

Gulf Studies 19

Md Mizanur Rahman
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Sharique Umar *Editors*

Handbook of Families in the Arab Gulf States

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Doha, Qatar

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Ziarat Hossain
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Chapter 1

Family Research in the Arab Gulf States: An Introduction



Md Mizanur Rahman, Kaltham Al-Ghanim, Ziarat Hossain,
and Sharique Umar

1 Introduction

Each society is comprised of various interconnected units, each with its own distinct characteristics and functions. One such unit is the family, which can be seen as a cornerstone upon which cultures and nations are built. In the fields of behavioral sciences (e.g., sociology, family studies, anthropology, psychology), family is considered an institution which serves as a gateway to understanding the inner workings of a community. Family is the quintessential subject of theoretical analysis because it provides the foundational data on which grounded research on human societies thrives. This volume titled “*Handbook of Families in the Arab Gulf States*” addresses the institution of family with a focus on current scholarship on families in the Arab Gulf States.

The analysis of family has been a focal point of scholarly discussions within the discipline of sociology for a considerable period of time. In particular, the conceptualization of the family as a unit of analysis in modern academia was pioneered by American sociologists. Although they placed a great emphasis on systematizing the

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family as a unit of analysis in modern academia, interest in family structures predates their contributions. European scholars, including Pierre Guillaume Frédéric le Play (1806–1882), Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), and Max Weber (1864–1920), among others, had already explored the role family plays in societies and its impact on individuals. However, during the first half of the twentieth century, American scholars such as Carle Zimmerman (1893–1983) and Pitirim Alexandrovitch Sorokin (1889–1968), a Russian-American sociologist, spearheaded research in this field. They examined the structure and functions of families in traditional settings, including those in rural areas. Their collaborative efforts in this field resulted in some of the earliest works, such as *Principles of Rural–Urban Sociology*, published in 1929, and *A Systematic Source Book in Rural Sociology*, which is a comprehensive three-volume study published in 1930. Utilizing data sourced from regions beyond the borders of America, their primary objective was to liberate knowledge production from the grip of sweeping generalizations and extreme universalism. These tendencies often result in what they aptly referred to as “factually but erroneous simplifications and disfigurations of reality” (Sorokin & Zimmerman, 1929; p. vi). Their works largely focused on rural societies because they perceived traditional ways of living closely associated with robust and stable family structures, lower divorce rates, and larger family sizes. By focusing on rural family structures, they sought to highlight patterns of continuity and stability that, in their view, stood in contrast to the shifting and often fragmented roles of families in urban settings. In contrast, scholars affiliated with the Chicago School, such as Edward Franklin Frazier (1894–1962) and Joseph K. Folsom (1883–1960), were pioneers in the study of urban families.

In subsequent years, research on families had already reached its zenith in America, with several major works in circulation (Burgess, 1948; Folsom, 1934; Lewis, 1950; Nimkoff, 1934). Among these, Ernest Mowrer’s (1927) *The Family Disorganization: An Introduction to a Sociological Analysis*, as well as Ernest Groves and William Ogburn’s (1928) *American Family and Marriage Relationship*, stand out as pioneering contributions. Of particular significance was Groves’s (1940) work, *The Family and Its Social Functions*, which made a substantial contribution to the field. In this work, he conceptualized the family as a social institution and shed light on the role of families in the functioning and stability of societies. Groves also led efforts to form the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) in 1938. This professional organization galvanized a nationwide academic interest in establishing family science as a discipline. Likewise, established in 1933, the Society for Research in Child Development started to focus on aspects of child development in the family. Other organizations such as the American Psychological Association (established in 1892) and the American Sociological Association (established in 1905) also advanced research on families. Although there are variations in the names of family studies as a discipline (e.g., Family Studies, Family and Child Studies, Family and Consumer Science, Human Development and Family Studies, and Human Development and Family Science), family studies is a well-recognized academic unit that trains and supports scholars in the field across countries (Adams, 1986; Burr & Leigh, 1983; Day et al., 1995; Hamon & Smith, 2014). A recent development in the family studies field is to focus on the father’s role in

the family. Findings suggest that fathers actively participate in the parenting process and contribute to child development and household labor across cultural groups (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013; Hossain & Madon, 2021; Kagitcibasi, 2007; Keller et al., 2010; Lamb, 2010; Parke, 1996; Rohner & Ali, 2025; Roopnarine, 2015; Selin, 2014). These findings also report that fathers' increased participation in childcare and household labor has implications for a positive family environment and improved marital relations. Rejecting the ethnocentric Western views to interpret child and family development, scholars such as Margaret Mead (1949), John Whiting and Beatrice Whiting (1975) proposed the use of cultural relativism theory to understand family and child development in other cultural groups. Given the contexts of family diversity and globalized lifestyles, contemporary family study scholars and theorists have been formulating and applying newly developed ethno-theories (e.g., bioecological systems theory, developmental niche model, and cultural ecological theory) to understand the family across cultural communities (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Ogbu, 1981; Super & Harkness, 1986). While these and other scholars and organizations were at the forefront of family studies in the Western context, it is crucial to acknowledge that scholarship in this field was not progressing at the same rate in other parts of the world. In particular, scientific research on families did not get much traction in the Arabian Peninsula.

In tandem with developments in other parts of the world, the post-oil Gulf region, despite its continuities with the pre-oil era, has undergone substantial transformations. One of the most significant changes is the shift in socioeconomic patterns which is marked by increased literacy rates, the growing participation of a large number of females in the workforce, the relaxation of traditional social norms and rights, demographic shifts with the arrival of foreign populations, and their influence on public spaces, culture, and various facets of life. These transformations, among others, have had an unprecedented impact on how the family, as a social institution, operates in the Gulf region. The family has had to withstand, adapt to, and address the challenges posed by socioeconomic development and modernization, while also being shaped by them. This handbook endeavors to showcase the state of family studies and seeks to synthesize existing research in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.

The chapters in this volume are organized into nine sections. We discuss the pioneers of family research in the GCC states in the next section. The next seven sections provide an overview of existing knowledge in family studies by focusing on family formation, gender roles, youth and women, social media, family policies, family support systems, and migrant families. In the final section, we shed light on the structure of the volume by delineating five major parts: Part I: Family Formation, Marriage, and Gender Roles; Part II: Technology, Social Media, and Family; Part III: Family Policies, Economy, and Family Research; Part IV: Family Support Systems; and Part V: Migrant Families.

2 Family Research in the GCC States: The Pioneers

Family studies research in Gulf societies is frequently intertwined with themes such as gender studies, youth, society, culture, and children across disciplines. Bettina Dennerlein (2020) argues that the existing scholarship in this field typically engage with family-related research in the wider Arab region by often compartmentalizing it within the broader frameworks of subjects such as demography, urbanization, development, migration, and related topics. Furthermore, research on family studies in the Gulf region has mostly lingered in the shadow of the broader Middle East region. Many scholarly works addressing family studies have either perceived the Gulf region as homogenous, partly due to the shared characteristics of religion, language, and culture, or they conducted research prior to the independence of some of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. For instance, one of the earliest research exploring family relations in the Arab world was undertaken by M. Kamel Nahas. His study titled *The Family in the Arab World*, published in 1954, deals with the fundamental cultural values, political and social transformations, and challenges that have shaped family life in the Arab world. Nahas' research includes several countries across the Arab world, including "Egypt, Libya, Tunis, Algeria, Morocco in Africa, and Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, and Koweit in Asia" (Nahas, 1954, p. 293). However, only two of the GCC states, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, are included in this list, while others such as Bahrain, the UAE, and Qatar are absent, primarily because they had not yet achieved statehood at the time of Nahas' research. Interestingly, Oman, which had gained independence in 1951, approximately three years before the publication of Nahas' work, is also not mentioned in the article. Nevertheless, the work offers key insights into the cultural and social status of Arab families at that time. It probes various issues concerning family life in the Arab world, including the relationships between family members, the role of the family head, the interaction dynamics between husbands and wives, the authority over children, and the economic activities of families.

Nahas' work stands as one of the earliest endeavors focused on family studies, a subject that was not particularly popular among social scientists in the region. During this time, other works, such as Rupert Hay's (1955) *The Impact of the Oil Industry on the Persian Gulf Shaykhdoms*, primarily centered on sociopolitical developments brought about by the oil industry in the region. These works mentioned advancements in female education and improved living standards for the laboring classes.

While some of the early studies addressed family-related issues, the concept of studying the family as a distinct unit of analysis, akin to the approach taken in Western scholarship, was absent. Although it is widely recognized that the family constitutes the backbone of societies in the Arab world, little to no attention has been dedicated to the notion of the family itself, its historical evolution, and the variations across the region. This paucity of scholarship led to the prevailing view that the concept of family was universal and unchanging throughout the region. To challenge this monolithic perspective on the family, Beshara Doumani published an edited volume, *Family History in the Middle East: Household, Property, and Gender*, in 2003.

However, this contribution mainly covers the early modern and modern periods and focuses on the Arab heartlands of the former Ottoman Empire, including Greater Syria, Egypt, and Iran. Regrettably, it lacks focus on the Gulf region, perhaps due to the assumption that the Gulf was merely a sub-region of the larger Middle East.

Prior to the 1970s and 1960s, a systematic scholarship on family studies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries was virtually non-existent. Only a small number of works, such as Nahas' and Hay's (mentioned earlier), made passing references to oil development and its impact on family relations in the region. However, in the last couple of decades, the scholarship on Gulf families has grown extensively. There has been a surge in the number of studies investigating family life in the region (Abdelmoneium et al., 2023; Al-Najjar, 1996; Al-Zarad, 1989; Hassan, 2019; Joseph, 2000; Nagy, 2006). Among these, Yahya El-Haddad's (2003) work on Gulf families stands out as a significant addition to the field. Haddad's research investigates the changes in family structure since the 1970s, with a particular focus on the social, economic, and cultural shifts that have shaped them. He emphasizes the transformation from extended to nuclear family structures, a change driven by factors such as urbanization, migration, and globalization. Haddad's article draws from a range of sources, including academic studies and surveys, to provide a comprehensive analysis of demographic changes, marriage patterns, and the challenges faced by the elderly.

One of the most systematic studies of families within the context of the GCC countries is Fahad Al-Naser's (1996) article, *Development of Family Studies in the Eighties in Kuwait*. His work treats family studies as a source of knowledge and provides insight into the development of family studies in Kuwait during the 1980s (Al-Naser, 1996). He highlights theoretical deficiencies in family studies and calls for methodological innovation and theoretical development. He investigates the historical and societal changes that Kuwait underwent, particularly after the discovery of oil, and calls for a shift from historical and local research to more comprehensive and empirical studies in the field of family studies. This evolution in family studies was concurrent with the social and economic development driven by oil revenue. Although relatively narrow in its scope, Al-Naser's work sheds light on a various academic studies that treated family as a social institution and called for theoretical sophistication to study Arab families.

Other scholars who approached the family as a unit of analysis and contributed to this genre are Hopkins (2003), Gloom (1987), Al Thakeb (1976), Hassan (1978), Mustafa (1980), El-Feki & Abdel Raheem (1980), and Al Termanini (1984). While the scholarship on family studies has dealt with family life in the Gulf, its theorization and conceptualization have remained weak. To fill in the lacunae, William Young and Seteney Shami (1997) provide a conceptual and methodological approach to family studies. While calling for the need for anthropological research and its contribution to understanding the Arab family, they highlighted the diversity and complexity of family forms, challenged stereotypes and generalizations, and provided insights into the cultural and social processes that shape family dynamics. These insights have been applied in various ways, such as informing family planning programs,

promoting gender equality, and supporting policies that recognize the importance of family ties in Arab societies.

The theme of modernity and changes in family structure is also present in other influential publications. An example of this is an edited book titled, *Women and Power in the Middle East*, published in 2001 by Suad Joseph and Susan Slyomovics. The book explores the intersection of gender, class, and politics in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Palestine, Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iran, and Turkey (Joseph & Slyomovics, 2001; p. 1). An analysis of family life in countries like Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman is, however, absent. Despite its limitations, Joseph & Slyomovics's book is a key contribution to family studies in the region. The book approaches the family through the lens of gender relations. In the same vein, Deniz Kandiyoti's work in 1988 challenged the prevailing feminist perspectives on patriarchy by stressing the significance of analyzing women's strategies for negotiating within patriarchal systems, which she referred to as "patriarchal bargain". Her research builds on females' responses to the constraints imposed upon them by the society, and reveals how these responses vary across different cultures and historical contexts (Kandiyoti, 1988). In addition, Philip Fargues' (2005) research is a notable addition to this genre. He examines the status and empowerment of women in Arab countries in the context of the prevailing patriarchal system.

Suad Joseph's edited work, *Arab Family Studies: Critical Reviews*, further advances the discussion on conceptualizing "family" in the Arab region (Joseph, 2018). This edited collection critiques existing approaches to the family and reviews the scholarship on each country in the region (Joseph, 2018). The authors analyze the socioeconomic changes that have occurred in the region since the 1970s and their impact on family structures. The work investigates the factors influencing family relations, tensions between tradition and modernization, the role of public policies in shaping family structures, and the fault lines and contradictions within family policies. The study examines demographic data, national surveys, and previous research to provide insights into the transformations of family structures in the Gulf region. Collecting contributions from Arab scholars, Ahmad and Gielen (1998) in their book, *Psychology in the Arab countries*, chronicles Arab views on major psychological topics such as developmental issues, personality, education and creativity, and social and organizational behaviors in the Arab world.

A recent work on the subject of family is an edited collection titled *Families and Social Change in the Gulf Region*, by Jennifer Lansford et al. (2020). This book assesses the impact of rapid urbanization, technological advancement, the increased presence of females in universities and the job market, improved living standards driven by natural resource revenues, and the overwhelming presence of foreign migrants on family structure in the Gulf. The book revolves around two central themes, both of which are highly relevant to the changing nature of families. The first theme explores shifts in parenting, fertility, and partnership dynamics, while the second theme probes socioeconomic factors that influence families. In this context, the book is an in-depth study of how Gulf societies have gone through unprecedented changes in the last couple of decades.

Based on our reading of the current scholarship on family studies, it has become clear that the existing research tend to focus on small-scale, local communities, which may not be representative of larger social and cultural trends. Thus, more studies of interdisciplinary and collaborative nature are needed to fully capture the continuity and evolution families in the region is witnessing.

3 Family Formation

A considerable body of research has been conducted on marriage to understand the nature of marital practices and family relations in GCC countries. The central aspects of research on marriage include taking a stock of traditional values and changing perspectives toward marriages, and increase in the divorce rates, among other issues (Alharahsheh & Almeer, 2018; Safar, 2018; Khan & Abdul-Rahim, 2013; Harkness & Khaled, 2014; Hassan, 2018; Al-Thaqeb, 1998, 1999; Baqader & Al-Khazraj, 1994; Baqader, 1985; De Bel-Air et al., 2018; Al-Barwani & Albeely, 2007).

An investigation of marital practices is instrumental in making sense of broader family trends. However, this has to be done in the context of rapid development, modernization, and shifting gender roles. An increasing number of females are participating in education and the workforce as educational and employment opportunities for women have become better. These shifts have redefined perceptions of marriage and family in the region. For instance, Hoda Rashad et al. (2005) observe that early marriages are now regarded as potential impediments to girls' educational and career prospects in Gulf societies. The findings make us aware of how early marriages have introduced new personal and familial issues and raised complex legal and policy challenges in Arab societies. In addition, Attiya Ahmed (2018) scrutinizes the role of marriage in shaping citizenship regimes and forging familial, ethnonational, and religious identities in the Gulf region. Her research examines how Muslim marriages in the region are influenced by both transnational and ethnonational processes. Ahmed's work brings into light the challenges and contradictions within these marriages. In a similar discourse, Hassan (2018) shows that marriage, as a cornerstone of family life, not only influences the conferment of citizenship but also establishes and sustains households and gendered biopolitical spaces. In a region where a substantial portion of the population comprises noncitizens, the regulation of marriage plays a crucial role in creating and maintaining distinctions between citizens and noncitizens.

The rising number of divorces in the region, lately, has also attracted a wide scholarly interest. Studies on divorce reveal the impact of modernity on marriage and the changing perception of marriage and divorce (Anser, 2013; Al Gharaibeh & Bromfield, 2012; Abdul Jalil & Sibai, 2006; Bromfield et al., 2016). Layachi Anser's research (2013) observes that the GCC countries are experiencing the highest divorce rates in the Middle East, largely due to the rising education standards in GCC countries. Anser (2013) argues that the divorce rates tend to rise among individuals with higher levels of education, whereas the rate remains well below one percent for

those who are illiterate or have only completed primary education. His study relies on statistical data related to marriage and divorce rates across various GCC countries, with a specific focus on the definitions of concepts like marriage and divorce, and the role of education in shaping these trends.

Socioeconomic development and modernization projects have been central themes in various studies related to marriage and divorce including the role of alternative marriage contracts within the region. One such marriage contract is known as the *Misyar* marriage, which has also garnered considerable scholarly attention (Al Tamimi, 2009; Doe, 2008; Muhammad & Nasab, 2016; Golkowska, 2014; Hasso, 2007; Osmani, 2010; Rhys, 2007). *Misyar* (visitor's) marriage is a type of secret polygamy in which the couple does not disclose their marriage to anyone and the husband generally visits his wife in her home or her family's home, not in his own, and they may agree to meet elsewhere (Aref & Rahman, 2024; Al Khalifa et al., 2024). Tofol Al-Nasr's work (2011) interrogates the phenomenon of *Misyar* marriage in the GCC countries, assessing the social and gender imbalances brought about by the region's modernization policies and their impact on women's status. The article examines the evolution of women's status in the GCC, the concept of *Misyar* marriage, and the moral and social implications associated with this practice. It offers insights into the challenges and complexities faced by women in the region, while also emphasizing the need for heightened awareness and action to address the potential adverse consequences of *Misyar* marriage.

Furthermore, studies have also reviewed other forms of marriage practices common in the Gulf, one of which is consanguineous marriage which takes place between blood relatives, such as first cousins (Al-Gazali et al., 1997; Al-Ghanim, 2010, 2020; Bener & Hussain, 2006; Harkness & Khaled, 2014; Islam, 2012). Scholars have surveyed the prevalence of consanguineous marriages and the socioeconomic factors associated with them in the Gulf region. Jurdi and Saxena (2003) conducted a study tracing the patterns of these marriages in Yemen, based on data collected from the 1997 Yemen Demographic and Maternal and Child Health Survey, that includes information from 9,762 women. Their research found that highly educated men and those working in globalized economic sectors were more likely to be married to cousins. Similarly, Kaltham Al-Ghanim (2020) expounded on the persistence of consanguineous marriages in Arab countries and noted that the incidence of the practice varies based on factors such as urbanization, education, and socioeconomic status. The study presents research findings from various countries, including Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, and demonstrates that the consanguineous marriages remain prevalent, particularly among rural and less educated populations.

Thus it can be said that despite social changes like urbanization and improvements in socioeconomic status, cultural norms of marriage practices have largely remained unchanged in GCC societies. The persistence of consanguineous and *misyar* marriages feed into the notion that factors such as rising education and urbanization remain less effective in bringing about changes in traditional marriage practices. Bener & Alali's (2006) study in Qatar, for instance, found that these marriages, particularly among first cousins, is quite common in the society. Their research points

to the cultural and historical factors contributing to the prevalence of such marriages, including the influence of *Bedouin* culture and the desire to maintain family unity and wealth. These findings call for the need for further discussions regarding the factors influencing marriage and divorce practices in the Gulf region and the importance of conducting future research and strategies to address potential health implications associated with consanguinity. Alanoud Alsharekh (2012) addresses the paradox of the persisting importance of family and tribe in the face of modernization and evaluates past and present roles of kinship in the GCC states.

S. Khuda Bukhsh (2010) unpacks the cultural and social dynamics of Arab families and marriages. Bukhsh outlines various aspects of Arab family life, including the roles of men and women in the family, the importance of family honor and reputation, and the impact of Islam on family values and traditions. Bukhsh also examines various types of marriages in Arab society, such as arranged marriages, love marriages, and polygamous marriages. Throughout the book, Bukhsh draws on his extensive research and personal experiences to provide a comprehensive analysis of Arab family life and the challenges faced by modern Arab families in adapting to the changing social and economic conditions (Bukhsh, 2010).

The concept of polygamy in Muslim communities has mostly been studied from an orientalist perspective in which the practice is frequently viewed through sexual connotations and male power versus female powerlessness paradigm. Maha Yamani (2022) sheds light on the often-misunderstood polygamous situation in modern Saudi Arabia. Maha investigates the factors that lead individuals to enter polygamous marriages, and analyzes the personal, social, legal, economic, and emotional consequences that come with it. The study reviews the historical roots of Islamic polygamy in Mecca and Medina and how its legal standing has evolved in present-day Saudi Arabia. Yamani argues that shifts in local laws, the resurgence of tribal traditions, and the growing influence of materialism have reshaped the practice, often moving it away from its original Islamic legal foundations and leading to a reinterpretation of the laws that regulate it (Yamani, 2022).

In tandem with other issues concerning marital practices, marital satisfaction in the Arab Gulf states has also drawn attention in recent decades. Nadia Al-Tamimi (2009) probes marital satisfaction in arranged marriages in Saudi Arabia, examining whether the predictors of marital satisfaction that were found in the West are also predictors of material satisfaction in Saudi Arabia. Al Tamimi found that marital satisfaction and love increase with the duration of marriage among arranged marriages in Saudi Arabia.

While there has been tremendous change in the region, Al-Khateeb (1998) argues that not all aspects of family have changed to the same degree. For instance, in his work on families in Saudi Arabia, he found that some aspects of family, such as housing, home appliances, furniture, and bridal price have changed faster than cultural ones, such as marriage patterns, roles, attitudes toward the sexual division of labor, and authority in the family (Al-Khateeb, 1998). One important change, however, that has taken place in the Saudi family is the power dynamics in the marital relationship. While traditionally, the relationship was characterized by wives' unquestioned respect towards their husbands, nowadays mutual respect and understanding are

increasingly evident in the relationship. The study shows that women's attitudes toward equality between the sexes tend to be more progressive than those of men. Moreover, different expectations have caused role conflict in the family and an increase in the divorce rate. Though men have lost some of their social and religious authority in the family, their economic and general authority remains intact. The Saudi family is a male-dominated institution with important decisions still being made by men. Cultural norms, civil rules, and juridical legislation support Saudi men's authority in the family and society (Al-Khateeb, 1998).

In other GCC countries, such as in Kuwait, a new social structure has developed in recent years. The spread of education to members of both sexes, cultural contact with Western and Eastern worlds, and significant immigration of foreigners to Kuwait has led to a more heterogeneous population, with Kuwaiti citizens becoming a minority in their society. This heterogeneous society has experienced an increase in the number of heterogeneous marriages, not only in terms of nationality, but also in terms of religion, sect, and caste. Al-Naser (1986) notes that there was an increase in marriage across religious lines, especially among highly educated men and those holding high-status occupations, but marriages between members of the two Islamic sects, Shia and Sunni, decreased from 1974 to 1984. Furthermore, marrying from different nationalities increased between 1974 and 1984. When Kuwaiti men marry women of other nationalities, they prefer to marry Arab women. Kuwaiti men who marry women from non-Arab countries are more likely to have high socioeconomic statuses, with a great deal of education and high-status occupations. Marrying from other social/tribal groups also increased in Kuwait between 1974 and 1984, especially among highly educated men and men with high-status occupations (Al-Naser, 1986). Furthermore, the general age at marriage decreased for men and slightly increased for women between 1974 and 1984 while the general mean age difference between husbands and wives decreased across the decade.

4 Gender Roles

The discourse in family studies frequently adopts a gender lens in which women's issues such as dress codes and social relations take center stage. The traditional, predominantly male-dominated outlook of Gulf societies has prompted scholars to study the family from gendered perspectives. Existing scholarship has called for reforming patriarchy, strengthening the role of women's organizations, and devising political strategies to support women's empowerment in GCC countries. Scholarly contributions to this field also scrutinize the evolving roles of women and the influence of development on gender roles and attitudes toward women (Abdalla, 1996; Hapke & Ayyankaril, 2018; Shah et al., 2018; Parahoo et al., 2013; Golkowska, 2014; Bennett & Wright, 2010; Müller & Camia, 2023; Al-Nasr, 2011; Sultan, 2012; Longva, 1993; Seikaly, 1994; Al-Ahmadi & Al-Naama, 2023).

One of the earliest studies exploring attitudes toward women is Ikhlas Abdalla's (1996) work which suggests that there is a prevalence of traditional and conservative

attitudes regarding women's roles, rights, and responsibilities in society. Abdalla assess the interactive effect of gender and sex-role self-concepts, revealing that men with non-traditional self-concepts tend to hold more liberal attitudes toward women. As liberal attitudes evolve, so does the perception of women's independent roles in both the private and public spheres. In the context of Qatar, Golkowska's (2014) case study raises an important question: How do young Qatari women perceive their lived reality compared to the national narrative of contemporary changes in society? Her study demonstrates that Qatari women perceive their lived reality as a reflection of the opportunities and challenges they face in their society in light of the national narrative of change. They are aware of the transformation Qatar has undergone due to industrialization, modernization, and urbanization. They also hold positive views towards the leadership's vision for gender equality and equal opportunities for all. However, they also understand that change is a complex process that involves negotiating between traditional values and modern aspirations.

Concurrently, the issue of women's citizenship in the family and society has come to the forefront. Studies on female empowerment also highlight tensions between promoting female education and labor market participation and the policies that support women's roles as caretakers and homemakers. Rania Maktabi (2016) examines the status of female citizenship and family law in Kuwait and Qatar, two rentier states in the Gulf region. She observes that Kuwait has experienced greater political pluralism and an expansion of female citizenship rights, whereas Qatar has a more autocratic ruling structure and more conservative interpretations of family law. Her work discusses the impact of rentierism (rentier capitalism), the demographic disparity between citizens and noncitizens, and the role of political pluralism in shaping female citizenship. This study reveals that Kuwait has made more progress in expanding female citizenship rights compared to Qatar.

Scholars have also shown interest in examining the GCC states' positionality in dealing with gender issues. Müller and Camia (2023) show how governments in the region harness news media to mold the narrative surrounding women's empowerment. Their study scrutinizes how women's issues have been reported and addressed in the press. Their research notes that women's empowerment, specifically women's rights, has played a significant role in enhancing the reputation, attracting investments, and contributing to the nation-building process for governments across the region. Indeed, women's empowerment has been a topic that has garnered extensive scholarly attention.

Scholarship on female empowerment has also explored the discourse surrounding female leadership in the GCC states (Bahry & Marr, 2005; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Mueller & Abdulkadir, 2020; Hallward & Muellers, 2020). Based on the principles of state-centered feminism in the context of women's empowerment framework, Fakir Al Gharaibeh (2011) provides a case study of women's empowerment in Bahrain. He argues that women's political participation in Bahrain has improved, with more women holding positions in government and participating in elections. However, challenges remain in terms of limited representation and obstacles faced by women candidates. In the same vein, Mueller and Abdulkadir (2020) identify how traditional practices like favoritism, *waasta*, kinship, family connections, and patronage

influence the government's efforts toward women's empowerment and female leadership. They also examine the distribution of leadership positions among female leaders in the GCC states. In their other article, they examine efforts made by the governments of GCC states, particularly the UAE, to promote women in public life and the current state of women's leadership in the UAE compared to other parts of the world (Mueller & Abdulkadir, 2020). This study offers a detailed analysis of the socioeconomic backgrounds of female leaders in the UAE and the specific social arenas where they most frequently obtain leadership positions.

Kemp et al. (2015) offer an in-depth analysis of the presence of women in various leadership positions in private and publicly listed companies in six Gulf Arab states. Their studies observed that Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar have a significantly higher percentage of women in senior leadership roles compared to Saudi Arabia. Oman and the UAE were not significantly different from other countries. The study also highlights the types of positions female leaders hold within organizations. Hallward and Muellers (2019) employ a feminist lens of intersectionality to analyze women's leadership in Oman as a function of four thematic categories: the impact of the oil economy, class and privilege, race and ethnic origin, and the displacement of domestic responsibilities. By examining the impact of Oman's transnational political economy on women's leadership opportunities, Hallward and Muellers shed light on the factors that shape women's positions in leadership. They draw from the work of transnational feminist scholars to define intersectionality and emphasize the importance of considering the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities in the discourse of women's empowerment.

5 Youth and Women

The study of youth opens the door to exploring and addressing adolescent development inquiries of substantial relevance within the context of family studies. By focusing on youth, we gain a vantage point to examine societal transformations, including shifts in gender expectations, family structures, and class relations that have implications for fashioning and understanding youth development. Despite the burgeoning youth population, often referred to as the "youth bulge," in the Gulf region, the field of youth studies has yet to attract the much-needed scholarly attention. Existing studies, for the most part, remain descriptive and do not treat youth as a unit of analysis (Al-Hendawi & Keller, 2014; Harkat, et al., 2016; Mina, 2023, and others). The state of youth studies in the Gulf region partly reflects the field's infancy, mirroring the primary stage of youth studies in the Global North (MacDonald & King, 2021).

As the number of youths in the GCC states has increased, so has youth unemployment. Youth unemployment remains one of the primary concerns in some countries in the Gulf, despite their efforts to implement economic reforms and austerity measures to boost the economy and create more employment opportunities (Thompson & Quilliam, 2024). Consequently, issues related to youth unemployment

have garnered some scholarly attention (Al-Hendawi & Keller, 2014; AlMunajjed, et al., 2011; Aftandilian, 2017; Gouider, 2022; Harkat, et al., 2016; Kabbani & Kothari, 2005; Kabbani & Mimoune, 2020; MacDonald & King, 2021; Mina, 2023; Poplavskaia, et al., 2023). Scholars suggest that the private sector should be encouraged to absorb new entrants into the job market, and there should be a significant societal push to promote the learning of vocational skills and job training while removing the stigma associated with such jobs in the private sector. Many argue that unemployment also calls into question the traditional political system in the region, leading many youths to become critical of government policies.

A few studies have looked into the political awareness and identity of emerging youth (Aleky, 2020; Al-Jenaibi, 2011; Alsayed, 2014; Alwazir, 2016; Diwan, 2014; Hashmi, 2019; Meijer, 2000; Parvez, 2019). In this context, Kristin Diwan's (2014) article, *Breaking Taboos: Youth Activism in the Gulf States*, comprehensively captures the emergence of new forms of civic engagement and political contestation among activist youth. Diwan's found that they are influenced by a new media environment and inspired by the early success of the Arab Awakening. These youth movements are characterized by their critique of the ruling system and their rejection of existing political leaders as incapable of delivering fundamental political reform to sustain economic development and equal society. Diwan emphasizes that these youth activists are challenging the conservative political culture and traditional social norms of the oil-exporting monarchies in the Gulf. They are striving for greater democratic representation and government accountability, despite facing significant barriers such as the banning of political parties and imprisonment for direct criticism of rulers.

Focusing on the struggles of youth in the Arabian Gulf to find their place in their encounters with modernity, Emanuela Buscemi and Ildiko Kaposi (2020) explore how global forces are reshaping everyday cultural experiences in authoritarian societies. In the study, we gain an in-depth understanding of Gulf youth through reading about their everyday lives, struggles, opportunities, and contributions, while simultaneously developing their own identities and transforming their societies and cultures in the process. The volume provide fresh insight into Gulf youth micro cultures from the ground and engage local and foreign academics in dialogue. In light of the general difficulties of accessing Gulf societies, the book's richly detailed depictions of everyday life can be of interest to academic research in Middle East studies, youth sociology, political science, and anthropology, as well as to business and governmental decision-making (Buscemi & Kaposi, 2020). Mark C. Thompson and Neil Quilliam's (2024) research on policies and practices involving Saudi youth offer a balanced understanding of the dilemmas, challenges, and opportunities associated with youth policy formulation and implementation in contemporary Saudi Arabia (Thompson & Quilliam, 2024).

In addition to providing insights into the socioeconomic and political lives of Gulf youth, studies have also focused on their education and well-being (Lansford, et al., 2019; AlBuhairan et al., 2016; AlMarri & Oei, 2009). An in-depth research focus in this area is critical for fathoming how society mentor emerging adults towards becoming productive citizens. However, the scholarship on youth predominantly

remains Western-centric. Cooper et al. (2018) argue that there exists a bias in knowledge production, especially in the field of Youth Studies. This bias primarily favors scholars and institutions located in Western Europe, North America, and Australasia (WENA). Consequently, theories and concepts originating from these regions are often prematurely considered universally applicable, without extensively tested in other global contexts. While existing scholarship on Gulf youth brings to light various evolving sociopolitical and economic issues, theorization remains conspicuously absent, leaving ample room for foundational work in the study of youth in the Gulf.

Research on Arab Gulf women is also on the rise (Altorki, 1986; Sonbol, 2012; Abubakar, 2018; Soffan, 1980; Missal, 2003; Fakhro, 2015; Naguib, 2004). Amira Sonbol (2012) records a comprehensive history of the Gulf and the Arab world as well as the history of Muslim women. Sonbol (2012) reviews women's history before and after the arrival of Islam, the narratives surrounding women's lives in early Islam compared to their actual experiences, the types of work women engaged in the shifts in family structures over time, and the legal systems governing women and family from the pre-modern to modern periods. Similarly, Soraya Altorki (1986) studied the women of thirteen families belonging to three generations for more than a decade. Using religious rituals, residence patterns, marital choice, and veiling and seclusion customs as examples (among others), Altorki notes that both ideology and social organization have helped shape women's lives. These women are not in a static environment. Rather, they are expanding their autonomy through the definition and manipulation of norms and religious doctrine, albeit within confines still defined by men (Altorki, 1986).

Jamila Abubakar (2018) examines the factors that impacts job satisfaction of females employed as school principals in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia. The study identifies work-family conflict, and compares the difference in job satisfaction based on age groups, experience in the principal ship, school size, and school type. The study captures the changes taking place in job satisfaction across age and gender lines (Abubakar, 2018). First published in 1980, Linda Soffan looks at the factors that influenced the position held by women in the United Arab Emirates in the second half of the twentieth century (Soffan, 1980). Soffan argues that Islamic Law has granted women rights and privileges in the spheres of family life, marriage, education, and economic pursuits, which was aimed at improving their status in society. However, due to the interpretations of various religious scholars, influenced by local traditions and social trends, women have often not been given these rights, particularly in family life and marriage. Irrespective of the existing patriarchal structure, she notes, the discovery of oil has strengthen the position of UAE women, principally in the fields of education, social affairs, and economic activity (Soffan, 1980). Bernita Eileen Missal (2003) analyzes the Gulf Arab women's perspective of their transition to the role of motherhood. Missal identifies four patterns during the Gulf Arab women's transition to motherhood: woman's personal transitions, mother/baby relationships, family influences, and cultural and religious beliefs and practices. In line with global interest in gender studies, we also notice a shift from women's studies to gender studies in the region (Dickson et al., 2023).

6 Social Media

Since technology and social media have become an inseparable part of daily activities, GCC countries, in tandem with other emerging economies, have incorporated digital technologies in almost all sectors. Considering the rapid use of the internet and digital media, various studies have sought to understand their influence on social values and relationships in Arab society (Al-Jenaibi, 2011, 2016; Alnaghaimshi & Pearson, 2023; Gjylbegaj & Abdi, 2019; Mansour et al., 2018; Reyaee & Ahmed, 2015). For example, Abuiyada et al. (2016), in their case study of Oman, illustrate that while internet access brings educational resources, particularly for children, it also strains family bonds, especially between spouses and siblings. The same issues have been raised by Gjylbegaj and Abdi (2019) in their study on internet usage and family communication in the UAE. Besides, lack of communication, social media has also led to problematic internet use (PIU), a disorder that makes an individual addicted to the internet while impairing their capacity to conduct other activities properly. Studies have found that PIU in adolescents is a serious issue in many GCC countries (Al-Khani et al., 2021; Bener & Bhugra, 2013; Saquib et al., 2023; Vally et al., 2020). In Saudi Arabia, Saquib et al. (2023) show that more than one-third of adolescents are suffering from problematic internet use (PIU). Their study probes factors associated with family that lead to these problems. They found that children from less well-off or broken families are susceptible to PIU.

7 Family Policies

Studies have also analyzed various family policies primarily aimed at safeguarding family cohesion and women's rights and economic engagement (Alsharekh, 2012; Brik et al., 2020; Langworthy & Naguib, 2023; Moller, 2013). Alessa's (2010) examination of gender bias within Kuwaiti Family Law reveals systemic inequities in areas such as marriage, divorce, alimony, and custody. Her study traces the impact of legal and social frameworks on Kuwaiti women's marital choices and family roles. In the same vein, Sandy's (2007) study in Bahrain examines the contested codification of family law. The work also notes that the push for reform is complicated by sectarian divisions in the country.

In the UAE, Hamdoun (2021) investigates the role of the UAE Personal Status Law in safeguarding wives' rights. The Law provides a legal framework that upholds women's rights in areas such as dowry, alimony, and compensation in divorce cases. This protective stance within the UAE's legal system contrasts with the ongoing legal challenges women face in neighboring Gulf nations. Thus, the current situation points towards divergent approaches to gender equality and family rights within the region. In the context of a larger debate on women empowerment, the role of females in driving economic changes has not gone unnoticed. Several studies have explored the emerging trend of women's engagement in the economic sector. Hashim et al.

(2024) studied how females maneuvered through traditional kinship networks to assert economic and social influence within the family and community.

In contrast, Dukhaykh (2023) investigates the effects of work-family conflict on job embeddedness among Saudi women. The study examines how the strain of balancing professional and personal responsibilities impacts their sense of stability in the workplace. Dukhaykh pays attention to emotional exhaustion and dwells upon its role as a key factor in shaping women's experiences and decisions regarding their careers. Social policies concerning housing schemes have also attracted some attention. M. Shareef & Ahmed (2023) explore the social sustainability of transitioning from single-family to multi-family public housing in the UAE, with a focus on two prominent vertical housing projects: Diba Al Hosn in Sharjah and Al Ghurfa in Fujairah. The study explains how well these developments address the social needs of Emirati citizens and uphold the values of Emirati society.

8 Family Support Systems

In the Gulf region, family support systems encompass various forms such as parental involvement in children's education and care, family environment, and elderly care. When exploring parenting styles, research emphasizes the impact of supportive and structured family environments on children's social and academic development. For example, Lari (2023) finds that an authoritative parenting style positively influences children's personality development in Qatar. The benefits increase when parents maintain a healthy work-life balance. Alnafea and Curtis (2017) echo these findings in Saudi Arabia, where they demonstrate that children of authoritative parents are more likely to develop effective self-regulation and learning strategies.

Academic performance and self-esteem are also closely linked to parenting practices, as seen in UAE and Omani studies. Alsheikh et al. (2010) report that, in UAE, boys achieved better grades in school than girls when parents were strict and set high expectations of them. Aldhafri et al. (2020) observed a similar pattern in Oman where structured, authoritative parenting improved students' self-concept and academic performance. Other studies explore how families contribute to early education and family cohesion. For instance, Ihmeideh and Al-Maadadi (2020) show that family literacy programs in Qatar have bolstered literacy skills in young kids.

Parents across GCC countries understand that it is ideal to have a robust involvement in their children's education, which includes monitoring their performance in school, providing a safe and stress-free environment at home, helping them personally with their school projects and homework, and also engaging in various activities organized by schools. However, research on family participation in education demonstrates that efforts to involve parents are often hampered by practical and social barriers. For instance, Malluhi and Alomran (2019) found that, despite efforts by Abu Dhabi school leaders to foster collaboration with parents, obstacles like language differences (Arabic and English language) and limited awareness continue to restrict parental involvement in school activities. In a complementary study, Ihmeideh and

Al-Maadadi (2020) found that, while Qatari schools report a high level of family support for home learning, direct engagement in school decision-making such as parents' meetings and voluntary activities remains low depending on the medium of instructions at the schools.

Focusing on children's psychological needs, Alghanami and Keshky (2023) suggest that a healthy family environment in Saudi Arabia can reduce eating disorder symptoms among youth. Moreover, it must be noted that the involvement of parents alone is not sufficient for children's well-being and better performance in studies. Parents often face challenges when it comes to curbing bad habits among children. For example, Rakha et al. (2022) found that Saudi families encountered challenges like physical inactivity and high screen time among children.

Parental support becomes much more critical in raising children with special needs. Research on families of children with disabilities shows how different family support needs are shaped by unique family circumstances. Smadi (1998) observes that families in the UAE, particularly those with more severe cases of disability, express a need for extra psychological support, information, and social services. Factors such as the parents' work status and the severity of the child's disability influence these needs.

While the GCC countries are focusing on their bulging youth population, there is also a segment of the population, i.e., elderly people, who need special care. The issue of elderly health has come to the center stage in many of these countries as they are pushing for socioeconomic development. Urbanization and development have made the young population move to cities seeking better economic opportunities and lifestyles. In this rural-to-urban mobility process, elderly people are often left behind. Studies by Ismail and Hussein (2018) and Khan et al. (2017) explore the demographic shift toward aging populations, particularly in Oman and the neighboring countries. As life expectancy rises and fertility rates decline, most developed societies experience rapid population aging. These demographic shifts accelerate the need for elderly care support systems. Both studies emphasize the early-stage nature of social policies, with calls for cohesive strategies that integrate state, family, and community efforts to support the elderly population.

Other studies argue that the lack of a structured health care system for elderly population impact their health and well-being. For example, Alhalal et al. (2022) investigate psychological abuse of older adults in Saudi Arabia. They found a concerning high prevalence of this phenomenon and noted that social factors such as income, living conditions, and social networks strongly influence the vulnerability of elderly people. In Kuwait, Shah et al. (2011) examine the care provided by foreign live-in domestic workers and note that reliance on such caregivers often correlates with lower health and increased depression among the elderly, especially among women and those without co-resident children.

9 Migrant Families in the Gulf

The Arab Gulf states have been one of the largest labor markets for the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria), the Mashreq (Egypt, Jordan, the occupied Palestine territories, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen), and Asian (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Philippines, and Indonesia) migrant workers since the 1970s (Rahman, 2011a, 2011b). The Arab Gulf states have devised sophisticated temporary migration programs for semi-skilled, skilled, and professional migrants to work on a renewable work permit, with little chance of permanent settlement (Baber, 2016; Gardner, 2010; Rahman, 2012, 2015, 2018; Rahman & Yong, 2015). Over 35 million international migrants are living in the Gulf states, which is also the major destination region for South-South migration (Babar, 2020). The temporary labor migration program involves the invitation of migrants under specific labor migration policies (exit and entry policies) that aim to ensure the workers return home after the expiry of their work permits.

While low-skilled migrant workers are not allowed to bring their family members with them to the Gulf, high-skilled, professional migrants may bring their immediate family members with them. Although, there exists substantial research on low-skilled migrants, there is a dearth of research on high-skilled, professional migrants' families (Babar, 2020; Babar & Gardner, 2016; Gardner, 2011; Rahman & Yong, 2015; Rahman, 2011a, 2011b, 2013a, 2013b, 2018). Professional and skilled migrants are recruited to the Arab Gulf states with a lucrative family package that allows them to bring in their immediate family members and live in the Gulf for extended periods. As a result, almost all professional and skilled migrants are eligible to bring in their families to live in the Gulf. These families hold temporary, renewable residence permits which are often tied to the earning members of the family. Millions of migrant families have been living in the Arab Gulf states for decades. The term "migrant family" is used in this volume to refer to a migrant family that has lived in the Gulf states for employment or business on a contractual basis and adopted a deliberate strategy of living in at least two countries involving the origin country and the Arab Gulf states to maximize opportunities for education, employment, and social advancement of family members.

Studies have looked into the ways these migrants continue to engage with and contribute to their home countries (Vohra, 2013; Gardner, 2012; Mahdavi, 2011; Osella & Osella, 2012). Vohra (2013) examines the experiences of South Asian migrants in Dubai, focusing on the ways remittances and economic support shape transnational family dynamics, and, Gardner (2012) looks into how remittances and economic support impact both migrant and host communities, particularly within Indian families in Bahrain. Studies have also probed the ways migrant complement their absence in families at home through remittances (Azeez & Begum, 2009; Rahman, 2013a, 2013b). While migrants generally engage in various practices to sustain connections with their home countries, many high-skilled migrants have settled in the region with their families and raised their children. Some studies have investigated the identity process, exclusion, and transnational mobility of migrant

children, also referred to as “transnational generation” in GCC countries (Akinci, 2019; Ali, 2011; Kanchana, 2012; Matsukawa et al., 2023; Naik, 2021; Soudy, 2017; Vathi, 2015). Similarly, Naik (2021) studies the struggle of this generation of migrants in constructing their concept of home. Akinci (2019) traces the interaction between the socio-cultural identity of second-generation Arab migrants in Dubai with legal and cultural divides between them and the Emirati host society. The ethnographic research work based on the interviews conducted with various second-generation migrants seeks to understand how these migrants view their differences and similarities with the socio-cultural fabric of the host country. Syed Ali (2011) has further expounded on this transnationalism behavior among the second-generation behavior in Dubai. His research analyzes the impact of Dubai’s exclusionary policy of not granting citizenship on the mobility choices of second-generation migrants. Many second-generation migrants first leave mainly to the Western countries and then come back to Dubai and then leave again. There is a lack of sociological and psychological research on how these migrant families function and contribute to host countries. Future research needs to underscore the importance of focusing on the lifestyles of these migrants in their host countries.

10 Structure of the Volume

Considering the scope of the existing literature and the void in addressing family topics in a dynamic Arab Gulf society, we have divided this volume thematically into five broad parts as described below. The geographical scope of the book encompasses research on the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Thus, this volume attempts to advance the body of knowledge about the factors, directions, and magnitudes of family research in the Arab Gulf States from a multidisciplinary perspective. We offer a brief overview of the five broad divisions by delineating individual chapters and their key arguments and findings in the remainder of this chapter.

11 Part I: Family Formation, Marriage, and Gender Roles

Part I covers topics such as family formation, marriages and divorces, fertility, and gender roles and disparities in GCC countries. This part begins with Chapter 2 titled “Choosing Marriage Partners in the Digital Age: Insights from Qatar” by Rajnaara C. Akhtar, Alexandre Caeiro, Chaïmaa Benkermi, and Maryam Al-Thani. The authors argue that the family laws of Gulf states have undergone noticeable transformations in the twenty-first century, driven by codification and justice system overhaul, diverging from traditional norms. Drawing on a qualitative empirical research study in Qatar from 2020 to 2022, this chapter examines subtle shifts in how younger

generations pursue marriage partners in the digital age. Chapter 3, “Family Formation and Ideal Number of Children in the Arabian Gulf: A Case Study of the UAE” by Tatiana Karabchuk, Salma Omar, Zainab Abdalla, Khadijah Diab, and Meriem Ben Jeddou explores the formation of the family in the UAE. They demonstrate that the average age at first marriage and first childbirth has been consistently increasing since the 1990s. Current Emirati families prefer their children to complete higher education before getting married. Many young women after university graduation opt for their first job and professional experience rather than childbirth. Chapter 4, “Unpacking the Decline: Social Determinants and Fertility Dynamics in Qatar” by Ahmed Aref, Sharifa N. El-Emadi, Abdul Hadi Al-Shawi, and Sahar El Sayed examines key factors contributing to the fertility dynamics in Qatar, focusing on family structures, economic and financial changes, and the impact of women’s employment, education, and health on fertility. They report the influence of modern trends and evolving perceptions among younger generations. Chapter 5, “Rapid Decline in Family Size in Oman: Untangling the Puzzles and Paradoxes” by M Mazharul Islam demonstrates the changes in the family size in Oman and attribute these changes to economic and social development, women’s education and participation in the labor force, which have influenced family formation, reproductive behavior, and lifestyles of women. Chapter 6, “Consanguineous Marriage: A Continued Tradition in Contemporary Qatar” by Kaltham Al-Ghanim, Juhaina Sultan Al-Easa, and Fatima Al-Kubisi addresses consanguineous marriage practice in Qatar. They report that variables such as gender, education, age, and additional socioeconomic variables explain the perseverance of this practice across the Qatari society.

In the frontier of gender roles, disparities, and gender dynamics, several chapters address these issues in detail. Chapter 7, “Gender Role Belief Predictors of Spousal Distribution of Household Labor in Kuwaiti and Qatari Families” by Ziarat Hossain, Fahad Al-Naser, Sadia Shaukat, and Fatima Al-Qubaisi explores whether Kuwaiti and Qatari husbands and wives differ in their sex-role belief structure regarding the spousal distribution of household labor in the family, and the influence of sex-role beliefs on their involvement in six domains of household labor (housework, meal preparation, keeping track of expenses, laundry, shopping, and maintenance). The research reveals that husbands and wives differ significantly in their sex-role beliefs in both countries. Chapter 8, “Neo-Gender Balancing in Saudi Arabia: Divorce under Social Exchange Theory” by Abdullah F. Alrebh and Radhi H. Al-Mabuk analyzes the balance in the exchange relations between men and women in Saudi Arabia by using Richard Emerson’s social exchange theory. The authors provide interesting insights into neo-gender balancing in Saudi society and recommend directions for future research in this area. Chapter 9, “Housekeepers or Catalysts of Change in the Family? ‘Al-Khadam’ and the Evolving Role of Qatari Women” by Sharique Umar and Wajdan Karbon investigate the shifts in household labor division and changing gender roles. Authors argue that domestic workers both enable and challenge traditional family dynamics, while also contributing to social transformations in the Gulf. They situate the study within a framework that acknowledges their agency and their vital, though often overlooked, role in shaping Qatari society. Chapter 10, “Reverse Gender Gap in STEM Disciplines at Qatar University: The Impact of Family

Influence and Educational Support” by Maryam Abdullah N J Al-Thani and Sanaa Ashour addresses gender disparity in the number of enrolled students in Qatar. They investigate enrollment patterns and gender distribution across various STEM disciplines at Qatar University and reveal a reversed gender gap in STEM fields at Qatar University. Chapter 11, “Gender Disparities in Work-Study-Life Balance Among Non-Traditional University Students and Implications for Family Dynamics in the Gulf Region” by Hissa M. Al-Mannai, Haya M. Al-Mannai, Nasser K. Al-Fedalah, and Sanaa Ashour examines undergraduate study for non-conventional students in the Gulf States. These students confront with work commitments, demanding family responsibilities, or challenging personal lives. They show that these demands are exacerbated for working female students and report several WSLB consequences in the region.

12 Part II: Technology, Social Media, and Family

PART II includes eight chapters that address technology and social media and its impact on family relations. Chapter 12, “Exploring the Impact and Prevention of Digital Drugs: Insights from the Emirati Youth Perspective” by Khawlah M. Al-Tkhayneh and Sanaa Ashour explores the threats of digital drugs (binaural beats) among Emirati youth. The study provides a theoretical framework for understanding digital drugs and suggests a holistic solution to digital drugs. Chapter 13, “Regulatory Policies and Digital Security for Protecting Minors in Qatar” by Ahmed Badran addresses regulatory frameworks for new media in ensuring digital security for minors in cyberspace. Badran discusses legislation such as Qatar’s Personal Data Privacy Law and Cybercrime Prevention Law in safeguarding minors in cyberspace. Chapter 14, “The Impact of Personal Communication Technology on the Family Interaction and Wellbeing in Saudi Arabia: A Qualitative Analysis” by Saddiga AlGhalib examines the effects of Personal Communication Technology (PCT) usage among Saudi youths on family relationships and well-being. This research enhances our awareness and contributes to a family-friendly PCT policy formulation in Saudi Arabia. Chapter 15, “Impact of Social Media on Family Relations in the Arab Gulf Region” by Radhi H. Al-Mabuk and Abdullah F. Alrebh addresses the issue of social media use and its impact on family relations. This chapter discusses the problematic aspects of social media and suggests policy recommendations for the safe use of social media. Chapter 16, “Social Media and Youth Socio-political Standpoints in Qatar: The Case of Twitter” by Lina Ayman Darwish explores how Twitter (presently “X”) usage impacts the sociopolitical perspectives of Qatari and non-Qatari youth. The study reports that Twitter significantly influences youth’s perspectives on migrant issues, domestic politics, and gender norms in Qatar. Chapter 17, “Saudi Adolescents’ Identity Development and Social Media Use: An Exploratory Study” by Monerah Almahmoud, Dena Swanson, April Luehmann, Joyce Duckles, and Corey Whitesell investigates the identity development among Saudi adolescents who use social media platforms by exploring their common identity statuses and

how these identity statuses relate to their social media activities. Chapter 18, “The Impact of Technology on Maintaining Family Connections during the Pandemic: A Study of Qatari Families” by Mohamad Zreik investigates how Qatari families used technology to maintain family connections during the COVID-19 pandemic. The author reports both the benefits and challenges posed by technology during the pandemic. Chapter 19, “TikTok: The Young Saudi Females’ Village” by Monerah Almahmoud explores how Saudi adolescents of both genders use the platform to shape their identities by exploring various forms of self-presentation. The author finds that young Saudi females are the most engaged in using and posting on TikTok.

13 Part III: Family Policies, Economy, and Research

Part III includes eight chapters and casts light on family policies, the impacts of the economy on families, and finally research on family dynamics in the region. Chapter 20, “Family Policies in the UAE, What is at Stake?” by William Gueraiche discusses the rationale behind public policy-making in family issues in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The discussion emphasizes the demographic transition, social contract, and the promotion of women in Emirati society. Chapter 21, “Family Welfare Policies in Kuwait and Qatar: A Comparative Analysis” by Tamadher Almalek investigates family welfare policies in Kuwait and Qatar from a comparative perspective. Tamadher offers insight into how Islamic values, rapid modernization, and oil-based economies have shaped distinctive family welfare paradigms in these two Gulf states. Chapter 22, “Qatar Family Law No.22: Legal and Social Perspectives” by Hajer Mohammed, Lakshmi Venugopal Menon, and Yasser Abdulaziz Jadallah examines Qatari Family Law No. 22 of 2006 as it is a comprehensive legal framework that regulates a wide range of financial and non-financial aspects of family matters in Qatar. The study reports that this law integrates Islamic legal customs, traditions, and cultural norms into the legal system and maintains the family. Chapter 23, “The Hidden Face of Domestic Violence: Economic Abuse of Women and Its Impact on Family” by Khalid J. Al Naama and Hala Abdel Magid M. Al Ahmadi addresses the economic abuse of women in Qatar as a form of domestic violence. The chapter unfolds the hidden form of domestic violence and elaborates on its impacts on women and their families. Chapter 24, “Entrepreneurial Aspirations in the Gulf: The Impact of Family Business Experience on the UAE Students” by Damodharan V. S., Glenn W. Muschert, K.A. Asraar Ahmed, and Louise Patterson examines the entrepreneurial aspirations of undergraduate students in the UAE and focuses on how the influence of family shapes the business goals of students. The authors provide insight into family influence in shaping students’ entrepreneurial goals in the UAE. Chapter 25, “Women, Family, and Workplace in Qatar: Navigating the Domestic-Public Divide” by Mustabshira Jannat delves into how Qatar’s quest for gender equality, has influenced Qatari women’s participation in the labor force. The author sheds light on how Qatari women navigate challenges by bargaining with patriarchy. Chapter 26, “Development of Family Studies in Kuwait” by Fahad

Alnaser addresses the development of family studies in Kuwait. The author offers a review of existing literature to show the extent of the development of family studies in Kuwait during the past four decades. Finally, Chapter 27, “Family Studies in the Gulf: A Systematic Analysis” by Mustafa Altıntaş presents an overview of family studies in the Gulf Countries by identifying and elaborating general themes in current Gulf family studies. The author casts light on various aspects of family dynamics, including parenting styles, academic performance, family and technology, COVID-19’s impact, divorce, family structure, fertility, work-family balance, elderly care, child and family support, family health and well-being, family function, family law, and family studies and education. The author reports that educational advancements, technological changes, and socioeconomic changes shape family studies in the Gulf society.

14 Part IV: Family Support Systems

Part IV includes six chapters dealing with topics such as childcare, disability, aging, and other family support systems. Chapter 28, “Family Satisfaction among Qataris: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach” by Kaltham Al-Ghanim, Rima El-Kassem, Maitha Al Naimi, and Buthaina Al-Khelaifi scrutinizes the relationship between shared beliefs and morals, work-family conflict, flexibility at work, marital adaptability, family cohesion, and family satisfaction in Qatar. The study provides a conceptual causal model for family satisfaction that has the potential to reinforce the institution of marriage across the Arab Gulf states. Chapter 29, “Childcare in Bahrain: The Role of the Extended Family and Domestic Workers” by Inés Fernández-Moral explores the role of the extended family and domestic workers in childcare in Bahrain. The study reveals the maternal grandmother as the most desirable figure of childcare support. The chapter reports that although domestic workers are commonly considered valuable in assisting child-rearing, there is also a concern about the overuse of nannies in society. Chapter 30, “The Financial Cost of Childhood Disability in Qatar” by Sabika Shaban and Hira Amin investigates the financial dynamics of families who are raising children with disabilities in Qatar. The authors report that such families confront several challenges, and recommend more government involvement. Chapter 31, “Journeys of Connection: Commuting and Parent–Child Relationships in Qatar” by Azza Abdelmoneium and Fatima Al-Motawaa addresses the effects of commuting children to school on parent–child relationships. The chapter describes how commuting strengthens family bonds and how challenges arise due to inflexible work policies to support families. Chapter 32, “Aging and Family in the Gulf: Trends and Patterns of Ageing in the GCC States” by Ghada Al Kuwari investigates the existing support systems for the elderly and explores policy implications for managing population aging. The author recommends inclusive policies to promote healthy aging and well-being of the elderly populations across the Arab Gulf states. Chapter 33, “Quality of Life of Elderly People Living in Taif, Saudi Arabia: A Scoping Review” by Basit Ali Haidari and Hafiz T.A. Khan addresses the daily

activities, healthy aging, and Quality of Life (QoL) of elderly people living in Taif City, Saudi Arabia. The study identifies and interprets the interrelation and integration between daily activities, healthy aging, and the quality of life of elderly people living in Taif.

15 Part V: Migrant Families

PART V deals with various aspects of migrant families across the region. Chapter 33, “Rethinking the Family: Transnational Mobilities and Conceptual Imperialism in a Globalizing World” by Andrew Gardner and Areej Jamal sheds light on the relationship between the concept of the “family” and many decades of transnational migration to the Arabian peninsula by suggesting a categorization of relationship, and proposing a tripartite conceptual structure for a better understanding of the relationship. Chapter 35, “Emerging Trends among Transnational Bangladeshi Families in the Gulf” by M. Mustahid Husain explores the emerging trends among transnational Bangladeshi families in the Gulf through an interdisciplinary lens. The chapter explores the lived experiences, challenges, and adaptations of these families in navigating the complexities of migration and cultural transitions on foreign soil. Chapter 36, “Western Families in the UAE: Migration and the Implications for the Family Unit” by Kristin Kamøy provides insights into how Western expatriate families structure their lives in the UAE, highlighting the dilemmas they face in everyday life. Chapter 37, “Education in the Gulf: Pakistani Migrant Families’ Strategies” by Sugra Bibi explores the experiences of Pakistani migrant families in the GCC states and sheds light on how these families navigate the educational system despite the constraints imposed on them across the Gulf states. Chapter 38, “Indian Malayalee Migrant Families in the UAE” by Lakshmi Venugopal Menon explores various aspects of the Indian Malayalee migrant families in the UAE. The chapter focuses on family relationships, particularly the interactions within these families, and their transnational connections with India. Chapter 39, “Young Jordanian Families in Dubai: Renegotiating Gender Roles and Expectations in Marriage” by Ivana Cosmano addresses the shifting gender dynamics within family life among young married Jordanian couples who have relocated to Dubai, UAE. The chapter unfolds couples’ enactment of more egalitarian gender relations within marriages and the embodiment of alternatives to normative models of femininity and masculinity. Chapter 40, “South Korean Transnational Families in Qatar” by Byung-Lim Ji examines various aspects of family life among South Korean transnational families in Qatar, focusing on family formation, fertility behavior, parenting practices, and the challenges of living and working in the Gulf. The chapter exposes the complexities of family formation and child-rearing for Korean families residing in Qatar.

Chapters included in this handbook are diverse in content and approach each topic with its own interpretative frameworks. This anthology on contemporary Gulf families underscores the importance of ecologically grounded arguments to fathom human relations and development. Since, the discussions and perspectives permeate

through the intersectionality of cultural mores, economic praxes, social norms, this edited collection highlights how these factors, along with technological development and migration, shape family life in the GCC region.

The long-term goal in putting this volume together has been to reflect on the contemporary Arab Gulf families with all its intricacies. This volume aims to be comprehensive but is by no means all-encompassing. Our goal is to provide the reader with a holistic understanding of the Gulf families that cannot be grasped by adopting any one discipline or perspective alone. We anticipate this volume will inspire academics and policymakers alike to carry this line of inquiry forward across the Arab Gulf states.

16 Concluding Thoughts: Significance of This Volume

This handbook is a timely and significant publication chronicling the current state of families within the advancing contexts of socioeconomic development and social changes in GCC societies. In recent years, the Doha International Family Institute and the Qatar Foundation have been actively buttressing research on family strengths and vibrancy across Gulf states. In addition to marshaling academic interests, the publication of this seminal volume is a manifestation of the research and education efforts of Qatari institutions as well as Qatari and other international family scholars. This handbook contributes to an understanding of scientific research on GCC families and is expected to inspire scholars to stimulate future research on this topic. Below are some additional points highlighting the significance of this handbook.

First, family life across the GCC countries is being impacted by unprecedented diversity in household living arrangements and sweeping economic, cultural, and social changes. Consequently, a profound but silent transformation is taking place in the institution of family in the Gulf region, influencing its structure and function in all possible ways. Family life often intersects with other realms of life such as politics, economics, consumption patterns, education, gender, law, social media, religion, culture, social reforms, and state. The chapters in this volume offer insights into understanding these aspects of Gulf families as they negotiate complex and delicate relationships within and across other major social institutions.

Second, contributions in this volume reverberate the notion that the formation, functions, and salience of families have evolved across human civilizations. The changes and development of families in GCC countries vouch for how these societies conceptualize the family as a cultural product within their own ecological systems. Cultural traditions have shaped the very meanings and functions of family throughout human history. Each society witnesses and executes its normative models and expectations of family's role for its members and the communities. Scholars engaged in the study of family agree that its structures and functions vary across cultures. For example, Eastern societies typically include the husband, the wife, children, and extended networks such as grandparents, brothers and sisters, cousins, and other relatives to be part of the family. Although patriarchy is a common characteristic of

Eastern families, motherhood and/or grandparenthood elevate women's status in the family and society. We remind the readers that the chapters in this volume have laid out these family values and structures in changing Gulf societies.

Third, this edited volume incorporates the articulations of interdisciplinary scholars interested in Gulf families. We contend the thirty-nine main chapters fashion five major themes that characterize contemporary Gulf families. The chapters and the themes provide a unique pan-Arabic perspective on current changes, and diverse beliefs and practices of families. In particular, migration and migrant families have become an inseparable social fabric of GCC societies. This volume introduces pioneering work on migrant families in Gulf counties and will inspire behavioral science scholars to initiate future research on migration and its impact in the region.

Fourth, the work of this volume also prompts us that regardless of contemporary challenges and changes, the Gulf families seem to retain and continue many of the traditional roles and functions of families in a sustained manner. This is because the concept of family denotes stability, and most Gulf societies place a high value on the institutions of family and maintain the centrality of the family in the Gulf social institutions. The debate over continuity and change that revolves around questions of what changed and what stayed the same in the Gulf families constitutes one of the most prolific fields in the Gulf family scholarship.

Fifth, the contributors also inform us that despite the obvious centrality of the family in Gulf societies, the institution of the family remains at the periphery of academic scholarship in the region, and it seems that the very notion of what it means to be a Gulf family has changed in more ways than the family research has been able to capture and explicate over the last several decades. Essentially, there is little knowledge of the breadth and depth of this rapid change at the primary unit of the Gulf society—the Gulf family. This handbook advances the body of knowledge about the factors, directions, and magnitudes of change in the Gulf families from an interdisciplinary perspective. The volume bridges a gap in our understanding of the Gulf family, by providing opportunities for assessing the current state of the art and learning from field research findings in addition to offering practical solutions for policy interventions. We expect this handbook on understudied societies in the Arab world will contribute to the further advancement of scholarship on the families in the GCC States.

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Part I
Family Formation, Marriage, and Gender
Roles

Chapter 2

Choosing Marriage Partners in the Digital Age: Insights from Qatar



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Abstract The family laws of Gulf states have undergone noticeable transformations in the twenty-first century, driven by codification and justice system overhaul, diverging from traditional norms. Drawing on a qualitative empirical research study in Qatar from 2020 to 2023, this chapter examines subtle shifts in how younger generations pursue marriage partners in the digital age.

1 Introduction

Noticeable transformations in the family laws of Gulf states have occurred in the twenty-first century, driven by codification and an overhaul of the justice system. This formalization of the legal framework diverges from traditional Arab historical norms, with the role of the judge undergoing the most notable metamorphosis. The impact of modern family law codes is politically ambiguous: it exacerbates certain forms of gender inequality while diminishing others. Given the noticeable lack of female representation within the family justice infrastructure—with only relatively small numbers of female judges, legal representatives, and court officers—this ambiguity has the potential to significantly disadvantage women (Maktabi, 2021; Tucker, 2008; Welchman, 2012).

This chapter is based on the findings of an in-depth qualitative empirical study focused on women's experiences with marriage, family law, and family justice in Qatar. The research conducted between 2020 and 2023 aimed to capture data on

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their lived realities and contextualize their encounters with the family justice system. The findings revealed a spectrum of issues that highlighted significant disparities in women's marriage and divorce experiences compared to men. These differences stemmed from legal intricacies, family justice processes, gendered financial vulnerabilities, and cultural norms. The study unveiled both similarities and distinctions between the experiences of Qatari and non-Qatari resident women on various fronts. Overall, regardless of citizenship status, women were frequently identified as financially vulnerable aligning with women's economic vulnerability globally. There were further structural disadvantages faced within family justice processes including the experience of being underprivileged, leading to gendered outcomes in family law proceedings.

This chapter focuses on 'marriage choices.' The findings of our study indicate that the dynamics surrounding the choice of a marriage partner are undergoing a subtle transformation among the younger generations. The concept of arranged marriages, deeply rooted in familial expectations and societal norms, remains prevalent, yet the younger generation is increasingly navigating a delicate balance between parental customs and evolving societal values. Despite a cultural aversion to dating, there is a growing acknowledgment of the importance of personal compatibility and shared values in marital unions. Companionate marriage is becoming hegemonic. The influence of social media and global exposure has broadened perspectives, allowing young individuals to connect in more nuanced ways, often though not always, facilitated by familial networks. As a result, there is a great diversity in the processes through which one chooses a life partner in contemporary Qatari society.

This article begins by providing a brief overview of the research project before exploring two aspects of the findings in greater detail: the perils of 'courting' and the extent of women's free-choice in marriage partner.

2 Empirical Research

Qatar's diverse population means the family justice system faces the complex challenge of catering to the requirements of a Muslim population characterized by differences in citizenship, religious school, ethnic origin, and migratory patterns. Ours is arguably the first research project to explore the experiences of both Qatari women and non-Qatari resident women using state family law.

The key research questions were centered on women's experiences of marriage and divorce in Qatar and relevant legal processes. The primary objective was to achieve a greater understanding of the impact of family law and institutional processes in Qatar on the family, and women in particular, with the purpose of identifying ways to help family law institutions achieve better outcomes for families. The project's overarching objective was to advocate for evidence-based reforms in family law and associated family justice processes.

Forty female participants were engaged in semi-structured interviews and invited to recount their varied experiences within the family justice system.¹ The ensuing data, transcribed for analysis, underwent systematic thematic scrutiny (Jaspal, 2020). The identification of themes unfolded through coding, with each theme further segmented into thematic clusters. Within these clusters, data were organized based on the nature of the experience, its correlation to family law or justice processes, and its broader implications within legal, political, social, and cultural contexts. The diverse range of experiences and the use of thematic analysis meant the study was not seeking to systematically compare and contrast experiences. Instead, it aimed to offer an encompassing overview of these experiences, contextualized within the legal and structural framework of family law. The resulting qualitative data paints a vivid tapestry of family life, family law, and family justice, providing valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of these interconnected realms.

2.1 Participant Overview²

The foundation of this study rests on the understanding that women's voices play a crucial role in evaluating the practical effectiveness and accessibility of the law. With a dedicated focus on the legal process, the project seamlessly amalgamated insights from studies examining both citizen and non-citizen family structures in Qatar, highlighting significant differences in experiences. The diverse participant pool comprised ten Qatari citizens by birth, six Qatari through marriage, eight from other Arab backgrounds, five Europeans, five North Americans, three South Americans, one Algerian-French, one Palestinian-Canadian, and one Pakistani. Age-wise, participants spanned from 19 to 56, with a mean age of 38. Seven were below 30, 11 between 30 and 39, 19 between 40 and 49, and three aged 50 and above. Relationship statuses varied, with three single individuals, 21 married (16 with children), and 16 divorced (15 with children). The majority held university degrees, including two undergraduate students, 19 with Bachelor's degrees, 11 with Master's degrees, and six with PhDs, while two held High School Diplomas.

This participant overview reflects a comprehensive cross-section encompassing diverse citizenship statuses, ethnicities, and ages. Furthermore, the participants' high level of education aligns with the broader representation of women in higher education in Qatar. While our sample may not fully represent women across all social strata and women from South Asian and Southeast Asian backgrounds, it captures a

¹ Two interviews were conducted in Arabic, audio recorded and translated into English. 29 interviews were conducted in English, audio recorded and transcribed. A further nine interviews were not audio recorded with the interviewer noting down responses by typing as the participants spoke. One interview was conducted as a group interview with two participants together, and the remainder were individual interviews.

² Our participants were each allocated a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. In this article, we will use the same pseudonyms for the participants found in the full project report, and each name is followed by their nationality, age, and marital status, for context.

wide range of female voices involved in the family justice system. The subsequent section of this paper will delve into the research findings, specifically addressing marriage choices, the challenges of ‘courting,’ and the intricacies of family courts in divorce processes, providing a thorough analysis of these crucial aspects.

3 Marriage Choices and the Perils of ‘Courting’

The theme of ‘marriage choices’ prominently surfaced in the data, with numerous participants detailing the factors influencing decisions related to matrimony. This is not surprising given the way Qatari media debates consistently link partner selection to successful marriage (Al Thani 2020). Among Qatari participants and those closely connected to their cultural roots, such as our Yemeni participants, family expectations and societal norms wielded significant influence over marriage choices and subsequent decisions. For women who became Qatari through marriage, these factors had a profound impact on their own marital journeys or those of their children. These deeply entrenched norms, often justified by Islamic jurisprudential principles, sometimes encroach upon personal autonomy. Consequently, some women opt to defer marriage or forgo it entirely (Lari, 2022). This phenomenon is observable in the ‘celibate women’ trend evident across Gulf states, where 10 percent of women in Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait have never married (Bel Air et al., 2018; Lari, 2022). The decision of women to abstain from marriage and reproduction carries significant implications for the state. Celibacy remains a recurrent topic in Qatari public discourse, frequently stemming from tribal hierarchies and social constraints that impede women’s freedom in making marital choices.

Multiple participants, both Qatari and non-, knew of couples who they described as having courted by ‘dating,’ or professed to have themselves ‘dated’ prior to marriage. The nature of that ‘dating’ seemed to range from getting to know each other better prior to marriage in a break-away from tradition to some participants saying they were aware of long-term relationships where marriage was not possible due to state policies such as restrictions on marrying out. The latter would be socially, culturally, and religiously prohibited, and such relationships would never be made public. Dating in this sense seems to come close to those forms of ‘marriage’ often described as ‘customary’ (‘urfi). Customary marriages are prevalent in the Arab world, although they are rarely the topic of public debate (Hasso, 2011; see also Al-Nasr, 2011).

This study was interested in charting emerging marriage-related norms and behaviors in Qatari society not already identified in existing research. A key finding pertained to changes in the social expectations of young people and their use of digital spaces to engage with each other. Traditionally, the courting process often excludes interaction between individuals prior to tangible marriage discussions. This, coupled with financial and material expectations and decision-making influenced by guardianship provisions were all raised as issues which impact women’s autonomy in marriage decisions. The findings supported the contention that autonomy for

women is relational to other factors, and this conforms with scholarship on relational autonomy and the law more broadly where the theory of liberal individualism is deemed inadequate in explaining individuals' social context (Nedelsky, 2012). As such, all decisions are influenced and impacted by a range of factors.

A lack of prior engagement between families can leave some women vulnerable as it becomes easier for potential partners to hide undesirable character traits which would lead to a breakdown of the relationship. This concern was raised by Duaa (American, 49, divorced) who described some 'girls' and 'families' being 'fooled' into agreeing to marriages. Others 'rushed it' such as Samia (Qatari, 23, married) who said she agreed to the legal wedding quickly so that they 'can see each other—to get everyone off our backs.' She elaborated on how she 'was so sick of wanting to be with him and we couldn't.' With their legal marriage complete, Samia said they still 'have to have parental supervision, but it is not as bad,' describing how 'we can be in my bedroom, with the door open.' She considered this as a cultural and social improvement since her sister who married 15 years prior 'was not allowed to sit next to her husband after the *nikah*.' Before the public celebration, the legal and religiously valid wedding was considered incomplete from a social perspective.

Samia's example signifies some changing attitudes to young couple's desire to get to know each other. Malak (Qatari, 35, married) described how the transition has been slow, and how the social setting is now 'so different than it was even 20 years ago, because you have all these places to go and mix, you know, Farmer's Market, Lusail night market, The Pearl... that didn't exist 20 years ago.' These new physical spaces intersect with cultural and family expectations:

'See, we have this concept of *Ro'iya* Shariah, like the first looking, it's permitted in Islam. In Qatari society, let's say 10 years [before] now, this was absurd. You will not see or talk to your spouse before marriage, only after the signing of the *niqah* and the *miltcha*. There's no way. But now I feel like more families are like, "Okay, we'll arrange a marriage, but you can talk in the *khutba* time, see if you like each other." And so that's the compromise, really. Islamically, it's okay, nothing's formal, it's hush-hush, but you can get to know each other, see each other once or twice and see if you like them. And I think the younger generation are more comfortable with that feeling because technically how it happened before it's like, okay, "You're married now get to know each other."

Malak viewed this change as being led by the younger generation themselves, and their changing expectations. This 'getting to know' remains culturally specific, as a couple seeing each other 'once or twice' would still be deemed insufficient by some. Malak further elaborated:

'I'll take it from the Qatari society perspective. I feel like, as you said, mostly it was arranged marriages, cousin marriages, and that was the norm, like let's say 10 plus years from now. But now the younger generation, they're like, "No, we want to get to know our partner. We want to choose our partner," especially, they're more educated now, they're more aware. So the issue really happening is that the families cannot really enforce who they want their kids to marry. So the kids are really taking the lead. And most of them are like, "we're not finding anyone, so we're just going to stay single." Or, "we don't want to get married at 20. We're going to think about it when we're 30."

Our study found that young people are able to break away and reach beyond the realm of family and community through social media and technology. Questions arise as to the cultural recognition or approval of the use of digital contact between young single people. Our data found that young people were using social media, gaming, and ‘airdrop’ type mobile phone features to contact members of the opposite sex. The extent to which different generations are aware of, understand, and use these different tools will inevitably vary.

Hala (Qatari, 19, single) stated that the digital space has provided a new medium for communication which facilitates the ‘getting to know’ process for young people. She described how ‘now, especially with technology, there is a concept of “dating” or getting to know each other. Using twitter, whatsapp, Instagram—she will be able to ascertain his views.’ However, even where this occurs, Hala stressed that it would still have to be ‘masked as an arranged marriage’ unless the family was ‘really liberal.’ Samia’s parents had ‘met through love’ which made her meeting her husband without family involvement acceptable, however, she said that even they told the wider family the couple had ‘met at the gym’ (presumably an acceptable place of mixed gender interaction for some liberal families) rather than that they had gotten to know each other for a while.

These transitioning attitudes and expectations remain relational as compared with prevailing cultural norms. Terms such as ‘dating’ used by our participants are therefore to be construed in light of the cultural specificities they entail. Importantly, they should be differentiated from ‘dating’ in its Global North sense.

The lack of social acceptance of any prolonged communication between unmarried men and women may extend to the digital space. However, such contact is easy to achieve and difficult to monitor, allowing individuals more insight into the other party than was previously possible. The types of queries being made would also extend beyond formal questions to the specifics of a person’s views, aspirations, and outlook on life. Beyond actual social media posts, ‘likes’ on social media can map out a person’s personality, sense of humor, political views, etc. The ability to determine views and character traits of a prospective life partner seems to indicate acknowledgment of the importance of personal compatibility and shared values in marital unions, which stretch beyond alliances at the tribal and familial levels. These are likely to be more individualistic criteria determining decisions at the individual level.

Another way to meet and speak was virtually through online gaming. Rania (Qatari through marriage, 47, divorced) described how her daughter who is in her late teens, was linked to her female friends through online PS4 gaming, and connected to some boys in this way.

‘Some girls have [guys in] a friend’s group. And they know it’s not okay, that’s why she was so shy to tell me about it. She was like, “So there’s actually a couple of guys that are my really good friends. And they’ve been since COVID.” I’m like, “COVID? That was years ago!” But it’s through online gaming and how they’re meeting each other. And what they’ll do is they’ll be playing with one of their friends, then their friend’s brother gets on, and then he links their account, and then his friends then can link to that account.’

This engagement is spontaneous, purposeful (for gaming), limited (to known circles of acquaintances), and unmonitored. This enables young people to meet safely in the virtual world, and spend time on an activities together over long periods of time. While further studies are required to ascertain whether such contact can eventually culminate in decisions around marriage, it does provide a limited form of unrestricted exposure to the other gender. As a parent, Rania admitted to not really knowing ‘what do we do here.’ The lack of direct face-to-face contact seemed to make the friendships in some way acceptable, though she would not permit them to meet in person.

In the realm of digital communication, young adults can easily establish contact with strangers. The use of digital communication was explained by Malak, who described how young people in the recent past would be driving around and ‘throw papers at the roundabout. When you slowed down, if the window was down, they’d throw their number in here.’ This was a way to connect and begin conversations on mobile phones whether by SMS messages or directly speaking. Modern technology means this can be done in a more sophisticated way today. Malak described how ‘now everything is supposed to be through the air drop. You’re sitting in a traffic light and they’ll air drop you pictures. But it’s a new thing.’ She described how it was an alien concept to her as she had been married for over a decade and so was ‘out of the “game”.’ While a decade is not a long time, a lot has evolved and changed over that time. Malak stressed that, in her experience, ‘they do get married’! Demonstrating that the contact is not vexatious and without purpose. It is a way that young people try to meet for the purposes of marriage. Unlike in the past, ‘they’re able to connect much easier now’ (Rania).

The myriad digital spaces available remain culturally and socially unmonitored, offering individuals the possibility of disengaging from virtual accessibility at their own discretion. This feature diminishes the potential repercussions of rejections, a contrast to face-to-face interactions where such fallout can be more challenging to navigate. Additionally, virtual interactions provide a layer of protection not afforded in physical encounters. The extent to which these virtual interactions may also result in online shaming and bullying could not be ascertained. Qatar’s stringent laws regarding the dissemination of images may serve as a deterrent, but further research will be necessary to evaluate both the opportunities and the risks that digital space offers potential couples.

The disparity in technological knowledge across generations serves as a safeguard, shielding young people from potential cultural discontent. This is particularly crucial for women who may encounter limitations in initiating conversations in real-life settings. The lack of awareness among parents, families, and communities regarding virtual ‘getting to know’ processes creates a novel, culturally unmonitored space that young individuals can leverage for their social interactions.

These, and other culturally acceptable avenues which allow couples extended periods of time in getting to know each other, may contribute significantly to the establishment of healthy foundations for marital relationships. Through these avenues, couples can thoroughly assess their compatibility in terms of expectations and personalities. Despite these developments, the ultimate decisions regarding marriage often remain steeped in tradition for many individuals, with families continuing to play a

central role in the decision-making process. Zaynab (Qatari, 32, divorced, remarried) highlighted that both Qatari men and women are still ‘really limited in our choices,’ emphasizing the enduring influence of familial norms on matrimonial decisions.

4 Women’s Choice

Navigating the intricacies of state regulations for marriage presents challenges for both men and women, yet women often encounter additional burdens. For example, when a Qatari citizen wishes to marry-out, if they are female, ‘you have nationality playing a big role into it. So in the case of a Qatari woman of course where you don’t pass citizenship. So instantly, that kind of relation is devalued, because you think about all the repercussions that come afterwards’ (Zaynab, Qatari, 32, divorced, remarried). This constraint on choices not only regulates but also limits options, with known adverse outcomes significantly impacting the decision-making process.

...let’s say it’s just a Qatari to a Qatari, a Qatari to a Gulf national. So it’s not really a state issue that you’re looking at, [yet] there’s a lot of reluctance from families. There’s a lot of limitations that [women] face when it comes to who you’re allowed to marry. Tribally speaking, are they from the same family as you, how different are they from you? So the pool of choice just becomes smaller and smaller and smaller, to a point where it doesn’t feel like a choice, a lot of the time. It depresses our imagination to an extent where we can’t begin to visualize the person we would see because there are so many detriments in it. "Is my mom going to be okay with it? My dad? I’m scared they’re going to reject this person?" (Zaynab)

Nevertheless, our data revealed that women are given a degree of choice in selecting their marriage partners, and none of our participants reported instances of forced marriages. The extent of this autonomy is circumscribed by culturally defined boundaries. Thus, while women are not subjected to forced marriages against their will, conversely they do not have the freedom to marry whomever they choose. The nuanced balance between choice and cultural expectations underscores the complex dynamics shaping marriage decisions for women in this context.

Hala (Qatari, 19, single) described consent as a ‘line they [parents or family elders] cannot cross.’ She emphasized that, as a Qatari woman, she had ‘the right to say no. They can never force me to get married.’ This right was also the experience of non-Qatari resident women. Warda (Spanish, 35, married) confirmed that consent was needed but added that being able to consent does not mean ‘complete freedom.’ While Warda does not follow Qatari norms, wider religious norms and teachings relating to consent are evident here. Hala (Qatari, 19, single) described how ‘the girl can say no’ but ‘[i]f the parents say no, then she does not have the right to marry.’ This exemplifies how the consent or refusal to marry is limited to a decision about a potential suitor approved by the family. Women are often unaware of proposals which their families do not approve of. This means those who wish to marry someone against family norms and expectations will be tasked with persuading their families to allow the marriage. This was the case for Layla (Qatari, 42, married) who succeeded in

convincing her family in a process which took over a year to complete. She wished to marry a non-Qatari man she had met at her place of employment but the family was reluctant as ‘it is difficult in our society for women to marry non-Qatari men.’ In Layla’s family, her father approved almost right away, while her mother remained reluctant until the wedding day. This demonstrates that differences exist between families where gendered power-structures are concerned.

Consent in Qatari families was sometimes described as imperative due to the prevalence of consanguineous marriages (Akhtar, 2020; Harkness & Khaled, 2014). Hala shared the example of a cousin who married and divorced twice and was now married for the third time. Since the marriages involved relatives, the divorces ‘created family feuds’ and became ‘political’—a term she used to highlight the fact that the consequences of marital breakdown go far beyond the individual couple and engage different branches of a single family or tribe. This particular experience underscored the crucial importance of obtaining consent in marital decisions within the family. Thus, complexities arising from familial relationships and the subsequent impact on family dynamics have served as a reinforcing factor for the value placed on consent within the context of marriage. In order to avoid such negative outcomes and conflict, Hala said ‘they will not force a marriage.’ As consanguineous marriages account for over 40 percent of marriages each year, this is an important issue. Forcing a man or woman into a marriage is not desirable for anyone.

Consanguineous marriages are the object of considerable societal debate in Qatar and in the Gulf more generally. On the one hand, medical doctors and public health officials fear the risk of genetic disease that result from these marriages. On the other hand, sociologists emphasize the stability and longevity of these unions (Harkness & Khaled, 2014; Kilshaw et al., 2015).

The prevalence of consanguineous marriage in Qatari society may manifest as a hindrance to, as much as a guarantor of, female consent. Another restriction on the ability of woman to marry pertains to *kafā* ‘a or marriage equivalence. According to Islamic law, a father cannot marry his daughter to someone who is her inferior (Al-Azri, 2010; Limbert, 2007; Ziadeh, 1957). A Qatari woman from ‘higher up family’ will be ‘made aware from a young age’ that they will be restricted in who they can marry. Hala (Qatari, 19, single) described how they would be expected to marry someone from their tribe or ‘higher’ on the social ladder. Consequently, the higher the social strata, the more limited the pool of potential partners.

Yara (Palestinian-Canadian, 40, divorced) described how ‘[e]ven if the person is rich and nice and kind, but his family is not in the higher tiers of society,’ this will impact on the decision of the family. Lana (Algerian, 50, divorced) described a friend whose family has ‘old traditions’ requiring her to marry within certain families or tribes only. For her friend, the proposal she was interested in did not meet her family’s expectations and she remained single as a result. Celibacy, another recurrent issue in Qatari public debate, appears here as a consequence of the tribal hierarchies and social constraints which hinder the ability of women to exercise freedom in marital choices.

For some, being a relative was important in marriage decisions—with Samia (Qatari, 23, married) saying it was a ‘determinative factor’ for her husband’s family,

while her own parents did not hold the same view and only needed to 'know the family.' Sondos (Qatari, 45, married) suggested that contestations were taking place, with some young people going 'totally against their parents' understanding of how to marry, how to meet their spouse, and the process of marrying—resisting the old way of doing things and have their new way of doing things.' She described this as 'part of the "LA" culture' emerging in Qatar, in reference to the growing influence of Western cultural production on established mores and traditions. However, despite these contestations, Sondos described how some women 'will begin with ideas of equality but at the end of the day—.... when they get married, there will be an understanding that at the end of the day he allows her to do things, not that it's an equal footing.' Though this observation may be legally reinforced by family laws which empower male authority over women,³ its practical manifestation is likely to be multifarious and contested in the private family domain.

As social expectations in a population as diverse as Qatar's change, it is probable that no 'norms' exist which are absolute, but within Qatari families, cultural beliefs continue to occupy a central position in marriage choices.

Choices are heavily influenced by family expectations and cultural norms. The binary distinction between freedom versus coercion often appears inadequate to describe the complex processes which underlie marriage choices in Qatar. The behavior of men is similarly relational, however, participants described a greater ability by men to simply 'impose[s]' his spouse [to his family]' (Lana, Algerian, 50, divorced) when the latter do not approve. This freedom eludes women. However, as cited above, others such as Zaynab (Qatari, 32, divorced, remarried) proffered that both Qatari men and women are 'limited in our choices' with 'nationality playing a big role into it.'

Basma (Qatari, 28, married) suggested that Qatari women are more restricted due to demographic factors with more women available than men, and the pool shrinking further by men choosing to marry 'foreigners.' She observed that 'women have to be allowed to marry foreigners because first of all, there's more women than men. So for every woman that there are more than men, those are women who will never be married.' The observation is relevant for those making policy decisions on Qatari marriage laws, as it highlights an inherent problem with an unequal approach to men and women seeking to marry-out, though on the surface the law is intended to apply equally to both men and women.

This sentiment was echoed by Dana (Qatari through marriage, 47, married) who described Qatari girls as being 'left behind.' She described how she married her

³ For example, Article 66 of the Qatari Family Law Code 2006 provides that the wife has no right to accommodate her Children from another husband in her marital home, 'unless they have no custodian other than her or they would be disadvantaged by parting with her and the husband has agreed to that expressly or impliedly.' While the same Article provides the husband with the 'right to accommodate his parents and his Children from other women with his wife in the conjugal abode, if he is responsible for their support, provided that she may not be disadvantaged.' Article 68 provides the husband with a duty to facilitate the wife completing her compulsory education, but on the basis that it does not 'conflict with her family duties,' leaving it open as to what such a conflict may constitute.

Qatari husband abroad ‘without knowing any of this’ (referring to the difficulties faced by some Qatari women) and when she came to Qatar ‘they told me that I did a huge wrong deed.’ Upon understanding the predicament of some Qatari women, she told her husband ‘go and marry up to three other Qatari ladies. Because me marrying you, some poor woman’s going to be a spinster, and if I knew this, I would never have married you.’ Official statistics show that more women than men married out until 2015, however, from that point onwards more men married out (Akhtar, 2020).

These considerations are less likely to be present for non-Qatari citizens. Given the nature of the immigrant workforce in Qatar, the number of men is more than double that of women. The question of choice was also a concern for non-Qatari women. Wahiba (Yemeni, 33, married) described her experience of consenting to marry, and how she was introduced to her husband by family, saying ‘they came into our house and we met, we sat and talked and everything and that’s it.’ A week later, his father ‘came to ask for me to marry his son.’ She refused as she felt after one meeting she did ‘not know him, I do not know the family, nothing,’ so they came to visit a second time. Wahiba described this second meeting as a ‘disaster’ following which she told her father, the answer was ‘no.’ The family still persisted, and a third meeting then took place after which she again said ‘no.’ However, by now her father felt under pressure, and ‘insisted’ that he ‘is a good guy and that he had worked, and studied and did everything and is ready to have a house and he is just taking responsibility.’ Wahiba eventually gave into the pressure as she had been engaged before and broke it off. This is an example of the complex range of issues and approaches which intersect where marriage decisions are being made, and how ‘choice’ can be regulated and constrained. While Wahiba did consent, and the marriage would not have occurred without her consent, there was significant pressure on her to do so. Marriage choices are likely to be collective family decisions rather than individual determinations, as demonstrated in this example, and family dynamics can play a role in the manifestation of the consent (al-Ghanim, 2019).

The lack of opportunity to get to know those of the opposite gender means that marriages may occur too early or without the parties fully understanding the commitment being made. Samia (Qatari, 23, married) navigated this by ‘rushing’ to enter the marriage contract to be able to ‘see each other—to get everyone off our backs.’ There are two stages to the marriage in Qatar, the signing of the legal contract by which the couple enter a legally binding marriage, and the ‘party’ where the marriage is effectively announced and the husband and wife then begin to cohabit. Despite the lack of cohabitation between the legal wedding and the party, the couple is considered to be married according to Islamic law and therefore able to spend time with each other. Samia (Qatari, 23, married), as with many young couples, entered the legal contract and planned not to have children ‘for a couple of years’ so that they could get to know each other. The separation of legal marriage from the cultural celebration of the wedding provides an avenue for couples to get to know each other and if the relationship breaks down during this period, the couple can annul the marriage.⁴

⁴ Where a physical intimate relationship had begun, a divorce would be required rather than an annulment.

Such culturally acceptable avenues which allow couples to spend longer periods of time getting to know each other could align expectations and personalities and build stronger relationships between couples. Although in this example this requires a legal marriage commitment, the subsequent marriage annulment does not carry the stigma of a divorce in Qatari society.

Where there is a gap in age or experience, when coupled with a lack of opportunity to get to know the other person, lack of mutual knowledge and understanding can lead to potential for exploitation as Duaa (American, 49, divorced) experienced in her relationship when she married very young, and at that time did not 'know who I am, what I want exactly.' She felt manipulated by someone who was older and more experienced, and as a result her view now was that 'marriage is something that you don't rush into, there's no hurry.' Duaa reflected on the need for young women to take the time they need to 'find your voice' and 'be strong in your opinion' before marrying, as this would better equip them for married life.

Marriage choices for some women are linked to guardianship and for Qatari women, this is often a key issue in the decision-making process. Hala (Qatari, 19, single) described being able to 'negotiate with my father about certain things' and preferring this to the 'step into the unknown,' questioning 'why would I want to give up that freedom that I have to someone who will exploit it for his own gain?' This was a profound summary of the stark choices she believed lay ahead of her. While for this participant the father was a benevolent patriarch, for others a marriage decision may be prompted by a desire to escape the guardianship of a male relative.

For previously divorced women, like widowhood, women 'become a guardian of [them]selves' and this seems to explain why some women choose not to remarry. Zaynab (Qatari, 32, divorced, remarried) shared her reflections on her own situation, saying:

'[W]hen I got divorced it felt like it wasn't as bad as when I was single. In a weird way, even though it was a very devastating experience, and traumatizing experience, I think you feel like you have more autonomy. And I think maybe it's not necessarily directly linked to how little rights you have before you're married, and what kind of more rights you have after you're divorce, but it can be part of that, you know, you feel like you have more agency over yourself, because in the process of divorce, your sense of self is on a higher level.'

These reflections highlight the lack of control women feel due to guardianship laws prior to marriage, and how divorce from a marriage potentially releases them from the guardianship of their male relatives as they become responsible for themselves. They demonstrate the impact that legal frameworks have on individual subjectivity and self-esteem.

The difficulties faced by non-Qatari women who are alone in Qatar are of a different nature. The lack of family protection and accountability makes the process of meeting a potential husband fraught with difficulty. Nehal (American, 27, single) describes it as a 'jungle' where 'unless it's intertwined with family and the traditional way, it's really like a jungle... people don't even want to commit to being boyfriend and girlfriend, let alone like marriage, you know?' The lack of family meant men would not be accountable and so her experiences were diametrically opposite to those

women whose choices were limited by the presence of family, and she found that men rarely had an interest in marrying leading to a greater potential for exploitation of women like her. Tamara (Pakistani, 31, single) further explained how the experiences of lone females are shaped by their ethnic and nationality status. She described how 'being White helps,' European citizenship provides better protections regardless of the woman's ethnicity, and hierarchies exist among different Arab nationalities. Therefore, intersecting characteristics of single women in Doha are likely to lead to different experiences and outcomes.

5 Conclusion

Our research sheds light on various gendered issues surrounding marriage choices and decision-making among both Qatari and resident women. The advent of digital communication platforms has empowered younger generations, allowing them to navigate cultural norms and expectations and to develop closer relationships with the individuals they contemplate marrying. The use of social media, online gaming, and tools like 'air drop' have facilitated interactions among young people, seemingly with few risks attached.

Despite these behavioral shifts, our findings confirm that the family maintains a pivotal role in the selection of a marriage partner, and cultural and religious norms continue to influence the dynamics of how single individuals engage with one another.

Consent emerged as a critical element in the marriage process. Our study found no instances of forced marriages, but different types of arranged marriage seemed highly contested. The well-attested involvement of family members in marriage decisions appears in our study as an ambivalent phenomenon. It is sometimes experienced as a constraint, especially for Qatari women, who feel that social and legal norms limit their chances. At the same time, the absence of wider family involvement creates problems for many non-Qatari resident women, who regret the behavior and lack of commitment of prospective spouses in these cases. The lack of family support leaves resident women particularly vulnerable to potential exploitation which speaks more broadly to the intended role of a Guardian to provide protections and accountability.

Overall, our research findings underscore significant transitions that challenge established norms and suggest that young people navigate the complex process of marriage selection with a respectful acknowledgment of societal expectations and the prevailing status quo.

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Chapter 3

Family Formation and Ideal Number of Children in the Arabian Gulf: A Case Study of the UAE



Karabchuk Tatiana , Salma Omar, Zainab Abdalla, Khadijah Diab, and Meriem Ben Jeddou

Abstract The chapter is dedicated to the discussion on family formation in the UAE as a case study of a GCC country. The average age of first marriage and first childbirth has been consistently increasing since the 1990s. Current Emirati families prefer their children to complete higher education before getting married. Many young women after university graduation opt for their first job and professional experience rather than childbirth. The social norm for the number of children in the families is considerably decreasing as well as the total fertility rate. Using available national statistical indicators and previous research outcomes authors provide analysis for the determinants of the total fertility rate and ideal number of children. Moreover, the chapter adds to the literature by application of the descriptive analysis of social norms among Emirati youth.

Keywords Family · Marriage · Age at first childbirth · Ideal number of children · Youth · UAE

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1 Introduction

The chapter is dedicated to the discussion of family formation in the UAE as a case study of a GCC country. The average age of first marriage and first childbirth has been consistently increasing since the 1990s. Current Emirati families prefer their children to complete higher education before getting married. Many young women after university graduation opt for their first job and professional experience rather than childbirth. Economic independence becomes one of the important priorities and values for young females. Globalization and widespread practice of divorce as well as female empowerment encourage women for self-realization as professionals in the labor market not only at home as mothers. These tendencies go in line with the declining fertility rates and increasing level of education in the Gulf.

In order to be able to develop efficient social policies the governments need to have better understanding of social norms and youth's preferences for the number of children. The ideal number of children serves as a proxy for total fertility rate (TFR) and allows predictions of the dynamics and appropriate family-friendly policy corrections. The recent changes in family formation and social norms on how many children to have are directly linked with the future decline of fertility rates in the UAE society.

Perception of gender roles in the family, labor market, and society explain possible family dissolutions due to unmet expectations. For instance, traditionally men expect that their wives will be taking care of children and the house and will not work outside home, but the young women nowadays are not ready to accept these roles of housewives as they want to complete higher education and have a decent career in the labor market.

The UAE is the leading country on gender equality in the Middle East and North Africa with the lowest Gender Inequality Index for 2022 (Human Development Report, 2023). The country is investing great effort into female empowerment and female education. Indeed, most Emirati women have access to university degrees, which equip them with the necessary skills for professional careers. There is a visible increase in the share of professional occupations taken by women. How does that reflect on the young females' perception of their family roles and wish to have children? What is the ideal number of children in the families for the current youth? These are the questions that current research is going to answer in this chapter.

The importance of family is always high for the Arab society however the recent increase of divorce rates might speak for the existing challenges. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on youth family formation in the UAE and the Gulf region. This chapter fills the gap and sheds light on the ideal number of children preferences for current youth in the UAE. The objective of the study is to contribute to the research on family formation by getting new insights from the empirical survey of the Emirati youth.

The next section of the chapter is dedicated to the theoretical explanations of family formation from the social and economic perspectives. The country's background is provided in the section after. The determinants of fertility and the ideal

number of children are discussed accordingly. After that, the chapter provides an overview of the current youth perceptions of ideal number of children and family values.

2 Family Formation and the Concept of the Ideal Number of Children: Social and Economic Theories

People develop their ideas about the preferred number of children during their socialization and through their life experiences. Since 1936, the concept of the “ideal number of children” has been used to measure attitudes toward fertility and population growth (Girard & Roussel, 1982). The ideal (or desired) number of children has been proven to be highly predictive of subsequent fertility (Pritchett, 1994). Fertility desires lay the foundation of fertility intentions, which in turn, transform into real children (Miller et al., 2004). The desired number of children is determined by value systems and social norms (Morgan, 2011), which, in turn, reflect a balance between the driving forces of modernization and the persisting influence of tradition or the cultural setting (Inglehart, 2018).

According to the neoclassical economic approach, fertility decisions are a function of individual preferences and the costs of children, given an income constraint, meaning that women have to make choices between childbearing and employment (Becker, 1991). Since parents receive utility from increased child “quality” and “quantity”, the cost of children is endogenous in the models. The cost of children consists of opportunity costs (the earning loss from reduced labor supply), childcare costs (including the availability of childcare), and time costs of raising and educating a child (Macunovich, 1996). From this perspective women’s employment negatively influences fertility. In the modern world where women have equal rights to get higher education and career, there is a conscious choice between the number of children she would like to have and her employment.

According to rational choice economic theory on fertility, fertility decisions are based on rational thinking where children are thought of as one of the many possible ways of self-fulfillment in life (Miettinen & Paajanen, 2003). Some women might decide to decrease the number of children they have in favor of their careers. Pourreza et al. (2021) found a TFR decline in member countries of the OECD, which can be explained by the higher levels of education for women and the trend of delaying marriage until their studies are completed. Moreover, multiple opportunities outside the home are open to women nowadays, thus the choice of fertility is becoming costly in terms of potential career sacrifices (Shukla et al., 2023).

Demographic transition theory argues that with life quality and economic developments, the perception of the ideal number of children decreases since the mortality rate decreases (Winckler, 2023). Within the Arab world, some cases support and others negate the theory. In the GCC, efforts to diversify GDP sources followed by the decrease in oil prices in 2014 have led to a rapid decline in fertility (Winckler,

2023). Interestingly, the economic growth of GCC countries' oil economies in 1973 and the rapid decline in infant deaths did not immediately lead to a birth rate decline (Winckler, 2023). It was not until the 1990s that the total fertility rates in GCC countries underwent a dramatic decline, specifically when comparing it to other Arab countries (Winckler, 2023).

3 Recent Trends in Family Formation in the Arab World and the UAE

Marriage became no more a sacred and social obligation than it had been used to be before. In Morocco, in 2010, 42% of males and 33% of women in the critical age bracket, 30–35 years, remained bachelors and spinsters, sometimes by personal choice (Courbage, 2015). In Algeria, Tunisia, and Lebanon, female mean age at marriage approaches or exceeds 30 years, almost twice what it used to be in the 1960s (Courbage, 2015). Family and demographic shifts are no longer met with resistance by patriarchal societal institutions and mentalities. Women are increasingly taking on household leadership roles in many if not all, Arab countries for a variety of reasons. These include personal preference to stay single and reject arranged marriages; rising divorce rates, increasingly requested by females; growing emigration, either within or outside the nation.

The UAE government places family at the core of initiatives and goals by focusing on creating cohesive and stable families, family cohesion, strong positive relationships, and family values (Abouelkheir & Alkarbi, 2023). The National Family strategy includes the main needs of a family such as stability, social services, a decent standard of living, financial security, education, health care, security and safety, human rights, government procedures, and housing (Abouelkheir & Alkarbi, 2023).

Marriages in the UAE are conducted by UAE Judicial Department of Sharia courts or through the services of authorized marriage officers (Mazoons) in each emirate according to the Islamic Sharia law regardless of nationality given that both the bride and groom are Muslims, or where the groom is Muslim, and the bride is from “Ahal Al-Kitaab” (Abrahamic Religions; Judaism or Christianity). As per UAE's law, polygamy is permissible where a muslim male may have up to four wives, provided he is able to offer equal sustenance and treatment to all. According to federal Law No.21 of 1997 on Fixing the Dowry in the Contract of Marriage and Its Expenses, the advance dowry may not exceed AED 20,000 and deferred dowry may not exceed AED 30,000 as per Islamic marriage. The maximum dowry limit for UAE nationals is AED 50,000, with AED 20,000 should be paid in advance (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, 2024a).

UAE national males should first obtain a special permission from their employers if they are members of the Armed Forces or employees of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Police and wish to marry expatriates. In the emirate of Ajman, nationals

if marrying a woman other than from GCC countries must obtain the approval of the Sharia Court of Ajman. As for Emirati women when they wish to marry an expatriate man they should obtain parental/guardian consent or a permit from their employer if they are working in the armed Forces, and the groom must not be stateless, must be a legitimate resident of the UAE, and obtain a certificate of good conduct issued in the UAE (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, 2024d).

To help nationals to create their families the UAE government established the Marriage Fund (under the Federal Law No. 47 of 1992) which complements the social policy of the late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the Founding President of the UAE. The Marriage Fund in 2016 was put under Marriage Grant Department of Ministry of Community Development (MoCD). The Cabinet Resolution No.5 of 2017 regarding terms legalization and procedures for the settlement of marriage funds governs marriage grant. Emirati couples who have a lower-income and those on social welfare receive AED 70,000 from the government, paid in one installment, as part of the resolution. In addition, other services are available in each emirate such as finding a match, providing community centers and majlis venues for wedding ceremonies, and providing counseling before and after marriage (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, 2024a).

Interesting trends in marriages and divorces can be observed in the UAE with the help of official statistical data (Table 1). During the last ten years, the total number of contracted marriages in the country fluctuates around 15–16 thousand per year. Two tendencies are hidden in the total numbers though: the gradual increase of non-Emirati marriages from 5,016 to 7,618 and constant decrease in emirate couple marriages from 7,553 to 5,707. At the same time, the mixed marriages among Emirati husbands/wives remains almost same. It means that indeed, recently, fewer young Emirati citizens want to marry. These dynamics are in line with other Gulf countries discussed above on marriage postponements and reductions.

It is worth noting that, across the Gulf, marriage's importance for social mobility and heightened status has reduced over the years, lowering the incentive to marry, especially for women (El-Haddad, 2003). These findings suggest an openness toward non-traditional values within the Gulf region (Al-Khraif et al., 2020; De Bel-Air et al., 2018; Lari, 2022). One value that gained popularity recently is the desire to choose a partner and marry for love rather than through an arranged marriage (De Bel-Air et al., 2018; De Jong & Moaddel, 2013; El-Haddad, 2003; Wang & Kassam, 2016).

Since the 1990s, family structures in the Gulf region have been significantly impacted by increasing marriage age and decreasing fertility rates (Bel-Air et al., 2018). Marriage patterns are shifting away from the traditional and early nuptiality, leading to a narrower age gap between brides and grooms and to women marrying later due to higher educational attainment and labor force involvement (Al Awad & Chartouni, 2014; Bel-Air et al., 2018). The decline in early marriages is clearly observable in the UAE, where 57% of women aged 15 to 19 were married in 1975, then the percentage of married women fell sharply to 8% by 1995 (Rashad, 2005). This trend correlated with increased education level among females, where women with secondary or higher education married at an average age of 27, whereas those without education married at an average age of 18 (Rashad, 2005). As the age of

Table 1 Registered marriage contracts and divorce cases by nationality in the UAE, 2010–2022

Year	Registered marriage contracts by nationality						Divorce cases by nationality					
	Emirati husband			Non-Emirati husband			Total			Emirati husband		
	Emirati wife	Non-Emirati wife	Emirati wife	Emirati wife	Non-Emirati wife	Non-Emirati wife	Emirati wife	Non-Emirati wife	Emirati wife	Emirati wife	Non-Emirati wife	Emirati wife
2010	7,553	1,798	737	5,016	15,104	1,795	693	1,561	145	1,478	3,901	4,194
2011	7,239	1,852	809	5,205	15,105	1,849	659	1,845	159	1,417	4,233	4,145
2012	6,962	1,791	824	5,357	14,934	1,704	647	1,628	133	1,628	4,809	4,913
2013	7,411	2,109	898	6,023	16,441	1,749	694	1,840	191	2,048	4,599	4,403
2014	7,401	2,159	838	6,519	16,917	1,992	786	1,844	176	1,844	4,506	4,554
2015	7,202	2,013	838	6,195	16,248	1,891	759	1,845	182	1,897	4,213	5,450
2016	7,095	1,966	866	5,851	15,778	1,780	736	1,897	204	2,272	5,298	
2017	6,875	1,965	633	5,673	15,146	1,717	766	1,739	181			
2018	6,400	1,978	717	5,709	14,804	1,720	766	1,844	176			
2019	6,322	2,002	612	5,973	14,909	1,799	728	1,845	182			
2020	8,817	2,145	685	6,006	17,653	1,523	618	1,897	175			
2021	7,654	2,325	660	7,741	18,380	2,163	816	2,272	199			
2022	5,707	1,955	548	7,618	15,828	2,011	796	2,266	225			

Source: Federal competitiveness and statistics centre data

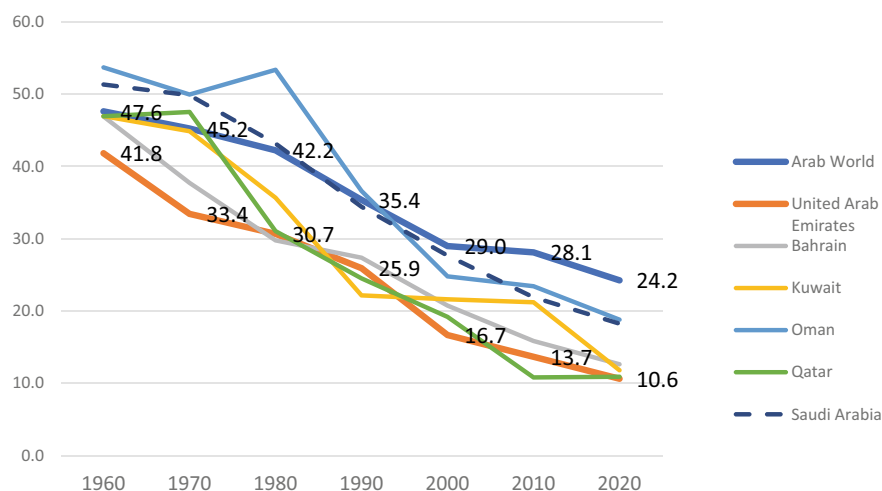


Fig. 1 Birth rate in the GCC countries 1960–2020, World Bank Data. *Source* World Bank Data, 2024. Birth rate, crude (births per 1000 people)

marriage rises, particularly among highly educated and accomplished professional women, the difficulty of finding a suitable spouse becomes even more apparent (Wang & Kassam, 2016). Furthermore, the UAE is experiencing a rise in divorce rates and a fall in marriages, which have had big social implications (Wang & Kassam, 2016; Rehim et al., 2020).

The Arab World has been experiencing a drastic decline in birth rates and total fertility rates within the last twenty years. The GCC countries are no exception. Birth rate is an indicator reflecting the number of children born in the country per 1000 people in the country per year. The average Arab World numbers dropped from 47 children in 1960 to 24 children in 2020 (Fig. 1). All the GCC countries have birth rates below the Arab World average, and the UAE has the lowest among them almost 11 children per 1000 people.

The UAE has the lowest TFR in 2021 among the GCC countries. TFR in the UAE has declined from 5.9 children per woman in 1980 to 1.5 in 2021 (Fig. 2). The fertility rates for the national population (Emirati only) have dropped from 6.7 children per woman in 1970 to 3.7 by 2017 (FCSA, 2021). Even though the fertility rates among Emirati women are still above 3.0 children, the speed of decreasing dynamics is alarming.

The next section of the chapter highlights the possible reasons for the fertility decrease and discusses the predictors of higher number of children in the families in the Arabian World in general and GCC countries in particular.

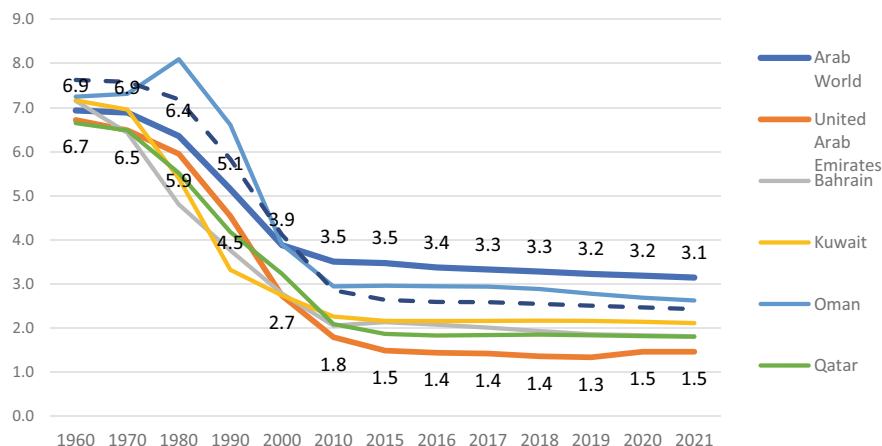


Fig. 2 Total fertility rates in the GCC countries, 1960–2021, World Bank Data. *Source* World Bank Data, 2024. Total Fertility Rates (birth per woman)

4 Family Formation Factors: Economic Factors, Social Norms, Family Background and Composition, and Health Conditions

Role of Income and Employment in the Family Formation

In general, in the Arab world, monetary challenges such as low income and high costs are prominent setbacks for couples when considering the ideal family size (Inhorn, 2022; Pourreza et al., 2021). One essential challenge is increasing child-raising costs (Pourreza et al., 2021). Income is a significant factor in deciding the ideal number of children (Inhorn, 2022; Karabchuk et al., 2022).

Moreover, Arab countries outside of the GCC region showcase the contrasting impact of economic factors: inflation, housing problems, and low employment expectations of the youth support the decline of the perceived ideal number of children (Pourreza et al., 2021). In countries with harsh economic conditions, there seems to be a preference for only two children and a nuclear family structure (Inhorn, 2018). According to several studies conducted in Egypt and Lebanon (Inhorn, 2022), there is a desire for family formation with a limit of two to three children due to the unstable economic climates of these countries.

However, the ideal number of children does not always negatively correlate with wealth (Colleran & Snopkowski, 2018). Data shows that higher wealth quintiles, higher levels of education and income for women, and household income are significant factors that predict the lower ideal number (Assaf & Davis, 2022; Barber, 2009; Colleran & Snopkowski, 2018).

It is important to note that in the UAE, economic factors do not play a significant role in determining the ideal number of children due to the availability of governmental support in the form of free or cheap services through social insurance (Al

Awad & Chartouni, 2014). At the same time, life quality development led to a decline in fertility rates in the Arab world (Abdul Salam et al., 2015). For instance, in GCC countries, modernization, and lifestyle improvement have led to the highest decline in fertility in the region, even without accounting for contraceptive use and abortion facilities, as they are not widely used or available (Abdul Salam et al., 2015). Furthermore, childcare services could be a much stronger determinant of the ideal number of children than income (Karabchuk et al., 2022).

Not only do objective economic factors influence an actual and ideal number of children in the families but also perceived financial situation. Factors such as perceived financial situations, unfinished studies of oneself or one's spouse, housing size, and challenges in balancing work and childcare emerge as significant considerations for postponing childbirth decisions (Miettinen & Paajanen, 2003; OECD, 2023).

The growth in female employment and higher education enrollment is another drastic economic factor of decreasing fertility. Women with better education and higher income employment were associated with lower achieved fertility (Adda et al., 2017; Berrington & Pattaro, 2014). Across the studies, the findings show that employed women on average tended to desire fewer children than unemployed women did (Fang et al., 2013). Moreover, work-family tensions often lead women to limit their fertility aspirations (McDonald, 2000, 2013). The negative correlation between women's engagement in paid work and fertility aspirations underscores the challenges faced by women balancing work and caregiving responsibilities (Paul & Grönlund, 2024).

5 Social Norms, Gender Norms, and Values in the Family Formation

Values play a major role in guiding the choices and decisions of individuals (Myry & Helkama, 2001). According to Miettinen and Paajanen (2003), values are expressed through attitudes, which are models of behavior that develop through life experiences. In modern societies, characterized by post-capitalist and post-materialist eras, attitudes toward family formation are undergoing significant shifts. Ingelhart in Cultural evolution theory (2018) and Pourreza et al. (2021) identified shifts in women's attitudes toward employment and early marriages, reduced interest in family formation among younger generations, weakening traditional values, and a growing tendency toward Western cultural norms as key contributors to the decline of fertility. Pourreza et al. (2021) stated that individuals are starting to opt to remain single or delay marriage or if they marry, they will tend to leave their relationship in a short span, leading to postponed childbirths.

Social attitudes, beliefs, and values significantly influence desired fertility rates. In particular, individuals with stronger religious beliefs and traditional gender values

desire a higher number of or larger families, which was demonstrated in the previous studies, including the UAE (Shukla et al., 2023).

There is a major shift happening in the family attitudes in the Arab World countries. Forty years ago, on the question: “What is your ideal number of children?” the majority of the surveyed respondents answered with non-numerical responses. Instead of answering two, three, or ten children, they would respond: “It is God’s will”, “It depends on what my husband desires”, or “I don’t believe in spacing births, it is not me who decides”. Today, such non-numerical responses have almost completely disappeared from surveys, signifying more rational attitudes on reproduction (Courbage, 2015).

In South Sudan the social norm to have as many children as possible remains well established (Kane et al., 2016), however, it is under competitive pressure now from the other spreading norm of spacing between pregnancies as a socially desirable thing and taking good care of one’s children by providing them with a good education.

In the Muslim world, the family remains the fundamental institution, where men hold guardianship roles (Crabtree, 2007). Moreover, just in the beginning of the 2000s, studies showed that larger families are highly valued, with an average of five or more children being common (Crabtree, 2007). Emirati families have a high level of marital compatibility, reflecting the success of the Family Development Foundation’s initiatives to create cohesive families in line with the UAE’s vision (Al-Othman, 2012). However, marital compatibility is not static and varies with shifts in family structure, such as transitioning from a couple without children to a family with school-age kids. Therefore, it is crucial to continually enhance marital compatibility, particularly in areas where couples indicated uncertainty (Al-Othman, 2012).

Children are valued as sources of various emotional and social benefits, sources of social capital, or sources to increase marital solidarity (Miettinen & Paajanen, 2003). Parenthood bonds individuals and couples both emotionally and legally (Miettinen & Paajanen, 2003). However, in an individualized lifestyle, the birth of a child may stand in the way of people’s individual freedom, thus individuals would postpone childbirth or will never commit to having one. Traditionally, having children is perceived as the ultimate expression of commitment and relationship fulfillment and individuals who build their relationships upon the intention to have children are more likely to have another child and expand their families (Miettinen & Paajanen, 2003).

Gender roles assigned to men and women by society as well as the value system in general heavily impact fertility behavior (Inglehart, 2018). Traditional gender attitudes are positively associated with larger ideal numbers of children while individuals and couples with egalitarian attitudes tend to desire fewer children in total and also show a decreased intention for an additional child compared to those with traditional mindsets (Paul & Grönlund, 2024, Shukla et al., 2023; Welzel, 2013). This preference for fewer children among egalitarian women may be influenced by career aspirations and a desire to avoid conflict between work and family demands (Paul & Grönlund, 2024). Egalitarian women, both in Western societies and Arab world, who expect support from their partner in household chores and childrearing, tend to desire fewer children when this support is lacking (Karabchuk et al., 2022).

Conversely, as recent UAE research showed, egalitarian men who wish to participate in childrearing tend to desire more children (Shukla et al., 2023). This shift toward egalitarianism, influenced by female empowerment, has led to an increased demand for smaller families (Shukla et al., 2023). Female empowerment plays a crucial role in shaping fertility behaviors and determining the ideal number of children (Pourreza et al., 2021).

Attitudes toward gender equality within households also influence fertility preferences. Shukla et al. (2023) found that youths from Emirati families with greater involvement of fathers in household activities expressed a lower desire for children. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, McDonald (2000) suggested that the gap between high gender equality in institutions such as education and employment and lower equality in family life contributes to low fertility rates in advanced countries.

For example, tolerance for wife beating, as an indicator of gender inequality, is strongly associated with fertility aspirations among both young men and women. Females living in violent households are not free to express their will in family planning, and abusive men often have more male-dominant attitudes thus they aspire to higher fertility (Ambrosetti et al., 2021; Snow et al., 2013).

Religiosity is another aspect of the value system that impacts family formation across the Globe. The analysis of 141 countries discovered that fertility (TFR) correlates positively with religiosity (Götmark & Andersson, 2020). Faith and religious authority can influence TFR at individual and country levels. For instance, at the UN population conference in Cairo in 1994, Vatican and Muslim leaders opposed aspects of family planning, especially abortion and women's autonomy (Götmark & Andersson, 2020). Increased faith has accompanied population growth in parts of the world. Based on the World Values Survey, Norris & Inglehart ranked 73 countries as "most secular", "moderate", or "most religious". The mean TFR 1970–1975 for the most secular countries was 2.8 children, for moderate 3.3, and for most religious 5.4. The corresponding values 2000–2005 were 1.8, 1.7, and 2.8 (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). Religiosity most likely helps to preserve high TFR in Sub-Saharan Africa, Arab States, and parts of Asia and Latin America, in part by inhibiting factors that lower TFR (Götmark & Andersson, 2020).

Family Background and Childcare

Housing type, family background, and type of settlement where the women were born are other factors that influence fertility behavior. Women living in traditional Arab houses show higher levels of fertility than those living in an apartment type of housing (Kharif, 2007). Furthermore, in societies with lower levels of urbanization, such as African societies, higher fertility rates are observed due to children's roles in farming practices and providing security to aging parents (Pourreza et al., 2021).

The environment in which children are raised impacts their socialization and attitudes toward fertility and family. Mönkediek and Bras (2017) suggest that children from regions with strong family systems attach higher value to family and express more positive attitudes toward fertility compared to those from weaker family system regions. As previous research demonstrated, in the UAE individuals coming from families with more siblings tended to have a higher ideal number of children (Shukla et al., 2023).

Moreover, previous experience of raising children and receiving support from other family members influences individuals' intentions about future childbearing (Mönkediek & Bras, 2017). In addition, the birth order of children influences the values and concerns regarding having another child and expanding families. For instance, Personal affection and closeness to one's spouse are concerns for lower birth orders, whereas gender preferences and financial considerations are more commonly expressed for higher parity births.

Past studies suggest that the composition of children's gender within families influences fertility decisions. Kharif (2007) found that in Saudi Arabia women with fewer or no sons tend to continue bearing children until they achieve the desired number of sons. In other words, fertility is lower for women who have a large proportion of male children and vice versa. In other Arab world countries, the recent trends are different: Families stop their fertility at two children, and about one-fourth of the families in Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey, an even larger proportion in Lebanon and Iran, and in coastal and mountainous Syria, accept they will raise only 2 daughters, with no sons (Courbage, 2015).

Changing Health Patterns and Contraception Use

GCC countries, Arab world countries in North Africa, and West Asian countries showed substantial health improvements in the last thirty years, especially a huge decrease in infant and child mortality rates. Even though life expectancy has increased to above 70 years, due to cleanliness, dietary habits, activity profile, and lifestyle (Salam et al., 2015) the total fertility rate keeps declining.

According to a systematic review by Pourreza et al. (2021), healthcare-related factors are one of the influential factors in the TFR decline in various parts of the world including the MENA region. Specifically, the increased use of contraceptives among residents of Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asian countries, and member countries of the Organization of the Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is emphasized as one of the most important causes of TFR decline.

Since 1985 even with the absence of family planning information and country-wide policy, contraceptive use began to rise, and by the start of the new millennium knowledge of contraceptive methods became widespread among Arab women (Inhorn, 2022). The Arab world countries vary in contraceptive use depending on the local cultural attitudes toward contraception (Knwal et al., 2017). Eltigani (2005) reported that compared to the Arab world the leading determinant of fertility in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean is contraception, whereas in Sub-Saharan Africa it is postpartum in-fecundability. Among the 12 Arab countries studied, marriage is the leading determinant of fertility in Algeria, Jordan, Sudan, Mauritania, and Syria, while in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia it is contraception. In Libya and Saudi Arabia, it is both marriage and contraception that equally determine fertility, while postpartum in-fecundability is the determinant in Oman and Yemen.

Muslim societies, especially Gulf countries, are known as low users of contraception. The previous studies showed that the percentage of married women who use contraceptives among Arab countries ranges from 31% in Tunisia to 1% in Mauritania and North Yemen (Eltigani, 2005). The overall prevalence of contraceptive use is much lower in the Arab World compared to Asia (59%) and Latin America

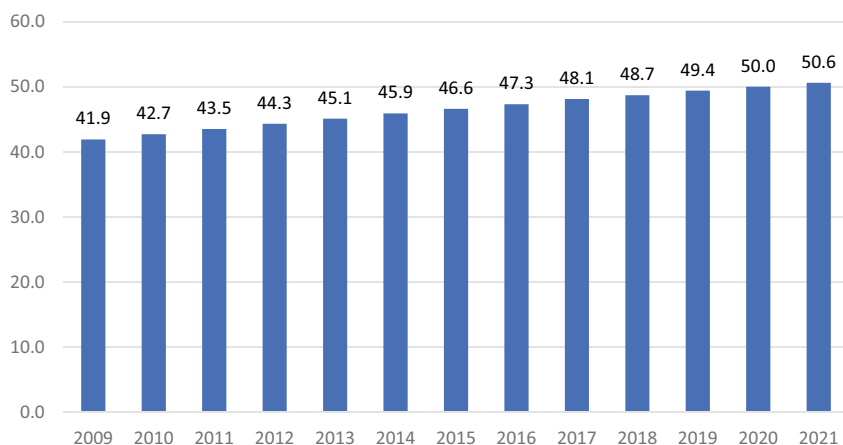


Fig. 3 Contraceptive prevalence rate in the UAE, 2009–2021, FCSC data. *Source* Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre data, 2024

and the Caribbean (58%) having reached only 39% during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Similarly, the mean duration of postpartum sexual abstinence is significantly higher in Sub-Saharan Africa at 9.8 months compared to the Arab World ranging from 2.5 months (Morocco and Tunisia) to 5.7 months (Mauritania).

More recent studies confirm the same tendency: Women surveyed in the UAE were aware of contraception methods but utilization rates were quite low in comparison to women in the USA (Abdulrahman et al., 2019). Overall, only 51% of women in the UAE use contraception (Fig. 2). However, the percentage of users is gradually increasing since 2009 which evidences that women in the UAE started to control more the process of family planning (Fig. 3).

Kanwal et al. (2017) showed that the probability of not using contraceptives was three times higher among Emiratis than among expatriates. Similarly, a study on the family behavior of married Saudi Women showed that contraceptives do not determine fertility behavior among Saudi women (Khraif et al., 2018). This is possibly due to the use of contraceptive methods for child spacing after having a certain number of children rather than limiting them. Birth spacing is applied especially when certain fertility goals are met by older women or to preserve women's health.

Age was found to be an influential factor in contraceptive use. Interestingly, it was also found that contraceptive use is less frequent among women under 25 years old due to their desire to conceive, while it did increase with education level (Kanwal et al., 2017). Also, a notable association between the use of contraceptives and the type of family system was disclosed: Women from three-generation family systems were less likely to use contraception compared to women reared in a nuclear family. Knowledge of contraceptive measures coming from medical professionals and doctors positively influenced the use of contraception by women (Kanwal et al., 2017).

Multiple studies conducted in several Arab countries show that Arab men are supportive of female contraception and advocate for men-controlled birth control known as “Azl” (Withdrawal, or coitus interruptus) as a preferred “safe”, and more “natural” method for family planning than female-controlled methods (Inhorn, 2022). Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) such as In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) globalized in the 1990s became subsequently popular in multiple parts of the Arab world (Inhorn, 2022). The first IVF clinic to open was in Egypt in 1986 experiencing a “boom period” by the mid-1990s which caused other Middle Eastern countries to follow suit, and by the mid-2000s the IVF industries in the region became one of the world’s largest and most prosperous.

Furthermore, Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) invented in Britain was initially used to determine whether each eight-cell embryo carried a genetic defect, and Pre-implantation Genetic Screening (PGS) are both ART methods popularized in the Arab world by 2008 for sex selection purposes, mostly for son selection. The United Arab Emirates is counted among the many Arab countries that perform PGS for son selection in IVF clinics (Inhorn, 2022). This makes it a clear example of selective reproduction amidst a fertility decline. In 2007, PGD for genetic diagnosis was first introduced in the Emirates to mitigate one of the highest frequencies of sex-linked genetic diseases prevalent in the world, and by 2010 UAE’s federal ART law recognized it as a legal ART practice. An ethnographic study discovered that most Emirati couples used PGS-assisted son selection as a form of family planning for their small families (Inhorn, 2022). Moreover, most of the Emirati families wished for no more than two children, and one of them had to be a son for their families to be complete and for cultural purposes such as carrying the father’s patrilineage (Inhorn, 2022).

The recent history of the COVID-19 pandemic negatively influenced fertility-related decisions among UAE residents (Ganesan et al., 2024). The results showed that the people were scared of the virus’s possible impact on fertility and pregnant women. About 65% of the respondents declared that they postponed their pregnancy because of COVID-19 and about 20% of the COVID-19 survivors in the study reported decreased libido and difficulty conceiving (Ganesan et al., 2024).

6 Family Formation and Ideal Number of Children for the Emirati Youth

The UAE and the Gulf highly prioritize education, leading many young people to stay longer in the education system to complete their degrees (Alibeli, 2014; Alnaser, 2018; Khraif, 2001; Obermeyer, 2015). In addition, several studies across the Gulf have linked a higher level of education to wanting fewer children (Al-Khraif et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2013; Khraif, 2001). Balancing academics, physical health, and motherhood responsibilities becomes a huge challenge for married Emirati female college students (Dickson & Tennant, 2019). More females do not

want to go through the hassle of combining family and studies and postpone their marriage after graduation.

Since the UAE highly encourages and prioritizes female education, young Emirati women may choose to delay getting married and having children until completing their education. Besides that, both male and female youth believe that the husband must hold a higher level of education than the wife (Wang & Kassam, 2016). Since more women are educated than men within the Gulf region, female youth find it difficult to choose a husband whose schooling fulfills their criteria (De Bel-Air et al., 2018; Lari, 2022). The dissonance also exists in terms of gender equality ideals since women hold more liberal ideals than men (Shukla et al., 2023; Wang & Kassam, 2016). Evidently, the ideals and standards for male and female youth contrast in several studies, presenting an issue of compatibility.

Another cause of delayed marriage or even remaining unmarried is the socio-economic pressures that younger generations face. Women across the Gulf choose to delay getting married and, if married, widen the intervals between each childbirth (Al Awad & Chartouni, 2014) as it allows them to participate in the labor market (Alnaser, 2018; Lari, 2022; Obermeyer, 2015). Shukla et al.'s (2023) study in the UAE supports this hypothesis: Female youth is more likely to value women's financial autonomy. Since household work is still seen as the wife's responsibility, even among younger Emirati people (Shukla et al., 2023; Wang & Kassam, 2016), finding a balance between work and familial duties can be difficult for young women. Alternatively, male youth challenges in the Gulf center around economic and job security. Within the Gulf, securing enough money to pay the bride's dowry and the wedding expenses is a notable setback for young men (De Bel-Air et al., 2018; Lari, 2022). In Kuwait, men also choose to delay the marriage due to expectations about a well-approved, high-paying job to satisfy the demands of the bride's family (Alnaser, 2018). Most importantly, younger men value achieving career and financial fulfillment before marriage (Alnaser, 2018). Thus, we can conclude that youth in the Gulf generally aspire to achieve professional and personal ambitions, consequently pausing the search for a partner (Alnaser, 2018; El-Haddad, 2003).

The youth's preferences and life perceptions are prominent contributors not only to the later marriages but consequently to the declining fertility rates. A recent Emirati youth study revealed that 50 percent of them support the traditional perspective on marriage, and on average Emirati youth ideally wished to have 5.4 children in their future families, with a preference for sons over daughters (Shukla et al., 2023).

Indeed, still current female Emirati youth with university degree opt for on average two sons and two daughters. Thus, Table 2 shows that about half of the young Emirati women, who completed the study in 2019 wanted ideally four children (two sons and two daughters), less than 16 percent of educated females wanted four or more sons or daughters. Interestingly, male Emirati youth ideally wants more children than women. Only 5 percent of young educated men said they want only one son, about 60 percent want at least three sons. Another observation could be done is that among the females the child gender preferences are more equal while males tend to give preferences for having higher number of sons rather than daughters.

Table 2 Percentage of Emirati youth by their wish for ideal number of sons and daughters, 2019 survey data, %

Ideal number of sons			Ideal number of daughters		
	Males	Females		Males	Females
1 child	5.22	8.1	1 child	14.2	9.7
2 children	35.8	53.0	2 children	39.6	50.8
3 children	23.1	24.9	3 children	19.4	22.7
4 + children	35.8	13.0	4 + children	25.4	15.7
	100	100		100	100

Source Authors calculations based on the Educated Emirati Youth Survey in 2019

Only a small percentage of educated youth supported the economic independence of women and husbands' participation in household chores/childrearing (Shukla et al., 2023). As expected, youth who preferred women's economic independence and equal household contribution by spouses sought fewer children (Shukla et al., 2023), which is consistent with modernization theory and cultural evolution theory by Inglehart (2018).

Another strong factor that influences youth's preferences for the ideal number of children is their own parental family. The correlation coefficients, presented in Table 3, suggest that the number of siblings (number of sons and daughters that their mother had) correlates with the ideal number of sons and daughters chosen by the Emirati youth. Moreover, number of born sons by the mother plays a crucial role since it has higher coefficients which are significant for both ideal number of sons and ideal number of daughters. Number of daughters born in the parental family significantly associates only with the ideal number of daughters for the current youth.

At the same time, other studies showed that many young Emiratis under 25 years old do not want more than 2 children in their families as children are no longer seen as the main source of happiness, especially for young men (Wang & Kassam's, 2016). The social norms of having more than 4–5 children might disappear and then it will be difficult to improve fertility rates as there will be no buffer for the unmet fertility targets.

Table 3 Correlation coefficients between ideal number of children and parental family number of children

	Number of sons that mother had	Number of daughters that mother had
Ideal number of sons	0.257**	0.08899
Ideal number of daughters	0.169**	0.162**

Source Authors calculations based on the Educated Emirati Youth Survey in 2019

7 Conclusion and Policy Implications

This chapter underlines the current challenges for the GCC countries in terms of improving declining fertility rates and strengthening the families. The total fertility rate as well as birth rate dropped considerably during the last twenty years, and the UAE is currently having the lowest rates of these two indicators among the GCC countries. It is definitely linked with the drastic development the country is doing in economics, education, gender equality, and medical services. High employment and high tertiary education rates among the women are usually associated with the drop in fertility rates which was explained by both economic and socio-cultural theories.

These observed by official statistics tendencies are happening in line with multiple family programs that the UAE government developed to foster stable and consolidated Emirati families and encourage Emirati men to marry Emirati women to build a strong social and demographic structure.

An important outcome from the recent empirical studies is that the young generations are still willing to have 3–4 children on average and majority of Emirati youth wants to have minimum of two sons and two daughters. It gives room for the family policy makers to provide programs to meet those ideal aspirations for the family formation.

Thus, the current overview analysis could serve as a vital ground for further research to support the UAE's national strategic goals on sustainable population growth and social development. More studies of the challenges that youth are having to create families and opt for more children should be funded and conducted at local and national levels. It will help to identify the needs and prioritize the family support programs making them more accurate and targeted to those needs.

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Chapter 4

Unpacking the Decline: Social Determinants and Fertility Dynamics in Qatar



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Abstract Declining fertility rates in Qatar have raised state concerns, prompting an in-depth investigation into their causes. This chapter explores key factors contributing to this trend, including shifts in family structures, economic and financial changes, and the impact of women's employment, education, and health on fertility. Employing a mixed-methods approach through surveys and semi-structured interviews, the research builds on 4,271 Qatari nationals and 58 in-depth interviews. The finding reveals significant impact of personal values favoring individualism and a preference for quality over quantity in family size decisions. The findings confirm the influence of modern trends and evolving perceptions among younger generations, underscoring the need for state policies supporting family welfare and enhancing working conditions for women.

1 Introduction

Fertility rates are a critical indicator of a nation's demographic health and socio-economic stability. A balanced population growth enhances human capital, keeps the production wheel going and secures the very survival of the society itself (Abeliansky et al., 2020; Lunenfeld, 2008; Nakatani, 2023). Since the first World Population Conference in Belgrade in 1965, the global discourse on population growth has been shaped by a variety of ideas and theories, often differing and sometimes even opposing each other (UN, 1967). These ideas range from portraying population growth as a plague consuming state budgets to actively advocating higher fertility,

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especially in countries threatened by negative population growth. Qatar is no exception to these global trends, despite the unique characteristics of the Qatari context and those of all the GCC states. Qatar, like all Arab Gulf states, has a population that has dramatically increased over the past decades, due to the increasing numbers of foreign expatriates. As a result of this trend, the percentage of Qatari nationals in the total population has decreased to only 12% in 2019 (PSA, 2019). Likewise, the percentage of the nationals in the economically active population has declined significantly. In addition to the notable decline in fertility rates among Qatari women, these trends have recently prompted concern and a need for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena.

From early on, theories of fertility and population studies have sought to explain the determinants of fertility rates; what influences a couple's decision to have a certain number of children? Is it driven by economic factors, health considerations, or social and cultural norms? In agrarian societies during the Middle Ages, large families were the norm due to the reliance on hard physical labor, with children regarded as human capital essential for farming activities and the economic prosperity of their families. High infant mortality contributed also to these trends (Caldwell, 1978; Puleston et al., 2014). Many theorists employ economic models, arguing that children are *an economic good*, and determine fertility rates based on economic evaluations. Methodologically, they relied on economic analysis of linkages in fertility across generations and the interaction between fertility and various macro variables, such as wage rates, interest rates, population growth, and capital accumulation in closed economies (Becker & Barro, 1985). At a later stage, demographic transition theory emerged, suggesting that the modernization process is marked by inevitably lower fertility rates, reduced collectivism, and higher levels of individualism. The study draws theoretically on elements from both economic models and demographic transition theories.

Thematically, this chapter explores the social determinants of fertility in Qatar, examining the complex nexus of personal, economic, health, and cultural factors that influence reproductive behaviors and decisions. The chapter embarks on a comprehensive mixed-method study conducted by Doha International Family Institute in collaboration with the Qatari Planning and Statistics Authority, as a response to the growing concerns about the demographic imbalance in the state. How far has women's increasing participation in the workforce and education impacted marriage and fertility? Do modernity, globalism, and cultural factors have a say in this decline? How do economic factors, health, and family structure interact in these dynamics? What is the significance of state policies? These are some of the questions this book chapter answers. The following sections will provide an overview of the methodology, the theoretical framework and an analysis of the results. Finally, the chapter will wrap up with some final thoughts on the findings, recommendations, and research prospects.

2 Theoretical Framework

Historically, the world's demographics and the academic approaches to it have undergone several phases of ideational transformation. Interestingly, demography as a scientific field, has long had a reputation as an “all methods, no theory” field, due to its heavy reliance on mathematical patterns, and then economic models in a later stage (Greenhalgh, 1996; Leibenstein, 1975). In the 1960s, the theory of overpopulation and global starvation threat grew in relation to family policies and family programs in the US and Europe. This theory dominated academic discourse for decades. Ehrlich, a prominent biologist, argued in his famous book, *Population Bomb*, published in 1968, that the growing world population, coupled with high rates of per capita consumption in the most economically advantaged societies, would put an unremitting burden on the resources, particularly food, needed to sustain our species. At that stage, a kind of apocalyptic thinking prevailed, expecting the world's population to exceed 10 billion inhabitants of hungry people by the end of the twentieth century (Ehrlich, 1968). Luckily, the technical revolution in agriculture and the food industry has freed us from starvation and this dire anticipation. Additionally, medical innovations have dramatically raised lifespan expectancy and reduced infant mortality (Aitken, 2024).

Dudley Kirk (1969) also commented on the lack of theory in the field, stating that “demography is a science short on theory, but rich in quantification. Despite this, it has produced one of the best-documented generalizations in the social sciences: the demographic transition” (p.361). Kirk's contribution was significant to conceptualizing demographic transition as a well-grounded theory in the field. He came up with a crucial definition of the theory, explaining that “stripped to essentials, it states that societies that experience modernization progress from a pre-modern regime of high fertility and high mortality to a post-modern one in which both are low” (Kirk, 1996, p.361). However, a valid critique of this theory of modernity is its Eurocentric bias, equating modernity with Westernization and viewing history as a linear progression that all nations must inevitably follow to achieve development. This perspective often overlooks cultural sensitivity, and the unique paths different societies may take (Greenhalgh, 1996).

Traditional demographic transition theory focuses on several axes. First, fertility and the number of children is an economically rational choice. Second, maximum and minimum family sizes in a society are determined by personal, social, and physiological reasons. Third, economic modernization coupled with new intrafamilial relationships are shaping factors of low fertility (Caldwell, 1976).

The second Transition Theory, a revised and more recent version of the traditional demographic transition theory, gained significant momentum within the academic discourse in the past two decades. The theory suggests that most of the world's states are experiencing a unilinear change toward a very low fertility rate. The primary factor behind these changes is the gradual, irreversible shift toward a culture of individualism, enhanced by globalized personal attitudes and norms that magnify values such as self-actualization, personal freedom, and life quality. A countless number of studies prove the empirical fit of the framework to significant changes in

demographic and family behavior in the US, the West, and beyond (Zaidi & Morgan, 2017).

Examining the fertility rate decline in Qatar, through the lens of demographic transition theories, and the economic and cultural models is considered a convenient theoretical and conceptual framework. Notably, the discovery of oil in the Arab Peninsula in the first half of the twentieth century marks the most significant turning point in the modern history of the region (Basedau & Lay, 2009; Legrenzi et al., 2011; Ross, 2013). The massive flows of capital and workers to the region were unparalleled. In the wake of a swift wealth accumulation, societies have gone through a rapid process of modernization, that transformed their traditional cultural and economic forms to the current rentier social structures, and familial patterns (Cooke, 2014; Fox et al., 2006; Rahman & Al-Azm, 2023).

Fertility trends in Qatar have gradually declined over the past few decades, reflecting broader socioeconomic shifts within the country. Historically, Qatar exhibited high fertility rates typical of many Gulf countries, driven by cultural and religious norms favoring large families and lower female participation in the workforce (Lansford et al., 2020). However, recent data indicate a noticeable decline in fertility rates among Qatari women. The total fertility rate (TFR) dropped from 5.3 children per woman in 1986 to 2.9 in 2017 (PSA, 1986, 2017). This decline can be attributed to several personal and structural factors, including increased educational attainment among women, greater workforce participation, delayed marriage, and changing social values regarding family size. According to the UN Human Development Index, Qatar has consistently ranked between 33 and 36 globally over the past 10 years, holding the top position among Arab states (UN, 2024). This means that Qatar is transitioning into a modern, developed society, this process is typically marked by profound social and economic transformations, including a lower fertility rate.

As fertility rates impact population growth, demographic stability, and socioeconomic development, identifying the factors influencing reproductive behaviors and decisions is essential. In Qatar, these determinants are multidimensional, encompassing economic conditions, educational attainment, health factors, cultural norms, and personal preferences. Examining these factors relying on empirical evidence will enable us to exhibit causal relationships between variables under examination. This study aims to develop compelling, evidence-based conclusions that can both benefit researchers and guide policymakers in designing targeted strategies based on coherent insights and scientifically sound data.

3 Methods

Recently, mixed-method research has become widely used after a period of reluctance, during which academia was entrenched in the dichotomy of quantitative and qualitative methods. Creswell (2009) asserts that mixed-method design is highly effective in studying complex, multidimensional research problems. Its strength lies

in circumventing the limitations of each method while leveraging their respective strengths (Creswell, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative research methods in the forms of analytical descriptive analysis, quantitative data analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The objective of mixed-method design is to determine the degree to which each factor impacts the fertility rate among Qatari women; and to understand the social context itself as well as the cultural and personal nuances that cannot be captured through numbers alone. Quantitative data is used to measure the impact, while qualitative data is used to give meaning to this impact, expose structures and patterns, and give participants the space to voice their interpretations and personal preferences. A research team from Doha International Family Institute was appointed to work on this study in close collaboration with the Planning and Statistics Authority in Qatar. The main parameters and conceptions were defined at the beginning of the study, such as Crude Birth Rates (CBR) and the General Fertility Rate (GFR) which is a ratio that measures the number of births per 1,000 women of childbearing age, and so forth.

The quantitative survey methodology was structured to gather data on a broad range of factors influencing fertility. These factors incorporate demographic attributes, marital status, levels of educational attainment, employment status, health considerations, economic circumstances, and personal perspectives on fertility and childbearing. The survey engaged a cohort of 4,271 Qatari nationals, ensuring an equitable representation across gender lines (51% male and 49% female). The sample was representative in the demographic sense when it comes to gender, age, education, employment, and income. Additionally, a massive amount of quantitative data in the form of statistics issued by the Planning and Statistics Authority in Qatar was collected for research purposes. Data collection was conducted through online questionnaires to ensure broad reach and response accuracy.

Thereafter, the data were analyzed using relevant statistical software (e.g., SPSS and Microsoft Excel). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the sample's demographic characteristics, while inferential statistics were employed to identify socially significant determinants of fertility rates.

The qualitative component of the study relied on semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with 58 individuals, 30 females and 28 males. The diversity in demographic characteristics was considered, in terms of marital status and number of children for those married, age group, educational backgrounds, job statuses, and income levels. Regarding marital status, the focus was on the married individuals in the sample, with 41 married participants, including 22 females and 19 males. There were also six single females, nine single males, one divorced female, and one widow.

Most participants, especially females, were from the younger age groups. More than three-quarters of the females who disclosed their ages were between 25 and 34. As for the males, 37% were in the mentioned age group, 30% were between 35 and 44, and about 26% were 45 years or older.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns, through coding and categorization. The design of the questions

included groups of structural, social, cultural, economic, health, lifestyle, and policies impact factors. The target was to compile a comprehensive analysis that methodologically answers the inquiry about the nature of declining fertility rates in the State of Qatar. Transcripts from interviews were coded, focusing on the underlying reasons for declining fertility rates, personal and societal attitudes toward childbearing, and the impact of existing policies on fertility decisions.

The quantitative and qualitative research findings were integrated to provide a holistic overview of the social determinants of fertility in Qatar. Triangulation of data from different sources helped to validate the results and ensure robustness. Finally, the research design intentionally targeted the concerns of validity and reliability through providing an adequate analysis. Our purpose was to open the door for transferability for interested scholars, and to provide a solid grounding for comparisons between this study and similar ones (Merriam, 1998). These procedures ensured internal reliability and validity, while the systematic analysis allowed for the identification of key social factors influencing fertility.

4 Results and Discussions

With the shift to the twenty-first century, many states in the world realized the downsides of the demographic imbalance and its critical impact on socioeconomic stability, including low fertility and population aging. Several studies across academic disciplines have sought to identify the key factors behind declining fertility, be it social, economic, or cultural. For instance, some specialists refer to “postponement” as a primary factor of the declining fertility rates. In this context, postponement refers to the couples’ desire to delay childbearing to the extent that triggers what fertility scholars call: the lowest-low fertility rates (Billari, 2008). Intriguingly, women’s education attainment was pointed out in most of the studies as the main reason for childbearing postponement (Fiori et al., 2014; Gustafsson, 2005; Rondinelli et al., 2010).

Preliminary scanning of the situation in Qatar reveals similar trends to global patterns, where marriage rates are declining, while mothers’ age at first birth, late marriages, and divorce rates are rising. Data from the Planning and Statistics Authority (PSA) shows that the total fertility rate for Qatari women has declined from 4.2 in 2005 to 2.9 in 2017. Looking at the results of the population censuses conducted in the state, we see that this decline began earlier. From 5.3 in 1986, this rate decreased to 4.6 in 1997, and then to 4.5 in 2004. However, the most significant decline occurred during the following six years, with the total fertility rate dropping to 3.6 in 2010 and continued to decrease until it reached 2.9 in 2017 (PSA, 2017).

The available data on the average age of Qatari women at childbirth shows fluctuations from year to year. However, the overall trend tends to increase, rising by about one year and two months over a span of 12 years (PSA, 2017). Data from the current study has shown similar results, as demonstrated in the following analysis of the various factors and their impact on fertility.

Personal Factors and Changing Perceptions

Personal factors, as well as the changing perceptions of the younger generations about issues such as life, health, and marriage significantly influence fertility rates in Qatar. These factors include individual health issues, family security, quality of life, and personal attitudes toward marriage and childbearing. Understanding these personal elements provides insights into how individual preferences and circumstances shape fertility decisions. This observation is consistent across both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Notably, personal preferences among the younger generation play a crucial role in shaping decisions about family size. There is a marked preference for quality of life and high parenting standards, reflecting a shift toward valuing quality over quantity. This trend toward individualistic thinking, combined with contemporary perceptions that diverge from traditional norms seems to be aligned with the transition theory outlined earlier (Lesthaeghe, 2020; Woods & Rees, 2023).

The quantitative results showed that only a third of the sample, whether male (36%) or female (39%), believes that fertility-related health factors are the reason for the low birth rate in Qatar. Additionally, 76% of men and 69% of women confirmed that the lack of family security and the fear of divorce are not among the reasons for the low birth rate. In comparison, the remaining 24% of men and 31% of women believe it is one of the reasons. Meanwhile, concern for the couple's quality of life was cited as a factor influencing the decision to have more children by 64% of male participants and 69% of female participants. However, 63% of men and 72% of women believe that focusing on the quality of upbringing and care necessitates having fewer children.

Likewise, more than two-thirds of the sample, 79% of men and 81% of women, confirmed that emotional stagnation between spouses affects the decision to have children. Additionally, 69% of the male participants and 76% of the female participants believe that the fast-paced lifestyle between work and other commitments necessitates reducing the number of children in a family to cope with this demanding everyday life (see Fig. 1).

The qualitative results of the semi-structured interviews are very similar to the quantitative ones. Both single participants and married ones at childbearing age were asked several questions regarding the number of children they intended to have and the reasons behind their decision on the desired number of children. Most participants confirmed a trend toward limiting the number of children. Male participants were less responsive to these questions than females, and tended to want more children. Notably, older men, on the other hand, prefer a larger number of children. One of the participants, Alhamadi, said, "Children are the fruit of life, the continuation of generations after a person's death. They contribute by being good citizens in society and increasing the number of Qatari and Muslim populations" (Alhamadi, 2023). In his response to why the new generation tends to limit the number of children, he answered, "Inability to bear responsibility, inability to afford financial costs, love of enjoying life, inability to raise children, fear of their deviation" (Alhamadi, 2023).

Most responses indicated that circumstances and cultural concepts that previously encouraged having as many children as possible have changed. Awareness

Impact of Personal Preferences on Fertility

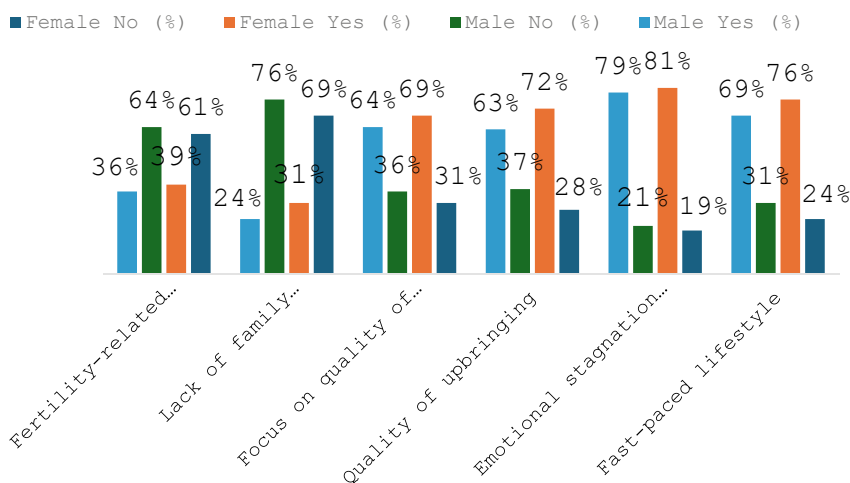


Fig. 1 Impact of personal preferences on fertility

has increased that proper social upbringing of children is more important than their number. Farah¹ says: "Rates depend on people my age, because they are either newly or not yet married. Another reason is possibly increased awareness about expenses. I feel that mothers now want to enjoy motherhood and their personal activities, work, and studies. I see people choosing to marry at an older age" (Farah, 2023). Some participants expressed that women's work and education limit childbearing, even though there is a desire for more children: "There is a desire, but there are challenges, as my children are young and need my attention. Maybe in the future, when we settle in a new house. Firstly, women's work has become important, and their education is important. Before, women were content with university and felt that was enough, but now they have ambitions, and with ambitions come responsibilities. Childbearing, of course, is a factor that impacts and disrupts this lifestyle" (Anonymous, 2023). Another participant added the high cost of living and expenses as reasons for not having more children: "Yes, I feel it has become less because living conditions have changed. Working hours are longer, the quality of life is different. Okay, now income has increased, but life is more expensive, and people have many options, not just having children. They want to do business, travel, and experience many other things" (Anonymous, 2023).

When the questions focused on the impact of parenting responsibilities on the choice of the number of children, the answers were more precise and specific. Many parents with two or three children, especially women, expressed their reluctance to have more children because they want to raise them well and cannot bear the responsibility of more children: "No. We want to educate and focus on raising our

¹ Most participants, particularly females, preferred to be identified only by their first names.

three children properly" (Anonymous, 2023). Some women mentioned that they do not wish to have more children, but their husbands might want two or three additional children: "No, but my husband wants two to three more children" (Anonymous, 2023).

In response to a question about why the current generation chooses fewer children, participants (especially women) repeatedly highlighted parenting responsibilities, the diversity of educational options, and the focus on quality over quantity. Some pointed out that increasing financial expenses influence the decision to limit childbirth. However, some participants noted that spouses or parents pressure them to have more children. Additionally, the variety of educational options for children causes parents to be concerned about ensuring their children attend the best and most advanced schools. A crucial point is that some parents focus on having competent children and dedicating the necessary time to raise them, which relates to thinking about quality, not just increasing the number of children. Phrases like the following were repeated in many interviews: "Yes, because of work and life pressures and the desire for personal luxury over family obligations."

Fast-paced lifestyle and dual-income households were mentioned as important factors that makes families tend to have fewer children. In response to the impact of a fast-paced lifestyle, especially when both spouses are working on the decision regarding the number of children, almost everyone agreed that these two factors significantly limit the number of children. Bashayer says: "Yes, for example, now both spouses return from work at 3:30, 4, or 5 PM. I can't spend time with my children, if I return home at 5 PM and my children sleep at 6 or 7 PM. Where is my time with them during the day? Many women, for instance, aren't working, taking their children to school and picking them up, and planning to work when the youngest child is a bit older and can rely on themselves. So, the mother might then be free to work, with older children taking care of the youngest" (Bashayer, 2023). Most men shared the same opinion regarding the influence of parenting responsibilities on the decision to choose the number of children. However, some were more reserved. Abu Abdulaziz says: "Not necessarily. It depends on traditional upbringing. For example, among Bedouins, families are often large, so they have more children. The fear of commitment in parenting makes parents decide to have fewer children" (Abu Abdulaziz, 2023).

To sum up, personal attitudes toward marriage and childbearing significantly influence fertility rates. The study indicates a shift in personal preferences, with many individuals prioritizing personal development, education, and career over early marriage and childbearing. This shift in attitudes is reflected in the increasing age of marriage and the decision to have fewer children. The results demonstrated how these personal factors collectively impact fertility rates in Qatar. It emphasizes that while economic factors and quality of life are significant considerations, personal attitudes toward marriage and childbearing play a crucial role in shaping fertility decisions. The increasing focus on personal development and economic stability has led to delayed marriage and childbearing, contributing to the overall decline in fertility rates. Other recent studies concluded with similar results emphasizing the impact of

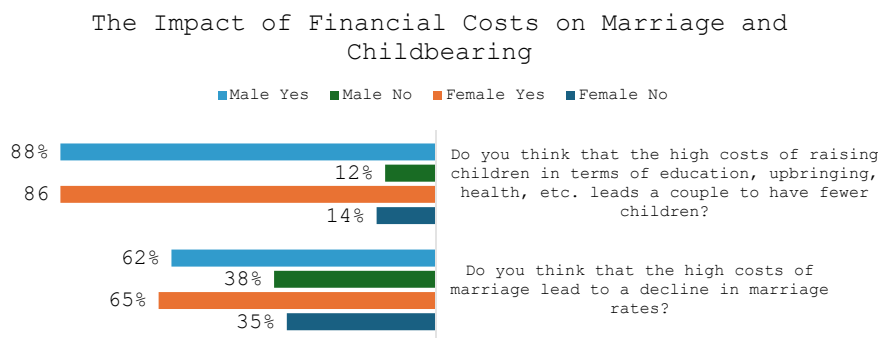


Fig. 2 The impact of financial costs on marriage and childbearing

modernization on perceptions and attitudes (Al Marri, 2023; Lari & Al-Rakeb, 2021; Lari et al., 2020).

Economic Factors and Family Finances

Theorists have emphasized economic factors' role in determining fertility rates; this is also empirically validated in this study. Quantitatively, 88% of men and 86% of women confirmed that the high costs of marriage lead to a decline in marriage rates and consequently in childbirth. Additionally, 62% of men and 65% of women affirmed that economic factors related to the costs of raising, educating, and nurturing children are reasons that contribute to the decline in birth rates (Fig. 2).

The qualitative data analysis showed similar results. In response to a question about the impact of marriage costs related to building a house and wedding expenses on marriage rates, Umm Abdulaziz says: "It has an effect, because not all families have the financial capability to help their children. Some young people rely entirely on themselves, and at the same time, they don't want to marry a girl of a lower social status than their own, so they are forced to marry someone of the same status. Meanwhile this doesn't necessarily mean they can live and maintain this status, so they might have to borrow money or delay marriage until they are financially capable" (Umm Abdulaziz, 2023).

Some participants did not show significant interest in questions of an economic nature. Over half of them did not answer three of the four questions (impact of marriage costs, child-rearing costs, house size, and increased household income on marriage and childbirth decisions). However, most participants of both genders answered the question regarding the impact of house size on birth rates. Those who answered the mentioned questions were almost evenly split between those who believe these factors impact marriage and childbirth and those who do not. A few preferred to indicate that the matter varies from case to case. There were no significant differences between the answers of males and females. However, females were more interested in answering some of these questions and more inclined to affirm the impact of the mentioned factors.

Regarding the impact of the cost of educating and providing healthcare for children on the number of children one decides to have, women were more likely to confirm

the influence of this factor. Only four men affirmed its influence, while five denied it. Those who denied the impact of this factor argued that healthcare and educational services are free in Qatar. On the other hand, those who acknowledged the influence of education and health costs pointed out that some people desire premium services, which require significant expenses, leading them to have fewer children. Some distinguished between education and healthcare costs. Lulwa emphasized the role of school and nursery costs and that focusing on children's upbringing is more important than having many children: "It has an effect because schools and nurseries cost me. There's clothing, school activities, even if work pays for them. So, there's no need to have more children than I can handle, just to increase the number" (Lulwa, 2023).

A male participant responded: "This is the main determinant for me. But it's a joint decision that we will make together. Currently, I am not married" (Anonymous, 2023). Another male participant said: "I believe that upbringing should not be viewed through the lens of material cost, especially in a society where the state provides education and healthcare for every citizen and their family, which are the two most important things a family expects from the state in modern times" (Anonymous, 2023).

When asked about the impact of increased family income on the decline in Qatari women's fertility rates, only 11 women responded, five said yes, and six said no. Similarly, seven men responded to the question, four said yes, and three said no. Most participants who affirmed the influence of this factor considered its impact indirect, an increase in income is accompanied by increased awareness and a desire for a luxurious lifestyle, among other factors. One of the female participants said: "It's not about the income level but about the cultural level and awareness in society. The younger the generation is, the more aware they are of their surroundings. Therefore, income is not the main factor. The decision to have children is linked to other factors besides income. Income might be part of it, but not everything" (Anonymous, 2023). Another female participant said: "Yes, because families with higher incomes care about social and material luxury, so they have fewer children" (Anonymous, 2023).

Interestingly, the question about the impact of reduced home space on the decision to have children received the highest number of responses in the section on economic factors. A total of 27 women (15 affirmed and 12 denied the impact) and 22 men (9 affirmed, 12 denied, and one said it depends) responded to this question. In sum, though very significant, economic factors should be analyzed within the frames of the larger social and cultural contexts (Becker, 1960).

Shifting Family Paradigms; Spinsterhood, and Transition to Nuclear Families

A significant percentage of participants highlighted the impact of structural factors on birth rates. Specifically, 72% of the male and 74% of the female confirmed that the rate of spinsterhood is increasing in Qatar. Additionally, 86% of both male and female participants agreed that young people are marrying at older ages than in the past, which reduces birth rates. Furthermore, 47% of the male participants and 52% of the female participants affirmed that the independence of couples in housing, away from extended families, negatively affects birth rates, because of the lack of support and help from other family members (see Fig. 3).

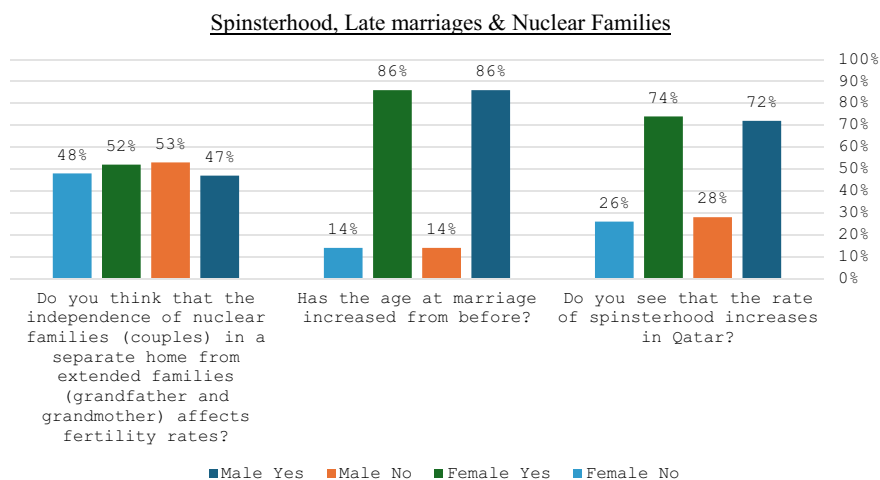


Fig. 3 Spinsterhood, late marriage & nuclear families

The rise in the rate of spinsterhood could be attributed to various factors such as higher education levels, especially among Qatari women, career ambitions, and changing societal norms prioritizing personal and professional development over early marriage. A male participant said: “The culture has changed among the younger generation. They have become more open than the previous generation, more exposed to different cultures and ideas, and there’s more interaction in mixed universities or private sector jobs, leading to daily interactions with the opposite sex. This exposure has changed their views on issues such as family life and choosing a partner” (Anonymous, 2023).

Notably, couples living independently from their extended families might face increased financial and logistical challenges, affecting their decision to have more children. The support system provided by extended families in terms of childcare and shared responsibilities can ease the pressures of raising children, making it more feasible to have larger families. Without this support, couples may opt for fewer children due to the higher perceived costs and responsibilities. A female participant, Umm Faisal confirms this attitude saying: “I believe that the younger generation’s freedom and individualism in a developed and open society is a major reason for the decline in marriage rates” (Umm Faisal, 2023).

We ranked the factors leading to increased spinsterhood based on our quantitative and qualitative data, and we have drawn several related conclusions. Participants ranked the factors leading to increased spinsterhood according to their importance. Both male and female participants agreed that changing life priorities for men and women is the most important factor, ranked first, contributing to increased spinsterhood. Additionally, the most significant factor from the female perspective is the increased comfort and luxury experienced by the youth and their reluctance to

take on the responsibilities of marriage, which was ranked third by the male participants. Both genders agreed that the negative stigma associated with marriage, such as frequent marriage conflicts, increased life burdens, social responsibilities, and high divorce rates, is the second most important factor. Then the other factors followed: social isolation by parents affecting marriage opportunities for daughters, disparity in social, ethnic, or economic classes, and difficulty in finding a suitable partner.

Rising divorce rates were also a central part of our questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. In this regard, it was frequently mentioned, especially by women, that women's awareness and independence have grown, and they no longer feel the need to stay with someone they do not like. Divorce is no longer seen as a significant issue or a social taboo for women. Najla-2 expressed: "In the past, girls wouldn't get divorced because they were afraid of social stigma. Now, girls are aware of their rights and know what they deserve" (Najla, 2023).

To sum up, the study highlights the significant influence of structural factors on birth rates in Qatar. The increasing rates of spinsterhood, delayed marriages, and the trend of independent housing all contribute to lower birth rates (Anser, 2013). Addressing these factors may require long-term policy interventions, societal support mechanisms, and efforts to balance work-life responsibilities to encourage higher birth rates. The study also reveals a consensus among participants on several key factors influencing increased spinsterhood in Qatar. Changing life priorities, the negative stigma surrounding marriage, and the reluctance of youth to attain marital responsibilities are seen as the top reasons. While men place more importance on social isolation by parents and disparities in social, ethnic, and economic classes, both genders agree on the impact of excessive conditions imposed by guardians and the difficulty of finding suitable partners. Addressing these factors through policy interventions, societal support, and premarital programs could help mitigate the rising rates of spinsterhood and divorce and ultimately influence birth rates.

Women's Employment and Work-Related Policies

This study observed that the impact of work-related factors on childbearing is detrimental. Women's work and financial independence have been pointed out as one of the main reasons for late marriages, and lower fertility rates in Qatar. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis in this study has empirically proved this correlation. 63% of men and 62% of women confirmed that Qatari women's employment affects the decision to marry. 58% of men and 57% of women stated that employment significantly impact the decision to have children. 69% of men and 71% of women indicated that the limited availability of maternity and childcare leave negatively affects childbearing. Similar results can be found in questions on the availability of nurseries at workplaces, flexible work policies, and the impact of long working hours (Fig. 4).

The analysis highlights the significant impact of work-related factors on decisions about marriage and childbearing among Qatari families. The majority of participants agreed that women's employment, limited maternity and childcare leave, the availability of nurseries, flexible work policies, and long working hours all play crucial

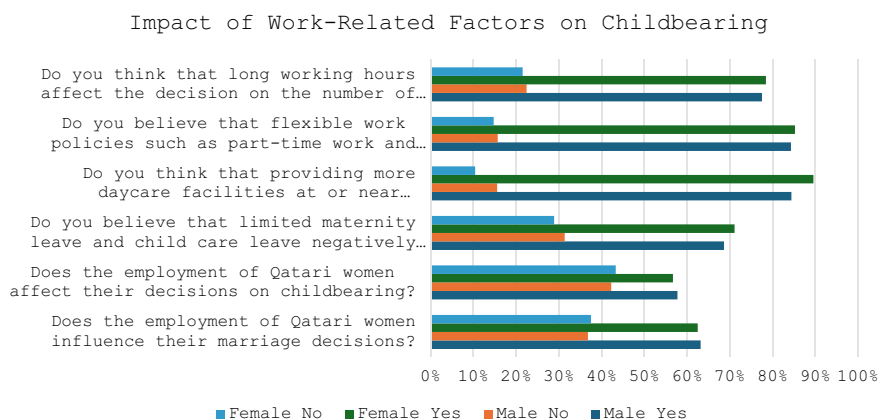


Fig. 4 Impact of work-related factors on childbearing

roles in shaping these decisions. The results suggest that enhancing workplace policies and support systems for working women could positively influence birth rates in Qatar.

Women becoming more financially independent and career-focused, might delay or reconsider marriage. Moreover, the trend of marrying at older ages has a direct impact on fertility rates. Biological factors limit the childbearing years, and starting a family later can reduce the number of children a couple can have. Additionally, older couples might prioritize career stability and financial security, which could further delay having children. Billari's theory on the phenomena of postponement, and its impact is evident in the case of Qatar (Billari, 2008).

The study proved a correlation between reproductive decisions on one side, and work policies and environment in the workplace on the other side. Several participants, especially women, highlighted the conflict between excelling at work and having children. All those who answered about the impact of the work environment and its conditions (limited maternity leave, availability of nurseries at workplaces, etc.) agreed that increasing maternity leave duration and providing suitable nurseries at workplaces, flexible working hours, and other supportive measures would encourage working women to marry and have children, as well as encourage more housewives to join the workforce. Some participants shared their personal experiences or the struggles of their relatives. Umm Ibrahim says: "The most challenging thing is the long working hours, which take away time that we can't get back with our children. We need to be with them longer. Long working hours have a big impact" (Umm Ibrahim, 2023). Most of the participants, especially females, expressed similar opinions. Additionally, research confirms that state regulations and family policies can help create a workplace environment that empowers and enables women to find the right work-family balance (Gauthier, 2007; Haan & Wrohlich, 2011).

Education and Fertility Trends

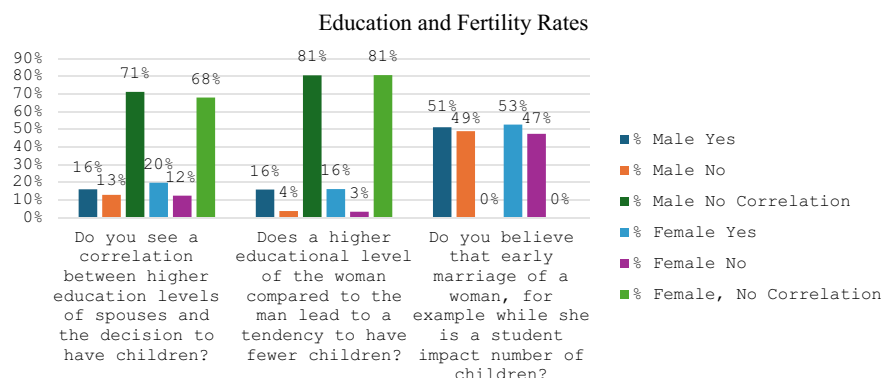


Fig. 5 Education and fertility rates

Quantitatively, most participants (71% male and 68% female) confirmed that the education levels of the spouses are irrelevant and have no impact on fertility rates, while emphasizing the impact of women's education in general (see Fig. 5).

The qualitative data analysis revealed that most of the participants agreed that higher education levels of spouses lead to the decision to have fewer children. Some linked education with work. Abu Shihab says: "I address educational and work factors together, not education alone. My wife has a postgraduate degree and works in the public sector. I can't force her to quit her job. Nevertheless, our work also makes us neglect our children. These are reasons, along with the quality of upbringing, that make us decide to have only three children" (Abu Shihab, 2023). Many participants of both genders linked education and work in influencing the decision to have children: "Yes, the more educated she is, the more likely she will hold a significant position at work, leading to greater responsibilities. She will carefully study the decision to have children" (Anonymous, 2023).

22 women and 10 men affirmed the relationship between higher education and low fertility, while 7 men and 3 women denied such an impact. Six women and three men said that higher education levels might or might not affect the decision depending on the situation. Bashayer says: "It might affect, but personal beliefs also play a role. No matter how high your academic level is, you still have personal convictions that you believe in. Education builds you academically, but it doesn't necessarily change your thoughts completely. It might influence but doesn't result in drastic changes" (Bashayer, 2023). Another female participant, Umm Mohammed adds: "I take myself as an example; my husband is educated. It depends. Some educated people love big families; some prefer quietness and don't like having many children. It's a personal preference" (Umm Mohammed, 2023). Omar says: "It's an inverse relationship; the more educated they are, the fewer children they have because the parents are busy" (Omar, 2023).

Others attributed these trends to the rising awareness of the importance of children's education: "Because they realize the importance of education and are keen on

their children's education, the fewer children are better." "Education shapes awareness, and awareness determines the capacity and appropriate number of children for each couple." "They are more aware of responsibility, which leads to fewer children." "Increased logical thinking and responsibilities, striving for a better life for the children." "The more educated the parents are, the more they focus on raising competent children, leading to fewer children."

Most of the participants who did not acknowledge a relationship between higher education levels and the decision to have children did not provide justifications for their belief and simply denied the relationship. Regarding women's higher education, all participants who indicated a relationship between the education of both spouses and the decision to have children provided similar responses when asked about the specific impact of women's higher education rates on declining birth rates. Many of them echoed the belief that a higher education level of the wife leads to fewer children in the family.

