

# Stereotypes And Family Cohesion In The GCC: The Socio-Economic Role Of Spouses



# STEREOTYPES AND FAMILY COHESION IN THE GCC: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ROLE OF SPOUSES



**DIFI**

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## DOHA INTERNATIONAL FAMILY INSTITUTE (DIFI)

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A member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF), DIFI plays a vital role in QF's efforts to build healthy, well-educated, family-oriented communities in Qatar and across the region.

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## PREAMBLE

We are pleased to present our study “Stereotypes and Family Cohesion in the GCC: The Socio-Economic Role of Spouses”, which provides a desk review of the literature that discusses the stereotypical role of spouses in the GCC from both economic and social perspectives. In this study, we shed light on the stereotypes and norms of the roles assigned to husbands and wives in the Gulf family in a changing and shifting context, due to many complex and overlapping factors that shape and continue to reshape these stereotypes in Gulf society. In this context, the study is concerned with the response and interaction of the public policy of the GCC countries to changes that have occurred in the family in the current modern era and the roles of husbands and wives in it.

The discovery of oil, which linked the economy of the GCC countries to the global market, and the modernization policies adopted by these countries, have contributed to changing the family structure in the GCC countries from extended families to nuclear families. Other factors such as globalization, the technological revolution, the increase in the level of women’s education, and the high rate of their participation in the labor market have also contributed to changing the norms and stereotypical roles assigned to the husband and wife in the family. These roles were previously shaped by a socio-economic context in which husbands took the role of the main breadwinner of the family and the wives’ role was restricted to the private sphere (i.e., the home), In this setting, they unilaterally took on the responsibilities of caregiving and homemaking, often due to limited education and employment opportunities.

This situation changed due to the aforementioned factors, leading to transformations in the stereotypical roles of spouses that impacted the family, primarily because of the financial independence achieved by wives through employment. Several challenges have emerged that pose a real threat to the cohesion, stability, and sustainability of Gulf families, including rising divorce rates, delayed marriage ages, and declining fertility levels. In this context, this study emphasizes the need to change traditional concepts and stereotypes surrounding the roles of spouses in the family, as these negatively affect family stability and cohesion. The disparity in expectations regarding the roles of spouses, stemming from entrenched stereotypes, creates economic, social, and psychological pressures that can disrupt marital relationships with conflicts and disputes, ultimately leading to divorce and the disintegration of the family unit.

This study indicates that the challenges facing families in the GCC may be linked to changes in the stereotypical roles of spouses within the family. This situation necessitates proposing policies that contribute to addressing these challenges and taking the necessary measures to preserve family cohesion and continuity. Accordingly, the study seeks to investigate the public policy response to the changes that have occurred in the roles of spouses in Gulf families, offering a set of recommendations for decision-makers and policymakers in the GCC countries to help maintain the sustainability of marriage, the cohesion of the family structure and enhance the well-being of its members.

**Dr. Sharifa Al Emadi**  
**DIFI Executive Director**

## INTRODUCTION

The discovery of oil in the GCC countries during the latter half of the twentieth century, its export, and the unprecedented financial wealth it brought to the GCC population over the past 50 years led to a renaissance accompanied by rapid modernization in all countries in the region (see - Al-Ammari and Romanowski, 2016; Robinson, 2001; Roylance and Barlow, 2015). The level of urbanization rose from 10% to 79% in Saudi Arabia, 25% to 83% in the UAE, 50% to 71% and over 90% in Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait (Hijazi, 2012). It also led to a demographic shift in the composition of the population in these countries due to the large influx of migrant labor (Hijazi, 2012). Other factors such as globalization, increased education of women, and the technological revolution have contributed to changing the social and economic fabric of GCC societies (Al-Ammari and Romanowski, 2016; Robinson, 2001; Roylance and Barlow, 2015). These transformations have led to changes in lifestyles across all dimensions and have profoundly affected the family, including its structure, relationships, functions, and status (Al-Ammari and Romanowski, 2016; Robinson, 2001; Roylance and Barlow, 2015). The emergence of the nuclear family structure and changing traditional gender roles and expectations are among the most important of these changes, among others (Al-Ammari and Romanowski, 2016; Robinson, 2001; Roylance and Barlow, 2015).

Families in the GCC countries were typically large, living in extended family units, and often resided close to other related families within the same tribe (El-Haddad, 2003). In this context, family members were not limited to the nuclear family, but included members from several generations, such as grandparents, siblings, widows, unmarried women, and other extended family members (El-Haddad, 2003; Hijazi, 2012; Roylance and Barlow 2015). Since it was common for three or more generations to live under the same roof or within the same family compound, this housing pattern strengthened the bond between extended family members and reinforced a sense of family and clan loyalty and solidarity (El-Haddad, 2003). This pattern of family life has changed, as has the family structure, due to the aforementioned factors, which include the discovery of oil, the integration of these countries' economies with the global market, the influence of industrial consumer culture, globalization, and other factors (El-Haddad, 2003; Hijazi, 2012; Roylance and Barlow 2015). Under the weight of these influences and the rising costs of modern life, GCC societies have begun to adopt a small family structure, especially in light of the changes in the housing arrangements of married spouses, where a nuclear family may choose to live in a separate house instead of sharing the same home with the extended family like before (De Bel-air et al., 2018).

In the past, the roles of spouses were shaped by societal norms where husbands were the primary breadwinners, as women had limited access to education and employment opportunities (Hijazi, 2012; El-Haddad, 2003; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a, 2019-b, Mohiuddin, 2014). However, due to modernization, globalization, and the socio-economic renaissance in these countries, gender parity in education was achieved in all six Gulf countries, and women surpassed men in higher education enrollment (UNESCO, 2019). For example, in Qatar, there were

31,000 students enrolled in university education for the academic year 2016-2017, of which 68.8% were female and 31.2% were male (Planning and Statistics Bureau, 2018). The number of graduates amounted to 5521 graduates, of whom 66.4% were female and 33.6% were male in the same academic year (Planning and Statistics Bureau, 2018). As a result, Qatari women's participation in the national labor force increased to 36% (Planning and Statistics Bureau, 2018). Thus, traditional gender roles have shifted due to women's increased education and participation in the labor market (see – Hijazi 2010; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a, 2019-b, Mohiuddin, 2014; Al-Ghanim, 2013; Lari, 2023; Robinsion, 2001). The wife's employment and financial independence gained from working outside the home have affected the roles of both spouses in the family (Hijazi 2010; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a, 2019-b, Mohiuddin, 2014; Al-Ghanim, 2013; Lari, 2023; Robinsion, 2001). This has led to a shift in the husband's role as the primary authority figure in the household, resulting in the emergence of a "modern family" that adopts more participatory and equitable arrangements and behaviors than were previously the case. These modern practices may be based on tacit agreements that ensure equal participation in family affairs and decision-making, such as organizing family expenses and the number of children the spouses plan to have, among other things. This study aims to investigate these hypotheses and identify these developments and changes.

On the other hand, all studies related to the family in the GCC countries are unanimous on the emergence of many issues within the "modern Gulf family" that pose a real threat to its cohesion, stability, and sustainability (Hijazi, 2012; El-Haddad, 2003; Hijazi, 2010; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a, 2019-b, Mohiuddin, 2014; Al-Ghanim, 2013, Lari, 2023) . This comes as a result of the effects of the aforementioned factors and the economic and social changes in the six Gulf countries over the past 50 years, most notably the high divorce rate, late marriage age and low fertility level, among other challenges and issues as the literature indicates that family breakdown may be related to the transformation of the stereotypical roles of spouses within the family, for example, the traditional stereotype for women's roles has shifted, expanding their responsibilities outside the home due to working outside (Hijazi, 2012; El-Haddad, 2003; Hijazi, 2010; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a, 2019B, Mohiuddin, 2014; Al-Ghanim, 2013, Lari, 2023). This has placed a heavy burden on working wives, who must manage multiple responsibilities, including continuing to perform their household duties as the "primary caregivers" in the home, often in a singular and exclusive manner (Hijazi, 2012; Hijazi, 2010). Moreover, the change in these stereotypical roles has led to a conflict over status and role between spouses, especially after the rise of women's status educationally and professionally (Hijazi, 2012; Hijazi, 2010). This conflict is evident in the wife's demand to share household chores, achieve equality in family decision-making, and assert her right to personal identity and independence (Hijazi, 2012; Hijazi, 2010). Meanwhile, the husband insists on maintaining traditional roles, imposing his "patriarchal" authority and not acknowledging the wife's rising status and changing roles (See – Hijazi 2010; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a, 2019-b, Mohiuddin, 2014; Al-Ghanim, 2013; Lari, 2023; Robinsion, 2001).

Saleh Al-Ghaddouri (unpublished) highlighted the challenges facing Gulf families due to changes in the modern family's structure, functions, and characteristics, attributing these challenges to various economic and social factors. These challenges include the rebellion of the younger generation against family authority, increased violence and behavioral issues, the spread of drugs, rapid exposure to the outside world through technology, and a lack of understanding between spouses in managing the home and children. This situation necessitates identifying these difficulties and proposing policies to address them, taking necessary measures to preserve family cohesion and continuity.

This study seeks to analyze the challenges faced by the “modern family” in light of the changes that have occurred in the economic and social role of spouses in the GCC countries, in order to explore and propose policies that contribute to confronting these challenges and addressing the resulting risks that threaten the family's cohesion and continuity.

## 1. Study Objectives

1. To explore societal values based on transforming of family roles.
2. To explore the negative effects of unsatisfactory relationships and communication between spouses due to differences in their mindsets and perceptions of their socio-economic roles.
3. To explore the status of policies and interventions that contribute to changing perceptions and stereotypical family roles and identify gaps in policy frameworks in this regard.
4. To explore the role of social policies, including educational programs, awareness campaigns, and other interventions, can play in changing gender role stereotypes and promoting concepts of equality in marital relationships.

## 2. Methodology

This is an exploratory study that adopted a desk review methodology for literature relevant to the study topic, which is concerned with discussing and understanding the gender roles of spouses in the GCC countries from economic and social perspectives. The desk review involved a comprehensive review of available relevant literature, including books, reports, research studies, articles, and any other documents that discussed stereotypical family roles in the GCC and focused on the socio-economic roles of spouses, which the researcher was able to obtain (Hart, 2018; Huggett and Dhurup, 2017; Agarwal and Peterson 2015). A comprehensive search was conducted across academic databases, journals, books, conference proceedings, and reliable online sources to identify literature related to GCC countries specifically, and other countries more generally. The researcher then analyzed this literature to uncover key theories and concepts highlighted by scholars and to identify knowledge gaps concerning the topic under investigation.

The researcher adopted several strategies to search different databases and find literature related to “stereotypical family roles and socio-economic roles of spouses”.

**i. Online research strategies included:**

- **Keyword search:** By identifying keywords relevant to the search topic, e.g. “stereotypical family roles”, “social roles of spouses”, “economic roles of spouses”, “gender roles in the family”, “traditional family roles”, “modern family roles”. The keywords were combined in various ways to create effective search queries.
- **Boolean operators:** Boolean operators such as AND, OR, and NOT were used to optimize the search. For example, the researcher combined keywords with “AND” to narrow down the results and increase their relevance.
- **Truncation and tagging:** Truncation (using an asterisk (\*)) or other tags (“?” or “\$”) were used to obtain references that use different spelling variations of a word or term. For example, the syllable “spous” was used to retrieve results related to spouses that included words like “spouse”, “spouses”, “spousal”, and so on.

**ii. Relevant academic databases and online resources that provide scholarly articles, books, and research papers were accessed through:**

- **Research Gate:** A vast, multidisciplinary digital library for research.
- **JSTOR:** A vast digital library that offers a wide range of scholarly resources for various disciplines.
- **ProQuest:** A comprehensive database that includes academic journals, newspapers, magazines and scholarly papers.
- **Google Scholar:** A useful tool for searching scientific literature across disciplines. It indexes articles, research papers, books, and conference papers.
- **Sociological Abstracts:** A site that indexes the literature of sociology and related disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences and provides summaries of the literature in these fields, thus covering the topics of family interaction, gender roles, and social structures.
- **Family and Society Studies Worldwide:** An academic database that offers a wide range of resources related to family studies, including gender roles, family structure, and social aspects.

The researcher then synthesized the key themes and findings identified from the literature review in order to detect key concepts, theories, and models relevant to the research topic and to find gaps in the policy framework in the GCC (Creswell, 2014; Bamberger, 2011). She also discussed the key findings that emerged from the literature review in light of the study objectives. Since the study and the resulting report are intended to develop and propose policies for decision makers,

the conclusion and findings of the study aimed to clarify the gaps in the policy framework in the area of the research topic, “The Stereotypical Role of the Family in the GCC Countries: The Social and Economic Role of Spouses”, in order to come up with recommendations for policymakers to take into account when designing policies and programs (Torgerson, 2016; World Food Program, 2009).

### 3. Challenges and Limitations

- Lack of relevant sources, especially those related to the GCC region.
- Lack of up-to-date sources, as most studies are outdated and even modern sources rely on information from old sources.
- Lack of accurate statistics and data on the GCC region, as well as inconsistency in the available data and statistics.

# CHAPTER ONE: CONCEPTS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 1. Introduction

This section seeks to review the literature on family role stereotyping in the GCC and traditional and modern perspectives on spouses' roles in order to shed light on the evolving nature and changing dynamics (or interactions) of spouses. This review discusses the historical context, prevailing beliefs, and social structures that shape and reshape gender roles within GCC societies and the factors that influence these shifts in these countries.

## 2. Key Concepts and terminologies

### 2.1. Family Stereotypes

The term “family stereotypes” refers to the widespread beliefs or ideas that shape societal consciousness about the family and the relationships between its members, often based on simplistic concepts that do not reflect reality (see - Orthner, et al., 2004; Coles, 1992; Eagly and Wood, 2012; Putrevu, 2001). These stereotypes may be based on gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or family structure (Orthner, et al., 2004; Coles, 1992; Eagly and Wood, 2012; Putrevu, 2001). In this context, we recall the widely recognized stereotype of the family, the so-called “traditional family” or the “ideal nuclear family”, which, according to the common stereotype, consists of a married man and woman and their biological children (Coles, 1992). In it, the spouses perform typical traditional roles in the family, which may not necessarily reflect reality, as the husband performs the duties of the main breadwinner and decision-maker, while the wife performs the duty of caring for the children and doing household chores (Coles, 1992).

This stereotype often fails to represent the wide variety of family structures that exist today, such as single-parent families, childless spouses, families with adopted children or children from a previous marriage, among others (Coles, 1992). Other stereotypes are based on a family's racial and ethnic background, including negative assumptions about their culture or parenting styles, and families are stereotyped based on their socioeconomic status (Orthner, et al., 2004). For example, the term “absent black father” is a common stereotype that explains the cause of poverty and crime among African American families (Orthner, et al., 2004; Coles, 1992). This stereotype claims that the cycle of poverty and crime among African American families is mainly due to the absence of African American fathers in their children's lives (Orthner, et al., 2004; Coles, 1992). While some African American families may face these challenges, this stereotype unfairly accuses and stereotypes all Black fathers, when the reality may be more complex than this simplistic stereotype

(Coles, 1992). Families from modest or poor socio-economic backgrounds are portrayed and stereotyped as “dysfunctional”, disorganized, chaotic, and unable to provide a suitable environment for raising children because the parents lack the ability to take responsibility or are less capable than other parents (Orthner, et al., 2004; Coles, 1992). This image faces the issue of stereotyping because it simplifies complexity and ignores the resilience and adaptability that is often found in families at the bottom of the social ladder (Orthner, et al., 2004). Stereotypes are negative and harmful because they are often based on an unrealistic foundation and thus lead to generalizations or assumptions that do not represent the diversity and complexity of individual and family experiences (Orthner, et al., 2004; Coles, 1992; Eagly and Wood, 2012; Putrevu, 2001). The destructive impact of these stereotypes is widespread and may involve every aspect of the lives of families and their members, from social policies to the social, economic and psychological well-being of individuals (Orthner, et al., 2004).

## **2.2. Stereotypical Family Roles**

By “stereotypical family roles”, we refer to the “gender” roles assigned to men and women concerning their responsibilities for providing for the family and parenting (Eagly and Wood, 2012; Putrevu, 2001). According to the Social Role Theory, there are stereotypical role expectations for spouses in societies, with men taking on the role of “breadwinners” and women taking on the role of “caregivers” (Eagly and Wood, 2012; Putrevu, 2001). Cultural norms and traditions significantly contribute to the construction of these roles and their associated stereotypes, which are primarily based on biological differences between males and females, particularly male physical strength and female reproductive function (Eagly and Wood). These differences are viewed as assigning specific traits and social roles to men and women, with men perceived as “protectors” and “providers,” while women are seen as “homemakers” and “caregivers.” (Eagly and Wood, 2012). According to this perspective, these roles are considered “natural” and “universal,” prevalent in all societies and countries, though the extent to which they are ingrained varies across different cultures worldwide (Putrevu, 2001).

## **3. The impact of norms and stereotypes regarding the roles of spouses on family well-being, cohesion, stability of the marital relationship, and its sustainability**

This study treats the concept of “spouses role stereotypes” as an independent variable that affects the family in many ways, including its well-being, cohesion, and continuity, among others. Stereotypes related to spouses significantly affect family cohesion in various ways (Brines, 1994). For instance, the belief that “men are the primary breadwinners and women’s roles are confined to the home” can increase and exacerbate financial pressures if the family adheres to the notion that only men should earn an income (Brines, 1994). Based on this notion, families may face financial challenges that undermine their cohesion and stability if the

husband loses his job and the wife's role is limited and prevents her from working (Brines, 1994).

On the other hand, if a woman wishes to pursue a career but is told to focus solely on domestic and childcare responsibilities, this may create tensions that lead to marital discord (Bianchi, et al. 2000; Blood and Wolfe, 1960). Also, the family and marital relationship may face challenges if decision-making is restricted to the husband only, as such behavior leads to unilateral decisions that do not consider the wife's needs or perspectives (Bianchi, et al. 2000; Blood and Wolfe, 1960). Traditional stereotypes also directly impact parenting and children's wellbeing (Thébaud, 2010). Working mothers may struggle to spend quality time with their children due to juggling multiple roles and the lack of burden sharing by their husbands (Thébaud, 2010). We will discuss this from a policy perspective in the coming chapters of this study.

Stereotypes can also hinder communication between spouses (Brody, 2000; Al-Rasheed, 2013a; 2013b; Connell, 2005). For example, men may refrain from expressing their feelings and sharing emotions with their wives if traditional stereotypes dictate that husbands should suppress their emotions, deeming emotional expression as a weakness unfit for males (Brody, 2000; Al-Rasheed, 2013a; 2013b; Connell, 2005). This results in inadequate emotional communication and an inability to fulfill the emotional needs of both spouses, ultimately resulting in emotional detachment within the marital relationship (Brody, 2000; Al-Rasheed, 2013a; 2013b; Connell, 2005). Traditional role pressures also lead to less (or no) marital satisfaction, as spouses feel trapped and imprisoned in their roles (Brody, 2000; Al-Rasheed, 2013a; 2013b; Connell, 2005). Over time, women may feel overburdened with domestic responsibilities, while men may feel the economic and physical pressure of being the sole breadwinner (Conger, et al., 1990; Doss, 2013).

In families where stereotypical role norms and behaviors prevail, cooperation between spouses is reduced (Connell, 2005; Davis and Greenstein, 2009; Frisco and Williams, 2003; Murstein, et al., 1970). When decision-making is restricted to one spouse, this leads to unilateral decisions that do not consider the other spouse's needs or perspectives (Connell, 2005; Davis and Greenstein, 2009; Frisco and Williams, 2003; Murstein, et al., 1970). Mismatched expectations of spouses also lead to marital conflicts and disputes, arising from one spouse's belief that the other is not fulfilling their 'perceived' duties based on stereotypes, especially if the other spouse does not share these expectations (Connell, 2005; Davis and Greenstein, 2009; Frisco and Williams, 2003; Murstein, et al., 1970).

Over time, negative emotions accumulate, and resentment increases due to frustrations and conflict arising from stereotypical gender roles, which can erode the spouses' intimacy due to the widening emotional distance and conflicts that can be draining to resolve (Connell, 2005; Davis and Greenstein, 2009; Frisco and Williams, 2003; Murstein, et al., 1970). All of this is the result of both partners entering a marriage with expectations that are based on stereotypical gender roles that do not match reality (Flood and Pease, 2006; Gelles, 2007; Mathews, 2004). Gender role stereotypes also play a pivotal role in the occurrence of domestic violence (Connell, 2005; Davis and Greenstein, 2009; Frisco and Williams, 2003; Murstein, et al., 1970).

Viewing men as dominant decision-makers in the family and women as submissive legitimizes an unequal distribution of power between spouses (Flood and Pease, 2006; Gelles, 2007; Mathews, 2004). This power disparity can foster an environment where domestic violence is more likely to occur (Flood and Pease, 2006; Gelles, 2007; Matthews, 2004). These cumulative repercussions of stereotypical role norms can lead to separation and divorce.

#### 4. The traditional Stereotypical Role of the Family in the GCC

The geographical location and harsh climate conditions of the GCC countries have influenced lifestyles and societal relations in this region of the world since ancient times (El Sayed, 2023). Factors such as the scarcity of water contributed to the adoption of nomadic lifestyles by the peoples of this region for survival, and the population living near the shores of the Gulf relied on fishing and pearl extraction as a means of livelihood (El Sayed, 2023).

Since that time, marital relations have been dominated by the traditional pattern of spousal roles (El Sayed, 2023). Men primarily worked in pearl fishing or trade, requiring long journeys that could last several months, while women stayed home, exclusively handling housework and childcare (El Sayed, 2023). However, some research indicates that women of that era also shared duties with men and took full responsibility for the family and its members for several months each year (El Sayed, 2023). These roles were not much different for spouses in inland wildlife communities, far from the shores (El Sayed, 2023). Pastoral life required tribes to move from place to place in search of water and pasture. Men were responsible for caring for their livestock, while women managed the household and took care of the children (El Sayed, 2023). According to the literature, Gulf Bedouin women of that time were also involved in small-scale production at home, using handicraft skills to weave carpets and make ceramic vessels (El Sayed, 2023). In this context, Bedouin women made significant contributions to the household economy of their families and tribes (El Sayed, 2023).

Historically, traditional families in the Middle East, including the Gulf, have exhibited specific characteristics. Patai (1952) identified six key traits: (1) extended, (2) patrilineal, (3) residing in the husband's home or community, (4) patriarchal, (5) endogamous, and (6) sometimes polygamous. The "Arab traditional family" was described as the basic unit of production and the center of socio-economic activities, with all members working together to ensure its continuity and elevate its societal status (Al-Thakeb, 1985; Barakat, 1993). Over time, it evolved into an extended hierarchical patriarchal institution (Al-Thakeb, 1985; Barakat, 1993).

As for marital relations, the traditional pattern of roles prevailed, with the father taking the role of "breadwinner" and the mother the role of "homemaker" (Barakat, 1993). The father's role as "breadwinner" was dominant, holding authority and responsibility over all family matters (Barakat, 1993). Once a woman became his wife, she joined his kinship group (patrilineal kinship), and their children took his surname (patrilineal descent) (Barakat, 1993). As the "head" and "father" of the

family, he expected obedience, respect, and absolute adherence to his orders from all family members, including his wife (Barakat, 1993). Based on this traditional division of labor that gave him the role of “breadwinner”, the father’s position was at the top of the family’s power pyramid (Barakat, 1993). On the other hand, the mother, in her role as homemaker, was merely an appendage to her husband as one of his dependents with the children, who could not challenge his authority and had to obey his instructions and comply with them in all matters (Barakat, 1993).

Parental relationships in the “traditional family” are marked by significant self-denial, particularly from the mother. Indeed, mothers often sacrifice their ambitions for the sake of their children, finding happiness in their well-being and accomplishments (Barakat, 1993). While the father maintained a strong presence at home, he was less involved in his children’s lives, frequently spending his free time in the village square or neighborhood café after work (Barakat, 1993). Although the father held absolute authority in the home, the mother exercised actual power over the children (Barakat, 1993). She was responsible for their care and discipline, often invoking the father’s authority to threaten them as a means of maintaining control (Barakat, 1993). Some researchers interpret this dynamic as indicative of a “matriarchy” existing alongside the “patriarchy” in Arab families (Barakat, 1993). However, this “matriarchy” primarily served to reinforce the patriarchal structure within these families and societies (Barakat, 1993).

## 5. Key Theories

The previous part of this section explained that GCC countries have traditionally placed a strong emphasis on family values and stereotypical roles within the family. This part discusses the main theories underlying the socio-economic role of the family in the GCC.

### 5.1. Collectivism Theory

The Collectivism Theory is a sociological perspective that emphasizes the role of social groups and culture in shaping and maintaining individual identities, behaviors, and attitudes (Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Smith, et al., 2006; Hofstede, 1980). This theory is often used to understand family structures and roles, particularly in societies that highly value group belonging and harmony (Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Smith, et al., 2006; Hofstede, 1980). For example, in GCC countries, the extended family system is prevalent, with multiple generations living together under one roof (Al-Anzi, 2018). This arrangement exemplifies the Collectivism Theory by strengthening family ties and ensuring community support (Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Smith, et al., 2006; Hofstede, 1980).

Many writers and researchers have closely examined the “collective systems” of Gulf societies (Al Ghanim, 2013; Al-Anzi, 2018; Al-Subaie and Yaghi, 2018; Hijazi, 2012). For example, Al-Anzi (2018) explored the importance of the extended family system in Kuwait and its impact on child-rearing practices and socialization. The

virtue of children being dutiful to their parents and elderly family members, along with respect and obedience to seniors, which is deeply rooted in Gulf families, can be considered one of the values that strengthen group bonds and shape their behaviors and identities (Al-Anzi, 2018). Al-Anzi (2018) also studied the impact of children's piety on intergenerational relationships in Bahrain and the role it plays in providing care and support for elderly family members.

This theory explains the nature of the societies of the GCC which adopt a collective identity based on the family unit (see - Al Ghanim, 2013; Al-Anzi, 2018; Al-Subaie and Yaghi, 2018; Hijazi, 2012). In this context, the countries of this region have had a traditional collective cultural orientation that helps them overcome various life difficulties by relying on kinship ties, support, and interdependence among family members (Al Ghanim, 2013; Al-Anzi, 2018; Al-Subaie and Yaghi, 2018; Hijazi, 2012). This "collective identity" is reflected in family cohesion and the prioritization of family needs and values over those of the individuals. It should be noted that the family, the central unit of society in the GCC, does not only refer to the nuclear family structure, but often includes extended family members (Al-Subaie and Yaghi, 2018). This extended family pattern is a clear marker of collectivist societies, whose "collective culture" is emphasized by some common family practices, such as living with parents even after marriage and supporting family members financially (Al-Subaie and Yaghi, 2018).

