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Attitudes towards Career Women Roles in outlook of Family-Social Surroundings: Perspectives from the UAE

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines United Arab Emirates career women's attitudes towards their roles held by a sample of 944 participants. To find out the effect of family social environment, work place culture and self esteem on their attitude, the respondents completed the scale on Attitude towards women roles, Family Environment Scale, Self-esteem Inventory. The results reveal that greater the non-traditional attitude expressed by high self-esteem females, the more indications were observed of their family environment being marked with social change and liberalism, whereas low self-esteem females were found to strive for personal advancements and also experienced less support from their families. This study has provided some insights into the factors associated with attitudes towards career women in the UAE and contributes the ways to enhance the self-esteem of UAE career women.

Keywords – Attitude, Gender, United Arab Emirates, Career women, self-esteem, Family social environment.

INTRODUCTION

The world today is witnessing rapid developments in different fields. It is undergoing major transformations because of the rapid technological advances in the field of production, distribution, communication and information. These developments have given rise to the concept of the small global village. Arab countries no longer live in isolation from international events but form an integral part of this world. They have succeeded in handling some of these developments, but in other fields, especially the economic, social and institutional ones, they are still lagging behind. Further in this step, a common focus is on empowering Arab women so as to reinforce their role in political, social and economic development and provide them with opportunities to build up their capabilities without gender discrimination. The empowerment of women via education, training, healthcare and provision of job opportunities will contribute towards boosting the standard of universal development.

The issue of measuring career women's attitude towards women's role has been an important concern in the twentieth century. It became of particular importance in the Arab world when women began to enter into the labor force in record numbers. For example, in 1960, women in Arab world constituted only 12 percent of the labor force. While in 1995 they constituted 30 percent. In 1980 UAE women constituted 3.4 percent of the labor force. By 2006 this figure had only risen to 13.6 percent, despite the fact that the majority of University graduates are women (Source: UAE in Figures 2007; Ministry of Economy, UAE). Attitudes towards women involve expectations directed at women (Spence and Helmreich, 1972), and these ideas are often based on negative stereotypes and broad assumptions about women's characteristics (Conway and Vartanian, 2000). Research indicates that the gender roles commonly lead to the discouragement of women's employment outside the home in non-traditional jobs (Heilman, 1997; Schreiber, 1998).

Females enter adulthood by assuming the roles of worker, spouse and parent, where as males relatively plan their vocational career and life course independently. In Middle East countries, where females are more guided by environmental and psychological factors, they are forced to consider the choice between family and career or opt for both. The responsibility for not adopting non-traditional roles or raising self-esteem, in various age groups, lies on both, the attitude of family members and the females themselves. Whittake and Christine (2001) in line with the above findings for relationship between multi-dimensional family functioning and personal growth accounted for as significant factors for women's high personal growth and avenues for development.

Research on attitudes to women's roles showed over the last two decades or so a universal trend of increasing liberalism and acceptance of more egalitarian role definitions, especially among women (e.g. Allan and Coltran, 1996). Twenge (1997), in a meta-analysis of literature on attitudes towards women (1970-1995), suggested that mean scores of attitudes towards women were strongly, positively correlated with the year of the study. Twenge argued that this statistic suggests a trend toward more liberal attitudes towards women over the course of this period. However, Arab societies seem to be reluctant to abandon their traditional viewpoint of women primarily committed to the house and children (El-Jardawi, 1986; Abdalla, 1996; El-Rahmony, 2002; Orabi, 1999). Most Arab men

consider households and domestic activities suitable for women and most Arab families educate their sons rather than their daughters on the assumption that boys are a greater economic asset than girls (El-Ghannam, 2001, 2002). Some conservative Arab societies like Saudi Arabia are completely dominated by men: women cannot go out in public without being covered from head to toe in black. They cannot drive, nor can they run a business in their own name (Gulf News, 2004). As a result of these traditional viewpoints towards women in Arab societies, Connors (1987) found that the majority of women are employed in three occupations: elementary school teacher, secretary, and nurse.

