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13 June 2014

Online at <https://mpa.ub.uni-muenchen.de/47521/>
MPRA Paper No. 47521, posted 01 Nov 2014 09:42 UTC

Parental Influence on Female Vocational Decisions in the Arabian Gulf

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Abstract

Due to the Arabian Gulf's pyramid-style 'national' demographic profile and pronounced reliance on expatriate labor, policymakers are now actively seeking ways to increase national FLFP. In this context, we examine the impact of parental influence on the post-graduation vocational intentions of women in the United Arab Emirates. Perceived levels of parental support, engagement and interference are measured against factors including: the likelihood per se of seeking formal employment, sectoral preferences and, the impact of sociocultural barriers on such decisions. While remunerative factors (particularly salary and maternity leave) and sentiment towards a given occupation's 'appropriateness' were observed to have considerable bearing, so was the role played by parents. Parental support is found to significantly reduce the magnitude of sociocultural barriers. Conversely, parental interference results in labor market entry being less likely. Moreover, those whose fathers have tertiary-level education have a significantly higher intention of joining the workforce.

Keywords: Arabian Gulf Labor Markets; Female Labor Force Participation; Parental Career-related Behavior, Vocational Behaviour, Middle East Human Resource Model

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There is a distinct preference for public sector employment amongst the citizens of the Arabian Gulf, in part a consequence of perceptions of appropriacy as dictated by prevailing sociocultural norms and also, in no small part, for pragmatic economic reasons (e.g. Al Ali, 2008; Gallup/Silatech, 2011; Salih, 2010). Some amongst the national cohort who are unable to secure such positions believe for instance, that society considers them as ‘second tier’ citizens who have failed in some way (Harry, 2007, p. 138; Nelson, 2004, p. 22). In the United Arab Emirates, on average, government employees earn three times as much as their private sector counterparts and have an additional 57 days of annual leave (Issa, Mustafa, & Al Khoori, 2013). For women, it is observed, the public sector is considered by far the most suitable option (e.g. Abdulla, 2006; Gallant & Pounder, 2008; Marmenout & Lirio, 2013). Consequently, in all six Arabian Gulf states at this juncture, the majority of all employed nationals work in this sector (Randeree, 2012).

However, regional labor nationalisation policies have now replaced much of the expatriate workforce in the respective public sectors’ administrative and bureaucratic strata (e.g. Issa et al., 2013). Moreover, its absorptive capacity is said to be reaching “saturation point” (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010, p. 38). While the “Arab Spring” has not impacted the Gulf to a significant degree, one of its key antecedents: high levels of youth unemployment, can be observed within the region albeit in the guise of on the one hand, an increasing number of nationals choosing to remain unemployed unless, or until, a government position is made available and on the other, a large number of unfulfilling sinecures (e.g. Hazran, 2012; Kitchen, 2012). Such labor market ‘strains’ along with the systemic structural imbalances and rigidities have in fact been emergent for some time (e.g. Dyer & Yousef, 2007; Fasano & Goyal, 2004).

In reaction, and also in an attempt to reduce the ‘demographic imbalance’—the over-dependence on expatriate labor who largely staff the private sector—policymakers are

seeking to encourage more nationals to take up ‘productive’ (i.e. private sector) employment (e.g. Andersson & Djeflat, 2013; Government of Abu Dhabi, 2008; IKED, 2010). In this regard, national women are considered both by policymakers and within the HRD literature, as an “underutilized asset” (Marmenout & Lirio, 2013, p. 51; Rutledge, Al Shamsi, Bassioni, & Al Sheikh, 2011, p. 192). Although they comprise the majority of nationals enrolled at tertiary level institutions and outperform their male counterparts in terms of grades (e.g. Baud & Mahgoub, 2001; Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2012, p. 26; Karoly, 2010), they constitute only a small fraction of the ‘national’ workforce. Within the Gulf they comprise, a little over a quarter and for the UAE, just one in five (Rutledge et al., 2011, p. 186).

