



Saudisation and Women's Empowerment through Employment in the Health Care Sector

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in
Development Studies, School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences, Victoria
University of Wellington.**

October-2014



Abstract

The majority of studies concerning Saudisation policy as a solution to decrease the unemployment of nationals and reduce the reliance on expatriate. However, this study looks at Saudisation as a tool to empower Saudi women working in the health care sector. Saudi working women have been lacking opportunities of empowerment, due to challenges they face in their daily life that hinder the development and equality of those women.

The thesis has been guided by the literature and qualitative evidence that suggests obstacles to women's empowerment and development involve socially constructed norms, traditions, religion and culture that primarily favour men. The study, also, adopts feminist geography and gender perspective and focuses on the individual voices of women working in the health care sector. This research uses different empowerment frameworks of Kabeer, Rowland, Stromquist and Freire, which are relevant to women employment and empowerment. This research utilises feminist methodology in obtaining deep understanding of the reality and experience of women employed in the health care sector.

Findings of this research reveal conditions that maintain disempowerment of women working in health care sector, as well as identifying the tools that might guarantee their empowerment. Findings also show those women necessities in the case of gender needs that revolve around their domestic and working responsibilities.

This thesis provides some recommendations to government, policy makers, educational institutions and employers about how to contribute in empowering women and overcoming challenges that hinder their development and wellbeing. Ultimately, this study aimed to, first, contribute to the literature of women's empowerment by exploring their employment in a Saudi context and second, to put the spotlight on Saudi women's issues through development lens and enrich that field of study.

Acknowledgment



In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

First of all I am thankful and grateful to Allah the almighty, who granted me the chance to improve my knowledge.

To my Mum and to my Dad for their love, support and encouragement. I am grateful to them of seeking whatever makes me happy, for their confidence that I would succeed in doing this.

I love you.

To my husband, Abdulbasit, for his love, support, care and encouragement in the entire journey of doing this project.

To Sara Kindon, my super supervisor, for being emotionally and intellectually supportive, and for making me always feel I am able to do this.

Also, my gratitude and thanks:

To my entire family for loving and encouragement

To my second supervisor Marcela Palomino-Schalscha

To my editing team; Abdulbasit, Anna and Tagan

To my interviewees in Saudi Arabia and New Zealand

To school of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences with all its members for being supportive since I started doing my project

This project is the fruit of this support

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Chapter one

Empowering women and enabling them to participate in all economic sectors is central to build healthier economies, achieve goals of development and sustainability, and increase the quality of life for men, women, families and, therefore, communities (UN, 2012).

1.1 Introduction and rationale

A major aim of this thesis is in-depth investigation of how to achieve Saudi women's empowerment through the use of a government policy of localizing jobs and promoting Saudi women in the health care sector. This national policy is called 'Saudisation'. It aims to replace foreign expatriates with nationals to decrease the high unemployment rate among Saudis. Saudisation started in the 1990s and was to be accomplished within the national five-year plans, in order to be implemented gradually, as the country relies heavily on foreign expatriates. In 2009, expatriates made up approximately 50.2 per cent of the workforce in Saudi Arabia (Central Department of Statistics and Information, 2009). Addressing the shortage of qualified national labour is important for the long-term implementation of the Saudisation policy.

Saudi women represent a small portion of the Saudi labour market, and in its early stages Saudisation did not target women intensively. Many of the targeted sectors were not employing women at all. In 2006, 26.3 per cent of female university graduates were unemployed, and in 2013, 34.8 per cent were unemployed (Central Department of Statistics and Information, 2013). Saudi culture and norms play a critical role in hindering women's employment. In addition, women's employment is restricted to certain fields; with many jobs in education and few in medicine. Recently, the Saudi government has started to focus more on women's employment, as educated women have come to be viewed as a previously wasted resource. Saudisation can prove its efficiency in decreasing women's unemployment if it is implemented effectively, and offers hundreds of job opportunities for women. Through effective implementation of Saudisation, women will have the chance to participate in the labour market and will have their own spaces, rights and opportunities for their voices to be heard.

Further, the absence of Saudi women's issues in the academic literature makes it challenging to understand their actual conditions. Yet, in development studies, it is important to understand

people's life conditions - their contextual epistemologies, cultures, economies, social features and any related issues that further contribute to their development. Through studying development I have become focused on how Saudi women would potentially be allowed to contribute to their country's development. Saudi women's employment issues have gained great attention from the Saudi government and policymakers. Yet employment policies have not achieved the anticipated results and many studies have emerged to discuss the reasons for this failure (Riyadh Economic Forum, 2012). Nonetheless, no study has examined this situation using theories of development or feminism, and this gap led me to produce this research.

Furthermore, gender and feminist studies, particularly within the Saudi context, are still blurred concepts, as not much concern exists socially or academically for Saudi gender issues. To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first to explore the empowerment of Saudi women through employment, and how to utilise Saudisation for the sake of Saudi women, within their established strict social and cultural constraints.

1.2 Research questions

This thesis aims to present an in-depth analysis of how women's empowerment can be achieved through Saudisation and employment. In order to achieve this aim, a group of Saudi women gave their points of view and shared their life experiences regarding the health care sector, Saudisation and women's development. Three main questions guided this research:

1. What are some of the challenges and the opportunities facing Saudi women currently engaging with the health care sector in Riyadh?
2. How can Saudisation increase empowerment opportunities for women in the health care sector?
3. How Saudisation can reduce barriers to the empowerment of women working in the health care sector?

1.3 Research approach

In order to answer the research questions I employed qualitative research to collect my data. Feminist geography also informed my study. The methods included semi-structure interviews, which were framed by feminist interviewing. In addition, I used constructivist methodology that helped me build and enrich my knowledge from the interviewees' points of view and experiences.

Moreover, because I belong to the same environment in which the study took place, I paid attention to my positionality, so I could know where to situate myself. Also, my personal standpoint as insider and sometimes outsider played a critical role in conducting my research, as I discuss further in the thesis.

1.4 Thesis outline

Following the introduction chapter, **Chapter two** explores the literature on Saudisation, women's employment and the obstacles they face, male superiority and women's position, and finally the gaps in the literature. **Chapter three** describes the methodology and methods adopted to conduct this study. **Chapter four** explores the Saudi context. It outlines the geographical, historical and political background of Saudi Arabia. It also describes Saudi Arabia's economic development and the status of Saudi women. **Chapter five** presents the findings and analysis of the first main theme, answering the first two questions of the research. **Chapter six** continues with the findings and analysis of the second main theme, and answers the third research question. **Chapter seven** concludes the study by returning to the main questions of the research, the themes and findings, and discusses the implications and contributions of this study.

Chapter Two: Conceptual framework

2.1 Introduction

Within debates regarding women's issues such as gender equality, empowerment, employment and development, a variety of approaches exist. These approaches, which concern women's participation in development processes have been considered by international policymakers. From the fields of women's empowerment, gender, feminism and employment, key concepts, theories and practices are established in this chapter. In addition, this chapter explores the connection between women's development employment, and consequently, empowerment. Moreover, this chapter examines the possibility of implementing these concepts in context for Saudi women.

2.2 Gender and Development: from WID to GAD

Gender analysis is vital to global attempts to achieve sustainable development. Gender is a term that is broadly used but often misunderstood (Momsen, 2004, p. 3). One early and famous definition of the term 'gender' was put forth by Whitehead in 1978:

The relations between men and women are socially constituted and not derived from biology. Therefore the term gender relations should distinguish such social relations between men and women from those characteristics, which can be derived from biological differences. In this connection sex is the province of biology, i.e. fixed and unchangeable qualities, while gender is the province of social science, i.e. qualities which are shaped through the history of social relations and interactions (as cited by Tasli, 2007, p. 23).

Gender is also defined as the "socially acquired notions of masculinity and femininity by which women and men are identified" (Momsen, 2004, p. 3). Razavi and Miller (1995) define gender as a social and cultural concept that refers to the "relative position of men and women" (p. 13) within the family and society alike. Gender is different within cultures due to its social and cultural characteristics. Additionally, gender "has a dynamic character which makes it subject to change under the influence of a wide-range of socio-economic factors" (Tasli, 2007, p. 27).

'Sex', on the contrary, is universal, biologically determined and permanent (CEDPA, 1996, p. 10). This binary has been under debate recently, because gender and sex (as concepts) are varied from place to place, and they cannot be defined similarly in every region of the world. However,

I may conceptualise this binary, as it sits better in the Saudi context at present. That is because identifying gender and sex, and their roles is a very critical process in Saudi Arabia, as I discuss later in Chapter four.

Gender is deeply linked to development, and it is important to shift the trajectory from 'developing women' to 'developing gender'. That is, authoritative policy excludes women from all of life's activities. These policies have led to modelling the mentality of men who have inherited authority from cultures and traditions. Moreover, other reasons that pushed for the evolution of the concept of gender and its integration into scientific arenas due to the importance of the role of women in development. Therefore, addressing the problem of marginalizing the role and participation of women in development started in 1975. It emerged from the recommendations and strategies emanating from the global women's conferences. Analyses of those recommendations and strategies widened which led to the evolution of many theories regarding women and gender.

Consequently, the Women in Development (WID) approach was launched during the 1975 UN Decade for Women. It concerns how women had been excluded from the thinking of development experts, and how this exclusion had hindered the development process itself. Additionally, WID sought to integrate women more into existing development processes by targeting them in particular activities (Saunders, 2002). Following WID came another approach; Women and Development (WAD). This approach focused on adjusting and enhancing the existing gender roles in a society. WAD was based on the notion that women were already within development processes, but not in an equal way. WAD was built on the notion that development could work better and more effectively when women's efforts inside or outside their homes were appreciated (Rathgeber, 1990). That is, women were an economic underclass, as they were involved in unpaid jobs like family farm helpers, and less prestigious occupations such as working in restaurants or pubs (McDwell, 1999). WAD is also deeply concerned with how to make development plans and strategies more equal in terms of gender roles. Most recently, Gender and Development (GAD) has become prominent. It looks at how to organise women's and men's power relations, by challenging the notions that place women in development at an inferior level. Moser (1993) confirms that concentrating only on women neglects the core problem of women being in an inferior position from that of men.

GAD is concerned with “analysing the historical and social construction of gender relations” (Kotsapas, 2011, p. 29). GAD is an alternative bottom-up theoretical and practical approach that evolves from critiques of the top-down WID, the dominant liberal approach of the 1970s. GAD, also responds to third world Women, and to calls for empowerment in the 1980s.

The GAD approach focuses on transforming structural inequities and unequal relations. GAD views gender as structured by social influence, and GAD’s advocates call to understand, deeply, the socially constructed roots of gender differences and how this affects relationships between men and women. In addition, GAD seeks to draw greater attention to patriarchy and its impact in forming gendered roles. GAD supporters argue the importance of expanding the understanding of power relations and the gendered nature of systems and institutions (Elson, 1999), which affect the lives of women as well as men (Rathgeber, 1990). Rather than integrating women into the existing patriarchal system, GAD advocates claim for the transformation of the system into one illustrated by gender equality (Smith, 2008).

The GAD approach concerns the importance of transforming the development process from developing women into developing social gender equality. In other words, the merging of women into the development mainstream is necessary to create balance between men and women’s roles (UNESCO, 2000). This can be achieved by identifying the problems and specifying the goals of removing inequalities built on gender, which are the result of social authoritarian (patriarchal) policies, and affect women and men alike.

GAD views gendered power relations as the main cause of women’s secondary status in both public and private domains of society (Kotsapas, 2011). Thus, the importance of GAD has come from many factors. First, it evaluates the validity of both men and women’s assigned roles, to achieve the needed transformation of gendered power relations. Second, GAD disagrees with the idea that women are ‘passive beneficiaries’, and instead, agrees with promoting the variety of women’s experiences and knowledge, as well as their important role as ‘agents of change’ in their society (Rathgeber, 1990). Third, GAD’s principles look at the state as an integral provider of subsidies for services provided by women as part of their gender allocated roles (*ibid.*). Those services are invested to subsidise other forms of social reproduction, such as health care, education, and childcare, among others. This will cause the problematic burden of women’s work to decrease over time (Rathgeber, 1990; Saunders, 2002). Finally, if there is a true

transformation of gendered power relations, men should be involved because they are the main actors in reproducing gender identity and inequality (Kotsapas, 2011).

Along with GAD are Molyneux (1985) and Moser's (1989) approaches to women's practical and strategic gender needs. Molyneux defines the 'practical' interests of women as "based on the satisfaction of needs arising from women's placement within the sexual division of labours", and identifies 'strategic interests' of women as "those involving claims to transform social relations in order to enhance women's positions and secure a more lasting re-positioning of women within the gender order and within society at large" (Molyneux, 1998, p. 232). Therefore, conceptualising strategic gender needs will improve gender planning and development policy implementation (UNESCO, 2003). Moser's gender framework has been used by development institutions around the world (*ibid.*). This framework argues that the differentiation between practical and strategic needs is important to implement gender perspectives in any development policy or practice (Moser, 1989). The GAD approach believes that it is important to "understand women's gendered roles as it "influenced not just which questions researchers decide to explore, but how they situate themselves within the research study and the methods they choose to adopt" (Robison Plant, 2004b, p. 21).

The GAD paradigm promotes development policies and practices that target women's practical gender interests and needs as well as strategic gender interests and needs. GAD argues that development should also seek the transformation of social structures which maintain oppression and gender inequality (Kotsapas, 2011). Moreover, GAD looks at the impact of development projects and programmes on both women and men, and emphasizes the contributions of men and women in development, who should both benefit from development projects and programmes. GAD shows that the contribution of women in development process does not necessarily mean they benefit from these contributions. Integrating gender into the development mainstream means allowing men and women to work towards their strategic interests, and allowing women and men to work together toward mutual goals and greater equality. These endeavours deserve consideration by development planners.

In recent times, integrating women into development processes has meant remarkable shifts from WID to GAD. These shifts in development thinking and practice influenced the gender relations within development. This shift also helped in seeking better understanding of the varied roles that women play. Understanding women's roles and services provides understanding of

women's needs and interests, which are the main keys to establishing effective ways to nurture women's power and empowerment.

2.3 Power and empowerment

Power, as Foucault (1983) points out, is an inescapable presence in our everyday lives. For something that continuously shapes our lives, a simple definition might puzzle us. The theoretical analyses for understanding power are various. Thus, definitions of power in literature are extensive; and here I explore some important definitions of power relevant to my research. Some authors discuss a division of power; 'power over' and 'power to'. For instance, Dahl (1957) and Lukes (2005) defines power as something that one holds over another. Foucault (1983) describes power as 'domination', and he elaborates by saying "[p]ower is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society" (Foucault, 1983, p. 187). Foucault's definition indicates that power is conceptualised more as a process than as an outcome (Harkins 2010). The following sections elaborate more in power and empowerment.

Power is a term we use daily in our lives that refers to many implications at different levels: "[t]he word power lies at the centre of a semantic field that includes authority, influence, coercion, force, violence, manipulation, strength, and so on" (Lukes, 2007, p. 59). The concept of power has been defined and discussed within many fields such as the social sciences, politics, psychology, geography and sociology. Steven Lukes is known to be the most famous theorist who discussed various perceptions of power within the social sciences, sociology and politics. He came up with his famous three dimensions of power; the first being power that concerns the behaviour of decision-making "on issues over which there is an observable *conflict of interest*" (Lukes, 1974, p. 15), such as policy preferences shown through political actions. The second dimension dives deeper in the less visible sides of social power, into "the question of the control over the agenda of politics and of the ways in which potential issues are kept out of the political process" (*ibid*, 1974, p. 21). The third dimension of power delves deeper, in which "hidden social powers ensure that a particular political agenda will be pursued, even while the forms of political legitimacy remain intact" (Leicht & Jenkins, 2009, p. 114).

Moreover, Rowlands categorises power into: power over (ability to influence and coerce) and power to (organise and change existing hierarchies), power with (power from collective action) and power within (power from individual consciousness) (1997, as cited by Luttrell, Quiroz,

Scrutton & Bird, 2009). While Luttrell et al (*ibid.*) suggest that empowerment could be viewed in any of the four categories depending on which kind of development is being aimed for. Power is not the main subject of this research, but understanding the conceptions of power is vital to understand the conceptions of empowerment. This is because empowerment can be applied through different dimensions of development processes, such as economic, religious, social, and so on.

Empowerment has also been defined broadly. Alkire and Ibrahim (2007) state that people try to define empowerment according to their purposes. Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland (2006, p. 1) define empowerment as “the process of enhancing an individual’s capacity to make choices and then transforming those choices into the sought after outcome.”

Empowerment as a theory or a practice has its roots in many community organization methods such as feminism, adult education and political psychology. For example, Fagan (1979) and O’Connell (1978) state that empowerment at the macro level can be defined “literally and depict it as the process of increasing collective political power” (as cited by Gutierrez 1990, p. 149). Alternatively, empowerment at the micro level can be characterised as “the development of a personal feeling of increased power or control without an actual change in structural arrangements” (Sherman & Wenocur, 1983; Simmons & Parsons, 1983).

Empowerment concepts have historical grounds in several collective struggles for social justice, such as capitalism, the Protestant Reformation, Jeffersonian democracy, Quakerism, the Black-Power Movement (Arnoff, 2011). In the mid-1980s, the ideas of women’s empowerment emerged as a way to challenge patriarchy. Then, in the 1990s, the term was broadened from thinking of it as collective process to also understanding it as an individual process of self-transformation.

Empowerment, as a concept, has always been linked to women’s development, and described as being the core of development. Rowlands (1997) argues that understanding power in a social context is important to realising which approach is most applicable to create the empowerment of women. She maintains that previous understandings and conceptualisations of power typically focused on neutral aspects, which resulted in the failure to acknowledge how power was being distributed unfairly along gender lines, thus leading to inequality and oppression (*ibid.*).

At the 1995 Fourth World Conference in Beijing, women's empowerment was introduced to a wider audience including state actors and governments. The signatories of the conference promised to spread women's empowerment worldwide. Their vision of women's empowerment confirmed three main basic notions. First, empowerment is a socio-political process; second, power is critical to empowerment (Arnoff, 2011); and third, the process encouraged changes in social, political and economic power between and across individuals and groups (Batliwala, 2007). These notions were combined in the growing literature on the conceptualization of women's empowerment. (Arnoff, 2011).

In addition, Rowlands' (1995, p. 102 & 1997, p. 13) definition of power-over means "bringing people who are outside the decision-making process into it." This implies participation in political, social, and economic decision making. Empowerment incorporates the practices which make people perceive themselves as capable and entitled to make decisions. Empowerment also involves all the abilities and potential of people (Rowlands, 1995, p. 102). Furthermore, empowerment indicates "undoing negative social constructions, so that the people affected come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and have influence" (*ibid*, pp. 102-103).

Feminist Empowerment Frameworks		
Rowlands (1995)	Kabeer (1999)	Stromquist (1993) and (2002)
Personal – developing personal identity, capacity and belief in self. Relational – capacity and bargaining ability to determine the boundaries of personal relationships. Collective – fostering cooperation between individuals and their collective strength will be greater than their individual strength.	Resources – the material human and social resources that enhance the ability to exercise meaningful choice. Agency – the ability to define and determine one's goals and make decisions. Achievements – those achievements that embody meaningful choice.	Cognitive – awareness and understanding of one's self, of the ways in which one is subordinated and oppressed and the causes of this. Psychological – overcoming learned helplessness and increasing self-belief in the ability to solve problems. Political – having the ability to analyse the political environment and mobilise for change. Economic – participation in the productive sector for income.

Table 2.1 Personal, close relationship and collective empowerment
Source: Adopted from Kotsapas, 2011

Empowerment is not limited to the notion that individuals need others to empower them, rather, they should generate their own power and empower themselves. Kabeer (1994b) states that empowerment should be created through one's internal well, as it cannot be obtained from outside. It is "a process whereby women can freely analyse, develop and voice their needs and interests, without them being predefined, or imposed from above" (Oxaal & Baden, 1997, p. 4). Kabeer (2001, p. 3) suggests that empowerment for women can include "[t]he expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them."

