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**Gender, Disability and Islam:
Living with Visual Impairment in Bahrain**

By

Dunya Ahmed Abdullah Ahmed

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work**

University of Warwick, School of Health and Social Studies

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Have they, then, never journeyed about the earth, letting their hearts gain wisdom, and causing their ears to hear? Yet, verily, it is not their eyes that have become blind - but blind have become the hearts that are in their breasts!

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَتَكُونَ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ بِهَا أَوْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا
فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ

Al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage) 22:46

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DEDICATION

To our beloved Prophet Muhammad (All prayers and blessings of *Allâh* be upon him). I hope to be one of his companions in the Day of Resurrection, Amen.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my parents. To my mum for her support and sacrificing to be with me most of the time and to my father, who sadly passed away while I was completing my thesis, for always believing in me and encouraging me to improve myself.

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DECLARATION

In accordance with the University of Warwick's Guidelines on the Presentation and Examination of the thesis, I wish to declare that this work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree. This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Warwick.

The thesis has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

SIGNED: 

DATE: 14/09/2007

ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses how interpretations of Islam in an Arab society shape the lives and experiences of young people with visual impairments. The study explores the understanding of disability and of visual impairment in particular, through an analysis of the interface and interplay of gender, culture, religion and disability in an Islamic society and the way in which these influence people's lives. It also analyses the ways in which the teachings of Islam are interpreted in relation to both disability and gender by policymakers and individuals. This topic is approached through a case study of people living with visual impairment in Bahrain. The data was collected through narrative interviews with users, semi-structured interviews with service providers and policy makers, and focus groups with teachers. Some documentary analysis and observations were also undertaken.

Within disability studies, the medical and social models of disability are well established and are being increasingly considered together, in a rational model in order to deal with impairment more judiciously. Diversity, in terms of to what extent these models are applicable or transferable to other cultures and societies, is a neglected area that this thesis addresses.

The argument of this thesis is that in Bahrain, Islamic teachings are interpreted to promote a compassionate and charitable approach to people with disabilities which, in some ways, is congruent with the medical model of disability. Segregated specialist educational provision is provided, with limited inclusion in the sixth form, university and in adult life. Owing to Islamic interpretations of gender segregation, visually impaired girls and young women experience the intersection of gender and disability in ways that disadvantage them more than visually impaired boys and young men. Because of their gender and impairment they experience a double jeopardy. It is argued that there is the potential for Islamic teachings to be interpreted to support further social inclusion of disabled people with a focus on a rights-based approach.

KEYWORDS

Disability, Visual Impairment, Islam, Interpretation of Islam, Gender, Arab Culture, Bahrain

GLOSSARY

<i>'abāya/dafah katef</i>	a black overgarment fitted with buttons, worn on the shoulder and not on the head
<i>'abāya/dafah</i>	a black loose cloth or cloak that cover the body
<i>'abid</i>	slavers
<i>'agal</i>	black ring on the <i>ghutra</i>
<i>'aīb, khuzy</i>	shame
<i>'ajez</i>	unable
<i>'amiah</i>	blind girl
<i>'asha'</i>	two hours after sunset
<i>'aṣr</i>	afternoon
<i>'edeh</i>	traditional bands
<i>'eīd</i>	religious festivals
<i>'ibādāt</i>	worship
<i>'adhān</i>	call to prayer
<i>'estisgha'</i>	prayers to ask God for rain
<i>'iqra'</i>	read
<i>a'amā/'amā</i>	blindness
<i>al-darūrāt tubīḥ al-maḥḍurāt</i>	necessity overrules the forbidden
<i>a-lḥelwah jwuzūha</i>	let the beautiful daughter marry
<i>Allāh</i>	God
<i>al-muṭawa'</i>	religious teachers
<i>al-weḥshah 'almūh</i>	educate the ugly daughter'
<i>amal</i>	hope

<i>arkān</i>	articles
<i>āyāt</i>	Qur'an Verses
<i>ba'th / ba'thi</i>	radical, secular Arab nationalist political party "resurrection"
<i>bayet al-māl</i>	treasury
<i>bisht</i>	black lose overcoat worn by men
<i>chador</i>	black loose cloth that cover the body 'cloak' mainly worn in Iran
<i>ḍa'if baṣar</i>	visual impairment
<i>ḍarīr</i>	visual impairment
<i>dīn</i>	religion
<i>etekālīah</i>	dependency
<i>fajr</i>	sunrise
<i>fiqh</i>	jurisprudence
<i>fitnah</i>	attraction (temptation)
<i>ghīrah, nakhwah</i>	sense of honour, solicitude
<i>ghutrah</i>	a white headdress worn by men
<i>ḥadith</i>	what is said by Prophet Muhammad
<i>ḥajj</i>	Pilgrimage
<i>ḥalal</i>	permitted by religion and good
<i>ḥaram</i>	forbidden by religion
<i>ḥijab</i>	Muslim women's dress that covers their hair and whole body except for the face and hands, and is worn in front of all unrelated men
<i>ḥishmah</i>	modesty
<i>ḥudūd</i>	boundaries
<i>iḥsān</i>	treated with a good deed
<i>ijmā'</i>	is the consensus of the religious scholars, regarding a question of law

<i>ijtihād</i>	the exercise of judgement of scholars
<i>imān</i>	faith
<i>jama'a</i>	group
<i>janāzh</i>	funerals
<i>jizya</i>	historically there was a tax paid by non-Muslims living in a Muslim country
<i>juma'h</i>	Friday
<i>kafīf</i>	visual impairment
<i>kalām al-nās</i>	concern about gossip
<i>khlwah</i>	to be only one girl among foreigners male/s
<i>khums</i>	one fifth 1/5
<i>khuṭbah</i>	discourse
<i>khuṭīb</i>	who lead the prayer and give the discourse (<i>khuṭbah</i>)
<i>madhāhib</i>	Islam thoughts and sects
<i>maghrib</i>	sunset
<i>mahar</i>	dowry
<i>masjed</i>	mosque
<i>meskīyn</i>	unfortunate/powerless/poor
<i>mīlayah</i>	the black loose cloth made of heavy silk crêpe worn over the head and parts of the body, mainly worn by Egyptian women
<i>mu'āmalāt</i>	social relations
<i>mu'dhen</i>	holy men who called Muslims to prayer (<i>muezzin</i>)
<i>mujbar 'akhaka lā baṭal</i>	The brother is forced but he is not a hero
<i>mutaḥajebah</i>	Muslim women dressing in <i>hijab</i>
<i>mutaḥashemah</i>	<i>hijab</i> that some wear it in some places and in front of some people and may not cover all their hair
<i>najis</i>	impure

<i>nīqāb</i>	which cover their face 'veil'.
<i>Noor</i>	the light
<i>purdah</i>	partition
<i>qaḍā' and qadar</i>	predestination fate and destiny
<i>qara'a</i>	read or to recite
<i>qīyās</i>	decisions which are made by analogy
<i>qur'an</i>	Muslim holy book
<i>ṣadaqa</i>	which does not have to be a fixed amount of money and can be paid by anyone in any amount at any time
<i>ṣala-a</i>	pray
<i>salām</i>	peace or submission
<i>Sayyid</i>	in Islamic countries a supposed descendant of Muhammad through his grandson Hussein, the second son of his daughter Fatima. / A title of respect, esp. for royal personages 'Mr'
<i>shahāda</i>	testimony
<i>shaqaiq</i>	full sisters and brothers
<i>sharaf</i>	honour
<i>shari'ah</i>	Islamic law
<i>Sheikh</i>	prince or old man or religious man
<i>Sheikha</i>	princes
<i>Shī'ī/ Shi'a</i>	one of the Islamic sects
<i>shūrā</i>	consultation
<i>shyīlah or melfa'</i>	a <i>ḥijab</i> or veil, different to the veil worn in other Muslim countries, traditionally worn in black by women in GCC
<i>ṣīām or ṣawm</i>	fasting
<i>som'ah</i>	reputation
<i>sufūre</i>	woman who does not wear Muslim dress (<i>ḥijab</i>)

<i>Sunnah</i>	sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad
<i>Sunni</i>	one of the Islamic sects
<i>surat</i>	chapter of the holy Qur'an
<i>takāful</i>	symbiosis / supportive/ co-operation
<i>ṭaqāqah</i>	who work in the traditional bands
<i>taqwah</i>	piety
<i>tarawīḥ</i>	prayers of nights of Ramadan that have breaks in
<i>tawḥīd</i>	monotheism
<i>thobe</i>	gown
<i>wafa'</i>	loyalty or homage
<i>wāly al-amr</i>	male guardians: responsible man in her family, who is normally father or husband or even brother or uncle if father is dead
<i>wāṣṭh</i>	mediation
<i>wḍw'</i>	ablutions
<i>zakāt al-fiṭer</i>	which Muslims pay on the last day of Ramadan
<i>zakāt al-māl</i>	annual tax of 2.5% of one's net saving from income and property
<i>zakāt</i>	mandatory contribution to the poor or alms giving (tax)
<i>zinā</i>	sexual relation between men and women who are not married
<i>zuhur</i>	noon

The system adopted for transliterating Arabic letters into the English language in this thesis is the one which is used by International Journal of the Middle East Studies (IJMES), which shares most of the features of the system adopted by the Encyclopaedia of Islam.

ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Ano Domini = Common Era (C.E.)
BD	Bahraini Dinar
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
F	Female
FG	Focus group
FSoB	Friendship Society of the Blind
GCC	Gulf Co-operation Council
M	Male
NGOs	Non Government Organisation
PE	Physical Education
PWD	People with Disability
SP	Service Provider
UoB	University of Bahrain
VI	Visual impairment /visually impaired

Note: Islamic Scholars will have a blessing after the name of Prophet Muhammad

‘Peace Be Upon Him’. In this study it was not used for academic reasons.

Translation of the Qur’an were done via

‘<http://www.islamicity.com/QuranSearch/>’, with having the original Arabic text

as well.

INTRODUCTION

The Study

The overarching aim of this thesis is to extend the way in which religion, culture and gender are considered within disability studies and addressed within models of disability. Religion, culture and gender intersect with other key aspects of social identity, including ethnicity and socio-economic position and therefore, shape peoples experience of disability in particular ways. This thesis explores the way these aspects of diversity and disability intersect through a case study of visual impairment in an Islamic Arab society. The study explores the understanding of disability and of visual impairment in particular, through an analysis of the interface and interplay of gender, culture, religion and disability in an Islamic society and the way in which these influence people's lives.

The choice of this topic is a long story that begins in my childhood. When I was in the Girl Scouts, we visited orphanages, retirement homes and some institutions for the disabled. We took flowers and some gifts, together with a programme for a day's play with this latter group. After visiting these institutions, I asked my teacher '*why such children did not attend our school?*'. She replied, '*This is their place. They should not be with us as they are different, and the only thing we can do is to visit them to make them happy and to pray for them.*'

As I grew up, I was sure that such people were not getting their rights and, as it was always my dream to be a lawyer in order to help people to receive such rights, I felt this should be my duty. However, at that time, there was no school of law in Bahrain so my options were either to study abroad or to study in one of the schools

available in Bahrain. My mother could not accept me going abroad, first, because I was a young girl and she wanted to keep an eye on me and, second, my elder sisters and brother were married and living on their own so she did not want to lose me as well. None of the specialist subjects in the schools in Bahrain interested me, but there were some new specialities such as social work and, although this was new in Bahrain, I thought that this might be the area that I could study in order to learn more about the problems of vulnerable groups and how they could be supported.

I decided to do voluntary work with visual impaired people. I became a member of the Friendship Society of the Blind (FSOB). I used to help with organising charity days to collect donations, in arranging seminars and lectures to raise awareness, as well as giving some individual support such as reading, guiding or driving. Girls had bigger problems with mobility and were more in need of support on lots of occasions. I also helped male members, as my family gave me this freedom for two reasons: first, they are open-minded and trust me and, in addition, because I was helping people with disabilities. I still remember the day when one visually impaired young man was with me in the car, it is not common in Bahrain for a girl to drive alone with a man who is not a relative, and, unbeknownst to me, one of my relatives saw me. The next time this relative spoke to me he immediately asked, in a strange way, who was the man I was with in my car. I replied first that I never gave lifts to strange men, but then I said, *'Oh, yes. You mean X.'*

Immediately, when I said his name, my relative realised he knew him and that this man had a visual impairment. My relative's voice and expression changed from anger to pity. He apologised and told me that if ever the visually impaired man needed help I should help him and if I could not, I should ask my relative because this is our duty and we will be rewarded by God.

After my graduation, I worked for a while in the orphanage where there were some children with disabilities. Then I moved to an institution for children with learning disabilities but my volunteer work continued with both the FSoB and the Girl Scouts. I decided to develop the Girl Scouts at the Institute for people with visual impairment. This was the first Girl Scout group for people with visual impairments in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC).

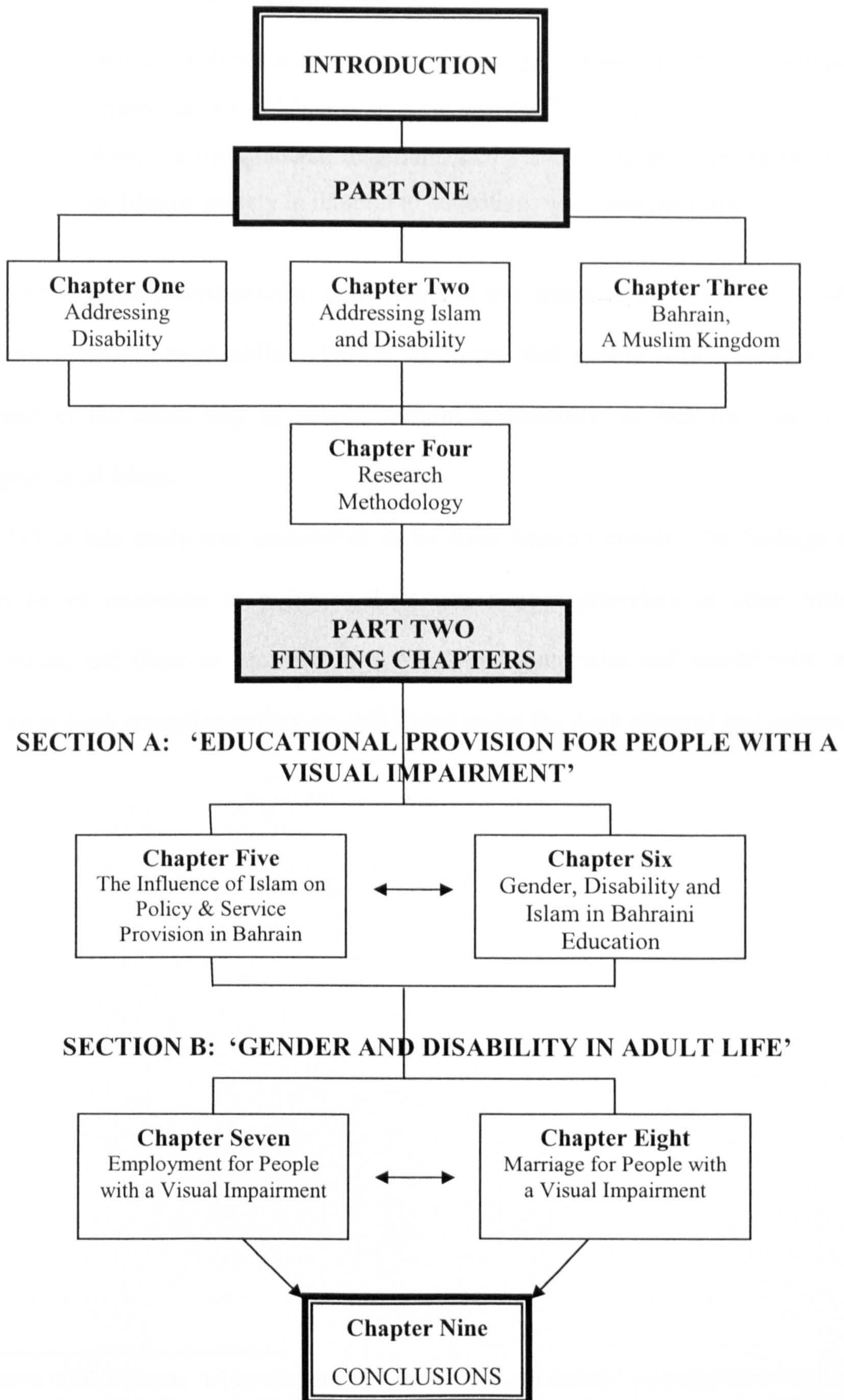
I was employed at the University of Bahrain (UoB) as a research assistant and obtained a scholarship for an MA at Nottingham University and subsequently a PhD scholarship at the University of Warwick from my employing institution. For a PhD subject disability in Bahrain was a too general topic, so I focused on the group closest to my heart, the group to which one of my best friends belong: people with visual impairments.

Structure of the Thesis

As outlined in Chart 1 below, the thesis is in two parts. Part One contains the first four chapters starting with a literature review on disability, then a literature review on Islam, moving to chapter three about the setting of Bahrain. Chapter four discusses the methods used in this research.

Part Two contains the finding chapters and is divided into two sections. Section 'A' discusses 'Educational Provision for People with Visual Impairment'. Section 'B' discusses 'Gender and Disability in Adult life' in two chapters on Employment and Marriage for People with Visual Impairment. Chapter Nine is the conclusion chapter.

Chart 1 below outlines the structure of the whole thesis, the order and contents of the chapters, and demonstrates how each chapter relates to the whole thesis. The structure of each part will appear again at the beginning of its part.

Chart 1: Structure of the Thesis

Research Questions

This study addresses two research questions:

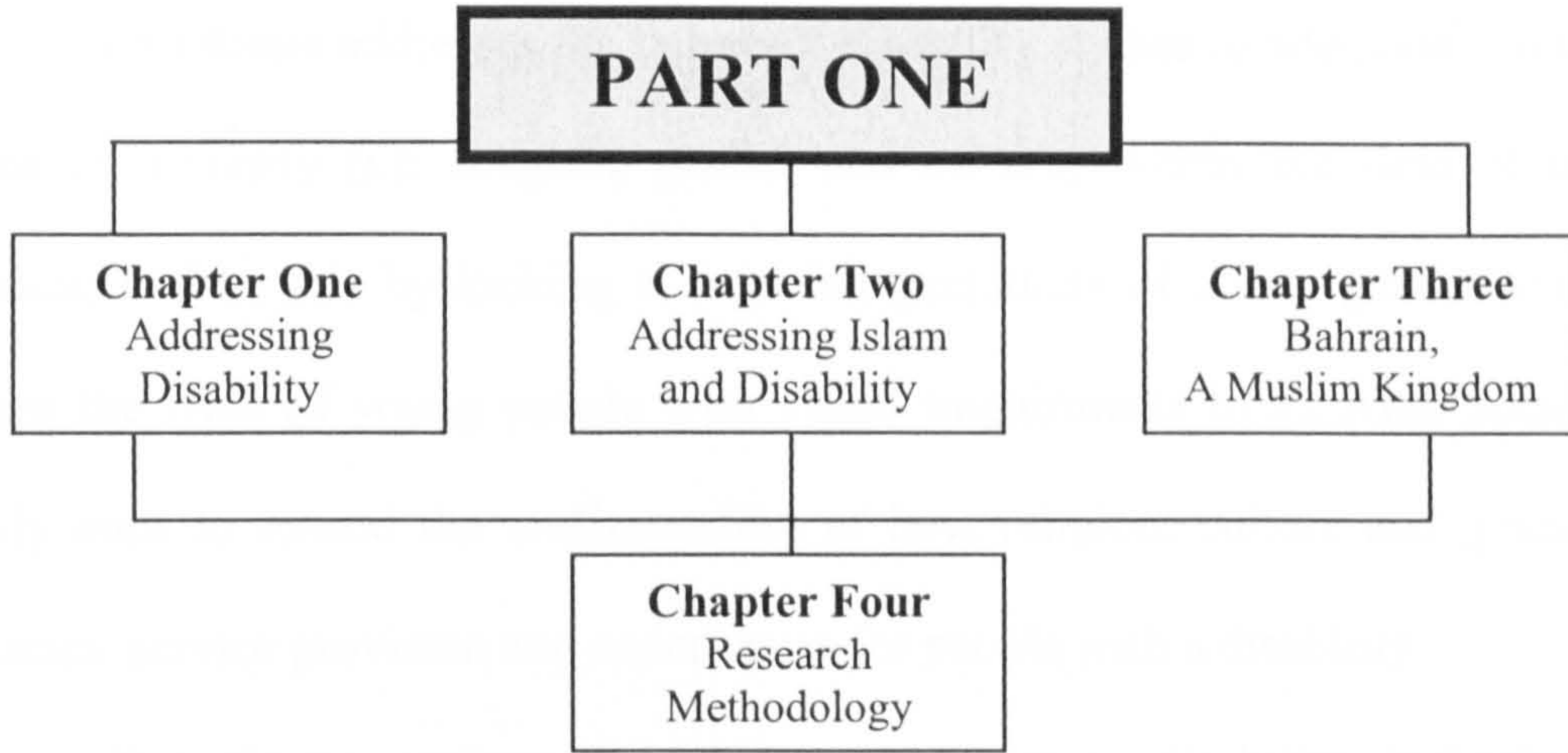
1. How are policies and provision for visually impaired people influenced by interpretations of Islam in an Arab society? *
2. What are the gendered experiences of visually impaired young people in an Islamic society in relation to education, work and marriage?

The original contribution to knowledge of this thesis is its consideration of an Islamic approach to disability. This is to ensure that people with a disability are treated in the same way as people without a disability, as was the case in the beginning of Islam.

While this study was undertaken in an Arab Muslim country the findings may also be of relevance to policy makers and service providers in other Muslim countries, and those in countries with Muslim communities and non-Muslim Arab living in Arab countries as they are still living under the Arab customs and culture.

* I have used the term: 'interpretations of Islam in an Arab society' in recognition that there is no single interpretation of Islam. There are different interpretations and interpretations vary across time and place, and by individual scholars. This study looks at Islamic views and practices in one Arab country, Bahrain, in a particular cultural context and place and at a specific time period.

Chart 2 : Structure of Part One



1. CHAPTER ONE: ADDRESSING DISABILITY

Introduction

This thesis addresses the failure of disability studies to adequately address the issue of diversity (i.e. religion, gender and culture) within the field of disability studies. It does this by looking at how interpretations of Islam, gender and culture shape the lives of young people with visual impairments in an Arab society. This study aims to extend the understanding of how religion, culture and gender shape policies, service provision and experiences for people with a disability.

This chapter reviews the relevant literature on disability. It begins with a review of the literature on definitions and models of disability. It then discusses the normalisation and rehabilitation literature as these are key concepts underpinning policy and service provision for disabled people in Bahrain, which is the case study for this thesis. It then moves on to review how gender and culture are considered within the disability studies literature, noting its failure to adequately address the roles of gender and culture in shaping disabled people's experiences. Finally, the chapter examines the literature on special education.

Historically, UK disability research, policy, legal frameworks and models of provision have been very influential in Bahrain (See Chapter Three for a more in-depth discussion). Therefore, this chapter draws heavily on the UK literature, referring to other international literature where appropriate. The literature in this chapter on disability needs to be considered alongside that in Chapter Two, which

examines Islam and its interpretations and views of disability. Both chapters consider gender issues as these cross-cut both disability and Islam.

1.1. Definitions of Disability and Visual Impairment

Disability is a concept that is defined in a variety of ways. It is not possible to have a global and unambiguous definition of it, as understandings of disability vary in different societies and cultures (Altman, 2001).

Brechin and Liddiard (1981) reviewed definitions of disability and were able to identify 23 different ones. Townsend (1979) identified a number of definitions and divided them into five categories, which were abnormality or loss, clinical condition, functional limitation of everyday activities, disability as deviance, and disability as disadvantage.

Terms such as impairment and disability are not neutral or objective but contested and their meanings vary within and across cultures. Being impaired does not necessarily mean that someone is disabled, even if the impairment is visible. For instance, a person who has lost a limb, may continue with his/her life and if fitted with an artificial replacement may not be perceived as being 'disabled' (Helander, 1993).

Disability definitions are shaped by the models that underpin them. Some definitions are underpinned by the medical model, while others reflect the social model. The World Health Organisation's International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (UN, 1983 :1.c.6-7; WHO, 1980) for example, which is widely used internationally and not without critics, is generally considered to reflect a social model whereby disability is not the inevitable consequence of impairment but the result of restrictions stemming from social and physical barriers. This will be explored more fully in the next section.

Visual Impairment is also defined in many ways. Some definitions are based on functional loss of vision, for example, having a visual acuity below a certain measurement. For example, according to the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (2004), the following terms: partially sighted, low vision, legally blind, and totally blind are used to describe people with visual impairments in an educational context. These terms are defined as follows:

- ‘Partially sighted’ indicates some type of visual problem that has resulted in a need for special education.
 - ‘Low vision’ generally refers to a severe visual impairment, not necessarily limited to distance vision. Low vision applies to all individuals with sight who are unable to read the newspaper at a normal viewing distance, even with the aid of eyeglasses or contact lenses. They use a combination of vision and other senses to learn, although they may require adaptations in lighting or the size of print, and sometimes Braille.
 - ‘Legally blind’ indicates that a person has less than 20/200 vision in the better eye or a very limited field of vision (20 degrees at its widest point).
 - ‘Totally blind’ students learn via Braille or other non-visual media.
- (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2004)

Visual impairment is the consequence of a functional loss of vision, rather than the eye disorder itself. Eye disorders which can lead to visual impairments can include retinal degeneration, albinism, cataracts, glaucoma, muscular problems that result in visual disturbances, corneal disorders, diabetic retinopathy, congenital disorders, and infection.’ (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2004).

It is important to note that in Arabic the term ‘visual impairment’, when translated, approximates to the English word ‘blind’. However, in Arabic there is more than one word to describe visual impairment. In Arabic the words for visual impairment/blind include *darīr*, *a’ma*, *kafīf*, *daief bassar*. ‘*Darīr*’ means blind in a physiological sense and is mainly used to refer to a person who has lost his/her sight. It is derived from the root *ḍa-ra-ra* (Baalbaki & Baalabaki, 2006), which suggests harm or disability and has a negative connotation. *A’amā* has many uses, one of

which is a person who is physiologically blind. It is derived from the root *'amā*, which means to not see. For Arabs in the seventh century, the word *a'amā* did not carry a negative connotation since it referred only to the condition of not seeing. The word *a'amā* is used in the Qur'an to refer not only to blindness in terms of sight, but also to a kind of blindness of the heart (Bazna & Hatab, 2005). In the academic field, the word *'kafīf*' is generally used for visual impairment and *'da'īf baṣar*' is used to denote partial sight and low vision.

