Barriers to Arab female academics’ career development

Legislation, HR policies and socio-cultural variables

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Abstract

Purpose – Arab female academics struggle to advance within their universities in both academic and managerial ranks. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the factors hindering Arab women’s academic career development through studying the case of Jordanian academic women.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were gathered through document analysis (Jordan constitution, Jordanian Labour Law and its amendments, higher education and scientific research law, Jordanian universities’ law and universities’ HR policies and regulations), interviews with 20 female academics and a focus group with 13 female academics (members of the Association of Jordanian Female Academics).

Findings – The results indicate female academics as tokens facing many interconnected and interrelated barriers embodied in cultural, social, economic and legal factors. The findings support the general argument proposed in human resource management (HRM) literature regarding the influence of culture on HRM practices and also propose that the influence of culture extends to having an impact on HR policies’ formulation as well as the formal legal system.

Originality/value – The influence of culture on women’s career development and various HR practices is well established in HR literature. But the findings of this study present a further pressure of culture. HR policies and other regulations were found to be formulated in the crucible of national culture. Legalizing discriminatory issues deepens the stereotypical pictures of women, emphasizing the domestic role of women and making it harder to break the glass ceiling and old-boy network.

Keywords Gender, Arab, Jordan, Human resources, Career development, Culture

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The rush of women into the workforce during the last decades suggests a need for a career development theory that explicitly addresses the lives and experiences of women (Omair, 2010). Pringle and Mallon (2003) state that social structures such as national context, gender and ethnicity are not given sufficient weight in much of the contemporary careers’ literature.

While the study of women’s working lives has gained extensive attention among Western researchers, these studies have mostly been limited to European and North American settings and women in different cultural contexts have not been given the same attention (Omair, 2008). With regards to the Arab region, Metcalfe (2007) argues that there is limited knowledge of gender and HRM policies. Besides, little is known of HRM dynamics within the Arab region and how modernization has shaped and is shaping, management philosophies and practices.
Regarding Arab women, some studies scrutinized women’s leadership and political development (Romanowski and Al-Hassan, 2013; Al-lamky, 2007). Others investigated gender and management (Kemp and Madsen, 2014; Metcalfe, 2007). Also, the Arab cultural role in hindering women’s participation in public positions was investigated (Sarkis et al., 2009; Al Barak, 2005) and few other studies dealt with some aspects of HR-like employment and pay (Sidani and Feghali, 2014; Metcalfe, 2007; Metle, 2002). However, none of which considered both culture and HR.

With regard to Jordan, some efforts have been dedicated to examining women’s employment and discrimination (Nseer, 2015; El-Kharouf, 2000). But the focus has been on studying women’s representation in political, public and private positions (Azzam and Al-Shhabi, 2003; Al Barak, 2005; Peebles et al., 2007, Al-Maaitah et al., 2011; Al-Maaitah et al., 2012). However, the status of academic women has not been given adequate attention.

Further, female academics’ perspectives have not been investigated and their voices have not been heard.

Accordingly, this study is designed to offer an understanding of the female academics’ career development in Jordan. At first by investigating related legislations and HR policies. And second, by exploring female academics’ perspectives of legislations, policies, socio-cultural and economic factors’ effects on their career development. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to the development of a career development theory through studying women status and experiences from a different cultural lens. Moreover, this study intends not only to document the current state of female academics’ career development in Jordan, but also to identify the key issues affecting their advancement. Finally, it aims to propose practical solutions to enhance females’ representation in higher academic ranks and managerial positions.

Research problem
Jordanian women’s participation rate in academia at 24 per cent for the academic year 2013-2014 (www.mohe.gov.jo) is higher than the overall women’s labour force participation rate of 16 per cent (www.worldbank.org). Nevertheless, women’s representation diminishes in high academic ranks and they are underrepresented in managerial positions.

According to the Ministry of Higher Education figures of 2013-2014, in the master degree academic ranks, women constituted 56 per cent of lecturers (entry level), 40 per cent of teachers and 51 per cent of instructors, which is the final academic rank that can be reached by a master degree holder, according to the academic promotion regulations. Conversely, in post PhD academic ranks, women accounted for 22.9 per cent of assistant professors, 12 per cent of associate professors and only 7 per cent of full professors. For 2012-2013, the figures are almost the same (www.mohe.gov.jo). Generally, female academics’ representation decreases as the academic rank increases. However, within the post PhD ranks, female academics’ representation decreased by almost half as the academic rank got higher.

Regarding managerial positions, the problem is quite evident. Within the period 1962-2016, across 28 private and public universities, only one woman headed a public university in Jordan and this was only for a single year. Current figures, as of the first academic semester 2015-2016, show that there are only two women among 46 vice presidents and only 27 women among 300 deans (universities’ websites). Interestingly, 10 out of 27 female deans head nursing faculties. In Jordan, some jobs such as nursing are considered an extension of women’s care-giving role (Nseer, 2015; Peebles et al., 2007).
Overall, the problem is not the absence of women in the academic arena; rather, it is their lack of advancement within Jordanian universities both in academic ranks and management positions.

**Literature review**

For the past couple of decades, the Arab region has witnessed remarkable changes regarding labour markets’ gender composition. However, women’s participation in the labour force is still low and has not reached the desired level (Al-Maaitah *et al.*, 2011).