Women's empowerment, also, is vital objective of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (see figure 2.1 below). Empowerment, according to those goals, are to be achieved within the third goal of the MDGs, which is "promoting gender equality and empower women" (UNDP) through working of international development organisation and countries together in order to achieve those goals by 2015.



Figure 2.1. The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
Source: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

In this research, I adopted Kabeer and Stromquist's and Freire empowerment approach, as I am focusing on individual women. Also, because I discuss women's empowerment through economic opportunities, which are represented in creating more job opportunities through localising jobs in Saudi Arabia. This is achieved through the Saudisation policy, and impacts on the process of empowering Saudi women socially and economically.

2.3.1 Saudi women's empowerment

As outlined above, empowerment has gained momentum since its evolving in the second half of the twentieth century. This theory has increased with the emergence of and covered multiple issues that many nationalities have experienced; yet, Saudi women's perspectives have so far been omitted from these theoretical discussions. Empowerment has been discussed extensively in literature, as is part of many development programmes and processes. However, literature on Saudi women's empowerment is almost non-existent. Previous literature has discussed Saudi women's affairs, such as education, employment, social matters, and religious concerns, and so on (see, e.g. Abu Askar, 2013; Bahry, 1982; House, 2007; Miller-Rosser, Chapman & Francis, 2006). The place of women in Islam and Islamic states has generated much scholarship but, with remarkable exceptions (Al Munajjed, 1997; Altorki, 1986; Doumato, 2000), published work on the current status of women in Saudi Arabia is almost non-existent (Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004). In fact, women's affairs are considered highly sensitive subjects in Saudi Arabia, which makes many writers, academics, journalists and even activists 'think twice' before initiating a discussion about Saudi women.

According to Saudi society, women's affairs are taboo, and discussing them publicly raises great public objection. Throughout the history of the Arabian Peninsula, culture, norms, and tradition have always considered public talk or mention of women among men as highly shameful, as women are like sacred secrets, which should not be revealed by or in front of strangers.

These concepts might be considered meaningless in contemporary society, because today, after the great openness of a global 'world culture', such concepts have become strange in the huge globalisation process (McFadden, 2001). Women in many countries have succeeded in exposing and participating in their societies, and it is rare to find a present day society that still applies these concepts about women.

Culture and tradition are the axes of Saudi social life, as well as Islamic values, which are sometimes misinterpreted for the sake of conservative *ulama*¹ and some sectors of the government. Women's empowerment may not yet be an acceptable issue to discuss, because empowerment might mean that women have opportunities to appear and participate more in public and private sphere. In addition, the male-dominance of society still views women as the 'weaker' link, unable to look after themselves, especially outside the house. This patriarchy

¹ Ulama refers to the learner of Islam sciences, or those who possess the quality of 'ilm, "learning," in its widest sense. From the 'ulamā', who are versed theoretically and practically in the Muslim sciences, come the religious teachers of the Islamic community.

considers it unacceptable for women to free themselves from male control (Human Rights Watch, 2008).

Women's empowerment principles are still largely absent in Saudi society, except for some attempts by some domestic NGOs that run projects which aim to support women in several ways (Riyadh Chamber,² 2007). For instance, Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundation (ABTF) has a focus area in Women's Empowerment, implementing projects that support women to improve the conditions of their lives. One important ABTF programme is Al-Faisaliah Women's Charitable Society in Jeddah. The society's objectives are to support handicrafts and the women involved in the work, and to support families who need to initiate micro finance projects (ABTF, 2011). However, the role of NGOs is still limited because of the nature of Saudi society—the conservative attitude toward any new initiatives regarding women and the culture and traditions that gave women certain kinds of jobs, limited to home and private family matters (Hamdi 1996; Al Munajjed, 1997; Al Dossary 2011; Alzahrani, 2012). I discuss more about Saudi history and society in Chapter three.

For these reasons, there is a severe shortage of literature that discusses Saudi women's empowerment. Thus, this research aims to fill in part of this gap, and to contribute to initiating further academic research that puts forth empowerment as a subject that concerns Saudi affairs in general, and Saudi women in particular.

2.4 Gendered division of labour

The gendered division of labour is another theoretical focus of this research. The gendered division of labour is defined as “the socially determined ideas and practices, which define what roles and activities are deemed appropriate for women and men” (Reeves & Baden, 2000, p. 2). In most of the world's countries, the conceptions of labour division among men and women are seen to be natural and immutable, culturally and societally, which results in “context-specific patterns of who does what by gender and how this is valued” as stated by Reeves & Baden (2000, p. 8).

The gendered division of labour has emerged due to many factors. First, social norms, which restrict and limit women's participation to certain jobs. Second, discrimination in labour markets

² Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry

that women have access to, putting women in lower-paid jobs, because of their low education or according to social discrimination (IFAD, 2001). Third, formal employment conflicts with women's other responsibilities, such as household responsibilities and childcare (*ibid*).

This theory describes how specific tasks and jobs are assigned to men or women. Women are the more aggrieved group in such specification, because, and without their choice, they are put in certain jobs and responsibilities and given lower wages. According to the United Nations Platform for Action Committee (UNPAC), women make a tremendous contribution to the world economy, however, this contribution is not as valued as men's contributions (2010). The reason for this is the construction of the societal ideas and norms, which do not value women's independence. Consequently, women have had lower economic status than men. Women form the majority of those in poverty globally; they make up 70 per cent of the world's 1.5 billion absolute poor people (FAO, 2013, and UNPAC, 2010 cited in Vorsters, 2011). The fact of women's poverty is not new, as women have been trapped in unpaid or low wage jobs for centuries.

With all the theoretical approaches that have demonstrated how the labour market is divided by gender, none of them explain why women continue to be put in the same range of occupations (McDowell, 1999). Studies have shown that women are seen and treated as secondary or temporary workers in the labour market, while men have primary and full-time attachment to their jobs (Casey & Alach, 2004). Shirley Dex (1985, pp. 203-4) has explained women's labour market participation:

Women are not a marginal workforce and should be viewed as permanently attached to the labour force. . . . The issue of whether women are a reserve army of labour or a disposable workforce buffeted by economic fluctuations have both been found to be asking the wrong questions about women's employment. The questions have been informed by too much male-centred theorising. More specific gender related questions need to be formulated about women's and men's work as a further step towards the reconceptualization of the socio-economic changes that are occurring.

Women's participation in waged labour has increased in the late twentieth century, in nearly every country in the world. This increase is the result of the global capitalist industrialization (McDowell, 1999). Moreover, there has been a tendency for women and men to specialise, respectively, in domestic work and the formal sector (Washbrook, 2007). Women have become

concentrated in specific occupations and sectors, creating 'horizontal segregation', and in addition, they have been put at the bottom of those occupational hierarchies, which is termed 'vertical segregation' (Charles & Grusky, 2004). The pay gap is another aspect of this segregation, that is, "women as a group earn less than men as a group" (McDowell, 1999, p. 126). A breadth of research has taken place in order to understand why certain jobs have been assigned to certain genders, which resulted in the emergence of many theories such as labour market segmentation and gender labour division. In this research I apply gendered labour division theory in order to understand the nature of the Saudi labour market and how women have been put in certain jobs or occupations.

In the Saudi case, women and the labour market have similar divisions as other parts of the world, but with more restrictions and regulations emerging from religion and Saudi culture. Saudi society, with its "patrilineal/patriarchal culture and Islamic ideology, sexual asymmetry assumes an extreme expression marked by the formal segregation of women, their veiling and their relegation to the private sphere of the household" (Rassam, 1983, p. 122). The gender division arises from the conviction that there are natural mental and psychological differences between women and men (Al-Aloola, 2008). It is scientifically true that mental, physical and psychological differences between the two sexes exist; however, this is not evidence that legitimises the oppression of women and the confiscation of their rights. Saudi society legitimates gender segregation and division in general on religious bases, and maintains them using many channels, such as education. For instance, education is used to transmit conservative cultural aspects (El-Sanabary, 1994).

In Saudi society, women are responsible for domestic work, even if they have other jobs. This results from the domination of men: fathers, husbands and brothers. Working women return home early to do housework and look after their children. Saudi men do not commonly share in domestic work, but there are some exceptions. Men are responsible for earning income that supports their families, and in this way the household equation is 'balanced'. Society emphasises these gendered roles by referring to holy scripts, especially the Prophet's *Hadiths*,³ which encourages certain rights and responsibilities between spouses. It is true that religion encourages women to obey their husbands, but this is only valid when the husbands themselves are honest, cooperative, supportive and respectable. Unfortunately, through history, these 'encouraging' *hadiths* have been misused by scholars and individuals, for many socio-political reasons. First,

³ *Hadiths* mean the reported sayings, teachings and deeds of Prophet Mohammed.

scholars support the government, and manipulate religion's regulations in order to control people. Second, scholars and the government pretend to be religious to gain public sympathy and support.

Conversely, women themselves have spread concepts regarding the gendered division of labour. From childhood, boys and girls are taught to have certain responsibilities and characteristics according to their gender. Mothers are keen to train their daughters in housework, in order to produce good housewives and mothers, guaranteeing successful married life for their daughters. In addition, boys are educated to do outdoor work, such as grocery shopping and transportation when they are older. In Saudi society it is shameful for men to do housework. While this notion is changing in many families, many others still practise it.

The gendered division of labour is crucial in conceptualising the case of Saudi women working in the health care sector. Since the beginning of women's participation in the health care sector in the late 1970s, the debate about gender segregation is ongoing. Although hospitals are the only place women and men can mix, gender segregation advocates still request the government to establish hospital sections to separate men from women (El-Sanabary, 1994). The government has responded to most of these requests, and built a large number of segregated local medical centres. These policies play a great role in strengthening gender segregation, and Saudi female workers remain limited to certain jobs, such as nursing and general practice doctors, as these centres do contain all medical specialisations.

All of these aspects of segregation have strengthened the gendered division of labour in Saudi Arabia and maintained the segregation of workplaces. Gender segregation is a central characteristic of Saudi society, although there have been attempts to change this, in keeping with other social transformations, since the early 1990s. These movements have spread all over the country, though they are weaker in big cities such as Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam,⁴ and stronger in smaller cities. Education has been devoted to spreading the concept of gender segregation to 'maintain Saudi traditions and protect Islamic values' (*ibid*). Much feminist research has argued that schools and colleges deliver, directly and indirectly, social messages and expectations, socialize students (males and females) into their prescribed adult roles, and consequently reinforce early gender roles. Feminist research is strongly linked to gender issues

⁴ See the Saudi map, p 35.

research (Bolzendahl, 2004; Conover, 1988). That is, feminism is a collection of notions that call for social, cultural, political and economic gender equality.

2.5 Islamic or Eastern Feminism?

The term 'Islamic feminism' often raises controversy, as the term is rejected by seculars as well as Islamists, who avoid using the term 'feminist', as it carries 'Western' thoughts which contradict the cultural specificities of Muslim communities. In her book, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, Jaywardena (1986) summarises this issue by saying that those who oppose feminism think that,

a product of 'decadent' Western capitalism...it is the ideology of women of the local bourgeoisie, and...it either alienates women from their culture, religion and family responsibilities on the one hand, or from the revolutionary struggle for national liberation and Socialism on the other. (p. 2)

However, many Muslim thinkers who are known to be feminist such as Leila Ahmed, Qasim Amin, Asma Barlas and Fatema Mernissi, have been studying feminism from Islamic and Eastern perspectives. They had many definitions of the term feminism. Those definitions, generally, concern women's rights and gender equality from Islamic perspective. These perspectives distinguish this theory from other perspectives. Islamic feminism's consistency with Islamic guidelines does preserve women's rights, however, issues arise in how to interpret the 'real' Islam and apply it (Golley, 2004).

Islamic feminism concerns enabling women to participate in producing religious knowledge, which has been monopolised and limited to men. This creates an Islam that is influenced by masculinity and patriarchal perspectives, as well as the social and cultural contexts which are produced. Patriarchal culture must be updated, as it is not suitable to contemporary societies.

As a result of this patriarchal domination of religion, Islamic feminists had to break male monopolies and tried to produce new thought regarding women's rights and gender equality in Islam. These attempts were faced with severe opposition, because it is believed that women are not qualified to challenge religious authority. Opponents of Islamic feminism believe that these activists are non-compliant with agreed upon regulations, and use extracts of religious scripts biased towards men, arriving at conclusions that are not consistent with Islamic faith. Some of the opponents describe feminism approaches as being against Islamic principles, especially those studies that do not rely on trusted references.

Feminism from a social sciences' perspective has contributed to the theories of the sociology of work and employment (Hakim, 1995). Between the 1960s and 1980s the relationship between feminism and employment and the notion of how feminism could support employment was not yet clear (Ferrer, 1980). Also, Ferree's (*ibid*) study about *Working Class Feminism* argued that working women were more feminist than housewives. That is, the idea of feminism circulated in the working women's networks in their workplace. This shows that because working women sought rights and to have gender equality, feminism was the notion that supported their attitudes.

In addition, "[F]eminists rightly recognise that there is a clear distinction between what many regard to be jobs for men and what people regard as jobs for women" (Aston, 2003). Accordingly, the gendered division of labour does clearly exist throughout any society, and feminists might argue that "...this is not a natural condition based on differences of sex but rather a result of social conditioning which throughout history has been propagated by men for their benefit" (*ibid*). The concepts of feminism and the gendered division of labour cannot be separated, whenever the latter exists the former will appear too. That is, working women are mostly those disadvantaged by the gendered division of labour. And if they try to oppose against that, feminist notions would be an essential that moves them, because feminist movement was established in the first place to claim women's rights.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the conceptual framework for this research. It discussed gender in development approaches that showed the shift from the top-down approach to bottom-up approaches. The WID approach seeks to integrate women into existing development processes. The WAD approach aims to make development plans and strategies more gender equal. It, also, discussed the GAD approach, which concerns the socially constructed notions of difference between men and women and emphasises the importance of challenging existing gender roles and relations, and how these approaches have influenced the changes that occurred in the attitudes towards women and development and therefore their effects on women in employment.

The chapter also discussed theoretical frameworks of power and empowerment, and how they are essential in development processes. Power and empowerment are key tools to challenge obstacles facing Saudi women's development, noting the need to examine the empowerment of

Saudi women within the Saudi context. After that, the chapter outlined theory of the gendered division of labour, how it was shaped, and its relationship with gender segregation in the work place. The gendered division of labour is also related to the gender roles that have been assigned by social, cultural and traditional aspects, to both men and women. Then, it discussed how to apply these theories to the case of Saudi Arabia. Finally, the chapter discussed the Islamic or eastern attitude towards feminism, and then it outlined the concerns of Islamic feminism, that implied a call for women's rights, gender equality within the Islamic legislations. Then it finished by relating feminism to the employment and gendered division of labour theories. All those theories are related because since women are employed they have the right to be equal to men and therefore there is no place for the gendered division of labour. The next chapter discusses the methodology that guided this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

[A]ll researchers interpret the world through some sort of conceptual lens formed by their beliefs, previous experiences, existing knowledge, assumptions about the world, and theories about knowledge and how it is accrued. The researcher's conceptual lens acts as a filter: the importance placed on the huge range of observations made in the field (choosing to record or note some observations and not others, for example) is partly determined by this filter.

(Carroll and Swatman, 2000, p. 3)

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the methodologies used in this research. Broadly speaking, this study aims to discuss how to empower Saudi women through Saudisation. Specifically, the objective of this study is to utilise the Saudisation policy as an empowerment tool, for the Saudi women who work in the health care sector. To do so, I convey the feminist geographies approach and how this approach guides my data collection process and then data analysis. Also, I explore constructivist methodology, and how it helps me build knowledge through the data I collect, then I give an account about my positionality as a researcher, the methods used for data collection, research participants and recruitment processes, data analysis, trustworthiness and credibility and ethical issues and considerations.

3.2 Research Design

The epistemological position chosen in this research is interpretivist; “the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated” (Cohen & Manion, 1985, p. 27). The ontological situation that emerges at the basis of this epistemological standpoint is constructionist; I take the point of view that reality is constructed by the interacting individuals, who are part of the same reality (Bryman, 2008, p. 366).

It is accepted that research is usually guided by the design adopted by the researcher (Creswell, 2008), which then influences the research approach. Research approaches are generally classified as quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative research deals with the measurement and analysis between variables and emphasises product and outcomes. A quantitative researcher relies on numbers, rates and percentages to gain information about a research area (Denzin & Lincoln,

2007). On the other hand, qualitative research is usually described as interpretative research. It focuses on the understanding of the gathered information. The qualitative researcher concentrates on what the collected data reveals about the research topic (Johnson & Christensen, 2007). This research adopts a qualitative approach. It is interested in finding out how Saudisation can empower Saudi women and be an effective instrument to help consolidating a firm space for women in the Saudi job market.

3.3 Research questions

This research aims to provide an in-depth study of the following:

- How Saudisation (in the health care sector) should be used as an effective way to empower Saudi women?
- What factors prevent Saudisation implements relating to women employment in the health care sector?

To achieve this, the following questions were devised to guide me through in the research:

- What are some of the challenges and the opportunities facing Saudi women currently engaging with the health care sector in Riyadh?
- How can Saudisation increase empowerment opportunities for women in the health care sector?
- How Saudisation can reduce barriers to the empowerment of women working in the health care sector?

3.4 Methodological approach

3.4.1 Qualitative research

The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand. (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 123)

Qualitative research endeavours to “highlight the meanings people make and actions they take, and to offer interpretations for how and why” (Lutterell, 2010, p. 1). It can gain deep insight into how people live or view their lives because of the sensitivity and flexibility of methods.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p. 4) state that: “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world.” Qualitative research takes place in natural settings, and aims to see

through participants' eyes, to understand their perceptions (Cresswell, 2003). I focus on generating theory rather than verifying theory (Cresswell, 2003), which also connects my qualitative approach to that of constructivist methodology.

3.4.2 Constructivist methodology

Constructivism is a paradigm in qualitative research that “deals with the role of human consciousness” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 391). It is a form of social analysis that seeks to understand the nature of social life and social change. Constructivism focuses on the role of knowledge, ideas, norms and culture, emphasizing in particular the role of collectively held or “intersubjective” concepts and understandings on social life (Adler, 1997; Ruggie, 1998; Wendt, 1999). According to constructivists, the meaning of experiences and thoughts are constructed by individuals, thus, people construct the realities in which they participate (Charmaz, 2006). From this point, my research aims to extract and understand how research participants construct their individual and shared meanings around the phenomenon of interest. Constructivist methods have guided the evaluation of participants' *evidentiary merits* of knowledge, and attempt to make sense of them within socially acceptable contexts (Rudge & Geer, 2002).

In constructivist theory, the researcher's goal relies on the participants' views of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2009). When the researcher's questions are clear and specific the participants become more able to construct their answers and meanings of the situation or phenomenon carefully. And, as the researchers address the processes of interaction among individuals, they are able to understand the “specific contexts in which people live and work, in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8).

Moreover, for a research interpretation in constructivist research, it demands that I conduct research in a reflective and transparent process (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) identify that reflection requires:

Thinking about the conditions for what one is doing [and] investigating the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement affects interaction with whatever is being researched (p. 245).

Writing reflective and analytical memos, of thoughts and assumptions, during data collection and analysis, helped me achieve this transparency (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Constructivists

agree that learning occurs when individuals assimilate new information into existing mental models of the world. As a result, new models can accommodate both old and new insights gained from experience (Rudge & Geer, 2002).

3.4.3 Feminist geographies

Feminist geography also informs this study. Feminist geography is defined in the Dictionary of Human Geography as: “perspectives that draw on feminist politics and theories to explore how gender relations and geographies are actually structured and transformed” (Nina-Gunnerud, 1997, p. 259). Hansen has another definition: “a sub-field within human geography that relies on gender and place-based analyses to more fully understand the interface between human and natural environments” (Hansen, 2012, p. 1).

