

# **SOCIETAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS IMPACT ON WOMAN'S CONTRIBUTION IN THE PRIVATE SERVICE SECTOR**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Even though there had been a substantial advancement regarding the gender parity and women's empowerment, there are still cultural and societal challenges down the road. This paper aims to investigate the impact of such challenges. The study encompasses workers of the private service sector in Bahrain. 182 questionnaires were distributed, using a simple random sample, to employees of different specialties. Simple and multiple regressions were used to analyze the data and test hypotheses. The main findings of the study reveal a statistically significant effect of the social barriers of women's work in its various dimensions on the work of women in commercial companies in the private sector, where the most influential dimensions were the social status of women, followed by society's view of women's work and women's involvement in leadership positions. The research recommends working to improve the society's negative view towards working women, which would broaden the society's vision of Bahraini women in assuming leadership positions in the private sector.*

**Keywords:** Culture, Women Empowerment, Glass Ceiling, Bahrain, Cultural Barriers, Private Sector.

## **INTRODUCTION**

According to the Global Gender Gap Report (2020), issued by the world Economic Forum, the average gender parity was at 68.6% globally. Even though there had been a remarkable improvement over the years, still there is a 31.4% gap to be closed globally so that the world could translate the gender parity words into action. The same report tells us that in spite of the positive slow progress regarding the leadership positions, participation of women in the labor market is still behind and the financial disparities, on average, are larger than the mentioned ratios. Moreover, we find that adult women in the labor market represent 55% globally, while there is, in average, over 40% of wage gap and over 50% of the income gap. This could be attributed to several variables, but on the top of which, we find that the cultural barriers play the most vital role.

We all know that women are the pillar of society and have a vital role in operating all fields of life, and that without their engagement, society will not function properly. *"No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you"* as was stated by Mohamed Janahi. But based on some forces, like customs and traditions, woman cannot freely participate in the labor market in a substantial portion of the globe. Such limitations are gradually decreasing and this is helpful in increasing the rate of women's empowerment.

As Harvey (2004) argued, empowerment is the process that involves a series of stages through which, individuals are aware of their rights. Via going through such process, people raise their economic, social, education and health conditions (Nawaz et al., 2013). It does not mean to cross the rights of others, but it means to enable people to substantially enhance their standard of living (Harvey, 2004).

Women empowering entails inspiring them with the courage that enables them to break free away from the limitations, cultural and societal, that have traditionally kept them suppressed without the power to see their potentials and what they could do. The competitiveness of any country depends mainly on its women capabilities that constitute half of its power, plus or minus. That would tremendously contribute to heighten the country's advancement. In Bahrain, women empowerment is at the top level of priorities supported by governmental willingness. Regardless, women still have to face several societal and cultural challenges that still impede their path.

Significance of this study stems from two elements, its theoretical contribution and practical implications. The whole world is exerting more endeavors to achieve the gender parity, hence, shedding the light on real problems that deal with societal and cultural barriers that impede women's progress towards their well-deserved status could give a hand in this long path. On the other side, the theoretical contribution lies in its examining of a previously tested theory, but in a new context as argued by Fillion et al. (2015). Furthermore, it could be one brick upon which further studies could be built along the road to women's empowerment. In addition, findings reached and recommendations could provide substantial information for those who are keen on the cultural barriers in affecting women contribution to the private sector labor market.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's work issues - especially in the Gulf region - have become one of the most important issues that occupy large areas of concern. Various human societies seek to achieve comprehensive development that includes all areas of life, the scale of urbanization in any society is measured by the extent to which the laws and regulations of the society grant equal rights to men and women.

Many countries of the world have been keen to directly involve women in work and development, by offering increasingly productive employment opportunities for them; however, in other countries, women labor participation rates are much lower than men's.

