A Critical Analysis of the Literature in Women's Leadership in Saudi Arabia

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*Abstract--*The presence of women in various fields of employment and aspects of public life in Saudi Arabia has been increasing continuously, with the last 10 years witnessing considerable growth in the participation of women in senior management positions and in the decision-making process in public and private sectors. In response to this trend, this paper attempts to explore women leadership opportunity in the Saudi environment. The paper highlights the fact that although there are many obstacles for Saudi women who are seeking to lead, there is still considerable scope for them to be appointed as leaders in the social, political and economic spheres. Women first joined the consultative assembly in 2013; in the same year women were appointed as deputy chairpersons of related committees. In 2015, women voted and ran for office in the municipal elections. Such developments indicate considerable progress in terms of the willingness of organisations to grant Saudi women the chance to occupy managerial positions.

Keywords: Women, Leadership, Saudi Culture, Islamic Culture, Saudi Arabia

I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of leadership has been extensively researched because it is believed that it plays a most important role in the success of countries, organizations and communities [1]. It is considered to be the main and crucial factor in influencing group processes and outcomes. Stereotypes, however, are often a potent barrier to women's advancement to positions of leadership. This assertion is the consensus view not only of social and organizational researchers but also of women who have substantial experience as leaders.

Gender issues within developing countries have been the focus of many studies over the last few decades [2]. The Arab Gulf Countries, however, have received limited attention [3]. Some of these studies focused on Saudi women and the loss of their rights [4]. The revival of women's studies in Saudi Arabia was apparently due, in part, to the birth of women's movements within and after the Gulf War in 1991 with the first attempt by women in Saudi Arabia to test the ban on women drivers inside cities1.

Various articles and books from Western and Middle Eastern authors have covered women and their rights, reflecting an intensive interest in all areas of social science and the humanities (Offenhauer, 2005; Metcalfe, 2008 & 2011; Doumato, 2010; Wagemakers et al, 2012; Odine, 2013).

Furthermore, many conferences have been held to discuss women issues (e.g. World Conference on Women, Copenhagen, 1980; Beijing, 1995; International Conference on Population, Mexico, 1984; International Conference on Population and Development/Cairo, 1994). Such conferences have been held internationally to try to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

Although leadership has been researched extensively, no consensual definition of either the conception of leadership or its nature seems to have been reached. Rost (1993) examined 587 publications, within which he found 221 different definitions of leadership. To define leadership, the attention should be given to the whole process: individual personal traits, leader behaviours, followers' behaviours and perceptions, task goals and situations. According to Kofman (2006, p.9), 'Leadership is a process by which a person sets a purpose for others to follow and motivates them to pursue it with effectiveness and full commitment'. Northouse (2010) defined leadership as mainly a process between the leader and the followers "to influence others to achieve a common goal".

Therefore, such definitions reflect several components that describe leadership as: (a) a process (b) influence (c) context of a group (d) goals attainment and (e) leaders and their followers are sharing the same goals. Women have increasingly moved toward greater gender equality at home and in the workplace.

In some nations, women have steadily emerged in leadership roles in all societal spheres in the last few decades (Chandler, 2011). Women have been making their way in ever-increasing numbers to the uppermost rungs of the corporate ladder, ascending to leadership positions once occupied almost exclusively by men (Matsa and Miller, 2012). They bring to the exercise of leadership an arsenal of strengths, which increasingly are received to benefit the organisations that they lead on national or global levels. However, although they are trying to take part in leadership roles, women are still underrepresented in such positions in corporations, institutions of higher education, and in the political sector.

Women now hold just 15 per cent of corporate officer positions and board seats in Fortune 500 companies, up from about 9 per cent of each 15 years ago, and 3 per cent of CEO spots, up from one-fifth of one per cent (Matsa and Miller,

2012). In the U.S., for example; women now make up 23% of American CEOs. Few women reach the top in higher education, although they increasingly enter the ranks of academia. A total of 453 women, representing 16 per cent of all presidents, now head U.S. colleges and universities. As of July 2013, there were only 19 female elected presidents and prime ministers in power around the globe (Llopis, 2014). This particular study focuses on literature about women's leadership in Saudi Arabia.

II. SAUDI NATIONAL CULTURE

Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam and part of an ancient civilization (Alkahtani, 2013; Abu Nadi, 2012). It has an ancient culture with a history extending several thousand years[5]. Therefore, the Islamic and Arabic traditions are revered and nurtured by Saudi citizens with great pride and satisfaction. The Islamic roots from which the Saudi culture stems, along with its time-honoured role as a centre of commerce and its Bedouin traditions, have moulded the very core of its heritage.

