

**OPEN ACCESS**

Research article

# Socioeconomic, demographic, housing and health conditions of Qatari women by status of marriage and implications for family polices

Shafqat Shehzad\*

Department of Health Sciences College  
of Arts and Sciences, Qatar University,  
P.O. Box, 2713, Doha, Qatar  
\*Email: sshehzad@qu.edu.qa

## ABSTRACT

This study addressed the problems and issues facing the Qatari family in the wake of rapid socio-economic development. The study explored housing conditions, health conditions and economic conditions of Qatari women as related to the marital status categories such as never married, married, divorced and widowed across seven administrative regions of Qatar, i.e., at the national level. The data for the study were obtained from the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, Qatar Census Data, 2010. Macro-level data were analyzed in Excel for prominence in frequency for demographic, socio-economic, housing and health conditions across different types of marital status categories. The results of the study showed that most of the Qatari women belonged to the married or never married categories. However, the divorced and the widowed women, though in the minority, faced health issues in terms of more reported disabilities and lower housing and economic conditions as compared to other categories.

*Keywords:* family issues, women's health, socio-economic status, housing in Qatar, Divorce JEL  
Classification: J12; J10; I10; I18

[http://dx.doi.org/  
10.5339/difi.2015.9](http://dx.doi.org/10.5339/difi.2015.9)

Submitted: 11 June 2015  
Accepted: 5 August 2015  
© 2015 Shehzad, licensee  
Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation  
Journals. This is an open access  
article distributed under the terms  
of the Creative Commons  
Attribution license CC BY 4.0, which  
permits unrestricted use,  
distribution and reproduction in any  
medium, provided the original work  
is properly cited.

## INTRODUCTION

Marital status generally refers to being married, single, widowed, divorced or separated. Marital status has strong implications for females, especially in societies where social protection policies are not very sound and females are dependent on their spouses for meeting most of their basic needs. When a marriage breaks down due to any reason, women may have to suffer or face discrimination in many aspects of their lives such as health status, economic status, social acceptance and even shelter.

Qatar at present is witnessing rapid economic growth and this may mean that the traditional family values might be at stake due to increased socio-economic pressures. Periods of rapid economic development and other global influences may not retain traditional family ties, and in absence of sound family policies, this may affect family welfare. This paper intends to explore different aspects of women's welfare relating to health, economics, social protection and shelter associated with or influenced by their marital status.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is a vast body of literature that explores female health and socio-economic status as being associated with or influenced by the status of marriage. The studies conducted by Dupre, Meadows (2007) and Haas (2006) explored different aspects of health as associated with the marital status. Hui Liu and Deborah Umberson (2008) conducted health interview survey in the US from 1972–2003 and found significant impact of marital status on self-reported health. Other studies conducted by Hawkins, Booth (2005) and Hemstrom (1996) addressed issues of low quality marriages and marriage dissolution on health and wellbeing.

Table 1 reviews selected studies conducted around the world for exploring the well-being of women and children as influenced by the marital status. The focus of these studies has been on identifying factors associated with female vulnerability as their marital status changes. The major findings of these studies suggest that early marriages, financial hardship, changes in the labor force patterns, economic conditions that require increased female participation for running the family may bring a change in marital status and have consequences for the family institution.

**Table 1. Summary of selected studies exploring marital status and socio-economic, health and housing characteristics**

Data	Method	Result/Policy Implications
<p>The study used data from national sample survey of primary respondents, interviewed during 1992–94, in USA. The data set was longitudinal National Survey of Families and Households that in aggregate consisted of 13,007 primary respondents. The study used sample of 3211 families in the study.</p>	<p>The study used logistic regression to explore the relationship between gender ideology and marital status. The study explored the level of female economic contribution in the family and divorce and the independence effect as an indicator for economic independence. The study estimated the effects of demographic and characteristics of wife's employment.</p>	<p>The study found that women's economic contributions were destabilizing <i>the</i> marital life. In recent times, it has become very difficult for the husbands to support the family alone. There is stagnation in male wages, hence female participation may reduce a family's financial burden, but at the cost of increased risk to marriage. The results of the study showed that female increased earnings were not necessarily associated with the risk of divorce. The absence of female participation in income may actually decrease a family's financial gains.</p>
<p>Ming Wen (2008) Data for this study were obtained from the National Survey of American Families, 1999.</p>	<p>This study explored the relationship between family structure and well-being of children aged between 11 to 17 years. The study estimated parent rated health, health conditions that were in some way limiting for the children, and certain aspects of child behavior as influenced by the family structure.</p>	<p>The results of the study found that a family's socio-economic status has more influences on child's behavior as compared to the social capital. However, most of the influences on child health and behavior were persistent, even after controlling the effect of certain factors. Most of the differences in child behavior in the study were explained by the economic status; religious practices; child's engagement in social activities and parent child relationship.</p>
<p>Namoi Finch (2003) The data were obtained from receipt of child support during 1999–2000 for the lone mothers; amounts of child support; amount of child benefits or tax credits; child support for poor families; child trust funds; educational maintenance allowance; evidence of a family friendly labor market; and the review of the child care policies.</p>	<p>The study reviewed various policy documents and got data from the published sources. The study documented and analyzed economic rights of all citizens including children, men and women. The study reviewed how the state facilitated citizenship through family oriented policies such as child-care; adoption; paid leave for child-care; parental rights and child support programs and issues in raising children.</p>	<p>The results of the study showed that the UK welfare state is based on the breadwinner family in this model family has the right and obligation to undertake paid work. However, the traditional family norms still prevail, in which, women are the main care-providers of the children and men maintain breadwinning. Non-residential fathers had the obligation to provide financial support to the children and child-care was considered a private responsibility. Women had to organize their work and family life and they were forced to design their work obligations while maintaining their role of family as care-providers.</p>
<p>Andrea N. Lambert (2008) The study found that in the US, one in three marriages ended in divorce after ten years of marriage; and 75% of the divorced persons remarried; 40% of the remarriages ended in divorce. The study recruited 50 children from the Midwestern community college consisting of 39 females and 11 males.</p>	<p>This study conducted interviews of 50 adult children between ages 18–50 years who had experienced parental divorce. They were divided into two categories, children having experienced single divorce and children having multiple divorce experience. The children were interviewed about the advantages and disadvantages of the parental divorce.</p>	<p>The results of the study showed that the children of divorced parents experienced both advantages and disadvantages of die parental divorce. Children who had gone through multiple divorces of the parents, reported increase in social network as an advantage as compared to other children who experienced single divorce. However, the transitory nature of die experience was considered as a disadvantage. Results showed mat average length of first marriage was 11. 53 years. Of the multiple divorce participants, average number of marriages was 2.57 for females and 2.43 for males. About 55% of the remarriages involved children, according to the US Department of Human and Health Services (2002).</p>

