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Societal Feminist Research On

WOMEN'S SOCIAL
PROTECTION
& SAFETY,
ECONOMIC
PARTICIPATION,
&GENDER ROLES,
GUARDIANSHIP

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Over the years, women in Jordan have struggled with the problems of restrictions to economic participation, inequitable social protection, forced guardianship, and predefined gender roles. The women have not had a solid sense of adequate protection physically, financially, and socially. Over the years, more women gained exposure and enlightenment through education and local awareness which is greatly evolving the cultures that support the old ways.

This study aimed to understand this evolution to determine the present baseline of women's situation in the communities across Jordan. The study applied a feminist participatory research methodology which is largely descriptive to comprehend the lived experiences of women including men in the governorates in Jordan. The paper crystallized these insights to make recommendations that support more holistic policies to advance the realities of a feminist economy in Jordan.

INTRODUCTION

Social protection systems provide a bouquet of policies and interventions that ensure the survival of a targeted set of people in contexts that can adversely affect their well-being. These interventions from an international development standpoint, help individuals and groups in targeted communities to not fall below a minimum standard of living, and to improve their ability to afford the basic needs of life (White, 2016). Social protection systems also improve inclusivity for a marginalized group of people at the societal level (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler 2004).

The World Bank (2020) has stated that social protection systems are designed to help the poor and the vulnerable during times of crisis, gain employment, and have better access to health and education. Effective social protection systems are beneficial to countries in that they ensure that all sections in the society are empowered to contribute to nation-building, thus shaping the countries and improving capacity and economic development (World Bank, 2020).

Jordan has recently been cited as one of the countries paying serious attention to the development of social protection systems to protect vulnerable groups and individuals (Zureiqat & Abu Shama, 2015). Many government agencies have their work cut out for them in social protection. These include the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), the National Aid Fund (NAF), the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the Ministry of Labour (MoL), the Ministry of Health (MoH) amongst others (Zureiqat & Abu Shama, 2015).

Jordan, a beacon of stability in the Middle East with an educated workforce, has nonetheless struggled to create employment and growth, especially for women. Despite a female literacy rate of %99.11 (in the age group of 24-15), which is the highest in the Middle East (UNESCO, 2019). Jordan has one of the region's lowest female economic participation rates at %15.6, compared to %69 for males (JCEF, 2010). On an international scale, Jordan ranked 138 out of 144 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report for labor force participation (WEF, 2020). The question remains if

women's literacy and educational achievements have improved so drastically, then why has this not led to women's economic participation and greater agency, and why do such large gender differences persist?

The female workforce is both a driver for a healthier economy and an outcome of development. A country has greater potential to thrive when a section of the population workforce such as the women enters the labor force. A study of the MENA region showed that the region's lack of female participation in the labor force results in approximately USD 575 billion in losses (Slimane et al., 2020). Furthermore, an increase in the number of working women would lead to a higher family income thus, increasing the chances of families escaping poverty. This would result in an overall increase in purchasing power ultimately leading to a rise in the consumption of goods and services which also translates to improving the country's economy. As of %51.7 ,2014 of Jordanian women enrolled for higher education while %48.3 of the enrollments were from men (Dababneh & Taher, 2016); and this was a great development from what it used to be in the mid-nineties.

The issues of safety and social protection have been fingered as significant reasons why women are economically underrepresented in Jordan. This paper aims to explore the issues of safety of Jordanian women, their perception of safety, social protection systems that help them function better, and how local constructs of protection have impacted their ability to play in the labor market.

Problem Statement

Jordan has notably paid the highest attention to social protection amongst the countries in the MENA region. However, women remain underrepresented in the Jordanian workforce particularly due to subjective barriers and a belief system that wishes to preserve women's traditional roles in the household (World Bank, 2017). Many strategies address constraints related to the provision of childcare and safe transportation. However, "*a sizable gap exists for women between constitutional rights and acceptable social norms, with traditional expectations and cultural restraints continuing to limit women's advancement*" (MoL, 2018).

If the social protection systems in Jordan were undoubtedly effective towards making women safe in society and the workplace, it should have translated into a wide increase in the ability of women to go out and work. The worrisome gaps between the level of education of women in the kingdom and their economic participation, leave much to be desired. It is important therefore to examine the social protection systems available to women in Jordan, how these systems have impacted the freedom of these women to get education in the first place and to contribute their quota to the national economy by active work.

Gender roles in the country have been much talked about concerning women's economic representation. The evolution of these roles especially the construct of guardianship, and how this concept has affected the perception of safety among the women, and by extension, their ability to participate in the labor market must be put in perspective for actionable strategies to be developed to close the gender gap in Jordan's economic development.

