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**National Comparisons of Gender Egalitarianism in Islamic-Majority and Other Countries: An Investigation of Ethical, Social, and Economic Issues**

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**Abstract**

In this review and meta-analysis we propose that it is unethical for a government to obstruct development of the economic ecology of its citizens. Using the participation of women in the non-agricultural work force as an indicator of utilization of economic potential, we compare three categories of Muslim-majority nations with non-Muslim majority nations. We find that despite conditions that could indicate developing opportunities for women, their participation has declined in Muslim nations over the past ten years. We discuss explanations for this lack, and the effects on the economic development in Muslim nations.

**Keywords:** Economic Development, Ethics, Islamic Majority, Muslim, Nation, Women

**Introduction**

Syed (2008) demonstrates there is ample evidence of gender equality in the principal religious texts of Islam, the *Qur’an* and *ahadith* (admonitions traditionally attributed to the Prophet Muhammad). The *Qur’an* declares creation of men and women as a part of the divine scheme (51:49; 36:36). Syed continues that men and women possess equal rights for work and compensation. “Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he/she male or female: you are members one of another” (3:195). Additionally, there is a large body of cross-religion, cross-cultural, and cross-national literature relating to human rights and natural law relating to employment opportunities for women; we will not approach opportunities from this point of view, but will investigate empirical indicators of the existence of discrimination against women in employment related to living in Arab-Muslim majority, non-Arab-Muslim majority, and non-Muslim majority nations. Our ethical point of view is that the government of a nation has a responsibility to maximize economic opportunity and development to benefit its citizens. There are arguments for balancing development with economic and social sustainability; while realizing their relative importance, we do not address these. Our focus is on the ethics of excluding women from the labor force as a negative effect on maximizing growth of an economy. (Some attempt to distinguish between “work force” and “labor force”; following Ross (2008) we see no reason for differentiation.) Our labor force of interest is men and women who work in non-agricultural jobs outside of the home, within the formal sector, and who are nationals of their respective country. Our focus is on the ethics of excluding women from the labor force as a negative effect on maximizing growth of an economy. Support for this position is provided in the *Qur’an* (4:75): “what has come upon you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and for the oppressed among men, women, and children who pray, ‘Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people...’”. It follows, e.g. from Naway & Naqvi (1997), that if any harm is being done to the society or segment of society either through one’s own behaviour or by that of others, then we must be moved to remedial action within the bounds of law. These and many more subtle and wide-ranging issues concerning responsibilities of governments, economic development, and ethical practices are discussed in Dollery and Wallis (2001).

We present a meta-analysis of statistical data and literature for gender-related practices concerning women in business across countries. To best describe and understand women’s participation in business in the Muslim world, it is first necessary to describe and understand the underlying ethnic, tribal, and cultural influences that, in some cases, pre-date the establishment of Islam. We begin by describing the nations and regions that are most affected by Islam and the underlying cultural customs. The Muslim world is vast and not homogenous (Allawi, 2009; Esposito, 2003; Triandis, 2009); there are varying denominations (e.g. Sunni, Shia, etc.) and varying schools of law (e.g. Hanafi, Shafi`i, etc.), as well as underlying societal cultures within the Muslim world which influence behaviours of the citizens and followers of Islam (see, e.g., Littrell & Bertsch, in press).

**Literature review**

We first establish context. Metcalfe (2007) points out it is important to realize that interpreting societal cultural norms and organizational management and human resource practices from the Northern European and Anglo societal perspectives does not fit Islamic societies. Metcalfe has demonstrated that equality agendas do not constitute part of human resource management (HRM) policy frameworks in organizations in Islamic societies. For example *hijab* or veiling constitutes an important aspect of a woman’s professional and social identity in many Arab Islamic nations and is associated with women’s empowerment. Metcalfe further suggests that we cannot understand the complexity of gender and HRM processes without connecting to broader social and economic changes relating to the rights of women in Islamic nations.

Using the World Values Survey (WVS) data, Norris and Inglehart (2002) found that citizens of Muslim societies are significantly less supportive of equal rights and opportunities for women and have significantly less permissive attitudes toward homosexuality, abortion and divorce than those living in Western, democratic countries. We find that customs and cultures, often predating the establishment of Islam, have contributed to the conservative and patriarchal orientation towards women in majority Islamic countries (Caldwell, 1982). The term *patriarchy* is used to denote the specific gender arrangements in which a wife lives with the husband's family in their residence, and individuals belong to their father's genealogical descent group (Caldwell, 1982). Kandiyoti (1988) uses “classic patriarchy” to describe gender relations and the position of women in North Africa, the Muslim Middle East (including Turkey and Iran), and South and East Asia. Timmer & McClelland (2004) point out that the status of women in Muslim countries, as measured by employment, education, health, and political participation varies by region. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and South Asian have the lowest participation in the labor force. Participation in Muslim countries located in Europe, Eurasia, and East Asia are higher and nearer to that of more-developed non-Muslim countries. In the MENA, and South Asia negative discrimination concerning women is institutionalized in laws that prohibit women from participating in much of public life or fully competing in the labor market.

