

Women's Rights and Call to Shifting Paradigms from Under Representation into Empowerment: The Case of Lebanon

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Abstract

The study is set to investigate women empowerment status in Lebanon with a focus on education, career, and positions in management, public sector and civil society as well as women's impact and potentials that would enable them to be good fits for leadership positions. Another purpose of the study is to elicit suggestions that would promote the Lebanese women's rights and ensure equity in terms of employment and participation in the political arena and civil society. The article reports the findings of a plethora of related literature as well as the descriptive statistical analysis of responses to questionnaire consisting of predefined questions used to collect the data reflecting the attitudes and perceptions of 331 educated Lebanese respondents of different academic majors and professions. Reflection logs were qualitatively analyzed to report the vision of changes suggested by the respondents. The findings of the study underscored the necessity for legislations and education that would conform with the women empowerment instruments and conventions and would render a significant change in the culture, values and mentalities of the Lebanese society which would ensure the full investment of both, women's and men's, potentials

Keywords: Equality, Rights, Women Empowerment

1. Introduction

Bazalgette & Mohamed (2015) state that all over the globe, gender-based violence (GBV) forms a reflective surface and a support for various disparities between the two sexes. It is firmly established that due to three main causes: power relations, in which one gender exerts control over the other, customs remaining in disavowal, which are being replicated through the generations, and thirdly the political and cultural lack of interest in this matter, GBV has its influence on both males and females all through their lives. The GBV research in Lebanon has been analyzed and assessed in a way that follows the multinational consensuses represented in the "Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women"(CEDAW, 1979), "Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women" (DEVAW, 1993) and "International Conference on Population and Development agreements" (ICPD, 1994).

The CEDAW outlines the most significant explicit forms of GBV, which are somatic, sexual undermining conduct, compulsions, and hardships of freedom. However, savagery can also have a less apparent form reflected in unequal education, job opportunities, payments, and laws promoting gender inequality and society's culture and norms that often give advantage to males. According to "Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women," the household, community, and workplace are the three domains in which acts of brutality occur. What was once considered solely a family or a country issue is now broadly perceived as a collective incident.

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Due to the revelations of the seriousness of the situation and the extent at which such incidents are occurring all around the world, nations promised to work towards achieving the “Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals” and specified a number of chapters and goals to solve the problem. The second includes the 3rd MDG, concerned with supporting egalitarianism between both genders in general and the emancipation of women in particular (Economic and Social Commission for West Asia, The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report, 2013).

Thirdly, during the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the UNFPA suggested a solution to the discussed problem in the developing nations; The “Programme of Action” (PoA). This plan acknowledges that development can only be achieved if women are given a certain degree of power and authority and considered equal to men. It also pushes the males to “take responsibility for their sexual and reproductive behavior and social and family roles with special emphasis on the prevention of violence against women and children” (ICPD Po A, paragraph 4.27). At the state level, it calls on countries “to take full measure to eliminate exploitation, abuse, harassment, and violence against women, adolescents, and children” (ICPD Po A paragraph 4.9). These announcements support UNFPA's ways to foster advancement. International endeavours aimed at tackling gender-based violence (GBV) and serve to shield those subjected to it and to prevent future occurrences. In addition, there is growing understanding about different types of GBV, departing from the usual physical and sexual violence connotations to consider dimensions such as bullying, psychological abuse, discrimination and economic exploitation.

1.1 Background of the study

The discourse on women's rights and gender equality in sustainable development has evolved since the 1992 United Nations (UN) Summit on Environment and Development held in Rio and over the series of UN development summits held throughout the 1990's. Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration (1992) established that “women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development”. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which entered into force in 1981, had obligated Member States party to the Convention to condemn all forms of discrimination against women and to take steps “by all appropriate means and without delay” to pursue a policy of eliminating this discrimination” (Article 2 of CEDAW). Most Arab countries have ratified the convention. Article 2 of CEDAW sets out steps that a State party must take to eliminate discrimination, including adopting appropriate legislative and other measures. Most Arab countries have undertaken a reservation on this Article; they indicate willingness to comply with the obligations as long as it does not counter Islamic Sharia. Furthermore, Article 4(1) of CEDAW recognizes the legitimacy of “temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women”. State parties' obligations under CEDAW extend beyond ensuring absence of a discriminatory legal framework; policies must also not be discriminatory in effect. CEDAW requires that states achieve both substantive and formal equality, while recognizing that formal equality alone is insufficient for a state to meet its affirmative obligation to achieve substantive equality between men and women.

The fundamental principles that spearheaded the agenda of sustainable development and women's rights and gender equality in sustainable development were established in 1992 and reinforced in the Rio +10 Summit (known as Johannesburg Summit 2002). Many real examples show discrimination against women in workplace, starting with the example of two female and male applicants who applied for a confirmed business in Lebanon. The female has many years of working experience and deeper connections with other institutions in the field. With all the positive points the female has, the company chose the male applicant. The administrator was afraid that the woman might drop out because she could get married later and quit her job (The Daily Star, 2015).

Around 50 percent of overall public, impacting economics all over the world, are affected by discrimination against women. Lebanon is not the only country covering workforce discrimination against women. Women form 25 percent of the Lebanese workforce (CAWTAR and ESCWA Report: Equality and Women Empowerment in the Arab region, 2013).

Also, Jamali, Professor of Management asserts, “...the entire national economy is suffering because of losing half the talent and half the productivity of women”. However, some countries like Sweden, Canada, or UK perceive children rearing as being a responsibility to share with both parents and not only with the mother who gives birth.

In Arab countries in general and in Lebanon in particular, employers crack down on the working mothers. A woman's role is mainly considered to be at home, raising the children and handling the household duties. The mother's work outside of the home is often perceived as unimportant in comparison with her role at home; women are compelled to work only to support their spouses financially when economic times are harsh (The Daily Star, November 25, 2015). The household duties cause some problems, in terms of career, for the majority of females. Working women work under tremendous pressure as they have to fulfill their duties as mothers in opposition to having productive roles in the places of work. Women perceive and fear such pressure which is the main reason for having women's educational accomplishments undisclosed in their workforce representation (Bazalgette & Mohamed, 2015).

