

Attitudes of Kuwaiti women toward leadership role and perspectives on leadership characteristics: An exploratory Study

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Abstract:

The aim of this exploratory study was to investigate the attitudes of a sample of Kuwaiti women toward their social roles and whether they desired leadership roles at work. The study addressed key questions related to women's perceptions toward leadership roles at work, the challenges faced women in their administrative leadership positions, the women leadership characteristics, and the socio-cultural challenges of women leadership roles in the Kuwaiti society. To achieve this goal, the study conducted open and closed-ended interviews along with a survey. The sample's participants included 45 female graduates from different departments at Kuwait University. The study demonstrated

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[المَقَالَاتُ وَالذَّرَاسَاتُ وَالأَبْحَاثُ الْمَنشُورَةُ بِالمَجَلَّةِ، لَا تَعَكِسُ وُجْهَةَ نَظَرِ مَرَكَزِ
الْبُحُوثِ وَالذَّرَاسَاتِ الإِجْتِمَاعِيَّةِ، وَإِنَّمَا تُعَبِّرُ عَن آرَاءِ مُؤَلِّفِيهَا].

descriptive and qualitative analyses of the obtained data. The results showed that participants held positive attitudes toward accepting leadership roles and had the required personal characteristics and social skills for professional success and growth. They also listed the challenges in holding leadership positions, many of which were endemic to the patriarchal Kuwaiti society.

Keywords:

Kuwaiti women, leadership roles, female leadership, characteristics, patriarchy, social structure

اتجاهات المرأة الكويتية نحو الدور القيادي وخصائص القيادة "دراسة استطلاعية"

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الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة الاستطلاعية إلى معرفة اتجاهات عينة من النساء الكويتيات نحو أدوارهن الاجتماعية، ومدى رغبتهن بتسّم أدوار قيادية في مجال عملهن. وحرصت الدراسة على طرح أسئلة جوهرية تتعلق بتصورات النساء نحو الدور القيادي للمرأة في العمل، التحديات التي تواجهها عند القيام بدور ريادي في مجال عملها، صفات المرأة القيادية، والتحديات الاجتماعية-الثقافية لدور المرأة القيادي في المجتمع الكويتي. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف قامت الدراسة بإجراء مقابلات ذات أجوبة إما مفتوحة أو مقيّدة، بالإضافة إلى استخدام أداة الاستبيان. وتكونت العينة من ٤٥ امرأة من خريجات جامعة الكويت، ومن مختلف الأقسام العلمية. وباستخدام المنهج الوصفي والتحليل الكيفي للبيانات، فقد أظهرت النتائج أن أغلب المشاركات بالدراسة يحملن اتجاهات إيجابية نحو القيام بأدوار قيادية، كما يعتقدن بأنهن يمتلكن السمات الشخصية القيادية والمهارات الاجتماعية المطلوبة للنجاح والنمو المهني. كما بينت النتائج اتجاهات أفراد العينة حول طبيعة التحديات والمعوقات التي تواجه المرأة لتسّم أي موقع قيادي، والتي عادة ما تكون نابعة من تركيبة النظام الأبوي في المجتمع الكويتي.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

المرأة الكويتية، الأدوار القيادية، الصفات القيادية للمرأة، النظام الأبوي، البناء الاجتماعي

1- INTRODUCTION:

Social change is a universal phenomenon, regardless of whether the context is primitively tribal, rural, urban, or industrial. Gulf Arab societies, which have developed new social structures, are no exception. There are now more educated individuals of both sexes, with increased cultural contact with the Western and Eastern worlds and significant inward migrations from other nations, all of which have resulted in more heterogeneous populations and open societies. Over the last four decades, various historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors have catalyzed many economic, social, and political changes. After a long period as a collection of developing and traditional societies, Gulf Arab nations have undergone noticeable growth and modernization (Marshall, 1982; Tetreault, 2001; Al-Kazi, 2008; Alzuabi, 2017).