This research study will include visually impaired young people who attend special educational provision and who have been defined as impaired by the Bahraini medical and education professions.

1.2. Models of Disability

The term 'model' is generally used to refer to a system, theory (Marshall, 1998) or way of thinking about an issue. The literature within the field of disability studies mainly refers to two models, which are the medical model of disability and the social model of disability. More recently a relational disability approach has been developed.

1.2.1. The Medical Model of Disability

The medical model of disability developed in the nineteenth century alongside the establishment of the medical profession and technological advances in medicine (Drake, 1999). People with disabilities were treated by medical professionals who tried to rehabilitate individuals to cope with normal life. This medicalisation of disability focused on the individual and the individual was seen as a victim whose disability was a personal tragedy (Barnes, 1999).

The medical model is concerned with individuals and focuses on the bodily 'abnormality' or disorder. In such a model, a disease is seen as a definite disturbance of the normal function of the body. This can be detected by diagnostic instruments or

through a chemical analysis of organs, cells or body fluids. It produces signs and symptoms which can be recognised as familiar and which are often attributed to a specific cause, diagnosis and/or classification (Seale & Pattison, 1994).

The model has been further strengthened by the field of genetics, as techniques have developed to identify genes that cause diseases. The physiological body is seen as an object and people with disabilities are viewed as patients with a disease that can be medically treated. Moreover, the model emphasises that the biological body shapes human experience (Drake, 1999).

This individual model of disability defines the problems that people with disabilities face as a direct consequence of their impairment. In such cases, the professional's task is to work with the individual. However, this view has two consequences. Firstly, physical adjustment is required through rehabilitation programmes which are designed to return the individual to as near normal a state as possible. Secondly, psychological adjustments, which help an individual to come to terms with his/her physical limitations, are needed (Oliver & Sapey, 1999).

The process of rehabilitation is aided by the development of technological devices. For example, before recent technological advances people with hearing difficulties might cup their hand to their ear in order to hear or perhaps could not even hear at all. However, with medical improvements and advances in technology, operations can be carried out, hearing aids can be used, and lip reading and sign language can be learned by both those with hearing difficulties and by others in order to communicate. Other examples are the use of Braille by people with a visual impairment and electronic wheelchairs that can aid those with physical disabilities (Pandey & Advani, 1995). Developments in technology help many people with disabilities to overcome technical problems which may also offer them a more equal

footing in the workplace (Roulstone, 1998). However, technological innovation alone cannot deal with social oppression or discrimination.

The medical model is powerful because of the influence of the medical profession and the technologies used within medicine (Marks, 1999; Oliver, 1990). The development of the movement for people with disabilities started as a critical response to the medical model and professional power, especially the hegemony of doctors (Thompson, 1998). However, the medical model of disability has been criticised since the 1970s by those who developed the social model of disability and by those who have adopted a rights-based approach to disability.

The social model, as will be discussed later, challenges the medical model's equating of disability with illness, since not all people with disabilities are ill or need medical treatment or care (Marks, 1999). As indicated by Barnes (1999) that, the medical model fails to reflect the reality of the experiences of people with disabilities. The medical model uses three typologies. The first is 'impairment', which means psychological abnormality. The second is 'disability', which means the lack of ability to carry out activities as a normal human being would. The third is 'handicap', which is a disadvantage for a given individual, as was explained previously. However, psychological and physical normality are not easily defined as they are different according to temporal, cultural and situational factors (Barnes, 1999). Moreover, by concentrating on the working of the body, the definition omits the non-medical causes of disadvantage and promotes the idea of 'abnormality'. Moreover, the medical model ignores the influence of culture by focusing on the body, thus ignoring the experiences of people with disabilities and how disability is perceived in different societies. In addition, much of the rehabilitation considered to be needed by people with disabilities cannot be provided only by doctors or medical staff (J. Gill, 1999;

Oliver, 1990), as community rehabilitation is needed as well. This idea will be discussed later on in the chapter.

Furthermore, by focussing narrowly on the individual, the medical model fails to recognise disability as a social response to impairment. As well as the restrictions that the impairment itself brings with it, responses from society may be patronising, degrading or even insulting to people with disabilities and bring further restrictions. Social responses to people with disabilities may 'disable' them as much as the impairment itself. Furthermore, traditional approaches to impairment could be viewed as 'pathologising' the individual; meaning that the person may be viewed either as a helpless victim who should be pitied or, conversely, as a hero to be admired (Barnes, 1999).

1.2.2. The Social Model of Disability

The social model of disability was developed by a number of scholars and activists such as Oliver, Abberley, Finkelstein and Hunt who formed the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in the 1970s to challenge the medical model of disability (Chappell, Goodley, & Lawthom, 2001). This social model focuses on social and institutional structures and views disability as a product of the social environment, both culturally and historically. The social model of disability does not locate disability in an impaired or malfunctioning body. The model makes a clear distinction between impairment and disability (Marks, 1999; Read, 2000). Instead, this model views disability, not as a result of individual impairment, but as a result of social obstacles (Shakespeare, 2006a). It does not see disability from a negative point of view (i.e. not seeing, not walking) but looks at how the environment meets the needs of people with disabilities. The model directs attention to those aspects of the lives of people with disabilities that can, and should, be supported. For example, when there are no ramps in a building, wheelchair users will

not be able to access it. Similarly, the physical environment is inaccessible if there is not enough material (e.g. books or signs) in Braille or if there is no one who knows sign language to communicate with people with hearing impairment. This approach stresses that society must change rather than concentrate on individual rehabilitation (Barnes et al., 1999; Oliver, 1990, 1991; Oliver & Sapey, 2006).

The proponents of the social model of disability make a clear distinction between physical impairment and disability. ‘Impairment’ is defined as having a limb, or part of a limb, which is missing or defective, or as having a defective bodily organ. ‘Disability’ is defined as being restricted or disadvantaged in terms of the activities that can be carried out by people with disabilities. This disadvantage/restriction is caused by a contemporary social structure in society that takes little or no account of people who have a physical impairment, excluding them from participation in the mainstream of societal activities (Barnes et al., 1999).

The social model takes into account the importance of the citizenship rights of people with disabilities and the way that a lack of full social rights is a form of social oppression. In addition, the model focuses on policy and planning to serve the needs of people with disabilities (Marks, 1999). Therefore, a strength of this model is that it focuses on the rights and needs of people with disabilities, on empowerment as well as care (Thompson, 1998). Evidence suggests that the rights of people with disabilities are limited. The People with Disabilities’ Movement promoted the idea of ‘right, not charity’ and legislation concerning anti-discrimination (Oliver, 1990), with assistance as a right not as a form of care or kindness (Silvers, 2004). Issues about charity will be discussed in Chapter Two.

Commenting on the strengths and the limitations of the social model of disability Shakespeare (2006a) suggests that the ‘social model of disability has created as many problems as it has solved’ (2006a :31). There are various critiques of

the social model. Marks (1999) argues that it fails to fully address the complex social factors and diversity that shape the production of disability, such as differences in experience and differences in relation to gender and ethnicity. Moreover, there is insufficient content in the model regarding people with learning disabilities (Chappell et al., 2001). Additionally, the model focuses on the physical environment, which makes people disabled when this may affect only a minority of people with disabilities. People with physical disabilities may be more affected by the physical environment, for example, while those with learning difficulties may be less affected. The model fails to show an interrelationship between the three levels of analysis, that is, the social, psychological and biological levels (Marks, 1999). It also fails to meet the needs of people with a range of disabilities and/or impairments (Shakespeare, 2006a, 2006b).

The social model does not offer adequate consideration of impairment because a disability can be a matter of situation. For example, a person with a visual impairment has no difficulty talking on the telephone while a person with a hearing impairment has no problem reading books. Shakespeare suggests that disability studies have not really changed over the years and that the social model of disability has become like a religion (Shakespeare, 2006a).

Shakespeare suggests that the view that disability can be 'solved' by getting rid of social barriers is a limited view. He argues that not all impairments will be removed by removing barriers since the same problems may not apply to all people with disabilities. Secondly, what is a barrier to one group or individual with an impairment may not be a barrier to another group or individual. In addition, there are issues of practicality and cost. Therefore, removing obstacles (e.g. physical barriers) is not an end in itself. It can only offer a way of providing more facilities and thus greater inclusion for disabled people. However, having different or segregated

services in certain cases may ensure that these services are of better quality. In short, the social model is a useful theoretical system that has limitations as well as strengths (Shakespeare, 2006a).

In conclusion, the social model neglects the importance of impairment for many people with disabilities by considering that, in reality, it is difficult to distinguish between disability, impairment and social barriers. In addition, different kinds of disability have different barriers (Shakespeare, 2006a, 2006b).

1.2.3. Comparison of Medical and Social Models of Disability

The medical model leads to policies and provision where people with disabilities live in health care centres or residential care homes and are often socially excluded (Morris, 1991). On the other hand, the social model leads to more socially inclusive policies and provision with more support for people with disabilities to live within the wider society by removing social and physical barriers. The medical model emphasises that people with disabilities should be dependent on others (i.e. professionals and supporters), while the social model encourages people with disabilities to be independent. Table 1:1 shows a comparison between the models as set out by Oliver:

Table 1:1 Comparison of Individual and Social Model of Disability

Individual Model	Social Model
Personal tragedy theory: personal problem individual treatment medicalisation professional dominance expertise individual identity prejudice care control policy individual adjustment	Social oppression theory: social problem social action self-help individual and collective responsibility experience collective identity discrimination rights choice politics social change

Source: (Oliver, 1996b :34)

The very nature of the medical model means that society cannot respond to the needs of people with disabilities and an inevitable consequence is that disabled people do not have full rights in public policy. The social model came about as a reaction to the medical model through the development of a rights-based approach and direct action by people with disabilities. A recent study by McEwan and Butler (2007) stated that:

There is thus a need for a more holistic and flexible approach to understanding disability, with a greater focus on local and individual experience and on recognising the importance of geopolitical, social and cultural as well as economic contexts. This is one welcome lesson from social models of disability... models of disability also need to be flexible (McEwan & Butler, 2007 :463).

A social approach to disability is vital as it is inappropriate to consider disability purely from a medical point of view. However, the social model is only one approach to formulating theories concerning disability. Other, more complex approaches are necessary if it is to be recognised that disability is in itself a complex phenomenon and, as such, it requires a range of levels of analysis, intervention, and consideration of medical and socio-political aspects (Shakespeare, 2006b).

1.2.4. Relational Approach to Disability

Recently, because of the criticisms concerning the limitations of both the medical and social models of disability (Crow, 1996; French, 1993; Morris, 1991; Shakespeare, 2006a), a new relational approach to disability has been put forward which views disability in terms of factors that are intrinsic (e.g. the impairment) and/or extrinsic (e.g. the 'social and physical' environment). The difference between this new relational approach and the social model is that the former acknowledges that environment and context are both important. In other words, people are disabled by their own bodies and by the society in which they live. Thus, this approach attempts to establish a balance between the medical and social models as well as

acknowledges that even people in the same society with the same disability can have different experiences. So, the relational approach considers how the situation of disabled people can be improved by looking at improving physical functioning through treatment and rehabilitation (the medical model) and by overcoming obstacles and initiating anti-discrimination legislation (the social model). This approach includes factors concerning the individual and society thus relating disability to ‘physical, physiological and external problems’ (Shakespeare, 2006a: 62).

Disabled and non-disabled people need to be treated equitably, not by being treated in the same way but by being provided with equal opportunities and through a redistribution in terms of rights and resources in order to ensure a greater degree of social inclusion (Shakespeare, 2006a). Gender and culture are key factors shaping disabled people’s experiences, and important considerations in relation to models of disability. These are discussed later in this chapter (Sections 1.5 and 1.6).

1.3. The Normalisation Approach

Many writers have emphasised that people with disabilities should have the same rights, opportunities and choices as other non-disabled people through being socially accepted and normalised within society (Brown & Walmsley, 1997; Spencer, Davies, Lott, Still, & Shan, 2001). Theories of normalisation were developed by rights-based activists in Scandinavia and the USA in the 1960s and 1970s (Shakespeare, 2006a).

There are many definitions of normalisation. One understanding is the ‘principle by which people with a disability have the right to lead a valued ordinary life, based on the belief in their equality as human beings and citizens’ (Ramon, 1991). A second conceptualisation defines ‘normalisation’ as using culturally

normative means as far as possible to achieve behaviour which is as culturally normative as possible within a given society (Szivos, 1992).

When it was conceived, the aim of the normalisation approach was to ensure that people with disabilities were accorded the right to enjoy the same quality of life as non-disabled people. It was necessary to consider if such equality could be attained whilst people with disabilities were segregated from the non-disabled. In the short term, it was felt that equality did not, of necessity, require integration with non-disabled people (Emerson, 1992).

The term 'normalisation' has been in use for more than thirty years during which time it has been influential in discussions regarding the most appropriate ways to provide services for people with learning difficulties in Scandinavia, North America, the United Kingdom and Australia. In later years, its scope has broadened to include other disabled groups and involves making the housing, education, working and leisure conditions as normal as possible for people with disabilities, as well as offering them the legal and human rights enjoyed by all other citizens. The normalisation approach did not develop in isolation, but reflected the social movements and lobbying for equal rights of a number of disadvantaged or minority groups in many Western societies (Emerson, 1992).

Emerson (1992) notes that the introduction of the normalisation approach to the UK followed a series of inquiries into conditions in long-stay institutions in the late 1960s and 1970s. Scandinavian ideas of normalisation influenced the design of new services, as well as the remodelling of old institutions. Tyne (1992), suggests that normalisation, as an idea, really came into its own in Europe in the 1970s when many things came together to create the right climate. These included new ideologies about social welfare and recognition of the limitations of policy and provision in social care. These created agendas for action, pushing for the use of ordinary housing and

community living, paid work in employment, and a focus on the importance of relationships. They also created networks of people, with a leadership structure that moved beyond services. This offered a basis for understanding the problems of people with disabilities and enabled them to participate in decision-making (Tyne, 1992).

The approach of normalisation means that a structured evaluation process could include the levels of physical and social functioning of the individual, the availability of services and the impact of the wider society in terms of exclusion, inclusion and discrimination. The normalisation approach therefore links to the perspective of viewing disability as a form of social oppression.

In order to understand the process of the normalisation approach with respect to people with disabilities forming their own identities, it is necessary to examine the historical process which led to the formation of cultural images of people with disabilities. These images portrayed people with disabilities as less than human. Such images were further reinforced by portrayals of individuals adjusting to tragedy or managing stigma. These portrayals take no account of history and culture. They also locate the problem within the individual, taking no account of the ways in which factors such as race, gender or religion might effect the formation of an individual's identity.

Current thinking has now moved towards self-advocacy for people with disabilities, which means that rather than being passive recipients of the charity of others, it is about people with disabilities as a group gaining power to fight for their rights. The policies and practices of many forms of rehabilitation focus on enabling people with disabilities to be as close as possible to a non-disabled person in their level of physical and social functioning (Goodley, 2000). Therefore, a hearing impaired person is encouraged to lip read, or a visually impaired person is encouraged

to have corneal implants or to learn to be mobile with the aid of a stick or dog. This is clearly linked to the debate about the difference between the medical and social model of disability in that the idea of normalisation can be interpreted to put the burden on the individual and follow the medical model or it can be interpreted to involve the wider society and therefore link more closely with the social model. People with disabilities began to achieve some of their rights to be normalised through different rehabilitation approaches which will be discussed in the section below.

Although ideas about normalisation underpin policies and services for disabled people in many countries, this is not the case in Bahrain, as will become evident in the findings chapters. The concept of rehabilitation however, is key to disability issues in Bahrain.

1.4. Rehabilitation Approaches

Policies and services for visually impaired people in Bahrain are underpinned by the concept of rehabilitation, thus it is appropriate to consider the literature on this. Normalisation can be achieved through a variety of strategies, one of which is through rehabilitation programmes that enhance the functioning of people with impairments. There is a wide range of approaches within rehabilitation that are linked to different values and assumptions regarding the different models of disability. Rehabilitation could be said to be a concept which restores 'a person's dignity and/or legal status' (Helander, 1993 :15).

Rehabilitation services are based on the premise that each person with a disability has some functional limitation. This can be reduced by adjusting society, according to the social model, or by rehabilitating the individual, as emphasised by the medical model. Rehabilitation provision aims to enable people with disabilities to

live more 'normally' i.e. like people without disabilities (Albrecht, 1992). There are a variety of models of provision and approaches.

A traditional approach to rehabilitation is to develop a segregated programme such as separate schools and workshops. These are based on maximising the potential of individuals to function 'normally' and these services are derived from the medical model of disability as an 'individual tragedy'. This type of rehabilitation provision helps the individual but often excludes him/her from the wider society both at school and through sheltered work placements. These rehabilitation programmes offer experience and skills to people with disabilities (Albrecht, 1992) and aim to provide jobs for people with disabilities that will allow them to earn their own incomes and thus live independently but sometimes in a socially excluded way (International Labour Conference, 1998).

As indicated by Helander (1993), there has been a change in the scope of the term 'rehabilitation' in the industrialized countries over the past 25 years and these stages of rehabilitation are discussed in more detail below. During the first phase, rehabilitation focused on the concept of the disabled individual and involved the co-ordinated use of a combination of medical, social, educational and vocational measures for training or re-training the individual to the highest possible level of functional activity. The second stage recognised physical barriers in the physical environment. Early on, professionals recognised the important role played by the environment in rehabilitation, particularly for people with physical problems. The third phase has attempted to equalise opportunities through social inclusion (Helander, 1993).

The term 'equalisation of opportunities' was introduced in the UK and other Northern European countries in the 1970s and 1980s. This term refers to the process through which social systems, such as the physical environment, housing and

transportation, social and health services, educational and work opportunities, sports and recreational facilities, were made accessible to all. This process aimed to bring about a change in the circumstances of disabled children and adults, who in some countries were excluded from mainstream schooling and others prevented from gaining access to vocational training and jobs. People with disabilities were not integrated into public services, housing, transportation, leisure and sports, work places, etc. and some authorities viewed separate facilities for living, sheltered workshops for work, and special medical, educational and vocational services as a solution to the problem (Helander, 1993).

Attempts to promote and protect the human rights of disabled people are viewed as a corner-stone of community-based rehabilitation (Helander, 1993). In the UK, recent changes in social policy on 'community care', have been designed to shift the balance of provision in the direction of care at home. This service provision represents an attempt to combine lower costs with a greater sense of control for the consumers through a mixed economy of care (Kestenbaum, 1993).

Rehabilitation encompasses both a philosophy and a practice which enables people with disabilities to achieve whatever is possible through adjusting and learning to live with their impairment. The training enables them to do this and they may be able to obtain employment (Albrecht, 1992; International Labour Conference, 1998; Pandey & Advani, 1995). The employment services define rehabilitation as the help that can be provided to meet the needs of people with disabilities to prepare for work or training. In the rehabilitation of people with disabilities, the main requirements include: confidence-building in order to make effective use of work opportunities; understanding the effect of disabilities in work-related activities; making suitable occupational choices; improving skills; developing the necessary physical capacity to

cope in a work environment; re-learning basic skills (Albrecht, 1992; Lakey & Simpkins, 1994).

Rehabilitation programmes in particular countries may depend largely on the social and economic situation within that nation (International Labour Conference, 1998). In this way, culture has a marked influence on rehabilitation programmes and their organisation, as well as to who services are delivered. This is because the aims of rehabilitation initiatives can be represented in different ways (Albrecht, 1992). Therefore, diversity and context are relevant. In some developing countries, services are being developed for certain groups of disabled people, such as injured freedom fighters or war veterans. Efforts are made to rehabilitate them and to provide them with disability pensions which compensate them for the loss of income incurred as a result of their disability. Other groups include victims of traffic accidents, military personnel and civil servants, where some form of insurance or social security system has been set up for them (Helander, 1993).

There are gender issues within vocational rehabilitation which are not always addressed. Rehabilitation programmes have been criticised for not always providing equal training opportunities for both men and women with disabilities (Dines, Jensen, & Russo, 1998). A study carried out by Kutnre (1979) cited in Oliver (1990), for example, showed that disabled black and white men were similar in their perceived losses of independence and the inability to make and spend money. However, women were more concerned with the effects of their disability on their personal relationships and responsibilities. These examples show that the losses that are attributed to disability seem to be closely linked to prescribed sex roles in society. Nonetheless, the inability to perform tasks, either at work or in the home, was the loss most frequently mentioned by all four groups. This finding highlights the need for gender-sensitive vocational rehabilitation that takes into account culturally appropriate

gender roles. Certain issues regarding gender and disability will be discussed in a later section.

Vocational rehabilitation is an attempt to achieve more equality of opportunity and treatment for workers with disabilities by creating policies of compatibility and non-discrimination (International Labour Conference, 1998). However, it is debatable whether segregated rehabilitation centres and programmes achieve normalisation and offer what people with disabilities want.

Within rehabilitation, the notion of adjustment is crucial, but at the same time, contentious. Proponents of rehabilitation believe that for a disabled person to become completely 'human' again, and for them to form an identity, he/she must undergo both medical treatment and physical rehabilitation, and must also experience the process of psychological adjustment in order to come to terms with his/her disability. It is suggested that to make a satisfactory adjustment, the disabled person may need to work through a period of 'bereavement' in which he/she needs to grieve and mourn for the ability which has been lost. He/she may pass through a series of stages before this adjustment is complete. This notion of adjustment has been severely criticised in terms of its theoretical basis and also on the grounds that it does not match the actual experience of disability. Alternative frameworks, such as social adjustment and social oppression, have been developed not only because people with disabilities have criticised this framework theoretically and empirically, but because researchers have found it difficult to provide empirical evidence that rehabilitation benefits all groups (Oliver, 1990).

A climate of dependency may be created through the delivery of certain professional services, such as residential and day care institution. These services generally do not involve people with disabilities in the running of such facilities even though the services are run to benefit them. For example, users are moved in

specialised transport and usually take part in rigidly routine activities and this creates dependency. Power and control remain with professional staff, with people with disabilities being offered little choice about aid, equipment, times etc. The tasks that professionals can perform may be limited in terms of range because of professional boundaries, employer requirements or trade union practices (Oliver, 1990).

Further problems exist in an organisational sense. For example, economic limitations mean that professionals act as gatekeepers to scarce resources; legal frameworks control the functions of service administrators; career structures limit the decision-making capacity of professionals; and cognitive structures prescribe practice with individual people with disabilities. Oliver (1990), suggests that professionals and clients may be trapped in dependency-creating relationships. Professionals are themselves dependent upon people with disabilities for their jobs, their salaries, their subsidised transport, and ultimately their quality of life and so both people with disabilities and professionals are trapped in dependency-creating relationships.

While professionals tend to define independence in terms of the ability to carry out activities such as washing, dressing, toileting, cooking and eating without assistance, people with disabilities tend to see it as the ability to take control and to make their own decisions about life, rather than doing things alone or without help. In this way, independence could be said to be a process of the mind rather than of the body (Oliver, 1990). According to Oliver (1990) the present system of special education may leave disabled school leavers as socially immature and isolated. This can result in disabled young people facing the tasks of adulthood without relevant skills and being ignorant of the main social issues of the world around them (Oliver, 1990).

However, this dependency is not created by the educational environment alone. A significant role is also played by society in forming the idea that people with

disabilities are dependent on charity. Dependency is not a problem only for the individual who is himself/herself dependent, but also for politicians, planners and professionals since it is these who must manage such dependency in line with current social values and economic circumstances (Oliver, 1990). Dependency is a key issue for visually impaired people in Bahrain and will be discussed in later finding chapters.

Within the approaches to rehabilitation, providers of community-based rehabilitation and advocates of the independent living movement have tried to tackle the barriers to social inclusion. It is argued by Marks (1999) that it is in the long-term interests of the rehabilitation professional to ally itself with the independent living movement, and to obtain goodwill and contacts in the community as this is likely to benefit both parties. In particular, rehabilitation facilities could improve their own programmes and services if they looked to the expertise of the consumers. It could be argued that a new compact is needed based on the notion of obligation and collaboration between professionals and activists. This would benefit both groups (Marks, 1999).

Tate et al. (1992) noted a study that considered people with spinal injuries at the time of their acute rehabilitation. Those who were put on an 'independent living programme' were able to adjust to their new circumstances with fewer negative psychological effects than those who received a more traditional, medically-orientated service. From such a study, it can be seen that individual people with disabilities can testify personally to the value of the independent living approach, based on a rights-based approach, and the social model of disability.

Critics of the independent living movement assert that only certain kinds of people can be allowed control over their lives and argue that some are not mentally capable of doing so, or do not wish to do so. Furthermore, some people are a danger

to themselves and others unless someone takes responsibility for them (Morris, 1993a; Shakespeare, 2006a). In addition, the independent model may not suit Islamic societies, which are mostly interdependent societies.

Critics also argue that independent living is not achievable by the majority of disabled people who are old and/or experience poor health, and that proponents of independent living are said to address primarily the young, fit, and predominantly male, wheelchair users (Morris, 1993a; Shakespeare, 2006a). However, if the basic premise of the independent living movement, that all human life is valuable, is accepted, then human and civil rights that are accorded to younger, fitter and more articulate disabled people must also be accorded to those who are older, less fit and less articulate (Morris, 1993a).

In practice, proponents of the social model of disability maintain that the role of the professional in rehabilitation needs to change from being the manager/organiser of the users to being a resource for the users to use in reaching his/her own goals. Professionals need special education and training so that they can act as enablers to allow people with disabilities to exercise, wherever possible, their own control (Oliver & Sapey, 1999).

Shakespeare (2000) identified two models that may be used in the re-conceptualisation of 'care'. The first model, put forward by the disabled people's movement, redefines independence. This asserts that the disabled do not necessarily wish or need to do everything for themselves. They do require having choice in and control over what help they need. In other words, disabled people do not want or need care; they want their rights as citizens. The second model, the feminist ethics of care, is based on recognising people's interdependence on each other, and their relationships and responsibilities. This model is critical of ideas of the supremacy of

independence, autonomy and the rights of the individual, suggesting that such views are based too much on a masculine notion of people as separate (Shakespeare, 2000).

Morris (2001) argues that whatever 'care' is, it must allow people 'to state an opinion,' 'to participate in decisions which affect their lives,' and 'to share fully in the social life of their community,' otherwise it is unethical (Morris, 2001: 15). Thus, the ethics of care is based on the notion that to deny the human rights of others is to undermine our own humanity. Such ethics also recognise the right of human beings to express preferences and so, the ethics of care aim to: allow people to participate in decisions which affect them; to be involved in community life; ensure that everyone has the same rights; understand that some people have additional requirements in order to access their rights. Recognising difference can therefore be part of recognising common humanity (Morris, 2001).