A feminist approach mainly focuses on describing the results of gender inequality the lived experiences of individuals and groups in their own localities, upon the geographies that they live in within their own communities, rather than theoretical development without empirical work (Rose, 1993). Feminist perspectives may form a channel to use policies that realize social justice for women in specific contexts or knowledge about, for example, oppressive situations upon women (Olesen, 2000). On the one hand, feminist approaches consider “exploring absence, silence, difference, oppression and the power of epistemology” (Ackerly & True, 2008, p. 694). On the other hand they consider the way that researchers make their decisions according to what counts as knowledge, the meaning or interpretation they give to what differences arise and how they will be epitomized in the research puts in a powerful position in the research (Creswell, 2009, p. 107). Feminist methodology can employ qualitative techniques, such as semi-structured interviews, as a medium for women to express themselves as well as share personal experiences more fully (Jenkins, 2007).

Furthermore, a feminist lens enables me to focus on gender differences and how they relate to the elements of social organization. Gender differences allow me to look at existing differences that have resulted from the socially constructed norms. In Saudi Arabia these differences can be clearly seen in the division of labour, power, rights and responsibilities exercised by men and women in managing their careers or homes.

Feminist geography has also contributed to our understanding of the gendered nature of economic processes. Since this research focuses on female employment and empowerment, a

feminist methodology is an appropriate approach to understanding the voices and attitudes of a small group of Saudi women who are at the core of this study.

3.5 Positionality

The question of 'where do I stand?' is not only a question of research methods, but a question that relates to wider ethical debates that have come to the fore within human geography.
(Gold, 2002, p. 224)

It is possible that a researchers might bring their own subjectivities and biases to the research they conduct. Determinants of positionality are, as Chacko (2004, p. 52) articulates, “attributes that are markers of relational positions in society, rather than intrinsic qualities” per se. Qualitative research is not neutral, and researchers impart their own subjectivities into the practices and processes of conducting research and in the analysis of research findings (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln, 2003; Sullivan, 2003). Furthermore, the act of observation itself can influence the participants of a study. To mitigate bias complications and protect the “integrity of the knowledge produced” and the “wellbeing of the researched” (O’Leary 2010, p. 28) it is essential for the researcher to identify their own positionality and impact this will have on their analysis of the findings (Jerkins, 2007).

In line with qualitative methodologies and in considering the sentiments of O’Leary (2010), it is essential to take into account my own world-views, which have undoubtedly shaped the processes of my research at all stages. As a Saudi woman I noticed the lack of literature regarding Saudi feminism and gender issues, which encouraged me to choose Saudisation and empowerment through employment as my specific research topic and allowed me insider privileges in regards to conducting this research. A benefit of being an insider researcher is the advantage of having pre-established knowledge, which affords intimate insights into the perspectives of participants (Abu-Lughod 1988; Hill-Collins 1990). As Kanuha (2000, p.444, cited in Dwyer, 2009, p.57) has stated:

being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that may not be accessible to a non-native scientist, questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised because perhaps one knows too much or is too close to the project and may be too similar to those being studied.

Within a closed and conservative society like Saudi Arabia gaining insider advantage is not an easy feat. It is particularly true of Saudi women to remain guarded about their interactions and personal information, unless they are familiar with the person whom they are engaging with.

My insider positionality helped me to gain the trust of research participants, and to be aware of Saudi norms and traditions, in which I was born and raised. I was able to apply sensitivity and recognition to these societal norms to effectively enhance the accuracy of my research interactions, processes and data interpretation. Being an insider has given me the opportunity to make suitable recommendations to research that will add to the existing body of literature concerning women and Saudi society.

While being an insider researcher has its advantages, it is also important to ensure that one's positionality "did not lead me into the trap of judging the reality of the participants' experience in relation to my own experiences and views" (Kotsapas, 2011 p. 95). To mitigate the over-application of my personal views I remained self-reflexive, a process that acknowledges rather than denies my own position, and questions how my research interactions and the information I collected are socially conditioned (Dowling, 2005).

I am a Saudi postgraduate student of Victoria University of Wellington, studying Development Studies. I have academic curiosity in the field of Saudi development, in general and Saudi women development specifically, from which I personally might stand to benefit. As a Saudi woman, and a citizen who would value enhanced opportunities for Saudi women especially in education and employment, I feel it is important to identify that I am personally connected to the purpose of research in this area.

3.6 Research methods: Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a main tool of qualitative research. They play a pivotal role in the co-creation of knowledge (Hand, 2003). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) and Gillham (2000) define interviews as a managed verbal exchange, whose effectiveness depends, deeply, on the "communication skills of the interviewer" (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007). These skills may include the ability to structure questions clearly (Cohen et al., 2007); listen politely and attentively (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007); encourage interviewees to speak and express freely "[m]ake it easy for interviewees to respond" (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007, p. 134); and pause, probe or stimulate appropriately (Ritchie & Lewis, p. 141).

In my research, the primary means of data collection was semi-structured interviews. “Semi-structured interviews consist of predetermined questions related to domains of interest, administered to a representative sample of respondents to confirm study domains, and identify factors, variables, and items or attributes of variables for analysis or use in a survey” (Schensul, 1999, p. 149). I chose semi-structured interviews for both practical and ethical reasons. Given the aim that my research was to explore how Saudisation could empower Saudi women, I needed an approach that would encourage participants to provide descriptions of how they as Saudi women work and deal with societal norms. This method is considered one of the preferred methods of feminist research (DeVault & Gross, 2007), so, semi-structured interviews were a suitable approach given the nature of my research.

In addition, interviews place a value on personal language as data. Face-to-face interviewing may be appropriate where depth of meaning is important and the research is primarily focused on gaining insight and understanding (Gillham, 2000, p. 11; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 138). Hence, using this method provided an appropriate space for my interviewees to express as well as give examples of their everyday working lives, and for me to follow up and explore any new issues that were introduced. This could not have been done through the use of questionnaires or structured interviews because the structured format of these methods would not have allowed me to follow up on new issues that emerged.

Semi-structured interviews, too, helped my research ethically. Research processes have the potential to create hierarchies between the interviewer and interviewee (Stanley & Wise, 1993). Therefore I sought an interview method that would challenge this division between the ‘subject’ and the ‘object’ through creating commonality and relationships built on “mutuality and respect” (England, 2006, p. 288). Qualitative research interviews seek to describe the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The core task of interviews is to understand the meaning of what the participants say (Kvale, 1996). The language used by interviewees is considered essential to obtain insight into their values and perceptions. In such studies contextual and interpersonal sides are seen as important to understanding others’ perceptions” (Gillham, 2000, Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant’s experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic. Interviews may be useful as follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires, for example, to further investigate their responses (McNamara, 1999). Semi-structured interviews will contribute

in generating rich data, besides, getting the interviewees' opinions in different topics including those which may be considered slightly more sensitive, such as personal details and working conditions.

3.6.1 Feminist interviewing

Interview procedure of this study uses a feminist method of interviewing (Riger, 1992). This method recognizes "... [the] interdependence between interviewers and participants and took into consideration the social and historical contexts of the interviewees" (Henry, 2011). It is built in avoiding the complexity of human talking, and instead, using flexibility and dynamic powers of language (DeVault & Gross, 2007). Also, DeVault and Gross say that conveying shades of meaning through suitable ways of speech, expression, and gesture; need of translation (*ibid.*) to conduct comfortable interviews. Likewise, "the specialized vocabularies of particular settings and groups; the organizing effects of format and genre; the injuries and uses of silence; the challenges inherent in listening" (*ibid.*, p. 173) are all characteristics of feminist method. Those tools are powerful to explore women's experiences and stories as well as the contexts which define and organize their experiences. These types of methods (of interviews) assist the interviewers and their interviewees to exchange knowledge and opinions, and help interviewers to put those experience in view.

Many feminist researchers always refer to the importance of including feminist research methods of interviewing (e.g., Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; May, 2002; Warren & Karner, 2005), because after the developing of feminist research and women's studies the need to have deep literature, which explore and understand women's studies, has increased. That is, women's experiences within different context are varied and complicated, requiring deep and diverse consideration and understanding (DeVault & Gross, 2007). Indeed, using this complexity and contradiction can be employed as a powerful instrument that helps in generating beneficial knowledge that can enrich the field of feminist research.

3.7 Research participants and recruitment processes

Achieving the greatest understanding of the phenomenon depends on choosing the case(s) well (Yin, 2008). This study is based on interviews I conducted with 15 Saudi women. My study was limited to Saudi girls and women, for two reasons: firstly, there are limited studies about Saudi women's empowerment and Saudising jobs for women. Secondly, as a Saudi woman I am aware that for traditional and cultural reasons contacting Saudi men would have been difficult and not

preferable, although I believe that having male perspectives in such studies would enrich them greatly.

The interviews took place in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. My interviewees were a selection of 15 Saudi women whom I contacted through relatives and friends. Eleven of them I met for the first time. They are fortunately from different regions of Saudi Arabia but all live in Riyadh. Being from different places provided my research with deeper and richer perspectives and experiences. That is, every region of Saudi Arabia has different aspects and traditions.

To be more specific, my interviewees fell into three categories: employees in the healthcare sector (Group 1), students majoring in any healthcare subject (Group 2) and housewives (Group 3). Group 1 had studied at universities in Riyadh; group 2 were all students at two different universities in Riyadh; group 3 were living in Riyadh, but two of them had recently come to live in Riyadh. I chose Riyadh for many reasons. First it is the biggest city in Saudi Arabia and it was most accessible to me. Second, it has the largest population among Saudi cities, and it includes the main universities and hospitals (the two main interviewing places); and third it has the highest percentage of women who work in the health care sector in Saudi Arabia.

In choosing this sample, I focused on women who could give relevant information (Bryman, 2012) and significant answers to my research questions. For that, purposive or criterion-based sampling was employed to select participants for this research. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) purposive sampling is specifically suitable for studies that involve subjects with specific features. They, also, argue that it is necessary to decide which criteria should be used for purposive selection: “the choice of purposive sample selection criteria is influenced by a review of the aims of the study” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 97). As my interest is how Saudi women look at Saudisation in healthcare sectors as an empowering tool, I purposely selected my participants on the basis of how healthcare is strongly related to their lives.

Qualitative researchers prefer to use purposive sampling that would be able to answer their research questions (Creswell, 2008). However, key benefits to random sampling methods include avoidance of “researcher bias in the selection of participants” (Shenton, 2004, p. 65) and that random samples may help to ensure that ‘unknown influences’ are distributed evenly across participants (Preece, 1994). Some researchers find that random sampling methods are particularly appropriate to the nature of their specific investigations (Shenton, 2004). Consequently, I chose

to have a combination of random but deliberate participants, which will enable me to think and distinguish between different and diverse points of view.

To be honest, choosing my samples was complicated by the nature of Saudi society. To find my participants, I contacted my sisters, relatives and friends. I asked them to find girls and women who would willingly participate and be interviewed. Actually the number exceeded my needs, but I put in my mind that some of them might choose to withdraw for a variety of reasons. I, also, considered that some of them might not provide sufficient information (this happened during one interview and I had to put it aside as the respondent was not familiar with some terms I used such as Saudisation and empowerment). After being put in contact with possible participants I had to recruit them. To do that, I went first to meet group 1 interviewees, in two hospitals and one medical centre. A relative, who works in one of the hospitals, introduced me to them, after they had agreed to meet me. I met the three women individually, and I explained what my study was about, and had their agreement to start on a later day. A friend's sister working in another hospital, mentioned that two of her colleagues were interested in women's issues in Saudi Arabia, and would be happy to be interviewed. The fifth interviewee was the hardest to find, because I wanted a nurse. I finally found one via a friend, who was working in a local medical centre. The nurse accepted to do the interview immediately after our first meeting.

Meeting groups 2 and 3 was easier, as for the students, they were so enthusiastic and curious about my study, so it did not take much of my time or theirs. We completed the interviews publicly in their faculties' halls over a period of two days. The third group was easy to approach, but difficult to choose, I had a large number, and I had to do many meetings in order to choose suitable members. Some interviews proved irrelevant and I discarded the information. I was kindly received into the houses of four of them, and I met another two in my house (a friend and a relative) and I met two in cafes.

By receiving positive responses from potential participants, I discussed with them the extent of the research commitment involved. All potential participants had the opportunity to speak with me or to meet me to talk about any questions or concerns they had about the study. These meetings were arranged via phone calls. Speaking broadly, my interviews went smoothly and warmly. The participants showed a lot of friendly and responsive attitudes, which enriched my knowledge with their diverse stories and experiences.

Part of my strategy was to allow each participant to express her view of her world in her own terms. I recognise that this was an imperfect strategy. Moreover, I relied on direct quotes because we conducted the interviews in Arabic as it is our native language, and, then, I translated them into English, with the assistance of two native speaker friends. Nonetheless, the participants clearly valued the opportunity to talk about their experiences and points of view, and also, volunteered many different stories about their lives and careers.

During the transcribing process, I accidentally deleted the interviews of four of my participants, from group 3. And when I returned to New Zealand, I decided to carry out some interviews to replace them. I contacted four women, who live in New Zealand because they had accompanied their husbands who are studying in New Zealand. They agreed to do the interviews, and in fact, showed a great sense of enthusiasm to participate in my research. I was pleased to witness their cooperation and interest. We agreed on suitable times and places to meet. The interviews went very smoothly and were interesting, and the atmosphere was so friendly and warm, and I felt so grateful to them. In addition, they all lived in Wellington city, and their information, besides the others, gave richness and depth to my study.

3.8 Data analysis: Transcription and coding

If there were only one truth, you couldn't paint a hundred canvases on the same theme.

(Pablo Picasso, 1966, cited in Zhang, 2009)

In qualitative research, content analysis is used to analyse various types of data, but, in general, the data needs to be converted into written script before analysis can begin (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The procedures of transcription and coding were not that 'romantic'. After all the warmth and friendship of the conversations I had with my interviewees, I ended up having 'frozen' texts and scripts (Kvale, 1996). I felt that some of emotion, depth, and humour that shaped most of the conversations were 'lost in transcription' (*ibid.*).

All the data I collected was organised and interpreted. I started by reducing, coding and then categorising them. To do so, I transcribed all the interviews in Arabic and then translated them into English. Intensive reading and induction took place to help me code and analyse the data. In the coding process I used the 'open coding' method to identify the concepts by highlighting and labelling them, and I coded the data manually. During the coding stage, many themes and concepts emerged. I read them several times and I was able to identify two main themes, so I categorised them into two themes, one was relating to disempowerment and the other one was

about empowerment and I put them as; a) understanding conditions that maintain disempowerment; and b) identifying tools of empowerment. Then, under each main theme I put the suitable sub-themes, which are discussed later in Chapters five and six. The coding stage, thus, helped me to shift from general reading to a close coding, to write a deep analysis (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 144). This stage was important, because, I had to pay more attention to generating knowledge from the data that I had collected from Saudi Arabia, and other ideas and concepts and relate them to the various frameworks of this research and disciplinary backgrounds.

3.9 Trustworthiness and credibility

Validity and reliability are two main concepts used in the discussion of the credibility of any scientific research (Silverman, 2011). Yet, in the case of qualitative research, it has been argued that credibility and trustworthiness are more relevant concepts. Golafshani discusses that “.... the concepts of reliability and validity are viewed differently by qualitative researchers who strongly consider these concepts defined in quantitative terms as inadequate” (2003, p. 599).

The number of interviewees contributed to enriching the study. Also, the checking of their transcripts increased the credibility of my interpretations and their authenticity. Revelation of the researcher’s interest as well as the degree of reflexivity (showed by the researcher) contributed to the trustworthiness and credibility of the qualitative research data.

3.10 Ethical issues and considerations

Before going to Saudi Arabia for data collection, I sought ethical approval from the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee which was granted in December 2014. As required in doing this study, I did an Information Sheet for Participants (Appendix 1), a Consent Form for interviews (Appendix 2) and a Semi-Structured Interview Guide (Appendix 3). Then, prior to all the interviews, I explained my research topic and nature to the interviewees, then, I outlined their rights. I asked the participants, kindly, to sign the consent form. I explained that doing this was voluntary and that no rewards would be offered to participants. They were also informed that they would have the opportunity to view the transcripts of their interviews and correct them if they felt that their views or beliefs had not been represented accurately.

Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time they desired until the data analysis was completed. They were also informed that they would be able to review the complete research findings if they wished to. I endeavoured to stay attuned to the contextual knowledge and appropriate “learning from others involved in research – organisations, research

participants . . . – about what they want[ed], what suit[ed] them and what they perceive[d] to be ethical” (Hopkins, 2007, p. 389) in response to the University’s ethical processes. All interviews were voice recorded, as I wanted to make sure that I would not miss anything of what was said. During the research process, I stored all records and transcripts in a safe place, and kept individual information confidential. Also, I have been storing the data I collected securely and will have it destroyed after three years following the completion of this study.

Confidentiality, too, was another principle of ethical concern (Cohen et al., 2007). I ensured confidentiality during the research by allowing “the researcher [to] match names with responses . . . but ensure[d] that no one else would have access to the identity of the respondent” (Miller & Brewer, 2003, p. 97). I made sure that confidentiality was respected and maintained at all times of this research. And to keep confidentiality and conceal participants’ identities no real names have been used. Instead I have used Arabic pseudonyms, each starts with the same letter of the participant’s real name. None of the participants indicated any problem with this system, which allowed for the privacy and traditions of Saudi society to be respected.

Additionally, there were no cultural or social issues that might hinder the moving of this study. Both parties, the researcher and the participants, belong to the same society and we share the same values and tradition. However, I explained to them that my study did not intend to criticize any of the government or country’s policies, and, therefore, there would be no harm caused by participating in this study. On contrary, such studies might help to provide insight into the country’s decision-makers in the future.

3.11 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has outlined details of the research methodology, and has described the tools I utilized to conduct this study. Qualitative research is chosen because it has effective techniques that offer better comprehension of what makes phenomenon or a situation understandable (Brockington & Sullivan, 2003). I first discussed the nature of qualitative methodology, and how it would assist the present inquiry into Saudisation and women’s empowerment. Then I explained the constructivist theory and its importance in enabling the researchers to build their knowledge and learn from their participants’ experiences and lives. After that, I turned my focus to feminist geographies and how they would assist me in grounding the understanding of women’s realities and their lived experience, and then apply that to the Saudi women in particular. Afterward I explained the role of my personal worldview in shaping

my understanding and thoughts while conducting this study. Then, I outlined the methods I used to collect my data, namely, semi-structured interviews and feminist interviews. Next, I highlighted the process I used to analyse the collected data. I concluded my chapter with a discussion concerning trustworthiness and credibility, ethical issues and considerations and the researcher's role and positionality. The next chapter will present the first theme of the research findings, analysis and researcher's reflection on the theme, as well as provide answers to the first two questions of the research.

Chapter Four: Saudi Context

4.1 Introduction

Saudi Arabia roots is linked to the early civilisations of the Arabian Peninsula. Over the centuries, the peninsula has an important role in the region history and as an ancient trade centre and as the birthplace of Islam, one of the world's major monotheistic religions (Fandy, 1999). The modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932. Since then, the kingdom has been characterised by rapid development and the progression from a desert nation to a world power on the international stage. Despite the fact that Saudi Arabia has been achieving economic and social shifts, women remain less privileged and limited in the case of participation in development processes.

This chapter provides insight into the present geographical, political, economic and social contexts of Saudi Arabia to contribute to a framework of understanding how Saudi Arabian religious beliefs, culture, and norms have been formed. This is followed with general accounts of the status of Saudi women. Then, the latter part of this chapter will introduce Saudisation. It is defined and overviews are provided of Saudisation policy. Next, this chapter explores the study relating to Saudi women's status in Saudisation, employment, and the barriers that Saudi women face regarding employment in Saudi Arabia.

4.2 Geographical background

Saudi Arabia occupies about 2.25 million square kilometres of the Arabian Peninsula, and is located in the southwest of Asia. The country's topography is predominantly desert. Water resources such as rainfall, permanent rivers and groundwater are limited; and the country depends on desalinated seawater and scarce water services. The lack of readily accessible fresh water limits agriculture to the south western areas of the country. In 2012, the Saudi Arabia population census showed that there were 29.196 million people, 9.3 million of whom were non-Saudi. The population is about 90 per cent Arab and the vast majority belong to the Wahhabi sect of Sunni Muslims, with a minority of Shiites, living mostly in the Eastern Province. Islam is the only officially documented religion and the public practice of other faiths is prohibited. Arabic is the most commonly spoken language.