1.2 Research questions

The study addresses the following questions:

1. Do the educated Lebanese agree to the statement indicating women and men are equally paid in Lebanon?
2. Do the educated Lebanese agree to the statement indicating women and men have equal job opportunities?
3. Do the educated Lebanese agree to the statement indicating women and men have the same decision-making authorities?
4. Do the educated Lebanese agree to the statement indicating women and men are allowed to have the same number of working hours?
5. Do the educated Lebanese agree to the statement indicating women and men have the same management positions in Lebanon?
6. Do the educated Lebanese agree to the statement indicating women have representation in key decision-making positions in the public sector?
7. Do the educated Lebanese agree to the statement indicating Women have representation in key decision-making positions in the civil society?
8. Do the educated Lebanese agree to the statement indicating that corruption among women in leadership positions is less than that among men?
9. Do the educated Lebanese agree to the statement indicating women can reach any senior/leadership position in the private/public sectors if they are given the chance (being empowered)?
10. Do the educated Lebanese support women's participation in politics and civil society?

1.3 Theoretical framework

The study presents the international instruments that would improve women's conditions and rights. The choice of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the endeavors outlining the post-2015 plan, principle 20 of the Rio Declaration (1992) and articles 2 and 4 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1981) form a theoretical framework for the study. Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration (1992) stipulates that women participation is essential to achieve sustainable development and articles 2 and 4 of CEDAW(1981) obligate the Member States to condemn all forms of discrimination against women and to pursue a policy of eliminating this discrimination" as well as to adopt appropriate legislative measures.

Most Arab countries have undertaken a reservation on these articles as they indicate willingness to comply with the obligations as long as the Islamic Sharia doesn't stipulate the opposite. CEDAW (1981) requires from all the approving states to take the appropriate measures in order to put a boundary on this male-female separation. Recommendation 19 (1992) stipulates that discrimination incorporates the gender-based violence which targets a woman just for being a woman. Gender-based violence includes acts that inflict physical, mental, sexual harm or threats of coercion and deprivations of liberty acts. The UN Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China in 1995 represented a major breakthrough in promoting women's participation and a renewed global commitment to women's empowerment. At Beijing, 189 governments- including most Arab governments promised women "equal access to" and "full participation in leadership structures and decision-making and review of "the differential impact of electoral systems on the political representation of women."

They also assured to set certain goals and carry out measures to increase the number of women in government at all levels. The first world conference on the status of women (1980) convened in Mexico City adopted the first world plan for action that called upon governments to develop strategies that would render gender equality, eliminate gender discrimination and integrate women into peace-building development.

The Women's major supporters Group, which consists of over 500 women's human rights and advancement organizations and eight unofficial organizations from the Arab region supported the following statement: "We won't be mainstreamed into a contaminated stream." The desire to accomplish women's rights is connected with struggling to change the economy development model as one cannot be done without the other; more than 340 women's groups, including activists from Sudan, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan asserted the need to change the current model. This statement also emphasized the significance of redistributing the unjust burdens on females in achieving the well-being of societies and economies. The statement shows that such change demands reconsidering the current paradigm of spending huge expenditures in militarization, changing the models that bring excessive consumption and production, and making sure that new plans are set to respect boundaries. The group requested that gender equality be greatly examined as it is needed to restore women's power and leadership.

The Women's working group which comprises more than 500 women's rights groups, accepted the most important goal related to strengthening women's role 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.' In addition, these women's supporters welcomed numerous other goals that target women's rights and gender equality; these conferences involved 30 members in an Open Working Group of the UN General Assembly; the conferences also demanded to broaden support for a number of priority actions including preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, empowering women legally and economically, and strengthening women's voice, participation in decision-making and leadership in all areas of life.

2. Literature Review

One of the responses to GBV was the issuance of Resolutions 1325 and 1820 by the UN Security Council, which was meant to guarantee women's right to participate comprehensively in conflict prevention and resolution, promotion of security and peace, as well as protection of women during peace, conflict, and post-conflict periods. Moreover, the recently set up Arab States Regional Office (ASRO) of UNFPA has mapped activities pertaining to women's empowerment and gender equality in the region. One of the main findings was that GBV's manifestations were different from one country to another, including verbal abuse, sexual harassment, violence, early marriage, child marriage and female genital mutilation. Another finding was that the region would do well to enhance knowledge sharing, despite already present research and mapping efforts. Women's status, with the exception of Tunisia, differs among the various countries in the region, but it still conforms with religious and Sharia laws (CAWTAR and ESCWA Report: Equality and Women Empowerment in the Arab region, 2013). Passages from Qur'an have been used outside their original context in order to justify GBV under the banner of religion. Additionally, gender-stereotyped roles continue to prevail, with the notion of sanctity and overall patriarchal values constituting roadblocks to the fight against violence. A substantial number of people, females and males, justify wife beating and some even attribute such brutal action to a wrongdoing by women themselves, thereby holding victims responsible (UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4, 2014).

In 1996, the CEDAW was ratified by Lebanon, with article 7 outlining the equality of men and women before the law, whereby women are entitled to the same political and civil rights and endowed with the same duties and obligations without discrimination. However, no laws governing the minimum age of consent or marriage exist. In addition, personal status matters are ruled over not by civil but rather by religious courts; these courts handle cases of marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc. As for GBV, it is widespread in Lebanon, taking on various shapes which include physical, sexual and psychological abuse including the domestic / marital levels. NGO estimations also indicate that 80% of women who undergo domestic violence are also subject to marital rape (CAWTAR and ESCWA Report: Equality and Women Empowerment in the Arab region, 2013).

