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THE ARAB WOMEN MANAGER: PARTICIPATION, BARRIERS, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of research examining the status of Arab women managers. It summarizes the current situation and highlights constraints Arab women face in their career progression. Given the theoretical shortcomings of research on management and gender in this region, a holistic approach is adopted to evaluate the pressures that Arab women managers must address. Human capital and gender discrimination theories are invoked to explain the restricted managerial advancement of women in this part of the world. This review supports the notion that social, organizational, and personal barriers faced by women managers arises from the culture-based gender roles and status. Research using rigorous designs is needed to probe in more depth many of the issues raised in this review.

Key Words: Arab women, management, career progression, barriers, gender

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades Arab societies have witnessed dramatic economic, political and social changes (Abuznaid, 2006; Ali, 1999). One of these important changes has been the opening up of economies to foreign investments which have increased the need for skilled labour. This has transformed the composition of the workforce, changed the nature of women's employment and paved the way for improving the general economic, political, and social status of women in a large number of Arab nations (Metcalfe, 2008; Middle East and North Africa, 2007). Women's overall status in Arab nations has improved, particularly in terms of education and participation in economic activities (Middle East and North Africa, 2007; Weir, 2000; World Bank, 2003). A number of Arab governments have tried to improve education for women and promote greater gender equality in employment (World Bank, 2004). Yet these changes have not resulted in a corresponding increase in Arab women's participation in the labour force (International Labour Office, 2002, 2003).

The organizational reality in Arab countries is that women struggle with patriarch cal, male-dominated hierarchies which have a conservative orientation towards women. Moreover, in Arab countries, women have only recently began to join the rank of managers and are grossly under-represented at the lower, middle and senior levels (Jamali, Sidani, and Safieddine, 2005). According to a regional gender report in Middle East and North Africa (2007) women's share of the total workforce increased by 19% in the region between 1990 and 2004 compared to 3% globally (Neal, Finaly, and Tansey, 2005). Despite this, women's participation in the labour force in this region remains the lowest in the world (less than 33% across the region) as opposed to the world average of 56% (Arab Human Development Report, 2005) compared to men's participation which is similar to the rest of the world (Middle East and North Africa, 2007). It should be noted that accurate statistics on women managers in the developing world is limited (Omar and Davidson, 2001) and there are huge intraregional disparities. For example, women constitute 32.3% of the total workforce in Lebanon compared to 15% in Saudi Arabia (World Bank, 2004). Kuwait has seen women's participation increase by 3% between 2000 and 2005 while Saudi Arabia has witnessed a decrease from 7% in 1990 to 4% in 2003 (Hamdan, 2005). In Bahrain, women make up 36% of all the employees in the public sector, yet their participation in the workforce increased only by 2% between 1990 and 2004 (Middle East and North Africa, 2007).

To date, studies related to women's career advancement have been limited to North American and Western European contexts (Metcalfe, 2008; Adler, 2007; Benson and Yukongdi, 2006; Whiteoak, Crawford, and Mapstone, 2006; Aycan, 2004; Burke and Karambaya, 2004; Omar and Davidson, 2001; Powell, 2000) with little attention to problems and issues confronting Arab women managers (Omair, 2008; Metcalfe, 2006, 2007, 2008; Moghadam, 2003). Knowledge on women managers in the Arab region is limited, precluding reliable conclusions on how the causes of gender differences in managerial advancement differ from those in developed countries. The aim of this paper is to review the evidence for challenges facing the career advancement of Arab women managers. A systematic literature review is provided to establish what is known and what more needs to be understood about the factors impacting the career progression of Arab women as they prepare to move up the management hierarchy. We begin the paper with a brief overview and a definition of the context of the study. We emphasize the socio-cultural set up of the region to highlight the influence of religion and Arab culture on the status of women. We then draw on human capital and discrimination theories to illuminate the constraints facing Arab women managers. Finally we evaluate the evidence and suggest future areas of research.

