

# Chapter 4

## Empowering Women Through Public Sector Employment in Qatar: Challenges and Opportunities



Rabia Naguib and Ahmed Aref

**Abstract** Integrating women into the workforce is considered as part of the economic progress formula and modernization process leading to women’s empowerment. While this process has been internally driven in Western societies, it is globally imposed through policy diffusion, raising challenges for policy-makers to adapt the prevailing models to local cultures. Given the dearth of empirical studies in the context of Arab Gulf countries, this chapter offers compelling insights and qualitative evidence of women’s employment in Qatar. It focuses on the public sector as it represents the main employer of women providing many benefits and opportunities while presenting some constraints and challenges. Using an integrative multi-level lens and a culturally sensitive approach results from 50 in-depth semi-structured interviews with civil servants are analyzed to identify factors affecting women’s economic empowerment. The findings highlight the complexity of determining specific factors and provide policy recommendations based on women’s opinions and conveyed voices.

**Keywords** Public sector · Women empowerment · Economic empowerment · Female employment · Labor policies · Opportunities · Challenges · Multi-level perspective · Qatar

### 4.1 Introduction

Women’s empowerment is a top priority for all Arab Gulf countries, including Qatar, where it is a pillar of the National Vision 2030 strategy. In this chapter, empowerment is defined as “a dynamic, context-based process that involves agency and requires

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access to resources for individual and social well-being". This definition emphasizes the importance of local values and cultural practices. Through the voices of interviewed women, it is evident that Arab Gulf countries, including Qatar, have a unique conception of empowerment rooted in their culture and religion, while transnational organizations promote, through their mechanisms of policy diffusion, a westernized version dominated by liberal and capitalist values.

Women's empowerment through gender equality is a key focus of global development initiatives, such as UN Women and the World Bank. The UN Beijing conference led to a commitment to empower women, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a goal (SDG5) to achieve gender equality. Consequently, policy-makers in the context of Arab Gulf countries face a political dilemma and a moral conundrum to balance global pressures with local demands and values while promoting women's empowerment. They have to adopt and comply with the borrowed policies and exogenous models of development.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime, they need to adapt to the internal requirements and respect the local values and preserve the national identity. As highlighted by Tok et al. (2016), Qatari policy-makers are struggling to achieve a balance between Islam, social traditions, and modernity. Qatar's National Vision 2030 seeks to preserve Arab and Islamic values and identity while empowering women in political and economic decision-making roles. The national vision balances empowerment through agency and resources with the context of Arab identity and Islamic values.

However, the focus of women's empowerment outcomes remains largely on economic indicators such as income and female labor force participation, neglecting overall well-being, and turning actually the means to becoming an end. The United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) measures long-term progress based on standard of living, lifespan, and educational attainment, but does not fully capture empowerment or inequalities (UNDP, 2021).<sup>2</sup> There is a need for subjective indicators of well-being to better understand multiple domains of people's lives (Diener et al., 2009), as cultural norms can influence these indicators (Miranti et al., 2017). The importance of subjective indicators<sup>3</sup> is highlighted by the limitations of objective measures like the HDI.

The Qatari government prioritizes families as a key part of society and the basis of the nation, as outlined in the National Vision 2030 and the Qatari Constitution (2003). To support women's empowerment, the government provides education and employment opportunities, particularly in the public sector, which is the main employer for

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<sup>1</sup> The government has to provide every 5 years a national report on "the complete and effective implementation of Beijing Declaration" related to gender equality and women's empowerment. The last report covered the period (2014–2019). [https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/Qatar\\_en.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/Qatar_en.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> UNDP (2021). Human Development reports. Retrieved from: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#/countries/QAT>. Accessed on Nov 25, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Subjective indicators can only be measured by asking a person to self-rate their experiences, and examine a person's feelings and experiences (e.g., level of satisfaction with life, happiness, or satisfaction with a range of aspects of life such as their relationships, security, sense of personal safety, and having strong social connections) (Miranti et al., 2017, p. 11).

nationals. With 92% of female nationals employed in the public sector, Qatar leads the GCC in terms of economically active women (Planning & Statistics Authority, 2020a, 2020b). However, various factors impact women's employment, including macro-level factors such as oil wealth (Ross, 2008), cultural norms (Masoud et al., 2016; Metcalfe, 2011; Moghadam, 2004), and workplace practices and individual attitudes (Haghighat, 2013; Lari, 2016). To account for these multiple factors, this study uses an integrative multi-level research lens (Naguib, 2022; Naguib & Jamali, 2015), drawing on findings from in-depth interviews with 50 males and females in the public sector.

This chapter provides qualitative evidence on women's empowerment in the Qatari public sector. It begins with a review of contextual factors at the macro level, including legislative frameworks, to understand the local context. The chapter then presents the results of the empirical research exploring the factors that promote or hinder women's empowerment in the Qatari public sector. A critical and culturally sensitive discussion follows, and the chapter concludes with policy recommendations based on the opinions and voices of the participants interviewed.

## 4.2 Background: Contextual Challenges and Policy Frameworks

Qatar is a rapidly transforming state undergoing fast economic and societal change (Tok et al., 2016). It has a rich natural gas reserve and has invested its rent revenues in development, turning from a traditional society into a modern and technologically advanced one (Al-Ansari, 2020). The government has increased women's participation in education, healthcare, and the workforce, and Qatar is classified as a very high human development country (UNDP, 2021), with the fourth highest GDP per capita income (World Bank, 2021), and a ranking of 29th most competitive nation (World Economic Forum, 2019).<sup>4</sup> Yet, there are complex challenges and legal frameworks to consider in understanding the need for adapted policies for women's employment and economic empowerment in this context.

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<sup>4</sup> The Global Competitiveness Index includes 98 variables organized into twelve pillars: institutions; infrastructure; ICT adoption; macroeconomic stability; health; skills; product market; labor market; financial system; market size; business dynamism; and innovation capability. It emphasizes the role of human capital, innovation, resilience, and agility as drivers of economic success (<https://tradingeconomics.com/qatar/competitiveness-rank>).

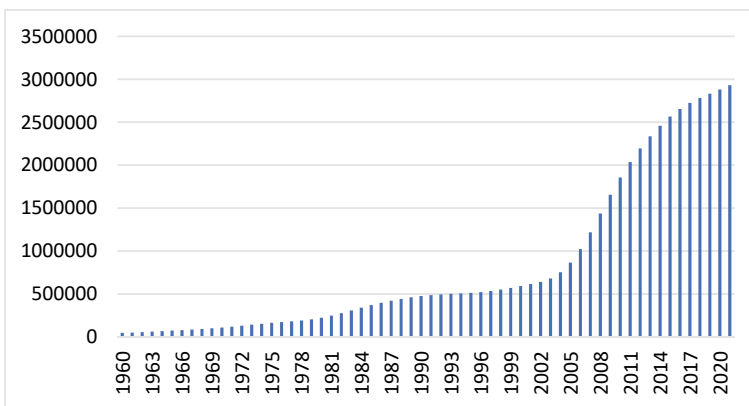
### 4.2.1 Contextual Challenges Affecting Women's Employment in Qatar

Women's labor force participation has been a central topic of discussion in literature on women's economic empowerment in the GCC region (Young, 2016). The inclusion of women in the workforce in the GCC countries presents unique policy challenges due to the political and economic context. However, data on women's labor force participation in the GCC countries is inconsistent with existing research on women in the Middle East (Buttorff et al., 2018). This inconsistency is attributed to situational factors and specific characteristics associated with the national labor market and local context, which will be briefly discussed in the following section.

