Empowering women in Saudi universities: Realizing Vision 2030

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Abstract

The study identifies the degree of women's empowerment in Saudi universities and their effective role in strengthening community partnership to achieve the future vision 2030. The study participants were 39 Saudi female faculty members in decision-making positions in Saudi government universities as participants of the study. Data were collected using a questionnaire to measure the level of empowerment of Saudi women and their active role in promoting community partnership to achieve the Vision 2030. Results showed that 51.8% of the participants considered Saudi women's empowerment as central to societal development, 53.8% considered women to be empowered in the country, while 30.8% identified challenges in Saudi women's participation in community service, and 66.7% of the indicators exhibited Saudi women as empowered in the institutions of higher education. The study concludes with recommending the necessity of media awareness of the importance of empowering women in Saudi society, and the need to stimulate mechanisms for empowering Saudi women and their participation in the workforce.

Keywords: *Women's empowerment, Saudi universities, community partnership, Vision 2030.*

Introduction

As a term in the study of societies, 'empowerment' finds its roots in the Marxist sociological thought but has continued to develop and fine through neo-Marxist ideas well into the modern times. By its very definition, empowerment applies to those sections of society that have been earlier marginalized and denied equal opportunities as a result of the overt or covert societal trends and mores. Its two defining characteristics are autonomy and self-determination that give control to people over their lives and in claiming their rights. When referring to women's empowerment in a society, it is important to acknowledge that ensuring this is highly significant not only because they theoretically constitute one half of the population, but also, because as majority caregivers in families, their well-being will ensure development of families, communities, and countries. Abdullah (2021) asserts that empowerment in general is a crucial element in the development process, particularly in addressing the challenges faced by oppressed or marginalized communities. It involves overcoming obstacles and discrimination that undermine their rights and status. Al-Qahtani (2016) further reiterates that it is a social action that aims to encourage individuals, institutions, and communities to increase their control, achieve political effectiveness, improve quality of life, and promote social justice.

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Modernity in all spheres of life especially with the rapid technological advancements has led to significant transformations across all aspects of life, raising new opportunities and challenges. Consequently, individual, community, and national goals that impact society have also undergone change. Moreover, emerging geopolitical dynamics have made it pertinent for nations to evaluate the standing of their societies. In the Arab world, Saudi Arabia has been the first country that drew out an active plan for development of all sections of the society without compromising its rich cultural and religious heritage. Under a visionary leadership determined to empower all citizens, the national developmental roadmaps Vision 2020 and 2030 gave detailed outlines for achieving these goals. Education has been identified as most crucial in realization of these and accordingly, new opportunities created for the participation of Saudi women in diverse fields, including in the echelons of higher education. However, critics may claim that there can be chasms between plans and their implementation. Hence, the main objective of this study is to examine the empowerment of Saudi women in achieving the Saudi Vision 2030 by evaluating the efforts undertaken to prepare and uplift women to meet the demands of the job market and serve the community. Additionally, the study focuses on a wide range of interconnected inquiries regarding the role of women in societal service and their leadership contributions towards achieving the strategic goals associated with the Kingdom's future vision.

Literature Review

Societal developmental goals need the participation of women as much as men for their accomplishment, and it has become a foundational element in public life across diverse societies however distinct their customs, traditions, and ideologies be. In recent years, Saudi society has undergone a sweeping transformation that has positively influenced various aspects of life, resulting in an enhanced perception of Saudi women within the community. Accordingly, their empowerment is evident in political, economic, and social dimensions as they have actively participated in a range of fields, including the Shura Council, teaching positions, and municipal elections (Al-Qahtani, 2016).

The status of women in any society is considered one of the primary criteria for measuring its development and progress. Advanced societies are those in which women play important and necessary roles alongside men. A society cannot thrive, develop, and grow relying solely on men, to the exclusion of women (Abu Ajajah, 2020).

