

Forum: The Arab League in English

Issue: Methods to Combat Gender Inequality in the Middle East

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Introduction

As defined by the Oxford dictionary, gender inequality is a “social process by which people are treated differently and disadvantageously, under similar circumstances, on the basis of gender”. Social indicators and gender statistics reveal that women in the Arab region are on average more disadvantaged economically, politically, and socially than are women in other regions, and certainly more so than in regions with similar income levels or at similar stages of economic development (e.g., Latin America, Southeast Asia, East Asia).

The primary factor leading the rise of gender equality in the region is the misinterpretations of Islamic laws derived from the Quran. All Arab nations follow Islam as their primary religion. Extremists in the country, whether it be the government or a citizen, hide behind the veil of Islamic laws to justify the discrimination they incur onto women of the country. These extremists quote incorrect interpretations from their holy text to maintain the patriarchal system of their country. This inturn displays to the rest of the world the highly discriminatory features of Arab states, and leads them to the conclusion that Islam is a sexist and patriarchal religion.

At the same time, since at least the early 1980s, issues pertaining to women and the family have been highly politicised, partly due to with Islam’s cultural and political revival. One manifestation has been the re-emergence or expansion of hijab (Islamic dress, or veiling) in countries such as Egypt, which led to spirited debates among feminists in the 1980s and 1990s concerning the meaning of this phenomenon.

The distinctive pattern of gender inequality and women’s marginalization from economic and political life in the Arab region raises several sets of questions. First, what factors explain this

state of affairs? To what extent are Islam and Arab culture implicated? What is the role of factors such as patriarchal social structures, the regional oil economy, authoritarian states, and the strength of Islamist movements? Second, despite the fact that all Arab countries are governed to some extent by Islamic laws and norms and all are part of what used to be called the “Arab nation”, what differences can be observed in gender norms and relations, and what explains these differences? Third, what is the potential for a progressive interpretation of Islam that is in line with the advancement of women and the promotion of gender equality and women’s rights? Fourth, how have Arab states responded to feminist demands for equality and empowerment, and what legal, policy, and discursive changes have come about as a result of women’s collective action?

Women’s collective action ranges from consensus-building (e.g., Jordan, Egypt) to confrontational (e.g., Algeria), and that Arab feminism’s relationship to the state also varies. State responses to feminist activism have ranged from indifferent (e.g. Palestine Authority, Lebanon) to hostile (Saudi Arabia, Egypt) to receptive (Algeria, Morocco), with a number of states now actively promoting women’s rights and implementing legal reforms (Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia).

To summarize the problem, states in the Arab region have incorrectly enforced their culture in a manner that has resulted in oppression towards women, either intentionally or unintentionally. The issue had spiked in the 1980’s, when a few Arab states had a *hijab* mandate. As of now, Arab states have shown ignorance towards the issue and have made very small efforts to solve the issue. Women in the Arab region have been marginalized in almost every aspect of their lives since the 1950’s, however modernization alongside women empowerment has gained popularity over the past couple of years, which will have a positive influence on the issue.

Definition of Key Terms

Women Empowerment:

Women's empowerment is the ability of women to make their own decisions for their personal and societal development. Women's empowerment would imply encouraging women to be self-sufficient and financially independent.

Islamic/Arab Family Laws towards Women:

In Arab/Islamic states, family law mainly follows the Koranic principles. Veiling (hijab), divorce laws, a relatively early legal marriage age, child custody, polygamy, women's rightslessness in terms of job, travel, selecting the place of residence, and honor killing are all parts of Islamic Shari'a based on the Koran and Islam's theology.

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality refers to the societal phenomenon in which men and women are not treated equally. Distinctions in biology, psychology, or cultural standards may lead to therapy. Some of these distinctions appear to be experimentally supported, while others appear to be socially produced.

Socioeconomic and Political Equality

Political, social, legal, natural, and economic equality are all sorts of equality. There is a close connection between liberty and equality. In terms of affirmative action, it may be said that affirmative action is seen as a successful method of removing or minimizing the effects of discrimination.

Gendered Socialization:

Gendered socialization refers to segregating genders in social activities. The extremity this can be carried across can differ drastically, from separating genders for a gym class in school, to blatantly not allowing women to vote. Sometimes, gendered socialization can be carried out with positive intent, but a majority of the time it is used with a negative intent.

Crisis of Masculinity:

Male concerns about being a "true man," a protective father, a powerful leader, the family earner, and, unfortunately, sexually appealing to other women, are nothing new.

UN Sustainable Development Goals:

Goals established by the United Nations after the millennium development goals expired, with the purpose of ensuring a more sustainable future of excellent quality for all by solving important, pressing modern-day concerns.