Korinek (2005) provides a review of evidence of micro- and macro-level studies that indicates that gender inequality inhibits long-term national economic growth, suggesting two reasons. First, better-educated women with more control over household resources have been shown to bring an increase in spending on children’s education, health, and nutrition, thereby investing in future generations and the future labor force. This is particularly true in developing countries where household service help resources are relatively scarce. Second, unused female potential in terms of lower levels of education, employment, remuneration, and access to productive resources implies that the allocation of economy-wide resources is sub-optimal. Our literature review finds that the proportion of women in higher education in Muslim-majority countries is increasing, and in some cases is higher than men (Littrell & Bertsch, in press), however, this event has not led to increased participation in the non-agricultural work force, which has, in fact, been decreasing for women. For example, Metcalfe (2006) found that Arab nations strongly supported gender equality in education but not in employment. The culture supports “the development of human capabilities of women but not for their utilization” (UNDP, 2003, p. 19).

Moghadam (2008) summarizes commentary from experts who contend that for economic progress it is vital that women play a larger role in the economy and society. To varying degrees across the countries, discrimination against women is built into cultural attitudes, government policies, and legal frameworks. Family laws codify discrimination against women and girls, placing them in a position subordinate to men in the family, a practice that is then replicated in the economy and society. Korinek (2005) finds evidence that women are constrained from moving into more skilled, higher-paying jobs when trade liberalization occurs, though some studies indicate successes of some women in the region; e.g., Chamlou et al. (2007) provide an overview of somewhat isolated successes of entrepreneurial women in the MENA. McIntosh & Islam (2010) discuss positive behaviours leading to success of women entrepreneurs in Bahrain. However, Syed, Özbilgin, Torunoglu & Ali (2009) studying Muslim-majority implementation of *Sha'aria* and secular practice nationally find that from an institutional analysis point of view, organizations adopt practices that are considered legitimate in the eyes of their main stakeholders, even if they are not necessarily efficient, such as restricting full participation of women in the organizations.

Our samples consist of four mutually exclusive categories; see Table 1. Group 1, ‘The Islamic Middle East’ includes Arab nations within the Arabian Peninsula, Levant, Mashriq, and the Sinai Peninsula. These nations have a majority of Arab ethnicity, use the Arab language and script. Group 1 excludes Israel. Group 2 is the remainder of the Islamic Arab World and includes the Maghreb region of North Africa, other Arab nations on the African continent, and those societies that belong to the Arab League but are not part of Group 1. Group 3, ‘The rest of the Islamic World’, includes those nations not already included in Groups 1 or 2 that also have Muslim majorities (i.e., non-Arab Muslims). Group 4 is all other nations of the world and is too numerous to list here. We realize the lack of homogeneity of Group 4, but as our interest is Muslim and non-Muslim majority comparisons, the grouping is accurate enough for the purposes of this study.

*Insert Table 1 about here*

Our initial research question is whether non-agricultural employment in Muslim-majority countries differs from non-Muslim countries? Our prediction is that it is lower. Additionally, do these measures differ amongst Muslim-majority countries? From prior research (Littrell & Bertsch, in press) we predict that Arab-majority Middle East countries will have lower participation, development, and opportunities for women.

We compare women’s participation in the labor force in Muslim countries across three groups defined in Table 1. Our literature review indicates differences between the groups. Our review leads us to believe Group 3 countries will be similar to the developed nations of Group 4 (Timmer & McClelland, 2004, p.3) regarding women’s representation in the work force. We find that women’s participation in the work force is much lower in Arab than in other Muslim nations, and in non-Muslim majority nations (Littrell & Bertsch, in press).

Using our categories we will provide an overview of national indicators of hindrances, opportunities, and processes for women’s participation in business in the various categorizations of Islamic nations with a comparison to non-Muslim societies.