There have been remarkable educational expansions too in recent years, with citizens encouraged to study abroad. This has widened the contact with both the West and East, leading to radical changes in not only the material aspects of life but also societal norms and values, with Kuwait being no exception. Soon after the establishment of educational programs for men in 1958, Kuwait took the initiative to establish parallel programs for women, encouraging gender diversity for the first time (Joyce, 1998). The Kuwaiti government supports education aimed at meeting the social development challenges of contemporary society, which has expanded the opportunities for women to

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realize empowerment at a gradual but promising pace (Crystal, 1992; Alzuabi, 2017).

In the past, national conventions and laws suppressed many opportunities for women to achieve empowerment through education. This included an anti-coeducation law passed by the Kuwaiti parliament (1996), which aimed to segregate the male and female education sectors; however, this law was eventually overturned by Kuwait's constitutional court in 2015. The government and private universities are now encouraging women to complete higher education. Kuwaiti women have achieved 40% representation in the education sector and are increasingly assuming executive roles in educational institutions as well as in national economic development (Rizzo, 2005).

By focusing on the modern context of their involvement in numerous social positions in the Kuwaiti society, this study attempted to examine the aspirations of Kuwaiti women in pursuing leadership roles at work. The study also explored the types of societal challenges that hinders women from achieving their leadership roles.

1.1 Research Questions

We established the following research questions:

1. What are the aspirations and attitudes of Kuwaiti women toward their leadership roles in the workplace?
2. What are the attitudes of Kuwaiti women toward the challenges they faced while holding prominent leadership

roles in their careers?

3. What are the perspectives of Kuwaiti women on the ideal female leadership characteristics in Kuwaiti Society?
4. What are the views and opinions of Kuwaiti women on issues hindering women as leaders?

1.2 Literature Review:

The concept of leadership encompasses several characteristics, including self-awareness, communication skills/reinforcement, a shared future vision, and appealing action (Donald *et al.*, 2006). Leadership impacts are associated with thinking skills that enhance one's achievement while enabling the leader to work as a respectable organizer, planner, problem-solver, and decision-maker (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Gender inequality in employment and assuming leadership positions is a manifestation of patriarchy. Patriarchy is a social structure that places women in vulnerable positions within intimate relationships, families, groups, and society at large.

The manifestations of patriarchy in laws and organizational structures as well as role expectations regarding mothers at the home and fathers at the workplace, all have patriarchal roots. Despite commonalities regarding male dominance, patriarchal influence appears differently in many cultural contexts. Hunnicutt (2009) focuses on the fluidity of patriarchy and calls it the theory of different types of patriarchy, which consist of "the social arrangements that characterize males, in which men as a group

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dominate women as a group, structurally and ideologically, hierarchical arrangements that appear in varieties across history and space. Evidence for the continued existence of patriarchy is seen throughout the world, but the way it is experienced varies in accordance with local social mores.

Tabassum and Nayak (2021) explored literature on the relationship between gender stereotypes and discrimination against women. The literature reflects that individual factors, family factors, socio-cultural factors and organizational factors shape stereotyped thinking in human beings thereby perpetuating gender discrimination and obstructing the career progressions of women in organizations. Tabassum and Nayak (2021) concluded that theories of management need to engage with critical social theories of gender to understand the patriarchal social, economic, cultural, political and religious conditions in which gender stereotypes are rooted.

In his work on Neo-patriarchy in the Arab World, Sharabi (1988) perceived of Neo-patriarchy as one of the main causes of the Arab crisis. According to him, Arab societies in general did not adopt modernism in its real form. Therefore, rather than being transformed into modern society they turned into “distorted modernism”. He described the social development in the Arab World as being distorted and lagging behind many other developing nations. His conclusion emphasized the need to integrate the study of culture, language and gender into political economy. He argued that women are still discriminated against

and not being fully integrated in the modernization process.

Patriarchy and gender inequality is a global reality particularly in developing countries. Despite traditional patriarchy and tribal roots, the Arab Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain) took major steps towards the empowerment of women during the past five decades. This was achieved through involving women in educational development strategies, labor force, politics and opening a room for them to establish women organizations. Sas (2019) argues that even though some of women's rights have been acknowledged by these countries, this process was gradual and is facing deep-rooted cultural norms that need to be altered. This renders the social transformation of the region both a legal issue and a structural process which impacts cultural and national identities.

