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## **Young Women's Civic Awareness and Public Engagement: A Challenge in a Bahraini Context**

By Fatima H. Eid<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

In recent years, growing attention to cultivate civic participation among young citizens has been mounting. In Bahrain, young women receive some attention via their participation in civic, political and public engagement initiatives.

This paper presents the theoretical and conceptual background for a field study that intends to examine whether young Bahraini women are equipped with the civic knowledge and understanding necessary to participate effectively in community. It also presents their conception of citizenship, their perception of their identity, their political awareness, and their concern about their community issues.

Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data, this paper analyses the ways in which young Bahrainis perceive their identity and citizenship status. In this mixed methods approach, a questionnaire was administered to 245 Bahraini young women at the age of 18, followed by in-depth interviews with a stratified sample of 11 young women who had participated in the questionnaire survey. Although the gender gap is closing or reversing in regard to specific forms of participation, some inequalities remain (Lorenzini and Bassoli, 2016), this study contributes to understanding the gender differences in issues related to civic participation and to find if there are any significant differences among women themselves.

*Keywords:* Civic Participation, Public Engagement, Bahraini Women, Civic knowledge.

### **Introduction**

Towards the end of the 20th century, there was a rise in the use of gender-neutral language in the world. Women wanted to be valued, respected, recognized and be able to voice their own concerns within the public domain. Women's struggle for citizenship internationally is now widely recognised by historians as one of the great social movements for liberation of the 20th century.

In this regard, Bahraini women have fought to take part in economic, cultural, political decision-making, to take a place in the history of a nation, to be recognized, on the one hand, for the ability to be active agents of change creating their own political movements and different forms of political organizations. Historically, isolated and small women's movements existed in Bahrain since 1950, as Bahraini women participated in male-directed political parties and movements. In

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1994 and in 2011 women participated actively in anti-government protests. In 2001, The Bahrain Women Union (BWU) was created. This union of 12 women's associations works for women's economic, social and political empowerment. Since then, women's associations have worked under the umbrella of the Supreme Council for Women (SCW).

The importance of citizenship is evident in the constitution of the kingdom of Bahrain, which was amended in 2002. In its seventh article from text (B): which states that 'the law organizes the different ways of religious education and citizenship in the different stages of teaching and its types; the law concentrates on the strengthening of the citizen's character and nationalism' (p.8). Bahrain's Constitution, provides equal rights to women and men at articles 1 and 5, and bans discrimination on the basis of gender (Government of Bahrain, 2002), so long as this is compatible with Sharia law.

In Bahrain, there is no policy condemning violence against women or safeguarding their welfare in the labour market. Bahrain's labour laws do not prohibit or provide protection against gender-based discrimination in the workplace. The government has so far not taken any action against employers guilty of gender discrimination. This is despite the fact that since 2001, women have participated overtly in a variety of demonstrations and political, cultural, and social activities (BCHR, 2006). Despite the implementation of equal opportunities legislation in Bahrain, there has been a reluctance to pursue the policies necessary to make gender equality a reality.

Yet, historically, despite the exceptional nature of Bahraini women's struggle for the rights of full citizenship, it is significant to know that their struggle for education and access to knowledge has been so extraordinarily difficult. Women's level of education in Bahrain is often high; however, their employment opportunities remain limited. Bahrain's first report on the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) identifies changing traditional views of the role of women – both in society and in the workforce as a main challenge to be addressed. Discrimination against women in job opportunities must be eliminated (UNDP, 2003).

In recent years, the pressure for educators to cultivate civic participation among young citizens has been mounting (Bell and Lewis, 2015). The educational achievements of women have yet to be translated into greater economic participation. Hence, to contribute effectively to the future health of their communities, young women need to be prepared for active citizenship. Thus, a national wave of curriculum reform introducing or enhancing civic education has taken place.

Internationally, educational institutions are increasingly becoming committed to civic and public engagement with their local and regional communities. Despite growing attention to youth civic and public engagement in policy development, the engagement of young women still receives little attention via their participation in public engagement initiatives (Levac, 2013). They are generally expected to be reasonably knowledgeable about their national issues that will allow them to understand the problems of their community and will effectively help to solve such problems (Eid, 2015). This implies that educating young citizens help to engage their own experiences of society and enables them to make direct use of information and knowledge provided. Helve (2015) argues that for young people, citizenship often refers to participation in community life, which may or may not be political. Public activities bring together multiple role activities that can facilitate civic engagement. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority – QCA (1998) stresses the importance of young citizens' involvement in community affairs and states that they not only tend to be more involved and better citizens, but also significantly improve their academic knowledge and skills, and tend to stay involved throughout their lives.

In short, this paper presents the findings of a field study that intends to examine young Bahraini women's civic knowledge and understanding including citizenship and identity. It

explores their awareness of their role in a democracy and their concern about their community issues. It also contributes to understanding the gender differences in issues related to civic participation.