However, it is necessary to ask to what extent rehabilitation centres and programmes, meet the needs and requirements of people with disabilities and what are the views and opinions of people with disabilities regarding such rehabilitation programmes? It is clear that there needs to be greater levels of awareness, education and change in attitudes regarding social development programmes and the rights of people with disabilities in order for rehabilitation services to develop and grow (Pandey & Advani, 1995).

Goffman's ideas about social stigma are useful to consider in relation to normalisation and rehabilitation approaches. Goffman (1963; , 2006) considered how individuals become stigmatised and how dependency is a socially constructed concept on the part of rehabilitation professionals. He also considered changes in self-perception or what he termed the 'moral cares' of people who were thus stigmatised and labelled by society. Goffman considered the nature of embodiment in both symbolic and social interactions.

Goffman (1963) suggests that 'devalued identity' is acquired in two stages. Firstly, society adopts certain values and beliefs about what it is like to be 'abnormal'. Then, the disabled person learns that this is how he/she is viewed, finally grasping the consequences of this understanding. Goffman states that the timing and interplay of these stages are of vital importance since they affect the person's response to his/her own circumstances.

When this idea is applied to the case of a person with a perceived impairment, Goffman noted four processes (Goffman, 1986, 2006) . First, Goffman showed that the body is central to the development and maintenance of social relationships, as well as in defining the relationship between an individual's self and social identity. The body can be summed up as a resource which can be managed to construct a version of the self. However, although Goffman focuses on the body when considering day-to-day interaction, the body does not act independently but is subject to what Goffman calls the 'body idiom' or 'conventionalised discourse'. The idea of body idiom consists of the way the body appears and acts. For example, it concerns facets such as dress, bearing, movement and position, sound level and physical gestures. While individuals can control these aspects to a certain extent, they cannot be controlled completely. In this way, it could be said that the body has a dual location belonging to the individual and society. As indicated by Goffman, the 'body idioms' that people use to classify others are, in turn, used to classify the self. Hence, if others judge a person's body as indicating that the individual is a 'failed' member of society. This label will then be internalised by the person himself/herself and then be reflected in the idea of a 'spoiled' identity (Goffman, 1963).

Goffman's explanation shows how the body forms a link between 'social identity' and 'self-identity' and, how bodies can equally disrupt social relationships. Because individuals who are 'stigmatised' by society share the same beliefs of the

society about the body and its performance, these ideas will form the basis of the individual's own self image (Goffman, 1963, 1986).

When an impairment is not immediately apparent, Goffman notes a range of strategies used to hide the stigma or to cover it by reducing its significance in order to avoid embarrassment, including medical and surgical procedures to make the individual appear 'more normal' or less likely to attract attention. Another option is to withdraw from social interaction altogether (Goffman, 1963). Goffman further demonstrates that the stigmatisation is inclined to 'spread'. For example, physical disability is sometimes perceived to indicate general incapacity or negative attitudes towards an impaired individual and may even extend to other family members in what Barnes and Mercer term a 'courtesy stigma' (Barnes & Mercer, 2003).

Goffman also developed his theory of symbolic interaction in order to examine human interaction in social settings. Such analysis was developed of the interaction order as the social situations or 'environments in which two or more individuals are physically in one another's presence' (Lemert & Branaman, 1997 :235).

Goffman's work can be seen as supplementing the work of theorists who put forward the social model of disability. He showed that disablement is more than just a material, institutional or statutory issue by demonstrating the effects it can have on social interaction and the construction of personal and social identities. He also makes it plain that the problem of stigma attached to impairment derives from the body itself and from the society that creates the stigma (N Watson, 2003). In this thesis, his work is relevant to the analysis of social interaction and the social identity of visually impaired people in Bahrain at both an individual and a family level.

Goffman's work within social interactionism has been criticised in many studies on disability for concentrating on the 'micro-issues' while failing to consider the power of socio-economics and inequality (N Watson, 2003 :37). Goffman was

criticised for 'individualising the issues' by Finkelstein (1981). Oliver (1990) criticised Goffman because he relied on the 'psychology model and secondary sources'. Oliver (1996a) argued that Goffman fails to move beyond the individual and neglects to consider segregation and the inferior status of stigmatised individuals and groups, including people with disabilities. He does not seriously address questions of causality or manage to move beyond the personal tragedy theory of the medical model. Peters (1996) notes that sociologists such as Goffman treat the body as a 'text' or 'social operator'.

1.5. Gender and Disability

Disability is not just a physical or mental condition. It is also a matter of social stigma (Goffman, 1963). People with disabilities, have traditionally been classified in terms of their disability as 'mild', 'moderate' or 'severe'. Until recently, researchers and practitioners have failed to recognise that people with disabilities also have identities in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and/or class (Walmsley & Downer, 1997). In fact, the disability movement has been criticised for failing to consider diversity among people with disabilities (Stuart, 1996). This can be explained, at least in part, by the fact that the field of disability did not recognise feminist theories and that feminist scholars did not recognise disabled women. Like gender and race, disability, is all around us and to understand how disability works is to understand what it is to be human (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Morris, 1992; Read, 2000).

Disability theory tended to neglect the experience of individual people with disabilities in relation to ethnicity, gender and impairment (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Morris, 1992; Read, 2000). There has been much criticism of disability theories of non-disabled feminists failing to address the issue of disability, and of the lack of

attention given to issues of gender within the disability movement in Britain and throughout the world (Barnes, 1999; Morris, 1991).

Disability intersects with gender in a number of ways. Therefore, even though disabled men and women may share experiences in terms of feeling devalued, isolated, marginalised and discriminated against, their experiences are different since certain stigmas converge for women with disabilities, further undermining their gender status. For example, women with disabilities are more likely to be sexually assaulted, while disabled men are more likely to be physically abused in other ways (Gerrschick, 2000).

In the 1970s, feminist issues made an impact on the academic world as they challenged traditional research methods and tried to change the ways that both men and women were viewed (Barnes, 1999). Feminist research developed in two stages. It started by 'adding women in' to the previous male-dominated research, which produced revealing studies in different disciplines. Feminists discovered that the idea of 'adding women' to research, theories and methodology should be fundamentally challenged as existing models failed to explain their realities. One of the developments in feminist thought was recognising the experiences of different groups of women and their relationships with other forms of oppression (Morris, 1991). The disabled movement in Britain grew in strength from the early 1980s and yet according to Morris this movement also had a tendency to treat disabled women and their experiences as if they were invisible since the movement excluded many issues that were of relevance to this group (Morris, 1998, 2001).

'Women First' in 1992 was supposedly the first national conference in the UK for women with learning difficulties. For the first time, perhaps, women with learning difficulties were in a majority at a conference because non-disabled women were only allowed to attend if two disabled women agreed to accompany them. While there are

areas of common ground where men and women can usefully work together, there are also areas which are of particular interest to women (Walmsley & Downer, 1997).

In the 1980s, feminist scholars in the field of disability drew attention to the fact that disabled women were in a worse position economically, socially and psychologically compared to either disabled men or non-disabled women (Deegan & Brooks, 1985; Fine & Asch, 1988; Gerschick, 2000). So, for example, most disabled children sent away to boarding school are boys (Morris, 1998). According to Schur (2004), girls in the USA have fewer educational opportunities than boys. Disabled women have less education, fewer qualifications, less access to employment, lower incomes and fewer vocational training opportunities in the USA than non-disabled women or disabled men. Furthermore, the experiences of men and women with disabilities are different, even if their disabilities are similar. Although the gap between men and women with disabilities is decreasing in employment and in terms of income, the gap between women with and without disability is increasing (Schur, 2004).

Disabled women face a double jeopardy in areas such as education and employment because of their impairment and because of their gender (M. L. Baldwin & Johnson, 1995; Morris, 1998). Disabled women face more discrimination than non-disabled women. Men with disabilities have challenged the stigma related to impairment and aspired to 'normal' male roles. It is suggested that women with disabilities are doubly disadvantaged as they may be in a worse position 'economically, socially and psychologically' than both non-disabled women and men with disabilities (Barnes, 1999 :87). Furthermore, women with disabilities are perceived as unable to fulfil traditional adult roles such as being a wage earner or carrying out domestic duties and fulfilling sex roles (Fine & Asch, 1985). Many disabled women are denied becoming wives or mothers. Some non-disabled people

have the idea that 'defective bodies' engaging in sexual activity is 'unwholesome, repulsive and comical'. This makes the assumption that women with disabilities can only expect to marry other people with disabilities (Barnes, 1999: 89).

Schur's study (2004) of disabled people in the USA showed that women with a disability were less politically active than men with disabilities and non-disabled people. This could be due to their lower status in terms of education, income and employment. This study also showed that women with disabilities experienced higher levels of depression and lower levels of satisfaction. They were also more aware of discrimination than men with a disability and non-disabled women (Schur, 2004). Schur (2004) also showed that disabled women in developing countries may face even more discrimination. For example, she found that in Syria 78% of women with disabilities were not educated, compared to 65% males with disabilities and 55% of total female population. In addition, women in developing Arab countries are more likely to be unemployed, or work in low income job for long hours. Jordanian statistics in 2000 showed that the number of employed males with disability is twice of women with disability. Moreover, there are less married disabled women than disabled men or non-disabled women (EL-Hessen, 2006). A study by Atkin and Hussain (2003), about Muslim, Hindu and Sikh families in the UK, showed that families tend to overprotect their disabled child. Their study also showed that families and parents tend to differentiate between their disabled members depending on their gender. In these cases, males with disability received more concessions compared to non-disabled men, while women with disability were more protected as a result of concern about them being damaged in the context of getting married. This gave males with a disability more freedom than women with a similar disability in these communities (Atkin & Hussain, 2003).

Ferri and Gregg's study (1998), showed that disabled women in the USA faced both silence and oppression because of the interaction of gender and disability. This placed them at risk financially and socially, especially women who worked in lower status or part-time jobs. Furthermore, statistics show that many women do not receive special education programmes since two thirds of all students who undertake such courses are male, and those women who are identified as in need of special education are most likely to be from ethnic minorities. Ferri and Gregg's study showed that such women are also less likely to take up work-specific vocational training, so that disabled women are more likely than males to experience poor outcomes for post-secondary education. Statistics further suggest that, for women with disabilities, rehabilitation programmes consider it a successful outcome if a woman becomes a 'homemaker', even if she was seeking to be trained for paid work. Thus, more such women live below the poverty line, are single parents and have fewer social outlets than their male counterparts (Ferri & Gregg, 1998).

Women with disabilities are worse off than non-disabled women or men with disabilities but they are also less stereotyped in terms of their gender role than non-disabled women, in that there are fewer expectations that they will fulfil stereotypical gender roles as wives, mothers and home-makers. Women with disabilities were described as 'cute, but not sexy; always the cared for, never the caring' (Blackwell-Stratton et al., 1988: 307). Harris and Wideman (1988) considered women with disabilities in France. Their study showed that women with disabilities faced a kind of double invisibility as they were neither an object nor a subject of desire.

Women with disabilities have been made almost invisible in every aspect of their day-to-day lives, even more than disabled men. Furthermore, they are equally marginalised in the work of UN bodies and Member States because most UN documents do not refer to people with disabilities. UN documents which do mention

disabled women are not actually legally binding for Member States (Arnade & Häfner, 2005).

Schur's study of disabled people in the USA (2004) identified that disabled women face more problems concerning transport and going out alone. They also request more help compared to men with similar disabilities in carrying out their daily activities. Furthermore, women with a disability are more isolated, both physically and socially, and are less likely to get married. Although, people with a disability are more isolated and meet together in groups or attend religious services less often when compared to non-disabled people, women with a disability may meet with their peer group and attend religious services more than men with a disability, as women may find it more important (Schur, 2004). Wendell (2006), states that there is a need to develop a feminist theory of disability which will liberate both disabled and non-disabled people. Garland-Thomson (2002) argues that such a theory may apply to women with and without a disability. Garland-Thomson identifies four domains: representation; body; identity; and activism. These domains should be considered within the exacting feminist theory so that disability is considered part of it. In addition, the theory underlines the intersections and convergences that can be shared with other ethnic studies.

As noted earlier in this chapter, until recently disability research predominantly focused on male issues. This has been addressed more recently, by a raft of research on the position and experiences of disabled women. This suggests that disabled women experience more discrimination and issues in their daily lives than disabled men and non-disabled people. Although this earlier literature addresses some issues for disabled men, it failed to give attention to gender issues such as masculinity. More recently, a small literature has focused on disabled men and masculinity (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Morris, 1993b).

The experiences of men with disabilities are important because they demonstrate both the power and limitations of contemporary interpretations of masculinity. So, the gender practices of some of these men exemplify other visions of masculinity that can be open to men in culture and also allow an understanding of how men with physical disabilities find fulfilment and self-worth in cultures that have denied them the right to their own identity. Men with disabilities respond differently according to factors such as sexual orientation, class, age, race and ethnicity (Gerschick & Miller, 1995). Gerschick and Miller, use three labels for men with disability 'reformulation', 'reliance' and 'rejection' (Gerschick & Miller, 1995: 185). The body is central to how men define themselves and how others define them. Men with disabilities are marginalized and stigmatised in some societies because their image undermines cultural beliefs about men's bodies and physicality. It is suggested that they experience 'embattled identities' (Gerschick & Miller, 1995 :185; Wilson, 2004) because conflicting expectations are placed upon them; they are both men and people with disabilities. So on the one hand, masculinity denotes men who are strong, aggressive and independent but, on the other, people with disabilities are thought to be weak and dependent. For men with physical disabilities, therefore, it is difficult to be recognised as masculine by others (Fine & Asch, 1988; Gerschick & Miller, 1995; Wilson, 2004). Nancy (1996) suggested that the bodies of disabled men are often feminised. As indicated by Morris (1993b), men with disabilities may experience 'rolelessness', as they have failed to meet the cultural definition of man who should be strong, physically abled and autonomy. As will be discussed later in this thesis, for men in Bahrain the experience of disability is very different to that of women.

1.5.1. Friendship, Sex, Marriage and Disability

Disability studies neglect issues related to sex, especially among women (Morris, 1993b). Shakespeare (2006a) argues that friendship is more important than sex as it

lasts for a longer period in human lives and people cannot live without friendship. Friendship also has an importance in building emotional, medical and practical networks. People with disabilities are more in need of friends as they suffer more from isolation. Their school friends may live far away as they attend special, rather than mainstream schools. This means that they may not have friends in their neighbourhood. This may also reduce their opportunities to take part in activities with non-disabled children (Shakespeare, 2006a) and may limit access to their community. Moreover, people with a disability from ethnic minority groups face even more isolation (Atkin & Hussain, 2003).

A study by Huurre and Aro (1998) concerning people with a visual impairment showed that such people may suffer from greater levels of loneliness, face more difficulties in making friends and have lower self-esteem, compared to sighted people. The social skills and achievement at school were poorer for girls with a visual impairment than for the girls in the control group. Certain young people with a visual impairment, and especially girls, needed more support in terms of their psychosocial development (Huurre & Aro, 1998).

Shakespeare (2006a) identified that isolation and loneliness may be bigger problems in Western countries as such societies are more individualised, and family, religion and community relations have declined. Segregated education and discrimination in terms of employment and transport may make disabled people more isolated as they may also lack communication skills. This decreases their chances of building relationships, getting married and finding employment. It also decreases their confidence and autonomy (Shakespeare, 2006a).

This segregation affects non-disabled people as well, as they may not know how to communicate with people with disabilities. Some people with a visual impairment may face difficulties in making eye contact and non-impaired people may

not know how to deal with them. This is a result of unfamiliarity, it is not a question of discriminating against them, but the effect of the stigma undermines the possibilities of interacting (Goffman, 1963). Non-disabled people may think that they can only be a carer of a disabled person and may not see the possibility of any other kind of relationship. Thus, if more services (e.g. transport, Braille books) were available for people with disabilities they might rely less on non-disabled friends. Therefore, non-disabled people need to learn about their disabled counterparts, while disabled people need to receive training about building friendships and social networks (Shakespeare, 2006a).

Most non-disabled people who support people with disability are female. In addition, people who have a disabled family member are more willing to support disabled people outside of the family. Others may support them because they find it enjoyable, for humanitarian reasons or because of religious beliefs (Taylor & Bogdan, 1989).

Parenting is an issue for women with a disability and discussion of this topic has particularly undermined disabled mothers as many such situations concern women who are parenting on their own. In the UK, children of disabled parents are often described by the society as 'little angels' who are required to 'neglect their schoolwork and friends' to act as carers for their disabled parents (Morris, 2001 :7). Such parents often have no option but to rely on other family members to help them go about their daily lives. Another obstacle often faced by disabled mothers is the discrimination of professionals and attitudes of health and social services personnel may well deter disabled parents from asking for help because they are afraid that their children will be taken from them (Morris, 1998, 2001).

1.6. Culture and Disability

As noted earlier, how disability is defined shapes all matters related to it. Disability is a contested concept even for people from the same culture. While it is possible that disabled people across cultures may share some common experiences, it is acknowledged that experiences are likely to vary across time and cultural contexts (Tisdall, 2003). Not only does culture shape views of disability and impairment, it also contributes to the oppression of disabled people. The definitions which society places on the disabled centre on judgements of individual capacities and personalities (Morris, 1991). People with disabilities however, have also moulded their own sub-cultures in order to resist such oppression. Thus, culture can be both a source of oppression and of liberation for disabled people and, as such, is at the centre of the politics of disability (Riddell & Watson, 2003). Understanding disabled people's experiences is not possible without a consideration of their cultural contexts.

All people with disabilities live within a cultural context but this fact has often been overlooked by policy makers and practitioners. Stone (1999) notes the dangers of exporting Western approaches to disability to other parts of the world. As Bahrain has imported a British policy and service model (See Chapter Three), an exploration of the appropriateness of this is a key aspect of this thesis.

Culture however, intersects with other key aspects of people's social identity, including their ethnicity, religion, gender and socio-economic position. There is little empirical data about the combined effects of these disabled people's personal experiences. Quinn (1998) writes that in dealing with people with disabilities we should be sensitive to the culture that they come from, as people are affected by their culture, ethnicity, religion and all the influences of their family and society.

Shakespeare (1994) criticised the social model of disability for not including cultural representation. He noted that:

If the social model analysis seeks to ignore, rather than explore, the individual experiences of impairment (be it blindness, short stature or whatever), then it is unsurprising that it should also gloss over cultural representation of impairment, because to do otherwise would be to potentially undermine the argument (283-284).

Those who put forward the social model of disability argue that disabled people should attempt to develop a shared culture which concerns itself with the causes of oppression. So, looking at disability in individual terms was seen as possibly fragmenting the movement as opposed to bringing it together (Riddell & Watson, 2003). Schutz (1970 :72), calls this a 'natural attitude' for people in everyday society. However, in Oliver's analysis, culture acts very much as a structure in which views are manipulated by the medical profession and others who present disabled people as tragic victims. They view 'ordinary' people as lacking the understanding and the critical ability to challenge the dominant social powers. This can be challenged since, for some European sociologists, culture is viewed as encompassing the struggle for power among different groups in society. So, acquiring and passing on accepted social and cultural notions out of habit has tended to reproduce social inequality. A theme in such writing is that sub-cultures are able to challenge dominant cultures in spite of the power relationships between them (Riddell & Watson, 2003).

For some groups it has been suggested that a concept such as 'multiple minority status' and 'multiple minority group' might be a useful point for understanding individual experiences of those who are, for example, disabled Muslim feminists (Deegan & Brooks, 1985). Society functions as a complex set of interlocking social relations which also has implications for the way minority groups are perceived (Oliver, 1990). The rise of the importance of such ideas as the 'consumer society', 'consumer behaviour' and 'commodity culture', which focus on the body, may cause

anxiety to those who do not fit into such norms. These ideas only remind people with disabilities that they are 'different' in terms of ethnicity, sex, class and/or nationality (Nicholas Watson, 1998).

The first conference organised in the UK by black people to address the problems of black people with learning difficulties (Black People First, 1993) highlighted certain key issues about their problems. A charter was produced at this event which mentioned that services should be sensitive to language, culture and diet (Walmsley & Downer, 1997).

Critics argue that it is already common knowledge that people with disabilities are stereotyped and that they lack 'cultural capital'. Furthermore, they argue that more research is not needed into how people with disabilities cope, perceive their impairment, or organise their day-to-day lives (Barton, 1998).

Recently, there has been a growing realisation that some images degrade the experience of disability. They fail to provide positive role models for people with disabilities and do nothing to break down the prejudices of the rest of the population. As a result, there have been a few attempts, particularly in the mass media, to erode or break down some of these negative images by developing special programmes, dramas and documentaries. Little attempt has been made, however, to present culturally the collective experiences of disability. Giving disabled individuals a sense of identity has generally been constrained by images of superheroes on the one hand or helpless victims on the other. Influenced by medical professionals, world-views also individualise disability and reinforce the less or more than human cultural image of people with disabilities (Oliver, 1990).

In societies where religion or magic is dominant, disability may well be seen as a punishment from the gods or God, or as a result of witchcraft or the evil eye. In this way, disability is viewed in the light of the religions or magical beliefs of the society

and the way that disabled people are treated within the society in which they live. Amongst the Wapogoro people, for example, Aall-Jilek (1965) found that she had to treat epileptic patients within the family context rather than as individuals requiring modern medical treatments. In addition, in a study of Navajo Indians, researchers found a high incidence of limping within the population because of a congenital hip disease. However, the Navajo rejected offers of modern treatment because they did not perceive the problem as a stigma or as a disability.

It is clear that there are diverse cultural beliefs and social practices in relation to disability, gender and ethnicity that have not been adequately addressed within the models of disability. This thesis will make a contribution to knowledge in this area.

1.7. Special Education

As most disabled people in Bahrain have been educated in special rather than mainstream educational provision (See Chapters Three and Five), it is appropriate to review the literature on special education. This literature reflects the debates within disabilities studies. In the UK, special education started in 1791 when the first school for blind people was opened. This school, which was more like a workshop than a traditional school, catered to both children and adults, and offered training in music and handicrafts. By the 1850s, these schools offered training for employment rather than providing traditional education. However, by 1886 the Royal Commission for the Blind and Deaf included some purely educational content into the curriculum. The Commission sought to categorise disabilities so that some people were allowed to attend ordinary schools while others attended special schools. By the end of the 19th century special schools could be found everywhere in the UK (Hall, 1997).

The Warnock Report made it clear that by the middle of the nineteenth century society had found a sense of social conscience regarding the plight of the disabled,

especially the blind. However, education then was primarily concerned with providing relief for their distress (Warnock, 1978).

By the 20th century, disabilities were categorised into different kinds and the 1944 Education Act placed children with disabilities under the heading of health and welfare. This Act categorised children with disabilities into 11 categories; the blind and partially sighted accounted for two of these categories. The Act did not allow such children to attend mainstream schools unless special provision was made, which resulted in segregation for many children.

The normalisation movement started in the 1960s. This made it clear that people with disabilities should be viewed as normal and should have the same opportunities as able people. The Handicapped Children Act (1970) removed distinctions between pupils who were and were not educated in mainstream schools (Frederickson & Cline, 2002).

In 1976, the Education Act made provision for integrated education and while the 1981 Act commended the provisions made in the Act of 1976, it stated that these recommendations were 'too loose and vague'. In 1989, certain volunteer organisations were established by the parents of disabled children and by 1992 a joint enquiry was conducted by Her Majesty's government. In 1993, a new Act of Parliament was put forward and then the White Paper, 'Choice and Diversity', made the pronouncements of the 1981 Act official. However, even after all the acts that called for integrated education, special schools still existed in the UK (Hall, 1997).

Barnes (1991) noted that segregation in special schools was influenced by the medical model which makes education a low priority and instead attempts to equip people with disabilities with useful skills and opportunities. However, this seems to devalue their social role leading to the creation of negative stereotypes, such as dependence, which then leads to discrimination in society as a whole.

The normalisation approach has been criticised, however, since, although valuing the individual, it is also problematic to support the same individual effectively (Hall, 1997). Conversely, putting people with the same disabilities together in a special needs institution in order to protect them, may, at the same time, suppress an individual's characteristics (Marks, 1999). The social model of disability, therefore, criticised the idea of normalisation as it denies the identity of people with a disability. So, although it makes an attempt to value them, it actually seeks a way of hiding them or their problems as if these are something for which one should be ashamed. It denies their humanity (Hall, 1997). Segregated schools exclude students with disabilities from their friends in the same age group. Besides, these schools may not always meet their needs (Hirst & Baldwin, 1994).

The literature on special education contains debates on the difference between the terms integration and inclusion (Ainscow, 1995; Frederickson & Cline, 2002).

Frederickson and Cline (2002), state that:

Integration is about making a limited number of additional arrangement for individual pupils with special education need in schools which themselves change little overall. On the other hand, inclusion implies the introduction of a more radical set of changes through which schools restructure themselves so as to be able to embrace all children. Integration involves the school in a process of assimilation where the onus is on the individual to make changes so that they can 'fit in'. By contrast inclusion involves the school in a process of accommodation where the onus is on the school to change, adapting curricula, methods, materials and procedures so that it becomes more responsive. (Frederickson & Cline, 2002 :65)

Hall (1997) suggests that it is very important not to segregate children with disabilities. This is because they learn from others and have the right to know other people and let others know them. Hall notes that special schools not only provide education for students with special needs, they also offer special support. The lack of such special segregated schools would mean that most people with disabilities would attend their local government schools as special schools might be far away from

where they lived (Hall, 1997). A study carried out by Liu (2001) in Vietnam showed that in certain sectors some parents might not send their children, especially girls, to schools that were not nearby due to safety considerations.

In the UK, the government is encouraging inclusive provision by focusing on the educational needs of students. Students with disabilities should have equal access and provision of education (Frederickson & Cline, 2002). According to legislation in the UK, families may get financial support to take their disabled children outside the UK to get special education if this service is not available in the UK (Read, 1992).

Summary

This chapter has discussed how the medical model focuses on the individual, while the social model looks at disabled people within a social structure. The social model of disability has been criticised, however, as it fails to fully address the complex non-personal factors that shape the production of disability and also fails to view the differences in experience between different people with disabilities. Both models of disability have certain strengths which help in considering the rights and needs of people with disabilities. However, both models have been criticised and have their limitations. A relational approach however, brings together these models and considers impairment and diversity.