Arab countries scored high in Hofstede's (1980) masculinity dimension. Although little work has been done to specifically examine the role of masculinity in relation to sexist attitudes, Western researchers (Archer and Rhodes, 1989; Spence, 1993) have confirmed the contribution of masculinity to sex-related attitudes, implying that these sex-related traits significantly influence biased sex-related attitudes. The strong emphasis in Arab culture on masculine role attributes (Dedoussis, 2004) is expected to contribute to the UAE society's traditional attitudes towards women managers.

In UAE culture, the females are differently socialized than the males. They get inadequate feedback and care, which may be the reason for developing their anemic personality in general. The behavior patterns and 'mother as role', especially presented to them for modeling, differentiates gender stereotypes, and contributes greatly to role adoption and personality development. How easily they can adopt new roles is entrenched in the ideologies of UAE culture. Females psyche is molded in such a way, that they start perceiving themselves from the point of view of others and so give more importance to their physical appearance instead of personality qualities. Mostafa (2005) in his study based on UAE women managers revealed that UAE students have significantly different attitudes towards women managers from those of the older generations. There are significant differences between males and females perceptions of women's roles and participation in society. The study also predicts that modernity may diminish patriarchal attitudes towards women managers in the Arab world.

Chawdhry & Kumari (1996) found that girl's competence is not simply a trait, but a structure developed by interaction and negative responses they receive in the family. It is also evident that they are nurtured with reinforced negative attitude for themselves, hence they develop deformed self-image, unworthy and stereotyped thinking. Kapur & Prabhu (1995) found rejection, anger, poor self-esteem and negative reinforcement; have influential impact on behavior of females. Peterson (1986) found that self-esteem of females diminish during adolescence due to restrictions posed by the family but can be enhanced by parental support. Thus it is needed to understand as to how career women would perceive their roles with high and low self-esteem under family environment, being an influencing factor.

There is a need to design a developmental model of gender roles, to be applied, to support and ease role adoption by females along with equal participation of the family in their psychological empowerment. Block (1984) reported the same fact that differential socialization in terms of role adoption of sons and daughters, contribute greatly beyond biological differences. Role Ideology constructs the gender beyond the self and into larger world of relationships. Often one's gender role identity is inferred from an ideological statement about the role of women in the family or the society. Ojha (1991) found, prejudice and anxiety are associated with similar parental attitudes. In consistence, Achenbach et al. (1991) concluded that, family configuration may have an effect on children's behavior, but the social contexts in which they live, appear to be far more important to personality development. Tseng and Ilsa (1999) rightly stated that, family tries to maintain or restore the balance between demands and resources by promoting changes in family structure and interaction that give the family more strength and skill for dealing with strains and demands effectively.

As more and more women in United Arab Emirates are entering in multi roles, their physical and mental well-being are put at stake, nevertheless, the way they perceive their roles, prepares them physically and mentally to withstand all situations and enhances their self-esteem. Western researchers have observed that more roles are not always better than fewer and that condition is associated with particular roles or role combinations. Learly and Mechania (1983), Gore and Mangiane (1983), Kessler and McRae (1982), Ross, Mirowsky and Huber (1983), Baruch and Barnett (1986), Hirsch and Rapkin (1986), found quality of role is important factors to be considered. However many studies report that health and psychological well-being in women do increase with the number of roles undertaken, Antonacci and Adelman (1987). Gore and Zeiss (1987) found women having multiple roles and enhanced selves are more independent, confident, tolerant, individualistic and complex than women with fewer

roles. In line, Peterson and Gitelson (1985) suggested that more liberal attitudes in girls exist, who were higher in assertive qualities and perform multiple roles.

