BLURRING THE LINES OF TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES AMONG YOUNGER QATARI GENERATIONS

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Abstract - How do the younger generation relate to traditional gender roles and values in the State of Qatar? In the last few decades, rapid socioeconomic development in Qatar has brought dramatic changes to the gender roles assigned to men and women. Research shows that geographical settings and economic status, as well as social and cultural structures, are factors with great implications for attitudinal shifts among individuals that can contribute to the process of empowering women. We use nationally representative survey data from Qatari nationals to explore the relationship between gender stereotypes and the young generation in Qatar. Findings show that the educational and cultural strength of young Qatari adults can play an outstanding role in changing gender stereotypes.

Index Terms - Education, Gender Roles, Qatar, Women's Empowerment, Young Generations.

I. INTRODUCTION

The conversation about gender has become increasingly louder with every passing year as people question traditional ideas about gender roles. Many have rejected the restraints posed by gender stereotypes, instead embracing the freedom to act and be themselves. Modern society no longer expects men to hunt and women to gather as convention once demanded. More and more studies show that gender is no longer used to define identity as it was for past generations. Younger generations are no longer interested in adhering to the gender roles traditionally assigned to them; they prefer to make their own interpretations of what gender means to them. The reason may be that they grew up at a time when both parents took almost equal responsibility for raising them, thus fostering the perception that inherently female and male roles do not exist in society.

The government of Qatar has set up several programs in education, health, employment, and leadership, all with the aim of ensuring greater gender equality and women's empowerment. These initiatives have greatly improved many aspects of Qatari women's lives and have helped the development of gender discourse in Qatari society. These developments make it hard to deny that the aspect of gender is indeed a social construct and not a subject of innate biological characteristics as traditionally claimed (Lindsey, 2015). Today, gender fluidity and androgyny have become the norm as gender stereotypes are increasingly regarded as outdated. Now society's view of roles and responsibilities is more balanced; it will continue to be shaped by the current and coming generations. This paper supports the argument that the lines of traditional gender roles are blurring among young people. The paper is organized as follows. A discussion of relevant strands of literature, including studies in gender roles and feminism, is followed by an analysis of the changing attitudes towards traditional gender roles in the case of Qatar, a subject that is discussed in some detail. The data and methods section describes the measurement of important concepts and their subsequent analysis. Age-related results show that traditional gender roles are blurred and that the empowerment of women is strongly supported by young and middle-aged adults.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In their homes, men and women have done away with philosophies dictating gender-specific roles; they now share responsibilities and behave in a manner that completely ignores tradition. Studies by the US Census Bureau show that the number of stay-at-home fathers rose from about 1.1 million to 2 million between 1989 and 2012; projections showed that the numbers would continue to increase (Friedman, 2017). Lewis (2018) adds that a benchmark survey of 35,000 Americans shows that women aged 29 and below are likely to demand jobs with as much responsibility as men's, or even more. This emphasizes that motherhood does not dim ambition for today's younger generation as it did in the past, when women had to stay at home to take care of their children until they reached school age. While most women prefer to balance work and family, some have even prioritized their careers, opting to chase their dreams rather than marry or bear children (Olah et al., 2014). This trend also shows that the career ambitions and expectations of millennial women are the same as those of their male counterparts; these attitudes are expected to continue in the coming years. Many millennial women today prefer to be single mothers; they act as both mother and father, juggling their time

at work and with the children. In earlier generations, single mothers were viewed as outcasts, but today's society has become more accepting of them, even appreciating and praising their efforts. Furthermore, while it was unheard of in the past for men to participate in childcare care and household chores, today's younger men are more willing to take an active part, as their wives also work to supplement household income. This trend has grown over the past three decades. According to a 2013 study, just one out of eight people still held the view that the traditional separate gender roles should prevail; today, many stay-at-home fathers prefer to take on what used to be the maternal role, staying at home full-time as their partner works to pay the bills (Abrams, 2018). This would never have happened in the 1980s; societal changes have brought about major transformations in parenting.