Whatever the context or focus for learning, the opportunities provided in the educational institutions make important contributions to the process of educating for active and responsible citizenship. These learning experiences provide opportunities for the development of students' capabilities and encourage their active involvement in the local community in which they live in order to participate as responsible citizens. Thus, as far as building citizens' personalities is concerned, educational institutions must play a vital role in nurturing all young citizens and providing them with a comprehensive civic learning. Such personal and social developments are essential components of education for citizenship, which can help to make the educational institutions as well as local and national communities, better for all their members.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

In this study, Bahraini young women's conceptions of citizenship and perceptions of their identity and their civic role in community are explored and highlighted. The study presented here was a part of a wider research project, which aimed to examine whether Bahraini young people are equipped with civic and political knowledge and understanding necessary to participate effectively as citizens. It provides valuable insights that are firmly grounded in the contemporary institutional context of democratic citizenship, and meet the needs of the citizenship education that Bahrain requires at this preliminary stage.

### *Aims and Objectives*

The main aim of this study is to examine whether young Bahraini women are equipped with the civic knowledge and understandings necessary to participate effectively in community and explore their engagement in public life.

The specific objectives of the research are as follows:

- a) To examine young women's conception of citizenship.
- b) To explore how young women perceive their identity.
- c) To explore young women's awareness of their political role in a democracy.
- d) To identify young women's concern about their community issues.

### *Research Hypotheses*

There is a statistically significant relationship at the  $p < 0.05$  level, between young women and their

- a) conceptions of citizenship
- b) perceptions of their identity
- c) awareness of their political role in a democracy
- d) concerns about their community issues

Each of these relationships are explored further through the analysis of qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews.

### *Mixed Methods Approach*

In this study, the main source of the quantitative data came from a survey questionnaire and the qualitative data came from in-depth interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule was formulated, and open-ended questions were focused around particular topics and was guided by some general questions. The main purpose of the interview in this study was to gain insights into young women's civic knowledge and experiences and to concentrate on the concrete details of their present concern about their community issues and public engagement.

### *Selecting the Sample*

For the purpose of this study, a stratified random sampling approach was adopted. The nature of this study required that the sample were young people who had started to get their civic rights as adults and had begun to shape their attitudes and values as well. The sample of this study was a stratified sample of 245 Bahraini young women, at the age of 18 years. All were from the five governorates in Bahrain (Capital, Central, Northern, Southern and Muharraq), and at the same level of schooling during the entire study year. They were chosen randomly (by using a table of random numbers). They came from families with varied backgrounds (Muslims – both Shia and Suni, Christians, Jewish and others). Their parents had received education at different levels and they came from socioeconomic backgrounds reflective of the social structure of the country.

Furthermore, to examine a range of different experiences and be consistent with the survey study sample, the sample for the in-depth Study (i.e., semi-structured interviews) comprised 22 young Bahrainis; twelve of them were young women.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis is conducted according to a predetermined set of criteria and hypotheses. The statistical analyses of the quantitative data, both nominal and ordinal, were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). An alpha level of 0.05 was chosen as the level of significance. Cross-tabulation with the Chi-squared test was used to examine relationships between variables for nominal data; and the Mann-Whitney U rank-sum test for ordinal data. The Mann-Whitney Test is one of the most powerful non-parametric tests for comparing two populations with ordinal-level variables. This test is used when members of two categories can be ranked in terms of their scores on the same variable.

The qualitative data of the in-depth study was sorted and managed into what is useful for the purpose of the study being undertaken. In this research, the data that was generated through semi-structured interviews was analysed manually. Since my qualitative research sample was small, and I had already decided on the themes which emerged from the survey questionnaire, I chose not to use a software package to code the qualitative data.

The tape recorded interviews were transcribed. The transcripts were studied to explore responses about the key themes presented in the conceptual framework of the study. The responses were examined to bring out the commonalities and the divergences in the young women's understanding of aspects related to citizenship. While performing this analysis, the responses of the interviewees were studied in relation to the research hypotheses and the conceptual and theoretical background of the study.

After they were analysed, the interview data was triangulated with the survey data. This was done by comparing interview transcripts with written documentation of the quantitative data from the questionnaire. This process helped to establish connections between data sub-sets. These

two sources of data were integrated, discussed and interpreted. The data gathered by questionnaires and interviews was analysed.

### **Findings and Analysis**

This part analyses the findings of the empirical research data that aims to examine young women's conceptions of citizenship and their concerns about their community issues, and sets out to gauge how they perceive their identity. Besides the statistical analysis of quantitative data, a range of quotations from the qualitative data are presented in the analysis below in order to provide an indication of the various ways in which young women conceptualise the term 'citizenship' and other themes related to it. By using the data analysis techniques, it should, however, be borne in mind that the quotations are not representative of all responses to the questions, and thus are used solely for illustrative purposes.

To better understand the findings of this study, the following three research questions were addressed:

What do young women actually understand about citizenship?

How do young women perceive their identity?

What extent do young women aware of their political role in a democracy?

What extent do young women engage in their community issues?

To answer these questions, the research hypotheses were examined. It was hypothesized that there was a statistically significant relationship at the level of  $p < 0.05$  between young women and their conceptions of some elements related to the following domains: citizenship, national identity, political role and community involvement. In order to make sense of the findings, the discussion of the research hypotheses is compared and contrasted with the findings, the views, theories, issues and research.