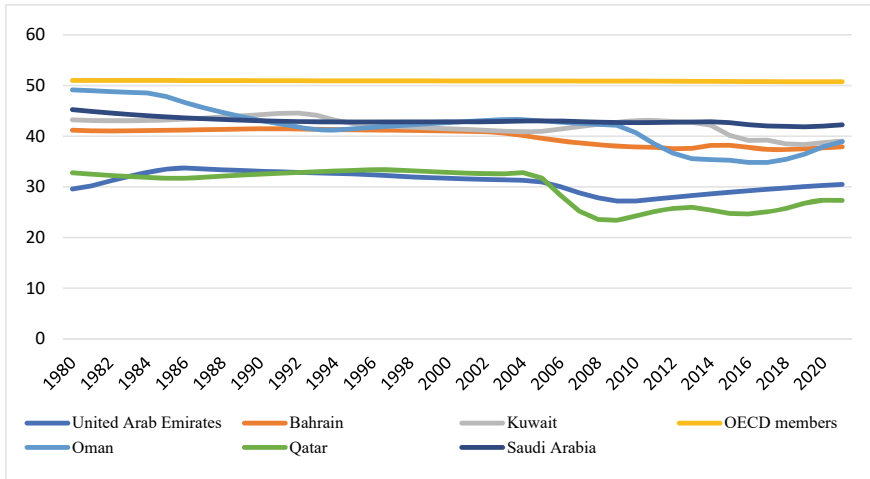
#### a. Demographic Imbalance

The population of Qatar is estimated to be 2.9 million in 2021 (World Bank, 2022a). The population has grown fourfold since the start of the millennium, primarily due to an increase in foreign workers, reflecting Qatar's rapid development and major projects (Fig. 4.1). This has resulted in a significant imbalance in the demographic composition between Qatari citizens and expatriates from other countries who now make up the majority of the population. According to a 2014 report, only 14% of the population in the country are Qataris (Madar Research and Development, 2014). Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have the greatest imbalance between nationals and expatriates among the GCC states.

Additionally, due to the high influx of male workers, women make up only a quarter of the total population. The sex ratio of the total population is 3.150 (3,150 males per 1,000 females), which is significantly higher compared to the global sex ratio of 1.016 in 2021. Among GCC countries, Qatar has the lowest proportion of female population compared to the OECD members (Fig. 4.2). The demographic



**Fig. 4.1** Qatar population (1960–2021) (Source <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.FE.ZS>. Accessed December 6, 2022)



**Fig. 4.2** GCC female population (% of total population) (1980–2021) (Source <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=QA>. Accessed December 6, 2022)

imbalance, with males accounting for 76% of the population, results in a higher rate of male labor force participation and a persistent gender gap. Young (2016) highlights the role of migrant labor in perpetuating gender inequality in GCC countries.

#### b. Declining Fertility Rates

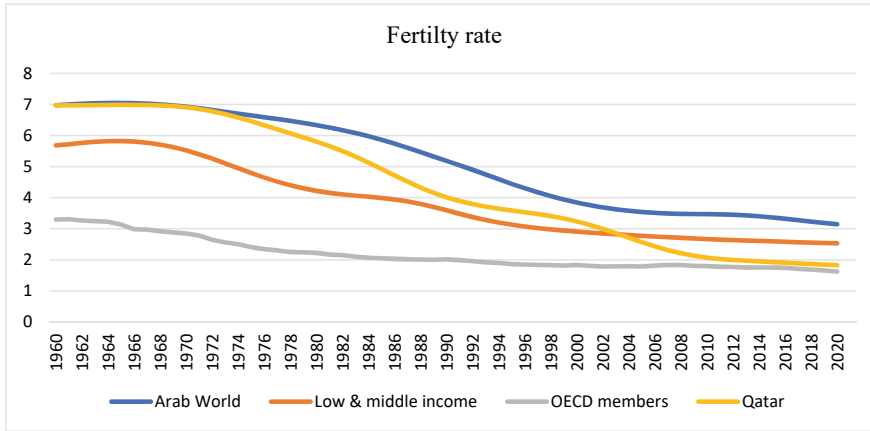
Samari (2020) found that in the context of Egypt, higher education attainment is associated with a lower fertility rate and a more egalitarian attitude toward gender norms, leading to fewer children and easier entry into the labor force. Meanwhile, Qatar boasts one of the highest rates of female education in the region but also faces one of the steepest declines in fertility among GCC countries. The fertility rate in Qatar dropped from 6.9 in the 1960s to 1.8 in 2020, comparable to the rate in OECD countries (Fig. 4.3). According to national statistics, the fertility rate among Qatari women only fell from 4.5 in 1997 to 2.6 in 2019 (PSA, 2020a).

The declining fertility rates present a security threat to the sustainability of Gulf societies and pose a challenge for policy-makers who must balance empowering women through education and economic participation with the need to maintain and grow the local population. A population projection (2020–2100) shows a severe decline in growth starting from 2030,<sup>5</sup> requiring policy-makers to set strategic priorities adapted to their local context.

#### c. Concentration of Women in Specific Sectors

A challenge in empowering women in Qatar is the local economic activity structure, which emphasizes non-traded sectors and heavy industries with a concentration of male-dominant foreign labor force. As a result, Qatari women are mostly employed

<sup>5</sup> <https://countrymeters.info/en/Qatar>.



**Fig. 4.3** Qatar fertility rate (1960–2021) (Source World Development Indicators [2022]. <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/WLD/world/fertility-rate>. Accessed December 6, 2022)

in professional roles (46%) and administrative positions (30%), while Qatari men are more prevalent in craft and trade professions (38%) (PSA, 2020b). The majority of Qatari citizens, both male and female, are employed in the public sector with 81.7% of females and 81% of males being economically active. However, when compared to the total number of workers in this sector, women make up only 20% compared to 9.8% for men (Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs (MADLSA, 2019).

The concentration of Qatari women in government agencies and institutions can be attributed to job stability, retirement benefits, reduced working hours, stable wages, and social status. However, the majority of unemployed Qatari women (83.2%) are not willing to work in the private sector compared to just 16.8% of unemployed men (PSA, 2022). Conversely, the majority of non-Qatari men work in the private sector (85%), while the majority of foreign female workers, primarily from Asia, are employed in the domestic sector (38.9%) (PSA, 2020a). This highlights the “heavy reliance of many families on domestic workers” as noted in the second National Development Strategy (2018–2022) (PSA, 2019, p. 221).

**4.2.1.1 Education and Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP)**

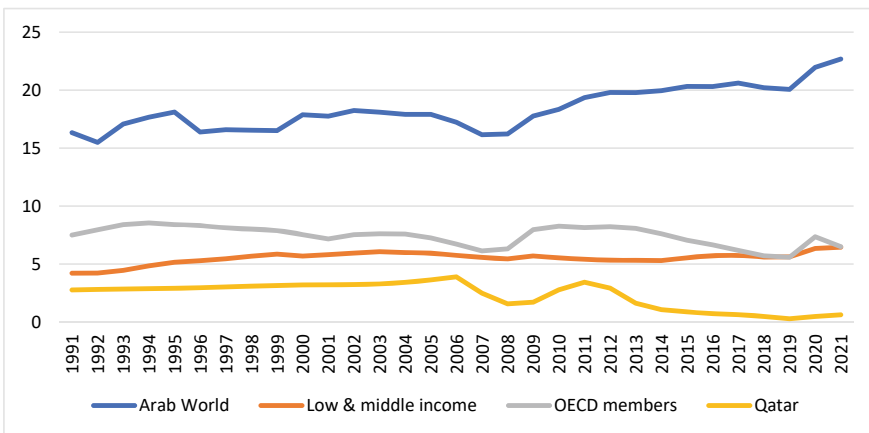
Qatar has made great achievements in the field of education. The literacy rate, representing a key indicator in the field of human development, reached 99.3% for females and 99.1% for males indicating a gender equity and good access to educational opportunities for all (PSA, 2020b). Theoretically, the higher the female educational level, the higher the female labor force participation. However, this relationship is different in Qatar and most GCC countries. According to Hendy (2016), even though the educational attainment level of women is higher than men in Qatar and other Gulf

states, their involvement in the labor force remains the lowest in the region. However, as observed by Buttorff et al. (2018), measuring female economic participation in the GCC states as a percentage of the total labor force is not accurate given the high demographic imbalances and the large share of migrant male labor. In addition to the gender imbalance in the country and its peculiar work structure, the low female participation can be explained by a change in opportunity structures for educated women (Assaad et al., 2018). The Gulf state experiences work structure imbalances in two aspects. First, there is significant disparity between nationals and expatriates in the labor force. The second dimension concerns the proportion of nationals in the public sector.

