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**Lived Experiences of Women in Leadership Positions in the Public Sector  
in Saudi Arabia Post- Promulgation of Vision 2030**

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The thesis report was submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

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**Author's Declaration**

*I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated in the text, is the author's original work. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.*

*Signed:*

*Dated:*

## Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	II
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION .....	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	V
LIST OF TABLES .....	VIII
LIST OF FIGURES.....	IX
LIST OF APPENDIXES .....	X
ABSTRACT .....	XI
PUBLICATIONS.....	XII
LIST OF GLOSSARY .....	XIII
<b><u>1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</u></b>	<b><u>1</u></b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM .....	7
1.3 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.....	8
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	8
1.5 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK.....	9
1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	10
1.7 JUSTIFICATION OF THIS RESEARCH .....	11
1.8 CONTRIBUTION OF THIS RESEARCH.....	11
1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY .....	12
1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS .....	12
<b><u>2. CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....</u></b>	<b><u>14</u></b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	14
2.2 LEADERSHIP THEORIES .....	15
2.2.1 "GREAT MAN" THEORIES .....	16
2.2.2 TRAIT THEORIES.....	18
2.2.3 BEHAVIOURAL THEORIES .....	19
2.2.4 CONTINGENCY THEORIES.....	20
2.2.5 SITUATIONAL THEORIES .....	21
2.2.6 MANAGEMENT THEORIES.....	22
2.2.7 RELATIONSHIP THEORIES.....	23
2.2.8 PARTICIPATIVE THEORIES AND KURT LEWIN'S LEADERSHIP STYLES .....	24
2.2.9 AUTHORITARIAN LEADERSHIP STYLE .....	25
2.2.10 PARTICIPATIVE LEADERSHIP STYLE .....	25
2.2.11 DELEGATIVE LEADERSHIP STYLE .....	26
2.3 SAUDI ARABIA AND ITS CULTURE .....	26
2.3.1 IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN AS A LEADER.....	28
2.4 WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN VISION 2030.....	30
2.5 BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S LEADERS IN SAUDI ARABIA .....	33
2.6 STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN .....	35
2.6.1 LEGISLATING FOR CHANGE IN NORWAY .....	36
2.6.2 COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY OF CANADA .....	38
2.6.3 MALE CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE IN AUSTRALIA .....	40
2.7 DETERMINATION OF THE STRATEGIES FOR WORLDWIDE IMPLEMENTATION .....	41
2.7.1 SPEEDING UP THE CHANGE .....	42
2.7.2 CHANGES IN CULTURE .....	43

2.7.3	CHANGES IN ORGANIZATION .....	44
2.7.3.1	Public Sector .....	45
2.7.4	CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR AND PRACTICES .....	46
<b>2.8</b>	<b>LEADERSHIP ROLES .....</b>	<b>47</b>
2.8.1	PRECONCEPTIONS ABOUT LEADERSHIP ROLES AND ASSIMILATION OF WOMEN IN WORKPLACES .....	50
2.8.2	EMPOWERMENT OF SAUDI WOMEN .....	53
2.8.3	WOMEN'S ATTITUDE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE TOWARD LEADERSHIP ROLES.....	54
2.8.4	WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES IN THE WESTERN CONTEXT.....	56
2.8.5	WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES IN THE ARAB CONTEXT AND THE CULTURAL CONTEXT.....	59
2.8.6	FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE REGION .....	62
2.8.6.1	Patriarchy:.....	63
2.8.6.2	Tribal origins: .....	65
2.8.6.3	Government and policy .....	66
2.8.6.4	Religion: .....	66
2.8.6.5	External market conditions:.....	66
2.8.6.6	Private sector perceptions and concerns: .....	67
2.8.7	LEADERSHIP ROLES IN SAUDI ARABIA .....	67
2.8.8	GENDER LEADERSHIP AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN SAUDI ARABIA.....	73
2.8.9	WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP BEYOND GENDER EQUALITY.....	74
2.8.10	ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP JOURNEY .....	75
<b>2.9</b>	<b>LEADERSHIP CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>76</b>
2.9.1	POLICY ENVIRONMENT .....	77
2.9.1.1	Saudi Arabia's pre-vision 2030.....	77
2.9.1.2	Precipitating factors of Wahhabism .....	78
2.9.1.3	Precipitating factors of vision 2030 .....	80
2.9.2	PROMULGATION OF VISION 2030 .....	85
2.9.2.1	Key elements of vision 2030 .....	85
2.9.2.2	Post promulgation of vision 2030 reforms and associated policy shifts .....	85
<b>2.10</b>	<b>THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN KSA .....</b>	<b>88</b>
2.10.1	FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIP CONTEXT OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE KSA .....	89
2.10.1.1	Workplace context of female leadership in the KSA .....	90
<b>2.11</b>	<b>RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDER AND LEADERSHIP .....</b>	<b>92</b>
2.11.1	PROVISIONAL SELVES AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY .....	92
2.11.2	GENDER AND LEADERSHIP .....	95
<b>2.12</b>	<b>THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN LEADERS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR .....</b>	<b>98</b>
2.12.1	THE INFLUENCE OF THE SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT ON THE JOURNEY OF FEMALE LEADERS.....	99
2.12.2	THE INFLUENCE OF THE POLICY FRAMEWORK ON THE JOURNEY OF FEMALE LEADERS.....	100
2.12.3	THE INFLUENCE OF THE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT ON THE JOURNEY OF FEMALE LEADERS.....	101
2.12.4	THE INFLUENCE OF THE FAMILY ON THE JOURNEY OF FEMALE LEADERS .....	102
<b>2.13</b>	<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION:.....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>RESEARCH PARADIGM: .....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>RESEARCH STRATEGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN .....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>RESEARCH METHODS .....</b>	<b>120</b>
3.4.1	DATA COLLECTION .....	120
3.4.1.1	Qualitative data collection - semi-structured interviews .....	121
3.4.1.1.1	Sampling and recruitment of interview participants in this study .....	123

3.4.1.1.1.1	Research Population .....	123
3.4.1.1.1.2	Sampling Technique.....	124
3.4.1.2	Data collection - quantitative survey.....	129
3.4.1.3	Data Collection - Qualitative Media Portal .....	133
3.4.2	DATA ANALYSIS .....	135
3.4.2.1	Data analysis - qualitative (interviews).....	135
3.4.2.2	Data analysis - quantitative (survey) .....	137
3.4.2.3	Qualitative data analysis - qualitative (media articles).....	137
<b>3.5</b>	<b>ETHICAL CONSIDERATION.....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>3.6</b>	<b>THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>139</b>
3.6.1	CREDIBILITY .....	141
3.6.2	DEPENDABILITY .....	141
3.6.3	CONFIRMABILITY .....	142
3.6.4	VALIDITY.....	143
3.6.5	RELIABILITY.....	144
<b>3.7</b>	<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b><u>CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND FINDING .....</u></b>	<b><u>147</u></b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>INTERVIEWS FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>147</b>
4.2.1	ROLE OF FAMILY IN THE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP JOURNEY.....	147
4.2.2	SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACT .....	157
2.	Socio-cultural and policy impacts post-vision 2030 on women's leadership .....	163
4.2.3	IMPACT OF WORK CULTURE AND WORK ENVIRONMENT IN KSA .....	168
4.2.3.1	Patriarchy exists in workplaces.....	168
4.2.3.2	Merit-based growth is still difficult.....	170
4.2.3.3	Lack of training and development .....	171
4.2.3.4	Lack of women-friendly work culture .....	173
<b>4.3</b>	<b>SURVEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>175</b>
4.3.1	FINDINGS FROM SURVEY .....	175
4.3.1.1	Factors that determine success in a job .....	175
4.3.1.2	Factors That Determine Achievement of Leadership Positions.....	177
4.3.1.3	Characteristics of a good leader .....	178
4.3.1.4	Barriers or facilitators for career progression .....	180
<b>4.4</b>	<b>MEDIA ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>181</b>
4.3.2	PROMINENT PHRASES FROM MEDIA ARTICLES.....	182
4.3.3	THEMES.....	185
4.3.3.1	The positive impact of vision 2030 on enabling female leadership .....	185
4.3.3.2	Positive socio-cultural changes encouraging female leadership .....	185
4.3.3.3	Workplace changes making steady progress toward inspiring and supporting women's leadership .....	186
<b>4.4</b>	<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b><u>CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION .....</u></b>	<b><u>189</u></b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>LEADERSHIP ROLES OF WOMEN .....</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP JOURNEY IN DIFFERENT CULTURES.....</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>5.4</b>	<b>VISION 2030 EMPOWERS WOMEN .....</b>	<b>199</b>

<b>5.5</b>	<b>STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT.....</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>5.6</b>	<b>WORLDWIDE IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIES .....</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>5.7</b>	<b>DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>205</b>
5.7.1	FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS - A WOMAN LEADER'S UPBRINGING AND MARRIED LIFE.....	205
5.7.2	SOCIO-CULTURAL AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT .....	208
5.7.3	WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT.....	210
5.7.4	PATRIARCHY .....	210
5.7.5	LACK OF MERIT-BASED GROWTH .....	214
5.7.6	LACK OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT .....	215
5.7.7	LACK OF WOMEN-FRIENDLY WORK CULTURE .....	216
<b>5.8</b>	<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>216</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b><u>CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION .....</u></b>	<b><u>218</u></b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>SUMMARY OF THE STUDY .....</b>	<b>218</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>6.3</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE.....</b>	<b>229</b>
<b>6.4</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION .....</b>	<b>231</b>
6.4.1	PROVISION OF EDUCATION .....	232
6.4.2	DECREMENT IN THE INVOLVEMENT OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES .....	233
6.4.3	VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING .....	234
<b>6.5</b>	<b>LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY .....</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>6.6</b>	<b>PLAN FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>238</b>
	<b><u>REFERENCE .....</u></b>	<b><u>- 257 -</u></b>

**List of Tables**

Table 1-1: List of Abbreviations.....	XIII
Table 1-2: Glossary of Terms .....	XIV
Table 3-1: philosophical orientation of research .....	113
Table 3-2: Strategy for the Research .....	115
Table 3-3: Participants in the Interview.....	125
Table 3-4: Age Range of the Participants .....	130
Table 3-5: The Academic Qualification of the Participants .....	130
Table 3-6: Marital Status of the Participants. ....	130
Table 4-1: Role of The Family In The Women's Leadership Journey.....	148
Table 4-2: socio-cultural impact .....	157
Table 4-3: Factors Determine Success at Job .....	176
Table 4-4: Factors That Determine Achievement of Leadership Positions.....	178
Table 4-5: Characteristics of a Good Leader .....	180
Table 4-6: Barriers or Facilitators for Career Progression.....	181
Table 4-7: Prominent Phrases from Media Articles .....	184

## List of Figures

Figure 1-1: The percentage Of Women In Leadership Positions In KSA (OECD 2019).....	5
Figure 2-1: Percentage of Women in Leadership Roles by Role Category .....	72
Figure 2-2: Conceptual Framework of Women Leaders in the Public Sector .....	98
Figure 3-1: Interpretivism – positivism continuum .....	112
Figure 3-2: Research Strategy Map .....	116
Figure 3-3: Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Design.....	119
Figure 3-4: Components of an Interview .....	128
Figure 4-1: Role of Family .....	148
Figure 4-2: Socio-Cultural Impact .....	158
Figure 4-3: Factors Determine Success at Job.....	176
Figure 4-4: Factors That Determine Achievement of Leadership Positions.....	177
Figure 4-5: Characteristics of a Good Leader.....	179
Figure 4-6: Barriers or Facilitators for Career Progression .....	181

**List of Appendixes**

Appendixes 1: Approval Letter From KAU For Conducting The Interviews .....	241
Appendixes 2: Email the Interviewer .....	242
Appendixes 3: interview guide .....	243
Appendixes 4: Interview Research Question .....	245
Appendixes 5: Interview Participant Consent Form .....	247
Appendixes 6: survey questionnaire (English) .....	248
Appendixes 7: A Screenshot of One Page from Data Referencing .....	252
Appendixes 8: Sample Media Article .....	253
Appendixes 9: List of Articles .....	256

## Abstract

In today's globalized society, opportunities to hold leadership roles are increasing for many women. However, in countries where women's political rights have only recently and partially been recognised, women's representation in senior positions remains low compared to men. This is notably true in the Arabic world, specifically in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this study aims to assess and analyse the experiences of Saudi women leaders to determine how their family dynamics, socio-cultural, policy-making environment, country and workplace experience may impact their leadership journeys and develop recommendations for encouraging women's aspirations toward leadership positions in Saudi Arabia's public sector through an examination of female's perspectives. It attempts to do so in order to accomplish the following objectives:

- To examine from the perspective of the female leaders the aspects associated with family dynamics that may have impacted their journey to arrive at senior leadership roles.
- To discover from the viewpoint of female leaders the cultural, social factors and policy framework that may have enhanced or inhibited their core capability to obtain leadership positions in Saudi Arabia.
- To assess the female leaders' opinion on the influence of a decisive workplace environment and policies that may have impacted their leadership aspirations.
- To develop suggestions for encouraging women's aspirations toward leadership positions in the public sector organizations in Saudi Arabia.

The study employed a pragmatic paradigm and a hybrid methodology, which included semi-structured qualitative interviews with nine selected women leaders, a quantitative survey with 134 randomly selected participants, and a thematic content analysis of 25 media articles. The findings indicate that while a supportive early childhood and home environment helped

shape leadership qualities and aspirations, post-marriage, assistance for managing household responsibilities and work aided women leaders in career progression. Discrimination based on gender stereotypes was shown to be a product of the traditional socio-cultural and religious-based gender stereotypes, segregation, and missed opportunities. At the same time, the patriarchal work culture continued to deny women leaders equal compensation, credit training and growth opportunities. The research proposed that vision 2030 policy adjustments be implemented with greater rigour and precision.

Keywords: Women, Gender, Leadership, Saudi Arabia, Empowerment, and Vision 2030.

Abbreviations are shown in the table below. That way, the reader will understand what the research's keywords mean and how they are used in different settings.

1	ASX	Australian Securities Exchange
2	CEO	A Chief Executive Officers
3	CEW	Chief Executive Women
4	CPO	Chief Purchasing Officers
5	PEW	The Pew Research Centre is a nonpartisan American think tank based in Washington, D.C.
6	DLC	Diversity Leadership Council
7	EQ	Emotional Intelligence
8	EU	European Union
9	GDP	Gross Domestic Product
10	GOSI	General Organization For Social Insurance
11	HES	Higher Education Sector
12	HRD	Human Resource Development
13	IBGE	Brazilian Institute Of Geography And Statistics
14	IOC	International Olympic Committee
15	IQ	Intelligent Quotient
16	KSA	Kingdom Of Saudi Arabia
17	WTO	World Trade Organisations
18	MBS	Mohammed Bin Salman
19	MCC	Male Championship Of Change
20	MCS	Saudi Ministry Of Civil Service
21	NIC	National Information Centre
22	OECD	Organisations For Economic Co-Operation And Development
23	RBC	Royal Bank Of Canada
24	SAMOFA	Saudi Arabia Ministry Of Foreign Affairs
25	SDS	Sustainable Development Goals
26	SLA	Statutory Legal Authority
27	UN	United Nations
28	UN-SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
29	WEF	World Economic Forum

**Table 1-1: List of Abbreviations**

## **Publications**

The following publications have resulted from the research detailed in this PhD thesis:

### **Conferences**

Gawarir a. A. M. Researching Personal the Professional Development of Women in Senior Leadership Roles in Saudi Arabia. International Conference on Gender Research 2018. Academic Conferences International Limited 501-Xii.

Gawarir a. A. M. “Development Of Women In Senior Leadership Roles In Saudi Arabia” The 10th International Conference On Management Economics And Humanities On 23–25 October 2020 In Amsterdam Netherlands.

## List of Glossary

	<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
1	Ulamas	Religious figures, guardians or interpreters of Islamic knowledge are all examples of religious figures (Abidin, 2018)
2	Empowerment	It is delegating authority to make decisions, especially rendering the power down the hierarchy (Page & Czuba 1999).
3	Fatwas	Authoritative Islamic legal interpretations (Irawan et al., 2019).
4	Followers	According to the “Harvard Business Review” article, followers are defined by their behaviour as “performing duties that others ask them to do” (Billsberry, 2009). Similarly, these individuals are under a leader’s influence. In this research, followers refer to the employees.
5	Gender	Psychological characteristics are associated with being male or female (Brown & Jewell, 2019).
6	Leader	The one who effectively marshals their followers to accomplish specific goals is a leader (Rajasekar & Loo-See Beh, 2013).
7	Leadership	A process of influencing an individual or a group to attain a goal (Hersey et al., 1979)
8	Non-mahram	People who can marry each other (Abalkhail, 2017).
9	Public sector	The public sector consists of governments and all publicly controlled or publicly funded agencies, enterprises, and other entities that deliver public programs, goods, or services (Handler et al., 2006).
10	Patriarchy	A system that maintains women's subordination in various ways (Mitchell, 1971/2015).
11	Vision 2030	National Transformation Plan that would allow the Kingdom to diversify its primarily oil-dependent revenue source, eliminate mounting budget deficits, balanced budgets and encourage long-term economic growth (Moshashai et al., 2018)
12	Shura	Shura is an Arabic word that means consultation. The literal meaning in Islam is to make decisions with consultation (al-Sulami, 2004).
13	Qiddiya	A large entertainment district is proposed for Riyadh's outskirts. It will reportedly be the world's most extensive entertainment district, 25 miles from the Saudi capital and 200 Square Miles (Obaid, 2018).
14	Was ta	Wasta is an Arabic word which means connection. Developing social relations to achieve specific goals (Alsarhan et al., 2020).
15	Pardah	Pardah is an act of hiding a women's body or face through cloth (Abdurraqib, 2006)
16	Sahwa	It is an Arabic word meaning “Awakening”. It is a period of powerful social and political change in KSA. The period lies between 1960 and 1980 (Hussain, 2016).
17	Abaya	Abaya is a long cloth worn by Muslim women to hide their bodies and faces (Lindholm, 2014). It is a black robe.

<b>18</b>	Saudization	Saudization was taken up as a drive to replace in full of expatriates, who held 38% of the jobs in the country and were increasingly seen as an impediment to the implementation of the Saudi first brand of nationalism (Al-Dosary & Rahman, 2005)
<b>19</b>	Shia Islamic	The Shia community are Muslims who believe that Ali and Imams are rightful successors of Muhammad (Moore, 2015).
<b>20</b>	Shari'a	Shari'a is the religious law that shares rules on spending life according to Islamic laws and teaching (Thalib, 2018).
<b>21</b>	Neom	Neom is a name of a new city constructed in KSA (Biryukov, 2017).
<b>22</b>	G20	A group of finance ministers and central bank governors from 19 of the world's largest economies, including many developing nations and the European Union (Andrew et al., 2013).
<b>23</b>	Strewn	Islamic history is "Strewn." (Ibrahim, 2012).
<b>24</b>	Hazim	Ann Arabic term for "decisive" nationalism is a word that conveys militarism (Ibrahim, 2012).
<b>25</b>	Wahhabism	A puritanical form of Sunni Islam advocates from the seventh-century Islamic practices" (Armanios, 2003).
<b>26</b>	Haraam	This indicates that there is something that contradicts religion. In the terminology of Islamic Fiqh, women have to minimize social interaction in all settings (Al-Qaradhawi, 2013).

**Table 1-2: Glossary of Terms**

## 1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Saudi Arabia (KSA) has witnessed significant development recently, with women's roles being reinterpreted on cultural and corporate levels. Furthermore, the government has initiated a new strategic road to hiring intellectual women of character, resulting in a visible transformation (Abalkhail, 2017). According to (Hodges, 2017), Saudi women have recently made incremental advancements into traditionally male-dominated professions such as deputy ministers, members of chambers boards, university presidents, SHURA Council Consultants and other private and public sectors. Despite these achievements, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the world's recognized nations for its cultural segregation of women and its below-average performance on the gender gap index despite being a wealthy country in terms of GDP (Al-Bakr et al., 2017). Specifically, there has been a dearth of Saudi women in the workforce and in leadership positions capable of contributing to the economy (Sabri & Thomas, 2019). This trend appears to be reversing with women taking on increased responsibilities, asserting themselves in public arenas and ascending the corporate hierarchy. However, the situation is considerably more frightening than recorded instances where women who wished to be leaders in Saudi Arabia were rejected despite performing exceptionally well, having had superior qualifications, and having more relevant job experience than their male counterparts (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Women are significantly less likely than men to be considered for a leadership position in Saudi Arabia (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). According to Hodges (2017), Saudi women face many obstacles while attempting to ascend to leadership positions generally operated, controlled and dominated by their superior male counterparts. Frequently employers provide a hostile or non-family-friendly climate where women struggle to manage work and family life duties and may avoid professional advancement (Gawarir 2018). According to

Hodges (2017), women are more likely to choose to work in organisations that promote their cultural and religious values.

Women in Middle Eastern countries, especially in Saudi Arabia, face gender-based stereotyping biases, gender-based role biases and societal pressures when they aspire to increase their responsibilities and enhance their careers in the workplace (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). For instance, women are often restricted from travelling to conferences or seminars. They may face criticism and backlash that they might be susceptible to receiving in familial and cultural restrictions and limitations (Alghofaily, 2019).

Several socio-cultural and attitudinal barriers can account for the gender discrimination against women in power and leadership positions in Saudi Arabia (Gawarir, 2018). Firstly, Saudi society is patriarchal and expects women to stay at home performing childcare duties and domestic chores while men are considered the breadwinners, pursuing full-time employment (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Such attitudes prevent the female child from developing aspirations or self-efficacy and often lead to a lack of education; in addition, Childhood education has influenced career aspiration (Dubow et al., 2009). Secondly, women face gender role discrimination at work too. This kind of gender stereotyping against women creates barriers for female employees aspiring to acquire senior leadership and management positions. Thirdly most women face dual responsibility in society, working full-time or part-time, handling childcare and other household responsibilities (Beham et al., 2018). This puts enormous pressure on them and negatively impacts their job and leadership effectiveness.

Additionally, organizations may use this as an excuse for the unsuitability of women to handle sensitive leadership positions that require commitment and long work hours (Fisk & Overton, 2019; Hughes, 2011). Fourthly, women also face the impact of culture and religion in the Arab world, promoting sex-based segregation in most public places (Bobbitt-Zeher

2011). This negatively affects women's socialization and leadership aspirations in the workplace.

Following the cultural and social limitations, there is a lack of female leader role models who could inspire young females to aspire for similar achievements (Gawarir, 2018). Women's concerns, such as a lack of leadership opportunities, training, and growth opportunities, might contribute to low self-esteem and confidence hurdles among women seeking leadership positions (Faidah & Al-Ghalib, 2020).

In alignment with the UN-SDG (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals) and with the changing trends in Saudi society and perceptions about women, KSA started making policy changes and taking initiatives toward gender equality in the workplace. The last two decades have transformed since the United Nations (2021) began to improve gender equality and foster women's empowerment across the member nations.

One hundred ninety-three nations joined in 2015 to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with goal five being gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls by 2030. (United Nations 2021). As an essential member of the United Nations, Saudi Arabia has recognized that women increased engagement in society will contribute to the nation's socio-economic progress and development. OECD (2019) data reveals that Saudi Arabia has improved women's employment since 2009. Overall, the average female participation rate for the OECD countries was 57 per cent (OECD, 2019), indicating that Saudi Arabia needs to improve this index (Lockwood, 2014).

Saudi Arabia's government and crown prince Mohammed bin Salman have prioritized tackling women's difficulties that impede their full involvement in nation-building in light of the growing awareness of women's desire and capacity to contribute to national advancement. MBS has implemented revolutionary changes since taking power in 2015, including appointing the first woman spokesperson for the Saudi Arabian embassy in Washington D.C., Fatimah

Salem a. Baeshen and making Reema Bint Bandar Bin Sultan Bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud the 11th ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States (H Alsoraihi, 2022).

The underlying premise for vision 2030 as it relates to the empowerment of women is that sustainable development cannot be attained without involving female participation in leadership positions in society's economy and environmental development matters (Al-Qahtani et al., 2020)

Although governmental efforts in the form of vision 2030 have encouraged Saudi women's interest in career advancement and adoption of leadership qualities, the various agendas that were essentially inculcated into the system were primarily focused on minor aspects such as allowing women to work outside of their homes and allowing them a certain amount of mobility and freedom for decision-making (Al-Qahtani et al., 2020) and likely lag behind what has been accomplished (Bryman, 2021; Eum, 2019). Al-Qahtani et al. (2020) believed that more effort is required at the grassroots level, where human resource management departments of Saudi organizations can eventually improve the quality of work experience for women while also educating them about various career opportunities that they may wish to pursue and that would enable them to advance to leadership positions as they progress in their careers.

The skills and roles of women leaders have gained increased attention from practitioners from researchers in public organisations and businesses globally. The growing realisation development is not possible without female participation (Barrios et al., 2020). Increasingly, it is acknowledged that female leadership is essential to businesses' survival and long-term viability and a key aspect in pursuing organisational excellence. Women undertake various leadership roles in large-scale firms and the economy in general, and they have been acknowledged and received accolades. Putting women in leadership positions has improved the economic growth in most countries, especially in the OECD countries (Akinici et al., 2014).

According to Gawarir (2018), the number of Saudi women working in the diplomatic sector at the ministry of foreign affairs is currently 113, which means that the number has increased by more than 20% compared to 2015. In addition, Saudi women constitute 50% of the total number of university graduates. Still, their participation in the labour market does not exceed 22%, which the Kingdom is looking to increase to 30% according to the 2030 vision (Parveen, 2021).

However, it was not until recently that Saudi Arabia made available a ministerial post to a woman. Only eight women reached a leadership post in contrast to 1047 men in the government of KSA (OECD, 2019). There is good overall growth in all labour force sectors, yet fewer Saudi women are working in the business sector and senior leadership positions (Al Shaer, 2010; Kemppainen, 2019). These statistics portray the uphill task women empowerment faces in Saudi Arabia.

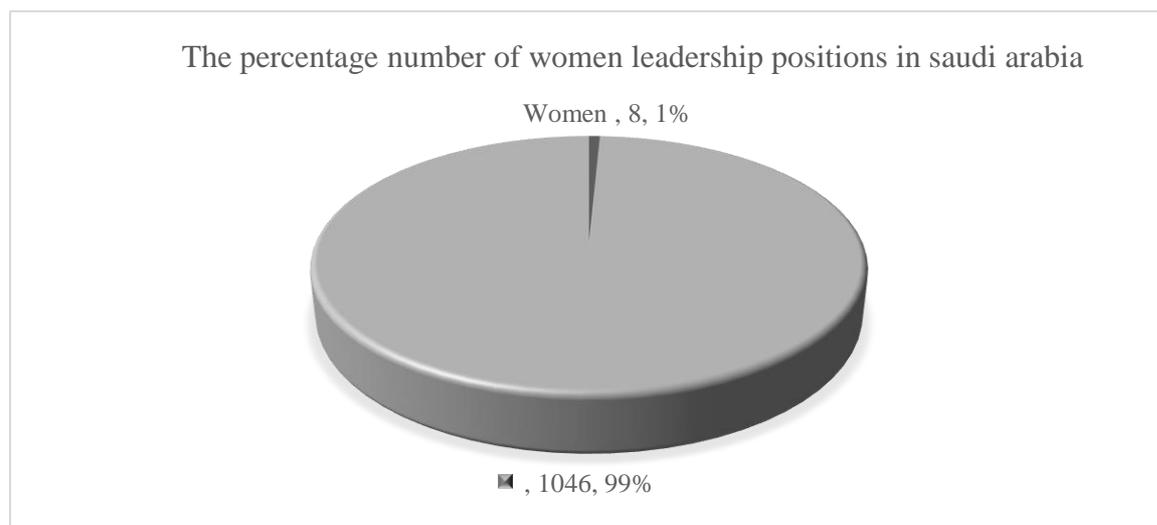


Figure 1-1: The percentage Of Women In Leadership Positions In KSA (OECD 2019)

Furthermore, though several initiatives have been undertaken to improve women's representation at the apex levels of governmental institutions, such enterprises and attempts are often made with the schedule of being focused on politics. Moreover, some researchers believe that even with such initiatives and programs directed at uplifting and empowering women, only

a dent has been made as women are far from attaining equality at par with their male counterparts (Al-Qahtani et al., 2020).

In addition, a lack of awareness of encouragement and role models can inspire women. There has been minimal effort to highlight women's role models in the past decades so that young girls can aspire to become prolific leaders for their country (Gabarret & D'Andria, 2021).

Topics like women empowerment are only recently promoted to increase the awareness levels of women (Alshareef & AlGassim, 2021). Therefore, much needs to be undertaken in the form of policy development and cultural transformation to enable the development of women in leadership roles (Almathami et al., 2020; Alotaibi et al., 2017). To move toward this, as a first step, it is essential to conduct ground-level research to understand the practical challenges the Saudi women leaders face regarding their lived experiences on their leadership journeys Alotaibi et al., 2017. Therefore a comprehensive study must be conducted that can explore the situation from the perspective of Saudi women and how they perceive the impacts of their family relationships, socio-cultural and policy environment, country and workplace experience on their leadership. Such a perspective is crucial if recommendations are made for policy changes or implementation for encouraging and developing more female leaders than male ones in Saudi Arabia (Baker, 2017).

In addition, there is scope for developing in the existing literature, as the majority of studies, even in the context of the KSA, were conducted before Saudi Arabia initiated the sweeping or radical reforms that revolutionized the concept of women's empowerment and enabled Saudi women to assume leadership roles on par with their male counterparts. (Buengeler et al., 2016). Previous scholarly literature has acknowledged the barriers that hinder women's career progression to the upper levels of the public sector organisational hierarchies. These barriers have been highlighted as follows: lack of role models and societal expectations

(Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011), role socialisation public–domestic divide/division (Shah & Shah, 2012), discrimination in hiring and promotion (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2010), exclusion of qualified women from particular jobs and high-level jobs (Al-Manasra, 2013) and stereotypes that limit women roles to teaching limiting them from administrative roles (Abu-Tineh, 2013) women elimination from male developmental networks patriarchal exclusion (Al-Bakr et al., 2017) culture and religion (Rwafa, 2016). Previous research has identified the overlap between culture and religion as the core foundation of gender inequality in the KSA (Abalkhail, 2017). While previous research has focused on female leadership in Saudi Arabia, researchers have not offered adequate data and information from the perspectives of female leaders. Most research details the statistics of female leadership or comments on the socio-cultural context of female leadership from an academic perspective ignoring the essential part of the story: the lived experiences of women leaders. Moreover, since the promulgation of vision 2030 aimed at emancipating the role of women in Saudi society, not much research appears to have been focused on studying its aftermath and its affect women leadership.

Regarding women's leadership, there is a significant difference in the opinions of females. Saudi Arabian women have faced great hindrances in their professional life due to the perspectives of the culture KSA has adopted (Rwafa, 2016).

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

The above sections have highlighted specific issues related to female leadership in the KSA in the form of continued low representation of women in leadership roles, lack of role models for women to get inspiration and lack of targeted initiatives and policies to make workplaces more women-friendly (Nieva, 2015). These practical concerns are aggravated by the lack of recent studies exploring gender issues which is a glaring gap in the literature that needs to be addressed through further exploration and warrants the conduct of the current study. Because of globalisation factors and worldwide rivalry Saudi Arabia has been known as one

of the major countries that changed its policies and organisational strategies for women in recent years (Baker, 2017; Almathami et al., 2021). During the past decades, it has been identified that women were not allowed to leave home to work in Saudi Arabia. However, Saudi women can perform jobs and show their talents in different fields with the growing era. Therefore, the study examines the distinct viewpoints and perceptions of female leaders in the Saudi Arabian public sector regarding the barriers and challenges or support they faced in becoming leaders.

### 1.3 Research aims and objectives

The overall aim and the key objectives of the research are:

- To examine from the perspective of the female leaders the aspects associated with family dynamics that may have impacted their journey to arrive at senior leadership roles.
- To discover from the viewpoint of female leaders the cultural, social factors and policy framework that may have enhanced or inhibited their core capability to obtain leadership positions in Saudi Arabia.
- To assess the female leaders' opinion on the influence of a decisive workplace environment and policies that may have impacted their leadership aspirations.
- To develop suggestions for encouraging women's aspirations toward leadership positions in the public sector organizations in Saudi Arabia.

### 1.4 Research questions

The above research objectives lead to the following research questions:

- Q 1. How do the family relationship and the socio-cultural context impact women's commitment to career progression and aspirations for leadership roles?
- Q 2. What are the impacts of vision 2030 and the institutional policy changes on women's career progression and leadership performance in Saudi Arabia?

- Q 3. How does the conventional patriarchy at the workplace impact women leaders' performance and career/professional growth from women's perspectives?

### 1.5 Methodological framework

The research used a pragmatic paradigm and employed a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques to answer the research questions comprehensively and objectively. A pragmatic paradigm is most suited as it allows for the perspectives and context of the research participants to create reality. The data collection was undertaken in three phases. Phase one of the data collection included semi-structured interviews of nine females from governmental institutions across Saudi Arabia. Phase two consisted of a survey sample where responses were obtained from 134 female participants. Both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained to cross-validate the data from the three phases. Phase three included a media review to understand the lived experiences of women leaders using 25 articles from 2020 across the national media portals. The interview responses were analysed using thematic analysis to capture the themes that were related to the presentation of women leaders in the media. "this is an effective qualitative approach to analysing data by describing and developing themes from data and helps to create maps and shared patterns of behaviour thinking or talking" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The thematic content analysis is provided to develop the broad research themes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Miles et al., 2020). Survey data were analysed using statistical analysis. The media articles were analysed using manual thematic content analysis to find out the themes used in the media to portray women leaders or their lived experiences. The data from the three streams were finally merged to answer the research questions. More elaborate and specific details of the research methodology are given in chapter three.

The study participants were selected purposively, as specific attributes were required, like women in the public sector who had attained leadership roles. Participation was voluntary,

and the participants were advised that they could withdraw at any time (during both phases). In addition, the participants were informed about how the data from the study would be used and assured that responses would remain anonymous and confidential. The researcher also advised participants that their information would not affect their current employment. The researcher also conducted pilot testing data collected was then analysed using a combination of quantitative and quantitative techniques, which led to the refinement of the final research questionnaires.

### 1.6 Significance of the study

The significance of this study rests on its contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the field and its potential contribution to leading policy development in Saudi Arabia. The literature review on women's leadership has shown very few studies in Saudi Arabia, particularly women's headship in the government / public sector. In addition, some previous studies have identified socio-cultural personal, and workplace-related barriers and challenges faced by aspiring women leaders in the KSA. Most of those studies pre-date the vision2030 and women empowerment initiatives undertaken by the country (Buengeler et al., 2016). As such, this research will fill a significant gap. Moreover, the findings of this study will open the door for future studies to analyse further the challenges women face in specific cultural contexts, Saudi or otherwise, and find effective methods of upholding their roles and responsibilities.

The research also discusses the idea of presuming leadership as a journey, thus focusing on using leaders' life experiences and perceptions by exploring the perspectives of females. Therefore it advances the methodological approach that has been underutilised in studies on government leadership in the Saudi social context. Using the lived experiences of women is underutilised in researching female leaders. Therefore this study offers methodological value by demonstrating the feasibility of using lived experiences to support the method's usefulness.

The theoretical lens of social constructionism theory has helped unmask the gendered norms and constructions that affect women in Saudi Arabia.

More fundamentally, the findings from this research are based on women's experiences across their life histories, from their childhood to interviews and surveys. Giving a voice to these stories through the presentation of interviews and surveys is a significant act, especially in the Saudi context. By making the concerns, difficulties and struggles of the study's participants heard, the current research expects to gain the attention of the decision-makers and the policymakers of Saudi Arabia so that they can broaden their horizons and view the ecosystem of global leaders in its entirety by also taking into consideration the perceptions of women.

#### **1.7 Justification of this research**

The primary justification behind selecting this particular topic for conducting research is the lack of research on women's experience in leadership in the public sector in Saudi Arabia. The research is explicitly undertaken in Saudi, as it is considered a country that does not offer too many employment opportunities to women. There is a general perception that men are great leaders, and there are scarce research studies on women leaders' significance. This is the primary rationale behind selecting this research study to provide significant and reliable research about women's leadership in Saudi.

#### **1.8 Contribution of this research**

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on gender and leadership in three unique ways. Firstly it contributes to the literature on the under-representation of women in high leadership positions. Secondly, it contributes specifically to the growing body of knowledge on gender gaps and leadership in Saudi Arabia at a time of transformation in the system. Thirdly it contributes to the literature on the gender-based differences in lived experiences of female leaders in the public sector using participants' perceptions of their

obstacles and the challenges they have gone through leading them to their current positions. Moreover, the study presents insights into how family relationship dynamics, socio-cultural factors, policy environment, country, and work experience may shape female leaders' lived experiences. In practical terms, the research findings enable the policymakers to take cognisance of the insights gained and develop more targeted and relevant policies for female leadership development in the country. It also expects to provide insights to organisations that may want to set up a more conducive environment for encouraging female leadership aspirations.

### 1.9 Limitations of the study

The approach and analysis portions of the thesis thoroughly explore the study's limitations. Nevertheless, a few of the most significant ones are highlighted below. The findings are limited to Saudi Arabia's local public/government and university sectors for practical reasons. The conclusions of this research are context-specific and may not apply to other contexts, even those with comparable conditions. Due to that, the number of women government sector in Saudi Arabia is small compared to their counterparts in many other countries worldwide. The results are restricted to the government sector in Saudi Arabia (Varshney, 2019). Further, the researcher has conducted this research individually, and combined large-scale national research might have yielded more fruitful results.

### 1.10 Structure of the thesis

*Chapter one* provides an overview of the current study as already reviewed.

*Chapter two* reviews developments and progression in classifying leadership theories and identifies and examines these theories' strengths and limitations. It also examines leadership models and styles across cultures and contexts, including those of 'western' countries, compared to the leadership and management approaches used in Saudi Arabia.

*Chapter three* discusses the study's methodological framework, including the researcher's position on the study, the philosophical approaches used in research design, and methods and procedures followed in the data collection and data analysis processes. The techniques and protocol used in recruiting participants and ethical considerations are discussed thoroughly in this chapter.

*Chapter four* presents and analyses the data collected from the three phases. The chapter includes discourse analysis of the media, thematic content analysis of the interviews and statistical analysis of the survey.

*Chapter five* adopts a triangulated approach to discussing the key findings of the three phases of the study.

*Chapter six* provides concluding remarks and summarises the findings of the study.

## 2. CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### 2.1 Introduction

Cross-cultural studies worldwide show more women in the west who assume leadership positions (Gupta et al., 2016) and fewer in the east. According to Hodges (2017), similar research reveals that female leaders and executives face a glass ceiling characterised by common difficulties such as a lack of career opportunities, suitable role models and access to training and development. Some of these obstacles fall into broad categories of personal (such as striking a healthy balance between work and family life), organisational (such as differential treatment at the workplace), and institutions, such as a lack of women-friendly government-led policies initiatives and incentives to encourage women in leadership roles (Sobehart H. C. 2008). However, the situation is different in the Gulf countries, especially in Saudi Arabia, where research indicates that women in leadership positions in these countries face unique problems in their career progression, such as cultural and religious taboos which limit their economic participation (Sbaity Kassem, 2012; Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004).

Some researchers describe their situation as being locked in time without a chance to change (Eltahawy, 2015). However, one must point out that most existing research on Saudi Arabia was undertaken before Vision 2030. Vision 2030 has significantly changed the social milieu since it was conceptualised (Alotaibi et al., 2017; Eum, 2019). Few studies have explored how Saudi Arabia's women perform in the more open policy environment of the post-Vision 2030 era (Salameh, 2016; Naseem & Dhruva, 2017). Consequently, the primary purpose of the current research is to fill the gap.

This chapter is divided into two broad sections - one that provides a critical review of leadership theories and examines the literature on leadership in general while highlighting the conceptual implications of women's leadership. Two that develop the context and background

of the current research. The second section, therefore, critically reviews Saudi Arabia's vision 2030, its historical background, and precipitating events while highlighting the position of women in society, their general participation in public life, shifts in state policy on women and resultant effects on gender as contained in literature; examines existing research on the socio-cultural factors (family relationships) and institutional factors like policy environment and workplace culture which combine to produce both enablers and inhibitors for women leadership experiences. However, women worldwide have proved to be great leaders. The issue is only the cultural constraint and family responsibilities; while highlighting their opinion, the chapter details how the literature review informs the research methodology and data collection.

## 2.2 Leadership Theories

Leadership is a complex and multi-dimensional topic that has been researched and studied worldwide. According to (Bolden, 2004), leadership has been of interest for hundreds of years, from the early Greek philosophers such as Plato and Socrates to the vast number of modern management and leadership experts. It has been classified as one of the most observed and analysed phenomena on earth while the least understood (Burns, 1978). It is stated that there are as many different definitions of leadership as individuals who have attempted to define the concept (Bass et al., 1981). On the other hand, leadership has been described as using available resources (Human And Capital) to achieve a common goal while maintaining a cohesive and coherent organisation (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). A simple but more succinct definition adopted for this study is that leadership is a process of influencing an individual or a group to attain a goal (Hersey et al., 1979). Critical components of this definition are A) a process (it is an activity that is done over time), B) influence (the leader must motivate their followers), C) group setting, and D) goal attainment (there must be a purpose) (Northouse 2021). It follows from this definition that when one looks at women in leadership in the current

study, one must ascertain whether they can influence people, leading to attaining the given organisational objectives. This speaks to the element of effectiveness and has shaped the development of the research questionnaire used in the current study. However, it is also essential to study leadership theories to develop a context for female leadership in Saudi Arabia by examining the relevance of implications of the theories. In analysing extant literature on leadership in this study, the researcher adopts the (Cherry, 2019) classification of leadership theories. Cherry divides leadership theories into eight groups, namely I) “great man” theories, II) trait theories, III) behavioural theories, IV) contingency theories, V) situational theories, VI) participative theories, VII) management theories and VIII) relationship theories. This section is followed by a discussion of Kurt Lewin’s theories, which provide a different perspective on leadership and need to be included.

### 2.2.1 “Great man” theories

According to this group of theories, leaders are born and not made (Cherry, 2019). Either one is born with the necessary leadership qualities (already equipped to lead) or not, which means the latter will be a poor leader no matter how much training one is given. On the other hand, Abalkhail (2017) disagreed with the postulate of this theory and argued that leaders were products of their environment or the society in which they lived and grew up. The author highlighted that the leader is made from the community, not the other way around, where society is made from great men. Besides this, proponents of this school of thought argue that natural leaders are born with innate characteristics such as social skills, charisma intelligence (meaning both high intelligence quotient and emotional intelligence) and confidence (Cherry, 2019). Other theorists point out that a leader ought to possess qualities evident to those the leader interacts (Landis et al., 2014). Therefore merely having a high IQ or EQ is not sufficient; a leader should be able to display these characteristics in their interactions. According to one

early theorist James (1880), “the history of the world is the history of great men; they created what masses could accomplish” (Bass et al., 1981). Adherents to this view portray leaders as mythical heroic mystic figures and predominantly male (Cherry, 2019). This underlying presumption of masculinity is inherent in leadership that famous male leaders such as J F Kennedy and Martin Luther king are presented in glowing pictorial language (Landis et al., 2014). Still, female leaders such as Catherine the great queen Elizabeth I and Margaret thatcher are conveniently ignored (where they are not) described in masculine terms (Abalkhail, 2017).

The implication of this school of thought to the current study is that a woman (and indeed any person) cannot be groomed to be a leader if born without leadership skills. Women leaders are an exception rather than the rule, as, by definition, leaders are male. Research shows that traditionally leadership has always summed a male character even though no empirical evidence supports this notion (Alotaibi et al., 2017). The situation is made worse in Saudi Arabia, where women have historically been groomed to be subservient to males, which has limited their involvement in strategic decision-making even at home, a situation that has denied them opportunities for developing their leadership capabilities Eum, 2019) and acted as a self-fulfilling prophesy that they cannot be influential leaders. In vision 2030, women are presented as economic contributors and saviours of the nation in the context of Hazim (an Arabic term for “Decisive”) nationalism. This term conveys militaristic and masculine characteristics, given that it has been used to describe the country’s “decisive” involvement in the Yemen war and the crown prince’s “decisive” reign ( Naseem & Dhruva, 2017; Eum, 2019). This militaristic and masculine presentation of Saudi women was further buttressed by the image of a Saudi woman journalist (Haifa Al-Zahrani) who achieved instant fame when she was photographed at the Yemeni war front wearing a military helmet and vest (Eum, 2019). This leads to whether or not it is essential to present Saudi women leaders as masculine to gain traction as influential leaders in the implementation of vision 2030.

### 2.2.2 Trait theories

Related to the “great men” theories, this group of theories posits that leaders inherit specific characteristics that make them suitable for leadership positions (Malos 2012). For instance, there is the notion that strong leaders are produced in the aristocratic class that is biologically superior to the masses they preside over (Bass et al., 1981). Nevertheless, a significant misgiving associated with the trait theories is their failure to explain why some people who exhibit characteristics associated with influential leaders are not in leadership positions or have no appetite for leadership positions (Cherry, 2019).

Innate leadership characteristics include courage, self-confidence and extraversion (Cherry, 2019). Males listed strong, influential, intelligent, stubborn, focussed, assertive, and single-tasking female leaders as emotional, relational, compassionate, collaborative, and consensus-based (Alotaibi et al., 2017). However, only recent literature on leadership has moved away from a singular notion of masculinity and aggressiveness leadership traits and focused on alternative aspects that include compassion, interpersonal relationships, and empathy. Also, it is interesting to note that recent research evidence shows that women compared to male leaders, are endowed with better interpersonal skills, better communication skills, empathy, better reception of alternative views and, resultantly, better judgment of situations ( Alzougool et al., 2021; Kattan et al.,2016; Ben Saad & Abbas 2018). Therefore, the evidence suggests a growing acknowledgement of women's inherent traits and capabilities as leadership traits. However, it needs to be seen if the conceptualisation of leadership has also transitioned in Saudi Arabia and if women's innate traits are acknowledged at par with male leaders' masculine and aggressive leadership traits.

### 2.2.3 Behavioural theories

The behavioural theories' philosophical premise is that great leaders are made, not born, instead of trait theories that believe leaders are born (Cherry, 2019). The behavioural theories of leadership focus more on the leaders' actions than merely on their inherent traits. A Leader's behaviour is considered the best predictor of their leadership influence and, as a result, the best determinant of their leadership success (Bornstein & Gardner, 1986). as behaviour can be learned, these theories further postulate that leadership skills are acquired through observation and training (Cherry, 2019). Therefore a significant application of the behavioural approach is that leaders can be developed, and people can learn to adopt leadership behaviours. Contrary to the trait theories that postulate that leaders can only be identified (through psychometrics as assessments or visible traits), behavioural theorists made leadership inclusive. Anyone can learn to display leadership behaviour (Malos, 2012).

Moreover, behavioural theory plays a significant role in numerous fields; for instance, the literature identified that managing projects and coordinating different activities perform the CEO's duty (A chief executive officer) and others in professional activities. Same as the behavioural theory provides a deep understanding of the idea and concept that enables leaders to create and learn different behaviours and capabilities of people and modify them according to the organisation's goal (Derue et al., 2011).

The practical implication is that Saudi women can acquire leadership skills through training and development or by observing role models in action (Eum, 2019). So it can be predicted that mentorship and coaching can be critical in women's leadership development. Further, it can also be presumed that leadership behaviours may differ for the two genders, affecting their acceptance in the given cultural context (Al-Shamrani, 2013). For instance, research conducted in Kuwait showed that women leaders occasionally practised an idealised influence (behavioural) leadership style (where communication of organisational values, core

purpose and mission were a critical component), which showed that they believed in the involvement of employees in decision-making (Alzougool et al., 2021). This behavioural style may contrast with the predominantly patriarchal and hierarchical nature of workplaces in Saudi Arabia which is used to centralise decision-making styles more. Therefore the current study would focus on understanding how leadership roles and behaviours of female leaders may be viewed in the socio-cultural backdrop of the country.

#### 2.2.4 Contingency theories

The contingency theory of leadership is determined to be the most appropriate and beneficial theory in the context of leadership. According to contingency theory, a leader's success relates to their abilities and capabilities. Further, numerous factors have affected the success of a manager or a leader, such as the organisation's, country and workplace experience, the efficiency of employees, and personal skills (Derue et al., 2011). The focus of this group of theories is on the suitability of a given leadership style to a particular environment (Cherry, 2019) and, as such, variables like the nature of the situation and the task to be performed; type of subordinates (their personalities abilities skills and past experiences); and the leadership style adopted based on the leader's experiences (Badshah, 2012; Cherry, 2019) are considered. Therefore effective leadership is presumed to be contingent upon the fit between a leader's style and what is demanded by the situation (Buengeler et al., 2016). The essence of these theories is that there is no universally applicable leadership style (Cherry, 2019). From a practical perspective, the primary task of those charged with staffing an organisation is to find a leader whose leadership style best suits the situation at hand (Buengeler et al., 2016). Famous contingency theories include Fiedler Contingency Theory and Vroom Theory of Leadership.

The practical implication of this group of theories to this study is that leaders need exposure to leadership situations to gain insights into their style and conditions under which it

is effective. It becomes essential that potential leaders undergo extensive training and experience to explore their techniques fully. In the context of the Saudi female leaders, it needs to be seen if they have been exposed to similar training experiences post vision 2030 (Kinninmont, 2017). Empirical evidence before the vision 2030 reforms suggests that female managers were not given opportunities to develop their leadership capabilities as a result of structural challenges where they were cut off from strategic decision-making in centralised authority systems and patriarchal society, which extended to the home front (Hodges, 2017; Thompson, 2015; Varshney, 2019). Finally, the qualities of subordinates will be necessary, given the historical background where women had a subservient status to males who had to permit virtually all their dealings with the public (Al-Shamrani, 2013).

#### 2.2.5 Situational theories

Like contingency theories, proponents of this class of theories posit that a leader chooses the best leadership style based on the situation on the ground (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). The manager is flexible and knowledgeable enough to determine which leadership style to use in a given situation, and this presupposes that the manager has a battery of techniques up his or her sleeve from which they can pull to deal with particular concerns as different styles may be appropriate for different situations (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Cherry, 2019). This is also a crucial difference between the situational theories (that view leaders as possessing flexibility and contingency theories that presume the leader to have one distinct style). It is the organisation's task to match the style to the situation. In deciding on which type to employ, the manager must consider the task at hand, the qualities of the subordinates (knowledge and experience) and their knowledge of the study and experience with applying the suitable style (Cherry, 2019). Mouton's managerial grid is one of the earlier examples of situational leadership theories.

The practical implications of this group of theories for a research study are that Saudi women need exposure to different leadership styles and situations to vary their leadership styles based on the circumstances (Al-Shamrani, 2013). Under contingency theories, this exposure and experience were lacking during vision 2030's promulgation. This observation implies that leaders can be developed and trained. As a result, the current study intends to focus on the institutional and workplace-related aspects that facilitate or hinder the necessary exposure and development of women leaders in Saudi Arabia following Vision 2030.