The Saudi society is a tribal system where the family and tribe are the basis of the social structure and are the most significant entity in the entire Saudi society (Maisel, 2015). Kinship and affiliation play an important role in all social relations and tribes carry a weighty impact on individual lives. Firm tribal loyalties exist within certain zones and tribal traditions and influences can have a heavy bearing on an individual's liberty when the tribe's reputation is at stake.

Indeed, Saudi Arabia's culture preaches a strong sense of loyalty to their family and tribe, yet provides a wide berth for individual tastes. Fostering durable, trust-based personal relationships is of the utmost priority to the majority of Saudis; these characteristics are inherited from Islamic teachings.

III. WOMEN IN SAUDI CULTURE

The segregation of men from women and their participation in the social, political and economic life are the hottest topics in Saudi Arabia and Western media. Some Westerners, according to Morris (2008: p.93), perceive that Saudi women exist behind imprisoning walls, cloaked and prohibited from the fruits of the free life enjoyed by Western women. They feel that women in Saudi Arabia are stripped not only of their beauty but of their position and their free speech amidst the Saudi hierarchical mandates (Morris, 2008). These Westerners take a superficial look at Saudi women's lives - their veils, the restraints placed on their mobility and suffrage.

Smith (1987), who is a Western feminist, claimed that the time-honoured absence and muzzling of women in Saudi Arabian public sectors lay at the root of the inequity of gender. As Doumato states, "Girls have been taught well in Saudi Arabia to follow a specific role, a role in which they were subordinate to men, but not enough to challenge it" (2000, p.93). However, these allegations reflect the lack of understanding of the Islamic culture and in fact the Saudi culture. Factually, the Saudi culture is either unknown to the Western media or they simply do not recognise it for what it is or try to understand it.

Western Media (and some Westerners) judge a Saudi woman's lifestyle according to their cultural criteria and standards. Their viewpoint is that Saudi women may not claim to be women unless they fail to bow to the prescribed standards of their traditions. They are considered to be devoid of femininity in the absence of comparable conduct to the Western female (Al-Tahlawi, 2008). This in fact reflects a substandard pattern of thought and a meagre level of understanding (Al-Bishr, 2008). Further, with such biased patterns of judgement they effectively ignore Islamic cultural values and beliefs and want others to simply emulate their own patterns. Consequently, the big debate about Saudi women and their veiled existences has been a controversial topic for political institutions and human rights organisations in the Western countries.

These parties have not, however, gone deep enough into the issue to ask themselves simple questions such as 'What is the historical background and the cultural values behind Saudi women and the wearing of a veil?' Wearing a veil can in fact be considered to be a surface manifestation of the Saudi culture. Although the reasons behind it can be easily understood, it appears to be very difficult to grasp by outsiders. Indeed, (some) Westerners and the Western media look at Saudi women with just a Western eye. This eye usually focuses only on the negative side of Saudi women when judging them; they ignore the luxuries that Saudi women enjoy socially, economically and in many other aspects of their lives.

In fact, Saudi women have contributed hugely to the revitalization and prosperity experienced by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recently. Many Saudi women are academicians, physicians, administrators and businesswomen(Wagemakers et al, 2012). At both national and international strata their influence is felt, just as it is felt in the field of healthcare and in the media. They are often counted amongst the finest minds in the banking and business sectors. They also enter the newspaper arena as journalists, correspondents and writers (Odine, 2012). Many are also novelists and poets.

Government, in Saudi Arabia, has assured numerous rights to Saudi women; freedom to receive an education, to employment, to welfare, to personal privacy and security, to the right to own and to medical support. Notably, Article 30 stipulated that the state would be dedicated to guaranteeing education to the masses and that illiteracy would be challenged in all citizens regardless of gender. In Saudi Arabia, therefore, women have (for example) the right to incomes which are comparable to men's, and may benefit from equivalent retirement prerogatives. Interestingly, in the US, according to Al-suwaidan et al. (2003) and Metcalfe [6], women receive 71% of men's salary despite having the same qualifications and competences.

To summarize, the Saudi Arabian state does in fact assert equality between women and men in all aspects of their lives, in its national regulations and policies and the Saudi culture deals with women and men on an equal basis. Consequently, if there appears on the surface to be an inequality between women and men, authors would account for this by shortfalls in the accuser's thinking, level of education, maturity and

perception of what the relationship between men and women should be.