Aims & Objectives

This body of work seeks to explore the beliefs and perceptions of people in the communities across Jordan regarding the participation of women in the national economy. Social security and the protection of women will be examined in light of women's economic participation. Specific areas of concern that will be addressed include the perception of the safety of the women in Jordan, the available social protection systems available and accessible to them, the availability of safety nets to improve the quality of life of these women. More also, this paper will discuss the gender roles perspectives and how this has affected the ability of the women in Jordan to seek and get employment. As action research, this paper will take a "critical subjectivity" approach to discuss these perceptions based on the lived experiences and accounts of people in the communities.

The research answers the following questions:

1. Do women in the kingdom of Jordan experience financial, social, and personal security?

2. How have gender roles changed over time, and how has this affected the ability of Jordanian women to get employment?

3. Do Jordanian women possess the agency to decide their level of participation in the labor market?

4. To what extent has guardianship affected the participation of women in the economic development of Jordan?

5. What socio-political structures exist to ensure the safety of women?

Tabular representation of the questions and concepts:

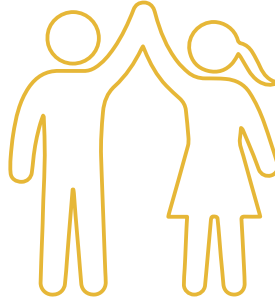| Research Question	Concepts	Sub Questions

Q1
 	
Do women in Jordan experience financial and social security?
	Safety & Fundamentals	i. What does safety mean to you? Why?
		ii. Where do you feel most safe? Why do you feel safe there?
		iii. How do we care for one another? Do you think it is a type of social security?
		iv. What are the basic needs of life?
		v. How can we meet those needs?
		vi. What are the challenges that interfere with your ability to meet the basic needs?
		vii. Did your elders farm?
		   a. What did they farm/ harvest?
		   b. What did they do with what they cultivated?
		   c. What happened to this farm?
		   d. Do you farm now? To whom this harvest today?
		   e. Are today's agricultural methods changed? (Insecticides...)

Research Question	Concepts	Sub Questions
Q2 How have gender roles changed over time, and how has this affected the ability of Jordanian women to get employment?	Gender roles	i. Have the challenges you met resulted in a change in the role of family house-hold members? ii. What are the roles of a woman? And what are the roles of a man? iii. Did our social roles change from what it was in the past? iv. From stories your elders have shared, do you notice any differences in the social reality? v. Why did your elders share these stories with you? How did this affect you? vi. Did modernization change the role of women and men? Did it place regulations or conditions on women?

Q3
 	
Do Jordanian women possess the agency to decide their level of participation in the labor market?
	Women's participation in the labor market	i. Do you think women do not want to participate in the job market? Or is it not her decision?
		  a. Who is the decision-maker?
		  b. How do you think this has changed today?
		ii. Was the decision made by the individuals, or by grandfathers and grand-mothers?
		  a. Do you think this has changed today?
		iii. Do you think women should be able to work in any field?
		  a. And any time? (e.g.,...Shifts)

Q4
 	
To what extent has guardianship affected the participation of women in the economic development of Jordan?
	Guardianship and protection	i. What is guardianship?
		  a. What is protection?
		ii. How can we protect women?
		iii. Can a woman be exposed to harass-ment when she leaves the house?
		  a. What ways do you suggest that we can use to limit these harassment?
		  b. Did these harassments exist before?
		iv. What does danger mean to you?
		  a. How did danger exist before?

Research Question	Concepts	Sub Questions

Q 5
 	
What socio-political structures exist to ensure the safety of women?
	Hosting government initiatives, assemblies, groupings (social structures)	i. Was there diwan in the society?
		  a. Did the diwan exist for men and women?
		  b. Do you understand diwan as social solidarity/ a type from social security?
		ii. What allows you to feel safe? Or what does safety mean to you?
		iii. Is the social security that the government is providing you sufficient? What are some of the inequities?
		iv. What is social security to you?
		v. What are the types of social security?
		vi. Who do you think is responsible for providing social security?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Zureiqat & Abu Shama, (2015) signalled that a growing body of evidence shows that measures such as cash transfer programmes positively support people's lives, reduce poverty and vulnerability, and strengthen livelihoods. They did clarify nonetheless that this has its limitations, thus the new goal is to extend social protection to all people through:

1. Creating connections between social protection policy and multidimensional approaches to the analysis of poverty, risk, and vulnerability (Zureiqat & Abu Shama, 2015).

2. Leveraging open, independent, and critical networks to disseminate innovative work on the design, delivery, and evaluation of social protection interventions across different regions and countries (Zureiqat & Abu Shama, 2015).

3. Harmonizing research, capacity building and advocacy, to support campaigns for the right to social protection, and ensuring that practitioners and policymakers have the information and analytical tools to advocate for social protection effectively and credibly (Zureiqat & Abu Shama, 2015).

These goals mean that beyond cash transfer programmes are the critical aspects of sustainable systems that take people out of poverty and their associated menace to systemically improve their living conditions. Money, therefore, becomes a tool for social change by evolving the possibilities of social protection programs for all.

These dimensions of social protection are structured, broad and sustainable, bringing the government in coalition with local and international actors for sustained impact. This can be understood as a systems approach to social protection.