#### 2.2.6 Management theories

Also known as transactional leadership styles, management theories focus on three variables supervision, group performance and rewards (Cherry, 2019). They operate on a system of rewards and punishment whereby the leader is expected to outline clearly what needs to be done and determine rewards or punishment contingent on the outcomes (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Cherry, 2019). Similarly, management theories significantly enhance productivity by providing leaders with suitable and convenient ways. These theories are also helpful in simplified decision-making processes. Leaders can create strategies that boost decision-making in business and enable leaders to play their roles and responsibilities efficiently. Not limited to this, Cherry (2019) explained that management theories had been categorised as the best practice in increasing collaboration and objectivity. Besides this, many businesses employ this leadership style whereby good performance is rewarded with promotions, salary increments and bonuses (Tlaiss & Al Waqfi, 2020). The practical implication of transactional theories to the study is that Saudi women can be exposed to the art of using rewards as positive reinforcement of good behaviour and sanctions as negative reinforcement of undesirable behaviour, with the results being that organisational ends are met. Reward and coercive power bases can be essential tools in a leader's toolkit to achieve leadership excellence (Tlaiss & Al

Waqfi, 2020). However, due to the lengthy traditional background and socio-cultural role restrictions, women in Saudi Arabia may have grown up in an environment that makes them hesitant to adopt such a leadership style (Jogulu & Wood, 2006).

### 2.2.7 Relationship theories

Also known as transformational leadership theories, this group of theories spotlights the relationship between leaders and followers (Cherry, 2019). Their line of approach is that the leader can motivate his or her subordinates by helping them see the importance of their jobs at a personal level and letting them understand how they fit in the big scheme of things, and enabling them to realize their full potential while performing their tasks (Cherry, 2019). These leadership theories are usually compared to charismatic ones, whereby a leader endowed with charisma can motivate followers to accomplish acts beyond normal expectations (Buengeler et al., 2016). Relying on the work of Eagly and Carli (2008), Alzougool et al. (2021) posit that the transformational leadership style has four variants, namely A) idealized influence (attribute), where a leader motivates subordinates by displaying qualities that inspire them with a sense of pride and respect derived from their association with the leader; B) idealised influence (behaviour) whereby the leader motivates followers to higher performance levels by linking their personal goals with the purpose values and mission of the organisation; C) intellectual stimulation where the leader engages and encourages subordinates to adopt an entrepreneurial approach (outside-the-box thinking) to problem-solving and decision-making; D) individual consideration was uppermost in the leader's style is the development mentoring and attendance to the individual needs of the subordinates. Choi et al. (2016) observed that followers of such leaders enjoy high levels of job satisfaction and good relations with the leader. According to Ben Saad & Abbas (2018), women have good interpersonal, communication, and judgment skills, making them ideal leaders for relationship-based styles.

Studies show that the transformational leadership style is the most dominant style among females worldwide (Alzougool et al., 2021), which confirms an earlier finding by Eagly and Carli (2008) that female leaders were more transformational than male leaders. A recent study of women's leadership styles in the public sector in Kuwait found that they frequently, if not always, employed idealized influence (behaviour) intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation leadership styles (Alzougool et al., 2021). The adoption of transformational leadership as the preferred leadership style by female leaders implies that women are good communicators persuasive empathetic possess integrity and thus lead by example (Alzougool et al., 2021; Kattan et al., 2016). A practical implication for the current study is to study the female leaders' style in Saudi Arabia and assess if transformational leadership style was culturally and socially fit and allowed the female to gain respect as well as growth opportunities at the workplace.

#### 2.2.8 Participative theories and Kurt Lewin's leadership styles

These theories postulate that the best leadership style is one where there is equal participation in decision-making between the leader and the followers (Cherry, 2019) is predominantly covered under Kurt Lewin's theories below.

The discourse on leadership theories would be incomplete without a discussion of Kurt Lewin's three ground-breaking leadership styles, which are namely (1) *authoritarian style of leadership*, (2) *participative style*, and (3) *delegating style of leadership*. These styles are developed based on the power relationships between the leader and the follower, the leaders' roles, and the followers' expectations.

### 2.2.9 Authoritarian leadership style

Also known as an autocratic leadership style, an authoritarian leader demarcates between them and their subordinates (Cherry, 2019). Authoritarian leaders ensure that the task is clearly defined and that the associates understand how and when the study should be done. The leader makes all the decisions independently with little or no input from the subordinates. This leadership style is best employed in two scenarios - when the leader is very knowledgeable about the task to be performed or when there is little or no time for consultation of subordinates (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Cherry, 2019). According to Lewin in Cherry (2019), this style has two main drawbacks. The first limitation was that autocratic leaders were rigid and unable to shift to any other kind even if the situation warranted it. The second was that the quality of decision-making lacked creativity, and When abused, this style could become bossy dictatorial and controlling (Cherry, 2019). Studies, however, show that women leaders rarely employ an autocratic leadership style (Alzougool et al., 2021; Kattan et al., 2016). As such, the current study will contribute directly to the literature on the styles of leadership adopted by female leaders in the KSA.

### 2.2.10 Participative leadership style

This leadership style which is also known as a democratic style is characterised by the full participation of followers in decision-making, with the leader giving only a guide to the process (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Cherry, 2019), though leaders still can have the final say on the resultant decision (Cherry, 2019). Lewin has found this style to be the most effective. However, productivity was lower than under authoritarian management though the quality of contribution by followers seems to increase under the participative style (Cherry, 2019).

Recent studies in Kuwait show that compared to men, women frequently involve subordinates in decision-making (Alzougool et al., 2021). This is consistent with earlier studies

that show that women leaders display an inclusive approach and empathy in decision-making (Kattan et al., 2016).

### 2.2.11 Delegative leadership style

Leaders who practise this leadership style, also known as laissez-faire, leave the decision-making to their followers, offering little or no guidance. Under these conditions, production is usually deficient, while followers show little or no cooperation and are unwilling to work independently (Cherry, 2019). This leadership style is appropriate for unstructured work professionals (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). Otherwise, it leads to suboptimal returns from followers' poor motivation and ill-defined roles (Cherry, 2019).

Recent studies in Kuwait's public sector show that women occasionally employed a laissez-faire leadership style, implying that they prefer granting their subordinates freedom in decision-making (Alzougool et al., 2021). This area requires further exploration, as in the context of the KSA, where opportunities for growth for women leaders may be below; such a leadership style may be encouraged for women driven by the socio-cultural underpinning of the society.

## 2.3 Saudi Arabia and its culture

After the political unification in 1932, the state of Saudi Arabia came into existence and experienced rapid social and economic transformation for the rest of the 20th century. Saudi Arabia consists of an ancient culture with a history ranging over numerous thousand years (Nieva, 2015). Consequently, Saudi inhabitants admire and encourage Arabian and Islamic traditions with immense pride and satisfaction (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). The Islamic roots have moulded the very heritage of the cultural stems. Hence Islam plays a significant role in defining the culture of any Islamic country.

Moreover, it also serves as a natural stimulus in regulating the social standards, principles, protocols, and credos significantly trained from birth by education institutions and

relatives (Choi et al., 2016). Consequently, the chronological obedience to the strict beliefs has led to an image of a country that is unenthusiastic toward undergoing social change and uncompromising in its policies and practices specifically for its inhabitants (Buengeler et al., 2016). In such a profoundly old-fashioned society, gender politics, religion, and modernity are all tangled.

Notwithstanding, a distinctive reality has been determined through a closer look at the recent history of Saudi Arabia. Saudi society has been permitted to involve its citizens, irrespective of religious connection, gender, and socioeconomic background, to participate in its future economic and social development (Eagly & Carli, 2008; Nieva, 2015). Moreover, Saudi society is identified as a tribal system where the family and tribe are the factors on which the social structure is dependent (Nieva, 2015). Moreover, these factors are determined to be extremely powerful entities in the completely Saudi society. In all social relations, the relationship and affiliation play an essential role; tribes heavily influence individuals' lives (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). The tribal loyalties of the organisations are presented with definite zones and tribal traditions. Thus its impact can have a heavy bearing on the individual's liberty when the reputation of the tribe is at stake (LaPierre & Zimmerman 2012).

Furthermore, since the country was initiating to establish the national institutions and identity, the generation of Saudi s lived a traditional born in 1950s tribal existence. The children born in the 1950s of this generation attained the benefits of oil wealth, political integration, increased access to education and increased contact with the west (DeArmond et al., 2006). Moreover, the young adults of Saudi Arabia face numerous challenges and struggle to make sense of their personal and societal personalities concerning the changes in gender roles (Nieva, 2015). However, in the next few years, numerous issues will be reshaped the culture of Saudi as thousands of students have been sent to study abroad; which might assist the country in bringing back its values and norms of the country (Baker, 2016; Hebl & King, 2019; L Pollard

2007). In addition, the rapid increase in the media is shaping the higher percentages of the youth compared to the parents.

Additionally, the Arab youth is determined to be number one in using and following Twitter and Facebook daily on the internet (Elmuti et al., 2009). The young generation is provided with a new standpoint regarding their lives socially, politically, and culturally through the development of the new windows globally such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook etc. it also makes this young generation more persuaded in contrast to their parents to admit or discard what they are taught. Notwithstanding, no one can determine the culture of Saudi Arabia a decade from now; however, the dramatic change is identified as inevitable (Ng & Pine, 2003).

### 2.3.1 **Importance of women as a leader**

The world is currently and will always be in desperate need of effective leadership, whether in politics or businesses. It has been determined in the report of Fairlie and Robb (2007) that the overall companies have been upsurged by 1.5 times by the businesses that women own are outperformed. The individual's strength and personality traits make a leader effective (O'Neil, 2007). Consequently, it is generally determined that women are less motivated to attain leadership positions and are not perceived as powerful as men. According to (Elliott & Stead, 2008), providing a leadership role to a woman leads to a more positive environment; however, women cannot realise how they are effective in leadership roles, but their capabilities and potential are recognised indisputable. Women are more coordinated with their team due to their inborn traits such as open-mindedness, pressure handling, empathy, mindfulness, open communication and multitasking (Ford-Gilboe et al., 2011). Businesses and industries realise that women bring significant benefits to the organisation, but they are also inimitable in the office boardroom and at the head of a table. Regardless of the progress over

the years, the gender pay gap is recognised as a phenomenon that has persevered significantly in workplaces and organisations (Blau & Kahn, 2003).

Additionally, it has been a long since organisations have searched for ways to close the gender pay gap. Therefore women's leadership is determined to be the practical solution for resolving the gender pay gap in organisations (Bergmann et al., 2018). Moreover, the gender pay gap is usually determined as the gender opportunity gap. It has been foreseen that when men and women initiate their careers, men are generally provided with more opportunities leading to higher-paying leadership positions (Nieva, 2015). Hence, higher-diverse organisations tend to enlarge those with lower percentages (Al-Shamrani, 2013). The organisations are led to practical solutions employed by the men when the women become leaders as they bring different perspectives, skills and cultural and structural differences (Ochieng & Price 2010; Al-Shamrani, 2013). With a sense of awareness and dissimilar viewpoints, women can investigate the finer details to determine what is beneath.

Moreover, women leaders are also determined to be significant in the organisation as gender diversity can assist in attaining effective financial outcomes (Dwyer et al., 2003). The more varied the organisation will be, the more ideas will come together, which might assist the organisation in attaining growth and sustainability in the external environment. The gender diversified workplace is regarded as a matter of difference in women and men in the roles of leader; however, it is determined to be the matter of grouping of both the men and women in the entire organisation (Han et al., 2019). Every organisation must aim to attain a gender-diversified workforce as it might increase creativity and productivity and significantly enhance performance collaboration and staff retention. According to the study of Sadri & Tran (2002), a company that attains a more diversified workforce is more likely to experience average profitability above 21 per cent. Hence, the business's performance can be improved by recruiting more diversified talent. In addition to this, the power of role models is determined

to be remarkable (Gabarret & D'Andria 2021). Despite gender, all individuals require good mentors who can assist them in attaining career growth (Al-Shamrani, 2013).

Concerning mentoring and guiding young employees, women leaders are more influential mentors than men. One of the main hurdles women face is that they are less expected to be mentored by men; however, it is the case for men (Elliott & Stead, 2008). In addition, the study conducted by O'Neil (2007) states that it is believed by 29 per cent of the women that their gender is the hurdle towards growth and development. Therefore, women must be appointed leaders to effectively mentor and empower the next generation's leaders to overcome this hurdle. Establishing women in a leadership position can significantly enhance the teamwork and processes of the organisation as well (Ford-Gilboe et al., 2011).

Additionally, women can make the most out of the knowledge and skills of groups by taking turns in conversation in the group of women leaders. Moreover, it is determined in organisations and businesses that women are more capable of negotiating and making deals even though the stakes are too high. They can fundamentally attain agreements but must be provided with authoritative and leadership positions (Bergmann et al., 2018).

#### **2.4 Women empowerment in vision 2030**

Even though, from the cultural viewpoint of Saudi Arabia, the women in Saudi culture are more motivated to remain at home to serve their partners and children (Almathami et al., 2021); however, it does not mean that Islam and the culture of Saudi Arabia prohibit women from working as long as it is well-ordered by the traditional law of sharia (Kark & Waismel-Manor 2005). Judge et al. (2002) stated that Islamic law allows women the right to work; however, Islam permits them to carry out their businesses and financial issues. Consequently, these businesses' primary responsibilities and duties at home should not be conflicted. Furthermore, the main concentration of vision 2030 is on women's empowerment

(Amanchukwu et al., 2015). In addition, it was declared that the government of Saudi Arabia need to overcome the old-fashioned rentier economy, i.e. based on oil and shift towards a more diversified paradigm with an effort for the upsurge in more job skills and to ensure the employment for the inhabitants of Saudi Arabia (Choi et al., 2016). Nonetheless, one of the main steps regarding the accomplishment of this objective is to empower the women of Saudi Arabia through which more than 50 per cent of the population is constituted to contribute and take part in the required talents and skills for the labour market of Saudi Arabia (Buengeler et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the accessibility of the labour market is usually dependent on one of the major themes on which the national transformation program is developed, which concentrates on overpowering the hurdles faced by the establishment of the labour markets for all the divisions of the society (Hayes, 1999). It significantly includes solidifying the culture of the participation of women in the labour market and the provision of the possible ways that enable them to provide the appropriate working environment for women (Almathami et al., 2021). Because of this theme, the government stated the two main challenges that disallowed women to participate in their state. The first major challenge was regarding the limited awareness of the positive role of women in the labour market and their contribution to the economic development and enhancement of the GDP (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). The second major challenge stated by the government waste feeble demonstrations of the women in the position of leadership in all the fields determined to be conservative to some extent (Almathami et al., 2021; Tlaiss & Al Waqfi, 2020), and therefore motivates and leads women to stay at their home and serve their children and husband. Furthermore, over the past few years, a considerable public, albeit the women of Saudi Arabia, played a limited role this was determined to be true in 2016 when the 2030 vision was announced (Tlaiss & Al Waqfi, 2020).

Notwithstanding, there was a rapid shift between the economic and social policies (LaPierre & Zimmerman, 2012). In 2017, women fielded three senior positions in finance; this also included the CEO of the stock. In addition, for the first time, Saudi Arabia has sought applications from women to run a company, which was determined to be remarkable as a significant step towards enhancing the rights and opportunities of women in the country. Saudi Arabian women are permitted to attend football matches and have the right to drive in the state (DeArmond et al., 2006). In addition, in 2018, a woman was appointed deputy labour minister in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the absurdity in the number of women in Saudi Arabia in the workforce is identified to be part of Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman's proposed reforms for the 2030 vision having an objective of increasing the contribution of women in the workforce from 22 per cent to 33 per cent. According To Baker, 2016; Hebl & King, 2019; L Pollard, 2007 over the last decade, the contribution of women to the labour market has almost tripled.

Moreover, Saudi Arabian women entering higher education specialising in technology, science, and engineering will significantly enter the labour market potentially full of technical jobs. It includes the constitution of the GIGA projects, for instance, Qiddiya and Neom, along with various new solar and wind renewable energy installations declared and proposed in recent months. Moreover, the world's largest university is the Princess Noura Bint Abdul Rahman University which also includes the colleges of humanities (arts languages education translation and social services), the science college (business administration computer and information arts and design), and then the medical college (pharmacy dentistry health and rehabilitation nursing and medicine (Zimmer & House, 2003). Preparing young Saudi females for such technical jobs will lead to their participation in women's labour goals of 2030 (Alshareef & AlGassim, 2021). Hence it might assist Saudi Arabia's commitment relative to women's empowerment. Regardless of the positive enhancement made by the government and policymakers in the past few years, women are neither still nor empowered in Saudi Arabia

(Alkhaled & Berglund 2018). Therefore in terms of the contribution of women in the labour force, the country still scores very poorly fundamentally due to the structural challenges—the lack of contribution of women in establishing the strategies of decision-making process centralisation and lack of authority. From 1990 to 2019, the data relative to the rate of contribution of the women in the labour force is provided by the World Bank (Altuzarra et al., 2019).

Notwithstanding, in 2019, the world average of 181 countries was 51.81 per cent (Blanchflower et al., 2002). In addition, Saudi Arabia has been identified to have the best female education statistics in the world; in 2018, according to the statistics of the Saudi general authority, more than 53 per cent of the university graduates are female in Saudi Arabia (Hamdan, 2019). However, these numbers do not reflect the lower position of employment and empowerment of women, where two-thirds of the female graduates are not employed. The structural barriers can be attributed to a lack of managerial efficiency capabilities and a lack of confidence in their leadership skills (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018).

## 2.5 **Barriers to women's leaders in Saudi Arabia**

Conventionally the leadership concept is integrated with the characteristics and traits of males, for instance, assertiveness, power and domination (House & Howell, 1992). Even though there is no such evidence regarding the characteristics that they are integrated with authentic leadership; however, it appears that they are associated culturally and socially. In addition, numerous examples have been found related to women leaders in Islamic literature (Alsubhi et al., 2018). Generally, over the last century, there have been numerous cultural and traditional gender biases faced by the women living in Saudi Arabia (Naseem & Dhruva, 2017), not just in the leadership field but also in all areas of life. Therefore, women were absent from public life (Sadi & Al-Ghazali, 2010). However, recently, most students in universities and schools in Saudi Arabia are represented by females. In 2017, the enrolment of females in

primary education was determined to be 52.4 per cent compared to 47.6 per cent of the male population. For higher education, the males constituted 46 per cent while the females constituted 54 per cent (Alselaimi & Lord, 2012). In addition, in 2017, approximately 45.4 per cent of female lecturers in higher education; however, regardless of such higher figures of females in higher education in Saudi Arabia, only a few females were appointed to leadership roles (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). There are numerous barriers to the leadership role, such as structural, individual, and cultural barriers. According to (Alotaibi, 2020), the labour inequalities are determined to be prevalent at the structural level in Saudi Arabia, where the rate of the contribution of women in the labour market was determined to be at the lowest in the region. In 2007, Mehrotra and Parida (2017) stated that about 8.2 million people were actively engaged in the workforce; however, only 14.4 per cent of the labour force was women.

Moreover, in 2008, the unemployment rate among Saudi women was 26.9 per cent (Alfarran, 2016). One of the main reasons behind this was that most women had no options to search for work other than health and education. However, in Saudi Arabia, women were restricted from politics, engineering, and architecture (Naseem & Dhruva, 2017). In addition, the women were also disadvantaged in the region due to opportunities related to training and development (Attanasio et al., 2008).

Another barrier to the employment of females at the leadership level is culture due to the differentiated philosophy of Saudi Arabia regarding the lifestyle of men and women. Therefore due to their responsibilities and duties, both genders were required to agree with the Islamic standpoint, which states that men are needed to support women financially (Ballenger, 2010). Gender discrimination is another factor that restricts the opportunities for women to work in leadership positions. However, the need to establish a moral working environment is developed by this factor. Consequently, the private sector usually hesitates to appoint women

to the organisation, specifically in leadership positions (Tlaiss & Al Waqfi, 2020), due to the social norms and the additional cost incurred to develop the working environment.

Moreover, women's work or leadership role is limited due to restrictions placed on the mobility of women in the state (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). In addition to this, at the individual level, it is believed by the majority of women that their fundamental roles and responsibilities are exceedingly related to Islamic beliefs. Moreover, Saudi women also believe that men attain additional capabilities to lead. One of the significant barriers to women's leadership is the contradictory accountabilities of family and home (House & Howell, 1992). Moreover, these personal barriers are complications associated with structural barriers.

Moreover, overcoming the structural barriers is interlinked with developing policies such as resting the tenure clock or providing flexible working schedules (Alsubhi et al., 2018). Even though the hurdles for women's journey toward leadership have become absorbent in the meantime, the structural barriers identified as biased still hamper the enhancement of women's career trajectories (Tlaiss & Al Waqfi, 2020). The organisation can teach negotiation skills to the women in the leadership development program; however, the concrete walls will remain if the exclusionary practices and policies remain in the organisation (Sadi & Al-Ghazali 2010).

## **2.6 Strategies for effective leadership of women**

The fast-growing and changing environment demands attention to the minimisation of gender inequality and maximisation of women's leadership. Women have proved fit for leadership positions and good management in most OECD and non-OECD countries. Previously the societal perception towards women was that they were just responsible for making food, care children and the house, and responsible for all house chores. However, Gorondutse et al. (2019) highlighted that the world experienced dramatic change when women became leaders, as women can win high profiles in national leadership and politics and participate in parliaments. Although it is also true that women have faced many difficulties and

challenges in aspiring leadership positions (Naseem, & Dhruva, 2017), they often face different sorts of tests and hurdles to prove themselves appropriate and suitable for the particular job (Hodges, 2017; Naseem, & Dhruva, 2017). According to Belasen et al. (2021), in acquiring the leadership position, the most important is the person who has the competencies and characteristics to become an extraordinary leader regardless of gender and identity. In line with this, the author highlighted that in a male-oriented workplace environment, women had been provided with group discussions and co-operating activities, which assisted them enhance their skills (negotiation communication influencing) (Hodges, 2017). The government is responsible for the programs that facilitate women gaining sufficient knowledge and attaining leadership skills in public and private organisations (Naseem, & Dhruva, 2017). Since they have faced different barriers and challenges in succeed their businesses.

Consequently, women have to ensure their security and privacy, cope with discrimination and show more effort than men to prove themselves compatible (Al-Shamrani, 2013) and credible with others. The underlying reason behind these challenges is the media representations and societal discourse, which provide restricted and extremely stereotypical interpretations of female leadership (Vidyakala, 2020). Apart from this, government organisations and private and public sectors have adopted numerous strategies and steps to enhance women's leadership skills and advance women's involvement in leadership positions (Naseem & Dhruva, 2017). The below section will illustrate some strategies that successfully and positively affect women's leadership context.

### **2.6.1 Legislating for change in Norway**

In Norway, just 5% of board members were women, and their incomes were 20% lower than those of their male colleagues in 2000 (Cukier et al., 2020). Moreover, with the support of political parties and agencies, the government of Norway took some innovative and exceptional steps to achieve gender equality by invading the private economic realm. On a

similar note, in 2003, one of the “quota bill” laws was steered by the “minister of trade and industry through parliament. This law amended the business organisations of Norway to sign up about 40 per cent of the female staff. Not limited to this, the company act has influenced the overall companies of Norway, public and private, along with a two-year evolution period (Machold et al., 2013). In 2006 more public limited businesses were added, and by 2008, all limited public corporations had been covered. Although the rule regulations and restrictions were eventually expanded to cover the boards of all municipal and cooperative enterprises and limited private corporations in whom municipalities control two-thirds or more of the shares under the local government act. Kaneshina (2020) specified that the social democratic parties of Norway excellently endorsed the unique plan of conservative-centre government, as both the political and non-political party’s involvement is crucial in the successful implementation of any project. It is stated by Donovan (2021) that industry was the key opponent, and politicians were the most prominent factors in the critical arguments over justice skills and democracy. In line with this, the media heavily promoted the quota law, and labour unions backed it up. The companies had time to modify and equip themselves to satisfy the quota requirement.

Several national and regional organisations have stepped forward to broaden the system activities, such as registration being opened with the help of some regional organisations. The most prominent Norwegian employers’ group recruited firms to participate in a “female future initiative”. CEOs selected exceptional women for training and networking opportunities for leadership and board roles in their organisations. On the other hand, companies did not use the databases as much as possible, preferring to hire board members they knew directly. Bryndum-Buchholz et al. (2021) studied that the practical measures equivalent to the conventional punishment for company law violations were included in the legislative package, including the forced dissolution of non-compliant firms. These were crucial to the program’s successful

adoption; many firms did not willingly follow the policy without fines during the early phase. Despite these, due to some steps and government plans, Norway has experienced a dramatic increase in women's empowerment. From 2002 to 2009, the involvement of women on board increased up to 40 per cent, and in private companies, the women's representations increased to 15 per cent concerning quota law. Concerning the fact, the survey of Naaraayanan and Nielsen (2020) explicit that there was an enhancement in board functions, as the law provides new perspectives, innovative plans and ideas, discussion patterns and new themes around the board table.

Additionally, it has been determined that most private firms that altered their status to eliminate compliance issues faced challenges in providing a safe and secure environment to women candidates. One and the foremost reason behind the effectiveness of the quota law were explored by (Foster, 2017), as this law initiated the steps that facilitate women breaking down the exclusion cycle. Moreover, the gradual change in the women's representation on board was due to the authorised government policy, specifically the addition of influential endorsements that fortified compliance. Same as with the help of this quota law, companies hired qualified and trained women.

### **2.6.2 Comprehensive Strategy of Canada**

To ensure the growth and development of the “royal bank of Canada,” the company identified that market value and intellectual capital advantage are directly linked with inclusion and diversity. RBC established its first task group on women's issues almost 40 years ago (Dutil et al., 2018). Canada has offices in different commonwealth nations, which assists the country in keeping a solid record of many women in executive and middle management positions. The RBC strategy has been defined by Cukier et al. (2016) as a tiered integrated approach to diversity that was driven from the top and supplemented by actions created deeper down the organisation. In line with this, diversity is a critical value that incorporates values and business

strategies. In the year 2001, top management demonstrates a solid commitment to diversity by championing diversity throughout the organisation with the assistance of the “RBC diversity leadership council (DLC)” (Longmuir et al., 2018). This committee's key representatives were the company's CEO, the president, and senior management.

Similarly, the DLC meets regularly to develop and assess strategy progress and action plans toward the specific targets (diversity and inclusion goals); this concept is duplicated throughout RBC regions and business units. Accordingly, Kalaitzi et al. (2017) briefed that goals, priorities, commitments and schedules are categorised in diverse blueprints and specified deadlines. A thorough monitoring and data analysis method is used to understand the impact of DLC, which involves transnational collaboration on women's progress. Quarterly results reporting ensure accountability by reporting patterns and actions to the board. At the core of the bank, the managers and committee members got assistance from a “diversity centre of excellence” function (Desjardins & Freestone, 2020). The networking organisations and employee resources are encouraged to assist career development (Naseem & Dhruva, 2017) and are linked to management’s diversity efforts. Similarly, initiatives were taken to promote work-life balance and flexible working hours.

In addition, RBC management took quick action to integrate diversity and business goals and use the results-oriented approach common in business to achieve diversity advancement. The leaders and management of RBC examined that the exhibition of a strong and persistent commitment is crucial to gender diversity. To fulfil all the tasks, enhancement in organisational culture was high on their priority list, which included using female role models at senior levels. With the involvement of females in high positions, the company could demonstrate and reinforce cultural change and motivate more women to search for executive and board roles. Mattis (2001) has discussed that leaders and executives were required to break down obstacles,

give leadership development opportunities, create a sustainable talent pipeline and hold themselves accountable for diversity goals.

### 2.6.3 Male champions of change in Australia

In 2010 the human rights commission of Australia created a plan named “Male Championship of Change (MCC)” about different department heads, directors, senior managers and CEOs of the federal government and businesses that were comprised in this change. The agenda behind the establishment of MCC was to attain an expectable enhancement in women's empowerment and encourage other departments to regulate the presence of both men and women in the workplace (Nash et al., 2021). Moreover, the change was partially based on the concept that traditional patterns and borders that create gender inequality have to break and everyone has equal opportunities in the organisation. In the year 2014, a program was launched named “the leadership shadow” (Mitchell, 2021); this program was initiated with the partnership of “male championship of change (MCC) and Chief Executive Women (CEW).” This model was specifically designed to drive and strengthen the effectiveness of leadership and equality. To distribute knowledge and clarification regarding multiple effects, MCC and CEW summoned all the colleagues and staff members to reflect on their leadership perceptions and understand and highlight opportunities for future improvement.

According to Mwiine (2018), the progress of the leadership shadow model of MCC was continuously monitored by the head of MCC. In addition, for sharing the model, approximately 2100 members of the “Australian securities exchange (ASX)” were enlisted, and around 400 leaders of different departments were directly briefed to advance gender equality. Similarly, MCCs have given over 100 speeches on gender equality and signed the “Panel Pledge” to improve the representation of women in the task force's public forums and panels (Chapman & Vivian 2017). MCC piloted a step-by-step approach to duplicating the MCC strategy at the national and sector levels. Thirteen business organisations provide inclusive leadership

development programmes to corporate executives, and 75 per cent of MCC organisations have included objectives to enhance women's participation in leadership in senior executive key performance metrics.

## 2.7 Determination of the strategies for worldwide implementation

One of the studies by Hinds et al. (2021) found that from 2012 to 2013, the share of women related to senior management has been significantly increased by 3 per cent; however, they just hold 24 per cent of such positions. In addition, the movement in the rate of increase in the senior management positions is not increased; consequently, it can slip back, as determined by the 2 per cent drop in 2015 (Hinds et al., 2021). Furthermore, the variations are masked between countries' regions in states and sectors in nations. However, no government with a commonwealth has broken the glass ceiling for women in all areas. It is determined by evidence provided in Kay and Duffield, and Hewitt's (2013) research that women make a significant variance when they are appointed to upper management and board positions. In 2007, McKinsey indicated that the organisations attaining three or more women in upper administration positions significantly perform 10 per cent more effectively in achieving the return on equity (Hinds et al., 2021). It was uttered clearly by CEW and MCC in Australia “the path to lasting performance improvement on any priority – like gender balance – starts at the top.” In the development of substantive changes, the commitment of solid leadership is determined to be critical, which is noticeable in practices and behaviour (Morley and Lugg, 2009). It is highly significant for the top leader to sustain their commitment to driving change, mainly if it happens to a satisfactory level. The reason is that the responsibilities were made personal for most senior executives in the organisations. They established the specification of queries for the CEOs to direct themselves on acting, prioritising speaking out, and compute

the outcomes of the performance in terms of positive outcomes or negative outcomes (Matlosa, 2008)

### 2.7.1 **Speeding up the change**

Regardless of the main concern about women's leadership, the circumstances remain with the little changes in women's business positions in some regions. In five years as a Pacific, the share of women dropped by 5 per cent; Australia has not advanced in 10 years (Hinds et al., 2021). Moreover, the problems in Latin America have been determined to be intense, with the percentage of 10 per cent decrease in the senior roles of women in just five years and the organisations having no high-ranking women are jumping by 20 per cent to increase by 50 per cent (Hinds et al., 2021). Evidence reveals that the enacted change provided effective outcomes, particularly when reinforced with penalties. Significant progress has been evident in European countries, wherein ten years, women have advanced themselves from 9 per cent points to 26 per cent share of top jobs (Hinds et al., 2021). Most of the enhancements are made by the countries with quota provisions; it was determined that the United Kingdom made 4 per cent points while France, Sweden, and Spain points had an upsurge by 10-12 per cent (Hinds et al., 2021). Norway showed that the fastest progress could be made when the quotas were enacted regarding the share of women, which jumped to 34 cent points in a comparable period of 10 years (Hinds et al., 2021). Germany slipped back; however, as the quota law has been passed and imposed in Germany, it is expected to move forward. In the meantime, 59 per cent of the business operating in Europe does not have women leaders; therefore, the European Council has waited for the EU directives (Hinds et al., 2021). Furthermore, according to the perception of MCC members, change is taking place too steadily, specifically in Australia, which is determined to be far from meeting the aim of attaining 50 per cent of women as a leader in organisations (Hinds et al., 2021).

### 2.7.2 Changes in culture

According to Ke and Wei (2008), gender quotas are not determined as international solutions because they are required to be the best fit with the authority's cultural expectations. The higher-level administration can significantly implement two types: tight and loose cultures (Turan and Bektas, 2013). A closed culture is usually regarded as a culture where authorities mainly impose the policies and demand the individuals to accept and adhere to the guidelines implemented in the state, for instance, gender quotas; similarly, on the other hand, loose culture is regarded as a culture where nations are less probable to impose general practices even though they have faith in parity (Mohelska & Sokolova, 2015). Compared to the commonwealth, Pakistan has a tight culture, whereas New Zealand has been identified to have loose culture. However, removing the unconscious and conscious bias and other hurdles concerning diversity, along with the inclusions that preclude the women from moving quickly through the pipeline to the most senior positions in upper management, requires efficacious approaches and practices that intrude the position quo and change in the values as well (Bass et al., 1981). The realisation of these situations is determined to be part of the reason behind the quotas becoming less provocative; in addition, it is also realised that the changes are taking place too slowly. However, it was reported by the global business report that an increase in the businesses by 8 per cent supports the quotas leading it to at least 45 per cent internationally in 2014 and another 2 per cent in 2015 (Hinds et al., 2021). In addition, the support was determined to be highest in Asia Pacific, Southeast Asia, and Latin America at 71 per cent, 55 per cent and 68 per cent, respectively (Hinds et al., 2021). According to Kay and Duffield (2013), there are enormous challenges. Thus, it was suggested that setting goals is extraordinarily mandatory but is not determined enough to stimulate the level of change required in the organisation or state. It was shown by the workforce modelling in the UK that there will be a 5 per cent increase per annum in the role of women leaders in civil services if

the new positions are filled by women candidates (presuming the rate of turnover at 5 per cent) than equivalence can be achieved in the year 2025 by which 80 per cent of the success post will be required to be fulfilled by the women (Hinds et al., 2021). Suppose if it is insisted to increase the percentage of women leaders by 10 per cent annually, then equivalence can be achieved in the year 2022, due to which 96 per cent of the upper management post will be required to be fulfilled by women (Morley and Lugg, 2009).

### 2.7.3 Changes in Organization

In determining the instances of the successfully implemented strategies, it is mandatory to choose among them to enhance the women's leadership position; they are not recognised as the reciprocally exclusive alternatives (Sage & Burrello 1994). Having robust legislation; establishment of the overall assimilated strategies containing in-depth reach across and in the organisations and attainment of the role of a champion to model by the senior leaders; initiative and keep responsible those individuals to whom they provide the obligation for instigating the modification in the organisation contains no conflicts (Avolio et al., 1991). The most significant aspect of the example is that it concentrates on structural, cultural, and legal change in the organisation and its nearby atmosphere. However, the method increases the intense change or familiarises the differences in various stages. Efficient strategies can be recognised as more “root and branch” than tampering with some initiatives and policies (Dimmock & Goh 2011). Harmel et al. (1995) stated that both require leadership accountability and drive in regulating and compelling individuals to act or undertake an approach following the result-based business. In addition to this, the concerns are taken into consideration in all the cases, whether they are penalties and sanctions for nonfulfillment or least efficient performance of corporate that might significantly have lost the market share as the organisations itself has not obtained all of the talent available (Abas and Basri, 2019).

Furthermore, allocations or targets are not determined to be adequate. For instance, the mandatory changes are driven by the quotas; however, the source of women impending from the pipeline further down the organisation is not resolved by these quotas (Sage & Burrello, 1994). Moreover, gender equality and diversity must be rooted in-depth to be sustainable and consistent.

Consequently, women and quotas who have successfully attained higher-level positions on boards should not be condemned for the failures and problems in the structure and systems of the organisation (Avolio et al., 1991). In addition, women should not wait until the issues are fully resolved. The commonwealth bank of Australia found in the set targets that it usually takes a bit longer to enhance the averages lower down as the vast numbers are involved in it (Dimmock & Goh, 2011).

### **2.7.3.1 Public Sector**

Since the government owns or controls things in the public sector, the general definition of the public sector includes the use of public authority and the implementation of public policy (Wegrich, 2019). The public sector defines in the context of the economy as enterprises that control and ownership belong to the state (Lapsley & Miller, 2019). The public sector consists of governments and all publicly controlled or publicly funded agencies, enterprises, and other entities that deliver public programs, goods, or services (Handler et al., 2006). Furthermore, in terms of public sector universities, it is determined that it is a university or college in the state's ownership or is funded by the government. The public sector universities usually work by receiving significant funds from the national and sub-national governments. The public sector is generally concerned with attaining maximum profitability and productivity (Lapsley & Miller, 2019).

It is noticeable that women's leadership is mainly found in the university sector of all public sector agencies in Saudi Arabia. Women in Saudi Arabia have faced many difficulties and challenges while working in the public sector (Alotaibi et al., 2017); hence it is crucial to study the lived experience of female leaders in Saudi Arabia. The public sector is not providing significant employment opportunities to females (Naseem, & Dhruva, 2017). If it allows, the possibilities are essential, and the university does not offer leadership positions to female students. This is the central discrimination in the public sector as male students have been provided with more leadership positions than female students. However, it has also been observed that if the employees are female in a leadership position, they have to face many hurdles and hardships while leading and managing their assigned work (Metcalf and Mutlaq (2011). It is usually beneficial for an individual to get an employment opportunity in the public sector as it depicts a secure job. Still, it is complicated to attain that position in the case of females because of gender biases (Soekarba, 2019). According to Alotaibi et al., A 2017 research study, women face numerous difficulties in the social-political and economic arenas.

#### **2.7.4 Changes in behaviour and practices**

In both the sectors, whether public and private initiating from the high-ranking people managers and those who are more engaged in the recruitment exercise, more attention has been given to comprehending and tackling the unconscious bias; in addition to this, the discrimination dynamics. It is analysed from the findings of the research of Darroch and Mcnaughton (2002) that the focus group of females raises the theme of insentient bias among the leaders in the civil services. Progress regarding this matter cannot remain in the monarchy of changing attitudes; however, it must be evident in changes in the practices and behaviours of the individuals and thus. As a result, it significantly enhances the performances of the individuals (Robie et al., 2001). Furthermore, RBC is determined to be an award winner

regarding gender equality whose strategy is selected to be applied universally to implement changes. It comprises multiple integrated synchronised and activated components with each other at numerous levels across the states.

Moreover, diversity is identified as a core value in the strategies of businesses and corporate values (Bass et al., 1981). The leaders' robust commitment to diversity is evident since the diversity champions ensure that all the targets and objectives are met accordingly. According to Iweka et al. (2019), target goals and particular timelines have consisted of action plans. The consistent and systematic multi-level supervision accountability spreads across geographical locations and falls beneath the organisation. To disaggregate the collection and analysis of data through reporting in contradiction to targets, transparent and accountable systems are used. However, they can be added by disseminating the training and worthy practices celebrating success and making women's leadership visible (Darroch and Mcnaughton, 2002).

## 2.8 Leadership roles

Currently, there are different definitions and philosophical interpretations of leadership available. Despite that, the notion of leadership has been explored since the late 1800s. It remains impossible to develop a single description incorporating leadership's genuine meaning and fantastic revolution. The number of researchers aiming to understand how an excellent leader could influence others piqued the curiosity of innumerable experts in the twentieth century as they sought to comprehend the precise meaning of leadership (Rost, 1993). Numerous studies have identified that the advanced and competitive business era demands a high level of efficient leadership since it offers others an insight into vision and communication opportunities. In addition, leadership significantly provides a clear vision and brief understanding of the direction of organisational success (Abu-Tineh, 2013).

The world economic forum (2021) quantifies the magnitude of gender-based disparities holding them responsible for undermining the long-term competitiveness of the global economy. Gender equality has also been identified as a precondition for the full enjoyment of human rights by women (Naseem, & Dhruva, 2017), with unequal treatment and discrimination of women representing a gross and frequent violation of fundamental human rights (European Parliament 2015, 2015 world economic forum 2014). Moreover, gender equality is essential in today's world, as it prevents violence against females and girls. It has been stated by Alzougool et al. (2021) that a society where both men and women are treated equally has achieved a safe and healthy working environment and growth (Naseem & Dhruva, 2017).

John Kotter's concept of leadership is one of the most distinctive as it captures the essence of what a perfect leadership style ought to be. In the opinion of John Kotter, a leader is someone who provides direction in difficult situations and encourages others by fostering teamwork. Another essential theory about good leadership characteristics is Kouzes and Posner, which explicitly states that good leaders must boost psychological toughness in a challenging environment (Kibort, 2004). For instance, establishing an engaging work atmosphere while lowering anxiety leads to a more productive workplace. Leadership used to be defined by a leader's skill, conduct, attitude and charm (Abu-Tineh, 2013). Leadership in the twenty-first century has taken on a new dimension that encompasses team members' active participation. As a result, the role of leadership is not just the leader's responsibility but the leader's connection with their employees (Rost, 1993).

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Even though businesses and organisations may seem to provide equal opportunities for both men and women, their social structure and culture often create more challenges for women than for men (LaPierre & Zimmerman, 2012). According to an extensive literature review, These challenges are found in organisations' rules, roles and procedures, and conduct norms

(DeArmond et al., 2006). The challenges women face in organisations are extensively documented by researchers (Baker, 2016; Hebl & King, 2019; L Pollard, 2007). Some of the features included in the organisation were added to make the organisation appear gender-neutral.; however, these features may often pose more difficulties to women than men (Almathami et al., 2021). It is not surprising that many aspects of organizations implicitly favour men's leadership because, traditionally, many men and very few women have held leadership roles in most organizations (Elmuti et al., 2009). Organisations tend to develop traditions which fit men's lifestyles (Halford, 2001).

These masculine traditions have increased over the years because, in the last 20-30 years, organisations have developed an implicit model of an employee who can work long hours and be called to work and flexible (Ng & Pine, 2003). This ideal employee should also make personal sacrifices for the business (Elegido, 2012). According to a study by Kark and Waismel-Manor (2005), this perfect employee has few situations that could limit their involvement in the workplace and especially have fewer family responsibilities.

The gender difference in leadership emergence paints troubling pictures of the challenges and preconceptions women have to overcome to obtain leadership roles as women. Judge et al. (2002) notes that leadership emergence refers to "whether" and "to what degree" an individual is perceived as a leader by others.

When we look at leadership roles and gender, it is apparent that women can effectively lead public and private sector organisations (Rosener, 1990). This can be seen in the increasing number of female leaders worldwide in many top positions. The rapid change can be seen in the last two decades after the advent of the new millennium (Almathami et al., 2021). Nowadays, some of the most successful businesses globally are led by women. For instance, the success of eBay as a digital marketplace is widely recognized due to the efforts of MEG

Whiteman (former CEO of eBay). However, these stories are not seen often, and negative experiences are often reported.

An acronym appropriately reflects essential principles in a new period of literature that provokes change and inspires leaders to take on more challenging positions. The most typical characteristics of a good leader have a recurring factor. The initial letters of a leader, when stated, simply further describe the essential attributes of listening and understanding others, energizing the organization by acting in the best interests of all self-improvement, others are empowered to lead, and their accomplishments are recognized (Baltoni, 2000). So at the end of each day, the actual nature of a new leader is the ability to maintain control when dealing with challenging circumstances, whether effectively or not. An excellent leader should respect employees while retaining a forceful demeanour (Bursztyn et al., 2020; Baker, 2017), whether coping with a funding crisis, grappling with the ramifications of a combination, or counselling a challenging colleague who refuses constructive feedback.

The notion that women were perceived substantially differently than males must be acknowledged to grasp the enormous transformation and transformation in history toward the development of women as leaders. “women leaders were very few in number in previous generations,” Hayes writes “there was a rare queen political or social leader head of a family enterprise usually through inheritance” (Hayes, 1999).

### **2.8.1 Preconceptions about leadership roles and assimilation of women in workplaces**

Leadership is viewed differently by each individual. Perhaps precursors of leadership must be found to better comprehend the genuine meaning of leadership. Throughout the literature, a select few traits (antecedents) emerged frequently. A person who is a skilled communicator, one who transforms ideas into reality, and one who gives guidance in times of transition, and possibly the best are some of the desired leadership attributes Aguirre, Master Cavanaugh, & Sabbagh, 2011).

Porath et al. (2015) and Zhang et al. (2012) have noted that being perceived as a leader in organisational settings, such as a team leader and leading a committee, is associated with higher job performance ratings. This perception of being a leader is also related to their ability to get a promotion (Staw & Barsade, 1993). In male-dominated settings, women are hasty to assimilate. They are pressured to behave masculinely to satisfy these preconceptions about what job should be held by whom and the qualities of job incumbents (Perry et al., 1994).

Despite focusing on cooperation in management, personal, and professional settings, women's cooperative and contributing behaviours have significantly improved while men's scores have decreased (Domínguez, 2004). A leader needs to view people as individuals instead of gender-based capabilities and shortcomings when hiring and promoting employees in today's business environment.

Intelligence quotient (IQ) tests have been considered acceptable to measure intelligence since the first part of the twentieth century. Intelligence has been linked to leadership success in several studies. The disparities between men and women in leadership styles and interpersonal skills have lately been analysed. Emotionally data becomes increasingly essential when minor technical expertise distinctions (Akram, Murugiah, & Shahzad, 2017). Successful and consistent leadership is impossible without emotional maturity, the highest education, and bright ideas backed by objective skills. A transactional leader helps establish yourself as an excellent example by acquiring people's confidence and trust. Transformational leaders are often influential because they state long-term goals, develop plans to attain these goals and demonstrate a creative edge (Bass et al., 1981). Women, in particular, can learn from transformative leadership as a good example. This paradigm may be favourable for women because of transformative leadership's supporting and compassionate behaviours (Eagly et al., 2003).

Females performed better on emotional intelligence exams than males (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). According to a study, there is a considerable difference between males and females regarding emotional aptitude. According to the statistics, females appear to be better at balancing their emotions than males (Akram, Murugiah, & Shahzad, 2017). Though the results show that women had a higher emotional intelligence rating than men, certain sections of the exam were likely poor while others were outstanding. For females, socioemotional skills may be strengths, but optimism, self-confidence, and self-acceptance may be weaknesses. (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003).

Historically most leadership positions have been held by men resulting in a stereotype that task-oriented traits and masculinity are the prerequisites for being a good leader (Fisk & Overton, 2019). An interesting point is noted by Schein (2001) that this stereotype is held much more strongly by men than women. These preconceptions about leadership and how one leader should look in a corporate world: the more experienced women managers are and the higher their positions, the higher their masculinity (Sheaffer et al., 2011). Women corporate leaders face a particular set of challenges compared to their male counterparts due to the male-dominated nature of their work settings (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). as there is a predominance of men in the workplace, this culture and preconceptions have developed to reflect men's values and needs ( Korabik & Ayman, 2007). Employees who join an organisation are confronted with either accepting the majority's norms or maintaining their own (Akram, Murugiah, & Shahzad, 2017). However, as discussed earlier, both genders are usually expected to accept the values and norms of the organisation and adopt the prevailing cultural standards. According to an interview study "gender and leadership in the corporate world" carried out by Korabik and Ayman (2007) notes that when talking to a white male colleague, the second author remarked, "*it will be interesting to see what the workplace will look like in years to come given the increased diversity among workers.*" He replied, "*I don't*

*expect much difference. The newcomers have to accept our way or the highway!*”. Korabik and Ayman (2007) also noted that assimilation into the organisation culture creates problems for women. They cannot maintain a positive sense of identity and have feelings of marginalization, isolation, and increased exposure to harassment, among other stressors.

### 2.8.2 Empowerment of Saudi women

In 2009, the Saudi government proclaimed the nomination of a woman for the position of “assistant undersecretary in the ministry of education.” This initiative made a dramatic change, as there was the first time a female was appointed as the “deputy education minister for girls' affairs in the ministry of education” (Amondi, 2011). It represented a significant shift in Saudi political culture. In line with this, this appointment encouraged many Saudi women to feel appreciated (Bursztyn et al., 2020). A female instructor reported in Arab news (the Saudi newspaper), “this appointment is an excellent step, as we've always suffered from having a guy in charge.

Moreover, the newspaper highlighted that a woman is aware of her peers' issues and obstacles (Alasgah & Rizk, 2021). It is a positive change, summarising the typical reaction to this breakthrough. In the same manner, different reform efforts have involved females in excellent prospects freeing women in Saudi Arabia from the seclusion they had long been subjected to during the previous century and allowing them to participate in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia's cultural renaissance (Bursztyn et al., 2020). Furthermore, the reforms illustrated how these fledgling government programmes might significantly offer power to females in Saudi Arabia (Rather 2016). Such efforts demonstrate how evolving social, economic, and political variables associate form a crucial component in shaping Saudi females' future (Baker, 2017), allowing them to play an essential part in establishing a better Saudi Arabia. Since the 14th century, there have been several examples of female leaders in Islamic history. Muslim women's achievements and impact may be found in every sector of global history's pivotal times.

Women empowerment was fearless in combat as they were in the peaceful and persuasive preaching of Islam's beliefs (Saqib et al., 2016). Women were found in every sector, including educational institutes, political positions, educational fields, courts, banks, trade and commerce, textile interpretation of sharia and many more (Al Fassi, 2016). Conclusively, no area did not profit from the women's knowledge, wisdom and delicate yet solid character strength. Apart from this, with the advent of King Abdullah's period in Saudi Arabia in 1995, the women's problem was addressed differently (Al-Qahtani et al., 2020). The king devised a plan and vision to advance the rights of females in the country.

In Saudi Arabian history, it was seen for the first time that the government permitted about twenty females to enter consultative council sessions, which was an outstanding achievement. Not limited to this, the effort cleared the door for women to enter the state's public sphere. At the turn of the millennium, five critical events occurred in Saudi Arabia such as; "King Abdullah's national dialogue in 2003 municipal elections in 2003 chamber of commerce elections in 2004 the development of the university, particularly for women and the appointment of first women as a leader in the Ministry Of Education in 2009" (Al-Qahtani et al., 2020). however, it has been stated by Metcalfe and Mutlaq (2011) that these reforms and events were not fully effective, although they illustrate how Saudi society may become accustomed to seeing women in positions of authority.

### **2.8.3 Women's attitude and self-confidence toward leadership roles**

Another concern researchers show is women's attitude toward leadership roles (Neal et al., 2005). This attitude towards leadership is also a strong predictor of leadership emergence. Moreover, Claes (1999) notes that women may be disadvantaged because of the un-leader-like impression of being socialised to convey incompetence. According to Appelbaum et al. (2003), the sex role theory does not work in the workplace.

*According to the sex-role theory being a man or a woman means enacting a general role as a function of one's sex. However, this theory also uses the words masculine and feminine, asserting that the feminine character, in particular, is produced by socialization into the female role. According to this approach, women acquire a great deal of sex-role learning early in their lives, and this can lead to an attitude of mind that creates difficulties later during their working lives. It is a form of 'culture trap'. (Appelbaum et al., 2003).*

The author notes that women have been taught to play, and their attitudes seem to signal a specific second class. On the other hand, the philosophy of women becomes far more critical in a group setting where the group members have to elect a leader who seems capable of representing them (Al Alhareth, Al Alhareth, & Al Dighrir, 2015). In a study by (Kolb, 1997), the attitude toward leadership is a statistically significant predictor for group-assessed leadership emergence. If women want to establish themselves as leaders in organisations nowadays, their leadership is likely to be assumed. Women have internalised this "second class" attitude, resulting in diminished self-confidence and disconnecting from what others expect from them as leaders.

*'the addition of self-confidence to the regression model for leadership emergence substantially improved its predictive ability' ( Kolb, 1997)*

There are many studies about purported differences between men and women. Leaders, both male and female, in each gender group have progressed during the last three decades. They declared their leadership approaches superior (Chusmir et al., 1989). In the 1990s, scholars attempted to define features of gender disparities particular to today's world, which sparked intense arguments about women's leadership styles vs men. According to a Harvard Business Review paper, incredibly collaborative and nurturing female behaviour became more suited for leaders in a new organizational context than classic control and power shenanigans. In traditional leadership approaches, women have many benefits over men (Al-Shamrani, 2013).