The Global Gender Gap Index 2015 ranks 145 countries according to how well they are leveraging their female talent pool, based on economic, educational, health and political indicators (World Economic Forum, 2015). In this index, Jordan ranks 93rd for gender equality in educational attainment. However, it ranks in 142 in terms of gender economic participation and opportunity (World Economic Forum, 2015). While improvements have been made in educational attainment and political empowerment since 2006, Jordan is the world’s second-least improved country in the economic participation and opportunity sub-index and the overall global gender gap index (World Economic Forum, 2015; UNDP, 2015). The educational outcomes show no gender gap in enrolment (UNDP, 2015); for example, female university graduates constitute 54.7 per cent of the total graduates for 2014-2015 (www.mohe.gov.jo), which shows a reverse gender gap. However, female labour force participation has been around 16 per cent for the past four years (www.worldbank.org).

According to The Jordanian National Commission for Women’s (JNCW) (2011) report, women’s low representation in the various decision-making positions is an indicator of the weak response of political systems to the requirements of developments and the needs of women, or at least indicative of the society’s hesitance to acknowledge women’s capabilities and citizenship. Therefore, women’s working environment in Jordan is comprehensively reviewed by the researchers, beginning with the legal aspect.

To gain insight regarding the formal legal system that governs the working women in Jordan in general and academics in particular, the following section discusses constitutional and legal background, including: provisions of Jordan’s constitution, Jordanian Labour Law, higher education and scientific research law, Jordanian universities’ law and universities’ HR policies and regulations.

**Jordan constitution**

According to the Jordanian constitution, Article 6-1 states that: “Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties on grounds of race, language or religion”. However, “gender” was not mentioned. Article 6-2 states that the Government ensures work and education within the limits of its possibilities and also ensures a state of tranquillity and equal opportunities for all Jordanians. Further, the constitution’s Article 22 affirms the right of all Jordanians to hold any public position on the base of merit and qualifications.

Thus, the constitution’s Articles 6-2 and 22 are fair in ensuring equal opportunities for all Jordanians. However, the constitution is still in need for more clarification particularly regarding ignoring the gender issue in Article 6-1, which leaves room for interpretation as all the later articles refer to “Jordanian” even though “Jordanian” is not a clear term.

**Jordanian Labour Law**

According to the *Jordanian Labour Law* (1996) No. 8 of 1996, in Article 2 the term “employee” refers to every person, male or female, who performs a job for wages and who is a subordinate to the employer and at his or her service. According to JNCW (2011), the
labour law provides protection to the working woman in the workplace on the basis of equality between men and women in all rights and duties. However, the Jordanian Labour Law embodies both positive and negative provisions for women (Peebles et al., 2007).

Jordanian Labour Law restricts the working hours and types of industries that are permissible for women to work in. Article 69 states:

The following shall be determined by a decision from the Minister subsequent to seeking the opinion of the competent official authorities: The industries and jobs in which it is prohibited to engage a woman. The times during which it is not permitted to put a woman to work and the exceptional cases there from.

Peebles et al. (2007) argue that although this provision is designed to protect women’s safety, it limits women’s freedom of choice, limits professional advancement and denies women the opportunity to engage in some professions.

Regarding pregnancy, Article 27-b prevents employer from terminating the service of the pregnant woman as of the sixth month of her pregnancy or during the maternity leave. This has positive impact in terms of supporting women. However, employers may terminate employment because of pregnancy prior to the six-month cut-off point (Peebles et al., 2007).

Article 70 states that a working woman shall have the right to obtain maternity leave totalling ten weeks with full pay prior to and after delivery provided that the period subsequent to delivery may not be less than six weeks. However, there is a need to increase women’s maternity leave (Al-Maaitah et al., 2012).

Article 67 entitles a woman who works at an establishment which engages ten employees or more the right for unpaid leave for a maximum period of one year after her delivery to look after her infant. Article 71 grants working mother the right to a total of one hour per day to nurse her children for a period of one year after delivery. According to Peebles et al. (2007) Articles 67 and 71 indicate state’s consideration of parenting as solely the female’s responsibility.

Article 72 obligates the employer who employs a minimum of 20 women to provide a suitable place under the custody of a qualified governess to care for the employees’ children of less than four years of age provided that the number is not less than ten children. Peebles et al. (2007) and Nseer (2015) argue that employers try to hire less than 20 women to avoid establishing childcare sites. Moreover, the establishment of workplace childcare is also of interest to many male employees (Peebles et al., 2007). Article 72 is another evidence of the state’s consideration of parenting as the female’s responsibility.

Higher education and scientific research law
A revision was made to the Higher Education and Scientific Research (2009) law No. 23 of 2009 and its amendments, which governs public as well as private universities. Further, a revision was made to the Jordanian Universities’ (2009) law No. 20 of 2009, which regulates the formulation and responsibilities of the trustees committee in each university and which is in charge of selecting the vice presidents and deans. In addition, this law regulates the formulation and responsibilities of the universities' councils and the deans’ council.

None of the mentioned laws’ articles were found to be gender discriminatory as all the laws’ provisions are impartially stated. However, none of them were supportive of female academics. In a similar context, Bagihole and White (2011) argue that it is the state’s role in shaping gender discourses and determining gender equality legislation, rather than the institutional organizational model, that has the greatest impact on women’s access to senior positions. For example, in South Africa, Sweden and Australia recognition of the responsibility of the state for transforming the male organisational culture of universities
and commitment to broader gender equality has impacted positively on the promotion of women.

Universities’ human resource laws and regulations
Unlike Higher Education and Scientific Research Law, universities’ internal laws have some discriminatory articles. For example, at a majority of universities in Jordan, women are unable to include their children or parents in their health insurance. However, all universities prevent women from including their husbands in their health insurance. Moreover, all universities prevent married women from family allowance which is given unconditionally to married men. This indicates practiced inequality against female employees and their dependents (Peebles et al., 2007). This was attributed to the perceived dependency of women in Arab culture (Peebles et al., 2007; Nseer, 2015).