There has been consideration of the literature on normalisation and rehabilitation of people with disabilities. In particular, the normalisation approach employs a variety of methods such as rehabilitation, by which the person with disabilities is 'normalised'. This review has attempted to show, not only the rehabilitation process used to achieve such normalisation, but also some of the critiques which have been generated regarding these approaches.

Although poverty for people with a disability is a big issue within the disability literature in general, this literature review has not focused on it because poverty is not a big issue in Bahrain. As a petroleum country, people have a reasonable standard of living which is well above the poverty line (El Guindi, 1985; Fakhro, 1990; Seikaly, 1997, 1998; Shirawi, 1989; Zahlan, 1989). In addition, as the next chapters are going to explore, charity and support is a key element of being a Muslim in Bahrain. Therefore, people with a disability will always have someone who will support them, either from their family or the wider society, as will be explored later in the thesis. Although they face difficulties in employment or are employed in lower income jobs, poverty is not as big an issues as in other countries.

The literature on the models of disability has given insufficient consideration to the issues of gender, culture, ethnicity and religion. Disability is as fundamental to humanity as race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, although not everyone acknowledges this (Couser, 2006). This study concentrates on the way these different factors affect, the lives of people with visual impairment as well as policies and service provision in Bahrain within a relational rights based approach to disability. As Bahrain is a Muslim society, the next chapter explore the literature on Islam and disability.

2. CHAPTER TWO: ADDRESSING ISLAM AND DISABILITY

Introduction

This chapter reviews the ways in which Islamic doctrine and writings discuss and portray the issue of disability, together with the relationship between people with disabilities and the wider Islamic society. The chapter contains a literature review of relevant portions and verses of Islamic law (*shari'ah*), the writings of the Qur'an, and interpretations of the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad (*Sunnah*). It aims to provide non-Muslim readers of this thesis with some background information on Islam.

This review sets out the difference in approach between what is prescribed in these Islamic texts and the subsequent interpretation of these texts by later Islamic scholars. The argument of this chapter is that there are Islamic texts that support a charitable, compassionate approach to disabled people and that these have been implemented in Bahrain and elsewhere in Islamic societies at social, religious and individual levels in a way that is kind but socially exclusive. However, other Islamic texts can be seen to be in line with a socially inclusive, rights-based approach to disability and have the potential, as yet not fully realised, to support these types of policies (Turmusani, 2003).

Although this study is about disability and Islam, it is necessary to give some explanations about Arab culture in this chapter since this also shapes people's gendered experiences of disability. This is relevant because the case study takes place in Bahrain, an Arab Muslim country.

2.1 Background about Islam

Islam is the faith of around 1.2 billion people in the world at present (Abdul Rauf, 2004) and these are spread over a large proportion of the world from the Middle East, Asia, Southern Europe and Africa. Relatively recently, Islam has spread, largely as a result of immigration, into Western Europe, North and South America, and Australia (Bazna & Hatab, 2005).

Islam is a monotheistic religion with a belief in one God and a recognition of Abraham, Moses and Jesus as prophets. The word 'Islam' literally is an Arabic word coming from the root of '*salām*' meaning peace or submission. The word 'religion' (*dīn*), means a way or style of life (Kouj, 1994). It also means judgement.

Islam believes in the unity of mankind and its institutions. This stems from belief in monotheism (*tawhīd*) through the belief in God (*Allāh*) from whom everything originates. Human institutions are viewed as small parts of the great whole of human existence which itself comes from the Will of God (Azer & Afifi, 1992). Thus, Islam sees a sense of unity between worship and deeds, and between practical and spiritual aspects of life (Qutb, 2000).

The religion of Islam began in the seventh century A.D. when the Prophet Muhammad of the Quraysh tribe proclaimed in the town of Mecca that there was only one God who was the creator and sustainer of the universe. It was and is the duty of Muslims to worship Him. An Islamic state was established based entirely on religious principles in al-Medina. The Prophet organised this state based on what Muslims believe to be the revelations, divine and eternal, of God by Gabriel. These are collected in the holy book of Islam, the Qur'an. The Prophet did not appoint a successor after his death, instead he left the choice to his community based on the Qur'anic notion of consultation (*shūrā*). The main sources of the teachings of the

Islamic faith, the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, are open to interpretation by scholars in regard to specific issues and legal opinion is derived from them (Badawi, 1995).

2.1.1 The Qur'an and *Sunnah*

The source of the divine revelation of the Islamic faith is the Qur'an. This word comes from the Arabic verb *qara'a* (to read or to recite). The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad starting in 610 AD until his death in 632 AD (Bazna & Hatab, 2005).

Muslims take pains to ensure that the Qur'an, in Arabic, remains without any revision, editing or addition and so interpretations and translations into other languages are felt to only represent the translator's/interpreter's own understanding (Lang, 1997). The Qur'an's message is seen by Muslims as universal, in terms of both time and place, and that it is as clear now as when it was revealed to Arabs in the seventh century (Bazna & Hatab, 2005). The Qur'an contains 114 chapters. Verses (*āyāt*) are recited as a blessing to both the reciter and the listener and are viewed as the key to knowledge of both God and Islam. Muslims are encouraged to memorise the whole text or parts of it and there are some Muslims who know the entire Qur'an by heart (Al-Hedaithy, 1989).

The Qur'an is viewed as the source of divine law (Kouj, 1994) and so the Islamic law (*shari'ah*), derived from the Qur'an, constitutes the basic divine law of Islam. The Qur'an also deals with historical matters, such as the creation of the universe, and offers the histories of the people who lived before the era of Prophet Muhammad and the prophets who were sent to them (Weeks, 1978).

The *Sunnah* sets out the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad . The term *Sunnah* literally means the path or the way of Prophet Muhammad . The Prophet's role was to demonstrate, explain, interpret, transmit and practise the laws of the Qur'an so that Muslims could follow his example and would know how to live an

'Islamic' life. Although the Qur'an is seen as the primary Islamic text and the *Sunnah* as secondary, the *Sunnah* is given the same validity as the Qur'an. This is because, in the Qur'an, certain passages make it clear that obedience to the Prophet Muhammad is obligatory. What he said and did is seen as being in accordance with specific commands that came from God to him (Watt, 1961).

2.1.2 Articles of Faith in Islam (*arkān al-imān*)

Islam plays a central role in the lives of individual Muslims and their societies. This is because Islam has rules and regulations with respect to all aspects of human life (Al-Hedaithy, 1989). The key articles of faith are:

1. The most important belief on which a Muslim bases his/her faith (*imān*) is the belief in monotheism (*tawhīd*), which constitutes the essence of the teaching of Islam: that there is only one Lord of the universe who is all-powerful, all-knowing and who is everywhere. God is the sustainer of the world and of mankind.
2. The second article of faith (*imān*) is an absolute belief in the existence and description of God's Angels, as mentioned in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*.
3. The third article is belief in the other earlier sacred books, such as the Torah and the Bible.
4. The fourth article of faith is a belief in the Prophets and Messengers, such as Jesus, Moses and the Prophet Muhammad . The Qur'an says that a prophet is a human chosen by God as a model and example for other people to follow because he is an ideal human being in terms of his character, humility and dedication in applying God's laws and plans. Prophets are teachers and pass on what people must know about the purpose of this life, the Day of Judgement, and life after death (Kouj, 1994).

5. The fifth article of faith (*imān*) is a belief in life after death, which is required of all Muslims in order to 'complete' his or her faith.
6. The sixth article of faith (*imān*) concerns destiny, which is related in Arabic to the word for 'acts of God' (*qaḍā'*), or the eternal will of *Allāh* in relation to future existence, and to the proportion and measure or the power of action (*qadar*). *Qaḍā'* comes from the Arabic root which means to complete something by word or action, through will or by other means, while scholars define *qadar* as *Allāh*'s ability to cause things to exist according to their determined measure.

The Qur'an states that nothing good or bad happens to anyone, except through predestination fate and destiny (*qaḍā'* and *qadar*). Thus, Muslims turn to these verses when they face difficulties in their lives, using them as a comfort in times of sadness, loss or sickness, because they believe that *Allāh* will reward them if they are patient. However, according to Islam, this should not make people stop trying to solve their problems. Instead, they should seek knowledge and work hard to better their lives because, although everything depends on the will of *Allāh*, people cannot know what He decides for them.

The article about fate and destiny is important in this research as people with disabilities, their families and society as a whole tend to accept disability believing they should not complain. This is because they view fate and destiny (*qaḍā'* and *qadar*) as a test from God.

A Muslim must also carry out the duties of the Five Pillars of Islam; these constitute the main acts of worship (*'ibādāt*) in Islam (Al-Hedaithy, 1989).

2.1.3 The Five Pillars of Islam (*arkān al-Islam*)

The five pillars are the basic duties of each individual Muslim, male and female, towards God. They are designed to test the sincerity of a Muslim's faith by requiring

him or her to demonstrate it in their actions. Nobody can be a Muslim unless he or she accepts these pillars and performs them. The pillars are:

1. Testimony (*shahāda*): the testimony that there is no God but *Allāh* and that Muhammad is a messenger of *Allāh*.
2. Prayer (*ṣala-a*): this is prayer, which is offered five times every day at designated times and follows a set pattern. Muslims are encouraged to pray with a group (*Jama'a*) in the mosque (*masjed*), but prayer can be offered individually in the home or anywhere else. Before praying, a Muslim is required to make the ablutions (*wḍw'*) and to raise the call to prayer (*'adhān*). Muslims are also required to face Mecca (Saudi Arabia) wherever he/she may be in the world. Daily prayers are offered before sunrise (*fajr*), at noon (*zuhur*), in the afternoon (*'aṣr*), at sunset (*maghrib*), and about two hours after sunset (*'asha'*). On Fridays, the noon prayer (*zuhur*) is replaced by the Friday (*Juma'h*) prayer which can only be performed with a group (*Jama'a*) and is preceded by discourse (*khuṭbah*) given by the leader of the prayer (*khuṭīb*). Beside these regular prayers there are special prayers for the two annual religious festivals (*'eīd*) and for other rites such as for funerals (*janāzh*), for the nights of Ramadan (*tarawīh*), and prayers to ask God for rain (*'estisgha'*).
3. Mandatory charitable contributions to the poor or alms giving (*zakāt*). There are two types of *zakāt*:
 - The first is *zakāt al-fiṭer* which Muslims pay on the last day of Ramadan (the month when they fast). It equals the price of those meals missed during the fasting period for each person in the house.
 - The second type of *zakāt* is a wealth tax (*zakāt al-māl*). This is an annual tax of 2.5% of one's net saving from income and property. The amount is calculated after deductions for personal expenses. The amount saved must

reach a certain amount and be deposited for a whole year before the individual is obliged to pay *zakāt*. It is given directly to eight categories of people identified in the Qur'an:

At-Tauba (The Repentance) 9:60 The offerings given for the sake of God are [meant] only for the poor and the needy, and those who are in charge thereof, and those whose hearts are to be won over, and for the freeing of human beings from bondage, and [for] those who are over burdened with debts, and [for every struggle] in God's cause, and [for] the wayfarer: [this is] an ordinance from God - and God is all-knowing, wise.
 إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَاتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْعَامِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَالْغَارِمِينَ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ
 فَرِيضَةً مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

Zakāt means literally 'purification' for it fulfils the religious function of purifying both the giver's soul and his/her wealth. *Zakāt* purges the soul of greed and miserliness and purifies wealth by the payment of what is due (Qutb, 2000). What is worth mentioning here is that donations to charity (*zakāt*) are one example of a range of Islamic practices that represent a unity between the social and the spiritual spheres. The relation between *zakāt* and services for people with disabilities is of relevance.

4. Fasting (*ṣīām* or *ṣawm*): This means abstaining from food, drink and sexual relations from dawn until sunset during Ramadan. Muslims should also shun all evil thoughts, actions and sayings with the purpose of learning piety (*taqwah*). Children, the elderly, the sick, expectant and nursing mothers, menstruating women, and travellers covering about fifty miles or more are exempt from this duty (Al-Hedaithy, 1989). However, this can be made up at a later date if the people are healthy.
5. Pilgrimage (*hajj*): Every able Muslim should perform this duty once in a lifetime unless they are exempt for physical or financial reasons. It takes place in and around Mecca for four days starting on the ninth of the last month of the Islamic calendar. People who are making the pilgrimage (*hajj*) or those who

have been to *hajj* in previous years sacrifice an animal e.g. sheep and distribute the meat to the poor as a type of almsgiving.

2.1.4 Islamic Law (*shari'ah*)

The word (*shari'ah*) can best be translated as 'the path in which God wishes humans to walk' (Roerts, 1981). These laws constitute a way of life and deal with both public and private spheres. They apply to all Muslims and also make provision for non-Muslims in an Islamic state (Al-Hedaithy, 1989). Islamic law (*shari'ah*) was described by Weeks (1978) as comprehensive with rules for nearly all human activity both personal and interpersonal. It sets out rules for government, fighting wars, and settling disputes. It decrees who not to marry and what foods to eat. There being no area of activity not covered by law, there is no accommodation, in theory, for a separate secular, as opposed to religious, jurisdiction. Islamic law (*shari'ah*) derives its laws, rules and regulations from four main sources. The two major sources of the *shari'ah* are the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*.

The concept of consensus in the development and maintenance of the *shari'ah* is central. This arises out of a belief in the community as divinely instituted and ordered. Consensus is, perhaps, an expression of the Islamic belief that once a community has reached agreement on a contentious topic, this agreement must be mutual.

The two minor sources of the *shari'ah* are *ijmā'* and *qiyās*. *Ijmā'* is the consensus of the religious scholars, regarding a question of law. *Qiyās* means decisions which are made by analogy. These two minor sources were made necessary by the appearance of situations for which the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* have no specific instructions (Esposito & DeLong-Bas, 2001). This is the means by which the law of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* are applied to situations not explicitly covered by these two sources (Al-Hedaithy, 1989).

Aldridge (2000) states that religion is changing alongside changes in society. There are changing interpretations of Islam, although the core of the Islamic religion, such as the belief in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* does not change.

2.1.5 Schools of thought and sects (*madhāhib*)

The two main schools of thought and sects (*madhāhib*) in Islam are *Shi'a* and *Sunni*. The *Shi'a* follow the teaching of AL-Ja'afary. The main Muslim *Shi'a* country is Iran although other Muslim countries also have *Shi'as*.

The *Sunni* sect has four schools of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). In the eighth and ninth centuries, four men became the imams of four legal schools. These were: Malik Ibn-Anas Al-Asbahi (713-795), Abu-Hanifa (699-767), Muhammad Ibn-Idris Al-Shafi (767-820) and Ahmad Ibn-Hanbal (780-855) who, founded his centre of influence in Baghdad. It was eventually recognised that the four schools had equal competence, merit and authority (Ruthven, 1997). By the eleventh century, the exercise of judgement of scholars (*ijtihad*) had been exhausted by the four great imams and their immediate successors (Turner, 1974).

The differences between the four schools are minimal. They are in essence different interpretations of the same principles for all decisions based on the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. These schools of jurisprudence have made certain laws and regulations easier to practise by codifying them. However, the individual Muslim is not obliged to follow any particular school (Al-Hedaithy, 1989).

2.1.6 Charity in Islam

Charity and charitable organisations play an important part in the lives of many visually impaired people in Bahrain, as will be discussed in the later chapters. It is appropriate therefore, to consider this issue. Charity is important in Islam, as helping others is an essential part of the religion. Muslim people give a certain amount of their earnings to charity through *zakāt*, *ṣadaqa*, *jizya* and *khums*. This money, since

the earliest years of Islam, has gone to the treasury (*bayet al-māl*) in the Islamic country to be distributed to charities. The methods used for collecting this money have changed in recent years. It is now an individual matter and the people take their contributions to Islamic societies from where money is distributed to charities. Other people pay money directly to those who are in need. The amount of money given depends on an individual's sense of responsibility. People work out what they own and earn, but if they are doubtful about the amount they should give, they contact a man of religion to calculate the amount they should pay (for example, 2.5% for *zakāt*).

The wealth tax (*zakāt*), which was previously explained in the articles of faith of Islam (*arkān al-Islam*), is compulsory and is paid by all Muslims up to the present day. Muslims also give another type of donation called (*ṣadaqa*), which does not have to be a fixed amount of money and can be paid by anyone in any amount at any time to any person, society or country that they think is in need. The payment of *ṣadaqa* should be secret as it is not for show.

Additionally, there used to be a tax paid by non-Muslims living in a Muslim country (*jizya*), but this is no longer done. Not all countries became Islamized peacefully, as some became parts of the Islamic world after being involved in wars. When Muslims were victorious in wars, one fifth (*khums*) of what they gained would be sent to the treasury (*bayet al-māl*) to be used for charity. The rest would be used for the expenses of war. Since there are no longer wars that are fought under the name of Islam, 1/5 (*khums*) is not paid by *Sunnis* anymore and *Shi'as* pay 1/5 (*khums*) only once in their lives. This sum is based on all the things they own: their house, savings, money, lands or any other valuable possessions. This is, as mentioned above, not paid yearly as with *zakāt*, but is paid only once. Additionally, *Shi'as* distribute their 1/5 (*khums*) money with more conditions attached than with *zakāt*. For example, they

give to people who are in need but only to those who are descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

Muslims are encouraged to do good deeds, such as voluntary work or giving to those in need. Money is not given especially to a disabled person unless the family cannot support them. However, the money can be given to societies for the disabled, through for example, charitable donations for the Visually Impaired Institute in Bahrain. The donations are either given in the form of money or goods. For example, some people pay for Braille typewriters for visually impaired young people. There is also a good deal of voluntary work that takes place with people with disabilities.

The interpretation of charitable giving continues to be flexible in the modern world. For example, in 1980, a local committee of Muslims in Pakistan discussed how Islamic wealth tax (*zakāt*) might be used to support a school for mentally handicapped children. This tax was meant to be restricted to the purchase of food, soap, clothing and textbooks, but they decided that paying for a specialist teacher for severely handicapped children was equivalent to buying textbooks for them (M. Miles, 1995). These charitable practices therefore support people with disabilities either individually or institutionally.

In Bahrain, the charity sector developed along a similar pathway to those in the UK, in that they started in the Victorian period and are often organised according to the impairment (Shakespeare, 2006a). While charity is seen as a fundamental part of Islam, the field of disability studies has put forward critiques of charity that raise the issue that an unquestioning approach to charity can have negative outcomes for disabled people. Many disabled activists in Western countries strongly oppose notions of charity, arguing for a rights-based rather than a charity approach to disabled people (Shakespeare, 2006a). Receiving charity, it is argued, makes some disabled people receive support as a gift rather than as a right from the state and

society. This increases the pity perception (McDougall, 2006). It might be said that disabled people make non-disabled people feel good about themselves and thus, non-disabled people may feel both powerful and generous by patronising and demeaning their disabled counterparts who are often viewed as passive, incapable, in need of assistance, and as objects of pity (Shakespeare, 1994). Charity has a negative impact if it forces people with a disability to depend on it when they are excluded and no services and/or jobs are available to them. It can be argued that this makes people with a disability powerless while receiving charity from powerful people (Shakespeare, 2006a). As will be discussed in Chapters Five and Seven, visually impaired people in Bahrain have less access to employment than other people and often have to rely on charity to support themselves. Charity organisations such as the Friendship Society for the Blind play an important role in the lives of many visually impaired people in Bahrain by providing social opportunities and support. It is also important to the many volunteers who, as young women, are able to carry out useful and fulfilling work at the Friendship Society for the Blind, in a country where opportunities for women to socialise outside the family are otherwise limited. It can also be argued that care is reciprocal in that all receive care from each other (Silvers, 2004; F. Williams, 2001). This is similar to how care is conceptualised in Muslim countries. Muslims believe that all have a duty to care.

Shakespeare (2006a) argues disability rights and charity are not incompatible. While promoting disability rights is key, voluntary organisations are necessary because they can offer types of support to disabled people that statutory services cannot. Although advances have been made in providing care in many countries, there are often problems related to the inability of services to meet the complex needs of some individuals (Davies, 1998). Shakespeare (2006a) argues that charitable work and organisations are needed to fill gaps in service provision.

So, while offering charity has been criticised, mainly by the social model theorists, who see it as affecting the independence of people with a disability, it can also be viewed as a humanitarian and positive response to meeting the needs of disabled people. Charity is one of the pillars of Islam, as is explained earlier in the chapter.

2.2 Islam and Women

This section aims to give a basic overview of Islamic views on women. There is not one model of a Muslim country or an ideal Muslim woman as both traditional and modern ideas often exist side by side. These models and ideals differ from country to country, within countries and from person to person. The Qur'an gave both men and women the same duties and promised them the same rewards (Esposito, 1998). Women have many rights, including: the right to choose their partners in marriage and the right to keep their own name after marrying. Also, traditionally, in Arab countries, the first born child or the first born boy bears the name of both the mother and the father. The Qur'an also gives women the right to own property and the right to both inherit and bequeath property. However, they do inherit less than men in the same family inherit, as men have more financial responsibilities (AL-Hibri, 2005; Esposito & DeLong-Bas, 2001).

Khadijah, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, was a wealthy woman who owned her own business. Thus, women can own their own property independently of any man according to the Islamic law (*shari'ah*). This right has always been practised in Muslim countries, while women in England, on the other hand, were only given the right to keep property after the Married Women's Property Act in 1884 (Kahf, 2005).

Early in the history of Islam, Muslim women were actively involved in the religious and cultural affairs of their community. Some women even went into battle

alongside men and nursed the wounded (AL-Hibri, 2005; EL-Sanabary, 1998; El Saadawi, 1997). An important example of the prominence of women in the early Islamic period is that one sixth of the *hadith* was transmitted by Aisha (wife of the Prophet Muhammad), which shows the importance of women (Yamani, 2000). As Prophet Muhammad says, '*Women are the full sisters (shaqaiq) of men*'. Islam improved the conditions of women when compared to the earlier pre-Islamic period in Arab societies and neighbouring societies (e.g. Persian and Roman) at that time.

The interpretations of Islamic teaching, however, may be more restrictive concerning the status of women. (L. Ahmed, 1993). In the Arab world around 1895, many believed that women should not be educated and should be socially segregated (Qasim, 2001). Women started to lose their independence as men's authority over women increased. Men were, and are, usually the head of the family, the Islamic leaders and people in authority (El Saadawi, 1997). During the early part of the nineteenth century, as the Islamic civilisation declined, the status and situation of women also declined. Most Muslim women were illiterate and women's duties were limited to the home and family responsibilities. During later centuries men generally benefited from formal education and industrialisation, and public roles were largely taken by men while women continued to be responsible for family care within the domestic sphere. Women supported their families through unpaid work within and outside the home. The social segregation of women was the rule, especially among the upper classes. By the early part of the seventeenth century, contact with the West came as a result of trade. Colonialism came in the nineteenth century, and educational missions were formed later in that century and at the beginning of the twentieth (EL-Sanabary, 1998).

The education brought by foreign missionaries, together with the European custom of educating women of the upper class, introduced new ideas about women

into society, including ideas about the division of gender roles. Moreover, modern ideas on education offered opportunities for women that extended beyond their domestic and family roles. Formal education, when it arrived for women, was organised in single sex provision. Such changes continued through the last century and this period included the first and second United Nations Decades for Women (1976-1995), with international conferences being held to promote and support the rights of children, women and human rights in general. These all led to further changes for women (EL-Sanabary, 1998).

Some modern thinkers believe that changes could be brought about regarding the status of women by interpreting the teachings of Islam in a more liberal way while others, mainly nationalists, preferred a secular approach. Both sides, however, looked for support for their ideas concerning more active roles for women in society in the Islamic texts of the Qur'an and the *hadith* (EL-Sanabary, 1998). In Prophet Muhammad's time, women were less segregated and had more extensive rights regarding participating in society, therefore, the status of Muslim women cannot be related to Islam (Chatty & Rabo, 1997). Islam does not forbid the mixing of the genders, as can be seen in many examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (e.g. women and men were educated together in Dar Al-Arkam). Islamic writings give guidance concerning the relationships between men and women and define social limits and boundaries (*hudūd*) between them, giving each gender different rights and responsibilities depending on their roles and duties (Khaled, 2005).

The verse in *surat Al-Nour* 30-31 (the light) in the Qur'an indicated the boundaries and limits in relationships between men and women including modest behaviour and clothing.

<p>Al-Nour (The Light) 24: 31: <i>And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity, and not to display their charms [in public] beyond what may [decently] be apparent thereof; hence, let them draw their head-coverings over</i></p>
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their bosoms. And let them not display [more of] their charms to any but their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' Sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their womenfolk, or those whom they rightfully possess, or such male attendants as are beyond all sexual desire, or children that are as yet unaware of women's nakedness; and let them not swing their legs [in walking] so as to draw attention to their hidden charms And [always], O you believers - all of you - turn unto God in repentance, so that you might attain to a happy state!

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوْ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطُّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَى عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يُضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

One way in which Islam draws the boundaries between men and women is that, in many Islamic societies, from puberty a girl wears the Muslim dress for women (*hijab*) when in the company of unrelated men (Boddy, 2006; Chatty & Rabo, 1997). Although some women cover their face (*nīqāb*), few Islamic religious leaders accept the need for this and women are not allowed to wear such dress in most workplaces in most Muslim countries.

In addition to the Muslim dress for women (*hijab*), there are other ways to maintain gender segregation. For example, shaking hands between men and women is not allowed. Women also keep their distance socially. For instance, they may stand further away from people of the opposite sex than from other women and they learn to keep their eyes and voices lowered to express themselves quietly and submissively, as expressed in the Qur'anic verse below.

Luqman (Luqman) 31:19 "Hence, be modest in thy bearing, and lower thy voice ..."

... وَأَقْصِدْ فِي مَشْيِكَ وَآغْضُضْ مِنْ صَوْتِكَ

In addition to the previous practices, in some Muslim communities partition (*purdah*) is practiced that restricts women's movement more among strange men (Anwar, 1979). Women cover their bodies so as not to cause temptation (*fitnah*). However, the Qur'an' does not use the word *fitnah*. It asks both genders not to gaze but to lower their eyes (Ruby, 2006).

The Qur'an states there should be equality between men and women (Engineer, 2004). Abu-Lughod (1999) states that in Arab societies, relationships in the families establish inequality between the genders. There are hierarchical relationships that make women subordinate. Males are responsible for the females even if the male is younger.