Minor drawbacks are also highlighted due to various biased assessments of their leadership abilities, particularly in a male-dominated workplace (Eagly et al., 2003).

What has long been assumed to be the cause for men's predominance over women in leadership positions might be fading? According to a new analysis-comparing male and female leadership abilities, not only do standard gender role preconceptions fall short but also neutralize patterns. The connected organisational structure, which focuses on nine achievement styles, was used to analyse data from 2,371 male and 1,768 female executives and higher executives in the united states from 1984 to 2002 (Domínguez, 2004). The authors discovered that the conventional gender gap in the competition had narrowed dramatically during these testing. The most significant observations were that male executives' ratings were much lower than in the early 1980s, although female management staff' scores had stayed reasonably stable.

#### **2.8.4 Women in leadership roles in the western context**

There is some evidence of gender-neutrality in leadership in the west, which considers the influence of socialization and cultural worldviews on leadership (Al-Shamrani, 2013). Men had always occupied the higher ranks and led from the front in the past. However, there has been a noticeable shift recently as women have made strides toward greater gender equality by taking on leadership roles and responsibilities in the workplace. On the contrary, in various nations, women are still under-represented. They are not given adequate opportunities and resources to significantly improve their career progression, with stereotypes as a significant impediment(Alimo-Metcalf, 2010).

Regarding their academic career, women reach a higher level of education than men in most European countries. However, once they graduate, their presence decreases at each step of the typical academic career. Also, women are more successful than men in the initial degree level; however, their share falls in higher education; for instance, the number of PhDs among women decreases. Authors like Macha and Bauer (2009) and Ohlott et al. (2003) have

extensively reported the imbalance in gender to be a severe issue in industry science or politics. If we take a look at Europe, according to Macha and Bauer (2009), Europe for women is still a “wasteland” (as quoted by T.S Elliot), especially in educational leadership and for leadership positions in industry science or politics. However, things have been improving in recent years with the reduction of horizontal and vertical segregation in all sectors, as discussed in the next paragraph.

In Europe, the workforce is still predominantly men, with 63% of women working compared to 76% of men. Shortall and Bock (2014), in The European Parliament report “women careers in science and universities and glass ceiling encountered”, stated that gender mainstreaming constitutes a significant factor in achieving a sustainable and inclusive society. The European institute for gender equality (2015) notes in its report “gender equality index report 2015 measuring gender equality in the European union 2005-2012” that the 21st century needs sustainable, intelligent, inclusive growth in terms of gender equality scores for women. The United Nations noted the same in their sustainable development goals (SDGs). Goal 5 of the SDGs in the 2030 plan of the UN is focused on gender equality and empowering women. The United Nations also notes that gender inequality impacts society adversely. The following paragraphs will examine women in the workforce and leadership positions across the United States.

The traditional definitions of leadership have been challenged by the recent changing demographics of the society in the United States (Levitt, 2010). The author also notes that there has been an increase in leadership roles across the United States, and expectations have shifted in recent decades (Levitt, 2010). In the USA, women are more present in the workforce than ever. Carli and Eagly (2001) note that globally, 25 of the 42 women who served as prime ministers or presidents summed their roles in the 1990s. A study of United States medical school faculty compared the female faculty from 1985 to 2006, and they found that the increase

of full professors in the institutes was not significant (Mayer et al., 2008). The study By Carli and Eagly (2001) also noted that women made up 47% of all workers and had earned 51% of all bachelor's degrees, 45% of all advanced degrees, 42% of all doctoral degrees and 43% of all professional degrees. These statistics show that many working women are currently in the workforce of the USA and are placed into leadership positions and roles.

The United States in 2018 saw an unprecedented number of women running for leadership roles in government at all levels (Dittmar, 2020). According to the PEW research centre (2020) "data on women leaders," this is part of a broader movement in our society which has seen them becoming ever so involved in leadership roles. This has been achieved as there is a general rebalancing of power dynamics between the two genders; the society has seen everything to achieve this balance of power from a desire for fairness (us equal employment opportunity commission 2020), as well as the efforts to tackle the issues of sexual harassment at workplaces (national academies of sciences & medicine 2018). If we look at women's education in the United States, the statistics show an increasing percentage of college degree holders (McCullough, 2019). According to the United States Department of education's latest data, women earn 58% of bachelor's degrees overall. Yet, in the stem fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), women make up only 36% of baccalaureate degrees. Let us look at the areas between stems. The segregation is again apparent in terms of the degrees being earned by women, with the biological sciences granting 60% of bachelor's degrees to females and computer sciences only 19% (McCullough, 2019). The study looked at women in leadership positions in academia and found that women in leadership roles are similarly low in these fields. Women are only presidents in 30% of colleges and universities in universities and colleges. Another interesting statistic noted in New York Times' article "glass-ceiling index" is that there are more CEOs named James in the US compared to CEOs who are women (Ibarra et al. (2014). Researchers have extensively studied the difference between

science and gender and how it influences leadership positions held by women (Mullet et al., 2017). Eagly and Carli (2012) have also studied the relationship between women and leadership in the United States and globally. Most research about women and leadership has focused on why women are less represented and some of the barriers they face in these technical fields. McCullough (2019) notes that there are several barriers to moving into leadership roles, such as A) discrimination, B) harassment, C) lack of role models, and D) work-life balance, among others.

Changes have been noticed in the lifestyles and gender roles, with men now investing more time and effort in household-related work (Almathami et al., 2021). With changes in etiquette, social and gender roles have become more equity-driven and flexible. This has led to more women joining the workforce in western nations such as the USA, where numbers have increased significantly in the last few years (Fisk & Overton 2019). This notwithstanding, only a few women have been able to assume leadership roles in institutional bodies and corporations compared to their male counterparts, even in the west. Research evidence shows that only 23 % of the total number of CEOs in the USA are women (Choi et al., 2016). Women leaders are often seen as manipulative, dominating, ineffective, and a soft perception further compounded by ethnic and racial differences (Fisk & Overton, 2019). Suffice it to say, notwithstanding the high number of women entering the workforce, the numbers of those in leadership roles and positions are still below expectation as women are still regarded as “outsiders” even in the west in comparison to men when it comes to handling and undertaking positions of responsibility (Choi et al., 2016; Kattan et al., 2016). As discussed in the next section, the situation is aggravated in the Arabian context.

### **2.8.5 Women in leadership roles in the Arab context and the cultural context**

In the Gulf States and the region of the Arab peninsula, women are characterized by gender inequality (Baliamoune-Lutz & McGillivray, 2007; Rwafa, 2016). This creates

problems for women in achieving their due rights and liberties, which is reflected in some laws. It must be noted that several factors influence women's leadership, and the workforce in the region is not entirely Muslim or Arab (Almathami et al., 2020). Still, the current study focuses on gender equality in the cultural and management context. As noted by Moghadam (2003) in the book “modernizing women's gender and social change in the Middle East”, “women are themselves stratified by class, ethnicity, education and age.” There are differences across each country, as noted by several researchers. Religion plays a critical role in the region, as indicated by Kabasakal and Bodur (2002) in their research

“Islam defines the roles that men and women fulfil and create a masculine society where men are more dominant in many facets of life.” (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002).

According to Farrell (2008), these beliefs result in attitudes towards women who work outside their homes as they are generally seen as homemakers. Researchers have shown that women working in male-dominated industries are deficient in numbers, and most women in the workforce are entrepreneurs in the region. The women in the Arab area still are striving for their rights as the site is characterised by gender inequality. According to some of the laws in the region, all women, regardless of their age, are required to have a male guardian (Aldosari, 2017). There has been a lot of debate over granting driving licenses to women in Saudi Arabia (Addawood et al., 2018). As discussed earlier, several cultural and religious norms dictate how society works in the region. There have been several improvements in women's empowerment which will be addressed in the next section. However, despite advancements, there is still a long way to go, and progressive women who advocate for modernity are still a minority in the region. Fatany (2013) notes that the conservatives still support gender segregation policies in the kingdom. The social and religious norms combine to foster significant social control over women. Society and the state still enforce severe gender segregation, but to a lower extent than in earlier decades. Gender segregation and imbalance are at odds with the "Holy Quran's"

viewpoint on women, granting those equal rights and decision-making freedom (Abukari, 2014). However, these societies tend to control women and change them according to their needs and interests, as several researchers noted (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). The following paragraph discusses women's leadership roles in the cultural context.

The private business sector in the Arab region relies on foreign labour from multiple countries and expatriates, as noted by Shayah and Sun (2019), among several others. As the workforce comprises foreign nationals, gender inequality becomes the context. Women are a minority in the overall population of the countries in the region. Qatar has more than twice the number of men compared to women (Gulf Labour Markets and Migration 2017). For instance, there is a higher percentage of expatriates in countries like UAE and Qatar compared with the number of citizens. As discussed earlier, in Saudi Arabia, the restrictions due to the societal and tribal norms on working women cause an increased and significant dependency on the foreign male workforce (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). This dependency on foreign labour reduces the pool of women available for the force in the region. This lack of leadership from women in the area has been well documented, as most countries made progress on this front in the last decades regarding women holding leadership positions. Authors like Madsen and Andrade (2018) have reported the vast differences between regions and countries for gender equality in leadership positions.

Experience and knowledge are regarded as some of the essential factors that play an important role in determining leadership success (Kattan et al., 2016) and so also have an impact on the success of women as leaders, as women may not have gained experience or adequate knowledge due to socio-cultural or institutional restrictions. Therefore, women empowerment initiatives in Arab nations where an increasing number of women assume leadership roles with associated decision-making responsibilities must also look at developing experience and knowledge among women (Nieva, 2015).

With vision 2030, a significant shift has affected perspectives on gender roles. As a result, more women than ever in government bodies in leadership positions in the Arab world serve as role models for young girls who aspire to take up high leadership positions (Alshareef & AlGassim, 2021) represent the country globally. More importantly, women from such nations are expected to bring issues and difficulties to the global agenda that women from the Middle East may encounter in their new roles as leaders (Baker, 2017). This has increasingly led to the rise in meaningful representation of Arab women in international conferences and interactions where issues such as inclusivity and diversity have been given more recognition and importance.

#### **2.8.6 Factors affecting women's leadership in the region**

As mentioned earlier, each country needs to be examined individually. The literature on the subject continues to do so to understand various variables that affect women's leadership in such situations. Metcalfe and Mutlaq (2011) have developed a framework that provides the factors (external and internal) that affect women's participation in leadership positions in the region.

Metcalfe and Mutlaq's (2011) framework is quite similar to those presented by Kattan et al., 2016; Alotaibi et al., 2017; and Saad, 2020): They all refer to factors affecting women's leadership, and there are certain factors where the resemblance is more prominent. For example, just as the framework from Metcalfe and Mutlaq (2011) defines patriarchy as the main factor that affects women's leadership, so does the framework from Kattan et al. (2016), as they have pointed out that the line between tradition and Islam has become increasingly blurred over time giving religious clerics latitude interpret the Quran through the lens of patriarchy. In addition, the framework by Metcalfe and Mutlaq (2011) emphasises the tribal origins as a vital factor affecting women's leadership as the tribal origins follow the tradition of the tribe that women are bound to stay at home to serve their family members. This is similar

to what Alotaibi et al. (2017) found. Namely, they found evidence that a woman's place was traditionally at home, where she was expected to be a good wife and an excellent mother to her offspring.

Another similarity is concerning the government and policy factors from the framework by Metcalfe and Mutlaq (2011). They point out that the government has enforced some laws and policies that limit the representation of women in the workforce. This is also found in the framework by Kattan et al. (2016) and Saad (2020). They point out that even though man and woman are morally equal according to the Quran, a raft of laws was enacted that entrenched gender segregation.

Finally, Metcalfe and Mutlaq's (2011) framework refers to the private sector perceptions and concerns where they point out two essential elements. There is an assumption that women than men are more preferred for leadership positions and that it is generally assumed that women are inconsistent with their job. This is similar to the framework given by Kattan et al. (2016), Alotaibi et al. (2017), and Saad (2020); they have proven through research that the decision-maker's customs and traditions are masculine, thus forcing women to work harder than men to establish their equality are.

The following factors form part of Metcalfe and Mutlaq's (2011) framework.

#### **2.8.6.1 Patriarchy:**

The concept of patriarchy is conceptualised differently by many scholars. Mitchell, a feminist psychologist, uses the term patriarchy "to describe family networks in which men exchange dominance over women" (Mitchell, 1971/2015). This factor centres on power and honour, family and marriage, education and freedom of choice. According to Kattan et al. (2016), those factors significantly impact women as leaders. It shapes the woman's behaviour, weakening her performance and organisational citizenship behaviour. Moreover, the study found that patriarchal attitudes often practised at home are significantly transmitted to

corporate settings. This substantially affects the workplace behaviour of women and maintains the superior status quo of men, where women are discriminated against, dominated, and placed permanently in inferior positions (Funnell & Chi Dao, 2013).

Women were relegated to housewives, who were expected to raise morally upright children and watch over the nation's overall integrity (Kattan et al., 2016). Because of Saudi society's different social and primary qualities, women in leadership roles in numerous Saudi organizations experience a different reality than their male partners (Alotaibi et al., 2017). The customs and Islamic directions won in Saudi Arabia limited the social job of women in this nation and comparative safeguarding social orders (Kattan et al., 2016). Women are not invited out in the open places and must be at home more often than not. Notwithstanding the advancement and valuable open doors proposed to Saudi women in terms of wellbeing assurance and training (Alotaibi et al., 2017), restricted, open doors are accessible for female business people to break in, particularly in political and monetary perspectives of exceptional accepted practices. Women living in the Northern and Southern districts of Saudi Arabia keep having fewer open doors for advanced education than those living in different locales because of the lopsided dissemination of colleges and their branches across areas and regions (Saad, 2020). This is combined with the hindrance of traditional culture that forbids women to decide on advanced education.

The Saudi society is an ancestral framework where the family and tribe are the premise of the social design and are the central element in the whole Saudi society. Connection and alliance are significant in every social contact, and tribe profoundly affects individual lives (Alotaibi et al., 2017). Firm ancestral loyalties exist inside specific zones, and traditional practices and impacts can significantly impact a singular's freedom when the tribe's reputation is questioned.

Different articles and books from Western and Middle Eastern writers take care of women's freedoms, mirroring a concentrated interest in every aspect of sociology and the humanities (Metcalf and Mutlaq, 2011; Alotaibi et al., 2017; Saad, 2020). Metcalf and Mutlaq, 2011 discuss the role of women in Saudi Arabia and the contract between Islamic teaching and modern traditions. However, in its general guidelines and strategies, the Saudi Arabian state affirms equity among women and men in all parts of their lives (Alotaibi et al., 2017). The Saudi culture manages ladies and men on an equivalent premise. Therefore if there shows up on a superficial level to be an imbalance between females and males (Metcalf and Mutlaq, 2011; Saad, 2020), creators would represent this by deficiencies in the informer's reasoning level of training development and view of what the connection among people ought to be. Metcalf and Mutlaq, 2011; Alotaibi et al., 2017; Saad (2020) identified various challenges and lack in promotion of women leadership. According to Lerner (1989), patriarchy was not the outcome of a single event but rather the product of a process that evolved over about two thousand five hundred years. This theory is based on the observation that patriarchy has existed for far longer than a single event. This process comprised many various reasons and forces responsible for the formation of male supremacy in the form it takes today (Lerner, 1989). These reasons and details were accountable for establishing male supremacy; even in the 21st century, patriarchy persists as men continue to disregard women's rights (Bhopal, 2003).

#### **2.8.6.2 Tribal origins:**

Metcalf and Mutlaq's (2011) framework notes that community power and wealth are through the male networks. This result in women's social status being connected to the family as per the tribal customs (Adra, 2016). The factor of tribal origins also significantly impacts women's leadership. It follows the old tradition of the tribe that women are bound to stay at home and serve their family members, and they would not be allowed to go outside of their

home (Soekarba, 2019); specifically, they would not be allowed to go outside their home for working (Bursztyn et al., 2020). Because of this, women are bound to remain associated with their family members.

#### **2.8.6.3 Government and policy**

This includes various laws and policies that the government in the region formulates, which limits the representation of females in the workforce. The government and policy factor significantly impacts the woman's leadership role as this factor highly influences all organisations. The government has imposed various policies and practices that greatly restrict women from attaining leadership positions (Soekarba, 2019). However, the government has recently been working on initiatives to support and empower women in leadership and authoritative positions (Bursztyn et al., 2020).

#### **2.8.6.4 Religion:**

As extensively discussed earlier, religion also plays a role as the laws based on “Shari’a” significantly influence the public sector (Thalib, 2018). Religion plays an essential role in any individual’s life; religion and religious norms are pivotal in formulating and shaping public policies and general life compared to any other factor (Saqib et al., 2016). It has been determined that the participation of women in religious institutions around the globe is diversified based on religion and the traditions currently followed in the state or region.

#### **2.8.6.5 External market conditions:**

This includes the various investments in the Gulf States, which require highly educated women, the foreign labour workforce, gender inequality, and the public sector is a better employment opportunity for the female employee (Baker, 2017). This factor also significantly impacts the woman as a leader due to numerous investments within the Gulf States. The organisation is bound to appoint highly educated women. However, due to some tribal origins, and a dominant male society, a woman is not given many opportunities to attain a higher level

of education as they are bound to serve their family (Adra, 2016); due to some woman could not achieve a higher level of knowledge, and thus, they lose the opportunity to attain the authoritative, and leadership positions within the organisation.

#### **2.8.6.6 Private sector perceptions and concerns:**

Private sector perceptions and concerns include the belief that women are more expensive than men (e.g., maternity leave) and that women are more likely to leave their jobs for better chances or family reasons (Almathami et al., 2020). There is also an assumption that women than men are more preferred for leadership positions. Hence, it is assumed that women are inconsistent with their job, as they cannot assure long-term participation within the organisation (Bursztyn et al., 2020); therefore, due to this reason, a woman is not provided with the opportunities to obtain a leadership position within the organisation.

Personal motivators:

The statistics show that the salary of the females in the workforce is lower than their male counterparts; however, the public sector provides more benefits to women than the private sector, such as flexible working hours and better career development opportunities.

#### **2.8.7 Leadership roles in Saudi Arabia**

An organisation's culture in a country like Saudi Arabia, among other Islamic countries, is impacted by tribal customs whereby a manager or leader should behave like a fatherly figure (Walker & Salt, 2006). They noted that an organisation where the leader is expected to make the entire decisions could adversely affect its ability to change or improve its performance. Literature shows that most Saudis also like to be directed and informed on what to do, impacting their preference for government involvement in their organisation practices (Bhuiyan et al., 2001). Another exciting thing (Krishnan et al., 2012) is that the candid feedback on performance by Arab employers is considered hostile and unfriendly.

According to the latest report by the world economic forum in 2021, the “global gender gap report” ranks Saudi Arabia at 147 out of 156 countries (world economic forum, 2021). In Saudi Arabia, “purdah” is required for women to avoid men and make them cover most of their bodies (Chakraborty et al., 2018). Historians have noted that this veil requirement or this custom predates Islam in the gulf region (Sanders et al., 2017). These historians argue that the Holy Qur’an was interpreted in a way to make the veil a part of adapting to the tribal traditions. Non-mahram (mahram is an Arabic term derived from ‘Haraam’, which refers to something sacred or prohibited. In Islamic Fiqh, a Non-Mahram is a person with whom marriage is generally permissible) women have to minimize social interaction in all settings. Due to this, according to law, most workplace settings have segregation of both genders and even separate entrances for both genders. Organisations have been expected to create different areas for females. Since they have to deal with this added weight on their organization, they cannot hire women. (al-Fassi, 2010). However, in recent years the strictness has reduced a bit. Women have enjoyed more freedom regarding veils and covering their clothing with an Abaya; this varies across regions in the kingdom. In 2005, Saudi Arabia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), which resulted in increased international investment and more open culture for women. As a result, there have been more efforts to empower women in society. The recent changes have also seen women being allowed to vote and run in the recent elections and be on the advisory council in the kingdom (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). Some of the first women in various fields and notable mentions are “Arwa Al-Hujaili”, “Bayan Alzahran”, and “Ayat Bakhreeba”. They are the kingdom’s first female trainee lawyers to be granted an official license from the ministry of justice, and Saudi Arabia’s first female police officer, respectively. The following paragraph looks at the success of women's leadership roles in the kingdom and how education has a significant role in achieving that.

Women are getting enrolment in different educational phases in the recent decade, with females representing about 60% of students in colleges and universities because of the efforts by the government to promote education among women. However, they still represent only 14% of the kingdom's workforce (Kattan et al., 2016). Most of these working women prefer working in the education sector and almost all in the public sector. Aguirre et al. (2011) have reported that even after enrolling at higher educational levels, women still face various hurdles to getting to the leadership roles that match their high academic credentials. Aguirre et al. (2011) have also noted that female leaders' qualifications are less favourable than male peers in Saudi Arabia. In their paper "women at the top: successful leaders define success as work and family in a culture of gender" (Cheung & Halpern 2010), the setting of a culture influences expectations from both genders as men are still favoured in leadership jobs. More opportunities to reach leadership roles are significantly linked to higher education certificates. According to Kattan et al. (2016), women who have already achieved leadership roles in the kingdom have obtained higher education degrees. Employers prefer female employees with masters or PhDs from foreign institutes, which is the primary reason for their success compared to other factors that may lead to men being successful in leadership roles. Kattan et al. (2016) and co also noted that the way education had been imparted to females affects their ability to be good leaders, as traditional methods may not produce good leaders (Baker, 2017). However, the new modern methods of education that help create an environment that encourages creative thinking solving problems and searching for solutions outside the box can help produce better female leaders in the kingdom (Almathami et al., 2020).

In Saudi Arabia, organisations are constantly looking for individuals who have the potential to learn from their experiences and seek to appropriately equip themselves to be influential leaders (Kattan et al., 2016). Despite this, women continue to face discrimination in Saudi culture, which is demoralising given the difficulties they already face in gaining

appropriate education and expertise for the opportunities that have only recently been open to them with the promulgation of Vision 2030 (Hodges, 2017; Kattan et al., 2016). At the same time, women still face a shortage of opportunities for leadership positions, as their male counterparts hold most places. The problem is exacerbated when male leaders and mentors favour men, which diminishes the chances women aspire to undertake new roles and advance in leadership roles (Alotaibi et al., 2017). Resultantly Saudi women account for only a tiny percentage of the workforce in leadership positions. In addition, since women started joining the force relatively recently, they may not have had the prolonged period of experience or bulk knowledge possessed by males (Hodges, 2017; Kattan et al., 2016). However, with time although there has not been significant representation in the private space (Varshney, 2019), women are gaining exposure to leadership roles in the public sector as part of the reforms following the promulgation of vision 2030 where for instance, job localisation (Saudi nation) has essentially been a feminisation of the labour force (Eldermedash, 2014). In (Varshney, 2019) and Abalkhail (2017) opined that women are likely to adopt similar leadership styles to their male counterparts, as their motivation is to perform such functions and activities as males. Accordingly, to promote female leadership, different programmes have been organised. For instance, with the incorporation of the British Council, Durham University created a “three days’ women leadership programme,” which offers females sufficient leadership skills and expertise that assist s them in advancing their careers and further growth. The main objective behind this programme is to increase the understanding level of women in leadership and management and to enhance delicate effectiveness as a leader. Moreover to promote the women who have enough capability to become a leader the Arab is now wide spreading this sort of program. Moreover the curriculum is designed for professional women who have a few years of job experience (Baker, 2017). It is unusual in that it not only covers key leadership abilities but it also examines the impact of gender on leadership. The training is also appropriate for

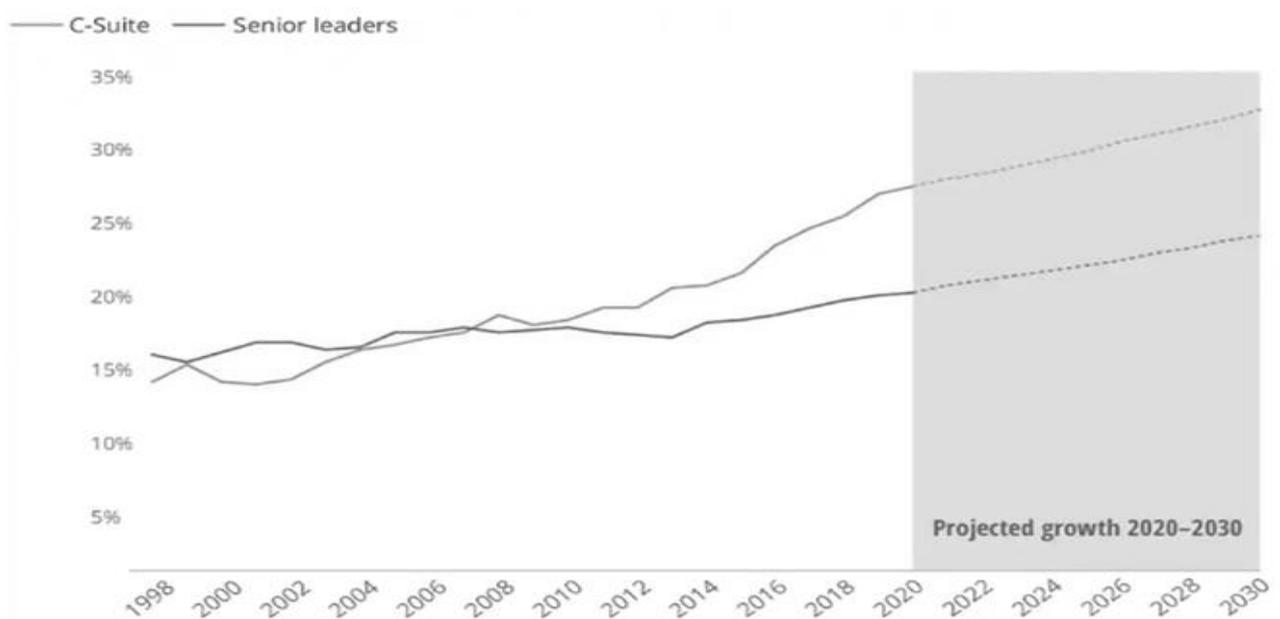
women who are advancing in their professions and seeking prominent decision-making positions in their workplaces or communities (Baker, 2017).

There are particular concerns and advantages studied in the literature related to women in leadership roles owing predominantly to the socio-cultural backdrop of their upbringing (Alghamdi et al., 2022). For instance, on the positive side, women are more likely to be motivated than men to engage in and learn other-gender norms due to their upbringing, which gives women more flexibility and an innate ability to adapt to new situations (Kattan et al., 2016). However, the observation is that women generally have a great degree of uncertainty and are often afraid of going into business all by themselves compared to men, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle of lack of exposure and experience (Akram et al., 2017).

The remains that such perceptions above do not define gender and should not be used for stereotyping - women could be equally vulnerable to uncertainties as men or men could be taught to become more adaptable and flexible. According to research (Dirani et al., 2017), gender stereotypes significantly impact women who seek to reach the leadership ladder. For instance, women need to earn higher qualifications for the same jobs as their male counterparts, considered natural leaders. They frequently work harder than men to receive the same recognition and demonstrate that they are more skilled than their male counterparts, necessitating higher qualifications (Dirani et al., 2017; Kattan et al., 2016). According to (Appelbaum et al., 2003), women face three dilemmas on their leadership journey: high competence and lower rewards where they must be more qualified than their male counterparts but still earn lower salaries; extreme perceptions where they are labelled tough if they go against established stereotypes and soft if they show consideration; and competent but not liked were coming across as capable elicits feelings of resentment from work colleagues. At the operational level, it can be assumed that enterprises lose out on this vital intellectual capital if

they cannot utilize all available resources (in this example, qualified and skilled Saudi women) (Kattan et al., 2016).

Stereotyping is an issue across Saudi institutions and firms (Kattan et al., 2016). It must be addressed if the vision 2030 must attain its objectives and involve women in the country’s economic progress. The diagram below shows the state of affairs regarding women's leadership in KSA.



**Figure 2-1: Percentage of Women in Leadership Roles by Role Category**

(Source: Rogish et al. (2019))

Though the Saudi Arabian government has adopted various measures to enhance women's leadership skills, including directing and or resourcing formal institutions to hold training programs, courses and workshops (Alghamdi et al., 2022), the above statistics indicate that much effort is still needed to bring female leaders to par with their male counterparts. Madsen and Andrade (2018) have acknowledged that leadership development for men and women is essential for any organisation to succeed, especially in emerging markets. The studies focusing on developing women across developing countries are few and far between. In

countries where women are less represented in the workforce or are oppressed, there is a critical need to understand the dynamics of women in senior management positions.

### **2.8.8 Gender leadership and the public sector in Saudi Arabia**

Dirani et al. (2017) have stated that after decades of intense modernisation and technological advancement, the urban infrastructure of Saudi Arabia is technologically advanced and highly developed. Other factors such as information technology, modernisation, the internet satellites, feminism movements, liberalisation, WTO involvement, urban migration, women's education, the influx of foreign workers, and society urbanisation have positively impacted women's leadership development in the public sphere. At the same time, as more and more Saudi women take up traditionally jobs to preserve men across all sectors, a fresh dynamic is created in the workplace (Alshareef & AlGassim, 2021). However, the number of women in senior leadership positions has been low (only 3.2% in 2017), which means gender diversity on board continues to be very low (Varshney, 2019) in Saudi Arabia. The gender inequalities are usually normalised due to the creation of gender boundaries, which significantly take place in multiple structures from market to religion and from language to family. It has been determined that the Saudi state is based on tribal solidarities and kin for its institutional associations that bring up religious nationalism (AlSaleh et al., 2012). Previously there was massive gender discrimination in the KSA; however, recently, the government has removed some restrictions on women to avoid bias and provide women with the right to live accordingly. Many men in Saudi Arabia believe that women are permitted to work if allowed by sharia (Islamic law). On the other hand, some men believe that women are not allowed to work as they must look after their parent's husbands and children (AlSaleh et al., 2012). As revealed in the above discussion about the lack of women's leadership positions in Saudi Arabia's public sector, the following section turns toward literature that may provide insights into the underlying reasons for this discrepancy.

### 2.8.9 Women in leadership beyond gender equality

According to the research study by Fine and Sojo (2019), times have changed, and women's figure is no longer seen in terms of leadership only as the “leader of the home.” In addition to this, the family sphere is considered part of the corporate world that occupies management positions in large companies and manages large teams. This portion corresponds to only 37.4% of managerial positions according to the survey “gender statistics social indicators of women in Brazil” released by the Brazilian Institute of geography and statistics (IBGE) in 2020. We also have the wage inequality in which they received only 77.7% of their earnings compared to men in 2019. In addition, according to the IBGE in Brazil, the female gender exceeds the male gender in studies and career preparation, which shows that 23.5% of women over 25 have higher education.

In comparison, the percentage of men with the same degree is 20.7%. Does the question remain where these women who are not in leadership positions are? What are the factors that prevent them from reaching the place? What companies have been doing to contribute to leveraging these women's participation?

From a walk with not only historical but also numerical evidence that shouts the need to evolve the theme, we gained reinforcement and strength through the 2030 plan. We have a sustainable development goal (SDG) dedicated to the theme that aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls from a global perspective. As well underlined by SDG 5, gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also the necessary basis for building a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. However, everyone must be committed in practice to achieving this goal, whether setting goals or rooting this in the culture of our companies. As per the findings of a research study by Elias (2018), it has been analysed that women's leadership offers extensive opportunities to set goals to develop and engage. When pronounced and put into practice in a corporate environment, words can positively affect when we seek to raise and increase the number of women in leadership positions (Alshareef &

AlGassim, 2021). Raising the flag only through a speech without effective action in practice will not change the scenario in our organizations and will increasingly distance us from what we are committed to achieving in the 2030 plan or even beyond (Alghamdi et al., 2022).

#### 2.8.10 **Role of stakeholders in the women's leadership journey**

It was determined by the research of Maak and Pless (2006) that the first and foremost principle of women empowerment is to develop a high level of corporate leadership for gender equality as an outcome of collaboration among the UN Global Compact and UN Women, which was significantly espoused by approximately 1000 business leaders across the globe. It involves sustainable extraordinary level support and leading highest-level procedures for gender parity development of the goals and objectives regarding gender parity along with the inclusion of internal and external stakeholders in the establishment of the effective strategies, plans and programmes to advance equality and make sure regarding the policies related to gender-sensitive and including corporate culture. Hannum et al. (2015) stated that it is expected for accountable leaders to make sure that at least 30 per cent of the women participate in the process of decision-making and governance as well. In addition, the core component for impacting the change is identified as deep commitment, i.e. the capability to change and make a change (Hannum et al., 2015). Moreover, the primary failure of the leadership journey of women is determined to be the absence of political drive and leadership drive generally. In addition, the “will” should be more than just a statement of honourable backing; it must be an obligation that can be obvious in the practice of behaviour and performances in both the sectors, whether public or private (Hannum et al., 2015). Eventually, changes may occur without the accountability undertaken by the leaders; however, it might take a bit longer. One of the most significant vital stakeholders that play an essential role in empowering the woman towards the leadership role is government as it must develop a permitting atmosphere through the public

policy and legislation, for instance, safeguarding the parity in gender in all parts and at all the education level system along with career programmes that significantly root out the gender categorising and sentient and insensible bias (Maak & Pless, 2006). Concerning employment, it is crucial to legislate the employ protected paid maternity parental parenthood leave and implement an effective strategy that is implemented systematically for accessing affordable childcare that significantly meets all the working parents and employees (Bonebright et al., 2011).

Furthermore, the government is also held accountable for making sure that the existence of the laws in a place are applied effectively for tackling sexual harassment and discrimination in the organisation; it also involves indirect discrimination and legislation to expand the possibilities of working with flexible and part-time work (Hannum et al., 2015).

Moreover, it also involves eliminating the gender pay gap that discriminates the individual through the robust legal frameworks that cover all the discernment in employment training and development pay promotion; however, all of these must be enforced effectively (Maak & Pless 2006). Confronting discriminatory practices is not enough; however, it is required to supplement it with positive actions for emerging and spreading opportunities to repay the legacy of the drawbacks that might arise due to gender inequality. Bonebright et al. (2011) identified that it is highly significant to pay more attention to the reduction in the obstacles and act positively in favour of entrepreneurship of women along with access to advantages from the list of public and private sector supplier and procurement opportunities and including access to finance and the contribution in the business networks and trade allocations (Hannum et al., 2015).

## 2.9 Leadership context

This section discusses the policy environment, socio-cultural context, family and country and workplace experience context of leadership in Saudi Arabia.

### 2.9.1 Policy environment

The policy environment consists of the country's legal and regulatory framework, which directly impacts society and workplace policies. Saudi Arabia's policy environment has undergone a transformational change with vision 2030 (Alghamdi et al., 2022). The following sections trace the country's policy environment pre- and post-promulgation of vision 2030.

#### 2.9.1.1 Saudi Arabia's pre-vision 2030

Before the declaration of vision 2030, Saudi Arabia was presented as a bastion of *Wahhabism*, described as “a puritanical form of Sunni Islam which advocates the return to 7<sup>th</sup>-century Islamic practices” (Eum, 2019; Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004). *Wahhabism* religious nationalism was used by the El Saud family (from 1932 to 2016) as a rallying point to unite an otherwise disparate nation and contrasted with the neighbouring countries' approach that relied on secular nationalism (Hitman, 2018). Hitman (2018) puts it succinctly when she states that *Wahhabism* functioned

*“...as an umbrella to construct a homogenous nation out of a fragmented diverse and plural Arabian society” culminating in a “pious nation.”*

The presence of Mecca and Medina's holy sites on its borders bolstered the country's puritanical reputation, making it a real symbolic "cradle of Islam" Through gender segregation and a veiling custom, the state portrayed women as Symbols of national authenticity and identity and visual border markers of virginity and morality, working closely with religious clergy (Al-Rasheed 2013).

Women were confined to the home and charged with the critical role of producing and nurturing pious offspring (Alghamdi et al., 2022) and being the guardians of the moral purity of the nation (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Until 2002, women's education was under the department of religious guidance rather than the ministry of education (Hamdan et al., 2016; Sandekian et al., 2015). This ensured that their scholarship would not deviate from their societal role of being

good wives and excellent mothers for the nation's future generations (ibid). This notwithstanding, there is general unanimity among scholars that there is nothing in the Quran and hadith that advocates gender segregation (specifically the treatment of women as second-class citizens) or that promotes inequality of the sexes or acceptance of patriarchy (Alotaibi et al., 2017; Saad 2020) or even forbids women from working (Saad, 2020). There appears to be an unfilled need to review and discuss education leadership and faith through the true meaning of Islam (Saeeda Shah, 2015).

### **2.9.1.2 Precipitating factors of Wahhabism**

An assortment of socio-politico-economic factors led to the entrenchment of *Wahhabism* in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the weighting of the relative importance of which being beyond the scope of this study, namely

- A. The universal patriarchal nature of society adduces research evidence that the practice of restricting women's rights was pervasive around the world in medieval times. For instance, in England, under common law, whatever the woman-owned became the property of the husband at the date of marriage; in France, married women's rights were limited until as late as 1965; in China, women were restricted to the home, and in India, a wife was expected to throw herself onto the husband's funeral pyre and burn to death as a guarantee of her automatic entry into heaven. Traditionally Saudi women's rights were restricted where in the past, a girl child was considered a source of misery and burden resulting in some female babies being buried alive (Kattan et al., 2016).
- B. The conflation of the state and religion - Saudi Arabia is regarded as the birthplace of Islam and the "cradle" of an ancient civilization and culture dating back several thousands of years, woven to form the nation's heritage (Alotaibi et al., 2017). The line between tradition and Islam became increasingly blurred over time, giving

- religious clerics latitude to interpret the Quran through the lens of patriarchy (Kattan et al., 2016). Scholars are unanimous that the state cooperated with the clerics by giving some of the gender-based *fatwas* (authoritative Islamic legal interpretations) statutory legal authority (Eum, 2019; Kattan et al., 2016). For instance, according to the Quran, man and woman “were created of a single soul” and are morally equal in God's sight, yet laws entrenched gender segregation (Saad, 2020; Kattan et al., 2016).
- C. Saudi oil-based economic prosperity - as a result of economic prosperity, the state provided subsidized housing, water, electricity, education and high salaries. It kept educated women at home, earning unemployment benefits. According to O’Sullivan (2013), women received 86% of such benefits during the economic boom, of whom 40% were university and college graduates leading to a portrayal of Saudi women as educated but idle (Eum, 2019; Kattan et al., 2016), citing (Al-Rasheed, 2013) while employment of migrant female labour went up to as high as 38% of the labour force (Eum, 2019; Kattan et al., 2016). Further, this undreamed-of economic boom that attracted migrant labour and increased general affluence in the population resulted in calls for more stringent rules to prevent moral standards and impairment of the pious image of the Saudi nation (Kattan et al., 2016).
- D. Foreign-inspired political events - included the 1979 invasion of the mecca’s grand mosque by extremist insurgents led by one Juhayman Al- Otaybi demanding the return to the 7<sup>th</sup>-century version of Islam, abolition of television and discarding of other relics of western influence (Eum, 2019) citing (Al-Rasheed, 2013). The other event was the 1979 Shia Islamic revolution in Iran led by Ayatollah Khomeini, which instigated Saudi s in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia to agitate against the state (Eum, 2019). The last factor of note was the *Sahwa* (awakening) movement which

campaigned against the state's alliance with the Americans (infamously referred to as "infidels") during the 1990 gulf war.

As a response to the factors described above, King Khaled (1975-1982) proclaimed Saudi Arabia as the "cradle of Sunni Islam" and adopted stricter religious conservatism during his all-caring reign, which resulted in more powers being given to religious elites banning women participation in artistic performances giving legislative backing to *fatwas about* women marriages mobility and polygamy (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Further, during the blessed reign of King Fahd (1982-2005), further gender-based restrictions were introduced to improve the morality of the nation and enhance its standing as the "cradle of Islam." These included stricter veiling policies in public places, formalising the driving ban into law and entrenching the male guardianship law, which meant women could no longer get an education to execute business transactions take a job or travel without permission from a man (Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004). According to Eum (2019), it cost usd1105 per month to hire an expatriate male driver, a cost which was manageable in addition to spoiling the womenfolk at home (women were able to shop from upmarket western shops that had opened outlets in Saudi Arabia) during the oil-based economic boom era given the generous salaries and subsidies which Saudi males received (Alotaibi et al., 2017; Kattan et al., 2016).

The situation resulted in women staying away from employment due to a lack of education or employment opportunities (Alghamdi et al., 2022) and a lack of motivation or role models for working Saudi women (Almathami et al., 2021). In this background, women reaching leadership positions was unfathomable, and as such, there appear to be almost no studies dedicated to female leadership till the first decade of the millennium.

### **2.9.1.3 Precipitating factors of vision 2030**

Scholarly studies show that the following factors and events led to the promulgation of vision 2030

- A. A fall in oil prices - a fall in oil revenues between 2014 and 2015 resulted in a decline in foreign currency reserves and a ballooning budget deficit which triggered a cut in water and energy subsidies slashing of civil servants' salaries, and recently an imposition of a 5% surtax in January 2018 (Kinninmont, 2017). These circumstances disturbed the complacent existence of the citizens. They created a need for changes in how Saudis perceived work and encouraged the state to think about creating competitiveness and leadership in Saudi's future sustainability, which became an essential focus of vision 2030.
- B. According to the labour force survey of 2016/17 released by the general authority of statistics, the Saudi population grew by 40%, from 23.91m in 2005 to 33.55 in 2017. *Saudisation* was taken up as a drive to replace ex-pats who held 38% of the jobs in the country and were increasingly seen as an impediment in the implementation of the Saudi first brand of nationalism (Eum, 2019). To actualize this strategic intent, in January 2018, the state declared 12 industries in the private sector as reserved for Saudi's only, which was over and above a family tax it had introduced in 2017 for the ex-pats. These measures were meant to make the socio-economic environment less comfortable for expatriates (Eum, 2019) and make space for native Saudi's in business and the workforce. At the same time, the focus was placed on the youth and women of the country who were expected to take over the jobs from the ex-pats. During this period, the unemployment rate of females grew by a substantial 156% to stand at 4m compared to 3.3m for males in 2017 (Varshney, 2019). One of the strategic goals of vision 2030 was to increase women's employment from 22% to 30%.
- C. Increase in the number of educated women – despite that education was only granted to Saudi women in the 1970s, women's participation in education equalled men's in 2003 and surpassed it in 2007. In 2012 women comprised 57% of graduates from Saudi

universities, according to the central department of statistics in KSA (Alotaibi et al., 2017; Kattan et al., 2016). Most of these women performed domestic duties and received unemployment benefits from the state post-graduation. In his supreme wisdom, the crown prince saw an opportunity in this “idle” asset of great value that could be galvanized in line with the human capital theory (which advocates the full exploitation of talents at the disposal of an entity to further its fortunes). He conceptualized that diversifying the economy from being over-reliant on oil and thus maintaining the affluence that the general citizenry had become accustomed to women's role in economic development needed to be encouraged (Kattan et al., 2016; Varshney, 2019). As a result, vision 2030 places a particular emphasis on the advancement of women.

- D. Increase in the number of students studying abroad - the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme was launched in 2005 and saw 174,333 Saudi students studying abroad by the 2015/16 academic year. This exposed male and female students to cultures in other countries, especially the west, that liberalized their views on gender segregation roles and expectations of women and workplace dignity and equality ((Kattan et al., 2016). The government realized that society was at a pivotal turning point and that vision 2030 reflected these changing sensibilities.
- E. According to Alotaibi et al. (2017), as role models, Islamic history going back centuries is “Strewn” with stories of female heroes across all fields of human endeavour. One such Khadija was the wife of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and another was the famous 13<sup>th</sup>-century Egyptian woman named Shajart Al-Durr. Inspirational female role models also started to emerge during the second decade of the millennium - Arwa Al-Hujaili (the first Saudi female trainee lawyer in 2013); Luba Olayan, who was named one of the most influential women by Forbes and time magazine in 2013;

Buyan Alzahran (the first female lawyer to be granted a practising license by the KSA Ministry of justice in 2013) and Ayat Bakhreeba (the first Saudi female to achieve appointment as a police officer in 2013) (Kattan et al., 2016). Such role models gave women groups the courage to campaign for equal rights with males. At the same time, their very existence indirectly played an essential part in helping to change negative stereotypes against women (Kattan et al., 2016). These notable women also inspired other younger women to have aspirations and ambitions that would lead them to leadership roles and enable them to contribute to the country's economy.

- F. Rural-urban migration - empirical evidence shows that 26% of the Saudi population lived in urban areas in the early 1970s, and by 1990, that figure had gone up to 76%. The effect of the urban migration was to reduce tribal affiliations and promote societal integration (Kattan et al., 2016). As a result, societal views about gender segregation began to change, as confirmed in a survey carried out in 2013 in 11 Saudi cities involving 3000 males and females. Furthermore, it showed strong acceptance of women taking formal employment and participating in national development (O'Sullivan, 2013). Therefore, the urbanization of Saudi lives paved the way for more significant roles and opportunities for women in the workforce, which was further taken up in vision 2030.
- G. Globalization - the rise of Saudi Arabia as an economic power in the Arabian Peninsula due to the surge in its oil revenues attracted both technological investments from the west. It led to an enhancement of the importance of technical and administrative skills. The focus on technology and scientific temper ultimately resulted in the reduced social standing of the *ULAMA* (Islamic scholars) (Kattan et al., 2016). Furthermore, Saudi Arabia joined the world trade organization in 2005, which required it to reduce the influence of cultural, religious and social practices and norms in business dealings with the west (Saad, 2020; Kattan et al.,

2016). Vision 2030, therefore, targeted creating a society and a business environment that was diverse open and accepting of others' perspectives while preserving the local identity.

- H. Internet - access to the internet exposed Saudi s to more liberal views, resulting in changing views on gender segregation and acceptance of women joining the labour force, thus preparing the ground for more reforms (Saad, 2020; Kattan et al., 2016).
- I. International pressure - the September 9, 2001, terrorist bombings in Washington and New York 2001 (in which it was discovered that 15 Saudi nationals had participated) led the international community to pressure the Saudi authorities to tone down their strict religious conservatism. Though stressful, the situation led to a renewed focus on female education. It was believed that educated mothers would nurture children with moderate and liberal outlooks on life (Meijer, 2010). Further, the Arab Spring of 2011 also contributed to the state's need to address the problem of high unemployment among the youth (who comprised more than 50% of the population) and women, who were increasingly getting more educated than their male counterparts (Eum, 2019). Therefore, these above factors precipitated a situation that called for reforms in the form of vision 2030.

In response to the above factors, the state introduced a raft of carefully considered changes over an extended period, namely it outlawed forced marriages; appointed the first woman minister of education; opened the first mixed-gender education institution (The King Abdullah University Of Technology) in 2009; allowed women to work albeit in segregated places such as women-only hotels and women-only industrial town of Hofuf in 2012; appointed 20 women to the 150 member advisory body (The *Shura* Council) in June 2013; and granted women the right to vote and participate in elections in 2015 (Eum, 2019; Varshney, 2019). These ongoing changes were further aggregated and institutionalized through vision 2030, which is discussed in the next section in detail.

## 2.9.2 Promulgation of vision 2030

### 2.9.2.1 Key elements of vision 2030

Vision 2030 is a national plan with an overarching objective of diversifying the Saudi Arabian economy from dependence on oil revenues. Promulgated in April 2016 and championed by Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (the de facto ruler in King Salman's government), the vision is premised on three themes, namely; "a vibrant society," "a thriving economy", and "an ambitious nation" (Eum, 2019). Vision 2030 aims to create employment in this overriding vision, especially for Saudi youth and women (Eum, 2019; Varshney, 2019).

It is important to note that vision 2030 explicitly states that women are a "great asset" and that the state would do everything possible "*to develop their talents, invest in their productive capabilities, and enable them to strengthen their future and contribute to the development of our society and economy*" (Varshney, 2019). Once again, women are portrayed as saviours of the nation, albeit economically instead of in a puritanical religious sense that had kept them indoors and away from contributing to the country's development and economic growth. With vision 2030, women are presented as financial partners of the state (Eum, 2019).

### 2.9.2.2 Post promulgation of vision 2030 reforms and associated policy shifts

Following the promulgation of vision 2030, the crown prince introduced the following reforms curtailed the powers of the religious police; retired religious hardliners (most of whom were opposed to reforms) from the government; opened up the red sea region as a free tourism zone; permitted mixed-gender concerts and cinemas in 2017 and allowed for women driving in 2018 (both of which had up until then been labelled social and cultural taboos); permitted women to join the armed forces; allowed women to work side by side with men as long as there were separate ablution facilities and prayer rooms (Eum, 2019). Further, the crown prince declared that women were no longer necessary to wear the *abaya* as long as their attire was decent and respectable. A declaration received affirmation from a Saudi cleric in march 2018

was reported in the gulf news (Eum, 2019). Further, to facilitate and protect women working in public places, the council of ministers passed anti-harassment legislation, which imposed a hefty fine of up to USD 80,000 on the offenders.

The crown prince announced a significant policy shift in October 2017 that Saudi Arabia was shifting to moderate Islam and declaring that the pursuit of ultra-conservative Islam (Wahhabism) over the past 30 years had not been a normal phenomenon (Eum, 2019). In conjunction with the vision 2030 themes, this pronouncement signalled an official departure from religious nationalism to Saudi first nationalism. The economy occupies the central spot, and women are expected to play a pivotal role (Eum, 2019; Varshney, 2019).

Given the openness that has characterised the transitional period, it is essential to find out through scholarly research whether women have been placed in a position where they can develop their talents, improve their future and make a telling contribution to Saudi society and economy as contemplated in vision 2030; or better still whether they have made significant strides towards living up to their new construction as envisaged in vision 2030. The objective barometer of this would be their performance in leadership positions (in the public service in this case), with the enquiry extending to examining challenges and barriers they are encountering, if any, given that people take time to change habits, especially patriarchal ones (Saad, 2020; Alotaibi et al., 2017) that have been entrenched over a long time (Kattan et al., 2016). As a result, this acknowledges that reality on the ground may differ from the vision's normative formal pronouncements. The current study was designed to fill a significant gap in the existing body of knowledge.

While the current study focuses on leadership positions, it becomes essential to explore the entire construct and meaning of leadership and relate it to the context of Saudi Arabia to understand the implications of leadership roles for women in Saudi Arabia. Therefore the next section looks at the literature on leadership in general and contextualizes it in the Saudi

situation during the period immediately before the openness that was ushered in by the vision 2030 reforms.

The twin developments of a poorly performing oil-based economy, alarming unemployment rates, and the resultant knock-on effects described above led the Saudi government to pronounce more reforms following vision 2030 (Eum, 2019). The Red Sea region was opened to free tourism; mixed-gender concerts and cinemas were permitted in 2017 and 2018, respectively (both had been considered social and cultural taboos); women were allowed to join the armed forces; women were permitted to work alongside men as long as there were separatists. (Eum, 2019).

A significant policy shift was the national announcement by the crown prince in October 2017 that Saudi Arabia was shifting to moderate Islam and declaring that the pursuit of ultra-consecutive Islam (Wahhabism) over the past 30 years had not been ever day (Armanios, 2003).

Significantly, the crown prince described the state as not being a normal state during Wahhabism, given the way women were being treated (Armanios, 2003). Given the openness that has characterized the transitional period, it is essential to find out through scholarly research whether women have been placed in a position where they can develop their talents, improve their future and make a telling contribution to Saudi society and economy as contemplated in vision 2030 (Alghamdi et al., 2022); or better still whether they have made significant strides towards living up to their new construction as envisaged in vision 2030. The objective barometer of this would be their performance in leadership positions (in the public service in this case), with the enquiry extending to examining challenges and barriers they are encountering, if any, given that people take time to change habits, especially patriarchal ones that have been entrenched over a long time (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). This is in appreciation

that objective reality on the ground may differ from normative official pronouncements in the vision.