In 2021, global gender gap index for Kuwait was 0.63 index. Though Kuwait global gender gap index fluctuated substantially in recent years, it tended to decrease through 2007 - 2022 period ending at 0.632 index in 2022 and Kuwait ranked 130th out of 146 countries (The World Economic Forum: The Global Gender Gap Report, 2022).

Women's participation in the workforce has improved in the Gulf countries over the past few decades. Although the extent of this development varies from country to country. The increased presence of women in the political sphere albeit limited in some countries of the Gulf states, has led to an increase in public

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awareness of women's issues (Al-Kazi, 2008). Compared to the other gulf nation and many other Arab countries, Kuwait was a pioneering country in addressing the issue of women rights. Like other Arab Gulf states, Kuwait suffers from a small indigenous population and labor force and suffers from an acute shortage of manpower. Foreign labor and skills are the catalyst for its exponential growth. Citizens represent about 40 percent of the population and only 22 percent of the country's workforce (Hosni & Al Qudsi, 1989).

Kuwaiti women are seen as demonstrating clear leadership abilities. They are creating an impact in the corporate world and the field of education in Kuwaiti society. Many Kuwaiti women are now successful professionals and hold prominent positions in academia, private business, medicine, government, and multinational companies. Kuwaiti women are also vocal advocates for social and political advancement in their country (Alsarraf, 2008). Their progress in academic life has been rapid, with approximately 70% of all female university students enrolled in university, including in the fields of engineering and medicine (Kuwait University, 2021). They are active contributors to teaching, engineering, medicine, law, management, administration, and government administration. In sum, Kuwaiti women making some cultural impact and notable progress toward improving their status in society.

Kuwaiti women have increasingly joined the workforce in the past decades. Kuwaiti women's engagement in the labor market

has increased tremendously as their representation in leadership positions stood at less than 15% in the government sector and at less than 20% in the private sector (Sas, 2019). Women are allowed to sign commercial and financial contracts without male consent, and in practice, the number of women starting their own businesses and gaining more economic independence is increasing. In Kuwait, women are involved in most professions, including engineering, architecture, medicine, and law, and hold positions as executive board members in major banks and private companies. The Ministry of the Interior is encouraging women to join the police force by establishing a police academy. The Ministry of Defense is also working to encourage women to join the military. Women have the right to maternity leave and childcare in both the private and public sectors (Seikaly et al., 2014).

Al-Zuabi (2007) argued that the entry of Kuwaiti women into the labor market and their participation in economic activities during the past 50 years has contributed to their increased integration in the political process. Kuwaiti women have recently gained top positions at executive and non-executive organizations despite challenges from certain groups such as tribal leaders and some conservative Islamic groups who disapprove of women holding leadership roles (Alzuabi, 2016). Paradoxically, negative social and political arguments have encouraged Kuwaiti woman to confront these problems while intensifying their enthusiasm to demonstrate leadership proficiency.

Many studies have found Arab women holding positive

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attitudes toward leadership roles. For example, Galanaki *et al.* (2009) reported a greater presence of women in managerial positions, and relatively stable attitudes toward women as managers. Islam and Nasira (2016) found that women tend to hold more positive views about female leadership than do men. Lewis (2010) found that women held more positive attitudes toward female managers than toward male managers. Some studies investigated the importance of gender dynamics and their impacts on decision-making, but with less attention to gender stereotypes, gender-based recruitment plans, and public perceptions about these stereotypes (Hannagan & Larimer, 2011). Notwithstanding all legal, social, and organizational changes, Schein (2007) reported that male managers were still associated with successful management. In this context, women in the Gulf countries have endeavored to raise concerns about their lack of rights in the political process (Rizzo, 2005). Additionally, Arab female workers have worked harder than male workers to demonstrate their value, leading to more private enterprises hiring women (Atiyyah, 1992). As such, this exploratory study investigated how female leaders in Kuwait perceived social impacts in the context of their personal and professional experiences. We used scientific scales to measure the extent to which Kuwaiti female graduates desired leadership roles in the workplace as well as the extent of their perception and understanding of the challenges they have endured while performing leadership roles.