The importance of this paper stems from the following points: (i) it brings together the literature on the challenges facing the career advancement of Arab women, with insight from human capital and discrimination theories, to identify the social and economic challenges facing Arab women managers; (ii) in bringing these literatures together, we also reach an understanding of why Arab women are so poorly represented in management positions; (iii) the review identifies the need to increase our conceptual understanding of gender, organizational and societal factors that hinder the progression of Arab women managers.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Studies have attempted to inspect the status of Arab women managers across a number of countries including Lebanon (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010, 2011; Jamali, Safieddine, and Daouk, 2006; Jamali et al., 2005), Egypt (Kattara, 2005; Abd El Latif, 1988), UAE and the Gulf (Metcalfe, 2006; Salloum, 2003; Abdalla, 1996). These studies have shown that there is a prejudice clustering of educated and well experienced women in the lower levels of management across a wide range of organizations in several industries. In attempting

to synthesize these findings we will consider three explanations for gender differences in advancement to management positions in Arab organizations.

First, the nature of Arabic society is one in which the social structure is fully grounded in the Islamic religion. The general view is that attitudes towards working women in the Arab region are not the same as in the more developed economies of the West because of traditional and conservative values and the religious background of this region (Metle, 2002; Abdalla, 1996). Cultural values, societal practices, and stereotypical viewpoints towards the role of women in Arab countries are seen to impact on the structures and practices of organizations that employ these women. Moreover, cultural and societal norms in this region are still regarded as highly patriarch cal with clear gender role differences (Metle, 2002; Khattab, 1996; Kausar, 1995).

The second explanation assigns gender differences in investments in human capital (such as levels of educational attainments, training and development of skills and competencies). Human capital theory is based on the premise that educational investments translate into economic advantages (Langelett, 2002; Becker, 1971). The theory predicts that continuous investment in human capital leads to better job opportunities and thus offering positive rewards for the individual (Becker, 2002; Drucker, 2001). It views investment in human capital as a consequence of an individual's rational calculations of the costs associated with acquiring education, skills and experience and benefits in terms of having better jobs and advancements in careers. According to this theory, men and women differ in terms of their investment in human capital, with men more likely to invest in further education and development of new skills. Therefore, Human Capital theory argues that the differential treatment of men and women at work is a natural outcome of their position in the labour market (Becker, 1971).

The third explanation is that women are prevented from advancing to the top because of gender discrimination (Blau and Ferber, 1987; Bergman, 1974). The view is that discrimination against women managers is reinforced by the negative attitudes of others which may result in personal and organizational barriers that women encounter in their career development (Davidson and Burke, 2000, 2004; Adler and Izraeli, 1994; Fagenson, 1994; Morrison and Von Gilnow, 1990; Riger and Galliger, 1980). These attitudes reinforce gender role stereotyping that defines women via their domestic and reproductive chores, and perceive women as inadequate managers. Gender discrimination is also embedded in the organizational policies and practices that can limit women's advancement.

Differences between men and women in their attitudes and behaviour are due to the differences in the opportunities given, power and group representation in organizations rather than gender (Kanter, 1977). The basic premise of this theory is that individuals who have greater opportunities, hold more power and enjoy a major status are more likely to accelerate in their careers.

Given the diversity among socioeconomic and political factors influencing the development of Arab countries, an agreement on the geographic boundaries of the region is difficult to define. In this paper, the term Arab region will be used to refer to the Arab speaking nations, with the exclusion of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Iran, and Iraq given their linguistic, administrative and historical differences (Weir, 2003). The Arab region has been described as composing of twelve Middle Eastern countries (Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine [the Gaza strip and West Bank], Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, U.A.E. and Yemen) and ten African countries (Algeria, Egypt, Eritrea, Djibouti, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, and Tunisia) (Al-Olayan and Karande, 2000). The United Nation's definition includes the Levant area, namely Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine and the Gulf Cooperation Council states (GCC), namely United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman). However, it is not within the scope of this paper to address all the nations in the Arab region as no single archetype for the Arab women exists. The focus of this paper from a geographical viewpoint will be based on the destinations that have received most attention in terms of where research has been conducted; specifically Lebanon within the Levant area given its economic significance and cultural religious distinctiveness; the GCC countries given their growing political and economic significance in the region, namely United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Much of the research on women managers has been conducted in these nations with little if no data on the poorer Middle Eastern countries (Omair, 2008). Taken together these countries share a common language, religion and cultural heritage as well as encompassing almost all of the political, economic, social and cultural diversity of the Arab region. (The United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2004)