The following section looks at the literature on leadership in general, with overtures on what is known about the Saudi situation during the period immediately before the openness that was ushered in by the vision 2030 reforms.

### 2.10 The socio-cultural context of women's leadership in KSA

Research evidence shows that women in leadership or aspiring to be leaders encounter the following challenges:

These refer to barriers mainly due to the conflation of state culture and religion, especially regarding enforcing *Wahhabism* before the promulgation of vision 2030. There is a host of scholarly research which shows that the enforcement of gender segregation has been an albatross around the neck for women who wanted to join the labour force and later who aspired for advancement in leadership roles (Saad, 2020; Hodges, 2017; Kattan et al., 2016; Varshney, 2019). Evidence from the above scholars shows that the place of a woman was traditionally at home, where she was expected to be a good wife and an excellent mother to her offspring while it was the duty of the husband to take care of her and her children (Alotaibi et al., 2017; Eum, 2019). as noted by Kattan et al. (2016), such traditional cultural norms and perspectives take time to change and often face challenges and pressure as women seeking leadership advancement were viewed by the *ULAMA* as contrarian to the accepted moral values, given that the primary focus of the Saudi culture is the “family” (Kattan et al., 2016; Varshney, 2019). Such cultural norms manifested themselves in male resistance to female leadership. A subordinate can deliberately refuse or neglect to follow orders or post-sub-optimal performance under a male manager (Saad, 2020; Kattan et al., 2016). Further research shows that due to the traditional father-figure role of males, male managers displayed a paternalistic management style that expects the followers to communicate the critical attributes of unquestioning

obedience and autocratic decision-making where the leader assigns tasks and determines the quality of work and also shows how it should be done (Kattan et al., 2016; Ben Saad & Abbas, 2018) citing (Shireen Chengadu & Scheepers, 2017). Such a conceptualization of a leader contrasted with the perceptions around female abilities and gendered roles, as women were considered subservient lacking confidence and only meant to obey rather than dictate.

### **2.10.1 Family and relationship context of women's leadership in the KSA**

These are considered higher than organisational barriers and more so in a society such as Saudi Arabia, with a history of strict gender segregation (Shabbir et al., 2017). Personal barriers centre on self-confidence, self-image, and self-efficacy (Kattan et al., 2016). According to research, Saudi women suffer from poor self-image, self-confidence, and self-efficacy due to socialisation (Bursztyrn et al., 2020). They have been invisible actors due to severe gender segregation, which consigned them to the home (society gave them a “familial role as opposed to a professional role”. Women were treated as perpetual minors, making it difficult for them to “image” themselves as successful leaders, and thus they lacked the confidence to take responsibility (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Hodges, 2017).

Further, women leaders face difficulty maintaining a healthy balance between family obligations and professional responsibilities, often opting for the latter when forced to choose. Research also shows that some female managers feel guilty about failing in their familial duties when they spend time pursuing professional aspirations even without being confronted (Alghofaily, 2019). These outcomes result from socialisation through upbringing and gendered roles but are perpetuated by the family dynamics and relationships with family members (Alghamdi et al., 2022). Much research is still needed to investigate the changes in the family dynamics of Saudi people post vision 2030 and how they may impact women's leadership privations (Amran Et Al., 2020). Also, no recent research has discussed changes in aspirations, confidence, self-efficacy, leadership styles, and effectiveness of female leaders in Saudi

Arabia. A much earlier study from the USA had indicated that there is a range of attributes that distinguish women leaders from men (Nakitende, 2019), which are namely:

- Women leaders are more adept at managing adversity and carry on with their duties and responsibilities to counter the hardships and difficulties with finesse and an audacious attitude.
- Women leaders are more persuasive rather than their male counterparts.
- Women leaders appear predisposed to negate the rules and take more risks than their male counterparts.
- Women leaders display a team-building inclusive leadership style of decision-making and problem-solving.
- Women leaders have more vital interpersonal skills.
- Women leaders judge situations more accurately.
- Women leaders are more receptive to ideas and or information from all sides.

Therefore similar research is warranted in Saudi Arabia to understand the roles and effectiveness of women leadership.

### **2.10.1.1 Workplace context of female leadership in the KSA**

According to Kattan et al. (2016), barriers placed on women's path to leadership include I) discrimination against them concerning selection placement and promotion. This is traced to the fact that the selectors and managers are usually males and prefer males on the presumption that leadership requires a masculine dimension (Alotaibi et al., 2017; Hodges, 2017). II) a shortage of women and men willing to take aspiring women leaders as mentees; III) management development programmes based on job rotation which may not be accessible by women as they may not be able to find the balance between work and household duties(Kattan et al., 2016). Given the lack of mentors and limited opportunities for exposure and experience that such management development policies unfold for women (Sobehart, 2008), it constitutes

constructive and systematic discrimination against women. Other studies show that there is a dearth of professional management development programmes, with one respondent (a dean in a business administration college) in a survey conducted by Kattan et al. (2016) stating that she could not recall when she last went for a management development course in her 37 years of work experience most of which was in a leadership position (Alghofaily 2019; Kattan et al., 2016).

Other organisational barriers cited in research include unsupportive females, especially colleagues, who were often consumed by jealousy (Alghofaily, 2019; Kattan et al., 2016); lack of professional networking (WASTA-Arabic for “connections”, which the Saudi s colloquially call vitamin c - whereby family or members of one’s tribe will mediate on one’s behalf to get the best possible compensation or reward in a given situation irrespective of performance) when it comes to hiring and promotions (Alghofaily, 2019). This is mainly due to Saudi society's closed nature, especially among women, where traditional values limit social interaction between non-mahram (people who can marry each other) males and females. Similarly, women face a barrier to learning at the workplace, as they are prevented from involvement in decision-making and lack authority to make decisions. This is because, in Saudi organizations, decision-making is highly centralised at the top of the hierarchical structure with a male leader, making it nearly impossible for women to get an opportunity to hone their decision-making skills, resulting in low self-confidence (Abalkhail, 2017; Alghofaily, 2019). Another organizational barrier for women is the lack of role models with whom ordinary aspiring women leaders can relate, as most heroines (if any) are seen as belonging to the upper class (Aristocracy) (Hodges, 2017). So at the organizational level, women are prevented from getting experience and self-development. Still, they may also lose self-confidence and self-efficacy due to the explicit policies and implicit protocols of promotion and development. Significant organisational barriers to women's leadership include discriminatory work

procedures and promotions where women are treated as outsiders based on their physical appearance (Abalkhail, 2017; Kattan et al., 2016). There is also a lack of empowering legislation that could encourage organizations to develop proactive policies and create supportive environments like providing day-care centres for women (Saad. 2020).

## **2.11 Relationship between gender and leadership**

### **2.11.1 Provisional selves and professional identity**

Gender roles refer to the different roles of men and women, and studies often divide these into the categories such as feminine and masculine (Al-Shamrani, 2013). Feminine refers to the gender role of women, and masculine refers to the gender roles of men. Scholars and researchers such as Ibarra et al., 2014 have continuously explored the relationship between gender roles with leadership. Other scholars, such as Herrera et al. (2012), have also explored the relationship between gender roles with leadership. These scholars do not neglect the conceptual framework of the relationship between both these. Professional identity is often defined in values, motives, attitudes and beliefs, which impact both the professional practice at the workplace (Nieva, 2015) and the professional behaviours of the individuals. Traditionally it is assumed that shapes over time when feedback and experiences vary, allowing individuals to attain insights and meanings of their considerable talents, preferences, and values. Therefore studies suggest that professional identity is mutable and adaptable in the initial days of an individual's career.

Identity, which is often referred to as personal and image, is different. The professional landscape refers to the impressions that individuals trust that they convey. It is more like a reputation where individuals share their qualities and expect to be ascribed by others (Reicher et al., 2018). For instance, credibility, judgment, trustworthiness, creativity, and other attributes. Theoretical mechanisms to theorise the relationship between gender roles and

professional identity suggest that while some may be connected with the qualities, others are associated with the experience.

Furthermore, social theorists suggest that career transition also impacts individuals' professional identity. Career transition refers to the transition of a career from one to another and a new career that demands new skills and abilities (Tlaiss & Al Waqfi, 2020). Behaviours, values and attitudes may also change with the career transition, where the new environment may demand and reshape the individuals' values, beliefs and attitudes (Eubanks et al., 2012). Therefore, the research found that new patterns with career transition redefine and reshape individuals' professional identities. New situations may require individuals to change their already established values and beliefs. As Ibarra et al. (2014) note, “socialisation is not a unilateral process imposing conformity on the individual but a negotiated adaptation. People strive to improve the fit between themselves and their work environment”. This suggests that socialisation is the adaptability and adjustment of individuals between the environment they work in and their individual beliefs and knowledge. Their experience enables individuals to redefine the new professional responsibilities and roles and assess whether or not these positions align with their values.

Professional identity is strongly connected with gender roles, as already mentioned. Studies have found that conventional professional roles are also distributed into feminine and masculine parts. Some of the functions, such as physical labour, are associated with male roles and are traditionally considered men's roles (Carroll & Levy, 2010). On the other hand, a personal secretary is associated with feminine roles and should be played more by women. The paper conducted by the participant Ibarra et al. (2014) included the elements such as firms where the participants are working and their gender roles to determine the relationship of gender roles with the professional identity of individuals. Other articles, such as Kragt and

Guenter (2018) and Clapp-Smith et al. (2018), have similar professional identity and leadership claims.

These articles suggest that the relationship between self-identity and leadership cannot be ignored. On the other hand, studies indicate that the traditional thinking of relating gender identity with professional identity may be incorrect. In addition to those, studies such as Kasperuniene et al. (2019) also suggest similar claims that the current workforce frameworks and the business models have changed the traditional assumption of masculinity and femininity about the professional roles and identity may not apply to the current workforce. But critical social theorists like Ibarra et al. (2014) don't ignore the link between gender and professional identity, Identity and leadership.

Research suggests that professional identity and gender are not disconnected completely. Scholars and researchers have conducted thorough research to evaluate and determine leadership's basis. Managers learn leadership practice from observations and practical experiments (Tlaiss & Al Waqfi, 2020). Leadership in the literature has been linked to these experiences and comments; however, modern scholars such as Ibarra et al. (2014) connect leadership with identity and suggest that identity plays an essential role in leadership development (Collins, 2012). These scholars explore the manager's and leaders' concepts, values, and beliefs to determine how these are connected with leadership practices. According to Ibarra et al. (2014), “a compelling argument that the development of leadership skills is inextricably integrated with the development of the person’s self-concept as a leader is emerging. But research and theorizing on leadership development have yet to specify the processes and moderating conditions that account for this identity transformation”. Identity is not only associated with social constructs; it determines the professional role of an individual and shapes the future, meaning what an individual would become in the future.

Identity-based model leadership development conceptual model, which is provided by scholars such as Ibarra et al. (2014), suggests that with a role transition, “disengage from central behaviourally-anchored identities while exploring new possible selves and eventually integrating a new alternative identity (Daire & Gilson, 2014). Old and new identities coexist in the interim, as people try on provisional selves refined through social and emotional feedback or abandoned if either ineffective or blatantly inauthentic” (Ibarra et al., 2014). Another scholar, Huisin societies, the change and transformation in the organisations by subject to the personal transformation of individuals. During the business process redesign (BPR) procedure, individuals may feel a sense of self-awakening based on their understanding of change. This further allows organisational transformation.

The concept of leadership practices follows the ideas of scholars and researchers such as Kotter (1990) and Heifetz et al. (2001). Leadership means the application of innovative and new technologies to organisations. These scholars suggest that leadership is strongly connected with organisational transformation. Furthermore, change is subject to developing skills and abilities and systematically transforming the individual's values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (Seemiller & Priest, 2017). The personal motivation and ambition of the leaders also significantly impact the organisational transformation. Studies have found that experience develops skills, abilities, evaluation, and judgment and makes new meanings and purposes that make new transformations and changes desirable.

### **2.11.2 Gender and leadership**

As already mentioned in the organisational setup, several biases regarding the genders are famous. Some biases and beliefs regarding the masculine and feminine may linger in organisations' leadership and creative practices (Al-Shamrani, 2013). Studies have found that particular cultural and social biases regarding the gender role of women pose a severe restriction to the leadership abilities of women (Baden-Fuller & Haefliger, 2013). Moreover,

the organisation's culture has been changed since the early work to encompass many studies of business organisations and some public agencies. The gender gap in employment has been one of the focus areas of academic scholars and researchers to determine the extent to which gender discrimination practices influence the recruitment process of companies and organizations, as well as to determine to what degree gender discrimination affects internal organisational beliefs and behaviour regarding women (Fitzpatrick & Queenan, 2020). Some studies suggest that finding a career for women is much more difficult around the globe than for men. Furthermore, this group of scholars argues that women work under vulnerable conditions and are paid lower wages than men. They work for low-quality jobs, and their future growth for a position in an organisation is also uncertain compared to men.

This group of researchers particularly considers women's biases and suggests that the percentage ratio between the women and men workforce is 75% and 49% in the current global force. There is a gap of 26%, which is a significant employment gap among both genders (Christofides et al., 2013). Additionally, studies have found that in some domains, particularly in the Gulf countries such as third-world countries, this gap extends to even 50% (Akkari, 2004). These countries do not provide labour or workforce opportunities to women. Scholars and research suggest that in the African countries and Arab states, the employment gap further extends to 16%. However, women are more susceptible to less paid jobs and working in dire circumstances. According to Canrinus et al. (2011), they tend to do some business to meet their demands, while on the other hand, women need to work for their households. Furthermore, this group of researchers suggests that stereotypes may impact women's leadership in an internal environment.

In addition, this researcher group does not ignore the biases and discrimination in an organisation against men. In organisations where women are in leadership and managing, they promote and hire women. In such an organisation, chances of growth and promotion to

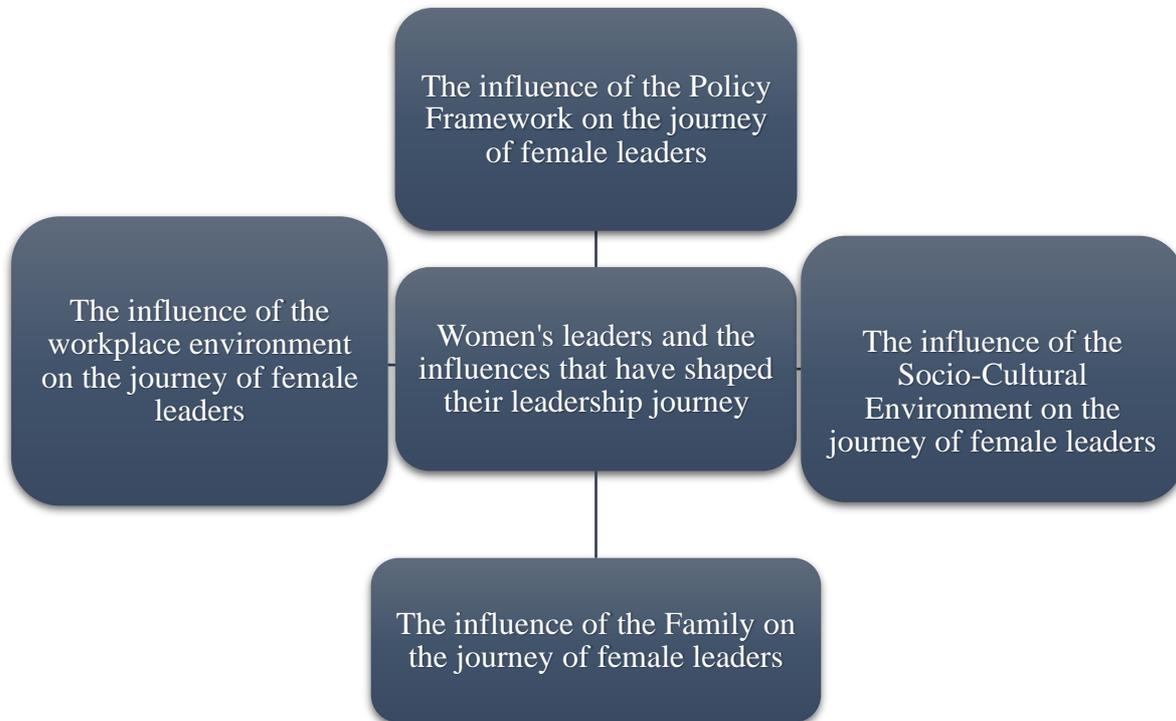
managing and leadership positions for women are more than that of men. Therefore in these kinds of organisations, men are subject to gender discrimination. Nevertheless, regarding women's leadership in the workforce, these scholars suggest that men are subject to cultural biases and traditional stereotypes to work as subordinates of women in both public and private sectors. That eventually impacts the leadership practices of women.

On the contrary, another group of scholars, including Ibarra et al. (2014), comes to opposite conclusions. They suggest that women outshone men in the current workforce in the leadership dimensions. This group of researchers come with different dimensions and indicates that the significant thing regarding women is that they may lack a solid vision to determine new opportunities in an environment (Almathami et al., 2021; Alghofaily, 2019). This may influence their leadership practices and create poor organisation plans and strategic objectives for organisations (Gartzia & Van Engen, 2012). To determine the influence of gender on leadership activities, this group of scholars focus on both genders. Ibarra and Obodaru (2009) noted that “the first surprise for us given prior published research was that we found no evidence of a female modesty effect. On the remaining dimensions, the women and men gave ratings about the same”. This group of scholars and researchers suggest that men work happily under women's leadership in an organisational setup. These studies do not entirely ignore the gender biases and stereotypes; however, they indicate that they are not necessarily against women; these could be against men (Alghofaily, 2019; Abalkhail, 2017).

The significant difference among the findings of these scholars is that they have found that women tend to perform lower when it comes to envisioning. Envision is one of the most important traits and abilities for leadership in an organisation which allows one to evaluate and redefine the organisation's strategic objectives. Envision allows the organisational transition and change as well. When the leadership is less visionary, it will impact organisations' goals and target achievements.

## 2.12 The conceptual framework for experiences of women leaders in the public sector

Based on the reviewed literature, women leaders' journey appears to be impacted by several factors, including the policy framework of the country's socio-cultural context, their family relationships, and their workplace context, as captured in the following diagram



**Figure 2-2: Conceptual Framework of Women Leaders in the Public Sector**

While the above conceptual map provided a framework for the research and helped develop the research questionnaires, it is the women's experiences used to develop women's journey and explain the factors that may have impacted their leadership journeys. It has been found in the literature that the leadership practices of individuals are influenced by perceptions and biases as well as by personal values, attitudes, and beliefs. Preferences regarding gender roles and discrimination, such as the roles of women and men are different, impact individuals' leadership activities (Robertson & Barling, 2017). In addition to those, social and cultural values and religious beliefs may also impact women's leadership.

Furthermore, most researchers and scholars link leadership to change and transition. The conceptual model of organisational change under visionary leadership was considered in

the second half of the 20th century. In 1960 a sociologist offered a conceptual model regarding the phase of evolution and the tasks required for change and transition in an organisation. This conceptual change model was based on a three-step process known as passage separation transition and incorporation. Their model is based on Lewin's work which suggests the phase is of "unfreezing changing and refreezing and notions of alternating phase is of exploration provisional commitment and integration to conceptualize identity transformation". It has been analysed that the mixed research method is utilised to complete this research study and obtain the objectives effectively and appropriately.

### **2.12.1 The influence of the Socio-Cultural Environment on the journey of female leaders**

According to Cseh et al. (2013), women's journey as a leader is highly impacted due to the socio-cultural environment factor, as this factor comprises the social system and national culture. In addition, the system is identified as an intangible component that might significantly impact the perception of behaviour, relationships, way of life, the existence of a person the society, and survival (Gray & Mitten 2018). It is suggested that women are usually described as charismatic leaders, and they typically attain more temper criticism with positive responses than men. It was elucidated by Appelbaum et al. (2003) that women are more likely to adopt more participative and democratic leadership styles than their male colleagues, who seem to possess more directive or autocratic leadership styles. In numerous cultures, women are forced to conduct local work and look after everybody at home. At the same time, males are upraised to be authoritative such as at home. They expect their commands to be followed. However, these characteristics are usually transmitted to the organisation (Longman et al., 2018). In the socio-cultural environment, women are generally expected to pursue their careers by reaching the topmost level and managing their homes under the leadership of their husbands (Abalkhail, 2017). Therefore being a leader in such circumstances can be relatively challenging. Women who are sandwiched between masculine supremacy at home and their roles as leaders in the

organisation could not be fulfilled. The male members cannot assist this situation as they have been raised in a culture where males are superior to women (Funnell & Chi Dao, 2013). Therefore, women must be more self-confident or commanding in many situations, which can be referred to as women being strict when they are leaders in the workplace.

Moreover, a good leader must possess considerable skills to enhance productivity and efficiency. Changes in the expectations of the customer's internationalisation development of capabilities inventions in the technical arena appealing establishing and retaining the knowledgeable and skilful human resources and guaranteeing the sustainability of the changes for the long term are the main challenges faced by the leaders (Aschenbrenner, 2006). Therefore, to tackle these challenges, a workplace requires an effective leader capable of utilising human and non-human resources to achieve productive, efficient, and effective accepted organisations. Since now women are in the leadership position, it is authoritative to find if their womanly characteristics and the socio-cultural beliefs that women are weak can make the workplace effective or ineffective (Showunmi, 2021).

#### **2.12.2 The influence of the Policy Framework on the journey of female leaders**

A "Patriarchy" society is an arrangement of connections, convictions and values implanted in political, social and financial frameworks that structure disparity among genders (Metcalf and Mutlaq, 2011). A man-centric structure is found in private and public sectors guaranteeing that men dominate. This man-centric society of patriarchy is every day in Muslim countries, specifically KSA. Saudi culture is entirely based on the customs of Islam, and it influences all aspects of life (Alhareth et al., 2015). The framework or regulation in Saudi Arabia depends on two significant subsystems: 1) the Islamic religion, the religion for most Saudi residents and Hasan essential impact, and (2) customary ancestral traditions. Those two components are vitally and significant when examining the subject of women's freedoms in Saudi Arabia (Bowen, 2015). Women in Saudi Arabia are directed by those two subsystems, which are

simply patriarchal in regulation and norms in the tribe. Besides, those two subsystems are tangled with one another and make a regulation. Saudi residents embrace Islamic society's social, cultural, and religious traits; subsequently, they adopt conservative values (Alhareth et al., 2015). Having a suitable policy framework can lead women to contribute to the entrepreneurship and formal economy as they also significantly impact the journey of women's leadership. Many countries across the globe are working to ensure that their legal frameworks are more gender-neutral and equal both on the nation and legitimate level and in other laws as well. Therefore it is determined that policy framework can have a huge and significant impact on the women's leadership journey. Henceforth, the countries must implement policies that contribute to gender equality and provide women with an opportunity to attain leadership positions. Enforcing access to parental leave is the first and foremost important step (Kuschel and Salvaj, 2018). Providing access to paid maternity and parental leave can enable women to continue their workplace jobs.

Moreover, these leaves must be at least job-protected and employment protected along with the provision of the rights to the women to return to the same or at least equivalent positions in the organisation (Longman et al., 2018). Therefore the OECD established a wide range of policy instruments and recommendations that support the progress in authorising the position of management and leadership roles for women. Furthermore, the minimum quota was set out for women on boards, the diversity in gender policy was implemented, and many more policies were developed (Bangs and Frost, 2012).

### **2.12.3 The influence of the workplace environment on the journey of female leaders**

The journey of women's leadership is also highly impacted due to the workplace environment. For instance, if the organisation has a hostile environment or follows the culture of male superiority over women, it would significantly impact the women's leadership journey (Appelbaum et al., 2003). Moreover, the workplace environment is significant for women and

men as employees spend most of their time in the organisation. Dahlvig and Longman (2014) stated that women are determined to be more concerned regarding the workplace environment. Their leadership journey is more likely to be impacted by the workplace environment. It has been determined that numerous factors significantly impact women's leadership, such as positive professional relationships with employees, noise, temperature, colour, and workplace design (Cseh et al., 2013). It was further found that a comfortable environment can lead the women as a leader to be lenient instead of being harsh with their co-workers, which might enable the women as a leader and other employees working under the commands of women leaders to be more productive and effective in achieving the goals and objectives of the organisation (Dowdy and Hamilton, 2011).

Furthermore, a positive work environment may direct the leader women to remain more productive while accompanying and motivating all the employees working to achieve the organisation's goals and objectives (Lucia and Padgett, 2021). On the other hand, the hostile environment of the workplace may direct the leader women to be demotivated and encouraged to leave the organisation even though being in a leadership position due to which the women being a leader in the organisation would not be able to motivate their employees to accomplish the goals and objectives of the organisation (Wright & Gray, 2013). In addition, the hostile environment could lead the women leader to get demotivated at such a level that it would immediately direct them to leave their jobs.

#### **2.12.4 The influence of the Family on the journey of female leaders**

According to Hannum et al. (2015), family is another factor that significantly impacts women's leadership journey. The conflict that might occur in the family can substantially negatively impact the individual. The issues in the family can affect diverse the mindset of the leaders from the accomplishment of goals and objectives of the organisation (Osi and Teng-Calleja, 2021). Generally, three forms of conflict might affect the women's journey, i.e. strain-

related conflict, time-based conflict and behaviour-based conflict. Thus, such conflicts impact the individual's emotional intelligence (Osi and Teng-Calleja, 2021). Most women's minds are drained due to competition, which makes them emotionally exhausted. The work-family conflict may exhaust the leader's mind faster as they tend to focus more on both roles simultaneously.

Furthermore, due to work-life conflicts, women leaders become more likely to get triggered and annoyed by more minor things (Menchaca et al., 2016). Moreover, due to such disputes related to work-life, women leaders are more likely to lose their self-control and hence less motivated at work. On the contrary, the positive environment provided by the family can direct the leader women to be happier, which might enable them to be more productive and effective along with motivating and encouraging the employees in achieving the goals and objectives of the organisation more effectively and efficiently (O'connell et al., 2015). In addition, most employers hesitate to provide upper management or leadership role to women because, in their opinion, women are not consistent with their job due to family conflicts and issues. Due to the culture of the superiority of men over women, the females are held responsible for all the circumstances that might occur at home, and even in some cases, women are forced to leave their jobs; due to which the management of the organisation thinks twice for employing women as a leader in the organisation (Osi and Teng-Calleja, 2021).

### 2.13 Summary

This chapter discussed leadership theories, including trait behavioural contingency situational and management theories, and critically reviewed the literature regarding implications for women leaders. It also reviewed available literature on the situation as it pertained to women in leadership or aspiring to be leaders in Saudi Arabia before the promulgation of vision 2030, the central tenets of vision 2030 and the implications on a lot of women in leadership roles or aspiring to be leaders leadership theories in general to generate

insight into their impacts on the development of women leaders in Saudi Arabia given women pivotal role in the implementation of vision 2030 and contemporary global trends on women in leadership with an emphasis is on enablers and inhibitors (Amran Et Al., 2020). Additionally, the chapter discussed the Saudi women's experiences related to the building of their self-efficacy, gender stereotyping and development of leadership abilities immediately before the promulgation of vision 2030 and concluded by crystallizing a conceptual framework to guide research into how Saudi women leaders have fared after the promulgation of vision 2030 and attendant reforms given the severe shortage of research literature in this area. Significant findings in the literature include the wide scope women are supposed to play under vision 2030, the discovery of distinct attributes that set women leaders apart from their male counterparts and the deep-rooted nature of gender segregation in Saudi Arabia which present unique additional hurdles for women in leadership roles or aspiring to be leaders.

In addition, the above study has concluded that personal values, beliefs, attitudes and business have influenced the practices of individuals in leadership positions. Different perceptions have impacted the leadership, and business-like traditional roles in women discrimination have influenced individual leadership styles. In the context of the social-cultural environment and its impacts on a women's leadership journey, the study has extracted that the sociocultural factors comprised the overall social system and national culture. Additionally, the social system is highly influenced by the perception of relationships and ways of life, personal existence, and women's journey as a leader. In line with this, it has been evident that men are more responsible and effective leaders while women are categorised as charismatic leaders. Similarly, it has been observed that women in leadership positions are supposed to adopt a participative and democratic leadership style.

In contrast, men should adopt a directive and autocratic leadership style. The foremost reason behind this difference in selection is that women are pressured to conduct regular work

and house chores simultaneously. As illustrated from the above study in the social-cultural environment, it has been expected that women have managed both their career and home while also living under the leadership of their husbands. Henceforth, it isn't easy and challenging for women as they become sandwiched between male dominance in the home and the organisation.

Moreover, the literature has discussed that policy framework significantly impacts women's leadership; therefore, most countries are taking extra care in structuring the policy framework according to the facts and circumstances regarding both genders. The literature mentioned above has justified that parental leave is one of the most significant steps that must be taken by all organizations; along with this, it is also essential to pay maternity leave to women to easily resume their job without any difficulty. Despite this, the workplace environment also impacts women's leadership journey, as women are determined to be more concerned about the workplace environment due to which their leadership has been impacted. Even in women's leadership, positive and professional connections with colleagues and everything they work with have affected their journey; if they don't feel comfortable working in such an environment, it has ultimately harmed their decisions and creativity. It is worth mentioning that the positive environment of an organisation directly leads to an increase in productivity as a woman leader feels more comfortable and motivated while working and develops a strong and positive relationship with co-workers. This all resulted in a positive outcome.

The next chapter now discusses the research methodology employed to conduct the primary research in this study.

### 3. CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 **Introduction:**

This chapter introduces the methodological framework used to investigate women's experiences in leadership positions in the public sector in Saudi Arabia to identify enablers and obstacles. Methodology refers to a researcher's way of thinking and studying a social experience and the reasons for picking one method ahead of other methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The research's contextual framework based on the views and values guides the research. The choice of methods is used in research that answers the ontological epistemological and axiological methodological questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The ontological question addresses a researcher's beliefs on the nature of reality and what there is to know about it. It is deep and tries to identify what can be known about reality. The epistemological question concerns a researcher's beliefs about how reality can be studied, measured, and captured. It describes the possibility of finding the truth about the subject matter. It also describes the scope and depth of reality. It also expresses how to determine confidence in the truth and what is good and not. Axiological question deals with the relationship between the researcher and the reality they are studying. It tries to determine how the researcher sees values in work and how values are classified. Therefore the methodological questions concern how researchers know what they seek to understand (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This chapter presents the study's ontological axiological and epistemological position and the methodology adopted to discuss the resultant methods for understanding the experiences of women in leadership positions in the public sector in Saudi Arabia. It also discusses the specific research methods used for data collection and analysis. It provides reasons for the decision to adopt the strategies and style adopted in carrying out the research and provides an overview of the research validity reliability and transferability. Table's graphs and charts are included where necessary to

provide clarity and comparison. The chapter concludes by discussing the study's ethical considerations.

### 3.2 **Research paradigm:**

The research paradigm guides a study's ontology and epistemology (Saunders et al., 2019). Research paradigms are the fundamental world views or belief systems the researcher holds on how to understand and address problems (Saunders et al., 2019). It involves the researcher's perspective on the research's ontological epistemological and axiological methodological concerns. The three main paradigms are post-positivism constructionism and pragmatism (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this research work, constructivism is preferred. The following section discusses three main paradigms and the rationale for constructivism in the current study.

#### ***Positivism***

A positivist ontological assumption that there is a real-world that can be understood using scientific methods (Quinlan et al., 2019) conforms to ordinary laws. It does not depend on anyone's opinion (Neuman, 2014). It does not believe in myths, metaphysics, and anything that cannot be scientifically proved. It also assumes that every true reality must always be actual irrespective of the environment or condition. It does not consider values, morals or individual opinions. There is an objective reality outside of the researcher and the context. Epistemologically, since truth is objective and universal, it can be accessed and studied objectively, irrespective of the context of the situation or the people involved (Bryman, 2021). Usually, the research strategy used in positivist research is quantitative (Quinlan et al., 2019), as reality is presumed to have the quality of being gauged and assessed in discreet and unambiguous terms. The truth is regarded as a reality that can be identified and estimated using logical strategies. A positivist may use measurable methods like experiments, quasi-experiments, relevant inspections and summarizing information. Positivism haste the

advantage of being straightforward logical, and quantifiable. It is easy to obtain collate process and interpret extensive data. Many standard tools can be used to obtain and analyse quantitative data. However, it does not capture many aspects of a real-life situation.

Although the positivist research method has been used in numerous studies, its disadvantage is that it does not consider the research setting and may not give a complete picture of a phenomenon (Bryman, 2021). People's behaviour in different situations may vary sharply and cannot be measured quantitatively. Further, a quantitative approach may not capture people's emotions and other non-quantifiable aspects, mainly when a study focuses on people's experiences. Since positivist philosophy does not recognize that many factors depend on how individuals interpret their current situation, positivism cannot respond appropriately to these research concerns. Moreover, personal perspectives have also influenced the research decisions, from the definition of research inquiry to the techniques used and understanding of the findings. For that reason, the axiological position denies the positivist paradigm assumptions.

The research questions raised in this study require an exploratory approach to understanding the life experiences of women in leadership positions in the Saudi Arabia public sector. This requires a qualitative research method that describes the environment or its impact on individuals, institutions and society based on discernment and practice (Neuman, 2014). Consider research question 1 "how do family relationships and socio-cultural contexts impact women's commitment to career progression and aspirations of leadership roles?" This cannot be answered by a positivism approach or quantitative research as the socio-cultural context in Saudi Arabia is undoubtedly different from what is applicable in other parts of the world. Even in the same community, family relationship affects individual differently. The second research question is, "what is the impact of vision 2030 and institutional policy changes on women's career progression and leadership performance in Saudi Arabia?" It is on a program in the

KSA, and there can never be a universally true answer. Also, based on individual performance, responses are expected to be diverse. Likewise, the third research question is “how does conventional patriarchy in the workplace impact women leaders' performance and career/professional growth? Perspectives of women? It refers to the traditional patriarchy in Saudi Arabia (Al Alhareth et al., 2015). In KSA, what is conventional may not be established in China, the United States, or African countries. Hence there cannot be a generalized reality that is always true irrespective of location or culture in this case. Therefore, a paradigm that allows for the inclusion of such complexities and their measurement and the inclusion of the researcher's perceptions like constructivism is more suited for the current study, though with certain limitations, as discussed in the following sections.

### *Constructivism*

A constructivism approach is premised on a belief that reality is multi-dimensional so that natural sciences laws cannot be applied in an attempt to understand it. It refutes the ontological position of the existence of a reality outside one's mind-independent and separates from one's perception or distinct from the context. It provides a favourable position by giving a chance to study a complex "whole" that does not need to be broken down into its components (Neuman, 2014). Truth from society can be explained through an interpretation that may vary for different cultures so that reality is understood as a "commitment to reality in reality" (Bryman, 2021). This conceptualization of reality contrasts with the positivists' approach (Andrew et al., 2013). It presumes that the nature of human behaviour and society affects the phenomena implicitly without being observable and measurable (Kothari, 2004). For instance, actions can be observed, recorded, and studied, but the motives behind such actions cannot be directly considered.

Positivist and constructivist ontologies underlie quantitative and qualitative approaches, respectively (Cupchik, 2019). It was asserted that the two ontologies address

alternative approaches to progressing toward actual peculiarities that are not predicated on them. Quantitative and qualitative philosophies likewise share anything in the like manner regarding looking at these phenomena. They are deconstructive about disturbing the texture of typical unfurling episodes in the social environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The march of events in day-to-day existence is halted or sectioned off and changed into an object or subject of investigation.

Bryman (2021) pointed out that extensively subjective research depends on people's interactions as reality is constructed with these interactions. The constructionist strategy recognises that the research quality is intertwined with the research approach. The researcher and the research topic cannot be separated: the researcher and the mentioned "object" are interrelated. (Neuman 2014). (Cupchik, 2019; Saunders et al., 2019). In that regard, researchers must constantly strive to understand and control any possible sources by which they can impact the research results (Andrew et al., 2013).

In many ways, the constructionist approach may be feasible for this study. The study investigates Saudi females' leadership experiences by understanding their perceptions, behaviours, communication with others and their situation (Neuman, 2014). According to Neuman (2014), people interpret their experiences through their "customs, prejudices and institutional practices" so that these can impact people's activities in ways that are not apparent to people. In this sense, a positivist approach is deemed inadequate because it does not explicitly consider these structures. When all conditions are equal, it only focuses on how individuals or collectors interpret insights. A constructionist approach which allows for the complex nature of reality and presumes that people and the situations interact to create perceptions and lived experiences and enable the researcher to bring in value (Cupchik, 2019), is found to be better suited for the current research. Using the constructivism approach in this research is based on the fact that it will accommodate individual opinions from different

backgrounds and socio-cultural practices and be specific to the situation in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, constructivism is one of the choices for obtaining answers to research question number two, which is concerned with Saudi Arabian government policy.

However, the constructionist approach suffers from over-reliance on qualitative methods (Andrew et al., 2013) and may not allow for the capture of data from a larger population (Bryman, 2021; Esin et al., 2014).

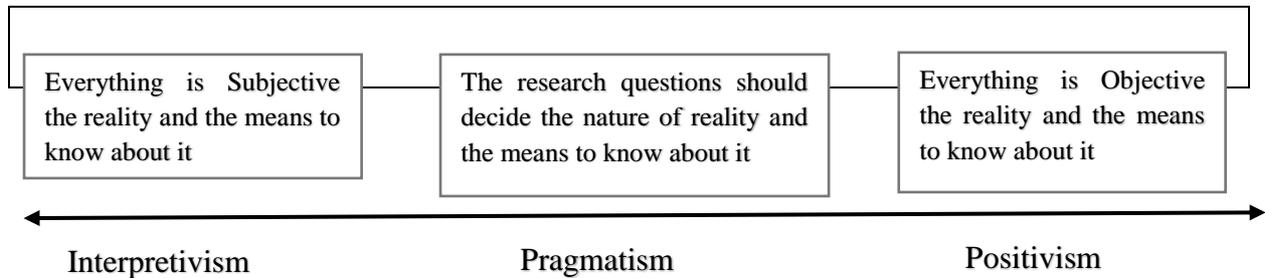
In addition, the analysis of data and its interpretation may be cumbersome. Understanding data may depend on the researcher's perspective and may be biased or not be accepted by people of different opinions (Andrew et al., 2013). Developing a mathematical model that will always be true in all situations may not be possible. The interpretation of reality may also change over time as the belief and socio-cultural behaviour of people change.

Quantitative research is based on positivism (Esin et al., 2014), using quantifiable information to derive a mathematical model for the investigated phenomenon. However, while extensive data can be easily collected and processed in this approach, it does not explain the rationale behind the data. In addition, this approach has no room for facts that cannot be quantified. Hence it is not appropriate for this present research. Notwithstanding, data obtained by the quantitative approach was used to complement the qualitative research method chosen as the direct approach.

On the other hand, qualitative research involves non-numerical data but gives an in-depth insight into the behaviour of the data (Kothari, 2004; Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is based on constructivism (Cupchik, 2019). Qualitative research may not include many participants, involving interviews and videos (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Opinions may also have to be analysed separately. This is considered the best approach for this research work as it will enable detailed information obtained from the participating women leaders.

**Pragmatism**

Comparing constructivism and positivism are mutually exclusive, representing the two ends of the continuum, as shown in figure 3.1.



**Figure 3-1: Interpretivism – positivism continuum**

Constructivism focuses on the subjectivity of experiences, and positivism deals with objective variables (Cupchik, 2019). As a more practical and non-extremist approach, pragmatism allows using any method from either of these paradigms to answer the research questions. Pragmatism focuses on the success of an approach rather than its philosophy. As long as a technique can give the desired result, pragmatism believes the method is suitable (Donelson, 2017). According to pragmatists, if an approach helps answer the research question, its utility defends its use in the paradigm (Dudovskiy, 2011). Pragmatism does not discriminate against any technique based on the philosophical underpinnings but focuses on the method's utility. The guiding principles of pragmatism in a research study are that the research questions determine which methodology techniques and approaches are appropriate (Dudovskiy, 2011). As the research questions evolve, the research methodological framework also becomes. The current study explores the questions related to gender inequity and the associated problems that women in leadership positions in Saudi Arabia face. Social constructionist epistemology is adopted as the study context plays a critical role in understanding women's leadership in Saudi Arabia. It does not limit the research methods to deductive and objective approaches but also recognises inductive and subjective approaches. A constructionism paradigm requires a subjective

research strategy (Saunders et al., 2019). This research plans to clarify how Saudi society influences female scholars' career direction and the social structure in Saudi Arabia is the key to clarification. Because the research is rooted in the cultural belief and lifestyle of the people of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, separating the phenomena from the culture is not recommended in this case, and enough data could not be collected through interviews alone, so questionnaires and media were used to collect additional data from the Saudi perspective. Hence both qualitative and quantitative approaches are used. Therefore the study falls in the pragmatic school of thought.

Philosophical	Axioms	Implications	Major theoretical influence
<b>Ontology</b>	Nature of the “reality” to be studied, i.e. what is real?	A researcher sees the concept of reality in the research questions that need to be answered. This paradigm deals with the solutions to the problems around us and focuses on answering the research questions defined as a result of the literature review.	Pragmatism
<b>Epistemology</b>	How can knowledge be achieved, i.e. how can we know about reality?	Knowledge is subjective, and the cultural influences on knowledge need to be considered. We focus on women's leadership in Saudi Arabia in the context of the Arab cultural constraints.	Social constructionism
<b>Axiology</b>	Relationship between the research and the researcher	To avoid losing the essence of the research in translation, personal interpretation is essential in this case	Value laden value-laden or personal values and beliefs play a role in the performance of findings
<b>Methodology</b>	Methodological framework followed to answer research questions	Qualitative and quantitative measures to answer the research questions This method indicates that the following method should be adopted Qualitative → quantitative Whereas the design adopted is Interviews → questionnaires → media	Exploratory sequential mixed methodology
<b>Methods</b>	The methods through which data is collected and analysed	Detailed views and opinions are collected from the society Interviews – in-depth interviews Media articles – opinion of others Questionnaires – mainly open-ended questions focus on males' and females' opinions about factors like a leader's quality, etc.	Interviews, articles from the media and open-ended questionnaires are used to collect data, and qualitative and quantitative techniques are used to analyse the collected data. The qualitative data is analysed using thematic analysis The quantitative data is analysed using descriptive analysis

**Table 3-1: philosophical orientation of research**

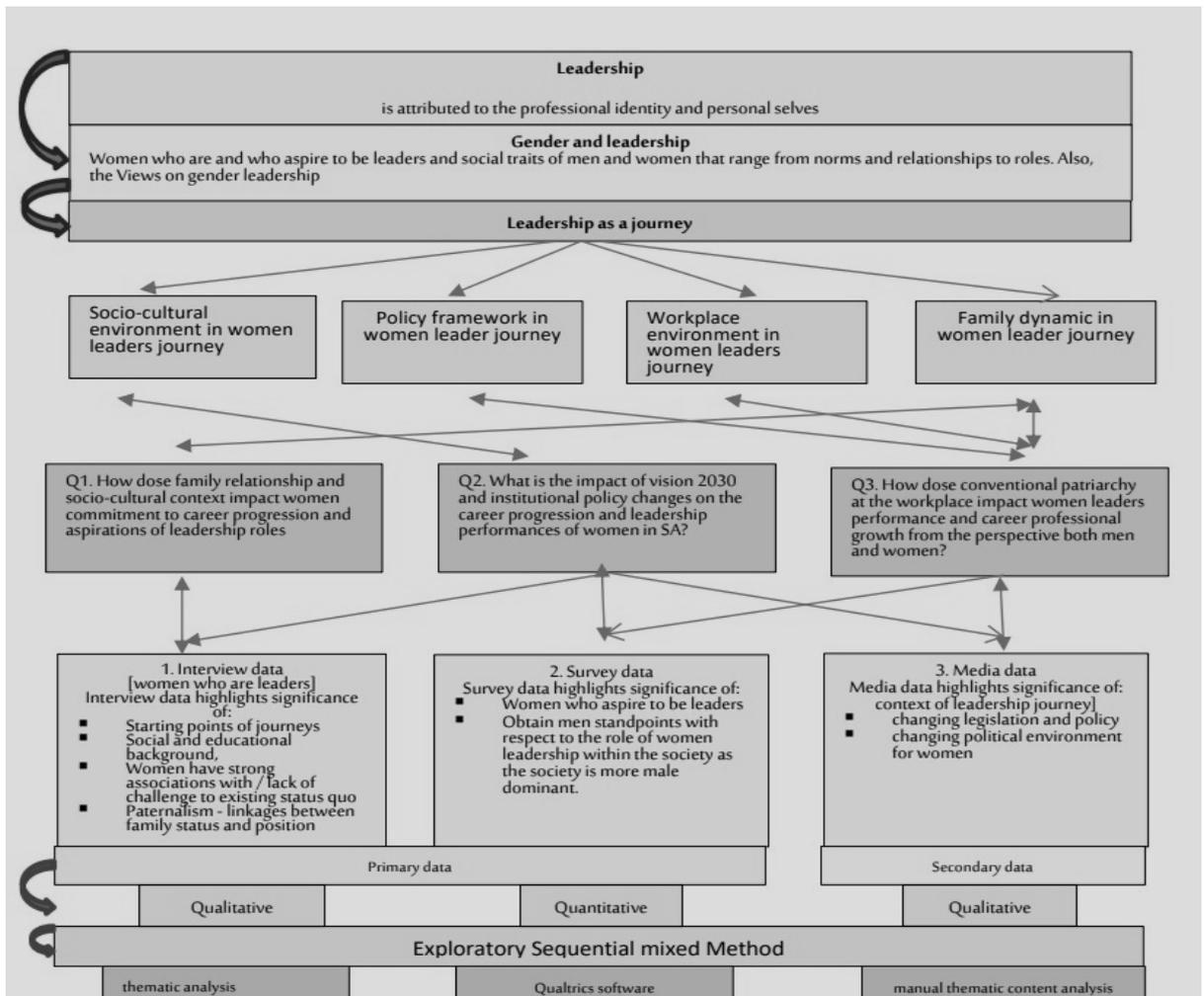
### 3.3 Research strategy and research design

Bryman (2021) states that a research strategy is "a general description of conducting research." According to O'Brien et al. (2003), the concept "research strategy" refers to the direction and process flow of the research study. In their study, Saunders et al. (2019) stated that choosing a particular research strategy relies on the research goal and objective. The current study uses a mixed-methods approach to investigate the conceptual model and gain a deeper understanding of the problem by analysing the data. According to Hurmerinta-Peltomaki and Nummeia (2006), using the mono approach provides a narrow view of a large complex model. Therefore the present study employed a mixed strategy to eliminate the inherent biases of quantitative and qualitative research. Travers (2008) states that qualitative research can be undertaken in five ways: observation interviewing, fieldwork, discourse, and textual analysis. According to Saunders et al. (2019), seven research methodologies are available: experiment survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography, and archive research. Creswell (2013) recognized numerous qualitative research methodologies, including narrative phenomenology grounded theory case study and ethnography. There has been considerable discussion about conducting qualitative studies with discourse analysis narrative research grounded theory phenomenology and intuitive inquiry (Wertz F et al., 2011). Denzin and Lincoln (2015) identified the following research approaches: ethnography case study grounded theory, participatory research, clinical research and narrative approach. According to Saunders et al. (2019), the strategy used in an investigation can be chosen by determining the research questions and objectives, research time, and other accessible resources. The narrative was deemed the most practical alternative for the research strategy in this study. Narrative inquiry recounts an individual's or small group's lived experiences by interviewing the individual and transcribing the interviews into a chronological narrative

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). On the other hand, the quantitative method confirms the developed hypothesis. A quantitative study expands on how observed phenomena affect individuals.

<b>Research strategy</b>	The processes used to solve the research problem meet the research objectives (Creswell & Poth 2018).
<b>Qualitative</b>	The qualitative technique is used to explain people's behaviour through in-depth interviews and other qualitative methods of data collection, assisting the researcher in collecting the non-numerical media and semi-structured interviews to obtain in-depth insight into the research phenomenon (Creswell & Poth 2018).
<b>Quantitative</b>	The quantitative technique is used to Help the researcher obtain the survey data through the 134 respondents in the questionnaires.
<b>Mixed methods</b>	The chosen mixed-method strategy for the current research had three distinct data gathering phases to accommodate the quantitative and qualitative strands, including semi-structured qualitative interviews of 9 women leaders purposively selected a quantitative survey involving randomly selected 134 participants and a thematic content using 25 media articles.
<b>A pragmatic paradigm</b>	A pragmatic paradigm is most suited as it allows for the perspectives and context of the research participants to create the reality and answer the research questions in the most comprehensive and unbiased manner (Driscoll et al., 2007).
<b>Exploratory sequential mixed method</b>	The chosen Exploratory sequential mixed method for the current research is when the qualitative strand precedes the quantitative strand. Also, This design is more suitable when the phenomenon under study needs to be initially explored and validated through quantitative methods (Schoonenboom & Johnson 2017).
<b>Triangulation</b>	Triangulation was used to check whether the data collected matched the researcher's interpretation of the current research. To ensure the quality of the research and the trustworthiness of the findings from the three data sources (Neuman 2014).

**Table 3-2: Strategy for the Research**



3-2: Research Strategy Map

Using mixed-method enables an extensive opportunity to collect the most relevant and reliable data directly from the participants and collect the validated information by reviewing the research of previous researchers (Creswell & Poth 2018). In addition, the core rationale for using the mixed method is that it studies the phenomenon of women's leadership in a specific context and concentrates on a broader phenomenon. Another main reason for adopting the mixed method is that amalgamating thematic analysis approaches with statistics can prevent over-reliance on only one research design (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011) and allow the researcher to consider objective and subjective factors.

Following Saunders et al. (2019), time horizons are necessary for research design regardless of the methodology employed. There are two types of time horizons: Longitudinal

and cross-sectional studies. In this study, we used cross-sectional because we collected the data simultaneously. Moreover, the present study uses the purposes sampling technique. Purposive sampling is more convenient and effective than random sampling (Barnard, 2011). While it is not unbiased, it provides insights and rich data to fulfil the objective of in-depth analysis and information gathering in qualitative research (Tongco, 2007). In purposive sampling, the researcher seeks to find people who meet the criterion willing to participate in this research based on their knowledge or experience and provide the necessary data. The current study adopted a pragmatic paradigm that allowed for adopting strategies involving collecting data through applying methods that draw from qualitative and quantitative traditions to best address the research questions and meet the study objectives. The current research focused on the social-cultural environment policy framework in KSA's organizations and Family dynamics in the KSA workplace. These all parameters are connected with three research questions. The first question captures the parameter of the family dynamic. The research undertakes the KSA Vision 2030 to cover the social-cultural aspect of the research.

In contrast, the conventional patriarchy in KSA undertakes family dynamic workplace environment and policy framework in the country and covers all the aspects of research. The present study adopts the exploratory sequential mix method. The exploratory sequential mixed method design is followed for designing the research methodology. The dominant strand is the qualitative method, and the quantitative study complements the overall findings of the research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This strategy was selected because it was suitable for exploring the factors affecting career and professional progression for Saudi women in leadership positions. The researcher follows up the qualitative findings with quantitative analysis.

Also, the quantitative method alone wouldn't have provided the in-depth information required to understand the emotional reason (Kothari, 2004) and diverse opinions for the answers.