#### *Conception of Citizenship*

Citizenship is defined as the condition or status of a citizen, with its rights and duties (Collins English Dictionary, 2016). In the literature, it is defined (See for example, QCA 1998; Huddleston and Kerr 2006; Cogan and Derricott 2012) as membership of a political community, which carries with it rights and responsibilities. It is sometimes referred to as nationality and often implies involvement in public life and affairs to improve life for all citizens.

A statistically significant gender difference was found at the level of  $p < 0.05$  and young women's conceptions of citizenship. There was a tendency to mention the importance they placed on their status as Bahraini citizens. Examples of such definitions included, 'citizenship means a formal membership to a country, which means having the Bahraini nationality and holding a Bahraini passport' (Khatoon). Although not all young women in the present study knew what citizenship meant, it was characterised by a tendency to identify citizenship with love and loyalty to their nation state. The majority of them referred to citizenship as a sense of belonging to a nation state and commitment to a community. Citizenship was 'the feeling of love and affiliation towards a country' (Mariam).

To me citizenship means combinations of sensations that tie individuals to their country. It means to me love, devotion, loyalty and sacrifice to my motherland. It means that we must be proud of being Bahraini (Raqia).

This association is noted by Osler and Starkey (2003), when they argue that citizenship involves a sense of belonging. In addition, young women referred to it as the rights of people and emphasised obligations to the country as well.

Since 'a citizen is a member of a political community or state', and being a citizen 'depends upon different factors, for example place of birth, family ties or the duration of residence in a country' (Huddleston and Kerr, 2006: 2), the affective dimension of the young Bahraini women towards the political community is very important. It has taken-for granted value and contains special meaning for them. This emotional tie for such a status was common. Their feeling of belonging and affiliation with their motherland was generally evident in the survey and the interviews. This group thinks that holding Bahraini nationality or simply living in Bahrain is not enough to be considered a 'citizen'. They believe that it is the feeling of belonging, and love and affiliation to a country that are more important. A very small number of the young women mentioned the importance of caring about other people in the community.

Such responses can be attributed to lack of a clear idea of citizenship and reveals a sense of uncertainty about their citizenship status. 'Different types of political systems require a different type of citizen' (Breslin and Dufour, 2006: 144), i.e. the rights and responsibilities of individuals living in a democratic society differ significantly from those living under a totalitarian regime. To be a citizen of a democratic state requires active citizenship, where citizens are willing, able and equipped to have an influence in public life (QCA, 1998). This lack of clarity of the meaning of citizenship seems to persist. It indicates that there is a need to broaden young women's knowledge and understanding of the meaning of citizenship and the status of being a citizen.

### *Identity*

In the survey, in order to examine young women's sense of belonging to their nation-state, they were asked whether they considered themselves Bahraini citizens. A statistically significant gender difference existed at ( $\chi^2 = 5.030, df=1, p=0.025$ ), suggesting that more than three-quarters of the young women were more likely to consider themselves as Bahraini citizens (86.1%, n= 211). They indicated reasons such as, 'loving Bahrain and having a sense of belonging to their nation state', their belief about 'getting their rights' in their country, being 'born in Bahrain', 'living in Bahrain'; and 'holding Bahraini nationality'. In this regard, most young people highlighted the importance of caring for and respecting others:

To me citizenship means having rights and being responsible for my family, my country, and myself; respecting the laws of the country... I feel that I have some of my rights, such as the right of education, the right of getting good health services, but I still do not have the right to vote or to participate in political life (Nadeen)

Moreover, the majority of young women recognized their responsibilities as citizens as well. For example, one stated:

Bahraini citizens have responsibilities; they are citizens in their homeland and should participate to make their country a better place. Without responsibilities we cannot develop our country. Citizens are responsible for making changes in society (Safa).

On the other hand, a considerable number of them (13.9%, n=34) did not see themselves as Bahraini citizens. The reasons stated by those who did not consider themselves as Bahrainis were ‘not getting their civic rights’, and their disappointment with facing ‘discrimination’ in the country, which made them ‘feel like foreigners in spite of holding Bahraini nationality’, as one young woman said in the interview:

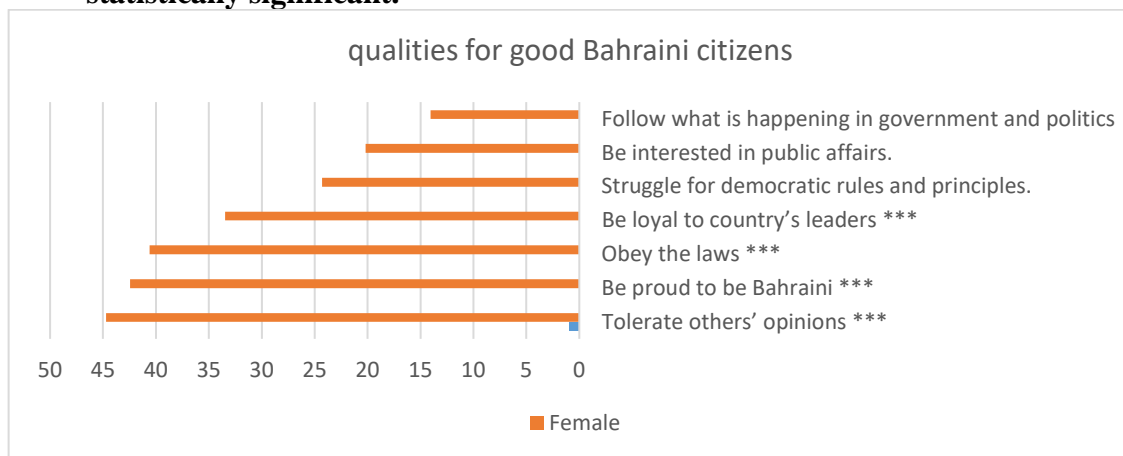
In Bahrain, we are not treated equally; people are demonstrating and protesting almost every day. There are some important issues that Bahraini citizens have are not resolved (Ayat).