*Group 1: The Islamic Middle East*

Caldwell (1982) refers to the MENA and South Asia as “the patriarchal belt”. Though diverse within itself, research to date indicates the Middle Eastern countries to have generally more traditional, tribal, and conservative practices than the rest of the Islamic World. Cultures and customs of the tribal communities prevail and continue in the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula from prior to the establishment of Islam (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Alajmi 2001). These have contributed to a conservative and patriarchal orientation towards women for those nations in Group 1. Effendi (2003) argues that Arab cultures are patriarchal and place women in a passive role at work and in the family. Effendi states it is not Islam that places women in these roles, but rather the way that patriarchal societies interpret Islam to support their positions regarding what is and is not acceptable behaviour for women. Studies of attitudes towards women in the Arabian Gulf region generally find men are not willing to share public responsibilities with women (Abdulla, 1996), while others point out that there are contrasting views in the Arab world towards women, which reflects a deep rift in the fabric of Arab culture (Ibrahim, 1997, cited in Al Ahmadi, 2011). Ibrahim suggests that social institutions such as the family, school, and the media play a critical role in perpetuating negative values and attitudes towards women’s work and role in society. These attitudes towards women are not unique to the Arab world; but are quite ingrained in day-to-day opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours in that region.

*Group 2: The Islamic Arab World (excluding the Middle East)*

Arab populations encompass a vast geographical region that extends from Iraq in the east to Morocco in the west. They occupy the whole of traditional Mesopotamia, the Middle East, the Arabian Gulf, North Africa, as well as parts of East and West Africa. Arab populations are distributed in 23 different countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen*.* Arabs do not homogeneously populate this geographical area and tend to be concentrated in narrow locations such as in the Nile, Euphrates, and Tigris valleys, the coastal regions of North Africa, the Gulf, and Western Asia*.*

From the WVS Inglehart & Welzel (2010) find that the countries in our Group 2 are very similar as a well-defined high Traditional / low Secular-Rational, high Survival / low Self-Expression values region. Schwartz (2006) found the group to have similar individual values, with high Embeddedness and low Affective Autonomy and Intellectual Autonomy, and very high Conservatism (Schwartz, 1999). Minkov (2011, discussed in Littrell, 2012) also found this group to be culturally similar to one another.

*Group 3: The rest of the Islamic world (non-Arab Islamic majority)*

For Group 3, Rizzo, Abdel-Latif & Meyer (2007) find that in non-Arab Muslim countries there are higher levels of support for women’s rights compared to Arab Muslim countries. Whilst the countries in the group are geographically and culturally diverse, they all fall in Caldwell’s *Patriarchal Belt*.

The majority of the countries from the 1999–2003 wave of the WVS are part of the band of “classic patriarchy” that extends from North Africa, through the Muslim Middle East to South and East Asia, particularly India and China, and cuts across the cultural and religious traditions of Hinduism, Confucianism and Islam (see Kandiyoti, 1988 for a more in depth discussion). This zone is characterized by the low status of women in general as a result of patrilineal-patrilocal households, high fertility rates coupled with low age at first marriage, high maternal and infant mortality rates, higher rates of female illiteracy, lower levels of female educational enrollment, low female labor force participation, and the lack of women’s political participation and political rights (Moghadam, 2003 & 1993).

*Group 4: All other nations*

The defining characteristic of the countries in Group 4 is that they do not have Muslim-majority populations. Other than that they maximize global cultural and geographical diversity. This group does include India and China with traditions of Hinduism and Confucianism, being well-established members of the Patriarchal Belt (Caldwell, 1983, and Kandiyoti, 1988).

**Knowledge as a Factor of Production**

The addition of “knowledge” as a factor of economic production has been suggested of significant importance in creating new wealth within a society (see, e.g., Powell & Snellman (2004), Stam (2007), and Syverson (2011)). Knowledge has long been identified as an important component of production and an engine of economic growth throughout history; all economic growth has had a knowledge component (see, e.g., Machlup, 1962/1973; Toffler, 1980; OECD, 1996). In a knowledge-based economy human capital (the skills and education of its people) is a crucial factor to achieve sustained long term growth and a key determinant of a society’s economic competitiveness. The World Economic Forum’s (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index of 2011 (Hausman et al., 2011) shows a strong correlation of knowledge indicators with global competitiveness and GDP per capita (GDPpc). As an indicator, the trends of high-technology exports of the Arab World significantly lag behind those of North America and OECD members (World Bank, 2012).

According to the WEF’s Global Gender Gap Index 2011 the overall gender gap index score of the MENA region is approximately 58%. This region comes in last amongst six regional categories. MENA also is in last place for the economic participation and opportunity scores. The report describes countries in the region as having made substantial investment to reduce the gender gap in education yet the gender gap in economic opportunity remains the widest in the world. As women account for half of the world’s population and half of its talent, the economic cost of not developing or not using this talent looms huge (Bertsch & Warner-Søderholm, 2012). Closing gender gaps and utilizing the potentials of women can be keys to enhanced productivity and economic growth. Excluding half of a country’s population from accumulation of knowledge and generation of wealth retards economic growth.