ARAB CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Gender disparities that exist in Arab societies cannot be understood without considering the challenges confronting women in the general structure of Arabic culture

influenced by customs, traditions, practices and religious beliefs. The predominant social fabric of Arabic culture is the Islamic value system- the main platform of Arabic culture and society and a common social force in the region (Metle, 2002; Al-Hibri, 1982). Over the long history of Arabic civilization, Islamic ideology has been firmly established as an undeniable system governing various aspects of Arab individuals. Several writers seem to agree that Islam is a social order and a way of life and cannot be separated from the culture of the Arabic people (Badran, 2005; Metle, 2002; Al-Hibri, 1982).

The general impression among some Islamic scholars and feminists is that Islam accords a low status to women in comparison with men and treats them differently (Sidani, 2005; Haq, 1996; Saeed, 1994). Moreover, Islamic law is frequently used as the main reason for the exclusion of women from the public sphere. Traditional religious teachings are frequently interpreted as saying that a women's primary role is taking care of household responsibilities. Other activities are permitted, provided domestic responsibilities are not compromised (Shaaban, 1996; Esposito, 1991). Various practices including sex segregation and the reproductive role of women in Islam are perceived as barriers to women's participation in socio-economic and political activities. The socio-cultural environment of this region also contributes to the conservative orientation towards women (Alajmi, 2001). Patriarchal structures influence gender ideology and religious institutions serve as important transmitters of information about how to organize and conduct family life (Abouchedid, 2007; Sharabi, 2000; Haddad, 1994; Mernissi, 1987). Conservative religious groups, in particular, promote a traditional family structure in which married women are expected to concentrate on family life rather than attaining a career (Sidani, 2005; Kazemi, 2000).

However, several writers agree that Islam has been exploited by patriarchal societal structures to legitimize discrimination against women (Metle, 2002; Kazemi, 2000; Afshar, 1998; Khattab, 1996; Mernissi, 1987). It is the patriarch cal interpretation of Islam that places women in subservient roles (Alajmi, 2001; Ahmed, 1998). Islam does not forbid women from seeking an education or from pursuing a career. On the contrary, Islam confers both men and women equality in their religious, ethical and civil rights duties and responsibilities. Islam made it obligatory for every Muslim to acquire knowledge to understand the true spirit of Islam and does not discriminate against women in terms of their rights to pertaining education (Al-Lamki, 1999; Kausar, 1995; Esposito, 1991).

Still, the way in which Islamic decrees are interpreted and practiced across Arab countries significantly contribute to shaping attitudes toward women's participation in the public domain (Sidani, 2005). Overall, women managers have reported that their roles and status are very much influenced by traditional ideas, institutions and Arabic culture (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010, 2011; Siddiqi, 1996; Stowasser, 1996). The majority of Arab women report that patriarchal attitudes are highly salient within the culture, and significantly impact gender role attitudes. More importantly, their perceptions give the impression that Islam provides a powerful socio-cultural explanation for inequality between the sexes (Metle, 2002; Abdalla, 1996). It appears that Islamic teachings guarantee equal treatment to Arab women concerning their participation in economic opportunities, but social realities portray a completely different and mostly negative image of women. Arab women are subject to discriminatory customs, traditions, and social practices deep rooted in the culture that are neither Islamic in spirit nor in conformity with ideals (Abdalla and Omair, 2010; Abdalla, 1996). Various assumptions of religious beliefs and practices of Arab societies concerning the role differentiation between men and women's activities exist. However, it is important to see Islam as a discourse which defines a set of rules and practices that are important in shaping gender relations rather than prejudicing them.

LITERATURE
Can human capital theory explain gender imbalances in Middle Eastern organizations?

