success of women executives. The deficient use of social networks may be caused by the woman herself or by other members of the network. Women can find it difficult to engage in informal networks when they are a minority and especially when men center their networks on masculine activities particularly in conservative societies. An Arab woman pushing herself in such a situation could get a negative response and may risk tarnishing her reputation. Hence men and women, when entering opposite sex groups, tread their steps with caution. Further, previous research (e.g., Eagly & Carli, 2007) stated that due to work/family balancing, many women give low priority to networking and spend little time in developing social capital accruing from “nonessential” parts of the work (socializing, politicking and interacting outside the work domain). Thus, depriving themselves from essential information and visibility needed for more recognition and advancement (Budworth & Mann, 2010).

Since ‘formal mentoring’ is not practiced in Arab organizations, men and women are deprived from its benefits, but the respondents did not seem to miss its absence. Previous research produced inconsistent results regarding the role of mentors in enhancing women’s careers. Some studies suggested that for disadvantaged employees, such as Arab women, lack of sponsor or formal mentor would be a significant career barrier while others indicated that the careers of men more than women benefit from mentors and powerful networks (e.g., Eddleston, Baldrige, & Veiga, 2004). Women tend to prefer informal mentoring relationships because they want someone who can advise them in light of their personal goals, skills and character (Schipani, Dworkin, Kwolek-Folland, Maurer, & Whiteman, 2006).

The present findings suggested that the main career facilitators of female executives were their high self-efficacy and good track records. “Work hard and be qualified” were often repeated side by side in the survey responses as baseline expectations for career success. These results are not surprising and they are consistent with human capital (Becker, 1964) and attribution theories (Heider, 1958). They are also consistent with international research findings which suggest that women’s career strategies are associated with individual rather than organizational factors (Broadbridge, 2008). A strong portfolio is needed for a woman to overcome negative stereotyping and gender discrimination which were perceived as major career barriers by the respondents. A Sudanese respondent indicated that, “Women have to prove their worth! Men don’t always need to do this; just being a male is sufficient!” A Tunisian executive, cited in DWE, (2009) stated that, “... there were an awful lot of men in senior executive positions who were far from brilliant, yet as soon as we talk of women elites in politics or business, everyone's asking about competence ...”. In this regard Schipani et al. (2006) argued that when considered for promotion men were assumed capable of higher-level jobs unless they had performed poorly in their current positions, whilst women were not automatically presumed capable to handle a promotion, hence their past track-record was scrutinized.

The second most important career facilitator of these executives was their social capital (i.e., the quality of their relationships with superiors, peers, relatives and strategic sponsors), which is consistent with previous findings (e.g., Omair, 2010). Over 60% of the Arab women leaders surveyed by DWE (2009) stated that the support of their fathers/husbands had positive effect on their career progression, and Omair (2010) found that male relatives’ social support enhanced Arab women’s professional confidence and encouragement. These findings are consistent with the arguments of Nicolaou-Smokoviti (2004) that women elites, more than men, draw upon additional structural and cultural resources in order to counteract the structural and cultural deficits in their gender. One of the deficits was inadequate role model options available to the respondents and hence the perceived moderate effect of role models in their lives. Scarcity of role models deprived them from symbols of possibility and vital sources of inspiration, hope, assertiveness, and identity building. Overall, the results suggest that the hostile culture at the executive suite encourage women to operate in a ‘survival mode’ where self-efficacy, perseverance, hard work and social support may be more effective survival tools while the use of

role models fell into lower place. Thus, the utilization of their material, social and cultural capital may explain how and why they gained access to top leadership positions.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings showed that despite the enormous burden of heritage, custom and the difficult hurdles Arab women are facing, today's women made significant victories owing to education, entry to work, awareness, access to foreign cultures, liberationist and human rights thought. Thus, now the modern Arab women have far more options. However, studies of the Arab world (e.g., Hausmann et al., 2013) revealed meager women's successes, as women are still largely absent from the political domain, only thinly present in the social welfare sector, shadowy in the civil and cultural spheres, insignificant in the economic domain, and almost completely missing from the official religious domain. The respondents depicted a picture of their micro-setting revealing that the factors within their purview (e.g., competence) were the main facilitators of their career advancement while some factors in their mezzo (e.g., organization culture) and macro socio-political settings (particularly the legal, social and cultural) were the main inhibitors.