**Methods**

This article is an exploratory survey and review of extant public data sources; we are seeking to explore and define relationships as well as interpret indicative results. We are discuss the relationships, if any, among societal-level variables of (i) investment in knowledge creation, (ii) gender egalitarianism in employment outside of the home in non-agricultural industries, and (iii) the prevalence and impact of knowledge industries on overall GDP. We find from our literature review that these are inadequately explored relationships. Our data are from public sources where usable data is available, hence convenience samples, a reasonable and acceptable process in exploratory research, are used herein (Hair, Babin, Money, & Samouel, 2003; Malhotra, 2007; and Zikmund & Babin, 2007).

Our methodology is to explore relationships between observable investment in the development of human capital, gender-based employment in non-agricultural business sectors, and the impact that knowledge sectors have on societal GDP. Our method includes furcating societal level data into the four mutually exclusive groups in Table 1.

*Data sources*

The UN Statistics Division (UNSD; UN, 2000; World Bank, 2011) collects and publishes data tracking the “Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector” across the world, and has been collecting this data, along with other data elements, since 1990.

The World Bank publishes a Data Catalog of over 8,000 indicators from 18 different categories. Of particular interest to us is the Science and Technology indicator titled “High-technology exports (% of manufactured exports)”. High-technology exports are products with high R&D intensity, such as in aerospace, computers, pharmaceuticals, scientific instruments, and electrical machinery (Worldbank.org, n.d.a).

The Skills & Innovation Policy (SIP) program of the World Bank Institute's Growth and Crisis practice provides advice on four Knowledge Economy (KE) indicators: (i) economic and institutional regime, (ii) education, (iii) innovation, and (iv) information and communication technologies (ICTs). The Knowledge Assessment Methodology (KAM) is a set of 148 structural and qualitative variables to measure and index countries in the four KE indicators, which are then aggregated into two overlapping indices. First, the Knowledge Index (KI) measures a country's ability to generate, adopt and diffuse knowledge. This is an indication of the overall potential of knowledge development in a given country (Worldbank.org, n.d.b). The second index is the Knowledge Economy Index (KEI) which takes into account whether the environment is conducive for knowledge to be used effectively for economic development. The KEI represents the overall level of development of a country or region towards the Knowledge Economy.

The World Bank also publishes various economic and social indicators. Of interest to us were the percentages of total GDP attributable to both services and industry, as defined in the International Standard Industrial Classification (UNSTATS.UN.ORG, 2012).

**Analysis**

We limit our analyses to correspond with the period since the UN’s Millennium Development Goals were established and where data is available, representing a time frame where the global array of nations have agreed to engage in improving the lot of women in their countries. Our analyses included the average share of women who are employed in the non-agricultural sector since the year 2000; the average share of high-technology exports as a percentage of total exports; the average Knowledge Economy Index (KEI); the average Knowledge Index (KI); the average percentage of services as a share of total GDP; and the average percentage of industry as a share of GDP across the four societal groupings described earlier.

*Share of women in wage employment in non-agricultural sectors*

Using the UNSD data for “Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector”, averages were calculated for the period of 2000 to the most recent reported period. Table 2 illustrates those averages, standard deviations, and the results of two-sample t-tests with unequal sample sizes and non-homogenous variances for each of the country groups.

*Insert Table 2 about here*

All Muslim-majority groups have a lower rate of employment compared to “All Other Nations”. “The Islamic Middle East” has a lower rate of female participation in non-agricultural sectors compared to “The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East” (t=2.26, p<0.05); “The rest of the Islamic world” (t=5.51, p<0.001); and “All Other Nations” (t=16.76, p<0.05). The analyses indicate that the employment rate of women in the Islamic Middle East is significantly lower than the other three categories.

“The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East” countries have a lower rate of female participation in the non-agricultural sectors compared to “The rest of the Islamic world” (t=1.86, p<0.05) and “All Other Nations” (t=5.74, p<0.001). The analyses indicate that the employment rate of women in the Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East is significantly lower than the non-Arab Muslim world and all other nations.

Finally, “The rest of the Islamic world” is found to have a lower rate of female participation in the non-agricultural sectors compared to “All Other Nations” (t=4.54, p<0.001). The analyses indicate that the employment rate of women in the non-Arab Muslim world is significantly lower than all non-Muslim nations.

*Average of high-tech exports as a percentage of all manufactured exports*

High-technology exports are products with high R&D intensity, such as in aerospace, computers, pharmaceuticals, scientific instruments, and electrical machinery. Table 3 illustrates the average of high-tech exports as a percentage of all manufactured exports, standard deviations, and the two-sample t-tests for all four groups.