One of the most imperative changes that the Arab world is undergoing to eradicate gender discrimination is increased governmental efforts in enhancing the education of girls (Middle East and North Africa, 2007). According to this report, the enrolment rate of females in the Arab region has increased for all levels of education over the last three decades (Middle East and North Africa, 2007) and this increase has significantly reduced the educational gap between males and females in the region (World Bank, 2005). For example, females comprise more than 70% of students in higher education colleges and 60% in universities in the UAE (Salloum, 2003). Despite these encouraging figures not all Arab states hold the same position regarding the importance of education of girls as not all Arab families want to educate their daughters. Families are more likely to favour the education of males than females (El Ghannam, 2001, 2002). Furthermore, levels of education for women vary across the Arab region (Metcalfe, 2006; Arab Human

Development Report, 2005; Salloum, 2003; World Bank, 2003). For example, Kuwait in 1937 was the first Gulf state to invest in and promote women's education, while females in Qatar started looking for education from 1956 onwards (Abdalla, 1996). Women in Gulf countries have only recently been allowed to pursue professions in areas other than nursing, medicine, and teaching (Hamdan, 2005; Shah and Al-Qudsi, 1990). Still, Arab women perceive the attainment of education as more of an important pre-requisite for their development and participation in the labour force than for men (Tlaiss and Kauser 2011; Middle East and North Africa, 2007; Al-Lamki, 1999). Although this supports the appearance of more women holding managerial positions, the reality is that human capital has not eliminated gender disadvantages in the workplace and returns from education and experience are lower for women compared to men. The majority of Arab women still seem to cluster at the lower levels of management. Arab women are continuously marginalized and excluded from rising to managerial roles (Middle East and North Africa, 2007; Al-Lamki, 2006; World Bank, 2003). El Ghannam (2002), for example reported, across 22 Arab countries, that the number of women holding managerial posts was substantially lower than what their level of education and experience would warrant. In Lebanon, Jamali et al. (2006) reported that most women managers were clustered at entry level positions with very few reaching senior management positions. Moreover, the authors report that some women only after 20 years of service are finally reaching middle management positions with men dominating decision-making positions. Exceptionally low numbers of women managers were also found in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, given their highly restrictive society and culture towards women (Wilkinson, 1996). Similarly, Metle (2001) noted that Kuwaiti women, despite having higher qualifications compared to men, were prevented from reaching decision-making positions. Other studies in the region report that while men and women have similar educational attainments, there are differences in promotion and salaries (Al-Lamki, 1999, 2007; Whiteoak et al., 2006; Jamali et al., 2005; Eid, 2002; Wilkinson, 1996; Seikaly, 1994), with women earning less than men (Eid, 2002). For example, women's estimated earnings in Lebanon in 2002, were USD 2552 compared to USD 8226 for males (Human Development Report, 2004). On the basis of this evidence higher educational attainment for Arab women managers does not necessarily lead to higher pay levels as suggested by human capital theory. This however, does not eliminate the fact that a few exceptional women have been able to penetrate senior executive echelons. However, in the majority of cases women are clustered in

secretarial departments and administrative positions and junior levels of management (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010; Jamali et al., 2006; Kattara, 2005).

In terms of industry variations, there are little if non official statistics available on working women in this region. In the majority of the GCC countries, particularly in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain, the majority of women make up the service sector (World Bank, 2003) and areas such as education, and people-oriented jobs such as communication and personnel. Statistics for the Arab region by the International Labour Office (2003) indicate a low participation rate for Arab women in the industrial sector in most countries with 32.4% of women compared to 57% of men in Bahrain; 12.4% of women compared to 29.5% of men in Lebanon; and 13.8% of women compared to 36.1% of men in the UAE. Surprisingly, in Qatar 98.1% of working women were employed in the industrial sector compared to 38% of men. There seems little evidence that the representation of women in management and decision-making positions together with their participation in the workforce is improving. The decline in state owned enterprises and the increasing growth of the service sector in a number of Arab countries has resulted in more entrepreneurial activities being taken up by women (International Finance Corporation, 2007; Center for Arab Women Training and Research, 2001) but there is a growing, albeit slow, acceptance of women in management positions.