Table 1 – continued

Data	Method	Result/Policy Implications
<p>Diana Hernandez (2014)            Sample: The study participants were recruited through the community health centers, with at least one self-reported housing hardship. The study sample comprised of 70 female and 2 male family heads between ages 18 to 59 years. Most participants were single mothers of Black or Hispanic origin who were undocumented immigrants.</p>	<p>The study conducted interviews of 72 respondents in an urban community in the US. The study used public health literature to explore links between housing, neighborhood and health. The study addressed two issues (i) challenges faced by low income communities in terms of housing and neighborhood (ii) strategies that families adopted to cope with these situations (iii) what implications these strategies had on the health and well-being of the families.</p>	<p>The results of the study reveal how low-income families, especially the ones headed by a female, avoid neighborhood insecurity and related threats by downgrading family life to the home environment. Such circumstances increased the exposure to health risks for the families including stress, depression, and asthma. The study focuses on public health literature and links housing and health conditions. The study suggests the use of legal protection strategies and community involvement / engagement as potential coping strategies in addition to currently existing approaches for dealing with die housing and neighborhood problems faced by the study participants.</p>
<p>Anne-Rigt Poortman (2005)            The data for the study were obtained from the large-scale survey "Divorce in the Netherlands 1998" for 19Municipalities. The sample comprised of 1,296 women, of whom 1,024 eventually divorced</p>	<p>The study assessed the general work variables and financial and time aspects as related to the risk of divorce and examined financial stress and marital interaction time as related to the risk of divorce. The study explored the link between husbands weak financial conditions as resulting in divorce. The study also explored less interaction time due to increased work hours as increasing the risk of divorce.</p>	<p>The results found an increased risk of divorce when the husband worked fewer hours as compared to the wife in the early years of marriage. Furthermore, couples facing more financial problems and those spending less time together had a higher divorce risk. The results support the hypothesis that financial hardship was responsible for the higher divorce risk of around 15%. However, women who worked extra time and had less interaction time with their spouses not necessarily had the high risk of divorce</p>
<p>Liana C Saver; Suzanne M. Blanche (2000)</p>		

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study explored socioeconomic, demographic, housing and health conditions of Qatari women by the status of their marriage and implications they hold for family polices in the State of Qatar.

Data for the study were obtained from the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, Qatar Statistics Authority. Qatar Population and Housing Census (2010) was one of the most extensive nation-wide activities carried out in the state. It contained information on different aspects of the households covering, demographic, health, education, economy, income, housing and other related variables, QSA (2010).

The paper explored socio-economic, housing, health, labor force participation and employment conditions of Qatari women by marital status categories. Quantitative analysis in terms of prominence in frequency was carried out to see how variations in selected indicators emerged across marital status categories and for different municipalities. Differences in socio-economic status, health status and housing conditions for women across different administrative divisions of Qatar were analyzed in Excel. The results were compared for all categories of marriage (never married or single women, married, divorced and the widowed).

Besides using Census data for quantitative analysis, evidence was reviewed from various state level policies relating to the welfare of women. The paper explored whether policies and practices are in place and standards are set to ensure that women do not suffer because of their marital status in Qatar. The presence and absence of such policies becomes crucial when there are disparities witnessed in terms of opportunities and women may become socially or economically disadvantaged. Last section provides summary of results and policy implications.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Qatari women by status of marriage: Distribution by different administrative regions

Figure 1 shows distribution of Qatari women by status of marriage (i) never married (ii) married (iii) divorced and (iv) widowed, across seven administrative areas of Qata—Doha, Al Rayyan, Al Wakra, Um Slall, Al Khur, Al Shamal and Al Dhaayen. Results show that of the total 74, 724 Qatari women (41%) in Doha were never married, 47.4% were married, 3.4% were divorced and 8.2% were widowed at the time of collecting data in 2010. Distribution across other administrative regions was more or less the same. For example, 35.9% in Al Rayyan, 36.3% in Al Wakra, 37.3% in Um Slall, 36% in Al Khur, 33.3% in Al Shamal and 33.0% in Al Dhayyan belonged to the never married category. The married women distribution was 47.4% in Doha, 56% in Al Rayyan, 54.9% in Alwakra, 54.3% in Um Salal, 54% in Al Khor, 53.4% in Al Shamal, 58.5% in Al Dhayyen.

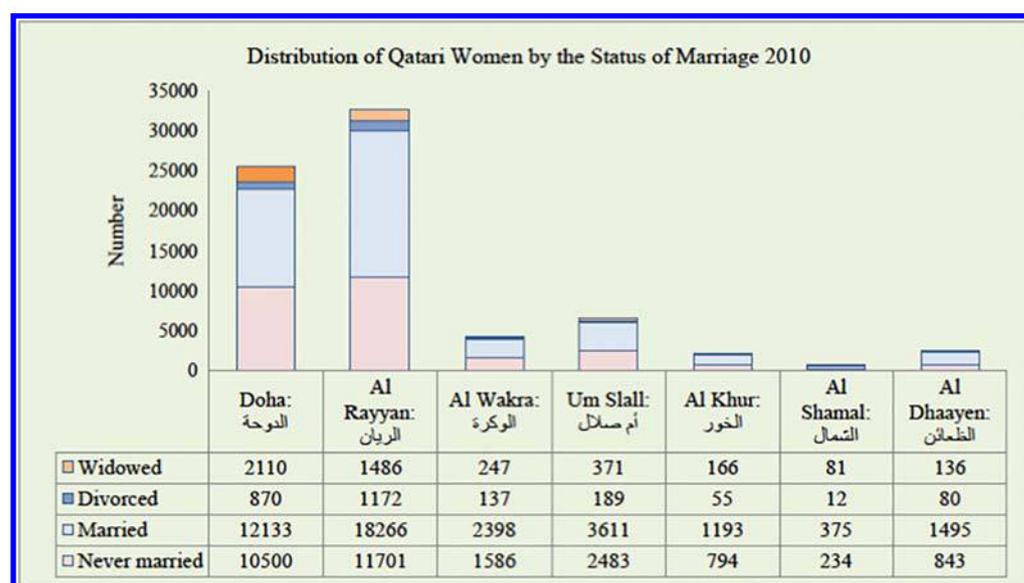


Figure 1.

For the marital category of the divorced females, 3.4% in Doha, 3.6% in Al Rayyan, 3.1% in Al Warka, 2.8% in Um Slall, 2.5% in Al Khor, 1.7% in Al Shamal and 3.1% in Al Dhayyan belonged to this category. Altogether, approximately 3.4% of the total interviewed women, or 2,515 out of 74,724, were divorced.

For the widowed category, 8.2% women in Doha belonged to this category, 4.6% were widowed in Al Rayyan, 5.7% in Al Wakra, 5.6% in Um Slall, 7.5% in Al Khor, 11.5% in Al Shamal, and 5.3% in Al Dhayyan. Approximately 6.2% women across all administrative regions belonged to the widowed category.