IV. WOMAN LEADERSHIP

Although Islamic history is strewn with examples of women leaders since the 14th Century, leadership has been regarded in English literature in the early part of the last century as a masculine concept (Gedney, 1999). This has been particularly prevalent following the rise of the Great Man and Traits Theories. These concern themselves with the traits, characteristics and equalities of men as opposed to women.

Traditionally, the concept of leadership has been associated with masculine characteristics and traits such as power, domination, and assertiveness (Alomiri, 2015; Koenig et al., 2011; Gedney, 1999). Although there is no evidence that such characteristics are associated with true leadership, it appears that socially and culturally they have been.

According to Cummings (2005), who asked women executives to provide descriptions for female leaders, such leaders are: multi-tasking, emotional, strong, intuitive, compassionate, relationship-oriented, consensus-based, collaborative and gossipy. The same group provided a different list of adjectives to describe the male leader, including: strong, intelligent, powerful, dominant, assertive, focused, stubborn, and single-tasking.

Per Cummings, the nature of women is different than men in many aspects. Many women don't believe that they are capable, for example, of having an argument with someone at work and then going out to dinner with that person as if nothing had happened. In other words, women tend to 'hold a grudge' while men tend not to do so. Consequently scholars and practitioners usually associate leadership concepts with masculine traits and characteristics regardless of the leader's nature, whether it's a man or a woman. Further, the successful women leaders tend to have some very masculine traits. For example, Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, is often considered to exemplify leadership traits and is viewed as having been self-assured, iron willed, resolute and bearing great determination; all of which are traditionally considered to be masculine traits.

Indeed, our culture has a huge impact on our perspective of leadership. It affects how women are prepared as leaders, and typically embraces masculine traits and characteristics. Therefore, those who explain leadership in terms of traits and characteristics may feel that anyone could become a leader if he/she has specific masculine traits and characteristic, regardless of their gender.

According to many studies (e.g. Mintzberg, 1980; Helgesen, 1995; Cummings, 2005), women tend to be more relationship-oriented, while men are more task-oriented. Therefore, a 'masculine style' tends to adopt an assertive and directive style with task-based behaviours, whereas a 'feminine style' tends to be interpersonal and democratic, with people-based behaviours. A female leadership style, according to Al Suwaidan & Bashraheel (2003), includes:

1. Working with the same effort but taking short and divergent rest

2. Being interpersonally oriented
3. Being democratic
4. Believing that visits and disturbances provide a good chance to understand subordinates' needs
5. Allocating enough time to her family
6. Building a relationship with people outside the organisation
7. Assessing every piece of work and considering the future effects on families, environment and education
8. Linking with her work but also linking with other things
9. Liking information exchange
10. Not liking working through organisational hierarchies; preferring instead to work through relationship networks
11. Being more efficient in problem-solving situations
12. Emphasizing the process

Al Suwaidan & Bashraheel (2003) claimed that although men and women share some common characteristics, there are also many differences:

Common characteristics (with men)	Women's characteristics (strengths)	Women's characteristics (weaknesses)
Adaptable	Tender	Compliant
Polite	Understanding (Appreciation)	Reliant upon others
Loyal (faithful)	Passionate	Temperamental
Committed	Sensitive	
Creative	Compassionate (merciful)	
Enthusiastic		
Competent		
Effective (efficient)		
Systematic		

Fig 1.   Common characteristics between men and women, and women's characteristics

The dominating leadership style is a masculine style, since this has repeatedly been established as a successful and acceptable style during the last century. Therefore the easiest way for women to lead is to utilize a male style of leadership, especially in masculine organizational contexts, as the masculine style is a commonly accepted style of leadership. According to some researchers (e.g. Porat, 1991; Growe, 1999; Cummings, 2005), female attributes of nurturing, being sensitive, empathetic, passionate, caring and cooperative are associated with effective administration. Furthermore, other researchers, such as Helgesen, 1990 and Rosener, 1990, claim that female leaders, compared with male leaders, are less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative, and more oriented to enhancing others' self-worth; such behaviours, they say, make women excellent leaders. These characteristics, however, are innate and valuable within women. Therefore women can be creative and innovative in particular organisations that need such characteristics (e.g. those in the fields of education and health). Desvaux & Devillard (2008: 2)

claimed that most leadership behaviours that enhance corporate performance tended to be utilized by women more than men in team management. They measured, in their study, a company's organizational competence based on nine key criteria: Leadership team, Direction, Work environment and values, Accountability, Coordination and Control, Capabilities, Motivation, Innovation and External orientation.