There are a group of studies related to women and entrepreneurship such as Sajuyigbe & Fadeyibi (2017) that focused on women and entrepreneurship in Africa particularly in Nigeria, and has addressed the bad status of women for a long period of time in the past and showed the women deprived from privileges such as the finance for small projects. Also, it has addressed the impact of women entrepreneurs on the sustainability of economic development in Nigeria. Moreover, the study has been done on 3150 women entrepreneurs registered in Commerce and Industry Ministry in south west of Nigeria. On the other side, the study of Yousfani et al. (2019) has also addressed examining the tendency of low growth of women entrepreneurs who take a small loan from microfinance institutions. In this study, there are 100 borrowers have been selected, and the data was gathered to measure the impact of microfinance on women entrepreneurial growth in Pakistan. The main parameters of the study were the trend of the startup of the business, the limit of the amount of loan, and training of entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the study has concluded that about 80% women do not start a business, the credit limit is low and ranges between Rs 2000 and 40000, and that there is a dire need for Women

Entrepreneurial Training (WET), which is an upsurge in the limit of loan that directly correlates with the growth of the female enterprise.

According to Al-Asfour (2017); Nawaz et al. (2013); Menhas et al. (2013); Njogu & Orchardson-Mazrui (2009); Akhunzada et al. (2015); Shaheed (2009) they explored the work challenges and career barriers faced by women in several countries such as KSA, Pakistan, Great Lakes in the USA, and Hong Kong, the purpose of these articles were about finding out the experiences of female employed. They have found many cultural, social, and structural barriers which include a lack of mobility; the salience of gender stereotypes; gender discrimination in the workplace; limited opportunities for growth, development, and career advancement; and excessive workload caused by a lack of family-work balance.

Furthermore, there is another study about KSA (Al-Hazmi et al., 2017), that aimed to identify the obstacles facing Saudi woman while working in a mixed work environment. The study has depended on questionnaire and a sample of 233 from health sector female. The article has made a comparative study between the community in Riyadh and Najran, and reached that no statistically significant differences between both groups in accordance to psychological and professional obstacles and the overall questionnaire degree. Furthermore, there were significant differences due to the nature of work, whether a physician, nurse, or administrative employee regarding the social obstacles in favor of the woman working the administration field. There were significant differences with regard to both ethical and psychological obstacles in favor of women working in the administration field.

According to these empirical work and theoretical considerations, the study presents the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>1</sub> There is a significant positive relation between Cultural Barriers and Women Contribution to Private Labor Market.*

There have been few studies regarding society's perspective of woman's work, Ebadah (2011) and Faridi et al. (2009) the first study has dealt with a historical and descriptive tracing of the status of women in Arab societies in various fields, whether political, social, cultural or economic, but it is not addressing what the woman has been able to achieve in terms of achievements and gains. The second study has focused on number of determinants such as social, economic, and demographic as an impact on women work participation with application to Pakistan.

According to Khan & Khan (2009) women contribution to the labor market in the developing countries gained several implications, such as the strengthening of the women stance in the society and family based on the financial capacities, which is reflected on the economic development, but on the other side of the equation, we have the work condition deterioration and the insufficient chances for women to achieve the vertical moving.

Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>1-1</sub> There is a significant positive relation between Society's View to women contribution to private labor market and Women Contribution to Private Labor Market.*

Isa (2018) has mentioned that the important role of women in political participation came through the interest and support of the political system in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and also presented the aspirations and hopes that women want to achieve through their political participation, as well as the challenges and difficulties they face that may hinder further progress, this is focusing on the different methods that can be used to face these challenges.

Also Mahboub (2011) and Khan & Khan (2009) both are focused on the labor market, its needs, its problems, its defects and ways to reform it, and what concerns the localization of jobs and the extent of women's willingness to resettle in different jobs according to the need of the labor market, but the first study has focused on the societal impact on the limited equality within the labor market in GCC and the discrepancies between these countries and the government's role in setting up mechanisms to ensure increased participation of women in the labor market in order to achieve gender equality in obtaining jobs and wages. Second study has a different practice on the married women in Pakistan.