Empowering women stands as a paramount priority within Arab societies, reflecting a socio-economic challenge shaped by historical contexts and societal dynamics. Initially met with numerous obstacles, this endeavor represents a fundamental element in community development. Recent times have witnessed a noteworthy surge in attention toward women's issues, particularly in culturally and socially progressive societies. The empowerment of women and their seamless integration into society hold substantial significance in fostering robust social partnerships (Abdullah, 2021). Credit for speeding this change also goes to the United Nations which has been playing an active role in addressing women's issues by organizing global conferences and implementing resolutions to combat gender discrimination. This support has significantly influenced the conversation surrounding gender equality and has been instrumental in promoting women's empowerment (Al-Kurdi & Adira, 2014).

With growing emphasis in Saudi Arabia on engaging more actively in world politics and interacting with the international community, efforts have been invested to harness its resources in order to stay aligned with global advancements and achieve comprehensive development in all domains. As a result, there has been a strong commitment to devise an ambitious plan aimed at elevating the country and its people. In April 2016, the Saudi Crown Prince unveiled the Saudi Vision 2030, which rests on pillars covering different sectors but aligned with the goal of nation-building and citizens' empowerment (Kingdom

of Saudi Arabia, 2016). Education being one of the foundational aspects, the current study gains relevance as it endeavors to identify the degree of women's empowerment in Saudi universities and their effective role in enhancing community partnership to achieve the future outlined in Vision 2030.

Theatrical underpinning

Women's empowerment

Women's empowerment refers to the process through which women individually or collectively realize the mechanisms and dynamics of power relations that enable them to gain self-confidence and strength to challenge gender inequality (Abdullah, 2021). It encompasses a woman's recognition of her own value and her entitlement to make decisions, along with her access to opportunities and resources. It also involves her ability to exercise control over her life both within and outside of the home. Moreover, women's empowerment includes their capacity to influence social changes that contribute to a more equitable social and economic landscape at the national and global levels (Kazouz, 2016).

Principles of women's empowerment

The principles of women's empowerment are identified as:

1.   Participation: Women's ability to invest their resources and find solutions to the challenges they may face is a crucial principle of empowerment.

2.   Self-reliance: Increasing women's self-confidence enables them to confront their problems and minimize risks with limited resources.

3.   Social justice: Empowerment principles aim to achieve equality among individuals in terms of social participation within the surrounding community (Abdullah, 2021, p.16).

Components of women's empowerment

Al-Kaabi (2020) mentioned the following components of women's empowerment:

1.   Self-worth: Women having a sense of self-value.

2.   Right to choose: Women having the right to make choices.

3.   Access to opportunities and resources: Women having the right to access opportunities and resources.

4.   Control over their lives: Women having the right to control their lives both within and outside the home.

5.   Ability to influence social change: Women having the ability to influence social change towards a more just social and economic system at both national and international levels.

Community partnership and women's empowerment

Community partnership involves the collaborative and mutual communication between different groups or entities that share projects, plans, operations, activities, and joint programs. The overall goal is to foster communication and cooperation among partners to find suitable solutions to various obstacles, problems, and activities within this relationship (Muhammad, 2017). Community partnership entails participation of each partner in the educational process and preparing learners to be productive in the community Qashou (2013).

Types of community participation

Qadoumi (2008) identified the types of community participation to include:

1.   Participating in identifying demands and needs.

2.   Participating in program planning, including evaluation, and proposing coping methods.

3.   Participating in program implementation, monitoring, and supervision.

4.   Participating in benefiting from implemented plans and programs.

Previous studies in community participation

Abdullah (2021) conducted a study aimed at determining the relationship between empowering working women and their ability to obtain social and economic rights. The study was conducted on 252 women working in the Directorate of Education in Al-Buhaira Governorate. The results showed that empowerment of women to obtain their social rights was of moderate degree, while the empowerment to obtain their economic rights was of weak degree.

Al-Shahri and Abed (2020) identified the hindrances faced by gifted centers in Saudi Arabia when building community partnerships. The study was conducted using a questionnaire distributed to the directors of these centers. The results indicated that all directors agreed that there were significant obstacles to building community partnerships in gifted centers, with the primary obstacle being the lack of awareness among local community institutions about the importance of partnership with these centers. However, the contribution of center directors to developing partnership-building strategies for gifted students received a high rating.

