

Cultural and Economic Changes in Saudi Arabic and Their Impact on Saudi Arabian Women

Beshaier Mohammed Alqahtani*^{id}, Edyta Wolny-Abouelwafa^{id}

College of Sciences and Human Studies, Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University, Saudi Arabia, Dammam

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* Corresponding author:
balqahtani@pmu.edu.sa

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Abstract

Objectives: The current study aimed to identify the attitudes of Saudi women towards the impact of current social and economic changes on the role of Saudi women and their contribution to the economic role within the family and society. It also sought to understand their perceptions of changes in roles within the Saudi family.

Methods: To achieve the study's objectives, a questionnaire was conducted involving 207 female students at Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University.

Results: The results revealed that Saudi women perceive a significant transformation in their role. However, religious teachings and traditions still impose limits on the development and openness of Saudi women in their social and economic roles. Additionally, the results indicated that 66% of the female participants in their twenties expressed a desire for mutual cooperation between spouses, noting that the role of women extends beyond motherhood and childbirth.

Conclusions: The study recommended providing Saudi women with opportunities to engage in new roles within the framework of religious teachings, as they have demonstrated their capability to be leaders and balance their new roles with their social roles within the family.

Keywords: Changes, marriage, women work, social roles, Prince Mohammed bin Fahd University, female students, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, women, identity.

التغيرات الثقافية والاقتصادية التي شهدها المملكة العربية السعودية وأثرها على المرأة السعودية

بشائر محمد القحطاني*، إيديتا أبو الوفاء

كلية العلوم والدراسات الإنسانية، جامعة الأمير محمد بن فهد، المملكة العربية السعودية، الدمام

ملخص

الأهداف: هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى التعرف على اتجاهات المرأة السعودية نحو أثر التغيرات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية الحالية على دور المرأة السعودية ومساهمتها في الدور الاقتصادي في الأسرة والمجتمع. وتصوراتها نحو تغير الأدوار في الأسرة السعودية.

المنهجية: لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، تم إجراء استبيان شمل 207 طالبة في جامعة الأمير محمد بن فهد. **النتائج:** كشفت النتائج أن تصورات النساء السعوديات ترى أن دور المرأة السعودية لاقى تحولاً كبيراً، إلا أنه تبقى تعاليم الدين والتقاليد لها حدود في تطور وانفتاح المرأة السعودية على دورها الاجتماعي والاقتصادي، كما أشارت النتائج إلى أن 66% من الفتيات العشرينيات من أفراد عينة الدراسة أكدن رغبتهن في التعاون المتبادل بين الأزواج، مشيرات إلى أن دور المرأة يتعدى أدوار الأم والإنجاب.

التوصيات: أوصت الدراسة بإعطاء الفرصة للنساء السعوديات بممارسة الأدوار الجديدة لها في ظل تعاليم الدين، حيث أثبتت أنهن قائدات وقادرات على موازنة دورهن الجديد ودورهن الاجتماعي في أسرهن.

الكلمات الدالة: التغير الاقتصادي والاجتماعي، الزواج، عمل المرأة، الأدوار الاجتماعية، المرأة السعودية، الهوية.

Introduction

Saudi Arabia, located between tradition and modern change, has experienced significant transformations in recent years, particularly concerning the status of its women. These changes can be analyzed through the lens of Modernization Theory, which suggests that societies progress through stages of modernization, characterized by economic development, technological advancements, and social change. Saudi women find themselves at the intersection of cultural traditions and economic shifts, reflecting the tensions between traditional values and modernization. Traditionally, Saudi women have been divided into two distinct groups. On one side, some women adhere to conservative norms and values, leading lives that can feel restrictive.

This adherence to tradition is rooted in cultural practices and societal expectations. On the other side, a different picture emerges, with women representing the more modern aspects of Saudi society. These women often enjoy luxurious lifestyles, associated with the concept of the 'Harem,' which symbolizes the intersection of wealth, privilege, and modernity (Al-Sudairy, 2017a).

Moreover, Saudi women face a unique situation due to the power dynamics and legal rule of guardianship within their society. Unlike many other countries, Saudi women navigate a system deeply tied to traditional ways, where male family members hold significant influence over important aspects of a woman's life. Permission or approval from a male relative, such as a father, husband, brother, or son, is often required for decisions related to travel, marriage, and sometimes even work (Al-Sudairy, 2017b).

However, it is important to challenge stereotypes and recognize that Saudi women have long held responsibilities within their families and communities. Historically, they have overseen household responsibilities, managed businesses, and even influenced political decisions. Dr. Hend Al-Sudairy, in her book "Modern Woman in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," highlights the political influence of Saudi women throughout history. Wives of politicians, such as Princess Noura Bint Abdelaziz, played significant roles in shaping decisions and supporting their male counterparts (Al-Sudairy, 2017c, 2017d).