Hence combining the two methods provides first depth and detail and then uses a more extensive sample survey to corroborate and complement the findings from the qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research aim requires an exploratory approach for the topic under investigation. A predominant focus was placed on the qualitative data collection from the participants and the media. This was further complemented by quantitative data from a larger pool of subjects. Detailed views and opinions are collected from the society through interview media and questionnaires. The interview of women in leadership positions of government agencies gives in-depth information about how the culture and society influence the career progression of Saudi women in positions of authority. The rationale for adopting the exploratory sequential mix method is to explore the topic first before measuring the variables (Edmonds & D. Kennedy, 2017). Therefore we first collect data through interviews to get insights related to the topic. However, literature review already provides us with insights, but our motive is to gain new insights about the current situation or time.

Therefore, the researcher aimed to conduct interviews with the participants in leadership positions where relatively few respondents with a part of leadership led to focusing the interviews on the sectors where some respondents in this category were available. The group of women interviewed was often of a particular generation and history, which made it essential to look more widely to understand women's leadership journey than the researcher felt the need to conduct the quantitative study well in the form of the survey questionnaire. Therefore, this method was also implied by the researcher. The exploratory sequential mixed method support researcher in identifying missing dependent variables (Edmonds & D. Kennedy 2017), such as the patriarchy concept in KSA society or culture. While only a few participants are targeted for interviews, a survey allows the researcher to target an extended population. Furthermore, findings from only interviews may be limited because of the subjective biases and human social

constructs. On the other hand, preferences are not involved when people respond to and fill out survey questionnaires.

After conducting the research based on mixed methods, the researcher aims to achieve the media analysis to determine the influence of media on society and culture as it might assist in determining how the media has impacted the role of women in the leadership position or how the perceptions of numerous individuals are changed regarding the women leadership through the critique of media analysis.

The chosen mixed-method strategy for the current research had three distinct data gathering phases to accommodate the quantitative and qualitative strands. The first phase included the qualitative strand, the main or the dominant strand that explored participants' views. The second phase included the quantitative strand, which performed a secondary role with the “exploratory sequential mixed methods”. The design can be visualized below in figure 3.3.



**Figure 3-3: Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Design**

The present study implements the above model by administering a qualitative interview with the selected participants. In the interviews, the women were asked to speak about ‘their journey’ in leadership. A quantitative online survey follows this process to assess the perceptions on the leadership journeys of women leaders in Saudi Arabia. The final phase consisted of thematic content analysis for media articles. The following section discusses the data collection and analysis methods in more detail.

### 3.4 Research methods

The research method collects and analyses data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Kothari, 2004).

The research methods used in this study included tools and techniques to collect and analyse data to answer the research questions.

#### 3.4.1 Data collection

Data collection was conducted in three stages:

- 1) Semi-structured interviews were conducted with women leaders in the public sector in Saudi Arabia.
- 2) A structured questionnaire survey to obtain responses from subjects in authoritative positions working in the public sector.
- 3) Articles from the media portal of Saudi vision 2030 that portrayed the Saudi government's official position and their visualization of women's future were selected.
- 4) It has been ensured that women's responses are given priority because reviewing and discussing their experiences is the main component that adds value to the research; therefore, the male perspective is not part of the study.

The first type of data collection is through conducting semi-structured interviews. The main sampling technique utilised for collecting the primary data through interviews is purposeful. The main characteristics of this extensive type of sampling method are that it helps the researcher rely on their judgement while choosing the appropriate participants to be included in this research study. Moreover, the probability sampling technique is the main method utilised while conducting primary data through the survey method. The main characteristics of this extensive type of sampling method are that it is entirely unbiased and randomised in all manners (Kothari, 2004). This is considered an effective sampling technique as it randomly selects the participants for conducting the survey (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The third data

collection method is the secondary data collected from articles. The data has been gathered from reviewing the most reliable and credible sources for this research study.

#### **3.4.1.1 Qualitative data collection - semi-structured interviews**

The study used qualitative methods as the first part of the mixed methodology. A qualitative semi-structured interview was used, which allows for information-gathering in a face-to-face manner allowing for direct contact between the researcher and the participant, with the researcher asking the questions to the interviewer (Neuman, 2014). To collect data in the life history format (which was the aim of the qualitative part of the current study), the interviewer begins by providing the interviewee (respondent) with a starter to start the conversation and leads the interviewee about the data required (Bryman, 2021).

The qualitative interview method was chosen as it is aligned with the pragmatic paradigm adopted by the current research. Interviews are also considered the most common and vital assessment tools in a qualitative study (Neuman, 2014) as they enable the researcher to extract something from another person's thoughts (Saunders et al., 2019). The main advantage of interviewing over other qualitative methods like observation is that the meeting (basically an open interview) can be used to gain perceptions and insights from the interviewee (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), whereas only observing what another person is doing may not be sufficient to understand what they think or perceive about the situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and why they are doing it. Similarly, the time and resources required for the observations may not always be feasible for the researchers. Before a reasonable conclusion can be reached from observation, the person of interest must be observed for a long time. However, a limitation of the interview method is that the effectiveness of the interview depends on the nature of the data required. This is why the interviewer should be prepared to obtain the interviewee's answers in a planned manner to understand their position (Saunders et al., 2019). Nevertheless, carefully

developed and conducted expert interviews can yield rich contextual information (Andrew et al., 2013).

According to (Neuman, 2014), researchers can follow many types of interviews, such as structured, unstructured and semi-structured. A structured interview involves oral questions and is limited to pre-planned questions prepared by the researcher (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). An unstructured interview may be conducted like the observation approach (Dudovskiy, 2011), where the interviewer invites the respondents for a guided discussion. A semi-structured or conversational interview involves the interviewer discussing with interviewees on the pre-determined themes of interest (Neuman, 2014). This research was conducted using semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are the most common approach adopted in qualitative data collection techniques (Bernard, 2000). The information accumulated using semi-structured interviews can include data on practices, timetables, needs, habits, or other data necessary to solve research problems (Quinlan et al., 2019). The first phase of primary data collection was undertaken through semi-structured interviews. This study used semi-structured interviews where the study respondents were encouraged to speak about their life experiences through questions and probes (Weller et al., 2018). The semi-structured interviews were selected because the researcher wanted to have some control over the topic of the interview and the format of the interview while at the same time allowing for the participants to be able to contribute freely and without restrictions by developing trust through the duration of the interview (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Such an approach was also crucial for ensuring that data coding analysis and theme derivation were made more accessible during the analysis phase (Kothari, 2004; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Providing some structure to the interviews allowed easy comparison of data and results across all respondents, facilitating analysis. The interview format focused on the respondents' life history. They shared their experiences working in the Saudi government at the leadership level and the factors that

affected their progression to the leadership position. The interviews can also adopt various formats, such as face-to-face interviews with individuals' face-to-face groups or telephone interviews (Quinlan et al., 2019). Face-to-face interviews were the most suited because of the current study's complex concept of gender and leadership. Additionally, face-to-face interviews can be helpful as they allow the researcher to use cultural sensitivity and adopt the appropriate tone of voice and body language, thus building a positive relationship while dealing with previously unknown people (Weller et al., 2018).

The researcher conducted the interviews on weekdays between April and July 2018. The main focus of the interviews was to bring valuable and generous data to analyse the obstacles encountered by women when moving to senior positions in the public/government sector in Saudi Arabia.

#### 3.4.1.1.1 Sampling and recruitment of interview participants in this study

##### 3.4.1.1.1.1 Research Population

The interviews were conducted in 4 public/government areas selected based on their employing female leaders. Not all government institutions have women in leadership positions, so the sampling technique was convenient purposive sampling. The institutions with female leaders were identified and later contacted for interviews, and the cooperating organizations were included in this study.

The study targeted Saudi women between 30 -60 years who work in leadership positions. This was to understand the lives of those women through their narratives - childhood family education, work opportunities and challenges - positive and negative influences on their professional journey. Also, to explore how they built their careers and advice for other women with these ambitions. The perspective of Saudi women leaders accounts for how women leaders themselves describe their success. Targeting the Saudi women between 30-60 years of age was that they possess the leadership capabilities and mindset, which highly assist the

researcher in attaining more information. Targeting women of these ages is considered the most appropriate participants as those individuals usually try to apply for leadership positions. This range is justified because most females are maturing and deciding to pursue careers as leaders (Alotaibi et al., 2017). However, the author is aware that women of this age have the necessary leadership experience and that a person decides what they want to do with their lives at this age.

However, the decision as to whether or not to take part in this study is entirely voluntary. If they decide not to participate in this study, it will not affect the care they receive and will not result in any loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled. The research will contain three questions (personal life questions, professional life questions opinion questions).

#### 3.4.1.1.1.2 Sampling Technique

Researchers need data access to research and draw results from individual interviews, surveys, and document records or past views (Saunders et al., 2019). Researchers may choose non-probabilistic sampling techniques (Bryman, 2021) when their interest lies in understanding social factors rather than achieving generalizable representation or even in cases when a sufficient number of target respondents are not available or accessible (Bernard, 2000). However, in a non-probability sample selection, it is difficult to expect that the results can be applied in contexts (Quinlan et al., 2019). For the current study, nonparametric sampling methods are considered based on the qualitative nature of the study, as well as the target population (women in leadership positions in the public sector of Saudi Arabia) were limited. Bryman (2021) pointed out that convenience sampling is used when researchers face time or resource shortages, and this method was found to be suitable for the current study. However, the disadvantage of convenience sampling is that it severely limits the study results' generalisation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), making it only applicable to the population on which the example is based (Neuman, 2014). In this study, purposive convenience sampling is

adopted to understand that it will yield results applicable to the target population, as the study population is the Saudi females and the results are meant to be applicable to the Saudi leaders working in the public sector. So the disadvantage of not being able to generalize the findings to other contexts does not limit the current research findings based on the convenience sampling method.

**Sample**

According to Creswell & Poth (2018), the interview respondents can range from 2 to 25, as their rich “lived experience” lends to understanding the phenomena under study. The institutions with female leaders were identified, and a request to conduct interviews was submitted. Those institutions that accepted the request were included in the study. The participants included were all in leadership positions for over two years. This sample was selected so that the participants had sufficient lived experiences and could give insights to the researcher.

Name	Marital Status	Employment	Education Level	Occupation
1	Divorced	Consultative assembly Of Saudi Arabia	Master’s	Manager
2	Married	King Abdul-Aziz University	Doctorate	Vice-Dean
3	Married	King Abdul-Aziz University	Doctorate	Vice-Dean
4	Married	King Abdul-Aziz University	Doctorate	Vice-Dean
5	Married	King Abdul-Aziz University	Doctorate	Vice-Dean
6	Married	Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University	Doctorate	Vice-Dean
7	Married	Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University	Master’s	Vice-Dean
8	Married	Princess Norah Bint Abdul Rahman University	Doctorate	Vice-Dean
9	Married	Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University	Master’s	Vice-Dean

**Table 3-3: Participants in the Interview**

A total of 9 participants participated in the interviews, all females and from three Saudi Arabian institutions. One or 11 % was from the consultative assembly of Saudi Arabia. Four principals representing 44% were from King Abdul-Aziz University; one or 11% was from princess Norah Bint Abdul Rahman University. Three, or 33%, were from Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (Table 3-3). The reason for selecting the participants from the different universities and consultative assemblies of Saudi Arabia is that there are not many variations in the role of the leaders across these sectors, that all of them are women leadership positions and are significantly associated with matters regarding education. The main underlying reason for avoiding other sectors was that they were not consistent with the leadership position of women because there was a lack of women participation in those sectors.

Also, there are gender variations in the distribution of employees in public and private sectors (Madhi & Barrientos 2003). Identifying the institutions with female leaders and getting their time for the interviews was challenging. Therefore the constraint of time and resources obliged the researcher to select these respondents. To get included in the study, the participants must have experienced-leading employees. Also, each participant needed to be in a leadership position for one to four years to ensure that they would have sufficient information to answer the research questions. Eight of the respondents representing 90 per cent, are vice deans, while the remaining one or 10 per cent are managers. Three has master's degree, while the remaining six are doctorate holders. They all have experience with marriage. Even though one of 10 per cent is divorced, the remaining nine (90%) are married and still in marriage. It is believed that marital status also plays a significant role in Saudi Arabian females' lives and career progression.

### ***Interview protocol***

After determining the research questions and the number of interviews required, the next stage was establishing interview questions (Bryman, 2021) and developing the data

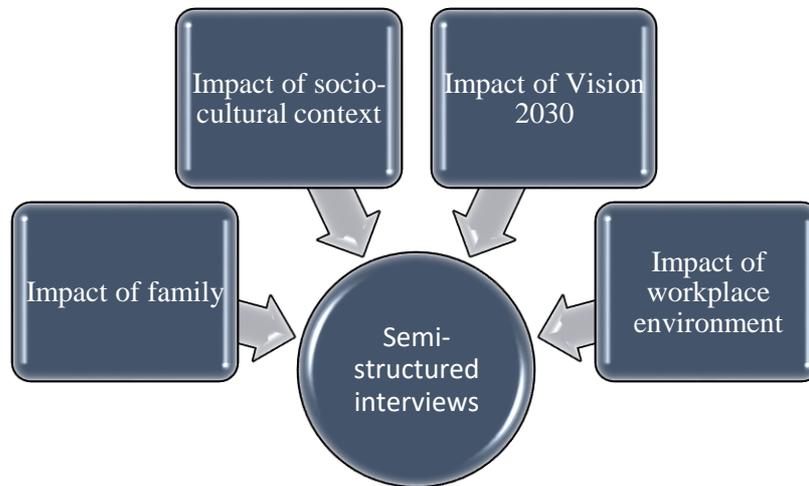
collection process. Formulating interview themes and questions is essential for guiding semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). An interview protocol should include a brief introduction to the study's purpose for the interviewee to understand the impact of their interview with space for noting down the interview date and fundamental data of the interviewee (Neuman, 2014). Each participant was contacted through email to arrange the interview in the current study. After their consent was obtained, their respective concerned secretaries were called to confirm the date and time of the interview. The documents sent to the participants included the following:

- Researcher's background and research motivation (please refer to appendix 3)
- Explanation of the research in simple terms for the participants to understand (please refer to appendix 3).
- The purpose of inviting the participant for the interview (please refer to appendix 3).
- The participant agrees to the interview (please refer to appendix 5).
- Interview inquiry (please refer to appendix 4).

The interview protocol clarified the purpose of the research and the significance of the participant's interview. The motivation for sending inquiries in advance was to draw members' attention and prepare them for their interviews. Although this approach can lead to interviewee bias towards some questions, the benefits derived from their coming prepared outweighed the drawbacks of any possible bias (Kothari, 2004). Semi-structured interviews depend on the questions and themes raised during the session (Creswell & Poth 2018). The following themes were covered with each participant presented in figure 3.4:

- Understanding of the impact of family on leadership career.
- They were exploring the factors that affected their lives and career progression.
- Their understanding of Saudi vision 2030 (policy environment) impacts their life experiences on their leadership journey.

- They are exploring the impact of the workplace environment on their leadership journey.



**Figure 3-4: Components of an Interview**

The interviews were conducted in Arabic; however, they were later translated into English. While the interviewees provided valuable and in-depth information, the researcher faced obstacles to total transparency. Firstly, recording some of the interviews was impossible, such as participants' concerns and declining to consent. Secondly, some participants indicated they did not want their personal beliefs and opinions to be made public or potentially harm someone else. They, therefore, requested that their responses be kept confidential and not shared with anyone.

All interviews were done face-to-face in their office to make them feel comfortable. Their responses were mostly recorded unless they were explicitly asked not to record any section. The duration of each meeting was approximately 45 to 90 minutes. The researcher recorded the interviews where permission was given and took notes about the non-verbal cues and the environment, like if the respondents asked to take a break from the interview to attend to some essential work or showed any enthusiasm and interest. These observations were part of the analysis and provided a context to the findings.

### 3.4.1.2 Data collection - quantitative survey

Quantitative research strategies can help collect data from many respondents (Neuman, 2014). The current study employed quantitative methods to collect data from more women participants. Considering that the interviews' data were analysed to identify the factors that may play a role in the leadership journey of women in Saudi Arabia, the quantitative survey was expected to help in exploring the perspectives of female leadership positions and to help validate and complement the results from the findings from the lived experiences of the women leaders who were interviewed. Therefore, a questionnaire was prepared for the survey based on the insights gained from the literature review about the factors that may impact leaders. A pilot study evaluated its reliability and validity (discussed in the next section). Qualtrics software was used to survey selecting the respondents from the government sector. The sample was chosen randomly by placing a request on LinkedIn calling public sector employees to participate in the survey and giving a brief overview of the research. This was done to ensure that the collected sample was representative of the target population - employees in the government sector. The people who indicated their willingness to participate in the research were contacted with the survey link. The sampling strategy required female participants for leadership positions even though the study focuses only on women's opinions. The questionnaire was sent to 146 people, but only 134 respondents provided filled answers (a response). However, three of them did not consent to use the information they provided for the research work; hence they were excluded. Among the participants, nine did not specify whether they were in a leadership position or not; therefore, they were also excluded from the research. Out of the 134 that responded, 76 (56.7%) said they are leading or responsible for one or more staff members, while 58 (or 43.2%) are not leading or accountable for any staff member. Moreover, 12 females have been in leadership positions for four to six years. Thirty-two have been in the position for two to four years, and 31 have spent less than two years in leadership.

The table below (3-4) shows the age range, (3-5) marital status, and (3-6) academic qualifications of the Participants.

Age						
	Total	20 -29	30 – 39	40 - 49	Above 50	Not specified
Female	134 (100%)	19(14%)	46 (34%)	39 (29%)	30 (22%)	0

**Table 3-4: Age Range of the Participants**

Academic Qualification							
	Total	High school	Higher diploma	Bachelor’s degree	Master’s degree	Doctorate	Not specified
Female	134 (100%)	18 (13%)	4 (2.9%)	57 (42%)	20 (14%)	20 (14%)	15 (11%)

**3-5: The Academic Qualification of the Participants**

Total	Married	Not married	Divorced	Prefer not to say	Yes	No	No response
134 (100%)	109 (81%)	(%9.7) 13	7 (5.2%)	4 (2.9%)	65 (48%)	54 (40%)	15 (10%)

**Table 3-6: Marital Status of the Participants.**

The objective of the survey was to identify the factors that could affect the Saudi women working in the government sector from a larger group of participants who were government sector employees of different ages and levels in their careers. A diverse sample was targeted to

capture employees' perceptions of female leadership in Saudi Arabia and understand the whole picture from diverse points of view. The questions were open-ended but with scope for short answers to collect participant opinions on various issues.

### *Pilot study*

A pilot study is usually conducted to identify and deal with problems in the research instrument and the data collection process (Creswell & Poth 2018). A pilot study was conducted for this research to get feedback and critique the questionnaire, and fine-tune the items (Kothari, 2004). The pilot was instructed to flag the time respondents took to complete the questionnaires, the questions that seemed unclear to the respondents, and relevant feedback issues related to how the questionnaires were formatted. The pilot was carried out with 14 people. The result from the pilot study identified that time was to be reviewed because it was subject to the availability of the participants. Also, the formatting was revised to correct the identified shortcomings of the initial questionnaire. Since after the pilot, it was determined that there were some formatting errors in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire development followed a nine-step process to develop and create an effective questionnaire for the survey. Churchill and Iacobucci introduced a method for creating questionnaires that included nine distinct steps (Iacobucci & Churchill, 2018). The model proposed by these authors consists of actions and the information required to develop an effective and efficient questionnaire. In the first step, the purpose of the questionnaire was determined that it is needed to identify the leadership condition of women in KSA. Therefore the purpose of the questionnaire was clear. The next step in this model is determining how to distribute this survey. The distribution method selected for the survey questionnaire was to distribute it online. The third step is the most important in this framework, and this step allows to determine the questionnaire's content. This means what should be included in the questionnaire. After an extensive literature review, the questionnaire's content was determined.

The study of the existing literature helped link the research variables and the content of the questions hence trying to determine the relationship and the impact of the research variables.

The fourth step of this model is to determine the form of response. Once the questionnaire is developed, it is essential to decide on how the participants are expected to respond to the questionnaire. The form of response to the current survey is selected as the response to the first two questions is demographically based on gender, language, and age. The rest of the questions in the questionnaire can be answered in the form of questions about the respondents' professional responsibilities. The fifth step was to determine the wording used in the questionnaire. The researcher must use appropriate vocabulary in the questionnaire so that the respondents can respond appropriately (Kothari, 2004). The language of the questionnaire includes words such as gender equality, women leadership, and others to determine and identify a relationship among the various research variable.

Furthermore, the sixth step of this framework is to determine the questionnaire sequence. Sequencing the questions in the survey questionnaire is very important to make a flow in the questionnaire so that the results can be defined in a particular direction by following the flow of the responses to the questionnaire. The questionnaire that is developed follows a sequence as well.

The seventh step is revising and reviewing the questionnaire. The review of the questionnaire when it is completed is crucial. Although the questionnaire is developed with more excellent care following this model, errors are inevitable. This step allows for reviewing the survey questions and any errors in the questionnaire after an evaluation; those errors can be removed after revising the questionnaire. At this step, question number 5 was reviewed and revised. This question previously manifested shortcomings where the option of leading one staff member was not included, and only the respondents were asked if they showed more than one staff member.

Furthermore, the eighth step of this model is to test the questionnaire. The current questionnaire is tested to ensure no errors and room for improvement before the distribution. Finally, the ninth step of this model is to distribute the survey questionnaire. When the survey questions were reviewed, there were a few errors regarding the formatting of the questions and the time when the survey should be posted accordingly to the availability of the respondents. The questions flow was also not in order. Therefore when these were revised, the questionnaire was ready to be distributed. This survey was distributed online to the participants, and their responses were collected online as well these responses were analysed with the help of quantitative analysis.

Generally, the results from the pilot study showed that the questionnaire had achieved satisfactory levels. Fourteen participants were sent the questionnaire in a hard-copy format, and their responses were collected after a week. The pilot study found that the participants had difficulties with some questions they had left un-answered. To help them respond clearly to the questionnaire and understand the problems they were facing, a face-to-face meeting was held with the 14 pilot study participants. Participants highlighted difficulties with some of the terms used in the questions. The language needed simplification to increase clarity and found some phrases in questions led to misunderstanding, which was changed due to the pilot. For instance: question number five (are you leading or responsible staff members) change it to be more specific and add (one or more) if they were responsible for one or more staff members in any organisation or sector. As a result, the content was adjusted to make it more straightforward. It was also agreed that the survey is distributed online to access more participants in a short time.

#### **3.4.1.3 Data Collection - Qualitative Media Portal**

To include the context related to the influence of society on the Saudi female leaders' journey, the current study used an additional method for collecting data in the form of articles

in the electronic media. Data were obtained from various sources from news portals for this study phase.

The media articles were included in the research. According to Pinkleton and Austin (2002), one of the functions of media is to record events, sentiments and changes in society as they unfold. Media news is portrayed as "real data," based on facts and backed by evidence (Hayles, 2004). Media was considered a good source of authentic and credible information and current perceptions around growing societal concepts and ideas (Panayiotou, 2021), including Saudi Arabian women in leadership roles. The study used articles from al Arabiya Arab news and news Saudi Arabia news portals. These have a wide readership and are noted for their authentic coverage. The data from the news portal was also helpful in ensuring that the political developments and changes in issues surrounding the career and professional progression of Saudi women in leadership roles were tracked and analysed (Sabri & Thomas, 2019). The sources were carefully selected from the leading Arabic channel portals to explore the current issues and the topic under investigation. The selection process for these sources followed a strategy that involved both inclusion and exclusion criteria. The chosen papers had a large daily distribution and wide-ranging routes, making them ideal for quickly disseminating data on women's development to millions of people. Hence, they carried immense potential as sources of creating awareness about change.

The articles included in the selected newspapers were published between June 2020 and September 2020. This time was set based on the following reasons:

- At the beginning of 2020, a discussion about women's abilities and how to be more confident and thrive in the Saudi Arabian economy was gathered.
- The nature and measure of women's investments have excessively varied throughout this period.

- During this period, people have seen Saudi ladies' interest in a wider public and broader communication.

The search terms that were used to locate the articles included: "Saudi women," "Saudi female drivers," and "Saudi and un women." "Empowerment and inclusion of Saudi women," "Saudi vision 2030", "historic ruling for Saudi women," and "gender gap in Saudi." articles that were included needed to be in the form of opinions or surveys and directly related to the role of women in strengthening the economy. Articles that were merely literary or based on other issues related to women (not concerning leadership roles) were excluded.

The researcher also studied various news highlights articles, reviews, editor's letters reviews, and commercials carried in the *al Arabiya Arab news and news Saudi Arabia news portals* and applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria to choose the item of interest for analysis. A total of 25 articles were thus selected for the analysis presented in appendix 1 (list of articles).

Qualitative research about Saudi women would give an in-depth analysis to answer this study's research question. The qualitative thematic content analysis of the media articles focused on how the articles reported on Saudi women and provided an understanding of the more comprehensive opinion and perceptions regarding women leaders' roles and journeys in the public sector and vision 2030.

### 3.4.2 Data analysis

Data from interviews and news portals were analysed qualitatively. Data from the questionnaire survey were analysed quantitatively.

#### 3.4.2.1 Data analysis - qualitative (interviews)

After the information was collected, the data must be prepared to make it easier to analyse (Saunders et al., 2019). For the current study, this required transcribing the interviews; the researcher followed several stages of data analysis.

There are different techniques used for qualitative analysis like thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), content analysis (Miles et al., 2020), framework analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) and phenomenological interpretation (Alase, 2017). Thematic analysis is among the most common methods to analyse qualitative research information. It is ideal for use when the information is obtained through an interview as it extracts views and opinions from the information. This analysis identifies and extracts common themes or ideas from different interviews. The researcher will thoroughly examine the report to detect issues and views that come up repeatedly. Content analysis is another tool commonly used to interpret and analyse qualitative research. This technique turns qualitative information into quantitative information by sorting out the data obtained in the qualitative approach. It can analyse data from interviews recording social media, print media books, and other similar sources. Framework analysis is used to change qualitative information into data that can be sifted and charted. It involves five basic steps. They are familiar with identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation. There is software available for qualitative data analysis that assists researchers in handling large amounts of data through qualitative data analysis invariably requires engagement and involvement of the researcher. When using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, although the NVIVO software assists in the analysis, the process still has to be undertaken by the researcher who needs to be immersed in the collected data (Miles et al., 2020). In this study, thematic analysis was adopted and involved the following steps:

Step 1 - Read the transcripts multiple times to understand the themes that were prevalent in the interviews

Step 2 - coding the data for data reduction. This involved multiple cycles of data coding. The first coding cycle involved picking short sentences or words representing the essence of the interview excerpts.

The second cycle of coding involved categorising the codes into meaningful themes.

The third coding cycle involved comparing the themes from the interviews with the insights and themes from the theoretical framework and the literature review.

At this stage of the analysis, data were displayed as findings in the next chapter for the reader to understand the overall essence of the themes emerging from the interviews.

Step 3 - the last step was to interpret the “lived experience” in a short paragraph.

Therefore, this type of inductive data analysis challenges the researcher to identify the themes from the collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative data analysis takes a substantial amount of the researcher’s time and must be undertaken with care, focus, and guarding against any self-bias (Malthus, 2017).

#### **3.4.2.2 Data analysis - quantitative (survey)**

Quantitative data can be analysed using statistical packages. This study employed quantitative data analysis through the use of QUALTRICS and NVIVO. The data were analysed using percentages and frequencies to see the participants' views in the study. Also, the data was analysed using descriptive statistics that allowed the researcher to get an overall idea of the demographics of the respondents. The questions were mainly open-ended and focused on the factors that the respondents felt had influenced their career progression. Such responses were analysed qualitatively by coding them and then scoring the number of participants mentioned. The results were then integrated with the qualitative results obtained from the in-depth interviews.

#### **3.4.2.3 Qualitative data analysis - qualitative (media articles)**

The selected 25 media articles presented in appendix 2 (list of articles) were read several times and coded using the following:

- The meaning of the report to the Saudi women in the vision 2030

- The source of information used to check the Saudi women issues (the story of the Saudi woman the irregular Saudi woman, the paper, the website or online media) and
- The writers who write about Saudi women (Saudi Arabian press offices correspondents or columnists news releases by writers without records.
- Columnists female writers). Each of these three reveals how the newspapers represented Saudi women.

The analysis was done by reading the articles several times and noting the following:

- The exploration of vision 2030 concerns women in leadership positions as this allowed for developing the institutional environment for female leadership in the country's public sector.
- The story was related to women's journey as they moved up in leadership roles - as this could provide more context about how society feels about the women's lived experiences.

The analysis from the media was therefore undertaken in the above contexts. The findings from the three streams were analysed independently, as discussed in the previous sections and then merged to answer the research questions.

### 3.5 Ethical consideration

Ethical consideration is essential in studies that involve human participants, and every research needs to adhere to the ethical guidelines governing research involving human subjects (Neuman, 2014). A research study needs to be ethically sound so that no individual is harmed while conducting the study. So, according to (Creswell & Poth, 2018), ethical issues include obtaining consent to ensure that participants understand the study's purpose and are not misled. Their rights and privacy are protected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher obtained permission from the cross-college research ethics panel of the University of Brighton university review board, following the board's policy concerning the protocols related to ethical

considerations. All respondents were above 18 years old and required to provide consent before participating in the study. Once the interviewees had informally agreed to participate in the qualitative data collection, they were asked to sign an informed consent form. This form explained the study's nature and how the information was managed. Those who did not agree to sign the consent form were excluded from participating in the study; for the quantitative data collection, consent was obtained in the written form before starting the research survey.

Another ethical issue that was adhered to in this study was confidentiality. The researcher assured the interviewees that confidentiality and privacy would be preserved. They assigned numbers to identify the research participants instead of referring to them by their names. For instance, participants in this study were identified as participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 to ensure their responses stayed confidential. Additionally, the participant's demographic or contact data was not shared with any third party. Another ethical issue that was considered was the safety and comfort of the participants. To ensure participants' safety and security, the interviews were conducted in the participants' safe, sanitised, quiet environment. Most participants were interviewed in their workplace's boardrooms and office rooms conducive to interviews. Respondents were also assured that they could withdraw from the interview or survey whenever desired and were not bound to provide any reason. To further make the participants comfortable, they were allowed to decide the time best conducive for them to have the interview. Some meetings were rescheduled if the participants were reluctant to interview at the agreed time. Lastly, on data management issues, all participants were assured that the collected information would only be used for the purposes stated in the study.

### **3.6 The trustworthiness of the research**

Research quality requires several additional efforts from the researcher, especially when qualitative research is involved. The trustworthiness of research describes how believable the research's finding is (Kothari, 2004). It examines the actions of the researcher to do the work

and the results obtained credibly (Guest et al., 2012). It includes how the research is designed, carried out and reported (Guest et al., 2012). Trustworthiness is essential in qualitative research; the presentation and interpretation of information depend on the researcher's perspective and virtues (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher can use many descriptions not part of the conventional parameters commonly used in qualitative research.

Transferability is the qualitative equivalent of quantitative generalisability, meaning the research findings can be applied to similar settings in other situations (Guest et al., 2012). However, neither every research may be transferable, nor can the researcher be sure of the context others may want to transfer. It is always the responsibility of anyone who wishes to share the result of research in another context to ensure the two contexts are similar and the results are transferable from one context to the other (Saunders et al., 2019). However, a researcher can also significantly guide other researchers in making transferability decisions (Guest et al., 2012). A technique that can ensure transferability is providing a detailed account of the research process and conditions. If others want to transfer it, they will know precisely how the research was undertaken and which assumptions were considered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once the researcher describes all these assumptions and conditions correctly, it is left to the person who wants to transfer to decide if it is reasonable enough to transfer the result to his research or not. The current research addressed transferability by clearly defining the research's culture and describing the research process throughout this report. The location conditions, limitations, assumptions, techniques, and methods are appropriately represented. However, the research also acknowledges that the study was focused on Saudi women leaders. All of the participating women leaders are from the public sector, and the qualitative part of the study exclusively targeted them, which comprises a small pool of respondents, the majority of who are also females; as such, any transferability of the research findings needs to be carefully assessed by future researchers.

### 3.6.1 **Credibility**

Credibility expresses the degree of agreement between the participants and the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It shows likely or appropriate qualitative research results from the participant's perspective (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this case, it must be established that the participants agree that the results are credible since they are the ones that provided the information. The credibility of this research is enhanced through different methods. Among these techniques is proper piloting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A pilot study was conducted for this research to get feedback and critique the questionnaire fine-tune the items, and provide an opportunity to meet participants after handing in their contributions. Fourteen participants were involved in this process. They were all given the questionnaire in a hard-copy format, and their responses were collected. The piloting was used to determine the accuracy of the questionnaire; after selecting it, there was no need to analyse the results as the questionnaire was examined directly. After analysing their responses, all the 14 participants met face to face to discuss the questionnaire and their answers. They also made further suggestions to clarify respondents' contributions which were accordingly followed. Also, after the interview, the participants were included in the quality check of the interviews, as they were provided with the summary of their interviews in situations where they disagreed with particular points in the summary; those points were corrected so that both the researcher and the participant can have a shared understanding and agreement.

### 3.6.2 **Dependability**

Neuman (2014) believes in a close relationship between credibility and dependability because the latter cannot be accomplished without the former. Dependability in qualitative research is the equivalent of reliability in quantitative research (Creswell & Poth 2018).

Reliability tries to check if the research will give the same result if it were to be repeated under the same circumstances (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). However, events are changing, and it is not likely that there could be the same condition for qualitative research. Therefore the credibility of qualitative research may be enough to judge its dependability (Guest et al., 2012). Researchers use external techniques to increase credibility, like getting an expert's opinion about the research process and instrument used. This research ensures everything possible is done to guarantee its credibility. It was checked repeatedly and by different categories of people. Initially, the current research process was cross-checked and passed on to research supervisors and committees to help establish accuracy and clarity and obtain opinions on the credibility of discoveries. This information was also cross-checked in two instances to confirm the dependability of the research. Firstly, the findings were checked with the notes obtained during the interviews and the initial draft of the participant's interview records. This helped corroborate that the research questions that were asked reliably received the desired answers. With this, the research result is dependable.

### 3.6.3 Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that research can have confirmability if it already has credibility, transferability and dependability. Confirmability is how other researchers can confirm the content of research work (Kothari, 2004). It allows other people to be judged or bring in a new opinion to work (Saunders et al., 2019). A researcher may invite other researchers to check. Participants may be involved as co-researchers; a researcher may also document the procedure correctly and enable easy cross-checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). It was initially established through partial inspection (that is, requiring qualitative research participants to comment on the original information in the record and to check whether they wish to ignore or summarize certain parts); and through a concerted

effort (that is, attracting participants as co-researchers this included considering their opinions when shaping research questions and data collection systems) (Bryman 2021). This present work tries everything possible to enhance its confirmability. All procedures followed in this work are appropriately documented, and some can be verified. The reasons and justification for all the decisions undertaken during the research process were also given to increase the confirmability of the thesis. This helps the readers to assess if the research fulfils the confirmability criteria of the trustworthiness of research.

#### 3.6.4 **Validity**

Validity is a concept that assesses whether the research measures what it was designed to measure (Leung, 2015). In other words, it checks the research's accuracy in tackling the research questions. This research investigates how societal beliefs and culture influence women's career progression in leadership positions in the public sector in Saudi Arabia. Hence, the research aims to measure women's lifestyle in leadership positions, life experiences, progress and challenges, and the perception of society about women holding leadership positions. One of the techniques used to ensure the quality of the research and the trustworthiness of the data was through triangulation of the findings from the three data sources, namely interviews, news portals and questionnaire surveys (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Methodological triangulation is applied when different methods are used to collect data for the research purpose, which was the case in this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The depth and quality of the research findings were improved by using multiple sources of information and cross-checking them across different resources (Saunders et al., 2019). The face-to-face interview with some women in leadership positions in the public sector enables all the relevant information vital to the research. Also, the open-ended questionnaires included all questions about this research work.

Neuman (2014) proposed triangulation to check whether the data collected matches the researcher's interpretation. Quinlan et al. (2019) consider it to be verifiable from three perspectives: (1) researchers, (2) participants and (3) others outside of research institutions such as users and commentators. Though the researcher conducted the current research alone, it was revised and read by the supervisor and the research committee to ensure the quality of the research and point out the deficiencies and suggest improvements. The participants were also included in the quality check of the interviews, as they were provided with a summary of their interviews. If they disagreed with any specific point, it was corrected in the specified section. Certain meetings were postponed to accommodate the interviewers and ensure their comfort if participants were unwilling to be interviewed at the originally arranged time.

Moreover, this study carried out a quality control process where the researcher sought to improve the data's validity, credibility, and accuracy recorded during the interview. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), introducing outsiders to the research or panel to check the data can help improve the study's trustworthiness. Therefore the transcription was shared with three randomly selected interviewees, and their confirmation or refutations of the transcriptions were recorded as they expressed it regarding the transmitted data.

### 3.6.5 Reliability

Reliability refers to the results' consistency and accuracy, which allows the reproduction of the same results using a similar methodology (Leung 2015). Reliability in quantitative data collection was achieved by assessing the instrument's ability to replicate the processes used and the results achieved. Reliability may be challenging in qualitative research as it is almost impossible to replicate the research condition. However, dependability may be used to measure reliability in qualitative research. The questionnaires' questions are open-ended to make

reliability as a quantitative measure even more difficult in this research. However, the questions for the questionnaire were designed based on literature and interviews. It included keeping records of all steps and details of how the researcher's beliefs might have influenced every research step. Notwithstanding the concern that the questions focused on respondents' open-ended responses, the statistical technique often applied to check a questionnaire's reliability could not be used.

### 3.7 Summary

This chapter presented the study's methodological framework and outlined the most appropriate research paradigm and design to answer the research questions. Firstly there was a justification for adopting pragmatism as the research paradigm. Secondly, there was a discussion of the epistemology (social constructionism), the methodology (exploratory sequential mixed methods) and the methods (qualitative and quantitative) used to collect data and analyse it. It explained why mixed method design was followed as the research strategies and design. The chapter also discussed the pilot study that helped the researcher improve the data collection instruments modified before the data collection. Procedures for conducting interviews and collecting data were described. It illustrates why semi-structured interviews are the optimal method for this study. The section also described the research population and the sampling techniques used. It gives a brief description of the participants. The reasons behind their selection were also explained. Other important factors described in this chapter include the quantitative data collection and the data survey.

The data analysis methods were thoroughly explained. These include both qualitative data and quantitative data. The section also discussed ethical issues and how standard ethics were followed. The chapter ended with a discussion on the research's trustworthiness. It describes the parameters used to measure the trustworthiness of research and how this present

research ensures trustworthiness. The parameters discussed included research transferability, credibility dependability and confirmability. Others had the research validity and reliability.

The next chapter presents the study's findings. The anonymised individual experiences of the participants in this study are shared utilizing selected excerpts from the interview transcripts and the conclusions of the survey and the media analysis.

## 4. **CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND FINDING**

### 4.1 **Introduction**

The data was collected from three streams of interviews of selected female participants in top leadership positions in government work participants. A larger group of participants was surveyed using online questionnaires and selected articles presented in the media in Appendix 3 (list of articles). The three data streams were analysed independently and are presented in this section. The chapter also explains the findings sequentially since the research follows a sequential exploratory data collection and analysis approach. It starts with the results and analysis from the interviews and then presents survey analysis and finally the analysis of the media articles. The chapter summarizes the main conclusions and leads to the next chapter on merging and discussing results.

### 4.2 **Interviews findings and analysis**

The qualitative interviews were analysed using NVIVO software and are presented below in the form of themes that emerged from the content analysis.

#### 4.2.1 **Role of family in the women's leadership journey**

Among the questions asked by the interviewer is the description of the significant factors that contributed to the childhood development of the interviewees. It was seen that the respondents made a repeated claim regarding the role of their families - during childhood, while growing up, as well as after marriage in how their careers progressed over a while. This indicated that women's leadership is also influenced by the families to which they belong. Family plays a significant contribution in the lives of the individual since it incorporates individuals that accompany them from his birth and acknowledges all the experiences that person encountered. Additionally, the family likewise played a prominent part while contributing to those experiences of the individual., Moreover, the family contributes

profoundly to the personal development of that individual (Figueiredo and Dias, 2012), which impacts the future events that formulate the journey of life, explaining the individual’s success. Some of the sub-themes or categories captured from the attained information are listed in tables 4-1 below and explained further.

Themes	Subthemes	References
<i>Role of Family</i>	<u>Early-life family experiences</u>	
	A. Family encouragement since early-life	17
	B. Support of father	17
	C. Father, a hard-working military officer	2
	D. Mother influenced me to work hard	2
	E. No gender biases at home	2
	<u>Married life/family experiences</u>	
	F. Husband supportive of job	11
	G. Have child support at home (in-laws help)	10
	H. Treated with equality in marital relationship	11
	I. Widowhood challenges	1

**Table 4-1: Role of The Family In The Women's Leadership Journey**

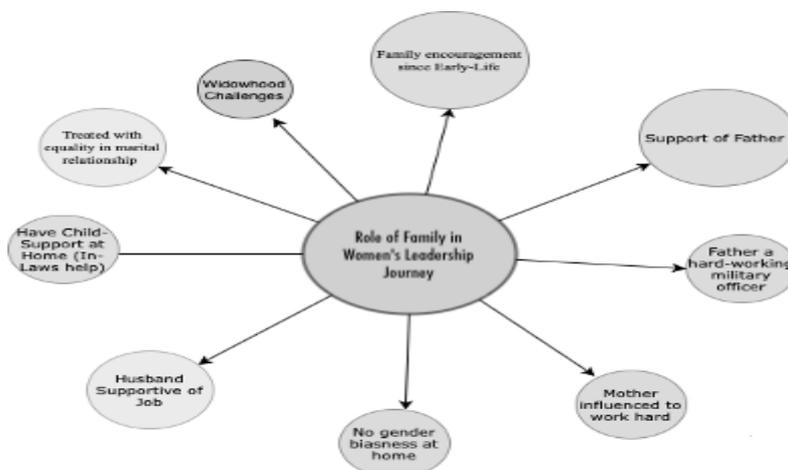


Figure 4-1: Role of Family

It was seen that a predominant impact on leadership aspirations later on in life was already made on women, as they were growing up in their parental homes.

### **1. Early-life family experience**

#### **A. Family encouragement since childhood**

Almost all participants mentioned that their families had supported them since childhood and cited it as the reason that enabled them to aspire for leadership roles later in life. They all have families who they described as being loving and supportive. Most of them grew up with their parents in a happy home. Those who lost their biological parents still have someone as a parent figure. This concept of encouragement and motivation from the family, be it on the part of parents or siblings, contributes prominently to the success in becoming what the child aspires to become. L Ferlazzo (2011), in his article, likewise highlighted the significance of parents' and family involvement as well as engagement for the enhancement of the development of the child in his school period while explaining, "A school striving for family involvement often leads with its mouth identifying projects needs and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute. On the other hand, a school striving for parent engagement tends to lead with its ears—listening to what parents think, dream, and worry about" (L Ferlazzo, 2011).

Additionally, a survey of 2016 likewise highlighted that parents' engagement is influential in student or child development while explicitly illustrating that in 2016 there was a decline in the rate of parents who convicted that intimate correspondence between teachers and parents is influential., This forestalled that parent's engagement is acknowledged as an essential component of the educational institutions in the child's growth, success, and personal development, implying that it likewise contributes to developing the qualities required to implement leadership in practical executions (Alghamdi et al., 2022). The responses from this investigation forestalled similar results in the case of women. A strong foundation as a growing

up child was therefore found to be crucial to becoming strong and successful in adult professional life, as depicted in the following excerpt from the response of one of the participants:

*“I can say that the family is the real manufacturing machine for the values of the personal self that is based on the principles of moral and educational quality and providing the suitable environment for a person - could produce a unique human with ethical and leadership of its kind ... the family is the first real brick and wall blocking all the negatives that can be encountered in life in general and when it is not very solid foundation won't come close to them any worse. It will become a high lighthouse where the individual can enhance his leadership and other skills and be ready to engage in communities.” P3.*

The response mentioned above is critically detailed and covers different aspects in which the family may influence the development of the child or the individual and may contribute to shaping the individual's entire personality and life events. From the above response, it has been examined that a supportive family plays a crucial role in the upbringing and growth of a person. The reaction of the participant illustrated that the role of the family is the primary contribution that matters most in building the character of the individual since it is a developmental zone of the individual where the person can enhance their capabilities without being considerate of the consequences that may get encountered in other territories.

*“Praise is to god my life and the valuable foundations planted by my father...all these greatly impacted my personality. Where I grew up, I learned to take responsibility, work honestly, make appropriate decisions, and consult with bright minds. These qualities greatly impacted my positions and dealt with people differently. However, the family reflected the impact of society and was still Saudi society seeks to empower women and develop their leadership personality.” P6.*

The response of another participant proved that if the child grew up with family support and responsive behaviour, it affects their overall personality and supports the child in future development and growth. Accordingly, the response likewise forestalled the contribution of Saudi Arabia in this regard, explaining that it is now upgrading its culture, social norms and values and focuses on reflecting the power of the female and their critical leadership roles.

Thus it has been established that though the family played a prominent role in making women leaders, some components influence this role of the family as well. The family dynamics continued to be impacted by society and culture, which may have imposed limitations on female children (Alghamdi et al., 2022). That indicates that the more significant socio-cultural influence shaped the home life, influencing the girl's self-perception and self-esteem. Multiple studies analysed in the scholarly literature support this claim. In most Western countries, it has been identified that girls are allowed to be a part of family discussions and make decisions concerning their lives. However, the eastern countries are more inclined toward a high-culture context which proposes that the residents of these countries are already prone to correspond implicitly (Edensor, 2020). Likewise, it is least encountered in the eastern countries that women can speak in the decision-making for the household execution since they are not given equal rights for freedom of expression (Basha et al., 2005); however, they are liable to perform all the domestic as well as caregiving work in the homes. This embedded culture of marginalising women even in homes is now getting demolished with time and the rapid increase in providing quality education to the residents of Arab countries (Alghamdi et al., 2022). This prevalence of education gave women the power to express their opinions freely and support their families emotionally and financially. In Saudi Arabia, this alteration got evident in the rule of King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz. Since 1956, women in Saudi Arabia were not permitted to get educated, but this changed with the country's government. As per Wilcke (2010), "central to King Abdullah's reform project has been four areas directly tied to the

human rights of Saudi citizens: women's freedom of expression, judicial fairness and religious tolerance. Today Saudis are freer than they were five years ago; Saudi women are less subject to rigid sex segregation in public places. Citizens have greater latitude to criticize their government, and reform in the justice system may bring more transparency and fairness in judicial procedures". This implies that, as per the literature, the socio-cultural environment likewise contributes to the role of the family in encouraging women to take the role of leaders. This early childhood practices and family norms enable the child, specifically girls, to feel connected, confident supportive and positive.

#### B. Support of father

The participants specifically explained the roles each member of their family plays. Most of them stated that their fathers were sources of encouragement for them. Also, the participants mentioned how their fathers or father figures encouraged and enabled them to aspire for a job and think of leadership roles in the future. It could be seen that their fathers did not only support education for a female child but also participated actively in facilitating it. This is evident in the response of the participant mentioned below.

*"I have lived with a mother and father who supports education with all the meaning of the word...received the first education from my first teacher, my father. He was with us despite his preoccupations with work, and my mother was helping us accurately in all stages of education. This resulted in us gathering general knowledge and personal development." p4.*

The response reflected that a father is the central pillar of a family, as he deals with all the financial and family concerns. According to the participant's comment above, the father demonstrates to the child how to survive, adjust to compete, and grow in the world. Following the findings of this research, some individuals stated that their father's occupation influenced their childhood development.

One of the participants stated that the military environment she grew up in as a result of her father's profession helped her develop discipline and honesty, which in turn led to the development of her leadership characteristics. According to this respondent:

*“My father is a retired colonel in the military sector and holds a master's degree from the USA. After retirement, he went to open his own business.” P8.*

This participant's response highlighted the role of the father's competence in his child's development. Father is the role model for every child (Gabarret & D'Andria 2021). As Steinberg (2001) illustrates, daughters perceive their fathers as essential role models in their lives. However, this may vary in some circumstances, for instance, in distorted families, particularly in the less civilised territories of the world.

#### C. Influence of mother

Another sub-theme that emerged was related to the impact of mothers while the participants were growing up. Most participants did not come from homes different from a typical Saudi Arabia home, as most of the participants' mothers are homemakers and not much educated. Yet, they inspired their children to achieve and develop hard work and integrity values. Most participants stressed that their mothers' roles in success are beyond their literacy level. That mothers who were not working or in any leadership roles could still encourage and inspire their female children to become strong and competitive for a professional future was acknowledged by several participants, including the following:

*“I have lived with a mother and father who supports education with all the meaning of the word...received the first education from my first teacher, my father. He was with us despite his preoccupations with work, and my mother was helping us accurately in all stages of education. This resulted in us gathering general knowledge and personal development.” p4.*

This response from the participant illustrates the mother's significance in developing the child's character, formulated through the means of different capabilities and traits a person possesses. The participant acknowledged her mother's role in developing her character while explaining her mother's endeavours to formulate her siblings' personalities. The role of the mother in developing a child's character is already critically explored by researchers (Winnicott, 2018), thus implying that the endeavours of mothers extensively develop female leaders. Additionally, this response from the participant implicitly reflects the notion of development in the context of Saudi Arabia. As per the illustration of the participant, her mother was not much literate and did not have any idea of how to read or write. This reflects that the inclination toward education was not evident in the past. Yet, the concept has now upgraded, and mothers acknowledge the significance of education while encouraging their female children to acquire education to succeed. This change in the cognition of mothers is anticipated to contribute to formulating female leaders since mothers fantasise about their daughters achieving what they wanted but could not.

#### D. No gender bias at home

A critical sub-theme from the interviews was how the participants were treated while growing up alongside their male siblings. Participants agreed that the socio-cultural practices in Saudi Arabia communities put a lot of limitations on girl children. However, they consider their families exceptional. They believe that the no gender bias in their family helped them have confidence and self-esteem, which invariably inspired them to be ambitious. In homes where the parents were open-minded and did not discriminate, children, especially females, grew up with self-confidence, self-respect, and ambition. A home environment that did not reinforce gender stereotypes and gender roles was acknowledged as a precursor to developing the participants' leadership aspirations later in life.

*"I never hear him saying that "you cannot do that because you are a girl" while other friends were complaining about the refusal of their parents to do the simplest things or talk to any male vendor outside the scope of their mahram. My family was the first supporter; my family equals the boy, and the girl inside the house, gave us self-confidence, especially in front of the men, and allowed me to take simple responsibility. Example society was refusing to do small things that include mixing such as talking to any seller in a store and choosing the best TV or camera." P9.*

The participant's response illustrated that educated families in Saudi Arabia promoted women's education and were convinced that women deserve equal rights in every domain as men. This, as per the respondent, incremented her self-efficacy and self-confidence, implying that such conduct of gender equality embedded in parents can potentially contribute to formulating female leaders in the current times and the long haul. Apart from the response of participants, gender equality theory explained that parenting is the best source of promoting gender equality, as, in childhood age, it is easy for a child to understand the significance of equality. Moreover, the theory explains that to support girls and normalise equality; parents need to open conversation with their children (particularly daughters); in this regard, keep them in their activities, read, listen and provide them opportunities to speak and teach them to respect for differences. Likewise, they are liable to educate their sons regarding promoting equality while respecting differences. In line with this, many participants also mentioned that things had changed; post-vision 2030, women were getting more freedom and space in their family context. However, most participants over 35 were born and brought up in pre-vision 2030 days. Their families had shown resilience against accepting gender stereotyping and inspired them in that context. This, however, contrasts with the content available in the literature since, as per the data gained from the survey of twelve countries in the Arab barometer in 2019, it was identified that the majority of the individuals contributing to the study convicted those men

are liable to make necessary decisions in the household and are better leaders than women while women ought not to independently travel or share likewise as for men in heirloom (Al Alhareth, 2013).