This "collective culture" is characteristic of Gulf nuclear families, which maintain a network of relationships with their families of origin and relatives, providing material and moral support and exchanging favors (Al Ghanim, 2013; Al-Anzi, 2018; Al-Subaie and Yaghi, 2018; Hijazi, 2012). The family of origin still retains and exercises a lot of influence over the nuclear family in many aspects of life, including making decisions with socio-cultural dimensions and intervening in resolving many marital and life issues (Hijazi, 2012). In general, despite the different views of Gulf sociologists on the relations between the nuclear family and the family of origin, it can be said that Gulf nuclear families are characterized by the strong presence of extended family ties and relationships despite their residential and economic independence from the family of origin (Hijazi, 2012). In this respect, they differ from Western nuclear families, which are basically built on a completely independent individual origin. Some researchers such as (Hijazi, 2012) consider that the continued cohesion of the social fabric may be attributed to the strength of these extended relationships, which contributed to the stability of society, especially in crisis situations where the system of protection, support and guidance is activated, compensating for the inadequacy of policies, services and systems of social protection and support (Hijazi, 2012).

"Extended family networks" in the GCC countries represent another aspect of collectivism, to which Gulf societies traditionally attach great importance, given that these networks do not exclusively include immediate family members, but rather embody a wider circle of relatives, in which extended family members provide support, guidance, and social connections, which can be particularly important in a collectivist society (AlSharkh and Springborg, 2012). A key characteristic of collectivism is the emphasis on group perspective rather than personal preference

(AlSharkh and Springborg, 2012). This collectivism is manifested in decision-making within the family, as decisions, especially major life decisions such as education, marriage and career, are often made collectively in these societies, respecting the opinions and wisdom of elders and family members (Elamin and Omair, 2010; Achoui, 2003). The family model, which emerges from the Gulf collective society, is based on cohesive, strong, and direct relationships in which young people defer to elders who in turn help, care for, guide, and protect them. Roles and responsibilities in the family are distributed according to age, which is the main factor in the arrangement of power in the extended family (Al Ghanim, 2013; Al-Anzi, 2018; Al-Subaie and Yaghi, 2018; Hijazi, 2012; Elamin and Omair, 2010; Achoui, 2003). People are often encouraged to prioritize family needs and desires over individual desires, placing a greater emphasis on the collective over the individual (Dion and Dion, 2001). Cultural norms strongly emphasize respect for authority and elders and maintaining harmony within the group, which are also hallmarks of collectivist societies (Dion and Dion, 2001). In general, the collectivist theory is highly applicable to family structures and practices in the GCC, where family relationships are characterized by strong ties, loyalty, interdependence, and a high level of respect for elders (Al Ghanim, 2013; Al-Anzi, 2018; Al-Subaie and Yaghi, 2018; Hijazi, 2012; Elamin and Omair, 2010; Achoui, 2003).

Despite its significance in analyzing the interactive dynamics of families and societies, the Collectivism Theory faces several reproaches. Critics argue that its emphasis on a uniformity of experiences and behaviors among individuals within a group is overly simplistic, often overlooking crucial differences and complexities within the group (Hofstede, 2001). The theory has also faced criticism for resisting change, as a collectivist approach can impede societal progress and restrict individual freedoms by emphasizing the preservation of traditional family structures and roles (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995; Markus, & Kitayama, 1991). For example, women in GCC countries may continue to face restrictions in their rights and freedoms due to the emphasis on maintaining traditional gender roles (Khalaf and AlKobaisi, 1999). Additionally, critics argue that this theory can promote stereotyping and overgeneralization, reducing complex individual behaviors and experiences to broad group characteristics; a matter that can limit understanding of individual dynamics within the GCC family unit and undermines individual agency (Fiske, 2004; AlMunajjed & Sabbagh, 2011). The theory assumes that individuals conform to the norms and expectations of the group, and this may not always be the case; for instance, in the case of the GCC younger generations may adopt more individualistic attitudes, influenced by globalization and the spread of Western ideals (Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Smith, et al., 2006; Hofstede, 1980; AlMunajjed & Sabbagh, 2011).

## **5.2. Cultural and Religious Value Theories**

Cultural and religious value theories are a set of theories presented by various researchers and scholars who sought to understand the impact of the intersection of culture, values, and religion on the lives of societies (see - Durkheim, 1912; Hofstede, 1984; Berger, 1967; Innaccone, 1990; Douglas, 1982; Inglehart and Welzel,

2005). These theories aim to study the principles, beliefs, and norms that guide human behavior within specific cultural and religious contexts; as they cover broad and interdisciplinary scientific fields, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, religious studies, amongst others, where they often deal with the nature of value, its sources and transmission, and its impact on individual and collective behavior (Durkheim, 1912; Hofstede, 1984; Berger, 1967; Innaccone, 1990; Douglas, 1982; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005).

The Social Theory of Religion introduced by Emile Durkheim (2012), for instance, viewed religion as a reflection of a society's moral values, which promotes social solidarity. Durkheim believed that religion plays a vital role in promoting social cohesion. He emphasized the collective nature of religion and how it can provide a framework for shared beliefs and practices (Durkheim, 1912). Geert Hofstede (1984) developed a framework that identifies key dimensions of culture that influence individual and collective behaviors. These dimensions include the concept of "individualism" versus "collectivism", the extent of power, and the concept of "masculinity" versus "femininity", among others (Hofstede, 1984). Peter Berger (1967) came up with the concept of the "sacred canopy", which seeks to understand how religion can create a "sacred canopy" or cosmic framework that explains the meaning of existence and provides order to the world (Berger, 1967). Lawrence Iannaccone (1990) introduced the Religious Capital Theory, which suggested that individuals accumulate "religious capital" through participation in religious activities and communities. This capital then influences their religiosity and participation in the future (Iannaccone, 1990). Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky developed the Cultural Theory of Risk which posited that individuals perceive and respond to risks based on their cultural values (Douglas, 1982). Inglehart and Welzel conducted the World Values Survey, a global research project that included both cultural and religious dimensions, which explored people's values and beliefs, shed light on how these values change over time, and examined their impact on social and political life (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005).

These theories are useful in understanding the cultural and social context that influences families in the GCC countries. Traditional family roles in the GCC region are influenced by Islamic principles and local cultural practices (Lippman, 2012). The GCC countries derive their core cultural and religious values from Arab and Islamic culture, which greatly influences every aspect of life in their societies, including politics, economics, social norms, and behavior (Lippman, 2012). Indeed, Islam is not just a religion in this region, but a comprehensive way of life that shapes social norms, laws, and behaviors, and the teachings of the Quran and Hadith (the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)) have profound effects on societal structure, legal systems, and interpersonal relationships (Lippman, 2012). For example, in terms of legal and legislative frameworks, Saudi Arabia applies Sharia law, which is manifested in the practices of the judicial systems and public policy applications in general (Lippman, 2012).

Societal values derived from Islamic teachings are clearly reflected in the family, especially those that emphasize the importance of family cohesion, respect for

elders, the roles and responsibilities of spouses, and children's relationship with their parents (Lippman, 2012; Alsharekh & Springborg, 2008). The values of respect and obedience towards parents and elders are deeply ingrained in the family and society where children are expected to care for their elderly parents and uphold family ties (Lippman, 2012; Alsharekh & Springborg, 2008). The cultural belief system in GCC countries also stems from traditional Bedouin values such as hospitality, chivalry, honor, courage, and loyalty; as despite modernization and urbanization, tribalism and tribal affiliation still play an important role in the GCC region (Lippman, 2012; Alsharekh & Springborg, 2008). They influence social interactions, marriages, and political alliances (Alsharekh, and Springborg, 2008). Tribal and clan ties also influence these societies' belief and value systems and cultural practices; for example, practices such as consanguineous and arranged marriages are prevalent in these societies (Chatty, 2010; Davidson, 2008).

### 5.3. Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a social system in which males control the means of production, own property, and dominate political, social, and economic power both within and outside the family (see - Lerner, 1986; Johnson, 2005; Connell, 2005; Ferguson, 1999; Green, 2010). As such, it involves the marginalization and subordination of women, being based on a conceptual framework built on stereotypical images of gender roles in society and the family, which privileges males over females. The term "patriarchy" comes from the Greek words' "patria", meaning father, and "arches", meaning rule, and the combination of the two words refers to "paternal rule" or "patriarchal rule" (Ferguson, 1999; Green, 2010). The term has been used in sociological and feminist theories to explain and critique societal power structures (Lerner, 1986; Johnson, 2005; Connell, 2005; Ferguson, 1999; Green, 2010). In the context of this theory, males do not benefit equally from the benefits of a patriarchal society, nor do all females suffer its effects to the same degree (Crenshaw, 1989). Rather, the oppression and privilege of both men and women is largely the result of the intersection of their class status and their ethnic, religious, and cultural background, among other differences and disparities (Crenshaw, 1989). This is a key part of the idea behind the term "intersectionality", a concept coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) to illustrate the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, which can lead to overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

Feminism considers patriarchy as the root cause of gender inequality (Hooks, 2000; Dworkin, 1981; Johnson, 2005). It emphasizes that the roles, expectations, and social norms created and enforced in a patriarchal society often lead to discrimination, oppression, and violence (Hooks, 2000; Dworkin, 1981; Johnson, 2005). In this context, patriarchy is the main obstacle to achieving gender equality because it enforces traditional gender roles and is based on the premise of male-centeredness at the top of the power hierarchy (Hooks, 2000; Dworkin, 1981; Johnson, 2005). This theory has influenced a range of social movements, including the women's liberation movement and third wave feminism, and many researchers and activists have used the concept to analyze women's discrimination and unequal rights

in various societal sectors including law, education, health care, and status in the home, among others (Hooks, 2000; Dworkin, 1981; Johnson, 2005).

Many researchers, such as Valentine Moghadam (2003), Kaltham Al-Ghanim (2012), and Nora Lari (2023), have pointed out that the traditional role of the family in the GCC countries has historically been predominantly patriarchal, centered on male dominance and authority, with the male head of the household assuming decision-making authority, providing financial support, and protecting family honor. Women are expected to be obedient and care for the home and children, often relying on male relatives for protection and guidance (Moghadam, 2003; Al-Ghanim, 2013; Lari, 2023). Male children in a Gulf family often enjoy more privileges than female children. Sahar El Sayed (2023), for example, highlighted the patriarchal nature of the family structure and its impact on social interactions in Saudi Arabia (El Sayed, 2023). Al Hourani (2019) explained the patriarchal nature of families in the UAE and its impact on gender roles and expectations.

#### **5.4. Gender Role Theory**

The Gender Role Theory posits that there are social systems defining the roles of men and women, in the family in particular, and in society in general (Kane, 2006; Wood and Eagly 2010). Researchers have pointed out that families raise their children in a system that defines social roles for males and females from an early age (Kane, 2006; Wood and Eagly 2010). Boys and girls are treated differently within their families from the time they are born, and they learn how to behave according to the beliefs they were raised with in ways that fit their male or female gender (Kane, 2006; Wood and Eagly 2010). Many studies have documented the gender stereotypes inherent in the upbringing of girls and boys in many societies (Kane, 2006; Wood and Eagly 2010). For example, girls are often taught domestic skills such as cooking, cleaning and caregiving, and encouraged to play with dolls and playhouses, emphasizing nurturing and housekeeping roles, while boys are steered towards activities such as building or fixing broken things in the house and are less likely to be encouraged to engage in tasks like cooking or cleaning the house (Kane, 2006; Wood and Eagly 2010).

Girls are encouraged to express their emotions and find no shame in crying, while boys are raised to suppress their emotions, learning that society will view them as “weak” if they express their emotions by crying and are often told that “boys don’t cry” (Chaplin and Aldo, 2013; Brody, 2000). For leisure activities, girls are encouraged to engage in play using toys such as dolls, tea sets and play kitchens, while boys are pushed towards competitive and active play, often using toys such as trucks, and are encouraged to play outside the home (Caldera, et al, 1989; Eisenberg, et al, 1982). Regarding dress and appearance, in Western countries, girls are often encouraged to express their ‘femininity’ by wearing dresses and skirts in colors like pink (Pomerleau, et al., 1990). Boys are steered towards wearing colors thought to be ‘masculine’ such as blue, and clothes that are considered practical (LoBue and DeLoache, 2011). This pattern of upbringing extends to careers and education as well (Wang & Degol, 2017; Ceci, 2009). Historically, in some societies, girls have been steered towards careers that are perceived to suit their feminine nature such as nursing, teaching

or housekeeping, while boys are pushed towards STEM careers and are often encouraged to have jobs that are characterized by leadership or financial success (Wang & Degol, 2017; Ceci, 2009). Although this has changed significantly in recent years, implicit biases still exist (Wang and Degol, 2017; Ceci, 2009).

A series of theories stemming from the gender role theory have attempted to provide different perspectives on how gender roles are formed and performed in society. Alice Eagly (1987), a prominent psychologist, proposed a “social role theory of gender differences and similarities”. According to Eagly, society created gender roles, and these roles shaped different behaviors and gender stereotypes and led to a division of labor in which women occupied nurturing and caring roles, while men were assigned dominant authoritarian roles (Eagly, 1987). According to Albert Bandura (1977), a proponent of Social Learning Theory, gender roles are acquired through direct instruction as well as observational learning, meaning that children learn to behave in a certain way that is considered appropriate for their gender by observing and imitating others, and this learned behavior is reinforced by rewarding or punishing them for their behavior (Bandura, 1977). For example, a girl may see her mother doing housework and learn that this is a “feminine” activity, especially if she is asked to help and praised for her performance (Bandura, 1977). Sandra Bem (1981) proposed the Gender Schema Theory, which posits that we have schemas, or organized sets of beliefs and expectations, about “gender”, which guide our behavior and perceptions. From childhood, once a person recognizes their gender identity, i.e., whether they are male or female, they begin to adhere to these schemas and perform activities that correspond to their gender (Bem, 1981). Judith Butler (1990), a philosopher and proponent of the Theory of Gender Performativity, argued that “gender” is not something one represents, but something one does, i.e., she suggested that “gender” is performed, and that it may not reflect one’s true “self”, as this performance depends on societal expectations and norms of what it means to be male or female (Butler, 1990).

Researchers who have studied the family and social order in the GCC countries have emphasized that the traditional family structure in these countries often defines certain gender roles and expectations, in which traditional gender roles are more pronounced and characterized by “gender segregation”, a cultural practice prevalent in GCC societies, especially in public spaces, where separate areas or facilities are designated for men and women, such as separate seating sections in restaurants or separate prayer areas in mosques and may exist in educational institutions as well (see - Le Renard, 2008; Hamdan, 2005; Doumato, 2000). In Saudi Arabia, for example, educational institutions are usually segregated from primary to university level. This has been a traditional approach, although there is evidence of increased integration in certain circumstances (Hamdan, 2005). Weddings and some social gatherings may also have separate sections for males and females (Doumato, 2000).

### **5.5. Gender Resource Theory**

Gender Resource Theory (GRT) stems from the Resource Theory, which was introduced by sociologists Bernard Murstein, Joseph Merkle, and Fred Peterson in the 1970s proposes that individuals engage in relationships based on the tangible

and intangible resources they can provide to their partners based on the assumption that both individuals bring certain resources to the relationship, which can be financial, physical, intellectual, or social, implying that resources are not limited to economic and financial resources but include anything that the partner brings into the relationship, including money, physical attractiveness, social status, housework, emotional support and companionship (see - Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Murstein, 1970; Murstein, et al, 1972; Foe and Foa, 1974; Merkle and Murstein, 1974). These resources influence the interactions of power relations within the relationship; as traditionally, men have had greater access to economic resources than women, which has enhanced their power in both the public spheres (work and politics) and the private sphere (family) (Ferree, 2010).

In general, women contribute significantly to unpaid work, such as housework or caregiving, which, historically, has not been recognized as a form of monetary resource (Bianchi, et al., 2000). The theory suggests that partners may provide the relationship with social resources (Moore, 1990). For example, men may connect the marital relationship to a network of high-status social relationships with individuals or organizations, thereby benefiting the family and elevating its social or economic status (Moore, 1990). Meanwhile, women may offer significant emotional and familial support, strengthening family bonds and creating a healthy environment for interaction (Moore, 1990). Alternatively, they may contribute cultural resources shaped by prevailing gender norms and values, where “masculine” traits like assertiveness or authority are valued differently than “feminine” traits such as emotional intelligence or compassion (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). The balance or imbalance of resources in a relationship affects the interactions of power relations, with more egalitarian relationships tending to distribute resources more evenly, while relationships with power imbalances tend to monopolize or control these resources (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

The resource theory posits that the power of an individual or group within a relationship or society can often be determined by their access to and control over resources (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Brines, 1994). Scholars and researchers have discussed this assumption in various contexts, including societal interactions and relationships and intimate relationships (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). Historically, in many societies, men have had greater control over resources such as land, money, and education (Brines, 1994). This has contributed to gender disparities in power relations and interactions (Brines, 1994). Considering the hypothesis of this theory, economic dependency, in which one partner is financially dependent on the other, can contribute to the imbalance of power interactions in a relationship, and this has been discussed extensively in the context of gender relations, where women have historically been more economically dependent on their male partners (Brines, 1994). Several studies have explored the relationship between women’s access to resources and their vulnerability to partner violence, finding that women’s access to their own financial resources can serve as a protective factor against such violence (Vyas and Watts, 2009). In this context, it has been noted that women’s empowerment often involves enhancing their access to and control over these resources, thereby creating a protective network that shields them from oppression and violence (Doss, 2013).

The previous section on gender roles in GCC countries explained that these roles have traditionally positioned men as the primary breadwinners, typically working in professions such as business, engineering, finance, or government positions. However, in recent years, there has been a marked increase in women's participation in the labor force across the GCC region, albeit with the persistence of societal cultural expectations that prioritize family responsibilities. Consequently, their employment may be more common in sectors such as education, healthcare, or other roles considered more suitable for women.

The changes in GCC countries have introduced new challenges to family life, arising from the dual and multiple roles women now play and their improved economic status due to their participation in the labor force (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023). Literatures inform us that conflicts between spouses may arise from disagreements over household economic decisions, differing spending habits, extravagance, or failing to consult each other on expenditures (Beuttler and Meson, 1987; Lueptow, et al., 1995). Not valuing the partner's opinion in financial decisions and investments can also contribute, leading to the occurrence and escalation of marital disputes (Beuttler and Meson, 1987; Lueptow, et al., 1995). Women's income can also be a source of conflict between spouses, particularly when the wife refuses to contribute to the family's needs or when the husband confiscates her financial resources (Al Raya, February 21, 2012; Al Raya, March 14, 2009). These challenges impact the marital relationship and jeopardize family cohesion by straining marital bonds, fostering disharmony and resentment between spouses (Beuttler and Meson, 1987; Lueptow, et al., 1995). The conflict's intensity can escalate to violent confrontations where harsh and forceful methods are employed to assert power and control (Matthews, 2004; Gelles, 2007). According to gender resource theory, hegemonic gender roles shape ideals of the "breadwinner," influencing gender power dynamics within marital relationships (Matthews, 2004; Gelles, 2007). Husbands may resort to violence when they perceive themselves in an inferior position to their wives in terms of education, income, or occupation, seeking to maintain their dominant role within the family (Matthews, 2004; Gelles, 2007).

In some marriages in the GCC countries, forms of "financial abuse" and "economic abuse" may take the form of controlling the wife's finances, restricting access to her bank accounts, or controlling her financial resources, such as controlling her salary, withholding, or controlling her spending (Al Raya, February 21, 2012; Al Raya, March 14, 2009). This may create a marital relationship based on financial dependency and thereby limit the wife's economic self-sufficiency and financial independence (Al Raya, February 21, 2012; Al Raya, March 14, 2009). Traditional gender roles and cultural norms may contribute to such exploitative and harmful relationships, which stem from traditional norms that expect women to submit to their husbands and prioritize their roles as wives and mothers rather than pursuing independent careers. Furthermore, there may be cases where a husband misuses joint assets or uses economic power to manipulate and control his wife. This can include making important financial decisions without consulting the wife or diverting marital funds for personal use, impoverishing the wife and leaving her unable to meet her own needs (Al Raya, February 21, 2012; Al Raya, March 14, 2009).

## 6. Summary

The literature reviewed in this section showed that the traditional stereotypical role of the family in the GCC countries is deeply rooted in tradition, patriarchy, extended family systems, and gender roles. It revealed that traditional views in the GCC region generally assign distinct roles and responsibilities to men and women. Men are often seen as the main breadwinners and protectors of the family, while women are expected to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers. Women's participation in public life, specifically in the labor force, has historically been limited by prevailing social norms. These power interactions have traditionally limited women's agency and autonomy within the family unit. The theoretical framework reviewed aimed to understand various facets of the family role, including its structure, culture, and power dynamics based on societal roles. These elements have been influenced by a blend of factors such as religion, local customs, societal norms, and modernity/urbanization, all contributing to shifts in these roles. In the subsequent chapters, we delve into these role changes and explore the factors facilitating their evolution.

# CHAPTER TWO: EVOLUTION OF SPOUSAL ROLES

## 1. Introduction

This chapter explores the traditional roles assigned to spouses in GCC countries, encompassing the expectations imposed on husbands and wives. It delves into their economic and social responsibilities within the family, reflected in financial contributions to the household budget, involvement in decision-making processes, participation in domestic tasks, and caregiving for family members. The influence of various factors shaping the evolution of beliefs and behaviors associated with these roles—such as modernization, education, women’s labor force participation, and globalization—will be examined. This analysis aims to gauge the extent to which these factors have contributed to shifting perceptions and behaviors between spouses in Gulf societies.

## 2. Factors that have influenced the change in stereotypical roles of spouses in the GCC

The previous chapter explained that, traditionally, men have been seen as the family’s main breadwinners, with their responsibilities largely centered on providing for the family’s financial needs and making decisions about family affairs, while women have primarily played the role of homemakers, taking on the responsibility for raising children, caring for family members, and doing household chores. We will examine the factors that influenced the shift in these perceptions, based on a hypothesis centered on the economic transformations that the GCC countries have experienced over the past three decades. This hypothesis posits that these transformations have significantly impacted the economic and social roles of husbands, serving as the primary factor and main argument underpinning the study’s analysis.

### 2.1. Education and Economic Transformation

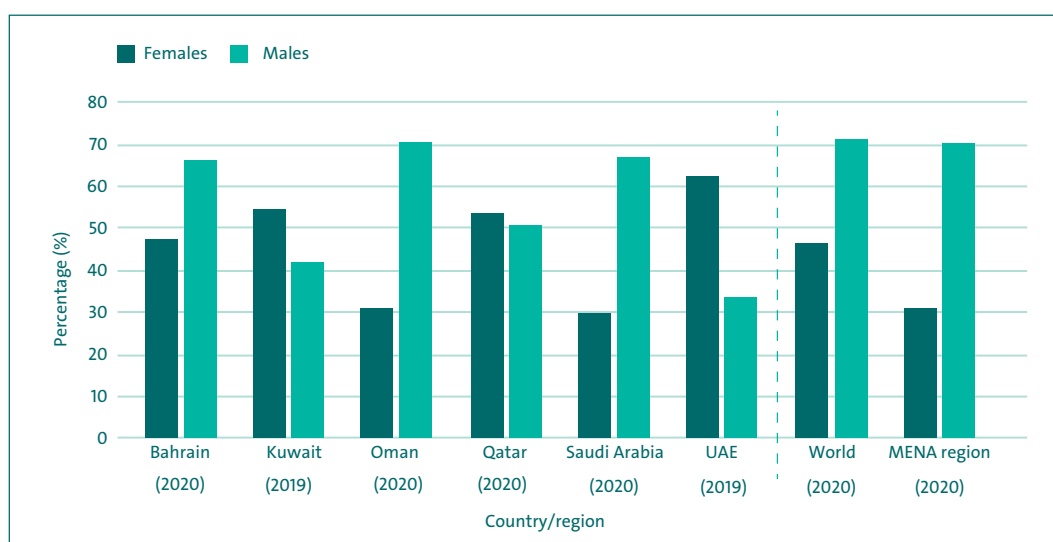
The flow of oil in the GCC countries, which occurred in the 1970s, and the ensuing economic boom led to improved educational and employment opportunities for women in the region (Ben Mimoune & Kabbani, 2023). According to the relevant literature and studies, the traditional stereotypical view of women’s role in society has had a major impact in limiting women’s participation in the labor force; for example, Najla Ben Mimoune and Nader Kabbani’s (2023) study on women’s employment in the GCC region indicated that women in the GCC countries previously had the lowest labor force participation rates in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In 1965, women represented less than 4% of Bahrain’s labor force and only 2.5% of Kuwait’s labor force (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023).

Researchers have attributed this situation to the widespread patriarchal notions of gender roles in society as these notions designate men as the primary breadwinners responsible for securing income and sustenance for the family, while women are assigned the role of managing household chores and family care (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023). Consequently, women have had significantly lower chances of entering the labor market compared to their male counterparts (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023). Conservative social norms also prevented women's active participation in public life and limited their movement, especially among the most conservative segments of society, such as Bedouin communities and small villages, which significantly and noticeably reduced women's contributions to the economy. Consequently, all these factors led to low labor force participation rates for women as mentioned earlier (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023).

Gulf countries' modernization policies have strengthened infrastructure and social services, such as increasing the number of public schools for girls, and education has become a key factor in increasing women's participation in the labor force (UNESCO, 2019-a; Ben Mimoune & Kabbani, 2023). Over the past five decades, women's educational attainment rates have risen dramatically, surpassing those of their male peers in most GCC countries. For example, according to UNESCO, by 2019, Saudi women accounted for more than half of Saudi Arabia's university students (UNESCO, 2019-a; 2019-b). The number of Qatari female university students in 2021 was almost three times the number of young men, in Kuwait it was more than double, while Oman saw only a slightly higher percentage of Omani females enrolled in university (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023). Women's economic participation has increased as a result of their increased levels of higher education, and their status has changed markedly since the early 1970s (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023). Bahraini women's participation rose to 4.9% of the national labor force and Kuwaiti women's share increased to 3.3% during the 1980s (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023). Bahraini and Qatari women accounted for 13.7% and 16.8% of the national labor force in 1981 and 1983, respectively. Kuwait's share of women in the national labor force rose to 19.6% in 1985 (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023), and according to World Bank statistics, the labor force participation rate of women in the UAE rose to 54.9% by 2022 (World Bank, 2022).

