

Introduction

Saudi Arabia has witnessed significant changes during the past few decades, with women being able to take more responsibility in public spheres and occupy higher positions in organizations (Thompson, 2015). Yet, despite the apparent expansion in the role of women in Saudi society, the participation of females in the workforce continues to be amongst the lowest in the world (Al-Ahmadi, 2011), and women are still under-represented in leadership positions (Al-Rasheed, 2013).

Compared to other Arab women, who have been the subject of academic research, the gender issues of Saudi women remain a relatively unexplored terrain (Sakr, 2008). The challenges faced by professional women in Saudi tend to be wrapped up in the broader literature and research findings on women in the Middle East (Tlaiss & Mendelson, 2014). Such research is often to be based on the assumption that, due to the similarities in history, language, religion, and society, countries across the Arab world justify a broad-based view of the 'women question' (Omair, 2008). In practice, the realities of Saudi differentiate it from other Middle Eastern countries (Hutchings et al, 2010) and, therefore, the experience of Saudi women needs to be treated separately. This has led to calls for more contextual research that serves to improve the understanding of the complexities of gender, organizational experiences, and women's leadership practices in Saudi (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Sidani & Al Hakim, 2012). The need to address this is all the more important given the high profile of Saudi in globalization debates and, as part of that debate, women's role in the economic and political sphere (Le Renard, 2014).

The aim of this paper is to understand the challenges faced by professional Saudi women in organizations. To achieve this empirical evidence has been gathered on the challenges and constraints faced by women leaders in Saudi. This research contributes to the existing literature by expanding the knowledge on the position of women in Saudi and the impact on their careers. The study provides fresh insights into the issues faced by professional women in Saudi Arabia. These insights may be used to inform organizations and, in particular, HR practices in how to make the best use of talent. Furthermore the study gives space to women's voices about their experiences and challenges as they strive to become leaders.

Literature Review

Cross-cultural studies on women have found a continuing increase in women in leadership positions in the West (Gupta and van Mart, 2015). Such research also shows that across the globe women in positions of leadership share a number of challenges including: career opportunities; a lack of role models; and a lack of access to training and development (Cooke, 2007; Stead & Elliot 2009). However, research also indicates that the unique culture in the Arab region poses a different set of challenges for women. A study carried out by Wilkinson (1996) in the Gulf countries of UAE, Oman, and Bahrain found that the inhibiting factors faced by women in leadership positions were based on cultural issues and cultural taboos. This is supported by Shahine (1997) who argues that, despite the growing leadership role of women in society, traditional beliefs and practices within the community prohibited the career advancement of women, which means that they are less likely to be preselected as leaders. The restrictions imposed on women by Saudi culture are also evident in a study of women doctors by Vidyasagar and Rea (2004, p. 262) who found

that women were restricted by *'their freedom to travel, to receive education and to work'*. Some researchers view this as women being locked into restrictive traditional gender roles (Kassem 2012), preventing their ability to involve themselves in the economic development of their country (Sidani, 2005), and in turn restricting their opportunities in leadership (Thompson, 2015). Eltahawy (2015, p. 195) criticises *"a country that in about six decades built multi-lane highways across the desert, and is one of the most connected on the information highway, [yet] keeps its women locked in a medieval bubble"*. In contrast, others have interpreted it as respecting and valuing the different, not lesser, skills and characteristics of women (Metcalf, 2006).

Research suggests that one of the main obstacles to females moving into leadership positions is the patriarchal power relations and attitudes towards women. A study by Elamin and Omair (2010) found that Saudi males strongly believe in the premise that men are dominant, independent, competitive and capable of leadership and that women are submissive, dependent, caring, good for domestic tasks and child rearing, and, therefore, incapable of leadership. These views contradict the findings of studies conducted in other parts of the Middle East. For example, Mostafa (2005) found that the attitudes towards women who work are changing towards a less traditional stance across the UAE. In contrast, Sidani (2005) concluded that, although the roles of women in other Arab countries have witnessed major strides towards more participation, women's development in Saudi has been relatively slower due to cultural factors.