Furthermore, at some universities, females who gain scholarships to pursue their PhD are not given the same benefits as males. For example, while a married male scholar is granted extra monthly salary to cover expenses for his wife and children, a married female scholar is only granted the salary of a single male scholar. Moreover, a married female scholar is not granted travelling expenses for her children and husband like her male counterpart. Again, this was attributed to the perceived dependency of Arab women, where the financial burden is generally assumed the males’ responsibility.

Regarding academic promotion policies, it was found that provisions are very firm, definite and specific. However, the hiring and managerial promotion policies were found to be more general and loose but not gender discriminatory.

Overall, by reviewing the formal legal system that governs the working women in Jordan in general and academics in particular, the following points are proposed:

- It harms the females’ financial rights;
- it deepens the stereotypical picture of women as dependents;
- it has a harming impact on academic women’s career development; and
- it is formulated in the crucible of national culture.

Other career development barriers
Although Arab women’s position has improved (Omair, 2008), they are still far from achieving equality, especially in career advancement (Metle, 2002). The number of barriers facing women in general and Arab women in particular can be categorized as cultural, social, religious, economic and institutional factors.

Cultural barriers
Moving up the management ladder is considered to be the males’ domain. A majority of top management positions are occupied by men and there is evidence of negative attitudes towards women (Powell and Graves, 2003). Women as managers are not welcomed in the workplace, as it is believed that managerial positions are masculine (Wilkinson, 1996; Preko, 2012). Moreover, Yaseen (2010) points to conflict regarding Arab women taking on leadership roles traditionally dominated by Arab men.

Women in the Arabian Gulf region are still locked into restrictive traditional roles (Abdalla, 1996). The situation is not much better in the other Arab countries. Generally, stereotypes, including the traditional role of Arab women, are the most recurrent challenge along with discrimination including patriarchy (Mensch et al., 2003; Jamali et al., 2005; Omair, 2008; Yaseen, 2010; Omair, 2011; Preko, 2012; Arar et al., 2013; Nguyen, 2013).
Similar results were found in Egypt, as gender socialization has been found to be both very patriarchal and very supportive of traditional family values and gender roles (Mensch et al., 2003). Interestingly, women themselves expressed the same stereotypes according to other females, as many believe that even when women reach the highest position, their primary concern should be their families (Jamali et al., 2005).

Such stereotypes hinder women's career advancement as it is assumed that women do not have the attributes associated with management (Nguyen, 2013). The stereotypes are related in essence to the patriarchal rules in Arab families that privilege males, benefiting their power and authority over women (Joseph and Slymovics, 2001). Overall, emphasizing women's traditional roles leads to yet further social barriers as discussed in the following.

**Social barriers**

Arab societies are currently in a state of confusion because of rapid changes and the impact of Westernization and modernization (Yaseen, 2010). The participation of Arab females in all areas is subject to further informal social traditions by a patriarchal and male-dominated society (Omair, 2008).

Moreover, some Arab institutions consider women highly risky employees because of their family responsibilities (Jamali et al., 2005). Nguyen (2013) claims that family obligations are connected to female academics' unwillingness to take management positions. Thus, care-giving interferes with productivity, promotion and tenure (Penney, 2015). Further, academic women experience high levels of stress (Bonawitz and Andel, 2009; Hirshfield and Joseph, 2012). This refers basically to family commitments (Bonawitz and Andel, 2009).

Overall, Arab social attitudes that restrict women's roles to care-givers, mothers and to domestic duties have been and still an obstacle in the way of equal participation in everyday life (Nseer, 2015).

**Religious barriers**

The concept of gender in the Arab world draws greatly on a mixture of Islamic beliefs and patriarchy, making the man the head of the family and society (Romanowski and Al-Hassan, 2013). This has impacted profoundly the status of Arab women's work participation and leadership. According to Omair (2008), Arab women's work activities have traditionally been subject to a restricted code of gender segregation in public, prayer and even at home. While such policies are informal, they do restrict placement and ultimately training and promotion opportunities for women (Metcalfe, 2006).

Another aspect of religion's role in hindering women's participation in public life has been the hijab, as it has been found that women wearing hijab are likely to face difficulty in finding jobs in the private sector (Nseer, 2015; Peebles et al., 2007). However, Yaseen (2010) claims that although Arab women experience discrimination and have been subject to restrictions of their rights and freedom, most of these practices are based on culture rather than religious beliefs.

**Economic barriers**

The financial situation of female academics forces them to take heavy teaching loads, which increases the level of their work stress (Bonawitz and Andel, 2009). Furthermore, female scientists around the world continue to face discriminatory pay. According to Shen (2013), the US National Science Foundation reports that females earn about half the doctorates in science and engineering in the US and on average just 82 per cent of what their counterpart males make. Further, in the European Union, females earn on average between 25 per cent
and 40 per cent less than males (Shen, 2013). Similarly, Jordanian working females in the private sector do not receive equal wages and pensions as males (Nseer, 2015).

**Institutional barriers**

Women face multiple challenges in the workplace. These include lack of support from the administration (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003; Bonawitz and Andel, 2009), biases of tenured colleagues (Bonawitz and Andel, 2009) and factors related to organisational culture (Jamali et al., 2005; Nguyen, 2013; Zulu, 2013). For example, organizations’ cultures in Lebanon do not enhance gender interaction (Jamali et al., 2005). Many organizations have a strong masculine culture, which translates more concretely into structural arrangements that isolate women from formal and informal networks and from developmental assignments that are used to groom males for senior leadership positions.

Furthermore, working women face a shortage of support services such as kindergartens, vocational training, employment-related information and access to development loans (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). Moreover, institutional policies do not consider care-giving needs for female academics (Penney, 2015).