International Review of literature shows that the traditional and stereotyped attitude proved an obstacle in the way of the role performance of women necessary for development. It was also reported that success anxiety is common among career women, as they perceive failure in the form of social rejection. Verma (1985), Tanwar (1987) found that even educated women in India generally want to retain certain traditional roles as prescribed by the society. Latha (1993) supports that sociological influence is more on attitude of girls toward equality of women. Mathur (1996) also reports women having high self-esteem have positive attitude toward their multi roles.

Since the Emirati society is characterized as transition to modernity, issues pertaining to conformity of women's traditional roles versus independent professional career and resolving the family-career conflict in favor of female demands, lie in transition too. In the past, women have experienced greater cultural pressures to assume only the role of caring, may it be the family or in profession out of home. Though certain cultural stereotypes still exist against them in the society, but are less visible than once they were. It is obvious that challenge entailed in such a family environment, is high for younger generation than the older ones. Briefly, this accounts for the gap between the ideology of equality and traditional male superiority in economic, occupational, political, and educational spheres as in practice. However women have entered and proved their competence in every field but the change is still very slow because of their mental set. Government is drawing attention of the society to empower women by educating and making them economically independent; still a little effort on the part of the family and society at large is left to empower them psychologically.

This exploratory study addresses female attitude towards women's roles in perspective of family-social environment of career women in different age groups. It draws attention to the socialization pattern of females, in UAE families. To ascertain the objectives of present research, certain hypotheses were formulated.

1. Younger females will express more liberal attitude towards women roles than the older ones.
2. Cohesive family environment promotes liberal attitude toward women's roles.
3. Mother's education and occupation will enhance positive attitude toward their roles.

METHODS

The present study takes a small step in attempting to analyze attitudes towards women role in perspective of family-social environment in the UAE career women as we believe that gaining a systematic understanding of the issues related to career women in this part of the world is a worthwhile objective for both intellectual and policy reasons.

Sample

The sample consisted of 944 Emirati career women between the age group of 20-50 years, selected by simple random sampling. The females were from Abu Dhabi & Dubai, two major states of United Arab Emirates. The sample drawn were serving in different organizations and in different professions like teaching, medical, finance, marketing, media, law & management having average income of AED 20,000 to 30,000 a month.

Measures

Attitude toward women roles

The scale comprises of 82 items pertaining to four areas viz. traditional role patterns, educational and occupational equality, multiple roles and family career conflict. The items were adapted from earlier published scales (Benson and Vincent 1980; Galambas, Peterson, Richards and Gitelson 1985; Hartman and Hartman 1983; Mason and Bumpass 1975) containing items suitable to UAE culture and conceptualization. The scale is based on Likert scale response choices ranged from (1) strongly agree to (6) strongly disagree. Internal consistency analysis using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients was found to be .82, .76, .73 and .81.

Family Environment Scale

Family environment scale by Moose and Moose 2nd edition (1993) was used to study family social climate of career women under study. The scale is composed of 10 sub-scales, concerning three dimensions that measure the socio-environmental characteristics of all types of families. Real form was used, measuring perception of their family environment with five major areas viz. cohesion, expressiveness, control, organization, conflict and personal growth. There are 45 numbers of items in total covering 5 areas having 9 items in each area.

Self-esteem Inventory

Self-esteem, a person's global orientation towards the self (self worth), plays a key role in determining behavior. The inventory consists of 55 items based on Likert scaling technique. Each item has five possible responses indicating strength of agreement, score of 5 'strongly agree' to 1 'disagree' and vice versa scores on negative items, were given. The higher numerical score on test reported high level of self-esteem. The items were reviewed from different psychological tests, books and journals in consultation with the experts of the field. The inventory was based on core and peripheral factors out of which some were stable and few, changeable.

1. Personal (Intrinsic Self-worth)
2. Social (Acceptance, Perception of external source)

Procedure

After sample selection, participants were contacted at their work places and were convinced to participate in the study. At the initial phase, family environment scale and self-esteem inventory were administered personally, then after a gap of 2 weeks, with their consent, they were interviewed and given attitude scale.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

The study was intended to explore the relationships among variables, and to predict attitude toward women's roles. The Iv's and Dv's were subjected to multivariate correlation and multiple regression analysis. A Path model was developed, by retaining highly associated variables.