Figure 4.1 Saudi Arabia in World map
Source: Google maps



Figure 4.2 Saudi Arabia map
Source: Google maps

There are three important factors that make Saudi Arabia unique. First, Saudi Arabia is home to the holy cities of Makkah and Medina, which positions it at the religious forefront of the international Muslim community. Second, Saudi Arabia is the world's largest oil producer and exporter, and holds one quarter of the world's oil reserves. Third, Saudi Arabia is located in the heart of the Middle East, which strategically connects it to Asia, Africa and Europe.

Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy. Its constitution is formed by a strict interpretation of Islamic legislations. The Council of Ministers is nominated by the King (Mobaraki & Söderfeldt, 2010). All media (print and visual) are owned by the government. Policies and rules are created and implemented by the government. In 2005, the government ran municipal elections for the first time, but women were not allowed to vote (*ibid*).

4.3 Political history of Saudi Arabia (1744 to present)

The Saudi state has passed through three main political stages, that being: the First Saudi State, the Second Saudi State, and the current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The First Saudi state (also known as the Emirate of al-Diriyah) was established by Mohammed ibn Saud (the Imam), a local ruler of al-Diriyah (in central Arabia) at that time, and governed from 1744 to 1818. Mohammed ibn Saud was the father of the Al-Saud, the present royal family of Saudi Arabia, and after whom the country is named. Mohammed ibn Saud's era coincided with the emergence of Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab (the Sheikh) as the founder of the Wahhabi sect. Wahhabi is a religious and socio-political movement, which appeared between the 1730s and 1740s. The Imam united his forces with the Sheikh and established a new political entity. The union between the new leaders was confirmed by an agreement that the sovereignty would remain with the Saud House whereas religious teachings would be the responsibility of the Sheikh House, a structure which is still practiced today. When the first Saudi State expanded it took over most of the Arabian Peninsula, stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea with the exception of part of Oman and Yemen. The Ottoman Empire had ruled Makkah and Medina since 1517 and the Empire took it as a challenge when the First Saudi State subsumed these cities under their control. In 1816, Mohammed Ali Pasha sent his son, Ibrahim Pasha, to fight ibn Saud and after two years of fighting, the Ottoman troops destroyed the First Saudi State. The conflict showed the decline of the sovereignty of the new Saud ruling house.

Ruled by Imam Turki ibn Abdallah ibn Muhammad, a Mohammed ibn Saud descendant, the Second Saudi State existed from 1818 to 1891. This era was characterised by the State's reduced expansion over the Peninsula and the decline of Wahhabi religious thoughts.⁵ Civil wars and instability spread, before being brought down by the Ibn Rasheed (of Hail) invasion of Najd. The last ruler of this state was Abd al-Rahman bin Faysal bin Turki Al Saud, who was forced to

⁵ Wahhabi or Wahhabism, is the religious system of the Wahhabi, a Muslim order founded by Muhammad Ibn-Abdul Wahhab. It is known for its strict observance of the Koran and has flourished mainly in Arabia.

leave Riyadh after being defeated. The Saud family, including their ten-year-old son Abd al-Aziz, went into exile in Kuwait.

The Third Saudi State, established in 1902, is the present Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Leader or the Imam at that time was Abd al-Aziz ibn Abd al-Rahman, who had been in exile for about ten years. He re-conquered the lost areas of the first Saudi State and defeated ibn Rasheed. Abd al-Aziz expanded his lands to new regions including all of Al-Hejaz (the west areas of the Arabian Peninsula), the northern areas up to Jordanian borders, the south down to Yemeni borders, and the whole eastern coast. Much of the Abd al-Aziz's military success "was owed to the Ikhwan, groups of settled Bedouins who were united by passionate religious bonds of loyalty to Wahhabism" (Ochsenwald, 1984, p. 274). In 1932, Abd al-Aziz united all conquered areas into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Abd al-Aziz passed away in 1953 but the political power remained with his family: Kings Saud (1953-1964), Faisal (1964-1975), Khalid (1975-1982), Fahd (1982-2005) and Abd Allah (2005-). Saudi Arabia has never been colonised by the West nor has it been a target of Christian missionary efforts. Instead, Saudi Arabia, a "fiercely independent state," had British and then American alliances (Ochsenwald, 1982, p. 274). The Wahhabi movement has been a strong influence and has contributed to the identity of the political and social life of Saudi Arabia.

4.3.1 Wahhabi influence on the Saudi setting

Wahhabis or the Wahhabi movement is attributed to Mohammed ibn Abd Al-Wahhab (1703-1792). It is a movement that claims to return Islam to the "true" puritanical principles of earlier eras. Mohammed ibn Abd Al-Wahhab took a clear attitude against all innovations (*bid'ah*) of Islam faith and insisted that the original glory of Islam would be regained when the Islamic community returned to the principles articulated by the Prophet Muhammad. Wahhabi doctrines "... do not allow for any kind of intermediary between the faithful and Allah and condemn any such practice as polytheism" (cited in Doniger, 1999, p. 485. See also Wynbrandt, 2010). The cult of saints, the decoration of mosques, and even the smoking of tobacco were condemned (*ibid*).

Abd Al-wahhab's doctrines were controversial, and led to his expulsion from 'Uyaynah in 1744 (Commins, 2006). He then settled in Ad-Dir'iyah, capital of Ibn Saud, a ruler of Najd (Commins, 2006).

The spread of Wahhabism was created from the alliance formed between ‘Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Saud, who, “by initiating a campaign of conquest that was continued by his (ibn Saud) heirs, made Wahhabi school of thought the dominant force in Arabia since 1800” (Britannica, 2001)⁶.

Over the past two centuries Wahhabi has been the main doctrine to which all aspects of social and political affairs in Saudi Arabia are concerned. The doctrine ensures that the ruler has an absolute power upon his people and country, and modern political concepts such as democracy are denied. Another example is the strict policies regarding women’s issues. For instance, women’s ‘hijab’ should fully cover her body and face, and males retain absolute control over females. Wahhabis are a minority in the Islamic world, but have the strongest dominance upon many Muslim countries (Voll, 1994). That is because, first, Saudi Arabia embraces the two Holy cities of Makkah Al-Mukarramah and Al-Madinah Al-Munoorah, which have strategic and political strength. Second, oil gives Saudi Arabia an economic power that it uses to help, and gain alliances with, other countries. Wahhabi doctrine is known as being an extremist sect, which will never accept adopting new thoughts at any level. For instance, socialist materialism, secular nationalism, and Western consumerism have all been rejected on the ideological level by the Wahhabi ulama (Commins, 2006).

Wahhabism has a great influence on the Saudi context, and as long as the Al-Saud dynasty is ruling, Wahhabi perspectives will continue to dominate public religious thought. Thus, the deep rooted Ibn Saud sovereignty and the Wahhabi school of thought have had a great influence on forming the religious beliefs and, therefore, the culture and traditions in Saudi Arabia.

The influence of Wahhabi has affected women’s access to power and created gender based issues. Wahhabi doctrine is against the reinterpretation of the holy scripts and therefore the status of women remains largely unchanged. However, in some Islamic countries such as Egypt and Kuwait women have had access to education and work which demonstrates that “there is an immense breadth of interpretation of Islamic sources and Islamic law” (Roald, 2001; Wadud-Muhin, 1992, cited in Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004, p. 262) and indicates that not all Islamic regulations are against women’s development (Marcotte, 2003).

⁶ Also see Commins: *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* & Wynbrandt: *A brief history of Saudi Arabia*.

4.4 Economy and oil boom

In the early years of the young Saudi Arabia, the main economic activities were simple agriculture, small domestic trade and hospitality near the main trade routes. The main source of the country's revenue was the *Hajj*⁷. Before the first oil discovery, the 1938 estimate of state revenue from Hijaz customs and pilgrims amounted to £1.3m (in gold) (quoted by Niblock, 1982). State employee salaries could not be paid until pilgrim revenues were collected. The world economic crisis of 1922 to 1933 resulted in a huge reduction of Hajj revenue.

In 1932, oil was found for the first time in the Eastern Province (Dhahran city), and the first commercial deposit was discovered in 1938. In May 1939, the first tanker with oil sailed from Saudi Arabia. The discovery of oil altered the economy of Saudi Arabia, although it took several more decades to gain significant momentum. Until the 1970s, Hajj and oil were equally the main sources of revenue. Up until this point, Saudi had been threatened by economic debt, a lack of infrastructure and shortage of power (Niblock, 1982). The king was succeeded by his son, Saud, who was renowned for his inability to deal with social and political affairs. Consequently, his brother Faisal took the throne in 1964. Faisal noticed that the small infrastructure, social services and the limited communication absorbed a huge portion of government expenditure and implemented five Five-Year Plans (FYP) to develop the country gradually. Faisal is considered the pioneer of Saudi prosperity, and his FYPs have created impressive progress throughout most of the country (*ibid*). Faisal increased oil exports, generated wealth and, increased the economic and political position of Saudi Arabia internationally.

4.5 Economic development and the social structure

Prior to the discovery of oil, the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula were living in tribal societies. Many were nomadic, although farming and coastal villages were also common. They lived on basic subsistence farming, livestock grazing, local trades and fisheries. The discovery of oil led to rapid changes in novel technologies and opened the region up to new Western culture. Wahhabi followers resisted technology on cultural grounds, but King Abd al-Aziz welcomed the technology, and these changes contributed to societal transformation from the family level up.

Prior to the 1970s, society consisted of large extended families. Most family members contributed to overall productivity of their extended group or tribe, and all shared strong bonds based on tradition, common experiences, and the hard economic conditions (Lippman, (2012).

⁷ Hajj is the Arabic word of pilgrimage journey to Makkah.

In this familial structure, the eldest male was responsible for the decision-making processes. The rise of technology saw a shift from tribal family structures to nuclear family models consisting of parents and unmarried children. Nuclear families experienced increased income and became able to afford independent housing. In some instances women began to experience a better quality of life as they transitioned from hard manual labour toward more domesticated roles. Further disenfranchising tribal interactions was the redistribution of property. Prior to the nuclear family, the eldest male retained exclusive property rights. The emergence of individual jobs, youth migration and urbanisation saw tribes and extended families divide properties and inheritance (Al-Khateeb, 2007). Consequently, the extended family model lost its position in modern Saudi society.

Saudi's golden era of the 1970s saw the economy reach its ultimate prosperity; salaries were high, expenses were low and most Saudi families could afford to own houses and vehicles (Al-Khateeb, 1998). It is common belief that if you did not get wealthy during the 1970s, you lost the chance. Saudi Arabia's economic status fluctuated during the next two decades but it was primarily the Gulf War that pulled Saudi Arabia back into debt.

Before the Gulf War, there were many chances for society to open up and challenge the barriers to societal development. Women began participating widely in the job market, and the country began to attract foreign investment. Families began to travel abroad for tourism and educational opportunities (Al-Khateeb, 2007). Consequently, Saudi Arabia experienced an increased education rate and their heightened economic status encouraged them to be more open-minded. However, in the late 1980s, a new religious movement called Al-Sahwa Al-Islamiyya⁸ also known as the Islamic Awakening gained momentum and demanded the resurgence of traditional Islam. The movement gave rise to aspects of conservatism and in some instances, extremism.

Some political and religious analysts, attribute the AlQa'edah phenomenon to the rise of the conservative practices of movements such as Al-Sahwah (see Atwan, 2008; Wright, 2006). The Ministry of Interior, which supports religious authorities, was greatly affected by Al-Sahwah. For example, scholarships to non-Muslim countries were curtailed, and heavy censorship based on religious grounds took place in the media. Oppositionists to this movement have cited male superiority as a driving force, as this movement intentionally and systemically denigrated women.

⁸ Al-Sahwa Al-Islamiyya movement espoused a blend of the traditional Wahhabi outlook (mainly on social issues) and the more contemporary Muslim Brotherhood approach (especially on political issues) (Middle East Report, 2004, p. 2).

Goals, embedded in conservative patriarchal attitudes, forced society to become more closed, and increased difficulties in making social changes (Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004).

4.6 Economic development and women: education and employment

Behind the veil, silently, women in Saudi Arabia are revolutionizing their status”

(Al Munajjed, 1997, p. 56)

Positive economic growth resulted in many advantages for women. For example, wealthy households were able to afford new technology and household appliances to change and improve the quality of domesticated life (Al-Khateeb, 1998). Yet, amongst the most significant advantages for women was access to education and then employment.

Before the 1960s, there was no public education for women in Saudi Arabia. Some wealthy families were able to afford private *motowa’a*⁹ to teach their daughters, but less fortunate families were either unable or not keen to provide these services. Instead, girls were expected to participate in domestic work in order to be prepared for married life.

Girls’ education was limited to those whose families allowed them to attend kutab.¹⁰ Malawi and Indonesian immigrants to Mecca in 1941 founded Madrasat AlBanat AlAhlihah, the first formal girls’ school (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991). Some historians thought that the beginning of girls’ schooling by non-Saudi may imply “that the people of Mecca were not much interested in the education of their daughters at that time” (Saleh, 1973, p. 289). Afterwards, a number of philanthropic and private schools for girls were founded in Mecca, Jeddah and Riyadh. King Saud was the first of the Royal family to open a special place for girls’ education. The King’s initiatives began when he founded a small school for his own daughters in 1951, to educate them in the Quran, and to encourage citizens to support girls’ education. The King instructed the school, known as the Alkareymat Institution, to receive more girls. Later, three of his daughters opened Mabarrat Kareymat Almalek Saud, a school dedicated to female orphans. These schools were the first to offer female students access to a previously male curriculum, with the addition of embroidery, home economics, sports and English (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991).

⁹ A religious female teacher, the male is *motowa*.

¹⁰ Kuttab is the basic school in Islamic education in the past, which was usually attached to a mosque.

The conservative majority of society stood against the changes in education (Lacey (1981). They believed that education would negatively influence girls' morals and, therefore, impact the Saudi Muslim family. In some regions the opposition became serious and there were many demonstrations during the King Saud era, particularly in Najed and Qassim (as these two regions are the centre of the Wahhabi thought school) (Parssinen, 1980).

Saudi women currently live in one of the richest countries in the world (Fernea, 2010), but remain subjected to gender based disadvantage. The wealth of Saudi Arabia has not contributed to enhancing the circumstances of women effectively. Women continue to be dependent on the men in their families; are controlled by patriarchal norms; and have fewer opportunities to participate in their own communities and wider society. Women must still seek permission to study, to work and to travel domestically and internationally. Often, these norms are supported by government and religious bodies, which persistently develop many societal rules in accordance with social traditions.

From the mid-1960s girls' education started to spread and under King Faisal's personal support and protection the first official primary school opened in Riyadh (Almunajjed, 1997). For example, in 1963 King Faisal had to send an official force to stop a protest in Buraydah¹¹ against opening a girls' school in their city. However, the King did not force parents to send their daughters to school, nor made education compulsory (Parssinen, 1980, p. 159). The King was aware of societal traditions and culture, as he was part of them; how difficult it was to make changes by force, and how important it was to make changes over time (Parssinen, 1980). The King's wife, Iffat Althunyan, was at his side in supporting the girls' education and she participated in opening many schools around the kingdom (Hamdan, 2005).

For many years, conservative families did not take girls' education seriously. Many girls only attended school in their primary years and left with basic reading, writing, maths, home economics and embroidery skills (Almunajjed, 1997). Although women's education faced opposition by the majority of society, a minority of men showed great enthusiasm in enrolling their daughters in educational facilities. Fatina Amin Shaker is an example of one of the fortunate students that gained access to these opportunities.¹² Initially declined for a Ministry of Higher Education scholarship based on the grounds that "it was immoral to allow young single women

¹¹ A city in Najed – Middle of Saudi Arabia.

¹² Fatina Amin Shaker, a Saudi journalist and former radio announcer.

to study abroad”, Fatina and her father appealed to King Faisal to insist that the Ministry reconsider (Lacey, 1981; Arebi, 1994). The Kings intervention allowed Fatina to continue her studies and, in 1971 went on to become one of the first Saudi women to obtain a Doctorate of Philosophy.

Ulama are Muslim legal scholars and religious leaders. Ulama did not support girls’ education and despite having to follow the King’s will, imposed conditions which they declared to be Islamic instructions, that is, education should remain compatible with the traditional and social rule of women in the society (Hamdan, 2005). The General Presidency of Girls’ Education (GPGE) was established in 1970 and was supervised directly by the religious authority, which approved their dominion over that sector. The GPGE administrated girls’ schools and GPGE colleges; supervised nurseries and kindergartens; and sponsored the literacy programmes of females. In early 2003 the GPGE was dissolved and its functions taken over by the Ministry. The amalgamation between the GPGE and the Ministry of Education created a wide debate, and society was divided between those who supported the decision, and those who opposed it as Hamdan (2005) stated.

Regardless of the debate, Ulama continued to oppose the inclusion of any aspects recently introduced into Saudi society. Processes and practices restricting the mobility and freedom of women were welcomed by the Ulama, who feared women would be ‘liberated’ from their religion by ‘enemies’ of Islam (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991). Consequently, and with few exceptions, women’s access to opportunities were diminished while men continued to benefit from greater chances in work and education.

In the late 1990s, Saudi Arabia began discussing the need to enhance women’s development. The movement came as a result of United Nations (UN) processes, which saw the period from 1976 to 1985 declared as the UN Decade of Women. The aim of the UN was to achieve equality for women, and encourage development and lead to world peace. The sentiments were reiterated in Beijing in 1995.

The gap between males and females became more and more obvious; some “newspapers had carried stories of newly educated Saudi young men marrying foreign women because they felt that Saudi women were not sufficiently educated” (Alrawaf & Simmons p. 288). The number of girls who enrolled in educational institutions increased in the 1970s (Table I, II and III), but they

were still taught and trained to be good wives and mothers. Kabeer (2005, p. 16) describes education as being “seen in terms of equipping girls to be better wives and mothers, or increasing their chances of getting a suitable husband”. With the spread of education especially among males, younger generations of men have become more open-minded toward women’s rights to education and work (Alrawaf & Simmons, 1991, p. 288).

Literacy rates have shown a steady increase; according to the UNDP (2003), female literacy in Saudi Arabia is currently estimated at 50 per cent, while male literacy is 72 per cent. Opening schools for girls was the first step for women to have the chance to improve their lives via employment.

Year	No. of schools	No. of classes
1960/61	15	127
1965/66	160	1623
1970/71	357	3645
1975/76	963	8037
1980/81	1810	14,661
1985/86	3155	25,564
1988	3370	29,092

Table 4.1 Development of girls' elementary schools over 28 years
Sources: GPGE (1988a, Concluding Statistics, pp. 37-39).

Year	No. of schools	No. of classes
1963/64	1	3
1965/66	1	5
1969/70	1	10
1973/74	13	160
1977/78	50	613
1981/82	109	1510
1985/86	314	2754
1988	415	3317

Table 4.2 Development of girls' intermediate schools over 25 years
Sources: GPGE (1988a, Concluding Statistics, pp. 40-43).

Year	No. of schools	No. of classes
1963/64	5	12
1965/66	9	29
1969/70	17	222
1973/74	85	802
1977/78	183	1968
1981/82	491	3609
1985/86	831	5514
1988	958	6528

Table 4.3 Development of girls' secondary schools over 28 years
Sources: GPGE (1988a, Concluding Statistics, pp. 43-45).

After the discovery of oil, the demand for labour increased at different levels, because of the expanding economy of the country (Madhi & Barrientos, 2003). Saudi women, however, had a very small space to work in, and worked particularly in the education sector. Teaching has been an accepted job for women as the schools (and then universities) were segregated from boys' schools. In the 1960s and 1970s the number of Saudi working females was very small, and public and private educational institutions and hospitals counted on foreign workers. According to Alrawaf (1991), "in 1985 only 5.1 per cent of the total female working-age population was in paid employment and this level was not expected to rise beyond 5.5% in 1989 (Ministry of Planning, 1985, p. 89)" (p. 278). Women, in fact, still make less than 15 per cent of the native workforce today (Fakeeh, 2009).