Overall, by reviewing the related literature, the following points are proposed to further hinder females’ career development:

- The Arab masculine culture;
- the Arab social attitudes;
- religious beliefs; and
- economic problems and discriminatory financial rights.

**Tokenism, the glass ceiling and the old-boy network**

Tokenism is a situation in which a member of a distinctive category is treated differently from other people (Linkov, 2014). Kanter (1977) suggests that policy formulations might consider the effects of proportions in understanding the sources of behaviours affecting low representation, causes of tokens’ stress and possibilities for change. Thus, women need to be added to a total group in sufficient proportion to counteract the effects of tokenism. Torchia et al. (2011) consider women directors as “tokens” as most corporate boards have either one woman director or a small minority of women. Similarly, universities in Jordan have a small minority of female academics at the managerial levels; therefore, they can be considered as tokens.

Kanter (1977) saw that the visibility associated with being “tokens” generates performance pressure. Women faculty members felt they were expected to act as role models for female students plus they were consistently asked to do extra work, something which they believed was caused by increased visibility (Hirshfield and Joseph, 2012). Despite their extra work, female faculty members are not being considered for managerial promotions and they continue to encounter prejudice from their male colleagues (Hirshfield and Joseph, 2012). Overall, female academics’ progress remains far slower than would be expected (Jacobs, 1996). This indicates evidence of a glass ceiling for women (Cotter et al., 2001; Wirth, 2001). The glass ceiling is “invisible artificial barriers, created by attitudinal and organizational prejudices, which block women from senior executive positions” (Wirth, 2001, p. 1). In some cases, female academics doubt the commitment of senior management to change this situation and make the universities more culturally and gender inclusive (White, 2003).
Although its power is less than it used to be, the old-boy network still exists (Cross and Armstrong, 2008; Bonawitz and Andel, 2009; Zulu, 2013). The old-boy network is the informal forms of male power in the workplace and public life, from which women are excluded because of their gender (Cross and Armstrong, 2008). Overall, female academics feel that they are ignored, excluded, regarded as “light-weight” and receive unequal treatment (White, 2003).

Finally, the literature review showed that there is a knowledge gap concerning Jordanian female academics’ status and their perceptions regarding the impact of legislation and other social-cultural factors on their career development.

Methodology
As mentioned earlier, most of the previous studies focused on women’s representation in public and political positions with no adequate attention to Jordanian female academics’ positions. This insufficient theoretical background has led researchers to use the inductive approach.

As the status of women in any working field is affected by legislation, socio-culture and economic environment, this study investigated the perceptions of female academics regarding the previous variables through document analysis, interviews and a focus group. The figure below shows the research framework (Figure 1):

The research methods were as follows:

- According to the research objectives, the related documents (Jordan Constitution, 1952, Jordanian Labour Law No. 8, higher education and scientific research law No. 23, Jordanian universities’ law number 20 and universities’ HR regulations) were gathered and analysed. This method was used to gain insight regarding the formal legal system that governs the working women in Jordan in general and female academics in particular.

- In-depth interviews with 20 women were conducted during the period from August 2015 to November 2015. Seeking a richness of data, our sample was derived purposefully to represent our study community. Interviews were conducted with female academics with different academic ranks from different Jordanian universities as shown in Table I. Questions that were asked to interviewees are listed in Appendix.

- Focus group was conducted for three reasons:

![Figure 1. Research framework](image-url)
(1) First, group discussion of the interviews’ preliminary findings aimed to test the concurrence with these assumptions, to verify points of agreement, consistency and/or divergence;

(2) second: group discussion allows exchange and critiques each other’s ideas; and

(3) third, during interviews, it was found that over 25 per cent of interviewees were not fully aware of legislation and HR regulations:

- Therefore, it was important to present legislations and HR provisions to participants for thorough discussion. The focus group was conducted with 13 women academics (members of Association of Jordanian Female Academics). The discussion was held at the Association of Jordanian Female Academics headquarters in Amman. Participants in the focus group were not among the interviewees. The participants included two professors, one of whom is a current dean, five associate professors and six assistant professors. They represent three public universities (the University of Jordan, the Hashemite
University and the German Jordan University) as well as four private universities (Al-Zaytoonah University, Al Ahliyya Amman University, Philadelphia University and the Applied Science University).

- The discussion duration was about 90 minutes. A summary of the research’s preliminary findings was introduced by one of the researchers; the other researcher was assigned to document the discussion’s notes. Researchers presented the provisions of laws which were found through the document analysis – to be related to women and/or influence women’s rights and status. After presenting each article, participants were asked to express their opinions of “whether” the presented article had a positive or negative effect on women’s status and “how”. Moreover, interviewees’ opinions regarding other factors (cultural, economic, religious and social) were analysed, summarized and presented to focus group participants. They were asked to discuss and comment on the interviews’ findings.

- Finally, the overall number of participants in this research was 33 female academic participants, representing 11 universities (five public and six private). The overall number of universities in Jordan is 29 universities (ten public and 19 private). It is worth mentioning that public universities are funded and established by the government, whereas the private universities are funded and established by the private sector.

Data analysis
Data analysis was conducted in three stages: stage one: document analysis; stage two: interview analysis; stage three: focus group analysis.

1) Stage one: each document (Jordan constitution, labour law, higher education and scientific research law, universities’ law and HR regulations) was analysed separately. At this stage, the written statements that are related particularly to women were identified and coded. This was considered a useful starting point for organizing and reducing the huge number of statements and articles.