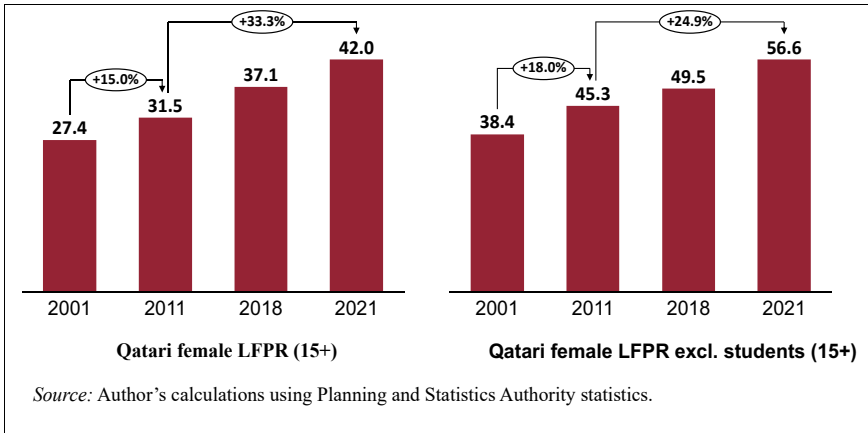
In Qatar, women are primarily employed in the public sector, but with declining growth in opportunities in this sector, unemployment has become an issue. Despite this, female unemployment in Qatar remains low compared to Arab countries and OECD members (Fig. 4.4). The main reasons for female unemployment are lack of job opportunities, health conditions, lack of experience, unsuitability of jobs, inadequate academic qualifications, and search for better jobs (PSA, 2022). Despite the gender imbalance in Qatar, the gender equality index for Qataris is 55.4%, with a female economic participation rate of 37.6% compared to 67.9% for men (PSA, 2020b).

Qatar has seen significant progress in female economic participation over the years. The Qatari female labor force participation rate rose from 27.4% in 2001 to 42.0% in 2021. Excluding Qatari female students, the rate increased from 38.4% in 2001 to 56.6% in 2021 (Fig. 4.5). According to the latest labor force sample survey (2022), 43% of Qatari women are economically active, while 57% are inactive, compared to 65% and 35% for non-Qatari women, respectively (PSA, 2022).

The reasons for Qatari women’s inability or reluctance to participate in the economy are mainly due to their commitment to education or their families. Many



**Fig. 4.4** Female unemployment in Qatar (% of female labor force) (Source <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.FE.ZS>. Accessed December 6, 2022)



**Fig. 4.5** Qatari female labor force participation rate, 2001–2021

are full-time students (44%) or homemakers (42.8%), with only 10% being retired (PSA, 2022). Becoming a homemaker can be a personal choice motivated by family priorities, such as childcare (Golkowska, 2014). A survey of young Qatari graduates found that female students, with diverse educational and professional goals, agreed that family and child-rearing are the top priority once married (James-Hawkins et al., 2017).

**d. Wage Gap**

The wage gap in Qatar is wide due to the imbalanced local economic activity structure and the high proportion of female migrants in domestic work. In 2019, the average female monthly income was 88.9% of the average male income, a gap of 11.1% (PSA, 2020a). However, some high-skilled fields, such as construction, manufacturing, and accommodation and food service, showed a favorable wage ratio for women reaching 200%, 167.1%, and 139% respectively (PSA, 2020b). The average monthly wage for total paid employees was QR 11,737, with males earning QR 11,642 and females earning QR 11,990 (PSA, 2022). These data suggest that policy-makers are making an effort to reduce gender inequality, particularly in terms of the wage gap.

**e. Gender Roles and Sharing Family Responsibilities**

Challenges that hinder women’s empowerment in Qatar’s public sector include the difficulty in balancing family and work responsibilities. Cultural and social norms place the burden of family duties on women, limiting their participation in the workforce. Women in almost all countries, particularly in the Gulf Arab states, work longer hours than men when combining paid and unpaid work (Al-Ansari, 2020). The challenge to balance work and family obligations leaves women with two options: quitting work or delegating parenting responsibilities to domestic workers. This latter option



has negative effects on women's ability to raise their children and on their psychological development (Al-Matary & Ali, 2013). To address this, the second National Development Strategy aims to reduce the use of domestic staff and promote family cohesion, while the National Vision seeks to reduce gender stereotypes and promote women's full participation in the workforce. However, cultural barriers, such as patriarchy, continue to impact women's employment (Salem & Yount, 2019). Social and cultural barriers at both individual and community levels also pose obstacles to women's employment.

#### ***4.2.2 Strategic and Legal Frameworks Related to Women's Empowerment in Qatar***

The empowerment of women in Qatar is influenced by both legal frameworks and cultural practices. While the absence of legal rights and protections for women can hinder their workforce participation, this is not the case in Qatar, where gender equality is enshrined in law (Felder & Vuollo, 2008). However, as pointed out by Golkowska (2017), the country's National Vision 2030 affirms gender equality in legal terms but also leaves the challenge of bridging the gap between modern practices and traditional customs with regard to gender relations and women's empowerment to women themselves.

To support women's empowerment, the first and second National Development Strategies (NDS) were developed, with the second NDS (2018–2022) being more explicit in its efforts. The strategy explicitly stated the government's commitment to increasing the number of women in leadership and decision-making positions and reducing gender stereotypes. It also aimed to improve the individual well-being of all Qataris, through increased career opportunities for women and better occupational safety standards. One of the eight priorities for family cohesion identified in the NDS was empowering women, through measures such as expanding childcare facilities and family-friendly employment practices and promoting gender-sensitive working environments (NDS, 2018–2022, p. 175).

The first National Development Strategy in Qatar aimed to increase women's empowerment through the recognition of their capabilities and qualifications for political and leadership positions. The "Women in Leadership" program was established to build women's skills, increase their representation in decision-making roles, and create a supportive environment. The second National Strategy continued to monitor progress made in women's empowerment and included the "Empowering and Educating Women" project under the violence prevention program, which was implemented by the Protection and Social Rehabilitation Center with support from the Qatar Foundation for Social Work and the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs. Despite higher average educational attainment by women, the strategy acknowledged the existence of a "glass ceiling" in employment

and promotion opportunities for women. The strategy aimed to address this challenge and change traditional views toward women through various initiatives.