The matrix revealed highly related variables, i.e. the more accurate predictors, based on their relationships. It further revealed that self-esteem, family social environment, stay in Dubai/ Abu Dhabi and mother's education were the major related variables to permit needful predictions about attitude towards women roles. By using deductive rationale in the study, the variables respondents education, occupation, age, mother's occupation, father's education and occupation were found equally contributing to positive attitude formation.

In order to give best estimate of the criterion, the regression weights were calculated for the different predictor variables. The stepwise regression analysis was used and 'R' values calculated to estimate proportion of the total variance in the criterion and also to assess which of the 10 variables contributed significantly.

Table 1 Composite Table of Correlation Coefficient

D.V.	Attitude toward women roles				
I.V.	Beta	R	t-values	Sig. Level	Significant
Age	.162	.129	5.108	.001	**
Education	.042	.150	1.262	.20	
Family social environment	.170	.252	5.616	.001	**
Occupational status	.129	.181	3.647	.003	**
Stay in Dubai/ Abu Dhabi	.205	.252	6.802	.001	**
Self-esteem	.181	.224	5.908	.001	**
Mother's education	.120	.251	3.732	.002	**
Mother's occupation	.003	.132	.099	.90	
Father's education	.050	.190	1.199	.13	
Father's occupation	.024	.170	.730	.46	
Multiple R= .431 / R ² = .190 / F = 35.708 Significant Level = .01					
Correlation 1-tailed / .05 level of significance - .05, .04, .03, .02 / ** .01 level of significance - .01, .001, .002, .003					

Table 2 Stepwise contribution of Iv's on Dv. (Attitude towards women role)

I.V.	R ²	Beta Value				
1. Family Social environment	.064	.253/1				
2. Stay in City (Dubai/ Abu Dhabi)	.112	.223/1	.221/2			
3. Self-esteem	.149	.184/1	.233/2	.196/3		
4. Mother's Education	.170	.166/1	.152/4	.190/2	.186/3	
5. Respondent's Occupation	.180	.161/1	.156/4	.105/5	.175/2	.165/3
6. Respondent's Age	.197	.140/6	.160/1	.120/4	.145/5	.172/2

The tables (1 & 2) reveal that in hierarchy, family social environment, stay in city and self-esteem, exert significant effect and interact at step 1, step 2 and step 3 respectively, contributing maximum R² 14.9%. Mother's education, respondents occupation and age, also rendered a moderate status. The significance of gain in the explained variance at each step from its previous step was tested by 'F' test, which was found to be significant.