Abu Ajajah (2020) assessed the level of social participation of Libyan women and identified the obstacles they faced in social participation. The study also emphasized the role of social services in activating the social participation of Libyan women and identifying the strategies used. The researcher employed a descriptive-analytical methodology and found several pertinent results, including the necessity of effective social participation for the development of society. Social participation by Libyan women takes various forms and aims to enhance the motivation of women and the Libyan society. However, there are numerous obstacles that hinder women's social participation, with some of the most prominent being certain inherited customs and traditions in Libyan society.

Al-Atawi and Mar'i (2018) detected the level of administrative empowerment among female leaders in Saudi higher education. The researchers used a descriptive-analytical approach with 17 female leaders in Saudi public universities. The study revealed significant effects of administrative empowerment, in its various dimensions, on female leaders in Saudi higher education.

Mohamed (2017) measured the level of community partnership activation among department heads in private universities from the perspective of faculty members. The study examined the differences in viewpoints based on gender, college, academic rank, and years of experience. The results of the study showed that the level of community partnership activation among departments varied from 92.3 to 56.3 with an average score that reached 72.3, indicating a high level of activation.

Kazouz (2016) identified the main obstacles facing women's economic empowerment and the possible solutions to them. The study employed a qualitative approach, using interviews and questionnaires to gather information about the problem. The findings revealed that the unemployment rate among women is around 42-62% of the total workforce. The study identified traditional societal perceptions of women's work and lack of experience as the major hindrances to women's empowerment, making them less

competitive, along with a deteriorating security situation contributing to the inhibited participation.

Kattan et al. (2016) explored the factors that contribute to the success of organizations with women in leadership roles. The study found that the prevailing societal culture is a major obstacle to the success of women leaders. It also revealed that women's higher education levels increase their chances of success in leadership roles. The study showed a significant increase in the percentage of women with higher education, reaching 60% in recent years, due to the Saudi government's efforts to promote higher education amongst women in the Kingdom.

Alomair (2015) also identified the primary obstacles and challenges encountered by women leaders in Saudi higher education. The findings of the study indicated that the prevailing stereotype of male dominance in Saudi society, as well as social, cultural, and familial barriers, contribute to these challenges. The study also emphasized the scarcity of existing research on this subject, underscoring the need for further investigation. To address these issues, the study recommended the implementation of strategies that promote the development and effectiveness of women leaders in Saudi higher education. This is particularly important considering the increasing aspirations of women to pursue advanced degrees and the growing percentage of female enrollment in universities.

Al-Kayed (2015) diagnosed the challenges faced by women in leadership positions in Saudi government universities, with the goal of proposing solutions for addressing these. The study identified the main challenges as the long working hours, dealing with supervisors with diverse attitudes and biases, and the lack of authority and responsibilities that align with the job positions for women leaders. The study recommended urging decision-makers to reduce working hours by promoting decentralization and delegation of authority, and provide appropriate executive power and training for women leaders in their administrative roles.

After reviewing previous studies conducted both in Arab and foreign contexts, the researcher discovered a lack of research addressing women's empowerment in Saudi universities and their role in promoting community partnership to achieve the Vision 2030. This study builds upon existing research by contributing to the theoretical literature on women's empowerment and community partnership, as well as by employing a suitable methodology, formulating the research problem, and selecting appropriate statistical analysis. What sets this study apart from previous ones is that it is among the pioneering studies to discuss women's empowerment in Saudi universities and their effective contribution to fostering community partnership in order to achieve the Vision 2030. It is also one of the first studies, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, to be conducted within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Research problem

Women possess the ability to participate, make decisions, build relationships, and be attentive to mistakes as much as men. Given the contemporary societal developments, women have difficult roles to play in empowering their communities, enabling them to be highly effective and actively contribute to addressing societal challenges. Understanding the level of women's empowerment and their effectiveness in promoting social partnership is, therefore, of utmost importance. The research problem revolves around assessing the extent of women's empowerment and their active involvement in enhancing social partnership in alignment with Saudi Vision 2030. The study aims to address the following key question:

-        To what degree are women empowered in Saudi universities, and how actively do they contribute to promoting social partnership to achieve Vision 2030 objectives? The following subsidiary questions arise:

1.   What is the concept of empowerment of Saudi women?

2.   What is the status of Saudi women's participation and empowerment in the labor market and community service?

3.   What are the visions and aspirations of Saudi women for future community service?

4.   What is the role of training centers in preparing Saudi women and equipping them with necessary life skills?

5.   What are the main challenges facing Saudi women in achieving their participation in community service?

6.   What are the indicators of empowerment of Saudi women?

Research objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1.   To assess the level of women's empowerment in Saudi universities and their role in promoting social partnership to achieve the goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

2.   To gain an understanding of the concept of women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia.

3.   To investigate the status of women's participation and empowerment in the labor market and community service in Saudi Arabia.

4.   To explore the visions and aspirations of Saudi women for future community service.

5.   To examine the role of training centers in preparing Saudi women and equipping them with necessary life skills.

6.   To identify the main challenges facing Saudi women in their efforts to participate in community service.

7.   To highlight the indicators of women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia.

8.   To provide suggestions that can benefit researchers and experts working in the field of women's empowerment and social partnership enhancement.

Research significance

The study has immense significance as it aims to explore the level of women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia and their active role in promoting social partnership. With the increasing recognition of women's potential in the empowerment process, it is crucial to focus research efforts on identifying the weak spots in the process of enhancing women's strength and position in society to facilitate their effective participation in social partnerships. The study intends to make recommendations that contribute to enhancing the social role of Saudi women and develop a comprehensive theoretical framework by drawing upon the insights of various researchers regarding women's contributions to society. Moreover, the practical significance of this study lies in its emphasis on the active involvement of women in improving community affairs. The findings and recommendations derived from this study can have tangible benefits for society by addressing challenges and barriers to establishing effective social partnerships with community institutions. By proposing practical solutions, the study aims to foster a more inclusive and empowered role for Saudi women, ultimately contributing to the betterment of society.

Methods

Research design

The study applied the descriptive-analytical method to achieve its objectives, which was considered appropriate for the scope and nature of this research. Data were collected from a sample of Saudi female faculty members in decision-making positions in Saudi government universities. The study focused on examining women's empowerment in Saudi universities and their role in promoting community partnership to achieve the Vision 2030. The study was conducted during the academic year 2020/2021 in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Population and sample

The study sample consisted of 39 randomly selected faculty members at a Saudi university, based on the size of the community. The following demographic data defined the sample as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Description of the study sample according to the demographic variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Degree	Bachelor	3	7.7		Single	3	7.7
	Master	10	25.6	Social status	Married	26	66.7
	Ph.D	25	64.1		Divorced	10	25.6
	Postdoctoral	1	2.6	Total		39	100.0
	Total	39	100.0				
Specialization	Curriculum and Instruction	3	8.1	Specialization	Information systems	1	2.7
	Geography	2	5.4		Chemistry	3	8.1
	Computer Science	2	5.4		Arabic	3	8.1
	Mathematics	3	8.1		Designs	3	8.1
	Methods of Teaching Science and Mathematics	1	2.7		Principles of management	2	5.4
	History	1	2.7		Psychology	1	2.7
	Zoology	1	2.7		Medicine	1	2.7
	Sharia and Quranic Studies	3	8.1		Tourism and antiquities	2	5.4
	Accounting	3	8.1		Physics	4	10.8
	Total					39	100.0
Job position	Head of the Department	5	13.5		Lecturer	9	24.3
	Dean	5	13.5		Director of the Department	4	10.8
	College agent	13	35.1		Vice Dean	1	2.7
	Total					37	100.0

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the following observations can be made:

1.   A large section of the sample (64.1%) held a Doctoral Degree (PhD) as their highest academic qualification. On the other hand, those with a post-doctoral qualification comprised a small section (2.6%).

2.   In terms of specialization, 10.8% of the sample specialized in Physics, and a small percentage (2.7%) specialized in subjects such as Methods of Teaching Science and Mathematics, Psychology, Medicine, Zoology, and Information Systems.

3.   On the count of designation, the highest percentage (35.1%) were employed at the post of College Agent, and a low (2.7%) were employed as Vice Dean.

4.   66.7% of the sample were married individuals, while the lowest percentage was 7.7% for single women.