While Saudi women have traditionally been seen as grateful housewives and mothers, their contributions extend beyond these roles. They have been described as the backbone of the family, supporting their husbands, taking care of children, and maintaining connections with relatives and neighbors. Moreover, they have engaged in tasks such as weaving, gathering wood, and tending to animals, showcasing their active participation in the economic and social fabric of society (Al-Sudairy, 2017e, 2017f). Saudi women have a history of actively safeguarding their lands and farms, exemplified by their role in protecting palm trees from Turkish soldiers (Al-Sudairy, 2017g).

Despite their contributions, Saudi women have often faced marginalization and societal perceptions of oppression and inferiority. However, they have played crucial roles in reforming the country over the years, contributing to societal changes and reforms. While historical norms limited their job opportunities, Saudi women have remained engaged and active in various ways, challenging traditional gender roles and pushing for greater opportunities (Saikuddin & Amrullah, 2023).

Currently, with King Sulman bin Abdel Al-Aziz and his son, Prince Mohammed bin Sulman, and the vision of 2030, the trend is to improve Saudi women's social, cultural, economic, and political position and allow them to be more powerful, intellectual, and strong. As was previously mentioned, Saudi women's participation in the social roles and work always existed, but through the vision of 2030, the government aims to elevate her to a higher level locally and internationally. In one of the governmental reports titled, Saudi Arabia and Political, Economic and Social Development, Prince Mohammed bin Salman states, "Our Vision is to build a strong, thriving, and stable Saudi Arabia that provides equal opportunities for all" (Saudi Arabia and Political, Economic and Social Development, 2017). Emphasizing the importance of equality, he further acknowledges that "Saudi women have begun to make their mark on politics, and if rates of education are any indication, they are not yet done shaping the history of the Kingdom alongside the laundry list of political and economic changes transforming the lives of Saudi citizens from all backgrounds" (Saudi Arabia and Political, Economic and Social Development, 2017). In other words, the new changes allow Saudi women to have more opportunities, and they have impacted the new generation of Saudi females regarding their perceptions of work, marriage, and social roles.

This paper aims to investigate the impact of economic and social changes on Saudi Students (women) regarding work,

marriage, and social roles as well as how their perceptions have changed. Accordingly, this gave rise to the following research questions:

- (1) What are the attitudes of Saudi female students towards working marriage and what is the impact of this on their social roles?
- (2) how will cultural and economic changes reshape the Saudi family?

Literature Review

Saudi Arabia's Cultural Renaissance

In the past few years, Saudi Arabia, particularly Saudi women, has been absent from scholarship and academic writing regarding feminism and social upheaval. However, after the remarkable change in Saudi Arabia in many fields such as the economy, politics, and culture, many scholars have begun to shed light on its transformation and impact on the society and population. In her published paper titled "Cultural Transformation and its Impact on Social Change: Saudi Arabia 2022", Dr. Mirna R. Khalife investigated the effects of Saudi Arabia's cultural transformation and how it extended to literature, art, theater, architecture, media, and so on. She believes that this transformation helps develop the thinking and behavior of the Saudi population clearly shown in the economic, social, and cultural structure, which results in raising the equality of life (Khalife, 2023). Dr. Beverley McNally in her published paper, "Embracing the Changes: A Study Examining the Career Intentions of Saudi Women Undergraduates", investigated the impact of Saudi Arabia's changes on undergraduate Saudi females' perceptions regarding their career choices (McNally & Winkel, 2023).

Economic Changes and Saudi Women

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undergone substantial economic reforms in recent years as part of its Vision 2030 initiative. These reforms, spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, aim to diversify the economy, reduce dependence on oil revenue, and encourage a more inclusive and dynamic workforce (Moshashai et al., 2020). In the context of Saudi women, these changes have paved the way for increased participation in the workforce. Historically, societal norms restricted women's involvement in certain professional domains, but recent economic policies have sought to break down these barriers (Topal, 2019). One of the notable outcomes of these economic reforms is the gradual but significant increase in the workforce participation of Saudi women. The removal of the ban on women driving in 2018 was a landmark moment, contributing to greater mobility and accessibility to employment opportunities (Al-Garawi & Kamargianni, 2022). Moreover, the establishment of sectors such as entertainment, tourism, and hospitality has opened up avenues for women to enter professions that were traditionally male-dominated. For instance, the General Entertainment Authority has actively promoted female participation in various cultural events and initiatives (AlKhaldi et al., 2020).

As economic opportunities expand, Saudi women are reevaluating and reshaping their perspectives on work roles. Women are increasingly considering professional careers, pursuing higher education, and challenging stereotypes associated with traditional gender roles. This shift is reflected in the growing number of Saudi women entering diverse fields, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), once considered unconventional for women (Al-Bakr et al., 2017; Le Renard, 2014). The economic changes are not only influencing the quantity but also the quality of work available to Saudi women. Notable examples include the appointment of women to leadership positions in various sectors. For instance, the appointment of Sarah bint Yousef Al Amiri as the Minister of State for Advanced Technology underscores the changing dynamics and increasing recognition of women's capabilities in high-profile roles (Torstrick & Faier, 2009).