2 METHODOLOGIES:

2.1 Participants and Procedures:

The researchers asked some department chairs at Kuwait University to send an email to female university graduates regarding participation in this study. Seven departments from two key colleges (College of Social Sciences and College of Public Administration) at Kuwait University in Shuwaikh campus were selected. The departments include political science, sociology and social work, geography, psychology, public administration, management and marketing, and economics. A total of 45 female graduates (N=45) agreed to participate and filled out formal consent forms. The intention was to conduct one-to-one interviews to all participants but 20 of them preferred to have a questionnaire sent to them by e-mail. The remaining participants were interviewed via Skype because of social distancing restrictions due to COVID-19. Using telephone interviews and any other communication software has been widely used in research methods (Creswell, 2005). The questionnaire developed for all participants has addressed their aspirations of the pursuit of leadership roles and their perceptions on the challenges they faced while working in high-ranking positions. The questionnaire includes open and close-ended questions on participants' socio-demographic background as well as their perceptions of the studied issue. Two research assistants were trained on how to conduct interviews by using a step-by-step guideline to obtain needed information.

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Variables related to socio-demographic data included are age, qualifications, work experience, status of currently held position, names of affiliated organizations, work duties, length of time in the current position, and length of time in other leadership positions. Additionally, the questionnaire included a Scale for the Attitudes and Aspirations of Kuwaiti Women Toward Leadership Roles (SAKWLR), and the Open-Ended Questionnaire (OEQ). The participants responded to the scales of their own accord. All responses (interviews and mailed ones combined) were recorded and tabulated using the SPSS software for analysis. Table 1 presents the participants' socio-demographic information.

Table 1. Participants' socio-demographic information (N=45)

Variable	F	%
<i>Age</i>		
Less than 30 years	18	40.0%
30–40 years	25	55.6
More than 40 years	2	4.4
<i>Marital status</i>		
Married	30	66.7
Single	13	28.9
Separated	2	4.4
<i>Professional experience</i>		
Less than 1 year	4	8.9
1 year	8	17.8
More than 5 years	33	73.3

Most participants (N=25) were aged between 30 and 40 years, followed by those less than 30 (N=18) and those over 40 (N=2). The majority (N=30) were married, followed by the single (N=13)

and the separated (N=2). Finally, most of the participants (N=33) had more than five years of professional experience, followed by one year (N=8) and less than one year (N=4). As for their level of education, all the 45 participants had received at least a bachelor's degree in their respective specializations. Only six of them had pursued their graduate education where four of them earned a master's degree and the other two earned a doctoral degree.

2.2 Measures:

2.2.1 Scale for the Attitudes and Aspirations of Kuwaiti Women Toward Leadership Roles (SAKWLR). Prepared by the authors, the SAKWLR is a 14-item instrument designed to measure the attitudes and aspirations of Kuwaiti women toward their social roles in Kuwaiti society and toward pursuing leadership roles in the workplace. Items 1–7 were rated on a 3-point scale, in which 1 = Yes, 2 = Unsure, and 3 = No. For validation, the authors presented the scale to a group of eight professors specializing in psychology and family sociology. Their opinions were used to slightly modify some items; agreement ranged from 90 to 100% for all items.

As an exploratory study with a small sample, the reliability was determined on a pilot sample of 10 individuals. The split-half coefficient was 0.78, Cronbach's alpha was 0.85, Spearman-Brown's coefficient was 0.81, and Guttman's split-half coefficient was 0.81. Internal consistency was measured based on the correlations between each item and the total scale score.

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Correlation coefficient values ranged from 0.67 to 0.76 for each item ($p < 0.001$).

2.2.2 Open-Ended Questionnaire (OEQ) and Interview

The OEQ, consisting of open-ended questions, was prepared by the authors to measure the opinions of Kuwaiti women on leadership characteristics in Kuwaiti society and on women as leaders. To validate the content, the authors presented the instrument to a group of eight professors specializing in psychology and family sociology. Their opinions were used to slightly modify some items; agreement ranged from 90 to 100% for all items. Al-Suwaihel (2009) and Atiyah (1992) recommend that interviews and open-ended questions be constructed by following the relevant literature to obtain opinions and a review of the sample.