Instrument

The researcher developed a questionnaire to collect self-report data on the level of empowerment of Saudi women and their active role in promoting community partnership to achieve the Vision 2030. This was done by referring to the theoretical literature and previous studies, including Alshihri and Abid (2020), Abdullah (2021), Al-Attiwi and Mar'i (2018), and Abu Ajajah (2020). The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first part collected basic demographic data from the participants, including years of experience and educational level. The second part focused on women's empowerment, the opportunities and challenges they faced.

Validity

To establish the face validity of the questionnaire, it was shared with expert reviewers from Saudi universities. They were asked to provide feedback on the questionnaire items and assess its linguistic accuracy. The tool was then revised and modified based on their valuable observations and suggestions.

Reliability

The study instrument's reliability was established through the test-retest method, and its internal consistency was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha formula. The questionnaire was administered to a pilot sample of 15 participants not included in the final study. Table 2 displays the stability coefficient and Pearson correlation coefficient for the study test.

Table 2 Results of internal consistency coefficients

Women empowerment	Cronbach's Alpha	Pearson correlation coefficient
	0.800	0.679

Based on the findings in Table (2), it is evident that the reliability coefficient and Pearson correlation coefficient values for the study test are high, suggesting that they are adequate for conducting the study.

Data analysis

The researcher employed the SPSS (Version 26th) and applied appropriate statistical procedures to analyze the study questions including mean and standard deviation, and the results were extracted, interpreted, and discussed based on the specific tests outlined in the study methodology and procedures.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study aimed at understanding the empowerment of women in Saudi universities and their active role in promoting community partnership to achieve the Vision 2030. These results are presented according to the research questions.

RQ1: To what degree are women empowered in Saudi universities, and how actively do they contribute to promoting social partnership to achieve the future vision of 2030?

The following subsidiary questions arise:

SQ1: What is the concept of empowerment of Saudi women?

Table 3 displays that the highest frequency was achieved by item 2 of the questionnaire, with 51.8% of the responses supporting the idea that Empowerment is a pivotal strategy for achieving development by taking advantage of the capabilities of all members of society, including women. This was followed by a frequency of 17.9% for item 5 (Empowerment is to support women's personal capabilities to contribute to the development of society), and the lowest frequency of 6.9% for item 7 (Women's empowerment means more women's power, and strength means increasing their ability to control and the possibility of change). These responses can be attributed to the study sample's knowledge of the concept of women's empowerment and their understanding of its role in achieving sustainable development in society, as well as their familiarity and experience with women's roles and how to empower them appropriately.

Table 3 Participants' responses on the concept of empowering Saudi women

No	Dimension	Frequency	Percentage
1	Empowerment is a tool that helps women claim their rights	8	14.3
2	Empowerment is a pivotal strategy for achieving development by taking advantage of the capabilities of all members of society, including women	29	51.8
3	Empowerment is the process of facilitating women's access to their rights	7	12.5
4	Empowerment is the process through which women individually and collectively become aware of the way power relations affect their lives	5	8.9
5	Empowerment is to support women's personal capabilities to contribute to the development of society	10	17.9
6	Empowerment is when women take their opportunity in development to improve their situation	8	14.3
7	Women's empowerment means more women's power, and strength means increasing their ability to control and the possibility of change	4	6.9
8	Empowerment means equal opportunities for men and women in society	5	8.9

SQ2: What is the status of Saudi women's participation and empowerment in the labor market and community service?

Table 4 indicates that the majority participants believe that the current participation of Saudi women is "high" (53.8%), followed by "Moderate" (41.0%) and "Low" (5.1%).

This can be attributed to the fact that women in Saudi Arabia are increasingly participating in the workforce and are being empowered to serve their communities in appropriate ways, thanks to laws that support their rights. However, this finding contrasts with the results of Abdullah's study (2021), which found that women's empowerment in terms of obtaining social and economic rights was weak.

Table 4 Participants' responses to the status of empowering Saudi women

No	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	To low extent	2	5.1
2	Medium extent	16	41.0
3	High extent	21	53.8
Total		39	100.0

SR3: What are the visions and aspirations of Saudi women for future community service?