2) Stage two interview analysis: the researchers read the interview transcripts to become familiarized with the entire data. In addition, each interview transcript was given a code. Thereafter, concept-driven coding was utilized based on the research’s basic questions. Each interview question formulates a basic category and tables were constructed for each. Next, data-driven coding was conducted for unplanned issues that emerged during the interviews. In these cases, interviewees’ opinions were coded according to their meaning and placed under relevant categories, or, in other situations, they formed new categories or subcategories. It is worth mentioning that the data were analysed manually. Although there are several benefits of using the computer-assisted analysis software packages, the researchers preferred to construct the analysis based on the statement’s metaphoric, symbolic or direct meaning. Thus, it was decided to test out the meaning within its context and to look continuously for the general analysis structure in the light of the original data.

3) Stage three focus group analysis: as mentioned earlier, the discussion was based on the basic findings of the document and interview analysis. Preliminary results were introduced and raised for discussion. After the meeting, the researchers read through all the meeting notes. Answers were grouped into key points, to look for frequencies, similarities, dissimilarities and specificity of answers. Thereafter,
pattern matching was made to form themes according to the main results generated from the utilized techniques (document, interviews and focus group).

Finally, although qualitative research is interested in generating ideas and meaning rather than numbers, we present our findings as “percentages” to show how much agreement there was among participants on a particular point and/or how much emphasis was given to a particular idea.

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Results and discussion
Participants expressed several interrelated and interconnected factors that are believed to have an impact on their status. Before presenting these factors, it is worth mentioning that over 65 per cent of interviewees and focus group participants view an academic female’s career as challenging, tough and exhausting.

Jordan constitution
Over 30 per cent of the interviewees pointed to the ignorance of gender equality in the constitution. Similarly, the participants of the focus group expressed their dissatisfaction with article 6-1, with a strong request to include gender as follows: Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties on grounds of gender, race, language or religion. Overall, the focus group participants claimed this article was purposefully formed this way, as it is not culturally accepted for women to have the same rights as men. Additionally, 60 per cent of the focus group participants claimed that this article legalizes any discriminatory HR article and/or regulations. In a similar context, Odhiambo (2011) referred to the World Bank’s (2001) report, which argues that women’s position in any organization is inseparable from women’s position in society and that in no region of the world are women and men equal in legal, social or economic rights.

Jordanian Labour Law
Although Article 2 of this law define the term “employees” as every person, male or female, who performs a job for wages. However, over 45 per cent of the interviewees and focus group participants stated that equality is actually on paper, as practices are far from what is formally written.

Article 69 determined by a decision from the Minister of Labour the working hours and industries that women are permitted to work in. Although this was assumed to be evidence of the paternity role that is practised over women and treating them as unable to decide what is adequate for them, surprisingly, 60 per cent of focus group participants perceived this article as a protective article that can prevent abuse.

All participants state that there is a bias in Article 27-b which prevents the termination of the pregnant woman as of the sixth month of her pregnancy or during the maternity leave. They argue that such an article creates stress and causes women to hide their pregnancy till the sixth month.

Another debatable article was Article 67, which entitles a woman who works at an establishment which engages ten employees or more, the right for unpaid leave for a maximum period of one year after her delivery. In this case, 30 per cent of the focus group participants wondered why, when it is unpaid childcare leave was it related to a company having 10 employees or more. Thus, they perceived it as an indirect way to force women to quit and interrupt their career progress.
Article 70 states that a working woman shall have the right to obtain maternity leave totalling ten weeks with full pay prior to and after delivery provided that the period subsequent to delivery may not be less than six weeks. In this context, 40 per cent of interviewees and focus group participants claimed that even if 6 weeks is enough for some mothers, it is obviously not enough for the baby. One participant states:

We all know 6 weeks is not enough […] women are circuitously forced to quit their jobs to take care of their children.

Regarding Article 72, which regulates the establishment of childcare, one participant stated:

There are no deterrent penalties for breaking the law […] I think it does not exceed 500 dinars per year […] therefore violating the law is cheaper than opening day-care […] what does that mean?

Overall, according to our interviewees and focus group participants’ perceptions, three basic themes were found:

1. First, while the Jordanian Labour Law ensures gender equality in defining “employee”, there are several articles that have either a harmful or ambiguous impact on working women;
2. second, the Jordanian Labour Law was not perceived to be fully protective or supportive of women; and
3. third, although the constitution and the Labour Law do not only affect academic females and perhaps do not affect their career development directly, they emphasize the stereotype and inferior position of women.

Higher education and scientific research law
As mentioned earlier, none of the mentioned laws’ articles were found to be gender discriminatory; however, none were supportive of female academics. Thus, 60 per cent of the interviewees and focus group participants claimed the need for a quota to ensure women’s representation in higher positions. Franceschet and Piscopo (2008), who study gender quota in Argentina, state that quotas generate mandates for female legislators to represent women’s interests, whereas also reinforcing negative stereotypes about women’s capacities. However, Xydias (2007) states that gender quotas are typically assumed to provide women’s substantive representation. Furthermore, there is indicative proof that the design of the quota and selection schemes is essential for increasing female leadership (Pande and Ford, 2011).

Universities’ human resource laws and regulations
Over 25 per cent of interviewees state that they are not fully aware of the general HR regulations, whereas 45 per cent state that there are some problems in HR policies. They mentioned some points in this regards such as women’s inability to include their children, husbands or parents in the health insurance. Second, the debatable point mentioned earlier was that some universities do not give females who gain scholarships to pursue their PhD the same benefits as those given to males. Again, this was attributed to the perceived dependency of Arab women, where the financial burden is generally the males’ responsibility. This is closely related to the “cultural” stereotyping perceptions. Furthermore, it is related to the “economic” inhibitors, as deprivation of married female candidates from married allowances restricts their ability to pursue higher education, or
worse, limits a woman’s ability to gain a visa, as the western countries treat women as independent and her family as dependents. This partially explains the clustering of academic women in certain positions. As mentioned earlier, 51 per cent of instructors are women, which is the final academic rank that can be reached by a master degree holder according to academic promotion regulations. The percentage decreases to almost half at the post PhD levels.