## **2. Married life/ experiences**

Marriage is one of the critical factors affecting Saudi Arabian women's career progression. Once a woman is married, her husband takes up the role similar to her parents. The women who mentioned that they were married reported that their husbands supported their jobs and had practical support at home for child support and household work. They believe this support they enjoyed from their husbands helped them progress in their careers. Also, they mentioned being treated with equality at home which helped them take on additional roles and responsibilities at home. However, the participants did not experience such a support system and accepted the family and society.

One of the participants cited the challenges she faced due to a lack of a support system when she became a widow.

This narration of the respondent illustrates a woman's liabilities after her husband's death, implying that single mothers go through extensive challenges in such circumstances and require assistance in this regard. However, living in a dominating male society is already one of the main challenges. Additionally, these challenges increase if the woman's widow is likewise uneducated. In such circumstances, women opt for domestic or caregiving work, which possesses numerous peculiarities regarding gender equality and opportunities for women that are often not granted only in Arab countries but globally. As per the explication of Sabbagh (1996), a woman's primary role is as a housewife and a nurturing mother. This concept was instilled in the residents of the Arabs, which initiated the discrimination of gender in the place of work as well. This caused gender inequality in the work of domestic execution and caregiving. Due to the stereotypes attached to females' gender, women's household work and

caregiving are likely executed. However, this may likewise contrast in the context of Saudi Arabia since the territory is diverse and is gradually advancing over time.

#### 4.2.2 Socio-cultural impact

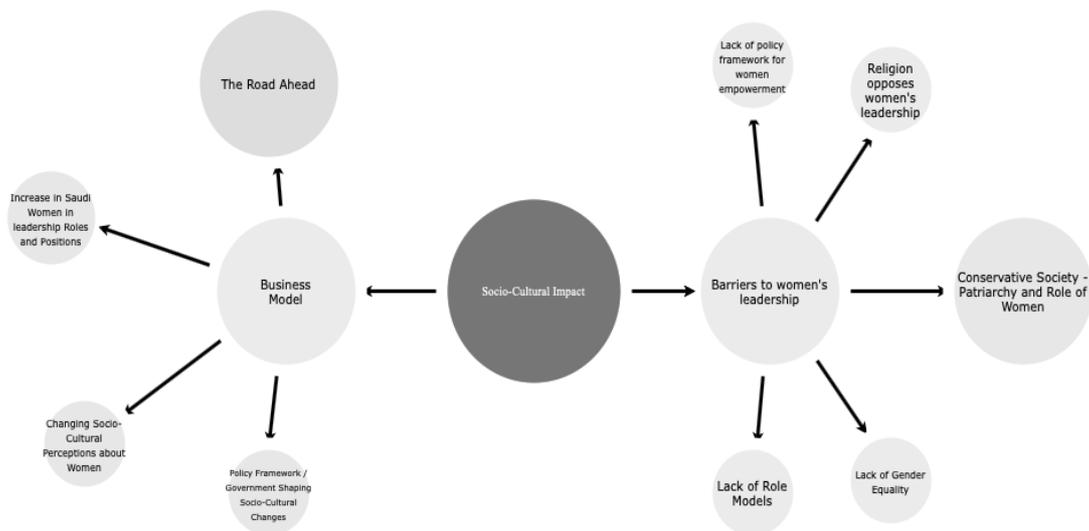
The social and cultural impact is considered one of the most significant parts of women leaders' conceptual framework, which will be analysed. The following analysis of data is based on that particular conceptual framework. There are two main organizing themes emerged which could be captured from the interviews

1. Barriers to women's leadership pre-vision 2030 in the KSA
2. Socio-cultural and policy impacts post-vision 2030 on women's leadership

The above two themes are discussed further using the sub-themes that had emerged.

Theme	Basic theme	Files	References
Barriers to women leadership	A. Conservative society - patriarchy and role of women	5	6
	B. Religion opposes women's leadership	1	1
	C. Lack of gender equality	1	1
	D. Lack of role models	1	1
	E. Lack of policy framework for women empowerment	1	1
Things are now improving for women	A. Policy framework/ government shaping socio-cultural changes	1	1
	B. Changing socio-cultural perceptions about women	1	2
	C. Increase in Saudi women in leadership roles and positions	1	1
	D. The road ahead	5	7

**Table 4-2: Socio-Cultural Impact**



**Figure 4-2: Socio-Cultural Impact**

### 1. Barriers to women's leadership pre-vision 2030 in the KSA

Most of the participants, being educated and having started their professional journeys before vision 2030, had several life problems and challenges. Some of the barriers that they recalled having faced on their leadership journeys were directly linked to the conservative nature of the Saudi society, the country's religion, the lack of concepts related to gender equality and almost non-existent female leadership role models and finally, the lack of governmental focus on making policies to encourage women in workforce and leadership roles.

#### A. Conservative society - patriarchy and role of women

Saudi society is predominantly conservative and traditional and encourages it to segregate genders and gender-typical roles. The community believes that women cannot function in some leadership roles. They believe women lack the intelligence to make decisions and are too emotional to handle sensitive issues. Even though the participants agreed that things are changing, most believe that men still hold important leadership positions. One of the participants said:

*“The decision-makers in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia continue to be men... The customs and traditions were traditional and mostly dominated by males. They still see that women's role is limited to being either a housewife or a teacher.” P9.*

The respondents stated a lack of role models for women leaders. However, several female leaders have emerged recently, reflecting society's barriers to women. Closely related to the conservative community was the belief that women were meant to stay indoors and do the household work. This meant that the household duties were the sole responsibilities of women while decision-making and power remained in the hands of the male family members (Nieva, 2015; Al-Shamrani, 2013; Abalkhail, 2017). This perception can be evidenced in the outcome of the Arab barometer 2019 that proposed that males are liable to make decisions and can lead; however, women are not responsible for independently travel or demand their equal share in the heirloom (Al Alhareth, 2013).

Similarly, as per the explication of Suwaidi (2020), “more recently Saudi Arabian women have been labelled as homemakers irrespective of their educational backgrounds, career interests and qualifications. It is a common position of all the participants that women must prove to the men that they are capable of excelling in other fields aside from education and domestic work”. Additionally, Al Rawaf and Simmons (1991) illustrate that “the professional world only slightly accommodates for their interests, as women are largely restricted to teaching and social work positions in all-female settings”. One of the participants revealed that:

*“Yes, and we must prove ourselves as we proved ourselves in education and other areas. In the end, I hope that the man will participate in the housework and that it will not be exclusive to women.” P8.*

On the one side, it is evident that women were not allowed to get educated and become independent decision-makers in their personal lives. On the other hand, they were accused of being incapable of having an emotional IQ and decision-making capabilities. This participant's

response likewise reflects the similar notion explicated above that men are not considered appropriate for domestic work nor the work of caregiving and that women are not competent enough to leave homes and take part in professional domains.

#### B. Religion opposes women's leadership

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia, being an Islamic state, operates in the concepts and worldview provided by the holy Quran. The ULEMA'S understanding of the sacred book led to the interpretation of women's role in society as inferior to men. Women were deficient in mind or morality and unfit for leadership roles. Most people agree with the interpretation of the holy writings, and fighting for women's rights is sometimes seen as fighting against religion. Following the belief that many organisations will not allow women to lead, many will not even employ them in any position. Such religious perceptions of women made it almost impossible for Saudi women to come out of their homes and be a part of the workforce, let alone take up leadership roles. This can be evidenced in the response explicated below,

*“No, my daughter. For the status of women, what we have had over the past forty years was a selective stage. It was done regarding meditation on women in both the Quran and the prophetic traditions (hadith) in Islamic tradition was eclectic in its excellent way. The woman is not qualified, deficient in mind and religion, and cannot take any leadership position. The prophet said: "a people who make a woman their ruler will never be successful." [Reported by al-Bukhari].” P2.*

In the response mentioned above, it can be seen that responder convicted that it is not as per the teachings of Islam that women enjoy superior or even equal power to men. Additionally, the responder herself convicts that females cannot compete with men considering either the women's intellect or status of women. Thus, it can be explained that the country of Saudi Arabia follows a religion that assigns both genders rights but is not similar.

#### C. Lack of gender equality and the need for women to work harder to get recognized

It was noted that there was a lack of gender equality, and though changes were happening, there was a lack of acceptance of women in decision-making roles and individual posts as they were considered less than men. This could be traced to the socio-cultural backdrop as discussed above. Religion's direct view of women's abilities limits women's participation in many activities. Additionally, the societal beliefs about women being weak in domestic roles and compulsory submission to their husbands do not give women many opportunities to be considered for many leadership roles. Organizations believe women cannot take decisions independently and have limited time to concentrate on their work. They still have domestic work and may not be available to work outside their comfort zones. This conception of then companies is instilled due to the stereotypical assigning of household work to women, which males cannot execute according to society. This inequality of gender is likewise highlighted in Ferrant et al. (2014), which illustrated that due to the assigning the liability of domestic work to women, they lack time and opportunities to get indulged in paid employment or activities that might benefit them. Therefore the companies will prefer to consider men they see as independent for leadership positions. As per this conception, the investigation participants responded in the following manner, Gender inequality impacted family dynamics, but it also affected how women were perceived and treated in the workplace. Some participants claimed for a woman to be successful at her workplace, she must put in more effort than her male colleague. For instance, one of the participants stated that:

*“Women must work better than men because there is an inferior image of women - that their ideas are illogical and realistic. Women need to be self-confident and appear in the media to change the stereotype that women are not fit to hold a leadership position” p9.*

The findings reflect that Saudi society was holding on to gender stereotyping and reinforcing the role of women in the household parameters - which prevented them from acquiring an independent or professional experience and further trapped them in the boundaries

set by society and religion. The response from the participants still forestalls that inequality among genders in the workplace is still practised. These perceptions of the participants are supported by Syed et al. (2018), who explain that equality in Saudi Arabian workplaces is influenced by "religion-cultural factors" and "the social power of WASTA" as well as "concern relating to gender segregation discrimination and harassment at work. Furthermore, as per the investigation, the women's encounters likewise varied as per the concerns of "Social Class", "Family Status", and other identity-related problems. This implies that gender discrimination is still practised in the workplaces in Saudi Arabia even after the clear rule of King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, which is further backed by the literature.

#### D. Lack of role models

Many years of denying women education and leadership positions had led to a lack of women leaders in Saudi Arabia. Since Saudi women had only been allowed to get an education in the previous generation and the current one, there is a lack of role models for working women and women in leadership roles. Additionally, the participants shared that most of the rich women that upcoming women can look up to were living on their husbands' riches, making them not good role models for women who want to make their wealth and build their careers. Many wealthy Saudi women flaunted their riches, creating an aura around being 'pampered housewives' and having an easy life - which created a negative image for the hard-working women who wanted to earn their living. For instance, one respondent stated that:

*"Perhaps the good models are absent and did not play a good role in interacting with the community and interact with the media. Women must initiate and create a blog and be on social media. Behind the scenes are still conscious models enormous productive."* P2.

The lack of suitable role models and the projection of being wealthy, idle women are negatively associated with women who aspire for independence and work hard to earn their living.

### E. Lack of policy framework for women empowerment

Most participants recalled that pre-vision 2030, there were almost no initiatives or policies focused on women's education training or workplace participation. Unfortunately, society was comfortable with this and accepted the government position. While post-vision 2030 focused on women empowerment and encouraging women to participate in economic development, no such initiatives existed pre-vision 2030. An underlying reason for this apathy toward women's development and encouragement was that the government relied on the support of the Ulama, and the religious interpretations they provided largely guided its decision-making. For instance, one of the participants stated that:

*“In Saudi Arabia, I think the reason is political and social. Also, leadership and government in the past did not support women's access to managerial positions although the society was receptive and supportive of government guidance.” P10.*

The above findings underscored the numerous barriers aspiring female leaders likely faced during their journeys, especially before vision 2030. The next theme that emerged from the interviews focuses on the changes that the participants had perceived after the government promulgated vision 2030 and is also reflective of the more significant differences in the socio-cultural sensitivities of the country.

## **2. Socio-cultural and policy impacts post-vision 2030 on women's leadership**

### A. Policy framework/ government shaping socio-cultural changes

Most participants thought that after vision 2030, the government's multiple policy shifts had ushered in enormous advancements for women. The perception is that new government policies and programmes are articulated and followed. Most participants said that the current government policy gives Saudi women a bright future. For instance, one participant expressed

confidence in the vision of the government and expected that the new guidelines would lead to a better lot for all women in the kingdom:

*“The vision is clear, and god willing, the future is bright under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and our wise government” p2.*

Another participant expressed her opinion about the policy changes in the country in the following words:

*"In my opinion, 2017 is one of the most beautiful years for Saudi women. It's the year when Saudi women get many of their rights. God willing, this development continues in the fields of work, even in the labour market and educational institutions, whether governmental or private, where women get their real place. If women deserve a particular position, they receive it without distinction because she's women. An example is Saudi banks; a chief executive officer is already a woman. I hope that this will also happen in universities and institutions.” P8.*

According to another participant, the impact of the broader policy changes was felt in the individual workplaces. For instance, at King Abdul Aziz University, wide-sweeping changes were introduced to encourage women's development and participation and help them develop their careers.

*"Certainly because the pressure of the current region is forced. It is not a personal choice either to move, or you will find yourself in a tough position. Still, everything is available, especially King Abdul Aziz University, where the ability to accommodate all variables. The stage of brainstorming practices where the practices of the initiative the practice of empowerment is high.” P2.*

Similarly, there were mentions of government policies and scholarships that had transformed education and made it possible for women to acquire skills and academic backgrounds that could support their career development. Considering many responses from participants about the policy changes, it is clear that King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz's rule has made a difference

and helped increase the number of women who are leaders.

#### B. Changing socio-cultural perceptions about women

A significant change that the participants reported was related to the gender stereotyping of women from being just housewives or capable of taking up a teaching or nursing job to becoming total contributors to the Saudi economy in all fields. Most participants believe that post vision 2030, women have taken up positions in almost all areas of the country. Some of the excerpts from the interviews of the participants provide the evidence to support this change:

*-"Now the situation is different, and women are taking their rights." P5.*

*"Selected interpretations that left the most beautiful feature of the Qur'an and the prophet's hadith in the biography of the Prophet Muhammad, and I think it's a stage and finished. This period in Saudi Arabia is ripe for social, intellectual, and psychological investigations. But this corrective period is only the beginning of returning to real life. The last 40 years are an exclusionary period for the Saudi people and women because they are the source of life. I talked about the woman in the south, especially the woman who was the man's partner in all things, life activities, agriculture, and grazing." P3.*

The above responses highlight that the new rule influenced the preconceptions of the Saudi Arabian population and that people started acknowledging the presence of the female gender in leadership positions.

#### C. Increase in Saudi women in leadership roles and positions

Most participants Also identified some participants believed that the equation is not balanced yet between men and women in a leadership position. They felt the percentage of women in leadership positions is satisfactory. This can be seen in the comment of one participant who pointed out the growth in the number and quality of women leaders in Saudi society and expressed satisfaction and optimism:

*“In this era, many women leaders have emerged in Saudi society, whether academic, commercial or political. It may not be equivalent to men's leadership. Still, we can observe the rapid movement of women in our society. At the same time, I am optimistic that our present era holds many wonderful leadership opportunities for Saudi women to prove their ability and success in leadership positions.” P6.*

These present changes are believed to induce more rapid future changes. They indicate a growth in role models that young women can look up to and find inspiration in their lived experiences on their journeys to leadership.

#### D. The road ahead for women leaders

While the participants reported positive developments toward women empowerment and indicated that society was poised to accept women's leadership as a usual way of life, They also expressed several concerns about socio-cultural, family and policy-making elements that still needed to be amended and modified. In the context of socio-cultural barriers, one participant stated that women often act as barriers to other women's advancement (due to their values or beliefs rooted in their upbringing and childhood experiences) - by spreading rumours about working women's character or by not serving as mentors to other women. There was also a concern about how women used the new freedom. A participant claimed that if women irresponsibly or misused the opportunity, it may influence the future decision of the government. Additionally, one participant also reported that it was essential that women carry themselves with dignity and respect when aspiring for more severe and responsible roles in the workplace instead of becoming aggressive and losing their sense of being female. In the words of one of the participants:

*“These specific women will be the ones who will lead to real change. We are now in a difficult transition stage, perhaps observing some phenomena. Unfortunately, some ladies are like a volcanic eruption after a previous stage. The reaction to this change is not mature. The*

*joy of that decision is not conscious and may be reprehensible. For instance, women attend sports stadiums in some events and activities of the general authority for entertainment. Many ridicules accompanied very excellent activities but their responses. The act was unconscious, and some demagogic behaviour and unconscious attendance. Therefore Saudi women should be aware that we are in a transitional stage in the history of our country, and this is our time.”* P2.

The participants also believed that what the media say about women's leadership positions is essential. They proposed that women needed to represent themselves in more positive roles in media so that other girls aspiring for ambitious positions could get inspired.

*“Perhaps the good models are absent and did not play a good role in interacting with the community and interact with the media. Women must initiate and create a blog and be on social media. Behind the scenes are still conscious models enormous productive.”* P2.

The participants did not propose an immediate change in women's domestic roles, as they believed such changes would take a long time. In the context of the continuing family-related barriers, other participants also noted that women need to learn to have a balanced approach to family and the workplace and stay patient as long-held gender roles would take time to change. However, some participants believe that men must also be oriented to accept gender equity. Saudi men need to transform their own to get women equal and in leadership roles; as one participant put in:

*"We (the women) have been brought up by our parents thinking we are equal and capable...but many parents forgot to teach their sons the same lessons...that their sisters or wives are not second-class citizens, but their equals... and this change is still needed for the Saudi society to accept women as equals altogether "p5.*

According to another participant:

*"The balance between work and personal life can only be managed if the family members accept women as equal contributors to the country's economy and not just as people who cook and clean after other family members"p4.*

The participants also opined a need for stricter and more conscientious implementation of the vision 2030 policies at the organizational levels to ensure that women are not made just name-heads but also given actual power and authority when they reach leadership positions. They believe those implementing vision 2030 policies must not do so just for recording purposes but in good faith.

#### **4.2.3 Impact of work culture and work environment in KSA**

These questions asked to women were specifically targeted to obtain their perceptions regarding barriers or facilitators at their workplaces that they may have experienced on their leadership journeys. Some of the subthemes that emerged from this discussion are captured below:

- Patriarchy exists in workplaces
- Merit-based growth is still difficult
- Lack of training and development
- Lack of women-friendly work culture

##### **4.2.3.1 Patriarchy exists in workplaces**

According to almost all participants, they were hard-working women who spent hours doing their jobs with meticulous care and commitment. Such work ethics helped them along their journey to leadership positions.

However, they also acknowledged that patriarchy exists (Kattan et al., 2016; Metcalfe and Mutlaq, 2011; Alotaibi et al., 2017). Saudis, especially men, are not expected to work hard or put in the extra effort to attain high positions. Several respondents acknowledged that women had to work extra hard and be extra careful about their quality of work and the time they spent at work to stay above blame. They faced more barriers than males and were often blocked in their progress because of the patriarchal attitude adopted by the organization (Lerner, 1989; Bhopal, 2003; Alotaibi et al., 2017). Some shared challenges they faced in their career progression simply because they are women.

Also, the participants acknowledged that often male leadership was considered better than female and women were not put in charge though there was a perceptible change in things in recent times:

*"Such as, the University Of Taif has a dean of the faculty of medicine. Yes, we are at the University of King Abdul Aziz. We have a dean. Nevertheless, the dean (a woman) of the faculty of medicine at the University Of Taif runs the students for both male and female sections. However, in King Abdul Aziz University, the dean (man) runs the students for male and female sections." p8.*

Budur and Demir (2019) have critically analysed this aspect: they were not trusted enough to make essential decisions despite giving women some leadership positions. Accordingly, some participants reported that female leaders were required to consult male counterparts before taking final decisions, which is indicative of the continued negative perceptions about female leaders' capabilities and skills:

*"In general, as female leaders in part of the female students. For instance, we are faced with a permanent reference to the male section. In most decisions, the department cannot make the decision alone without reference to the male section and taking the approval of the final decision. My job title is the supervisor of the college of communication and media. Even the*

*title is (the supervisor), and it is not the head of the department. The head of the department is in the male section, and I am under the head of that department.” P5.*

A related sub-theme emerged from the interviews: women have only been ceremonial heads of departments in governmental agencies. They did not enjoy any real power. According to one participant

*"Women in most government agencies could not have actual powers and authority. When all the powers and authority were in the hands of the man, the powers and authority of the women were only formal., But now, under our new King Salman, all that has been completely changed." P9.*

As per the research study of Shivani Inamdar (2020), it has been critically analysed that in a situation where a woman holds the same leadership position as a man, the participants believe she will still not be given the same authority as the man. This difference in power between men and women who technically held the same positions was explained by a participant in the following words:

*"In the nominations, there is no difference between men and women, such as men are nominated for the nomination of women in return. But the difference is in functional powers. In the sense that men and women are in the same position, but the man has more powers, I feel that now women do not have the same powers available to men, and up to my knowledge, that does not happen in other universities." p8.*

#### **4.2.3.2 Merit-based growth is still difficult**

According to the participants, the culture of Saudi organizations supported favouritism and nepotism to a certain extent. This was not a negative aspect, though, as it stemmed from the tribal rooting of the Saudi society, where tribe members and relatives lived and worked closely. While there has been a substantial change in the lifestyles and sensibilities of Saudi s,

some vestiges of nepotism continue to exist, especially at the organizational level. So merit-based opportunities were sometimes rare, especially for women. However, most women stated that they had tried their best to achieve success on their own accord without involving their family or mentors:

*“At the time, there was an article in a newspaper for my father in which he stated that he had nothing to do with his daughter's employment in the consultative assembly of Saudi Arabia. But quite the opposite, he was a dissident because she was a teaching assistant at the university. I was the only chance up to my cv in 99.5% of the interview that washed in the council knowing that it was not easy to interview and I was going to interview without telling my family about it.” P1*

*“It is an individual effort 100%. I did not aspire to this position and was very surprised by the nomination. Still, the work in the art department when I was the head of the graduate studies unit was highlighted and nominated for more than one post. Still, I would avoid these positions to build myself academically.” P4*

*“Before I got my current position, I had been selected to supervise one of the important units of our faculty and then became clear to the leaders of the faculty my abilities and the recommendation from the college's vice dean. I was nominated for the position.” P6*

#### **4.2.3.3 Lack of training and development**

The respondents were concerned that they lacked adequate growth and development opportunities. One of the reasons for this is the belief that women are not independent and may not be available for such training.

However, things seemed to be changing post vision 2030, where several participants acknowledged that they were getting more and more opportunities for self-development and preparing themselves for leadership roles:

*“Of course, I participated in many leadership and women's leadership courses. And areas of the language seminar. “I am constantly developing from a leadership standpoint”. The university has nominated me to take training courses in leadership in many areas. Still, I have always been going to the UK to look for courses in which I practice more than what is theoretical and take advantage of classes left in this research, such as the last summer I was at the University of Leeds with specialists like me looking for what's new in my field working with universities and international partnerships to develop my thinking.” P4.*

*“Any Saudi woman's leadership should develop from the skills required by leadership in many respects. There are training programs that train leaders and thank god. Saudi institutions are quick to provide these programs to their employees. Such as managing difficulty in the work environment, making the decision and measuring all the things needed by the right decision and understanding the institutional environment and the appropriate development method for each position.” P6.*

Longman et al. (2018) critically analysed that gender issue is no institutional problem. Men had previously dominated the leadership positions in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Alsubhi et al., 2018). The restriction on close relationships between opposite genders was why women in leadership positions could not get mentors. The participants also reported not being paired with mentors, mainly because most senior leadership positions and mentors were male. It wasn't easy to work closely between the genders.

#### 4.2.3.4 Lack of women-friendly work culture

The majority of the participants reported that they had to face several difficulties in the daily course of their work which were not related to the type of their work or quality of work but stemmed from the perceptions of their male colleagues. These challenges relate to male patriarchal thinking, where the men in the organisation try to put down women as much as they can (Kattan et al., 2016; Metcalfe and Mutlaq, 2011; Alotaibi et al., 2017); negative and discriminatory remarks that women employees have to hear from male co-workers and through that women work is often left unrecognized despite their hard work. It has been critically analysed by Hodges (2017) that an underlying reason that emerged from the interviews was that men found it extremely hard to accept women as their equal in wisdom, skill or hard work. Most of the time, men look down on women's work not because it is inferior but because of their bias towards women's ability to excel. Two of the respondents mentioned the following to illustrate the nature of discrimination they faced at the workplace:

*"Yes, it is true. Many say, "Yoooh l is this department managed by women?" The reason is not the failure of women or their inability. In my opinion, men are always the decision-maker, and for women, the position is often configurable (she does not have a certain authority). She works on applying systems developed by the man (her manager) to facilitate the work with all sincerity and accuracy and charity. But there may be cases that require exceptions or consideration of a holistic view of the subject." p9*

And:

*"At the family level, I did not face any challenge. Everyone encouraged me to be the best. But at the level of work, the person must face some obstacles and things. This is the nature of the human psyche for men. Men, unfortunately, do not accept the idea that women are capable of being wise in making a particular decision or having a good opinion, but unfortunately, the eastern man still thinks he is the oldest and most experienced." p6*

Women also reported hearing several derogatory or discouraging stereotypical phrases and myths at their workplace.

Men also tended to deny acknowledgement for hard work done by women in the workplace that many women leaders were forced to report to men also makes men take credit for the excellent job done by women. For instance, according to one respondent, she was doing the work for which a male colleague was getting the credit:

Participants also reported that their male colleagues or bosses often would go out of the way to create barriers to their successful completion of jobs to reinforce the idea that they were not capable of good performance as a woman. For instance, one participant stated that:

*“Yes, I have faced some challenges that are no longer a challenge, while it is a man's view of the inability of women to reach a position parallel to his position in one way or another. The attitude was to reduce my ability to complete the tasks required by my position competently. Thank god I was able to prove my ability to lead and complete tasks in a manner comparable to a man's liability if he is the one who carries out my duties.” P6*

This implies that women in Saudi Arabia still encounter gender inequality in the workplace even after the new and prevailing rule of King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz. This can likewise be critically analysed in the investigation conducted by Hodges (2017) that illustrated the factors that influenced the successful formulation of women as leaders. These factors incorporated “social factors”, “religious factors”, “cultural factors”, “organisational practices”, “women's relationship with self”, “women's relationship with others”, “women's relationship with the place”, as well as “women relationship with work”.

Next, the chapter turns to the survey findings and analysis.

### 4.3 Survey findings and analysis

#### 4.3.1 Descriptive statistics

A total of 146 respondents had provided answers, out of which only 134 Female participants were included in the analysis due to their responses' completion. Additionally, the majority of the respondents were between 35 to 39 age group of 46, which corroborated with the finding that most of the participants had substantial experience working in the workforce and were likely to be in senior positions in their jobs. The majority of the respondents (57 women) held at least a bachelor's degree (20 women) had master's and (20 women) doctorates. These findings indicate that the target respondents for the current study were suitable. They were adequately educated and in the workforce for long enough to have gained experiences on their career journeys.

#### 4.3.1 Findings from survey

##### 4.3.1.1 Factors that determine success in a job

Among the questions in the survey, the questionnaire is the factor that determines success at the job. Some of the notable factors that the respondents cited included commitment (134 women), training (114 women), honesty (90 women) and teamwork (84 women). As seen from the following figure 4.3 below, the findings indicate that majority of the women respondents believe that commitment to their job and getting adequate training are the factors that can lead them to turn points in their careers. 67 % believe honesty (90 women) can bring success in the job, while 75 % (100 women) of the respondents believe that travelling can aid job success their religious faith can help them succeed at work.

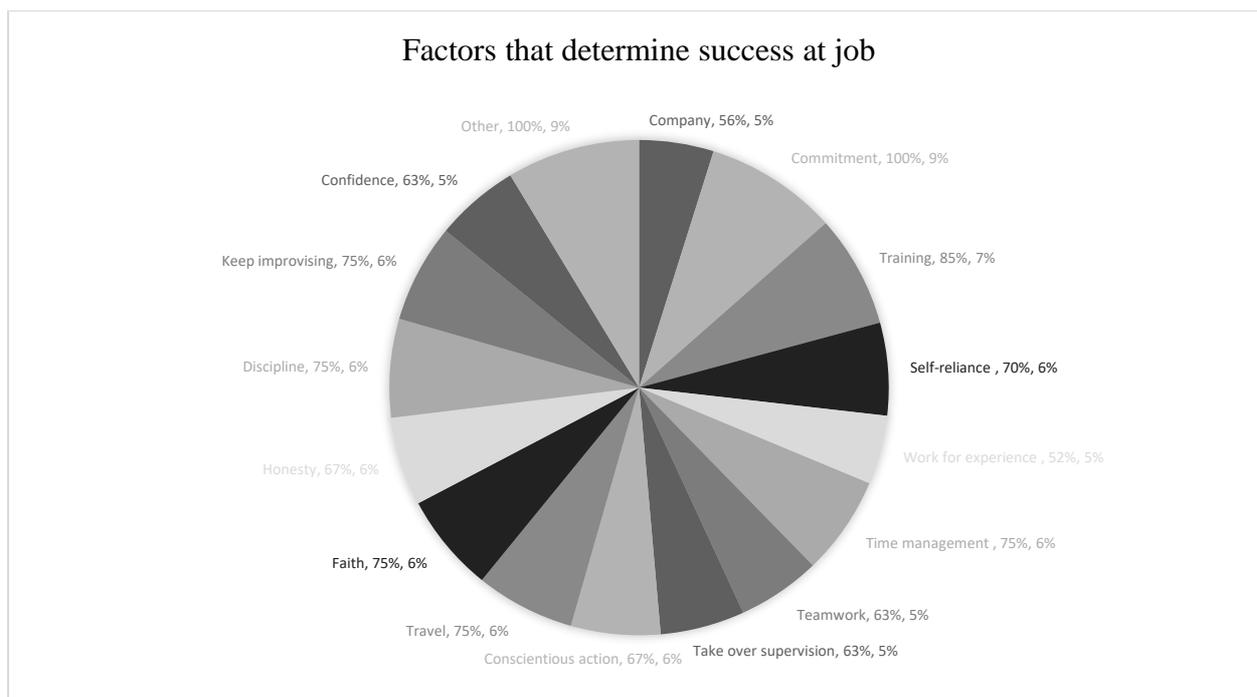


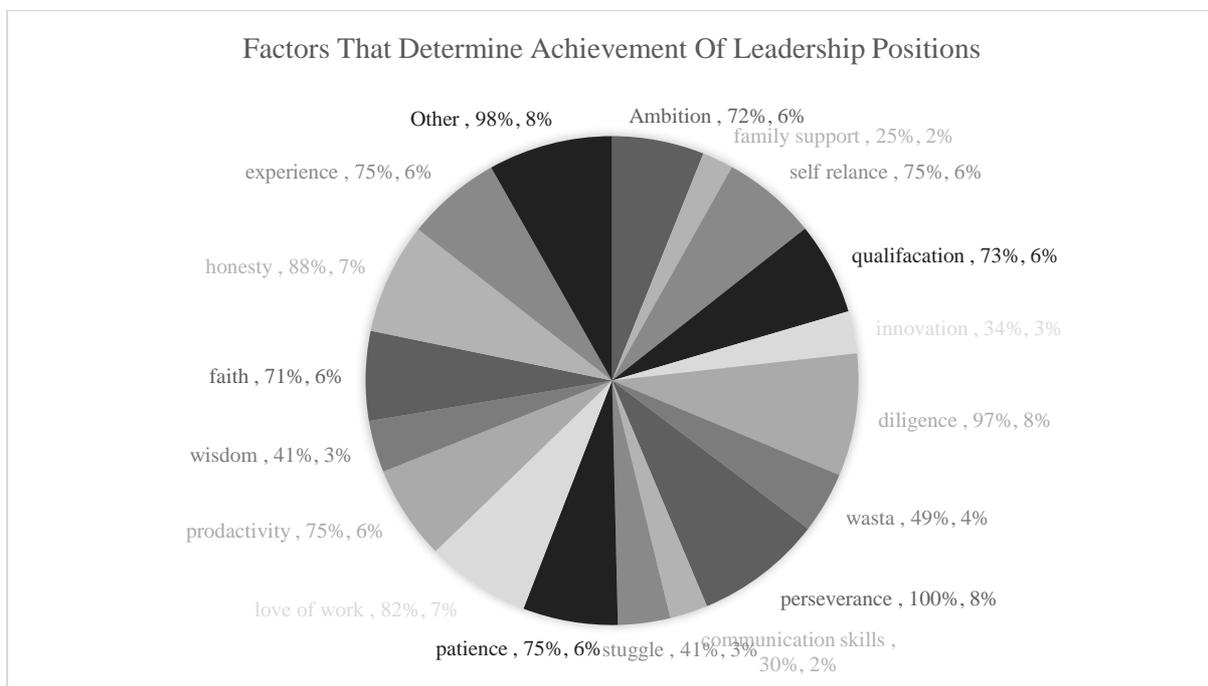
Figure 4-3: Factors Determine Success at Job

Factors That Determine Success In A Job	Female	Percentage
Commitment	134	100%
Other	134	100%
Training	114	85%
Discipline	100	75%
Faith	100	75%
Keep improvising	100	75%
Time management	100	75%
Travel	100	75%
Self-reliance	94	70%
Conscientious action	90	67%
Honesty	90	67%
Confidence	85	63%
Take over supervision	85	63%
Teamwork	84	63%
Company	75	56%
Work for experience	70	52%

Table 4-3: Factors Determine Success at Job

#### 4.3.1.2 Factors That Determine Achievement of Leadership Positions

More specifically, the respondents believed that for women to achieve leadership positions, they need to have diligence 97% (130 women), which is again closely associated with commitment and perseverance 100% (134 women): and that they also need to qualify 73% (98 women). Experience 75% (100 women), ambition 72% (97 women), and productivity 75% (100 women) were additional factors quoted by the respondents for women leadership. Diligence, 97% (130 women) of the participants, as depicted in figures 4-4, was the most cited attribute that could lead to women achieving leadership positions in Saudi Arabia, followed by perseverance (reported by 100% of the participants). Qualification was equally important to the respondents as it is also cited by 73%, while 75% believe that experience can determine the achievement of leadership positions. Only 25% (33 women) believe that family support can help determine leadership position achievement, and 49% (65 women) believe in nepotism.



**Figure 4-4: Factors That Determine Achievement of Leadership Positions**

Factors That Determine Achievement Of Leadership Positions	Percentage	Women
Perseverance	100%	134
Other	98%	131
Diligence	97%	130
Honesty	88%	118
Love Of Work	82%	110
Self-Reliance	75%	100
Patience	75%	100
Productivity	75%	100
Experience	75%	100
Qualifications	73%	98
Ambition	72%	97
Faith	71%	95
Nepotism	49%	65
Struggle	41%	55
Wisdom	41%	55
Innovation	34%	45
Communication Skills	30%	40
Family Support	25%	33

**Table 4-4: Factors That Determine Achievement of Leadership Positions**

#### 4.3.1.3 Characteristics of a good leader

Most respondents stated having the quality of wisdom 75% (100 women) as most important for a person to become a good leader. This was followed by honesty 88% (118 women) team builder 75% (100 women) being fair 97% (130 women) moral strength 85% (114 women) patience 44% (59 women) objectivity 92% (123 women) and compassion 67% (90 women). It is evident from the responses that most participant's recognised factors attributed to a transformational leader as essential for good leadership. Wisdom reported by most respondents 75% (100 women) was, therefore, the most acceptable quality of being a good leader for women. This was followed by qualities like honesty, reported by 88% of the respondents (118 women), and being a team builder by 75% (100 women). Figure 4.5 also highlights other reported qualities, including being fair 97% (130 women) and having moral strength of character 85% (114 women). It needs to be noted that characteristics like being

assertive 54% (73 women), having confidence 75% (100 women) and being firm 60% (80 women) were not mentioned by many respondents as essential qualities for women leaders. Only 75% (100 women) choose to be ambitious as part of the characteristics of a good leader, and another 75% (100 women) included responsibility in their characteristics.

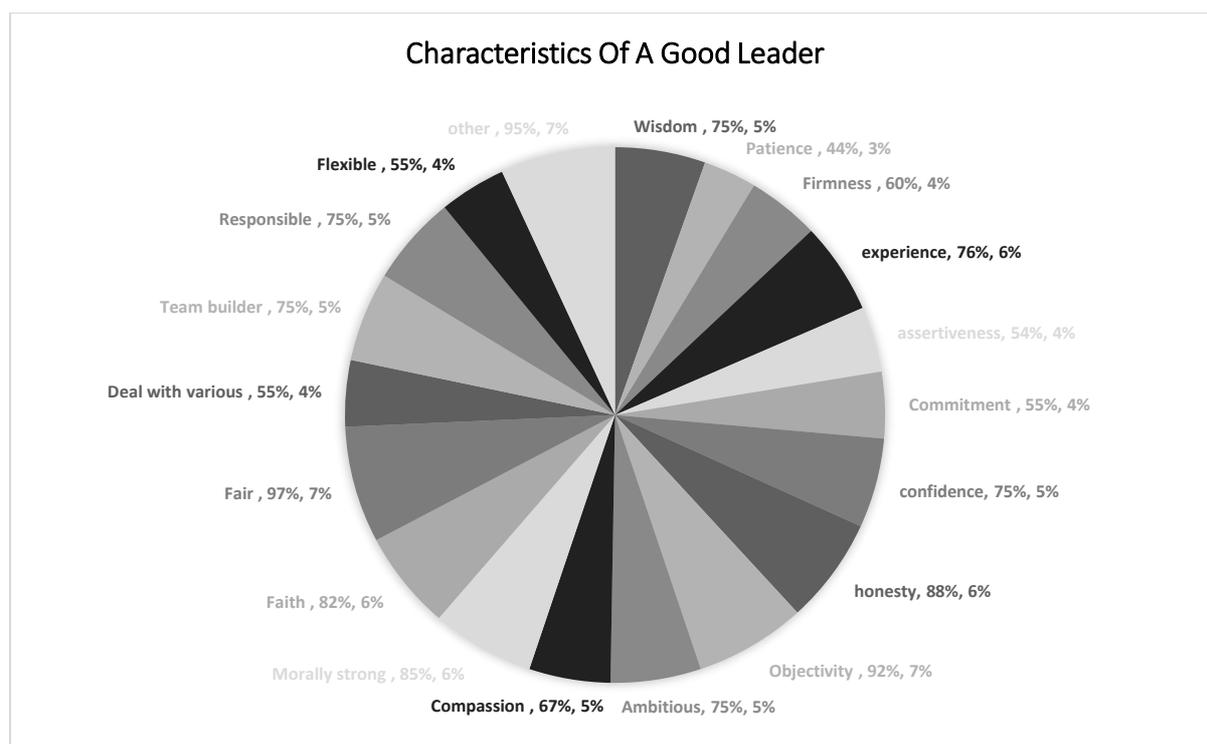


Figure 4-5: Characteristics of a Good Leader

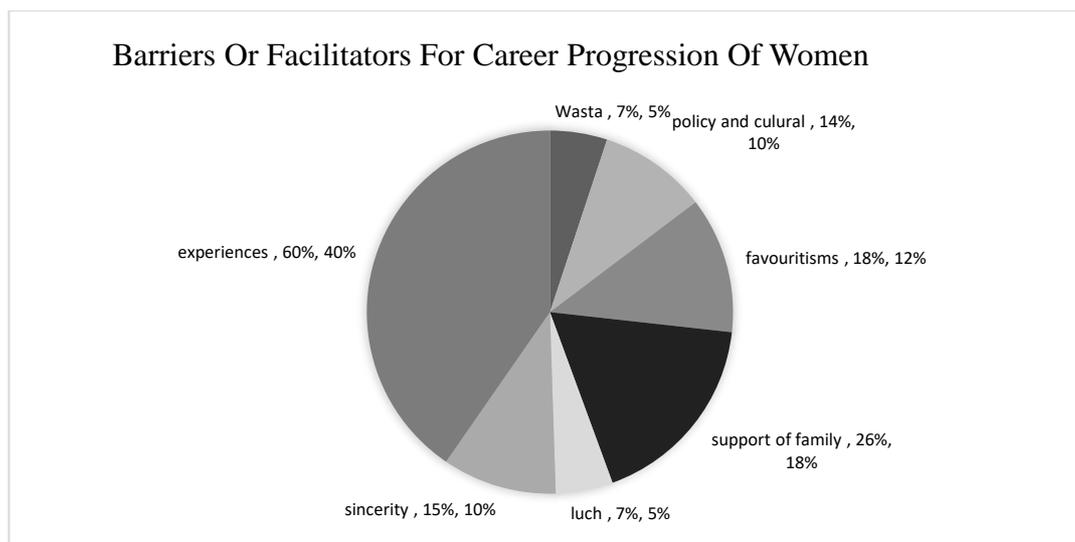
Characteristics of a Good Leader	Percentage	Women
Fair	97%	130
Other	95%	127
Objectivity	92%	123
Honesty	88%	118
Morally Strong	85%	114
Faith	82%	110
Experience	76%	102
Wisdom	75%	100
Confidence	75%	100
Ambitious	75%	100

<b>Team Builder</b>	75%	100
<b>Responsible</b>	75%	100
<b>Compassion</b>	67%	90
<b>Firmness</b>	60%	80
<b>Commitment</b>	55%	74
<b>Deal With Various</b>	55%	74
<b>Flexible</b>	55%	74
<b>Assertiveness</b>	54%	73
<b>Patience</b>	44%	59

**Table 4-5: Characteristics of a Good Leader**

#### 4.3.1.4 Barriers or facilitators for career progression

The survey also asked the respondents about their perceptions regarding the factors that help or hinder women from achieving leadership roles. It was evident that family support, workplace policies, and overall socio-cultural acceptance of women were ushered in Saudi Arabia post vision 2030 (Gray & Mitten 2018). However, practices like *wasta* and favouritism negatively impacted women leaders' aspirations. Additional factors cited included favouritism, 18% (24 women), which was cited as a negative impact since women were likely to get discriminated against for their gender and were ta 7% (10 women), where women did not have connections that could help them along with their career growth. 14% (19 women) of the respondents reported a positive factor in the country's policies and culture change. Only 6.1% believe that lick can work against women, and experience 60% (80 women) are among the least cited factors.



**Figure 4-6: Barriers or Facilitators for Career Progression**

Barriers Or Facilitators For Career Progression Of Women	Percentage	Women
<b>Experiences</b>	60%	80
<b>Support Of Family</b>	26%	35
<b>Favouritisms</b>	18%	24
<b>Sincerity</b>	15%	20
<b>Policy And Cultural</b>	14%	19
<b>Was Ta</b>	7%	10
<b>Luch</b>	7%	10

**Table 4-6: Barriers or Facilitators for Career Progression**

The most potent factor cited by 26% (35 women) of the respondents, as seen in the following table 4-6, was family support - which, when present, could act as a facilitator and, when absent, can hinder women's leadership aspirations when zero men did not have connections that could help them along with their career growth. However, while sincerity (15%) 20 women believe in the effectiveness of sincerity in the workplace.

Next, the media analysis is presented below.

#### **4.4 Media Analysis**

The selected articles presented in appendix 3 (list of articles) were analysed using manual thematic content analysis where each article was read to find out the mentions of women

leaders (their achievements journey challenges facilitators), the socio-cultural context of women leadership in the KSA policy-framework supported by vision 2030 as it related to female leadership and workplace culture and environment in the context of its impact on female leadership in the KSA. These mentions or phrases were coded manually in specific categories related to Saudi Arabia's socio-cultural, family, and workplace policy framework. The types were then read together to evolve the predominant themes discussed below. Some of the mentions captured from the media articles are presented in appendix 5 (list of articles) below and further developed into themes later in the later section.

#### 4.3.2 **Prominent phrases from media articles**

A review of the articles found that most of them mentioned that post promulgation of vision 2030, the government was backing gender equality (29 mentions). Another theme that emerged from the analysis of the articles was that women were increasingly entering the male-dominated roles, including leadership roles in Saudi Arabia (25 articles) presented in Appendix 4 (List of Articles). Further, 25 articles in the media were on the themes related to changing times and how the socio-cultural structure of the country was adjusting to pave the way for women's participation in the workforce and leadership roles. Only one article among the selected articles discussed the adoption of new technology as the key, and one addressed the increase in women's participation in sports. The following table contains the prominent focus that seems to form the crux of the articles. These themes are based on the article's focus, title, and how the news was introduced in the first paragraph of the article. The underlying idea of categorising the articles under these key phrases was to indicate the relative popularity of the categories (focus and title-based) discussed in the media. The next step was to collate these categories of articles together to see if some overriding themes could be developed after tables (4-7).

<b>Women bring innovation</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>16</b>
Adopting new technology is the key	1	1
International liaison	1	7
Aim for self-sufficiency through localisation	1	5
Focus on quality	1	3
Women equally able to lead	3	11
Highly experienced individual	1	1
Internationally qualified	1	1
Qualified	1	1
Specialized and experienced in military equipment	1	5
Background in social science	1	1
Adventurous in nature	1	1
Textiles can be handled better by women	1	1
Breaking into traditionally male-dominated careers	3	15
Saudi first woman ambulance driver	1	6
Saudi women explore the desert	1	4
Women's participation in sports increasing	1	1
Encouraging women's participation in sports in line with vision 2030	1	1
Female national teams are established	1	1
Academies established to encourage sports	1	1
Focus on sports is increasing in general as well	1	1
Family support highlighted	3	6
Family support made it possible	1	2
Support of family for nomination	1	3
Family ties in military	1	1
Mentions changing times	3	14
Women entrepreneurship is central to women's inclusion	1	3
Giving women opportunities will eradicate the stereotypes	1	1

Social barriers are stronger than legal barriers to overcome	1	2
Women's perception of themselves need to change	1	2
KSA is ready for a change to encourage women's empowerment	1	2
Her move will help encourage the female athletes	1	2
Driving women in KSA were frowned upon	1	1
Women can now achieve at all levels	1	1
Government backs gender equity	6	29
Gender equality is the aim of the government's new policy	1	1
Women work as hard as men	1	1
2030 vision focuses on a prosperous economy	1	1
An inclusive policy is designed for all citizens	1	1
Multiple measures are taken to encourage the participation of all employees	1	1
The goal is to empower women through the textile industry	1	3
Highlighted the need for women's financial inclusion	1	2
Highlighted the need for women's labour inclusion	1	2
Highlighted the need for women's digital inclusion	1	3
Highlighted the need for inclusive decision making	1	2
Focus on giving recommendations to the government to empower women	1	2
Focus on empowering and including women in economic growth	1	1
The explorers were trained for the 26 days of adventure	1	1
Exploration trip ordered by the crown prince	1	1
Women need to be included in decision making	1	1
Historic ruling for the judicial system	1	1
Ruling in line with the vision of the crown prince	1	1
Ruling in line with human rights	1	1

**Table 4-7: Prominent Phrases from Media Articles**

### 4.3.3 Themes

Several themes were identified using the manual thematic content analysis of the articles. As seen in Table 4.7 above, several articles discussed the impact of vision 2030 on women's professional lives, and others discussed the changing nature of Saudi society and human rights. However, several articles focused on underlying challenges women may face at work. The following three themes could be consolidated from the media analysis.

#### 4.3.3.1 The positive impact of vision 2030 on enabling female leadership

The articles almost always mentioned vision 2030 in the context of emerging female leaders in the country, so it can be presumed that the concept of women's leadership is provided mainly by vision 2030. The media showcased the changes in the overall policy framework of the KSA, making it possible for women to adopt leadership roles and move into areas that were earlier dominated by males only.

One of the articles focused on KSA's official statement regarding women empowerment:

*"as the current women 20 (w20) presidency Saudi Arabia's theme of 'putting women at the heart of the g20' adds to the pillars of labour inclusion, financial inclusion, and digital inclusion that have been introduced by previous G20 presidencies — the fourth pillar of inclusion in decision making."*

However, news stories also underscored a persistent challenge for women aspiring for leadership roles in the form of existing labour laws discriminatory toward women (Aschenbrenner 2006). So it is found from the media analysis that the country is moving toward better opportunities for female leaders brought about by the promulgation of vision 2030.

#### 4.3.3.2 Positive socio-cultural changes encouraging female leadership

The articles also captured the changes in Saudi society that were happening partly due to vision 2030 and partly due to the globalisation and opening up of the country toward new

ideas. The socio-cultural context of female leaders was transitioning toward gender equality, non-segregation, and acceptance of non-gendered roles. These changes gave women leaders greater freedom, self-confidence, family support, and inspiration. For instance, one of the articles carried the story of the first ambulance driver in Saudi Arabia, Sarah Khalaf-Al-Enez and revealed that as a girl, she was called a "home doctor" by her family and thus was encouraged and inspired to follow up on her dream and move ahead in her leadership journey.

The following excerpt on the female ambulance driver from one of the articles displays the impact of society and family on women's lived experiences:

*"Being the first female ambulance driver in Saudi Arabia is indescribable. My field of work is a healing balm for my soul and a motivation to be more committed to helping the injured and saving lives," she (AL-ENEZ) said. Family encouragement and support helped her become a pioneer in Saudi Arabia. As a child, she loved emergency work."*

Even though society believes that a female needs the approval of a male before she can live alone, the media articles indicated that this is changing. One article carried the story and debate around a woman who tried to live alone without her father's permission.

*"The court ruled that the independence of the defendant in a separate home is not considered a punishable criminal act as the "woman is a sane adult who has the right to decide where she wants to live."*

Therefore, the media analysis revealed that Saudi society was on a transformative path with greater acceptance of women in leadership roles, which can be presumed to be good news for women aspiring for leadership roles in the country.

#### **4.3.3.3 Workplace changes making steady progress toward inspiring and supporting women's leadership**

A theme that emerged from the thematic analysis of the articles was that changes were still needed to make the workplaces more inclusive of women in decision-making roles and

allow equal participation and contribution from women leaders. Since several articles had mentioned organisations in the process of making women-friendly policies encouraging female participation and creating inclusive workplaces, there is work still needed to bring women to par in the workplace. Also, articles carried information regarding the growing demand from some government sector officials for equal rights for men and women that include maternity as well as paternity leave, availability of childcare support services, and educational and awareness programmes that can help Saudi families move away from gender-based roles and encourage men to participate in taking up household responsibilities. Government policies are supporting women's rights. One of the articles illustrated the above, as seen in the following excerpt:

"The Saudi ministry of human resources and social development recently issued an order to ensure no gender-based discrimination in employees' wages.

The latest move is to create an encouraging and safe work environment that provides decent and sustainable job opportunities for all citizens and addresses challenges for workers and employers.

The ministry said that the employer is prohibited from distinguishing between their workers during work or when hiring or advertising it, such as sex disability age or any other form of discrimination."

#### **4.4 Summary**

The chapter presented the interviews, media analysis, and survey findings. The interviews with female leaders revealed that their early life experiences in the form of a supportive father, inspirational mother, and no-gender bias shaped their self-esteem and ambition. Also, later in life, post-marriage having a supportive husband and his family and hands-on practical support with child upbringing enabled them to aspire for leadership roles. According to Aschenbrenner (2006), the women seemed to have challenges related to the

conservative nature of the society and religion, lack of role models and the perpetual gender stereotyping that undermined their professional contributions and exposed them to discrimination and discouragement, and prevented them from gaining training and experience in leadership skills (Kinninmont, 2017). The findings were complemented by the survey where female participants reported similar barriers and challenges for women leaders. The majority of the participants in the survey believed favouritism and lack of support from the family are the significant challenges women are facing in attaining leadership positions. Further, the media analysis revealed that post vision 2030, things appeared to be changing with an increased number of role models, enhanced opportunities for women and growing support from the government in innovative policymaking to develop women leaders. The next chapter discusses these findings.