The legislative framework in Qatar supports its vision of empowering women. The constitution codified gender equality in 1999, granting female Qataris the right to vote and hold public office (Golkowska, 2017). In addition, labor laws reinforce equality in the workforce, such as Law No. 1 of the Civil Service Act (2001), which guarantees equal pay and career advancement, and Law No. 24 of 2002, which provides retirement benefits to working women. Qatar has also ratified the International Labor Organization's Convention No. 111 on job discrimination in the workplace (AlMunnajjed, 2011). The labor law offers generous benefits to working women, including 50 days of paid maternity leave, the right to a daily one-hour breastfeeding break for one year, and protection from dismissal due to marriage or maternity (UNIFEM, 2023). The Civil Human Resources Law No. (15) of 2016, which replaces the Human Resources Law No. (8) of 2009 and regulates the public sector, includes provisions aimed at further empowering working women by promoting work-family balance.

Secondary data shows that various contextual challenges, including structural, situational, and cultural factors, influence women's empowerment in the public sector in Qatar. However, there is limited research on these factors in this context. The following sections present the results of field research to identify the factors affecting women's empowerment, based on the perspectives of female and male public sector employees.

### ***4.2.3 Factors Affecting Women's Empowerment: A Qualitative Analysis***

This section focuses on the results of the qualitative aspect of the study. The aim is to uncover the enabling and hindering factors of women's empowerment in the public sector in Qatar through the experiences of 50 women and men working in this sector. The interviews were structured to gather the participants' perceptions of the concepts and dynamics of empowerment in the public sector. Their perspectives serve as the main source of understanding the driving forces for women's empowerment and the obstacles that hinder it. The interview questions were designed to be comprehensive, allowing the participants to share their experiences and opinions beyond the formal factors in the work environment.

### ***4.2.4 Methods***

This research employs a mixed methods approach, including an online survey with a sample size of 510 civil servants and semi-structured interviews with 50 participants (33 women and 17 men) working in the public sector. The participants were selected

using referral and snowball sampling and were interviewed to share their perceptions on the concepts and dynamics of women's empowerment in the public sector. Their narratives provide insight into the driving forces behind women's empowerment and the barriers that hinder it. The interview questions were designed to elicit a comprehensive understanding of the participants' attitudes and experiences, going beyond formal factors in the work environment. In this section, we present the qualitative findings through thematic analysis, where themes were extracted and analyzed from the interview narratives.

The inductive approach is a widely used reporting tool in qualitative research, especially among social constructivist researchers. It involves the identification, analysis, and interpretation of narratives to derive major themes. This bottom-up approach thoroughly examines the data and identifies recurring patterns of meaning that form the core findings of the study (Thomas, 2006). Table 4.1 highlights the demographic characteristics of the participants, which are crucial to understand the themes derived from their narratives.

Most of the participants (48%) were in their 30s to 40s, and the majority of them were women (66%). Most participants were also Qatar nationals (62%) and held a high level of education, including Bachelor's (40%) and Master's/Ph.D. degrees (54%). The sample had a good representation of participants who were married (52%) and held leadership positions at the 4th rank or higher (54%). These demographic characteristics are important to consider when analyzing the themes derived from the data.

#### ***4.2.5 Data Analysis: A Multi-level and Multidimensional Approach***

The semi-structured interviews conducted in this study revealed several themes related to the opportunities and challenges affecting women's empowerment in the public sector in Qatar. The themes, which represent a mix of internal and external factors, highlight the importance of considering a multi-level and multidimensional approach to understand the process of women's empowerment in the workplace. The internal factors include individual and psychological dimensions, while the external factors involve institutional, organizational, societal, and cultural norms. A summary of the empirical results and relevant quotes from the participants are presented in separate tables to provide consistency throughout the report and to help illustrate the multiple factors impacting women's employment in Qatar.

##### **4.2.5.1 Individual Factors: Agency and Outcomes Related Dimensions**

Women's empowerment is a multifaceted concept, involving agency that enables women to make decisions and exert control over their lives. In the context of this

**Table 4.1** Demographics characteristics of the participants

	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	0–19	0	0
	20–29	6	12
	30–39	24	48
	40–49	13	26
	50–59	4	10
	60–69	2	4
Gender	Male	17	34
	Female	33	66
Nationality	Qatari	31	62
	Non-Qatari	19	38
Marital Status	Single	15	30
	Married	27	54
	Divorced	8	16
Education Level	PhD	6	12
	Master's	21	42
	Bachelor's	20	40
	Secondary	3	6
Discipline	Arts & Humanities	7	14
	Social Sciences	19	38
	Math and Information Science	9	18
	Other	15	30
Job Rank according to Human Resources Law of 2016	Rank 1	8	16
	Rank 2	7	14
	Rank 3	9	18
	Rank 4	3	6
	Rank 5	3	6
	Rank 6	11	22
	Rank 7	7	14
	Other	11	22

study, the participants pointed to both individual and psychological factors that can either support or hinder women's empowerment. These factors, such as women's personality, motivation, self-efficacy, and determination, are considered to play a crucial role in determining women's agency in the workplace.

It is worth noting that women's empowerment goes beyond the ability to make decisions and choices, it encompasses the overall well-being and quality of life of women. In this light, many participants linked women's empowerment to job

**Table 4.2** Multi-level analysis of Women Empowerment/Employment in the public sector: Micro/Individual Level

Perceived influencing factors	Respondents' Quotes
Job satisfaction/Intrinsic motivation	"Personally, I love what I am doing in the field of media and projects. I am enjoying my work and feel empowered" (I#49, FQ) "I think that the negative impact of the work on personal life is less for a single woman, than for married and working mothers" (I#4, FQ)
Leadership/Participation in decision-making	"Being named in charge of a department, at a time when there were alternative options and male colleagues available, is an indication of my empowerment as a woman. My opinion is considered in some specialized issues to a large and wide degree. The degree of the responsibility reflects on the level of empowerment" (I#11, FQ) "To be empowered for me, requires to be asked about my opinion, to be heard, to listen to what I have to say, to be able to express my point of view along with others, so that decisions related to mu work are made based on my experience, and my knowledge that I sought and my certificates that I obtained and the training that the State paid for" (I#10, FQ) "As a manager, I give the employee a scope of freedom to act and make a decision. It is good that one delegates the authority to his subordinates on the basis that they get the necessary trainings" (I#14, FQ) "Empowerment in the workplace implies that I can make a decision without having to constantly go back to my boss" (I#23, FM) "Being empowered, means being able to make decision at work, able to be lead and to express your opinion" (I#32, FQ)

satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and a love for their work. In addition, participants also emphasized the importance of women’s ability to lead and make decisions in the workplace. Table 4.2 presents a summary of the micro-level factors affecting women’s empowerment and includes selected quotes from the participants to provide a deeper understanding of these factors.

**4.2.5.2 Work Environment and Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is a critical factor in employee retention and motivation in the workplace. When employees are satisfied with their jobs, they are more likely to stay with an organization and progress in their careers. Results indicate that the work environment has a mixed impact on personal life, with 24.2% of women and 32.4% of men feeling that it positively affects their personal life, while 38.8% of women and 35.2% of men feel that it has a negative impact. This suggests that men are more likely to see their work environment as having a positive impact on their personal life, while women are more likely to experience it as negative. Results also show

that men are generally more satisfied with their work environment than women, with 60.9% of men and 52.7% of women indicating at least some level of satisfaction. However, more women than men prefer to remain in the public sector, despite lower levels of job satisfaction, because it offers job security, stability, and benefits such as less working hours, social status, and retirement benefits. Additionally, the findings suggest that marital status and number of children can have a significant impact on women's job satisfaction.

