

Gender Inequality in Saudi Arabia: Myth and Reality

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Abstract. Gender inequality is getting increasing attention in social and health studies, and it is becoming an important subject in medical sociology, health administration, and interdisciplinary studies of health and illness. This topic is an especially sensitive one in international and cross-cultural discussions on the status of women. For decades, Western media, scholars, and activists, have discussed the lack of equality that Saudi Arabian women face. They also think that Islam, as a religion, plays an important role in this kind of inequality between men and women. As we are going to see in this research, their discussions are apparently based on unreliable information gathered from people who perceive the proverbial glass as half-empty. Women in Saudi Arabia, like women in any country, have their perception of equality. They have a pre-eminent role not only within their families but also outside their households. It would be unfair to think that the role of women in Saudi Arabia is confined to home-making only. The development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has brought with it increasing opportunities for women in education, employment, and in political participation, as will be seen in the up-coming elections for Shura Council and municipal councils.

Keywords: Gender inequality, gender studies, equality between men and women, male and female differences.

1. Introduction

Gender inequality is a broad, abstract, and often vague idea. In simple terms, it commonly revolves around three meanings: first, men usually experience better opportunities, more freedom, and higher social regard than women who share the same social characteristics (such as class origins, race, nationality, and age); second, men usually hold sway in marriages and other direct relationships between genders; and third, men occupy a preponderance of the social positions that possess significant political, economic, legal, or cultural power. [14]

Feminist movements made a forceful appearance in Europe and the United States in the 1960s. Intellectual proponents and opponents emphasized what they thought were empirically substantiated premises: that women in most societies do not have equal rights to men; and that gender inequality exists, both at home and in the workplace. With these premises accepted as true, the search for the cause of inequality started in the mid-sixties and continues to this day. [12]

The principle of equality applies to gender and productive rights in two main areas: relations between men and women (gender division) and relations among women (conditions such as class, age, nationality, or ethnicity that divide women as a group). [5] The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlights some facts about gender equality on its website. It mentions that the International Women's Day, March 8th, raises awareness of equal rights and participation in the political and economic process for women,

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while the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, November 25th, draws attention to the extent of violence against women. It also states that despite many improvements in the status of women, there are still many inequalities. Some of these inequalities include but are not limited to the following:

- Two thirds of people in the world who cannot read are female
- Nearly seventy percent of the world's poorest people are female
- Women represent a growing proportion of people living with HIV/AIDS
- In only 16 countries in the world are women's representation in national parliaments above 25 percent
- Women's contributions to the global economy are growing rapidly, but their labor remains undervalued and undercounted in national accounts
- An estimated one-quarter to one-half of all women have suffered physical abuse
- Each year, half a million women die and 18 million more suffer chronic disability from preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth [17]

Western activists argue that women in Saudi Arabia, whether at home or in the work place, are subjugated persons and that they have no say in decision making. They argue, too, that women in Saudi Arabia are excluded from public life and are confined to the private sphere. Moreover, they contend that women in Saudi Arabia cannot stand for office or even vote, and they have narrowly restricted rights and opportunities outside the home. They think that moving toward achieving equality, in the home, in the workplace, in education, in the health arena and in positions of political power, remains one of the most important challenges facing the Saudi government in the twenty-first century. [13]

Women in Saudi Arabia, like women in any country, have their perception of equality. They play an important role not only within the family but also outside their families. It would be a mistake to think that the role of women in Saudi Arabian society is confined to home-making only. The development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has brought with it increasing opportunities for women in various disciplines.

Some western scholars and intellectuals view Islam as a major factor that determines women's condition in society. Whether or not their argument is correct, it seems that they are ignoring major factors such as social, economic, and political factors that also play major roles in women's status.

2. Gender Inequality: Definition and Background

The concept of gender equality emerged during the 1980s as feminist scholars began to question the mainstream sex role theory and reorganize the structural basis of gender inequalities. The term "gender equality" has been widely used among social scientists and policy makers in the international community. [25] By the mid-90s, a number of international conferences had been held to discuss gender equality in developing countries in all fields in general, and in healthcare organizations in particular. In June 2000, representatives from 180 countries met at the United Nations Headquarter in New York City, and they confirmed the centrality of gender equality and sustainable development in advancing women's health worldwide. [25]