Figure 2 shows distribution of women according to different age groups that were married, never married, divorced and widowed.

Figure 2 (a – c) shows distribution of Qatari women by status of their marriage (never married, married, widowed and divorced) according to age categories for all administrative areas taken together. According to QSA data, the majority of females aged between 15 to 19 years were not married, see Figure 2a. Figures 2b – c show that highest number of divorced women lies in the age category of 40 – 44 years of age and the lowest number is for females between ages 15 – 19 years. For the widowed, the highest number is in the age category 55 – 59, followed by 60 – 64 years. In QSA data, prominence in frequency appears at young ages for never married women, old ages for the widowed, and married women are typically within the ages between 25 – 49 years.

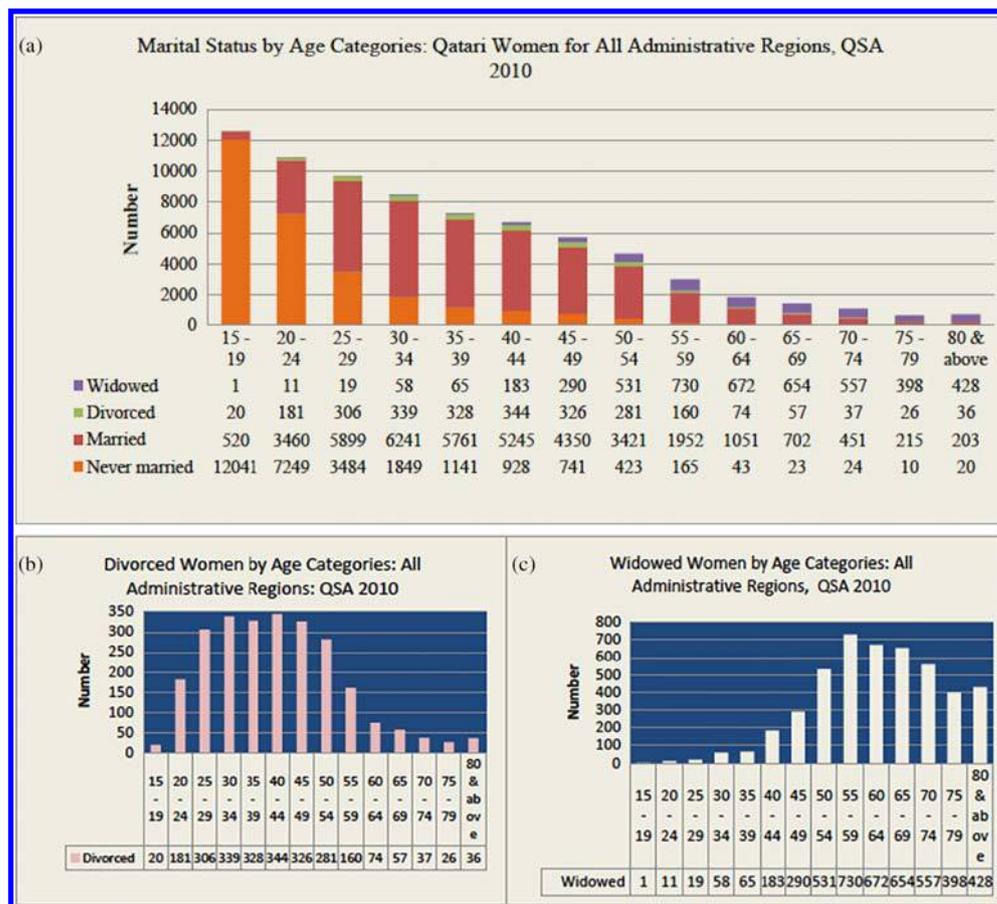


Figure 2.

Figure 3 shows distribution of Qatari women by level of educational attainment for all selected marital categories. Data results show that for all administrative areas taken together, for illiterate category, the prominence in frequency occurs for the married women (n = 3077 or 53.41%) followed by the widowed (n = 2147 = 37.26%). For divorced women, (n = 230 or) 4.02% were illiterate and for never married women, (n = 307 or) 5.32% were illiterate. In aggregate, 5761 women were illiterate for all marital status categories, out of 74,724, i.e., 7.70% of women.

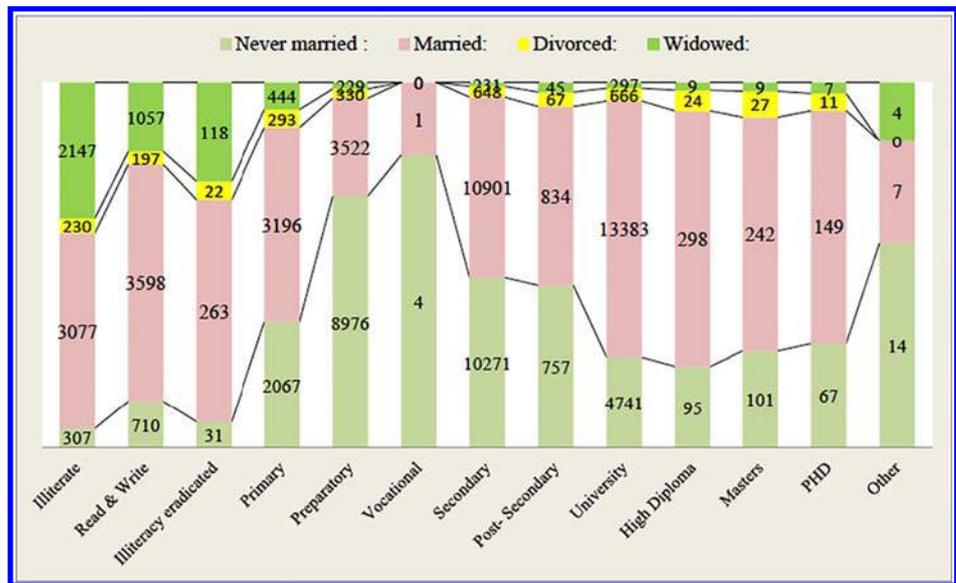


Figure 3. Distribution of Qatari women by level of education across all marital categories.

For educational attainment at primary level, the distribution showed that altogether 6000 women out of 74724 women, or 8.03%, had completed primary levels of education. Among primary education categories, (n = 3196 or) 53.26% were married women, (n = 2067 or) 34.45% were never married, (n = 293 or) 4.88% were divorced and (n = 444 or) 7.4% were widowed.

For the secondary level educational category, 22051 women out of 74724, or 29.50%, had completed secondary education. For the divorced women (n = 648 or) 2.9% had completed secondary education. For the widowed, (n = 231 or) 1.04% had completed secondary education. For the never married and married categories, the number and percentages were higher, 46.57% and 49.43%, respectively. For higher education, the number distribution shows that 19087 women out of 74724, or 25.54%, had received university education. For the university education category, (n = 666 or) 3.48% were divorced women, (n = 297 or) 1.55% were widowed, (n = 13383 or) 70.11% were married and (n = 4741 or) 24.83% were never married.

### LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND EMPLOYMENT OF QATARI WOMEN ACROSS MARITAL CATEGORIES

Figure 4 explains the distribution of Qatari women across all administrative regions of Qatar (Doha, Al Rayyan, Al Wakra, Um Slall, Al Khur, Al Shamal and Al Dhaayen) in labor force participation. The broad

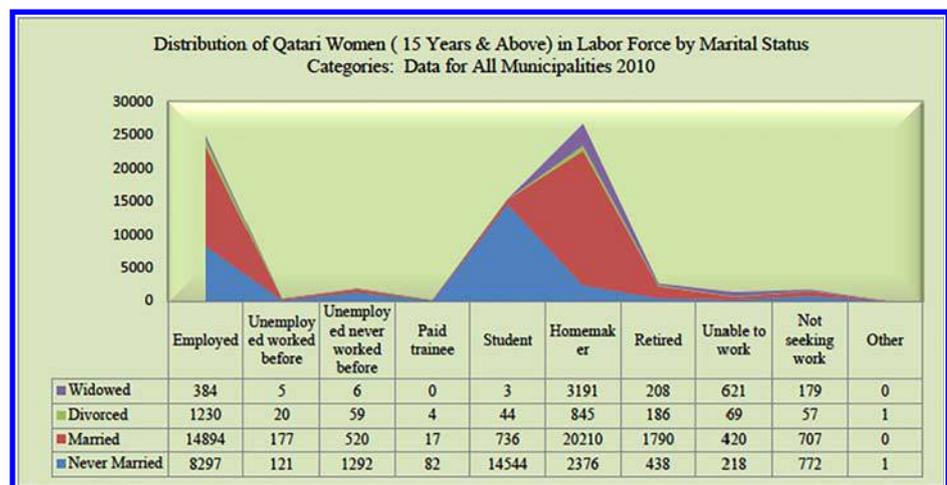


Figure 4. Distribution of Qatari women across all administrative regions of Qatar (Doha, Al Rayyan, Al Wakra, Um Slall, Al Khur, Al Shamal and Al Dhaayen) in labor force participation.

categories studied were unemployed (worked or not worked before), paid trainee, student, home maker, unable to work, not seeking to work and any other.

For the never married category, the majority of women were students ( $n = 14544$  out of  $15327$  or  $94.89\%$ ), followed by ( $n = 736$  or  $4.80\%$ ) married students ( $n = 44$  or  $0.28\%$ ) divorced, and three were widowed. Of the total females included in the survey, the percentage of students was ( $n = 15327$  out of  $74724$  or  $20.11\%$ ) across all marital categories.

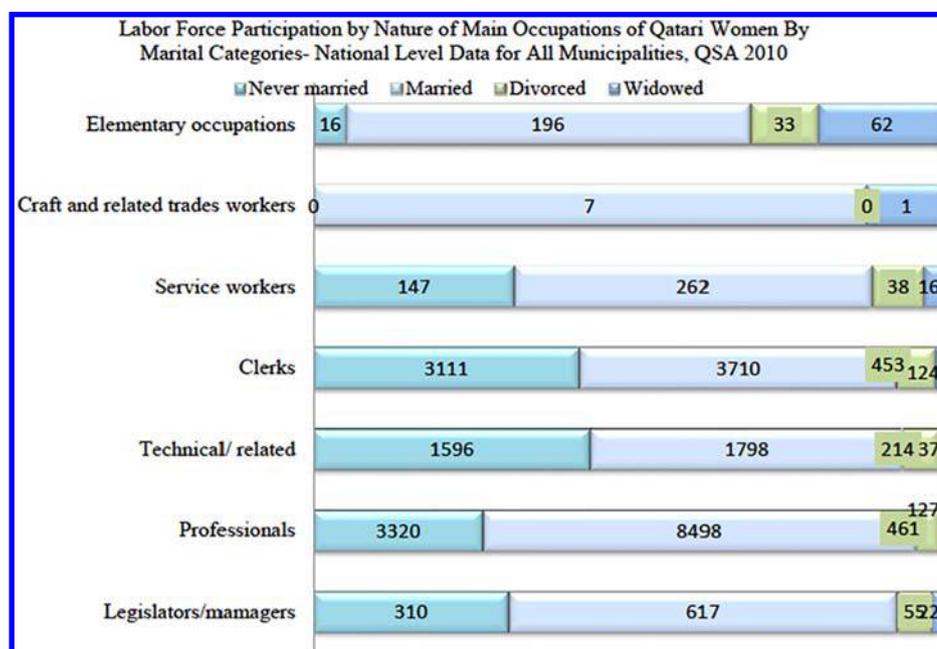
For women who had never worked before, ( $n = 1292$  or  $68.83\%$ ) were never married, ( $n = 520$  or  $27.70\%$ ) were married, ( $n = 59$  or  $3.14\%$ ) were divorced and 6 were widowed.

For the employed category,  $24805$  women out of  $74724$ , or  $33.19\%$ , were employed across different marital categories. For example, ( $n = 14894$  or  $60.04\%$ ) of married women were employed as compared to ( $n = 8297$  or  $33.44\%$ ) never married women. For divorced women, ( $n = 1230$  or  $4.95\%$ ) were employed and ( $n = 384$  or  $1.54\%$ ) of those widowed were employed.

Another important category for participation in the labor force was women as homemakers. The QSA data show that the majority of women ( $n = 26622$ ) were categorized as homemakers and were not in the formal labor force employment. For example, ( $n = 20210$  out of  $26622$  or  $75.91\%$ ) of women in the married category were homemakers as compared to the never married ( $n = 2376$  or  $8.92\%$ ), ( $n = 3191$  or  $11.98\%$ ) widowed and ( $n = 845$  or  $3.17\%$ ) divorced women. Another important category was retired workers, for whom the majority belonged to the married and never married categories.

Figure 5 shows distribution of women across major occupational categories, such as legislators, senior officials and managers; professionals; technical and associate professionals; clerks; service workers; craft and trade related workers; and other elementary occupations listed above.

For the married women, totaling  $15088$ , ( $n = 617$  or  $4.08\%$ ) were legislators and senior officials as compared to ( $n = 8498$  or  $56.32\%$ ) in the professional category, ( $n = 1798$  or  $11.91\%$ ) in the technical or associate professionals category, ( $n = 3710$  or  $24.58\%$ ) working as clerks, ( $n = 262$  or  $1.73\%$ ) as service workers, ( $n = 196$  or  $1.2\%$ ) were engaged in elementary occupations and only 7 were in the craft and trade related occupations.