Overall, it is difficult to ascertain whether Arab women's lack of career advancement is related to their human capital, although the effect of gender on returns on investment in human capital cannot be ruled out. The lack of publicly available data and government sources on women's literacy and educational attainments (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010; Omair, 2008), makes it difficult to ascertain whether human capital is the reason why Arab women advance less in the workplace. Even though investing in human capital is universally perceived as a positive factor offering higher probabilities of rewards of pay and promotion, higher education in this region is considered a pre-requisite for women's and not for men's access to managerial positions.

Are women discriminated against in their career advancement because of gender stereotypes?

There is little evidence to suggest that Arab men are equipped with personal characteristics that make them more suitable than women for management (Kauser and Tlaiss, 2011). However, the "think male/think manager" attitude continues to prevail in

Arab cultures. The evidence suggests that stereotypical attitudes towards women managers are salient within Arab organizations (Jamali et al., 2005). Results reported by Abdalla (1996) found strong evidence of traditional attitudes towards working women in the Gulf region. Mensch, Ibrahim, Lee, and El-Gibaly (2003) found evidence of strong stereotypical beliefs about gender roles among Egyptian students. Similarly, Mostafa (2003, 2005) reported that Egyptian societal attitudes towards working women were extremely patriarchal and supportive of traditional family values. According to Wilkinson (1996), in a study among UAE, Oman and Bahraini women managers' negative attitudes and cultural taboos were the root cause of discriminatory treatment against women's career advancement. Overall, the limited evidence suggests that as in developed countries, Arab women have to deal with male orientated behaviour; work harder than men and consistently exceed performance expectations to counter negative assumptions. The patriarchal nature of Arab corporate culture perpetuates traditional attitudes concerning masculine managerial stereotypes. It is also the reason behind women selecting fields that are viewed by society to be more suitable to women's gender roles such as education, health and social services. So despite the increasing number of Arab women in the workforce and their increased investment in human capital, they continue to be under-represented in other fields such as construction and engineering.

Many scholars believe that gender based discrimination in Arab societies has its roots in the cultural and family traditions of the Arab male dominated culture (Orabi, 1999, Abdalla, 1996). Arab societies perceive the family as the strongest social unit with the father or husband as the head of the pyramid of responsibility and authority within the family (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011; Hutchins and Weir, 2006; El-Rahmony, 2002; El-Jawardi, 1986). Furthermore, marriage is considered a social necessity and women are pressured by their families to get married and have children (Khattab, 1996; Kausar, 1995). These social beliefs are also widely impacted by the practice of Islam, which highly values marriage and children (El-Ghannam, 2001; Jawad, 1998; Khattab, 1996; Kausar, 1995).

As in many Western countries, Arab women consider marriage, children, and family important, and do not see a trade off between family responsibilities and a successful career (Al-Lamki, 1999, 2007; Moghadam, 1992). But as we have already noted Arab women are not supposed to prioritize their careers before their family. In Arab countries a career is only a last resort if the family is having a financial difficulty (Al-Lamki, 1999). Nonetheless, it is not surprising to find that almost all married women with careers receive

help with their children and domestic responsibilities from their families and domestic helpers (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011).

One explanation is that in Arab societies the socialization of males and females into respective roles is stronger compared to the rest of the world (Barakat, 1993; Hutchings and Weir, 2006; World Bank, 2003). In Arab countries, boys receive intense socialization compared to girls in the notion that boys will carry the family name and provide support to the parents in old age while girls will get married and will have to be good wives and mothers. Thus in Arab societies gender role stereotyping provides a powerful socio-cultural explanation of gender equality in the workplace. The role of Arab women is mainly identified within the context of family and the traditions and culture of Arabic society. The evidence suggests that the cultures and customs of this region contribute to the gender cantered roles, behaviours and the conservative orientation towards Arab women. However, it is still not clear how the challenges and demands of balancing family responsibilities with work affect the career progression of Arab women.

Are women and men provided with the same organizational opportunities for advancement in their careers?