In 2008, a 2-year program was started by the UNFPA in Lebanon. The program, with the help of the Italian government, targets the eradication of GBV through national planning. There were several similar initiatives organized by UNFPA and corporate and held by the program during the '2-year national GBV action plan' focusing on years 2009-2011. UNFPA had a global authorization to raise awareness of the rights of human beings at all ages and genders and to ensure that all people would have healthy life and fair chances.

Lebanon had taken important actions towards its international agreements, including the CEDAW; in 1996, a 'national women's strategy' was devised and prioritized 'Women under Occupation'. The National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) has been entrusted to propose and give the adequate recommendations and social support on women empowerment and gender mainstreaming. Women are suffering from biases featured in limited job opportunities, low pay, lack of social protection, denial of entitlements to maternity leave and protection, lack of laws that ensure them protection from violence and harassment (CAWTAR and ESCWA Report: Equality and Women Empowerment in the Arab region, 2013). Patriarchal culture shapes women's role in Lebanon whereas women are restricted to household duties and are prevented from working outside their homes.

However, Lebanese women keep receiving comparable or even higher education than that attained by men (United Nations Development Program Report, 2013). Women suffer from legalized discrimination which subordinates them to men, which in turn makes them vulnerable to all forms of violence (UNDP Arab Human Development Report, 2009). There are many NGOs working with 'national and local programming' that reject GBV; however, no official national plan issued by the government has been set yet for GBV in Lebanon and no permanent coordination or commitment to the project was made. Even though the government failed to set an official plan on GBV, the current ministry declared in its statement the urge to regard GBV as a contributor to the empowerment of women (The Daily Star, Nov. 26, 2015). The bill on the protection of women from domestic violence' was accepted by the Council of Ministers in April 2010. The bill stipulates that any act of violence against women, committed by a family member, which might result in the physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm including threats of deprivation of liberty, whether occurring within or outside the family home shall be penalized (Article 2, paragraph 2).

Civil society has witnessed high levels of activity recently. Women's activism and movements in particular date back to the 19th century, but only began to touch on topics such as gender-based-violence (GBV) in the past few decades. Early attempts to tackle the problem were based on a human rights approach, whereby women were educated about their rights, and issues of gender discrimination as well as legislative abuses were reported, particularly in civil and religious laws (Freedom House Special Report, Lebanon 2010).

There is scarcity or scanty literature pertinent to gender equality issues as there are few organizations conducting such research in Lebanon. Some regulations have been set; for example, the rule that confirms the ability of women to stop working only before and after birth forty-nine to seventy-nine days was approved in assembly in April 2014. Beyond any reasonable doubt, laws and regulations supporting women to work at the administration and corporate levels should be issued and supported by Arabs (Bazalgette & Mohamed, 2015). Discharged in June 2014, the proposed maintainable advancement objectives (Sustainable Developmental Goals), encapsulated a takeoff from the reductionist ideology of the thousand years' improvement objectives (MDGs), which did not address the bigger arrangement structure. The five proposed objectives of the SDGs sum up the requests of women's gatherings and developments displayed amid the advancement dialogs held through the 1990s on sexual orientation equity and strengthening of young women.

The five proposed objectives of the SDGs, together with sexual orientation centered measurements secured under other proposed SDGs, are more extensive as they touch on more basic measurements contrasted with the limited ways reflected in the MDGs (UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4, 2014).

However, the SDGs don't go further than the arrangement of responsibilities attempted by states amid the 1990s improvement gatherings and under human rights traditions. One of the significant deficiencies of the SDGs is the restriction of the proposed targets and their method for execution concerning tending to auxiliary changes expected to acknowledge substantive correspondence amongst men and women. Contrastd with different locales of the world, the Arab area still witnesses most noteworthy discrepancies amongst women and men in professional development, economic sustainability, and political strengthening. Patriarchal states of mind and profound established generalizations prevail the obligations of women (Bazalgette & Mohamed, 2015).

Women's conditions in the area are very impacted by profound and different law segregation. Inadequate improvements in the Arab locale are generally controlled by oppression controlling women and rendering deficiencies in women's strengthening. The sort of development accomplished in the Arab region amid the most recent three decades did not work for women, nor did it work for a great deal of other societal groups and gatherings.

The recurrence of contentions, including state emergency, wars, occupation, and ramifications of religious fundamentalism has tremendously, implicitly, and explicitly impacted women in the Arab region. The global association underlined in the Rio+20 report states: "sex balances and the urge support of women are essential for viable activity on all parts of manageable improvement"; the Rio report underscores the essential role of women and the necessity of their full investment and empowerment in every aspect of maintainable advancement.

3. Methodology

The study employed a mixed method qualitative and quantitative methodology design.

3.1 Instruments

A questionnaire consisting of predefined questions was used to collect data from 331 respondents (n = 331). The questionnaire consisted of 12 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question asking respondents to answer the question in their own words through sharing their "vision of change". The open-ended question responses were used to collect the qualitative data reflecting broadly the attitudes and perceptions of the respondents towards the empowerment of women and women's roles and positions in Lebanon. A Likert scale was used to collect the responses for the closed-ended questions. Using Google Drive, the survey link was created and the data were analyzed. The survey was administered by sending the link through WhatsApp and Facebook post to a pool of 700 educated people of different professions in Lebanon. The response rate was 47.28 % within 3 days of sending the survey. The survey responses were closed after receiving 331 responses.

Simple Random Sampling was used as accurate estimates of the population's characteristics were obtained as every member of the population had an equal chance of being selected. The ethics of survey research including informed consent and confidentiality and anonymity were observed. The researchers sent along with the survey link a statement explaining the study's purpose, content, duration, and potential benefits after showing no risks. The researchers also informed the respondents that they do not have to answer all the survey questions. The respondents' identities were kept confidential as identifiers such as names, numbers, addresses, and telephone numbers were not included.