Within this context, the respondents provided several suggestions that may alleviate the constraints they had identified. First, they strongly believed that women would eventually triumph if they relied on themselves as the main instrument for change – particularly changing the negative stereotype - by sustaining high work-ethics, competence, hard work, self-efficacy, high aspiration and using whatever social support available. They also considered their good fortune of having early significant assignments a factor that gave them a head-start. Second, the cultural and legal systems need to change as they are the main sources of the constraints but cultural transformation needs time and determination to introduce radical change in children socialization, the education systems and the media. Changing the legal system without equivalent cultural change may alleviate only part of the problem as was evident from the Tunisian case. Tunisia has the most modern legal system in the Arab region and they, along with Lebanon, have the most liberal societies. Yet, the Tunisian respondents believed that patriarchy was still entrenched in Tunisian organizations. Their career barriers did not seem to be different than the Kuwaitis and Sudanese. This may lead to a pessimistic conclusion that even acculturation and accommodation of new socio-political patterns may not have a significant positive impact on alleviating the challenges facing Arab women. This statement needs to be qualified since there were not enough observations per country to fully support it. In this connection it is worth noting that the amendments to the Egyptian constitution, approved after the Arab Spring, enhance the chances of bringing democracy to the country but there was no reference to equality for women. It is a sign that the old ways may last except if women's rights supporters win the battle between prejudice and democracy. This also requires a society with generous spirit which views all citizens as fundamentally equal.

Another suggested buffer against anti-women forces and exclusion from networks was effective utilization of their social capital which could be in the form of strategic sponsors, family members and senior personnel to supplement the structural and social deficiencies in their work situation accruing from limited access to networks, role models etc. While the research highlighted several significant issues pertaining to several career facilitators and barriers in three countries, the exploratory nature of the research and the limited number of respondents-due to the limited availability of Arab executive women- did not allow for generalizations.

Among the major limitations of this study are that the three countries are very different, most notably in their economic and social indicators (Table 1), and the small sample sizes did not allow for cross-country comparisons. Thus, uncovering no differences between the three groups could be attributed to the sample size, or to the fact that women in those three countries share common attitudes and work experience. The latter interpretation could be plausible given the fact that the 'admired' Tunisian legal and social models failed to produce better indicators of gender equality in employment, education or opportunity to rise to positions of power than those of Kuwait and Sudan (Table 1). The findings of this study, perhaps, need to be revisited through a focus on much larger sample of women in management across a wider geographic area of the Middle East before any definitive conclusions can be drawn. A pressing inquiry for future research is the impact of the Arab spring – the goals of which were freedom, dignity and fairness - on patriarchy, acculturation, women opportunities and empowerment.

References

- Abdalla, I. A. (1996). Attitudes Towards Women in the Arabian Gulf Region. *Women in Management Review*, 11(1), 29-39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09649429610109271>
- Abdul Ghani, H. (2011). Urf-o-Adah (Custom and Usage) as a Source of Islamic Law. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 1(2), 178-185.