Married women, after marriage, and whether with or without children, spend less time among the labor force than those who are not married and without children (Duncan et al., 1993). And working women in the private and governmental labor markets tend to have few children compared to those who do not work. Even though married women might keep up their economic activities or enter the workforce as new applicants conditioned, they find decent wages (Ofer & Vinokur, 1983), retirement benefits of social security (McGrattan & Rogerson, 2004), husband's positive stance towards their work (Huth, 1978), or profession education and ROI on it. The majority of such women get involved in the labor market, not for the financial necessity, but to pursue a professional career and for their self-actuation (Sayeed et al., 2002).

Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>1-2</sub> There is a significant positive relation Social Status Effect and Women Contribution to Private Labor Market.*

The study of Ponnuswamy & Lysander Manohar (2014); Tiwari et al. (2019); Asadul Islam & Jantan (2017); Samkange & Dingani (2013) have addressed the idea of Glass Ceiling with many different variables such as organization culture model, organizational commitment, but all of these studies have focused on women empowerment in different institutions whether private or public, and mentioned that women face many obstacles and barriers in order to get high positions in management as compared to men. They struggle to get fair representation in corporate boards and higher management levels. These articles are aimed to lay bare the level of Glass Ceiling for Women in terms of its three major barriers such as personal barriers, organizational barriers and societal barriers among women employees working in different countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Zimbabwe service sectors and identify the impact of glass ceiling for women on their work engagement level.

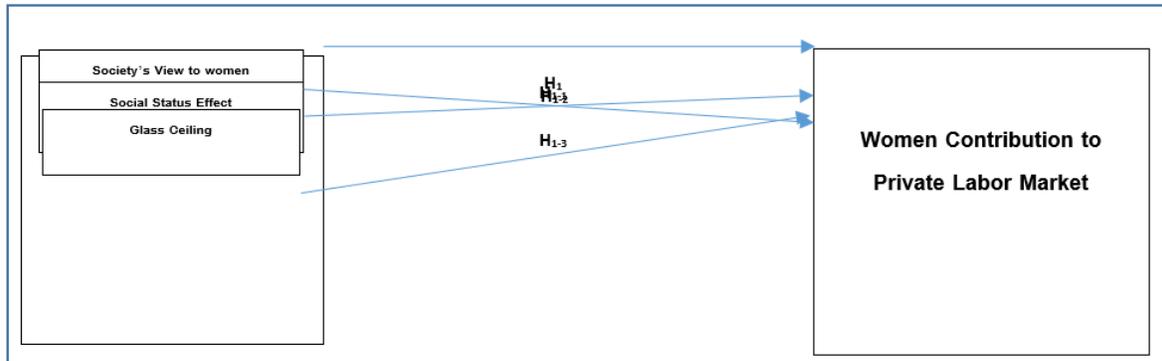
There are a number of studies which addressed the relationship between the work of women and leadership positions such as Radovic Markovic et al. (2013), it argued that Women leadership has been increasing during last forty years, they left their successful in Business, and the problem if this study revolved around "*inequality in the workforce leads to salary gaps and struggles for promotions*", the study focused on the charismatic leader characteristics as a mean for achieving what they want in world business, as well as it focused on identifying a profile of a successful female leader can assist clarifying the direction in which any female manager should head. Another study such as Radovic Markovic et al. (2016); this study has addressed the low percentages of women's participation in the upper levels in business, and aimed at getting comments and opinions of leaders about the women status in leadership levels and knowing the obstacles in front of their improvement. The study has noticed that there is no lack of qualified women in leadership positions but their percentages in leaderships jobs seem less than men. the authors have concluded that there is a need to find a new approach in anti-equality in business, and minimized the barriers which impede women advancement and make a correct action.

Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

$H_{1-3}$  *There is a significant positive relation between Glass Ceiling and Women Contribution to Private Labor Market.*

### Conceptual Framework

In this paper, researchers have developed a conceptual framework to depict the relationship between Cultural Barriers and Women's contribution in the private labor market as follows (Figure 1):



Source: Designed by researchers

**Figure 1**  
**STUDY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### METHODOLOGY

This part of the study speaks of the study variables and their measurement, study population and sample, reliability tools employed and data analysis methods, as follows:

#### Study Variables and Measurement

This study contains three types of variables:

1. Independent Variable, represented in Cultural Barriers along with its used dimensions of Society's View to women contribution to private labor market, Social Status Effect and Glass Ceiling.
2. Dependent Variable, which is Women Contribution to Private Labor Market.

A self-reported questionnaire was distributed on 182 employees working for the service sector organizations to assess their perceptions of the three dimensions of the Cultural Barriers.

#### Validity and Reliability

In addition to using a pilot study representative sample of 40 individuals to assure the reliability of the data collection tool, the researchers assured the constancy and reliability of it through calculating Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the different dimensions used, results of which came as follows:

Table 1 below demonstrates the result of the analysis:

<b>Table 1 STUDY VARIABLES VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY</b>					
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Cultural Barriers Dimensions</b>			<b>Total Cultural Dimensions</b>	<b>Women Contribution to Private Labor Market</b>
Dimensions	Society's View to women contribution to private labor market	Social Status Effect	Glass Ceiling	0.856	0.898
Alpha	0.854	0.819	0.769		
Significance	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01

Table 1 above indicates that the validity and reliability coefficients for the study variables are relatively high, as the least Alpha value was 0.769 for Glass Ceiling. As far as validity is concerned, confidants were high for all study variables, hence, reached results indicate an appropriate degree of internal consistency among the used items. In addition, degrees of correlation coefficients were calculated for each paragraph of the survey, in addition to calculating the total correlation coefficient using SPSS to assure the consistency and validity of the data collection tool used. Consequently, the validity and reliability of the study instrument was assured logically and statistically to collect the study field data.

### **Data Analysis**

SPSS 23 was used in data analysis. Methods used included the following techniques: Descriptive Statistical Measures represented in ratios and repetitions, means, SDs, and correlation coefficients among variables to give initial results about them. Simple and Multiple Regression Analysis were used to test the relationships which included in the research model.

## **RESULTS**

This will include the description of the study variables and initial indicator, then testing the study hypotheses, as follows:

### **Initial Indicators**

Before testing the study hypotheses, it is worth mentioning some of the reflected. In this regard, Table 2 outlines the descriptive statistics of the demographic variables of the study sample:

### **Testing the study hypotheses**

This part contains the statistical data analysis test for the study hypotheses as follows:

#### **Testing H<sub>1</sub>**

To test this hypothesis, we used the simple regression analysis as shown in Table 3

Variable	Category	Repetition	Percentage
Gender	M	165	90.6%
	F	17	9.4%
Age	<25	22	12.09%
	25-36	95	52.20%
	37-50	49	26.92%
	>50	16	8.79%
Qualification	High School	46	25.27%
	Diploma	42	23.08%
	Bachelor	70	38.46%
	Higher Studies	24	13.19%
Experience	<5	41	22.53%
	5-10	70	38.46%
	11-15	37	20.33%
	>16	34	18.68%
Position Status	Employee	128	70.33%
	Supervisor	25	13.74%
	Head of a Section	14	7.69%
	Dept. Manager	15	8.24%
Social Status	Single	52	28.57%
	Married	125	68.68%
	Widow (er)	0	0.00%
	Divorcee	5	2.75%

Variance Source	Freedom	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F-Value	Sig. Level
Among Groups	3	0.611	0.535	10.517	0.01
Within Groups	179				
Total	182				