Parents now have to adopt a genderless approach to parenting. The concept of gender-neutrality is evident in parents' choice of names—the child's name is no longer necessarily a clue to his or her gender—and in the way that babies' rooms are decorated—parents prefer to use neutral colors instead of the traditional pink for girls' rooms, blue for boys'. Many parents also buy their children gender-neutral toys. Even in the shopping malls, the pink and blue toy aisles are increasingly becoming obsolete; the girls' and boys' sections have merged into one (Glasgow, 2015). These phenomena reflect society's shift toward blurring the gender lines and achieving gender equality especially in status, rights, or opportunities. Many parents are now more open-minded in their attitude to child rearing, preferring to raise their children as individuals rather than as boys or girls—they totally ignore the gender stereotypes. It is important to note that most people of today's older generation had their lives defined by the labels associated with being boys or girls (Abrams, 2010). Perhaps today's parents, also having been raised this way, are now trying to avoid this labeling by ensuring that their children are not forcibly identified by gender. Manufacturers have responded to these changes in ways that would not have been dreamed of in the past, modifying old products and creating new ones that are unisex in nature.

The number of women enrolling in higher education has been increasing over the years. Traditionally, women were raised to believe that their place was in the home, so that parents invested all their resources in educating sons. Men and women are now given equal educational and income opportunities, showing that older generations are becoming more accepting of the blurring lines of their offspring's gender roles (Abrams, 2010). According to Lewis (2018), 58 percent of the students in college were women in 2006. More recently, in 2016, women earned about 64 percent of the associate degrees, 60 percent of the Bachelors', 63 percent of the Masters' and 56 percent of the doctorates. In all these categories, more women than men are going through college to join the workforce. With these achievements, the resultant new generation of women is full of self-confidence; unlike their mothers and grandmothers of the Baby Boomer Generation, they do not regard their achievements as giving them a competitive edge over men, a possible source of conflict, but rather as an opportunity to exploit their full potential (Lewis, 2018).

In the workplace, many forward-thinking organizations are now setting the stage for gender equality to prevail. As women become empowered and family needs are prioritized, gender pay gaps are also narrowing. Men and women are now entering the workforce on an equal footing. Jobs that were traditionally male- or female-dominated are now characterized by gender neutrality (Andersen, 2014). The workforce now has more female pilots, doctors, lawyers, and even military personnel occupying positions originally meant for men. Similarly, many male nurses, caregivers, and chefs, among others, work in the hospitality industries and in other areas, occupying roles traditionally assigned to women. As the younger generations become predominant in the workforce, the need for economic self-reliance and sustenance has forced men to take careers, such as teaching and nursing that were traditionally meant for women. According to Winograd and Micahel (2013), most of today's millennial women are unwilling to accept any form of gender-based restrictions that dictate available actions or limit achievement. These major developments in compensation can be attributed to the younger generation's ability to openly and confidently speak about pay; they can also review salary data online, so they can see if they are being compensated fairly (Andersen, 2014). Older generations considered it taboo to discuss their pay at work, but their successors have abolished norms like these and disregard them totally.

A. The Case of Qatar

Qatar's gas and oil boom in the 1950s has led to new socio-cultural and physical perspectives. The geographical and political climate in Qatar favors the advancement of women. The state needs to take advantage of the potential of all its citizens, male and female, to build a stronger economy based on knowledge. The Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030), a national document formulated by Qatari leaders, is a roadmap to social, human, environmental, and political development in the country. It advocates a narrative that promotes modernization based on tradition, encouraging the use of all government sponsored initiatives and reforms to mold and advocate for women empowerment's policies.