According to Table 5, a high percentage (39.3%) exhibited belief in the ability of Saudi women to engage in community service and decision making. This was followed by a percentage of 25.0% for the need to enhance national policies to address inequality and discrimination against women in community service. The lowest percentage (3.6%) was recorded for suggesting the importance of taking appropriate measures to strengthen the foundations of Saudi women's community service. These findings suggest that the study participants possess clear strategies and visions for empowering women in community service and have confidence in their capabilities. This finding is consistent with Al-Atawi and Mar'i s (2018) findings, which highlighted the significant impact of administrative empowerment and its various dimensions on female leadership in Saudi higher education.

Table 5 Aspirations of Saudi women for future community service

	Dimension	Frequency	Percentage
1	Maximizing the coherence of national community service policies that reduce inequality and discrimination against women.	14	25.0
2	The ability of Saudi women to carry out community service and their ability to make decisions.	22	39.3
3	Taking appropriate measures to strengthen the pillars on which Saudi women are based for community service.	2	3.6
4	Changing the prevailing mentalities at all levels of society that limit Saudi women's participation in.	10	17.9
5	Increasing the coherence of national community service policies that reduce inequality and discrimination against women.	9	16.1
6	The ability of Saudi women to carry out community service and their ability to make decisions.	3	5.4

SR4: What is the role of training centers in preparing Saudi women and equipping them with necessary life skills?

According to Table 6, the mean scores and standard deviations for the items pertaining to the roles of training centers ranged from 3.41 to 3.615. The highest mean score 3.615 was for item 8, which indicates that the training being provided to Saudi women helps them

achieve their ambitions. This was followed by a mean score of 3.59 for item 7, which suggests that the current training helps Saudi women assert themselves and build self-confidence. On the other hand, the lowest mean score 3.41 was for item 5, which states that the current training helps Saudi women establish public relations and engage in social marketing. The overall average mean score for the roles of the training centers was 3.513. These findings highlight the importance of training centers in supporting Saudi women realize their dreams and goals, by providing them with guidance and advice that empower them to make meaningful contributions to society.

Table 6 The role of training centers in preparing Saudi women and equipping them with necessary life skills

No	Dimension	Mean score	Percentage
1.	The training provided to Saudi women helps achieve future ambitions	3.615	0.350
2.	The training provided helps Saudi women prove themselves and have self-confidence	3.590	0.229
3.	The training provided helps Saudi women find new job opportunities	3.538	0.335
4.	The training provided helps Saudi women make decisions	3.513	0.335
5.	The training provided helps to conduct communication and communication by Saudi women	3.513	0.254
6.	The training provided helps manage manpower	3.487	0.295
7.	The training provided helps improve the ability to prepare positive proposals	3.436	0.334
8.	The training provided helps Saudi women establish public relations and social marketing	3.410	0.464
9.	Total	3.513	0.225

SR5: What are the main challenges facing Saudi women in achieving their participation in community service?

Table 7 shows that 30.8% of the participants attribute the poor participation of women in community service to adverse social traditions (item 5), followed by 25.3% for poor attention given to their participation in community service (item 7). On the contrary, the lowest percentage recorded was 2.6% for the responses to item 6 (More job opportunities are available to men than women). Thus, societal norms are largely responsible for women's poor participation in community service. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness in society about the importance of community partnership. These findings align with Alshihri and Abid (2020), which highlighted that the biggest obstacles to building community partnerships are the lack of awareness among local community institutions about the importance of partnership. Abu Ajaja's (2020) also indicated various obstacles to women's social participation, including customs, traditions, and social norms. The findings are also consistent with Kazouz's (2016) which found that the traditional society's poor perception of women's work is a major hindrance to women's empowerment.