- AFESD (2006). Unified Arab Economic Report, Abu Dhabi publishers, Abu Dhabi, (in Arabic).
- AFESD (2007). Unified Arab Economic Report, Abu Dhabi publishers, Abu Dhabi, (in Arabic).
- AFESD (2009). Unified Arab Economic Report, Abu Dhabi publishers, Abu Dhabi, (in Arabic).
- AFESD (2012). Unified Arab Economic Report, Abu Dhabi publishers, Abu Dhabi, (in Arabic).
- AFESD (2013). Unified Arab Economic Report, Abu Dhabi publishers, Abu Dhabi, (in Arabic).
- Alami, N. (2013). *Waiting for the bloom: Correcting policy biases against Arab women's economic rights*. Paper prepared for the expert group meeting Women and Economic Empowerment in the Arab Transitions. ILO 21-22.
- Al-Baz, Sh. (2002). *Women and decision making: a research view of women's empowerment*. Presented at The Regional Seminar on Gender and Development: Relationships of Partnership and Networking. Tunisia, 20-22 October 2002, (in Arabic).
- Aljazeera. (2013). Retrieved from http://www.aljazeera.com/photo_galleries/africa/2010831920332122.html
- Al-Kazi, L. (2011). Women and Non-governmental Organizations in Kuwait: A Platform for Human Resource Development and Social Change. *Human Resource Development International*, 14(2), 167-181. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2011.558313>
- Becker, G. (1964). *Human Capital*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Broadbridge, A. (2008). Senior Careers in Retailing: An Exploration of Male and Female Executives' Career Facilitators and Barriers. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 23(1), 11-35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17542410810849105>
- Broadbridge, A., & Hearn, J. (2008). Gender and Management: New Directions in Research and Continuing Patterns in Practice. *British Journal of Management*, 19, 38-49. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2008.00570.x>
- Broadbridge, A., & Simpson, R. (2011). 25 Years on: Reflecting on the Past and Looking to the Future in Gender Management research. *British Journal of management*, 22, 470-483.
- Bryman, A. (2004). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Budworth, W., & Mann, S. (2010). Becoming a Leader: The Challenge of Modesty for Women. *Journal of Management Development*, 29(2), 177-186. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02621711011019314>
- DWE. (2009). *Arab Women Leadership Outlook 2009-2011*. DWE, Dubai.
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). *Through the labyrinth: The Truth about How Women Become Leaders*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press.
- Eddleston, K. A., Baldrige, D. C., & Veiga, J. F. (2004). Toward Modeling the Predictors of Managerial Career Success: Does Gender Matter? *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 1(4), 360-385. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02683940410537936>
- Elamin, A. M., & Omair, K. (2010). Male attitudes Towards Working Females in Saudi Arabia. *Personnel Review*, 39(6), 746-766. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00483481011075594>
- ESCWA. (2006). *Report on Arab Women Conditions: Women's Movement in the Arab World*. UN, New York.
- Gupton, S. L., & Slick, G. A. (1996). *Highly Successful Women Administrators: The Inside Stories of How They Got There*. California: Corwin Press.
- Hausmann, R., Tyson, L. D., & Zahidi, S. (2013). *The Global Gender Gap Report 2013*. Geneva: World Economic Forum.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. New York: John Wiley and Sons. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/10628-000>
- Heilman, W. E., Wallen, A. S., Fuchs, A., & Tamkins, W. (2004). Penalties for Success: Reactions to Women Who Succeed at Male Gender-Typed Tasks. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(3), 416-427. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.3.416>
- Hutchings, K., & Weir, D. (2006). Guaxi and Wasta: A Comparison. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 48(1), 141-156. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tie.20090>
- Hutchings, K., Metcalfe, B. D., & Cooper, B. (2010). Exploring Arab Middle Eastern Women's Perceptions of

- Sidani, Y. (2005). Women, work, and Islam in the Arab societies. *Women in Management Review*, 20(7), 498-512. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09649420510624738>
- Singh, V., & Vinnicombe, S. (2004). *Women Pass a Milestone: 101 Directorships on the FTSE 100 Boards*. The Female FTSE Report 2003. Cranfield: Cranfield University School of Management.
- Tlias, H. (2010). Perceived Organizational Barriers to Women's Career Advancement in Lebanon. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(6), 462-481. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/17542411011069882>
- UN. (2014). *Women in Parliaments*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>
- UNDP. (2005). *Arab Human Development Report: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World*. UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, Jordan: National Press.
- UNDP. (2009). *Arab Human Development Report: Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries*. UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, Jordan: National Press.
- UNDP. (2013). *Human Development Report: Rise of the South –Human Progress in a Diverse World*. New York: UNDP.
- Wilkinson, G. (1996). *Women in Business*. Dubai: Gulf Business.
- World Bank. (2010). *Middle East and North Africa Region: Bridging the Gap, Improving the Capabilities and Expanding Opportunities for Women in the Middle East and North Africa*. Washington: World Bank.
- World Bank. (2014). *Women, Business and the Law 2014: Removing Restrictions to Enhance Gender Equality*. Washington: World Bank.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).