Gender inequality refers to the unequal valuing of the roles of women and men. It is best for societies to overcome the barriers of stereotypes and prejudices so that both sexes are able to equally contribute to and benefit from economic, social and political development within society. When men and women have relative equality, economies grow faster and there is less corruption. When men and women are healthy and educated, their families, communities and nations benefit. [11] Thus, gender equality can be defined as equal treatment of women and men in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within families, communities and society at large. [26]

Furthermore, gender inequality refers to the social differences and relations between men and women that are learned, vary widely among societies and cultures, and change over time. It is affected by age, class, race, ethnicity, religion, and the geographical, economic and political environment. It means that the different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favored equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and

opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. [18] The concept of sex and gender, however, are not synonymous. Sex is genetically set as are associated physiological, anatomical, and hormonal differences. Gender refers to attributions attached to members of the same sex that are physiologically, socially, and culturally influenced. [22]

Moreover, gender inequality has many implications for people’s lives, but one of the most consequential is that it acts as a basis for bias between persons. Scholars such as Ridgeway think of gender inequality as an ordinal hierarchy between men and women in material resources, power, and status. According to Ridgeway, a system of gender inequality persists in many countries, including Saudi Arabia, despite major reforms in the way that gender has been entwined in various economic and social organizations. She contends that the gender hierarchy that advantages men over women survived the profound social and economic reorganization that accompanied the transition of many countries from agrarian societies to advanced societies. [19]

Byrne argues that the educational system is responsible for women’s subordinate status and claims that boys and girls are channeled into subjects of study determined by society as appropriate for their gender. Girls, according to Byrne, are encouraged to study languages, secretarial skills, and arts, while boys are directed toward engineering, physics, mathematics, military studies, or chemistry. Byrne also contends that different qualifications mean different opportunities in work. This kind of difference will lead, either by force or by system, to gender inequality. [4]

Moreover, many Western scholars contend that sexes have often been treated differently from childhood on. They think that in some societies, girls have not been educated as often or to the same extent as boys, so that, in such societies, women on average are less qualified to hold jobs requiring education. Such discrimination on the part of those controlling the education of children, according to Thomas Sowell, produces income differences between adult females and adult males, even if employers do not discriminate among comparable workers, because women and men end up with different levels and kinds of knowledge, skills, and work experience. [23]

The different levels between women and men lead us to determine the most extreme examples of gender inequalities that can be found currently practiced, and sometimes state-sanctioned, in the world today. These examples can be one of the following ten cases:¹



Fig. 1: The ten examples of gender inequality

¹ These examples have been developed by the researcher.

3. Gender Equality According to Islamic Principles

This section is devoted to answering the research question related to whether or not Islam stands against the equality of men and women. In fact, Islamic principles promote the concept of human brotherhood and the equality of all humans. The Holy Quran asserts that all humans are the children of one man (Adam) and one woman (Eve) and that we all share the same lineage; there are many verses addressed directly to women and men that explain their rights and duties. Islam explicitly maintains that as human beings, both sexes have the same origin and, therefore, are given equal rights. [15]

Islam views women as playing an integral role in all aspects of society, including the workforce. Without women's participation, society would be stagnant. According to the tradition of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh), no ruling exists forbidding women to seek employment. In the time of Prophet Mohammed, women worked and engaged in different trades. If an Islamic government, according to Younos, prohibits women from working, that government has violated Islamic Law. [28]

Moreover, Islamic principles give Muslim men and women the same duties and the same rewards. The Muslim woman does not abandon her name when she gets married, and Islamic law guarantees a woman her economic independence. [10] Whether a Muslim woman is single or married, she has the right to maintain her own property without any interference from anyone, including her father, husband, or brother. Islam, also, gives a Muslim woman the right of choosing her spouse, and the marriage contract is not valid without her acceptance and approval. According to Islamic principles, both men and women enjoy equal opportunity for education, are equal before the law, and receive the same punishment for wrongdoing. [16]

Younos asserts that many Quranic verses reveal to us that women are part of the political decision-making process because the Quran talks of an allegiance of women to Prophet Mohammed and also of the Prophet to them. He believes it is obvious through the direct study of the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet that men and women in Islam are allowed to have equal access to knowledge. Additionally, learning and education are mandatory for both genders. In this regard, Younos contends that women are participating in the socio-political system in many Islamic countries, and there are many verses revolving around this kind of participation. [28]