*Insert Table 3 about here*

From Table 3, we find that Group 1 has a significantly lower average of high-technology exports as a percentage of all manufactured exports compared to Group 2 (t=2.27, p<0.05), Group 3 (t=3.16, p<0.01), and Group 4 (t=8.54, p<0.001). Further, we find that Group 2 has significantly lower high-tech exports compared to Group 3 (t=1.87, p<0.05) and Group 4 (t= 3.69, p<0.01). Lastly, we find that Group 3 has no significant difference in high-tech exports compared to Group 4.

*Knowledge Index*

The Knowledge Index (KI) measures a country's ability to generate, adopt, and diffuse knowledge. This is an indication of the overall potential of knowledge development in a given country. The Knowledge Index does not measure a country’s realization of a Knowledge Economy. Table 4 illustrates the averages of the Knowledge Index, standard deviations, and two-sample t-tests for each of the country groups.

*Insert Table 4 about here*

Group 1 has a significantly higher Knowledge Index than Group 2 (t=2.63, p<0.05) and Group 3 (t=2.12, p<0.05) while there is no significant difference between Group 1 and Group 4 in the KI means.

There is no significant difference between Group 2 and Group 3 in the KI means; however, Group 2 has a significantly lower Knowledge Index than Group 4 (t=3.92, p<0.01). Similarly, Group 3 has a significantly lower Knowledge Index than Group 4 (t=3.81, p<0.001).

Although the KI mean scores for Group 1 and Group 4 were not deemed to be significantly different, we must remember that the KI scores reveal a country’s *potential* for knowledge development. Recall that the WEF’s Global Gender Gap Index 2011 describes countries in the MENA (e.g. the Arab Muslim world) as having made substantial investment to reduce the gender gap in education yet the gender gap in economic opportunity remains the widest in the world.

*Knowledge Economy Index*

The Knowledge Economy Index (KEI) takes into account whether the environment is conducive for knowledge to be used effectively for economic development. It is an aggregate index that represents the overall level of development of a country or region towards the Knowledge Economy. Table 5 illustrates the averages of KEI, standard deviations, and two sample t-tests for each of the country groups.

*Insert Table 5 about here*

We find that Group 1 has a significantly higher KEI average than Group 2 (t=3.00, p<0.01) and Group 3 (t=2.49, p<0.05) but no significant difference when compared to Group 4. Group 2 has no significant difference in the KEI mean compared to Group 3, Group 2 did have a significantly lower KEI mean than Group 4 (t=4.33, p<0.01). Lastly, Group 3 has a significantly lower KEI mean than Group 4 (t=4.19, p<0.001).

The KI mean scores reported earlier indicate a country’s *potential* for knowledge development. The KEI score takes into account whether the environment is conducive for knowledge to be used effectively for economic development. Taken together the KI and KEI scores would indicate that the Middle East has both the potential and supportive environment for knowledge development. However, as stressed earlier, the WEF’s Global Gender Gap Index 2011 reports the MENA to be in last place among six regional categories in economic participation and opportunity scores.

Even though there is no significant difference between Group 1 and Group 4 in terms of KI and KEI mean scores, the gender gap persists. We believe this may be attributable to the economic structure of Group 1 (Drucker, 1993; Toffler, 1980) and the presence of an oil-based economy (Ross, 2008). We will reserve discussion of Ross’s argument applied to Group 1 until after we explore the economic structure of the four groups.

Drucker (1993) and Toffler (1980) suggest that economic development will progress from industrial-based to knowledge-based in which the competitive advantage of organizations is based on the ability to exploit knowledge resources. The transition to the knowledge economy focuses on the increase in scale of knowledge as a production factor (Stam, 2007). To explore this, our analyses will now include the percentage of the GDP that relies on services vs. industry in the four groups.

*Percentage of GDP attributable to services*

Sidani (2005) discussing women’s employment in Arab Muslim societies finds that the majority of women who do work outside the home are in educating females, nursing, and medical care. Women also deliver female-oriented retail and personal care services. To investigate the impact of this phenomenon, we calculated the percentages of total GDP attributable to services as defined by the World Bank for the four groups. Table 6 illustrates the percentage of GDP attributable to services, the standard deviations, and two sample t-tests for the four groups.

*Insert Table 6 about here*

Each of the three Muslim categories has statistically lower means than “All Other Nations”. Our review indicates the situation for women in Muslim-majority countries is that their participation in work appears to be generally limited to service industries, which are a smaller portion of the national economies than in the non-Muslim-majority countries.

Some good news for the situation is that we also found that the percentage of GDP attributable to services (ISIC divisions 50-99) has been increasing steadily in recent years across the globe. In general, an economy that is turning toward a knowledge-based economy will increase the proportion of services in GDP.