They then determined how the above dimensions of organizational performance could be affected by leadership behaviours, basing their study on the work of Bass & Avolio (1990), as cited in Desvaux & Devillard (2008: 4): Participative decision making, Role modeling, Inspiration, Expectations and rewards, People development, Intellectual stimulation, Efficient communication, Individualistic decision making, Control, and Corrective action. In exploring how women contribute to organizational performance, Desvaux & Devillard (2008) explored these nine leadership behaviours, citing Eagly's (2003) findings that women used five leadership behaviours: People development, Expectation and rewards, Role model, Inspiration, and Participative decision making.

These five dimensions assist in strengthening the work environment and values, accountability and leadership team organisational performance dimensions. Therefore, those who believe that leadership is down to skill and who place emphasis on the process of the work rather than its products consider women to be well qualified as potential leaders. Furthermore, it is considered that if potential leaders learn these skills and processes well; they can contribute hugely to the overall organisational performance.

V. WOMEN WORKING AND LEADING, FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

From the beginning of Islam, the main resource for Islamic teachings has been the Holy book (Quran). Although this resource has not been exposed to any changes over the last fourteen centuries and will not in the future, meanings and interpretations of the Quran is subject to the times and places of interpretation[7]. Consequently Muslim scholars in different Islamic countries have interpreted the Quran slightly differently.

Muslims who believe in gender equality always interpret the Quran as supporting such equality. In contrast, conservative scholars follow a more time-honoured fashion of interpretation, regardless of globalization, the media revolution, the social transformations, the demographic shifts and the economic waves of affluence that the country has passed through over the last few decades[8]. From an Islamic perspective, according to conservative scholars in Saudi Arabia, women are encouraged to remain at home. During the last fourteen centuries their kingdom has been their house, and their hijab (veil) has concealed them.

Conservative scholars in Saudi Arabia have cited (and interpreted) many verses of the Quran that support their claim that a woman should remain at home and serve her children and husband. They believe that 'women are required to dedicate themselves fully to nurturing the family environment whereas husbands are expected to devote their energies towards furnishing the wherewithal for their families' survival' [9].

This view from conservative scholars about a woman's work or leadership position has also gained support from some Muslim scholars in other Muslim countries. Sayed Qutub2, for example, in his book 'International peace and Islam', as noted by ALsheha (2000), claims that:

"…the co-ed drags man and woman into sin and they drift towards moral decay. Such actions will definitely threaten the precious and holy ties between them and then there will be no room for trust and confidence in one another….".

Furthermore, ALsheha (2000: pp.99-100) has cited some Western views about women's right to work that support the conservative perspective. He points out that the well-known English writer, Lady Cook, says in New Echo:

"Men like (and prefer) the mixed environment. Thus, women are lured to something that conflicts with their human nature. The greater the co-ed. environment (between male and female), the more illegitimate children the society will have. There is the greatest disaster..."

He also cites one of the pillars of the English renaissance, Samuel Smiles, who wrote:

"The system that has required women to work in factories and industrial areas, regardless of the national wealth it brings, has destroyed the family life. It has attacked, in fact, the basic structure and foundations of the home and destroyed the essential pillars of the family. It has cut and destroyed social ties as well. Stripping the wife from her husband, and depriving children of their rights of proper, tender and maternal care, has resulted in lower moral values for the women. The real job and profession of a woman is to raise a good, sound and moral family. She is mainly required to take care of household responsibilities, home economics and other domestic needs."

This Western perception of a woman's domestic role as an innate right (fitrah) coincides with the Islamic one. The principle was further supported in Western newspapers' headlines during the 2011 'England riots':

'Proper parenting would have prevented these riots' (the Guardian)

'Poor parenting to blame for London riots, report says' (the Daily Telegraph).

Moreover, British Prime Minister David Cameron has admitted that British society is a 'broken society' and that:

"The 'moral collapse' and tackling the 'broken society' is back at the top of my agenda". (BBC, 15 August 2011).
He added that he would "...speed up plans to improve parenting….'.

Consequently, the nature of a woman and her function in the house of bringing up children is not one that merely provides safety and a means to construct her family; she will in fact produce ideal generations and build an ideal society who may then lead the country into prosperity and revival.