Women, in particular, emphasized the factor of awareness. Umm Rashid says: "It might be because a female's increased awareness makes her realize that life offers other things besides childbirth, which is great because someone who is aware understands that childbirth is a huge responsibility. She thinks about how she will educate and dedicate time to them. With a higher education level comes higher awareness, and she wants the best for her children. It's not just about money and time; it's also about quality over quantity" (Umm Rashid, 2023). Umm Faisal emphasizes the impact of a woman's focus on continuing her education on her children: "It's not necessarily the case, but the more a woman is interested in education and continuing her studies, the more likely her interests will lean towards completing her education and career. In this case, deciding to have children would be unfair if she knows she will be too busy for them" (Umm Faisal, 2023).

The responses, particularly from female participants, indicated an intensifying tension between traditional family-oriented approaches and the influence of modernization on the family structure. State policies emphasize education and employment as crucial women empowerment strategies (Naguib & Aref, 2024). Concurrently, significant efforts are being made to counterbalance their adverse effects on the fertility and reproductive behaviors of Qatari families by implementing evidence-based family policies (Aref & Al-Emadi, 2024).

Health and Fertility: Influences on Qatar's Reproductive Trends

The quantitative analysis indicated that 41% of men and 47% of women confirmed an increase in cases of infertility requiring medical treatment. Additionally, 88% of men and 86% of women stated they would not undergo gender selection procedures if they did not have a medical condition necessitating such treatment for conception. Moreover, 70% of men and 67% of women indicated that gender is not a determining factor for having more children, meaning that having daughters does not lead to further attempts at childbirth until a son is born, in contrast to 30% of men and 33% of women who believe otherwise (see Fig. 6).

The qualitative study aimed to understand the participants' opinions on the influence of three factors on birth rates: infertility in both genders and its explanations, the lifestyle of Qatari families (consumption, luxury, physical activity, and exercise), and

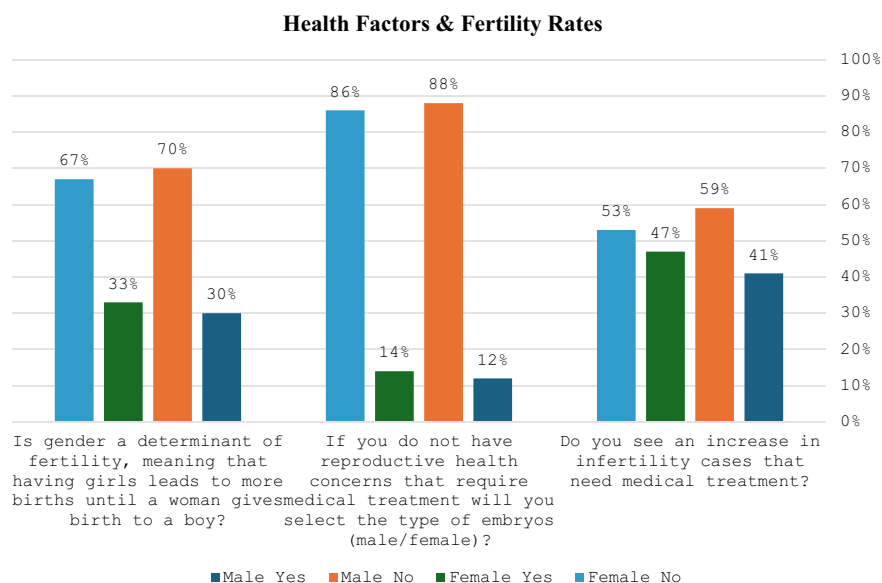


Fig. 6 Health factors & fertility rates

the use of modern technology (IVF, gender selection). Most participants (26 women and 17 men) responded to the second question about the family's lifestyle. Only one man and four women answered the first question about infertility, and two men and nine women responded to the third question about the use of modern technology. The rest either did not answer these questions or simply said "I don't know."

A total of 20 women and 10 men confirmed that the lifestyle of Qatari families affects birth rates, while 7 men and 6 women denied this influence. Physical activity generally improves health, contributing to the birth of healthy children, while a sedentary lifestyle can lead to obesity, negatively impacting fertility. Moreover, women's desire to maintain their body shape can limit the number of children they plan to have. Luxury can negatively impact birth rates through frequent travel and the desire to enjoy life before having children, leading to a preference for fewer children. Umm Rashid said: "It can have an effect, for example, exercise improves fertility, and luxury can provide relaxation and reduce stress, allowing for treatment options" (Umm Rashid, 2023). Another participant, Farah said: "I think it helps with fertility, but it depends on the person. Personally, I care about my health because I want to have children, and I don't want anyone else, like a nanny, to look after them. I want my husband and me to be the ones who take care of them" (Farah, 2023).

Najla explains the influence of luxury: "Before, men were content to work while women raised the children, and they were happy with that role. Now, couples have separate roles as husband and wife and as parents. Expectations have increased, like wanting family vacations, couple vacations, and individual vacations. They now must save money for purchases and travel more than before. Unlike the previous

generation, where women contributed financially to the household and children, women now want their salary for themselves. Before, they didn't care, and there wasn't any social pressure requiring them to live at a certain level. Now, daily life demands a certain standard, and men also want things like fancy cars and watches, so they make choices based on these priorities" (Najla 1, 2023). Among men who affirmed the impact of health on birth rates: Abu Abdulaziz: "Yes, if the couple is in better health, the birth rates may be higher" (Abu Abdulaziz, 2023).

Some participants denied the influence of lifestyle. For example, Umm Turki said: "I don't think it's a key factor. Even those who get negative results in health checks still have children without much concern" (Umm Turki, 2023). Haya said: "I don't think lifestyle affects the decision. It's just a natural part of life; people get married and have children" (Haya, 2023).

Umm Mohammed disputes the term "luxury" and acknowledges only the state's facilitation: "I don't consider our life luxurious; we have facilities, but 'luxury' is a negative word. Where is the luxury? We work, our children study, we need to teach them religion. We are not just sitting around. Our life is under a lot of pressure, despite the facilities provided by the state" (Umm Mohammed, 2023). Some participants linked the Qatari families' lifestyle (unhealthy eating habits, lack of exercise) to the increasing cases of infertility in both men and women. Examples of responses about infertility include: "Yes, I feel that our stressful lives affect this. I personally went through it and know people who have experienced it. Stress doesn't allow the body to function properly, and fertility problems are more common now." Another participant confirms "I see more delays in conception around me. Although medical advancements have improved, I'm not sure why" (Anonymous, 2023).

Regarding the use of modern biotechnology to encourage childbirth or determine the gender of the child, some participants mentioned societal pressure to have male children as a factor influencing the use of such technology. Others referred to attempts to have twins, while some denied knowledge of such attempts.

To sum up, the study aimed to understand participants' opinions on the influence of infertility, lifestyle, and modern technology on birth rates (see, Homan et al., 2007; Zauner & Girardi, 2020). While there were varied responses, a significant number of participants highlighted the impact of lifestyle, including physical activity and luxury, on fertility. Participants also observed the growing discourse and interventions associated with infertility, attributing it to factors related to contemporary lifestyles.

5 Conclusion

Qatari society exhibits distinctive traits shaped by the rapid economic, social, and cultural transformations, following the discovery of oil and gas in recent decades. These transformations have precipitated a significant elevation in living standards, increased exposure to diverse cultures, and heightened levels of education and awareness. As a result, some traditional norms and behaviors have changed, impacting family life aspects such as marriage and childbirth, thereby influencing fertility rates.

While these demographic challenges are not unique to Qatar alone, they reflect a broader regional trend observed across all GCC states, although at varying degrees.

Driven by a notable demographic imbalance and a decreasing proportion of Qatari citizens relative to the rising number of foreign expatriates, fertility rates have become a focal point for family policies in Qatar. This study investigated the array of factors influencing marriage and childbearing decisions among Qatari families, with an emphasis on the roles of work-related, educational, economic, personal, social, and health-related determinants. Utilizing a mixed-methods research design, this chapter thoroughly analyzed quantitative data alongside responses from both male and female participants. The study has drawn several significant conclusions, most notably the profound influence of individual preferences and contemporary social and cultural perceptions on reproductive choices and fertility rates.

Both the quantitative and qualitative components of this study yielded consistent findings. The statistical analysis highlighted discernible trends, including declining marriage rates, a gradual increase in the average age at first marriage, an elevated average age of women at first childbirth, and an overall reduction in fertility and replacement rates. The qualitative data corroborated these findings, identifying workplace policies, economic costs, heightened awareness, and cultural shifts as primary factors cited by participants. These elements reflect the profound influence of educational attainment and global cultural exposure on altering life choices and perspectives.

Furthermore, employment conditions and policies related to women's work emerged as significant determinants affecting fertility decisions. Specifically, the work environment and employment policies were noted as crucial in shaping choices regarding childbearing. Economic considerations also played a pivotal role, with many participants citing financial constraints and the high costs associated with raising children as reasons for postponing marriage and opting for fewer children. Additionally, changing marital dynamics such as increased divorce rates, consanguineous marriages, and high living expenses were highlighted as contributing to the high incidence of divorce, particularly in the early years of marriage. It is noteworthy that Qatar has recently experienced higher divorce rates compared to the other GCC states, except for Kuwait, which had higher rates than Qatar (Statistical Centre-GCC, 2019).

This study highlighted the complex nature of declining birth rates in Qatar, attributing these trends to shifts in cultural norms, changing structural factors, economic pressures, and work-related challenges. Although the ideal number of children as perceived by society remains relatively high, there is a tendency among younger and more educated individuals to prefer smaller families, indicative of evolving priorities and lifestyles. Addressing these dynamics necessitates a comprehensive approach that involves policy reform, enhanced societal support, and heightened individual awareness. To encourage higher fertility rates effectively, it is imperative to cultivate an environment that supports families both financially and socially and promotes a work-life balance that accommodates family growth.

Significantly, participants emphasized the need for better work environments for women, extended maternity leave, the inclusion of paternity leave, part-time work,

and work-from-home options. Additionally, they stressed the necessity for policies that focus on providing nurseries at workplaces, flexible working hours, and support for families in balancing work and childcare responsibilities. Educational reforms, stricter premarital medical examinations, and psychological evaluations were recommended to address underlying issues affecting marriage and fertility rates. Moreover, civil society organizations were seen as crucial in mediating between the state and the community and raising awareness about the importance of family life.

Developing a regional, actionable, long-term strategic plan encompassing all GCC states could prove highly beneficial in addressing these issues collectively. In conclusion, fertility and demographic balance represent a complex social phenomenon that requires interdisciplinary research initiatives for effective management. Building a robust academic knowledge on fertility and its societal and familial implications is crucial for enhancing awareness and aiding governments in formulating both short-term and long-term evidence-based policies to achieve demographic balance and societal cohesion.

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Chapter 5

Rapid Decline in Family Size in Oman: Untangling the Puzzles and Paradoxes



M. Mazharul Islam

Abstract It is puzzling to note that the ‘sea-change’ in the family size in Oman (from about 9 births in 1988 to 3.3 births per woman in 2008) has occurred in the midst of many paradoxes, which is still remained unnoticed. This study provides a critical review of the recent fertility decline in Oman and its underlying causes. The study is based on data obtained from available national-level surveys, published reports, and the World Population Prospects report. The massive economic and social development, women education and participation in the labor force brought a big change in family formation, reproductive behavior, and lifestyles of women, resulting in a fertility decline in Oman. Delayed age at marriage and spacing birth appeared as the major cause of fertility decline in Oman. The tradition of prolonged duration of breastfeeding also contributes to declining fertility. The Omani government should be aware of the current trends in fertility and its consequences, and adopt the culturally appropriate policy for future population management.

Keywords Rapid decline in family size • Fertility transition • Puzzles • Paradoxes • Birth Spacing • Demographic transition • Oman

1 Introduction

Over the last six decades, dramatic changes have occurred in social, economic, cultural, and political aspects of all the six countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that has a profound impact on the institute of family in the Gulf region. The discovery of oil and gas reserves on the Arabian Peninsula in the early 1960s accelerated the economic development of the GCC countries. This rapid economic development led to dramatic changes in the family system and family life, which is also interconnected with the change in social, economic, cultural, and political aspects of life. Historically, the social system in Arabian Gulf countries is structured around the family

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and is linked to traditional and religious teachings that consider family formation to be the basic function of society (Eickelman, 2002; Hashemi, 2007). The family is the unit in which reproduction is authorized and is expected to occur through marriage. Marriage and establishing a family are treated as essential and sacred. In the past, the main and the most important role of women was to bear and raise children. Today, this role is still central and the Gulf families give high value to their family tradition and try to uphold the traditional roles and functions of families. Yet, Gulf families are experiencing many challenges and undergoing profound changes due to rapid economic transformation, educational development, rapid urbanization, the influx of labor immigration, women empowerment, technology uptake, and globalization (Lansford et al., 2021). These changes led to contraction or decline in traditional family roles, changes in norms and attitudes toward family life, changes in family structure, delayed marriage, reduction of fertility, increasing rates of divorce, and shifting patterns of female labor force participation (Islam et al., 2011, 2013; Lansford et al., 2021).

Like most other countries in the Gulf and the Arab world in general, Oman is in the midst of a rapid transformation of social, economic, political, and cultural life that is dramatic in pace and effect. Families are undergoing major changes as new patterns of marriage and family formation emerge in the country (Islam et al., 2013; Rashad et al., 2005). The long tradition of early and universal marriage, high levels of consanguineous marriage or endogamy (particularly marriages between maternal and paternal cousins), and the presence of polygyny (men having more than one wife simultaneously) in the Gulf countries including Oman is gradually diminishing and the new pattern of nuptiality and family formation has emerged (Islam et al., 2013, Islam, 2012, Tabutin & Schoumaker, 2005).

Oman has experienced one of the most dramatic fertility declines in the recent history of fertility transition. The fertility rate has declined from a natural level of nearly 9 births per woman in the late 1980s to a control level fertility of about 3.5 births per woman in the early 2000s—a decline of more than 5 births per woman over a short period of about three decades, which Europe took centuries to go from 5 to 2 children per woman (Courbage & Todd, 2011). The country was once ranked to have had the third-highest fertility rate in the world with more than 8 children per woman (United Nations, 2013). According to the classical fertility transition theory, fertility mainly declines due to a decline in demand or desire for more children, increased use of contraception, economic development, and the resulting social modernization (Becker, 1981; Easterlin & Crimmins, 1985; Notestein, 1953; Thompson, 1930). The classic transition theory fits fairly well with most populations in the West, and in some populations in East Asia and Latin America. In Europe, the fertility decline was preceded by the postponement of marriage and increasing numbers of permanent singles, declining demand or desire for more children, and increased use of contraception. By contrast, it is puzzling to note that the ‘sea-change’ in the total fertility rate (TFR) in Oman has occurred in the midst of paradoxes, such as having a pronatalist policy, low rate of contraceptive use, no official family planning program, universal marriage for both male and female and with little change in high desired family size.

The rapid decline in fertility and family size in Oman with a relatively low (around 30%) rate of contraceptive use contradicts the accumulated evidence of decades of fertility research that there exists a strong negative correlation between contraceptive use and fertility rates (Ross & Frankenberg, 1993). The sharp fertility decline in Oman has occurred in the absence of any official birth control policy or family planning program with a parity-specific target of fertility reduction. For example, fertility decline in China, India, Iran, and many other Asian and African countries occurred due to a strong family planning program (FPP) with a strategy to attain a replacement level of fertility. The Omani government is concerned about rapid population growth, but it has no official population policy for controlling the birth rate. Although the classical demographic theory says that family size declines with the increasing demand for smaller family size, but in Oman fertility declined in the presence of a relatively high desired family size (about 6 children), i.e. couples have fewer children than they would like to have. There is still a gap in knowledge about the extent of the changes in the Gulf family life and its underlying causes. Thus, the objectives of this study are to provide a critical review of the recent fertility decline in Oman and provide some plausible explanations on the causes of fertility decline in recent times, focusing on the changes in direct and indirect determinants of fertility and the emerging demographic dividend. Considering the country's present demographic scenario, and population and economic policy interests, it is essential to examine whether the country is moving on the right path to reap the demographic dividend.

2 The Socio-Demographic Context of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is an 'oil-rich' high-income country in the Arabian Peninsula with 4.9 million people living within 309.5 thousand sq., km (about 16 people per sq. km) (National Centre for Statistics and Information [NCSI], 2023). Of the total population, 2.9 million (59%) are Omani nationals and the rest 2.0 million (41%) are expatriates. The country has had a turbulent past characterized by internal tribal strife throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prior to the discovery of oil and gas in 1962, the economy of Oman consisted of subsistence agriculture and fishing, representing 70% of the GPD (Metz, 1993). In 1970, when the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said assumed power, the country had only three elementary schools and six miles of paved roads. Under his rule, the economy of the country experienced a rapid expansion during the 1980s and 1990s with the revenue earned by exporting oil and gas, which accounted for about 60% of GDP in 1985 (Metz, 1993). By the late 1990s, Oman has been transformed into a modern and high-income country. The standard of living, women's education, and status improved enormously since the mid-1980s (Al-Riyami & Afifi, 2003). Women's participation in the paid labor force is also increasing in Oman (Al-Lamki, 2000). Political stability, peace, and social security have been established and the standard of living has increased over the period. Urbanization has changed the spatial distribution of the population greatly

and reshaped the contemporary social structure of the Omani population. A well-organized healthcare system assuring universal free access to healthcare services for Omani nationals has been implemented (World Health Organization, 2000). The country efficiently managed the 2011 Arab uprising, the so-called 'Arab Spring'. Amid all these changes, the most profound positive social change that has happened in Oman, and in the rest of the Arab World as well, is the 'silent reproductive revolution' (Inhorn, 2018).

The whole Arab world including Oman is in the midst of one of the most dramatic fertility declines in world history (Eberstadt & Shah, 2011; Inhorn, 2018). The fertility levels of the Arab world have fallen down dramatically, disproving the long-held belief of most Western intellectuals, academicians, and policymakers that the Arab Muslim world is resistant to demographic changes and modernity and Muslims are different species in their demographic behavior (e.g. Caldwell, 2009; Courbage & Todd, 2011; Kirk, 1966). Such belief has been developed, because, for a long time, the whole Muslim World tended to have high fertility with no evidence of decline, when the rest of the world, except a few African countries, were experiencing fertility decline. The Western belief is now an outdated era. There is no clear evidence to confirm the relation between Islam and high fertility as some of the Muslim countries (i.e. Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Oman) have reached low fertility despite having pronatalist ideologies (Groth & Sousa-Poza, 2012; Jones & Karim, 2005).

Though later than the West, the Muslim world has been experiencing dramatic fertility and demographic transition that is as sharp as within a short period of 20–30 years during the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. During this period, the number of children per woman in the Muslim world has dropped by more than 3 children. An American research report described the contemporary demographic changes in the Muslim world as 'a veritable sea-change, still curiously unnoticed' (Eberstadt & Shah, 2011). The report also termed Oman, a 'world record-breaker' in the history of recent fertility decline, since the country has experienced a decline of 5.3 births per woman or a 62% decline within a short period of 20 years (from 8.6 births in 1988 to 3.3 births in 2008) (Islam, 2017). However, since 2008 the fertility rate of Omani women has been stalled in the vicinity of more than 3 children per woman. The demographic changes in the Muslim world in general, and in Oman in particular, largely remained unnoticed as compared to in Europe and other developed countries (Eberstadt & Shah, 2011; Inhorn, 2018).

3 Data and Methods

To study the demographic changes in any country, historical time series data on population are the essential ingredients. However, there is a scarcity of demographic data in Oman, as the country was isolated until 1970. There was no national-level survey in the country prior to 1988. The first population census in Oman occurred in 1993. However, during the 1980s and 2000s, the Ministry of Health (MoH) of Oman

conducted few national-level health and population surveys. This study utilizes data from these surveys as well as the official data from the published annual health report of the MoH, the Statistical yearbook of Oman published by the NSCI, and the data from the 2019 revision of the World Population Prospect of the United Nations. The latest country-specific population projection data from the World Population Prospects 2019 Revision of the United Nations (UN) have also been used to describe the different aspects and consequences of past and future demographic transition in Oman (United Nations, 2019a, 2019b).

The 2019 Revision of the United Nations population estimates and projections covered 150 years, starting from 1950 to 2100, which is subdivided into past estimates (1950–2019) and future projections (2020–2100) (UN 2019). However, this study considered past (1950–2019) estimates and future 50 years (2020–2070) projections results of the medium variant of the 2019 Revision of the United Nations population projections. To meet the objective of the study, summary descriptive statistics and graphical presentation of the data have been used. Various conventional demographic indicators have been used to analyze the population and age structural transition.

4 Results

4.1 Demographic Transition in Oman

The population of Oman grew from less than half a million in 1950 to 4.5 million in 2020; a gain of 4.0 million or 9 times as many people as were alive in 1950. The projection result indicates that the population of Oman will reach 7.0 million in 2050, and after 2060, the population will stabilize at 7.4 million. Over the last 70 years, Oman experienced a very high rate of population growth. The annual growth rate of the population increased from 1.6% in 1950 to a very high rate of more than 5% from 1980 to 1985 and it reached an all-time high rate of 6.5% in 2010. Until 1970, the population growth was mainly due to natural increase (excess births than deaths) and the annual population growth rate was below 3% (Fig. 1). The population growth rate in Oman has a strong correspondence with the net migration rate. Like other oil-rich Arab Gulf countries, Oman started attracting a huge foreign workforce after 1970. The projection results indicate a sharp decline in the net migration rate after 2015, reaching to less than one percent in 2035. The fluctuation of the annual population growth rates in Oman follows the same pattern of fluctuation of net migration rate with two distinct periods: 1950–1995 and 1995–2020. After 1970, the annual population growth rate accelerated due to the high rate of immigration of working age people, but it dropped to a minimum rate during 1990–1995 as the net migration also dropped during this period due to the Gulf War in Iraq at that time. After 1995, the net migration rate as well as the population growth rate accelerated again and reached to all the time high rate in 2010. After 2010, the population growth rates started to decline due to gradual decline in immigration rates as well as due to

rapid fertility decline. Projection results indicate that the population growth rate will decline to 1.26% in 2030 and it will further decline to less than one percent in 2030 onward.

Figure 2 presents the population pyramid showing the age-sex distribution of the total population (combining Omani and non-Omani), Omani population, and non-Omani population. There is a huge imbalance in the age-sex structure of the total population, with large numbers of young men as a result of high levels of young migrant workers, mainly from Asia. However, the age-sex structure of the Omani population is more or less balanced. The broad-based triangular-shaped population pyramids of Oman for the period 1980–1990 indicate a typical population in an early stage of demographic development with relatively high birth rate and growth rates and a youthful population.

Following the classical demographic transition theory, demographic transition in Oman also began with a decline in mortality. The crude death rate (CDR) declined rapidly to about 3.0 deaths per 1,000 populations in recent times from a high rate

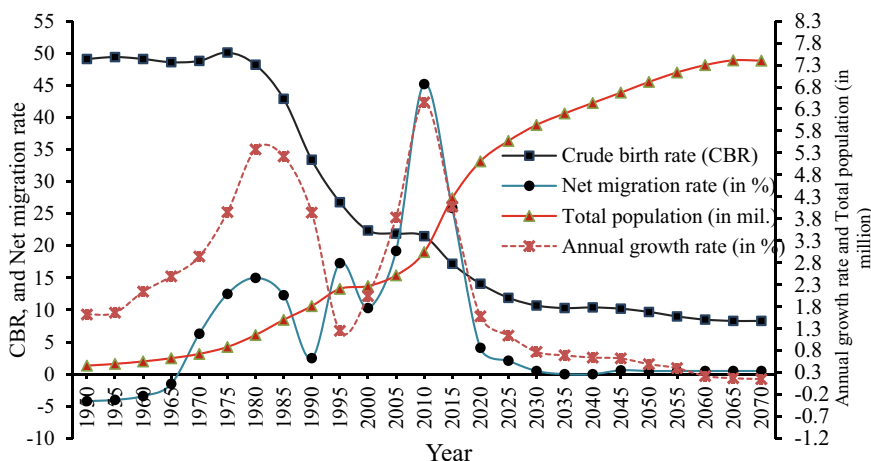


Fig. 1 Trends in total population (in millions), annual population growth rate (in %), crude birth rate (CBR), crude death rate (CDR), and net migration rate: Oman 1950–2070

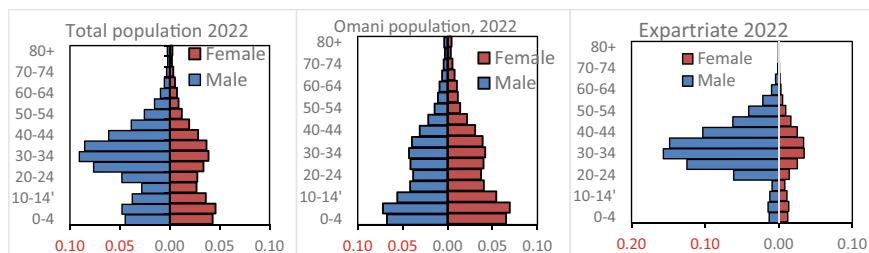


Fig. 2 Population Pyramid of Oman, 2022

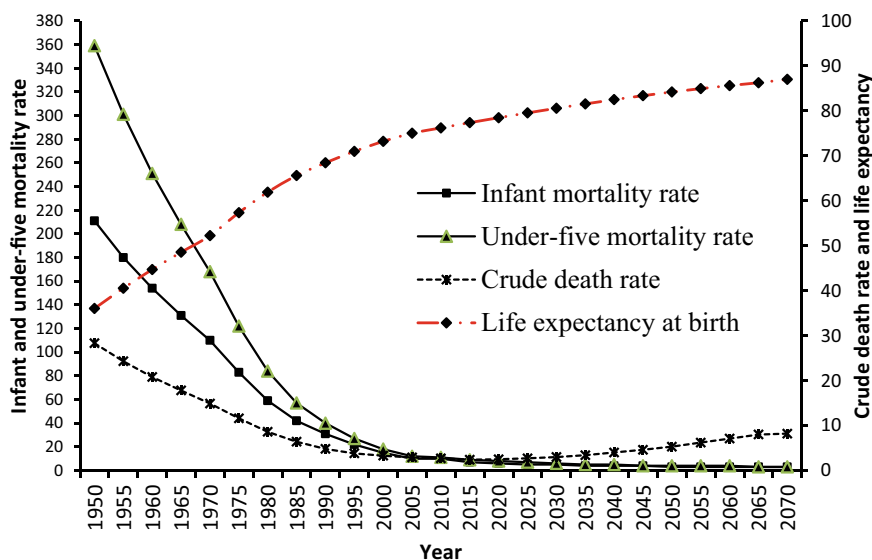


Fig. 3 Infant and under-five mortality rates, crude death rates and life expectancy at birth, Oman 1950–2070

of about 28.0 deaths per 1,000 populations in 1950 (Fig. 3). The projection results, however, indicate a slight increase in CDR after 2020, reaching 8.5 deaths per 1,000 populations in 2070. Like the crude death rate, the infant mortality rate, which was around 211 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1950, declined to about 8 deaths per 1,000 live births by 2020, and the under-five mortality also declined from 359 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1950 to 10 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2020 (Fig. 2), which is comparable to any developed country in the West. UN projections suggest that under-five mortality will further reduce to 3 deaths per 1000 live births in 2030 and then will stabilize. As a result of declining mortality, the life expectancy at birth has increased from a very low average of 36 years in 1950 to 77 years in recent times in Oman (Fig. 3). The projection results indicate a continuous increase in life expectancy, reaching over 80 years in 2030 and a further increase to 86 years in 2070.

4.2 Patterns of Fertility Change in Oman

Figure 4 presents the historical change in fertility and percentage change in fertility in Oman along with the future projections. The analysis is based on data extracted from the 2019 revision of world population prospects by the United Nations (United Nations [UN], 2019). The results indicate that the overall fertility rates in Oman were consistently high at a level of more than 7 children per woman from 1950 to 1970. During that period, the growth rates of fertility were close to zero. The

fertility rate started to increase after 1975 and reached a peak of more than 8 children per woman in 1985 and then started to decline rapidly and reached a level of 3 children per woman in 2005. From 1975 to 1985, there was a positive growth rate in fertility. The rate of fertility decline was highest during the 1995 to 2005 period. The fertility rate stalled in the vicinity of 3.0 children per woman during the period 2005 to 2020 (Fig. 4). According to the UN projection, the fertility rate in Oman will reach to a replacement level of 2.1 children per woman by 2035. Replacement level fertility means the number of children per woman needed in order to maintain current population levels.

The UN's estimates of fertility levels thus far discussed were based on combined fertility rates for both Omani and expatriate women of reproductive age. As the expatriate women are mostly working-class women or family members of migrant workers, they are not a typical or representative group of women of reproductive age, and thus have different fertility patterns than the typical Omani national women. According to the published results of the NCSI, on average, an expatriate woman has one or less birth as opposed to more than three births per Omani woman. As a result, the combined TFR is substantially lower than the TFR for the Omani nationals, and thus could be misleading for policy formulation. It is, therefore, important to analyze the fertility pattern of Omani nationals only.

Table 1 presents the analysis of the levels and trends of fertility for Omani national women, based on data obtained from two national-level surveys conducted in 1988 and 2008, and the published reports (Statistical Yearbook) of NCSI for the years 2010, 2015, and 2020. The survey results revealed that the TFR for Omani women

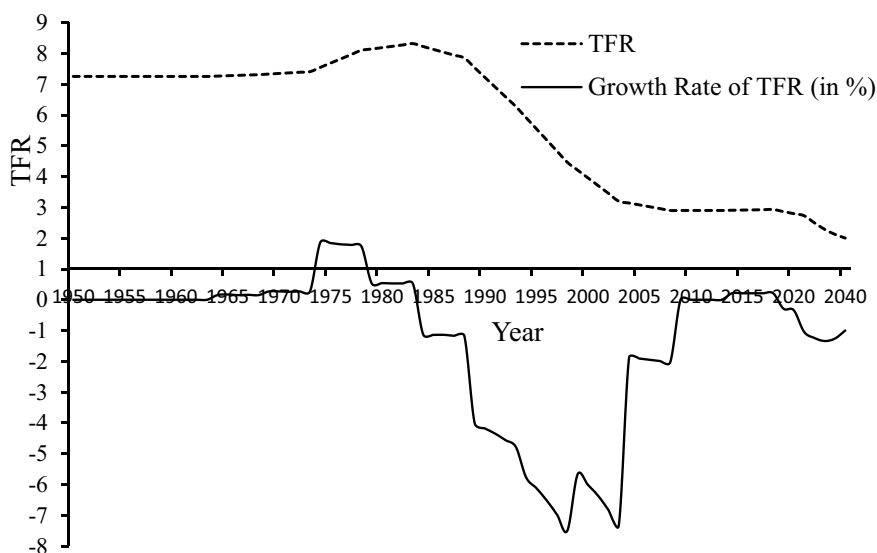


Fig. 4 Historical trends in total fertility rate (TFR) and its growth rate for both Omani nationals and expatriates, 1950–2040

was 8.6 births per woman in 1988, which is close to the natural level of fertility of about nine births among the Hutterites women (Eaton & Mayer, 1953; Henry, 1961). Hutterites are members of Anabaptists living in the northern United States and in Canada, who lead a traditional life without any deliberate birth control, and demographers considered their fertility level as natural level of fertility (Bongaart and Potter, 1983).

The TFR of Omani women declined rapidly from 8.6 births in 1988 to 3.3 births per woman in 2008—a decline of 5.3 births per woman over a short period of 20 years. However, since 2008, the fertility rates of Omani women have been stalled at a level over 3 births per woman, which is evident from the official statistics of the NCSI (Table 1). According to data from the NCSI, the TFRs were 3.7, 4.0, and 3.5 births per woman, respectively, in the years 2010, 2015, and 2020. These results, thus, indicate that the fertility rates had even increased slightly after 2008 among Omani women. It is worth mentioning here that the level of TFR for the total population in Oman (including both Omani nationals and expatriate women) as reported by the international communities such as the UN is lower than the observed TFR for Omani nationals. For example, according to UN data, the overall TFR for Oman is 2.9 births per woman in 2020, while the NCSI data indicates that it is 3.5 births per woman in 2020.

The age-specific fertility rates in Oman indicate that Omani women continue childbearing over a wide age range, with a broad peak extending over the ages 20–39 (Fig. 5). The comparative analysis of the fertility change by age cohorts during the period 1988 to 2008 indicates that fertility has declined consistently in all age groups over the period. The most fertility decline occurred among the women of age 15–29 years. The relative contribution of ASFR to TFR has declined from 35% in 1988 to 15% in 2008 for the women under age 30; while it has increased for the women aged 30 and above over the period (Table 1, Fig. 5). This indicates a shift in the age pattern of fertility toward older age groups in Oman, suggesting a delay in childbearing at younger ages and recovery of childbearing at later ages. After 2008,

Table 1 Age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) per 1,000 Omani women and total fertility rates (TFR) during 1988–2020

Age group	1988 OCHS	2008 ONRHS	% change during 1988–2008	2010 NCSI	2015	2020	% change during 2008–2020
15–19	220	8.2	-96.3	12.3	14.9	7.4	-9.8
20–24	383	88.8	-76.8	112.8	117.6	87.2	-1.8
25–29	382	178.2	-53.4	203.6	218.5	189.9	6.6
30–34	323	190.1	-41.1	201.3	207.8	189.6	-0.3
35–39	251	133.2	-46.9	141.7	157.8	151.6	13.8
40–44	117	46.7	-60.1	58.5	68.4	71.2	52.5
45–49	43	18.1	-57.9	12.6	11.3	9.1	-49.7
TFR	8.6	3.3	-61.6	3.7	4.0	3.5	0.06

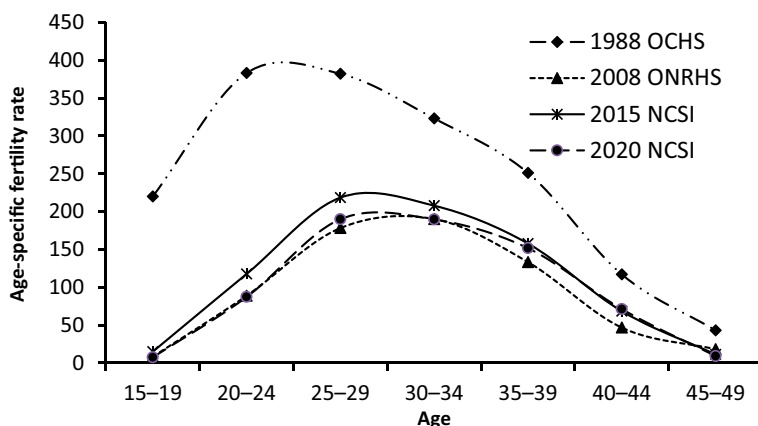


Fig. 5 Age pattern of fertility of Omani women, 1988–2020

the slight increase in fertility is mainly due to an increase in fertility of the women of middle ages, i.e. ages 25–44 years. The stalling or slight rise in TFR between 2008 and 2020 is due to rise in fertility among the women of older age groups, leading to restraining further decline in fertility. If this pattern continues, it would be possible that the TFR will remain the same or even increase in the country.

4.3 Causes of Fertility Decline in Oman: Some Explanations

What causes rapid fertility decline in Oman over the last two decades? Unlike Europe and other developed countries that completed their demographic transition, population control policy or contraception played little role in fertility decline in Oman. Oman's fertility decline occurred mainly due to a wide range of changes in the economic, social, political, and cultural system that played an increasingly important role in shaping the family formation, reproductive behavior, fertility pattern, and demographic transition. Since 1970, the Government of Oman has been implementing many welfare policies, such as universal free education at all levels, free healthcare facilities, birth spacing programs for the improvement of maternal and child health, urbanization, and infrastructure development. Most of the government-provided public services are largely free of charge or are heavily subsidized. This type of welfare state policy may have both positive and negative impacts on the reproductive behavior of the couples in the country. Since the state is bearing the cost of education and health, and providing many other subsidized services including no income tax, Omani couples could feel encouraged to produce more children. Yet the country experienced rapid fertility decline and achieved a low fertility level. The following subsections provide some evidence-based explanations for the rapid fertility decline in Oman.

4.4 Delayed Age at Marriage: A Revolutionary Change

Early and universal marriage and having many children has been a long tradition in the Arab world including Oman (Inhorn, 2018). However, in the midst of social, economic, and cultural transformations, a lot of changes have occurred in the role of women within the family and the family formation system (Rashed et al., 2005). This propound change in marriage in the Arab World has been described by the researchers as the ‘delayed marriage revolution’ (Rashad & Osman, 2003; Tabutin & Schoumaker 2005). In China, Retherford et al. (2005) also observed that about two-fifths of the decline in TFR between 1990 and 2000 was due to delayed age at first marriage.

The tradition of early marriage has been losing its ground gradually in the country. As a result, the mean age at marriage for both male and female are rising in Oman. The mean age at marriage for females, as depicted in Fig. 6, has increased from 19.2 years in 1988 to 26.8 years in 2008, a rise of about 8 years within a 20-year period. The mean age at marriage for males is less variant than females, a rise of 3.5 years, from 25.6 years in 1988 to 29.1 years in 2008.

The rising trends in mean age at marriage of females are also evident from the rising trends in the proportion of singles in the younger age groups (Table 2). During the period of 1988–2008, the overall proportion of single women of reproductive age has increased more than two times, as it has increased from 18% in 1988 to 39% in 2008. Over the period, the proportion of single women in all the younger age groups between ages 15 and 34 years has increased. For example, the proportion of single women in the age group 20–24 has increased from 13% in 1988 to 55% in 2008 (Table 2). However, by age 40, the proportion of single women was about one percent, indicating almost universal marriage in Omani society. Data from the NCSI

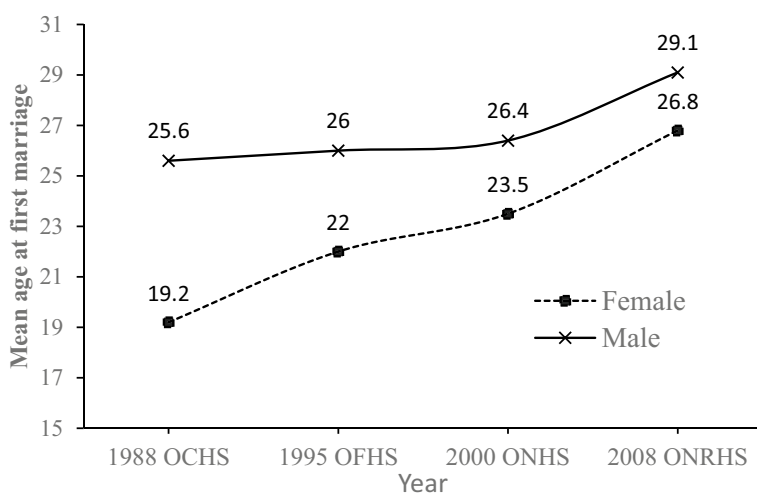


Fig. 6 Trends in mean age at marriage of Omani nationals, 1988–2008

indicate a substantial decline in the marriage rate (i.e. number of marriages per 1000 population). The marriage rate in Oman has declined from 16 per 1000 population in 2005 to 5.7 per 1000 population in 2020, a decline of 64% over the last one and a half decades (Fig. 7) (NCSI, 2023).

The declining trends in the marriage rate and the rising trends in age at marriage of females in Oman are related to the increasing aspiration for higher education and labor force participation of women. On average, the higher a girl is educated, the later she marries. Girls are supposed to enter in marriage market once they finish education. At the same time, education might make females more selective in their partner choice as well as career building, and thus get delayed marriage because it takes time to get a suitable marriage partner and job (Islam, 2017; Rashad & Osman, 2003).

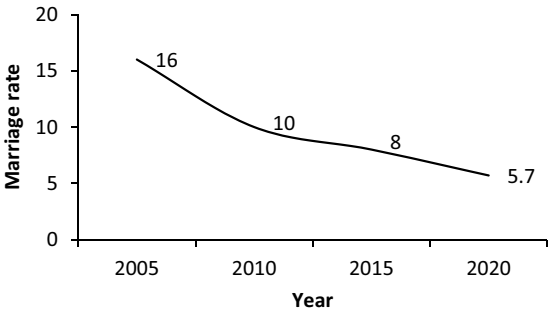
Another important cause of delayed marriage, particularly among boys, is the rising cost of marriage. Among other things, money needs to be saved for the wedding party, dowry, housing, furniture, jewelry, electronic devices (televisions, satellite antennas, refrigerators, etc.), etc. (Puschmann, 2011; Winckler, 1998). Due to the rising cost of all these items, a prospective groom has to wait until he is able to bear all these expenses.

The educational and other socio-economic development in Oman brought many changes in the life course of Omani women. Females today enjoy a prolonged period of single life in their family of orientation. This extended period of life as a single opens up new opportunities, as is proven by the fact that more and more girls go to

Table 2 Proportion of single Omani female population by age and survey years, 1988–2008

Age group	1988 OCHS	1995 OFHS	2000 ONHS	2008 ONRHS
15–19	62.8	84.5	92	94
20–24	12.9	38.7	53.1	55.2
25–29	5.9	9.7	18.8	20
30–34	2.7	2.5	5.1	6.2
35–39	1.4	0.7	2.3	2
Mean age at marriage	19.2	22	23.5	26.8

Fig. 7 Marriage rate (number of marriages per 1000 population) among Omani nationals, 2005–2020



school, study, and participate in the labor market. As women are making progress outside the household, their position is also strengthening within the household decision-making. Women can also spend more time on non-reproductive-related activities. The trend from less reproductive to more non-reproductive tasks has positive effects on the health and well-being of women. Because of delayed and reduced fertility, maternal mortality is, for example, decreasing.

4.5 Birth Spacing Program—a Proxy Family Planning Program

Until the beginning of the 1990s, the government of Oman was not concerned about the population size and growth as the population size was small (less than 2 million, including expatriates), compared to the land size and resources of the country. Thus the Omani government was in favor of maintaining the population growth due to over-reliance on foreign workers in their rapidly modernizing country (Drysdale, 2010). However, the high rate of population growth, large family size, and relatively poor maternal and child health status as observed in the first population and housing census of 1993 in Oman prompted the government to take some measures to slow down the population growth. The government felt the need of a population policy: slow down the rapid population growth and improve maternal and child health. In this regard, the most widely used viable option was the introduction of a family planning program. However, it was a sensitive issue in terms of religion and Omani culture. Thus, to get wider acceptability and easy implementation among the public, the government introduced a program called ‘Birth Spacing Program’—a proxy family planning program, just to avoid cultural and religious sensitivity attached with the term ‘family planning’ (Drysdale, 2010). In 1994, with the directive of the His Majesty, the then Sultan of Oman, the Ministry of Health (MoH) introduced the birth spacing program by integrating the contraceptive use counseling and supply of methods of contraception with the healthcare services. It was a major and bold shift in government policy. The primary objectives of the birth spacing program are: to improve the health of Omani women and children by reducing high-risk pregnancies and reasonable spacing between births, and to aware women with the means to regulate their fertility safely and effectively with modern contraceptives, and conceiving when they desired (Al Rawahi and Sharts-Hopko 2002). The ultimate goal of birth spacing is to reduce fertility in a way that is culturally acceptable by promoting healthier families (Drysdale, 2010).

The program provides information, education, and counseling about contraceptive methods through different health outlets and distributes contraceptive methods to couples free of cost. Contraceptive methods were also made available through commercial outlets such as pharmacies and social marketing. Within a very short time, the program proved to be very useful and effective, which was evident from changing birth intervals and an increase in contraceptive use. Since the introduction

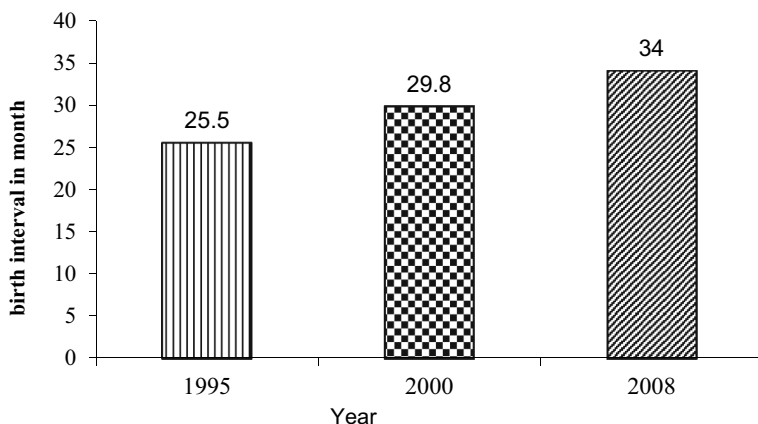


Fig. 8 Trends in birth interval of Omani women, 1995–2008

of the birth spacing program in 1994, the average birth interval showed an increasing trend. For example, the average birth interval has increased from 25.5 months in 1995 to 34 months in 2008 (Fig. 8).

Birth spacing program is playing a positive role in the contraceptive use rate in Oman. The contraceptive prevalence rate has increased substantially, from 8.6% in 1988 to 23.8% in 1995, an increase of three-fold. The rate further increased to 31.7% in 2000, but after that slightly declined to 24.4% in 2008. The 2014 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in Oman also reported a low rate of contraceptive use of 29.7% in 2014, which was also lower than that observed in 2000 (NCSI and UNICEF, 2016). The recent decline in CPR, however, does not match with the rapid decline of fertility in Oman (Fig. 9).

One of the characteristic features of contraceptive use in Oman is that the large proportion of contraceptive use rate is due to traditional methods. According to the 2008 ONRHS, nearly one-fourth (24.4%) of the currently married women were using some form of family planning methods; 15.3% being modern methods; and 9.1% traditional methods (Table 3). Modern methods account for 62.7% of the total use, while traditional methods account for 37.3% of the total use in 2008. A similar pattern of use of modern and traditional methods was observed in 2014 also. The substantial contribution of traditional methods to overall CPR deserves special attention by the health program managers.

4.6 Culture of Prolonged Breastfeeding and Post-Partum Infecundability

In their aggregate fertility model framework, Bonggarts and Potter (1983) demonstrated that, in addition to marriage, contraception, and induced abortion, the period

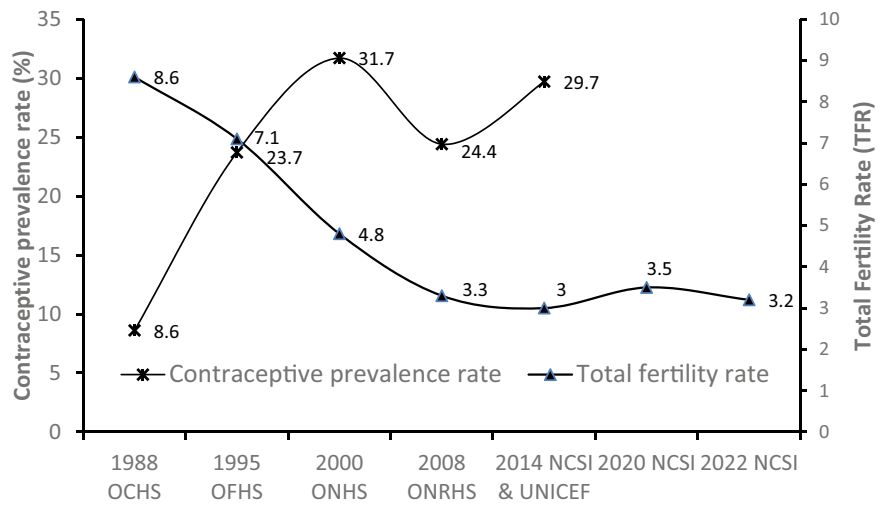


Fig. 9 Total fertility rates (TFRs) and contraceptive prevalence rates (CPRs) among married Omani women, 1988–2022

Table 3 Contraceptive use rate of any method, modern method, and traditional methods among the married Omani women, according to different national-level survey dates, 1988–2008

Methods	1988 OCHS	1995 OFHS	2000 ONHS	2008 ONRHS	2014 NCSI & UNICEF	
Any method	8.6	23.7	31.7	24.4	29.7	
Any modern method	7.5	18.1	24.6	15.3	18.8	
Any traditional method	1.1	5.6	7.1	9.1	10.9	

of lactational infecundability is a major determinant of fertility. Bongaarts and Potter termed these four factors as the major ‘proximate determinants’, because these factors affect fertility directly and all other social, economic, and environmental factors affect fertility through these four factors. Duration of the period of post-partum infecundability is associated with the duration of breastfeeding. It is well documented that breastfeeding is not only beneficial for children’s and mothers’ health but also provides natural contraception through lengthening the postpartum amenorrhea period and thus increasing the length of birth intervals. Survey results in Oman indicate almost universal breastfeeding in the country as more than 95% of the children born during five years preceding the survey were breastfed and the average duration of breastfeeding was about one and a half years (Sulaiman et al., 1992). This is true irrespective of the level of education and place of residence.

Direct estimates of the duration of postpartum infecundability can be obtained through survey data, which was lacking in all the surveys in Oman. However, in the

Table 4 Average duration of breastfeeding and the corresponding estimated duration of postpartum infecundability over the period 1988–2008

Year	Duration of breastfeeding (in months)	Duration of postpartum infecundability
1988	15.9	10.05
1995	19.1	12.74
2000	17.4	11.29
2008	20.7	14.14

absence of a direct estimate of postpartum infecundability, it can be obtained from the duration of breastfeeding by using the fitted model as suggested by Bongaarts and Potter (1983). The model is given by.

$$i = 1.753e^{0.1396 \times B - 0.001872 \times B^2}, \quad R^2 = 0.96.....(1).$$

where, *i* is the average duration of postpartum infecundability and B is the average duration of breastfeeding. In this study, the above-fitted model is used for estimating the duration of postpartum infecundability in Oman for the observed duration of breastfeeding.

Table 4 shows the observed duration of breastfeeding and the corresponding estimated duration of postpartum amenorrhea based on the four national-level surveys conducted during the period 1988 to 2008. The duration of postpartum amenorrhea was estimated using the fitted model (Eq. 1) proposed by Bongaarts and Potter (1983). There was an increasing trend in both the duration of breastfeeding and the postpartum ammenhorea over the period 1988–2008. The duration of breastfeeding has increased from 16 months in 1988 to 21 months in 2008, and the corresponding duration of postpartum ammenhorea has increased from 10 months in 1988 to 14 months in 2008. The increase in the duration of breastfeeding in Oman is consistent with the current health policy and birth spacing program in promoting prolonged breastfeeding in the community. In a recent study, while analyzing the role of the four major proximate determinants of fertility in rapid fertility decline in Oman, Islam (2017) observed that postpartum infecundability emerged as the second-highest fertility-reducing factor in Oman in 2008, inhibiting 39% of the natural fertility.

4.7 Women’s Educational Attainment

Since the initiative of the modernization in the 1970s, the government of Oman has put much emphasis on the expansion of education to both males and females, providing free education at all levels. Within a short period of three decades, Oman succeeded in expanding education by attaining almost 100% enrollment rate in primary school and literacy rate over 90% (NCSI 2021). The share of female school students has increased from 13% in 1972 to more than 50% in recent times, indicating that the gender gap in literacy rates has almost disappeared and at universities, females are already better represented than males.

Table 5 Trends in educational development among ever-married Omani women according to the national-level surveys, 1988–2008

Year	No education	Primary	Secondary & above
1988 OCHS	68	19	13.2
1995 OFHS	49.7	26.9	23.4
2000 ONHS	31.4	38.3	30.3
2008 ONRHS	17	31.3	51.7
2014 MICS	9.9	23.8	66.3

Significant progress in educational attainment among the ever-married women of reproductive age has also been achieved in Oman. Data from the national-level survey as presented in Table 5 indicate that during the 1980s more than one-third (68%) of the ever-married women of reproductive age had no formal education, which reduced to 10% in 2014. The percentage of the ever-married women with at least a preparatory level of education has also increased from 13% in 1988 to 66% in 2014. The appreciable expansion of education among females not only increased the social status of women but control over their own reproductive lives (Al-Riyami & Afifi, 2003). The educational attainment of females might have a major impact on the rising age at marriage, increase in contraceptive use and birth spacing and stopping, which ultimately reduce the fertility level. It can be seen from Fig. 9 that there is a strong negative relationship between the level of education and the level of fertility. For example, the 2008 Oman National Reproductive Health Survey (ONRHS) results indicate significantly higher TFR for women with no education (4.9 births per woman) compared to women with more than primary education (2.9 births per woman). Women with no education had on average more than nine births in their lifetime compared to 6 births per woman with more than primary education (Fig. 10).

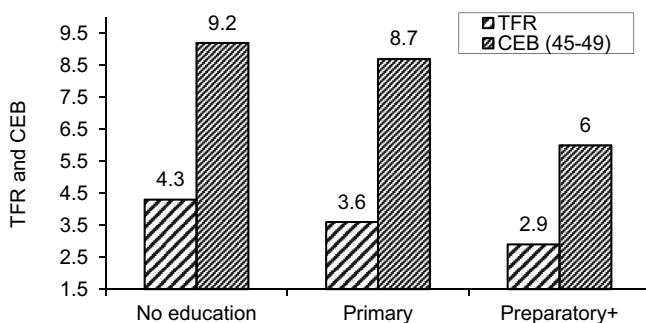


Fig. 10 Total fertility rate (TFR) and completed fertility (children ever born (CEB)) of women aged 45–49 years. *Source* 2008 Oman National Reproductive Health Survey (ONRHS)

4.8 Improved Survival of Children Help Decline Fertility

According to the classic demographic transition theory that mortality decline, especially childhood mortality, preceded fertility decline. The possible mechanisms through which improved child survival help reduce fertility can be attributed to biological effects, replacement effects, and insurance effects (Preston, 1978; Richter & Adlakha, 1989). The biological effect mainly operates through increasing birth interval if child survival improved. The replacement effect operates through controlling family size because couples usually continue childbearing to replace the child they lost due to high childhood mortality. The insurance effect is the expectation of couples that their desired number of children will survive.

Oman has experienced a rapid decline in infant and child mortality since 1970. The infant mortality rate, which was around 118 per 1,000 live births in 1970, declined to about 8 per 1,000 live births by 2020, a decline of 93% over the last 55 years. Under-five mortality also declined from 181 per 1,000 live births to 9 per 1,000 live births in 2020, a decline of 95% over the last 55 years. The decline in childhood mortality in Oman contributed significantly to the decline in overall mortality rates and to an improvement in life expectancy at birth, which increased from a very low average of 49 years in 1970 to 76 years in 2020 in Oman (Fig. 3). This indicates that Oman has exceeded the world's current average life expectancy of 72 years. The improvement in child survival and overall reduction of mortality in Oman can be attributed to a rapid increase in the availability of and access to quality healthcare services and improvement in socio-economic conditions and quality of life. As a result couples in Oman increasingly felt secure with a lower number of births.

4.9 Fertility Decline Amid High Desired Family Size: A Paradox

Pritchett (1994) in his classical study has shown that there is a strong relationship between actual fertility and fertility desire and argued that fertility desire plays the main role in decreasing fertility. So, the policies that improve the socio-economic conditions and reduce the demand for children are the most important and sustainable ways to reduce fertility. Ideal family size is an indicator of fertility preference. To understand the relationship between fertility level and desired family size, we analyzed the fertility desire of Omani women using available four national-level surveys during the period 1988 to 2008. Data on desired (ideal) family size in the surveys were collected by asking the ever-married respondents about the number of children they would choose to have if they could start their reproductive life again, irrespective of whether they can accomplish it, and irrespective of the number of children she already has.

Table 6 summarizes the results by presenting the distribution of ever-married women according to their perceived ideal number of children as well as the mean

Table 6 Desired (Ideal) number of children by national-level survey dates, 1995–2008

	1995 OFHS	2000 ONHS	2008 ONRHS
Mean desired (ideal) no. of children	6.4	5.5	6.0
Desired no. of children (%)			
1	0.6	0.2	1.6
2	4.3	3.7	3.5
3	4.8	3.6	3.7
4	15.7	27.1	17.1
5 +	60.6	52.4	51
Non-numeric	13.9	12.9	23.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

ideal number of children. On average, Omani women perceive to have six children in their lifetime. More than half of Omani women reported five or more children as an ideal number of children. Over the period, the desired family size remains almost unchanged in the vicinity of six children, despite the fact that their actual fertility level (measured by TFR) declined substantially. Thus, the paradox lies in the fact that contrary to the classical theory of ‘lower the desire, lower the fertility’, couples in Oman are having actually fewer children than they would like to have (i.e. higher the desire, lower the fertility). Couples want to have children, but can’t make it work given the economic, social, and relational conditions facing them. It is interesting to note that a substantial proportion of women (14–23%) provided a non-numeric response (say Allah knows) about their preference for an ideal number of children. This may be attributed to the dominant culture of Arab peoples to rely on God or total submission to God in case of any unforeseen matter. The abstract nature of the question which may provoke verbal or non-numeric answers also cannot be ruled out.

5 Age Structural Transition in Oman

Demographic transition leads to many changes in the age structure of a population which is called age structural transition (AST). Change in age structure can efficiently be depicted graphically by the ‘population pyramids’ or ‘age-sex pyramid’. The reduction in the mortality as well as fertility rates and increase in net migration caused a rapid transformation in the age structure between 1980 and 2015. During this period, the proportions of population under age 20 years showed gradual declining trends, while the proportions of population of age 20 years and above showed increasing trends. The proportion of children under age five decreased from over 20% in 1980 to about 10% in 2015 due to fall in fertility rate, which is reflected in the narrowed base of the pyramid in 2015. Similar pattern of reduction in the proportion of population

has been observed in all other age groups under age 20 years during this period (Fig. 11). After 1980, the age structure of the population of Oman started to lose its regular pyramid shape due to a huge increase in working age population of age 20–39 years of age.

The projection results indicate that the intensity of the change in age structure will further increase in the next five decades from 2020 to 2070. During this period the base of the population pyramid will be slimming both in relative terms and in absolute numbers. As a result, the age structure will emerge as a beehive or barrel shape. Such a pyramid is typical of a population having low birth and death rates and a large proportion of the population surviving to working age and older ages.

The results indicate that since 1950 to 1990, more than 40% of the total population was children under the age of 15 years. Due to decline in fertility in the late 1980s and onward, the relative share of the population of age less than 15 years began to decline, and it has declined from 45.3% in 1990 to 22.0% in 2015. The proportionate

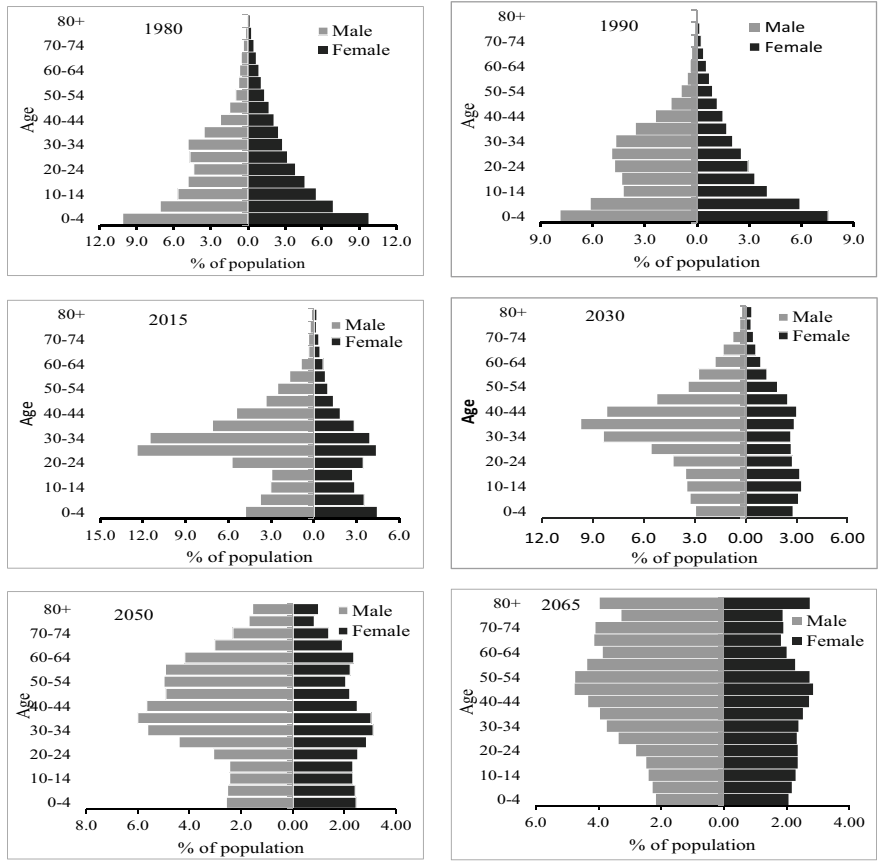


Fig. 11 Population pyramid of Oman, 1950–2065

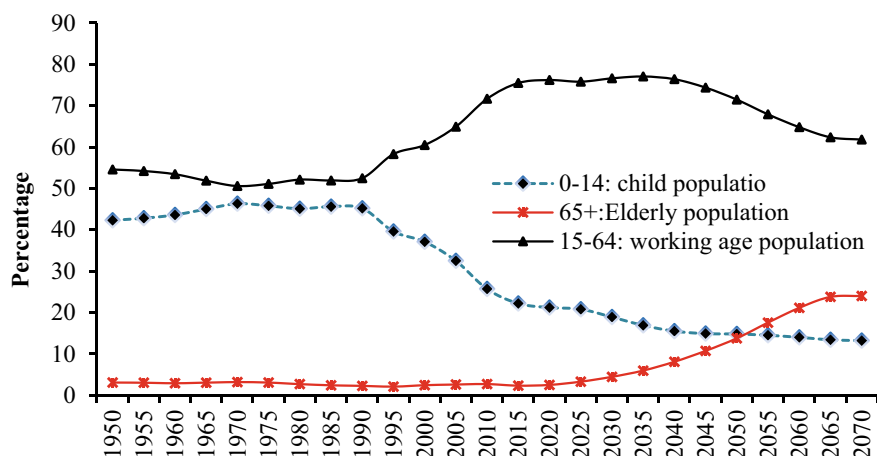


Fig. 12 Age structural transition in Oman 1950–2070

share of the child population is expected to continue to declining further to reach to 15% by 2065 (Fig. 12). The relative share of prime working age population of age 25–49 years has increased from 24.0% in 1970 to more than 50% in 2000 and will reach to a peak of 56% in 2020, but will gradually decline to about 30% in 2065 (Fig. 12). However, the absolute size of the prime working age population will continue to increase until 2065.

The proportional share of elderly population has been observed to be in the vicinity of 3% during the period 1950–2015 and it is expected to continue until 2025. However, after 2025 it will start increasing very fast. The proportion of the old age population will rise from 4.4% in 2030 to almost 22% in 2065.

6 Discussion

Fertility in Oman has declined from a natural level of nearly 9 births per woman in the late 1980s to a control level fertility of slightly more than 3 births per woman in the early 2000s—a decline of more than 5 births per woman over a period of about two decades. This is one of the steepest fertility declines within a short period of three decades in the history of fertility reduction. The fertility change in Oman is comparable with the fertility change in Iran, another contemporary traditional Muslim country has also experienced a similar rapid fertility decline from 7.0 births per woman in 1986 to 2 births per woman in 2000 (Erfani and McQuilan 2008). But the characteristics of the fertility change in these two countries are quite different. Fertility declines in Iran, like in Europe and other low fertility countries, were mainly through a well-organized birth control program (i.e. family planning program), leading to a high rate of use of modern contraceptive methods and reduced

family size norm. On the contrary, fertility decline in Oman has occurred in the absence of any birth control program as well as in the midst of a low rate of contraceptive use, and a high rate of desired family size. High rate of contraceptive use was the norm for fertility reduction in industrialized societies including Iran (e.g. more than 70% of currently married women are using family planning methods in Iran), whereas in Oman, it is about 30% and recent national-level surveys show that the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) slightly declined in recent time than observed in 2008. This implies that the TFR-CPR relationship in Oman seems to be inconsistent and does not conform to the international pattern that there is a strong negative correlation between CPR and TFR. Unlike developed countries, Oman's fertility decline has been intertwined with a wide range of social, economic, political, and cultural changes that have played an increasingly important role in family formation, reproductive behavior, and demographic transition (Islam, 2020).

Delaying marriage to a higher age and consequently delayed childbearing appeared as the most important factor for the recent reduction in fertility in Oman. With socio-economic development and women's emancipation from the traditional roles as wives and mothers, women are pursuing more education and seeking careers, which delay their entry into marriage. As reported by the NCSI the marriage rate in Oman has declined substantially over the years, from 16% in 2005 to 5.7% in 2020. As childbearing outside wedlock is non-existent in Oman and women have a limited reproductive span between ages 15 and 49 years, the postponement of early marriage decreases the proportion of married women of prime childbearing age, resulting in a delay in childbearing and a decline in fertility level. In recent decades, fertility decline in most Asian countries has also been attributed due to delayed onset of marriage and childbearing (Frejka et al., 2010; Jiang et al., 2019; Tsuya et al., 2012).

The national-level survey data indicate that there has been a considerable rise in the proportion of single and a fall in the proportion of currently married women at early ages. This leads to an increase in the mean age at marriage for females from 19 years in 1988 to 27 years in 2008. The rising trends in delayed age at marriage combined with limited use of traditional and modern contraceptive methods by the Omani couples help reduce fertility in Oman.

Another instrumental factor for fertility reduction in Oman is its unique birth spacing program—an integral component of the healthcare program. Although there is no official population control policy or family planning program in Oman, since 1994 the country is implementing a birth spacing program. The birth spacing program in Oman may be considered as a proxy family planning program because it has similar objectives to the family planning program. Like the family planning program, the birth spacing program in Oman provides counseling for reasonable spacing between births, avoiding high-risk pregnancy through effective use of modern family planning methods, and conceiving when couples desire and thus helps reduce fertility. To promote wider acceptance and easier implementation of family planning activities, the program refers to birth spacing to avoid cultural and religious sensitivity attached to the term 'family planning'. The program succeeded in raising the use of contraceptive methods among the couples in Oman at the initial stage and in increasing the inter-birth intervals in Oman since the inception of the program.

The analysis of the role of direct proximate determinants of fertility in rapid fertility decline in Oman by Islam (2017) suggests that marriage pattern has emerged as the most prominent inhibitor of fertility in Oman, with postpartum infecundability as the second most important fertility inhibitor and contraception as the third. It has been observed that the marriage pattern alone is responsible for more than half (58%) of the total reduction in fertility during 1988–2008, followed by 25% by contraception and 21% by postpartum infecundability.

Though contraception shows low prevalence with relatively lower fertility-reducing effects than marriage patterns, its effect on fertility reduction cannot be ignored. The prevailing contraceptive method mix is also quite effective. A substantial proportion of women are using highly effective semi-permanent methods, such as IUD and injectable, and permanent methods such as female sterilization. According to the 2008 ONRHS, female sterilization accounts for 23% of the modern methods, while IUD and injectable constitute 23% and 16% of the modern methods, respectively (Islam, 2017). This indicates that a substantial proportion of users are using family planning methods, not only to space but also to limit fertility.

It is worth mentioning here that although the increasing trends of delayed marriage appeared as the most important proximate determinants of fertility reduction in Oman, the prevailing culture and social norms of universal marriage in Oman are unlikely to permit a life-long single and delay the age at marriage beyond a certain age. Thus the future prospect of a further increase in fertility inhibiting effects of marriage is not bright. On the other hand, the prevailing prolonged duration of breastfeeding and its consequential effect on the duration of postpartum infecundability is also likely to be decreased in the future due to the modernization effect. Under such circumstances, the future fertility trends in Oman will largely depend on the use-effectiveness of contraception.

The government of Oman, aided by the oil export revenues, is implementing various economic and social development programs. The peace and political stability that has been established in Oman over the past 50 years have enabled the authorities to design and implement a successful and wide-ranging modernization program that influenced all aspects of the life of the Omani people. The government of Oman has also intensified the expansion of education, particularly among the females. Over the period the expansion of education among females is remarkable and girls in Oman are better represented than males in the higher educational institutes, and are outperforming boys (Islam, 2014). Educational expansion among females created a revolutionary change in nuptiality and the life course of women in Oman. Instead of engaging them in early childbearing and family formation, today females are enjoying a prolonged period of single life in their families, increasingly taking part in the paid labor force in all public and private sectors (Chatty, 2002), and establishing more control over their own reproductive lives. All these positive changes in the society and women's life impacted on fertility change in Oman.

Demographic transition has created many changes in the age structure of the population in Oman. The size and relative share of the child population under age 15 is declining. On the other hand, the size and share of the population of youth (age 15–24), prime working age (25–49), and mature working age (50–64) is increasing.

As a result, there is a declining trend in the dependency ratio in Oman, which is very important for its economic development process. The current and future decline in the dependency ratios would increase the working age population and their participation in labor force in Oman. The increased participation of people in the labor force leads directly to increased saving at the household and macro levels, and the saved resources can be diverted to productive sectors. It brings opportunities for families to invest more on education, nutrition, and health of their children, which in turn enhance the quality of human capital in the country. The increased employment also leads to numerous indirect benefits, such as increase in savings and investment, infrastructure development, and institution building (Pool, 2007; Mason, 2007; Bloom et al., 2003). There is increasing evidence that improvements in early childhood health and nutrition lead to improved educational outcomes and labor market productivity (Canning, 2011).

Demographic transition in Oman would also enhance women's participation in labor force, as family size becoming smaller due to reduction in fertility. There is also emerging evidence of causal effects of reduction in fertility on investments in children (Schultz, 2009). During the period of window of opportunity, the size and share of the female labor force also increases. Demographic transition does not only affect the family size but also the reproductive life span of women and their social status. It reduces the number of children per woman, increases her reproduction free life, and provides opportunity to improve her level of education. As a result, more women become able and often more willing to participate in the workforce for cash earning, and are more likely to invest additional income to education and health of their children. Oman has already been receiving economic benefits by employing large number of female workers in different non-manufacturing public sectors. Oman would likely to have added demographic dividend by creating employment for women, and increasing female labor force participation rate in both service and manufacturing sectors.

Oman has been experiencing a period of youth bulge over the years and it is expected to continue for at least the next 20 years. The increasing working age population, especially the population of prime age workers (age 25–49) would result in greater capital accumulation, because, according to consumer behavior model, prime-aged workers tend to save more, while younger workers (15 to 24) tend to consume and borrow (Guiso et al., 2002; Milligan, 2005). Prime age workers are also more productive relative to younger workers and thus likely to earn higher incomes (Gomez & deCos, 2008).

The increase in size of working age population opens up both opportunity and many challenges for the country. Challenges are to provide education, training, health care, and housing and create employment opportunities for the increased youth bulge, while opportunity is the positive impact on economy. Oman could be benefited from its rapid growth of workforce by speedy increasing employment opportunities to match the growth in labor supply. Failure to do so will bring many negative consequences like increased unemployment rate, crime rate, and social and political unrest.

Over the period, the size and share of the elderly population would increase in Oman due to demographic transition and increase in life expectancy. As a result, Oman would have to face the challenges of health care, retirement benefits, and social services for a huge number of elderly populations. To meet the challenges, Oman would need to allocate resources to address at least three fundamental needs of the elderly population, which include social security, pension, health, and participation in income generating activities. As this would also be the period of second demographic dividend, policies aimed at providing incentives to save and accumulate wealth during this phase are important components to optimally utilize this opportunity.

7 Conclusion

In summary, what, then, lies behind the sharp fertility decline and, in particular, the changing patterns of fertility over the last two decades? Such a rapid decline in fertility resulted from both structural changes and changes in values and attitudes. For instance, the female literacy rate and education level increased significantly during the decades, which led to an increase in the marriage age and shortened the childbearing period. The increase in women's education raised their public awareness and led to their further participation in various areas of family decision-making, particularly marriage and family formation and mate selection. At the same time, the government's policy toward maternal and child health through the birth spacing programs has provided the necessary family planning services and means for families to meet their demand for small family sizes. This program might have a substantial impact on the reduction of fertility in Oman, which is reflected in increasing inter-birth intervals in Oman since the inception of the program. In addition to the 'birth spacing program', the government of Oman is implementing a variety of development activities, which are affecting fertility levels either directly or indirectly. The development activities include the strengthening healthcare system, promoting public education, particularly for girls, promoting women empowerment and job opportunities, the development of electricity, drinking water, transport, and communication networks in remote areas of Oman contributed to the country's modernization and had an indirect effect on fertility. The findings of this study reveal that since 2008, the TFR among Omani women stalled at a level over three children per woman, which is, by definition, a high fertility rate. The Omani government needs to be aware of the current trends in fertility and its consequences. The government also needs to make the decision whether it will allow the current fertility trend to be continued or opt for an anti-natalist policy.

Demographic transition in Oman has created many important changes in population age structure and opened the window of opportunities for economic development due to rising share of working age population. Policymakers should consider the inter-relationships between population structure and potential opportunities for economic growth and development. In order to reap the benefits of the emerging demographic dividend, Oman has to take necessary steps in a timely manner to address the need of

the growing population. Understanding demographic challenges must therefore be a priority for the government of Oman to formulate policies to harvest the benefits of the demographic windows.

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Chapter 6

Consanguineous Marriage: A Continued Tradition in Contemporary Qatar



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Abstract Despite the rapid development seen in Qatar and other Gulf States, many aspects of social life remain grounded in the longstanding practices of the region. Consanguineous marriage is one such practice, which remains the norm not only in Qatar but throughout the Gulf States. This research explores consanguineous marriage as a social and cultural practice. The ethnographic methods that we employ to answer our study questions help to examine and understand the variables that support the continuity of such marriages. We found that the ongoing adherence of some portion of the Qatari population to the practice of arranged consanguineous marriage is sociologically sensible. Variables such as gender, education level, age, and additional socioeconomic variables help to explain the perseverance of this practice. Endogamous marriage practices remain the norm in Qatar and in all the Gulf States.

Keywords Kinship · Family · Marriage · Marriage selection · Consanguineous · Tribal marriage tradition

1 Introduction

Consanguineous marriages, particularly among first cousins, have been traditionally practiced in many parts of the Middle East and North Africa (Hamamy, 2014). Studies indicate that consanguineous marriage is still prevalent in Arab societies, with rates as high as 80% in certain areas (Oniya et al., 2019). The Omani National Health Survey found that 52% of Omanis marry within the family, with first cousin marriages accounting for 75% of these unions (Islam, 2012). These traditions are sometimes also preserved by emigrants from these regions in their host countries as well (Merten, 2019).

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In much social theory, urbanization is envisioned as a game-changing variable. Once in the urban environment, groups practicing consanguineous marriage—a product of environmental and economic factors endemic to rural regions, assimilate to new social practices and abandon consanguineous marriage. Based on evidence in the Gulf, however, it is clear that these practices remain common in Qatar and other Gulf States despite of the rapid modernization and urbanization. This suggests that urbanization is not a universal indicator of changes to practices like marriage partner selection. There is strong evidence that moving from rural to urban areas does not always lead to changes in kinship ties or the disappearance of extended families, especially in Arab and Islamic societies. Both functional theory and modernization theory suggest that urbanization should affect kinship relations, with factors like expanded housing, increased education, and shifts in the job market. However, this has not always been the case. The key question is whether these changes have altered family structures in the Middle East, and to what extent they have impacted marriage traditions that rely on extended family and kinship ties.

Thus, we hypothesize that members of Qatari society continue to express and practice a demonstrably strong preference for consanguineous marriages. To address this hypothesis, our research investigates the empirical and ethnographic aspects of this practice. Overall, this exploration provides a unique opportunity to address a host of larger academic concerns, particularly regarding the veracity of modernization theory. In other words, the continued presence of traditional marriage practices in Qatari society speaks directly to hybridization arguments that have tempered predominant understandings of modernization such as education, urban living, and the roles of social and cultural change.

The chapter is divided into five main sections, including an introduction and a conclusion. The next section addresses key conceptual issues and offers an overview of the existing literature on the topic. The third section details the methodology and sample characteristics used in the study. The fourth section presents the analysis of the study's results, followed by a section on discussion and conclusion.

2 Theoretical Background

Consanguineous marriage is classified as endogamy, where a person marries within the same group, community, or tribe to which they belong. The difference here lies in that these group members are connected by blood. Hence, “consanguineous marriage is defined as a marriage between two people connected either by kinship, or by the belonging to a certain tribe...” Indeed, exogamous and endogamous rules can coexist in a single society. Customs may universally dictate that an individual marry outside his or her immediate family but may also dictate that she or he select a marriage partner from a particular group (Fox, 1975).

Practices in some societies, such as Arab societies, is that individuals are advised to marry their cousin or a member of the kinship group. This type of marriage is encouraged by several objective factors, the most important of which are perhaps the drive to maintain the family assets and characteristics, its consolidation, and also, in many cases, the desire to preserve its resources (Holy, 1989; Wasilla, 2008).

Consanguineous marriage is considered one of the most preferred marriage patterns in many parts of the world. According to Bittles et.al. (2010), despite the lack of information on consanguineous marriage even in the most densely populated communities, it is possible to divide communities into four main categories: those in which the consanguineous marriage rate is below 1%, those where it is between 1 to 10%, followed by 11% to 50% and then higher than 50%. Many Muslim countries in Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa have witnessed marked demographic changes such as urbanization and improvements in socioeconomic status. However, cultural practices, especially those pertaining to marriage, have remained largely unchanged (Zaidi et al., 2002; Abbasi-Shavazi, 2008; Hennon, 2005; Gunid, 2004).

Furthermore, only a few studies showed changes in the consanguineous marriage preference depending on the education level or age. For example, a study in Kuwaiti society showed that only 20% of undergraduates are opposed to consanguineous marriage and pointed out that such marriage was a widespread phenomenon among their relatives (Salah, 2008). This is also the case in other Arab countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, Libya, and Algeria, and GCC countries too, such as Qatar (Kilshaw et.al, 2015), Saudi Arabia (Alharbi, et.al, 2015), Kuwait (Al- Kandari, & Crews, 2011), and Oman (Islam, 2012).

Marriage selection follows observable patterns for individuals in most societies as they continue to select marriage partners with similar qualities including class, ethnicity, religion, social standing, personality, and so forth (Ross, 1997). There are many categories that affect an individual's decision to marry, however, kinship remains one of the most significantly impactful factors on marital choice in many societies, especially traditional ones (Koc, 2008; Weinreb, 2008; Yagoub, 2018; Abbasi-Shavazi, 2008).

Despite the growing number of people moving to live in cities within contemporary Arab societies, consanguineous marriage is still widespread in these communities. Studies show that this type of marriage is as common in cities as it is in rural areas. This pattern of marriage is estimated to make up 50% of the annual marriages in some Arab countries. The data indicates that urbanization is not enough to change this value system, since consanguineous marriage has gradually gained social legitimacy, and has become a cultural legacy that reflects the Arab family identity. The following section explains this phenomenon and its spread in the region.

This raises the question about the extent to which elements of modernity may influence traditional structures within different cultures. Many studies suggest that the continuation of traditional marriages is carried out as per the parents' choice and controlled by the extended family values, which still apply to and influence the lives of prospective spouses. For example, in Qatar, the latest statistics show the proportional distribution of marriage contracts according to kinship in 2018. The marriage rate between cousins was 42% of the total in 2018, while the percentage of marriages between second cousins was 17% and the percentage of couples who are not relatives was nearly 58% (Planning and Statistics Authority, Marriage and Divorce Statistic, 2018). Given that the consanguineous marriage accounts for a significant portion of

marriages in Qatar today, it is important to study the various dimensions of this issue to better understand how it shapes or is shaped by values, attitudes, and health issues prevailing in Qatari society.

3 Methodology

This study on consanguineous marriage was conducted using a sample of 1041 individuals to explore the foundations of this phenomenon, its consequences, and people's attitudes toward it. The objectives of the study can be summarized as follows:

- Examine the prevalence of consanguineous marriage in the population.
- Understand Qatari attitudes toward consanguineous marriage.
- Explore the reasons for the continued spread of this pattern of marriage.
- Assess the awareness among Qataris about the health effects of consanguineous marriage.

The sample was selected using a simple cluster design based on a random sampling of Qatari men and women. The participants were pulled from residential areas depending on the distribution of the municipalities of the State of Qatar and based on Population Statistics offered by the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics in the State of Qatar. The original size of this research sample was 2185 Qatari men and women. Table 1 shows the quality of the sample response to the researchers, and so, considering the number of completed responses, the margin of error in the sample is ± 3.4 which is an acceptable error rate.

The research team developed a questionnaire to cover all axes of the study, namely: marriage and marital choice, the spread degree of consanguineous marriage among the Qatari population, Qatari positions toward consanguineous marriage, individual health statuses, degrees of awareness regarding the health dangers of consanguineous marriages, and overall attitudes toward this pattern of marriage. The questionnaire was presented to colleagues who are specialists in social survey research to measure the sincerity and reliability of the questionnaire. After considering their views, it was presented to the specialist survey team at the Social and Economic Survey Research

Table 1 Sample responses

Responses	Number
Completed	1,041
Not completed	1,144
Eligible	297
Ineligible	427
Unknown eligibility	420
Raw response rate (<i>RR1</i>)	59%
Adjusted response rate (<i>RR2</i>)	63%

Institute (SESRI) at the University of Qatar, where a group of Institute experts was formed to examine and verify the questionnaire as well as ensure its suitability and validity for application. The questionnaire was then amended based on the team's observations and was tested on a sample of 50 representative units of the sample community to confirm its validity for application. The research instrument received approval from the Qatar University Institutional Review Board QU-IRB 80/11. The study followed scientific research ethics procedures by providing a consent form that was signed by the respondents.

The Institute assembled a team to conduct the interviews and the team members were offered a training course at SESRI in the presence of the research team. The questionnaire was developed based on a computer program as per Blaise's method, and the team used the CAPI method, which is a computer-assisted method for collecting data through personal (face-to-face) interviews and entering the data directly on the computer. All interviews were conducted in Arabic under the direction of a field supervisor who had first visited the families to explain the purpose of the research, record their agreement, and then set a date with them for the interview. Interviews were conducted between January and February 2013. The reliability coefficient value of the questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.864, indicating a high and appropriate reliability of 86%. The validity coefficient of the questionnaire (reliability coefficient square) was 0.743, which is an acceptable value, meaning we are 74% confident in this survey's results; therefore, this allows us to disseminate the results.

4 Results

4.1 *Characteristics of the Sample*

The total number of the sample was 1041; 570 (54.8%) were males and 471 (45.2%) were females. Respondents' ages were between 18 and 73 with an average of 38.59 years, and we noted that more than half the sample (56%) was aged between 18 and 40 years, meaning that the youth category constitutes the majority of the sample. The overall mean of the number of children of our participants is 4, with a standard deviation of 2.66. These means are consistent with the fertility rate among Qatari women, which was measured at 2.9 children in 2017, significantly lower than the 5.8 rate in 1986 (The Authority of Planning and Statistics, 2018). This decrease in fertility in Qatari society indicates that the family size type is shifting from extended family to nuclear family.

The sample distribution as per the marital status of males shows that 67% were currently married (to one wife), while 23% of the sample had not yet married (are single), and a small percentage, not exceeding 3%, had more than one wife. Regarding the fathers of the total participants, the polygamy rate was 7.5%, indicating a decline in polygamy rates between the two generations.

Among our participants, the percentage of those with secondary education was the highest as our data show that 36% of the sample had completed secondary education, 26% had graduated from university, and 12% had completed preparatory educational levels. Additionally, our results show that the rate of illiteracy among females is 9% versus 2% for males. Participants' employment status reflects a paradoxical pattern which is similar to the general societal statistic. Our study found that 80.2% of the males were employed, compared to 35.0% of females. This means that 65% of females were unemployed. Upon the sample classification of monthly income, data show that 63% of the overall employed sample (624 persons) had a monthly income higher than 20,000 QAR, while 30% of them, most of whom were females, had a monthly income of less than 20,000 QAR. As such, the sample mean income was equal to 27,500 QAR per family.

4.2 Consanguineous Marriage Among Respondents

The results show that 46.2% of the respondents were related by blood to their spouse. These results are consistent with the data on the annual marriage contracts in Qatar, confirming that consanguineous marriage is still widespread in the region. This is also in line with Saggar and Bittles' (2008) study, which confirms that modernization in Arab society did not result in fewer consanguineous marriages. Most studies, some of which are older than three decades, show that consanguineous marriages were and still are widespread in societies that observe a tribal structure. These results are in contradiction with Goode's (1963) theory in his book "*World Revolution and Family Patterns*," which proposed that manufacturing and modernization led to the spread of the small nuclear family and the decline in consanguineous marriage rate in communities.

4.3 Most Individuals Are Married to Their Relative

More than a third of the sample 37% stated they were married to a first cousin (sons/daughters of either their uncles or aunts on their fathers' side), while 8% of the sample said they were married to a second cousin (sons/daughters of their fathers' first cousin). This shows a preference to marry on the father's side in particular. Besides, 21% of the sample said they were married to a partner within the same tribe but who was not an immediate relative. The proportion of those married to people from outside their family was only 2%, see Fig. 1. This result aligns with those found by Bener and Hussain (2006) in their study on Qatari society which shows that marriage to first cousins on the father's side was common and that marriage within the same tribe was one of the preferred types of marriages in Qatari society. This highlights the role of the father and its importance in his children's marital choice.

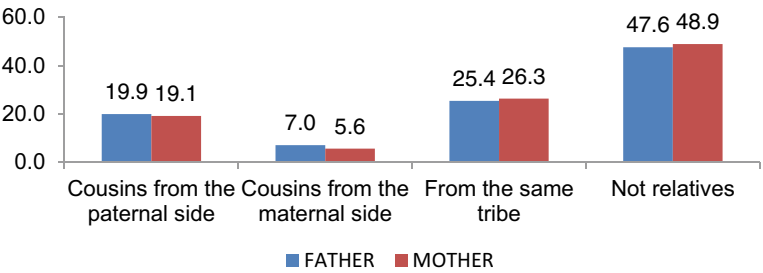


Fig. 1 Marriages of the respondents’ fathers and mothers to relatives

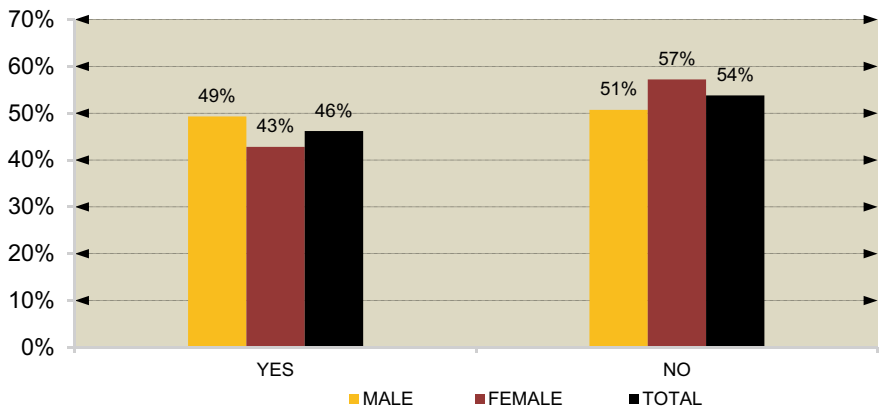


Fig. 2 Distribution of those married to relatives by gender

4.4 Males Are More Likely to Marry Their Female Cousins

Results show that, relatively, males tend to marry a female cousin more than vice versa. Our data reveal that 49% of males and 43% of females are related by blood to their spouse (Fig. 2). This result is contrary to that of Koc’s (2008) study conducted in Turkey where women were more likely than men to marry their cousin.

4.5 Parents and Relatives Are Involved in Their Children’s Marital Choices

In our study, 38% of the respondents chose their own spouse while 23% replied that their marital choice was made by their parents. Furthermore, 14% of the sample reported that the choice was made by their mother and 12% by the entire family. These responses confirm the role family plays in Qatari society and in marriage selection,

particularly. Our study also reveals that the female's role in choosing her spouse is limited compared to that of the male; 22% of females chose their spouse, compared to 52% of males. These findings are in accordance with previous research conducted in 2010 on youth attitudes toward marriage in Qatari society, which showed that 50% of the sample was still subject to arranged marriages and that females are more affected by this (Al-Ghanim, 2010).

4.6 *Qataris Have a Positive Attitude Toward Consanguineous Marriage*

We found that 52% of respondents were in favor of consanguineous marriage, while 47% of the respondents expressed their disapproval of such marriages (Fig. 3). Furthermore, our study suggests that males are more likely than females to support consanguineous marriages where 55% of the males were favorable toward it versus 48% of females. Additionally, more females than males were opposed to it, at a rate of 51% and 43%, respectively. This also aligns with the study by Mahboub et al. (2018) on 680 educated Saudi adults living in Riyadh. Another study showed that there was a significant difference in attitudes between genders, with males having a more positive attitude toward consanguineous marriage compared to females (57.8% vs. 38.0%, p -value = 0.001) in Saudi Arabia (Alharbi, et.al, 2015). It further observed that consanguineous spouses had a more positive attitude toward supporting consanguineous marriages than non-consanguineous spouses (65.8% vs. 30.5%, p -value = 0.001). Respondents with consanguineously married parents had a significantly more positive attitude toward consanguinity compared to non-consanguineous parents (56% vs. 38.1%, p -value = 0.001) (Alharbi, et.al, 2015:12).

The remainder of our study's participants were neither for nor against consanguineous marriage. Thus, overall, a large proportion of Qatari society still supports

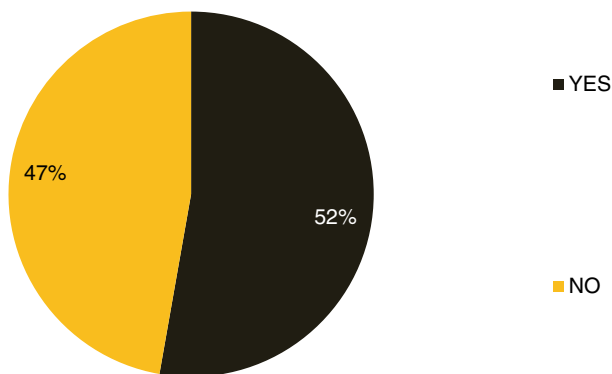


Fig. 3 Support of consanguineous marriage

Table 2 Reasons for supporting consanguineous marriage

Reasons	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
It offers social status for the family	28	22	25
A cousin is more deserving of their cousin than a stranger	23	19	22
It offers me social capital in my society	11	8	10
It offers me social capital in my tribe	13	11	12
It protects the ancestral line of the tribe	21	29	24
Marrying a relative is more comforting	42	61	50
It deepens relationships between relatives	35	33	34
It respects the opinion of my family	10	12	11
Other	6	3	4

consanguineous marriage. These findings are consistent with Sandridge et al. (2009) where, from a sample of 326 Qatari employees, it was found that 35% of married couples were related by birth to their spouse.

4.7 Reasons for Supporting Consanguineous Marriages

Our data reveal that 50% of the respondents who support consanguineous marriage supported it because they consider it to be more comforting to them. Beyond this, 34% reported that they supported it because it deepened the relationship between relatives, 25% thought that it provided a social status for the family, and 24% said they supported it because it protected the ancestral line of the tribe (Table 2). These results are consistent with Bittles' (1994) findings that consanguineous marriage strengthened and ensured social relations, facilitated knowing the partner, simplified the marriage procedures (i.e. the engagement, dowry, etc.) and, most importantly, they maintained the family's wealth. These results are also aligned with those found by Al-Obeidi (1997) and Warsy et al. (2014) about Saudi society as well as Omoush's (2008) study about the UAE. Our research found that respondents favored consanguineous marriage because they believed it strengthened family ties, ensured familiarity with the partner, respected parental wishes, and offered social and economic advantages. Additionally, many saw it as a way to promote more stable marriages.

4.8 Respondents Refused to Marry if Medical Tests Proved the Presence of a Genetic Disease

When the respondents were asked about their reaction in the case of medical tests proving there was a possibility of transmitting a genetic disease to their children,

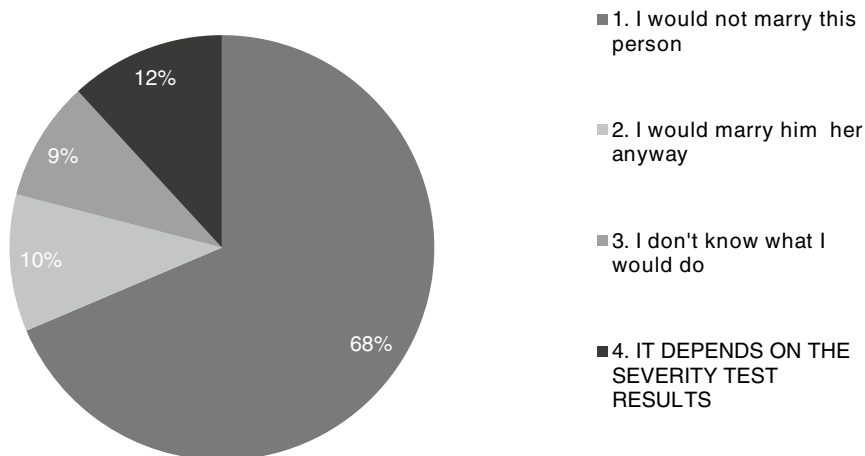


Fig. 4 Hypothetical reactions if the probability of genetic disease was high

68% (i.e. more than two-thirds) of the respondents said that they would not marry the person in the first place while 12% of the respondents said they would base their decision on the severity of the test results and 10% said that they would marry that person anyway (Fig. 4). No differences based on the respondents' gender were noted, which shows that even though Qatari society prefers consanguineous marriage, most of the Qataris would not go through with the marriage if there were logical reasons to not do so.

The study also reveals a positive correlation between the level of education and the opinion of the respondents. The higher the level of education, the more likely the respondent was to decide not to marry the individual. These data had a weak correlation coefficient as per Pearson Spears scale, reaching 728 at a mean indication level of 0.39 degrees.

4.9 Perceptions and Culture Associated with Consanguineous Marriage

This section focuses on identifying the respondents' perceptions about consanguineous marriage. Some statements designed to measure these attitudes were shared with the respondents. They were asked to determine their position regarding these statements according to a five-point Likert scale. The results are as follows:

4.9.1 Consanguineous Marriage is a Comforting Concept for Me

We found that 17% of the respondents strongly agreed with this sentence, 29% agreed with it, 29% did not agree with it, and 10% of the respondents strongly disagreed with it. Thus, our respondents' views were split between those who supported and those who opposed this pattern of marriage was comforting to them. Further, regarding the gender disparity of the answers, we found that 50% of males agreed or strongly agreed with the statement versus 43% of females. Moreover, females disagreed with the sentence more at a rate of 47% while 34% of males disagreed with it. This indicates a trend toward the non-approval of consanguineous marriage that is stronger among females than males.

4.9.2 Consanguineous Marriage Strengthens Offspring

This sentence measured the extent to which the respondents were influenced by the tribal structure based on kinship and lineage. Respondents who agreed were measured at 45% and the overall proportion of those who disagreed was 41%. Results show that the difference in opinion between males and females in this regard was not significant, measuring 46% versus 43%, respectively. Preferences such as marrying first cousins on the father's side emphasize the importance of the idea of continuing the male lineage and the impact it has on marital choices in Qatari society.

4.9.3 The Best Type of Marriage is Between Cousins on the Paternal Side

Data reveal that 44% of respondents preferred marrying a cousin on their paternal side. The overall opposition rate to marrying a family member was 42%. Our results also show a correlation between the education level of the individual and their point of view regarding the statement. The higher the education level, the more negative the attitude. The correlation coefficient was measured at 0.189 degrees with a very high statistical indication of (000). Beyond this, we noted that more females than males prefer to marry cousins on their father's side. This result shows that a broad sector of society still tends to prefer marrying a relative, considering cousins more deserving of each other than strangers.

These results confirm how cultural legacies within Qatari society underline the encouragement and preference for consanguineous marriage. Examples of such cultural legacies include popular, widely known proverbs such as one which states "*halat althawb ruqeatuḥ minh w fih*," which means "a garment is beautiful if the patch was of the same type or similar to it." In this way, marriage would be better between relatives, as they are similar to each other.

4.9.4 Divorce in Consanguineous Marriage Increases Problems Between Relatives

A third of our respondents (33%) believe that divorce in consanguineous marriage increases problems between families to some extent and 23% believe that it increases problems to a very large extent. The results show that the proportion of female respondents who agreed with this statement is higher than males measuring 67% and 49%, respectively. This result aligns with Alchhatne and Banawi's (1996) study on a sample of 4000 university students, both females and males, at the University of Jordan. The study shows that these students considered consanguineous marriage one of the causes of social problems. The same conclusion was reached by Omoush (2008) where 52% of respondents in the UAE said that divorce in consanguineous marriage was more harmful than if it were to happen in a marriage between non-relatives.

4.9.5 Consanguineous May Result in Genetic Diseases

Our data reveal that 70% of respondents either agree or strongly agree that consanguineous marriage may result in genetic diseases in society. This points to a high level of awareness among Qataris of the health risks of consanguineous marriage. Furthermore, females are more aware of the dangers than males, their overall rate of agreement with this statement reached 75% compared to 66% for males. The majority of respondents agreed that early screening for genetic diseases contributes to the reduction of consanguineous marriage. Here, those who agreed made up 83%, 41% of whom strongly agreed with this sentence. It is worth noting that 47% of females strongly agree with it compared to 35% of males. This highlights some awareness among members of society, especially females, of the importance of early screening for genetic diseases.

In summary, the results of this study indicate that consanguineous marriage remains popular among Qataris. Most couples married to relatives have chosen cousins on the paternal side. Our data also indicate that parents play a crucial role in selecting a spouse for their children in contemporary Qatari society. The results show that many females, in particular, believe the husband should be chosen by their parents. On the other hand, while males expressed a desire to choose their own wives, they did not oppose their parents' involvement in the decision.

There are trends in favor of consanguineous marriage in Qatari society and males are more supportive of this marriage pattern. From our interviews, we found that the reasons for Qatari support of consanguineous marriage stem from various reasons, such as it is more comforting for them, it strengthens the relationships between relatives, it strengthens the offspring, and it preserves the continuation of the tribe.

The feeling of belonging to the family impacts peoples' choices to partake in consanguineous marriage, where a preference to marry cousins on the father's side was shown. Here, females were more in favor of marrying their cousins on the father's side than males. Overall, there is an agreement that consanguineous marriage may be a cause of familial problems between members of the group.

This research indicates that there is an awareness of the dangers of consanguineous marriage among the educated respondents with females showing a greater awareness than males. Yet, they did not oppose it. The respondents generally showed a commitment to traditional marriage customs in Qatar.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

Despite the respondents' awareness of the health dangers of consanguineous marriage, their support for this type of marriage emerges from a tribal family structure that influences people's attitudes, thus supporting its continuation. The tribal structure in the Qatari society represents a significant social unit that replaces the idea of "classes" in modern societies. However, its social functions are still effective and influential, especially in determining one's identity and social standing, as well as in its provision of economic support and protection. These elements create the foundation for the high value of consanguineous marriage in Qatari society.

Factors of modernization such as the changing employment and housing patterns, spread and increase of education, increase in the number of qualified and skillful university graduates, the proliferation of the media, and manifestations of cultural friction are all factors that should have led to waves of social change, where the family becomes a vital site to enact and experience such changes. However, in Gulf societies, most of these changes remained at material levels resulting in a reduction of family size, a decrease in fertility rates, a decline in the involvement of the extended family which is thus replaced by the nuclear family, an increase in the standard of living, and an increase in employment rates among women. These changes have been revealed by social and demographic surveys conducted in the Gulf societies.

Rather, it seems that these changes neither affect the nature of family and social relations nor the tribal or clan structure of Qatari society in general. Consanguineous marriage is still widespread and stable, as seen through our data, strengthened by elements such as the persistence of certain values among individuals that preserve the integrity of the family. These values also result in the preference for marriage among paternal cousins and the desire to maintain the social status that is acquired by individuals through their belonging to a particular tribe. In Qatar, the tribe still replaces class and, in addition to other factors (such as comfort from knowing the partner's background and reducing the marriage expenses), gender influences the continuation of the tradition of consanguineous marriage. Here, females are proud to be a part of the tribe's honor and legacy, therefore, it is the priority of the tribe's males to marry the females of the tribe.

The study also reveals that family or clan values continue to strongly influence the current generation's choices, particularly by reinforcing the preference for marrying paternal cousins. Additionally, our study found that factors like age, education, and gender have little impact on those who support consanguineous marriage. This shows that social upbringing plays a major role in encouraging people to accept this type of marriage. These traditions reflect the core structure of society, where consanguineous

marriage is seen as a way to maintain family ties and continue the family line. It also strengthens the role of males, who are often viewed as responsible for carrying on the family lineage and ensuring its continuity across generations.

Our research found that parents play a major role in their children's marriages, whether they are sons or daughters. This influence helps maintain the tradition of arranged marriages, where the elders in the family or kinship group often decide on marriage arrangements for the children. However, in recent years, families have started to listen to their children's opinions more when it comes to choosing a partner. Despite this, many of our respondents shared that parents still put pressure on them, which has led to an increase in early divorces, a trend also supported by official statistics. This parental influence also helps keep consanguineous marriages common, especially since older generations are strong supporters of this practice. Even with many changes in the lives of young people—such as better education, more involvement in the global economy, and greater access to information through modern technology—consanguineous marriages still happen frequently. The older generation's influence and strong family values contribute to the persistence of these marriage patterns, despite the shifting lifestyles of younger generations.

However, our study reveals that despite the high level of support for consanguineous marriage in Qatari society, there is full awareness of the spread of genetic diseases. Therefore, couples to be married are being subjected to screenings aimed at detecting genetic diseases. This level of awareness was indicated when a large proportion of the respondents said that they would not go through with their marriage to a relative if the test results showed that there was a possibility of transmitting a genetic disease to their children. These attitudes show that should scientific evidence prove it is harmful, it is socially acceptable to cancel a consanguineous marriage even though it is the preferred marriage pattern in Qatari society.

Therefore, the study findings show that the practice of marrying relatives is related to many variables other than maintaining the line of genealogical descent. Analysis of the interviews has shown that psychological factors play an important role; the feeling of security provided by entering into a consanguineous marriage and the familiar surroundings it provides are not only social characteristics but also emotional ones. It is a practice that continues despite increasing participation in education, which suggests that education may even enhance support of such marriages while minimizing differences due to age, sex, and education. Thus, consanguineous marriage will likely continue to be widespread among Qatari families for the coming period.

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Chapter 7

Gender Role Belief Predictors of Spousal Distribution of Household Labor in Kuwaiti and Qatari Families



Ziarat Hossain, Fahad Al-Naser, Sadia Shaukat, and Fatima Al-Qubaisi

Abstract This paper examined whether Kuwaiti and Qatari husbands and wives differed in their sex role belief structure regarding the spousal distribution of household labor in the family, and the influence of sex role beliefs on their involvement in six domains of household labor (housework, meal preparation, keeping track of expenses, laundry, shopping, and maintenance). Analyses revealed husbands and wives differed significantly in their sex role beliefs in both countries. Compared to husbands, wives showed stronger personal and cultural sex role beliefs but similar religious beliefs toward the spousal distribution of household labor in Kuwait. In Qatar, wives showed higher personal, cultural, and religious sex role beliefs than husbands did. Personal beliefs positively but religious or cultural beliefs negatively influenced husbands' and wives' involvement in various household labor in both countries.

Keywords Husbands and wives · Household labor · Qatar · Kuwait

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1 Gender Role Belief Predictors of Husbands' and Wives' Involvement in Household Labor in Kuwaiti and Qatari Families

Extant sociocultural and ecological contexts suggest age-old cultural beliefs and sex role practices shape the nature and dimensions of the spousal distribution of household labor in Asian societies including Gulf families in the Arab world. Collectivism, extended networks, family well-being, patriarchy, *adat*, *pativrata*, *filial piety*, and women's self-sacrificing socialization values often ensnare women to do almost all household labor and childcare tasks in Asian families (Hossain & Juhari, 2015; Roopnarine, 2015). Increasing industrialization, evolving commercial economic structures, educational and technological advancement, and social changes have been reimagining the sex role ideologies and interaction dynamics in most Asian societies. Consequently, contemporary Asian women are progressing to a stronger position to renegotiate traditional sex roles in the family (Bulbeck, 2005; Hossain, 2017). Because of robust revenues from the oil and gas industries, socioeconomic changes are more rapid and pronounced in the Gulf countries of the Arab world. These changes including people's strong adherence to cultural and Islamic values have the potential to influence how Arab men and women view the link between cultural and religious factors and their involvement in household labor. Although limited work on the distribution of household labor between husbands and wives has been reported in some Asian communities (Hossain, 2017; Johnson et al., 2016; Oshio et al., 2013), empirical research on sex role in the family and its link to cultural and religious value systems in Gulf families is literally non-existent. The present study was an attempt to investigate the extent to which personal, cultural, and religious values influence husbands' and wives' participation in household labor in two-parent families in two Gulf countries—Qatar and Kuwait.

Due to a lack of prior findings on how personal, religious, and cultural factors influence spousal distribution of household labor in Arab families, introspection of the tenets of theoretical paradigms on sex roles inveigles us to speculate that the micro (personal belief) and macro level (religious and cultural beliefs) factors may help us understand sex role behaviors in contemporary Arab families (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Arabs value collective well-being and invest in protecting family honor and the interests of family members and extended kin. Although an interdependent relationship is a basic framework for family functions, both patriarchy and gender hierarchy often relieve men from doing household labor such as cleaning and cooking. Both the urbanization and westernization processes have been shaping the indigenously practiced Arab customs and norms of sex role for the past several decades. We speculate such a change in sex relations may have implications for how husbands and wives perceive their involvement in household labor in contemporary Arab families.

Grasping the notions and the traditions of spousal distribution of household labor is important as it has relational and developmental implications for family members.

Findings from British samples revealed an increased intellectual competence in children when their fathers took part in household labor (Flouri, 2005). Married men's less involvement in household labor decreased their wives' marital satisfaction in Japanese, Chinese, and Korean families (Oshio et al., 2013). Likewise, research on Western families reported mothers' positive marital relationships (Baxter et al., 2008; Stanik & Bryant, 2012) and less depression and more personal worth when their husbands participated in household labor (Coltrane, 2000). Furthermore, men's egalitarian belief toward sex relations positively influences their involvement in household labor in the family (van de Vijver, 2007; Xu & Lai, 2004). Because we need empirical data on the spousal distribution of household labor in Arab families, the current study is designed to underscore how personal, cultural, and religious parameters influence husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor in contemporary Gulf families.

2 Literature Review

Most data on the division of household labor derives from Western families and the findings revealed that wives spent more time in domestic labor including childcare than their counterparts did across cultural groups (Guppy et al., 2019; Roopnarine & Yildirim, 2019). Although some reports suggested that Western spouses shared family chores (Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006), the division of household labor largely remained divided along the gender line. Broadly, wives performed about 65% of household chores and 80% of routine tasks (e.g., cleaning, laundry) in contemporary Western families (Young et al., 2015). Findings from other international families suggested although German couples jointly spent more time than Israeli couples (27 vs. 23 h per week) in household labor, Israeli couples were more egalitarian than couples in German households (Lewin-Epstein et al., 2006). However, husbands in both Israeli and German families were found to spend 36% as much time as wives did in household labor.

Available empirical research on the spousal division of household labor in Asian families was primarily concentrated in Southeast, the Far East, and South Asian families (Abu Bakar & Hashim, 1984; Al-Ghanim & Badahdah, 2017; Anser, 2013; Arnold & Kuo, 1984; Lu et al., 2000; Hossain, 2018; Jesmin & Seward, 2011; Kulik, 2007; Noor, 1999; Oshio et al., 2013; Thambian & Talib, 1999; Xu et al., 2004). Using samples from China, Malaysia, Japan, Bangladesh, and South Korea, these studies documented that compared to wives, husbands spent more time buying food, preparing food, and washing/ironing clothes. Findings from these studies suggested that husbands spent about 35–70% as much time as wives did in major household labor in various Asian societies. In particular, Lu and associates (2000) reported whereas urban Chinese husbands spent 34.63 h less time than their wives did each week (18.11 vs. 52.74 h), rural husbands spent 40.36 h less time than their wives did each week (12.15 vs. 52.51 h) in buying food, preparing food, and washing/ironing clothes including childcare. Findings from a multinational study on Southeast Asian families suggested Chinese couples favored an egalitarian division of household

labor, Japanese couples supported traditional specialization, and Korean couples were in transition to negotiate wives' roles in both paid and household labor (Oshio et al., 2013). Although educated urban husbands in South Asia (e.g., Bangladesh) expressed an egalitarian attitude toward sex roles (Jesmin & Seward, 2011), urban husbands actually spent only 35 percent as much time as wives did in major household tasks such as cleaning, preparing meals, caring for children, and maintenance (Hossain, 2018). This latter study also reported that the differentiation in time engagement between wives and husbands was higher in urban families when compared to rural families in Bangladesh.

Findings from a Malay-Chinese combined sample of professionals showed husbands spent 29 percent (3.32 vs. 4.67 h per day) less time than wives did in household labor in urban families in Malaysia (Noor, 1999). Reports from another study on low-income urban Malay-Chinese-Indian families suggested Malay husbands assisted their spouses more in doing major household tasks than their Chinese or Indian counterparts did (Abu Bakar & Hashim, 1984). This study chronicled, "Malay men help with basic tasks such as cleaning, marketing, washing clothes, and even cooking, twice as much as Chinese men, with the Indian men between the two" (pg. 91). Another study reported although most urban Malaysian wives and husbands expressed an egalitarian attitude toward sex roles, husbands spent less time than wives did in three major household chores such as cleaning, cooking, and childcare (Thambian & Talib, 1999). They further reported that in 25–35 percent of cases, the husband and the wife jointly completed major household chores. Most of these studies on Asian and other international families were dated and no findings were available from Gulf families.

Recent scholarships indicated that the sex-linked distribution of household labor persisted in contemporary Malay families as men participated less in traditional housework (Hirschman, 2016; Hossain & Juhari, 2015; Hossain & Madan, 2021). There was a general expectation for Malay and other Asian women to routinely perform certain housework such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare. Likewise, women in Malaysian Indian families did not view their engagement in household labor such as cooking or making food as gender subjugation (Devasahayam, 2005). In line with cultural norms, Malaysian Indian women are socialized to reproduce sex-linked gender identity. These findings uphold the cultural ethos of women's "duty" to engage in traditional household labor in most Asian families. Furthermore, there is a trend that husbands in urban families showed higher participation in household labor than their rural counterparts in many Asian societies.

In our assessment, the narratives in many of the above-mentioned studies neither clearly articulated the extent to which husbands participated in household labor nor identified a robust list of household activities. Likewise, the literature on the factors that influence husbands' and wives' participation in household labor in Asian families is extremely limited. In particular, research on this topic is conspicuously absent from the Arabian Gulf families. The current study has used a comprehensive list of household chores that are common to Arab Gulf families and the measures have collected data on both the levels and the amount of time engagement. The current study is creative and pioneer because there is virtually no data on household labor

available from Kuwaiti and Qatari families, and the findings from these Arab families strengthen the global literature on household labor. More importantly, this study tested a novel idea of linking personal, cultural, and religious beliefs toward sex roles to the reported amount of involvement in household labor. This approach is unique because most Arab families still dwell with traditional Arab values of patriarchy with a strong tendency to transition to post-industrial lifestyles. We argue given the context of the rapid modernization of Kuwait and Qatar, the current findings are expected to reshape both the theoretical underpinnings and the household literature in the field of social and behavioral sciences. Furthermore, the findings are expected to lay the groundwork for future research on family relations and cohesion in understudied Arab communities.

3 Theoretical Consideration

The conventional definition of household labor is unpaid family chores that ensure the well-being of family members and the maintenance of their residences. This conceptualization has been consistently employed in household labor literature across studies. Most researchers included five very time-consuming physical activities such as cooking, cleaning, washing dishes, laundry, and shopping for groceries in household labor (Coltrane, 2000; Hossain, 2018; Shelton & John, 1996). Based on these commonly identified tasks, the present study used six major categories of household labor as follows: housework, preparing meals, shopping, keeping track of expenses, laundry, and maintenance. A unique aspect of this study is to include types of household activities that are common to Arab families. Depending on research interests and family contexts, several theoretical approaches have been employed to explain similarities or differences in men's and women's involvement in household labor (Coltrane, 2000; Kroska, 2004). The *relative resource* theory states that compared to men, women usually make less economic contributions to the household and have less power in the family, and therefore, women are expected to do more housework (Bianchi et al., 2012; Coltrane, 2000). The *sex role and housework ideology* suggest that men with more conventional sex role attitudes participate less in traditional household labor. On the other hand, husbands and wives who do not support traditional sex roles practice egalitarian division of household labor (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). The *time availability* view suggests that the distribution of household labor between the husband and the wife is linked to the time each spouse has to perform a particular family chore. If the husband works part-time or is unemployed, then he is expected to do more around the house because he is home and available (Bianchi et al., 2012). The *gender construction* view explains how men and women negotiate their participation in household labor by constantly creating, maintaining, and renegotiating masculine and feminine behavior that resonates with their sex role beliefs and practices (Coltrane, 2000).

Because the above-reported approaches were developed from and applied in Western families and largely ignored the cross-cultural contexts of family interactions, the current study employed the *bioecological systems theory* to interpret the findings. This theory underscores the importance of banking on several embedded subsystems (e.g., micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono system) that are inter-related and help researchers identify the proximal processes and culturally and ecologically valid contexts of human development and family functioning (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The child's immediate environment such as the family is a microsystem and interactions among microsystems create mesosystemic influences on a developing child. Some parental systems such as fathers' workplace that is not directly linked to the child also influence the child's growth and development. At the same time, greater social and cultural systems (e.g., religious practices) influence the context of parent-child interactions. All the forces together work in a nested structure that influences how mothers or fathers care for their children. Scholars agree this theory emphasizes how various contextual factors such as family composition, economic conditions, support systems, and parental beliefs affect parental roles in the family. Because of its ecological consideration and cultural sensitivity, this theory has been applied to study Asian families (e.g., Hossain & Atencio, 2017). The principles of the bioecological system theory appeared to resonate with the cultural-ecological context of Gulf families (e.g., parental beliefs) and afforded scholastic vibrancy to systematically investigate family interactions in Qatari and Kuwaiti families. Our findings have the potential to explore the extent to which the tenets of the bioecological systems theory help us understand the sociocultural and personal variables and the ecological contexts of the spousal division of household labor in Arab families.

4 Sociocultural Context of Kuwaiti and Qatari Families

Both Kuwait and Qatar are unique societies as less than one-third of their populations are natives. About 98% of Kuwaitis or Qataris are employed in the service and industrial sectors. Other socioeconomic indices such as infant mortality rate, maternal health, life expectancy, and the GDP per capita (PPP) income (\$66,000 and \$124,000 in Kuwait and Qatar, respectively) place these two countries in the high-income group in the world. These social, health, and economic indicators have a transformative impact on family functions and patterns in these two Gulf nations. For example, family patterns have always been an indicator of social change, and Kuwait, with its recent economic growth, has witnessed these patterns changing continuously and rapidly. There are two kinds of family patterns in Kuwait: nuclear (urbanized) and extended (tribal-traditional). After the discovery of oil and the consequent rise in the standard of living, access to education, and economic development, some Kuwaiti families that had followed the extended family pattern began to establish the nuclear form of living arrangement. Many newly married couples separated themselves from their parents and the joint family structure and started living on their own. Sociologists

would call the newly evolved Kuwaiti family structure the transitional form because it resembles the nuclear family structure yet it behaves like the extended family in its functions (Al-Nasser, 2004). Likewise, although education has become a norm for Qatari women, they remain conflicted about their independent roles and identities in the labor market as they prioritize their involvement in family roles over education and paid work (Al-Kubaisi, 2017; James-Hawkins et al., 2017; Rajakumar, et al., 2017). Therefore, the current study is timely as it addresses one of the key family roles the husband and the wife play within a complex mix of traditional values, transitional family patterns, and the modernization of these two Gulf countries.

As we indicated elsewhere, the ongoing economic, social, and political changes in Kuwaiti and Qatari societies during the last four decades can be attributed to many historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors. The discovery of oil and gas played a significant role in accelerating the process of modernization and socioeconomic development in these two countries. In recent years, Kuwaitis and Qataris alike have been going abroad especially in Western countries to further academic pursuits. The East–West contact has led to a radical change affecting not only the material and consumer aspects but also the family norms and values of Kuwaiti and Qatari societies as a whole. Arab sociologists (see Al-Naser, 1996, 2004) assert that with the development of an industrial economy and the growth of urban cultures, the family structure and its functions in Arab societies will gravitate toward an independent nuclear family form. The current study was designed to collect and analyze information about husbands' and wives' family roles within the context of such contemporary changes.

5 The Current Study

Couched within the bioecological systems theory, the current paper examined two major research objectives as follows:

1. Whether Kuwaiti and Qatari husbands and wives differed in their personal, cultural, and religious belief structures regarding the spousal distribution of household labor in the family and
2. Whether the sex role belief structure influenced their involvement in five domains of household labor such as housework, meal preparation, laundry, shopping, and maintenance.

6 Method

6.1 Samples

The samples included 125 two-parent families (couples) from Kuwait and 137 two-parent families from Qatar. In total, husbands and wives from 262 Kuwaiti and Qatari families participated in the current study. Based on Cohen's (1988) f^2 with a medium effect size (0.15) and a power of 0.95, this was a large enough sample ($n = 262$) for the study. These were convenience samples and families were selected if the husband was employed in the paid sector. The husband's employment status is perceived to have a significant bearing on the level of his involvement in household labor.

For the Kuwaiti sample, the average age of husbands and wives was 35.35 ($SD = 8.49$) and 32.13 ($SD = 7.97$) years, respectively. The average length of marriage was about 9.78 years ($SD = 8.60$). Whereas wives completed 14.76 years ($SD = 2.06$) of schooling, husbands completed 14.32 years ($SD = 2.51$) of formal education. For the annual median income, both the husband and the wife reported category 2 (between US \$25,000-\$49,999). The average number of hours husbands and wives worked each day of the working week was 8.86 ($SD = 6.44$) and 6.03 ($SD = 2.44$) hours, respectively. The average family size was 5.11 ($SD = 2.23$) and the average number of children in each family was 2.36 ($SD = 1.75$). For the Qatari sample, the average age of husbands and wives was 38.25 ($SD = 11.77$) and 36.44 ($SD = 11.87$) years, respectively. The average length of marriage was about 13.38 years ($SD = 11.94$). Whereas wives completed 14.60 years ($SD = 4.68$) of schooling, husbands completed 14.32 years ($SD = 3.94$) of formal education. The husband and the wife reported category 3 (between US \$50,000-\$74,999) and 2 (between US \$25,000-\$49,999) as their annual median income, respectively. The average number of hours husbands and wives worked each day of the working week was 8.80 ($SD = 2.98$) and 7.08 ($SD = 3.45$) hours, respectively. The average family size was 5.87 ($SD = 2.92$) and the average number of children in each family was 3.08 ($SD = 2.55$).

6.2 Procedures

Using non-random or snowball methods, participant families were identified through local charity and/or community centers, religious and social organizations, cultural centers, personal contacts, and word of mouth. We hired seven project assistants (three in Kuwait and four in Qatar) who interviewed families for data collection. The project assistants were university students and/or graduates who were bilingual (Arabic and English). All research participants, project assistants, and two major investigators had a similar language background (i.e., Arabic). Although the project assistants conducted the interviews in Arabic, it was not necessary to translate the instruments from English to Arabic as the interviewers were skilled bilingual college

students/graduates. We were aware that it might be a standard methodological suggestion to translate the instruments into Arabic and then back translate them into English for consistency, and use the Arabic version to collect data. However, the English version of the instruments was preferable because we were an international research team and intended to analyze the data for dissemination in international forums. Furthermore, the language in the instruments was in plain English and the bilingual interviewers easily used the Arabic equivalent terms when conducting the interviews.

Two investigators (one Arab and one American) conducted a one-day workshop via Zoom discussing the scope of the project, training them on interview techniques, and guiding them to prepare major Arabic phrases for each question item. These Arabic phrases were used as a general guideline for them to be consistent in interviewing each participant. As a part of the workshop activities, the project assistants were primed to pre-test the questionnaires to gauge their clarity and applicability to the research population. It may be noteworthy to mention that the project assistants observed the COVID-19 pandemic-related health measures (e.g., social distancing, masks) during the data collection.

6.3 Instruments

Sociodemographic Information Sheet

This questionnaire contained 12 items concerning age, education, occupation, number of workdays, work hours, income, length of time couples were in the current marriage, number of children in the family, number of people in the family, number of maids, and number of hired car drivers.

Division of Household Labor Questionnaire (DHLQ)

Due to ecological and cultural variations in conceptualizing household labor, psychological studies have not uniformly used a standard instrument to measure the division of household labor across cultural groups. However, based on prior research on the division of household labor (Hossain, 2001; Shelton & John, 1996), we constructed the division of household labor questionnaire that included the areas of tasks husbands and wives anticipated participating in Arab families. This instrument consisted of 19 items designed to assess the amount of time wives and husbands perceive to invest in household labor each week. The 19 household activities were arranged into seven major categories. The categories were *doing housework* (sweeping and dusting, cleaning floors, picking up after people, cleaning windows, washing dishes, making the bed, and cleaning stove/burner); *preparing meals* (food preparation, cooking meals); *shopping* (getting groceries, shopping clothes for family members, buying household supplies); *doing laundry* (washing clothes, ironing clothes); *household expenses* (keeping track of household expenses); and *maintenance* (household repairs, tool/furniture maintenance, cleaning cars, and cleaning the lawn/garden). Participants also rated each item on five-point ratings ranging from 1 (lowest involvement) to 5 (highest involvement) to report the levels of their

involvement in household labor. The internal consistencies (i.e., Cronbach alpha) of this instrument were 0.84 and 0.88 for Kuwaiti and Qatari families, respectively.

Personal Beliefs About Gender Roles Questionnaire (PBGRQ)

Based on our previous research and the literature, we developed the Personal Beliefs about Gender Roles Questionnaire (PBGRQ) to chronicle the participant's both personal and global views toward husbands' and wives' participation in household labor. The first section of the instrument has 10 items including two personal narrative questions. The first eight are statements about husbands' and wives' getting involved in various household chores and record responses on a Likert-type scale (1 = least likely to 5 = most likely). The two narrative questions ask a respondent to elaborate on the reasons for his/her involvement or lack thereof. The second part of the instrument includes three questions asking a respondent to elaborate his/her overall view toward husbands' involvement in three major household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach alpha) of the first eight items were 0.83 and 0.92 for Kuwaiti and Qatari samples, respectively.

7 Results

Gender Role Beliefs

A $2 \times 2 \times 3$ (*sex-of-spouse* $\times$ *country*) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on three sex role belief variables listed in Table 1 revealed a significant MANOVA main effect for *sex-of-spouse*, $F(3,489) = 11.84$, $p < 0.001$, Wilks's $\Lambda = 0.93$, $\eta^2 = 0.07$ suggesting husbands and wives differed significantly in their sex role beliefs toward the spousal distribution of household labor. Overall, wives scored higher on personal, cultural, and religious beliefs than their counterparts. Likewise, the MANOVA main effect for the *country* was significant, $F(3,489) = 10.62$, $p < 0.001$, Wilks's $\Lambda = 0.94$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$. The univariate analyses showed that whereas Kuwaiti spouses scored higher than Qatari spouses on *religious beliefs*, $F(1,491) = 11.46$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$, they did not differ on their reported scores for personal belief, $F(1,491) = 0.23$, $p = 0.64$, and cultural belief, $F(1,491) = 3.40$, $p = 0.07$, $\eta^2 = 0.00$. The MANOVA *sex-of-spouse* $\times$ *country* interaction effect was not significant, $F(3,489) < 1.00$, $p > 0.05$. Compared to husbands, wives showed stronger personal and cultural sex role beliefs but similar religious beliefs toward the spousal distribution of household labor in Kuwait. In Qatar, wives showed higher personal, cultural, and religious sex role beliefs than husbands did.

7.1 Predictors

We conducted a series of regression analyses to gauge the influence of personal, cultural, and religious beliefs on seven areas of household labor. Results revealed

Table 1 Spousal sex role beliefs about the distribution of household labor in Kuwaiti and Qatari families

Sex Roles Beliefs	Kuwaiti Families (<i>n</i> = 125)				Qatari Families (<i>n</i> = 139)			
	Husband		Wife		Husband		Wife	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Personal Belief	3.13	0.70	3.52	0.81	3.08	0.88	3.50	0.82
Cultural Belief	2.94	0.71	3.03	0.80	2.99	0.95	3.27	0.92
Religious Belief	3.68	0.79	3.74	0.82	3.32	1.08	3.52	1.04
Sex-of-Spouse:	$F(3,489) = 11.84, p < 0.001, \text{Wilks's } \Lambda = 0.93, \eta^2 = 0.07$							
Country:	$F(3,489) = 10.62, p < 0.001, \text{Wilks's } \Lambda = 0.94, \eta^2 = 0.06$							
Sex-of-Spouse x Country:	$F(3,489) = 11.84, p < 0.001, \text{Wilks's } \Lambda = 0.93, \eta^2 = 0.07$							

personal belief positively predicted Kuwaiti husbands' involvement in meal preparation ($\beta = 0.31, p = 0.00$) and shopping ($\beta = 0.23, p = 0.04$) but cultural belief negatively influenced their involvement in meal preparation ($\beta = -0.21, p = 0.05$). Cultural belief positively influenced wives' involvement in shopping ($\beta = 0.25, p = 0.02$) (Tables 2 and 3). In Qatar, personal belief positively influenced husbands' involvement in housework ($\beta = 0.34, p = 0.03$), meal preparation ($\beta = 0.43, p = 0.00$), shopping ($\beta = 0.43, p = 0.00$), and maintenance ($\beta = 0.46, p = 0.00$) but cultural belief negatively influenced their involvement in housework ($\beta = -0.40, p = 0.02$), meal preparation ($\beta = -0.32, p = 0.05$), and maintenance ($\beta = -0.38, p = 0.02$) (Table 4). For Qatari wives, cultural belief was negatively linked to their involvement in housework ($\beta = -0.30, p = 0.03$), meal preparation ($\beta = -0.29, p = 0.04$), and laundry ($\beta = -0.37, p = 0.00$). Whereas religious belief positively influenced wives' involvement in keeping track of expenses ($\beta = 0.36, p = 0.00$), personal belief negatively ($\beta = -0.29, p = 0.02$) but religious belief positively ($\beta = 0.31, p = 0.00$) influenced their involvement in maintenance (Table 5).

8 Discussion

This paper explored whether husbands and wives differed in their sex role belief structure regarding the spousal distribution of household labor in Kuwaiti and Qatari families, and whether sex role beliefs influenced their involvement in five domains of household labor (housework, meal preparation, laundry, shopping, and maintenance). The findings revealed husbands and wives differed significantly in their sex role beliefs in both countries. Compared to husbands, wives showed stronger personal and cultural sex role beliefs but similar religious beliefs toward the spousal distribution of household labor in Kuwaiti families. Wives showed higher personal, cultural, and religious sex role beliefs than husbands did in Qatari families. In general, cultural beliefs negatively, but personal beliefs and, to a certain degree, religious beliefs,

Table 2 Predictors of husbands' involvement in household labor in Kuwaiti families

Variables	R ²	F	B	SE B	β	p
Dependent variables						
Housework						NS
Meal preparation	0.11	4.00				0.01
Personal beliefs			0.48	0.18	0.31	0.00
Culture beliefs			0.48	0.18	0.31	0.00
Religious beliefs						NS
Laundry						NS
Shopping	0.08	2.94				0.04
Personal beliefs			0.44	0.21	0.23	0.04
Cultural beliefs						NS
Religious beliefs						NS
Keeping Track of Expenses						NS
Maintenance						NS

Table 3 Predictors of wives' involvement in household labor in Kuwaiti families

Variables	R ²	F	B	SE B	β	p
Dependent Variables						
Housework						NS
Meal Preparation						NS
Laundry						NS
Shopping	0.08	2.86				0.4
Personal beliefs						NS
Cultural beliefs			0.39	0.17	0.25	0.02
Religious beliefs						NS
Keeping Track of Expenses						NS
Maintenance						NS

positively influenced husbands' and wives' involvement in various household labor in both Gulf societies.

The sex differential findings about sex roles reaffirm traditional norms for wives to be visible and consistent in assuming household tasks in Gulf families. Generally speaking, sex role socialization across cultures often coerces women to invest more in household tasks than their male counterparts. Husbands and wives in both Kuwait and Qatar showed a similar level of personal and cultural beliefs but Kuwaiti spouses scored higher on religious beliefs than Qatari spouses. This trend accords with the correlational analyses revealing religion had little influence on spousal attitudes toward the distribution of household labor between husbands and wives. We speculate these participants took religious principles as a given integral part of their

Table 4 Predictors of husbands' involvement in household labor in Qatari families

Variables	R ²	F	B	SE B	β	p
Dependent variables						
Housework	0.06	2.65				0.05
Personal beliefs			0.17	0.07	0.34	0.03
Cultural beliefs			-0.18	0.08	-0.04	0.02
Religious beliefs						NS
Laundry						NS
Shopping	0.08	3.96				0.01
Personal beliefs			0.65	0.22	0.43	0.00
Cultural beliefs						NS
Religious beliefs						NS
Keeping Track of Expenses						NS
Maintenance	0.07	3.35				0.02
Personal beliefs			0.58	0.19	0.46	0.00
Cultural beliefs			-0.44	0.19	-0.38	0.02
Religious beliefs						NS

daily lives and both the husband and the wife avidly subscribe to the importance of religious dictum in shaping their involvement in household functions. They do not consciously overthink how religious principles influence their commitment to routine household chores, hence, as a predictor, the influence of religious beliefs on the distribution of household labor appeared to be limited in the current study. At the same time, we contemplate there may be shifting approaches to the traditional interpretation of religious notions toward sex roles, especially among wives, indicating variable influences of religion on spousal participation in household labor in Qatari families. We need additional data to fully explore this matter.

Husbands' and wives' similar levels of personal and cultural belief structure toward sex roles in the family were somewhat expected findings. Families in Qatar and Kuwait live in comparable socioeconomic, cultural, and ecological settings shaping sex role ideologies and practices in both societies (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Although patriarchy delegates most family chores to wives, both the husband and the wife actively invest in raising children and ensuring family well-being in Gulf communities. Family socialization revolves around culturally responsive norms of sex-segregated interactions, respect for elders, inclusion of extended networks, behavioral etiquette for children, and family honor and dignity, especially in the Islamic world (Hossain & Juhari, 2015). These deep-rooted value systems including contemporary economic development consistently shape husbands' and wives' personal and cultural views toward sex roles in these two Gulf societies. We stipulate that economic development and educational opportunities have the potential for reexamining skewed sex roles in Qatari and Kuwaiti societies where wives are expected to do a lion's share of household chores. The current findings lay bare

Table 5 Predictors of wives' involvement in household labor in Qatari families

Variable	R ²	F	B	SE B	β	p
Dependent variables						
Housework	0.11	5.37				0.00
Personal beliefs						NS
Cultural beliefs			-0.36	0.16	-0.30	0.03
Religious beliefs						NS
Meal Preparation	0.136.42					0.00
Personal beliefs						NS
Cultural beliefs			-0.46	0.22	-0.29	0.04
Religious beliefs						NS
Meal Preparation	0.13	6.42				0.00
Personal beliefs						NS
Cultural beliefs			-0.46	0.22	-0.29	0.04
Religious beliefs						NS
Laundry	0.14	6.76				0.00
Personal beliefs						NS
Cult Cultural beliefs ural beliefs			-0.55	0.20	-0.37	0.00
Religious beliefs						NS
Shopping						NS
Keeping Track of Expenses	0.14	6.99				0.00
Personal beliefs						NS
Cultural beliefs						NS
Religious beliefs			0.50	0.16	0.36	0.00
Maintenance	0.09	4.42				0.00
Personal beliefs			-0.27	0.12	-0.29	0.02
Cultural beliefs						NS
Religious beliefs			0.23	0.08	0.31	0.00

a momentum to direct the dynamics of spousal interaction and socialization toward a complementary sex role in the family. Because of resemblances in social behaviors and cultural practices, husbands and wives in these two countries continue to demonstrate similar levels of personal and cultural beliefs regarding the division of household labor between husbands and wives. The lack of interaction effect between the sex-of-spouse and country suggested husbands and wives in Qatar and Kuwait shared similar beliefs toward family roles and functions. Future research may explore the influence of cultural variables on sex role attitudes and practices in Gulf societies.

The correlational findings predicted the less Kuwaiti husbands and Qatari spouses subscribed to cultural norms and traditions about sex roles, the more they got involved

in household labor, especially in meal preparation, housework, laundry, and maintenance. This finding somewhat challenges the patriarchal value system that traditionally cultivates skewed spousal distribution of household labor in Arab societies. Arab cultural values and expectations require wives to heavily invest in household labor. This expectation is not only contrary to the contemporary notion of egalitarianism in sex roles, but it also emasculates Islamic edicts of complementarity between spouses in family roles. We speculate participants in the current samples are in transition to consciously negotiate sex roles in the family and according to our data, this transition is more pronounced among Qataris than Kuwaitis. We argue that compared to Kuwait, faster changes in lifestyles in Qatar primarily due to extraordinary levels of technological and economic opportunities have implications for reshaping husbands' and wives' cultural deliberations on the spousal distribution of household labor.

Personal beliefs significantly positively influence Qatari and Kuwaiti husbands' involvement in household labor. This particular finding underscores the importance of sex role ideologies that husbands who believe in the sense of equity in sex roles participate more in household labor. Findings from Western families also upheld the notion that husbands participated less in family chores including childcare when wives demanded (or nagged) their participation (Christopher, 2020). Such a demand or "nagging" milieu sometimes leads to marital discord but is countered by husbands' own awareness and commitments to family chores. This self-realization is in line with the Islamic value system that encourages spouses to buttress each other in doing household chores. It is encouraging to observe that Qatari and Kuwaiti husbands in this study show some level of personal beliefs and commitment to get involved in household labor. The findings also prompt us to postulate that husbands are responding to changing social landscapes that may have consequences for them to move away from traditional sex role ideologies of the division of household labor in contemporary Gulf families. It is important to focus more on this topic because traditional attitudes as well as the distribution of sex roles cultivate more conflicts in marital relationships (MacDermid et al, 1990).

The religious beliefs as a predictor of the spousal division of household labor are only at work for Qatari wives. The more they adhere to religious beliefs the more they keep track of household expenses and maintenance work. This finding elucidates their active interests and expectancies to keep the home economically and aesthetically tidy and comfortable. These aspirations are compatible with Islamic sentiment for keeping the home and living environment healthy for family members. Without additional data, we simply cannot explain why religious beliefs did not have any influence on husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor in Kuwaiti families. Compared to Qatar, the links between personal, cultural, and religious factors and husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor are less pronounced in Kuwait. Does it mean contemporary socioeconomic and technological changes are impacting lifestyles and the psychology of sex roles of Qataris more than Kuwaitis? If it does, why? Future research can shed light on the reasons for the differential influence of these factors on the spousal distribution of household labor in Gulf families.

9 Conclusions

The current study reports pioneer empirical data on family and personal variables predicting the spousal distribution of household labor in contemporary Qatari and Kuwaiti families. The findings are important for understanding how personal, cultural, and religious belief structures influence husbands' and wives' involvement in various domains of unpaid household labor in contemporary Arab families. Whereas personal and cultural factors remain significant predictors of how much husbands and wives participate in household labor, religious factor appears to have a lukewarm influence on them. Personal beliefs coax wives or husbands in how they assess their role in participating in household labor. The positive link between personal belief and household labor vouches for husbands' willingness to participate in family chores. On the other hand, the inverse relationship between cultural belief and household labor alludes the more the husbands challenge the traditional sex roles the more they are willing to take part in household labor. Current data encourage us to believe that the more the husband well as cultural norms of sex roles. We need more data to explain the limited influence of religious beliefs on husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor in the family.

The intersection of Islamic values of spousal complementarity and reverence, the cultural practice of male authority and age hierarchy, modernization, and economic development defines the structure of sex roles in Gulf societies. The practice of patriarchy vis-à-vis evolving norms of women's education and employment in the paid sectors creates a complex social and family order to understand the distribution of household labor in contemporary Gulf societies. Because enlightened husbands and educated wives are sound partners and parents (James-Hawkins et al., 2017; Moghadam, 2013), the current findings have implications for informing educators, family scholars, employers, and national policymakers to develop appropriate provisions for married employees as they may benefit from a supportive work environment in Kuwait and Qatar. Prompted by personal commitment, husbands' involvement in household labor ensures wives are not always saddled with the majority of household labor at home. The shared role in household chores improves the marital quality and mental health of each partner as well as encourages wives to excel at paid work ensuring a consistent economic benefit for the family. Although many Kuwaiti and Qatari families have paid employees to do household chores (Rajakumar, 2014), they hardly fall within the family boundary and their assistance may not be predictable, sustainable, and uniform across families. However, future research can address whether the link between husbands' and wives' sex role beliefs and their participation in household labor varies as a function of the availability of hired maids in the family. We are convinced the current findings set the stage for conducting future research on the mental health and economic benefits of husbands' involvement in household labor. We believe the Education and the Social Affairs and Labor ministries in Qatar and Kuwait may farm the findings in addressing practical family matters such as excessive work hours, recognition of women's contribution to family economics, work-family balance, and wives' and husbands' complementary

role in family functions. These considerations will strengthen marital quality, family well-being, and aspects of workplace productivity and adjustment of married couples within Arab sociocultural and ecological contexts (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Future research can employ longitudinal designs and broad samples to address these issues.

The current findings should be considered with several caveats. Data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic when interviewers faced restricted access to family visits. Because of non-random samples, the generalizability of the findings across Gulf families is limited. These limitations aside, the findings enrich the field of behavioral sciences by generating new information about the links between husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor and their changing cultural-ecological contexts of livelihood in understudied Arab families.

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Chapter 8

Neo-Gender Balancing in Saudi Arabia: Divorce Under Social Exchange Theory



Abdullah F. Alrebh and Radhi H. Al-Mabuk

Abstract This paper uses Richard Emerson's social exchange theory to analyze the balance in the exchange relations between men and women in Saudi Arabia. The paper is comprised of four major sections: (1) Emerson's social exchange theory; (2) Saudi women in Vision 2030; (3) Statistics on Saudi women marital status; (4) Power dependence. Emerson's five assumptions are applied to cases of Saudi women in order to demonstrate how winds of social change are affecting not only attitudes but also actual behaviors and decisions regarding divorce. Using the Comparison Level for Alternatives model, the results of the analysis are reported, and a few directions for future research in this area are offered.

1 Introduction

The recent and unprecedented reforms introduced by the Saudi government have touched and changed many aspects of Saudi society. Among the new policies that have so affected life for Saudi women and granted them rights they have long been deprived of include the freedom to drive and the ability to travel without a close relative male guardian. The abolishment of male guardian authority has given women more power to choose and an increasing freedom to move. Also, family law related to both financial matters and child custody has changed in favor of women by making them equal to that of men. Moreover, the new laws have empowered Saudi women by giving them wider access to the job market. As the existing literature shows, sociodemographic patterns significantly contribute to divorce predictors (Lari & Al-Thani, 2023). The major premise of this paper is that changes in gender-power balance predictably and understandably impact the Saudi social system in general and the Saudi family dynamics in particular. With more power and agency in the

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emerging social equation, Saudi women, especially married ones, have gained more confidence in their ability to manage their own lives. They can leave the marital relationship if they are not happy as they now can file for divorce. Given the nature of sweeping social changes, it is not surprising to see an increase in divorce rates, which was reported to be about 168 cases per day in 2022 (Nasrallah, 2022). The increase has prompted some writers in the national Saudi media to describe the high divorce rates as “destabilizing” to Saudi social fabric (Saudi Gazette, 2018).

The Saudi Ministry of Justice introduced 18 new decisions that enhance women’s rights, in addition to 20 other specific articles of Women’s Rights in Saudi Laws (Ministry of Justice, 2023). Such reforms were formulated to address gender equality and equity issues. Likewise, the new rules and regulations help to minimize idiosyncratic interpretations by judges who might otherwise rule in favor of men. The number of Saudi female lawyers and female formal employees in the judicial system has increased. The Ministry of Justice is now dedicated to addressing and filling the big gender gap.

Since the launch of Vision 2030, Saudi women got rid of two major obstacles, financial and legal. The opening of job opportunities for women in different fields helps them to be financially independent, and the new laws and regulations also help them to be free from the tight grip of male guardianship and the previously enforced legal conservative restrictions. Thus, Saudi women have gained more power while men lost a considerable margin of their powerful position in the new social equation. Conflict between the two genders is, therefore, inevitable. Couples go about resolving their conflicts in different ways. One of the options is parting ways temporarily or permanently. Divorce has become a likely outcome for marriages that fail to accommodate the new rules of the old game. This topic is the major concern of this paper. In the next section, we discuss Emerson’s social exchange theory in more detail. New laws and their resultant impact on social exchange theory and social relationships, especially on marital relations is the central focus of this paper. The paper is organized in four inter-related sections: (1) Emerson’s social exchange theory, (2) Saudi women in Vision 2030, (3) marital status statistics, and (4) power of dependence. At the end, we provide an integrative summary and conclusion. In the next section, we begin with the first major section of the paper in which we discuss Emerson’s, 1962 social exchange theory in more detail.

2 Emerson’s Social Exchange Theory

In this paper, Richard Emerson’s social exchange theory will be used to analyze balance dynamics in relational exchange between men and women in Saudi Arabia. According to Emerson (1962), the power of a given party in a relationship is equal to the other party’s dependence on the rewards or resources derived from the relationship. That is, an exchange relation is balanced if both parties are equally dependent on each other for exchange, which includes resources of value (Prendergast, 2013). If they are equally dependent, they have equal power. The central idea that power is

based on dependency allows for the specification of ways in which dependencies are altered so that they affect the balance of power in the exchange relation and networks of exchange relations.

3 Emerson's Theoretical Assumptions

To understand Emerson's theory, it is important to consider the five major assumptions that underlie his theoretical paradigm. The first assumption is that humans are rational beings who weigh the rewards and drawbacks of relationships they engage in. Also, they must, according to the second assumption, incur expenses in order to reap gains in the future. The third assumption states that humans develop and follow certain criteria to compare benefits and costs of relationships, which are susceptible to change over time and vary from person to person. The fourth assumption is that reciprocity standards govern social transactions. The fifth and final assumption is that people are motivated by self-interest when seeking and engaging in social exchanges.

Comparison is part of the rational thinking of relationships. In this regard, Thibaut and Kelley (1959) have developed Comparison Level (CL), which explains the contributions that previous experiences and expectations make to the determination of how satisfied an individual is with a relationship. Individuals get into relationships with an awareness of societal norms and a backlog of experiences regarding such affairs. This awareness explains the expectations of individuals regarding what they deserve and realistically attainable within relationships.

Considering alternatives, dependence, and obstacles, social exchange theory contends that relationship satisfaction alone does not guarantee the continuance and stability of a relationship. Most people have the idea of "what if...", which recalls the notion of the "comparison level of alternatives," abbreviated as CLalt. This idea explains why individuals opt to stay in or out of relationships. That is, staying in or leaving a relationship is not motivated by avoiding potential negative exchanges in a relationship; instead, it is driven by one's desire to increase the potential positivity of the available options. The CLalt stands for a person's evaluation of the potential outcomes of a future relationship compared to the present relationship one has. It follows then that a person may end a relationship when benefits offered by an alternative relationship outweigh those offered by the current one. Hence, the decision to remain in a relationship is not merely an issue of how fulfilling that partnership is. Relationships that are rewarding are more likely to be stable because a high degree of outcome lessens the possibility of a better alternative existing in terms of expectations. In turn, unsatisfactory relationships may remain stable due to a lack of a better choice. These partnerships have been conceptualized as nonvoluntary (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Married people who continue in violent partnerships may be in a nonvoluntary relationship. That is, the relationship remains stable despite the violence due to a lack of better choices (Gelles, 1976).

Emerson's theoretical precepts will be used as a tool to analyze the fast-changing relationship balance between husbands and wives in Saudi Arabia. More specifically,

the paper will examine the relationship between women empowerment and divorce rate in Saudi Arabia. We begin by discussing women in Saudi Arabia's grand vision of 2030 and the special attention it gives to women's rights and roles. Despite the recency of social changes, rebalancing of gender relationships is already taking place and will continue to redefine the positions of Saudi men and women in the family institution in general and in marital relationships in particular. Comparison level and comparison level of alternatives are two important factors that can be used to analyze how Saudi women redefine the roles of husbands and wives in the Saudi family in the era of 2030 Vision. Thus, it is to a discussion of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 we turn next.

4 Women in Vision 2030

In 2016, the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) launched a series of socio-economic reforms known as Vision 2030, which kick-started far-reaching changes in the kingdom. The king-in-waiting notably oversaw the development of the Vision strategy, which includes significant political, economic, and social reforms, as part of a broader effort to restructure much of the existing order (Alrebh, 2022). Vision 2030 aims to diversify the sources of income and reduce the kingdom's full dependence on oil. Such a goal requires many affirmative actions to attract global firms to invest in Saudi Arabia. Hence, social reforms that include a wider margin of personal freedom are a must for creating a healthy environment for the country's ambitious goal.

In the pre-Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia was criticized on its women rights record that included lack of women's ability to obtain a national ID, to move and travel freely, and to manage their own personal affairs. The present government has gone beyond granting these basic reforms and has set a clear strategy of gender inclusion, which enables women to participate fully in the public sphere. Thus, the reforms give women more employment opportunities and more legal rights within the family law, especially in marriage and divorce issues. Indeed, the Vision turns the image of Saudi women from being the cultural repository of traditional values to being active participants in the building and advancement of the homeland (Abdullah, 2021; Alharbi, 2022).

Moreover, government electronic services such as Absher app help women to track their own status and manage their own business. Some of the studies used old data to build their argument. For example, Joel W. Abdelmoez published a study in 2022 criticizing Absher for being a tool used by males to track and control women. This might have been the case before the recent legal reforms. E-government is a governmental virtual service, which has been modified to give women equal access and autonomy, including the ability to file for divorce using electronic platforms. Such online services have made it possible for the government to collect and report more accurate divorce data, marriage contracts, and employment status of both genders.

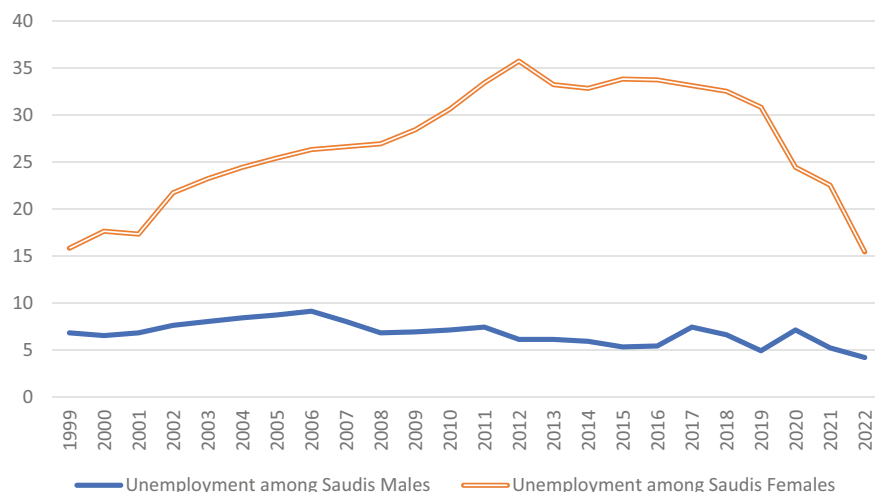


Fig. 1 Unemployment level among Saudis (by Gender) gathered from General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT)

According to the General Authority for Statistics in Saudi Arabia, “the Ministry of Justice reported that the total number of marriage contracts in Saudi Arabia reached 150,117 in 2020, an increase of 8.9% compared to 2019. However, the total number of divorces reached 57,595 in 2020, which increased by 12.7% from 2019.” (GAS, n.d.).¹ Based on this data, the ratio of divorce to marriage in 2020 was 38.36% which reflects a significant increase in divorce cases in the kingdom.

By comparison, the unemployment rate among Saudi women in the same year (i.e., 2020) was 12.6%.² The ratio of Saudi employed females in the job market was 35.43% compared to 64.57% for the Saudi employed males. Figure 2 shows the decrease in the unemployment level among Saudi females, which has gradually put them closer to males’ level, which is a significant indicator of women’s empowerment. That is to say, for each two employed males, there is at least one employed female. The higher rate of women employment suggests a significant structural change in the Saudi family, from the traditional male as the sole breadwinner to dual-working couples. The data also suggests that while at least half of Saudi families remain traditional, there is an increasing number of families that have a working wife and an unemployed husband (Fig. 1).

The burgeoning rates of female employment and divorce among Saudis ignite curiosity about the nature of association between the two variables: female employment and divorce. The specific question these two variables pose is whether financial independence is a main, if not the main, causal factor in the increasing divorce

¹ <https://www.stats.gov.sa/sites/default/files/Marriage%20and%20Divorce%20Statistics%202020%20EN.pdf>.

² https://www.stats.gov.sa/sites/default/files/LM_Q4%202020%20%28Press%20release_EN%29_4.pdf.

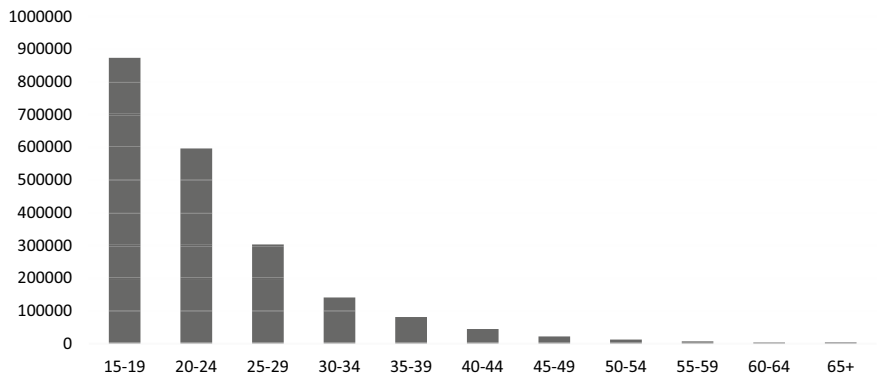


Fig. 2 Single Saudi women by age (2022) data was gathered from general authority for statistics

rate equation in Saudi Arabia. This question considers financial independence as the source of power that enables women to have a say in staying in or leaving their marriage. In this regard, Alharbi (2022) finds that “husband’s dependence on his wife to support the family economically, the increase in family disputes and problems and their severity, the increase in divorce cases” (Alharbi, 2022, p. 67).

In addition to financial autonomy and security, the Saudi government has introduced a set of social reforms granting women freedoms previously denied to them by previous strict interpretation and enforcement of Islamic law. Under the current law, Saudi women no longer need permission from a male relative or guardian to apply for a national ID or a passport neither needing approval from or to be escorted by a male guardian when traveling inside or outside of Saudi Arabia. The new law also gives women the right to move out of the family house and live independently without the permission of a male guardian. The family law, which includes cases such as divorce and custody, has been modified to give women more rights compared to what they had in the past. For example, article 127 of the Saudi child custody law states, “the mother has the priority right of the custody, then the father, mother’s mother, then father mother” (Bureau of Experts, 2023).

Compared to pre-Vision 2030 era, Saudi women now have more cards in the game, which are operative in the rebalance of power between men and women. With more freedom, personal and financial, the balance of power between men and women has changed considerably. Having the power to choose whom to marry and when is the first step to gender balance.

The next section provides statistical data that shed light on marital status of Saudi women in different age brackets, which are captured in Table 1.

Table 1 Marital status of Saudi Women by age (2022) Data was gathered from General Authority for Statistics

Saudi women	29 and Younger	30–39 years old	40–49 years old	50–59 years old	60 and older
Single	1,773,298	223,000	67,334	20,138	9027
Married	768,006	1,088,844	758,086	457,048	239,986
Divorced	64,820	107,666	83,697	54,829	39,729
Widowed	3826	14,075	38,343	88,212	250,652
Total	2,609,950	1,433,585	947,460	620,227	539,394

5 Statistical Facts of Marital Status

Table 1 shows information provided by General Authority for Statistics in Saudi Arabia in 2022.³ related to marital status of Saudi women in different age brackets.

The numbers show a stable range of divorce among Saudi women who are above 30 years old (7.36–8.84%), while only % 2.48 of women under 30 got divorced. However, divorce itself does not reflect the reality of women's attitudes toward marriage. Table 2 shows that % 67.94 of women under 30 years old have never been married. The tendency of staying single among young Saudi women might explain the stability of the divorce rate. The table also shows that % 15.55 of women who are in their 30s have never been married, compared to % 7.1 of 40s category and % 3.24 of 50s category.³

Using the data from the Saudi Woman Report (GAS, 2022, p. 10), Fig. 2 shows more details of Saudi single women. Youth are less likely to get married in pre-college age compared to their counterparts in previous generations. Saudi girls used to get married at a very young age, mostly before they reach the age of 20. The figure may reflect a growing tendency of waiting for what they might consider to be as a sign of maturity. Now, the average Saudi woman does not consider being a housewife as her sole social role anymore. Thus, the decision to get into marriage is not as easy as it used to be in the past.

Women under 40s belong to the generation that has been overseas on educational scholarships to many Western countries, mostly to the United States. Those women also experienced the first major wave of women empowerment in the job market during King Abdullah's rule (2005–2015). The 18-year-old girl who traveled to study abroad in 2005 is a 36-year-old woman now. The mentality of those women who studied abroad or started working in multinational companies is different from those who stayed home and studied in their hometowns and barely worked or interacted with male coworkers.

Moreover, the numbers show that marriage is not a life-purpose for the current generation of Saudi women as it was to previous generations. Saudi young women

³ We don't consider the % 16.73 of women above 60 years old, as they are less likely to get married in that age. There are many reasons might cause being single.

are less likely to get married at an early age and have alternative plans that include pursuing education and building their financial independence through jobs and entrepreneurship.

The high number of single women can also be explained by the new marriage age law. The Saudi government restricts marriage for women under the age of 18 (Alsaadi, 2022). A young person, male or female-, who intends to get married before reaching the age of 18 needs to obtain an official permission to be legally married in Saudi Arabia.⁴ The Said law specifies some conditions for the marriage of minors, which includes: obtaining permission from the court, explicit declaration from the minor and the parents, and medical reports of physical and psychological eligibility for marriage (Al-Dossary, 2022).

Financial independence and legal protection helped to break a major social taboo in the Saudi society. The stigma surrounding divorce has declined in Saudi Arabia (Rahaimy, 2023). Financial dependency and social stigma are hard to be separated. A woman who moves from a position of a dependent of her husband to a dependent of her father/brother is more likely to be considered a burden. In such a case, a woman is more likely to be blamed for the divorce and to be excluded from the new household (her original family that she returned to). Cultural ethos and religious teachings do not favor getting a divorce. An employed woman might have an advantage over an unemployed divorcee. An unemployed divorced woman is expected to be guided and controlled by a close male relative. Saleh and Luppigini (2017), pointed out that a divorced woman is likely to be considered as a burden on the family and will be controlled as a way of placing the blame on her for the failed marriage.

The financial independence, however, helps divorced women to escape the burden-on-the-family position, while the law reforms help them to escape the domination by their male relatives. The social stigma of being a divorced woman is not as forceful and shameful as it once was, and a woman who has an independent source of income will have an easier time and be able to move on with their lives.

As women become more protected by law and exercise their rights, they realize they have more voice in the important decision of when to get married and to whom. The link between career-pursuing and increasing age at which to get married is a global phenomenon. For example, in the United States, the average age of marriage for women was 20 in the 1950s compared to 28 in 2022 (U.S. Census, 2022). The breakdown of statistical information about single and married women in different age brackets, the delayed age of marriage for women, and the inevitable redefinition of roles in a marital relationship discussed in this section takes us to the crux of this paper, which is discussed in the next section. More particularly, power dependence through balanced and imbalanced marital relationships in Saudi Arabia will be discussed using Emerson's five core assumptions.

⁴ <https://www.my.gov.sa/wps/portal/snp/servicesDirectory/servicedetails/17499>.

6 Power of Dependence

As mentioned earlier, a key concept in Emerson's exchange theory of power is the idea that exchange relations can be balanced or imbalanced. That is, marriage is a relationship that has a balance between both partners, and the balance is subject to the position each spouse has in that relationship. Table 2 explains the case of Saudi women in the marriage relationship based on Emerson's five key-assumptions. In the left side of the table, the assumptions are listed and their corresponding case of Saudi women are described in the right side.

The five assumptions were gathered from (Emerson, 1962).

Although Vision 2030 mainly focuses on economics and prosperity, Saudi youth pay more attention to the quality of life they like to have and enjoy. As culturally believed, happiness starts from home and individuals work hard in order to be able

Table 2 Richard Emerson's five key-assumptions of exchange relation

#	Emerson's assumption	Case of Saudi women
1	Humans are rational beings	After receiving quality education and legal backing for inclusion in society, Saudi women have begun to seize the opportunity to participate actively in society and grow their capacity for leadership roles in various spheres of life in Saudi society
2	Individuals must experience costs in order to obtain future rewards	As Saudi women have a long history of being subjugated and subordinated by a male-dominated social system, it did not take them long to start working outside the home, gain experience, and contribute to society just like men. Thus, their reward is to have equal rights in the household and the relationship with their male partners (i.e., husbands) as well as equitable treatment in the workplace
3	The standards that humans use to evaluate rewards and costs differ from person to person and can vary over the course of time	Just like men, each woman has her own criteria for evaluating a good marriage. It follows then that there will be much variability and individual differences on what constitutes, for example, a successful marriage, a fair and equitable relationship, etc
4	Social exchanges are regulated by the norm of reciprocity	Saudi women now look for mutually-beneficial marital relationships. The marriage is expected to be based on an ethic of reciprocity in terms of respect, appreciation, and responsibility. Deviation from this ethic causes unbalancing in the marital relationship, which, in turn, could lead to a negative reciprocity norm, with the potential for emergence of and rise in active and/or passive aggression as a means to defending oneself as well as a means to safeguarding one's rights
5	Individuals are motivated by self-interest	Marriage is a relationship in which each partner strives for happiness and stability. If a spouse no longer feels he/she is reaping the expected benefits of marriage, he or she will begin to question the viability of the marriage and may begin to see no reason for continuing being in it

to afford the desired living standards to enjoy a personal life with their families. Thus, marriage is the turning point in the life of any individual. Under Vision 2030, women have more rights within the Saudi family and society, which changes the social equation. Emmerson's theory helps to analyze the new social equation in Saudi Arabia, as man is not the only independent variable anymore, and helps to examine the perspective of both men and women on what constitutes the quality of life they aspire for.

Taking women's perspective, they seek a quality of life that is coupled with security. The history of Saudi society is governed by the patriarchal system, where women have a limited margin of power. This historical account makes women anxious about losing the rights and privileges they gained with Vision 2030. Thus, they look at marriage as an issue that should not restrict their life and put them back under the control of a man. On the other hand, age does not serve women's position. Aging affects fertility and the physical appearance of women way more than men. According to the World Bank, the fertility level in Saudi Arabia has decreased from 5.0 in 1995 and it was predicted to reach 2.4 in 2021 (World Bank, 2022). Thus, a woman in her 30s might be well-educated and financially independent, but her chances of finding a single man—with no children—is harder than a woman in her early 20s.

Taking men's perspective, they seek establishing family as a sign of adulthood. As the patriarchal system in Saudi society is declining, men are beginning to adjust to the changes taking place to the institution of marriage. Sharia law holds men responsible for all financial responsibilities for marriage and family. However, Sharia also gives him the privilege of patriarchal power. For a long time, social traditions in Saudi Arabia overlapped with the basic religious law. Man was considered to be the breadwinner and woman was expected to be the housewife. The one who earns money is obligated to take care of the family, while the one who receives money is obligated to follow the breadwinner's lead.

When a wife goes to work, the time she has to spend on doing chores becomes limited thereby necessitating help from the husband or hired housekeeper. The man is expected to pay the housekeeper's salary. By comparison, an employed wife is not only financially independent she also has a stronger position within the family. With the balance tipped, the man finds himself with more financial responsibilities and less power within the family. This is an unbalanced relationship, as only one part of the equation has been changed, while the other remains as it is.

Traditional marriage stipulates that power is associated with financial responsibilities. However, this is not the case anymore. Part of the equation has changed in the form of an employed wife who is not responsible for chores anymore, and not obligated—traditionally and legally—to share the financial responsibility of the household with her husband. At this point, men might review the costs and benefits of marriage. The imbalance in the marital equation makes some men to do a cost-benefit analysis: what they receive in return in the relationship.

It is clear that Vision 2030 has worked in favor of women. The abolishing of morality codes that have for long limited women's freedoms coupled with the adoption of more open-minded policies have naturally given women more voice and accorded them greater rights including personal freedoms and a wider access to job

opportunities in various fields. These changes will be difficult to undo, and it is hard to imagine the kingdom reverting to the pre-Vision 2030 era (Alrebh, 2022). This point is closely related to Emerson's second assumption that indicates individuals must experience costs in order to obtain future rewards (Nye, 1978). It is understandable that women want to maintain the gains offered through Vision 2030, and it is hard to imagine they would comprise on them.

Balancing rewards and costs depends on the power positioning that exists in a relationship. Thus, it is normal for today's Saudi women to reevaluate the power game and reassess rewards and the costs of a marital relationship based on the new reality. The reassessment of balance between the rewards and the costs aims to maximize profits and minimize expenses. Just like men, women look for getting the maximum benefit out of a marital relationship (both materially and emotionally).

Moreover, when reassessing balancing of rewards and costs, people need a reference point to compare their current position with the potential alternatives. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) call such a reference the Comparison Level (CL), which helps individuals to review their satisfaction of their previous/current experiences and expectations in a given relationship. CL is a tool that helps individuals to enhance their awareness of their rights within a relationship.

The CL leads to developing critical thinking that goes beyond the awareness of one's position in a relationship to consider alternatives, referred to as CLalt. According to Steve Duck's (1994), a comparison level for alternatives of an individual is influenced by the degree of happiness and reward in their existing relationship. If the CL is favorable, the individual could not consider the potential advantages of a romantic relationship. Thus, CLalt serves as the mental mechanism for the comparison of the outcomes (reward-to-cost ratio) of the current relationship with the possible outcomes of available alternative relationships or of no relationship at all. That is to say, CL questions the cost and rewards of a given relationship, while CLalt compares it to an alternative choice (either another relationship or no relationship).

Given the new reforms that empower women, the average Saudi woman has the opportunity and capacity for both CL and CLalt. This can shed light on the increase of the divorce rate in Saudi Arabia, as women are no longer the dependent variable anymore in the marriage equation. Gaining more power enhances women's position in the Saudi family, which includes the option to leave an unhappy marriage.

Back to Emerson's five key-assumptions, using rationality to determine costs and rewards of a relationship helps individuals to use the standards that suit and meet their own needs. As the fourth assumption indicates that individuals are motivated by self-interest, both men and women would seek a partner who fulfills their needs thereby establishing a norm of reciprocity (Emerson's fifth assumption) that governs social exchange relations.

As Fig. 2 explains that the younger the woman is the less likely she is to get married. That likelihood increases if the woman is employed (See Fig. 1). Empowerment of women in Saudi Arabia allows all youth—not only females—to think more seriously about marriage. A woman might assess her position within a family and based on that assessment rejects the patriarchal system. She will also begin to claim more rights based on her power/income and the new immunity/family laws. Reciprocally, a man

who lost his patriarchal position may question the duties thrived from the masculine culture.

The high number of single females in Saudi Arabia reflects the declining tendency toward marriage for both genders. As we could not locate specific data on single Saudi males, the data on single females perhaps reflects a similar—or even higher—percentage of single males. This assumption is based on the formal statistics that show a slight difference between the two genders. The number of males in Saudi Arabia reached 9,434,131, or 50.2%, while the number of females reached 9,358,131, or 49.8% (Gastat Portal, 2022).

Based on the Arab-Islamic culture of marriage, a man is expected to find a future wife and when he does, he proposes to her family. A woman, on the other hand, waits for the time when a man comes and asks her family for her hand. Hence, the slight advantage of the number of males compared to that of the females leaves Saudi men with limited choices. The statistics show that for each male, there is only one female, perhaps less. Thus, some of the traditionally and religiously sanctioned privileges are no longer affordable (e.g., polygamy).

A qualitative study by Saleh and Luppicini (2017) identified four major areas where divorced Saudi women face challenges: social stigma, family restriction, social outcast, and relationship with former husband. The reforms of the Personal Status Law solved two of these challenges: family restriction, as the father or brother of a divorced woman has no legal authority upon her anymore. In addition, relationship with former husband, as the law specifies the rights and duties for each party, and the man lost a significant part of his privileges. Regarding the social stigma and outcast, the financial independence and the new cultural openness should reduce the negative image of a divorced woman. In addition, the gender equivalent ratios left Saudis with no choice other than reevaluating the traditional image of a divorced woman as ‘used commodity.’ That is to say, the new changes in Saudi Arabia helped to elevate and dignify a woman’s status who is no longer to be treated as a non-person. An independent woman who is aware of and exercises her legal rights can move on after a failed relationship.

7 Conclusion

The facts that should be considered here are beyond the rate of divorce, which is not significantly increasing in parallel with women empowerment in the kingdom. That range, as Table 2 shows, is between 7.36–8.84% for Saudi women who are 30 and. Thus, reluctance toward marriage is the main issue in social status within Saudi society, as more than 70% of women under 30 years old are unmarried.⁵ This hesitant

⁵ Based on the numbers shown in Table 1, Saudi women who are under 30 years old: % 67.94 Never been married, % 2.48 divorced, % 0.14 widowed, which makes the total of unmarried women is %70.58, while only % 29.42 are still married.

attitude toward marriage should not be understood as solely—or mainly—an attitude taken by women.

Hesitance toward marriage among Saudi youth (under 30 years old) is a factor compounded by the fact that the ratio of males relative to females is slightly more among Saudi citizens (50.2 vs. 49.8%). These factors are further complicated when viewed in the context of the national laws that restrict Saudi males and females from marrying non-Saudis.⁶

A Saudi young man who wants to marry and establish a family faces a number of obstacles that limit his options. Women, on the other hand, have more cards in the game as they have access to more job opportunities, and the Personal Status Law has been reformed in a way that limits male domination of and in society.

Emerson's exchange theory and its assumptions apply equally to men and women. Perhaps, men have more reasons today to reevaluate their exchange relation with women, as they have lost the major sources of power, dominance, and privilege. With the changing social scene, women are increasingly becoming less dependent on men. Taking Emerson's first assumption, humans as rational beings, a man who is gradually losing his male dominance advantage would need to evaluate the potential costs and benefits of marriage. He must ponder what he would gain and what he would lose if he gets into a marital relationship. The traditional standards of evaluating the rewards and costs of marriage are not exclusively up to men anymore. Thus, the reciprocal relation has to now be based on a more equivalent relation that requires careful planning and serious thinking before making the final decision. Just like women who are motivated by their self-interest to accept a marriage offer, a man would need to assess the relationship with his future wife based on his self-interest and in accordance with the new social landscape that gives women an active and decisive role in the relationship.

Based on some of the aforementioned, especially the narrowing gap in the ratio of men to women in Saudi Arabia and to increase the choices of finding the suitable marriage partner, Saudi Arabia may benefit from reconsidering its ban against Saudis marrying non-Saudis. Lifting the ban would expand options of finding a spouse for both Saudi men and women. It is understandable that Saudi Arabia, just like the other GCC countries, might be concerned about potential abuses of lifting the existing ban. For example, some non-Saudi men or women might exploit the ban lift to get married to a Saudi citizen in order to obtain residency or work permit in Saudi Arabia. The government can handle such potential abuses by instituting new laws and measures that would minimize their occurrence.

Using the Comparison Level for Alternatives (CLalt), both Saudi men and women would increase the rational consideration of marriage based on available options. CLalt refers to "the lowest level of relational rewards a person is willing to accept given available rewards from alternative relationships or being alone" (Rolloff, 1981)

⁶ Saudis must obtain a special permission from their government before marrying non-Saudis, the law is not applied to GCC citizens, who are treat like Saudi citizens.

https://www.my.gov.sa/wps/portal/snp/servicesDirectory/servicedetails/9216/tut/p/z/04_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfljo8zivQIsTawdDQz9LQwNzQwCnS0tXPwMvYwN3A30g1Pz9L30o_ArAppiVOTr7JuuH1WQWJkHm5mXlq8fYWlkaKZfkO0eDgAYzaJN/.

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Chapter 9

Housekeepers or Catalysts of Change in the Family? “Al-Khadam” and the Evolving Role of Qatari Women



Sharique Umar and Wajdan Karbon

Abstract In the last couple of decades, there has been an increase in the number of female domestic workers, locally referred to as “al-khadam” employed in households in Qatar. This is partly due to the economic growth and rising household incomes because of which families are able to hire migrant females to help them in domestic tasks. In this chapter, we examine how the presence of these workers impacts household labor division and assess how they enable and challenge traditional family settings. Rather than perpetuating a one-dimensional narrative of domestic workers as mere “victims of exploitation”, in this chapter, we situate their experiences within a framework that acknowledges their agency and their vital, though often overlooked, role in shaping Qatari society. Our objective in this chapter is to offer a context-sensitive understanding of how domestic work mediates intersections of gender, class, and cultural norms in Qatar.

1 Introduction

One of the characteristics of modern Gulf societies, particularly in Qatar, is the increasing reliance on female domestic workers for domestic chores in local families. Their presence influences on both the public and private spheres. These women, often coming from countries across Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and Southeast Asia, are integral to maintaining the daily lives of local families. The role that these migrants play goes beyond the household chores as their labor is embedded in a system of care work and social reproduction that is reflective of changing relationships between gender, labor, and migration in the region.