The GCC governments' efforts and heavy investment in human capital development and women's employment over the past three decades have been highly successful, as reflected in women's labor force participation rate compared to the past (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023). Women's average total labor force participation rate among GCC nationals is 45%, much higher than the Middle East and North Africa average of 18% and equals or exceeds the global average of 47%. According to the latest available data, Kuwaiti women have the highest female labor force participation rates in the GCC at 54%, followed by Bahrain at 47% and Qatar at 43% (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023). Since the initiation of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, approved by the Council of Ministers by its decision No. 308 dated 18/7/1437 H corresponding to April 25, 2016, Saudi women have seen a substantial rise in their labor force participation rate, increasing from 21.2% in 2017 to 34% in 2022. This major social transformation came in the wake of Saudi

Arabia’s reforms in 2019, which provided greater economic opportunities and social mobility for Saudi women and showed the size of the untapped potential of this segment of the population, as the percentage of women in managerial positions (senior and middle) increased from 28.6% in 2017 to 39% in 2021 (UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, March 13, 2023). Even Omani women, who have the lowest participation rates in the GCC (31%), outperformed the rest of the MENA region (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023) - see Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Participation rates of GCC citizens in the labor force**

Source: Authors accounts based on national statistics (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023: p.2)]

Historically, women’s work outside the home has been restricted because it violates local norms of gender segregation, as work requires women to deal directly with men who are not their close relatives or “muhrams” ((Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023). To overcome this societal objection to modernization and increased educational opportunities for females, Gulf countries have used their financial capacity to provide free, high-quality, gender-segregated education in public schools and universities, and hired female citizens as teachers to work in girls’ schools (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani, 2023). As a result of these policies, women’s labor force participation doubled in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain between 1981 and 2019, and almost tripled in the United Arab Emirates and Oman (Hezratji, 2021). The gender gap in the labor participation rate is widest in Saudi Arabia and narrowest in Kuwait and Qatar (Hezratji, 2021). According to national employment trends in the GCC countries, the participation of female citizens in the labor force is 44% in the UAE, 33% in Bahrain, 16% in Saudi Arabia, and 36% in Qatar, based on 2019 data (Hezratji, 2021).

## 2.2. Globalization and cultural stereotypes

The literature has pointed to the role of globalization in changing of stereotypical gender roles in the GCC countries (Al Dabbagh, 2012; Brannagan and Giulianotti ; 2014; Serhal, et al., 2023). Globalization is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that describes the growing interdependence between countries, which gained momentum

after the collapse of the communist bloc in the early 1990s (Krugman, et al, 2015; Watson, 2006). This shift led to the dominance of the free-market liberal economic approach over socialist political economy and communist ideology, resulting in the rise of economic globalization. Economic globalization manifested in various forms, including the creation of a global economic network linking local economies to the global market through free trade agreements, increased cross-border trade of goods and services, the expansion of multinational companies' operations and investments, the dominance and widespread presence of global brands like McDonald's, Apple, and Coca-Cola, the rapid movement of capital across borders, and the growth of stock markets (Krugman, et al, 2015; Watson, 2006; Melitz, 2015). It is also driven by the technological revolution that has made the world a "small global village" by connecting countries and their inhabitants through the Internet, satellite and mobile phone technology, enabling instant communication and the exchange of information more widely and abundantly than before (Castells, 2011).

Globalization has encompassed the cultural space as well, changing the cultural identities of societies and the consumption of pop culture, movies, music, and television shows around the world (Appadurai, 1996). There is also political globalization, in which international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the International Monetary Fund, among other political, economic, and human rights institutions, play key roles in global governance, armed with international treaties and agreements, such as those dealing with climate change, nuclear proliferation, children's rights, women's rights, and human rights (Stiglitz, 2003). Political globalization has been accompanied by social globalization in the form of increased migration between different countries and societies, and the emergence of global social movements, such as those advocating human rights, environmental conservation, or gender equality (Castles, and Miller, 2009; Smith, & Johnston, 2002). Globalization marked the end of the era of inward-looking and closed-mindedness and replaced it with an era of openness and interaction with other peoples, whether by choice or by necessity, and created universal values calling for the rule of law, human rights, and gender equality, among other things (Smith, & Johnston, 2002).

Some scholars have argued that globalization is a process of standardization and homogenization, which imposes Western norms and lifestyles on weaker societies and contributes to the erosion of local cultures (Beck, 2000; Stegar, 2009). Others, such as Turner and Khondker (2010), explain that globalization refers to a complex and non-linear reality, and emphasize that it is necessary to move beyond binary modes of thinking and recognize globalization as a multidimensional process in order to understand its implications in a more meaningful and useful way (Turner and Khondker, 2010).

The manifestations of globalization in the GCC countries are the high levels of trade and capital movement and its linkage to global financial markets, the remarkable boom in urban infrastructure, and the influx of expatriates, as the Arab Gulf has become one of the largest employers of foreign labor (Al Dabbagh, 2012; Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2014). These developments have been accompanied

by great technological progress that has connected these countries to the global communications network in a rapid and powerful way (Al Dabbagh, 2012; Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2014). The establishment of branches of foreign universities and higher education institutes with international affiliations, alongside investment in large-scale cultural projects like Western museums and international sporting events, exemplifies globalization in this region, for instance notable examples include Qatar's organization and hosting of the 2022 World Cup (Al Dabbagh, 2012; Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2014).

Social media and globalization have had a great impact in changing these concepts and stereotypes of the role of husbands and wives within and outside the institution of marriage (Al Dabbagh, 2012). The widespread use of social media platforms has enabled GCC citizens to engage with global ideas, leading to a reshaping of traditional beliefs and norms (Al Dabbagh, 2012). Through media technology, especially social media, women in the GCC have become more empowered and have a clear voice (Al Dabbagh, 2012). Gender-sensitive analysis of globalization emphasizes the importance of examining how the various facets of globalization intersect and affect gender systems and values within societies (Serhal, et al., 2023). In the case of the GCC, which is experiencing fast-paced globalization, gender roles and systems have become a battleground for social concerns (Serhal, et al., 2023). Globalization has brought about changes in culture and social relations in this region and has altered interactions between family members, including the traditional roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women within the family unit (Serhal, et al., 2023).

Education, women's economic participation and working outside the home are among the most important effects of globalization in these societies, which led to a change in gender roles in the family and community system (Alderazi, 2012). Women's achievements in education, compared to men, have become distinctive and admirable. The progress that Gulf women have made in education and scientific fields is often described as a "reverse gender gap" (Alderazi, 2012). According to education indicators across all GCC countries, females surpass males in terms of educational attainment, with the percentage of females in university education reaching 58.7% (Alderazi, 2012). Women's access to paid employment has increased in recent decades, and government statistics show that most employed Gulf women are employed in the public sector, and in some cases, such as the UAE, hold a significant proportion of senior positions (Alderazi, 2012). Despite low levels of employment in the private sector, GCC women have managed to break into the private sector as businesswomen and entrepreneurs in increasing numbers (Al Farsi, 2012).

While globalization has opened doors for Gulf women in terms of education and study, it has also created conflicts with social customs and traditions (Alderazi, 2012). For example, it is still unacceptable for many GCC families to allow their daughters to pursue education abroad due to fear of Western cultural influences (Alderazi, 2012). Some studies point to societal fear and anxiety about these influences, as the more educated GCC women become, the more they clash with cultural and societal norms (Alderazi, 2012). This context might explain why some literature characterizes

globalization as a challenge confronting the Gulf family, which seeks to reshape and challenge its values, placing it in a dilemma between tradition and modernity, and between preserving its authenticity while embracing globalization and leveraging its opportunities (Alderazi, 2012).

### **3.2. The Transformation of Family Structure.**

We have elaborated on the influence of various factors, such as the rising education levels of women and their increased participation in the labor force in GCC countries, on the structure of families and the rise of nuclear families. In the subsequent section, we will explore how this impacts the roles of spouses.

#### **3.2.1. The Extended and Nuclear Family**

As mentioned earlier, Gulf Arab society was characterized by the prevalence of the extended family as a traditional structure, which was predominant before these societies underwent urbanization following the oil boom. In these societies, the extended family stems from the tribe or clan and forms one of its branches (Hegazy, 2012). Its structure usually includes three generations, namely grandparents, parents and children, living in the same space before and after marriage, and its ties are strengthened through inbreeding and intermarriage (Hegazy, 2012). The extended family provides its members with protection, care, economic opportunities, and social status in return for their compliance, submission, and loyalty to the family and its senior leaders (Hegazy, 2012). It operates on a hierarchical structure, where authority is vested in the elders across generations (Hegazy, 2012). This structure entails clear definitions of roles for offspring, siblings, as well as marital and parental responsibilities (Hegazy, 2012).

The literature suggests that the family, in its transformation from extended to nuclear, is shrinking in size, albeit at a slow pace, with data indicating that the average family size in Qatar increased from 8.5 in 1997 to 9.5 in 2008 (Anser, 2013). This evidence suggests that the presence of the extended family remains strong, albeit somewhat diminished with the advent of the nuclear family (Anser, 2013). Dr. Kaltham Al-Ghanim (2013) tells us that the extended family model in the Gulf region has been gradually declining in favor of nuclear families consisting of two parents and their children since 1970. According to the 2004 census survey, for example, the extended family constituted only about 30% of households in Qatari communities in 2004 (Al-Ghanim, 1913). It should be noted that this census included all households in Qatar, most of which were non-Qatari, reflecting a social structure markedly different from the traditional tribal framework of Qatari society (Al-Ghanim, 1913). With most of the Qatar's population residing in urban locales, it's these areas that are witnessing a decline in the prevalence of the extended family (Al-Ghanim, 1913). A similar phenomenon has also been observed in Saudi Arabia, which has witnessed rapid urban growth and a marked increase in the number of families living in it (Al-Ghanim, 1913). Data from population surveys applied to the population of the city of Riyadh showed that the family structure has changed dramatically from the past (Al-Ghanim, 1913). The number of nuclear families, consisting of two spouses and their children, has increased, and the number of extended families, consisting

of two spouses and their relatives, has decreased (Al-Ghanim, 1913). The period from 1996 to 2004 reflected this situation, with the nuclear family becoming the dominant model, accounting for 67 percent of all families in 1996 and rising to 75 percent in 2004. The proportion of extended families declined from 33% to 21% during the same period (Al-Ghanim, 1913).

### **3.2.2. Nuclear Family, Marital Harmony, and Changing Expectations**

According to literature, prior to the oil boom, the extended Gulf family was characterized by many qualities and led a modest lifestyle unaffected by consumerism (Hijazi, 2012). Within this familial structure, relationships were governed by traditional gender roles within a patriarchal system, where the father held sway over all family matters (Hijazi, 2012). Possessing absolute authority, he managed the family's assets and resources (Hijazi, 2012). However, the financial abundance, economic boom, and other aforementioned factors in the Gulf countries have transformed the functions, roles, and relationships, leading to more flexibility than before due to the prevalence of values such as equality and sharing, and have brought significant challenges to family stability, marital life, and childcare (Hijazi, 2012). These challenges were manifested in the increasing tendency towards individualism, independence, and insistence on decision and choice, not only within the marital institution, but before that in matters of courtship and marriage, as the shift from arranged marriages to those based on free choice, the wife's consent, and the imposition of her rights in the marriage contract increased, and the emerging family found itself facing challenges related to changing stereotypical roles and the prevailing traditional mentality (Hijazi, 2012).

Gulf region studies indicate that involvement in the labor market has achieved financial independence for women and provided them with the opportunity to support the family and help the husband bear the burdens of life by contributing to the family's livelihood (Al-Ghanim, 1913; Al-Dhafiri, 1996). Al-Husseini and Al-Issa's study in 1981 revealed that 67 percent of young men favored wives who worked. Another study by Abdulrahman Moosaigir on Bahraini society in 2005 indicated that 55 percent of young men desired their future wives to work, with only 5 percent expressing a preference for them not to work. The remaining 40 percent showed no particular interest in the matter of women's employment (Al-Ghanim, 1913). The result of this study shows a change in the status of women since the 1980s, which saw women entering the labor market and earning incomes that could, in some cases, be greater than those of their husbands. Men, who used to oppose women working outside the home, began to change their minds when choosing their partners, due to changes in lifestyle and increased material pressures (Al-Ghanim, 1913). Opinions regarding the factors driving women into the labor market in the GCC region vary across regional literature as some argue that it was primarily an economic necessity, not only on an individual level but also for national economies, a hypothesis supported by policies and strategies implemented by GCC countries (Al-Dhafiri, 1996). Conversely, others contend that women entered the labor force for reasons beyond mere economic need (Al-Dhafiri, 1996). These motivations include self-realization, securing future prospects, pursuing personal ambitions,

and psychological motives such as demonstrating competence and productivity, alongside financial considerations (Al-Dhafiri, 1996). These multifaceted motivations for women working outside the home were underscored by Al-Dhafiri (1996) in her study on the true drivers behind women's employment in Kuwait (1996).

Some studies pertaining to the Gulf family indicate existence of numerous challenges within modern nuclear families, with a prominent issue being the lack of stability and marital harmony (Hijazi, 2012). This instability can often manifest in hidden rifts or result in divorce, stemming from conflicts over traditional gender roles, particularly in light of increased female education and advancement in status and profession (Hijazi, 2012; Al-Ghanim, 1913). In such scenarios, wives may assert their rights to partnership, equality, autonomy, and personal independence, while husbands may adhere to traditional role arrangements grounded in their "patriarchal" authority (Hijazi, 2012). Ahmed Jamal Zaher conducted a study in 1981-1982 involving a sample of 6901 women across the six Gulf countries (Al-Ghanim, 1913). Among the participants, 55% were students, 24% were homemakers, and 14% held senior management or employee positions (Al-Ghanim, 1913). The study aimed to explore Gulf women's perceptions of themselves and their family roles, revealing a preference for being viewed as partners by men rather than being confined to roles solely focused on enjoyment and procreation (Al-Ghanim, 1913). Additionally, the study highlighted their perception of gender roles compared to those of their male counterparts, with an expressed belief in gender equality concerning rights and responsibilities (Al-Ghanim, 1913). Below, we delve deeper into the evolving dynamics of traditional spouse's roles.

#### **4.2. Women's Economic Participation**

Many relevant international literatures are unanimous that women's education and involvement in the labor force has the greatest impact on the traditional roles of the spouses in the family, which is positively reflected in parenting and decision-making within families and increased relationship satisfaction (see - Lueptow, et al., 1995; Bianchi, et al., 2000; Yeung, et al., 2001; Frisco & Williams, 2003; Bolzendahl & Myers, 2003). For example, Lueptow, et al.'s (1995) study, "The persistence of gender role ideologies in an era of change", noted the positive effects of women's work on gender roles within the family, showing that wives who work outside the home have more economic independence and a greater say in family decisions, allowing for a shift in traditional family power interactions (Lueptow, et al. 1995). Also, in their article "Is anyone doing the housework? Trends in the gender division of household labor", Bianchi, et al. (2000) indicated that men in dual-income households are increasingly involved in housework and childcare (Bianchi, et al., 2000). Furthermore, Yeung et al. (2001) examined in their article "Children's time with fathers in intact families" the changing perceptions of fatherhood stemming from mothers working outside the home. They demonstrated that men in households where women are employed outside the home often cultivate closer and higher-quality relationships with their children, as they tend to be more engaged in their upbringing (Yeung, et al., 2001). Croft, et al. (2015) argued in their article "An underexamined inequality: Cultural and psychological barriers to men's engagement with communal roles"

that working spouses can serve as role models for gender equality and that children in families where both parents work and share household responsibilities are more likely to adopt egalitarian views of gender roles, positively influencing the thoughts and practices of the next generation (Croft, et al, 2015). In addition, there have been studies, such as those by Frisco and Williams (2003), on “Perceived housework equity, marital happiness, and divorce in dual-earner households”, which found that spouses report higher levels of marital satisfaction when they share household responsibilities and care for family members equally (Frisco, and Williams, 2003). Another study by Bolzendahl and Myers (2003) argued that women’s work outside the home changed social norms and perceptions of gender roles, which may have enhanced social acceptance of women’s work outside the home and led to the formation of societal views in favor of gender equality (Bolzendahl and Myers, 2003).

#### **4.2.1 The public sphere, the private sphere, and the principle of gender segregation**

Arguments have varied in the literature that has sought to analyze the changes that occurred in the concepts and practices of gender roles and systems in GCC societies; whereas some argue that these roles have evolved others affirm that these roles resume being trapped in the traditional values of society as we will illustrate in this section. If we look at the practice of gender segregation, which this study addressed in the previous chapter that dealt with the relevant theories for instance, we find that it still exists and has not been significantly affected by women’s access to the public sphere. Al-Dhafiri’s (1996) study on women’s work in Kuwait and Falasi’s (2001) study on women’s work in the United Arab Emirates revealed that working women in these countries prefer to engage in work sectors that guarantee limited or no contact with men.

Al-Dhafiri’s (1996) research indicated that Kuwaiti society embraces women’s employment outside the home and respects their autonomy in selecting the type of work they desire. However, certain restrictions exist in professions traditionally dominated by men, like mechanics and electricians (Al-Dhafiri, 1996). The study revealed that Kuwaiti women generally opt for professions that don’t necessitate interaction with men, displaying a preference for roles that allow for gender segregation (Al-Dhafiri, 1996). Another study conducted by Al-Falasi (2001) affirmed that Emirati women show a preference for employment in the government sector due to its alignment with their preferences and family obligations. This preference is particularly evident in the structured office work environment, restricted working hours, familial inclination towards government employment, limited interaction with men, and confined geographic and institutional settings (Al-Falasi, 2001). This inclination is reflected in the rising proportion of women employed in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which nearly reached 40 percent of the total labor force by 1998, constituting almost half of the ministry’s employees (Al-Falasi, 2001).

The practice of gender segregation and its effects are closely linked to the broader evolution of traditional, stereotypical gender roles in society. While many factors are pushing towards a more integrated and egalitarian approach, there are also parallel forces resisting such changes. The results of these studies imply that the transition from structural systems of gender and gender roles is not smooth, as societies try

to contain the changes taking place in them by reaffirming gender segregation as a means of maintaining traditional values and stereotypical gender roles.

Other researchers have validated the hypothesis that traditional gender roles persist despite advancements in women's status. For instance, the division of labor and household tasks, historically designated to women as homemakers and caregivers, remains largely unchanged (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a; 2019-b). The participation of married women in the labor market has not significantly altered their expected responsibilities within the domestic sphere (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a; 2019-b). Much of the literature suggests that married women continue to shoulder all domestic responsibilities alongside their external employment (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a; 2019-b). This dual burden places significant hardships and challenges on working married Gulf women, adversely affecting various aspects of marriage, stability, and marital harmony (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a; 2019-b). This context helps explain Gulf women's preference for shorter work shifts. A 2015 study titled "The Reality of Working Women and the Issues They Face in Kuwaiti Society" revealed that Kuwaiti women favor jobs that conclude by 2:00 p.m. to manage their domestic responsibilities. The study found that about 87 percent of participating women work a single shift ending at 2 p.m., 9 percent work a single shift until 4 p.m., and 3 percent work two shifts (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a).

Other studies conducted in Qatar corroborate the findings from Kuwait, indicating minimal changes in role stereotyping and men's participation in household chores (Al-Ghanim, 1913). For instance, a survey investigating spousal involvement in household tasks revealed that the distribution of responsibilities remains largely unchanged, with husbands not participating in household chores (Al-Ghanim, 1913). Despite women contributing financially to the family's livelihood, they are often excluded from major decisions and public life matters. Dr. Kaltham Al-Ghanim (2013) noted some families show an increase in women's participation, but this is mostly confined to the "field of care", such as guiding and educating children, buying household necessities, and taking children to the doctor. This underscores the persistence of stereotypical roles, with women's primary responsibilities still centered around home and family care (Al-Ghanim, 1913).

#### **4.2.2. Sharing Household Chores and Stereotypical Gender Roles**

Some literature reinforces gender role stereotypes by adopting a traditional perspective when analyzing the development and its impact on the roles of working spouses in the GCC region, for example, Al-Rashidi's (2006) study on "Women's Work Between Pros and Cons" in Saudi Arabia highlighted the negative impacts on marital life when married women entered the labor force, attributing these issues to the difficulty in balancing home and work responsibilities, sometimes due to poor planning and other times due to personal reasons. It argued that married women working outside the home has become a source of marital discord and disagreements, stemming from the changes in their status, their sense of independence, their involvement in decision-making, and their freedom from many family and social constraints (Al-Rashidi, 2006). This increased their self-esteem

and desire for control and dominance, which has significantly harmed the marital relationship (Al-Rashidi, 2006).

Al-Rashidi (2006) attributes the high rate of marital disputes to issues potentially stemming from the husband's jealousy of his wife's success and excellence at work. This can manifest in various forms, such as "psychological divorce" or the so-called "empty shell", where both partners live in the same house but lack intimacy and frequently quarrel (Al-Rashidi, 2006). The marital relationship eventually becomes a formality, sustained (if at all) due to social pressure, customary standards, and the spouses fear of damaging their reputation and social status (Al-Rashidi, 2006; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a). Alternatively, it may culminate in divorce and family disintegration (Al-Rashidi, 2006). Although Al-Rashidi (2006) highlighted the benefits of women's employment at both the family and national levels, her analysis of the negative aspects was rooted in a traditional perspective on gender roles. The positive benefits, in her view, included raising the family's income, enhancing well-being, achieving a better quality of life for its members, and alleviating poverty for disadvantaged families (Al-Rashidi, 2006). At the national level, women's employment contributed to the country's economic advancement by boosting productivity and effectively utilizing their leisure time (Al-Rashidi, 2006). The availability of modern appliances has reduced the time and effort required for household chores, allowing women to engage more in the labor force (Al-Rashidi, 2006). This participation enhances their sense of value in society, recognizing them as effective and productive members who contribute to the country's development and prosperity (Al-Rashidi, 2006; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a).

In addition to the negative consequences of a married woman's work on the marital relationship revealed by Al-Rashidi in her 2006 study, the neglect of her husband due to long working hours and returning home exhausted was highlighted. This exhaustion leaves her unable to engage in conversation, as she desperately needs to rest, which negatively impacts both their psychological well-being and can lead to their separation. In this regard, Al-Rashidi (2006:7) referenced a study conducted on several working wives who reported various impacts on their marital relationships. According to the study, 84 percent of respondents said, "My husband is annoyed when he is at home and I'm not". Forty-two percent stated, "My husband is annoyed when I talk about my work issues with my bosses and colleagues". Twenty-three percent admitted, "My husband is upset when I leave him alone when he is sick", while 22 percent noted, "I worry my husband by postponing the idea of having another child". Additionally, 12 percent said, "My husband is annoyed when I want to have a major say in important topics in the family", and another 9 percent mentioned, "My husband is annoyed when I ask him to help me with household chores such as cooking, washing dishes, and laundry". (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a, p.91).

While studies often attribute the negative effects of women's work to the conflict with their primary "natural" functions and traditional family duties, it is likely that the persistence of stereotypical gender roles in society is the real source of these

harmful effects. This traditional system places an undue burden on working women to fulfill both domestic and professional roles, without considering the consequences or the need for equal sharing of responsibilities. It also overlooks the importance of supportive workplace policies that acknowledge and address traditional stereotypes about women's roles at home.

The Doha International Family Institute (forthcoming-b) conducted a study titled "Perceptions of Qatari Youth on Happy and Sustainable Marriage" to explore young people's views on what constitutes a happy marriage, identify the challenges they face, and determine the components and factors that contribute to achieving and maintaining such marriages. The goal was to provide recommendations to decision-makers in Qatar to help develop policies related to marriage. This study followed a qualitative and quantitative approach based on in-depth interviews directly with the respondents or by phone, and the research sample consisted of 164 Qatari youth, including 62 males and 102 females between the ages of 18 and 35, living in the State of Qatar. The data was analyzed using qualitative methods and based on interviews. The results were categorized and examined according to sub-themes, guided by relevant theories and literature. A survey was conducted with the participation of 676 students from Qatar University, comprising 222 males and 453 females. Among them, 173 males were single and 50 were married, while 305 females were single and 148 were married. Descriptive analysis was used for this study because it is an exploratory study (Doha International Family Institute, forthcoming-b).

The qualitative findings of Doha International Family Institute's study on "Perceptions of Qatari Youth on Happy and Sustainable Marriage" revealed a divergence of opinions regarding the roles of spouses in managing household affairs and meeting family needs (Doha International Family Institute, forthcoming-b). Some young men in the study emphasized the importance of mutual cooperation between partners in managing household tasks, believing it shouldn't fall solely on one partner. Others felt it was primarily the responsibility of the woman, with supportive men assisting when needed. Responses from married participants mirrored those of unmarried individuals, with many agreeing that the wife currently bears most household tasks. However, some believed that responsibility should be shared equally between spouses through coordination and understanding. The equitable distribution of responsibilities was highlighted as crucial for family stability, enhancing overall well-being and happiness (Doha International Family Institute, forthcoming-b).

Young women's responses indicated that while the mother or wife typically bears the responsibility of managing household affairs, husbands can share this responsibility with them, albeit in a fair but not entirely equal manner. The quantitative findings of the study echoed the qualitative results, demonstrating that although perceptions of responsibility for household management have evolved, they remain influenced by stereotypes. Participants' responses varied, with 25.67% of males and 40.08% of females considering it the joint responsibility of both partners equally—the most common response. This was followed by the

view that both partners share responsibility, but with a greater burden on the wife, cited by 26.57% of males and 38.50% of females. Subsequently, some participants identified the wife as primarily responsible (22.52% of males and 13.43% of females), while others attributed primary responsibility to the husband (14.86% of males and 3.96% of females). Lastly, a minority believed in shared responsibility, with a greater burden on the husband (10.36% of males and 4.18% of females) (Doha International Family Institute, forthcoming-b).

#### **4.2.3. Caring for Family Members and The Stereotypical Roles of Husbands and Wives**

Al-Otaibi (1993/1414 AH) conducted a study on the family and social impacts of a married woman's employment on childcare and child rearing. The findings affirm the persistence of traditional gender roles within spouses, where women are primarily responsible for caring for children, regardless of their employment status (Al-Otaibi, 1993; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a). The study involved a sample of 365 educated mothers, both working and non-working. Results revealed no significant difference in the average performance of childcare and child nutrition between the two groups. Both working and non-working mothers showed a preference for breastfeeding. However, working women, due to their employment outside the home, spent less time with their children compared to non-working women (Al-Otaibi, 1993; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a).

The results of the aforementioned Doha International Family Institute's (forthcoming-b) research on "Perceptions of Qatari Youth on Happy and Sustainable Marriage" showed a significant development in this concept. The responses from young people regarding child-rearing highlighted a shared responsibility between both spouses to sustain a happy marriage. However, some emphasized the importance of dividing roles based on the lifestyle of the husband and wife, particularly if both are working, as this contributes to the children's development and psychological well-being. Others stressed the necessity of agreeing on educational methods from the outset, while others challenged traditional stereotypes about spousal roles, suggesting that the wife should nurture the children while the husband assumes responsibility for their education and upkeep. In the quantitative study, participants emphasized that child-rearing is an equal responsibility shared by both spouses, with 42.79% of men and 56.16% of women supporting this view. The next common perspective was that both partners share responsibility, but with a greater burden on the wife, supported by 30.63% of men and 38.98% of women. Subsequently, some participants believed that child-rearing is primarily the wife's responsibility, with 16.21% of men and 7.26% of women endorsing this view (Doha International Family Institute, forthcoming-b).