The literature highlights a number of other factors associated with the social circumstances of women. In a study of women in the Middle East Shahine (1997) found that women are subjected to socialization, educational and social pressures that

prevent the formation of values and attitudes appropriate to leadership roles, thus limiting the effectiveness of women in leadership positions. This is exacerbated by the limited authority that women are given which Almenkash, Abdulaziz, Shaman, Haijan, and Dagsh, (2007) found tended to be disproportionate to the size of their responsibility. This supports the findings of a study conducted by Al-Halawani (2002) across the Arab world which concluded that women in many sectors of government were operating under the umbrella of men, which reduced their levels of responsibility and accountability, as they had to defer to men, and that ultimately this impacted negatively on the performance of women- only sections. A study by Almenkash et al (2007) found that women in Saudi face several other barriers including: lack of clarity in the organizational relationship between women's and men's sections; poor coordination between sections and the subordination of women's sections on the organizational chart and, in some cases, failure to include women's sections in the organizational chart altogether; lack of control over financial and material resources; as well as a lack of participation in strategic planning (Almenkash et al. 2007). Such restrictions appear to limit women's authority and influence in organizations.

Research also show that a lack of empowerment is another challenge facing women leaders, which is reflected in their inability to influence the decision-making process and achieve organizational goals (Metcalf 2008). Studies suggest a number of factors contribute to the lack of empowerment of women leaders across the Middle East including: lack of professional exchange opportunities; poor cooperation with other institutions to gain diverse experience; and exclusion of women from some policies and regulations, and from participating in decision-making (Almenkash et al. 2007). Evidence also shows that the amount and quality of leadership training

available to women in Saudi is not adequate to empower them to meet the demands of their role as leader (Al-Ahmadi 2011).

Research also indicates that women's own view of their ability to exercise leadership effectively is somewhat negative. Shahine (1997) found that this was due to women being subjected to socialization through educational and social pressures that prevent the formation of values and attitudes appropriate to leadership roles. While others maintain that the difficulty of balancing professional and family obligations leads to women feeling that they are unable to take on a leadership role (Al-Halawani 2002). In a study of women in Egypt Ibrahim (1997) found that the conflict of home and work roles leads to women feeling frustrated which culminates in a sense of marginalization, inferiority, and a lack of self-confidence. Such feelings appear to arise despite the increasing levels of education among women in the Middle East (Hutchings , Metcalfe, & Cooper, 2010).

According to Le Renard (2014) professional women in Saudi are highly educated. This is supported by findings from a study by Al-Ahmadi (2011) which found that despite an increase in the level of education amongst women it was having little impact on women's career opportunities. This was also evident in a study by Sakr (2008) which found that an increase in education and an increase in visibility for women working in the media in Saudi were followed by little change in the promotion of females. This disparity may indicate that although women leaders in Saudi have grown in terms of education they are still struggling to reach leadership positions.

One of primary forces which contributes to the contemporary position of women in Saudi is shaped by the historical legacy of Wahhabiyya and its transformation into a religious nationalist movement under the banner of the Saudi state (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Wahhabi is often held responsible for the many restrictions imposed on Saudi women (El-Fadl, 2001). The exclusion of Saudi women, which delayed their emancipation and activism, is often attributed to Wahhabi teachings, considered to be the most restrictive within the Islamic tradition. As Al-Rasheed (2013: 15) points out, “*unlike other Muslim countries, Saudi Arabia applies the strictest interpretations of the Wahhabi teachings*”. Critics, however, argue that Wahhibiyya alone is not responsible for the position of women in Saudi. Altorki (2000: 233) argues that “*it has sometimes been asserted, especially in the West, that Islam is responsible for the marginal status of women in Saudi Arabia. This ahistorical contention, however, flies in the face of the fact that her inferior position results from cultural and social constructions by men and not from formulations in sacred texts*”. Cultural and social factors do indeed play a role in the position of women, however, researchers point out that religion is also very influential in seeking to preserve women’s status and confirm their position as subordinate members of society (El-Rasheed, 2013).

Based on the review of the literature, it is concluded that women in Saudi face many challenges that limit their effectiveness and prevent them from achieving their leadership potential. Such studies that exist suggest that the experiences of women professionals in Saudi are comparable with those of females elsewhere in the Middle East, and that barriers or obstacles to leadership roles may be similar. However, what is distinctive is the need to understand the local, social, and organizational cultures in Saudi rather than applying a generalization of a Middle East typology. This paper, therefore, aims to advance the understanding of the challenges faced by women

professionals in Saudi by considering the culture in which they work and the relationships they have within it.