In fact, the Islamic perspective about women leadership does not deny her opportunities to undertake professional work, nor is it against female empowerment 3[9]. It is rather an

address to the Islamic concern about building a stable family that cultivates Islamic morals, ethos and values in its children in their early age, as "a stable family will produce a stable society".

VI. WOMEN WORKING AND LEADING, FROM A SAUDI CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Islam plays a pivotal part in delineating the country's culture and serves as a cardinal impetus in regulating the social standards, protocols, principles and credos which have been inculcated from birth by relatives and educational institutions. Saudis believe that Islam is not just a channel for worshipping God; rather, they believe that it is a comprehensive system which regulates their behaviour and embraces detailed prescriptions for the whole of life.

Saudis might be grouped into two categories:

Pure Saudis. These are conservative families who have been fully educated in Saudi Arabia and haven't had the opportunity to live or work in Western countries. These cohere with Islamic teachings, rules and principles and pride themselves on having achieved a harmony between the Islamic beliefs and principles and their culture toward women's roles, responsibilities and duties. Their perception about women's leadership is consistent with the Islamic one. Although they believe that the main role for Saudi women is to bring up their children and maintain their family structure (Metcalfe 2008b; Ramadan 2009), they are not against women working if the work is guided by Sharia (Islamic) law.

Those who have been educated in Western countries and have embraced Western thought. These believe that there is inequality between men and women and feel that women should challenge gender inequalities, break the mould and disregard their disparities of class and culture. Such thinkers believe that these women should unify and fraternise in a bid to prevail over male social supremacy. They have tried to challenge some Islamic values such as gender segregation by mobilising resources for a collective action. According to Hamdan (2005), Saudi women in general have faced a cultural and traditional gender bias over the last century in all areas of life, not merely in the field of leadership, and in Saudi Arabia they have been absent from public life (Metcalfe, 2008; Teitelbaum, 2011).

VII. BARRIERS TO WOMEN WORKING IN THE SAUDI ENVIRONMENT

The foregoing discussion has highlighted some of the barriers to women's work, from an Islamic prospective. Some of these barriers concur with Saudi national culture that restricts and limits such work. In fact there are many barriers facing a woman's work in Saudi Arabia on, structural, cultural and individual levels [11].

At a structural level, labour inequalities are prevalent in Saudi Arabia, where according to UNDP (2009) and AlMunajjed[12], the rate of women's labour market participation is one of the lowest in the region. In 2007, according to AlMunajjed[13], the active workforce in Saudi

Arabia reached 8.2 million people; yet just 14.4 percent of the nationals in the labour force were women. Furthermore, the unemployment rate of women in the Saudi labour force in 2008 was 26.9[14]. One of the reasons behind this was that there were no options for the majority women to find work other than in the fields of education and health. Until recently in Saudi Arabia, women have been barred from certain professions, such as engineering, politics and architecture. Furthermore, training and development opportunities, according to Metcalfe [15], disadvantaged women in the state.

At a cultural level, the main obstacle to female employment is the Saudi philosophy toward men and women's lifestyles. Both genders are expected to agree with the Islamic perspective with regard to their responsibilities and duties wherein men should financially support women. Another factor that limits women's opportunities to work is the gender segregation. This factor reflects the need to create a moral work environment. Therefore, there is reluctance by private sector organisations to employ women, partly due to social norms and partly due to additional costs that may be incurred for creating such a work environment [16]. Furthermore, the restrictions placed on women's mobility within the country are another factor that has limited their work in different areas.

At an individual level, the majority of women believe that their main roles and responsibilities are strongly related to Islamic beliefs (Ramadan, 2009). Further, Saudi women believe that men's abilities to lead are superior to theirs. Marmnout (2009) conducted a study of gender role stereotyping at Prince Sultan4 University in Riyadh using the Schein Descriptive Index (SDI) to evaluate perceptions of leadership effectiveness. The study found that men perceived that they possessed more requisite managerial characteristics than women. Interestingly, women also believe that men have more appropriate skills and abilities than they do. It could be concluded, then, that the Saudi culture has stereotypical masculine qualities and that the Saudi culture coheres with Islamic beliefs.