Based on the Gender Status Index (GSI) adapted from FAO 2005:3-4 and using Google Drive, the survey has been created to inquire about the attitudes and perceptions of 331 educated Lebanese people of different majors and professions towards Lebanese women's education, job opportunities, pay, working hours, decision-making authorities, positions in management, public sector and civil society as well as women's empowerment impact on decreasing corruption and women's potentials that would enable them to be good fits for leadership positions. A copy of the responses was downloaded as an excel sheet to calculate the quantitative data and to obtain the inferential statistics required to answer the questions of the study. Quantitate and qualitative data were collected from reflection logs and a survey. Google Drive survey was used to analyze quantitatively collected data. The reflection logs were employed to write up the study results regarding participants' perceptions.

Reflection logs were also qualitatively analyzed to report the vision of changes suggested by the respondents. The study survey can be accessed at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1sZc-b2Kx-L-OY9BbUapn9FQtV8EpYAdJekZKEPKajKU/edit#responses>.

3.2 Survey Respondents

A total of 331 (n = 331) respondents completed the survey. The demographic characteristics of the sample are displayed in Figure 2 below. Specifically, 90% of the Participants were Lebanese, 72.1% came from Beirut, 13.9% from the South, 8.2% from Beqaa and the remaining percentage from the North. Likewise, 36.1% were in the age group of 30 and above; 30.9% between 18 and 30; and 30% above 18 years. Female respondents were 53.3% and 46.7% were males. It should also be noted that 65.2% were single whereas 30.6% were married. One hundred thirty one respondents were university students of different majors and the remaining respondents were university professors, physicians, directors, managers, investors, analysts, employees, pharmacists, lawyers, engineers, accountants, and 2 housewives holding Bachelor degrees in Business.

4. Findings

In response to the following statement: Women and men have the same education opportunities in Lebanon, 57% agreed; 16.75% strongly agreed; 18.2% disagreed (see Figure 3.) This suggests that the majority of the participants believe that the education gender gap has been closed to a considerable extent in modern Lebanon. However, responses to the statements regarding economic returns, management positions, and decision making suggest that males are still better off than their female counterparts. For instance, in response to the following statement "Women and men are equally paid in Lebanon," 46.1% disagreed; 14.5% agreed; 13.6% strongly disagreed; 20.6% were neutral (see Figure 4.) This indicates that the considerable numbers of the respondents still feel that there exist discrepancies in favor of males when it comes to economic returns at the expense of females. This observation is further emphasized by the response to the following statement

"Women and men have equal job opportunities," whereas 47.6% disagreed; 17.3% were neutral; 16.4% agreed; 13.6% strongly disagreed (see Figure 5.) Subsequent responses to the questionnaire items further underscored the perceptions that there are still discrepancies in the status of men and women. For instance, in response to the following statement: "Women and men have the same management positions in Lebanon," 44.5% disagreed; 18.8% agreed; 11.5% strongly disagreed; 21.8% were neutral (see Figure 6). Similarly, in response to the following statement "Women have representation in key decision-making positions in the public sector, 44.2% disagreed; 23.3% were neutral; 16.75% agreed; 13% disagreed (see Figure 7). Likewise, 32.8 % disagreed; 28% agreed (see Figure 8) to the statement: Women have representation in key decision-making positions in the civil society. As for corruption among women, the participants seem to be divided as 38.8% agreed; 24.5% were neutral; 19.6% disagreed; and 12.3% strongly agreed to the statement "corruption among women in leadership positions is less than that among men." (See Figure 9.). Finally, in response to the statement whether women reach any senior/leadership position in the private/public sectors if they are given the chance (being empowered), 51.1% agreed; 30.3% strongly agreed; 8.8% disagreed (see Figure 10). Likewise, 52.1% strongly agreed and 38.8% agreed to support women's participation in politics and civil society (see Figure 11).

The preceding findings were corroborated to a considerable extent by the qualitative data collected through the open-ended survey question. Some respondents tended to confirm that women **have less power than their male counterparts** in contemporary Lebanon, and they called for the issuance of laws that grant women more power. In fact, 33 reflection logs asked for **the issuance of laws** that would grant women quotas in the representation in the political arena and civil society positions. Specifically, one respondent indicated, "Women should have their rights protected by laws of Lebanon" and the "Laws should be applied." Another respondent remarked, "Women are deprived from their basic rights in Lebanon although they are educated." This position is also echoed by another respondent who stated, "**Laws** should be issued to protect women's` rights to participate in the political arena." The same perception was echoed in many reflections; "Women's power in Lebanon is still underestimated. Women should be given a higher chance to work in the political field." "To allow her participate in authorities by law and rules. Abiding by the actual law is a must in which no gender inequality is stated." "Strengthen gender equality principles at school since a young age and separate religious institutions from all public sectors." "Women should interfere more in political activities in Lebanon in order to get more power to make change and show what they are capable of."

"Laws should be empowered to allow women to take part." "Change the law and burn the mentalities." "Women should have their rights protected by laws of Lebanon." "Women should have laws that protect their rights." "The government should issue laws that grant women good positions in the society." "Laws should be issued to protect women's rights to participate in the political arena." "Laws giving women a quota in the civil society should be issued." "Laws that guarantee women's participation in the political life should be issued." "Women need strong laws to protect them." "The Lebanese government should issue laws that grant women protection in the workplace." "Be more active to enforce laws." "Women should have a say in legislating laws that protect them."

Second, some other respondents also felt that the power accorded to women in contemporary Lebanon is less than that given to men because women's potentials aren't not reflected in their representation in the political arena and the civil society. For instance, one respondent remarked, "Women's power in Lebanon is still underestimated. Women should be given a higher chance to work in the political field."

Another respondent further emphasized, "They" (women) "are considered as weaker creatures while they are actually the ones holding a house together and working hard outside their homes. And that they should get the jobs they deserve; they can be outstanding lawyers, politicians, doctors, and engineers." The respondents also called for changing the laws which currently obstruct fully the participation of women in society and compromise their rights. Likewise, one respondents called, "to allow her" (woman) to "participate in authorities by law and rules" and for "abiding by the actual law is a must in which no gender inequality is stated."