As noted, these reasons correspond to their definitions of the term ‘citizenship’, which indicate that young women believe that the feeling of belonging, and having rights and responsibilities are the most important reasons for being a citizen. It is evident that young women believe that a love of Bahrain is the most important reason for considering themselves as Bahrainis.

In the study, young women were asked about ‘the qualities which are important for someone to be considered a competent and responsible Bahraini citizen’. In this question, young women were presented with the option of ticking one box along a three-point scale (very important, somewhat important, and not at all important) for twenty-four different possible qualities of a good citizen.

For the purpose of this study, the results presented in this discussion are therefore the responses, which were found to be statistically significant, and the majority of young women found them to be ‘very important’. Figure 1 shows young women’s views of the most important qualities of a good Bahraini citizen.

**Figure 1: ‘The most important’ qualities of a good Bahraini citizen that were found statistically significant.**



\*\*\*P<0.001



It can be observed through the findings presented in the above figure that young women believed that 'tolerate others' opinions' was the most important quality for a good Bahraini citizens. When the young women were interviewed, one said: "A good Bahraini citizen should care for others' feelings and tolerate them "(Rehab). Young women indicated that 'to be proud of being Bahraini' was the second important quality for a good Bahraini citizen. This quality seemed to be important for young women as it came as a priority in almost each question in the survey questionnaire. With regard to the importance of qualities related to citizens' responsibilities, the majority of young women thought that a good citizen should 'obey the laws'. A large proportion of interviewed young women endorsed qualities related to the citizenship rights and responsibilities, as can be seen in the comment below:

As a citizen, I should call for my rights, perform my duties perfectly and should not break the law. I have to be, also, loyal to my motherland in order to become a righteous citizen (Ayat).

Here, they were more likely to believe that to 'be loyal to country's leaders' was an important quality for a good citizen. A large number of the interviewed young women said that they loved Bahrain, were loyal to its leaders and were proud of being Bahraini citizens, as this quotation shows:

I think in order to be a good Bahraini citizen, it is important that I love my country Bahrain, be proud of it, and be loyal to the king and other leaders. In fact, I feel that I belong to this homeland (Safa).

Furthermore, young women were more likely to see that 'struggling for democratic rules and principles' was an important quality for a good citizen. As seen in the following quotation a good citizen should believe in equality between people, the struggle for democratic rules and principles, and the practise of democratic values. Fatima said: "I think in order to be a good citizen, and fulfil my responsibilities such as to participate in developing Bahrain, and in trying to make changes in society, it is important that I live in a society which treats all its people equally".

Moreover, young women were found to be the most inclined to 'being interested in public affairs' as an important quality. This suggests that young women are more involved in their community and interested in public affairs. In addition, the majority of them indicated the importance of being a citizen who 'follows what is happening in government and politics'. The importance of these qualities and other qualities are presented in the following quotation: "Being a good citizen means a lot because having good qualities may correct things and prevent problems from happening" (Mariam).

In addition to these qualities, in an open-ended question, some young women endorsed other qualities that they found important for good citizens. These are, 'Avoid intolerance or fanaticism', 'Love, affiliation, and loyalty to country', 'Participate in developing country', 'Be religious', 'Protect public welfares', 'Express opinion freely', 'Speak the truth', and ' Help in developing public awareness of citizenship'. In contrast, the qualities that young women considered as 'not at all important' for a good citizen are, 'Contact a public official to express your views', 'Work or volunteer in a political campaign', ' Write an article or letter to the editor', and 'Join a political party '. Although there was no statistically significant gender difference were found for these qualities, the findings revealed that these qualities, which were obviously related to

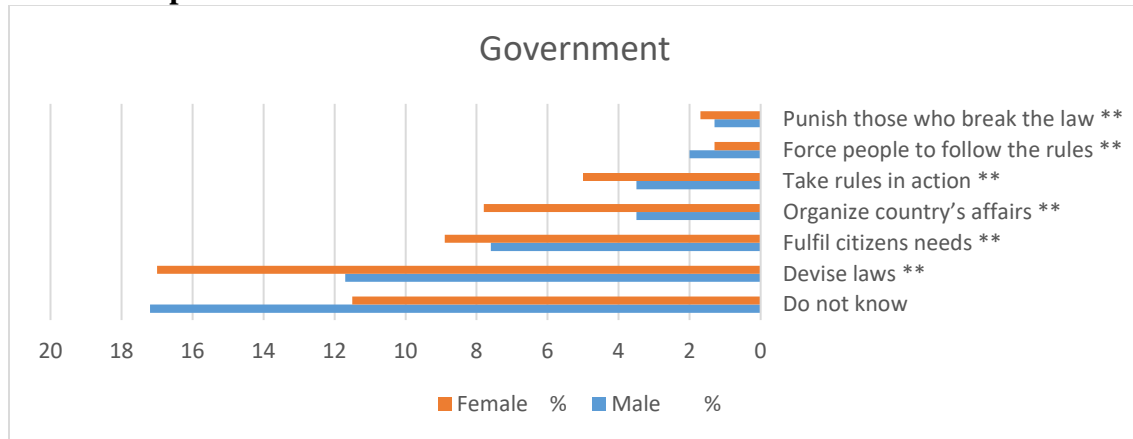
politics, were not seem important for those young women. Thus, it appears that the Bahraini young women have less awareness of politics and its role in shaping their life.