QNV 2030 also outlines the extent to which gender roles are being re-established, as one its goals is to offer women new vistas. Advancement in education has led to increased participation of women in the job market. Qatari women's employment and education have been prioritized and a constitution has been approved that allows them to hold public office, vote, and enjoy equal rights with all other citizens in Qatar. Their educational achievements are rising steeply and are better than the men's (Stasz et al., 2007). There is an increase in the rate of employment among women of up to 36% (Al-Tamimi, 2016). This is the highest rate in the Gulf region and it reflects well on the 8 percent of women in Qatar who attain higher education. Notably, 44 percent of the women who have attained higher education, but do not work, have cited cultural reasons as an obstacle to engaging in professional development.

Additionally, women in Qatar are restricted to specific segments in the job market. They continue to take specific working roles that are traditionally considered as female-oriented, such as teaching, or high-valued jobs, such as medicine. Society see some occupations as being less desirable or inappropriate for women. For instance, chemical engineering is considered a male-dominated field, yet some females choose to study and work as professionals in this field regardless of society's attitudes towards them. In addition, there are more female than male students pursuing political science, although very few women occupy significant political positions (Al-Tamimi, 2016).

The blurred lines of traditional gender roles are therefore evident in Qatar society; women's engagement in society appears to be based on their mobility needs, reflecting contemporary gender-relation patterns in the Islamic state. Individuals are now aware of the different ways through which categorization of gender is associated with an oppressive binary structure that is bound to affect them later in life. This is in sharp contrast with the older generations, whose boys and girls, men and women, always implicitly obeyed the rules for each gender.

III. DATA AND METHOD

This paper uses nationally representative survey data collected in 2018 by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University. The survey sampled Qataris, white-collar expatriates, and blue-collar laborers living in camps. Analysis was restricted to Qataris as the theory deals primarily with citizens. Given the sampling method, such restrictions are allowable. Sampling plays a critical part in any survey process since the ability to make any valid inference about the population, the target of the investigation, relies upon a rigorous sampling design. This study has the methodological advantage of examining key variables in a population-based sample that represents all Qatari nationals.

The questionnaire was designed to collect all necessary information related to the study. The survey was programmed into a Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) system using BLAISE software. After the data collection, all individual interviews were merged and saved in a single BLAISE data file. This dataset was then cleaned, coded, and saved in STATA format for analysis of the data, including the ordered logistic regressions, marginal effects, and predicted probabilities discussed in the following section. The following discussion supplies univariate descriptive statistics for variables used in the analysis. The dependent variable is captured by responses to the statement, "It is a man's duty to exercise guardianship over his female relatives" on a five-point scale where 1 corresponds to "strongly agree" and 5 to "strongly disagree." This dependent variable was selected for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, the statement captures support for a man's authority over his female relatives. It implies that every woman must have a male guardian, normally a father, a husband, a brother, or even a son, and evaluates that male's power to make a range of critical decisions on his female relatives' behalf as tradition dictates.

Practically, the positive framing of the question is not very desirable, as it does not reduce the satisficing behavior that makes respondents tend to disproportionately agree with whatever statement is read by the interviewer, simply because of the desire to please. This behavior is a common problem in surveys around the world and has been shown to exist in Qatar (Gengler et al., 2016). To indicate that their attitude towards gender roles and decision-making had changed, respondents had to disagree with the statement given by the interviewer. The danger therefore arises of detecting falsely inflated levels of support for male guardianship, since respondents who strongly disagree (5) with the statement are considered the most feminist.

The main independent variables used in the analysis were gender, education, employment, marital status, number of children, and age. These variables have been cross-tabbed with the dependent variable to show how effective they are in relation to gender roles. Analysis showed that this method of measurement correlates in the expected direction with other measures in the model and is thus included in the final models reported below. Notably, the findings confirm that education contributes to women's empowerment and lower dependency levels, so patriarchal notions such as women's reliance on men become outdated once women can attend to their own needs and those of close relatives.