Regarding hiring policies, 85 per cent of interviewees and focus group participants claimed that the formal hiring policies are generally fair. However, one participant stated:

There is nothing wrong with the written hiring policies, but it is commonly agreed that males should take priority, since a female will marry and find someone to take over her responsibility […] So the advantage is to be given to male candidates.

Another participant said:

According to my personal experience as a woman who was interviewed for an academic job and recently participated in a job interview to hire lecturers […] job selection practices may have something against women. For example, 8 years ago when they interviewed me […] I was asked questions like “Are you married?” “Do you have kids?” “Do you see yourself as a housewife or academic person?” “If you got the scholarship, what would be your husband’s opinion?” […] I have heard the same kind of questions in recent job interviews. If there is an equal opportunity in the selecting and hiring process, why would it seem natural to ask female candidates about their family commitments, which would not happen when interviewing male candidates?

Nevertheless, 30 per cent of participants stated that the hiring policies are loose, which leaves room for the old-boy network influence. Abramo et al. (2015) studied women in the Italian academic context, state that academic recruitment is often described as an informal process, in which a few influential professors promote or select new professors through mechanisms of cooperation. Such mechanisms often disguise phenomena of personal favouritism.

Regarding academic promotion policies, 60 per cent of interviewees stated that the related policies are generally fair and promotion requirements are standard. Conversely, Shen (2013) argues that women have fewer opportunities academically in Spain compared to men, where men are 2.5 times more likely to rise to the rank of full professor than female colleagues with comparable age, experience and publication records.

Doherty and Manfredi (2006) argue that male academics are more likely than females to be counted as research active. Moreover, they referred to a study of the UK research councils, which verifies that females’ research careers are less well developed than males’. Their study proved that that research councils were not discriminatory in allocating research funds, yet that there were embedded explanations for fewer females applying for grants than males. The most important presented explanation of females’ under-representation in professorial posts was their less developed research profiles.

Regarding managerial promotion, there was general agreement that women are usually excluded from positions such as department head, dean, vice president and president. Over 85 per cent of focus group participants stated that the related regulations are indecisive. Once more this leaves the door open for men to freely choose their preferences and, again, this reflects the influence of the old-boy network. Similarly, Odhiambo (2011) states that the problem facing women is not in justifying their right to earn their place in leadership positions but in gaining access to those positions. Doherty and Manfredi (2006) indicate that the criteria for advancement in English universities do not disadvantage women. However, some senior managers did not think that women’s involvement in management always worked for their long-term benefit, as this was often at the expense of their research. The
view was expressed that men were more “ruthless in protecting their research and it could be argued that this placed them in a better position when making a professorial application. Concerning the equality in selecting committee members, there were different opinions. Some claimed equality in this issue, whereas others stated that the important committees are the domain of men, adducing that there are no committees headed by women. Even worse, 45 per cent of participants claimed that women are nominated for the minor committees only to claim their representation. This is further evidence of women as tokens.

Overall, two basic themes were formulated: first, some HR articles were found to be discriminatory. Second, the overall regulations are very definite regarding academic promotion and very vague regarding managerial promotion, which leaves the door open for the influence of the old-boy network.

The social dimension
Over 85 per cent of the interviewees stated that the family responsibilities, obligations and priorities are the most influential factors in women’s development. Over 95 per cent of focus group participants agreed on this point. In this context, several and interrelated points were raised revolving around the following themes:

The traditional Jordanian family
There appear to be restrictions on women’s travel, working hours, women’s primacy in the domestic sphere and preference of marriage over study, the priorities of male preferences and study over female and patriarchal attitude; this idea was reflected by a participant’s view as:

[... ] fathers and/or husbands usually take decisions on her behalf, even if it is about her future and career.

Multiple responsibilities of conventional and professional roles
Women need to struggle to balance family responsibilities as wife, mother and career requirements, which sometimes could be conflicting and always exhausting. Placing all the responsibilities on women leaves no time or energy for her to pursue her professional development. One participant stated:

[... ] a woman has to make triple men’s effort in academia. She has to play many roles in her life [ ... ] wife, mother, host, teacher [ ... ] while the male academic puts the load on his wife and devotes himself to his work [ ... ] above all, the society view us as unable, so we have to prove that we can [ ... ].

Another stated:

The centre of a woman’s life is her family and kids, while the centre of a man’s life is himself.

Similarly, Doherty and Manfredi (2006) attribute women’s reticence in English universities for promotion to women’s related to the broader interests in their lives, sometimes directly related to family commitments and sometimes in relation to their more “rounded” lives. They added that there was a sense that women were often concerned about their work-life balance and maybe put off by the long hours required of senior roles.

Interrelatedness of the economic and social dimension
As will be clarified, women accept more classes to earn more money for the sake of family, which doubles the burden they hold and leaves no adequate time for them to pursue their
career. This point was raised by over 45 per cent of interviewees and focus group participants.

**The cultural dimension**

Over 75 per cent of interviewees and focus group participants attributed the limitation of women’s role to cultural variables. The interrelated views were clustered in four main themes: first, the male chauvinism of Arab societies. This point is the centre to all the other points. Males are given the priority to pursue their studies over their sisters and/or wives. One story was told by a lecturer:

When I gained a scholarship fourteen years ago, my husband refused to allow me to complete my study. He said, put your effort in raising your children. It’s better.