### Political Awareness

In the literature, political scientists have been argued that a certain degree of political knowledge is necessary for young people to be able to participate fully in the political life and to play an active role in a democratic society. They need to have some ‘factual knowledge about the institutions and processes of government and how they work locally, nationally and internationally’ (Breslin and Dufour, 2006: 145). This is an important prerequisite for motivating political participation.

In this study, in order to explore young women's awareness of their political role in a democracy, they were asked about the role of the government, the Bahraini constitution, voting in elections and the national council.

**Figure 2: Conceptions of the Role of the ‘Government’**



\*\*P<0.01

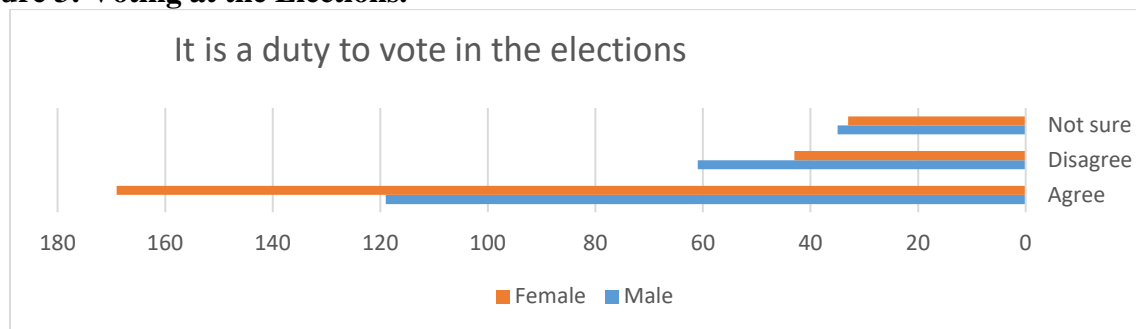
Data analysis revealed a statistically significant gender difference found at the level of  $p < 0.05$  at ( $\chi^2 = 17.913$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p=0.006$ ) between young women and their awareness of their political role in a democracy. A large proportion of young women indicted that the role of the government was to ‘devise laws’. Only about one-third of them mentioned that the role of government was to fulfil a citizen’s needs and to organize the country’s affairs. In general, young women showed more understanding of the role of the government compared to males. In addition, the result indicates that about two-third of the sample still do not have a clear picture of the role of government in their country.

In a further exploration of young people’s political knowledge and understanding of Bahraini political system, they were asked “who devises laws according to the Bahraini constitution”. According to the Bahraini constitution, laws are formulated by the ‘national council’ and approved by ‘the King’. The results showed that young women had no knowledge about who is responsible to devise laws in their country. These results indicated young peoples’ lack knowledge about these institutions and their role in a democracy. Young people did not know the content of the Bahraini constitution and perhaps did not even read it, or did not have the chance to see it either in their school or at home. It is important to mention that when young women were asked about the role of the ‘National Council’, the majority did not answer the question, only a

quarter of them indicated that the national council ‘discusses peoples’ problems’, ‘makes decisions and devises the laws’, ‘defends people’s rights through censorship’, ‘devises the laws and the government implements them’ and ‘organizes the state’s affairs’.

A statistically significant gender difference existed at ( $\chi^2 = 9.941, df=2, p=0.007$ ) between young women and their knowledge about voting at the elections. A great proportion of them believed that women could vote at the age of 21 according to Bahraini constitution. Two-third young women ‘agreed’ that ‘It is every adult's duty to vote at the elections’ and around one quarter of them ‘disagreed’ and 'not sure’.

**Figure 3: Voting at the Elections.**



\*\*P<0.01

In the survey, the highest percentage of young women believed that the reason for voting was to ‘choose community representatives’, to ‘exercise their political rights’ and to ‘show that people live in a democratic society’. A few of the sample believed that ‘it is an obligation’. In interviews, the majority of young women agreed voting at the elections was important. The majority of them felt the same way as this young citizen does:

I believe that voting at the elections is important. Since the citizen is a part of this country, his or her voice can make a big difference. It is very important for us as citizens to vote at elections to choose our representatives, to practise our political right and to choose the best people for the national council (Reem).

Some of them endorsed the view that at the elections people need not just vote but also to choose the right people. Despite their endorsement of the importance of democratic values, the majority of young women exhibit little political knowledge. The majority of them lack knowledge about the Bahraini constitution, the role of the government and the national council. They also do not take part in political activities for various reasons. As mentioned by them, one major reason for non-participation is the impression that it is too complicated.