The survey also asked respondents if they agreed with several more statements related to making decisions in the home, male engagement in caring for children or other domestic work, violence against women, and women's freedom to access social media. These assertions are a clear reflection of the patriarchal or male-dominated society's mode of thinking now rejected by much of the world's population. The theoretical argument is concerned with the way in which new gender roles can serve as a bridge to the outside world for women who otherwise have limited options for involvement in public. Any of the statements featured in the survey can serve to confirm that the lines of traditional gender roles are actively blurred. In fact, the following results are robust enough to measure the level of support for these traditional roles.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that, from the perspective of public discourse, social norms in Qatari society, such as those that encourage males to maintain control over the behavior of their female relatives, promote gender inequality. However, a new perspective of Qatari women appears, as there is a dynamic change in the nature of female space in the household, controlled by several independent variables, as previously mentioned. Notably, three statements have been positively framed to capture participants' attitudes towards taking decisions in the home setting, males' guardianship of female relatives and boys' responsibility towards their sisters.

Male respondents expressed more agreement (69%) than did females (59%) to the statement that "a man should have the final word about decisions in the home." These results were quite surprising, (especially the women's), since the assertion is a clear reflection of the old patriarchal mode of thinking.

Unsurprisingly, most respondents agreed with the statement "it is a man's duty to exercise guardianship over his female relatives." This result is quite consistent across genders, and a positive correlation was found with the participants' education levels. Those with undergraduate or higher degrees were less likely to agree with the statement (67%) than those with vocational, high school, or other diplomas (75%), and those who had not completed high school (83%). The opposite (i.e., disagreement) is also true (17%, 25%, and 33%, respectively). Guardianship involves several critical decisions in women's lives, but the findings confirm that education contributes to empowerment and lower dependency levels; patriarchal notions, such as women's reliance on men, become somewhat outdated once women can attend to their own needs and those of close relatives. In terms of results which were obtained from the statement: "boys are responsible for their sisters' behavior, even if they are younger than their sisters", the intensity of agreement increased with the individuals' levels of education, and the degree of disagreement rose with a decrease in the respondents' education. Those with undergraduate or higher degrees were less likely to agree with the statement (48%) than those with vocational, high school, or other diplomas (57%), and those who had not completed high school (77%). The opposite (i.e., disagreement) is also true (23%, 43%, and 52%, respectively).

Another area where the gender lines are blurring is in men's involvement in household chores. The statement was negatively framed as "I think it is shameful when men engage in caring for children or other domestic work." The data show that a statistically significant connection exists between the participants' level of agreement with this assertion and their marital status, regardless of their age, gender, or education. Respondents who had never been married make up most of the participants who disagreed with the statement (84%). However, a significant number of married participants also disagreed (81%). Divorced and separated respondents were more likely (65%) to reject male engagement in caring for children or other domestic work (35% agreed with the statement).

The exact causes of this tendency are difficult to identify, given that the percentage of participants who were married or had never married and did not support this assertion is higher than that of those who agreed. Although the respondents come from a patriarchal society in which such notions are not widely accepted, the results have not been have influenced by this particular notion. This result shows increased receptivity to these changes as husbands support their wives, helping with the chores at home, raising the children, and ensuring that their work schedules do not clash with those of their wives. Findings indicate that Qatar society is moving towards new gender roles, with both sexes increasingly able to blend work with other responsibilities and pleasures in life. Governmental organizations also need to take steps to provide paid paternity leave for non-primary caregivers, giving them an opportunity to bond with their newborn children and assist mothers through the postnatal recovery period. Employees should put pressure on the government to implement paid paternity and maternity leave programs across all the sectors to avoid favoring one sex only.

CONCLUSION

Qatari society is male-dominated, but the lines of traditional gender roles are obviously blurring. This is evident in the workplace, in homes, and in schools; employers that hope to survive in today's highly

competitive business environment know that they have no choice but to attract top talent from among the younger generations. This means that they must accommodate their new employees' demands, doing away with the pay gaps, providing paid maternity and paternity leave, and creating opportunities that enhance work-life blending. Politicians who want the votes of the young will need to be seen as supportive of policies aimed at achieving gender equality and eliminating the rigidity of traditional gender roles.

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