Social Changes and Marriage

Saudi Arabia has experienced cultural shifts that are reshaping traditional notions surrounding marriage. While historically marriage was often arranged and influenced by familial considerations, contemporary Saudi society witnesses a growing emphasis on individual choice and compatibility. Cultural shifts are challenging the conventional approach to marriage, fostering an environment where young Saudis, including women, have a greater say in selecting life partners (Alfurayh & Burns, 2020; Pilotti et al., 2021). Social media platforms and increased connectivity have facilitated greater

interaction and communication, contributing to changing dynamics in the realm of relationships and marriage (Alqahtani, 2020). The evolution of marriage norms is evident in the changing expectations and aspirations of Saudi women. With increased educational and career opportunities, women are delaying marriage to pursue personal and professional goals (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). The societal expectation for women to marry at a young age is gradually diminishing, providing women with more agency in deciding the timing and nature of their marital commitments. There is a growing acceptance of intercultural and interracial marriages, challenging previous conventions and promoting greater diversity in familial structures (Topal, 2019). Saudi women's perspectives on marriage are evolving in tandem with broader social changes. Many women now seek partnerships based on mutual respect, shared values, and emotional compatibility. The emphasis on communication and understanding within marriages is gaining prominence (Alhajri, 2020). Moreover, the evolving role of women in the workforce has contributed to a shift in power dynamics within marriages, with women increasingly seeking equal partnerships where both spouses contribute to familial and financial responsibilities (Kedan, 2023).

Shifting Social Roles

In recent years, social expectations for Saudi women have transformed, challenging conventional norms. The increasing participation of women in the workforce has broadened the scope of their social roles beyond traditional boundaries. Saudi women are engaging in diverse fields, contributing not only to the economic landscape but also challenging perceptions regarding their capabilities and potential contributions to society. The social expectation for women to prioritize familial responsibilities over personal and professional pursuits is gradually diminishing (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018; Ojdiran & Anderson, 2020). As social roles evolve, Saudi women are expressing a desire for more agency in shaping their destinies. With educational and professional opportunities expanding, women are redefining their identities beyond traditional roles (Syed et al., 2018). The desire for a balanced life, where personal fulfillment and professional achievements coexist, is becoming more pronounced. Women are increasingly advocating for equal participation in decision-making processes within families and society, challenging historical norms that constrain their autonomy (Alshoaibi, 2018).

2.5. The Intersection of Economic and Social Changes in the Context of Modernization Theory

The intersection of economic and social changes in the context of modernization in Saudi Arabia presents a dynamic landscape where the two forces mutually influence and shape each other. Economic reforms, such as Vision 2030, have not only opened up new opportunities for Saudi women in the workforce but have also catalyzed shifts in societal norms and expectations. The increasing presence of women in professional spheres is challenging traditional beliefs about gender roles and contributing to a reevaluation of social dynamics (McNally & Winkel, 2023; Nahshal, 2020). The dual influences of economic and social changes are evident in the evolving aspirations of Saudi women. The desire for personal and professional growth is intertwined with changing social expectations, creating a nuanced landscape where women seek to balance both dimensions of their lives. This complexity is reflected in the narratives of women who, while pursuing successful careers, also navigate the intricacies of societal expectations, family dynamics, and personal aspirations (Le Renald, 2014; Syed et al., 2018). Women-led businesses, supported by economic reforms, not only contribute to the national economy but also challenge stereotypes and pave the way for more diverse and inclusive social structures (Abou-Moghli & Al-Abdallah, 2019; Welsh et al., 2014).

In the same context, several studies have examined the impact of modernization on Saudi women's rights and their journey towards achieving gender equality. Alrasheed (2018) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the influence of modernization processes, such as legal reforms and social changes, on women's rights movements in Saudi Arabia. The study emphasized the ongoing tensions between traditional norms and the aspirations of Saudi women, underscoring the significance of women's agency in driving societal transformations.

Similarly, Al-Yahya (2019) explored the intricate relationship between modernization, family dynamics, and women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia. The study delved into the effects of changing economic conditions and educational opportunities on women's roles within the family structure. It provided insights into the evolving expectations and aspirations of Saudi women, as well as the obstacles they encounter while navigating traditional gender roles in a rapidly changing society.

Another relevant study by Alwafi (2020) focused on women's entrepreneurship as a catalyst for economic development and women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia. It examined how economic changes, such as the diversification of the economy and government initiatives, have created opportunities for women to establish their businesses. The research highlighted the positive role of entrepreneurship in empowering Saudi women and contributing to the overall process of modernization.

Collectively, these studies contribute to our understanding of the impact of cultural and economic changes on Saudi Arabian women within the framework of modernization theory. They shed light on the complex experiences of women in a society undergoing transformation, highlighting the challenges they face, the opportunities that arise, and the evolving roles they embrace while navigating traditional norms and pursuing empowerment in the context of modernization.

Methodology

Study Design, Setting, and Population

In this study, a questionnaire survey approach was employed to gather data, questionnaire survey specifically targeting 282 female students enrolled in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Prince Mohammed bin Fahd University. It's worth noting that the total female student population across all majors in the university was 2,031. The survey was conducted within a three-week timeframe, spanning from April 1 to April 21, 2023 (Alqahtani & Wolny-Abouelwafa).