Hijab:

A head covering worn in public by some Muslim women.

Gender Pay Gap:

The gender pay gap or gender wage gap is the average difference between the remuneration for men and women who are working. Women are generally found to be paid less than men.

Patriarchal Practices:

The sociologist Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women". Social stratification along gender lines, with power predominantly held by men, has been observed in most societies.

Marginalization:

Unfair treatment of a group of individuals based on preconceived prejudices and astigmatism directed towards that group of people.

Key Issues

Increase in the Gender Pay-Gap

A gender pay gap can be defined by being paid less for doing the same job simply because of their gender. This is one of the worst forms of discrimination since you are taking away someone's livelihood for an extremely unjust and incorrect reason. This may not *just* affect them, but also the people who they are earning the money for, such as their family.

The gender pay gap exists for a number of reasons, one being a woman's ability to have kids. When a woman has a baby, they have to take time off work. This means that they miss out on promotions and on career progression opportunities. Also, women tend to be associated with a care taking role, not just within the Arab states but globally. Therefore, when a woman takes on a position outside the caregiving role, their employers may have

a sexist attitude and wouldn't want to "waste" their resources on a woman because they believe a man could do a better job.

According to the UNDP, Arab States have the second widest gender gap in the world after South Asia as measured by the Gender Development Index (GDI) with women lagging behind particularly in income and work participation. In 2018, the average gender pay gap in Arab States was about 60%, which meant that women were paid 60% less for the same job.

Now, states like UAE and Kuwait are working towards abolishing the gender pay gap. However in countries such as Iran, gender discrimination has actually increased and as a direct result of that, so has the gender pay gap. The contrast between the progression of gender equality in the workforce is quite shocking and interesting, since they share similar cultures and beliefs.

Presence of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is found in every community and affects all people regardless of age, race, religion, nationality, gender or socioeconomic status. Domestic violence involves violence, abuse, and intimidation used by the abuser to control and dominate the other person. Cultural and societal factors add layers and barriers when understanding domestic violence within a particular group. For Arab Muslim women, the difference in domestic violence between them and non-Arab Muslim women does not lie in the dynamic of power and control, but in the cultural values and norms abusers have to coerce and abuse their victims.

Arab families are largely patriarchal, supporting the dominant role of a man as the authority figure, and patrilineal, where family lineage is passed down through sons.⁶ These gender norms regulate the role of family members where the man of the family handles women's affairs. Some males feel the right to defend their family honor by asserting power and control that can take the form of domestic violence if a woman fails

to be submissive or comply with her husband's or family's demands and expectations. This form of power can be taken advantage of and used as a reason for abuse. It should be noted that some women support these traditional beliefs.

Increase in Low Female Economic Participation

According to the ILO, only 26% of women are participating in economic activities, which either means that they do not want to participate, or they can not participate due to a specific reason. Keeping in mind that the global average female economic participation is around 56%, there must be a major factor present within the Arab states. On the other hand, a whopping 76% of men are active in economic activities, above the global average of 74%, which can confirm that this isn't a case of unemployment, but rather blatant inequality.

Aside from the common reasons for why a woman can't join the workforce (taking care of a child, etc.), an Arab woman has to face the stereotype of "men being the breadwinners" to an extreme case. This stereotype is definitely present in other parts of the world, but is exaggerated in these regions due to Arab/Islamic patriarchal views on men being stronger or smarter, which isn't necessarily true.

Presence of Sexist Attitudes

Discriminatory attitudes against females start at home, with discrimination towards the girl child. Boys are advised not to be girls if they display 'too much emotion,' which is a kind of gender discrimination. Girls are supposed to consume less since their bodies do not require as much physical strength as guys. Girls are expected to be well-groomed and aware of their body image. Boys, on the other hand, are rarely well-groomed because 'boys will be boys,' and they run around and are physically active. A girl child participating in the same physical activity, on the other hand, is referred to as a tomboy.

In educational institutions, sexist attitudes are reinforced when teachers tell young girls to behave a certain way, to be less boisterous. This can be damaging when

pubescent girls are told that they are delicate when they start menstruating. It's surprising how harmful myths about female health prevail in our society, limiting the physical activity of young girls and women during menstruation. This discrimination translates into social attitudes as well; how many times have women been dismissed, particularly by men, called "hysterical", "emotional", or asked, "are you on your period?" The generalization of women as emotional creatures, constantly at the mercy of their hormones, is one of the most harmful forms of sexism. It brings into question the capabilities of women, which manifests itself in multiple ways.