Interestingly, the young women mentioned that they had ‘very little knowledge’ about politics and government. A large proportion of young women who participated in the survey and the interviews admitted that they 'never' had the opportunity to practise activities, such as forming political groups; forming human rights groups; debating political and social issues, editing the school newspaper or magazine, or participating in the student council in their schools. They mentioned that the school curriculum ‘never’ encouraged them to find out about and discuss topics related to politics and government. It has also found that young women have a negative perception

of politics, a sense of uncertainty about politics, and a general belief that politics are too complicated, and this has induced passive attitudes of non-involvement.

This implies that young women live at a time where politics appear to be far removed from their lives, and what we are seeing, instead, is the emergence of a kind of anti-politics, a retreat from civic involvement. This suggests that young people need to expand their knowledge of the Bahraini constitution to understand who devises laws in their country in order to have a clear understanding of the political process in Bahrain. This view emphasizes the importance of reinforcing the political, civil, and social participation by citizens, which is an important aspect of democratic and institutional life. This indicates that government and non-government institutions should participate in preparing Bahraini young citizens to be democratic for a better future.

### *Community Involvement*

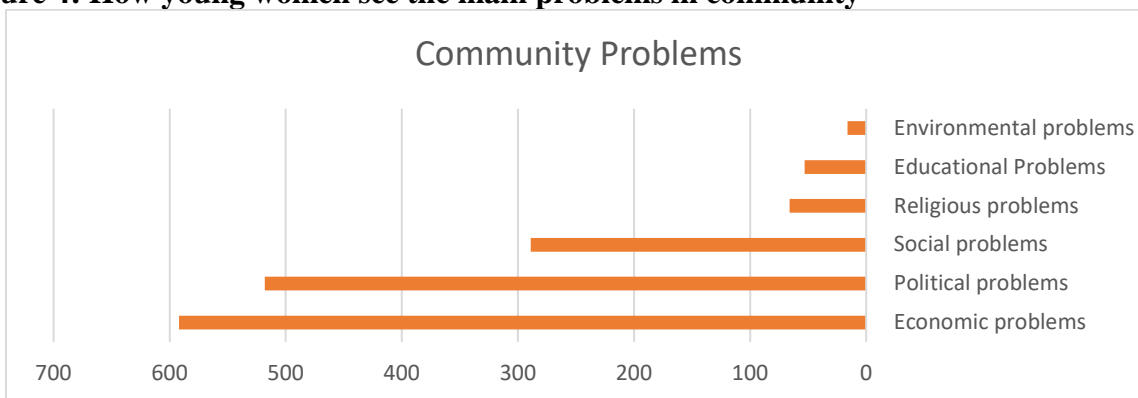
The literature suggests that young people who are involved in their communities tend to be more knowledgeable and better citizens and are more likely to stay involved throughout their lives (Cogan and Derricott 2012). In this study, young women's involvement in the community was explored by investigating their concern about community issues and their attitudes to participation in social services. The majority of young Bahraini women were aware of the fact that holding a particular nationality/passport was important, but for them helping to improve their nation-state and caring for their community was more significant.

To me citizenship means not only holding a Bahraini nationality, but it also means improving my community and caring about its people by guarding their rights and helping them to perform their duties (Mariam).

A statistically significant gender difference was found at the level of  $p < 0.05$ . Findings revealed that the young women, in this study, are involved in their community and have a wide knowledge of, and concern about, community issues. The problems in the community, as they perceive them, are economic, political, social, religious, educational, and environmental. The problems, which were found to be statistically significant, are unemployment, discrimination, oppression, lack of housing, and a dearth of educational programmes, which aim to improve people's civic and political awareness. Since these problems are more pertinent to young women, they are more cognisant of, and involved in, community issues.

In order to identify how much young women were involved in and aware of community issues, they were asked to mention the main problems in their community in an open-ended question. Thirty-two different problems were mentioned by them, which were classified into categories and sub-categories. They are sorted in a descending order (from the most common to the least common) in the following figure:

**Figure 4: How young women see the main problems in community**



As seen in this figure, the main problems were economic problems. They were unemployment, poverty, low salaries, and increasing living costs. One-third of the problems mentioned were political problems, they were discrimination, oppression, demonstrations, lack of democracy, not getting their rights, lack of unity in society, and ineffective parliament. Some of the problems mentioned were social problems, such as drugs, crimes, robbery, housing, family problems, lack of entertainment programmes and places for youth. Other problems noted were educational problems, such as weak curricula, illiteracy, lack of counselling and lack of programmes directed towards developing citizens' knowledge and awareness. A few religious problems were stated such as not following the teachings of the Holy Quran and the existence of moral problems, such as drinking and adultery. Only a few mentioned environmental problems such as air pollution and sea pollution.