2.3 Data Analyses:

For theoretical background, this study analyzed the data obtained from the 45 participants by following the descriptive approach. The data whether obtained by interviews or emailed questionnaire were transcribed and converted into frequencies by entering participants' responses into the SPSS software. Each response was numerically coded and subjected to a descriptive analysis to determine the percentage of responses against the variables.

3. Results and Discussion:

3.1 First Research Question:

Table 2 summarizes the responses to the first question: what are the aspirations and attitudes of Kuwaiti women toward their leadership roles in the workplace? Before discussing the results of this question, it is worthy to note that the majority of participants (75.6%) did not hold high-ranking positions at their respective workplaces. Only five participants (11.1%) said they held leadership roles, while five others (11.1%) reported holding high-ranking positions as well as leadership roles.

Table 2. Aspirations and attitudes of Kuwaiti women toward female leadership in the workplace (N=45)

Variable	Category	F	%
	<i>High-ranking position in the workplace</i>		
	No	34	75.6%
	Yes, as a leader	5	11.1
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>11.1</u>
	<i>Aspire to be a leader in the workplace</i>		
Leadership role	No	1	2.2
	Yes	30	66.7
	No	14	31.1
	<i>Previously assigned a temporary leadership position</i>		
	Yes	18	40.0
	No	27	60.0
Reasons for	<i>Why I want/do not want to</i>		

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desiring a leadership role	<i>become a leader</i>		
	No, too much responsibility and pressure	5	11.1
	No, I have other interests	2	4.4
	Yes		
	<i>Working with diverse staff</i>		
	Yes, I can handle responsibility	1	2.2
	Yes, to raise standards to a high level	8	17.8
	Yes, to obtain further personal development	4	8.9
	Yes, to obtain further personal development	7	15.6
	Yes, I deserve it because of my work	4	8.9
Future expectations	Missing	14	31.1
	<i>Fill a future leadership role in the workplace</i>		
	Yes	34	75.6
	No	7	15.6
	Not sure	4	8.8
Division of leadership roles	<i>Equality between male and female leadership roles</i>		
	Yes	33	73.3
	No	12	26.7

When asked whether they desired leadership roles in the workplace, most participants (N=30) said that they did, with 14 saying they did not and only one declining to answer. Sixty percent of the respondents had no experience with temporary leadership, while 40% reported that they did. The reasons for holding such roles were mixed. Some believed that they could

handle any responsibility and considered it important for personal development. However, some said that domestic responsibilities prevented them from spending time on high-level tasks, and hence they had no interest in management. Most participants (75.6%) had positive attitudes regarding future expectations about their leadership roles, with some remaining uncertain. Finally, when asked about the division of leadership roles between men and women, most of them (73.3%) said that they believed in equality, and 26.7% reported that they did not.

3.2 Second Research Question

Table 3 shows a breakdown of the responses to the second question: what are the attitudes of Kuwaiti women toward the challenges they had experienced while holding prominent leadership roles in their careers?

Table 3. Attitudes of Kuwaiti women toward challenges they faced in performing leadership roles (N=45)

Variables	Category	F	%
	<i>Critics against women leaders</i>		
	Yes	28	62.2%
	No	10	22.2
	In some areas	7	15.6
Critics against leadership roles for women	<i>Perceptions of women's personalities</i>		
	Conservative	15	33.3
	Moderate	7	15.6
	Open-minded	5	11.1
	Missing	18	40.0

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	<i>Family encourages you to acquire a leadership position</i>		
	Yes	39	86.7
Family encouragement	No	4	8.9
	Neutral	2	4.4
	<i>Motivation to pursue a leadership role</i>		
	I know I can do it	19	42.2
	To obtain experience and personal improvement	6	13.3
	Missing	20	44.4
	<i>Perceptions about workplace sector suitability</i>		
Workplace sector suitability	Government	13	28.9
	Private	13	28.9
	No difference	19	42.2
	<i>Perceptions about women's leadership capabilities</i>		
Women's leadership capabilities	Women are capable	33	73.3
	Some are capable, some are not	7	15.8
	Women have knowledge/character deficiencies	5	10.9
	<i>Difficulties that hinder your ambitions to become a leader</i>		
Difficulties for women in their careers	There are difficulties	31	68.9
	No difficulties	9	20.0
	Uncertain	5	11.1