Moreover, Islam has never insisted on a rigid way of life. It has treated everyone equally; the rights of all Muslims, male and female, are equal before the law. Indeed, the principle of equality is the cornerstone of the Islamic edifice. Historically, Islam has managed to develop a homogenous and integrated society without classes, in which a call for "liberty, equality, and fraternity" could not have stirred up true feelings, since it did not fulfil a real need. The basic principles of Islam stand on the absolute equality of all humankind. [28]

4. Gender Inequality in Saudi Arabia

Gender equality in Saudi Arabia has been discussed widely in recent years without taking into consideration the unique cultural history of a society like Saudi Arabia's. As a matter of fact, the cultural impact of gender makes it extremely difficult for any of us to think outside the opposition between female and male. Cultural impact is one of the main factors affecting gender equality in any society, especially in Saudi Society. Islam, as a religion, and the fact that the Saudi society is blessed with conservative rules and regulations, is what is meant by the cultural impact on Saudi society, as every aspect of life is based on Islamic principles. [14] When we discuss gender inequality in this regard, it affects almost half of the population, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Population Totals in Saudi Arabia by Gender

Year	Total Population	Percentage of Men	Percentage of Women
2004	16527340	% 50.1	% 49.9
2007	17493364	% 50.4	% 49.6
2011	18707576	% 50.9	% 49.1

Source: Central Department of Statistics and Information

As mentioned earlier, equality between men and women in Saudi Arabia is a sensitive and often controversial issue. In relation to gender equality, Saudi Arabia has developed a reputation for being more restrictive of women's mobility and public activity than other Arab or Muslim societies due to the implementation of Islamic principles in the society. Yet, many women in Saudi Arabia participate in the creation of culture by acquiring a powerful voice, while remaining physically invisible. [1]

However, many authors and scholars think that this restriction on women is based on Islamic principles, which encourage gender inequality. Whyte contends that Islam, as a religion, is blamed for the gender inequality in all Islamic countries, especially Saudi Arabia. He emphasizes that among all Muslim countries, the lowest rates of female education are found in countries that enforce Islamic restrictions. He points out two types of restrictions imposed on Muslim women: legal restrictions traceable to Islamic teaching, and the de facto political practice of concealing women from men. He also claims that women belonging to religious minority groups in Middle Eastern countries enjoy more freedom and occupy better jobs than do Muslim women in conservative countries. [27]

Moreover, Doumato postulates that women in Saudi Arabia have little protection in relation to their physical integrity. She thinks that there are no specific laws addressing the issue of violence against women, nor any adequate protection for victims. Incidents of domestic violence, according to Doumato, are rarely reported or even talked about publically. She contends that societal norms and rules are patriarchal, and women are perceived and treated as second-class citizens. As a result, she finds that women in Saudi Arabia continue to face discrimination in most areas of society. They have fewer rights than men in family matters, their freedom of movement is restricted, and their economic opportunities and rights are very limited. [8]

Cosby does not see a light at the end of the tunnel. She states that even though Saudi women will be granted the right to vote in the 2015 election, there are still other hurdles that may prevent their full involvement. For example, women are still legally prevented from driving and cannot travel anywhere without a chaperone, therefore, according to Cosby, "their significantly limited mobility could prevent women from making it to the polls, especially if a woman's spouse or father objects to her right to participate." She contends that the struggle of reducing discrimination against women in Saudi Arabia is one of many gender equality struggles across the globe. [6]

Along the same lines, Al-Mohamed states that although the Saudi government has recognized that the economic integration of women begins with education, and has consequently improved educational opportunities for women, the next step is to boost the number of Saudi women in the workplace. She states that, "Currently, roughly 300,000 Saudi women work, comprising five percent of the Saudi national labor force. Ironically, the constraints on female employment mean that women in the workforce are generally much better qualified than men, with half of working women possessing a college degree, compared to only 16 percent of men." [2]

However, between 2001 and 2011, the net enrolment rate of boys at the primary education level increased from 84% to 96.7%, compared to an increase from 82% to 96.5% for girls. These rates demonstrate the success of the Kingdom's policy to achieve gender equality in education and the increased absorption capacity of all stages of education for males and females. [20] [21] Empowering women educationally has been accompanied by progress in enabling them to benefit from available health services, leading to tangible improvement in general health, with a declining incidence of certain diseases. As a result, life expectancy in 2010 increased to 74.9 years for females and 72.6 years for males. [21] It is relevant to note in this regard, that the Ninth Development Plan (2010-2014) published by the Ministry of Economics and Planning, has selected policies and targets to alleviate gender inequality, which include but are not limited to the following:

- To achieve 100% enrollment rate in primary education
- To increase Saudi women's participation rate in the labour force to 13.9% by the end of the plan period
- To eradicate female illiteracy
- To upgrade women's contribution to economic activities and ensure that support services are provided to enable their participation

- To encourage girls in higher education to study specializations that match labour market needs
- To adopt specific measures to address unemployment of women, particularly educated females [21]

5. Research Questions and Hypotheses

5.1. Statement of the Problem

Following the summit held at the United Nations in 2000, the “Millennium Declaration” was issued in the presence of 147 heads of states under the theme “Role of the United Nations in the Twenty-First Century.” The declaration emphasized the commitment of member states to achieving a world with less poverty, hunger and disease by providing better healthcare for mothers and infants, developing universal primary education, fighting gender inequality, creating a healthy environment for all citizens, and working for an effective global partnership for development. [24]

This paper, however, is going to focus primarily on gender inequality in Saudi Arabia. Based on this research, the researcher deems that there is a huge misperception from many scholars and researchers when it comes to gender studies in Saudi Arabia.

5.2. The Research Questions and Hypotheses

This research strives to answer the following questions:

- How do Saudi women, who study and work in a healthcare organization, view gender inequality?
- Do they believe that there are adequate programs to educate the people of Saudi Arabia about gender inequality?
- Do they believe there is strong leadership in the country to alleviate gender inequality in case of its existence?
- Do they believe that Islam is a major cause of inequality between males and females?

While the hypotheses of this research are:

H1: The greater the notion that the eight kinds gender inequality do exist in the Saudi society, the greater the disappointment that will prevail among Saudi women.

H2: The greater the perception that factors such as inadequate programs, support of Islamic principles, and weak government leadership encourage gender inequality, the greater the likelihood of problems within the society.

6. Research Methodology

6.1. Research Approach

This study uses two different research approaches aimed at evaluating equality and its impact on gender. The primary research method was the use of surveys related to how respondents perceive equality in general and in the workplace, including in the areas of employment, fair wages, merit increases, vacations, business leaves, etc. The survey was intended to provide useful insights into various issues, such as social, managerial, and cultural issues. The researcher did not include two examples of gender inequality, which are female infanticide and sexual subjugation. For religious and cultural reasons, respectively, these two examples were omitted. Surveys were distributed to Saudi females studying and working in King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences.

Secondary research involved the use of public documents and aggregate data from sources including published and unpublished documents from both Western and local scholars. This method is indispensable because, on the one hand, it gives an idea of how Westerners perceive gender inequality among Saudi women, and on the other hand, how local scholars discuss gender inequality in general and with regard to Islamic principles in particular. The researcher also gathered data from the Ministry of Economics and Planning for statistics about gender in Saudi Arabia.

There were advantages for the use of secondary research, which enhanced the validity and reliability of this study. One advantage was that the analysis and interpretation of existing databases provided more trustworthy and reliable information about gender studies in general and gender inequality in particular. Another

advantage revolved around the fact that secondary research allowed cross-cultural comparison between Saudi Arabia and other countries presenting, health, social, and cultural similarities.

In this study, several kinds of survey formats were included. For example, many of the items are statements, respondents were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with. Other questions were written in the form of a checklist. In this case, respondents were given a variety of possible answers and asked to check those that applied.

The target population for this study included two main groups; the first group was female students who were studying in College of Nursing, and College of Medicine at King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences. The other group was female employees who were working in King Abdulaziz Medical City, as well as female employees who were working in King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences. The sample size was comprised of 400 females. The researcher distributed 70 surveys to female students, and 330 surveys to female employees.

Having a high return was very important to the success of this research. Therefore, each questionnaire was accompanied by a brief but informative cover letter. The cover letter was designed to:

- Introduce who was conducting the research
- Explain the purpose of the research
- Stress the importance of such study
- Assure the respondent that her participation was not only important but also would be confidential

It is important to note, in this regard, that since participants from both sides – students and employees – were generally well-educated, experienced, and were willing to contribute to this study, no major obstacles were encountered in getting them to agree to participate.