The current study aimed to encompass the entire female student population in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the census sampling approach that includes every individual within the defined population was employed (Prince Mohammed bin Fahd University, 2023). While a census ensures comprehensive coverage, it might be resource-intensive in terms of time, effort, and cost, especially for larger populations. However, this approach was best suited for this study because the population of interest was reasonably manageable, and the objective is to gather insights from all individuals within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Census was considered as a sampling approach because it eliminates potential sampling bias, ensuring that the survey results accurately reflect the opinions and perspectives of every female student in the specified college. This approach enhanced the study's internal validity and strengthened the generalizability of findings to the entire female student population in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at PMU (Ross & Reeve, 2003).

Selection of Participants

As mentioned, 282 female students at the College of Humanities and Social Sciences were invited to participate in the survey. Strict inclusion criteria were adopted and followed to maintain the study's authenticity. The Inclusion criteria encompassed all female students, irrespective of nationality, To ensure a focused analysis and avoid potential confounding variables, this study deliberately included only Saudi female students while excluding non-Saudi female students. By narrowing the sample to Saudi women, the aim was to examine the specific experiences and perspectives of this group within the context of cultural and economic changes in Saudi Arabia. The study specifically targeted the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, embracing students from all academic years to provide a holistic understanding of the female student population within this academic domain. Exclusion criteria were tailored to maintain the study's focus and ethical standards. Faculty and administrative staff were excluded since the study's focus was on a younger generation. Male students were excluded from participation, aligning with the research's explicit focus on female students' perspectives. Furthermore, to uphold the specificity of the college-based investigation, students from other colleges within the university were excluded. Furthermore, the study excluded participants who provided incomplete responses or did not offer informed consent, ensuring the reliability and ethical integrity of the research findings.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument utilized in this study was adapted from the questionnaire developed by Alqahtani & Wolny-Abouelwafa. The questionnaire was structured into three distinct sections to systematically collect data on various aspects related to the participants' demographic information, personal experiences within the Saudi social and economic system, and perceptions regarding the roles of men and women in marriage within the Saudi social structure. The first section gathered essential demographic details of the participants. This included information such as age, nationality, academic

major, and academic year, providing a foundational understanding of the diverse backgrounds of the surveyed female students. The second section comprised questions focused on the participants' personal experiences within the Saudi social and economic system. Participants were presented with binary response options (Yes/No) to capture their subjective experiences and perspectives on the societal changes and economic shifts in Saudi Arabia. The third section focused on the participants' views on the roles of men and women in the context of marriage within the Saudi social structure and included one open-ended question to examine the reshaping of Saudi identity. For this section, participants are presented with specific questions and provided with options to tick either one or more than one response. This structured format enables a nuanced exploration of the participants' perceptions concerning gender roles within the institution of marriage.

The entire questionnaire was developed in English, considering the familiarity of students at PMU with the language. This choice facilitated a consistent and standardized understanding of the questions, ensuring that participants could accurately convey their thoughts and experiences.

Survey Procedure

The ethical approval was approved by the university's ethics committee. Data for this study was gathered through an online survey conducted using a questionnaire between April 1 and April 21, 2023. The online questionnaire was designed and implemented using Google Forms, ensuring a user-friendly and accessible platform for participants (Vasanth Raju & Harinarayana, 2016). Dr. Edyta's student research assistant, Ms. Sakinah Al Talb, played a pivotal role in the distribution and facilitation of the survey. Moreover, cooperation from PMU instructors, who generously allocated ten minutes at the beginning of their classes, contributed to ensuring widespread participation among students.

Out of the total female student population of 2,031 across all majors, the survey specifically targeted 282 students within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The survey gathered 207 successful responses, indicating a 73.4 % participation rate among the invited population. To uphold ethical standards and ensure informed participation, a consent form was integrated into the survey. This form outlined the study's objectives, assured participants of the confidentiality of their responses, and sought their willingness to partake in the research. To maximize participation and enhance completion rates, a reminder was dispatched after a one-week interval to individuals who had not initiated or completed the survey. This proactive approach aimed to encourage those who may have initially overlooked the survey to actively engage in the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0, involving several key statistical procedures (George & Mallery, 2019). To assess the normality of the data distribution, Shapiro-Wilk's test was employed, revealing that the collected data did not follow a normal distribution (Alizadeh Noughabi, 2016). Subsequently, a reliability analysis was conducted to determine the internal consistency of the survey instrument using Cronbach's alpha (Bonett & Wright, 2015). The calculated value of 0.913 indicated high reliability and consistency among the survey items, reinforcing the robustness of the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were then employed to summarize and present key features of the dataset.