The majority of respondents (62.2%) admitted that there were critics against the idea of women holding leaderships roles, while 22.2% said that there were none, and the rest reported criticisms

in only a few areas. When asked about personalities, 33.3% considered themselves conservative, 15.6% said they were moderate, and 11% said they were open-minded. In terms of whether their family members supported the idea of women in leadership roles, almost all (86.7%) said yes. As for pursuing these roles themselves, 42.2% said they would do so because they were confident in their abilities, with 13.3% simply saying it would benefit their personal growth. Regarding the suitability of women working in public and private sectors, 42.2% believed there was no difference in effectiveness: that is, women were seen as being suitable in both sectors. Further, most participants (73.3%) positively evaluated their ability to execute all leadership roles, with 15.8% saying they could do so in some areas and 10.9% saying that women were deficient in this capability. Many (69%) said they faced challenges that hindered their leadership performance, although some (20%) did not believe there were any such obstacles, and the rest (11%) reported uncertainty.

It is worthy to note that the high numbers of the missing data of some items in Table 2 and Table 3 were mostly from participants who preferred to use the e-mailed questionnaire rather than the interview. Few interviewees had skipped or not responded to some questions.

3.3 Third Research Question:

Table 4 shows participants' responses to the third question: What are the perspectives of Kuwaiti women on the ideal female leadership characteristics in Kuwaiti Society?

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Table 4. Perceptions of Kuwaiti women on the ideal female leadership characteristics in Kuwaiti society (N=45)

Category	F	%
<i>They are knowledgeable, academic, and professionally committed in leadership roles.</i>	16	35.6%
<i>They have the necessary problem-solving and decision-making skills to guide organizational functions.</i>	7	15.6
<i>They have confidence in their ability to listen to others and treat others with respect; they are disciplined in their leadership roles.</i>	8	17.8
<i>They have social skills that are desirable for leadership positions and make decisions with integrity.</i>	1	2.2
<i>They have the intelligence and wisdom needed to perform organizational leadership roles; they have all the characteristics required for successful leadership.</i>	9	20.0
<i>They have confidence in their abilities as empowered women; they are sufficiently knowledgeable and understanding for leadership roles.</i>	4	8.9

When asked which personal characteristics were required for effective leadership, 35.6% of participants said that leaders should be knowledgeable, academic, and professionally committed, while 15.6% reported that problem-solving and decision-making skills were important from an organizational perspective. Overall, 17.8% of participants also mentioned confidence in their ability to

listen to and respect others, and 19.2% of participants maintained a disciplined attitude toward leadership roles. One participant said she had social skills that were desirable for leadership and focused on making decisions with integrity. Twenty percent of respondents also said they had intelligence and wisdom in terms of organizational leadership and had all the required characteristics for becoming a successful leader. Finally, 8.9% reported confidence in their abilities as empowered women and said they had the knowledge and understanding needed to accept leadership roles.

3.4 Fourth Research Question:

As shown in Table 5, participants' responses to the question "what are the views and opinions of Kuwaiti women on issues hindering women as leaders?" were divided into two components: *patriarchal culture* and *community customs and traditions*.

3.4.1 Patriarchal culture:

Regarding the idea of women as leaders in Kuwaiti society, the majority of participants (31.1%) felt that the patriarchal culture discouraged them from aspiring for these roles, and 11.1% reported that men had the "final say." An overall 26.7% said that women were perceived as sensitive and unable to handle any leadership roles, and were advised to instead focus on caring for their children and husband. Finally, 6.7% said that most people did not like female leaders because they did not trust their decisions.

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Table 5. Views and opinions of Kuwaiti women on women as leaders (N=45)

Variables	Category	f	%
<i>Patriarchal culture</i>	<i>The patriarchal culture does not encourage them to be leaders</i>	14	31.1%
	<i>Men have the final say and are found to be more dependable in leadership roles</i>	5	11.1
	<i>A woman is sensitive and cannot handle leadership; she should only take care of her children and husband</i>	12	26.7
	<i>Most people do not like female leaders because they do not trust their decisions</i>	3	6.7
<i>Community customs and traditions</i>	<i>It will take time for society to accept women's social mobility and social roles alongside men's</i>	2	4.4
	<i>Societal traditions do not allow women to take leadership positions</i>	7	15.6
	<i>Some people are conservative, so they find it difficult to accept women's leadership</i>	2	4.4

3.4.2 Community customs and traditions

A few participants (4.4%) believed that certain factors influenced people to not accept occupational mobility for women or the idea of women working alongside men. These included

community customs and traditions and the general social setup of Kuwaiti society. Specifically, 15.6% reported that current societal traditions do not allow women to take leadership positions. Some participants (4.4%) also said that conservative attitudes made it difficult for people to accept the idea of women in leadership roles.