#### **4.2.5.3 Leadership and Participation in Decision-Making**

Participants unanimously agreed that key components of empowerment through employment are active involvement in decision-making, the ability to express opinions and contribute personal experience and knowledge, delegation of authority, trust, and support for personal initiatives, and the ability to lead and communicate change. Despite many participants holding managerial and leadership positions, they reported feeling restricted by the nature of the field, workplace culture, bureaucracy, and poor management practices. Research by Jaradat (2019) and Al-Ansari (2020) support these findings, highlighting challenges such as lack of support, societal refusal of women as leaders, and lack of confidence as factors that hinder women's advancement in leadership positions. The struggle to balance work and family life was also a factor that led some participants, including those with PhDs and high-level leadership positions, to resign. Therefore, policy-makers need to consider the impact of organizational and societal factors on women's agency and intrinsic motivation to improve their effective participation in the workforce and overall well-being.

#### **4.2.5.4 Organizational Factors: Resources-Related Dimensions**

The empowerment of women through employment is greatly impacted by organizational and institutional factors, with the public sector being a major provider of employment opportunities and benefits such as a favorable work environment, higher pay, and retirement benefits. However, it also faces challenges in the form of organizational culture, laws, managerial practices, and work climate that hinder women's empowerment. Participants identified common barriers such as limited agency, poor work-life balance policies, bureaucracy, routine work, lack of capacity-building, and unequal treatment of nationals and expatriates. Table 4.3 summarizes these meso-level factors and includes quotes from participants.

#### **4.2.5.5 Recruitment/Access to Employment in the Public Sector**

Access to employment in the public sector remains a critical factor in the growth of women's labor force participation in Qatar and the main source of job opportunities. Participants reported that the most common way for women to secure employment

**Table 4.3** Multi-level analysis of Women Empowerment/Employment in the public sector: Meso/Organizational Level

Perceived influencing factors	Respondents' Quotes
Recruitment/Hiring process	<p>“Empowerment at work relates to providing opportunities for an individual to get the job based on merit and competency, regardless of gender” (I#46, FQ)</p> <p>“At the institutional level, I really don't think the hiring policies disadvantage women, based on gender or specific marital status” (I#23, FM)</p> <p>“I had 3 interviews and after that I started my job normally. This took place in 2013, now the procedures have changed, they have become very different, before if I want to apply for a job, I must go to the authorities and apply in person, now there is an electronic program—where you fill in your personal data, CV and apply, or check vacancies and apply” (I#4, FQ)</p> <p>“The entity/Ministry was in contact with the university to nominate students with cumulative GPAs above 3.0. So, as soon as I received my graduation certificate, I immediately started working in this ministry” (I#28, FQ)</p> <p>“My CV reached the Ministry and I was contacted directly. I was interviewed and was nominated and recommended” (I#44, MQ)</p>
Skills development/ Capacity-building	<p>“We need to have a clear career path and the necessary trainings to get the next grade and understand what are the short and long-term goals to reach the career objectives” (I#38, FQ)</p> <p>“Developing job skills, providing training courses, and expanding opportunities for employees to further build their capacity is part of their empowerment” (I#47, MQ)</p> <p>“The ministry's work schedule was appropriate and they would grant me a leave a week before the exams period what enabled me to complete my master's degree” (I#4, QW)</p>
Promotion	<p>“For the ministry, you get promoted automatically, based on your educational level and the years of experience” (I#47, MQ)</p> <p>“Promotion is based on the civil human resources law of periodical promotion that occurs every three years, depending on the corporate career ladder” (I#11, FQ)</p> <p>“The promotion process is very narrow, unless I change my current field of work or resign” (I#5, FQ)</p> <p>“There is a certain system according to the Qatari labor law, in which you are subject to promotion automatically. This is only for Qataris in the government sector. Non-Qataris enter on a designated salary and remain with the same rank and the same salary indefinitely” (I#26, FM)</p> <p>“I have been working for almost 8 years without getting promoted. It is very frustrating” (I#23, FM)</p> <p>“To get to senior positions is a discretionary matter. There are no clear criteria” (I#4, FQ)</p>

(continued)

**Table 4.3** (continued)

Perceived influencing factors	Respondents' Quotes
Relationship with supervisor	<p>“Empowerment at work depends on the employee’s direct manager. I came across different direct managers. There is a difference in the way I felt empowerment depending on how much freedom I had to make decisions” (I#9, FQ)</p> <p>“I am not in a kind of leadership position. However, when there is a decision that is being made to develop the department, my boss does ask for my opinion, and I feel involved in the decision-making process” (I#30, FM)</p> <p>“At the departmental level, I would say that the flexibility of your manager is definitely a contributing factor” (I#21, FM)</p> <p>“If there is flexibility from higher management, the employee will be able to produce and innovate. Feeling comfortable at work would make him/her more empowered, but on the other hand, if there were restrictions to freedom, you will feel disempowered” (I#16, FQ)</p>
Agency segregation/ gender wage gap	<p>“The number of working women in our workplace is a factor of empowerment. It’s very comforting that I work in an environment where my boss is a woman, the team working under my supervision are also women. So, I feel empowered amongst a huge group of women, I don’t feel alone, unlike when I’m in a group of men” (I#7, FQ)</p>
Compensation	<p>“I don’t think there are enough flexibility in laws and policies, regarding financial incentives to encourage or make women equal to men. Let’s talk for example about the spouse allowance, it is only given to men and not to married women, the land loan in the country is given to married men even though they receive a title based on the marriage contract. When I got divorced, I applied for support certificate to prove that I have my children under my custody, and only in that condition I received the spouse allowance” (I#46, QW)</p>

(continued)



Table 4.3 (continued)

Perceived influencing factors	Respondents' Quotes
Work-life balance	<p>“In order to be a productive person, we need to be able to take care of our family” (I#9, FQ)</p> <p>“When covid started, all of the working mothers we wrote a petition to say that we can't keep up abalance because of online learning and having to work, but unfortunately it didn't go through, it was shut down” (I#33, FM)</p> <p>“One of the reasons I had to resign was the long working hours preventing me from spending more time with my children and taking care of them” (I#12, QNW)</p> <p>“There is a need for improvement of the regulations related to maternity, breastfeeding and nursery” (I#22, MW)</p> <p>“There are laws in place generally for both men and women without taking into account women's nature or her nature being a mother or a caregiver. I'm talking particularly about mothers who have children. So, when you make me come to work same as men 7 h a day, you didn't consider the concept of family, particularly that there are some campaigns at Aman Centre for women and children protection under the title “drive your child”. How am I going to drive my child when me and his father go to work at the same time? And this child must be present at school at the same time as well. We all must be present at 7 am or 7:30 maximum. I mean, you set up, start a campaign, you invest resources on it, while you don't even have laws that supports this campaign or back it up. I mean I feel that these are mere slogans without any real change” (I#3, QW)</p> <p>“The maternal leave is supposed to extend to the man also so that there can truly be a balance within the family and the tasks distributed among them fairly” (I#9, QW)</p> <p>“The maternity leave is only two months, it is not enough for the woman physically and mentally to go back to work. I wish there were some policies to help the woman have a little bit of balance between her career and her life at home. I wish to see policies that will empower us more. I am sure that many women quit or went for a part-time job, just because of this.” (I#2, FM)</p>

(continued)