6.2. Pretest

In order to determine the reliability and clarity of the survey and the length of time needed for completing it, a draft was pre-tested by several male and female colleagues. Based on the outcome of the pre-test, the researcher modified the survey. The next step was to pre-test the modified instrument with five individuals who were working in the academic field. Pretesting allowed the researcher to identify questions and statements that were unclear or were too sensitive from a religious or cultural point of view. Based on the outcome of the second pre-test, the researcher modified the survey for the second time and this was the final version used for the research.

6.3. Validity

Babbie defines validity as a “term describing a measure that accurately reflects the concept it is intended to measure.” [3] In the same context, Creswell contends that validity is the degree to which an item measures what it is supposed to measure. He thinks that the three traditional forms to look for are content validity, predictive or concurrent validity, and construct validity. [7]

In order to determine the maximal validity of the data in this survey, the following steps were taken:

- The wording and sequence of the questions were designed to motivate the respondents and to facilitate recall
- Content validity was established by reviewing the literature and past research to define the major dimension of gender inequality
- The researcher asked specialists at King Saud University and Imam Muhammad Bin Saud University and other experts to criticize the questionnaire items in order to determine their validity
- It was possible to find behavior criteria that can be taken to validate certain questions relating to religion or culture sensitivity

6.4. Data Collection

After determining the population and the sample being studied, the data collection procedure involved distributing the survey and waiting for them to be returned. All surveys were sent directly to each individual in the selected sample of both student and employee participants. To facilitate this process, the researcher

contacted by phone some of the individuals in each institution chosen for this study. The researcher, used fax machine, e-mails, and mail for sending the survey. This process took four weeks; one week to distribute the survey and three weeks for receiving the responses.

In general, the data collection procedure was very difficult and time-consuming. The researcher encountered many difficulties in collecting the surveys due to the fact the individuals involved in the sample were female students and employees and they, therefore, worked in a separate location. Even though the study was done in a healthcare organization, males have no direct contact with female students, especially those who are studying at College of Nursing and College of Medicine. The researcher had to make telephone calls and send e-mails urging participants to answer the survey in an efficient and honest way. The purpose of doing this was to get an acceptable rate of return for the survey. As the researcher expected, the rate of return was $(320/400) \times 100 = 80$ percent providing answers to all questions, while 15 surveys were eliminated for not completing their answers.

The first step that the researcher did for analysis purposes was to enter the data with the widely-used SPSS program, and the accuracy of entry was cautiously verified. The SPSS procedures for cross-tabulation and correlation analyses were used.

7. Data Analysis and Results

7.1. Demographics of Sample Population

The section of the survey related to demographics collected personal information. Members of the sample population were asked about their age, marital status, level of monthly income, and level of education. It was noted that 228 respondents were between the ages of 20-29, while 49 respondents were between the ages of 30-39. It was also noted that only 2 widowed and 14 married women participated in the study, while 304 respondents were single. In terms of the level of income, it was observed that 102 respondents had a monthly income level between SR 5,000-10,000 while 94 had an income level between SR 10,000-15,000. Respondents with income less than SR 5,000 numbered 42, while the income of 40 respondents exceeded SR 20,000. The last question in this section concerned the level of education, where 281 respondents held a bachelor's degree, 19 respondents held associate degrees, and 16 respondents held a Master's degree; 3 Ph.D. respondents participated in the study.

7.2. Cross-tabulation Analysis and Discussion

The first question on the survey was a general question where respondents were asked whether they were very familiar, slightly familiar, or not familiar at all with the issue of gender inequality. Of those who responded, 297 said that they were very familiar with the issue of gender inequality, while three respondents said they were slightly familiar. The main purpose for asking this question was to know the percentage of the sample population that was familiar with the issue being studied.

On the second question, the sample population was given the opportunity to answer YES or NO to whether they suffered from gender inequality at school, work, or home. Their answers were quite astonishing: 35 women (11 percent) said that they suffered from gender inequality in the eight kinds of gender inequality provided, while 285 women indicated that they had not suffered from any kind of gender inequality. On this question, women answered that they had not faced any gender inequality in access to education, clothing requirements, and citizenship. But when it came to being forbidden to drive, 13 women saw this as gender inequality, while 27 did not see any kind of inequality in this regard. The other kinds of inequality mentioned, custody rights and the right to divorce, were very sensitive issues for women to discuss.