Third, it should be noted that some participants also emphasized the need for **proper education** to ensure gender equality. One respondent expressed the view that "Educating boys and men along with girls and women on being different and embracing the difference instead of using it as a tool for discrimination. Educating both boys and girls on thinking like citizens whose actions pour into the idea that whether men or women are all equal under the law." Another respondent agreed and called for "educating "the masses and change the laws to ensure women rights are acknowledged and supported by law." "التعليم هو الأساس" (Education is essential.), "Educate the masses and change the laws to ensure that women rights are acknowledged and supported by law." "Women are underestimated although they are the ones holding the house and holding a job." "They should let them hold political positions since they are organized and can multi task." "They can be outstanding engineers, lawyers, politicians and mothers!"

"Educate boys and men along with girls and women on being different and embrace the difference instead of using it as a tool for discrimination. Educating both boys and girls on thinking like citizens whose actions pour into the idea that whether men or women we are all equal under the law."

Fourth, further analysis also revealed a great deal of sympathy, especially with working women who hold jobs and fulfill their roles as housewives at the same time. One respondent indicated, "Women are underestimated although they are the ones holding the house and holding a job." Another respondent agreed and added, "Society should let women hold political positions since they are organized and can multi task. They can be outstanding engineers, lawyers, politicians and mothers!"

Fifth, some other respondents emphasized the importance of **equality between men** and women. 22 reflection logs asked for equality between men and women. For instance, some respondents' responses were as follows: "The necessity of having Equality laws." "Give women equality with men." "Abiding by the actual law is a must in which no gender inequality is stated." "Strength engender equality principles at school since a young age and separate (separate) religious institutions from all public sectors." "The main thing is to work on the equality between men and women. And never underestimate a women's skill." The respondents also stressed elimination of prejudice. One respondent said, "We must eliminate prejudices and inequality on all fronts before we make any change, i.e. political, religious and gender related issues. We need to unlearn and relearn as discrimination has always contaminated our society." Some respondents called for allocating quota between men and women to ensure equitable participation in rights and duties. One respondent stated, "To achieve equality between both genders, a quota should be applied."

Another respondent questioned the value of empowering women and called for empowering those women who "deserve" empowerment rather than empowering everybody indiscriminately." "When "empowering women" term is used, this empowerment should be for women who deserve it and no other. And to make sure of that, when choosing who will get the job among the participants (irrespective of the gender), make a test concerned with this position that they are willing to hold and the "person" with the highest score takes the job. Here the right person is in the right place! And u(you) gave everyone equal opportunities |(opportunities)of different genders..." Another respondent expressed some skepticism regarding achieving quality between men and women and remarked, "It's tough in our society for this to happen because we still live in a patriotically (patriarchal) society although women would really help our community (community) by having such positions in the civil and political sector akdhopefully (and hopefully) our society mind will change soon. |"

Sixth, the call for giving Lebanese women who are married to other nationalities the right to give the Lebanese nationality to their children was another recurring theme: "Giving women the right to give their nationality to their children." Some of the respondents also called on women to be more proactive in advocating for their rights until they get them because "Change doesn't come on a golden plate.

Women have to take action and protest to earn their rights." One respondent also indicated, "Women should ask strongly for their rights." Some agreed, "Women should protest to get their full rights."

Conversely, some respondents felt that women are fine and are enjoying more rights than men do, and they don't need any more rights." "This is because No human beinh (being) is taking all his rights. Women should not keep consider (considering) themselves as maltreated." Another respondent added, "|Women shouldn't be given more rights because they are enjoying many rights." Consequently, "No change. Most women won't be able to do men's jobs for example like construction work, plumbing, and many more. Women will not work as hard as men by staying over time to earn as much as men and most women will stop working after getting married." However, the above position contradicts the views of another respondent who said, "Women should be given the right to rule the country and to have a say in everything."

Finally, it should be noted that some respondents seem to blame the "Culture, religion, and values" that "shape the mentality of the Lebanese." The majority called for a change in the mentalities through the eradication of the religious courts and the integration of women empowerment and gender equality in education. Some respondents did not show much optimism about changing the status quo; In fact, one respondent remarked that " المرأة نرد العدل (Woman needs fairness)".

Specifically, one respondent indicated, "Awareness should be spread to change mentality of the society and to make them believe that women aren't any lesser than men." New generations should learn more about gender equality." "Despite the progress made in the struggle for gender equality, women still face violence, discrimination, and institutional barriers to equal participation in society. And I think this mentality will remain the same." Yet, a few respondents called for keeping things as they are since there is no need for any change because |women's physical and mental abilities are different from those of men." "Provide women with chances to prove their abilities." "Traditional ideas about women should be no longer present. Change occurs when the society changes their thoughts and traditional ideas regarding women and when women themselves believe they can make a change." "Change doesn't come on a golden plate. Women have to take action and protest to earn their rights. Women should have all their rights because men and women are equal. Women must have the same equal right that men have to run for election." "Enhance women's rights in oppressed families which don't allow women to get educated for the long term." "Educate the masses and change the laws to ensure women rights are acknowledged and supported by law." "Change doesn't come on a golden plate. Women have to take action and protest to earn their rights." "Provide women with chances to prove themselves." "Traditional ideas about women should be no longer present. Change occurs when the society changes their thoughts and traditional ideas regarding women and when women themselves believe they can make a change." "People should listen more to women's opinion so they notice that women can do it as good as men can."

"Men and woman should have the same rights in Lebanon or else our country will never know evolution!" "There is a need of a cultural change of values. The first value of every woman should be education rather than the silly values followed by today's Lebanese men and women."