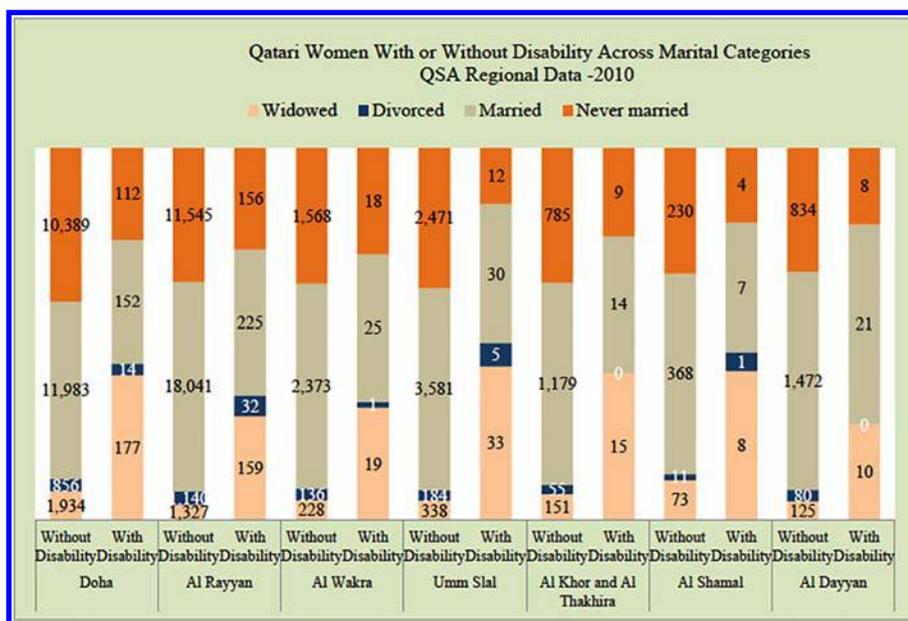
**Figure 5. Distribution of women across major occupational categories.**

For the divorced Qatari women, totaling  $1254$ , ( $n = 55$  or  $4.3\%$ ) were working in the senior management occupations compared to ( $n = 461$  or  $3.67\%$ ) in the professional category. Other occupations that the divorced women were engaged in included the technical and associate category ( $n = 214$  or  $1.70\%$ ), and ( $n = 453$  or  $36.12\%$ ) were serving as clerks, ( $n = 38$  or  $3.03\%$ ) were service workers, ( $n = 33$  or  $2.63\%$ ) were engaged in elementary occupations, and none was reported in the craft and trade related occupations, see Figure 5. For the never married women, the majority were found in the professional category ( $n = 3320$  or  $39.05\%$ ), followed by ( $n = 3111$  or  $36.6\%$ ) in the clerical

category, and (n = 1596 or) 18.77% engaged in technical or associate professions. The majority of the widowed worked in occupations such as professional related and clerks (n = 127 or) 32.64%, and (n = 124 or) 31.87% respectively.

**HEALTH CONDITIONS QATARI WOMEN BY MARITAL STATUS CATEGORIES**

Figure 6 shows distribution of Qatari women across all administrative regions for women having any disability or without disability for marital status categories. The results show that, in Doha, the number of women without any disability is n = 25162, and with disability is n = 455, or 1.8%. The highest number having any disability in Doha appeared for the widowed (n = 177), followed by the married women (n = 152), n = 112 for the never married and n = 14 for the divorced.



**Figure 6.** Distribution of Qatari women across all administrative regions for women having any disability or without disability for marital status categories.

For Al Rayyan region, the disability reported for the women was slightly lower as compared to Doha, n = 32,052 without any disability and n = 572 with any disability (or 1.78%). The number of women who reported any disability in Al Rayyan was n = 159 for the widowed; n = 225 for the married, n = 32 for those divorced and n = 156 for the never married. The reported disability in terms of percentage across marital categories was (27.79%; 39.33%; 5.59%; 27.27%), respectively for all marital categories.

For Al Wakra region, the total number without disability was n = 4305 and with disability was n = 63 showing that 1.46% women reported any kind of disability across different types of marriage categories. In Al Wakra region, the number of widowed who reported any disability was n = 19; for the divorced n = 1; for the married, n = 25, and n = 18 for the never married. In terms of percentages, women having any disability in the Al Wakra region were 30.15%, 1.5%, 39.68%, 28.57%, 0, for the widowed, divorced, married and never married, respectively. For other regions, the numbers of women having any disability were n = 80 out of 6654 in Umm Slal; n = 38 out of 2208 in Al Khor; n = 20 out of 702 in Al Shamal; n = 39 out of 2250 in Al Dayyan; with an overall total of n = 1267 out of 74724 for all regions taken together.

Figure 7 provides the breakdown of disability by type of disability. The reported disabilities in QSA data included seeing, walking, hearing, difficulty in speech, difficulty in remembering, lack of self-care, and others. Among types of disabilities reported, for all regions taken together, n = 3429, and for this (n = 876 or) 25.54% disabilities were reported by the never married, (n = 1173 or) 34.20% for the married, (n = 1241 or) 36.19% for the divorced, and (n = 139 or) 4.05% for the widowed.

Among the types of disabilities reported, the number of women who reported difficulty in seeing was (n = 471 out of 3429 or) 13.73%. For the difficulty in hearing (n = 330 or) 9.62, for difficulty in walking

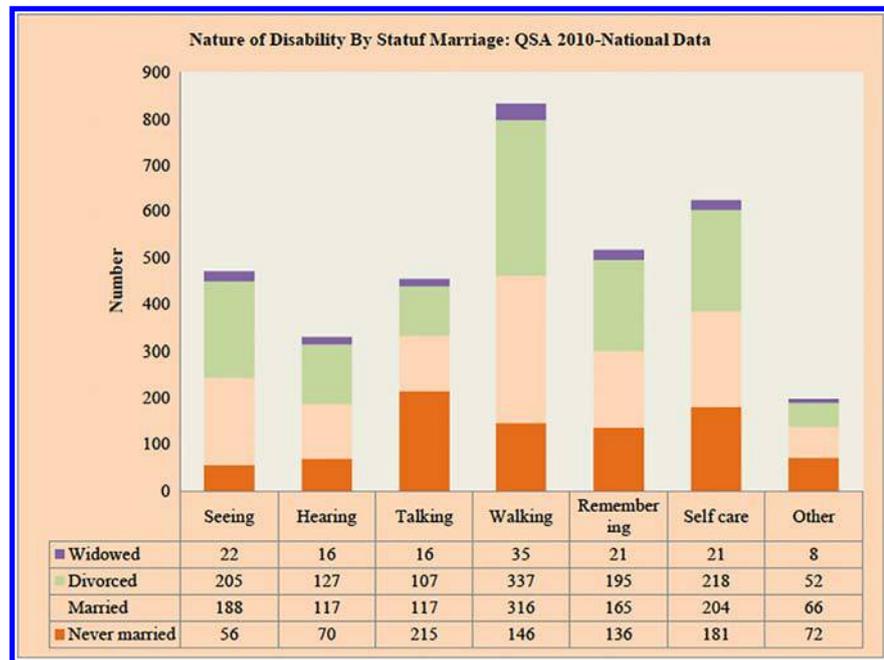


Figure 7. Breakdown of disability by type of disability.