Misinterpretations of Islamic Law Towards Women

Islam's strict restrictions have denied half of the people of basic human rights. The male is in control of the female: Koran 4:34, and the oppressed half is encouraged to think, through Islamic teachings, that the superiority of the man is Allah's will, and that women have been predestined to live as submissive, obedient wives.

They are obliged to agree that women are inferior to males, that their testimony is only half that of men, that they should inherit one-half of the male portion, that Allah does not want any woman to be uncovered, and that she may not associate with men other than her father or brother.

The proper job and position for women is taking care of home, children and to be a housewife. The majority of Muslim women are brought up with the conviction that it is Allah's command for them to be under male dominance and their fates are interwoven with that of men.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Iran

For many years, gender inequality has been a persistent feature of Iranian society. The position and treatment of women in an Islamic state is based on interpretation of Islamic law (Shari'a).

If a woman applies for divorce without providing proof, her financial rights are immediately abandoned; in order for this to happen, the husband must also agree to the divorce. Protection from violence is another example of gender discrimination in Iran; there are no laws prohibiting domestic violence, and rape is classified as a criminal act with harsh penalties; however, the act must be witnessed by four male witnesses, or three male and two female, and marital rape is not recognized under Iranian law.

UAE

The UAE is one of the world's top countries in terms of female legislative representation, with 50% of seats in the Federal National Council, and a significant proportion of female ministers, with 27.5% in the Cabinet. Furthermore, the UAE has a strong presence of women in the labor market, specialized occupations, and future jobs.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia, an Islamic country, has a theocratic style of governance in which many of its laws are based on religious codes. Unfortunately, Sharia law in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia, creates an uneven environment for women. In Muslim culture, gender inequity not only identifies women as servants to men, but it also hampers their capacity to pursue feminism.

Women have extremely minimal rights in public attire under Sharia law. For example, in public, all skin, save the hands and face, must be covered. As a result, ladies must wear long veils or even a black, full-body covering known as the chador. This stringent restriction drastically restricts women's rights in Saudi Arabia, plainly labeling the female gender as a lower category because males are not subject to the same rules. Furthermore, female individuality is finally erased as a result of the conformity they must accept.

Lebanon

"Lebanese women who marry foreigners cannot pass on their citizenship to their children, although Lebanese men who marry foreign women may," said Claudine Aoun, president of the government-run National Commission for Lebanese Women.

Aoun faults two primary factors: patriarchal attitude and the sectarian political structure in Lebanon. This strategy addresses the country's religious diversity by providing top positions and civil service jobs based on faith (six Muslim and 12 Christian groups).

Another encouraging trend is that the government just passed a legislation against sexual harassment, giving hope that momentum would be maintained despite the country's difficulties.

United Nations Human Rights Council

The UNHRC was established in 2006 to promote and preserve human rights across the world. The United Nations established the UNHRC to replace the UNHCR (United Nations Commission on Human Rights). The UNHRC serves as a governing body for member nations, establishing goals and resolutions that member states must follow in order to decrease human rights violations. The UNHCR guarantees that gender equality is present.

United States of America

The USA is a country that is governmentally for gender equality. The reason the word "governmentally" is used is due to the fact that a lot of these gender inequality terms and ideas originated from the USA, which indicates low action being taken against it. For example, the term and concept "gender pay gap" had originated and gained

popularity in the USA. A majority of gender equality protests occur here, since USA is “the hub of discrimination” as said by a citizen on CNN.

European Union

The European Union is a strong advocate for gender equality in all spheres of life. The EU intends to focus on any barriers to gender equality, such as law, societal prejudice, and gender stereotyping. According to the European Union, gender equality is a necessary step toward sustainable and inclusive growth (European Commission, 2018).

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
1878	The First International Congress of Women's Rights convened in Paris	The International Council of Women, International Alliance of Women, and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom gathered together women who were dedicated to promoting women's rights. They collaborated with one another as well as with other ensembles. Despite the fact that these groups largely drew aristocratic, Christian, older women from Europe and North America, they built a feminist internationalism that they thought would unite

		women from all around the world.
01/01/1891	The NWSA was founded	In its fight for women's suffrage, the NWSA focused largely on the federal level. It urged women to vote and to sue if they were denied, contending that the constitution implicitly enfranchised women through its promises of equal protection for all citizens.
1897	Suffragettes Movement	Suffragette's movement was the direct passageway into letting the 19th amendment pass in the United States. Women protested on rights to vote, and gender inequality present in socioeconomic aspects of their lives.
09/04/1920	19th Amendment Passed in USA	The Nineteenth (19th) Amendment to the United States Constitution granted women the right to vote, making it illegal for any US citizen to be refused the right