"Women nowadays are working and getting an education; they are trying their best to get to their dreams, but people's mentality is not changing; we've been living for centuries with the idea that women are not equal to men. In order to change that we should really focus on the upcoming generation, to raise them with a healthy mentality because psychological changes are more powerful than physical changes." "We can't only suggest some vision of changes; the whole society should be changed so that people can start accepting women roles and positions."

25 reflection logs asked for change in traditions, laws, and policies. 41 reflection logs expressed that culture, religion and values shape the mentality of the Lebanese and the majority called for a tremendous change in the mentalities through the eradication of the religious courts and the integration of women empowerment and gender equality in education. However, a few logs called for keeping things as they are since there is no need for any change since women's physical and mental abilities are different from those of men. As such, there would be no avail to change our traditions and values that perceive women as an inferior sex to men who should be the decision makers in families and communities of Lebanon. "Women nowadays are working and getting an education, they are trying their best to get to their dreams, but people's mentality is not changing, we've been living for centuries with the idea that women are not equal to men. In order to change that we should really focus on the upcoming generation, to raise them with a healthy mentality because psychological changes are more powerful than physical changes."

"Change the law and burn the mentalities", "To let go of the Arab mentality of women, which would have to start from the family", "They should believe in themselves more, their worst enemy is themselves!", "Educate the young children at schools about the importance of gender diversity in life. Show young girls that not only do they have the right to succeed in many different areas in Lebanon's political and social ladder but they also have the ability to do it and they should never let any man dictate what she is worth or capable of." "Allow the voice of women to reverberate through the constitution." "It's not about job opportunities in private sector, it's about the mentality of most of Lebanese men, we have to work on changing mentalities and this is a long process! We should never give up."

"Change the society's mentality." "The biggest role of change begins by changing the mentality of our eastern society that doesn't believe in women's role and abilities. By education and determination, we could reach our aim. Everything starts from the society, especially those in the villages. Religion should be separate from education. Religion is the reason for the impartiality and prejudice."

"Change the educational system in schools to portray women differently than (from) being just mothers, sisters or daughters who take care of men in their life. The image of the woman will be empowered automatically as she is seen as her own person rather than as subjugated to others." To change the mentalities, some respondents highlighted the necessity of abolishing the religious courts and the electoral system in Lebanon. Their responses were as follows: (the religious courts should be abolished in order to have equality in the society. Moreover, a civil society based on democracy and the electoral model of special relativity is needed.

يجب الغاء المحاكم الشرعية والكنسية واقامة نظام عادل يحافظ على المساواة في المجتمع وهذا غير ممكن دون إقامة مجتمع مدني (وديمقراطي على اساس النسبية).

"Women should believe in themselves in the first place. They should apply to high level decision making positions and not wait for somebody to grant them the job."

"Women should speak louder to reach what they desire when the only deciding factor in jobs is competence; but I do not see this happening in Lebanon due to corruption at every level."

Conversely, some respondents were against women's work outside their homes and their responses were as follows: "

النساء هم النصف الناعم والمشرق في المجتمع وهم الاكثر فاعلية اذا قامت المرأة بالرسالة الملقاة على عاتقها وهي تربية اسرة صالحة (Women form the sweet, bright side of the society, and they are the most efficient when they contribute to building a society through fulfilling their duties in upbringing and raising children.) "Women shouldn't be given more rights because they are enjoying many rights." "Women don't need any more rights in Lebanon."

"The worst enemy for women is the women themselves!" "Do awareness workshops for their empowerment." "(The traditions and customs should be respected in Lebanon.

"(في لبنان هناك عادات وتقاليد يجب اخذها بالاعتبار "No change. Most women won't be able to do men's jobs for example like construction work, plumbing, and many more. Women will not work as hard as men by staying over time to earn as much as men and most of women will stop working after getting married."

Some respondents believed in the stagnation of culture and traditions, and their responses were as follows: "Despite the progress made in the struggle for gender equality, women still face violence, discrimination, and institutional barriers to equal participation in society. And I think this mentality will remain the same." "Ensure equal citizenship and end patriarchy in the system."

5. Discussions

The findings of the study corroborate with those of Economic and Social Commission for West Asia, The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report, 2013, CAWTAR and ESCWA Report: Equality and Women Empowerment in the Arab region, 2013, UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4, 2014, Bazalgette & Mohamed, 2015 and UNDP Arab Human Development Report, 2009. Patriarchal culture shapes women's role in Lebanon. However, Lebanese women keep receiving comparable or even higher education than that attained by men.

Women are agonized by legalized discrimination which subordinates them to men and makes them vulnerable to all forms of violence (UNDP Arab Human Development Report, 2009). Culture might transform the pace and nature of development, and it benefits both communities at large and the individuals.

Gender equality and women integration into development have been on the UN agenda since 1975. Many organizations and networking have been established with the aim of enabling women to enjoy their human rights and freedom of expression. The Vienna World Conference and the Cairo International Conference held in 1993 and 1996 respectively placed women's empowerment at the center of sustainable development programs (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). However, women in Lebanon are still suffering from gender inequality, low pay, limited or lack of representation and participation in the political arena. The findings of the study also underscored the necessity of active interventions from the concerned parties with active participation of the youth to overcome the obstacles preventing women from practicing their rights. Recommendations to empower women through awareness raising and legislating gender protective laws have been underscored by the study qualitative data. The analysis of the reflection logs findings also indicated that endeavors to decrease Lebanese tolerance to abuse and to modify norms of public discourse could be a necessity. Furthermore, the need for awareness campaign plans that target employers' attitudes and practices and comprehensive policies and strategies to improve representation of women within Lebanese workplaces has been also revealed.