Currently, low-skilled single female migrants make up 17 percent of the total single migrant population who primarily work in the service and hospitality sector (Labour Migration, 2024). A report in 2020 shows that approximately 118 thousand female migrants were engaged in elementary occupations such as housekeeping,

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cleaning, and cooking among other services in Qatar (GLMM, 2020). While an exact number of females working in households can be difficult to obtain due to limited publicly available data, based on some reports, we estimate that the number of domestic workers in Qatar increased from 63,000 in 2006 to around 174,000 in 2016 (Bel-Air, 2023; *Number of migrant domestic workers in Qatar*, 2020). However, readers must keep in mind that this figure includes other professions too, including drivers, gardeners, and private security, many of whom are men. The inclusion of low-skilled male migrants in domestic work renders it hard to determine the precise number of females in household service. Nevertheless, given that local families generally employ more than one female, it is not far-fetched to state that they constitute the majority of domestic workers in Qatar. Relying on existing reports and data from Qatar's Planning and Statistics Authority, it can be said that approximately 102,000 non-Qatari women were specifically employed in household work in the last couple of years (*Planning and Statistics Authority*, 2023).

To better contextualize these figures, we need to compare the number of domestic workers with Qatari population, which is almost 332,000 (Babji, 2024; GLMM, 2015). This comparison shows a striking ratio: for every three Qatari citizens, there is roughly one female worker. However, it must be noted that while not all domestic workers are employed by Qatari families—many are hired by expatriate households as well. The intention here is not to directly link the numbers of these workers with Qatari citizens but rather to point towards the fact that female domestic workers are employed extensively in local families. The precise ratio may vary with changing employment patterns and demographic shifts, however, it does not impact the structural embeddedness of female domestic workers in Qatari society. In our research, we aim to expound on this structural embeddedness while focusing on how female workers are essential in the lives of Qatari women.

The term “*al-khadam*”, derived from the Arabic root “kh-d-m”, which means to serve, is commonly used in Qatar and other GCC countries, to refer to domestic workers. The term has historical connotations that are tied to servitude and subordination, especially in domestic settings. Though linguistically neutral, the word does carry socio-cultural baggage and shows the power imbalances between local families and migrant workers. This terminology is not unique to the region; in other parts of the world, domestic workers are referred to by terms that carry similar hierarchical implications—such as “*katulong*” in the Philippines (Patterson, 2019), “*amah*” in Hong Kong and Singapore (Twomey, 2023), or “*naukarani*” in South Asia (Wasiuzzaman & Wells, 2010). In this study, we use the terms “housekeepers” and “domestic workers” interchangeably; to avoid cultural connotations and to emphasize the various roles they play in the household.

While much of the existing research on migration in the Gulf deals with issues concerning male workers, such as their economic condition, challenges, and contributions to economy (Adhikary et al., 2017; Bruslé, 2012; Ewers et al., 2020; Khaled & Gray, 2019; Seshan, 2012), scholarship on female domestic workers is relatively scarce. Specifically, there have been limited research on how these women contribute to the host countries in the region. When attention is given to women migrants, research tends to either celebrate highly skilled women as empowered agents of

change (Buttorff et al., 2018; Khattab et al., 2020; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2019), or focus on the exploitation, and human rights abuses faced by low-skilled female workers (Acosta & Acosta, 2013; Amnesty International, 2022; Fernandez, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2023; Joseph, 2010). Despite the fact that these studies shed light on several important issues, they often present female domestic workers as passive subjects rather than active social participants.

While acknowledging the necessity of these studies and the importance of raising awareness regarding the challenges domestic workers face during their stay in their host countries, we seek to draw attention to another important aspect of gender and mobility in which we view female workers as social actors whose presence alters gender roles in the host families. We emphasize that their presence should not be understood solely from the lens of household needs but through a perspective that takes into consideration the negotiation of gendered labor in the Gulf region’s economy and society.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section, following the introduction, presents the conceptual framework, which is essential for understanding theories that guide our research. We also provide a brief review of existing studies and literature on the topic to show how our work fits into the broader scholarship. The second section explains the research methodology used in the study. Following this, the fourth section discusses recent trends, focusing on the employment of domestic workers in households and the participation of Qatari women in the labor market. The fifth section summarizes the findings and reflects on how the presence of domestic workers is contributing to shifts in gender roles within Qatari families. The sixth section examines the social and cultural factors that complicate a straightforward interpretation of these experiences, emphasizing how class, tradition, and societal norms mediate the influence of domestic workers on Qatari women’s lives, often reinforcing existing power structures rather than dismantling them.

2 Conceptual Framework

We propose two theoretical frameworks to study the changes brought by the presence of domestic workers in Qatari female’s domestic roles and aspirations; Becker’s (1965) theory of the allocation of time and the cooperative approach to household bargaining, albeit with some caveat (Agarwal, 1997; Bolt & Bird, 2003; Carlsson et al., 2012; Doss, 2013; Flinn et al., 2018). While these theories provide useful analytical tools, neither fully accounts for the socio-cultural, religious, and global labor structures that shape labor distribution in family. Becker’s theory of time allocation emphasizes how individuals and households allocate time between various activities—such as work, leisure, and household duties to maximize utility. This framework helps explain how the employment of domestic workers reshapes time allocation within Qatari households, particularly for women. With domestic help, women can delegate household tasks, which will allow them to invest more time in other pursuits. However, Becker’s theory, which is rooted in a neoclassical economic

perspective, may not fully account for the socio-cultural expectations that still heavily influence time allocation, particularly for women in Qatar.

While women may delegate household tasks to domestic workers, the persistent social and familial expectations around their roles as caregivers and homemakers could limit how much time they can reclaim for non-domestic activities (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015). For example, even with domestic assistance, many women still participate in overseeing household duties or child-rearing because of cultural norms. Therefore, Becker's framework provides only a partial understanding of the situation at hand. To fully grasp how domestic workers influence the allocation of time within Qatari households, we must also consider the socio-religious context, where traditional roles are deeply rooted in both cultural and Islamic values.

To complement the limitations in Becker's theory, we apply the cooperative approach to household bargaining to examine how domestic workers influence decision-making and power relations within Qatari families (Agarwal, 1997; Bolt & Bird, 2003). Household bargaining theory focuses on the unequal allocation of resources and decision-making authority, often between men and women. It recognizes that power imbalances exist within families, between husbands and wives, and that family decisions are products of bargaining power, which is impacted by various factors such as income, social norms, religious values and access to external resources. In theory, the presence of domestic workers could strengthen women's bargaining power by reducing their burdens and allowing them to pursue work or education, which would eventually increase their economic and social leverage within the family (Doss, 2013). However, this assumes that time reallocation translates directly into greater agency, which is not always the case. The application of household bargaining model may offer us a critical understanding of hierarchy in the family, it is not going to completely explain all the aspects of issues at hand. Besides utilizing a gendered approach, there is also need to analyze the issue from a macro perspective i.e., looking at it from the global labor system in which domestic work is embedded. It would help us comprehend how well off households outsource domestic work but retain traditional gender expectations (Parreñas, 2001; Yeates, 2009). As societies progress, the fundamental need for domestic and caregiving work remains unchanged, yet its burden is systematically shifted downward in the social hierarchy. In GCC countries, families continue to uphold expectations of women's domestic roles, but these roles are now mostly performed by migrant women from developing countries. It can be argued that this system thrives on the dislocation of labor, where migrant women's work is simultaneously indispensable and devalued (Mahdavi, 2013). Moreover, this process exposes the paradox of modernity: while economic liberalization promotes gender inclusion, it does so by deepening the reliance on racialized and classed labor (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015). The household, therefore, is not merely a site of intimate negotiations, as household bargaining theories suggest, but a microcosm of global capitalist structures where power is exercised through individual choice as well as embedded in transnational labor flows that sustain economic privilege.

The demographic of female domestic workers in Qatar, despite its large size, has received comparatively little attention within academic circles. The existing literature

on gender and migration in the Gulf tends to fall into two distinct areas, as outlined by Hanson (2010). The first area explores how mobility affects gender roles, while the second looks at how gender shapes migration patterns. This includes examining the biological sex differences and their impact on the mobility, employability, and vulnerability of females. Current research primarily emphasizes the vulnerability of this group (Acosta & Acosta, 2013; Demissie, 2017; Fernandez, 2014; Halabi, 2006; Hewka, 2022; Ishii, 2019; Jarallah, 2009; Joseph, 2010; Malit Jr. & Naufal, 2016; Murray, 2013; Sabban, 2020; Shah, 2004; Shlala & Jayaweera, 2016; Strobl, 2008; Syed, 2017; Tsujigami, 2019). This body of literature adopts a gendered approach, investigating how gender identity interacts with factors such as ethnicity, employment, and immigration status, thereby shaping the experiences of female domestic workers in Qatar. These studies further our understanding of the plight of female domestic workers in Qatar and highlight the need for improved legal protections, better working conditions, and increased awareness of the challenges faced by female workers. In addition, Jawad Syed (2017) introduces an Islamic ethical framework to address the challenges domestic workers face. Syed proposes a harmonization of Islamic ethics with labor norms and regulations, envisioning a scenario where housekeepers receive fair treatment, equality, dignity, and social justice. Another body of literature focuses on the relationship between host families and domestic workers, primarily addressing issues such as trust, cultural differences, and the impact of housekeepers on children (Aldahri et al., 2015; Al-Matary et al., 2013; Ivanova, 2020; Malit et al., 2018; Nagy, 1998).

Our study intersects with two critical bodies of literature. Firstly, it aligns with research analyzing the contributions of migrant communities to the Gulf countries while recognizing how these communities impact the broader socio-economic landscape. Secondly, it adds to the literature on the role females play in the economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. By exploring the various dimensions of the presence of female domestic workers, we seek to add depth to existing scholarship on migration as well as shed light on the potential inherent in the gendered aspect of labor migration to the Gulf region.

3 Research Methods

We adopt a qualitative approach where we primarily rely on secondary data sources, including academic literature, official statistics, and reports on domestic labor and women's economic participation in Qatar to provide a foundation for understanding the socio-economic context and labor trends in the Gulf. Additionally, the co-author's own lived experience as a Qatari woman and her observations of the interactions between local families and domestic workers were immensely beneficial in aiding our analysis. Her close connection to the community allowed for a thorough understanding of the relationships between domestic workers and the households. While we have included specific examples to illustrate key points, we omitted any reference linking personal information.

For data analysis, we employed narrative analysis to interpret the themes and patterns identified within the literature and the co-author's observations. This approach helped us explore how domestic labor influences the roles and experiences of both Qatari women and female domestic workers. Additionally, grounded theory was used to develop a theoretical framework that emerged from the study's findings, allowing us to capture the changing nature of household labor and its impact on family structures.

4 Female Domestic Workers in the GCC States: Trends and Patterns

Since the discovery of oil, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have undergone rapid development which has necessitated an increasing reliance on foreign labor to support large-scale projects in education, healthcare, and infrastructure. These migrants are employed in a wide variety of sectors, but low-skilled female migrants are particularly concentrated in the household and service industries. In 2022, there were nearly 5 million domestic workers across the GCC countries, with Qatar employing approximately 102,000 of them (Planning & Statistics Authority, 2020). This figure represents nearly one-third of Qatar's citizen population and highlights the country's reliance on migrant domestic labor.

When comparing Qatar to other GCC countries like Bahrain and Kuwait, it becomes evident that Qatar has a higher concentration of female domestic workers relative to both its total population and its female citizen demographic (see Table 1). To put this into perspective, we need to compare domestic worker to citizen ratio of Qatar with its neighbors that have somewhat similar demography. In 2021, there was approximately one female domestic worker for every 13 citizens in Bahrain. In Kuwait, the ratio was even more pronounced, with one housekeeper for every 4 Kuwaiti citizens in the same year. Looking specifically at the number of female citizens, the proportions become even more striking. In Kuwait, for example, there was one female domestic worker for every two Kuwaiti women.¹ This indicates a very high concentration of domestic workers compared to the female citizen population. Similarly, in Bahrain, the ratio was one female domestic worker for every six Bahraini female citizens in 2021.² For Qatar, we estimated that the ratio of female domestic workers to Qatari women is approximately 1:1.5. This estimate is supported by a study suggesting that Qatari families typically hire between one and three housekeepers (Aldahri et al., 2015). It is important to note that this ratio provides a general

¹ The ratio is calculated from the available date. Source. Information and eGovernment Authority. Bahrain Open Data Portal. Accessed September 24, 2023, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20230703180743/https://bahrain.opendatasoft.com/explore/dataset/mid-year-population-by-nationality-and-sex/table/?sort=year>.

² The ratio is calculated from the available date. Source. Kuwait Population by Nationality, sex, and age group (2022). GLMM. Accessed September 24, 2023, from <https://gulfmigration.grc.net/kuwait-population-by-nationality-kuwaiti-non-kuwaiti-sex-and-age-group-2022/>

Table 1 Number of domestic workers by gender (mid-2022)

	Females	Males	Total	% Females
<i>Bahrain</i>	52,748	22,148	74,896	70.4%
<i>Kuwait</i>	339,219	315,545	654,764	51.8%
<i>Oman</i>	N.A	N.A	271,976	N.A
<i>Qatar</i>	96,373	64,413	160,786	59.9%
<i>Saudi Arabia</i>	877,227	2,509,842	3,387,069	25.9%
<i>UAE</i>	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A

Source GLMM. Accessed September 21, 2023, from <https://gulfmigration.grc.net/domestic-workers-in-the-gcc-a-diverse-population/>

estimate rather than an exact count of domestic workers per female citizen. Additionally, while non-citizen families also employ domestic workers, it is predominantly Qatari families who are the primary employers in this sector.

By comparing these ratios, we aim to illustrate the average proportion of female domestic workers relative to female citizens in GCC states such as Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain. The comparison suggests that Qatar has a relatively higher concentration of female domestic workers compared to its neighbors, both in terms of its overall population and its female citizen demographic.

5 Discussion

One of the primary goals of our research is to examine how the presence of female domestic workers at home impacts the socio-economic trajectories of Qatari women who employ them. In particular, our objective is to evaluate how the employment of domestic workers enables women to participate in social and economic spheres while also reinforcing existing hierarchies of race, class, and nationality. We are interested in observing the ways through which employing domestic workers allows Qatari women to pursue personal or professional goals that they otherwise might not have been able to pursue. Our inquiry is situated within theoretical discussions on gendered labor division (Federici, 2004), the commodification of care (Parreñas, 2001), and the global stratification of reproductive labor (Anderson, 2000; Hochschild, 2000).

Family culture in Qatar, similar to other GCC countries, has for a long, adhered to the traditional distribution of labor; men are supposed to earn while females manage the household and rear children. This labor equation primarily binds females at home for the majority of the day. However, due to the riches oil has brought, local families have been able to employ one or multiple domestic workers who take upon the duties at home that were earlier assigned to the female family members. By shouldering the responsibilities of domestic chores and child supervision, these workers offer women the latitude required to chart out their career aspirations. Furthermore,

a gradual change in the perception of gender roles has allowed females to follow their pursuits beyond the confines of their homes; whether those involving personal hobbies, education, professional careers, or entrepreneurial ventures. With housekeepers taking charge of household responsibilities and childcare duties, women are able to channel their energies toward personal growth and development. Our interaction suggests that many Qatari females recognize this change and claim that this shift has positively affected their mental well-being and has made them better equipped to pursue education, participate in local markets, and even engage in entrepreneurship and business. Yet, in reality, the employment of domestic workers does not necessarily challenge the gendered division of labor; rather, it merely transfers household responsibilities from citizen women to migrant women, who, in the case of Qatar and its neighbours, often come from lower-income countries in South, Southeast Asia and Africa. Our findings indicate that while domestic workers allow women to actualize opportunities for professional and personal growth, this process, however, is embedded within the structural inequalities that characterize the labor market in the region.

Nevertheless, we came across many examples that prove the significance of domestic workers in the family. A middle-aged Qatari woman reported that employing a domestic worker allowed her to complete an online master's degree in business administration. Before hiring domestic help, she struggled to balance household chores and childcare with her academic commitment. With a domestic worker managing daily tasks and childcare, she was able to dedicate more time to her studies and professional networking. In another example, a 42-year-old entrepreneur from a high-income family utilized the assistance of domestic workers to manage her expanding business. She hired two assistants who took over household responsibilities and allowed her to focus on scaling her startup. This arrangement enabled her to attend international conferences and facilitate her professional growth. In contrast, a 29-year-old Pakistani female found that domestic help was less accessible due to financial constraints. After relocating to Qatar with her husband, who works at a local school, she hoped to pursue a nursing course. However, the presence of two young children and limited financial resources made it difficult for her to hire domestic help. As a result, she found it challenging to balance childcare responsibilities with her aspiration to further her education. It ultimately prevented her from enrolling in the course and seeking employment. Thus, it can be said that, while the presence of domestic help has given women greater flexibility to pursue education, employment, and entrepreneurial ventures, it remains contingent on the socio-economic status of the family and the availability of a low-wage migrant workforce. The delegation of household labor to migrant domestic workers is a part of a larger pattern of transnational care economies, where the reproductive labor of women from lower-income backgrounds helps the career and personal aspirations of upper-class women (Parreñas, 2001). By outsourcing care work, these women are able to enter or remain in the workforce which ultimately sustains their financial independence and social mobility. However, this comes at the cost of reinforcing the invisibility and undervaluation of domestic labor within capitalist economies (Federici, 2004).

It is important to note that not every Qatari woman relies on domestic workers, but their presence definitely improves the ability of those who do to participate in social activities. This was particularly evident in the management of hosting gatherings and events at home. For instance, a woman in her mid-thirties, who regularly hosted family gatherings, found that with the support of her domestic worker, she could enjoy the company of her guests rather than worry about the preparation or cleaning up afterwards. Many women accepted invitations and participated in social engagements without worrying about the condition of their homes, knowing that domestic workers would manage everything in their absence. Additionally, they were able to host friends and relatives with ease which strengthened their social and professional networks.

Moreover, several women attested that employing domestic assistance enabled them to undertake extended trips for leisure, healthcare, or other personal reasons. A mother, for instance, shared how her domestic worker ensured her children and home were well-cared-for while she was abroad for medical treatment. It helped her focus on recovery without the constant worry of household responsibilities. This example fits right in the debate on how outsourcing domestic labor can lead to redistribution of maternal responsibilities rather than relinquishment of them (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2004). At the same time, it also raises questions about how this arrangement affects the relationship between Qatari children and their nannies, particularly in cases where they assume a central role in early childhood socialization.

Besides these practicalities, the presence of domestic workers also helped Qatari women cultivate a refined outward appearance and self-confidence. A woman who is a mother of three shared how her domestic worker has allowed her to reclaim time for personal grooming and self-care. She feels more self-assured in her interactions and has even taken on active roles in female *majlis*—female gatherings, where they discuss social issues.

This illustrates how domestic labor is not only an economic resource but also a mechanism through which social lives are sustained. The employment of domestic workers enables local women to cultivate social capital. This phenomenon has been observed in other contexts as well, where women outsource household tasks to lower-income workers (Parreñas, 2014). However, the reliance on domestic workers does not fundamentally challenge the gendered division of labor. Instead, it leads to a stratified form of gender emancipation which is enabled by the labor of marginalized migrant women.

5.1 Socio-Economic Impact

Over the years, there has been a clear trend in Qatar of more women pursuing education and joining the workforce. Valentine Moghadam (2003) have argued that economic diversification and state-driven modernization policies have led to more women participating in labor force in the Middle East, albeit within constraints imposed by patriarchal structures. Qatari women are now working in a variety of

fields, including healthcare, education, finance, technology, hospitality, and many other service industries. In recent years, we have observed a noticeable increase in the participation of women in the job market. The average labor force participation rate of Qatari women is higher than that of several highly developed countries. According to the data presented in Fig. 1, as of 2022, the labor force participation rate for Qatari females stands at 60.5%. This surpasses the rates observed in some of the most developed nations globally, such as the United States (56.5%), the United Kingdom (58.5%), and France (52.5%). Remarkably, Qatar's figure exceeds the global average labor force participation rate, which is reported at 47.3%. Similarly, as depicted in Fig. 2, female labor force participation rate outstrips that of its neighboring countries.

In our research, we define “employment of females” as their involvement in the workforce across different sectors of the economy. This definition includes women who are engaged in paid employment, whether they work part-time or full-time, as well as those who are involved in entrepreneurial ventures or self-employment. In the context of Qatar, where most domestic work is done by housekeepers, our research does not include the domestic roles performed by women within their own households as part of female employment.

The number of women in Qatar holding positions as authorized signatories and managing companies has reached around 4,900, respectively (More Businesswomen in All Sectors, 2022). They are increasingly making their mark in sectors such as design, interior décor, jewelry, real estate, and the food and beverage industry. Data from the Qatar Chamber of Commerce & Industry further supports this trend, showing a rise in the representation of Qatari women across various economic sectors.

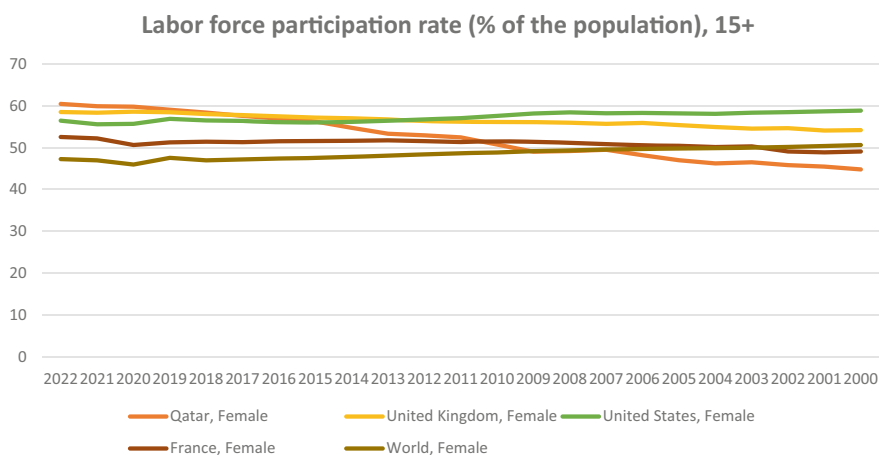


Fig. 1 Labor force participation rate (% of the population) Qatar, United States, United Kingdom, France, World. *Source* Gender Data Portal. The World Bank. Accessed October 22, 2023, from https://genderdata.worldbank.org/indicators/sl-tlf-acti-zs/?gender=female&geos=QAT_GBR_USA_FRA_WLD&view=trend&year-range=2000_2022

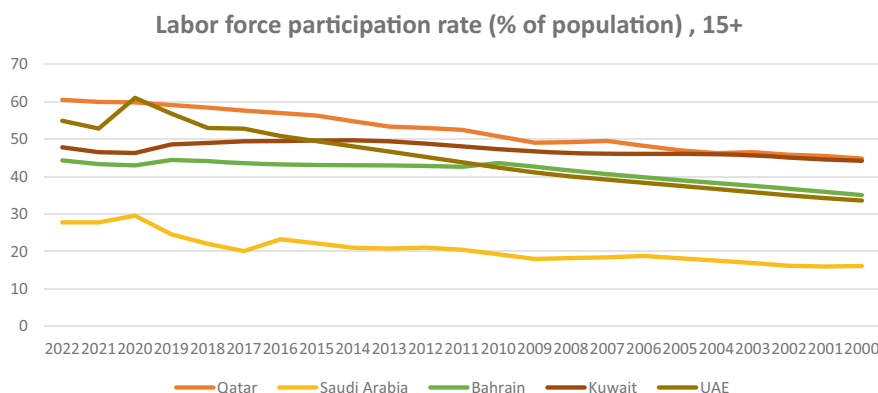


Fig. 2 Labor force participation rate (% of population) Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain. *Source* Gender Data Portal. The World Bank. Accessed October 22, 2023, from https://genderdata.worldbank.org/indicators/sl-tlf-acti-zs/?gender=female&geos=QAT_SAU_BHR_KWT_ARE&view=trend&year-range=2000_2022

Specifically, the Qatar Chamber reports that 7,000 Qatari women hold full or partial ownership of companies within Qatar (The Peninsula Qatar, 2022).

This growing number of women’s participation in business aligns with the goals of the Qatar National Vision, 2030 (More Businesswomen in All Sectors, 2022; Qatar National Vision, 2030, 2023). Central to this vision is the goal of achieving gender equality and empowering women. The vision emphasizes the importance of women’s contributions to the workforce while also enhancing their social security.

Beyond labor force participation, women are also increasingly established and manage their own businesses. Data from the Qatar Chamber of Commerce suggest the growing involvement of women in entrepreneurship. Between 2003 and 2005, 1,360 business licenses were issued to women. By 2005, women made up nearly 17 percent of active entrepreneurs, reflecting their increasing role in the business sector (Felder & Vuollo, 2008; *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010—Qatar*, 2010).

The integration of domestic workers into Qatari households has changed the way local women perceive their engagement in the entrepreneurial and professional pursuits. For instance, an entrepreneur in the tech sector attributes her ability to focus on expanding her startup to the support provided by her domestic staff. By delegating household chores and childcare responsibilities, she was able to dedicate more time to business development and networking, which contributed to her startup’s success. Similarly, an executive in a design firm, highlights how the assistance of domestic workers has allowed her to manage her professional responsibilities while maintaining a balanced family life. The presence of domestic help has enabled her to take on additional leadership roles and engage in community outreach programs.

Historically, advancements for women in leadership roles began in 2003 with appointments to key positions such as the Minister of Education and the President

of the University of Qatar, a female Dean of the Faculty of Sharia and Law at the same university, and a female Chair of the Board of Directors of the Hamad Medical Corporation, the official health organization of Qatar (Felder & Vuollo, 2008; Reply by the State of Qatar, 2004). These milestones set the stage for future growth in women's leadership. Recent developments continue this trend, with more women now holding influential roles across various sectors.

The growth of women's involvement in scientific fields and leadership roles is supported by both the integration of gender considerations into economic activities and the changing societal attitudes toward women's roles. However, it is crucial to mention that the impact of domestic workers varies across different socio-economic contexts. For instance, women from higher income brackets may benefit more from domestic help compared to those with limited financial resources.

5.2 Relationship Between the Qatari Woman and Domestic Worker

Our research also seeks to understand the nature of the relationship between Qatari women and their domestic workers. Findings indicate that the women, typically the primary homemakers, hold authority within their households. Domestic workers, by contrast, occupy a subordinate role, with limited influence over family decisions. However, beyond their professional duties, domestic workers often become trusted confidants, and privy to personal concerns, challenges, and crises. This bond sometimes goes beyond the employer-employee relationship, with some Qatari women considering their domestic worker akin to a sibling due to shared living arrangements and the camaraderie established. Especially in long-term employment spanning over a decade or more, the relationship tends to expand its influence to include other family members. For instance, a family describes their domestic worker from the Philippines as a "trusted family member" rather than just an employee. She has been with the family for over eight years, during which she has become akin to a member. They share personal conversations, and she is often consulted about family matters, though her role remains officially limited to household chores. While, the stories we came across may give an impression that domestic workers are integral part of the family they serve in, we must, however, keep in mind that the situation can be different for other workers. The emotional bonds formed in these relationships, while genuine at times, do not dismantle the fundamental hierarchy of servitude within a system where the relationship remains structured around labor and obligation, rather than reciprocal social membership. Moreover, this relationship can be understood through Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labor, where domestic workers are expected to provide emotional care as well as physical labor often without clear boundaries between work and personal relationships. Rhacel Parreñas (2001) describes this as "fictive kinship," a phenomenon in which domestic workers are emotionally incorporated into families yet remain structurally

excluded from the rights and privileges of true kinship. Despite this emotional closeness, the hierarchical structure of employer-employee relationships does not usually change.

Nevertheless, we observe that the relationship requires developing a sense of belonging for housekeepers within the family while maintaining professional boundaries to respect privacy. Achieving this balance needs a continuous efforts and communication from both parties. Qatari women act as mediators who bridge the gap between their domestic workers’ expectations and household realities. This mediation extends to communication, where language barriers sometimes hinder effective interaction between the family and their housekeepers. While English serves as a common language, its proficiency varies. As a result, family members may use basic Arabic and English skills or resort to nonverbal cues to facilitate communication.

6 Challenges

While the employment of domestic workers could be framed as a means to enhance Qatari women’s autonomy, the reality is more nuanced. We observe that it does not always result in an automatic shift in gender roles or decision-making power. In some conservative household, the presence of female workers reinforces existing gender roles rather than challenging them because for some families the employment of domestic workers serves as a status symbol rather than a means to take household responsibilities away from women. In such cases, domestic workers may relieve women of certain household burdens, but these women may still lack autonomy in other areas, such as financial independence or freedom from familial expectations. This points to the need for examining how cultural values around gender roles intersect with the hiring of domestic workers. For instance, we heard of a woman, who despite employing two domestic workers, still feels obligated to fulfill household duties. Her husband expects her to oversee all aspects of the home. For her, the workers alleviate some of the physical workload, but the societal expectations surrounding her role as a wife and mother remain unchanged. Similarly, a younger woman who recently got married, hired a live-in domestic worker but she still faces restrictions in her ability to make decisions about her own finances. Her husband, though supportive of her career, insists on retaining control over the family’s major financial decisions. The presence of a domestic worker in the family although reduces her household chores, but it does not translate into increased autonomy in other areas.

The impact of this shift in household responsibilities on women’s bargaining power is more complicated than what it may seem. While some women may experience increased leverage in household negotiations, such as over-financial decisions or children’s education, this outcome is not uniform across all households. For instance, in wealthier families with multiple domestic workers, women may enjoy greater autonomy, but this might not translate equally in middle-class or conservative households where traditional gender roles are still dominant. In such cases, women

may experience pushback from male family members or even from extended family, who may see domestic help as a threat to traditional family hierarchies.

Gendered expectations, class differences, and the presence of extended family all mediate the extent to which domestic workers actually enable shifts in traditional roles. In some cases, domestic workers may help reinforce existing family structures, particularly in more traditional households where women's roles as caregivers remain central to their identity, despite the outsourcing of physical tasks. A newly married female who comes from a wealthy family has the assistance of domestic workers but lives in an extended family setup where her in-laws expect her to be highly visible and active in family gatherings and caregiving tasks. Despite having more free time due to the help she receives, these expectations prevent her from fully utilizing that time for personal or professional pursuits. She finds herself caught between class expectations, which afford her the luxury of help, and gendered expectations that still prioritize her role as a caregiver. Similarly, a middle-aged woman from a conservative family hired two domestic workers but still prioritizes her role as the primary caregiver for her children and husband. While the workers manage the cleaning and cooking, she remains involved in her children's upbringing and the day-to-day running of the household. For her, delegating physical tasks to domestic workers allows her to focus on nurturing and maintaining her family, reinforcing her traditional role rather than challenging it.

Besides these issues, the demography of female domestic workers is quite heterogenous in terms of age, nationality, religion, and culture. However, we noted that Qatari families commonly seek housekeepers who adhere to Islamic principles and understand the importance of modest attire, which includes covering themselves in the presence of unrelated men. According to Islamic law, any man outside a woman's immediate family (brother, father, uncles, grandfathers, nephew) is considered a *mahram*, necessitating her modest covering in their presence. As a result, some families exclusively hire Muslim housekeepers, while others consider non-Muslim housekeepers who respect local traditions. However, challenges arise when domestic workers encounter difficulties assimilating into the Qatari family which potentially creates a disconnect between their expectations and the reality of their employment.

A major challenge for the employer family stems from cultural differences between domestic workers and the family, particularly when these differences influence the upbringing of children under their care. Given that many women entrust childcare to housekeepers, children often form strong bonds with their caretakers. Consequently, the emotional attachment developed can lead to feelings of loss when housekeepers depart, especially if they have become influential figures in the children's lives.

Furthermore, few concerns have emerged regarding the privacy associated with domestic workers in local households. One of the issues is the potential for domestic workers to share confidential family information with outsiders. This could include personal details about family members or private aspects of household life, which could lead to privacy breaches or unwanted exposure. Another concern involves the unauthorized sharing of images, particularly on social media. There have been instances where domestic workers have posted pictures of children or family

members online without the family’s consent. This can be particularly troubling for families who value privacy and prefer to keep their lives off social media. Additionally, photographing veiled women and sharing these images with individuals outside the family, including foreign men, is another sensitive issue. In many cases, this practice is seen as not only an invasion of privacy but also a potential violation of religious and cultural principles.

7 Conclusion

In recent decades, Qatari society has gone through several changes, of which the increased presence of females in educational and economic sector is unprecedented. As women pursue higher education and increasingly participate in the workforce, the demand for domestic help has grown. Our research examines an often-overlooked aspect of this shift—the role of female domestic workers in facilitating Qatari women’s socio-economic engagement. While in many societies domestic workers are employed primarily to help women balance professional and domestic responsibilities, in Qatar, these workers are often viewed as both a marker of social status and a practical necessity.

Besides their functional role, domestic workers disrupt traditional household arrangements. Their introduction into local families challenges the conventional division of labor, where household chores were traditionally assigned to female family members. These live-in workers who come from different cultural backgrounds also bring with them new practices and approaches to household management. Over time, many domestic workers have come to be viewed as integral parts of the household, involved in much more than simple chores. They accompany families in various activities such as family functions, leisure trips which blur the lines between worker and family member. However, this does not disrupt the hierarchy in the family.

Our findings suggest that the experiences of Qatari women and the influence of domestic workers on household relations are far from uniform. The presence of domestic workers does not lead to a straightforward shift in gender roles or decision-making power. While some women may gain greater autonomy and freedom from traditional responsibilities, others continue to face cultural and familial pressures that limit the extent to which they can leverage the support of domestic workers to pursue careers or education. In more conservative households, the presence of domestic workers may further uphold traditional family structures, as women continue to be seen primarily as caregivers, even when household tasks are delegated to others.

The effect of domestic help varies depending on socio-economic status, cultural norms, and the agency of both the local women and the workers themselves. Women from wealthier or more liberal families may experience more substantial shifts in their roles, however, women from more traditional or lower-income families may not experience the same benefits, as they remain bound by cultural and gendered expectations. Ultimately, while domestic labor has facilitated certain socio-economic

opportunities for Qatari women, its influence is neither linear nor universal, but deeply embedded in the intersecting forces of tradition, class, and gendered expectations

As Qatar continues its social and economic transformation, it is important to recognize the contributions of female domestic workers and the challenges they face. Future research should not only explore how these workers support local families but also work towards developing a framework that deals with systemic issues affecting their well-being.

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Chapter 10

Reverse Gender Gap in STEM Disciplines at Qatar University: The Impact of Family Influence and Educational Support



Maryam Abdullah N. J. Al-Thani and Sanaa Ashour

Abstract In recent decades, the field of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) has become a topic of significant interest worldwide. Yet, one of the key concerns in this area is a considerable gender disparity in the number of enrolled students. Accordingly, in the present study, we investigate enrollment patterns and gender distribution across various STEM disciplines at Qatar University. Our specific focus is on undergraduate students in three academic years—namely, 2011–2012, 2019–2020, and 2021–2022, which were chosen because of the changes in student enrollment numbers caused by amendments in the university policies over these years. Using quantitative data analysis, we analyze enrollment trends and compare the representation of male and female students in specific STEM programs. The findings reveal a reversed gender gap in STEM fields at Qatar University. Although cultural norms in Qatar shape career choices by imposing distinct expectations on men and women, the influence and support of families and school teachers play a crucial role in shaping women’s attitudes toward and representation in STEM fields. Taken together, the results of this study contribute to the broader discourse on gender equity in higher education.

Keywords STEM education • Gender reverse gap • University • Higher education • Qatar

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1 Introduction

As part of Qatar's National Vision 2030 (QNV2030), which is constructed of social, economic, human, and environmental pillars and prioritizes the educational sector (Malkawi, 2022), Qatar aims to shift away from depending on oil and gas as its major sources of income to become more dependent on knowledge (Sellami, Ammar, and Zubair, 2022). Accordingly, in recent years, there has been an increased interest in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, which are expected to make a significant contribution to the sustainable development and progress of Qatar's economy and national security. In addition, STEM supports achieving the Qatarization strategy where graduates from the corresponding fields will take the lead in the construction of the country and the nationalization project (GSDP, 2008).

In this context, there is an urgent need to investigate labor market needs related to STEM fields, along with the outcomes of STEM education. One salient concern in this area is a considerable gender disparity in the number of students enrolled in STEM programs, which is caused by a low demand for qualified female professionals specializing in STEM fields in the labor market (Sellami, Ammar, and Zubair, 2022). Furthermore, in recent years, concerns have been voiced about students' performance in STEM subjects as reflected by Qatari students' poor performance in standardized tests such as TIMSS and PISA. The low grades on these tests demonstrate that Qatari students lack the needed skills and interest in continuing their higher education in STEM fields (Romanowski & Du, 2020).

While Qatar has a diverse population of 3,129,000 people coming from different nationalities, backgrounds, and races (The Planning and Statistics Authority, 2024), the number of male population (2,224,795) by far exceeds that of females (904,188) (PSA, 2024). Taking into account this demographic specificity, in this study, we investigate gender-related patterns in student enrollment in STEM fields at Qatar University. By providing insights into the amount of female and male students registered in STEM subjects at Qatar University, we seek to support future researchers and decision-makers to understand students' patterns in these fields in higher education.

2 Review of the Literature

2.1 *International Discussion on STEM*

Gender differences in students' interest in higher education have previously been explored in many research domains. For instance, in a study on a sample of Spanish students, Verdugo-Castro et al. (2022) used the social cognitive career theory to examine the reasons underlying gender-specific interest in STEM education and to explore the views university students have about this specialization. More specifically, the authors looked into four factors—namely, gender, perception, expectations,

and attitudes—that might affect students' interest in STEM education. The authors also explored students' motivations, learning, and educational history, as well as the potential impact of the society and family on the students. An interesting regularity spotted in this and other relevant studies is a critical gender gap in different STEM fields. Accordingly, as noted by Holgado et al. (2020), the European Union intends to increase the number of female students in STEM via dedicated research projects.

In the context of the growing attention to STEM education, many governments have sought to develop several policies and mechanisms that would enhance students' enrollment into the corresponding university programs (Cheryan et al., 2017). In a study that explored government STEM policies from an international perspective, Freeman et al. (2019) identified several pertinent trends. Based on the results of a comparison of students' performance on reputed international assessments such as PISA and TIMMS, the authors examined various programs and solutions that can motivate students to join STEM programs. The authors concluded that reforming school curricula and strategies of teaching can considerably enhance students' participation, interest, and performance in STEM subjects.

Although STEM education offers students important tools and abilities ranging from problem-solving skills to applying scientific theories in real-life circumstances, along with other useful skills, Roungos et al. (2020) reported low performance in Mathematics and Science of a sample of the EU students in the PISA test that took place in 2018. According to the authors, the reasons for these low results were that the EU was not paying sufficient attention to STEM education between the period 2000 and 2015; other factors included individual national curricula of each EU member state, the recent expansion of the union, and the growth in the number of immigrants.

2.2 The STEM Field in the Gulf Region

Over the last several years, the Gulf countries have adopted long-term policy plans that prioritize transitioning national economies from being resource-based to knowledge-based. Given that the GCC needs skillful and expert labor for its growing market, the Gulf countries aim to prepare their population to be highly qualified in the different STEM fields. In a recent review on this topic, Fadlelmula et al. (2022) highlighted the lack of STEM studies in the Gulf region that would provide insights and enhance the participation of the population in STEM-related fields. Another issue emphasized by Fadlelmula et al. (2022) was that women in the Gulf region appear to be underrepresented in this field, which results in visible gender disparities. Among the reasons underlying this trend, the authors named the role of culture, gender stereotypes, and the lack of interest in STEM among female students, as well as a low number of female STEM graduates in the labor market.

In another relevant study, Islam (2019) investigated the issues related to gender in the region and women's rights. Overall, 65% of the Middle East population is people aged 25 years old or younger. Based on the analysis of the number of female students in STEM at different universities in the region, Islam (2019) concluded that

there were almost 50% or more female students in STEM subjects. This conclusion was also supported by the statistics published by UNESCO and the World Bank, suggesting that gender disparities in the region were not remarkable; however, men were found to outnumber women in the engineering field.

In another pertinent publication, Patterson and co-authors (2020) explored STEM-related issues in different states in the Middle East and in the GCC states. This paper covered the period from 1999 to 2019 and analyzed a total of 72 articles. While the authors observed a declining pattern of discrimination against women in STEM fields, they argued that the issue of gender gap in STEM areas persists. Based on this evidence, the authors argued that a greater gender equality in STEM can be achieved through support from society, the government, and decision-makers. The study also noted an increase in research outcomes on women's enrollment in STEM and the job market.

2.3 *STEM in Qatar*

In a large-scale survey of a total of 660 students from middle- and high schools in Qatar, Sellami et al. (2017) examined how personal characteristics and contextual variables can be associated with an interest in STEM. Overall, the authors identified the following four factors that predicted Qatari students' motivation to study STEM: (1) teachers' influence; (2) assignments; (3) students' confidence; and (4) students' plans to continue studying or working in a STEM-related field.

Since, according to QNV 2030, STEM education is expected to exert a positive impact on the Qatari economy, in another study, Sellami et al., (2023a, 2023b) explored the reasons why students get interested in studying STEM and working in a STEM field. Based on the results of a survey of 425 public preparatory schools and using the social cognitive theory, the authors identified several outcomes and factors underlying students' decision to pursue a STEM degree or a profession.

Further studies were conducted to explore high school students' interest in STEM-related disciplines and jobs in Qatar. For instance, in a survey of 1492 students from secondary schools, Sellami et al., (2023a, 2023b) concluded that students' interest varies depending on the STEM subject. Specifically, while the surveyed students were interested in pursuing their studies in Mathematics and Science subjects, they had less interest in Engineering and Technology. Moreover, the authors noted differences in the students' preferences to acquire STEM studies based on gender and nationality, showing that female students demonstrated a greater interest in STEM subjects as compared to their male peers. The authors also concluded that expatriates studying in Qatar showed a higher interest in STEM fields than Qatari nationals. Based on this evidence, the authors recommended enhancing Qatari male students' interest in registering in STEM disciplines, notably, Engineering and Mathematics. This would align with the goals and objectives of QNV2030. Overall, Sellami et al. and's (2023a, 2023b) findings are largely consistent with the results of previous research conducted

on Qatar’s schools where female students were found to be doing better in STEM than their male counterparts.

Previous research also highlighted that motivation has an important influence on students’ academic performance and achievements. For instance, in a survey of 1803 middle- and high school students in Qatar, Fadhel et al. (2019) found that students’ motivation can be evaluated using the following three indicators: (1) students’ efforts in studying; (2) the way they feel at school; and (3) their attendance records. Additionally, the authors considered the impact of gender and family on students’ involvement, finding that male students exhibited lower motivation as compared to female students. Also, a large number of students showed a low level of motivation, and this decrease in motivation was found to be affected by students’ grade level.

3 Results: Gender-Based Student Statistics at Qatar University

In this study, we analyzed data and statistics from various Qatar University (QU) publications. Our specific focus was on statistics related to the STEM subjects taught at Qatar University in the academic years 2011–2012, 2019–2020, and 2021–2022. We also explored the number of Qatari female and male students registered in each of the STEM subjects.

Overall, according to the Department of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (2023), in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of students enrolling in these STEM subjects, from 14% in Fall 2017 to 20% in Fall 2022 (see Fig. 1). In Fall 2022, the total number of students registered in the STEM disciplines at Qatar University amounted to 24,587 students, with 67% female and 19% male.

Due to their importance of the development of Qatar’s new vision, STEM disciplines are gaining in significance and demand in the country. Accordingly, at Qatar University, many colleges offer STEM subjects in their curricula. In the subsequent

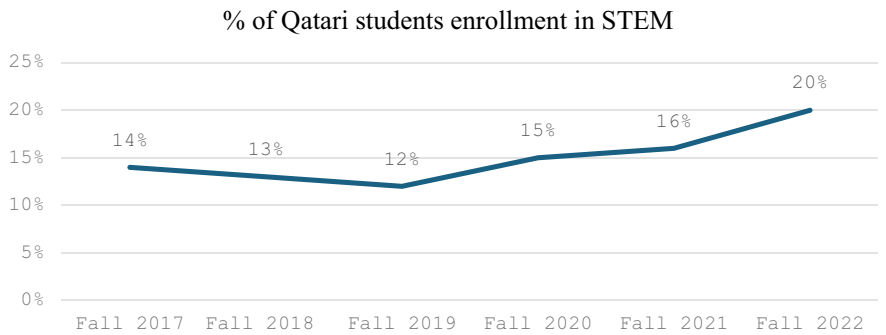


Fig. 1 Percentage of Qatari students’ enrollment in STEM (The Department of Institutional Research and Effectiveness, 2023)

sections, we will present further detail on the corresponding statistics in the academic years 2011–2012, 2019–2020, and 2021–2022, thereby providing an insight into the number of Qatari students registered in each STEM discipline. Our specific focus is on the gender distribution among the enrolled students.

3.1 Academic Year 2011 – 2012

Qatar University is one of the main universities in the country and the primary institution of higher education offering a variety of subjects and majors beyond STEM fields (Qatar University, 2024a). In the academic year 2011–2012, the total number of students enrolled at all academic levels was 10,352. Of these, specifically, Qatari students included 4978 female and 901 male students. For the non-Qataris, the number of female students amounted to 2970, while that of male students was 1503. In percentages, the registered Qatari students at QU amounted to 57% as compared to 43% of non-Qatari students. In terms of gender, the proportion of male students was more than three times lower (23%) than that of female students (77%) (OIPD, 2012).

Furthermore, in the academic year 2011–2012, the number of female Qatari students registered in all majors for their Bachelor’s degree was 4,014, while that of male Qatari students was 608. Conversely, the number of non-Qatari female students enrolled in a Bachelor’s program at QU amounted to 2265, while that of non-Qatari male students was 1,044 (OIPD, 2012). The breakdown of the number of Bachelor students at QU is shown in Fig. 2.

In the academic year 2011–2012, QU offered a total of 19 STEM-related disciplines. These disciplines, along with the corresponding numbers of female and male Qatari students enrolled, are summarized in Table 1. According to the data presented in the table, with few exceptions like Chemical Engineering, Civil Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering majors, Qatari female students by far outnumbered their male counterparts in most disciplines.

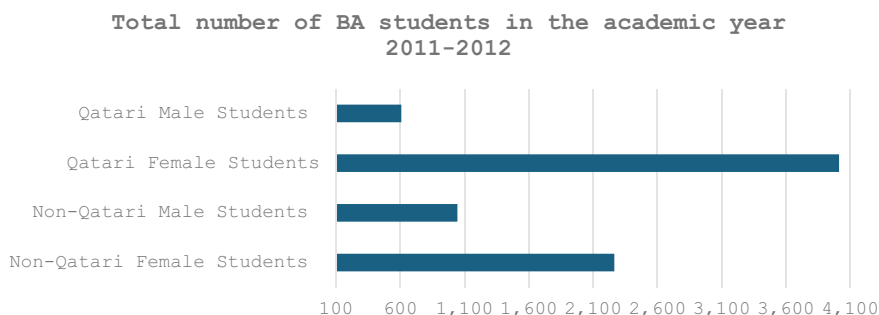


Fig. 2 Total number of BA students in the academic year 2011–2012 (OIPD, 2012)

Table 1 Number of students in STEM disciplines for the academic year 2011–2012 (OIPD, 2012)

STEM subject	Discipline	Qatari male students (N)	Qatari female students (N)	Total
Science	Environmental Sciences	2	20	22
	General Sciences	1	23	24
	Sport Sciences	2	5	7
	Pre-Biomedical	0	5	5
	Biomedical Sciences	0	9	9
	Chemistry	10	3	13
	Biology	0	8	8
Math	Statistics	2	28	30
Technology	Computer Engineering	0	60	60
	Computing	2	9	11
	Computer Science	15	46	61
Engineering	Architecture Engineering	0	19	19
	Architecture	0	27	27
	Chemical Engineering	26	19	45
	Civil Engineering	27	0	27
	Electrical Engineering	15	19	34
	General Engineering	19	35	54
	Industrial and Systems Engineering	0	76	76
	Mechanical Engineering	36	0	36

3.2 Academic Year 2019–2020

In the academic year 2019–2020, the total number of students studying at QU amounted to 22,461. Of these, 2426 were Qatari male students, while 12,428 were female Qatari students. Regarding non-Qatari students, the corresponding numbers were 2614 male and 4993 female students. According to nationality, in the academic year 2019–2020, 66% of QU students were Qatari, while 34% were non-Qatari. In terms of gender, the overwhelming majority of students (78%) were female, while 22% were male (Institutional Research and Analytic Department Strategy and Development Office, 2020).

From the total number of students at Qatar University, the number of undergraduate-level Qatari male students amounted to 2208, while the corresponding number of female students was almost six times higher—namely, 11,819. Among non-Qatari students at QU, 2,093 were male and 4273 were female (Institutional Research and Analytic Department Strategy and Development Office, 2020; see Fig. 3 for further detail).

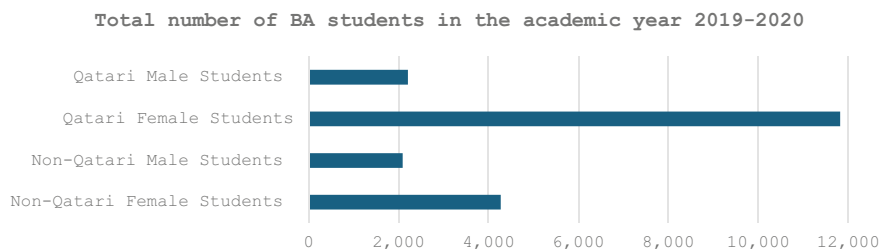


Fig. 3 Total number of BA students in the academic year 2019–2020 (Institutional Research and Analytic Department Strategy and Development Office, 2020)

Table 2 lists the STEM disciplines and the number of students, with the corresponding gender distribution numbers, registered in the STEM programs in the academic year 2019–2020 (Institutional Research and Analytic Department Strategy and Development Office, 2020). In this year, a total of 25 disciplines were offered for all students, which exceeded the previous year's numbers. This increase was due to the expansion of some colleges, such as the College of Medicine that was launched in 2015, the College of Health Sciences that started in 2016, and the College of Dental Medicine that opened in 2019 (QNA, 2020), (Al-Sharq, 2016; The Peninsula, 2019).

Overall, as compared to previous academic years, seven new disciplines were introduced, including General Dental Medicine, Medicine, General Pharmacy, Pharmacy, General Health Sciences, Education (Math & Science), and Mathematics. Concurrently, QU removed two majors—namely, Pre-Biomedical, and Architecture Engineering. Similarly to the academic year 2011–2012, the number of Qatari female students by far outnumbered the number of Qatari male students. In the academic year 2019–2020, since the number of Qatari female students was higher in most disciplines, they also surpassed the number of Qatari male students enrolled in the Chemical Engineering program, which was not the case in the academic year 2011–2012.

3.3 Academic Year 2021–2022

The academic year 2021–2022 witnessed additional changes to the STEM disciplines and the number of students. In general, QU continued to attract new students to enroll in its STEM programs. In this academic year, the total number of students registered at QU across all programs was 24,988 students. With regard to gender, the number of male students was around 6000 students (ca. 25% of the total), while that of their female counterparts was 18,700 (ca. 75% of the total). In terms of nationality, there were around 70% Qatari students and around 30% non-Qataris.

With regard to specifically Bachelor-level students, the total number of Qatari undergraduate male students amounted to 2508, while that of their female peers was

Table 2 Number of students in STEM disciplines for the academic year 2019–2020 (Institutional Research and Analytic Department Strategy and Development Office, 2020)

STEM subject	Discipline	Qatari male students (N)	Qatari female students (N)	Total
Science	Environmental Sciences	5	22	27
	General Sciences	2	47	49
	Sport Sciences	1	39	40
	Biomedical Sciences	0	25	25
	General Health Sciences	0	111	111
	Biology	0	31	31
	Chemistry	1	16	17
	General - Dental Medicine	5	14	19
	Medicine	16	80	96
	General Medicine	13	74	87
	General Pharmacy	0	34	34
	Pharmacy	0	13	13
	Public health	0	29	29
Science/ Math	Education (Math & Science)	0	1	1
Math	Statistics	3	10	13
	Mathematics	0	8	8
Technology	Computer Engineering	36	196	232
	Computer Science	26	112	138
Engineering	Architecture	0	108	108
	Chemical engineering	18	135	153
	Civil engineering	41	0	41
	Electrical engineering	24	68	92
	General Engineering	64	181	245
	Industrial and systems engineering	0	214	214
	Mechanical engineering	49	0	49

12,986. As to non-Qatari students, 2,098 were male, while 4376 were female (see Fig. 4 for further detail).

Similarly as before, in the academic year 2021–2022, QU again introduced further STEM disciplines, so their number reached 27 disciplines. The new disciplines included Dental medicine and Mechatronics Engineering. In addition, QU launched its eleventh college—the College of Nursing (Newsroom, 2022). This change implies that, in the upcoming years, there will be more disciplines offered to support the college's visions and enrollment plans. The trends observed in the academic year

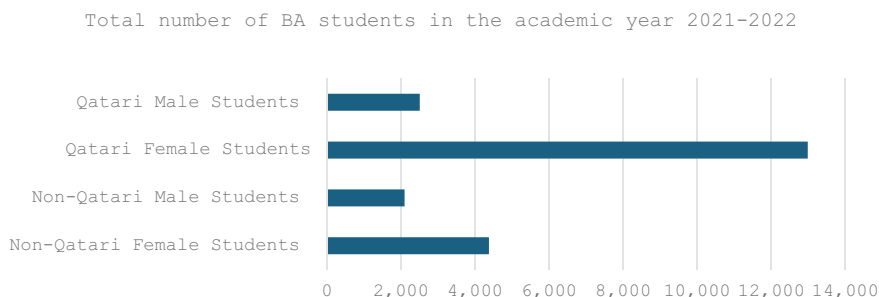


Fig. 4 Total number of BA students in the academic year 2021–2022 (Institutional Research and Effectiveness Department Strategy and Development Office, 2022)

2021–2022 were largely consistent with those observed previously. Again, Qatari female students in all STEM fields outnumbered the Qatari male students (see Table 3).

4 Discussion

The implementation of Qatar’s National Vision 2030 (QNV2030) plan requires qualified individuals who have appropriate education and skills to let the country attain its ambitious goals. With the rapid growth of the Qatari economy and taking into account the newest technological developments, the importance of knowledge and skills in STEM fields cannot be underestimated (Black et al., 2021). Reflecting this societal and economic demand, in the past academic years, QU has witnessed an unprecedented growth in the number of students enrolled in various STEM majors. Overall, while the total number of students at QU in the academic year 2011–2012 was 10,352, just eight years later, in the academic year 2019–2020, the corresponding number more than doubled, reaching 22,461 students. Among the key reasons underlying this change is the introduction of new disciplines and colleges, as well as amendment of several QU’s laws and regulations.

Prior to 2012, QU students struggled to obtain the required degree in the IELTS and TOEFL exams. Consequently, the university launched a foundation program aimed at enhancing the students’ English proficiency and knowledge of mathematics. However, this foundation program was an obstacle for many students to join the university. A factor that, by contrast, supported the increase in the number of students joining QU was the university’s decision to change the language of instruction from English to Arabic for most of its programs. This language change attracted more students to enroll at the university, which allowed the numbers to keep on growing (Al-khader, 2012).

Yet another factor underpinning the observed growth in the number of enrolled students at QU was the modifications to college admission rates and requirements.

Table 3 Number of students in STEM disciplines for the academic year 2021–2022 (Institutional Research and Effectiveness Department Strategy and Development Office, 2022)

STEM subject	Discipline	Qatari male students (N)	Qatari female students (N)	Total
Science	Environmental Sciences	3	22	25
	General Sciences	6	45	49
	Sport Sciences	0	18	18
	Biomedical Sciences	0	37	37
	General Health Sciences	0	134	134
	Biology	0	37	37
	Chemistry	1	15	16
	General - Dental Medicine	8	20	28
	Dental Medicine	3	18	21
	Medicine	28	124	152
	General Medicine	19	64	83
	General Pharmacy	3	38	41
	Pharmacy	0	20	20
	Public Health	0	32	32
Science/Math	Education (Math & Science)	1	1	2
Math	Statistics	3	8	11
	Mathematics	0	8	8
Technology	Computer Engineering	82	330	412
	Computer Science	61	117	178
Engineering	Architecture	0	132	132
	Chemical engineering	28	205	233
	Civil engineering	86	0	86
	Electrical engineering	38	110	148
	General Engineering	42	88	130
	Industrial and systems engineering	0	271	271
	Mechanical engineering	70	0	70
	Mechatronics Engineering	0	19	19

In 2011, some of the QU colleges required the following high school percentage to enroll in the programs: 85% for College of Pharmacy; 75% for College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business and Economics, College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, College of Law, College of Engineering, and College of Education (Raya, 2011). As of 2024, the required rate is considerably lower—namely, 70% for College of Arts

and Sciences, College of Business and Economics, College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, College of Pharmacy, College of Law, College of Engineering, and College of Education (Qatar University, 2024).

The rise in the total number of students at QU also affected the number of students enrolled in programs in STEM fields. The results of our analysis revealed that, in terms of gender and during the three academic years under study, female students outnumbered their male counterparts. This finding contradicts Fadlelmula et al.'s (2022) conclusion about a gender gap in the GCC region, with women being a minority in STEM programs as compared to their male counterparts. Contrary to this conclusion, we observed that, in the case of QU, female students were more interested in pursuing their education in the different STEM fields. Therefore, our findings are somewhat more congruent with those reported by Islam (2019), who found an equal distribution of the two genders in STEM disciplines. Yet the best alignment with our results comes from Sellami et al., (2023a, 2023b), who observed that, among high school students, female students showed more preference in STEM than their male colleagues and that female students were in fact doing better in those subjects.

To better understand the gender distribution in certain STEM fields at QU, particularly in engineering programs, it is essential to analyze the policies specific to each specific discipline. In this respect, two majors offered at QU—that of Civil Engineering and Mechanical Engineering—are offered exclusively to male students. Conversely, majors such as Architecture or Industrial and Systems Engineering are accessible only to female students at QU (Saad, 2023).

One of the reasons why the aforementioned programs are offered to either exclusively male or female students is related to the number of interested students. In an interview conducted at the launch of the Department of Architecture, the head of the department said that there was a growing demand from female Qatari students to study architecture, while the corresponding demand from male students was very weak. However, the department plans to open the program for male students provided there is sufficient demand from the students (Al Turk, 2009).

Furthermore, as concerns the disciplines that are not offered to female students, such as Civil and Mechanical Engineering, this decision is underpinned by several factors (Saad, 2023). First, culture and stereotypes play an important part in women's enrollment in these disciplines. Second, families play a significant role in shaping the career choices of their children. In the Gulf region, families exhibit a strong protective attitude, particularly in the upbringing of their daughters, which is reflected in their educational and career choices (Rutledge & Madi, 2017). Unlike in other programs, these two fields require women to be more present in the field and to perform physical tasks. Yet, most women in Qatar would opt to work in jobs that are more administrative (The Peninsula Qatar, 2013).

Moreover, the Qatari Labor Law (law No. 14 of 2014, Article 94) limits women's access to physical labor, as women "shall not be employed in dangerous or hard or arduous work." Furthermore, Article 95 states that women can be involved in physical labor only at the times determined by a resolution passed by the Minister (Labor Law, 2014). Accordingly, this would contribute to the challenges women

might face as the law would not support them taking on physically demanding tasks due to the risks such tasks might hold. If women wanted to do so, there should be a resolution or a decision passed by the minister to allow them to work in a field; concurrently, no such limitations exist with regard to male employees.

However, when looking at enrollment numbers in the Chemical Engineering major, we observed an interesting trend: while, in the academic year 2011–2012, the number of Qatari male students was 26 vs. 19 Qatari female students, in the academic year 2021–2022, the balance shifted dramatically, with a total of 205 female vs. 28 male students in this program.

Overall, there are various reasons for Qatari female students to pursue STEM studies at QU. As identified by Sellami et al. (2017), the main elements that interest Qatari students in STEM disciplines are related to the role of teachers, the types of homework and assignments they would do, and the students' intention to continue their study at university in a STEM field. In addition, Sellami et al. (2017) found that students' pursuit of a STEM degree at university was affected by their previous experience with STEM subjects at school. In Qatar, there are three tracks for high school students to choose from: scientific, literary, and technological (Al-Sharq, 2019). Therefore, students with good experiences with STEM subjects in high school are more likely to choose the corresponding majors when at university.

Another important factor affecting female students' enrollment in STEM is the availability of role models and family support. For one thing, the high number of women enrolled in STEM fields provides female students with the inspiration to join as well. In addition, some female students decide to join STEM because they feel inspired by Qatari women who are already succeeding in this field (Drury et al., 2011). This factor is well aligned with the Qatar National Vision 2030 that aims to emphasize and promote women's empowerment in society.

This being said, there are nevertheless numerous challenges that female students might face when joining a STEM field. Women might be demotivated to join due to their lack of interest, motivation, or exposure to STEM subjects. Because of deeply entrenched gender stereotypes, women are expected to work in certain jobs and, in the system of popular beliefs, some of STEM professions are assumed to be mostly directed toward males (Banerjee & Santa Maria, 2013). Another factor is the view that women's gaining more education and securing their employment can lead to marriage delays, which some female students may consider to be an obstacle to their well-being. Said differently, choosing a STEM specialization may drive some female students to make a difficult choice between marriage, on the one hand, and education or a career, on the other hand (Lari, 2022).

Concurrently, another important trend highlighted by our analysis is the decreasing number of Qatari male students in the different STEM disciplines at QU. Upon finishing high school, many male students prefer to join the military or the police sector as they believe doing so will provide them with better privileges, such as good salaries and job security (Stasz et al., 2007). Also, considering that most of the positions provided by the government are offered to Qataris regardless of their education, knowledge, skills, or gender, male employment is assumed rather than pursued by most of the population (Mitchell & Gengler, 2019). This is a part of the

rentier system mindset where the government would provide its citizens with a job for life. Therefore, most male students prefer to work in a job that does not demand manual and technical skills.

5 Conclusion

In this study, we investigated patterns in gender enrollment in STEM fields at Qatar University. Focusing on academic years 2011–2012, 2019–2020, and 2021–2022, using quantitative analysis, we identified remarkable differences in the number of female and male students registered in STEM subjects at QU. The academic years under study were chosen due to several factors, including the rapid changes occurring to the number of students registered in the STEM subjects, the disciplines created to support market needs and the country's vision, as well as a series of amendments to the university's policies and regulations.

One noteworthy finding is the change in the ratio of male to female students majoring in Chemical Engineering at QU. While, in the academic year 2011–2012, the number of Qatari male students was higher than that of Qatari female students, the academic year 2021–2022 witnessed a dramatic tenfold increase in the number of Qatari female students enrolled in the program. In this chapter, we also reviewed several reasons underlying the observed differences in the number of female and male students majoring in STEM subjects at QU. Among them, there was the fact that several STEM programs at QU were accessible to only one of the two gender groups. An important role was also found to be played by culture and stereotypes, as well as by labor laws and university regulations. Furthermore, school teachers and families were crucial in shaping the educational and career choices of their children and in increasing female participation in STEM fields.

Our results also highlighted that students' decisions to enroll into a STEM program depend on their previous experiences with STEM subjects at school. Female students also attached importance to role models in a STEM field who they found to be encouraging and motivating.

Among the challenges that prevented students from choosing STEM programs, we identified the lack of interest, motivation, or insufficient exposure to STEM subjects. Furthermore, an adverse role was also found to be played by stereotypes that women are not expected to work in (frequently physically demanding) STEM jobs and that a career in a STEM field would negatively affect their marriage opportunities. As concerns male students, many reported preferring to join the military or the police sector as they believed it would provide them with privileges such as good salary or job security.

Taken together, the results of our investigation highlight the need for the implementation of targeted programs that would educate prospective students on the benefits of joining STEM programs at Qatari universities. STEM fields provide countless opportunities to women in the region, and professionals in possession of appropriate skills and knowledge are of critical significance to Qatar's vision of the new economy.

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Chapter 11

Gender Disparities in Work-Study-Life Balance Among Non-traditional University Students and Implications for Family Dynamics in the Gulf Region



Hissa M. Al-Mannai , Haya M. Al-Mannai , Nasser K. Al-Fedalah , and Sanaa Ashour

Abstract Undergraduate study can be a strenuous experience for non-conventional students, those with work commitments, demanding family responsibilities, or challenging personal lives. In the Gulf region, these demands are exacerbated for working female students due to the socioeconomic structures of family, culture, and work. The study explores work-study-life balance (WSLB) among working students in Qatar, the UAE, and Oman, focusing on gender roles, experiences, and coping mechanisms. The impact of WSLB on family dynamics is also examined, including mothers and their children. The study reports several WSLB consequences, such as work-family conflict, stress, and reduced productivity.

Keywords Work-study-life balance (WSLB) · Mental health · Stress · Gulf region · Gender roles · Non-conventional students · Higher education · Coping mechanisms

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1 Introduction

Although work-study-life balance (WSLB) is broadly acknowledged to be a strong predictor of individuals' life satisfaction and well-being (Pološki Vokić et al., 2021), the WSLB of female working students in the Gulf region is considerably lower than that of their male counterparts (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Nkulenu, 2015). This outcome is underpinned by systemic gender disparities in education and at work that are common within the Gulf region, which are amplified by conflicting family dynamics that are often even more demanding for working mothers (Abdalla, 2015). For instance, in Saudi Arabia, women are legally required to have a male guardian's permission to travel, work, or marry (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). In this context, the present review seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the gendered dynamics in the WSLB of working female students in the Gulf region.

Hamadeh et al. (2022) argued that gendered differences at work and in higher education in the Gulf region arise from a broad array of socio-cultural, political, and economic factors. Among the socioeconomic factors that are particularly relevant are education, the economy, and employment. Governments in the region view education as an essential part of developing their economies and societies and are thus proactively implementing strategies to shift toward knowledge-based economies (Mohamed et al., 2021). As a socioeconomic factor, the economy is intrinsically related to education, which is conceptualized as one of the first steps toward employment and, thus, joining the workforce (Carnoy, 2017). Conventional perspectives on education and society highlight the influence of education in transforming individual traits and shaping the individual's role within the economy, social hierarchy, and political system (Carnoy, 2017).

While many women in Gulf countries are highly educated, skilled, and largely employed, most are held back by socio-cultural constraints. Specifically, conservative, strict, and frequently prohibitive gender expectations limit Arab women's access to education and traditionally male-dominated careers, thereby increasing pressure on women, especially working mothers, to balance their academic and career aspirations with family expectations and responsibilities (Barbar et al., 2023a, 2023b). While, in full alignment with Qatar's National Vision 2030 and the national visions of other Gulf States, women make up a significant part of human resources, they remain largely "subject to a number of coded and unwritten social mores in a patriarchal male-dominated society" (Omair, 2011, p. 19).

Work-family balance is a salient concept that impacts the workplace, employees' families, and individuals' well-being. In most countries of the Gulf region, women are typically considered to be primary caregivers in their families and thus are expected to devote more time to domestic tasks than their male counterparts. Yet, in recent years, in response to global economic problems, the number of women in the workforce has considerably increased, exposing women to the increasingly difficult challenge of maintaining a balance between their careers and taking care of the young, old, and vulnerable family members (O'Brien, 2012). This societal expectation frequently

results in a considerable imbalance in the WSLB of female university students in the Gulf region (Manimekalai, Geetha, & Poulpunitha, 2017).

Ideally, a good work-life balance should result in employees' being able to function competently at work and concurrently achieve life satisfaction at home. However, according to recent estimates, the time that Arab women spend performing unpaid domestic chores is six-fold higher than that of Arab men (Barbar et al., 2023a, 2023b), which leads to a poor work-family balance among women in the Gulf states. According to Erdwin et al. (2001), parents (particularly mothers) with a work-family conflict may suffer from a reduction in parental, marital, and life satisfaction arising from their inability to perform both their nurturing role and their professional duties, which can in turn adversely impact their children's well-being due to the diminished quality of caregiving. For instance, in a study on Qatari families, Abdelmoneium et al. (2018) found that women who suffer from work-family conflict tend to feel less competent in their roles as parents.

The situation is aggravated by the fact that, over the last several decades, education has become crucial in the Gulf states, and the percentage of women enrolled at universities in the region has reached its historical high (Liloia, 2022). Specifically, according to available statistics, the percentage of female students or women with a higher education degree in the Gulf States is considerably higher than that of men, 60% versus 40% (Hamdan, 2015). While some women strive for a university degree only as an assurance in the event that they do not eventually get married, others have ambitions of continuing their higher education and getting a Master's Degree or PhD for a career in academia or industry; yet another group of women sees education as a way to raise their social status (Hamdan, 2015). In this context of the ever-growing number of women in higher education, it is essential to thoroughly investigate how women in the Gulf States can maintain a good WSLB, as this balance is crucial for both their own well-being and that of their families.

In response to this need, the present literature review aims to identify patterns, challenges, and coping strategies related to maintaining a healthy WSLB among female working students in the Gulf region. The three countries focused on in this paper include the State of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman. Our predominant focus is on full-time employed female students—specifically, on how they balance work and higher education with their family responsibilities, as well as what impact WSLB has on their well-being. By identifying the gaps in extant research, this review seeks to contribute to future research endeavors that may inform laws, policies, and programs aimed at supporting gender equity and addressing the needs of working mothers and their families, thus initiating a positive social change among working female students in the Gulf region.

2 Theoretical Issues

In this section, we review the theoretical foundations of most studies included in the present review. Our specific focus is on the key concept of WSLB, which was developed based on several intersecting theoretical frameworks. One such framework is Sue Campbell Clark's (2000) *work-family border theory*, which posits that individuals operate in both public (work) and private (family) domains, and although these domains are distinct, they are intrinsically interrelated and exert mutual influence on each other. Furthermore, as argued by Clark (2000), the borders between these domains are fuzzy and can be shaped by people and their specific environment (Clark, 2000). This lack of rigid borders between the private and public domains can result in an imbalance between work and family life, as both domains can influence the individual (Clark, 2000). In the reviewed context, this theory can be applied to the complications that female working students in the Gulf region may encounter as they try to balance various demanding aspects of their lives, potentially leading to conflict, imbalance, and poor well-being.

Another important theoretical framework pertaining to this area of study is *the work-border theory*. This theory posits that people flexibly adapt to the demands of various areas of their lives, including work, study, and family (Okolie & Okereka, 2022). The degree of robustness or fragility of the borders among those areas determines the extent to which students' academic and family lives are vulnerable to conflict and imbalance, as it depends on the flexibility of each facet of their lives (Okolie & Okereka, 2022). This particular theory is particularly relevant for part-time or full-time working students with family responsibilities, as it can potentially shed light on how effectively such students can manage different areas of their lives while pursuing higher education as non-conventional students.

One more relevant theoretical concept that has gained widespread popularity and acclaim among academic researchers is the Job-Demands-Resource (JD-R) model, created by Arnold Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti in (2006). Formulated early in the twentieth century, the JD-R has become a leading job stress model adopted by many corporations, particularly in the field of human resources (Bauer, Hämmig, Schaufeli, & Taris 2014). Complementing Clark's (2000) work-family border theory, the JD-R model additionally considers the demands of high-stress jobs, thus taking into account several further factors such as workload, tight deadlines, limited job resources, and time scarcity (Mazzetti et al., 2023). This model is particularly relevant to apply in research on the rapidly changing dynamics of job sectors in the Gulf region, where various concerns arising from high-stress job demands aggravate conflicts in maintaining a healthy work-family balance, thereby adversely impacting both employed parents and their employers (Abdelmoneium et al., 2018).

Equally relevant for research on WSLB among working students in the Gulf region is *the spill-over theory (SOT)*, which predicts that individuals' accomplishments in one area may compromise their chances of meeting competing demands in other areas. For instance, cultural expectations positing that family roles are more important than education or engagement in economic activities adversely impact the

likelihood of women studying or working (Belsky et al., 1985; Sok et al., 2014). Conversely, workers transpose the emotions, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that they develop at work into their family life (Abdelmoneium et al., 2018). Accordingly, work-related stresses and demands can make it more difficult for individuals to fulfill their family responsibilities, resulting in workers experiencing job stress at home (Abdelmoneium et al., 2018). In the context of Maslow's (1943) reputed hierarchy of needs theory, according to which meeting family needs is essential before meeting other higher level needs, such as education and work, the SOT predicts that individuals' accomplishment of their competing responsibilities is affected by their multiple roles; for instance, cultural preferences can impede the achievement of competing goals and thus adversely affect WSLB (Nkulenu, 2015).

The final theoretical framework relevant to the present review is *the theory of resource conservation* advocated for by Okolie and Okereka (2022). This theory is based on the assumption that individuals' engagement in both work and non-work activities requires energy and time. Accordingly, job-related activities can drain employees' emotional, mental, and physical well-being (Okolie & Okereka, 2022). This theory is a suitable analytical framework to analyze the challenges encountered by specifically working students who can struggle to provide "resources" for the different facets of their personal lives while trying to balance their time in each domain.

All theories briefly reviewed above are pertinent to the discussion of previous research on WSLB among working female students in the Gulf region. In the next section, we review available research in this area, with a particular focus on what is currently known about working patterns among female students in the Gulf region, including the impact of cultural and socioeconomic factors, gendered dynamics, personal coping mechanisms, and institutional forms of support, as well as relevant governmental policies.

2.1 The WSLB of Working Students in the Gulf Region

Several previous studies have investigated the working habits and schedules of students in the Gulf region. For instance, Adekoya et al. (2021) reported that many college students in the United Arab Emirates work either part-time or full-time jobs on top of allocating time and energy toward their academic aspirations. These trends are also evident in other countries in the Gulf region, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Abdelmoneium et al., 2018). The students' working schedules, whether part-time or full-time, depend on their respective professional fields. However, the remaining students may work in other sectors such as hospitality, medicine, retail, administration, government, and so on. For example, the Dubai Development Authority in the UAE offers a no-fee Student Part-Time Work Regulation permit, which allows students to pursue employment with relevant organizations in the ICT, media, entertainment, human capital development, education, life sciences, energy, environment, as well as in fashion and design sectors (Visit Dubai, 2023).

However, working during university studies may result in a lack of balance between the different facets of working students' lives and adversely affect their academic performance. Available research on academic performance, grades, and success of working students in the Gulf region revealed that, as compared to their non-working peers, students who work for prolonged periods experience higher stress levels and consequently perform poorly in their academic studies (Nkulenu, 2015). Likewise, in a study on working students in the UAE, Adekoya et al. (2021) demonstrated that the colliding demands from work and academic studies decrease working students' overall productivity, leading to missing assignment deadlines and poor grades.

2.2 Impact of WSLB on Mental Health and Well-Being

By definition, WSLB is deemed to be achieved when time spent at school and work is effectively harmonized with a meaningful personal life and engagement in leisure time and family activities (Pace & Sciotto, 2021). Previous research has identified WSLB as a critical predictor of academic life satisfaction and job performance (Morgenroth et al., 2020). Furthermore, studies suggest that an effective WSLB drives positive perceptions about job and education experiences—for instance, by nurturing a work-study-family climate where working students feel they do not have to abandon their family roles to attend classes and perform their jobs (Pace & Sciotto, 2021). Conversely, poor WSLB was found to be associated with high-stress levels and inadequate coping mechanisms (Pace & Sciotto, 2021).

According to a definition formulated by Pitt et al. (2017), stress arises whenever individuals perceive that any given activity's demands exceed the personal and social resources they are prepared to mobilize to accomplish the task at stake. Excessive levels of stress are linked to negative physical, psychological, and emotional functioning and can severely impair an individual's ability to adjust to internal and environmental stressors (Pitt et al., 2017). Accordingly, limited personal and social resources are catalysts for higher stress levels, particularly among working students in the Gulf region (Abdelmoneium, 2018; Belwal & Belwal, 2014). Interestingly, studying online compared to in person does not appear to decrease working students' levels of stress. Specifically, Ayadurai's (2018) study on students' WSLB and well-being in the Gulf region found no significant differences in WSLB and well-being of on-campus and online students. Quite to the contrary, online students also experienced higher levels of stress and overall poor satisfaction when attempting to balance work commitments and their own well-being (Ayadurai, 2018). These findings are well aligned with the findings of numerous studies reporting the negative emotional and psychological repercussions that arise due to an imbalance in their work, studies, and personal lives (e.g., Fordjour, Chan, & Fordjour 2020).

To date, extensive evidence is available showing that the ability to successfully incorporate family commitments into work schedules and academic study has a marked impact on mental health and well-being (Abdelmoneium et al., 2018; Belsky

et al., 1985; Kelly & Voydanoff, 1985). For instance, in a study on the experiences of working Qatari parents, Abdelmoneium et al. (2018) reported that Qatari families, including working students, experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional burnout due to the challenges of concurrently managing several responsibilities.

Overall, employees' and working students' well-being and mental health are affected by three types of work-family conflict: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict (Abdelmoneium et al., 2018). Trying to balance work, family, and study can lead to conflicts in all of these areas, such as issues caused by the number of hours worked or studied, inflexibility of the work schedule, and family domain pressures, including the number of children, spouse employment status, family conflicts, and insufficient spouse support (Abdelmoneium et al., 2018; Greenhaus et al., 2003). Negative consequences of a poor WSLB include job burnout, decreasing levels of achievement, and higher levels of depressive symptoms (Belwal & Belwal, 2014; Wood & De Menezes, 2010).

2.3 The Impact of Undergraduate Studies on Working Mothers and the Family Dynamic

The last two decades have seen substantial investments by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) governments in human capital, particularly in increasing the participation of women in the work. The efforts have seen considerable success (Middle East Council, 2023). Notably, female labor participation in the GCC exceeds the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region's average by up to 19% (Middle East Council, 2023). Among the GCC countries, Kuwaiti women were found to have the highest workforce participation at 54%, followed by Bahrain at 47% and Qatar at 43% (Middle East Council, 2023; Mosly, 2023). Saudi Arabia's female workforce participation has sharply increased from 20% in 2018 to 35% in 2022, reflecting the significant social progress in the region (Middle East Council, 2023). These improvements in labor force participation are crucial for the region's economic development and social change toward gender equity. However, according to Mosly (2023), despite the progress made in female representation in the workforce and influence in political and economic spheres, they still face obstacles that prevent them from reaching their full potential. These obstacles include a conservative society that prioritizes women's roles within the family unit and ongoing socioeconomic pressures (Bakr, 2022, as cited in Mosly, 2023).

The social and cultural transformations in recent years throughout the GCC have significantly impacted traditional family structures and dynamics (Al-Yammahi, 2008). Working mothers, who are increasingly pursuing higher education while being part of the labor force, are experiencing unique challenges as they navigate the difficulties of creating a healthy WSLB (Al-Yammahi, 2018). In many societies in the Gulf's societies, there is a strong cultural expectation for women to maintain the integrity of the family unit, adding to the pressure of balancing professional and

academic responsibilities (Al-Yammahi, 2018). Although higher education is often perceived as a sign of prestige and knowledge in the GCC, with many working mothers in the Gulf region viewing it as an opportunity to improve their career prospects, it can also bring a host of stressful challenges given the multifaceted lives that GCC women are expected to balance (Al-Yammahi, 2018). Al-Yammahi's (2018) study on Emirati women observed high levels of stress and anxiety female participants encountered as a result of juggling their professional, academic, and familial lives. The study shows that females often felt "guilt-ridden" due to an overwhelming schedule and failing to adequately attend to the needs of their children and spend enough quality time with them (Al-Yammahi, 2018). Although the females developed coping strategies to mitigate the impact of stress and a chaotic working schedule, the study revealed that women in the UAE generally lacked adequate institutional support, such as flexible working hours or accessible child care (Al-Yammahi, 2018). This raises important questions about what solutions in the form of personal coping mechanisms, familial support, and work-based coping strategies are available to ease pressure on working mothers balancing their studies with the demands of everyday life and how these strategies can be effectively implicated.

2.4 Personal Coping Mechanisms and Support in the Workplace

Among the straightforward coping mechanisms that individuals may use to mediate stress levels caused by a lack of or poor WSLB are time management strategies, seeking social support, and practicing self-care activities such as exercise and mindfulness (Balla & Mohamed, 2022). Time management strategies include scheduling, prioritizing, and planning for work-related tasks and academic assignments, coupled with discipline to steer away from procrastinating (Abdelmoneium et al., 2018). Accordingly, some effective measures working students in the Gulf region can utilize to reduce the level of emotional stress are socializing with friends, peers, colleagues, and academic instructors for emotional support (Fournier, 2022). Other relevant mechanisms to reduce stress, anxiety, and emotional burnout include meditating, breath work, physical exercise, and allotted time in their schedules to prioritize self-care (Komariah et al., 2022). For working parents, another powerful support system is their family, as a reasonable degree of WSLB can be achieved if the parents meaningfully and fairly share their responsibilities (Belwal & Abdelmoneium et al., 2018; Belwal, 2014).

Work-based coping strategies to adequately manage time to reduce stress and pressure can equally be implemented by employers. From employers' perspective, a poor WSLB is associated with many negative consequences, such as a reduction in employees, productivity and creativity, absenteeism, and high staff turnover (Belwal & Belwal, 2014). A solution here can be the implementation of family-friendly policies in the workplace that can help accommodate employees; needs

for work-life balance and enable them to better manage their work and family responsibilities (Albrecht, 2003; Beham & Drobnič, 2010). Furthermore, family-friendly policies help to enrich the quality of work-life balance, provide employees with more control over their time, and decrease the interference and stress between work and family life (Belwal & Belwal, 2014; Houle et al., 2009; Porter & Ayman, 2010). Several relevant instances of such family-friendly policies implemented by employers include working from home, after-school summer and winter programs for children, on-site wellness programs, paid family leave, on-site child care, compressed work week, and paternity leave (Belwal & Belwal, 2014). For example, Qatar faces challenges in balancing traditional values with women's workforce participation. To address this, the 2016 Civil Human Resource Law introduced enhanced maternity leave, extended childcare leave, and flexible working arrangements, including part-time options, to support working women and their families (Barbar, Naguib & AbuHilal, 2023a, 2023b).

2.5 Institutional Support

Similarly to employers, higher educational institutions are also important actors that can ensure a better WSLB among working students. While working students can use a number of coping mechanisms to reduce their stress from an imbalance in work, higher education, and personal lives, they cannot succeed in achieving a healthy WSLB without appropriate support from their respective higher educational institutions. Accordingly, universities should be capable of addressing the strenuous demands arising from students' workloads while studying, working, and providing for their families. Among pivotal measures used to this end, academic institutions can offer flexible studying hours and the possibility of choosing the specific number of courses to be taken per semester (Belwal & Belwal, 2014). Other relevant measures include offering academic counseling and mentorship programs and providing students with the opportunity to acquire time management skills (Fournier, 2022).

Furthermore, stress caused by working students' economic and financial responsibilities may also be effectively mediated by institutions' offering grants and opportunities for on-campus work, which considerably relieves pressure on students who frequently seek work outside of campus (Abdelmoneium et al., 2018; Visit Dubai, 2023). In the UAE, for instance, the high economic cost of living forces many students—particularly those with a lower socioeconomic status (SES) and international students—to work to be able to sustain themselves. This, in turn, causes financial strain and can spill over into other domains of working students' lives (Khalaf & Alkobaisi, 1999). Accordingly, greater access to financial support from higher educational institutions may be of particular benefit to working students' WSLB.

2.6 *The Impact of Culture on Working Female Students' WSLB*

Another key factor that shapes female working students' WSLB in the Gulf region is the cultural makeup of the respective societies. In most Gulf States, the distribution of gender roles is traditionally conservative, with strictly assigned gender roles in terms of family responsibilities, where women are expected to be caregivers in the family, while men are perceived as providers (Shah, Al-Kazi, and Husain (2018). This distribution of gender roles compromises female students' ability to appropriately balance their academic and career aspirations while caring for their families (Ayadurai, 2018). For instance, while women in Oman are now granted equal rights and opportunities to men, previous socio-cultural constraints continue to exist, especially at the behest of society (Al-Sadi et al., 2011; Belwal & Belwal, 2014). The same trend is observed in other Gulf Arab nations, such as Qatar (Abdelmoneium et al., 2018).

Indeed, as reported by Belwal and Belwal (2014), female students in Oman reported experiencing arduous challenges just to overcome male students due to cultural inhibitions and societal pressures that view women from a more traditionally conservative point of view, which makes balancing the different aspects of their life all the more stressful. Similarly, Ayadurai (2018) highlighted that women studying online in the Gulf region reported feeling increasingly frustrated due to the increased fatigue from their demanding jobs and academic and family responsibilities. The aforementioned studies underscore the detrimental effect of cultural and societal pressures on working female students' ability to succeed at work, in higher education, and in their personal lives,

While a prevalent force that influences culture in the Gulf region is Islam, which is frequently highlighted as the main factor affecting the disparity in career and educational opportunities of female students and employees in the Gulf region, as argued by Haghighat (2014), there are other significant factors to consider. Specifically, gendered cultural factors related to WSLB include a conservative patriarchal makeup of the society where women's roles are limited to domestic work or lower-paying jobs rather than extent to better-paid professional positions (Haghighat, 2014; Mosly, 2023). The Gulf region's predominantly patriarchal culture, where fathers influence their daughters' education, career trajectory, and choice of marriage partners, may also influence females' WSLB (Ridge et al., 2020). For example, a study found that some fathers in the UAE discourage or prohibit their daughters from pursuing specific courses, while others prohibit them from working in mixed-gender environments (Alteneiji, 2023). This evidence suggests that cultural expectations do have an important impact on the Gulf region's gendered differences in WSLB.

Importantly, the aforementioned patriarchal ideals across the Gulf region are also perpetrated by women themselves rather than exclusively by males. For instance, a recent study found that most women in the Gulf region regard their domestic roles as more important than their studies or work-related roles (Begum et al., 2024). More specifically, Oman, a representative state in the Gulf region, was argued to

be “characterized by kin-based patrilineal extended families, male domination, early marriage, son preference, restrictive codes of behavior for women, and the association of family honor with female virtue” (Offenhauer & Buchalter, 2005, p. 10). However, in recent decades, traditional family structure in the Gulf countries has undergone several changes. For instance, Offenhauer and Buchalter (2005) noted an “increased likelihood of living in a nuclear, as opposed to a multi-generational household” (p. 10), while Haghighat (2014) reported a higher level of educational attainment among women and a swift fertility decline in Iran, Libya, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Based on these findings, Haghighat (2014) argued that the recent demographic changes may predict a positive correlation between women’s higher educational studies and increased social status and higher social mobility.

Despite advances made by women across the Gulf region, gender discrimination in the Gulf region remains a reality. According to the findings reported by Belwal & Belwal (2014), Omani women are considerably less likely than men to be appointed to top positions in the workplace—a pattern that the authors attributed to socio-cultural constraints, restrictive codes of behavior for women, and gender discrimination in the workplace. The study also found the scarcity of women in managerial positions in both the private sector and government ministries in the Gulf region.

Similar reports on gender discrimination in the workplace come from Qatar. In a study on a sample of Qatari nationals (ten men and ten women, age range: 30–60 years old), Abdelmoneium et al. (2018) found that, although Qatari women are highly educated and constitute a high percentage of the public sector’s workforce, they are not thriving in the workplace and are less likely to be promoted to managerial positions. The authors attributed this disparity to inequality in opportunities available to both genders.

In recent years, however, the geopolitical landscape of the Gulf States has started to gradually change—above all, under the impact of several noteworthy gender reforms. For instance, in 2019, the UAE established the Gender Balance Council, which abolished traditional restrictions on women’s participation in male-dominated jobs and criminalized workplace sexual harassment (Sinha et al., 2023). The Council also officially prohibited all forms of gender-based discrimination, including a policy of equal pay for jobs of equal value (Mosly, 2023). Similar policies aimed at increasing women’s participation in the workforce and challenging traditional cultural norms and restrictions have been recently implemented by Kuwait and Qatar (Mosly, 2023).

Along similar lines, recent policies of the Omani government have demanded equal rights and opportunities for women without any discrimination in obligations, social rights, and occupation of public office (Belwal & Belwal, 2014). As a direct outcome of these endeavors, Omani women currently outnumber their male counterparts in sectors such as education, with some women appointed ambassadors and ministers or receiving top positions at private sector organizations (Belwal & Belwal, 2014). Since the implementation of these reforms, and due to their new educational or other professional responsibilities, women in Oman have been able to bargain for fewer household chores and greater white-collar work (Belwal & Belwal, 2014). Furthermore, better access to education has led to a decrease in the birth rate and an

improvement in women's health conditions and access to work in different domains (Goveas & Aslam, 2011; Belwal & Belwal, 2014). Collectively, these developments offer hope for a more equitable future for women in the Gulf region.

Other factors that have played a role in creating more opportunities for females in the Gulf region are socio-cultural and economic changes in the respective countries. While, historically, the economy of the Gulf region was dominated by the oil industry, in the context of today's shift toward renewable energy sources, the Gulf region has started to benefit from economic diversification that presents novel opportunities for women entering the workforce (Balla & Mohamed, 2022). Among such opportunities are new positions in the labor market created by automation and digitalization, which enhance women's representation in the labor force and improve working female students' and employees' WSLB (Balla & Mohamed, 2022). According to recent estimates, leveraging female employment participation in the workforce could increase the Gulf region's gross domestic product (GDP) by nearly \$2.0 trillion (Mosly, 2023).

3 Conclusions and Future Research Agendas

While the literature reviewed above provides valuable insights into the WSLB of working students in the Gulf region, our review also highlights several important gaps and limitations that warrant further research.

First, most of the reviewed studies focused on the status quo in the area without an analysis of how students' WSLB may change over time. Accordingly, a longitudinal study is needed to address the dynamic issues and coping mechanisms of working female students in the Gulf region over a prolonged period of time. Doing so will provide relevant data as the participants will be monitored from their time at work to their pursuit of higher education, taking into account the changes in the working students' lives and their circumstances and different personal coping mechanisms that the students adopt to alleviate the stress they are experiencing.

Second, a limitation of the reviewed literature is that most of the studies focused on the UAE (Adekoya et al., 2021; Begum et al., 2024; Jabeen et al., 2018), with only two pertinent publications on Qatar (Abdelmoneium et al., 2018; Barbar et al., 2023a, 2023b) and one on Oman (Belwal & Belwal, 2014). This adversely affects the generalizability of the findings reported in the present review.

Third, comparative analyses of working female students' WSLB among different Gulf States have not yet been undertaken. However, such analyses would provide a more comprehensive and extensive insight into the problem. Similarly, taking into account factors such as nationality, socioeconomic status, and family responsibilities of working female students is essential to uncover the multifaceted concept of working students' WSLB in the Gulf region. Accordingly, future studies may consider investigating the differences in the dynamics of work-study-life balance between specific countries within the Gulf region—for instance, between nationals from the UAE and Qatar, as well as between residents of these countries studying

internationally. Furthermore, examining the disparities between men and women, as well as comparing the experiences of women in cross-analyses between countries across the region, could shed more light on gender-specific challenges. It is essential to incorporate intersectionality in such research to focus on how women's responsibilities as workers, students, and caretakers contribute to high-stress levels. Likewise, there is a need to study the intersection of gender with nationality, socioeconomic status, class, social status, and family obligations.

Fourthly and finally, universities and other higher education institutions can effectively intervene to make their working students' time at university more balanced, compared to relevant studies published in North America and Europe (e.g., Stoilova et al. 2020, Krilić et al. 2018), extant research on how governments of the Gulf states can support policies aimed at enhancing WSLB among working female students in the Gulf region remains scarce. Accordingly, it is necessary to conduct further research in this area so as to support working students' ability to balance various facets of their lives. Indeed, government policies are an important area of future research, particularly in the Gulf region, where work dynamics have rapidly changed over the course of the last two decades and where women have become increasingly important in the workforce. As highlighted in the present review, national governments of the Gulf states can also support higher education institutions by introducing regulations to support time management, workload, flexible work schedules, and accommodations for working students to take into consideration the many responsibilities that they have (Ran & Sanders, 2020). Additionally, the establishment of gender equity policies can assist non-conventional female working students in addressing the disparities between men and women, particularly regarding the many responsibilities that women have as both working women in addition to domestic and familial responsibilities (Ran & Sanders, 2020). Indeed, in the complex landscape of the Gulf States, relevant policies should take into account the unique cultural, traditional, economic, social, and educational climate of the Gulf region to mitigate the severe implications that may come with ignoring the pressing issues that non-conventional working students experience as they attempt to balance their personal life, work, and academic ambitions.

WSLB is a salient concept for all working students in the Gulf region. In the present review, we have reviewed severe consequences that a poor WSLB can have, including but not limited to work-family conflict, stress, low productivity levels, depression, feelings of life dissatisfaction, and inability to thrive at work and achieve promotion in the workplace. These issues are exacerbated for working mothers who may be unable to engage meaningfully with their children due to their lack of WSLB, potentially leading to diminished parent-child relationships and negatively impacting their children's well-being. We have also reviewed major socio-cultural factors that impede working female students' progress at work and in studies and that adversely affect their WSLB.

While, owing to the recent shift toward more gender equality-oriented policies and programs for empowering women to study and work, the Gulf region has succeeded in improving women's graduation rates, cultural factors continue to adversely influence women's participation in the labor market. In this review, we have outlined the

central role of cultural expectations that strongly influence working female students' WSLB. Yet, there is a great opportunity for positive social change in this area. Achieving this social change will depend on the combined efforts of continued academic research efforts, governmental policy reforms, institutional support, and a greater public awareness of the importance of WSLB, which will jointly empower individuals to prioritize personal coping mechanisms and demand greater support from their workplaces and higher educational establishments to develop the Gulf region's knowledge-based economy. By prioritizing WSLB, not only can female students enhance their own well-being, but they can also foster a more supportive environment for their families, thereby promoting healthier family dynamics and better outcomes for their children.

4 Disclosure Statement

All authors declare that they have no competing financial or other conflicts of interest.

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Part II
Technology, Social Media, and Family

Chapter 12

Exploring the Impact and Prevention of Digital Drugs: Insights from the Emirati Youth Perspective



Khawlah M. Al-Tkhayneh and Sanaa Ashour

Abstract This chapter explores the threats of digital drugs (binaural beats) among Emirati youth. To this end, a survey was conducted among 202 university students aged 18–22 years old. Key findings revealed that excessive use of digital drugs could exacerbate mental health issues (e.g., depression), lead to physical health problems (e.g., memory impairment), and have adverse social implications (e.g., social deviance). The chapter concludes with a discussion of solutions, such as implementing appropriate educational programs and enhancing parental engagement, raising awareness about the negative effects of digital drugs, and fostering open public and family discussions about their dangers.

Keywords Digital drugs · University students · Youths · Social impact

1 Introduction

Today, we are witnessing rapid advances in technology and Internet usage. This progress has brought forth a new challenge that poses a threat to both young individuals and families alike: the phenomenon of digital drugs. Drug consumption has transcended conventional methods like injection, chewing, snorting, or smoking. Instead, there's been a shift toward electronic abuse, wherein human cognition has adapted to mimic the effects of traditional drugs on brain function and chemistry. These electronic drugs represent a novel criminal trend, constituting an insidious

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global affliction that effortlessly traverses borders and evades detection. They epitomize the dark side of technological advancement, intricately tied to the widespread use of Internet technologies across various devices. Al-Sawy and Al-Sawy (2023).

The consumption of digital drugs involves listening to binaural beats, i.e., sounds that are claimed to engender the embodied experience of psychoactive drugs and capable of eliciting specific cognitive or emotional states (Bhatia et al., 2016; Fawzi & Mansouri, 2017a; LaLiberty, 2017). This effect is enabled by a perceptual phenomenon that occurs when two tones that slightly differ in frequency are separately presented to each ear. The listener then perceives a modulating tone at a frequency equal to the difference in pitches, purportedly “entraining” the brain waves and inciting cognitive and mental effects (Flore, 2021; Plowman et al., 2018). Digital drugs are thus a consumable experience at the intersection of digital sound production, personal listening devices, and listener physiology, which potentially mediates auditory stimuli to elicit psychoactive effects (Bhatia et al., 2016; Fawzi & Mansouri, 2017a; LaLiberty, 2017). At present, a variety of Internet and mobile applications offer binaural beats named after specific drugs, thereby facilitating their spread among younger cohorts.

Digital drugs, or binaural beats, remain largely unexplored in the literature. In a pioneering study, Barratt et al. (2022) used the Global Drug Survey 2021 to better understand digital drugs’ user demographics, consumption patterns, reasons for use, and methods of obtaining these beats. The Global Drug Survey 2021, translated into 11 languages, garnered a total of 30,896 responses from 22 countries, including but not limited to the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Poland, Romania, and the UK. About 5.3% of all respondents, predominantly male (60.5%) with a median age of 27, reported using binaural beats to achieve altered states of consciousness. Factors such as younger age, non-male gender, as well as recent usage of cannabis, psychedelics, and novel drugs were found to be strongly linked to binaural beat usage.

This worrying trend stems from the ever-growing reliance of younger demographic groups on digital devices, the Internet, and communication technologies in general. This dependence, coupled with easy Internet access, provides young people ample opportunities to explore novel realms and gain unique experiences. In this context, it becomes imperative to thoroughly investigate the challenges and dangers associated with digital drug consumption. According to Barratt et al. (2022), most users (72.2%) turned to binaural beats for relaxation or sleep, while 34.7% used them for mood alteration. Of note, 11.7% of respondents reported seeking effects similar to those of other drugs, especially among classic psychedelic users. Furthermore, most of those individuals sought either self-connection (53.1%) or a connection to something greater (22.5%). In terms of access, binaural beats were reported to be primarily accessed through video streaming on mobile phones.

To date, evidence is available showing that digital drugs have a broad array of detrimental effects on both youth and families, ranging from a decline in physical and mental health to impaired concentration and reduced cognitive performance (Raouf, 2022). Social consequences, such as increased isolation and diminished participation in actual social activities, were also reported (Al-Rifai and George, 2022).

This having been said, the adverse impact of the phenomenon of digital drugs might be more pronounced in specific socio-cultural contexts, potentially affecting traditions, values, and social relationships (Hunt et al., 2007). One such area is the Gulf region where the issue of digital drug consumption is getting increasingly recognized as a significant problem. Considering that it is crucial for Emirati families to comprehend this issue and seek appropriate solutions, in this chapter, we aim to investigate digital drug consumption in the United Arab Emirates.

The challenge of understanding and analyzing the phenomenon of digital drugs, along with its adverse consequences on individuals and the wider community, is multifaceted. Yet considering that demographic groups most vulnerable to digital drugs are younger people, it is imperative to explore the factors underlying a recent increase in digital drug consumption and to evaluate the extent of its proliferation among younger population cohorts. What also requires more attention is the diverse range of consequences stemming from digital drug use, especially the psycho-physical impacts that pose a real threat. Understanding these effects necessitates a comprehensive analysis of both the psycho-physical outcomes and the addiction phenomenon.

Statistical evidence available to date points to a significant rise in digital drug addiction among Arab and Emirati families, with a pronounced increase specifically among youth. According to a 2022 World Health Organization study, 25% of individuals aged 15 to 35 years old in the Middle East and South Africa reported using digital drugs in the past year. In the United Arab Emirates, a 2022 study by the Ministry of Interior found that 17% of individuals aged 18 to 25 years old engaged in digital drug use in the previous year (Ministry of Interior in Saudi Arabia 2023). In Saudi Arabia, a 2021 study by the Ministry of Health indicated that 15% of young people aged 16 to 24 years used digital drugs in the preceding year.

Social ramifications of digital drug addiction on the dynamics within Emirati families cannot be overlooked, as such effects can disrupt social interactions and adversely impact the social and economic well-being of both individuals and entire communities. Accordingly, in this chapter, we seek to identify potential health and social effects of digital drug addiction.

The significance of the present investigation is that our results can enhance awareness about the risks and detrimental effects of digital drugs. A comprehensive understanding of such dangers can inform the implementation of preventive measures against this growing concern. Furthermore, the insights gained from this research can be instrumental for policymakers and governmental bodies, guiding them in formulating effective strategies and initiatives to combat the prevalence of digital drugs. Additionally, our findings can aid in the development of support mechanisms for individuals adversely impacted by digital drug use. By comprehensively addressing these issues, the study contributes to the broader efforts of safeguarding communities from the negative consequences associated with digital drug consumption.

The specific research questions addressed in this chapter are as follows: What are the perceived impacts and risks of digital drugs among university students? How are digital drugs promoted to families, as observed by university students? How effective

are current strategies and practices in mitigating digital drug use within the Emirati community, according to university students?

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. In Sect. 2, we briefly review extant literature on the topic of digital drugs. In Sect. 3, we present the methodology used in our study. Section 4 reports the results that are then discussed in Sect. 5. Finally, conclusions are drawn in Sect. 6.

2 Literature Review

In this section, we briefly review previous literature on the scope, impact of, and societal response to digital drugs in the Gulf region. The studies reviewed in this section provide valuable insights into the complexities surrounding digital drug use, including its prevalence, psychological and social implications, and potential strategies for intervention and prevention.

In a relevant investigation of the spread of digital drugs, Al-Iraqi (2017) observed that young people's use of digital drugs can lead to addiction, distraction, and mental disruption. Using the third-person effect theory, Al-Iraqi (2017) analyzed university students' use of websites discussing drug issues and their awareness of the dangers of digital drug addiction. The results of this study highlighted the adverse societal impact of digital drugs, such as reduced communication with peers and family, and emphasized the vital role of families, schools, universities, friends, religious institutions, and governments in managing and raising awareness about the risks associated with digital drugs.

Using an experimental approach, Al-Khalidi (2019) explored the effects of digital drugs on adolescents and identified appropriate prevention and treatment strategies. Key findings of this study included the identification of two major factors fostering digital drug addiction—namely, poor parental relationships and overbearing parental control.

One more pertinent study is Al-Maliki (2022) investigation conducted in the Iraqi community. According to this study, as compared to neighboring countries, Iraq is less affected by the phenomenon of digital drugs. A prevalent form of digital drugs in Iraq is the addiction to websites displaying immoral content. Similarly, to several other studies (e.g., Al-Khalidi, 2019), however, Al-Maliki (2022) found that key factors underlying the spread of digital drugs are the lack of family supervision and family fragmentation.

Furthermore, in a theoretical analysis, Serwan (2023) argued that digital drugs pose a significant threat to individuals and communities, affecting morals, health, and national economies, emphasizing the unique characteristics of digital drugs within the digital and technological space.

Badawi and Saadat (2016) perceive drug abuse as a profound societal issue with detrimental impacts on both individuals and the fabric of society. This phenomenon, driven by various factors, affects individuals, families, and the broader social structure. Official data from specialized agencies highlights the threat posed by drug users

to society, hindering progress and development across all domains. Legally, rising rates of offenses committed by drug users necessitate increased judicial intervention. Economically, society suffers from the loss of productive individuals who could contribute to growth and development. Socially, drug users endanger both themselves and others, fueling anxiety and insecurity within communities. Furthermore, prolonged drug abuse may lead to individuals developing psychopathic or criminal tendencies, ultimately isolating themselves from society and impeding their own well-being.

In a study focused specifically on dangers of digital drugs, Al-Aqoon and Latrash (2023) emphasized the importance of community, government, and social institutions in controlling this phenomenon and recommended the implementation of effective regulations and digital protection programs. Along similar lines, Jaloul and Qaraat's (2020) investigation of the risks associated with digital drugs emphasized the need for educational programs to increase digital awareness and prevent the associated social and psychological health risks. More specifically, the authors advocated for targeted educational initiatives to combat the challenges posed by information technology to the youth.

In another study based on a survey of 166 employees of Oman's Ministry of Education, Al-Ebry (2015) identified factors influencing digital drug use and the role of various parties in protecting against these drugs. The results of this study highlighted social, psychological, and economic factors contributing to digital drug addiction and its consequences, such as social isolation and deception about using smart programs. Finally, in an investigation of digital drug crimes under Emirati law, Al-Hayyas (2018) reviewed the risks such drugs pose to youth and advocated for updated laws to prevent digital drug use, increased monitoring of related websites, and appropriate educational programs.

Overall, as suggested by our brief review of previous studies on digital drugs and their impact on society, previous research conducted in the Gulf region, particularly in the United Arab Emirates, remains scarce. Furthermore, while several previous studies explored the social, psychological, and economic factors influencing digital drug use in Iraq, Oman, and—to a lesser extent—in the UAE, there is a lack of studies on social effects and promotion methods of digital drugs. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of past research exploring the effectiveness of different intervention and prevention strategies on the community level. In addition, although several scholars highlighted the need for the elaboration of comprehensive community and legislative approaches, there is a gap in empirically validated studies assessing these interventions. Finally, most previous studies focused on specific regional or demographic groups, indicating a need for more diverse, cross-cultural research that would provide a comprehensive understanding of global implications of digital drug use and its variations across different societies. In this chapter, we seek to address some of the aforementioned gaps in the literature.

3 Methodology

In this study, we used an analytical descriptive approach, which was chosen for its suitability to the research objectives and nature. An analytical descriptive approach is particularly effective in realistically describing and analyzing phenomena. It is well-suited to explore social phenomena, which are prevalent and multifaceted within communities. In this study, we used this approach to describe and analyze the effects of digital drugs on the community, aiming to produce insightful results and practical recommendations for mitigating the risks associated with digital drugs.

The study's population consisted of students enrolled in the second semester of the 2022/2023 academic year at a private university in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates.¹ A random sampling technique was used to select participants from this population. The sample consisted of a total of 202 male and female students, chosen for their awareness and vulnerability to the use and adverse effects of drugs. The age range of the sample was between 18 and 22 years old. To collect the data, an online questionnaire link was distributed to participants via the WhatsApp platform. This method was chosen to ensure the collection of accurate information regarding the impact of digital drugs on the community.

The primary tool for data collection was a questionnaire designed to explore the community's perceptions of digital drug effects. Prior to conducting the research, approval was sought and obtained from the institutional review board of the university where data were collected (reference number Edu-2023–65). The questionnaire was then distributed to the selected sample from the university in Abu Dhabi. The questionnaire consisted of items in the following five sections.

1. *Demographic variables.* This section consisted of six questions covering gender, age, economic level, academic year, marital status, and employment status.
2. *Impacts of digital drugs.* Items in this section evaluated the extent of agreement with statements concerning the impact of digital drugs, to be rated on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”).
3. *Promotion of digital drugs.* This domain included questions about common methods used to promote digital drugs, again rated on a 5-point Likert scale.
4. *Prevention of digital drugs.* Questions in this section focused on the study participants' attitudes towards various preventive methods against digital drugs, using the same 5-point Likert scale.

The data were collected from April 16 to June 10, 2023. All statistical analyses were performed the SPSS software (version 26).

¹ The university's name is withheld to maintain confidentiality of both the participants and the institution.

4 Findings

Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the study participants. Most students participating in the study were middle-class (51.5%) female students (85.1%) aged above 22 years old (84.4%). Most of the study participants were single (55.4%), in their fourth year of study at the university (36.6%) and not yet working (65.3%).

Table 2 summarizes the participants’ perceptions regarding the impact of digital drugs on various aspects of society. About three-quarters of the students strongly agreed that digital drugs pose a threat to communities (75.2%), can lead to a deterioration in general health (29.2%), cause social problems (76.2%), adversely affect family relationships (74.3%), result in a decline in academic or job performance (78.2%), or adversely affect the economy in general (74.3%). Furthermore, the proportions of the respondents who agreed with the aforementioned statements ranged from 15.8% to 17.8%. To compare, the number of the surveyed students who remained neutral or disagreed with the aforementioned items was negligible ($\leq 5\%$).

Table 3 summarizes the results concerning the most common methods used for promoting digital drugs. The findings revealed that over half of the respondents strongly agreed that the most common methods of promoting digital drugs were social media sites (59.4%), digital websites (57.4%), Internet ads (52.5%), and smart

Table 1 Demographic characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	30	14.9
	Female	172	85.1
Age	20–18	40	19.8
	22–21	32	15.8
	22 or more	130	64.4
Income level	Middle income	104	51.5
	High income	78	38.6
	Very high income	20	9.9
Academic year	First	60	29.7
	Second	30	14.9
	Third	38	18.8
	Fourth	74	36.6
Marital status	Married	80	39.6
	Single	112	55.4
	Divorced	10	5
	Widow	0	0
Employment	Employed	70	34.7
	Unemployed	132	65.3

Table 2 The impact of digital drugs

Statement		Frequency	Percentage
Digital drugs threaten communities	Strongly agree	152	75.2
	Agree	34	16.8
	Neutral	6	3
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	10	5
Using digital drugs can lead to a deterioration in general health	Strongly agree	160	79.2
	Agree	32	15.8
	Neutral	4	2
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	3	3
Digital drugs cause social problems	Strongly agree	154	76.2
	Agree	38	18.8
	Neutral	4	2
	Disagree	2	1
	Strongly disagree	4	2
Digital drugs affect family relationships	Strongly agree	160	79.2
	Agree	32	15.8
	Neutral	6	3
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	4	2
Using digital drugs can lead to a decline in academic and job performance	Strongly agree	158	78.2
	Agree	36	17.8
	Neutral	4	2
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	4	2
Digital drugs affect the economy in general	Strongly agree	150	74.3
	Agree	34	16.8
	Neutral	10	5
	Disagree	6	3
	Strongly disagree	2	1

devices such as smartphones and tablets (60.4%); furthermore, about one-third of the study participants (32.7%) agreed with the corresponding statements. The proportions of survey respondents who remained neutral or disagreed with the statements in this section of the survey did not exceed 5%.

Finally, the results concerning prevention methods that the surveyed students believed to be the most effective against the spread of digital drugs are summarized in Table 4. As can be seen in the table, most surveyed students strongly agreed that family (73.3%) and, more specifically, parents (72.3%) should play the key role in counteracting the spread of digital drugs. Other methods of prevention strongly supported by the study participants were the media (71.3%), education, legislation, and scientific research (69.3% each). The importance of the aforementioned

Table 3 The most common methods of promoting digital drugs

		Frequency	Percentage
Social media sites play a prominent role in promoting digital drugs	Strongly agree	120	59.4
	Agree	66	32.7
	Neutral	10	5
	Disagree	4	2
	Strongly disagree	2	1
Digital websites contribute to spreading digital drugs	Strongly agree	116	57.4
	Agree	66	32.7
	Neutral	10	5
	Disagree	6	3
	Strongly disagree	4	2
Advertisements on the Internet play an important role in encouraging the use of digital drugs	Strongly agree	106	52.5
	Agree	66	32.7
	Neutral	22	10.9
	Disagree	6	3
	Strongly disagree	2	1
Smart devices, such as smartphones and tablets have an important role in facilitating individuals' access to digital drugs	Strongly agree	122	60.4
	Agree	66	32.7
	Neutral	8	4
	Disagree	4	2
	Strongly disagree	2	1

methods of prevention was also explicit in the proportion of the study participants who agreed with the corresponding statements about the role of family (19.8%) and parents (20.8%), as well as the media (19.8%), education (24.8%), legislation (22.8%), and scientific research (22.8%). As with the items in other sections of the survey, the proportion of surveyed students who remained neutral or disagreed with the statements was insignificant, ranging from a mere 1% to 5%.

5 Discussion

The results reported in this chapter highlight that university students in the UAE are strongly aware of the adverse social consequences of digital drugs, as well as knowledgeable about the methods of promoting digital drugs and possible intervention measures needed to curb this problem in the country. Taken together, our results are largely consistent with the findings reported in the literature. For instance, our results concerning the UAE students' awareness about the detrimental psychological health impacts of digital drugs, including anxiety and depression, are consistent with Badawi and Saadat (2016) findings about such psychological effects of digital drugs as involuntary screaming, muscle spasms, body shaking during listening sessions, lack of focus, and disconnection from reality. Likewise, several other studies highlighted other mental health issues associated with the excessive use of digital drugs, such as memory impairment and sleeping disorders (e.g., Al-Aqoon & Latrash, 2023; Al-Khalidi, 2019). Furthermore, as highlighted by our results and previous findings (e.g., Al-Ebry, 2015; Al-Maliky 2022; Al-Aqoon & Latrash, 2023), digital drugs are also linked to social isolation, an increase in negative behaviors, and social deviance, which frequently manifest in adolescents' withdrawal from their community and engaging in deceitful behaviors.

Digital drugs also contribute to escalating crime rates, particularly when intertwined with illegal activities. Accordingly, the overuse of these substances can affect not only individual behavior but scale up to have broader economic implications, diminishing productivity within communities and negatively impacting students' focus and educational processes. The study participants proved to be aware of this, with over 90% respondents agreeing that digital drugs adversely affect the economy in general. Similarly, Lawheed and Hamed (2020) pointed out that digital drugs adversely affect manners, public health, and the national economy, potentially leading to the emergence of diseases and a decline in community values and etiquette.

In the light of these findings, there is an urgent need for robust legislation to regulate the use and distribution of digital content. Most of the study participants (92.1%) agreed or strongly agreed with the corresponding statement in the survey ("There should be more tightened legislations concerning digital drugs"). Families and educational institutions play a crucial role in raising awareness about the risks associated with digital drugs, which was also explicit in our findings. Taken together, our findings highlight the critical need for additional research to deepen our understanding of how digital drugs are spreading among youth, the factors driving their

Table 4 Methods of prevention against digital drugs

		Frequency	Percentage
Media plays an important role in spreading awareness about the dangers of digital drugs	Strongly agree	144	71.3
	Agree	40	19.8
	Neutral	8	4
	Disagree	8	4
	Strongly disagree	2	1
Education plays a prominent role in educating the youth about the risks of digital drugs	Strongly agree	140	69.3
	Agree	50	24.8
	Neutral	8	4
	Disagree	2	1
	Strongly disagree	2	1
Family needs more initiatives to combat digital drugs	Strongly agree	148	73.3
	Agree	40	19.8
	Neutral	10	5
	Disagree	2	1
	Strongly disagree	2	1
Parents should have more role in raising their children's awareness about digital drugs	Strongly agree	146	72.3
	Agree	42	20.8
	Neutral	8	4
	Disagree	4	2
	Strongly disagree	2	1
There should be more tightened legislations concerning digital drugs	Strongly agree	140	69.3
	Agree	46	22.8
	Neutral	10	5
	Disagree	4	2
	Strongly disagree	2	1
More scientific research should be conducted on the risks and effects of digital drugs on society	Strongly agree	140	69.3
	Agree	46	22.8
	Neutral	12	5.9
	Disagree	2	1
	Strongly disagree	2	1

use, and the effects and impacts on communities. This area requires significant focus and intervention. The scarcity of research in the Gulf region, particularly in the UAE, combined with the high prevalence of social media and Internet usage in the Gulf region (Digital 2022 Global Overview Report 2022), underscores the importance of expanding research on this critical issue. Without the implementation of appropriate measures, digital drug usage could become widespread and uncontrolled.

6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined the impact, promotion methods, and mitigation strategies of digital drug usage as perceived by university students in the United Arab Emirates. The findings indicate a significant awareness among the surveyed students regarding the risks associated with digital drugs, particularly their psychological and social impacts, as well as the subtleties of how they are marketed, which frequently occurs through social media and targeting younger members. This underscores the need to equip families with the necessary knowledge and tools to counter such tactics.

Overall, the heightened awareness among the surveyed students of the risks associated with digital drug use serves as an encouraging indicator of their understanding of digital drug risks and the limitations of current preventive measures. This awareness is crucial for tackling the challenges posed by digital drugs, emphasizing the need for ongoing research and the implementation of more dynamic strategies in the future. In evaluating existing strategies to curb digital drug use, there is an urgent need for more comprehensive measures, stricter regulations, enhanced educational initiatives, and more active community involvement.

The results reported in this chapter contribute to the current understanding of digital drug usage and highlight the importance of involving the youth in formulating solutions to these modern societal issues. Our findings call for a collaborative effort from various sectors—policymakers, educators, healthcare professionals, and community leaders alike—in establishing and executing effective strategies, stressing the role of strict laws and educational awareness in mitigating the risks of digital drugs.

Finally, this study underscores the importance of involving young, educated populations in developing solutions to contemporary social challenges, thereby laying down a foundation for future research on the way to counteract the impact of digital drugs, highlighting the need for ongoing research for comprehensive community protection and well-being.

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Chapter 13

Regulatory Policies and Digital Security for Protecting Minors in Qatar



Ahmed Badran

Abstract In contemporary society, the ubiquitous presence of technology, particularly among minors, underscores a nuanced landscape where benefits coexist with risks. Regulatory frameworks, notably in Qatar, play a pivotal role in ensuring digital security, particularly concerning minors in cyberspace. Legislations such as Qatar's Personal Data Privacy Law and Cybercrime Prevention Law are instrumental in this regard. Oversight mechanisms, spearheaded by entities like the Ministry of Transport and Communications and the Communications Regulatory Authority, fortify Qatar's commitment to digital security. This chapter critically examines Qatar's regulatory paradigm concerning online child protection, emphasizing the imperative for robust measures amidst rapid technological advancement.

Keywords Regulatory policies · Digital security · Cyberspace · The state of Qatar

1 Introduction

In the contemporary milieu, the pervasive integration of technological advancements into familial and juvenile spheres profoundly influences interactions, activities, and developmental trajectories. Traditional childhood pastimes have metamorphosed under the digital canopy, often involving extensive use of smart devices by minors. This paradigm shift underscores technology's dualistic nature, wherein its ubiquitous presence offers unprecedented opportunities for enrichment and connectivity, yet simultaneously presents inherent risks and challenges. The beneficial impact of technology on familial dynamics and juvenile development is palpable across various domains. Digital platforms facilitate enhanced communication and collaboration among family members, nurturing closer bonds and enabling shared experiences. Furthermore, educational resources and interactive learning applications empower juveniles to engage with diverse knowledge domains, fostering intellectual growth and skill development.

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Alongside these advantages, the proliferation of technology introduces complexities and vulnerabilities, particularly concerning juvenile well-being and safety. Excessive screen time and unrestricted access to online content pose risks to physical health, cognitive development, and socio-emotional well-being. Moreover, exposure to inappropriate or harmful content, cyberbullying, and online predators underscore the urgent need for comprehensive safeguards and regulatory measures. In response to these challenges, regulatory frameworks play a pivotal role in promoting digital security and safeguarding juveniles in virtual environments. Qatar's proactive approach to digital governance is exemplified by robust legislative initiatives such as Law No. 13 of 2016 on Personal Data Privacy and the Cybercrime Prevention Law. These laws establish stringent guidelines for data handling and cybersecurity practices, aiming to mitigate risks and safeguard juveniles' online experiences. Furthermore, Qatar's regulatory landscape encompasses a diverse array of stakeholders, including governmental agencies, internet service providers, educational institutions, and parental organizations. Collaborative efforts among these entities are indispensable for the effective implementation and enforcement of digital regulations, ensuring comprehensive protection for juveniles in cyberspace.

The intersection of technology and juveniles' lives presents a nuanced landscape characterized by both promise and peril. While technology offers unprecedented opportunities for learning, connectivity, and innovation, it also poses inherent risks to juvenile well-being and safety. Regulatory frameworks, supported by collaborative partnerships and proactive governance, are indispensable for addressing these challenges and safeguarding juveniles in the digital realm.

2 Defining Cyberspace

Different people mean different things when they refer to cyberspace. Murray (2007) has indicated that cyberspace is wider and more comprehensive concept compared to the Internet. At the same time other scholars do not see a clear demarcation between these two concepts although they admit that they are closely related and interconnected (Lessig, 2006). The aim of this section is to illustrate what cyberspace means and not to state the differences between cyberspace and the Internet. Therefore, in the context of this study cyberspace and the Internet will be used interchangeably. Cyber-regulatory scholars and theorists have come up with different definition to the cyberspace. The term was first used to describe a virtual computational space within which the characters were acting. As a science fiction construct, cyberspace has acquired many descriptions including "a conceptual hallucination" "a graphic representation of data abstracted from the bank of every computer in the human system" "unthinkable complexity" "lines of light ranged in the non-space of the mind, clusters, and constellation of data" "like city lights receding" (Ibid: 51).

In a more concrete fashion, cyberspace has been defined by Rheingold as "the conceptual space where words, human relations, data, wealth and power are manifested by people using computer mediated communications technology" (Rheingold,

1994: 5). Loader has described Cyberspace as “a computer-generated public domain which has no territorial boundaries or physical attributes and is in perpetual use” (Loader, 1997: 1). According to Murray (2007: 59) cyberspace is defined as “the global information system that (1) is logically linked together by a globally unique address space based on the Internet protocol (IP) or its subsequent extensions/follow-ons (2) is able to support communications using the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) suit or its subsequent extensions/follow-ons and or other IP compatible protocols (3) provides uses or makes accessible either publicly or privately high level service layered on communication”.

In the words of Loader (1997: 5) cyberspace is best conceived as “a collection of different multi-media technologies and networks which whilst they may be held together by standard computing protocols do not necessary imply that visitors to cyberspace can access all of its domain”. Mathiason defines the cyberspace as “a global data communication capability realized by the interconnection of public and private telecommunication networks using Internet Protocol (IP), Transmission Control Protocol (TCP), and the other protocols required to implement IP networking on a global scale, such as DNS and packet routing protocols” (Mathiason, 2009: 11). As such the cyberspace is “a determinant of its physical and virtual boundaries” (Marsden, 2010).

From this angle, cyberspace is an identifiable subset of a larger digital environment that denotes human interaction facilitated by digital technology. From a macro perspective, this digital environment extends to cover a wide range of subjects including both fixed line and mobile digital telecoms, facsimile communications, both terrestrial and satellite digital broadcast media, digital consumer products, the Internet, computer software and gaming digital tracking and security products databases, digital profiling tools, and digital satellite technology (Murray, 2007).

What can be understood from these definitions is that cyberspace is a virtual and intangible space which by nature differs in many of its characteristics from the real world that we live in now. Information technology plays a major role in shaping and reshaping this space and the relationships between the visitors and users of this virtual world. In this sense, virtually, cyberspace can be found everywhere, as it is freely accessible by anyone regardless of race, religion, sex, economic power, or social status (Lessig, 2006; Loader, 1997).

In the 1990s, the concept has become common in the evolving academic debate over the developments and the challenges that the cyberspace imposes on nation states and traditional governmental control systems. The fundamental question was how law and cyberspace connect? The debate has been fuelled by the contributions of the supporters of two different paradigms of cyber-regulatory governance: cyber-libertarians and cyber-paternalists (see Murray, 2007: 5–11). Cyber-libertarians led by John Perry Barlow argue for the protection of the fundamental rights of individuals to communicate freely in a sovereign cyberspace without unnecessary intervention from the state and national governments. In his famous declaration of the independence of cyberspace Barlow has mentioned that the cyberspace “is too big to be dominated by any single government (Barlow, 1996). Accordingly from a cyber-libertarians perspective the best regulatory system of cyberspace is the one

that organically emerge from within and based on cooperation and consent between cyberspace actors. As Murray (2007: 42) puts it “the cyber-libertarian approach was predicated on the concept that regulatory authorities would be unable to enforce their regulatory standards within the network due to the inherent design feature of the Internet which would render any attempts at regulatory intervention futile”.

Cyber-paternalists agree with cyber-libertarians on the complexity of cyberspace and acknowledge the fact that the Internet as a medium has its own particularities and problems and in turn does not lend itself to the traditional ways of control and regulations. However, they also emphasize that the way in which cyber-libertarians present their argument implies an oversimplification of the social and political phenomena and sweeps statements about actors’ interaction in cyberspace. According to Lessig for instance “regulation is essential to preserving and defending certain fundamental liberties” (Lessig, 2006: 27). From this view, a distinction should be made between two different processes of governance: the political processes and technological processes.

The first type of governance processes reflects the desire of nation states to control and regulate the substantive issues in cyberspace. The second type, or what Reidenberg calls “Lex Informatica” refers to compulsory rules imposed on the users of the Internet due to technological capabilities and choices made by system developers and designers (Reidenberg, 1998). From this angle, cyberspace is not totally free of regulations as there are rules imposed by the structural design of the Internet; however, for government intervention to be effective, the focus of regulators should be shifted from attempts to directly control cyberspace interactions and actors’ behaviour to attempts to influence the structural aspects and technological choices of cyberspace. These two aspects of cyberspace governance will be discussed in more details in the next section.

3 Regulatory Approaches to Cyberspace

The concept of regulation has no authoritative definition; it is used by different scholars to describe different things (Badran, 2013b, 2017, 2022, 2024). From an economic perspective, the notion of regulation in its widest conception refers to “state intervention in the economic decisions of companies” (Foster, 1992: 186). From a wider perspective, regulation can be sociologically conceived as “all mechanisms of social control including non-legal norms, and the interaction of firm, civil society and State” (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992: 4). According to Kleinstaub, the term regulation in its essence means “an arbitrary process under the rule of the State, usually centred in a (more or less) independent regulatory body” (Badran, 2022; Kleinstaub, 2004). The fundamental assumption here is that decision-making processes are so complex therefore specialized independent bodies are better equipped than states to make and to take such decisions.

The conventional wisdom behind these definitions of regulations is that some sort of control over the behaviour need to be practised normally by public bodies

in order to protect the public interests. The logic of “control by a superior” and the “authoritative role of law” are cornerstones in the traditional definitions of regulation. Another important feature of the traditional meaning of regulation is the exclusion of many non-state actors from the regulatory processes.

This conceptualisation of regulation can be acceptable in economic, legal, and political fields. However, when it comes to the regulation of the cyberspace where all these disciplines and others intersect we need to think about regulation in a different way. In other words, cyberspace regulation does not lend itself to the traditional forms of regulation where the state and its apparatus are the dominant actors. Because of the very specific nature of cyberspace, cyberspace regulation normally represents a challenge to traditional forms of state regulation. For instance, Basu and Jones have noted that a simple extension of legislation from the real world to cyberspace would not be enough to reduce the level of cyberspace crimes (Badran, 2017; Basu & Jones, 2007). Kleinsteinuber (2004) has come to the same conclusion by asserting that the traditional rulemaking process wherein state actors take the lead proved ineffective in regulating the cyberspace. Hence, Kleinsteinuber argues that new approaches need to be taken in dealing with the cyberspace as a new medium and that existing laws and regulations are in need of revision and updating to be able to cope with the new challenges posed by the growing use of the Internet.

The regulation of cyberspace reflects to a great extent the features of self-regulation regimes. In the words of Hwa Ang “self-regulation occurs when regulatory authority—the power to create and enforce rules—is formally delegated to a private entity” (Badran, 2020; Hwa Ang, 2005). However, this historically narrow view of self-regulation has been replaced by a broader conception “where non-government entities take it upon themselves to regulate with or without the formal backing of government” (Ibid). As noted by Kleinsteinuber (2004) this modern concept of self-regulation emphasises the role of the industries in defining and enforcing their “codes of conduct”. That means the players in the Internet market are relatively free and responsible for developing and enforcing the rules and standards that regulate their behaviour and interaction (Badran, 2022; Badran et al., 2014; Christou & Seamus, 2006).

Despite such a general notion of self-regulation the practice of this form of regulation differs from one industry to another. Focusing on the Internet sector, Bonnici has made a distinction between three meanings of self-regulation: self-regulation, co-regulation, and hybrid-regulation (Bonnici, 2008). The starting point of her categorization is a broad notion of self-regulation which looks at self-regulation from three main angles: as a flexible model of regulation; as a developed and accepted set of rules by participating actors; and as a regulatory process. In its pure form, the self-regulation of the cyberspace substitutes state regulation. It implies the exclusion of governmental actors from the process of developing and enforcing standards on condition that the industry self-regulation achieves the desired regulatory outcomes (Kleinsteinuber, 2004).

Marsden (2004: 84) has described this form of self-regulation as mainly “concerned with reconciliation of private interests”. However, under this form of regulation private actors act in the “shadow of the State” (Kurbalija, 2009) which means they

are threatened by state interventions in case that they did not comply with the overall framework set by the government or if they fail to come to an agreement on how to deal with certain issues. Self-regulation in this sense is a mixture of the actions of private actors, “intentional self-regulation” and the state penalties which bring about a self-regulatory system governed by the likelihood of government intervention (see Marsden 2004: 84–85, 2010: 5–6).

The second form of self-regulation presented by Bonnici (2008) is the co-regulation. In this form, the authority to regulate the industry is delegated by the government to the non-state actors; however, governmental actors are still in charge of the function of the self-regulatory process. As Marsden (2010: 123) puts it co-regulation is “self-regulation underpinned by legislative foundation and in the possibility of intervention by the regulator”. The principal actor as can be understood from this characterization of co-regulation is the state; nonetheless, other non-state actors’ points of view regarding the regulatory issues are taken on board and form the basis for the regulatory process. In this sense, co-regulation reflects an output of a “dialogue process between stakeholders, which results in a form of regulation which is neither state command-and-control regulation, nor ‘pure’ self-regulation as observed in industry-led standard setting in Internet infrastructure” (Marsden, 2004: 80). In other words, co-regulation represents a third way between regulation by the state and self-regulation by the industry (Badran, 2023).

Co-regulation with the abovementioned characteristics has elements in common with previously described self-regulation. Both forms of regulation can be regarded as “self-regulatory codes of conduct voluntarily agreed by industry, and supervised by user groups and regulators” (Badran, 2022; Tambini et al., 2008). In this sense, they represent final outcomes of negotiations and compromise between different state and non-state actors. The major difference between these two versions of self-regulation is the role that is played by the state or its agents in the regulatory process. While the state has a light presence or no presence at all under the pure form of self-regulation, in co-regulation the involvement of the state is very much expected (Badran, 2013b).

The conception of self-regulation as co-regulation is widely accepted in Europe with variations in applications. The European Commission has addressed the issue of co-regulation in its second evaluation report (2003). In this regard, it has recommended that co-regulation can be a suitable approach for achieving regulatory goals generally in media and particularly in the Internet sector. The commission has described co-regulation as it should “consist of cooperation between the public authorities, industry and the other interested parties, such as consumers” (Ibid: 3). This general conceptualization of co-regulation has been applied in different ways by different European countries which gives different weights and importance to different stakeholders. For instance, in Germany co-regulation justifies state intervention when essential constitutional rights need to be protected. In the UK telecommunications sector, co-regulation has been used to highlight the role of the state in setting regulatory objectives which need to be delivered by private actors. The joint responsibilities of private and state actors have also been reflected in the French utilization of the term “co-regulation” which in essence differs from command-and-control approaches in the regulation of cyberspace (Badran et al., 2014).

Following on from the above discussion it can be concluded that in practice co-regulation may take different forms ranging from pure self-regulation with no state involvement to the command-and-control regulation with the state and its agencies have the upper hand (see Table 1).

As the table indicates the term co-regulation includes a variety of regulatory activities which reflect multifaceted interactions of state and self-regulatory mechanisms. In-between pure self-regulation and co-regulation comes another form of regulation called by Bonnici (2008:14–19) hybrid-regulation. This form includes components from both state and self-regulation which are needed to deliver specific regulatory goals that neither the state nor the private sector can individually deliver. The focal point here is the interdependent nature of the regulatory process which makes it difficult to any of these parties to solely regulate the cyberspace. In this regard, it is hard to claim any pure form of self-regulation as governments always watch private actors and they are ready to intervene if those actors were unable to agree. Therefore, both state and self-regulation are necessary to regulate the cyberspace; they work side-by-side to complement each other based on a relationship of interdependence. Within the framework of these three forms of self-regulation scholars have come up with different classifications of the concept. Ogus has for example classified self-regulation according four criteria: monopoly of power, level of formality, legal status, and transparency of the self-regulatory process (Badran, 2011, 2022; Ogus, 2004).

With the meaning and classifications of self-regulation so identified the question becomes why self-regulation for the cyberspace? Is this the best way to regulate such an important sector? The supporters of cyberspace self-regulation build their argument on the fact that the traditional regulation by the state and its agents is not suitable and might be counterproductive if it is extended to cover cyberspace. Because of the very specific nature of cyberspace and the way in which cyberspace has developed states seemed helpless and unable to govern this medium solely.

The proponents of cyberspace self-regulation support this argument on different grounds (Ang, 2001; Emmanuel & Caral, 2004; Kleinstauber, 2004; Van den Bergh, 2004; Badran, 2023). On the one hand, they regard self-regulatory bodies as having better expertise and technical knowledge which enable them to set and enforce the standards for the whole industry. On the other hand, they see self-regulatory regimes

Table 1 A typology of co-regulation

Regulatory type	State role
1. Intentional or “pure” self-regulation	No state IRA involvement
2. Industry codes	Registered with the state IRA
3. Industry standards	Mandatory codes set in the absence of pan-industry code agreement
4. Command-and-control	Set by state IRA pre-empting attempts at self-regulatory action

Source Marsden (2004: 87)

as a means for achieving mutual trust between participating actors and establishing a more dynamic and responsive regulatory process in which actors will be able to introduce innovative solutions with minimum level of monitoring and enforcement (Badran, 2020).

In spite of these advantages of cyberspace self-regulation there are still major disadvantages that should be considered when this form of regulation is considered as a governance mechanism for the cyberspace. From a policy perspective, the notion of self-regulation raises fundamental concerns about the transparency, legitimacy, and the accountability of the self-regulatory process and the produced regulations. From an economic angle, self-regulation can be opposed for several reasons such as the tendency of self-regulatory bodies to act as cartels and to stifle competition, the possibility that self-regulation may establish entry barriers to the markets and encourage rent-seeking behaviour among actors who participate in the regulatory process (Emmanuel & Caral, 2004). At the technical front, the opponents of self-regulation have presented different reasons for their objection including the risk of capture as self-regulation is perceived as always in favour of the interests of either the self-regulatory body or the regulatees. Furthermore, actors in self-regulatory regimes may lack incentives to control and enforce standards or they may tend to develop poor quality standards in order to be able to meet them easily (Ang, 2001; Emmanuel et al., 2004).

The conceptualisation of self-regulation as hybrid arrangements which encompass both state and self-regulation is best describing the reality of cyberspace regulation (Badran, 2012, 2022). However, a full understanding of how self-regulation works in practice needs more than just admitting that the real world of cyberspace regulation encompasses governments and private actors working jointly to govern the cyberspace. It is important to understand who regulates what. In other words, which aspects of cyberspace regulation are governed by the state and which are self-regulated by non-state actors? To answer this question a multilayered approach that reflects the complexity of the cyberspace and its various stakeholders as well as the architecture of the cyberspace itself is required (Badran, 2013a, 2019).

4 Cyberspace Regulatory Risks for Minors

As the aforementioned discussion indicates, in the realm of digital interconnectedness, cyberspace emerges as an abstract domain transcending physical boundaries, encompassing a vast network of computer systems, networks, and information. It functions as a virtual arena where data traverses intricate pathways, shaping and intertwining with human experiences (Steiger et al., 2018). Through this expansive platform, accessible via Internet-connected devices, cyberspace influences myriad aspects of human existence. Regulatory efforts aimed at cyberspace entail the development and enforcement of laws and policies governing online conduct, particularly concerning the protection of minors (Badran, 2011, 2021). Given its vast and largely

unregulated nature, cyberspace poses significant risks to minors, including exposure to online predators and cyberbullying. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as an individual below eighteen years of age, a designation upheld by Qatari legislators in their legal framework (Article 7, Law 14; Combating Cybercrime). From a legal standpoint, a child is characterized by multifaceted attributes encompassing mental, spiritual, emotional, physical, and sensory dimensions. Consequently, their regulatory requirements within cyberspace diverge markedly from those of adults, given their distinct vulnerabilities and developmental stages. Minors, by virtue of their age, confront unique challenges and considerations in navigating the digital realm. Their cognitive and emotional maturity may not align with the complexities of online environments, rendering them susceptible to potential risks. Limited decision-making capacities coupled with a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding online hazards may predispose minors to unwittingly share personal information, engage in risky behaviours, or fall prey to fraudulent schemes. Furthermore, the cognitive and emotional evolution of minors varies significantly across age cohorts, necessitating tailored regulatory interventions to safeguard their well-being within cyberspace (Livingstone & Bulger, 2014).

Minors, characterized by vulnerability and immaturity, represent a distinct demographic within digital technology users, making them susceptible targets for technology companies and software developers. Research suggests a deliberate or inadvertent targeting of minors by companies within the digital technology sector. Notably, technology firms identify and exploit developmental traits such as impulsivity, immaturity, impressionability, naiveté, and susceptibility to peer influence to enhance children's engagement with digital products and services. Empirical evidence reveals that minors aged 8 and above in the United States spend 4–9 h daily on screen-based activities. However, the concern extends beyond screen time to the nature of the content consumed, including content intended for adults, posing significant risks to minors (Laleh et al., 2018). The child's interaction with cyberspace is symbiotic, integrating into the information society, granting access to an extensive array of services and information via internet-enabled devices. With reduced technological and financial barriers, minors now explore diverse realms of knowledge and engage with new individuals, assuming the role of a bona fide "digital citizen" within cyberspace. This status entitles minors to knowledge and information access within a secure regulatory framework governed by legal statutes and legislation (Vishwanath et al., 2018).

Addressing the regulatory risks that minors are facing in cyberspace calls for a definition of cybercrime as the majority—if not all—of these online threats can be regarded as potential cybercrimes (Kulshrestha, 2022). The Qatari legislator defined cybercrime as "any act that involves illegal use of information technology means, information system or information network in breach of the provisions of law" (Eldeeb, 2021). Some of those cybercrimes have been stated in the law as examples and not as an exhausted list. Among the listed cybercrime, child pornography, cyberbullying and identity theft are of prime importance. Talking in detail about the threats and risks facing minors in cyberspace goes beyond the limits of this chapter. Due to the multiplicity of applications and electronic media that can be connected to

the Internet, minors are exposed to many types of risks. It should also be noted that the risks to which minors are exposed in cyberspace are not limited only to those associated with applications and social networking sites. In other words, minors as a societal group may become a target for technology companies to maximize their profits, taking advantage of the impulsiveness and inability to properly assess consequences, as well as the desire to keep up with peers and even outperform them. Given the wide range of risks resulting from all these sources, this part of the chapter will be limited to giving some examples of the types of risks that minors may be exposed to, whether on social networking sites or through the marketing strategies of technology and gaming companies.

The absence of a robust regulatory framework to oversee digital technology companies' operations leaves minors vulnerable to various forms of exploitation. Given the expansive scope of these companies' activities and products, it is impossible within this chapter's confines to cover them comprehensively. Instead, attention will be directed to select areas necessitating intervention through the establishment of an effective regulatory framework. Among these areas, the gaming industry stands out prominently for its profound impact on minors. This multibillion-dollar industry and its diverse array of products have both positive and negative effects on minors. While some social games aim to cultivate skills and personality traits, enhancing educational and social development, others exploit minors' s impulsive tendencies and lack of risk assessment for profit. Research indicates that many gaming companies allocate significant resources to understand children's behavioural and psychological traits, tailoring their products to maximize appeal (Faraz et al., 2022; Pradhan, 2023). Moreover, there is a propensity to design games in an addictive manner, potentially leading to irresponsible behaviour and addiction-like tendencies in minors. Recent studies highlight parallels between certain game-induced behaviours and gambling addiction, as they activate similar brain regions. Over time, addiction to these games may precipitate behavioural and personality disturbances, exacerbating societal concerns.

Beyond the risks associated with online gaming, minors face various dangers when using social media platforms. These threats encompass online predators, cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, identity theft, and phishing scams. Such risks can have serious repercussions on children's physical safety, mental health, and privacy. Cyber predators often prey on vulnerable minors, exploiting their naivety for malicious purposes by utilizing deceptive tactics (Borj & Bours, 2019; Fauzi & Bours, 2020). Moreover, children's mental and emotional well-being is jeopardized by exposure to inappropriate content, which can include graphic imagery and harmful concepts. According to GuardChild (2023), 70% of minors aged 7–18 years have inadvertently encountered online pornography, often during web searches for homework. Law enforcement officials estimate that at any given time, over 50,000 sexual predators are online. This underscores the critical need to address cyber grooming to protect minors from sexual exploitation (Fauzi & Bours, 2020).

Cyberbullying, or the use of social media and online messaging services to threaten, humiliate, or harass, is another serious issue facing minors (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). Generally, bullying involves deliberate and persistent acts of hostility by an individual or group against someone unable to defend themselves (Olweus, 2012).

Cyberbullying is defined as “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly or over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself” (Salawu et al., 2020). Almost 65% of minors aged 8 to 14 have experienced some form of cyberbullying, with 12% of tweens having already been bullied online. What makes this trend more concerning is that most parents are unaware of their children’s experiences with online bullying. Available statistics suggest that only 15% of parents are aware of their children’s cyberbullying due to their social networking activities (GuardChild, 2023).

Social media platforms and online messaging services are increasingly exposing minors to threats, humiliation, and harassment, a phenomenon known as cyberbullying (O’Keeffe et al., 2011). Bullying, in general, involves persistent acts of hostility perpetrated by individuals or groups against someone unable to protect themselves (Olweus, 2012). Cyberbullying can be described as “an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly or over time, against a victim who cannot easily defend themselves” (Salawu et al., 2020). Research indicates that approximately 65% of minors between the ages of 8 and 14 have encountered cyberbullying, with 12% of tweens experiencing online harassment. The gravity of this issue is heightened by the fact that most parents are unaware of their children’s exposure to cyberbullying. For instance, studies suggest that only 15% of parents are aware of their children’s cyberbullying due to their social media activities (GuardChild, 2023).

The issue of identity theft among minors is also alarming, with minors 35 times more likely to experience identity theft compared to adults (Kropp, 2017). Identity theft involves a hacker or a stranger impersonating a legitimate user, often to gain unauthorized access to personal information or contacts (Jain & Gupta, 2022). This type of cybercrime can go unnoticed for a long time because children’s online profiles are often not monitored as closely as those of adults. When criminals acquire a child’s identity, they can conduct fraudulent financial transactions, leading to long-term consequences for the child’s future. To mitigate this risk, minors must exercise caution when providing personal information online, and parents should vigilantly monitor their children’s online activities (Kropp, 2017).

These risks represent just a fraction of the dangers minors face in cyberspace. Given the vast number of platforms and virtual worlds that minors explore, it becomes increasingly challenging to monitor their online activities. Thus, educating minors about their rights and responsibilities in cyberspace is a fundamental step towards protecting them and establishing a first line of defence against cybercriminals (Olweus, 2012; Quayyum et al., 2021).

5 Protecting Minors in Cyberspace: The Regulatory Framework in the State of Qatar

The State of Qatar stands out as one of the wealthiest nations in the Arab world, boasting rapid economic expansion and a notable embrace of information and communications technology. This embrace of technology has significantly influenced the daily lives of the Qatari population, particularly minors and youth. Consequently, the State of Qatar has recognized the importance of cybersecurity and information security, striving to create a safe digital environment for its citizens. This section delineates the legislative and institutional efforts undertaken by Qatar to regulate cyberspace and ensure a secure virtual environment for minors.

At the legislative level, despite lacking a unified regulatory framework explicitly dedicated to child protection in cyberspace, Qatar has been proactive in enacting laws that contribute to a safer digital space for minors. Law No. 14 of 2014, known as the Cybercrime Prevention Law, exemplifies these efforts. This law, while addressing general cybercrime provisions, includes specific measures aimed at combating child pornography. Article 7 stipulates that anyone found using information technology to create, sell, offer, distribute, or transmit child pornography can face imprisonment for up to five years and a fine of up to QR500,000. Additionally, mere possession of such material can lead to a one-year prison term and a fine of QR250,000. Importantly, these penalties apply irrespective of the child's consent, highlighting the state's commitment to protecting minors from exploitation. The law is explicit about the definition of a child, considering any individual under the age of eighteen to be a minor for the purposes of this article (Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2014). This robust legal framework underscores Qatar's commitment to combating cybercrime and safeguarding minors. The penalties are designed to act as a deterrent against the exploitation of minors in cyberspace, while also providing a legal recourse to hold offenders accountable. Such legislative measures are a key component of Qatar's broader strategy to create a safe digital environment for all citizens, especially its most vulnerable ones.

Law No. 13 of 2016, Concerning Personal Data Privacy Protection, is an important piece of legislation in Qatar that focuses on regulating cyberspace with a particular focus on the protection of children's data. Articles 16, 17, and 27 play a key role in safeguarding personal information, categorizing specific types as sensitive. These include children's data, health-related information, ethnic origin, religious beliefs, marital status, and criminal history. The law mandates explicit consent from a child's guardian before processing their personal data, and it obligates website operators to provide transparency about their data practices, allowing guardians to request the deletion of their child's information if needed. Additionally, the law requires collaboration among relevant institutions to enforce these protections, encouraging partnerships with organizations that focus on family affairs to ensure child safety online. Qatar's broader National Cybersecurity Strategy, established in 2014, complements this law by outlining a comprehensive approach to maintaining cybersecurity. It seeks

to raise awareness of cybersecurity, provide necessary safeguards for national information infrastructure, and promote social engagement to combat cyber threats. By doing so, the strategy aims to create a secure and stable environment, protecting both government systems and personal data. A significant aspect of the strategy is its focus on building a culture of cybersecurity that emphasizes safe and appropriate use of cyberspace. This involves initiatives to raise cybersecurity awareness across a range of demographic groups, from minors and students to older adults and government employees. Through these efforts, Qatar seeks to ensure a secure digital landscape that minimizes risks and protects the rights and safety of minors and other vulnerable groups.

To address the growing use of digital technology and its associated risks, the Qatari government has set up the National Committee for Information Security (NCIS), a key institution dedicated to advancing Qatar's national cybersecurity strategy and safeguarding information security across the country. The primary objective of this committee is to establish a safer online environment through increased awareness about internet safety and improved education on the topic. The Supreme Council of Information and Communication Technology (ictQATAR) played a pivotal role in developing the NCIS, reflecting the government's commitment to comprehensive cybersecurity measures. The NCIS is comprised of representatives from a wide range of organizations and sectors, indicating a multi-stakeholder approach to internet safety. Its membership includes representatives from ictQATAR, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice, the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, the Supreme Education Council, telecommunications companies like Qtel and Vodafone Qatar, academic institutions such as Carnegie Mellon University-Qatar and Qatar University, and various non-governmental organizations focusing on social issues. By involving such a diverse group of stakeholders, the NCIS aims to foster a collective effort towards internet safety, ensuring that the interests and concerns of various sectors are addressed. This multi-stakeholder approach is designed to create a comprehensive framework for online safety, with a focus on empowering individuals to become digitally literate and make informed decisions when using the internet. The NCIS seeks to engage not only government and industry leaders but also families and young people, providing them with the tools and knowledge to navigate the digital world safely. By raising awareness and promoting a culture of cybersecurity, the NCIS contributes to a broader effort to protect individuals, especially minors, from online threats and ensure a secure digital environment in Qatar.

The National Committee for Information Security (NCIS) is tasked with a multi-faceted mandate focused on improving online safety and security in Qatar. Central to its mission is the commissioning of research that delves into various aspects of internet safety, helping to understand the evolving risks and vulnerabilities in the digital world. Beyond research, the NCIS aims to provide tangible support to both organizations and individuals, ensuring that they have the resources and guidance needed to address internet safety concerns effectively. Additionally, the NCIS is responsible for identifying and implementing specific solutions to a broad range of internet safety issues, from protecting personal data to combating cyber threats. This comprehensive approach allows the NCIS to address the diverse challenges of

the digital age, promoting a safer and more secure online environment for all. To implement its mandate effectively, the National Committee for Information Security (NCIS) has established three specialized sub-committees, each with distinct focus areas. The first sub-committee is dedicated to family issues, with a key objective of raising awareness among minors and their parents about online safety. This group aims to educate families on safe internet practices, emphasizing the importance of digital literacy and parental guidance in ensuring a secure online environment for minors. The second sub-committee is focused on content management, exploring how the content sector can contribute to internet safety. This includes reviewing digital content to ensure it aligns with safety standards and does not promote harmful or illegal activities. This committee plays a crucial role in setting guidelines for content providers and monitoring compliance with established safety protocols. The third sub-committee takes a legal perspective on internet safety. This committee is responsible for scrutinizing current laws to identify content that is legally prohibited and for analysing various illicit online activities, such as pornography, religious defamation, and human trafficking. Additionally, this group has the task of recommending new laws or regulations to enhance cyber safety in Qatar. Part of its role involves organizing and conducting workshops and training sessions to educate various stakeholders on internet-related crimes. By promoting legal awareness and compliance, the sub-committee contributes to a safer digital environment in the country. Through these targeted efforts, the NCIS works to create a comprehensive framework for addressing online safety and security concerns.

The National Cyber Security Agency in Qatar has launched a comprehensive awareness campaign aimed at parents, teachers, and school students to educate them about digital safety and the risks associated with internet use. This initiative aligns with the broader goals of the National Agency for Cybersecurity, which seeks to empower local communities by creating digitally safe and technologically informed environments. As technology increasingly infiltrates all aspects of life, the need for cybersecurity and digital safety has become more pressing, especially for minors and adolescents. To address these challenges within the educational sector, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education has launched the “Educational Cybersecurity Curricula” project. This initiative aims to integrate cyber safety and digital security into school curricula, with a specific focus on teaching minors and adolescents about the concepts and principles of cybersecurity. The project covers a wide range of educational levels, from primary school to university, and even includes parallel education and literacy programs. Its objective is to raise awareness of the importance of protecting personal data and information while promoting responsible, ethical, and safe use of technology. The project provides interactive content via a learning management system and is a collaborative effort involving several stakeholders. By emphasizing Digital Citizenship, the curriculum encourages students to become responsible members of both the local and global digital community.

In addition to educational programs, Qatar has established a National Child Protection Helpline to support minors who experience online abuse, bullying, or harassment. The hotline, accessible at 919, offers free, confidential social, psychological, and legal consultations for women and minors. It also provides support for those who have

been victims of violence or family breakdowns. According to Child Helpline International, child helplines worldwide receive over 13 million calls annually, offering counselling services to nearly 3 million minors and young people. The collaboration between the Supreme Education Council (SEC) and private schools, facilitated by the Qatar Computer Emergency Response Team (Q-CERT), is aimed at providing courses for educators in Arabic and English, helping them to convey security issues to minors in an age-appropriate manner. Qatar's efforts to protect minors online extend to creating a safe digital space. The Government's "Safe Space" website serves as a hub for information about online threats, best practices, and cyber safety tools. This platform is designed for youth, parents, teachers, and the general public, providing educational games, tips on cyberbullying, and a wealth of resources on cybersecurity. Two major programs, HASEEN and the Digital Literacy Curriculum, offer classes and online resources to promote digital safety. The initiative also features seminars, ambassador programs, digital libraries, and social media campaigns to foster a culture of cyber safety and security. Through these concerted efforts, Qatar aims to create a safer online environment and empower its citizens to navigate the digital world responsibly and securely.

6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the vibrant theoretical and conceptual debate between scholars in the academic community about the three core notions has been reviewed as an initial step for explaining how cyberspace governance works in the case of Qatar. The discussion of these concepts has indicated that the emergence and developments of cyberspace as a distinct digital phenomenon has posed many challenges to our traditional understanding of concepts such as governance and regulation. Because of the relative novelty of cyber-environments and the way in which online communities have been developed many claims have been made that it would not be possible to control this new medium in the fashion that the old media have been regulated. As Lips puts it the governance of the Internet is complex as it includes "confrontation between (emerging) on-line activities, on the one hand, and traditional regulatory frameworks and approaches, on the other" (Lips, 2024). At the same time, because of the trans-border nature of the Internet, no single country can impose its legal system to regulate online behaviour.

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Chapter 14

The Impact of Personal Communication Technology on the Family Interaction and Wellbeing in Saudi Arabia: A Qualitative Analysis



Saddiga Al Ghalib

Abstract A positive familial bond contributes to an individual's happiness and well-being. The strength of family relationships depends on several factors such as family structure, gender, culture, proximity etc. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of Personal Communication Technology (PCT) usage among Saudi youths on family relationships and wellbeing. It includes an analysis of current literature with a focus on research conducted in Saudi Arabia and empirically draws on interviews with Saudi residents. Conclusions drawn from this study suggest that PCT usage has both positive and negative effects on wellbeing and family dynamics depending on the duration of usage, parental supervision, and awareness. This research is expected to raise awareness and contribute to a family friendly PCT policy formulation in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords Technology use • Problematic internet use • Family wellbeing • Family communication • Internet addiction • Saudi family

1 Introduction

Technology has become an integral part of our lives. Media channels report that Saudi culture has undergone quantum changes due to the fast-paced spread of modern technology. Rapid technological advances have paved the way for the emergence of a digital culture in which PCT has become the norm rather than an exception. The fierce competition between tech companies has made interactive PCT accessible to people across all socio-economic levels and demographics. The impact of this significant shift in technology is complex and it is difficult to determine its influence on the Saudi family wellbeing and dynamics. A major part of available research suggests that

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technology has adverse effects on social interaction and competence, teenage behavioral patterns, family relationships, parental attachment, learning, wellbeing, etc. (Drago, 2015; Moawad & Ebrahim, 2016; Kang & Munoz, 2014; Perham & Currie, 2014; Pannilage, 2017; Volkmer & Lerner, 2019). However, most of these studies have been conducted in America and Europe, with only a few of them conducted in developing countries (Elsobeihi & Abu-Naser, 2017; Alolyan, 2015). Therefore, it is critical to examine the effects of an extensive use of technology on the wellbeing of the Saudi family in light of its key role in the cultural and socio-political contexts of the Kingdom.

The family is a basic social institution in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its wellbeing is an essential prerequisite for the health of the Saudi society. The WHO's definition of health underscores the importance of wellbeing in this regard: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". This clearly indicates the need to understand the implications of using interactive technologies on family wellbeing. The main purpose of this research project is to examine the impact of using technology (smart phones, computers, internet, and so forth) on the wellbeing and dynamics of Saudi families. The research questions that will be addressed are: What is the intensity of technology usage by Saudi family members across background variables such as age, genders, economic level, region, etc; What is the impact of technology usage on Saudi family interrelations and wellbeing? The conclusions drawn from this chapter are intended to form the basis of further research that will involve gathering primary data via large-scale surveys and subsequently creating interventions for encouraging appropriate and advantageous use of PCT and suggesting recommendations for the same.

This chapter is organized into 3 main sections—Literature review, interview analysis, and conclusion. The next section discusses the existing literature on the impact of PCT on family dynamics and wellbeing. It also delves into the role of parents in the usage of PCT and trends in the field in Saudi Arabia. Interview analysis presents the observations noted from the interviews conducted with parents to investigate the perception of PCT usage in Saudi Arabia. Conclusions have been derived from the literature review and interview analysis in the final section and recommendations for PCT usage have been discussed.

2 Methodology

This research paper adopts a qualitative research strategy. The two methods adopted are literature review and interview analysis.

2.1 Literature Review

A review of extant literature was conducted to find patterns, draw conclusions, and provide answers to the research questions. The search criteria included both research papers and articles on the topic from reliable sources. It was not limited to any single database. Literature from the years 2000 to present was included. Research papers with only limited access to the full paper were filtered out. The search for existing literature was done in two stages. In the first stage, the search terms used were “technology”, “social media”, “mental health”, “wellbeing”, “family interaction”, “relationships”, and “impact”. A total of 23 papers were selected from the search results. At this stage, research conducted in Saudi Arabia was not included. Once global research papers were reviewed, in the second stage, the search terms were narrowed to include only literature from Saudi Arabia. 11 papers were selected from the search results. Conclusions were drawn from the review of these research papers and articles to answer the research questions.

2.2 Interview Analysis

A semi-structured interview was conducted with five people residing in Saudi Arabia. The aim of the interview was to investigate the participants' views on the impact of PCT on wellbeing and family interactions. The interviewees were five parents who were Saudi residents. They had two to five children aged from seven months to 19 years. After conducting the interview, it was transcribed, and thematic analysis was done to identify common themes. The sample population was limited to allow for in-depth interviews that will form the basis for further research. The interviewees were selected to include parents of all age ranges of children, and families with two working parents and one working parent (one stay-at-home parent). The interviews paved the path for a better understanding of the perception of parents regarding what constitutes wellbeing, impact of PCT on wellbeing and family relationships, and parental and governmental role in regulating the use of PCT.

3 Personal Communication Technology and Family Dynamics

The term “Family Dynamics” refers mainly to the forms of interaction and communication between members of a family, each of which is characterized by unique and distinctive traits. An individual's perception of self is largely based on the dynamics and connections between his/her family members including previous generations and their family culture. Family culture is the set of rules, beliefs, and values each family has that are colored mainly by its cultural background. This includes individual

roles, attitudes toward education and employment, family loyalty, amount of time family members spend together and supporting each other (Becvar & Becvar, 2002; Minuchin, 1974). Interaction between family members has dramatically changed in the past 15 years due to the advent of interactive communication technologies (ICTs). This phenomenon has not only generated many benefits for families but has also led to the creation of a new set of challenges (Villegas, 2013).

PCT has greatly influenced family interactions. It has facilitated work from home policies which in turn allowed employees to avoid commuting and have more time available to spend with their family. The downside to this is that the employees may be expected to work at all hours of the day which may lead to a stressful environment at home. Some research shows that PCT has led to a decline in the quality of family relationships. This may be due to the wider technology gap between generations and a reduction in time spent with one another. On the other hand, PCT has also improved family relationships in some respects due to increased connectivity and giving families the opportunity to spend time together while relaxing such as watching a movie together (Trilar et al., 2018).

One of the most obvious and worrying changes that have occurred in a typical family that is dependent on technology is the disappearance of conversation and social involvement (Priatelj, 2016; Villegas, 2013; Kraut et al., 1998). Modern technology allows people to easily choose distraction over self-reflection and real human connections with other people. Once individuals are used to the ease of online interactions, they tend to avoid face-to-face conversations. What people do not realize is that face-to-face conversation leads to better emotional connection while online messaging leads to the exact opposite (Priatelj, 2016). Villegas (2013) concluded in a study that media is seen as a necessity and a very important part of the lives of both kids and adults in this era. This dependency on media technology has led to a heavy influence on a family's structure and dynamic. Family mealtimes and coffee breaks are filled with silence as each individual is engaged with their mobile device leading to a deprivation of facial expressions and spontaneous conversations (Priatelj, 2016).

There is a noticeable shift that can be seen in parental styles where most parents use technology to "babysit" or distract children, which may hinder the development of strong family relationships. Villegas (2013) suggests that in these cases, it is important that parents follow-up with conversations and discussions to connect with their children. Research has shown that the advent of mobile technology and the internet has generated newer serious problems that may affect the wellbeing of families. Some of these include adult predators stalking children, online harassment, cyber bullying, lack of trust, apathy, lack of social involvement, and infidelity (Kraut et al., 1998; Priatelj, 2016). Studies have shown that people find that modern technological devices allow them to keep in touch with one another and continue to work from remote locations (Chesley, 2005; Huisman et al., 2012). However, they also acknowledge that it impedes on family time due to extended work hours, creates more distractions and is stressful because they have to keep up with the costs of the latest advancements in the fast-paced world of technology.

Conversely, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) also has many benefits. One of the most visible benefits is being able to stay connected with extended family members around the world. Using technology provides people with more opportunities for social communication (Tee et al., 2009). It is also very useful for distance parenting for international students by maintaining close relationships and a sense of connectedness (Bacigalupe & Bräuninger, 2017; Tee et al., 2009). Studies (Schroeder et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2015; Hülür & Macdonald, 2020) suggest that technology and the internet can be useful for older generations if they are aware of how to use it appropriately to manage and understand their health conditions, strengthen close relationships, etc.

Older people using the internet for communication and information seeking has a positive impact on their wellbeing, loneliness, and social capital (Morris, et al., 2014; Sum et al., 2008). Chan (2014) uses the Socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 1999) to explain how older generations benefit from communication technologies while younger generations seem to receive adverse effects. He posits that using technology enhances wellbeing for older people (ages 35–70+) because they use it to strengthen the bonds with people they are already in some form of relationships with as maintenance of relationships with strong ties becomes important when older. While younger generations tend to form a large number of weak-tie relationships through technology, the maintenance of which eventually diminishes their wellbeing.

4 Personal Communication Technology and Wellbeing

Diener et al. (1999) explained wellbeing as a “broad category of phenomena that includes people’s emotional responses, domain satisfaction, and global judgments of life satisfaction” (as cited in Bartels, 2015, p. 138). The word “wellbeing” is often used interchangeably with terms like satisfaction with life, happiness, or quality of life (Layard, 2010). It is vital for the proper functioning of families, communities, and society as it affects social behaviors, cohesion, inclusion, and eventually, prosperity (Nef, 2014). While a multitude of wellbeing models have been developed to understand and measure wellbeing, the current research endeavor plans to make use of two particular models of wellbeing. The first one is Nef’s model of wellbeing, which was derived from empirical evidence about the drivers of wellbeing. The model (refer to Fig. 1) consists of the various features of wellbeing (external conditions, psychological resources, good feelings, good functioning, and the satisfaction of needs) and the interactions between them (Nef, 2014; Seaford, 2010). Two of the measures strongly recommended by Nef for the measurement of wellbeing are the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) subjective wellbeing questions (Seaford, 2010). In their guide to measuring wellbeing, they also provide additional information regarding supplementary question items and administering the questionnaire.

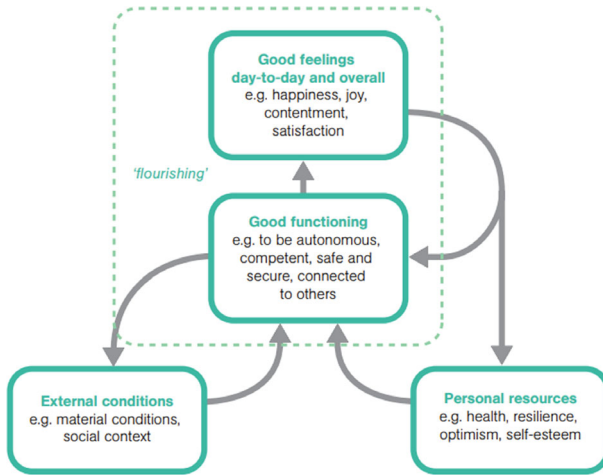


Fig. 1 Nef's dynamic model of wellbeing. Adapted from "Wellbeing At Work" by Nef (2014), Retrieved from <https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/downloads/wellbeing-at-work-a-review-of-the-literature>, p. 11

Dr. Mary Jo Kreitzer (2012) proposed the second model of wellbeing and it includes factors of health, purpose, relationships, community, environment, and security. The health aspect underscores physical, psychological, and spiritual health. Purpose is defined to be an extension of spirituality that drives someone to achieve fulfillment and meaning in their life. Community refers to both the level of engagement that people have toward each other and the resources that are available to someone. Another impact factor to wellbeing is healthy environmental conditions (e.g., clean water). Lastly, security conditions (e.g., financial stability, safety) can have a direct effect on someone's experience of wellbeing.

Wellbeing is another facet of our life that has been affected by PCT. It has made it possible for people to access resources easier than before. Reputed websites, health apps, and social media can play a positive role in raising awareness and providing care efficiently. Research (Lal et al., 2017) shows that technology such as web and phone-based interventions and health care apps that connect service providers with patients increase accessibility and reduce the cost of services. On the negative side, the online world is filled with information some of which is unreliable, false, and sometimes downright dangerous. There are also concerns with regards to privacy and confidentiality (Lal et al., 2017). Technology, especially PCT, is advancing rapidly and it is impossible to avoid it. It is prudent that we analyze the impact of such technology and devise strategies to benefit from it and mitigate its adverse effects.

Kraut et al. (1998) conducted a longitudinal study that was among the first ones to examine the causal effects of internet use on family psychological wellbeing. They found that increased usage of the internet leads to increased levels of depression, stress, and loneliness despite using it for communication purposes. Bargh and Mckenna (2004) found similar results in a comprehensive review on the effects of the

internet on social life. Likewise, Weiser (2001) concluded that problematic internet use increases introversion and illness. Many studies also found that life satisfaction levels decrease as problematic internet use increases (Kabasakal, 2015; Ko et al., 2005; Kraut et al., 1998; Koç, 2017; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Deniz & Yılmaz, 2006; Bevan et al., 2014; Lu & Yeo, 2015; Satıcı & Uysal, 2015; Wang et al., 2008; Stepanikova et al., 2010; Çelik & Odacı, 2013). Additionally, researchers found that adolescents' self-esteem was negatively affected by negative feedback on social networking sites while positive feedback had the opposite effect (Valkenburg et al., 2006).

Inversely, technology studies have also shown that technology can have certain benefits. Castellacci and Tveito (2018) provided a theoretical framework of well-being and internet use in their paper. They argue that there are four channels, which are used by the internet to affect wellbeing. Internet usage changes time-use patterns, facilitates a platform to create new activities, provides access to massive amounts of information and lastly, poses as a powerful communication device. They state that the internet has been beneficial to humankind in providing formidable opportunities, increasing efficiency and precision, increasing hedonic wellbeing as more time is created for recreational activities and personal growth, increasing personal characteristics and capabilities, providing opportunities for social interactions, etc. Similar results are shown in a study conducted on international students where increased physical, social, and emotional wellbeing was observed with the use of communication technology (Bacigalupe & Bräuninger, 2017). A meta-analysis study revealed that technology could be beneficial for learning effectiveness if it is properly interwoven with pedagogy (Chauhan, 2017).

5 Parental Role in Regulation of Personal Communication Technology Usage

Parents have played and will continue to play a vital role in the introduction and regulation of PCT devices. Most of the experiences a child has during their formative years are provided by parents. Parents mainly adopt 3 strategies to mediate PCT usage—active, restrictive, and technical. Active strategies involve having open discussions with the child to raise awareness about the digital world and monitoring the child while they use PCT. Restrictive strategies consist of setting time limits, restricting areas where PCT can be used and also controlling what the children watch. Technical strategies involve using tools such as parental controls to restrict and monitor PCT usage. PCT is being increasingly used by parents to regulate behavior during meal-times, travel, doctor visits, while eating out or even just to get a break while the child is busy watching something. Research shows that children need an adequate amount of free play, i.e., play not involving screen time, for their development (Işıkoğlu et al., 2021). There is also evidence that links long time spent using PCT to issues such as cyber bullying, increase in violent tendencies, addiction to games, obesity, and

increased risk of viewing inappropriate content (Balkam & Dönmez, 2017; Livingstone, 2017; Neumann, 2015; Nikken & Schols, 2015). While there are undeniably advantages to digital play such as relaxation, improved eye-hand coordination, development of decision-making skills and motor skills, it is essential that such play be mediated by adults to reap these benefits (İşıkoğlu et al., 2021).

6 Personal Communication Technology Usage in Saudi Arabia

Internet accessibility is very high in Saudi Arabia with a massive 99% of the population having access to internet and more than 79% using social media. Among the online platforms, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat are the most widely used social media platforms. On average, an individual in Saudi Arabia spends more than 7 h online which includes an average of around 3 h spent on social media (Global Media Insight, 2023). High internet access combined with a young population means that its impact is very high and penetrates most facets of life.

7 Impact of Personal Communication Technology Usage on Wellbeing in Saudi Arabia

Research on the topic in the region indicates a link between PCT and mental wellbeing (Alammar et al., 2020; Alsubaie et al., 2021; Alwuqaysi et al., 2024). PCT is widely used by adolescents and young adults for social media and browsing (Global Media Insight, 2023). Social media unfortunately sometimes portrays an unrealistic image of the “perfect” life, body, or home that viewers may try in vain to achieve and become disappointed with themselves. This age group is more susceptible to being influenced by likes, shares, and followers, etc. This can become a source of stress and unhappiness for them. In fact, research shows that the social media features of likes, shares, and followers cause the most stress, anxiety, and depression among the youth features (Beyari, 2023). These features are closely followed by browsing posts and sharing media in their negative effect on mental health. This negative impact could be due to users basing their value and worth from the responses they receive on social media. It is interesting to note that, in Saudi Arabia, social media games, although shown to be addictive, do not seem to have the same negative impact on mental wellbeing as other features (Beyari, 2023). Research shows that university students seem to be aware of the impact of social media on their life. It was observed in a study that majority of the students in a Saudi Arabian University reported that spending time on social media affected their academic performance, lifestyle and distracted them from their college obligations (Mansour et al., 2020).

Spread of false information through PCT is another source of stress to the public. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was observed that such misleading and false information created panic and anxiety in the population. This was a period of many unexpected changes in lifestyles such as quarantines, masking, curfews, etc. People are always fearful of the unknown and unfortunately during this pandemic there were many unknown factors with regards to treatments, new variants, etc. This uncertainty caused the public to turn to social media to get information and stay updated. However, as the WHO noted, fake and false information was spreading as quickly as the virus creating anxiety and stress thereby affecting the psychological well-being of the population (Hammad & Alqarni, 2021). The health sector has also been impacted by PCT. Research shows that the Saudi population has a favorable view of the utilization of social media in the health sector (El Kheir et al., 2021). Social media was mostly used by the public to search for information regarding specific ailments and how to manage and prevent them. It was also used to exchange information on health-related topics (El Kheir et al., 2021).

Adequate physical activity is linked to better physical and mental health. With the rise in the use of PCT, there have been concerns about decline in physical activity, especially among adolescents. It is essential to investigate this phenomenon since insufficient physical activity leads to a higher risk of diabetes, obesity, heart diseases, and mental health issues. Data collected by researchers to analyze the relationship between hours of technology used and physical activity shows that the higher the use of PCT, the lesser the physical activity. Researchers collected data through a cross-sectional study from 277 children aged 6–12 years in Saudi Arabia (Almaqhawi & Albarqi, 2022). A shocking 68.2% of the children spent more than 6 h on the screens while 31.8% spent less than 5 h. Higher screen time was linked to lower physical activity among the children. Interestingly, as opposed to other studies done globally, in Saudi Arabia the mean age of parents whose kids spent more time on screens is higher than those whose kids spend less time on their screens. It was also observed that screen time was inversely related to the number of siblings the children had (Almaqhawi & Albarqi, 2022).

8 Impact of Personal Communication Technology Usage on Family Dynamics in Saudi Arabia

PCT has influenced family dynamics and interactions in the country. Within the context of Saudi Arabia, exposure to different media has made the population more open minded as it has been exposed to differing viewpoints. It has also given the younger generation the confidence to express themselves in what was previously a society where the opinions of elders were supreme. However, not all influence has been positive as communication between family members has been negatively affected due to long hours spent on PCT devices.

