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[Psychology](#), [Success](#)



## **Introduction**

In the recent years, there has been a heated debate on the position and role of women in development in Saudi Arabia. There has been a lot of controversy surrounding the issue of women rights in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This is due to the cultural background and the social attitudes towards the role of women in the development of the society. The current position of women and the rise of successful women in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia can be attributed to social events that have occurred in the kingdom for the last century (Altorki 55-85). The study of the rise of successful women in Saudi Arabia is of priceless significance because it serves as a template for designing gender empowerment in the Middle East region. Saudi Arabia has come a long way in the journey towards the empowerment and liberation of women in the Islamic nations (Altorki 55-85).

Saudi Arabia is a rich Middle East nation found in Southeast Asia. The country was established in 1932. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest in Arabia occupying approximately 80% of the Arabian Peninsula (Prokop 76-90). Most of the landmass of the mainland Saudi Arabia is a desert comprising of three major deserts. The main source of national revenue is oil that has propelled the economy of the country to amazing levels in the world map. Saudi Arabia has also in the recent past emerged as a global shopping hub with multitudes of shoppers visiting the kingdom of Saudi Arabia annually from all corners of the world (Prokop 76-90).

The fact that the economy of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is primarily based on oil helps in solidifying the social perception on gender roles. The

professions that the women can become involved in are limited (Altorki 55-85). There are social and religious restrictions on the jobs that the women can take up. This is an advanced extent of profound gender discrimination. It is worsened by the fact that it is reinforced by the law. In Saudi Arabia, women must be granted permission by a male relative in case they want to seek employment, start a business and take out a loan (Jawad 122-165). Therefore, the rise of successful women in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a critical step in the liberation of the female mind-set in Saudi Arabia. More women are now encouraged and motivated to have a more open and less conservative approach to the job market, business and education (Prokop 76-90).

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia currently has a population of approximately 19 million occupants according to demographic data available in 2013. The official language in Saudi Arabia is Arabic. The majority of the citizens belong to the Islam religion. The law system adhered to is strictly Islamic. The average literacy rate in Saudi Arabia is 60%. Though this reflects a dramatic increase in the literacy rate it is still the lowest in the region. This can be attributed to the low rates of female literacy levels in the country; below 50%. Most elements of Saudi's culture are Arabic and Islamic traditional values and moral subscriptions are aligned to the Islamic religious (Jawad 122-165). Most of the traditional social values have been adapted into the law by the administration. The dress code especially for the women is strongly dictated by the conservative laws that have been put in place by the government (Altorki 55-85).

## **Implications and Relevance of the study of the rise of successful women in Saudi Arabia**

The issue on the rise of powerful women in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a novel issue. There has been constant pressure upon the administration of the kingdom to actively involve women in the process of policy making (Arebi 24-36). There have also been controversial legislations that have been passed that have been deemed as oppressive to the women in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These legal hurdles limit the types of jobs that the women in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia can be involved in (Jawad 122-165). It also limits their options for growth. This has necessitated the rise of a new crop of Saudi women. This new generation of women has been on the forefront in the liberation of the modern-day Saudi woman. This new wave of calls for women empowerment has seen the issue gain global attention (Jawad 122-165).

This new rise of successful women in Saudi Arabia has countless benefits to the Saudi women. In addition to this, women in other Arab nations in the Middle East region and in the rest of the world have also benefited from this rise of successful women. The successful women have been pioneers in fields of education, business, medicine, fashion, media and sports. The exposure gained through their involvement in these programs changes their perception about their potential (Prokop 76-90). Increased participation of women in the education sector has seen the illiteracy levels among the Saudi women go down gradually over the years especially in the last decade (Altorki 55-85).

The successful women act as role models to all the women in their

communities. They represent the minority if the community who prove that the impossible can be done. In addition to this, educational empowerment of women in the society translates to economic success since more members of the society become productive (Prokop 76-90). By the year 2010, over 4 million subjects in the workforce in Saudi Arabia were foreigners. However, through the recent rise of successful women in education in Saudi Arabia, more women can participate in the labor market. This enhanced productivity has a direct impact on the economy of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Jawad 122-165).

Another implication of the rise of successful women in Saudi Arabia is that through women education, there is population growth, increase in fertility and reduced child mortality rate. This leads to the realization of overall improvement in the family health (Arebi 24-36). The rise of women entrepreneurs especially in fashion and business means that more women are earning. This is translated into better nutrition for the children because their mothers can afford better diets and medication for them. This shows that the rise of successful women in Saudi Arabia has a positive impact on the overall state of health of the nation (Prokop 76-90).

The long term implications of the rise of successful women and the efforts in women empowerment in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia are exponential. For instance, where the mother in a family is educated, she will make sure that her daughters will be educated too. The daughters will in turn strive to bring up well educated children (Altorki 55-85). Where the mother in the family is an entrepreneur, the economic status of the family will be enhanced.