Method

Approach

This study is aimed at understanding professional women who are not mere actors but who have the capacity to interpret their experiences in leadership (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2012). The research adopted an interpretivist approach, in which it 'gave voice' to women's experiences and attempts to understand their meanings and interpretations (Creswell, 2007). Compared with most quantitative designs, qualitative interviews can provide a deeper understanding of the assumptions and processes underlying leadership (Bryman, 2004), and allow for a more detailed analysis of the various contextual factors that might affect it (Bryman, Stephens and Campo, 1996).

Sampling procedure

Since conducting studies in Saudi Arabia is hindered by a number of methodological challenges, not least the reluctance of respondents to complete surveys and of organizations to allow researchers to survey their employees (Omair, 2008), obtaining a representative sample of women through conventional sampling is difficult, thus necessitating the use of a 'convenience sample' (Berg 2004). The purpose of this type of sample is not to "*establish a random or representative sample but rather to identify those people who have information about the process*" (Hornby & Symon, 1994, p. 169). The sample for the study was therefore constructed using professional and informal networks which is an approach regularly employed as a means of

gaining access (Gummesson, 2000). A snowball technique was used so that individuals who agreed to participate recommended other potential respondents (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). One danger of “snowballing” is the potential for cloned respondents with each person at risk of being much like the next in terms of traits, interests or patterns. To prevent this happening ten separate “snowballing” chains were launched, each starting from a different networking source. Through this approach respondents were identified to participate in the interviews for the study.

Interviews

Interview arrangements with the women were made via e-mail with the researcher explaining the purpose of the study, guaranteeing the anonymity of the interviewees, the confidentiality of the data, and also requesting permission to record the interviews. Twenty-five interviews were conducted between January and October 2014 and took place via phone or Skype. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Participants were asked for personal biographical details (age, marital status, educational experience, job role and length of time in role). Consistent with the interpretive approach being used for the study interviewees were then asked a series of semi-structured questions which were open-ended, and focused on exploring their experiences of leadership. Examples of the questions asked included: What does leadership mean to you? How did you learn about leadership? What experience do you have of being a leader? What challenges do you face in moving to a leadership position? What challenges do you face in being a leader?

Participants' background

The demographic characteristics of the women in the study were as follows. Almost 75% of the respondents were 31–50 years old. Specifically, 40% were 31–40 years old and 45% were 41–50 years old. Almost 80% of the women were married, with children (85%). Furthermore, regarding their educational attainment 75% had a bachelor's degree and 10% had a postgraduate degree. The women were employed across a range of industries including: education; science; health; media; law; journalism; and in their own business. The types of roles participants were working in included: dean of women's university; head teacher; lawyer; company founder; and women's doctor. The majority (65%) of the women were employed in the public sector.

Data analysis

In order to analyse and interpret the different perspectives and experiences expressed by the women the software NVivo was used to aid thematic analyses and as a means of mapping evolving relationships between themes (King, 1998). Several iterations of thematic analysis were carried out. A key aspect of the analysis was a reflexive approach to the analytical process itself, particularly focusing on the way in which understandings emerged and were clarified (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). From this analysis, the experiences, perceptions, and the challenges faced by the participants emerged. This enabled the key themes to be identified and these are presented in the following section.

Findings

Overall the data from the study identified a number of social, religious, cultural and organizational themes and within each of these themes factors were identified which impact on women's experience and practice of leadership in Saudi Arabia. Since there is only space for a few extracts from the data, the ones included are indicative of the responses from participants.

Social factors

The findings provide evidence that the view held of Saudi women in society is a major barrier to them moving into leadership positions. In particular, participants believed that women's leadership opportunities were constrained by the view in society that women lack the capabilities for coping with the demands of leadership. This was described by one woman as follows: *'women are considered to be weak, not able to handle sophisticated tasks and needing to be looked after by men'*. Such views were felt by participants to be linked to the attitude that women should stay at home rather than pursue their own careers; such opinions were not just from men but also from other women. Interviewees spoke about the often verbal, but also silent, condemnation they faced for allegedly abandoning their family to work outside the home. One participant said, *"I hear it almost daily from my family – why are you working so many hours? They think my job is not important. This puts me off looking for a more senior position as I just don't have the support from my family"*. While another stressed that, *"There needs to be more encouragement for women's roles as being more than just a mother... we are intelligent, have business skills and usually more qualifications than many men... yet we need male permission to start a business, have to use a separate banking system and receive minimal government assistance"*.