		to vote on the basis of gender. After a protracted fight known as the women's suffrage movement, it was approved on August 18, 1920.
10/05/1941	National Service Act Pass for War work	The majority of young males were drafted into the military services. As a result of the severe labor crisis, Parliament approved the National Service Act on December 18, 1941. This legislation targeted unmarried women aged twenty to thirty.
1945	Gender Equality was added to the International Human Rights	States started to progress towards a more equal society after gender equality was added to the IHR.
09/07/1960	The first contraceptive pill was released onto the market	Enovid was licensed by the FDA for use as a hormonal tablet to treat problems such as irregular periods. The FDA eventually authorized Enovid for official birth control usage. On June 23rd, 1960, the pill was initially sold and released

		as an approved means of birth control.
1986	Finland ratifies the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).	The UN General Assembly enacted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, and it is sometimes referred to as a worldwide bill of rights for women. It consists of a prologue and 30 sections that describe what constitutes discrimination against women and establishes a national action plan to remove such discrimination.
13/09/1994	The Violence Against Women Act is signed into law, providing funding for programs that help victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, stalking and other gender-related violence.	The Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (VAWA) is a United States federal statute enacted by President Bill Clinton on September 13, 1994 (Title IV of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, H.R. 3355). The Act allocated \$1.6 billion for the investigation and prosecution of violent crimes against

		women, imposed automatic and mandatory restitution on those convicted, and allowed for civil remedies where prosecutors declined to prosecute cases. In addition, the Act established the Office on Violence Against Women within the United States Department of Justice.
24/01/2013	The U.S. military removes its ban on women serving in combat positions	After centuries of restrictions, the Pentagon is eliminating its prohibition on women participating in combat, opening hundreds of thousands of front-line roles and perhaps elite commando posts.
06/2018	Women were allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia	The restriction was repealed as part of a large-scale public relations campaign, but the Saudi government has provided few reliable numbers on the increase in female driving in the nation. The Saudi government did not reply to demands for updated information on the number of

		female drivers and driving schools, and calls to the General Department of Traffic went unanswered.
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Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Suffragettes Movement

The U.S. Constitution granted each state the power to decide the voting qualifications of its residents in all elections. Given the property laws and economic status of citizens at that time, most women and persons of color could not vote. A few state constitutions-such as New Jersey's (1797) were written in such a way that allowed free women to vote. In general "woman suffrage was almost unheard of up to the middle of the nineteenth century". Modeled on the U.S. Susan B. Anthony, a Quaker and rising leader in the women's suffrage movement, made nationwide suffrage a goal and recruited many supporters (Carter 1996; Weatherford 1998).

The AWSA was dedicated to state-by-state campaign reform; the NWSA focused on a federal amendment campaign. Susan B. Anthony, a Quaker and rising leader in the women's suffrage movement, made nationwide suffrage a goal and recruited many supporters. From this split, two associations emerged: The American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), and the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA).

Foundation of the NWSA

On May 15, 1869, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) was founded to advocate for women's suffrage in the United States. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were its key leaders. It was founded when the women's rights movement divided over the proposed Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which would effectively provide black males voting rights. The amendment

was supported by one branch of the movement, but the other, which formed the NWSA, rejected it, urging that voting rights be granted to all women and all African Americans at the same time. In its battle for universal equality, the NWSA focused largely on the federal level.

Gender Equality Added to the UN SDG

SDG 5: Gender Equality strives to close that gap by granting all women equal rights, safety, opportunity, and representation. A sustainable, peaceful, and wealthy future is impossible unless it is founded on fairness.

Possible Solutions

Hefty Fines for Firms Involved in the Gender Pay Gap

The issue of the gender pay gap has not yet been abolished due to the lack of action against it. Sure, there have been protests and advertisements against it, but very little direct action has been taken. Therefore the idea of significantly fining a firm that pays women less than men by over 2% could help solve the issue. The wages per gender would have to be reported to ILO so that they can be monitored, alongside random questionnaires sent to women working at that firm.

Gender Discrimination Classes at School

Studies have shown that discriminatory biases originate from a young age, which only grows later in their lives. If schools can educate children on gender equality, these biases can be eradicated, which can help abolish gender inequality.

Increase in Minimum Percentage of Women Working at a Firm

Firms are usually in favor of hiring men into their workforce because they have this incorrect perception that they are smarter or better. This is very untrue, and a majority of women don't have a chance to display their talents in the workfield because they are confined to their job as a stay-at-home mom. 2 main reasons as to why women

don't want to work is either that they feel as if they aren't wanted, or they won't have someone to look after their own children. The concept of increasing the minimum percentage of women required to work at a firm solves 1 of these factors, which can increase women's participation in the workforce by almost 35%!

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