Results

Demographic information of the participants

The demographic information of the 207 survey participants reveals a diverse and representative sample across various key characteristics (Table 1). In terms of age distribution, participants span a wide range, with the majority falling between 18-23 years (51.7%). Notably, a significant proportion of participants are Saudi nationals (87.0%), underlining the predominantly local representation. In academic majors, Humanities (50.7%) slightly outweighs Social Sciences (42.0%), showcasing diversity within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Regarding academic progression, a balanced distribution is observed across Junior (32.9%), Senior (34.9%), and Postgraduate (32.4%) categories, reflecting participation from various academic levels. Most participants are single (62.8%), emphasizing the prevalence of unmarried individuals in the surveyed cohort. Employment status varies, with a substantial portion being employed (44.4%), while others are either students (37.2%), unemployed (15.5%), or homemakers (2.9%) (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic information of the survey participants

Demographic Information	Frequency	Percent
Age		
- 18-20 years	45	21.7
- 21-23 years	62	30.0
- 24-26 years	38	18.4
- 27-29 years	32	15.5
- 30 years and above	30	14.5
Academic Major		
- Humanities	105	50.7
- Social Sciences	87	42.0
Academic Year		
- Junior	68	32.9
- Senior	72	34.8
- Postgraduate	67	32.4
Marital Status		
- Single	130	62.8
- Married	60	29.0
- Divorced/Separated	10	4.8
- Widowed	7	3.4
Employment Status		
- Employed	92	44.4
- Unemployed	32	15.5
- Student (not employed)	77	37.2
- Homemaker	6	2.9

Saudi Women's Perception of the social and economic system

The frequency distribution table (Table 2) offers a comprehensive view of Saudi women's perceptions regarding work, marriage, and societal expectations. The majority expressing a resounding commitment to working after graduation (98.6%) challenges traditional notions of women's roles. Noteworthy is the significant proportion planning to continue working post-marriage (3.9%) and after having children (8.2%), signaling a shifting paradigm in societal expectations. Acknowledging perceived differences in challenges faced by mothers, sisters, or in their anticipated future work (44.4%) reveals a nuanced understanding of gender-related disparities. Strong affirmations of the necessity of women's work (86.5%) and recognition of the financial impact on Saudi women (89.9%) underscore the economic dimensions of empowerment. The overwhelming belief in the ability of Saudi women to balance various life roles (98.6%) challenges stereotypes, while a divided perspective on choosing between marriage and a career (83.1%) reflects evolving societal norms. Notably, the endorsement of husbands supporting their wives in their careers (98.1%) highlights the importance of spousal collaboration (Table 2).

Table 2: Saudi Women's Perception of the social and economic system

Item	Frequency		Percent	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you plan to work after graduation?	204	3	98.6	1.4
Are you planning to stop working after you marry?	8	199	3.9	96.1
Are you planning to stop working when you have children?	17	190	8.2	91.8
Do you see any differences between your mother's work and your sister's work or your future work regarding the struggles, challenges, and obstacles?	92	115	44.4	55.6
Do you believe that a women's work is necessary for her?	179	28	86.5	13.5
Do you think that the financial security impacts Saudi woman?	186	21	89.9	10.1
If your mother has a job, was her financial security important and helpful to her?	174	33	84.1	15.9
Do you think marriage is necessary?	82	125	39.6	60.4
Do you think a woman can be a wife and a worker?	203	4	98.1	1.9

Item	Frequency		Percent	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Do you think marriage can control a Saudi woman's success?	88	119	42.5	57.5
Do you think Saudi women can balance between their roles in life?	204	3	98.6	1.4
Do you think a woman should choose between marriage and a career?	35	172	16.9	83.1
Do you think a woman should marry after finishing her studies?	101	106	48.8	51.2
Do you think a woman should marry before she has a stable career?	32	175	15.5	84.5
Do you think a husband should support his wife in her career?	203	4	98.1	1.9
Do you think a woman should stop working when she becomes a wife?	7	200	3.4	96.6
Do you think a woman should stop working when she becomes mother?	13	194	6.3	93.7
Would you say that the husband's career is more important than the wife's?	82	125	39.6	60.4

Saudi Women's Perceptions of Role of Men and Women in the Saudi Family

Firstly, regarding the role of a wife in marriage, 82.1% of the participants claimed that their sole role was to support their husbands in day-to-day activities. Whereas 80.7% of women voted in favor of the fact that their main role was to teach good ethics to their children. However, only 33.3% of women were responsible for supporting their families financially (Figure 1). This number is quite impressive compared to traditional thought of school where a married woman was solely bound to household activities. Secondly, regarding the role of the husband in family life, 90.8% of participants viewed that men were responsible for maintaining the financial liabilities of the house whereas 94.7% of participants highlighted that men used to support their wives in household activities. The husbands also seemed to cooperate with their wives in housing activities such as cooking (41.5%) and cleaning (44.0%) (Figure 2). Overall, the wife's ambition to support her husband shows the change in the perception of the younger female generation in Saudi Arabia. This shift in perception can enhance the quality of life for the couples and their children by having the wife help provide a great education, a great house, etc. Secondly, this study also highlighted the shared responsibilities within the family. As explained earlier, Saudi women's responsibilities have been extended to be more than bearing children, raising children, cooking, etc. Now, Saudi women can share the same rights as men, which leads to equality even as it relates to family responsibilities.