Source: Data analysis to the study data

Dimension	B	بيتا	T- value	p-value	Sig
Constant	59.455		9.765	0.000	0.01
Society's View to women contribution to private labor market	0.522	0.643	4.768	0.000	0.01
Social Status Effect	0.754	0.553	6.437	0.000	0.01
Glass Ceiling	0.413	0.254	3.7651	0.000	0.01

Source: Data analysis to the study data

The above Tables 3 and 4 a statistically significant effect for the independent variable dimensions together on the independent variable, with a high F value of 10.517 that was

statistically significant at (0.01) which is less than ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ), and this is supported by ( $R^2 = 0.535$ ). Hence, we may say that cultural barriers interpret 53.5% of Women Contribution to Private Labor Market. This is evidenced by the high ( $R = 0.611$ ), and based on that, we accept the first main hypothesis.

### Testing $H_{1-1}$

To test this hypothesis, we used the simple regression analysis as shown in Table 5 below:

Variance Source	Freedom	Beta $\beta$	$R^2$	F-Value	P-Value	Sig. Level
Among Groups	1	0.655	0.247	12.543	0.000	0.01
Within Groups	180					
Total	182					

Source: Data analysis to the study data

The above table show a statistically significant effect for the Society's View to women contribution to private labor market on the independent variable, with a high F value of 12.543 that was statistically significant at (0.01), and this is supported by ( $R^2 = 0.247$ ). Hence, we may say that of Society's View to women contribution to private labor market interprets 24.7% of Women Contribution to Private Labor Market. This is evidenced by the negative  $\beta$  value of 0.655 which is also statistically significant at (0.01), and based on that, we accept the second hypothesis.

### Testing $H_{1-2}$

Variance Source	Freedom	Beta $\beta$	$R^2$	F-Value	P-Value	Sig. Level
Among Groups	1	0.721	0.358	18.654	0.000	0.01
Within Groups	181					
Total	182					

Source: Data analysis to the study data

The above Table 6 a statistically significant effect for Social Status on the independent variable, with a high F value of 18.654 that was statistically significant at (0.01), and this is supported by ( $R^2=0.358$ ). Hence, we may say that of Social Status interprets 35.8% of Women Contribution to Private Labor Market. This is evidenced by the  $\beta$  value of 0.721 which is also statistically significant at (0.01), and based on that, we accept the second hypothesis.

### Testing $H_{1-3}$

The below Table 7 a statistically significant effect for Glass Ceiling on the independent variable, with a high F value of 5.554 that was statistically significant at (0.05), and this is supported by ( $R^2=0.147$ ). Hence, we may say that of Glass Ceiling interprets 14.7% of Women

Contribution to Private Labor Market. This is evidenced by the  $\beta$  value of 0.445 which is also statistically significant at (0.01), and based on that, we accept the second hypothesis.

Variance Source	Freedom	Beta $\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	F-Value	P-Value	Sig. Level
Among Groups	1	0.445	0.147	7.554	0.03	0.05
Within Groups	181					
Total	182					

Source: Data analysis to the study data

## DISCUSSION

Data analysis demonstrated that cultural barriers, represented in the dimensions of Society's View to women contribution to private labor market, Social Status Effect and Glass Ceiling has a substantial impact on Women Contribution to Private Labor Market (53.5%) with the Social Status of woman as being the dimension that effects the dependent variable the most with effect percentage of 35.8, which agrees with results reached by Biswas & Mukhopadhyay (2018) ; Menon & Sharma (2020), followed by Society's View to women contribution to private labor market with 24.7%, which agrees with results reached by Ojediran & Anderson (2020); Aloud et al. (2020), and last came Glass Ceiling with 14.7, which agrees with results reached by Imadoğlu et al. (2020; Eghlidi & Karimi (2020); Radovic et al. (2013).