*Percentage of GDP attributable to industry*

The percentages of total GDP attributable to non-service industry as defined by the World Bank were then calculated for the four groups. Table 7 illustrates the percentage of GDP attributable to industry, the standard deviations, and the two sample t-tests across each of the country groups.

*Insert Table 7 about here*

The Islamic Middle East has a significantly higher percentage of GDP attributable to industry when compared to all non-Arab Muslim countries (t=2.45, p<0.05) and all non-Muslim countries (t=3.30, p<0.01). No other mean differences were significant. Hence we find that in the Muslim-majority MENA region, a large portion of available jobs appears to not be open to women. Opposite of that we found in the analysis of trends in services, we found the percentage of GDP attributable to industry (ISIC divisions 10-45) has had a steadily decreasing trend globally.

**Yet Another Detriment to Women’s Employment in the Middle East:**

**Expanding Oil Production in the 1960s and 1970s**

The Oil Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s may have been another negative turning point for the treatment of women in the Middle East. We have discussed that it is not so much the original Islamic writings in the Qu’ran or even the fatwa that have been decreed over the years but traditional patriarchal society. Ross (2008) proposed a demarcation in the treatment of women in the Middle East and the Arab world in general is the wealth derived by oil production in the region. As a society enjoys revenues from oil and gas production, females experience lower participation rates in the labor force.

Ross (2008) suggested gender egalitarianism in the Muslim World, particularly in the Middle East and parts of North Africa, has relatively little to do with Islam but much to do with the region’s oil-based economy. Different economic growth patterns bring different gender relationships. According to Ross, when growth (the economic growth based on the export-oriented manufacturing and agriculture) encourages women to join the formal labor market, it ultimately brings about greater gender equality; when growth is based on oil and mineral extraction, it prevents women from entering the labor force and tends to exaggerate gender inequalities.

Ross (2008) tested two hypotheses. The first is that a rise in the value of oil production will reduce female participation in the labor force. The second is that a rise in the value of oil production will reduce female political influence. His results were consistent with both statements and confirmed there is a strong correlation between female labor force participation and female political influence. In short, oil not only hinders democracy; it also hinders more equitable gender relations.

Although females have experienced a significant increase in education and literacy (compared to men) since 1970, women have not been so fortunate in the realms of economic advancement or political representation. For example Freedom House has been producing a Freedom in the World Index since 1973. This index includes political rights and civil liberties. Making up the civil liberties portion of the index includes such benchmarks as autonomy, social freedoms, and gender equality. Although the index does not pre-date the Oil Revolution, one finds interesting trends from 1973 onward. For example, Arab Muslim countries such as Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, and Syria experienced trends toward more freedom for three to seven year beginning in 1973 followed by a prolonged move toward the “not free” designation by Freedom House. On the other hand, non-Arab Muslim nations experienced on average a slow but steady pace toward freedom during the same period with non-Arab nations such as Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Chad, Nigeria, Senegal, and Turkey setting the pace toward more civil freedoms (www.freedomhouse.org).

When controlled for religion and regional culture, the relationship between oil and gas production and revenue as a corollary to women’s participation in the labor force holds. For example, in the Middle Eastern Arab societies (Arab, Islamic, and geographically bound by the Arabian Peninsula), as oil and gas economic rents increased, the percentage of women participating in the workforce decreased.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

In summary, experts contend that for women to play a larger role in the economy and society is vital to the region's progress (Moghadam, 2008). Women in Islamic majority countries still face gender discrimination that prevents them from reaching their potential, despite impressive gains in education. To varying degrees across the countries, discrimination against women is built into cultural attitudes, government policies and legal frameworks. Family laws codify discrimination against women and girls, placing them in a position subordinate to men in the family, a practice that is then replicated in the economy and society. There is evidence that women are constrained from moving into more skilled, higher-paying jobs when trade liberalization occurs because they have less access to resources, education and time (Korinek, 2005). This represents one extreme of discrimination in women’s employment opportunities, and

In our literature review we present previous research findings indicating participation of women in the non-agricultural labor force is necessary to increase the rate of economic advancement in a nation. Our findings indicate significant gains can be achieved in knowledge-based aspects of an economy, an area where women could easily be included. We also find evidence supporting suppression of women’s participation in Muslim-majority nations, especially in the Middle East.

In our analyses we demonstrate that from publically available national statistical data:

1. The Islamic Middle East countries have the lowest percentage of participation of women in the labor force, other Islamic Arab nations are next lowest, the rest of the Islamic world next lowest, and the “all other nations group” the highest. All differences between adjacent groups are significant at p<0.05 or stronger.