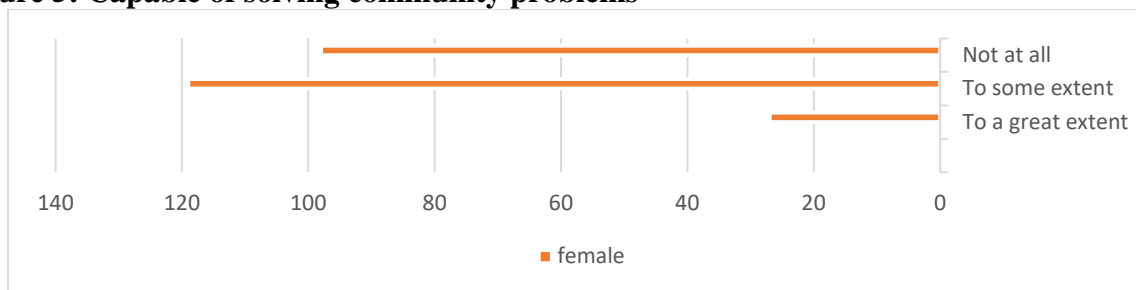
Young women indicated many problems in the Bahraini community. However, only two problems were found statistically gender significant; 'demonstrations' at ( $\chi^2=6.078$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.014$ ) and 'the lack of civic and political awareness' at ( $\chi^2=3.553$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.054$ ). Although very few young women indicated that Bahraini young women lack of civic and political awareness, it was considered an important point of discussion since it indicated the importance of developing programmes that were directed towards developing citizens' civic and political awareness. It is important to highlight that young women, in a different question related to responsibility towards society, disagreed with this statement 'The government is responsible for creating a better society' and stated that it was not only the responsibility of the government to create a better society, but also it was the responsibility of individual citizens. This implies that the majority of them were aware of their responsibilities towards their society and making Bahrain a better place to live. In this regard, one young women (Fatma) showed her belief that she could make a difference by becoming a member of political or youth associations, she said:

I can make changes by being a member of a political or youth association, which cares about educating young people about democracy and citizenship. They try to find solutions for youth problems and make the voice of youth heard. They prepare young people for the future. For example, the 'Bahrain Youth Institution' has recently developed programmes like 'The Achieving Youth' and 'Youth parliament project', which prepares the youth to become future leaders.

In the interview, although young women indicated that they could make their country a better place to live for future generations, they perceive themselves as powerless to change the state-wide political reality. They are of the opinion that actions by individuals are useless and negative experiences in real life situations discourage them from active participation in citizenship. They have a negative view about the usefulness of political action and are wary of the power exercised by those in control. The disbelief that young citizens, women in particular, can exert an influence to bring about change partially explains why they rank items related to participation in politics, such as struggle for democratic rule, being an active member of a community organization and working or volunteering in a political campaign, relatively low.

Young women were asked if they considered themselves capable of solving the problems of their community. Results showed that the majority of young women believed that they had the ability to solve problems of their community 'to some extent', because solving problems, as they indicated, 'need group work, unity and cooperation'. For those who thought that they could not solve their community problems, they believe that they were 'not important', and their 'opinions would not be heard', and their 'suggestions would not be taken into account'. This indicates that they do not perceive a role for themselves in decision-making or even in suggesting solutions to their community problems. The following figure shows the results:

**Figure 5: Capable of solving community problems**



As noticed, despite emphasizing the problems that Bahrain faces and young citizens' dissatisfaction with their life situation, most young women to some extent show a desire to solve the problems of their community. They want to participate in making changes in their country by getting involved in voluntary social services and feel an obligation to serve their community. A few young women participate as volunteers in community centres serving people in need, doing charity work or joining youth associations. By doing so, they admit that they also want to develop their skills and gain useful experience. In spite of wishing to do so, many young women do not take part in such activities because of various constraints, such as time and resources.

### Conclusions and Interpretation

The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data indicates that young women's perceptions, attitudes, opinions and ideals are a product of how they are socialised. It is evident that young women's conception of citizenship and their cognition of their status as citizens changes as the contexts change. Their understanding of their citizenship and their affective relationship with this status, are constrained and shaped by the conditions of citizenship within a specific historical, legal, political, socio-economic and cultural setting. Young women's attitude to their real life experience of citizenship is the product of the interaction between these various elements. Young women do not just accept what they are taught; they accept what seems to match the reality

of their lives. Their experiences of citizenship resulting from the strategies and educational policies are important factors in shaping their conceptions of their citizenship.

In this study, young women see citizenship as affiliation and belonging, rights and responsibilities, nationality, and freedom. They are aware of their community issues, but they are not greatly involved in community associations or activities. They believe that good citizens should struggle for democratic rules and principles, be interested in public affairs, follow what is happening in government and politics, and avoid intolerance and fanaticism. They view unemployment, lack of proper housing, discrimination, and oppression as community problems. In addition, young women indicate that they have never had the opportunity to 'participate in the student council' and 'express opinion freely'. They believe that performing responsibilities and participating in decision-making as an important role of good citizens.

This study has provided evidence that the socialization process via citizenship education in its present form is contributing only partially to Bahraini young women's notions of citizenship. The degree of influence of different sources varies according to the background, culture, and education of the family, the educational institutions that the young women attend, the social activities they are involved in, and the life experiences that he or she has encountered. The socialization of Bahraini young citizen and the efforts to promote a national consciousness are having an impact. Citizenship education that includes building a certain type of national identity, accompanied by the appropriate emotional responses, which emphasizes the history and tradition of the state, is accepted by young citizens who consider it to be relevant since it informs their identity. However, such dominant discourses on patriotism, and the related obligations, have been implemented at the cost of more desirable objectives that relate to a real understanding of citizenship, and have led to resentment amongst young women for allowing little room for their own thoughts and views.