It is true that certain jobs, such as teaching in girls' schools and social work with women, can only be performed by women, but in general social attitudes do not encourage a public role for women. Despite changes in society and women's way of thinking, the social norms and traditions have overshadowed the choices for women's job opportunities. Norms and traditions have been diminishing those choices and restricted women to work extensively in the education sector broadly and in health care sector narrowly (Al-Jeraisy, 2008). Consequently, women have had to follow what the society wanted. Other fields, like working in government, are very limited as the government does not offer jobs to women. Yet the public sector remains the largest employer of women, as it provides "greater job security and more advantages than the private sector does" (AlMunajjed, 2010, p. 5).

The private sectors, like banking and private business, offer a very narrow range of jobs. Before the 1970s Saudi women were able to have run their own businesses and enterprise. However, religious authorities banned women from self-managing business because, according to them, these kinds of jobs lead to mixing between the two genders, which is prohibited in Islam. Therefore, "Saudi businesswomen are still widely required to have an authorized male representative to manage their businesses and represent them in government agencies" (AlMunajjed, 2010, p. 10). Those procedures led many private businesses to cases of financial loss and fraud (*ibid*).

Saudi Arabia's recent programmes and policies are promising steps towards women's greater participation in the national labour market. Women form about 15 per cent of the national workforce, and this illustrates a massive source of unused potential for the country, which relies

heavily on foreign workers. The Kingdom supports initiatives that help get women into the workforce, however, restrictions based on societal traditions and culture act as ongoing barriers to the types of work that women can participate in. Overcoming these constraints will be the key to enlarging a dynamic economic market. Women need reform in the existing educational system, to a new effective one that could prepare Saudi females for competitive jobs (Al-Jeraisy, 2008). Saudi men are still the bread-winners in the national labour market. But, as many jobs are still occupied by foreign workers, men also face difficulties in finding jobs (Madhi & Barrientos (2003). Thus, the Kingdom initiated a Saudisation Policy in order to decrease the huge dependence on expatriates, and prioritize getting jobs to nationals first (Fakeeh, 2009). New legislation that promotes more gender equality and family friendly mechanisms are essential to activate any new policies that target women.

4.7 Saudisation

Saudisation is often discussed as a policy to decrease the unemployment experienced by Saudi nationals as a means to reduce national reliance on foreign expatriates, but never is this policy discussed as a tool that could empower Saudi women. In addition, there is minimal literature regarding feminist perspectives from Saudi or eastern women.

Saudisation is not a new policy. It was applied in different employment sectors as job localisation or domestication in the literature of contemporary marketing and management since the 1980s (Fakeeh, 2009; Sadi & Al-Buraey, 2009). However, this policy has not been extensively studied in the context of the Middle East or Gulf States.

Academic research concerning Saudisation is limited but the Saudisation programme itself has attracted attention within many Middle Eastern countries that have made use of large-scale expatriate workforces. Participating countries form the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) comprising, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab of Emirates. Saudisation has been especially discussed by some Saudi researchers. Fakeeh (2009, p. 78) defines Saudisation as “the replacement of the expatriate work force in the Kingdom by Saudi nationals”, and she suggests that Saudisation is the main tool to solve the problem of unemployment in Saudi Arabia. Sadi and Al-Buraey (2009) note that of the 3,431,574 Saudi workers, Saudi women comprise only 670,388. Sadi and Alburacy further discuss how the successful implementation of Saudisation aims to reserve jobs for local citizens to decrease the

country's dependence on the expatriate workforce and reduce the rate of unemployment in the Kingdom. Madhi and Barrientos (2003) discuss how Saudi Arabia's economic growth encouraged the influx of foreign workers that became a problem when they formed two thirds of the Saudi workforce.

The decline of oil prices in the 1980s revealed the hidden dangers of the reliance on oil revenue and the urgent demand for diversification, also, the foreign remittance of billions of dollars by foreign expatriates was considered to be damaging to the local economy (Al-Qassimi, 1988). All previous factors, of relying on foreign workers, the increase in remittances, and the high rate of unemployment have attracted attention to Saudisation or job localisation as important issues for further study. In comparison, little research about Emiratisation and Omanisation has emerged to discuss the importance of activating such policies and the economic risk of relying on foreigner expatriates. Mashood, Verhoeven and ChanSarkar (2009) indicate that aspects of poverty, injustice and a lack of jobs for locals is partly a result of these countries' reliance on foreign workforces over the decades. Now, it is time to form new policies that support locals as the primary human resource.

For Saudi Arabia, foreign remittances have been an important source of international cash outflow. According to Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) (2006), the value of remittances increased by SR18.8 billion (\$5.1 billion) since 1985. Compared with 1985 SAMA's data to 2006, the value of such remittances increased from SR18.8 billion (\$5.1 billion) or 10 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to SR54.6 billion (\$14.56 billion) or 14.6 per cent of GDP (Ramady, 2007). Compelled by economic motives, GCC governments have since made numerous efforts to replace expatriate workers with locals, often imposing financial penalties on the recruitment and retention of overseas staff (Azzam, 1997).

Only a few studies discuss women within Saudisation, such as Al-Mahmoud, Mullen and Spurgeon (2012). Their study argues how Saudisation could increase the number of graduates who join nursing, and decrease the dropouts. They also suggest the importance of Saudisation in strengthening the position and number of Saudi workers, influencing the possibilities for greater levels of women's employment, as among those non-Saudi workers there are a large number of women who occupy jobs in the health care sector. According to the Economic Developments and Prospects report, which released by the World Bank in 2007, the labour market in Saudi Arabia is unusual because "it has the highest level of labour force growth, and the lowest levels

of female participation” (2007, p. 18). Almunajjid (2010) mentions that “since 2006, about 57 per cent of the university graduates in Saudi Arabia have been women”, yet the labour participation rate among Saudi women is extremely low (15 per cent).

The labour force in Saudi Arabia is 4,286,515 and female Saudi workers comprise 8.2 per cent of this number, and the non-Saudi female workers 6.7 per cent (www.cdsi.gov.sa, 2009). For example, the estimated number of Filipino nurses in Saudi Arabia is about 130,000 (Ball, 2004), which decreases the chances of employment for female Saudi graduates to within this massive number. The number of Saudi women working in the health care sector is low for many reasons including social traditions and religious culture, transportation difficulties, and the importance of marriage. This area is also discussed in a number of general studies concerning acculturation and socialisation processes that affect both expatriates and citizens in the workplace (Lee & Larwood, 1983 & Saad & Fadeel, 1983).

4.7.1 Feminisation policy

Part of the Saudisation plan was also the feminisation policy. Feminisation is a policy that aims to implement that only Saudi women to be employed in the retail businesses, which are dedicated to the sale of women’s shops that provide women’s goods (clothing, accessories, cosmetics, etc.) this programme takes into account an increase in job opportunities for Saudi women. This programme has created about 65,000 job opportunities for Saudi women (Ministry Decree, 2011). The first phase of the feminisation programme started in 2011. It only targeted some shops. But, it resulted in employing about 43,383 Saudi women. The second phase was in 2012. It allowed women to work in a larger variety of stores, as well as increased the number of female workers to 201,411, at first, and then to 454,274 in 2013 (Alhussein, 2014). The third phase was launched in early 2014. It allowed women to work in shops that do not have to be part of shopping malls (MENA, Women’s News Brief, 2014).

However, the society has become divided over this policy. The opposition to this policy has been generated from the religious and cultural perspective that emphasises gender segregation (Alhussein, 2014). While the advocates found the policy to be a great chance to employ women needing jobs. Although, feminisation has succeeded to an extent, it still faces social and religious challenges to greater implementation. Feminisation and women’s work in general have been facing challenges of legal, historical and cultural factors, which cannot be changed immediately. These ongoing challenges are reviewed in the following section.

4.8 Women's employment: Current challenges

4.8.1 Social traditions and culture

Tradition and culture are critical in Saudi Arabia and shape the regulations that guide many legislative decisions. Tradition and culture are also a core focus of most Saudi Arabian academic studies related to Saudi Arabia. Many researchers, especially Saudis, include traditions and culture as the main factors that influence people and society. In Al Dossary's (2011) research, she discusses how social tradition and culture is the strongest barrier faced by Saudi women in, or considering, employment. Dossary explains how society drives women to choose certain types of jobs, as "women are limited in professions that are seen as feminine and [they are to] remain in less distinguished positions than men" (p. 7). Almunajjid (2010, p. 10) found that "the move toward greater female participation in the labour force has been met with scepticism, debate, and even hostility". Similarly, Alqublan (2011) discusses how the culture defines the nature of women's work, what or where to work. Society has the right to accept or reject women's participation in certain jobs if it is considered outside the norm, even if religious doctrine were to technically permit it.

Tradition and culture are some of the main causes of gender segregation in Saudi Arabia. Gender segregation prevents women from working in places that do not have private workplaces for females, such as government sectors. Fakeeh (2009) estimates that only 10 per cent of working women are employed in the health care sector. With few job prospects in the health sector, many women are reluctant to study in this field. Working alongside men is prohibited in Saudi society, although there are some instances where women have chosen to challenge these 'old-fashioned' traditions. Fortunately many of them are very successful and famous now (Alzahrani, 2012).

Fakhri's (1992) in his book *Women rights and duties* examined core factors that influence the choice of women's chosen fields of study and employment. The study found family wellbeing to be of paramount importance, while many women further cited the influence of their peers. Alkhateeb (1993) researched women working in the health care sector and identified the conservative tendencies of Saudi women in their work choices. Alkhateeb, also, found that many women cited the physical differences between males and females, which lead participants to believe women should not work at all. Alkhateeb further discussed the disrespectful attitudes of male patients toward female employees, and the doubt that patients cast upon women's ability to conduct their work. Hamdi and AlHaidar (1996) conducted a survey to examine what influenced Saudi

women's choices to study nursing. The study showed that positive enrolment is geographically localised, with greater numbers of students in Jeddah and Dammam compared with Riyadh, because those two cities are more liberalised and open. Half of the respondents emphasised that nursing was considered to contradict social norms because of the requirement for genders to mix, and therefore faced discrimination in their choice of profession. Aljuhani (2002) confirmed the desire of Saudi girls to study in health care schools and the imperative need for Saudi women to participate in the health care sector, but noted that conservative attitudes toward women in work will prevent women from considering medical employment.

Dominant Saudi norms are constructed by traditional hegemonic male representations, and enshrined within interpretations of Islamic law. It is within these spaces that Saudi women must position themselves to confront societal attitudes toward women in general and women in work in particular, so that they may participate in society in the roles that they desire.

4.8.2 Male superiority and women's position

The status of women in Saudi Arabia has attracted international attention. For instance, the driving ban on women was condemned in international media¹³ and Human Rights Watch published a report about the women's driving ban in Saudi Arabia.¹⁴ Outsider perspectives do not understand Saudi social and political processes. Literature written about Saudi women's affairs has had some place among women's studies. For example, Mtango (2004), in her article 'A state of oppression?' refers to the denial of women's access to human rights, and discussed the oppression they experience due to the actions of men and government. Omair (2008) states that "women's status is complicated by the fact that the women are subject to a number of coded or unwritten social norms in a patriarchal male-dominated society" (p. 108). Omair further concluded that these codes are the main factors in women's late entrance into the labour market. Previous studies showed that attitudes toward females' roles in society were influenced by many factors. For example, "gender was found to have a strong, reliable effect on society (Diwan & Menezes, 1992; Furnham & Karani, 1986), whereas culture (Diwan & Menezes, 1992), education, and marital status (Baker & Terpstra 1986) also contribute.

¹³ For example see CNN: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/26/world/meast/saudi-arabia-women-drivers/> Also, see:

http://www.google.co.nz/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=11&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CIEBEBywCg&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.kenwoodacademy.org%2Fourpages%2Fauto%2F2014%2F2%2F18%2F57924600%2FSaudi%2520Articles%2520Women_s%2520Rights%2520Issues.docx&ei=sitsU9XIINGykgWF8YGwCQ&usg=AFQjCNEAwWmW67ZwkwdqrA70prPJgfg3Q&sig2=0BJ9zTIGyq8sHkGYIOeLnQ

¹⁴ See <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/10/24/saudi-arabia-end-driving-ban-women>

Many of these studies used the Attitude toward Women Scale (AWS) (Abdalla, 1996). AWS is a conceptual analysis of how attitudes toward women and men relate to gender stereotypes (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989). According to many social psychologists, stereotypes are used to describe, “beliefs which are shared with other members of [the same] culture and which thus reflect a general consensus” (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1989; Secord & Backman, 1964). As a result, the AWS analyses of gender stereotypes are applicable in Saudi Arabia because distinctive gender divisions have been made normative (Smerecnik et al, 2010). The prevalent assumption is that worklife is less central to women than men (Kaufman & Fetters, 1980) and that men should be the primary ‘breadwinner’ (Tary, 1983). Al Rawaf and Simmons (1991) found that the Saudi educational curriculum for girls emphasises their role within society, and that most girls’ curriculum “reinforces traditional views of the separate roles of men and women: “My father goes to work; my mother stays at home and cooks and cares for the family” (p. 291). The study also indicated that intermediate curriculum for girls and boys are similar, with the exception of physical activities for boys and home economics and embroidery for girls (*ibid.*).

Baki (2004) in her study about gender segregation and social norms questioned whether “the government will relax its social restrictions on women to accommodate its economic needs?” (p. 7). A critical point related the subject of male and female relationships in religious perceptions among men and women. Unfortunately, the dominant attitudes of some Arab men toward women relates to the religion of Islam. In other words, gendered expectations are taken from Islamic law, through the interpretation of the Holy Quran verses, and refer to the Prophet’s sayings. Unfortunately, while there are many verses that insist on equality between men and women, some Islamic fundamentalists insist that this is not the case. For instance, the Quran shows that men and women are alike in origin and creation, and equal in social and religious responsibilities. This is evidenced by Allah who said,

“whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do” Surat Al nahl (16:97).

قال الله تعالى: "مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ" سورة النحل آية ٩٧.

Variations in the interpretations of the Quran, also known as “*Tafseer*,” are responsible for misunderstanding of Islamic regulations concerning gender roles. Unfortunately, extreme Islamic ideals such as those represented through Wahhabi’s school of thoughts, have become dominant,

and often attract international media. Islamic law is a rich source of knowledge that can be used by women to empower themselves if understood correctly by wider society. Allah confirms that men and women are equal when stating:

The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakat and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wisdom.

Surat At-tawbah (9:71-72).

قال الله تعالى: " وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ {٧١} وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَاكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ " سورة التوبة الآيتين ٧١-٧٢.

4.8.3 Marriage

Marriage contributes to the career choices of Saudi females. A Saudi husband agreement is a condition that allows his wife work, although the husband can still control where she works (Fakhri, 1992). Early marriage is common in Saudi society and many females get married while still at university. For female medical students, whose academic demands are high, balancing marriage and study can be difficult to navigate. Marrying young has been associated with the choice of females to discontinue medical training, particularly if the husband is concerned that his wife is not fulfilling her marital duties or if he has concerns that she might interact with men at work (Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004).

Also, some husbands are demanding, and a wife has to follow her husband's demands, in order to avoid any problems, which results in a shortened study period. Another difficulty for married female doctors might be the pressure from husbands objecting to time spent alongside men in their workplace. In addition, managing study, training or working in the health care sector with household responsibilities (husband's rights, children, cooking, etc.) is very difficult. Some wives could face problems in managing too many responsibilities. Those problems may require families to have maids to help in managing their housework, and allow them to have more time for studying, working and relaxing after work. Thus, the problem of exporting more foreigner workers continues.

4.8.4 Transportation

Saudi Arabia is a wealthy country but lacks effective public transportation services. Most Saudi's are able to afford a vehicle and fuel so the need for extensive public transportation has not previously been necessary. But, as urban populations are increasing, so too is the need for safe and reliable means of public transport. Saudi women are forbidden from driving, and with the increase in Saudi women's participation in education and the workforce, public transport is perhaps, for these women, most imperative. Baki (2004) stated, "Saudi women do not have easy access to transportation" (p. 3), explaining that the prevention of women driving is a form of societal control.

Baki elaborated that transport limitations on women meant they were reliant on a chauffeur or male relative to drive her. Hiring a chauffeur means that women who are from poor socioeconomic backgrounds or from families who are unwilling to spend the money on her transport are negatively affected. Research conducted by Bahry (1982) found that while women's employment had increased, transport options for women had not. Even in instances where women are able to taxi, they must only do so with a suitable male chaperone. Almunajjid (2010) suggests that "the government should look for ways to facilitate the development of a system of transportation services for women that enables them to commute to work without the help of a male driver or family member" (p. 11). As demonstrated, transportation is a barrier to women in accessing both education and employment in Saudi Arabia. These social norms need to be addressed to allow women to better participate in employment in the health care sector.

4.9 Conclusion and gaps in current literature and future consideration

This review has summarised the small number of studies that discuss issues of women's empowerment, Saudisation and the status of women in Saudi Arabia. It has been identified that there are significant gaps in the literature, which might be filled by researching a number of questions. While a lot of new research could be conducted, there remains a critical need for literature regarding Muslim and Saudi women. Research should aim to assist and facilitate the empowerment of women by better understanding gender concepts, especially among Islamic and Arab worlds. It is with this in mind that this research will discuss why Saudi women's empowerment is important and how the Saudisation policy should be used as an effective instrument to empower women in Saudi Arabia.

Based on the literature gaps identified, a series of research questions have been formulated that could be filled by further research. This leads me to ask the following research questions:

- How can women in the healthcare sector empower themselves through Saudisation?
- How will greater numbers of Saudi women participating in the health sector build additional social and employment opportunities for Saudi women?
- How can Saudisation be facilitated in a way that helps women instead of creating more obstacles?
- How do Saudi women who want to work in the healthcare sector perceive their chosen career path within the strict social norms?

In conclusion, this section of Saudisation examined the policy of Saudisation, which was initiated for many reasons. First, to decrease the country's heavy reliance on expatriates working in Saudi Arabia. Second, to increase the chances for the unemployed nationals. Third, to keep the economy localised by keeping the money inside the country. Saudisation, however, targeted men more than women. The presence of women in the labour force is very slow according to the traditional, religious and social obstacles.

Saudisation in the health care sector is the main area of focus in this research; it aims to investigate how Saudisation can empower women working in the health care sector. Therefore, the gaps identified out of this literature review were that Saudi women's empowerment remains absent. Saudi women's issues need further research and in greater volumes than has been the case. Saudisation has not investigated the context of development. The following chapter discusses the findings of this research and provides analytic accounts of these findings.

Chapter Five: findings and analysis

“Women who work in health care sector, know that they are being watched, and under accusation because they work in this sector, and they cannot do anything about that. But they have to endure that. Our society will not change overnight. If we don’t stand and fight, we lose everything” (Manal, Pers. Comm., 28/1/2014).

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the conditions that participants identified as contributing factors to the disempowerment of Saudi women who work in the health care sector. I present their perceptions of the conditions, and how they cope with them. Consequently, this chapter aims to answer two of the research questions:

- What kind of conditions contribute to disempowerment of Saudi women who work in the health care sector?
- What are the main challenges facing Saudi women engaging with the health care sector?

As mentioned in chapter 3 data was collected by conducting interviews with female workers in the health care sector, who reported experiences and perspectives of empowerment, employment and Saudisation. This chapter gives an insight into how some Saudi women understand empowerment, gender and development, and what the barriers are that prevent the achievement of their goals. The results of the interviews show a number of key points that describe how working-women manage their struggles to enter and stay in the workforce. Employment in the health care sector is difficult for Saudi women because of the patriarchal nature of Saudi society and its reluctance to discuss and rethink gendered issues and the societal positioning of women. It is for these reasons I have chosen to focus on the health sector in particular.

Health care is a human right, and a primary focus of overarching development processes (WHO, 2013). Fully equipped and functioning medical centres and a well-educated medical workforce are fundamental to achieving improved positive health outcomes. In Saudi Arabia, health care is improving over time, and the government allocates a large annual budget to establish a solid ground for this service. For instance, in 2011, the health budget was 68.7 billion SR (US \$18 bn), and the 2014 budget is 855 billion Saudi riyals (US \$228 bn).

Figure 5.1 shows the cumulative increase in the health care budget from 2005 until 2011. Figure 5.1 shows a sharp increase for the year from 2008 to 2009 is to continue establishing the network of health care facilities the government has implemented. This health care network includes a network of primary clinics and healthcare centres throughout the Kingdom. The clinics and centres are supported by a network of secondary health care hospitals, and specialised treatment facilities located in major urban areas across the country (Colliers International Healthcare (CIH), 2012).