2. Our literature review leads us to believe that women can more successfully participate in service industries than in industrial-manufacturing. We find that the MENA region has the lowest percentage of businesses in the service sector, the rest of the Islamic world next and significantly higher, and “all other nations” significantly higher than any of the Muslim-majority groups. The obvious implication, and one supported by analyses, is that Muslim-majority nations have a larger proportion of their economies in the industrial sectors, with fewer jobs appropriate for women.

3. We review Ross (2008), who provides convincing evidence that in countries where economic wealth is derived from oil production, females experience lower participation in the labor force in general. We do not explore the socio-economic reasons in this paper.

We conclude that living in a Muslim-majority nation retards participation of women in the non-agricultural labor sector. Evidence indicates that this is due more to the total overlap of Muslim-majority nations and the *Patriarchal Belt* than to Islamic tenets in government and society, with societal tenets taking precedence over Islamic tenets. Nonetheless, nations that do not have Islamic majorities tend to fare significantly better in participation of women in the labor force compared to all our categories of Islamic-majority nations.

Metcalfe (2008) finds that Arab states are committed to social change and reform, but within the framework of an Islamic gender order. This will require separation of the multi-thousand years of patriarchal culture in the belt and the intents of the *Qur’an* and *ahadith*. There are grassroots organisations promoting women’s advancement and empowerment through raising literacy levels, making provisions for business programmes as well as supporting entrepreneurial development. To ensure women’s economic security, there is a need for an enabling institutional, legal and regulatory framework to facilitate women’s access to economic resources. This will require some of the women’s administrative bodies in Arab states to give equal emphasis to the work as well as the private sphere. Metcalfe (2011) proposes some national and business organisational policies that should be of interest to governments and businesses in Muslim-majority nations for moving their economic and social development forward in the 21st century through greater participation of women in business. On the other hand, Syed (2008) argues that the concepts of equal opportunity and concerns about diversity are generally indigenous to Anglo-Western contexts and implementation in Muslim majority countries must be customized according to local socio-cultural contexts. A non-local discourse on diversity management faces the traditional challenges of local non-compatibility (Jones et al. 2000). Based on the history and origins of management research, the extant management knowledge is far from global. It is, therefore, important to contextually locate the multilevel discourse of gender and diversity management and its enactment within the unique context of each society. And, after all, Syed & Kramar (2009) note that the Western approach has not achieved equitable employment outcomes for women or for other diverse employees in Western countries. So we are discussing issues of degree. Accommodating diversity may require accommodating differences that may prevent equality. It is, therefore, important to properly situate the multilevel discourse of diversity management and its enactment within the unique context of each society.

**Shortcomings and Future Directions in Research**

Our study clearly demonstrates the differences we proposed in our tests, but is somewhat constrained by a journal special issue having a submission deadline. We plan further exploration of this kind of issue with a more finely parsed set of categories within the Patriarchal Belt, and general influences of a majority of the population in a country adhering to the same religion. Ross (2008) provides insight into the possibility that the source of wealth of a nation may influence societal and institutional gender relations, and investigations of sources other than oil are called for. Difficulties in access to individuals for societal studies, particularly women, have been in place in the past. Ways need to be found to remedy this lack of access to produce valid studies at various levels of analysis.

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**Table 1: Mutually Exclusive Country Groups**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Group** | **Country list** |
| 1. The Islamic Middle East: Defined as the Arabian Peninsula, Levant, Mashriq, and the use of Arab language and Arab script. | |  |  | | --- | --- | | Bahrain | Egypt | | Kuwait | Iraq | | Jordan | Lebanon | | Oman | Palestinian Territories | | Qatar | Saudi Arabia | | Syria | United Arab Emirates | | Yemen |  | |
| 1. The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East: Defined as those nations of the Arab world not included in Group 1 including Maghreb nations and member nations of the Arab League. | |  |  | | --- | --- | | Algeria | Comoros | | Djibouti | Libya | | Mauritania | Morocco | | Somalia | Sudan | | Tunisia |  | |
| 1. The rest of the Islamic world: Defined as Muslim majority countries that are not of Arab ethnicity (e.g. all of Islam minus Groups 1 and 2 above). | |  |  | | --- | --- | | Afghanistan | Albania | | Azerbaijan | Bangladesh | | Brunei | Burkina Faso | | Chad | Cyprus | | Gambia | Guinea | | Indonesia | Iran | | Kazakhstan | Kosovo | | Kyrgyzstan | Malaysia | | Maldives | Mali | | Mayotte | Niger | | Nigeria | Pakistan | | Senegal | Sierra Leone | | Tajikistan | Turkey | | Turkmenistan | Uzbekistan | |
| 1. All other nations | Too numerous to list |