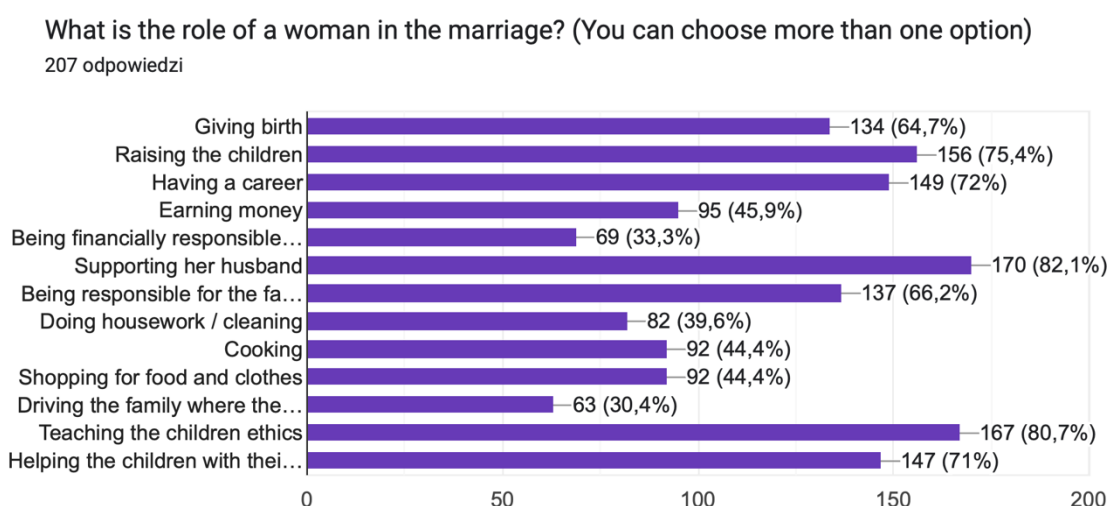


Figure 1. Demographics Regarding the Roles of a Wife

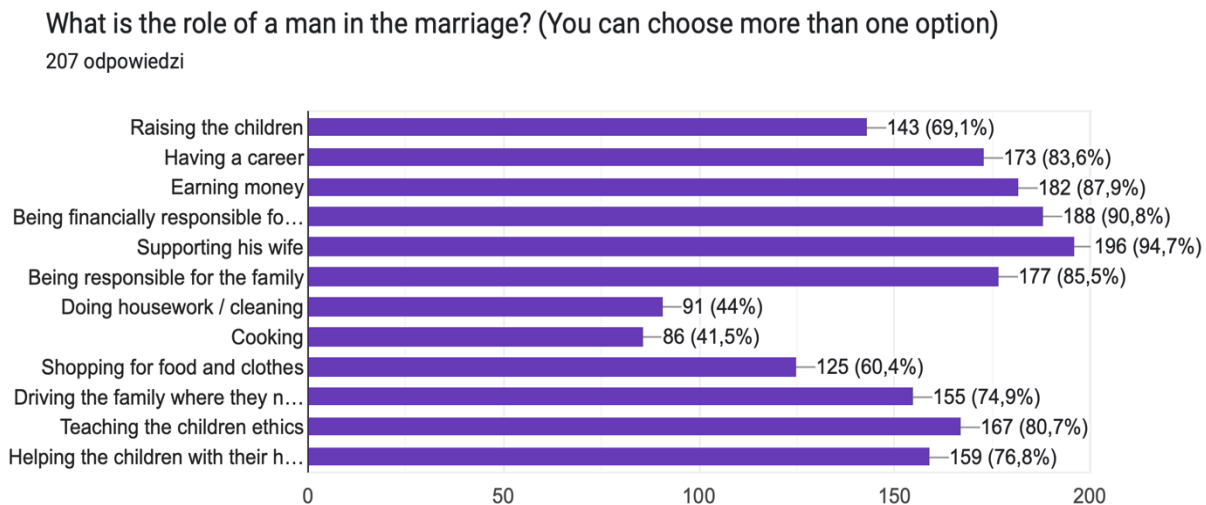


Figure 2. Demographics Regarding the Roles of a Husband

Saudi Women's Perceptions of Reshaping the Future of the Saudi Family

The study's results show a new view of Saudi women's perception of the future of the Saudi family. A notable segment of participants expressed optimism, highlighting the positive impact of recent changes

on Saudi identity among the youth. They emphasized the embrace of open-mindedness, exposure to diverse ideas, and the evolution toward a more dynamic and inclusive identity. One of the participants expressed her views as:

"Yes, the recent changes are significant. Young Saudis are more open-minded, embracing new ideas. This shift challenges traditional norms, contributing to a more dynamic and inclusive Saudi identity."

To support this narrative, another participant viewed that:

"I believe the changes are positive. The younger generation is exposed to diverse perspectives, fostering a more globalized and modern Saudi identity. It reflects a Saudi Arabia that is evolving with the times."