6. Implications and Recommendations

Women have marginal role in the economy in Lebanon although the Lebanese women are educated compared to women in the Middle East. Lebanese women face many institutional barriers which inhibit their benefit from the workplace. Recommendations to combat all forms of gender equality including awareness raising and legislating gender protective laws are revealed in the study findings. Awareness campaign plans that target the employer attitudes, practices and comprehensive policies and strategies to improve representation of women within Lebanese workplaces are also revealed. Development activities focusing on strategic gender needs and aiming at eradicating institutional discrimination should enable the Lebanese women to claim their rights. The development activities should aim at uniting women and increasing the mobilization required to overturn the injudicious structures within the Lebanese communities. The researchers also recommend the issuance of laws and policies that ensure the fulfillment of women's needs and raise women's awareness. Economic opportunities should be integrated with awareness of rights. Above all, women should be encouraged to claim their entitlements from the state. The researchers call for the ratification and application of international conventions that eliminate discrimination against women and ensure gender equality and justice. School curricula should be revised to teach gender equality and justice schooling. Culture, religion and values that shape the mentality of the Lebanese shouldn't form obstacles that impede women empowerment; some respondents underscored that a tremendous change in the mentalities can be feasible through the eradication of the religious courts and the integration of women empowerment and gender equality in education.

7. Conclusions

Women's empowerment results in improving and raising self-esteem which is needed to handle the existing social norms. Mechanisms and procedures should be adopted to ensure social development curriculum. The study implications suggest guidelines for measures and activities aiming at improving household and reducing gender inequality. The research implications should expand women's understanding of the available choices and should provide them with better job opportunities, which eventually promote the living standards in the Lebanese society.

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Appendix: Figures

Figure 1: Gender of respondents

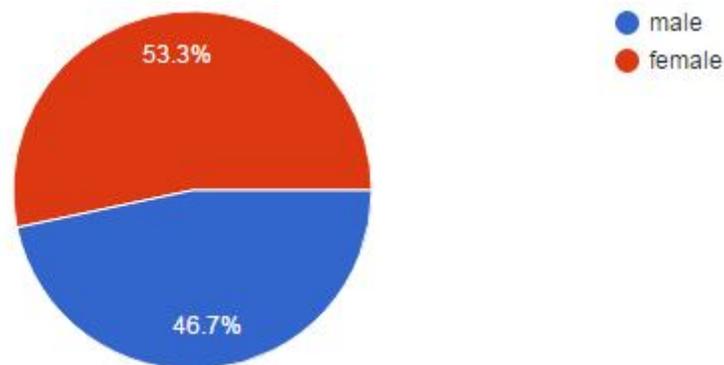


Figure 2: Marital status

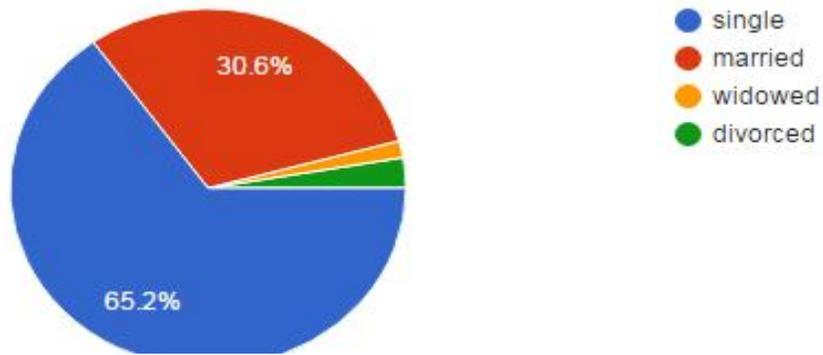


Figure 3: Women and men have the same education opportunities in Lebanon.

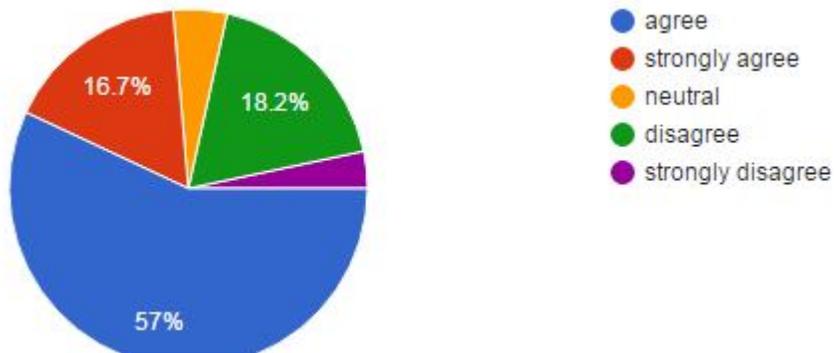


Figure 4: Women and men are equally paid in Lebanon.

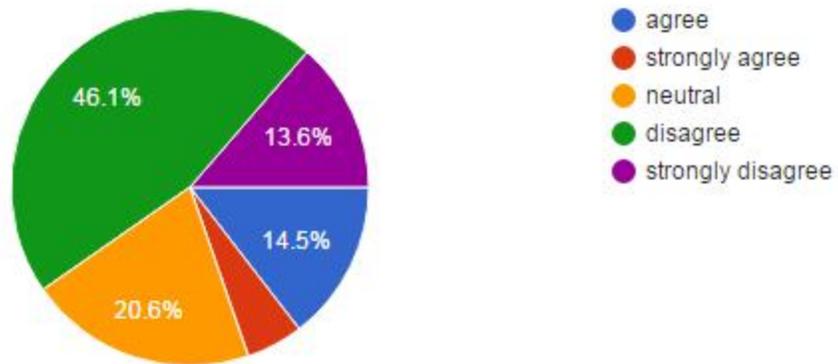


Figure 5: Women and men have equal job opportunities.