The findings of Doha International Family Institute's study on "Perceptions of Qatari Youth on Happy and Sustainable Marriage" mirror a shift in the attitudes of the current generation, influenced by modern parenting ideologies promoting shared responsibility in child-rearing. Participants' responses highlight the positive influence of women's employment, fostering a collective approach to raising children among spouses (Doha International Family Institute, forthcoming-b).

#### 4.2.4. Financial Contribution, Decision-making, and Role Stereotyping

Many studies argue that women's work outside the home has altered the dynamics of patriarchal authority within the family (World Bank, 2013). This premise suggests that women's employment has elevated their status and social power, enabling them to become equal partners with their husbands in making family decisions, including those related to the family's livelihood, thereby ending the era of unilateral decision-making (World Bank, 2013). For instance, a study titled "Opening Doors: Gender Equality and Development in the Middle East and North Africa" conducted by the World Bank in 2013 noted that women's participation in the labor market can lead to increased decision-making power within the household (World Bank, 2013).

The results of the aforementioned DIFI (forthcoming-b) study on "Qatari Youth's Perceptions of a Happy and Sustainable Marriage" demonstrated the importance of financial stability for the success, continuity, and longevity of marriages. The results of this study disproved the hypotheses and arguments suggesting that traditional stereotypical roles of spouses have changed due to women's employment. Instead, it indicated that opinions regarding the equal financial participation of both spouses in the family have not significantly shifted. The youth emphasized that the primary financial responsibility lies with the husband, but it can be shared if both partners agree or in emergency situations. About 62.61% of males and 41.18% of females stated that financial responsibility primarily belongs to the husband. This was followed by the view that financial responsibility is shared, but to a greater extent for the husband (24.32% for males and 40.52% for females). Next, 5.85% of men and 15.85% of women believed financial responsibility should be equally shared. The belief that financial responsibility falls primarily on the wife was held by 6.75% of men and 2.20% of women. Finally, 0.45% of men and 0.02% of women thought financial responsibility should be shared, but to a greater extent for the wife (Doha International Family Institute, forthcoming-b).

Saleh Al-Ghaddouri (unpublished) highlighted the importance of economic planning for families, which involves balancing income and expenses. He stressed the need to plan the consumption of goods and services in line with the family's means to achieve social and economic balance. Economic and political fluctuations at the global level have increased the cost of living, making financial planning and negotiations between spouses essential for a stable family life. The economic, social, and cultural changes of the current century have significantly impacted family concepts and relationships, particularly the dynamics between spouses and their respective roles. These changes have also underscored the necessity of confronting challenges in marital life. The economic role of both spouses is crucial, as it provides experience and good financial practices, helping to clarify their responsibilities and the importance of financial resources. This enables them to make sound and appropriate spending decisions. Managing a family's financial resources is a social process that should involve all family members, with the goal of distributing the financial income across various expenditure categories and creating a budget to address multiple needs. Conflict between spouses can arise from insufficient financial resources to meet the family's needs, which vary across different families,

classes, and societies. Conversely, an increase in financial resources and wealth can also lead to family disputes. Successful marriages are characterized by effective household management, mutual respect, appreciation, understanding, sacrifice, and a clear understanding of each partner's responsibilities and roles in life (Saleh Al-Ghaddouri, unpublished).

The aforementioned study on "The Reality of Working Women and the Issues They Face in Kuwaiti Society" revealed that 92% of men believe women contribute nothing financially, while 8% think women contribute 25% or less (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a). In contrast, 84% of women believe they willingly and proactively contribute to easing financial burdens, with 61% admitting to doing so at their husband's request. The study attributed these differing perspectives to several factors, including men's feelings of modesty and embarrassment about women's financial contributions or different understandings of what constitutes the family's financial burdens (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a). Women may consider personal expenses as part of family obligations that the husband should cover, whereas men might view these as separate personal costs (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a).

Regarding the financial relationship between working women and their husbands, the study indicated that a woman's job and salary could negatively impact the marital relationship. Approximately 48% of men and 33% of women believe that a woman's work and salary negatively affect their marital life. Conversely, 43% of women and about 30% of men believe their relationship remains unaffected by the woman's work and salary. Overall, 53% believe that women's work negatively impacts marital harmony, while 49% see no effect (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a).

Al-Otaibi's study (1993/1414 AH), which examined the family and social implications of educated married women working outside the home, investigated the relationship between a wife's participation in family decisions and various factors, including her employment status, job level, family status, and her husband's socioeconomic level (Al-Otaibi, 1993; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a). It found no significant impact of these variables on the wife's involvement in family decisions. Based on a sample of 653 educated working and non-working mothers, the study revealed no correlation between the wife's education level and her participation in decisions related to the education, upbringing, and naming of children (Al-Otaibi, 1993; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a). Regarding the relationship between a wife's habitual decision-making at work and her participation in family decisions, the study found that the nature of the wife's work influences the husband's likelihood of consulting her and approving of her working outside the home (Al-Otaibi, 1993; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a). However, there was no relationship between the nature of the wife's work and her reaction if her husband does not seek her opinion. The study also highlighted that a wife's employment status enhances understanding between spouses and motivates her to work to improve the family's standard of living. However, there was no statistically significant relationship between the wife's employment status and the husband asking her to give her

opinion (Al-Otaibi, 1993; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a). The study further revealed that the duration of marriage did not significantly affect the joint decision-making process, as most decisions were made together regardless of the number of years married. There was, however, a statistically significant relationship between the number of children a spouses had and the husband's likelihood of seeking his wife's consent when purchasing certain commodities (Al-Otaibi, 1993; Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a).

In a study titled "Family Stability and its Relationship with Decision-Making Methods in Saudi Families", AbdulJalil and Al-Zahrani (2011) aimed to uncover the relationship between family stability and the degree of a wife's participation in family decision-making. Using a descriptive-analytical method, the research was conducted on a sample of 258 heads of household, evenly split between working and non-working women. The study examined participation in decision-making across five areas: economic matters, social gatherings, hiring domestic workers, family visits, and overall family management where the results showed no statistically significant differences in the degree of a wife's participation in family decisions across these different areas, except for decisions related to hiring domestic workers (AbdulJalil and Al-Zahrani, 2011). In this area, there were statistically significant differences at the 0.001 level, favoring the working women group. This indicates that working wives have a greater influence in participating in decisions to hire domestic workers, such as drivers and maids (AbdulJalil and Al-Zahrani, 2011)

The findings of the finding of the study of AbdulJalil and Al-Zahrani (2011) align with previous research (Estero, 1981), indicating that crucial decisions within households are often not made solely by the female head of the household. However, there is a tendency for women to monopolize decisions related to food choices and household purchases. Specifically, the breakdown of the wife's contribution to household consumption decisions showed that 25.1% were made by the wife alone, 35% with the husband's participation, and 24.8% by the husband alone. Furthermore, the study revealed a correlation between family stability and the level of a wife's involvement in family decision-making (0.01). Interestingly, no significant differences were found in the dimensions of family stability between female workers and non-workers. However, there were statistically significant differences noted between socio-economic variables of families and the extent of a wife's participation in decision-making and family stability at a significant level (0.001). In light of these findings, the study suggests the importance of educating spouses on the significance of participating in family decisions through various media channels and institutions dedicated to family matters. Additionally, it underscores the necessity of developing plans and programs aimed at enhancing the overall well-being of families (AbdulJalil and Al-Zahrani 2011).

In a comparative study conducted by Al-Suwayan (2000 /1421 AH) and titled "The Influence of Wife's Employment on Family Decision-Making", in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, involving 385 working and non-working wives across various educational backgrounds, it was found that the wife's age significantly influenced her participation in decision-making (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a).

Specifically, as the wife's age increased, her involvement in decision-making also increased. This trend was attributed to the accumulated experience and maturity that typically accompany aging (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a).

Ben Mimoune and Kabbani's (2023) examination of women's employment in the GCC region, a topic explored within the segment on women's education and labor force engagement, suggests that despite the significant economic contributions made by women in these countries, there hasn't been a substantial deviation from traditional gender roles. Although there has been some relaxation of societal norms and barriers to women's employment, traditional gender roles persist. Working women are expected to manage their work according to the needs of the family (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani 2023). Even high-income women generally choose to focus on providing for their families and taking care of their children, despite having access to paid domestic helpers (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani 2023). This was underscored in interviews with Qatari female college students, who indicated that upon marriage, their primary focus shifts to family and childcare, regardless of their educational and career objectives (Ben Mimoune and Kabbani 2023).

Hence, the prevailing consensus in the literature reviewed indicates that despite the impact of education and employment on the status of women, traditional spousal roles have remained largely unchanged. Kaltham Al-Ghanim (2013) highlights that the persistence of gender-based responsibilities and power dynamics within the extended family has mitigated the advancements brought about by education and employment for women (Al-Ghanim, 2013). A 2012 study in Qatar, involving interviews with five spouses, revealed that wives unanimously perceived that power predominantly rests with the husband in the household. However, they acknowledged their increased involvement in decision-making regarding household matters, children's education, outings, and social activities (Al-Ghanim, 2013).

### 3. Summary

The analysis presented in this section demonstrates an evolution and transformation in the social and economic roles of spouses, propelled by internal reforms, external influences, and the aspirations of the region's youth, such as modernization, heightened education, women's increased participation in the labor force, and globalization. However, despite these changes, there hasn't been a fundamental shift in the traditional stereotypical roles of spouses. Responsibilities related to household chores, caregiving, and decision-making in family matters still predominantly align with stereotypical norms.

# CHAPTER THREE: THE CURRENT LEGISLATIVE AND SERVICE FRAMEWORK OF THE GCC COUNTRIES

## 1. Introduction

This chapter examines the current policy framework in the GCC countries, including legislation and service interventions that reinforce stereotypical roles of spouses. It aims to identify both the reforms that have been implemented and the gaps that remain for policymakers to address, in order to support families by challenging these stereotypes that negatively impact family cohesion, stability, and well-being.

## 2. Policy and Legal Framework Reforms

The impact of globalization, discussed earlier in this study, has influenced the social and economic roles of spouses in the GCC countries and extended to governance, particularly regarding legal frameworks and public policies (Elias, 2013). The GCC countries have signed several international conventions affecting the status of women in the family and society, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) issued in 1979, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the human rights convention (Elias, 2013). These agreements have become significant sources of legislation and key references for the legal framework of social policy in these countries (Elias, 2013). By virtue of their membership in the United Nations and the League of Arab States, the GCC countries have ratified several international instruments and conventions related to social policy, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the Arab Charter on Human Rights (2004), CEDAW, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). All GCC states have ratified these conventions, highlighting their commitment to upholding these international standards (Elias, 2013).

Examining the constitutional provisions that outline the fundamental rules of social policy in the GCC countries, specifically under the headings of “social pillars” or “basic components” of society, reveals a foundation based on several key principles (Elias, 2013). These include Article 14 of the UAE Constitution, Article 4 of the Bahrain Constitution, Article 11 of the Basic Law in Saudi Arabia, Article 12 of the Basic Law of Oman, Article 18 of the Basic Law of Qatar, and Articles 7 and 8 of the Kuwait Constitution (Elias, 2013). These provisions collectively define essential principles of social relations, prominently featuring “equality”, which is referenced in the constitutions of all six countries, and “justice”, which is included in the constitutions of five countries, notably the Bahraini constitution uses the term “social justice” instead of “justice” (Elias, 2013).

The constitutions of the six GCC countries prioritize the family, emphasizing its central role in the state as the fundamental unit of society. The family is described

as the “basis of society” in the constitutions of the United Arab Emirates (Article 15), Bahrain (Article 5(a)), Oman (Article 12.3), Qatar (Article 21), Kuwait (Article 9), and Saudi Arabia (Article 26 of the Basic Law), which refers to it as the “nucleus of society”. Furthermore, these constitutional texts include provisions that protect the family from abuse and safeguard its members from harm. Specific provisions address various family members, including motherhood, childhood, youth, and old age (Elias, 2013).

Examining the legal legislative framework of the GCC countries reveals that it is primarily based on Islamic Sharia, which serves as the foundational reference for all legislation, including those regulating social policy (Elias, 2013). The GCC countries’ ratification of various UN conventions has led to obligations requiring them to align their national legislation and practices with the provisions and content of these international agreements (Elias, 2013). This alignment necessitates amendments to existing national laws or the enactment of new laws that conform to the ratified conventions (Elias, 2013). Internationally approved follow-up mechanisms and procedures oversee and monitor the implementation of these conventions, compelling states to submit periodic reports on their progress (Elias, 2013).

The GCC countries have begun making constitutional amendments related to these conventions, ensuring they comply without contradicting Islamic Sharia (Elias, 2013). For instance, Bahrain has introduced special provisions for women. Article 5(b) of the Bahraini Constitution states that “the State shall ensure the reconciliation of women’s duties towards the family and their work in society, and their equality with men in political, social, cultural, and economic fields of life, without prejudice to the provisions of Islamic Sharia” (Elias, 2013).

Legislation on women’s work is deeply connected to changing stereotypes about the roles of spouses. Working married women continue to bear the traditional burden of managing household affairs and caring for family members. This necessitates legislation that supports women in these dual roles and simultaneously encourages a shift in the stereotypical view of the father’s role in childcare. For example, enacting paternity leave policies can support fathers in fulfilling their caregiving duties. Below, we examine the legislation adopted by GCC countries to address these issues.

### 3. Spousal Role Stereotypes and Legislation

The implementation of international conventions ratified by states requires more than just legislative measures to align national laws with these conventions. It also necessitates the development and execution of social policies, as well as the adoption of plans and programs to prepare society to accept these conventions’ provisions. This includes changing stereotypes that influence the social roles and economic status of certain groups, such as women (Elias, 2013). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) obliges states parties to take appropriate measures to change stereotypes (UN General Assembly, 18 December 1997). It stipulates the following:

### **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

1. Modify social and cultural patterns of behavior of men and women with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and other practices based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either sex or on stereotyped roles for men and women.
2. Ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of motherhood as a social function and the recognition of the joint responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, the best interests of the child being paramount in all cases.

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2. Ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of motherhood as a social function and the recognition of the joint responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, the best interests of the child being paramount in all cases. (UN General Assembly, 18 December 1997:8).

In the previous chapter, we explored relevant theories that highlighted the detrimental impact of gender role stereotypes and norms on family and marital life, particularly for married working women. The literature explored in the previous parts of this study consistently underscores the necessity of developing policies that address the multiple roles imposed on working women based on stereotypical norms. These policies should assist families in balancing work and family responsibilities. Research has confirmed that the simultaneous demands of household chores, childcare, and professional duties result in physical and mental exhaustion for married working women (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-b). This exhaustion can lead to various health issues, both physical and psychological, which strain marital relationships and reduce marital satisfaction (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-b). The burden of these multiple tasks, coupled with the lack of equitable sharing with a partner, leaves little time for personal hobbies, leisure activities, or self-care. Additionally, it diminishes the quality time a working mother can spend with her children, causing feelings of guilt and concerns about proper child-rearing. Moreover, the situation adversely affects the working wife's professional life. The lack of shared caregiving responsibilities may force women to leave their jobs, making re-entry into the workforce challenging at a later stage. To address these issues, it is crucial to support married working women by adopting policies and interventions that challenge and change stereotypical gender role norms. This is especially important for norms that position women as the primary and absolute caregivers and homemakers.

### 3.1. Strategic Plans and Policies

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have implemented several policy and strategic plan reforms to support families amidst ongoing changes. For instance, the UAE initiated significant legal reforms in 2019 and 2020 to enhance women's economic participation, aligning with broader national policy commitments to gender balance (World Bank, 2022). The UAE's reform efforts demonstrate that substantial progress toward gender equality can be achieved swiftly with strong leadership commitment (World Bank, 2022). Notably, 56% of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) graduates in the UAE are women (World Bank, 2022). This reflects the UAE's dedication to combating negative stereotypes that traditionally view STEM fields as male-dominated, stemming from the assumption that males are inherently more rational and intelligent than females. Similarly, Kuwait has tackled discriminatory stereotypes through its development policies aimed at bridging the gender gap across economic, social, educational, and political spheres (UN CEDAW Committee, December 29, 2021). One notable initiative is the project "Supporting the State of Kuwait in Implementing the Fifth Goal on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality" (UN CEDAW Committee, December 29, 2021). This program, which involves cooperation between various government agencies, including the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), aims to empower ten government agencies with "gender-responsive budgeting" (UN CEDAW Committee, December 29, 2021). Qatar has taken several measures to combat stereotypes of women. The Family Strategy, part of the First National Strategy (2011-2016), included a program to change stereotypes, and the Second National Development Strategy (2017-2022) included a women's empowerment and education project under the outcome "A Strong, Cohesive, and Empowered Qatari Family" (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, February 16, 2018). It aimed to effectively overcome gender equality challenges, patriarchal attitudes, and entrenched discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, February 16, 2018). This is in addition to achieving women's balance between their family roles and professional duties to avoid transmitting stereotypes about the roles of women and men (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, February 16, 2018).

### 3.2. Amendments to Labor and Family Legislation

Several Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have initiated legal reforms to advance women's rights and foster their engagement in the workforce while recognizing their familial responsibilities (Dabbagh, 2012). For instance, Saudi Arabia has implemented various legal reforms aimed at enhancing women's participation in the labor market. An amendment to Article 155 prohibits the termination or issuance of warnings for dismissal during pregnancy or maternity leave, including any illness duration stemming from these conditions (UN CEDAW Committee, March 13, 2023). Additionally, under the Saudi Labor Law, female employees or

workers are entitled to up to ten weeks of paid leave, which they can allocate as per their discretion (Saudi Arabia, 22/8/1426 AH). In Oman, significant legal reforms were initiated through royal decrees and amendments to the Basic Law of the State, substantially augmenting women's rights to a level more equitable with men. These reforms encompassed various domains such as social security, social insurance, labor, civil services, pensions, and personal status (Al Dabbagh, 2012). Similarly, the United Arab Emirates introduced revisions to maternity leave laws through the issuance of Decree No. 14 of 2017, applicable to female employees in both federal and local government entities in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Under these provisions, working women are entitled to 90 days of paid maternity leave commencing from the date of childbirth, with the option to initiate this leave up to 30 days before the anticipated delivery date, provided it is taken continuously. Moreover, the law permits the combination of maternity leave with periodic leave and unpaid leave, totaling a maximum of 120 days from the onset of maternity leave. Furthermore, provisions were introduced to extend breastfeeding breaks to two hours instead of one for working mothers for up to one year. Additionally, part-time and remote work arrangements were introduced for women to facilitate the balancing of family and professional responsibilities, aiming to augment women's participation in the labor force (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, December 11, 2020).

Under the Qatari Labor Law, female employees are entitled to two months of fully paid maternity leave, separate from other types of leave, upon presenting a medical certificate or the child's birth certificate. In cases of multiple births, such as twins, the maternity leave extends to three months (Al-Mezan, 2016). Furthermore, in September 2021, the Qatari Council of Ministers ratified Decision No. 13 of 2021, endorsing the implementation of a part-time system in governmental bodies. This initiative aligns with Qatar's commitment to fostering strong and supportive family structures while enhancing workforce efficiency (Al-Mezan, October 18, 2021). The part-time system aims to offer Qatari employees, particularly women, greater flexibility to balance familial responsibilities with work obligations. This decision acknowledges the importance of accommodating employees' needs, especially regarding family circumstances (Al-Mezan, October 18, 2021).

Kuwait introduced laws protecting working women. According to Article 24 of Kuwait's Labor Law No. 6 of 2010, pregnant employees are entitled to seventy days of paid leave specifically for childbirth, which does not deplete their other leave entitlements. Employers are prohibited from terminating an employee's service during this period or due to any medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth, verified by a medical certificate (Kuwait Labor Law No. 6, 2010). However, there are notable gaps in Kuwait's legislation due to its non-ratification of Conventions No. 103 and 183 concerning maternity protection (United Nations Development Program, undated). These conventions outline measures to safeguard pregnant or nursing women from engaging in work detrimental to their health and that of their child (United Nations Development Program, undated). They also guarantee a minimum maternity leave of 14 weeks, including six weeks postpartum, during which women are entitled to receive financial benefits through compulsory social insurance or

public funds, with the employer not solely responsible for payment (United Nations Development Program, undated). Kuwait's maternity leave duration falls short by four weeks compared to the stipulations of Convention No. 183 on Maternity Protection (United Nations Development Program, undated). Additionally, the legislation does not specify that the employee can utilize part of the leave after childbirth, as mandated by Convention No. 183 (United Nations Development Program, undated). The Convention emphasizes that the postpartum leave should not be less than six weeks, considering the mother's health and circumstances, as she may require additional rest and care for herself and her child during this period (United Nations Development Program, undated).

There is an additional loophole regarding the allocation of the worker's wages during the leave period, where the burden falls solely on the employer. However, Convention No. 183 on Maternity Protection specifies in Article 6 (8) that the employer should not bear this cost individually. Instead, it stipulates that the cost should be covered through social insurance, public funds, or by other means as determined by national legislation and practices. Moreover, Article 25 of Labor Law No. 6 of 2010 mandates two hours of breastfeeding time for working women and requires employers to establish daycare for children under the age of 4 in workplaces with more than 50 female workers or over 200 workers, aligning with the provisions of Article 10 of Convention 183 and Recommendation 191 (United Nations Development Program, undated; Kuwait Labor Law No. 6, 2010).

The Kingdom of Bahrain took significant strides in labor legislation by revising the National Labor Law on the Employment of Women (No. 23 of 1976) through an amended labor law in 2012 (Abdulrahman Al-Mualla, 2016). This update aimed to align with international labor standards and accommodate evolving dynamics in the labor market (Abdulrahman Al-Mualla, 2016). Notably, the 2012 Labor Law extended greater rights to working women, particularly in maternity leave entitlements (Abdulrahman Al-Mualla, 2016). Compared to the previous 1976 Labor Law, the amended law increased paid maternity leave from 45 days to 60 days, with an additional 15 days of unpaid leave, demonstrating a marked enhancement in support for working mothers (Abdulrahman Al-Mualla, 2016). Under the new Labor Law, working women are entitled to two care periods totaling at least two hours each until their child reaches six months of age, and two care periods of at least thirty minutes each until the child turns one year old, with the option to combine these periods (Abdulrahman Al-Mualla, 2016). In comparison, women employed under the previous labor law were granted two care periods for two years from childbirth, whereas the amended law of 2012 extends this right until the child turns one year old (Abdulrahman Al-Mualla, 2016). Furthermore, the 2012 amendment ensures that women cannot be dismissed due to marriage, pregnancy, or childbirth leave, eliminating the provision allowing the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs to authorize occupation changes for married workers as stipulated in the 1976 law (Abdulrahman Al-Mualla, 2016). In an effort to incentivize Bahraini women to join the workforce, the legislature introduced new rights not present in the previous law (1976), including a ban on employment for forty days following childbirth and the option for unpaid leave for up to six months, three times during her employment, to care for a child under six years of

age (Abdulrahman Al-Mualla, 2016). The amended Labor Law of 2012 broadened the protection afforded to working women by increasing the penalty for violating the guarantees provided to them in the section on women's employment. Previously, the fine ranged from 50 dinars to 200 dinars, but it was revised so that the fine now ranges from 200 dinars to 500 dinars (Abdul Rahman Al-Mualla, 2016).

In 2023, the Sultanate of Oman enacted comprehensive changes to its labor law through Royal Decree No. 53 of 2023 (Oman, 2023). These reforms included extended leave provisions for parents, caregivers, and patients. Under the new regulations, Omani working mothers are entitled to 98 days of paid maternity leave, covering both pre- and post-natal periods, and they can also take up to one year of unpaid leave for childcare (Oman, 2023). Additionally, upon returning to work, they have the right to one hour of childcare every day (Oman, 2023).

The legislative reforms implemented by the GCC countries have primarily centered around enhancing maternity leave, establishing nurseries and daycare facilities, and introducing flexible work arrangements. While these reforms are commendable and greatly support families with dual-working parents, there's another aspect of policy that has been somewhat overlooked: paternity leave. In the following section, we will delve into this topic and explore its significance.

### **3.3. Sharing Care Responsibilities: Paternity Leave in the GCC**

Paternity leave signifies the period during which a father takes time off from work following the birth or adoption of a child (Addati, et al., 2022; Lam, 2010; Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978). Research and literature on policies and interventions aimed at reshaping traditional norms and stereotypes surrounding the roles of spouses within families have consistently highlighted the significance of legislation providing fathers with paternity leave to engage in childcare (Addati, et al., 2022; Lamb, 2010). Through such legislation, the law acknowledges and underscores the influential and valuable role that fathers play in parenting (Addati, et al., 2022; Lamb, 2010). By doing so, legislators and policymakers convey a clear message that the responsibilities of raising children are not solely the mother's duty but a shared obligation of both parents (Addati, et al., 2022; Lamb, 2010).

As previously discussed, traditional social norms have often depicted mothers, and women in general, as the primary caregivers for their children and families, while men are typically viewed as the providers (Addati, et al., 2022; Lamb, 2010). The introduction of paternity leave challenges this conventional perspective, asserting legally and institutionally that fathers also hold a crucial role in the early stages of their child's life (Addati, et al., 2022; Lamb, 2010). Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impacts of shared parenthood on child development (Addati, et al., 2022; Lamb, 2010).

By facilitating parental involvement from the earliest days, children can experience emotional, social, and cognitive benefits (Addati, et al., 2022; Lamb, 2010; Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978). Fathers play a crucial role in their children's development by engaging in various activities that support their growth from birth through their

formative years such as talking to the child, singing songs, and soothing them to provide comfort and reassurance (Addati, et al., 2022; Lamb, 2010; Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978). Fathers also contribute by assisting in meal preparation, creating enriching environments through storytelling, and actively participating in daily routines such as feeding, watching educational programs, waking up with them, and attending to their hygiene needs (Addati, et al., 2022; Lamb, 2010; Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978). However, these contributions by fathers can only be fully realized by challenging negative traditional stereotypes that exclusively assign these responsibilities to mothers (Addati, et al., 2022; Lamb, 2010; Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978). The positive effects of paternity leave extend beyond sharing caregiving responsibilities with mothers; they also have beneficial economic impacts on family well-being; as through providing fathers with the opportunity to take time off and actively engage in early child-rearing, mothers may have the option to return to work earlier if they choose to do so, which in turn can help reduce occupational gender gaps and promote gender equality in the workplace (Addati, et al., 2022; Lamb, 2010; Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1978).

When examining the legal framework concerning paternity leave in GCC countries, a notable legislative gap emerges, suggesting the need for further reforms to ensure family stability, cohesion, and the well-being of its members. Unlike maternity leave, provisions and legislation regarding paternity leave are relatively limited in GCC countries. For instance, Kuwait’s labor laws do not specify paternity leave, and Bahrain previously lacked a specific provision for it (Kuwait Labor Law No. 6, 2010). Private sector employees in Bahrain could utilize sick leave for this purpose. However, in 2012, Bahrain addressed this issue by granting workers the right to one day off with full pay upon the birth of their child (Bahrain Labor Law No. 36 of 2012).