A major concern with the rise of PCT, is what has been termed as “Problematic Internet Usage” (PIU). This term is used to describe the behavior of a person who actively prefers online activities over offline ones and has an impaired ability to control internet usage despite facing negative consequences. While the exact level of PIU in Saudi Arabia is unknown, global data indicates 4–25% problematic usage among adolescents. Researchers hypothesize that Saudi Arabia is more likely to have higher PIU due to being a high-income nation with high integration of technology in society (Saqib et al., 2023). Harsh weather conditions that are not favorable to outside activities may also lead to higher reliance on PCT. PIU has been linked with a higher risk of depression, anxiety, sleep issues, and lower quality of life. Such users may isolate themselves from family and friends and focus more on virtual connections. In a cross-sectional study conducted by Saqib et al. in 2023, among students of grades 7–12 in government schools in 3 cities of Saudi Arabia, researchers observed a very high level of PIU at around 41.8%. Interestingly, PIU was significantly higher among girls than boys. Several factors affected PIU such as socio-economic conditions, rate of internet usage by siblings, parental supervision, and family dynamics (Saqib et al., 2023).

The Saudi Arabian society is traditionally a family-oriented society where spending time with immediate and extended family members was considered important and was the norm. PCT usage has the potential to affect family interaction by either reducing the time available to spend with family or by introducing new cultural and social norms for family interaction. Alolyan (2015) conducted a study to analyze this impact by distributing a questionnaire among 300 respondents from 2 universities and a high school in Saudi Arabia and conducting 50 interviews. Through the questionnaire, overall, it was observed that respondents felt they were still well connected with their families and seemed to recognize that online interactions are not a substitute for face-to-face interaction. While normal usage level did not negatively affect family interactions, higher frequency of PCT usage was significantly linked to worsening family relationships and unhealthy attachment to internet use. The negative impact was markedly higher among respondents who used social media, chatting and gaming. Interview analysis conducted during this study revealed that both adults and children felt PCT usage disrupted family dynamics by taking time away from family. Adults were seen as neglecting family responsibilities in favor of spending time online and children were perceived as not spending time interacting with their family. The major positive impact of PCT was reported as the ability to be anonymous and interact beyond social restrictions (Alolyan, 2015).

9 Interview Analysis

Five themes were identified during the interviews—subjective wellbeing, impact of PCT devices on wellbeing, impact of PCT devices on happiness and quality of life, impact of PCT devices on family interaction, and Parental role and government regulation.

10 Device Usage

The PCT devices used by the children of the respondents were smart phones, tablets, and computers. These devices were mostly used for educational purposes, entertainment and to stay connected to family and friends. Duration of use ranged from two hours to more than six hours daily. Most of the interviewees said that their children spent four to six hours using PCT devices regardless of age except in one case where a parent did not allow any PCT usage for their seven-year-old.

11 Subjective Wellbeing

The interviewees all agreed that family wellbeing to them meant having a safe and supportive environment at home and good relationships with each other. One interviewee commented that, in her view, open communication was also a part of family wellbeing. Opinions regarding individual wellbeing were more varied. A common theme in individual wellbeing was overall good health comprising of physical, mental, spiritual, and other components. One respondent included personal growth and access to adequate medical care in individual wellbeing. Two of the interviewees believed that being in harmony and feeling good about oneself was a part of individual wellbeing too.

12 Impact of Personal Communication Technology Devices on Wellbeing

When asked if the impact of PCT devices on wellbeing was positive or negative, all the respondents replied that it was both positive and negative depending on how the device was used. The respondents believed that PCT enabled their children to stay connected with far off family and friends, helped with their studies and skill development, and made information more accessible. One parent believed PCT was advantageous in health sector such as access to online counseling. On the other hand, with regards to negative impact, the main concern of most interviewees was physical impact such as strain on eyes, poor sleep habits, and reduced physical activity. Two of the five parents were also worried about the impact of social media on self-esteem and access to inappropriate content. Three of the five parents felt that improper use of PCT may lead to poor social development and overdependence on technology for communication and entertainment.

13 Impact of Personal Communication Technology Devices on Happiness and Quality of Life

Four of the five interviewees agreed that PCT devices affected happiness and quality of life mainly by making information and resources easily accessible and helping them stay connected to family and friends. Only one of the interviewees felt that while PCT has had some effect on happiness and quality of life, it is not a major contributor or factor affecting either of them.

14 Impact of Personal Communication Technology Devices on Family Interaction

All interviewees agreed that PCT devices influenced family interaction. The respondents believed that while PCT has made it easier to communicate with loved ones who are far away, it has created a distance within the members residing in one home as they may end up spending more time on their devices rather than communicating with each other. Interestingly, some interviewees remarked that sometimes all the messages and information can make them feel overwhelmed and stressed. Overall, the interviewees were divided on whether the impact of such devices was largely negative or positive.

15 Parental Role and Government Regulation

The common theme in the interviews was the belief that parents play a very significant role in determining whether PCT has a positive or negative influence on wellbeing. The interviewees believed that parents should make their children aware of all risks and safe practices from a young age and keep an open dialogue with their children regarding this topic. One of the interviewees emphasized that the values and morals imparted by parents were also a direct factor influencing how PCT is used. Interestingly, none of the interviewees believed in government regulation to curb overuse of PCT. They believed that such regulation would be an infringement of personal freedom and would also be difficult to implement. One of the interviewees noted that while it may help vulnerable populations, there is a chance that it will stifle creativity and freedom.

In conclusion, we observe through these interviews that parents residing in Saudi Arabia believe that PCT has many benefits and risks, but it is their responsibility to ensure PCT usage is a positive and safe experience for the younger generation.

16 Conclusion

This study combined two methods of research—literature review and interviews. Through the literature review, it was observed that PCT has had a considerable impact on family dynamics. In terms of positive impact, it is observed that PCT has enabled easier communication with family living far from each other while allowing parents living far from their children to “distance-parent” them. It has also provided opportunities for global social interaction. The impact on older generation is more positive as they use PCT to learn information about their health and strengthen existing familial bonds (Tee et al., 2009; Bacigalupe & Bräuninger, 2017; Morris et al., 2014; Sum et al., 2008; Ballagas et al., 2009; Tee et al., 2009; Chan, 2014). Despite these advantages, research reveals that the adverse impact of PCT on family dynamics is also very visible. There is a trend of users preferring online interactions to face-to-face interaction with family members. As a result, communication within the family unit disintegrates. Parents are increasingly using PCT to entertain their children instead of spending quality time with them (Prijetelj, 2016; Villegas, 2013; Kraut et al., 1998).

The impact of PCT on wellbeing is also well documented. While there are positives such as improved access to information and resources, and education efficiency, high usage of PCT has been linked with declining mental health (higher occurrence of depression, anxiety, and stress, lower self-esteem). Incidences of cyber bullying, harassment, and false information have also negatively affected wellbeing (Bacigalupe & Bräuninger, 2017; Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Lal et al., 2017; Valkenburg et al., 2006).

Within the context of Saudi Arabia, higher usage of PCT was associated with lower levels of physical activity, lesser time spent with family, and a breakdown in communication coupled with feelings of abandonment within the family unit. Students reported that high PCT usage was negatively affecting their studies. PIU levels are also reported to be at the higher end of global PIU levels (Alolyan (2015); Mansour et al., 2020; Saquib et al., 2023). In the health sector, PCT usage has a favorable view in the Saudi society as it is instrumental in gathering information about illnesses and makes healthcare more accessible in terms of health apps and others (El Kheir et al., 2021). Another positive impact of PCT as observed through literature review is the ability to transcend societal restrictions for social interactions and exposure to a variety of opinions and views (Alolyan, 2015).

Interview analysis revealed interesting trends. As far as wellbeing is concerned, interviewees felt that PCT helped to develop skills and assist in learning. However, they expressed concerns regarding negative physical impact such as eye strain and poor sleep health. The interviewees believed PCT could help improve health by making online counseling available to the public and providing access to a wealth of information on the internet. As far as family dynamics are concerned, interviewees felt that while PCT has made it easier to communicate with family far away, it has taken time away from family that lives close by. The common theme in PCT usage

was observed to be the view that PCT impact can be negative or positive depending on how its used and parents play a significant role in ensuring proper usage.

Advancements in technology are happening at a more rapid pace than before. It is not feasible or wise to avoid it. It is crucial to learn and implement strategies to make using technology a positive experience. Parents and caretakers play an influential role in mitigating the risks of PCT use. The simplest strategy is to set time limits on screen time. In young children, along with restricting the duration of use, it is also important to ensure that the content they are accessing is beneficial and appropriate. Violent and other mindless entertainment should be strictly avoided. Focus should be on educational content, video chatting with family, and development of motor skills and decision-making skills. Parents can also create technology free family times such as during meals so that family members can engage in healthy dialogue and speak about their day. The key to positive PCT use is having an open and ongoing dialogue with children about internet safety in age-appropriate ways to help them identify problematic situations and keep themselves safe. They should also be made of the lack of privacy and confidentiality of data posted online so that they can make informed decisions about what they post. Besides learning how to navigate the digital world safely, parents and educators should advise and guide children on appropriate online behavior to avoid cyber bullying. They should be taught to be kind in their online interactions just as they would be expected in face-to-face interaction. With access to social media becoming an essential part of keeping up with peers, parents may need to monitor their ward's interactions and content accessed periodically. Children should be encouraged to immediately notify a trusted adult if they find any suspicious behavior. It is the responsibility of parents and caretakers to keep their knowledge of technology updated so that they can effectively connect with the younger generations and guide them accurately. It is also critical that children be taught to analyze any information they receive online for credibility and accuracy, especially before forwarding it to others. To overcome the negative effects of prolonged PCT use, children should be provided with ample opportunities for face-to-face interactions and physical activity. PCT use should be stopped before bedtime and while in bed to maintain good sleep hygiene and improve sleep quality (American Psychological Association, 2019).

Technology, if used properly, has many benefits. We can embrace it rather than be afraid of it and use it in a prudent way to improve our lives.

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Chapter 15

Impact of Social Media on Family Relations in the Arab Gulf Region



Radhi H. Al-Mabuk and Abdullah F. Alrebh

Abstract Social media use especially among children and adolescents has become a topic of concern in the Gulf region especially for parents. This chapter addresses the issue of social media use and its impact on family relations, and is comprised of six parts: (1) place of social media in sociology; (2) prevalence of social media in the Gulf region with an emphasis on how much use, nature of use and motivation for use; (3) positive and detrimental consequences of social media use; (4) impact of social media use, especially problematic social media, on family relations; (5) parents' role in guiding their children toward reasonable and safe use of social media; and (6) conclusion and recommendations.

“The real problem of humanity is the following: We have paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions and god-like technology” (Bhargav, 2023)

Edward O. Wilson, Sociobiologist

Social media networks and platforms have afforded people around the world with instant and easy means of connecting and interacting with others. Social media is used to fulfill various needs including connecting with close friends and family, obtaining information, accessing entertainment venues, and using it as a platform for self-expression has been increasing around the world in general and in the Arab Gulf region in particular. The increase in social media use especially among children and adolescents has become a topic of concern in the Gulf region especially, and above all, for parents. This chapter focuses on the issue of social media use and its impact on family relations and is comprised of six parts: (1) Place of social media in sociology; (2) prevalence of social media in the Gulf region with an emphasis on how much use, nature of use and motivation for use; (3) positive and detrimental consequences of

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social media use; (4) impact of social media use, especially problematic social media, on family relations; (5) parents' role in guiding their children toward reasonable and safe use of social media; and (6) conclusion and recommendations. We start with a zoom out (macro) look at the place of and relationship between social media and sociology.

1 Social Media and Sociology

The field of sociology is concerned with the study of social life and how social change occurs as well as the social causes and consequences of human behavior. It studies the individual, interactive, and collective roles and impact of social institutions as organized systems of roles and interactions and mechanisms of social order whose aim is to meet social needs (Ocasio, 2023). As a major social institution, the family has long been considered as the crucible of socialization, and that it has traditionally been the primary agent in this process. Durkheim defined socialization as "the process of replacing the biological aspect with social and cultural dimensions, which become the basic guides of the individual's behavior within his society" (Leila, 2006, p. 193 as cited by Rehim et al., 2020; Guy van de Walle, (2008).

Sociology also focuses on media and communication as mechanisms of social life and social change. In fact, there is a domain in sociology known as media sociology which has historically focused on the impact of mass media starting with print media, followed by film, television and has increasingly been concerning itself with a focus on the yields and complexities of information technology including social media networks and internet platforms (Hepp, 2020). The competing social impact of the family and social media are of particular interest nowadays to many including sociologists, psychologists, and helping professionals and scholars, and technologists in the communication and information technology fields. The interest is driven by the tremendous change in society brought by information technology in general and social media networks advertising platforms in particular. More specifically, questions are raised about the enculturating effect of social media (Lindner & Barnard, 2020). That is, how individuals acquire the characteristics and norms of their culture and how they internalize its practices and values. Kim and Alalilla (2019) described four dimensions of enculturation that span the three parts of behavior which are behavioral, affective, and cognitive components. The first dimension is behavior which includes choices of friends, preferences such as what books to read or what favorite social networks to use, which cultural activities to participate in, language use, etc. The second dimension is related to the values transmitted by culture including attitudes about social relations, customs, and gender roles. Knowledge constitutes the third dimension and refers to specific information germane to one's culture. The fourth dimension is cultural identity and individuals' attitudes toward their cultural identification.

The enculturation process is principally carried out by the family, and as the child's social world expands, other social agents, such as the social media, partake in that

enculturation process. Rehim and Abu-Attiyeh cautioned that “the internet culture and its influence on trends, values, ethics, behaviors, lifestyles, and social values and standards, a society may want to limit or monitor unwanted cultural norms and beliefs from outside that society” (2020: p. 2) Cultural norms and beliefs are the focus of a research conducted by Priopae Șerbănescu & Matoi (2023), which examined the impact of web technology on the deeper structures, or belief system on Generation “Z” in GCC societies. Potential impact on belief system of the young is one of the areas that arouse fear and suspicion in families about adverse social media influence. Social media poses a real threat to families who worry about losing control over their enculturation role and makes them feel vulnerable to and supplanted by the potential competing outside socializing influence of social media. This sentiment was echoed by Rehim et al., regarding families in the Arab Gulf region by pointing out that, “the family no longer functions as the ground force that cannot be disobeyed. Thus, the family is generally weakened” (2020: p. 1).

Seemingly, there is a struggle for supremacy or control over socialization of children and adolescents between the two antagonists: family and social media, around the world in general and in the traditional societies of the Arab Gulf in particular. The use of social media in the GCC region is shaping new norms of conduct and expression. In the next three sections, we attempt to unpack this complex issue by looking at social media use in the Arab Gulf region, examining its consequences on children and adolescents, and discussing its impact on the family relations.

2 Social Media Use in the Gulf

In this section, we present information and discuss questions related to what social media networks children and adolescents use, how much time they spend using them, and why they use them. We begin with the big picture of internet use worldwide and then zoom in on the Arab Gulf region.

According to the website Statista, there are about 5.3 billion internet users worldwide, and estimates the average daily usage at 6.37 h, with adolescents being the group that spends the most time online. The number of social media users is estimated at 4.95 billion people globally. According to Stacy Dixon from the Statista website, there are roughly 3 billion active users of Facebook as of the second quarter of 2023, making Facebook the most widely used online social network in the world. She pointed out that social media sites were initially mainly used as online communities only for younger users, but they are now used by users of all ages for a variety of purposes including socializing with close friends and family. The Gulf region has the highest mobile internet penetration rates within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Approximately, 92% of the population in GCC countries uses the internet. Statista (2023) reported that 98% of the population in Bahrain and 96% in UAE accessed the internet through their mobile devices in 2022. In 2022, UAE News 24/7 reported that the number of internet users in GCC countries was above 98%,

and that cell phone subscribers make up more than 137% of the total population in the region.

ASDA'A, a leading communication consultancy group, released its 15th annual Arab Youth Survey on World Mental Health Day, October 3, 2023. The survey was conducted face-to-face with 3,600 young people ranging in age from 18 to 24 in 53 cities drawn from 18 Arab countries. According to one of the main findings of the survey was that just under $\frac{3}{4}$ of the participants in the survey, 74%, said they were struggling to disconnect from social media. That percentage rose to 82% when the focus was solely on young survey participants from the Gulf region.

Drawing his numbers and percentages from the Arab Youth Survey, Kumar (2023) stated that the MENA region has 77% internet penetration, which is higher than the global average of 65%. He also pointed out that users in MENA have an average of 8.4 social media accounts and spend over 3.5 h daily on them. Of the GCC countries, Saudi Arabia has the highest number of YouTube users in the world, where 68 percent of the users access more videos online than on TV. The UAE boasts the highest number of social media accounts per person, with an average of 10.5 accounts. More than 98% of the population in UAE is active on social media (Hale, 2021).

Kumar also indicated that the top 5 countries in terms of access and use of TikTok are in the MENA and include UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and Iraq. According to the survey, Saudi Arabia is among the top 15 largest markets for Snapchat platform. Social media networks used include Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat, blogging, and YouTube with such significant social media usage, it is not surprising that in this year's survey nearly three-fourths (74%) of young Arabs said they are struggling to disconnect from social media. Additionally, about two-thirds (61%) agreed that social media addiction negatively impacts their mental health. More will be said about the impact of social media use on mental health in the next section.

Most Saudi adolescents have access to electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers, and the overwhelming majority spends more than two hours a day using social media applications with WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Twitter as the most popular platforms. Saudi Arabia was the fifth-largest market for Snapchat in 2019, with more than 15.6 million users.

Juliann Saquib (2020) pointed out that internet addiction is a fast-rising problem in Saudi Arabia especially among adolescents and young adults. Saquib also mentioned that prevalence estimates for internet addiction among youth and young adults were between 4–6% in 2014–2015. Those estimates rose markedly in 2019 and were in the 30–60% range. Indeed, GCC nations including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait are among the top countries in the world with regard to social media use.

Two questions that build on the prevalence of social media use among youths in GCC that was presented above are: What do they use social media for? And, what are the consequences of social media for and to the users? The first question is addressed in the rest of this section, and the second will be answered in the next section.

The majority of young people in the Gulf use social media platforms for information both acquiring and sharing it, and to access videos and visually-oriented social media networks. According to Parves (2019), young people in the Mena region, and

GCC region in particular, increasingly use social media to create a sense of social participation in a community, albeit a virtual one, to grow and develop their sense of identity and individuality, and to take part in reshaping communication by transcending the traditionally-imposed rules and boundaries on it. In Qatar, for example, young people are involved in initiatives like Embrace Doha and SeeMyCulture using platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube to share the Qatari culture with others.

Social media is also used as a means of self-expression and finding one's voice and expressing it (Reyaee & Ahmed, 2015). This particular use of the internet was also highlighted in an answer given by the organization Caring for Kids to the question: How do kids (children and youth) use social media? The answer included: connecting with other people (friends, family), sending and receiving messages, sharing videos about personal experiences, sharing photos and video clips of common interests, to reduce social isolation by joining a group, to access and play games, and to meet new people.

A macro-level perspective to understanding motivations of the use of social media in the Gulf region is offered by a number of researchers (e.g., Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Kircaburun et al., 2020). Kircaburun et al. indicated that why people use a specific social media and for how long depend on their motivations and the gratification they derive from it, and that a number of social and psychological factors mediate their use of social media. In addition, Kircaburun et al. noted that media use and interpersonal communication are related. Thus, a user's tendency toward the use of a particular social media network and how much time will be devoted to it is dependent on the gratifications the users expect and what they actually obtain. A big factor that affects media use motivations and gratifications is associated with five overarching personality factors that include agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience (McCrae & John, 1992; McCrae et al., 1998). Each of these dimensions further contains specific features. Agreeableness consists of personality characteristics like being reliable, generous, and well-mannered. Personality features that characterize conscientiousness include being conscientious, hardworking, well-organized, punctual, and trustworthy. The third big personality dimension is extraversion and is manifested in features such as being talkative, sociable, active, and passionate. The neuroticism dimension of personality is expressed by being short-tempered, whiny, and unstable. The fifth and final dimension is related to being curious, imaginative, original, unique, and having a wide range of interests.

In summary, social media use in GCC nations is very high and young people use the internet to satisfy different needs including the need to connect with others, to acquire and share information about oneself and others, to access movies, videos, and games, and to express one's voice. There is no doubt that social media use has both advantages and disadvantages. Naturally, parents feel at ease with their children's reasonable and beneficial use of social media and are ill at ease with the potential of their children's use of social media may gradually become problematic. The focus of the next section is a discussion of potential positive and adverse consequences of social media on children and adolescents.

3 Consequences of Social Media Use

Despite their significant role as catalysts for change, a source for information and entertainment, and a place for self-expression, social media platforms constantly raise concerns about negative impact on general wellbeing and mental health of users, cyberbullying, and predatory behavior of some users and predatory practices of advertisers, privacy, data protection, and surveillance. Social media use can influence in either direction the physical and mental wellbeing of adolescents and adults (Almaazmi et al., 2023). What physical and psychological aspects of the user does social media use affect? That is the question we attempt to address in this section.

Most of the existing research focuses on the deleterious effect of excessive or problematic use of social media on mental health and well-being. However, not enough research is done to investigate the effects on physical health. Among the studies aiming at filling the knowledge gap is a study that was conducted by Lee et al. (2022). Their research investigated how social media use relates to various indices of physical health. Young adults provided a blood sample that was analyzed for C-reactive protein (CRP), a biological marker of chronic inflammation in the blood that is associated with chronic illness such as cardiovascular diseases and cancer. They also completed self-report measures of social media use, somatic symptoms, illness-related physician, or health center visits, and whether they sought medical care for infection-related illnesses in the last 3 months. Social media use was positively correlated with higher levels of CRP, more somatic symptoms, and more visits to a health care provider for an illness. Among the somatic symptoms they found included stress and reduced amount and quality of sleep, which could, in turn, lead to more physical ailments. Additional physical health consequences associated with excessive social media use include obesity, decreased physical fitness, and vision and musculoskeletal problems (Saqib, 2020). Elahi et al. (2021) included physical pain in the hands and neck as a consequence of problematic internet use.

Read, Reed et al. (2015) asserted that social media is associated with poor physical health, including poor immune functioning. Read et al. also indicated that social media can influence users' diet choices by exposing them to food advertisements of food and beverage brands and types that may not be conducive to physical health.

Physical health cannot be separated from psychological wellbeing as they both affect one another. The literature is replete with studies highlighting the correlation between excessive social media and psychological distress (Blabst & Diefenbach, 2017; Montag & Hegelich, 2020; Duradoni et al., 2020; Brooks, 2015). As internet addiction has emerged as a mental health concern, more disorder classifications have been added to the psychological and psychiatric lexicon or terminology such as internet addiction (Peterka-Bonetta et al., 2020; Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2020; Kuss et al., 2013; Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016); Facebook addiction or Facebook use disorder (Sindermann et al., 2020), social networks use disorder (Hussain et al., 2020; Wegemann et al., 2020), and internet gaming disorder (Wartberg et al., 2020). These disorders are indicative of a serious mental health problem especially among

young individuals around the world. Researchers (i.e., Efrati, 2023; Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016); highlight several risk factors that are associated with internet addiction including sociodemographic variables such as gender, age and family income, and internet variables such as what social and gaming applications used and for how long, and psychosocial factors that include impulsivity and loneliness, and comorbidity symptoms such as anxiety and depression. Additional risk factors include genetic and other biological factors, deep-seated cognitions as well as cognitive and affective responses to outside stimuli and events and maladaptive coping mechanisms (Elahi et al., 2021).

An inclusive term for the above spectrum of interrelated but distinct addiction disorders is behavioral addictions which is defined as, “a group of recognizable and clinically significant syndromes characterized by distress or interference with personal functions, which develop from engaging in repetitive rewarding behaviors” (Efrati, 2023; Kormas et al., 2011).

As young people increasingly spend more time on social media, the more likely they are to be at risk for developing maladaptive internet use including problematic internet use. The user’s attention is what is targeted by what Wang (2023) calls “attention economy”. She asserted that, “attention has become a commodity that is bought, sold, and traded by companies seeking to capture our focus and keep us engaged with their products or services. But this comes at a huge cost” (p. 3). Wang also raised the alarm at the advancing AI technology and the potential for more manipulation, misinformation, and loss of privacy at the individual level, and raises a deep concern for humanity.

Before we directly address the issue of internet addiction among young people in the GCC region, let us focus on two terms that will help with understanding the issue of addiction better. The two terms are used interchangeably in the literature, and they are: problematic internet use, often abbreviated as PIU, and the other term is excessive internet use. Spade (2014), defined PIU as “an inability to control one’s use of the internet which leads to negative consequences in daily life” (p. 3). Weinstein and Lejoyeux (2010) likened problematic internet use with obsessive compulsive and impulse control disorders, and namely pathological gambling. The characteristics of the problematic or excessive use include poorly controlled preoccupations, urges, or behaviors regarding computer or electronic gadget use and internet access that lead to impairment or distress. Aboujaoude (2010) highlighted the aspects of tolerance and withdrawal that substance addicts experience. That is, the experience they go through when they feel the need for more of the substance to achieve the same effect (tolerance). They go through withdrawal when they begin to experience psychological or physiological discomfort upon reducing or stopping the substance. The problem of excessive internet use is something that is more common in adolescent males than females. It is most often linked to excessive use of online gaming site, and users become so addicted that gaming consumes their entire life.

A study conducted by Saquib (2020) found that internet addiction is a fast-rising problem among Saudi Arabian youth, who make up over two thirds of the population. He mentioned that prevalence estimates of internet addiction increased markedly from 4–6%, in 2014–2015 to 30–60% in 2019. The overwhelming majority of Saudi

youth have internet connection and easy access to electronic devices, and they spend more than two hours a day online. Females are equally, if not more, addicted to the internet than their male counterparts. Saquib referred to two studies the first of which consisted of female university students in the Eastern Province city of Dammam. Two-thirds of the sample had either problematic internet use (38%) or internet addiction (30%). The other study was conducted in Al-Hassa region, also in the Eastern part of Saudi Arabia, that reported more female internet addicts than males (50% females and 38% males). If left unaddressed, the prevalence rates of internet addiction among Saudi youth are likely to increase.

Going back to the Arab Youth Survey that was mentioned in the previous section, Ryan et al. (2023), and Kumar (2023) reported that more than 60 percent of young Arabs think social media use is leading to a decline in their mental well-being. Just under three quarters of those surveyed, 74%, said they are struggling to disconnect from social media. This figure rose to 82% when it directly focused on young people living in the GCC region. Snippets of some of the interviews reflect feelings and experiences that align with our discussion of the psychological effects of social media. They include the following:

Bana Al Kurdi, a Palestinian-Jordanian who lives in Al-Ain, UAE, said social media affects her "more negatively than positively".

"I try to focus on getting inspired, motivated, or entertained by it, but the negative side effects always seem to come along", she told *The National*.

"I find myself involuntarily comparing myself to others, even though I am perfectly content. I still have to decide if that motivates me to do better, like work harder and eat healthier, or if it just puts my confidence down".

Amna Elhadi, 21, a Sudanese who lives in Abu Dhabi finds the "endless scrolling through stressful news, clips and posts" can impact mental health and said she can disconnect from social media "when I'm placed under present pressure that requires my focus and time".

Aisha Nasser, 22, from Oman, who is a managing director of an event organizing company, said watching the perfect side of other people's life can make her feel "inadequate, unaccomplished and demotivated".

Aisha Nasser said watching the perfect side of other people's life can impact people's mental health.

"It has become an overwhelming and addictive at the same time",

"Social media has affected me subconsciously and consciously. If I stopped looking and scrolling through social media, I feel anxious and falling behind".

Shamma Al Ali, 22, an Emirati who is studying computer engineering at United Arab Emirates University, said social media can create "unrealistic" (The National, 2023, pp-4-9).

Other psychosocial risks that are characteristic of internet use and can have severe negative outcomes for the victims include cyberbullying, which is defined as repeated violent and intentional act direct at another person who cannot defend him/herself. Online grooming is another social problem which occurs when an adult gradually lures a minor to obtain sexual material or to abuse the minor sexually (Machimbarrena et al., 2018). Machimbarrena et al. also discussed sexting as another potential risk for social media users. Sexting is the sending of taken or recorded photographs that contain some level of sexual content to another.

It is apparent that social media use has both positive and adverse effect on users depending on what platform is used and how much time is spent on them. In addition to physical and psychological consequences to social media use, there is also a social cost, especially to family relations, which is a topic we turn to next.

4 Impact on Family Relations

Social media use in the GCC region by the young and old is pervasive. It affords family members and close friends to stay connected. However, smartphones and other electronic gadgets seem to have taken over our lives. One of the obvious effects of social media on family relations deals with the nature of frequency and quality of communication. It is paradoxical that the increase in connectivity has increasingly distanced family members from each other. Gjylbegau and Abdi (2019) conducted a study with a UAE sample regarding the impact of social media on family communication. It found out that most of the UAE community seems to be in charge of its internet usage and young people make attempts not to be too preoccupied with their virtual world. Both children and their family members have adapted to communicating with each other in new ways both face-to-face and over the internet. A study investigating the impact of internet use on family relations in Saudi Arabia, evidence was found implicating internet use to significant changes in family and social relations in Saudi Arabia due to time displacement. (Alolyan, 2015).

Another area that is of concern for parents is the interference of social media use with children's academic performance. Doing well in school is highly valued in every society, and parents in the Gulf have very high academic expectations for their children. The potential adverse effect of social media use is closely tied to how much time a person uses social network sites (SNS). Al-Yafi et al. (2018) investigated the question of the impact of social media use on academic performance in Qatar. Their survey results identified three SNS profiles among the two university student samples they used in their study: passive users characterized by low usage, engaged users with normal usage, and addicted group with high usage. Their findings also revealed that the engaged-user group had significantly higher academic performance than the passive and addicted groups, and there was no significant difference between passive and addicted in academic performance. The takeaway from this study for parents is to instill disciplined and self-regulated use of SNS in their children early on. This is a good segue to the next section which focuses on family's role in guiding their children's social media use.

5 Family's Role in Guiding Children

In this section, we first discuss overarching and interwoven prerequisites to effective and successful strategy for how parents can guide their children to healthy social media environments, and then elaborate specific practical ways that can help parents in their efforts. The prerequisites are predicated on the premise that parents' ability to actively and successfully guide their children's use of social media hinges on bridging the gap between their understanding of the issue and their willingness and willfulness to act on that understanding. That is, parents first need to be aware of what social media sites their children access and platforms they use, how much time they spend doing it, and why they do it. Parental awareness and understanding need to be complemented by a consistent willingness to help guide their children toward reasonable and safe use of social media. The third precondition for an effective family strategy is willfulness or deliberate and well thought-through ways of acting on one's awareness and willingness to provide counsel and direction to children and adolescents. These three conditions constitute the first prerequisite, and though it is one of the essential and necessary prerequisites, it is not sufficient. Its three components, however, relate to and impact upon the second prerequisite: parenting style and practice. The reason for including this prerequisite in this paper is to highlight the significance of parental practice to the role of guiding children with social media. In other words, the emphasis is on what Darling and Steinberg (2017) refer to as the observable actions used by parents to socialize their children.

Parenting style plays a pivotal role in guiding children on what social media networks they visit and how to use them judiciously. Psychologist Dianne Baumrind and subsequent researchers (Baumrind, 1991a, 1991b, 1966; Maccoby, 1992; Lee et al., 2006; Holden & Edwards, 1989) distinguished four parenting styles: Authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and uninvolved or neglectful. Baumrind and parenting style researchers used two important dimensions that interact to form the four parenting styles: responsiveness and demandingness. Responsiveness refers to parental behaviors such as warmth, assurances of love and respect, close bonds, reciprocity, and open and clear communication. Demandedness refers to the degree of control parents exercise over their children.

Authoritative parents are high in responsiveness as they are attuned and sensitive to their children's cues, moods, and behavior and value and encourage their autonomy, responsibility, and self-regulation. The demandingness dimension of these parents is expressed in setting reasonable and consistent expectations and boundaries and use reasoning rather than absolute and coercive control to guide their children behavior. In short, authoritative parents are reasonably high and consistent on both responsiveness and demandingness (Baumrind, 1966). It is precisely this type of parenting practice that would be most successful in guiding children's use of social media owing to its emphasis on encouraging and nurturing maturity in the child.

The second parenting style is called authoritarian where the parent exerts unreasonable control and shows low responsiveness. Parents use coercion as a means to influence and shape the child's behavior and character and show little love and

nurturance. They expect their children to obey authority and to follow its commands. Researcher (e.g., Uji et al., 2014) reported that authoritarian parenting leads to potential negative effect on the child's mental health in adulthood. In the short term, children of authoritarian parents feel parentally love-deprived and cannot understand their parents' behavior. Often, they react by rebelling against their parents, especially when they reach adolescence.

The permissive parenting style is almost the opposite of the authoritarian where the parent does set boundaries or place restrictions on the child's behavior. The child has a free reign and can come and go as he/she pleases and does whatever he/she desires. The parent, however, is responsive, loving and nurturing. Children of permissive parents tend to be susceptible to pressure from their peers, who become the authority they look up and listen to (Baumrind, 1971; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2019). Moreover, children of permissive parents tend to lack self-discipline and self-regulation, and self-esteem, and also tend to have a higher sense of entitlement which often leads to irresponsible behaviors. In short, this parenting style is characterized by a lack of monitoring, control, and discipline, which is not a good recipe for guiding children's social media use.

The fourth parenting style is known as neglectful or uninvolved which is characterized by low responsiveness and low control or demandingness. Children of neglectful parents fare the worst when it comes to overall well-being, social competence, academic performance, psychosocial development, and problem behavior (Darling, 1999).

The aforementioned prerequisites impact the family's ability to meet the needs of its individual members, what decisions to make, how goals are defined, and how rules are established and enforced. All of these functions are influenced by the nature of communication and interactions within the family. One of the most important yet challenging task facing families in the Arab Gulf region and globally are related to what decisions to make, what goals to set, and what rules to establish regarding social media use and enforce. More specifically, parents, of varying parenting styles and practices, face the formidable task of answering the following questions: At what age should I allow my children to use social media? What social media networks and platforms should I permit them to use? How much time should I allow my children to use social media? We will address each question and conclude this section with practical guidelines for parents to consider.

When to Access Social Media. In an answer to a recent question by CNBC about the gateway to social media use, "How old should a child be before getting their first cell phone" Laurie Santos, a Yale University psychology professor, answered, "Wait as long as possible" (CNBC, Santos). Also, the advocacy group Wait Until 8th (www.waituntil8th.org/), recommends waiting until children and young people are in 8th grade before buying them a smartphone or letting them use one. More than 50,000 parents signed the group's pledge to wait until the 8th grade. Though it is ideal for parents to wait until their children are in the 8th grade before buying them a smartphone, it may not work for every family. The child's maturity level and habits also enter in the equation of when a child is ready for a personal device. The important factor to consider is how much time and effort are parents ready to put

forth to learn and understand and to translate their best intentions and best interest of their children into action. In other words, once parents allow their child to have a gadget to connect to the internet, they must be ever vigilant of what their children access and for how long.

What Social Media networks. Parents must get acquainted with sites and internet activities that are age appropriate. This is part of the awareness, willingness, and willfulness prerequisite referred to at the beginning of this section.

How Much Time. Aacap (2024) recommends the following screen time for children: screen time should be limited to video chatting with a parent who is out of town for example with the help of an adult, online educational programming for children between 18 and 24 months with the caregiver present, for children 2–5, non-educational screen time should be limited to about 1 h per weekday and 3 h on the weekend days, and for children ages 6 and older, parents need to encourage healthy habits such as sports and limit activities that include screens as much as possible. For adolescents, it is recommended that screen time should not exceed 2 h a day.

At the forefront of practical guidelines for parents to consider when guiding their child's internet use is to set a good model for their children with their own safe and healthy use screen habits. Parental actions force themselves upon the unconsciousness of their children. Thus, parents need to reflect on and examine the example they are setting for their children's use of social media. Children follow what they see much more readily than what they are told. Also, parents must resist the temptation to use screens as pacifiers, babysitters, or as a way to deal with tantrums. Once the child begins to access the internet, parents must set reasonable limits for how much time they can be online daily, and explain what is okay and not okay to do on social media. It is also imperative that parents learn about parental controls such as sharing of children's passwords so they can regularly monitor their child's social media accounts. Moreover, it is also a prudent habit to engage children and adolescents in conversations about the good, bad, and the ugly of social media (Mayo Clinic, 2023). Use of Monk mode applications might help regulate a child's use of social media, where these apps provide forced breaks when using social media (Bedirian, 2023).

6 Conclusion and Recommendation

The Arab Gulf region has one of the highest populations of youth in the world and one of the highest rates of social media usage. Most of the youth use social media for information, entertainment, socialization, a means for self-expression, and for shopping. As the use of social media has become ubiquitous, families in the Gulf began to worry about the potential effect of social media on their children's physical and psychosocial health and on their academic performance. Parents are concerned about the role of social media as an outside influence on the development of their children. They worry that social media will replace or weaken their primary role of engendering cultural values and beliefs in their children. The discussion

about potential adverse effects discussed in this paper point to the momentous task that families have nowadays of guiding their children to use social media safely and responsibly. Parents need to exercise their role authoritatively by continuously learning and acting on what they learn about social media. More particularly, they need to learn about new networks and advances in technology including those in the area of artificial intelligence which many perceive as a mysterious black box with potential risks not to families only but to humanity in general. Not only do parents and social media vie for supremacy for enculturating the young, parents, and society at large are directly and indirectly engaged in an effort to demand technology firms to be more socially responsible and to make technology more humane. The Center for Humane Technology captured the ongoing struggle as follows, “As long as social media companies profit from outrage, confusion, addiction, and depression, our well-being and democracy will continue to be at risk” (Montag & Hegelich, 2020).

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Chapter 16

Social Media and Youth Sociopolitical Standpoints in Qatar: The Case of Twitter



Lina Ayman Darwish

Abstract Using a mixed-methods approach, this article evaluates how Twitter usage impacts the sociopolitical perspectives of Qatari and non-Qatari youth, particularly their views on Qatari cultural norms, politics, and the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Qualitative interviews with ten Georgetown University students assess these perceptions, while the quantitative section analyzes 600 Twitter lines from October 2022 to January 2023, focusing on themes of Palestine and the World Cup. The findings suggest that Twitter significantly influences youth's perspectives on migrant issues, domestic politics, and gender norms in Qatar.

1 Introduction

Social media and its impact on Middle Eastern politics has been a topic on the rise in the past decade or so due to technological advancements. More generally, social media has become a key tool in politics, with the Arab Spring serving as a notable example. During the Arab Spring, Arab youth used platforms like Twitter and Facebook to express dissent, share real-time news, and drive political change (Revolution in Cairo, 2011). Although the Arab Spring was less evident in the Gulf region, social media continues to play an important role in the region's politics. Gulf states have increased digital measures to manage social media's influence on politics, particularly among the youth (Jones, 2021). However, there is limited literature analyzing the impact of social media on political ideas or consciousness in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. This might be due to the rarity of open rebellion in the region. While some evidence suggests that GCC states, including Qatar, manage criticism through social media oversight, other literature indicates that the Qatari government listens to grievances and requests voiced on social media (Leber & Lysa, 2016).

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Social media has undoubtedly become one of the most influential forms of media to impact the globe since the technological evolution took place, as the global internet penetration rate—defined as the proportion of users that who frequently access the internet—has reached 62.5% of the world population around 2022 (DataReportal, 2022a, 2022b). In Qatar, this figure soared to an impressive 99.0%, signifying near-universal reliance on the internet in daily life (DataReportal, 2022a, 2022b). Among the major platforms driving this shift, Twitter stands out as a particularly influential arena for political engagement among Arab millennials, with a user base exceeding 450 million active users (Ruby, 2023). Given such influence, the platform is believed to play a pivotal role in shaping political discourse, as evidenced by studies, such as those of Nguyen (2018), and Bestvater et al. (2022). Consequently, the growing influence of this platform on contemporary politics raises numerous concerns regarding its general content and impact, as well as the perspectives of young people. Given that youth played a crucial role in the Arab Spring protests and are the primary users of the internet—which now permeates all aspects of life—it is essential to examine how social media influences their political involvement and attitudes in the Gulf, including Qatar. Understanding these effects can help predict how technology will shape Qatar's future political discourse and emerging social and political norms.

This chapter investigates how Twitter influences the sociopolitical views of youth in Qatar. Specifically, it explores whether engagement with Twitter fosters a shift toward liberal or conservative perspectives, and whether those ideological changes differ between Qatari and non-Qatari youth—which emphasizes the role that citizenship may play in this context. Additionally, the study examines whether using Twitter encourages political activism among the youth. On a broader level, the chapter analyzes Twitter's overall impact on sociopolitical opinions and youth politics, considering its influence on state perspectives, as well as domestic and international media. The quantitative analysis focuses on two case studies—Palestine and the World Cup—examining how Twitter discussions around these topics expose and engage young people, especially regarding specific sociopolitical issues like women's rights and freedom of speech.

Building on Shockley's (2016) study, which demonstrated a correlation between political thought and Twitter usage in Qatar, this chapter delves deeper into the underlying dynamics shaping the political consciousness of the youth in Qatar. Through qualitative interviews and Twitter content analysis, it identifies potential political topics that resonate with Qatar youth and explores their engagement with issues such as Palestine and the World Cup. This approach aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the sociopolitical landscape shaped by social media in Qatar.

To establish the theoretical foundations for the subject on hand, it is crucial to define the terms '*liberal*' and '*conservative*' without the implicit ideological connotations from Western political thought. The two definitions will be used to analyze qualitative data and monitor perspectives on sociopolitical issues in terms of receptivity to change or opposition to it. Many philosophers have contributed their own definitions or significantly influenced the commonly accepted understanding of the

terms “liberal” and “conservative”. However, many of these definitions are based on concepts that may not accurately reflect the historical or cultural context of Qatari society. This is potentially due to the fact that terms ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ are frequently interchanged with concepts on liberalism and conservatism that emerge from authors such as Adam Smith (1723–1790), John Locke (1632–1704), Charles Mills (1951–2021), and John Rawls (1921–2002) for liberalism, and authors such as Kirk (1918–1994), Burke (1727–1797), Goldwater (1909–1998), and William Buckley (1925–2008) for conservatism, among many others. While the literature on social media and politics in the West provides a conceptualization of these labels (Jones et al., 2018; Rao et al., 2021; Sterling et al., 2019; Yulan et al., 2012), current research in the Gulf region often lacks a clear theoretical framework for what constitutes liberal or conservative views (Kinninmont, 2013; Watson, 2010; Al-Jenaibi, 2016; Winder, 2014; Noman et al., 2015). To contribute to the ongoing debate and address this conceptual issue, this chapter proposes a working definition rooted in the linguistic origins of these terms. The goal is to make them more general and adaptable, free from preconceived notions. Thus, *liberal/liberalism* can be considered as the willingness to respect or accept behavior or opinions different from one’s own, and openness to new ideas. In contrast, *conservative/conservatism* stands for “commitment to traditional values and ideas with opposition to change or innovation” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023). Additionally, the term “youth in Qatar” will be used to include both Qatari and non-Qatari youth, as this chapter aims to establish a foundation for social media’s impact on the sociopolitical thought of youth in Qatar. The remainder of the chapter is organized into five sections. The next section deals with existing literature, followed by methods, findings, and analyses. Finally, the paper concludes with policy imperatives.

2 A Review of Literature

Research on social media usage in Qatar reveals a steadily increasing dependence on digital platforms, reflecting their growing significance in Qatari society. Reyaee and Ahmed (2015) analyzed the growth of social media networks in the Gulf region using data from StatCounter and found that between 2011 and 2013, Qatar ranked first in the region for the highest number of internet users. Qatar maintained this leading position, as confirmed by another survey analyzed by Meeds in 2015, which reported an internet penetration rate of 85.3%. Although Reyaee and Ahmed (2015) concluded that Twitter was the most popular social media platform in the Gulf by 2015, this was not initially the case in Qatar. However, since 2012, Twitter has continuously gained more market shares than Facebook, despite Facebook being the most used social media platform in 2015. Additionally, Meeds’ secondary analysis of the Omnibus Survey of Life in Qatar (conducted from 2010 to 2012) indicated a steady decline in the use of television and newspapers for both local and international news. More recently, Galal (2021) cited a 2016 study by Northwestern University in Qatar, which found that Qataris were the most digitally connected population

in the Gulf, with approximately 60% spending more time online than residents of other Gulf countries—a finding was supported by Richter et al. (2021). Regarding which platform has the most significant impact on Qatari social discourse, Bethany Shockley (2016), similar to Meeds, conducted a secondary analysis of the Omnibus Survey, highlighting a strong preference for Twitter over Facebook among Qataris. At the time of the survey, the most-followed Twitter accounts in Qatar were those of media professionals, suggesting a link between social media usage, particularly on Twitter, and political news (Shockley, 2016). While many of these studies may now be somewhat outdated, they allow for a tentative conclusion: since the mid-2010s, social media has played an increasingly pivotal role in shaping discourse in Qatar—an influence that has likely only expanded in recent years.

When examining social media use in Qatar, it is essential to consider the level of surveillance these platforms are subjected to, a phenomenon known as digital authoritarianism. This issue is critical in shaping the content shared on Twitter and helps explain why certain topics are more frequently discussed while others face greater censorship. Scholars who study digital authoritarianism in Qatar concentrate on the blockade and the pandemic's role in advancing Qatar's cybersecurity mission and national narrative preservation as the primary causes of stricter digital laws. Thousands of Twitter accounts, including Twitter bots, from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia were established during the 2017 Qatar crisis to spread fraudulent information against Qatar. Despite Qatar's efforts to rectify the erroneous claims, the accusations spread internationally and provoked a massive backlash from American conservatives (Jones, 2019a, 2019b; Soliman, 2022; Shires, 2022). As a result, Qatar enacted a cyberlaw that imposes up to five years in prison and a \$25,000 fine on anyone who spreads "false or biased rumors, statements, or news, or inflammatory propaganda, domestically or abroad" that poses a threat to the country's public narrative, security, and order of the state. Due to the ambiguous wording, this law initially sparked a literary backlash against Qatar, with claims that it will inevitably impede freedom of expression through social media (Amnesty International, 2020; Soliman, 2022). Literature linking Qatar's pandemic policies to digital authoritarianism often focuses on the Ehteraz app, which was introduced in response to the pandemic. However, there are no significant allegations that Qatar used these policies to enhance its political narrative. Despite this, disinformation campaigns against Qatar continued at the time (Jones, 2021; Lynch, 2021). It's important to note that criticisms of digital authoritarianism in Qatar are mostly voiced by foreign critics rather than by locals. Circling back to the topic at hand, there is a lack of research on how Qatar's residents, particularly the youth, perceive digital authoritarianism—an issue this chapter's qualitative section aims to explore.

Despite ambiguity on perceptions of Qatar's status on digital authoritarianism, the country has proven to allow political expression, despite what current critics may state. In Qatar, current studies have shown a positive relationship between social media, political interest, and activism—especially among the youth. According to Meeds' (2015) analysis of the Omnibus survey, frequent use of Twitter and Facebook correlates positively with political interest. In Qatar, Twitter users are more inclined to believe it is preferable to reside in a democracy. As for the youth, most

studies argue that youth in their late teens and early twenties are more likely to be politically engaged via Twitter and social media. In examining the influence of social media on public perspectives, Al-Zoby and Ghaffar (2014) argue that political activism has already had a tangible impact in Qatar. He cites the example of the “*Freedom Revolution March 16 Qatar*” group, which called for political reform and welfare benefits, receiving a prompt response from the Emir, who advanced the timeline for legislative elections. They further assert that social media empowers the youth, increasing the likelihood that political activism has, or will, intensify over time. Al-Jenaibi (2016) strengthens this argument by asserting that Twitter allows everyone a platform, making users feel more empowered to voice their opinions without the fear of censorship. Additionally, some studies suggest that social media offers Qatari women a unique avenue for addressing gender disparities, given the relative freedom afforded by digital spaces (Farha et al., 2014). This argument is particularly compelling considering that 63.7% of Qatari women reportedly use social media for at least one hour daily (Farha et al., 2014).

When discussing activism, studies have shown that social media has increased opportunities for citizens to express their opinions and demands to the government. Al-Jenaibi (2016) argued that Twitter had provided people in GCC countries with a platform to express and voice their opinions regarding their demands and opposition to the government. She found several campaigns in Gulf countries, including Qatar, aimed at social, economic, and political reform of the government. Shockley’s (2016) analysis revealed similar results, indicating that frequent Twitter users are more likely to engage in political activism. However, the lack of recent content analyses on political engagement in Qatar—due to the reliance on surveys conducted over five years ago—limits the extent to which contemporary trends can be fully understood.

The existing body of research—though limited—offers insights into how both Qatari citizens and expatriates engage with social media. Given the contrast between the ideas circulating on social media and Qatar’s traditionally conservative values, many Qatari citizens are conscious of potential societal shifts that could impact familial ties and cultural norms. Conversely, Farha et al. (2014) show that expatriates use the internet for news more frequently than Qataris, although the reasons for this discrepancy warrant further exploration.

In summary, while the existing literature provides sufficient evidence of the increasing reliance on social media in Qatar and its potential influence on perspectives, there remains a substantial gap in research on its impact on individual narratives since 2016. The most recent data on social media use comes from the Omnibus survey, which was discontinued in 2014. As time progresses, this outdated data weakens the relevance of the findings. It is likely that newer surveys would reveal even higher social media engagement rates, particularly given the post-pandemic rise in online news consumption. The research gap may potentially impact some numerical assumptions regarding the shifting rates between television to internet use as the years go by; it will be challenging to estimate the specific percentage of users that use social media instead of television for news over the years. Furthermore, much of the literature on Qatar’s sociopolitical landscape and its connection to Twitter (and other social media platforms) naturally focuses on the Arab Spring, given Twitter’s

role in the wave of uprisings. However, this does not negate the possibility that social media has had more subtle, yet enduring, effects on political participation and attitudes across the Gulf, including in Qatar. To address these gaps, this chapter presents updated insights, contributing to the ongoing discourse on digital media's evolving role in shaping sociopolitical dynamics in Qatar.

3 Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to provide both contextual depth and quantitative insights into the most prominent sociopolitical discussions on Twitter. A concurrent triangulation research design was adopted, drawing on methodological frameworks outlined by Clark et al. (2008), Creswell (2015), and Hanson et al. (2005). This approach ensures cross-verification and validation of research findings by integrating both qualitative and quantitative data in a complementary manner. The qualitative data informed the identification of key themes, which were then analyzed quantitatively, while the quantitative findings provided contextual reinforcement for the qualitative insights. This reciprocal relationship between the two datasets enriched the breadth and depth of the analysis.

Given the nature of the topic at hand, more weight was given to the qualitative section as it served as the foundation for deriving data for the quantitative analysis. This approach aligns with similar concurrent triangulation methodologies employed in studies such as Gibson-Davis & Duncan (2005) and Struthers and Bokemeier (2000), although these studies were conducted outside the field of political science. In this study, the qualitative component was considered central to deriving insights into the influence of Twitter on sociopolitical thought.

To capture a diverse range of youth perspectives and political orientations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 10 students from Georgetown University in Qatar over a four-month period (October–February). The sample included four Qatari and six non-Qatari students, with an equal gender distribution (five males and five females). To incorporate a broad spectrum of perspectives the study included a random snowball sample of both Qatari and non-Qatari youth. This was done to ensure representation from both groups, and to reflect the diversity of experiences within Qatar's youth population. The non-Qatari participants came from a range of national backgrounds, including Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, the United States, and India. To ensure relevance, all participants were required to have engaged with political content on Twitter for at least two months and used the platform at least once per week. To protect participants' privacy, all interviewees remained anonymous. In instances where direct citations from interviews were used, participants were referred to simply as "interviewee" with their verbal consent explicitly obtained for the use of their statements in this study.

The interviews, conducted in English with an average duration of 40 minutes, did not require the interviewees to actively post on Twitter, as the study's focus was on their perceptions and interpretations rather than their personal tweeting habits.

A set of 14 open-ended questions, approved by Georgetown University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), guided the interviews. The questions were designed to assess participants' political viewpoints before and after engaging with Twitter and to explore whether they perceived a shift in their sociopolitical perspectives due to their Twitter usage and if there was, how. Additionally, the study sought to elicit their perspectives on current sociopolitical issues, such as Qatar's policies, World Cup policies (given the significance of the event during the study period), and Qatar's overall sociopolitical climate. Furthermore, the interviews aimed to determine whether the interviewees believed that other youth in Qatar were similarly affected by Twitter, and if so, what the underlying causes might be.

This study employs an inductive methodology in its qualitative section, allowing for the identification of recurring themes that inform both the qualitative and quantitative analyses. This flexible and adaptive approach facilitates the detection of nuanced patterns in the data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

The quantitative analysis serves to contextualize the two most frequently discussed sociopolitical themes that emerged in qualitative interviews—namely, the FIFA World Cup and Palestine. These topics were mentioned by all ten interviewees, warranting further examination of their prevalence and discourse on Twitter. The 2022 FIFA World Cup, a landmark event for Qatar, extended beyond the realm of sports, sparking discussions on foreign policy and domestic affairs. Its inclusion in this study aims to shed light on the broader sociopolitical conversations it catalyzed among Qatar youth.

A total of 433 lines were annotated and analyzed from these two themes in the quantitative section. This analysis not only identifies the sociopolitical topics to which youth are exposed but also establishes connections between these digital discussions and the themes emerging from the qualitative interviews. Ultimately, this approach offers a deeper understanding of key issues—most notably, Palestine and the World Cup. The tweets selected for this study were strictly limited to those containing political or social content, including expressions of political participation, responses to news, and activism-related discourse. Both Arabic and English tweets were analyzed, with descriptive statistics used to summarize key characteristics of the dataset. Additionally, inferential statistical analyses—including probability testing—were conducted to assess the likelihood of specific categories recurring in Twitter discussions within each theme.

The Twitter lines were collected from October 2022 to January 2023. Data was obtained using a Twitter data collection tool designed to track engagement metrics such as replies, mentions, likes, and retweets based on predefined keywords. To ensure a representative sample, 24 Twitter accounts from universities across Qatar were selected as a control group to assess the forms of engagement these accounts generate, including the types of accounts they follow and what they are exposed to. The primary focus was to analyze discourse surrounding the two dominant themes—Palestine and the World Cup—while also examining the types of accounts followed and the nature of interactions they generated. To align the sample selection with the study's objectives, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

Table 1 Table 1 outlines the thematic categorization applied to the Twitter content analysis

Theme	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
World cup	Foreign Policy	Local Policy critique	Pro-Qatar
Palestine	Institutional Critique	Individual critique	Information Sharing

Keywords: For each theme, a selection of words in both English and Arabic were used in relation to the theme.

1. The user must actively tweet and engage on Twitter at least biweekly;
2. The account must have demonstrated consistent activity over a four-month period;
3. The Twitter account must be at least three months old;
4. The account must be publicly accessible;
5. The user must be enrolled in a university in Qatar;
6. The account must engage frequently with sociopolitical content (Table 1).

4 Results

Twitter’s Alteration of Perspectives on Sociopolitical Qatari Norms

The majority of interviewees (seven out of ten) reported that their engagement with Twitter had, to some extent, altered their perspectives on Qatari cultural norms. These changes were not inherently radical—rather, they involved acquiring a more nuanced understanding of Qatari cultural norms and the perspectives of others on these norms. For instance, interviewees B and D specifically specified that Twitter helped them gain more knowledge and, as a result, a deeper understanding and appreciation of Qatari cultural norms. They noted that Twitter provided them with access to information and explanations regarding cultural norms, such as gender segregation and the Qatari women’s cultural practice of donning *abayas* (Interviewee B, D, I, J, 2022–2023). In addition, other interviewees gained a better understanding of the Qatari cultural norms as a result of exposure to discussions and validations on these norms, whereas two interviewees remained unaffected, despite being exposed to the same discussions and knowledge as interviewees B and D. Meanwhile, one participant indicated that their perspective had changed negatively, as engagement with discussions on Twitter—particularly regarding the divide between expatriates and Qatari citizens—had made them more critical of Qatari cultural norms (Interviewee G, 2023). Nonetheless, the findings suggest that Twitter plays a role in shaping sociopolitical perspectives, though the extent of this influence varies among individuals. Notably, in this context, alteration does not necessarily imply a drastic shift in beliefs but rather an increased willingness to consider alternative perspectives and engage with nuanced viewpoints. In other words, it fosters a more flexible and informed mindset.

Concerns About Freedom of Expression in Qatar

The majority of respondents had reservations about the country's freedom of expression. Some interviewees (Interviewees B and E) attributed this to the country's governance structure, while another participant argued that the extent to which one can freely express opinions depends on their social privilege. Specifically, this interviewee suggested that a "straight white male" would likely have more freedom to express opinions than others in the country (Interviewee D, 2022). Another interviewee (Interviewee F, 2023) acknowledged that individuals can voice their opinions but only within certain boundaries, noting that those wishing to express more radical viewpoints often resort to discussions outside of social media due to concerns over potential instability within Qatar and the broader region. However, one needs to interpret such findings in the Arab Gulf regional context where academics need to draw a line for the very definition of freedom of expression with an appreciation of society and culture—surely an important topic, though it is beyond the focus and scope of this research.

Twitter Use and Perceptions of Domestic Media Outlets

Most of the interviewees argued that they have become more skeptical of domestic media outlets in Qatar due to Twitter, but to varying degrees. For instance, Interviewee E claims that they were critical due to them believing that Qatar's prioritization of appearing peaceful or with little political discontent was due to international pressure (Interviewee E, 2022). Another outlook was provided by interviewee F, who argued that they were generally skeptical but claimed that Qatar remains more "open" than other GCC countries (Interviewee F, 2023). Some interviewees explained that their skepticism was less due to the platform itself and more because of the discussions it generated. They suggested that if they had seen more tweets critiquing Qatari media, their skepticism might have increased, but such critiques were not common (Interviewees H and I, 2023). Despite these varying perspectives, a general trend of increased skepticism toward domestic media remains evident.

Twitter Use and the Inclination to Do Acts of Activism

The majority of participants claimed that Twitter has made them more inclined to engage in activism. For instance, one of the interviewees claimed that they feel pressured to participate in activism either out of a sense of obligation or concern that they might face criticism for not taking action (Interviewee C, 2022). On the other hand, one interviewee stated that Twitter did not influence their views, as they do not express their opinions publicly. Another interviewee argued that platforms such as Instagram had a greater impact on their inclinations toward activism than Twitter. (Interviewee G and Interviewee J, 2023). Nonetheless, several interviewees suggested that, at the very least, Twitter had encouraged them to express their opinions or consider participating in protests on occasion. These findings highlight the platform's potential role in shaping political engagement, albeit to varying degrees.

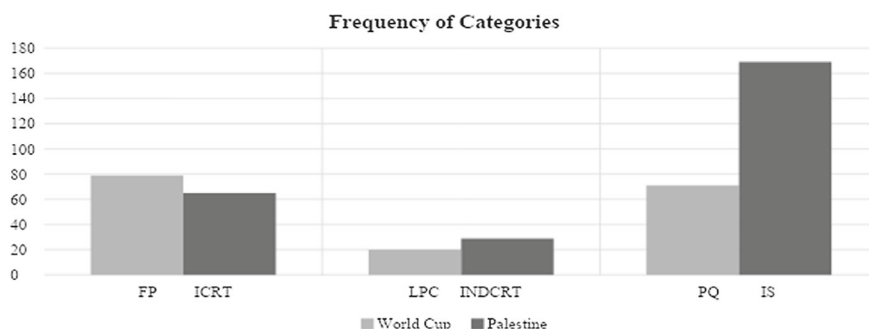


Fig. 1 Frequency of categories

Quantitative Results

The quantitative findings indicate that information sharing (IS) was the most dominant category in Twitter discussions related to Palestine. Additionally, three primary thematic categories emerged from the analysis of World Cup-related discourse: Foreign Policy (FP), Pro-Qatar (PQ), and Local Policy Critique (LPC). However, discussions critiquing Qatar's local policies during the World Cup were relatively limited in volume (Fig. 1).

World Cup

The analysis revealed three key thematic categories in discussions surrounding the FIFA World Cup: The highest number of discussions ($N = 79$) fell under the Foreign Policy (FP) category, primarily critiquing Germany and the United States for what was perceived as hypocrisy—advocating for human rights and LGBTQ+ rights while allegedly failing to uphold these values within their own borders. These discussions often referenced these nations as a form of retaliatory critique, rather than serving as a direct defense of Qatar.

The Pro-Qatar category ($N = 71$) was characterized by discussions explicitly challenging media portrayals of Qatar, particularly accusations of misrepresentation in international coverage. Many tweets in this category sought to defend Qatar's policies as an Islamic country, emphasizing its cultural and religious sovereignty. These discussions often aimed to counter negative narratives and reinforce a more positive image of Qatar on the global stage.

The Local Policy Critique category ($N = 20$) focused primarily on migrant worker mistreatment, with discussions highlighting concerns regarding labor rights and the treatment of migrant workers in Qatar. Critiques in this category largely centered on domestic policies, raising questions about workplace conditions and government oversight. The findings suggest that the discussions related to foreign policy, pro-Qatar, and local policy critique toward Qatar were distinct in nature and had different foci. The Foreign Policy category largely critiqued external actors, the Pro-Qatar category aimed to defend national policies and media representation, while the Local Policy Critique category highlighted domestic concerns. Together, these thematic

categories provide valuable insight into the key issues shaping Twitter discourse among Qatar youth, offering a deeper understanding of the perspectives they are exposed to online.

Palestine

The data analysis revealed several categories related to Palestine-focused discourse, including news dissemination, individual critiques of engagement with Palestine, and institutional critiques of governments and organizations. Among these, the Information Sharing category ($F = 179$) was the most dominant, with the majority of engagement centered on sharing news about Palestine. This included tweets promoting awareness events, seminars, and museum exhibitions, which generated significant engagement and retweets.

The Institutional Critique category ($F = 65$) primarily consisted of criticisms of the Israeli government, particularly in relation to human rights violations and the displacement of Palestinians. Additionally, discussions in this category extended to organizations or individuals accused of normalizing relations with Israel, emphasizing political opposition to normalization policies. On a smaller scale, the Individual Critique category ($F = 29$) emerged, focusing on public figures or well-known personalities who were criticized for engaging with Israel.

Nevertheless, the results shed light on the various categories of Palestine-related discussions, including information sharing, individual critique, and institutional critique. While individual and institutional critiques adopt a more critical stance, information sharing remains neutral in tone. Ultimately, these categories provide a structured framework for analyzing thematic patterns in Twitter discussions and serve as a foundation for further interpretation of the data.

Inferential Statistics: Probability

The tested categories included Institutional Criticism, Individual Criticism, Information Sharing, Foreign Policy, Pro-Qatar Content, and Local Policy Critique. The results indicate that among tweets related to Palestine, Information Sharing had the highest probability of engagement at 64%, followed by Institutional Criticism at 24% and Individual Criticism at 11%. Conversely, for World Cup-related tweets, Foreign Policy was the most engaged category at 46%, followed by Pro-Qatar Content at 41% and Local Policy Critique at 11%. These findings suggest that discussions surrounding the two themes were largely independent, with only minimal thematic intersections. However, some overlap was observed, particularly in instances where critiques of Western nations' stance on Qatar also referenced Palestine—often framed as an example of whataboutism.

Further analysis confirmed that the two themes remained independent of each other, regardless of the time frame, as the categories within each topic varied significantly and could not be generalized for a chi-square analysis of their interdependence. However, within the sample of Qatar youth analyzed, there was a notable likelihood of exposure to Information Sharing in discussions about Palestine and Foreign Policy in discussions about the World Cup. Additionally, minor intersections were observed between Pro-Qatar Content and Foreign Policy, particularly

when criticisms of Western nations' narratives regarding Qatar were presented as counterarguments.

It is important to note that this analysis was conducted to identify dominant themes in a qualitative framework rather than to provide an empirical test of engagement patterns. The findings do not offer a definitive measure of Twitter user behavior but rather highlight key trends in sociopolitical discourse among Qatar youth. Ultimately, these results underscore the need for further research into the interplay between thematic dependencies and engagement patterns, particularly by examining how different sociopolitical issues intersect within comparable time frames.

5 Analyses and Commentaries

The analysis of Twitter discussions surrounding the World Cup revealed that Germany and the United States were the most frequently criticized nations within the Foreign Policy (FP) category, largely due to the international scrutiny directed at Qatar during the tournament. Additionally, a subset of pro-Morocco tweets emerged but could not be classified within the predefined sociopolitical categories, as they lacked explicit political content. However, the pro-Morocco sentiment observed within Qatar Twitter circles appears to have pan-Arabist undertones, suggesting a potential avenue for future research. This finding contributes to the broader understanding of sociopolitical discussions on Twitter during the 2022 World Cup and underscores the importance of regional and cultural contexts in the interpretation of social media discourse.

While sentiment analysis could have provided deeper insight into the tone and emotional resonance of the themes identified, it proved challenging to apply in this study, as the predominant sentiment across nearly all discussions was critical. Despite this limitation, an interesting finding was the high number of information sharing related to the topic of Palestine, which coincides with the findings of Metaxas et al. (2017) who identified news and information gathering as a top motivation for Twitter users. This indicates that there is a potential engagement and impact of Twitter on the youth case study in Qatar, as the sharing of information related to Palestine aligns with broader trends in Twitter usage. Although sentiment analysis was not feasible, the prevalence of information-sharing behavior offers valuable insight into the role of Twitter in shaping the political consciousness of young people in Qatar, providing a foundation for future research.

The quantitative findings of the study provide further insight into the qualitative research by demonstrating the intertwining of topics mentioned by the interviewees, including foreign policy, migrant workers, and media skepticism, which aligns with the theme of Palestine observed in the Twitter data. This suggests a strong connection between the topics discussed on Twitter and those mentioned by the interviewees. Furthermore, despite some categories having low exposure and engagement in the quantitative data, they were frequently mentioned by the interviewees, such as the

topic of migrant workers. This raises the question of the extent to which Twitter influenced the conversation on these topics. While a definitive answer remains elusive, it strongly suggests the presence of such discussions among Qatar youth, including those in the interviewee sample of this research. The quantitative analysis provides evidence of the impact of Twitter on the sociopolitical perspectives of youth in Qatar and sheds light on the nexus between social media discussions and real-life issues mentioned by the interviewees.

While there are other factors that impact the findings of the research that can be taken into consideration—like the individual's environment and education, there is enough data to conclude that Twitter causes a trend toward open-mindedness in the sample population. Therefore, the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data posits these findings:

Youth Sociopolitical Backgrounds and the Impact of Social Media

The interview findings reveal that Qatar youth exhibit diverse perspectives and experiences regarding social media, and these differences are often shaped by national identity. This difference in nationality appears to shape how young people perceive the role of social media, including how it influences their thoughts, behavior, and possibly their engagement in social or political activities. One of the areas where social media helped them gain insights was domestic issues in Qatar. As their knowledge of migrant rights in Qatar was limited, interviewees from Qatar stated that their use of social media increased their awareness of the subject. Non-Qatari interviewees, on the other hand, stated that they were already aware of migrant issues, but Twitter enhanced their comprehension by providing additional examples, such as the case of Malcom Bidali (Interviewee C, H, and G, 2022–2023; Migrant rights, 2021). In addition, male interviewees noted that Twitter helped them understand gender norms and their impact on women by providing more information about the obstacles women face in the region (Interviewee H, F, and D, 2022–2023).

Twitter Theme Engagement and Insights: Quantitative and Qualitative Section

The integration of various themes and patterns from both the quantitative and qualitative sections helps clarify how social media shapes discussions on sensitive topics like Palestine. There is a noticeable link between respondents' skepticism toward the media and how information is shared, particularly when it comes to news articles about Palestinians. This indicates that social media not only affects perceptions of media reliability but also plays a significant role in shaping opinions on specific sociopolitical issues, such as the Palestinian cause. As observed during interviews, interviewees exhibited greater skepticism toward domestic media outlets, with some indicating that international outlets are viewed as more reliable. This finding is consistent with theories on media engagement and referrals, as the data demonstrate that international news outlets are more actively engaged in posting about Palestinians. Moreover, the engagement with institutional criticism alongside the foreign policy category in the 2022 World Cup themes resonates with statements from several interviewees. They reported engaging with foreign policy topics on their Twitter feeds, noting that they discuss Western politics as frequently as Gulf politics (Interviewee

B, C, E, F, G, H, and I, 2022–2023). The idea of skepticism toward domestic media is further investigated to understand whether Twitter was the sole factor that led to media engagement, or if there are other factors to be considered.

The quantitative section provides substantial evidence indicating a potential relationship between the topics youth engage with. It is important to note that these topics are not only exposed to Georgetown University students; the sample of 24 Twitter accounts included students from various universities in Qatar as well. However, due to the nature of a multicultural, politics-centered education, it is possible that Georgetown students engage with such topics to a greater extent. Moreover, while some interviewees expressed greater trust in international media outlets than domestic ones, there was significant criticism of international media coverage during the World Cup, particularly evident in the Pro-Qatar category. This criticism mainly countered media misrepresentation of the country, prompting questions about whether Qatar's portrayal through what Interviewee H termed an "orientalist lens" compromised the integrity of international media coverage post-World Cup (Interviewee H, 2023). However, the local policy critique category goes in tandem with the interviewees that claimed their perspective on migrant rights was further amplified due to the case of the World Cup (Interviewee A, C, H, 2022–2023).

In addition, the quantitative section on the World Cup and the qualitative analysis demonstrate that events are as worthy of consideration as political issues because they provide a foundation for examining a variety of issues. The qualitative section discussed the World Cup's aspects of migrant rights and Qatari norms, whereas the quantitative section brought up discussions on foreign policy and media bias. All of this demonstrates that there is value in examining the relationship between youth Twitter engagement and what they claim has changed in their interviews. In the context of this study, despite the topics not aligning exactly, a connection persisted. The local policy critique category resonated with criticisms directed at Qatar's mismanagement of migrant rights during the World Cup. Subsequently, interviewees stated that their opinions toward the issues critiqued in Qatar's local policy, particularly migrant rights, had changed. This analysis does not posit an answer to what would count as liberal, but it surely allows for understanding how Qatar youth might potentially become more open-minded in some respects, due to exposure and engagement that was seen on Twitter.

Liberal and Conservative in Qatar: Is There an Increase in Liberal Thought?

The study indicates an increase in liberal thought but only in the sense of comprehending or being receptive to certain contexts and not all. For instance, interviewees C and B claimed to have become more open to discussing gender and sexuality-related topics, while interviewees A, E, and I claimed to have become more aware of Qatari culture and perspectives (Interviewees A, B, C, E, H, and I, 2022–2023). Moreover, the majority of interviewees believe Twitter altered or enhanced their perspectives on women's rights, racism, and sexuality-related issues (Interviewees A, B, C, D, E, H, I, 2022–2023). Alternatively, some interviewees argued that Twitter reinforced their belief in their own arguments. For instance, interviewee J (2023) mentioned that they use Twitter primarily to find content that supports their views, rather than

to engage in discussions about their beliefs. Thus, there is evidence from the respondents that indicates an increase in “liberal” thought due to Twitter. However, this does not indicate that the interviewees consider themselves liberal in a Western sense and that they have completely changed their political stance. Rather, they are becoming more considerate and tolerant of certain sociopolitical issues. Obviously, to determine whether they have generally become more liberal or conservative, one would need to examine a much broader picture than what this case study provides. So, for the time being, the study only highlights the increase in open-mindedness toward some topics. Overall, according to such findings, the terms liberal and conservative added to the definitions portion are applicable in this context.

Nonetheless, there remains the difficulty of fitting some topics, such as Palestine and the World Cup, into the liberal-conservative dichotomy. It would be difficult to define how some opinions—such as being pro-Qatar—would count as liberal or conservative. Attempts to define liberal and conservative in Qatar do so must take into account the regional history to ensure that the cultural and religious diversity is fully represented. This requires an understanding of Qatar’s traditions and how applying Western definitions of liberal, and conservative may overlook these regional and religious nuances. There is a pressing need for further analysis to develop terms that are more regionally sensitive to Qatar’s context.

Does the Change in Sociopolitical Thought Affect Qatari Youth and Non-Qatari Youth Differently?

There seems to be no clear answer or rather, not enough claims to argue that Twitter affects sociopolitical thought between Qatari youth and non-Qatari youth in a drastically different manner. It is because there is no contrast in opinions between the Qatari interviewees and the non-Qatari interviewees, and there is no dichotomy to compare perceptions from. Rather, both groups were impacted differently, so one cannot create a comparison between the two categories based on the findings of this study. What is worth noting, however, is that some interviewees became more understanding of Qatari norms (Interviewees E, I, and F, 2022) with the exception of one becoming more critical due to the “expat-local divide” (Interviewee G, 2023, 00:23:13).

Western Narratives Prevalent in the Youth’s Political Thought on Twitter

Another significant theme that emerged from the interviews was the prevalence of “Western” narratives on social media, particularly among Qatar’s youth. According to interviewees, Western popular culture dominates mainstream Twitter, and this has led to the incorporation of Western discourse into Qatar’s educational system and in Twitter itself (Interviewees A, B, C, and G, 2022–2023).

However, the interviewees also noted that those with international education, i.e. those who went to private international schools, or were exposed to different curricula aside from the Qatari national curriculum, are more likely to criticize Qatar’s cultural and social narrative than those who went to public schools in Qatar. Some interviewees also noted that there is a disparity between discussing Western discourse

and non-Western political crises, with a sense of remorse and priority attached to discussing Western issues.

When asked about the primary factor shaping adolescent sociopolitical thought, most interviewees cited education, while a few (Interviewees C, E, and D, 2022–2023) pointed to the influence of social media. Interestingly, a significant number of participants stated that studying in a Western institution had altered their perspectives, making them more receptive to or even inclined to prioritize Western discourse. This shift was attributed to both their academic environments and exposure to global narratives via Twitter feeds. From this, an intriguing pattern emerges: an acceptance of Western sociopolitical discourse appears to correlate with its normalization on social media, positioning these discussions as equally—or even more—relevant than domestic and regional issues. This phenomenon is further reflected in the experiences of non-Qatari interviewees, some of whom (Interviewees B, D, and I, 2022–2023) reported that their Twitter feeds contained an equal balance of discourse on their native countries and on Qatar. This raises important questions about how a heterogeneous Twitter feed—one that blends multiple regional perspectives—might influence an individual's sociopolitical outlook. Additionally, a significant portion of the Tweets in question were critical of the United States in the Foreign Policy category's World Cup-related content, (Interviewees A, C, H and I, 2022–2023). In this case, this further illustrates Western political narratives are debated within Qatari Twitter circles.

Does Twitter Contribute to Increased Political Activism among Qatar Youth?

Evidently, the answer is yes but with some caveat. The data suggest that Twitter does contribute to increased political activism among Qatar youth, though the nature of activism varies. Several interviewees reported that Twitter had made them more outspoken on sociopolitical issues (Interviewees A, B, and C, 2022), while others noted that it influenced their offline engagement, such as attending protests and rallies (Interviewees E and I, 2022–2023). Additionally, interviewees highlighted Twitter's role in facilitating grassroots reporting on Palestine (Interviewees G and I, 2023). These findings correspond with the quantitative results, which identified information sharing as the most prominent category of engagement.

6 Conclusion

This chapter investigates the potential influence of Twitter on the sociopolitical perspectives of Qatar youth, with findings indicating a notable increase in open-mindedness on topics such as women's rights, race, and cultural norms. Consequently, this study indicates that Twitter plays a significant role in molding political discourse and influencing the political attitudes of Qatar youth. The quantitative analysis further supports these claims by demonstrating that Twitter exposure aligns with specific patterns of engagement, particularly regarding foreign policy discussions, critiques of Western politics, and increased political awareness about Palestine.

Holistically, it demonstrates that there is a strong indication of political activism as a result of Twitter use, which warrants further investigation, as the question of which facets of political activism increase—such as protesting, being digitally active on social media, etc.—remains unresolved.

Further, the study underscores the nuances in how sociopolitical perspectives have evolved among Qataris and non-Qataris. Non-Qatari interviewees indicated that Twitter has enhanced their understanding of Qatar's cultural norms, while Qatari interviewees noted that the platform has broadened their awareness of global issues that are not directly relevant to Qatar.

However, through such nuanced answers, this study also highlights the challenges of applying Western frameworks—such as the liberal-conservative dichotomy—to the Qatari sociopolitical landscape. Qatari political discourse is influenced by religious, tribal, and cultural factors that do not neatly align with Western political classifications. Future research could explore alternative frameworks that better reflect the regional complexities of Qatari political discourse and avoid imposing Western-centric labels.

Relatedly—and more broadly, future research should also consider several factors to advance our understanding of how Twitter, and more broadly social media, influence the sociopolitical thought of young people. Firstly, it is essential to evaluate other social media platforms independently and in conjunction with Twitter, as the outcomes could vary significantly. For instance, platforms like Instagram, with their focus on visuals and software, may yield different results. Secondly, given the considerable diversity among non-Qataris, including non-Qatari youth, the generalizability of the findings to the broader youth population in Qatar is limited. Future research should strive to include as many youths as possible from various universities as well as those who are not enrolled in an educational institution to measure the influence of education on the social media environment. Finally, it should be noted that the findings of this study may differ from future studies on other social media platforms, as platforms can rise and fall in popularity over time. This fluidity in media platforms poses challenges in documenting changes in sociopolitical thought through these platforms.

As social media continues to evolve, so too will its influence on political discourse—here, this study provides a foundation for future endeavors into this field to emphasize the profound role that Twitter plays (and has played) in shaping the political consciousness of Qatar youth. In five years, the results, and the platform, may be entirely different.

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Chapter 17

Saudi Adolescents' Identity Development and Social Media Use: An Exploratory Study



Monerah Almahmoud , Dena Philips Swanson, April Luehmann , Joyce Duckles, and Corey Whitesell

Abstract This chapter examines identity development among Saudi adolescents aged 14 to 19 years who use social media platforms. It explores their common identity statuses and investigates how these identity statuses relate to their social media activities. Data were collected via a survey distributed on different social media platforms. The survey includes the dimensions of identity development scale (DIDS), questions assessing social media use, and demographic information. The survey drew responses from 1642 participants representing all 13 Saudi Arabia regions. The findings show that the majority of Saudi adolescents are in three identity statuses characterized by low commitments. However, no significant relationship is found between adolescents' activities on social media platforms and their identity statuses.

Keywords Adolescence · Identity development · Social media platforms

1 Introduction

Understanding adolescents' social media use in relation to their identity development is important for human developmentalists, educators, and counselors, especially since many adolescents spend a significant portion of their time online daily (Borca et al., 2015; Israelashvili et al., 2012). Like teenagers in the United States, Saudi teenagers

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rely on social media to stay connected with their peers. Social media platforms offer them a space to socialize that is comparable to traditional social settings such as schools, community centers, and other community spaces (Ito et al., 2010; Zemmels, 2012). This participation is crucial for maintaining their social relationships and integrating into their social circle. Existing research suggests that social media platforms are vital to many adolescents' lives, playing a crucial role in their identity construction (Borca et al., 2015; Choi & Sung, 2018; Kofoed & Larsen, 2015; McRoberts et al., 2017; Yau & Reich, 2018). Despite, adolescents are likely to encounter challenges in forming their identity online as they do offline (e.g., at school and home) (Davis, 2010; McRoberts et al., 2017). Although studies have shown global similarities in the influence of social media on youth (Osgerby, 2020), cultural differences should be considered when examining youth's identity development in online contexts.

For Saudi adolescents, navigating shifts in traditional customs and cultural heritage while exploring their identity online is significantly influenced by their ability to interact with other cultures through social media (Kuppuswamy & Rekha, 2015). Researchers have also found that gender significantly impacts how youth socialize and post information online in Saudi society (Abokhodair & Vieweg, 2016; Guta & Karolak, 2015). However, only a handful of studies have explored how Saudi adolescents form their identities while socially interacting with others on social media platforms. Their use of social media merits investigation, as it serves as both social and cultural context for identity formation.

1.1 Saudi Adolescents' Online Social Interactions

Many Saudi individuals use social media while adhering to Islamic principles, which include maintaining a reputation of honor within Saudi society. This is especially important for females, who must be cautious about exposing themselves without a cover and carefully navigate social media features to preserve respect and modesty (Abokhodair & Hodges, 2019; Abokhodair & Vieweg, 2016; Kuppuswamy & Rekha, 2015). Because visual content carries more risk than text, Saudi women appear more concerned than men about sharing visual content particularly on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Abokhodair and Vieweg (2016) show that youth are concerned that the photo of a woman viewed by other than the intended audience may bring shame and embarrassment to the user and her family. The key challenge facing Saudi social media users is how to negotiate modernity while maintaining authenticity and traditions. Consequently, coherent self-presentation on social media remains difficult for Saudi youth (Abokhodair & Vieweg, 2016).

Alenezi et al. (2018) discovered that identity construction in online contexts comprises an intentional process involving language and other means, such as dress, symbols, and pictures. Many studies indicate that youth use varying degrees of visual and text-based self-presentation on social media depending on their audience and platform (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018; Rui & Stefanone, 2013). Saudi youth present themselves via written posts in online contexts by using language to enact

their gender, tribal, and religious identities that apply in offline communication as well. Al Harabi and Bin Jaza (2019) pointed out that, in addition to expanding social media use among Saudis, these platforms might also influence their traditional values. Their research showed that 31% of the sample believed that social media platforms strongly influenced their opinions on different topics (e.g., social and religious), and 33% claimed that social media shaped their ideas. Although the study mainly focused on Saudi men, it offered a sense of how social media use can influence users. Still, little research has explored Saudi adolescents' social media use in relation to their identity development with respect to gender, highlighting the need for more studies to understand their strategies for constructing identity in online contexts.

1.2 Measuring Adolescents' Identity Development Online

Instruments designed to measure identity formation tend to be distinct in their assessments of how individuals form identity. For instance, in online contexts, most studies aiming to measure the role of social interaction in adolescents' identity formation have applied Goffman's (1959) theoretical perspective to understand the roles of online audiences (e.g., feedback and evaluation) in adolescents' online identity construction (Riccio, 2020), peer comparison (e.g., Chua & Chang, 2016), and online self-presentation strategies (e.g., Yau & Reich, 2018). Investigation of adolescents' identity development based on Erikson's (1968) and Marcia's (1966) paradigms in online contexts remains scarce.

Marcia's identity status paradigms have been used to track adolescents' progress through the phase of identity exploration and commitment with consideration of the social-cultural influences (Yoder, 2000). In online contexts, this paradigm would be effective in describing explorations or commitments to beliefs or actions explored online for Saudi adolescents. Quantitative measurements based on Marcia's (1966) paradigm, such as the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS; Luyckx et al., 2008), capture the identity process in a static way by conceptualizing identity exploration as a process that remains similar across various life domains (e.g., politics, career, religion, relationships, and gender) (Klym & Cieciuch, 2015; Hatano & Sugimura, 2017). It measures the process used to explore identity alternatives instead of relying on a domain approach (e.g., gender, career, or religion). This model suggests that identity is a dynamic process and captures identity and commitment in different cycles.

The measurement includes five dimensions (i.e., exploration in breadth, exploration in depth, commitment making, identification with commitment, and ruminative exploration). These dimensions are designed to evaluate the breadth (i.e., the extent of exploring identity alternatives) and depth (i.e., the degree of commitment and adherence to choices) in identity development (Hatano & Sugimura, 2017; Klym & Cieciuch, 2015). Based on adolescents' scores in each of these five dimensions, the scale classifies identity into six statuses (i.e., Carefree Diffusion, Ruminative

Moratorium, Foreclosure, Diffused Diffusion, Moratorium, and Achievement). The DIDS Measure has been tested in different cultural contexts, such as Oman, Kuwait (e.g., Alhumaidi & Albalushi, 2018), Japan (e.g., Hatano & Sugimura, 2017), and Turkey (e.g., Mastrotheodoros & Motti-Stefandi, 2017). The model of identity development proposed by Luyckx et al. (2008) has proven to be valuable in research on adolescents' development (Crocetti et al., 2008; Hatano & Sugimura, 2017; Klym & Cieciuch, 2015).

The Present Study

This study examines identity formation among Saudi adolescents who are active on social media platforms. This cross-sectional study tackles two main research questions: What identity formation statuses and gender differences are most prevalent among Saudi adolescents using social media platforms, and what is the relationship between adolescents' social media use and identity statuses?

Since the research is exploratory, the study employs a survey method due to its ability to facilitate access to a large population of Saudi adolescents. The Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS) was selected as an appropriate tool for the survey method because it effectively measures various aspects of identity development, making it well-suited for research on adolescent identity. An anonymous online survey was utilized to achieve the study's objective (i.e., exploring Saudi adolescents' identity formation via social media platforms). This method is suitable for several reasons: First, adolescents are generally comfortable with completing tasks online, which many consider as part of their natural setting (Mlikotic et al., 2016). Second, it facilitates access to a population that may be difficult to reach physically (Padayachee, 2016). Third, adolescents are more open to answering psychosocial questions (e.g., The Dimensions of Identity Development Scale DIDS) online than offline due to anonymity and privacy (Padayachee, 2016), especially when given the option to skip questions or leave the survey at any point. Fourth, it provides widespread access to the participants who live in Saudi Arabia.

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

Participants for this study were middle to late Saudi adolescents, aged 14–19 years old, who used social media platforms outside of school settings for non-academic purposes. Participants were recruited via invitations on different social media platforms to complete an online Qualtrics survey in Arabic. Different social media accounts posted invitations. A total of six social media accounts owned by Saudi youths were selected based on the number of followers (i.e., more than 5000 followers), and content related to adolescents' interests (e.g., fashion, well-being,

school). Hashtags (i.e., #) were added to the invitations in topics related to adolescents to help in distributing the invitations. The invitee and participants were encouraged to forward the invitation to other potential subjects. Participants were required to provide their agreement on the assent; no parental consent was required as the survey carried minimum risk. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the corresponding author's university. Participants were adolescents from all 13 regions of Saudi Arabia. The population of adolescents in Saudi Arabia is roughly 5 million (Population Characteristics Survey, 2020) which makes the sample number for this study representative of the Saudi adolescent population.

The survey was open to all Saudi adolescents. To ensure participants met the inclusion criteria, the survey included two filter questions (i.e., do you use social media, what is your age). Participants who neither used social media nor fell within the age range of 14–19 years old were excluded. A total of 1642 adolescents (Age $M = 17$; range 14–19 years; $SD = 1.4$; 83% females) met the study's inclusion criteria. About 53% of participants were 17–19 years old, and 46.9% were 14–16 years old. The data were weighted to correct for gender. A post-stratification weight reduced females' overrepresentation in the sample from 83 to 50%.

2.2 Measures

A link was provided for consenting participants to the 62-item Qualtrics survey, which assessed the social media platform used, types of social media activities, and dimensions of identity.

2.2.1 Demographic Information

The survey included questions about age, gender, and location. Questions about participants' home location offered information about their access to internet services and electronic devices. Since Saudis are considered a homogeneous population in terms of religion, language (i.e., Arabic), and race (i.e., Arab) (Metz et al., 1993), questions about tribe and religion were excluded due to their sensitivity and controversial nature.

2.2.2 Social Media Use

Adolescents were asked about their frequency of using six social media platforms (e.g., Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok). The platforms were chosen based on their popularity in the country. Adolescents indicated how often they used each platform by choosing from multiple options (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, never). To address the general social media activities participants engaged in they indicated their typical actions on each platform using the

phrase “When I use social media, I usually...” (1) Edit or post images/videos/text, (2) only view others post, (3) comment or like on others posts, (4) delete my posts or comments, (5) share/retweet others posts.

2.2.3 The Dimension of Identity Development Scale (DIDS)

The DIDS (Luyckx et al., 2008) applies a five-dimensional identity model to understand the level of exploration and commitment: (1) exploration in breadth (e.g., I think actively about different directions I might take in my life, I think about different things I might do in the future); (2) exploration in depth (e.g., I think about whether the aims I already have for life suit me, I think about plans I already made) (3) commitment making (e.g., I have plans for what I am going to do in the future, I know which direction I am going to do follow in my life); (4) identification with commitment (e.g., My plans give me self-confidence, my future plans match with my true interests and values); and (5) ruminative exploration (e.g., I am doubtful about what I really want to achieve in my life, I worry about what I want to do with my future). Each item was answered on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. The total scale reliability for this sample was adequate ($\alpha = 0.79$).

2.3 Data Analysis

The data were first cleaned and prepared for analysis using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics for social media use and demographic information were examined to explore data normality and appropriateness for the planned analysis. Subscales for DIDS and social media measures were tested for internal reliability using Cronbach’s Alpha and relatedness using Bivariate correlations (Table 1).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations of the five dimensions of identity

	M	SD	2	3	4	5
1. Commitment Making	3.51	0.98	0.43**	−0.54**	0.65**	0.32**
2. Exploration in Breadth	4.00	0.73		−0.04	0.43**	0.39**
3. Ruminative Exploration	3.53	1.05			−0.36**	0.11**
4. Identification with Commitment	3.78	0.88				0.38**
5. Exploration in Depth	3.39	0.71				

Note ** $p < 0.05$

Next, *k*-Means Cluster Analysis grouped subjects with similar identity formation statuses based on subjects' scores on the DIDS subscales. A cluster analysis was performed to capture the multivariate interactions of the five identity dimensions, present in five subscales through performing two steps; first, a hierarchical Ward's clustering method based on Squared Euclidean distance was performed (Morsunbul & Cok, 2014; Hatano & Sugimura, 2017) to test six-cluster model proposed by Luyckx et al. (2008). Convergence was achieved in 38 iterations. The six-cluster model produced groupings with adequate similarity on the five subscales (e.g., commitment making, identification with commitment, exploration in breadth, exploration in depth, and ruminative exploration) within clusters and distance between clusters. The distance between the cluster means and total sample standardized means were interpreted as the effect sizes (Luyckx et al., 2008) where 0.2 SD is a small effect, 0.5 is a medium effect, and 0.8 is a large effect size (Cohen, 2013; Luyckx et al., 2008). Second, the six clusters- Achievement, Foreclosure, Moratorium, Ruminative Moratorium, Carefree Diffusion, and Diffused Diffusion (see Fig. 1), were mapped onto statuses of identity exploration previously hypothesized by Luyckx et al. (2008).

Chi-square tests were performed to test whether the distribution of gender and age group differed according to identity clusters, and an independent sample *t*-test was performed to test if there was a significant difference between identity dimensions and the use of different social media platforms or activities online.



Fig. 1 The six clusters' Z-scores on the DIDS subscales

3 Results

3.1 Saudi Adolescents' Identity Statuses

The majority of Saudi adolescents who use social media platforms were in Care-free Diffusion status ($n = 371$, 23%) and Ruminative Moratorium ($n = 361$, 23%), followed by Foreclosure ($n = 267$, 17%), Diffused Diffusion ($n = 244$, 15%), and Moratorium ($n = 229$, 14.7%); few adolescents were in Achievement status ($n = 88$, 5%).

Chi-square tests were performed to test whether the distribution of gender and age group differed according to identity clusters. A significant difference was found between gender, $X^2(5, N = 1543) = 46.6, p = 0.05$, and age groups $X^2(5, N = 1560) = 12.7, p = 0.03$. More males were found in Carefree Diffusion status ($n = 222$, 55%), Ruminative Moratorium ($n = 200$, 53%), and Moratorium status ($n = 128$, 53%) than females. More females were found in Foreclosure status ($n = 147$, 71%), and Achievement ($n = 45$, 57%) than males (see Fig. 2). Participants in late adolescence were more likely to be in Ruminative Moratorium status ($n = 217$, 60%); and in Diffusion status (i.e., Carefree; $n = 219$, 54%, and Diffused; $n = 137$, 56%), and Moratorium status ($n = 129$, 54%). Middle adolescents were found to be more in achievement status ($n = 41$, 51%).

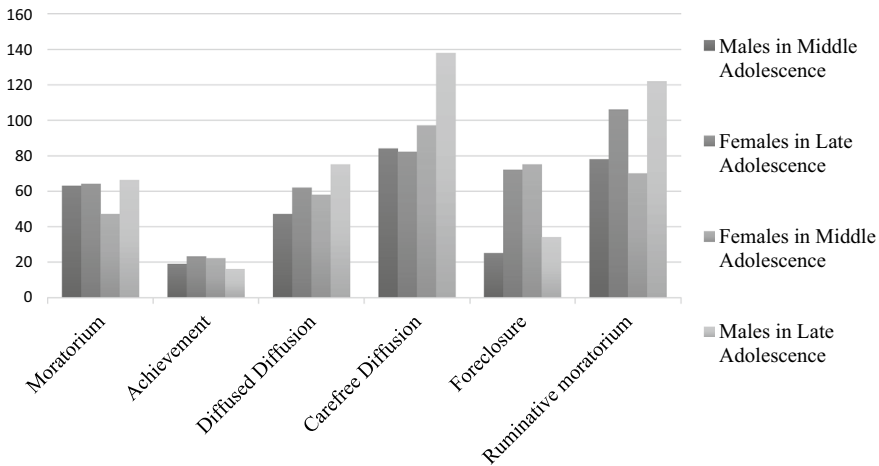


Fig. 2 Difference in age and gender for adolescents in different identity statuses

3.2 Saudi Adolescents' Identity Statues and Social Media Use

Ninety-six percent of Saudi adolescents in this sample were using Snapchat ($N = 1594$), and Instagram ($N = 1582$), 95% were using WhatsApp ($N = 1571$), 94% were using Twitter ($N = 1544$), 71% were using TikTok ($N = 1179$), and only 10% use Facebook ($N = 166$). About 85% of adolescents were using Snapchat ($n = 1393$) and WhatsApp ($n = 1387$) daily, and about 72% ($n = 1189$) of participants indicated they use Instagram daily (see Table 2). Females were using Twitter ($n = 701$, 42.9%) and TikTok ($n = 399$, 23.8%) more frequently than males. Male participants did not show a preference for using Twitter or TikTok since less than 26% indicated that they use the two platforms daily, and some males reported using social media only weekly, such as Instagram (16%) and TikTok (17%). The majority of Saudi adolescents did not use the Facebook platform ($n = 1450$, 88%). Some participants indicated they use the Facebook platform to gain access to games or other social media platforms that allow users to use their Facebook login information instead of creating new accounts.

An independent sample t -test was performed to assess if there was a significant difference between identity dimensions and the use of different social media platforms. Adolescents who were engaging in ruminative exploration reported higher use of Instagram and Twitter (Instagram: $M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.04$; Twitter: $M = 3.5$, $SD = 1.1$) than those who did not use the two platforms (Instagram: $M = 3.3$, $SD = 0.88$; $t(1612) = 1.1$, $p = 0.03$; Twitter: $M = 3.4$, $SD = 0.88$; $t(1612) = 0.84$, $p < 0.001$). Results also indicated that adolescents using Twitter were engaged less in exploration in depth ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.71$) compared to those who do not use the platform ($M = 3.4$, $SD = 0.83$; $t(1612) = 0.87$, $p = 0.03$). Similarly, adolescents using WhatsApp engaged less in exploring in breadth ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.71$) than those who do not use the platform ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.85$), $t(1612) = -0.89$, $p = 0.014$. Adolescents who identify with commitment scored higher in the use of the TikTok and Facebook (TikTok: $M = 3.8$, $SD = 0.88$; Facebook: $M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.77$) than those who do not use the two platforms (TikTok: $M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.84$, $t(1612) = -2.9$, $p = 0.03$; Facebook: $M = 3.8$, $SD = 0.71$, $t(1612) = 1.5$, $p = 0.02$). No significant results were found in the use of the Snapchat platform across all five dimensions.

Table 2 Frequency of social media use: proportion of population (N)

Frequency of use	Snapchat	WhatsApp	Instagram	Twitter	TikTok	Facebook
Daily	0.85 (1393)	0.84 (1387)	0.72 (1189)	0.68 (1117)	0.40 (655)	0.02 (34)
Weekly	0.09 (149)	0.10 (165)	0.17 (290)	0.14 (240)	0.16 (273)	0.01 (26)
Monthly	0.02 (41)	0.01 (30)	0.05 (93)	0.06 (99)	0.08 (145)	0.07 (127)
I don't use the platform	0.03 (55)	0.03 (55)	0.04 (65)	0.11 (182)	0.34 (563)	0.88 (1450)

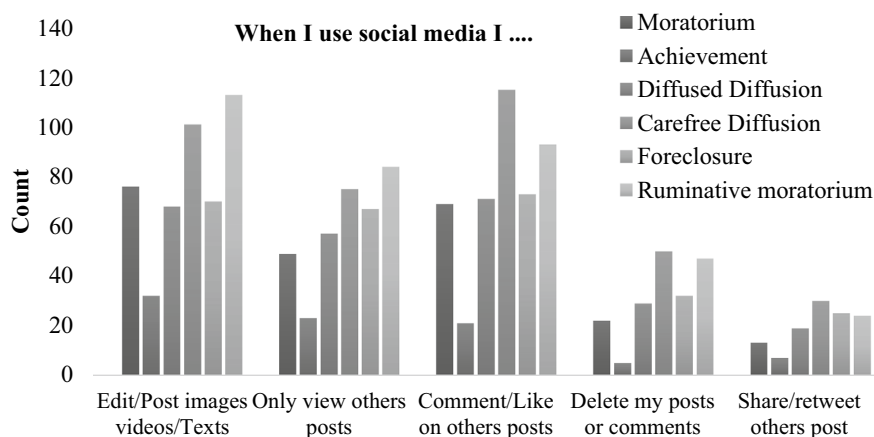


Fig. 3 Activities on social media in relation to identity statuses

A chi-square test was performed to measure if social media activities (e.g., editing or posting, viewing other's post, commenting or liking, deleting posts or comments, or sharing/retweeting other's posts) on different social media are influenced by adolescents' identity statuses. The results showed no significant relationship between adolescents' activities on social media platforms and their identity statuses, $X^2(4, N = 1560) = 3.27, p = 0.514$. Findings indicated that adolescents' activities on these platforms have no significance in influencing the process of their exploration or commitments (see Fig. 3).

4 Discussion

Few studies have considered how Saudi adolescents explore their identity via social media; the current study examined the relationship between Saudi adolescents' identity development and social media use. Relationships between the five dimensions (i.e., commitment making, identification with commitments, exploration in depth and breadth, and ruminative exploration) played substantial roles in clarifying dimensions of adolescents' identity and use of social media platforms (i.e., Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook). The relationships between these dimensions also reflected adolescents' identity statuses (i.e., Carefree Diffusion, Ruminative Moratorium, Foreclosure, Diffused Diffusion, Moratorium, and Achievement).

Commitment-related dimensions helped to clarify where adolescents were in the identity development process. Generally, adolescents who were committed or identified with commitments appeared more likely to engage in systematic reflective exploration rather than aimless exploration with no goal (Luyckx et al., 2008). Alternatively, fewer commitments suggest those adolescents were ruminating on their

exploration; that is, they were confused and directionless when asking questions or investigating choices related to their identity development.

The identity statuses most prevalent among Saudi adolescents who used social media platforms were Carefree Diffusion and Ruminative Moratorium, followed by Foreclosure, Diffused Diffusion, and Moratorium; few were in Achievement status. The finding that fewer adolescents were in Achievement status differed from previous studies, such as those employing the DIDS scale with adolescents in Japan (e.g., Hantano & Sugimura, 2017), Turkey (e.g., Morsunbul & Cok, 2014), and Greece (e.g., Mastrotheodoros & Motti-Strfnidi, 2017). This study was the first to adopt the DIDS scale to assess Saudi adolescents' use of social media platforms. Two factors identified in this study could explain why the results differed among this population: cultural norms and the use of social media platforms. The next section explains the findings in relation to Luyckx et al.'s (2008) classifications. This is followed by a discussion on differences in the study's findings compared to previous research, focusing on cultural norms and the use of social media platforms.

4.1 Saudi Adolescents' Identity Statuses

Consistent with Luyckx et al.'s (2008) findings, the results indicate that participants who were in Moratorium and Achievement established commitments, continued exploring in breadth and depth, and scored low on ruminative exploration. Although adolescents in Achievement and Moratorium generally engage in a continuous and adaptive exploration process, Saudi adolescents in Moratorium might feel less stable as they re-evaluate their existing commitments and search for alternatives (Mancini et al., 2015). By contrast, adolescents in Ruminative Moratorium and Diffused Diffusion tended to score from moderate to high on ruminative exploration with few commitments. Saudi adolescents in Diffused Diffusion and Ruminative Moratorium were preoccupied with questions about their identity but lacked direction to make progress in their identity formation. Only adolescents in Foreclosure and Carefree Diffusion were low in engaging in exploration. Nevertheless, Saudi adolescents in Foreclosure status scored high on commitment but low on all dimensions of exploration, meaning they were not re-evaluating their identity choices or exploring alternatives as they accepted identity commitments. Those in Carefree status scored low on all five dimensions; They neither identified choices or values to which they could commit nor felt the need to engage in a search or address challenges related to identity formation.

Similar to previous studies, findings from this study showed that ruminative exploration moved in the opposite direction of both exploration dimensions, especially in breadth. In general, adolescents exploring in breadth often gather information, ask questions, and search for alternative choices. In contrast, adolescents engaging in ruminative exploration constantly worry without deciding which direction they want to take in life, leading to some confusion during identity development (Beyers & Luyckx, 2016; Luyckx et al., 2008).

In this study, Saudi adolescents in Ruminative Moratorium and Diffused Diffusions appeared less proactive in exploring their identity issues because they were distracted by ruminative exploration. Adolescents in Ruminative Moratorium were distressed when trying to revise commitments that had already been endorsed. Although adolescents in Diffused Diffusion aim to fulfill their developmental needs, they ruminate without direction and lack prior commitments to propel them forward (Mancini et al., 2015; Morsunbul & Cok, 2014). Ruminating adolescents may become confused by limitless possibilities and have difficulty making choices or identifying with commitments. They may also experience strong feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity as they ruminate on the same identity questions (Luyckx et al., 2008; Morsunbul & Cok, 2014). Ruminative exploration can delay adolescents from identifying, committing, or engaging in reflective and adoptive progress in forming their identity, thus impeding identity formation (Luyckx et al., 2008). Still, strong rumination does not cause individuals to stop exploring various alternatives and choices for commitments (Beyers & Luyckx, 2016; Luyckx et al., 2008). Adolescents in Achievement or Moratorium status seem to set clear goals and explore continuously, largely untroubled by rumination (Luyckx et al., 2008). They evaluate their identity goals by gathering information, talking to others, and conforming to a sense of secure identity commitment (Markovitch et al., 2017). Adolescents in Carefree Diffusion exhibit a lack of engagement in challenges related to identity development and are reluctant to engage in identity-related questioning (Luyckx et al., 2008; Markovitch et al., 2017; Schwartz et al., 2011). Carefree adolescents spend their adolescence demonstrating an apathetic approach toward identity formation, especially regarding future domains (Schwartz et al., 2011).

Compared with younger adolescents, late adolescents might need to relinquish an early commitment for new cycles of exploration as they face a growing array of life situations while transitioning to early adulthood. This study's findings revealed that late adolescents (i.e., 18 and 19 years old) were more likely to be in Ruminative Moratorium, Diffusion, and Moratorium statuses. At this stage, many Saudi adolescents are either in their final year of high school or beginning their first year of college. This phase requires them to make significant decisions about their future career and education, which can be challenging to navigate (Kroger et al., 2010; Waterman, 1999). Adolescents in Moratorium status begin to re-evaluate their choices and commitments as they transition to the next life stage, adulthood. They also ask questions and navigate their prior commitments. Conversely, late adolescents in the three aforementioned statuses (i.e., Ruminative Moratorium, Diffused, and Carefree Diffusion) ruminate on questions about their future while navigating their identity due to an absence of prior commitments. They need support, as they may lack internal resources to help them move from maladaptive exploration to reflective and adaptive exploration. Their engagement in such a maladaptive process signals that they are trying to explore their identity and search for commitments but ruminate on questions that inhibit them from achieving commitments (Kroger et al., 2010). Adolescents in Carefree Diffusion need more intervention to motivate them to explore aspects of their identity before transitioning to early adulthood. They may lack internal or external resources to begin engaging in identity challenges and thus

require more validation than discouragement to ease their distress and indecisiveness when beginning identity work (Kroger et al., 2010).

Cultural interpretations, given norms, and expectations are essential to understanding these adolescents' DIDS responses. For instance, this study showed a less robust relationship between items on in-depth exploration (e.g., "I think about the future plans I already made" and "I try to find out what other people think about the specific direction I decided to take in my life"). Cultural restrictions could contribute to adolescents' reluctance to share their plans with family, possibly because doing so can be in contradiction with socio-cultural norms. As the results indicated, a growing gap exists in what adolescents consider appropriate to post online and what family members deem impermissible. These circumstances could influence adolescents' responses to these items.

4.2 Relationships Between Identity Statuses and Social Media Use

The DIDS scale helped to reveal whether adolescents were engaging in exploration with prior commitments when using social media or going online to find answers to their questions. Results of this study further suggest that when adolescents were wondering about what direction to take in life or if their future plans were inconsistent with their values and beliefs, they brought these questions to online spaces. These findings validate earlier research showing that adolescents use social media as a tool to explore their identity. However, the results differed from studies involving adolescents outside online contexts (e.g., Hantano & Sugimura, 2017; Luyckx et al., 2008; Mastrotheodoros & Motti-Strfnidi 2017; Morsunbul & Cok, 2014). This study's contribution thus lies in revealing how adolescents' online usage leads to identity statuses, featuring fewer commitments and more exploration. Adolescents on social media may exhibit a range of perspectives on commitments, as the fluid and dynamic nature of digital spaces offers a postmodernist lens that highlights the coexistence of multiple identities rather than a singular, unified identity. The combination of living in a conservative culture and having access to social media, where endless possibilities are presented, could each affect how adolescents evaluate their identity and shape their exploration and commitments. These circumstances raise further questions on how Saudi adolescents form their identity within a changing culture where social media use is increasing.

Overall, rumination plays a crucial role in influencing how Saudi adolescents share information on social media platforms. Considering cultural norms, Saudi adolescents can ruminate and have questions due to consistent changes occurring in the country. As part of the 2030 vision to globalize Saudi Arabia, many laws and norms are shifting, which can contribute to adolescent's confusion. This evolution especially concerns women's rights, the enhancement of public education, and the opening of the country to tourism. Adolescents could, therefore, be caught between

negotiating goals and wondering about their future plans from a global perspective. At the same time, they may also be establishing goals that may go against their families' wishes. For instance, Saudi medical schools are welcoming females, but not all parents approve of their daughters being involved in the medical field. Additionally, males and females can socialize on social media, but schools remain segregated. These examples highlight the conflicting standards between public and family expectations. Additionally, questioning gender roles and the challenge of balancing personal aspirations with cultural norms can delay adolescents' exploration process as they struggle to determine the right direction for their lives. These cultural factors manifested as distinct identity development trajectories between males and females in this study.

In this study, gender differences were observed, with females typically scoring higher on commitments earlier than males. Additionally, more males were found in Carefree Diffusion and Ruminative Moratorium statuses, whereas more females were found in Foreclosure status. These findings echoed previous work (e.g., Alhumaiddi & Albalushi, 2017; Meeus et al., 2011), indicating that female adolescents assumed statuses with stronger commitments, while males more often assumed statuses reflected by high exploration scores. Two factors contributed to Saudi females making or identifying with commitments earlier than males: developmental and environmental factors. Developmental factors, such as females reaching puberty earlier than males, can set females ahead in identity development (Klimstra et al., 2010; Meeus et al., 2011). Environmental factors, including cultural contexts and social norms, can hinder some females from freely experimenting with their identity (Kroger et al., 2010; Luyckx et al., 2016; Markovitch et al., 2017). The social settings in Saudi Arabia may provide some females with fewer opportunities for exploration, potentially leading them to accept commitments made by others or to adopt commitments based on family values and perspectives that differ from their own. Limited opportunities that permit adolescents to exhibit agency in exploring their identity can influence adolescents' identity development and formation.

5 Conclusion

This study examined Saudi adolescents' social media use in relation to their identity development. Adolescents' pursuit of an answer to the question "Who am I?" on social media may not be simple, especially for Saudis in late adolescence who must relinquish their commitments when beginning to explore new identity alternatives. This study effectively captures adolescents' use of social media platforms in the context of their identity development. Findings contribute to our understanding of similarities and differences in adolescents' use of these platforms. Although the six selected platforms vary in how they engage users in posting and sharing information, this study revealed how Saudi adolescents utilize these platforms based on their specific needs. (e.g., communicating with family and friends, searching for answers

related to their identity). Results also showed how engagement on different platforms intersects with the way adolescents navigate identities in these spaces.

Given its exploratory nature, the study utilized a cross-sectional design, leading to the emergence of several new avenues for research. For example, future studies could explore whether Saudi adolescents transition from Foreclosure to Diffusion or Ruminative Moratorium as a result of relinquishing commitments while in Moratorium status. Furthermore, this research could not determine whether adolescents were ruminating after a period of unsuccessful adaptive exploration when transitioning from mid-to-late adolescence. Therefore, longitudinal studies are needed to examine Saudi adolescents' identity development and transitions over time while using social media platforms.

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Chapter 18

The Impact of Technology on Maintaining Family Connections During the Pandemic: A Study of Qatari Families



Mohamad Zreik

Abstract This chapter explores how Qatari families used technology to maintain family connections during the COVID-19 pandemic. The onset of the pandemic led to unprecedented social isolation, challenging traditional family interactions. This study examines the role of various technological tools in facilitating family communication and the long-term implications of increased reliance on technology. It also addresses the scarcity of research focusing on Gulf families, offering insights into the specific cultural and familial dynamics of Qatar. Through document analysis, the research highlights both the benefits and challenges posed by technology during the pandemic, evaluating the effectiveness of different communication platforms and their impact on family dynamics.

Keywords COVID-19 · Family · Gulf · Qatar · Lockdowns · Technology · Social network

1 Introduction

The new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which triggered the COVID-19 pandemic, surfaced late in 2019 and quickly spread worldwide, posing serious health, economic, and societal concerns (Zreik, 2023). Social isolation, travel restrictions, and lockdowns were among the measures implemented globally to slow the spread of the virus. Although these actions were justified by the public health emergency, they significantly impacted cultural norms and family practices (Seyfi et al., 2023).

Family bonds have historically been nurtured and sustained by frequent face-to-face contact, shared activities, and close living quarters. The outbreak of the pandemic and the subsequent public health measures, however, presented a serious challenge to these customs. Family get-togethers, especially for large or geographically dispersed

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families, were curtailed due to restrictions on social events and physical contact as the fear of viral transmission grew (Gilligan et al., 2020). In addition, COVID-19 has had complex effects on interpersonal relationships among families. Family members who shared a home grew closer to one another as a result of the extra time they spent together. However, families that were already struggling with issues like job loss, homeschooling, illness, and uncertainty about the future found that the pandemic exacerbated their problems (First et al., 2021). The pandemic caused the physical separation of many families as a result of quarantine, travel restrictions, and illness. Consequently, many people experienced emotional distancing, loneliness, and worry (Tripathi & Singh, 2022). The forced seclusion severely disrupted the social support networks of elderly family members, who were at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 (Smith et al., 2020).

Given the significant impact the COVID-19 epidemic had on families, it is important to see how families, in cultural contexts like Qatar, dealt with these shifts and found ways to stay connected despite the difficulties it presented. Due to the sudden digital shift experienced in recent years and the reliance on technology for communication during the pandemic, understanding the role of technology in facilitating this process is particularly relevant. Although research into the impact of technology on families during the pandemic has been conducted extensively, studies focusing on Qatari families or Gulf families, in general, are scarce. This chapter sheds light on how Qatari families have used technology to keep their social support networks strong, considering the country's specific cultural background and family dynamics. This involves examining the pros and cons of using various technology tools and identifying which ones have proven to be the most useful.

The pandemic has forced people to rely on technology for urgent communication, and it may also have initiated a longer-term shift in the way families communicate and spend time together. Therefore, this study also examines these possible shifts and their consequences. This query comprises two main components. The first component investigates how people have used technology to stay in touch with their families during the pandemic's widespread disruption of daily life. Understanding the technological resources that Qatari households use and the reasons behind their usage is a crucial first step. The second component focuses on the future implications of excessive use of technology in keeping up with family connections. The potential for better communication and connection building must be weighed against potential drawbacks like screen addiction and the decline of face-to-face engagement.

2 Family and Technology

The global COVID-19 pandemic has affected various aspects of family life and relationships. Suppawittaya et al., (2020), highlight one significant consequence: the physical separation of families due to travel restrictions, quarantine, and isolation measures. This situation poses particular challenges for families living apart and for professionals in high-risk occupations such as healthcare (Dubay et al.,

2020). The disruption of physical separation disrupted people's normal routines and rituals, leaving many of them feeling lonely and alone (Kubacka et al., 2021). This distance strained in-person relationships, which traditionally serve as the cornerstone for emotional support and care within families. According to Iztayeva (2021), the pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of many people, especially older relatives who may have relied heavily on these social networks.

Research, such as that conducted by Avolio et al. (2014), indicates that while digital tools can facilitate immediate and continuous contact, they often alter the emotional quality of exchanges. For instance, the absence of non-verbal cues in digital communication can lead to misunderstandings and decreased emotional closeness. Further, research by Brown and Duguid (2017) suggests that an overreliance on digital communication might foster a sense of complacency in relationships, where the ease of connecting online supplants the efforts typically made to engage in more meaningful, face-to-face interactions. In contrast, Reis et al. (2021) highlight that digital platforms have not only bridged the physical gaps between family members but have also facilitated unique intergenerational exchanges. Younger family members often took on the role of digital mediators, introducing older relatives to new technologies. This shift has potential long-term implications for familial roles and interactions, as it alters the traditional knowledge dynamics within families. Studies by Correa et al. (2015) further elaborate on how these changes may lead to greater empowerment of younger family members while also enhancing the digital literacy of older generations.

While physical separation due to COVID-19 has posed significant challenges for families, the lockdowns have paradoxically enabled family members to spend more time together. Although closeness increases the potential for family strife, it has also provided an opportunity for some families to come together and enjoy quality time together (Singh & Sim, 2021). According to Cheng et al. (2021), family relationships have been severely tested by the demands of homeschooling, in addition to the stressors of job loss, financial insecurity, and health worries brought on by the pandemic. Besides, the pandemic also upended domestic responsibilities as parents struggled to balance their careers and their children's needs, blurring the lines of traditional caregiving duties. Power (2020) observed that the interruption of regular school and extracurricular activities had a severe effect on children's social development and mental health.

The global spread of the COVID-19 virus has demonstrated the value of technological means for maintaining human connections in times when personal contact is impractical. According to Stuart et al. (2021), people's reliance on current technological means of communication has expanded considerably due to the widespread implementation of social isolationist policies. Susanto et al. (2021) note that social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, video chat applications like Zoom and Microsoft Teams, messaging apps like WhatsApp, and even traditional communication channels such as phone calls and emails have all contributed to an increase in family communication. They allowed separated relatives to stay in touch regularly, virtually attending each other's milestone occasions and participating in the joys and sorrows of life.

Despite physical constraints, technology facilitated alternative forms of communication. Virtual gatherings of loved ones, whether to watch a show or play a game, became increasingly popular. Byrne et al. (2021) found that these online get-togethers helped people feel less alone and offered a welcome distraction from the fears and uncertainties of the pandemic.

Online resources have also increased the amount of time people spend volunteering and helping their communities. Communities have used the internet to do things like arrange virtual meetups, spread important information, and rally support for those in need. According to Zreik and Abunamous (2021), the emotional support and sense of community provided by these online groups were vital during a particularly lonely period.

Education technology was also equally important for young people to maintain social relationships. According to Shaytura et al. (2020), internet education platforms made it feasible for students to participate in virtual classrooms where they could study independently while still staying in touch with their professors and peers.

The increasing popularity of technological means of communication has both positive and negative outcomes. It has become increasingly challenging for low-income individuals and families to maintain an online presence as the digital divide between the haves and have-nots has grown wider. There are also negative aspects to the increasing use of technology for social connection, such as “zoom fatigue,” cyberbullying, privacy problems, and the impact on mental health (Cypers & Lopez, 2021).

Gulf Families During the Pandemic

The effect of lockdowns and other social isolationist policies on family life and relationships in the Gulf region has been a consistent focus of several studies. Furthermore, the strains on families resulting from factors such as economic pressures, health concerns, and the challenges of distance education have been extensively studied. According to Alabdulkarim et al. (2020), many people in the Gulf region felt emotional distress and loneliness because of the pandemic as it significantly disrupted customary family gatherings.

Carlier et al. (2020) have examined the impact of the epidemic on women in the Gulf region, focusing particularly on the mental health implications of increased childcare responsibilities at home. Due to school closures and the shift to online education, many women have had to assume greater responsibility for their children's education alongside their existing duties at home and in the workplace. This increased workload in caregiving has been noted to place significant stress on women, posing risks to their mental health (Carlier et al., 2020).

Ben Hassen (2022) points out that in many Gulf countries, extended family living arrangements are common, which influenced how families coped with and adapted to pandemic restrictions. These close-knit family structures often faced significant challenges due to social distancing requirements, fundamentally altering daily interactions and support systems. Moreover, Maspul and Almalki (2023) show that in the Gulf region, the reliance on communal gatherings is a critical cultural practice for maintaining social bonds. The sudden shift to virtual interactions, facilitated by

technology, was a significant adjustment that impacted the psychological well-being and social stability of families.

Apart from adults, children and teenagers also suffered severe difficulties as a result of the epidemic in the region (Bensaid & Brahimi, 2021; Cowie & Myers, 2021; Rider et al., 2021). These studies highlighted a spike in screen usage, shifts in sleeping habits, and worries about mental health and well-being.

Although there has been a rise in the use of digital communication tools and social media platforms during this time, research on how Gulf families, such as those in Qatar, have used these technologies to maintain social support networks is still in its early stages. Little research has focused on how technology helped families stay in touch during the Gulf region epidemic.

In light of this deficiency, the purpose of this study is to examine how technology helped Qatari families stay connected and cope with the pandemic. This focus is crucial for several reasons, including understanding potential long-term changes in family communication and relationships and gaining insight into how families coped with the epidemic.

Based on the research issue and relevant literature, the following three hypotheses are proposed for this study. The first hypothesis contends that despite the widespread spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus in Qatar, families have been able to keep in touch with one another due to technological advancements. During lockdowns, families used various technical tools such as social media, video conferencing applications, and other digital communication ways to keep in touch and offer each other emotional and practical support.

The second hypothesis posits that the success of various forms of electronic communication in keeping Qatari families connected varies widely. Some technologies may have been more widely used and successful than others due to factors such as availability, ease of use, and the types of interactions they facilitate.

The third hypothesis suggests that family dynamics in Qatar may change permanently as a result of the increasing use of technology for communication during the pandemic. It is hypothesized that the prolonged use of technology for communication during the pandemic period will have long-lasting impacts on the intimacy of relationships, the quality of communication, and the organization of family events.

These hypotheses form the foundational assumptions of the study, which will be tested against the findings of the investigation. The study's results may corroborate or alter these theories, adding to our knowledge of how technology affects family ties amid a global pandemic.

3 Research Methods

The chapter employs a document analysis approach, which entails gathering and assessing publicly available sources concerning the use of technology by Qatari families during the pandemic. Document analysis was chosen as the primary research method due to its ability to provide rich, non-intrusive, and contextual information.

Data for the study came from a wide variety of sources, such as government directives, social media posts, existing articles, reports, and survey results. These sources provide insight into how Qatari households made use of technology throughout the pandemic.

Social media platforms were particularly valuable, as they serve as venues where individuals express their own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. The analysis focused on posts, comments, and conversations that reference or imply the use of technology for communication and connection among family members during the pandemic. Numerous conversations and experiences were captured, shared, and archived online during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering a unique opportunity to investigate data sets directly relevant to the research question of how technology facilitates family connections. Additionally, longitudinal data from various stages of the pandemic allowed for an examination of both short- and long-term effects on family relationships.

In addition, government reports and pronouncements, such as lockdown measures, social distancing laws, and technological guidelines, were also analyzed to understand the context in which Qatari families were living.

Besides these sources, news pieces and features provided anecdotal evidence of the experiences of the Qatari families throughout the pandemic, while scholarly articles and studies provided theoretical frameworks and empirical findings that contextualized and assisted in data interpretation.

After an initial review, the documents underwent an in-depth, targeted examination. The information was categorized according to topics such as the various forms of technology, usage patterns, and effects on interpersonal relationships. The coding procedure was continuously updated and refined as more data was reviewed and new patterns emerged. The codes were then organized into themes, and the significance of these themes in answering the research question and testing the hypothesis was determined. This process included evaluating data, making inferences about the relationships between concepts, and recognizing trends.

The final step in the data analysis process was synthesizing and presenting the findings in a logical and comprehensible manner. The results were discussed in relation to the research question and hypothesis, exploring their implications for understanding the role of technology in facilitating family relationships among Qatari families during the epidemic.

To ensure the accuracy and validity of the process, stringent procedures were followed throughout. The data collection and analysis process was audited clearly, coding consistency was checked frequently, and contradictory evidence was sought out and considered.

4 Findings

Use of Technology by Qatari Families During the Pandemic

Similar to families worldwide, those in Qatar became increasingly reliant on technology due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These families showed remarkable flexibility and fortitude throughout the pandemic by finding creative ways to incorporate technology into their daily lives and routines. Due to restrictions on family gatherings during the pandemic, many people quickly became accustomed to virtual interactions and preferred to engage virtually instead of in-person. As a result, platforms like WhatsApp and Zoom have become standard tools for daily check-ins and group conversations. Qatari families have embraced the use of various forms of electronic communication, from basic text messages to audio–video calls, as part of their routine.

The impact that social media sites have on helping people stay in touch and share their stories was equally significant. Social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat were used as meeting places for friends and relatives to exchange information and support during the lockdown. These mediums also facilitated communication across generations, with younger family members frequently assisting their elders in using the technology.

Another area where technology use increased was in education. Families turned to online learning platforms to supplement their children's education as schools closed and remote learning became the norm. Parents grew more actively involved in their children's education, and siblings increasingly worked together on school projects.

Moreover, technology made it possible for distant relatives to partake in one another's lives and celebrate milestones together. Synchronized streaming services became a preferred means for families to enjoy movies and games together. Amidst the chaos and uncertainty of the pandemic, these online group outings helped everyone feel more at ease and connected.

However, the increased reliance on technology was not without its challenges. Issues such as digital literacy, screen time concerns, and online safety were particularly problematic for elderly family members. Additionally, families with limited access to technology faced greater difficulties in staying connected, which further underscored the pervasive issue of the digital divide.

Effectiveness of Various Technology-Based Communication Tools

Technology-based communication solutions proved their worth by allowing Qatari families to keep in touch and even grow closer together despite the pandemic's devastating effects. The adaptability and convenience of these resources allowed for virtual interactions among family members that closely mimicked their regular patterns of communication. WhatsApp and other similar instant messaging apps have proven to be invaluable for regular conversation. Their ease of use and familiarity made them suitable for even the least tech-savvy members of the household. With the use of these apps, family members were able to keep up with one another's whereabouts, communicate important updates, and organize their schedules.

More immersive communication experiences were facilitated by using video calling systems like Zoom or Skype. These mediums provided families with a place to talk together, complete with visual aids and a sense of common ground. Family milestones were commemorated over these channels, such as birthdays and anniversaries, keeping important traditions and rituals alive.

Social media platforms on the internet also served as an effective means for relatives to stay in touch. These networks enabled not only one-on-one interaction but also the dissemination of private news, photographs, and accounts of one's life. This method of interaction allowed people to feel like they were still linked and sharing experiences despite being geographically apart.

The efficiency of digital learning resources also merited attention. Continuity in kids' education was made possible by online learning platforms, digital textbooks, and mobile apps. These resources also facilitated the involvement of parents in their children's education.

Potential Implications on Family Dynamics

Despite the advantages of the technologies that made communication easier during the pandemic, there may be long-term effects on family relations due to the increased usage. These alterations are multifaceted, with both beneficial and negative outcomes, and have consequences that extend beyond the pandemic.

One significant repercussion is the changing family roles, particularly in relation to technological needs. Younger family members, more accustomed to using technology, have assumed the role of "tech guides," teaching their elders how to use various devices and software. This intergenerational sharing of wisdom has deepened family ties and promoted respect and understanding among members of the same family.

In addition, a greater participation of family members in shared activities has led to more cooperative family connections. For instance, parents are now increasingly engaged in their children's education due to the integration of technology in the classrooms. Similarly, the popularity of family-friendly activities such as viewing movies or playing video games online together has also grown (Sanborn, 2022). Sustained levels of participation have the potential to improve parent-child communication and foster more collaborative learning environments, as noted by Haris and Al-Maadeed (2021).

However, there is a danger that greater technology use could drive a wedge between family members. The "always-on" nature of digital communication can erode the distinction between work and personal life, increasing the risk of tension and burnout for those involved. There are instances of family members getting distant from one another when they withdraw into their online worlds to pursue personal interests or interact with friends and acquaintances (Subramaniam et al., 2021).

In addition to these impacts, changes in how people talk to one another have a less obvious but equally significant impact. Families are adapting to digital communication, where non-verbal cues and face-to-face interactions are increasingly being replaced by text and emojis (Sherbersky et al., 2021). This transition will affect how families deal with conflicts, communicate, and feel emotionally attached to one another.

5 Conclusion

This study's results provided valuable insight into how technology helped Qatari families stay connected throughout the exceptional COVID-19 outbreak. Families' resilience in the face of tragedy is exemplified by their use of technology to stay in touch, keep learning, and do things together. The effectiveness of these technological communication methods during the pandemic suggests a shift in how families connect with one another in the Internet age. There is a potential for more unified usage of technology in the aftermath of the pandemic as Qatari families continue to adjust to a digitally mediated way of communication. The widespread adoption of internet platforms for family connection during the pandemic may signal the beginning of a long-term trend. The ways in which families show their feelings, handle arguments, and stay close have also shifted as a result.

Shared online experiences, such as co-op video games, are on the rise, and they may help families broaden their entertainment options and grow closer to one another over time. Furthermore, younger family members' assistance to their elders in using digital platforms is indicative of an intergenerational exchange that may affect the distribution of power within the family. This situation presents an opportunity to build bridges between generations and encourage tolerance and understanding.

However, the increased use of technology and shifts in family dynamics also highlight a digital divide within families and society, particularly affecting those with limited access to technology or lacking digital skills. This may exacerbate existing inequalities and create new ones in terms of maintaining family connections and access to social support.

The ramifications of overreliance on technology are far-reaching and affect many areas, such as interaction, division of labor, and the dynamics of the family. Online gaming and virtual movie evenings, all of which rely heavily on technology, may permanently alter how families spend their free time together.

Studying Qatari families is essential as it expands our understanding of how technology can facilitate familial connectivity during challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Insights into the implications of increased technological integration over time can inform initiatives aimed at families in post-pandemic recovery. The necessity of digital inclusion is further emphasized, as is the need to address any inequalities in access to technology and digital skills.

The findings suggest several intriguing avenues for future research in the post-pandemic era. First, examining the long-term effects of technology use on family relationships can elucidate whether these changes signify a lasting transformation in familial communication. Second, understanding the digital divide within homes and communities is crucial for developing strategies to mitigate disparities. Lastly, exploring the emotional ramifications of digital communication inside families can provide insights into its role in strengthening or straining familial bonds.

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Chapter 19

TikTok: The Young Saudi Females' Village



Monerah Almahmoud 

Abstract In recent years, TikTok has gained significant popularity among Saudi youth. This study examines how Saudi adolescents of both genders use the platform to shape their identities by exploring various forms of self-presentation to shape an answer to the question of who I am as an individual within a society, which is a crucial part of adolescents' identity development. To explore this phenomenon, a survey was conducted with 1,074 TikTok users from all 13 regions of Saudi Arabia, gathering data on social media usage, self-presentation practices, and demographic information. Results showed that Saudi adolescents use this platform to interact with friends, acquaintances, and meet new people. There were differences between the self-presentation of both genders, where females were keen to present their true selves more than males. Young Saudi females are the most engaged in using and posting on TikTok, indicating that they use the platform as a third place to negotiate offline boundaries while navigating their identity away from adults' observation.

1 Introduction

During the Coronavirus lockdown in 2020, Google Trends showed an increase in downloading TikTok in Saudi Arabia (Haigney, 2020). Haigney argues that the platform was the best distraction for the public away from the pandemic (Haigney, 2020). Since TikTok was designed with populations 19 and younger in mind, it has grown in popularity, especially among adolescents (Bossen & Kottasz, 2020). Unlike many social media platforms, TikTok allows users to view others' posts without opening an account. Those with an account can share or duet videos with other content creators from different parts of the world.

Although the platform may appear disordered and unorganized to new users compared to other platforms (Burns-Stanning, 2020), adolescents may find it a space to experiment with different aspects of themselves. The easy access to TikTok

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and its entertaining features allowed youths to interact with the global community. Saudi adolescents, like many adolescents in the world, find online platforms such as TikTok as an essential tool to engage in trending cultures and experiment with different aspects of themselves through self-presentations (Choi & Sung, 2018; Kofoed & Larsen, 2015; McRoberts et al., 2017; Yau & Reich, 2018). Despite this, youth in Saudi, especially females, are also aware of issues associated with using social media apps and cultural limitations on what to share and present on these apps. While main concerns around TikTok have focused on user privacy and the spread of videos of teens in their personal spaces (Anderson, 2020; Kennedy, 2020), Saudi concerns about online privacy extend beyond security to include adherence to Islamic values, reputation maintenance, and careful social media navigation to respect cultural modesty (Abokhodair & Vieweg, 2016).

Although several existing studies have examined the impact of social media applications on the Saudi community (Abdellatif & Alibrahim, 2023; Al-Amer, 2023; Al-Bahlal et al., 2023; Almohammed et al., 2023; Almahmoud, 2021), few have specifically focused on how Saudi youth are using and expressing themselves on TikTok. Given its unique format and widespread popularity among adolescents, it is crucial to understand how it influences their social interactions and identity formation.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how Saudi adolescents utilize TikTok for communication and self-expression. Specifically, it will investigate how these young users present themselves on the platform and whether there are any identifiable differences in self-presentation between genders. By analyzing data from a diverse sample of TikTok users across all regions of Saudi Arabia, this research seeks to provide insights into the social and cultural interaction within this digital environment, contributing to a deeper understanding of the role of social media in the lives of Saudi youth. The nature of this study is exploratory. The data were drawn from a large dataset collected in December 2020, which aimed to explore Saudi adolescents' identity concerning their use of social media platforms.

This article has six main sections, excluding the introduction and conclusion. The first section looks at self-presentation during adolescence. This section reviews theoretical frameworks and empirical research on self-presentation during adolescence, emphasizing its role in identity development and social interaction in digital contexts. The second section explores TikTok as a third space for Saudi youth. It examines how TikTok functions as a virtual third space, enabling Saudi adolescents to transcend physical and cultural boundaries to express and negotiate their identities through creative and interactive means. The third section outlines the objectives and methodology focused on understanding how Saudi adolescents use TikTok for communication and self-expression. Following the methods section, the results section presents findings related to Saudi adolescents' communication on TikTok, including communication styles, content preferences, and interaction dynamics. The discussion section interprets these findings within the broader context of digital media, adolescence, and cultural identity in Saudi Arabia. It addresses implications for understanding youth socialization and identity formation in digital environments, exploring theoretical insights and practical implications for future research and interventions.

2 Self-presentation During Adolescence

Adolescents engage in self-presentation to facilitate social interactions, acquire social rewards, and construct their self-image (Chua & Chang, 2016). This involves consciously shaping and managing their online personas to reflect their desired identities, fostering connections with peers, and seeking validation and recognition within their social circles. As adolescents' cognitive abilities develop, their quest to answer a fundamental question, *Who am I?* becomes essential to realizing a stable sense of self. This exploration is driven by an innate necessity to forge an identity that prevents being misunderstood or overlooked during social interactions (Arnold, 2017). Goffman (1959) describes social interaction as a performance where individuals play the role of "actors," and their audience shapes their performance within specific contexts. He explained that actors seek to acquire information during their interactions with the audience to help them define the situation they are encountering and the expectations of the audience in the situation. Actors also strive to convey an identity consistent with the audience's expectations and the situation. As such, adolescents can perform an act for their followers while socially interacting with them on different platforms to acquire information about themselves. They can take their "self" in an online context as an object to explore their identity by presenting themselves to others via either written text or visual expressions such as photos and symbols such as emotional icons (Davis, 2010).

Adolescents form multiple self-views as they become more aware of themselves and others (Harter, 1999). These selves can vary based on their current perceptions of who they are, their roles, their understanding of themselves from childhood experiences, and their aspirations for adulthood (Harter, 1999; Markus & Nurius, 1986). They have an inner drive to search for their true self or center, which usually embodies mutual interaction between an adolescent's inner capabilities and outer contexts. Waterman (1999) explained that adolescents undergo a process of discovery and creation to answer the question *Who am I?* and they are obligated to discover their true self because it is there—but when they cannot find it, they are driven by creation to develop possible selves through personal exploration within the contexts they create. These two processes are neither mutually exclusive nor distinct in adolescents' lived experiences (Arnold, 2017). Higgins (1987) specified three domains of the self that emerge during adolescence: the true self (i.e., what an individual believes they are currently), the ideal self (i.e., what they wish or hope to be), and the ought self (i.e., what they feel obligated to be according to others). Adolescents' creation of ideal or possible selves reflects their search for their true selves which is the foundation of identity that conveys crucial aspects of one's sense of self (Waterman, 1982).

Exploration can be stressful due to the multitude of options for possible selves (i.e., individuals can project various identities) (Waterman, 1999), particularly heightened in online contexts. The discrepancies between one's true, ideal, and ought selves can induce negative emotions; the larger the discrepancy, the greater the distress adolescents face (Higgins, 1987). As adolescents advance in their cognitive development and self-awareness of their inner and social abilities and limitations, they are forced to

integrate different views of the self into a coherent one. This process can be stressful for adolescents as they explore their identity (Makros & McCabe, 2001). The conflict between the true self and other selves that guide behavior (e.g., ideal or ought) is unavoidable but beneficial for adolescents in their late and early adulthood (Kroger, 2006). As adolescents develop their identities, they also develop strategies to cope with stress caused by the discrepancy between the true and ideal self (Harter, 1999).

Social media, in general, provides adolescents with a platform to experiment with different self-presentations for online audiences. Compared to offline spaces, social media offers a more flexible context for Saudi youth to explore and create multiple selves. Online environments allow them to transcend cultural limitations experienced offline, enabling the exploration of identities that may be constrained in traditional settings. However, this freedom can also lead to significant discrepancies between the online personas they cultivate and their offline selves. For example, while social media enables Saudi youth to express identities that are not feasible in offline spaces due to cultural constraints, navigating these different personas during offline interactions can pose challenges and create social conflicts. As a result, Saudi youth may experience variations in self-presentation between online and offline contexts or find agency in experimenting with different identities online before implementing them in offline spaces.

3 TikTok as a Third Space for Saudi Youth

Social media platforms offer Saudi adolescents, particularly females, a distinct space to negotiate social boundaries that impact them offline. This digital environment allows them to explore and assert identities that may be constrained in traditional offline settings, thus providing a valuable avenue for social interaction and self-expression. Burns-Stanning (2020) explained that the third space is where both real and imagined reality meet, facilitating communication that bridges the online and offline worlds. In these third spaces, adolescents may experiment with different presentations of the self, relationships, and alternative forms of community.

Saudi Arabia has embarked on modernization and reform plans for globalization as part of its 2030 vision. While recent policy changes have empowered women in areas like driving, age of marriage, and face coverings, societal norms still restrict women's online socialization and sharing of visual content (Abokhodair & Vieweg, 2016). In addition, most sectors in Saudi Arabia have separate areas for men and women. However, social media has enabled young females to establish new friendships with members of the opposite sex, even though doing so is still considered socially unacceptable. Consequently, females keep these connections secret from family and only share the details with friends (Guta & Karolak, 2015).

As the feeling of belonging to a group that shares similar interests is essential for youth development, TikTok offers a vital space for youth to explore new communities that share similar interests or to come across possibilities to engage in

popular cultures with other youths around the globe. Youth often reflect the association with a group through clothes, behavior, and adaptation to the affiliated group's social norms (Brighton, 2007). In today's digital landscape, youth feel an increased sense of belonging to fan communities centered around celebrities, fueled by the pervasive presence of social media. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced with the emergence of both traditional celebrities and microcelebrities, individuals who actively cultivate their public personas through self-branding on social media platforms. Unlike conventional celebrities like musicians and actors, microcelebrities leverage social media to craft distinct identities, effectively shaping, and influencing their audience's perceptions and interactions (Khamis et al., 2017; Senft, 2013). Microcelebrities are connected directly with their followers on TikTok via direct messaging, live streaming, or duet videos, which results in high engagement from fans. Establishing interpersonal relationships with followers can build feelings of belonging and connectedness between users and these social media celebrities, impacting followers' behaviors, consumption, and ideologies (Nouri, 2018).

As Saudi females' social roles and expression are still constrained within Saudi society, they might have a desire for social change and to cross the boundaries that restrict their daily lives (Le Renard, 2014; Wheeler, 2020). The experience of having personal agency in forming relationships, joining new groups, interacting with celebrities from around the world, and sharing content with global audiences online has the prospects of bypassing several restrictions they experience in offline spaces. In this context, TikTok offers Saudi females a platform to create an alternate reality distinct from their offline lives. It also exposes Saudi youth to new ideologies that can reshape their views on gender roles, relationships with the opposite gender, and opportunities in traditionally male-dominated fields like military and engineering.

4 Methods

4.1 Participants

Participants for this study were middle to late Saudi adolescents aged 14 to 19 years who are users of the TikTok platform. They were recruited via invitations on different social media platforms, including the TikTok platform, to participate electronically in an anonymous survey in Arabic, intended to take approximately 12 min. A total of six social media accounts owned by Saudi youths were selected based on the number of followers (i.e., more than 5000 followers) and content related to adolescents' interests (e.g., fashion, well-being, school). Hashtags (i.e., #) were added to the invitations in topics related to adolescents to help distribute the invitations. Participants could scan barcodes or use a link provided by Qualtrics to access the survey. Participants were required to provide their agreement on assent; no parental consent was needed as the study carries minimum risk. The subjects completed two screener questions (e.g., what is your age group, and do you use social media); subjects who did not

Table 1 Gender and age group crosstabulation

			Age Group		Total
			Middle adolescent	Late adolescent	
Gender	Male	Count	206	259	465
		% of Total	19.2%	24.1%	43.3%
	Female	Count	294	314	608
		% of Total	27.4%	29.3%	56.7%
Total		Count	500	573	1073
		% of Total	46.6%	53.4%	100.0%

meet the inclusion criteria for both questions were excluded. Recruitment efforts spanned three weeks (December 11th–30th, 2020). The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the corresponding author's university.

A total of 1074 adolescents (Age $M = 17$; range 14–19 years; $SD = 1.4$; 83% females) who are users of TikTok were included in the analysis. About 46.6% ($n = 500$) were in their middle adolescence stage (age 14 to 17 years old), and 53.4% ($n = 573$) were in their late adolescence stage (age 18 to 19 years old). The sample was weighted to correct for gender; males represented about 43.3% ($n = 465$), and females represented 56.7% ($n = 608$) of the sample (see Table 1). Participants were adolescents from all 13 regions of Saudi Arabia.

5 Measures

Demographic Information Measure: The measure includes questions about age, gender, and location. The Saudi Arabian society is considered homogenous, and questions about tribe and religion would be sensitive and controversial and, as such, were excluded.

Social Media Measure: Questions in this measure were designed to explore participants' communications, self-presentation, and use (i.e., login to your accounts or view others' posts) and post on different social media platforms. Posting refers to engaging in building or sharing content on social media. Participants could choose from multiple options based on their frequency of use and posting. Participants' communications on different social media were obtained from two questions: who they communicate with when using each platform and their number of followers and friends. Participants had multiple options (e.g., friends, family, or relatives, meet new people, celebrities, or social media public figures, and indicate other communication types in a text box).

Self-presentation: The survey included three statements measuring self-presentation on social media (Choi & Sung, 2018; Higgin, 1987) based on the level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale (e.g., strongly agree to disagree). The statements measure if participants were presenting an ideal self online (i.e., I can show

who I wish to be even if it does not reflect their offline reality) or an actual self (i.e., I feel I can present who I am on social media), and if there were difference in presenting self in online and offline contexts (i.e., I generally present aspects of myself on social media that I cannot express in offline settings).

6 Data Analysis Overview

The data were first cleaned and prepared for analysis using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics for TikTok use and demographic information were examined to explore data normality and appropriateness for the planned analysis. Internal reliability was obtained using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.79$). Chi squares tests were used to measure differences between variance in self-presentations and usage/posting on TikTok between genders.

7 Results

Saudi Adolescents Use and Post on TikTok: Most Saudi adolescents were using TikTok daily, especially females in middle adolescence (see Fig. 1). Nevertheless, the majority of adolescents were viewers but not content creators. About 58.8% ($n = 631$) of adolescents in this sample say they do not post on this platform. Younger adolescents ($n = 231$, 21.5%) were more likely to post on TikTok than older adolescents ($n = 212$, 19.7%), and females were more likely to post than males. Out of the 41% ($n = 443$) who say they post on TikTok, 61% ($n = 271$) were females, mostly in their middle adolescence ($n = 147$, 33%).

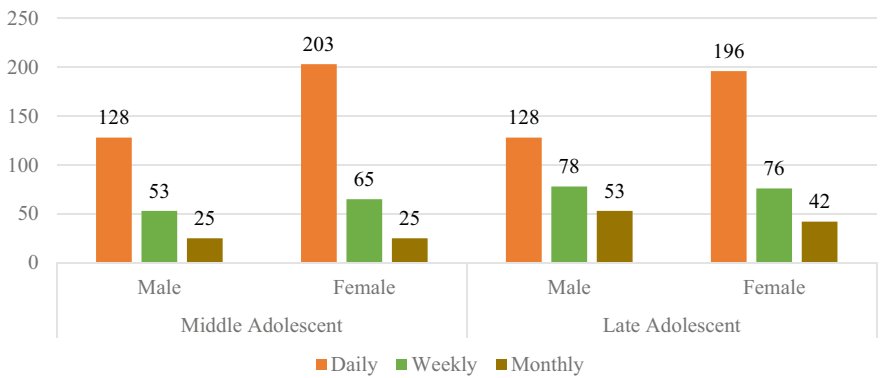


Figure. 1 Differences between gender and age groups in TikTok use

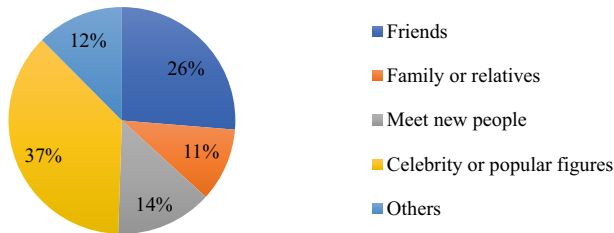


Figure. 2. Types of communication on TikTok

Saudi Adolescents Communicate on TikTok: Saudi adolescents used TikTok mostly to connect with others with whom they share weak ties, such as celebrities or public figures ($n = 494$, 37%). TikTok appears to be a space where adolescents hang out with friends ($n = 314$, 26%) or meet new people ($n = 209$, 12%). About 11% ($n = 126$) of adolescents indicated using the platform to communicate with family or relatives (see Fig. 2).

Self-presentation on TikTok: When adolescents were asked if they could present who they wished to be on social media, even if it did not reflect their offline reality, answers were split fairly. About 24% ($n = 259$) somewhat agreed, 20% ($n = 221$) strongly agreed, 20% ($n = 219$) were neutral, 21.5% ($n = 231$) somewhat disagreed, and 13% ($n = 143$) strongly disagreed. Differences were more divergent when adolescents were asked if they generally present aspects of themselves on social media that they cannot express offline, as about 42% ($n = 452$) strongly agreed, 26.3% ($n = 282$) somewhat agreed, and 12% ($n = 132$) were neutral. About 19.3% ($n = 208$) disagreed somewhat or strongly. Similarly, about 32.4% ($n = 348$) strongly agreed with the statement "I feel I can present who really I am on social media," compared to 23.1 ($n = 248$) who somewhat agreed. About 20.9% ($n = 224$) were natural, and 23.6% ($n = 253$) either somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Chi-square showed significant differences between genders in presenting their actual selves and differences in delivering aspects of themselves in an online and offline setting. There was a difference between both genders on how they feel in presenting who they are on social media $X^2 (4, N = 1074) = 41.09, p = 0.000$. More females either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement 34.9% ($n = 375$) than males ($n = 222$, 20.6%). Additionally, results showed that there were differences in presenting aspects of self on social media and offline settings between genders $X^2 (4, N = 1074) = 88.641, p = 0.000$. About 44.9% ($n = 482$) of females either strongly or somewhat agree that they feel they can present aspects of themselves online that they cannot in offline settings compared to 23.6% ($n = 253$) of males. Chi-square tests showed no differences between genders in expressing who they wish to be, even if it does not reflect their offline reality $X^2 (4, N = 1074) = 2.906, p = 0.574$.

8 Discussion

TikTok is a friendly space for Saudi adolescents to interact with friends and meet new people. Some Saudi adolescents expressed interest in using the platform to communicate with celebrities or public figures but not necessarily with people with whom they shared strong ties in offline contexts (e.g., family members and relatives). Although the platform's popularity among adolescents continues to grow, its use remains low among adults (Saudi Arabia Social Media Statistics, 2020). Adolescents, hence, consider TikTok a new space to navigate themselves away from adults' observation. There were differences between females' and males' self-presentation, where females were keen to present their true selves more than males, specifically young females who were active in posting and sharing on the platform.

The daily social interactions on this platform were not necessarily to create content but to view other users' posts and explore global trading cultures. However, young Saudi females appeared more involved in this contemporary culture and were likelier to engage in content creation and sharing than males. Additionally, females were more likely to express who they were or share aspects of themselves they could not share offline than males. These results implied that females considered TikTok a space where they could present aspects of themselves that they may not be welcomed or safe to express offline. Given Saudi culture's conservatism and limitations on female self-expression, TikTok provides a space where young Saudi females can freely present themselves, express their ideas openly, and experiment before sharing them in offline spaces. Besides, the TikTok platform appeared to enable female adolescents to experiment with different aspects of themselves in a fun and engaging manner.

Kennedy (2020) asserted that TikTok "can be read as a celebration of girlhood in the face of the pandemic" (p. 1070). She stated that during COVID-19, TikTok culture has contributed to the transformation of girlhood through what she called "bedroom culture" (p. 1070). TikTok encourages users to showcase themselves in unfiltered and playful ways, potentially portraying girls as independent and less concerned with privacy. This often involves sharing stories from around the house, even in personal spaces like bedrooms. However, as Kennedy argues, this portrayal of unapologetic girlhood on TikTok might challenge stereotypes related to gender and sexuality but also highlight disparities in privilege, particularly favoring white girls. She points out that TikTok's trend suggestions and popular videos often feature privileged white girls in domestic settings, engaging in light-hearted activities while disregarding girls from other backgrounds who might be advocating for their rights or participating in activism elsewhere in the world. This could raise questions about the adoption of new ideologies and ideas, especially regarding femininity, among young Saudi females exposed to such portrayals on social media.

Jackson (2020) argues that scholars must investigate how young girls perceive feminism, especially given the influence of feminist celebrities and microcelebrities on their audience. The prevalence of TikTok use and posting among Saudi females raises questions about the role of celebrity feminism in this demographic. Celebrity feminism refers to famous young females on social media who adopt a

feminist identity and popularize feminist ideals (Jackson, 2020). Through platforms like TikTok, these celebrities and microcelebrities may normalize key aspects of the fourth-wave feminist movement, including themes of sexual liberation, challenging toxic masculinity, and promoting female agency. However, there is a need for a cautious approach toward embracing values from TikTok. Keller (2015) discussed how celebrities, while raising awareness about gender inequality and power dynamics through mass media, often portray a skewed narrative of feminism. This limited portrayal, coupled with a lack of a nuanced understanding of feminism and gender equality, can be concerning for youth. In other words, when celebrities and media present a narrow or incomplete view of feminism and gender equality, it can have negative effects on young people. If young individuals only see a superficial or distorted representation of these issues, without understanding their full complexity or seeing real-life examples of feminist activism and gender equality in their daily lives, they may form misconceptions or not fully grasp the importance and implications of these concepts. This can hinder their ability to critically engage with gender issues, recognize inequalities, and advocate for positive change in society. She further highlighted that TikTok's algorithm reinforces an idealized image of teenage girls as beautiful, affluent, and carefree, marginalizing those facing economic or cultural disparities and actively engaging in social movements for change.

Catherine Rottenberg (2014) describes celebrity feminism as neoliberal feminism. This form of feminism highlights gender inequalities and emphasizes individual actions, responsibility, and personal choice as the primary solutions for achieving gender equality. However, it tends to overlook these disparities' deeper economic and sociocultural roots. Thus, celebrities and microcelebrities might use feminism to benefit their cause and gain popularity and profits rather than raise awareness around social and economic roots that slow women from progressing.

Although feminism has a long history in the West, the movement has a shorter history in Saudi Arabia. Young Saudi girls might find some core feminist tenets unrelatable and difficult to adopt in their sociocultural contexts. As a result, they may seek out communities that align more closely with their societal norms and values. Soedardi (2020) studied girls in hijabs using TikTok in Indonesia, a culture similar to Saudi Arabia's adherence to Islamic values and emphasis on women's honor, reputation, and modesty. Soedardi noted that girls wearing hijabs did not encounter obstacles to posting and expressing themselves on TikTok. The platform appeared to encourage girls to wear hijabs, as many users shared tutorials on wearing the garment and encouraged others to do the same. Additionally, many girls wearing hijabs established new communities on the platform where they could express themselves by creating dancing and voiceover short videos to reach viewers. Thus, Saudi females could find new communities that share similar values and beliefs while navigating choices to adopt new ideologies.

9 Conclusions

TikTok has become a crucial platform for Saudi adolescents to connect with the global community, particularly through interactions with celebrities and microcelebrities. Despite its greater popularity among adolescents than adults, TikTok is a third space where users explore crossing cultural boundaries and forming new relationships. This platform allows them to experiment with aspects of their identity online before navigating these identities in offline interactions with adults. Moreover, TikTok provides a unique opportunity for adolescents to engage with diverse ideological perspectives, such as celebrity feminism, prompting them to critically assess and potentially adjust their beliefs in light of global trends.

As a result, Saudi females are increasingly challenging traditional gender norms and becoming agents of change in Saudi Arabia. While many still adhere to conservative cultural expectations, some are actively testing societal boundaries on online spaces. Understanding these changes is essential for grasping how digital platforms influence the perceptions and behaviors of Saudi youth.

This study focused on analyzing the content shared and viewed by Saudi youth on TikTok, highlighting avenues for future research. Further investigation is needed to explore how celebrity-driven content influences young Saudi girls and its broader implications for shifting societal perspectives on women in Saudi Arabia. In addition, exploring the societal impact of digital platforms and celebrity influence on Saudi youth could provide valuable insights into shaping cultural norms and gender roles. Policymakers could use these insights to learn how Saudi adolescents engage with digital media to formulate strategies that promote youth empowerment while navigating societal expectations. Despite the study's limitations, such as its focus solely on TikTok, future research should include other platforms and employ longitudinal approaches to track evolving youth perspectives over time.

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Part III
Family Policies, Economy, and Family
Research

Chapter 20

Family Policies in the UAE, What is at Stake?



William Gueraiche

Abstract The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has paid a great deal of attention to families since the beginning of the century. Three factors may explain the rationale behind public policies. First, the demographic transition has transformed the “nationals” into minorities in their own country. To stabilize the local population, families have been thought of a strong leverage to maintain a high birth rate. Second, families are, with the tribal heritage, the main pillar of the “tradition”. The social contract between the ruling families and their citizens is the cornerstone of social and political stability. Third, with the promotion of women at all stages of the Emirati society, their role has been discussed.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has paid a great deal of attention to families since the beginning of the century. Like in the other GCC states, and developing states, the demographic transition has transformed the “nationals” into minorities in their own country. To stabilize the local population a high birth rate has been paramount. In the seven emirates, families are, with tribal heritage (socio-political relations), the main pillar of the “tradition”, the daily experience of being an Emirati national. The social contract between the ruling families and their citizens in the emirates is the cornerstone of social and political stability. In recent years, due to increased social pressure, the federation and the local governments have tried to address the main concerns related to families. The Emirati authorities have established different structures, from a ministry to local organizations, to assess the issues related to families. They launched programs and initiatives and drafted projects whose objectives have been to find a balance between tradition and modernity. What is really at stake with the implementation of new family policies?

The research is based on the analysis of the facts that occurred over the last decade. The official sources, the reports issued by different parastatal entities, as well as the dispatches of the national press agency WAM (Wakalat Anba’a al Emarat) reflect the official discourse as well as the changes made by federal and local governments.

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1 Getting to Know Emirati Families and Their Administration

Although the transformation of a traditional society is one of the main features of the Emirati society, few scholars have worked on the topic. As demographics is considered a sensitive topic, the authorities have been reluctant to issue regular data on the population—which is the foundation of all demographic analysis.

1.1 Counting Emiratis and Non-Emiratis

Quantitative data are mandatory to apprehend the long trend evolution of the UAE families—be it the size, age of spouses, of the firstborn, and so on. However, updated statistics are missing in the federation. Two organizations are supposed to supply them. First, the Federation Competitiveness and Statistics Centre (FCSC) in Abu Dhabi was established in 2020 under the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs. Its mission is to “develop and enhance the UAE performance in the area of global competitiveness, statistics and data, and to support the country’s journey in achieving UAE’s Centennial Plan 2071”.¹ Presented as such, it is a tool of public administration to implement policies. No wonder that the interface with the public, including the research community, is no priority. Second, the same could be said about its Dubai counterpart, Dubai Statistics Center (DSC). Reorganized in 2021, its ambition is to implement “a digital economy”.² The focus, in both cases, has been put on economic data. As far as demographics are concerned, most of the data is missing. The last census took place in 2010 but on the website, data mostly stem from the previous census (2005).

Nonetheless, scattered information may give some insights about family, for instance, with data by gender. Statistics about the gender ratio (women/men) available on the FCSC website show an evolution of the population from 2010 to 2019. The Emirati population—the addition of Emiratis and non-Emiratis living in the UAE—in 2010 was 8,549,998 million and 9,777,526 in 2019 (Table 1). If these numbers are not very far from other official publications,³ it’s nonetheless surprising that there were 6,395,966 million men in 2010 for 2,154,032 million women. In 2019, the breakdown ratio changed: 6,766,806 men for 3,003,720 women. It means that in fewer than 10 years, the discrepancy of $\frac{3}{4}$ men for $\frac{1}{4}$ women narrowed down to $\frac{2}{3}$ for $\frac{1}{3}$. In any other country, the ratio is close to 50/50. In the UAE, before the financial crisis, Dubai was booming. Construction workers worked seven days, night and day. After the completion of most of the projects and the diversification of the economy, there were fewer unskilled male workers and at the same time, employees could bring their families as long as their salary was sufficient. The only conclusion

¹ <https://fcsc.gov.ae/en-us/Pages/About-Us/About-FCSC.aspx> consulted on September 3, 2023.

² <https://www.dsc.gov.ae/en-us/About-Us/Pages/default.aspx> consulted on September 3, 2023.

³ On the FCSC site the 2011 population is 8,946,778 million. In 2011, the ministry of Interior gave 8.26 million (Guéraiche, 2017, p. 211 sq). After correction, it seems that the numbers are reliable.

Table 1 Emirati population by gender (2010–2019)

Year	Women	Men	Total
2010	2 154 032	6 395 966	8 549 998
2011	2 298 030	6 648 748	8 946 778
2012	2 428 283	6 713 315	9 141 598
2013	2 544 751	6 653 157	9 197 908
2014	2 648 905	6 565 277	9 214 182
2015	2 742 042	6 520 854	9 262 896
2016	2 823 141	6 537 834	9 360 975
2017	2 891 724	6 595 482	9 487 206
2018	2 950 609	6 680 357	9 630 966
2019	3 003 720	6 766 806	9 770 526

Sources FCSC

that we can draw is that there have been fewer single-male construction workers and more middle-class families in the UAE. Without further information, it's impossible to know more about migrant families as well as the Emirati families.

Official statistics are limited. To make any comparison, the point of reference would be the overall population. Its assessment is directly linked to the branding of the UAE and Dubai in particular. The basic principle is that population increase is an indicator of either economic stability or growth and therefore a healthy economy. If for some reason, the population decreases—a consequence of the financial crisis or of the COVID 19 crisis—the authorities do not release data. The Emirati population, within the UAE population, is a sensitive factor in the analysis of demographics, national stability and identity, and economic growth. With the modernization of the economy, the high GDP per capita hastened the demographic transition. Like in all developed countries, the decrease of natality triggers unease, not to say contributes to a crisis of identity. In the UAE, the ratio of Emirati to non-Emirati is pretty low (1 million for 9 million). The prospect of having fewer children and citizens increases the threat of losing control of the country. This is the reason why the breakdown of the Emirati population is not available. Instead of relying on data, the only option for understanding the Emirati family is the qualitative approach.

1.2 What Does Research Say?

The recent bibliography has barely explored Emirati families. First, a demographic approach is missing. The rarity of sources, especially available data regularly updated with censuses (see above) may prevent scholars from venturing in this direction, except in the field of migrations (Bel-Air, 2015). Because of the lack of data, the analyses remain shallow. For instance, late marriages, postponing the first birth, or higher-level of female education as causes of decline in fertility confirm what has

been demonstrated in all developed countries (Al Awad & Chartouni, 2010). Second, only a handful of anthropologists have spent time outside the globalized cities (Dubai/ Abu Dhabi but we could extend to Sharjah). Even if the UAE has been under the spotlight of globalization, the anthropological structures are still not well-known. In this regard, the local communities of the Northern Emirates (from Ajman to Fujairah) seem to have escaped the scope of the researchers. There are a few exceptions like William Lancaster and Fidelity Lancaster on Ras al-Khaimah (Lancaster & Lancaster, 2011), folklore (Hurriez, 2013), or Andrea Rugh (Rugh, 2007). Like the latter, the analysis is always a pretext to shed light on the striking contrast between what the Trucial states (1820–1971) were and the level of development of the global cities (Al-Suwaidi, 2018). Miriam Cook offers a good example of a new orientalism (Cooke, 2014).

Over the last two decades, the research on Emirati families has taken three directions: health, business, and social changes. Health issues are caught between the devil, a postmodern society, and the deep-blue sea, how traditions may affect public health. Eating disorders can serve to illustrate the former: how the media but also parents exert influence over the new generation of Emiratis' eating habits (Hasan et al., 2018). Medically speaking, diabetes (type 2) has been one of the lingering issues in the federation (Bani-Issa, 2011; Al Bataineh et al. 2020). If the change of diet impacts public health, certain traditions such as consanguineous marriages take their medical toll as well. Even if Emirati families are ethnically diverse (Bedouin, Ajami, Baluch, etc.), marriages lead to high frequencies of recessive conditions (birth defects, genetic disorders, congenital malformations, etc.) (Al-Gazali & Ali, 2010). The role of a family business in the UAE has also become an area of research and rightly so. Family businesses account for more than 60% of the GDP and use over 80% of the Emirati workforce (Jasir et al., 2023). Supported by the authorities, they should be an asset and not a liability for the national economy. But their organization should be updated (Almezaiani, 2013; Bodolica et al., 2015). To be sustainable, Emirati families have to consider their business in terms of continuity and survival (Oudah et al. 2018). In a world of male managers, Emirati women struggle to find their place even if they run their own small or medium-sized company (Erogul & McCrohan, 2008; Tlaiss, 2014). Women are also questioned when it comes to social changes. In this last direction of research, the traditional society is always presented as a model threatened by modernity. Daughters want to have their say in the choice of their husband but also to marry later after college if possible (Schvaneveldt et al., 2005). But not all of them feel confident enough to overcome family expectations (Crabtree, 2007; Jabeen, 2010). Emirati women feel that they are the bearers of tradition and they may be more conservative than foreigners living in the UAE (Wang & Kassam, 2016). Marital happiness depends on many factors such as education, family seize, religiosity, etc. (Al-Othman, 2012). With good intentions, families also undergo social pressure that leads to disputes (Al Gharaibeh, 2015) or the lack of communication within the family (Gjylbegaj & Abdi, 2019).

Given the social contract between the authorities and the Emirati citizens, the governments (local and federal) are supposed to find solutions, meaning, to implement public policies for maintaining harmony among Emiratis. The relations between

the authorities and the families should therefore be examined closely. Since the exploitation of oil in the late 1950s, the UAE has been a rentier state. Royalties coming from the oil industry did not change the social contract that pre-existed. The relationship between a family, the father, and the local rulers in each emirate went two ways. The Emiratis owed their rulers full obedience. In “exchange”—even if the term is not appropriate—the rulers must act to guarantee the welfare of their people. Centuries of interpersonal relations led to a special relationship based on non-written rules. The rulers had to be generous. With a high level of royalties, the local communities expected recognition as well as generosity from their rulers—generosity proportional to their position in society (proximity to power, family name, and lineage, etc.). Finding a job for a young adult is perhaps the main legacy of the long-term entrenched tradition. To a certain extent, oil revenues disrupted the old social contract which was adequate for tribal organization, when societies lived near to point of rupture in a small area. Global economic dependency on oil has channeled immense wealth towards some rulers, namely Abu Dhabi and Dubai which exploited resources at the end of the Trucial States (1820–1971). This is also why local rulers, aware of the unequal distributions accepted the federation (except Ras Al Khaima) on the condition that they keep their power over their people (Friedman, 2020, p. 13–14). But the issue never publicly discussed relates to the distribution of wealth? While education and healthcare are taken for granted, housing, for instance, remains unclear. Julia Grauvogel and Christian Von Soest point out that the Gulf rulers maintain legitimacy because they demonstrate their “performance”, in other words, their ability to satisfy their people’s needs (Von Soest & Grauvogel, 2017, pp. 290–291). Scholarship shows that in all rentiers-states, the local populations have adopted a more civically passive, and certainly a more demanding attitude than before oil exploitation (Mahdavi, 1970; Gengler, 2015; Najmabadi, 2015).

2 Public Administration of Families

Different structures emerged over time. Their role is to channel social demands and to prepare the official response in line with the different economic and social plans.

2.1 *Local and Federal Structures*

What is the link between the Emirati families and their administration? As mentioned above, when they need help, the first step is to seek help locally (within the emirate where they live). When it does not tackle the problem, federal resources could be used, with the mediation of local administrations. This procedure is usually for medical issues (to access state-of-the-art medical facilities) or higher education (getting a scholarship for studying abroad). For other family problems, the *modus operandi* is not as clear as in the previous domains because barring a few exceptions such

as housing, the core problem is not financial resources. To be effective, Emirati leadership must have a direct line to its citizens on a grassroots level: it can intervene in cases of intermarriage or decreased natality. The response can be carried out through federal institutions.

Different structures, from local organizations to the Ministry of Community Development (MOCD), contribute to the implementation of the public policies. Female figureheads lead organizations in Sharjah, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi engaged in family wellbeing and a new long-term vision of the modern Emirati family. The Family Development Foundation (FDF), created in May 2006, was led initially by HH Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, the “Mother of the Nation”. Today Maryam Mohammed Al Rumaithi is Director-General and the figurehead of the organization. Its objective is to “foster a healthy family system based on cohesion and stability” (WAM May 10, 2023). Aside from the FDF, in the government of Abu Dhabi, the Family Care Authority (FCA) works under the supervision of the Department of Community Development (DCD). There is a counterpart institution in Sharjah, the Supreme Council for Family Affairs. At the federal level, the major change occurred in February 2016. The Ministry of Social Affairs changed its name to the Ministry of Community Development. Mariam bint Mohammed Khalfan Al Roumi, minister, explained that the name reflected the new objectives of the cabinet. Aligned with the government’s new orientations, the ministry would shift from “social care to social development” (WAM February 9, 2016). The idea implies to go beyond the giving/receiving act but instead, building together the Emirati of the twenty-first century. The first decision was to incorporate the Marriage Fund Corporation into the ministry. Grants for the UAE citizens were a “strategic priority to build a cohesive society which derives its strength from UAE family life” (WAM March 23, 2016). Najla bint Mohammed Al Awar preceded Hessa Essa Buhumaid who took over in October 2016. The new minister had a broader understanding of community development. “Satisfaction” and “happiness” guided her action. Supporting all members of the community and developing specific services (not specified but most likely senior citizens, “people of determination”, etc.) or assistance to them should be the main task of the ministry. This is a new direction for the Emirati authorities as the focus appears to be shifting from largely financial guardianship to social guardianship in the face of external physical and cultural forces that are inescapable even in traditional Emirati family life. From an administrative point of view, the MOCD would define “policies, legislation, services and initiatives provided to all members of society and will support stability and cohesion in the Emirati family” (WAM October 24, 2017).

In addition, ad hoc committees have been established to help family business for instance. In 2006, Dr. Omar Bin Sulaiman, Director-General of the Dubai International Financial Centre Authority (DIFC), announced the creation of the “Family Office” in the financial center. Inasmuch as more than half of the companies were family-owned in the UAE, the stability of the overall economy was at stake. According to the director of DIFC, 95% of family business did not survive the third generation of ownership. Unfortunately, nothing more was explained. This number arguably prompted the Emirati authorities to provide assistance (WAM April 1, 2006) and begs further research to understand how economic, social, and familial changes,

and changing societal forces are hindering generational participation in a thriving internationally charged local economy.

Finally, a Coordination Council for Family Policies (CCFP) gathered in November 2021. With the development of the local and federal entities, the council has tried to make the different parties work together. The CCFP, in addition to facilitating communication among the public authorities, serves as a link between the public and the private sectors (WAM, November 8, 2021).

2.2 *Families in the Emirati Vision*

Against the backdrop of modernization of the economy, the Emirati public authorities have been concerned about the disruption of the Emirati family's traditional lifestyle. The "old generations" perceive the spread of the Dubai model as a main cause of the societal disturbance. This social disturbance is unclear, aggregating the challenge of the patriarchal model, changing relations between the generations, contradictory expectations from the different members of the family, the elusive tensions resulting from *wasta* and meritocracy, and identity crisis (Guéraiche, 2017, pp. 190–191) among others. Developed countries have faced the demographic transition at the outset of their industrialization. Given the social contract between the Emiratis and the rulers, the former looked to their rulers for guidance and support. The authorities were faced with an impossible situation: growing into an international commercial hub and competing on the world stage as a world power, while maintaining the traditions of the family unit. The best illustration of a mitigated crisis remains the promotion of women. Sheikh Zayed, the first president of the country (1971–2004) created the first university for women in the Arab world. Until today, the federal and local governments have made it easier for Emirati women to work in the administration or in the public sector. However, in this example as well, the dissonance between traditional and historical norms and socio-political appeasements remains: the increase of the educational level and the resulting postponement of the first childbirth has been on a collision course with traditional familial practices.

Vision 2021 was the first federal plan to bring families to the realm of public policies. In 2010, the federal government launched the plan with the objective to reach a new stage of development for the Golden Jubilee of the federation in 2021.⁴ More than 300 officials, all governmental and parastatal entities as well as stakeholders from the civil society were mobilized to bring their expertise and experiences. In 2014, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum signed a national agenda, the roadmap towards Vision 2021. 52 Key Performance Indicators were defined with specific regard to families (education, healthcare, society, and housing). Six national priorities emerged. Cohesive society and preserved identity was the first one and could

⁴ <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/strategies-plans-and-visions-until-2021/national-agenda> consulted on September 5, 2023.

be understood as a response to the unease in the Emirati family.⁵ The “Family cohesion index” is probably the cornerstone of Vision 2021. The Ministry of Community Development intends to assess “relations between parents, parents’ relations with children, relations among children, relations with bigger families, and upbringing of the new generation”.⁶ The Vision insists also on unity, the old motto promoted during independence after the British withdrawal announcement (Heard-Bey, 1982). The Emiratis will be united in Prosperity, Knowledge, Destiny, and Responsibility.⁷ However, this “unity” needed to be clarified, at least with regard to the other segments of the population in the UAE. The plan implied that this unity concerned the citizens and not the foreigners. The stability of the country has relied on security (Guéraiche, 2022) and especially on the visa system. This is how we may understand “Cohesive families”. Vision 2021 aims to “strengthen family ties and endorse the family’s core role in preserving the identity and culture of society” (WAM May 8, 2016). This clarification is significant. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum eliminated ambiguities. If the UAE wants to be among the most competitive countries in the world, strengthening families would remain its solid foundation. In parallel, the idea of a pledge emerged.

The “Family pledge” was an attempt by the authorities to create a space within modernity to retrieve tradition. The Ministry of Community Development (MOCD) elaborated a campaign to involve all community members. The parents, for instance, were encouraged to sign the pledge with their children at their schools. Shahnaz Abdul Razak, a member of the Federal National Council (FNC), gave her interpretation of the pledge. She remembered, when she was young, that she was surrounded by different family members, uncles, and grandfathers, all living in the same house. She regretted that she sees her cousins once a year, at best.⁸ Family was the main space to cultivate a traditional sense of community. A campaign was organized to honor family traditions with a hashtag #CohesiveFamilies2021. The Ministry engaged also media influencers (WAM May 8, 2016). But it did not last long. The “pledge” was in fact the social link created over generations outside the reach of public authorities. Yet, this link had slowly been eroding: the family unit is now neither physically nor emotionally cohesive as it once was. The elders may live alone and the young have lives beyond the physical and conceptual reach of their families.

In March 2018, the UAE cabinet adopted the National Family Policy. The Ministry of Community Development (MOCD) prepared it. Instead of the pledge and focusing on the family members’ duties, the discourse and objective changed: the goal is for the Emirati families to lead “a happy and prosperous life”, still in line with the UAE Vision 2021. According to Hessa Bhumaid, the new policy sought to help

⁵ The other are 2. Safe public and fair judiciary 3. Competitive knowledge economy 4. First-rate education system 5. World-class healthcare may also have some familial implications 6. Sustainable environment and infrastructure. *Opus cite*.

⁶ Cohesive Society and Preserved Identity, p. 3.

⁷ <https://www.vision2021.ae/en/national-agenda-2021/list/environment-circle> consulted on September 5, 2023.