The findings indicate that stereotypical views of women in Saudi society are widely held and impact on women's opportunities to seek leadership positions.

Religious factors

At the root of the societal views of women appears to be the influence of religion as it relates to women in Saudi Arabia. This was summed up by one interviewee who said, *"As women we are viewed as protected, provided for, and confined members of society"*. The reason for this was explained by another woman as the *"restrictions imposed on us by the strictest interpretation of Wahhabi teachings which keeps us segregated in education and the workforce"*. This was supported by another interviewee who said, *"women's marginalisation, which affects our ability to move up to senior management levels, is a result of religion being turned into a state religious nationalist ideology"*. The impact of this was summed up by one woman as affecting, *"our education, work, right to drive a car and travel alone"*. From such comments it would appear that religion has an influence on marginalising and excluding women from attaining leadership positions.

Cultural factors

Religious traditions reinforce the cultural constraints which affect women's perceptions and experience of leadership in Saudi Arabia. Many of the women in the study were struggling to see themselves as leaders since culturally they had been brought up to see themselves as inferior to males. As one participant proffered, *"women mistakenly believe that they are weak, sensitive, and not able to handle sophisticated tasks. This is what we have been taught from an early age"*. The

impact of this is that women are cautious about moving into a leadership position due to the impact it could have on their reputation. This was summed up by one participant as, *“We avoid anything that could result in our reputation being destroyed. We avoid any career moves that will be scorned by our families, friends and neighbours. Our reputation is too important to lose”*. This was further illustrated by one woman who said that what she wanted to do was to go into politics. Yet she said that she was wary of doing so as such a move *“could get me killed”*. This woman spoke passionately about making changes to the religious laws which oppress women but was concerned about the impact of making such a bold move. There is therefore evidence of women in Saudi Arabia being significantly constrained from moving into leadership roles due to the impact of the religions laws on the culture in which they live.

Findings also provide evidence that the segregation of women from men in the workplace impacts on women’s opportunities. It is culturally expected that women and men work separately in Saudi which means sex-segregated work spaces, including separate institutions for ‘women only’ such as schools, universities, banks and hospitals. This has created the lack of an appropriate infrastructure to accommodate women since employing women means totally new bathrooms, meeting rooms and entrances. Additional infrastructure gaps include insufficient access to safe, reliable public or company-provided transportation. In a country where women are not allowed to drive, this creates logistical difficulties for women getting to and from work. As one respondent said, *“finding a taxi or a regular driver is expensive and usually impractical”*. This inability to drive restricts many women in getting to and from work and may inhibit them from taking on roles which involve travel. The

separation and difference which marks Saudi culture, therefore, hampers women's ability to move into leadership positions and to remain in them.

Organizational Practices

The majority of respondents (two-thirds) reported that organizational practices are a key challenge for women's leadership opportunities. Participants spoke about being discriminated against in terms of selection, as well as, training, and development. Interviewees said that they were not encouraged to apply for training since it was expected that they would leave employment and have children when they got married. Less than a quarter of the participants (22%) had attended professional development events. While far fewer had written a personal development plan (10%) or had been advised or supported by a mentor (5%). Participants also pointed out that their opportunities to be promoted into a leadership role were limited. One respondent described how, *'women are passed over for promotion . . . they are not seen as being able to lead departments'*. Participants suggested that this was due to the view in Saudi Arabia that leadership is male which means that women are prevented from being promoted into leadership roles despite their ability. As one participant said, *"My supervisor gives me excellent performance reviews but refuses to give me a salary raise or promotion because I am a woman."* Interviewees also reported that job appointments were often not based on personal qualifications and competencies, but on an individual's relations and family networks. As one participant explained, *"women from well-connected, wealthy or prominent families have more opportunities than those that are less privileged"*. This suggests that class and status may be as important as gender in determining access to leadership positions for women.

Interviewees also emphasised that the lack of opportunity to make decisions in organizational life was a significant challenge for women aspiring to move into influential positions. As one participant said, “*women in Saudi influence but don’t make decisions. They have to defer to men to make decisions*”. All interviewees identified this as a major restriction on their ability to be effective leaders

A further organizational challenge identified in the findings was the insufficient HR support. Participants talked about ‘*out of date*’ HR policies and procedures for women. They also expressed their frustration at the lack of support from HR to make women in leadership positions the norm, rather than the exception. One interviewee described it as needing to, “*make women in leadership sound uneventful and normal, but we need the help from HR to make this happen*”. It is evident from such comments that organizations reflect the broader societal views that a woman’s role is primarily one of being a carer at home and that there is overt resistance to women moving into leadership positions.