Gendered sociocultural factors are widely considered to act as barriers to this cohort’s formal employment, inter alia, their limited geographic mobility and societal notions of what are appropriate occupations for ‘national’ women to undertake (e.g. Farrell, 2008; Metcalfe, 2008; Nelson, 2004). Indeed, in some quarters there is ambiguity per se as to whether or not they should actually be in formal employment at all (Abdulla, 2006, p. 10). To date, the specific role parents play within the region, has received little direct attention. Yet, within the field of vocational behavior the influence and impact of the role parents play is widely acknowledged. Otto (2000) contends that adolescents speak most frequently about their vocational options and decisions to their parents and moreover, such influences are said to be stronger in conservative societies; essentially those that are more patriarchal in nature (e.g. Hijab, 1998; Hindi, Khasawneh, Qablan, & Al Omari, 2008).

In order to gauge parental influence we use the Parental Career-related Behaviour (PCB) construct (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009). Each PCB criterion—perceptions of support, engagement and interference—is measured against: the likelihood per se, of seeking formal employment post-graduation; the extent to which sociocultural factors are considered to be barriers and, whether or not they significantly affected sectoral preferences. This paper is based upon a survey of 335 Emirati women and provides an initial assessment of the impact

of parental influence on vocational decision making processes in the Arabian Gulf.

Information was also collected on a range of remunerative variables and, the extent to which the sample considered a range of occupational roles to be 'attractive' (from an individualistic viewpoint) and 'appropriate' (in terms of what they considered to be the sentiments of wider society).

Background

As a direct result of parental influence, it is argued that gendered notions of appropriate occupational roles are formed at a very early stage of childhood (Weisner & Wilson-Mitchell, 1990). Astin (1984) reports that amongst the 'impressions' which women personalize from prevailing sociocultural norms and peer groups, it is that of their parents which carries the most weight, more so even than that of educators and career counselors (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005). Gutek and Larwood (1987) argue that gendered expectations affect occupational decision making and indeed, the process of recruitment selection in a number of distinct ways. Of particular relevance to this study are the points that they make concerning parenting roles; they are generally gendered among men and women and secondly, they contend that men and women accommodate their careers to their spouse's careers to different extents. Parents therefore, have the capacity to play a major role in both the educational and vocational decision making processes (e.g. Mortimer, Zimmer-Gembeck, Holmes, & Shanahan, 2002).

It is further argued that parental influence is most pronounced in patriarchal societies where the role and status afforded to women is subjugated (e.g. Cohen, 2006; Hijab, 1998) and also, where gender segregation is more commonplace (Chang, 2004). In a study conducted in Greece, Koumoundourou, Tsaousis, and Kounenou (2011, p. 174) find that due to stricter parental control, women are more negatively influenced compared to their male siblings, and conclude that authoritarian family environments result in proportionately more career indecision for young women. Research conducted in Jordan by Hindi et al. (2008)

reports that in collectivistic cultures with close family ties, there exists higher levels of parental influence over female career-path choice. In the PCB context this may arguably be interpreted as ‘interference’ (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009, p. 110).

While it may be the case that vocational-related gender barriers are being eroded in parts of the industrialized world, such progress is by no means universal (Vignoli, Croity-Belz, Chapeland, de Phillipis, & Garcia, 2005). At present, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the gender equality gap—particularly in terms of economic participation and opportunity—remains pronounced. Indeed, eight of the ten states with the lowest FLFP rates globally are in MENA (Hausmann et al., 2012, p. 25). It has been argued that elements of Gulf society, which de facto includes parents, consider a wide range of occupational roles to be inappropriate for national women (e.g. Donn & Issan, 2007; Gallant & Pounder, 2008; Marmenout & Lirio, 2013; Moghadam & Roudi-Fahimi, 2003). For Saudi women, a career in nursing was for instance, found to adversely affect their marriage prospects (El Sanabary, 1998). Indeed, Ashencaen Crabtree (2007, p. 57) argues that despite the political rhetoric encouraging women to take marketable skills to the workplace, it is, “Evident that only a minority... intend to use their acquired knowledge to pursue an active career upon graduation.” The ‘intention’ in our view, may be better termed as ‘permission’ for as Farrell (2008, p. 148) suggests, male support for a female relative’s education, does not necessarily translate to their acquiescence for her subsequent entry into the labor market.