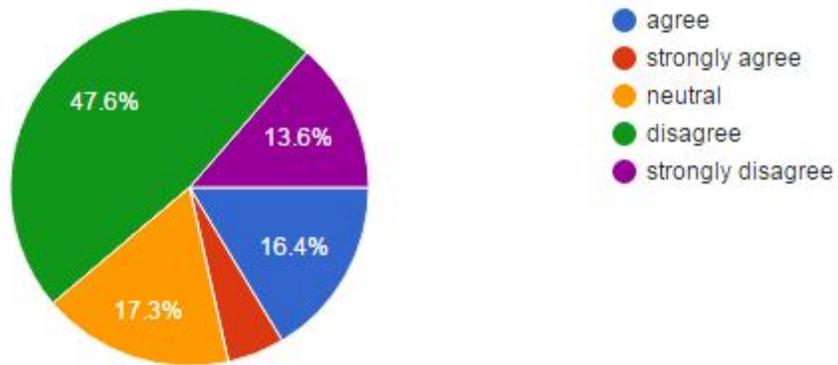


Figure 6: Women and men have the same management positions in Lebanon.

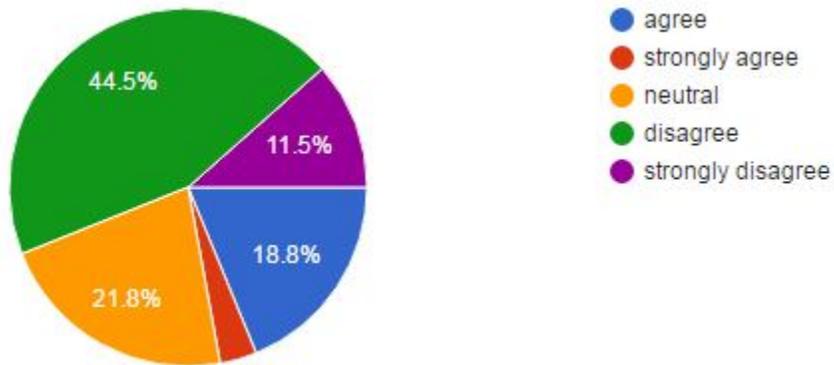


Figure 7: Women have representation in key decision-making positions in the public sector.

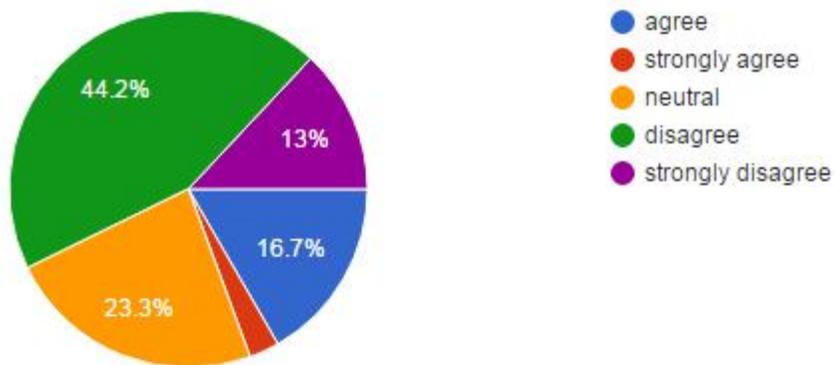


Figure 8: Women have representation in key decision-making positions in the civil society.

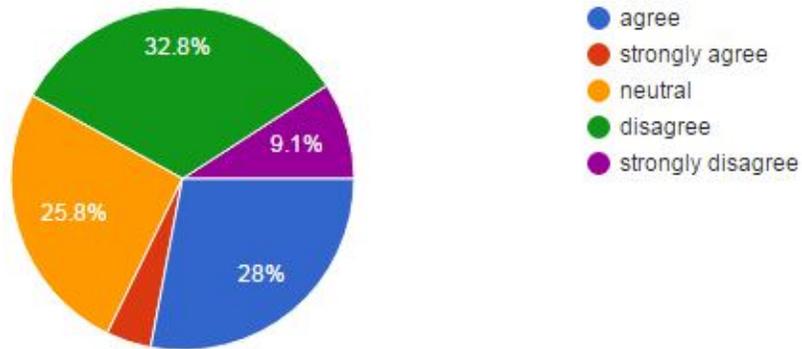


Figure 9: Corruption among women in leadership positions is less than that among men.

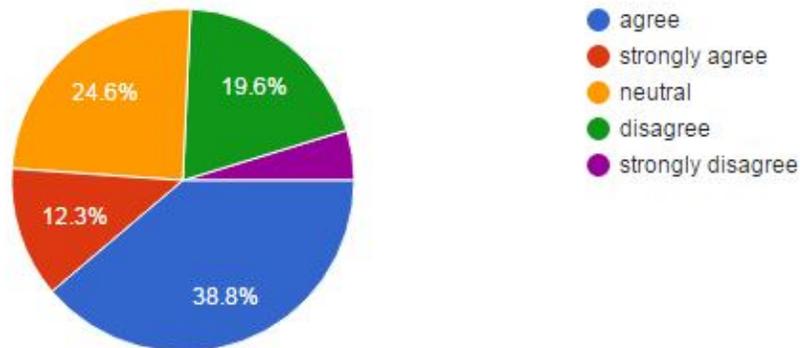


Figure 10: Women can reach any senior/leadership position in the private/public sectors if they are given the chance (being empowered).

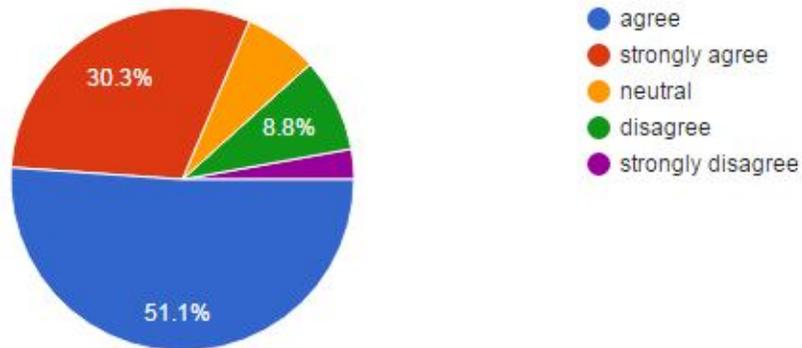


Figure 11: Do you support women's participation in politics and civil society?