So findings from the research provide evidence that the antecedents which impact upon women moving into leadership positions are societal, religious, cultural and organizational. Findings also provide support for the argument that the experience of leadership for women in Saudi is focused on what Brah and Hoy (1989: 72) defined as the struggles around, “*relations of power between different social group and around cleavages such as racism, class, gender and sexuality*”. The current study found that women in Saudi draw upon various sources of relationships for their practice of leadership including their relationship to self, others, place, and work.

Women’s relationship with self

Findings from the study suggest that women in Saudi are not seen as natural inhabitants of leadership roles, this means that they need to learn how they can work in a masculine culture in order to present themselves as leaders and to be understood as leaders. To achieve this, women in Saudi need to battle the social, religious, and cultural barriers which make it difficult to envisage or label themselves as leaders. This difficulty is due to Saudi women needing to see themselves as leaders. The women lack the ability to 'story' themselves as a leader, that is, imaging and presenting themselves as a leader (Shamir and Eilam, 2005) with authority and influence (Gherardi and Poggio, 2007). Parry and Hansen (2007, p.290) go as far as to say that, '*if women cannot be storied as leaders, they cannot be leaders*'. Similarly, Ford et al (2008, p.116) note that the use of the words 'leader' and 'leadership' is instrumental in their very construction '*in the way that they provide an identity, or a way of being, a self for the people charged with the tasks of leadership*'. Learning to identify themselves as leaders and recounting their experiences as leaders would be a significant step forward for Saudi women..

Women's relationship with others

A common theme across all interviews was the women's relationship with other people, in particular, their relationship with their family. Participants emphasized the challenge of being expected to take responsibility for their homes and balancing this with work and the degree to which they received support from their family. This result is contrary to other studies of Saudi women which have indicated that women are able to balance work and home life (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). The current study found that this 'double-burden syndrome' (Camussi, & Leccardi, 2005) is a barrier to

women becoming leaders, as women are faced with the dilemma of choosing between family and career.

The scarcity of role models and mentors was also highlighted when participants were discussing their relationships with others. Women spoke of their limited access to role models and mentors. This results in women having less access to opportunities for learning about how they might overcome difficulties and barriers as leaders. This contradicts research that shows that despite their importance, mentoring programmes are not rated highly among the priorities of women in the Middle East (Alajmi 2001). In contrast, the value of mentoring was raised by the majority (n=20) of respondents in the current study, which supports research that has shown that mentor programmes can benefit women's career planning and advancement (Powell, 2000).

Along with the lack of role models and mentors, findings support the evidence that there is an absence of social networks and alliances which impact on women's experience of leadership, since networks play a vital role in helping women deal with the isolation of being a woman in a leadership position (Stead and Elliot, 2009). In Saudi Arabia women are excluded from professional networks through not being considered as having the legitimacy to join formal networks since these are seen as traditionally masculine. Given women's limited opportunities to network, they tend to find alternative channels and rely, for example, on informal social networks. This supports research which indicates that women's experience of relying on support from other women is important for their career (Karam and Jamali 2013).

Women's relationship with place

In Saudi Arabia women's leadership experience and practice is also shaped by their relationship with place, which is the physical and geographical location in which they are brought up and in which they live. Tied to the physical and geographical location are the social, political and cultural values of the place in which they live and work. Women's leadership opportunities are affected by cultural and religious attitudes to gender which means that in many cases there is a lack of spouse or family support to assist women to progress in their careers. This is reflected in a prevailing traditional conservative mentality among some men, which reinforces the exclusion of women leaders despite their education (Almenkash et al. 2007).

Although the data from the study indicates that access to higher education has significantly increased for women, the number of women employed in leadership roles remains low. This has led to the image of Saudi women as being educated and idle (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Moghadam (2004: 15) describes this as the:

growing number of educated, mobile, employed and politically aware women who are suffering [as] women continue to be subjected to discrimination, oppression, and gender inequality.

This suggests a 'bursting pipeline' where more and more women have the necessary education and capabilities, but are unable to secure employment (Kassem, 2012).