The limited geographic mobility typically granted to national women is another deterrent: they are less likely to apply for (or be ‘allowed’ to apply for) jobs that require commuting independently to different cities let alone, overseas travel (Nelson, 2004).

As Abdulla (2006) portrays it, within the region a national woman’s primary role is still seen mostly in the family realm or in traditional vocational roles resultant from the fact that it is often considered *haraam* (‘sinful’) for women to interact with men other than their close relatives. Thus vocational contexts requiring frequent contact with men, such as within

the healthcare and hospitality sectors, are often considered to be inappropriate a typical vocational role would be e.g. a teacher in a gender segregated government school). Harry (2007, p. 138) in fact reports that less *aib* ('shame') is attributed to national women working in the public sector and Nelson (2004, p. 19), who examined the experiences of national women working in the UAE's private sector, reports that society tends to view them as having 'failed' for not being able to secure a public sector position. Therefore, selecting an occupation deemed to be 'respectable' is of particular import for national women (Gallant & Pounder, 2008).

Nevertheless, Marmenout and Lirio (2013, p. 51) point to some evidence that national women in the UAE are gradually making their mark in atypical professions and that a number of role models are emerging. Also, while Baud and Mahgoub (2001, p. 33) state that a significant proportion of 'husbands' in the UAE would not 'allow' their wives to work in mixed-gender environments (commonplace in the private sector), they estimate that almost 70 percent of Emirati women actually work in such situations. Moreover, the share of 'national' women participating in all Arabian Gulf states has been growing incrementally since the late 1990s (Rutledge et al., 2011). In the UAE, the percentage of women in the active 'national' workforce was 11.8 percent in 1996 and grew to 19.3 percent in 2008 (Abu Dhabi Statistics Centre, 2010; Rutledge et al., 2011, p. 186).

The nature and the structure of the region's labor markets, to varying degrees, are also undergoing transformations. The 'public sector' increasingly constitutes state-owned enterprises, or what are termed as government-backed entities (GBEs). It has been argued that such entities, which provide skilled (but, for an indeterminate period, government subsidized) jobs, may at some point see a considerably larger fraction of the national workforce taking up more productive roles in commercially run entities (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010). While strictly speaking such entities are in the public sector, they are

nonetheless considered to be semi- or quasi-private, not least by regional policy makers and, many of the nationals currently seeking employment.

Interestingly—in light of the region's stated aim of transitioning to a knowledge-based, non-oil dependent economy by way of such GBEs (e.g. Government of Abu Dhabi, 2008; Government of Qatar, 2008)—gendered figures on educational attainment and performance in terms of grades, are in stark contrast to FLFP rates. It is the female cohort in many instances that have the qualifications and skillsets more aligned to those required by the nascent GBEs. At secondary level, Karoly (2010, pp. 46–48) finds that adolescent females statistically outperformed males in mathematics and science, in five of the six states (see also: Benard, 2006, pp. 40-41; HCT, 2012; UAEU, 2012). Although the Gender Equality Gap index data does not delineate between nationals and non-nationals, the figures it provides for the UAE's tertiary level enrolment ratio—3.61 woman for every one man (Hausmann et al., 2012, pp. 346-347)—are likely to be reflective of the national cohort. In every year since 1986 substantially more national women have graduated from the UAE's national university compared to men; very often the ratio was over three to one (UAEU, 2012, p. 15). Of the total number of nationals who have graduated from the UAE's 14 principal vocational institutions since 1991, 62 percent have been women (HCT, 2012). One reason for such discrepancies is that a considerable fraction of men join the army or police force upon graduating from secondary school.

Furthermore, proportionally far more national women elect to study what might be considered as 'vocationally relevant' academic subjects. For example, 28 nationals graduated from UAEU in 2012 with a degree in Mathematical Science, 25 of whom were women, two students were awarded the highest Honor's and four the second highest Honor's, all six were women. The picture is the same for biology, chemistry and physics (UAEU, 2012, pp. 39-42). However, if compared to that attained by the pool of professional level expatriate labor, the 'quality' of the education attained within the region is often called into question and one

major reason for this, it has been suggested, is the way in which the state has traditionally allocated public sector jobs irrespective of merit impacts negatively on educational outcomes (e.g. Bains, 2009; Benard, 2006; EIU, 2009; Muysken & Nour, 2006; Salih, 2010).