**Table 4.3** (continued)

Perceived influencing factors	Respondents' Quotes
Social exclusion	<p>“To feel empowered, I need to feel that I’m being included, that my rights are guaranteed in the policies and procedures, and that my own circumstances as a woman are taken into consideration. Both men and women are going through some difficult situations and need inclusive and multi-scenarios policies to make them feel empowered” (I#34, FQ)</p> <p>“In the public sector, as non-Qatari people, we do not have opportunities. But during my work in the public sector, I received an opportunity for promotion and a salary increase. This is only because my manager made like a special case which she submitted to the Board of Trustees to get the approval. But in the normal situations, it is very rare for non-Qatari to get promoted” (I#26, FM)</p> <p>“In the public sector HR policies, there is empowerment and help for Qatari. But for non-Qatari it is not clear. There are differences” (I#25, FM)</p>
Gender discrimination/ Gender equality	<p>“When the culture is purely patriarchal or tends to favour men in certain fields, men are hired regardless of the competency, and women are disqualified and discredited because they have a family or they get pregnant. There are entities who actually do so, and I have witnessed cases where women were rejected because they were pregnant even though they were highly qualified” (I#28, FQ)</p> <p>“Empowerment is about equality of opportunities, fairness and absence of discrimination based on gender. Evaluations should be based on competency and efforts, regardless of gender” (I#46, FQ)</p> <p>“The policies related to Human Resources... not all of them are supporting women” (I#1, FQ)</p> <p>“In the workplace, you are fine as long as you are single. There is a negative view from the work community, from managers and colleagues, of pregnant women and those who have children” (I#14, FQ)</p>

in the public sector was through formal procedures by applying to the Ministry of Administrative Development. Many female participants stated that they applied, went through multiple interviews, and were ultimately hired. On the other hand, men tended to rely on references and recommendations as a key means of access to employment. This suggests that networking is more significant for men and that the Ministry of Administrative Development is working to increase the number of women in the workforce. Participants agreed that hiring policies at the institutional level do not discriminate against women based on gender or marital status.

#### **4.2.5.6 Skills Development and Capacity-Building**

The availability of professional development opportunities and capacity-building is crucial for women's empowerment and growth in the public sector workplace. The expansion of skills and knowledge through such programs can lead to promotions or raises, and thus contribute to employees' upward mobility. However, the results of this study suggest that women may not have equal access to professional development opportunities compared to men. Only 32.1% of women and 54.2% of men reported that their organization supports professional development and education scholarships, and 36.4% of women and 42.2% of men reported that their agency provides a professional development plan. According to one interviewed expert, the current focus on short-term training courses in the public sector is not enough and there is a need for long-term capacity-building plans. To achieve women's empowerment in the workplace, it is important to have a clear career path and to provide equal professional development opportunities for all employees in the public sector.

#### **4.2.5.7 Promotion**

The promotion of women in the workplace is seen as a key factor in empowering them (Agran et al., 2016; Rusch, 1990). Participants in this research were asked about the criteria for promotion and most of them said that the procedures are based on the human resources law and the manager's evaluation or "boss's referral", along with years of experience and education. The data shows that women were more likely than men to receive a promotion based on higher education, with 52.4% of those who were promoted due to education being women and 73.2% of those who received a raise due to education being women. However, some interviewees reported that subjective factors such as connections and favoritism also play a role in promotions, and even referred to the process as "discretionary". When asked about women's potential for growth and promotion, 73% of the interviewees said they have the competence to be promoted, while 12% said they could not be considered due to citizenship status. Therefore, the eligibility for promotion remains a critical issue.

#### **4.2.5.8 Relationship with Supervisor**

The relationship with one's supervisor is crucial for job satisfaction, job retention, and upward mobility. Supervisors often have a significant impact on promotions and professional development. As per the participants' responses, empowerment in the workplace is largely dependent on the employee's direct manager. When asked to describe their relationship with their supervisor, 76.2% of women and 84.0% of men reported it as cooperative. In terms of feeling motivated and supported by their supervisor, 52% of women and 64% of men agreed. This indicates that men have better relationships with their supervisors and why they feel more satisfied with their work environment. Although most participants reported cooperative relationships at work, some pointed out instances of bad management practices and discrimination from their direct supervisor, resulting in a hostile and demotivating work environment. As one interviewee stated: "Institutional policies exist, but they are not always followed by senior managers who pursue their own agenda" (I#25, FM).

#### **4.2.5.9 Agency Segregation and Gender Wage Gap**

Gender-based pay disparities in the public sector are a widespread issue, with women often concentrated in lower paying industries. However, in the case of Qatari female public sector workers, they are found to earn more income than their male peers in the same positions. This is a unique finding compared to most countries, where women are paid less than men within the same rank. This result is commendable but needs to be viewed within the context of the overall public service system, as overall, women still earn significantly less than men. When asked about unequal pay, a majority of interviewees (56%) disagreed, stating that both men and women should be treated equally as they both fulfill the requirements set by the public sector. However, some male participants justified the gender pay gap based on their financial responsibilities. Gender-based pay disparities are not favored in the public sector in Qatar, as it promotes discrimination and hinders women's empowerment.

#### **4.2.5.10 Compensation Determinants**

The issue of compensation remains a critical factor in promoting women's empowerment in Qatar's public sector. To gain insight into the factors that contribute to pay disparities, the interviewees were asked to provide reasons for any differences in their pay compared to other employees. One-third of the interviewees indicated that rank is a major determinant of salary, while the remaining two-thirds believed that the legal framework, represented by the human resources law, has a significant impact on salary levels. This could be seen as a negative aspect for women's empowerment as factors such as hard work and years of experience were mentioned less frequently by the interviewees as important determinants. In addition to salaries, other benefits such as housing, transportation, communication, and other social allowances also

play a crucial role for public sector employees, especially those with lower salaries. The issue of divorced women was also raised during the interviews, highlighting the loss of benefits associated with their work after divorce.

#### **4.2.5.11 Work-Family Balance Policies and Practices**

Balancing work and family is a critical issue that greatly impacts women's empowerment. The relationship between maintaining a work-family balance has been extensively studied by researchers (Bauer, 2009; Jones et al., 2006). When asked about their ability to balance work and family, 23% of the interviewees reported facing a significant imbalance. The primary reasons cited were: the distance between work and home, excessive family responsibilities, long working hours, limited leave options, and limited childcare facilities. As a result, many female interviewees expressed a need for shorter working hours, extended maternity leave, workplace childcare facilities, flexible work arrangements, and part-time options.

#### **4.2.5.12 Social Exclusion**

According to Avramov (2002), demographic factors play a significant role in shaping the working environment and can lead to social exclusion. This issue is faced not only by women but also by men, especially when non-national employees work alongside national employees. Rodriguez and Scurry (2019) explore how gender and foreignness intersect to shape the experiences of skilled migrant women in Qatar and contribute to their exclusion in the workplace. Our data analysis indicates that being a non-citizen is the most significant factor leading to social exclusion. Migrant employees in the public sector are disadvantaged as they do not have access to promotions and career growth, and their allowances are limited compared to those of Qatari employees. Thus, social exclusion based on national differences appears to impede the empowerment of female expatriates in particular.

#### **4.2.5.13 Gender Discrimination**

Gender discrimination continues to be a significant concern in the workplace and other social institutions. Gregory (2003) suggests that gender discrimination in the workplace can hinder job advancement and empowerment for women. To explore whether gender discrimination impedes the potential growth of women in the public sector, the interviewees were asked about potential discrimination related to maternity leave or breastfeeding hours. 15% of the interviewees reported facing discrimination due to social reasons such as family emergencies or female health problems. When asked about government laws in Qatar discriminating between male and female employees in the public sector, the majority of the interviewees stated that the laws

were non-discriminatory. However, 23% of the interviewees reported facing discrimination that was a result of male-dominated practices rather than government laws. Thus, discrimination seems to be prevalent and stems from societal norms, according to the views of many interviewees.

## **4.2.6 Macro Level: Societal Factors**

The literature recognizes patriarchal social orders as a common challenge faced by Arab women across the region (Lari, 2016; Moghadam, 2004; Sholkamy, 2010). Participants in the majority also raised the issue of patriarchy and identified cultural traditions rooted in tribal mindsets as constraints to women's empowerment in the regional and local contexts. They differentiate between religion, which can act as a catalyst, and cultural norms and traditions, which hinder empowerment. Table 4.4 summarizes the macro-level related factors and corresponding quotes.