Barriers to career progression for Arab women have also to do with the exclusion of women from organizational networks (Jamali et al., 2005; McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). In most Arab countries the absence of role models and mentoring programs is a major organizational concern limiting women's access to top managerial positions. Many women managers have reported difficulties with interpersonal relationships with their subordinates (Jamali et al., 2005; Wilkinson, 1996) and the fact that they have been excluded from Informal networks (Jamali et al., 2005; Kattara, 2005). Weir (2003) found evidence of limited access by Arab female managers to on-the-job training and development and a lack of systematic performance appraisal and career development. Furthermore, networks are seen as male domains and women's virtual exclusion from their membership deprives them from any professional support, career planning, and access to key personnel, and organizational information among other things (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010; Al-Lamki, 1999). Moreover, since there are few women in senior management to act as mentors, Arab women find it difficult to establish relationships in a network dominated by men (Kattara, 2005). The low tolerance in Arabic society of close relationships between men and women makes it even more difficult for the sexes to mix.

In terms of the structures of power within Arab organizations, men are vested with more power and status compared to women. Organizations are structured with an absolute majority of men who do not accept women as equally positioned work colleagues (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011; Kattara, 2005). Furthermore, Arab women find it rather challenging to deal with other female managers because they are so accustomed to dealing with male managers (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011; Jamali et al., 2006) and have internalised gender hierarchies that men are one's superiors. It seems plausible to suggest that these behaviours are not characteristic of gender but are manifestations of power.

An important component of Arab societies is a network of power relations known as wasta which is critical to the recruitment and career advancement of women. This form of social connection has been widely used to influence and facilitate the recruitment or the promotion of women in managerial positions (Metcalfe, 2006; Whiteoak et al., 2006; Cunningham and Sarayah, 1993, 1994). Consequently, training and development opportunities, as well as promotions and many other aspects of management, end up being based on individual relations and family networks, and not on personal qualifications (Hutchins and Weir, 2006; Metcalfe, 2006).

Finally Kanter (1977) proposes the representation of groups as the third organizational structure which impacts on employee behaviour within the organization. Studies conducted in Western countries have shown that tokenism in a male-dominated environment contributes to the feeling of undervaluation at work (Powell and Graves, 2003). Research on tokenism in the Arab world is virtually non-existent. The limited evidence suggests that women do not perceive themselves as tokens within their organizations and are less likely to feel isolated or undervalued at work (Tlaiss and Kauser 2010; Jamali et al., 2006). Even still, Arab women make up a small percentage of the management workforce (Jamali et al., 2005, 2006; Metle, 2002; Al- Lamki, 1999; Wilkinson, 1996), and thus constitute a token status in a male-dominated work environment (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010).

The above studies have highlighted that barriers including limited access to networking processes, lack of mentoring, and limited training and development opportunities continue to keep women stagnating at lower levels of management within their organizations (Jamali et al., 2005; Metle, 2002; Al- Lamki, 1999; Wilkinson, 1996). This lack of organizational networking suggests that Arab women managers are likely to

be deprived of any professional support, career planning, access to key personnel, and organizational information among other things.

CONCLUSIONS

The above review has attempted to explain the under-representation of women managers in terms of human capital characteristics and discrimination against women embedded in individual attitudes and organizational policies and practices in the Arab region. Each perspective has offered a unique insight into issues related to the slow progression of Arab women managers in their careers. The findings clearly point to the fact that Arab women are under-represented in management, irrespective of the fact that women are proportionately better educated compared to men. The overall evidence suggests despite similar education attainments the returns on investment in human capital are greater for men compared to women. Women are taking up management positions but remain marginalised at lower levels of management; women make up almost half of the labour force, but are employed in low level, traditional female occupations with poor opportunities for training and promotion; and compared to their male colleagues have lower salaries (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011; Jamali et al., 2005, 2006). This reduces their human capital in terms of specific management skills, knowledge and the experience needed to be promoted to senior and executive levels. Thus the impact of gender on the return on investment in human capital in Arab countries cannot be ruled out. However, the human capital explanation falls short of explaining why there are fewer Arab women in management positions.