(n = 834 or) 24.32%, for difficulty in talking (n = 455 or) 13.26%, for difficulty in remembering (n = 517 or) 15.07%, and for lack of self-care (n = 624 or) 18.19%, and others (n = 198 or) 5.77% for all regions taken together.

For difficulty in walking, the divorced women reported the highest number (n = 337 out of 834) or 40.40% as compared to other marital categories, for example married women reported this disability (n = 316 out of 834) or 37.88%. Similarly, for difficulty in remembering, the divorced women reported (n = 195 out of 517 or) 37.71%, and for lack of self-care (n = 218 out of 624 or) 34.93% as compared with the married women (n = 165 out of 517 or) 31.91% and (n = 204 out of 624 or) 32.69%, respectively. For difficulty in hearing the divorced women were (n = 127 out of 330 or) 38.48%, the highest number among the other marital categories. For difficulty in talking, the highest number was reported for the never married (n = 215 out of 455 or) 47.25% as compared to other marital states.

Figure 8 shows the total number of difficulties reported by Qatari women across different administrative regions of Qatar. For example, in Doha, across different marital categories, the number

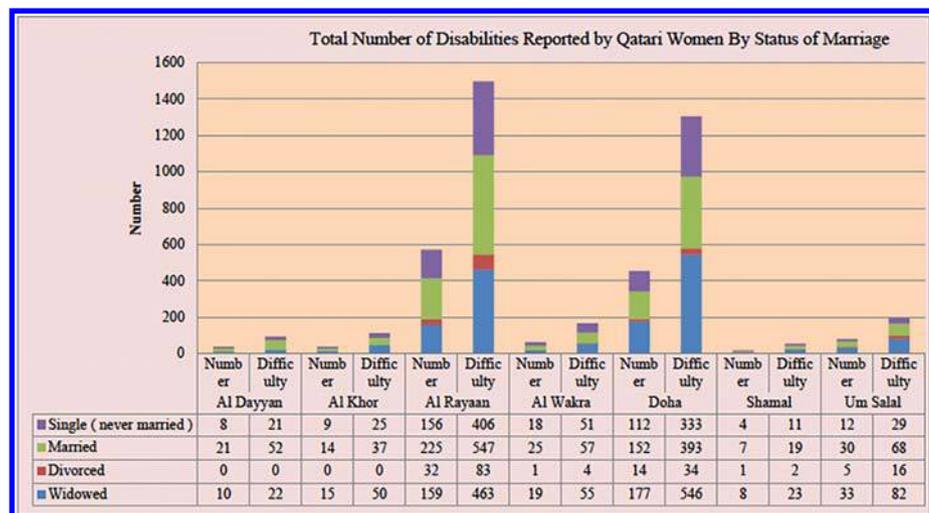
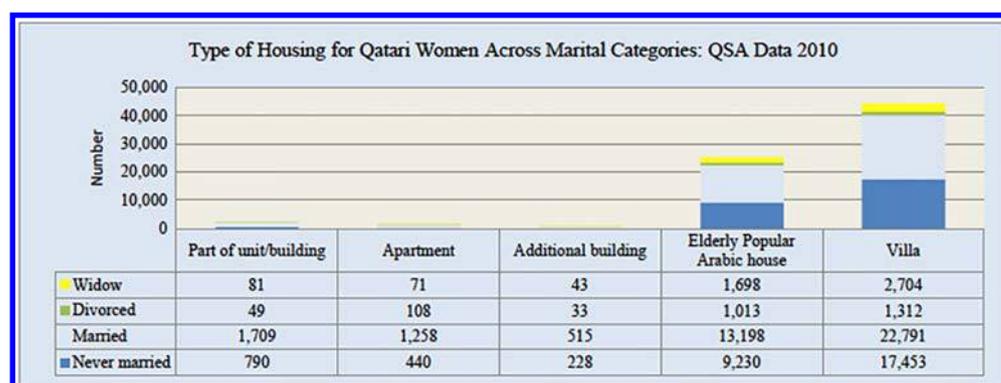


Figure 8. Total number of difficulties reported by Qatari women across different administrative regions of Qatar.

of women that reported any difficulty was (n = 112) and the number of difficulties reported was (n = 333) for single or never married women. The difficulties reported were levels in not being able to see, hear, walk or talk, or engage in self-care. For example, questions were asked if someone faced some difficulty, a lot difficulty or total disability related to seeing, hearing, walking and talking. For never married women, the number of difficulties reported was highest in Al Rayaah (n = 406) followed by Doha (n = 333) and AlKhor (n = 25). For the married women also, Al Rayyan reported n = 547 difficulties followed by Doha (n = 393) and Al Dayyan (n = 52). For the divorced category, the number of reported difficulties was n = 83 in Al Rayyan and n = 34 in Doha. For the widowed, the number of reported difficulties was n = 546 in Doha, followed by n = 463 in Al Rayyan and n = 82 in Um Salal.

### HOUSING CONDITIONS OF QATARI WOMEN BY STATUS OF MARRIAGE

Figure 9 shows marital status categories of Qatari women by type of housing. The QSA collected data on different types of housing where women resided, and these included parts of building units, apartments, additional buildings, elderly or popular houses and villas. The data show that of the sum total of (N = 74724) Qatari women, 2629 or 3.5% lived in building units, (n = 1877 or) 2.51% lived in apartments, (n = 819 or) 1.096% lived in additional buildings, (n = 25139 or) 33.64% lived in elderly/popular or Arabic houses as compared to the vast majority (n = 59.23%) living in villas. For the never married women, (n = 790 out of 28141 or) 2.80% lived in building units, (n = 440 or) 1.56% lived in apartments, (n = 228 or) 0.81% lived in additional buildings, (n = 9230 or) 32.79% lived in popular Arabic houses and (n = 17453 or) 62.01% lived in villas. For the married women, (n = 1709 out of 39471 or) 4.32% lived in building units, (n = 1258 or) 3.87% lived in apartments, (n = 515 or) 1.30% lived in additional buildings, (n = 13198 or) 32.79% lived in popular Arabic houses and (n = 22791 or) 57.74% lived in villas.



**Figure 9. Marital status categories of Qatari women by type of housing.**

For the divorced women, (n = 49 out of 2515 or) 1.94% lived in building units, (n = 108 or) 4.29% lived in apartments, (n = 33 or) 1.31% lived in additional buildings, (n = 1013 or) 40.27%, lived in popular Arabic houses and (n = 1312 or) 52.16% lived in villas. As for the widowed, (n = 81 out of 45970 or) 1.76% lived in building units, (n = 71 or) 1.54% lived in apartments, (n = 43 or) 0.93% lived in additional buildings, (n = 1698 or) 36.93% lived in popular Arabic houses and (n = 2704 or) 58.82% lived in villas.