The second question also included an option for the respondent to explain her thoughts if she felt she was suffering from inequalities described in the question. Most respondents explained why they thought that a woman should not be prohibited from driving her car to work. Many answers revolved around the difficulties that women face every morning on their way to school or work. Respondents also spoke negatively about two other issues that they suffered from, the right of custody (8 answers) and the right to divorce (8 answers). All responded thought that there should be no difference between men and women in the right of custody and divorce. Respondents explained their own experiences when dealing with such kinds of inequality. It is

interesting to note, in this regard, that all the answers related to the custody and divorce came from married students and employees.

On the third question, respondents were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement regarding four different statements related to gender inequality.

On the first question in this section, respondents were asked whether gender inequality in Saudi Arabia is caused by events that have occurred outside the country. To this question, 121 respondents replied that they agreed, while 86 said they strongly agree. On the other hand, 73 disagreed and 40 strongly disagreed that gender inequality is caused by events that occurred outside of Saudi Arabia.

On the second question in this section, respondents were asked if they agree that there is strong leadership in the country to alleviate gender inequality. Their answers were quite surprising: most of the respondents strongly agreed that the government of Saudi Arabia had taken many steps toward alleviating gender inequality in the country. The number of respondents who strongly agreed was close to 233, while 62 respondents agreed. On the other hand, 17 respondents disagreed and 8 strongly disagreed.

Respondents to the third question in this section were asked whether there were adequate programs to educate the people of Saudi Arabia about this issue. Their answers also were quite astonishing as 89 respondents strongly agreed and 74 agreed that there were adequate programs, while 93 said that they disagreed. This variation in the answers to this question gives an indication that people, especially women, are either unaware of or do not care about this issue.

The fourth question in this section was necessary because Islam in Western literature is usually blamed for promoting inequality between men and women. Respondents in this question were asked if Islamic principles are to blame for gender inequality or not. All of the respondents, except four, rejected this notion; 173 strongly disagreed and 43 disagreed that Islam principles is a major factor causing gender inequality. Many respondents rejected this notion and wrote on a separate sheet of paper condemning this false idea and stressing that Islam as a religion and practice is the solution for any issue facing either gender and cannot be blamed for gender inequality at all.

7.3. Correlation Analysis

The purpose of this section is to test the hypotheses of the study by correlating independent and dependent variables. Independent variables are defined as variables that (probably) cause, influence, or affect outcomes. They are also called treatment, manipulated, antecedent, or predictor variables. Dependent variables are variables that depend on independent variables; they are the outcomes or results of the influence of the independent variables. Other names for dependent variables are criterion, outcome, and effect variables. [9]

Table 2 below is prepared to test the first hypothesis. As the table shows, our independent variables are three kinds of gender inequality chosen among the overall kinds of inequality, which are correlated respectively with the dependent variable, 'Alleviating gender inequality.' These variables are set in order to test them to see if they affect gender inequality or not.

Table 2. Correlation between the right to travel, being forbidden to drive, and the right to divorce, and alleviating gender inequality in Saudi Arabia

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable
	Alleviating Gender Inequality
Right to travel	.043*
Forbidden to drive	.009**
Right to divorce	.015

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

In table 2 above, the first hypothesis (that the greater the notion that the eight kinds of gender inequality exist in the Saudi society, the greater the disappointment that will prevail among Saudi women) is rejected, because there is no correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variables. The sample population believed that the three factors chosen can be considered major factors in gender inequality, but they do not consider that the factors play any major role in alleviating gender inequality in Saudi Arabia.

Table 3. Correlation between adequate programs, Islamic Principles, and government leadership, and alleviating gender inequality in Saudi Arabia

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable
	Alleviating Gender Inequality
Adequate programs	.116*
Islamic principles	-.072**
Government leadership	-.188

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 above is prepared to test the second hypothesis. As the table shows, the independent variables are adequate programs, Islamic principles and government leadership, which are correlated with the dependent variable, 'Alleviating gender inequality.' We set these variables to test if they can be employed to alleviate gender inequality in Saudi Arabia or not.

As seen in Table 3, we have mixed results between the sample population's perceptions. Statistically, we partially accept the hypothesis because there are significant relationships between adequate programs and government leadership with alleviating gender inequality. At the same time, there is no correlation whatsoever between Islamic principles and alleviating gender inequality. It seems that the sample population does not think Islamic principles play any role in gender inequality in Saudi Arabia.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The journey with so many bright and intellectual female students and employees was an extremely insightful journey. The researcher did not expect that Saudi women would so boldly reject the assertions of many Western scholars to say that women in Saudi Arabia live a normal life like other women in the world. This interaction with female colleagues opened the doors to many unanswered questions. The researcher is extremely glad that he concluded this research without leaving any question unanswered.