Methods and Sample Design

The purpose of our survey was to gain some insight on the variables that impact on the post-graduation vocational plans of national women in the UAE. We aimed to assess the extent to which vocational decisions are influenced by parental input, in particular, the three PCB criteria and, in so doing the impact of this on sectoral preferences (be they motivated by pragmatic or sociocultural considerations). Additionally, data was also collected on the 'appropriacy' and 'attractiveness' of a range of occupational types (individualistic perspective, and also in terms of what the sample considered society's perspective to be) as well as variables relating to remuneration. The majority of the survey questions were constructed as 5-point Likert statements, but several involved ranking lists of items (i.e. non-parent specific factors that may influence the decision to seek labor market entry in terms of importance; occupational roles in terms of attractiveness and appropriateness).

As the overarching research aim was to see how parental support, engagement and interference impacted on (a) the likelihood per se of seeking labor market entry (b), perceptions of sociocultural barriers to labor market entry and (c), sectoral preferences, 12 of the statements reflect the items Dietrich and Kracke (2009, p. 109) themselves deployed: questions tailored to elicit perceptions of parental support, interference and, (lack of) engagement. Data on parental educational attainment levels and job status was also collected; variables that Dietrich and Kracke (2009, p. 117) recommended be factored into future PCB analyses.

For analytical purposes a number of survey statements were subsequently combined into an array of 'independent' variable items and tested against a 'dependent' group of items

which comprised the following components: “I intend to enter the labor market after completing my education” and, “I can decide myself whether or not I enter the labor market post-graduation” (referred to henceforth as the dependent item/“Likelihood of labor market entry”). When grouping items to be regressed against inter alia, each PCB criterion, the extraction process used was Principal Component Analysis and the rotation method utilized was Varimax with Kaiser Normalization; this was done using SPSS.

Sample members were selected by a stratified sampling approach from within the pre-defined target group: national women in their final year of secondary education or enrolled at tertiary level education institutions (n=335; mean age=21; SD=3.6). The geographic breakdown was broadly reflective of, and guided by, the constituent Emirates’ population ratios for the female 15 to 24 age cohort as reported in the 2005 UAE Census (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009). The survey, conducted in Arabic, was carried out in a single face-to-face engagement. To facilitate the process and in order to be able to quantify the ‘appropriateness’ and ‘attractiveness’ of various occupations, a prompt sheet listing 26 job classifications was provided to each participant.

Results

Looking first at sectoral preferences, 78.5 percent stated a preference for the public sector when specifically asked in which sector they most wanted to secure employment. While 28.4 percent strongly agreed with the statement that they would ‘only’ work if able to secure a government job and, 29.6 percent strongly agreed with the statement that they would ‘wait’ for such a position as opposed to taking private sector job in the interim. In order to gauge the extent to which parental influence might implicitly play in this regard, dependent item responses were cross-tabulated with a dummy variable ‘private sector’ (where 1 means having one or more parents or close family members working in the private sector and 0 the reverse) it was found that 70 percent of those intending to work in the private sector already

had family members there (over a third of the sample had no immediate family members working in this sector; the corresponding chi-square test p-value is less than .001).

As depicted in Table 1, the sample ranked a number of discrete factors in terms of their relative importance in influencing their decision to enter formal employment. The job being 'interesting' (i.e. considered to be an 'attractive' occupation and/or related to their area of academic interest) and the level of salary offered were considered most important. Of least relative importance were the availability of childcare and whether or not the given job would be in a gender segregated environment.

As Table 2 shows, a number of significant relationships were identified. Positive correlations were found with a range factors: salary level; quality of maternity provision; proximity to residence and also, the given job being interesting (which was explained in part as working to make use of academic skills and knowledge acquired). There was also a strong positive relationship if more female role models were seen to be working in different industries. Taken as a whole sociocultural factors when combined were found to negatively impact on the sample's prospects of entering the labor market. Conversely, and all other things being equal, if the given position offered a high level of salary and/or a good maternity leave package, labor market entry would be significantly more likely. In terms of PCB criteria, the only statistically significant and negative relationship with the dependent item was found to be amongst the sample members who reported higher levels of parental interference.