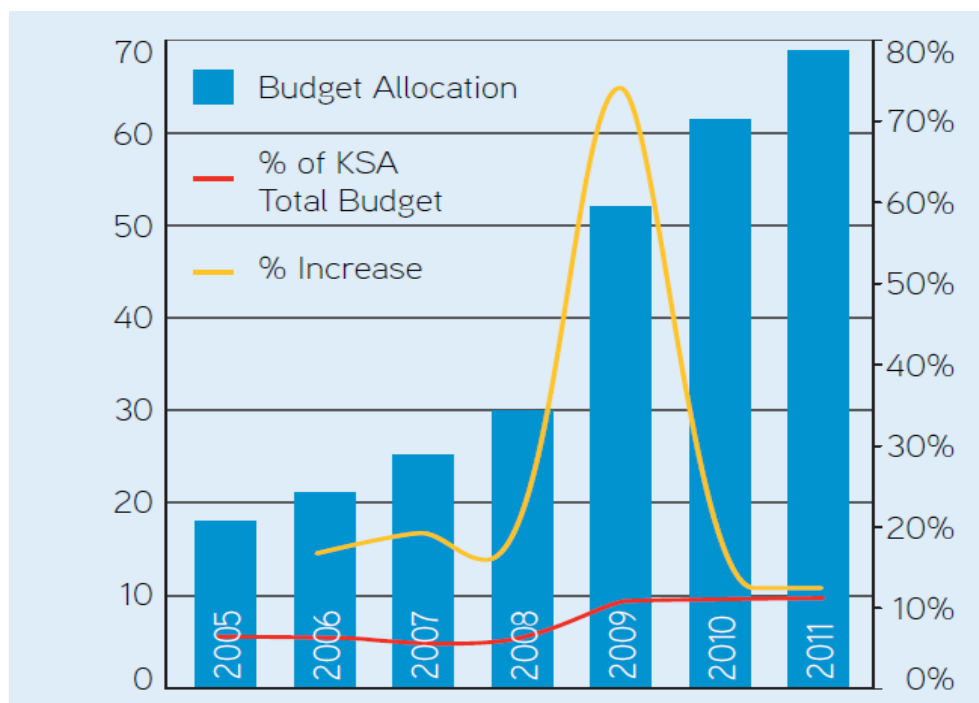


Figure 5.1: Healthcare Budget in the KSA (SAR billion).

Source: Ministry of Health 2009, Colliers International Healthcare (CIH) 2012

Health sector employees in Saudi Arabia earn relatively decent salaries and gain alleviated social recognition from their work. However, Saudi women are subjected to socio-political criticism for working in this sector. The health care sector is an important and dynamic sector for any country and its people, and addressing women's health issues and employment in this field could make it a source of economic and social empowerment for women.

Women's empowerment is part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Empowerment, according to those goals, are to be achieved within the third goal of the MDGs, which is "promoting gender equality and empower women" (UNDP). Thus, it is important to give more space and a voice to participants to share their experience, anecdotes and perspectives. This chapter presents the findings of the interviews. It explore what it means for these women to work in the health care sector, study health care or medical major and/or to be a woman who has the right to access health care. Then, it analyse my interviewees' perspectives concerning Saudisation, empowerment and the employment of Saudi women.

5.2 Participant profiles

Group 1 interviewees had been working for between three to nine years and range in age from 26 to 37 years. Group 2 were still students and aged between 20 to 22 years and Group 3 were housewives aged between 25 to 39 years. The three groups shared many similarities and aspects regarding their backgrounds, families and education level. All of Groups 1 and 2 had fathers who were educated to at least a high school level, with some even obtaining Masters degrees. Participants' mothers had education levels that ranged from elementary to university (Bachelor and Masters degrees). The participants' parents had supported them in either studying, working in the health care sector or both. Group 3 participants had lower levels of education to their parents'; one parent was illiterate whereas another parent had intermediate education levels. On the request of participants, names used are either real or pseudonym (See Table 5.1 below).

Groups	Name	Occupation
Group 1	Eman	Cancer Radiotherapist
	Nora	Nuclear medicine specialist
	Dana	Cardiologist – Cardio photographer
	Manal	Paediatric echo cardiographer
	Faten	Nuclear medicine supervisor
	Rawyah	Nurse
Group 2	Soha	Student in medicine school
	Yasmeen	Student in pharmacology
	Amal	Student in nursing college
	Layla	Student in nursing college
Group 3	Zohour	Housewife
	Maha	Housewife
	Sabreen	Housewife
	Zainab	Housewife
	Maryam	Housewife

Table 5.1 Participants' profile

5.3 Key Themes

Working in paid employment is an effective tool of empowerment for many women around the world, and facilitates development processes. In Saudi Arabia, women who engage in paid work outside their home gain many advantages, such as better financial status and self-respect, which enhance their lives. However, in my interviews most women focused on factors that contributed to their disempowerment as employees in the health sector, because it was a topic of more importance to them. As Eman reported, “to know what weakens you comes first, it is more important than what strengthens you” (Eman, Group 1, pers. Comm. 31/1/2014).

A number of key narratives surfaced from the data collection process, which included women's stories and experiences. From listening and transcribing those stories and experiences, this thesis derived themes that are discussed in this chapter and Chapter 6 respectively.

Theme	1-Understanding conditions that maintain disempowerment	2-Identifying tools of empowerment
Sub-theme 1	Recognising institutional and social barriers	Gaining high education level
Sub-theme 2	Recognising social double standards	Fighting for better job opportunities
Sub-theme 3	Recognising women under control, monitoring and surveillance	Enhancing their financial situations
Sub-theme 4		Seeking personal independence (within social norms?)
Sub-theme 5		Influencing the new generation

Table 5.2 Key themes 1

5.3.1 Conditions that maintain disempowerment:

5.3.1.1 Institutional and social barriers

Saudi women have high literacy levels of 97 per cent (UNICEF, 2012). Nevertheless, the Saudi constitution prevents gender equality by restricting women's freedom, and access to education, work, and travel. Mobility is controlled by the requirement that women must, at all times in public, be escorted by a male relative (Al Fayez, 1978; Keene, 2003). Consequently, women must therefore also have the permission from and availability of a suitable chaperone, which hinders the ability of women to move freely and creates a barrier to women's development.

Institutionalised barriers are considered the main obstacles faced by Saudi women who join, or will join, the health sector. Participants indicated that one disadvantage is the number of female candidates in medical schools and colleges. Despite government initiatives to reserve employment positions in this field, there are fewer than those for male candidates. As Nora (Group 1) said,

When I applied to enrol in the College [of Applied Medical Sciences], I was surprised that there are limited seats for female students. They are only half of the numbers of the male students. I also was shocked that they accepted male students with lower grades than girls

because they still have seats for them, while girls with higher grades are declined because they don't have more seats for them! (Pers. comm. 28/1/2014)

Having fewer allocated spaces for women indicates that women face obstacles from the first step of their career path (studying). The government (like the society) still looks to men as being more capable to study, work and produce than women (Kelly, 2009). Saudi statistics support Nora's observation and show that male students of health care schools outnumber women, a statistic which is then reflected in employment. (Tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5).

Year \ Students	Students	
	Male	Female
2005 / 2006	1206	522
2006 / 2007	1117	453
2007 / 2008	1315	534

*Table 5.3 Medicine students - King Saud University in Riyadh.
Source: Saudi Ministry of Higher Education – Statistics Centre*

Year \ Students	Students	
	Male	Female
2005 / 2006	750	502
2006 / 2007	771	541

*Table 5.4 Applied Medical Science Students - King Saud University in Riyadh.
Source: Saudi Ministry of Higher Education – Statistics Centre*

Year \ Student	Student	
	Male	Female
2006 / 2007	193	84
2007 / 2008	214	80
2008 / 2009	222	96

*Table 5.5 Medical Graduates - King Saud University in Riyadh.
Source: Saudi Ministry of Higher Education – Statistics Centre*

Institutional barriers facing women have been studied for some time. Gender discrimination is a problematic issue in terms of women's education and employment. Many studies recognise that employment is an empowerment tool. It can be used to advantage women by providing a sense of security through professional careers and increased income opportunities. However, women still face gender discrimination in the labour market. Employers and the labour market have been 'gender bearers', which refers to the social stereotypes that imply men have authority over women in the work place (Whitehead, 2001, p. 3).

Social stereotypes that refer to gendered employment are institutionalised and contribute toward gender inequality (Elson, 1999). Principles of gender division of labour indicate that the roles and activities are supposed to be appropriate for men and women alike (Whitehead, 1979, cited in Kabeer, 2008). Gender divisions of labour are socially constructed and the results of this are "context-specific patterns of who does what by gender and how this is valued" (Reeves & Baden, 2000, p. 8). In the Saudi context, gender roles are constructed to position men as more worthy than women of education and work. For instance, Maryam (Group 3) says that in her hometown (Hafr Albatin)¹⁵ girls (including her friends) were graduating from the Health Institute but have to wait a long time for employment (Pers. comm., 2/6/2014). Further complicating the matter is that many institutions will only afford female graduates a diploma. Many women, seeking a higher level of academic accomplishment are therefore steered away from this field, and toward 'gender appropriate' courses in which they are allowed to succeed.

¹⁵ Hafr Albatin is a small city, in the Eastern Province and located in the North-eastern of Saudi Arabia.

Many of the restrictions that women face are not formally regulated by State laws but are the result of social traditions enforced through by-product laws. For example, women cannot work without the permission of their male guardians,¹⁶ which, though not legislated, is unequivocally practiced as a societal norm. However, male control over female employment is enforced because women require, by law, the Identification Card of her father or, post-marriage, her husband. All formal education and business processes mandate the necessity for the identification cards, and enrolment or employment cannot occur without them.

Although there is growing awareness of the importance of women's participation in society and the economy, many do not support this stance. The latter group continues to doubt and rebut the morality and social progression of women. Hence, all interviewees of Group 1 and 2 were asked if they had received their families' approval and support before enrolling and working in the health sector. Participants unanimously highlighted that without such approval they wouldn't be able to study or work (Pers. comm., interviews, 2014). The responses of Group 1 and 2 showed that the role of family and domestic power shaping the individual possibilities.

Dominant Saudi thought indicates that women's work should follow the societal norms that dictate work in the health care sector is difficult. Rawyah (Group 1) indicated that health care institutions have never tried to adjust the work-load expected of female nurses in a way that reflects the nature of the Saudi culture. Rawyah, and all her colleagues, agreed that to minimise the pressure on nurses the health care sector could reduce the number of working hours per female and hire more women (Pers. comm., 1-2 /2014). Improved working conditions would also enable women to better meet their family responsibilities. Rawyah also said that institutions should consider the possibility of giving male or non-Saudi nurses the night shifts as it will be easier for Saudi women to adjust to that. Rawyah stated,

I cannot imagine myself going or coming back from my work in the late hours of night. People will never understand. Although they know how important it is to have female nurse who can look after their female patients, they still don't accept me doing this!

Moreover, another core obstacle is societal perceptions of women who work in the health care sector, as Saudi society does not accept women who interact with non-familial men. A woman's reputation, and therefore the reputation of her family, may be at risk from her professional

¹⁶ The guardian should be a relative: a father, brother, uncle or husband.

interactions as a Nurse. Nurses are judged according to their clothes, appearance, and frequency of interactions with male colleagues and patients; as Eman (Group 1) relayed,

People look at the way you look. If your clothes are not wide and long enough, that might give you a bad reputation. They will judge you badly if your voice is a bit loud or you are laughing in public. (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014).

Manal (Group 1) said that if a female employee put on a little bit of make-up, men may consider that she is trying to attract men, and, therefore, they will have an excuse to flirt and annoy her. Manal added, “If I tried to be polite or smile with patients or their companions, they would misunderstand me, and that has happened to me many times!” (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014).

Another barrier to the possibility of women’s empowerment through employment is the challenge for a mother to leave her children during work hours, a complex problem in Saudi society. Working mothers with children under school age (0 to 3 years) do not have many pre-school options for their children because traditional expectations dictate that the mother should remain at home to care for them. So, many working mothers must hire housemaids to fulfil the childcare roles. Rawyah (Group 1) stated:

I had to import a maid from Indonesia to look after my two children, because the only child care centre in our neighbourhood is small and it doesn’t look hygienic enough for children to stay in, which made me have to bring a stranger into my house to look after my children! (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014)

Nora (Group 1) depends on the help of her own mother in a bid to avoid hiring a nanny (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014). Nora mentioned that hiring a helper might increase the number Saudi’s immigrant population, and that she would rather support the policy of Saudisation. Faten (Group 1) added:

If the government does not build enough childcare centres, then women’s organisations should support the government by establishing these centres to help the worker mothers, and help them working without worrying about their children. And I think this is a way of supporting empowerment of working women (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014)

Maryam (Group, 3) explained that accessibility to childcare centres would be a primary contributor to her choice to work or not. In Saudi Arabia the mother has a foremost responsibility to raise and look after her children, and many husbands refuse her ability to work based on this notion. Zohour (Group 3) commented,

Having day care centres can empower women in two ways; first, it will help the working mothers greatly and will support them by making them comfortable to leave their children in a safe place. Second, those centres can create new job opportunities for Saudi women who look for jobs. (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014)

Dana (Group 1) reflected that even though her children go to school, she worries about their after-school care while she is at work. Dana noted that Allah has dictated that parents must care for their offspring, and that a proper upbringing, especially of daughters can be rewarded by entrance heaven. Sabreen (Group 3) remarked, “there is no doubt that the working mother will sacrifice some of her children’s rights, but I think if there are a high level of childcare places, she can guarantee a good level of safety and education for her children in her absence” (Pers. comm., 3/5/2014).

All participants confirmed that society should help women secure care for their children, as many women balance work with all of the domestic duties. Culturally, Saudi fathers do not help with domestic duties that often place the burden of responsibility on mothers. In addition, the assigned gender roles inside and outside the family continue to disempower working women. Childcare centres can contribute effectively to solving gendered problems, and help to empower women.

5.3.1.2 Social double standards

Participants highlighted the common belief that a man will only do what a woman has allowed him. Thus, women are blamed for any harassment they are subjected to, and men face no consequences (Manal, Rawyah, Nora and Faten, Pers. comm., 25-27/1/2014). Rawyah notes that in the medical profession, it is expected that a nurse may have to work a night shift. Therefore, if she returns home late she will often “face accusations of being bad”, while Saudi men may do not face the same criticism. (Pers. comm., 25/1/2014).

Transport options for women are restrictive, and limit accessibility to her choice and location of employment. Women are not allowed to travel independently, are heavily frowned upon for having to take a taxi, and while bicycle use is permitted under strict guidelines (with permission, women may only use a bicycle in restricted recreational areas if she is accompanied by a male, dressed in the full Islamic head-to-toe cloak “*abaya*”, and if usage is explicitly limited to entertainment and not for transportation purposes), though bicycle usage is extremely rare. Of transport, Manal (Group 1) says:

I had to export a foreigner worker to be my chauffeur, and I bought myself a car. I don't want people to see me getting in and coming off of taxis all the time. They will say bad things about me and my family, although our neighbourhood knows that I work in a big and famous hospital in Riyadh (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014).

Transport limitations on women are clear evidence of the paradox and double standards of Saudi society. Women are not allowed to drive because of religious instruction and social constraints that seek to prevent the interactions of women and non-familial men. While taxis, or private chauffeur are heavily frowned upon, a woman may, in her privately owned car, hire a non-familial male chauffeur. The paradox being, that under certain circumstances, interactions with non-familial men are permitted.

The right of a woman is dictated by the support of her husband or father, societal norms and law. Women continue to lack access to basic education and employment, and are heavily restricted in their ability to make decisions regarding almost all aspects of their life.

5.3.1.3 Locating women under control, monitoring and surveillance

Masculine superiority is common in Saudi Arabia. The authority of men puts women in subversive positions where they are exposed to male control, evidenced through common interactions such as financial dependency, decision-making, and the restricted movement of women. Many husbands and fathers prevent women from accessing independent transport as an attempt for the man to retain control and power. This authority is the main cause and maintenance of women's disempowerment. According to Zohour (Group3):

It is better for women in such society to work in order to be independent. Money in the Saudi society is an effective weapon; with it you can protect yourself, and prevent yourself from not

being controlled by any person. If you have your own money it means that you don't need anyone to control you for a hand-full of Riyals (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014).

Yasmeen agrees with Zohour, and further explains that in a patriarchal society women must financially empower themselves. Yasmeen articulates:

As long as he supports you financially, he has the right to control you, I mean according to our traditions! That is one main reason of why I chose to study pharmacology. I know that I can find a good job and have a pleasant salary in the future, money is a power, which can guarantee my independence, at least financially (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014).

The prevention of women from obtaining employment limits her financial opportunities, increases unemployment among women, and leads to financial dependency on a husband or father (Alobaidi, 1996). A study done by Almosaed (2008) discussed the relationship between money and power, and determined that enhanced financial authority corresponds to increased decision-making authority. Almosaed documented that power comes with breadwinning, and supports the notion of hierarchy within the family, which perpetuates patriarchy. In contrast, Almosaed also found that some participants not mind being financially dependent as long as it did not cause them to be disempowered. Zainab, Dana, Maha (Group 1 & 3) were more comfortable being sponsored by their fathers and husbands, and said that they understood that their views could not be taken as standard (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014). Maha expressed that even though they, as women, earn money to support their family or participate in the household income, their familial power is unlikely to increase (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014).

Broadly speaking, Muslim women tend to be supported financially by their men, because Islam encourages men to do so. According to the Quran:

“Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth” (An-Nisa', 4:34).

قال الله تعالى: "الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ... الآية" (سورة النساء، آية : ٣٤)

The interpretation of this verse is that Allah gave men the duty of protecting and helping women; and that men are responsible for financially supporting their daughters and wives. In another words, if men are not responsible financially for women, the former cannot control the latter. However, this verse has been misinterpreted in the favour of men, and has promoted the

subjugation of women. Osman (2009) discusses how masculinist interpretations of Islam have led to problematic debates about the status of women. Osman also documents that it has hindered the development processes of Muslim women in her statement:

For centuries, Islam was used as an excuse to stop women from entering certain fields, to suppress them and make them believe they were inferior to men. It worked. Many Muslim women I've met throughout my life actually believed they were less important than their male counterparts and obligated to serve them.

Women are forbidden from conducting religious interpretations, even in specific regulations that pertain to women's affairs. The absence of women's roles has been promoted by local traditions and cultures, with no basis in the Islamic faith, and has caused most of the mistreatment of women in Islamic world. In early Islam, Aisha, the wife of Prophet Mohammed, was a famous scholar. Today, her sayings and explanations of the holy scripts are studied as a main reference of Islamic law. In theory, men and women are equal by Islam regulations; however, in practice, societies are more forgiving of men. Many practices including restricted movement, forced marriage and spousal abuse contradict Islamic law, which primarily concerns governing human behaviour and personal freedom.

The misinterpretation of Islamic law is further evidenced in the illegibility of women to undertake leadership positions. Many Islamic countries do not appoint women to leadership positions, which has seen women's rights further diminished within Islam

A similar study done by the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation and Sporting Equals (2010), showed that misinterpretation is used to prevent women from practising sport in some Islamic communities. The report showed that script misinterpretation in addition to the lack of awareness largely prevented women from athletic participation, and "fear of discrimination or of facing negative attitudes from service providers in relation to their religious and cultural needs" acts as a further barrier (*ibid.* p. 1). Generally, "Islam promotes good health and fitness and encourages both men and women to engage in physical activity to maintain healthy lifestyles" (*ibid.*). The same sport study demonstrates how misinterpretation is used broadly, more than the disempowerment context, not only in certain country but also internationally.