One further factor, which participants highlighted as impacting on their experience of leadership, was their lack of authority to make decisions. This supports the work of studies such as Al-Halawani (2002) which found that the constant intervention by men restricted women's freedom to make decisions in society, in general, and not just in the workplace.

Women's relationship with work

Women's relationship with their work, such as having a supportive environment, is an important factor in how they experience leadership. The findings from the study suggest that paid professional work is seen as a way of gaining autonomy for many Saudi women. It is a way for women to broaden their existence in autonomous ways, around activities and places independent from their families. Women in the current study justified their desire to work outside the home, in terms of personal accomplishment, affirmation of self, or even self-discovery. This supports the findings of Le Renard (2014) who found that women in Saudi sought work to know themselves better.

Also relevant to the women's relationship with work are the barriers they encounter, including the lack of promotion. This dissatisfaction with promotions is rooted in discriminatory organizational cultures and structures that continue to see leadership as a man's job; a challenge frequently highlighted by studies examining the status of Arab women (Tlaiss and Mendelson, 2014). This supports previous studies which show that women around the world are often found in lower management positions that give them little access to power and few meaningful challenges (Omar and Davidson, 2001). The barriers they encounter, as well as their desire to gain autonomy, therefore, define Saudi women's experience of leadership.

In conclusion, Saudi women's relationships with self, with others, with place, and with work illustrate how leadership is experienced, and is influenced by the cultural, religious, and social context in which they live and work.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to capture some of the experiences of a sample of professional women in Saudi and to highlight the challenges which they encounter in leadership positions. The findings reveal a number of constraints which impact on women's ability to exercise leadership in Saudi Arabia. It is evident from the findings that women's perceptions and experiences of leadership are dependent on their relationship with self, others, place and work which provide difficult terrain for women to navigate their way to leadership positions. Yet despite the constraints and frustrations they face, findings from this study provide support for the desire and readiness for change among professional women in Saudi. This was summed up by one participant who said, "*Women in Saudi don't want to be left in the dark. They want to have the same opportunities as male leaders.*" The challenge, however, for women in Saudi Arabia is achieving this within the traditions and laws of the country.

The research adds to the developing literature on women and leadership in the Arab countries. It contributes to our understanding of the challenges at a social, religious, cultural and organizational level.

Implications for practice

The insights from the research suggest important implications for practitioners. For public policy and organizations the findings suggest the need for institutional frameworks to help eradicate inequalities and give women autonomy in the

workplace. Legislation is needed to grant women fairness and equality within organizations in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, there needs to be government advocacy for women leaders across all sectors. However, this also needs action by women who feel oppressed and want to have more opportunity to contribute to organizations at a senior level.

One sector which appears to be supporting females is the non-profit sector, which is enhancing women's confidence and business skills (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010). To promote similar opportunities for women in other sectors requires equal opportunities for women in organizations in order to build their confidence and experience.

Within organizations, HR practices need to be reviewed and revised so that they focus on creating a workplace that is not discriminatory but instead one that promotes and develops talent based on its merit and not on the gender of the employee. In addition to implementing HR practices which support women's ability to move into leadership roles and balance it against their family responsibilities, Saudi women also need to receive relevant training and development. A programme on leadership development across Saudi would be of benefit, since having trainers from a variety of cultures, outside of the Middle East, would help to break down stereotypes and ensure that women gain exposure to a range of people and ideas from varying cultures. To help women gain the confidence to step into leadership roles there also needs to be investment in mentoring schemes to enable the transfer of acquired knowledge from those women who have carried out leadership roles to those who seek such experiences. Having exposure to other women who have worked at a senior level outside Saudi would also be of benefit.

The future role of women as leaders in Saudi Arabia will require society, organizations, and women themselves to change the traditional role-expectations of women..

These implications for the review and promotion of policies to eradicate inequalities in the workplace are the first steps at addressing the constraints preventing women from cracking the walls of leadership in Saudi Arabia.

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Future Research

Although this research contributes to the literature on women in Saudi there is still a need to explore further the issues that serve as obstacles to women's advancement.

Future research could explore women's positive experiences with work and employment by asking them to report situations and experiences in which their skills and knowledge are valued and identifying what can be done to maximize their experience and opportunities. Research is also required to shed light on women entrepreneurs who have set up their own business in Saudi Arabia, examining what the drivers and blockers for this are, and ascertaining whether or not this is a viable route forward for other Saudi women.

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