Furthermore, a strong support came in favor of this school of thought as:

"Absolutely. The changes are empowering the youth. They are more vocal about their aspirations and rights. This evolution contributes to a Saudi identity that is both proud of its heritage and ready for the future."

Conversely, some participants approached the question with caution, acknowledging the delicate balance needed between preserving traditional values and adapting to the changing world. This group emphasized the importance of navigating change without compromising core cultural values. For example, a woman expressed her views on the significance of recent changes:

"I'm not so sure. While there are changes, some core values remain. The balance between tradition and modernity is delicate. It's crucial to preserve our heritage while adapting to the evolving world."

One more participant highlighted her thoughts:

"I'm a bit skeptical. Yes, there are changes, but it's not happening uniformly. The divide between the old and the new remains. Reshaping Saudi identity requires more comprehensive efforts to bridge these gaps."

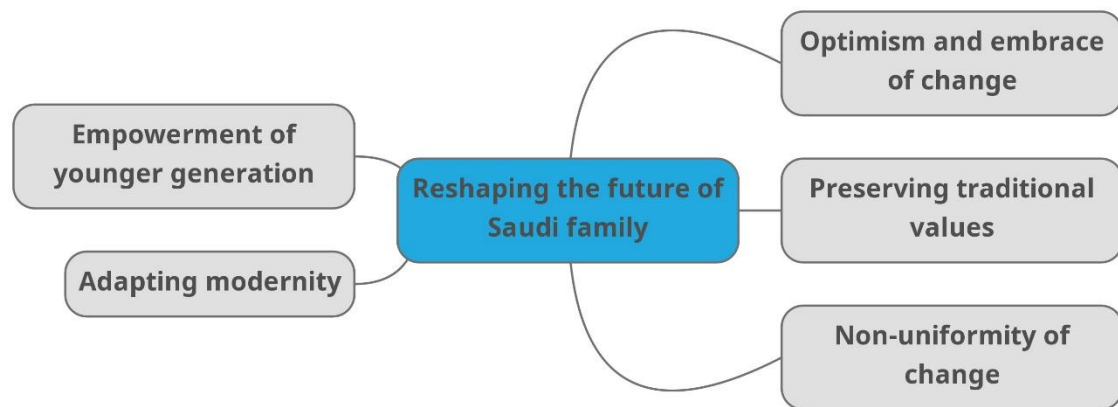


Figure 1: Mind map showing Saudi women's perceptions of reshaping the Saudi family

Discussion

The quantitative approach to this study contributes to sharing the views of Saudi Arabian women who have been empowered by the new changes in Saudi Arabia. These women have not only been empowered, but they also have an increased understanding of their goals, desires, and roles as well as additional confidence and strength. Saudi women had held stereotypical images of working in the domestic sphere and being afraid of reshaping their identities as women and Saudis (Le Renard, 2014). However, the findings of this study show how Saudi women are capable of multitasking and balancing between their roles successfully. Nowadays, Saudi women are mothers, wives, and workers simultaneously. The most interesting finding is that Saudi women have redefined/reshaped their identity in terms of pursuing their goals, holding roles in many fields, and balancing roles within the family. Women are not only working in the domestic sphere, but they are also to work as men's equals in the domestic sphere. Women with progressive mindsets often seek educational and professional empowerment, as well as greater personal freedoms. This shift is marked by a desire for increased participation in public life and a rejection of limitations imposed by traditional norms. The significance of this shift from traditional to progressive perspectives is noteworthy. It reflects a changing societal landscape in Saudi Arabia, with women increasingly seeking to redefine their roles and contribute to the nation's development (Albahoth, 2018; Kedan, 2023). The findings indicate that the social and economic changes in Saudi Arabia have changed the perceptions of Saudi women toward work, marriage, and social roles, which leads them to reshape their own identities, which in turn reshapes the Saudi family.

While the participants are aware of marriage's responsibilities, they do not view marriage as an obstacle. They believe they can overcome all the struggles and challenges they might face in their marriage in order to hold a job. This finding takes us to the importance of financial independence since most Saudi female participants want to work after graduation, although their mothers and older sisters were unemployed. The experiences of older women do not impact the passion of the Saudi women to work immediately after graduation. Based on the participants' answers, their mothers advised them to have a job for financial security. That is why, more than 85% of the participants agreed that women's work is important. The importance of mutual support is becoming increasingly evident within Saudi families. Both husbands and wives recognize the value of working together to overcome challenges and achieve common goals. This collaborative approach enhances the overall well-being of the family unit, creating a more harmonious and inclusive family dynamic (Syed et al., 2018). Younger Saudi women are demonstrating ambitious aspirations and making notable contributions to their families. With access to education and career opportunities, these women are pursuing personal and professional goals, contributing not only to their individual growth but also to the overall prosperity of their families. Their ambition is reshaping perceptions of women's roles within the family, emphasizing the positive impact of women's empowerment on familial stability and success (Eum, 2019; Topal, 2019). A more equitable distribution of responsibilities and mutual support contribute to stronger family bonds. As women play a more active role in decision-making and pursue their ambitions, families are

adapting to a more dynamic and inclusive structure. This evolution signifies a positive transformation in traditional family dynamics, reflecting the broader societal shifts in Saudi Arabia as women continue to contribute significantly to the well-being and progress of their families (Alhajri, 2020; Gawarir, 2022).