### **4.2.6.1 Role of Religion**

Studies have conflicting views on the impact of Islam on women's participation in the public sphere in the Gulf. Some researchers argue that Islam is the root of barriers to women's progress, while others point to economic conditions, such as oil wealth, as the main obstacle (Masoud et al., 2016; Metcalfe, 2011; Ross, 2008). However, this study provides empirical evidence that Islam is perceived as a catalyst for women's active participation in society, as 80% of the 50 participants from both the male and female public sector workers interviewed, refuted the idea that religion constrains women's employment and considered work as "an act of worship" in Islam.

Participants in this study provided insight into the role of Islam in shaping women's participation in the public sphere. Many noted that the constitution and national vision of Qatar are based on Islamic principles, which include a call for work, regardless of gender, and a rich history of Muslim women holding prominent positions. The majority of interviewees stated that their religious beliefs do not conflict with the work system, as long as the professional environment adheres to Islamic laws. Some interviewees, particularly women working in the public sector, viewed gender segregation as a fostering factor, while others highlighted the potential for misinterpretation of religion. On the other hand, the study of Blaydes et al. (2021) suggests that mixed-gender workplaces can be more constraining for women in conservative societies like Qatar compared to work sector or salary. Interviewed men also agreed that religion was not a constraint for women's work, but mentioned customs, traditions, and jurisprudential views as potential hindrances. Overall, it was emphasized that policy-makers must take into account the importance of understanding religion correctly to align laws with the spirit of Islam and its justice.

**Table 4.4** Multi-level analysis of Women Empowerment/Employment in the public sector. Macro/societal level

Religion/Islam	<p>“Islam urges work, diligence, community building, and Islamic history is full of stories of working women. Islam does not prohibit women’s work, but rather permit it” (#49, FQ)</p> <p>“Religion encourages work, particularly in my case as a divorcee. I have to work as the allocations does not cover for my needs and my children’s” (#34, FQ)</p> <p>“I have always believed that work is an act of worship” (#21, FM)</p> <p>“Many verses and hadiths encourage work” (#33, FM)</p> <p>“There are many verses encouraging work, its mastery and good performance” (#40, MQ)</p> <p>“Islam recognizes the right for a woman to have her own income. Sharia’ guarantees women the right to an individual income, and gives them the choice to contribute to the household or not” (#14, FQ)</p> <p>“Islamic is a way of life. All the provisions and precepts are in line with common sense. Islam has urged Muslims to work and earn a lawful income, including both men and women. But Islam has set rules on the work of women in a way that guarantees their freedom and dignity and prevents them from humiliating mingling and degrading dealings. If the woman secures a healthy environment far from any violation of God’s prohibitions, then work is welcome, as for a Muslim woman, obtaining the pleasure of God in this world and the hereafter is the ultimate goal” (#26, FM)</p>
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(continued)

**Table 4.4** (continued)

<p><i>Issue of Misinterpretation or misunderstanding of religion</i></p>	<p>“We have a problem either of misunderstanding of religion or its misappropriation. We need to have a correct understanding of religion, rooted in the authentic sources of legislation (Qur’an and Sunnah) without interfering opinions. There are principles of jurisprudence and there is a certain methodology to induce a fatwa (formal ruling or interpretation on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified legal scholar). If we make fatwa without proper knowledge and “<i>fiqh</i>”, we might make mistakes. The Holy Qur’an is valid for every time and place. But some fatwas are definitely not valid for every time and place because societies change and cultures change” (#11, FQ)</p> <p>“It’s not religion, it is the understanding of a group of society about religion that create restrictions for women and fences around them. So, religion is exploited in a way to promote certain ideas and mindsets. If you return to the prophetic biography and history, a woman had much more freedoms than she currently has” (#9, FQ)</p>
<p>Culture</p>	<p>“Sometimes the problem is in our environment, the networking in Qatari society is different in nature. Most decisions are made in Majalis which are exclusively for men. Women are away from the place where decisions are being made” (#9, FQ)</p> <p>“I think we need a detailed internal examination of the laws, a general comprehensive view gives us an unclear picture of the situation. I think that we have empowerment, but to some extent. The empowerment is conditional to the presence of an understanding guardian. So, we need to look at the laws and the procedures followed in the state so that it facilitates the right of women whereby a woman does not have to go back in every small or big matter to someone who can stop her or not allow her to reach her goal; a goal which is not in conflict with the laws of the state or the religion” (#8, FQ)</p> <p>“There is always a need to focus on efforts on women’s empowerment since we live in patriarchal societies governed by customs and norms beyond laws” (#26, FM)</p> <p>“Government has to set rules and regulations to women’s empowerment to make it easy for her, and to make the society accept the change” (#32, FM)</p>



#### 4.2.6.2 Role of Culture: Patriarchal Society/Tribal Mentality

Patriarchy, defined as a system of social organization in which men hold a disproportionate share of power, is seen as a major obstacle to women's empowerment and participation in the public sphere in many countries and notably in the Arab Gulf states (Al-Ghanim, 2019; Haghghat, 2013; Naguib & Jamali, 2015). Cultural practices, outdated customs, and tribal traditions are often cited as the root of these patriarchal attitudes (Dechant & Al-Lamky, 2005). Participants in the study also mentioned social expectations and pressure on women to be "superpowers", and a lack of trust in their abilities and qualifications. Despite these challenges, there is a recognition of progress and social change happening in the country. While one-third of the interviewees invoked a social pressure on working women stemming from remaining conservative mindsets, the rest of participants pointed to the noticeable progress and social changes that occurred in the country with political leadership playing a key role in empowering women and encouraging their participation in different domains.

### 4.3 Discussion: Integrative and Culturally Sensitive Lens

Women's employment and their participation in the economic activity, as a determinant of women's empowerment worldwide, is a complex and complicated topic subject to heated debates and ideological struggles. While some are considering paid employment as empowering women, others deem female's participation in the workforce as counterproductive and exploitative and hence disempowering (Haghghat, 2013). According to Barsoum (2019), the decision to participate or not in the labor market is a pragmatic one and cannot be reduced to ideology. The findings in our study indicate a lower level of job satisfaction of women compared to men in the public sector. They concretely highlight the various factors and multiple dimensions affecting women's employment as identified by the literature and derived from the empirical study. The multi-level perspective and contextual approach adopted in this study helped in exploring the challenges and opportunities related to this phenomenon involving individual, organizational, and societal factors embedded in the specific context of the Qatari public sector. It shows the imbrication and entanglement of these multiple factors and the difficulty to single out a specific dimension as a catalyst or obstacle to women's empowerment through employment and economic participation.

There is an agreement about agency as the main determinant of empowerment. The enactment of agency in the workplace is revealed to be influenced by individual as well as organizational and institutional factors. The access to leadership and the ability to actively and effectively participate in decision-making are apparently limited. This is due either to women's lack of interest and personal choices or to structural barriers such as glass ceiling and the difficulty to balance professional and family roles and responsibilities. Despite the availability of many opportunities

and resources attracting women to work in the public sector, the workplace's regulations and practices, as highlighted by many participants, are deemed unsatisfactory and necessitate improvement especially in regard to promotions, compensations, capacity-building, and family-friendly policies.