⁸ Emmanuel Samoglou, UAE Vice-President announces national family-centered campaign, *The National*, May 8, 2016.

families cope with the stresses of modern life while promoting a stable family life for generations to come. The policy consisted of six major topics: marriage, family relations, balance of roles, child protection, family protection, and the provision of family services to achieve “family happiness”. The minister pointed out some issues regarding childcare. In 2014, women accounted for 46% of the workforce in the country and 60% in the administration. “Most parents today have jobs and hire nannies to look after their kids when they are away” (WAM March 25, 2018). Hessa Buhumaid hinted that it was not right.

With Vision 2021, the Emirati authorities tried to give some responses to lingering family problems. In 2021, the MOCD established itself as the main institution of families. Its purpose was twofold: short-term implementation and long-term planning (WAM November 11, 2021). In May 2022, Hessa Buhumaid chaired the first meeting of the Coordination Council for family policies to discuss new topics such as the licensing of family counselling (WAM May 29, 2022) with no further description because it was still a project.

3 Families, Mirror of Societies

This blend of enduring and new issues shows that families have been largely integrated into the governments’ policies. All of them, old and new are complex and require not comprehensive but specific programs.

3.1 *Marriage, the Solution to a Drop in Natality?*

Marriage has been identified as the main problem and the main solution for Emirati families. Few scholars have worked on marriage in Emirati society, most likely because of the lack of data. However, the decrease in natality drew their attention. The level of education and inclusion in the workforce have an impact on natality. At the beginning of the century, an Emirati young woman who did not attend college had on average between four and six children. In contrast, a female college graduate would have between one and three (Al Awad & Chartouni, 2010). Hessa Buhumaid interprets late marriage, spinsterhood, and divorce as “posing serious obstacles in the way for achieving UAE development goals” (WAM March 25, 2018). The local and federal governments have been generous with marriage grants. Indeed, the main statement coming from Emirati society is that early marriage is hindered by the lack of financial resources. Right after its creation, the MOCD distributed \$3,270 million to 358 families (WAM March 23, 2016). Three years later, the grants doubled (\$7.13 for 374 beneficiaries). “The goals of the marriage grants coincide with the vision of the UAE government and the reflect the ministry’s objectives” stated the minister (WAM April 20, 2019). However, grants have been a limited tool—probably because the problem is not about money. The couple would be left with the responsibility of

funding housing which inevitably falls on the federal government, seen as benefactor of the Emirati people. As we can see in the table (Table 2), the number of marriages between Emiratis (see Table 2) is relatively stable between 2015 and 2021 (around 6/7,000). If we compare the total number to the grants, fewer than 5% of Emirati couples need money for their wedding. Beyond the financial incentives, the definition of a “Marriage Encouragement Policy” (WAM December 19, 2020) remains elusive. The funds show that the Emirati authorities mean to enhance marriage trends between Emiratis to keep up with other marriage trends.

Divorce is another indicator of the evolution of Emirati society in recent years. Even if we have scattered information, we can compare marriages to divorces. In 2021, according to the FCSC, there were more than 2,000 divorces. It means that almost one in three marriages end up in divorce (Table 3). The breakdown by age reveals that almost half of the spouses were below 30 (41.2%). Therefore, nearly one in two marriages between young Emirati spouses ends in divorce. Certainly a high number, but this is also in addition to the data that divorce is more often prompted by the woman. This is a significant fact in relation to women’s shifting roles and mobility in Emirati society, whether via education, employment, fertility, or trans-cultural engagement and exposure. The data also points to a significant shift in female empowerment as it presents itself in the marriage and the family, as well as a possible decline in the power of traditional tools, such as loyalty, and familial controls to contain the family unit under conditions of social change. The Abu Dhabi Judicial Department (ADJD) piloted the Al Solh Khair (Reconciliation is better) initiative. According to the local ministry, the procedure allows the spouses

Table 2 Marriages in the UAE 2015–2021

	Marriage Emirati male and Emirati female	Marriage Emirati male and non-Emirati female	Marriage non-Emirati male and Emirati female	Marriage non-Emirati male and non-Emirati female	Total
2015	7 202	2 013	838	6 195	16 248
2016	6 559	1 887	833	5 649	14 928
2017	6 895	1 965	633	5 673	15 150
2018	6 400	1 978	717	5 709	14 804
2019	6 322	2 002	612	5 973	14 909
2020	8 817	2 145	685	6 006	17 653
2021	7 653	2 325	660	7 741	18 380

Sources FCSC

Table 3 Registered Emirati divorce contracts by age groups of Spouses in 2021

Wife age group	Husbands' age group										
	%	Total	55 +	50–54	45–49	40–44	35–39	30–34	25–29	20–24	> 20
>20	2.6	57	0	0	0	1	2	4	22	27	1
20–24	17.7	382	1	1	1	0	10	63	202	104	0
25–29	20.9	454	3	1	11	15	54	164	193	11	0
30–34	17.3	375	1	11	13	49	117	154	29	1	0
35–39	15.3	331	17	15	28	98	116	42	11	4	0
40–44	12	259	16	34	56	83	51	14	3	2	0
45–49	7.3	157	30	39	47	28	10	1	2	0	0
50–54	3.8	83	38	22	9	4	4	3	2	1	0
55 +	3.1	67	55	5	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total 100%		2 163	161	128	172	278	364	445	465	150	1
%		100	7.4	5.9	8	12.9	16.8	20.6	21.5	6.9	0

Sources FCSC, Ministry of Justice, DSC, RAK CSS

to “resolve their differences amicably by providing them with the necessary skills to overcome the difficulties they may encounter in their marriage” (WAM, January 23, 2023). ADJD delivers lectures, workshops, counselling meetings with the objective to enhance family stability. Turki Al Qahtani, senior family counselor pointed out the importance of “respect, affection, loyalty, tolerance, forbearance and forgiveness, and a set of upright principles and ideals the family should embrace” (WAM, January 23, 2023). In 2022, ADJD revealed a 3% drop in divorce compared with 2021, a drop attributed to the reconciliation pilot program. The department underlined its efforts to divert the cases to Alternative Dispute Resolution Division. With the same spirit of conciliation, in 2022, the ADJD managed to resolve almost all the family disputes (99.2%) and almost two-thirds of the disputes in the emirate. To ensure sustained reconciliation, the department follows up to uphold “compliance with the reconciliation agreement and to address any obstacles that may arise during its implementation” (WAM, February 20, 2023).

3.2 New Society, New Family Issues

Permanent structures and public discussions within the Emirati society have brought new angles of perception with regard to the role of the elderly. What was the norm in the family unit, the prominent role of the elders of the family, and the priority of their care and inclusion have also shifted. In May 2019, the MOCDD launched a program “We are your family”. Its objective is to consolidate family cohesion. The authorities encouraged the community to interact more with senior citizens—be they relatives

or neighbors. Alia Al Joaker, Director of Community Development Department at the ministry, emphasized the importance of getting closer to the elderly to benefit from their experiences (WAM May 22, 2019). Such an intervention in the life of the family tells of the growing exclusion of the elderly from the everyday life of the family unit. The Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research published a study of the aging population in the UAE (Almarabta & Ridge, 2021). Shahed Almarabta and Natasha Ridge shed light on the changing role of the Emirati elderlies in families. Their report analyzed the different causes, namely social and economic, and how public policies have to adjust to the new social trends. Even if the Emirati population is still young with a median age of 32.6 years in 2020, by 2050, the Emirati above 65 will rise to almost 20% (Almarabta & Ridge, 2021 p. 4). The Emiratis appear to still believe in their duty to look after their elderly but also insist that the financial burden should fall on the government as well. In addition, the healthcare system is not ready to support the growing number of elderly Emiratis. This increase will put pressure on local and federal funds (Almarabta & Ridge, 2021 p. 34). The Emiratis respect the elderly, and 80% consider that the society is obliged to care for them. The modern life with adults working, men and women alike, alters the traditional lifestyle. Only 35% reported visiting the elderly daily (Almarabta & Ridge, 2021 p. 16), implying that many of the elderly no longer live with their children. The creation of a ministry of aging and age care (Almarabta & Ridge, 2021 p. 34) could be a solution for the public authority but sustaining the old family traditions would probably be a better one.

Surprisingly, violence has been one new topic discussed within the MOCD and the different organizations in the UAE. In 2018, the federal government took measures to expand Wadeema Law, the UAE's Child Right Protection Law. This law, previously implemented in Dubai and Ajman, protects the rights of the children (WAM September 23, 2018). A year later, the law was more comprehensive. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, Hessa Bumuhaid presented a new Family protection policy. In December 2019, several initiatives took place, such as the creation of a new database to link all entities related to family protection. The minister stated that the UAE would not tolerate any violence towards "children, elderly people or women". The policy defined various forms of violence: "physical violence, verbal violence, psychological or moral violence, sexual violence, economic violence and neglect" (WAM December 16, 2019). After the COVID crisis, the debate took place against the back-drop of gender balance, namely, to reduce "cases of violence and abuse" against women. In this regard, Dr. Mugheer Khamis Al Khaili, Chairman of the Department of Community Development in Abu Dhabi suggested a framework to rehabilitate victims of violence and abuses in Abu Dhabi (WAM December 7, 2021). Very little has been said about this policy but in August 2022, the National Human Rights Committee noted again that the federation is working to prevent "domestic violence" (WAM August 30, 2022).

The sum of the data above shows, first and foremost, that the Emirati authorities have been closely following Emirati societal bonds with respect to changes in society and culture since Dubai was launched onto center stage globally, and since Dubai and Abu Dhabi became rentier strongholds. What is more, the sheer number of

authorities, councils, and local as well as federal bodies which keep a finger on the pulse of changes and needs of the modern Emirati family indicates that the federal government is not unaware of the threats to the stability of its society and is intent on maintaining this stability through planning, compromise, and mitigation. The Emirati authorities work to sustain family traditions in the society. However, they face the dilemma of encouraging modernization of the economy and therefore culture, which directly impacts the traditional lifestyle. Promoting women has been successful in moving society towards modernization but the movement has impacted the woman's role within the family as well as demographic sustainability. By the same token, young educated Emiratis are moving away from the home, physically and culturally, to participate in the Emirati workforce, and yet this movement away from the homestead has created shifts in family dynamics with demographic repercussions. This is not dissimilar to shifts in generational family-owned businesses which are seeing discontinuity due to shifts in career opportunities and not dissimilar to shifts in generational solidarity which is seeing a growing elderly population relying on governmental protections rather than the traditional oversight of the family. The public policies defined and implemented by the governments witness the difficult quest for a balance between tradition and modernity. While the demographic data of the country is highly guarded by the authorities, what is available shows that growth is still taking place. The survival of the country, in a competitive world, is what is really at stake. At some point, the social contract between local rulers and their people may also be given to change.

Beyond family policies, what is at stake in the UAE is no less than the redefinition of social values. What matters most? Are familial connections more important in a tribal society or is the survival of the Emirati nation crucial in a highly competitive global environment? At some point, decision-makers have to choose the former or the latter. Looking back at Western societies, the breakdown of families was the cost of industrialization's success. One way or another, the right balance between keeping alive traditions and embracing modernity (under the disguise of economic growth) is difficult to sustain, especially in the UAE with the demographic imbalance created by immigration.

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WAM Dispatches

- 01-04-2006 Dr Omar Bin Sulaiman officially launches Family Office at Dubai.
- 09-02-2016 Al Roumi says structural changes in federal government reflect leadership interest in change 23-03-2016 Ministry of Community Development approves names of 358 beneficiaries of its 1st batch for 2016.
- 08-05-2016 UAE Cabinet launches “Cohesive Family 2021”.
- 24-10-2017 Ministry of Community Development to support stability, cohesion in Emirati family.
- 25-03-2018 Hessa Buhumaid introduces UAE National Family Policy.
- 23-09-2018 MOCD organises workshop on Wadeema Law.
- 22-05-2019 Ministry of Community Development launches “We are Your Family” initiative for senior citizens.
- 16-12-2019 Family Protection Policy enhances family, community stability initiatives: Hessa Essa Buhumaid.
- 19-12-2020 Family Policies Coordination Council discusses proposal of “Marriage Encouragement Policy”.
- 8-11-2021 Coordination Council for Family Policies organises brainstorming session at Etihad Museum.
- Supreme Council for Family Affairs.
- 07-12-2021 Panel discussion highlights frameworks to combat violence and abuse.
- 29-05-2022 Family is UAE Government’s top priority: Hessa Buhumaid.
- 30-08-2022 National Human Rights Committee launches preparatory process for fourth national report on Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights.
- 23-01-2023 ADJD intensifies its efforts support families.
- 20-02-2023 ADJD succeeds in reducing divorce rate to 3% in 2022.
- 10-05-2023 FDF helped promote family awareness: Sheikha Fatima.

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Chapter 21

Family Welfare Policies in Kuwait and Qatar: A Comparative Analysis



Tamadher Salman Almalek

Abstract This chapter examines family welfare policies in Kuwait and Qatar from a comparative perspective. It scrutinizes the structure of the welfare state, the distribution and redistribution of resources through family welfare policies, the preservation of family structures, and the functions of welfare policies. It explores the different approaches and implementation of welfare policies in the two Gulf states. Kuwait's system is characterized by constitutionally guaranteed universal benefits for citizens as a birthright, while Qatar employs a more discretionary, targeted approach that is more responsive to the evolving needs of its citizens. The study provides insight into how Islamic values, rapid modernization, and oil-based economies have shaped distinctive family welfare paradigms in these Gulf states.

1 Introduction

The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are known for their strong ties to classical Islamic traditions. These nations, which include some of the most historically significant Islamic states, have preserved their religious and cultural heritage as a key part of their identity. Islamic teachings play a central role in shaping their laws, politics, and social practices. Despite this strong cultural and religious foundation, these states have experienced rapid and significant development in recent decades. While embracing modern sociopolitical systems, they have managed to preserve their conservative values, creating a unique blend of tradition and modernity.

Among the traditional systems, the family is of utmost importance in these countries. Families, in general, remain the most basic unit of any state or society. They are primary agents of socialization and are the mechanism through which the values of any community or society are transmitted to the next generation. The GCC states have various components and features that allow them to support and direct the activities of the family as a fundamental unit of their existence. As a result, social welfare

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policies and programs are designed to guide family affairs, promoting outcomes that support the survival and growth of society.

This chapter provides a detailed examination of family welfare policies in two Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries: Kuwait and Qatar. It offers a comparative analysis of these policies by focusing on several key areas. First, the chapter explores the characteristics of the welfare states in both countries, considering how these frameworks shape social and family policies. Next, it examines how resources are distributed and redistributed through family welfare initiatives, highlighting the role of these policies in promoting social equity. Additionally, the chapter analyzes the ways in which both states use welfare policies to preserve and reinforce traditional family structures, positioning the family as a central component of their social welfare agendas. Finally, the chapter outlines the core functions of these welfare policies, shedding light on their broader impact on society.

The chapter is organized into five main sections, excluding the introduction and conclusion. The first section addresses the theoretical framework, offering an analysis of key concepts and ideas from existing scholarship. The section focuses on the dominant contemporary social welfare structures and systems as they exist in the modern nation-state and links them to the common practices in Muslim countries. After a brief second section on research methodology, the third section examines the general welfare systems in both Kuwait and Qatar. Following this, the fourth section focuses on the distribution of wealth through social welfare systems. The fifth and sixth sections primarily address family systems and welfare policies in the two countries. Finally, the last section offers an overall comparison of the two welfare states.

2 The Welfare State and Family Policy

Many European countries adopted welfare state policies after the Second World War, recognizing the need to support families and households in the aftermath of the conflict. These efforts primarily included addressing the old risks through passive policies, such as unemployment benefits (Dettlaff et al., 2020). Key aspects of the welfare state that intersect with family policies include enhancing public health, measuring well-being through statistical models, addressing social exclusion, helping women navigate a hostile labor market, and formulating policies to protect children (Barr, 2020, p. 12). The goal was to ensure that the tax system was optimized in a way that families with little were protected while those who were better off contributed their fair share of the tax to support the welfare of the poorest citizens and residents (Williams, 2020). Social welfare policies in modern societies were intended to promote child support, family assistance, community safety, and well-being (Dettlaff et al., 2020). However, many critics argue that these programs often excluded people from minority communities, which had adverse effects on the functioning of society.

2.1 Distribution and Redistribution by the State for Families

The development of social welfare policies has often been a complex balancing act between modernizing societal structures and preserving traditional values. In the context of the British welfare state, for instance, a study indicated that the model was not designed to dismantle tradition but rather aimed to establish a national balance between state legitimacy and citizens' entitlement (Bhambra, 2022). The central challenge was how the state could maintain its credibility and fulfill its obligations while respecting and balancing the individual rights of families and citizens. This raises important questions about how welfare policies can support the public good and protect individual freedoms without undermining long-standing social norms.

In the twenty-first century, populist radical politicians have shifted debates on the “deservingness criteria” regarding who should access welfare and how they should do so (Abts et al., 2021). This is an issue that is widely contested in most countries, as there is no definite standard on who should be given aid and who should not. In contrast, in Islamic social theology, different frameworks are used to steer social values and principles. The process includes allocating resources for *Zakat*, *Khums*, and *Waqf*, which are essential elements of Islamic charity (Tajmazinani & Mazinani, 2020). Muslim-majority countries follow diverse sets of rules for the collection and distribution of charitable resources, which are shaped by the specific jurisprudence school adhered to by the state and other practical considerations. These rules govern how religious obligations, such as *Zakat*, are managed. *Zakat*, one of the five pillars of Islam, requires eligible Muslims to give a portion of their wealth to support those in need. The amount is carefully quantified based on Islamic law, and its distribution is often managed by a range of intermediaries, including government agencies, religious institutions, and non-governmental organizations, to ensure that it reaches the intended beneficiaries (Abdul Razak, 2020). The government of an Islamic country has a duty to create the right regulations and standards to ensure the fair distribution of these religiously mandated alms. Moreover, there are rules on how these alms get to the families who need them based on mandated hierarchies (Abdul Razak, 2020). The logic behind *Zakat* and similar charitable obligations lies in the belief that wealth should circulate within society because this will reduce poverty and inequality. By mandating such contributions, these systems aim to foster social cohesion, alleviate economic disparities, and ensure that even the most vulnerable members of society are cared for.

2.2 Functions of Welfare Policies for Families

Welfare policies for families involve mobilizing stakeholders for the protection of children and other vulnerable persons in the family unit (Berger & Slack, 2021). This is premised on the need for engagement and empowerment of different groups of stakeholders to ensure they all give their best and contribute to the attainment of the

greatest outcomes and the common good of society, with the family acting as a pivot for social welfare.

Many developed countries have state social welfare policies that focus on the people at the bottom (Michener et al., 2020). In the US and most European countries, welfare policies provide families with tax and in-kind benefits to reduce inequality (Wagmiller et al., 2020). This has a redistributive effect that goes beyond just providing support to guaranteeing the survival of individual families. The protection of family structure is often integrated into welfare provisions, particularly for the more vulnerable members of the family unit, such as women and children. This approach supports gender balance and ensures the protection of children within the family (Chanfreau, 2023). However, this approach is criticized on the grounds that it neglects people in the middle tier, who are often required to pay exorbitant taxes. The bottom-up model means that the poorest are given basic survival inputs, while middle-class families with potential are often given little since they are assumed to be doing well.

In many Islamic countries, support to families is provided through civil society rather than national governmental social services (Iskakova et al., 2022). In the process, the jurisprudence and religious entities that guide the state play a major role in nurturing and empowering civil society to maintain family structures (Hayat, 2022). Another function of welfare policies in the context of families is that they influence the fertility rate of the population. For example, Saudi Arabia's welfare policies and systems encourage marriage, discourage marital dissolutions, and provide a structured approach to how women enter the labor force (Al-Khraif et al., 2020).

3 Methodology

This research adopts a policy analysis approach, focusing on the examination and evaluation of social welfare and family structure policies in the Gulf countries of Kuwait and Qatar. The methodology involves a systematic process of identifying existing policies, critically analyzing their implications, and conducting a comparative evaluation between the two nations. The research is structured around four key functional components: first, the identification and documentation of relevant policies in both Kuwait and Qatar; second, an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic and cultural implications of these policies, particularly in relation to family structures and welfare distribution; third, a comparative assessment that highlights similarities, differences, and potential lessons that can be drawn from each country's approach; and finally, an evaluation of the effectiveness and sustainability of these policies within the broader context of the Gulf region.

Data for this analysis is sourced from a variety of scholarly and official channels. This includes academic journals, government publications, and authoritative websites that provide detailed information on formal policies and frameworks relevant to the

regions in question. The study will ensure a thorough examination of these sources to provide a well-rounded comparative analysis of social welfare and family policies in Kuwait and Qatar.

3.1 The Welfare State—Kuwait and Qatar

Since their independence, the resource-rich countries of Kuwait and Qatar have incorporated rentier welfare state systems in their state policies (Palier et al., 2021). Despite sharing similarities in terms of being reliant on natural resources, government structure, and demographic composition, among other characteristics, both countries adopted a different approach toward welfare systems.

Kuwait, from the onset, provided free healthcare, education, a guaranteed public sector job, and interest-free loans to citizens to build a house (Palier et al., 2021). Kuwait's constitution states in Article 11 that the state guarantees aid for citizens in their old age, during sickness, or when they are incapable of working. For children, there are guarantees of free education and gifts from the state when they reach various milestones, including marriage. However, in 2013, Kuwait's prime minister announced that the current system of guaranteeing generous gifts to its citizens at different milestones was not sustainable (Wells & Azoulay, 2014). Hence, demands were raised to cap the benefits for citizens. In contrast, some strongly supported an all-out benefit system. Since Kuwait's oil and gas system was large and based on the sparse population, it was projected that Kuwait could afford to maintain a huge budget with benefits to its citizens without diversifying the economy in the next 90 years (Wells & Azoulay, 2014).

On the other hand, Qatar's welfare system is similarly elaborate, relatively newer, and more selective in most cases. Like Kuwait, Qatar guarantees its citizens free medical care and education; however, some rights are closely linked to the citizens' employment status or specific social categories (Al-Hendawi et al., 2023). Qatar has also been more active in the last few years in formulating and adopting measures that would help sustain the country's welfare system. State pensions and welfare benefits are reformed through new laws that are made in response to specific incidents and trends (Al-Thani, 2022). Thus, the country has a proactive mechanism for providing measured welfare solutions to different classes of people. These solutions include programs for women and children. In other situations, there are laws facilitating activities that provide citizens with better opportunities, such as insurance, which provides a balanced approach that supports responsible behaviors (Al-Thani, 2022). The social insurance laws also ensure that benefits are calculated in proportion to what people contribute to national pension funds. Thus, Qatar maintains a performance-based system that encourages hard work and contributions rather than birthrights that are to be protected by laws. Aside from these benefits, there are various elements that incentivize Qatari citizens, such as tax-free incomes, well-paid government jobs, financial aid for couples, free healthcare, generous subsidies, and many others.

3.2 Distribution and Redistribution of Wealth Through Social Welfare in Kuwait and Qatar

The social welfare system is designed to ensure wealth is distributed across the different groups of people in the country. Kuwait and Qatar have invested money in their social welfare agendas due to the large oil and gas revenue pool. These mechanisms are part of the socio-economic base for both countries and have essential functions in social security and quality of life. Consequently, Kuwait's oil wealth distribution has been institutionalized in the country's political and economic systems. The government offers numerous benefits to the people, thereby distributing the nation's oil riches (Palier et al., 2021). This includes free health care, shelter, and affordable commodities and services. Kuwait also offers employment assurance within the public sector, which has resulted in the overcrowded population of the civil service. Still, it also provides many Kuwaiti citizens with a guarantee of employment and income.

Kuwait's wealth redistribution also comes in the shape of direct financial support. For instance, in 2011, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of independence, the government granted 1,000 Kuwaiti dinars (approximately \$3,600) to every citizen, along with free food staples for 14 months (Choplin & Pliez, 2019). Such generous one-off payments are not uncommon and serve as a direct means of wealth sharing.

Qatar's approach to wealth distribution and redistribution, while also extensive, tends to be more targeted. Like Kuwait, Qatar provides free education and healthcare to its citizens. However, unlike in Kuwait, basic utilities like water and electricity are free and are not charged by Qatari government (Lowi, 2017). Some benefits in Qatar are more closely tied to specific criteria. For example, Qatar's housing program offers land grants and interest-free loans to eligible citizens, but the eligibility is based on age, marital status, and income level.

Qatar has also implemented innovative wealth redistribution mechanisms. The country has invested heavily in its sovereign wealth fund, the Qatar Investment Authority, which diversifies the economy and ensures long-term wealth preservation for future generations. Additionally, Qatar has implemented a profit-sharing system in strategic industries, benefiting citizens directly from the country's economic success (Baabood, 2019).

Both countries have used their welfare systems as a tool for national development. By providing comprehensive education and healthcare, they aim to develop human capital and improve their citizens' overall quality of life. However, this approach has also led to challenges, including a heavy reliance on foreign labor for private-sector jobs and difficulties in encouraging citizens to seek employment outside the public sector (Ulrichsen, 2018).

The redistribution of wealth through social welfare in Kuwait and Qatar has undoubtedly contributed to high living standards for citizens. However, it has also created a culture of dependency on state provisions, which both countries are now trying to address through various reform initiatives to promote entrepreneurship and private-sector employment among nationals (Fargues & Shah, 2018).

3.3 Family Structure and Welfare in Kuwait and Qatar

Family welfare policies form a cornerstone of the social welfare systems in both Kuwait and Qatar. These policies reflect the cultural importance of family in Gulf societies and aim to support family formation, growth, and stability. The Kuwaiti government provides financial grants to citizens to cover part of their marriage expenses. As of 2021, this grant amounts to 4,000 Kuwaiti Dinars (approximately \$13,000) per couple (Testaverde & Pavilion, 2022). This policy encourages marriage among Kuwaiti nationals and helps new couples establish their households. Kuwait provides monthly allowances for each child in a family. These allowances continue until the child reaches adulthood or completes their education. The amount varies based on the number of children and their educational status. The government provides housing loans or ready-built houses to Kuwaiti families. The waiting period for these benefits has been a point of political debate in recent years, with efforts to reduce wait times. Employed Kuwaiti women are entitled to 70 days of paid maternity leave. Additionally, they can take up to four years of unpaid leave to care for their children without having to leave their jobs (ILO, 2022). Besides free education, the government also provides school supplies and transportation allowances. Students pursuing higher education abroad also receive substantial financial support.

Qatar established a marriage fund in 2006 to provide financial assistance to Qatari citizens getting married. The fund offers loans of up to 300,000 Qatari Riyals (approximately \$82,000) to help couples start their married life (Fargues & Shah, 2018). Qatar also provides monthly allowances for children, with increased benefits for children with disabilities. These allowances are typically paid to the father and continue until the child reaches a certain age or completes their education. The country offers eligible citizens land grants and interest-free housing loans. The amount and terms of these benefits depend on the applicant's social and economic status. Recently, Qatar has enhanced its parental leave policies. As of 2022, employed women are entitled to 90 days of paid maternity leave, while fathers can take five days of paternity leave (ILO, 2022). Along with free education, the government provides financial support for students studying abroad, covering tuition fees and living expenses for approved programs.

Both countries have similarities in their family welfare. Kuwait and Qatar have other services and funds for families of persons with disabilities. This consists of an increased child allowance, educational facilities for children with disabilities, and home care services. Each country has legislation concerning the payments for widows and orphans, including monthly payments and preferences in some social services. Although these policies have undoubtedly benefited families and made the societies in both countries more stable, their implementation also has negative effects on the economic system. These benefits have raised fiscal sustainability issues and meager oil prices. Furthermore, there is a continued discussion on the undesirable consequences of all-embracing support on employment, especially for women (Ulrichsen, 2018).

Kuwait and Qatar have only begun in the recent past to liberalize their labor market to encourage more citizens, particularly women, to enter the labor force but, at the same time, continue to support their families (Abu-Kaf et al., 2022). These changes are evidence of emerging awareness of the necessity to combine the provision of reasonably extensive welfare benefits with the corresponding efforts to diversify and make economies more competitive and resilient (Baabood, 2019).

3.4 Function of Welfare Policy in Kuwait and Qatar

The Welfare policies in Kuwait and Qatar have several central roles that are much broader than delivering social services. These functions are directly connected to the states' social, economic, and political lives. One of the main aims of the welfare policies in Kuwait and Qatar is wealth distribution, which is to use the money generated from the nation's oil and gas sales to provide for the citizens. This is especially the case given the levels of inequality that could prevail if economies are overly endowed with natural resources. Thus, both the countries make a large part of the national wealth available to citizens through free healthcare, education, housing subsidies, and other allowances.

An equally important role of welfare policies in both countries is human capital development. Welfare policies affect human capital accumulation, especially in the education and health sectors. Kuwait and Qatar offer free education for the populace from primary school to the university level, as well as scholarships for foreign universities, to develop the human capital needed to spearhead the process of economic diversification and overall development of the respective countries (Alhashem & Alhouti, 2021). Likewise, extensive healthcare provisions make for a healthy nation, which is regarded as a productive entity for any country. These investments in human capital are regarded as essential to these nations' future beyond the hydrocarbon age (Ulrichsen, 2018).

Family formation and social reproduction are prerequisites for fulfilling various societal roles and responsibilities today. Family welfare policies in both countries have the added utility of promoting the formation and well-being of families. Aid to marriage, child support, and housing ensure that it is financially possible for young people to start families (Lari, 2022). Employing family support agrees with these societies' culture since they hold the family in high esteem, hence the preservation of culture and order. Policies regarding maternity leave, childcare, and education for women help enhance women's employment within specific traditional gender roles (Fargues & Shah, 2018).

The welfare policies in Kuwait and Qatar are not just about providing immediate assistance; they play a broader role in shaping their societies (El Amine, 2023). These policies are integrated into the social, economic, and political landscapes of both countries. The significant oil reserves in Kuwait and Qatar have led them to develop differently from other Gulf states. Despite their wealth, they face challenges such as diversifying their economies, managing rapid population growth, and adapting

to changing social expectations. As a result, their welfare systems are diverse and continually evolving to meet these challenges.

4 A Comparison Between Qatar and Kuwait

Qatar and Kuwait share similarities in their family welfare policies because of their common historical, demographic, and cultural backgrounds. However, they differ in their approaches and implementations due to their unique characteristics and individual developmental paths. These differences arise from variations in their economic strategies, population dynamics, and specific social needs. Kuwait’s welfare state developed slightly earlier in the 1960s and has not changed significantly since then (Porter, 2020). Meanwhile, Qatar’s system is relatively younger and has undergone more modifications and reforms. As such, Kuwait prefers the more open public goods provided to citizens irrespective of their income status or employment. Qatar has shifted to selective provisions for housing and social allowances.

The two countries employ public sector employment as a means of wealth distribution; however, Kuwait has gone the extra mile, resulting in a significant focus on developing a large public sector. Qatar has made relatively more recent attempts to promote job opportunities for nationals in the private sector (Ulrichsen, 2018). Qatar has been more active in undertaking changes to the welfare system to make the system sustainable in the long run and pushing for the country’s diversification of the economy. Meanwhile, Kuwait has maintained a more stable welfare system, but there is growing pressure for reform to address emerging challenges and to better align with contemporary economic and social needs (Baabood, 2019).

There have been slight advancements in family-friendly policies in Qatar compared to Kuwait regarding women’s workforce participation and flexibility in maternal leave and childcare (Fargues & Shah, 2018). Qatar has a more strategic approach to long-term economic development, as demonstrated through the Qatar Investment Authority and the National Vision 2030. While Kuwait has been more inclined toward the outright distribution of wealth.

Women’s engagement in the workforce and their ability to combine careers with parenting are highlighted through the welfare policies. In Kuwait, this is done through a minimum payment that is guaranteed if a mother/wife does not have a job. In Qatar, special allowances and flexibilities exist for women to maintain a career while parenting. This is based on pragmatic conditions and circumstances.

Aspect	Kuwait	Qatar
Marriage Grant	4,000 KWD (~\$13,000)	Up to 300,000 QAR (~\$82,000) as a loan
Child Allowances	Monthly allowance per child	Monthly allowance per child, higher for children with disabilities

(continued)

(continued)

Aspect	Kuwait	Qatar
Housing Support	Housing loans or ready-built houses	Land grants and interest-free loans based on eligibility
Maternity Leave	70 days paid leave	90 days paid leave
Paternity Leave	Not specified	Five days
Education Support	Free education + allowances for supplies and transport	Free education + grants for studying abroad
Healthcare	Free universal healthcare	Free universal healthcare
Employment Policy	Strong emphasis on public sector employment	Recent push for private-sector employment
Disability Support	Additional allowances and services	Additional allowances and services
Recent Reforms	Limited	More extensive, focusing on sustainability

Source Compiled by Author

5 Conclusion

Kuwait and Qatar's family welfare policies reflect the complexities of their political economies and are deeply rooted in their resource-rich contexts. Both nations have leveraged their substantial oil and gas revenues to offer extensive benefits to their populations, including access to health care, education, housing, and social services. These welfare policies play a critical role in maintaining social stability, managing resource distribution, and supporting family formation and development. By utilizing their resource wealth, both Kuwait and Qatar have created systems designed to enhance the quality of life for their citizens.

Despite these similarities, the approaches adopted by Kuwait and Qatar exhibit notable differences. Kuwait's welfare system tends to emphasize universal services, aiming to provide broad-based benefits to all citizens. This approach reflects Kuwait's strategy of ensuring comprehensive support across the population, fostering a sense of security and stability. In contrast, Qatar has focused on implementing more targeted and sustainable welfare policies. Qatar's approach seeks to address specific needs and promote long-term sustainability which aligns with broader goals of economic diversification and modernization. This focus on targeted assistance and sustainability highlights Qatar's commitment to adapting its welfare system in response to evolving economic and social challenges.

The divergence in welfare policy approaches between Kuwait and Qatar highlights the impact of their unique developmental paths and policy priorities. While both countries aim to use their wealth to improve societal well-being, their differing philosophies and methods reflect their unique economic contexts and future aspirations.

As they continue to address challenges such as economic diversification, population growth, and social expectations, both Kuwait and Qatar will likely refine their welfare systems to better meet the needs of their citizens and adapt to an ever-changing global landscape.

Future studies are essential to explore and understand the evolving nature of welfare systems in Kuwait and Qatar. Research should focus on the effectiveness of current policies in meeting the needs of diverse populations and the impact of economic and social changes on these welfare systems. Additionally, comparative studies involving other Gulf states and resource-rich nations could provide a broader perspective on the challenges and innovations in welfare policy. Such research would contribute to developing more informed and adaptable welfare strategies, ultimately enhancing the capacity of these countries to address both current and future socio-economic challenges.

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Chapter 22

Qatar Family Law No. 22: Legal and Social Perspectives



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Abstract Qatari Family Law No. 22 of 2006 is a comprehensive legal framework that regulates a wide range of financial and non-financial aspects of family matters in Qatar. The law, a reflection of Qatari society's unique needs and values, is significantly influenced by societal and cultural factors. Including provisions that protect women's status and promote gender equality, it places a strong emphasis on the family as the cornerstone of society, a key aspect that connects the Qatari society to the law's societal values. This chapter examines the Qatari Family Law No. 22 of 2006 and the law's social implications. We report that the law integrates Islamic legal customs, traditions, and cultural norms into the legal system and maintains the family, which is regarded as the fundamental institution of Qatari society.

1 Introduction

The Qatari Family Law No. 22 of 2006 is a comprehensive legislation that uniquely integrates Islamic law with societal customs and traditions to govern family matters in Qatar. This approach effectively merges the law with the authentic practices of Qatari families, which have been deeply ingrained in their way of life for generations. The reliance on these customs not only aims to preserve them but also stems from a deep respect for their significance to the Qatari people and their spiritual and ideological identity. Disregarding these customs is discouraged and deemed unacceptable due to their sacred nature and intimate connection with the core values of Qatari families.

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The legislation outlines important terms and sets forth the general terms and conditions for marriage. It also addresses significant matters such as parentage, guardianship, and inheritance, thus serving as a crucial legal framework. It is worth noting that guardianship in Qatari family law differs from the guardianship outlined in Law No. 40 of 2004 regarding the Guardianship of Minor's Funds. In family law, guardianship pertains to a father's inherent responsibility towards his children, while the Guardianship over Minor's Funds Law provides a comprehensive and clear explanation of guardianship, including the authority to manage minors' financial matters and assets under its supervision. It is praiseworthy that the Qatari legislator defines all critical terms in each enactment law in its primary provisions.

Importantly, the Qatari Family Law is not just about regulations but protection. It aims to safeguard the families in the State of Qatar, providing a sense of security and playing a crucial role in enhancing social stability, thereby reassuring the citizens of the Qatar government's commitment to their welfare. This law, with its practicality and inclusivity, is a living example of how cultural norms, traditions, and customs, especially those derived from Islamic law, are harmoniously integrated into the legal system. The law includes provisions that not only protect women's status but also promote gender equality. For instance, it grants women the right to divorce under certain conditions, a significant step towards empowering women in family matters. It is widely recognized that Islamic law holds more weight than local laws in several Arab countries, including Qatar. Furthermore, it is common knowledge that women have the right to seek divorce in many countries around the world. However, the procedures for obtaining a divorce can vary significantly from one country to another. Qatar is known for its streamlined and straightforward processes for women seeking divorce, as evidenced by divorce statistics resulting from cases initiated by women. These provisions, along with those that prioritize children's best interests, reflect the Qatari society's progressive stance on family issues, inspiring hope for further progress in gender equality.

Before exploring the key topics covered in Qatari Family Law, it is essential to recognize that the concept of family has been defined in numerous ways over time. Each definition underscores the fundamental importance of the family unit within different legal and social contexts. Article 16, paragraph No. 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes the family as: "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State" (OHCHR, 1948). This assurance of protection is confirmed by the State of Qatar in its Permanent Constitution by stipulating in Article 21 that "The Family is the basis of society. A Qatari family is founded on religion, ethics and patriotism. The law shall regulate as necessary to protect the family, support its structure, strengthen its ties and protect mothers, children and the elderly" (the Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar). This illustrates Qatar's keenness to promote family linkage and revive its values; on the other hand, the Qatari Permanent Constitution asserts the central role of the family in the education and the formation of the new generations (De Assis Lucifora et al., 2021). However, the family is subject to the law that

regulates it and the legal rules set by public authority, which give rise to penalties for non-compliance. Reflecting on family status in the different legal systems, this study will shed light on the Qatari Family Law and then briefly describe the topics addressed by the family legislators.

2 Qatari Family Law in Protecting the Families in the State of Qatar

The development of Qatari Family Law was significantly influenced by societal and cultural factors, reflecting the unique needs and values of Qatari society. Its roots can be traced back to the 1990s when Qatar and other Arab Gulf states began prioritizing family law (Welchman, 2007a, 2007b). This dedication led to the adoption of the Muscat Document for the Unified Personal Status System for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, a guiding law since 1996. This document marked a significant milestone in the codification process by providing a unified legal framework for the GCC countries. The historical context of the Qatari Family Law No. 22 of 2006 underscores its evolution and responsiveness to societal changes. The transformation of religious opinions on family matters into binding law had a profound impact on the legal system, particularly in countries like Qatar, which relied on the regulations and stipulations outlined in the Muscat Document, a crucial document in the development of Qatari Family Law, where the legal system follows a specific school of jurisprudence: the *Hanbali* school. The Muscat Document greatly affected the development of Qatari Family Law. This impact went beyond legal aspects, incorporating important societal and cultural elements. Notably, the strong influence of Islamic conservatism shaped both the legal structure and the social expectations surrounding family life in Qatar (Welchman, 2007a, 2007b).

3 The Qatari Family Law: Areas Covered

The family plays a vital role in societal growth and is highly valued in universal laws, thematic legislation, and international agreements. It serves as the cornerstone of society. The Qatari Family Law represents a significant shift from relying solely on Islamic jurisprudence, with different denominational schools in family matters, to an enactment law. This change encompasses various juridical schools of thought (Aldosari, 2016). Moving from a diverse approach to a unified one through establishing a specific law governing family matters brings significant implications for the legal and societal landscape. The shift aims to reduce variation. When family matters are governed by Islamic law provisions may differ, leading to inconsistencies. Therefore, nations with diverse religious groups need unified laws grounded in Islamic principles to minimize variations in provisions and opinions. Applying the

foregoing to the State of Qatar as a case, the Qatari Family Law has clearly defined provisions, marking a new era in regulating family matters in Qatar. This transition has not only transformed the legal landscape but has also had societal implications, shaping the understanding and handling of family matters in Qatari society.

The Family Law No. 22 of 2006 in Qatar provides a comprehensive legal framework that covers various financial and non-financial matters. It includes regulations on dowry, inheritance based on legal shares, filiation expenses, and matrimonial maintenance. While specific legal rulings remain consistent with Islamic jurisprudence, other provisions can adapt to changing social contexts. Each country's law aims to regulate different aspects of human affairs and settle disputes using consistent legal principles. This is done to prevent separate rules for different societal groups and ensure that each group is not governed by its own set of laws. Non-financial aspects such as personal obligations between spouses, parentage, and custody are also addressed. The Family Law of Qatar emphasizes the family, recognizing it as the foundational nucleus of society, highlighting its integral role in the societal framework. The enactment of a Family Law represents the societal progress it brings. As a result, specific provisions of the Family Law introduce new measures to safeguard marital relationships and enhance the status of women. Additionally, they prioritize the protection and welfare of children while maintaining consistency with existing regulations and respecting historical precedents. The law's focus on safeguarding the status of women is particularly reassuring and is likely to earn support from the public. The Qatari family law, closely linked to Islamic Sharia, jurisprudence, and social customs, is not aligned with a specific doctrine but is influenced by the *Hanbali* and *Maliki* schools of thought. This study will provide a brief overview of marriage, divorce, and the status of children within the framework of the regulations outlined in Qatari Family Law No. 22 of 2006. By examining these aspects, a deeper understanding of how the law is applied in real-life situations and its impact on family dynamics in Qatar can be gained. This understanding is crucial for the development of the legal, professional, scholar, or individual interested in Qatari family law and Islamic jurisprudence. It provides a practical perspective on the law's provisions and their implications, making the information highly relevant and engaging for the career growth of the audience.

3.1 Engagement

The Qatari legislature places significant importance on engagement, defining it as "a request of marriage and/or the expressed promise of marriage as determined by custom. Consequently, it shall not give rise to any of the consequences of marriage" (Aldosari, 2016). The legitimacy of the engagement is primarily derived from the holy Quran, underscoring its crucial role in the Qatari legal system. Within the context of engagement, the Qatari legislator plays a crucial role in safeguarding the rights of the contracting parties. Just as a consumer is entitled to inspect a product before purchase to ensure its quality and suitability, a prospective married couple is all the

more entitled to assess each other before entering into a marital agreement (2020 السّتار). This emphasis on rights and fairness underscores the equity in Qatari Family law and regulations, providing a reassuring framework for all involved. The tradition of engagement is deeply rooted in Islamic law. As such, the involved parties are expected to adhere to the family law engagement procedures outlined by the Qatari legislature. These formalities are to be fulfilled prior to the marriage. Typically, the engagement process includes visiting the groom's mother or female relatives at the bride's home to meet her. Upon mutual agreement of marriage, the exchange of engagement rings symbolizes their commitment to each other as they commence their journey into a shared life.

The engagement, in line with Islamic Sharia law, provides the potential couple with more time to establish harmony and understanding. This cultural significance of the law adds a layer of depth to the legal process, making it more meaningful for the individuals involved. For an engagement to be valid and permissible under Sharia law, it must meet specific conditions. One key condition is that the woman must not fall into categories where marriage is prohibited. This includes permanent prohibitions, such as marrying one's own sisters or aunts, as well as temporary prohibitions, such as marrying sisters-in-law. Second, the women should not be engaged to another man (Law.22, 2006). Nonetheless, under Qatari Family Law, as outlined in Article 7, either party in an engagement has the right to cancel the engagement. The Qatari legislator allows a party to withdraw from the engagement without needing to provide a reason or pay compensation unless there is damage caused by the withdrawal. This means that the party choosing to end the engagement is not required to justify their decision or compensate the other party, except in cases where their withdrawal causes harm (Law.22, 2006). However, the termination of the engagement obliges the potential spouse to return the dowry to the potential partner unless the engagement termination was due to death circumstances, as provided for in Article 8: "If the engagement is cancelled without justification, gifts shall be returned in kind if they exist, alternatively their equivalent or value when received if he/she terminates the engagement without reason. However, if the engagement was terminated due to death and/or reasons beyond the control of both parties, the gifts shall be irrecoverable" (Law.22, 2006). Conversely, the usual engagement course concludes with marriage by officially registering the marriage at the Qatari Family Court's Documentation Department. This registration may occur as part of a wedding celebration or a more intimate family gathering, and both options are equally valid for publicly recognizing the marriage. The standard is to register the marriage contract in the Documentation Department.

3.2 *Marriage*

In Qatar, *marriage* is defined by law as “a legitimate contract between a man and a woman based on sustainability, with the aim of cohabitation and securing chastity” (Law.22, 2006). According to the Hanbali School of Thought, marriage is “the contract which is valid if recited using the words al-nikah and al-zawaj” (Law.22, 2006). These definitions are firmly rooted in Quranic teachings, highlighting the influence of religious principles on Qatari legal practices. This demonstrates the Qatari legislature’s strong focus on the family as the foundation of a thriving society, striving to create a community free from issues that may impact its members. The rigorous regulations put in place by the Qatari legislature to validate marriages serve as a testament to this commitment. It is important to note that family law in Qatar is designed to align with Islamic law, focusing on respecting customs and traditions. A standardized process requiring official validation in the Family Court applies to Muslim marriages, regulated in the Qatari Family Law, regardless of their school of thought. This underscores Qatar’s dedication to a fair and inclusive approach to marriage.

In Qatar, legal authorities developed formal and substantive requirements for concluding the marriage agreement. For instance, one of the formal requirements is that the potential spouses undergo a medical examination prior to marriage and that the marriage contract be registered (2018, عبدالستار و راشد). Qatar devoted particular attention to the health and well-being of the spouses through the stipulation that obtaining a health certificate of both potential spouses before concluding the marital Agreement is mandatory, as stated in Article 18 of the Family Law: “Each party to the contract shall submit to the marriage attestator/notary a medical certificate from a competent medical authority specifying that parties are free from genetic diseases and the other diseases specified by the National Health Authority in coordination with the relevant authorities” (Law.22, 2006). The Qatari legislator also requires that in order to be eligible for marriage the spouses must be rational, mature, and compatible, as well as proportionate in age. As per Article No. 17, “Males are not allowed to enter into marriage contracts before the age of eighteen (18). Females are prohibited from entering marriage contracts before the age of sixteen (16). All marriages of males and females over eighteen (18) and sixteen (16) shall only be allowed after the guardian’s approval, verification of the consent from both parties to the contract and the permission of a competent Judge” (Law.22, 2006). The minimum age requirement for both husbands and wives is designed to combat early marriages that can harm families and society. This decision was made, taking into consideration the child’s age in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a significant international agreement. Numerous Arab countries worldwide have introduced amendments to their legislation on the marriage age to be a standard age between boys and girls, and the age of eighteen (18) was the determined age.

On the other hand, concerning the proof of the marriage, article 10 of the Family Law stipulates that “Marriage shall be established by a formal contract issued in accordance with the law. However, as an exception, it may be proved by other

evidence as may be decided by the judge.” (Law.22, 2006). This provision underscores the pivotal role of the judge in determining the marriage’s existence and in preventing the suspension of proving the marital relationship. The legislator has allowed this exception to prevent the suspension of proving the marital relationship established without an official marriage agreement. Thus, the judicial rule issued by the concerned judge is a substantiated rule of establishment of marital life. It is important to note that the official marriage agreement is required to prove the marriage rather than validate the marital relationship. The legislator’s path to proving marriage assures the necessity of certifying a marriage contract, as it delivers stability in marital union and preserves the rights of spouses and children.

To acknowledge the wife’s rights, the law allows for specific conditions to be included in the marriage agreement. For example, the agreement can specify that the wife should complete her university education and pursue employment. Therefore, if the condition is valid, it must be fulfilled. Otherwise, the wife shall be entitled to claim the termination of the marriage agreement for the non-fulfilment of the agreed conditions, underscoring the importance of her rights in the marriage agreement.

3.3 Divorce

Under Qatar’s Family Law, husbands have the authority to initiate divorce. This is because the law grants husbands control over certain aspects of the marriage. As described in article 109 of the Family Law: “divorce may be effected by the husband personally or his agent having a special power of attorney to that effect, or by the wife if the husband gave her such power” (Law.22, 2006). However, the legislator emphasizes the importance of specific conditions and rules surrounding the divorce incident to protect the marital bond. To prevent the abuse of such rights, the Qatari legislator has outlined numerous contraindications that prevent the occurrence of divorce as stipulated in article No. 110 of the Family Law. The article states that: “Divorce by an insane person, by a person under an intellectual disability, by a person under duress, or by a person who lacks comprehension because of intoxication, anger or otherwise, shall have no effect.” Hence, a divorce from a spouse who suffers from intellectual disability, duress, and incomprehension shall not be counted due to the lack of a well-functioning mind and free will. This requirement is clearly emphasized in the above-mentioned article: “For a divorcer to effect divorce, he must be of sound mind and act of his own free will” (Law.22, 2006). However, it also restricts it by requiring specific conditions and precautions to consider such a divorce has been effected. These measures are in place to protect the integrity of the marital bond and prevent potential abuse of the divorce process.

The consecutive divorce, as per the legislator, shall be counted one-time, as indicated in article 108 of Family Law: “Divorce may not take effect: If it is equivocal or conditional, intended to pressure for doing or not doing something, or to believe or

disbelieve in something. Furthermore, repeating pronouncements of divorce or associating it with numbers, whether verbally, in writing or by gesture, shall be considered but only one divorce" (Law.22, 2006). Additionally, the divorce must follow Sharia requirements, which stipulate that it should be pronounced three times. Each pronouncement must occur separately, not all at once, to ensure that the process is carried out correctly. In order to be valid and counted among one of the three legal divorce attempts, the law requires the wife must be pure from the menstruation cycle or marital intercourse when the husband intends to divorce his wife. It is not considered valid while the wife is in her Iddat, the waiting period that follows the divorce. The divorce only becomes valid after the Iddat period, which lasts for three months from the day the divorce occurs. During this time, the wife is not permitted to remarry and is entitled to remain in the marital home and receive financial support from her ex-husband. In accordance with Article 156 of the Family Law, "Iddat is a mandatory waiting period ensuing upon separation between spouses during which the wife shall remain without marriage" (Law.22, 2006). Failure to observe this period has significant legal consequences, including the potential for lineage confusion.

It is crucial to understand that a divorce must be absolute, not conditional, and the conditions for an absolute divorce are unambiguous. A conditional divorce is subject to a subsequent condition; if the condition is met, the divorce will occur. Similarly, a divorce is not absolute when it is subject to committing the wife to do or to abstain from doing any act or for malicious purposes, as explicitly stated in Article No. (108) of the Qatari Family Law. Divorce does not occur based on the predicate, i.e., informing the wife by the husband that the latter left her; therefore, the divorce shall be explicit, not a euphemism (لا يقع الطلاق بالخبر , 2007).

Furthermore, the Qatari legislation allows the wife to initiate the divorce process if the husband grants her the marriage bond, as stipulated in Article No. (109) of the Qatari Family Law. This provision states, "Divorce may be effected by the husband personally or his agent having a special power of attorney to that effect, or by the wife if the husband gave her such power" (Law.22, 2006). In the case of unilateral divorce by the husband, the Qatari legislation mandates the proof of divorce before the court, with both spouses present before the notary public to certify the divorce. The husband can also certify the divorce without the wife's presence by attending before the court with two witnesses. However, it is a requirement that the husband shall announce the divorce to the wife by sending her the divorce certificate as stipulated in Article No. 113 of the Family Law, ensuring proper communication (Law.22, 2006).

The Qatari legislature has also granted the wife the right to seek separation and divorce through a judge's order in cases where she experiences harm that makes marital life difficult or impossible. This right also extends to situations involving discord and abandonment, financial issues such as miserliness and lack of spending, incurable illness lasting for at least a year, and the husband's impotence. In summary, the fundamental idea behind outlining such rights in the Family Law is to safeguard the family institution as part of the legislature's efforts (Law.22, 2006).

The Qatari legislator also allows the wife to request *khula*. In Article 118, the legislator defines *khula* as “redemptive divorce,” “a dissolution of a marriage contract by mutual consent of the husband and wife expressed in the word ‘*khula*’ or its meaning, with consideration from the wife. This ‘redemptive divorce’ is not conditioned by post-menstruation cleanness and shall be considered a rescission” (Law.22, 2006). The *khula*, therefore, enables the wife to free herself from the husband by agreeing to return the paid dowry to her husband. If the husband disagrees, the judge separates both sources and determines the *khula* allowance. Typically, in a *khula*, the wife relinquishes her legal rights, including the deferred dowry, alimony, and conciliatory allowances; however, this should not be interpreted as the wife waived her right to child custody in return for separating herself from the husband in the marital relationship. As per Article No. 120 of the Family Law: ‘Consideration for *khula*’ may not be a waiver of Child custody or any Child right” (Law.22, 2006).

Article 122 of the Family Law states, “If the couple cannot agree on *khula*’ (redemptive divorce), the Court shall attempt to reconcile between them by appointing two arbitrators to conduct reconciliation within a period not exceeding six months. If the two arbitrators cannot reach a settlement, and the wife demands *khula* to consider waiving all her financial and legal rights and refunding the dowry money, the Court shall order the separation between them” (Law.22, 2006). This provision, however, does not rule out the possibility of reconciliation between spouses at any stage of the divorce proceedings before the family court issues a final judgement. This instils hope and optimism, as it allows for the potential restoration of the marital relationship. In this case, whatever terms and conditions of the reconciliation agreement are agreed upon shall be included in the divorce judgement and the session’s minutes. This agreement, considered a certified executive instrument, further instils confidence in the process and its legal validity. Article 128 of the Civil and Commercial Procedure Law, states that: “The copy of the judgement under which the execution will be undertaken shall be sealed by the court seal and signed by the Registry of the court, after affixing the executive form, and it shall only be delivered to the party that is interested in executing the judgement, and only when execution is permissible” (Law.13, 1990).

Through the provisions of the Family Law, the Qatari legislator has erected a protective shield around the family. This shield ensures the family’s survival and non-fracture. The Qatari legislature does not permit ungrounded judicial divorce. Instead, it addresses estrangement and discord as the grounds of the divorce, emphasizing the importance of affection and compassion. These values, the bedrock of a successful marital life, are not just legal principles but also a reflection of the humaneness of Sharia and the Law, highlighting the human aspect of the law.

3.4 Custody

In recognizing the importance of the child's welfare, the Qatari legislator has stipulated provisions within the Family Law to protect the child, whether during marital life or upon divorce. Article 156 states "Child custody shall be for keeping, maintaining, nurturing, upbringing and educating the Child" (Law.22, 2006). The law ensures that child custody is with the mother until the ages are defined for both male and female children, even in cases of ungrounded divorce. Generally, both spouses are responsible for the child's welfare during marital life. However, if the spouses are separated even without a divorce, the Qatari legislator prioritizes child custody for the mother. Article No. 166 of the Family Law states "child custody shall be the duty of both parents in wedlock. Should the parents separate, even without divorce, the mother shall have priority for Child custody, unless the Judge decides otherwise in the interest of the child" (Law.22, 2006). The Qatari legislator also makes the mother the first line of the custody order as indicated in Article No. 169, which provides that: "The right to Child custody shall vest in the following order: The mother, The father.." (Law.22, 2006).

In the case of divorce, the law grants the right of male child custody to the mother until the age of 13 and female child custody until 15. The legislator has also allowed for flexibility, extending the age of custody for a female until she gets married and for a male until he reaches puberty. These conditions are designed with the child's best interests in mind, as Article 173 of the Family Law stipulated. This article states that custody of children granted to women shall terminate when a male child completes thirteen years of age, and the female child completes fifteen years of age. After investigating the child's interest, the court may permit such custody to continue until the male child attains fifteen years of age and the female child consummates marriage (Law.22, 2006).

The Qatar legislature has established stringent conditions for the removal of child custody from the mother, recognizing the crucial role of the mother in a child's life, particularly during the custody age. The divorced husband is required to file a dropping custody case, supported by official documents from government authorities that demonstrate the mother's ineligibility for custody due to a breach of the custody requirement, as stipulated in Article No. 167. The conditions for child custody eligibility are strict. The individual must have reached puberty or maturity, be of sound mind, be honest and trustworthy, and have the ability to nurture, raise, and care for the child to ensure their well-being. They must also be free from serious contagious or infectious diseases. In cases where the child and the custodian are of different genders, the custodian must be someone the child is permitted to be in close contact with under Islamic law, known as a *mahram* (a close relative whom one cannot marry) (Law.22, 2006). Custody may be terminated for reasons listed in Article 183 of the Family Law, such as when conditions for custodians are no longer met, a new female custodian moves in with a former custodian, or when a child's father or guardian cannot fulfil their duties due to the custodian's difficult-to-reach location unless the court deems otherwise necessary (Law.22, 2006). The process for

revoking a mother's custody of a child is clear and detailed, requiring the submission of official documents. These typically include medical reports, court judgments, or religious declarations. Grounds for revocation may include the mother contracting a dangerous contagious disease, being found guilty of criminal conduct, or being declared unfit due to religious reasons.

Furthermore, in Qatar, child custody is highly valued by the legal system. When determining the custodial parent, the paramount consideration is always the child's best interests within the marriage. If one parent is granted child custody, the non-custodial parent in Qatar has the right to request visitation and overnight stays by raising this issue in divorce, custody, or related cases. In such situations, the judge establishes the visitation schedule and determines the days the child can spend with the non-custodial parent, taking into account the child's age and other relevant circumstances. However, the judge does not raise demands automatically under his discretion; the entitled person must raise them. This approach ensures that the child's well-being, both during the marriage and after divorce, takes precedence over the spouses' interests. This prioritization demonstrates the fairness and thoroughness of Qatari Family Law, instilling confidence in its ability to address family matters.

3.4.1 Social Implications

The social implications of the Qatari Family Law No. 22 of 2006 are numerous. These implications reflect the comprehensive and culturally rooted approach the law adopts regarding family matters. The law is a comprehensive regulation that addresses all family matters, including marriage, guardianship, divorce, parentage, and inheritance, ensuring that each aspect of family life is legally protected and clearly defined. The Qatari Family Law No. 22 of 2006 aims to provide a sense of security and social stability, thereby safeguarding families and reassuring citizens of the state of Qatar's commitment to the welfare of the citizens. The key social implications of the Qatari Family Law No. 22 of 2006 encompass the protection and stability of families, the promotion of gender equality, emphasis on child welfare and protection, regulation of marital relationships through the articulation of clear guidelines, the detailing of rights and responsibilities in a marriage, divorce regulation, supporting of reconciliation efforts, economic implications, and the integration of Islamic law and cultural norms.

The law is designed to protect the family unit, which Qatar considers as the foundation of society. The law provides families with security and enhances social stability by establishing a clear legal framework for marriage. It outlines formal and substantive requirements for marriage contracts, including mandatory medical examinations to ensure the health of both spouses. Additionally, the law defines the obligations and responsibilities of spouses towards each other, helping to maintain harmony and understanding within the marriage and contributing to healthier family structures (Fig. 1).

Families feel secure realizing that their rights are legally ensured and protected which leads to a more harmonious society. The law incorporates social and cultural

traditions, cultural norms, as well as Islamic law, attempting to create a resultant law that is inclusive and practical. This cultural integration further reflects society's values and maintains a connection with the country's heritage, meanwhile ensuring the law's relevance to contemporary Qatari society and reinforcing social cohesion.

Transitioning from the absolute reliance on Islamic jurisprudence to a comprehensive and unified legal framework, the Qatari Family Law No. 22 of 2006 has helped shape discussions regarding family matters in Qatar's legal and societal landscape (Maktabi, 2016). The law has strong provisions designed to provide greater protection to women's status than before the existence of the law. The law also aims at promoting gender equality such as granting women the right to file for divorce (although demarcating specific conditions for this right); a move that gives women more empowerment in family matters than before the existence of the law.

The legislation also prioritizes the well-being of children by incorporating provisions for child protection and custody. This reflects the government's and society's dedication to the future generations of the Qatari population (Möller, 2018). In the event of a divorce, the custody laws offer clear guidelines for child custody, with the primary objective of safeguarding the children's best interests. The law ensures that children from broken families receive the support and nurturing environments necessary for their development, aiming to cultivate future generations of well-adjusted Qataris capable of making positive contributions to local, national, and international communities. Additionally, the Qatari Family Law establishes a structured framework and guidelines for divorce, emphasizing the importance of free will and mental well-being throughout the process. It also includes *khula'* provisions, enabling women to seek divorce and separation under specific predetermined conditions. The right to *khula'* is intended to minimize long-term conflicts and promote peace within the Qatari community. These measures were implemented to prevent the divorce process's misuse and uphold marriage's sanctity. By incorporating provisions from Islamic Sharia, the legislator has empowered wives to initiate the dissolution of the marital bond in cases of harm, thus preventing potential abuse and misuse of divorce power by the husband. The Qatari Permanent Constitution emphasizes the significance of the family as the foundational and fundamental unit of society.

The law strengthens family ties, protects mothers, children, and the elderly, and ensures processes such as divorce are regulated in order to prevent abuse, guarantee fairness, and ensure these vulnerable groups receive the care and support they need, creating a more compassionate and inclusive community. The law also encourages reconciliation between spouses, providing guidelines and a legal framework for marital relationship restoration attempts. Reconciliation efforts lead to more familial stability and fewer divorces, thus holistically contributing to the community strength of the Qatari society. The law also has economic implications as it includes provisions on financial matters such as inheritance, dowry, alimony, child maintenance, and matrimonial maintenance. For instance, in Qatar, well-off children are legally required to financially support their parents if they are unable to meet their own needs. The parent's financial situation determines this obligation. If the parents lack the means to support themselves, their affluent children are legally obligated to

provide for them. These economic or financial provisions help reduce family disputes regarding money matters as financial rights and responsibilities are detailed.

Overall, the community and societal implications of Qatari Family Law No. 22 of 2006 are numerous and multifaceted. It can be observed that the law plays a significant role in shaping family dynamics in Qatar and reflects a balance between preserving religious values, cultural heritage, traditions, and contemporary society; thereby contributing to the progress and social stability of the Qatari society. Thus, the law simultaneously regulates family matters and plays a crucial role in enhancing the overall well-being and social fabric of Qatari society. However, family planning and the issue of reproductive rights are missing from Qatari family law (Al-Amri, 2020).

4 Conclusion

The State of Qatar places a strong emphasis on protecting families and children through its legal frameworks and the establishment of dedicated organizations like the Qatar Foundation for Protection and Social Rehabilitation, Aman, Wifaq, and Dreama. These institutions are focused on supporting future generations to contribute to the state's development.

The Qatari Family Law, in effect since 2006, plays a vital role in maintaining family stability. This law, which has been in place for over 22 years, includes numerous provisions aimed at safeguarding family unity and well-being. It provides detailed guidelines for marriage contracts and related matters, reflecting a comprehensive approach to family issues. The law's foundation in both Sharia and legal principles enhances its credibility and effectiveness, ensuring that it addresses the various aspects of family life within the Qatari context.

Given the critical role that the Qatari Family Law plays in shaping family dynamics, future studies should explore its impact on specific groups, such as women, children, and extended families. Additionally, research could investigate how the law adapts to evolving social norms and the challenges faced by modern Qatari families. Understanding these aspects could provide valuable insights into how the law might be refined to better serve the needs of Qatar's diverse population while preserving the principles of family unity and social stability.



Fig. 1 Social implications of the Qatari family law no. 22 of 2006

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Chapter 23

The Hidden Face of Domestic Violence: Economic Abuse of Women and Its Impact on Family



Khalid J. Al-Naama and Hala Abdel Magid M. Al Ahmadi

Abstract This chapter discusses the economic abuse of women in the Qatari context as a form of domestic violence that has not received adequate attention from scholars. The overall aim of the chapter is to unfold this hidden form of domestic violence and elaborate its impacts on women and their families. This research reports that Qatari women experience economic abuse during marriage and upon separation or divorce. This abuse takes many forms, including forcing the wife to make excessive financial contributions to the household, maintaining financial ties with the husband, controlling the wife's inheritance, demanding payment of the husband's debts, and squandering household income on unnecessary expenses or projects. Following a divorce, economic abuse continues through arrangements related to residency and financial responsibilities for childcare.

1 Introduction

Economic abuse of women in the Arab region remains overlooked and underexplored despite the proliferation of studies addressing other forms of domestic violence, notably physical, sexual, and psychological abuse (Alsawalqa, 2020; Kanougiya et al., 2021). Subsequently, data and information on economic abuse in the Arab region regarding prevalence, causes, impacts, and policy implications are rather scarce (Alsawalqa, 2020; Kanougiya et al., 2021). In fact, this face of domestic violence and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is still relatively invisible not only in the Arab region but in other countries alike (Postmus et al., 2018). Although available literature on economic abuse acknowledges its certain components, such as control, exploitation, and employment sabotage, the nature and magnitude of all its types remain unexplored (Alsawalqa, 2020; Kanougiya et al., 2021). The estimation of the

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prevalence identified varies in accordance with differences in location, source, and methods used for its assessment (Kanougiya et al., 2021). Country statistics generated through different methods and sources demonstrate that the range of economic abuse is between 3 and 5% in Canada and 12 and 15% in the USA, whereas it reached 21% in the United Kingdom, 28% in Vietnam, and 62% in a rural Bangladesh (Ansara & Hindin, 2009; Kanougiya et al., 2021; Kutin et al., 2017; Yount et al., 2022).

Few studies have been carried out on this subject in Arab countries (Usta et al., 2013). Evidence emerging from a survey utilizing a sample amounting to 2,410 women in Palestine in 1994 indicates that 45% of them disclosed experiences of economic abuse by their husbands (Haj-Yahia, 1999). A comparative quantitative study conducted in Jordan utilizing a random sample of 500 working married women from rural and urban backgrounds found that 44.5% of rural women and 55.5% of urban women were subjected to economic abuse, identifying financial control and economic sabotage among its main forms (Alsawalqa, 2021). Statistics produced by Demographic and Health Surveys for the period 2005 and 2008 in Egypt showed that around 43% of married women ages 15 to 49 disclosed being subjected to economic abuse (Usta et al., 2013). Outcomes of a study carried out in Alexandria, Egypt, reported that 27% of women were compelled by their husbands to beg for money, 25% were coerced to borrow money, and 14% disclosed that money was withheld from them (Kharboush et al., 2010). Results of an exploratory study done in Lebanon utilizing data collected from interviews and focus group discussions indicated that many women in Lebanon experience different kinds of economic abuse types and lack control over their own earnings (Usta et al., 2013).

Findings of a study conducted by Doha International Family Institute in 2021 entitled “Young Perceptions of a Happy Marriage” in the State of Qatar pointed out that economic disparity, difficulty in dealing with economic matters, and financial responsibilities are among the most important factors of divorce in the State of Qatar. Women experiencing economic abuse meet significant obstacles in realizing economic self-sufficiency and economic stability. They face serious threats to their wellbeing as a whole; as perpetrators use various psychological, physical, and economic tactics to control, manipulate, exploit, isolate, and terrify their victims, a matter that has destructive impacts on women and their families.

This chapter attempts to shed light on women’s economic abuse within the Qatari context and its impacts on them and their families. It also illuminates some policy measures to help prevent and mitigate its impacts. The chapter is organized into five sections. We first discuss conceptual issues for family violence and economic abuse, followed by sections on research methods and the Qatari family context of this study. The next two sections discuss the findings of the study and its implications. The final section concludes with policy implications.

2 Conceptualizing Family Violence and Economic Abuse

Family violence refers to a spectrum of violence and abuse occurring in familial relationships, whether it be physical, sexual, economic, or emotional and psychological, inflicted upon various categories of family members, including men, women, children, the elderly, and the disabled (Alsawalqa, 2020; Commonwealth of Australia, 2010; Tyyskä & Saran, 2013). Family violence also involves the neglect of family member's needs, especially children (Alsawalqa, 2020; Commonwealth of Australia 2010; Tyyskä & Saran, 2013). In intimate relationship settings, economic abuse is recognized as part of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) be they men or women. Economic abuse of women within marital and family contexts is thus an integral component of family violence. It is also part of a broad array of Violence Against Women (VAW), encompassing rape, sexual harassment, forced/early marriage, female genital mutilation, and honor crimes, among others (Conner, 2014; Grovert, 2008). Article 1 of the United Nations "Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women" defines "violence against women" as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (United Nations General Assembly, 1993). The root cause of domestic violence is societal gender inequality and the uneven power relationship between men and women (Conner, 2014; Grovert, 2008; Matthews, 2004). Previously, economic abuse was regarded as part of emotional violence because it overlaps with psychological abuse, specifically in its deployment of coercive control, however, it was later identified as a distinct form of abuse and a category of violence in its own right (Kanougiya et al., 2021). Economic abuse correlates profoundly with other forms of domestic violence, such as battering, intimidation, isolation, and psychological abuse in general (Adams et al., 2008; Postmus et al., 2012; Stark, 2007).

Economic abuse has been defined as the perpetuation of certain acts against intimate partners to seize, control, exploit, sabotage, or limit their ability to acquire, use, and maintain economic resources (Adams et al., 2008; Conner, 2014; Grovert, 2008 Matthews, 2004; Postmus et al., 2018). Economic abuse of women in familial relationships refers to the myriads of controlling and sabotaging behaviors that intentionally seek to hamper women's ability to gain, utilize, and retain economic resources (Adams et al., 2008; Matthews, 2004; Pence & Paymar, 1986; Postmus et al., 2018). Financial abuse, as a sub-category of economic abuse, involves abusive and manipulative acts like using credit cards and valuable objects of the victims without their legal consent or personal authorization. It can also take the form of forcing the victim to agree to contractual obligations and risking family property through gambling or venturing into business (Sharp, 2008). Specific acts of economic abuse encompass withholding access to resources such as denying the victim money to cover their needs, refusing to pay for household expenses, blocking the victim's access to the family house or evicting her from it, denying access to transportation (e.g., using the family car), childcare, health care, among others economic resources (Dutton &

Goodman, 2005). Economic abuse involves sabotaging acts like preventing the victim from education or work, or blocking her from completing her working hours, draining the family's savings and assets, or overloading the victim and the household with expenditures and debts (De Serpa Pimentel et al., 2021; Postmus et al., 2018). Despite this distinction between economic and financial abuse, scholars, like (Sharp-Jeffs, 2016) use the two terms interchangeably.

Theories developed by sociologists to explain family violence, including Social Learning Theory, Social Structure Theory, Ecological Theory, Exchange Theory, and Feminist Theories, among others, call for examining the social structure producing violence (Grovert, 2008; Gelles, 1983, 1993; Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001; Heise, 1998; Yllo & Bograd, 1988). Social Learning Theory, for instance, argues that inflicting violence upon others is a learned behavior that individuals gain through observation and imitation of others, especially during childhood. Those who grow up in a household where domestic violence occurs are more likely to replicate that behavior in their own relationships (Bandura, 1977; Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001). Social Structure Theory points out that societal structures, notably economic inequality, social exclusion, and social discrimination, contribute to stress and frustration, which can lead to domestic violence; as economic hardship and lack of social safety net can increase the likelihood of violent behavior (Gelles, 1993; Straus & Gelles, 1990). Ecological Theory integrates multiple factors at the individual, relational, community, and societal level to understand the complex interplay inducing domestic violence. Personal relationships, community context, and societal norms are key actors within this interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Heise, 1998). Exchange Theory posits that individuals use a cost–benefit analysis approach to consider undertaking violence; they are more likely to exercise violence if the rewards/gains are seen to outweigh the costs. In the context of domestic violence, the rewards can be represented in gaining power and control over their victims, whereas the costs can be legal repercussions or social condemnation (Blau, 1964; Gelles, 1983).

Feminist theories underscore gender inequalities and patriarchal structures in society as the main factors perpetuating male dominance and female subordination. Domestic violence is seen as a mechanism to enforce and maintain these power dynamics (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Grovert, 2008; Yllo & Bograd, 1988). Within this context, economic abuse is viewed as a strategy to maintain power and control over women in marital relationships and over any other family members within familial relationships due to the unequal power relationships between men and women in societies. Patriarchal social structures place men in a privileged status, within and outside the domestic sphere, providing them with more resources and power than women. This uneven power structure enables men to exercise control over their wives and family relationships and justifies the deployment of violence and abuse to maintain male authority (Abramsky et al., 2011, 2019; Grovert, 2008). Strange as it may sound, exercising violence over women within marital relationships may not terminate when men lose their superior status and lack economic and financial resources enabling them to adequately provide for the family, as their abuse is likely to continue to compensate for their incompetence and to assert their dominance and superiority (Cools & Kotsadam, 2017; Vyas & Watts, 2008).

Economic abuse severely impacts on the victim's life, freedom, and welfare (Adams et al., 2008; Postmus et al., 2012). It undermines their economic self-sufficiency due to a lack of decision-making ability and access to economic resources such as income, enabling them to meet their basic needs without depending on private or public support (Adams et al., 2008; Cools & Kotsadam, 2017; Vyas & Watts, 2008). Economic abuse jeopardizes marriage stability and threatens family cohesion. Control by husbands and male guardians of the economic resources of their spouses and working daughters, notably inheritance and income, can greatly induce marital and familial problems, thus destabilizing matrimonial and family relationships. Economic abuse has devastating impacts on children alike. It impacts their physical and mental health negatively due to limited financial and economic resources (Postmus et al., 2012). Financial abuse impacts children's wellbeing alike, as some of them may resort to criminal activities because of economic deprivation, while others can engage in harmful behaviors such as substance abuse (Postmus et al., 2012).

3 Methodology

This chapter is based on two studies; the first is titled "Domestic Violence against Women in Qatar", conducted by Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) from 2020 to 2021, and is based on an analytical desk review of secondary sources on domestic violence in Qatar. The study sought to cover all available references, reports, research, and articles written by Qatari and non-Qatari researchers on domestic violence in Qatar, and review information on Qatari government websites and NGOs. The second study, titled "An examination of the impact of domestic abuse on Qataris women's mental health", conducted in 2023 adopted mixed methods utilizing primary data. Both studies pointed out that the literature on domestic violence against women in Qatar is outdated, especially with the rising academic interest in new emerging forms like economic abuse. The second study sought to fill this gap in knowledge about existing types of domestic violence in Qatar by addressing the impacts of economic abuse on the mental health of Qatari female victims. The researcher collected quantitative survey from mental health services organizations, family counseling centers, shelters for domestic abuse victims, university students, and the public domain located in Qatar. The Scale of Economic Abuse (SEA-12) was used to analyze the descriptive data for economic abuse among the participants. Overall, three hundred fifty (350) victims of domestic abuse in the past year gave their consent, and 165 women fulfilled the study's requirements to assess the prevalence of domestic abuse and its effects on women's mental health to examine factors associated with victims of domestic abuse and the effects of women's mindset on the risk of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) victimization.

4 Economic Abuse of Women in the Qatari Context and Its Impact on Their Families

4.1 *Legal and Policy Context*

The State of Qatar has made significant strides in supporting the family and empowering women; it has taken numerous legislative, legal, and administrative measures to promote human rights and preserve the human dignity of all its citizens including women and children (Ministry of Development Planning & Statistics, 2015). Guided by its Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030, the State of Qatar developed the First National Development Strategy (2011–2016) and the Second National Development Strategy (2018–2022) to forge a supportive and conducive environment for the implementation of national laws and policies protecting women and children and ensuring their welfare and wellbeing; as conservation of strong and cohesive families that have the capacity to cater for needs and welfare of their members, was at the heart of QNV (2030) (Planning & Statistics Authority, 2018, General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2008). Furthermore, the State of Qatar strengthened its normative policy framework by ratifying important international treaties and conventions like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on June 23, 2009 and the International Convention of the Rights of the Child on April 3, 1995, among others (Ministry of Development Planning & Statistics, 2015). The Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar of 2004 affirmed gender equality, stipulating in Article (34) that “citizens are equal in public rights and duties” and in Article (35) that “People are equal before the law, without discrimination on grounds of sex, origin, language, or religion” (The Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar, 2004). Based on these just principles, the State of Qatar issued and promulgated a number of laws to protect women from violence and abuse and preserve their human rights, for example, the Penal Code No. 11 of 2004 demonstrates Qatar’s commitment to protecting women from crimes causing physical harm to their bodies and integrity notably crimes against honor like slander, defamation, insult, molestation, discredit, dishonor, and those promoting prostitution or abortion (Law No. 11, 2004).

Internationally, many countries legally recognized and defined economic abuse as one of domestic violence’s types and undertook legal and policy measures to address it, including protective orders, financial remedies, and provision of support services for victims (Davies & Lyon, 2014). For instance, in England and Wales, economic abuse is included and clearly articulated in the Domestic Abuse Act of 2021, where it is perpetuated in abusive marital and intimate relationships (Domestic Abuse Act, 2021). With respect to women’s economic and financial rights upon or during marriage, Qatari laws clearly state that the husband is responsible for dowry upon marriage and alimony during marriage. Law No. 22. of 2006 promulgating “The Family Law” in Qatar specified the rights of husband and wife (Almeezan. 28.08.2006). Article 57 on the rights of the wife against her husband affirmed that the wife has a right to legal support or maintenance (permanent Alimony). This Article

also prevents the husband from intervening in her private property and prohibits him from hurting her physically or morally (Almeezan. 28.08.2006). Alimony covers all basic needs of the family and wife, such as food, drink, clothing, and housing, and includes other expenses like maintenance of the maid. A Wife, under Qatari laws, is not obligated to hand over her salary or any other form of income or wealth to her husband without her consent and out of her own free will (Almeezan. 28.08.2006). Economic abuse of married women by their husbands, like confiscation of the wife's salary, inheritance, and economic resources, therefore, is not allowed by Qatari laws as it conflicts with *Sharia*' laws, which are the basis of the Qatari legal framework.

4.2 Social and Family Context

Like in many other countries and societies, despite the existence of a legal and policy framework denouncing violence and abuse against women, cultural practice normalizes and justifies abuse of women in the matrimonial context (DIFI, forthcoming). Forcing women to hand out their wages by their husbands, for instance, seriously jeopardizes the stability of the marriage and threatens the cohesion of the family in Qatar (Al-Raya 21 February 2012/14 March 2009). Marital relations can witness enormous pressure as a result of disputes over the wife's salary, specifically when some husbands seize their wives' salaries, some husbands may consider it part of the family income and then a way to pay off some of their debts. In contrast, the wife considers her salary her own, which leads to quarrels and conflicts until the marital relationship reaches the point of emotional aversion, mutual hatred, and estrangement. This situation may eventually lead to divorce (Al-Raya 21 February 2012/14 March 2009).

Al-Naama's (forthcoming) empirical research titled "An examination of the impact of domestic abuse on Qataris women's mental health" reveals how Qatari women have been subjected to various kinds of economic abuse during marriage and after divorce. The quantitative phase of this study (2023) affirmed that psychological aggression and economic abuse were the most reported forms of abuse for Qatari women. The findings on economic abuse reveal various classifications of this issue. Notably, economic control emerged as the highest reported form of abuse among participants, with an average score of 15.12 ($SD = 4.78$). The mean score for economic exploitation was 7.76 ($SD = 3.50$), and for economic sabotage, it was 9.45 ($SD = 3.98$). The low score for economic exploitation might be due to the government's stringent legislation and monitoring efforts to protect individuals' employment rights, thereby preventing unfair deployment practices. The qualitative phase substantiated the findings of the quantitative analysis as narratives of women (20 Qataris women) shed light on the occurrence and perpetuation of economic abuse during marriage and after separation or divorce.

4.3 Economic Abuse of Qatari Women During Marriage

Financial abuse and economic exploitation were the main forms of economic abuse experienced by Qatari women during marriage (Al-Naama, forthcoming). Many of them narrated how their husband forced them to make excessive financial contributions to the household from their own financial resources, be it their salary or wealth. Also, many interviewed women disclosed the eruption of marital conflict over their wages (Al-Naama, forthcoming). Whereas women usually regard their salary as their own, their husbands view it as part of the family's income and as such a means to pay off some of their debts. Others reported that their husband refused to cover their expenses and depended solely on their salaries for the provision of the household's needs. One participant shared, "Can you imagine that? My husband used to give me only 100 QR per month, even though he covered all the household and children's expenses. Bear in mind that I am an unemployed wife. My mother is the one who supports me financially and pays for my children's education fees".

Some of the exploitative tactics deployed by abusive husbands in the Qatari context include putting the family house on the mortgage to carry out investment activities or start a business, risking by doing so the place that provides a roof over the family members' heads (Al-Naama, forthcoming). Other tactics involve hijacking their inheritance through depositing the wife's inheritance or wealth in a joined bank account and then abusing the deposited amount through venturing into business or paying off debts. Furthermore, Qatari women reported that their husbands squandered household income on unnecessary expenses or failed investments (Al-Naama, forthcoming). For instance, one participant described her situation "He does not like anyone to question his decisions, he always has to be right. I cannot let him do that because he spends our money on infeasible investments, which always come to a loss. Then he controls what is left of our money to close his debts".

Needless to say that all these cohesive controlling behaviors served to maintain victim's financial ties with the husband depriving her of any control or decision-making power over financial matters.

4.4 Economic Abuse of Qatari Women After Divorce

Many of the interviewed women disclosed that economic abuse did not end with the termination of the marriage rather it was exercised in its aftermath upon separation and after divorce as perpetrators withheld money, denying them and their children allowances to cover their basic needs (Al-Naama, forthcoming). Following a divorce, economic abuse continued through manipulating arrangements related to residency and financial responsibilities for childcare (Al-Naama, forthcoming). Participants described experiencing financial hardships, particularly covering school fees, which appeared to be driven by personal vendettas aimed at retaliation against the wife. For instance, one woman said, "My ex-husband refused to give me money, even for

her children's expenses". Another form of economic abuse emerged, where husbands prioritize their leisure activities over the family's basic needs. One participant shared, "My husband relies on me financially. I handle our living expenses because his salary is insufficient since he did not complete his high school diploma. He uses his income mainly for his leisure activities, such as hunting trips". These narratives support the quantitative findings of the study considering the household factor as a risk indicator for economic abuse. The results indicate a significant difference in reported economic abuse based on annual household income. Specifically, those earning less than \$25,000 per annum had a mean rank of 97.60 ($n = 63$), those earning less than \$100,000 had a mean rank of 80.48 ($n = 33$), those earning less than \$150,000 had a mean rank of 65.99 ($n = 36$), and those earning \$150,000 and above had a mean rank of 76.21 ($n = 33$).

5 Results of the Study

Regarding the descriptive analysis of the risk of economic abuse, the Scale of Economic Abuse (SEA-12) was used to analyze the descriptive data for economic abuse among the participants. The mean score for economic abuse was 32.34 ($SD = 8.85$), while the mean score for economic exploitation was 7.76 ($SD = 3.50$). In the group of victims, the average score for economic control was 15.12 (standard deviation = 4.78), whereas the average score for economic sabotage was 9.45 (standard deviation = 3.98). The test results showed an insignificant association between physical, sexual, injury, negotiation, and economic abuse with the state and level of anxiety among the respondents (Al-Naama, forthcoming).

Results for the multiple linear regression indicated that there was a collective significant effect of psychological aggression and economic abuse on predicting the level of PTSD among participants. The results of the regression and the two predictors explained 12% of the variance, and the significant regression equation was found to be ($F(6,158) = 3.507, p < 0.003$). The results showed that psychological aggression and economic abuse were significant positive predictors of PTSD level ($\beta = 0.180, t = 2.32, p < 0.001$, and $\beta = 0.272, t = 2.625, p < 0.001$, respectively). The results showed that other forms of abuse, such as negotiation, physical injury, and sexual coercion were not significant predictors of PTSD levels among the participants (Al-Naama, forthcoming).

The results of multiple linear regression analyses indicate that there was an effect of economic abuse on depression levels. The significant regression equation was found ($F(6,158) = 2.146, p < 0.001$). In contrast, other forms of abuse were not a significant predictor of depression level. Furthermore, the results indicated that psychological aggression and economic abuse were significant positive predictors of PTSD levels, with Psychological Aggression showing $\beta = 0.180, t = 2.32, p < 0.001$, and Economic Abuse showing $\beta = 0.272, t = 2.625, p < 0.001$.

Major key findings were found from quantitative phases showing that psychological aggression and economic abuse were the most reported forms of abuse whereas

physical assault and sexual coercion and injury were the least reported kinds of abuse among the participants. Also, exposure to different forms of abuse was associated with an increased risk of acquiring PTSD, Depression, and Anxiety. The results from regression analysis showed that Psychological Aggression and Economic Abuse were significant positive predictors of PTSD level. In contrast, other forms of abuse were not crucial predictors of PTSD. Furthermore, economic abuse had a noteworthy impact on Depression levels (Al-Naama, forthcoming).

6 Impacts of Economic Abuse on Qatari Women and Their Families

Economic abuse impacts severely on women and their families. Qatari women reported that arguments over the abuse of their financial resources, for instance, went beyond intense discussion reaching the point of emotional aversion, mutual hatred, resentment, and estrangement, affecting the wife psychologically and mentally (Al-Naama, forthcoming). One participant shared, “Many times, I tried to remind him about the good moments, but still, after 15 years of marriage, my husband insisted on the divorce and threatened to cut me off Nafaqa [financial support paid after divorce for a certain period] whenever I asked him to visit his children. He does not want to see them anymore” (Al-Naama, forthcoming). Interviewed women also mentioned the evolution of the abuse from being financial in nature to physical violence when disputes over their salary or wealth occur, notably if they refused to surrender their wage, wealth, or inheritance to the abuser (Al-Naama, forthcoming). The experiences of Qatari women fall in line with the analysis of other studies and literature on economic abuse which found out that it is most often intertwined with other forms of domestic violence. These studies pointed out that perpetrators deploy physical, sexual, or psychological violence to maintain their power and control over their victims, as the tactics they use limit women’s access to economic resources, jeopardize their financial self-sufficiency, and imprison them in abusive relationships (Kanougiya et al., 2021; Alsawalqa, 2021; Abramsky et al., 2019). For instance, the study done on married Jordanian women found that economic abuse intertwined with other forms of domestic violence, notably physical, psychological, and emotional harassment (Alsawalqa, 2021). Women subjected initially to economic abuse also experienced emotional and psychological abuse to be pursued by physical abuse as tactics reinforcing each other with the aim of maintaining power and control (Alsawalqa, 2021). Jordanian women reported that they felt frustrated and neglected and were told by their abusers that they were inadequate. Then, they disclosed that they were slapped by their abusers (Alsawalqa, 2021). Others reported that their abusers attempted to sabotage their employment through harassment at their workplace through continuous phone calls (Alsawalqa, 2021). Another study on the economic abuse of women in India utilized a cross-sectional survey in informal settlement areas in Mumbai. The feedback from 4906 women revealed that 23% of

them had experienced at least one type of economic abuse by an intimate partner or a family member, and found an association with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts (Kanougiya et al., 2021).

Economic abuse causes profound psychological harm to women's mental health due to the endurance of financial hardship affecting their livelihood and wellbeing (Postmus et al., 2018). Studies demonstrated that women experiencing economic abuse suffer short-term and long-term mental health problems, especially those low-income ones (Abramsky et al., 2019; Vyas & Watts, 2008). The stress emanating from the lack of financial support for housing and inadequate financial resources to cover expenses of children's schooling and the basic needs of the household contributed to increasing risks for depression, anxiety, diminished self-worth and self-esteem, and caused suicidal ideation (Al-Naama, forthcoming; Kanougiya et al., 2021; Alsawalqa, 2021; Abramsky et al., 2019; Usta et al. 2013).

Economic abuse has devastating effects on children alike (Kanougiya et al., 2021; Usta et al., 2013). These abuses, which continue after divorce, impoverish women and lower the standard of living of their families substantially (Kanougiya et al., 2021; Usta et al., 2013). The limited financial aid provided by the ex-husband, or its denial of it altogether, adversely affects children's education, and physical and mental health (Postmus et al., 2018). It negatively affects wellbeing of children, as some of them may resort to criminal activities due to economic deprivation, and others can engage in harmful behaviors such as begging or substance abuse (Kanougiya et al., 2021; Usta et al., 2013).

7 Conclusion

This chapter sheds light on economic abuse as a form of domestic violence that has not been adequately explored. The chapter provides evidence and empirical support for its prevalence and consequences, elaborating on its harmful impacts on women and their families. The case study demonstrates its correlation with psychological aggression asserting the need for remedy and intervention. Domestic violence against women in the Qatari context involved the deployment of tactics like coercing women to maintain financial ties with their husbands, manipulating them to make excessive financial contributions to the household, or using women's inheritance for their business, forcing them to pay off their debts during marriage. Upon divorce, economic abuse included forms like withholding financial aid, limiting, or withholding children's allowance or denying covering children's school fees. The study elaborated on the harmful impacts on Qatari women's psychological and mental health, as the deployment of these forms of economic abuse was associated with an increased risk of acquiring PTSD, depression, and anxiety. While the case study revealed these psychological consequences, the relationship between economic abuse and other forms of domestic violence, notably the physical one in the Qatari context, is yet to be explored further and studied. Situating economic abuse within the wider context of domestic violence in Qatar and understanding its relation to the power

and control dynamic deployed by perpetrators allows the formulation of policy and legal interventions to address and mitigate its impact in a more holistic manner.

The case study of economic abuse against women in the Qatari context also reveals the existence of a gap between legislation and social practices. Laws governing the financial arrangement of couples during marriage and after divorce allocate the financial responsibility of covering the needs of the household and family members' expenses to the husband. The wife is not obliged to forcefully contribute to the household in anyway nor is she required to surrender her inheritance, wealth, or salary to the husband. The same arrangement applies after divorce. The discrepancy between the legal framework governing this area and practice requires undertaking additional policy and legal measures to protect women and their families from economic abuse. Increasing awareness, reviews of laws, and strengthening interventions are needed to enhance mechanisms protecting Qatari families from all forms of violence including economic abuse. Generation of evidence in terms of data and statistics on its prevalence, causes and consequences is needed to inform policymaking, as little can be done if institutional responses to economic abuse in Qatar are hampered by lack of knowledge and evidence.

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Chapter 24

Entrepreneurial Aspirations in the Gulf: The Impact of Family Business Experience on the UAE Students



V. S. Damodharan , Glenn W. Muschert , K. A. Asraar Ahmed ,
and Louise Patterson

Abstract The present study delves into the entrepreneurial aspirations of undergraduate students in the UAE, a region that is uniquely characterized by its blend of traditional family values and rapid economic development. This study will specifically focus on how the influence of family, a cornerstone of Emirati society, shapes the business goals of students. It will explore the impact of family influence on students' entrepreneurial intentions and compare the entrepreneurial aspirations of students from families with established businesses to those of students from non-business-owning families. Additionally, the study will evaluate the effect of direct involvement in family businesses on students' entrepreneurial ambitions. Through this research, we aim to gain greater insight into the role of family influence in shaping students' entrepreneurial goals and understand the impact of family involvement on entrepreneurial intentions in the context of the UAE.

Keywords Family business · Entrepreneurial intention · Gulf society · Gender disparity · Empirical study · Educational influence · Policy implications

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1 Introduction

Family business entrepreneurs in the UAE are not just a part of the economic landscape, they are the backbone of their economic transition and rapid growth. These entrepreneurs have capitalized on opportunities in the growing market by venturing into sectors that have a crucial role in the growth and economic development of the UAE. In the last five decades, the UAE shifted from an economy based on fishing, pearl diving, and agriculture to a diversified trade center with the discovery of oil. The main reasons are that the visionary leadership under His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and His Highness Sheikh Rashid Al Maktoum focused mainly on infrastructure, health, tourism, and education, propelling rapid growth.

The various family business entrepreneurs supported the idea and developed a sustainable business model. These entrepreneurs, who are vital as family businesses account for more than 90% of the private sector in the GCC, have evolved from sibling partnerships to national and cross-border conglomerates. There is drastic growth expected in the future as entrepreneurs play crucial roles in the construction, retail, and automotive sectors, driven by exclusive agency laws. Family values drive the purpose of these businesses. However, to ensure these businesses' continued success and growth, we must all commit to preparing the next generation of family business entrepreneurs to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Budding entrepreneurs are essential as the older generations pass down business values and history while the younger members introduce innovative perspectives. The pandemic acted as a test for resilience, as businesses had to change their outlook, prompting family businesses to adapt by adopting new technologies and strategies, such as e-commerce (Alkaabi & Ramadani, 2024; Scarlet, 2024). There can be differences in vision between the existing generations and the youth, which require collaboration for successful transitions. As the market changes, family businesses must prepare successors through knowledge transfer and strategic alignment to ensure sustained growth and resilience (Ng & Hamilton, 2024; Abdullah, 2024; Dubey et al., 2024)

The present study employed a robust stratified random sampling method, which divided the population of undergraduate students in the UAE into distinct subgroups based on essential characteristics such as family business ownership and work experience in family enterprises. This method ensures that each subgroup is adequately represented in the sample, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of family business experience on students' entrepreneurial mindset. The research sheds significant light on the subject, delving into individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors when considering or engaging in entrepreneurial activities.

The study's findings, which reveal the positive association between practical involvement in a family business and students' self-assurance and perceived behavioral control, are not just significant, they are crucial. This research implies that social norms and expectations significantly influence the entrepreneurial aspirations of male and female students, even if they possess the requisite experience in family business. Despite their family business background, male and female students face

social discouragement, reflected in the negative correlation between subjective norms and behavioral intention. These findings provide a deeper understanding of the interplay between family influence, gender, and social norms in shaping entrepreneurial aspirations.

2 Literature Review

The author compiled findings from different sources, as in Table 1.

2.1 Hypothesis Development

Logically emerging from the literature in the field, the following hypotheses are the subject of testing in the present study, as organized in the theoretical framework illustrated in Fig. 1.

H1: Attitude (ATT) has a significant influence on Family Business Succession Intention (FBSI)

H2: Parental Emotional Support (PEMS) has a significant influence on FBSI

H3: Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) has a considerable influence on FBSI

H4: Family Business Self-Efficacy (FBSEF) has a significant influence on FBSI

H5: Entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESEF) has a substantial influence on FBSI

H6: Commitment to family business (CMFM) has a considerable influence on FBSI

H7: Identification of the role of family members with the firm (IDFM) has a significant influence on FBSI

H8: Financial Literacy (FLIT) has a substantial influence on FBSI.

3 Methodology

The measurement instruments in this study derive from existing studies based on the hypotheses framed. According to a purposive sampling method, the researchers sent a 39-item questionnaire to business students in the UAE. Specifically, the target study population was college students with family business backgrounds. Based on Hair and colleagues' (2020) principle, the sample size estimation employed 1:5 ratios. While the minimal sample required was 195, the valid data included 715 cases, as in Table 1.

The four measuring items of attitude (ATT) are derived from Liñán and Chen (2009), financial literacy (FLIT) from Iram and colleagues (2022), and entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESEF) derived from Cooper and Lucas (2006). Barakat and colleagues (2014) and family business self-efficacy (FBSEF) derived from

Table 1 Summary of relevant scholarly literature

Author(s)	Year	Summary	Findings
Abdullah	2024	Explores how an entrepreneurial mindset influences family business success	Found that a robust entrepreneurial mindset positively impacts performance
Alkaabi et al.	2024	Collection of case studies on family businesses in the UAE	The research highlights diverse strategies and challenges in UAE family businesses
Dubey et al.	2024	A case study on technology diversification in family businesses	Technology diversification can be both a strategic move and a necessity
Ng et al.	2024	It examines socio-emotional wealth in UAE family SMEs	There is a positive link between socio-emotional wealth and innovation
Ramadani et al.	2024	The research focuses mainly on the relationship bridging the gap between mindset and performance in UAE family businesses	Entrepreneurial mindset positively correlates with business performance
Scarlat	2024	The research discusses trends in family business succession	The research identifies emerging trends and challenges in succession planning
Iram et al.	2022	Studies interventions for the importance of financial awareness among women entrepreneurs	Effective interventions and understanding can lead to improved decision-making
Sindakis et al.	2022	The research aims to collate the literature on entrepreneurial strategies across Arab family firms in the GCC	The research Identifies cultural influences on entrepreneurial strategies
Krueger et al.	2021	The research theoretical contribution of family business ventures in the GCC,	The research mainly advocates for theoretical, context-specific research approaches in the GCC
Basly et al.	2020	The research examines factors influencing commitment in family businesses	The research tries to understand the gap between identity fit and emotional connection for enhanced commitment
Basly	2017	The research discusses governance and strategy in Arab family businesses	Emphasizes the cultural and structural uniqueness of Arab family businesses
Fahed-Sreih	2017	The research explores the founder's legacy in Arab family businesses	Legacy significantly impacts governance and strategy
Palaiologos	2017	The research theorizes the dynamics of Arab family businesses	The research highlights unique challenges and strategic approaches in Arab contexts
Dawson et al.	2015	The research analyzes variables of commitment in family business	The research identifies key factors like trust, shared values, and communication
Lia et al.	2009	Develops a cross-cultural tool for measuring entrepreneurial intentions	Validated tool applicable across different cultures

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Author(s)	Year	Summary	Findings
Turner & Lapan	2003	The research addresses career development among Native American adolescents	Cultural identity plays a significant role in career development
De Noble et al.	1999	The research develops a methodology to understand the self-efficacy of entrepreneurs	Self-efficacy correlates positively with entrepreneurial action
Chen et al.	1998	Studies self-efficacy in entrepreneurs versus managers	The research shows higher entrepreneurial self-efficacy in entrepreneurs than in managers
Ajzen	1991	Introduces the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), linking beliefs and behavior	Attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control influence the research’s behavioral intentions

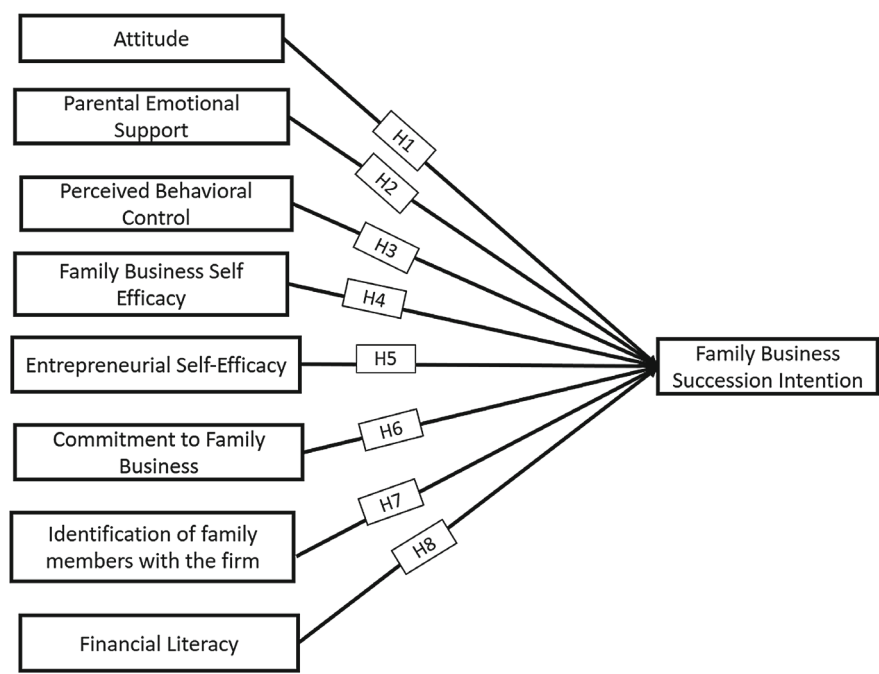


Fig. 1 Theoretical framework

Torres and colleagues (2023). The items of family business succession intention (FBSI) are derived from Liñán and Chen (2009), and the identification of family members (IDFM) from Berrone, Cruz, and Gomez-Mejia (2012) and Basly and Saunier (2020). The five commitment items toward family business (CMFM) are derived from Dawson and colleagues (2015). The three items of parental emotional

Table 2 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics		
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	445	62.23
Female	270	37.77
<i>Educational qualifications</i>		
UG	518	72.44
PG	197	27.56
Total sample N	715	100%

support (PEMS) are derived from Turner and Lapan (2003) and PBC from Koropp and colleagues (2014).

The analysis involved a total of nine constructs with thirty-nine items. All the measuring items are measured using “5” point Likert scales. Scale “1” denotes “strongly disagree” and “5” denotes “strongly agree.” As shown in Table 2, a total of 715 samples were collected. From the respondents’ profiles, college students pursuing undergraduate degrees totaled 72.44 %, and postgraduate degrees totaled 27.56%. The sample consists of 62.23 % of male and 37.77 % female students.

4 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data was analyzed using the partial least-squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique. The PLS-SEM technique consists of two steps. Step 1 uses different tests, like (i) reliability tests, (ii) validity tests, and (iii) common method bias detection tests, to examine the relationship between the visible and hidden variables. called “measurement model analysis.” Step 2 measures the central relationship between the two variables, namely the exogenous and different tests used in the endogenous analysis, also known as “structural model analysis.” These include a multi-collinearity detection test, a path analysis beta test using the bootstrapping method, an R² test, an f-square test, a Q² test for predictive relevance, and a PLS prediction test. Using Smart-PLS 4 software, this study followed Hair and colleagues’ (2022) PLS-SEM technique. The comprehensive data analyzed was obtained from a survey, providing valuable insights into the subject’s current status under examination.

Step 1

- (i) *Reliability tests*: The reliability test clarified the robustness of each item in measuring its relevant constructs (Hair et al., 2024). According to Bagozzi (2011) and Bonett and Wright (2015), the criteria state, “It can be measured if all the items of each construct should have loadings of above 0.5 value.” Hair and colleagues (2024) recommend that Cronbach’s alpha value of each construct

should be above 0.7 to have a reliable measurement of its constructs, as described in Table 3.

- (ii) *Validity tests:* The measuring items should positively correlate with their constructs. The average variance extracted (AVE) value above 0.5 is called the “convergent validity” of constructs (Hair et al., 2013, p. 102), as in Table 3. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Hair and colleagues (2024), each construct’s square root of the AVE value should be less than that construct’s latent variable correlation values. Thus, it is called a discriminant validity test (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 4 describes the square root of AVE values with the Fornell and Larcker (1981) method. Hair and colleagues (2022) recommend the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) as an advanced method to identify the correlation between the indicators of constructs. The correlation between the indicators of constructs should be below 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2024) to satisfy the discriminant validity test. See Table 5 for HTMT discriminate validity analysis results.
- (iii) *Common method bias (CMB) detection test:* In cross-sectional studies, the items for the dependent and independent variables were tested using the same scale as the Likert scale method, which can lead to respondents giving biased answers (Kock et al., 2021; Podsakoff et al., 2023). Knock (2015) “defines the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF): the VIF values should not be greater than 3.3” (p. 7) to avoid a common method bias problem, as in Table 3.

Step 2

- (i) *Multi-collinearity detection test:* There should not be a high standard error between the independent variables with high correlation (Hair et al., 2024). The variance inflation factor (VIF) is “the degree to which the standard error has been increased due to the presence of collinearity” (Hair et al., 2013, p. 124). The VIF values of all constructs should be less than 5 (Streukens et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2017), as in Table 3.
- (ii) *Path analysis beta coefficient test using the bootstrapping method:* The beta coefficient of the hypothesized relationship between the constructs indicates the main effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable. The path coefficient values can vary between -1 and $+1$. Hair and colleagues (2013, p. 130) state that the procedure of bootstrapping involves “mainly a large number of subsamples (i.e., bootstrap samples) drawn from the original sample with replacement.” To find the path coefficient between the construct relationships, the bootstrapping method needs at least 5,000 sub-samples with no sign and a 95% two-tailed significance level (Hair et al., 2021). Eight hypotheses [H1–H8] appear in this study. All the hypotheses [H1–H8] are significant at a 95% confidence interval with a p-value < 0.05 with “FBSI” as the dependent variable. There is a considerable path coefficient (β) between the ATT $\rightarrow$ FBSI with $\beta = 0.159$ (p-value = < 0.001 , t-statistics = 8.401), PEMS $\rightarrow$ FBSI with $\beta = 0.327$ (p-value = < 0.05 , t-statistics = 13.505), PBC $\rightarrow$ FBSI with $\beta = 0.104$ (p-value = < 0.05 , t-statistics = 4.451), FBSEF $\rightarrow$ FBSI with $\beta = 0.199$

Table 3 Item loadings, reliability, and convergent validity test

Construct	Items	Item loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Variance inflation factor (VIF)
FBSI	FBSI1	0.934	0.881	0.927	0.81	
	FBSI2	0.918				
	FBSI3	0.844				
	FBSI4	0.878				
	FBSI5	0.899				
	FBSI6	0.901				
FLIT	FLIT1	0.842	0.853	0.9	0.693	1.145
	FLIT2	0.820				
	FLIT3	0.844				
	FLIT4	0.822				
PBC	PBC1	0.891	0.852	0.91	0.771	1.225
	PBC2	0.883				
	PBC3	0.861				
ATT	ATT1	0.897	0.843	0.881	0.652	1.074
	ATT2	0.854				
	ATT3	0.801				
	ATT4	0.923				
IDFM	IDFM1	0.881	0.842	0.904	0.759	1.132
	IDFM2	0.846				
	IDFM3	0.886				
	IDFM4	0.887				
	IDFM5	0.825				
	IDFM6	0.876				
CMFM	CMFM1	0.869	0.909	0.935	0.783	1.144
	CMFM2	0.877				
	CMFM3	0.937				
	CMFM4	0.854				
	CMFM5	0.879				
FBSEF	FBSEF1	0.902	0.859	0.914	0.781	1.126
	FBSEF2	0.891				
	FBSEF3	0.858				
	FBSEF4	0.879				
ESEF	ESEF1	0.904	0.905	0.933	0.778	1.144
	ESEF2	0.895				
	ESEF3	0.886				

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

Construct	Items	Item loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Variance inflation factor (VIF)
	ESEF4	0.842				
PEMS	PEMS1	0.827	0.913	0.932	0.695	1.086
	PEMS2	0.881				
	PEMS3	0.835				

Table 4 Discriminant analysis with Fornell & Larcker (1981) method

	ATT	CMFM	ESEF	FBSI	FLIT	IDFM	PBC	PEMS	FBSEF
ATT	0.807								
CMFM	0.03	0.885							
ESEF	0.198	0.013	0.882						
FBSI	0.278	0.396	0.516	0.901					
FLIT	0.148	0.084	0.181	0.416	0.832				
IDFM	0.013	0.175	0.103	0.404	0.083	0.871			
PBC	0.011	0.304	0.177	0.372	0.236	0.225	0.878		
PEMS	0.026	0.103	0.114	0.371	0.205	0.163	0.074	0.834	
FBSEF	0.109	0.157	0.219	0.463	0.12	0.223	0.125	0.038	0.884

Table 5 Discriminant analysis with heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT)

	ATT	CMFM	ESEF	FBSI	FLIT	IDFM	PBC	PEMS	FBSEF
ATT									
CMFM	0.091								
ESEF	0.168	0.058							
FBSI	0.236	0.426	0.575						
FLIT	0.148	0.100	0.204	0.473					
IDFM	0.071	0.182	0.127	0.461	0.114				
PBC	0.145	0.334	0.199	0.428	0.272	0.262			
PEMS	0.091	0.119	0.137	0.397	0.218	0.185	0.111		
FBSEF	0.111	0.163	0.249	0.531	0.148	0.253	0.146	0.110	

(p -value = < 0.05 , t -statistics = 9.172), ESEF $\rightarrow$ FBSI with $\beta = 0.246$ (p -value = < 0.05 , t -statistics = 10.865), CMFM $\rightarrow$ FBSI with $\beta = 0.243$ (p -value = < 0.05 , t -statistics = 11.802), IDFM $\rightarrow$ FBSI with $\beta = 0.224$ (p -value = < 0.05 , t -statistics = 10.272), and FLIT $\rightarrow$ FBSI with $\beta = 0.196$ (p -value = < 0.05 , t -statistics = 10.497), as in Table 6 and Fig. 2.

Table 6 PLS-SEM bootstrapping path analysis test at 95% confidence interval with dependent variable “FBSI”

Path	Hypothesis	Beta coefficient (β)	t-statistics	P-values	f-square
ATT - > FBSI	H1	0.159**	8.401	0	0.081
PEMS- > FBSI	H2	0.327**	13.505	0	0.319
PBC - > FBSI	H3	0.104**	4.451	0	0.031
FBSEF - > FBSI	H4	0.199**	9.172	0	0.157
ESEF - > FBSI	H5	0.246**	10.865	0	0.184
CMFM - > FBSI	H6	0.243**	11.802	0	0.175
IDFM- > FBSI	H7	0.224**	10.272	0	0.119
FLIT - > FBSI	H8	0.196**	10.497	0	0.114

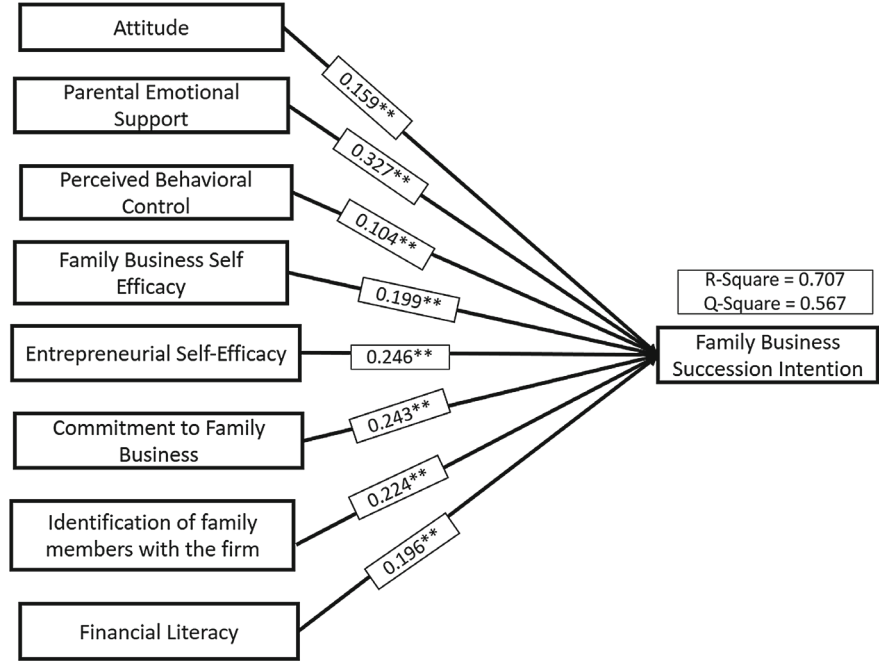


Fig. 2 SEM-PLS output results (beta-coefficient)

- (iii) *Coefficient of determination test*: The coefficient of determination (R^2) test clarifies the model’s effectiveness in explaining the relationship between independent and dependent variables. The R-square value above 0.5 is considered the model with medium explanatory power (Hair et al., 2021). The proposed model has a medium effect on FBSI = 0.707, as in Fig. 2.
- (iv) *Effect size test*: The effect size “analyses how much a predictor construct contributes to the R-square value of a target construct in the structural model”

(Hair et al., 2013, p. 198). An effect size above 0.15 is considered a medium effect (Hair et al., 2021; Jafri, 2013). The predictor constructs such as PEMS, FBSEF, ESEF, CMFM, IDFM, and FLIT had a medium effect on the target variable FBSI. The predictor constructs, such as ATT and PBC, had a negligible effect on the target variable FBSI, indicating that the variables effectively predicted the dependent variable, as in Table 4.

- iv) *Predictive relevance test*: Predictive relevance is “a measure of how well the path model can predict the originally observed values” (Hair et al., 2013, p. 183). Geisser (2017), Stone (1974), and Hair and colleagues’ (2021) procedures mainly state that Q2 values above 0.35 results have strong predictive relevance. The proposed model of this study has good predictive relevance for FBSI with $Q2 = 0.567$, which is above 0.35, as in Fig. 2.
- v) *PLS prediction*: Some of the indicators of the dependent variable in the PLS-SEM model have lower mean absolute error values than those in the linear model (LM) for both samples. Thus, both models have medium predictive power (Shmueli et al., 2016; Hair et al., 2024).

5 Findings and Implications

The following recommendations emerge from the findings:

- (a) Enhance Financial Literacy Programs (FLIT): Given the significant positive relationship between FLIT and FBSI, training programs for improving entrepreneurs’ understanding of financial literacy should be planned to lead them to new ventures.
- (b) Promote Perceived Emotional Support (PEMS): As PEMS shows the most potent effect on FBSI, policymakers should prioritize initiatives to increase perceived emotional support. Family entrepreneurs’ forums are necessary for idea-sharing experiences, and university students should attend to develop the required skills.
- (c) Strengthen Attitude toward Financial Management (ATT): Positive attitudes are critical to effective financial behavior. Incubator training programs should focus on fostering these positive attitudes.
- (d) Improved Self-Efficacy (FBSEF and ESEF): Both financial behavior self-efficacy and emotional self-efficacy are critical for enhancing financial behavior. Training and workshops are necessary to boost self-efficacy.
- (e) Support Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC): Strengthening individuals’ control over their financial behaviors can lead to greater financial satisfaction, especially when tools and resources empower financial control.
- (f) Focus on Commitment and Identification with Financial Managers (CMFM and IDFM): Developing solid relationships with financial managers can lead to better economic outcomes. Strategies to enhance these relationships are needed.

6 Conclusions

The findings suggest that family business backgrounds significantly shape this mindset, with students from such backgrounds demonstrating a greater inclination toward entrepreneurship. The research also indicates that exposure to business operations and the family legacy is pivotal in fostering an entrepreneurial mindset. The present paper brings to light several significant findings and explores their implications for families, educational institutions, and policymakers in the Gulf region. The gender gap issue demands attention from all stakeholders, who must collaborate toward establishing a more comprehensive and inclusive entrepreneurial atmosphere.

It proposes strategies to empower the coming generation of entrepreneurs, especially women, by leveraging the advantages of family business experiences while simultaneously addressing cultural impediments. These recommendations, derived from the study's insights, offer a promising and optimistic way to promote a more entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Gulf region. Implementing these initiatives can lead to a more diverse and dynamic business landscape, instilling hope for a brighter future. The research analysis demonstrates that future entrepreneurs need support and help on many important factors, including financial literacy and other skills, to run a venture.

The government and policymakers can focus on these areas, provide initial startup support, and provide incubators and capital support, which can significantly improve individuals' financial strength to develop new ventures. The research results show that the intention can become a reality if they organize various workshops and support systems for budding entrepreneurs. Seed capital and entrepreneur camp and arranged an idea generation workshop on the importance of comprehensive financial education and support systems like licensing and funding options to help interested entrepreneurs foster positive financial behavior and satisfaction.

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Chapter 25

Qatari Women, Family, and Workplace: Navigating the Domestic-Public Divide



Mustabshira Jannat

Abstract This chapter examines how Qatar’s quest for gender equality, a core goal of the Qatar National Vision 2030 (Government Communication Office. <https://www.gco.gov.qa/en/about-qatar/national-vision2030/>), has influenced Qatari women’s participation in the labor force. Despite their academic qualifications and government initiatives, Qatari women stay underrepresented in mainstream jobs and leadership positions. Using a feminist geographic perspective, the chapter explores how patriarchy contributes to this imbalance. The concept of “gendered space” is analyzed as a key barrier while analyzing the factors like family expectations and societal norms that limit women’s roles. The chapter also investigates how Qatari women navigate these challenges by bargaining with patriarchy.

1 Introduction: Qatari Women and National Goal

Qatar, one of the influential Gulf nations located in the Arabian Peninsula, is heavily committed to modernization and women’s empowerment through the Qatar National Vision 2030 (hereinafter “QNV 2030”). Sheikha Mozah Al-Missned, one of the three consorts of Qatar’s former Emir, has been a driving force behind Qatar’s ambitious transformations through educational investment and policy reforms¹ to materialize QNV 2030. For instance, the establishment of the Education City in Doha, which offers world-class education within Qatar’s borders and empowers Qatari women by granting them access to prestigious international universities and opening doors to the labor market.

Despite Qatar’s efforts in education and policy reforms, gender disparities persist in education and job sectors. Women face obstacles, such as limited job opportunities

¹ Here, “reform” means the changes in State laws and policy that aim to decrease disparity in the distribution of human rights in the civil, political, and economic domains between male and female citizens.

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aligned with their qualifications and societal norms relegating them to traditional domestic roles. Rosalind Barnett (2004) calls this domestic-public divide a “century-old tendency” and argues that “...the maternal wall, the ideal worker, and the ideal homemaker beliefs are current iterations of the century-old tendency to mark women as suited for the home and men as suited for the workplace” (p. 667). This chapter aims to examine the challenges faced by Qatari women that arise from their participation in the workforce. It explores how Qatari women negotiate with the difficulties of patriarchal domination while navigating their roles from families to workplaces and leadership positions.

The study observes that an existing “gendered space”² in Qatar, rooted in the patriarchal system, reinforces gender divisions by confining women to domestic roles and emphasizing family responsibilities, while granting men greater access to public life. This division significantly impacts women’s engagement in the workforce, influencing their educational paths, marriage choices, family roles, and career opportunities. This not only limits women’s options in the workforce but also discourages them from seeking leadership positions. This chapter uses a feminist geographic lens to explore how women navigate in this space.

There are three main sections in this chapter excluding the introduction, methodology, and concluding discussion. The first section discusses the chapter’s main focus and contextualization of Qatar as a nation investing heavily in its women’s emancipation. It also provides a clarification of the research approaches employed in this chapter. The next section portrays an overview of Qatari women’s performance in the workforce and leadership positions and challenges presented by patriarchal norms. Thereafter, a scenario of existing gendered space in Qatari society is highlighted by drawing on secondary data from three relevant case studies. It also analyzes the findings through the lens of this chapter’s research approaches.

2 Conceptual Framework

Feminist scholars often explore the concept of the “patriarchal bargain” (James-Hawkins et al., 2017), in which women navigate and negotiate within patriarchal systems to gain agency. Rather than viewing patriarchy solely as an oppressive force, this concept highlights how women can sometimes strategically work within these systems to improve their circumstances, albeit in constrained ways. One of the foremost thinkers in this area is Deniz Kandiyoti, a key figure in the post-colonial study of gender and Islam. Kandiyoti’s work (1988), particularly her theory of the patriarchal bargain, suggests that while patriarchy imposes restrictions, women also engage with and manipulate these structures to secure certain benefits or protections.

² The term gendered space is taken from Krystina Golkowska’s work on “Qatari Women Navigating Gendered Space”. Please see Golkowska, K. (2017). Qatari women navigating gendered space. *Social Sciences*, 6(4). <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci6040123>.

Parvez (2021) suggests that the patriarchal bargain is often more complex in certain regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where the inclusion of religion adds another layer of complexity to women's agency. In these contexts, perceived religious norms and values can reinforce patriarchal structures, making it more difficult for women to challenge traditional roles and assert their autonomy. This situation reveals the ways in which femininity, patriarchy, and religion intersect and shape the experiences and agency of women across different societies.

However, a recent field study in Qatar suggests that it is not religion but cultural norms and deep-rooted customs that hinder women's economic and professional engagement (Naguib & Aref, 2024). Ross (2008) argues that the hindrance of women's empowerment in some regions, particularly in oil-rich countries, is not due to religion but rather linked to the development of the oil and gas industry. The reasoning behind this argument is that the oil and gas industry creates an economic structure that hinders women's participation in the labor market. Resource-rich countries tend to focus on male-dominated industries, reducing the need for women to work outside the home, and limiting opportunities for women in sectors such as education and services. This leads to slower progress in gender equality and women's empowerment. Since not all MENA countries depend on oil and gas, this has shifted the discussion toward Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, of which Qatar is one of the most prominent members.

Qatar has undertaken a long-term strategic plan while hosting the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ with an aim to showcase itself as a contemporary state. Tok and Khaled (2021), highlight that "the World Cup is an opportunity to support Qatar's aims of showcasing how modern and progressive the country is" (p. 26). By rebranding its identity worldwide, Qatar's priority is to establish the "empowered woman" narrative (Harkness et al., 2018).

According to the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor, and Social Affairs, QNV 2030 focuses on women's empowerment through their work rights, reducing family responsibilities, preventing gender discrimination, and providing equal opportunities at work and in leadership positions. As per the Ministry, Qatar encourages sharing family responsibilities among all its members through several means, including providing flexible working hours, providing the option to work from home, and offering maternity leave to enable higher participation of Qatari women in the workforce (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). However, the historically present patriarchy in Qatari society creates a conflict between the country's goal of achieving gender balance in the workforce and the reality of women developing their careers. Here, the concept of gendered space is studied in various dimensions, including education and career choices, marriage prospects, family responsibilities, social norms, organizational settings, rapid modernization, etc. This chapter draws on several frameworks to analyze the study areas, with a particular emphasis on feminist geography, and theories of patriarchy. Specifically, it applies Kandiyoti's concept of "bargaining with patriarchy" to explore how Qatari women navigate gendered spaces. Additionally, it relies on Golkowska's (2017) view of feminist geographers on the

interaction between gender and space in defining public and private spheres and the spatial constraints experienced by women within this structure.

Additionally, this framework of feminist geography (1980) is constructed upon the theories of post-colonial theorists, such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler. Their contribution has brought forward the practice of studying women based on their lived experience following a particular time, place, and locality (Blidon & Zaragocin, 2019). Understanding Arab culture through this lens is particularly relevant, given Qatar's Sunni Muslim monarchy governs the country based on laws derived from Islamic norms and approaches. This approach helps see Qatari women's mobility within established gender relations that is reshaping their identities in contemporary workforce reinforcement.

Moreover, this chapter considers Walby's (1989) framework of "theorizing patriarchy" a critical framework to study family as a fundamental institution perpetuating gendered roles and women's subordination. Walby's theory explains how patriarchy manifests its control in different spheres from home to occupational fields, such as science, politics, and finance, while maintaining male dominance. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for studying Qatari women's career decisions and experiences in male-dominated workplaces.

3 Methodology

This chapter extensively relies on discourse analysis, which involves examining various forms of communication, e.g., conversation and written, and vocal and sign language to understand the perspective of a particular group or community. This method includes analyzing a wide range of texts, such as media articles, op-eds, speeches, legal documents, etc. Additionally, quotes and narratives from three fieldwork-based case studies are considered for better comprehension. These studies are Romanoski and Al-Hassan (2013), Al-Ansari (2020), and Mitchell et al. (2015).

These studies, although secondary sources for this chapter, are selected for their effective research methodologies that investigate the reasons behind women's limited engagement in Qatar's workforce. These studies provide invaluable primary data generated from fieldwork through interviews with Qatari-educated, working, and non-working women; and Qatari men. Additionally, ethnographic involvement allowed for the interpretation of Qatari women's perspectives regarding the national call for empowering women.

While the chapter draws upon data and findings from these studies, it neither is influenced by those researchers' opinions nor accepts entirely the interpretations therein. Rather, it is developed based on the main focus of this chapter which is understanding Qatari women's positionality in the context of navigating the public and private divide.

4 Perplexity Between the Domestic and the Public Spheres

This section provides an in-depth of the current situation of Qatari women in light of state policy reforms as well as challenges in job sectors, educational fields, family dynamics, etc. The section is divided into two parts: empowering Qatari women and reshaping Qatari women's positionality. Each part explores distinct aspects related to the complex relationship between the domestic and the public spheres for Qatari women.

4.1 Empowering Qatari Women: An Urge

Presently, Qatar is actively enhancing its international reputation. As part of its State-building initiatives, Qatar has prioritized projects to increase female participation in the national agenda. This effort is driven by Qatar's desire to remove the stereotype of unequal treatment often associated with Arab nations. A report was also published by a popular Qatari news media, *Doha News*, which asserted that Qatar ranks among the top Arab countries for women's rights (Scott, 2013). Dye (2007) emphasizes Qatar's progressive stance on women and considers the country as a beacon of progress in the Middle East, particularly in advancing women's rights.

According to the Qatari Constitution, discrimination against women is strictly prohibited. Article 35 of the Constitution states that "All persons are equal before the Law and there shall be no discrimination whatsoever on grounds of gender, race, language or religion". Indeed, Qatar remains persistent in its policies and opportunities that empower women to make autonomous decisions. Also gender equality and the empowerment of women are central elements of QNV (2030). Qatari media outlets have highlighted this commitment. *Gulf Times* (2022) reported that this vision places significant emphasis on supporting women's empowerment, strengthening their skills, and securing their access to employment opportunities under the news headline: "Equality and empowering women is central pillar in Qatar National Vision". Similarly, *The Peninsula* published "Equality, empowering women is central pillar in QNV 2030", describing that Qatar strengthens the protection and well-being of Qatari families to safeguard women's self-esteem and honor, and to prevent any form of discrimination or abuse within the families. These protection funds also offer various benefits and support mechanisms to enhance their social protection (Blaydes et al., 2021).

At the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women on 16 March 2017, Qatar emphasized the necessity of providing resources for women's empowerment across all platforms, including economic and political decision-making. While presenting Qatar's mission and vision, Najat Al Abdullah, Director of Family Affairs at the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs, said

The National Vision 2030 prioritized the empowerment of women through their right to work and enhancing her social protection. Qatar also remains committed to all the international

and regional agreements it signed on the rights to women led by the UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women... when it comes to employment, whether in the public or private sector, it also provides women with opportunities with men in the assumption of leadership position. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017)

Sheikha Mayes, the director of the US-Qatar Business Council, emphasized that utilizing the skills of highly educated Qatari women is a key element in the country's shift toward a knowledge-based economy (Alagos, 2022).

In line with the above-mentioned aims, the Qatari government has established the foundation for gender equality in the workforce in 2001 through the Civil Service Act (Law No. 1 of 2001) and the regulations of the Council of Ministers Order No. 13. Along with identifying the steps to solidify women's economic position, Law No. 24 of (2002) (the Retirement and Pensions Law) provides retirement benefits for women. Article 16 allows them to combine their earnings and pension entitlement with those of a deceased spouse (Felder & Vuollo, 2008). Recent additions to labor laws, under Chap. 9: "Employment of Women" (articles 93–98) of Law No. 14 of (2004) on the promulgation of Labour Law, have further enhanced women's rights in the workplace, including equal pay, pension benefits, training opportunities, and prospects for job advancement.

However, research shows that despite State-level efforts, Qatari women's participation in mainstream job sectors remains marginal due to cultural and institutional barriers, including patriarchal gender roles, and male dominance in professional and leadership positions (Felder & Vuollo, 2008).

4.2 *Reshaping Qatari Women's Positionality: A Dilemma*

Qatar's rapid modernization and socio-cultural changes have significantly impacted the lifestyle of Qatari women in recent years. The image of Qatari women keeps on reshaping through modern investment, where new identities are forged and social roles are negotiated. Qatari women are becoming increasingly visible in public sectors, including education, employment, and sports, which indicates a significant shift in societal norms (Golkowska, 2014, 2017). The most significant aspect of reforms is equality of education and the availability of more educational opportunities for females. According to the Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority (2022), the number of female Qatari graduates (68%) in the 2020–2021 academic year is more than double that of Qatari males (32%). Recent reports also show the growing presence of women in Qatari businesses. Approximately 20% of business agencies are led by Qatari women ("*Equality, Empowering Women is Central*", 2022).

Regardless of government support and a wide range of professional opportunities, Qatari women's visibility in career development remains low at 36%, compared to 88% pursuing higher education (Al-Tamimi, 2016). However, the "Gender gap between the rate of economic activity of females and males continues to widen despite the improvement in the female participation rate (42%) in the labor market" by 2021 (Planning & Statistics Authority, 2022, p. 73). Despite, a growing female presence

in the workplace there is a vacantness in the leadership positions (Dizon, 2022). As per the latest report, 44% of Qatari women mention cultural reasons as a barrier to establishing professional goals (Walker, 2016). Romanoski and Al-Hassan (2013) observed that 52% of participants identified maintaining family commitments as the biggest challenge for women in leadership positions. Women are also underrepresented in political positions, notwithstanding their high academic achievements in political science. Only two women serve on the Municipal Council and one female ambassador out of 100 (Al-Tamimi, 2016).

Studies have observed that cultural norms substantially influence Qatari women's career choices, often restricting them to traditionally female roles, like teaching or medicine (Golkowska, 2017). This is further exacerbated by familial pressures where educated Qatari women face restrictions in selecting their career paths (Mitchell et al., 2015). In addition to this, certain professions remain inaccessible to Qatari women, such as architecture, chemical engineering, etc., despite the huge demand for those two fields in the Qatari labor industry (Georgetown University, 2018; Abuhelaiqa, 2020), while nursing or flight services are considered less prestigious for Qatari women (Bahry & Marr, 2005). Data from the Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority confirm the "absence of women in leadership positions in ministries concerned with political, economic and legal affairs" (2022, p. 74). Many Qataris view the political sphere as predominantly suited for men, a perception rooted in traditional and religious values that often place men in positions of authority over women. Around 40% of Qataris consider it unacceptable for a woman to run for political office (Golkowska, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2015). At a conference hosted by Qatar University in 2010, panelists acknowledged that the pervasive glass ceiling practice limits women's leadership opportunities. Nouf Al Sulaiti, the director of the Legal Affairs Department at Vodafone, stated that "For women in Arab society, there is a cap on the level of achievement they can reach" (Toumi, 2010). Al-Ansari's (2020) research further supports the argument that Qatari women predominantly occupy entry-level administrative roles due to the glass ceiling phenomenon.

In Qatar, the coexistence of national efforts to promote gender equality and the persistence of traditional gender roles creates a complex challenge for women. Al-Muhannadi (2011) highlights this tension, describing Qatar as a conservative tribal society where entrenched patriarchal norms limit the society's ability to fully modernize. Although modernity provides opportunities for women to assume leadership roles, traditional frameworks maintain a male-dominated system where most decisions continue to be centered around men. Amal Al-Malki (2010) stresses on this dilemma and argues that the conflict between modernization and the preservation of traditional values is detrimental to women's advancement (p. 60). In her research, Al-Malki (2010) identifies several key obstacles that prevent women from attaining leadership positions in the workplace. The most prominent barriers include societal customs and traditions, which were reported by 23.7% of respondents, and disapproval from husbands, cited by 22.9%. Additionally, concerns about mixing with males were highlighted by 15.8%, while 15.7% pointed to the long hours spent outside the home as a significant challenge. Lastly, 13.5% of respondents

indicated that a lack of interest and trust from institutions in hiring women for leadership roles further hampers their progress. A policy paper jointly published by the Social & Economic Survey Research Institute and Qatar University also observed that Qatari males prefer women-only office environments for their working female family members (Lari et al., 2020, p. 3).

Other complications related to women's education merit attention. Mitchell et al. (2015) found that the majority of females they interviewed expressed discontent with societal pressures to pursue higher education, particularly when most men prefer wives with lower levels of education. The study revealed that 35% of Qatari women were disappointed to leave their educational pursuits after marriage.

Hence, it is evident that marital obligations often lead to a withdrawal from the workforce which creates a gendered space in the workforce that restricts women's mobility. The conflict between traditional norms and modern aspirations burdens women who are considered key vessels of cultural preservation. James-Hawkins et al. (2017) noted "young women are in a quandary, caught between social expectations to become a wife and mother and pursuit of personal educational and workforce goals" (p. 4). This dichotomy of nurturing patriarchy and mitigating the national goal of women's empowerment is perilous and leaves women with more loaded duties to accomplish, which has negative repercussions for building a healthy Qatari society in the long run.

5 Qatari Women's Bargain in the Gendered Space

Qatar aims to achieve gender balance while upholding Qatari tradition amidst modernization efforts outlined in QNV 2030. Interestingly, there is no specification as to which aspects of tradition to uphold and which aspects to modify. As a result, constraints arise in defining women's roles who are frequently seen as key components for cultural conservation.

The situation exerts push and pull forces on Qatari women's choices. While on one hand, they are pulled backward to traditional bindings, modernization projects push them toward workforce participation. They either sacrifice their professional careers or burden themselves with double responsibilities to secure a professional establishment, simultaneously taking the family charges. A family is a highly gendered space where roles are gendered and heavily loaded on women's charges. Many might argue that "charge" is not an appropriate term for women, since men are traditionally considered head of the family, thus, holding the charge. However, the word "charge" is more appropriate for Qatari women who are not accountable for traditional household tasks. They are wealthy and have access to household assistance. Nonetheless, this does not discharge them from family responsibilities. They significantly manage the family's functioning where holding the charge is highly essential to their supervision. Parvez (2021) also employs the term "charge" to illustrate the modern roles of Qatari women within the family. She writes, "This 'new domesticity' demands a new role from the 'modern' wife and mother were to be in charge of a new household of

the modern nation. Women's role indeed has shifted but the concept of unpaid labor remains, household work was not considered on equal level of paid work" (Parvez, p. 236).

This complex relation between societal pressures and individual agency leads women to develop strategies to negotiate with the system according to their patriarchal structures. Given the circumstances, Kandiyoti's concept of "bargaining with patriarchy" (1988) helps determine how Qatari women navigate the challenges.

To further explore the gendered space, I will draw findings from three relevant case studies, Romanoski and Al-Hassan (2013), Al-Ansari (2020), and Mitchell et al. (2015), to demonstrate how the concept of gendered space influences job sectors and leadership positions. These case studies provide primary data on Qatari women's positionality in domestic, work, and leadership roles. Although the selected studies were conducted between 2013 and 2020, their findings are still relevant to the current discussion. It should be noted that the findings of these studies align with the statistics published by the Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority until 2022. At the time of this writing, official data for 2024 has not been released, as the Authority typically publishes data every two years.

5.1 Gendered Space Through Traditional Boundaries: Study 1

Romanoski and Al-Hassan's (2013) study, *Arab Middle Eastern women in Qatar and their perspectives on the barriers to leadership: Incorporating Transformative learning Theory to Improve Leadership Skills*, explores the obstacles hindering women from attaining leadership positions in Qatar despite their educational achievements. Due to its small citizen population, Qatar often relies on expatriates to meet its corporate workforce needs. However, this reliance creates intense competition for leadership roles, resulting in barriers not only for Qatari women but also for Arab female expatriates. Both groups face similar challenges in advancing to managerial positions as they navigate cultural norms and workplace dynamics shaped by a predominantly expatriate workforce.

The data from the fieldwork indicate three principal reasons, cited by 76% of participants, behind the challenges faced by women in attaining leadership positions: traditional Arab values and perceptions of women, the patriarchal structure of the family, and strict interpretations of religious rulings.

The participants' responses are essential to this chapter's focus, as they provide direct insights into the gendered space model, which illustrates how women are traditionally tied to the home and discouraged from seeking employment outside of it. For instance, a participant holding a senior position at her workplace asserted:

Yes, I agree. Normally, leadership positions require more time and devotion than other positions, and in our culture, there is a dominating belief that most of a woman's time should be spent at home with her family. Even when you have a successful female leader, you will hear jokes that her husband must be the woman at home. (p. 7)

Another participant commented:

Yes, there are barriers like culture, religion, and the thinking of Arab men. Arab men do not encourage women to be leaders and manage people, especially managing men. This is taught when they are young, e.g., the brother is always responsible for sisters, and the father is responsible for his daughters, sisters, and wives. (p. 5)

One participant with significant work experience in Qatar noted:

Also, some people interpret the rules of Islam based on experiences, or a wrong understanding of Islam... I know some families who refused to allow their daughters to work in some places because of the idea of working with men in the same office. That is a misconception and this is supported by some historical stories in the first stage of Islam. The women worked hand by hand with men to build the Islamic community. Some men will have different perceptions about the women who work in these places, that they are not suitable for him as a wife, and this leads the parents to prevent their daughters [from working] in middle management. (p. 7)

All three testimonials above from Romanoski and Al-Hassan's study show the common perceptions of the participants' families, societal beliefs, and religious interpretations that demonstrate a clear gender division. It is visible that overcoming the division is a big challenge for women. Even if a woman transcends these barriers and shoulders a managerial role, she may face ridicule from colleagues regarding her husband's perceived role at home. Traditionally, the home is regarded as a woman's domain where she can hold managerial authority. Thus, if a woman ventures into a senior position that demands significant time, energy, and commitment at the workplace, society may accuse her of neglecting familial duties or her husband of lacking traditional masculinity.

The aforesaid discussion based on Romanoski and Al-Hassan's data accentuates the pivotal role of gendered space in restricting and confining women's navigation and, hence, falls under the framework of feminist geography. Furthermore, patriarchy nourishes this setup of gendered space where people are brought up to see men's space and women's space differently by differentiating roles and responsibilities through traditional boundaries, which are strictly attached to the gendered body. From a feminist geographical perspective, Qatari women's prominent positioning within the workforce may hinder the traditional norm of preserving the heterogenous family labor division. In this situation, bringing a substantial shift in the system will require a protracted period.

5.2 Gendered Space in Work-Family Balance: Study 2

The second case study selected for this research is a doctoral dissertation *The "Glass Ceiling" and Empowerment of Qatari Women for Employment in Qatar* by Dr. Bothaina Hassen Al-Ansari, conducted in 2020. This study presents immense empirical data on the underexplored issue of Qatari women's limited visibility in leadership roles. It shows that the "Glass Ceiling" practice is overarching in Qatar, whose

primary victims are Qatari women, despite accomplishing good academic degrees and having versatile skill sets. Qatar is experiencing rapid development, but women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, which is a potential setback for the country. Regardless of their growing participation in the country's workforce, women primarily occupy entry-level or middle-management positions with limited representation at higher levels of management. This finding matches the report of the Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority (2022).

With a total of 76 Qatari participants, consisting of 52 females and 24 males, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of both employee and employer attitudes.

Data from this study reveal the significant impact of the glass ceiling on the Qatari job market, mostly in senior leadership and management roles that are often perceived as suitable for men only. Moreover, female respondents cite self-inflicted reasons for not deliberately pursuing senior positions aiming to balance work-family responsibilities. Al-Ansari argues, "Self-Infliction can be a reason for the lack of enthusiasm to progress into senior roles by women themselves due to the Islamic and patriarchal society values" (p. 2). What Al-Ansari referred to as self-infliction, Hill et al. (2004) termed it the "mommy track" in their article *Beyond the Mommy Track: The Influence of New-Concept Part-Time Work for Professional Women on Work and Family*. This term describes the strategy adopted by women to prioritize raising their children over their careers, often by taking breaks from work or switching to less demanding jobs, as a means of achieving work-family balance (p. 122).

The data from this dissertation also show that a significant number of working women opt for early retirement even before proving themselves as potential candidates for senior roles, because they remain less enthusiastic and dissatisfied juggling with work and family simultaneously. They also show reluctance to work due to men's domination in the office. Conversely, management-level employers perceive that women employees are content with junior roles, stay less focused, and show less interest in developing their skills for higher-level positions. This scenario reflects Walby's "theorizing patriarchy" (1989) where male dominance controls women's role from household to working zone.

This representation of Al-Ansari's research allows us to consider why women are less likely to progress to senior positions. It can be said that their obligations at the family level might be less exhausting due to technological advancement and affluence, yet neither wholly reduced nor equivalently shared among other family members. In a study, Butler & Skattebo (2004) demonstrate how family conflict negatively impacts job performance ratings based on worker's sex as society thinks managing work-family balance is principally a women's issue. They remark, "... this is the first study to demonstrate that men suffer negative consequences even for minor periods of absence due to family responsibilities" (p. 559). According to a recent research finding, women holding PhD degrees were compelled to resign from prominent positions to prioritize their familial obligations over their careers (Naguib & Aref, 2024).

Here it is important to analyze the scenario presented above through the feminist geographic lens as it addresses patriarchy associated with geographical location

and men's and women's physical movements. By location, Qatar is an inclusive part of the Arab world where the gendered body is considered hierarchical, i.e., men are superior and have easy access everywhere. On the contrary, women are under men's subordination (Harkness et al., 2018) and their movements are confined according to the narrative of male supremacy. Despite having educational success, Qatari women are not apart from this deep-rooted patriarchal setting. Fulfilling the national imperative of economic participation has become an additional burden for Qatari women. Therefore, by engaging in entry and mid-level positions at work, women are conforming to the national agenda while performing family obligations, which can be considered as their coping mechanism to bargain with patriarchy.

5.3 Gendered Space in Choices Conflict: Study 3

At the national level, there is a national call for Qatari women to enter the workforce. Considered an integral part of the nation, Qatari women are expected to respond to this call. On the surface, it appears to be a promising opportunity for them to advance their careers. However, the call for domesticity is historical, deep-rooted, and ingrained in Qatari values. As a result, many Qatari women may feel conflicted about aligning themselves with the national agenda. Rather than viewing it as an opportunity, they may perceive it as a burden. Mitchell et al (2015) in their study "*In Majaalis Al-Hareem: The Complex Professional and Personal Choices of Qatari Women*", explored these tensions by focusing on the experiences of Qatari women navigating the expectations of both the country and the society.

For a nuanced performance, the researchers of this study conducted participant observation in *majlis al-hareem* (women's gatherings), a ubiquitous and integral social institution for Qatari women. This Qatari *majlis* serves as a forum for inter-generational dialogue allowing women of different ages to freely exchange thoughts and discuss various aspects of their lives "which can extend beyond family gatherings to encompass religious topics, educational experiences, neighborhood issues, or socializing" (p. 1).

While exploring negotiation strategy to national call, researchers discovered that, in the *majlis*, the predominant discussion centered around the dilemma faced by educated Qatari women—the conflict between pursuing a career and getting married. A brief overview of this ethnographic findings is presented below:

1. Qatari women face inequality in the job market as their Qatari male peers are given priority by employers.
2. Qatari women feel that their Qatari male colleagues are more highly paid, rewarded, and inspired than they are.
3. Importantly, conflicting discussions arise regarding prioritizing workforce participation versus maintaining family obligations, which is unduly thought of as women's sole duty.

4. Qatari women stress that higher academic degrees and ambitious career goals negatively impact their chances of getting married and having a fulfilling family life, including earning their husbands' trust. This concern is agreed upon by many experienced women and parents.
5. A crucial point discussed in almost all majlis is that a higher percentage of Qatari-educated women remain unmarried and/or divorced. Hence, elders in the family remain fearful whether their daughters' ambition might sentence them to a life alone.

Some numerical data of this study disclose important facts about popular mindset. Although 98% of the total participants of this study see it as encouragement by the Qatari government to join the national workforce, a prevalent frustration has been seen among 73% of them due to the social pressure of traditional attitudes toward marriage and family. Illustrating the complexity, participants of the study expressed different thoughts on the disproportionate women representation in the workforce and leadership positions. Regarding the right to work outside, more than 55% of Qatari women participants believe that men have a greater entitlement to work than women. Moreover, 49% of them think that marital relations would be disrupted if the wife earns more than her husband.

This ethnographic observation also highlighted the fear among some participants that they would face ridicule in the *majlis* if they continued working after marriage. Furthermore, few participants believe that it would be difficult but not impossible to balance the demands of family and work. There were pressing concerns from many Qatari women regarding how work harms marriage. One participant stated:

[A woman] wouldn't want to work after graduation as it may present problems with the marriage since [she] wouldn't be always available to spend time with her husband every day and it might distract her from raising her children to the best of her abilities. (p. 7)

Another survey conducted among young Qatari graduates also found that female students with a variety of educational and career goals unanimously identify family and child-rearing as their primary focus post-marriage (James-Hawkins et al., 2017). Nonetheless, in a recent survey, 23% of respondents noted a significant challenge in balancing work and family responsibilities. Factors contributing to this imbalance include the commute, heavy family duties, extended work hours, restricted leave, and limited childcare options (Naguib & Aref, 2024, p. 95).

Through the findings of the ethnography study of Mitchell et al., it becomes evident that women shoulder the sole responsibility of responding to the national call to join the workforce while fulfilling their domestic roles. However, half of the participants, who struggle in their jobs, believe that Qatari men receive preferential treatment at work regardless of their qualifications. The researchers observed a sense of disappointment among Qatari women regarding the government's efforts to join the workforce. Many women feel pressure by this expectation while also meeting the needs of their families. However, it is not that they wish to disregard the opportunity; rather, their concern lies in the judgment. They might be judged by the traditional society, a society that always measures the perfection of women's duty, performance at work, and mostly duty toward family.

This study shows that Qatari women wrestle while dealing with such a complex issue of maintaining traditional family responsibility over prioritizing professional advancement. However, their response to navigate this pressure is not homogenous but rather based on their internalization and priority. Researchers of this study agreed that “the decision to emphasize career and education over home and family remains a difficult choice for many Qatari women” (p. 11).

The difficulty in balancing family and work is highlighted by the repeated use of the term “conflict” in this study. This term can be interpreted as the gendered space, which is also a conflict between domestic and public space. This idea of conflict here imposes rigidity on the gendered body, which limits a woman’s mobility to spaces that are available to men. The control exerted over gendered bodies outlines the dynamics of power and privilege within the society.

6 Discussions and Conclusions

A brief analysis can be drawn in light of the studies explored above. Here, a few back-questions may help explain them under the addressed frameworks: Why does a woman’s likelihood of marriage decline with higher education; Why does the presence of a working wife, especially in leadership roles or with higher income, potentially threaten marital relationships; Why do employers continue to favor male candidates over females, despite efforts to promote gender equality? These questions stress the discourse surrounding gendered space—the traditional assignment of women to domestic roles and men to public pursuits. Society apprehends that pursuing high-level careers may divert women from domestic duties and may impact their marriage prospects. Moreover, women in leadership or high-income roles may disrupt traditional marital power dynamics, cause tension, and increase the divorce rate.

Nonetheless, conscious and unconscious biases of gender stereotyping are strongly engrained in Qatari organizational culture despite the commitment to non-discrimination. Male-focused organization policies and male-oriented workplaces lead to employers favoring male candidates over females. The practices of the glass ceiling indicate the undermining of women’s potential at the managerial level and in leadership positions. On the other hand, social patriarchal values reinforce self-infliction among female employees of unwillingness for higher posts aiming for a balanced work-family survival. Salem & Yount (2019) called this phenomenon—the “contemporary Qatari patriarchy”, where women are inspired for new employment opportunities, however, under a preserved male-dominated structure. They claim, “...employers and state institutions in Qatar maintain patriarchy while calling upon Qatari women to work outside the home under a new system of ‘contemporary Qatari patriarchy’” (p. 502).

Discussions within the majlis are also significant as they unveil societal sentiments. They shed light on the burdensome nature experienced by Qatari women as they are the ones who need to fulfill societal as well as the state’s expectations. Many

women face the dilemma of prioritizing family over career, while others sacrifice their professional aspirations for marital harmony. This highlights the ongoing bargain between modernity and the traditional patriarchal gendered space experienced by Qatari women. This discussion is also relatable to Kandiyoti's "Bargaining with Patriarchy" (1988) where women play an integral role in strategizing the constraints in a dynamic patriarchal setting.

In a nutshell, despite government initiatives to promote women's empowerment, Qatari women remain underrepresented in the workforce and leadership positions. The persistent gendered spaces pose a significant challenge in achieving gender equality and women's professional advancement in Qatar in the name of preserving traditional values amidst massive modernization efforts.

Throughout this chapter, Qatar's significant investment and unwavering efforts to integrate women into the national workforce have been evident. It emphasizes Qatar's liberal sense of women's agency which can dismantle the stereotypes of oppressed Arab women though many scholars (Al-Muftah, 2017; Harkness et al., 2018) see it as a global economic interest of Qatar. The scenario can be problematic, because the repetitive narratives of empowerment may camouflage the actual barriers that require institutional and social rectifications. Therefore, it needs to be addressed by the native voices and further research which may help awaken the Qatari societies.

Qatar is a nation that values its family ethics, which is integral to its social and national cohesiveness since family ethics play a crucial role in fostering a prosperous generation. It is also widely recognized that no nation can be self-sufficient without a balanced participation of men and women. And, the practice must begin within the core unit of the family, where male and female children witness their mothers engaged in work and achieving economic independence. As the male child grows and eventually becomes a husband, it would become routine for him to marry an educated, working woman, who continues her professional career after marriage. This would alleviate parents' concerns over their daughters' marital prospects and grant them the freedom to pursue their desired career paths.

Nevertheless, the practice of sharing household chores should be instilled in children's upbringing and among partners. This approach will lessen the pressure enabling women to be less stressed, more attentive to their professional commitments, and increase motivation at work. True change takes time to materialize, and there is no shortcut. However, with support from family, society along with State initiatives aimed at breaking unhealthy gender norms, the journey toward progressive change can be smoother and faster.

Culture is a dynamic and complex phenomenon and should be observed through a multi-diverse lens. However, Qatari culture is not unique in its practice of gendered space; rather, women in Qatar exercise agency in myriad ways that may not be accessible to women in many ostensibly progressive societies. Qatari's actual concern is a female-friendly working environment rather than remarkable positions or salaries (Blaydes et al., 2021; Salem & Yount, 2019; James-Hawkins et al., 2017). So, there is a pressing need to invest in the redesign of women-friendly zones within all public sector workplaces. This initiative not only respects Qatari culture but also provides educated Qatari women with a sense of comfort and support. Given Qatar's

wealth, technological advancements, and commitment to women's empowerment, such investments are both feasible and essential. Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that this women-friendly/women-only zone should not imply any hierarchy by gender, nor should it serve to restrict women's mobility or marginalize their presence in the workforce.

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Chapter 26

Development of Family Studies in Kuwait



Fahad Alnaser

Abstract Family studies in Kuwait underwent various developments driven by societal changes, research advancements, and the recognition of the importance of understanding family dynamics for the well-being of individuals and communities. The current study provides a review of existing literature to show the extent of the development of family studies in Kuwait during the past four decades and the factors that contributed to this development. This review concludes with the suggestion that family research in Kuwait is at the threshold of theoretical development and requires improvement in the quality of research methods to build sound theory.

Keywords Family studies • Social change • Kuwait

1 Introduction

In recent years, Kuwait has witnessed developments in the field of social sciences and social research. Studies and research have focused on various topics related to Kuwaiti society, such as social and economic changes, cultural transformations, social policies, and the social conditions of different groups of the population, including the family. Kuwait experienced a significant economic transformation following the discovery of oil resources, marking a pivotal moment in its history. This newfound wealth propelled rapid economic development, leading to unprecedented urbanization and substantial improvements in the country's GDP (Carvalho et al., 2017; Crystal, 2016; Nagy Eltony, 2007; Ghabra, 1997; Khalaf & Hammoud, 1987). The incoming oil revenues not only elevated living standards but also created job opportunities, thus fuelling the growth of a modern workforce. As a result, Kuwait underwent profound social changes as traditional norms began to give way to modernization and urbanization (Al-Ansari, 2003; Alhashem & Alhouti, 2021; Al-Kandari & Poirier, 2001; Ghabra, 2022; Ghareeb, 2020).

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The impact of economic growth on Kuwaiti society was manifold. Access to better education and healthcare emerged as key catalysts, contributing to higher life expectancy rates and improved overall well-being. This societal evolution also triggered shifts in traditional family structures and gender roles, reflecting broader changes in societal dynamics (Al-Ansari, 2003; Shah et al., 2002; Gërguri-Rashiti & Rotabi, 2021). These changes were further amplified by increased exposure to global influences, as Kuwait opened up to international trade and cultural exchange (Al-Mutawa, 2004). The economic boom also reverberated across the political landscape, prompting significant political reforms in Kuwait. With newfound economic prosperity came demands for greater political participation, leading to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and the introduction of a parliamentary system. These reforms empowered citizens to engage more actively in the political process, marking a significant departure from the traditional monarchy-based governance model (Alzougool et al., 2021; Chay, 2020; Crystal, 1991; Fadhli, 2021).

Culturally, Kuwait underwent a period of transformation characterized by increased cosmopolitanism and cultural exchange. Economic growth facilitated greater cultural interchange with the outside world, fostering a more diverse and vibrant societal fabric. International influences permeated various aspects of Kuwaiti culture, from art and fashion to culinary traditions, contributing to the enrichment of the country's cultural landscape (Al-Mutawa, 2004). The economic prosperity fuelled by the oil boom also precipitated substantial investments in urbanization and infrastructure. Modern cities emerged, equipped with state-of-the-art amenities such as roads, schools, hospitals, and recreational facilities. These developments significantly enhanced the quality of life for Kuwaiti citizens, underscoring the transformative impact of economic growth on urban development (Crystal, 1995; Fabbri, 2020; Hindelang, 2022). Furthermore, the investment in education emerged as a cornerstone of Kuwait's progress, driving workforce development and innovation across various sectors. Access to quality education expanded, empowering Kuwaitis to pursue higher education and training opportunities. As a result, Kuwait witnessed advancements in fields ranging from technology and engineering to healthcare and finance (Arman et al., 2022; Kamrava, 2012; Salman et al., 2020).

Despite the manifold benefits of economic growth, Kuwait's heavy reliance on oil exports underscored the need for economic diversification. The economy's vulnerability to fluctuations in global oil prices highlighted the imperative of reducing dependency on oil revenues. Diversification efforts aimed to cultivate alternative sources of revenue, thus mitigating the risks associated with overreliance on oil exports (Longva, 2005).

Each aspect of Kuwait's development journey—from economic growth and societal changes to political reforms and cultural evolution—interconnected to shape the nation's trajectory. As Kuwait navigated the complexities of modernization and urbanization, it underwent a profound transformation that reverberated across all facets of society, laying the foundation for its emergence as a dynamic and resilient nation in the global arena.

Thus, this paper seeks to explore how social science research in Kuwait has evolved in response to these societal changes, delving into methodological advancements and their implications for understanding Kuwaiti society's dynamics. By examining the patterns of social science research in Kuwait, this study aims to shed light on the methodologies employed in studying various aspects of Kuwaiti society, including family structures, gender roles, cultural transformations, and socioeconomic changes. Additionally, it aims to analyze the effectiveness of these methodologies in capturing the developments in Kuwaiti society. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and empirical studies, this paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on social science research methodologies in Kuwait, offering insights into the evolving research landscape and its significance for advancing knowledge and informing policy decisions in the region.

2 Social Science Development in Kuwait

The development of social sciences in Kuwait has been marked by significant progress and research initiatives across various disciplines. Studies in Kuwait have focused on diverse areas such as family dynamics, aging, expatriate housemaids, women's studies, and child development, reflecting a broad spectrum of social issues and concerns within the country. Additionally, research has delved into challenges and advancements in sociology within the Gulf States region, with a specific case study on Kuwait shedding light on the shared interests in oil production and the social sciences field in the region (Alnaser, 2010). However, the process of development has not been the same across time. Research in social sciences in Kuwait can be categorized across in two different stages: the first stage was in the pre-oil period, until the late fifties, at a time when Kuwait was a small, homogeneous traditional society, whose members relied on pearl diving as a means of earning their living. In that period, social research was not actively conducted, but a number of historical studies were studied by local pioneers, foreign merchants, and explorers (Alnaser, 1996; Crystal, 1995; De Candole, 1959; McCreddie, 1963; Southwell, 1953). The second stage was in the post-oil period, that is, after 1960, when schools were established as educational institutions and education became a compulsory system for both sexes. Moreover, many scientists were sent on scientific missions by the new emerging government to research in different fields. The opportunity for local scholars to travel abroad to countries like Egypt, the US, Lebanon, Britain, and other European nations for academic development arose. This period witnessed the development of scientific theories and a shift toward more structured and academic research in the social sciences field. The growth of social science in Kuwait was further propelled by the return of graduates from the US and Europe, contributing to the field's advancement and the establishment of new scientific journals dedicated to social scientific study. Additionally, the economic prosperity brought about by the discovery of oil played a significant role in accelerating socioeconomic development and fostering the growth of the social sciences in Kuwait and the Gulf region as a whole.

Kuwait is a country in the Middle East with a strong focus on education and development. Kuwait places a high value on education, and this includes social sciences (Al-Mutawa, 2004; Alhashem & Alhouti, 2021). Universities and educational institutions in Kuwait offer various social science programs, including sociology, psychology, economics, political science, and more. Kuwaiti universities and research institutions actively engage in social science research. Scholars and researchers in Kuwait contribute to academic knowledge by conducting studies and publishing research in various social science fields (Tétreault et al., 2011). Kuwait's diverse population offers a unique context for social science research. The interactions and dynamics between different ethnicities, cultures, and social groups provide rich opportunities for studying social phenomena (Jacqueline, 1981). Kuwait has experienced rapid urbanization and modernization. This has led to changes in social structures, family dynamics, and urban planning, providing ample material for social science analysis. Kuwait has implemented social welfare programs to support its citizens (Tétreault et al., 2011). These programs include healthcare, education, housing, and financial assistance. Studying the effectiveness and impact of these programs falls within the realm of social sciences. The role of women in Kuwaiti society has been evolving over the years, with increasing emphasis on women's education and participation in the workforce. Research in gender studies can shed light on these changing dynamics (Al-Ansari, 2003; Meleis et al., 1979; Metle, 2001).

One of the cornerstones of Kuwait's economic trajectory is its heavy reliance on oil exports. The study of economics and its impact on various aspects of society, including income distribution, employment, and resource management, is crucial to the country's development. In addition, Kuwait's unique political system with a constitutional monarchy and an elected parliament warrants research into its unique position among its neighbors. Furthermore, Kuwait, similar to other GCC countries, has a significant expatriate population. There are venues for experts to explore the experiences of expatriates and their interactions with the local community (Joseph, 2018). Also, the preservation of cultural heritage is an important aspect of Kuwaiti society (Tétreault et al., 2011). Social science research can examine the impact of cultural practices and traditions on social cohesion. Overall, Kuwait's commitment to education and its diverse social landscape provides ample opportunities for social science development. Researchers and scholars in Kuwait contribute to the global body of knowledge in various social science disciplines, helping to shape policies and programs that enhance the well-being of its citizens.

3 Increased Research and Awareness

Kuwait has recently witnessed an increase in research related to family studies. Researchers and academics have focused on topics such as family structure, parenting practices, gender roles, and the impact of social and economic changes on family dynamics. This heightened attention has led to expanded efforts by research institutions, universities, and academic organizations to explore various facets of family

dynamics through both qualitative and quantitative studies (Al-Kandari & Poirier, 2001; Fraser, 1995; Shah, 2004; Hussein, 1983). One significant area of inquiry has been the evolving family structure in Kuwait, with researchers examining the transition from traditional extended families to nuclear units (Almulla & Polimeni, 2021; Al-Thakeb, 1985). This exploration seeks to understand the factors driving these changes and their implications for familial relationships and support systems. Moreover, investigations into parenting practices have shed light on the shifting roles of parents, influenced by modernization, globalization, and intergenerational transmission of parenting techniques.

Gender roles within the family have also been a focal point, with researchers probing the changing dynamics between men and women and their negotiation within familial contexts (Ji-Yeon, 2013; Musaiger & D'Souza, 2009; Wheeler, 2001). This examination extends to the broader societal shifts in Kuwait, including urbanization, industrialization, and economic transformations, and their impacts on family dynamics, relationships, and expectations. The heightened awareness of the importance of healthy family dynamics has prompted various educational initiatives, including workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns organized by educational institutions, community organizations, and government agencies. These efforts aim to disseminate research findings to the general public and foster a deeper understanding of family dynamics.

Furthermore, the research conducted in Kuwait has implications for policy development and implementation, with government agencies considering insights from these studies to shape policies related to family support, social services, and gender equality. Additionally, researchers have explored the intersection of cultural norms and religious beliefs with evolving family dynamics, examining how traditional values coexist with modern changes and their impact on familial relationships (Al-Mughni, 2020; Alsuwailan, 2006; González & Al-Kazi, 2011). The increased research activity in Kuwait has fostered greater collaboration among local researchers, academics, and international experts in the field of family studies. Through conferences, seminars, and collaborative projects, knowledge exchange and interdisciplinary discussions have flourished, contributing to a deeper understanding of evolving family dynamics and informing future research directions.

4 Family Research in Kuwait

Kuwait, like many other countries, has undergone significant changes in family structures over time. The transition from traditional extended families to more nuclear families can be attributed to various factors such as urbanization, education, and workforce opportunities. These changes have prompted researchers to delve into the effects of these shifts on familial relationships, roles, and support systems (Abdel-Khalek & Lynn, 2008; Hicks & Al-Najjar, 2005; Michalak-Pikulska, 2004; Tétreault & Al-Mughni, 1995; Wheeler, 2003). Interestingly, while family studies as a field had gained momentum in many parts of the world by the mid-twentieth

century, it appears that Kuwait did not experience significant scientific research in this area until the early 1970s. Prior to that time, there was a lack of systematic investigation into family dynamics in the country. The growth of social sciences and family studies in the United States and other Western countries has had a ripple effect on many Arab countries, including Kuwait. The increasing body of literature on family studies in Kuwait over the last decade suggests a marked improvement and expansion of the field. This growth is likely due to a combination of factors, including increased awareness of the importance of studying family dynamics, the influence of global research trends, and the recognition of the impact of changing family structures on Kuwaiti society. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that various official Kuwaiti institutions and organizations have started to take a keen interest in the field of family studies. The involvement and sponsorship of research by institutions like the Amiri Diwan, Higher Planning Council, the Cabinet, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Planning, Kuwait University, and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science underline the growing significance and relevance of family research in Kuwaiti society. As this field continues to evolve and expand, it will likely shed further light on the complex interplay between societal changes, family structures, and individual well-being within Kuwaiti communities (Alnaser, 1996).

One of the most comprehensive works on family structure in Kuwait is "*The Arab Family and Modernity: Evidence from Kuwait*" by F.T. Al-Thakeb, published in *Current Anthropology* in 1985. Al-Thakeb examines the impact of modernization on family structures and values in Kuwaiti society. He argues that despite rapid economic development and social changes in Kuwait, traditional Arab family values and structures have largely persisted. He presents evidence that the extended family system remains strong in Kuwait, with married sons often living in close proximity to their parents and maintaining close family ties. The article suggests that while Kuwaiti families have adopted some modern values and practices, such as smaller family sizes, they have done so in a way that is compatible with traditional Arab cultural norms. His work highlights the ability of Arab families to incorporate modern elements while preserving their cultural heritage and family-centered values. In the early 1980s, G. Al-Muhaini contributed to the discourse on family and social structure within Kuwaiti society through the publication of a master's dissertation in Arabic. This seminal study provided valuable insights into approaches to Family Theory, particularly adopting an interactional perspective to examine marriage and family structure dynamics in Kuwait. Similarly, "The Social Customs and Life Cycle in the Kuwaiti Society" by Sabiah (1981) delved into Kuwaiti individuals' attitudes toward various familial phenomena, including mate selection, mixed marriages, and family relations, based on a social survey. The findings underscored the evident influence of urbanization and modernization on marriage norms and mate selection practices.

In the discourse of family dynamics, several research papers have contributed valuable insights. El-Feki and Fathi (1980) conducted a study "Family Relation Criteria and Conformity Among Family Members." Their work focused on translating and assessing criteria for measuring family relationships and prevailing attitudes among family members, specifically tailored to the Kuwaiti context. Al-Thakeb (1982) conducted the first scientific exploration of kinship in Kuwait, titled "The Family

Kin Relationships in Contemporary Kuwait Society.” This study revealed a strong correlation between immediate family members and the broader kin network. Additionally, Al-Thakeb (1986) examined the impact of urbanization on family structures and kin relationships in the Arab world. Through an evaluation of research findings, the author concluded that nuclear families were not the sole prevalent form, traditional family-kin relationships remained robust, and the influence of urbanization and westernization on family dynamics was limited to a minority of the population.

Several Islamic studies, initially intended for students of Islamic jurisprudence, have also delved into family issues. For instance, Mohammed (1987) explored “Family Relations in Islam,” while Al-Khateeb et al. (1986) examined “Family Systems in Islam,” and Saqr (1980) delved into “Islamic Interest in Family.” These texts provided foundational insights into Islamic perspectives on family dynamics, addressing various aspects such as familial relations, structures, and the significance of family life within an Islamic context.

As Kuwait undergoes rapid development and modernization, traditional family structures and dynamics are evolving, impacting the intergenerational relationships and support systems within households. Al-Kandari and Poirier (2001) investigate the impact of modernization on family structure in Kuwait, focusing on spousal attitudes toward marriage practices. They compare consanguineous marriages with non-consanguineous marriages, revealing differences in marriage age, spousal selection methods, and educational levels. In contrast to Al-Thakeb’s work, which primarily examined the evolution of the Arab family and marriage practices within the Kuwaiti context, this study specifically explores the effects of modernization and urbanization on family structures. It delves into spousal attitudes toward marriage practices, including consanguineous and non-consanguineous marriages, and examines the influence of educational levels on partner selection criteria. The study highlights the shift toward non-kin partner selection and the role of education in shaping modern marriage dynamics.

By examining the correlates of living arrangements among older Kuwaiti adults, Shah et al. (2002) contribute to our understanding of family dynamics in the country and shed light on the factors influencing living arrangements of elderly people. Their findings suggest that living arrangements are largely similar for both genders, with a significant majority of older adults residing in households with at least one son or daughter. Notably, a small percentage of older adults live alone, with women being more likely to be widowed compared to men. The study observes an ongoing demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural transformations in Kuwait, suggesting a potential decline in intergenerational co-residence in the future. The implications of such changes in this small city-state warrant further investigation.

5 Marriage and Divorce

Existing literature on marriage and spousal relationships show that there has been a gradual decline in family support systems, legal reforms have become imperative, and a newfound consciousness of gender rights and responsibilities has surfaced (Al-Kazi, 2008). Concurrently, the surge in employment opportunities has reshaped conventional gender roles, empowering women with greater economic independence and steering society toward a path of individualization. Statistics from 2017 underline the extent of this phenomenon, revealing approximately 76,000 divorce cases across Gulf Cooperation Council countries. The overall divorce rate stands at 2.2%, with Saudi Arabia leading at 2.3%, closely followed by Kuwait at 2.2% (Statistical Center of the Gulf Cooperation Council, 2017). Numerous factors contribute to this trend, encompassing the transition from extended to nuclear family structures, an upsurge in marriages between individuals from diverse backgrounds. Divorce has evolved into a matter of public concern, attributed to factors such as spousal maltreatment, neglect, undue intervention by parents and relatives, and limited interaction during the engagement period (Al-Najjer, 2003).

Family studies related to marriage and divorce have developed slowly in Kuwaiti society, like other Arab societies. The shift from limited research in the 1980s to an expanded focus later resulting from radical social and economic changes makes for an interesting context. The shifting values and norms within Kuwaiti society during this time period played an important role in shaping the dynamics of marriage, family, and the overall social structure. There is no doubt that the introduction of new values and norms through social media and globalization has had an impact on relationships, including the dynamics of marriage and family. Where Kuwaiti researchers are interested in studying these phenomena to understand the reasons behind these changes, their consequences, and how they interrelate with different aspects of society can provide valuable insights about societal transformations and adaptation. Gloom's (1987) comprehensive statistical study, "The Phenomena of Late Marriage in the Urbanized Kuwaiti Society," analyzed marriage trends in Kuwait. The study revealed an emerging trend among both Kuwaiti men and women toward delaying marriage to later ages, challenging traditional notions such as the concept of an "old maid" among females, which also resonated among males. In 1980, Mustafa conducted a study exploring the attitudes of Kuwaiti spouses toward fertility. The research findings indicated that various factors influenced individuals' perspectives on having children, including sociopsychological, economic, societal, governmental, and biological factors. Specifically, the study noted that Kuwaitis with higher levels of education tended to have fewer children, with a significant number of mothers in such families being employed. Conversely, households where the mothers were primarily homemakers tended to have larger families.

Researchers with a sociohistorical lens delved into the topic of "marriage among Arabs," offering insights into the evolution of marital customs and practices. Al-Termanini (1984) conducted a study focusing on marriage norms, values, and rituals among Arabs before and after the advent of Islam, highlighting aspects such as

dowry customs. Another notable study by Abdul Raziq (1986) examined “Two Early Mamluk Marriage Contracts,” shedding light on marriage practices during the Mamluk era in Egypt. Through the analysis of historical marriage contracts, the study provided valuable information about social customs, dowry traditions, and financial arrangements, offering glimpses into the social and economic dynamics of the period, including details on currency and repudiation practices.

Alqashan and Al-Kandari (2010) explore the impact of parental marital status on the attitudes of young adults toward marriage and divorce in Kuwait. They observe that individuals from divorced families exhibit less favorable attitudes toward marriage and more positive attitudes toward divorce compared to those from intact families. Moreover, gender plays a significant role in shaping these attitudes. Alnaser and Al-Fadhli (2023) use Likelihood of Divorce Inventory (LDI) methodology to examine married university students’ perceptions of reasons for divorce in Kuwait. Their study identifies three key factors—negative relationship and lack of respect, differences in behavior and personality, and psychological and physical illness—that explain a significant portion of the variance in attitudes toward divorce. They found that women were more supportive of divorce compared to men if the reasons justified it.

Abu Al-Ezz and Hamdi (2006) investigated the prevalence of family conflicts among male and female adolescents. Findings revealed that 60.2% of the study sample reported a low level of family conflicts, while 37.2% expressed a medium level, and 2.6% reported a high level of family conflicts. Meanwhile, Al-Jassas (2019) explored domestic violence and its correlation with gender and the socioeconomic status of families among intermediate school students in Kuwait. Results indicated a relationship between economic and social status and domestic violence, with lower socioeconomic levels exhibiting higher rates of domestic violence. Additionally, statistically significant differences were observed in behavioral problems between socioeconomic and cultural levels, favoring lower socioeconomic and cultural standings.

Marriage and family are essential components of any society, and changes in these areas can reflect broader changes occurring within society. Most studies over the past decades have so far dealt with understanding how changing values affect traditional concepts of marriage, family roles, and interpersonal relationships. Investigating these changes can shed light on how people adapt to new social norms and overcome the challenges brought about by these shifts. In understanding family structures and family roles, analysis of parent–child interaction is crucial. Al-Kandari et al. (2022) studied communication within Kuwaiti households. Investigating various factors such as gender roles, household structures, and the impact of polygamous marriages, the study sought to shed light on the relationship between parents and their children. The study provides insights into how factors like academic performance, household composition, and parental education levels influenced the dialogue between parents and children. Their study underscored the importance of fostering strong communication channels within Kuwaiti households to bridge gaps observed in interactions with fathers.