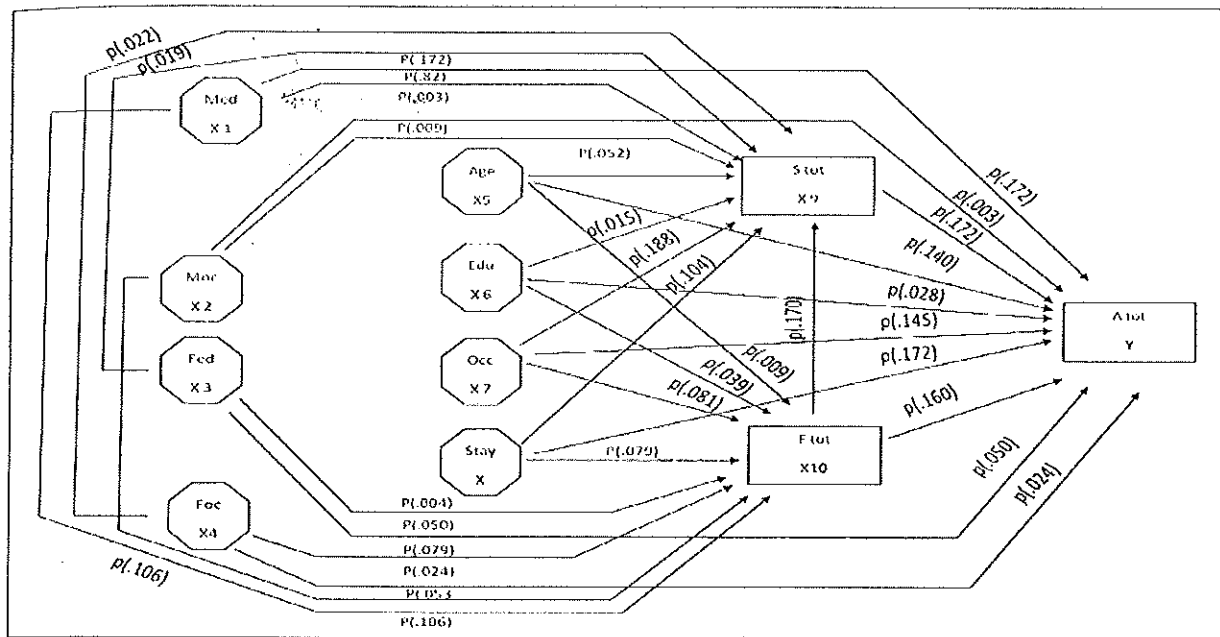


Figure-1

Conceptual causal model

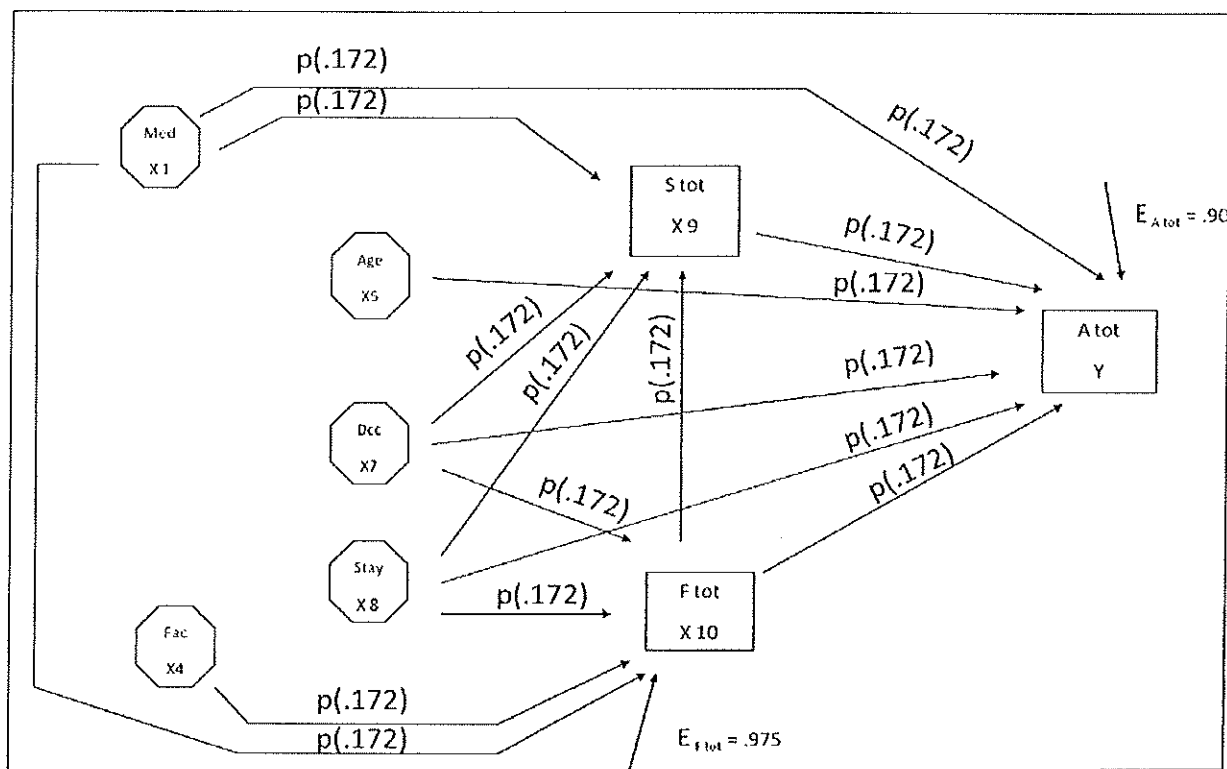


Figure-2 Modified Path Model (Attitude toward Women's Role)

Hence assumptions, concerned with the effects of the type of influence on attitude toward women roles among career women admit that the higher the self-esteem, the more the non-traditional attitude will be. The results also support the role of family environment, mother's education and city stay on attitude. The result obtained is supported by the study of Gore & Zeiss (1987) and Peterson and Gitelson (1985). They observed that women having

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multiple roles and enhanced selves are more independent, confident, tolerant, individualistic and complex than women with fewer roles and have more liberal attitudes.

Path model was used to analyze the causal model. It gives the picture of direct effect of a particular variable upon the other variables as well as the total effect resulting from one variable via the other variable/variables.

Finally there were maximum 14 possible path arrows between 8 variables. Though the path model accurately reflected the empirical relationship model, however, the weak path coefficients were eliminated.

Path coefficients were recalculated to assess the direct and indirect effects. Hence it was found that family social environment, self-esteem, city stay, age, mother's education and respondent's occupational status and their education exert direct effect on attitude where as father's occupation exerted indirect effect on attitude. It was also found that the younger females between the age group of 20 to 30 years have non-traditionalistic attitude in comparison to older females. The women executives with professional degrees have more self-esteem as compared to others. It is also evident from the present study that staying in Dubai and Abu Dhabi is an important factor in determining role flexibility and attitude among professional women as there is more focus on empowering females.

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS

In sum, self-esteem, family social environment, mother's education and city culture are the major contributory variables to attitude formation regarding women roles. Precisely women's educational attainment and professional status are the reflection of positive attitude of female roles. Hence good family social environment promotes self-esteem.