Social Protection Systems – Global Perspective

Social protection systems globally are broadly understood as an integrated portfolio of interventions aimed to serve key and basic functions for both households and individuals. These functions include protection of the minimum standard of living, minimizing shocks by increasing local resilience, promoting sustainable livelihood (White, 2016).

Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler (2004) explained that social protection systems aim to bring about transformation towards improved equity at a societal level. They argued also that social protection systems reduce exclusion and increase the realization of the human right to social security. A reduced exclusion is a crucial part that emphasizes the inclusive roles of vulnerable people in society, especially women.

The Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2022) resounds a global drive for social protection systems. This implies that global social protection systems provide one of the most direct means for the achievement of SDG1 ('to end poverty in all its forms everywhere) and with a potential to contribute to several other SDGs' (White, 2016).

Taking a trail of social protection through the SDGs, one sees the first signpost indicating the importance of social protection to end poverty (SDG 1), followed by the recognition of unpaid care work (SDG 5) and then the goal to achieve decent work (SDG 8) based on the United Nations Women report (2021). Governments around the world agreed to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems that increase coverage among the poor and the vulnerable by 2030 (UNwomen, 2021).

In the wake of the COVID19- crisis, gaps in several countries' critical social protection systems were exposed (DFAT, 2022). Although it was apparent that a handful of countries have effective mechanisms to protect the near-poor, informal workers, small to medium-sized enterprises, and the women who contribute significantly to economic growth and social stability, unfortunately, these classes of people (women, informal workers, and migrants) are disproportionately represented.

It is evident by the recent scourge of the pandemic that having long term and continued social protection programs in place is both crucial and a wise action for countries' human and economic development, both in times of normalcy and crisis (DFAT, 2022).

Countries with social protection systems in place were noted to fare better in rapidly delivering assistance to their citizens in response to the COVID19- crisis, thereby cushioning shocks on jobs and increasing economic stimulus in response to the pandemic (DFAT, 2022; OECD, 2020).

Social Safety Nets for Women in Jordan

Explicit goals of Social Safety Nets (SSNs) are to reduce current and future poverty by raising income and positive consumption and change poverty status (typically measured at the household level) (World Bank, 2014). Based on measure and

disaggregation by gender of the outcomes, results confirmed that males and females respond differently to SSNs and benefit from SSNs in different ways (World Bank, 2014).

In the report by the World Bank (2012), women beneficiaries of SSNs did not show substantial impacts on their household decision making based on their role in making several household decisions regarding expenditures, employment, children's health and education, use of contraception, and so on. Four SSN interventions in Bangladesh had little or no impact on the woman's participation in expenditure decisions regarding food, housing, education, health care, and clothing. This is an indicator of how highly nuanced the empowerment of women beyond access to funds is.

Gender-sensitive programming is important as women often face barriers to accessing social protection, for example, women in Afghanistan cannot travel far from their villages, which could hinder their ability to attend registration centres (World Bank, 2018b). It was noted that the World Bank's funded cash transfer programme also had gendered impacts on food security: male food security increased, but women did not. Cash-based programmes do not necessarily have impacts on gender norms or roles or equality (see, for example, UNHCR, 2018).

A social insurance law was introduced by the Jordanian government in 2010. The objectives of the law were to make social insurance financially sustainable, enhance social justice and gender equality, and expand social protection. It was created in part to encourage more women to participate in the workforce through incentives such as maternity insurance, to reduce bias against hiring women (Brodmann & Jillson, 2015).

A study by the World Bank shows that those most affected by the law were largely uninformed about it (Brodmann et al, 2014). Those aware of it had heard of the law through extensive government mass media campaigns, but with an inaccurate or incomplete understanding of it because it came by word of mouth. "We heard about the new law," one woman said, "but didn't understand it much" (Brodmann et al, 2014). Such lack of awareness stands as an impediment to the effectiveness of this feature of SSN feature in Jordan (IRCKHF, 2020), and gives light to equal impediments that come from lack of awareness and incomplete understanding of general SSN for women in the country.

Research findings from the 2014 'Social Insurance Reform in Jordan: Awareness and Perceptions of Employment Opportunities for Women' show that very few employers and employees had specific knowledge of the provisions of social insurance. For some, it is an old-age pension. But generally, everyone who knew the law spoke categorically of the importance of maternity insurance, as a source of income. Brodmann et al. (2014) added that some women perceived maternity insurance as necessary for a mother's physical and psychological health.

Regardless, more findings show that the law does not guarantee women's employment opportunities. The reasons cited include absence from work for marriage and childbearing, hiring based on qualifications rather than maternity, local customs and traditions, work conditions, and so on (Brodmann et al. 2014).

As of 2019, the economic situation meant that women were increasingly expected to contribute financially to their families. Interestingly, Todman (2019) noted from a field survey that more men desire working brides. An indication that working brides (women) make economic sense. However, the fear by employers of women going on maternity leave makes it challenging for women to find work (Todman, 2019).