First, women have only just begun to enter the realm of management and (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010; Jamali et al., 2005) have had little opportunity to develop their human capital in terms of management skills and training at the same rate as men. Second, in Arab societies decisions concerning education are not necessarily an outcome of rational choices made by women but to a great extent are socially and culturally determined. The evidence reviewed clearly points out that education and management training largely depend on the decisions made by parents and employers who are guided by the norms and practices of Arab culture. In Arab countries, even where women have similar levels of education to men, the priority of marriage and family responsibilities prevent women from gaining further relevant work experience. Third, human capital fails to take into

account for socio-cultural explanations particularly religion based social norms in Arab societies that may impact the employment prospects of women.

The gender stereotyping perspective provides a powerful socio-cultural explanation of gender equality in the management profession. Arab women undertake domestic responsibilities in addition to their careers like many other women in many parts of the world. However, Arab women are in a unique position handicapped by ideological and cultural factors which are difficult to eliminate because of a patriarchal male dominated society. In addition to this, the interpretation of Islam defines gender roles and responsibilities, all serving to maintain a traditional role for women. While women are allowed to work outside their homes, male dominated politico religious centres of power believe that a women's place lies within domestic boundaries. These cultural prescriptions when adopted by organizations then have implications for gender discrimination in the workplace

Overall, the limited evidence suggests that stereotyping of gender roles is persistent in Arab society. In other words, the Arab societies are highly reluctant to empowering women. Quoting the United Nations Development Program report (United Nations Development Programme, 2003):

"Arabs stood for gender equality in education but not in employment……. Arabs expressed support for building the human capabilities of women but not for their utilization".

Undoubtedly, women's freedoms have not followed the same path in all countries in the Arab world. Evidence that attitudes are changing towards the working women particularly is substantiated in a number of studies (Mostafa, 2003, 2005).

The studies have also emphasized that the discriminatory nature of Arab organizations foster inequality in terms of women's access to organizational opportunities for advancement when compared to men. Most of the literature reviewed supports the view that Arab women are disproportionately located in the lower rungs of organizational hierarchies. Kanters' (1977) theory has clarified subtle forms of discrimination within the organizational structures and processes of Arab organizations. The evidence highlighted that women are deprived of formal access to opportunities of growth and development such as training and education and also denied informal opportunities such as mentoring and peer support. Overall Arab women, constitute a weak group in the organizational power structure because of their low positions within the organizational hierarchy and

because they possess relatively low levels of informal power as a result of their exclusion from informal organizational networks.

The evidence also highlighted that the career advancement of women was dependent on a strong network of friends and family members, or "wasta" as it is called in Arabic. This presents particular difficulties for Arab women who work in an environment which makes it difficult for them to network with their male colleagues. The fact is that Arab women face greater barriers than men within the workplace because of cultural and social traditions rather than their management capabilities. The empirical evidence most supports the view that powerful cultural and societal factors effectively act to limit the types of careers suitable for women. It seems that Arab women still have a long way to go before they receive equal access to organizational opportunities for advancement. Arab women managers are not only less in number within organizations, but are also less empowered as a result of being absent from positions of power and decision-making. The findings indicate that female managers from all levels are looking for a more supportive organizational culture that looks into supporting the most qualified candidates based on their credentials and performance rather than their gender.

It is difficult to ascertain from the limited number of studies whether Arab women's low representation in management is due to the discriminatory nature of organizations or human capital factors. Both explanations with their combined effects along with socio-cultural practices and religion play a part in their low managerial representation. What is clear is that Arab women are faced with the same barriers as other women in the world in their professional working lives. What is unique for Arab women is that they live in a society where culturally prescribed roles for women underlie the roles and responsibilities for both men and women. Thus working women have to balance their traditional and career roles within the given cultural and social constraints and opportunities. Nevertheless, the evidence does suggest that the number of working women in this region is on the rise and women are coping with balancing the demands of their traditional roles with working life. More research is clearly needed in this region to understand the process and the extent to which societal and cultural factors impact women from progressing in their careers.

RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE COMING DECADE

The paucity of studies on Arab women managers underscores the very limited knowledge available on the experiences these women are facing in their organizations (Metcalfe, 2007, 2008). Our review of the limited research exemplifies that there are major disparities when trying to build a comprehensive picture of the Arab women manager. Overall we know less about why Arab women managers are not progressing in their careers compared to men. Studies addressing the impact of societal and organizational factors on the career progression of women managers are minimal (Metcalfe, 2008; Omair, 2008) and largely theoretical (Hamdan, 2005; El-Ghannam, 2002). Many of the studies have tended to concentrate on a few very broad topics, and have not used rigorous designs to allow firm conclusions to be drawn. Studies have focused on specific organizational dimensions, such as organizational practices and climate and have been limited to small sample sizes and specific sectors and countries (Omair, 2008). There is an absence of studies towards understanding societal (institutional, cultural and religious) barriers that interfere with the experiences of women managers in this region. Moreover, the research has tended to provide overall perceptions with little objective data on human capital and discrimination theories that explain gender differences in career advancement. There is also a lack of an effective database reporting on the number and growth of women managers in the Arab region with which to inform policy making. What is needed is a comparative profile of the changing status of women managers addressing their personal and occupational demographics across a range of different Arab countries in order to capture trends and patterns and provide comparisons across countries.

It is not clear whether human capital is the reason women do not advance in their careers compared to their male colleagues. For example are gender differences in managerial advancement caused by women's having less human capital than men? More rigorous longitudinal tests of the extent to which lack of management experience by Arab women compared with men leads to gender differences in subsequent advancement are needed. Even if gender inequity occurs, it may still be due to lack of human capital. Studies also need to evaluate whether Arab men have better opportunities for developing their human capital for advancement than women do. Gender stereotypes and discrimination also appear to be barriers for Arab women not advancing in their careers. An understanding of societal expectations from both genders, gender stereotyping in terms of choices of educational and occupational fields, women's personal aspirations

regarding marriage, having children, and careers and how these may discriminate against the progression of women managers is vital.

Future research should also consider organizations across Arab regions to examine whether gender role stereotypes result in gender differences in managerial advancement. Do Arab women who adapt their behaviours to fit in more male-orientated cultures advance more, and similarly to men compared to those who do not adapt to male cultures? More tests are also needed of the exclusion from networks and importance of networks for the career advancement of Arab women. Interpersonal explanations such as male dominated cultures; access to networks and mentors; access to wasta are need to be evaluated for their relative importance.

Research focusing on the impact of social and cultural values on the experiences of women managers in this region is needed. In particular future research should aim to explore the role of country culture and traditions, patriarch cal nature of the Arab society, as well as economic and institutional issues and how they impact the career advancement of Arab women. In particular, future research should aim to investigate the extent to which Arab women managers share certain common barriers and problems across the region. In line with this objective, research should aim to examine the impact of these factors on the structure, culture and practices of organizations. Key issues her include understanding the patterns and promotion for women managers across the region. What forms of organizations are conducive to success for Arab women managers? And what kinds of organization cultures allow Arab women managers to progress. A focus from a male perspective would be a valuable step forward in trying to understand the anxieties experienced by female managers who have to report to male bosses. Future studies should aim to represent the views of men managers in different countries across the Arab region to show how their perceptions differ from that of women in similar job positions. This aspect needs to be incorporated in order to ensure the isolation of gender related factors from social, cultural and religious issues.

Also from a theoretical and methodological point of view, Arab women have only just started to rise to middle management positions, with very few reaching the top. As such, our comprehension of the dynamics involved in their organizational success is still very limited. This means that a solid theoretical basis still needs to be developed and tested. The building of such a foundation will not only make research in this area more purposeful and significant, it will also generate solutions to the many problems that both

Arab men and women are facing within their organizations. Utilization of a triangulation of research methods is a must as it will allow researchers to substantiate their findings in multiple ways. Such an approach will provide a better and deeper understanding of the dynamics that impact t opportunities and barriers for Arab women managers.

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