Religious *fatwas*¹⁷ further contribute to gender imbalance in Saudi Arabia. Religious *fatwas* support the notion that the man is the guardian of his relative female, and has perpetuated male dominance in Saudi culture. An example of a *fatwa* is the forbidden feminisation of women's clothing and accessories' shops. As discussed in Chapter four, feminisation is a policy to ensure that women's clothing stores are only operated by women. In response, many people called to close those shops which are run by women, and some wanted to sue the Ministry of Labour as the developers of feminisation policies (www.alriyadh.com, 2011 and www.skynewsarabia.com, 2012). A formal announcement by the Royal Diwan¹⁸ accelerated the implementation of this decision of feminisation. Sabreen (Group 3) commented on the feminisation of shops as a great step by the government to support and 'empower' Saudi women, she states:

Rejecting the feminization of workers and shops selling feminine goods, is ridiculous. People who are against this step are really selfish, they just consider their opinions and affairs, while they should think that there are women in need to these jobs. I would say to them, please stop your trying to control people and manipulate their point of views" (Pers. comm., 3/5/2014).

The absence of regulations that allow women to be independent is a method for men to retain control over women. For instance, passport issuance is forbidden for women if they do not have the permission and signature of a male guardian. Limiting the mobility of women can reinforce disempowerment. In their study *Rural Credit Programs and Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh*, Hashemi, Schuler and Riley (1996) use mobility to public locations as an indicator of women's empowerment, and argue that mobility can have a significant positive influence on women's economic status.

A male guardianship system is common in the Arab world in general. It is rooted in Arabian traditions and norms from the past, and supports gender inequality within these countries (Qurami, 2007). A United Nations report (2002) explains that women in Arab countries still suffer from gender inequality in areas of citizenship, job opportunities, employment wages and gender-based occupational segregation, legal entitlements and the right to voting. However,

¹⁷ Fatwa means advisory opinion. According to Oxford Dictionary, fatwa is a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized religious authority.

¹⁸ The primary executive office of the king is the Royal Diwan. The king's principal advisers for domestic politics, religious affairs, and international relations have offices in the Royal Diwan. (<http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/48.htm>)

women in Arab countries such as Egypt, Kuwait and Lebanon have succeeded, to some degree, in challenging gender apartheid.

The monitoring and surveillance of women is applied to all Saudi and non-Saudi women within Saudi Arabia. The government automatically contacts and informs the male guardian if a woman passes the beyond the country's borders. Many participants of this study commented that society in general and families in particular should treat them as adults who can take care of themselves (Pers. comm., 1-5/2014).

All participants articulated that the behaviour of Saudi women is extremely regulated, which causes men to become surprised of the abilities of Saudi women. Dana stated that one of her male patients was surprised by her skill, and disgruntled that the supervisor was female. He reprimanded her male colleagues for taking orders from a woman (Pers. comm., 24/1/2014). Manal also added:

Some of [my] male colleagues practise the guardianship over his female workmates. If one of the girls has done something a male workmate might blame her or shout at her, acting like being one of her member family, and he has the right to treat her that way. (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014).

Such examples show that men act with their colleagues as they do with their sisters or wives at home. The attitude that women are incapable maintains the suppression of women, increases their sense of minimisation by their male colleagues, and negatively impacts their mentality and quality of work.

The Saudi government supports traditions and religion that prevent women from obtaining any political position. Eighty years after the Saudi state was founded, women have been able to join the Saudi Council of *Majlis Alshora*¹⁹.

5.4 Conclusion

Disempowered women reflect the hardships they have had to endure in their everyday life. Saudi society considers women to be of less value than men, and accordingly, women face many

¹⁹ Majlis Alshora or The Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia. It is a legislative body that advises the King on issues that are important to Saudi Arabia
<http://www.shura.gov.sa/wps/wcm/connect/ShuraEn/internet/Home/>

barriers to development and empowerment. Recognising and understanding factors that disempower women is a primary step for women to change their reality, and step forward to prove themselves. This chapter has answered two of the research questions by narrating and analysing the participants' perspectives. Themes that discuss opportunities and tools that would contribute toward empowering Saudi women have emerged, and they will be discussed and analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter Six: Identifying tools of empowerment for Saudi women who work in the health care sector

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to elaborate and analyse the second main theme of the findings – identifying tools for empowerment. These tools are a combination of socioeconomic factors stemming from social, institutional and cultural legacies, and participants in this study believe that these tools will enhance their social status. Interestingly, during the interviews, it was noticed that the participants seemed very aware of the situation of female Saudi employees, regarding challenges and opportunities facing them. As participants conversed about the tools that contribute to women’s disempowerment, they were also very enthusiastic about discussing what kind of tools can effectively enhance and develop Saudi women working in the health care sector (see Table 6.1 below). Section 2.1 identifies and analyses the following tools of empowerment.

Identifying tools of empowerment
• Higher education
• Fighting for better job opportunities
• Enhancing their financial situations
• Seeking personal independence
• Influencing the new generation
2.2 Saudisation, is a main effective empowerment tool

Table 6.1 Key theme 2

This chapter answers the following research questions:

- How can increasing opportunities through the Saudisation of the health care sector better support women's empowerment?
- How can Saudisation increase opportunities and lessen the challenges for women in the health care sector?

6.2 Higher education

Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process (International Conference on Population and Development programme of action, paragraph 4.2, 1995).

There have been some theoretical connections between education, women's empowerment and power, and these relationships have been central to macro theories that concerning social change and gender stratification. Facilitating girls' access to education has been on the agenda of development. Education is perceived "in terms of the resource base essential for women to acquire greater independence from patriarchal constraints" (Malhotra and Mather, 1997, p. 605). Therefore, a key modernisation argument indicates that as societies industrialise, "education exposes women to ideologies emphasising independence from the extended family and egalitarian conjugal relationships" (*ibid.* p. 606). Education also leads women to be liberated from traditional subordinate roles by participating in modern labour markets (*ibid.*).

Participants in this study agreed that the first or core empowerment tool in a society like Saudi Arabia is education, and particularly higher education. Studying medicine is considered a high and respectable achievement in Saudi Arabia, although society maintains conservative opinions toward women whom are studying. Maha and Zainab (Group 3) identify that education is fundamental to women enhancing their social status (Pers. comm., 7/5/2014 and 3/2/2014). Maha and Zainab relate this to the presumption of the relationship between education and empowerment. Faten (Group 1) also concentrated on the education, and how it contributes to obtaining self-respect:

If Saudi women do not study to gain high level of education, no one will care! Because as a common sense in our society, it is guaranteed that she will have financial support, but what

about having self-esteem and self-respect. She might find herself losing when comparing to her well-educated peers (Pers. comm., 28/1/2014).

Soha (Group 2) said that education is power. Soha also indicated that when women are educated, they know their duties as well as their rights. (Pers. comm., 1/2/2014). In Islam, an individual is given certain duties such as honouring one's parents and obeying them. In addition, an individual has his or her own rights, such as the right of the children to be financially sponsored by their father, or the right of women have to own property or wealth (Alkhaloof, 1996). Participants also said that education opens minds and works as a gateway to knowledge. Mothers gain increased knowledge of how to care for her children and learn basic health care for her household. In addition, some participants thought that education can be used as a tool to minimise the gender gap in Saudi society because it is more difficult for a man to control an educated woman whom is aware and well versed in her religious and legal rights (Faten and Yasmeeen (Group 1 and 2 respectively, Pers. comm., 28/1/2014 and 2/2/2014 respectively). Most of the participants agreed the government has established great education systems for girls, and it is women's turn to take advantage of those systems. Although those systems are not as varied as the systems for male students, women can benefit greatly and gain high employment positions if they combine formal educational systems with self-education and self-development.

6.3 Fighting for better job opportunities

Participants agreed that having employment is an important step in women's empowerment. Participants referred to jobs as providing women with different merits such as self-confidence, self-esteem, a better social position, enhanced life experiences and an increased capability in decision-making. Most participants were aware that despite the overall development of women's status in Saudi Arabia, women still have limited opportunities in the Saudi job market, and participants insisted that this does not mean women should stop looking for decent jobs that provide them with better lives. For instance, Faten (Group 1) confirmed that work is a main part of her life, that she would never give it up, and that she is lucky to have such an excellent career (Per. Comm. 28/1/2014).

Zohour (Group 3) stated that she was looking for the right chance to apply for a job once she finished her part time study because, "studying gives me a good sense of self-respect, and I want to have a better status. So, I am looking forward to the day when I start my work" (Per. Comm. 27/1/2014). Zohour also added that she would not prefer to remain a housewife forever, but

desires a successful career (Per. Comm. 28/1/2014). Eman (Group 1) is happy with her job and stated, “*Alhumdulillah*²⁰ who made my way easy to get this level of success, however, I am looking forward to improving myself even more, and proving that even though I am a woman, I am still able to gain higher positions” (Per. Comm. 29/1/2014). Many women in Group 2 agreed that if there were job opportunities that would provide them with professional development, then they would apply for it (Pers. comm., 2/2014). Manal, Rawyah and Dana (pers. Comm.) said that they must motivate themselves to be competitive within the job market, because there are limited opportunities for women.

Without exception, all of Group 2 members strongly agreed that they should fight for better jobs after graduation. Group 2 explained it is their own responsibility to ensure they integrate into the job market. All Group 2 members also stated that they should not wait for the government to widen the domain for more women to work, but they can make efforts to do so in the private sector in order to prove themselves and support the Saudisation policy. Participants then added that health care is a promising sector within which they can gain a better social status, and prove themselves as positive and effective members of their society.

Group 2 showed the desire to work and to establish a positive attitude toward overcoming the challenges that Saudi working women face, by standing in the face of societal norms and increasing empowerment factors. Participants can achieve their goals by maintaining their careers, and taking opportunities to enhance their status and improve their working and social conditions.

In the Saudi context, “women have been denied for so long, that they try harder and give more” Amal (Group 3) said. “Women are desperate to work,” Amal added, and she emphasised that they need real opportunities (pers. comm. 2/2/2014). I agree with Amal, as the government and stakeholders should activate Saudisation to give more space for Saudi women.

According to an International Monetary Fund (IMF) report, “women make up a little over half the world’s population, but their contribution to measured economic activity, growth, and well-being is far below its potential, with serious macroeconomic consequences” (2003, p. 4). Women are a valuable but unused source to improve the Saudi economy because, when women are able

²⁰ *Alhumdulillah* means “Thanks granted to God ‘Allah’”.

to develop their full labour market potential there can be significant macro-economic gains, for today and the future. (Loko and Diouf, 2009).

6.4 Enhancing their financial situation

“Money can help women establish their own means of income. It is a powerful weapon against poverty and injustice affecting women” (Yasmeen, Pers. comm., 2/2/2014). Having a good financial status is as important as education; it can help change the position and self-perception of women, and change the patriarchal gender contract. Manal said:

Women are always likely to be poor and weak, especially in the developing countries. And in Saudi Arabia, it could be serious because women usually don't go outside and expose their need and poverty because they feel embarrassed and shy to mix with men, or wander in the street, also, they find it very hard to ask for help and charity. Which means they will suffer secretly with no help or support (pers. comm., 29/1/2014).

Zainab stated that in a society like Saudi society, if a woman lost her father or a husband (her financial supporter) and she does not hold a degree, she might not be able to support herself, and might fall into the poverty. Zainab also stated that when women have a personal income they often experience a sense of personal freedom, as they feel that they do not need to wait for others to give them their allowance (pers. Comm. 3/2/2014). Most of the participants thought that they should be able to stand on their own and to be prepared for whatever life brings to them. Rawyah added that “this is a ‘touchy subject’ for our society, but is an important issue, because many women may find themselves without options once their ‘financial supporters’ are no longer in the equation for some reason” (Pers. comm., 1/2/2014).

Financial independence has been recognised as a human right (Brown, Hung and Yoong, 2011) and acknowledged as enhancing empowerment. All participants agreed that men’s control in Saudi Arabia is maintained in part by financial dependency, which correlates to a study conducted by YouGov and Bayt.com (2012). The study showed that many Saudi women now demand work, and the “aim of their working is to achieve greater financial independence” (research.mena.yougov.com). Furthermore, Almosaed (2008, p. 63) argued that the ‘modernisation’ of Saudi Arabia have further contributed to the increase of women’s awareness, and has helped them demand more independence:

Modern Saudi women are seeking education as a means to employment, financial independence and decision making. Women's employment has been almost as important as women's education in changing the position and self-perception of women, and in altering the patriarchal gender contract.

Personal income, too, can allow women to achieve their dreams in life, have a higher level of self-esteem and self-satisfaction, and more financial independence. According to Rubin and Spaht (2010), financial independence means being able to support oneself, having one's own income, and the ability to sustain a proper quality of life and standard of living without needing financial support from anyone. Consequently, pursuing and practicing financial liberation can lead a woman to practice personal independence.

6.5 Seeking personal independence (within social norms?)

Participants did not share the same point of view as each other when discussing independence within Saudi social norms. The majority of participants thought they should be granted more independence and that society should respect women and their decisions. These participants felt that the problem itself is embedded within societal norms, which tend to perpetuate gendered inequalities. Participants also said that Saudi is strict with upholding its traditions, and therefore it is highly unlikely that societal norms will be modified.

On the other hand, a significant number of the participants thought that norms can be modified for the benefit of women, because a big part of Saudi identity is generated from social norms. Participants whom held this view also felt that it is easier to adjust the norms instead of abandoning them, because, according to them, society is not flexible enough to accept big changes. Some of the participants were neutral about independence within or without social norms, and some of these participants were not as familiar with the concept of norms, independence and gender.

I realised from talking to some of the participants that independence might indicate some kind of women's liberation that is not accepted in our society. Confusion about the concept of independence may cause some kind of rejection against women or against any kind of change, even if this change could be in the best interest of wider society. For instance, one of the participants was uncomfortable about using 'words that do not belong to us', such as independence. The participant was not content with using foreign terms because, as she stated,

women should obey their 'guardian' and live in the shadows of their men. The sentiment of using foreign terms to describe Saudi women's desires made me believe that terminology concerning equality are still not clear for many Saudi people. In an article about Saudi women doctors, Vidyasagar and Rea state, "we would not be the first to make this point that Western feminism can be perceived as part of an overwhelming external force threatening a culture" (2004, p. 265). Saudi society prohibits independence because it is considered to be against Islam.

In contrast, Nora stated, "being independent doesn't necessarily mean that a woman will go against the Islamic or social will, or she will commit unacceptable deeds. On the contrary, independence can give a woman personal safety. She will know that with her own abilities she will be able to survive without depending on others" (pers. Comm. 27/1/2014). Faten said that it is difficult for Saudi society to accept the idea of an 'independent' woman, who lives or moves by herself. Faten also emphasised that this woman might be judged unfairly, or might obtain a bad reputation of behaving 'boldly' like men. Faten justified her statement by saying, "for example, our society always looks at men who live alone suspiciously, because they are not married, and this is not common in our society, so what about a woman, they will completely reject her independence. It is a very difficult society" (pers. Comm. 28/1/2014). Maha also agreed with Faten's idea of an independent woman, and elaborated, "It is impossible to happen and have independent women in our society because there is a misunderstanding of the concept, and because society wants women to stay dependent on men" (pers. Comm. 7/5/2014).

Allowing women to be independent might take long time to achieve in Saudi Arabia. However, women should keep looking forward to gaining their rights and freedom in any manner that does not go against Islamic law. Furthermore, Saudi women should implement laws that affirm their religious rights, instead of adhering to norms that might be harmful for society and individuals alike. As Swain (2008, p. 24) said, "Women's empowerment takes place when women challenge the existing norms and culture of the society to effectively improve their well-being".

Participants asserted that independence might strengthen women who will then be able to contribute to their own self-development and that of their society (pers. Comm. Soha, 1/2/2014 Eman 29/1/2014 and Layla pers. comm. 3/2/2014). The GAD approach emphasises that that empowerment can be achieved through participation in the development process, which will give women more independence, self-confidence and power (Kotsapas, 2011).

6.6 Influencing the new generation

Saudi society is a typical example of a patriarchal society in need of more time and effort to change the status of women. While women remain largely dependent on men and experience subjugation at the hands of men, they also participate in creating the conditions that control them. For instance, a wife may blame her husband for not being cooperative in the household concurrent with raising her children to adhere to the same gendered roles and responsibilities that irk her. Maryam believes that women contribute toward the future when she explains, “I only have two daughters, and I am not going to raise them as I was raised, I mean in terms of gender inequality. But I will teach them how to be strong, independent and confident, so they can raise their children the same way” (Pers. comm., 6/5/2014). Manal (Group 1) was not happy about her brothers controlling her and her sisters when she said, “they have been against my will to go to study overseas, even though I am a high achiever, and have been successful in my job. But in the future *in sha Allah*²¹, I will be sure to raise my own children equally” (Pers. comm., 29/1/2014).

Similarly, Faten added that she never felt oppressed in her family because her father raised her brothers and sisters equally. She continued, “on the contrary, as I am the oldest of my siblings, my father has always shown how he is proud of me, and he is sure I will be a great person in the future, and that is how I will teach my children” (Pers. comm., 27/1/2014). Soha, Layla and Yasmeen (Group 2) agreed that their families treat sons and daughters unequally, but they are not annoyed as long as they can have the same rights to education, financial support and rewards or punishment (pers. Comm. 1/2, 2/2 and 3/2/2014). Yasmeen said, “the only thing is that my brother can go out by himself or travel without a guardian, but sometimes I don’t mind, as according to my parents they want to protect me” (Pers. Comm. 2/2/2014). However, these three participants still insist that they should raise their children (boys and girls) equally, so the children then do the same, and that this is the right way of influencing new generation (Pers. comm., 2014).

Maha emphasised that she will teach her children to respect each other no matter their gender. Maha said that she treats them equally at home, and expects housework to be done by all of them (pers. Comm. 7/5/2014). Sabreen (Group 3) agreed with Maha and added that she does not want her sons to be biased against women, and at the same time does not want her daughters to be victims of sexism (pers. Comm. 8/5/2014).

²¹ *In sha Allah* means “if God is willing”.

The gender gap may get worse in Saudi society because it is still greatly controlled by religious extremists, and some official authorities support the power of these radicals. Consequently, the gender gap could become deeper and wider. In such cases, individuals themselves should take action against these practices. Changing conceptions of gender in Saudi society is by no means an easy task. Participants in this study emphasised that society needs more time to change the attitudes toward women, especially those who work in the health care sector.

Dana (Group 1) referred to that gender gap as present even in judging the quality of their work as women, and whether they are capable to be in leading positions. She also expressed how painful and frustrating it is to be treated less than a male colleague, just because she is a woman. She told me that she was an excellent student, and she never thought that she would be 'humiliated and treated with prejudice' because of her gender:

People still believe that male doctor is better than the female doctor. One of my patient[s] was shocked that our supervisor is female, and he asked a male colleague how come they accept a woman to be a supervisor over them (pers. Comm. 28/1/2014).

Most of the participants showed that they are proud to be women, despite the inequitable treatment they face in their daily life. Participants said that Allah has honoured them by giving them many rights, and they will contribute to implement the regulations of Islam in Saudi society by adjusting the negative attitude toward women, and by legislating equality for future generations. Influencing the new generation should focus not only on treating males and females equally at home, but in all aspects of our lives; in education, job opportunities, social perspectives, and social justice.

6.7 Saudisation is a main effective empowerment tool

Saudisation essentially aims to replace expatriate labour with national workers. In other words, it is “‘reclaiming ownership’ of the Saudi labour market” (Fakeeh, 2009, p. 78). The governmental objectives of Saudisation are very clear: to reduce the rate of unemployment, and to ensure that indigenous applicants to local job markets are open to job opportunities (*ibid*). In the case of women, Saudising jobs suitable for Saudi women could be successful implementation of this policy.

Saudisation could be the effective instrument to empower women in the Saudi job market because it is implemented by the power of the government. If the government legislated for public and private sector employers to hire more Saudi women, employers would have to comply. Women who are restricted by the power of society and who must work or study as society dictates, might find a way out of these constraints through the implementation of Saudisation for women (Yasmeen and Amal, Group 2, pers. comm. 2/2/2014).