In United Arab Emirates, an increasing attention is being given to women empowerment by giving education, economic independence and participation in economic, political and social activities of the nation. This wave of national pressure for achievement no doubt put forth new challenges and more demands besides the pressure of quality of role performance, be it mother, worker or partner. As younger age is more critical in shaping attitude about oneself, self-esteem takes shape and expands. There is still ample scope for it to be further reshaped, redirected and modified.

If females experience some success periodically in areas that are more central to self-esteem, it would make possible to change their attitude and improve competence. Failure in relations, rejection from immediate members, negative messages in family and society influences and lowers self-esteem. Early success in life gives a sense of competence, accomplishment and develops a positive image of one's own self. Positive feedback from people close to them feeds ego and fuels motivation. This feedback works as an external award and the self-esteem, as an internal award. Attitude toward their role decidedly brings an effect on their actions and adjustments in future life. Thus for positive personal and professional growth, feeling of success is probably more crucial. Successful females are typically characterized by self-confidence, self-acceptance, feeling of adequacy, personal competence, high self-esteem and positive attitude towards their role at home and in society at large.

A comprehensive program should be designed by the government and corporate for creating an environment that enhances sense of security, identity, belongingness, purpose and competence. Emirati women should be trained in personal and professional front to know their place, which will steer their self-growth. There should be healthy work and family environment by making them realize their contribution towards the organization and society.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of the present study should be viewed with caution because of the limited generalisability of the studies involving the career women's from Dubai and Abu Dhabi and not from other emirates of UAE. This should be kept in mind when viewing the results of the present study, and may be direction for future research.

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