### EARNINGS FOR QATARI WOMEN FOR ALL MARITAL CATEGORIES

The average income reported for the Qatari women consisted of (i) imputed rent: estimated values of own housing (ii) value of electricity supported by the government (iii) estimated value of drinking water supported by the government, see QSA (2010). Income consisted of all cash or in-kind earnings for women. For wages and salary, it was the total monthly income divided by the number of women in that category and the unit was Qatari Riyal, QAR (source, QSA, 2010). The data show that on aggregate, 1628 women reported total income (without and with subsidies); and wages and salaries across all administrative regions. For women who reported income (n = 509 or) 31.26% were never married, (n = 797 or) 48.95% were married women, (n = 120 or) 7.37% were divorced and (n = 202 or) 12.40% were widowed. The average wage/ salary for the divorced women was QAR 17,073.26 as compared to QAR 22,426.25 for the married and QAR 23,437.48 for the unmarried. The salary for the divorced was

higher as compared to the widowed (QAR = 4087.28) but lower than married and unmarried. Married women had the highest total income (inclusive of state subsidies) as compared to other marital categories and the widowed had the least income as compared to other categories (see Figures 10, 11).

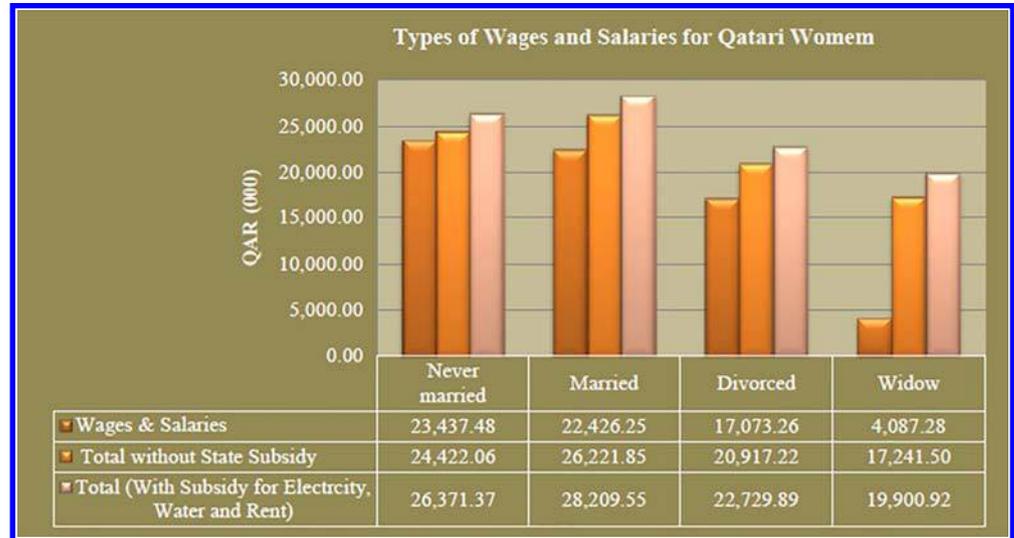


Figure 10. Types of wages and salaries for Qatari women.

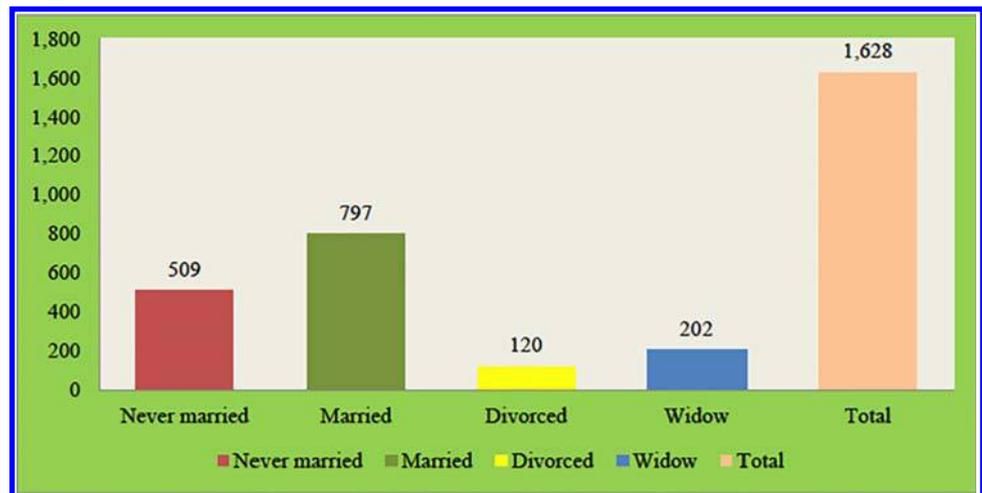


Figure 11. Distribution of marital statuses.

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR QATAR’S FAMILY POLICIES**

Qatar in the wake of rapid economic growth may lose hold of the strong family ties that have been the tradition in the past. The divorce rate in Qatar is still low, but the pattern may change quickly in the coming years. There appears to be disintegration in the roles performed by parents, with most of the mothers now working and taking an active part in Qatar’s economy. The domestic ties that form the basis of a strong family institution may disappear if policy level interventions are not timely undertaken side by side the process of development. The current analysis showed that in Qatar, divorced and widowed are disadvantaged in terms of their living conditions and economic status. Similarly, for the number of disabilities reported for the divorced women for seeing, hearing, walking, remembering and self-care outnumbered those reported for other marital categories. The analysis highlights the importance of retaining marriages, because the burdens and social costs for the economy in terms of split families may be very high. Some of the proposed family policy implications from the current analysis are as follows:

1. Qatar with its current strong economic and financial position can emerge as a welfare state for its neglected segments of the society. The social and economic protection of the divorced or widowed may be considered as the state responsibility, because when a crisis hits the family in the form of divorce, separation or death of the spouse, the consequences for the children and the dependents become dire. In presence of a sudden stop to an income flow, the state can guarantee a minimum sustainable package to run the shores of the divorced or widowed family especially for an interim period during which the female can be absorbed in the labor force or otherwise become self-sufficient.
2. While developing the healthcare financing policy, the Supreme Council for Health may ensure access to adequate healthcare facilities and social health insurance for the divorced or widowed women and their dependent children. Health insurance policies usually provide care coverage to persons in formal employment; however, if the divorced or widowed are not part of the formal employment, some minimum healthcare package may be provided when the family system breaks down.
3. Respectable shelter in the state protected areas may be provided to the widowed or the divorced. Access to housing/shelter and its quality is a basic need and an important aspect of family welfare. When a marital crisis, in terms of separation or death, takes place, the normal flow of income may be disrupted. In these circumstances, some minimum standard for the housing and shelter maybe set and provided at subsidized cost to the broken families. Many times, the divorced or widowed are accommodated within the large joint family system; however, this may create many social and psychological problems, loss of identity and respect and even privacy, especially when accompanied with the dependent children. An independent respectable accommodation may help address many of these related issues and entitle the divorced and widowed women with the same rights as married women.
4. In view of the growing economy in Qatar, the gender roles may have to be re-defined. There is a need to make families more aware of their marital obligations and the need for protecting and saving the family institution. For this purpose, it is important to educate all stakeholders on the consequences of broken families and the provide examples from the countries where such issues are creating enormous problems for child rearing, economic and social protection and belonging. In this period of transition to modern developments, increased participation of the females in the labor market is inevitable. However, besides this increase, there will have to be an equal need for expanding services for the females, especially those who manage to take care of both the work and family issues. In absence of monetary support from the husband, in a traditional family oriented culture, the State may intervene to protect the rights of children and women and integrate them in the normal flow of the society.
5. There is need to estimate the cost of supporting the lone families and in presence of still low divorce rates, it should not pose a significant burden on the State. The benefits provided by the State may far outweigh the associated costs. In most of the instances, children become the responsibility of the women, when separated or divorced; hence, there should be some policies that make fathers more liable to financial support even after the marriage breaks. Such compensation may help relieve the financial burden of the divorced or widowed families.