Nora (group 1) wondered exactly where Saudisation is implemented and explained, “Since I started working in this hospital I haven’t seen any Saudisation. The nurses, for example, are all foreigners and we have no Saudi nurse at all, we have had the same workers in our section for more than three years” (pers. comm. 27/1/2014). Rawyah (Group 1) is the only nurse that agreed to participate in this study. Rawyah, employed in a local medical centre, said that all the nurses in their centre are Saudi, and about five of these nurses are women. However, these female nurses are long-term employees whom are currently experiencing overloaded work hours. Health sector insights lead to two important questions: Where are the nursing school graduates? And, why they are not employed in the private or the public sector? Group 3 agreed that they have not encountered any Saudi nurses at these private centres, and are instead treated by Filipino expatriate nurses.

According to the literature, Saudisation is not being implemented effectively and, on the contrary, it had achieved less than expected (Riyadh Economic Forum, 2012). The population of migrant workers continued to grow about 5.1 per cent annually between 1995 and 2006 (*ibid.*). Moreover, according to the Saudi Statistics Book (2013), the rate of job localisation has increased only five per cent in 2013, demonstrating the slow progress of Saudisation. Many employers still manipulate the regulations to avoid hiring Saudi nationals. Some hire Saudi workers and offering those Saudis to stay at home and have low wages, and in this way employers increase their percentage of Saudi employees while keeping some of their foreigner workers, who also agree to low wages. In this way, employers keep wage costs low while using governmental human resources financial support.

Participants in this study commented on the Saudisation policy as a tool to women’s empowerment. For example, Zohour said, “If there is no real Saudisation, especially in the private sector, people who seek jobs (men and women) won’t be able to get employed” (pers. Comm. 27/1/2014). Zohour and other participants said that they have heard about Saudisation,

though are yet to see it be a success. Participants hoped that all unemployed Saudi women would be able to work to free themselves from financial and social dependency.

Women working in the health care sector could benefit from the Saudisation policy, as many participants from the three groups affirmed. Dana, for instance, indicated that “Saudisation can help unemployed women to get trained and then employed in the health care sector. This is not only for medical graduates, but also other majors like administration, accounting, public relationships, are all majors that can find their places in any health care establishments” (pers. comm. 2/1/2014). I agree with Dana, as many Saudi girls have not been taken into account in the government policy. Saudi women have been marginalised for many years, and the government must increase the capacity of job market in order to accommodate more Saudi women.

Finding suitable working environments is not easy under current Saudi labour market conditions, due to social and religious constraints. Women are limited by the lack of appropriate work places and jobs that might require male and female interaction. Gender segregation is a main restriction in the implementation of Saudisation, and unless employers can find suitable solutions, such as establishing special workplaces for women, women’s employment will continue to suffer. According to Haifa Jamalallail, Dean of Effat College in Jeddah, some Saudi women in leading positions believe that “the issue isn't about working so much as creating the proper protected environment in which women can work,” (cited in House, 2007, p. 3).

Women make up about fifty eight per cent of Saudi universities’ graduates, and no longer want to be limited to medicine or teaching (El-Sanabary, 1993). In the last three decades, many new fields have opened for women, namely information technology, business, interior design and engineering. These fields could further open because it is relatively easy to establish separate women-only offices in these fields (House, 2007). Such processes can be effective to implement Saudisation. The Saudi government can help stakeholders activate Saudisation and focus specifically on women’s employment.

In addition, the number of male graduates is not sufficient to implement Saudisation. Faten said, “Where are the medical graduates who will work instead of the foreigner workers in the health care sector? We have a high rate of unemployment, but they are not medical graduates, and the medical educational institutions have to increase the number of enrolled students to fill the gap

made by the expatriates who left” (pers. Comm. 28/1/2014). Manal, on the other hand, was against full Saudisation of the medical sector. She said that Saudi workers are not qualified enough yet to fill all the vacancies, especially since Saudi Arabia still lacks training organisations, and still needs experienced foreigners (pers. Comm. 29/1/2014).

Saudisation needs more labourers to be properly qualified to meet job market demands. Failure to do so will not address the need to replace expatriates with Saudi citizens. If Saudisation fails, or does not work properly, the unemployment rate of Saudi’s will increase. Women show potential to work and are ready to face the challenges, norms, and society that currently hold them down.

6.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the participants in this study showed great knowledge regarding their personal and professional lives. Participants expressed decent knowledge about empowerment and how they could create suitable chances to empower themselves and the other women around them. According to participants, the first tool of empowerment is education. Enhanced access to education will give women better academic qualifications, more confidence, and increased opportunities to a successful career. Education and enhanced career possibilities lead to liberation from financial dependency and greater personal independence. Participants agreed to pass their knowledge to their children to positively influence future generations, to create more educated and open-minded people, who will then participate in developing new Saudi generations. Finally, the participants commented on Saudisation law and implementation. Participants agreed that once Saudisation is implemented effectively, women will gain increased employment opportunities and empower themselves by reclaiming their rights. The next chapter provides a detailed discussion of the discussion and concluding remarks of this thesis.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion

7.1 Overview

The transformation in the Saudi socio-economy in the 1970s obligated the country to import expatriates to occupy the massive vacancies in the young labour market at that time. Over the next two decades, the growth in expatriate employment correlated with the increase in the rate of national unemployment. Subsequently, the government of the early 1990s announced the Saudisation policy to ensure preferential employment for Saudi nationals. Women have recently been incorporated into the Saudisation policy in order to integrate them in the labour market and enhance their social and economic development.

This thesis has investigated possibilities for Saudisation as a vehicle for women's empowerment within the context of the Saudi health care sector. It has been guided by the literature and qualitative evidence that suggests barriers to women's empowerment and development involve socially constructed norms, traditions, religion and culture that primarily favours men. Participants identified access to balanced education systems and enhanced employment opportunities as fundamental to enhancing women's empowerment.

Saudisation is a development initiative, which seeks to ensure Saudi nationals are preferenced over expatriates in securing employment. However, due to the nature of women's access to and types of employment, Saudisation currently provides more opportunities for Saudi men than Saudi women. Consequently, this thesis has also identified core processes necessary for improving women's access to employment and subsequently, enhanced development outcomes. This chapter presents a summary of the findings and theoretical insights, which concern Saudisation, women's empowerment and development. Conclusions locate this research within the wider context of development studies. Finally; I suggest recommendations for research in the future.

7.2 Research aims and questions

This study aimed to, first, contribute to the literature of women's empowerment by exploring their employment in a Saudi context. Second, it aimed to enrich the field of study that centres on Saudi women's issues.

Women's employment is limited in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the health care sector because of the dominant preference for foreign or male Saudi employees. Consequently, it is difficult for Saudi women to participate in health care professions. As an important avenue to increasing the employment opportunities of Saudi women could be through effective Saudisation policies that ensure women have equal rights and access to work, this thesis has explored the following questions.

7.2.1 Research Questions

This research has been guided by the following key questions:

1. What are some of the challenges and the opportunities facing Saudi women currently engaging with the health care sector in Riyadh?
2. How can Saudisation increase empowerment opportunities for women in the health care sector?
3. How Saudisation can reduce barriers to the empowerment of women working in the health care sector?

7.3 Research Findings:

The key findings of this research are summarised below and relate to each of the key questions above.

1. The main challenges faced by Saudi women engaging in the health care sector are:
 - Gender discrimination against women
 - Gender segregation between men and women
 - Patriarchal dominance over women's employment choices

Employment in the health sector provides the following core opportunities for Saudi women:

- Greater financial independence and therefore decreased financial dependence on male relatives (father or husband)
- Increased social prestige
- More female medical specialists for Saudi women patients

2. Benefits of Saudisation for women include:

- Increased job opportunities in the national market which is currently dominated by foreign expats and male Saudi employees
- Increased enrolments in higher education (which will be necessary for them to match highly qualified jobs)
- Shifts in societal perspectives about women in the workforce, in terms of, for instance, respect them and believe in their equality to their male peers.
- Decrease of gender segregation in workplaces (as get men to feel normal with women around)

Saudisation can reduce the challenges faced Saudi women by:

- Normalising women in the workforce
- Decreasing gender inequality with regards to traditionally gendered employment options
- Enhancing the education system to qualify women getting into the job market
- Establishing women's sections within government sectors and departments that include ministries, councils and civil services.

3. Saudisation can reduce the barriers to women's empowerment in the health care sector by:

- Increasing the numbers of women enrolled in the health and medical colleges
- Decreasing gender inequality by giving women equal opportunities
- Increasing the respect accorded to women by assigning more women to leadership positions
- Appointing women to positions of policy development to address women's affairs and development issues

7.4 Discussion

While this study was only a snapshot of the views of a small group of Saudi women (working in the health care sector and individual women who benefit from health services) it has portrayed critical dimensions of those women's experiences. In fact, Saudi women, as discussed in previous chapters, have been marginalised from the national job market for long time. It is only recently

that Saudi women have gained the attention of government through the implementation of Saudisation and feminisation policies. Yet, women still need more space in the Saudi labour market. The paradox that faces Saudi policy makers is although the number of female graduates is high; it does not meet the job market's needs. In other words, currently girls' education does not teach them about the critical contribution that women overseas make to their societies and nor does it help produce female graduates for the specific demands of the Saudi labour market. The lack of variation in women graduates' skills limits their participation in the workforce, and continues to force the government to import more expatriates to fill the vacancies in the domestic labour market

The health care sector is one sector that faces a shortage of Saudi nationals. There are not enough Saudi graduates to meet its demands, and the issue is predicted to worsen as Saudi Arabia is currently experiencing a rapid economic and population increase, and therefore demand for health services is rising. The Government has allowed Saudi women to be employed in the health care sector to help meet the demand, although they are not yet fully integrated, and many women still encounter challenges that increase their disempowerment in this dynamic sector support.

Saudi women continue to face barriers that maintain their disempowerment. However, these have received limited attention in existing research. Finding solutions and implementing them to overcome these challenges is needed. As I discussed in Chapter four, when work and employment regulations were set up in the Kingdom, women were not included in those regulations, as it was believed that there is no need for women to work. The legacies of social and traditional norms have been the main ongoing challenge to women's development in the country. The ongoing impacts of restrictions against women (in the name of the religion) have been shown to contribute to disadvantaging women in education and employment.

My research attempted to show that some concepts such as empowerment, gender equality and feminism are still blurred and mostly misunderstood by Saudi society. These misconceptions have negatively impacted the development of Saudi women. In addition, according to Golley (2004), some have argued that "feminism is an illegal immigrant and an alien import to the Arab world and, as such, is not relevant to the people and their culture" (p. 521). So given Saudi Arabia is the most conservative among Arabic societies, it is strongly opposed to the ideas of feminism. Feminism in its western vision might not be applicable in the case of Saudi Arabia,

and not compatible with current Islamic regulations, such as the rights of the homosexuals. Consequently, it is important for Saudi society to focus on more research that investigates how feminist ideas and theories might fit within their context instead of resisting the existence of its ideas and thoughts. Previous research focusing on the development of multicultural feminism may be relevant here (Shohat, 2001).

A focus on gender faces the same resistance because some Arabic and Islamic literature supports that male is different from female in all ways. The concept of gender can be investigated within the context of Islam, however; which described men and women as “brother and sisters” in their rights, values and duties. Moreover, Islamic historical heritage has shown how women worked in different fields, like agriculture, trades, nursing and religious teaching (such as some of the Prophet Mohammed’ wives). Developing Saudi women’s status needs a major reassessment of our Islamic history and culture. The negotiation and debates going on among religious intellectuals and feminists should be continuously communicated, discussed and exposed (Sidani, 2005).

This research also found that women have been absent from religious literature and debate, such as interpreting the Quran, because they are not allowed to participate in it, even concerning women’s affairs or issues. This is a result of patriarchal dominance, which still considers men as the only ones who can conduct religious studies. Moreover, women themselves have tended to support this patriarchal regime by remaining silent, agreeing to the oppression and not claiming their rights, within Islamic law. Accordingly, women are absent, too, from the public decision-making, which maintains their disempowerment, as they cannot yet have “full participation on the basis of equality (DAC, 1998 p. 10) despite the fact that, according to Beijing Declaration, empowerment should also include “participation in the decision-making process and access to power, which are all fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace” (DAC, 1998, p. 10).

Understanding the deep meaning of development goals can facilitate individual as well as society’s development. Women in Saudi Arabia may experience better conditions than women in some other countries, but they still need more attention so as to be better integrated into the development process. For example, some may think that it is nice to be driven by someone else, it shows some extravagance, but in fact, if a woman’s ‘driver’ is absent for a while, she might be unable to go to work. So having good jobs and decent salaries, while their rights are absent, is not achieving

development. Saudi working women face challenges and restrictions that limit their opportunities to accomplish real wellbeing.

Participants of this study showed a deep understanding of empowerment and the barriers faced by many in their efforts to become empowered. According to Freire (1972), it is important that the unempowered know the sources of their oppression, and an effective approach to help “translating this knowledge into action” (p. 76). The participants of this research also suggested tools that could be utilised to empower women in Saudi Arabia, of which education was implicit. Educating women can help them understand not only their societal duties but also their rights. Education, then, could be a gateway to greater job opportunities. Participants agreed that better jobs might guarantee a better financial situation, which could in turn facilitate enhanced financial and personal independence.

More importantly, participants identified their desire to contribute toward changing the present conditions that maintains their disempowerment. Participants further indicated that they carry some of the responsibilities of empowering themselves and other women. However, they still attempt to meet society’s expectations and understand things cannot change overnight. Participants raised concerns about society’s high level of expectations of women, and cited how women are responsible for any public harassment that she might expose to, while she is the victim, and how women are the primary carriers of all domestic responsibilities and family care.

Participants showed that they are struggling to cope with society’s expectations of them to be ‘respectful’ women and good wives or daughters, which conflicts with their desire to study and have a successful career (Al- Subaie and Alhamad, 2000). Participants expressed their hope and waiting for the new generation who would change the current prejudicial and unfair conditions. Finally, participants referred to the importance to keep level of harmony with the Saudi society, and avoid conflict with the social norms and traditions.

7.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has found that the status of women in Saudi Arabia has been shaped by different historical, religious and social norms. To summarise, Saudi women currently face many obstacles that hinder the development and equality of women, which includes the:

- Patriarchal nature of the society
- Misinterpretation of holy scripts relating to women’s issues, and prevention of women from participating in religious studies and interpretation

- Religious extremists who maintain authority in Saudi Arabia
- Institutional and social barriers against women's education, socio-economic progress, and mobilisation
- Gender discrimination
- Gendered division of labour
- Underestimation of women's abilities and qualifications
- Forced subservience of women throughout their lives

The disadvantages faced by Saudi women have had negative impacts on enhancing Saudi women working in the health care sector, and empowerment in general. This research has been limited by focusing on the perspectives of a small group of women working in health care sector, but it clearly portrays an insider's view of how some women look at the conditions related to their empowerment. The study showed that the situation of Saudi women is more complex than previous research has discussed. Saudisation, too, can be implemented to empower women effectively, but the challenges of Saudisation are complex, and may need more time to be solved.

7.6 Recommendations to Government, Policy Makers, Educational Institutions and Employers:

- Increase the number of students enrolled in health and medical colleges
- Change the biased portrayal of women in educational curricula to make it fair
- Implement Saudisation within the health care sector to effectively contribute to the empowerment of women.
- Give women the same opportunities as men, such as in the number of students enrolled in medical and health majors in universities.
- Establish female teaching and training programmes to qualify them as equal to their male peers
- Facilitate the means to empower women such as allowing women access to transport (driving or safe public transportation)
- Provide childcare centres for children of employed women (hospitals and medical centres may contribute in building those childcare centres)
- Remove social pressures that maintain women's disempowerment such as blaming women for any family problems or failure.
- Support men to regard women as peers who are equal in rights and values

- Encourage men to appreciate women's responsibilities and work, as they are doing larger share especially in domestic matters
- Review the male guardianship authority over women
- Review the interpretation of core religious texts relating to women issues
- Allow women to participate in religious studies
- Avoid mixing traditions and religious legislations, which created misconceptions about peoples' rights and duties.

Appendix 1: Information Sheet for Participants



SCHOOL OF GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT AND EARTH SCIENCES

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INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Title of thesis:

Saudization and Women's Empowerment Through
Employment in the Health Care Sector.

Researcher: Fatemah Alghamdi: Masters of Science student at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

Purpose of the research

In My research, I aim to explore how the policies of Saudization can be used as effective instruments to empower Saudi women who work, or intend to work, in the health care sector. I also aim to investigate the many obstacles that hinder Saudi women from participating in the Saudi health care work force. Given the gap in this topic in the existing literature I will discuss how Saudization can build capacity for women and how it can be a tool to empower women, even with the strict conditions of the Saudi government and society's restrictions against women.

I am interested in hearing from women who work in the health care sector inside Saudi health institutions, besides, a number of housewives as they are a the recipients of the health care services. I am inviting women who work and study in any health care area to

participate in my study. Participants will be interviewed individually. The interviews will be approximately 1 to 2 hours per participant.

In what a participant involves

If the participant meets the selection criteria and agree to participate in this research project, she will be asked to take part in the interview sessions. Fatemah Alghamdi will interview the participants. All sessions will be voice recorded transcribed but full confidentiality will be maintained. The recordings will be used to complete the notes taken during the interviews.

The participant's rights

Participation is voluntary. I will be happy if a participant wants to volunteer to become part of this research. If a participant accepts the invitation to participate she will have the following rights:

- To withdraw from the study whenever she wants, but after informing the research prior to her withdrawal.
- To refuse to answer any particular question in the interviews.
- To ask any questions about the study at any time.
- To select the time and place of interview session.
- To be provided with transcripts of their interviews.
- To be sure that confidentiality will be maintained and that the participant's identity will be protected.
- To be given access to the summary and findings of the research when it is finished.

How the results will be used

The data will be organized and analysed then included in a Master's thesis that will be available through Victoria University of Wellington. If a participant requests it, she will be sent a summary of these results.

Please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or the research supervisor if have any questions, or if you like to receive further information about this research.

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Appendix 2: Consent Form for interviews



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CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

Saudization and Women's Empowerment through Employment in the Health Care Sector

I have read and understood the attached 'Information sheet for Participants'. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to participate in an interview and understand that I may withdraw from the study a week after doing interview in maximum, after informing the researcher, and before the researcher starts the data analysis.
- I understand that the interview will be recorded and that I have the right to refuse to answer any question and / or turn off the tape recorder without having to provide reasons.
- I understand that the interview will be transcribed, and that only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to this material.
- I understand that all written material and recorded interviews will be stored on a computer protected by a password and then destroyed 2 years after the research.
- I understand that I will not be named the research thesis, and that the information I provide will not be used for any other purpose or released to others without my written consent.

I would like to receive a summary of the research findings **Yes / No**, (Please circle one)

I _____ (full name) hereby consent to take part in this study by participating in this interview.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Interview conducted by: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3: Semi-Structured Interview Guide



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Semi-Structured Interview Guide

• Personal Information (for all women)

Name

Age

Ethnicity/Nationality:

Marital Status:

Husband's (if relevant) occupation:

Current Role or Occupation:

Current Location:

Birthplace:

Position in birth family (ie – eldest daughter, or youngest etc):

Occupations of parents:

• Experiences of the Health Sector (for workers and students)

- Can you tell me a little bit about your work (or study) at X (hospital, training college etc)? Probe – what do you do?
- How long have you been doing this work/study?
- Why did you decide to take this up? (what inspired her?)
- What/who supported your decision to pursue this line of work/study?
- What challenges did you face trying to get into this line of work/study?
- And how are you finding your experience of work/study now?
- What do you enjoy about your work and your work environment?
- What is challenging about your work environment? (Probe – work relationships, opportunities to learn, challenges – especially in relation to being a woman?)

- How do you think your experiences might be different if you were a man?
- What social traditions and norms did you consider when choosing this career?
- How do these norms and traditions influence your daily decisions?
- What gender issues do you face at work? At home?

• **Experiences of the health Sector (for housewives)**

- Can you tell me about a time when you needed to see a doctor?
(Probe – how did you get there? Who did you see? How was the experience? How were you treated? – explore gendered dimensions)
- Can you tell me about a time when you needed to be in hospital?
(Probe – how did you get there? Who did you see? How was the experience? How were you treated? – explore gendered dimensions)
- How do you think your experiences might be different if you were a man?
- Have you ever thought about working in the health sector?
(Probe – why? Why not? – especially about gender issues, norms and traditions)

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