The research concludes by stating that the government of Saudi Arabia has achieved remarkable progress in the status of gender equality in education, employment and health. Clearly, the direction of the Ninth Development Plan represents the efforts made to promote improvements in the status of women and in enabling them to participate in economic, health, and social development. The plan includes objectives and policies that address issues relevant to the development of women's status in areas such as education, health, social care and employment, and an entire chapter on gender equality.

The brave historic announcement of the Saudi King on September 25th, 2011, giving women the right to vote, to run in future municipal elections and to be appointed to the all-male influential advisory Shura Council, has been seen as strong leadership to alleviate gender inequality in Saudi Arabia and is considered a step in the right direction. These initiatives are considered to be major advancements for the rights of women in a conservative society such as the Saudi society. This gives an indication that barriers in gender equality have been demolished and the role that women should play in all aspects of life has been determined and achieved.

The other conclusion of this research revolves around the important role that Islamic principles play in the lives of all Muslims, especially women. As we have seen from the survey, the notion that Islamic principles are behind gender inequality was shown to be utterly false and it was rejected by the sample population. Indeed, there is no evidence from the Holy Quran to preclude a woman from engaging in any role that suits her. Moreover, Islam does not forbid or discourage the education of women; in fact, it authorizes women to have careers in fields such as teaching and medicine. Islam also gives the woman the most essential responsibility, which is to educate her children and raise a sound family. Raising children is a key social function; for a society's future and efficient functioning depends on educated generations. Thus, from this perspective, a woman's responsibility is rather significant and challenging.

In terms of the recommendations of this research, based on what the respondents suggested and recommended in their surveys, they includes but is not limited to the following:

- Respondents confirmed that Islamic principles are in favor of gender equality and not considered to be a barrier whatsoever.
- The study concludes that there are adequate programs and policies from the government to alleviate gender inequality in Saudi Arabia.
- It also concludes that there is strong leadership from all government agencies to remove all barriers of gender inequality at all levels.
- Many respondents asserted that the Saudi society is blessed with conservative rules and regulations. Hence, such rules play an important role in equality between men and women.
- According to five respondents, the Saudi woman will, sooner or later, be allowed to drive her car, and therefore, a major reform for the road system should be implemented and strictly followed.

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Appendix

Survey on Gender Inequality in Saudi Arabia

Q1- How familiar you are with the issue of gender inequality in Saudi Arabia?

() Very familiar () Little familiar () Not familiar at all

Q2- Do you feel that there is gender inequality in Saudi Arabia in the following areas?

الحالات / Cases	Yes	No
Right to Travel		
Custody Rights		
Access to Education		
Clothing Requirements		
Right to Divorce		
Domestic Abuse		
Right to Drive		
Citizenship		

Q3- If you answered YES to any of the topics mentioned in the previous section, please explain your answer below, (either in Arabic or English).

Q4- Please indicate your degree of agreement with each of the following statements:

A- The gender inequality issue in Saudi Arabia is caused by events outside the country:

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

B- There is strong leadership in the country working to alleviate gender inequality:

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

C- There are adequate programs to educate the people of Saudi Arabia about gender equality:

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

D- The notion that Islam led to gender inequality is utterly false:

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Personal Information

1- Age:

- | | |
|--|--|
| a- <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 20 years | b- <input type="checkbox"/> 20-29 years |
| c- <input type="checkbox"/> 30-39 years | d- <input type="checkbox"/> 40 years and above |

2- Marital Status:

- a- Married
- b- Single
- c- Widowed

3- Monthly Income:

- | | |
|---|---|
| a- <input type="checkbox"/> Less than SR 5,000 | b- <input type="checkbox"/> SR 5,001 to 10,000 |
| c- <input type="checkbox"/> SR 10,001 to 15,000 | d- <input type="checkbox"/> SR 15,001 to 20,000 |
| e- <input type="checkbox"/> 20,001 and above | |

4- Level of Education:

- | | |
|--|---|
| a- <input type="checkbox"/> Associate degree | b- <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor degree |
| c- <input type="checkbox"/> Master degree | d- <input type="checkbox"/> PhD |
| e- <input type="checkbox"/> Post-Ph.D. | |

5- In the space below, please write any information, comments, suggestions, or observations that you think will add to this study.