Prior research on marriage and divorce within Kuwaiti society, akin to other Arab societies, has yielded several key conclusions. Firstly, shifting marriage patterns reflect changing values and norms, evident in alterations to age at marriage and preferences for arranged versus love marriages. Secondly, evolving societal standards have influenced divorce rates, driven by shifting expectations and values surrounding marriage. Thirdly, challenges to traditional gender roles and family dynamics have impacted family cohesion, decision-making processes, and individual roles within families. Additionally, cultural norms intersect with emerging values, potentially leading to tensions or adaptations within marital and familial contexts. These changes extend to social support networks, influencing individuals' well-being and resilience. Moreover, transformations in marriage and family structures have profound implications for children, affecting their upbringing, education, and overall development. Furthermore, researchers may have explored the legal and policy implications of these shifts, questioning the adaptability of existing frameworks to evolving social landscapes.

6 Women and Changing Gender Roles

The role of women in Kuwaiti society has been evolving, with more women pursuing education and entering the workforce. This change has influenced family dynamics, leading to discussions about gender roles within families, the balance of work and family responsibilities, and the effects on children's upbringing. Women's studies are an interdisciplinary academic field that focuses on the experiences, contributions, and challenges of women in society. It emerged as a response to the historical marginalization of women's perspectives and contributions in various disciplines, including history, sociology, psychology, literature, and more. The field aims to examine and understand women's roles, achievements, and struggles in different cultures and time periods, while also critically analyzing the social, cultural, economic, and political factors that shape these experiences (Joseph, 2018). Since the early 1980s a number of studies on women have been published that show that Kuwaiti women are tasked with embodying the nation's values, while simultaneously being encouraged to engage in public life and contribute to national development. Tétreault et al. (2011) shed light on the challenges women face in reconciling traditional cultural values with modern societal demands. They explore the tensions arising from these competing expectations, as modernizing influences collide with conservative, patriarchal norms deeply rooted in tribal and religious traditions. By comparing Kuwaiti developments with those in other nations, such as Britain, the authors offer a broader contextual understanding of the challenges faced by Kuwaiti women in navigating their roles within the nation. Naser et al. (2012) explore various personal and external factors influencing women's decisions to pursue entrepreneurship in Kuwait. Their study observed that while females acknowledge the influence of external factors on their entrepreneurial decisions, they place greater emphasis on personal factors. Kuwaiti women participating in the study expressed the belief that

engaging in entrepreneurship would enhance their social standing and provide them with autonomy in decision-making. Factors such as personal interests, availability of business ideas, and the potential for profit were identified as significant motivators for women to establish their own businesses.

Kuwaiti women are also participating in politics. Al-Duwailah and Nasser (2008) found that Kuwaiti women have obtained their right to run for and be elected to the House of Representatives, which represents the legislative authority in the system of authorities. The mirror was absent from any role in political life, except for the positions it reached in the executive authority that came by a group of factors. Further exploring challenges women face in public life, Maktabi (2017) delves into the impact of female parliamentarians on male MPs' support for women's civil and economic rights following women's enfranchisement in Kuwait in 2005. The study posits that male Islamist MPs acted as reluctant feminists and opportunists, responding to the presence of female MPs by reframing demands related to poverty alleviation and social assistance to focus on women as mothers, widows, and caregivers. These MPs emphasized gender relations, advocating for Kuwaiti women's empowerment and access to welfare services, such as education and healthcare.

The increasing number of women assuming leadership roles has also attracted scholarly attention, specifically focusing on the peculiarities of Kuwaiti women's leadership styles. In the discourse surrounding women's engagement in public life, Alzougool et al. (2021) seek to accomplish two primary objectives: firstly, to delineate the diverse leadership styles adopted by women in the public sector of Kuwait, and secondly, to investigate whether these identified leadership styles vary based on the demographic characteristics of their subordinates. The findings reveal that women in leadership positions frequently exhibit various leadership styles, including inspirational motivation and idealized influence (attribute). Additionally, management by exception (active) and idealized influence (behavior) styles are observed with some regularity. Notably, the transformational leadership style emerges as the predominant approach among women leaders. Furthermore, the study highlights variations in the transformational leadership style concerning the educational background and job titles of subordinates.

Women's engagement in the labor market is a pivotal aspect of societal development, reflecting progress toward gender equality and economic empowerment. However, it is essential to recognize that societal attitudes toward women's participation in the workforce significantly influence their opportunities and experiences. A study on the role of Kuwaiti women in development management concluded that Kuwaiti women represented only 13.2 percent of the total employment in development management, and the author expected that this percentage would increase as there is a great need in society for Kuwaiti women to participate in the field of development management (Abdel Khaleq, 1981). Al-Enezi (2022) assesses the attitudes of Kuwait University students toward women's gender roles, examining whether these attitudes leaned toward traditional views and whether any statistical significance could be attributed to demographic variables. The analysis demonstrated statistical significance in Kuwaiti students' attitudes toward women's gender roles concerning

gender, parental education, and maternal employment status, while no significant correlation was found between attitudes and family economic status.

Other scholar such as Metle (2002) examines how traditional Kuwaiti cultural values impact job satisfaction among female employees in the public sector. Their work emphasizes the need to consider cultural factors alongside workplace dynamics. The findings highlight the significant role of traditional norms in shaping job satisfaction levels. There is also discussion on the role gender bias plays in facilitating female participation in job sectors. Koushki et al. (1999) show that despite increased female participation in higher education since 1970, gender bias persists, particularly in promotion to upper management positions. Women engineers generally feel “less than equal” to their male counterparts in job-related factors such as salary, professional treatment, and responsibility, with promotion being a key area of inequality. Factors influencing equality perceptions include education level, work experience, and professional treatment, with salary scale exerting minimal impact.

Several studies have examined various aspects of women’s roles and experiences in Kuwaiti society, shedding light on attitudes toward working women and the assessment of femininity and masculinity within the cultural context. Mahmood (1989) investigated men’s attitudes toward women in the workforce, finding that non-authoritarian individuals held more positive views toward non-working women compared to authoritarian counterparts. Torki (1988) focused on developing an instrument to assess masculinity and femininity within Kuwaiti culture, addressing a gap in existing research within the broader Arabian culture. Dissertations submitted to universities in the U.S.A. and Egypt have also contributed to women’s studies in the Gulf, highlighting the evolving roles and expectations placed on women in the context of societal development (Al-Shallal, 1981; Al-Tarrah, 1978). Overall, these studies underscore the growing recognition of women’s agency and the importance of their participation in both the workforce and decision-making processes for the advancement of Gulf societies.

One of the key areas that women’s studies explore is changing gender roles. Gender roles refer to the social and cultural expectations and behaviors associated with individuals based on their perceived gender. These roles are not static but evolve over time and are influenced by various societal factors. Researchers in women’s studies contextualize changing gender roles through a historical lens, unraveling the construction and perpetuation of these roles across different epochs (Risman, 2004). Moreover, the field adopts an intersectional approach, recognizing the interplay between gender and other dimensions of identity such as race, class, sexuality, and ability (Ridgeway, 2011). This acknowledgment highlights the diversity of experiences within gender roles and underscores the need for nuanced analysis.

Furthermore, women’s studies scrutinize power dynamics inherent in relationships and societal structures, dissecting how traditional gender roles often result in unequal distributions of power and privilege (Risman & Davis, 2013). By shedding light on these dynamics, researchers aim to challenge existing power structures and advocate for more equitable social arrangements. Moreover, women’s studies scholars critically examine the role of media and popular culture in shaping and

perpetuating gender roles. They analyze how media representations influence societal perceptions and behaviors, contributing to the reinforcement of certain gender norms (Risman, 2004).

Beyond academic inquiry, women's studies extend into activism and policy advocacy, seeking to translate research insights into tangible societal change. Scholars in this field engage in activism aimed at promoting gender equality and dismantling societal norms that perpetuate unequal gender roles (Joseph, 2018). Through policy work and grassroots movements, women's studies contribute to the advancement of gender equity agendas, advocating for policies that foster inclusivity and challenge discriminatory practices. In essence, women's studies serve as a catalyst for social transformation, interrogating existing gender norms and envisioning a more equitable future for all individuals.

6.1 *Journals and Institutions*

Over the past fifteen years, there has been a significant advancement in journals and institutions dedicated to family research, largely driven by the return of graduates from the U.S.A. and Europe with advanced degrees in Master's and Ph.D. programs. This period also saw the establishment of key journals such as the *Journal of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula*, the *Journal of Social Science*, and the *Arab Journal for the Humanities*, all of which focus on social science topics. Kuwait University has played a pivotal role in fostering research in this field, with departments such as Sociology and Social Work, Psychology, and newly established departments providing financial support for research endeavors across various disciplines. Additionally, the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS) has been instrumental in advancing social studies, particularly in the realm of family studies.

Moreover, the Sociological Association, founded in 1966 as a non-profit organization, has made noteworthy contributions to family studies in Kuwait. Through its initiatives and collaborations, the association has facilitated the exchange of ideas and resources, further promoting research and scholarly activities in the field of family studies.

Several women's organizations have emerged gradually over time, marking significant progress in promoting women's rights and social engagement. Among these, the first established was Al-Jam'iyya Al-Thqafiyya Al-Nissaiyya (Social-Cultural Society for Women), which began organizing biennial meetings on regional development for women across the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula. These gatherings addressed pertinent issues such as women's roles in development and societal progress. Subsequent meetings in various locations, including Kuwait, the U.A.E., and Bahrain, focused on themes like women's participation in the workforce, family relations, and child welfare, reflecting evolving societal concerns. Another notable organization, Jam'iyet Al-Nahdha Al-Ussariya (Family Renaissance), convened seminars and meetings at both Arab and regional levels, initially discussing topics

related to the Arabian family structure. Additionally, initiatives such as Nadi Al-Fatah (Girl's Club) and Byader Al-Salam (Islamic Women Society) have contributed to the discourse on familial and cultural matters through annual cultural seasons and community engagement activities. The establishment of Jam'iyet Re'ayet Al-Mar'aa (Society for the Care of Women) in 1991 further underscored the ongoing commitment to addressing women's needs and promoting their welfare within Kuwaiti society.

7 Methodological Development

The common methodology applied in studies on the family in Kuwait is the conduct of empirical research, i.e., selection of samples, design of questionnaires, and data collection. Therefore, what we need in the future is a sociologist who bridges the gap between the philosophy of science literature and the troubling world of sociology. To do this, we need to develop a new methodology, a theory-building methodology. This will help us find theoretical variables, systematically identify theoretical ideas, link statements with abstract propositions, relate different theoretical ideas to each other, distinguish differences between observations, and consider contingent variables. This will help develop and refine the theory. In the long run, it will facilitate the mutual interaction between theory and research and will help both to grow. We need a methodology that helps provide the tools for most social scientists to actively participate in the systematic development of theory. What we experience in Kuwait in the field of family studies is systemic innovation. Most of the literature has been mainly experimental, with an emphasis on description and diagnosis. The theory tends to be rudimentary at best. Developing theoretical frameworks specific to Kuwaiti family dynamics is paramount, providing a foundation rooted in the local context to guide research and interpretation of findings. Once the methodological development is increased beyond the marginal level of interest, these prior studies and theoretical writings will become rich sources for further analysis. It was relatively easy to use a new methodology to augment, clarify, clarify, define, combine, synthesize, generalize, infer, and revise previous studies and findings.

The methodological advancement of family studies in Kuwait entails refining and expanding research techniques to examine various facets of family life within the Kuwaiti context. Empirical research serves as a cornerstone, employing methods such as surveys, interviews, and observations to discern patterns and trends within Kuwaiti families. Ensuring the cultural relevance of survey designs is imperative, as well-structured questionnaires tailored to the Kuwaiti context facilitate accurate and meaningful data collection. Cultural sensitivity underpins all stages of research, ensuring studies are conducted, interpreted, and presented in a manner that respects local norms and values. Moreover, selecting appropriate samples representative of diverse segments of Kuwaiti society is vital to yield findings that reflect the population's heterogeneity. Leveraging technological advancements, such as online surveys and virtual interviews, enhances data collection accessibility and efficiency. Investing

in capacity-building initiatives, including training programs and workshops, fortifies researchers' methodological prowess and keeps them abreast of cutting-edge techniques. Besides, ethical considerations, including participant consent, privacy, and confidentiality, must be upheld throughout the research process to safeguard the rights and well-being of participants.

The integration of mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, offers a holistic understanding of family dynamics by probing both the "what" and "why" behind behaviors and patterns. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking families over time illuminate how familial dynamics evolve in response to societal shifts, economic factors, and cultural changes. Complementing this approach, in-depth case studies will delve into individual family dynamics, offering insights into the intricacies of familial relationships, values, and challenges.

Finally, disseminating research findings through academic publications, conferences, and community engagement platforms fosters informed discourse and shapes policy and practice. By adhering to rigorous methodological standards and embracing collaborative and culturally sensitive approaches, family studies in Kuwait can contribute to a deeper understanding of familial dynamics and inform evidence-based interventions to support Kuwaiti families in navigating contemporary challenges.

8 Conclusions

This comprehensive analytical study sheds light on the development of family studies in Kuwait during the past four decades until now. The research has revealed significant shifts in the societal, cultural, and economic landscapes that have influenced the trajectory of family dynamics and structures within the country. From the findings presented, it is evident that Kuwait has experienced remarkable transformations in terms of family roles, values, and norms, driven by factors such as urbanization, globalization, technological advancements, and changing gender dynamics. The study underscores the importance of understanding these developments in a broader context to inform policies, programs, and interventions that can effectively address the evolving needs and challenges faced by Kuwaiti families. As the nation continues to progress, it is crucial for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to remain attuned to these changing dynamics and collaborate in fostering healthy and resilient family systems that contribute to the overall well-being of Kuwaiti society. This study not only contributes to the body of knowledge on family studies but also offers valuable insights into the intricate interplay between tradition and modernity in the Kuwaiti context.

Social sciences, as a whole, and the realm of family studies, in particular, have traversed a remarkable journey in Kuwait. The methodologies employed for statistical analysis have undergone enhancements. The exploration of family dynamics has witnessed an upsurge in Kuwait as well as other Arab societies throughout this timeframe. Evidently, a series of conceptual, methodological, and theoretical advancements have taken shape in this domain, as research endeavors in family

studies forge ahead in novel trajectories, amalgamating qualitative and quantitative approaches. In charting the trajectory for both research and theoretical pursuits, a call for inventive synthesis echoes. This appeal seeks to foster support for avenues of research and theories that exhibit promise, while unearthing overlooked pathways. This agenda ought to encapsulate comprehensiveness to promote diversity, while simultaneously channeling focused interest and endeavors within the scientific community of Kuwait. By involving scholars in the pursuit of intellectually demanding theory-building challenges, numerous facets of family theory are poised to witness refinement.

Anticipating the forthcoming trajectory, the shift from descriptive research to explanatory investigations assumes paramount significance. Furthermore, the integration of macro and micro analytical tiers is imperative across all sub-disciplines within this field. Concurrently, while certain domains continue to be under the research microscope, others languish in neglect. Subsequent research endeavors should zero in on themes encompassing partner selection, familial bonds, and the nuanced examination of women and children. This collective progress, across multiple domains, is poised to unfold in the ensuing decades, steering the discipline toward heightened efficacy and scientific precision. A surge of studies in the realm of family sciences, particularly from psychological and sociological vantage points, is poised to shape the vista of the future.

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Chapter 27

Family Studies in the Gulf: A Systematic Analysis



Mustafa Altıntaş 

Abstract This chapter presents a general overview of family studies in the Gulf countries. The chapter identifies and elaborates general themes in current Gulf family studies. This study draws on a total of 72 articles from indexed journals and analyzes them by using MAXQDA. The research highlights various aspects of family dynamics, including parenting styles, academic performance, family and technology, COVID-19's impact, divorce, family structure, fertility, work-family balance, elderly care, child and family support, family health and well-being, family function, family law, and family studies and education. The findings reveal the trends in family studies over time, influenced by educational advancements, technological changes, and socioeconomic changes in the Gulf society.

1 Introduction

The family is considered the fundamental building block of society in many cultures. The structure and dynamics of the family can significantly influence the economic, social, and cultural framework of a country. In the Gulf countries, rapid social and economic changes reshape family dynamics. To grasp the broader social transformations in these societies, it is essential to analyze how these changes influence family structures, dynamics, and values. The family dynamics of the region is a good indicator for a comprehensive understanding of the region's ongoing social change. This research examines studies on families in the Gulf region within a thematic framework. By systematically reviewing the relevant literature, it aims to identify key trends and reveal how themes have evolved. This analysis provides a clearer understanding of the interaction between family dynamics and broader social changes by focusing on family research in the Gulf.

The existing literature on the Gulf states tends to focus on parenting styles, divorce, fertility, the structure of family, the impact of technology on families, and other aspects of family lives. Recent studies emphasize the impact of parenting styles on

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academic performance and self-efficacy in GCC countries, exploring how different approaches influence children's academic outcomes and self-regulation. Additionally, the role of family involvement in education and its effect on children's academic success is a significant theme.

Another important topic is the influence of technology and social media on family. The rise in social media usage has been shown to strain relationships within families, affecting the quality of spousal and sibling interactions. Recent studies highlight the negative impact of excessive internet usage on family cohesion and emphasize the need for better parental control and family harmony.

Divorce rates in the Gulf region have seen a significant rise, reflecting broader social changes and challenges. Studies highlight factors such as higher education levels, economic independence, and sociodemographic variables influencing divorce rates. The shift from single-family to multi-family public housing is another area of focus. Recent vertical housing projects in the UAE address the demand for affordable housing but face shortcomings in social sustainability, particularly in promoting social interaction and providing high-quality living environments.

This paper seeks to address the gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of family studies in the Gulf region. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in understanding how globalization, urbanization, and government policies impact families. This shift reflects a broader recognition of the need to integrate family studies into the analysis of Gulf societies to gain a holistic understanding of social change.

This paper is organized into five sections. The next section discusses research methods, followed by an overview of family studies in the Gulf, presented in a table format. Subsequently, the next section debates prominent themes in family studies research in the Gulf states. This includes an examination of family structures, gender roles, and the impact of socioeconomic changes on family dynamics. The thematic analysis aims to uncover patterns and trends that have emerged over time, highlighting how scholarly focus has shifted in response to evolving social realities. The conclusion section synthesizes the findings and discusses future research implications, emphasizing the importance of continued scholarly attention to family dynamics in the context of rapid social change.

2 Research Methods

To see a general picture of family in the GCC, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. This review aimed to identify and analyze the current trends, thematic changes, and key findings related to family dynamics and structure, divorce, and fertility within the Gulf countries.

The keywords "family, divorce, fertility" were used to search for relevant articles, specifically focusing on the regions/countries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Oman. Studies published between 1990 and 2024 were included to account for the influence of the internet and globalization,

which began to significantly impact family dynamics around 1990. This initial search yielded approximately 2,127 articles.

To refine the search, specific databases were selected. By selecting the “family studies” category in the Web of Science and the “social sciences” category in Scopus, the number of articles was reduced to 510. These databases were chosen for their comprehensive coverage of scholarly articles in the social sciences and family studies disciplines. After a thorough review of the abstracts, the selection was further narrowed down to 72 articles. Some studies were excluded because, although they were related to family, they involved comparative studies with countries outside the Gulf region. The inclusion criteria focused on studies that specifically addressed family-related issues within the Gulf region.

The collected data were coded using MAXQDA software to identify key trends and thematic changes over time. This qualitative data analysis software allowed for the systematic categorization and analysis of the articles. The coding process involved identifying recurring themes and patterns related to family. The findings were initially presented under the columns: Authors/Year, Country, Research Focus, Methodology, and Key Findings. This structured presentation facilitated a clear and concise overview of the literature. The articles were examined under the following categories: Parenting Styles and Academic Performance, Family and Technology, Divorce, Family Structure, Fertility, Family and Work, Elder Care and Aging, Child and Family, Family Health and Well-Being, Family Function, Family and Law, Family Studies, and Education.

Systematic analysis was employed to systematically identify, organize, and offer insight into patterns of themes across the dataset. This methodical approach ensured a thorough and focused examination of the existing research, allowing for a detailed understanding of the evolving family studies in the Gulf region. This review also finds out areas that require further investigation (Table 1).

3 Discussions

3.1 Parenting Styles, and Academic Performance

Some studies on families in the GCC countries explore how parenting styles and family structures affect academic performance, while others highlight the impact of parenting styles on children’s academic outcomes. Alsheikh et al. (2010) found that demandingness, defined as the level of academic rigor and high expectations set by teachers and educational institutions, was positively correlated with higher GPA scores in the UAE. This means that students who were subjected to more challenging academic standards and expectations tended to achieve better grades. Alnafea and Curtis (2017) reported that authoritative parenting, combining high demandingness with responsiveness, positively influences Saudi students’ self-regulated learning and academic achievement. In contrast, Alrajhi and Aldhafri (2024) showed the negative

Table 1 An overview of family studies in the Gulf

Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
<i>Parenting styles, and academic performance</i>				
(Abdel-Khalek & Lynn, 2008)	Kuwait	The study examines the relationship between intelligence, family size, and birth order among Kuwaiti children aged 8–15	Quantitative	The study argues that family size and birth order have no effects on intelligence in Kuwaiti children
(Malluhi & Alomran, 2019)	UAE	The study investigates the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of school leaders, teachers, and parents regarding parental involvement and family volunteering in an Abu Dhabi primary school	Mixed Method	School leaders use various collaborative and transformational leadership practices to enhance parent volunteering, but language barriers and lack of awareness are significant obstacles to parental participation
(Abdelrasheed et al., 2022)	Oman	The study investigates the relationship between intelligence (IQ) and family size in Oman, examining whether the negative correlation observed in other countries also exists in this context	Quantitative	A small negative correlation indicates that children with lower IQs tend to come from larger families, while moderate negative correlations suggest higher parental education is associated with having fewer children
(Alrajhi & Aldhafri, 2024)	Oman	The study investigates the direct and indirect effects of parenting and teaching styles on students' Mathematics achievement, with a focus on the mediating role of students' self-concept in these relationships	Quantitative	Permissive parenting and teaching negatively impact students' Mathematics achievement, whereas authoritative styles boost academic performance by enhancing students' self-concept in Mathematics

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Alnafea & Curtis, 2017)	Saudi Arabia	The study investigates the influence of mothers' parenting styles on the self-regulated learning (SRL) behaviors of primary school students in Saudi Arabia	Quantitative	Saudi mothers' authoritative parenting positively influences their children's self-regulated learning behaviors, significantly enhancing self-efficacy, cognitive and metacognitive strategy use, and time and study management among primary school students
(Ihmeideh et al., 2018)	Qatar	This study investigates how parents, early childhood teachers, subject coordinators, school administrators, and school counselors in Qatar perceive family-school relationships (FSR) based on Epstein's model of six types of parent involvement	Mixed Method	Participants in Qatar reported high to moderate levels of family-school relationships, with learning at home rated highest and decision-making lowest. School staff in Qatar perceive higher levels of family involvement in parenting and communication than parents, highlighting potential areas for improvement in direct engagement.
(Ihmeideh & Al-Maadadi, 2020)	Qatar	This study examines the impact of family literacy programs (FLPs) on the early literacy development of kindergarten children in Qatar	Quantitative	Family literacy programs significantly improved early literacy skills in Qatari kindergarten children, showing effectiveness without notable gender differences and emphasizing the need for such programs.
(Al-Qahtani et al., 2020)	Saudi Arabia	This study investigates the adaptation experiences of female international students from Saudi Arabia who are mothers, focusing on their parenting and family life while studying in the UK	Qualitative	Female Saudi international students in the UK faced significant adaptation challenges but balanced them with positive personal and family experiences, highlighting their resilience and the importance of practical and emotional support.

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Alsheikh et al., 2010)	UAE	The study investigates the impact of different parenting styles on the academic performance and self-esteem of 5th- to 8th-grade students in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It examines how autonomy granting, demandingness, and responsiveness of parents influence children's GPA scores and self-esteem	Quantitative	Higher demandingness was associated with better GPA scores, boys performed better in school than girls despite parents being more responsive to girls, and family cohesion and effort positively influenced school performance, while self-autonomy negatively impacted GPA
(Aldhafri et al., 2020)	Oman	The study examines the predictive role of students' perceptions of parenting styles on their academic self-efficacy beliefs. It explores how this relationship may vary across different life stages by comparing school and university students in Oman	Quantitative	Parenting styles explained more variance in academic self-efficacy beliefs for school students than university students, with authoritative parenting by both mothers and fathers significantly predicting these beliefs in both groups, and authoritarian father style positively influencing school students' academic self-efficacy

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Table 1 (continued)

Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
<i>Family and technology</i>				
(Abuiyada et al., 2016)	Oman	The study examines the impact of internet usage on family relationships in the Dhofar region of Oman. It explores how modern technology influences interactions between spouses, parents, and children within Omani families	Quantitative	Internet usage has negatively impacted spousal and sibling relationships in Omani families, with 92.4% of husbands reporting lower relationship quality with their wives, while also negatively influencing religious values and ethical principles for 24.7% of husbands and 35.8% of children, despite providing better access to educational information largely unrelated to school curriculum and having minimal financial impact for nearly 39% of families
(Saquib et al., 2023)	Saudi Arabia	This study investigates the family characteristics associated with problematic internet use (PIU) among adolescents in Saudi Arabia. It aims to identify the influence of socioeconomic status, family harmony, parental control, and family members' internet use on PIU	Quantitative	Poor socioeconomic status, low family harmony, and lack of parental supervision are significantly associated with higher problematic internet use among Saudi adolescents The study found that 41.8% of Saudi adolescents in grades 7–12 exhibit problematic internet use, with significant associations with family characteristics such as poor socioeconomic status and lack of parental control

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
<i>COVID-19 and family</i>				
(Ahmed & Eltahir, 2023)	UAE	This case study examines how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted family values and relationships in the Ajman Emirate. It aims to explore the changes in family dynamics and identify potential interventions and policy recommendations based on the experiences of families in the region	Quantitative	Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, families in the UAE showed resilience and cohesion, with family values largely unchanged and 52.3% of respondents in Ajman Emirate strongly disagreeing that family relations had strengthened, while minimal changes in cultural practices related to consolation and burial posed potential disease transmission risks
(Rakha et al., 2022)	Saudi Arabia	This study examines the role of families in promoting healthy lifestyles for children aged 3–12 during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Qassim region, within the context of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 program. It highlights the impact of family actions on children's physical health, diet, sleep habits, use of electronic devices, and psychological well-being	Quantitative	During the COVID-19 pandemic, only 34.40% of children exercised more than three times per week, and 13.40% engaged in sessions of 45 min or more, while families maintained sufficient food and aimed for healthy diets despite varied meal frequency and consumption patterns, and children excessively used electronic devices, often exceeding recommended screen time limits

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
<i>Divorce</i>				
(Al-Kazi, 2008)	Kuwait	The paper investigates divorce in Kuwait, analyzing how the trends and characteristics of divorce have evolved over the past decades in the context of urbanization, economic changes, and social transformation. It aims to understand the relationship between divorce and factors such as education, income, and age, and to assess the support provided by society and the state to divorced individuals	Qualitative	The divorce rate in Kuwait has more than doubled from 3.1% in 1985 to 6.8% in 2004, with the highest rates among young adults (20–24 years for females and 25–29 years for males) and higher education levels associated with increased divorce rates, reflecting greater awareness of rights and economic independence
(Lari & Al-Thani, 2021)	Qatar	This paper examines the societal attitudes toward divorce predictors and the legislative response in Qatar, focusing on individual differences leading to marital dissatisfaction and divorce. It highlights legislative initiatives aimed at strengthening family cohesion and preventing the dissolution of marriages	Qualitative	Divorce rates are highest among younger Qatari spouses (20–29 years), with higher education levels linked to a higher likelihood of seeking divorce due to unsatisfying marriages, driven by factors such as growing apart, physical violence, lack of respect, personality differences, financial issues, and infidelity

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Mansour et al., 2020b)	Oman	This study investigates the effects of sociodemographic characteristics on divorce rates in Oman, using spatial modeling to analyze marital separations. The research aims to understand how variables such as women's employment, female educational levels, urban residence, economic inactivity, and polygamous marriage influence divorce rates across different geographic regions	Quantitative	High divorce rates in the northwest and northeast areas of Oman indicate significant geographic variations, with female education levels negatively correlating with divorce rates, while women's employment, economic inactivity, urban residence, and polygamous marriage are positively associated with higher divorce rates, highlighting the influence of sociodemographic factors on marital stability
(Bromfield, 2014)	UAE	The study examines the lived experiences of divorced Emirati women and the social factors contributing to the rising divorce rates in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Using a phenomenological approach, the research explores issues such as family interference, early marriage, domestic violence, controlling spouses, and the social stigma of divorce	Qualitative	Marital stress and divorce are significantly influenced by extended family involvement, marrying at a young age without understanding marital responsibilities, and over half of respondents experiencing domestic violence

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Al-shahrani & Hammad, 2023)	Saudi Arabia	The study explores the prevalence of emotional divorce among married women in Saudi Arabia and examines the relationship between emotional divorce and alexithymia. Emotional divorce is described as a state where couples live together but lack a positive or constructive relationship. The study aims to understand how alexithymia, characterized by difficulty in recognizing and expressing emotions, impacts emotional divorce	Q uantitative	Working women had significantly higher emotional divorce scores compared to non-working women, with longer marriage duration and higher levels of alexithymia also associated with higher emotional divorce scores
(Rasheed et al., 2020)	Saudi Arabia	The study investigates the relationship between emotional divorce, marital expectations, and self-efficacy among wives in Saudi Arabia. Emotional divorce refers to a state where spouses live together without emotional connection, impacting their family life negatively. The research aims to determine the prevalence of emotional divorce and its predictors, focusing on marital expectations and self-efficacy	Quantitative	Emotional divorce was less prevalent among employed participants, more common in couples with an age difference of over 10 years compared to 1 to 5 years, and significantly predicted by marital expectations

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
<i>Family structure</i>				
(Al-Khraif et al., 2020)	Saudi Arabia	The study explores the profound reduction in Saudi Arabia's fertility rate and its impacts on household size, family composition, and the changing values and norms within families and society. The focus is on understanding the demographic transitions in marriage, fertility, and livelihoods in the context of Saudi Arabia's evolving family structures	Quantitative	Saudi Arabia's fertility rate dropped from 4.9 children in 2000 to 2.7 in 2016, reducing household size and altering family composition, with delayed family formation due to higher educational attainment and career aspirations, and a shift toward nuclear families influenced by Western lifestyles and increased opportunities for women
(Alnajjar, 1996)	UAE	The study aimed to assess the psychological health of families in the UAE with adolescent members by examining adolescents' perceptions of their family life across seven dimensions of family functioning: family structure, emotional fulfillment, internal relations, behavioral control, value transmission, basic requirements, and external relations	Quantitative	Adolescents in the UAE generally perceive their families as functional, with higher family functioning scores in upper SES families; males reported higher functionality in family structure and external relations, while females rated their families higher in internal relations, behavioral control, and basic requirements

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Al-Ghanim, 2013)	Gulf Region	The paper explores the persistence of hierarchical authority structures in Gulf States' families amidst rapid social changes. It examines the influence of kinship, age, and gender on social positions, roles, and expectations, particularly focusing on the patriarchal system and its impact on women's roles and authority within the family	Qualitative	Despite rapid social changes, Gulf States' families maintain a patriarchal hierarchy with men holding ultimate authority, influenced by kinship ties, particularly paternal lineage, while extended families continue providing social support and cohesion even as the nuclear family model becomes more common in urban areas
(Dashti, 2013)	Kuwait	The study investigates the use of "foreigner talk" (FT) by Kuwaiti families when interacting with their domestic workers. It aims to analyze the simplified grammatical constructions used in this context, examining how language contact influences these interactions	Qualitative	Dashti (2013) identified that Kuwaiti families frequently use the present tense instead of the past tense when interacting with their domestic workers, highlighting a significant deviation from standard grammatical rules

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Babalola et al., 2021)	Gulf Region	The study examines how family ostracism—being ignored or excluded by loved ones—affects employee creativity at work. It explores the mechanisms through which this negative family experience translates into reduced creativity, focusing on the roles of strain-based family-to-work conflict (FWC) and creative process engagement (CPE), and how the need for affiliation moderates these effects	Quantitative	Family ostracism leads to increased family-to-work conflict, negatively impacting creative process engagement and creativity at work, with the need for affiliation moderating this impact, resulting in greater negative effects on individuals with a higher need for affiliation
(Rajab et al., 2021)	Saudi Arabia	The study investigates the associations of religiosity and family atmosphere with the lifestyle of Saudi adolescents, focusing on how these factors correlate with lifestyle risk factors such as physical activity, diet, screen time, obesity, and smoking	Quantitative	Low religiosity and poor family atmosphere significantly correlated with higher lifestyle risk profiles among Saudi adolescents, with those experiencing both factors having higher odds of engaging in risky behaviors, suggesting that promoting higher religiosity and better family atmosphere may help reduce these risks

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Al-Barwani & Albeely, 2007)	Oman	The paper investigates the Omani family by examining its strengths and challenges within the context of significant attributes that characterize Omani society, such as Arabic and Islamic heritage, tribal influences, and modern challenges	Qualitative	The Omani family remains cohesive with strong Islamic and Arabic traditions, despite modernization empowering women through delayed marriage and increased economic independence, which also brings challenges like rising divorce rates and youth restlessness and concerns about weakening family ties and traditions due to globalization
(Khadhar, 2021)	Saudi Arabia	The research aims to understand the reasons why women commit violence against men in Saudi Arabia, focusing on female-perpetrated domestic violence, a relatively understudied area in the Kingdom	Qualitative	The study reveals that many Saudi women commit violence in self-defense against prolonged abuse by male family members, motivated by emancipatory longing and frustration with patriarchal practices, and institutions like prisons can become spaces of freedom, leading some women to commit deliberate acts of violence to escape oppression

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Al-Khateeb, 1998)	Saudi Arabia	The study investigates the impact of socioeconomic changes, particularly the discovery of oil, on the Saudi family structure and women's lives. It explores how wealth influx has transformed various aspects of family dynamics, marriage, gender roles, and authority within the family in Saudi Arabia	Mixed Method	The most significant change in marital relationships is the shift from exaggerated respect for husbands to mutual respect among younger couples, while material aspects of family life have evolved faster than cultural aspects, and educated women face role conflict between progressive gender equality attitudes and traditional expectations
(Bakoush et al., 2016)	Gulf Region	The study examines the structure of consanguineous (kin) and non-consanguineous (non-kin) marriages in the wealthy tribal society of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It aims to understand how economic prosperity affects the prevalence and characteristics of kin marriages and family structure	Quantitative	The rate of parental consanguinity was 36%, showing kin unions persist despite high socioeconomic status, with no significant difference in family size between consanguineous and non-consanguineous families, though non-consanguineous families had more half-siblings due to higher polygamy rates, and consanguineous parents faced more difficulty arranging marriages for their offspring, often resorting to kin marriages

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Al-Arrayed & Hamamy, 2011)	Bahrain	The study investigates the changing rates of consanguinity (marriages between relatives) in Bahrain from 1990 to 2009, examining the impact of genetic education and awareness campaigns on these rates	Quantitative	First-cousin marriages in Bahrain declined from 24% in 1995 to 6.8% in 2009, with overall consanguinity rates dropping from 32% to 11.4% due to genetic education and public health campaigns, reflecting the impact of increased literacy and genetic awareness over two decades
(Harkness & Khaled, 2014)	Qatar	The study investigates the increasing prevalence of consanguineous marriages in Qatar despite rapid modernization. It aims to understand the social processes and categorical schemas that lead to such marriages, exploring how these traditional practices persist and are framed within the context of romantic love	Qualitative	Despite rapid modernization, nearly half of all marriages in Qatar are between first or second cousins, following social processes like reservation, joking, filtering, engagement, and courtship, with participants blending traditional practices and contemporary notions of romantic love

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(MShareef & Ahmed, 2023)	UAE	The study investigates the shift from single-family to multi-family public housing in the UAE, specifically analyzing the social sustainability aspects of two recent vertical housing projects: Diba Al Hosn in Sharjah and Al Ghurfa in Al Fujairah. It aims to assess how these designs meet the social sustainability needs of Emirati citizens	Qualitative	Both Diba Al Hosn and Al Ghurfa projects demonstrate significant shortcomings in social sustainability, particularly in promoting social interaction and providing high-quality living environments, with Diba Al Hosn succeeding in functional mixed-use spaces, security, privacy, and user needs, and Al Ghurfa emphasizing privacy, security, and user needs, but both lacking in social interaction and community involvement
<i>Fertility</i>				
(Awad & Chartouni, 2014)	UAE	The study aims to identify the factors contributing to the decline in fertility rates among the citizens of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, using the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as a case study	Quantitative	The decline in fertility among UAE nationals is significantly influenced by late marriages and higher levels of female education, rather than economic factors or labor market participation, with marriages between UAE national males and foreign females and increased childbirth intervals being major contributors

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Islam et al., 2012)	Oman	This study investigates the factors responsible for the significant decline in fertility rates in Oman during the 1990s, using the Bongaarts framework of proximate determinants of fertility	Quantitative	Oman's fertility rate declined from 8.6 to 4.8 births per woman between 1988 and 2000, primarily due to reduced marriage rates and increased contraceptive use, with women's education and employment contributing significantly by encouraging delayed marriage and modern contraceptive use
(Al-Mubarak & Adamchak, 1994)	Saudi Arabia	This study examines the structural determinants of fertility attitudes and behavior among Saudi Arabian students studying in American universities, focusing on factors such as age, religiosity, education, income, length of stay in the U.S., and wife's age and education	Quantitative	Religiosity significantly influences fertility attitudes among Saudi students in the U.S., with more religious individuals favoring larger family sizes, while higher education levels of wives correlate with smaller family sizes

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Shah et al., 1998)	Kuwait	This study investigates the patterns of desired fertility and contraceptive use among Kuwaiti women, particularly in a highly pronatalist society. It aims to understand the factors influencing ideal family size, the desire for additional children, and contraceptive practices	Quantitative	In Kuwait, the mean ideal number of children among currently married women was 5.3, with Bedouins and women with more children desiring larger families, and although 41% of women wanted to stop childbearing, only 45% were using contraception, highlighting a gap between fertility preferences and contraceptive use, which was higher among non-Bedouins, women who had reached or exceeded their ideal number of children, and those with primary or secondary education
(Mansour et al., 2020a)	Oman	This study investigates the impact of sociocultural factors, particularly the presence of immigrant female domestic workers, on local fertility variations in Oman. It aims to understand how these factors influence fertility rates at a subnational level, considering geographical and socioeconomic aspects	Quantitative	The presence of foreign female domestic workers significantly impacts local fertility rates in Oman, particularly in rural and Bedouin communities with higher unemployment among women

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
<i>Family and work</i>				
(Dukhaykh, 2023)	Saudi Arabia	The study investigates the relationships between family-work conflict, work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion, and job embeddedness among Saudi working women, with a focus on how emotional exhaustion mediates these relationships	Quantitative	The study found that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between work-family conflicts and job embeddedness, negatively impacting job embeddedness among Saudi women in the private sector and emphasizing the need for organizational support and flexible work arrangements to balance work and family demands
(Sarour & Keshky, 2022b)	Saudi Arabia	The study explores the relationship between perfectionism and work-family conflict among Saudi workers, focusing on the mediating roles of coping strategies and positive automatic thoughts	Quantitative	Standard and discrepancy perfectionism significantly predict work-to-family conflict, indicating the need for interventions focused on coping strategies and positive thinking to reduce tensions. Active coping and positive automatic thoughts are crucial pathways through which perfectionism affects work-family conflict, highlighting the importance of training programs for effective coping. Discrepancy perfectionism is more closely related to family-to-work conflict, mediated by support-seeking and evasive coping strategies, underscoring the unique challenges perfectionists face in balancing family and work roles

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Shah, 2004)	Kuwait	The study examines the changes in marital patterns and socioeconomic characteristics of women in Kuwait, focusing on how these factors influence marital status, age at marriage, consanguineous marriages, and polygyny in a rapidly developing Muslim society	Quantitative	The study found that the percentage of single women in Kuwait nearly doubled from 1965 to 2000, while the percentage of currently married women decreased significantly, highlighting a shift in marital patterns in the country The increase in the Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) for Kuwaiti women from 18.9 years in 1965 to 23.8 years in 2000 reflects the impact of socioeconomic development on marital timing Higher rates of consanguineous marriages were observed among Bedouin women, those residing in rural areas, and women with lower educational levels, indicating the influence of socioeconomic factors on marriage choices

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Hashim et al., 2024)	Bahrain	The study investigates the agency of women entrepreneurs in family businesses in Bahrain, examining the pathways and barriers they encounter and the active roles they play in overcoming these challenges. It also explores the underlying enablers that support and facilitate their agency	Qualitative	The study found that women entrepreneurs in Bahrain navigate various barriers and use their agency to become key mediators between family businesses and central institutions, thereby reinforcing their roles within the business and society. By integrating indigenous theory with Western family business concepts, this research highlights the unique contributions of women entrepreneurs in Bahrain, emphasizing the importance of kinship, alliances, and clientship in building and maintaining Asabiyyah. The findings reveal that women's entrepreneurial activities, both within and independent of family businesses, are crucial in breaking institutional barriers and fostering economic and political influence in the Gulf States.

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Hong et al., 2021)	Qatar	This study explores the concept of work-family balance among Qatari adults, emphasizing the cultural and social constructs that shape their understanding and pursuit of this balance. It aims to build a conceptual model of work-family balance in a non-WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) context, focusing on the interplay of work and family expectations	Qualitative	The study reveals that work-family balance among Qatari adults is an idealized but challenging goal, influenced by the demands of work and the rising needs of the family, making it largely unattainable. Qatari adults view work-family balance as a socially and relationally constructed concept, actively pursued through negotiation and adaptation within cultural and religious contexts. Work is seen primarily as a means to meet family financial needs, with the dedication to work considered a respectable sacrifice for the family's sake among Qatari working adults
<i>Elder care and aging</i>				
(Ismail & Hussein, 2018)	Oman	The study examines the process of population aging and long-term care (LTC) policies in the Gulf region, specifically focusing on Oman. It explores demographic changes, LTC needs, and policy developments within the context of traditional family care norms	Mixed Method	Oman is experiencing rapid population aging, with projections indicating a significant increase in the older population (60+) by 2050. The current LTC system in Oman heavily relies on informal care provided by family members, especially women. Recent policy developments in Oman reflect a growing recognition of aging issues, but a comprehensive and sustainable LTC system is still in its early stages

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Khan et al., 2017)	Gulf Region	The study investigates the nexus between demographic change and the need for elderly care in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, emphasizing the implications for social policies in the region	Qualitative	GCC countries are experiencing rapid demographic changes, including declining fertility rates and increasing life expectancy, leading to a faster pace of population aging than observed in many European countries. Social policies in the GCC are in the early stages of addressing the needs of the aging population, with a heavy reliance on traditional family care systems. There is a significant gap between the demand for and supply of elderly care, necessitating cohesive social policy strategies that involve the state, family, and community stakeholders.
(Alhalal et al., 2022)	Saudi Arabia	This study investigates the extent of psychological elder abuse among older Saudi adults, identifies the characteristics that increase the risk of such abuse, and examines the impact of psychological elder abuse on self-rated health.	Qualitative	88.3% of older Saudi adults reported at least one symptom or suspected symptom of psychological elder abuse. Age, gender, income, living arrangements, functioning, and social networking were significant predictors of vulnerability to psychological elder abuse among older Saudi adults. Psychological elder abuse negatively impacted self-rated health, and this relationship was not moderated by social networking.

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Shah et al., 2011)	Kuwait	This study examines the role of foreign live-in domestic workers as caretakers for older Kuwaiti men and women, focusing on age and gender differences in care provided, sociodemographic correlates of care during illness, and the self-reported physical, functional, and psychological health status of the elderly about their caregivers	Quantitative	Domestic workers provided care to 28% of men and 58% of women who needed assistance with ADL. Respondents cared for by domestic workers reported poorer health indicators and higher depressive symptoms than those looked after by family members. Care by a domestic worker was seven times more likely for women than men and 10.8 times more likely for those without co-resident children compared to those with three or more co-resident children
<i>Child and family</i>				
(Smadi, 1998)	UAE	The study aims to identify the counseling and support needs of families with disabled children in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It also investigates the effects of several variables, including residential area, previous experience with social workers, number of disabled children within the family, parental level of education, parents' job, and the type and degree of the child's disability, on these counseling needs	Qualitative	Families with disabled children in the UAE exhibit substantial counseling needs in information, rehabilitation, psychological support, and social services, irrespective of their residential area, previous social worker contact, or parental education level. Significant differences in counseling needs were found among parents based on their job status and the type and degree of their child's disability, highlighting the higher demands among employed parents and those with severely disabled children

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Eid et al., 2019)	Saudi Arabia	This study assesses the treatment acceptability and preference for common behavioral interventions among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in Saudi Arabia. The interventions evaluated include medication, positive reinforcement, response cost, spanking, and timeout	Quantitative	Parents of children with ASD in Saudi Arabia found positive reinforcement to be the most acceptable and preferred behavioral intervention, whereas spanking was rated the lowest in acceptability and preference. The alignment of treatment acceptability scores with treatment preferences suggests that positive reinforcement is not only seen as socially valid but also preferred by parents, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive intervention strategies
(Hariri, 2018)	Saudi Arabia	This study explores the factors contributing to adolescent girls' elopement in Saudi Arabia and assesses the empirical relationships between these factors within a multidimensional model	Mixed Method	Adolescent girls' elopement in Saudi Arabia is significantly associated with deviant friends, low religious faith, and media and technology use. Family conflict and relationships indirectly contribute to girls' elopement when mediated by deviant friends and low religious faith, reflecting the complexity of this issue in a traditional society

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Alsaleh, 2013)	Kuwait	This study investigates whether family transitions (disruptions due to parents' divorce, separation, marriage, or death) are related to conduct problems and self-esteem issues among 8 to 10-year-old boys in elementary school in Kuwait	Experimental	Family transitions in young Kuwaiti boys are significantly linked to higher levels of conduct problems, highlighting the impact of family disruption on children's behavior. Despite increased conduct problems, Kuwaiti boys' self-esteem remains unaffected by family transitions, possibly due to the support provided by the tribal culture.
(Bedair et al., 2020)	Qatar	The study examines the relationship between attachment styles, marital satisfaction, and mutual support among couples in Qatar	Quantitative	Secure attachment significantly enhances marital satisfaction, whereas insecure attachment detrimentally affects both mutual support and marital satisfaction among Qatari couples.
(Alquraini et al., 2018)	Saudi Arabia	The study investigates the impact of the severity of mothers' psychosocial functioning, specifically parenting stress and depression, on the efficacy of a relationship-based intervention (Responsive Teaching) for young children with autism in Saudi Arabia	Experimental	The study found that high levels of parenting stress and depression did not impede mothers' ability to engage in relationship-based interventions, and participation significantly reduced these psychosocial issues.

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Khusaifan & Keshky, 2022)	Saudi Arabia	The study investigates the predictors of runaway behavior among adolescent Saudi girls, focusing on family cohesion, adaptability, psychological needs, and demographic factors	Quantitative	The study found that low family cohesion, education level, age, number of siblings, and birth order significantly predict runaway behavior among adolescent Saudi girls, highlighting the critical role of family dynamics and psychological needs
(Alsimah et al., 2021)	Saudi Arabia	The study investigates Saudi mothers' and their children's judgments and reasoning about exclusion based on religion, comparing those residing in Saudi Arabia with those in the UK	Qualitative	The study revealed that Saudi families residing in the UK were significantly less accepting of religious-based exclusion compared to those in Saudi Arabia, demonstrating the influence of sociocultural contexts on attitudes toward exclusion
(Emam & Abu-Serei, 2014)	Oman	The study examines how family functioning predicts self-concept and self-esteem in children at risk for learning disabilities (LD) in Oman, considering the roles of parent education level (PEL) and gender	Quantitative	Family functioning significantly predicts self-concept in both at-risk LD and normally achieving students in Oman, with cohesion and social/recreational orientation being key predictors for LD students
(Ekas et al., 2023)	Qatar	The study examines whether the unmet needs of parents of children with autism in Qatar predict parental well-being and if sociodemographic factors and child characteristics are associated with these unmet needs	Quantitative	Greater unmet needs significantly predict lower life satisfaction among parents of children with autism in Qatar, with child behavior problems being a key predictor of unmet needs for family support and explaining the child's diagnosis to others

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Lari, 2023)	Qatar	The study investigates the impact of parenting styles on child development in Qatar, exploring the links among socioeconomic factors, parent–child relationships, and child outcomes	Quantitative	Authoritative parenting positively influences child personality development, while better work-life balance among parents is associated with higher child personality development scores
(Lari & Al-Emadi, 2021)	Qatar	The study explores the extent of parental involvement in dual-earner Qatari families, examining gender differences in parental engagement, work-family balance, and social supports affecting parental roles	Quantitative	Fathers in dual-earner Qatari families are less engaged in childcare compared to mothers, with work demands and social supports being significant factors affecting parental involvement
<i>Family health and well-being</i>				
(Al-Darmaki et al., 2019)	UAE	This study aimed to examine whether anxiety and depression, as well as perceived family functioning, predict marital satisfaction among a sample of 1,041 Emirati married individuals	Quantitative	Marital satisfaction negatively correlated with lower levels of family functioning as well as depression and anxiety Lower levels of depression and anxiety as well as healthy family functioning together explained about 50% of the variance in marital satisfaction The interaction between gender and depression and anxiety was insignificant

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Alghanami & Keshky, 2023)	Saudi Arabia	This study aimed to investigate the relationship between family environment and eating disorder symptoms, examining the mediating role of negative automatic thoughts and the moderating role of gender in a non-clinical sample of Saudi students	Quantitative	A healthy family environment was found to be negatively associated with eating disorder symptoms. Negative automatic thoughts mediated the relationship between family environment and eating disorder symptoms. Gender moderated the relationship between family environment and eating disorder symptoms, with a stronger effect observed in females.
(Alwhaibi et al., 2018)	Saudi Arabia	This study aimed to compare the quality of life (QoL) of Saudi mothers of children with Cerebral Palsy (CP) and Down Syndrome (DS) to mothers of children without disabilities and to explore the relationship between their QoL and socioeconomic status	Quantitative	Mothers of children with disabilities reported significantly lower satisfaction in social and economic aspects and placed more importance on health and functioning but less on psychological/spiritual status compared to mothers of children without disabilities.
(Aldiabat et al., 2023)	Oman	This study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of how Omani families care for a member with mental illness, including the support provided for self-care activities	Qualitative	Omani family caregivers provided comprehensive care to their mentally ill family members, emphasizing empathy, love, and understanding. Caregivers often sacrifice their own needs and well-being to prioritize the care of their mentally ill family members, motivated by a deep sense of responsibility and unconditional love.

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Almalky et al., 2020)	Saudi Arabia	The study aims to examine the perspectives and expectations of families of students with disabilities regarding school-business partnerships that facilitate postsecondary transitions and employment preparation in Saudi Arabia	Qualitative	Families believe schools emphasize social, communication, and personal skills for students with disabilities but lack focus on job-searching and transportation skills, with insufficient communication and student involvement in transition planning, and inadequate community support for vocational training and internships
(Hamza et al., 2021)	Qatar	The study investigates the impact of adolescent substance abuse on family quality of life, marital satisfaction, and mental health in Qatar	Quantitative	Families with a substance-addicted adolescent had significantly lower family quality of life compared to families without such an adolescent Marital satisfaction was significantly lower in families with an addicted adolescent than in those without Families with an addicted adolescent experienced significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to those without an addicted adolescent
(Hassanein et al., 2021)	Qatar	This study explores the influence of social support and resilience on the family quality of life (FQOL) among Qatari mothers of children with intellectual disabilities (ID)	Quantitative	Giving and receiving social support explained 62% of the variance in Family Quality of Life, with emotional and instrumental support significantly predicting it, while resilience was not a significant predictor

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
<i>Family function</i>				
(Hassan, 2018)	Qatar	The study examines the role of family and marriage institutions in sustaining and reproducing social stratification in Qatari society, highlighting how cultural, traditional, and social values are passed down through generations	Mixed Method	The family institution in Qatari society perpetuates social stratification by passing down cultural values through marriage and child-rearing, with married females aligning more with traditional social stratification, ensuring the preservation of core cultural values despite modern influences
(Sarour & Keshky, 2022a)	Saudi Arabia	This study investigates the relationship between family functioning, specifically adaptability and cohesion, and extremist beliefs in young adults. It also explores the mediating role of psychological well-being in this relationship	Quantitative	Balanced family functioning is linked to fewer extremist beliefs among young adults, with psychological well-being fully mediating this relationship, and family adaptability and cohesion being highly correlated, suggesting a unidimensional family functioning construct in the context of extremism
<i>Family and law</i>				
(Hamdoun, 2021)	UAE	The study examines the role of the UAE Personal Status Law in protecting and strengthening the rights of wives. It explores various guarantees provided to wives in terms of marriage, dowry, alimony, and post-divorce compensation by analyzing relevant legal texts and amendments	Document Analysis	The UAE Personal Status Law ensures the wife's rights at the initiation and conclusion of the marriage contract, upholds her right to dowry and alimony, and mandates compensation for arbitrary divorce, reflecting a commitment to fair treatment and financial support

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
(Alessa, 2010)	Kuwait	The study investigates sex discrimination within Kuwaiti Family Law, highlighting how laws about marriage, divorce, alimony, and custody subordinate women. It aims to identify and analyze the articles in Family Law that result in the unjust treatment of women, despite claims that these laws are based on Shari'a and therefore just	Mixed Method	Kuwaiti Family Law discriminates against women in marriage and divorce, relying on interpretations of Shari'a without substantial evidence from primary Islamic sources, with unjust treatment in alimony and custody cases, and the study highlights varied awareness and acceptance of these laws, indicating a need for increased public education on gender equality
(Sandy, 2007)	Bahrain	The study explores the debate over the codification of family law in Bahrain, highlighting the tensions between conservative clerics and progressive women activists, and the underlying sectarian conflict between the Shi'a majority and the Sunni ruling family	Qualitative	The codification of family law in Bahrain has intensified sectarian tensions with Shi'a clerics opposing it, while the inconsistent and inefficient sharia court system causes hardships, especially for women, and women's rights activists advocate for reform despite conservative opposition and political complexities

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Authors/Year	Country	Research focus	Methodology	Key findings
<i>Family studies and education</i>				
(Al-Naser, 1996)	Kuwait	The development of family studies in Kuwait, emphasizes the shifts in research focus and methodologies before and after the discovery of oil. The study examines the progression from minor family research to substantial studies supported by various Kuwaiti institutions, highlighting key areas such as aging, expatriate housemaids, women's studies, and child development	Literature Review	The discovery of oil in Kuwait led to a surge in family studies supported by institutions, influenced by socioeconomic changes, but there remains a need for better research methods to develop sound theoretical frameworks

impact of permissive parenting on students' Mathematics achievement in Oman, indicating that low demandingness in parenting and teaching can hinder progress.

Abdel-Khalek and Lynn (2008) found a negligible correlation between family size and intelligence among Kuwaiti children, challenging the stronger negative correlations observed in Western studies. Similarly, Abdelrasheed et al. (2022) reported a small but significant negative correlation between children's IQ and family size in Oman, indicating that larger family sizes may be associated with lower IQs, though the effect is modest. The importance of parental involvement and family dynamics is evident in studies from the UAE and Qatar. Malluhi and Alomran (2019) highlighted the importance of effective school leadership and overcoming language barriers to enhance parental involvement in Abu Dhabi primary schools. Ihmeideh et al. (2018) found that strong family-school relationships positively impact children's academic experiences in Qatar, with home learning being particularly significant. Ihmeideh and Al-Maadadi (2020) demonstrated the effectiveness of family literacy programs in improving early literacy skills among kindergarten children in Qatar, emphasizing the role of family engagement in early education.

The studies also reveal gender differences and cultural variations in the impact of parenting styles. Alsheikh et al. (2010) reported that boys performed better in school than girls in the UAE, with parents being more responsive to girls. Al-Qahtani et al. (2020) explored the adaptation experiences of Saudi mothers studying in the UK, highlighting the resilience and challenges faced in balancing parenting and academic responsibilities. Aldhafri et al. (2020) found that authoritative parenting significantly

enhances self-efficacy among students in Oman, across both school and university levels.

3.2 Family and Technology

With the rise of social media, people now spend more time on these platforms, which has significant impacts on family dynamics. This increased online engagement often leads to changes in how family members interact and communicate with each other. Abuiyada et al. (2016) found that excessive internet usage strains relationships between spouses and siblings, with many husbands reporting a decline in relationship quality with their wives. Although the internet provides educational resources, much of the content is not directly related to the school curriculum, limiting its positive impact. Many families also observed a negative influence of internet usage on religious values and ethics, complicating its role in family life. Saquib et al. (2023) identified poor socioeconomic status, low family harmony, and lack of parental supervision as significant predictors of higher problematic internet use (PIU), which refers to excessive or poorly controlled preoccupations, urges, or behaviors regarding internet use that lead to impairment or distress, among Saudi adolescents. The study reported that 41.8% of adolescents in grades 7–12 exhibit problematic internet use, emphasizing the need for better parental control and family cohesion.

3.3 COVID-19 and Family Dynamics

COVID-19, which negatively affected the world, brought about unique experiences for families. Scholars analyzed these experiences, but their studies did not reveal major changes in family dynamics overall. Ahmed and Eltahir (2023) found that despite disruptions, family values in Ajman remained largely unchanged, with most respondents disagreeing that family relations had strengthened. In Saudi Arabia's Qassim region, family actions during the pandemic promoted healthy lifestyles for children aged 3–12. Rakha et al. (2022) noted that physical activity levels among children were low, with only a third exercising more than three times per week. Families made efforts to maintain a healthy diet, but variations in meal frequency and food consumption were noted. The excessive use of electronic devices for learning and entertainment, often exceeding recommended screen time limits, highlighted the challenges families faced in balancing healthy habits and technology use during the pandemic.

3.4 *Divorce*

Divorce rates in the Gulf region have risen significantly, reflecting broader social changes and challenges. In Kuwait, the proportion of divorced women more than doubled from 3.1% in 1985 to 6.8% in 2004, with higher education levels and economic independence contributing to this increase (Al-Kazi, 2008). Similarly, in Qatar, younger spouses and those with higher educational attainment are more likely to seek divorce due to growing apart, physical violence, lack of respect, and financial issues (Lari & Al-Thani, 2021). In Oman, divorce rates are influenced by sociodemographic factors, including women's employment and urban residence (Mansour et al., 2020b).

In the UAE, social factors such as family interference, early marriage, and domestic violence significantly contribute to rising divorce rates among Emirati women (Bromfield, 2014). Emotional divorce, characterized by a lack of emotional connection despite cohabitation, is prevalent in Saudi Arabia, especially among working women and those with longer marriages. Alexithymia, or difficulty in expressing emotions, is strongly linked to emotional divorce (Al-shahrani & Hammad, 2023). Marital expectations and self-efficacy are significant predictors of emotional divorce, further complicating marital stability (Rasheed et al., 2020).

3.5 *Family Structure*

Al-Arrayed and Hamamy (2011) show that consanguinity rates have significantly declined due to increased genetic education and awareness campaigns in Bahrain, indicating the potential impact of targeted public health initiatives. Similarly, the UAE, despite its economic prosperity, shows the persistence of kin unions, with consanguineous parents facing challenges in arranging marriages for their offspring (Bakoush et al., 2016). These findings highlight the nuanced and varied responses to modernization across different Gulf States.

The shift from single-family to multi-family public housing in the UAE reflects a strategic response to the growing demand for affordable housing amidst limited land resources. The analysis of two pioneering vertical housing projects, Diba Al Hosn in Sharjah and Al Ghurfa in Al Fujairah, reveals significant shortcomings in social sustainability, particularly in promoting social interaction and providing high-quality living environments (MShareef & Ahmed, 2023). While the Diba Al Hosn project successfully integrates functional mixed-use spaces, security, privacy, and user needs, it falls short in aspects such as social interaction and community involvement (MShareef & Ahmed, 2023). Similarly, the Al Ghurfa project emphasizes privacy, security, and user needs but lacks provisions for social interaction and high-quality living environments, indicating areas for improvement in future designs (MShareef & Ahmed, 2023). These findings underscore the need for a more holistic approach to public housing.

3.6 *Fertility*

The role of female education and employment in fertility decline is well-documented. In the UAE, higher female education levels and delayed marriages significantly contributed to reduced fertility rates, rather than economic factors (Awad & Char-touni, 2014). Similarly, in Oman, increased female education and employment led to delayed marriages and higher contraceptive use, driving fertility decline (Islam et al., 2012). These patterns highlight the importance of educational and employment opportunities for women in shaping reproductive behaviors.

In Oman, foreign female domestic workers significantly influence fertility rates. Mansour et al. (2020a) found that households with domestic workers have higher fertility rates, especially in rural and Bedouin communities with high female unemployment. This suggests that domestic workers enable local women to balance work and family responsibilities, supporting higher fertility rates despite increased female labor force participation (Mansour et al., 2020a).

In Saudi Arabia, religiosity and education predict fertility attitudes and behaviors among Saudi students in the U.S. More religious individuals favor larger families, while higher education levels among wives correlate with smaller family sizes (Al-Mubarak & Adamchak, 1994). This highlights the relationship between cultural, religious, and educational factors in shaping fertility preferences. In Kuwait, desired family size and contraceptive use among women revealed a pronatalist trend. Bedouins and women with more children desired larger families, indicating that cultural norms influence reproductive behaviors even with modern contraceptive options (Shah et al., 1998).

3.7 *Family and Work Balance*

Women's active participation in business and extended education periods affect the work-family balance, sometimes creating trouble for couples. In Saudi Arabia, Dukhaykh (2023) and Sarour and Keshky (2022b) highlight the roles of emotional exhaustion and perfectionism in exacerbating work-family conflict among working women. Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between work-family conflict and job embeddedness, suggesting the importance of flexible work arrangements and organizational support (Dukhaykh, 2023). Perfectionism, particularly discrepancy perfectionism, is related to work-family conflict, with coping strategies and positive automatic thoughts being crucial for managing these tensions (Sarour & Keshky, 2022b).

In Bahrain, Hashim et al. (2024) emphasize the role of women entrepreneurs in family businesses, showing how they navigate barriers and leverage their roles as mediators between family businesses and central institutions. The study integrates indigenous theory with Western concepts, highlighting kinship, alliances, and clientship in reinforcing women's roles within family businesses and society.

The findings suggest that women's entrepreneurial activities are vital in breaking institutional barriers and fostering economic and political influence in the Gulf States.

In Qatar, Hong et al. (2021) reveal that work-family balance is perceived as an idealized but largely unattainable goal due to competing demands. The study underscores that work-family balance is a socially constructed concept pursued through negotiation and adaptation within cultural and religious norms. Work is viewed primarily as a means to meet family financial needs, reflecting a collectivist orientation where family obligations influence work behaviors and priorities.

In Kuwait, Shah (2004) shows a shift in marital patterns and socioeconomic characteristics among Kuwaiti women, with an increase in the age at marriage and a decline in consanguineous marriages. This shift reflects broader socioeconomic developments and changing attitudes toward marriage and family life, highlighting the evolving nature of family structures in Gulf societies.

3.8 *Elder Care and Aging*

Ismail and Hussein (2018) investigate demographic changes and long-term care (LTC) policies in Oman, revealing a significant increase in the older population (60+) projected by 2050. The reliance on informal care, mainly by family members, especially women, underscores traditional family care norms. While recent policies show a growing awareness of aging issues, a comprehensive LTC system is still under-development. Policymakers in Oman need to accelerate the development of formal LTC infrastructures to address the rapidly aging population effectively (Ismail & Hussein, 2018).

Khan et al. (2017) examine demographic changes and the need for elderly care across the GCC countries. Similar to Oman, the GCC faces rapid demographic changes, declining fertility rates, and increasing life expectancy, leading to an aging population. The study highlights a gap between the demand for and supply of elderly care, heavily reliant on traditional family systems. This reliance poses challenges given evolving family structures and urbanization. The findings call for cohesive social policy strategies involving the state, family, and community to ensure sustainable elder care systems across the GCC (Khan et al., 2017).

Al Halal et al. (2022) highlight psychological elder abuse, revealing that 88.3% of older Saudi adults reported experiencing at least one symptom of such abuse. Factors like age, gender, income, living arrangements, functioning, and social networking predict vulnerability. The negative impact on self-rated health underscores the urgency of addressing this issue within elder care in Saudi Arabia. Targeted interventions and policies are needed to protect older adults from psychological abuse and improve their well-being (Alhalal et al., 2022).

Shah et al. (2011) focus on the role of foreign live-in domestic workers as care-takers for older adults in Kuwait. They reveal a significant reliance on domestic workers, with 28% of men and 58% of women needing assistance with Activities of Daily Living (ADL) being cared for by these workers. Those cared for by domestic

workers reported poorer health indicators and higher depressive symptoms than those looked after by family members. This reliance is particularly pronounced for women and those without co-resident children, highlighting the gendered dimensions of elder care and the health implications of non-familial caregivers. Policies supporting both domestic workers and the elderly they care for are needed (Shah et al., 2011).

3.9 *Child and Family*

Smadi (1998) identifies significant counseling and support needs among families with disabled children in the UAE, emphasizing the importance of information, rehabilitation, psychological support, and social services. These needs persist regardless of residential area, previous social worker contact, or parental education level, suggesting that the challenges faced by these families are widespread and not confined to specific demographics. Notably, the study highlights that employed parents and those with severely disabled children exhibit higher counseling needs, pointing to the added pressures of balancing work responsibilities and intensive caregiving. This finding underscores the necessity for tailored support services that address the unique demands of working parents and those caring for children with severe disabilities (Smadi, 1998).

Eid et al. (2019) explore treatment acceptability and preference among parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Saudi Arabia, finding that positive reinforcement is the most acceptable and preferred intervention. This preference indicates a cultural alignment with socially valid practices and highlights the importance of implementing culturally sensitive intervention strategies. The low acceptability of spanking further underscores a shift toward more positive and constructive behavioral interventions. These findings are crucial for developing effective and culturally appropriate therapeutic approaches for children with ASD in Saudi Arabia (Eid et al., 2019).

Hariri (2018) examines the factors contributing to adolescent girls' elopement in Saudi Arabia, revealing significant associations with deviant friends, low religious faith, and media and technology use. The study also notes that family conflict and relationships indirectly contribute to elopement through these mediators, illustrating the complexity of the issue in a traditional society. This multidimensional model highlights the need for comprehensive interventions that address not only family dynamics but also peer influences and the impact of media and technology (Hariri, 2018).

Alsaleh (2013) investigates the impact of family transitions on conduct problems and self-esteem among young boys in Kuwait, finding a significant link between family disruptions and increased conduct problems. Despite this, the study notes that self-esteem remains unaffected, possibly due to the support provided by the tribal culture. These findings emphasize the resilience factors inherent in Kuwaiti society that can buffer children against the negative effects of family transitions, while also

highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address behavioral issues arising from such disruptions (Alsaleh, 2013).

Bedair et al. (2020) explore the relationship between attachment styles, marital satisfaction, and mutual support among couples in Qatar. The study finds that secure attachment significantly enhances marital satisfaction, while insecure attachment negatively impacts both mutual support and marital satisfaction. These results underscore the importance of fostering secure attachment styles within marital relationships to promote marital harmony and support. Interventions aimed at improving attachment security could thus have substantial benefits for marital satisfaction in Qatari couples (Bedair et al., 2020).

Lari and Al-Emadi (2021) investigate parental involvement in dual-earner Qatari families, highlighting significant gender differences in childcare engagement. Fathers are found to be less engaged compared to mothers, with work demands and social supports playing crucial roles in shaping parental involvement. This study points to the need for policies and workplace practices that support greater paternal involvement in childcare, as well as the importance of enhancing social support systems to balance work and family responsibilities (Lari & Al-Emadi, 2021).

3.10 Family Health and Well-Being

Al-Darmaki et al. (2019) investigate predictors of marital satisfaction among Emirati individuals, focusing on anxiety, depression, and perceived family functioning. Marital satisfaction is negatively correlated with lower family functioning and higher depression and anxiety, explaining about 50% of its variance. These findings highlight the need for interventions to enhance family functioning and address mental health issues to improve marital satisfaction.

Alghanami and Keshky (2023) find that a positive family environment is linked to lower levels of eating disorder symptoms in Saudi students. They identify that negative automatic thoughts, which are habitual and spontaneous negative patterns of thinking, serve as a crucial factor in explaining how a positive family environment influences these symptoms. This suggests that the presence of supportive family dynamics may help mitigate negative thinking patterns that contribute to eating disorder symptoms in students. The study highlights a stronger effect in females, emphasizing the importance of gender-specific approaches in tackling eating disorders.

Alwhaibi et al. (2018) compare the quality of life (QoL) of Saudi mothers of children with Cerebral Palsy (CP) and Down Syndrome (DS) to those without disabled children. Mothers of children with disabilities report significantly lower satisfaction in social and economic aspects of life, prioritizing health and functioning over psychological/spiritual status. These findings highlight the socioeconomic challenges faced by these mothers and the need for targeted support.

Aldiabat et al. (2023) provide an understanding of how Omani families care for members with mental illness. Family caregivers provide comprehensive care driven

by empathy and responsibility, often at the expense of their well-being. This points to the importance of support systems for both the mentally ill and their caregivers.

Almalky et al. (2020) examine the perspectives of families of students with disabilities regarding school-business partnerships in Saudi Arabia. Families believe schools focus more on social and communication skills than job-searching and transportation skills. There is also dissatisfaction with student involvement in transition planning and community support for vocational training.

Hamza et al. (2021) investigate the impact of adolescent substance abuse on family quality of life, marital satisfaction, and mental health in Qatar. Families with a substance-addicted adolescent experience significantly lower family quality of life and marital satisfaction, alongside higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support programs.

Hassanein et al. (2021) explore the influence of social support and resilience on the family quality of life among Qatari mothers of children with intellectual disabilities (ID). Social support, both emotional and instrumental, significantly predicts family quality of life, while resilience does not. This highlights the importance of robust support networks for families of children with ID.

3.11 Family Function

Hassan (2018) explores the role of family and marriage institutions in sustaining social stratification in Qatari society. The study finds that these institutions play a crucial role in instilling and perpetuating cultural values and traditions across generations. Marriage and child-rearing practices are pivotal in maintaining the social hierarchy, with married Qatari females displaying greater alignment with traditional social stratification compared to their non-married counterparts. This indicates that marriage reinforces traditional social structures and norms, even in the face of modern influences. The persistence of these traditional values through family institutions ensures the continuity of Qatari cultural heritage and social hierarchy, highlighting the powerful role of family in shaping societal structures (Hassan, 2018).

Sarour and Keshky (2022a) examine the relationship between family functioning—specifically adaptability and cohesion—and extremist beliefs among young adults in Saudi Arabia. The study finds that balanced family functioning, characterized by high adaptability and cohesion, is associated with fewer extremist beliefs. This underscores the importance of a supportive family environment in mitigating the development of extremist tendencies. Furthermore, the study reveals that psychological well-being fully mediates the relationship between family functioning and extremism. This suggests that improving psychological health can be an effective strategy for reducing extremist beliefs. The high correlation between family adaptability and cohesion supports the notion of a unidimensional construct of family functioning in the context of extremism, indicating that these aspects of family life are deeply interconnected and collectively influence young adults' beliefs (Sarour & Keshky, 2022a).

3.12 *Family and Law*

Hamdoun (2021) examines the UAE Personal Status Law, which is designed to protect and strengthen the rights of wives. The study reveals that the law ensures the wife's rights at both the initiation and conclusion of the marriage contract through provisions on competency, guardianship, and official registration. The law upholds the wife's right to dowry and alimony, ensuring financial protection even if these are not explicitly mentioned in the marriage contract. Additionally, in cases of arbitrary divorce, the law mandates compensation for the wife, reflecting a commitment to fair treatment and financial support. This comprehensive legal framework underscores the UAE's efforts to balance traditional values with the protection of women's rights within marriage (Hamdoun, 2021).

Alessa (2010) investigates sex discrimination within Kuwaiti Family Law, highlighting significant issues in marriage, divorce, alimony, and custody. The study finds that Kuwaiti Family Law relies heavily on interpretations of Shari'a without substantial evidence from primary Islamic sources, leading to unjust treatment of women. Discrimination is pervasive, particularly in alimony and custody cases, where women often face unfavorable outcomes. The study's questionnaire results indicate diverse levels of awareness and acceptance of these discriminatory laws, suggesting a need for increased public education on gender equality. This highlights the entrenched gender discrimination within Kuwaiti Family Law and the urgent need for legal reforms to ensure justice and equity for women (Alessa, 2010).

Sandy (2007) explores the contentious issue of family law codification in Bahrain, focusing on the tensions between conservative clerics and progressive women activists, and the underlying sectarian conflict between the Shi'a majority and the Sunni ruling family. The study reveals that the codification efforts have intensified sectarian tensions, with Shi'a clerics opposing the government's initiatives due to fears of losing their judicial authority. The Sharia court system in Bahrain is marked by inconsistencies and inefficiencies, causing significant hardship for families, particularly women awaiting alimony and custody decisions. Despite these challenges, women's rights activists have been pivotal in advocating for family law reform, demonstrating resilience in the face of political and religious opposition. This highlights the complex interplay between sectarianism, legal reforms, and women's rights in Bahrain (Sandy, 2007).

3.13 *Family Studies and Education*

Al-Naser (1996) shows how the discovery of oil in Kuwait acted as a catalyst for a significant increase in family studies. Before this period, family research in Kuwait was relatively minor and limited in scope. However, the socioeconomic transformations resulting from the oil boom led to a heightened interest in understanding the

evolving family dynamics, prompting substantial support from institutions such as Amiri Diwan and Kuwait University.

4 Conclusion

In the 1980s and 1990s, the GCC countries began experiencing rapid socio-economic changes driven by oil wealth. This period saw the beginning of shifts in family structures and roles, although traditional values and practices still predominated. Studies from this era often highlight the resilience of extended family systems and strong patriarchal norms. For instance, consanguineous marriages remained prevalent, reflecting deeply rooted cultural practices despite emerging modernization pressures.

By the 2000s, increased female education and employment started to reshape family dynamics more noticeably. Higher education levels and greater workforce participation among women led to delayed marriages and smaller family sizes. In Saudi Arabia, the fertility rate dropped significantly. Research from this period underscores the growing importance of educational and employment opportunities for women in shaping family structures.

The 2010s marked a significant technological shift with the widespread adoption of the internet and social media, which profoundly affected family dynamics. Studies reveal that excessive internet usage began to strain familial relationships and alter traditional values. The impact of technology on family life became a critical area of study, with research highlighting both the benefits and drawbacks of digital engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020s brought unprecedented challenges and unique experiences to families worldwide, including in the GCC. Recent studies continue to explore the complex interplay between modernization and traditional values. Divorce rates have risen, influenced by higher education levels and economic independence among women. Elder care has emerged as a critical issue, with traditional family systems struggling to meet the demands of an aging population. The reliance on foreign domestic workers for elder care in countries like Kuwait highlights the need for comprehensive eldercare policies.

Overall, the trajectory of family dynamics in the GCC countries reflects a gradual but significant transformation influenced by educational advancements, technological changes, and socioeconomic shifts. Future research and policy development must focus on balancing modernization with cultural values, supporting family well-being, and addressing emerging challenges in elder care and work-family balance.

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Part IV

Family Support Systems

Chapter 28

Family Satisfaction Among Qataris: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach



**Kaltham Al-Ghanim, Rima Charbaji El-Kassem, Maitha Al Naimi,
and Buthaina Al-Khelaifi**

Abstract The study aims to examine the relationship between shared beliefs and morals, work-family conflict, flexibility at work, marital adaptability, family cohesion, and family satisfaction. This study draws on a survey of 510 male and 507 female Qataris. A regression analysis shows that only 4 out of 5 independent variables are significant in predicting family satisfaction, with specific reference to families in Qatar. This research comes up with a modified circumplex model to understand family satisfaction among Qatari families, which is hypothetically sound and adapted to suit the Qatari context. Thus, the study offers a conceptual causal model for family satisfaction that may enhance our understanding and reinforce the institution of marriage in Qatar and beyond.

Keywords Qatar · Family cohesion · Work-family conflict · Marital adaptability · Flexibility at work · Family satisfaction

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1 Introduction

The family serves as the cornerstone of Qatari society, forming the bedrock for all facets of Qatar's social structure, "Qatar's strong Arab and Islamic identity pervades all aspects of family life" (Qatar National Development Strategy, p.17). Using strategies and techniques such as feeling of togetherness, supporting each other, sharing responsibility, discussing married life problems, and coming up with resolutions are signs of a healthy and adaptable marital relationship. Husband and wife in their marriage enterprise face two fundamental challenges: Do they continue to behave the same way as they used to behave in their homes before they got married, or do they change their approach to adapt to the differing conditions in their family enterprise? Evidence supports the Greek philosophers' saying that "the only constant in life is change" (Heraclitus, circa 535–475 BC). As marriage's short-term objectives are achieved, husband and wife in a team of two broaden their goals to reach satisfaction with family belonging, at every phase of their marriage. A family is very much like an organization of people working together to achieve goals. Knowing what task to be accomplished (milestones), enables spouses to become satisfied with broadening the family's ability to solve conflicts. Suifan, Alhyari, and Sweis believe that their "results supported the idea that some conflict is required for teams to remain viable, self-critical, and innovative" (Suifan et al., 2020; p. 91). Moreover, teamwork improves the quality of communication and concern between family members in addition, to increasing closeness between family members.

However, modern society and globalization are changing family dynamics. In the tapestry of contemporary global dynamics, families, including those within the dynamic Gulf States, confront significant work-family conflicts. Work-family conflict is a great issue for modern society, as a growing number of men and women report that work interferes with their home responsibilities and family cohesiveness (Glavin & Schieman, 2012). These challenges, ranging from the prolonged absence of parents to a lack of workplace flexibility, possess the potential to profoundly impact family satisfaction. Therefore, the lack of house policies based on partnership will have adverse effects on mothers' abilities, in particular, to fulfill their commitments and may ultimately lead them to quit their jobs. Nowadays, new concepts related to the developments that have affected families in contemporary societies have emerged, such as the concept of family responsibilities, which means the responsibility that family members have toward each other, especially the one that the elders have toward the younger or the rest of the family members, for which they are responsible due to their position in the family, such as parents toward children. The family responsibility concept is used to also include working mothers and fathers who have children, in addition to any working individual who is a caregiver to a member of the family, such as taking care of siblings or relatives like uncles from the father's or mother's side. The notion of balancing work and family life, or achieving an effective balance by men and women between family demands and the workplace, which reduces daily conflicts and pressures, is arising. This led to the emergence of a new term called

“Family Responsibilities Discrimination,” which refers to discrimination in employment against workers who have family responsibilities, including pregnant women, mothers and fathers of young children, and even employees who are older parents who have a sick spouse or partner. These individuals may be denied working opportunities or being hired in a certain level of positions, get harassed, denied promotions, or even be terminated despite their good evaluations, simply because their employers make personal decisions based on stereotypical notions of how these employees will behave. There has also been a growing interest in supporting vulnerable populations in families and the impact of work on them. Therefore, the notion of supporting families with children with disabilities emerged: to support the working family by providing families with children or adolescents with behavioral, mental, emotional, sensory, or physical disabilities with adequate support and to provide comprehensive care to the disabled child and help all members of the family, whereas helping parents and caregivers is a different job as productive employees and responsible individuals. However, the more prevalent concept at the moment to increase families’ abilities to conquer daily challenges is the concept of family partnership. In this context, new ideas were presented on policies that adapt new concepts, such as providing child-care services to working families to increase their abilities to face the responsibilities of their daily lives and enhance overall family satisfaction. In addition to reviewing labor laws, advanced societies are now implementing family support policies, such as training parents on the concept of partnership and marital adaptability to fulfill their family responsibilities and face family challenges.

While, work and family conflict have a negative impact on family adaptability, family cohesion and family satisfaction, religion, and morals continue to play a significant role in shaping the structure of families in the Gulf States. Traditional principles such as respect for elders, strong familial bonds, and collective decision-making persist, influencing everything from household roles to intergenerational relationships. These cultural pillars not only contribute to the cohesion of families but also reflect broader societal norms and traditions deeply rooted in Gulf Arab heritage. God in the Holy Qur’an said, “And among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, so that you may find tranquility in them; and He planted between you love and compassion. In this are signs for people who think” (4:21 QURAN) and said “[A]nd of His Signs is that He has created mates for you from your own kind [28] that you may find peace in them [29] and He has set between you love and mercy [30]. Surely there are Signs in this for those who reflect” (30:21 QURAN). That said, Jorgensen argues that “Understanding the religious ‘fit’ of a couple could provide a more nuanced explanation of how religiosity influences family strengths for couples” (Jorgensen, 2010; p. 71). Previous research has revealed that religion strengthens ties within a family (Stinnett & DeFrain, 1985; Mahoney et al., 2001; Dollahite & Marks, 2005). Jorgensen believes that his “[R]esults suggest that religious beliefs and practices are equivocal and are associated with higher and lower marital commitment, parent–child closeness, and family involvement for both husbands and wives” (Jorgensen, 2010; p. 2).

Reflecting upon the earlier insights, this study will explore the intricacies of family satisfaction within Qatari households. Specifically, this research aims to investigate

the interplay between family morals, work-family conflict, workplace flexibility, marital adaptability, family cohesion, and family satisfaction. This exploration is critical for understanding the dynamics of familial relationships in the Qatari context and for providing insights that can inform policymakers, educators, and practitioners in their efforts to support family well-being and societal cohesion in the region.

The current research answers the basic question: What are the direct and indirect effects of the explanatory variables preceding family satisfaction among Qataris? The research hypotheses are summarized in the following interrogative statements:

H1: Shared beliefs and morals positively impact family cohesion among Qataris

H2: Shared beliefs and morals positively impact family satisfaction among Qataris

H3: Work-life conflict negatively impacts family cohesion among Qataris

H4: Work-life conflict negatively impacts family satisfaction among Qataris

H5: Flexible working arrangements positively impact family cohesion among Qataris

H6: Flexible working arrangements positively impact family satisfaction among Qataris

H7: Good marital relationship positively impacts family cohesion among Qataris

H8: Good marital relationship positively impacts family satisfaction among Qataris

H9: Family cohesion positively impacts family satisfaction among Qataris.

This paper is structured as follows: It begins with a comprehensive review of the literature, establishing the foundational themes relevant to the study. Following this, it details the survey design and methodology, providing insight into the research approach and data collection techniques. Then, it presents an overview of family structure in the Gulf and the dynamics of marriage selection, offering context specific to the regional focus of the study. Subsequently, it discusses the core findings of the study, highlighting the key results and their implications. Finally, the manuscript concludes with a summary of the findings and their policy implications, suggesting actionable recommendations based on the research outcomes.

2 A Review of Literature

The literature review is structured around several key themes: family satisfaction among Qatari families, family cohesion, marital adaptability, shared beliefs and morals, work-family balance, and flexible working arrangements. Each theme is elaborated upon as follows:

2.1 *Family Satisfaction Among Qatari Families*

Through modernization and globalization, Qatar has seen significant societal change that is changing the traditional family structure (Lari, 2022). According to circumplex

model, family cohesion and flexibility are viewed as two very important family functioning variables and are essential in predicting family satisfaction (Olson, 2000). “In line with cohesion, the most balanced levels of flexibility reflect better family functioning, making it easier for families to overcome their difficulties and adapt to changes” (Neto et al., 2021). However, when studying marital satisfaction, numerous elements must be taken into account (El-Kassem et al., 2022). The study aims to further the body of knowledge on family satisfaction. It is crucial to research family satisfaction in Qatar in order to gain a deeper picture of the factors associated with family satisfaction. For this, this study will contribute to the existing body of research by investigating the influence of family cohesion and flexibility on family satisfaction, as suggested by Olson (2000). Additionally, it will examine how variables such as family shared beliefs and morals, work-family conflict, and workplace flexibility impact family satisfaction through their relationship with family cohesion. Understanding these elements can assist in guiding policy choices and ensuring that Qatari families have access to the tools and assistance they require for their general well-being.

2.2 Family Cohesion

The family is a crucial institution and the foundation of society in many Arab nations, including Qatar (Abdelmoneium et al., 2018). The emotional connection that family members share has been referred to as family cohesiveness by Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle (1982). “Cohesion implies the affective and emotional relationships that family members have with each other, the connection and closeness, coalitions, mutual relationships, relationships of friendship, the level of ability to make decisions when necessary and the interest and ability to share feelings and problems” (Neto et al., 2021, p. 777). However, unconventional social trends have reshaped family dynamics, marriage formation, and societal behavior—which are adapting to less conservative viewpoints, with high divorce rates and a steady decline in marriages, and a corresponding decline in fertility rates in the Arab region. That said, the society of Qatar offers an intriguing chance to investigate the effects of recent socioeconomic developments on family cohesion and family harmony (Lari, 2022). It’s crucial to comprehend how families function and what they contribute to society as a whole. This study will contribute to the body of information on family cohesiveness in order to help policymakers and Qataris better understand their society and the difficulties they confront.

2.3 Marital Adaptability (Flexibility)

Al-Othman (2012) carried out a study with around 1136 local families in Sharjah Emirate, United Arab Emirates, to investigate which aspects of married couples’

marital happiness are most important. According to the regression analysis's findings, there are statistically significant relationships between a married couple's communication, education, sex, place of residence, self-reported health, family size, and religion. Fisiloglu and Lorenzetti (1994) conducted a study to explore the connection between marital adjustment and family cohesiveness. The results show that a strong marital adjustment is associated with a high level of family cohesion. Family adaptability (flexibility) is seen as a fundamental basis for family satisfaction (Neto et al., 2021). This study will expand on existing research on marital flexibility and add fresh insights, by exploring how marital flexibility affects family cohesion and satisfaction in Qatar.

2.4 Shared Beliefs and Morals

Social conventions continue to exist within the sacredness of family structures inside the fabric of traditional societies, particularly in the Middle East (El-Kassem et al., 2022). Berc et al. (2017) examined the relationship between the degree of family conflict, perceptions of cohesiveness within the family, and family member engagement in shared religious activities. The results of their study show that encouraging shared religious practices within the family can strengthen bonds between members and improve the quality of family life. Understanding how families function also requires an understanding of spiritual and religious matters (Berc et al., 2017). That said, Qatari society is governed by Islamic values. Islam is the official religion of Qatar, as it is in the other Gulf nations. While the Qatari government refers to Islamic law as "the moral anchor of Qatari society," the 2004 Qatar Constitution acknowledges the sharia as "a primary source of legislation" (Caeiro, 2018). According to Berc et al. (2017), fostering shared religious practices within the family can help to build family cohesion and increase satisfaction with family life. Spiritual and religious issues are also crucial components of understanding how families function. This study will contribute to and advance the body of literature already available on the impact of shared ideas and morality on family cohesion and family satisfaction by examining this relationship within the context of Qatari families.

2.5 Work and Family Conflict

Work-family conflict has developed into one of the utmost prominent challenges of contemporary work and a prominent research topic (Fan & Lin, 2022). It is well-known that balancing work and family can be difficult and can have a negative impact on couples. A study conducted by Ahmad et al. (2011) investigates the reasons why working mothers struggle to balance their personal and professional lives. According to Ahmad et al. (2011), women's physical and mental health suffers as a result of

traumatic life events and the stress brought on by juggling work and family responsibilities, both individually and collectively. For instance, long work hours can lead to stress and a variety of mental health problems in women, such as depression, burnout, and other diseases. Women who are burnt out have lower energy levels, difficulty relating to others, and difficulty carrying out the duties and responsibilities of their jobs. Furthermore, according to Erdwin et al. (2001), couples who experience high levels of work-family conflict may experience decreased family satisfaction as a result of their failure to fulfill the nurturing role necessary to be a “good” parent (Erdwin et al., 2001). This research will add to and further the body of knowledge already available on the impact of work-family conflict on family cohesion and family satisfaction by exploring this connection within the Qatari family context.

2.6 Flexible Working Arrangements

Work is necessary for the family’s well-being because it is primarily motivated by financial necessities. Qataris see the concept of work-family balance as socially and relationally formed (Hong et al., 2021). Maintaining a balance between professional demands and family obligations is one of the biggest issues modern families face. Barnett et al. (2003) conducted a study among the working-class Mexican-Americans who earn two incomes to explore the work and family balance. Barnett et al. (2003) discussed how marriage contentment, family harmony, and career satisfaction may be impacted by one’s capacity to juggle work and family obligations. Results of Barnett et al. (2003) study show that work-family balance is positively correlated with marital, family, and job satisfaction, with gender and acculturation having moderating impacts on certain variables. However, flexible working rules are strongly correlated with reduced levels of work-family conflict among employees (Choo et al., 2016). Flexible work schedules can be set in a variety of ways to fit the needs of the employee and/or company (Costa et al., 2006). Appropriate flexible work schedules that assist workers’ coping mechanisms tend to have a definite positive impact on employees’ health and family well-being. According to Costa et al. (2006), flexibility was determined to be the single most important component to affect family and social commitments; in general, the larger the individual-based flexibility, the better the health and work satisfaction. According to Neto et al. (2021), it is important to study the relationship between work and family characteristics (family cohesion and family adaptability) to measure family satisfaction. This study will build on prior research on flexible working arrangements and make new contributions to it by examining whether it influences family cohesion and family satisfaction in Qatar.

3 Survey Design and Methodology

3.1 Population and Sample Selection

The data in this study comes from the Family Cohesion in the State of Qatar project, carried out by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) in collaboration with Doha International Family Institute (DIFI). A survey was carried out using the research instrument (questionnaire) administered to 510 male and 507 female Qataris. This project is a milestone in a process of work on family cohesion and solidarity in Qatar. The purpose of which is to develop, validate, and further perfect an aggregate approach to family cohesion and family satisfaction. The population of this study consists of all Qatari citizens who were 18 years of age or older and residing in Qatar at the time of the survey. From a database, a representative sample was chosen at random. There were at least seven attempts to complete the interview for each phone number in the sample. To increase the likelihood of reaching responders, calls were placed at various hours of the day and on various days of the week. Devoted interviewers made an effort to get in touch with and conduct interviews with phone numbers that had broken off or softly declined. Our survey's sampling strategy, like that of other surveys, could result in various selection probabilities and response rates among significant subgroups. Thus, the analysis and reporting were done using the weighted dataset.

3.2 Instrumentation (Questionnaire Construction)

The data was collected through computer-assisted personal interviewing. The study's questionnaire does not include any unnecessarily sensitive items and is based on existing tools and scales. The instrument was conducted in English and in Arabic. The team pretested the questionnaire with a few examples prior to the entire data collection to assess the questionnaire's timing, timing patterns, skip patterns, question flow, and responder comprehension. The researchers modified the instrument after the pretest in light of the findings. The programming script that is used to collect the data was then updated by the study team using the final, corrected questionnaire. The instrument was then debugged in order to find any programming flaws.

3.3 Factor Analysis and Construct Validation

Statements having 4-point Agree (*strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree*) and Satisfaction (*very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied*) Likert scales were used in factor and path analysis. The survey comprised 1,017 questionnaires (510 males and 507 females).

As a method of data reduction, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to evaluate the construct validity of the survey. To assess the suitability of the factor analysis, two statistical tests were run. First, the Kaisers-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sample adequacy resulted in a score of 0.824, which is significantly higher than the suggested limit of 0.50. Second, the Bartless test of sphericity showed that the 20 valid items have enough correlations with one another to support factor analysis (Chi-Square = 2757.905, P = 0.00) as shown in Table 1. Oblique rotation was employed as a rotation method, while principal axis factoring was used as an extraction method. A factor greater than 0.519 was used to extract six factors.

The six-factor solution accounted for 63.180% of the total variance. The six factors were easy to label as follows:

The first dimension was labeled **Marital Adaptability** (Cronbach alpha = 0.911). This factor accounts for 24.083% of the total variance and is defined by five items with factor loadings ranging from 0.779 to 0.892. Researchers used statements from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale- FACES II (Kuehl, 1984). The five items are:

34 RELATION We discuss problems that we face and we look for solutions (communication)

37 RELATION My spouse and I really help and support one another

38 RELATION I believe our marriage is successful and happy

39 RELATION In our marriage we share responsibilities (leadership)

40 RELATION There is a feeling of togetherness in our marriage (teamwork).

The second dimension was labeled **Work-Family Conflict** (Cronbach alpha = 0.772). This factor accounts for 11.213% of the total variance and is defined by three items with factor loadings ranging from 0.773 to 0.883. Researchers used statements from the Third European Quality of Life Survey (2012). The three items are:

WLB It has been difficult for me to fulfill my family responsibilities because of work

WLB I have come from work too tired to do some of the household jobs

WLB I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities

The third dimension was **Family Satisfaction** (Cronbach alpha = 0.825). This factor accounts for 10.142% of the total variance and is defined by three items with factor loadings ranging from 0.744 to 0.774. Researchers used statements from the Family Environment Scale- FACES- IV (Moos & Moos, 1994, 2009). The four items are:

Table 1 KMO and Bartlett’s test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.824
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2757.905
	Df	190
	Sig	0.000

23SATISFIED I am satisfied with the degree of closeness between family members

27SATISFIED I am satisfied with the quality of communication between family members

28SATISFIED I am satisfied with our family's ability to solve conflicts

31SATISFIED I am satisfied with our family members' concern for each other.

The fourth dimension was **Flexible Working Arrangements** (Cronbach alpha = 0.623). This factor accounts for 7.021% of the total variance and is defined by two items with factor loadings ranging from 0.801 to 0.852. Researchers used statements from the Third European Quality of Life Survey (2012). The two items are:

44WLB I can vary my start and finish times

45WLB I have some flexibility in terms of my weekly working hours

The fifth dimension was labeled **Moral** (Cronbach alpha = 0.503). It is worth noting that Saidi and Siew (2019, p. 654) reports that "[A]ccording to George and Mallery (2003), Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.90 indicates excellent internal consistency, above 0.80 is good, above 0.70 is acceptable, above 0.60 is questionable, above 0.50 is poor, and below 0.50 is unacceptable." The researcher chose to employ this dimension in this study since construct validity is more challenging to establish than reliability, valid measurements are reliable, and the reliability of 0.503 is above the threshold that is considered unsatisfactory. This factor accounts for 5.487% of the total variance and is defined by three items with a factor loading ranging from 0.597 to 0.776. Researchers used statements from the Family Environment Scale—FACES IV (Moos & Moos, 1994, 2009); however, the statements were modified to fit the Qatari context. The three items are:

5MORALS My family and I often talk about religious subjects

6MORALS My family and I share similar beliefs and morals

7MORALS The commitment of my family to religious practice is strong.

The sixth dimension was **Family Cohesion** (Cronbach alpha = 0.619). This factor accounts for 5.234% of the total variance and is defined by three items with factor loadings ranging from 0.519 to 0.698. Researchers used statements from the validated Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale—FACES II and Family Environment Scale—FACES IV (Moos & Moos, 1994); however, the statements were modified to fit the research study. The three items are:

1 COHESION Family members are dedicated to each other

2 COHESION I have a strong sense of belonging to our family

3 COHESION I relax with my family and feel happy with them

4 Gulf Family: The Qatari Context

4.1 *Family Structure in the Gulf*

There are several family models and forms determined by lifestyles and by a society's culture, blood, and marriage relations. According to the traditional model of the family, most individuals become members of two nuclear families: the family of origin (that is, the family into which the individual is born and in which he or she is reared) and the family of procreation (the family that the individual creates by marriage and in which he or she rears children). The combination of these two sorts of nuclear families constitutes the extended family, which may comprise several generations who usually live within one household, neighborhood, or area. The size of an extended family may expand within its region to eventually become a clan or even a tribe.

Neither functional theory nor modernization theory explains the development of kinship relations during the process of urbanization, as the scope of housing settlements has expanded in cities, education has spread, and the structure of the work sector has changed. The question that arises is whether these changes have led to changes in family structures and kinship norms in the Gulf states and to what extent marriage traditions that depend on extended-family ties and kinship relationships have also changed. In fact, social structures in many parts of the Arab region still include the strong existence of kinship relations (Al-Abdulkareem & Ballal, 1998).

Various studies reveal the occurrence of major changes in Arab societies, such as the increase in urban population, the spread of education, the change in the patterns of economic life, and the change in the structure of the Arab family that resulted in a decline in the presence of the extended family to be replaced by the nuclear family (Labib, 2004).

Much evidence indicates that the transition from rural to urban life is not always accompanied by a change in kinship relations and does not lead to an extended family in all cultures (Cao, 2012; Furstenberg, 2020; Pfirsch & Araos, 2019), including in Arab and Islamic societies (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2008, Al-Abdulkareem & Ballal, 1998; Hussain, 1999).

The approaches of functional theory and modernization theory, which have a large impact on social research in the Gulf region, simplify the processes of social transformation and social change. Functional theory divides societies into two types: "traditional societies" (or pre-industrial societies) and "modern societies" (or industrial societies). This analysis focuses on features of social change, such as changes in family size, the prevalence of isolated nuclear families, the participation of women in the workplace, increasing education, and changes in income levels. Such an analysis ignores the structural bases of social phenomena that play complex roles in determining the nature of a given social relationship.

Traditional forces remain active and influence the direction of social change amid the contemporary acceleration of Arabic Gulf societies, which are in a state of ongoing transformation. The most fundamental being consanguineous marriage, as

a social structure phenomenon, continues to stabilize several social patterns of social change.

Since the beginning of the 1970s, the extended-family model has started to gradually disappear in Gulf societies in favor of nuclear families consisting of two parents and their children. For example, according to population data from the 2004 census, the extended family represented only approximately 30% of families in Qatari society in 2004, although it must be taken into consideration that the census included all families located in Qatar, most of which were not Qatari, and reflected a social structure entirely different from the tribal structure of Qatari society. Most of the population of Qatar lives in urban areas; these are the regions that are witnessing a decline in the extended family (Population and Housing Census, 2004).

In fact, there is strong support in these societies for the survival of the traditional family. Any attempt at change is met with great resistance. This adherence to the traditional family, despite outward appearances of modernization, is the greatest factor in sustaining its role in the life of the individual in the region, its ability to support social integration, and its service as a social safety network.

4.2 *Family and Marriage Selection*

While all societies have demonstrable cultural norms and customs that guide marriage selection, such as race, class, and religion, tribe and tribal affiliation remain particularly important in the Gulf States. Tribal affiliation often plays a principal role in guiding marriage selection. Dr. Noora reported that tribe is one of the “primary predictors of partner selection” (Lari, 2022, p. 3) in Qatar. In her study, she found that families do not usually support their children marrying from a different tribe due to cultural norms (Lari, 2022). Despite the increasing presence of nuclear families in the Middle East, studies show that the phenomenon of consanguineous marriage is not receding, and, in some areas and among some tribal communities, consanguineous marriages account for 80% of annual marriages (Oniya et al., 2019). In fact, most Arabs in Middle Eastern and North African countries customarily prefer consanguineous marriages, particularly between first-parallel cousins (Al-Gazali & Hamamy, 2014).

These practices remain essentially unchanged in Qatar (Kilshaw et al., 2015), the U.A.E. (Al-Gazali et al., 1997; Al-Gazali et al., 2006), Saudi Arabia (El Mouzan et al., 2008), Kuwait (Al-Kandari & Crews, 2011), Oman (Islam, 2012), and Jordan (Hamamy et al., 2007). All these countries are characterized by a social structure in which the basic component is the tribe unit, which comprises a large network of relations. Bener et al. (2007) conducted a study on Qatari society that also showed an increase in the rates of consanguineous marriage across generations. Another study investigating Bahraini society showed high rates of consanguineous marriages in both the current and previous generations but found a clear sign of a downward trend in the current generation’s tendency to use this type of marriage (Al-Arrayed et al.,

1997). By contrast, a 2010 study investigating a Palestinian community in occupied territories found that women marrying earlier show a greater preference for consanguineous marriage than women who marry at older ages (Bittles & Hamamy, 2010). Furthermore, a 2006 study of female students from Qatar University revealed that 54.4% of married female students had consanguineous marriages, of whom 66% were married to a first cousin, indicating that consanguineous marriages are common among younger generations in Qatar (Al-Ghanim, 2009). The Qatari population continues to practice consanguineous marriage, and there was no decline in consanguineous marriages during 2007–2018–2022. Abdu et al., (2023, p. 1) report: “The prevalence of consanguineous marriage is high among the Qatari population, and this requires an immediate need for community-based campaigns to raise public awareness about the problem and its potential impact.” Marriage selection in Qatar remains subject to family wishes rather than an individual decision, despite Qatar’s economic modernization (Abdu et al., 2023).

5 Findings of the Study

5.1 Multiple Regression Analysis

The Multiple Regression analyses show that there is a significant relationship ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between four independent variables: (1) Marital Adaptability, (2) Work-Family Conflict, (3) Family Moral, and (4) Family Cohesion and the dependent variable Family Satisfaction. What’s more, the Relationship between “Flexibility at work” and “Family Satisfaction” is not significant. The coefficient of determination RSQ is 0.218 as shown in Table 2, translated into an F-Statistic = 23.272 as shown in Table 3, which is highly significant at the ($\alpha \leq 0.001$) significance level. The two independent variables “Family Moral,” “Marital Relationship,” have a positive relationship with “Family Cohesion.” On the other hand, “Work-life Conflict” has a negative relationship with “Family Cohesion.” Moreover, the three independent variables “Family Moral,” “Marital Relationship,” and “Family Cohesion” have a positive relationship with “Family Satisfaction.” While “Work-life Conflict” has a negative relationship with “Marital Satisfaction” as shown in Table 4.

Table 2 Model summary

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
1	0.467 ^a	0.218	0.208	0.88972049

^aPredictors: (Constant), Family Cohesion, Work-Family Conflict, Flexibility at Work, Family Moral, Marital Adaptability

Table 3 ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
1	Regression	92.110	5	18.422	23.272	< 0.001 ^b
	Residual	330.890	418	0.792		
	Total	423.000	423			

^aDependent Variable: Family Satisfaction^bPredictors: (Constant), Family Cohesion, Work-Family Conflict, Flexibility at Work, Family Moral, Marital Adaptability**Table 4** Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Sig
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	7.475E-17	0.043		0.000	1.000
	Marital adaptability	0.316	0.044	0.316	7.166	< 0.001
	Work-family conflict	-0.086	0.044	-0.086	-1.975	0.049
	Flexibility at work	-0.011	0.044	-0.011	-0.252	0.801
	Family moral	0.188	0.044	0.188	4.292	< 0.001
	Family cohesion	0.177	0.044	0.177	3.997	< 0.001

^aDependent Variable: Family Satisfaction

5.2 Path-SEM Analysis

“Real works concerning the idea of structural equation modeling were actually initiated by Wright (1918, 1921, 1934, 1960a, 1960b), a geneticist who developed path analysis because he was dissatisfied with the results of using partial correlation in causal explanation,” Piotr Tarka wrote in 2017. “Consequently, he developed path analysis to impose a causal formation, with structural coefficients, on the observed correlations” (Tarka, 2017; p. 3). The researchers in this piece of research used an advanced multivariate analysis called Path-SEM (i.e., path analysis associated with a structural equation model). This kind of analysis is highly appreciated and supported by scholarly sources. Li Cai states that “This kind of path diagram is commonly found in the structural equation modeling literature. The structural equation models are linear simultaneous equation models derived from a successful merger of path analysis and factor analysis” (Cai, 2013; p. 117). Besides, Tzeng Yih Lam and Douglas A. Maguire note that “The two central components of SEM are the path model and the measurement model” (Yih Lam & Maguire, 2012; p.2). What’s more, the PLS-SEM & Path Analysis-SEM debate is still unresolved in prior literature. That said,

it becomes very important to note here that the main purpose of Path Analysis-SEM is to identify the direct and indirect effects between variables. Moreover, the latent variables in the psychometrics relevant literature are called factors in the multivariate factor analysis used in this research, while the questionnaire statements used in this analysis are called observed variables. Baghae and Yazdi note that “In psychometric literature, the test items are referred to as observed variables or indicators, and the variables which causally determine the performance on the test items are called latent traits” (Baghae & Yazdi, 2016; p. 171).

Figure 1 graphically depicts one of the latent hypothetical variables produced by the third dimension of the utilized multivariate factor analysis; which is defined by its four measured observed questionnaire statements with factor loadings close to 0.70. The researchers in this study labeled the third factor as “Family Satisfaction.” This latent variable as a hypothetical factor is assumed to be caused by the observed correlation among the four observed measured questionnaire statements (i.e., the questionnaire items known in SEM as observed -manifest-variables). The variance in response to each item in the “Family Satisfaction” reflects individual differences on this variable across questionnaire respondents, plus some error.

The researchers developed the underlying Path-SEM as shown in Fig. 2 based on Olson’s circumplex model (Olson, Sprenkle and Russell, 1989; Olson, 2000, 2011). “According to the circumplex model of family and marital systems, family cohesion and flexibility are seen as the fundamental bases of family functioning, and are deemed as essential to guarantee family satisfaction” (Neto et al., 2021, p.775). The researchers produced a modified circumplex model that fits within the Qatari family context. In which in addition to “Family Cohesion” and “Marital Adaptability (flexibility), the underlying Path-SEM highlights how “Moral” and “Work-Family Conflict” are crucial for nurturing “Family Satisfaction” in Qatar. The number between parenthesis is the true relation between variables which exemplifies the direct effect. The other number is the Pearson simple relations, which exemplifies the total (direct plus indirect) effects.

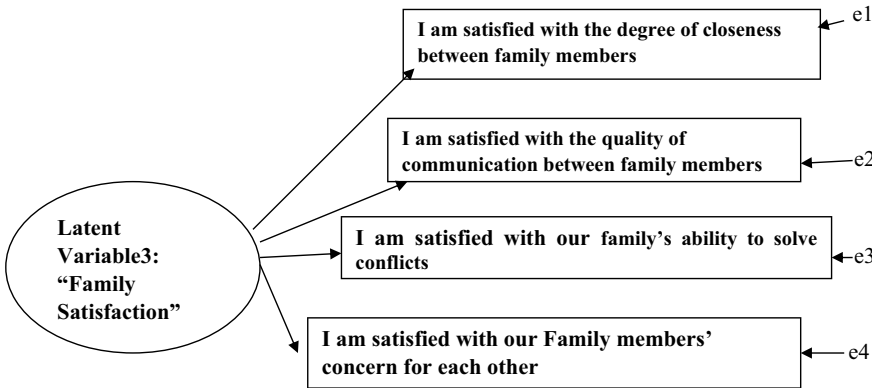


Fig. 1 .

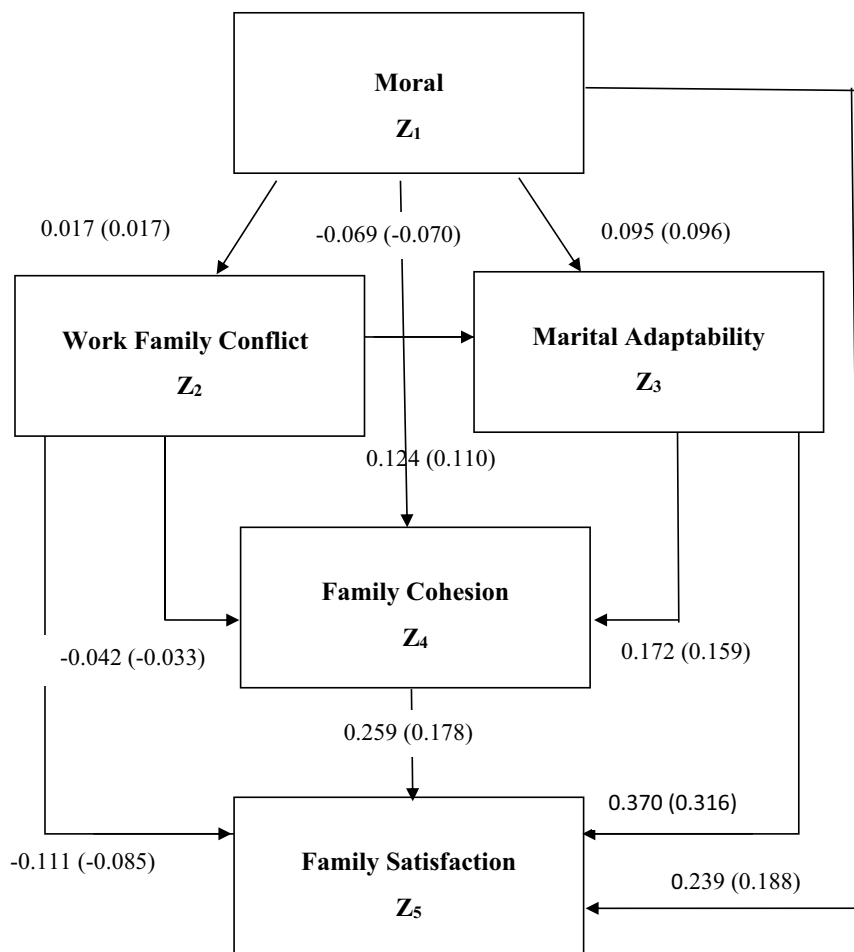


Fig. 2 Path model

The following are the four mathematical equations that underlie the relationships that solve the Path-SEM model:

$$Z_2 = \beta_1 Z_1 + u.$$

$$Z_3 = \beta_1 Z_1 + \beta_2 Z_2 + u.$$

$$Z_4 = \beta_1 Z_1 + \beta_2 Z_2 + \beta_3 Z_3 + u.$$

$$Z_5 = \beta_1 Z_1 + \beta_2 Z_2 + \beta_3 Z_3 + \beta_4 Z_4 + u.$$

The assumptions underlying Path-SEM analysis shown in Fig. 2 are:

- The relations among the Latent variables (factors) are linear, additive, and causal. As a result, curvilinear, interaction, or multiplicative relations are excluded.
- Error terms (Residuals) are not correlated with variables preceding them in the causal path model, nor are they correlated among themselves. An implication of

this assumption is that endogenous variables are conceived as linear combinations of the exogenous variable and the other endogenous variables and a residual in the causal model.

- The variables are measured on an interval scale. Huiping and Shing-On note that “The Likert scale is widely used in social work research, and is commonly constructed with four to seven points. It is usually treated as an interval scale” (Huiping and Shing-On, 2017; p. 527) (Fig. 2).

The multiple regression analysis revealed that the latent variable “Flexible Working Arrangements” is not significant, so it was not included in the path diagram. This is not surprising, because it is hard in the Middle East to have employees choosing their different work schedules that meet their personal and family needs. Employees in Qatar are not expected to have many variations in initiating specific schedules that meet customer needs. Our findings emphasize the importance of “Moral,” “Work-Family Conflict,” “Marital Adaptability,” and “Family Cohesion” in promoting “Family Satisfaction.” Additionally, the Path-SEM model results reveal that each explanatory variable’s direct effect is strengthened via the effect of the other independent variables. For example, the direct effect between “Moral” and “Family Satisfaction” is 0.188. While the total effect between “Moral” and “Family Satisfaction” is 0.239, the impact is improved via the exogenous variables “Work-Family Conflict,” “Marital Adaptability,” and “Family Cohesion.”

6 Conclusions and Policy Implications

The traditional and prevalent view of the family as an essential component of society forced governmental and non-governmental institutions in different parts of the world to attribute such great importance to strengthening the family as a social unit. The findings of the study reveal that @moral positively affects family cohesion and family satisfaction, as mentioned by previous research (Berc et al., 2017). Beliefs regarding God can have a deep impact on how individuals act in their marriage and family relationships. Religion provides individuals with an opportunity to share common values, form a sense of unity, and nurture a sense of attachment to their own family. Thus, maintaining meaningful religious traditions and values within the Qatari families will foster deeper connections and improve family cohesion. Additionally, the findings of the study reveal that a significant and positive relationship exists between marital adaptability and family satisfaction. This result is supported by previous research (Neto et al., 2021). Furthermore, as anticipated by the circumplex model, both family cohesion and adaptability were found to be significant features that shape family satisfaction (Olson, 2000, 2011; Olson et al., 1989). What’s more, the results of this study are in line with the role theory, which states that when people are not able to attain their required roles, a conflict between work and family will happen, which will result in family dissatisfaction (Kahn et al., 1964). Thus, it is imperative for employers in Qatar to adopt work-family policies to help employees

jointly manage work and non-work roles. Such policies would play a major role in improving family cohesion and boosting family satisfaction.

However,

The benefit of this study lies in that it provides good information about ways of dealing with family members in a rapidly changing society that is exposed to waves of modernity of an intellectual and consumer nature on a daily basis. However, the study's shortcomings must be taken into consideration notwithstanding the insightful conclusions reached. First, because the study was done over the phone, the researchers were unable to depict the participants' nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, body language, and vocal inflections. Second, the questionnaire was extensive in order to include the different components of the study. The pretested questionnaire took an average of 29.2 min. For this, the final questionnaire for production was revised and shortened. The production questionnaire took 20.7 min to complete, which is more appropriate for a phone survey. For future projects, researchers recommend that similar studies should be collected through face-to-face mode. Third, this study documents family cohesion and family satisfaction throughout a certain time span. In order to understand how family cohesion and family satisfaction in Qatar vary over time, a longitudinal study is recommended. It is crucial to investigate family cohesion and family satisfaction longitudinally in order to comprehend how they change over time. Studies that follow families over time can shed light on how changes in family dynamics, such as changes in sibling relationships or family size, impact family cohesion and family satisfaction. Furthermore, longitudinal research can aid in identifying both protective factors that may help promote family cohesion as well as risk factors linked to lower family cohesion and lower family satisfaction. Longitudinal studies can also give evidence for the efficacy of programs that focus on family cohesion and family satisfaction and provide information that can be used to inform those efforts. Finally, the study could not avoid social desirability, but the researchers took measures to minimize its effects. The research utilized a variety of methods to ensure that respondents felt comfortable with the questions and had a safe space in which to answer honestly. Researchers avoided any leading questions, allowed participants to opt out of answering certain questions, and provided clear instructions on how the data would be used. Furthermore, researchers took special care to ensure that any feedback that interviewers provided was non-judgmental and supportive.

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Ethical Clearance The Family Cohesion project gained an IRB clearance from the Qatar University Review Board-Research Ethics approval number is QU-IRB 1730-EA/22.

Consent Respondents were provided with an informed consent form before starting the survey. Respondents were informed that their names will not be associated with any of the answers to the survey and that the results of the data will only be presented in an aggregate format.

Disclosure Statement The researcher reports that there are no competing interests to declare.

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Chapter 29

Childcare in Bahrain: The Role of Extended Family and Domestic Workers



Inés Fernández-Moral

Abstract This chapter explores the role of extended family and domestic workers in childcare among urban middle-class Bahraini families. Drawing on in-depth interviews with women and men, it delves into the navigation between family, care, and work in single and dual-earner households. In doing so, it reveals the maternal grandmother as the most desirable figure of childcare support, making this matrilineal pattern of caregiving the dominant childcare arrangement. The preference for kinship care contrasts with the deep ambivalence surrounding female migrant domestic workers' involvement in the care of children. Although domestic workers are commonly viewed as valuable in assisting parents, there is concern that the overuse of nannies may lead to parental disengagement from childrearing, a role that participants seem unwilling to transfer.

Keywords Childcare · Extended family · Domestic workers · Bahrain

1 Introduction

Childcare responsibilities have traditionally been organized along gender lines in most societies across the globe. As such, women have been associated with caring and considered 'natural' providers of care (Pope & Radtke, 2022). Caring has also generally been linked to private spaces, such as the family and the home, in which close relationships with women develop (Graham, 2022). Given that the boundaries of marriage and motherhood normally delimit caring and womanhood, the care of children has also been assumed to be an integral component of women's designated role as caregivers. For this reason, the association of childcare with womanhood and motherhood has contributed substantially to the construction of women's roles and identities as childcare providers.

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Although childcare has commonly been linked to motherhood, caring for children has not been restricted to the figure of mothers alone. In Arab societies, as in many others, diverse female figures in extended families have customarily shared childcare responsibilities with mothers. In Bahrain, childrearing has traditionally been a responsibility divided between the mother, grandmother, and adult family members (generally female) residing in the extended family household (Al-Najjar, 2002). In addition to family members, Bahraini families have long hired female domestic workers to help with childcare. Since the pre-oil era, wealthy families have resorted to employing Bahraini women from low-income families to help with childcare and housework (Al-Najjar, 2002; Fakhro, 1990). Following the discovery of oil, a broader segment of the Bahraini population accumulated enough wealth to relinquish this work (Fakhro, 1990). The lack of economic necessity that previously drove Bahraini women to work as domestic workers, coupled with women's unwillingness to engage in this type of work due to the so-called 'culture of shame,' led to a shortage of national women undertaking this job (Al-Najjar, 2002, p. 6). The void left by the departure of Bahrainis from this occupation has been filled by (usually) low-paid female migrant domestic workers, mainly from East Asian countries, such as the Philippines, India, or Sri Lanka.

As increasing numbers of Bahraini women enter paid work, questions arise as to how female employment may lead to the reconfiguration of childcare roles and responsibilities within families, how it may impact the composition and the reliance on couples' childcare support networks, and how potential changes in the distribution of care labor may affect the continuity of the male breadwinner/female homemaker model. This model relies on a necessary gender division of labor in society and family, according to which men engage in paid market labor and women in unpaid domestic work. On this basis, the man becomes the wage earner, who works outside the household, providing income for the family, whereas the woman emerges as the non-wage earner who works inside the home in unremunerated domestic and care work. The male breadwinner/female homemaker model is underpinned by the 'patriarchal gender contract,' which governs the gender roles ideology and cultural rules that expect men to bear the responsibility of financially supporting families and women to embody the roles of wives and mothers (Moghadam, 2005; 2020).

By examining childcare practices within participants' current or anticipated family units, this chapter explores the childcare support networks of educated, urban, middle-class Bahraini families. It identifies the reasons behind prioritizing either domestic workers or extended family in childcare arrangements and provides insight into how Bahraini men and women approach childcare responsibilities and decision-making. This chapter aims to make an empirical contribution to the under-studied area of childcare in Bahrain through detailed contextualized specificities, thus addressing the lacuna regarding Bahrain in the study of families in the Arab Gulf.

2 Research Methods

For the purpose of gaining a better understanding of Bahrainis' attitudes and practices on childcare, the chapter relies on semi-structured individual interviews with 28 Bahrainis in 2021. This qualitative method was deemed appropriate to fulfill the goals of this research as it allows participants to recount their experiences and the researcher to obtain data of great specificity through in-depth explorations of the subject of study (Galletta, 2013).

This research envisioned conducting face-to-face interviews in Bahrain. However, due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 global pandemic, interviews were carried out online, primarily through Microsoft Teams. The use of video conferencing software benefits from the flexibility of online participation, overcoming physical, time, and financial constraints (Janghorban et al., 2014; Deakin & Wakefield, 2013). Despite its advantages, online interviews come with limitations. One disadvantage is the requirement that participants have Internet access and digital competence (Jowett et al., 2011). For these reasons, it was extremely hard to interview Bahrainis who were not technologically savvy or who did not have an active online presence. Bahrain-based contacts reported an unwillingness of potential participants to use online platforms with which they were unfamiliar (e.g., Teams, email), suggesting a preference for face-to-face interviews, particularly among older Bahrainis.

Recruitment began once ethical approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of Exeter's College of Social Sciences and International Studies in December 2020. The selection criteria were based on the combination of two characteristics: being a Bahraini national and being over the age of 18. This research focused primarily on recruiting respondents between 18 and 45 years old, the main ages of family formation.

Participants were mainly recruited through three channels: convenience sampling of personal and professional connections in Bahrain via email and social media and through snowballing. Bahraini members of civil society organizations and social media influencers were also contacted by email or social media (Twitter and Instagram), which provided additional participants. Further participants were recruited through referrals from several respondents. The call for participants was sent both in English and Arabic.

The interviews typically began with the author introducing herself, which helped establish an initial connection with the participants, who then also introduced themselves. Afterward, participants were asked closed-ended questions to gather information about their sociodemographic background. The interview would then move into a more in-depth conversation about family-related matters where questions about childcare were explored. The interview questionnaire was adapted to new emerging themes. All participants provided written or verbal consent and agreed to be recorded.

Most of the interviews were conducted in English (25) and a further three in Arabic, depending on the interviewee's linguistic preference. Interviews in Arabic were interpreted and transcribed into English by an employed female Bahraini

translator residing in Canada. Participants interviewed in Arabic did not know the interpreter beforehand. Translated quotes are explicitly denoted across the chapter.

Out of 28 study participants, more than half were women (15), 12 were men, and one self-identified as genderqueer. Respondents ranged in age from 19 to 66 years old, with the majority being under 45 (24) and only a few over 45 (4). The average age was 33 years. In terms of marital status, 15 participants were married, 11 were single, one was divorced, and one was widowed. All participants, whether currently married or previously married, were or had been in monogamous unions. As for children, 17 participants had none, 10 had children, and one was pregnant. Among the interviewees with children, the average number of children per family was 3.1. Half of the respondents had pursued or were pursuing an undergraduate degree (14), several had postgraduate qualifications (9), and only a few had not completed higher education (5); all participants had finished secondary school. The religious upbringing of the participants was described as Shi'a Muslim (16) and Sunni Muslim (9); few were raised in cross-sect families (3). Participants' religious upbringing did not necessarily represent their religious identity. In terms of employment, 12 were employed, nine were self-employed, five were students, one was retired, and one was a homemaker.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data collected. The first step in the analysis of the data collected was the manual transcription of the interviews in English, maintaining an inductive approach during the analysis process. After transcription, following the two levels of themes distinguished by Braun and Clarke (2006), central themes at a semantic and latent level were identified. The analysis combined participants' statements (semantic) with the underlying ideas and assumptions informing the semantics of the data (latent) to provide a more comprehensive analysis of explicit and implicit meanings.

The interviews were coded thematically using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. In analyzing the data thematically, the most enlightening responses were chosen as a source of quotation to illustrate best the major themes emerging from the analysis. Quotes deviating from general patterns are also included to avoid bias in the presentation of findings.

In order to protect the anonymity of participants while bringing them closer to the reader, the chapter uses pseudonyms. The sense of intimacy and proximity provided by naming the participants allows for more personal accounts of the respondents and their presentation not only as data but also as people. The anonymity of the interviewees was ensured by transcribing and removing any data that might directly or indirectly identify them. Following the stipulation of the information sheet that prevents sharing data with third parties, data will not be made available.

2.1 Positionality and Reflexivity

In conducting research, articulating one's position is important to situate the researcher in relation to the study, acknowledging how positionality shapes the interpretation of data and, therefore, the production of knowledge. I was born in Madrid (Spain) and educated in the Spanish and British educational systems. From 2017 to 2019, I worked in the Communications Department of Bahrain Public Transport Company. My experience of living in Bahrain helped me establish a connection with the participants from the very beginning. Although shared knowledge, experiences, and anecdotes helped create rapport to start a conversation in a comfortable and informal environment, it did not remove my 'outsider' status as a European non-Muslim researcher. In trying to compensate for my outsider status, I often drew on 'insider' sociocultural and geographical knowledge to reinforce that initial bond with participants, thus building up on my familiarity with the context of the study.

While reflecting on my position as an outsider is crucial to acknowledge my own beliefs and assumptions regarding the subject of study, it is also fundamental to do so in order to assess the participants' possible assumptions about my stance toward childcare choices and opinions and their implications for knowledge production. It could be the case that they assumed I embodied Western views on certain family-related practices, and this could have influenced their responses due to social desirability bias, choosing to communicate in a more socially desirable manner rather than revealing any socially undesirable traits (Biemer & Lyberg, 2003).

Participants did not question the fact that a woman was conducting research about family. This stance is not exclusively reflective of the Bahraini context but rather of the global experiences of female researchers within family and gender studies. Previous qualitative studies have shown that women tend to feel more comfortable with female researchers when discussing sensitive or intimate topics (Liamputtong, 2010). At the same time, when interviewing men, it may also be advantageous to be a woman since there seems to be an understanding that men are more comfortable speaking about intimate topics with women than with other men (Lefkovich, 2019). During the interviews, both men and women were willing to talk openly about their personal opinions, aspirations, and experiences with respect to family formation.

3 Preferential Patterns for Maternal Grandmother Care

When interviewees were asked how they expected to share care responsibilities with their extended families, the nuclear family of origin surfaced as the most common support network that participants turned to for childcare assistance. In a study of Bahrainis' marital and parental life, Kahtanie (1992) found that 84% of interviewees sought help from their parents, grandparents, or neighbors when experiencing difficulties in their role as parents. The remaining 16% claimed that they would deal with

these problems on their own. Participants' responses revealed a shift from the traditional support network described by Kahtanie, consisting of parents, grandparents, and neighbors, to a closer network of support composed primarily of parents. The exclusion of grandparents and neighbors from the interviewees' support network could largely be explained by the socioeconomic changes that have taken place in Bahrain over the last few decades, including urbanization, the nuclearization of families, the weakening of collectivist forms of care, or the decline of communal parenting (Kahtanie, 1992).

When asked about whom they expected to receive help from with childcare responsibilities, over half of the participants mentioned the maternal grandmother, and five respondents referred to both grandparents on either the mother's or father's side. There was no mention of brothers or sisters as figures with whom caregiving responsibilities were expected to be shared. There seemed to be an understanding among interviewees that both siblings, as well as other members of the extended family, such as aunts, uncles, or cousins, have their own caregiving responsibilities, and thus, participants did not expect to share their childcare responsibilities with them. When it came to sharing childcare duties, other family members outside the nuclear family of origin were cited; only one single woman alluded to her prospective husband, and another woman mentioned her aunt. Only two participants felt capable of caring for their children without the involvement of any family member.

With the maternal grandmother figure as the most expected and desired family member to participate in assisting parents in childcare, a matrilineal caregiving pattern emerged as the dominant childcare arrangement as well as the most preferable form of support. This downward transfer of intergenerational support from the maternal grandmother to the parents highlights the prevalence of family-based care systems in contemporary Bahrain, particularly in dual-income households.

Leila, a 21-year-old single master's student without children, was one of the participants who preferred family-based care in her hypothesized childcare arrangements. She explained:

I [would] definitely need the help of my family, especially if I am working. During the day, my mum or my aunt would have to babysit. It is still very communal families, communal raising of children, and I think that [it] is very important because that is how we grew up. My mum would work, and we would go to my grandma, and she would take care of us, or my aunt or my great uncle during the weekends so my parents could have some space. That's how we grew up and it is genuinely really nice because whenever something bad happens while growing up, you will always have people outside your nuclear family, and you have a bigger support system.

Leila's description of kinship care exemplifies traditional patterns of childcare in which the maternal grandmother, as well as other members of the extended family, are actively involved in supporting parents in the supervision and nurturing of their children. This is illustrative of the role of the extended family in sharing with parents the responsibilities for childrearing, including direct care of the children (Fernea,

1995; Sear, 2021). The involvement of the extended family in sharing childcare responsibilities shows that, despite the gradual decline in certain traditional roles like partner selection and the diminishing dominance of the extended family due to socioeconomic changes, its caregiving and emotional support functions remain intact (Cleland & Wilson, 1987, p. 7). Nevertheless, parents still rely on mostly female members of the extended family to share childcare responsibilities (Pirzada & Puri, 1998). This familial interdependence in childcare describes parents as involved in collaborative relationships with extended family members rather than as autonomous nuclear entities (Sear, 2021). It also represents nuclear families as not completely independent of their extended family since couples maintain strong ties with their parents (Goode, 1963). Leila's memories of her communal upbringing highlight the extended family's role as a support network and social safety system for its members. This reflects one of the key functions of the family, as described by Goode (1959), providing emotional sustenance and psychological security to individuals (Al-Ghanim, 2015).

Yasmeen, a 23-year-old single graphic designer, was of the same opinion as Leila. She favored her mother's support in the eventual care of her child. With the birth of her children, Yasmeen expected to give up paid work outside the home to devote herself more fully to caring for her newborn. Such expectation meant that her hypothetical household would transition from a dual-income to a sole-earning home, with her husband becoming the primary breadwinner. She explained, "that is why it is important for me that the guy has a good job because when we have a baby, I do plan to stop working for a while to take care of the baby, so I don't have to rely on people a lot." This expectation did not mean that she believed that childcare responsibilities rested exclusively with her as the mother. Yasmeen rather expected equal parental involvement between her and her future husband, remarking strongly that "it is very important for the man to be able to raise the kids with the mother." After her more active participation during the first years of her children's lives, Yasmeen hoped to re-enter the workforce. To be able to do so, "I would need my mum's help," as she recognized that it would not be possible for her to be working and take full care of her children.

The assistance of the maternal grandmother with caring responsibilities was mainly expected by single women without children. The fact that these single women were the ones who primarily referred to this form of matrilineal caregiving suggests that these potential mothers-to-be may view their mother as a valuable source of childcare support for first-time mothers. Research indicates that maternal grandmothers may be uniquely well-situated to provide first-time mothers with intergenerational support by offering emotional assistance, passing their knowledge, and sharing their experiences (Vázquez-Vázquez et al., 2021). Therefore, these participants' preference for maternal grandmother care appears to be inferred from the intersection of their marital and parental status as well as their gender. However, these single women did not see their mothers as solely responsible for childcare duties, nor did they feel that these responsibilities should fall exclusively on them as future mothers. Instead, like most of the interviewees, they believed that childcare should be a shared responsibility between both parents, regardless of gender. This was especially evident in the

statements of men, who also assumed childcare to be their responsibility. However, they were slightly more likely to expect or rely on the help of their parents (paternal grandparents) or nannies to assist them in childcare rather than on the maternal grandmother.

Among some married participants, concrete examples of childcare arrangements by the maternal grandmother were also provided, illustrating the preference of some parents for the utilization of this type of family-based caring system in their navigation of family, care, and work. Rashid (33), a pharmacist and father of a three-year-old daughter, was one of them. He explained: “My wife’s mom lives very close to us, so when we need to, we drop our daughter off and my daughter spends some time there, but again, it’s not too often that [this] happens, maybe once a week for an hour or two.” In this two-earner family, caregiving responsibilities were divided between Rashid’s wife and himself, with the support of his mother-in-law and a domestic worker. Amina (27), a married artist expecting her first child, had expressed her willingness and financial need to secure a stable salaried job (not as an artist) before the birth of her offspring, thereby aiming to contribute financially to the expenses associated with the newly born child. She intended to resume her job after childbirth. In an effort to delve deeper into the configuration of her childcare support network while her husband and herself worked, I asked her:

IFM: You will be a mother very soon. How will you both manage to work and take care of your family?

Amina: We are hoping my mum will come because my mum is good with babies. That was her job, she was a nanny. She is good with kids. She wants to come and stay with us for six months so she can help take care of the baby when I have to go to work.

Amina’s eventual situation as a working mother-to-be illustrates how increasing workloads drive families to turn to family members to help them reconcile work and childcare (Lari & Al-Emadi, 2022). Indeed, her mother’s support in caring for the newborn would allow Amina to continue working. Once her mother left, she hoped her husband and herself to be financially capable to hire a domestic worker, so that they could both continue working. Amina’s experience shows how household economies play a crucial role in decisions and choices regarding who works and who cares for children. It also illustrates how their involvement in the work sphere shapes the engagement of individuals in the family sphere and vice versa (Goldscheider et al., 2015).

Overall, the frequent allusion to the maternal grandmother throughout the interviews demonstrates not only the relevance of and preference for this family figure to care for children but also points to the allocation of caring responsibilities to a woman, revealing the underlying gender division of caring dynamics in Bahrain, as is generally the case elsewhere. The emergence of this asymmetrical gender pattern of intergenerational support suggests the existence of a latent expectation of women as caregivers, even if they are not mothers. This indicates a pattern of continuity in the prevalence of women as primary caretakers, as implied by the male breadwinner/

female homemaker model. It also points to the diminishing role of the paternal grandmother in her son's childcare arrangements due to the weakening of patrilocality in Bahrain.¹

4 Ambivalent Attitudes Toward Domestic Workers in Childcare

The employment of one or more migrant domestic workers has become normative in many households in Bahrain (Al-Najjar, 2002). In 2022, 52,748 female domestic workers were registered; 97% of them were categorized as housemaids (LMRA, 2023). Out of the 28 participants, eight employed live-in domestic workers (three had one employee, four had two domestic workers, and one was employing five household workers). Minimum wages of around 50 BHD (approximately 130 dollars) and in-house accommodation have allowed many Bahrainis to hire domestic workers, even among lower-middle-class families. The lack of state-subsidized childcare centers, the increase of women in paid market labor (although women who do not work also hire them), higher living standards, geographic decentralization of the extended family, nuclearization of families, and the enhancement of the family's social status have also contributed to the widespread employment of female domestic workers in Bahrain (Lari & Al-Emadi, 2022; El-Haddad, 2003; Al-Najjar, 2002). These migrant workers are usually hired to perform household chores, such as cleaning, cooking, ironing, and laundry, and to assist with childcare responsibilities, such as looking after children inside and outside the family home, helping them get ready for school, taking them out for walks, and to a lesser extent, assisting them with homework (Al-Najjar, 2002).

When I expanded questions about childcare support networks to delve into the role of domestic workers in these arrangements (a theme I had not anticipated), domestic workers appeared in the statements of many participants as ambivalent figures when it came to supporting parents in caring for their children. On the one hand, employed nannies, who generally resided in the family home, were viewed as beneficial in assisting parents with childcare and household chores, particularly in dual-earner households. On the other hand, the widespread use of migrant nannies was widely questioned by participants for its potential implications on children's upbringing, parental engagement, and the parent-child relationship.

Yasser, a 57-year-old driving instructor from a middle-class family, was one of the participants who had employed a female domestic worker for many years. He lived in a villa with his wife, three daughters, and a household employee. Yasser and his wife, like many other Bahrainis, had sought assistance to help them with household chores and childcare:

Nowadays it became important to have a domestic worker, because she will be responsible of some of the chores that your wife is responsible of. [It is important] to have her at home,

¹ Patrilocality refers to a type of residence system in which a couple lives with the husband's parents.

especially when your wife is working. First, to observe (look after) the children and at the same time to clean the house. She will not be cooking; your wife is the one who cooks. Nowadays, it's not possible dispensing domestic workers.²

The importance Yasser placed on having a domestic worker contained an explicit reflection of his view on the distribution of domestic responsibilities. His allusion to certain responsibilities, such as childcare, cleaning, and cooking, as the wife's responsibility exemplifies the persistence of the association of household and care responsibilities with wifehood and motherhood, and hence the prevalence of the male breadwinner/female homemaker model in some Bahraini households. Furthermore, Yasser's statement illustrates how Bahraini women's entry into the labor market has been accompanied by the continuation of women's domestic responsibilities, thus sustaining the expectation that women participate simultaneously in paid work and unpaid domestic care, a dual role that some participants considered a "double burden" (Lari & Al-Emadi, 2022; Al-Najjar, 2002). This new reality—leading to an increase in women's workload—has driven many Bahraini working women to seek the assistance of domestic workers in order to reduce women's designated responsibilities in the home. In this manner, the contribution of domestic workers to household labor allows women to accommodate their work and recreational responsibilities rather than performing these duties themselves (Lari & Al-Emadi, 2022). The employment of domestic workers by working and non-working women has resulted in a female figure, the domestic worker, replacing the assigned responsibilities of another female figure, the wife. This reallocation of roles continues to reproduce the association of femininity with domesticity and childcare, albeit not in the form of the wife or mother. Interestingly, it may be the case that, at the same time that these domestic workers embody homemaker responsibilities, they also become the main breadwinners of their families in their country of origin.

The employment of domestic workers for housework and childcare support, while seen as valuable by many participants, was also approached with considerable reluctance. This reluctance reflected concern that the active involvement of female domestic workers in childrearing could lead to the replacement of parental responsibilities toward children by nannies and the subsequent reduction in parents' involvement in children's lives. Rashid (33), a married man living in a villa with his wife, daughter, and a domestic worker, focused on concerns about nannies replacing parental and, particularly, maternal care to explain the low limited involvement of his live-in domestic worker in taking care of his three-year-old daughter. He critiqued: "You get a maid, a housekeeper, and basically, she becomes a second mother for the child, and then that's it, you take the child, you put them out with the housekeeper, and then that's where the child spends the majority of their time." Strongly opposing the use of domestic workers as full-time carers of children, Rashid remarked:

Our household is not like that at all. For us, if there are small things that we need help in, we would ask for help [from] the housekeeper, but we tend to do everything ourselves, even the chores, a lot of the chores we do ourselves. We

² Translation from Arabic.

don't like to depend on the housekeeper at all. So, it's mostly in the worst-case scenario where both my wife and I are busy for one reason or another, and then, our daughter might spend a little time like an hour or so with her.

Rashid's arrangement for childcare, which included the support of his domestic worker and mother-in-law, as discussed above, provides an example of the dynamics of childcare in a dual-income household. His organization of childcare duties illustrates how the increase in the number of two-earner households in the Arab Gulf region has affected levels of parental involvement due to work responsibilities and family obligations (Lari & Al-Emadi, 2022). The (limited) utilization of domestic assistance he reported derived from the sharing of domestic and childcare responsibilities between his wife and himself but also from an understanding of parenting in which parents are actively involved in the upbringing of their child. As such, Rashid's domestic worker appeared to perform supplementary childcare and household tasks rather than taking full responsibility for his daughter's care, a practice with which he disagreed.

Although several married participants objected to the overuse of domestic workers, concerns about the employment of these workers for childcare were more prominent among young, unmarried participants who did not have children, especially women. These respondents were critical of the incorporation of female domestic workers into the childcare network of Bahraini households, as they viewed the assignment of extensive childcare duties to domestic workers as an encroachment on parental childcare responsibilities, which interviewees strongly reclaimed and seemed unwilling to transfer. Ahmed (32), a private tutor without children, was deeply hesitant to entrust his children to a nanny:

IFM: In the case that you have children in the future, would you count on the help of a domestic worker?

Ahmed: I would rather not, honestly, only if I was pushed into a corner where I had no other choices, maybe in the early stages, when [it] is really necessary to have someone to have an eye on the child to make sure he or she doesn't hurt himself or does anything really drastic. But in terms of raising, parenting, and being there with them, no, I would rather not, at all.

Noor (25), a single woman, also refused the idea of hiring a babysitter to help her with childcare tasks. "I want to be [a] hands on mother, because in Bahrain a lot of the times they have nannies and caretakers, so they are able to go and work. I personally don't want to do that; I want to be there completely with my kids," she asserted. Noor's decision to stop working as a therapist to devote herself full-time to her future children reflected her prerogative of family, care, and work while disapproving of the justification of employing a domestic worker for childcare assistance so that the mother could work. It also highlighted her understanding of mothering as being linked to the full embodiment of care responsibilities in the child's early years. Once her child turns two or three years old, Noor planned to return to paid work outside the home. Returning to her job would not mean that she would

seek the help of a domestic worker to care for her child. She was more inclined to turn to her mother for childcare support, as her mother did when she was young: “She used to put me with my grandmother, and I loved that, I didn’t feel I didn’t have a mother.” She clarified: “It is different when you are with a nanny than when you are with someone that actually is like your mother.” Noor’s statement suggests that her conceptualization of employing a nanny as being associated with ‘not having a mother’ may have influenced her decision not to include a female domestic worker in her eventual childcare arrangements.

Other participants, who also expressed these concerns, shared a common attitudinal stance that included their agreement with employing domestic workers but not with letting them participate in childcare. As such, domestic workers were presented as a pragmatic alternative for parents to outsource their household responsibilities in order to have more time to care for their children. This household arrangement sustained a strict division between who takes part in childcare and who participates in household chores. While household chores could easily be shared or performed entirely by domestic personnel, childcare was constructed with rigid boundaries that were preferably only trespassed by family members, thus manifesting participants’ preference for family-based care. As indicated by Zainab, a 20-year-old single student without children: “[Domestic workers] to take care of the children, no, but to take care of the house so I can take care of my children, yes. Generally, the culture in our family is reluctant to leave our children with someone who is not a family member.” In a similar tone, Mariam (28), a single lawyer who also had no children, advocated restricting the care network for her future children to the extended family and relying on the domestic worker only for support tasks:

The preference would be how it is happening for my sister currently, which is that my parents are looking after them, but then there is the help of the domestic worker with them. But I personally would not leave my child with anyone who is not part of your family at home. I just would prefer a family member around.

The reluctance to employ domestic workers in childcare among several participants mirrored a lack of trust in the figure of the domestic worker that translated into a preference for family members, specifically the maternal grandmother, to take care of the children. This distrustful view of employing domestic workers to look after children, as opposed to the depiction of family care, manifested itself in the widespread reluctance of participants to leave their (prospective) children alone with them. Viruru and Nasser’s (2017) study of motherhood in Qatar revealed similar results. The authors found that many mothers did not leave nannies alone with their children nor permitted their assistance in the more intimate aspects of childcare, even though many of them were mothers themselves. This perception was also found in interviews conducted by the Doha International Family Institute (2018) with Qatari working mothers, who highlighted their constant concern about their children being left alone with domestic workers while they were working outside the home.

This disinclination to entrust childcare to female domestic workers serves to confirm the negative connotations associated with domestic workers in Bahrain, as

well as in the Arab Gulf. On the one hand, the figure of the nanny as a full-time childcare provider is directly questioned since it has been considered that migrant domestic workers may have negative effects on the family (El-Haddad, 2003). These potential negative effects on families, and in particular on children, stem from concerns about the preparedness of domestic workers to raise children, given their general lack of qualifications, including their education and linguistic level (Baqader, 1993). The concern about possible negative effects arising from their lack of qualifications explains the preference of families to hire workers with a minimum level of education and English language skills (Al-Najjar, 2002). Furthermore, the active presence of domestic workers in the children's lives has been viewed as leading to the replacement of the socialization function traditionally assigned to the family, producing what some scholars have defined as a dysfunction in the socialization of children (El-Haddad, 2003; Fernea, 1995). In addition to these potentially disruptive effects, critics have argued that the extensive involvement of domestic workers in childcare also contributes to the disintegration of family unity and the upbringing of children estranged from their country's culture, language, religion, and heritage (Al-Najjar, 2002; El-Haddad, 2003; Fakhro, 1990). Interestingly, none of the participants alluded to these arguments when explaining their reasons for leaving domestic workers out of their childcare arrangements.

On the other hand, the extensive presence of the nanny in the child's life points to the possible overdependence of Bahraini families on female domestic workers, questioning who is raising the children (El-Haddad, 2003; Joseph, 2018, p. 487). The importance of being an actively involved parent appeared to guide the participants' reluctance to employ domestic workers, thus demanding and reclaiming the preservation of their parental childcare responsibilities and roles rather than their perceived replacement through the widespread use of nannies. Their perception of substituting their caregiving responsibilities as a way of "outsourcing parenting" seemed to be limited, almost exclusively confined to childcare by domestic workers. Certainly, these concerns did not arise when discussing the sharing of childcare responsibilities with other family members, regardless of the amount of time children spent in family-based care. In this way, participants' ambivalent attitudes toward the involvement of domestic workers in childcare seem to be based more on the potential disengagement of parents from childrearing than on the possible negative effects of domestic workers on children mentioned above.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has described the composition of childcare support networks among urban middle-class families in Bahrain, identifying the roles and motives underpinning the recourse to caregiving assistance by the maternal grandmother and/or domestic workers. The emergence of the maternal grandmother as the most desirable and preferred form of childcare support presents this matrilineal pattern of caregiving as the normative arrangement for childcare. This intergenerational downward

transfer depicts the nuclear family as a non-autonomous familial entity that often relies on a cooperative network, the extended family, for childcare support (Sear, 2021). The persistence of kinship care appears to confirm the prevalence of the extended family's caregiving role. The reliance that interviewees placed on family-based care contextualizes the deep ambivalence surrounding domestic workers when entrusting them with the care of their children. The widespread concern that the excessive utilization of nannies for childcare may lead to the disengagement of parents from childrearing supported participants' disinclination to employ domestic workers for childcare. This reluctance portrays participants' aversion to the substitution of their reclaimed parental responsibilities in childcare through the extensive use of babysitters as full-time carers.

The participants' preference to include maternal grandmothers and female domestic workers in their childcare support networks reveals entrenched gender norms that latently associate childcare with women, thus confirming the (global) tendency of women to dedicate more time to childrearing than men. However, it is pertinent to emphasize that the fact that the main components of the interviewees' childcare networks were women did not necessarily mean that childcare labor within families was automatically assigned to mothers. This distinction avoids generalizing and oversimplifying the distribution of care work among Bahraini parents in light of the male breadwinner/female homemaker model. According to this research, the common allocation of unpaid childcare labor to mothers appears to be gradually blurring, at least in discourse, as participants viewed childcare responsibilities as shared rather than being gender-designated, especially in the hypothetical family settings of young single men and women. As such, the duties related to childrearing were equally claimed, desired, and expected by the participating women and men, thus dissociating the traditional designation of childbearing to mothers. The discursive emergence of this vision of childcare responsibilities indicates an attitudinal departure from the male breadwinner/female homemaker model as the idealized and normative division of responsibilities, giving way to expectations of a more egalitarian sharing of responsibilities between couples.

The prevalence of extended family and domestic workers in childcare arrangements reveals the continuation of a long-standing trend in Bahrain: the inadequacy of state-sponsored early care services (Fakhro, 1990). Although private daycare centers are common in Bahrain, state-financed early childhood education and care remains a pending service to be provided by the Bahraini government. The lack of effective work-family balance mechanisms unveils the potential consequences of this structural absence on Bahraini parents' decisions, choices, and career trajectories, especially in dual-income households. It also exposes the effects of the non-existence of public childcare services on the composition of parents' childcare support networks. It raises questions about the recourse to maternal grandmothers or domestic workers if this state service was provided to citizens throughout Bahrain.

Being a qualitative study based on in-depth observations of a limited sample, the findings call for cautious interpretations, as they are not necessarily representative of Bahraini society but rather a description of the childcare experiences and choices of educated, urban, middle-class Bahraini families. Further research involving lower-income and less-educated Bahrainis (especially women) could serve to corroborate, complement, or challenge these findings.

Further examination of some of the themes addressed in this study could also build upon the findings and thus contribute to providing a more comprehensive picture of childcare in Bahrain. Avenues for future research could include the exploration of experiences and opinions of the main components of the childcare support networks found in this study, maternal grandmothers and domestic workers, investigating how grandmothers experience the preference for their caregiving or how domestic workers perceive the negativity surrounding their work. Further research could also investigate in more depth how Bahraini couples make decisions concerning childcare, how their employment status affects their choices, or how the configuration of childcare support networks affects the parent–child relationship. The production of these qualitative studies may not only contribute to addressing the dearth of studies on childcare in Bahrain. However, it may also have practical implications, as marriage counselors, family therapists, and government actors could benefit from their findings. The production of this research may equip these stakeholders with a better understanding of how to develop effective mechanisms to assist families in fulfilling and navigating their parental responsibilities in relation to the care and upbringing of their children.

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Chapter 30

The Financial Cost of Childhood Disability in Qatar



Sabika Shaban and Hira Amin

Abstract Managing childhood disability is a complex endeavor, requiring a support system that encompasses healthcare, education, and social integration—each of which comes at a cost. This study explores the financial dynamics of fifteen diverse families who are raising children with disabilities (CWDs) in Qatar. A major finding is that financial strain creates a spillover effect, lowering the life expectations of their CWD as education or medical services are either significantly reduced, stopped, or not suitable to their needs. From the medical side, a rigid system and overstretched governmental services have led to long waiting lists for diagnosis and therapies at a time when early and regular intervention is critical. Moreover, scant affordable and high-quality education options for CWDs result in an extraordinary number of children out of school. The chapter concludes with recommendations.

1 Introduction

The experiences of raising children with disabilities (CWDs) are as diverse as the population itself. Disabilities require complex management and support, which includes healthcare, education, and social integration, as well as intense monitoring and guidance from the professional disability services community (Waters & Friesen, 2019). The nature and complexity of disability, types and levels of citizenship and rights, language, culture including culturally driven prejudice, religion and spirituality, social capital, and the overall demographic profile of a family are significant determinants that interact with each other. However, one of the most critical factors is the financial capacity of the parent or guardian of CWDs up until at least 18

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years of age.¹ The financial capacity of parents to provide these interventions has a direct correlation to the ability of the child to live a life of dignity. The overwhelming majority of studies illustrate that the first six years of the life of a CWD is essentially determinative of their future potential when their cognitive functions are in the rapid formation and developmental phase (DIFI, 2018; Education Services Australia, 2013; Smythe et al., 2021). Research shows that parents are required to design and implement a robust developmental plan to address their child's medical and wellbeing needs, which can often drain their emotional, physical, temporal, and financial resources; and place a significant mental and psychosocial strain on the family (Alsabah & Vittrup, 2017; Kheir et al., 2012). However, the financial disadvantages faced by persons with disabilities (PWDs) and their families—including their reduced ability to effectively convert income into wellbeing—remains overlooked (Palmer et al., 2016).²

This chapter aims to fill this research gap for families with CWDs living in Qatar. As the type of disability has a profound impact on the experience, this study specifically focuses on children with neurodevelopmental disabilities (CWNDs). However, many of the findings are applicable to CWDs in general. It qualitatively explores the disability price tag in the Qatari context related to healthcare and education. It examines the obstacles of raising CWNDs in order to help them reach their maximum potential and lead a life of dignity. First, it begins with an outline of disability laws, policies, and frameworks in Qatar; second, it explains the methodology of the study followed by results in the healthcare and education sectors; and finally, it concludes with recommendations.

2 Qatar and Disability Laws, Policies, and Frameworks

Qatar was one of the first countries to ratify the United Nations' Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006) in 2008 (PSA, 2021). The Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030) ensures an adequate standard of living for minors with disabilities as part of its specific focus on human and social development. Qatar's commitment to reducing inequalities has been reflected in various public events and initiatives. Examples of these include the National Autism Plan (2017–2021); establishing a national committee for women, children, elderly, and persons with disabilities; and the most prominent, hosting the most accessible World Cup in FIFA history where PWDs played a key part of the opening ceremony (Inside-FIFA, 2022). Furthermore, the government has recently announced that Qatar will host the Global

¹ As the child enters adulthood, the level of independence from then onwards is determined in part by the severity of the disability, willingness and capacity of the individual and the family, family bonding, family and local culture, and accessibility and inclusion standards of the environment.

² A literature review on finance in disability scholarship can be found in our previous work (Shaban & Amin, 2023).

Disability Summit in 2028 in cooperation with the International Disability Alliance (QNA, 2022).

Notwithstanding these successes, there still remain challenges, similar to many other countries who have ratified conventions (Amin et al., 2024a; Badran et al., 2023a, 2023b). Specifically for Qatar, the lack of accurate and up-to-date data on the numbers of PWDs and CWDs in the country, which has a direct impact on how public resources are allocated and managed, as well as the measurement of success are critical factors. Another pertinent issue is the nebulous laws and policies around the vast majority of its residents who are non-tax-paying non-citizens. Moreover, only a fraction of these residents have private medical insurance for their families. That being said, most insurance plans specifically include clauses to exclude any healthcare coverage related to one's disability. We have discussed these challenges in detail elsewhere (Shaban & Amin, 2023, 2024).

Another critical issue is the outdated framework and terminology of disability in law and policy documents. Traditionally, disability has been—and continues to be in many parts of the world—viewed as an individual's medical problem that needs to be “cured” or “fixed.” Endorsers of this *medical model of disability* tend to focus on the individual's impairment and lack of ability to contribute to society. Often considered as a progressive development away from the medical model and generating a paradigm shift across academia and policy, the *social model of disability* views disability as a social construct, requiring society's active contribution to make the environment more accessible for PWDs (Watson, 2012).

Often a perplexing exercise and a center of rich debate, several models of disability have emerged in recent decades to better understand the lens through which disability is viewed and addressed. These have included, *inter alia*, the individual model, the charity model, the welfare model, the administrative model, the capability approach model, and the cultural model (Degener, 2016; Oliver, 1996; Pineda, 2010). These rightfully indicate the complexity of disability and that understanding it remains an evolving exercise (Watson, 2012).

The CRPD adopts a *human rights model of disability*, which fuses together the individual and the social aspects of disability by acknowledging that disability results from the interaction of the person with an impairment with the barriers erected by society that hinder their full and equitable participation (UN CRPD, 2006). The CRPD and the human rights model “not only build on the premise that disability is a social construct, but it also values impairment as part of human diversity and human dignity” (Degener, 2016). Also considered as a “bio-psycho-social model,” this forms one of the more balanced approaches to disability (WHO & World Bank, 2011).

When we consider the model of disability through which strategies, plans, and reports are developed in Qatar, the state employs the following terminology and national definition for a PWD (UN ESCWA, 2018), in which the focus is exclusively on the individual and does not acknowledge the role of social or environmental barriers:

“Those Who Have Special Needs” means any person with a permanent total or partial disability in any of the senses or in his or her physical ability or in his or her psychological or mental ability to such an extent that his or her opportunity to learn or to undergo rehabilitation or to earn a living is limited (Law No. 2 on Persons with Special Needs, 2004).

The Qatar Planning and Statistics Authority (PSA) issues annual reports on disability data—the latest available report dating 2019 which continues to borrow from near-obsolete data in the 2010 census. Every issue is titled “Disabilities,” utilizes the limited national definition of “People with Special Needs,” and refers to PWDs as “People with Difficulties” throughout its reports (PSA, 2019).

The definition and the terminologies that are utilized medicalize disability by locating the limitations to achieve personal wellbeing or productivity onto the individual’s physical and mental capacities. They do not recognize disability as a limitation that is partially rooted within the society that the individual inhabits. It is not surprising then that the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities shares its strong concern that the legislation in Qatar fails to reflect the human rights model of disability, which has had a negative impact to produce progressive legislation to support PWDs (CRPD, 2015). Furthermore, one of the factors resulting in the significant underreporting of disability is arguably rooted in its narrow definition, resulting from the undue emphasis on the medicalization of disability in the policy space (Palmer et al., 2016).

However, in a progressive move forward, the most recent National Health Strategy 2018–2022 utilizes the WHO definition, i.e., “an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions,” and specifies both citizens and residents (MOPH, 2018). We hope this is an indication of positive change that will be reflected in all national documents going forward.

3 Methodology

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Qatar reviewed and approved this study. It was designed as an in-depth research project that included surveys and interviews to provide a holistic account with some of the main stakeholders in Qatar: families with CWNDs, ministry officials, developmental pediatricians, private school leaders, and private therapy service providers. The project aimed to both examine the quantitative and qualitative cost of raising a CWND in Qatar through these various perspectives. This paper only discusses the qualitative cost of healthcare and education from the vantage point of families with CWNDs. The remaining data from the other sources have been published elsewhere (Shaban & Amin, 2023, 2024).

Fifteen families with CWNDs volunteered to take part in this study. The families consisted of Qataris (2), Arabs (2), Asians (9), and Europeans (1). They represented a range of incomes from QAR 0–5,000 per month to QAR 50–70,000 per month, with one family choosing not to disclose. The families had been residents in Qatar for 1–5 years (3), 6–10 years (4), or more than 10 years (8). Each family had at least one CWND representing at least one of the various types of neurodevelopmental

conditions, for example, autism spectrum disorder (9), Down syndrome (2), cerebral palsy (1), and others (3); with mild (4), moderate (7), and severe (2) levels of need. The ages of the children ranged from 0 to 19 years, comprising 11 boys and 4 girls.

A call for participants was announced on Qatar Disability Resource (QADR), a platform established by Author One in 2018 that aims to address the information scarcity of resources for PWDs.³ QADR comprises more than 1,500 members from Qatar, a large proportion of which are families from wide-ranging backgrounds raising CWDs. The platform was a foundational ingredient to the level of trust built between Author One and the members of the group, which is vital when discussing such an emotionally heavy topic as the financial capacity to support the disability of one's child. All participants signed a consent form in advance and were aware that they could opt out at any time. Data is either presented in aggregate form or with very few identifier markers to maintain anonymity.

Participants completed a detailed survey modeled on the Goods and Services Required (GSR) Approach, which records not only what is spent but what further expenditures are required in order to empower the participatory right of the CWND (Mont & Cote, 2020). The GSR method is recognized as a fitting evidence-based approach in order to identify needed goods and services for social equity (Mitra, 2017; Mont, 2021). The questionnaire consisted of 19 questions that took approximately 20–30 min to complete. It requested demographic and economic data to determine contextual factors, specific nuances that the researcher should be aware of, as well as to numerically determine the current expenditure. This was followed by a short interview that was typically between 20 to 30 min via the Zoom platform or the phone depending on their preference. Both the surveys and the interviews were conducted in the English language.

The interviews were instrumental in clarifying details on the questionnaire to ensure consistency of measurement across all family experiences; to record the needs of the child that were unmet due to financial constraints; to take note of their desires for services they would employ if finance was not a barrier; and to record anecdotes, scenarios, reflections, and aspirations of their experiences raising a CWND. These interviews added significant depth and context to the data collected via the questionnaire and highlighted critical gaps that require attention in order to facilitate better access for CWNDs in Qatar.

4 Unpacking Key Neurodiversity Needs: The Healthcare Dimension

CWNDs, by the very nature of their condition, require extensive support from the healthcare sector. This section covers some of the key findings related to the challenges and costs associated with healthcare including diagnostics, medical consultations, and developmental and rehabilitation support.

³ A website to support the QADR platform is currently under development at www.qadr.qa.

4.1 *Diagnostics*

The diagnostic process and landscape for CWDs have been a central concern when it comes to diverse disability journeys in the community. The problem is primarily rooted in the fact that the government only recognizes diagnoses for developmental conditions that are made by specific departments in their public healthcare provider, Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC). Some leeway is provided in authenticating diagnoses by Sidra Medicine, a prominent private hospital complex which specializes in pediatric and women's services.

This rigid centralization of limited diagnostic authorities to serve the entire country essentially results in a number of alarming consequences, all of which were reflected in the experiences of the fifteen families that were interviewed. In most cases, families seeking a diagnosis for their child are placed on a waiting list that can extend up to two years, leading to significant delays in utilizing a child's formative early years for early intervention. If the child is already above six years of age, the wait is even longer since younger children on the waiting list are given priority for earlier assessments. A parent of an undiagnosed child corroborates this in her interview in 2022: "I have contacted [Sidra Medicine], there is a waiting list for 2 years. So he is placed in 2024. When, we don't know when... It was expected because I heard from other moms in the [community] and the rest of them had experienced the same. Two years on the waiting list. And when I asked them when, they said: 'We do not know, ma'am.' 'When there is an availability, we will contact you.'".

The access to diagnosticians is further exacerbated by the lack of clear pathways and guidelines on how to access their services. One interviewee with a recently diagnosed child shares: "I know some parents who keep calling, keep trying, and they are helpless. They do not know what to do.... It is very difficult as they are not very well informed." Parents who have the insight to proceed with early intervention therapies while waiting for an official diagnosis have to rely exclusively on the private sector, costing them thousands of riyals for assessments in order for the therapy provider to design an early intervention program for the child. Ultimately, the issue of diagnosis and appropriate guidance remains relevant, as it directly impacts the parents' approach to manage the needs of their child and its consequent financial implications.

4.2 *Medical Consultations*

Medical consultations refer to consultations with specialist physicians from departments such as developmental pediatrics, pulmonology, neurology, endocrinology, ophthalmology, nutrition, and mental health care. Overall, the state-provided healthcare system has, at either extreme, highly beneficial features as well as detrimental deficits. On the supportive end, the State of Qatar has ensured access to medical services to most of its residents, regardless of their citizenship status and nationality.

Financially, this allows residents to a complimentary national health card and access to consultations for as little as QAR 0 to QAR 50 per visit, with some subsidized additional payments if there is a need for further tests and provisions. Linked with their social services unit, PWDs can also avail an exceptional plan on the account of their disabilities which further subsidizes or entirely exempts their payments.

However, pediatrics is more complex. In 2016, with the launch of Sidra Medicine, key pediatric physicians across all specialty departments were gradually transitioned from HMC to Sidra Medicine. Consequently, CWNDs who had built relationships with these doctors followed. Their payment schemes were similar to HMC. An alarming situation emerged in recent years when Sidra Medicine began to raise their prices in specific departments, and without alternatives such as new insurance pathways or policies. For instance, a mother of an adolescent girl with autism stated how her CWND regularly seeks service from three specialty departments and the consult fees have risen from QAR 30–50 range to QAR 150–350 range. Another parent of an infant with multiple complex conditions states: “Once I remember in 2021, they were planning to cut off exemption from Sidra [completely]. And that was really scary, because my son has appointments... every other week.” She recalls the fear of trying to hunt for charitable organizations to apply to for support in case the cuts materialized, because she could not imagine transferring the complexity of her son’s case onto a new team of doctors in a hospital where he may not have coverage. Several parents expressed distress that should these consultation fees eventually outstrip their capacity to pay, they would be forced to find other specialists and detach from those doctors who have an in-depth understanding of their CWNDs’ habits and behaviors, and with whom their children have developed years of relationship. This is particularly important for CWNDs, who depend on the comfort of familiarity to reduce their anxiety, thereby increasing the effectiveness of their treatment. Even if Sidra Medicine eventually decides to develop connections with sufficient insurance providers, not all CWNDs have insurance. Furthermore, most insurance providers do not cover medical costs related to developmental disabilities.

Parents may be forced to shift back to public-sector HMC which has yet to rebuild its pediatric care capacity, or private options that are cheaper but can still amount to steep fees given the high level of medical care required for moderate to severe cases. In addition, the high consultation fees charged by the developmental pediatrics department in Sidra Medicine may have transferred a significant burden of producing diagnostic reports onto HMC, thereby resulting in waiting lists that run into years.

4.3 Developmental Needs

Early intervention programs comprise a schedule of therapies, such as speech therapy, behavioral therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy; and skill-building activities to encourage the development of children with disabilities. Though the intensity and composition of these programs for CWNDs vary widely as they are

customized to the ability profile, interviews were conducted with local developmental pediatricians to loosely estimate an approximate baseline. For instance, a four-year-old child with ASD with moderate needs may require significant speech, occupational, and physical therapies until the age of six years; after which ongoing reassessments would indicate the areas in which the child would need to continue intensive therapy.

Through interviews and multiple anecdotal stories from outside the project, it is evident that the capacity of governmental rehabilitation services for these therapies is under considerable pressure. Parents mention that typically their CWNDs are given sessions every two to three weeks, the gap between sessions rendering them nearly ineffective, and only for a short period of months—whereas the actual requirement is two to three sessions *per week*, to be provided for a longer period in terms of *years*. Some sessions take place during school or program hours, making it difficult for children who thrive on consistent routines without interruption in their daytime schedules.

This leaves limited options for parents: either abandon these therapies altogether or supplement these therapies with private sector providers at their own cost, resulting in a drastic increase in out-of-pocket expenses as they are rarely covered by insurance. Some parents reduce the number of private therapies required, despite the CWNDs' needs, due to financial strain. A mother of an adolescent girl diagnosed with multiple disabilities shares that she would spend up to QAR 7,000 in therapies per month until her child turned five years old and had to drastically reduce the frequency regardless of the consequences: "It became a question mark for me that how will I pay for school next year?" Others never enrolled their child into any therapy at all given the associated costs. The mother continues to share how her friends simply stop discussing therapies when they hear prices such as QAR 400 or QAR 600 per session: "They don't want to get the therapy for their child who really requires the therapy. It's not just one parent—it's so many.... They just keep [their children] at home... [some of these] parents cannot even afford QAR 200 per session. Many, many parents." A parent of a seven-year-old CWND who remains undiagnosed succinctly describes the private developmental therapy provision: "Everything is a business here." Another parent kept her daughter at home for years until she was finally accepted into Shafallah Centre for Special Needs, the only specialist institution that provides free-of-charge services, and which often has a years-long waiting list. The child attends Shafallah even though she is somewhat isolated from not understanding the same language of instruction, that is, Arabic; the family finds it acceptable because they have no stable income and at the very least it provides her with somewhere to spend her time in a structured manner, even if in a language that is foreign to her.

An additional concern, apart from whether parents seek therapy support from the public or private sector or both, is the quality of delivery that is widely variable. While there are highly experienced therapists in many centers, these seem to be in the minority, which further stresses parents who rely on developmental support for their children and strain their family budget to afford it. A father of a teenaged CWND shared the concern that "the access to quality therapeutic services is significantly lacking in Qatar. [...] I think everyone means well but you can clearly see that

they don't have the tools or the exposure to deal with high-level autism. [...] You have a little bit here and there, but not consistent long-term quality care.” Instead, he and other parents have sought professional help online to make up for the lack. In an informal conversation outside the study, this corroborates with the fact that there seems to be a significant disparity in the standards accepted to license therapists in GCC countries versus other parts of the world—one of the lowest licensing requirements being in Qatar.

Regardless of the variable situations, these conditions have serious implications for most CWNs who require high-intensity therapies at least in the initial years of development, and therapies at regular intervals during the course of their childhood in the area that requires strength-building.

5 Unpacking Key Neurodiversity Needs: The Education Dimension

The education sector in Qatar is fragmented and can be loosely divided into two overarching categories, the governmental sector and the private sector.⁴ Schools in the governmental sector are taught in the Arabic medium for Qatari nationals and selected expatriates, such as children of those who work in the government. The private sector is designed for different expatriate groups, where each nationality has their own schools and follows their home curriculum, ranging from American, European, and Middle Eastern to international schools following the International Baccalaureate. Expatriates are not limited to their own national schools and can enroll their children according to their choice—often heavily determined by the fee structure. Qatari nationals are given vouchers that heavily subsidize a select number of private schools that have been pre-approved by the ministry (Amin & Cochrane, 2023). There are also a handful of schools that are specialized for CWDs, such as Awsaj Academy, Renad Academy, and Al Tamakon for Comprehensive Education. While the governmental sector has gained remarkable progress over the years in terms of promoting inclusive education in schools, the Arabic medium of instruction and the admission restrictions means that even children of Qataris or Arabs struggle.

In comparison, the private sector, which has a much larger capacity, has been lamentably neglected in the disability context. According to the records dated 2022 from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE), about 25 percent of private schools in Qatar have admitted CWDs. However, 18 percent of private schools cannot be deemed as inclusive since CWDs number less than five among their entire student body. This leaves only 7 percent of private schools that officially accept CWDs and can be potentially classified as inclusive. In absolute numbers, this leaves only about 20 schools available in the entire country, most of which fall in a

⁴ For more background on the complex dynamics of reform and sustainability in the educational system in Qatar see Amin et al. (2023), Amin et al. (2024b), Romanowski et al. (2023), Sellami et al. (2025) and Cochrane et al. (2024).

high-fee tier which is typical of where US, UK, and international curricula are taught. The exclusive fee structure effectively excludes a very large population of CWDs that can only access education in the private sector. This was fairly reflected in the sample of families that were interviewed. Furthermore, even where financial resources are available, the admissions regulations of the private sector are not governed by the MOEHE, which has permitted schools to blatantly refuse admissions based on the child's disability—an act that is considered illegal in many parts of the world.

The repercussions of this were evident in the interviews. A mother of a five-year-old CWD relates: “We are expats... The mainstream schools were really challenging. They wouldn't accept [my child]. The teachers did not want to get to know [my child].” A Qatari-national parent shared how three nurseries “kicked my child out” because the child had a neurodevelopmental disability and that “they cannot give [the child] extra care.” After a long-drawn-out battle and years of struggle, he is finally settled well into a school setting.

The most alarming interview revealed one of a single parent's narration regarding her child with a neurodevelopmental disability and why he does not go to a school:

Finance is the only reason. [I have to pay my other child's] college fees, tuition fees, hostel fees, etc. ... and my father is 74 years old. By the end of the month, not even one riyal I can save. How many years I have not gone back home. [...] My son needs a school... but normal schools are not accepting such children. [Back home in South Asia] he was attending a school and writing and reading everything [but my family cannot care for him anymore]. ... [Here] he is not going to any school or therapy. He is here with me alone. I am going for duty for 8 hours—almost 9 hours; he is alone sitting at home, watching a laptop or something. Video games, video games, all day. [...] While I am on duty, I am seeing through a camera. He will not take [home meals]. He will take biscuit, chocolate, juice, [snacks that are easy for him]. [...] If nobody is home [to give him food], he will not take any food.

Another expatriate parent keeps her seven-year-old child in a daytime program in a therapy center as schooling costs remain beyond her financial capacity:

[My child] is a very capable child.... The [therapists] are telling me to put [my child] in a mainstream school.... [My child] can write now and can understand. Sitting tolerance is there. Everything is good.... [But the schools] are so expensive; we cannot afford at all.

When it comes to external financial coverage, large employers can be known to include children's education coverage in their employees' contracts. Within the interviewed families, only 40 percent receive either partial or full coverage for their children's education, which typically covers the standard tuition fee and not the additional charge for assisted learning services or shadow teachers. Most employers also do not recognize therapy centers with structured programs as “schools,” resulting in parents losing the opportunity to be compensated in this regard. One family with a Qatari parent receives vouchers from the government for educational coverage, but these vouchers are not at present applicable to any of the schools with inclusion programs—for now their child remains in a therapy center's day program and until a feasible school will accept him.

The lack of financial support for assisted learning services excludes many CWDs from the private school system, and often are unable to access the governmental

sector, too. It is an equal challenge to find schools that will accept students who require shadow teachers; from those that do, they come at a high cost typically ranging from QAR 4,000 to QAR 12,000 per month depending on a number of factors, including formal qualifications, experience record, and if the employer is the parent or the school.

Even if parents manage to admit their CWND in a mainstream school and find ways to manage the costs, it does not always guarantee its quality. A mother of an undiagnosed child mentions how her child faced censorious attitude from teachers that “he literally stopped going to school... because he felt that ‘my teachers do not like me.’” Another parent of a six-year-old child with autism states how providing their CWND’s diagnosis reduced the staff’s motivation to teach and instead led them to constantly highlight the disability as a barrier to learning: “[In my child’s previous school, my child] had a special Excel sheet that [tracked every move at every hour every day]. And I told them that it was very unfair. Any child—even [neurotypical]—if you [track his every move] he will sound like a very bad person. You don’t need to spotlight everything he does; they never looked at him like a [typical] child.” She sums it as: “[My child] would be stereotyped as an autistic child rather than being seen for himself; that makes me honestly very sad. And that makes all the thoughts about his future as very unknown.”