Women in the Middle East are not powerless, however. A study by Lewando-Hundt (1988) about the Negev area in Israel illustrated that Bedouin women often influenced the decisions of men in their community. Women's authority in such communities increased with age and marital status, as did women's freedom to participate in decision making. They were able to exercise influence through their husbands and their sons so they were able to exercise power in an informal way by influencing the male members of their family (Lewando-Hundt, 1984). This indicates that Arab women are not powerless, but also demonstrates that it is important to consider women's roles within the context of their own cultures (Afshar, 1993; El Saadawi, 1997; Lewando-Hundt, 1984). As was indicated by Altorki (1986), both men and women live within the social and cultural limits that have developed within the male dominated (patriarchal) Arab culture, rather than a culture that is reflected in Islamic writing.

2.3 Marriage in Islam

Marriage is thought to ensure stability and growth in Islamic society and is recognised as a highly religious, sacred covenant as it says in the Qur'an and *hadith*. By this, the Prophet orders all Muslims who can afford to marry to do so, otherwise they can fast.

Narrated 'Abdullah: We were with the Prophet while we were young and had no wealth whatever. So Allāh's Apostle said, "O young people! Whoever among you can marry, should marry, because it helps him lower his gaze and guard his modesty (i.e. his private parts from committing illegal

sexual intercourse etc.), and whoever is not able to marry, should fast, as fasting diminishes his sexual power. (Translation of Sahih Bukhari, 2007b)

In Islamic law, however, marriage is also a civil contract legalising sexual relationships and procreation. Marriage reflects the practical bent of Islam, combining the nature of both worship (*'ibādāt*) and social relations (*mu'āmalāt*) (Esposito & DeLong-Bas, 2001). Islam encourages those that can support a family financially to marry. Muslim women are only allowed to marry Muslim men, while Muslim men can marry Muslim, Christian or Jewish women. This is because, in patriarchal societies such as Islamic societies, children of a marriage belong to the husband's lineage. If a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim man, her children may be Muslim or of another faith. However, if a man marries a non-Muslim woman his child will carry his name and be a Muslim (Kholoussy, 2006). However, all Muslims are encouraged to marry other Muslims:

Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "A woman is married for four things, i.e., her wealth, her family status, her beauty and her religion. So you should marry the religious woman... (Translation of Sahih Bukhari, 2007b)

Islamic law (*shari'ah*) requires the female marriage partner to be in agreement. Although this is generally the case in Bahrain, it is not practised in some Islamic groups and countries. In Islamic law, women may sign their own contract or it can be signed on their behalf by a male guardian. Practices vary however, in different Islamic schools and countries, including in Bahrain (Dahlgren, 2005; Esposito & DeLong-Bas, 2001). In Islamic culture, men pay women a dowry (*mahar*). This is not a fixed amount; it varies from country to country and among different social classes and is arranged between the two families involved (Anwar, 1998; Engineer, 2004; Hassan, 2006).

Practices vary among countries. For example, in Iran, Egypt and some other Muslim countries, the women get the dowry (*mahar*) but the wife's family give the

furniture (An-Na'im, 2002). In Jordan, the dowry (*mahar*) mostly goes to the bride's father (Brand, 1998). This is not the case in all countries. In the GCC countries women mostly use their dowry to purchase gold and personal goods (Rippenburg, 1998; Wynn, 2006). As emphasised by Rabo, about Syrian Aleppo society that each partner owns his/her own property, the man is economically responsible for his wife (Rabo, 2005). This is also the case in other Muslim countries.

In Islam polygamy is allowed. Up to four wives simultaneously are permitted. The Qur'an states that a husband is meant to treat all wives equally. However, in practice, this may be difficult to maintain. Rates of polygamy vary among Muslim countries and are practiced by a minority (Kahf, 2005) as it requires substantial financial resources.

Virginity is important for girls and the families in Muslim countries, as it is considered to be part of family honour (Serhan, 2006). Islam considers sex to be an important aspect of spiritual life that is controlled and practised within marriage so sexual relations outside of marriage are forbidden (*zinā*). People marry young to avoid unlawful relations, but celibacy is proscribed for men and women, in reality more women than men are celibate. This can be explained by the fact that a man, through his family, initiates the marriage negotiation. If a marriage is not arranged for a woman, unlike a man, she cannot solicit a marriage partner. She is required therefore, to remain celibate, control her sexual needs and keep her chastity. Bargach (2006) has suggested that as the number of educated and financially independent Muslim women has increased, some women in some parts of the world have chosen to be celibate. The number however, remains very small. Although, in the Qur'an it says celibacy should not be practised among Muslims and it is prohibited on the grounds that everyone should get married. Many Muslim people find difficulties in

relating to single women (Hassan, 2006). The 'ideal' woman is married with children (Blackweed, 2006).

In general, it can be said that women in the Middle East are viewed first as wives and mothers (Chatty & Rabo, 1997). Arab women tend to marry earlier than males. They also tend to marry older men. At one time, early marriage for girls was an indication that the girl's education was lower in value with respect to other priorities, especially since it protected the family's honour. Furthermore, in poor families, daughters marrying reduced the financial burden and responsibilities on the family (Nagata, 2003).

In the Gulf most of the brides are chosen by the man's family, who seek a suitable future wife amongst family and friends. Mothers will look for suitable marriage partners for their sons and make informal enquiries when meeting socially. Dating has become more common in places like shopping malls and via Internet chatting. Romantic relations with the opposite sex will not be public as there is constant concern about gossip (*kalām al-nās*) and sexual relations before marriage are uncommon as virginity is regarded as important. Whereas in the past, many couples did not meet prior to the marriage, today some limited social mixing is permitted with a chaperone and marriages are approved with the agreement of the families (Wynn, 2006). (Chapter Three discusses marriage in Bahrain and Chapter Eight will highlight issues regarding marriage for disabled people).

2.4 Disability in Islam

Islamic teaching can be interpreted to support a rights based approach for people with disabilities. A key concept in Islam is equality. All Muslims pray together in the mosques (Collins, Tank, & Basith, 1993). All mosques are open and give access to all Muslims, rich or poor, disabled or non-disabled and regardless of

ethnicity. Also, it is believed that since all human beings are descended from the same mother and father (Adam and Eve), there is no need to discriminate between people (Wafi, 1991). John Williams, argues that many of the mosques in Muslim countries are readily accessible physically for people with disabilities and for elderly people (J. M. Williams, 2001). However, it has also been shown that generally mosques in poor Islamic and non-Islamic countries are less likely to be physically accessible for disabled people, lacking facilities such as lowered kerbs, wide doorways, signers, and Braille Qur'anic or other Islamic books (Legander-Mourcy, 2003). In Saudi Arabia and in other countries like Kuwait, people with visual impairments are provided with the Qur'an in Braille. Therefore, while not all mosques have such a copy, each person will have his/her own. The Qur'an and many other Islamic books are also available in audio form. However, Legander-Mourcy (2003) argues that this may not be so in poorer Islamic or non-Islamic countries where disabled people can be disadvantaged in terms of facilities and access to mosques, *halal* groceries and/or Muslim schools.

It can be argued, that the Islamic religion protects the rights of people with disabilities and that communities have an obligation to protect the vulnerable. Islam states that all people must accept each other regardless of any difference in ethnicity, gender or disability, as all people are equal and have the same duty to God (Musse, 2002).

An example of an Islamic text promoting social inclusion and independent living is the story of a visually impaired man who came to the Prophet Muhammad and asked if he should come to the mosque.

Abu Huraira reported: There came to the Apostle of Allāh (may peace be upon him) a blind man and said: Messenger of Allāh, *I have no one to guide me to the mosque.* He, therefore, asked Allāh's Messenger (may peace be upon him) permission to say prayer in his house. He (the Holy Prophet) granted him permission. Then when the man turned away he called him and said: *Do you hear the call to prayer?* He said: *Yes.* He (the Holy Prophet then) said: *Respond to it.* (Translation of Sahih Bukhari, 2007a)

The Prophet did not ask anyone to bring him to the mosque but he put a rope around the edges of the building where the man needed to walk so he knew his way.

The Islamic religion states that they who are patient in times of tribulation will obtain greater rewards from God as such tribulations are a test from God. This also applies to people with disabilities and their families, who should practice patience in the face of their problems. Islamic interpretations therefore exhort parents to deal with a disabled child as a gift from God and to give the child the love and care it needs. This child may be a test from God, to see how the parents will take care of the child, and the parents will get rewards from God for taking care of a child with a disability. Although, Islam interpretations views disability as a gift and should be treated with a good deed (*ihsān*), in reality not all do this as people with a disability are stigmatised and abused (EL-Hessen, 2006; Turmusani, 2003).

Some view Muslims as fatalistic because Islamic teachings request submission to the will of *Allāh* and this fatalism may seem to go against the idea of preventing or attempting to relieve disabilities. Islam does not forbid the use of any medical treatments that will reduce the effects of an impairment and/or extend the abilities of such people except when it is used only to change the shape or appearance as in the case of carrying out cosmetic surgery on those with Down's Syndrome.

In Western countries, there is much discussion concerning euthanasia; including within disabilities studies, in relation to people with disabilities (Shakespeare, 2006a). Among Muslims, however, abortion is forbidden as a person's life belongs to God who decides when life begins, when it ends, and in which situation (Poya, 1999; Rispler-Chaim, 2007). However, in practice the law may vary among Muslim countries. For example, abortion is only allowed when a pregnant woman is at risk, but countries have different barriers to abortion. In Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan,

Tunisia and Turkey there are fewer legal barriers. In Afghanistan, Chad, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Lebanon, Mali, UAE there are more barriers, but it is done to save a woman's life (Yount, 2006). In addition, as stated in verse 9:91 of the Qur'an, Muslims are expected to do what they can. If a person is not able to carry out his/her duties because of their disability he/she will not be seen as sinful.

At-Tauba (The Repentance) 9:91 [But] no blame shall attach to the weak, nor to the sick, nor to those who have no means. [to equip themselves], provided that they are sincere towards God and His Apostle: there is no cause to reproach the doers of good, for God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.

لَيْسَ عَلَى الضُّعْفَاءِ وَلَا عَلَى الْمَرْضَى وَلَا عَلَى الَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ مَا يُنْفِقُونَ حَرَجٌ إِذَا نَصَحُوا لِلَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ مَا عَلَى الْمُحْسِنِينَ مِنْ سَبِيلٍ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

The verses below mention the lame, the blind and the sick, and repudiate notions of a superstitious nature, often leading to exclusion, that people sometimes attach to disabled people. In this, the Qur'an argues for their inclusion in society and against many customs and ideas which prevail even now towards people with disabilities.

Al-Nour (The Light) 24:61: no blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the lame, nor does blame attach to the sick [for accepting charity from the hale]...

لَيْسَ عَلَى الْأَعْمَى حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى الْأَعْرَجِ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى الْمَرِيضِ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى الْأَنْفُسِكُمْ...

Al-Fath (The Victory) 48:17 No blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the lame, nor does blame attach to the sick [for staying away from a war in God's cause];...

لَيْسَ عَلَى الْأَعْمَى حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى الْأَعْرَجِ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى الْمَرِيضِ حَرَجٌ...

Verse 48:17, for example, removes blame from a lame person who does not go to war. However, although permission to be exempt from certain duties may be granted to some people, they should still obey the call of God as far as they are able.

The Qur'an contains many exhortations to protect the rights of weaker members of society. The implication of this is that followers of Islam should make every possible effort to protect those who are weak. People with disabilities, their families and society are exhorted to be patient regarding what they face, as part of Muslims' belief in fate and destiny. Islamic doctrine whilst encouraging acceptance of adversity

and protection of the weak also stresses that all people are equal and so have the same social rights to live independently, receive an education and build a family (Bazna & Hatab, 2005; Musse, 2002; Rispler-Chaim, 2007; Turmusani, 2001, 2003).

Since the medical model and ideas regarding rehabilitation have received much emphasis in Western countries, Muslim countries have largely followed suit and have built rehabilitation centres. The Islamic religion covers all aspects of life and does not regard a person with a disability as one who has also lost his/her social roles. A person with a disability is not depicted as a weak person. It simply asks people with disabilities to carry out their roles and duties (i.e. social and religious) depending on their abilities. People are exhorted to be patient and to cope by letting them help each other and by society taking some responsibility by building rehabilitation centres (National Committee for Disabled Persons, 1985; Turmusani, 2003).

The ideas of rehabilitation are not in conflict with the beliefs and values of Islam. For example, Islamic writing calls for education for all people so that they can achieve a better life. Therefore, rehabilitating people with disabilities can be seen as being in accordance with Islamic teaching. Islam also stresses the importance of all family members staying together with children, elderly, disabled or sick receiving care and help from the rest of the family. Therefore, the establishment of non-residential rehabilitation centres is not in conflict with Islamic ideas as disabled people are still part of their own family and society.

Islamic ideas of purity influence attitudes to dogs and this affects their use of guide dogs. Muslims regard personal hygiene as an important part of their faith since cleanliness and purification are a necessary part of worship and are also at the core of Islamic values (The Muslim Woman, 2006). For this reason, Muslims do not keep dogs in the living areas of their houses. It is thought that a dog's saliva is impure (*najis*) and, as a result, if a dog touches a person's clothes or body, it is thought that

this area then also becomes polluted or impure. The area must then be washed seven times, with dust being sprinkled in one of the washings. Some also hold the notion that angels will not enter a house if there is a dog inside. It is, however, permitted to keep a dog outside the house for security, farming and hunting (Abou-El-Fadl, 2004; Al-Amin, 2004; Kadwa, 2006).

Dogs are used in Western societies to aid people with disabilities. For example, dogs are used to guide visually impaired people, to support people with epilepsy, to be ‘the ears’ of a hearing impaired person. Dogs have also been used to aid people with mobility difficulties, such as a wheelchair user or someone who is unable to bend or lift because of arthritis (Kelley, 2006). Dogs are not used, however, by Muslims with disabilities. As mentioned above, dogs are felt to be impure (*najis*). In addition, Muslims feel it is necessary to create a barrier between humans and dogs to prevent humans from getting too attached to them, as to allow too close an attachment might mean that this would replace human companionship (Mohamad, 2005). This has implications for visually impaired people in Bahrain.

Some Muslim scholars have excluded disabled people from leadership roles on the grounds that they would not be accepted by others and on the basis that they would be unable to contribute as usefully as non-disabled people. However, Ibn-Hazm, a Spanish Muslim jurist in the twelfth century, advocated that disability did not prevent anyone from becoming a leader. In fact, there are many examples of people who overcame their disabilities and served their communities well in the history of Islam (Musse, 2002).

One such case was the man to whom Prophet Muhammad gave responsibility, on more than ten occasions, for governing Medina in his absence. This man, Abdullah Ibn-Umm-Maktum, was blind (Musse, 2002) and he was given the role of calling Muslims to prayer. Although he was excused from fighting, Abdullah Ibn-

Umm-Maktum was unwilling to stay at home while others had to fight so he found a role for himself on the battlefield between two rows where he carried the standard. He said, 'I will carry it for you and protect it, for I am blind and cannot run away'. After taking part in several battles, he was finally killed on the battlefield holding the Muslim flag (Bazna & Hatab, 2005).

Although, the Qur'an and *Sunnah* stress the equality of disabled people, the way in which Islamic scholars have interpreted these ideas places less emphasis on equality and more on protection together with some beliefs about difference.

The views regarding people with disabilities in Muslim cultures have evolved from ancient ideas; some from Islamic beliefs and some from other cultures (e.g. Greek and Persian). Muslims have added to their own ideas what they have gleaned from other cultures and religions including the Jewish and Christian faiths (Frog, 1983).

*The ideas from around the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, from the Arab or Muslim world were in books that were translated into several languages. For example, the book by AL-Razi that was written in the tenth century and then was translated in 1279 and Ibn-Sina's work was translated once in the 12th century and then retranslated into Latin in 1500. Other scholars came later; Ibn-Qayem AL-Jawziah was born in 1291, for example. These ideas appeared during the times when Arab and Muslim scholars were famous.

Muslim scholars treated disability as a medical problem. In particular, they studied the relationship between disability and worship and how disability affected such worship. Muslim scholars saw health and a normal body as the best gift from God (Dols, 1987). Muslim scholars attempted to define disability as a part of their

* The details given for these texts in the bibliography refer to modern day reproductions of original texts and translations.

society, to explain reasons for it, and to think of ways of dealing with it. One view was to see disability as deviance from normality. They therefore attempted to study disability to solve this deviance (Ibn-Al-Balkhi, 1998). Others, conversely, defined disability as not being able to carry out one's daily tasks.

AL-Tubary and AL-Sadigey (1928) put mental health and learning disability into one category subdivided into thirteen types, with physical disability divided and categorised into seven types. Ibn-Al-Balkhi (1998), however, distinguished between physical and learning disabilities while (AL-Razi, 1955) laid the basis for the Islamic medical model, including chapters for both physical and learning disabilities, as well as mental health. Ibn-Sina (1982) mentioned treating learning disabilities and mental health using medicine, food, beating and/or cauterization.

Another group of Muslim scholars (Ibn Qayem AL-Jawziah, AL-Syotey, Ibn Toulon and others) took all their ideas from the Islamic religion through the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. Such writers saw disability as a medical issue coming from God, and Muslims should show patience in facing this issue. When considering the 'Islamic position' on any issue, it is important to distinguish between the written teachings of Islam and the diverse cultural practices that are embraced by its followers, which may not necessarily be consistent with the teaching (Badawi, 1995).

Islamic attitudes towards disability focus on two general groupings. The first is people with physical conditions and superstitious people often associate these with some kind of divine punishment and people may be segregated and discriminated against. The second is the Qur'an that puts forward the view that every person is potentially perfect and therefore appears to view these physical conditions as neither a curse nor a blessing, but simply a part of the human condition (Bazna & Hatab, 2005; Turmusani, 2003).

Islam offers exemption from certain requirements in order to alleviate the difficulties that might arise from such physical conditions but, everyone is expected to do his/her best as far as individual ability will allow. The Qur'an focuses on the idea of *disadvantage* that is created by society, so it makes society responsible for rectifying the problem by constantly exhorting Muslims to recognise the situation of the disadvantaged and to improve their status and conditions.

Recently, however, some studies by Turmusani have addressed different attitudes to disability in the East, the West and, more particularly, in Muslim countries. Turmusani's study (2003) looks in more detail at Islamic countries, especially Jordan. He argues that the medical model had a big influence on perceptions of people with disability individually and that people with disabilities should be happy with services provided and being controlled by professionals. A further finding that should be noted is that many people with disabilities do not view meeting their needs as a right, but as a question of charity. Indeed, Turmasani pointed out that attitudes in Jordan needed to change in society, moving from a medical model to a social model of disability. Turmasani pointed out that attitudes must change if such people are to participate more both in the economy and in society in general (Turmusani, 2003). Also, he examined the position of disabled women in Islamic cultures, pointing out that they are generally of poor social status. Turmusani argued that, historically, this is related to the generally inferior positions of both women and disabled people in Islamic societies. Thus, the position of disabled women needs to be carefully examined in terms of their historical and socio-economic aspects, if their situation is to be properly understood. So, although feminist movements exist in Muslim countries at the present time, there is little discussion regarding disability or, in particular, disabled women. Turmasani asserts that, when studying women's positions in society, the present theoretical perspectives should not

only include disabled women, but should also examine wider issues such as religion, culture and a country's economy (Turmusani, 2001).

2.4.1 Arab Culture and Disability

Some scholars from around the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries put forward a number of explanations for people having disabilities; some offer reasons such as moods, the stars, or the season of the year. Others see it as an effect of being in love, caused by food, or sent by God. Still others see it as a problem which starts from birth and which cannot be solved, and a few see it as a part of how we look. For example, Ibn-Sinah (1982) and AL-Razi (1955) note that overweight white people are more likely to have a learning disability than others. Moreover, AL-Razi (1955) and Ibn-Sinah (1982) see disability as a gender issue since women are more often affected in terms of mental health and are more likely to have learning disabilities than men. Thus, the writers make a relationship between this, breast-feeding and bad nerves. AL-Razi (1955) makes a link between age and learning disabilities stating that older people are more likely to experience a learning disability (AL-Razi, 1955). Some, such as Ibn-Qayem AL-Jawziah (1987), Ibn-Habib (1987) and AL-Azraq (1984), see disability as a result of demons and the devil. Additionally, some say that there are people who are not disabled but make themselves look like people with disabilities to escape a responsibility or problem (Ibn-Habib, 1987). AL-Razi (1955), Ibn-Sinah (1982) and AL-Azraq (1984) think that some disabilities may be the result of sex. Lastly, they assert that some disabilities are the result of accidents.

In dealing with disability, some have not accepted certain kinds of treatment such as beating and cauterization although cauterization is still used in folk medicine. Some have tried to describe other methods of treatment and forms of medication, but have not considered the problem of disability from a social point of view. In some areas of the Arab world, such as northern Morocco, people with disabilities were not

allowed to live with others unless they were those who had become physically disabled as a result of war. This group was accepted because they were seen as heroes (Ajwiah, 1995).

Today, many people would not consider it to be acceptable to offer some of the reasons that were previously given for disablement such as sex or love. However, until recently, it was still accepted that the reasons for some disabilities might be caused by the evil eye (envy, spite and/or magic). In Ottoman times there was education and training for people with hearing impairment and social attention was paid to people with visual impairment. AL-Safadi in 1911 completed a specialised biographical work about blindness and in 1980, Malti-Douglas carried out a modern review of it (EL-Hessen, 2006).

The famous Arab writer and poet named AL-Jahed (776-868 A.D.), whose name means 'goggle eyed', in his book '*Kitab Al-Bursan*' asked for the inclusion of people with disabilities (EL-Hessen, 2006). Meanwhile, AL-Jahed (1981) notes that disability does not prevent you from doing work and adds that many famous people in Arab history had disabilities. Arab history makes a distinction between physical and learning disabilities. Some important families announced that they had members of their families who had physical disabilities and many of these obtained high positions, whereas people with learning disabilities were never mentioned as part of the family; even their full names were not mentioned. Often care was provided for men who had a physical disability, whereas women were denied such care because they were women.

In some Arab Middle Eastern countries, people with disabilities were hidden and looked after by women in the family for care and protection (Chatty & Rabo, 1997; Turmusani, 2003). Historically, in the Arab world, people with disabilities did not have equal rights. The problem was worse for disabled females who were often

killed as soon as they were born. This changed after Islam came into being in the 7th century. The Islamic faith called for equality for all, regardless of the gender, ethnicity or ability of the individual. People with disabilities were able to obtain rights and responsibilities in Muslim society and at the beginning of Islam, there were many examples of people with disabilities in important positions such as soldiers, scholars or holy men who called Muslims to prayer '*muezzin*' (*mu'dhen*). While more recent studies found that within the Muslim countries there are positive attitudes toward people with disability especially toward people with visual and/or hearing impairment comparing to mental disabilities. While Muslim women have better attitudes toward people with disability compared to men (Turmusani, 2003), and professionals who deal with people with disability have more positive attitudes as well (Al-Abdulwahab & Al-Gain, 2003).

2.4.2 Islam and Education for People with Disabilities

Education is considered to be very important in Islam as the first word in the Qur'an is read (*'iqra'*), which means to be educated. According to the Qur'an, gaining knowledge is a sacred duty that is required of every Muslim regardless of their gender, ethnicity or ability/disability. As observed by Abu-Lughod (1993), one of the main reasons that people are educated and send all of their children to be educated is to learn about the Qur'an and to learn right from wrong. In most Muslim countries gaining education and knowledge are mandatory requirements for men and women in Islam and the only group of Muslim extremists that ban women to some extent from education are the *Taliban* group in Afghanistan. In Saudi Arabia women are banned from driving cars. Thus, it can be argued from these practices that such judgments are imposed by the patriarchal cultures, where men draw up these national policies.

From the beginning of Islam and up until the present day the association of the mosque with education has remained a major characteristic as the mosque was and is a central feature of the Islamic community. It is as a place for prayer, meditation, religious instruction and political discussion, as well as being a school. So, anywhere Islam was established, mosques were established and basic instruction was created. Once established, these mosques developed into renowned places of learning, with many students and frequently contained important libraries (Zaimeche, 2005). These mosques offered education for all.

According to official statistics, 66% of the total female population were literate in the early 1990s in Syria, while this figure was 40% for disabled men and only 20 % for disabled women. In Bahrain at the same time, 79% of the total population of Bahraini men and 59 % of the total population of Bahraini women were literate while this was true for only 36% of disabled Bahraini men and 12% of women with disabilities. Thus, the rates of literacy among disabled people were lower and literacy among women with disabilities was far lower than for their male counterparts. Furthermore, in both countries (i.e. Syria and Bahrain), the percentage of disabled women who completed higher education was only one third of the percentage for disabled men (Nagata, 2003).

Recently, however, significant increases have occurred in the number of women participating in education in the Arab region at all levels. Lebanon, Egypt and some Gulf countries are setting up systems of education that integrate women. In fact, in certain oil-rich countries, such as Kuwait and Bahrain, the enrolment rate in higher education is higher for women than it is for men. In 1998, 214 girls were enrolled in higher education in Kuwait for every 100 boys. This is significant as educated women are more likely to be conscious of their rights and more likely to demand them (Nagata, 2003).

Summary

This chapter has reviewed Islamic texts and interpretations of them in relation to disability and gender. It has shown that Islam promotes a kind, compassionate approach to people with disabilities. This is supported by Islamic almsgiving that is both individual and through charitable institutions or taxes. This means that people with disabilities are provided for within Islamic societies. However, this provision is often within segregated provision, in a socially exclusive manner that is kind but disabling, as will be explored in later finding chapters. There is a congruence between these texts and policies in Islam and the medical model of disability as set out in Chapter One (Turmusani, 2003).

Therefore, it can be seen that there are a diversity of views regarding ways of explaining and conceptualising disability in Islamic teaching and interpretations of them. There are other Islamic texts that support the equality and rights of people with disabilities and women. These texts have been less influential in the development of policies and provision in this area but they have the potential to support socially inclusive provision and rights based legislation. These texts are congruent with the social model or relational approach to disability. This study will analyse the way interpretations of Islam affect policies and practices in dealing with people with disabilities, and in particular people with visual impairments. In this case study of gender disability and Islam in Bahrain, there will be further analysis of the influence of Islam in policy and provision in Chapter Five.

There is the potential to interpret Islamic teaching as socially inclusive of disabled people, giving them equal rights in line with the social model of disability. At the same time the Islamic charitable practices may result in protection of people with disabilities rather than the promotion of their independence, in line with the

medical model of disability (Turmusani, 2003). These contradictory tensions will be explored further in later chapters.