In line with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, Qatar has in place policies and practices relating to the welfare of the family. Through its establishment of Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), Qatar formulates, evaluates, implements and monitors family-specific policies for addressing the problems. The focus of institutional activities and policies has been on safe motherhood, adequate child rearing opportunities, protection of the family institution by the State, marriages with mutual consent, human dignity, child protection, and international collaboration on good family practices—see [DIFI \(2015\)](#).

Major policy priority areas in Qatar focus on marriage and family structures, women's issues, issues relating to fertility and demography, parenting, child and family safety. Family policies in Qatar are now encountering new challenges in the face of rapid socio-economic transformation in the country. Qatar at present is witnessing changes in labor force patterns, with many more women participating in formal employment than before. This means that in the near future, issues relating to parenting or shared child responsibilities, family protection, and retention of family ties will need more attention if the traditional ties have to be retained within the family institution. The following summary table provides insights taken from theory and practice on the scope, domain and tools through which

policy interventions can be introduced for improved understanding of the family dynamics and welfare in the State of Qatar.

**Table 2. Summary of policy domains and instruments for improving welfare**

Definition/Scope of family policy	Family policy domains	Policy instruments adopted from multi-disciplinary areas for designing improved family policies.
“Everything that government does to and for the family”	Explicit family policies deal with more “structured consequences” for the family, such as:	○ Housing policies, shelter and state protection
“Government activities that are designed to support families and enhance family members’ well-being”	1. Family creation 2. Economic’ monetary support for the family 3. Childrearing 4. Family caregiving 5. Partner responsibilities	○ Health care/ Health protection ○ Family planning  ○ Social services ○ Child support services
“Family is the basic social institution”	Implicit family policies relate to all “non-familial consequences” such as 1. Immigration policies 2. Certain health policies such as those relating to HIV AIDS	○ Income transfer/ Income support ○ Policies relating to inheritance  ○ Child custody ○ Female labor force participation and paid parental leaves. ○ School policies relating to child’s welfare ○ Early childhood care ○ Youth care’ services ○ Maternal and child health policies ○ Access to new technologies ○ Food security

Information in the table has been compiled from the following sources: (i) Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminars (ii) DESA, Social Policy and Development Division (iii) Zimmerman, S. (1988).

### Acknowledgements

This paper has been written for Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) and thanks are due to DIFI and anonymous reviewers for providing this opportunity. The author is thankful to a number of colleagues from Qatar University and Qatar Statistics Authority, Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics. Dr. Abedellatif S.S AlHusaini, Coordinator of Public Health Program, facilitated obtaining data from the Ministry of Development and translated data request applications in Arabic. Dr. Asma Ali J F Althani, Head of the College of Arts and Sciences, approved requests for access to data and Ms. Nada Al Kubaisi facilitated interaction with the Minister for Development’s office.

Special thanks are due to the following persons and departments from the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics who facilitated data provision: Mr. Nasser Al-Mahdi, Head of Household Survey Data; Mr. Mohammed Saud Al Boainain; Mr. Kassim Saad Al Amri; Mohamed Aly Ekeibed; Shaikha Salem Hassan Al Hmoud; Hessa Ali AlMaliki; all staff of the IT Department and Demographic and Social Statistics Department, and Qatar Statistics Authority. The usual disclaimer applies.

### REFERENCES

- Doha International Family Institute. Member of Qatar Foundation, Doha, Qatar Web References. 2015.
- Dupre ME, Meadows SO. Disaggregating the effects of marital trajectories on health. *Journal of Family Issues*. 2007;28:623–652.
- Finch N. *Family policy in the UK: Welfare policy and employment in the context of family change*. York, UK: Social Policy Research Institute; Retrieved from <https://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/nordic/ukpolicy.pdf> 2003.
- Haas SA. Health selection and the process of social stratification: The effect of childhood health on socioeconomic attainment. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 2006;47:339–354.
- Hawkins DN, Booth A. Unhappily ever after: Effects of long-term, low-quality marriages on wellbeing. *Social Forces*. 2005;84:445–465.
- Hemstrom O. Is marriage dissolution linked to differences in mortality risks for men and women? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 1996;58:366–378.
- Hernandez H. Affording housing at the expense of health: Exploring the housing and neighborhood strategies of the poor families. *Journal of Family Issues*. 2014;1–26. Doi:10.1177/0192513X14530970  
<http://undesadspd.org/Family/MeetingsEvents/FamilyPolicyinachangingworld.aspx>  
[http://www.familyimpactseminars.org/index.asp?p=2&page=tfp\\_defsdimensions](http://www.familyimpactseminars.org/index.asp?p=2&page=tfp_defsdimensions)  
<http://qsa.gov.qa/eng/PopulationStructure.htm>  
<http://www.difi.org.qa/about/difi>  
<http://www.qsa.gov.qa/QatarCensus/>

- Lambert A. Perceptions of divorce: Advantages and disadvantages. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*. 2008;48(1,2):55–77.
- Lui H, Umberson D. The times they are a changin: Marital status and health differentials from 1972–2003. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 2008;49:239–253.
- Poortman A. How work affects divorce? The mediating role of financial and time pressures. *Journal of Family Issues*. 2005;26(2):168–195. Doi:10.1177/0192513X04270228
- Sayer L, Bianche S. Women's economic Independence and the probability of divorce. *Journal of Family Issues*. 2000;21(7):906–943.
- State of Qatar, Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics. Qatar Statistics Authority, Census Data. 2010.
- Wen M. Family Structure and children's health and behavior. *Journal of Family Issues*. 2008;29(11):1492–1519.
- Zimmerman S. *Understanding family policy: Theoretical approaches*. Newberry Park, CA: Sage Publications; 1988.