One parent tries to make up for the lack of high-quality teaching with afterschool special education sessions. She hopes the school will continue to “keep expectations of their students low,” irrespective of whether the child learns anything or not. As long the child exhibits manageable behavior, the child will be permitted to go to a school and sit in a classroom. Similarly, a parent of an adolescent daughter with cerebral palsy narrates: “Now [my child] is going to a normal school. They are not taking care of anything. She is simply attending and coming [home]. They are not taking extra care. If she can understand [the work], she will do it, but otherwise she will only sit there.” She continues:

Other schools see her physical appearance; they say they will not take a special kid... I tried [different schools] for more than two years here... they don’t even give her a chance.... [I am sure if we put her in another school] she will be better than this.... In this school, they are simply dumping her. But I am helpless. Just I am watching... During PE, they are not including her. She will always come to me and say ‘mama I am just sitting.’ Because they just [need] a ‘normal’ kid to come and play.... I can understand. But I am helpless.

6 Summary of Key Findings

In an effort to examine the financial cost of childhood disability, the indisputable fact remains that the cost of meeting the needs of a CWD can be extraordinary, and the impact can be particularly devastating for families from lower income brackets (Parish & Cloud, 2006). Every CWD has a right to adequate, affordable, and quality healthcare and education, which remains elusive for a significant number in Qatar—most especially if the child is not a Qatari citizen. Many of these barriers take the form

of low availability, low capacity, lack of financial regulations and inclusion legislation, lack of trained professionals in healthcare and education, lack of data, absence of state support for disability-serving stakeholders, and a narrow understanding of the diversity and demand that roots from disability.

This study is part of a larger research project on CWNDs in Qatar and only represents a fraction of the findings. The remaining parts have been published elsewhere (Shaban & Amin, 2023, 2024). This chapter has focused on some of the challenges related to parts of the healthcare and education system from the vantage point of families with CWNDs. It found that raising a CWND in Qatar has many challenges, chief of which is financial. The financial strain has a spillover effect on the development and life expectations as education or medical services are either significantly reduced or are not as effective or suitable to their needs, such as mainstream schools without inclusive support, or, at worst, when stopped altogether.

From the medical side, a rigid system of centralization has led to long waiting lists for diagnosis at a time when early intervention is critical. Without an official diagnosis, it is very difficult to design and implement the best way forward for the child or seek rehabilitation support in the public sector. This has resulted in parents seeking private channels of assessment and rehabilitation while they await a diagnosis, which comes at a steep out-of-pocket price. Medical consultations used to have low or nominal fees but the transition from HMC pediatrics to Sidra Medicine, followed by the erratic and subsequent price hike in some departments without sufficiently replacing governmental pediatric specialists or creating accessible insurance pathways, have added additional pressure on parents. Similarly, with developmental needs, the governmental services are overstretched leading to therapies offered 2–3 times a month, when the required time is 2–3 times per week. This has also led to parents going to the private sector at a steep cost. These high-cost dependencies often lead to a crisis state for the child, as parents eventually are resorted to reduce the number of therapies or stop them altogether. From the educational side, there are very few affordable options for CWNDs, resulting in an extraordinary number of children out of school. Even if parents manage to pay the high diagnosis, medical, therapy, and educational fees, the quality of service providers and inclusive education is low compared to other developed economies.

7 Recommendations

Policymakers and other stakeholders need to gain an in-depth understanding of the financial adversities that resident families face in trying to meet basic developmental needs, but also need to appreciate the magnitude of unmet needs with the lack of adequate social protection systems and inclusive legislation (Al-Jayyousi et al., 2023; Indecon, 2021; Roddy, 2021).

Based on this study, the following are recommended:

1. Robust and accurate data capture:

- The state should invest in capturing accurate data on the type and level of adults and children with disabilities to ensure more accurate resource management and better planning.
- Ministerial departments that interact with the local disability community should commission topic-specific research studies to gain a richer understanding of the local dynamic and accordingly inform governmental schemes and mechanisms.

2. Rapid, low-cost diagnosis and parental awareness of early signs of disabilities or delays:

- The MOPH may need to consider providing a layer of screening before the official diagnosis that can be managed by non-diagnosticians who are trained in detecting red flags in order to distribute the families in queue. At the same time, MOPH should build greater diagnostic capacity beyond the handful of professionals in the country within the public sector. Rapid diagnosis would lead to a faster implementation of therapies that would not waste precious developmental opportunities in the early few years of life.
- As a complementing strategy, significant parental awareness programs need to be developed and delivered at various contact points (DIFI, 2018), from neonatal to regular pediatric appointments, to informing parents on how to detect red flags as early as possible. Early detection can allow parents to seek earlier care, thereby improving the child's potential to thrive and reducing the need for added financial pressures in the long term.

3. Standardized medical fees:

- The government should design strict legislation and standardize or regulate to a practical degree the cost of therapies across the private sector to prevent sudden price hikes.

4. Increase capacity of high-quality and advanced specialists in Qatar:

- The private sector could be used to supplement the severe lack of capacity of therapists in the public health system through a subsidization scheme.
- Within the public sector itself, capacity should be greatly expanded to offer pediatric interventions at a higher intensity level, while also simplifying the process of subscribing to the required therapies to ensure minimal delay between diagnosis and intervention programs (DIFI, 2018). As a mother of an adolescent CWD states: "I think *all* children should have access to free therapies... or make it affordable for everybody... so that *all* children can develop and be given an opportunity to achieve their optimum functioning."

5. State to enforce real inclusive education in all schools, particularly in the private sector:

- The conceptualization of inclusive education needs to develop rapidly. As one parent affirms, “The education world needs to change massively and there needs to be a massive rethink.... It needs to be inclusive. It cannot be so exclusive. The Ministry of Education, they need to be more flexible. For example, they fix all the age brackets to each grade.... If a child needs to stay an extra two years to complete a grade let them... and support them.” Another parent suggests that educational systems should be permitted to allow CWDs to focus on the subjects of their strength and promote their confidence; and not force them to do mandatory subjects that they struggle in and will never accomplish.
- If inclusive education is a part of all private schools, then there will be schools available at all fee structures, not just the top tier.

This investigation makes a strong case of exclusion of CWDs at multiple levels and across multiple sectors. Designing a robust, effective, and versatile disability-empowering ecosystem requires a bold vision, family- and child-centered strategies, and creative approaches to a deep-rooted challenge in the country. Qatar has both a small population and vast resources, a combination that can produce remarkable possibilities in service of CWDs within its borders and establish the state as a regional and global leader in the inclusion movement.

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Chapter 31

Journeys of Connection: Commuting and Parent–Child Relationships in Qatar



Azza Abdelmoneium and Fatima Al-Motawaa

Abstract This chapter examines the effects of commuting children to school on parent–child relationships, with an emphasis on the views of parents. In particular, the study explores how flexible work policies can enhance parental involvement in their children’s lives. The study’s main themes include child protection, quality time, and the impact of commuting on children. The research reveals that commuting strengthens family bonds through increased interactions and conversations during commutes. However, challenges arise due to inflexible work policies to support families. This research suggests policy recommendations to promote family-friendly practices in workplaces.

1 Introduction

Taking children to and from school may seem like a routine task performed by parents or supporting individuals, but it encompasses emotional and psychological interactions between parents and their children. During this time, families can invest in quality interactions that foster communication and strengthen their relationships. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to ensure the children’s safety and enhance their sense of security and reassurance. The contemporary lifestyle and its changing demands have significantly impacted the family structure in various ways. Parents strive diligently to find a balance between their responsibilities and commitments toward work and their family, which is often challenging. Consequently, many institutions around the world have adopted and incorporated flexible work policies in their schedules and workplaces. It is expected that this will increase the interaction between parents and their children (Rubin, 2015).

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This paper aims to identify the attitudes and perceptions of parents regarding taking their children to and from school, highlighting the importance of this activity. It explores the challenges faced by parents in this regard, particularly those related to work and its policies. The remainder of the paper is organized into five sections. The next section discusses conceptual issues, followed by a section on research methods. The findings and discussions of the study are presented in the next two sections. The final section concludes with policy recommendations to assist parents in taking their children to and from school.

2 Theoretical and Conceptual Issues

This section presents the theoretical framework used in this study, providing insights into why parents choose to send their children to school or encounter barriers in doing so. Additionally, it analyzes the impact of spending quality time with children during school commutes based on this theoretical framework. We base our theoretical analyses on key theories such as the work-family balance theory, the time-geography theory, and the family system theory. These theories help explain human behavior and the motivations behind certain choices made in specific contexts.

Historically, researchers have defined work-family balance theory as the absence of interference and conflict between work and family, where an individual can balance work and family responsibilities without conflict (Grzywacz, 2007). Additionally, some researchers have noted that balance is achieved when work resources meet family demands and vice versa, allowing individuals to effectively participating in both areas. Balance means that an individual fulfills their responsibilities and roles expected of them in both work and family without conflict. This theory emerged to help overcome the conflict between meeting family demands and work tasks. Achieving balance positively affects the individual by increasing work productivity and ensuring psychological and family stability (Grzywacz, 2007).

The founder of time-geography theory, a Swedish geographer, Torsten Hagerstrand (1970) emphasizes the importance of time in individuals' activities within the spatial and temporal environment, highlighting that there are temporal and spatial constraints imposed on individuals that limit their freedom of movement. These constraints are divided into three types: individual, collective, and societal. Individual constraints refer to biological and physiological needs and necessities, while collective constraints refer to when, where, and for how long an individual must join others. Societal constraints refer to limitation on accessing certain areas and resources, imposed by laws, rules, and economic barriers (Hagerstrand, 1970).

Family systems theory is a framework for understanding human behavior that views the family as an emotional unit, utilizing systems thinking to describe the complex interactions within the family unit. This theory asserts that all family members are emotionally connected, and this connection deeply influences the thoughts, feelings, and actions of each member, indicating interdependence among them. It also explains that this emotional bond among family members enhances the

cohesion and cooperation necessary for the family to protect, shelter, and feed its members (Kerr, 1981). The term “systems” in this theory refers to the predictable, automatic behavior among family members, viewing human behavior as a result of the balance of forces within the family. Dr. Murray Bowen, the founder of Family Systems Theory, emphasizes that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from each other but rather as part of the family. Families are systems of interconnected individuals, and none of these individuals can be understood apart from the system (Papero, 1983).

Dr. Abdulla Al-Suwaidi conducted a 2017 study titled “Work-Family Compatibility: A Work Institution Perspective,” which found that work-family balance policies are aimed to protect seven essential areas for families, which are: childcare, maternity care, career development, community activities, elderly care, work arrangements, and the care of employee’s families. Al-Suwaidi summarized his study by noting that there are no comprehensive policies regarding work-family balance, and even when they exist, they are insufficient to achieve positive societal results for families. The study emphasized that there must be a desire among employers to help employees achieve balance, as it positively impacts productivity in both work and family (Al-Suwaidi, 2017).

He and Giuliano’s study (2015) supports the above study, they found that flexible working hours for mothers and fathers reduce the likelihood of students being escorted by others or commuting independently. The study highlights that flexible work schedules offer greater opportunities for parents to escort their children. It also shows that family childcare responsibilities are shared, with fathers more likely to take children to school if they have flexible hours or work close to the school, while long working hours for mothers increase reliance on other alternatives for school commutes.

Discussing the link between the work-family balance (WFB) theory and literature is crucial, as most responses from interviews with parents who cannot take their children to school attribute this to the lack of flexible work policies that help them do so. Policies must support achieving a balance between work tasks and family demands, such as parents taking their children to school and spending quality time with them. This positively impacts the child and parents, as it generates a sense of balance and eliminates feelings of guilt or inadequacy in family responsibilities. This balance comes through facilitation from work institutions and policymakers for parents, establishing a cooperative mechanism between work institutions and employees to set policies that reduce this conflict. This approach views addressing this issue as a societal responsibility aimed at achieving community well-being (Al-Suwaidi, 2017).

Harvey Miller (2004) notes that there are other constraints imposed on individuals that limit their ability to move and participate in activities, such as the ability to exchange time for space during movement, like accessing public or private transportation. The Time-Geography Theory distinguishes between flexible and fixed activities based on the degree of flexibility in place and time over the short term. Fixed activities, such as work hours, cannot be easily rescheduled or relocated, while flexible activities, such as shopping, are easier to reschedule. The need for an individual

to be in a specific place at a specific time is considered a “coupling constraint” that restricts the individual from performing two important tasks simultaneously. Although the boundaries between flexible and fixed activities may be unclear—fixed activities often impose strict coupling constraints, while flexible activities allow for more coupling in place and time (Miller, 2004).

This theory can be linked to understanding the temporal and spatial constraints on school commutes. Interviews with parents revealed that a significant number have work start and end times that coincide with their children’s school start and end times. This coupling is considered a fixed constraint that parallels the time children go to school with the time parents go to work, making rescheduling difficult compared to other times such as going to a park or a shopping mall. He and Giuliano (2015) stated that these coupling constraints are often institutional, concerning work and school, as the parents’ work organization controls work times. The study concluded that parental employment significantly influences the choice of transportation for taking children to school. Parents whose workplace is close to the school tend to escort their children by walking or car. In contrast, those with workplaces far from the school either delegate this task or have their children commute independently by bicycle or on foot (He & Giuliano, 2015).

In Qatar, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education determines school times for both private and public schools (Al-Sharq Newspaper, 2019). Changing these institutional constraints is challenging, so recommendations can be made to address other constraints that parents can control, such as their work arrangements or the location of their work or home. Parents can choose a school close to their workplaces or homes, making school commutes easier and more flexible for them.

Parents escort their children to school for several reasons, primarily to protect them from traveling with strangers, including domestic workers, bus drivers, or using various means of transportation. One of the most significant concerns for parents is protecting their children from violence and sexual harassment. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) statistics in 2019, approximately one billion children aged 2–12 years globally have been subjected to violence, whether sexual, physical, or psychological (Violence against Children, 2020).

A report on domestic violence of children conducted by the Doha International Family Institute in 2022 highlighted the issue of violence against children by domestic workers (Doha International Family Institute, 2022). A review of the study by Al-Muraikhi and Al-Muraikhi (2013) concluded that about 58% of violence against children comes from maids, and 21% from drivers. Maids were the primary perpetrators of physical violence against children at 55%, while drivers were responsible for over 42% of sexual violence (Khalifa et al., 2018). According to the report’s findings, the rate of violence against children by domestic workers exceeded 14% in 2010, meaning one out of ten children (Khalifa et al., 2018).

Regarding sexual violence, a recent study by Iman Al-Abadi (2021) confirmed that children aged two to five are more vulnerable to harassment by caregivers, such as servants, nannies, or drivers. Older children, aged five to twelve, are more likely to be harassed by people they interact with without supervision, such as neighbors, relatives, servants, and drivers. Al-Abadi emphasizes that harassment of children at

this age is often accompanied by threats of punishment, violence, or death if they reveal the abuse to anyone. A study by Dr. Mohammed Morsi (2007) concluded that children from dysfunctional families, where parental roles are undefined and parents are constantly busy and reliant on servants and drivers, are more susceptible to harassment.

Another study conducted by King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in 2016, titled “The Role of Family Housing Environment in Practicing Violence Against Children,” found that maids are the most likely to perpetrate violence against children. The forms of violence include physical harm, such as beating and causing injuries, which negatively impact the child’s psychological and social well-being, potentially leading to isolation and learning difficulties (Al-Hilali, 2016).

3 Research Methods

This chapter is based on a study conducted by Doha International Family Institute in partnership with the Protection Social and Rehabilitation Center (AMAN) during 2020–2021 titled “Commuting children by parents to and from school: challenges and policy implications. This chapter is based on a qualitative description research design” (Creswell, 2003). This design provides a multilayered and descriptive understanding of the experiences of family caregivers based on the views of participants (Creswell, 2003). The Creswell approach explores family life in detail, which helps in deeply understanding the experiences of the parents. In addition, to understand the experiences of parents in the commuting process of their children, this article used an inductive approach following a qualitative methodology to extract knowledge via in-depth interviews. The inductive approach is used “to aid an understanding of meaning in complex data through the development of summary themes or categories from the raw data” (Thomas, 2003, p. 3). The use of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions has helped the author identify themes related to quality time, child protection, the challenges of commuting. This approach was chosen because it is an exploratory study aiming to delve deeper into the realities of parents taking their children to school, and to understand the factors that either help or hinder them in performing this task. Participants were selected using the snowball sampling method. The sample consisted of 140 respondents, including 71 Qatari respondents (55 females and 16 males), 68 non-Qatari respondents of various Arab nationalities, and one female respondent of unspecified nationality living in Qatar. The researchers employed snowball sampling to attract a diverse group of parents, both those who commute and those who do not commute their children. The interviews were conducted via phone in 2020 due to COVID-19, as in-person interviews were not possible for the safety and security of the participants. Prior to their recruitment, the institutional review board’s approval was granted by Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar.

4 Results

This section will discuss the results of the study, highlighting the most important themes: the safety and protection of commuting children and the challenges parents face in the commuting process.

4.1 *Child Protection*

Parents are keen to spend productive time with their children during school commutes, and one of the primary reasons for personally escorting their children is to protect them from violence and harassment. Concerns about sexual harassment were highlighted by some participants, who expressed fears and precautions to ensure their children's safety. This issue, although sensitive and rarely discussed openly in Arab societies, is a significant reason parents prefer to escort their children. Dr. Inas Alimat's study on Jordanian society found that many prefer to cover up harassment cases rather than report them, due to fear of shame (Alimat, 2019).

The responses from interviews with participants found that few parents mentioned harassment as a primary reason for escorting their children, reflecting the societal taboo around discussing such issues. Nouf, a participant in the study, expressed her concern and fear about the issue of harassment, saying, "I always have to tell them not to let anyone touch their pants, not to sit on anyone's lap, and if they go to the bathroom, I name the person who should go with them and tell them not to go with anyone else except that person." Despite the lack of official statistics on child harassment in Qatar, the concerns are real and impactful. Studies show that young children are particularly vulnerable to harassment by domestic workers, reinforcing the need for parental supervision. Violence by domestic workers is another critical issue, with significant negative impacts on children's development, leading to behaviors like isolation and aggression (Khalifa et al., 2018).

Moreover, the results showed that most parents who do not escort their children to school themselves implement strict rules for the driver, domestic helper, and the children. These rules include advising children to avoid close contact with the driver, installing surveillance cameras to monitor the journey, or maintaining continuous contact with the domestic helper to ensure the children's safety. This demonstrates the parents' concern for their children's protection, indicating that not escorting them is not due to neglect but due to unavoidable circumstances.

4.2 *Challenges Faced by Parents in Commuting Their Children*

This section highlights the various challenges and obstacles faced by the parents in taking their children to and from school which involve conflicting work schedules, distance from home to school, work policies.

4.2.1 *Conflicting Work Schedules with School Hours*

The respondents' feedback highlighted the challenges arising from workplace policies. The primary challenge identified was the work hours that may allow parents to take their children to school in the morning but extend beyond school dismissal time, hindering their ability to pick up their children. Amna says, "There is no problem in taking the children in the morning since school starts before the official work hours. However, school ends before work does, making it difficult to pick them up in the afternoon." Um Hamed agrees, stating, "The biggest issue is the pick-up time from school: both of us have conflicting schedules. I work from 8 AM to 5 PM, and my husband works from 7 AM to 2 PM, but he works in Ras Laffan, which means he cannot do the pick-up. He leaves home at 5:30 or 6 AM, which is too early for pick-up. In the morning, I can take them because my work starts at 8 and they need to be at school by 7, so I can drop them off and then go to the office, but the return is the problem."

As a result, parents may have to resort to inconvenient arrangements, especially if one parent is unable to contribute to the pick-up process. Noor shares, "My husband works at the Police College near the border and needs to be there by 6 AM, so he cannot drop them off. I can take them in the morning, but I have to leave an hour before their classes start and drop them off in the schoolyard because the classroom is locked and doesn't open until 6:45 AM. They wait with the maid until the classroom opens, and I head to work to arrive by 7 AM." To ensure family peace of mind, one parent participates in the pick-up process in addition to domestic help, consuming family resources like time and effort, as well as environmental resources, since instead of using one car, two cars are used.

Hani has to rely on available transport services or public transportation like "Uber" and the metro due to his schedule not aligning with his son's. He says, "The main reason is that I cannot take him to school and bring him back home afterward because I have work and lectures during school dismissal time, so no one can bring him home by car, and I don't have a private driver. My son has to use Uber or the metro to get home. If I'm too tired to take him to school in the morning, I wake him up, and he takes an Uber to school and back home as well."

Aisha tells us about the lack of flexibility in her workplace, which initially allowed her to take a brief leave but then revoked this permission. She says, "At first, I was able to get permission to leave work for just one hour, but then they told me I couldn't take more than an hour off. They said I had no valid reason for the leave and that I

just wanted to take my children to school. They mentioned that everyone wants to take their children to school in the morning, so it's not possible, and they would only give me one month at the beginning of the year. My husband is in the same situation; his workplace didn't allow him to take leave either. He works at Aspire."

4.2.2 Distance from Home to School

The second challenge is the distance between the school and home. Distance from home to school is also an important factor in determining transportation patterns, especially when both parents are working. Fatima shares her situation with her daughter: "My work is just 5 min away from home, but my daughter's school is about 20 min from home. I can't take her to school and bring her back home and then return to work. My husband's commute to the school is even longer, about an hour. For a period of time, I benefited from having breastfeeding hours, so I would leave work early during those hours and take her to school because my work hours were reduced. This solution was perfect for me. I would take her to school in the morning and then bring her back home after work. It was an excellent solution for me. However, once the breastfeeding hours ended, I couldn't bring her back home anymore, so the maid started doing it."

Reduced work hours positively impact parents' ability to transport their children to and from school, thereby enhancing their mental well-being through increased caregiving opportunities. Um Nawaf faces the same issue with the distance to the school: "First, the school is very far from both our workplaces and our home. Second, we have a fingerprint system at work, and if we are late one or two days, we will be penalized, so it's difficult." Thus, many respondents face the combined challenge of inflexible work hours and long distances.

4.2.3 The Impact of Workplace Policies

Workplace policies significantly influence parents' ability to take their children to school. This impact is evident through the daily challenges faced by individuals in fulfilling this responsibility. Work, in most cases, is the primary obstacle preventing parents from accompanying their children to school.

According to responses from individuals who take their children to school, less than half reported having workplace policies that support this responsibility. For example, Umm Ahmed said, "I have an hour from my work." However, another participant indicated the absence of flexible work policies that allow them to leave work early to take their children to school. Badria stated, "My work does not allow me to leave early, which causes delays. I suggest that mothers be allowed to leave early." Umm Faisal agreed, "There are no such policies, so we have to either ask for permission, be late for work, or leave early." Mohammed added, "There is no policy allowing me to take my son to or from school. Once, I was very upset because I woke up late, wanted to take my son to school, but told him he couldn't go because

I was late for work. I left him and went to work, feeling upset, and so did he.” This illustrates that the lack of flexibility in workplace policies and the strict adherence to fixed work hours can force parents to make difficult decisions, such as allowing their children to stay home to avoid being late for work, which can affect the child’s school performance, especially if this scenario recurs.

Some participants have the privilege of taking their children to school without needing flexible work policies, either because they own their businesses or are not employed. Less than one-sixth of the sample have their own businesses, with one respondent saying, “I am my own boss—I have flexibility.” A few participants mentioned that they are available to take their children to school because they are not employed, with one saying, “I do not work, so I take him to school,” and another sharing, “I do not work, so I have flexibility.”

The majority of the parents who sometimes take their children to school or do not do so at all agreed that there are no flexible work policies. A few respondents indicated that their flexibility does not come from workplace policies but from the flexibility of their supervisor. One participant said, “There is flexibility from my supervisor, who understands the importance of taking children to and from school, coordinating with the workplace and parents.” Therefore, a supervisor’s empathy toward an employee’s situation can allow flexibility in work hours to accommodate family needs, such as having a young child. Marwa’s job and supervisor provide some support, as she shared, “My job is somewhat flexible, and my supervisor always listens to me and respects my needs if I have to change my schedule without disrupting work.”

In summary, the presence or absence of flexible workplace policies plays a crucial role in parents’ ability to manage their responsibilities toward their children’s schooling, highlighting the need for policies that consider employees’ family obligations.

4.3 Positive Quality Time in Commuting

Modern parenting styles focus on the quality of time parents spend with their children, as it is more important than the quantity. Given the fast-paced nature of life and parents’ jobs that may require long hours, the time they can spend with their children may be limited. Thus, the school commute can be an opportunity for parents to spend quality time with their children, engaging in conversations and discussions to get closer and strengthen family bonds or raise awareness on certain issues.

The results showed that most respondents spend the commute talking with their children. Umm Mubarak says: “There is a dialogue between me and my children, and I am the one who starts. I ask them how their day was at school.” Similarly, Hani initiates conversations: “We talk about work, friends, and what to do on the weekend. Sometimes he starts talking on his own, often about what the teacher said or did, or any issues with certain teachers, or plans like going out or going to the club with friends.” This time allows planning for the day and family life with the children. Badriya says: “There is dialogue. We talk about our children’s academic

levels and grades or discuss plans for the day and what happened with them.” Other parents said they recite the Quran and revise lessons during the commuting journey.

The positive impact of this time is evident in parents and children’s remarks. Some respondents noted that children use this opportunity to talk to their parents without distractions, creating a space to express their feelings and discuss issues or negative emotions. The variety of conversations and activities parents have with their children during the commute is expected to positively impact their upbringing and mental health, as well as the parents’. This time embodies the quality time emphasized by the study as a key concept, important for the child’s psychological development and well-being. Parents also used this time to give children a say in family decisions, build children’s confidence, and make them feel their opinions matter, no matter how simple, even if it is about food or choosing family outing places.

5 Discussion

5.1 Child Protection

It is important to protect our children from any forms of abuse. As Emily Delap (2013) suggested that child protection “refers to strategies and structures aimed at protecting children from... all forms of abuse.... It is closely linked to the better care of children, which involves ensuring that more children grow up in safe and caring families” (Delap, 2013, p. 5). From the results shown above, it was clear that parents who commute their children are afraid of harassment and abuse of their children by a stranger. It is evident that children (ages 2–5) are more vulnerable to harassment by household staff, as evidenced by Iman Al-Abadi’s study (Al-Abadi, 2021).

In Al-Muraikhi et al.’s 2013 study, child violence was reported by maids and drivers. This violence negatively impacts children, leading to isolation, introversion, aggression, and estrangement from their mothers (Khalifa et al., 2018). Respondents were asked if their children had faced any issues with drivers or maids or if they had heard of any such incidents, and few reported related stories. Even children using school busses experienced bullying from older kids.

Previous studies have shown that early exposure to violence and harassment negatively affects children’s development, with younger children being more affected than older ones (Kerr, 1981). The Family Systems Theory mentioned above emphasizes the emotional connection among family members, which significantly impacts a child’s growth. Many respondents noted the positive impact of spending quality time with their children during commutes, reinforcing the theory’s assertion that emotional and psychological family bonds enhance child development (Kerr, 1981).

The results also found that most parents who do not escort their children to school still establish rules for drivers, maids, and their children, such as advising children to avoid contact with the driver, installing journey surveillance cameras, or continuously calling the maid to check on the children. Additionally, parents’ protective measures,

such as enforcing seatbelt use, maintaining phone contact, or instructing children to avoid distracting the driver, contribute to creating a safe environment for their children. This highlights their concern and effort to protect their children, indicating that not escorting them is due to unavoidable circumstances rather than neglect. This aligns with the Family Systems Theory, which views the family as an emotional unit with members caring for each other. The results showed that parents who escort their children regularly prioritize quality time and their children's psychological growth and safety through conversations during commutes. For parents unable to escort their children, there is still a strong bond represented by spending time together outside school hours and ensuring safety upon returning home, reinforcing the family unit's importance.

5.2 Challenges and Obstacles of Commuting

5.2.1 Work Hours

According to the theory of temporal geography, time constraints significantly affect school commutes. This study confirms this theory, showing that temporal constraints are the main factor preventing parents from accompanying their children to school. Conversely, the study found that parents who do accompany their children often have work flexibility, either through flexible work hours or understanding supervisors. Most parents who regularly accompany their children work in the government sector, with 77% of Qataris in this group working in government roles. For non-Qataris, the majority work in semi-government roles, accounting for 36%. This indicates that government and semi-government sectors offer more flexible work arrangements and understanding supervisors compared to the private sector. Often, this flexibility is provided informally by supervisors. Many participants reported that their supervisors are sympathetic to their circumstances, especially those with young children, allowing them to leave early. One participant shared, "Thank God, my supervisor is cooperative. Before I had an infant, he let me leave work every day at 12:30 PM to pick up my children by 12:50 PM." Another confirmed, "Yes, there is flexibility from my supervisor, who understands the importance of picking up children from school and coordinates with the workplace and parents."

5.2.2 Workplace Policies

Giuliano's study highlights that flexible work policies significantly increase the likelihood of parents being able to accompany their children to school, particularly given time constraints that often clash with each other. This study refers to these as institutional coupling constraints, meaning that work and school hours are governed by laws and institutions, making them difficult to change (He & Giuliano, 2015). The study concluded that flexible work policies enable parents to take their children to

and from school, and the primary barrier preventing this is the lack of such policies. Spatial constraints, on the other hand, were not found to be a significant obstacle. Contrary to Giuliano's study, which suggested that proximity of the school to home increases the likelihood of accompaniment, this study found that the location of the school does not affect the ability to accompany. Parents take their children to school even if it is far away, and some do not accompany their children even if the school is nearby, primarily due to the lack of flexible work policies allowing for morning delays or early afternoon departures.

5.2.3 Flexible Working Hours

The theory of work-family balance supports the findings of this paper. The results show an overlap between parents' work hours and their parental duties, leading to a lack of balance between work and family life. The overlap of school start times with work start times and the conflict between school end times and work end times creates an imbalance between work responsibilities and parental duties, leading to a conflict between these two aspects, especially in the absence of flexible work hours. While children do not interact directly with the work environment, its implications on parents and their choices directly affect their lives. The work-family balance theory emphasizes the importance of parents' ability to achieve this balance for their mental health and productivity at work. When parents can meet their familial duties by providing suitable living conditions and protection for their children, it helps them focus on their other responsibilities outside the home. A conflict between these two realms can lead parents to make concessions, such as quitting work or facing consequences like warnings or salary deductions for not adhering to work hours to accompany their children. These issues can be addressed through institutional support that prioritizes employees' well-being in determining work policies. By making work hours flexible, parents can achieve a balance between their family responsibilities and work duties without compromising either.

In summary, temporal constraints and rigid workplace policies are the main barriers preventing parents from accompanying their children to school. Flexible work arrangements, understanding supervisors, and supportive institutional policies are crucial in enabling parents to balance their work and family responsibilities effectively.

5.2.4 Joy and Positive of Commuting

Creating a secure attachment bond between the child and their parents through a safe, loving environment and sensitive responsiveness to the child's needs is the foundation for the child's future interactions and relationships. Quality time spent by parents with their children deepens this attachment through interaction and meeting the child's various needs. Given the current educational system where children are enrolled from as early as three years old, the long hours of separation in the morning can affect

the child's psychological state unless their emotional needs are compensated for upon returning home. Considering that school commutes take at least 20 min daily, and more depending on the distance, this time can be high-quality and impactful if utilized well by the parents.

Bradshaw's (1995) and Joshi and MacLean's (1995) studies in England confirmed that the primary motivation for parents to escort their children is to spend quality time with them. This is likely one of the reasons driving the parents in this study's sample to escort their children or the desire to do so, in addition to ensuring their children's safety. The respondents described various ways they invest time during commutes, ranging from discussions on topics of interest to guidance on specific matters, or Quranic recitation. Thus, parents can instill positive values in their children, such as good manners in dealing with others, which are based on kindness, affection, and love among family members, as well as reinforcing religious awareness and monitoring academic progress.

The parent–child conversations described in Joshi et al. (1995) align with those discussed by the respondents in this sample, including warnings to be cautious, not to talk to strangers, and reminders to follow instructions and guidelines at school and in their social lives. The intimate and interactive conversations between parents and children in the car create a sense of security for the child and promote their social, linguistic, emotional, and cognitive development. The majority of the sample, including those who do not escort their children, affirmed the importance of this time for the child.

6 Conclusion

This study has highlighted the importance of child protection and the challenges parents face in commuting their children to and from school. Parents escorting their children to and from school is not just a physical act but one that significantly strengthens family relationships and provides multiple psychological benefits for both children and parents. The paper observes that when parents commute children they ensure their safety and protection which enhances the relationship and creates quality time, as it fosters reassurance and psychological well-being in children. Parents strive to maintain this protection even when partially or entirely relying on others, such as relatives or household staff, for the task. Forms of protection include installing a surveillance camera inside the car, instructing the children to wear seat belts, avoiding distracting the driver by talking to them, and checking on the journey's progress via mobile phone. While the majority of respondents recognize the importance of this practice and believe in doing it personally, external factors such as distance from work and home, conflicting work schedules with school hours, and workplace policies, remain the biggest obstacles.

Based on the above, it is crucial to implement measures and policies that overcome the obstacles preventing parents from escorting their children to and from school. Flexible work policies should be introduced at parents' workplaces, such as flexible

working hours during the workday, opportunities for extended breaks to drop off and pick up children to school, and the ability to work from home to meet family responsibilities. Additionally, providing childcare facilities for preschool-aged children at or near workplaces would be beneficial. Media campaigns should be launched to educate parents on the importance of escorting their children to school and other places, with a particular focus on the importance of quality time and making the most of it during the commute.

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Chapter 32

Aging and Family in the Gulf: Trends and Patterns of Aging in the GCC States



Ghada Al Kuwari

Abstract Aging in the Gulf region presents unique challenges and opportunities due to its rapid modernization and changing social structures. It investigates the existing support systems for the elderly and explores policy implications for managing population aging. The chapter offers insights into how the GCC countries can create inclusive policies to promote healthy aging and ensure the well-being of their elderly populations.

1 Introduction

Aging is a natural and inevitable part of life characterized by a gradual and progressive decline in the body's physiological functions. This decline affects all aspects of an organism's health and capability, including biological, social, and cultural dimensions. Aging is a critical issue in societal discourse due to its implications on social structures, healthcare systems, and intergenerational relationships (Beard et al., 2016). As populations age and the proportion of elderly individuals increases, societies face unique challenges and opportunities (United Nations, 2019). Elderly people often encounter several challenges, including diminished physical capabilities, increased susceptibility to chronic illnesses, and social isolation (Ong et al., 2016). These challenges necessitate comprehensive societal responses to ensure that aging individuals can live with dignity and autonomy (World Health Organization, 2015).

While providing care to elderly people ensures the proper functioning of society, a nation's ethical and moral responsibility to support its aging population is a widely accepted principle (Calasanti, 2016). This support includes ensuring access to quality healthcare, providing social services tailored to the needs of the elderly, and creating policies that promote their inclusion and active participation in societal activities (Morrow-Howell & Sherraden, 2020). Furthermore, addressing ageism and fostering

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a culture of respect and appreciation for the elderly is essential for enhancing their quality of life (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018).

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, are experiencing major demographic shifts. The elderly population (over 50 years of age) is projected to comprise 18.5% of the population by 2025, up from 14.2% in 2020 (Jenkins et al., 2024). This demographic shift is expected to continue, with the median age rising from 32 years in 2022 to 51 years by 2100, indicating an overall aging population trend (Jenkins et al., 2024). As populations in the GCC region age, there is a growing burden on healthcare systems due to the prevalence of chronic conditions and diseases associated with aging, such as cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's, and osteoporosis. Limited availability of specialized treatment centers, a shortage of local specialist health practitioners, and an over-reliance on expatriate labor contribute to the challenges faced by healthcare systems in addressing the needs of the elderly population. Furthermore, in the Gulf region, where traditional family structures are being challenged by rapid modernization, there is a daunting necessity for a closer examination of how these changes affect the well-being of older adults.

Aging in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has garnered increasing academic interest, with researchers examining various social aspects of this demographic shift (Al-Sinawi, 2012; El-Haddad, 2003; Hafez et al., 2000; Khan et al., 2017; Ram, 2014; Ramadan & Butt, 2021; Salam, 2023a, 2023b). A key area of focus has been the analysis of long-term care policies to address the growing needs of the aging population. Researchers have analyzed policy documents and evaluated the effectiveness of existing support systems, offering insights into the efforts made by GCC governments to cater to the elderly (Ismail & Hussein, 2018; Khoja et al., 2017; Mourshed et al., 2006). Their analysis provides a somewhat comprehensive understanding of how policies are being shaped to meet the demands of an aging society.

The existing literature predominantly focuses on the demographic or policy aspects rather than adopting a more holistic, interdisciplinary perspective that examines the intersections between various social dimensions of aging. This paper aims to contribute to the expanding research on aging in the GCC region by examining how various social factors, including family structures and cultural influences, intersect and shape the experiences of older adults in the GCC. It will examine the support systems available to elderly individuals and identify policy implications for addressing the challenges posed by population aging. By exploring these areas, the paper seeks to provide insights into how the GCC countries can develop inclusive policies and invest in healthcare infrastructure to promote healthy aging and ensure the well-being of their elderly populations.

2 Elderly People in the GCC Countries

The discovery of oil has led to huge changes in the social and economic life of the community, transforming Gulf countries into urban societies. The processes of urbanization and modernization that traditional Gulf cities underwent impacted family relations and their function. For instance, the city's structural system separates people from the local community environment, resulting in more isolated lives. Besides, the transformation from extended to nuclear families had a major impact on families in rural regions, and the number of extended families that offer support to elders has been reduced by several types of social change, such as industrialization and urbanization (El-Haddad, 2003).

Studies reveal variations in family size across the region- research conducted in Qatar indicates an average family size of eight individuals, while in the UAE, families typically consist of around 7.28 members (Calgary, 2021; Ali, 2013). In Riyadh, a shift is evident, with 69% of families adopting nuclear styles, contrasting with 31% still maintaining extended family arrangements (El-Haddad, 2003). This shift can be understood sociologically, where economic and social factors influence family structures. The move toward smaller nuclear families often reflects urbanization, increased educational opportunities, and economic mobility, which can lead to the greater geographical dispersion of family members. Nuclear families may offer advantages such as enhanced privacy and autonomy, potentially aligning with modern lifestyles and individual aspirations.

However, despite these trends, traditional kinship ties remain resilient. These ties provide emotional and social support and reinforce cultural continuity and identity. The persistence of extended family networks in some contexts underscores their role in maintaining social cohesion and support systems, particularly in times of economic uncertainty or social change. Moreover, tribal affiliations influence familial dynamics, especially concerning marriage practices. Tribes serve as social units that regulate behavior and identity, impacting decisions related to partner selection and family alliances. This cultural continuity highlights the coexistence of traditional and modern influences in Gulf societies, where family structures develop amidst ongoing cultural preservation efforts and socioeconomic transformations.

With the onset of modernization, Gulf countries are also projected to witness population. Kronfol et al., (2015) have projected a striking decline in the region's population by the end of the century, estimating a reduction of 12.6% to 52.5 million people. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the UAE are expected to experience the most pronounced decreases, with 19.2% and 9% respectively by 2100. Bahrain and Oman also anticipate population reductions of 7.7% and 0.3% respectively. In contrast, Qatar's population is projected to increase by 9.6%, while Kuwait's will see a modest rise of 1% (see Table 1).

Jenevivi Lasrado (2022) highlights that this population decline is primarily attributed to decreasing fertility rates and a projected decline in the expatriate population. The fertility rate, defined as the average number of children born to a woman over her lifetime, stood at 1.8 in Gulf countries in 2022, below the replacement level

Table 1 Country-wide population projections (*Reproduced from Lasrado, 2022*)

Country	Population (000's)		
	2022	2100	% change
Bahrain	1 763	1 627	−7.7%
Kuwait	4 363	4 407	1.0%
Oman	5 295	5 278	−0.3%
Qatar	2 975	3 262	9.6%
KSA	35 729	28 879	−19.2%
UAE	10 037	9 137	−9.0%
GCC	60 161	52 590	−12.6%

needed to sustain population stability. Projections suggest a further decline to 1.15 by 2060, significantly impacting population growth (see Table 2). Lasrado (2022) emphasizes that these trends will result in a smaller and older Gulf population by 2100, with the median age expected to rise from 32 in 2022 to 51 by the end of the century.

Consequently, the old-age dependency ratio, which measures the number of people aged 65 and older supported by those aged 16–64, is expected to rise to 60.2 by 2100. This implies that in 2100, every 100 working-age individuals will need to support 60 elderly individuals in the Gulf countries (see Table 3) (Lasrado, 2022).

The increase in old-age dependency, particularly in the context of decreasing population sizes, stems from several interconnected demographic and social factors. First and foremost, declining fertility rates contribute directly to a smaller proportion of younger individuals entering the workforce and a larger proportion of elderly individuals relative to the working-age population. In Gulf countries, where fertility rates are decreasing, each generation is becoming smaller than the one before it, leading to a natural reduction in the number of working-age individuals available to support retirees. Additionally, as life expectancy increases due to improvements in healthcare and living standards, the elderly population is growing both in absolute

Table 2 Gulf countries' fertility rates (*Reproduced from Lasrado, 2022*)

Country	Current population (000's)	Fertility rate		
		2020–2025	2025–2030	2030–2035
KSA	35 729	1.92	1.64	1.42
UAE	10 037	1.10	0.91	0.81
Oman	5 295	2.35	1.96	1.68
Kuwait	4 363	1.78	1.59	1.45
Qatar	2 975	1.53	1.29	1.12
Bahrain	1 763	1.64	1.40	1.22
GCC	60 161	1.79	1.52	1.33

Table 3 Old age dependency ratio in the Gulf countries (Reproduced from Lasrado, 2022)

Country	Old age dependency ratio		
	2020	2050	2100
KSA	3.4	18.3	60.9
UAE	4.0	32.9	40.0
Oman	3.3	18.7	68.1
Kuwait	2.0	19.4	43.9
Qatar	4.9	27.3	68.1
Bahrain	1.5	24.8	34.8

numbers and as a percentage of the total population. This demographic shift further exacerbates the imbalance between retirees and the working-age population.

Furthermore, traditional family structures, which historically provided informal support for elderly members, are evolving. Smaller family sizes and increased geographical mobility mean that fewer adult children are available to care for aging parents. This places greater pressure on formalized systems of social support, such as pensions, healthcare services, and elder care facilities, to meet the needs of aging populations.

3 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)

Saudi Arabia has experienced noteworthy demographic changes, particularly in fertility rates, which have impacted various sectors such as education, health, and women’s employment. The changes in fertility demographics have included reduced parity differentials influenced by education and age at marriage (Salam, 2023a, 2023b). These shifts have influenced the aging process and the lifestyle of older individuals, affecting living arrangements, health, family support systems, and overall life satisfaction.

Current structural changes in the Saudi Arabian population have several positive aspects. These include improved life expectancy, a demographic dividend with a substantial proportion of the working-age population, and fewer dependents. Additionally, there are economic opportunities, enhanced health outcomes, a strengthened healthcare system, and increased participation in education and the labor force. These positive developments within the population drive a paradigm shift and present both social challenges and opportunities related to population aging.

Studies have observed that demographic indicators are shifting in Saudi Arabia, with an increase in life duration and a decline in fertility (Karlin et al., 2015). The proportion of children and adolescents is rapidly declining, while young adults and later adults are significantly increasing, though there are no major changes in the elderly population yet. This decline in childhood and adolescent populations has

contributed to the rise in the adult population, with potential future implications for the elderly as these adults age.

To understand these shifts in detail, examining the historical demographic trends is essential. As shown in Table 4, changes can be observed between 1974 and 2020. The decline in the percentage of children (0–9 years), a slight increase followed by a decrease in adolescents/youth (10–24 years), and a rapid increase in young adults (25–49 years). Minor changes in the percentage in late adulthood (50–64 years) were also apparent in the table values.

The median age in Saudi Arabia reached 26.4 years in 2014, with a slight difference between males (27.3 years) and females (25.3 years). Concurrently, fertility rates dropped, from 7.0 children per woman in the early 1980s to 3.0 per woman by

Table 4 Percentage of population by broad age groups, total and native (Reproduced from Salam, 2023a, 2023b)

	Native					Total				
	0–9	10–24	25–49	50–64	65 +	0–9	10–24	25–49	50–64	65 +
1974										
Male	32.1	30.7	25.4	7.8	3.9	34.6	30.4	22.4	8.2	4.3
Female	36.0	29.5	24.2	6.7	3.7	36.2	29.7	23.6	6.7	3.8
Total	34.0	30.1	24.8	7.3	3.8	35.4	30.1	23.0	7.5	4.1
1992										
Male	26.8	27.1	37.8	5.7	2.6	34.7	33.8	21.6	6.3	3.7
Female	33.2	31.9	27.3	5.0	2.5	34.6	34.0	23.1	5.5	2.9
Total	29.6	29.2	33.2	5.4	2.6	34.6	33.9	22.3	5.9	3.3
2004										
Male	20.9	27.2	42.8	6.5	2.6	26.5	33.7	30.3	6.0	3.6
Female	25.5	33.1	32.8	5.6	3.0	26.3	35.0	29.4	5.9	3.4
Total	22.9	29.8	38.3	6.1 ara>	2.8	26.4	34.3	29.9	5.9	3.5
2010										
Male	15.5	27.6	46.3	8.1	2.6	18.8	34.3	35.4	7.9	3.6
Female	18.7	31.6	40.3	7.0	2.4	18.2	33.8	38.0	7.4	2.7
Total	16.9	29.3	43.7	7.6	2.5	18.5	34.0	36.6	7.6	3.2
2016										
Male	15.2	20.2	49.3	12.3	3.0	21.0	28.2	36.9	9.9	4.0
Female	19.7	25.4	42.8	8.5	3.6	21.1	27.8	37.2	9.6	4.4
Total	17.1	22.4	46.5	10.7	3.2	21.0	28.0	37.1	9.7	4.2
2020										
Male						14.9	19.8	49.9	12.4	2.9
Female						19.6	25.2	43.1	8.5	3.6
Total						16.9	22.1	47.1	10.8	3.2

2010, while life expectancy increased. These demographic shifts are coupled with societal changes in education and employment, particularly affecting filial norms. As both Saudi males and females attain higher education levels and seek employment far from home, the availability of potential caregivers diminishes. For instance, 44,566 Saudi students were studying in the United States through scholarships, highlighting the potential impact on the number of young adults available to care for aging Saudi adults. Additionally, with more young Saudi women remaining in school, their availability to care for elderly family members is reduced (Karlin et al., 2015).

4 United Arab Emirates (UAE)

In the UAE, life expectancy has increased significantly, while mortality rates have declined over the years. In 2002, the mortality rate was 83.37 per 1000, which decreased to 74.42 in 2005 and further dropped to 67.52 by 2010 (Ali, 2013). This increase in longevity is attributed to several factors, such as access to high-quality healthcare, improved living standards, greater health awareness, and higher income levels. Over the past 30 years, these demographic trends have led to a substantial rise in life expectancy, which reached 76.39 for all UAE nationals in 2009 (Ali, 2013).

There are notable differences in life expectancy across different Emirates. For example, in Abu Dhabi, life expectancy in 2009 was 78.1 years for men and 81.5 years for women (Ali, 2013). By 2010, these figures had increased to 79.1 years for men and 81.9 years for women. These improvements indicate better developments in the health sector and higher health-related spending in Abu Dhabi compared to other Emirates. Feedback from a 2009 public forum led by Al-Bayan newspaper, focusing on elderly issues concerning Al-Qassimi Hospital Administration in Sharjah, revealed crucial changes in the treatment of elderly people over the preceding five years (Sense of Heart Forum, 2009). Families increasingly delegated the care of their elderly members to hospitals, leading to several outcomes. The hospital had to discharge 20% of admitted elderly patients against their families' wishes, and another 30% were sent home with family approval. Unfortunately, 20% of the patients passed away in the hospital due to chronic illnesses. The remaining 25% were transferred to Sharjah home care because their families refused to take them back home.

This pattern has become more frequent due to the migration of young Emiratis to cities like Dubai and Abu Dhabi. As young people move to urban areas for better education and employment opportunities, older adults are often left behind in smaller towns and rural areas. This migration exacerbates the challenges faced by older adults, as they are left to manage their care independently without the traditional family support structure. Consequently, there is an increased reliance on hospitals and care facilities, which are not always equipped to handle the growing number of elderly patients.

Additionally, Al-Ali's (2013) research conducted on elderly people in the UAE highlights further challenges faced by this demographic group. Firstly, he observed cases of neglect due to families' economic status and inadequate conditions, such as

poverty, inappropriate education, and low-income jobs. These circumstances force families to leave elderly relatives alone at home while they work, unable to afford costly medications and medical devices. The situation of older people becomes worse when they are released from the hospital; they experience neglect, and because of poor conditions, many of them are readmitted to the hospital. Moreover, most elderly people are worried about being alone at home, with their concerns rooted in their medical conditions and the potential for unexpected complications in the absence of family support.

Secondly, the consequences of the aging process are not clear either for the families or the elderly themselves, and in addition, cognitive decline and medical complications may result in old people's vulnerability to manipulation, because of their lack of awareness and loss of ability to report such abuse and ignorance. Additionally, health professionals and social workers have stated that the concept of public nursing homes is not well accepted among Emirati families. This is because locating old parents in such institutions is considered disobedient and is associated with humiliation and embarrassment.

Finally, financial exploitation emerges as a major concern. This form of abuse often involves adult children or other relatives manipulating or misusing the finances or assets of elderly parents. Such exploitation can range from unauthorized withdrawals of funds to coercive influence over financial decisions, particularly when elderly individuals may be suffering from conditions like dementia, which impair their ability to make sound financial judgments. A particularly sensitive issue arises when it comes to inheritance and the management of assets. In families where there is a lack of clear legal arrangements or where elderly parents may be illiterate or otherwise vulnerable, disputes over guardianship and control of finances can escalate. Adult children may exploit these vulnerabilities to gain control over their parents' assets, sometimes through legal means but not always in the best interests of the elderly individuals. On the other hand, physical neglect, while less common, still represents a serious issue. It involves the failure to provide adequate care, attention, or necessities to elderly family members, which can lead to physical harm or deterioration of health.

5 State of Kuwait

Similar to the case in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, life expectancy in Kuwait is quite high- 77.6 years in total, 76.0 for males, and 79.9 for females. Kuwaitis over 60 represented 4.6% of the population (4.5% of men and 4.7% of women) (Al-Kandari & Crews, 2014). Noticeably, between 1985 and 2007, the proportion of people over 60 rose from 3.4% to 4.8% of the population.

Due to excess oil revenues, family structure in Kuwait continues to change. Young adults are increasingly choosing to live in the nuclear family rather than extended families. As a result, the living arrangements for old people have changed based on these new family structures. So, the ratio of elderly people living alone has increased

(Shah et al., 2002). Furthermore, in 1999, about 8.5% of people over the age of 60 had no co-resident children; unfortunately, this ratio rose to 26.4% in 2006. The shortage of co-resident siblings affected both physical and mental health, along with their satisfaction and life quality, which increased their psychosocial life stressors.

Al-Kandari & Crews (2014) highlight that due to sociocultural values in Kuwaiti society men and women receive unequal treatment, particularly in terms of social activities and networks. Traditionally, Kuwaiti society assigns men the role of heads of their families, granting them access to extensive social networks through activities such as gatherings in *Diwaniyyahs*- external rooms specifically designated for men to socialize outside the home. This external socializing indirectly contributes to emotional and practical support for elderly men, as these gatherings facilitate networking that extends beyond familial boundaries.

Conversely, women in Kuwait are often confined to domestic roles, focusing primarily on interactions within the household, especially with children and other family members. This societal expectation limits their access to similar external social networks and support systems that men may benefit from through *Diwaniyyahs*. As a result, elderly women experience greater isolation and dependence solely on family members for care and support, lacking the broader social connections that could potentially enhance their well-being and quality of life in older age.

6 Sultanate of Oman

In Oman, according to a recent study, demographic trends have seen a crucial shifts in life expectancy and fertility rates, pointing toward an emerging demographic transition (Ismail & Hussein, 2018). Compared to other Arab nations, Oman boasts a relatively high average life expectancy of 77 years, with women typically outliving men by about four years as of 2013. The total fertility rate was particularly low when compared with other Arab countries, but an increasing fertility rate combined with high life expectancy suggests that Oman has begun its second demographic transition, with an expected trend toward an aging population. On this basis, the relatively small proportion of elderly persons (60 years and more) is expected to increase from 4% in 2013 to about 25% in 2050. This demographic shift raises concerns, particularly regarding older women, who face challenges due to limited social support networks influenced by cultural norms, gender-specific roles, and disparities in life expectancy. These gender variations lead to higher proportions of aged women living alone, with reduced access to gender-acceptable activities and services.

Table 5 indicates that Oman, excluding Saudi Arabia, had the highest old-age dependency ratios among GCC countries. Alongside other aging indicators, Oman is categorized with Saudi Arabia in the cluster of countries experiencing moderate population aging, whereas the remaining GCC nations are undergoing aging at a slower pace (Ismail & Hussein, 2018).

In a recent research, Badria Al Rashidi et al. (2022) highlighted that Oman's demographic trends show increasing annual population growth and life expectancy

Table 5 Demographic and other statistics related to social security, 2012 (Adapted from Ismail & Hussein, 2018)

Country	Total population (millions)	Percentage 65 or older	Dependency ratio	Old age dependency ratio	Life expectancy at birth	
					Men	Women
Bahrain	1.3	2.1	28.4	3	74.7	76.1
Kuwait	2.7	2.5	41.3	3	74	75.9
Oman	2.8	2.6	42.3	4	71.4	76.4
Qatar	1.8	1	17	1	78.7	78.2
Saudi Arabia	27.4	6	49.9	7	73.2	75.6
UAE	7.9	2	19	0	76	78

among Omani nationals. This suggests a projected rise in the elderly population by 2050 (Fig. 1). In 2020, the elderly comprised 6.6% of the total population, a figure projected to rise to 11.80% by 2040 (Rashidi et al., 2022). This demographic shift necessitates greater demand for health services. While the increasing proportion of elderly reflects successful health, service, and socioeconomic development policies, it also poses challenges for society to enhance health services, improve the functional abilities of older adults, and promote their social participation and safety.

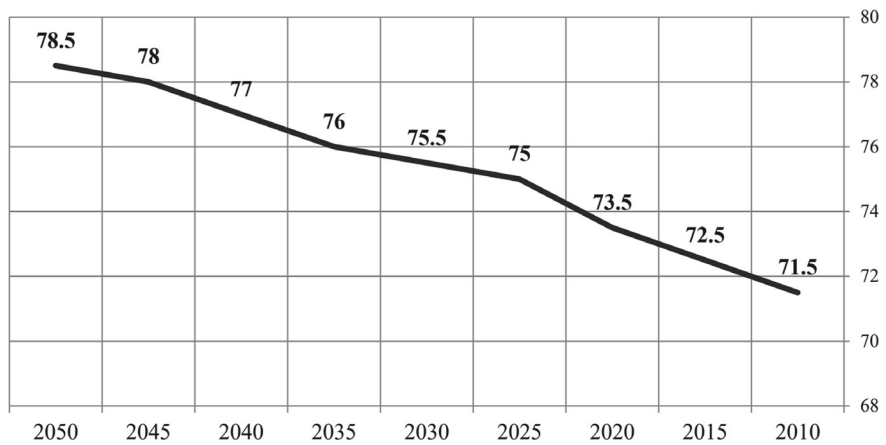


Fig. 1 Life Expectancy for the Omani Population by 2050 (Reproduced from Rashidi et al. 2022)

7 State of Qatar

Qatar is experiencing a sharp increase in its elderly population, with individuals aged 65 and over growing from 3,770 in 1986 to 32,375 in 2019. This shift is largely due to decreasing fertility rates and rising life expectancy (*Population and Statistics Authority*, 2021). A 2021 report by the University of Calgary in Qatar indicated that significant demographic changes have occurred over the last few decades. This has led to a gradual increase in the proportion of aged people, placing a burden on families expected to provide care for their elderly members (Calgary, 2021). Age groups are shown in Table 6, and based on these data, it is expected that the number of elderly people in Qatar will increase.

In Qatar, family members commonly provide care for elderly relatives at home, but societal changes are placing increasing pressure on these families. In addition, the growing number of working women has been one of the major factors that impact the needs of the family in providing care for their elderly. Family members who are caregivers also experience stress that potentially compromises the quality of life both for old people and care providers (University of Calgary, 2021).

Further report finds that Qatar's population is growing yearly by 24,352 people, with an average life expectancy of 78.781 in 2020, and is expected to rise in the next 50 years, as shown in the figure below (2) (Qatar Population, 2024) (Fig. 2).

Recognizing the needs of this demographic, the Qatari government has implemented several initiatives, such as establishing the National Committee for Women, Children, Elderly, and Persons with Disabilities Affairs, and introducing policies like social security, caregiver leave, and a monthly allowance for the elderly. Research indicates that Qatari women hold both positive stereotypes (such as views on socializing, independence, and retirement) and negative ones (like irritability and worries) about aging, with physical appearance and mental alertness being key factors in their perceptions (Musaiger et al., 2013). The elderly population in Qatar is also marked by a substantial migrant presence, with 71.2% of those aged 60 and above being non-Qataris (UNFPA, nd).

Table 6 Age groups in Qatar, 2010 (Data compiled from Calgary, 2021)

Age group	Qatari	Non-Qatari
65–69 years	2,685	3,769
70–74 years	2,032	1,605
Above 75	2,630	1,096

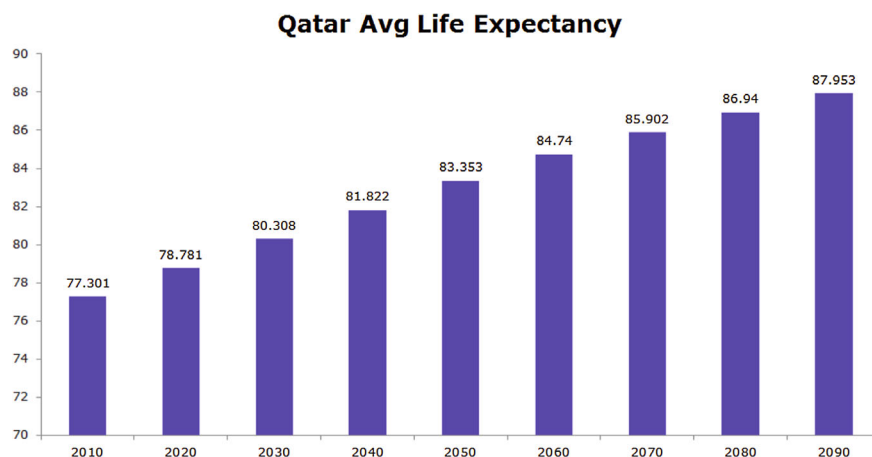


Fig. 2 Qatar average life expectancy. *Source* The global graph. Accessed from <https://worldpopulation.theglobalgraph.com/p/qatar-population.html>

8 Kingdom of Bahrain

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) report clarified that Bahrain witnessed an increase in population, and this growth is expected to continue until 2050 (Table 7). The report emphasizes that the ratio of life expectancy at birth rose from 1980 and toward 2050, from 70 to 81 years. In contrast, the infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) dropped in the same time period from 23 to 3 deaths per 1000 live births. Based on the previous data, the number of people aged 65 which was 7.427 in 1980 is expected to reach 303.687 in 2050.

The increase in life expectancy in Bahrain can be attributed to several key factors related to socioeconomic and health-related improvements. Research shows that an integrated approach to these factors is essential for ensuring the future health of Bahrain's population and creating a sustainable healthcare system (Wirayuda et al., 2022). Key contributors include advancements in healthcare infrastructure, better access to quality healthcare services, and improvements in medical technology. Additionally, effective disease prevention and control measures, increased health and wellness awareness, and overall socioeconomic development have played significant roles. These combined efforts have enhanced Bahrain's population's quality of life and longevity.

Government policies and initiatives have also added to this improvement. Bahrain offers free and advanced medical services to all citizens and expatriates at low costs, supported by a robust healthcare infrastructure that includes government and private hospitals, health centers, and clinics. Since 1979, the "Health for All" policy has ensured everyone has access to basic health services and medicines (*Education and Health – Ministry of Information, Kingdom of Bahrain*, n.d.). The country has also invested in an advanced educational system, achieved 100% vaccination coverage

Table 7 The demographic profile of Bahrain, 2017

Life expectancy at birth (Years)			
Year	Male	Female	Total
1980–1985	69.36	72.10	70.50
1985–1990	70.81	73.18	71.83
1990–1995	72.00	74.09	72.90
1995–2000	73.10	75.00	73.93
2000–2005	74.18	75.85	74.91
2005–2010	74.91	76.70	75.65
2010–2015	75.61	77.46	76.41
2015–2020	76.25	78.22	77.10
2020–2025	76.91	78.93	77.78
2025–2030	77.57	79.60	78.42
2030–2035	78.24	80.25	79.07
2035–2040	78.93	80.90	79.73
2040–2045	79.64	81.51	80.41
2045–2050	80.36	82.12	81.08

Source United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision (2017)

against major diseases, ensured specialized medical care for child deliveries, provided access to clean water and sanitation services, and established modern medical facilities since the late nineteenth century. These efforts have significantly increased life expectancy from around 70 years in 1980 to 80 years in recent years. Together with socioeconomic development, these policies have enhanced Bahrain's population's quality of life and longevity.

9 Family as a Caregiver: Challenges

The rising number of elderly people in the region has led to an increase in chronic and non-communicable diseases and disabilities, placing burdens on families, who often lack the resources and knowledge to adequately care for their elderly relatives, especially those with severe disabilities. Family plays an important role in taking care of elderly people, specifically when they require support because of serious chronic conditions and diseases, including severe arthritis, major sensory loss, Parkinson's disease, and Alzheimer's disease. In Arab culture, family members such as children, spouses, or other relatives are considered responsible for supporting the elderly and maintaining their quality of life. This support includes helping with regular chores and personal care activities, such as bathing, feeding, dressing, and communicating through electronic devices. Beyond these practical responsibilities, families provide

essential financial management and emotional support to their elderly relatives. This comprehensive care approach highlights the commitment required from families to ensure the well-being of elderly members in the region.

Family care providers face numerous challenges when caring for elderly individuals. Firstly, they must possess the necessary skills and experience to offer suitable care, including understanding the specific needs of the elderly, being vigilant for any changes or reactions in their health status, and knowing how to manage these changes effectively. Additionally, at least at a basic level, familiarity with the English language is important to read and pronounce medication names correctly. These demands require abundant time, effort, and sometimes specialized skills that many family care providers may lack. Consequently, they often struggle to provide adequate care without the necessary experience and expertise. Moreover, in Gulf countries, some families employ foreign helpers, typically from Asian countries, to assist with elderly care. However, these helpers often lack the necessary experience to provide proper elder care beyond performing routine tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and aiding with mobility.

Secondly, elderly individuals often seek meaningful communication with their family members. They enjoy conversations with their children, but the busy lives of family members, reduced visiting times, and constant engagement with mobile devices and social media have diminished these interactions. As a result, family caregivers bear the prime responsibility of bridging this gap by regularly communicating with the elderly using short, simple, and clear words. During family gatherings, they must ensure to repeat and clarify conversations for elderly members with impaired hearing.

Additionally, family caregivers should alert other family members to the needs of the elderly and encourage them to include the elderly in family discussions. It is also crucial for family caregivers to consider the cultural background of the elderly when communicating with them. Elderly individuals often enjoy reminiscing about their cultural norms, traditions, and past experiences, such as pearl diving and personal adventures. They seek attentive listeners for these conversations, a role that maids and servants are generally not suited for.

A study by Abdelmoneium (2023) indicated that family members experience significant stress and worry when they leave for work or study, as they are concerned about the well-being of the elderly people left at home. In addition, they feel guilty for not providing adequate help to the elderly, either because they are busy with other tasks or they perceive themselves as unqualified for elderly care. Furthermore, some care providers experience sorrow in response to their elder's weakness or the loneliness that the elderly feel because of their families' ignorance or their disabilities. It is worth noting that care providers also feel isolated because their commitment to the elderly sometimes prevents them from leaving the house or handling other tasks.

10 Conclusion

Based on a comprehensive study of issues related to aging across Gulf countries in this study, several key observations emerge. In GCC countries, pursuing higher education among women and the migration of young men for employment opportunities have left older individuals without adequate caregiving. This phenomenon highlights shifting family structures influenced by educational and economic pursuits. Moreover, advanced healthcare system has extended life expectancy among older adults, yet economic pressures such as poverty and low-wage jobs restrict families' ability to provide comprehensive care. This economic strain is compounded as younger generations relocate to urban centers, further limiting familial support for the elderly.

In countries like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait, the shift from extended to nuclear family structures has led to increased independence for the elderly. This trend is mirrored in Oman too, where many older women are anticipated to live in isolation and are constrained by traditional norms and limited social engagement. In contrast, Qatar has shown broader societal advancements, but the country faces challenges as women's increasing participation in the workforce has affected familial caregiving capacities. Furthermore, Bahrain's demographic trends, marked by population increase and declining fertility rates, present ongoing challenges in understanding and addressing aging issues due to limited research and resources dedicated to eldercare.

It must be noted that, in Gulf countries, Islamic principles traditionally emphasize strong familial bonds and the duty to care for elderly parents. These values are deeply rooted in cultural traditions that prioritize the unity of extended family members under one roof. Historically, older adults have been revered and respected within these familial structures, where their wisdom and experience are valued contributions to family cohesion and community stability. This cultural framework has provided a strong support system for elderly care, ensuring that older generations receive the necessary physical, emotional, and financial support from their families.

However, the Gulf society has seen several changes in recent decades with the advent of modernization and economic prosperity following the oil revolution. This period ushered in rapid urbanization, economic diversification, and the presence of migrants from diverse cultural backgrounds. These changes have created new norms and lifestyles that challenge traditional family structures and caregiving practices. Urbanization, for instance, has led to the fragmentation of extended families as younger generations move to urban centers for education and employment opportunities, often leaving behind elderly relatives in rural areas.

Furthermore, integrating various cultures has introduced diverse perspectives on familial obligations and caregiving responsibilities. While Islamic teachings uphold the sanctity of caring for elderly parents, modern lifestyles and economic pressures sometimes hinder the practical application of these principles. Economic demands, such as high living costs and the need for dual-income households, can strain familial resources and time available for caregiving. This contrast between traditional values

and modern challenges sheds light on how families face balancing cultural expectations with contemporary realities in providing adequate care for their elderly members. As Gulf societies navigate these changes, there is a growing need for policies and social initiatives that support elderly care within the evolving dynamics of family structures and societal norms.

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Chapter 33

Quality of Life of Elderly People Living in Taif, Saudi Arabia: A Scoping Review



Basit Ali Haidari and Hafiz T. A. Khan

Abstract Rapid socio-economic and demographic changes have promoted the adoption of modern lifestyles such as moving to and working in urban cities, which may impact the well-being of elderly populations. This chapter explores the daily activities, healthy aging, and Quality of Life (QoL) of elderly people living in Taif City, Saudi Arabia. The study identifies and interprets the interrelation and integration between daily activities, healthy aging, and QoL of elderly people living in Taif. The research recommends for developing new strategies to serve the elderly people in the rapidly aging Saudi society.

1 Introduction

In the Gulf region, the family structure plays an important role in population growth and is considered an integral part of social ties and community development (Khan et al., 2017). However, rapid socio-economic changes and demographic shifts have led to more people living in urban areas and adopting a more modern lifestyle (Baily, 2020). These changes have disrupted traditional norms and values, such as choices about family formation and size, and elderly care. Most importantly, they have had a negative impact on the Quality of Life (QoL) of elderly people in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). A recent study in KSA by Haidari and Khan (2022) found that this negative impact is associated with changes in family structure and daily activities within the community. However, there is limited evidence in the literature to confirm

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these findings due to a lack of scientific data. This paper conducts a scoping review of existing studies on elderly people in Saudi Arabia.

Currently the Saudi government policy concentrates on priorities based on younger generation. However, the government has not completely ignored the reality of a high proportion of its population who are going to age in the years to come. The government is keen on initiating policies to ensure that active aging and QoL are achieved within the local Saudi community. Little is known about the daily activities of the Saudi elderly, and it impacts their QoL in the region. Moreover, existing studies on QoL are highly dominated by the medical profiles of older people living in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it is important to study community-based numerous activities of elderly and how it impacts the QoL of the elderly population in Saudi Arabia. Such a study would help policymakers to take adequate actions on the government services, resource allocations, and elderly well-being in Taif city. This study rationale is to explore the ageing situation in Taif as its preferred city for many people after their retirement. Thus, the accessibility to all the government services as well as good climate makes it interesting for elderly to settle after their retirement. Furthermore, the initial research in this study may be starting point to set foundations for robust research outcomes. Henceforth, the similar research concepts could be applied in Saudi cities such as Riyadh, Jeddah, Makkah, and Medina. Furthermore, given the structure of bigger cities, optimization of results and resources may be challenging if research foundations are not developed by piloting in smaller cities such as Taif.

Saudi Arabia, the largest country in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) with a predominantly Muslim population, has experienced significant economic growth over the past five to six decades. This economic growth has had a major impact on people's lives and living conditions. The country is also undergoing major changes in terms of population growth and age structure. The increase in life expectancy, lower fertility, declining mortality, and other factors that encourage longevity, are putting pressure on urban lifestyles. This is interrelated with urbanization that is disrupting traditional norms such as people's choice of family formation and size as well as care for the elderly.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines QoL as an individual's sense of their place in life in relation to their goals, aspirations, standards, and concerns, as well as the cultural and value systems in which they live. In Saudi Arabia, the key factors of QoL predominantly depend on daily activities, integration into the local community, and care provision for the elderly.

1.1 Aging Population in Saudi Arabia

The demographic shift toward an aging population is a global phenomenon, and Saudi Arabia is no exception (Saxena, 2013). In 2019, the population aged 65 and older was 1.16 million (3.4%) of the country's total population, which is projected to

increase to 2.37 million (6.0%) by 2030 (UN, 2019). This increasing trend in the 65+ age group is creating a demand for new services such as care and medical facilities, recreational activities, and community involvement.

1.2 The Importance of QoL for Elderly People

The quality of life of elderly people is a global concern for policymakers, health-care institutions, social systems, and civil society. The increase in the number of elderly people in Saudi Arabia raises questions about whether the country's health-care system is ready to provide quality healthcare services to this population group. In fact, the QoL of an elderly person is largely dependent on family structure, daily activities, and demographic shift. Meanwhile, the Saudi government is in the early stages of recognizing that healthy aging and quality of life will emerge as key priorities in the years to come (UNICEF, 2020).

2 Literature Review

There is limited evidence in the literature regarding the impact of various socio-economic and demographic factors on the quality of life (QoL) of elderly people in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, a literature review is needed to consolidate existing knowledge. A scoping review, which is an effective method for identifying research gaps and guiding future research (Tricco et al., 2018), was conducted to explore available literature and databases on the QoL of elderly people in Saudi Arabia. Initial findings revealed a lack of significant studies focused on the QoL of elderly individuals at the community level in Taif, Saudi Arabia.

The initial search focused on the question, "What is the QoL of elderly people in Taif, Saudi Arabia?." It was performed using the Google Scholar, PubMed, Cochrane, and Medline databases. Additional keywords were added incorporating truncation and wildcards to the EBSCOhost, PubMed, and Google Scholar databases. A comprehensive search of peer-reviewed articles and gray literature was also conducted from June 2022 to September 2023.

There was no formal quality appraisal for this scoping review as its aim was to capture relevant literature on the topic. Two independent reviewers worked together to extract data that included authors, year of publication, title, country, study design, aim, inclusion criteria, intervention type, data source, analysis, outcomes, and key findings (see Appendix A). The JBI template source of evidence details, characteristics, and results extraction instrument was used as guidance for data extraction.

The total number of relevant articles identified through the above databases was 150 (Flow Chart 1). Existing literature shows that the QoL of elderly people can be assessed based on their medical profile. However, interventions and studies at the

community level are not well explored and data from 15 articles were thoroughly reviewed (see Appendix A).

The findings of this study will help policymakers understand the challenges that elderly people in the region face in relation to their quality of life (QoL) and assist them in developing strategies to improve their health and well-being.

3 Methods

This scoping review aims to explore the QoL of elderly people living in Taif city of Saudi Arabia, and incorporates experimental study designs, quasi-experimental studies, and government reports. The main review question was, “Do daily activities improve the quality of life (QoL) of elderly people living in the Taif city of Saudi Arabia” and “What are the daily activities of elderly people living in Taif city of Saudi Arabia.” The study explored peer-reviewed articles on the topic that were published in the last ten years. The findings were synthesized from 15 articles on QoL of elderly people living in KSA within the Saudi community. The keywords used in the Boolean search of EBSCOhost, PubMed, and Google Scholar databases, as well as secondary research, were: QoL, aging population, retirement, longevity, daily activities, healthy aging, and Saudi Arabia. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were devised on the basis of JBI guidelines.

3.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria involved studies with participants aged 60 years and above, both male and female, living in Saudi Arabia (KSA). The excluded studies involved elderly people with a medical treatment profile whose QoL may have been affected by their health conditions. Cultural factors, family norms, and the specific geographical location of Taif city were also considered. It was deemed of paramount importance that specific daily activities determined by healthy aging and urbanization affecting family structures were also explored. Analytical observation of inclusion criteria also included prospective, retrospective, descriptive observational, and cross-sectional studies. Studies that focused on qualitative data, not limited to grounded theory or qualitative description, and opinion papers were also explored (Table 1).

This scoping review of the quality of life of elderly people living in Taif was conducted using JBI methodology and the PRISMA-ScR reporting standards (Appendix A). The exploratory nature of the review meant that tangible publications on quality of life, healthy aging, and the daily activities of elderly people in Taif were identified. However, there was limited primary trial evidence or high-level aggregated data on these topics (Table 2).

Table 1 PCC criteria for the review adapted from (Aladel et al., 2023)

Criteria	Determinants (JBI's updated Manual, 2020)	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Population/ participants	Participants must be from the Taif region of Saudi Arabia and be above retirement age	The daily activities of participants, including their spiritual routine, family ties, and financial dependence, should be included in the study	Participants living outside Taif and below the age of 60 should not be considered for the study
Content	Research publications within the last 10 years on the quality of life studies, either in Saudi Arabia or globally, where participants' daily habits determine the quality of life and healthy aging	Studies conducted in the city of Taif, Saudi Arabia, within community settings	Hospitals and medical facilities should be excluded, as there are many studies based on the medical profiles of the elderly
Source of evidence	Gray Literature and empirical studies	Government and statistical society reports and academic research resources that meet the selection criteria	Evidence from literature reviews, study reports, and news blogs should not be considered
Others	Language and study duration	All reports and studies were conducted in English. The time frame for the search is from 2015 to 2023	All reports and studies meet the remaining criteria but are written in other languages. All studies meet the criteria but were conducted before 2015

Table 2 The above table shows the search terms used in the review; the key definitions are explained below

Construct of study	Search terms
Study design	Scoping review
Quality of life	Elderly quality of life, healthy aging, and daily activities in Saudi Arabia: Public health, community, and health services
Context	Public health, community, and health services
Avoided search terms	Global, Arab, and medical elderly QoL

3.2 Search Strategy

An initial search was carried out on Google Scholar and PubMed. Preliminary searches of Google Scholar, Medline, and Cochrane databases did not identify any community-based studies or reviews on the quality of life of elderly people living in Taif, Saudi Arabia. It was clear, however, that more research has been conducted on the medical profiles of elderly people living in Saudi Arabia, but there is no review at the community level to suggest that the quality of life of elderly people is determined by healthy aging. The articles listed above were identified by the keywords in the titles and abstracts. These keywords and terms were then adapted to include information on study sources. Reference lists of all sources of evidence were screened for more published studies.

Peer-reviewed reports and articles from government sources, as well as gray literature such as care home registers, unpublished studies, and trials, were included in the review. The published reports and studies on the QoL of elderly people living in Saudi Arabia range from 2012 to 2022 and are in English.

3.3 Selection of Sources of Evidence and Data Extraction

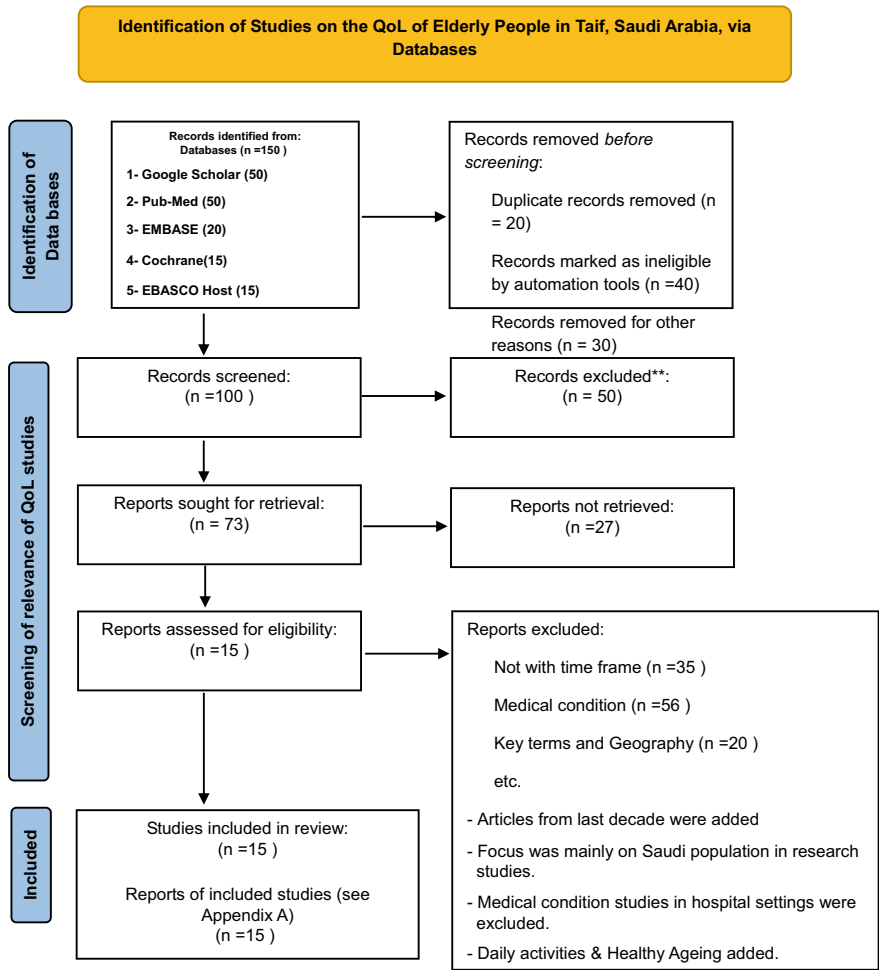
Citations identified from the initial search were collated and uploaded to RefWorks ProQuest Beta (2023) via the University of West London Academic Portal with duplicates removed. Independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts to assess whether they met the inclusion criteria. Potentially relevant sources from the pilot study were retrieved and added to the review while following JBI 2020 guidelines. The full texts of identified articles were fully assessed and matched against the inclusion criteria by an independent reviewer. The reasons for excluding sources that did not meet the criteria were explained and reported in the scoping review and disagreements between stakeholders were resolved through concrete discussions. The results of the scoping review search and inclusion criteria were detailed, reported, and presented in a PRISMA-ScR flow diagram (PRISMA.org 2023). Data extraction was performed using a developed tool in consultation with independent reviewers and relevant stakeholders. The extraction included specific details about the participants, such as their daily activities, concepts related to QoL, and the cultural context of participants. The key findings that emerged from this process are sufficient to address the sub-questions of the review.

3.4 Data Charting Process

The PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) was published in 2018. The

PRISMA-ScR checklist, containing 20 essential reporting items, was used to guide this review. Scoping reviews synthesize evidence on a specific topic, as well as assess the scope of the literature on the topic and identify gaps. In addition, scoping reviews can help determine whether a systematic review of the literature is feasible for future studies (Altamimi et al., 2016). Public health research requires both quantitative and qualitative data to fully answer research questions. The measures needed for this study were pre-defined and based on the PCC framework (Table 1).

The flow chart above illustrates the steps involved in conducting the scoping review for this study. Prior to defining the search strategy, exclusion and inclusion criteria were devised to help identify commonalities and themes. The search strategy



Flow Chart 1 Identification of studies on the QoL of elderly people in Taif, Saudi Arabia, via databases. Adapted from Page et al. (2021)

involved exploring different databases using relevant keywords and identified articles were added to the review.

3.5 JBI Quality Check for Selected Papers

JBI critical appraisal tools are used to assess the trustworthiness, relevance, and results of published papers. There are also other checklists based on each type of study. Scoping reviews are valuable tools for synthesizing evidence and addressing broad research questions by mapping evidence from a variety of sources (Imran et al., 2019). The 15 selected research articles that were identified for this study were broad in scope, aim, and design. The search was then extended to include government reports from various ministries and social welfare organizations. However, reports in Arabic format did not meet the selection criteria and qualitative approaches dominated quantitative research. These articles likely examined determinants affecting family norms, such as elderly care, including QoL as determined by healthy aging. Other identified articles focused on the medical profiles of those facing family norm challenges and compromised QoL (Bindawas et al., 2018).

4 Results

4.1 Scoping Review Findings

The scoping review explored available literature on the quality of life (QoL) of elderly people as determined by healthy aging and daily activities. The objective was to highlight the integration of QoL with family and cultural norms that are being disrupted by urbanization. Healthy aging studies on elderly people living in the GCC and KSA were also considered. Due to the limited available literature on the QoL of elderly people in KSA, the research was broadened to include global studies. The findings indicated a strong link between the QoL of elderly people and its integration with urban disruptive factors, including healthy aging. However, cultural and traditional values, such as people's choice of family formation, family size, and elderly care, are significant variables that warrant further study (Alatawi et al., 2023).

4.2 Limitations

The scoping review has some limitations that may affect its usefulness for policymakers. First, formal assessments of the methodological quality of the included

studies were not performed and could introduce bias into the findings. Second, the review did not provide any specific recommendations for policymakers. A key feature of systematic reviews is the provision of implications. To address these limitations, future research could include a formal assessment of the methodological quality of the included studies that would help to ensure that the findings are reliable and generalizable. Additionally, future research could provide specific recommendations for policymakers based on the findings of the scoping review.

4.3 Suggestions for Improvement

To further strengthen the scoping review, it is recommended that a formal assessment of the methodological quality of the included studies is carried out. This could be achieved using a validated tool, such as the Quality Assessment Tool for Quantitative Studies (QAT-QS). This process could then provide policymakers with specific recommendations based on the findings of the scoping review and should be clear, concise, and actionable. The use of multiple reviewers to independently assess the studies and findings would help to limit bias.

5 Discussion

Government policy indicators, such as those from the Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development and the Saudi Statistical Society, suggest that the government's focus is currently on urgent priorities. The priorities include addressing the growing school-age population, the rising number of out-of-school children, shifts in the composition of the youth labor force, the increasing youth unemployment rate, the growing entry of young women into the labor market, and government spending on healthcare. However, the Saudi government has not completely ignored the fact that the proportion of Saudis who are elderly is going to increase in the coming years. Therefore, the government is keen to initiate studies to ensure that healthy aging and quality of life are achieved among the elderly population.

Exploring the daily activities of Saudi elderly people could provide indications of whether healthy aging and quality of life are being achieved. It is noteworthy that most of the research on the QoL of elderly people in Saudi Arabia is heavily skewed toward medical profiles. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct and analyze community-based studies on the QoL of the elderly population, such as those living in Taif, Saudi Arabia. This will enable identification and understanding of the disruption caused by urbanization and its impact on cultural and family norms. The scoping review conducted for this study explored and identified studies on QoL as determined by healthy aging. It is evident that certain concepts, studies, and government reports are viable for mapping out the concepts related to the QoL of the elderly living in Taif, Saudi Arabia.

AlAhmari et al. (2022) employed the WHOQOL-BREF to examine different domains of QoL in the local Saudi community, evaluating the study outcomes. The findings suggest that healthcare authorities should adequately plan effective interventions to enhance and elevate QoL. The scoping review in this study revealed there is a gap in the community assessment of QoL and a dearth of scientific literature. Additionally, Elezbawy et al. (2022) found a scarcity of local data on the burden of Alzheimer's disease (AD), that ultimately impacts QoL (Mahmoud et al., 2018).

Balaha et al. (2023) investigated the health-related quality of life (HRQOL) and drug prescribing patterns in acute coronary syndrome (ACS) patients at Riyadh hospitals in Saudi Arabia. Other influential work by Abou El-Soud et al. (2020) examined the relationship between HRQOL and the burden among family caregivers of elderly patients undergoing hemodialysis in Saudi Arabia. Participants were selected from the King Abdullah Medical Complex in Jeddah between September and November 2019 using a convenient nonprobability sampling technique (Murshid et al., 2020). However, most influential studies are based on the medical profiles of participants, as opposed to local community-based studies (Canc Educ, 2018).

Table 3 shows the relationship of studies and involvement within the community and more specifically, the QoL of elderly people in community settings. These studies are based on both interventions such as quantitative and qualitative phases. It is evident that there is a gap in the literature for the identification of the QoL of elderly people living in Taif City. Most of the reputable community-based studies in Saudi Arabia are performed after 2015. The selection criteria in this study is based on a full decade leading up to 2023 but the articles identified only cover the past five years rather than the full decade. Older research could provide important and interesting information on how practices and perceptions around QoL have evolved over time. However, Bryson (2012) suggested that studies conducted more than five years previously and not including recent research could indicate that up-to-date reviews are not being undertaken.

The purpose of previous studies is to build a foundation for new investigations and to help with identifying further gaps. Therefore, the extracted data from the 15 articles identified in this study, could provide a solid foundation for future research investigating the QoL of elderly people living in Saudi Arabia.

Table 3 Data extraction based on selected articles

Total number of articles	Authors	Title	Years of Publication	Origin/country of origin (where the source was published or conducted)	Aims/purpose
1	The Economist: Baily, et al. (2020)	Shifting Demographics: A Global study on creating inclusive environments for aging population	2020	London/ Published on G20 Countries	To address active and inclusive aging in 19 countries
2	Inrnan, et al (2019)	Assessment of quality of life (QoL) in breast cancer patients by using EORTC QLQ-C30 and BR-23 questionnaires: A tertiary care center survey in the western region of Saudi Arabia	2019	King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia	The study is aimed at assessing the quality of life in a cohort of breast cancer patients at the Oncology Department, King Abdulaziz University Hospital (KAUH), King Abdulaziz University (KAU), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (SA), and to differentiate QoL among different groups

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Table 3 (continued)

Total number of articles	Authors	Title	Years of Publication	Origin/country of origin (where the source was published or conducted)	Aims/purpose
3	Mahmoud, et al. (2019)	Assessment of Quality of Life among Medical Students in Saudi Arabia: A Study Based on WHO-QOL-BREF Protocol	2018	College of Medicine, Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	The purpose of this study was to assess the quality of life-based on WHO-QOL-BREF protocol among medical students studying in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
4	Almuzani et al., (2018)	Health-Related Predictors of Quality of Life in Cancer Patients in Saudi Arabia	2017	Saudi Arabian cancer patients are a priority at King Abdulaziz Medical City (KAMC), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	The aim of this study was to identify the predictors of the QoL in a sample of Saudis with cancer
5	Altamimi et al., (2016)	Healthy aging conceptualizations in Saudi Arabia: a systematic review	2016	University of Hail, Saudi Arabia	The aims of the study was to achieve its objectives by seeking answers to the following research questions: (1) How do older populations of cultures and religions similar to the Saudi Arabian culture experience their aging processes? (2) What are the influences that are positively related to healthy aging in the context of cultures and religions similar to Saudi Arabia?

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Table 3 (continued)

Total number of articles	Authors	Title	Years of Publication	Origin/country of origin (where the source was published or conducted)	Aims/purpose
6	Firdos & Aman ullah, (2020)	Healthy aging in the context of physical and mental health: a systematic review of the elderly population in Saudi Arabia	2020	Department of Clinical Neurosciences College of Medicine, King Faisal University, Al-ahsa, Saudi Arabia	This systemic review aim is to understand the concept of healthy aging and mental health of the elderly through various concerns of physical health and mental health, lifestyle as physical activity and quality of life
7	Khan et al, (2017)	Nexus Between Demographic Change and Elderly Care Need in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries: Some Policy Implications	2017	GCC & Middleast	The paper aims to explore the population aging within the context of social policies designed by the stakeholders. Furthermore, the paper acknowledges the early stages of demographic changes taking place within the region
8	Bindawas et al, (2018)	Knee pain and health-related quality of life among older patients with different knee osteoarthritis severity in Saudi Arabia	2018	Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, College of Applied Medical Sciences, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	The research aims to determine the Health-related quality of life (HRQoL) in Saudi Patients suffering from osteoarthritis and Medical problems

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Table 3 (continued)

Total number of articles	Authors	Title	Years of Publication	Origin/country of origin (where the source was published or conducted)	Aims/purpose
9	Mirza et al, 2019a, 2019b	Medicines policy issues for Saudi Arabia: priorities and mode	2019	Saudi Arabia	The aim of the study is to integrate public policy, medicine and healthcare
10	Saudi General Authority for Statistics, 2021	Population Estimates in the Midyear of 2021	2023	Saudi Arabia	According to estimates by the General Authority for Statistics – a decrease of 2.6% compared to mid-2020, when the total population stood at 35.0 million
11	Al-surmi et al., (2019)	Quality of life among home healthcare patients in Saudi Arabia: household-based survey	2019	Saudi Arabia	The overall aim of this study was to describe and assess the quality of life (QOL) and associated determinants among patients enrolled in the Home Health Care (HHC) program affiliated with the Ministry of National Guard Health Affairs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
12	UNICEF (2019)	MENA GENERATION 2030 COUNTRY FACT SHEET	2019	UNICEF Headquarters and regional office for the Middle East and North Africa	The Aim of the document was to highlight health service provision in Saudi Arabia

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Table 3 (continued)

Total number of articles	Authors	Title	Years of Publication	Origin/country of origin (where the source was published or conducted)	Aims/purpose
13	Alenezi et al, (2022)	Ostomy-related problems and their impact on quality of life of Saudi ostomate patients: A mixed-methods study	2022	Saudi Arabia	The aim of this study is to explore the health-related quality of life outcomes and ostomy-related obstacles among patients with ostomy in Saudi Arabia
14	Aladel et al, (2023)	Effect of Weight Self-Stigma on Quality of Life and Dietary Habits among Adult Students in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	2023	Riyadh Saudi Arabia	this study aimed to examine the effect of WSS (Weight Self-Stigma) on the quality of life and dietary habits among adult students
15	Alatawi et al, (2023)	The prevalence of migraine headache among the general population and its impact on quality of life in Tabuk city, Saudi Arabia	2023	Tabuk city, Saudi Arabia	The aim of this study was conducted to estimate the prevalence of migraine in Tabuk and QoL

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Table 3 (continued)

Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
19 countries (comprising the G20 and excluding the EU) are included in this analysis: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the UK and the US. These were selected to broadly represent the world: covering roughly 65% of the population and 75% of global GDP	The methodology for the index, developed by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), including category and indicator definitions, scoring criteria, and data sources	Qualitative indicators	Old age dependency graph prediction from 1950 till 2050	The outcomes of this report are split between countries focused on aging population compared with countries having less focused policies on aging population	No G20 country is fully prepared to support healthy, financially secure, socially connected older people

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Table 3 (continued)

Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
The selected population for the study is the Arab population compared with the European population who recovered from breast cancer and their QoL	Categorical variables were used in this study. Kruskal Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests were used for non-parametric tests	Survey-based study (qualitative) was carried out in the Oncology Department at KAUH and	Data collection took 4 months. Cohorts of patients being treated at KAUH were asked to fill the questionnaire in Arabic or English language	The importance of QoL in breast cancer patients and the scarcity of data from Saudi Arabia, especially from the Western region, this study was conducted to assess the QoL in breast cancer patients by using EORTC QLQ-C30 and BR23 questionnaires in the western region of Saudi Arabia. The present study investigated the QoL in a cohort at the Oncology Department, KAUH, Jeddah, SA, and differentiated QoL among different groups and also explored the association of different variables with the domains of QoL	The breast cancer patients who visited the institute had a better quality of life regarding overall global health status as well as functional and symptom scales. Patients scored highest in social functioning and lowest in physical functioning. Insomnia and fatigue were the most disturbing symptoms. Similarly, patients scored better on the functional scale (QLQ-BR23), body image and future perspective. Hair loss and systemic therapy side effects were the most disturbing symptoms. Future studies can be performed keeping in view specific problems in detail

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Table 3 (continued)

Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
Total 983 male medical students from different academic years participated in this study voluntarily out filled their questionnaires for QoL	Demographic samples were defined and Cronbach's α -coefficient was calculated to determine the consistency. Bivariate analysis was done to delineate factors associated with total and domain scores using independent samples t-test or ANOVA. The QOL of the study sample was then compared using one-way ANOVA and student's t-test according to different years, accommodations and age groups. Post-hoc tests were then used to make multiple comparisons between different groups. The criterion of significance was set at $p < 0.05$	The data for quality of life was collected by a well-designed questionnaire as prescribed by the WHO-QOL-BREF which includes questions pertaining to different domains for the quality of life	A cross-sectional study was conducted among medical students at the College of Medicine, Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh during the year 2014	Two instruments were used for data collection: • A socio-demographic questionnaire to obtain information on age, hometown location, interest in the area of study, confidence in career development • The Arabic version of the WHOQOL-BREF questionnaire based on a brief version of the World Health Organization Quality of Life Instrument (WHOQOL-BREF)	The study conclusions were that the medical students had a decreased QoL. Students who lived with family led to an improvement in the QoL in some domains. There is a need for psychological support for students living alone and those in the middle of their medical courses

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Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
A cross-sectional study was conducted on 438 patients with a variety of cancer types (145 breast, 109 colorectal, 38 leukemia, 45 lymphoma, and 99 other types) who attended the Oncology Outpatient Clinics at KAMC	540 subjects who consented were given the survey, and 436 surveys were completed and returned (145 breast, 45 lymphoma, 109 colorectal, 38 leukemia, and 99 other types of cancer) with a response rate of 80.7%. Sociodemographic data of participants such as age, gender, height, weight, university degree, marital status, regular exercise, family support, and employment status and clinical data were also included	A survey study was conducted in the outpatient oncology clinics, KAMC, Ministry of National Guard Health Affairs	The data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 23 (SPSS, Chicago, IL). Patients' characteristics such as means and standard deviation were used to summarize numerical data	Quality of life was assessed by the Medical Outcomes Study 36-item short-form (SF-36) questionnaire, an instrument with an Arabic version and established reliability that provides a subjective evaluation of QoL	The effectiveness of exercise must be assessed in Saudi cancer patients as an intervention to improve QoL

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Table 3 (continued)

Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
A systematic review of the healthy aging conceptualizations in Arab-Muslim cultures was conducted to identify gaps in the evidence base. A systematic review of healthy aging studies was conducted to critically evaluate the quality of the evidence by comparing it to the STROBE (Strengthening the Reporting of Observational studies in Epidemiology) statement checklist	Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) flow diagram for conducting systematic reviews, literature searches were carried out in the following databases: Medline, PubMed, PsycInfo, Jstor, Sociological Abstracts, Social science information journals, Arabic language journals (via Google Scholar) and specifically the Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology	This systematic review could not find any studies that specifically focused on the concepts of healthy or successful aging in Arab-Muslim societies as seen in other published studies in the area. The articles either deal with demographic epidemiological outcomes such as well-being or health status (a measure of healthy aging) or examine living conditions, attitudes to care, or social integration. Most of the studies reviewed were surveys and only one study was qualitative	Most of the included studies examine the aging perspectives of the immigrant Arabs or older Arab Israelis. However, there are sporadic studies in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Lebanon. Most of the studies from the immigrant Arab focused on the nature of aging and the social networks and social relationships. Also, these studies remark on the role of religion and culture in the aging process of Arab-American elders, with social integration playing a big part in an older person's perception of healthy aging	In-depth analysis of the studies revealed that the selected studies were primarily cross-sectional in nature, based on small population-based studies that included older adults and were not specifically designed to investigate the healthy aging perspectives. Studies primarily collected data via self-reported surveys. Based on the findings of the systematic review, no research has examined the question of how older people themselves understand the concept of healthy aging in Saudi Arabia	There is a growing public health interest in understanding and promoting healthy aging worldwide, though the research into aging and healthy aging in the context of an older Saudi population has received little to no recognition in the literature. Therefore, one of the main strengths of this review is that it is the first review that seeks to explore older Saudi's perspectives of healthy aging concepts in Saudi Arabia. Other strengths are that the outcomes resulting from this study can contribute to the process of developing policies and programs for the older Saudi population (continued)

Table 3 (continued)

Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
145 papers were identified from the different databases, 52 duplicates were removed, 16 articles were excluded because of the non-availability of full text, and 57 papers were removed as did not meet the eligibility criteria. Finally, 20 papers were included and further assessed	The significance of this systematic review is to understand the concept of healthy aging of elderly people in Saudi Arabia by the evidence of physical and mental health along with the lifestyle changes and quality of life components. With this goal, the relevant articles have been reviewed through various databases and been selected, followed by PRISMA guidelines to answer the following questions: a) Physical health of elderly people in Saudi Arabia, b) Mental health status of elderly people in Saudi Arabia, c) Lifestyle as physical activity of elderly people, d) Healthy aging and quality of life of the elderly population in Saudi Arabia	Searches of peer-reviewed papers related to the topic were conducted through different databases using Scopus, PubMed, Web of science, and Google Scholar. Studies were included on the basis of eligibility criteria explaining the aging (i.e., concept of healthy aging) of the elderly population of Saudi Arabia	1. Identification: 145 papers were identified from the different databases 2. Screening: 52 duplicate papers were removed, and 16 articles were excluded because of the non-availability of full text and 57 papers were removed as did not meet the eligibility criteria 3. Eligibility: 20 papers were included and further assessed	145 papers were identified from the different databases, 52 duplicates were removed, 16 articles were excluded because of the non-availability of full text, and 57 papers were removed as did not meet the eligibility criteria. Finally, 20 papers were included and further assessed	The evidence of the review suggests that health issues, mental health, and well-being as well as the quality of life of the elderly population that has a strong relationship with healthy aging. The stigma perception in the Saudi population toward mental illness was also reported. Additionally, depression and anxiety, the mental health issues or psychiatric problems of the elderly population in Saudi have not been widely studied

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Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
	The demographic variables such as age distribution of populations, total fertility rates, life expectancies at birth and socio-economic variables including education, labor participation and human development indices were examined in order to develop the scenario analysis for the GCC elderly population		Secondary sources of information from GCC official statistics were taken from 1950 to 2050	The outcomes of the study are declining trends in fertility combined with increased life expectancy in the Arab world. Due to the early stages of the policy agenda, the implications are challenging and demand urgent and wider focus from community stakeholders	The factual information of GCC shows an increase in life expectancy and stat pension still very low compared with other countries around the world. The article highlights the lack of government policy toward the aging population in the coming years

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Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
209 consecutive males and females aged > 55 years with radiographically diagnosed knee OA from five hospitals across Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	HRQoL were assessed using the pain visual analogue scale (VAS) and the 36-Item Short Form Health Survey (SF-36). Descriptive statistical stratified and sample t-tests were used	Multicentre cross-sectional study	Study conducted between March 2016 and March 2017 on participants from five different hospitals in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	Saudi Patients with Knee OA and knee pain had reduced HRQoL compared with patients having moderate knee conditions	HRQoL was evaluated using the reliable and valid Saudi Arabia version of the 36-Item Short Form Health Survey (SF-36), a generic, self-administered, and patient-reported outcome measure. It consists of 36 items in 8 domains that assess the patient's physical and mental status. Future studies at the national level are necessary to measure the functioning, disability, and health of this patient population

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Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
This article describes the need to build a conceptual model and the future directions for medicine policy in the country. The model is needed to narrate and document the set of challenges regarding workforce, professional development, and human and health services for the pharmaceutical and medicines sector. A conceptual model could aid to build and identify priority medicines policy issues	The variables identified in the study are major challenges to health care such as an aging population, sedentary lifestyles, growing demand for healthcare services and changing disease patterns. Furthermore, there is a change in disease patterns from communicable to non-communicable diseases in Saudi Arabia	Thematic Analysis		Modern health issues have emerged due to an affluent society, the adoption of modern diets and the lack of physical activities. Both the prevalence of cardiovascular diseases and the share of the population with diabetes have increased. Some of the other challenges are poor referral systems between primary care centers and hospitals: long waiting time, underutilization of e-health and information systems and the accessibility of healthcare services in remote regions of Saudi Arabia affecting QoL	The interaction between all stakeholders such as the Saudi healthcare system and policy makers could lead to identify future health gaps. This could well fit with identify our study questions on the QoL of the elderly living in Saudi Arabia

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Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
the population numbers increased in KSA from 34.2 million in 2019 to 35.0 million in 2020, 2021 saw a decline in the overall population numbers to 34.1 million in midyear 2021	The new methodology applied by GASTAT estimates the population by age groups, in addition to other attributes such as sex and nationality. The estimation is based on the component of demographic change, including births, deaths, and net migration	In line with international standards and best practices, GASTAT applied for 2021, for the first time, a population estimation methodology – the so-called cohort component method - making best use of information from different data sources, including administrative data on births, deaths and international migration	No-Intervention used as this is only Saudi Stats document	The Saudi population increased by 1.2% in mid-2021 compared to mid-2020. In the same period, the non-Saudi population decreased by 8.6%. In 2021, the Saudi population accounted for 63.6% of the total population, with non-Saudis at 36.4%	The document falls into PCC JBI framework as it discusses about the population, context and culture

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Table 3 (continued)

Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
253 patients included and the Mean age was 67.05 (± 20.0)	Logistic regression models were fitted to determine factors associated with QOL low score	This cross-sectional study was conducted among patients enrolled in the HHC program. The World Health Organization QOL questionnaire (WHOQOL-BREF) was used to collect data about the different domains of patients' QOL. Logistic regression models were fitted to determine factors associated with QOL low score	The overall QOL for HHC patients was significantly affected by both socio-demographic and morbid characteristics. In the final Multivariate logistic regression models, marital status, and having psychological problems, stroke and number of illness were independently associated with the overall QOL of HHC patients	The overall QOL and its domains are significantly associated with several different factors. Many of these factors can be monitored and enhanced by improving the quality of HHC services, thus improving the QOL of patients	This study used the WHOQOL-BREF to assess the four main domains of QOL (physical, psychological, social, and environmental) of HHC patients. We conclude that QOL domains are affected by many different factors, and our results show that some factors affect more than one domain (e.g., psychological problems and stroke)

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Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
Number of total population and adolescents (10–19 years), 2015, 2030 and 2050 (in millions)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Government health expenditure is determined by growing population and requires the increase in total health expenditure to even maintain the status quo
Completed survey instruments were obtained from 421 participants across the five sites, representing an 88.5% (421/500) response rate	City of Hope Quality of life questionnaire (COH-QOL-OQ) Arabic version was used in this study. Originally COH-QOL-OQ developed by Grant and Davis (1997) (Grant et al., 2004)	This mixed-methods study was undertaken through survey (COHQOL-Q Arabic version) for collecting the quantitative data (n = 421) and semi-structured interview for collecting qualitative data (n = 12). This study employed STROBE and GRAMMS checklists		Multiple health-related quality of life challenges were indicated by Saudi patients with intestinal stomas. Ostomy surgery interferes with religious practice in Muslim people, particularly observing Hajj worship and fasting for Ramadan	The study findings reported a greater understanding of challenges that patients with stoma experience in Saudi Arabia. The process of the adaptation and the change of their lifestyle also affects patient's quality of life. The healthcare providers can use the study results to create a supportive intervention strategy that is needed to maximize QOL for people with stoma

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Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
385 students from Riyadh universities participated and The average age of participants was 24 ± 6.74 , and the majority were female (78.4%). The study duration was between September 2022 and February 2023	cross-sectional study and completed three online questionnaires: the WSS questionnaire, the WHO quality of life questionnaire, and a dietary habit questionnaire	According to the independent samples t-test, there was no significant difference in the QOL mean scores between males and females. No significant difference between the QOL and educational level was observed. However, as shown by one-way ANOVA, there was a significant difference between QOL and BMI categories	After the enrollment consent section, participants were asked to answer demographic data questions (as the first section of the questionnaire) which included: questions about age, sex, nationality, educational level, name of the university studied at, marital status, monthly salary, place of residence, weight, and height. Followed by The WHO Quality of Life (WHOQOL)-BREF, which was created to assess QOL,	The results demonstrated a negative association between all QOL domains and WSS ($p < 0.001$). Moreover, higher BMI is associated with increased self-devaluation and fear of enacted stigma ($p < 0.001$). There was also a negative link between both quality and quantity of food with WSS ($p < 0.01$)	No significant difference was seen in study outcomes concerning gender. The findings of this study suggest the importance of increasing awareness about the negative impact of WSS and developing social policies to prevent or decrease it. Additionally, multidisciplinary teams, especially dietitians, should be more aware of WSS when dealing with overweight and obese individuals

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Population and sample size within the source of evidence (if applicable)	Methodology	methods	Intervention type, comparator and details of these (e.g., duration of the intervention) (if applicable). Duration of the intervention (if applicable)	Outcomes and details of these (e.g., how measured) (if applicable)	Key findings that relate to the scoping review question/s
The general population of Tabuk city was estimated population size of adults was 667.837, the study sample size was 384	This cross-sectional study included a sample from the general population in Tabuk City, Saudi Arabia. A structured questionnaire was utilized to collect the participants' data. It comprised questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants and the experienced headaches, the ID Migraine questionnaire and the Migraine specific quality of life questionnaire	Data were obtained through an online, structured, self-administered questionnaire created using Google Forms. The survey was disseminated to the community using social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp. The questionnaire was prepared in Arabic and consisted of 34 questions asking about the participants' demographic data (e.g., age, sex and income), characteristics of migraine (3 ID migraine test) and the disease effect on the participants' quality of life (the Migraine specific quality of life questionnaire)	Categorical variables were summarized as counts and percentages and Pearson's Chi-Square test for independence of observations or Fisher's exact test were used to assess the association between the type of headache and relevant variables. The Chi-square test for trend was used when one variable was ordinal (e.g., rating of the MSQ 2.1 questions) and the other was categorical (e.g., the type of headache). The score of the MSQ 2.1 was summarized as the median and interquartile range (expressed as the 25th–75th percentiles). A p-value	The prevalence of Migraine headache in population in Tabuk city was high and consistent with current literature. Since quality of life is affected in these patients, efforts should be made to promote and support public awareness and health education of migraine headache	Health awareness of the public about the characteristics, relieving factors, and treatment of migraines would elevate and improve patients' quality of life

6 Conclusions

The scoping review of the QoL of elderly people living in Taif, Saudi Arabia, has mapped emerging literature and identified gaps for further systematic reviews. The primary question was developed based on a semi-structured interview study of retired elderly people in Taif. The review methodology was constructed for each stage, keeping in mind that the identified reviews may evolve. Therefore, the stages mentioned above are not limited but are a general summary of the process used in the scoping literature review on the elderly population of Taif, Saudi Arabia.

The overall quality of life (QoL) in Saudi Arabia and its domains are significantly associated with several different factors determined by urbanization. Many of these factors can be monitored and enhanced by improving functional capacity, which leads to greater physical autonomy, independence, improved cognition, self-efficacy, satisfaction, and positive feelings. Therefore, improving the QoL of the elderly population is based on aging, which is a complex, multidimensional process. All these factors are significant milestones identified in this scoping review of the quality of life (QoL) of elderly people living in Taif, Saudi Arabia. However, there remains a need to identify further gaps through the conduct of higher-level studies that engage all stakeholders at the community level. The participation of stakeholders is fundamental to addressing disruptive changes in family norms and the QoL of elderly people living in the GCC region.

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Part V
Migrant Families

Chapter 34

Rethinking the Family: Transnational Mobilities and Conceptual Imperialism in a Globalizing World



Andrew Gardner and Areej Jamal

Abstract The central purpose of this chapter is to explore the process of social change. We think broadly about the relationship between the concept of the “family” and many decades of transnational migration to the Arabian peninsula. The first portion of this chapter is devoted to a suggested categorization of that relationship, and proposes a tripartite conceptual structure: there are the families that singular migrants leave behind in their countries of origin; there are nuclear families that migrate to the Gulf states as a unit; and there are families in the Gulf States that, as a result of this migration, incorporate domestic workers into the households they comprise. After explicating and discussing this structure, this chapter turns to an ethnographically-informed discussion of the families typifying the second of the categories we establish: how does the migration of nuclear familial units to the Gulf States revise, shift, and alter members’ roles and responsibilities within the familial unit? In the concluding section of the paper, we take note of the global consolidation and simplification of the concept of “family” around its nuclear core, and then speculate that this fact suggests the ongoing conceptual hegemony of Western ideas and knowledge.

1 Gulf Migration and the Family

For many decades now the Arabian Peninsula has been an important destination for transnational labor migration. Twenty years ago, the quantity of research and assorted scholarly assessments of this regional destination for transnational migrants was paltry. Today, partially as a result of the growing archipelago of institutions of higher education located in the region, research and scholarship concerning migration to the

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Gulf States is both burgeoning and multifaceted.¹ The Gulf migration system encompasses six destination states—Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman—and the term *Gulf migration system* connotes the similitude of migrants' experiences in the transnational conduits that lead to and from the Arabian peninsula. Today, although located in the Global South, the Gulf States are reckoned to be the third most significant regional destination for transnational migrants in the contemporary world, after North America and Europe.²

The approximately 25 million transnational migrants who toil on the Arabian peninsula today are unevenly distributed among the six destination states. And although precise figures are difficult to obtain, the US\$98 billion in remittances outbound from the region in 2014 accounted for nearly a quarter of total global remittances.³ Those remittance flows are foundational to many regional and national economies in South Asia, in Southeast Asia, in portions of Africa, and in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa. Moreover, the rough estimate of 25 million transnational migrants provides only a synchronic portrait of Gulf migration's demographic footprint. If we take note of the cyclical and transnational nature of this migration system (with individual migrants moving back and forth for substantial periods of time), and then add all the members of the households that are at least partially dependent on remittances from Gulf-based transnational migrants, the demographic footprint of Gulf migration is clearly and evidently much larger than 25 million.

Those households, the changing nature of the "family," and transnational migration to the Gulf are, together, the central topics of this chapter. In the first section of this chapter we revisit and propose a tripartite structure for conceptualizing the relationship between Gulf migration and the family. After explicating and discussing three distinct realms of Gulf migration's impact on the family, this chapter turns to an ethnographically-informed discussion of the families typifying the second of the categories we establish: how does the migration of nuclear familial units to the Gulf States revise, shift, and alter members' roles and responsibilities within those nuclear units? Finally with that ethnographically-informed discussion as our springboard, in the concluding section of the paper we take note of the global consolidation of the concept of "family" around its nuclear core, and then speculate that this fact suggests the ongoing conceptual hegemony of Western ideas and the unequal geography of knowledge production in the contemporary world.⁴

¹ At the time of writing, the search term "gulf migration" yielded nearly two million results on Google Scholar.

² ECSWA (2007), Naufal (2011), Rahman (2020).

³ De Bel-Air (2018). Since 2010, three of the top ten remittance-sending states have been Gulf Cooperation Council states (World Migration Report, 2024).

⁴ In that sense, this paper joins numerous others in exploring the diverse impacts of the nucleation of joint and extended families (e.g. Singh, 2008, Annim, 2015, Esteinou, 2005).

2 Three Realms of Gulf Migration's Impact on the Family

The great majority of transnational labor migrants who reside on the Arabian Peninsula arrive as singular emissaries to work in one of the six Gulf States. Of the three realms of migration's impact upon the family considered in this chapter, this form of migration comprises the first.⁵ Upon arrival on the Arabian Peninsula, transnational migrants typically work under labor contracts that, essentially, make the *kafala* (or sponsorship system) legible in the global system.⁶ These singular working-class migrants are widely referred to as “bachelors” in parlance local to the Arabian Peninsula, despite these migrants' variable marital statuses. This class of migrants is also sexually homogenous: almost all members of this class of transnational labor migrants are men. While some of these migrants arrange for their own housing in the receiving state, the great majority are housed in dormitory-style residences that, in the same local parlance described above, are referred to as “labor camps.” For many decades now, a constellation of policies, laws, and institutional actors have sought to eradicate the exorbitant costs associated with migration to the Arabian Peninsula.⁷ These efforts have been largely unsuccessful: most members of this class of transnational labor migrants continue to pay fees to enter the Gulf migration system, and have therefore typically financed their departures from home via a series of loans. These monies are paid to various agents, labor brokers, manpower agencies, training programs, and government offices that, altogether, constitute the significant portion of the Gulf migration system located in the sending states from which transnational migrants depart.⁸ Entry fees can total many thousands of U.S. dollars, and are paid to obtain two year employment contracts in one of the Gulf States.⁹ Those fees are typically extracted from migrants' households.

The varied and sometimes complicated households from which these migrants depart yield some vantage point on the impact of Gulf migration upon the family. Those households frequently mortgage productive assets and incur other forms of debt to usher a household member into the Gulf migration system. Conversely, that migrant's forthcoming remittances are typically earmarked for key household expenditures—to pay off the debts incurred to send the migrant to the Gulf States in the

⁵ Note that these three realms of impact were first introduced in one of the authors' previous publications (Gardner, 2011).

⁶ *Kafala* is the Arabic term for the sponsorship system, and comprises one of the key structural features of the Gulf migration system. In summary, the *kafala* arranges in-migration around employment, and thereby locks migrants to their Gulf-based employers for set periods of time. Some scholars portray the *kafala* as a limited set of policies and practices that reinforce this relationship and lock transnational migrants to their employer and sponsor. In this chapter, by the *kafala* we mean something more comprehensive, including the accretion of these practices into the norms and expectations of employers, sponsors, and the state. This perspective on the *kafala* is explained at more length elsewhere (Gardner 2014, 5–6; see also Gardner 2024, 63–65).

⁷ Albella (2018), Hertog (2022), Martin (2012), Rahman (2012).

⁸ See Babar (2020), Kathiravelu (2016), Rahman (2012), for example.

⁹ Gardner et al., (2013).

first place, to purchase a house or improve an existing home, to finance the education of another household member, or in many sending states, to reinforce a sister's dowry for marriage. Expenditures are, of course, not limited to these ends, but even this small collection of typical expenditures speak to a more comprehensive and pertinent point: many of the transnational labor migrants present in the Gulf States are best conceived as emissaries of household livelihood systems.¹⁰ Indeed, those same families burdened with debt are often partially or wholly dependent on migrant remittances for sustenance and for basic function.¹¹ In summary, this form of migration to the Arabian Peninsula reshapes the financial horizons of the family in many migrant-sending states.

The departure of one or several working-age household members for employment in the Gulf can also reshape family dynamics, roles, and responsibilities in notable ways.¹² Children, for example, may grow up with largely absent fathers, and women may assume a variety of household roles and responsibilities that were previously the purview of men. Broader contexts may also be impacted—entire villages in some portions of South Asia largely comprise children, women, and the elderly, for example, as the entire stratum of working-age males in some regions are employed in one of the Gulf States. In summary, while the outmigration of men for remunerative work in Arabia has been generated by households seeking to preserve their place in the cultural settings in which they are enmeshed (to generate funds for a dowry, or to expand the home to better accommodate a joint family, for example), the large-scale departure of working-age men typical of some regions of South Asia is simultaneously reshaping gender roles and family culture in unprecedented ways.

In contrast to those households that place one or more emissaries into the Gulf migration system, other families migrate together as a nuclear unit. This form of migration comprises the second realm in which migration to the Arabian Peninsula reshapes families and family dynamics. Like the proletarian transnational migrants described above, the migrating nuclear family is also subject to the same sponsorship system that binds singular migrants to a Gulf-based employer for the duration of a labor contract. Those labor contracts are more variable in length than those of the proletarian transnational migrants described above, and unlike those “bachelors,” these migrants are referred to as “expatriates” in local parlance.

The term “expatriate” connotes the privileged experience of this class of transnational migrants: the capacity to move transnationally as a nuclear family unit is both coveted and, simultaneously, carefully governed by a raft of ancillary regulations and policies in the various receiving states. Most central to this governance are the minimums established for the “family visa” that allows members of the nuclear family to join the employed parent in the Gulf States. Qatar, for example, allows employed migrants to bring an accompanying nuclear family with proof of a minimum salary of QR 10,000 (U.S. \$2746). That figure is KD 800 (U.S. \$2609) in Kuwait, and AED

¹⁰ Gardner (2011), Rahman et al., (2024).

¹¹ See De Bel-Air (2017).

¹² Iqbal et al., (2014), John and Pandian (2014), Kaur (2023), Osella and Osella (2008).

4000 (U.S. \$1089) in the United Arab Emirates.¹³ Notably, the additional costs of a dwelling large enough to accommodate the family, the costs of transportation in the modern cities of the region, and fees for children to attend diasporic private schools result in household expenditures that often exceed the minimums established by the host state. More importantly, however, is the overall nucleation of the family once it enters the Gulf migration system—a subject to which we'll return later in this chapter.

Over the past two decades, scholars and researchers have had much to say about the experiences of these nucleated diasporic families resident in the GCC states. In part, this comparative plentifulness of scholarship is a result of this migrant population's accessibility: for many foreign researchers, accessing expatriate subjects requires crossing no significant boundaries of difference—they are neighbors in compounds, they might be found down the hallway in apartment buildings, or perhaps they occupy the office next door at the institutions that employ such foreign researchers. In addition to their accessibility, members of the expatriate class of transnational migrants on the Arabian Peninsula are also typically capable of speaking English, which functions as the most important *lingua franca* for the diversity of peoples gathered today on the Arabian Peninsula. Together, these factors contribute to the prominence of the expatriate class in the burgeoning swath of scholarship concerned with the Gulf migration system.

As a result of the bountiful literature concerning the expatriate migrant class, contemporary scholars are engaged in a constellation of different and often overlapping discussions. Speaking broadly, and echoing the themes that now define the mission of much of contemporary Western academia, a surfeit of scholarship today is concerned with these migrants' identities and the frictions perceived therein, or with the sense of belonging they purportedly develop for the states that invite them to reside and work for years or even decades of their lives.¹⁴ Other scholars explore the experiences of the children of these migrant families, and the lived experience of growing up in diaspora.¹⁵ Much work is also concerned with these diasporas' shifting relationship with their respective homelands, or with the general insecurity they frequently encounter as mobile non-citizen residents. While these themes only cover some of the fertile analytic ground covered by this scholarship, it is also notable that scholarship concerning the expatriate population on the Arabian Peninsula is typically focused upon the experiences of a singular national diaspora—with the experiences of Egyptian families in diaspora, for example, or with Indian families resident in one of the Gulf States.

The third category of families impacted by migration to the Arabian Peninsula are those resident families who employ transnational migrants as domestic workers in private households. In demographic terms, the households employing domestic workers include those of most citizen families in the Gulf States, and also some

¹³ In the United Arab Emirates, female expatriates must earn AED 10000 (U.S. \$2723) for the same privilege.

¹⁴ Akinci (2019), Almutawa (2020), Errichiello and Nyhagen (2021), Vora (2008).

¹⁵ Ali (2011), Gardner (2010), Vora (2013), Norbakk (2020), Yousef and Khattab (2023).

of the expatriate family households previously described. Altogether, the workforce they employ in the domestic sector is numerically substantial: approximately one in five transnational labor migrants employed on the Arabian Peninsula works in the domestic sector. Drawing on ILO data from 2021, for example, suggests some 5,828,637 domestic workers are employed on the Arabian peninsula, and further suggests that in consideration of the unknown number of undocumented migrants working in the domestic sector, this figure is very likely an underestimate.¹⁶

Like the expatriate class of migrants discussed above, for many decades now the portion of the transnational migrant workforce employed in the domestic sector has received an abundance of attention from scholars and activists foreign to the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁷ Although that scholarship and research have been focused on a variety of different themes, almost all of that work congeals around the vulnerabilities particular to domestic workers employed in the region. Those vulnerabilities are multifaceted: migrants employed in the domestic sector often have limited social networks by which they can communicate issues, questions, or problems to their fellow countrymen and countrywomen, to their embassies, and to other sorts of authorities who might adjudicate their concerns; migrants employed in the domestic sector sometimes have their mobility in the host country's public sphere truncated or otherwise constrained by their consignment to the private household that employs them; and similarly, migrants employed in the domestic sector are oftentimes subjected to the private, interpersonal dynamics of the households that employ them, and the complications that can ensue therein.¹⁸

Notably, although this workforce includes male drivers, male gardeners, and migrant men employed in a variety of other capacities, the domestic portion of the foreign workforce present in Arabia is predominantly female.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the impact of these migrants' absence on the families they leave behind roughly correlates with the pressures and issues encountered by the transnational labor migrants (or "bachelors") discussed earlier in this chapter, excepting for the fact that in the case of domestic workers, the absent members of those households mostly comprise mothers, sisters, or daughters in the various household configurations from which this labor force is drawn. In this section of the chapter, however, we do not seek to reiterate the impact of these migrants' absence on the households they have departed. Instead, the impact we seek to assess here is upon those families that employ these domestic workers.

The impact of migrant domestic workers on the families that employ them can be gauged in two distinct realms. First, for the citizenries indigenous to the Arabian Peninsula, domestic workers are often the most socially proximate representatives of the vast population of foreigners that now suffuse the cities and towns that citizen-families inhabit. In all the GCC states, foreigners today comprise the majority of the workforce. In some, foreign workers comprise an outright majority of the resident

¹⁶ Blaydes (2023), 727.

¹⁷ Fernandez (2014), Johnson (2011), Parreñas (2021), Rajan and Joseph (2020).

¹⁸ Ahmad (2017), Diederich (2004).

¹⁹ Blaydes (2023), Parreñas (2000), Shah (2004).

population.²⁰ In some regions the proportions of foreigners to citizens is extreme: in Qatar and portions of the UAE, for example, foreigners outnumber citizens by nine to one. As a result, families in the citizenries of the GCC states have long reported anxieties and concerns about the social and cultural context in which they exist—a context that is largely foreign, mostly working class, and predominantly male. With domestic workers in focus in this section of the chapter, however, this foreign presence is more than simply an atmospheric or environmental feature of contemporary Arabia: rather, domestic workers now occupy the intimate spaces of the household and are a part of the fabric of everyday life for most citizen-families. Oftentimes, foreign domestic workers are deeply engaged in the everyday tasks associated with raising *khaleeji* children, for example, and many domestic workers establish long-term relationships with the families that employ them.²¹ In this sense, the traditionally insular and intimate space of the Arab family has been penetrated by the foreigners who migrate to Arabia for work.

These foreigner workers' presence in the *khaleeji* domestic sphere points to another set of impacts as well. The second distinct realm of transnational migration's impact on the families employing domestic workers concerns the readjusted roles, responsibilities, and norms resulting from domestic workers' incorporation in *khaleeji* households.²² As domestic workers are hired to clean the household, prepare and cook meals, maintain the garden and yard, care for infants and entertain small children, drive women to and from school, work, or social obligations, and also tend to a constellation of other quotidian features of the operation of the household, members of the household are thereby freed to pursue other objectives and tasks. Broadly speaking, *khaleeji* women have been the greatest beneficiaries of this change. Their widespread entry into the public spheres of the GCC states correlates with the incorporation of domestic workers into the household. Similarly, women's notable successes in the realm of higher education is, in part, a result of this same rebalancing of roles in the domestic sphere and the resulting mobilities. And women's employment in a variety of economic sectors today is, in part, a result of being untethered from the traditional responsibilities of that domestic sphere. In this sense, the incorporation of domestic workers into *khaleeji* households has had a significant impact upon the family.²³

In summary, the impact of Gulf migration upon the family can be measured and assessed in three distinct realms, all of which are briefly reviewed here. For some families, the impact of Gulf migration is best measured by the migrant's absence from the sending household, and by the value of the remittances he or she feeds into that household from afar. For other families, the impact of Gulf migration can be measured

²⁰ Aarthi and Sahu (2021), Fargues and Shah (2018), Hertog (2013).

²¹ *Khaleeji* is the Arabic term for the Arab citizens of the Gulf Cooperation Council states.

²² As Al-Ghanim (2012) notes, families are changing as a result of several interlocking factors, including urbanization, women working outside the household, and the economic independence of the individual. We suggest that foreign domestic labor underpins several of these factors as well.

²³ In her analysis, Al-Ghanim (2012) argues that while these changes are all taking place, the household remains patriarchal, and that women remain responsible for supervising the care of the domestic sphere. See also Aref and Khodr (2022).

by their experience moving through the transnational realm as a nuclear familial unit, and the changes rendered by that process. Finally, families—and particularly citizen families in the Gulf States—have been impacted by the incorporation of domestic workers into the quotidian operation of the household. In the following section of the paper, we utilize one coauthor's ethnographic data to explore and examine the experiences of the second of these three sorts of familial impacts: how are families that move through the transnational realm as a single nuclear unit reshaped by that experience?

3 The Nucleation of Gulf Migrant Families

We have endeavored to describe the Gulf migration system and its variable impacts on the family. In our analysis, the second discernible form of transnational mobility pulls nuclear families from their homes to work on the Arabian Peninsula. The majority of those nuclear families are drawn from South Asia, where the *joint family* remains a significant and commonplace social form.²⁴ Upon arrival on the Arabian Peninsula, these migrant families reside in a social setting where a different form of family—the extended family—perseveres into the present era.²⁵ In spite of the diversity in the forms of family found on both ends of this transnational conduit, however, the familial unit moving from migrant sending to migrant-receiving state is a nuclear one. In this section of the chapter, we draw on detailed research focused upon migrant families residing in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.²⁶ Our objective is to illuminate the process of nucleation that these families encounter as they traverse the transnational divide.

Migration journeys to the Arabian Peninsula were usually undertaken first by married male migrants. After settling basic affairs in the new country of residence, wives would typically join their spouses later. The gendered patterns of migration to Saudi Arabia observed in this study essentially reified the patriarchal gender roles characteristic of both ends of this transnational conduit, particularly by reinforcing roles in which men provide and women are consigned to the domestic sphere. One interesting observation stemming from this research concerned the evident process by which middle-class South Asian migrants' life projects evolved or were otherwise modified as they started expanding their nuclear families in the receiving state. As

²⁴ The joint family is the familial form in which members of a unilineal descent group live together in a single household. It is a type of extended family. In South Asian, this form typically comprises a set of male siblings, along with the female spouses of male children of an apex nuclear unit. As Wadley (2010, 14) describes it, "The ideal joint family is made up of a married couple, their married sons, their sons' wives and children (and possibly grandsons' wives and great-grandchildren), and unmarried daughters."

²⁵ Extended families include at least three generations, may include a wider array of relatives than the joint family, and do not necessarily co-reside in the same household. This is the most common form of family in the world as well, and as a category, includes the joint family.

²⁶ See Jamal (2024).

their horizons shifted, for example, migrant families oftentimes aspired to settle for longer periods of time in Saudi Arabia. Tauseef, a first-generation migrant from India, encountered this dilemma.²⁷ As he explained:

So, the idea was always to go back to India at some point. My initial idea was, you know, I'll stay here [in Saudi Arabia] just for five or six years. Yes, and then go back, but you know you fall into this trap. Or maybe, you know, it's that once if you don't go back within the first five years then, you are here for you know, the long haul like twenty-five or thirty years. The same happened to me: I mean I just stayed.

His account elucidates how the life projects of middle-class South Asian migrants shift, change, and evolve as time passes in Saudi Arabia. In Tauseef's case, his aspirations to remain in the country grew stronger after his wife came and joined him and, subsequently, their nuclear family began to grow.

Although this pattern was noticeable in the ethnographic research conducted for this project, the opposite is also true: much of the scholarship about Gulf migration describes South Asian migrants' enduring commitment to a set of life projects and financial obligations anchored in their households of origin.²⁸ With the passage of time in one of the destination states on the Arabian Peninsula, however, some migrant families grow more ambivalent about their return to South Asia. Arranged now as nuclear families, these first-generation migrants build familial lives away from the countries of their origin, and in doing so, they can experience a shift in their aspirations.²⁹

For example, Yusuf, a first-generation Bangladeshi migrant in Saudi Arabia described the evolving waypoints in his life plan:

I worked hard, and supported my immediate family members [his parents and siblings] and external family members financially for years [in Bangladesh]. It was eternal happiness. After a couple of years with my hard-earned savings, I bought a land and built my own house in my home country. Once I felt I was financially stable enough to support and start my own family, I got married. I was blessed with a daughter. I brought them to the Kingdom [of Saudi Arabia] within a year.

As Yusuf portrays it, his migration to Saudi Arabia altered his obligations and shifted his expectations. Moreover, what is perhaps not obvious but certainly undergirds both examples presented above are the gendered features of the decisions that guide migrant family trajectories. As Tauseef further explained,

One of the reasons why, I mean, I had to come to Saudi Arabia was as I said, right at the beginning was like, you know, economic reasons for the simple reason that like, I am the eldest in the family. And in India, the families it's, you know, the eldest son is expected to support the family. You know, take care of younger siblings. There's a lot of expectations. So Saudi Arabia was, in a way, for me a way to fulfill some of those obligations as well.

Further elaborating on the pressures he felt as a migrant, he continued:

²⁷ This, and all the interlocutors' names that appear in this paper, are pseudonyms.

²⁸ Ishii et al., (2019), Kamrava and Babar (2012), Rajan and Oommen (2020).

²⁹ Márquez (2021).

You know, in some way I did things that I was like...like my first job, it was half-hearted. You know the thing for me is, if I didn't have those [family] pressures, I would have done probably something else, you know. But I have no regrets when things are not to be. And in the end, I mean it was all worth it. All the sacrifices you made. But I don't want to have my kids face the same situation, so in that sense, I have financially Alhamdulillah [thank God] secured my family so that my kids don't have to make those kinds of choices [in life].

Particularly of note here, we suggest, are his aspirations that his sons might avoid the same financial concerns and familial pressures that he endured as a transnational migrant. More directly, those aspirations and those objectives were strategically realized via a departure from the joint family system, and as a nuclear unit. In articulating these objectives, his account portrays how the nucleation of the migrating family can also shift the aspirations and expectations of the family's children.

While these shifts take shape in subsequent generations, Tauseef's comments also reveal how typical migration patterns from South Asia to the Arabian Peninsula simultaneously reproduce the patriarchal norms typical of South Asian sending countries: men typically migrate to fulfill their obligational duty as providers for the family, while women remain primarily responsible for the domestic sphere.³⁰ Even in diaspora, most South Asian women are regarded as the primary decision-makers in the domestic realm. Continuing, Tauseef noted that,

I wasn't very good at [managing obligations at home], but my wife did a great job of keeping the kids occupied at home, giving them tasks to do, playing with them, and keeping them involved. And my primary responsibility was to take them out for entertainment. That was my part. And I think my wife did an excellent job of keeping the kids engaged in learning.

As Tauseef, Yusuf, and numerous others portrayed their experiences and perspectives, patterns in the migration experience to Saudi Arabia became visible: generally, first-generation migrant women would join their husbands some time after their husband's initial arrival. Sometimes they would be accompanied by children as well. Few of the first-generation migrant women encountered in this study were employed in the host country. Instead, most remained focused on the domestic sphere. Interviews primarily revealed concerns about raising children in diaspora, or generally with managing family life in Saudi Arabia. They also described their central concern with children's religious socialization.³¹ Altogether, these gender roles and norms perceptible here reflect the influence of both South Asian and Islamic culture.

In the above examples, Tauseef spoke of his role in providing for family and meeting their expectations. Interestingly, his wife Muna mentioned that in her experience, migration to Saudi Arabia had resulted in an increased sense of freedom, and a visceral sense of autonomy. As she intimates here, these feelings reflected her distance from the pressures exerted by the extended family in her country of origin:

Muna: When I first came here [Saudi], I used to miss home, my city, my friends – everything! But now, having lived here for a long time, I feel more at home here. Even now when I go to Delhi to visit my family, I do not feel as comfortable as I feel over here, frankly.

³⁰ Kofman (2004), Leonard (2002), Pessar and Mahler (2003).

³¹ Franceschelli and O'Brien (2014), Leonard (2002), Rayaprol et al., (2021).

Areej: Can you please explain what you mean by feeling comfortable?

Muna: What I mean is, living here [in Saudi], we do not have a lot of people around; there is not much interaction with people. There is privacy as well. There is no interference from people. You can do things according to your will. It is not like we don't like it there [in India], but here [in Saudi], we can live according to our terms.

In this conversation, Muna portrays how the autonomy she acquired in the formation of a nuclear family shaped her sense of belonging in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, while reflecting on the long length of her residency in the Kingdom and her changing perceptions of India, like most other South Asians encountered in this study Muna referred to Saudi Arabia as “home.” She speaks, for example, about the sense of independence she developed away from the “interference” typical of India, and she spoke with pride about managing the affairs of her nuclear family in Saudi Arabia. In many households in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, extended families—especially parents and siblings—tend to be collectively involved in family decisions. This is particularly true for joint families. As Muna's experience clarifies, for many married women in this study migration entailed not only movement to a different country, but also separation from the joint family and the cultural system that surrounds it. As a result, migration to Saudi Arabia often resulted in a significant reconfiguration of family relationships and gender roles.

For many women, the nucleation of the family and the departure from the joint family system also lead to the redefinition of selfhood.³² For example, Husna, a first-generation Pakistani woman, had migrated with her husband to Saudi Arabia three decades ago. Before coming to Saudi Arabia, Husna lived in a joint family system at her family's home in Pakistan. Below, she describes how her role and her decisions shifted after her family migrated to Saudi Arabia and, in doing so, assumed the nuclear form.

I arrived from Pakistan, far away from my extended family, so living alone was a new experience for me. My husband was not as busy with his work when we first moved to Saudi Arabia, so we used to go to Aziziya [the marketplace] every evening to buy food and other necessities. Back then, we could purchase videotapes of movies. In 1992, I gave birth to my first daughter, my first kid. She was a baby girl, and my life got quite hectic with her because there is no mother-in-law, mother, or father over here [Saudi]. There are no family members present, therefore you must raise your children on your own. Thus, this was my first time. You know, as a mother, I was quite busy raising my daughter. What I find different here [in Saudi Arabia] is that you are responsible for yourself. And no one interferes with your life by instructing you how to raise your child, maintain your home, or interact with your spouse. And you don't have any relatives, which is both a positive and a negative thing.

Husna's reflection indicates the sociocultural norms expected of women in their roles as mothers and wives.³³ Husna's comments also portray women's recurring ambivalence about the reconfiguration of the family and the changing nature of their roles: like other participants in this study, Husna lauded some of these changes, and praised her newfound freedoms. At the same time, however, she articulated a set

³² Leonard (2002), Salih (2003).

³³ Kofman and Raghuram (2022).

of negative impacts resulting from the nucleation of the family. In her explication, foremost was the absence of the contextual extended family in times of need, and particularly during significant life events such as childbirth and family marriages—junctures at which women often required emotional and physical support.

The expression of increased autonomy by migrant South Asian women generally aligns with the findings of several other Gulf scholars regarding gendered belonging.³⁴ For example, in her study of Dubai, Neha Vora noted that middle-class South Asian women expressed a twofold sense of freedom; first, they spoke about their increased safety in moving around the city, and then also about a sense of increased agency in the context of their familial lives.³⁵ In the research described here, however, we couple those observations with a series of counterbalancing ethnographic data: this sense of increased independence and agency almost always emerged in tandem with subjects' reflections on the homes they had departed in South Asia, and the loss of the social connections those homes anchored.

Interestingly, while many migrant South Asian women appreciated the independence they encountered in diaspora and away from the joint family system, first-generation migrant women also dedicated time and energy to maintaining their nuclear families' connections to the social fabric they had left behind in their countries of origin. As Husna continued:

I used to make sure that my children go to Pakistan at least once or twice a year because our roots are from Pakistan ... So I made it a point to visit Pakistan more than once a year so that my children would understand they have roots in Pakistan through their grandfather, uncles, and aunts.

Along with frequent trips back and forth, other aspects of the transnational family life can be complicated. The children of transnational families resident on the Arabian Peninsula oftentimes depart for university education—typically returning to their parents' country of origin for education, or sometimes pursuing higher education elsewhere in the world.³⁶ This can often lead to the geographical dispersal of the nuclear family. Najma, for example, described a period of distress resulting from her nuclear family's geographic dispersal:

That phase [when her oldest son was studying in India] was very bad. One of my children had to stay here [in India], and I had to stay there [in Saudi Arabia] with the other two children because they were going to school there. That phase was very challenging. Now, all my kids are together, but still, my husband is working and living there [in Saudi]. He works hard and is alone. I feel sad for him.

When her other two children eventually joined their sibling in India for higher education, Najma spent most of her time there, in India, and visited her husband in Saudi Arabia only when possible. Her husband also started traveling back to India more frequently to spend time with his family.

³⁴ Gardner and Osella (2003), Gerry (2021), Leonard (2002), Vora (2008).

³⁵ Vora (2008).

³⁶ Ali (2011), Gardner (2008), Hosoda and Matsukawa (2019).

Accounts of frequent travel and of lives spent moving back and forth between the Arabian Peninsula and home are, altogether, commonplace features of life for many transnational families.³⁷ In many cases, fathers remained in Saudi Arabia because of employment obligations and the fundamental need to provide for the family. Mothers, however, were often more transnationally mobile—traveling back and forth between their countries of origin and residence, as Najma portrayed. In situations like these, some study participants emphasized the important role of the extended family in providing a supportive safety net for the transnational and mobile nuclear family. Members of extended families, such as grandparents, uncles, and aunts, often served as guardians for children while parents remained in Saudi Arabia or while mothers moved back and forth.

Additionally, migrants who brought nuclear families to Saudi Arabia typically envisioned futures in which they were reunited with the extended families they had departed. Other respondents sought to replicate the joint family in diaspora, or to otherwise rebuild the familial social context they had once departed. For example, while assessing their future options, some elder first-generation migrants revealed their wish to be emotionally and geographically close to their children and grandchildren.³⁸ Similarly, some second-generation children who grew up in one of the GCC host states articulated their desire to remain in a familiar place like Saudi Arabia. They would stress the value of being close to their families, which includes their aging parents and children, and thereby echoing the familial context their parents had originally departed.

All this suggests that the Gulf migration experience reshapes family life and household aspirations for South Asian families. As nuclear families migrate to Saudi Arabia, they experience significant changes in family dynamics and in the gender roles that members assume. The analysis reflects the counteracting patterns: while traditional patriarchal structures certainly endure, women seem particularly impacted by these changes, and they notably report gaining more personal autonomy in nuclear family units in diaspora. Nevertheless, a majority of them remain consigned to the domestic sphere of responsibilities—an outcome that reveals the influence of South Asian traditions, but also resonates with the Islamic traditions of their new countries of residence. While reflecting on their newfound freedom they found in departing the joint family dynamics in the sending state, many women also expressed a yearning for its social foundation. It is in the balance between these tensions that transnational migrant families exist. Yet even that precarious balance is impermanent: in the final accounting, the nucleation of the family often becomes permanent as subsequent generations often replicate the nuclear family form.

³⁷ Barglowski (2023), Kraler et al., (2011).

³⁸ Akinci (2022), Jamal (2023).

4 The Conceptual Hegemony of the Nuclear Family

To recapitulate, in this chapter we've offered a tripartite division of Gulf migration's impact upon the family. In migrant-sending states, families persist and evolve despite the departure of one or several members to remunerative work on the Arabian Peninsula. Other families traverse the same migration conduits as a nuclear unit, and in that sense, depart a social setting replete with other sorts of complicated households and diverse family structures. Third and finally, the incorporation of domestic workers into the quotidian activities of households in the migrant-receiving states has also reshaped those families, and both the gender roles and interrelations therein. In a sense, we commenced with our assertion that the impact of Gulf migration upon the family can be organizationally conceptualized in these three distinct realms.

In the subsequent section of this chapter, we utilized Jamal's dissertation research in Saudi Arabia to further explore and examine the second realm we had previously described. The observations and data collected by Jamal help illuminate the experiences of nuclear families who, as a singular unit, depart South Asia for work on the Arabian Peninsula. As we have portrayed, the nucleation of the family in transmigration results in a recurring set of impacts: in some sense, traditional South Asian gender roles and gender relations are replicated, as women are often consigned to the domestic sphere and the responsibilities therein. Women also often report developing a new sense of agency as well, and grapple with the ambivalent impacts of the family's departure from the broader social networks that enmeshed the joint household in South Asia. These impacts, and more, seem patterned in the experiences of nuclear families in the Gulf migration system.

There is, however, another issue buried in the folds of the experiences explored in this chapter. In his book *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott (1998) famously identified the diverse preconditions for the accumulation of hierarchical state power. For Scott, those preconditions involved the simplification of natural and human complexity—making orderly forests out of the complex canopy in rural Germany, forging cadastral maps of humans' complex patterns of tenure and ownership, unifying and simplifying our complex units of weights and measures, and so forth. The simplification of human and natural diversity rendered the landscape more legible for the implementation of hierarchical state power, Scott contends. We suggest something analogous is perceptible in the transnational field described in this chapter. Scholars, policymakers, and a constellation of other actors are engaged in the simplification of familial diversity in the transnational nexus that coalesces on the Arabian Peninsula. Examine the definition of "the family" articulated by G. P. Murdock many years ago:

The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one more more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabitating adults.³⁹

³⁹ Murdock (1949), 1–3.

Although penned by a sociologist, definitions of this sort are quintessentially concerned with humankind's social and cultural diversity. Families of various sorts share some common ground, but they come in all sorts of different shapes, compositions, and structures.⁴⁰ Consider again that this chapter explores the process of families' nucleation in the Gulf migration system. Many of those families depart one of the migrant-sending states in South Asia—a region notable for the heterogeneous social contexts in which the joint family system continues to be commonplace. As a nuclear unit, the families drawn from this context arrive to work and reside in a social context in which the extended familial form also remains a recurring social feature.⁴¹ From a bird-eye view, the last half century of transnational migration from South Asia to the Arabian Peninsula has nucleated countless families, despite the fact that those families both depart and arrive to social contexts remarkable for the perseverance of diverse familial forms.

It might also merit consideration that the nuclear family is the foundational and primary social unit in the West, in both the past and the present. Over the course of the twentieth Century, due to the economic primacy of the United States and, in part, via the institutions of higher education where ideas and understandings were both conceived and configured, various Western norms were projected into the global capitalist system and into the policy environments that enable it. On the Arabian Peninsula, and over several decades of gradual accretion, migration policies have been configured around various features of these Western norms. In part, at least, the nucleation of the family in the Gulf migration system indexes the long hegemony and the central role that America and the West have played in the proliferation of the global capitalist system.

As the global scholarly and academic system grows increasingly entwined, we ought to endeavor to identify and extricate some of the Western ethnocentricities woven into its fabric, and thereby seek to ensure that this singular global scholarly conversation maintains the differences that comprise the various social and intellectual traditions now convened in that conversation. Indeed, both South Asia and the Arabian Peninsula are key and important regions in the emergent global scholarly geography. In this chapter, we suggest that the nucleation of migrant families yields a discernible set of patterned impacts on those mobile household units. We also suggest, speculatively, that scholars and researchers play a role in this simplification, in replicating these understandings of family and its shape, and thereby in the process of injecting one iteration of "family" into the relevant policy environments via the research, scholarship, and analysis that informs it. In a more inclusive and diverse analytic conversation, scholars and researchers might endeavor not to reify pervasive ethnocentric concepts and ideas such as the nuclear family. And those same scholars and researchers—and particularly those concerned with "decolonization"—might productively explore the historical actors, agents, and discursive regimes that facilitated the simplification of the concept of family in this particular migration system.

⁴⁰ Murdock (1949). See also Stephens (1963).

⁴¹ Al-Ghanim (2012, 2020), Lansford et al., (2020).

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Chapter 35

Emerging Trends Among Transnational Bangladeshi Families in the Gulf



M. Mustahid Husain

Abstract This chapter examines emerging trends among transnational Bangladeshi families in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries through an interdisciplinary lens. Drawing on semi-structured interviews and fieldwork, it explores the lived experiences, challenges, and adaptations of these families in navigating the complexities of migration and cultural transitions. Key themes include the perks and hardships of urban life, evolving gender roles, access to education, marriage patterns, and the psychological impacts of familial separation. The findings shed light on the interplay between economic motivations and emotional factors, highlighting the significance of non-economic considerations in migration research and the need for amplified scholarly investigations into the multifaceted realities of transnational families.

1 Introduction

One of the massive contemporary trends around the world in the last four decades is labor migration that resulted in a large population of transnational families. The general precursor behind such a move remains having a better career opportunity, economic access, and increase the quality of living, as well as hope for a safer, less turbulent environment to raise families. However, this chapter problematizes the limitation of motivation algorithms vis-à-vis migration and transnationalism theories as they fail to consider emotional or psychological risks or factors. Unfortunately, an empirical study on the topic is scarce. The focus of this chapter is on racialized, Muslim South Asian nuclear families, in particular, Bangladeshi families based on their lived experience in the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC). Expat Bangladeshi families in the GCC have been essentially nuclear families, but it needs to be mentioned in this connection that there is a clear difference between the expat Bangladeshi nuclear family and the Western one in the region. The former seeks its syncretic cultural components derived from Hinduism, Arab Islamic, and British

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colonial sources. Therefore, expat Bangladeshi families in the GCC are in a transitional stage as they carry a number of features derived from the traditional extended family model and the Western model. These expat families mainly function as a social unit in which social interactions between family and community members occur within the context of social relations set by values and norms of their culture in the home country. At the same time, generally speaking, this expat group performs its basic social roles in the host country and aims to the benefit of its own immediate relatives and of community in the home country (Husain, 2019, 2022a, 2022b, 2024, n.d.). These conditions may not be apparent in a Western nuclear family residing in the GCC (El-Haddad, 2003). Interestingly, as the children and youth grow to be adults in expat Bangladeshi families, they appear to adapt toward the Western model of a nuclear family. While the GCC countries include Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman, the youth participants in the study grew up in Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. Therefore, the findings neither generalize findings and meanings for all the GCC countries, nor do the findings portray living experience for all racialized, Muslim expats in the region. Regardless, the voices shared in the findings section, which is preceded by the brief theoretical and methodological sections, can guide us through the feelings and experiences of the youth as grateful and privileged, and often as outsiders in a new land that shed light on coping and problem solving mechanisms from a positive and inclusive perspective.

2 Theoretical Guidance

Migration and transnationalism theories rely on rational choice models. These algorithms appear to generalize migrants' and their families' motivations, in which the economic costs and benefits of migrating to a host country are put on a premium (Husain, 2022b; Massey et al., 2002). Unfortunately, these algorithms remain indifferent toward considering emotional or psychological factors facilitating human decision-making process. Reasonably, transnational families can encounter issues during their transition, settlement, and integration in the host countries vis-à-vis conservative and even to the point of ethnocentric environments. Parreñas (2016) explores two dimensions of the transnational Filipino families: (i) the impact of distance on the intergenerational relationships, in particular, from the children's perspective; and (ii) analyzes gender norms in these families, both their reifications and transgressions in transnational households. The scholar acknowledges that geographical separation unavoidably strains family norms, bonding, and intimacy. The author makes an argument that the maintenance of traditional gender ideologies exacerbates and sometimes even creates new tensions that plague many Filipino migrant families. I employ the insight to analyze how intergenerational relationships and gender norms play out in the transnational Bangladeshi families in the GCC.

Existing scholarly literature exploring the outcomes of emotional or psychological risks or factors in transnational Bangladeshi families, in particular, in the GCC

countries, is limiting. To bridge the gap, my investigation considers step migration taken by transitional families of South Asian origin in the GCC. This includes youth, who grow up in the GCC going to the global North, in particular, Canada and United States, as international students and later seeking permanent residency naturalized processes. Many parents after retirement in the GCC join their children in North America and relocate there. Often it's the mother who joins the children abroad while the father stays back and work in the GCC. Courtesy of favorable family immigration laws in Canada, many translational families of South Asian origins from the GCC immigrated to Canada, in particular, in Toronto. Specific areas in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), for example, Mississauga, has a number of *Begum Para* neighborhoods of wives, whose husbands work and live in the GCC. Building upon that, this chapter takes a holistic, interdisciplinary approach to interpret migrants' experience in the two host countries, first in the GCC and then in the global North, in which transnational families remain split, and their stresses stay associated step migration frequently include: (i) familial separation; (ii) the breakdown of social support networks, and; (iii) the addition of new roles and responsibilities for all family members (Silver, 2014).

Results from around the world, such as Aguilera-Guzman et al. (2004), indicate that women, particularly mothers, are more adversely affected by family member migration than men. In addition, support structures for youth can suffer because of the loss of a tangible comfort provider and primary advice-giver. Moreover, youth can be vulnerable enough to be more affected by the out migration compare to one of their parents due to their daily reliance upon them. Overall, the strain of migration is connected to breakdown family support structures. Beyond the initial shock, however, daily life stressors may become more difficult to cope with due to diminished support networks. Studies examining migrants separated from their spouses and children indicate these individuals experience greater levels of depression than those who migrate with their families (Aroian & Norris, 2003). While most studies stress the primary importance of spousal relationships, other relationships throughout the life course differentially affect individuals' support structures.

It is important to acknowledge that my analysis does not include critiquing immigration laws in the GCC toward expats. Rather, I choose to discuss family members as remaining in the GCC, as well as acknowledge the idea that the youth remain in close contact with their nuclear family members back in the GCC, and may have no desire to change their place of residence. Although the family members, mainly the parent and younger siblings, may not feel vulnerable in the GCC, the breakup of families usually nonetheless induces considerable stressors that affect the daily lives of both students studying abroad in the global North and their family members back in the GCC. These specific findings illuminate the significance of non-economic measures in analyses of transnational migration. There are significant psychological and emotional repercussions of family member's out migration and these mental-welling conditions appear to be increasing evolving and the outcomes should not be undermined; rather they require amplified scholarly investigations in migration research.

3 Methodology

The paper draws on a review of the existing literature and primary research among Bangladeshi-Canadian and Bangladeshi-Americans immigrants that grew up in the UAE and Saudi Arabia between 1985 and 1999 and their families in these countries between 1985 and 2005. This research consisted of semi-structured individual phone interviews. I recruited respondents using snowball method in which each respondent provided up to two or three further contacts with potential respondents within their community. A total of 19 Bangladeshi-Canadians and Bangladeshi-Americans households were interviewed (12 in Canada, 7 in United States of America). The chapter also draws on findings from fieldwork conducted in United Arab Emirates in 2016 on the issue of migrant labor and masculinity.

4 Findings

Since 1980s transnationalism and globalization, as an interacting process, resulted in contributing to the rise of a new neoliberal phenomenon in the GCC whereby the tradition and the modern exist in tandem (Basch et al., 1994: 22). This new phenomenon offered immense technological advancement, progress in education quality and changes in the status of women. In addition, the outcomes paved paths for transnationalism, as well as presented new ideological implications in topics including social equality, social justice, and human rights. Unfortunately, at the same time, the outcomes deepened existing social problems and engendered new ones, such as decline in traditional family roles of caring for elderly. In this backdrop, transnational Bangladeshi families in the GCC find themselves confronted with and engaged in the nation-building processes of two or more nation-states encompassing their country of origin, the host country, and the new destination as part of step migration. At this juncture, the outcomes affect transnational families vis-à-vis their daily functions and relations, and often altered the structures of social institutions, such as family, education, and marriage. In the following sections I highlight some of these changes.

4.1 *The Perks and Privileges of Living in Urban GCC*

Bangladeshi professionals began to migrate to the GCC with their families since the late-1970s. These migrants from Bangladesh are highly diverse, criss-crossed by sharp differences in education, skill-sets, and social class. The working-class Bangladeshi laborers in the GCC live almost in a separate world, unfortunately, with only occasional reminders of their sense of community through celebrations of national day events (Khondker, 2003). The scholar also argues that the forces

of globalization have played a significant role in making the Bengali-speaking families transnational and then re-linking them to a complex web of relationships redefining the contours of community, in which nationalism is reproduced and gathers strength (Khondker, 2008, 178). This insight is relevant in interpreting the function of transnational Bengali families in the GCC.

“My identity as a Bangladeshi deepened since arrived in Jeddah in the mid-80 s. I realized the essence of my cultural origin. My cultural sense of identity and belonging depended further as I became a father. I realized the importance of trickling down these values onto my children,” shared a male informant who worked as an engineer in Saudi Arabia for three decades. The Alam family from Adu Dhabi, like many other Bangladeshi expats, had embarked on a journey that transcended geographical borders in search of better opportunities. Abu Dhabi, with its soaring skyscrapers and promises of prosperity, became a beacon of hope for families like the Alams. As they settled into their new lives, they discovered a blend of tradition and modernity that resonated with their values. Nafisa Alam, a resilient matriarch, found solace in the Bangladeshi community that had flourished in Abu Dhabi. For her husband, along with other Bangladeshi professional men, the local mosques became a post-prayer gathering point to share stories of their homeland, discuss the challenges of adapting to a new culture, and celebrate the triumphs of their collective journey. For them, Friday evenings were not just about family time but also about forging bonds with other Bangladeshi families that helped them navigate the complexities of expatriate life. The children of the Alam family found themselves straddling two worlds—the rich tapestry of their Bangladeshi heritage and the cosmopolitan allure of Abu Dhabi. In the heart of the city, they attended schools that welcomed students from various corners of the globe. Here, friendships blossomed, language barriers dissolved, and a shared sense of curiosity became the bridge that connected cultures.

Overall, the thriving job markets in the GCC offered opportunities for professional growth, drawing Bangladeshi expatriates from various fields. The Alam family, like many others, contributed to the region’s economic tapestry. The bustling souks and gleaming malls became places where their dreams were realized, and ambitions took flight. Based on the answers from my interlocutors, Bangladeshis in the GCC live dual lives and speak at least two or three languages (Bengali, English, and Arabic), have homes in two or three countries (GCC, Bangladesh, and Canada), and maintain regular contact with relatives and friends across national borders (Husain, 2024; Portes et al., 1999). They periodically returned to Bangladesh to visit families every year or so though that trend is altering.

I observed an emerging pattern that illustrates urban family get together these days take place in an exotic destination such as Turkey, or Sri Lanka, or Malaysia. Such a trend shows signs of increased standard of living and savings that is gathered after taking care of respective family in the host country and looking after elder parents and younger siblings in the home country. “Middle East is close to Asia, Africa, and Europe. Plus, Etihad, Emirates, Qatar airways cover many destinations and offer superior, international benchmark services. So, it’s wise to leverage that,” commented a male informant, aged 44, who grew up in Abu Dhabi and now works as a management consultant in New York. Many expat Bangladeshi families in the

UAE visit Saudi Arabia as part of a spiritual pilgrimage. In addition, as Khondker puts it, “Other occasions such as death or marriage may also bring members of the transnational family back ‘home.’ Important decisions are often held back so that the visiting members of the family can be consulted. Often, dates of marriages are fixed in view of the availability of overseas relatives who enjoy a certain amount of status just by being away from the homeland. The rituals of marriage and death often serve as reminders to re-socialize family members into the ways of the culture” (2008, 189).

Similar to the scholar, my interlocutors shared similar their similar observation on elderly parents that owning an apartment of a home in the posh residential districts of Dhaka using their earnings in GCC, the sense of owning a “home,” a place of their own “back home,” gave my informants a sense of satisfaction and contentment. “It is the force of nostalgia, the sense of belonging as well as peer pressure that makes many buy “homes.” Most expressed a strong desire to go home after retirement to live close to their kith and kin. Transnationalism affects the social life of the families who are caught in this double life differently at different life-cycle stages. With age, the yearning for home and sense of belonging intensify” (Khondker, 2008, 190). However, children who went to study in North America usually settle there. So, retired parents either split their time or relocate to stay closer to children and grandchildren.

In addition, generally, Children in the expat families that are born and raised in the GCC appear to lead “an upper-class privileged lifestyle” as shared by a female informant, who was born in Al Ain, UAE and is now settled in Toronto. Similar to her, many of her Bangladeshi friends are fluent in Bengali, compliment to attending weekend Bangla School, but have never lived in their “homes.” All her Bangladeshi friends from the UAE are now either in Canada or the USA. I argue that the effects of the school and of its requirements, as well as the influence of peers, especially during puberty and adolescence, played an instrumental part in these youth’s upbringing. The rising standards of living of families have enabled them to provide wide alternatives to their children, in particular, daughters that expanded their world and increased their demands, aspirations, and expectations far beyond what existed in traditional society. In additional, contemporary means of communication, in all forms, have increased the knowledge of young people and gave them specific alternatives that put them in touch with peers all over the world, and especially in the West. That access and experience influenced the aspirations of expat Bangladeshi youth.

When I asked the expat mothers about their spare times while raising family, the general answer engulfed consuming Bangla *natok* drama, Bollywood songs and movies, Hindi or Urdu television serials on satellite channels, all of which offered a common cultural space for interaction. Regular get together with other expat families over food, in particular, *Ilish mach* Hilsa fish and *adda* hangout, picnics when weather permits were frequent phenomenon. Consumption of these popular cultural products tends to create a common space and foster a broad “South Asian” identity. In addition, the GCC’s diverse culinary scene provides a nostalgic taste of home for the Bangladeshi families. The aroma of spices wafted through the air as they gathered in local eateries, savoring the familiar flavors of biryani and chapati. These culinary

experiences became a shared celebration of their roots, a comforting reminder that, even in a foreign land, they could find a piece of Bangladesh in every bite.

4.2 The Known and Unknowns Hardships of Living in Urban GCC

The journey for Bangladeshi expat families in the GCC has not been without its challenges. The transient nature of expatriate life meant that families often grappled with the pangs of homesickness. Before video calls and social media became lifelines, connecting them with loved ones oceans away was an excruciating and daunting endeavor. Moreover, Bangladeshi families in the GCC, like any expatriate community, may face a range of challenges. While the experiences can vary from family to family, some common issues include: firstly, cultural adjustment, which can be challenging for both adults and children. The conservative nature of GCC society may differ significantly from the more liberal culture in Bangladesh. Secondly, language can be a barrier, in particular, for those who are not fluent in Arabic. This may affect communication with locals, access to services, and overall integration into the community. Thirdly, some families may face challenges related to visas, residency permits, and legal requirements. Changes in immigration policies or difficulties in obtaining necessary documents can create stress and uncertainty. Next, breadwinners may experience workplace challenges such as long working hours, demanding job conditions, or issues related to workplace rights. Employment-related stress can impact the overall well-being of the family. In addition, finding suitable and affordable housing can be a concern for expatriate families. Living conditions may differ from what they are accustomed to in Bangladesh, and adjusting to new standards can be difficult.

Moreover, expatriates may experience social isolation due to language barriers, cultural differences, or a lack of local social connections. This can be particularly challenging for spouses and children who may feel isolated from their support networks. Generally, transnational nuclear families usually live in newly built cities that portray consumptive symbol, which Zayed (1998) characterizes as “impersonal and secondary social relationships” that “separates the individual from the environment of local community relationships, thereby turning his [or, her] life toward greater solitude.” This is true with transnational Bangladeshi families in the GCC. One female informant shared, “As a five years old, I relocated to Abu Dhabi with my mother and joined my father there. I left all my friends back in Bangladesh. My parents assured I would meet new friends in Abu Dhabi, but for the first 2–3 years I had almost no Bangla-speaking friend. It was a very sad and painful childhood experience for me.” Considering the content as a known pain of migration, there are interesting cultural factors that can help to explain the isolating experience of transnational Bangladeshi families. For example, expat Bangladeshi families prefer to mix with other Bangladeshis of similar background and remain content with staying in

touch with relatives back in the home country. These Bangladeshi transnational families appear cautious and restrict themselves in mixing with colleagues and neighbors of similar background. So, the initial social isolation many Bangladeshi families experienced in the GCC appears self-inflicted.

Other issues and challenges can be access to quality education and adjusting to the local education system, which can be a concern for expatriate families. Language differences and variations in the curriculum may pose challenges for children. Plus, understanding and accessing the healthcare system in the GCC might be a challenge. Differences in medical practices, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with local healthcare facilities can contribute to difficulties. Needless to say, Bangladesh and the GCC have different cultural and religious practices. Negotiating these differences in daily life, celebrations, and religious observances can be a source of stress for some families. Finally, families in the GCC often send remittances back to Bangladesh. The pressure to support extended family members and meet financial obligations in both countries can be overwhelming.

The list of issues will remain incomplete without adding a sensitive detail. Almost all the female interlocutors unanimously agree on a known pain. Speaking to seasoned female interlocutors in the presence of their daughters helped to understand a specific family structure in the expat Bangladeshi families in the GCC. The prevailing, often parochial, male domination aspect of the Bangladeshi culture complements family patriarchy among transnational Bangladeshi families in the GCC, where male authority and domination over family affairs are protected by culture.

It is important to note that while these challenges exist, many Bangladeshi families in the GCC also find ways to overcome them, build supportive communities, and create fulfilling lives in their new environment. As time passes the Bangladeshi families embrace the realities of GCC's urban life and its people. Interestingly, as children grow, the process of adaptation intensifies in these families. At the same time, with the death of parents and near and dear ones back in the home country, contact with their place of origin diminishes. It is worth mentioning that the process of adaptation differs from one group of emigrants to another. Support networks, both within the expatriate community and through local initiatives, play a crucial role in easing the transition and addressing these challenges. For example, the close-knit Bangladeshi communities in the GCC provide each other with a support system, offering comfort during times of longing.

4.3 Women and Work

In the 1980s and 90s Bangladeshi wives did not work outside and shouldered the main role in raising families and carrying out all the household work. Most Bangladeshi families did not have nannies or maids/servants. The biggest motivation behind that was cost savings. Besides that, raising children by servants carried negative connotations among Bangladeshi families. These days however, in more families both husband and wife work outside home; they need someone to care for their children

and perform cooking and cleaning duties at least two or three days per week. So, families remain open to hire part-time nannies or caregivers. Interestingly, initially Bangladeshi families preferred Muslim maids, preferably from Indonesia or South Asia, or if not from their home country. However, over the years, such a consideration was replaced with an appreciation toward professional efficiency and getting things done over religious, cultural, or linguistic affiliation and/or similarity. Such a mindset change is believed has to do generational change and appreciation for urban culture in the GCC that was facilitated by the financial provisions resulting from increased globalization.

Bagader (1993) presents that women's work and its significant contribution to family finances and well-being in the GCC. A working wife is currently preferred to help the husband in meeting the heavy financial demands of the new urban life. Hence, marital life is now based on true and real partnership as far as supporting household needs. The wife now has a say in the living conditions of her family and shares in decision-making. This transformation was not anticipated three decades ago. Bangladeshi women from expatriate families in the GCC countries in the past faced a number of unique challenges and then opportunities when it comes to working outside the home. While the situation can vary between countries and individual circumstances, generally, due to cultural norms of the conservative GCC societies, expat Bangladeshi women were expected to prioritize family life. Moreover, local labor laws and regulations were yet to become conducive. However, often there were opportunities for women in sectors such as education and healthcare, where female professionals were in demand. Moreover, some multinational companies operating in the GCC had progressive policies regarding the employment of women and provided opportunities in the corporate sector.

These days, expat Bangladeshi women working in highly technical and professional jobs were able to handle successfully the demands of their work and their private lives as females, mothers, wives, and public figures. These roles could be played through the network of social relations; the female can assume her role without having to confront the existing cultural system which appears from the outside as a system that deprives her of some rights, or that places so many constraints on her that do not enable her to live happily. Many educated men do not deny these female roles. It is true that we do not expect the Arab Gulf family life, even among the middle class, in the coming two decades to be similar to middle-class family life in industrial societies, where full equality or semi-full equality between husband and wives exist. Also we do not expect the status of women in the family or in society to be the same as it is in industrial societies. Gulf women are more knowledgeable and aware of what they can reach; however, the power of traditions and patriarchy are still effective.

In addition, the acceptance and prevalence of remote work provides flexibility for women to balance work and family responsibilities, have increased globally, and this trend is applicable in the GCC as well. Moreover, part-time work or flexible hours are available in certain industries, allowing women to maintain a work-life balance. In addition, many Bangladeshi women benefit from engaging with other expatriate communities, where they can share experiences, advice, and support that lead to a

better understanding and integration mechanisms into the local community leading to fostering positive relationships, and often opening up more opportunities. Finally, a number of Bangladeshi women explored entrepreneurship as a way to control their work schedules and contribute to their families and the local economy.

These recent changes transcend into altering family roles, in particular, for the husband. In this context, the transnational Bangladeshi families came across a significant shift in the last two decades. As of June-2023, almost most women interlocutors I interviewed had a job outside home. That access not only altered their household roles and responsibilities but also provided a fresh perspective. It can be added in this context that receiving higher education in business, technical, and professional field enabled women toward financial and social empowerment. At the same time, some of the participants added that despite working outside at a job, the household responsibilities did not diminish. So, they were stuck with working a “double shift” on a daily basis. However, generally, as women became more educated and received more financial and social freedom, they earned a voice to deal with patriarchy and traditional authority that subordinated and often subjugated women. With the expansion of personal dimension, liberal opinion and values received room to grow, nurture, and flourish, relations between males and females could aspire a balance of power. For example, many Bangladeshi expat households maintain a weekly or monthly routine that involves sharing cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing responsibilities between the husband and wife. In addition, women in these families have a growing say in cost allocation, wealth distribution, and making travel plans, among others. Such level of participation by wives and female household members was unseen two or three decades earlier among the expat Bangladeshi families in the GCC.

4.4 Higher Education

Accessing quality higher education in the 1990s was an issue for the youth in the expat families. With the establishment of branches by reputed western universities in the GCC in the past decades or so alleviated much of those challenges. During the 1990s, there were fewer universities in the GCC countries, and most of them were relatively new. The capacity of these institutions was often not sufficient to accommodate the growing demand for higher education. The governments in the GCC countries typically prioritized their citizens in matters of education, employment, and social services. This meant that access to higher education was often easier for nationals compared to expatriates. Therefore, youth in the Bangladeshi expat families seeking higher education predominantly went to the States, Britain, and Canada for university degrees. One interlocutor, who grew up in the UAE and now settled in Canada, added:

Courtesy of UAE's 2030 vision, now there're lots of options for higher studies. So, lots of youth are studying within the UAE. In the mid-90s as a youth I did not have such an option. And for parents, with more opportunities available, it's cheaper to get kids educated here. ...Overall, having these international education institutions help to broaden worldview. Back in the days our minds were so controlled; we were not critical thinkers. There were

so much censorship learning in school. We had no idea Israel existed in the world; not even in dictionary. Likewise, in an Indian school I had attended earlier, no one monitored the curriculum. So, the teachers did not include Kashmir in the Indian and world maps.

It is important to note that the situation has evolved over the years, and the GCC countries have invested significantly in developing their education systems. Today, many of these countries host prestigious universities and have become global education hubs, attracting students from around the world, including expatriates. Policies and attitudes toward expatriate education may have changed, allowing for more inclusive access to higher education in recent times. Thus, youth of Bangladeshi origin seeking higher education can stay put for their western education in the GCC with their families.

4.5 *Marriage and Divorce*

Marriage and divorce in expat Bangladeshi families in the GCC are usually influenced by a combination of cultural, legal, and economic factors. While experiences vary widely among individuals and families, interestingly, traditional arranged marriages are still prevalent among expat Bangladeshi families in the GCC. Families often play a significant role in finding suitable matches for their children. Also observable is the rise of marriage based on romantic love; women leaving the house to work and mixing with men; improvement in women's education; women playing a greater role in public life; and the new phenomenon of breaking the engagement and divorce. So, family transformation has been occurring in every Bangladeshi community in the GCC. Today there are other criteria and other characteristics that confirm a person's full membership in society, such as educational attainment and occupation or employment. A new phenomenon of remaining unmarried is appearing in Bengali families; however remaining single is not restricted to females, it involves males as well. The decision to remain single is not because women can't find husbands or men can't afford to marry. It reflects a desire to delay the "marriage project" by males or females until they realize their personal aspirations, such as obtaining the highest levels of education or mastering a certain profession or occupation. Some people may even be too busy with other activities that result in delaying marriage. A delay in age at first marriage is an important development that occurs as a result of severe economic causes. However, as time goes on delaying the time of marriage and increase in divorce rate might lead to redefining the importance of marriage or push it to later years, thereby reducing current birth rates, which are very high, and leading to unanticipated demographic changes; for instance, birth rates, and fertility rates among. Regardless, when marriage ceremonies materialize, they are heavily influenced by Bangladeshi cultural traditions even though families are living in a different cultural environment.

I could not find a recent statistic on the divorce rates in expat Bangladeshi families in the GCC. My interlocutors informed me that the legal procedures for divorce in

the GCC can vary between countries. Some countries follow Islamic law (Sharia), which plays a significant role in family matters. The legal process can be different from what expats may be familiar with in their home country. Despite changes in attitudes, divorce appears to carry a social stigma in Bangladeshi communities. This can affect individuals' decisions to seek divorce and may influence how they are perceived within their community. In addition, as expats, Bangladeshis have limited family support in the host country, and the absence of extended family can impact the resilience of marriages. A lack of a robust support system contributes to the challenges faced by couples. The experiences of expat Bangladeshi families in the GCC regarding marriage and divorce are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, legal, and economic factors. While some may navigate these challenges successfully, others may face difficulties due to cultural differences, legal constraints, or economic pressures. It's essential to consider individual circumstances and variations within the expatriate community.

5 Conclusion

The expat Bangladeshi families have benefited tremendously from the GCC's economic transformations. Their living standard has increased, and technological household machines and tools have become widely available. Economic development enabled the Gulf family to increase consumption, reflected in housing patterns, costs of marriage, types of cars, and other lifestyle aspects. Economic and social changes have also produced numerous individualistic values at the expense of collective values, thereby resulting in widening the social distance between couples and their children in particular. In turn, that has given rise to problems, such as separation and teen-age delinquency. These problems are serious and affect the family's role and solidarity. They also disrupt the economic and human capacity and capabilities of the family. More serious is their effect on the family's cultural identity. Hence, the future challenge facing Gulf society is how to support families engaged in a process of transition.

As the years unfold into decades, the GCC became not just a city of opportunity but a place where Bangladeshi families etched their lived experiences, lessons, and stories into the sands of time. The shimmering skyline bore witness to the dreams they pursued, the friendships they forged, and the resilience that defined their journey. In the heart of the desert, the echoes of "Joy Bangla" and "Bangladesh Zindabad" blended seamlessly with the cosmopolitan rhythm of the GCC cities, creating a symphony that celebrates the diversity of the persistent and diligent human experience.