3. CHAPTER THREE: BAHRAIN, A MUSLIM KINGDOM

Introduction

When studying disability in an Islamic culture, it is first necessary to clarify the specific historical and contemporary cultural, social and political context. As the case study for this thesis is based in Bahrain, this chapter will provide a brief historical and contemporary introduction to Bahrain. The chapter will begin with a description of Bahrain's geography, economy and culture. It will then examine issues of gender equality, marriage and employment, focusing in particular on the position of women in Bahraini society. A review of the health and social services provision in Bahrain will follow. Finally, the chapter will examine education in Bahrain, paying particular attention to educational provision for children and young people with visual impairments.

3.1 Bahrain: Geography, Economy and Culture

Figure 3:1 Map of Bahrain



Source: (British Chambers of Commerce, 2007)

The Kingdom of Bahrain is an archipelago, a small emirate made up of a group of islands situated in The Gulf (Arabian/Persian) and connected to the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia by a long, low bridge called the King Fahad Bridge (See Figure 3:1). Bahrain is a dry, desert land with very little rainfall. However, water wells all over the country have made small-scale agriculture possible. The total area of Bahrain is 728,32 square kilometres and it has a total population of nearly 707,200, of which 438,200 (62%) are Bahraini citizens and 269,000 (38%) are non-Bahrainis (Directorate of Statistics, 2004).

Bahrain is part of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), which comprises six countries: the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Kuwait, the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Qatar. These countries have strong relationships because they share similar histories, cultures and languages. Bahrain has been referred to as the '*Pearl of the Gulf*' and has a history of more than 5,000 years of civilisation.

Bahrain was the first country in the GCC to discover and refine oil. Although extracting oil only began in the early 1930s, Bahrain's oil reserves today are virtually exhausted. Bahrain still has an oil refinery, which refines oil from Saudi Arabian pipelines and there are also natural gas and aluminium factories. Bahrain had the smallest oil reserves among the countries in the GCC, hence today it is the least wealthy GCC country. Because its oil reserves have been exhausted, it was the first GCC to modernise as it needed to generate alternative sources of income (Zahlan, 1989).

Bahrain remained an independent Arab state until the Portuguese occupied the country between 1521-1602. It was also occupied by the Persians from 1602–1782, but this occupation was not continuous. In 1783, the Al-Khalifa family gained power in the country and this family has ruled ever since (Zahlan, 1989). Within the period

of rule of the Al-Khalifa family, Bahrain also faced some colonisation. Bahrain was part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire from 1840, although the Empire's control was limited in comparison to their power in other Arab countries such as Syria, Jordan and Egypt. In 1861, the Ottoman Empire lost control of Bahrain and the British protectorate then commenced in 1880, with the nation gaining its independence in 1971 (An-Na'im, 2002; Zahlan, 1989).

Bahrain began rebuilding its government and laws soon after the declaration of independence in the early 1970s by signing a Friendship Treaty with Britain one day after independence (BBC News, 2007b; U.S. Department of State, 2007; Zahlan, 1989). The government of Bahrain claimed that a key government goal was that all people living in the Kingdom should have their rights respected and fulfilled, regardless of their ethnic background, religion, and physical or mental state. Since the 1970s, establishing services and legislation for people with disabilities has been on the political agenda (The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2005; U.S. Department of State, 1994; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006).

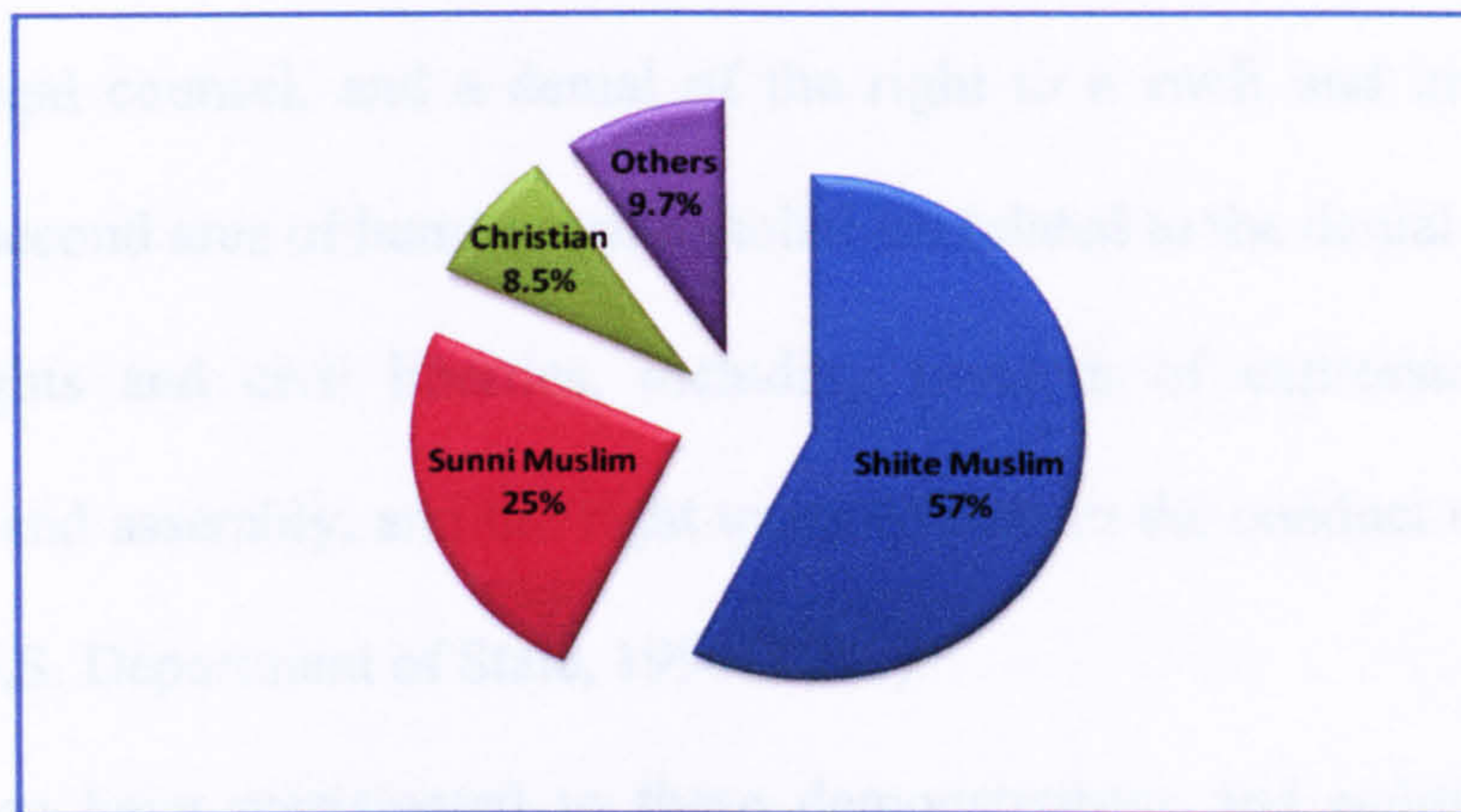
Although the population, land area and resources of Bahrain are relatively small, the country has achieved high levels of social and economic development in a short period by using its oil revenues to build up an infrastructure, such as a road network, international airport, telecommunications, public services, medical facilities and universities. A free-trade zone exists in the ports and it has also become the region's banking and communications centre (Crawford Homepage, 2002; U.S. Department of State, 2007).

Arabic is the nation's official language with Farsi being common but mostly spoken in the home. English is also widely spoken and understood. Most of the population is Arab, but many Indians, Persians, Europeans and Americans also reside and work in Bahrain, as citizens and non-citizens (Crawford Homepage, 2002; U.S.

Department of State, 2007). In rare instances, citizenship may be granted to a non-Bahraini who has served the state in some outstanding way over a certain period, normally around ten to fifteen years. Such citizens are mainly *Sunni* and citizenship is granted in order to adjust the demographic equilibrium between the majority (*Shi'a*) and the minority (*Sunni*) (Crawford Homepage, 2002; U.S. Department of State, 2007; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006). Bahrain is the GCC country that grants citizenship to the highest number of foreigners. Bahrain is rapidly becoming a centre of commerce, trade and, more recently, tourism as the islands are a convenient location between Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Crawford Homepage, 2002; U.S. Department of State, 2007).

Bahrain's legal system is influenced by both English and Islamic laws. Due to the long British presence in Bahrain, British law has had a huge impact on the shape of Bahraini legislation. Bahraini law has also been influenced by Egyptian codes and Islamic law (*shari'ah*). As Bahrain is a Muslim country, the Islamic law (*shari'ah*) is the main source of legislation with family courts following both state and Islamic law (*shari'ah*) (An-Na'im, 2002; Zahlan, 1989). It will become clearer later in this thesis (Chapter Five, Eight and Nine) how legislation and policies for people with disabilities are affected by both Western and Arabic policies and laws. This, in some cases, is problematic for people with a disability.

The people of Bahrain embraced Islam in the 7th century AD. Most Bahrainis, consequently, practise Islam. As shown in Figure 3.2, one quarter of the population, including the Sheikh's family, belongs to the *Sunni* sect. However, 57% of Bahrainis belong to the *Shi'a* sect. It is widely acknowledged that the *Sunni* sect hold more influential positions in Bahraini society than the *Shi'a* sect (Crawford Homepage, 2002; Encarta, 2007; Merriam-Webster, 2001; U.S. Department of State, 2007; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006).

Figure 3:2 Religious Affiliation in Bahrain

Source: (Encarta, 2007; Merriam-Webster, 2001)

The *Sunni* community consists of three groups: the tribes from which the Bahraini royal family are descended (the Al Khalifah family); the *Nejdis*, who came from the centre of Arabia (who are *Maliki* one of the *Sunni* sects discussed in Chapter Two); and the *Hawala* (these are *Shafi'i* one of the *Sunni* sects as was explained in Chapter Two). These are the Arab people who moved to Iran in previous times then later returned to the Arabian coast (Dahlgren, 2005; Fakhro, 1990; Zahlan, 1989). Bahrain has a close political relationship with the other *Sunni* governments e.g. the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the governments of Western countries (U.S. Department of State, 2007).

During the 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, Bahrain agreed to be a centre for U.S. troops, planes and ships. Bahraini forces took part in the anti-Iraq coalition and the country is today still used by American forces in the area. In general, however, Bahrain is still one of the more peaceful corners of the Islamic world. Although Bahrain is generally considered to be a peaceful nation, there are some internal conflicts between the *Sunni* government of the *Sheikh* and the majority *Shi'a* population. In recent times, there have been riots and conflict between the poor *Shi'a* people and the ruling family. This situation became particularly acute in 1994, when there was a long period of unrest until the spring of 1997. Sections of the *Shi'a* population became politicised regarding human rights abuses in Bahrain. Such abuses

included: arbitrary detention, physical and psychological abuse of detainees, denial of access to legal counsel, and a denial of the right to a swift and impartial judicial hearing. A second area of human rights violations related to the denial of fundamental political rights and civil liberties, including freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, and the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs and vote (U.S. Department of State, 1994, 2007).

Women have participated in these demonstrations and political movements (Glosemeyer, 2005; Seikaly, 1997, 1998; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006) and, in effect, ethnic and sectarian conflicts are still continuing in Bahrain. They have been a means by which women have become active in politics. This is because many important political issues are concerned with attempting to end the privilege and oppression of the ruling classes in order to initiate civil and democratic rights (Lindisfarne, 1997; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006).

Human Rights Watch called on the Bahraini government to repeal all laws that restricted the ability of citizens of the Kingdom to exercise their rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression. The organisation also urged an end to the practice of detaining citizens for unlimited or extended periods without charge, and to put an end to the practice of interrogating detainees without allowing them access to legal counsel (Defending Human Rights World Wide, 1997; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006).

In 1994, the government responded to the acute period of unrest with arrests, killings, imprisonment of prisoners of conscience, torture and capital punishment, the first to be carried out in almost 20 years. The government also continued a policy of forced exile of its own nationals, sending whole families out of Bahrain, or banning their return if they were suspected of opposition abroad. This period of unrest and instability ended when the new King, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, came to the

throne in 1999 following his father's death. On 14th February 2002, King Hamad declared a constitutional monarchy and called legislative elections for the first time since 1973 (Crawford Homepage, 2002; U.S. Department of State, 1994, 2007; Youngblood-Coleman et al., 2007). Most recently, the right to be involved in political activities has been introduced by adopting a new national charter. This charter allows equal human rights and opportunities for all citizens of the Kingdom (H.H. King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifah, 2000). However, in the 1920s elections, both women and men participated in voting. The next elections took place in the 1970s, but women were not allowed to participate. In 2002 and 2006 both genders were able to participate in elections (Glosemeyer, 2005; U.S. Department of State, 2007).

3.1.1 Gender in Bahrain

This section examines how culture, legislation and Islam shape the social positions of men and women in Bahraini society. Although there have been some studies about the status of women in Middle Eastern countries, there has been less attention given to the women in the Gulf. However, Bahrain also differs from other countries in the Gulf (Seikaly, 1997, 1998).

The equality of women has been a central issue of the Bahraini government's programme and women in Bahrain have always played a prominent role in society. The country established the first girls' school in the Gulf in 1928. Today, there are more women who are university graduates than men (The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2001; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006). Having more educated women may be related to a number of different reasons, but it may be that men seek jobs as a priority because they have more financial responsibilities, while girls can continue to study until they get married. A similar conclusion was drawn by Rabo (2005) concerning women in Aleppo, Syria.

In Bahrain women are well represented in the workforce. However, although there are still problems, particularly with regard to traditional attitudes, there is an awareness that attitudes towards gender need to change if the country is to achieve its full potential. The government stresses the importance of confronting issues that face the country and such an approach led to the creation of the Supreme Council for Women in Bahrain (Fakhro, 1990; The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2001; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006).

The social position of men and women in Bahrain is strongly influenced by culture as well as religion. Bahrain is a Muslim country, but it is generally considered to be more liberal in its interpretation of Islam than adjacent countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar. Despite its liberalism, Bahrain still has some families who adopt a more conservative stance towards Islam, especially in the *Shi'a* villages (Dahlgren, 2005; Seif, 2005; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006).

There has been a noticeable increase recently in the Arab region in the number of women participating in education at all levels. Indeed, some of the more liberal countries, such as Lebanon and Egypt, have been pioneers in setting up educational systems that integrate women and in some countries, such as Kuwait and Bahrain, the rate of enrolment in higher education for women is higher than enrolment for men. Educated women are both more conscious of their rights and more forthright in demanding that they are met (Nagata, 2003; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006).

In the early 1990s Bahrain started to move toward a more conservative interpretation of Islam. Events in Iran and Saudi Arabia, that led these countries to embrace more conservative Islamic ideas and practices, were influential in this change as was the political unrest within Bahrain, as discussed earlier in this chapter (Fakhro, 1990; Seikaly, 1997, 1998). This spread of conservative Islam has not only

occurred in Bahrain but in the whole area and has had a major influence on men and women's social positions (Badran, 1998).

From my own observations, a major outcome of the spread of Islamic conservatism has been a return to dress and social codes considered to be more in keeping with Islamic teaching. In Bahrain, as in many other Muslim countries, clothing and ways of dressing are used to signify the social boundaries between the men and women. Muslim dress (*hijab*) is not compulsory in Bahrain and while some women can be seen wearing a head-covering, many do not. Some wear it to respect tradition rather than for religious reasons. More women in villages cover their heads from an early age than those who live in cities (Fakhro, 1990). In addition, most girls with a disability wear Muslim dress (*hijab*). This may be due to the fact that most disabled people come from *Shi'a* villages, since they constitute the majority of the population. Also, their families may want to protect them as they attend non-segregated educational centres. For people with a disability in general and people with a visual impairment specifically, it was more difficult to wear the old fashioned full-length cloaks (*'abāya /dafah*), as it was not practical and limited their mobility. The new version is easier and more practical to wear and therefore it is worn by the majority, (See Appendix 1 for more details on dress codes).

Women's behaviour reflects not only on her, but on the honour (*sharaf*) of the whole family and tribe (Chatty & Rabo, 1997; Rippenburg, 1998; Yamani, 2000). These values have more effect on the social behaviour of girls than boys as it is women who carry the family honour and if a woman crosses any of the social or cultural boundaries she will bring shame (*'aīb, khuzy*) to her family. So, she must take pains to know what is shameful (*'ayb, khuzy*) and what is forbidden (*haram*) (Abu-Lughod, 1999).

Bahrain is a more liberal country in terms of women's freedom than some other Islamic states. For example, women in Saudi Arabia are not only taught in complete segregation but are not allowed to study subjects such as engineering and law. Also, although women in Saudi Arabia own 40% of the private wealth, they depend on men to do any official business with the government (Engineer, 2004). This is not the case in Bahrain. Women have always been allowed to drive in Bahrain, unlike in Saudi Arabia (L. Ahmed, 1993; Altorki & Cole, 1997; Sabban, 2005; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006; Yamani, 2000). Even other countries in the Gulf, like Qatar and UAE, have only recently allowed women to drive and still only with permission from their male guardians (*wāly al-amr*). Women of these countries cannot leave their country and travel without their male guardians (*wāly al-amr*) permission (Altorki & Cole, 1997; Sabban, 2005; Yamani, 2000). Even in employment, women in some Muslim and GCC countries, have to have permission from a male guardian (*wāly al-amr*) (Poya, 1999). In Bahrain, women have access to all jobs, although some fields have fewer women and others fewer men. Women mostly have the same salary and working hours as men (US Embassy Bahrain, 2006). The constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain in 2002 in Article 13 (H.H. King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, 2002) assures that all employees and workers have equal rights and opportunities at work. The only exception regards women working at night. Article 301 renewed in 2007 emphasises that it is illegal to allow women to work between 8 pm and 4 am unless under certain circumstances like working as a nurse or in any emergency sites (Laws Regulation, 2007).

Macleod's (1991) study about women in Cairo, suggested that as more women became employed they started to wear Muslim dress (*hijab*). This, however, was not the case in Bahrain. In the 1960s and 1970s, women started to take up more important roles in society but did not cover themselves with cloaks (*'abāya /dafah*). Well-

educated women began to have more freedom. More women started to drive cars, participate in political demonstrations, join the *ba'thi's* (radical, secular Arab nationalist political party) and the radical leftist groups with men they had met either in the course of their studies or in the work place. The number of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) increased as women volunteers participated in professional and women's organisations. Women were active in the modernisation of Bahrain and in the job market. They were less concerned with tradition and were less conservative and less educated at that time (Fakhro, 1990; Seikaly, 1997, 1998). However, political activity decreased with the dictatorship in Bahrain. It should be noted that in many parts of the Middle East from the 1940s to the 1990s only a few associations for women existed and these were organised mostly by men. Women were only allowed to create charitable organisations to provide services for disabled people (Chatty & Rabo, 1997). This may be one reason why there are more women volunteers in the field of disability, as will be discussed in later chapters.

Bahraini women have a recent history of political protest. They took to the streets in the 1960s to protest against Western colonisation and, in the 1990s, they demanded more political rights (Seikaly, 1997). These included the right to vote (Glosemeyer, 2005). Even in Jordan women were not given the right to vote until 1974 and this was only put in to practice in 1989 (Brand, 1998). In the new millennium, Bahrain was the first country in the GCC to consider equal human rights for both sexes, and women started to make progress in public life.

UAE is still a step behind with regard to political rights, but women in Saudi Arabia are in a worse position in terms of such rights (Sabban, 2005; Vogel, 2000). Qatar, on the other hand, has recently accorded many rights and much freedom to women, most of these decreed by *Sheikha* Mozah, the second wife of the Prince of Qatar. Kuwaiti women were not allowed to vote (An-Na'im, 2002; Engineer, 2004)

until 2005, but women were allowed to stand for parliament in 2007 (BBC News, 2005).

The position of women started to become more positive in the GCC in the early 1980s. This was affected by the revolution in Iran, and by the 1990s after the Iraqi/Kuwaiti war. Furthermore, after September 11th 2001 more rights were given to men and women in these countries. However, Bahrain was a step ahead of these rights because it started earlier with incremental changes and society more readily accepted them (Khabash, Al-Metwa, & AL-Harthy, 2005; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006).

In 2000, a National Charter of Action was written. Six of the forty-six members of the Committee that drafted it were females (Canavan, 2001; The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2001). Women also voted in the referendum on the National Charter in almost the same numbers as men (49% of the voters were women). Today, over four thousand women are members of non-governmental organisations and many have taken leading roles. In 2001, Bahrain held elections for parliament. There were six women candidates, but none of them won a seat. Latifa al-Gaoud, a 46-year-old British university graduate, lost her election by only a few votes in 2001 (Glosemeyer, 2005; The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2001), but took her place as the first and only woman in parliament in Bahrain in the 2005 election (The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2006b). The Consultative Council has always had female members since its establishment. In December 2006, Monira Bin-Hindi, who is female and a wheelchair user, became a member of the Consultative Council. She was the first person with a disability to gain such a position in Bahrain (Bahrain Tribune, 2006; BNA, 2006).

In 2001, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa announced the establishment of the Supreme Council for Women in Bahrain, to assist the government in drawing up

policies on women's issues. The Council comprises fourteen members and is chaired by *Sheikha* Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al-Khalifa, the wife of the King (The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2001). In addition, Sheikh Hamad ratified Bahrain's signature of the Convention Against All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 2002 (The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2002).

Bahrain has had female ambassadors since the 1990s and was also the first Arab country to have a female Minister of Health, Nada Al-Hafath, who does not wear Muslim dress (*sufūre*). The second female Minister for the new Ministry of Social Development, Fatima Al-Baloshi is from a conservative *Sunni* tribe. In June of 2006, Bahrain appointed the first female judge in the GCC (Mona Al Kawari), a woman from a *Sunni* Arab tribe. Both of these women wore Muslim dress (*hijab*) (Glosemeyer, 2005; The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2006a).

Bahrain is a moderate country in the Gulf region, the government states it applies international human rights regarding gender equality. However, the international organisations face difficulties in challenging some of the gender rights as interpreted by Islamic law (*shari'ah*) (Dahlgren, 2005; Seif, 2005), especially in the areas of divorce and family law. These derive mainly from the Islamic law (*shari'ah*), which is mainly used in Islamic countries. In November 2005 the Supreme Council for Women and Women's NGOs wanted family law in Bahrain to be based on the civil laws of Western nations which were seen as enhancing women rights. Conservative elements however, wanted to maintain Islamic law (*shari'ah*). There was political unrest and public demonstrations over this in Bahrain. There are also other discriminatory policies, such as not being able to pass citizenship from a Bahraini woman to her husband if she is married to a non-Bahraini man, whilst a Bahraini man can do this. Also, only since 2005 can a Bahraini woman pass citizenship to her children from a marriage to a non-Bahraini citizen (BNA, 2006;

Supreme Council for Women, 2006). This policy applies in all GCC and most Islamic countries, giving men more chances of marrying foreigners than women. As a result, some women feel that, in spite of the fact that women are participating more and more in the workforce, their rights have not advanced significantly. This is largely due to the influence of religious traditionalists, particularly in government-run institutions and in the Islamic law (*shari'ah*) courts. On the other hand, some women want to return to more traditional values and Islamic patterns of behaviour (Seif, 2005).

Violence against women does occur but this is usually covered up and kept within the family. Indeed, some professional groups suggest that abuse by a husband is fairly common and yet there are no government policies that address violence against women explicitly. Bahraini women rarely seek legal help in cases of violence and it is said that the courts do not look favourably on such cases (U.S. Department of State, 1994; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006).

Thus, although there are some areas of inequality, Bahraini women play an active role compared to other women in the region. One of these is in relation to sporting activities.

3.2 Financial Responsibilities and Employment in Bahrain

According to the Islamic law (*shari'ah*), the provision of financial support is primarily the duty of men (Hjarpe, 1988). As noted in Chapter Two, men inherit twice the amount inherited by women because they have financial responsibilities (Esposito, 1998).

According to the Qur'an and some Islamic thinkers, women have a duty to care for the home, their husbands and children, while men have a duty to treat women fairly and to be good to their wives (L. Ahmed, 1993) and shoulder financial

responsibilities (Abu-Lughod, 1998). In Islam a husband is responsible for his wife and for the household finances, the man is expected to maintain a standard of living for his wife that is not lower than what she enjoyed when she lived in her father's home (Chatty & Rabo, 1997; El Guindi, 1999). While these expectations have resulted in a particular gender division in many households in Bahrain and other GCC countries, in some households, there are less traditional arrangements. Increasingly women are becoming more financially independent through employment (Fakhro, 1990; Maclagan, 2006). Today, in the Gulf countries including Bahrain, it is no longer a man's duty to shop and pay for food and more couples shop together. Furthermore, in the home, it is no longer seen as a woman's duty to prepare the food, as housemaids do most of the domestic chores under the wife's supervision in many households (Maclagan, 2006). The phenomenon of having foreign housemaids is widespread in Bahrain and in the GCC, even among lower middle class families, as housemaids' salaries are low and Bahraini citizen incomes are high. While house servants provide considerable help to disabled people, the low social status and low pay of such employees places them in a position of social disadvantage and exploitation.

Paid employment for women in offices is a relatively new phenomenon in most Arab countries. As a result, women's situations have changed from being housewives, doing unpaid work in the domestic sphere, to becoming working, earning women. This has affected the life styles of both men and women (Fakhro, 1990; Mernissi, 2003).

In the early years of the last century some women in Bahrain from wealthy and educated families worked as volunteers, secretaries and nurses, although some wealthy families did not allow their daughters to take up paid work. By the middle of the twentieth century, more women had taken up paid employment in the region, in

part due to the discovery of oil (El Guindi, 1999; Limbert, 2005). The increase in wealth in the GCC countries because of oil made job opportunities available for both men and women and had an impact on the position of women in these countries (L. Ahmed, 1993; Limbert, 2005). El Guindi (1985), who carried out a study of the education and employment of women in Bahrain, suggested that the increase in the number of women in paid employment cannot be explained in merely financial terms. She suggested that, as many households were relatively well off financially, this was related to increased educational and employment opportunities for women in Bahrain. In Bahrain, as in other GCC countries, unskilled work attracts low pay and is mainly carried out by overseas guest workers (El Guindi, 1999; Limbert, 2005). The majority of such workers are men but women from overseas work in domestic labour (Maclagan, 2006).

According to the 2004 government statistics for Bahrain, the number of people potentially available for work (i.e. people who are 15 years old or above, economically active, employed or unemployed), is 339,500 (48% of the total population of 707,200) (Directorate of Statistics, 2004). Detailed data on the labour force and employment however, is only available from the 2001 census. Thus the data in the following paragraphs is derived from this source and the limitations of census data will be discussed in section 3.6 of this chapter.