4. DISCUSSION:

This study measured the aspirations and attitudes of Kuwaiti women toward leadership roles and solicited their perspectives on leadership characteristics. Several previous studies have demonstrated positive attitudes toward the idea of women holding leadership roles (e.g., Galanaki *et al.*, 2009; Islam & Nasira, 2016; Al-Suwaihel, 2009; Chullen *et al.*, 2017; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). In our study, participants also highlighted the strength of their social skills, and believed they had the personal characteristics needed to pursue leadership positions. Wood (1998) argues that employees should be appointed based on their merit, and executive roles should be considered regardless of gender. In this background, women can confidently fulfill leadership roles while facing related challenges and managing administrative tasks. However, some other studies have found lingering negative or conflicting attitudes toward women in leadership roles (e.g., Chesterman *et al.*, 2005; Mostafa, 2005; Megheirkouni, 2014; Kutlu & Akbulut, 2020).

In accordance with Sharabi's (1988) neo-patriarchal approach and the findings of Alzuabi's (2007; 2016); Sas (2019) and

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Tabassum and Nayak (2021) studies, many participants in this study reported the challenges of living in a patriarchal society, in which men get preferential treatment in leadership roles. According to the global gender gap report sponsored by the World Economic Forum (2022), it has been found that more men than women hold executive positions in both public and private sectors in Kuwait. Our findings also support those of the Al-Suwaihel study (2009), which demonstrated the commitment of women leaders to positively influence their culture. The development of female leadership in Kuwait is a collaborative effort by the country's women. When asked for their perspectives on Kuwaiti social practices, participants replied that they felt a general prejudice toward female governance in many areas, both in personal and professional settings. However, many also said that their families encouraged them to pursue leadership roles. They also expressed that social some norms, traditions, and religious interpretations in the Kuwaiti social context helped women develop the personal characteristics needed for leadership.

5. CONCLUSION:

The study investigated the aspirations and attitudes of Kuwaiti women toward their leadership roles in the workplace, the challenges they faced in holding prominent leadership roles, their views on female leadership characteristics in Kuwaiti society, and their opinions on women as leaders. The findings of this study related to the Kuwaiti context should be used as constructive inspiration for women who wish to develop their professional

abilities and seek leadership roles. They should be assured of equal opportunities and encouraged not to limit their pursuit of gender-diverse social development.

Our research presents implications and recommendations for future researchers to study the contribution of women in diverse fields such as medicine, engineering, and politics in Kuwait. It is necessary to use a large sample of women to generalize the results of the study, but the COVID-19 pandemic posed a challenge to the researchers, in that we were unable to visit the institutions physically. Future research studies can explore women's roles in academia or other settings through detailed investigations by conducting case studies. Our study recommends introducing leadership training programs at university level for women to learn leadership styles and characteristics, and ways to overcome the challenges to becoming a leader. Likewise, it informs policymakers to help women realize their equal social role in society, alongside men. In sum, this study is an attempt to help women break the glass ceiling in Kuwaiti society, with its cultural dominance of men, and secure their rightful role.

5.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

One of the challenges faced by researchers in this study was the lack of contact details of the university graduates and the difficulty in communicating with them via emails. As a result, the study was confined to two colleges at Kuwait University. Kuwait University is the only main public academic institution in Kuwait.

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A larger sample of graduates from Kuwait University and other private universities with different fields and academic backgrounds would enrich the analysis of the study. Furthermore, while the plan of this study was to conduct interviews with all the participants, almost half of them declined to be personally interviewed and preferred to have a questionnaire sent to them by email. These issues should be addressed in wider future research.

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