VIII. EMPOWERMENT OF SAUDI WOMEN

Although, from an Islamic and cultural perspective, Saudi women are, to some extent, encouraged to remain at home serving their children and husbands, this doesn't mean Islam or Saudi culture forbids women from working - as long as it is controlled by Islamic Sharia. According to ALsheha (2000), Islamic law does not deprive a woman from the right to work. Islam permits a woman to conduct her own business and financial issues. These businesses, however, must not conflict with her main responsibilities and duties at home (ibid). Furthermore, her work must be in a female environment involving no physical contact with men.

Islamic history is strewn with examples of women leaders since the 14th Century. According to (Ghadanfar, 2001):

'Muslim women achievements and influence are found in every sphere of momentous periods in the history of the world. ...They were in politics, were as courageous in war as in the peaceful and persuasive propagation of the teachings of Islam.

...They were to be found in the political arena, in the field of education, in the courts of Islamic jurisprudence, in the interpretation of Sharia, in trade and commerce, in agriculture, in medicine and in nursing. In short there was no sphere that did not benefit from their intellect, their wisdom and their gentle yet firm strength of character'.

In Saudi Arabia, with the dawn of the King Abdullah era in 1995, the women issue was treated differently. The King had the strategy and vision to promote women's rights in the state. In 1999, for the first time in Saudi Arabia's history, the government allowed twenty women to attend the Consultative Council session. This initiative paved the way for women in the state to penetrate into the public sphere.

Five major events, according to Al-Dabbagh[17], followed at the beginning of the new millennium: King Abdullah's "National Dialogue" in 2003, the Municipal elections in 2003, the Chamber of Commerce elections in 2004, the establishment of the first women's university in Saudi Arabia (the largest women-only university in the world - Princess Nora University) in 2007, and the appointment of a woman as an assistant undersecretary for the Ministry of Education in 2009.

Although these five events were not a comprehensive reform, nor what women sought in the state, they nevertheless demonstrate how the Saudi society can accustom itself to seeing women in a leadership position.

The National Dialogue in 2003

A conference held under Abdullah's auspices in 2003 grouped the religious leaders of different confessional groups. One of the main sessions of this conference discussed "women rights and duties". The main aim of such a session was to expand the role of women in public life.

The Municipal Elections

In 2003 the elections, which covered half the seats of the municipal councils nationwide, were announced. It was the first time that the Saudi government had introduced the word 'election' in their dictionary. Some commentators considered it to be a historic moment in Saudi political culture. This announcement, however, made it clear that women were not eligible to participate. Eight years after this announcement, in 2011, the government announced that they would allow its female citizens to vote and run for office in the municipal elections, starting in 2015 (Arab News, 2011).

Chamber of Commerce Elections

In 2004, one year after the original announcement about the municipal elections, the Saudi government allowed women to participate in broad elections for the Chambers of Commerce and Industry. In the Western province and Jeddah, two women were elected in these two cities, whereas no women won in other regions. Regardless of this failure to win, it was a groundbreaking opportunity for women to participate in an electoral process.

Princess Nora bint Abdurrahman University

Women's education has known a great deal of care in the King Abdullah era. This is further evidence of the empowerment of women in the state. Princes Nora University is the largest women-only university in the world, with twelve colleges servicing 50,289 students in the bachelor program, 371 in the doctorate and 432 in the Masters.

Appointment of a woman as an Assistant Undersecretary in the Ministry of Education

In 2009 the government announced the appointment of the first female in the Ministry of Education as the Deputy Education Minister for Girls' Affairs. It was a huge change in the Saudi political culture. Many Saudis were heartened by this appointment, especially women. A female educator, quoted in Arab News (the Saudi Newspaper) said, "This is a successful step. We've always suffered from having a man occupy the position. A woman knows what problems and challenges her peers face. It's a change for the better". This summed up the general reaction to this breakthrough.

These five reform initiatives have engaged women in unprecedented opportunities which have emancipated women in Saudi Arabia from the isolation to which they've long been subjected to over the last century into actual participation in the cultural renaissance that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is currently undergoing. Furthermore, it demonstrates how these nascent government initiatives can play a monumental role in empowering women in the Saudi environment. Such initiatives illustrate how shifting political, economic and social factors can combine to form a pivotal dimension in forming Saudi women's future, permitting them to play a vital role in building a successful society.