There is a high rate, based on respondents, to the dimension of Society's View to women contribution to private labor market, which agrees with results reached by Njogu & Orchardson-Mazrui (2009); Kabeer, (2005). Of this perspective, the lack of work opportunities suitable for women in the private sector received the top of attention, in addition to the inappropriateness the working hours in the private sector to the woman's responsibilities towards her family, and her frequent need to have days off which does not align with organizations' functions.

Furthermore, the sample's opinions showed a high demonstration for the effect of woman's social status on her contribution in the labor market, which agrees with the results reached by Choudhry et al. (2019; Menhas et al. (2013). Of this perspective, early marriage was a prominent variable in the weak contribution of women in the private sector labor market and her work out of home was negatively reflected on her relations with her family responsibilities due to the lack of role rotation among spouses.

As far as the glass ceiling is concerned, results showed a high demonstration of a high-level appreciation from the society towards women's assuming of leadership positions in the private sector supported by empowering women in the governmental leadership and the lack of disparity as long as required skills are present. As for the women weak contribution in the private sector labor market, respondents attributed to the lack of job security in the private sector in addition to the lack of motivation, even though they showed a strong tendency towards the availability of parity between the two genders in the private sector, supported by women's contribution in conferences and activities that contribute in the development of the private sector and support to the working woman's stance. In addition to that, they showed a high level of support from the private sector in providing a flexible and appropriate working environment that encourages women to engage.

## CONCLUSION

This article summarized various ways that gender norms act as a barrier to women's full and equal participation in the private sector labor market in Bahrain. Implementing policies and programs that are designed to work around these norms is one way to help female empowerment in this arena. The study is primarily based on cross-sectional data collected via a field survey, in which we have the effects of various socio-cultural factors, Society's View to women contribution to private labor market, Social Status Effect and Glass Ceiling, on female private sector labor market participation. The coefficients of all variables concerned are significant and have positive impact on women contribution in the private sector.

In other words, the invisible barriers that hinder women to advance beyond a certain level in their private sector careers and workplaces seem to exist. The notable factors contributing to these invisible barriers are mainly unequal stances, perspectives and treatment given to women in comparison to men when it comes to their contribution in the private sector labor market. Keeping in view the findings of the study, it is concluded that working women in the private sector in Bahrain are facing social and work place problems. Among these major problems their working hours are too long in private sector, compared to the working hours in the governmental jobs.

In this paper, we sought to show that culture can indeed be an ally to women's empowerment. There are positive attributes to the culture as well as spaces that could be re-inhabited in order to deal more deliberately with empowering women in the private sector. To enhance this situation and to decrease the disparity, we may take some measures to ensure that gender equality is promoted and enforced or enacted and implemented ought to be put in place such as revising wages and working hours in the private sector to make it more appealing to women, and restricting the private sector pay scales so that wages are based on qualifications and required tasks and mission, regardless of gender.

In addition, we may work on enhancing the society's perspective towards the working woman which could be reflected on widening the horizon of the society's stance concerning women assuming leadership positions in the private sector. This could be achieved through the educational curriculums and including the importance of women contribution in the labor market, in addition to rectifying the political and media statements towards the woman. Furthermore, it is necessary to adopt temporary special measures that would accelerate the equality between the two genders using such means that could spread and establish the culture related to woman contribution in the labor market and empowering her to be on equal foot with the man in assuming leadership positions.

### Study limitations and Directions for Future Studies

Due to time and resources constrains, the researchers could not cover all IM dimensions. In addition, the study the study can be used for education purpose, for examining problems of working women in formal sector in general and in selected departments in specific. This study can be useful from policy viewpoint as to reduce or eliminate all the barriers to working women in private sector labor market in Bahrain in specific, and in similar cultures in general.

The study is limited to a small sample due to available resources, and could be enhanced by using a wider one. This study opens horizons of research to study problems of women working in the private sector in different similar countries. The study included only three socio-cultural barriers, and future studies could include other variable such as official stances,

education of women, in addition to comparing women in governmental and private sector labor market or comparing women contribution in different sectors or industries.

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