SAUDIS' EXPECTATIONS AND PREFERENCES IN RELATION TO EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS A VIGNETTE STUDY

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Abstract - The study explored the impact of three factors (gender of the job seeker, financial support provided by husband, and type of job and wage) on theSaudi males and females' expectations about others, in relation to their employment decisions. It also explored males and females' employment preferences when facing different employment scenarios. The aim of this study is three-fold with respect to social norms: it explores differences between respondents' expectations about the employment preferences of others, as well as their own; it tests the impact of incentivising work in mixed working environments or low-status jobs by increasing wages; and it tests the impact generated by additional information that contradicts what is considered to be the norm onfemales' employment decisions. To achieve these goals, 369 Saudi university students were surveyed using an online experimental vignette as a research tool.

Results showthat all three factors (gender of the job seeker, money provided by the husband, and type of job and wage)have a significant impact on the Saudi males and females' expectations in relation to employment decisions. Results points to strong pressure that Saudi females are under to follow social norms. This was represented by the high expectations from participants for a female job seeker to choose to work in an SGWE compared to the expectation for a male job seeker, and for a female to be employed only if the husband does not give enough money to secure his wife's financial needs, and for a female to be employed in a high-status job even with lower wages.

Furthermore, the majority of Saudi students, males and females, prefer to work in an SGWE and high-status jobs even with lower wages. However, in terms of participants' expectations in this case, offering higher wages for the mixed gender environment lowered the participants' expectations for females to choose the SGWE. Thus, monetary incentives (high wages) may have a role to play in changing the perceived social norms related to working in an SGWE. It can be used to increase the acceptance by the society for females to work in a mixed gender environment, which will encourage more females to apply for these types of jobs and therefore increase the levels of female labour force participation in the country.

Results also have shown that Saudi males and females have assumed that their personal preferences are similar to others or in line with the other participants because they predict that others' preferences are identical to their preference. This could be a possible justification for their personal preference.

Results have shown that nearly half of females in the treatment group, compared to females in the control group, have changed their personal preference from working in an SGWE to a mixed gender working environment when they were told that other females' preferences are different from their own, and that the majority of females prefer to work in a mixed gender environment. Thus, this can be understood as the presence of "pluralistic ignorance" among Saudi females. This shows that those females privately reject the norm (working in an SGWE), suggesting that the given information resulted in changing those females' perceptions and, therefore, their employment preference. Females' responses in the treatment group reflect the desire of females to behave and act based on what is considered socially acceptable and desirable.

Keywords - Preferences, Expectations, Female Employment, Social Norms.