Previously, Oman’s labor law did not stipulate any paternity leave for fathers upon the birth of a child. However, in 2023, Oman implemented significant changes to its labor legislation. Through Royal Decree No. 53 of 2023, extended leave entitlements were introduced for fathers, caregivers, and patients, along with the introduction of part-time work arrangements. As part of these reforms, fathers are now entitled to a seven-day paternity leave (Sultanah Oman, 2023). In contrast, Qatar’s labor laws do not explicitly provide for paternity leave provisions.

1	State of Kuwait	No specific paternity leave in Kuwaiti labor laws
2	State of Qatar	No specific paternity leave in Qatar’s labor laws
3	Kingdom of Bahrain	One day
4	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	3 days
5	United Arab Emirates	5 days
6	Sultanate of Oman	7 days

**Figure 2: Paternity Leave in GCC countries**

Some organizations provide paid paternity leave to their male employees upon the birth of their child. For instance, the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and

Community Development extended its paid paternity leave to five (5) working days in July 2017 (Qatar Foundation, 2022).

In Saudi Arabia, paternity leave was introduced in 2019, initially granting private sector employees one day of paid leave. Subsequent legislative reforms in 2022, through Royal Decree No. M/46 dated 5/6/1436 AH, amended the Labor Law to provide fathers with a fully paid paternity leave of three days, referred to as “paternity leave for the father” or “baby leave”. These amendments apply to workers in both the public and private sectors (Saudi Arabia, 22/8/1426 AH). Similarly, the United Arab Emirates enacted legal reforms in 2022, it issued the “Federal Law by Decree No. (49) of 2022 on Human Resources in the Federal Government”, which was activated and implemented in January 2023. This law gave the father parental leave for a period of 5 days, as Article (20) stipulates the following “The Employee shall be entitled to parental leave with a gross salary for a period of (5) five working days for the Employee (whether the father or the mother) who has a newborn to take care of his child, who is entitled thereto continuously or intermittently within (6) six months as of the date of the childbirth” (Federal Authority for Government Human Resources, 2022, p. 18; United Arab Emirates, 2023; World Bank, 2022) – See Figure 2

While these reforms and the extension of paternity leave in GCC countries are positive steps, they still fall short of fulfilling the fundamental purpose of paternity leave, which is to promote shared parental responsibility. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has not established a specific standard for the number of days of paternity leave, leaving it to the discretion of individual countries based on their national context, however, the Resolution on Gender Equality adopted by the International Labor Conference in 2009 recognizes that work-family reconciliation measures concern both men and women and that childcare is a shared responsibility that must be undertaken by both parents (Addati, et al., 2022). In this context, paternity leave legislation acknowledges the critical role that both parents play in raising children and challenges the stereotype of the mother as the primary caregiver (Addati, et al., 2022). Paternity leave encourages fathers to be actively involved from the earliest days of a child’s life, fostering a more equitable distribution of childcare responsibilities (Addati, et al., 2022). Below, we examine the impact of legislation and practices in GCC countries concerning paternity leave.

## 4. Curriculum Revision

According to the literature, school curricula are considered one of the most significant means of shaping societal mindset and awareness, despite the influence of other educational tools like social media, television, and newspapers (Naima Al-Rashidi, 2018). Numerous studies and research have highlighted the role of educational books in embedding stereotypes in individuals’ consciousness (Naima Al-Rashidi, 2018). These books contribute to the reinforcement and perpetuation of traditional societal standards that negatively impact the roles of spouses within the family and limit women’s contributions to society and the economy (Naima Al-Rashidi, 2018).

GCC countries have undertaken several initiatives to change gender stereotypes in school curricula. For instance, Saudi Arabia is conducting an ongoing review of school curricula to ensure they align with national and international human rights standards and do not contain any form of discrimination, including against women (UN CEDAW Committee, March 13, 2023). This review led to 185 deletions, 171 replacements, and 77 amendments in the content of school curricula at all educational levels, according to the students' age and maturity levels (UN CEDAW Committee, March 13, 2023). These changes were implemented during the period when Saudi Arabia was preparing its periodic report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (UN CEDAW Committee, March 13, 2023). The review aimed to uphold the values of positive coexistence, ensuring that no discriminatory content, including discrimination against women, is perpetuated (UN CEDAW Committee, March 13, 2023).

The United Arab Emirates has placed significant emphasis on school curricula due to their influential role in shaping perceptions and changing stereotypes about women's roles in society. It ensured the harmonization of materials and study plans across both male and female schools, integrating content with three key components: Cognitive, Values, and Skills (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. December 11, 2020). It also aimed for balance in providing examples and testimonies that represent both genders without discrimination, and in selecting drawings and pictures that depict both females and males equally (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. December 11, 2020). Additionally, the UAE ensured balance in the choice of texts, articles, and knowledge content that address scientific and humanitarian issues applicable to both genders, and selected writers and authors based on the quality of their work, irrespective of gender (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. December 11, 2020).

The State of Qatar has implemented numerous measures to challenge stereotypical perceptions of spousal roles. These efforts are grounded in the permanent constitution, which emphasizes equality for all. The First National Strategy (2011-2016) highlighted five sectoral policies under the pillar of sound social development integration, including family cohesion and women's empowerment, social protection, security and public safety, and sports and culture. This strategy also promoted programs aimed at "increasing the number of women

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(c) The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programs and the adaptation of teaching methods;

in leadership and decision-making positions while reducing stereotypical roles and responsibilities for women” (General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2011). The Second National Development Strategy (2018-2022) emphasized women’s empowerment and education, aiming to achieve “strong, cohesive, and empowered Qatari families” (Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, 2018). Within this context, it sought to address negative stereotypes pertaining to roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society in addition to supporting working women to achieve family-work balance and shift perceptions about women’s roles (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018).

However, despite efforts to transform gender images and stereotypes and redefine the roles of spouses in Gulf countries, school curricula remain saturated with stereotypes (see - Ghalib, 2017). This necessitates a thorough review and reconsideration of their content, as altering these curricula is crucial for fostering family development and stability (Ghalib, 2017).

**Programs and interventions aimed at changing negative stereotypes of spouses cover several areas, including:**

- Educating and raising awareness
- Capacity building
- Group discussions
- Therapeutic interventions
- Support groups
- Role-playing exercises
- Showcasing positive role models to inspire participants
- Highlighting the benefits
- Strengthening the concepts and values of equity and equality

## 5. Media and Advertising

The literature highlights the significant influence of media and advertising in shaping societal knowledge, opinions, and perceptions, including those regarding the roles of spouses in the family (Khalil & Dhanesh, 2020). Media content and messages often perpetuate and popularize negative images and stereotypes of spouses (Khalil & Dhanesh, 2020). However, the media also has the potential to be a powerful tool for change, helping to shift societal perceptions and beliefs about the stereotypical norms of spousal roles (Khalil & Dhanesh, 2020). Some Gulf countries have been interested in conducting interventions that address this aspect. For instance, the United Arab Emirates has actively leveraged the media to alter stereotypes about women’s roles in society (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, December 11, 2020). This has been achieved by broadcasting programs and publishing content that showcases leading Emirati women across various sectors in print, audio, and visual media (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, December

11, 2020). Additionally, Emirati women are given prominent visibility in media and on social networking sites (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, December 11, 2020). Many women hold influential positions within the country's media sector and are active members of media clubs and associations that contribute to policymaking (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, December 11, 2020).

The UAE has also challenged stereotypes by supporting Emirati women in non-traditional leadership roles (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, December 11, 2020). Examples include appointments such as Minister of State for International Cooperation, Minister of State for Food and Water Security, Minister of State for Advanced Technology, Minister of State for Happiness and Wellbeing, Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Minister of Culture and Knowledge Development, Minister of Community Development, and Minister of State for Public Education (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, December 11, 2020).

The State of Qatar has actively encouraged women's involvement in the media to combat stereotypical images of women in society (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018). The Qatar Media Corporation has successfully attracted many women to work in radio and television, and it has focused on presenting programs related to various women's topics (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018). These include sports, women's work, municipal elections, women's retirement, women in liberal professions, women in the media, and married life (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018). Additionally, the corporation presents reports highlighting the achievements of Qatari women, particularly on International Women's Day (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018).

However, gaps remain in addressing gender stereotypes in advertising, necessitating further efforts. A 2020 study by researchers Ali Khalil and Janja Dhanesh on gender role stereotypes in television advertising in the Middle East, particularly the GCC region, analyzed 111 distinct advertisements aired over a week by a major TV channel in the region (Khalil & Dhanesh, 2020). The study found that while some advertisements attempted to challenge stereotypes by depicting women in non-traditional roles, such as in professional settings rather than at home, many still reinforced traditional gender roles through the background or products featured (Khalil & Dhanesh, 2020). Of the 90 ads with visible central characters, 67 featured women, with most (38) portrayed at home and only a few (8) in professional settings (Khalil and Dhanesh, 2020). This suggests that changing stereotypes in advertising and media in the GCC region may require more stringent regulations and policy reforms.

## 6. Programs and Services

In general, programs and interventions aimed at changing negative stereotypes of spouses focus on promoting healthy relationship dynamics by challenging and

reshaping norms deeply embedded in societal consciousness (Flood and Pease, 2006; Knudson-Martin and Mahoney, 2005; Davis and Greenstein, 2009; Wood and Eagly, 2012). These interventions address unconscious biases and misconceptions, helping individuals recognize how traditional gender roles limit their ability to build fulfilling marital relationships (Flood and Pease, 2006; Knudson-Martin and Mahoney, 2005; Davis and Greenstein, 2009; Wood and Eagly, 2012). Typically, such programs include various elements like education, capacity building, role-playing, advocacy, awareness-raising, group discussions, providing positive role models, therapeutic interventions, promoting shared responsibilities, and encouraging reflection on the importance of changing negative stereotypes (Flood and Pease, 2006; Knudson-Martin and Mahoney, 2005; Davis and Greenstein, 2009; Wood and Eagly, 2012). According to Flood and Pease (2006), interventions with educational and informational activities can change attitudes related to stereotypical gender norms by incorporating interactive discussions and critical reflections on gender relations. For instance, domestic violence intervention programs often include educational components that discuss the historical context and societal implications of gender roles (Flood and Pease, 2006).

By understanding the origins and effects of these stereotypes, individuals can appreciate the importance of challenging and changing them (Flood and Pease, 2006). These programs include skill-building components that equip spouses with tools and strategies for better communication, equitable negotiation of responsibilities, and effective conflict management (Flood and Pease, 2006). Activities such as role-playing exercises enable participants to step into their partner's shoes, experiencing firsthand the constraints and pressures of stereotypical roles, which fosters empathy and understanding (Flood and Pease, 2006).

Role-playing, grounded in Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, allows participants to model atypical behaviors and gain their partner's perspective. The theory posits that behavior is learned from the environment through observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 1977). These activities help participants acquire skills and concepts that enable spouses to negotiate fairly and resolve conflicts effectively, overcoming traditional gender role expectations (Gottman and Silver, 1999; Bandura, 1977).

The literature suggests that these interventions often emphasize the importance of fairness and equality in relationships, which can lead to greater satisfaction and happiness for both partners (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney, 2005; Davis and Greenstein, 2009). Studies, such as those by Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (2005), indicate that egalitarian relationships tend to enhance relationship satisfaction. This increased satisfaction occurs when marital roles are shared or divided based on personal strengths and preferences rather than societal expectations (Knudson-Martin and Mahoney, 2005; Davis and Greenstein, 2009).

These programs also include activities that provide positive role models and inspiring examples, showcasing spouses who have moved away from traditional roles to achieve balanced and happy relationships (Wood and Eagly, 2012). These real-life examples help participants see how they can shift from stereotypical roles to

more egalitarian partnerships (Wood and Eagly, 2012). Additionally, these programs offer a platform for group discussions, allowing participants to engage in open conversations with peers (McLeod, 2007). This helps them identify and challenge their biases, share experiences, concerns, and solutions, and understand the personal, relational, and societal benefits of rejecting negative gender stereotypes (McLeod, 2007). For instance, group discussions might highlight benefits such as improved relationship satisfaction, better mental health, and enhanced well-being of children (McLeod, 2007).

Moreover, programs with therapeutic interventions play a crucial role in changing harmful norms and stereotypes. Through therapy sessions, counseling, and advising, spouses are made aware of how gender role stereotypes can lead to marital distress (Doherty, 2002). By adopting a multifaceted approach, these intervention programs can effectively challenge and change negative stereotypes about spouses. The ultimate goal of these programs is not only to promote gender equality but also to help spouses achieve satisfying and happy relationships (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2005; Davis & Greenstein, 2009; McLeod, 2007; Doherty, 2002).

It is worth noting that these interventions or programs may not be exclusively titled “changing negative stereotypes of spouses”, but their components and elements are often integrated into other related interventions. These can include programs and services aimed at protecting the family from domestic violence or initiatives designed to strengthen marital or family relationships. The GCC countries have implemented several such programs aimed at bolstering family, marital, and parental relationships, which we will review in the next section.

### **6.1. Parenting Programs**

Parenting has a significant impact on establishing or changing stereotypical role norms. Research shows that stereotypes are formed in children’s minds from an early age through various influences such as interactions, expectations, dress, toys, games, stories, books, and television (Pomerleau, et al., 1990; LoBue & DeLoache, 2011). From the start, boys and girls are often placed into “blue” or “pink” categories, which come with associated behaviors and expectations (Pomerleau, et al., 1990; LoBue & DeLoache, 2011). The Doha International Family Institute (2022) published a study titled “Parenting Programs in the Arab Region”, which aimed to provide an overview of parenting programs across the Arab world, including the GCC region. The study sought to identify the current status of these programs in terms of types, objectives, patterns, components, and impact, to understand the challenges and gaps, and to offer recommendations to help policymakers enhance and strengthen them (Doha International Family Institute, 2022). Parenting programs are educational initiatives or services designed to support positive parenting interactions, encompassing behaviors, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and practices (Doha International Family Institute, 2022). These programs assist parents and caregivers in understanding effective parenting styles and the active role parents play in raising their children (Doha International Family Institute, 2022).

One of the most notable gaps in parenting programs is the limited participation of fathers. The DIFI (2022) study highlighted that the majority of participants in these programs are women. Consequently, the study recommended the inclusion of fathers in parenting programs across Arab countries, including Qatar and other Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Involving fathers is crucial as it has a positive impact on the well-being and development of children.

The DIFI's study (2022) employed a qualitative analysis methodology, ensuring reliability through multiple approaches, including a literature review of relevant reports and studies. An institutional survey of parenting programs across the Arab region was also conducted. The study identified one hundred and eight (108) parenting programs in the Arab region, with thirty-two (32) implemented in the GCC countries. Specifically, seven (7) programs were in Qatar, three (3) in Kuwait, nine (9) in Saudi Arabia, eight (8) in the United Arab Emirates, three (3) in Bahrain, and two (2) in the Sultanate of Oman (Doha International Family Institute, 2022).

These programs aimed to achieve various objectives, including resolving family conflicts, protecting children's rights, and caring for children (Doha International Family Institute, 2022). They also addressed issues related to divorce, dialogue skills, and parenting techniques both within the family and during periods of conflict and divorce (Doha International Family Institute, 2022). DIFI's study (2022) indicates that these programs successfully achieved several goals, which include developing the intellectual, emotional, and behavioral skills of participants, improving how target groups interact with children, and contributing to enhanced family cohesion and stability (Doha International Family Institute, 2022). However, these programs also face several gaps (Doha International Family Institute, 2022). Notably, they often neglect issues related to youth and adolescents, suffer from weak or vague theoretical frameworks, and lack a focus on marital issues (Doha International Family Institute, 2022). One of the most significant gaps is the limited participation of fathers in these programs. The DIFI study highlighted that the majority of participants in parenting programs are women (Doha International Family Institute, 2022). It recommended increasing the inclusion of fathers in parenting programs across Arab countries, including Qatar and other GCC countries, due to the positive impact on the well-being and development of children (Doha International Family Institute, 2022).

Traditional norms regarding the roles of spouses play a pivotal role in this limited participation. These norms typically designate mothers as the primary caregivers, sidelining fathers from such responsibilities. Therefore, it is essential to incorporate elements that address gender images, norms, and stereotypes within these programs. This approach not only impacts the well-being of children during their upbringing but also influences their future marital lives.

## **6.2. Premarital Education Programs**

Marital education programs play a crucial role in changing perceptions about spousal roles, thereby contributing to marital stability (Doha International Family

Institute, 2020). These educational courses raise awareness among married spouses by promoting concepts that enhance marital relationships, such as mutual respect and communication skills (Doha International Family Institute, 2020). These programs help spouses reinforce their commitment, adopt new behavioral concepts, correct misconceptions, and replace unrealistic expectations with rational ones, thereby strengthening marital bonds (Doha International Family Institute, 2020). By addressing and altering expectations rooted in traditional stereotypes, these programs can prevent marital disruption (Doha International Family Institute, 2020).

DIFI's study (2020) titled "Mapping Marital and Relationship Education Programs: current evidence and future directions", identified twenty-four (24) programs, with a significant concentration in the Gulf region, particularly in Saudi Arabia, which implemented thirteen (13) different programs aimed at increasing awareness of marriage issues. Al-Mawaddah Society, which was among the identified programs, conducted an evaluation of its program's effectiveness in 2010, reporting a dramatic reduction in the divorce rate from 98.3% to 1.7% (Doha International Family Institute, 2020).

In Kuwait, Mawada has launched a national program aimed at training 200 young men and women for marriage (Doha International Family Institute, 2020). This three-month program addresses both the pre-marriage stage and the marriage stage. It features a curriculum-based training that imparts knowledge and skills through workshops, lectures, and counseling sessions (Doha International Family Institute, 2020). The program's goals are to educate and encourage young people to marry, establish stable families, reduce the number of unmarried women in Kuwaiti society, and lower the divorce rate. It employs a comprehensive approach, covering various aspects of marriage, including family conflict and cognitive behavior. The program targets Kuwaiti youth between the ages of 21 and 32 (Doha International Family Institute, 2020).

Meanwhile, in Oman, the Ministry of Social Development re-launched its national program Tamasuk in February 2019, with plans for implementation during 2019-2020 (Doha International Family Institute, 2020).

DIFI's study did not clarify whether Marital Education Programs address and discuss the various dimensions of stereotypical images and norms that shape beliefs about the roles of spouses. These stereotypes influence what each partner expects from their spouse's behavior and role. Therefore, participants in these courses and programs could benefit significantly from materials that focus on stereotypical role norms and their impact on family cohesion and the stability of family relationships.

The program targets both Omani and expatriate married and engaged couples, focusing on marriage counseling, family cohesion, and family protection (Doha International Family Institute, 2020). In Bahrain, the Marriage License Program is a five-day initiative designed to raise awareness among young people about marital relationships. It includes a variety of family, social, and community awareness sessions led by specialized trainers from Bahrain and other Gulf countries (Doha International Family Institute, 2020).

**Premarital Education Programs play a crucial role in reshaping expectations based on stereotypical norms that can destabilize marital life. Through educational tools and targeted interventions, these programs aim to raise awareness among married couples, enhancing their skills to foster positive aspects of their relationships. By promoting mutual respect and effective communication, these programs help reinforce commitment, introduce new behavioral concepts, and correct misconceptions rooted in negative stereotypes about the roles of spouses.**

In the UAE, two programs are available (Doha International Family Institute, 2020). The first is the Premarital Program, a two-day course aimed at increasing awareness of marriage and marital relations through workshops covering topics such as marital happiness, spousal rights and duties, communication, choosing a spouse, marital responsibilities, and conflict management (Doha International Family Institute, 2020). The second is the Marriage License Program, which targets young people preparing for marriage and aims to promote the formation of stable and happy families (Doha International Family Institute, 2020). This program includes workshops that are both preventive and developmental, as well as therapeutic, spanning three to five days. While most workshops are open to both men and women, some are exclusively for women (Doha International Family Institute, 2020).

DIFI's study (2020) analyzed these programs based on eight dimensions: approach, types, design, content, focus, methods, objectives, promotion, and the impact or results achieved. The study concluded that these programs fall into two categories: structured programs based on specific curricula aimed at providing participants with distinct skills, typically delivered in group settings, and awareness programs that aim to educate soon-to-be-married couples through lectures on marital skills (Doha International Family Institute, 2020). DIFI's study (2020) found that fifty percent of the region's marital education programs utilize a cognitive behavioral approach, which encourages concepts that promote positive aspects of marital relationships. These include mutual respect and communication skills, reinforcing commitment, introducing new behavioral concepts, correcting misconceptions, and replacing unrealistic expectations with rational ones to strengthen marital relationships (Doha International Family Institute, 2020).

Regarding the curriculum used, over 96% of the programs implemented in the Arab region have been adapted to the local context (Doha International Family Institute, 2020). DIFI's study (2020) emphasized the importance of using evidence-based and culturally appropriate curricula (Doha International Family Institute, 2020).

It remains unclear whether these programs address and discuss the various dimensions of stereotypical role images and norms that shape beliefs and influence what spouses expect from each other's roles and behaviors (Doha International Family Institute, 2020). Therefore, participants in these courses and programs could benefit from materials that focus on stereotypical role norms and their impact on family cohesion and the stability of relationships, particularly between spouses, as

outlined in the previous section of this study (Doha International Family Institute, 2020).

### **6.3. Programs That Aim to Protect Families from Domestic Violence and Promote Family Cohesion**

The GCC countries have implemented various programs and interventions to combat negative traditional stereotypes about the roles of spouses (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018). For instance, the Wifaq Center of the Qatar Foundation for Social Work offers a program aimed at organizing family responsibilities between husbands and wives (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018). This program raises awareness about the importance of shared

The lack of a rehabilitation program for perpetrators of domestic violence is one of the gaps in interventions that seek to protect families from domestic violence, according to the DIFI study on domestic violence in Qatar, which recommended developing an intervention program targeting perpetrators of domestic violence, by taking advantage of programs that are being implemented internationally and regionally, such as the Duluth Domestic Violence Intervention Program in the United States and the Domestic Violence Intervention Program in the United Kingdom, which use school curricula that include a discussion of the roots of domestic violence and the impact of stereotypes and lack of equality in this regard.

responsibility among family members, promotes and strengthens family relations, and fosters parental reconciliation, all to enhance family cohesion and reduce reliance on domestic workers for child-rearing (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018). Additionally, the center conducts several awareness-raising activities to support the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018). The program aims to equip spouses with skills to balance work and family responsibilities, thereby challenging the stereotypical roles of women and men in the family (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018). It focuses on identifying skills to achieve an optimal work-family balance and positive strategies for managing work-related stress (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018). The Protection and Rehabilitation Center (Aman), is dedicated to protecting families from domestic violence in Qatar, also provides educational services to counter stereotypes about women and eliminate negative perceptions (United Nations Committee on

**Programs aimed at combating domestic violence play a crucial role in reshaping expectations based on stereotypical role expectations through education, group discussion, therapeutic interventions, role-playing exercises, positive role models that inspire participants, highlighting benefits, and reinforcing concepts and values of fairness and equality.**

the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018). These efforts address one of the root causes of domestic violence by challenging harmful stereotypes (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2018).

A study conducted by Doha International Family Institute (forthcoming-a) on domestic violence in Qatar highlighted the absence of a rehabilitation program for perpetrators of domestic violence as a significant gap in efforts to protect families from domestic violence. This study recommended developing an intervention program targeting perpetrators of domestic violence in Qatar, drawing on successful international and regional models such as the Duluth Domestic Violence Intervention Program in the United States and the Domestic Violence Intervention Program in the United Kingdom (Doha International Family Institute, forthcoming-a). These programs utilize school curricula that discuss the roots of domestic violence and the impact of stereotypes and inequality. Establishing a rehabilitation program for perpetrators of domestic violence in Qatar, based on scientific foundations, could explain the role of stereotypical norms in perpetuating domestic violence and demonstrate how changing these norms can help stop violence and protect families (Doha International Family Institute, forthcoming-a).

## 7. Awareness Campaigns

Awareness campaigns play a crucial role in challenging negative stereotypes about the roles of spouses (Rubegni, et al., 2021; Marinova, n.d.). The GCC countries have taken an interest in this interventionist aspect. For instance, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has developed educational programs and initiatives to address and rectify misconceptions that perpetuate discrimination against women (UN CEDAW Committee, March 13, 2023). These efforts involve various entities, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Information, and the Human Rights Commission (UN CEDAW Committee, March 13, 2023). Additionally, the Council of Senior Scholars has actively worked to dispel misconceptions about women through issuing statements, media publications, social media engagement, and hosting programs featuring its members (UN CEDAW Committee, March 13, 2023). The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah, and Guidance has also contributed to raising awareness and advocating for the correction of these misconceptions through mosque preachers and imams. Awareness-raising interventions have included meetings and programs to spread awareness of women's rights by the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (UN CEDAW Committee, March 13, 2023).

In Oman, similar efforts have been made to challenge the stereotypical portrayal of women and rectify cultural misunderstandings (UN CEDAW Committee, August 10, 2022). The Ministry of Education has implemented educational interventions and awareness programs targeting female students, parents, and the broader community (UN CEDAW Committee, August 10, 2022).

## 8. Summary

The GCC countries have undertaken numerous initiatives to change negative stereotypes about spousal roles specifically and gender roles in general. These initiatives include revising school curricula, reforming policies and legislation to help spouses balance work and family responsibilities, implementing various programs, providing services, and conducting community awareness campaigns. Despite these efforts, there remain gaps in legislative and intervention frameworks that need to be addressed to strengthen marital relations and ensure family stability and cohesion. One key area for improvement is the extension of paternity leaves, reviewing school curricula to remove stereotypes, revising media and advertising legislation and regulations, and incorporating the topic of “stereotypical standards for the role of spouses” in programs and interventions aimed at strengthening marital relations and enhancing family cohesion and protection.

The GCC countries have significantly initiated numerous programs to change negative gender stereotypes, primarily about the roles of spouses. Some of these initiatives include changing the content of school syllabi, altering policies and laws that would enable spouses balance between their jobs and family commitments, implementing different schemes, offering services, and running awareness campaigns within communities. Nevertheless, there are still gaps in legislation and intervention frameworks that need to be addressed in order to improve marital relationships as well as ensure family stability and cohesion. One crucial area for improvement is expanding paternity leave rights; revising educational curriculum outlines to eliminate any sort of bias; amending media laws and advertising regulations in addition to including ‘stereotypical roles of of spouses’ as a topic under marital strengthening interventions and family cohesion/protection interventions.