Second, the stereotype of women’s incapability to lead or to make rational decisions.

One focus group participant made an interesting point:

All the women’s pictures in grade five and six curriculum are cooking and/or eating while the men’s pictures are doctors and engineers.

Third, women’s acceptance of an inferior position, which was cited by 30 per cent of interviewees and 38 per cent of focus group participants. In this context, one participant who teaches social studies stated a shocking story:

I asked my female students in one of my lectures who would report it if they were physically abused by their father, brothers or husband. Believe it or not, only two raised their hands while others admitted that if they were physically punished by their fathers or brothers there would be no problem.

Another participant stated:

We are responsible for why we left behind […] women don’t know their legal or social rights and never ask about it.

This point is enhanced by our findings. When we asked about their opinion regarding the legal system and HR policies, 25 per cent of interviewees stated that they were not fully aware of the formal rules and policies. In addition, there are other problems regarding women themselves. Also, 25 per cent of focus group participants said that most females go to work for fun or to spend time. Other stated that females do not support other females, as they do not believe in their capabilities. Likewise, *Doherty and Manfredi (2006)* argue that in English universities, there was a general view across almost all women, both those in academic and support roles, that they were reticent to put themselves forward for promotion and also that they were likely to undervalue their achievements. By comparison, men were seen as more confident about their abilities and they were more likely to sell themselves confidently.

Fourth, rejection of females’ leadership, a theme which was magnified in many phrases like:

It’s a masculine inherited tradition,

It’s the nature of the Arab man […] he likes to be the leader,

The dean sees me like his wife, mother or sister. He cannot see or treat me as a professor exactly like him.
The economic dimension
Over 60 per cent of participants stated that economic conditions have an impact on female academics’ development. About 15 per cent stated that it is a common barrier for men as well as women, but it is greater for women. Explanations revolved around two themes:

(1) The financial burden and the living expenses force women to accept too many classes. Along with family obligations as mother and wife, this hinders their ability to engage in research and subsequently their academic advancement. It is worth mentioning that this point is highly interrelated with the “social” dimension. Although making a living is a common barrier, a woman is engaged in multiple roles. She has to fulfill her family obligations as male academics cast the family burden on their wives, which leaves more time for them to achieve promotion.

(2) There is the high cost of graduate studies, which limits females’ ability to enrol, particularly as males are given the priority to pursue their studies over females. This is again related to “cultural” preferences. This was referred to in a previous point regarding the privileges granted to the male scholarship candidates, which links to HR policies’ role in hindering women’s advancement.

The religious dimension
Over 75 per cent of interviewees refused to consider religion as an inhibiting factor. They said that social and cultural considerations are given priority over religion, although religion could be a good cover for male chauvinism practices. One participant stated:

There is nothing wrong about religions. It’s the practice that matters.

Another said:

Yes […] people are conservative but not religious. It’s all about culture […] […] work is a legitimate right for women and Islamic history bears witness to this […] Khadejah Prophet Mohammad’s wife was a trader […] our current position is much worse than our ancestors.

Ironically, 45 per cent of participants stated that what is practised under the cover of religion is men egotism, where males interpret religion in accordance with their own interest. It has been claimed that men prefer their wives to have a simple job with standard and short working hours for their own comfort.

However, 14 per cent of interviewees stated that there are some religious limitations, like the need for mahram to travel (the husband or a person whom a woman is never permitted to marry because of their close blood relationship). The need for mahram affects the social acceptance regarding the one who travels alone.

Overall, the findings’ basic themes that emerged through the document, interviews and focus group analysis are shown in Table II.

Conclusion
Jordanian female academics, as tokens, face a glass ceiling embodied in many barriers they experience. Further, there are visible barriers manifested in the legal system. It was found that the legal system in Jordan has harming impact on academic women’s career development. Similarly, Peebles et al. (2007) and Nseer (2015) found that Jordan labour law in some cases has led to several employers discriminating against women. Moreover, this is also similar to Sika’s (2011) finding that discriminatory laws undermines the status of women and impedes women’s rights in the Arab world.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constitution</th>
<th>Labour law</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ignoring gender in defining</td>
<td>Several articles harmful to working females Perceived to be not fully</td>
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<td>Jordanian citizens, [linked to</td>
<td>protective or supportive Emphasized stereotyping of female, [linked to</td>
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<td>No firm penalties for breaking supportive laws Several gender insensitive</td>
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<td>articles</td>
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<td>Higher education and universities' law</td>
<td>No articles to support women' representation Equal but not supportive</td>
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<tr>
<td>HR policies</td>
<td>Some discriminatory articles Loose articles regarding (academic appointments,</td>
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<td>scholarships) [old boy network] Somehow vague regarding the managerial</td>
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<td>promotion, [linked to tokenism, old boy network &amp; glass ceiling]</td>
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<td>Economic</td>
<td>Living expenses and family obligations [linked to social factors]</td>
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<td>High cost of graduate studies causes preference of males [linked to cultural</td>
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<td>Social</td>
<td>Traditional Jordanian family (preference of marriage over study, restriction</td>
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<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Multiple responsibilities and stereotypes of roles, [linked to cultural</td>
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<td>Religion</td>
<td>Male chauvinism of Arab societies. (patriarchal rules) The stereotype of</td>
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<td>females' incapability [linked to tokenism, old boy network &amp; glass ceiling]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Females' acceptance of inferior position Rejection of females' leadership.</td>
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| The research's basic themes     | Table II.                                                                 |
|                                 | MRR 40,10                                                                 |

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Some current legal articles deepen the stereotypical picture of women as dependent, incapable and inept. The Jordanian legal provisions continue to treat women as dependents (Nseer, 2015). Furthermore, the Jordanian legislations limit women’s freedom of choice, reinforces the perception of female employees as secondary breadwinners and enhances the perception that parenting as solely a female responsibility (Peebles et al., 2007).