Daughters who are brought up in such a family acquire the necessary skills,

expertise and motivation to start their own entrepreneurial missions (Altorki 55-85). As a result, through the inductive effect, the whole social structure will experience a drastic change for the better (Prokop 76-90).

The issue on the rise of successful women in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia has far reaching relevance globally. Saudi Arabia kingdom is one of the most successful economies of the Arab nations (Arebi 24-36). Most Arab nations have the same moral and social composition as Saudi Arabia. The social attitudes and temperament towards the roles of women in the society are similar (Altorki 55-85). In the Middle East, most of the economies are oil dependent. Therefore, the gender roles prescribed in Saudi Arabia are duplicated in these nations with a few modifications to make them better or worse (Jawad 122-165).

Owing to these similarities, this rise of a crop of successful women in Saudi Arabia acts as a wakeup call to other women in the Arab and Islamic nations in the world (Arebi 24-36). The rise of successful women in Saudi Arabia is of priceless significance to women in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Iraq, Sudan, Yemen, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Jordan. It also has great significance to Libya, Palestine, Lebanon, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Comoros. It is also important to note that this rise of successful women is not only significant to the Arab nations but also to the other nations in the world where the social and cultural values project gender oppression against women (Prokop 76-90).

## **Notable examples of successful women in Saudi Arabia**

Women in Saudi Arabia have become successful in areas that were previously dominated by their male counterparts (Shulail). To do this they had to rise above cultural and religious restriction slapped onto them by their native societies. Their success has not been easy as it has been punctuated by instances of social neglect and in some cases, intimidation. However, they have beaten the odds to acquire themselves a notable reputation in their respective fields. The fields that the women have risen to be successful include education, entrepreneurship, medicine, engineering, sports, research, and science. Some of these women include;

### **Dr. Hayat Sindi**

Dr. Hayat Sindi is a female Saudi biotechnologist who is a Ph. D. holder in electromagnetic and sound meter equipment from the Cambridge University. She rose above the conservative cultural prescriptions in her native Saudi Arabia and became the first woman in the whole of the gulf region to acquire a Ph. D. in biotechnology (Prokop 76-90). She was named by the united states as one of the top 15 scientists in the world chosen by the white house to participate in a documentary project to encourage students to pick up careers in science, engineering, technology and mathematics (Shulail). She has been on the forefront in encouraging other women from Saudi Arabia and the gulf region to rise above gender discrimination and oppression. Like any other Saudi girl, she faced a lot of problems when she intended to travel out of the country for further studies. She had to wait for two years before she could travel out of the country. This, she says, should

encourage other women in Saudi Arabia who are faced with the same problems to be persistent and always to shun negative comments from others. Today, she has won international acclaims in the biotechnology field while still maintaining her faith. She still wears a hijab in public. This shows that women can still be successful while maintaining their cultural and religious values (Prokop 76-90).

### **Dr. Khawla Al-Kuraya**

Dr. Khawla Al-Kuraya is a Saudi Arabian female research scientist in the field of genomic cancer. She has the record of being the first woman in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2010 to receive the King Abdul-Aziz Award of Excellence in recognition for her innovative initiatives. She is also one of the members of the board of advisers of the National Geographic Al Arabiya Magazine. In her field of research, Dr. Khawla Al-Kuraya has been involved in the genetic characterization of some of the most common Saudi tumors through the use of modern technology. Through this breakthrough research, she has enabled the identification of more than fifty types of cancers that the Saudi Arabians are susceptible to. She has also authored many medical publications in the field of cancer genomics research.

### **Dr. Faten Korshid**

Dr. Faten Korshid is a medical scientist from the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Her field of interest is in cancer treatment and diagnostics. One of her most notable inventions was when she discovered that nanoparticles that are found in camel's urine have the medically significant ability to attack cancerous cells. Currently Dr. Faten Korshid occupies the position of the



head of Plant Cells and Tissues Unit in the King Fahad Medical Research Center in Saudi Arabia. Following her numerous inventions, she has earned a lot of international awards for her innovative research approaches in medical therapy in cancer, especially lung cancer (Jawad 122-165).

## **Challenges to the rise of successful women in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

The rise and recognition of successful women in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia has not been a smooth ride to the top. There have been numerous major hurdles in the way. One of these hurdles that have stood in the way of Saudi Arabian women is their cultural restrictions (Prokop 76-90). The culture places men on a pedestal and makes the women dependent on the men for major decisions in their lives. Women have to seek permission from their male relatives in order to seek employment, to do business and to open bank accounts. This led to the oppression of women in the society since their fate was placed in the hands of their male relatives (Altorki 55-85).

In addition to this, the law cemented some of these oppressive cultural values. The law dictates the types of jobs that can be taken up by women. This limits the exposure of the Saudi Arabian women in the job market.

Another challenge faced by the Saudi Arabian women in their endeavor to rise and become successful is illiteracy (Altorki 55-85). The Saudi Arabian social inclination emphasizes on the education of the male child since there are no professional restrictions for the men. As a result, many females are not equipped to be productive in the economy (Prokop 76-90).

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