There is a growing expectation for women to become breadwinners or co-contributors with their spouses, yet it does not imply that women's domestic obligations have changed. Women are still required to meet obligations at the home of maternal and marital dimensions. This poses heavy conflicting distress on women, unlike the male counterparts who are chiefly expected to be financial providers. The dichotomy of economic and domestic demand on women is not without individual and collective crises.

Gender Roles and Women Employment

Breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty in Jordan becomes emphatic with women considering the lopsided roles of gender, which places more demands on women both at the domestic front and the workplace while giving them less agency to function.

In 2018, close to the Dead Sea in rural Jordan, the author noticed men gathered at the door of the garment factory where their daughters, sisters, and wives worked at the closing hours. The author assumed it was a daily routine where male "protectors" picks up their "vulnerable" female family members from work. (Abu-Jaber, 2018).

Much later, the author discovered that the male members —husbands, brothers, and uncles — of the women workers line up outside the factory on payday to collect the wages of their female family members. It was the unspoken "promise" that the young girls give to their families and male guardians when they signed the employment contract with the factory (Abu-Jaber, 2014). This firsthand experience raised a deep question on the contradiction of what constitutes women empowerment through employment and gender roles.

If women must be gainfully employed and by such, raise the quality of their lives, that of their families and communities, should it not imply that these women reserve the right to decide what their hard earnings should go into?

Majcher-Teleon and Slimene, (2009) drew a profound conclusion that women's economic participation does not necessarily lead to a restructuring of the division of labour within the home as well as women having more agency. Their findings suggest that while women's employment and contribution to the family income accords them a degree of hearing in family matters, the traditional division of labor between men and women within the family remains relatively unchanged. This has remained consistent with the author's recent findings in the communities.

Herein, is a pointer to the deeper nuances of the value system within the country that defines and grips tight on gender roles as the wind of modernization and increasing economic participation of women blows on globally.

In terms of gender and generation (especially intending to break intergenerational poverty), mothers' employment holds a profound effect on children's attitudes to women's employment which leads the latter to have less traditional and more egalitarian views toward gender roles in general (Vukovic, Birkelund, and Stulhofer, 2007).

Guardianship and Responsibility for Women Safety

With regards to women's safety in Jordan, male guardianship holds a central role. Guardianship when perceived from a cultural motive, indicates a well-meaning intention to provide women with protection from dangers and external forces that women may not be able to presumably defend themselves against. Nevertheless, guardianship has been about control and abuse of the female gender (The Guardian, 2019).

Amnesty International indicts the "guardianship system" pointing out that at the centre of a web of discriminatory provisions, men are empowered to control "women's lives and limit their freedoms" (Amnesty International, 2019).

An article published by the Global Citizen carries a bold headline saying, "Jordan Urged to Stop Imprisoning Women Who Disobey Male Guardians" (Rodriguez, 2019). This is a clear indictment of the concept of guardianship. The many associated ills make it an unfavourable tradition that only serves the male gender and deprives women of any rights as human beings.

Rodriguez (2019) gave an example in the article, mentioning how a woman was jailed for fleeing an abusive home alongside her sister as reported by Amnesty International.

Amnesty International published a document in October 2019 that showed the reality of male guardianship in Jordan. It articulated how the culture of male guardianship has given men power over women in various facets of life, especially in sexual activity and reproduction (Amnesty International, 2019). Women face criminalization, detainment and even separation from their children if reported by a male guardian.

The system of male guardianship prevails because the powers afforded to men is enshrined in law and can be easily executed by coercive measures by the authorities (Fanack, 2019). The framework that enables male guardians' to have unrestrained power over women lies within the Personal Status Law. For example, one article in the Personal Status Law sets out that male guardian consent is needed for marriage. This article inadvertently allows the guardian to cut off a woman's choice of partner at will, while also setting out who a male guardian is. A male guardian can be a father, brother, uncle, or another close male relative (Fanack, 2019).

The penal code also established the male guardian power. A woman can be prosecuted if her spouse complains, or a male guardian complains (Fanack, 2019). Male guardians have the power to initiate prosecutions of women with no sort of equivalent for men.

RESEARCH PROCESS

Following the feminist research framework, a feminist participatory method was used to ensure that women felt safe to communicate their lived experiences and perspectives on gender roles, gender-based stereotypes, social safety nets and their experiences with social protection or a lack of same to gain a grounded knowledge of women's lives in Jordan.

The research team utilized all the ethical considerations necessary to protect the privacy and confidentiality of research participants. For this reason, informed consent was obtained from participants, and interviews/conversations were only audio-recorded with their permission.

Primary data was collected in focus groups called Ficri circles in each community using designed questions that can be analyzed descriptively. Data collected were largely descriptive; describing the various phenomena and women's experiences across the governorates; data on guardianship and social protection systems; and some other data shedding light on the cultural beliefs of the respondents with regards to the agency, diwan gatherings and other socio-cultural structures in the Jordanian society. Trends in the derived data were discovered and analyzed to draw recommendations for action strategies.