The legal system reflects its impact on several aspects of universities’ internal HR policies. In a similar context, Sika (2011) states that Arab laws worked as a green light for both the enactment and the preservation of discriminatory laws and practices against women throughout the region.

The unsupportive working environment for female academics results from the biased systems attributed to Arab culture, which is reflected in the legal system. Moreover, it was found that the Jordanian legal system is formulated in the crucible of national culture. In this context, it is argued that legal texts are considered the mirror in which we see the true image of the state and society; a place where we see our values personified (JNCW, 2011). Further, every legal language reflects the history out of which it comes (Kocbek, 2008). Varner and Varner (2014) state that culture does not act in isolation; it is closely connected to law. Culture influences law and law influences culture.

It was also found that several laws and HR provisions harm female academics financial rights. Thus, the economic situation of female academics is affected by legal variables. Al-Maaitah et al. (2012) argue that economic and financial constrains represents major obstacle before women advancement.

Conversely, academic women’s economic situation is highly interconnected with some social variables. The social factors are apparent in the traditional Jordanian family norms and multiple social responsibilities as wives and mothers which are prioritized over females’ professional roles. Jordanian females academic take on more classes to earn adequate money, thus doubling their burden and leaving no sufficient time to pursue their research and career advancement. Similarly, Nseer (2015) argues that social attitude of Jordanian people was and still is an obstacle in the way of women’s equal participation in everyday life.

Social factors cannot be separated from the cultural factors which are all clustered around the male chauvinism in Arab societies, rejection of women’s leadership, a stereotypical depiction of females, as incapable and females’ acceptance of an inferior position. Finally, contrary to what has been proposed, the results indicate that religion is not a barrier, yet used as a good cover for masculine practices along with an erroneous interpretation of religious principles. This result is supported by Omair’s (2008) view that Islam is not the reason behind the gender inequality in Arab world; it is the patriarchal interpretation of Islam. It is also supported by Yaseen’s (2010) view, that most of practices that restrict women’s rights and freedom are based on culture rather than religious beliefs (Figure 2).

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**Figure 2.** Relationships among the factors influencing women academics’ career progress
Recommendations
Because of the multiple factors that hinder female academics’ progress and as those factors are complex, interlocked and interconnected to a troubling degree, we propose that any reform program should be launched from the legal system. Waiting for the culture to change naturally needs decades with uncertain outcomes, which would be unjust. Our recommendations address two levels as follows:

At the institutional level
It is recommended that universities do the following:
- Amend the HR systems that represent bias against women to enhance institutional change and support the modification of the stereotyped perception regarding women;
- define the managerial roles promotions regulations through articles specifying who the qualified candidates and the selection process for each promotion;
- encourage female academics to compete for managerial positions by developing professional management training and development programs;
- provide quality day-care centres on university premises;
- create an accurate and detailed database regarding academic and managerial appointments at all levels by gender, rank and original appointment;
- implement equal opportunity controls regarding appointments and scholarship procedures;
- develop awareness programmes to introduce academic women to the laws and regulations that affect their rights; and
- inspire women to career advancement by initiating programs of mentorship by female role models in academia.

At the personal level
It is recommended that female academics:
- Concentrate on their research and avoid taking extra coursework at the expense of research and academic development;
- change their own culturally inherited beliefs regarding their multiple roles and limitations; and
- balance their roles as wives, mothers and care-givers and their professional academic role.

Limitations and future research
This study has investigated the barriers to female academics’ career development. As this study explored females’ perceptions regarding legislation, HR policies and other factors that influences their progress; it followed the qualitative approach. Therefore there is a need for further study to empirically investigate the research findings with a wider scope.

Further studies are also needed to investigate and compare factors influencing female academics’ development in other Arab countries and the Middle East region. Finally, it would be useful to conduct comparative research with legislation and documents in different countries.
References
Jordanian Universities (2009), Jordanian Universities' Law Number 20 of 2009.


Barriers to Arab female academics’ career

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UNDP (2015), Socio Economic Inequality.


Further reading


Appendix

Opening questions

- What is your present academic rank?
- What is your specialty?
- Where do you work now? Which faculty? University?
- How many years of work experience do you have in total?

Part one

- As a woman, how would you describe the academic work?
- What types of challenges do you face?
Where do you think those challenges come from?
Are those challenges common for female and male academics? If YES why, if NO why?
Are those challenges restricted to females in academia or are they common in every area of women’s work?
From your personal experience, what is the role of your family here?
From your personal experience, what is the role of the society here?
From your personal experience, what is the role of the culture here?
From your personal experience, what is the role of the economic situation here?
From your personal experience, what is the role of religion here?
Can you classify the challenges mentioned above according to their intensity of influence?

Part two
Are you aware of the Jordanian constitution’s articles? If YES, what do you think about its gender sensitivity?
Are you aware of Jordanian labour law’s provisions? If YES, what do you think about its gender sensitivity?
Are there any articles supporting working women? Which?
Are there any articles that could harm women’s rights? Which?
Are there any articles that restrict women’s career development? Which?
What do you think about higher education and scientific research law’s gender sensitivity?
Does it include any articles supporting/negatively impacting women? Which?
What do you think about Jordanian universities’ law’s gender sensitivity?
Does it include any articles supporting/negatively impacting women? Which?
How would you describe the hiring process in your university?
How would you describe the promotion policies in your university?
Do you think that women have an equal opportunity in hiring, promotion and participation in committees and conferences? Explain.
Is there anything else you would like to add?

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