# CHAPTER FOUR: STEREOTYPES, FAMILY FORMATION AND STABILITY

## 1. Introduction

The previous section of this study examined the developments in Gulf Arab states and their impact on family structures and interactions, with a focus on the stereotypical roles of spouses. Public policies in these countries, particularly those related to girls' education and women's participation in the labor force, have significantly influenced family demographics. Changes in marriage, divorce, and fertility rates—key factors in family formation and the social order—have been profound. The literature indicates a dramatic decline in fertility rates in the GCC region in recent decades, alongside a notable increase in divorce rates. This chapter analyzes these changes in the context of the impact of stereotypical notions of the socio-economic roles of spouses in this region.

## 2. Stereotypes, Delayed Marriage and Singlehood

A number of socio-economic determinants have influenced shifts in family structures in the Gulf region, as explained in the previous chapter of this study. Advances in education, particularly women's education, have driven rapid developments, leading to changes in the stereotypical roles of husbands in this region (De Bel-Air, et al. 2018). Many studies on Gulf families have consistently highlighted several emerging issues that have altered family relationships and the pattern of marriage itself, among other effects (De Bel-Air, et al. 2018). Several studies have noted the increasing proportion of delayed or reluctant marriage among young people and women's dissatisfaction with traditional marriage patterns, such as arranged marriages (De Bel-Air, et al. 2018). Statistics show that since the early 2010s, the majority of women in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman have married after the age of 24, with only 5% of girls marrying before the age of 20 (De Bel-Air, et al. 2018).

As the average age of marriage for men has remained relatively stable, the age gap between spouses has begun to decrease (De Bel-Air, et al. 2018). For instance, in the United Arab Emirates, the age gap between husbands and wives averaged 8 years in 1975 but narrowed to nearly one year by the late 2000s, with Emirati women marrying at an average age of 25.5 and men at 26.6 (De Bel-Air, et al. 2018). These changes have impacted fertility rates and divorce rates, with some literature attributing these issues to the evolving roles of spouses.

Some researchers, such as Françoise De Bel-Air et al. (2018), argue that the shift in women's roles due to their participation in the workforce has significantly altered the power dynamics between spouses. This shift has led to grievances among women, stemming from disparities in personality traits and expectations between spouses, especially as women in the region are often more educated than their husbands (De

Bel-Air, et al. 2018). Female singlehood, once relatively marginal in Bahrain and Kuwait and extremely rare in Saudi Arabia, has risen significantly, indicating a potential new social reality (De Bel-Air, et al. 2018). Evidence from several surveys and censuses conducted since the late 20th century shows that around 10% of women aged 45-49 in Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait have never married (De Bel-Air, et al. 2018). The steady increase in the proportion of unmarried women aged 35 and over suggests that this occurrence could spread across the region (De Bel-Air, et al. 2018).

According to a study conducted by the Doha International Family Institute (2019-a) on the state of marriage in the Arab World, the rate of 'delayed marriage' is increasing in the Arabian Gulf region. Data trends from 2010 to 2015 for Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar indicate that marriage among individuals aged 30-39 is on the rise in all three countries. Specifically, the study found that the 35-39 age group is experiencing an increase in marriages. Additionally, the study showed that singlehood rates are rising in these countries (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a). In Bahrain, for example, the rate of single women aged 30-35 increased from 19 per thousand in 1991 to 25.9 per thousand (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a). Similarly, the rate of single men rose from 26.2 per thousand in 1991 to 38.2 per thousand in 2001. The same trend is observed across other age groups, with rates rising steadily from 1991 to 2001 (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a). In Kuwait, the rate of unmarried females in the 30-34 age group increased from 4.9 per thousand in 1970 to 32.7 per thousand in 2005 (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a). In Qatar, the rate of unmarried females in the 30-34 age group was 14.4 per thousand in 1986. The trend from 1986 to 2000 shows a nearly steady increase in the rates for the first five age groups (30-54) (Doha International Family Institute, 2019-a).

A study conducted by researcher Noora Lari in 2022 titled "Toward marriage sustainability: Impacts of delayed marriages in Qatar" highlighted the issue of delayed marriage and explored interventions and policies to address this social concern. Lari's (2022) research revealed that changing relationships, gender norms, and roles have contributed to the delay in the age of marriage in Qatar. She explained that these roles have evolved at the household level due to women's increased education and participation in the labor force, which has enabled them to earn an income (Lari, 2022). Despite women's rising status, Lari noted that they remain responsible for family obligations and responsibilities, resulting in an unequal division of labor within the family (Lari, 2022). The collective experiences of participants in the study revealed societal bias regarding gender roles, with women being perceived differently than men (Lari, 2022). The qualitative findings indicated that some women may delay marriage if they feel it will hinder their career development or limit their mobility (Lari, 2022). Additionally, some women may remain single because they cannot find a suitable partner, given societal expectations of stereotypical gender roles that require women to shoulder both domestic and professional responsibilities (Lari, 2022). This makes achieving a work-family balance unattainable without a supportive partner (Lari, 2022).

A study by Wang and Kassam (2016) titled "Indicators of Social Change in the UAE: College Students' Attitudes Toward Love, Marriage and Family" examined the perspectives of university students at the American University of Sharjah on love,

marriage, and family amidst evolving gender norms and stereotypes regarding the roles of spouses. The study found that Arab Emiratis are more likely to adhere to 'traditional' norms compared to non-Arab Emiratis or Arab and Asian expatriates, highlighting the strong and persistent presence of traditional understandings of spousal roles, even if the study indicated that Emirati Arab women exhibited more 'modern' values than their male counterparts (Wang and Kassam, 2016). This should alert policymakers to the importance of this issue and its repercussions on the family (Wang and Kassam, 2016).

James-Hawkins, et al. (2017) reached a similar conclusion for the UAE in their study "The Patriarchal Bargain in a Context of Rapid Changes to Normative Gender Roles: Young Arab Women's Role Conflict in Qatar". This research explored the normative gender roles and the conflicts experienced by Qatari women regarding their roles in the family and society. The study involved interviews with twenty-seven Qatari women aged between 18 and 25, who were attending a college in Qatar (unnamed in the study) (James-Hawkins, et al., 2017). These interviews highlighted the tension between societal expectations related to education, the workforce, and family roles, as well as how the patriarchal bargain shapes the aspirations of young women transitioning into adulthood amidst rapid economic, social, and cultural change (James-Hawkins, et al., 2017). The findings revealed that these women live in a state of conceptual and practical conflict, navigating between social expectations to become wives and mothers and their own educational and career ambitions (James-Hawkins, et al., 2017).

The study of James-Hawkins, et al. (2017) found that some young women resolved this normative conflict by prioritizing family over work and education, while others held conflicting norms and future goals without acknowledging the normative conflict (James-Hawkins, et al., 2017). Generally, the young women in this sample feared marriage failure and divorce due to an inability to fulfill both roles (James-Hawkins, et al., 2017). They were uncertain about the availability of family safety nets to support them, which led them to seek financial independence to support themselves if left alone due to divorce or the death of their spouse (James-Hawkins, et al., 2017). The authors urged policymakers in Qatar to consider the implications of these roles as they intersect with the patriarchal structure of family and society, advocating for the empowerment and advancement of women (James-Hawkins, et al., 2017).

Noora Lari (2022) emphasized the crucial role that policies can play in supporting families in Qatar, highlighting the differences between labor laws in the public and private sectors. For instance, the 2016 Human Resources Law, which applies to the public sector, grants women 60 days of paid maternity leave, whereas the 2004 Labor Law only provides 50 days of paid maternity leave in the private sector. Additionally, women in the public sector are allowed two hours of breastfeeding time for two years, compared to one hour in the private sector (Lari, 2022). In light of these disparities, Lari (2022) advocated for more nuanced policy interventions to promote gender equality. She also underscored the importance of reviewing school curricula and tools, and conducting awareness programs to change societal perceptions

regarding stereotypical gender roles (Lari, 2022). Such efforts could reshape public attitudes towards gender roles within the family context and potentially encourage young people to marry at an earlier age (Lari, 2022).

### **3. Stereotypes and Norms of spouses Roles: Fertility and Divorce**

The literature, research, and evidence consistently highlight the prevalence of divorce in the GCC countries, which poses a significant challenge to national progress (Hijazi, 2012; Mohiuddin, 2014). Divorce affects the family, the foundation of society and the producer of human capital (Mohiuddin, 2014). Studies have linked the rise in divorce rates in Gulf societies to the modernization processes of the past half-century, which have profoundly impacted family structures, leading to a notable transformation from extended to nuclear families (Hijazi, 2012; Mohiuddin, 2014). In the previous section of this study, we discussed the changes affecting family structures in the Gulf region, noting that one of the most significant shifts over the past three to four decades is the reduction in family size and the trend towards greater economic and residential independence from extended families (Hijazi, 2012; Mohiuddin, 2014).

In the following section, we explore the impact of changes in normative frameworks regarding gender roles on marital stability. Specifically, we focus on the tension that arises when women work outside the home while traditional expectations about their familial roles persist. This dynamic may contribute to marital separation or divorce. Despite evolving perceptions, many marriages in Gulf societies still adhere to traditional gender roles. As discussed in the previous chapter, husbands are often viewed as the 'primary breadwinners' and decision-makers or 'heads of the family', while wives are expected to be 'homemakers' and 'caretakers', even if they also work outside the home.

In the context of prevalent role stereotypes, the issue of divorce often reflects the failure of married couples to adapt to the changing social and economic demands of their roles (Killewald, 2016; Ridgeway, 2011; Tichenor, 1999; Kaufman & Edgell, 2004). As previously noted, spouses face significant challenges in breaking free from traditional roles due to evolving family dynamics (Killewald, 2016; Ridgeway, 2011; Tichenor, 1999; Kaufman & Edgell, 2004). When women work outside the home, they have less time to devote to household chores and child-rearing compared to a full-time 'homemaker' (Killewald, 2016; Ridgeway, 2011; Tichenor, 1999; Kaufman & Edgell, 2004). Consequently, husbands may find themselves taking on more responsibilities within the home, disrupting the traditional gender balance. This shift can be challenging for some spouses to adjust to. Some men view their careers as more important than their wives' and take pride in being the 'primary breadwinner', others perceive their wives' success as a threat to their status, leading them to become more controlling, demanding, and suspicious (Killewald, 2016; Ridgeway, 2011; Tichenor, 1999; Kaufman & Edgell, 2004). Some authors argue that as wives earn more, some husbands may work less but do not compensate by taking on more responsibilities at home (Killewald, 2016; Ridgeway, 2011; Tichenor, 1999;

Kaufman & Edgell, 2004). These difficulties and pressures stemming from changing roles often cause frustration and conflict within marriages, potentially leading to divorce (Hijazi, 2012; Mohiuddin, 2014; Killewald, 2016; Ridgeway, 2011; Tichenor, 1999; Kaufman & Edgell, 2004).

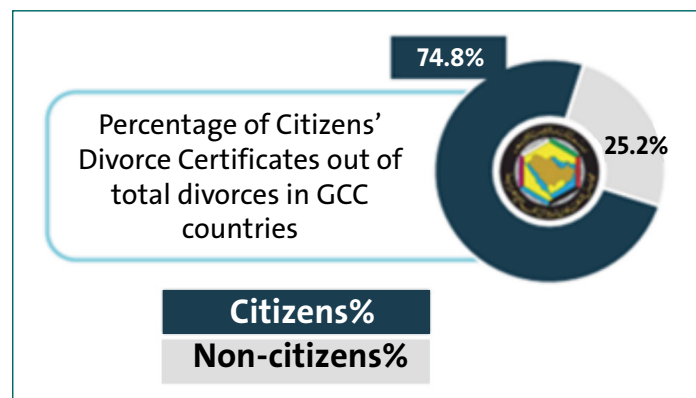
The literature and statistics indicate that divorce is both widespread and increasing throughout the GCC region. Between 2020 and 2021, the total number of divorce certificates rose by 3.1 thousand cases (GCC-Stat, 2022). The general divorce rate reached 1.8 divorces per 1,000 inhabitants aged 15 years and above. In 2021, the average number of divorce certificates issued daily was 213 (Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-Stat, 2022), as illustrated in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Number of divorce certificates in the GCC countries for the 2017-2021 period**

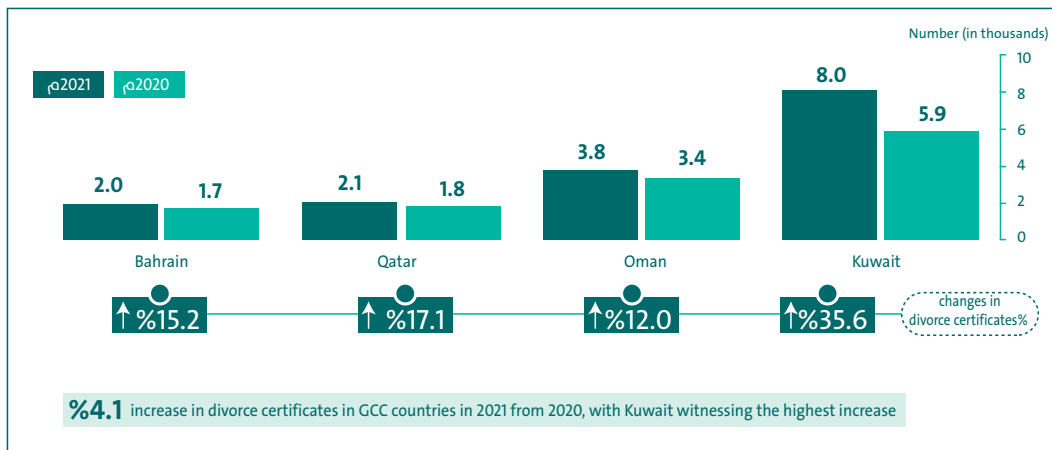
Source: GCC-Stat, “Marriage and divorce statistics in GCC countries 2021”]

In 2021, 74.8% of divorce certificates in the GCC were issued to citizens, while 25.2% were issued to non-citizens (see Figure 4). The percentage of divorce certificates in the Arab Gulf countries increased by 4.1% in 2021 compared to 2020 (GCC-Stat, 2022). The State of Kuwait saw the highest increase in divorce rates during this period, with total divorce certificates rising from 5.9 per thousand inhabitants in 2020 to 8.0 per thousand in 2021 (GCC-Stat, 2022). This was followed by the Sultanate of Oman, where the rate increased from 3.4 per thousand in 2020 to 3.8 per thousand in 2021 (GCC-Stat, 2022). Qatar’s rate rose from 1.8 per thousand in 2020 to 2.1 per thousand in 2021, and Bahrain recorded the lowest rate of increase, from 1.7 per thousand in 2020 to 2.0 per thousand in 2021 (GCC-Stat, 2022) – See Figure 5.



**Figure 4: Percentage of Citizens’ Divorce Certificates out of total divorces in GCC countries**

Source: GCC-Stat 2021



**Figure 5: Changes in divorce certificates in GCC countries for 2020 and 2021**

Source: Marriage and divorce statistics in GCC countries 2021]

Most statistics indicate that divorce typically occurs within the early years of marriage, specially within the first five years, however, in the Gulf countries, and Qatar in particular, it is notable that most divorces occur before the marriage is even consummated, with a significant number happening within the first years of marriage (Doha International Family Institute, forthcoming-c). For example, divorce rate during the first year or less of marriage reached 54% in 2018 (Doha International Family Institute, forthcoming-c). The literature highlights that the causes of divorce are multifaceted, including lack of parental involvement in child rearing, economic difficulties and debt, poor work-family balance, and domestic violence (Caeiro, 2018). High divorce rates in these regions are often attributed to policies that have weakened the tribal structure of Gulf societies, undermined traditional forms of authority, and raised new expectations regarding gender roles (Caeiro, 2018).

Divorce has devastating effects on family members. Studies focusing on Arab Gulf societies have shown that parental conflicts and divorce severely impact the psychological and emotional development of children, leading to mental illnesses, disrupted academic performance, and behavioral issues such as addiction, delinquency, and criminal behavior (Mohiuddin, 2014). For instance, the Ministry of Planning in Kuwait reported that 60% of children of divorce suffer from psychological issues and exhibit aggressive behavior (Mohiuddin, 2014). The environment of separation negatively impacts the mental and emotional health of the parents, which in turn affects their behavior and interactions (Mohiuddin, 2014). Additionally, a study on Saudi society found that 90% of child abuse cases stem from the mistreatment by separated parents, making these children more susceptible to delinquency and addiction to alcohol and drugs (Mohiuddin, 2014).

Divorce has been observed to be more prevalent among young people. Studies by DIFI, such as “A Critical Review of the Literature on Family Issues in Qatar” and “Qatari Youth’s Perceptions on a Happy and Sustainable Marriage”, highlighted in the previous chapter, indicate that divorce has become increasingly common and accepted in Qatari society (Doha International Family Institute, 2018; forthcoming-a). This trend has led to numerous negative social issues that undermine the family

structure and the well-being of its members, particularly children and women. (Doha International Family Institute, 2018; forthcoming-a)

The literature unanimously agrees on the impact of education and work on the interaction between spouses and the stability of marital life (Hijazi, 2012; Mohiuddin, 2014). Hijazi (2012) notes that a significant number of Gulf women have achieved education levels equal to or exceeding those of their husbands and have secured full-time jobs. This financial, social, and psychological independence has altered their expectations of their husbands' roles, creating challenges and difficulties within the family (Hijazi, 2012). These changes often lead to conflicts as husbands struggle to adapt to or accept the new dynamics, threatening their traditional status and authority as "head of the family" and "decision maker" (Hijazi, 2012). This shift poses a significant challenge to the stability and survival of the family unit (Hijazi, 2012).

Mohamed Mohiuddin (2014) in his study titled "Towards a Different Perspective on Understanding Divorce and its Effects in Gulf Arab Societies" highlighted a strong link between high rates of women's education and labor market participation and the increasing divorce rates in Gulf societies. Despite the scarcity of data, which has limited comprehensive analysis of these variables' impact on marital behavior and divorce, Mohiuddin (2014) confirmed the correlation. He explained that women's participation in the labor market has provided them with financial independence, influencing their behavior and expectations. This financial independence has made women more assertive and demanding regarding what they want and deserve from a long-term relationship like marriage (Mohiuddin, 2014).

Data from Kuwait, which has one of the highest divorce rates in the GCC region, shows a direct correlation between the wife's education level and divorce rates, while no such correlation was found with the husband's education level (Mohiuddin, 2014). The probability of divorce rises from 1% to 10% if the wife has only a primary education. It reaches 32% if the wife has a degree higher than high school but less than university when the husband has a university degree (Mohiuddin, 2014). This probability more than doubles, reaching 47%, if both spouses have a university education (Mohiuddin, 2014).

The high level of women's education and their resulting financial independence in the GCC region has enhanced their power relative to their husbands, whose traditional roles as the "sole income earner" and "primary breadwinner" have diminished (Mohiuddin, 2014). This shift has led women to seek greater participation in family decision-making, which some men may perceive as a challenge to their status and traditional authority (Mohiuddin, 2014). These changes can create tensions that contribute to marital discord (Mohiuddin, 2014). Additionally, when decision-making is dominated by one spouse, it often leads to unilateral decisions that fail to consider the needs or views of the other spouse, further increasing marital tension (Mohiuddin, 2014).

A study by Gina Bou Serhal et al. (2023) titled "Emirati Women on the Rise: The Impact of Globalization and Higher Education on the Key Social Institutions of Marriage and Family in the UAE" examined the prevalence of divorce in UAE society and found a

significant relationship between a spouse's level of education and divorce rates; as the study revealed that the lowest divorce rates in the UAE were among the least educated spouses, with 7.5% of illiterate women and 7% of illiterate men experiencing divorce (Serhal et al, 2023). Conversely, individuals with higher education had the highest divorce rates, with 39.5% of female divorcees and 30% of male divorcees holding high school degrees at the time of their divorce (Serhal et al, 2023).

The study suggested that changing perceptions and expectations about the stereotypical roles of spouses among the educated group contributed to their decision to divorce (Serhal et al, 2023). Greater participation in the labor force has given women more control over their wealth and household spending, reduced their financial dependence, increased their awareness of their rights and future aspirations, and made them less likely to accept an unequal status within the family unit (Serhal, et al. 2023).

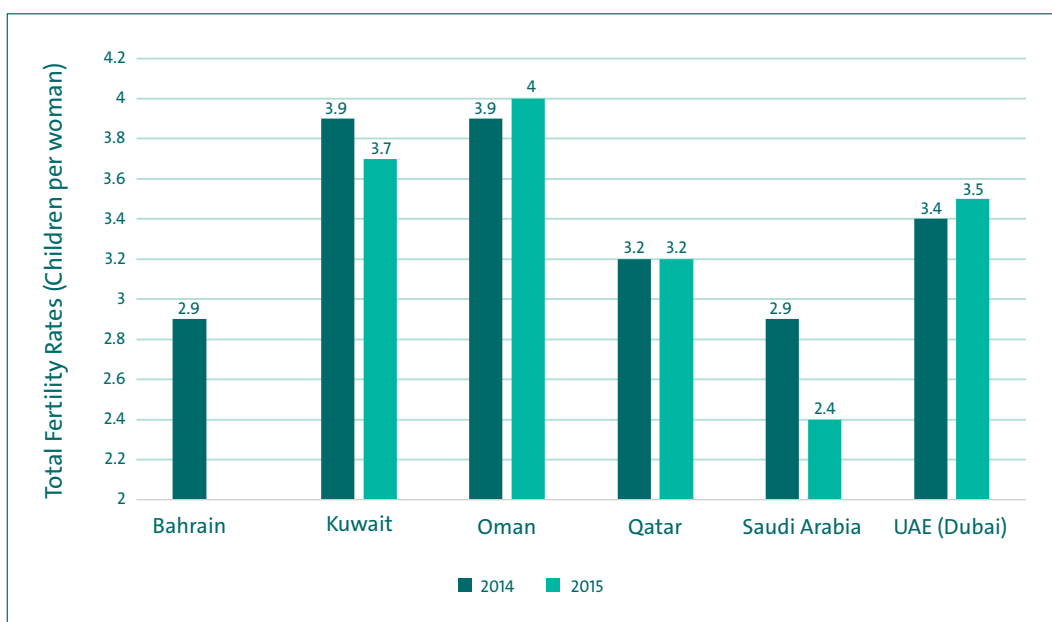
Stereotypes about spouses significantly impact family cohesion in various ways. The concept that "men are the main breadwinners and women's roles are confined to the home" can lead to increased financial pressures if the family strictly adheres to this notion, as it places the full responsibility of providing for the family on the man, even if the wife is capable and willing to contribute (Conger et al., 1990). Consequently, the family may experience harsh economic conditions and severe financial challenges, particularly if the husband loses his job (Conger et al., 1990). Numerous studies have shown the negative impact of difficult financial situations on marital relationships (Conger et al., 1990). These pressures can disrupt the harmony between spouses, leading to increased psychological stress, heightened emotions, and frequent conflicts and disagreements, ultimately disturbing the marital relationship (Conger et al., 1990).

Conger et al. (1990) highlight that economic pressures negatively affect the relationship between spouses, leading to increased pessimism, depression, instability, and emotional volatility, which ultimately undermines marital compatibility and stability. Additionally, tensions and conflicts often arise when a woman wishes to pursue a career but is hindered by traditional expectations that she should focus solely on domestic responsibilities (Conger et al., 1990).

Researchers like Hijazi (2012) have attributed some causes of divorce to shifting expectations regarding the roles of spouses within the family. Each partner enters marriage with specific expectations about their status, role, rights, satisfaction, and relationship patterns (Hijazi, 2012). They also have their own views on managing marital life, including decisions about spending, consumption, procreation, child-rearing, and lifestyle (Hijazi, 2012). Conflicts leading to the breakdown of the marital relationship often stem from disparities in these expectations (Hijazi, 2012). When there is a clash between the traditional roles and the evolving aspirations of each spouse, it can create feelings of injustice and result in accumulated disappointments that strain the marriage (Hijazi, 2012). This conflict of expectations, particularly when influenced by stereotypical role conceptions, can lead to significant disagreements and marital discord (Hijazi, 2012).

A study conducted by Fakir Al Gharaibeh and Muneera Majed Al Ali (2022) titled “The Voices of the Divorced: Reasons for Early Divorce among Emiratis in Abu Dhabi”, linked the high divorce rates among Emiratis to changing roles within marriages. The authors examined 2,162 Emirati divorcees registered with and receiving services from the Family Development Foundation (FDF) in Abu Dhabi between 2012 and 2018 (Gharaibeh and Al Ali, 2022). From this group, 200 divorced women agreed to participate in the study, and their quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS (Gharaibeh and Al Ali, 2022).

The study identified common reasons for early divorce, including poor marital relationships, problematic behavior of partners, and domestic violence (Gharaibeh and Al Ali, 2022). Additionally, it attributed the rise in divorces in the UAE to various social factors, such as widespread affluence and significant economic and technological development (Gharaibeh and Al Ali, 2022). These changes have influenced the structure of Emirati families, shifting them from “extended” to “nuclear” families (Gharaibeh and Al Ali, 2022). Among these changes, the study highlighted the evolving roles of women and men in both society and the family as significant factors contributing to the increased divorce rates (Gharaibeh and Al Ali, 2022).



**Figure 6:**

Source: De Bel-Air, Françoise 2022. Fertility in Qatar and in Other GCC States: Some Elements of Comparison.

Numerous studies examining the fertility landscape in the GCC countries highlight a demographic imbalance arising from low fertility rates among citizens and their relatively small number compared to expatriates in the population structure (De Bel-Air et al., 2018; De Bel-Air, 2014: 2022). The significance of this issue is underscored by policymakers’ keen interest in developing plans and programs aimed at boosting fertility rates, making it a priority within the broader strategic plans of the region’s countries (De Bel-Air et al., 2018; De Bel-Air, 2014: 2022). Literature indicates that the fertility rate among Gulf citizens began declining in the late 1980s, influenced by

various factors including the widespread availability of female education, resulting in delayed marriage and elevated divorce rates, among others (De Bel-Air et al., 2018; De Bel-Air, 2014: 2022).

In 2014, the fertility rate in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain decreased to 2.9 children per woman (De Bel-Air 2022). In 2014-2015, Qatari females had a total fertility rate averaging 3.2 children per woman, indicating a moderate level compared to the lower rates observed in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (De Bel-Air 2022). In Kuwait and Dubai, the total fertility rates ranged between 3.5 and 3.9 children per woman on average, while in Oman, it averaged 4 children per woman in 2014-2015 (De Bel-Air 2022). Researchers have pointed out the limited number and scope of available sources for studying the fertility of Gulf citizens, suggesting that these sources may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the fertility situation in the region (De Bel-Air, 2022) – see Figure 6.

To understand changes in demographic behavior under the concept of “gender role stereotypes” and “gender norms”, demographers have emphasized the centrality of stereotypes and traditional gender norms as key determinants in studies of changes in fertility, delayed marriage, and high divorce rates in advanced industrialized countries, especially those related to the “division of tasks and labor” within the marital institution and the changing roles women play outside the family for fertility, family stability, and delayed marriage (Esping- Andersen and Billari, 2015; McDonald, 2000a; 2000b; 2013).