In 2001, 47.4% of the total population* who were then economically active (employed or unemployed). Of this group, 41.2% were Bahraini citizens and 59% were non-Bahrainis. The census data reports that of the economically active population of Bahraini citizens, 36% were in employment, of which 23% were women. This makes the labour force participation rate for female Bahraini citizens

* in 2001 economically active population was 308,341

25.6% of the total number of the economically active population (15 years and older) of Bahraini female citizens (See Table 3:1).

The government has now pledged to introduce an unemployment benefit of \$415 per month for those citizens without work. People seeking work for the first time will be eligible if they are 18 or over and it is expected to get this benefit. This is a notable advance as an unemployment benefit is a rarity in the Arab world. Such a benefit does not exist at all in Egypt, Lebanon or Syria. Unemployed people may receive such benefits in Jordan, if they have already contributed to the state's social security system before becoming unemployed (Al-Jazeera, 2006; The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2006b).

Table 3:1 Population of Bahrain (15 Years +) by Labour Force Participation, Nationality and Sex, 2001 Census

Labour Force Participation	Nationality / Sex								
	Bahraini			Non-Bahraini			Total		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Working	84,920	26,067	110,987	146,604	33,787	180,391	231,524	59,854	291,378
Unemployed	9,434	6,702	16,136	519	310	829	9,953	7,012	16,965
Student	22,240	25,541	47,781	3,757	3,132	6,889	25,997	28,673	54,670
Home maker Income	...	64,681	64,681	...	22,034	22,034	...	86,715	86,715
Recipient	362	209	571	...	38	38	362	247	609
Disabled*	925	403	1,328	61	394	455	986	797	1,783
No Desire to Work	859	2,927	3,786	299	394	693	1,158	3,321	4,479
65 Yrs & not working	1,954	11,327	3,281	173	83	256	2,127	1,410	3,537
Total	120,694	127,857	248,551	151,413	60,172	211,585	272,107	188,029	460,136

* Includes population 65 years old and not working - 1981 census

(...) Not available

Source: (General Directorate of Statistics and Population Registry, 2007b)

According to the 2001 statistics, unemployment was also experienced by some educated people, as 6.9% of unemployed Bahraini citizens had sixth form qualifications or diplomas. Furthermore, 7.8% of Bahraini citizens with undergraduate degrees were not employed, and even some Bahraini citizens postgraduates (N=23: 0.14%) holding Master's and Ph.D. degrees were unemployed.

It needs to be noted here that the number of Bahraini postgraduates who are citizens is small (See Appendix 2, Table A).

In addition, periods of unemployment can last for many years in Bahrain as 12.7% of unemployed people in Bahrain have been on waiting lists for jobs for more than eight years. This seems a large percentage over a long period in a country that employs a great many overseas workers. In total, 7.5% of people on the waiting list are Bahraini males in a country where employment for males is important as a man without an income can be made to feel ashamed and may be stigmatised (See Appendix 2 Table B).

The presence of overseas workers in Bahrain has agitated young *Shi'a* Bahrainis who are unemployed and there have been demonstrations. This was one of the main reasons for the unrest which occurred in Bahrain in 1994. As a result, people with disabilities, who have had limited choices in education, face more difficulties in finding employment. The degree of difficulty they face depends on their gender and whether they are *Shi'a* or *Sunni* as will be explored more in Chapter Seven about employment. EL-Hessen (2006) suggests that women with disabilities in Arab and Muslim countries may face even more difficulties in getting employed than men with disabilities. In Jordan, for example, the number of unemployed women with disabilities is double that of unemployed disabled men. Women with disabilities are employed in lower-status jobs for long hours and low salaries. They are discriminated against in the region and do not get equal rights, opportunities or responsibilities because of their impairment and their gender (EL-Hessen, 2006).

3.3 Marriage in Bahrain

In Bahrain, families are now less involved and young people mostly choose their own partners, but families are still influential in marriage arrangements (Wynn,

2006). Bahraini weddings parties have also changed. Up to the early 1990s men had their own area but they could see the women and only a few girls wore Muslim dress (*hijab*) and the bands and waiters were male. Recently, Saudi Arabian style weddings, where women are totally segregated have become more common. In the women's section, bands consist either of males who are hidden behind a partition (*pardah*) or females (*jaqāqah*) who work in the traditional bands ('*edeh*), who are mainly of black African origin ('*abid*). There may be a visually impaired male organ grinder with a female singer. For such men their impairment eclipses their gender identity. (This will be explored further in Chapter Six). The waiters at women only weddings are generally female. The groom enters with the bride to exchange rings and then he goes out to give space for the women and girls at the wedding to unveil and dance. Among liberal families, weddings may have some mixing.

Bahrain is the first country in the GCC to make pre-marriage health check-ups compulsory for couples. This was decreed in Law 11 in 2004 (Bahrain News Agency, 2005). There is free blood screening for genetic conditions such as thalassemia, as marriage between relatives is common in the area. However, as yet, the screening does not cover everything and this makes some people worry about marrying someone with a disability because of concerns regarding the possibility of passing on a genetic disability (Bahrain News Agency, 2005). This causes difficulties for people with a disability in marriage, as will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

As in other countries in the GCC, there are now more educated females who enter the labour market, women are marrying later than before and some are remaining unmarried (Fakhro, 1990; Rippenburg, 1998). In some communities single women are seen as a social failure (An-Na'im, 2002). In Muslim countries, unmarried women are not allowed to live on their own. They live with their parents if they are alive or with their elder brother or another relative such as an uncle. In addition,

unmarried women are expected to look after the old and sick in the family (Poya, 1999).

3.3.1 Marriage for people with disabilities in Arab Muslim Countries

Marriage is not easy for people with disabilities, especially females. This is due to a variety of reasons including the way they are viewed by society and the stigma of being disabled. EL-Hessen (2006) suggests that women with disabilities in Arab countries do not have many of the rights possessed by the wider population, including the right to love, marry and have children. She states that most women with disabilities in the Middle East are either 'single, widowed or divorced' (99).

It can be argued that society does not recognise the sexual needs of women with disabilities. Even when disabled women get married they face more discrimination in their marriage compared to disabled men, as it is easier for men to marry (EL-Hessen, 2006). This is not only the case in Arab countries. A study by Arnade and Häfner (2005) showed that most women with disabilities in industrialised and developing countries face difficulties in getting married and being mothers. After reviewing a number of studies they concluded that only half of the women with mobility problems were married compared to two-thirds of men with similar disabilities. In addition, women who were married before they became disabled were more likely to be divorced than comparable men.

This was similar to Nagata's (2003) findings. She found that Arab women face greater discrimination and difficulty in marrying if they are disabled. An exception to this is women who have mild learning difficulties as men may accept such a woman if she is young and pretty. However, women are likely to refuse to marry a man who has learning difficulties. Statistics concerning Jordan in the early 1990s showed that 62% of disabled women were single, 18% were widowed, 16 % were married and 3% were divorced. The percentages of divorced and widowed Arab women with

disabilities, in comparison to the corresponding percentages for their male counterparts, were extremely high. Furthermore, the rate of divorce for people with hearing impairment was eight times higher for women than for men. Marriage for women with disabilities is described as 'very problematic' in the Arab region in particular when there is some doubt about whether the cause of a disease, such as muscular atrophy, may be 'genetic'. Society appears not to recognise the sexuality of such women and discourages its expression (Nagata, 2003).

When disability is caused by war, people have a different reaction to it. For example, in Iran during the war with Iraq there were more disabled men, so Khomeini encouraged these men to marry, particularly those women who had lost their husbands in the war. This, it was suggested, was in order to share their pain and to beget more children (Poya, 1999). This is similar to what happened in Palestine where disability was traditionally regarded as shameful. Negative perceptions concerning physical disability changed after the war because the number of people with permanent disabilities increased significantly. Thus, while disability had previously held a stigma, it became a symbol of resistance and was therefore heroic.

Preferential cousin marriage is a custom, which is widespread even now in the Arab region, is still a factor in terms of inherited disabilities, but it is not clear to what extent but to what extent is not clear as few studies have controlled for socio-economic status, which is thought to be a confounding factor (Nagata, 2003). Nagata (2003), reported that in Jordan, the rate of consanguinity is about 50% and that 67% of parents with severely mentally retarded children had married relatives. A further example is Lebanon, where in 1990, 20% of ever-married women and 24% of illiterate women were married to close relatives (Nagata, 2003). Preferential cousin marriage has been a pattern in many Muslim communities historically and today and

was/is linked mostly to keeping property. Cousin marriage is not forbidden in Islam (Anwar, 1998).

3.4 Health Services in Bahrain

The government of the Kingdom of Bahrain is fully committed to the policy that 'all residents in the country enjoy the right to access comprehensive health care'. This implies a commitment to provide integrated preventive and curative health services through a network of primary, secondary and tertiary health care facilities. The technical and financial responsibility for providing this care lies mainly with the Ministry of Health in cooperation with other ministries, the private sector and the community (Ministry of Health, 2005; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006).

Bahrain has a long history of providing health services. The first small clinic was opened in Bahrain in 1893 by an American missionary. Victoria Memorial Hospital, was opened in 1900 and was the first hospital in the GCC. In 1902, the American Mission hospital, with 21 beds, was built. In 1930, a clinic was built in the Naim area, and in 1940, a hospital. The first government hospital was built in Naim and in the same year, a police hospital was opened. In 1952, the General Health Department was established along with modern hospitals throughout the country. A modern hospital, Salmaniya equipped with the latest technologies was built in two stages in 1957 and 1959 (Abd-Al-Aziz & Skerman, 2001).

In 2004, there were four government hospitals, six private hospitals, nineteen government health centres and five government maternity hospitals, with 38 Health Centres, 1,200 physicians and 1,912 beds. This is more than in a country like Qatar that has a similar population and a higher income (Directorate of Statistics, 2004).

The government is committed to the Alma Ata declaration (1979), a global World Health Organisation goal of 'Health for all'. The primary health care network

includes 19 health centres and 2 clinics. They offer maternal and child health care services such as antenatal and postnatal care, family planning, periodic screening for women, premarital counselling, child screening and immunisation, home visits and health education. Additionally, dental services are offered by dentists and dental hygienists. The secondary and tertiary care is provided through the Salmaniya Medical Complex, five Maternity Hospitals, a psychiatric hospital and a geriatric hospital. The Ministry's strategic plan is to continue to improve the quality and quantity of the services. Since the early 1990s, more clinics have been assigned for diabetic patients in the health centres, as well as clinics for the elderly (Ministry of Health, 2005).

3.5 Education in Bahrain

In Islam, seeking and pursuing an education is seen as a responsibility for all men and women. Prophet Muhammad said, 'Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim' and here the term 'Muslim' includes both sexes, all ethnicities and races, and both disabled and non-disabled people (Badawi, 1995).

Education in Bahrain was formerly given by religious teachers (*al-muṭawa*). They taught children writing and reading, to learn the Qur'an and also some basic Maths and different sciences. Nevertheless, the focus was on the Qur'an. The learning in this period before mainstream schools were established was not segregated by disability or gender. After the establishment of mainstream education, religious teaching (*al-muṭawa*) continued in Bahrain for learning the Qur'an in the afternoons or vacations in parallel with mainstream provision (Shirawi, 1989).

Today both boys and girls enjoy equal access to education in Bahrain (Ministry of Education, 2003; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006). In the late 1900s and in earlier parts of the 20th century, reformers put forward the view that providing

education for girls would raise the status of women and at the same time improve living standards. Therefore, education was advocated for all Muslims (EL-Sanabary, 1998). According to a report from the UN (United Nations Development Programme, 2002), education among Arab women has spread very fast compared to other regions since the 1970s, but still 50% of Arab women are illiterate.

Bahrain does not have a major problem with illiteracy among men or women (Shirawi, 1989). According to the 2001 census, only 2.7% of people aged 10-40 were illiterate (of this figure, 1.4% were males and 4.0% females). The definition of illiteracy in the Bahraini census is: 'a person who cannot read or write, as well as a person who is educated only in the Qur'an' (Central Statistics Organisation, 2001 :5).

By the 1920s, Manama, the capital, already had a number of private schools. In 1921, the first school for boys in Manama was opened in a large house, which was initially the headquarters of the American Hospital. The first school for girls in Manama opened in 1929, run by a Lebanese woman. The first secondary school in the country was established in 1939. The first group of Bahraini students attended the Beirut American University in 1928, while the first female students (only three) went abroad in 1937 to attend the English Syrian College. The first public library was set up in Manama in 1946 (Shirawi, 1989).

The Census of 2004 showed that there were 199 government schools and 52 private schools accommodating 151,810 students respectively. There were also 7 universities (Directorate of Statistics, 2004).

Mainstream schools come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, while specialist provision comes under the Ministry of Social Development, with the exception of the Bahraini/Saudi Institute for the Blind that is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. Specialist provision provides rehabilitation programmes rather than educational curricula. These schools are mixed with teachers of both sexes

while mainstream schools are single sex with teachers of the same sex (Shirawi, 1989).

King Hamad's Schools of the Future Project was set up in 2003 to provide schools with modern services in line with present day advances in science and technology. This project to create electronic schools is viewed as an important turning point in the education of the nation since it seeks to reassess systems of learning used traditionally for many years. It will transform these into IT-based systems that will prepare the next and future generations. It is hoped that this project will help students to broaden their knowledge and understanding through individual learning. The first phase will reach 11,000 students and will involve 1,000 staff, both administrative and academic (Dheep, Abdulhameed, & Eqab, 2003). Currently it seems that students with a disability are missing from this strategy and plans, even though this project could make education easier for people with disabilities and, in particular, for people with visual impairments, as will be explored in Chapter Five.

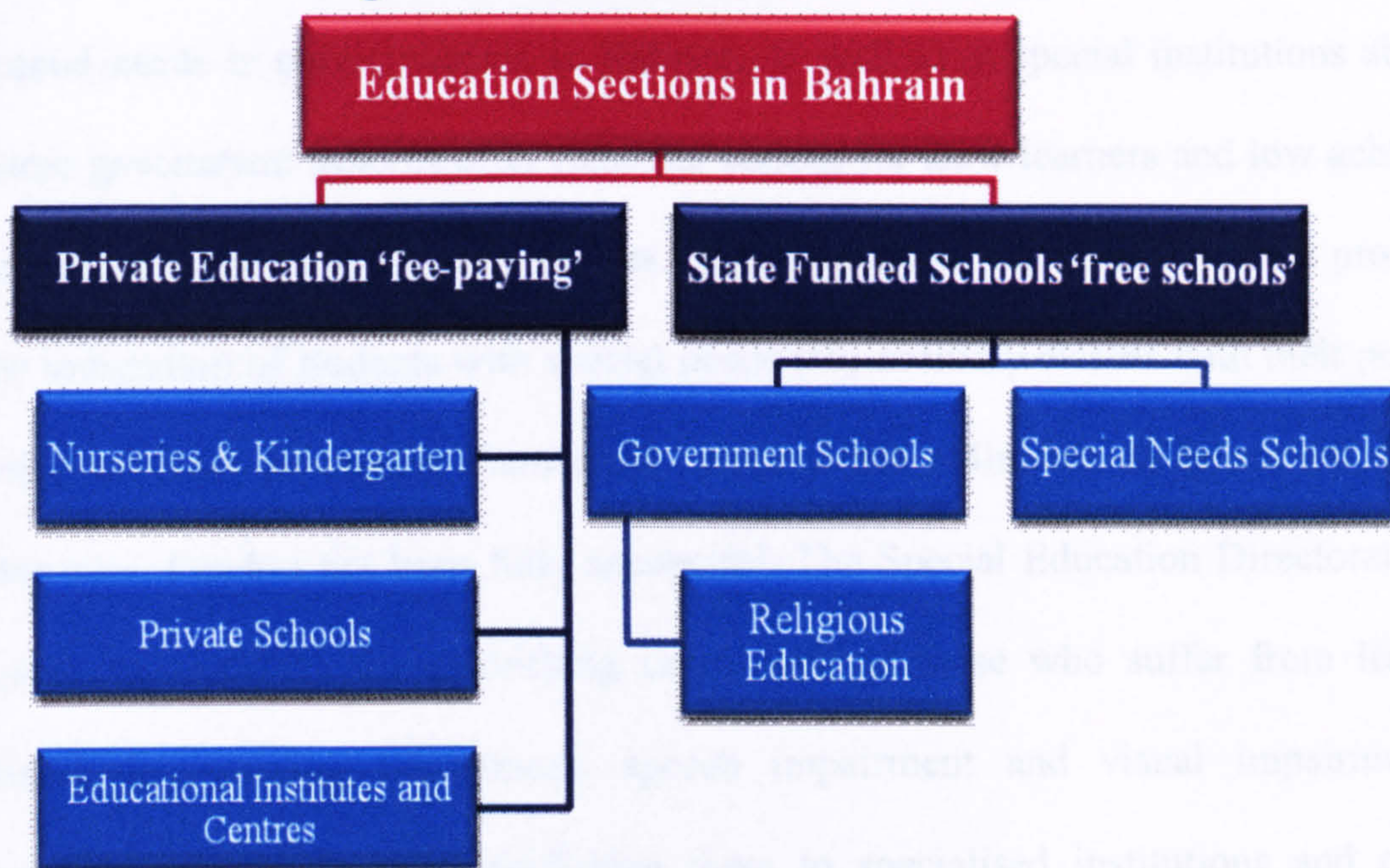
In Bahrain, children enter the education system at around three years of age via a nursery. There follows twelve years of schooling ending in higher education (Shirawi, 1989).

As shown in Figure 3:3 below, like most other countries, Bahrain has both private or fee-paying and state funded schools. Pre-school or nursery education is private. Compulsory education in Bahrain starts at the age of six (Shirawi, 1989; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006). However, the majority of people send their children to nurseries as there are a great many in Bahrain and most do not charge high fees, so the majority can afford it. The private schools have a variety of systems and curriculums, some of which are national and some of which are foreign. These systems have different rules concerning integration by gender but all are supervised by the Ministry of Education. Sending children to these schools is a matter of choice,

but in practice, those who attend are those who can afford the fees (Shirawi, 1989).

This thesis will not include private schools but will focus only on the government system which is free and available to all.

Figure 3:3 Education Sectors in Bahrain



Source: (Ministry of Education, 2007)

In mainstream state education for sighted children from the age of 6-17, schools are segregated by gender in terms of both students and staff. There are boys' schools where all staff members are male and girls' schools staffed entirely by females. In some boys' primary schools, however, there is female staff with no male staff. All twelve years of compulsory education are completely free (Ministry of Education, 2003; Shirawi, 1989). The situation however, for visually impaired children and young people is different, as well be discussed in the next section.

3.5.1 Special Education

In Bahrain, there also exists a special education system for people with disabilities. Children and young people with disabilities attend special schools. Special schools for people with disabilities were introduced in the 1970s in Bahrain and were heavily influenced by Western models of service provision. As a result, the

nation introduced schools that were specialised by disability and not segregated by gender (Shirawi, 1989; Turmusani, 2003).

The Special Education Directorate of Primary Education is responsible for identifying students with disabilities and overseeing the supervision of students with special needs in public schools in Bahrain, as well as in special institutions abroad. Some government schools offer remedial classes for slow learners and low achievers according to the need for such classes. The Ministry of Education states it promotes the integration of students with special needs into ordinary classes with their peers in order to avoid separating them from ordinary life (Ministry of Education, 2007). However, this has not been fully successful. The Special Education Directorate also takes responsibility for identifying cases such as those who suffer from learning disabilities, hearing impairment, speech impairment and visual impairment in government schools and transferring them to specialised institutions and centres supported by the Ministry of Education and/or the Ministry of Social Development (Shirawi, 1989).

For people with certain disabilities (e.g. severe learning disabilities) where there is no local Institute, children sometimes have to go abroad to be educated (Shirawi, 1989). The Saudi-Bahraini Institute for the Welfare of the Blind is the Bahraini special school for children with visual impairments. It is segregated by disability, but not by gender (Shirawi, 1989) as discussed below.

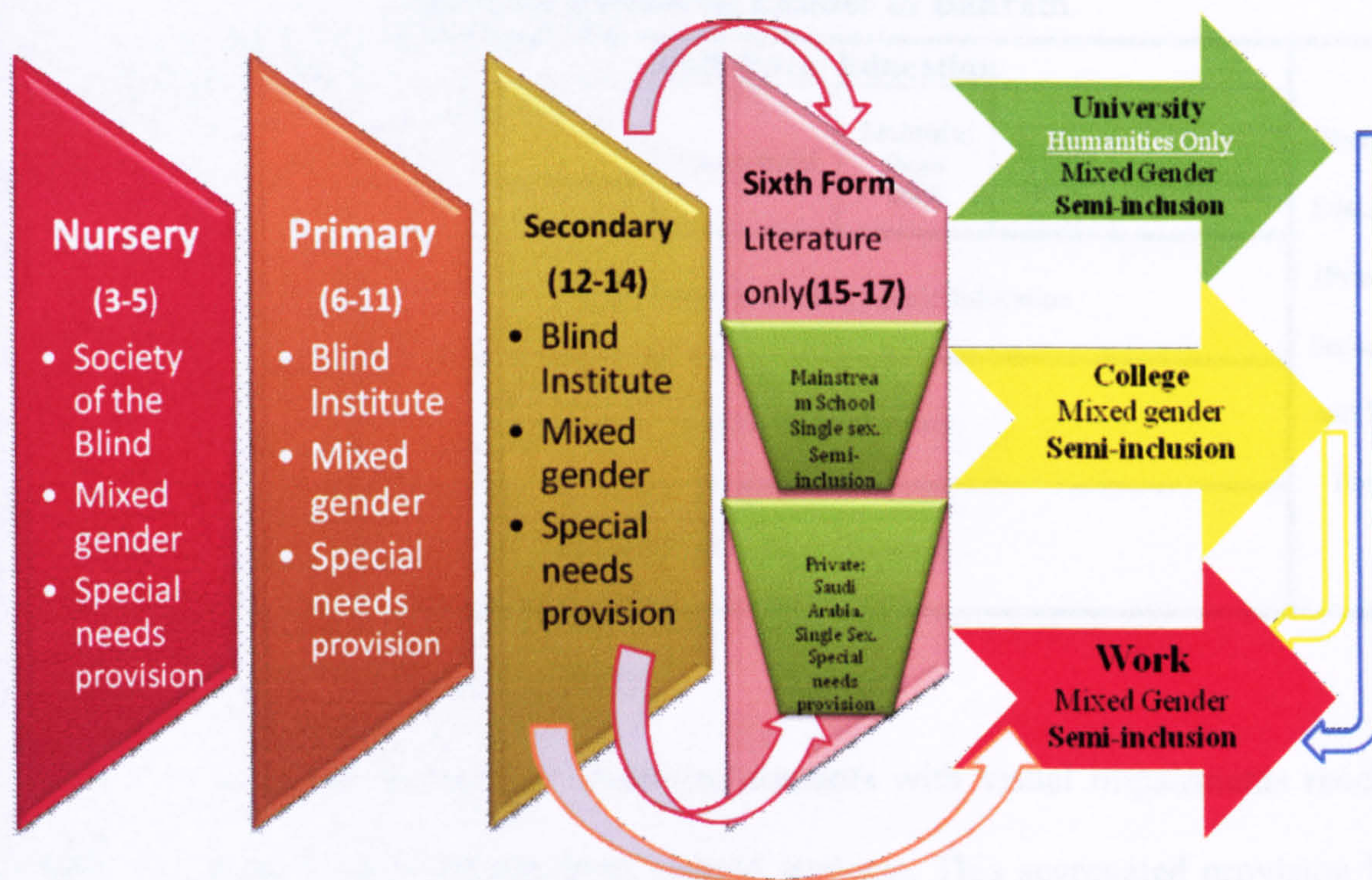
3.5.2 The Saudi-Bahraini Institute for the Welfare of the Blind

Most participants in this study attended this Institute. It provides educational training and cultural programmes, in addition to health, social and psychological care for visually impaired children of both sexes. The Institute uses the same grade structure and curriculum as the regular public schools at primary and secondary levels. Students who complete their secondary level courses are transferred to

mainstream sixth form schools which then provide them with special care. The Institute uses Braille as a method of instruction (Shirawi, 1989).

This Institute is partially funded by Saudi Arabia and not all students are Bahrainis. Students from other Arab countries can study there. Most non-Bahraini students are either from Eastern Saudi Arabia or Oman (Shirawi, 1989).

Figure 3:4 The Education Pathway for Students with Visual Impairments in Bahrain



As Figure 4:1 above shows, between the ages of 3 and 5 years, children with a visual impairment attend a nursery school which is funded by the FSoB. From 7-14 years, young people attend the Saudi-Bahraini Institute for the Welfare of the Blind and at this stage they are not segregated by gender but are segregated by disability. This stage is divided into two stages: 6-11 years which is the primary stage, and 12-14 years, which is the secondary stage of education.

From the age of 15-17 years, students with visual impairments usually attend sixth form in mainstream schools in the literature division only (See Figure 3:4 and Table 3:2). They are segregated by gender but are not segregated by disability. Some

may choose to study in Saudi Arabia if they do not want to be in mixed schools. In such cases, they do not pay tuition fees but may pay their living expenses. While non-Bahraini students go to schools in their own countries, from 2006/2007, only Bahraini students attend the Institute, as it is not a regional Institute any more (this will be discussed in Chapter Five). Students aged 18 years and over go to the University, Colleges or work (where they are not segregated by gender and/or disability).

Table 3:2 Education Ladder in Bahrain

	Grades	Ages	Sixth Form Education					Religion Education (Primary, Secondary and Sixth Form)
			General		Commercial	Technical (boys only)	Applied	
Semi-integration for VI	12	17	Science	Literature			Commercial	Technical (boys only)
	11	16						
	10	15						
People with VI are segregated in the Institute	9	14	Third Stage (Secondary) Basic Education					Religion Education (Primary, Secondary and Sixth Form)
	8	13						
	7	12						
	6	11	Second Stage (Primary)					
	5	10						
	4	9						
	3	8	First Stage (Primary)					
	2	7						
	1	6						

Source: (Ministry of Education, 2007)

As the above section has illustrated students with visual impairments receive different educational provision from sighted students. This segregated provision has an impact on both those with and without visual impairments.

3.6 Services for People with Disabilities in Bahrain

It is difficult to obtain accurate statistics concerning people with disabilities in Bahrain. As in most Middle East countries, the percentage of people with a disability shown in the census is low. Table 3:3 gives some data comparisons from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and developing countries for the 1990s (See Table 3:4) (EL- Deeb, 2002).