Table 3 sets out the linear regression results. We tested the three PCB criteria against a number of factors including: the likelihood of labor market entry (four items including e.g. I can decide for myself if I want to work after I graduate); sociocultural factors (four items including e.g. the views of Emirati society on women and work will influence my decision) and, sectoral preferences (four items including e.g. waiting for a government job to become available and expectations of being provided with a government job). PCB support was found

to significantly reduce sociocultural barriers. A lack of parental engagement in the vocational decision making process was found to significantly increase the preference for a job in the public sector. Parental interference on the other hand, not only increased public sector preferences and amplified the magnitude of perceived sociocultural barriers, but was also observed to significantly reduce the likelihood of labor market entry itself.

For those with educated parents (having a tertiary level qualification), support was found to more notably reduce the sociocultural barriers to employment. Moreover, for those among this cohort who reported higher levels of parental interference were not significantly less likely to seek employment as is the case for the sample as a whole. However, they were more likely to only consider job opportunities in the public sector. In terms of parental educational attainment levels, using the dependent item, it was found that sample members whose fathers had an advanced level of educational attainment were significantly more likely to seek labor market entry post-graduation and also reported a significantly higher level of freedom to make such vocational decisions for themselves. No such relationship was found however with regard to the mother's educational attainment level.

Discussion

As highlighted in Tables 1 and 2, the importance of the prospective job being interesting is clearly an important factor for the sample when considering labor market entry. Yet many of the job categories that were ranked highly as being 'attractive,' are not typically found in the public sector (e.g. retail, hospitality and pharmacy). Thus another important and pragmatic determining factor: salary level, is likely to mean that the pull of the classic public sector (e.g. the civil service and the education sector) will have a significant bearing. The same applies to the importance attributed to working hours and days of annual leave. Part-time work and job sharing schemes are, according to Afiouni, Ruël, and Schuler (2013), are very uncommon in the UAE, thus they contend that the choice to work in the classic public

sector because of the shorter working hours and extra days of annual leave, could be seen as similar to women in the industrialized economies considering part-time employment. Indeed, most of the working Emirati women interviewed by Marmenout and Lirio (2013, p. 157) considered public sector employment to be “less interesting,” but at the same time preferable because the “benefits are substantially higher and working hours considerably lower.” One reason for why the availability of childcare facilities was of least importance in terms of influencing the decision of whether or not to enter the labor market (see Table 1) may be because, almost all UAE national household currently employ a number of domestic helpers (see e.g. Sabban, 2002; Salama, 2012). With respect to maternity provision, the sample were significantly more likely to consider a job if the maternity leave package was relatively favorable (see Table 2). UAE Labor Law stipulates that public sector workers are entitled to 60 days while those in the private sector are only granted 45 days (Hausmann et al., 2012, p. 66).

Factors of a more specific sociocultural nature were also observed to have considerable bearing. It has previously been suggested that ‘needing to apply’ for a private sector job would suggest that the given individual had insufficient ‘connections’ to simply be granted, a public sector position (Harry, 2007, p. 135; Salih, 2010, p. 173). Adding weight to such contentions are the results of a recent Gallup/Silatech survey (2009, p. 22), which despite having the caveat ‘assuming pay and working conditions are similar,’ nevertheless found that 67 percent of young UAE nationals would only consider public sector employment. Our findings add to the contention that most national women would like to work post-graduation (e.g. utilizing their time spent in HE) and also that, a key challenge for many of this cohort is that they are not currently being afforded the space within which to “actualize this desire” (Marmenout & Lirio, 2013, p. 151). As observed, many of the job classifications that are stated as being ‘attractive’ were not at the same time considered to be ‘appropriate’ for national women to pursue.