## 5. CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

The study investigated the live experience of female leadership in Saudi Arabia, specifically in the public sector. The literature demonstrates that leadership plays a significant role in maximising organisational efficiency and achieving goals. Numerous notions of leadership were explained in the above literature. It has been illustrated that gender has a definable part in the importance of leadership, as gender refers to the social traits of women and men regarding their values and norms (Lalotis et al., 2017). It has also been studied that people's views towards gender equality in leadership fluctuate and broaden with time and advancement. Generally, organisations are fond of leaders with exceptional communication, inspiring, motivating teamwork and guiding skills.

Moreover, the literature explored that Saudi Arabian organisations preferred to appoint just male staff to the workplace. Saudi culture does not allow women to leave home for occupation purposes (Nieva, 2015). Similarly, Rihal's (2017) study highlighted that Saudi Arabia had adopted an ancient culture; accordingly, the country follows Arab and Islamic cultures. The Saudi state experienced extraordinary development over the past few decades, as people are now aware of their customs, values, styles and norms. In this context, it was explicit from Folarin (2021) that the traditional concept of Saudi organisations regarding women was that they were incapable of performing with men and must take care of house chores. Meanwhile, with the continuous advancement and development at the international level, the country faced difficulties and challenges in economic growth because of gender inequality in Saudi organisations (Al-Shamrani, 2013).

By reviewing the above literature, it has been found that the "vision 2030" is the foundation of a new future established under the rule of "his royal highness the crown prince of Saudi Arabia"(Alghamdi et al., 2022). The king created this vision to strengthen the

country's strategic position, enhance the relationship between Islamic countries and Arab and save the country from oil revenue. According to Amran Et Al. (2020), the Saudi government struggled to implement this vision successfully and establish other reforms during the past five decades. However, the author further explained that vision 2030 gives numerous benefits to the citizens, specifically women, such as the "right to drive leading positions freedom to travel access to sports right to live alone in a landmark case enhancement in female employment right to serve in the military women join human rights council etc. (Alghamdi et al., 2022). The study further explored that the promulgation of vision 2030 enables Saudi women to drive freely (Moshas Hai et al., 2018). According to "Saudi military of labour and social development", the driving license policies made in the light of vision 2030 have dropped the ratio of drivers, as women do their work by themselves. For the first time in history, the Saudi government permitted women to participate in sports. It has been evaluated from the report of "Sports Minister Abdul-Aziz Bin Turki Al-Faisal" that the ratio of female sports participants has gradually increased up to 149% approximately. Not limited to this, the world had seen a drastic change in the culture and principles of Saudi Arabia in 2019 when "Princess Reema Bint Bandar Bin Sultan Al Saud " became the first female ambassador to Saudi Arabia in the United States (H Alsoraihi 2022).

In addition to this, the princess was also nominated as a member of the "International Olympic Committee (IOC)", which was an excellent achievement for the country (Balabel & Alwetaishi 2021). Similarly, Saudi Arabia granted women the ability to work in "security services for the interior ministry criminal investigations security patrol and pilgrimage security" in February 2018. Moreover, in October 2019, the kingdom announced that women would be permitted to serve in private first class corporal or sergeant positions in the armed services.

The study also explored several elements that have influenced women's leadership development, such as the family, workplace environment policy framework for women's leadership development, the socio-cultural environment, etc. The literature mentioned that the women who aspired to practice leadership in sectors traditionally dominated by male viewpoints are likely to confront several obstacles that will dissuade or destroy their desire to pursue specific jobs. While women are progressively breaking down barriers and ascending to positions of power in government law, sports, and entertainment, among other fields, professionals must recognise what remains to be done (Alqahtany, 2020). Furthermore, a lack of gender representation in leadership roles puts them in a challenging situation. As Aldossari (2020) mentioned, when there is a lack of intersectional representation among decision-making groups, minority populations' issues are frequently and ultimately affected. Leadership diversification also reduces groupthink boosts collective intelligence, and promotes creativity (Offermann & Foley, 2020). Female leadership presence and involvement are a transformation mechanism and a way of assembling the most effective team. It has been further discussed that stakeholder representation in leadership is a virtue that should be developed in organisational dynamics and human interactions since they can only function successfully when customers, workers, the community and leadership are in line with each other and support each other.

The literature also identified that the socio-culture environment had impacted women leaders' journey. The element of the socio-culture environment includes a nation's social structure and culture. Furthermore, the system is an intangible component that may significantly influence perception behaviour, relationships, ways of living a person's existence in society and survival. In most countries, women leaders are expected to adopt a democratic and participative leadership style instead of autocratic and directive leadership. It is predicted that an authoritarian and directive style is the best choice for men compared to women (Appelbaum et al., 2003).

Moreover, the study of Dwivedi et al. (2021) highlighted this leadership style discrimination. In many cultures, women are obliged to perform domestic labour and care for everyone at home. Still, men are lauded for being authoritative, so they want their instructions obeyed at home. However, these qualities are often passed on to the organisation, specifically in the case of private firms in Saudi Arabia.

Numerous studies have evidenced that women in the socio-cultural context are typically expected to pursue their jobs to the highest degree while also managing their homes under the guidance of their husbands (Grissom et al., 2012). As a result, becoming a leader in such situations might be difficult. Women caught between masculine dominance at home and their jobs as organisational leaders are doomed.

While the rest of the world believes that Saudi Arabia has a limited perspective regarding the role of women in society, there is growing worldwide recognition that women's empowerment is on the rise. Moreover, many females enter educational institutes because of high education and knowledge. It has been determined from the above literature that, like the rest of the world, Saudi s also survived in the twenty-first century, forcing the country to eliminate gender inequality and enhance the involvement of women in every field. In almost all western countries, there has been significant success in expanding the number of women in the workforce and top management positions (Hamas & Zailaa, 2021). In both public and private sectors, women are increasingly being included in decision-making processes; for instance, in the list of most powerful and influential businesswomen, the "Forbes Middle East" has enlisted nine Saudi women. In addition, about 350,000 Saudi women were working in the private sector by the end of 2015, and it is expected that 450,000 women will be employed by the end of 2016 (Dwivedi et al., 2021). While this is only a fraction of the number of Saudi women who might be working, it represents considerable progress toward achieving equality for Saudi women (Hakiem, 2021). The literature discussed that the primary reason for Saudi

women's leadership progress is their involvement in institutions and academies (colleges and universities). Women of Saudi Arabia are getting more access to colleges at home and abroad, laying the groundwork for future leadership positions. In addition to government and private institutions, Saudi Arabia has over 300 higher education colleges for women (Vogel and Alhudithi, 2021). Similarly, women account for more than 56.6 per cent of all Saudi university students, with more than 20 per cent studying at foreign institutions thanks to the king Abdullah scholarship program. Accordingly, due to the underlying reason, women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia gradually increases.

The underlying aim of this study was to evaluate the lived experiences of female leaders in Saudi Arabia and identify the challenges and barriers faced by women in leadership roles and those who aspire to climb the leadership ladder in the public sector in Saudi Arabia. The focus was on the family relationships, socio-cultural and policy backdrop and the workplace environmental context that emerged following the promulgation of vision 2030 and with the subsequent enactment of a raft of social reforms aimed at freeing the space for women given years of gender segregation. The study results generated fresh insights that may assist the state as a public policymaker and an employer in fine-tuning the policy environment and encourage women to aspire for more leadership roles in KSA. To this end, the specific objectives of the study were as follows:

To this end, the specific objectives of the study were as follows.

- To examine from the perspective of the female leaders the aspects associated with family dynamics that may have impacted their journey to arrive at senior leadership roles.
- To discover from the viewpoint of female leaders the cultural, social factors and policy framework that may have enhanced or inhibited their core capability to obtain leadership positions in Saudi Arabia.

- To assess the female leaders' opinion on the influence of a decisive workplace environment and policies that may have impacted their leadership aspirations.
- To develop suggestions for encouraging women's aspirations toward leadership positions in the public sector organizations in Saudi Arabia

In pursuit of the above objectives, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- Q 1. How do the family relationship and the socio-cultural context impact women's commitment to career progression and aspirations for leadership roles?
- Q 2. What are the impacts of vision 2030 and the institutional policy changes on women's career progression and leadership performance in Saudi Arabia?
- Q 3. How does the conventional patriarchy at the workplace impact women leaders' performance and career/professional growth from women's perspectives?

Given the above aims and objectives, this chapter discusses the study's key findings in related literature and conceptual framework on women's leadership.

## 5.2 Leadership roles of women

The literature has found numerous definitions and philosophical concepts regarding leadership and its role in different sectors. The central idea of leadership exploded after 1800, although it has also been found that not a single definition of leadership can cover all the aspects. In the challenging and competitive area, every company must adopt strategies and effective leadership to offer others insight, vision and communication opportunities. According to Cukier et al. (2016), leadership provides a clear vision and an insightful understanding of the direction of organisational success. Moreover, for the long-term competitiveness and success of the global economy and to obtain the company's objectives, it is essential for businesses to approach an effective leadership style. For many years, the debate between a woman's and a

man's leadership has been conducted. This debate continuously occurred because countries do not allow women to work with men.

Consequently, the most highlighted concept of leadership is defined by Rhode (2017), in which author emphasises that an effective leader provides direction in every situation. Rather (2016), it is a complex or easy situation; an effective leader provides support and motivation to all staff members. Furthermore, fostering team and encouragement is the most critical element of leadership. As per practical leadership theory, a good leader must encourage psychological toughness in a challenging environment. Let us consider an example of an effective leadership environment where the leader is capable enough to provide an anxiety-free atmosphere and comfortable environment to the co-workers. The company ultimately leads towards increased productivity and performance. In addition, Eagly and Carli (2018) briefed that a charming attitude and leadership skill conduction style communications; all are key elements that describe a person's leadership. It can be said that the role played by a leader is not just his responsibility, but it is a connection and promises that he makes with his co-workers and his employees; all are composed of leadership roles. Apart from this, it has been illustrated that women have emerged less in leadership positions than men, a significant gap that needs to be addressed in this competitive era.

It has been discussed in the literature above that men and women have been provided equal opportunities in businesses and organizations; however, their social and cultural structures are often challenging. The norms of organization rule procedures hiring criteria working criteria all are different in men's and women's leadership. Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) mentioned that many well many countries have preferred to give men leadership positions over women. In other words, many women have been unable to pursue their careers because of the fewer resources and opportunities. Moreover, women as leaders are impacted by socio-cultural environmental factors (Cseh et al., 2013). It has been found that leadership is viewed differently

by every scholar; however, the concept of leadership must be understood by businesses to offer a comprehensive and feasible environment for both genders. According to (Offermann & Foley (2020), some of the following attributes make a person reliable for leadership positions: skilful communications, innovative ideas, creativity, and ability to guide in transitions, approachability and so on. In a male-dominated environment where female workers must assimilate, they are forced to act masculine to satisfy their job and the company; otherwise, they cannot get jobs. McCullough (2019) identified that the men's scores had decreased. Then the contributing behaviour and populated behaviour of women increased in the corporation, and their personal and professional settings were dealt with individually.

Furthermore, today's business environment has pressured businesses and individuals based on their capabilities, abilities and creativity during hiring instead of judging them under gender (Showunmi 2021). According to the literature above, Gandhi and Sen (2021) have explained that women have better performance and emotional intelligence than men. However, in the context of emotional aptitude, the characteristics of both genders leaders have some differences, like females have the capability and ability to balance their own and other emotions in contrast to men.

### **5.3 Women's leadership journey in different cultures**

The literature has also identified the role of women's leadership in different countries, just like in western countries; gender neutrality has been observed in leadership style (Showunmi, 2021). In most Western countries, the higher ranks and the leading positions are occupied by men. Although in the current passage of time, women have also been able to strive toward greater equality as they are accepted for leadership roles and leading positions in the workplace. On the contrary, Madsen and Andrade (2018) highlighted that women are still underrepresented and have not been provided sufficient opportunities and resources in the workplace to improve their careers. Similarly, men have persuaded higher education in most

European countries than women. However, the literature has elaborated that gender inequality is a severe issue in most European sectors like industries, politics, science, government, etc. It can be concluded that Europe is restricted and was the land for women, particularly in education. However, the continent has continuously struggled to improve man and woman balance by adopting different approaches and strategies.

Consequently, the participation of women in the workplace has gradually increased over the last century. According to Wodon et al. (2020), women's participation in the EU has reached 63.5%, a remarkable achievement toward gender equality. According to the report of the European Commission, it has been evident that women are less unrepresented in leadership roles as around 40% of women have been able to achieve broad-level positions. The workforce in Europe is still predominantly made up of men, in whom only 40% of women have been hired while 60% of men are hired in the workplace. Accordingly, in the context of gender equality, the 21st century demands intelligent, inclusive, sustainable, and effective growth, which facilitates both genders as well as the success of the business. Apart from the European context, the literature also explained the journey of women's leadership in the United States of America. It has been studied by Beba and church (2020) that the business environment is now supposed to occupy more women than men, which is an excellent achievement in the entire history of the USA. It has also been observed that in the educational institutes of the USA, there are many more female professors in contrast to men professors.

Additionally, the literature discussed that in 2018, the USA had seen an unprecedented number of women running for leadership roles at all levels of government. Same as when considering the academic position of women in us, it has been evident that they are increasing among college degree holders (Mayer and Oosthuizen, 2020). Moreover, Cukier et al. (2016) identified that harassment, discrimination, work-life balance, family pressure, lack of role

models and many other factors had impacted the leadership role of women in almost all countries.

It has been observed that gender inequality is the essential element that creates problems and challenges for women in achieving their goals. It is noteworthy that management culture management and many other factors have influenced women's leadership in Saudi Arabia; however, religion is the key element that plays a significant role in women's leadership. Accordingly, the religion followed by Saudi Arabia is determined as Islam which offers balanced rights to men and women in every context. Like in Islam, women can work and pursue their careers just like men. In line with this, gender inequality has become the primary contact in the private business sectors in Saudi Arabia as they prefer to utilise foreign labours from different countries and nations, specifically men, instead of delivering from their own country (Eagly & Carli 2018). As a result of relying on foreign workers, there is a high ratio of male independence, which also reflects the power of men in both home and organisation. Similarly, the literature found that experience and knowledge are critical factors that have a significant role in leadership success and the success of women leadership.

Moreover, with the rise of vision 2030, a dramatic shift has been noticed in the perspective of gender roles. For the very first time in the history of Saudi Arabia, women are allowed and accepted to represent the country globally and take up higher governmental positions. In addition to this, with the emergence of vision 2030, the Saudi Arabian government has incorporated various measures and training sessions which provide leadership skills and innovative skills to women directing them on how to become a leader and providing them with resource training programs, workshops, different courses which help them to become an effective leader. The country has now taken measures to bring women into the professional world. In contrast, the results have stated some responses with religious evidence regarding women's leadership, which does not allow such administration.

#### 5.4 Vision 2030 empowers women

Kark and Waismel-Manor (2005) found in their literature that from the cultural perspective of Saudi Arabia, women living in Saudi culture are more encouraged to stay at their home to serve their partners and children; notwithstanding, it does not mean that Islam and the culture restrict their women from working if it is ordered by sharia.

In their research, Choi et al. (2016) explored that women are allowed the right to work by Islamic law; nevertheless, women are permitted to carry out their businesses and financial issues by Islam. However, the foremost duties and accountability at home should not be conflicted by these business activities that women conduct. Therefore, vision 2030 is about women's empowerment, specifically living in the culture of Saudi Arabia (Buengeler et al., 2016; Aldossari, 2020; Eum, 2019). Furthermore, the government of Saudi Arabia declared respect to the need to overcome the old-fashioned economy, i.e. usually based on the oil and movement towards a more diversified paradigm by involving more effort in the increase in the job skills and ensuring sufficient employment opportunities for the citizens of Saudi Arabia (Amran et al., 2020). However, empowering women in Saudi Arabia can be determined as one of the main steps for the achievement of this objective effectively as it might enable more than 50% of the population to contribute and take part in the required talent and skills for the labour market Saudi Arabia. In addition to this, one of the major themes of the western national transformation program is the development of the availability of the labour market, which mainly focuses on the empowerment of hurdles faced by the development of the labour markets for the entire divisions of the society. Including the solidification of the culture of the participation of women in the labour market is highly significant, along with the provision of the conceivable ways that may lead them to the condition of a suitable working environment for women (Eum, 2019). In this theme, the government declared the foremost challenges that led the women to be restricted concerning their participation in the state (Eagly & Karau, 1991). The limited awareness of the positive role of women in the labour market and their involvement

in the economic development and improvement of the country's GDP was determined to be the first significant challenge (Alghamdi et al., 2022). In addition, the feeble demonstrations of women in leadership positions in all the fields were determined to be the second major challenge, considered conservative in some contexts. Thus, it encourages women to stay home and serve their husbands and children. In addition to this, it was identified by Eagly and Karau (1991) that three of the positions were felt by women, which include finance SEO of the stock etc. Moreover, for the first time, Saudi Arabian women have sought out applications regarded as a big noticeable step in enhancing the rights and prospects of women in their state barriers to women's empowerment.

Conservatively the concept of leadership is associated with the characteristics and traits of males, such as power domination and assertiveness. Albeit there is no such evidence regarding factors related to authentic leadership, it seems they are integrated because of culture and society. Moreover, various examples have been found concerning women leaders in Islamic literature. Usually, over the past 100 years, women living in Saudi Arabia have faced numerous cultural and traditional gender biases in leadership and all areas of life. Due to this reason, women seemed absent from public life (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014).

Currently, females represent most students in universities and schools in Saudi Arabia. In 2017 approximately 52.4% of the female population, in contrast with 47.6% of the male population, was enrolled in primary education. In higher education, males were determined to be at 46 per cent while females were at 54 per cent. Moreover, in 2017, almost 45.4 per cent of the female lecturers were in the higher education department; despite such high figures of females in the higher education department in Saudi Arabia, only a minimum number of females were employed in leadership roles. Various obstacles to women's leadership roles were identified, including structural, individual, and cultural barriers (Almathami et al., 2021). LaPierre & Zimmerman (2012) explored in their literature was determined to be the labour inequalities in

Saudi Arabia, where the contribution rate of women in the labour market was identified as at the lowest point in the region. In 2007 approximately 8.2 million people were actively engaged in the workforce, of which only 14.4 per cent of the labour force was determined to be women (Al-Shamrani, 2013). Another barrier identified as a cultural level barrier is the different philosophy of Saudi Arabia concerning the lifestyle of men and women. Thus based on their responsibilities and duties, the males and females were required to agree with the Islamic viewpoint. It is clearly stated that men are responsible for supporting women financially. In addition, gender discrimination is the core challenge women face concerning the leadership position in any organisation because it prevents women from attaining leadership positions in any field (Almathami et al., 2020; Al-Shamrani, 2013).

Notwithstanding, the requirement for developing a moral working environment is established due to this factor. Subsequently, the private sector organisations usually hesitate to employ women, specifically in leadership positions, because of social norms and additional costs that might be incurred to formulate the working environment.

### **5.5 Strategies for Women Empowerment**

According to Beham et al. (2018), the rapid growth and changing environment usually demand attention towards the minimisation of gender inequality and maximisation of the women's leadership in the country; as in most OECD countries, women have proved themselves to be the best fit for the leadership positions along with the excellent management (Almathami et al., 2021; Alshareef & AlGassim, 2021). Beforehand, it was perceived by most people that women were held accountable for making food, looking after their children in the house, and being responsible for all the house chores. Notwithstanding, Blanchflower et al. (2002) and Baker (2017) found evidence that women can be more effective and excellent leaders if provided with complete facilities and opportunities compared to men. Moreover, it was noted in the study of Alsubhi et al. (2018) that a dramatic change was experienced by the world when women began

to be employed as leaders in the organisation because women are the ones who can win high profiles in the national leadership and politics along with that they can also participate in parliaments. However, Sadi and Al-Ghazali (2010) found in their literature that women face many difficulties and hurdles and aspire to leadership positions. They must provide different tests and limitations to prove themselves suitable and appropriate for the job. Alsubaie (2017) found in their research that the most crucial individual with the competencies and characteristics for developing into an extraordinary leader can be appointed to the leadership position, even though gender and identity are not factors to be considered. In this context, the scholar highlighted that in an organisation with a typically male-oriented environment, women are not provided with opportunities in group discussion and operating activities, leading them to enhance their skills and competencies such as negotiation, communication and influencing (Baker, 2017).

Furthermore, the findings of the qualitative analysis also support such claims. It has been found by the analysis of data that the impact of social and cultural factors on the leadership of women is significant. Men dominate most sectors in the kingdom, and women's leadership among men is not recognized and acknowledged. The interview participants manifest a lack of gender equality.

In addition, the government is held accountable for the programs at the isolated women from obtaining sufficient knowledge and acquiring leadership skills in public and private sector organisations. In their research, Puhl et al. (2008) explored that women have started and manage their businesses in most developing countries; however, it is not easy for a woman to manage all the business activities individually, as they face numerous barriers and hurdles in succeeding in their businesses. Analysis of the results suggests that the government has not outlined any policies to focus on the education of women, their empowerment, and increase

their participation in the workforce. Qualitative analysis has found that there are, at present, almost no such initiatives that train and educate women.

In this context, women are required to ensure their safety and security. The privacy and scope of the discrimination ensure more effort than the men to prove themselves more compatible and credible with others (Nieva, 2015). The main reason behind the challenges is the representation of the media and societal discourse, which provides restricted and highly stereotypical interpretations of women's leadership. Regardless, the organisation's government and public and private sectors are highly focused on adopting the various strategies and steps for enhancing the leadership role of women so that their skills can be improved and women can be advanced in the leadership position.

#### 5.6 Worldwide implementation of strategies

Mehrotra and Parida (2017) explored in their research that from 2012 to 2013, the ratio of women concerning the role of senior management has been highly increased by 3 per cent; they acquired 24 per cent of such positions in the different areas of life. Furthermore, the upsurge in the rate of senior management positions is not increased; however, it can be slipped back, as identified by the 2 per cent drop in 2015. House and Howell (1992) illuminated in their research that organisations with three or more women in the upper administration positions perform 10 per cent more effective in acquiring the return on equity. Consequently, Sadi and Al-Ghazali (2010) provided evidence in their research in 2013. The organisations developing more women in leadership positions have attained a 16 per cent increase in their return on sales and a 26 per cent increase in returns on capital invested. Despite the focus on women's leadership, the situation remains stuck with the minor changes in the leadership position of women in businesses in some regions and retrenchments (Tlaiss & Al Waqfi, 2020). The analysis of the quantitative data that has been collected with the help of a survey questionnaire also supports similar claims. It suggests that there has been an increase in

women's participation in the workforce in recent years. Women working in leadership positions are significantly impacting the progress of organisations positively. However, regarding the government policies and strategies, the results and findings suggest no straightforward approach in the KSA for women to increase their participation in the workforce and leadership positions.

However, there were no changes identified in Canada. Minor changes in South Africa and Botswana were significantly falling. In 5 years in the Asia Pacific, the share of women dropped by 5 per cent; however, no advancement has been found in Australia over the last ten years. Furthermore, as gender quotas are required to fit the authorities' cultural expectations best, they are not determined as an international solution (Cukier et al., 2020). The higher-level administration can implement the two main types of culture, including tight and loose cultures. In contrast with the commonwealth, Pakistan is determined to have a familiar culture, whereas New Zealand has been identified as having an open culture (Gray & Mitten, 2018).

Notwithstanding removing the conscious and unconscious bias and other obstacles regarding diversity along with inclusion prevents the women from shifting to the pipeline to the most senior positions in the upper management needs practical approaches and practices that include the position quo and changes in the values as well (Bryndum-Buchholz et al., 2021). After determining the examples of the successfully implemented strategies, it has been explored that it is highly mandatory to choose among them to improve women's leadership position as they are not recognised in terms of reciprocal exclusive alternatives. Consisting of solid legislation development of overall assimilated strategies containing in-depth reach across and in the corporations and the acquiring of the role of the champion to model by the senior leaders initiative and keeping those individuals responsible for warming the provide the obligations for integrating the alteration organisation contains no conflicts (Belasen et al., 2021). The most important aspect of the invention is that it mainly focuses on the corporation's structural,

cultural and legal change and its nearby environment. Nevertheless, the method observes the intense change or familiarises the changes in numerous stages. Effective strategies can be recognised as more root and branch that tempers in some of the initiatives and policies implemented in the state. According to Gorondutse et al. (2019), the responsibility of leadership and drive is needed to regulate in compelling individuals to act or undertake the approach rights to the result-based businesses.

### **5.7 Discussion of findings**

The research aimed to explore the factors that impacted the lived experiences of Saudi women in leadership positions. It was segregated mainly around themes of family relationships, socio-cultural and policy context of the country, and workplace environment.

#### **5.7.1 Family Relationships - A Woman Leader's Upbringing and Married Life**

A substantial amount of research has explored the impact of early childhood upbringing and later life job performance (Varshney, 2019). Researchers have found correlations between childhood environment and job success. In the context of the current research, interview responses showed a strong relationship between a woman leader's upbringing and her career progression later in life (Alghamdi et al., 2022). It was noted from the responses that the home environment and the way a girl child was brought up seemed to impact how she fared as a leader significantly. An interesting finding from the interviews was that almost all the respondents (Nine Out Of Ten) who were selected due to their already being in leadership roles in the KSA reported having family support in their childhood in the form of encouragement from their fathers, equal and non-discriminatory treatment and influence of mothers. Suffice it to say that the interviews underscored the importance of the family as the rock and foundation on which the women had built their leadership careers. The significance of the early childhood home environment needs to be understood in the context of Saudi Arabia, which has a history characterised by gender segregation. Kattan et al. (2016) described the traditional approach

toward women as so all-encompassing that women's education up until 2002 was placed under the ministry of religious guidance and not the ministry of education. Most of the literature on Saudi Arabia shows that women generally grew up in a segregated environment where they were virtually shut out of decision-making, even on menial things, which only made them fear taking positions of responsibility such as leadership later on in life (Abalkhail, 2017).

In contrast, the participants' lived experiences revealed that they had a very different upbringing from the norm. Under these circumstances, those interview participants grew up in a supportive home environment characterised by equal treatment between boys and girls is laudable and gives them self-confidence. The research participants enjoyed more freedom and could explore the world more openly than their counterparts, who were prevented from interacting with people outside or doing chores like shopping independently. The findings from the interviews were corroborated by the survey findings, which showed that 35.2 % of respondents confirmed that their families positively impacted their careers. Also, media analysis confirmed that early childhood experiences played an important role in shaping ambitions and developing confidence in women leaders. For instance, the story of the first ambulance driver in Saudi Arabia (Sarah Khalaf-Al-Enez), carried out by Arab news on 28 September 2020, showed how home environment and early childhood family support could lead to success in a career later in life.

Further, the interviews and the surveys revealed that post-marriage, the husband's support, emotional and practical support in terms of household duties and child-care support were crucial for the Saudi leader's success. Therefore, these findings reflect what has been researched in the western context about female leadership success or female employees' performance. Early childhood experiences and later life experiences with the family impact their success (Kattan et al., 2016). According to the semi-structured interview respondents, one of the direct consequences of gender segregation, particularly the culturally assigned primary

role of women in raising children and being good wives (familial role), is the difficulty of balancing work and family roles in their quest to climb the leadership ladder. They described it as one of the most challenging things they faced, which sometimes filled them with remorse and shame when they had an inkling that they were placing their work ahead of their obligations to their families. There is no direct reference to this dilemma facing family women leaders in the media portal and questionnaire survey. However, it is instructive that the former cites government officials during a G20 women engagement group meeting in Riyadh advocating “*for the promotion of equal rights for women and men including paternity leave and improved childcare services to increase the sense of responsibility among Saudi families*” (Arabian news on 9 July 2020). This indirectly acknowledges that this area's disparity in rights between the sexes still exists. The story of a woman arrested for leading an independent life without her father's permission confirms the deeply rooted nature of conservative cultural values in Saudi Arabia.

Scholarly research, on the other hand, has it that some female leaders have had to abandon their careers because of the inner guilt of having neglected their families, especially with *Ulamas* being quick to label them contrarian (Alghofaily, 2019). This facet of gender segregation persists even after announcing a raft of reforms following the promulgation of vision 2030. It remains one of the significant impediments to Saudi female leaders' career progression (Alghamdi et al., 2022). So strong was the *Wahhabism* / state conflation over the years before the social renaissance that the assignment of the familial role to women has remained firmly etched on their minds even during the renaissance era wrought by the promulgation of vision 2030 and its attendant reforms, as evidenced by the responses of interview respondents and media portal stories.

Next, the research focused on understanding the broader socio-cultural and policy framework impact on women leaders' lived experiences and success.

### 5.7.2 Socio-cultural and policy environment

Most interview respondents contended that the Saudi Arabian conservative culture's social aspects were the most significant impediments to women assuming leadership positions. The characteristic response was that the decision-makers' customs and traditions are masculine, forcing women to work harder than men to prove their equality – a view which was confirmed by both the questionnaire survey respondents with a 67.75% affirmation and is also corroborated by the extant literature (Alotaibi et al., 2017; Saad 2020; Kattan et al., 2016) it is instructive that according to the Arabian news in the media portal, as late as 9 July 2020 government officials were still advocating for the removal of discriminatory gender-based labour laws and the promotion of equal rights for women and men at a G20 women engagement forum and that the ministry of human resources and social development only made an order for equal pay between men and women in September 2020 notwithstanding that vision 2030 was promulgated in 2016. Attendant reforms were announced immediately after that. All this confirms the absence of equality of opportunity between men and women, leading the latter to work harder to prove equality. This also opens the scope for positive action through quotas or reservations for women in leadership roles and areas that may be useful for the government to explore.

Being a conservative society and with the hardline traditional Islamic influence, Saudi Arabian women were subjected to stereotypical gender segregation and confined to roles that restricted them within the boundaries of their homes. Under such conditions, women aspiring to participate in the country's economic development or leadership roles could only be scarce. Some sub-themes related to this were lack of gender equality, lack of role models, and religious hardliners enforcing restrictions on women, making it almost impossible for them to succeed.

Another sub-theme related to the socio-cultural perceptions about women was that because of traditional stereotypes that present females as inferior to males, women must work

harder than men to earn the same recognition. Women must amass higher qualifications than men to make the same salaries and prove that they are more skilled than men. Previous scholars have also noticed these observations, like Kattan et al. (2016). With this backdrop, female leaders in Saudi Arabia are associated with a unique trait - their tenacious dedication to work without expecting any reward (Alzougool et al., 2021; Kattan et al., 2016). Nevertheless, this situation is not conducive to encouraging women that aspire for leadership roles. The Saudi ministry of human resources and social development sought to correct it with an order for equal pay for men and women in 2020 (as carried by the Arab news in the media portal). Further, with the promulgation of vision 2030, the country has seen a policy framework development that supports women's achievement, slowly transforming Saudi society into more accepting of women as equal citizens and able contributors to the economy. The interviews and the media analysis confirmed the changing state of affairs in the country with examples of more female leadership role models and tremendous respect and honour given to women leaders in KSA.

Nevertheless, the above observation that Saudi society is still patriarchal with masculine values continues post vision 2030 (Kattan et al., 2016). Even though Vision 2030 and the reforms that have been passed and put into place have been called the start of a cultural renaissance, many problems still exist (Alotaibi et al., 2017). This confirms observations by scholars cited in the literature review that it takes time for societal norms and values to change (Kattan et al., 2016). While women have ascended the leadership ladder, the critical mass to swing societal values and standards to embrace the equality of men and women is still to be reached. This is evidenced by their economic participation compared to men, as observed by Varshney (2019), which remains extremely low, confirming that a lot more still needs to be done, including leveraging information technology to achieve this goal (Kattan et al., 2016). This observation is collaborated by the media story of a woman who had been arrested and charged with a criminal offence for leading an independent life alone in Riyadh without

permission from her father. Yet, officially a decree had been made relaxing and freeing women from the guardianship law with the promulgation of vision 2030 in 2016. The Saudi constitution guaranteed freedom of movement and stability for all sane adults irrespective of sex. Demonstrates how difficult it is to change deeply entrenched social norms and practices. With a score of 69.37%, the questionnaire respondents emphatically confirmed that there is no equality of opportunity between men and women.

### 5.7.3 Workplace environment

The research found that several aspects of the workplace continued to act as barriers for women leaders. These include patriarchy, lack of merit-based growth, training and development opportunities for female leaders and a scarcity of women-friendly organizational culture.

### 5.7.4 Patriarchy

The interviews revealed a continued problem of patriarchy in the participants' organizations. Some of the manifestations of patriarchy were evidenced by the organizational-induced mandatory referral of women -section decisions to the male section for approval; an unsavoury attitude that women were unable to ascend to the same senior level as their male counterparts (Baker, 2017; Nieva, 2015); a superiority attitude that men had a divine right to lead and a contemptuous attitude that female leaders were incapable of making wise decisions. A similar question posed to questionnaire survey respondents on whether women had a profound lack of experience in leadership affairs got a 45.76% affirmative response and a 44.07% negative response which is an even split of opinion. This is perhaps an indication that views on the competence of women leaders are evenly divided in a country that is in transition, given its history of a puritanical form of Islam which confined women to a perpetual minority status and stripped them of involvement in decision-making even on family affairs as detailed in extant literature (Alotaibi et al., 2017; Kattan et al., 2016; Varshney 2019). In contrast to

this picture, stories in the media portal (Arab news) paint pictures of happy female leaders who oversee their destiny and deal with men on their terms and can be seen as charismatic leaders or authoritarian figures. The story of the larger-than-life entrepreneur (al-Mutairi) with lucrative uniform supply contracts with the country's military and ready to engage any businessmen anywhere in the world with no regard to limits imposed on interactions between *non-mahram* males and females or that of a woman (Awatef Al-Sahoo) vying for the presidency for a sports club ready to take any man head-on spring to mind. However, Arab news stories on the deliberations of the G20 women engagement group or that of the woman who had been arrested and charged with a criminal offence for contravening the country's guardian law (both of which have already been cited above) show the contradictions that exist in the country in transition.

Contemporary literature confirms the existence of patriarchal practices whereby women are treated as second-class citizens (Metcalf and Mutlaq, 2011). They are excluded from decision-making on the home front, thus depriving them of the chance to develop their decision-making skills (Saad, 2020). Therefore despite the renaissance, old habits and beliefs of treating women leaders as inferior to the male species persist in the public sector. More often than not, male leaders adopt a paternalistic management style characterized by centralized and autocratic decision-making (Kattan et al., 2016). The hierarchical nature of the workplace and the general acceptance of leaders as men who are aggressive authoritarian, and transactional leaders may place women at a disadvantage as they are observed as indulging in the more participative transformational and relationship-oriented style of leadership (Cherry, 2019; Alice & Carli (2008) so the logical conclusion is that while change has taken place as evidenced by reforms old habits die hard especially deep-rooted social practices and stereotypes, as observed by panellists on the G20 women engagement group as carried by the Arab news on 9 July 2020. Such attitudes mean women still have many hurdles to surmount in the form of

discriminatory practices based on their physical appearance (Kattan et al., 2016). Such attitudes sometimes extend to male employees who may find it difficult to take instructions from a woman or deliberately sabotage a female's leadership progression by posting sub-par performance to reflect the female's leadership ability (Saad 2020; Kattan et al., 2016).

Patriarchy also manifests in making women leaders figureheads with no real power (Alotaibi et al., 2017). In many societies, women may be promoted to high ranks but lack legitimate authority- thus, they become placeholders without enjoying the power that should accompany their positions (Bursztyn et al., 2020). Often even the titles were different, with a female manager being called a supervisor while her male counterpart continued to be addressed as a manager. The questionnaire respondents confirm this observation of a lack of positional power for women leaders. At the same time, men enjoy it, where 66.67% stated that there was no gender equality during their time as leaders. The mere fact that state officials were talking about advocating for the removal of all gender-based discriminatory practices and that an order was made outlawing payment of discriminatory pay on the grounds of sex on another forum (both stories being carried by Arab news) confirm by implication the existence of gender-based discriminatory labour practices even during the renaissance period.

However, the picture would be incomplete if one did not discuss the self-inflicted gender discrimination among women (Showunmi, 2021). Interview respondents reported that some believed females did not qualify to hold higher-level positions. One of them questioned her claim to the place she had been offered. This confirms scholarly research that leadership has traditionally assumed a masculine character even though no empirical evidence supports this notion (Alotaibi et al., 2017). In Saudi, women may find it difficult to "image" themselves as leaders due to being deprived of opportunities to engage in decision-making during their socialization process (Bursztyn et al., 2020), resulting in self-efficacy and decision-making capabilities remaining undeveloped (Abalkhail, 2017). Going back to the G20 women

engagement group mentioned above, one of its talking points was the need to change Saudi women's self-image to engage in entrepreneurship, which required confidence and courage. This confirms the interview respondents' observation that this attribute was deficient in some female leaders. On the questionnaire survey group, 46.77% believed women should be allowed to access leadership positions. Therefore there is a need to note that gender stereotypes are alive and well and often so profoundly entrenched even in women's minds that they begin to support patriarchal thinking. This may explain why women may lack confidence in them. Those women leaders further aggravate the situation and often face barriers and lack support from female colleagues (Ascher, 2017). Colleagues get consumed by professional jealousy, cited as an issue by interview respondents who contend that the former tend to spread malicious rumours and lies on social media group applications (such as WhatsApp) about the latter, which hurts all women who want to take up leadership positions. However, it must be noted that no leadership theory has fully captured the dynamics of female leadership, as indicated by these findings related to women leaders having to deal with negative behaviour.

Coming from female respondents, such comments show, among other things, that some women leaders do not believe in other women employees. They do not think a woman is intrinsically equal to a man apart from noticeable reproductive biological differences. Such thinking only perpetuates women leaders' treatment as "outsiders" based on their physical appearances (Abalkhail, 2017; Kattan et al., 2016). Perhaps the above observations should be understood as a natural consequence of respondents having lived a gender-segregated life for a long time such that it is now ingrained in some of their minds that women are naturally inferior to men, which are also cited (by p3) as having been attributed to the prophet by some *Ulamas*. Thus there is an apparent failure to distinguish an individual's failings from a female's general characteristics.

### 5.7.5 Lack of merit-based growth

Contrary to expectation, virtually all interview respondents stated that there was no *wasta* element in their ascent to their present leadership positions, albeit citing different reasons, with five out of eight (62.5%) who answered the question categorically ruling out the involvement of extraneous factors. Questionnaire respondents who attributed their promotion to natural progression on a score of 59.25%, with nepotism only accounting for 27.80%, gave a similar finding.

A likely explanation for the low incidents of *wasta* on female promotions is that women are unlikely to have networks outside their close family circles due to the generally closed nature of Saudi society, where traditional values limit social interaction between *non-mahram* males and females. The limited influence of *wasta* is contrary to its general notoriety in hiring placement and promotion decisions involving males in Saudi Arabia (Harbi et al., 2016). The situation portrayed in the media portal where female leaders such as al- Mutairi are cosmopolitan with international connections in seats of western capital such as France and the UK and attending international exhibitions where she makes acquaintances with high-ranking male officials in the Saudi military is rather unusual., The same applies to Azza Al-Rashidi, whom Arab news presents as an avid explorer "living for adventure and experiences," extending an invitation to other females to join her in future escapades and being the only female participant during her 2019 empty quarter desert expedition stands in stark contrast to conservative Saudi Arabia portrayed in extant literature for instance by (Eum 2019; Varshney 2019) and by both the questionnaire survey and semi-structured interview respondents. These female leaders seem to have adopted a similarly aggressive transactional or autocratic style of leadership as predominantly exhibited by male leaders (Cho et al., 2019) and have succeeded because such a leadership style is acceptable in the country. However, it is an exception rather

than the norm. Generally, Saudi females are portrayed as conservative "veiled" individuals who do not enjoy real power at home and work compared to men (Varshney, 2019).

Moreover, it was evident from the interviews that women leaders believed in hard work and merit-based returns and exhibited a tendency not to seek out favours (either from their fathers or mentors at the workplace), which could have made them progress at a slower pace than their male counterparts

#### 5.7.6 Lack of training and development

Most of the research participants have indicated that they did not get opportunities for training and development and that their leadership styles have developed out of limited exposure and experience. Nevertheless, drawing from this, one interview respondent noted that she meets her followers periodically and goes down to the shop floor to work on solutions with her followers. At the same time, another spoke of having to mould her followers into a team. As the two respondents who answered this question described, such approaches suggest an inclusive management style was employed. This implies that these leaders would either employ a participative leadership or a transformational leadership style depending on the situation obtaining on the ground, especially if regard is given to that one of the distinguishing characteristics of female leaders is their ability to read conditions more accurately than males. While it is difficult to read a management style from stories in the media portal or the questionnaire survey responses, the latter respondents were categorical one two things. Women's participation in leadership guarantees progress and prosperity, giving an affirmative score of 70.94% compared to 14.5% in the negative. Leadership effectiveness differs along gender lines, with a score of 74.77% and 9.01% not agree. Research in Kuwait's public sector in another country shows that female managers preferred to involve their subordinates in decision-making (Alzougool et al., 2021). This was consistent with earlier studies which show

that women leaders usually display an inclusive approach and empathy in decision-making (Kattan et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, suppose such leaders are also provided with further mentoring guidance and training. In that case, they may be able to enhance their contribution and transform more employees, and set them on the leadership path.

#### **5.7.7 Lack of women-friendly work culture**

A topic that does not seem to be covered in media or official reports is related to the lack of women-friendly work culture. The current research provides the most profound and eye-opening insights into women leaders' practical barriers in Saudi Arabia. It was found that women have to face discouraging and harassing comments and taunts at the workplace not given adequate credit for their hard work often made to work extra hours without acknowledgement or compensation (Ascher, 2017), and had to work more for less pay and get overlooked for training and development or promotional opportunities. Further, the workplace policies did not support them in balancing their home and professional life; instead, they were forced to choose one.

#### **5.8 Summary**

This chapter discusses the research findings from various studies and perspectives on women in leadership positions. As the investigation moved on, an effort was made to find answers to the research questions at the outset. A supportive early childhood home setting planted the seeds of self-confidence and ambition even in the face of unprecedented adversity. This was found to be the case even though the country's patriarchal system is firmly established in the country's family culture and work environment. The other information that can be obtained from the situation is the contract and any discrepancies between the official declarations and policy framework and the reality on the ground. The crown prince recently articulated a glorious and forward-thinking future for the country of Saudi Arabia.

Nevertheless, the government needs to put more effort into implementing laws that can be carried out to provide the necessary support for its female leaders to be able to carry out their positions in their entirety. The following section presents the conclusion drawn from this research study.

## 6. CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Summary of the study

It has been summarised that Saudi Arabia is the most controversial country because of the poor performance and gender gap (Showunmi, 2021). Moreover, it has been observed from multiple research indicated that there is a low ratio of women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia (Baker, 2017; Alshareef & AlGassim, 2021). Although Saudi women are urged to stay at home to serve their children and husbands, this does not mean that Islam or Saudi culture bans women from working Cseh et al., (2013), as long as it is governed by customary sharia law. The study explored that Islamic law does not deny women the right to work; instead, it allows women to run their enterprises and deal with their financial concerns. However, these enterprises must not clash with their primary obligations and duties at home. To deal with the gender gap performance, the government announced “vision 2030”. As a result, many reforms have been created under this vision (Alghamdi et al., 2022), affecting women's empowerment.

Regarding the issues of Saudi Arabia, women empowerment is a significant theme of vision 2030. The Saudi government proclaimed the need to overcome the conventional rentier economy centred on oil and transition to a more diverse paradigm to generate more job skills and ensure employment for its population. One of the most critical stages in achieving this aim is to enable Saudi women, who account for more than half of the population, to participate in and contribute their needed skills and abilities to the Saudi labour market. Therefore the current study highlighted the live experience of leadership of females in the public sector in Saudi Arabia under the vision of 2030. Concerning the theme of the study, the literature examined different theories related to leadership. The theories include behavioural management theory, contingency theory, management theory, trait theory and other theories that have been explored to understand the scope of leadership and nature. There are certain traits in leaders that they possess from their birth. The grand man theory explained that historically leaders are born to

lead due to inherent characteristics. Same as concerning trait theory, it has been illustrated that a leader is the one who has enough capability to influence an individual or a group of people towards the achievement of a vision or set of goals.

The above study has concluded that personal values, beliefs, attitudes and business have influenced the practices of individuals in leadership positions. Different perceptions have impacted the leadership, and business-like traditional roles in discrimination between women and men have influenced individual leadership styles. In the context of the social-cultural environment and its impacts on women's leadership journey, the study has extracted that the sociocultural factors comprised the overall social system and national culture. Additionally, the social system is highly influenced by the perception of relationships and ways of life, personal existence, and women's journey as a leader. In line with this, men are categorised as more responsible and influential leaders, while women are classified as charismatic leaders.

Similarly, it has been observed that women in leadership positions are supposed to adopt participative and democratic leadership styles.

In contrast, men should adopt a directive and autocratic leadership style. The foremost reason behind this difference in selection is that women are pressured to conduct regular work and house chores simultaneously. As illustrated from the above study, women expect to have managed both their carrier and home in the social-cultural environment. At the same time, they also live under the leadership of their husbands. Henceforth it is difficult and challenging for women as they become sandwiched between male dominance in the home and the organisation.

Moreover, the literature has discussed that policy framework significantly impacts women's leadership. Therefore, most countries are taking extra care in structuring the policy framework according to the facts and circumstances regarding men and women. The literature mentioned above has justified that parental leave is one of the most significant steps that must have taken by all organizations; it is also vital to pay maternity leave to women so they can

easily persuade their job without any difficulty. Despite this, the workplace environment also impacts women's leadership journey, as women are determined to be more concerned about the workplace environment, which their leadership has impacted. Nevertheless, in the women's leadership, the positive and professional relationships with employees' temperature, design colour structure, and everything they are worked on have impacted their journey. If they do not feel comfortable working in such an environment, it has ultimately affected their decisions and creativity level. It is worth mentioning that the positive environment of an organization directly leads to an increase in productivity as a woman leader feels more comfortable and motivated while working and develops a strong and positive relationship with co-workers. This all resulted in a positive outcome.

Furthermore, values, beliefs, and individuals' attitudes are subject to no change based on new experiences and new observations. Some leaders are charismatic, and others are based on their practices and observances. There is a tremendous difference between managers and leaders. Leaders are influencers, and they inspire others through their activities. A good manager may be able to manage teams and individuals, while, on the other hand transitioning a change is only subject to the leadership. Moreover, leadership relates to art, which requires special skills and techniques.

Women are considered less confident and less efficient in performing the leader's role and competing with men. In contrast, the behaviour theory evidenced that the skills and capabilities of leadership can be learned rather than inherent. In the light of behavioural theory, the study summarised that Saudi Arabian women could attain leadership skills via training, observations and development. On the other hand, contingency theory predicted that the female leaders of Saudi Arabia had been exposed to similar training experiences following the implementation of vision 2030. It is consequently critical that future leaders have an opportunity of considerable training and experience to explore their unique styles thoroughly

(Kinnimont, 2017). It has been concluded from the concept of contingency and situational theories that women of Saudi Arabia can attain leadership skills if they are facilitated with good training growth programs, mentoring, and coaching. Management theory also explains that Saudi female leaders could gain excellent knowledge and skills through positive reinforcement (rewards incentives justified behaviour). Apart from leadership theories, the study also summarised Lewin's leadership styles. It has been identified that the leader made all choices independently with little or no input from subordinates. This leadership style works best when the leader is highly informed about the subject or has little or no time for subordinate consultation. On a similar note, the study of Kuwait specified that female leaders mainly adopt a delegating leadership style, as it offers responsibility and authority to all the employees and managers.

It has been summarised from the above study that a leader is responsible for providing a vision. Workers should only work with full potential if they know the concept and primary goal well. The precise vision identification helps employees work accordingly and focus more on achieving that goal. Same as John Kotter explained, a leader is responsible for providing direction in challenging situations and motivating others by creating examples of teamwork. In line with this, the study also demonstrated that men are preferred to become leaders more than women in the current business environment.

Meanwhile, in many western countries, men and women are equal not due to their effectiveness in leadership but in every aspect. The study found that in considering the gender and leadership roles, women can effectively lead both public and private sector organisations. This may be observed in the rise of female leaders in many prominent positions worldwide. Rapid change may be witnessed in the last two decades following the millennium's arrival. Nowadays, female leaders lead organisations successfully and efficiently.

Furthermore, the definition of leadership is also not universally agreed upon; several explanations come from different scholars and researchers. However, it is agreed that leaders are those who influence others by their practices and performance. There are certain traits which are agreed upon by scholars and researchers. These include excellent communication skills, influential transformational, and adaptive to new changes and technologies to transform ideas and thoughts into realities and those who guide others to follow them. Leaders establish visions and urge and convince others to follow these visions.

Additionally, the current workforce and the organisational setting convince leaders to see the force above gender discrimination to improve corporate culture. However, some traditional perceptions consider gender discrimination in leadership. Women's self-confidence and attitude are regarded to influence women's leadership practices. In addition, these stereotypes and perceptions have been addressed in the western context, where long movements for women's rights and equality have addressed the issue to a great extent. Women today are seen equally contributing to the workforce and managing leadership positions in western countries. The literature summarised that in the last two decades, the involvement of women in business had risen gradually in Europe, as the ratio of female leaders reached 63.5 per cent in the workplace. Similarly, the study identified that in the history of the United States, a drastic change in the business had been observed, as most of the country's educational institutes have comprised female professors compared to males.

Further, it has also concluded that in 2018, the United States observed an exceptional ratio of women in leadership, including government. Apart from western countries, the above study has extracted that in Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, the issue is still present where women are subject to inequality, have no dominant presence in the organisational workforce, and social and cultural biases influence their leadership abilities. Apart from western countries, the above study has extracted that after vision 2030, it is expected that Saudi women may play

an essential role in the country's development. Over the last decade, the number of Saudi women in executive positions has grown. The kingdom recently implemented new measures to improve its overall “female empowerment and gender equality” record. According to the World Bank study “women's business and the law 2020,” Saudi Arabia was the top reformer internationally in the previous year. Saudi Arabia adopted ground-breaking measures to increase women's economic involvement. The legislation granted women over 21 the right to travel and move freely.

In addition, the current study explored that the women in the Arab areas are continuously fighting for their rights since the region is highly marked by gender inequality. According to some regional regulations of Saudi Arabia, all women are expected to have a male protector or a guardian regardless of their age or qualifications. Same as in Saudi Arabia, there has been much discussion over allowing women driving licences. While conducting the current study, the researcher has summarised that several factors influence the leadership practices of women in Saudi Arabia. These factors include male dominance government policies regarding the women workforce in the country, personal and private motivators, social and religious factors and public sector concerns.

In addition, several biases impact the abilities of the leadership of women. Men tend not to work as their sub-ordinate and neglect their authoritative orders. Personal identity and personal selves are also involved in leadership practices. Values and beliefs are the unique traits of individuals that influence individuals' leadership practices. This particular piece of paper also highlighted leadership roles in Saudi Arabia, from which it has been summarised that to lead the business in the appropriate direction, managers and leaders must make decisions in line with the rules and regulations of the country, as the overall performance has impacted by the findings. In women's context, they are restricted to doing ‘Pardah’ if they are willing to perform the job with men (Longman et al., 2018). Concerning this fact, it has been identified

that in Saudi Arabia, organisations' focus is on minimising workplace interactions, as most organisations have separate entrance and exit areas for men and women staff. However, after 2005 when Saudi Arabia joined the world trade organisation, a gradual policy change was observed, as the country allowed women freedom in a different aspect.