Table 7 The main challenges facing Saudi women in participating in community service

	Dimension	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Lack of awareness of the importance of Saudi women's participation in community service.	2	5.1
2.	Social traditions do not contribute to encouraging and empowering women to serve society.	15	30.8
3.	Social traditions limit Saudi women's participation in community service.	2	5.1
4.	The interest of Saudi women's associations in focusing on certain aspects and the lack of sufficient attention to their participation in community service.	4	10.3
5.	Men do not accept Saudi women playing a role in life and serving society.	2	5.1
6.	More job opportunities are available to men than women.	1	2.6
7.	There is insufficient attention given to women's participation in community service, and more job opportunities are available to men than women.	10	25.3
8.	The lack of importance of Saudi women's participation in serving society, and the interest of Saudi women's associations are due to their focusing on certain aspects.	9	23.1

SR6: What are the indicators of empowerment of Saudi women?

Table 8 shows that as many as 66.7% of the participants highly perceive the current indicators for empowering Saudi women, followed by 28.2% of the responses that indicated an average level of empowerment, while the lowest percentage, 5.1%, indicated a low level of empowerment. This can be attributed to the presence of clear mechanisms and strategies that empower women in social work and their increased involvement in the workforce. Additionally, changes in prevailing social customs, traditions, and social upbringing play a major role in encouraging women to work and empowering them appropriately. These findings contrast with Abu Ajaja (2020) which highlighted various obstacles hindering women's social participation, such as customs, traditions, and social norms.

Table 8 Participants' responses to the indicators of empowering Saudi women

No	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	To low extent	2	5.1
2	Medium extent	11	28.2
3	High extent	26	66.7
Total		39	100.0

Conclusion

The following conclusions derive from the foregoing analysis:

Empowerment for Development: The majority consensus (51.8%) underscores the pivotal role of empowerment as a strategic pathway towards societal development. This acknowledgment emphasizes leveraging the capabilities of all members, including women, for sustainable progress.

Perceptions on Women's Empowerment: Participants expressed varying degrees of understanding regarding women's empowerment. While a significant portion acknowledges the support for women's personal capabilities in societal development (17.9%), the concept of increasing women's control and transformative potential was less recognized (6.9%).

Saudi Women's Participation: The study indicates a notable spectrum in the current participation levels of Saudi women, ranging from "high" (53.8%) to "moderate" (41.0%) and "low" (5.1%). This rise in participation, particularly in the workforce, aligns with supportive laws that bolster women's rights, yet contrasts with findings suggesting weaknesses in attaining social and economic rights.

Community Service and Decision Making: Encouragingly, a significant percentage (39.3%) exhibits confidence in Saudi women's ability to engage in community service and decision-making processes. This aligns with previous research highlighting the impact of administrative empowerment on female leadership in higher education.

Role of Training Centers: The findings emphasize the crucial role of training centers in aiding Saudi women's ambitions. While training facilitates goal achievement and self-assertion, there's room for improvement in establishing public relations and social marketing skills.

Challenges to Women's Participation: Societal norms, traditions, and inadequate attention toward women's participation in community service emerge as primary obstacles. This resonates with existing studies citing societal perceptions and traditions as barriers to women's social involvement and empowerment.

Perception of Women's Empowerment: Encouragingly, a substantial majority (66.7%) perceives current indicators as highly empowering for Saudi women. This optimism points to clear strategies and shifts in societal norms fostering increased female involvement and empowerment, contrasting with studies highlighting impediments rooted in customs and social norms.

In essence, while there's recognition of the significance of women's empowerment for societal progress, there are challenges in fully realizing this potential due to societal norms, awareness gaps, and varying perceptions. Addressing these challenges through targeted policies and cultural shifts could further enhance women's empowerment and their substantial contributions to society.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the study recommends the following:

1.   Conduct studies on the mechanisms and strategies that encourage the empowerment of women in Saudi society.

2.   Raise awareness through media about the importance of women's empowerment in Saudi society, by organizing outreach campaigns.

3.   Encourage positive measures in empowering Saudi women and ensuring their participation in the workforce.

4.   Highlight the importance of women and their role in serving the community.

5.   Enhance the capacities and effectiveness of women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with better educational and workplace opportunities.

6.   Train women leaders and grant them executive authority in the administrative positions they hold.

Limitations

Though the study is pathbreaking in its assessment of women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia, some limitations are identified. The study sample was urban, middle class working women and not inclusive of other sections of the Saudi society. Moreover, male perspectives on women's empowerment in future replications of this study are likely to bring forth a new dimension.

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