The questions discussed in the ficr circles covered age, gender, level of education; psychological, financial, and social statuses of the women; their degree of agency, the level of security provision for the gender, the role of government in providing security, and the factors that affect their participation in work. The responses were grouped into categories including safety and social protection, gender roles, guardianship and socio-political structures protecting women.

Feminist research methodologies take the lived experiences of women in the study communities as a starting point and a way to understand in rich detail their struggles, fears, progress, and aspirations.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This research was conducted across six governorates Balqaa, Zarqaa, Madaba, Ir-bid, Ajloun and Ma'an, with Aljoun and Balqaa turning out the highest number of participants. There was a good urban-rural mix to ensure the inclusivity of all women in the territory. %100 consent was gotten from all the participants in the study, and the research covered women between the ages of 20years to 60years.

Women of all classes – married, single, divorced/separated and widows – were represented. Studies have revealed that the level of education has an impact on the knowledge and practices of people (Nwango, 2010); therefore, questions were asked around the highest level of education attained by the respondents. Women who have attained various levels of education were involved, from below high school to bachelor's degrees.

The participants included women who work, full-time students, those who are old, sick, or retired. However, a good number of the women revealed that they do not work and are not seeking employment. These are either stay-at-home mothers or unemployed youths. Some husbands, brothers and fathers of the women have engaged in interviews also.

Financial, Personal and Social Security of Women in Jordan

Women need to feel secure personally, financially, and socially. A woman feels safe when she can move freely without fear of being molested or harassed. A woman feels economically secure when she is financially adequate and can contribute to her personal needs and the needs of her household. A good sense of security also thrives when a woman is aware that the society in which she lives takes her safety seriously. In the words of some of the women interviewed:

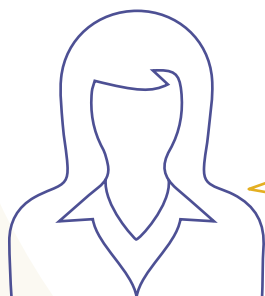> *My definition of safety is when I go anywhere, especially the streets and no one approaches me or harasses me.*

For another woman safety is deeper and more internal to her. In her words:

> *To me, safety means when I work on my fears and flaws to overcome them and to not be scared anymore.*

She also cited family structures and violence in the home as being able to cause fear in the minds of women.

This study explored the various safety constructs in the perception of women in Jordan. The women who participated in this study generally feel safe when they have the support and protection of their parents and family. The family is the first unit of protection, and the family has a strong voice even in issues of guardianship. The larger group of women agree that getting an education, getting a job, and having assets increase their feelings of personal and financial security. This can be traced back to the family because the family system would generally affect the ability of the women to look for jobs and secure them. Where family members, especially the malemembers of the family restrict female members   from getting a quality education or jobs, their dreams of financial security may not be achieved.

The women also look up to the government and its agencies to enact laws and policies that will protect them, as expressed by the women who participated in this study. The women cited freedom of speech as a safety concern. The women want to be able to express themselves without coming to harm because they expressed themselves. Many of the women (about %90 of them) indicated their desire for safe spaces where they can express themselves. One of the women in Aljoun responded when asked about safety saying:

> **Like, in today's circle, I am giving my opinion without any fear of saying my true opinion.**

For her, the circle in which she can speak freely gives her a sense of safety. Another woman responded to the same question saying:

> **I feel safe here as I am giving my opinion and I am not bullied. We are all talking in a free space.**

Marriage and family stability is also an issue of safety for women in Jordan. The presence of the male partner provides some level of security and reduces the feelings of vulnerability while at the same time helping them escape the stereotypes against unattached women in the community.

Some of the women also agree to feel some 'spiritual security from their closeness with God through religious practices. Having a loyal group of friends was not quite popular among the women as a security construct. This can be related to the fact that friends, a lot of the time, betray the trust and cause harm to others.

Other factors the women highlighted as giving them an improved sense of safety are the possession of weapons for self-defence, construction of schools for the physically challenged, and the ability to travel without fear amongst others.

Apart from personal security, women are concerned about the security of their loved ones, especially their children. The responses from the women reveal that they feel a higher sense of safety for their male and female children while in school, at the

university and work. However, while at work, the sense of safety they feel for their daughters is lower compared to their sons. This can be attributed to the cases of sexual harassment at work and in school which affects females a lot more than males.

Their feelings of security for their children on the streets and in public are quite low – even lower for the females than the males. Unaccompanied females have a higher propensity to come into danger than males who can more easily defend themselves. Provisions for security for young people in open places will greatly ease the tensions of these women and make them feel safer for their children whenever they are away at work

Gender Perceptions of Safety

Many women in Jordan as shown in the results believe that the feelings of safety in women differ from that in men. Although a few of them disagree. Research has shown that there are gender perceptions of safety that differentiate how women naturally view situations or environments from how men view the same. Research has shown that perceptions of safety are different concerning socio-cultural differences amongst individuals. Women tend to be biased about their environments with regards to safety considerations, especially when they have been previous negative experiences (Seedat et al., 2006). The number of respondents who submitted feelings of safety is the same for men and women may have the perspectives that some situations and/or environments are generally unsafe for both genders (Hidayati, Tan & Yamu, 2020).