According to this research perspective, low fertility rates, delayed marriage, and marital instability stem from an increasing discrepancy between women’s dual roles as mothers, spouses, and employees, which directly impacts fertility (Aassve et al., 2012; Arpino et al., 2015; Liefbroer and Billari, 2010; McDonald, 2000a; 2000b; 2013). This is based on the assumption that fertility determinants and trends are partly driven by changes in marital stability, for instance, Arpino et al. (2015) observed a decline in fertility in Western countries during the initial phase of shifting gender stereotypes, referred to as the “gender revolution”, primarily due to instability within the institution of marriage (Arpino et al., 2015). To elucidate this social transformation, Akerlof and Cranton (2000) introduced the concept of “identity economics”, underscoring the significant role of social norms in everyday decision-making. These norms dictate appropriate behavior based on individuals’ belongingness to specific social groups and the prevailing social milieu. Akerlof and Cranton (2010) expanded this framework by introducing “identity utility” as a factor in rational decision-making within the context of social norms. According to their theoretical model, which seeks to elucidate divorce in light of prevailing stereotypical norms, individuals either accrue “gains” or incur losses in “utility” depending on their adherence or deviation from these norms (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010). Individuals may choose actions that they anticipate will maximize their gains and benefit them, thereby viewing deviation from social norms as a social tax on their utility (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010).

Within marriage, gender norms dictate conditions that assign specific behaviors and responsibilities based on each partner’s gender (Batalova & Cohen, 2002).

For instance, in the 1950s, conforming to prevalent gender norms meant the wife dedicated herself to childcare and domestic duties while the husband assumed the role of the primary breadwinner, working full-time in the labor market (Batalova & Cohen, 2002). These social norms dictated a particular division of labor within the household, where any deviation from these norms would lead to a decrease in utility for both spouses (Batalova & Cohen, 2002). For instance, during that era, men sharing household chores or married women working outside the home was generally frowned upon (Batalova & Cohen, 2002).

The concept of identity economics has provided insight into how gender norms influence divorce (Batalova & Cohen, 2002). In a simplified model of household production, spouses engage in two types of activities: 'market' and 'household production' (Batalova & Cohen, 2002). Both partners invest their time in various household tasks like housework and childcare, while market activities involve participation in the labor market (Batalova & Cohen, 2002). The benefits of marriage, within this framework, stem from joint consumption of goods produced both in the market and at home (Batalova & Cohen, 2002). The total sum of spouses' wages and time allocated to market production determines the consumption of market-produced goods (Batalova & Cohen, 2002).

Moreover, the consumption of goods produced domestically hinges on the time spouses invest in household production (Batalova & Cohen, 2002). The decision to remain married is based on whether the utility derived from marriage surpasses or equals the utility experienced while single (Batalova & Cohen, 2002). Gender norms play a pivotal role in shaping individual household decisions by delineating the division of labor within the household. In this context, gender norms impact household dynamics through two distinct channels: costs and benefits (Batalova & Cohen, 2002).

Costs are incurred by spouses when they allocate more time to household production, and these costs fluctuate based on prevailing gender norms. In traditional settings, the loss of identity utility felt by spouses when prioritizing household responsibilities is substantial, whereas it is anticipated to diminish as gender norms become more egalitarian (Batalova & Cohen, 2002). In traditional environments where men's involvement in childcare or household chores is disapproved, their identity utility decreases, and their social costs increase (Batalova & Cohen, 2002). Conversely, in egalitarian settings, the social costs incurred by men for undertaking tasks typically associated with women decrease (Batalova & Cohen, 2002). Numerous studies demonstrate that contextual markers of gender equality are positively associated with an equitable division of household chores among spouses (Batalova and Cohen, 2002).

These theories and their underlying principles elucidate the correlation between gender norms and divorce (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010). They suggest that in more egalitarian environments, men tend to become more involved in household duties (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010). By actively participating in chores and childcare, spouses enhance the production of common marital goods, thereby increasing the benefits of remaining married compared to being single (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010).

For instance, when husbands engage in household tasks like cleaning, they provide their wives with additional free time to pursue leisure activities such as walking, shopping, or socializing with friends, while also enjoying a clean and tidy home (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010). Similarly, involvement in childcare grants wives time for self-care and recreation, which is crucial for maintaining psychological, mental, and physical balance and shielding against depression and other stress-related psychological ailments (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010).

The availability of these benefits serves as a mutual advantage for both spouses, as it diminishes stress and the likelihood of marital conflicts, thereby enhancing marital stability and reducing the risk of divorce (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010). Consequently, Akerlof and Cranton (2010; 2000) proposed that an egalitarian marital dynamic, where husbands actively contribute to household chores and childcare, fosters marital stability by amplifying the benefits derived from marriage (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010).

The New Home Economics or New Family Economics theories propose that women's involvement in the workforce diminishes the mutual reliance between spouses (Becker, 1991). This is because the wife's contribution to production occurs outside the traditional domestic sphere, thereby reducing the benefits of marriage through a decrease in the production of domestically generated goods within the home (Becker, 1991). The New Home Economics, developed by Gary Becker (1965; 1981; 1988; 1991), offers a theoretical framework for analyzing decision-making processes within families.

According to this framework, households, akin to firms, make rational choices to allocate resources in a manner that maximizes their welfare and utility (Becker, 1991). Becker's theory underscores the importance of comprehending economic decisions within the household, encompassing consumption, labor participation, and investment in human capital (Becker, 1991). Key concepts in Gary Becker's New Home Economics include resource allocation, household production, division of labor, investment in human capital, and household decision-making regarding marriage, divorce, fertility, etc (Becker, 1965; 1981; 1988; 1991).

From Becker's perspective, families function as both producers and consumers (Becker, 1965; 1981; 1988; 1991). Within the familial domain, various goods and services, such as childcare, cooking, and cleaning, are produced. Labor is divided based on efficiency and the comparative advantages of family members who invest in education and skills to enhance their earning potential and overall welfare (Becker, 1965; 1981; 1988; 1991). Becker employs this economic framework to analyze household decisions pertaining to marriage, fertility, divorce, and other aspects of family life (Becker, 1965; 1981; 1988; 1991).

According to theorists in new home economics, wives who engage in the labor market tend to devote less time to household and childcare duties (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010). This imbalance can intensify pressure on them, particularly if their husbands do not share these responsibilities (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010). Consequently, the qualitative benefits and overall gains from the marriage diminish.

An economically independent wife, empowered by her financial autonomy, may find it easier to exit an unhappy marriage compared to a housewife who lacks such independence (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010).

The stability of marriage is compromised when wives are active in the labor market, especially within an unequal marital dynamic characterized by prevailing gender stereotypes (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010). Within this framework, theorists propose that working wives, particularly in unequal relationships, may prioritize investing their time in market production over household production (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010). This shift can exacerbate marital instability, potentially leading to divorce (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010).

In essence, gender norms influence marital stability and divorce through two primary mechanisms: husbands' participation in household production and wives' involvement in market production (i.e., working outside the home) (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010). On one hand, societal adherence to gender norms may incentivize husbands to engage in household chores and childcare activities, while working wives may be motivated to remain in the marriage due to their higher earnings (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; 2010).

The 1960s marked a pivotal shift in industrialized Western countries, signaling the decline of the traditional family model characterized by the wife as the homemaker and the husband as the main breadwinner (Cherlin, 2010). The entry of women into the labor force redefined these roles, prompting profound changes in family dynamics (Cherlin, 2010). With the onset of the gender revolution, fertility and marriage rates experienced significant declines, accompanied by a notable rise in marital instability (Goldstein et al., 2009; Myrskylä et al., 2009). However, by the late 2000s, this landscape began to shift: fertility declines slowed and divorce rates stabilized in most industrialized nations, albeit with some exceptions (Goldstein et al., 2009; Myrskylä et al., 2009). This shift was attributed to increased societal acceptance of conceptual change and the adoption of egalitarian values (Esping-Andersen and Billari, 2015; Cherlin, 2010; Goldstein, 1999; Härkönen, 2014; Oppenheimer, 1994; Raley and Bumpass, 2003).

According to research, divorce rates in the United States not only stabilized in the late 1970s but have been declining since then (Cherlin, 2010). These studies suggest that families tend to stabilize when gender norms support the dual role of married women as both mothers and workers (Cherlin, 2010). Aassve et al. (2012) demonstrated that the increasing education levels of women have a negative impact on total fertility levels in countries characterized by low generalized trust. Here, generalized trust refers to a cultural catalyst for the dissemination of gender norms (Aassve et al., 2012).

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between marital stability, gender norms, and fertility patterns. For instance, Arpino et al. (2015) highlighted a decline in fertility during the early stages of the gender revolution due to the lack of theoretical exploration and empirical testing of changes in social expectations regarding gender roles and their impact on marital stability during the 1960s (Arpino et al.,

2015). Akerlof and Kranton's (2000; 2010) concept of identity utility underscores the importance of marital stability in the context of changing gender stereotypes, allowing spouses to invest in both household and market capital. They argue that under patriarchal norms, traditional gender roles dictated wives' caregiving responsibilities and husbands' role as primary breadwinners (Akerlof and Kranton, 2010; 2000). However, as society progresses towards gender equality, expectations regarding the contributions of both spouses in the home and labor market become more similar (Akerlof and Kranton, 2010; 2000). Consequently, the transition from traditional marital roles to egalitarian contexts alters the costs and social incentives associated with investments in labor market and household production for men and women in marriage, thereby mitigating their negative impact on marital stability (Akerlof and Kranton, 2010; 2000).

Researcher Mohamed Mohiuddin (2014) validated the hypotheses of these concepts and theories, affirming that the factors contributing to marital destabilization, particularly the societal resistance and adaptation challenges to evolving spouse roles, especially for women, will shift over time. As individuals and families become accustomed to and embrace the new roles of women, a redefined understanding of gender equality emerges, fostering marital stability and consequently reducing divorce rates (Mohiuddin, 2014). Mohiuddin (2014) highlighted indications supporting this hypothesis, noting a trend towards increased stability in the institution of marriage within Gulf Arab societies. This trend is evidenced by a growing number of men opting for working women, driven by the escalating economic demands of modern life, where the financial contributions of working women are crucial (Mohiuddin, 2014). Statistics from divorce cases in Kuwait in 2007 revealed a correlation between the wife's employment status and divorce rates (Mohiuddin, 2014). While 46% of divorces occurred among spouses where both partners were employed, this percentage increased to 54% in cases where the wife was not employed (Mohiuddin, 2014). Similarly, studies in Saudi Arabia indicated a preference among the majority of men to marry working women, especially those in stable official positions (Mohiuddin, 2014).

However, Kuwait's current statistics confirm the high divorce rate, prompting a closer look at other applied policies and further research to confirm this hypothesis (Mohiuddin, 2014). This examination takes place in light of the adoption and implementation of legislative reforms targeting sectors such as education, media, and family-friendly policies in the workplace, in addition to policies that contribute to raising societal awareness of the need to change gender role stereotypes. Achieving equality and burden-sharing requires changing societal perceptions, paving the way for greater equality in assuming parenting responsibilities.

All these interventions work towards reshaping the stereotypical perceptions of spousal roles by redefining the concept of masculinity. Consequently, spouses are encouraged to participate more actively in household chores and childcare, fostering relationships grounded in principles of equality and fairness (Al-Rasheed, 2013a; 2013b; 2020; Connell, 1995). The evolving role of men within the family, involving their engagement in domestic tasks and childcare, signifies not merely a redistribution

of household responsibilities but also a profound shift in the understanding of masculinity. This entails challenging traditional notions associating the expression of emotions, such as crying, with male weakness, and reframing them as attributes of strength within the framework of modern masculinity (Al-Rasheed, 2013a; 2013b; 2020; Connell, 1995). This shift in the perception of masculinity yields various positive outcomes, such as improved communication between fathers and family members, fostering deeper emotional bonds between spouses and a more harmonious family life. Consequently, the risk of divorce diminishes. Moreover, it fosters the internalization of gender equality as a beneficial social value, fortifying community and family ties and consequently mitigating the likelihood of divorce.

#### 4. Summary

Traditional norms and stereotypes of spouses' roles affect vital and pivotal aspects of the family, including its formation, cohesion, and continuity. Specifically, they affect the age of marriage, fertility, and divorce. This chapter concludes that the low fertility rate, late age of marriage, and increasing marital instability are the result of a growing mismatch between the dual roles of women as both mothers and workers, which is mainly the result of the prevalence of stereotypical traditional norms of the roles of spouses in society and the family. Changing this situation requires policies and interventions that help change the structure of societal consciousness by adopting and applying norms in which both spouses bear these burdens equally and in which the division of labor and family decision-making is more equitable.

# CHAPTER FIVE: POLICIES AND BEST PRACTICES FOR CHANGING ROLE STEREOTYPES

## 1. Introduction:

Shifting gender role stereotypes requires multifaceted strategies and interventions to change gender norms and standards that are deeply rooted in the social fabric, including revising educational curricula, reviewing legislation, media regulations and policies, and corporate policies. Many countries have made efforts to challenge and change these stereotypes through policy interventions, campaigns and educational programs, adopting successful policies to address stereotypes. In this chapter, we examine some of the most notable policies and initiatives.

## 1. Curriculum Revision

### 1.1. Sweden

Sweden is a pioneer in supporting and promoting gender equality at all levels, and its education system has introduced kindergartens with a gender-neutral approach to gender roles in society, where children are encouraged to just be children without imposing stereotypical gender role expectations (Löfdahl and Pérez Prieto, 2009). Sweden has been at the forefront of curricular and educational reforms that seek to combat gender role stereotypes (Skolverket, 2011; Gustafsson, & Brunila, 2017; Löfdahl, & Pérez Prieto, 2009). These reforms reflect the Swedish state and society's commitment to gender equality. The Swedish National Curriculum for Education emphasizes gender equality as a core value and is designed to ensure that schools address traditional gender stereotypes and roles (Skolverket, 2011; Gustafsson, & Brunila, 2017; Löfdahl, & Pérez Prieto, 2009).

Teachers in Sweden have been trained in Gender Pedagogy, an approach based on educational practices, methods, and curricula that are guided by and address gender-related issues (Skolverket, 2011; Gustafsson, & Brunila, 2017; Löfdahl, & Pérez Prieto, 2009). It emphasizes understanding the ways in which gender intersects with other identities (such as race, class, and gender) and power structures in shaping experiences, opportunities, and outcomes in educational settings, and seeks to change traditional norms and gender inequalities in educational settings (Banks, and Banks, 2010; Connell, 2002; Francis, and Skelton, 2005; Paechter, 2007; De Beauvoir, 2011). This pedagogy seeks to ensure that boys and girls are treated equally and are not constrained by traditional gender roles (Skolverket, 2011; Gustafsson, & Brunila, 2017; Löfdahl, & Pérez Prieto, 2009).

Sweden has placed great emphasis on early childhood education, i.e., the preschool years, as the early years are crucial in shaping children's understanding of gender. Kindergartens in Sweden use a "compensatory pedagogy" approach, which involves

combating traditional gender stereotypes to provide children with a wider range of options for their social role; as an example in Egalia kindergarten in Stockholm teachers avoid using gender role pronouns and offer a play and activity environment free from traditional gender norms (Skolverket, 2011; Gustafsson, & Brunila, 2017; Löfdahl, & Pérez Prieto, 2009). Moreover, Sweden has conducted a comprehensive review of school textbooks to remove any content that may reinforce traditional gender role stereotypes and perpetuate gender discrimination and insured that textbook content reflects diverse family structures, professions, and gender roles, providing students with a more balanced view of society (Skolverket, 2011; Gustafsson, & Brunila, 2017; Österlind, & Haake, 2010; Löfdahl, & Pérez Prieto, 2009). The country also ensured that teacher training included gender equality principles so that they could address and combat gender role stereotypes in their classrooms; additionally, schools are required to develop gender equality plans to ensure that girls and boys have access to the same opportunities and rights without being bound by gender stereotypes (Skolverket, 2011; Gustafsson and Brunila, 2017; Österlind and Haake, 2010; Löfdahl and Pérez Prieto, 2009).

## 2.1. The European Union

The European Union (EU) is actively addressing gender role stereotypes in education and promoting gender equality, particularly in fields like science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), traditionally dominated by males. Initiatives such as the “Science: It’s a Girl Thing!” campaign aim to encourage more women to pursue careers in STEM, recognizing the historical underrepresentation of women in these sectors, especially in leadership roles (European Commission, 2012). Targeting girls and young women, particularly those in their early to mid-teens, the campaign seeks to foster interest in science from an early age. Employing various platforms such as videos, social media campaigns, events, and competitions, the campaign has sparked controversy and debate regarding its effectiveness and the portrayal of women in STEM fields (European Commission, 2012). It has garnered attention by highlighting female role models in science and research from diverse backgrounds and disciplines, showcasing their stories, experiences, and achievements to inspire young girls and emphasize that women can thrive in these fields (European Commission, 2012).

## 2. Legislation: Parental Leave Policies

As discussed in previous chapters, legislation and family-friendly workplace policies are pivotal in reshaping traditional stereotypes and roles within the family. By providing leave for fathers, these laws acknowledge the crucial and active role fathers play in child-rearing, sending a clear message that parenting is a shared responsibility between both parents (Lamb, 2010). This approach challenges the traditional norms and stereotypes that cast women as the primary caregivers and men as the primary breadwinners (Lamb, 2010). The introduction of paternity leave, in particular, disrupts this traditional viewpoint, highlighting that fathers also play a critical role in the early stages of a child’s life (Lamb, 2010).

### Parental leave schemes in Nordic countries

Parental leave is an umbrella term that refers to the right of mothers and fathers to take time off from work to care for their children. It typically comprises three components: maternity leave, paternity leave, and shared parental leave. The specific allocation of days for each component varies across the different Nordic countries.

From a theoretical perspective, policy measures and interventions play a crucial role in reshaping societal norms and advancing gender equality on multiple levels (Lamb, 2010; Neuvonen, 2019; Haataja, 2009). For instance, the literature highlights the impact of paternity leave in challenging traditional roles and stereotypes, which view women as primary caregivers and men as breadwinners (Lamb, 2010; Neuvonen, 2019; Haataja, 2009). By granting non-transferable leave to both mothers and fathers, these policies recognize and explicitly affirm that fathers can also be primary caregivers; as this opportunity allows fathers to spend quality time with their newborns, strengthening the father-child bond and challenging the stereotype that fathers are less involved or less nurturing than mothers (Lamb, 2010; Neuvonen, 2019; Haataja, 2009). Additionally, paternity leave supports the shared responsibilities of a spouses, offering the time and opportunity to equally share household chores and child-rearing duties (Lamb, 2010; Neuvonen, 2019; Haataja, 2009). When fathers take parental leave, they often become more involved in daily chores, caregiving, and child-rearing, which helps balance household tasks and dispels the stereotype that these are primarily “women’s duties” (Lamb, 2010; Neuvonen, 2019; Haataja, 2009). As more fathers take parental leave, societal acceptance of changing stereotypes about childcare and household contributions grows; as seeing men pushing strollers or taking their children to daycare becomes a social norm, which shifts public perception about the roles of spouses in the family illustrating the power of political interventions to reshape societal norms and advance gender equality (Lamb, 2010; Neuvonen, 2019; Haataja, 2009).

In this section, we focus on the Nordic countries because they are global leaders in implementing policies aimed at achieving gender equality both at home and in the workplace. These efforts are evident through legislative initiatives to increase fathers’ share of parental leave via campaigns, regulations, and quotas. Additionally, we include Germany due to the availability of sources that highlight the impact of such policies on changing the stereotypical roles of spouses.

#### 2.1. Sweden

In 1974, Sweden became the first country in the world to offer parental leave that can be split between both parents. It is often praised for its progressive policies on parental leave, boasting one of the most generous systems globally (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). Currently, Sweden provides the longest period of paid parental leave among the Nordic countries, amounting to 69 weeks per child (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). Since the late 1970s, Sweden has continuously reviewed and amended its parental leave laws, introducing maternity and paternity leave policies

### Involving Fathers

To encourage men to take parental leave, Nordic countries have made their parental leave schemes highly flexible. For example, they have extended the time frame in which leave can be taken and allowed parents to split the leave into several shorter periods.

To support gender equality both at home and in the labor market, significant political efforts in these countries have aimed at promoting equal distribution of parental leave. These initiatives have produced tangible results: fathers in the Nordic countries take more parental leave than fathers anywhere else in the world.

to encourage both parents to take time off work to care for their children and to challenge traditional gender roles that designate women as the primary caregivers (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019).

When Sweden first introduced parental leave in 1974, it was made available to both mothers and fathers, but in practice, it was primarily used by mothers (Swedish Social Insurance Code, 2010). To combat the negative effects of traditional gender roles in childcare, Sweden introduced a father's quota in 1995 (Swedish Social Insurance Code, 2010). This policy set aside one month of the 13 months of parental leave specifically for fathers, with the stipulation that the family would lose one month of benefits if the father did not take that month's leave (Swedish Social Insurance Code, 2010). This quota was extended to two months in 2002 and further to three months in 2016 (Swedish Social Insurance Code, 2010). By allocating a significant portion of parental leave days to both parents, Sweden encourages fathers to take an active role in child-rearing, thereby challenging traditional stereotypes of women as the primary caregivers (Swedish Social Insurance Code, 2010:110).

Current Swedish law entitles parents to 480 days (about 16 months) of paid parental leave upon the birth or adoption of a child which can be taken until the child turns eight years old; as the law stipulates that parents can share this time, but 90 days are reserved for each parent and cannot be transferred to the other (Duvander and Johansson, 2012; Haas and Hwang, 2008; Sundström and Duvander, 2002). This provision encourages fathers to take a more active role in child-rearing, thus challenging the traditional stereotype of women as the primary caregivers (Duvander and Johansson, 2012; Haas and Hwang, 2008; Sundström and Duvander, 2002). Studies indicate that this policy has been highly successful, as evidenced by the increasing number of fathers taking parental leave to be with their children during the early months and years (Duvander and Johansson, 2019).

This policy not only strengthens the bond between father and child but also eases the caregiving burden on mothers, leading to the normalization of shared parenting; in Sweden, it has become commonplace to see fathers pushing strollers, attending parent meetings, or staying home to care for sick children (Duvander and Johansson, 2012; Haas and Hwang, 2008; Sundström and Duvander, 2002). The policy has also had positive economic effects by encouraging both parents to work and share child-rearing duties, which has positively impacted women's labor market participation rates; consequently, Sweden boasts one of the highest female

labor force participation rates in the European Union (Duvander and Johansson, 2012; Haas and Hwang, 2008; Sundström and Duvander, 2002). Sweden's parental leave policy has been instrumental in breaking down stereotypes and traditional roles within the family, setting a strong example for other countries to follow.

## **2.2. Norway**

Similar to Sweden, Norway is also a pioneer in promoting family-work balance through progressive policies. In 1993, The country introduced a father's quota in its parental leave policies to ensure that both parents share child-rearing responsibilities and to challenge the stereotype that childcare is solely the mother's duty (Brandth and Kvande, 2016). Norway's parental leave policies are generous, allowing both parents to share a total of 49 weeks with full pay or 59 weeks with partial pay (Ellingsæter, 2012). The policy includes a quota system to ensure that both parents take some time off, with a certain number of weeks reserved exclusively for each parent (Ellingsæter, 2012). The father's quota specifically allocates a portion of parental leave exclusively to fathers (Ellingsæter, 2012). Initially set at four weeks, it was later extended to 15 weeks. Similar to Sweden, this policy allows only the father to take this leave, thereby encouraging the breakdown of traditional gender roles (Norwegian National Insurance Act, 1997; Ellingsæter, 2012).

Studies have pointed to the positive effects of this policy on changing the traditional role of spouses in caregiving; as the implementation of this policy has resulted in an increase in the number of fathers taking parental leave, fostering their active involvement in childcare from the outset and promoting the acceptance of men as caregivers (Brandth and Kvande, 2018; Duvander et al., 2010; Farstad et al., 2019). Being raised in families where both parents participate in caregiving can influence children's perceptions of gender roles, encouraging the development of more egalitarian attitudes (Brandth and Kvande, 2018; Duvander et al., 2010; Farstad et al., 2019).

## **2.3. Iceland**

Iceland has consistently ranked among the world's top countries for gender equality, and its approach to parental leave can be seen as a reflection of its commitment to reducing gender-based disparities (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). Iceland's Paternity/Maternity and Parental Leave Act, introduced around 2000, was revolutionary in its approach to ensuring that both parents could take time off to care for their newborn child, providing for non-transferable leave for both mothers and fathers, ensuring that both parents share childcare responsibilities (Iceland, Act No. 95/2000). The previous Icelandic Parental Leave Act (No. 95/2000) had also allowed parents to share six months of parental leave, but in practice, its use was limited to women. This prompted the state to reform it and pass a new law, through which Iceland introduced a three-part model, the triple parental leave, in which parental leave is extended from six months to nine months per child, divided into three parts: three months for the mother, three months for the father, and three months to be shared between them (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019).

The implementation of this law has had an effective and strong impact in terms of taking and using paternity leave, with the proportion of men in Iceland taking it rising from less than one percent to 87 percent, after the introduction of the triple parental leave (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). A quantitative study of new fathers in Iceland, based on a longitudinal survey conducted in three parts, shows that the reform of the parental leave law has had a positive impact on changing traditional roles of spouses and achieving greater gender equality (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). Parents were asked how they divided their household chores, housework, childcare, and paid work. The responses show that the division of paid work and housework has become more equal since the introduction of the new law, and that parents who take their allocated parental leave become more involved in their children's care, especially since the leave is non-transferable (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019).

#### **2.4. Finland**

Finland has long been at the forefront of promoting gender equality, both in the workplace and within the family. Recent reforms in parental leave policies reflect a commitment to greater equality in leave allocation for fathers (Finland Ministry of Finance, 2023). Previously, Finland's parental leave law granted mothers 4.2 months of paid leave and fathers 2.2 months until the child turned two, with an additional six months shared between both parents (Finland Ministry of Finance, 2023). However, starting in 2021, Finland revamped its parental leave system to foster more egalitarianism, providing both parents with a total of 14 months of paid leave, evenly divided into 164 days (equivalent to 6.6 months) for each parent (Finland Ministry of Finance, 2023). Additionally, the new law permits only 69 days of paid parental leave to be transferred between parents (Finland Ministry of Finance, 2023). These reforms aim not only to afford parents more time with their children but also to challenge and reshape traditional gender roles within families. They underscore the idea that transforming stereotypes requires not just legislative changes but also societal awareness programs and broader interventions aimed at fostering more equitable gender representations.