The literature recognizes institutional constraints, such as laws and regulations, as crucial factors in either promoting or hindering women's empowerment (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010; Kabeer, 2005). This was supported by the female participants in the study, who emphasized the impact of laws and policies on women's empowerment. Some participants highlighted the constitutional and national vision of Qatar, which promotes equality between men and women and supports family-friendly initiatives. However, other participants had varying views on the human resource laws in the public sector. Some felt they were supportive and accommodating, while others believed they were a hindrance and should apply equally to all workers. Additionally, there was a need expressed for laws to cater specifically to mothers, caregivers, divorced women, and widows. Overall, the participants agreed that laws and policies should be based on principles of equity and justice, aligned with both women's nature and Islamic principles, while taking into account cultural influences on religion.

The Women, Business and the Law Index 2022 assigned Qatar a score of 29.4 out of 100, lower than the MENA region average of 53 (World Bank, 2022b). The index evaluates local laws in 190 economies based on 35 questions across 8 indicators, including workplace, parenthood, marriage, and mobility. Qatar scores low in these areas, particularly in relation to maternity and parental leave benefits. Some of the questions in the index, such as those relating to women working at night or in dangerous jobs, may be considered less relevant and appropriate. There are concerns about the moral legitimacy of international organizations and financial institutions interfering in national jurisdictions and imposing their own views on women's rights. The EU's promotion of women's empowerment through market incorporation can be seen as a form of external governance in the global South (Huelss, 2019).

This example shows how global indicators can be biased and influenced by neoliberal values and conflicting ideologies, emphasizing that a one-size-fits-all approach is not effective. It supports criticism of other indicators like the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and the Gender-related Development Index (GDI), which are criticized for ignoring cultural and social differences and fundamental empowerment variables. These indicators lack a contextual approach, taking an external normative perspective and disregarding local knowledge and practices (Haghighat, 2013; Kabeer, 2001). Thus, there is a need for policy-makers to create more culturally sensitive and nuanced indicators and to find solutions that are based on endogenous values and resources, instead of blindly imitating the West.

Another problem with the current understanding of empowerment is its top-down approach. As reported by Heitlinger (1996, in Benford & Snow, 2000), women's integration into the workforce under the guise of gender equality was imposed on them by the Communist party-state and reinforced the conflict between home and work, leading to rejection of the goal of equality itself. Several studies argue that the empowerment promoted by development agencies is not providing women the ability to make their own choices and is instead tying them to serving others (Chant, 2016;

Cornwall & Edwards, 2010). This violates the essence of empowerment, which is to enhance women's capacity for self-determination (Kabeer, 2001). Thus, besides cultural and structural factors, women's choice to participate in the workforce or be a homemaker should be respected and the necessary resources and opportunities should be provided accordingly.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) considers housework and caregiving as "non-economic" activities, raising concerns about unpaid work and social status. Neglecting these activities undervalues women's contributions to the economy as homemakers and caregivers. As highlighted by Miranda (2011, p. 6), homemaking and voluntary work, also "contribute to societal well-being but are not included in the traditional economic measures". Policy-makers should consider women's choices and aspirations. For example, Kuwait has proposed a law to pay housewives a fixed monthly income,<sup>6</sup> recognizing the value of their caring roles while improving their economic empowerment. It is important to acknowledge and value women's work as homemakers and caregivers while providing appropriate workplace conditions and family-friendly policies for those participating in the workforce. To address the complex and multidimensional phenomenon of women's economic empowerment, different approaches and alternative pathways should be considered, taking into account local women's voices and needs.

#### 4.4 Conclusion: Policy Recommendations

The significance of public policies in advancing women's empowerment has been emphasized as a factor that varies depending on the context (Duflo, 2012; Foss et al., 2019; Hunt & Samman, 2016). Policy-makers are encouraged to recognize the challenges faced by women in both public and private spheres and to establish legal reforms that support their empowerment and well-being (Perkins, 1995; Zuhur, 2003). A more empowering and participatory approach, rather than a paternalistic one, should be adopted by policy-makers (Rappaport, 1981). To ensure that women's voices are heard, participants were directly asked to offer their recommendations for policy-makers. These recommendations can be classified into five broad categories.

1. **Women's Participation in Policy-Making:** Participants emphasized the importance of utilizing their experiences and abilities in policy-making. They suggested the inclusion of women in committees responsible for developing policies and reviewing HR laws to prevent gender discrimination and biases. They also suggested involving women in resolving internal issues instead of relying on

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<sup>6</sup> This proposed payment of 600 KWD (about USD 2000) is available to "women once they reach 40 years of age on the basis that the woman had fulfilled her full opportunity in employment if she desires a government job, and accordingly, at this age, a woman needs to be close to her family and take care of them more than at any other time" (author translation). <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/kuwait-news/parliament/1013731/29-12-2020-الديحاني-تصرف-لربة-البيت-مكافأة-شهرية-بواقع-دينار>. Accessed October 4, 2022.

external consultants who may not be familiar with the local culture and work practices in the public sector. To empower all employees, training, capacity-building, delegation of authority, and freedom of expression should also be emphasized.

2. **Transparency in HR Laws and Policies:** Interviewees expressed concern about the lack of clarity and transparency in the decision-making process, particularly regarding appointment methods, promotion rules, and job descriptions. They emphasized the importance of non-discrimination and adopting more flexible and equitable HR laws and policies, particularly for divorced or widowed women and non-Qataris. Equitable incentives based on merit and competency, regardless of gender and nationality, will improve the overall working environment in the public sector.
3. **Promoting Family-Friendly Policies:** Most interviewees highlighted the difficulties faced by working mothers, particularly in the early stages of motherhood, and the need to address these challenges. They proposed extended maternity leaves, father leaves, and childcare arrangements, as well as teleworking, flexible hours, and part-time work options to help balance work and family responsibilities and protect the physical and mental health of working mothers.
4. **Advocating for Gender Justice within Islamic Principles:** Participants agreed on the important role of religion in empowering women and emphasized the need for policies that align with the objectives of Shari'a. They called for restoring principles of justice in accordance with the discourse of freedom and dignity and avoiding any misinterpretation or exploitation of religion to legitimize certain policies or interests. The aim is to remain true to the egalitarian principles of Islam.
5. **Encouraging Regional Cooperation:** Given the similarities among GCC countries, participants stressed the need for regional programs that allow women to support each other and called for policy-makers to cooperate on laws and benchmarks related to women's empowerment.

In conclusion, the advancement of women's empowerment in the public sector in Qatar requires a comprehensive and context-sensitive approach to address the various factors that impact women's employment and economic participation. This chapter highlights the crucial role of public policies in this regard and underscores the need for policy-makers to adopt a more empowering and participatory approach and to take into consideration the recommendations of women. Through this empirical study, participants emphasized the importance of including women in policy-making, promoting transparency in HR laws and policies, supporting family-friendly policies, advocating for gender justice within Islamic principles, and encouraging regional cooperation. The key recommendations focus on equal employment opportunities, professional development and capacity-building, merit-based promotion, positive relationships with supervisors, addressing the gender wage gap, equal opportunities and rights regardless of nationality, job satisfaction, leadership and decision-making, intrinsic motivation, aligning with Islamic principles, and challenging patriarchal attitudes and cultural practices. The study highlights the significance of creating

a supportive environment for women in the public sector that acknowledges their unique challenges and provides opportunities for growth and advancement.

Finally, the study suggests several policy implications for women's employment and economic participation in the Qatari public sector. These include improving the workplace environment for better job satisfaction, ensuring equitable and culturally sensitive policies, using nuanced indicators to measure empowerment, respecting women's choices and aspirations, valuing non-economic activities and acknowledging their contribution to societal well-being, and promoting self-determination. The study emphasizes the need for a bottom-up approach that provides women with necessary resources and opportunities, while also acknowledging the cultural and religious influences that shape gender roles and norms.

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