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Chapter 36

Western Families in the UAE: Migration and the Implications for the Family Unit



Kristin Kamøy

Abstract This chapter gives insights into how Western expatriate families structure their lives in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The chapter begins with an overview of the scholarship concerned with expat families to the Gulf, especially the UAE, highlighting the dilemmas they face. Then it explores some of the dilemmas for Western families in the UAE. Additionally, it aims to fill the gaps in migration research on the Gulf as it contextualizes the Western family in the Gulf. The chapter calls for more ethnographic studies of the Western communities in the Arab Gulf.

Keywords Western expats · Western families · Western migration · Emirati family · Dubai · Sponsorship

1 Introduction

In March 2023, the English daily *The National* in the UAE reported that the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (GCC), otherwise referred to as Gulf states, were ranked as top global destinations for expats (The National, 2023). This news story highlights the experiences and benefits of expats globally and emphasizes the ease of moving to the Gulf states. Globally, expats value destinations that make it easy to manage essential needs such as housing, language, digital life, and administrative tasks.¹ The Gulf states have been recognized for their efforts to create an expat-friendly environment, which includes streamlined administrative processes and a high standard of living. This appeal makes the region particularly attractive for those seeking new opportunities abroad.

For decades, the Arab Gulf states have served as migration destinations for white-collar Westerners and their families. However, these families are understudied in

¹ <https://www.internations.org/expat-insider/2024/expat-essentials-index-40455> consulted on 7 July 2024.

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migration research in the Gulf. Most research on migrations in the region focuses on migrants from South and Southeast Asia (Hosoda, 2023; Tumbé, 2022; Vora, 2013; Wang, 2019; Wright, 2021). The majority of Asian migrants work in low-skilled occupations, but there is a sizeable group of professional workers (Tumbé, 2022). In contrast, the majority of Western migrants, defined as persons with citizenship from countries in Western Europe or North America, are employed as professional workers and make up a group of privileged migrants.

It should be clear that the difference in social status meant Asian migrations have spurred more research interest due to their situation of disadvantage. These migrants are often referred to as “migrant labor” or simply “migrants”, in contrast to “expatriates” or “expats”, terms which, until recently, were used to refer to privileged migrants or highly skilled migrants from the Global North. However, as transnational migration has increased, highly skilled persons from the Global South are also called as expats in the GCC countries (Guéraiche, 2016; Hosoda, 2013; Wang, 2022). While Western expatriates are commonly perceived as highly skilled professionals, the reality is more nuanced. The expatriate community in the UAE is diverse, including younger Westerners who hold positions requiring only a high school diploma, such as cabin crew for Emirates.²

Generally, expats are relocated by their employer from their home country or country of residency to work overseas for a specified period of time. They are expected to return to their country of origin or residency once their work contract ends. In the context of Western expats living in the Gulf, there is a distinction between assigned expats (company-initiated international assignments) and self-initiated expatriates, who intentionally move to the Gulf to work legally and are perceived as expats due to their privileges (Pinto et al., 2024).

This chapter primarily deals with the first group, but at times, both. These two expat groups share key characteristics during their time in the Gulf, including ascribed social status and perceived privileges (Scurry et al., 2013). However, there are inherent differences between assigned expats and self-initiated expats. First, assigned expats have a corporate safety net outside the UAE. Nevertheless, these same expats on a relocation contract may have corporate limitations on their time residing in the UAE. In reality, a Western expat family may arrive as relocation expats and transfer to a local employment contract. In sum, these notions of differences between expats are fluid. Both kinds of contracts carry implications for how Western expat families structure their stay in the UAE.

This chapter aims to provide insights into how Western expatriate families structure their lives in the UAE, highlighting the importance of understanding contemporary family models in the rapidly developing societies of the Gulf. Relying on primary sources, such as legal and official statements and news reporting, the chapter begins with an overview of the current state of scholarship concerned with expat families and Western migrations to the Gulf, particularly to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The second part of the chapter examines how Western families organize their lives in

² <https://www.emiratesgroupcareers.com/cabin-crew/> consulted on 7 July 2024.

the UAE and how they are influenced by the Emirati family model. The final section of this chapter explores the implications of Western families' stay in the UAE.

To contextualize the discussion, it is necessary to address the limitations in available data. Firstly, it is challenging to make definitive statistical claims about these families due to the lack of official data on the population composition in the UAE. This absence of data is partly because the UAE does not publicly disclose detailed demographic information, as discussions surrounding the country's population composition are considered sensitive (Guéraiche, 2022). The sensitivity surrounding these issues makes it difficult for researchers to access comprehensive data on the population's composition and dynamics.

2 Western Migrants in the UAE: Facts

In the mornings in Dubai, one is struck by the sight of queues of 4×4 vehicles carrying mothers and children. The traffic itself is noticeably affected by the school run. Certain areas of the city appear to be densely populated with Western expatriate women and their children. However, official statistics on the composition and nationalities of Western expatriates in the UAE are lacking. Researchers face challenges in verifying the exact number of Western expats, as demographic data only differentiate between citizens and non-citizens without specifying the nationalities of residents. The two primary sources for official statistics, the Federation Competitiveness and Statistics Centre (FCSC) in Abu Dhabi and the Dubai Statistics Center (DSC), only provide data categorized into these two broad groups. The UAE authorities conducted its last census in 2016, but the results are officially unavailable. In order to make sense of the demographics, a researcher can only resort to non-governmental sources. In 2020, the UAE's population was more than 10 million, with citizens counting around 1 million, according to official sources.³ Among the 9 million non-citizens, Western passport holders make up a minority. As an illustration, there are more than 3.5 million Indians in the UAE out of a total population of 10.6 million (The National, 2023).

However, there are inroads into mapping the Western expat community in the UAE. First and foremost, the largest group appears to be British citizens, estimated at around 120,000 (The National, 2021). In contrast, those from the USA have a population of 40,000, making them the second largest group. Thirdly, there are 26,000 French citizens.⁴ Interestingly, the UAE hosts one of the largest numbers of French citizens abroad (WAM, 2022). In comparison, Germany, the largest European trading partner of the UAE, has around 15,000 citizens in the Gulf country (Khaleej Times,

³ <https://fcsc.gov.ae/en-us/Pages/Statistics/Statistics-by-Subject.aspx#/%3Ffolder=Demography%20and%20Social/Population/Population&subject=Demography%20and%20Social> consulted on 4 July 2024.

⁴ <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/united-arab-emirates/france-and-united-arab-emirates-65102/> consulted on 7 July 2024.

2022; WAM, 2019). Other nationalities, such as the Scandinavians, are hardly noticeable in the population landscape of the UAE. These North-Europeans from small states are represented by, for example, 5,000 Swedish persons (Gulf News, 2023) and only around 1,100 Norwegians.⁵

It is often challenging for a researcher to establish the gender breakdown of the Western communities in the UAE. Embassies of their countries in the Emirates do not share data on gender and nationality. However, other sources provide data on the subject. Until recently, the ratio of men to women in the total population of the UAE has been approximately 3:1 (The National, 2017). The reason for this imbalance between the genders is due to the presence of an extraordinarily large number of single male workers from developing countries in Asia and Africa. GCC countries' policies concerning the requirement of a minimum income for family visas render these low-earning male workers incapable of bringing their family members to their host countries. In contrast, Western expats are broken down differently between genders and are likely more balanced.

In Dubai's private schools, Western minors are notably visible, contributing significantly to the majority of non-citizen children. According to the Knowledge and Human Development Authority, there were 365,572 children enrolled in Dubai private schools for the 2023/2024 school year, of which 33,099 were Emirati. This means more than 300,000 children in Dubai are non-citizens. Although there is no publicly available data on the specific nationalities of these children, the overall number of students in Dubai schools has doubled since the 2007/2008 school year, reflecting a substantial increase in the population of expatriate children.

To provide context on the geographic distribution of Western expatriates in the UAE, it is noteworthy that the majority reside in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Dubai is particularly prominent, having been ranked as the second-best city in the world for expatriates in January 2023 (WAM, 2023).

2.1 Literature Review

Studies on the Gulf have focused on South-South migration in the past two decades (Gardner, 2011), but North-South migration in the context of the Gulf region is still understudied. According to Chinmay Tumbe, migration to the Gulf is marked by South-South migration, and the themes in this migration research have generally been nationality and citizenship, labor rights, gender, and source region development (Tumbe, 2022). Scholars have worked in-depth on Asian migrations to the Gulf, which provides valuable insights into how structures in the Global South push and pull low-skilled labor to the Gulf (Kamrava & Babar, 2012; Khalaf et al., 2015; Matsukawa et al., 2023). An important early work in a national setting in the Gulf is Anh Nga Longva's 1997 study on migration, exclusion, and society in Kuwait. Longva examines the sponsorship system (kafala) and the different social categories

⁵ Norwegian Embassy in Abu Dhabi, e-mail correspondence, September 2023.

of citizens and migrants. Another important work on Asian migration in the Gulf state is by Andrew Gardner (2011), who investigates the lives of Indians in Bahrain. While he mainly focuses on migrant laborers from India, Gardner also deals with the Indian Diasporic Elite in Bahrain. More recently, Claire Beaugrand (2019) examined statelessness (*bidoons*) in Kuwait which is set against the background of migration and belonging. Neha Vora (2013) studied the second generation of Indian migrants in the Emirates. Wang (2019, 2022) adds essential insights with her work on the Chinese community in Dubai. Finally, scholars have worked on Filipino migrants to the UAE, but so far, there is no in-depth study on the topic (Gueraiche, 2016; Hosoda, 2013, 2019, 2023). Furthermore, scholarly works on Gulf states like Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, have so far refrained from addressing migrations as a main theme (Kamrava, 2015; Kéchichian, 2023; Ulrichsen, 2014, 2020; Valeri, 2009; Worrall, 2018).

Despite the fact that the majority of studies focus on South-South migration, there are a few studies that have focused on Western expat communities in the Gulf. Amelie Renard's (2021) study on Western expats and their families is one the first substantial works on Westerners in the Gulf. Renard deals mainly with the French expats and their privileges in Dubai. Renard argues that Western expats have structural advantages in the job market due to their Western passports. In sum, Renard argues that Western privilege, which often transforms into white privilege, manifests differently for male and female Westerners in Dubai. She also addresses common research themes on expats in the Gulf, such as their relationships with domestic employees (Dickson, 2019; Nagy, 1998) and hedonistic lifestyles (Walsh, 2006, 2007).

Besides these studies, over the past decade, research on Western expats in the UAE has focused on four themes; "expatriate bubble" and segregated lives (Cosquer, 2021), diversity and openness to "others" (Chaveneau & Dubucs, 2021), home-making practices and belonging (Kanna et al., 2014; Vora, 2013; Walsh, 2009, 2011, 2012), and status migration (Primecz, 2023). This chapter aims to fill a gap in the migration research on the UAE by providing an overview of the history of Western migrations into the UAE. Beyond this historical review, it seeks to present a clear understanding of what is known about Western expats in the UAE.

2.1.1 Presence: From Imperial Administration to Wealth Management

The UAE, especially Dubai, has been a hub for migration for centuries. Recent migration history in the Emirates can be divided into early colonial history, imperial administration until independence in 1971, and contemporary society. It should be noted that significant information on early colonial history comes from colonial agents who regularly reported on Gulf Affairs in the sheikdoms.⁶ During the first half of the twentieth century, the majority of Western expats in the Trucial States (today's UAE) were British. There are historical records of Westerners and families of employees in diplomatic missions, such as assistants at political agencies in the

⁶ Record of the Emirates, primary documents, 1820–1958, Volume 1, 1820–1835.

1950s, and staffs at banks such as the British Bank of the Middle East in the Emirates (The National, 2018). For instance, Honor Cowell, a British citizen who arrived in Abu Dhabi in 1956 with her husband, was appointed as the local director of the British Petroleum and Total-owned Abu Dhabi Marine Areas (The National, 2017). Some Westerners, especially English language natives found teaching posts in the UAE in the 1960s. Gwen Gardiner, from Northern Ireland, was a teacher at the first girls' secondary school in Abu Dhabi in 1968 (The National, 8 March 2009). She arrived in the UAE with her husband after having taught in Kuwait and Bahrain. She stayed almost a decade before returning home and describing how her Emirati host was perplexed to learn her children were sent to boarding school in the UK. In contrast, male Western expats of European origin have been engaged with Emirati militaries since the 1960s (Yates, 2016). However, the records on how many of them brought their families are unavailable. The first German company on Emirati soil dug for water in Al Ain in the 1960s (Khaleej Times, 2022).

Further, a growing number of skilled Westerners took notice of the UAE as a work destination after the discovery of oil in the Emirates. A few years later, Dubai, with its pioneering developments in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the Jebel Ali port and free zone, became a regional logistics and infrastructure hub. This transformation created numerous positions that attracted highly skilled Westerners. The inauguration of the Burj Al Arab, the world's first seven-star hotel, in 1999, further added to Dubai's allure. Consequently, more Westerners began turning their attention to the UAE due to its burgeoning business opportunities.

2.2 *Why Leave the West for the Desert?*

Several factors attract foreign citizens to the UAE. Firstly, the financial gain is a significant pull for migrant families, including Western expatriates (Naithani, 2016; O'Reilly, 2022). Historically, Western expats expected and often received substantial financial benefits when relocating to the UAE. However, the reality of these financial advantages has become more complex in recent years.

Second, expats pay no income tax in the UAE, which means that their savings, in some cases, are higher than the salaries they would receive in their home countries. Nevertheless, the high living cost of Dubai in addition to hiring companies canceling or trimming tangible benefits linked to the expat family contract and downscaling has also impacted expats' earnings (The National, 2018). Previously, Western expatriates anticipated substantial savings from their time in the UAE (The National, 2015). Today, many report that the elevated cost of living impedes their ability to save (Khaleej Times, 2024) or necessitates relocating their families. Some expatriates express concerns about being priced out of their neighborhoods in Dubai (The National, 2023). Nevertheless, certain Western expatriates continue to accumulate savings by remaining in Dubai under high-value compensation packages (The National, 2024).

Third, the UAE's exceptionally low crime rate is often highlighted as a major advantage for expatriates.⁷ In 2022, Dubai reported theft, drug-related offenses, and burglary as the most common crimes, with rates significantly lower compared to global averages.⁸ For Western families, this translates to a sense of safety and security in the Middle East. As a result, the primary breadwinner or the father can comfortably travel for work while leaving their family behind, knowing they are in a secure environment.

Fourth, the UAE offers a diversity of services that add to its allure. Generally, this easiness refers to the option for many Western expats to hire domestic staff such as nannies and or maids to help with young children (The National, 21 September 2017). Finally, many Western expatriates are drawn to the UAE not only for professional opportunities but also for the adventure of living abroad as a family.⁹ This shared experience provides them with unique and memorable life experiences that strengthen family bonds and offer a broader perspective on the world. It is common for Western families to arrive for a year but end up staying for many years. Expats reported that the reason is the quality of life in the UAE.¹⁰ Others maintain that the financial package makes it challenging to leave the UAE. Besides, a prior history of transnationalism appears to be a common feature among Westerners settling in the UAE. This includes being a member of a transnational family, growing up or living outside the home country for a period of time, studying abroad, or prior work assignments abroad.

Besides the pull factors of UAE, citizens from the West are also forced to leave their host countries due to stagnant Western labor markets where it is challenging to climb the corporate ladder. High unemployment rates in some Western states push new graduates to look outside the Western markets. Since the last couple of decades, companies in the UAE actively recruited expats from Western countries for high-paying jobs. For some expats, working in the Emirates was seen as an important step in their international career. Others were able to gain a better experience in their field than in their home countries. Furthermore, the establishment of international university branches in the Emirates, such as the Australian University of Wollongong in Dubai (1993), British Middlesex University Dubai (2005), British Heriot-Watt University Dubai (2005), and others, have attracted Western academics to the UAE and employ new graduates from the West willing to make the move as well as trailing partners looking for employment.¹¹

Socio-spatially, Western expat families in Dubai tend to live in areas such as the Arabian Ranches, Greens, or the Palm, as expats who end up staying longer than

⁷ <https://getgis.org/blog/is-the-uae-safe> consulted on 7 July 2024.

⁸ https://www.dubai.police.gov.ae/wps/portal/home/opendata/majorcrimestatistics!/ut/p/z0/04_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfljo8zi_T29HQ2NvA18_V2NzQwCA_y9Ayy83Y3cvcz0g1Pz9AuyHRUBB3FbHA!!/ consulted on 7 July 2024.

⁹ <https://www.internations.org/magazine/expat-life-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly-39929> consulted on 7 July 2024.

¹⁰ Khaleej Times, 22 May 2023.

¹¹ <https://www.uowdubai.ac.ae>, <https://shorturl.at/WSQXF>, <https://www.hw.ac.uk/dubai/> consulted on 4 July 2024.

intended tend to buy properties. In 2001, Dubai became the first emirate in the UAE to permit non-citizens to purchase property in designated areas (WAM, 2001). For expatriate families who choose to rent rather than purchase property, neighborhoods near the beach, such as Jumeirah and Umm Suqeim, offer attractive options due to their desirable locations and high quality of living. Rentals in these areas often consist of spacious villas with pool and 24/7 security (WAM, 2001). The proximity to the beach in these areas further enhances their attractiveness, particularly for mothers with young children who value easy access to recreational and leisure activities.

Furthermore, each Western nationality in Dubai has access to national networks which adds to the comfort of the Western family. These national networks are visible in the urban landscape. For the British, there are numerous British nurseries and schools dotted around areas like Jumeirah, Umm Sequim, Barsha, Safa, and private clubs like Dubai Offshore Sailing Club (DOSC) on the shore in Jumeirah with its own harbor for its members. The Americans, similar to the British, prefer good quality US schools. While the French have their French curriculum schools, they also have their culture center, Alliance France, in two locations in Dubai. The Germans have their nursery and their German school. Even the Scandinavians have their own social club, such as the Norwegian Seamen Centre, which is a little haven for Scandinavians in Dubai. Furthermore, each of these nationalities often form their own business councils, creating close-knit communities that enhance social life for expatriates. The majority of non-Western migrants have national networks as well. However, in the case of Western expats these national networks can be ready-made support networks for already privileged groups. As an illustration, a Western mother who just arrived can attend a mother and baby group and have instant access to contacts and advice on how to integrate her and her family.

2.2.1 Immigration Policies and Western Families

Like other UAE migrants, the residency and labor laws dictate the stay of the Western families in the country.¹² Generally, these two federal laws work in tandem to establish the sponsorship system, or kafala system, which links the residency of Western expatriate families to their employment contracts (Kamøy, 2021). For the Western family, it generally means the male breadwinner is the sponsor of the rest of his family and any potential domestic staff members.¹³ The emirate of Dubai allows female breadwinners to sponsor their husbands, but this is not the norm. Concerning wives, sponsorship entails that wives cannot work without a no objection letter from their husbands or their sponsors and may not drive a vehicle without husbands' authorization. However, the law regarding driving varies in different Emirates. Moreover,

¹² Federal Law No. 6 of 1973 On Entry and Residence of Foreigners, Issuing The Implementing Regulation To Federal Law No. 6 Of 1973 On Aliens Entry And Residence and Federal Law No. 8 of 1980 Concerning the Regulation of Labor Relations.

¹³ <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/visa-and-emirates-id/residence-visas/residence-visa-for-family-members> consulted on / july 2024.

families may need to adjust the residency status of their members during their stay, as mothers often enter and leave the workforce based on their caregiving responsibilities or changes in their employment contracts. Ultimately, if the breadwinner no longer has an employment contract, the family will have to leave the UAE or risk fines for overstaying their visas. Recently, the UAE has introduced a Golden Visa, offering ten years of residency without the need for a sponsor. However, for families with no income, staying in the country can be challenging. A significant concern among many Westerners in Dubai is where they would go if they had to leave the UAE. For many Western families, this question remains unresolved even after several years of living in the region.

3 Western Perception and the Emirati Family

3.1 *The Emirati Family Model*

3.1.1 Emirati Fertility

Family is important to Emirati culture as the number of children in local families is still higher than the number of children in Western families.¹⁴ As a result of this cultural focus on fertility, Westerners perceive Emiratis as having families with multiple children and with cultural values, emphasizing the family over the individual (Sabban, 2020; Shukla et al., 2023). There are several reasons for this view of Emirati fertility. The family-oriented perception highlights the importance of fertility and subordination of the individual in family life. Available data suggests that Emirati married couples have fewer children than before, but their fertility is still higher than that of married couples in the West. The local family model consists of more than three children (88% of UAE families have more than four children) (Sabban, 2014). Most Emirati fertility consists of more than three children per woman, but the fertility rate per woman has declined since the start of the century (Al Awad & Chartouni, 2014). However, Emirati culture is a collectivist culture where family and children are highly valued. Shukla et al. (2023) show that the average Emirati youth ideally wish to have 5.4 children in their future families, with a preference for sons over daughters.

3.1.2 Western Fertility Trends in the UAE

Little is known about Western fertility rates in the UAE, as available data are generally categorized only by citizenship status, not by specific nationality. Families who

¹⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths> consulted on 7 July 2024.

choose to extend their stay in the Emirates might decide to have another child, particularly if they have the option to extend their employment contract. Additionally, women who have left their careers to support their husband's careers or who would otherwise be working outside of Dubai might be more inclined to expand their families (The National, 2011). Furthermore, the availability of domestic support, such as nannies or maids, can ease the challenges of raising additional children, making the decision to grow their families more feasible.

3.1.3 Emiratis and Domestic Workers

Domestic workers are a prominent feature of Emirati public life, often seen in shopping malls, playgrounds, parks, nurseries, and schools. On average, Emirati families employ more than three domestic workers—such as maids, nannies, and servants—per household (Sabban, 2014, 2020). This represents an increase from the 1990s, when families typically had around two domestic workers (Sabban, 2014, p. 3). The rise in domestic staff can be attributed to the improved economic conditions brought about by oil and gas revenues (Sabban, 2014). More than 90% of Emirati families now rely on domestic staff, leading to a structural dependency on these workers (Sabban, 2014, 2020).

The presence of domestic workers has significantly enabled Emirati women to participate more actively in the public sphere. However, assessing the full impact of domestic workers on the UAE family dynamics is complex. Privacy is highly valued in Emirati culture, which complicates research into this area (Roumani, 2005).

3.1.4 Western Families and Domestic Workers

Research on Western expats and their interactions with maids in the UAE is scant, with only a handful of studies addressing this topic (Nagy, 1998). However, there is a significant gap in understanding how Western children are affected by being raised by nannies from Asia and Africa. Studies have looked into the issues of domestic workers in the UAE, but they have mainly focused on the working conditions and coping strategies of domestic workers (Ishii, 2019; Mcgeehan & Keane, 2008; Parreñas et al., 2019; Mahdavi, 2013, 2014; Sabban, 2004). Little research exists on employers, or specifically Westerners and domestic staff in the UAE. The exception is Renard (2021) and her investigation in Dubai into the ambivalent stance of employing and moralizing over this employment.

Western families in the UAE frequently choose to hire domestic staff, as the presence of a maid has become closely associated with a comfortable lifestyle. More than 90% of expats have domestic staff (Sabban, 2004). However, the survey does not distinguish between different nationalities, so it is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of Western families who have hired maids. They also have live-in maid arrangements. Beyond obvious reasons, such as the lack of extended family support and living on another continent, the need for such an arrangement is essentially

financial and practical. The live-in arrangement is more cost-effective and provides assistance when needed by the family. Western women often view having a maid as a means to avoid interrupting their social and professional lives for household chores. With domestic staff, Western women can enjoy their new environment without the constant burden of housework and child care. While domestic staff frees the mothers to a certain extent from household responsibilities, the presence of live-in maids may result in a separation between children and parents and reinforce issues of identity in a foreign location.

The majority of Westerners in the UAE have no prior experience with domestic staff as many might not have hired domestic staff prior. As a result, Western mothers may struggle with leaving their children with nannies. Western women often discuss how to manage the maid and children when the mother is out of the house. It must be noted that the challenges of employing live-in maids are recurrent issues among all nationalities in the UAE (The National, 2015).

4 Western Families and Adaption to the Local Context

4.1 Western Families and Sponsorship: The Backdrop

The Emirati sponsorship law provides a framework for how Western families structure their lives in the UAE. In general, Western families depend on the stable employment of the male sponsor to reside. As a result, the equality between the husband and wife of the Western family might change during time spent in the UAE. Highly skilled expats are often perceived by citizens and other expats in the UAE to have contracts that may include a package of accommodation and educational benefits on top of a financial salary, making life comfortable (The National, 2023).

The traditional expat contract which often entails a male breadwinner, and a trailing wife means the dual-career model of the West where both have a career and work actively might be financially unnecessary for the family in the UAE. Consequently, it may be more practical for the family unit to have the mother stay at home to better support the younger children. The time constraints associated with relocation to the UAE, coupled with the demands of adapting to a new environment, often make this arrangement more feasible. As a result, families tend to structure their lives around the employment contract of the male head of the family.

4.2 Working Expat Mothers

While many women are employed and have children, female expatriates in the UAE face significant challenges related to balancing child-rearing responsibilities and their own careers. In addition, the expat package may also add to the hurdles for the expat

wife. This package may include financial benefits for the wife, such as a lump sum for annual retirement. However, this benefit may be attached to the wife not working full-time. Although small, such perks tend to prevent trailing wives from working.

Expat wives who are sponsored by their husband needs a no objection letter from their husband allowing them to work. While this letter of no objection might be easy to obtain, it signifies the subordination of the wife to the husband, which is different from working in the West. However, this letter is linked to the sponsorship system, and men who are sponsored by their wives in Dubai need a letter as well.

Generally, Western expats wives struggle with finding a job that pays enough to excuse their absence from childcare responsibilities. Western female expats might have the structural advantage of holding a degree from a Western institution, which can be appealing in a labor market where some employers prefer candidates with Western-recognized university diplomas. However, local conditions in the Emirates, including the high number of highly skilled trailing wives available to work, make it challenging to find a suitable position.

Consequently, the expat wives become increasingly financially dependent on their husbands. In terms of their professional careers, expat women are unable to launch or advance their careers. This results in a labor market in the Emirates with highly skilled employees available locally who could work, but are not fully utilized.

Expatriate women who are trailing spouses often face the perception that their jobs are merely hobbies and dispensable. This view stems from the assumption that they do not need to work, given their partner's primary employment and the financial stability it provides. Western women navigate these hurdles by reinventing themselves as expat-preneur, artists, coaches, or writers while abroad. From a corporate perspective, the expatriate spouse plays a crucial role in the success of international assignments. The well-being and support of the expatriate's partner significantly impact the effectiveness and overall success of these assignments (Rashi et al., 2021).

Trailing wives in Dubai go through an identity pause and reactivation as part of their identity redevelopment status (Rowson et al., 2022). Research finds no significant differences in happiness between employed and unemployed women among expat wives (Mendonca et al., 2020).

4.3 Western Families and Social Life

Prior to the family's relocation to the UAE, some corporations in the West have information days for the families to be relocated (AlMazrouei & Pech 2014; Tahir, 2021). These information days sometimes stress that the designated role for women will be the social focal point of the family abroad. This focal point role means connecting the family to their home country and grounding the family in the UAE. In reality, this means the wife is expected to establish relations in the expat communities, so the family unit has social engagements. While the employed expat has a "ready-made life", expat spouses do "mobility work" (Büchle, 2018). Socially, expat women are often defined by their husbands' careers in the UAE. Expat communities are

Table 1 Divorce in the UAE by Emirati or non-Emirati nationality in 2021

Total divorce cases 2021	Non-Emirati husband and non-Emirati wife	Non-Emirati husband and Emirati wife	Emirati husband and Emirati wife	Emirati husband and non-Emirati wife
	2.272	199	2.163	816

Source FCSC¹⁶

primarily focused on professional achievements, and within this context, expat wives can appear socially marginalized, with their identities largely shaped by their roles as mothers and wives.

Women encounter societal expectations of their roles through the education system as well. Schools in the Emirates frequently schedule events during the working day, such as sports day and book day. These daytime events are a novelty for Western families, as schools in the West typically do not assume that parents will be available during office hours to attend such activities. In the UAE, mothers are encouraged to participate in events like sports day during working hours to support their children because most of them do not work.

Additionally, in the Emirates, the international school system often does not include after-school clubs for younger children like in many Western contexts. As a result, younger children must be cared for by their families or nannies after school finishes often around lunchtime. A combination of factors, such as the hot climate and the non-pedestrian structure of Dubai, means that children often need to be driven back and forth to school. This reliance on driving creates more hurdles for women who want to work, as employing a driver is not viable.

4.4 Western Families and Divorce

Little is known statistically about Western families and divorce in the UAE. Official numbers are only broken down by Emirati and non-Emirati, not by nationality.¹⁵ Yet, it is evident that divorce is highest among non-Emirati couples (2.272). However, Emirati males and Emirati females are not far behind (2.163) (see Table 1).

Research on divorce in the UAE is primarily focused on Emiratis and divorce (Bromfield, 2014, 2016; Gharaibeh, 2022). Divorce might be challenging due to residency rules, as the sponsored partner might need to leave if the marriage breaks down.

¹⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths> consulted on 10 March 2025.

¹⁶ <https://fcsc.gov.ae/en-us/Pages/Statistics/Statistics-by-Subject.aspx#/%3Ffolder=Demography%20and%20Social/Vital%20Statistics/Marriages%20and%20Divorces&subject=Demography%20and%20Social> consulted on 7 July 2024.

Moreover, reliable data on domestic violence in the UAE remains scarce, and there are no specific statistics available regarding Western families and domestic violence. However, available data from the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children reveals that non-Emirati victims constitute 76% of those seeking assistance at their shelter, compared to 24% of Emirati victims (Dubai Foundation for Women and Children, Annual Report, 2020). The sensitivity of the topic has limited research in this area. On the legal front, the UAE authorities introduced the first federal law on protection against family violence in November 2019, aiming to enhance legal protections for victims of abuse.¹⁷

4.5 The Western Family and Return

Given the temporary nature of migration, most Western expatriates in the UAE eventually return to their home countries or their partner's home country. This trend is often driven by contract expiration and the high cost of living in the UAE, even if the contract is extended (Osmandzikovic, 2023). From a social status perspective, while expatriate men typically retain their social status, women may face challenges. Expatriate women, in particular, may lack strong connections to the national social systems. Lundstrøm (2018) highlights in her study of Swedish female expatriates that these women often find themselves caught between the expectations of a global labor market, which demands flexibility, and national welfare systems that rely on residency and national employment.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has expanded the lens of migration research on the Gulf. It illustrates how Western expatriates' families in the UAE adapt to the local context. Although, until recently, the main drivers for these expats to migrate to the Gulf were the financial package and professional opportunities, these drivers have also included an experience for life and the quality of life.

While Western families often enjoy a high standard of living in the UAE, living in a foreign country presents its own set of challenges. The comfort of life in the UAE does not negate the pressures faced by the family unit in adapting to a new environment. Balancing two professional careers and navigating the work–life boundaries perceived in the Gulf can be particularly demanding on the family dynamic. (Adekoya et al., 2021). Consequently, Western families often opt to keep the trailing partner out of formal employment, or the trailing partner may assume additional household responsibilities. As a result, Western women frequently face professional setbacks

¹⁷ <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/policies/social-affairs/family-protection-policy> consulted on 7 July 2024.

during their stay, despite their engagement in voluntary or entrepreneurial activities. These activities, however, are often outside the traditional corporate or public sector frameworks, which limits their professional advancement. Additionally, Western families may choose to have more children during their stay in the UAE.

Further research is needed to explore how Western families make migration decisions, their experiences as expatriates, and how they navigate the challenges of expatriation. Understanding how expatriation reshapes the family unit and influences their return to leading destinations, such as the Arab Gulf, will provide valuable insights into the dynamics of international migration.

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Chapter 37

Education in the Gulf: Pakistani Migrant Families' Strategies



Sugra Bibi

Abstract The kindergarten to Grade 12 education landscape of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is characterised by free education for citizens. In contrast, migrant families and temporary residents often face limited private and public school spaces, prohibitive schooling fees, and fragmented information from government sources. This chapter employs ethnographic and oral history methods to explore the experiences of migrant families. It demonstrates that rather than homeschooling being a new phenomenon, an older tradition exists among lower-income Pakistani households in the GCC to homeschool their children. Pakistani women access educational materials to homeschool their children and earn income through tutoring while supporting social change.

Keywords Education • Fees • Homeschooling • Choices • Strategies • Resilience

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 saw parents globally taking a more significant role in their children's learning, with some revealing differences between various social groups (Sanrey et al., 2021). Parents' social position influenced the capability and access to digital equipment and their overall preparedness to homeschool their children. Additionally, social class also influenced the type of activities they integrated into their children's structured time, which covered "educationally profitable" activities, including reading, arts, and sports, as opposed to "educationally unprofitable" activities such as watching television. Sanrey et al. (2021) suggest that research on learning loss among students during the school summer closures may signal a widening in the achievement gap between pupils of different class backgrounds arising from the school closures and lockdown. The authors drawing on

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the works of Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) suggest that the lockdown and home-schooling may have boosted the process and the role of education in reproducing future social differentiations.

Following the pandemic, there was an increase in the number of families *choosing* to homeschool their children globally. Prior to the lockdown, around 2.5 million students were homeschooled in the United States (U.S.), and the numbers increased to 4 million following the end of the pandemic (Hernholm, 2024). This transition allows families and parents greater autonomy in choosing the path that best aligns with their values, goals, and aspirations. In tandem with the increased interest in homeschooling in Western countries, the trend is growing and also taking hold in the GCC countries, as expatriate parents have begun questioning traditional pedagogical methods of teaching. This pattern, combined with some financial considerations, is giving rise to the reconsideration of schooling methods in the Gulf region (KDHA, 2011).

Existing scholarship on migration in GCC countries has highlighted the challenges that migrants' face in the host countries. For instance, in the UAE, the classification of the nation's population into citizens and different resident categories with various rights impacts migrants adversely. Three broad categories have evolved with the population being grouped into full citizenship or *Khulasat al-Qaid* (for those who trace their lineage in the UAE to 1925 or before), locals with passports (those who possess travel documents but not full citizenship rights), and Bedouins (UAE residents but without *Khulasat al-Qaid*, or passports and technically unregistered nomads) (Jamal, 2015). However, only those with *Khulasat al-Qaid* status are considered citizens and entitled to a wide array of state-provided privileges, including free health care and education in public institutions. Besides these categories, migrants employed by *Kafeel* (sponsors) in the UAE countries have entry visas, work permits, and residence permits. Within migrant communities, a hierarchy exists, with some groups being favoured over others. This results in disparities in salary levels and easier access to work visas for certain communities.

Existing literature has also pointed to the culture of separation and exclusion of single migrant labour from certain spaces and services in the GCC countries. Scholars have specifically noted the paucity of information collected by government institutions concerning labourers' lives, health, and social service needs (Kashif et al., 2019; Salama et al. 2017; Hamza, 2015; Gardner, 2011). Other scholarship has focused on the South-North migration-education nexus and the issues impacting migrants' children. Kippels and Ridge (2019) map out the education services at the UAE pre-university level and the information available to lower-income migrant families. Gardener (2011) examines various types of cultural education and higher education opportunities that migrant families seek. In examining the choices parents make around educational practices and children's participation, Sanchos (2020) emphasises the agency of migrant families. Sanchos argues that these educational practices, including sending children to Indian or non-Indian schools, home visits, and educational returns for university, are aimed at exposing children to a new cultural milieu. This exposure helps them gain experience and develop social networks for careers in transnational spaces (Sancho, 2020).

The chapter looks broadly at the educational aspirations of families and their responses to the contextual issues and constraints in the education environment adversely impacting them. Given the post-pandemic rise in homeschooling, this study makes an intervention on the topic of homeschooling that predates the recent trend. The study contributes to the broader research on migrant children's education and homeschooling in the GCC countries.

The chapter draws on literature from British labour history, particularly Analytical Marxism. Traditionally, Marxists and many labour historians have emphasised how structures- social, economic, and legal, which are present in societies restrict and limit individuals' behaviour. Amidst this broader context, Analytical Marxism promotes the idea that individuals are resilient and when faced with constraints, make choices and employ strategies towards their objectives. In doing so, Analytical Marxism attributes greater agency to individuals. The approach helps with understanding the relationship between individual choice and social processes. In the context of the educational environment of the GCC countries, families and women employ self-conscious strategies and exercise agency in educating their children (Elster, 1985; Wright, 1994).

2 Research Methodology

The study is based on ethnographic research methods, relying on interviews with Pakistani women from migrant households to capture their perspectives on children's education in GCC countries. The interviewees were selected through a snowball sampling technique, where the first participant, known from a previous research project, referred other women who could contribute their experiences from living in Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, Ajman, and Dubai.

The interviews were conducted using semi-structured surveys over six months. The participants, who were primarily in their forties and fifties and mostly home-makers, provided valuable insights into the socio-economic conditions of their households. While these women generally possess some level of education, their household incomes were more stable and secure than those typically associated with the broader "low-income group" category often attributed to large segments of the migrant population in the Gulf. This distinction became evident in their narratives, which also reflected their diverse backgrounds as first-, second-, and third-generation migrants born in the GCC.

The research employs pseudonyms for the interviewees to hide their identities. The interview consultations were mostly done with individual women, with one exception featuring a mother and daughter together. Interviews include women who moved to Qatar and or were born in the Gulf, returned to Pakistan for education, and later post-marriage resettled in the region. Some participants continue to reside in GCC countries, while others have returned to Pakistan, often due to their children's pursuit of higher education.

These women discussed a range of interrelated topics; the schooling systems in the Gulf, the issues impacting them, and the factors leading to homeschooling. Additionally, they cover topics such as tutoring and enterprise, the cohesive nature of the Pakistani community in the Gulf, and the inequalities inherent in the schooling system in the GCC countries and the way they impact migrants. The research sought to analyse the experiences of women across different generations to better understand the evolving needs, aspirations, and decision-making processes within migrant families. The survey questions were carefully designed to gather detailed information about their interactions with government policies, schooling, and educational institutions from the year 2000 to the present.

3 The Educational Environment in the Gulf

The migration of South Asian labourers to GCC countries and ensuing remittances flow back to the South Asian Subcontinent, maintain families' essential needs. During 2018, Pakistanis in the UAE were among the top 10 remittance-sending communities from the region, with \$21 billion in international remittances received in Pakistan (Pakistan & Gulf Economist, 2020:1). In South Asia, not only do these remittances improve the material conditions but they also support children's education and often propelling them towards higher education (Grigorescu, 2024; Anwar et al., 2024; Mizanur et al., 2024; Piras, 2023). As a result of these remittances, 450,000 children in Pakistan are in school, and families spend more on education than any other purchases (Pakistan & Gulf Economist, 2020).

Irrespective of the fact that there are massive remittance inflows to low-and middle-income countries, many children are still unable to attend school. Of the 220 million children who are not in school around the world, Pakistan has one of the highest numbers, with 19 million children reported to be out of school (Pakistan & Gulf Economist, 2020). Often the problem of children's schooling in Pakistan spurs families to migrate to the GCC countries which they perceive to have improved educational opportunities. In the UAE, international migrants constitute a significant portion of the population. Migrants constituted 87.9% of the overall population in 2020. Data from 2019 indicated that of these international migrants, 8% originated from Pakistan and 38% from India (Integral Human Development, 2021). In 2019, among GCC countries, the UAE had the lowest proportion of primary-educated migrants (44%), the highest proportion of secondary-educated migrants (33%), and the highest proportion of tertiary-educated migrants (16%). Twenty-five per cent of working migrants hold managerial positions in all sectors, while the rest (70%) are in low-income positions (Integral Human Development, 2021). Laws in GCC countries prevent migrants in the lowest salary brackets from bringing dependents, and a minimum salary is required to sponsor a child. This minimum salary ranges from \$2,700 in Qatar to \$800 in Oman. Despite these wage requirements, there are still extensive numbers of migrant children living in the UAE and GCC countries, with large numbers of 15-year-olds (Kippels and Ridge, 2019).

Apart from disparities in income, migrant families manage various financial constraints that adversely impact their children's education. The recent government-sponsored introduction of insurance plans requires migrant workers to cover injuries, overtime, and vacation allowance, which places an additional burden on migrant families. Concurrently, employers and sponsors are required to provide health insurance to employees and families, but they often fail to do so. Unlike UAE nationals, migrant workers do not receive government allowances for housing, subsidised health care, and other social services, and this contributes to migrant families' financial instability (Kippels and Ridge, 2019). Furthermore, with large proportions of the population concentrated in low-income positions, the ability of families in this group to afford their children's education is significantly impacted. Consequently, many non-nationals have remained migrants, staying for generations, without formal citizenship of the state.

Migrant children constitute a significant portion of the student population in the education systems of the UAE and Qatar, and they comprise the largest percentage of students. They also represent substantial proportions in the other GCC countries (Kippels and Ridge, 2019; Umar & Rahman, 2023). As a result of the large numbers of non-citizens and expatriates, a plethora of challenges arise connected to state education policies that specify a limited-term stay based on contracts. The impact of a shortage of schools on migrant families from the South Asian Subcontinent has been widely reported in the News media over the last decade. In 2013, 70% of the 183 private schools in Abu Dhabi, were reported to be oversubscribed. In a move to address the shortage of school spaces, Abu Dhabi Education Council employed various incentives to encourage investors with expertise in education to establish new private schools. The council supported the allocating plots of land to educational institutions across its territory (Issa, 2013; Gulf News, 2024). Around the same time, the Pakistani Ambassador to the UAE reported that more than 20,000 Pakistani children from low-income families in the UAE were not attending school (Gulf News, 2018). Some 9,000 children attended Pakistani Mission Schools, but overcrowding in these schools meant they were unable to accommodate additional students, thus some 20,000 girls remained at home while boys went to school. The Ambassador encouraged the community members to volunteer to help existing schools expand enrolment and meet some student fees (Gulf News, 2018).

4 Research Findings: Migrant Women and Homeschooling

The schooling options available to migrants and temporary residents include International Schools, Embassy Schools, community-run groups known as "tutoring schools," and homeschooling. The first three options involve paying fees. Earlier, when private schools announced an increase in school fees, parents were bracing themselves for "financial chaos" (Sarwat, 2018). Recently, a growing number of expatriate parents, who have access to school curricula based on child development theories, are choosing to homeschool their children. This group of digitally literate

parents expects to secure better outcomes for their children through these tailored approaches (KHDA, 2009).

Homeschooling has been a longstanding practice among migrant families, predating the current phenomena among expatriates. Historically, Pakistani migrants have faced challenges in identifying resources to support teaching at home. However, some of these barriers are diminishing with the development of digital technology and teaching materials becoming more accessible. There has been a shift in how homeschooling materials are sourced and this is particularly noticeable among second-generation migrants and those who have migrated within the last fifteen years.

The first interview was conducted with “Naseem,” a Pakistani citizen educated to A-level standard. She married in the late 1980s in Pakistan, had three children, and then moved to Dammam, Saudi Arabia, in 2001, where she joined her husband. Both Naseem’s father and her father-in-law, a university graduate had worked in the Gulf intermittently for some periods during the 1970s.

On initially moving to Dammam, I did not place the children in school, but homeschooled them instead. We then moved to Mecca and found there were no embassy schools in the city and the closest school was in Jeddah, which was 80km away from Mecca. We had the option of putting the children in the Arab schools, but the standard of education was poor, with limited instruction in English. I wanted my children to learn English, so I decided not to enrol them but homeschooled them again.

In analysing Naseem’s thought process and action, Jon Elster’s work offers valuable insights. Elster posits that all social phenomena, including their structure and transformations, can be understood by focusing on individuals’ desires: their beliefs, goals, and actions (Elster, 1985). In this context, Naseem faced several constraints while researching options for her children’s schooling. Some of these constraints were exogenous factors related to household income, high school fees, and the absence of a preferred school nearby. The primary endogenous factors were linked to her perceptions of educational standards at the local schools and the limited language instruction options available. Naseem’s social background shaped her belief and commitment to educating her children. Her insistence on English instruction for the children reflects her hopes for a broader range of career options for her children rather than having to accept limited choices. Rather than accepting the limited schooling options as a *fait-accomplie* or waiting for another move to a bigger city for better educational options, she understood the importance of beginning to educate the children immediately. Non-schooling could mean some learning loss for the children which would have significant implications later when the children sought higher education. She organised her time and resources to initially homeschool her children and hoped to mitigate a growing educational gap between her children and those children who were in school. She narrates:

I tried to build up a routine around the children’s schooling. I used what I learned from my education and taught this to my children. Back then, my friends and I did not know how to use computers or to search websites for information and teaching materials. We only had our mobile telephones and used these to do whatever we could on them. Our other resource was the dictionary which allowed us to translate from Urdu into English. There were too

few resources for me to use for formal guidance or teaching. However today, there are many more resources that parents can use, from YouTube videos to games, to help support children in learning. My friends who were Indian or from Sri Lanka had a higher level of education from whom I could get a little bit of information about teaching and curriculums.

The study observed that families employ a variety of contextual strategies to educate their children. They opt for homeschooling, educating their children at home for a period, before enrolling them in formal education. She narrates:

It was not uncommon for families to homeschool their children for the first two or three grades. They would have the children enter formal school once they were a little older.

Homeschooling children allowed families to save up for the resources they would invest in enrolling their children in school and paying education fees. At the same time, parents ensured that their children received some foundational education while at home. In other cases, families staggered the enrolment of their children in school, enrolling older children while continuing to homeschool younger siblings. If free schooling was available, they would avail themselves of the facility and supplement the learning from school with some additional home tutoring. At other times, parents sent their older children back to Pakistan for education and kept the younger ones with them. This latter option was connected to the cost of education in Pakistan being lower than in the Gulf, or the older children being independent and preparing for university admission.

We moved back to Dammam and sent our eldest daughter back to Pakistan to complete her studies, as there were no affordable options for us in Saudi Arabia. She lived with my parents while she was at school. Then in 2006, we moved to Al- Khobar and I put the children in the Embassy school. The Embassy school cost SR 200 per month per child. I would supplement the children's embassy schooling with English tuition when our financial situation allowed. We managed to get some information about the Embassy school from my husband's friend who knew teachers from his children's previous school. The friend asked the teacher to advise us about enrolling our children in the school. My children needed to take entrance tests in English, which they passed, and then they enrolled in the school. I was pleased with the embassy school – the teachers spoke and explained concepts mostly in English. The school also offered two or three Urdu subjects. Overall, I felt that the schooling level was high, and the school's children were bright. My children continued in the Embassy school for three years until my second eldest was in grade seven.

Naseem's personal connections helped her develop an understanding of the education landscape better than seeking out information from government websites. Currently, across the Gulf, several sources disseminate information to the public, covering both state and private international homeschooling companies. For instance, the UAE's official website provides information on educational institutions servicing kindergarten to university level, homeschooling policies, and fees for Pakistani schools (Gulf News, 2020; Government of Dubai, 2024). The website has a specific page called Home-schooling stream dedicated to parents who wish to teach their children at home. It states that home schoolers need not attend classes but are required to register with local educational officials. The officials act as a first port of call for families, they provide learning materials and details about examinations and respond to queries. Students study at home and, at the end of the year or semester, can sit for

the grade exams set by the Ministry of Education. The website assures parents that completing a homeschool education in the UAE is considered as valid as graduating from a standard public school in the country (KDHA, 2009). Interviewees suggest that although the website claims to be transparent, its primary function is to direct families to state-provided services and to register and track the children of migrant families. The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) serves as the private regulatory body of the Government of Dubai (KDHA, 2009).

In addition, the Home School Legal Defence Authority website details the legal status and resources for homeschooling in the UAE. It clarifies that primary education for Emirati children is compulsory from age 6, with some provisions available for homeschooling from grades 7 to 12, with an Arabic curriculum. It guides parents on how to transition their children from a homeschooling setting into a private school and reassures them that accreditation obtained through online schools is valid (HSLDA, 2024). Another resource, “Homeschooling in the UAE,” works with families in the northern Emirates and promotes an “active community” free of charge. It offers a range of resources, including curriculum options, online resources, a virtual school, a teacher-supported private school, after-school, and summertime activities, a K12 International Academy, and other services. Other websites appeal to specific communities focussing on building skills and knowledge through games, and art, and through introducing topics which are normally introduced at higher grades, to three- to five-year-olds. These can include languages, the humanities, and Islamic studies. Additionally, the Dubai and Northern Emirates Homeschool Association lists some places for children’s excursions. Overall, these privately run institutions and websites offer parents practical support on a fee basis, including access to diverse curriculums. The extent to which families connect to and use private homeschooling companies’ resources remains to be investigated further. These providers may be less expensive than sending children to schools. However, they do not guarantee students’ academic success. Moreover, fluency in English is necessary to comprehend and apply the lessons, which may require parents to seek help from the community and, therefore, have to reciprocate the support as needed.

Notwithstanding these efforts by the state, the overarching issue remains that migrants’ temporary residency status and the financial burden of their children’s education often eclipse the extent to which government efforts empower parents or deliver equitable schooling.

An interviewee said:

When my third child was in sixth grade, I took her out of school and enrolled her in a Madrasa (Islamic seminary), which was free. I would support her Madrasa schooling with some homeschooling and covered some broader subjects. By this time, my second eldest had completed up to tenth grade and had returned to Pakistan for college studies. I put our youngest in an English-medium International School. This was a private school and cost SR 600 per month.

While my daughter was studying in the Madrasa, she tutored other families’ children. I also began tutoring children, which included my next-door neighbour’s children and was paid SR100. I tutored for about two years, and then stopped for a while but have resumed this on a voluntary basis.

Once my two older daughters had returned to Pakistan for good, they would visit Saudi Arabia for vacations, and sometimes I would visit them in Pakistan for short periods. I moved back to Pakistan for the final time in 2013. Since then, my three girls have graduated from university, and my youngest is now in university.

Many families navigate the challenge of educating their children when faced with financial constraints. School and university fees pose a significant barrier for families, both low-income and middle-income families. In Naseem's case, finances were central in influencing her decision to return to Pakistan for her daughters' education, leading to a circular process of "re-migration, transnationalism, transnationality, and fluidity" (Sancho, 2020:334). Sometimes, the decision to move may have minor implications for the family and, at other times, significant implications. A separation of the nuclear family temporarily often results in a change in the composition of the population left behind in the Gulf with concentrations of men and bachelors residing in urban areas (Ashraf et al., 2017).

Naseem goes on to discuss an entrepreneurial spirit among the community members:

Some of the women I befriended were educated and they identified a gap in the affordable schooling options for the community. They set up tutoring businesses in their homes for children. These women were mostly Indian and had some [university-level] qualifications.

One of my friends, Mahar, had four children. Her eldest daughter had completed high school, and her younger children were still attending school. Her husband was university educated and had a secure job working for a company. Unfortunately, he became very unwell and could no longer work. However, the family didn't leave the country to return to Pakistan. Instead, Mahar started a couple of enterprises, including a tutoring business and beauty parlour. Her daughter helped with these. I knew lots of families that had started up a small business such as baby minding and cooking services for families.

The undocumented status of migrants can lead to fines and detention for the migrants. Employers' and migrant sponsors' failure to renew migrant employees' residential visas on time results in the undocumented status of migrants. Consequently, migrants' children drop out of school (Sankar, 2018). Overstaying the visa period due to the inability to pay the fines means indefinite detention for parents. The nation's legal structures, immigration policies, and connected processes are played out at a micro or a local level, and to better understand how social causes produce their impact, there is a need to analyse the reasons behind people's actions (Wright, 1994). In this instance, Mahar faced the possibility of her family being deported back to Pakistan with the sudden onset of her husband's illness. She understood the implications of her situation and adapted to it quickly. Through her entrepreneurial efforts and income from these, she kept her family afloat, and younger children in school. In facing structural constraints, Naseem showed resilience and flexibility.

Though some women had the economic means to educate their children through the Embassy Schools and International Schools, others lacked these means. Nevertheless, all these women shared a common commitment to their children's education, which was bolstered by their own education and social class. Despite their initially challenging circumstances, all of these women's children have achieved positive

outcomes. They are either pursuing or have completed their education and many have embarked on successful careers.

An interviewee “Firdos” who was born in the GCC in the late 1970s spent the first three or four years of her life in her host country and then moved to Pakistan for her education and received a BA there. She married in 2004 and joined her husband and his extended family in Dubai. Her husband is also a second-generation Pakistani living in Dubai, a result of her in-laws having resided there since the early 1960s. Shortly after she arrived in the UAE, the family moved to Ajman, where she lived for 11 years.

Firdos narrates:

I homeschooled my children because I was unimpressed with the schooling available in Ajman. At the time, the school standards were better in Dubai and Sharjah. Since then, I think the schools in Ajman have improved as the city is rapidly modernising.

I homeschooled my children until the third grade. Fortunately, I had a friend who lived opposite our home whose children went to school. I would borrow class notes from her children to ascertain what they were being taught in the schools, the topics, and the standards. I was also able to research information on the internet through Google and find activities and tasks such as games, social activities, and information on debates. I downloaded and printed whatever was available on the internet, and I would get the children to practice the exercises. My community of 20-30 Pakistani women and families was also very helpful.

Once the children had completed grade three schooling at home, I felt that I would be unable to cope with teaching at the grade four level. I subsequently put my older children into the local “Tutoring School”. Later, once my children were older and independent, I resumed teaching and tutored other families’ children. In total, I taught for four to five years, and through this, I developed my teaching skills.

After migrating to the Gulf, many families anticipate the economic and social benefits they will accrue will outweigh the emotional and economic costs associated with the initial migration from their home countries. Securing a high-quality education is a top priority for families during their time in the Gulf. Firdos added in this regard:

Living in an extended family, I know how to compromise, and have done so many times. However, I am not able to compromise on my children’s education. My children’s education is non-negotiable.

The time spent living in the Gulf among a cosmopolitan community impacts women’s outlook. There is some reframing of ideals relating to themselves and their families. Firdos concludes:

I am now back in Pakistan and my children are progressing through school. Recently, I have been taking some courses on how to set up my own business. I feel that living in the Gulf and observing how hard-working people are has been hugely beneficial for me. As a population, I believe that we need to make a greater effort to advance, and to constantly strive.

Another Pakistan-born participant, “Neelofar,” graduated with a master’s degree in education in Pakistan. Initially she taught children for four years before migrating to the Gulf. In 2006, she moved to Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Her husband worked for a company with a good employment package, and their children studied in international

schools. Both children attended university in Pakistan, and have since begun their careers. After her children became independent, Neelofar resumed teaching, and taught in the Gulf for ten years.

Neelofar observed that families with the means to do so often send their children to Europe for higher education. For those with fewer resources, Pakistan is seen as the next best option. Typically, daughters are sent back to Pakistan to complete their education, which is often the main reason why parents, especially mothers, decide to return. In the instances when daughters return to Pakistan unaccompanied for their studies, they usually live under the care of their grandparents or female relatives. Another interviewee, "Salma," born in Abu Dhabi to first-generation migrant parents, recounts her story:

I spent the first four to five years in Abu Dhabi and attended a nursery, while my older brother and sister went to local school. I returned to Pakistan for education and completed my B.Ed. and M.A. from university. I worked for a while tutoring children and earned an income. The teaching experience provided me with practical insights into effective teaching, going beyond theoretical knowledge. After my marriage I moved to Dammam in Saudi Arabia in 2009. My eldest child started schooling in a homebase nursery and then attended a proper school until fourth grade.

We then moved to Riyadh, which was without a Pakistani embassy school. The embassy schools in other cities were not good, with too many children in them, sometimes as many as sixty per class. The fees were SR. 600 per month in 2015-16, and another SR.250 for transportation to school per month. We were required to pay six months' fees in advance. Rather than managing the unaffordable school fees, instead I homeschooled my three children.

Pakistani migrant households prefer private schools based on the perception that private schools offer a better education than government schools, which though cheaper, are perceived as delivering a lower standard of education (Mizanur et al., 2024). In this instance, Salma's opinions regarding differences in the school standards persist despite her re-migration back to Saudi Arabia.

Salma added:

In March 2018, I moved back to Pakistan because my eldest daughter needed to get admission into school. [Previously we had calculated] the overall cost of educating one child in the Gulf was the same as educating four children in Pakistan. This left us with no choice but for me to return to Pakistan with our children. In Pakistan, I began home-schooling my younger children.

During the vacations, the children and I would visit Saudi Arabia. In fact, we were visiting Saudi Arabia in 2020 when the pandemic and lockdown were announced. All the flights were grounded, which meant that we had to stay. I homeschooled all three children once the lockdown began in Riyadh. I had my teaching materials from my B.Ed. days and supplemented these with other materials that I managed to buy from Saudi Arabia. I also managed to obtain some information from my friends' WhatsApp groups. The women in the group were responsive and very helpful. In addition, I researched information from the internet and YouTube videos and was able to integrate this into my teaching approach.

In accessing information about schooling options, families relied more heavily on insights shared by their friends and community rather than consulting official websites state-sponsored or private. Salma was self-reliant and was also able to access information from her own community. Salma continues:

After the pandemic ended, I returned to Pakistan and admitted my children into school. Each child is a position holder in their class. I am proficient in mathematics and was able to teach complex math exercises to the children, helping them practice and improve their skills. Even now, when I'm free from housework, I spend my spare time tutoring my children and the neighbours' children.

Looking ahead, I intend to send my children to university here in Pakistan. If they can get scholarships for other countries, then I'll send them there. We have the option of admission to Saudi Arabian universities, but students have to learn Arabic, and affordability is an issue.

The research included an interview with Zahida and her daughter Maria, which provides insight into their multi-generational migration experiences and the Gulf region's educational landscape. Zahida initially studied until grade ten in Pakistan and then moved to Al-Thuqbah in Saudi Arabia in 1990 and remained there until 2023. Her father-in-law, who was university-educated, had originally moved to Saudi Arabia in 1973. On his retirement, Zahida's husband migrated to Saudi Arabia in the mid 1980s, and has been there for 40 years. Zahida's husband had a job and a good income, which meant the couple were able to provide education for all five children. The children attended a Pakistani Embassy School and international schools in Saudi Arabia. Maria, Zahida's daughter, completed her education up to Grade 12 in Saudi Arabia and then moved to Pakistan to pursue university studies. Maria represents the third generation of her family living in the Gulf region. This multi-generational experience offers insights into how the education system evolved, how families perceive the changes and structural constraints, and how they organise themselves to tackle some of the inequalities arising from these. Maria narrates:

The law states that older children must attend some type of schooling provision. However, many people cannot afford to put their children in school in Saudi Arabia. The Government offers no financial help with schooling to Pakistanis, and so the community is not privileged. While the earlier generation of migrant families relied on community-run "tuition" schools, recent migrant families have more options and can enrol their children in some school services, academies, centres, or "tuition." When families cannot enrol their children in fee-paying schools and face a crisis, then "tuition" is an option for them. It's a self-help type of school. All the migrant communities have to help their community.

Maria is all too aware of how privilege works in the Gulf region. She hints at the differences in the rights and conditions between citizens and the migrant communities. For outsiders, there are two perspectives of the place that are informed by the media and scholarship. On the one hand, the government's public relations department promotes the high levels of development of the region, the region's economic prosperity, and the opportunities and lifestyles available for the fortunate. This image is juxtaposed, on the other hand, with the picture painted by scholars and journalists of the same. Scholars have commented on migrants' labour extraction and their difficult work environments (Seethi, 2024). With so many of the industries in the Gulf orientated towards profits, they need a steady source of labour. The economic success of these companies' rests heavily on the labour efforts of migrant workers (Wright, 1997:11). At the same time, the State's extractive processes and high taxes disproportionately impact migrants, often challenging family subsistence. Furthermore despite their toil, for migrants, tangible paybacks in the form of affordable school spaces remain elusive.

In terms of the Gulf region's economic development and workforce planning goals, integrating migrant children into national societies is crucial for reproducing a labour force. Yet, schools implement the state ideology orientated towards producing foreign residents as temporary migrants and nationals of their homeland (Sancho, 2020). Feelings of racial discrimination and marginalisation, combined with the dearth of accessible schools and investment in this, have encouraged the community to organise. Maria notes:

My older sister was schooled in Saudi Arabia, and after her studies, she set up a tuition school for the community. She used course materials from her earlier schooling. Whatever the teachers knew and recalled from their own studies, they passed on to the children. The "tuition" school requires a nominal fee, but this is low relative to other types of schools. In recent years, individuals have been taxed and have also had to pay insurance. The Saudi Arabian Government taxes everything and heavily enforces [payment] through inspection.

I had to return to the Pakistani school for my university-level studies in Pakistan. I finished my degree in 2018, and after graduation, I returned to Saudi Arabia and taught grade-one pupils for about a year and a half.

Conversations within the community indicate that in the Gulf, teaching is widely regarded as a respectable profession for women and their daughters to enter. Teaching often takes place in home-based settings or in the homes of others, where it is closely supervised by female members of the household. More broadly, as female family members observe women within their kinship networks engaging in tutoring and contributing positively to the community, this makes it easier for them to follow suit. Gendered notions of what constitutes "appropriate occupations" for daughters are developed from early childhood and reinforced through adolescence and are mirrored in Pakistan. Parents' influences tend to be more gendered and more pronounced in conservative families and often prefer their women folk to remain unemployed rather than undertaking inappropriate types of roles (Rutledge & Madi, 2017).

Educated women with some homeschooling experiences are supporting some changes to social hierarchies. Initially, they homeschooled as a strategy for educating their children and perhaps to save money. Now, when they teach, they earn an income, contribute to the household finances, and at times save it for the future. In these instances, they also have more say in household-related matters (Gamburd, 2000).

5 Conclusion

Historically, the cost of schooling and education has posed some challenges for many migrant families in the GCC. Combined with legal and other structural constraints, this has spurred families to identify the best ways to educate their children. For many Pakistani families, homeschooling has been the only option for them, rather than it being a part of a recently growing trend. Educated women have shown their resilience in the face of adversity. They have connected with their community to identify teaching materials, and over time, the approaches to homeschooling have shifted connected to the time, context, and technology. In educating their children,

women use multiple strategies, oriented towards stemming the development of a gap in learning between their children and children from higher-income families. In championing homeschooling, women challenge the social, racial, and economic hierarchies they face. As agents of change, women are giving rise to a culture of industriousness and self-reliance. They earn an income while also working towards their personal and social goals. In this empowered role, women propel other women to enter the profession.

Despite the resources and efforts of many families, there are still major problems. Families often face challenges because of temporary residency status and the high cost of education. These structural issues make it hard for migrant families to get the support they need. The absence of comprehensive state support for the educational needs of migrant families reveals a larger issue of inequality in the education system across the Gulf region. This means that even though some families try hard to provide a good education for their children, they still struggle due to systemic barriers and a lack of adequate support.

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Chapter 38

Indian Malayalee Migrant Families in the UAE



Lakshmi Venugopal Menon

Abstract This chapter examines various aspects of the Indian Malayalee migrant families in the UAE, based on the interviews conducted with selected migrant families. It focuses on family relationships, particularly the interactions within these families. The study also explores their transnational connections, paying attention to the cultural, social, and economic ties these families maintain with both the UAE and India.

1 Introduction

Over the past several decades, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emerged as a major hub for expatriates from around the world. As of 2024, the UAE's population stands at 10.24 million, with expatriates making up 88.50% of the total population or approximately 9.06 million people. Among these, Indian migrants form the largest expatriate group, comprising 30% of the expatriate population, which amounts to roughly 3.50 million individuals (Global Media Insight, 2024; *Embassy of India in Abu Dhabi*, 2021; *United Arab Emirates - Country Summary*, n.d.). Within the Gulf region, the UAE is particularly attractive to Indian migrant families, who rely on non-material and material support for the formation and sustenance of expatriate households (Rahman et al., 2024).

Long before the late twentieth century, when the GCC states had not yet become economic powerhouses, trade relations between the Indian subcontinent and the Arabian Peninsula were well-established. Indian traders and laborers played a crucial role in the region's economy, participating in the pearl trade, spice trade, and other commercial activities in the UAE's historic port cities, such as Dubai and Sharjah. This early presence laid the groundwork for the migration patterns that would intensify with the economic growth spurred by the oil boom.

The oil boom brought newfound wealth to the UAE, which triggered rapid modernization and infrastructure development. The resulting demand for a large contingent

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of labor was primarily met by workers from the Indian subcontinent seeking higher wages and better economic prospects. The majority of migrants came from India's southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, who were employed in various sectors such as hospitality, healthcare, construction, and services. Later, many high-skill Indians, such as professionals and businessmen, moved to the UAE to take up roles in IT, finance, education, and other business sectors (Bortolazzi & Khan, 2023). Thus, migration to the GCC, particularly the UAE, has become a cultural norm for the people of Kerala, Malayalees, in the past decades. So much so that Dubai is often humorously referred to as the "capital of Kerala," where young Malayalee adults go to mature into responsible adults. Around 90% of Kerala's diaspora is in the GCC, and in the UAE alone, there are approximately over one million Malayalees (Indians constitute approximately 38% of the UAE's total population) (Database for Business, 2024; Indo Asian News Service, 2014) (United Arab Emirates - Country Summary, 2024).

This chapter uses a case study of five Indian expatriate families to examine the broader experiences of Malayalee migrants in the UAE, as these families provide diverse perspectives and insights that can highlight common patterns and challenges faced by the larger community. By focusing on their social profiles, family relationships, and lived experiences, the study aims to probe key aspects of their integration into UAE society, alongside the challenges they face and their cultural and social contributions. In particular, it investigates the socioeconomic backgrounds of these families, the dynamics of their inter-family relationships, and their engagement in transnational activities. By exploring these elements, the study provides a look into how Malayalee migrants navigate the balance between maintaining their cultural identities and adapting to Emirati society, as well as their views on long-term settlement and integration in the UAE.

In examining the experiences of these migrant families, this chapter draws on key theoretical frameworks, including intersectionality and transnationalism. Intersectionality explores how various aspects of an individual's identity—such as gender, class, race, religion, ethnicity, and immigration status—intersect and shape their experiences (Cleton & Scuzzarello, 2024). Meanwhile, the concept of transnationalism deals with migrants' strategies to maintain connections across national borders (Shizha & Makwarimba, 2023). Transnationalism helps us understand how migrants integrate into society and, at the same time, hold onto their own cultural practices. This affects how closely they connect within their communities (community cohesion) and how they selectively adapt to the new culture (selective integration). It is especially suitable to study Malayalee migrants as they selectively adopt certain elements of UAE culture while holding on to their traditions. This often results in the formation of close-knit Indian communities that maintain strong internal bonds but have limited interaction with non-Indian groups. Malayalee migrant families often maintain strong ties with their homeland and engage actively in practices such as regular communication, remittances, and cultural exchanges, maintaining a transnational lifestyle that has the potential to affect family dynamics, community cohesion, and identity formation.

This chapter is structured into five main sections including the introduction and conclusion. The next (second) section discusses the research methods. The third section describes profiles of selected Indian Malayalee migrant families, shedding light on their socioeconomic status and community dynamics, social profiles, lived experiences, inter-family relationships, and interactions within these families. Finally, the fourth section, before conclusion, investigates the transnational engagement of Indian Malayalee migrant families.

2 Research Methods

This chapter adopts a qualitative research approach which includes interviews conducted with family members of various ages from five Indian migrant families residing in the UAE. This approach encapsulates the nuanced perspectives of both first-generation and second-generation migrants residing in the UAE, as well as the dynamics within the studied two-generation and three-generation migrant families in the UAE. Each of the five families serves as a case study and provides a detailed exploration of family dynamics and personal narratives to understand the complexities of migration and transnationalism in the migration of Indian families to the UAE.

Participants, A, B, C, D, and E, belong to different Indian migrant families in the UAE. Participants were selected based on a sampling criterion, which was focused on family structure, generational status, and duration of stay in the UAE. The sample represents two types of family structures: two-generation migrant families (first-generation migrants living with their children) and three-generation migrant families (including second-generation migrants and their children). Participants included both first-generational migrants (those who were the first from their immediate family to move to the UAE) and second-generation migrants (those who were born and/or raised in the UAE to Indian parents). Participants were required to have a minimum stay of 10 years in the UAE. Participants' selection was facilitated through social networks and referrals, with efforts made to ensure diversity in terms of socioeconomic status and duration of stay in the UAE. The sample size is adequate for an in-depth qualitative analysis within the scope of a book chapter.

Semi-structured interviews, guided by a pre-developed interview guide covering topics of family dynamics, transnational engagement, intra-family relations, and demographic features, allowed flexibility in covering key topics consistently across the five participants. The interviews lasted between 30 and 40 min and were conducted in person and virtually due to logistical constraints. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of their responses. During the data analysis, cross-case analysis helped compare and contrast the experiences of first-generation and second-generation migrants, as well as those belonging to two-generation and three-generation Indian migrant families in the UAE. Ethical considerations regarding maintaining anonymity, data security, and cultural sensitivity were taken into consideration. Focusing on a small, manageable sample allows

for an in-depth exploration of their unique social dynamics, cultural practices, and integration experiences. However, it is important to acknowledge that the limited number of families may restrict the generalizability of the findings, as the specific contexts and circumstances of these families may not fully represent the experiences of all Malayalee migrants in the UAE.

3 Discussion

3.1 *Socio-Economic Profiles of Participants*

All of the interviewed participants are white-collar professionals. Participant A is a first-generation female migrant living with her husband and a five-year-old daughter in Dubai. Her parents also lived in Dubai for four years while she was completing her schooling in Kerala. Although she finished the first year of her undergraduate studies in Dubai, the remainder of her education was completed in India. It establishes her status as a first-generation migrant. She is currently working as a fashion designer at a Dubai-based fashion company, and her husband is the logistics head for M&S, Dubai.

In contrast, Participant B is a second-generation female migrant (a homemaker raised in Oman) living in Qusais, Dubai. Her husband, a regional manager for a French infrastructure company, is also a second-generation migrant, having been raised in UAE. His parents were first-generation migrants who moved to the UAE prior to their marriage, subsequently raising their three children in the country. They prioritized education, sending their children to Indian schools and later to foreign universities in the UAE for undergraduate degrees and abroad for their postgraduate degrees.

Participant C, another second-generation female migrant, currently resides in Abu Dhabi. While she is a homemaker and a new mother to twins, she is also a trained lawyer. Her husband is a first-generation migrant who relocated to Abu Dhabi from Kerala after their marriage. Participant C's parents raised their four children in the UAE and have been living in the UAE collectively for over 21 years. Her father runs a medium-scale business in the UAE.

Similarly, Participant D is a second-generation female migrant from Al Ain, UAE, where she works as a childhood education specialist. She lives with her husband, a first-generation migrant and interior designer, along with their four children, all of whom received their education in Indian schools before pursuing various university degrees in India. Participant D's father was a medium-scale businessman who ran a successful electronics company in the UAE.

Finally, Participant E is a first-generation migrant who worked as the finance director of an American company. Along with his wife (a homemaker), he raised his two children (a daughter and a son) in the UAE, educating them in Indian schools and sending them to India for their undergraduate degrees, as well as = to the US

and the UK for their postgraduate degrees. As Participant E approaches retirement, he plans to move back to India with his wife, while their daughter has completed her postgraduate degree in the US and secured a job in Houston (Table 1).

3.2 *Education and Career*

For Indian migrants, education is a priority, and many parents invest significantly in their children's education. Typically, Indian migrant families in the UAE send their children to Indian curriculum schools affiliated with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE). These schools provide an educational environment that aligns with the Indian system, ensuring a seamless transition for children to the Indian education system and continuity in their academic journey should they unexpectedly return to India. In the cases of all five families in this research, the study observed that the children were sent to Indian curriculum schools. When asked why they were not sent to British or American curriculum schools, all participants mentioned one common reason—Indian curriculum schools tend to be more affordable (less than half the price) than British and American curriculum schools. Participant D mentioned that the British and American curriculum schools in Al Ain (where she stays) have employed South Asian teachers. Hence, it would not make sense to pay triple the price of an Indian curriculum if the children are not going to have the complete experience of being educated in a British or American school. The participant, expressing fear of the uncertainty of the duration of stay in the UAE as a non-citizen, said, “We do not know when we may have to leave. Today, we have a job, but tomorrow, we may not, so I do not want to put my children in a position wherein they find it hard to integrate into the Indian education system if need be.” In the same vein, Participant E said he had not ever considered other curriculums, perhaps due to unawareness, and perhaps he subconsciously wanted his children to return to India with him.

Building on this focus on education, a common trend among second-generation Indian Malayalee migrants in the UAE is their return to India for university education, a pattern observed in the families of Participants C, D, and E. This reflects a broader practice among Indian Malayalee migrant families in the UAE and other GCC states, where children are often sent to India for higher education. The decision is driven by the cultural familiarity of Indian universities and their relative affordability compared to international institutions.

In addition to education, professional development, and career opportunities also involve transnational considerations for many Indian migrants. Some seek further studies or specialized training in India to enhance their career prospects in the UAE, while others tap into the professional networks they have built in the UAE, which can create global opportunities. For example, Participant E's daughter finished her schooling in Dubai, where she earned an undergraduate degree in India and a postgraduate degree from the University of Boston, USA. She joined the Houston office of the same company in which her father had been a finance director for over a decade

Table 1 Profile of interviewed participants

Interviewee	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	Participant E
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Occupation of Spouses	Fashion Designer; Spouse: Logistics Head	Homemaker; Spouse: Regional Manager for a French infrastructure company	Homemaker; Spouse: Engineer	Early childhood education specialist; Spouse: interior designer	Finance Director; Spouse: homemaker
Education of second and third-generations	Indian curriculum school	Indian curriculum school; Undergraduate degree from India; Postgraduate degree from UK	Indian curriculum school; Undergraduate degree from India; Postgraduate degree from UAE	Indian curriculum school; Undergraduate degree from India; Postgraduate degree from UK	Indian curriculum school; Undergraduate degree from India; Postgraduate degrees from UK and USA
Migrant generation	1st migrant generation	2nd migrant generation	2nd migrant generation	2nd migrant generation	1st migrant generation
Family's Migrant generations	2 migrant generations	2 migrant generations	3 migrant generations	3 migrant generations	2 migrant generations
Relatives in UAE	First degree: 5	First degree: 10 Second degree: 15	First degree: 11 Second degree: 50	First degree: 10 Second degree: 15	First degree: 5 Second degree: 20
Remittances	25,000 INR monthly	1–2 lakhs INR quarterly	25–30,000 INR monthly	1–2 lakhs INR quarterly	20,000 INR monthly; Sporadic remittance to self; 25,000–400,000 UAE Dirhams

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Interviewee	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	Participant E
Family's Yearly Income	276,000 UAE Dirhams	400,000 UAE Dirhams	200,000 UAE Dirhams	500,000 UAE Dirhams	650,000 UAE Dirhams
Investments made in India	Small amounts in SIPs and Mutual funds	20 lakhs INR in non-sharia-compliant Mutual funds and shares and 40 lakhs INR in sharia-compliant businesses	Not made any investments in India	Investments in land, property (apartment, commercial spaces, villas, etc.), share market, and mutual funds	Investments in land, property (apartment, commercial spaces, villas, etc.), share market, and mutual funds

in Dubai. Similarly, Participant B's husband and his siblings (second-generation migrants) were sent to Indian curriculum schools, later to foreign universities in the UAE for undergraduate degrees, and abroad for their postgraduate degrees.

As these families navigate educational and career paths, the younger generations also face unique opportunities and challenges in developing their identities. Growing up exposed to diverse cultural influences, many youngsters from Indian migrant families in the UAE develop bicultural or even multicultural identities. For instance, Participant D mentions how her four daughters reflect different cultural leaning. Her eldest daughter, aged 23, identifies as "very Indian," while the second daughter, aged 22, has embraced Korean culture to such an extent that she speaks Korean, prefers Korean food and Korean culture, and plans to move to a different country rather than return to India. Meanwhile, the younger twins, aged 10, exhibit what she describes as a "very American" nature. This example illustrates how second and third-generation Indian migrants often construct unique identities shaped by their transnational experience. These influences are also reflected in their career aspirations, community affiliations, and social integration. Malayali migrants navigate between the traditional Indian aspect of their identity and the more cosmopolitan and multicultural modern Emirati or Dubai aspect of their identity, causing selective adoption of UAE culture (selective assimilation) causing complex identity negotiations and fragmented belongingness, particularly for second-generation Indian migrants.

3.3 Inter-Family Relationships

Marriage constitutes an important aspect of life for Indian migrants in the UAE. Arranged marriage remains the norm, where the families of the bride or groom find a suitable match based on factors such as social status, religion, financial capabilities, and in some cases, caste and even sub-caste. Malayalee migrants in the GCC tend to get married to Malayalee migrants settled in the GCC states or living in other foreign countries such as Australia, the USA, Canada, the UK, or other European countries. However, it is common practice that weddings take place in Kerala, as most immediate family, relatives, and friends reside in Kerala and other parts of India. Furthermore, potential spouses living in Kerala are often chosen based on their willingness to relocate to the bride or groom's current country of residence, ensuring the continuity of family ties and support networks in the GCC.

While arranged marriages are predominant, love marriages do occur, albeit less frequently. Participant A, a first-generation Hindu migrant, is an example of this. She met her husband during school, and despite belonging to different castes, they married after she agreed to leave her job in Kerala and move to Dubai, where he was working. Her story highlights the balancing of personal desires with family expectations, especially in situations where cultural or social norms are challenged. This flexibility in personal life decisions, such as moving for the sake of a marriage, underscores the importance of family harmony and migration adaptability among Indian migrants in the UAE.

Participant B's experience presents a different side of arranged marriages in the Gulf. A second-generation Muslim migrant who was brought up in Oman, she met her husband through a matrimonial website dedicated to Gulf Malayalees. With both families approving the match based on financial compatibility, the wedding was conducted in Kerala, followed by a celebratory event in Dubai. The influence of digital platforms in modern matchmaking among Gulf migrants reveals how transnational marriages are increasingly facilitated by technology yet remain grounded in cultural traditions.

Marriage arrangements among Malayalee communities in the GCC often serve as gateways for economic integration. Grooms may seek second-generation brides settled in the UAE or Qatar, viewing such marriages as opportunities to access better employment through the networks established by the bride's parents. These marriages are viewed as opportunities to secure better employment and benefit from the migrant networks and social capital established by the brides' parents. It is also common for grooms to search for second-generation brides living in the GCC states who belong to business families; the grooms would view the business run by the father-in-law as an employment opportunity that would provide financial support and job security for them. In some cases, the businessmen also select grooms for their daughters depending upon the willingness of the groom to move to the GCC states and/or the willingness of the groom to join the family business run by the father-in-law. The latter would also offer an assured car, accommodation, salary, and other allowances to make the offer more appealing and attractive for the potential grooms.

The case of Participant C further illustrates how transnational marriages among Malayalee migrants are often influenced by practical considerations like employment opportunities and family connections. This second-generation Muslim migrant was brought up in the UAE through a matrimonial website dedicated to Gulf Malayalis. Having matched the financial status of the two families, the marriage functions took place in Kerala and Dubai. Participant C, a second-generation Muslim female migrant and a lawyer in Abu Dhabi, met her husband through a matrimonial website for Malayali Muslims. Her husband is a first-generation Muslim migrant who was willing to move from Kerala to Abu Dhabi post-marriage. Participant C's father runs a medium-scale business in the UAE and has been living in the UAE with his family collectively for over 21 years. He agreed to the marriage because the groom was willing to move to the UAE, where the bride prefers to reside. This highlights the role of migration prospects in marriage decisions, where relocating to the UAE offers economic and social advantages for the groom, as seen in the improved employment prospects he gained after moving.

Similarly, Participant D, a second-generation Muslim female migrant from Al Ain, UAE, had her marriage arranged with her husband, a first-generation Muslim migrant and interior designer, who moved to the UAE from Kerala after their marriage. Participant D's father, a medium-scale businessman who ran a successful electronics company in the UAE, provided initial support networks for the establishment of Participant D and her husband in the UAE. Participant D's eldest daughter, a third-generation migrant, was also married off to a first-generation migrant who works in

the UAE. Here, too, the geographical location of the groom and his proximity to the bride's family played a critical role in the marriage decision.

These practices go in line with the fact that extended families and kinship networks play an important role in sustaining and facilitating migration flows (Andrikopoulos & Duyvendak, 2020).

They act as social capital for new migrants. Relatives and friends who have already moved to the new country provide valuable information regarding living conditions, job opportunities, legal procedures, and referrals for jobs and housing. The successful migration of one family member leads to the subsequent migration by other relatives, forming a chain of migration facilitated by kinship ties. Such kinship ties help preserve Indian cultural practices and offer a sense of identity for migrants while reinforcing their connection to their homeland and integrating into their host society (Sha, 2021).

Families migrate to maximize their collective well-being and increase their profits for improved living conditions and economic stability. For Indian migrants in the UAE, family and community members already residing in the country play a crucial role in providing support. They help new migrants find housing and employment, navigate social and legal systems, and reduce the uncertainties and risks associated with the migration process.

While kinship and social networks provide substantial support, overreliance on networks may limit exposure to better opportunities outside the immediate community and may even lead to exploitative labor arrangements wherein newcomers begin to feel obligated to accept poor working conditions and contracts for maintaining social harmony. Collectively, these factors determine an individual's decision to migrate, choice of country of migration, and the balance of the negative attributes of their current location against the positive attributes of the destination they are considering for migration.

3.4 Family Structure and Dynamics

Malayali families migrate to maximize their collective well-being and increase their profits for improved living and economic conditions. Support systems are formed by family or community members residing in the UAE who could help with finding housing and employment, navigating through social and legal systems, and reducing risks and uncertainties associated with migration.

The experiences of Indian migrant families in the UAE reveal diverse family structures. In the cases of the interviewed families, some families adhere to traditional extended family systems, with multiple generations living together to minimize costs, maximize benefits, and provide support systems, particularly when there are elderly parents or young children. However, the nuclear family model is also common among first-generation younger professionals who have migrated more recently. In the case of nuclear families, it is common for parents to come from India for short durations to support childcare. For instance, after giving birth to twins, Participant C, lived

with her parents in Dubai for support, alongside two live-in maids who helped with childcare. Participant A also received help from her parents, who came from India to assist her and train a new live-in maid. Similarly, Participant D's mother, residing in Dubai, helped with childcare and trained a live-in maid after the birth of her twins.

In some cases, the presence of live-in maids allows for shared childcare responsibilities, with husbands increasingly involved in household duties. Participants A, C, and D all mentioned that their husbands helped with childcare in the absence of maids. Thus, in three of the studied cases, traditional gender roles appear to be blurring as both spouses enter the workforce, resulting in a shift in power dynamics and household responsibilities.

While these shifts in household roles offer more flexibility, separation from extended family members can still lead to feelings of isolation, especially for homemakers with limited social outlets. Participants A, C, and D's accounts illustrate how both spouses navigate these challenges.

Despite the emotional challenges faced by migrant families, the improved living standards in the UAE make these hardships a worthwhile trade-off. The financial stability offered by employment in the UAE provides access to better healthcare and educational opportunities than what would likely be available in their native cities. For instance, Participant B's father-in-law, a first-generation migrant, ensured that all three of his children could pursue undergraduate degrees at prestigious foreign universities within the UAE, and postgraduate studies in Western and European countries. Similarly, participant C's father, also a first-generation migrant, was able to provide a university education to his four children at international universities in the UAE.

3.5 Cultural Practices and Social Life

Indian Malayalee migrant families in the UAE place great importance on maintaining their cultural heritage and strong family ties, both with relatives in the UAE and back in India. They regularly celebrate important milestones such as weddings, birthdays, and anniversaries, as well as major Indian festivals such as Diwali, Eid, Holi, and Malayalee festivals such as Onam and Vishu. These gatherings serve as important social outlets and are central to inter-family relationships because they reinforce cultural bonds, and encourage intergenerational interaction. For example, participant B, who has ten first-degree family members and over 15 s-degree family members residing in the UAE, said, "We make it a priority to meet our immediate family members at least once a week and others at least once a month." Similarly, participant C, who has 11 first-degree family members and over 50 s-degree family members residing in the UAE, said, "We definitely meet our first-degree relatives every week, others maybe once in a month or two and for Eid."

This sense of cultural and familial solidarity is not just limited to social gatherings but extends to practical support networks. Many Indian migrant families in the UAE benefit from strong kinship ties, where established families help newcomers

adjust to life in the country. This includes guiding them in securing jobs, housing, and schooling for their children, as well as assisting them in navigating the UAE's healthcare system. Participant E, for instance, shared how three first-degree relatives and four second-degree relatives lived with him at different periods during his 14-year stay in the UAE resident. Although reciprocal support and cooperation are key features of inter-family relationships and the kinship theory, in many cases, the better-established members of the community are expected to help the newcomers without expecting anything in return among the studied Indian migrant families.

In addition to these familial networks, cultural organizations, and community groups also play a vital role in helping these migrant families preserve Indian traditions and foster a sense of belonging. These groups organize religious ceremonies, festival-related programs, cultural events, and social gatherings, providing migrant families with a platform for cultural expression and social interaction (Rahman & Ranjan, 2020). Such formal support systems offer legal aid and, in some cases, financial assistance, helping the migrants to navigate the legal and bureaucratic landscape. Participant B and Participant D have been actively involved in such cultural organizations and are part of "Malayalee Samajam", a community organization that promotes the welfare of Malayalees living abroad. There are six registered Indian associations in the UAE: India Social and Cultural Center, Abu Dhabi; Abu Dhabi Malayalee Samajam; Kerala Social Center; Indian Islamic Center; Indian Social Center, Al Ain; and Indian Ladies Association.

While maintaining their cultural identity, Indian migrant families in the UAE also navigate the multicultural landscape of the UAE. Daily interactions with expats from different countries and Emirati nationals enrich their social life and create a cosmopolitan lifestyle that calls for a balance between preserving one's cultural heritage and integrating into a broader, multicultural society. Participant D mentioned that their family has close ties with the Iranian community due to her father's business partnership with an Iranian colleague. Similarly, participant E also enjoys an enriching experience in the multicultural landscape of UAE because the nature of his work allows him to travel to various countries such as Turkey, the USA, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Singapore.

4 Transnational Engagement

Communication technology advancements have significantly enhanced the ability of Indian migrant families to maintain regular and close ties through phone calls, video chats, and social media with their relatives in India despite physical distance. Through these technologies, family and friends can celebrate milestones, share experiences, and receive emotional support. It also helps parents engaging in transnational education and upbringing to participate actively in their children's lives despite the distance. As discussed earlier, transnationalism influences various aspects of life for Malayalee migrant families, particularly in areas such as cultural practices, education, and marriage. Furthermore, many Indian migrant families regularly travel back

to India due to the introduction of numerous cheaper airfares by budget airlines. Many migrants visit India during school and university vacations, festival seasons, and special family occasions such as weddings, etc. to maintain personal connections and fulfill familial obligations. Conversely, family members from India also visit the UAE. All of the interviewed participants have on one occasion or another, hosted visitors from India.

For Indian migrant families in the UAE, the two most significant forms of transnational engagement are – remittances and investments. Remittances, which serve as economic support for families back in India, are crucial for meeting everyday expenses, education costs, healthcare, and even small business ventures. In some cases, remittances also help settle the debt incurred to cover the migration costs of the family member, as South Asian labor migration to the Gulf is often debt-financed at exorbitant interest rates (Raj & Rahman, 2023).

Participant A remits approximately 25,000 to her parents; Participant B and her husband remit to self approximately one lakh INR quarterly; Participant C's husband remits 25–30,000 INR monthly to his mother. Participant D and her husband remit between 1–2 lakhs INR quarterly to themselves; and Participant E remit 20,000 INR monthly to his parents and sporadically transfer larger sums, ranging from 25,000 UAE Dirhams to 400,000 UAE Dirhams.

In addition to remittances, many participants have made significant investments in India. Participant A has invested small amounts in SIPs and Mutual funds, while Participant B has invested 20 lakhs INR in non-Sharia-compliant Mutual funds and 40 lakhs INR in Sharia-compliant businesses. Participant D and Participant E have made investments in land, property (apartments, commercial spaces, villas, etc.), share market, and mutual funds. While Participant B and Participant D said their family was considering purchasing property in the UAE as it would yield greater returns, Participant E (a first-generation migrant) emphasized that he never considered purchasing property in the UAE due to the inconsistencies in the legislature and regulations, unavailability of citizenship, and the perception of foreigners as temporary laborers. According to, Participant E, the UAE's "Golden Visa" is primarily a political and business agenda, offering no real substitute for citizenship. He remarked, "No matter how long you live in the UAE and how high your stature and position is, locals view you as laborers and outsiders." Meanwhile, Participants B and D said they felt comfortable and accepted in the UAE. Although Participant C has not made any investments in UAE, she hopes that her daughters would continue to live in the UAE or any other GCC state "so that they can comfortably practice Islam and not feel pressured to change themselves or not practice their faith."

5 Conclusion

This chapter emphasizes how intersecting identities shape the lived experiences of Malayalee migrant families in the UAE. It adopts a multidisciplinary approach to demonstrate the various challenges faced by Indian migrant families in their host

country. The experiences of Malayalee migrant families reflect an evolving process of cultural preservation, economic ambition, and social adaptation. Despite the physical distance from their homeland, these families have managed to sustain strong cultural connections through the regular celebration of Indian and Malayalee festivals, family gatherings, and active involvement in community organizations. These cultural practices strengthen solidarity among the migrant community and play a crucial role in ensuring that younger generations remain connected to their roots.

Economically, the opportunities available in the UAE have markedly improved the living standards of Malayalee families when compared to their native regions in India. Enhanced access to healthcare, better educational prospects, and financial stability have allowed many of these families to flourish. Furthermore, their ability to remit money to India and invest in both countries shows the transnational nature of their experience and highlights the dual importance of migration for personal advancement and familial support.

Nevertheless, certain challenges persist. While some second-generation migrants report feeling accepted and comfortable in the UAE, first-generation migrants, such as Participant E, continue to experience limitations due to their status as expatriates. The lack of a pathway to citizenship and prevailing attitudes toward migrant workers present ongoing challenges for many. Yet, despite these difficulties, most Malayalee families view the UAE as a land of opportunity, where they can build a better future through education, investment, and cultural involvement.

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Chapter 39

Young Jordanian Families in Dubai: Renegotiating Gender Roles and Expectations in Marriage



Ivana Cosmano

Abstract This chapter delves into the shifting gender dynamics within family life among young married Jordanian couples who have relocated to Dubai, UAE. Through close observation of family interactions, it sheds light on how these young Arabs are actively redefining gender roles, identities, marital expectations, and models of parenthood as their understandings of dominant gender norms undergo significant transformation. The findings uncover couples' enactment of more egalitarian gender relations within marriages and the embodiment of alternatives to normative models of femininity and masculinity. The study posits that Dubai serves as a heterotopia for the Arab youth—a space where the gendered status quo can be subverted and new realities can be forged that transcend conventional societal constraints. These insights open new avenues for exploring the UAE's role in meeting the evolving aspirations of Arab youth, offering a forward-looking perspective on their future within the Middle East region.

Keywords Jordanian youth migration • Young Arab families • Gender roles and identities • Marriage expectations • Conjugal and parenthood • Jordan • United Arab Emirates • Dubai

1 Introduction

This chapter explores the experiences of young married Jordanian couples who settled in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), seeking to uncover the evolving gender dynamics in family life within non-national Gulf households. It thoroughly investigates how these couples renegotiate gender roles in marriage upon relocating to a country that enables them to pursue more desirable life trajectories and transcend conventional gender norms. The findings illuminate how young Jordanians relocating to the UAE have adopted alternatives to normative gender identities and fostered

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gender equality in intimate relationships, underscoring the UAE's contribution to meeting the shifting aspirations and expectations of young Arab generations.

Since 1973, Gulf societies have undergone substantial transformations influenced by factors such as rapid economic changes, urbanization, educational reforms, mass immigration, and globalization (Rahman & Al-Azm, 2023). These transformations, intersecting with politics, economics, culture, and other vital societal aspects, have profoundly impacted the institution of the family, altering its function and role within society. Families, often regarded as "critical units in the social, economic, and political reproduction of their societies" (Joseph, 2018, p. 7), are integral components of the social fabric. Therefore, analyzing shifts in family structures, roles, and values is essential for understanding broader sociocultural transformations.

Although scholarly attention has focused on dissecting the interplay between the state and the family, including how states mold families through legal frameworks that are influenced by religious laws (Joseph, 2018, p. 9), there has been a noticeable neglect regarding the agency of couples in shaping alternative marriage dynamics independent of state oversight and structural constraints. This gap highlights the need to explore the extent to which families can influence and redefine social norms and practices, challenging hegemonic narratives and structures.

Research on families in the Gulf states has predominantly centered around transformations within native Gulf families, creating a notable void in understanding the influence of non-national Gulf families, especially Arab Gulf families, on the wider spectrum of social change within Gulf societies. Indeed, it is possible to suggest that non-national Gulf families wield significant influence within the social fabric of Gulf societies, particularly in the UAE, where a sizable population of Arab migrants from diverse backgrounds resides. Recent statistics indicate that nearly 87 percent of the UAE's total population comprises foreign nationals (De Bel-Air, 2022), with figures surpassing 90 percent in the Emirate of Dubai (Dubai Statistics Center, 2023). The latest data (2020) from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA) highlights that the primary non-national groups consist of Asians, particularly Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis, while Arab migrants represent the second-largest demographic, among which Jordanians constitute one of the largest groups, totaling approximately 170,000 individuals. These statistics underscore the importance of examining the dynamics within non-national groups to fully grasp their social implications and anticipate the future direction of the country.

Specifically, gaining a nuanced insight into the intricacies of Arab families' lives in the Gulf can shed light on several crucial facets of social transformation. Of particular interest is how ideological shifts undergoing in countries of origin (i.e., Jordan)—and specifically those pertaining to individuals' understandings of gender norms and values—can precipitate changes in the perception and practice of gender roles within the host society (i.e., UAE). This is especially relevant in cases where host societies provide conducive conditions for such changes to take place.

Another notable research gap arises from limited access to the private lives of these families, as highlighted by Sabban (2018). Consequently, the majority of studies have primarily focused on major trends affecting Gulf families' structure, including demographic changes (e.g., De Bel-Air et al., 2018; El-Haddad, 2003), leaving a void

in exploring the practical implementation of gender roles and relationships within both national and non-national families.

Drawing on firsthand family observations and informal conversations conducted with young Jordanian families in Dubai, this chapter aims to document their journey towards embracing more egalitarian gender dynamics that resonate more strongly with their evolving values and aspirations. The study argues that young Jordanian couples' ability to embody more desirable gender roles and subjectivities is intricately connected to their exposure to a new sociocultural environment where they can undertake the new roles they aspire to play within their family and society. Furthermore, it suggests that these transformations, while enhanced by the socioeconomic and structural changes of the host country, primarily originate from the evolving understandings of gender norms among a specific segment of young Jordanian women and men that began prior to their relocation to the UAE. In doing so, this chapter underscores the UAE's role in providing a supportive environment for young Arab generations as they reshape their gender identities and relationships, demonstrating how socioeconomic changes can facilitate couples' transition to more desirable gender dynamics. In essence, such transformations in family dynamics—which are intrinsically linked to changes in sociocultural norms and gendered expectations—mirror young Jordanians' shifting understandings of norms and values, signaling a move towards more egalitarian gender attitudes and practices.

These findings challenge prevailing narratives that families in countries with prominent, yet not exclusive, tribal identities, such as the UAE and Jordan, remain deeply entrenched in traditional customs, conservative practices, and kinship values, despite the influences of urbanization and modernization processes.

As per its theoretical underpinnings, this chapter draws on Lois McNay's theory of agency (2000, 2004) and Foucault's theory of heterotopia (1986), which enable us to understand how people negotiate their position within family and society, and how heterotopian spaces allow youth to forge alternative and more desirable realities. Indeed, the research proposes that the UAE serves as a heterotopia where young Arab generations can align their lives with their evolving values. This theoretical framework unveils the remarkable ability of young Jordanian migrants in the UAE to embrace their new value system, showcasing how they have translated their envisioned lives into reality within the UAE's context.

These findings make several contributions to the fields of Middle East gender and family studies, overall challenging an Orientalist epistemology that depicts young Arabs as lacking agency and the Arab family as an inherently patriarchal institution based on fixed and hierarchical relationships, which merely reproduce and reinforce normative gender roles and expectations. The findings also contribute to debates on the status of gender equality in the region, addressing topics such as gender roles and relations change, notions of normative femininity and masculinity, men's involvement in domestic work and childcare, hegemonic masculinity, love, and marriage.

In conclusion, this study enriches the existing literature on Gulf families by illuminating the often-overlooked dynamics of non-national Gulf families, acknowledging

the host country's role in reshaping migrant families' life dynamics, and underscoring the latter's impact on driving broader societal transformations.

2 Arab Family Studies: State of Scholarship

This literature review is thematically organized to deliver a comprehensive overview of the fundamental concepts and themes in the realm of Arab family studies. It delves into various aspects pertaining to Arab families, providing valuable insights into the structure, dynamics, and implications of societal changes on their makeup. The review begins by discussing the waning scholarly attention towards family studies and emphasizing their relevance in comprehending ongoing social transformations. Further to this, it explores three main themes. The first concerns how the Arab family has been conceptualized in the literature, with a specific focus on how the concepts of patriarchy and tribalism have shaped its understandings. The second theme explores evolving notions of Arab family and the wider impact of structural changes on its so-called traditional structure. Finally, the review delves into the emergence of family studies in Gulf countries, specifically exploring the key themes present in the Emirati family literature. The review ends by highlighting the role of migrants, especially domestic workers, within Gulf families, finally calling for a deeper exploration of family dynamics among young Arab couples settling in these regions. This thematic organization allows for a focused examination of essential topics, offering a better comprehension of the breadth of themes covered in the literature concerning Arab families.

In the analysis of scholarly work pertaining to the Middle East, there is a discernible trend of diminishing interest in family studies. Although a few studies (e.g., Joseph, 2018) have recognized the importance of the family in comprehending the social transformation of Arab societies—where it holds a central role—there is a need for further research delving into young, married couples' dynamics, whose newly renegotiated gender roles and expectations remain largely unexplored. This chapter addresses these gaps providing insights into the agency of young couples in enacting more desirable gender roles and egalitarian family relationships that reflect their shifting understandings of dominant gender norms. In doing so, this chapter transcends the view of the family as a homogeneous entity solely tasked with reproducing the social order, recognizing its potential to challenge the status quo by pushing gendered boundaries and establishing new ones.

The Arab family is often described as a predominant patriarchal structure characterized by power hierarchies based on age and sex (Barakat, 1993; Joseph, 1994, 1999, 2000). In this structure, the father is the authoritative figure who must be respected and obeyed by all female and male members, older and younger. Labeled by some scholars as emotionally and, often physically, distant, the authoritative father guards and monitors children but delegates power to the mother in everyday life matters, while retaining the final decision over important decisions (Sharabi, 1977). Mothers are, instead, often caught up in narratives of self-sacrifice for the sake of family

and children, to whom they should show absolute devotion by prioritizing their needs above their own. Such narratives underscore hegemonic discourses of ideal motherhood (Droeber, 2005). For Joseph (1993b), patriarchy and connectivity craft relationally oriented selves, socializing to negotiate gendered and age-based hierarchies. This structure has an imprint on shaping the bond between family members, reproducing power relations through socialization. In much of the literature on the Arab family, relationships between mothers and sons\daughters tend to be described as characterized by proximity, love, and affection, while relationships with fathers, although sometimes varying, are often distant and hierarchical (e.g., Abdalla, 2003; Droeber, 2005; Joseph, 1993a among others).

Suad Joseph's (2018) comprehensive review of Arab family studies since the 1960s serves as an invaluable resource for scholars seeking to contribute to this crucial field, which, as she observes, "has taken a back seat for several reasons" (p. 3). As the scholar (2018) notes, there are several factors contributing to this overshadowing. Firstly, the ongoing political dynamics in the region have directed scholarly attention towards disciplines like political science and history, often perceived as more prestigious. Secondly, certain topics, such as Islam, have been excessively emphasized, while others have been significantly neglected. Thirdly, as literature challenging cultural constructs, including the Arab patriarchy—which has the family at its core—gained prominence, family studies tended to be progressively sidelined rather than further developed in theoretical terms. As Joseph (2018) aptly states, the family represents a potent force in social dynamics, characterized by its dynamism and adaptability to the multiple variables and conflicting power dynamics that shape it. Families are the bedrock of political, ethnic, and religious identity, and loyalty; thus, "the production of families in the Arab region is foundational to the production of Arab societies" (Joseph, 2018, p. 3). Therefore, we cannot ignore families when analyzing social change.

In the realm of family studies, the concept of "patriarchy" has played a pivotal role, mostly in understanding women's subordination. Initially introduced by early Western feminists, patriarchy was perceived as a universal, enduring, and cross-cultural phenomenon responsible for the subjugation of women globally (Acker, 1989). However, feminist theory later challenged the notion of patriarchy as a natural system rooted in biological determinism, prompting a historical examination of its origins (Lerner, 1986). The absence of a clear conceptual framework prompted feminists to gradually shift their focus from the concept of patriarchy towards embracing the notion of gender. Within the context of Arab societies, patriarchy was conceptualized as a gendered system of domination based on kinship and age, privileging males and elders over females and the younger generation. The term "classic patriarchy" was applied to denote male-headed households commonly found in the geographical area referred to by Caldwell (1978) as the "patriarchal belt." In such societies, male dominance, control over women's behavior, and the significance of blood ties were pronounced. The prominent role given to kinship suggested that patriarchy originated within the family regarded as the fundamental unit of Arab societies (Barakat, 1993; Krauss, 1987), and from there, it is subsequently "replicated in other spheres of social life" (Inhorn, 1996, p. 4).

Moreover, tribalism has frequently served as a strong predictor of conservative gender norms, contributing to the formation of hierarchical and patriarchal family structures and relationships. In the Jordanian case, discourses on gender often intertwine with those on tribalism, and the negative implications of tribal norms on gender equality are often taken for granted (e.g., Sonbol, 2003). Similarly, in the Gulf family studies, families have often been examined as kinship and tribal entities closely intertwined with the state's existence. The shared element of tribalism in both Jordan and the UAE highlights the significance of examining gender dynamics within family settings across the two contexts.

Subsequent literature, shedding light on gender roles and structural changes in modernized institutions of both the state and the family, led to the development of theories around new forms of patriarchy, often referred to as “neo-patriarchy” (Moghadam, 2004; Sharabi, 1988). Sharabi (1988) posited that neo-patriarchy emerged through the fusion of imperialism and patriarchy during the era of Western imperial state modernization efforts. Building upon Sharabi's theory, Moghadam (2020) proposed the existence of a modernized form of the neopatriarchal state, characterized by a paradoxical promotion of “gendered modernization” while maintaining intact patriarchal family laws (pp. 469–473). This suggests that “the neopatriarchal state, family, and family laws reflect and reinforce each other” (Moghadam, 2013, p. 17).

Furthermore, the consequences of structural changes caused scholars to argue that modernization and globalization forces have altered the social structure of societies in a way that had positive implications for women's condition (Moghadam, 2013). Factors such as “capital penetration, infrastructural development, legal reforms, mass education, and employment” have been considered to have undermined classic patriarchy (Moghadam, 2013, p. 133). One immediate consequence of these changes was the shift from extended families to nuclear ones (Moghadam, 2013). Thus, the emergence of a new (modern) Arab family has been highlighted, characterized mainly by monogamous marriages, independent households, an increasing role for women in critical decision-making, such as divorce, and a new pattern of gender roles. This literature stressing the role of structural change on families (e.g., Fargues, 1997; Hopkins, 2003; Moghadam, 2004) mainly relied on quantitative data to analyze structural norms or drew on survey data to investigate sociocultural and political changes.

Family studies in the Arab Gulf states, including Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE, have emerged relatively recently, coinciding with the region's increased exposure to globalization (Sabban, 2018). This nascent state of family studies can be attributed to the historical transformation and the region's reliance on external expertise. Specifically, academic exploration of family and women's lives within the Gulf countries started as a response to the increased visibility of these states on the international stage, marking a significant shift in scholarly attention towards family dynamics and social change in the Gulf (Sabban, 2018). However, despite notable progress in the field of family studies, especially in Qatar and the UAE, scholars continue to face numerous challenges, and there remains a shortage of comprehensive literature on family studies specific to the region.

The scholar Rima Sabban (2018) notes that during the late 1980s, emerging academic publications from Arab scholars began to address family-related topics such as divorce and juvenile delinquency, indicating concerns about societal shifts (e.g., Al-Sayar, 1986; Al-Zarrad & Yasin, 1987;), with some authors warning against excessive adoption of Western values during this period of development (Sabban, 2018). In the 1990s, Arab scholars turned their attention more specifically to the issue of family disintegration, delving deeper into topics such as divorce, women's roles, and the impact of prosperity on UAE families. Most publications took a conservative approach, emphasizing cultural and Islamic values (Sabban, 2018). Conversely, the limited English-language scholarship from the same period mainly addressed the UAE's history and the influence of religion and domestic workers on family systems. Over time, the UAE family literature has shifted from a lack of focus in earlier decades to a growing academic interest in understanding family structures and societal changes (Sabban, 2018).

As noted by Sabban (2018), in the post-2000 period, there has been a remarkable surge in literature regarding family dynamics in the UAE, surpassing the cumulative output of previous decades. This increase was driven by conferences that explored topics such as family structures and women's status, leading to a notable expansion in Arabic scholarship. During this time, Arabic academic work increasingly focused on understanding the prevailing social anxieties that directly affected Emirati society. Overall, the literature from this period offered insights into the complex interplay between societal changes, family dynamics, and the evolving roles and status of women in Emirati society. Sabban's work (2018) proved valuable in identifying the several dominant themes that emerged, including marital problems such as divorce and spinsterhood, social challenges like domestic violence, and the impact of shifting social norms and family structures on youth.

Furthermore, a noteworthy contribution (Abdel Azim, 2008) focused on the perceptions and attitudes of newly married Emirati women regarding social and economic changes related to marriage. This study revealed the absence of a dominant family structure in the UAE, with families transitioning between extended and nuclear setups and vice versa. Additionally, Abdel Azim (2008) noted that despite many women achieving higher educational statuses than their husbands, they still entrusted economic matters to their spouses, emphasizing female education as a "gateway to financial security rather than an opportunity to grow intellectually and be independent" (Sabban, 2018, p. 305). Similar findings were observed in the Jordanian context, as demonstrated by scholar Fida Adely (2012), who highlighted the pivotal role of education in enhancing women's prospects of finding a suitable spouse and thereby significantly boosting a family's social mobility.

Other research (e.g., Al-Ghanim, 2008) delved into the consequences of divorce on both divorced females and males, shedding light on the negative social, economic, and psychological effects, particularly for women. Domestic violence was also a recurring theme, with studies exploring its prevalence and its root cause, patriarchy (e.g., Onsor, 2006). These studies criticized the lack of effective governmental intervention and legislation, highlighting the need to address domestic violence as a societal issue. The theme of violence within families extended to children, with studies analyzing

abusive behaviors by parents and the impact on children's well-being. Arabic drama's portrayal of violence and its influence on societal attitudes were also explored (e.g., Al-Khajah, 2009).

Women's status in the UAE was also a significant focus, with studies investigating career ambition, societal attitudes towards women's work in the police field, and the influence of women's education on workforce participation (e.g., Al-Samri, 2008; Al-Katbi, 2008; Ahmad, 2008). Additionally, scholarly efforts aimed to comprehend the evolving roles and challenges faced by Emirati women post-puberty (e.g., Abdel Azim, 2008). Further research delved into topics like the economic empowerment of women, the impact of polygamy on first wives and their children, and the repercussions of nontraditional sexual and marital relationships on familial and national frameworks (e.g., Al-Shamsi & Fulcher, 2005; Hasso, 2011). In general, socioeconomic changes and their consequences on women and families were largely scrutinized. This literature collectively underscores the complex interplay of cultural, religious, and economic factors in shaping the gender dynamics, family structures, and generational perspectives in the UAE.

Another significant theme revolved around intergenerational and cultural change within Emirati families, examining variations in attitudes, perceptions, and practices concerning family and gender roles across different generations. These studies emphasized how exposure to modernization, technology, and education shape evolving perceptions of gender roles and family dynamics (e.g., Alteneiji, 2023; Bristol-Rhys, 2010; Crabtree, 2007; Green & Smith, 2007; Schvaneveldt et al., 2005; Sonleitner & Wooldridge, 2014; Wang & Kassam, 2016).

Finally, a body of literature has examined the role of non-Arab migrants within Gulf families, predominantly focusing on their critical functions as domestic workers, responsible for maintaining household operations, contributing to childcare as well as caretaking of the elderly (Sabban, 2004, 2012, 2018; Shah et al., 2002). Few studies instead have explored the impact of non-Arab Gulf migration on families in both the sending and receiving societies (e.g., Gardner, 2011). Overall, although the literature on Gulf families has extensively covered various pertinent topics, it has overlooked exploring similar issues within non-national Gulf families considering their potential impact on the broader societal context. Specifically, there has been a significant lack of attention given to understanding the family dynamics among Arab migrants, including young Arab families who have recently established their households in the UAE. These aspects of family dynamics represent relatively unexplored territory within the field of Gulf family studies, a gap that this study seeks to address.

3 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study builds upon the findings of my Ph.D. research, which investigated young Jordanian women's and men's agency over hegemonic ideologies and structures operating upon them, affirming their power to shift undesired gender identities and relations. The findings of the research unveiled an ongoing ideological shift among

young generations of women and men, encompassing the domain of education and career, marriage and dating, lifestyle, and life choices, whose normative gendered meanings, the youth have co-opted to their advantage. Furthermore, the research brought to light the growing inclination of young Jordanians towards migration, motivated not just by economic prospects but also by the longing to live in a more equitable and just society that aligns with their evolving expectations for personal fulfillment.

The Arab Barometer (AB) Wave II report on Middle East migration trends revealed that 63 percent of young Jordanians aged 18 to 29 desire to migrate, with 56 percent of potential migrants holding college degrees (Abufalgha, 2022). Interestingly, 13 percent of them have expressed a preference for the UAE as their desired migration destination (Abufalgha, 2022). Additionally, the 2023 ASDA'A BCW Arab Youth Survey highlighted that for the 12th consecutive year, the UAE remains the preferred country for young Arabs, with nearly one in four selecting it as their top migration destination.

Expanding on these findings, I conducted research in the UAE to investigate the significance of Emirati society for the young generations of Jordanians, who, as my previous research has indicated, are increasingly embracing more egalitarian gender roles and relationships. Between November and December 2021, I undertook family observations within newly established households of young Jordanians in Dubai. My focus was on examining the gender dynamics present within their family life, aiming to evaluate the degree to which these couples have been able to adopt more desirable gender roles and subjectivities. This involved closely observing their daily interactions, decision-making processes, division of household and childcare responsibilities, as well as parental models. These observations provided me with a deeper understanding of the complexities of family life dynamics, transcending mere attitudes and perspectives to delve into the actual practices of gender roles. Finally, this exploration enabled me to unveil the UAE's role in fulfilling the evolving expectations of these young Arab generations, who have not only chosen to migrate but also to "remain" in the country.

The research employed qualitative methods of data collection, primarily consisting of participant family observations and informal discussions with family members, including both husbands and wives. Regarding recruitment, snowball sampling was utilized, drawing from previous research participants recruited in Jordan who shared comparable perspectives on gender norms and values. The sample of participants consisted of six young married couples aged between 25 and 31 years old, who lived and worked in Dubai and had moved there after their weddings. These couples had varying lengths of marriage, ranging from a maximum of seven years to as short as six months.

The first household (FO1) consisted of a couple who had been married for seven years and had a two-year-old child. The second couple (FO2) had been married for six years and had a child aged four years. The third (FO3) and fourth (FO4) households consisted of couples who had been married for four and five years, respectively; the first had a child aged three and the second had another child aged two and was expecting the second. The fifth (FO5) and sixth (FO6) households consisted of

newlywed couples with two years and six months of marriage, respectively, and no children.

Among the six families observed, four had children and employed domestic workers for household chores and childcare. The remaining two (FO5-6), without children, did not employ a domestic worker and shared their financial and household responsibilities to varying extents. In the first household (FO1), I conducted a four-week observation. Both the husband and wife were working full-time jobs. At the time of observation, the husband was working part-time as an engineer while also pursuing a master's degree, while the wife was a sales manager working in a private company. Being full-time working parents, they depended on a domestic worker to care for their child. The observation of this household allowed me to better understand the dynamics between wife and husband, as well as their interactions with their child. During the observation, I employed an active approach, which involved participating in the daily family routines and social gatherings, including several interactions with other Jordanian expat families. Furthermore, I conducted five additional one-week family observations in the households of other Jordanian couples, actively engaging in their everyday life practices and activities.

To analyze the data collected, I relied on reflexive thematic analysis, guided by an inductive approach, which is particularly useful when attempting to derive meanings without preconceived notions. The study participants represented an urban, middle-class, university-educated segment of Jordanian youth, primarily hailing from Amman and currently employed. The sample represents a fair combination of the diversity of the Jordanian population, including mixed couples of Palestinian and Transjordanian origins, with one Christian couple and the remainder being Muslims of varying degrees of religiosity.

The research utilized a multidisciplinary theoretical framework, incorporating perspectives from diverse fields such as post-structuralism and critical feminism, informed by postcolonial, intersectional, and decolonial theories. Specifically, McNay's theory of agency (2000; 2004) and Foucault's theory of heterotopia (1986) were particularly relevant in this research. Indeed, McNay's theory helped define agency as a dynamic and historically situated phenomenon influenced by individuals' lived experiences and surrounding circumstances, offering a valuable framework for reimagining passive and subjugated individuals as active agents capable of self-empowerment and collective transformation. Foucault's theory of heterotopia (1986) instead helped theorize Dubai as a heterotopia, or "enacted utopia", a place where people can momentarily challenge the dominant social order by subverting conventional norms and power structures. The chosen qualitative methods of data collection were crucial in revealing diverse family life dynamics, helping bridge the gap between gender roles and attitudes and their tangible implementation within family settings.

4 Young Couples Redefining Gender Roles, Relations, and Identities

The following sections embark on a nuanced exploration of the lived experiences of young Jordanian married couples who moved to Dubai, delving into the profound transformation of gender dynamics within their households. The first section scrutinizes their domestic interactions, enriching our understanding of how individuals actively reshape traditional Arab family structures within Dubai's multicultural milieu, reimagining gender roles, marital expectations, and parenting norms. The second section reflects on their desired gender identities, showcasing alternatives to normative models of femininity and masculinity they aspire to embody, alongside their novel conceptions of marriage and conjugality. Building upon these findings, the last section sheds light on Dubai's role as a heterotopia for the Arab youth, which provides a space for young Jordanians to experiment with and embody more desirable gender roles, relations, and identities within the family and societal context, allowing them to adopt the values and ethics they have long aspired to.

5 Transforming Arab Households: Shifting Gender Roles and Parenthood Dynamics

This section dwells on the practical aspects of gender roles, childcare arrangements, and marital and parenthood expectations among young Jordanian families living in Dubai. It highlights the progressive shift in attitudes and behaviors towards more egalitarian gender roles, presenting several anecdotes that illustrate how couples are renegotiating gendered boundaries by challenging conventional gender norms and expectations in marriage.

Nadia (FO3, 2021) was a female doctor working at a hospital in Dubai. Jordanian of Palestinian origins, she moved to the UAE with her family when she was still a teenager. She met Samir, her husband, through common friends. They dated for almost six months and then got married. Nadia traveled to Jordan to meet Samir's family and there, after a few months, they celebrated their wedding. She described Samir as her ideal match as, "He was sweet and supportive and above all shared my morals and values." However, what truly convinced Nadia that Samir was the perfect partner for her was his rejection of traditional gender roles and the widespread belief that women should be, "Only mothers and wives, and their responsibility is only to take care of the house, husband, and children." Nadia was a strong woman with a deep commitment to effecting positive change within society, as she claimed, "I feel responsible to make this society a better place and raise awareness on women's health issues. I do this every day in my workplace. I love my job." Nadia considered herself a lucky person, especially because she found herself in an environment where women—compared to Jordan—could enjoy more freedom and opportunities to make choices according to their desires and ambitions. In Jordan, she continued, "Women's

opportunities are much more limited. The Jordanian society is still very traditional and women in the workplace are not as valued as men.“ She further continued by saying, “Also within the household women may not have a say, especially if they are financially dependent on their husbands.“ In Dubai, Nadia contributes to more than half of the household expenses and receives incredible support with household chores and childcare from her husband, who works from home and enjoys greater free time and flexibility compared to her. Although they relied on a full-time domestic worker for most of the household chores and childcare, she mentioned that her husband is the one who cooks their meals, as she said, “He loves cooking, while I do not, and I am also really bad at it.“ Despite spending long hours outside the home, Nadia was a dedicated mother who emphasizes the importance of setting a strong example for her daughter. She prioritized instilling in her daughter a sense of self-worth as a woman, emphasizing strength and independence as essential qualities. Nadia aimed to be a role model for her daughter, demonstrating what it means to be a strong and independent woman who can take care of her family without compromising her own well-being and personal fulfillment. Hence, she clearly stated:

The UAE has allowed me to become the person I always wanted to be. I feel free and empowered here. Instead, when I go to Jordan on vacation, I feel the pressure from society and my extended family to comply to traditional gender roles. I believe my husband and I are great for each other and are happy with our roles, which reflect our own personalities. (Nadia, FO3, 2021)

Nadia’s sense of freedom from societal pressure was also echoed by her husband, Samir, who claimed, “I cannot wait to leave Jordan because I often feel judged by my cousins, mostly when I am in the kitchen.“ A similar sentiment was revealed by another woman in my sample, Farah (FO1, 2021), a Christian Jordanian of Palestinian origins, who loved the freedom of Dubai, especially her freedom to dress as she liked without feeling judged by others. Similarly to Nadia, also Farah was a woman who rejected and tried to resist traditional gender norms. She relished a vibrant lifestyle, which included nights out with her female friends and other Jordanian couples. However, there were moments when she felt the burden of childcare, particularly having to prepare meals and feed her child after a long day at work. In contrast to Samir, Ammar, Farah’s husband, did not play a substantial role in household and childcare responsibilities. However, he did look after his child when he worked or studied from home. Nevertheless, as she pointed out, “I do most of the cooking for the whole week. I cook for my child, my husband, and also my maid, and I sometimes feel overwhelmed.“

Similarly to Farah, Hala (FO6, 2021), who was unemployed at the time of observations, felt the weight of household chores and hoped to find employment soon, expressing, “I want to get out of the house. I need to feel I am useful in my life, contributing to something bigger than just taking care of the house and my husband.“ She admitted that her husband, Abdallah, “Tries to help out, but because he leaves at seven a.m. and returns after five p.m., when he comes back home, he only wants to eat and lie on the couch.“ For now, she said, “He only takes out the garbage, but I hope he will contribute more when I find a job.“ However, Hala acknowledged that since

she is currently not contributing financially to the household, it is her responsibility to take care of the house. “For now, because I do not work, taking care of him is my way of expressing love, but I expect things to be different when I start working and we share expenses. I do not want to work double shifts.”

Baha and Dima (FO4, 2021) are another couple whose family dynamics I observed. In their five years of marriage, they faced considerable challenges. As Baha lost his job a few years after they got married, they had to renegotiate gender roles and adapt to the challenging situation. Dima described that time as follows:

Our family dynamics were shaken a lot two years into our wedding. We were both on good salaries, had rented out a nice, semi-detached house in a beautiful neighborhood in Dubai, and hired a domestic worker to help us take care of the house and our child. We were sharing everything. When Baha lost his job, we had to negotiate our roles and responsibilities to fit the hard situation we were in. We moved into a small apartment in an affordable neighborhood. I took over all the financial responsibility of the household, paying the rent, the bills, and a few loans on cars we had. It was a very difficult time for us. My child was only four-months old when I had to return to work. My husband took care of our child and the house, as we also had to let go of the domestic worker after a while. It was very tough for me as I felt very attached to my son and still wasn't ready to leave him. However, my husband proved to be an amazing dad and took great care of him. After he found a job, we hired again a domestic worker and went back to our previous sharing responsibilities (Dima, FO4, 2021).

Asad and Mona (FO5, 2021), another couple in my sample, have been married for two years and displayed remarkable support for each other's personal goals and ambitions. They were an exceptionally driven couple, both with well-defined life objectives. Asad was an architect diligently working towards establishing his own firm in the UAE, while Mona had recently embarked on her career in the fashion industry. She soon recognized that the initial and demanding phases of her profession did not align with her ability to effectively balance career and parenthood. Hence, in common agreement with Asad, she decided to postpone her family planning for a couple of years, until she had consolidated her career. Asad and Mona were not only committed to their career growth but also to their well-being as a couple. Hence, they frequently planned vacations abroad and enjoyed frequent nights out. As a young married couple who had never experienced traveling alone, they took the chance to enjoy their time together. As Mona stated, “We never had the chance to do activities together when we were dating. My family was very controlling. Now, we love doing things without being questioned about our whereabouts by family members.” As per their financial responsibilities, the couple shared a fair agreement, which involved Asad paying the rent as he was on a much higher salary and Mona contributing towards food expenses. In terms of household chores, Mona handled meal preparation and the majority of the daily cleaning tasks, with Asad assisting more on weekends when he had extra time at home.

Rasheed and Rana (FO2, 2021), the last couple I spent time with, brought an intriguing dynamic to the study. Both were of Transjordanian origins with strong tribal affiliations and were born and raised in Amman. However, their distinct upbringings significantly shaped their marriage and parenting expectations, adding complexity to their relationship.

Both Rasheed and Rana grew up in households adhering to traditional gender roles, albeit with differing dynamics. Rasheed's upbringing involved a stay-at-home mother who handled domestic responsibilities and childcare, whereas Rana was brought up in a family where both parents were employed, although her mother did not contribute financially to household expenses. Despite sharing similar values and beliefs, these divergent backgrounds led to tensions within their family due to conflicting expectations. Rasheed, who valued his stay-at-home mother's role, expected Rana to assume a similar caregiving role while also contributing financially, given Dubai's high cost of living. Rana agreed to this arrangement but expected Rasheed to share equally in household responsibilities, including childcare, envisioning a more egalitarian partnership, especially as she had witnessed her mother's struggle to balance career and home duties. As she explained, "In our culture, the husband is the breadwinner, while the wife is the caregiver." However, she continued, "As an educated woman, I disagree with traditional gender roles, and I want to work and contribute to expenses. Moreover, the high cost of living here does not allow women to stay-at-home, even if they wanted to." Both Rasheed and Rana were employed and willingly shared financial responsibilities, however, Rana believed that this arrangement was fair only if her husband also contributed to household duties. Further challenges arose after the birth of their first child and Rana's return to work. As she recounted, "When I came home from work, I found myself responsible for cooking and cleaning, while my husband relaxed on the couch, waiting for his meal." She shouldered approximately 90 percent of the childcare and household chores, leading to burnout and prompting her to request the hiring of a domestic worker if her husband remained unwilling to share these responsibilities. Initially, Rasheed hesitated, concerned that their child might bond more with the domestic worker than with them. However, as a devoted father, he eventually agreed to hire help on the condition that Rana would continue to prepare their child's evening meals and handle feeding and bedtime. They also committed to spending quality time with their child each day, despite their exhaustion.

This couple's evolving views on gender roles and parenting were deeply influenced by their contrasting family experiences. Rana, having observed the challenges her working mother faced in managing both a career and household responsibilities, was determined to pursue a more balanced and egalitarian approach. However, unlike her mother who was not contributing to the family's expenses, she believed her financial contributions warranted an equal partnership in household duties and childcare. Influenced by her mother's experience, she sought a more balanced approach, while Rasheed, valuing the bond with his stay-at-home mother, initially found it difficult to move away from traditional roles. However, as they navigated the realities of their own family life, Rasheed and Rana began to negotiate and redefine these roles, seeking a model that balanced their own expectations, the practical demands of modern life, and their aspirations for their son's upbringing. This process of adjustment underscored the dynamic interplay between tradition and adaptation in shaping their evolving partnership.

The data presented above highlight how young Jordanian couples are shifting towards more egalitarian gender roles and relations while navigating the intricacies of societal, economic, and cultural factors within their living context as well as

their individual life situations. They seek greater equality and support each other in defining roles that work for their relationships. While traditional gender roles persist to some extent, they are being redefined in ways that align with couples' needs and desires, rather than simply conforming to gendered expectations. These young couples challenge fixed understandings of marriage expectations, particularly as partners offer mutual support, especially in the face of societal and economic constraints.

Furthermore, couples exhibited remarkable flexibility in their caregiver and breadwinner roles, transcending normative marriage expectations. Their non-conformity to established gender norms was evident, as they actively sought greater equality in their relationships as both a couple and as individuals. They also expect to adapt their roles based on various factors, especially different needs and circumstances including job availability, income, and also personal desires and expectations. Notably, the findings revealed that men were increasingly engaged in childcare, demonstrating a desire to be nurturing fathers. These findings challenge the stereotypical images of distant fatherhood in the prevailing literature on the Arab family, which often depicts mothers as the primary nurturers (Droeber, 2005; Joseph, 1993a). In my observations, an alternative model of fatherhood emerges, where fathers are caring and attentive not only to children's material needs but also to their emotional well-being. As Baha (FO4, 2021), one of the fathers in my sample, said, "I don't want my son to fear me when he grows up, as I was afraid of my father. I want him to see me as a friend, so I make sure I spend lots of quality time with him."

Similar findings have also disregarded an understanding of motherhood encompassing discourses on self-sacrifice for the sake of the children. In this study, young mothers were acutely aware that this idealized form of motherhood was both unattainable and counterproductive. As noted by Nadia (FO3, 2021), "I want to prove to my daughter that women have an active role in society and are able to make an impact. Our role and value cannot be confined to the kitchen's walls, and my daughter needs to see this." Women's desire to set an empowering example for their children reflects a rejection of traditional gender roles and an embrace of a more expansive view of motherhood.

These findings suggest that the family can also serve as a locus where the hegemonic gendered status quo can be challenged and subverted, rather than simply reproduced. Indeed, families can act as agents of change, functioning as disruptors of the system amidst the multiple societal barriers to gender equality.

Overall, the daily dynamics of gender roles observed in young Jordanian households in Dubai revealed an active engagement of Arab youth in reshaping gendered boundaries and redefining dominant gender norms that constrain both women's and men's roles in contemporary societies. These findings prompt critical inquiries into how young Jordanian generations are redefining conventional notions of femininity and masculinity, along with gender relations, including partnership and conjugality, as evidenced by their changing marital expectations. The next section will explore these emerging conceptualizations, providing further insights into the new role young Jordanians aspire to play within their family and society.

6 Transcending Norms: Rethinking Marriage and Gender Identity

This section delves into the transformative conceptualization of marriage among young individuals, emphasizing their agency in defying dominant social norms and expectations. Young families in Dubai are actively redefining the concept of marriage, establishing new interpretations of love, conjugality, and partnership as essential prerequisites for their fulfillment as a couple. The evidence presented in this context underscores the diminishing influence of the patriarchal institution of marriage on young individuals, who aspire to cultivate more egalitarian relationships and embody alternatives to normative models of femininity and masculinity. Specifically, the young couples I met in Dubai were actively engaged in reshaping gender relations within their marriages through a transformative process that places a strong emphasis on shared values, life goals, and mutual support. This redefinition reflects their agency in challenging and transforming traditional social expectations within the context of marriage.

McNay's conceptualization of agency, defined as people's ability to act within a specific social context influenced by various local and global factors, reveals the hidden processes through which individuals reshape desired gender identities. Indeed, McNay's theory (2000, 2004) posits that normative gender identity is not imposed from external sources but is a result of individual engagement in a process involving negotiation and conflict stemming from personal experiences. This theory helps us understand how the young couples in this study interact with complex social norms and actively negotiate their roles within the family and society.

One key aspect of this gender identities' refinement emerged in the rejection of traditional marriage expectations. In fact, young Jordanian women and men appear to be moving away from the conventional patriarchal family model where rigid gender roles were firmly entrenched. Instead, they seek to establish more egalitarian relationships where both spouses share responsibilities and decision-making power. The prevailing notion among these individuals is that marriage should not be a hierarchy where one partner, the husband, has authority over the other. Instead, they view marriage as a partnership where both wife and husband have equal rights and responsibilities. This transformation in gender relations emphasizes compatibility and shared values between partners. By prioritizing harmony, young individuals are ensuring that their marriages are built on a foundation of mutual respect and understanding. This approach allows them to move beyond traditional gender expectations of marriage and instead focus on building a relationship based on shared aspirations and goals.

I argue that love plays a central role in redefining gender relations within these marriages. These young couples view love as something that develops and deepens over time as partners support and care for each other. Love, in this context, is a dynamic force that encourages mutual respect and equality within the relationship. The majority of the couples I encountered, whether they had met through university, work, mutual friends, or family connections in Dubai or Jordan, expressed

their rejection of traditional marriage arrangements. They emphasized the importance of building a strong emotional connection and knowing their partners well enough before considering marriage. This rejection of conventional marriage practices appears to play a significant role in reshaping gender relationships. Even in instances where couples were introduced by family members, they agreed to meet with the condition that they could date each other for a specific period of time before determining whether to commit or not. This approach enabled them to challenge the notion of marriage as merely a social contract intended to strengthen family bonds, reconceptualizing it as a profound, personal, and emotional connection between spouses above all else.

Overall, marriage held a profound significance for the couples I met, representing a sanctuary where they envisioned their most cherished and idealized lives coming to fruition. However, marriage was viewed as ideal only when it was characterized by elements such as love, companionship, emotional and material support, shared decision-making, and, perhaps most importantly, support for each other's individual aspirations. In fact, in their narratives, young couples consistently emphasized the importance of supporting each other's personal ambitions. They no longer perceived marriage as a sacrifice made for the sake of family and children but rather as a platform that could facilitate, rather than hinder, personal growth, while also nurturing the relationship. For example, Ammar (FO1, 2021) had the opportunity to pursue a master's degree in the UAE because his wife, Farah, shared the household and childcare expenses, and consistently encouraged him to follow his dreams. After initially working in Jordan to cover wedding expenses and bring his wife to Dubai, Ammar's sacrifice paid off seven years later when his wife took over the household responsibilities, allowing him to pursue his educational goals while working part-time. Similarly, Asad (FO5, 2021) was willing to delay family planning for a couple of years to support his wife, Mona, in building her career. These redefined marital expectations among young couples fostered more flexible and egalitarian gender relations, challenging traditional power dynamics within marriage. This approach to marriage acknowledges that individual fulfillment and collective growth within the relationship go hand in hand. It represents a shift away from traditional models of marriage, where roles and responsibilities were often more rigid and focused on fulfilling predefined societal norms. Overall, couples' shared values played a significant role in ensuring that both partners were aligned in their aspirations and approaches to married life.

Moreover, young couple's willingness and ability to challenge power dynamics in their intimate relationships further signifies their shifting understandings of normative femininity and masculinity identities. As gender relations and identities are inherently dynamic rather than static, concepts of femininity and masculinity are not rigid or fixed but intricate and multifaceted. They evolve through a complex interplay of factors at both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels, adapting to individuals' changing life circumstances and evolving positions in relation to power throughout their life journeys (McNay, 2000, 2004).

These findings challenge the perceived uniformity of gender constructs and fixed family hierarchies within Arab and Muslim contexts, deconstructing existing narratives that tend to objectify Arab women and dehumanize Arab men, while simultaneously homogenizing Arab families. Eventually, these findings contribute to the process of decolonizing prevailing narratives, many of which are rooted in an Orientalist epistemology that still wields dominance within the fields of Middle East gender and family studies.

The feminine and masculine identities that young Jordanian couples have been constructing in the Emirati context, shed light on the roles they aim to assume not only within their families but also within society at large. This is evident in the evolving concepts of femininity(ies) among the women I encountered. Most of these women confessed that they had not compromised on their education or career goals when they got married, and among those with children, they all expressed their intention to continue working. Only one of the women with children expressed a desire to be a stay-at-home mom for an extended period, even though Dubai's high cost of living made achieving her desire difficult.

All the women I met, viewed career as a source of empowerment. They highlighted the significance of prioritizing education first and then pursuing a career as a means to unlock individual potential and achieve personal fulfillment. They viewed the UAE as a place where their dream of financial independence could be realized, especially when compared to their home country, Jordan, where highly educated women grapple with staggering unemployment rates reaching 82 percent (Department of Statistics, 2023). Furthermore, these young couples placed a strong emphasis on instilling gender equality values in their children. Indeed, they aspire to raise sons who respect women and daughters who are strong and independent, thereby challenging dominant notions of privileged masculinity and submissive femininity. This contests the narrative of Arab families merely socializing children into patriarchy and reflects a shift in parent-child hierarchical dynamics, moving from strict authority to a more supportive, guiding, and friendly approach.

Finally, women's desire for more egalitarian gender relations within marriage mirrors a broader shift towards more equitable relationships in both private and public spheres. As per the private sphere, women seemed to have found a good balance in their household due to their partnership with men who shared similar expectations, views, and values. In the public sphere, they felt more valuable members of their (host) society as they could enter the job market easily and achieve a sense of empowerment.

These findings indicate that Emirati society has enabled women to pursue their chosen roles in both the public and private spheres of life. Factors such as expanded economic opportunities, higher incomes, the availability of childcare facilities as well as access to affordable domestic workers, cosmopolitan living with reduced societal pressures, weakened family ties due to migration, and adjustments in family expectations have collectively empowered women to pursue their desired life paths. These elements have indeed facilitated women's transition towards more egalitarian roles and relations, shielding them from potential setbacks they might have faced in Jordan.

Similarly to women, Jordanian men in the UAE are also undergoing a redefinition of their masculinity(ies) identities, challenging traditional gender norms and embracing more inclusive and equitable values. Nonetheless, the process of men transitioning to more egalitarian roles appears notably more complex than that of women, as they contend with more significant societal and familial pressures, even within the host society.

In general, the men I encountered distanced themselves from toxic masculinity behaviors and adopted alternative masculinity models marked by open-mindedness and respect for women. The shifting conceptualization of masculinity underscores young men's desire for fairer gender roles in marriage, where they seek partners who not only share their life vision but also help lift the financial burden from their shoulders. Specifically, young Jordanian men's understanding of their traditional gender role as the main breadwinner is significantly evolving, reflecting a growing awareness that the traditional breadwinner model may no longer be sustainable in modern socioeconomic landscapes. Indeed, Dubai's high cost of living, fierce job competition, and job instability have prompted men to reconsider their role as sole providers for their families. They now recognize that shifting towards more flexible gender roles within their households is crucial to ensure the family's economic well-being and overall sense of security, especially in a foreign country where they cannot rely on traditional forms of family support. As Ammar (FO1, 2021) admitted, "I wish I could fully support my family and allow my wife to stop working, if she wanted to, but I can't. I wouldn't be able to maintain a decent standard of living for my family, and our quality of life would be significantly lower. Neither my wife nor I would compromise on that." Likewise, Rasheed (FO2, 2021) echoed a similar viewpoint, by stating, "I couldn't afford to live in the UAE if my wife wasn't willing or ready to share financial responsibilities."

These findings were reinforced by the challenging circumstances faced by another couple, Abdallah and Hala (FO6, 2021), who had recently got married. After their wedding in Jordan, Hala relocated from Saudi Arabia to Dubai, where Abdallah was based. In preparation for the move, Hala had left her previous job, anticipating it would be relatively simple to secure new employment in the UAE. However, financial difficulties arose as Abdallah's income could not cover their living expenses in Dubai, and Hala was still unable to secure employment. Faced with these challenges, they began to contemplate relocating to another Gulf country, with options including returning to Saudi Arabia or settling in Sharjah¹ (UAE) to maintain a more comfortable standard of living within their financial constraints. The couple's strained economic situation had also a bearing on their aspirations as a newlywed pair, as Hala (2021) acknowledged, "We had originally hoped to start a family soon after the wedding, but our financial circumstances forced us to postpone this plan."

The high cost of living in the UAE not only affected couples' desires for parenthood but also influenced their decisions regarding family size. As a male participant, Rasheed (FO2, 2021), confidentially stated, "I always wanted to have a boy and a

¹ Sharjah is one of the seven Emirates of the United Arab Emirates, and it is situated in the eastern coast of the country.

girl, but after I've seen the high cost of kindergartens and schools in Dubai, I am not sure I want another child. I just want to be sure I can provide the child I already have with all he needs." Of the four couples I met with children, only one (FO4, 2021) had intentions of expanding their family and was, in fact, expecting a second child.

Although these couples generally shared financial responsibilities within the household, the high cost of living in the country seemed to exert pressure on young men. Many were already facing financial challenges, having incurred debts to cover wedding expenses and establish a suitable home for their wives in Dubai. Significantly, these financial obligations, which predominantly remained the husband's responsibility in most cases, contributed to men's inability to uphold the traditional role of being the sole breadwinner after marriage.

Undoubtedly, financial constraints did indeed place additional pressure on some of the men in my study. Several even admitted to feeling a sense of threat to their masculinity when juxtaposed with other couples in their social milieu who enjoyed more comfortable lifestyles. These couples could afford spacious houses in desirable residential areas, as opposed to smaller apartments in more affordable districts. They also employed domestic workers and often treated themselves to outings in upscale areas of Dubai and international trips to Europe and South Asia. In some instances, this sense of fragile masculinity led to increased social isolation, and sometimes, even the severing of long-standing friendships. As Hasso (2018) asserts, "Men, no more or less than women, are irrational, emotional and fragile in their psychic structures and embodiments."

The findings presented in this chapter, shed light on the desired gender relations and identities that young Jordanian couples were able to embody in Dubai. These new conceptualizations illuminate that both women and men aspire to actively participate in their families and society, demonstrating a decreased willingness to compromise and the ability to resist societal expectations. The feminine identities embraced by my participants were characterized by qualities like independence and the freedom to chart one's life course based on personal aspirations rather than social expectations surrounding gender. Similarly, men were also actively exploring alternatives to normative models of masculinity, emphasizing the importance of partnerships and mutual support. Masculinities, akin to femininities, are multifaceted and intricate, never wholly confined to gender norms. Nevertheless, it became evident that men's ability to fully embody these alternative models of masculinity was restricted in the public sphere, where they sometimes felt compelled to conform to hegemonic models of masculinity, particularly those related to being the primary breadwinner. The following section brings out emerging considerations regarding the role played by the host country, and specifically Dubai's multicultural environment, in allowing young Jordanians to enact their desired gender roles and identities.

7 Dubai: A (Temporary) Heterotopia for Young Arab Generations

I moved to Dubai after our wedding. My husband was already working here for a few years while I was still completing my undergraduate studies in Jordan. He moved to Dubai to make some money to pay for our wedding expenses and then, after the wedding, I followed him. I did not like it here at the beginning. I felt lonely, I did not have a job and I was at home all day doing nothing. After some months, I found a job in my field, and I started helping my husband with the expenses. Soon, we could afford a bigger house in a nice neighborhood, dining out, and also some vacations. We also found a nice community of Jordanian expats to hang out with, which made a big difference. Our life changed completely. Here, I feel free and finally able to live my life on my own terms! It is a relief to be away from Jordan's judgmental society. We have everything we can possibly dream of here and we are very happy! Also, we are glad we can raise our child in a more open-minded society, while we can still keep cultivating our culture's values, morals and beliefs, but without limitations! We no longer wish to move to Canada as we thought at the beginning. We love our life in Dubai, and we will never go back to Jordan! (Farah, FO1, 2021)

In this powerful account, Farah recounts her transformative journey to Dubai following her wedding. Initially, the transition was challenging, as she grappled with the unfamiliarity and the absence of employment. However, her determination led her to secure a job in her field, and this turning point transformed her family life. She and her husband started sharing financial responsibilities and this allowed them to raise their standard of living significantly. Dubai became their haven, providing for their every need, to the extent that their earlier plans of relocating to Canada lost their appeal. Farah and Ammar had come to love their life in Dubai so deeply that the thought of returning to their home country was no longer a consideration.

This quote encapsulates the journey of many young couples who find in Dubai not only economic opportunities but also a fulfilling and desirable life. In the lived experiences of these couples, Dubai stands out as a city that not only meets their needs but also exceeds their expectations. This section dwells on the reasons why young couples like Farah and Ammar (FO1, 2021) felt able to enact their desired life pathways and identities by living in Dubai.

In examining the case of the young women and men I met, the lack of societal and family pressure was instrumental in allowing them to embrace their preferred gender identities and roles. Specifically, some women said, "I am free to dress as I like, without feeling judged, undermined, or less valued as a woman" (Rana, FO2, 2021), or, "I am so happy I don't need to deal with my neighbors' judgmental eyes when I come back home late, wondering where I might have been..." (Mona, FO5, 2021), or, "I am glad I don't hear the judgmental words of my family when I let my domestic worker feed my child while I relax" (Farah, FO1, 2021). Another key factor for the women in my sample was their increased decision-making power over household and childcare arrangements, which was made possible by their economic independence and shared financial responsibilities with their husbands. As mentioned earlier, this

possibility was determined by the country's wider opportunities for female employment. As Farah (2021) said, "In Jordan, the economic situation is very hard, and women's salary is very low. I am sure I wouldn't have had the same opportunities in my country."

Additionally, women appreciated the freedom to delegate household chores to domestic workers, which played a crucial role in enabling them not only to sidestep their expected gender roles but also to have more quality time to spend with their children and husbands.

Furthermore, physical distance from their families also proved to be influential, as the vast majority of the people in my sample, both women and men, expressed that they can now prioritize their own well-being as well as that of their relationship without the constant pressure of family obligations and demands. As Dima (FO4, 2021) said, "Finally we don't have to spend long Fridays in my family home hearing all about my uncles' and cousins' problems," and Rana (FO2, 2021), "My husband and I can finally decide to have a weekend out without feeling guilty that we did not spend time with our families." As per what specifically concerned the couple's lifestyle, the ability to focus on their well-being and continue enjoying quality time together even after becoming parents was of paramount importance. As Farah (FO1, 2021) stated, "My husband and I love going out in the evenings and enjoying our time as a couple without our child. Maybe in Jordan, we could not do that, as society would judge us as bad parents." Finally, couples also admitted that being able to set their own boundaries with others was a major life-changer as they settled in Dubai. In fact, even though the couples I observed were socially engaged with a community of Arab expats, mostly Jordanians, they admitted how glad they were to have been able to choose their own circle of friends and hang out only with those who shared their values and morals. Farah (2021) pointed out, "In Jordan, it is more difficult to distance yourself, as you are often connected to people you know for a lifetime, and you have to deal with them even if you don't like them."

In addition to releasing themselves from family expectations, some individuals, either women or men, also experienced relief from financial obligations towards other family members. For example, Mona (FO5, 2021) expressed her happiness at being able to spend the money she earns on herself and her family, but also on traveling and leisure activities, rather than having to financially support other family members. She further mentioned, "I still help out when I can, but not having the constant burden of lending money is a relief." This point was also emphasized by the men in my sample, who also found it reassuring not to be responsible for supporting their family members in Jordan, especially when they were already struggling to provide for their own families in Dubai. As Abdallah (FO6, 2021) stated, "I am already going through a lot with my wife here, I cannot imagine if I also needed to take care of my family back in Jordan. I help them when I can, but the fact that I am abroad and they know life here is expensive takes a burn off my shoulders!"

The physical distance from their families primarily facilitated the adoption of more egalitarian gender roles, empowering them to depart from traditional roles they did not identify with without feeling excessively judged or undermined. Living abroad in an expensive environment seemed to validate, both in their own perception and in

the eyes of others, their deviation from gendered expectations, freeing them from this constraint. The relief from pressure was also evident when discussing men's roles as not just breadwinners but also caregivers. As Samir (2021) mentioned, "In Jordan, I wouldn't feel so comfortable taking care of my daughter, feeding her, and changing her diaper in front of my mother."

In summary, the absence of societal and family pressure to adhere to rigid gender roles appeared crucial in empowering these young couples to embrace more adaptable gender roles. It also led to a transformation in their perceptions of marital expectations, as well as motherhood and fatherhood models. Furthermore, the country's employment opportunities for educated youth played a significant role in allowing both women and men to feel fulfilled and able to achieve their life goals. Ultimately, the cosmopolitan and open-minded atmosphere of the city was cited as a primary catalyst in enabling individuals to adopt unconventional lifestyles that might have been challenging to pursue in their home country.

Overall, the findings presented here indicate that young Jordanian couples view Dubai as a desirable place to live because it aligns with their evolving expectations of playing a more fulfilling, empowered, and egalitarian role within their family and society. They also perceive Dubai as a space where they can break free from restrictive norms and societal pressures that no longer resonate with their shifting identities. This suggests that Dubai serves as a heterotopia for young Jordanian women and men, providing them with the opportunity to embody alternatives to traditional gender roles and identities that reflect their new value system.

Furthermore, these observations closely align with those of my PhD research, which previously identified a shift towards more egalitarian gender roles among educated Jordanian youth. Hence, it can be suggested that these couples were already undergoing a process of value change in their home country, and the conditions and context of the city further facilitated, if not encouraged, their transition towards more egalitarian gender roles and relations.

For instance, the city's high cost of living has prompted couples to contemplate the possibility of evenly sharing financial responsibilities. This, in turn, has led to husbands taking on a more active role in childcare and household chores, thereby alleviating the burden of domestic work for women, further supported by the assistance of domestic workers. This has yielded positive effects on the overall well-being of the couples, as they have shown increased care and attentiveness towards each other's needs and aspirations. In this context, Dubai can be seen as a "realized utopia," a concept in Foucault's theory (1986) that denotes a space where people can question and resist the dominant social order. A place where individuals can exercise their freedom by envisioning an alternative—and more desirable—world. Such a place, which in Foucault's theorization usually co-exists besides those controlled by the power, in this study, is instead identified within a migration destination.

Lastly, this research revealed a noteworthy finding indicating that Dubai not only constituted an ideal city for temporary living but also a place to settle permanently, as the majority of the couples expressed a preference for Dubai over traditionally favored Western destinations, such as Europe and North America. This sheds light on the UAE's role in providing a safe oasis for young Arab generations who are in

the process of reshaping their own identities, and whose hope for a better future is increasingly found within the Middle East, rather than outside of it. Indeed, most of the couples I have been interacting with have conveyed their overall satisfaction with their life in the country and expressed their desire to ideally reside permanently there.

The opportunity to establish a permanent home in a cosmopolitan, open, and more liberal environment that still aligned with their values and morals was the foremost reason why Dubai seemed more attractive than other Western destinations. Specifically, the ability to embody non-normative femininities and masculinities without being exposed to controversial moral standards served as a shield, particularly for their children, against what they perceived as Western culture's inherent values.

Of the six families I met, only one (FO5, 2021) expressed a desire to resettle in Germany in the future, due to the presence of family ties in the European country. However, it is important to note that these couples' aspirations to make Dubai their permanent residence often remained more idealized than practical. In fact, many were aware of the practical constraints of fulfilling this desire and expressed concerns about their restricted prospects for permanent settlement in the country. This latter topic triggered the emergence of couples' anxieties regarding the lack of security for the future, particularly as individuals began to contemplate their uncertainties about what lies ahead. This shared sentiment among young couples was succinctly encapsulated by the words of Asad and Mona (FO5, 2021), who said, "We would love to stay here, but there is no future in this country for us or our children. Germany, on the other hand, can provide us with the future stability we need." These findings give rise to new questions about Dubai's potential to evolve into an actual lasting heterotopia for young Arab generations, prompting further inquiries about the role the Emirate aspires to assume in the future of the Middle East.

8 Conclusion

The findings from this research showed that young Jordanian couples living in Dubai are actively confronting and redefining traditional gender roles and expectations within their marriages. They prioritize compatibility and shared values, emphasizing the importance of companionship and conjugality as dynamic forces in their relationships. Their pursuit of partnerships based on mutual understanding and respect reflects their determination to reshape conventional gender norms within the institution of marriage, contributing to the cultivation of more egalitarian and fulfilling relationships.

In summary, a multitude of factors, including the host country's socioeconomic and cultural landscape, coupled with the expatriates' newfound freedom from societal and familial pressures, have collectively paved the way for their transition to more desirable gender roles, allowing them to lead lives in harmony with their shifting values.

Nevertheless, it is important to interpret these findings with an awareness of certain limitations. This research focused on a specific subset of Jordanian youth—urban, middle-class individuals with university degrees—resulting in a single-case study with limited sample size and narrow diversity. The lack of participants from various Arab nationalities and socioeconomic backgrounds restricts the generalizability of the findings. Consequently, the applicability of the results to the broader population of young Jordanian migrant families in Dubai, as well as to other Arab youth more generally, is constrained. Furthermore, gender role attitudes and practices within this population are shaped by a range of factors, including individual experiences, personal circumstances, and varying interpretations of culture, traditions, and morals. Therefore, these findings cannot be universally applied, given the diversity and complexity of these influences that make individuals' understandings of gender highly diverse.

The contributions of this study open up three main avenues for further research. The first avenue calls for an investigation into the extent to which a shift in gender norms and values in non-national Arab families living in the Gulf can affect wider sociocultural changes within the host society. The second involves investigating comparable transformations in gender norms and values among young Emirati couples who possess similar sociodemographic characteristics to the sample in this study. This exploration will aid in evaluating the alignment of sociocultural values, providing insights into the demands for change within the young Arab population in the country. The third avenue explores the UAE's potential to offer Arab youth a regional alternative to migration to Western countries and raises questions about how creating an environment that embraces egalitarian values can set an example of positive social change across the Middle East region. Subsequent research should delve deeper into this topic by addressing the following questions: Why is the UAE becoming more attractive to Arab youth compared to traditionally favored Western migration destinations? Why is the UAE's value system more appealing to Arab youth than those of Western Europe and North America, and which broadly perceived Western values do they reject in favor of the UAE's? Can the UAE offer a new vision for Arab youth in the Middle East, compensating for the shortcomings of Western societies in building truly inclusive communities, especially as far-right ideologies, rooted in anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia, are on the rise?

By addressing these questions, future research will contribute to enhancing our understanding of the values, hopes, and aspirations of a part of the Arab youth living in the UAE, highlighting ongoing social change. This will ultimately cast light on the UAE's potential to influence and drive change across the broader Middle East region, providing a model for building more equitable, cohesive, and engaged Middle Eastern societies, in which young people are active contributors to their communities' development and well-being.

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Chapter 40

South Korean Transnational Families in Qatar



Byung-Lim Ji

Abstract Qatar has become a destination for South Korean professional migrants who seek opportunities to work and build their lives, where they also form and nurture families. This chapter examines various aspects of family life among South Korean transnational families in Qatar, shedding light on family formation, fertility behavior, parenting practices, and the challenges of living and working abroad. It explores how these families balance cultural preservation with the demands of life in Qatar, emphasizing the importance of maintaining strong ties to their homeland through regular visits. The chapter reveals that while navigating the complexities of family formation and child-rearing is challenging on foreign soil, South Korean families strive to reinforce their cultural identity and connections with their motherland.

1 Introduction

Studying transnational families is essential in understanding the evolving patterns of family life in the twenty-first century and anticipating future developments (for details, see Skrbis, 2008). The twentieth century was marked by immigrant families often sacrificing their original nationalities and cultural practices to assimilate into host societies. However, in the twenty-first century, there has been a noticeable shift toward maintaining national identities and preserving connections with home countries (Howard, 2012; Jeong et al., 2014; Lee & Jo, 2018). This development facilitated by advancements in the modes of communication and transportation reflects broader global trends where transnationalism allows migrants to retain ties to their homeland, while still integrating into new societies. As national boundaries become increasingly blurred, transnational families have become an inevitable and prominent social phenomenon. Although the future remains uncertain, more diverse forms of family will certainly emerge (Al-Rasheed, 2005; Orellana et al., 2011; Matsukawa et al., 2023). In this context, Korean families living abroad, particularly in non-Western regions like the Gulf, present an important case for studying

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how transnational families negotiate cultural boundaries while maintaining national identity.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including Qatar, have become hubs for global migration and have attracted diverse populations due to their economic boom driven by oil wealth (John & Howard, 2013; Kamrava, 2015). Historically, the Gulf was a region of small coastal communities engaged in pearl diving and trade (Belgrave, 1968), but the discovery of oil in the mid- twentieth century dramatically transformed the social and economic landscape (Kergan, 1975). With small native populations, countries like Qatar turned to international labor markets to fuel rapid modernization. Within a couple of decades, migrants constituted the overwhelming majority of residents in Qatar, representing a broad spectrum of cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Ali & Cochrane, 2024; Umar & Rahman, 2023). This multicultural environment is particularly relevant to understanding the experience of South Korean families living in Qatar, as they navigate both the dominant Qatari culture and the expatriate communities around them.

Korean migrants in Qatar contribute significantly to the country's culture and economy, with a dominant presence in the aviation industry. As per the data available from the Korean embassy in Qatar, the estimated Korean population in Qatar was 2800 in 2023 of which around 1000 were employed in various airlines.¹ Many of these individuals initially moved to Qatar for employment opportunities and subsequently settled to start a family. For Korean families in Qatar, maintaining a cultural identity while adapting to a vastly different environment presents unique challenges. They face an array of challenges including cultural adaptation, language hindrance, educational obstacles, social assimilation, employment prospects, legal and bureaucratic issues, and healthcare accessibility. Unlike traditional immigrant models where assimilation into the host country is a central goal, Korean families often engage in "selective adaptation," choosing which aspects of Qatari and expatriate culture to adopt while reinforcing their national and familial ties to Korea (Choi et al., 2013; Jang & Sohn, 2013). This selective adaptation process points to the complexity of transnationalism for Korean migrants, where maintaining national identity does not preclude participation in the cultural fabric of the host country.

A critical issue for Korean migrants in Qatar is the impact of Korea's citizenship policies. While Korea prohibits dual citizenship, expatriates can retain their Korean nationality while residing abroad (*Constitution of the Republic of Korea*, 1987). This creates both opportunities and challenges for Korean families in Qatar. They can maintain their political and social connections to Korea by voting in national elections and participating in Korean cultural organizations abroad. However, children born in international marriages face challenges in acquiring Korean citizenship, particularly if they grow up outside of Korea's cultural and social context. This dual-national identity presents unique dilemmas for these families, as they attempt to balance their Korean heritage with the realities of living in a host country where they may never fully integrate (Jeong et al., 2024).

¹ The information was obtained through a telephone interview with the Korean Embassy in Qatar on May 7, 2024.

Despite their consistent presence in Qatar, these families remain understudied in academic literature, while much of the existing knowledge comes from media reports that provide only surface-level observations of their experiences. There is a lack of scholarly work exploring the nature of their adaptation and transnational family structures. This chapter seeks to address this gap by investigating how Korean families in Qatar engage with their host society while maintaining their cultural identity. The study aims to contribute to a scholarly understanding of the intersection between migration, transnational families, and cultural integration, particularly in the context of non-Western expatriate communities in the Gulf. The chapter draws on in-depth interviews with five Korean families residing in Qatar, as well as discussions with officials from the Korean Embassy in Qatar. These interviews provide firsthand insights into the experiences and much-needed data concerning Korean nationals in Qatar.

The paper is structured into six sections, including the introduction and conclusion. The second section explores the theoretical framework surrounding transnational families which lays the groundwork for understanding their transnational lives in their host country. The third section focuses on Korean migrants' mobility and employment patterns in Qatar. The fourth section examines parenting styles and gender relations within these families, highlighting how cultural influences and structural constraints shape family life. The fifth section, followed by the conclusion, provides an overview of how Korean families adapt to life in Qatar.

2 Theoretical Issues

Transnationalism, a defining paradigm of the twenty-first century, reflects the interconnectedness of individuals across global borders facilitated by advancements in technology and transportation (for details, see Wolf, 2002; Faist, 2000; Faist, et al., 2021). The widespread use of the Internet and smartphones, along with high-speed travel options, has broken down barriers, allowing migrants to maintain their ties with their home countries. Studies on migration in the twentieth century focused primarily on the adaptation process of immigrants leaving their country of origin and permanently settling in a new country. Immigrants primarily concentrated on adapting and thriving in a new country that was, generally, more economically advanced than their home country (Mazzucato, 2018). However, transnationalism, which emerged as a new paradigm in the twenty-first century, diversified the traditional view of immigration to align with contemporary trends. It focuses on the connection between migrants and their home countries. This perspective adds a hopeful dimension to migration while recognizing the growing trend of migration and explores, through academic research, how migrants can strengthen their links with their home countries (Kim et al., 2012; Lee & Pang, 2020; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011).

Transnationalism is used as a value-neutral concept that falls between internationalism and globalism. Studying immigrant families from the theoretical perspective of transnationalism helps us understand the tendencies of migrant families within

the Gulf region. Transnational families need to be understood in a theoretically completely different sense from multicultural families. A multicultural family refers to family members of different cultural backgrounds, races, and nationalities living together in the same country (Jang & Sohn, 2013). On the other hand, while transnational families sometimes exhibit characteristics of multicultural families, they are not to be confused with multicultural families. In other words, transnational families are based on the continuous maintenance of ties between family members living in different countries and family members remaining in their home countries for reasons such as overseas employment, migrant labor, study abroad, etc. (Faist, 2000; Jeong et al., 2024).

In earlier times, when overseas employment, migrant labor, or study abroad were uncommon, concerns arose about families being physically separated across countries. Instances were frequent where individuals, termed so-called “goose fathers” remained in Korea, supporting their families abroad by sending funds for living expenses and educational needs in places like the United States or the United Kingdom (Jung & Wang, 2018; Lee & Koo, 2006). However, in today’s time, the stereotype that families are meaningful only when they share a place of residence is anachronistic.

The reinforcement of ties within transnational families is notably evident through remittance. Families bolster their connections by sending money earned abroad back to their home countries and by providing essential items such as home appliances and cars or even helping in the construction of family homes (Baldassar, 2007; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004). These contributions support various needs back home, including education expenses for children and siblings and medical expenses for parents. Even when physically apart, they maintain a sense of family bond through online celebrations of birthdays and other significant events, ensuring a continued sense of solidarity and cultural exchange.

Transnational families, formed in the global era, are now recognized as a novel family type. Unlike family members residing together yet experiencing strained relationships due to communication gaps, transnational families emphasize the essence of familial bonds across international borders. German social scientist Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim² illustrates this concept through the notion of “long distance love” within a family (Wilding, 2006; Wolf, 2002). Transnational families serve as social mirrors reflecting the inherent ties and meaning within families living together, alongside exemplifying a contemporary family structure. Researching how these family members communicate and contribute socially to strengthening the bonds between families beyond the obstacles of physical space will aid in predicting and embracing the diverse family structure that will shape the future. Within this broader theoretical advancement, this research is contextualized.

² **Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim:** She majored in sociology, psychology, and philosophy at the University of Munich. She taught micro-sociology at the University of Giessen, social psychology at the University of Munich, and is currently a professor of sociology at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg. In particular, she studies social changes and changes in the family system. There are many books written by her, “What Comes After the Family?” and “Long-distance Love” and “Love Is Terrible, but Too Normal Confusion” written with Ulrich Beck.

3 Korean Families in Qatar: Moving, Living, and Working

In the early 2000s, the South Korean government initiated a series of overseas employment programs to address rising youth unemployment and foster global talent. One of the most prominent initiatives was launched under President Lee, Myung Bak's administration (2008–2013) to cultivate global leaders. This program encouraged Korean youth to gain international experience by working abroad for 5–10 years, with the intention of bringing their acquired skills back to strengthen Korea's developing economy. Despite these efforts, youth unemployment rates in Korea remained persistently high. In response, the government introduced the "K-Move" program from 2013 to 2017, which further promoted overseas employment, migration, and settlement opportunities for Korean youth. Although these government-led initiatives aimed to provide a pathway for Koreans to work overseas, many individuals have pursued migration and employment abroad independently.

Qatar emerged as one of the destinations for these migrants, particularly Korean women, who moved either as employees of Korean companies' overseas branches or as part of the broader government-led programs. They primarily relocated for employment as flight attendants and ground workers for airline companies. As a result, the proportion of Korean women working in the aviation sector became high, comprising one-third of all Korean residents in Qatar.³ The number of airline flight attendants, which stood at just over 300 in 2000, increased to more than 1,000 as of 2024 in Qatar.⁴ According to an analysis of the gender ratio among Koreans who moved to Qatar for employment or study abroad, women outnumbered men significantly. Most Korean men who moved to Qatar alone, leaving their wives and children in Korea, lived in groups with their colleagues in group accommodation provided by the company.

Until the early 2000s, most Koreans living in Qatar as families consisted of wives and children who moved with their husbands and were often employed by Korean companies located in Qatar, such as Samsung and Hyundai. These families typically resided in Qatar temporarily during their husbands' contract periods. This pattern also applies to Korean expatriates working at the Korean embassy. Aside from those families who settled down in Qatar for an extended period while operating businesses such as lodging and restaurants, most families returned to their home countries as soon as their working contracts were over. However, with the development of Qatar's infrastructure, the number of Korean families residing in Qatar for an extended period has increased. Furthermore, the number of Korean women marrying and settling in Qatar with men from Western countries has also been gradually increasing. Currently, there are more than 200 Korean women who are married to foreign men and are living in Qatar.⁵

In addition, there were also Korean couples who moved to Qatar together in their prime age to expand their businesses in the heavy machinery, restaurant, and lodging

³ Data obtained from the Korean Embassy in Qatar.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

industries in Qatar. Over time, some of these families encouraged their children and grandchildren to settle in Qatar. They invited some family relatives in Korea to expand their nuclear family to an extended family.

Despite Qatar's strong adherence to traditional Arab culture, these transnational Korean families have managed to establish their multicultural identity by embracing more than one culture. They actively engage in Qatar's Korean community, exchanging information and assisting newly arrived Korean immigrants in adapting to local life in Qatar. In addition, they teach the Korean language to children of multiple nationalities and share Korean culture and food with their neighbors, thus promoting their countries' culture in Qatar as well.

4 Childbirth and Parenting

There are several different ways Korean families deal with childbirth and parenting in Qatar compared to those living in Korea. Pregnant women who give birth in Korea are encouraged to refrain from traveling by plane during pregnancy and are advised to get as much rest as possible. However, many Korean pregnant women living in Qatar travel to Korea, a 10-hour flight, for regular prenatal examinations and childbirth due to the high cost of hospital treatment in Qatar, which is unaffordable for many without medical insurance coverage. Besides, traditionally, Korean females prefer to give birth while staying with their family (Han et al., 2020).

In Korea, after the birth of a child, a nanny is hired temporarily to receive assistance. From the time a child begins to walk or eat normal food, either they are entrusted to a daycare center, or one of the parents quit their jobs and focus only on raising their children. Since hiring a nanny is quite expensive in Korea, often the child is entrusted to a national or public daycare center, which offers free-of-charge childcare services with government support.

In contrast, the parenting practices of Korean families in Qatar vary based on family values and the cultural diversity within the household. In families where both spouses are Korean, traditional Korean gender roles often prevail, with wives primarily responsible for childcare and husbands focused on work. However, in families formed through international marriages, such as Korean women married to non-Korean spouses, these practices can be more complex. For example, "A," a former flight attendant, left her job after marrying a British man she met in Qatar to focus on raising their children. Despite this decision, she anticipated that her husband would be able to afford a nanny to care for the children, which would potentially allow her to return to work in the future. Her case is not unique; many Korean women in Qatar make similar decisions as they are influenced by both Korean cultural expectations and their economic situation. "B," married to a Singaporean pilot, also left her job after childbirth to fully dedicate herself to child-rearing.

This pattern reflects, to some extent, the traditional gender roles commonly found in Korean society and other immigrant communities from developing countries. In these settings, the wife's role as the primary caretaker of children, especially

during early childhood, is often emphasized (Frank & Hou, 2015). Some women may embrace traditional roles temporarily or full-time, while others balance professional careers alongside caregiving responsibilities (Bhalla, 2008; Yu, 2011). Nevertheless, the socio-economic context of migration also plays a critical role in shaping these decisions (Dion & Dion, 2001; Lansford et al., 2009). Living in a foreign country results in gender roles and parenting practices being shaped not only by the migrants' traditional values but also by the social, economic, and cultural realities of the host country (Yu, 2011). For instance, some Korean women left their jobs not only due to cultural expectations but also due to limited access to affordable childcare or work opportunities that accommodate family life in Qatar. In Korean families where both spouses were Korean, similar adjustments were made as they were often necessary to navigate these constraints effectively.

However, Korean families formed through international marriages were more inclined to take nannies' help for child-rearing. In Qatar, where employing nannies is a common form of parenting, the cost of hiring a nanny is not as expensive as in Korea (Lari & Al-Emadi, 2022). Hence, depending on the number of children, some families employ two or three nannies at the same time. These families usually employ nannies from the Philippines, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Family members who speak English communicate with them in English and share instructions or information necessary for joint parenting. Nannies stay at home with the child and proceed with co-parenting with members in charge of childcare and household care.

To ensure that their children are well-adjusted to Qatar's multicultural environment, Korean parents take deliberate steps to integrate both Korean and local cultures into their upbringing. This involves exposing their children to a blend of cultural experiences that reflect both their heritage and the host country. For instance, parents bring their children to cultural festivals organized by embassies or local cultural centers, where they can experience and appreciate elements of both Korean traditions and Qatari culture. To further enrich this cultural understanding, they encourage their children to read books and watch movies so that they are aware of the differences and similarities between their maternal and paternal heritages. Moreover, Korean children often socialize with peers from other multicultural families which inculcates in them a sense of stability and belonging at home and in society.

A discerning trend among many Korean families is their preference for living in affluent areas such as the Pearl, Qatar—an upscale residential area which is home to a large number of Western expatriates. By residing in such communities, children are exposed to British-style Western culture and education from an early age. This intentional immersion in diverse environments enables children to grow up with a broader worldview, equipped to navigate and appreciate multiple cultural norms and practices.

Through various cultural exchanges, children of Korean families in Qatar develop an ability to accept and respect different cultures without prejudice. This cultural openness helps them view the world from a broader perspective. One of the most vital aspects of a child's development in multicultural Korean families is the formation of strong self-esteem. When children feel confident and proud of their dual cultural backgrounds, they are more likely to grow into adults who are not only comfortable

with their identity but also equipped with the skills to contribute positively to society. Exposure to multiple cultures from a young age gives them a unique perspective, which becomes an asset as they navigate the complexities of a globalized world.

It is worth mentioning that foreign men who marry Korean women in Qatar and have children often pass on their own nationality to the children rather than their wives' nationality. In families formed through international marriage, children typically acquire their father's nationality and are predominantly shaped by his cultural background. This often results in the Korean heritage and identity imparted by their mothers being overshadowed or diluted in the process of cultural transmission. The influence of the father becomes even more pronounced when he is the primary financial provider or shares this responsibility equally with his wife. In such cases, his role extends beyond cultural influence, shaping the family's lifestyle, decision-making, and the overall upbringing of the children.

Korean mothers, in particular, place a lot of emphasis on language education so that their children can establish a strong connection to both their parents' countries and their host country, i.e. Qatar. By enrolling their children in Korean language schools and encouraging them to practice both languages at home, mothers ensure that their children grow up recognizing both countries as integral parts of their identity. The ability to speak both Korean and Arabic or English, allows children to engage meaningfully with both cultures, helping them to bridge cultural divides and maintain a sense of belonging in transnational settings. Books, movies, and other media further aid in helping children recognize the differences in cultures.

5 Visiting Home: Ruptures and Ties Within and Across National Borders

Many Koreans interviewed for this research expressed a strong desire to maintain a strong bond with their home country in order to preserve a sense of pride and identity rooted in Korean culture. For these migrants, staying connected to Korea is not only a matter of personal or cultural significance; it also plays a practical role in their ability to cope with the challenges they face in Qatar, particularly in dealing with instances of discrimination or prejudice. By maintaining a close bond with their homeland, they find strength and resilience in their shared cultural heritage. This connection, however, extends beyond the personal and cultural—it also contributes to Korea's economy. Korean immigrants remain connected to their families by regularly sending remitting and essential goods back home.

In addition, the advancement in communication technology, such as real-time video calls over Skype, WhatsApp, and Imo, further strengthens these ties and lays the groundwork for future in-person visits. These in-person family visits play an important role in reinforcing the bond between migrants and their home country. For example, approximately 1,000 Korean national flight attendants working for airlines

in Qatar visit Korea every month.⁶ In addition to visiting Korea, some invite their families to Qatar or plan short trips to nearby countries. Many Korean immigrants reserve tickets months in advance to attend festivals and family events, such as Chuseok and Lunar New Year's Day, where the whole family gathers to hold ancestral rites and share food. If unable to visit frequently or during major holidays, they take annual vacations to Korea for extended periods, up to three months. Interestingly, families separated by migration often maintain closer emotional bonds than those who live together on a daily basis, highlighting the strength of transnational family solidarity. The frequent interactions and shared belief in the unity of their hearts shed light on the meaning of family in today's globalized world.

6 Conclusion

This research shows that studying various forms of transnational migration holds importance for understanding changing family patterns in the twenty-first century. Most of the Koreans who moved to Qatar, one of the richest oil-producing countries in the Gulf, were motivated by overseas employment. When the goal of building a career in a variety of fields, such as aviation crew and pilots, medical and tourism, sports, and energy, meets the corresponding benefits and welfare, they set root in Qatar. Most Korean families hope that the hardships and loneliness they face working abroad will eventually be compensated by the support and solidarity of their families. While Gulf migration is a temporary phenomenon and the Korean skilled migrants come to Qatar for work on a contractual basis, many migrants often end up having their own families in Qatar through marriages.

As Korean migrants maintain their ties with their home country, it becomes evident that the experiences of overseas Koreans are deeply connected with Korea's broader cultural and economic sphere. The relationship between migrants and their homeland is reciprocal: while migrants contribute economically by sending remittances, they also bring back cultural influences from their host countries, enriching Korea's own cultural fabric. The study of these transnational families brings into discussion how migration affects family bonds, identity, and cultural continuity, particularly in a globalized world where borders are becoming more permeable.

This study suggests that the experience of Korean families in Qatar points to broader trends in migration and identity formation particularly in the South-South migration where temporality defines the lives of migrants. The experiences of these migrants provide insights into how family, culture, and identity can persist and evolve, even in the face of distance and change, yet being aware that their sojourn in their host country can come to an abrupt end if they lose their employment. Ultimately, this research offers a window into how migration reshapes individual and collective identities, while simultaneously contributing to both the home and host countries' economic and cultural landscapes. This precariousness influences how these families

⁶ Ibid.

approach both their personal and professional lives, always aware of the possibility of returning to Korea or relocating elsewhere.

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