#### **2.5. Germany**

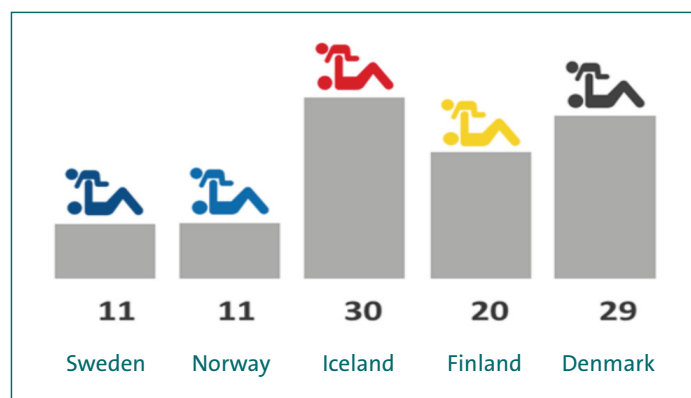
In 2007, Germany overhauled its parental leave system through the Parental Allowance and Parental Leave Act, introducing the concept of partner months or father months. This reform grants parents 12 months of leave, with an additional two months if both parents opt to share the leave (Parental Allowance and Parental Leave Act, 2007). The overhaul, known as Elterngeld (parental allowance), had significant impacts on gender roles and stereotypes within the country; beyond providing financial assistance to parents, the reform aimed to promote a more equitable distribution of childcare responsibilities between mothers and fathers and to incentivize greater paternal involvement in early childcare (Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women, and Youth, 2014; Spiess and Wrohlich, 2008).

Consequently, there was a significant rise in the number of fathers opting for parental leave. Previously, only approximately 3% of fathers chose this option,

marking a departure from the traditional perception of fathers solely as providers (Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women, and Youth, 2014; Spiess and Wrohlich, 2008). Additionally, the reform replaced the previous income-tested system with one offering 65% (up to 67% for low-income families) of parents' prior earnings, extending up to 12 months (or 14 months if shared) (Federal Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women, and Youth, 2014; Spiess and Wrohlich, 2008). This made it financially viable for higher-earning partners, often fathers, to take leave, challenging the notion that men should always prioritize work (Schönberg and Ludsteck, 2014). Research suggests that these changes have sparked societal discussions on the necessity of reshaping gender stereotypes in parenting and the workplace, gradually altering public perceptions and fostering a shift towards more equitable parenting roles (Ondrich, et al., 2003). However, despite these strides, the literature highlights persistent hurdles and obstacles; as some fathers opted for two-month leaves, returning to work due to entrenched stereotypical expectations in certain work environments and a lack of flexibility in specific sectors, hindering prolonged absences (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2011).

## 6.2. The Positive Effects of Father's Quota Policies in the Nordic Countries

As discussed earlier, the Nordic countries have implemented policies to encourage the sharing of parental leave between mothers and fathers. The primary motivations include empowering women and allowing fathers to participate more equally in childcare (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). This approach aims to challenge traditional stereotypes that confine mothers to the home as primary caregivers and assign the role of breadwinner solely to fathers (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). The Nordic countries recognized the importance of enabling women to financially support themselves and their children, viewing it as a public policy priority on par with men's involvement in childcare and unpaid domestic work (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). The rationale behind these policies is that they benefit children, parents, and society as a whole (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). While the specifics of parental leave policies differ between countries, they all offer a three-part paid parental leave package where each parent is allocated a quota, with the third part being flexible for the parents to divide as they choose (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). Research indicates that the utilization of the father's quota for parental leave varies among the Nordic countries. Iceland leads with 30% of fathers taking leave, followed by Sweden at 29%, and Norway at 20%. In comparison, Dutch and Danish men account for 11% of all parental leave (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019), as illustrated in Figure 7.



**Figure 7: Share of parental leave taken by fathers – figures in percent (2017)**

Source: Nordic countries statistics 2019 (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019:11)

Studies indicate that fathers are more likely to take longer parental leave when both parents have higher education levels, or when the mother's income is lower or equal to that of the father (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). The same trend is observed when the father works in the public sector while the mother works in the private sector (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). Research also reveals that attitudes towards paternity leave are becoming increasingly positive among parents, the general public, and social partners across all Nordic countries (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). Various labor market actors are taking initiatives to encourage men to take paternity leave; for instance, some employers offer additional weeks of paternity leave and higher compensation levels than those mandated by law (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). In Denmark, several unions have negotiated agreements where employers pay fathers their full salaries if they take the partial weeks of leave allocated to them in collective agreements (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019).

Currently, around 75 percent of Danish workers benefit from collective agreements that include dedicated paternity leave (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). In Norway, trade unions and employers' associations strongly support increasing the father's quota for parental leave (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). Sweden's system operates on the principle that parents are willing and able to cooperate with each other, which can become problematic if disagreements arise on important issues (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). In cases of joint custody, each parent is entitled to half of the parental leave and if one parent does not take their allocated days,

#### **The impact of paternity leave in changing traditional stereotypes of spousal roles**

- Men who take long-term parental leave in the Nordic countries are more involved in caring for their children throughout their lives.
- They do more housework and household chores.
- They communicate better with their partners about their children's needs.
- They have a better understanding of their children and their partner's daily life.
- Studies from around the world, including Denmark, show that taking designated paternity leave improves fathers' health.

the remaining days can be transferred to the other parent, but if the days are not transferred and the father's share is left unused, eight months of parental leave are automatically forfeited (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). This could mean the total amount of parental leave might not cover the period until the child starts childcare, potentially affecting the single parent financially (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). In Finland, only parents who live with the child have the right to parental leave, which means the system is not designed for parents who do not live together (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019).

Although the Nordic countries have made significant strides in enacting laws to encourage fathers to share childcare duties with mothers, they still face challenges in achieving more balanced parenting responsibilities between partners (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). Despite progress, mothers continue to take far more parental leave than fathers (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). The right of mothers to a long and flexible period of parental leave can inadvertently become a barrier to equal responsibility sharing (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). These countries still grapple with the challenge of encouraging men to take more parental leave and become more involved in childcare (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019).

Another challenge is the care of elderly parents and other family members; while the ability of parents to balance parenting and working life has been a cornerstone of the Nordic welfare model, less attention has been given to the responsibilities many adults, especially women, have in caring for elderly parents or other family members (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). This dual caregiving role raises concerns about its impact on women's participation in social and economic life, particularly as the population ages and life expectancy increases (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019).

### 3. Media and Advertising

Many countries have recognized the power of the media and advertising in shaping societal perceptions, including stereotypes. They have intervened to combat traditional stereotypes of the roles of spouses within the family and have initiated measures to combat and curb this influence, which perpetuates and reinforces negative norms and stereotypes, particularly with regard to the roles of spouses in the family. The following are specific examples of such interventions:

#### 3.1. United Kingdom

In 2019, the UK's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) introduced guidelines to curb advertising that promotes gender stereotypes. These guidelines prohibit ads that include or broadcast stereotypical images likely to harm the social fabric or contribute to serious or widespread offense (Advertising Standards Authority, 2019). Specifically, they ban ads that ridicule people for not conforming to gender role stereotypes or portray men and women in overly traditional roles, such as suggesting women should be solely responsible for house cleaning or depicting men struggling with tasks like changing a baby's diaper (Advertising Standards Authority, 2019).

These principles were based on findings from a 2017 ASA report titled “Depictions, Perceptions and Harm”, which highlighted that certain stereotypes in advertising can harm both adults and children (ASA, 2017). For instance, the guidelines ban ads showing men or women failing at tasks due to their gender, suggesting certain activities are more appropriate for one gender, or ridiculing individuals for challenging gender role stereotypes (ASA, 2017). These regulations have led to the banning or revision of many ads based on public complaints, demonstrating significant public engagement and awareness (The Guardian, 14 August 2019).

### **3.2. United Nations**

The United Nations has actively engaged in combating stereotypes on multiple fronts. UN Women has spearheaded the creation of a global coalition known as the Unstereotype Alliance, which aims to eradicate harmful gender-based images and stereotypes in media and advertising content (Unstereotype Alliance’s official website). The coalition includes major advertisers and global brands dedicated to removing stereotypes from their content (Unstereotype Alliance’s official website).

### **3.4. Australia**

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has established guidelines for media standards, recognizing the media’s significant role in shaping societal views, including those related to gender roles (Australian Communications and Media Authority; n.d.). These guidelines include provisions that prohibit the broadcast of material promoting negative stereotypes or content that discriminates against or denigrates individuals based on gender (Australian Communications and Media Authority; n.d.). ACMA also monitors and addresses complaints about potentially discriminatory or degrading images in the media (Australian Communications and Media Authority; n.d.).

One notable policy direction in this area involves the work of ACMA and associated organizations (Australian Communications and Media Authority; n.d.). The Australian Advertising Standards Bureau oversees the Code of Ethics of the Australian Association of National Advertisers which includes provisions against portraying individuals in a discriminatory or denigrating manner based on gender. (AANA) (AANA, February 2021).

## **4. Public Awareness Campaigns**

The aforementioned interventions highlight the influential role of media and advertising in shaping social perceptions and norms. While legislation and regulations are essential, their effectiveness relies on societal acceptance and collective efforts to promote gender equality. Public awareness campaigns serve as a key mechanism in this endeavor. Below are some of the best practices in public awareness campaigns:

#### 4.1. India: Share The Load Campaign

The Indian government has supported various campaigns to promote shared responsibility for household chores between men and women, challenging the stereotype that household tasks are solely women's duty. One of the most prominent and successful campaigns is Ariel's multi-year Share the Load campaign, launched around 2015. Ariel, a leading manufacturer of detergents and laundry soaps, aims to highlight through this campaign gender inequality in the home and change stereotypes about the role of spouses, specifically challenging the notion that wives and women, in general, are exclusively responsible for household chores such as washing and cleaning clothes (Ariel India, n.d.).

The ads for this campaign emphasized that household responsibilities, particularly laundry, should not fall solely on women (Ariel's #ShareTheLoad; Ariel India's YouTube Channel and various news articles covering the campaign; campaign). The campaign featured impactful ads portraying men realizing the unequal burden of housework their partners shoulder and taking steps to share the load where the core message was that men should participate equally in household chores, including laundry (Ariel's #ShareTheLoad; Ariel India's YouTube Channel and various news articles covering the campaign; campaign). The campaign kicked off with a commercial where a father, after witnessing his daughter balancing household chores and her job, decides to share housework with a clear message: "It's never too late to share the load and change the stereotypical norms of housework" (Ariel's #ShareTheLoad; Ariel India's YouTube Channel and various news articles covering the campaign; campaign). The campaign delved into the impact of the unequal distribution of household chores on marriages and families, urging men to share the load for a more equal and happy marriage; one of its ads specifically encouraged viewers to question whether the long-standing unequal distribution of household chores was creating emotional distance between spouses (Ariel's #ShareTheLoad; Ariel India's YouTube Channel and various news articles covering the campaign; campaign).

Numerous studies have delved into the impact and outcomes of the campaign, with one study revealing that 65% of women experience emotional distance from their husbands due to the unequal division of household chores (Ariel's #ShareTheLoad; Ariel India's YouTube Channel and various news articles covering the campaign; campaign). This disparity in responsibilities often leads to communication breakdowns between life partners, as women bear the brunt of household work, causing stress and disconnection in relationships manifesting itself in a "silent withdrawal" underscoring the detrimental effects of traditional gender roles on spouses' emotional well-being (Ariel's #ShareTheLoad; Ariel India's YouTube Channel and various news articles covering the campaign; campaign). The campaign has been credited with raising awareness and enlightening spouses and young men, prompting many to realize the strain on their relationships without fully understanding its cause. Its' success was globally recognized, earning the title of the most effective campaign worldwide by the World Advertising Research Center (WARC) for consecutive years in 2017 and 2018; additionally, the campaign garnered

over 10 awards at Cannes, including three Golden Lions from 2015 to 2017, as well as several Grand Prix and Golds at Spikes Asia (Ariel's #ShareTheLoad; Ariel India's YouTube Channel and various news articles covering the campaign; campaign).

#### **2.4. HeForShe Global Campaign**

UN Women's HeForShe campaign is a broad-ranging campaign dealing with various topics that contribute to the achievement of gender equality (UN Women, HeForShe website). It has many objectives, strategies and means to reach its goals. Engaging men as active and effective individuals in change and reaching gender equality is one of its main objectives, by encouraging them to change their behavior and take decisive steps against gender stereotypes. In this context, the campaign challenges traditional concepts of masculinity and marital roles (UN Women, HeForShe website).

### **5. Summary**

There are many good policy practices that GCC countries can benefit from in changing the traditional norms and stereotypes of spouses' roles that negatively affect the family and marital relations. However, the national cultural context of each country should be taken into account in adopting good practices, because the cultural and societal contexts of Arab countries in general and the GCC countries in particular differ from those of other countries. Therefore, the experiences of other countries should be adapted to the national contexts of the Muslim Gulf States.

# CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. Summary

This study sought to analyze the challenges faced by modern families in light of the changes that have occurred in the economic and social role of husbands in the GCC countries. It aims to explore and propose policies that contribute to confronting these challenges and addressing the resulting risks that threaten the cohesion of the family entity and the continuity of its existence.

This study shows that the traditional stereotypical role of the family, which gives husbands the role of primary breadwinner and main decision-maker in the family, and wives the role of caretaker and homemaker, is deeply rooted in the GCC countries. Multiple factors, including globalization and modernization policies pursued by these countries, have partially changed these roles. Previously, the roles of the spouses in the family depended on a social context in which husbands were the main breadwinners because women lacked education and employment opportunities. However, due to modernization, globalization, and the social and economic renaissance in these countries, gender parity in education was achieved in all six Gulf countries, and women outperformed men in enrollment in higher education.

The increased education and workforce participation of women have indeed reshaped traditional gender roles. However, these changes haven't resulted in a significant shift in the stereotypical division of household responsibilities or power dynamics within spouses. Despite women's expanded roles beyond the home, their dual responsibilities as working mothers often lead to overwhelming burdens. While they contribute economically, they still face pressure to fulfill the role of the primary caregiver at home. Concurrently, women's economic independence has heightened their desire for equality within relationships, causing tensions over roles, status, and decision-making power. These conflicts arise from the clash between evolving expectations and entrenched stereotypes regarding the roles of spouses.

These challenges have led to the emergence of several issues within Gulf families that threaten their cohesion, stability, and permanence, most notably the high divorce rate, late age of marriage, and low fertility, among other challenges and issues. Changing this situation requires the development of policies and interventions that help change societal awareness and help spouses change their behavior based on traditional stereotypes of their roles and push them to adopt more egalitarian and just concepts.

GCC countries have implemented various reforms to adapt to societal changes spurred by modernization initiatives. These reforms include legislation supporting working mothers through maternity leave and policies facilitating work-life balance. However, these measures have not adequately addressed the entrenched stereotypes

surrounding spousal roles in the family. While focusing on maternity leave and childcare facilities, some reforms have introduced flexible work arrangements. While commendable, these efforts often overlook the significance of paternity leave in reshaping spousal roles. Although some GCC countries have extended paternity leave, the durations remain brief, limiting fathers' ability to fully engage in childcare and household responsibilities. Paternity leave plays a crucial role in acknowledging the shared responsibility of both parents in child-rearing, challenging the notion of mothers as sole caregivers, and encouraging fathers to actively participate in family life from the child's earliest days.

GCC countries have initiated reforms and interventions encompassing various areas, including the review and revision of school curricula to eradicate stereotypes ingrained in the minds of young individuals from an early age. School curricula serve as a pivotal tool in shaping societal attitudes and perceptions by either perpetuating or dismantling stereotypes. The reproduction of traditional societal norms through these curricula can hinder the roles of spouses within families and constrain women's contributions to society and the economy. While these initiatives are commendable, further efforts are needed from GCC countries to ensure their effectiveness.

While certain GCC countries acknowledge the influence of media and advertisements in shaping societal perceptions, including those related to spousal roles within families by broadcasting media programs, substantial advancements in this realm necessitate the implementation of policies and regulations. These measures should aim to prohibit the dissemination of content and advertisements that perpetuate stereotypes regarding spousal roles, thereby elevating the media as a catalyst for change and a potent instrument capable of reshaping societal norms and stereotypes related to spousal roles within families.

The GCC countries have introduced numerous initiatives aimed at strengthening family bonds and fostering the longevity of marriages. These include programs to combat domestic violence, support spouses in resolving disputes and post-divorce issues, and educate soon-to-be-married couples on aspects crucial for building a happy and enduring marital life. While parenting programs have been implemented, there has been limited participation from fathers, revealing a significant gap in these initiatives. This disparity can be attributed to entrenched stereotypes assigning women as primary caregivers. However, there is a growing global movement towards involving fathers in childcare and parenting, recognizing the positive impact of their involvement on children's development and well-being. Parenting programs have the potential to reshape beliefs and behaviors surrounding child-rearing, as well as to scrutinize how parents may treat their daughters and sons differently, influenced by negative traditional norms governing their roles and behaviors within the family and broader society. By incorporating discussions on negative stereotypical norms regarding spouses into parenting programs, these gaps can be addressed, fostering more equitable participation and promoting healthier family dynamics.

The successful implementation of this legislative package hinges on complementing it with comprehensive awareness campaigns targeting all segments of society. Recognizing this, some GCC countries have initiated educational programs and

activities aimed at addressing and rectifying negative stereotypes and biases that perpetuate discrimination against women and reinforce outdated norms regarding the roles of spouses. To further progress in this endeavor, GCC countries should leverage best practices in the field and establish multifaceted partnerships and initiatives to engage all members of society in these awareness efforts. Effectively altering societal perceptions and norms surrounding social roles, particularly those related to spouses, is a complex and gradual process that cannot be achieved solely through legislation. It necessitates long-term strategies, such as national action plans, and entails forging robust partnerships with diverse stakeholders to effect tangible change.

## 2 . Recommendations

### 1. Reviewing educational systems and curricula and revising their contents to remove negative images and stereotypes of the role of men and women in the family and society

**1.1.** Examining the educational curricula, starting from early childhood education through to secondary levels, is crucial for reshaping children's perceptions, personalities, and behaviors by challenging traditional gender stereotypes. Saleh Al-Ghaddouri (unpublished) underscores the necessity of correcting and reshaping traditional gender role stereotypes, advocating for shared responsibility in household and family care. He emphasizes the importance of activating the roles of both husbands and wives, as well as working women, to foster stability and balance within families. This serves as an invitation to specialists and researchers in family, social, psychological, educational, and economic studies to contribute to educational programs and textbooks aimed at promoting the active involvement of working women in achieving family stability.

**2.1.** Teachers receive training on the principles of gender equity, empowering them to address and challenge gender stereotypes within their classrooms.

**3.1.** Both boys and girls receive equal and non-discriminatory treatment when assigned learning tasks and homework, rather than focusing on fostering boys' interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) subjects.

**4.1.** Parents are actively involved in educational sessions aimed at raising awareness about the importance of combating traditional gender stereotypes in both family and societal roles. They are encouraged to embrace standards of gender equality and justice.

**5.1.** Initiatives are implemented to inspire girls to pursue studies in science and technology within school curricula, encouraging them to explore STEM courses and careers.

**6.1.** Programs are developed to promote greater male participation in the field of education, including roles as teachers and in early childhood care.

## **2. Introducing the topic of gender norms and stereotypes as one of the main themes in parenting programs**

**2.1.** Discussing traditional gender role norms and stereotypes and incorporating them into parenting programs, considering that parental upbringing plays a pivotal role in shaping the concepts, behavior and personality of children.

**2.2.** Educate fathers on the need to share childcare duties with the mother from the moment of birth.

**2.3.** Educate parents, especially fathers, on the need to reject preferential treatment and adopt gender-balanced behavior during upbringing.

**2.4.** Build the capacities of both parents and encourage them to adopt behavior based on the values of equality between them in terms of sharing the burden of care and household chores so that they can be models and role models for their children in fair, just and equal behavior, because children's beliefs and behaviors stem from the beliefs and behaviors adopted by their parents.

### **2.5. Engage fathers to participate in parenting programs through:**

- Making these programs free of charge.
- Media and awareness messages that emphasize the benefits that parents will receive from improving their relationship with their children and gaining tools to address parenting challenges and children's behavioral issues.
- Offering program sessions during non-working hours, such as evenings or weekends, to accommodate working parents, and providing childcare during the sessions to make it easier for parents to attend.
- Collaborate with other relevant organizations such as schools, mosques, and preachers.

## **3. Undertake legislative reforms aimed at introducing/extending the duration of paternity leave by at least two weeks linked to mandatory enrollment in parenting programs:**

The text of the new legislation should include three main components:

**3.1.** Extending the period of paternity leave by at least two weeks.

**3.2.** Enrollment in parenting program courses is a mandatory requirement stipulated by the legislation.

**3.3.** Require workplaces to organize workshops and awareness campaigns to educate fathers about gender role stereotypes and urge them to use paternity leave to fulfill their childcare responsibilities.

**3.4.** The implementation of paternity leave must be accompanied by awareness-raising campaigns at the community level, to ensure that fathers use it to fulfill their childcare responsibilities, and that community awareness is imprinted

with the concepts of shared parenting. Changing stereotypes is not achieved by enacting laws and legislation alone, but by changing societal perceptions through awareness programs and broader interventions that challenge traditional roles and aim for more equitable gender representation.

#### **4. Introducing the topic of traditional norms and stereotypes of the roles of spouses and including it as one of the main topics in premarital education and marital reconciliation programs**

Saleh Al-Ghaddouri (unpublished) advocated for the enactment of social policies focused on upholding mental health within families and spousal relationships as fundamental for marital stability and continuity. This encompasses state-provided family counseling programs and the compulsory implementation of rehabilitation and premarital education programs for young individuals:

**4.1.** Addressing traditional gender role norms and stereotypes within these programs and integrating them as crucial topics that trainers must understand due to their impact on various aspects of marital life.

**4.2.** Conducting lectures and interactive educational activities that explore the historical context and societal implications of gender roles, aiming to elucidate the origins and consequences of these stereotypes.

**4.3.** Enhancing the communication skills of married and soon-to-be-married couples to facilitate better communication within marriage and enable more equitable negotiation of responsibilities. This recommendation was highlighted in a paper presented by the Executive Office of the Council of Ministers for Development/Social Affairs of the Gulf Cooperation Council (2023), with the participation of the Doha International Family Institute. The paper suggested educating spouses about the dynamics of marital life, including roles and responsibilities, especially considering ongoing social, cultural, economic, and educational changes and the increasing participation of women in the workforce. Special topics such as family stability, the role of working women, child-rearing and preparation, and parental involvement in children's education and academic progress should be included.

**4.4.** Incorporating role-playing exercises to allow participants to step into their partners' shoes and experience the challenges and pressures associated with different roles.

#### **5. Introducing the topic of traditional norms and stereotypes of the role of spouses and including it as one of the main topics in programs and services that seek to protect the family from domestic violence by:**

**5.1. Interactive educational lectures and activities** that discuss the historical context and societal implications of gender roles and seek to clarify the origins and effects of these stereotypes and their relationship to the perpetration of domestic violence.

**5.2. Promote positive masculinity:** Challenging negative notions of masculinity is essential to redefining marital roles, by engaging men and boys in discussions

about concepts and behaviors related to masculinity, emotion, vulnerability, and respect. Discussing these concepts helps transform deep-seated beliefs about masculinity and marital and family roles.

**5.3. Support groups:** Victims and perpetrators can meet others who have faced similar challenges and, by hearing the stories and experiences of others, learn about alternative ways of thinking and acting that challenge stereotypical family roles.

**5.4. Provide specialized programs and services for children who witness domestic violence,** as they are more likely to perpetuate these patterns in their own relationships as adults. Programs that specifically target children aim to break this cycle by teaching and educating them about healthy relationships, mutual respect and non-violence.

**5.5. Providing positive role models** and inspiring examples, such as modeling Spouses who have broken away from traditional roles and have a balanced and happy relationship, gives participants real-life examples of how to shift from stereotypical roles to more egalitarian partnerships.

**5.6. Therapeutic interventions and counseling:** Victims, perpetrators and family members can re-examine core beliefs that contribute to their violent behaviors through therapy and counseling sessions and Spouses counseling, making them aware of the scenarios in which gender role stereotypes lead to marital conflict and domestic violence. Therapists often work to redefine beliefs about gender, power, and control to promote healthy relationships.

## **6. Reviewing media and advertising policies in order to steer away from projections that perpetuate stereotypical images and stereotypes of the role of spouses and refer to the new and changing role of women in a positive light**

**6.1.** Review media policies and include guidelines on the standards to be followed by the media for the role the media plays in shaping societal views, including those related to gender roles, and include provisions that prohibit the broadcast of material that promotes negative stereotypes and programs with discriminatory images.

**6.2.** Review advertising regulations and standards and include guidelines to prevent advertisements that promote gender role stereotypes and prohibit advertisements from including and broadcasting stereotypical images that would and are likely to ridicule people for not conforming to gender role stereotypes or that portray men and women in overly traditional roles.

## **7. Strengthening policies that help Spouses reconcile work and family:**

Saleh Al-Ghaddouri (unpublished) highlighted the necessity of implementing public policies geared towards achieving a balance between work and family life, along with promoting women's economic empowerment and their participation in various societal domains to elevate their status, uphold their equal rights, and mitigate any forms of discrimination against them. This entails:

**7.1. Implementing a curriculum within the Ministry of Education covering the integration of balancing family and work, to be included in secondary education and final-year university courses.** This includes elevating societal consciousness through strategic measures, such as integrating educational materials within school curricula that elucidate contemporary family concepts and the roles assumed by spouses, conducting training sessions and educational campaigns targeted at soon-to-be-married individuals, and launching awareness-raising media initiatives targeting specific ideologies.

**7.2.** Instituting paid maternity leave and facilitating breastfeeding breaks, particularly during the initial two years of a child's life.

**7.3.** Introducing flexible work arrangements to facilitate the harmonization of childcare duties with work obligations.

**7.4.** Empowering working women within the family by alleviating parental responsibilities and involving husbands by offering paternity leave, enabling them to support their wives in childcare.

**7.5.** Expanding the availability of workplace nurseries.

#### **8. Organizing and conducting awareness campaigns:**

**8.1.** In collaboration with relevant ministries overseeing family affairs, religious institutions, civil society organizations, and academic bodies, these recommendations align with a proposal presented by the Executive Office of the Council of Ministers of Development/Social Affairs of the Gulf Cooperation Council (2023), which advocated for seminars and lectures. Additionally, it suggested that media outlets, charitable organizations, and universities emphasize the cultivation of attitudes and understanding regarding the interactions between working wives and their husbands, as well as the adaptation of husbands to this dynamic.

**8.2.** Targeting health centers and clinics in particular in awareness campaigns to encourage them to promote shared responsibilities by involving both spouses in prenatal care, childbirth education, and parenting workshops.

#### **9 . Conducting in-depth field research**

Conducting in-depth field research to explore the different effects of negative traditional stereotypes and norms on family cohesion, stability and well-being, as scientific evidence and data play a major role in shaping policy and decision-making processes.

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