Most interestingly, the Saudi female participants join the work not only with professional satisfaction, but also with financial independence. As was mentioned before, marriage does not stop a woman from fulfilling herself professionally, according to what the participants think. Almost 60% felt that their situation in marriage can determine if a woman will succeed or not. More than 170 participants did not agree that women should choose between marriage and a career, which calls into question if the typical, patriarchal Saudi society has started to change. Young Saudi women, represented by PMU students, almost unanimously declared that Saudi women can balance their roles of mother, wife, and professional worker. This is a significant change regarding Saudi women's perceptions toward work, marriage, and social roles. Unlike earlier beliefs, the findings indicate that Saudi female participants find fulfillment in their professions and also value financial independence. Interestingly, marriage is no longer seen as a barrier to professional fulfillment (Alghofaily, 2019; Alselaime, 2014).

Moreover, almost three-quarters of the participants realized that the changes which have been a part of the Saudi society the last few years can reshape Saudi identity, which will lead to a reshaping of the Saudi family. Most participants believe that women's working is important because of increasing prices, providing job security, and general financial security, and that not only extends to the woman herself, but also her family. A woman's work makes her more empowered, independent, and powerful (Cornwall, 2016). This kind of discussion can be an answer to the research question about the future of the Saudi family. Saudi Arabia is still holding on to the traditional role of the husband as being responsible for the family. In fact, more than 40% of the participants declared that husband's career is more important than the wife's. This role has not changed in the Saudi society, which is why the husband's career will still be more important. A situation where a wife works and a husband stays at home and cares for the children can be difficult to accept in the patriarchal Saudi society. This stereotypical image along with the new changes push the Saudi woman to have a job as her husband does to share all the responsibilities together. Based on the participants' answers, they believe that a man can share domestic duties with his wife (Finch et al., 2003).

Education holds a central role in shaping these shifting perspectives. Exposure to diverse ideas and the acquisition of knowledge empower younger Saudi women to question traditional gender norms. As education becomes a catalyst for change, it fosters critical thinking and independence, leading to a more progressive approach in family roles and societal expectations. The connection between education and changing gender norms is evident, as educated individuals tend to prioritize equality and challenge restrictive stereotypes (Al-Bakr et al., 2017; Le Renard, 2014). The impact of educational aspirations goes beyond personal achievements, extending to broader societal changes. As more Saudi women pursue education and challenge traditional roles, the entire society experiences a transformation in its approach to gender norms. This educational shift acts as a catalyst for dismantling stereotypes, fostering a more inclusive society that values the contributions of women in various spheres. In essence, the connection between education and changing gender norms highlights the transformative power of learning in shaping the future landscape of Saudi society (Hamdan, 2005; Abalkhail, 2017).

Limitations

Although this research aims to investigate the perception of Saudi women toward work, marriage, social roles, and identities within the new changes of Saudi Arabia, there are some limitations. The first limitation of this study is that the research is based on the students at a private university who have special level of education, who travel a lot, whose perspectives are wide, and who can have more international experiences. As a result, the sample of PMU students cannot be generalized to the Saudi women of younger generations in Saudi Arabia due to the differences between them regarding to education, social status, and life experiences. We think this study will open opportunities for scholars to conduct further studies connecting to a wider sample of younger Saudi Arabians. The second limitation is that this study studied only Saudi females regarding the impact of social and economic changes on their perceptions of work, marriage, and social roles, so

the results are not reflective of the younger generation of Saudi Arabia in general.

Conclusion

The study demonstrated, based on the undergraduate students at Prince Mohammed bin Fahd University in 2023, the current perceptions of the young generation of Saudi women toward work, marriage, social roles and their identities. Saudi Arabia's recent transformation supports Saudi women pursuing their dreams. The results of this survey and the participant observation research's results prove that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is undergoing transformation, not only in law and tradition, but also in the citizens' way of thinking. Their views about work, marriage, and social roles are changing. What remains the same, though, is men's financial responsibility for the family. These results showed that young Saudis view that work provide financial independence. Most do not agree that woman should have to choose between marriage and a career; they believe women can balance their roles in life and be a mother, wife, and professional worker at the same time. Young Saudi women believe in a division of labor, but some roles—such as driving family and shopping—are still seen as masculine.

Most of the participants agreed that the changes in the Saudi society over the last years can reshape Saudi identity in terms of empowering women, raising their awareness of the roles in their lives, and trusting their goals and desires in order to follow their passions.

Saudi women have roles in society, but the new changes of Saudi Arabia make opportunities easier and more accessible for women. Saudi women, nowadays, are leaders in work, family, and the home because the new changes give them strength and confidence in their intelligence and abilities.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

By "younger generation" the authors of the article mean the females, who in 2023 are between 19-30 years old.

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