Our findings suggest that sociocultural factors do have an impact, not just on the type of career national women choose to pursue but also, in cases whether or not to even seek formal employment if it is not to be found in the public sector. This may partly explain why data published by HCT (2012, p. 24), shows that between 2007 and 2010 of all nationals that were actively seeking employment 94.6 percent of men found work compared to only 70.3 percent of women (see also: TANMIA, 2005, p. 29). However, many occupations—be they in nursing, hospitality or retail—that are considered by some sectors of society as inappropriate are now increasingly being staffed by non-national women, many of whom come from MENA. Thus the normalization of such occupations for Muslim Arab women is, in our view, underway. Indeed, of the factors ranked by the sample (see **Error! Reference source not found.**), a ‘gender-segregated’ environment was one of the least important: if parents and ‘society’ object to their daughters working in such environments, the sample themselves do not seem to consider this to be a particular barrier. Furthermore, the fact that there is a strong correlation between the likelihood of labour market entry and salary levels does suggest that the public sector for pragmatic, if not sociocultural, reasons, remains the preferred vocational choice.

The observation that private sector career-paths are more likely to be considered if a given individual's parent or parents are currently working in this sector, suggests that current policies of placing national jobseekers in GBEs may have transformative potential. More realistically so because they do in fact offer ‘national’ employees with relatively high salaries (via government subsidies) as well as a considerable amount of on the job vocational training. Yet their *raison d'être* means they cannot match the remunerative packages offered by the classic public sector and concomitantly strive to be internationally competitive. Nevertheless in this regard, the importance our sample attributed to there being more female role models in a wider range of atypical industries and their likelihood of labor market entry is of particular

policy relevance. If the profile of women working in such entities is raised and commended by government authorities, the more likely it may be that others will follow.

Parental influence and policy implications

According to Marmenout and Lirio (2013), the role played by the father as being the initial supporter for young Emirati woman to enter the workforce was frequently voiced amongst those they interviewed. They add that, while female colleagues can act as role models and mentors, “Only male sponsors enable Emirati women to actually achieve their career ambitions” (p. 158). Our findings add to such contentions by highlighting a range of ways in which parents (unwittingly or otherwise) influence such vocational decision making processes. These do however need to be balanced against some of the more pragmatic non-parent specific factors, which also impact upon ‘national’ FLFP.

In terms specifically of the role parent’s play, a number of observations were made. The fact that PCB support significantly reduces the sociocultural barriers to employment and does so even more in instances where both parents are more highly educated has particular policy relevance. Lack of parental engagement, while not found to significantly impact upon labor market entry or the magnitude of sociocultural barriers, results in a much stronger preference for public sector employment. Thus, in tandem with seeking ways to encourage greater levels of parental support in the vocational decision making process, the UAE’s labor nationalisation and HRD entities could also seek to engage parents more directly in terms of the career counseling that is now increasingly taking place in the UAE’s HE institutions.

Parental interference is somewhat harder to interpret and address. Indeed, what some sample members may consider as PCB-style interference (e.g. my parents try to push me in a certain vocational direction) may be what parents consider to be supportive advice. Nonetheless it is evident that this criterion if reported to be high, does result in the likelihood of post-graduation labor market entry being significantly lower (see Table 3). It is quite possible that this mostly manifests with respect to being pushed toward an ‘appropriate’

occupation type and away from one that is considered to be more 'attractive' (i.e. the job being interesting). While parental interference strengthens the preference for the public sector, especially in cases where both parents are educated, for this cohort, interference does not significantly reduce their likelihood of entering the labor market (in distinction to our findings for the sample as a whole). Therefore such interference may manifest along the lines of providing advice that the remunerative benefits this sector currently offer supersedes any other considerations.

It was observed that, parental interference and lack of engagement also acts to reduce the prospect of national women being willing (read in instances, 'allowed') to join the private sector workforce. One deterrent to pursuing more 'attractive' and atypical career paths seems to be the fact that so few parents themselves currently work in the private sector (including commercially run GBEs). This is because, amongst our sample, the individuals who had family members working in the private sector were significantly more likely themselves to consider pursuing career-paths in this sector. A greater uptake of such vocational roles could be championed by senior decision makers as an effective utilization of the investments made in education and also in terms of helping achieve the UAE's stated economic diversification goals (see e.g.: Government of Abu Dhabi, 2008).