Although many women believe that their immediate families should ensure their safety, many others differ in their belief that it is the responsibility of the government to provide safety for women. This is not surprising as there are many factors of insecurity besides those that are not directly caused by humans such as earthquakes, drought, and such. One would naturally look to the government to provide a solution to such problems. This corroborates the comments made by some of the participants in this research that the family context can either provide them with safety or cause fear.

Some of the women also held different opinions as to what bodies should provide security. In the words of one of the women,

> *All the components of a community such as the people, its military and the government, and laws pour into the sense of safety.*

opines that all of these structures and institutions contribute to the perceptions of safety that the women in the community feel. The body language of the government reflected in the laws set the tone for dealing with security in the country.

Guardianship and its Implications for Safety

Many Jordanian women have their husbands or fathers as their male guardians. The male guardian who may be the husband or the father decides the kind of employment that the woman take up. One husband says that guardianship does not interfere in his marriage with his wife. Another husband specified that he would only let his wife work as a teacher in an all-female school. Many of the men (guardians) will never let the women decide the kind of employment they will take.

The results of this study show that male guardians even dictate the kind of social media accounts that their women should have. One of the women says that her husband feels that Facebook is an open community, and anybody can message her there. She reports that he vehemently stated,

I am your guardian, and it is my right to protect you!

The consensus is that the guardianship paradigm is getting less restrictive, although the male guardians are still in control, the women have more freedom than in the past. Some of the women revealed that they work while the men stay at home. However, there are still some responses that show that some male guardians (especially husbands) still prevent their women from going to the market. The men buy them materials for clothes, measure them at home and then take them to the tailors to be made.

There are indications that some families are no longer strict on guardianship. A woman had this to say,

I am unmarried, and my father is deceased, yet my brother does not interfere.

Interestingly, about four of the women interviewed mentioned that a woman is the guardian of herself. This sheds light on a strong opinion given by one respondent, Rania saying,

We are entrusted with raising the next generation, but you can't trust us with ourselves. It doesn't make any sense.

In the labor market, the male guardians have a say as to the kind of jobs that women take. Many of the responses eliminated clothing stores and factories as workplaces for women because they would mix up with so many people in such environments. However, many acknowledge that women work in more sectors these days. One response reads,

> *Women today work in all sectors. There is an old woman who works in agriculture on a tractor in land ploughing, she is a widow and in need, she has children and doesn't have a husband.*
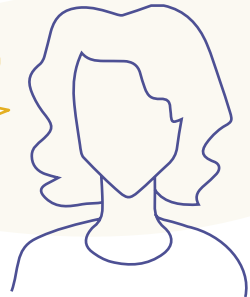
Another participant responded:

> *There is a woman who is a widow and delivers milk early in the morning to people.*

Results from the study also show that many young girls now have the freedom of choosing their courses of study, unlike what it used to be in previous years.

From these responses, one can deduce that where the women do not have male guardians who can take care of their needs, especially the widows, who take on several kinds of employment which may not be normally allowed by male guardians.

Guardianship is very much active and in practice judging from the responses derived from this study. A good number of women feel protected by their guardians. Some even mentioned that guardianship is beneficial to women in the aspect of inheritance. That is, the woman will not be able to fight to protect her inheritance by herself, but the male guardian could fight on her behalf. This in a way secures her financial security. In the same vein, women with guardians who can provide for them financially feel secure.

On the low end of the continuum, we see the restrictions that these women feel with guardianship and how it affects their ability to get good jobs. This means in essence that it robs them of their financial security. The feeling of low self-esteem, inability to connect with the world within their terms takes away their sense of social security.

Gender Role Changes and the Women Employment Discourse

Jordanian women agree that the roles of women have changed over the years from what it was in past generations. 486 out of the 572 women agree to this. An average of %63.9 of the women in this study stated assertively that unlike in years past, more women now work outside the home, participate in elections, engage in sporting activities, and participate in civil societies. On the home front, the women agree

that more women share in family expenses (this means that they work) and are allowed to air their views when family decisions are taken. The extent of this change is embodied in this response from one of the women saying,

> *I have been a massage expert for 15 years, and I have no problem doing massage for anyone, and I have no problem working in this field.*

This is a field that was banned for women in the past.

The need for the roles of women to evolve becomes imperative for many women as the expenses in their household increase including the education of their children as stated by about %94 of the women in this study.

The Jordanian society with its paradigms and strict rules is not one to bend easily to accommodate change. Therefore, one would wonder why gender roles have changed so much over the years. How come dreaded and prohibited paths are now being taken by the women? The women themselves answered this question. %95.8 of the participants cited exposure due to education as the reason why many women have gone beyond their traditional roles in society.