IX. INCENTIVES FOR WOMEN WORK AND LEADERSHIP IN THE SAUDI ENVIRONMENT

- Appointment of the first female in the Ministry of Education as the Deputy Education Minister for Girls' Affairs, which was considered a huge change in the Saudi political culture (2009)
- Although women's education was granted to Saudi women as late as 1970, the dramatic advances in education have grown rapidly over the last 5 years. Women's participation equalled men's in 2003 (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2003), while in 2007 there were more women than men. According to the Central Department of Statistics & Information in the KSA (2012), graduating male students from universities numbered 44,767 (43%) whereas graduating females came to 59,022 (57%).
- Expansion of the role of women in public life and discussion of women's rights and duties in the National Dialogue (2003)
- Establishment of the Businesswoman Committee in 2002 with the support of Princess Adelah bint Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz; in 2005 this became a Centre for businesswomen. The centre provides training in a broad range of areas including: public

relations; computer skills; management of social services; management of voluntary associations; banking skills and capabilities [9].

- Women were elected to municipal councils for the first time in 2015.
- Establishment of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology with mixed genders, allowing women to enter all professions (2009).
- Establishment of the largest women-only university in the world (2007);
- Saudi government allowing women to participate in broad elections for the Chambers of Commerce and Industry (2004) which supported the development of businesswomen and professional women
- The Chambers of Commerce and Industry calling for:
  - A human resource development fund to provide special training of Saudi women and employment of them in training programs;
  - Permission of women to work in stores selling women's goods;
  - The request for the Ministry of Labour to co-ordinate with the Ministry of Public Services and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Economy and Planning to establish an integrated plan for Saudi women workers and to identify the real needs of women workers;
  - The Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Trade and Industry, and Council Offices investigating maternity leave provisions with a view to providing further benefits in a manner which does not prevent their employment.

There have been, then, some remarkably successful achievements in furthering the empowerment of women in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, these breakthroughs have granted powerful political, social and civil rights to Saudi women, with political participation being one of the most significant rights that Saudi women have gained to date. In the last few years, Saudi women have proven that they are qualified to hold leading positions, and becoming fully involved in Shoura has helped them to gain their social, political and civil rights (Arab News, 2015). Furthermore, fifteen female Saudi CEOs who broke new grounds in the social, educational, economic, political and cultural fields have been named in the list of the world's 100 most powerful Arab women, published by CEO Middle East (2013). The highest Saudi entry was second-place Lubna Olayan, while Princess Ameerah Al-Taweel and Mona Al-Munajjed ranked third and ninth, respectively.

X. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine Saudi women in Islamic and Saudi culture and their effect on their leadership positions in a Muslim society. It is true that the law and the male-dominated society do not provide a good environment for leadership positions of women; women are, nevertheless now more willing than ever to take the risk and empower themselves, overcoming all barriers in the process.

According to the literature studied, Saudi women have contributed hugely to the revitalization and prosperity experienced by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Many Saudi women are academicians, physicians, administrators and businesswomen. Their influence is felt at both national and international levels, just as it is felt in the field of healthcare and in the media. They are often counted amongst the finest minds in the banking and business sectors. They also enter the newspaper arena as journalists, correspondents and writers.

Several conclusions and recommendations can be drawn from this literature review on women leadership. First, the underrepresentation of female leaders is a global phenomenon where, for example, only 22 per cent of all national parliamentarians were female in 2015, and only 17 per cent of government ministers were women (UN Women, 2015). These figures might be because of difficulty balancing family responsibilities with work demands, organizational factors, and gender stereotypes, all of which can serve as major roadblocks for females seeking leadership opportunities at different organisational levels. In the Saudi Consultative Assembly, however, women represent 20 per cent of its total number, which is more than America's House and the Senate council (19.3 per cent). This highlights the dramatic improvement in female status in Saudi Arabia.

Second, it has been argued that gender-segregation may be a barrier to female career advancement in the state. On the one hand, researchers indicated that segregation between genders might limit opportunities to hold a leadership position, as such a position requires a degree of mixing, if only to discuss an issue. On the other, researchers have claimed that gender-segregated organizations are able to provide females with leadership opportunities in Saudi Arabia.

Third, developing female leadership trends in Saudi Arabia are a significant outcome from this literature. Saudi women are gradually being empowered in order to fully participate and contribute to the progression and modernization of the country. Therefore, many initiatives have been adopted over the last ten years to support women participation in the social, political and economic life, including appointment of the first female in the Ministry of Education, participation in municipal councils, and participation in elections for the Chambers of Commerce and Industry. For this reason, female leadership development should be extended to college students that will equip them with the capacity and competencies needed for career advancement.

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