The fact that those with educated fathers were significantly more likely to want to find work and (also be 'allowed') to decide for themselves which career path to pursue is also of potential relevance to policymakers. Not least because as was alluded to above, at present a considerable fraction of male nationals choose not to undertake higher education and instead join the army or police force upon leaving secondary school. Whilst it is received wisdom that matriarchal education plays a key role in terms of progress towards gender equality (e.g. United Nations Population Fund, 2005; World Bank, 2006), in the regional context, improving the depth and duration of male education may well have a positive impact in terms of increasing 'national' FLFP in the longer term. Policymakers could consider ways to

incentivize more national men to complete some degree of post-secondary level education prior to enlisting with the army or police force; perhaps even making it a precondition to entry.

Conclusion

While the ‘pull’ of the public sector clearly has an important role in influencing the vocational decisions national women in the UAE make, a number of ways in which PCB factors specifically impact the likelihood of a given individual seeking to join the workforce and also their sectoral preferences were also identified. Within the region parental influence, as captured by PCB, may not just impact on choice of vocation—as Dietrich and Kracke (2009) found to be the case in Germany—but more fundamentally, the decision of whether or not to seek formal employment per se. As high levels of parental support act to significantly reduce the sociocultural barriers to labor market entry, those who receive higher levels of support are both more likely to seek employment and be relatively more willing to consider atypical career-paths at some point after graduation. On the other hand, parental interference, by significantly amplifying such sociocultural barriers and preferences for the public sector, will reduce such prospects. This is because the classic public sector is no longer (in any productive or sustainable sense) capable of absorbing each new batch of graduates.

Any notion that gendered differences in vocational choices result solely from individualistic interests and aptitudes has been dismissed by Eccles (1994), who goes on to contend that government policies have the capacity to broaden the range of conventionally accepted occupational roles for women. Thus, policymakers in the Arabian Gulf could seek to encourage parents to adopt a more ‘open-minded’ attitude when it comes to what constitutes the range of appropriate vocational avenues available to their daughters. Policies geared towards parents who currently have daughters in fulltime education could be incorporated into current initiatives that are seeking to normalize the concept of nationals

pursuing careers in one of the nascent government-backed entities that are working towards a more knowledge-based, less oil revenue dependent economic structure. In many of the Arabian Gulf states, GBEs have the capacity to productively employ all members of this aptly called underutilized HR asset.

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Table 1*Factors Ranked Most Likely to Influence Labor Market Entry Decision*

Factor	Mean	Std. Dev.
Having an interesting job	2.7470	1.89509
Salary level	2.7801	1.72851
Working hours and holidays	3.9428	1.50920
Proximity to residence	3.9819	1.75535
Job security	4.0241	1.69753
Gender-segregated environment	4.6777	2.10632
Availability of childcare facilities	5.7380	1.67459

Note. n=332, Min=1.0, Max=7.0 Proximity to residence is aligned to geographical mobility.

Friedman test statistics: Chi-square 463.863; df 6; Asymp. Sig. .000.

Table 2*Item Correlation with Dependent Item: Likelihood of Labor Market Entry*

Item	Correlation
Socio-cultural factors	-0.130*
Sectoral preferences	-0.074
Maternity leave	0.183*
Salary levels	0.201*
Female role models	0.257*
Job is interesting	0.298*
PCB criteria	
Support	0.039
(lack of) Engagement	-0.05
Interference	-0.208*

Note. n=335, *p < .05.

Table 3*Linear Regression Results*

	Likelihood of labor market entry	Socio-cultural barriers	Public sector preference
Support	ns	-0.118(-0.117)*	ns
(lack of) Engagement	ns	ns	0.253(0.257)*
Interference	-0.156(-0.154)*	0.144(0.146)*	0.100(0.104)**
Job is interesting	0.216(0.223)*	ns	ns
Maternity leave	0.162(0.161)*	0.182(0.182)*	ns
Female role models	0.162.(0.179)*	-0.271(-0.309)*	ns
Geographical mobility	ns	0.406(0.369)*	0.109(0.100)
R ²	0.160	0.094	0.349
Those with educated parents			
Support	ns	-0.321(-0.281)*	ns
(lack of) Engagement	ns	0.150(0.150)**	ns
Interference	ns	0.217(0.219)*	0.286(0.308)*
R ²	0.027	0.207	0.113

Note. n=335, *p < .05, **p < .10, ns means p > 0.10 Unstandardized coefficients between parentheses.