Moreover, the study also explored that women who have already attained leadership positions in the kingdom have obtained higher education degrees. Employers prefer women employees who have obtained masters or PhDs from foreign institutes. This is the primary reason for their success compared to other factors that may lead to men's success in leadership roles. Similarly, the researcher has learned that Saudi organisations continuously hire individuals who can learn from their experiences and prove themselves as professional leaders. Saudi women make up a tiny fraction of the workforce in leadership roles, even though these women continue to face complications and limitations in various forms in Saudi culture, which upset their performance.

Furthermore, because women have just recently entered the labour sector, they may not have had the same length of experience or breadth of expertise as men. Further, in Saudi organisations, women are already facing challenges in obtaining adequate knowledge and expertise for the opportunities; however, with the promulgation of vision 2030, these challenges have come to resolve somehow. Besides all the above facts, the study has also explored some key factors and events because the country led toward the declaration of vision 2030. Concerning the current research, it has been summarised that a fall in oil prices, increasing unemployment, an increase in the number of educated women role models, rural-urban migration, globalisation internet international pressure and an increase in the number of students studying abroad are determined to be the main reasons behind the promulgation of vision 2030.

In response to these critical factors, the Saudi government announced the establishment of vision 2030, which aims to create a national plan to maintain oil revenue and generate employment opportunities for women and the country's youth. As a result, the Saudi government is expected to provide women with diverse cultures (Gray & Mitten 2018) and take up more responsibilities and leadership roles in the social domain. The researcher has also summarised that the respective country's social-cultural environment, family relationships, workplace environment, and policy framework significantly affect women's journey as leaders.

From the above study, it has been concluded that Saudi women are the highlighted constitute established under vision 2030. Accordingly, vision 2030 is a national plan with the main agenda of minimising the oil revenue of Saudi Arabia's economy. In 2016, the crown prince first implemented this vision; the vision generally comprises three main themes. The themes are categorised as; "a vibrant society, an ambitious nation and a thriving economy". Not limited to this one, the central theme of this vision is promoting women's rights, specifically for Saudi women. As a result of this vision, Saudi Arabian women have expected to gain attention and care in the country and have received leading positions.

Moreover, the current study explored that implementing different strategies has given Saudi females power and leadership opportunities. With the promulgation of vision 2030, the country experienced a drastic change in economic development. Saudi women have contributed to organisational success (Economy Social-Political Science) with their full potential and confidence. The analysis of the study also summarised that the reform (Economic Social Civil) was initiated in early 2015 and is still going on; these reforms have played a significant role in promoting women's empowerment and took the actual steps to improve the status of women in the Arab society. In light of vision 2030, the willingness and enormous capabilities are essential in attaining success and prosperity at various stages.

Further, the above study concluded that Saudi ladies have travelled to decent lengths following modern advancement and society values. This further explains that while Saudi males are broadly shared in serving society and the nation, Saudi women depend on wise leadership's trust to play a substantial part in their vital position. For instance, with the modified strategies and advancements in-country Saudi females have been able to actively participate in economic, social and economic decision-making processes; also, they have been able to lead the critical positions and control the performance and concerns of Saudi Arabia government agencies.

In addition, the above literature has discussed that Saudi Arabia was taken a significant step by appointing the first woman to the position of "speaker of the SHURA council's assistant". This step positively impacted the country's females. Consequently, the decree was issued to encourage and improve Saudi women's involvement in Saudi Arabia's overall development. Since it has been observed that the thoughts and actions of women leaders greatly influence the growth and development of the country at both national and international levels. Vision 2030 has encouraged women to enter new lives with historical advancement. They are allowed to show their capabilities in different fields such as; human rights, political science, educational research institutes, and many more. The study also summarised that women had been allowed to vote in elections and nominated themselves for municipal councils' positions concerning advancement in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the selection of 13 women for the "new council of the Saudi human rights commission" has strengthened Saudi women's status as a fundamental partner in the development of society. On a similar note, according to the law of Saudi Arabia, the government has initiated the distribution of training licenses to women in the context of the law and court matters which assist s Saudi women in participating in Saudi Arabia's courts. Multiple research identified that regarding vision 2030, the Saudi government

standardised the retirement age between men and women according to the work system and established segregation of the sexes.

The research was undertaken using a mixed-method approach comprising qualitative semi-structured interviews, a quantitative questionnaire survey and a qualitative media portal analysis. The qualitative study involved conducting semi-structured interviews with ten female leaders chosen from the public sector institutions using a non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique. The questionnaire survey employed a probabilistic sampling technique involving 134 sample females. The media portal was used to find out how the contemporary media portrayed female leaders via a review of 25 articles. The research successfully answered the questions and provided insights into how women perceive their lived experiences on their leadership journeys, especially in vision 2030. The following section summarises the main findings and the conclusions drawn from the research.

## 6.2 Summary of the findings

The first research question is, "how do family relationships and personal development impact women's commitment to career progression and aspirations of leadership roles?"

It was answered by the participant's narration and survey results and indicated that childhood home environment, gender equality at home, fathers' support and encouragement, mother's influence and the level of freedom that they received while growing up all impacted the development of their personalities and leadership traits and capabilities positively. Similarly, post-marriage, the support of the husband and her family directly impacted the women's ability to balance their home and work responsibilities.

Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn that a woman's bringing and family support positively affected the woman's self-image and ability to cope with pressures associated with leadership. However, this is an area that the state cannot expect to impact through policymaking directly. Nevertheless, by attempting to influence the country's socio-cultural

context, the government can expect to bring forth a transformation in the family dynamics, so that girl children are brought up in an equal opportunity environment that gives them self-confidence and inspiration to contribute to the economy later on in their lives. Additionally, by developing policies that encourage the recruitment of women in senior positions to enable role models and ensuring that working women have adequate childcare facilities, the government can positively impact the lived experiences of women aspiring for leadership roles in the country.

The following research question is "what is the impact of vision 2030 and institutional policy changes on women's career progression and leadership performance in Saudi Arabia."

It was answered by exploring the country's socio-cultural and policy environment pre and post-promulgation of vision 2030. The research revealed that before the promulgation of vision 2030, women were considered subservient to men at home and work.

They faced personal barriers (including lack of self-confidence, poor self-image, and self-efficacy) primarily due to poor socialisation during their childhood or marital home environment. Women also faced the difficulty associated with balancing work responsibilities and familial obligations. Such situations impacted women's aspirations to join the workforce or take higher responsibility and decision-making positions. Women also faced socio-cultural barriers (deep-rooted social norms and practices that physically and mentally removed women from public spaces). Post vision 2030, many institutional barriers were reduced, discriminatory practices at work made illegal suitable role models encouraged, and an environment of equal opportunity was created in the country.

Some of the socio-cultural and institutional barriers in the form were reported to continue to exist even though they were receding with time post promulgation of vision 2030.

Therefore, a conclusion is that women continue to face socio-cultural and policy barriers to ascending the leadership ladder through vision 2030 and are increasingly paving the way toward equal opportunity and acceptance.

The final research question is how does the conventional patriarchy at the workplace impact women leaders' performance and career/professional growth from women's perspectives?

Helped focus the research on the barriers and challenges those women leaders may face at their workplace. It was noted that despite the promulgation of vision 2030 and the implementation of supporting reforms, the glass ceiling is still there and very difficult to break, especially where there is a deep-rooted culture intricately interwoven with religion. The stories carried by the media portal appeared dramatic and out of the ordinary when juxtaposed against the semi-structured interviews and questionnaire survey results. They came across as stories of a nation struggling to cast away the shackles of gender segregation that it is infamous for and desperately trying to prove that it had joined the international community “famed” for equality between sexes as an equal partner.

A conclusion that can be drawn is that while much progress has been made, a lot still needs to be done to make workplaces more accepting of women leaders and ready to treat women with equal pay, dignity and credibility.

### **6.3 Contribution to knowledge**

While providing answers to the study's questions, the above findings do not capture the entire situation in which female leaders and those aspiring for leadership find themselves in today's Saudi Arabia when the country is in transition. Nevertheless, the above findings reveal deep insights into the implicit and explicit barriers that may hinder female leadership - both in family responsibilities and the workplace environment and suggests that the government must

address these areas entirely. The current research contributes to knowledge that can help the country develop its women in leadership.

The main contributions of the study to the existing body of knowledge are this study is the first known study to be undertaken in Saudi Arabia on the experiences of women leaders after the promulgation of vision 2030 and subsequent implementation of social reforms by exploring the perspectives of females which makes its findings a welcome addition to the existing stock of knowledge given the scarcity of studies on Saudi Arabia in general., Moreover, the study crystallised a conceptual framework that demonstrates that women's experiences are a product of women's "learnings" while growing up and in adult life; institutional factors encompass societal and organisational contexts and workplace environments. It was evident from the findings that early childhood home gender roles in marriage, including childcare duties and lack of acceptance of women as equal decision-makers or contributors to the workplace, are probably unacknowledged barriers to female leadership that must be identified and addressed. The underpinning conceptual and theoretical framework can be worthwhile in identifying general norms and factors that impact women's force in Saudi Arabia, specifically in the public sector. Additionally, the study's findings support future researchers and policymakers to draw results of further research and establish effective policies and rules to enhance female leadership development in the country. Similarly, future researchers can target and encourage female leadership by establishing a diverse and conducive environment for men and women.

Multiple types of research were conducted in the context of gender diversity and the role of women in leading positions in different countries. The current research specifically examined women's experiences in leadership positions in the public sector in Saudi Arabia post-promulgation of vision 2030. Primarily with the help of analysis and findings of this study, the researcher could help the management of Saudi organisations improve women's leadership

in all aspects, including; educational institute's workplace, social and political positions and public and policy organisations. Moreover, the analysis can help Saudi Arabia's public and private organisations to create a framework by which the organisations can find the opportunity to wipe out inequalities regarding gender. Not limited to this the finding can also facilitate organisations to provide independence for women in the workplace and leadership positions. The overall study emphasises that implementing practical methods and policies is critical for raising awareness among males about the necessity of supporting female leaders in every aspect, particularly in leadership.

Furthermore, allocating leadership responsibilities to female leaders to demonstrate their ability, at least in the women section, is critical in changing prevalent perceptions about women leaders. The country's government could set up initiatives regarding gender equality, as because of gender discrimination, Saudi Arabia has been categorised as the most highlighted and controversial country among all the western media. On a similar note, with this study's help, the doors for future studies regarding women empowerment and leadership could be wide open. The current study's findings can help analyse the issues and challenges women face in competing with men, specifically in the cultural context of Saudi Arabia and can assist organisations in exploring effective methods regarding the roles and responsibilities of women leaders. In line with this, the particular study provides methodological significance as the researcher has offered in-depth insight into the live experience of women's experiences in leadership positions in the public sector of Saudi Arabia before the announcement of vision 2030.

#### 6.4 Recommendation for action

There is no doubt that Saudi Arabia, an oil-rich state, possesses more wealth and financial strength than many other countries worldwide. However, the country still lacks the qualities and drive to compete with the global business giants. One of the reasons identified is the lack

of diversity in the organisations, as the number of women in the leadership posts of Saudi organisations is significantly less (Khan et al., 2016). As previously, the women involved in the business environment in KSA are recognised as minimal compared to other regions of the world. It can be identified that diversity in the upper hierarchy, which includes a board of executives and managerial positions, is significant for a successful business. It contributes to diversification in the mutual sharing of thoughts and results in a multi-dimensional thought process for the management (Topal 2019). Both are the most prominent characteristics of the most recognised and profitable global organisations. Nonetheless, vision 2030 can eradicate this issue as vision 2030 highly emphasises increasing employment in the social communities with lesser representation, and Saudi females are one of them.

#### 6.4.1 Provision of education

It can be identified that the provision of online education has risen to a substantial extent and people are familiar with it nowadays. Hence, utilising resources to provide online education and training for women in rural areas can be a crucial change for KSA to increase the efficiency and success of the action plan. Moreover, it would allow women from remote regions to access adequate knowledge while sitting at home and not being forced to visit training centres miles away from their homes (Al-Qahtani et al., 2020). Results from this research back this argument as in the previous results chapter. It can be identified that around 11.7 per cent of respondents believe that training can increase efficiency and productivity in the workplace, and this figure may seem minor. Yet, it was sent later after commitment (16.1 %). Hence, it can be concluded that proper training and education for women in rural and unrecognized areas can widely allow women to enter the public sector of KSA efficiently and take charge of large enterprises effectively and efficiently while ensuring sustainability and growth in the national economy.

#### 6.4.2 Decrement in the involvement of religious authorities

On the other hand, relaxation of the hold of religious authorities can be effective in the modern business environment (Topal, 2019). It can be identified that to include women in the business plans in the coming year, relaxation of religious authorities can be pivotal. One of the primary reasons is that, in many cases, the religious leaders try to impose extremist laws that may not be in the religious books and regulations (Khan et al., 2016). For instance, considering the case of KSA, the country is predominantly Muslim; hence, the women living there are primarily practising Muslims. However, many Muslim families are not allowed to work outside their home; however, the Islamic laws do not notably ban women from working outside their houses, although some regulations regarding their dressing and code of conduct nonetheless it is far from restricting their contribution to the economic cycle of the country (Alghofaily, 2019).

It can be recognised that the contribution of women in the public sector around the globe has been pivotal and the talent of the women of Saudi Arabia and the constant increment in literacy rate is a positive indicators (Al-Qahtani et al., 2020). Hence relaxation of code of conduct, dress codes, and flexible work timings while ensuring that the uniqueness and values of a culture are preserved to reduce opposition from other groups of people can contribute widely to effective and productive work in the public sector as women would be more encouraged. Moreover, this can also attract foreign investors and contribute to building a more substantial and sustainable country's GDP. The Saudi king previously announced that women could wear what they wanted to until it was perceived as decent in public view. This stance of the KSA's king indicates that there is substantial room for improvement in this aspect of KSA's policies which can contribute widely in allowing encouraging and helping women of KSA to participate in activities actively and jobs associated with the public sector and get exposure to

the modern-day requirements trends and demands of the public sector which would only enhance their understanding learning and aims regarding their contribution to the public sector.

Moreover, flexibility in these aspects also means that women work in a collaborative environment with other male individuals and provide value and quality to the top-order decisions at a higher level of the public sector (Khan et al., 2016). Furthermore, when women have forced up the order in the public sector by making working conditions favourable and feasible for them, they would directly contribute more productivity to the sector while ensuring that the females from the upcoming KSA generation get more chances by developing effective policies.

#### 6.4.3 Vocational education and training

One of the biggest problems around the globe is that in many countries, the education system highly emphasizes the theoretical aspects, and students are forced to learn theories and their implications in real life; however, they do not get the opportunities, and neither are adequately encouraged to practice their learned concepts and approaches into the real world. This contributes to confusion and inefficiencies when these students enter the job environment. They cannot imply their deeply and thoroughly learned theories and concepts at their workplace, which only contributes to frustration and discourages them from trying hard again. Considering the KSA and the scenario of vision 2030, one of the main aims is to involve women in the working field and ensure the country's growth on different levels.

However, as identified above, women, especially rural women in Saudi Arabia, lack proper education; therefore, there is a slight chance they would have adequate skills and know-how of techniques to work in the public sector. Moreover, the previous culture of KSA was not all so accepting of the idea that women should work outside the home alongside male colleagues contributed to a large gap between the male and female workforce and their skills and knowledge gap regarding the modern working environment, including the public sector.

Firstly it is highly recommended to make some tweaks to the educational system. The primary aim should be to work on the education system and shift towards a more vocational side and make the students learn vocational skills and techniques that can be used in the practical world. This would only help women get opportunities at a higher level of jobs in the public sector and contribute to increasing students' skills in various departments, whether science or commerce. As a result, Saudi Arabia would benefit widely as these students are the country's future. Around 60 per cent of the population of KSA is under the age of 30. Focusing on these students' skills and knowledge regarding modern business and the political environment is crucial.

On the other hand, considering women who have completed their degrees and have substantial knowledge of the public sector through learned theories and concepts but fail to mark the industry, there is an alternative strategy. The government should widely focus on establishing learning camps where the women solely for women of KSA can join these vocational training camps and learn about their internets and jobs. This would require investment in modern technologies and skilled and qualified personnel who could effectively train the women. Establishing these training camps directly means increased practical knowledge and exposure to the contemporary working environment, which would result in skill development, eradication of confusion inefficient and anxiety from females having theoretical knowledge and education regarding the public sector and boost their confidence which can contribute to enhancing their positions as leaders in the public sector.

The discrepancy between official pronouncements and the guardianship law cited above bespeaks the need to harmonise legislation with vision 2030 and its accompanying reforms. This will go a long way towards assisting in thawing long-held traditional practices that have been the lynchpin of gender segregation. It is thus recommended that a body be set up to identify and repeal all pieces of legislation across all sectors that are out of sync with the abrogation of gender segregation.

Further, a counterpart to the identification and annulment of anachronistic legislation is enacting legislation to criminalise gender-based discriminatory practices by issuing relevant orders. The classic example cited in the media portal is the order issued by the ministry of human resources and social development outlawing gender-based discrimination in employees' wages, which supports this observation. The deliberations of the G20's women engagement group in Riyadh in July 2020, where most of the panellists are said to have agreed that social behaviours (practices) and legal restrictions were among the most significant obstacles to the advancement and empowerment of women in Saudi Arabia again confirm the need for more work on weeding out discriminatory social practices. A wholesome, as opposed to a piecemeal approach, is recommended whereby a constitutional body such as a commission is set up to tackle this demanding but essential task.

Further, the research was limited to the public sector affects the generalizability of the findings to other sectors of the economy. Civil servants' qualifications and world outlook may differ from those obtained in other sectors. Finally, many regulations in the public sector that define the degrees of freedom leaders enjoy in making decisions may affect experiences and influence the generalizability of the research findings to other sectors of the economy.

#### **6.5 Limitations of the study**

The study's primary limitation is the size of samples for all the three research methods employed, which may somewhat affect the generalizability of the research findings, mainly as the majority of the female participants included in the study were limited to the education sector. However, this risk was significantly mitigated by the inbuilt cross-validation mechanism inherent in the mixed-method approach employed.

Further, the research was limited to women in the educational sector and may not apply to other sectors of the economy. Civil servants' qualifications and world outlook may differ from those in the different sectors.

As identified above, the research was limited to only women in education still quite troublesome as the research is based on analysing the public sector as a whole. However, it is crucial to identify that education is an essential and integral part of public sectors. This particular sector covers a lot of public sectors as it has a considerable worker base. However, there are still other sectors such as health, social work and police etc. These sectors are also of substantial importance and have a pivotal and crucial role in the functionality of a country. However, the failure of this research to analyse these other sectors comprehensively risks broad generalisation and assumptions amongst the readers as the female employees from the educational sector cannot represent every female leader and employee in the public sector.

The primary reason is that work in different public sector departments vastly differentiates, resulting in diversified findings and opinions of women on their jobs and leadership. Hence the implication of vision 2030 would also be different for public sector departments. However, this limitation indicates that this research somewhat generalized the impact of vision 2030 on female leaders and employees in the public sector widely based on the opinions, experiences and ideologies of Saudi Arabia's female employees working in the educational sector, which can be a significant flaw. Therefore, the readers should be careful while devising implications from findings that fit the whole public sector or a particular department. One of the critical limitations of this specific research is that this detailed research fails to identify and highlight the new factor that emerged and disturbed the social-political and economic norms of the world, which is covid-19. It can be determined that covid-19 has contributed to the vast destruction of lives; however, it has also affected many different sectors of work in differentiating manner. Considering the emergence of the pandemic, it can be identified that the public sectors and, most importantly, the public sector has been widely affected worldwide by shifts in norms, methods and techniques of learning after covid-19.

The rise in online education and e-commerce are examples. Hence considering this argument, it can be said that research has limitations in identifying the current situation of KSA's women working in public sectors and their lives as heads of public sector departments after the emergence of covid-19 and the imposition of several different regulations and bans and laws after that. Furthermore, many economies worldwide face drastic losses; hence vision 2030, being a prolonged project, would have also been affected by economic and social changes the pandemic causes. Therefore, the research has limitations in comprehensively analyzing the current environment of women in KSA working in the public sector and the changes they have faced.

Finally, several regulations in the public sector that define the degrees of freedom leaders enjoy in making decisions may affect experiences and influence the generalizability of the research findings to other sectors of the economy.

#### 6.6 Plan for future research

A result of the above limitations is the recommendation that similar studies with more significant samples be undertaken in other sectors of the Saudi economy, for instance, the private sector and sub-sectors. There are no known studies on women's experiences in leadership in Saudi Arabia following the promulgation of vision 2030 and the implementation of a series of social reforms. Therefore it may be enriching to learn about women's experiences in other sectors of the economy as these may be very different from those in the public sector, which is usually characterised by tall hierarchical structures, bureaucracy and centralised decision-making. Further, another area of research is to reach out to the female students in management and professional institutes who are likely to enter the workplace in the next five years and obtain their perceptions, expectations and any visual barriers they already experience or expect to experience in future leadership journeys.

One of the significant prospects for future researchers planning to work on a similar topic would be to focus on the factor of covid-19 and how it affected the whole chain of vision 2030. The researchers can work on two significant factors. Firstly identification and analysis of the effect of covid-19 on the public sector and the progress of vision 2030. In this topic, the researcher can work on identifying the barriers to the improvement and their impact on vision 2030. Moreover, the reaction and effect of covid-19 on the employee base, specifically women, are generally tasked with catering to the needs of their husbands and children alongside working.

This would not only fill the void in the contemporary scholarly environment but would also allow people of KSA or even global audience to know how to tackle or at least effectively work in the public sector if any further pandemic or any emergency occurs on a worldwide or national level that has similar impacts as covid-19. This would vastly contribute to the scholarly world and have several different end theoretical implications. The researcher or future researcher can use these findings to generate other concepts and theories regarding management under pandemics and emergencies, which would benefit the scholarly world.

On the other hand, the aftermath of covid-19 on the public sector and vision 2030 can be explored. It can be identified that this project is long-lasting, with quite a lot of time to achieve what is aimed from the start. Hence there is no doubt that covid-19 would have substantially affected this project and its current progress and created barriers to further development. Analysing these factors would allow the researcher to identify and highlight the significant issues caused by covid-19 which are still intact and are currently or can potentially cause disruption in the vision 2030. Furthermore, based on the analysis and findings, several different strategies can be diversified, which would have substantial practical implications in the modern world as KSA's authorities can adopt these strategies to ensure the successful completion of the vision 2030 project while ensuring that each aim and objective are met comprehensively.

Exploring other sectors, such as the private and economic sectors, can also be the primary focus for future researchers. It would contribute to the identification and further indication of the adequate vision 2030 is for these particular sectors and to what extent the project contributes to the GDP of KSA. Furthermore, this would allow future researchers to differentiate between public and private sectors and highlight which sector receives more benefits and perks from this project. On the other hand, similar research can be conducted on Saudi Arabia's male population, which would not only contribute to developing these findings but would also result in the identification of significant differences between men and women working in some sectors in the KSA and identification of any discrimination which can be further eradicated with the help of specific propositions and recommendations from the researcher.

## Appendix 1: Approval Letter from KAU for Conducting the Interviews

KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA  
Ministry of Education  
KING ABDULAZIZ UNIVERSITY  
Deanship of Graduate Studies  
(035)



المملكة العربية السعودية  
وزارة التعليم  
جامعة الملك عبد العزيز  
عمادة الدراسات العليا  
(٠٣٥)

Encl: ..... : المرفقات Date: ..... : التاريخ Ref: ..... : الرقم

## إفادة مهمة علمية

إلى من يهمة الأمر،  
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته  
تحية طيبة وبعد،،

تفيد عمادة الدراسات العليا بجامعة الملك عبد العزيز بالسليمانية بمدينة جدة، أنه تم صدور موافقة سعادة وكيل الجامعة للدراسات العليا والبحث العلمي بموجب رقم معاملة (١٢٦٥١/٣٩/خ) وتاريخ (١١/٥/١٤٣٩هـ) في أن تباشر الباحثة/ أزهار بنت محمد علي قوارير صاحبة الهوية الوطنية رقم (١٠٤٧٥٣٧٧٧٢) وهي إحدى مبتعثات وزارة التعليم لدراسة الدكتوراه إلى جامعة برايتون في لندن، لمهمتها العلمية في رحاب الحرم الجامعي.  
وقد تم تسهيل إجراءات دخول المبتعثة لشطر الطالبات بجامعة الملك عبد العزيز، ابتداء من تاريخ ٢٠١٨/٢/٢٠م وحتى ٢٠١٨/٥/٢٠م.

وقد أعطيت لها هذه الإفادة بناء على طلبها، دون أدنى مسؤولية على الجامعة.

وتقبلوا فائق التحية والتقدير،،

وكيلة  
عمادة الدراسات العليا بالسليمانية المكلفة

عبدالله  
٩١٩

د. خلود بنت صالح الصالح



س. الكندي ١٤٣٩/٩٧هـ

## Appendix 2: Email the Interviewer

سعادة الأستاذة /

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ،،

أنا باحثة دكتوراه، في جامعة برايتون في المملكة المتحدة أقوم حالياً ببحث عن التنمية الشخصية والمهنية للمرأة في الأدوار القيادية العليا في المملكة العربية السعودية وجزء من البحث ان أجمع ا لبيانات عن طريق المقابلات (شبه منظمة) المخصصة لهذا الغرض ويسرني أن اخذ موافقتكم عضوات مجلس الشورى للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة. مؤكداً أن مشاركتكم الكريمة الجوهريه لإثراء البح (ث، توافقاً مع رؤية المملكة (٢٠٣٠

(العينة المستهدفة هم لمن سبق او مازالوا يتولوا منصب قيادي في السعوديه خلال العشرة سنوات الماضية)

موافقتكم تعتبر مساهمة وطنية كبيرة ومقدرة. والبيانات المقدمة من قبلكم ستستخدم فقط لغرض البحث العلمي وستعامل بسرية تامة، ولن يتطلب ذكر الاسم في البحث

March علما بانني قادمه الي الرياض من تاريخ 10-12

إن أردتم الاستفسار أسعد بالتواصل معكم حولها شاكره لتعاونكم ومقدره لوقتكم الثمين

، مع فائق التقدير والاحترام

ازهار علي قوارير

باحثة دكتوراه - جامعة برايتون - المملكة المتحدة

### **Appendix 3: interview guide**

My name is Azhar Gawarir. I am a PhD researcher at the University of Brighton, UK. I am currently researching women's personal and professional development in senior leadership roles in Saudi Arabia. Part of the research is to collect data through semi-structured interviews. For this purpose, I am pleased to get your approval to participate in this study. Its qualitative research and the interview will focus on the interviewer's personal and professional life stories. I understand and appreciate the significance of confidentiality and anonymity and assure you that the information gathered through the interview will only be used for academic purposes.

The research questions will be descriptive and exploratory, which are:

- Q 1. How do family relationships and socio-cultural context impact women's commitment to career progression and aspirations for leadership roles?
- Q 2. What are the impact of vision 2030 and institutional policy changes on women's career progression and leadership performance in Saudi Arabia?
- Q 3. How does conventional patriarchy in the workplace impact women leaders' performance and career/professional growth from women's perspectives?

The study objectives and aim

- To examine from the perspective of the female leaders the aspects associated with family dynamics that may have impacted their journey to arrive at senior leadership roles.
- To discover from the viewpoint of female leaders the cultural, social factors and policy framework that may have enhanced or inhibited their core capability to obtain leadership positions in Saudi Arabia.
- To assess the female leaders' opinion on the influence of a decisive workplace environment and policies that may have impacted their leadership aspirations.

- To develop suggestions for encouraging women's aspirations toward leadership positions in the public sector organizations in Saudi Arabia.

The study targeted Saudi women between 30 -60 years who work in leadership positions. Understand the lives of those women through their narratives - childhood family education, work opportunities, and challenges - positive and negative influences on the professional journey. Explore how they built their careers and advice other women with these ambitions. The perspective of Saudi woman leaders accounts for how women leaders themselves describe their success.

However, the decision as to whether or not to take part in this study is entirely voluntary. If they decide not to participate in this study, it will not affect the care they receive and will not result in any loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled. The research will contain three types of questions (personal life questions, professional life questions opinion questions.

## Appendix 4: Interview Research Question

### Personal life questions

- Q 1. Tell me about yourself, your childhood, your family and your education?
- Q 2. What role did other people's negative/ positive views of your ability play in becoming a leader?
- Q 3. How did you come to be oriented to your field of study?
- Q 4. What is your perception are the factors (family status, social standing etc.)? Which do you think helped you to be where you are today?
- Q 5. How did your self-esteem affect you in becoming a leader?
- Q 6. What role did family values have in your becoming a leader?
- Q 7. What role did your connections play in you becoming a leader?
- Q 8. At what stage confident were you in your pursuit of leadership?

### Professional life questions

- Q 1. Please describe the story of your professional experience, particularly the critical events and challenges you have faced?
- Q 2. Which these events have influenced your professional and personal development?
- Q 3. What effect did the environment and culture of the company have on you becoming a leader?
- Q 4. Was there any particular personal decision you would consider a turning point in your professional life or that changed your life?
- Q 5. What prior experience did you have that helped you achieve your leadership role?
- Q 6. Looking back over your professional experience, what would you describe as the "unanticipated outcome" of this professional journey?
- Q 7. How did you engage with people while seeking a leadership role in our organization?
- Q 8. What kind of views did you adopt to become a leader?

Opinion questions.

- Q 1. What difference does being a woman make to your becoming a leader?
- Q 2. How did you manage the resistance of men to you becoming a leader? If there is resistance?
- Q 3. How passionate were you about becoming a leader? Please give examples of situations.
- Q 4. Are there any targets you set yourself to achieve your goal of becoming a leader?
- Q 5. What was the influence of society on your becoming a leader?
- Q 6. What difference does being a woman make to your becoming a leader?

## Appendix 5: Interview Participant Consent Form

### Participant consent form

[Lived experiences of women in leadership positions in the public sector in Saudi Arabia

post- promulgation of vision 2030]

	Please initial or tick the box
I agree to participate in this research to [research the personal and professional development of women in senior leadership roles in Saudi Arabia].	
The researcher has explained the study's purpose, principles, procedures, and possible risks to my satisfaction. (“University of Brighton”)	
I have read the information sheet and understand the principles, procedures and possible risks.	
I know I will be required to <i>[answer questions etc.]</i> .	
I agree with the researcher about taking photographs/making audio/video recordings during the project.	
I understand how the data collected will be used and that confidential information will generally be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else.	
I understand that I can withdraw from the study without giving a reason or incurring consequences.	
I agree that should I withdraw from the study, the researcher may use the data collected up to that point for the purposes described in the information sheet.	
<i>[where there is a possibility that data may be reused or shared – please see the university’s data management policy]</i> I agree that data collected may subsequently be archived and used by other bona fide researchers.	

Name (please print) .....

Signed ..... Date .....

Azhar Gawarir

A.gawarir@brighton.ac.uk

PhD - University of Brighton - united kingdom

## Appendix 6: survey questionnaire (English)

Q1



يرجى تغير اللغة الي اللغة العربية من الالفتونة اعلاه

Please select your Language



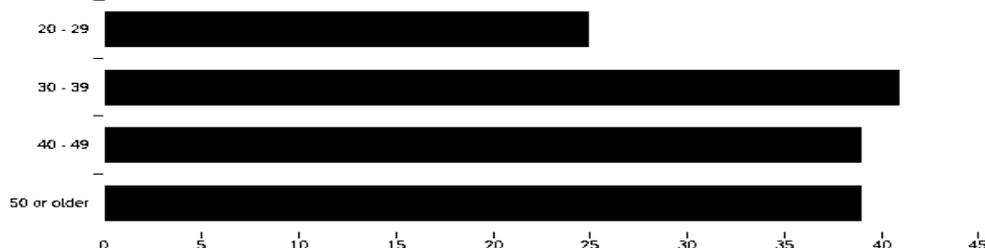
My name is Azhar Gawarir, I am a PhD researcher, at the University of Brighton, UK. I am currently researching **the personal and professional development of women in senior leadership roles in Saudi Arabia** and part of the research is to collect data through survey for this purpose and I am pleased to get your approval to participate in this study. I understand and appreciate the significance of confidentiality and anonymity and assure you that the information gathered through the survey will only be used for academic purposes and does not require your name or personal details. By selecting "I consent", you are agreeing to the following:

- I am aware of the purpose and scope of the research connected to this survey.
- I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any point during the project.
- I agree that the data contained within this survey may be used by the researcher(s) and acknowledge that it will be stored and shared as is appropriate within UK privacy laws.
- I confirm that I am 18 or over.

Yes I consent

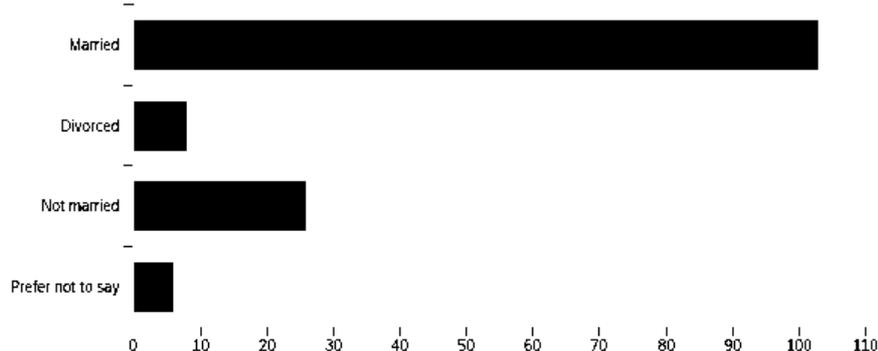
No I do not consent

Q 1. **Please select your age:**



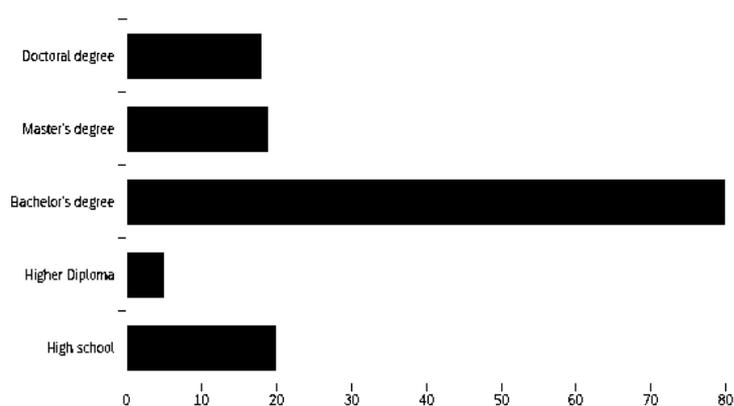
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std deviation	Variance	Count
1	Please select your age	1.00	4.00	2.64	1.06	1.12	144

Q 2. **Please indicate your marital status:**

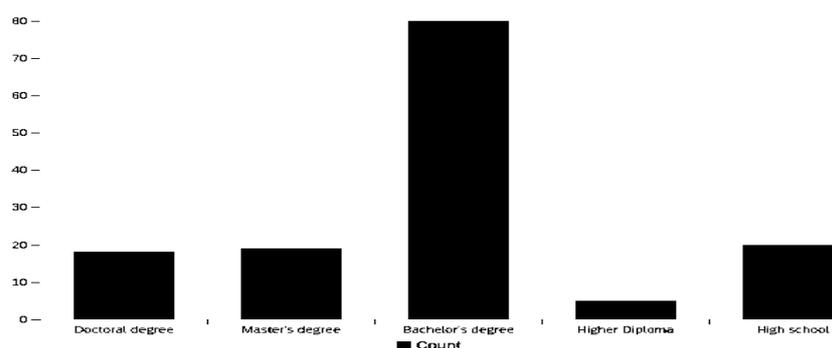


It has been demonstrated from the analysis of the following table that marital status plays a significant role in the growth and development of female leaders in Saudi Arabia. Therefore the researcher keeps considering the participants of different matrimonial grades, such as almost all the participants have experienced marriage once in their life. However, 10 per cent of participants were divorced, and 90 per cent were still married.

**Q 3. - please select your highest educational qualification:**



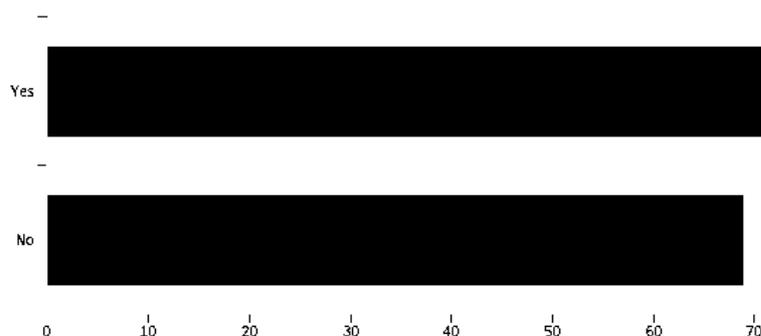
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std deviation	Variance	Count
1	Please select your highest educational qualification	1.00	5.00	2.93	1.11	1.23	142



The table analysis shows that the respondents selected for the interview are from different educational backgrounds, as each has various degrees. In this context, the table illustrated the ratio of the students' degrees from which it has been analysed that about 80 per cent of the participants were selected who bachelor's degrees. In contrast, only 8 per cent had some

diploma (high diploma). In addition, 20 per cent of participants were selected from master's, doctoral, and high school degrees. With the involvement of participants of different educational backgrounds, the researcher was capable of examining the central theme of the thesis.

Q 4. Are you leading or responsible for one or more staff members?

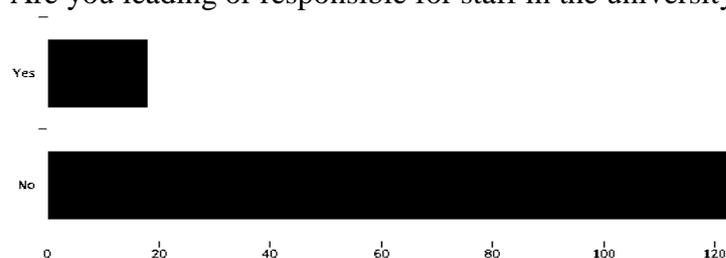


Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std deviation	Variance	Count
Are you leading or responsible for one or more staff members?	23.00	24.00	23.49	0.50	0.25	141

#	Answer	%	Count
23	Yes	51.06%	72
24	No	48.94%	69
	Total	100%	141

From the above table, it has been illustrated that 48.94 per cent of the respondents were not performing any responsibility towards one or more staff members. On the other hand, the table also elaborated that about 51.06 per cent of respondents were responsible for one or more staff members in any organisation or sector.

Q 5. Are you leading or responsible for staff in the university?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std deviation	Variance	Count
1	Are you leading or responsible for staff in the university?	1.00	2.00	1.87	0.33	0.11	143

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	12.59%	18
2	No	87.41%	125
	Total	100%	143

It has been demonstrated from the above table that approximately 12.59 per cent of participants responded yes to the statement that they lead any specific position or are a part of a responsible staff in any educational institution or university. At the same time, 87.41 per cent of participants were not a part of any educational institutions or worked in a leading position.

## Appendix 7: A Screenshot of One Page from Data Referencing



Dr. KS: Yes, I am an associate professor and I have supervision students. One of my students will discuss in two weeks to get her a master's degree and also two other students working under my supervision

AZ: Mashallah!

58/Dr.KS02/

Dr. KS: For me the first tasks, whatever the burden of study, supervision and guidance of the first tasks above all because my first goal is to be an Academy

59/Dr.KS02/

AZ: Although you are not ambitious to take up an administrative position, but your resume proves many of the administrative development in the field of leadership?

60/Dr.KS02/ 61/Dr.KS02/

Dr. KS: I have never aspired to a leadership or administrative position and I do not aspire to a higher position than my current post, but rather my ambition and my focus on how to build myself, my first obsession. After two weeks from now I will publish a book, and also an introduction to another book

62/Dr.KS02/

63/Dr.KS02/

will be published. Also, I participated in the course of general subjects in the Arabic language. I also participated in the written editing of the Arabic language 201 which is taught for students of the academic year of the bachelor's degree.

AZ: What role did family values play in becoming a leader? In other words, what was the impact of the family or society on becoming what you are now?

64/Dr.KS02/

65/Dr.KS02/

Dr. KS: As I mentioned previously, what was instilled by the parents, my father was initially a leader and worked in many leadership positions.

66/Dr.KS02/

AZ: He is a diplomat

67/Dr.KS02/

68/Dr.KS02/

69/Dr.KS02/

Dr. KS: Yes, he is a diplomat, but he's an academic, considering that he worked in the Cultural Attaché in Britain and then he moved to work as head of the Royal Court and is a representative of the Kingdom

70/Dr.KS02/

71/Dr.KS02/

72/Dr.KS02/

73/Dr.KS02/

74/Dr.KS02/

of Saudi Arabia in international law. To me these things still have a priority to be in a position that serves the Kingdom and serves the government/public sector.

75/Dr.KS02/

AZ: What role did your communications play in becoming a leader?

76/Dr.KS02/

77/Dr.KS02/

Dr. KS: It is an individual effort 100% I did not aspire to this position and was very surprised by the nomination, but it seems to me that the work in the Department of Arts when I was the Head of

### Appendix 8: Sample Media Article

Empowerment and inclusion of Saudi women ‘essential for economic growth.’

Arab News: [https://www.arabnews.com/node/1702041/Saudi -Arabia](https://www.arabnews.com/node/1702041/Saudi-Arabia)

G20’s women engagement group concludes its national dialogues with a final discussion of recommendations

Jeddah: Saudi women's empowerment and economic inclusion are necessary steps to create a more productive society that supports improved economic growth. This was the conclusion of a discussion on Wednesday hosted by the G20’s women engagement group.

The virtual meeting of the group organized and presided over by the Saudi non-profit Al-Nahda philanthropic society for women concluded the national dialogues on Saudi women's economic participation. The panellists presented and discussed several recommendations for government entities to facilitate women's professional development and empowerment in the economy, technology, and entrepreneurship.

“These dialogues highlighted the kingdom’s efforts to empower women economically and what was (previously) discussed in (a) the closed session on Tuesday confirms that we still have a lot of work to do,” said Princess Moudi Bint Khalid, chair of Al-Nahda society’s board of directors. “We hope these sessions will significantly impact the development of policies and programs to empower women and activate monitoring and follow-up systems.”

The recommendations focused on four areas financial inclusion, digital inclusion, labour inclusion, and inclusive decision-making, with women entrepreneurship a common thread.

The participants highlighted the crucial importance of financial inclusion as a critical driver of women's economic independence and capacity building which builds confidence and effective participation in their country’s economy.

“The current crisis has raised awareness of the need to improve production and increase productivity to a higher level, meaning (there is) a crucial need to involve women more in the market,” said Saudi entrepreneur Lateefa Al-Walan.

She presented the group’s initial recommendations for the empowerment of women in the field of entrepreneurship, which included offering support through the increased inclusion of women in professional groups, societies and networks; more training in financial literacy and investment; and the establishment of a minimum quota for the number of places for women on organization’s governing boards.

“Entrepreneurship is the largest sustainable resource for any country, especially during the current crisis,” said Al-Walan. “Growing businesses also help diversify sources of income and raise domestic product. By supporting them, we enable the country’s biggest goal of empowering the private sector.”

She added that women's sustained high-level engagement and commitment are essential to challenging the stereotypes about their abilities.

Most panellists agreed that social behaviours and legal restrictions are among the most significant obstacles to the advancement and empowerment of women in Saudi Arabia. While many legal barriers are being removed due to the ongoing reforms in the kingdom, it can be more complex and take longer to alter deep-rooted social behaviour and challenge stereotypes.

“Changing women's perceptions about themselves is essential for success in entrepreneurship because working in this field is risky and needs courage and confidence,” added Al-Walan.

Shahd Attar, executive director of the technology and communications department at the investment ministry, presented recommendations for digital inclusion. She stressed the necessity of considering the needs of all sections of society when designing and creating technical tools so that the final product does not have any in-built bias.

“Our main recommendation is to promote the equal participation of women in the design and development of technology. They must be at the heart of creating the technical solution and not only as consumers of technology,” attar said.

She agreed with Al-Walan that stereotypes could create uncertainty or lack of confidence in women about pursuing a career or developing their abilities in technical fields.

Munirah Al-Qahtani, a public policy consultant at Saudi Aramco, said that changes to the law are the primary driver of social change.

She presented recommendations designed to improve the inclusion of women in the workforce. These mainly focused on removing discriminatory gender-based labour laws and promoting equal rights for women and men, including paternity leave and improved childcare services to increase the sense of responsibility among Saudi families.

Salma al-Rashed, director of al-Nahda society’s development program, said the organization would work with governmental institutions to encourage the adoption of w20 recommendations.

Saudi Arabia holds the presidency of the G20 this year, and the group’s annual summit is due to be held in Riyadh in November. The w20 is one of several independent engagement groups led by organizations from the host country that focus on different sections and sectors of society and develop policy recommendations for consideration by G20 leaders.

## Appendix 9: List of Articles

number	Titel	Date	Writer	link
1	Empowerment and inclusion of Saudi women essential for economic growth	07/9/20	Ruba Obaid	<a href="https://www.arabnews.com/node/1702041/saudi-arabia">https://www.arabnews.com/node/1702041/saudi-arabia</a>
2	Saudi Arabia's historic ruling for woman living independently without permission	15/7/20	Joanne Serrieh,	<a href="https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2020/07/15/-Saudi-Arabia-rules-in-favor-of-woman-living-independently-without-permission">https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2020/07/15/-Saudi-Arabia-rules-in-favor-of-woman-living-independently-without-permission</a>
3	Saudi Arabia's first female ambulance driver says job is 'healing balm for the soul'	09/28/20	Tareq Al-Thaqafi	<a href="https://www.arabnews.com/node/1740941/saudi-arabia">https://www.arabnews.com/node/1740941/saudi-arabia</a>
4	Saudi Arabia calls for stronger links between UN Women and GCC	06/27/20	Arab News:	<a href="https://www.arabnews.com/node/1695941/saudi-arabia">https://www.arabnews.com/node/1695941/saudi-arabia</a>
5	Women's sports participation up 149%: Saudi Sports Minister	07/21/20	Arab News:	<a href="https://www.arabnews.com/node/1693046/saudi-arabia">https://www.arabnews.com/node/1693046/saudi-arabia</a>
6	Saudi woman explorer wishes to visit Empty Quarter again	09/28/20	Deema Al-Khudair	<a href="https://www.arabnews.jp/en/saudi-arabia/article_25074/">https://www.arabnews.jp/en/saudi-arabia/article_25074/</a>
7	Saudi woman runs a seamless op to meet military demands	09/19/20	Mohammed Al-Sulami	<a href="https://www.arabnews.jp/en/saudi-arabia/article_26932/">https://www.arabnews.jp/en/saudi-arabia/article_26932/</a>
8	Saudi foreign ministry appoints first woman as director-general	08/25/20	Arab News:	<a href="https://thenewsdiarabia.com/blog-post/saudi-foreign-ministry-appoints-first-woman-as-director-general/">https://thenewsdiarabia.com/blog-post/saudi-foreign-ministry-appoints-first-woman-as-director-general/</a>
9	Saudi Arabia looks to close gender pay gap	09/17/20	Deema Al-Khudair	<a href="https://www.arabnews.com/node/1735791/saudi-arabia">https://www.arabnews.com/node/1735791/saudi-arabia</a>
10	Women form 27.5% of the labor market; 391 Saudi women given leadership training	09/30/20	Saudi Gazette report	<a href="https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/595328">https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/595328</a>
11	Great Place to Work reveals 2020 best workplaces in GCC for women	09/30/20	Saudi Gazette report	<a href="https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/598642">https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/598642</a>
12	Exploring the rising workforce participation among Saudi women	09/30/20	Meshal Alkhowaiter	<a href="https://www.mei.edu/publications/exploring-rising-workforce-participation-among-saudi-women">https://www.mei.edu/publications/exploring-rising-workforce-participation-among-saudi-women</a>
13	Ten new female leadership appointments in Saudi Arabia mark historic moment	08/17/20	Jessie Tu	<a href="https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/ten-new-female-appointments-in-saudi-marks-historic-moment/">https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/ten-new-female-appointments-in-saudi-marks-historic-moment/</a>
14	Saudi Leadership Must Focus on Innovation for the Future	09/16/20	Dr Neil Quilliam	<a href="https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/09/saudi-leadership-must-focus-innovation-future">https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/09/saudi-leadership-must-focus-innovation-future</a>
15	Ten Saudi women appointed in leadership positions in Presidency of the Two Holy Mosques	08/15/20	Saudi Gazette report	<a href="https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/596680">https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/596680</a>
16	Saudi Arabia has appointed 10 women in senior positions at Two Holy Mosques	08/16/20	OLIVIA MORRIS	<a href="https://emirateswoman.com/saudi-arabia-appointed-10-women-senior-positions-two-holy-mosques/">https://emirateswoman.com/saudi-arabia-appointed-10-women-senior-positions-two-holy-mosques/</a>
17	Saudi Arabia's appointment of female rights council members empowering: President	09/21/20	Sponsored Statement	<a href="https://www.capacitymedia.com/articles/3826401/why-are-there-so-few-women-in-positions-of-power-">https://www.capacitymedia.com/articles/3826401/why-are-there-so-few-women-in-positions-of-power-</a>
18	"Saudi appoints 10 women in senior roles in holy mosques".	08/16/20	thejakarta post	<a href="https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/08/17/saudi-appoints-10-women-in-senior-roles-in-holy-mosques.html">https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/08/17/saudi-appoints-10-women-in-senior-roles-in-holy-mosques.html</a>
19	Divorce rates increase in Saudi Arabia amid COVID-19	05/06/20	Bassel Barakat	<a href="https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/divorce-rates-increase-in-saudi-arabia-amid-covid-19/1866563">https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/divorce-rates-increase-in-saudi-arabia-amid-covid-19/1866563</a>
20	Meet one of Saudi Arabia's first female forklift drivers	08/16/20	pepsicojobs	<a href="https://stories.pepsicojobs.com/meet-first-saudi-women-drive-forklift-for-pepsico/">https://stories.pepsicojobs.com/meet-first-saudi-women-drive-forklift-for-pepsico/</a>
21	Supporting policy changes that empower women to succeed	06/15/20	Kholoud Mousa	<a href="https://home.kpmg/sa/en/home/insights/2020/06/kpmg-partners-with-w20.html">https://home.kpmg/sa/en/home/insights/2020/06/kpmg-partners-with-w20.html</a>
22	Saudi women frustrated by pandemic in quest for financial independence	06/15/20		<a href="https://thearabweekly.com/saudi-women-frustrated-pandemic-quest-financial-independence">https://thearabweekly.com/saudi-women-frustrated-pandemic-quest-financial-independence</a>
23	For the love of the game: Saudi women's football teams ready to return	07/13/20	DEEMA AL-KHUDAIR	<a href="https://www.arabnews.com/node/1703831/saudi-arabia">https://www.arabnews.com/node/1703831/saudi-arabia</a>
24	Why are there so few women in positions of power?	09/21/20	Sponsored Statement	<a href="https://www.capacitymedia.com/articles/3826401/why-are-there-so-few-women-in-positions-of-power-">https://www.capacitymedia.com/articles/3826401/why-are-there-so-few-women-in-positions-of-power-</a>
25	Saudi Arabia's appointment of female rights council members empowering: President	07/13/20	Tamara Abueish	<a href="https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2020/07/02/Saudi-Arabia-s-appointment-of-female-rights-council-members-empowering-President">https://english.alarabiya.net/News/gulf/2020/07/02/Saudi-Arabia-s-appointment-of-female-rights-council-members-empowering-President</a>

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