**Table 2: Means, standard deviations, and t-tests for average share of women employed in non-agricultural sectors across groups**

| Probability Values | The Islamic Middle East  Mean = 15.48%  SD = 4.23 | The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East  Mean = 23.29%  SD = 5.57 | The rest of the Islamic world  Mean = 30.65%  SD = 12.2 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East  Mean = 23.29%  SD = 5.57 | t = 2.26  p < 0.05 |  |  |
| The rest of the Islamic world  Mean = 30.65%  SD = 12.2 | t = 5.51  p < 0.001 | t = 1.86  p < 0.05 |  |
| All Other Nations  Mean = 41.91%  SD = 6.27 | t = 16.76  p < 0.001 | t = 5.74  p < 0.001 | t = 4.54  p < 0.001 |

**Table 3: Means, standard deviations, and t-tests for of high tech exports as a percentage of all manufactured exports across groups, 2000 to present**

| Probability Values | The Islamic Middle East  Mean = 1.07%  SD = 1.803 | The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East  Mean = 4.21%  SD = 5.87 | The rest of the Islamic world  Mean = 10.08%  SD = 13.06 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East  Mean = 4.21%  SD = 5.87 | t = 2.27  p < 0.05 |  |  |
| The rest of the Islamic world  Mean = 10.08%  SD = 13.06 | t = 3.16  p < 0.01 | t = 1.87  p < 0.05 |  |
| All Other Nations  Mean = 10.49%  SD = 13.07 | t = 8.54  p < 0.001 | t = 3.69  p < 0.01 | t = 0.14  Not significant |

**Table 4: Means, standard deviations, and t-tests for averages** **of Knowledge Index for each of the country groups**

| Probability Values | The Islamic Middle East  Mean = 4.92  SD = 1.68 | The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East  Mean = 2.81  SD = 1.53 | The rest of the Islamic world  Mean = 3.45  SD = 1.94 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East  Mean = 2.81  SD = 1.53 | t = 2.63  p < 0.05 |  |  |
| The rest of the Islamic world  Mean = 3.45  SD = 1.94 | t = 2.15  p < 0.05 | t = 0.83  Not significant |  |
| All Other Nations  Mean = 5.44  SD = 2.59 | t = 0.92  Not significant | t = 3.92  p < 0.01 | t = 3.81  p < 0.001 |

**Table 5: Means, standard deviations, and t-tests for averages** **of KEI across each of the country groups**

| Probability Values | The Islamic Middle East  Mean = 5.01  SD = 1.63 | The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East  Mean = 2.74  SD = 1.41 | The rest of the Islamic world  Mean = 3.39  SD = 1.80 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East  Mean = 2.74  SD = 1.41 | t = 3.00  p < 0.01 |  |  |
| The rest of the Islamic world  Mean = 3.39  SD = 1.80 | t = 2.49  p < 0.05 | t = 0.91  Not significant |  |
| All Other Nations  Mean = 5.45  SD = 2.55 | t = 0.80  Not significant | t = 4.33  p < 0.01 | t = 4.19  p < 0.001 |

**Table 6: Means, standard deviations, and t-tests for services as a percentage of total GDP averaged from 2000 to present**

| Probability Values | The Islamic Middle East  Mean = 46.78%  SD = 14.31 | The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East  Mean = 46.06%  SD = 16.02 | The rest of the Islamic world  Mean = 46.68%  SD = 13.44 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East  Mean = 46.06%  SD = 16.02 | t = 0.09  not significant |  |  |
| The rest of the Islamic world  Mean = 46.68%  SD = 13.44 | t = 0.02  not significant | t = 0.09  not significant |  |
| All Other Nations  Mean = 58.26%  SD = 14.67 | t = 2.26  p < 0.05 | t = 1.86  p < 0.05 | t = 4.05  p < 0.001 |

**Table 7: Means, standard deviations, and t-tests for industry as a percentage of total GDP averaged from 2000 to present**

| Probability Values | The Islamic Middle East  Mean = 45.91%  SD = 14.96 | The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East  Mean = 35.01%  SD = 18.75 | The rest of the Islamic world  Mean = 31.72%  SD = 13.91 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The Islamic Arab World excluding the Middle East  Mean = 35.01%  SD = 18.75 | t = 1.20  not significant |  |  |
| The rest of the Islamic world  Mean = 31.72%  SD = 13.91 | t = 2.45  p < 0.05 | t = 0.42  not significant |  |
| All Other Nations  Mean = 28.32%  SD = 12.62 | t = 3.30  p < 0.01 | t = 0.88  not significant | t = 1.23  not significant |