Even though some of the women pointed to their participation in elections and civil organizations as catalysts for gender role changes, many others disagree with this. %84.5 of the women fingered their increasing participation in sporting activities and the fact that they have begun taking up leadership positions as indicators of the evolution of gender roles. In some other cases, the women have had to rebel and break barriers. As one young woman stated

> *My family discussed with me and they told me that I should not transfer my major to law and that I should remain in my previous major, which is financial and banking sciences. I did not care about this, and I am now studying law.*

Some of the women in response say that in many families presently, parents can only offer advice and not force their decisions on their children. One can attribute these changes to the exposure that comes with engaging in all the mentioned activities along with education. Society would gradually open to change as it enjoys the benefits of a more literate community of women.

One of the participants said,

> *It used to be reprehensible for a woman to work in the civil defence or the Police, but it is normal now.*

Results show that more women are in hitherto 'male' fields making an impact now more than before. %52.3) 299) of the women interviewed stated without doubt that the roles of men have also changed over the years. The roles of men in working outside the home, participation in politics, family decisions and expenses, sports and clubs have changed but in lower degrees to those of women. This accounts for the slight relaxation of patriarchy and many other strict rules guiding the families and communities. From getting data that majorly points to the father in the home as the sole breadwinner, our research results show many communities think otherwise. For example, the population in Maan Qasbah unanimously agreed that their breadwinners are the mothers and fathers.

Some responses from the women showed evidence that the society has had to come to a compromise situation to manage the gender role changes in balance with the moral structure of the society. An example is a young lady who works late night shifts without the interference of her parents. To maintain the morality of the Jordanian cultures, workplaces like this ensure that there are separate spaces for women and men. The young lady states

> *I used to work in a company called Daraghmeh for clothing, and my shift was at ten o'clock in the evening, and in Ramadan, I used to stay until 2 AM after midnight, and when I got employed, I was 17 years old, but the important thing is that females have a separate section separate from the male section*
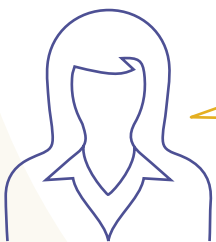
Parents have begun to harmonize the training and instructions they give to their daughters with that given to their sons as evidenced in this statement from a mother;

> *My daughter does not go out without my permission and she is not late, she is not like young men, but I also do not allow my son to go out without my permission.*

There are slight variations though as it is obvious that some of the parents remain more strict on their girls than their sons. However, the disparity is not as pronounced as it were. One parent stated that,

> *If my daughter is an employee, she may be late, so, everyone needs to know where she goes in the area, because if my daughter comes back in the middle of the night with a kick in her stomach, what am I going to do? This applies to my son also, but she should come back sooner."*

Fourteen women stated that the men over the years have begun to think rationally and with openness about women's rights to education; while four women believe that the menfolk have remained the same over the years stuck in their irrationality.

Driven by a need for sustenance and survival, the women in the communities have had to take on jobs to support their families. This has necessitated a change in the roles of women in society as they move about, meet new people, and express more of their agency. As the views of the society on women working has changed, women are having better options in the labour market; more employers are better willing to give challenging roles to women and this is expected to increase their sense of safety and financial security.

The Impact of Agency on Women's Labor Market Participation

Many of the women participants believe that women have the right to decide the kind of jobs they want to take; that they should be allowed to take on jobs in any field of their choice. They agree that they should be allowed to make decisions about their educational choices and whether to work outside the home or not. However, %30 of the women interviewed have a different view. These women think that women decisions about work, academics and nature of work should be taken on behalf of the women by their male guardians.

Due to the paradigm that suggests that women should not take agency for themselves, their families dictate the types of jobs they take on. This is limiting in the labor market. On this basis of restriction, one woman says in her restricted job consideration efforts that,

> *Factories have more difficult laws. In the teaching profession, at least, you return home at two o'clock, but the working hours of factories start from eight in the morning until six in the evening.*

For her, a teaching job is preferable because it falls within the limits her family would permit.

Another respondent said that men have more agency to decide the jobs they want than young women. In her words,
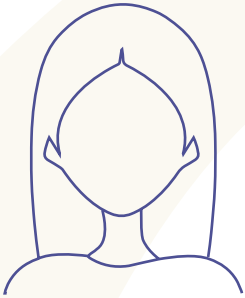
> *A young man can decide more than a woman. A girl has a mother to ask for permission, including a father and a brother.*

The responses show that society and families who still hold on to the agency of the women box these women by restricting them to a few professions such as teaching. To the families, these professions suit their perception of safety and morality because these jobs ensure that the women do not have too much freedom to 'mix up' and work closes early.