While the results affirms that the family, community, and the media are important influences in shaping young women's conceptions of citizenship, the school curriculum, in comparison, seems to be playing a relatively less important role in promoting their understanding of citizenship. It does not seem to match the reality of young women's lives, as they express a desire to be taught about democracy, human rights and political education, which they believe to be missing from the curriculum. This raises important questions for teachers, curriculum planners, schools and other educators about what the education systems needs to do to implement effective citizenship education.

Accordingly, the approaches and methods used should provide space for discussion and debate on the curriculum in light of the argument put forward by the QCA (1998) that discussion and debate are the bases for developing social responsibility. Accordingly, it is important to 'relate the citizenship curriculum to teenagers' needs and aspirations, as well as drawing valuable lessons from teenagers' own expertise and constructions of citizenship' (Weller, 2003:153). Such an approach could make teaching and learning more meaningful and relevant to young citizens, and could help them become more aware, knowledgeable, and active in their communities and nation.

It is important to mention that contemporary discussion of the "crisis in democracy" displays a tendency to see young people as the problem because they are "apolitical" "apathetic" and "disengaged" or point to deficiencies in institutions deemed responsible for civic education (Bessant, *et al.*, 2016). As findings revealed that citizenship education is currently relatively ineffective, it is understandable that young citizens' conception of citizenship is influenced, developed and shaped by other equally important socializing agents such as the family, and the mass media.

Young women in this study believe that a major role can be played by the family, the educational institutions and the community to prepare them to participate as active citizens in the shaping of Bahraini society. They believe that the family can encourage children to express their opinions freely, respect each other's rights, and accept each other's views by providing a democratic environment at home. In line with this result, the literature assured that children's early awareness of their parents' views leads to a tendency for children to inherit their parents' citizenship affiliations (Alqatam *et al.*, 2002). Thus, socialization within the family is important, since an individual's parents play an important role in the construction of his or her national identity. Parents, therefore, can encourage their children to fight for human rights and to participate in different community activities and related public events. In addition, the family can develop in children a sense of belonging to the homeland, an affiliation to their country, and respect for their traditions.

This study has also revealed the limitations of teaching selected aspects of citizenship that are contrary to real life experiences and which lead to doubt and mistrust in government and political institutions. Young citizens are not taught to think critically about citizenship. Therefore, conceptions of citizenship need to be grounded in the context of the political entity they are concerned with as non-contextualized teaching about citizenship lacks relevance and therefore effectiveness. For instance, teaching about the role of the citizens without teaching them the skills of participation, through which they can fulfil these roles in real life situations, will be ineffective. Although the government provides policy direction, it should not be too prescriptive in its implementation, and it is important to provide young people with a voice to put forward their views.

In conclusion, having discussed civic participation at some length, and taking into account the recent political changes in Bahrain, I argue that it is important for Bahraini young people to learn the concepts, skills, trends and values related to citizenship to enable them to understand themselves and to be able to express independent views. They have to learn how to cope positively with their environment and with the requirements of daily life and its challenges. They also need to learn how to participate in their community and in the economic, social, and political life of Bahrain in a positive way. Callahan and Ronald (1990:338) point out that 'the intellectual and interpersonal skills needed for effective civic participation must be learned, and to be learned well they must be practised'. The skills, which include the ability to help shape public policy, can be created by meeting, talking, and thinking with other members of the young people's community inside and outside the school.

Therefore, this study calls into question the effectiveness of depending solely on institutionalised socializing processes in shaping the desirable citizenship status. They need to see the connections between their knowledge of different aspects of citizenship and to move beyond conceptual understanding to have learning experiences that develop active participation. In addition, they need to make use of what they learn in school and their experiences in the wider world, which can be useful in developing their sense of belonging, and lay a firm foundation for their growing understanding of rights and responsibilities and their ability to participate effectively in society. In this way, young women can be enabled to take an active part in, and express their personal opinions, ideals and attitudes towards citizenship.

In this study, young women suggest cultural and societal activities such as training programs, workshops, seminars, conferences and forums that can help generate feelings of affiliation to Bahrain among its young citizens. They think that political associations, democratic organisations, civic institutions, and the mass media can also help in this regard. To achieve this level of civic knowledge and skills, the whole civil community has to be involved, beginning with



the family, which has a major influence on children. Educational institutions are also important, as has been established earlier. In addition to giving information and training young people how to think and how to use the different skills in the school curriculum, schools and higher education institutions can contribute by providing information on national trends and values and developing life skills. The other institutions in the kingdom can play a significant role in achieving the aims of citizenship education, especially the media, which has a powerful influence on people throughout their lives.

Last but not least, if the goal of civic engagement is exploring the participation of young women at all levels of civic, political and community life, it is ultimately important to devise a strategic plan for citizenship that involves all the institutions of the civil community to prepare young women to play an active role in their society. It is therefore, to promote democracy and competent citizenship, the whole process need to reflect the spirit of democracy.

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