The companies for their part also restrict the women from certain jobs; they refuse to accept applications for jobs in technology and engineering from women. One woman bitterly complained about her experience with such companies:

> *The companies prevent us, I graduated as computer engineering, I went to apply for a job in a Jordanian telecommunications company, they told me that this section is for males and how will you work with them, (they laughed at me) and I did not work with them because they refused, (Why do they decide that about me?*

It is evident that women still lack full or a good measure of agency to decide their level of participation in the labor market. Taking away agency from women is like taking their lives away from them and preventing them from experiencing life as sovereign beings with a mind. One respondent expressed when she said,
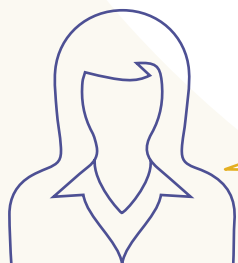
> *The inner desire for working exists in all women however the orientation of the woman's family plays a significant role in the decision-making process.*

This lack of agency is the reason few women are seen in challenging and high-profile jobs, especially in technology and engineering. Agency, therefore, has had a significant impact on the participation of women in the labor market in the Kingdom. This in turn has an impact on the nation's economy as many women remain dependent or take on smaller jobs that the males in their families permit.

Socio-Political Structures To Ensure Women's Safety in the Communities

The Jordanian government has implemented national policies and laws which protect the rights of women. Within the scope of this research, we engaged with questions around social security and diwan to give women a voice within the communities.

The women in their responses listed pension, health insurance, life insurance (in the event of death of the breadwinner), paid maternity leave, and work injury insurance as the structures which will give them a sense of social security. A small number of women stated though that they do not believe in the benefits of social security.

%60.3 of the women believe that it is the responsibility of the government to provide social security using the social security programs available. %37 of the women expect employers to leverage the Social Security Act to provide social security. Many of the women also see the diwan as providing social security, although %16 of the women participants disagreed with this. The diwan helps whenever the women encounter problems either with their family members or outside. It goes a long way to make them feel safe. In the words of one of the women,

> *If I encounter a problem, or my cousin or my brother, the family gathers in the diwan at 00;5 pm and put their collective efforts towards helping this member. This makes me feel safe and secure on the inside, knowing that I am protected. Moreover, this helps to contain the problem. It does not get bigger between two men for example. Because when family members meet and discuss what needs to be done. This will minimize any given problem.*

Reporting on the role of women in diwan, the women reported that women who attend diwan do participate in social events, they take part in politics and that is why during elections more women frequent the diwans. %17 of the women though believe that the diwans are for men, therefore women do not play any roles there.

One woman said:

> *Usually, when there are elections, it is used for both men and women. Here in Kufranjeh, we call it Madafa or diwan, but for every other tribe, there is a diwan. Men gathered more than women if there is a funeral or for elections too.*

There are indications that the diwan construct is not uniform in different tribes. Some tribes do not have them. While some of the tribes that have them do not permit women to act in them.

> *There are family diwans, but in a small percentage, but they are only dedicated to men, and women are not present in them. It is forbidden for women to just pass in front of men, as it is certain that they are not allowed to interfere in the diwan.*

A woman from one of the tribes said.

Reports from the research indicate that the diwans serve to provide the women with a sense of safety. In the diwans, they have a voice. They can bring their conflicts, suppression, or oppression they face from their menfolk to these gatherings and get some resolutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Social protection of women in Jordan is an especially important discourse that can change the way women are viewed, including the way women view themselves and the value they can contribute to their families, communities, the country. Jordan has the markings of socio-political structures that can improve the sense of safety and protection among women. Based on the result of this research, the following recommendations are drawn.

- The government needs to enact stronger feminist-oriented laws to give women a voice. These laws should give women the spectrum of liberty to choose whether they want guardianship. And limits the control of the said guardian.

- Government and its agencies, non-governmental organizations and social groups should be supported to hold transformative educational programs to enlighten families and employers on the benefits of granting women agency to decide what types of jobs and careers they wish to embark on.

- Companies should not prevent women from working in critical challenging areas such as telecommunications and engineering. Government can play a role to enforce this and even use the employment of women as a rating for these companies.

- The communities should leverage the diwan gatherings to give women more avenues for self-expression. Diwans should be open to women's participation, and women should be able to participate fully without fear of judgment.

CONCLUSION

Social protection, gender roles, guardianship, and women's economic participation, are critical dimensions of challenges faced by women in the communities across Jordan. A feminist perspective gives a fluid voice to highlight the realities of women.

The research also points to progress in the emancipation of women. There is a need for a continued effort on people's perceptions and policies that favour women if the high aspirations of a feminist economy are to be realized.

As much as guardianship and patriarchy give women in Jordan a sense of security, the downside is that women's ability to fend for themselves and their families is limited. Noting that financial security is critical to the discourse of safety and protection of women, women feel more secure when they are financially independent and can express themselves through their work and talent.

Concerning Zureiqat & Abu Shama's (2015) expanded goals for a sustainable social protection system, this feminist research is intentioned to inform, enlighten, advocate liberating paradigms and support critical connections and networks for practitioners and policymakers.

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