Table 3:3 Disability Statistics from ESCWA Region

Bahrain 1995	1.5%
Egypt 1996	0.5%
Gaza Strip 1996	2.1%
Iraq 1977	0.9%
Jordan 1994	1.2%
Kuwait 1996	1.1%
Kebebib 1994	1.0%
Oman 1995	2.4%
Palestine 1997	1.8%
Qatar 1998	1.0%
Saudi Arabia 1996	1.6%
Syrian Arab Rep. 1993	0.8%
United Arab Emirates 1995	1.1%
Yemen 1994	0.5%

Source: (EL- Deeb, 2002)

Table 3:4 Disability Statistics in Selected Developed Countries

Australia 1998	19.3%
Canada 1991	15.5%
New Zealand 1996	20.0%
United Kingdom 1991	12.2%
United States 1994	15.0%

Source: (EL- Deeb, 2002)

This lower percentage of people with a disability in the ESCWA region may be related to certain issues (EL- Deeb, 2002). Some conditions or states may be considered to be an impairment or disability by some people or countries and may not be recognised or considered to be an impairment or disability by other people or countries, hence do not appear in official statistics. Where a condition is classified as an impairment or disability, some families may be reluctant to admit that a member of their family is disabled because this is not considered socially desirable, especially when the person is a female. People, even some of those responsible for collecting information, may also be unaware of the importance of gathering accurate data regarding the disabled population. Also, since the general population census does not include data regarding categories of disability, the definitions and explanations are still unclear (EL- Deeb, 2002).

Blackburn, Read et al (2007) noted in their study that even in the UK national data concerning disabled children is limited. This may be because of the way disability is defined, or the way data is collected or because of some other reason (Bajekal, Harries, Breman, & Woodfield, 2004; Blackburn et al., 2007).

The main source of information on the prevalence of disability and visual impairment in Bahrain is the population census. Bahrain was the first country in the GCC to carry out a census in 1941 (Central Statistics Organisation, 2001). However, the census may not be accurate for similar reasons to those described above. There is also a lack of uniformity in the questions used to identify the population with disabilities (Mbogoni & Me, 2002).

A further explanation may be because not all people with a disability in Bahrain are registered as such. However, after introducing a new law in 2006 (See Appendix 8) which introduced a monthly disability allowance, more people started to register, especially those with lower incomes (Women Meeting With New Vision, 2006). In addition, this may be related to the way disability is defined, in the Bahraini census document. Here the term disability/impairment refers to the 'physical or mental impairment that prevents or limits the person's activity/movement as compared with a healthy person in his/her age and other socio-economic characteristic'. The term 'blind' refers to 'a severe limitation or absence of sight'. Not all people with a visual impairment however, may be included in the category 'Blind'. They can be included in the category 'Amputee' if they are missing one or both of their eyes. They could also be included in the category 'Weak/Aged', if for example an older adult has a degenerative eye condition associated with aging. They could also be included in the category 'Others' (Central Statistics Organisation, 2001 :8).

The census may not be accurate as a result of the way information is gathered since the census is carried out by sending a representative from the census to an

interview with one of the family members (normally the father) and the questionnaire is then filled in (Central Statistics Organisation, 2001). Some may not be willing to talk about having a disabled family member either because they are ashamed of him/her or because some people think that if they talk about this, it may suggest that they need help and they do not want help. So, realistically, it depends on the individual's response to the interviewer. It is a reasonable assumption that disabilities are under reported in the Bahrain census.

Overall, Bahraini people with a disability account for less than 1% of the total population according to the 2001 census (Central Statistics Organisation, 2001). The total number of people with a disability in Bahrain in 2001 was 4,229 of which 460 (0.07%) are visually impaired, (See Table 3:5).

Table 3:5 Disabled Population of Bahrain by Sex, Cause and Type of Disability (2001)

Sex / Cause of Disability	Census 2001								
	Type of Disability								Total
	Blind	Deaf	Deaf & Mute	Amputee	Mentality Slow/ Strange Behaviour	Paralyzed	Weak Aged	Other	
Males									
Birth	54	38	98	18	312	67	0	223	810
Work Injury	19	2	1	18	3	9	7	32	91
Accident	18	4	5	38	32	43	20	92	252
Disease	154	18	21	46	85	135	100	140	699
Hereditary	8	16	32	5	65	6	0	74	206
Others	34	11	19	15	79	45	38	182	423
Total	287	89	176	140	576	305	165	743	2,481
Females									
Birth	39	33	84	12	219	59	0	161	607
Work Injury	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	4	8
Accident	9	3	3	10	16	23	8	29	101
Disease	95	15	13	27	59	149	96	110	564
Hereditary	6	13	32	7	64	12	0	54	188
Others	24	10	13	5	57	23	44	104	280
Total	173	74	145	63	416	267	148	462	1,748
Total									
Total	460	163	321	203	992	572	313	1,205	4,229

Source: (General Directorate of Statistics and Population Registry, 2007a)

Table 3:5 indicates that the main reason for visual impairments is disease (N=249; 54%), followed by birth defects (N=93; 20%). There are 460 (0.1%) Bahrainis citizens with visual impairments and 287 of these are men and 173 are women (See Table 3:5). Of the 4,229 people with disability 3,963 (0.6%) are Bahrainis citizens (See Table 3:6), which shows that the majority of disabled people in Bahrain are nationals. Table 3:6 below shows that the number of people with visual impairments increases after the age of 40 (N=358; 83.1%). Only 73 (17%) of people with visual impairments were under the age of 40.

Table 3:6 Disabled Bahraini Population by Age and Type of Disability (2001)

Age Group	Type of Disability								Total
	Blind	Deaf	Deaf and Mute	Amputee	Mentally Slow/Strange Behaviour	Paralyzed	Weak Aged	Others	
0-4	4	2	12	2	23	23	0	67	133
5-9	7	16	30	6	74	26	0	97	256
10-14	9	23	27	12	180	41	0	152	444
15-19	10	15	36	6	153	28	0	106	354
20-24	8	18	45	9	158	27	1	124	390
25-29	11	18	34	12	78	19	1	108	281
30-34	8	7	26	10	84	33	2	85	255
35-39	16	9	39	11	83	40	11	91	300
40-44	13	8	21	17	44	31	14	72	220
45-49	20	6	12	10	23	25	16	45	157
50-54	27	1	7	10	12	22	10	33	122
55-59	30	5	5	11	6	25	18	30	130
60-64	38	3	1	13	3	37	26	33	154
65+	230	20	9	49	14	159	199	87	767
Total	431	151	304	178	935	536	298	1130	3963

Source: (The Saudi-Bahraini Institute for the Blind, 2005)

On 16 July 2005, a draft law suggested creating a Supreme Committee for people with special needs in order to improve job opportunities for the disabled. This committee was to be chaired by the Minister of Social Development, a disabled person, a parent involved in the special needs community and a representative from the private and public sectors (The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2005, 2006b). However, when the actual law came into force in October 2006 (See Appendix 8),

many of these suggestions were not implemented. A Supreme Committee for people with special needs is yet to be implemented, although, this may actually increase exclusion instead of encourage inclusion. In June 2007, the media discussed creating a committee to implement this law under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development, (The law is discussed in more depth in Chapter Seven).

Bahraini law protects the rights of disabled people and a number of government, non-government and religious organisations have a responsibility to care for, support and help such people. The Regional Centre for the Blind was established in Bahrain as a regional Institute in 1974. There is a similar centre for children with hearing impairment, which was created in 1994. People with disabilities tend to be perceived by society as 'special' people who need to be protected rather than being viewed as full members of the society in which they live. However, the government is required by law to offer vocational training for those disabled people who wish to find employment. The Disabled Law of 2006 (See Appendix 8) states that any employer with more than 50 employees must have at least 2% of its workforce from those on the government's list of disabled workers. The Ministry of Social Development attempts to find public sector jobs (in the public telephone exchanges, for example) for disabled people while the government's housing regulations state that access must be provided for people with disabilities. As a result, most large public buildings, (the University, schools, and the Ministries), have ramps etc. to make them accessible (U.S. Department of State, 1994; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006). Such issues are explored in more detail in later chapters.

The Ministries that serve people with disabilities in Bahrain are the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Education. The private sector also helps people with disabilities via NGOs. People can obtain accommodation from the Ministry of Housing, their health needs are met by the Ministry of Health and a

dedicated department has been created at the Ministry of Education. Below I will outline services offered by the Ministry of Social Development (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs), while I have given a brief description about the educational services offered by Ministry of Education in section 3.5.1, I will also give a brief description of the FSoB as a provider that offers service to people with visual impairment in Bahrain.

3.6.1 The Ministry of Social Development

The current Ministry of Social Development was a division formed from the original Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. It was divided into two separate ministries in January 2005 according to decrease 29 of 2005 (Ministry of Social Development, 2007b). The Ministry of Social Development has a Directorate of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation. The Directorate has the responsibility of providing services and rehabilitation to people with special needs such as the elderly, people with disabilities, children whose parents are unknown and orphans. It carries out these functions through a number of centres and units (See Appendix 3) (Ministry of Labour & Social Affairs (Social Development), 2007).

More financial support was promised by the Ministry for Social Development for private organisations that take care of the elderly or the disabled. The Ministry is considering a plan to budget for the support of such private institutions. These institutions are growing in number and are providing an important network of support for older adults and the sick (The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2005).

Although most services for people with a disability in Bahrain come under this section, people with visual impairments do not receive services from this department. This unit provides services for most types of disability, excluding visual impairment, and does not provide equipment such as white canes, Braille typewriters and papers. People with visual impairment either care for themselves or get services via the

FSoB, the Institute of the Blind, charities or from the community. This will be explored in later finding chapters.

3.6.2 Friendship Society for the Blind

The FSoB is the only NGO in Bahrain that provides services for people with visual impairments. It was established in 1981 (FSoB, 2007). When the society was established, most board members were non-disabled people. This is why it is called the 'Friendship Society for the Blind'. Nowadays, the board members are mostly people with visual impairments and they have applied to change the name from 'for' to 'of' in line with the disability rights movement in Western countries (Shakespeare, 2006a).

There are several committees within the FSoB including the social committee, cultural committee, sport committee, employment committee, women's committee and public relations committee. Some committees were only established recently. The women's committee, for example, was established in 2002 in line with the new initiatives in the country to give women more rights and in line with the establishment of the Women's Supreme Council. The board has always had female members (FSoB, 2007).

The employment committee plays an important part in the work of the FSoB. It was also established later as earlier individual efforts were made to find employment for members. A committee was then established to work on this issue. Most of the people with visual impairments in Bahrain nowadays find employment with the support of the FSoB (FSoB, 2007), as will be discussed in Chapter Seven. The FSoB not only trained its younger members, it also used to offer a programme to train older members but this depended on the budget. However, ways of co-operating with ministries to fund such a project are being sought in order to help older visually impaired people to be independent. In addition, the FSoB is trying to open up more

job opportunities, as well as trying to raise the awareness of society concerning the abilities of people with visual impairments by showing their achievements and by using the media. In addition, the society established a nursery for children with visual impairments in 1991 after the Institute stopped having a nursery. It is clear that the FSoB increased its work in the areas of nursery provision and employment when the Institute focused more on the provision of primary and secondary education.

3.7 Provisions in Neighbouring Countries

Within the Arab world, the number of disabled people has risen significantly as a result of ongoing conflict in countries such as Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan and Algeria. The incidence of disability is also increasing because of poverty and malnutrition, especially in countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen. There is also some concern that consanguinity through the practice of marriage to preferential cousins leads to some congenital disabilities (Kabbara, 2002).

Although disability in the Arab region is continuing to grow in both size and scope, many disabled people are marginalised through segregated schooling and subsequently through limited participation in the economic and social life of their countries. Disabled women are doubly disadvantaged because of gender-based social stigma (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2002-2003).

Services in Bahrain are similar in some aspects to the services in other GCC countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar. The GCC countries share similar names for their institutions and centres: for example, *Al-Amal* (hope), *Al-Nour* (bright or light), *Al-Wafa'* (loyalty or homage).

In addition, in the GCC the responsibility for services for people with disabilities is divided between the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Education. Some countries, however, such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, are aiming

to make all such services the responsibility of the Ministry of Education while in Kuwait all educational services for people with disabilities are provided via the Ministry of Education in settings that are segregated by gender and disability. Kuwait is considered to have the most extensive facilities in the area for people with disabilities and spends the most in this sector, although, it has a less inclusive approach than Bahrain.

In some countries, people with disabilities are segregated by gender at an early stage, as in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait, while in Bahrain most of the institutions start to segregate by gender at 15 years of age, with the exception of the *Al-Amal* institution for people with learning disabilities that segregates pupils at 12 years although they share the same buildings and are not segregated for activities and parties. In general Bahrain, which has been less influenced by Islamic fundamentalism than other countries in the region, has less gender segregation across society (Al-Hanaei, Al-Sariery, & Al-Farsi, 2000; Al-Noeimi, 2000; Al-Qasemi, 2000; Al-Waznah & Al-Naser, 2000).

Chatty and Rabo (1997), described how in Oman in 1980 some services for people with disabilities were offered via the private sector. These were run mainly by women and by women's associations which opened centres for people with disabilities. Thus, this phenomenon was spread throughout the GCC with Bahrain being one such nation. For example, the *Al-Amal* institution for people with learning disabilities in Bahrain was opened in 1977 by one of the women's associations lead by elite women in Bahrain (Shirawi, 1989).

Summary

This chapter sets out the social and historical context of the study. Bahrain has a long history of welfare development. Services and developments such as those in

education and health care started as early as the 19th century and, since the discovery of oil, the economy of Bahrain has improved considerably. Bahrain began to rebuild its government soon after the Declaration of Independence from British colonial rule in the early 1970s. Since then, massive improvements have been achieved in the fields of social care, education and economic development. Bahrain was, for a time, in the forefront of provision regionally. Now, however, the other GCC countries are becoming more developed than Bahrain. Bahrain is more liberal than other GCC countries in terms of its interpretation of Islam and, in particular, regarding gender segregation and political rights (Seikaly, 1997, 1998; Zahlan, 1989).

This chapter shows that currently women have rights in Bahrain and are mostly treated equally to men by the government, but in some cases equality is not obtained for reasons to do with culture and religion. The chapter also gives an overview of the services for people with disabilities in Bahrain in general and for visually impaired young people specifically. The next chapter addresses the research methodology.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter Three described the setting of Bahrain where the study took place, including aspects of geography, economy, culture and issues of gender, equality, marriage and education. These of course, all needed to be taken into consideration when choosing research methods that would be suitable for the society, time and resource available, and that would enable the research questions to be answered. Therefore, this chapter will start by recapping on the research aims and questions before discussing the research designs and methods used in this study.

This research adopts a case study approach that uses a mixture of qualitative methods including semi-structured and narrative interviews and focus groups, as well as some observations and documentary analysis as supplementary approaches. Observation was not undertaken as a main method due to access difficulties which will be explored in the chapter. In addition, it was decided not to use quantitative methods since the number of people in Bahrain with a visual impairment within the chosen age sample is small. Most of these were interviewed and, therefore, data has been gathered from a large proportion of them. Furthermore, there are few, if any, resources available for conducting questionnaires using Braille, which meant that it was more convenient to carry out narrative interviews with the users.

The chapter will address the process of sampling and how different methods were adapted with different groups. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups

were conducted with policy makers and service providers and some focus groups were carried out with teachers. Narrative interviews were conducted with service users. Ethical issues and access are also addressed in this chapter, as well as my positionality during the field work and how the data was collected and analysed.

4.1 Research Aims and Questions

The main aims of this research were as follows:

- To analyse the extent to which issues of diversity (gender, culture and religion) are considered in both policy and service provision for young people who are visually impaired in a Muslim society.
- To consider the gendered experiences of visually impaired young people in education, employment and married life within an Islamic society.

In order to fulfil these aims, the following questions will be addressed:

1. How are policies and provision for visually impaired people influenced by interpretations of Islam in an Arab Muslim society?
2. What are the gendered experiences of visually impaired young people in an Islamic society in relation to education, work and marriage?

4.2 Research Design and Methods

Selecting the most appropriate methods for research depends on the research questions, the information needed to answer these questions, the resources (both financial and human) that are available, and the extent to which people in the field are accessible (Patton, 2002). The social, cultural and political context of the research also influences the choice of research method (Abuateya, 2002; Anwar, 1979).

This research study explored how gender, culture and religion in Bahrain has shaped service provision for visually impaired young people and how visually

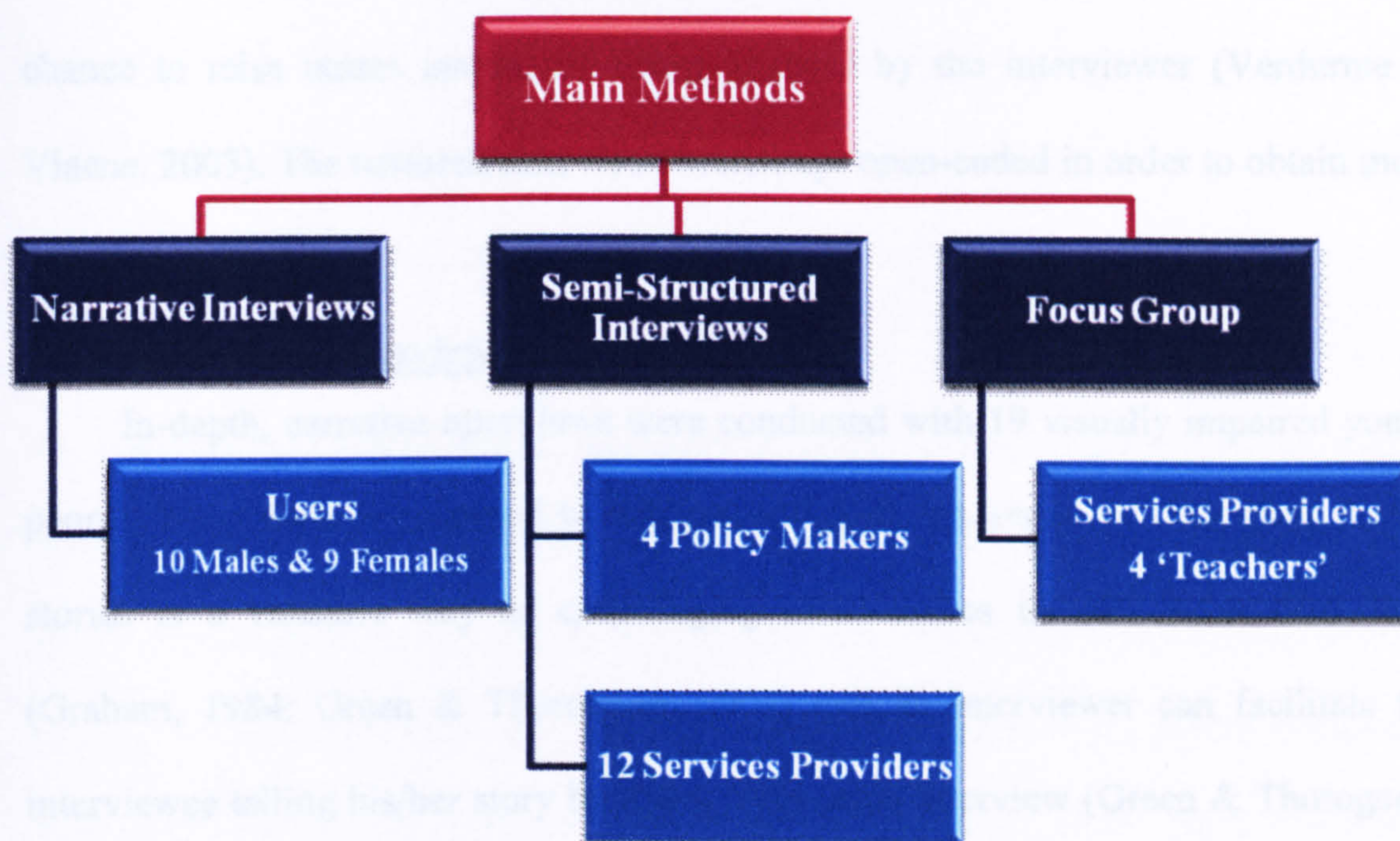
impaired young people have experienced services and policy, in relation to education, employment and marriage. Interviews with young, visually impaired people enabled them to voice their experiences of living with visual impairment. Service providers explained how gender, culture and religion in Bahrain shaped the provision of services.

A range of qualitative methods were used to collect the data. Semi-structured and focus group interviews were used as the main method (See Figure 4:1), with observations and documentary analysis as supplementary methods (See Figure 4:2). Pope and May (1999) suggest that researchers employ more than one method to collect data in order to obtain a valid, holistic and systematic picture when using an interpretative approach. This approach made it possible to consider how the views of people in different positions, such as policy makers, service providers and service users, coincided or differed.

The timescale of the fieldwork was not continuous as I had to suspend in the first stage of the fieldwork due to a car accident. The first stage of the fieldwork took place between December 2003 to January 2004, when I managed to get the list of users, conducted a pilot interview with visually impaired service provider and got permissions to do interviewees with service providers. However, I could not carry these out because of my car accident. I started again during May 2004 where I had to update the list, seek new permissions to carry out interviews within a new timetable. The other pilot interviewees with a female user and two service providers were carried out in May and June of 2004. The main fieldwork was carried out between July 2004 and November 2004. In total, fieldwork lasted around seven months.

4.2.1 Main Methods

Figure 4:1 Main Methods



4.2.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

An interview is ‘a verbal exchange of information between two or more people, with one person gathering information from the other(s)’ (Pole & Lampard, 2002 :128) and can give insight into a situation (Bryman, 1998). It is also one of the most frequently used methods in qualitative research (Green & Thorogood, 2004).

This study used semi-structured interviews to generate data from two groups of informants; policy makers and service providers. Interviews with key policy makers and service providers aimed to explore how aspects of gender, culture and religion in Bahrain shape policy and service provision for visually impaired young people.

Some interview questions were used to collect demographic data. These were structured, direct and descriptive, enabling all the desired information to be collected. The interviews were semi-structured, using topic guides, (See Appendix 4) and were conducted as a face-to-face conversation between the interviewer and the interviewees.

Qualitative interviews use open-ended questions with a topic guide referring to what will be covered in the research. An open-ended approach gives interviewees the chance to raise issues instead of being directed by the interviewer (Verdurme & Viaene, 2003). The research interviews were kept open-ended in order to obtain more information.

4.2.1.2 Narrative interviews

In-depth, narrative interviews were conducted with 19 visually impaired young people. They were encouraged to talk about significant events in their lives. Using stories is a valuable way of encouraging interviewees to talk about their lives (Graham, 1984; Green & Thorogood, 2004) and an interviewer can facilitate the interviewee telling his/her story by using a narrative interview (Green & Thorogood, 2004). This shows that stories are not the only form of narrative since individuals, when talking about their lives, tell autobiographical narratives in their own right (Riessman, 1994). Portelli (1997) makes the point that oral history is a science, but it is also the art of the individual. The narrative approach has been discovered only recently as a social research method, although the form is old (Riessman, 1994).

Two particular types of interview are associated with qualitative research: life history and oral history. In the case of the life history interview, the participant is invited to consider his/her past. This approach is not, however, popular as it has limited opportunities for generalisation. It does have certain strengths from a qualitative point of view (Bryman, 1998).

The interviews in this research were based around the stories and experiences of visually impaired young people with a special focus on culture, religion, education, employment, services and policies. The interviews were recorded and helped to give the study validity as an accurate record of the interviewees own experiences and behaviour (Beresford, 1997; Vernon, 1998). Little is known about the experiences of

visually impaired young people in Bahrain from their own point of view. Additionally, through the individual stories, both culture and gender inequalities can be examined by viewing the participants' knowledge of life (Riessman, 1994). Information learned from oral or spoken histories allows the voices of groups that are often pushed to the edges of historical research for being too ordinary, unimportant or marginal to be heard (Bryman, 1998).

Narratives are important components in research because they allow meaning to be constructed and experienced, which is an essential human activity (Riessman, 1994). Narrative relate not only to the life span of the individual but also to accounts relating to episodes, as well as their interconnections. Narrative is generally found in interviews in which interviewees tell their stories (Riessman, 1994). Such a technique can offer an insight into a situation (Bryman, 1998). The advantages of the interview are: checking researchers' interpretations; accruing data from groups closed to the researcher; expanding the scope of the study; studying phenomena without a geographical base (Bryman, 1988). Narrative interviews, which deal with life stories or with biographical research, focus on examining an interviewee's perspective as it is demonstrated in the story telling about facts surrounding that particular life. One concern, however, might be how this perspective changes in different contexts (Bryman, 1998).

All the advantages of oral and life history outlined above were used in the research by letting interviewees use memory to recall their experiences of living with a visual impairment and how beliefs and practices concerning gender, culture and religion in Bahrain shaped their lives. Interviewing people with disabilities may take more time in order to understand their experiences and perspectives (Beresford, 1997). From my point of view, interviewing visually impaired people may have fewer difficulties than interviewing other people with a disability such as people with

learning difficulties or hearing impairments. This is because visually impaired people generally have good communication skills in the absence of other impairments. Second, I had experience of being with them through having carried out previous voluntary work with visually impaired people.

I interviewed each interviewee depending on his/her individual abilities and was prepared to be flexible. If an interviewee was tired or could not continue the interview, it was stopped and another appointment was arranged. This only happened in two interviews and this was because the bus came and the interviewee had to leave. All other interviews were carried out only once. Most interviewees enjoyed talking and tried to make interviews last longer as they said they had never talked to anyone about these issues before.

Gillham (2000) suggests that ideally, researchers should spend time with the interviewee before the interview takes place to establish a relationship and to request consent. In this research it was not necessary to spend time with service user interviewees because I already knew them from my previous work. Beresford (1997) suggests that it may be helpful to involve a familiar person in the interview. In this research, however, this was not done as it was felt that this might affect the responses of the interviewees, especially if this person was in a position of power, such as a teacher. The sample consisted of adult visually impaired people aged 16-26 years so they could be interviewed without involving anyone other than themselves.

4.2.1.3 Focus groups

The focus group method was used to complement the individual interviews and was carried out with teachers of young visually impaired people (See Table 4:1). In a focus group, people can examine their own views as a group through a series of open-ended questions in ways that would be more difficult to achieve in an individual interview. Focus groups are a kind of group interview that use the communication and

interaction between the participants to generate data quickly and conveniently. An interview guide is used (Gibbs, 1997) to insure that the main topics are covered. In this study, the interviews were tape-recorded for later transcription. Krueger (1994) notes that respondents often encourage each other and identify common experiences. The researcher must encourage, probe, manage and maintain a focused discussion. Krueger (1994 :27) notes that the group 'must be small enough for everyone to have the opportunity to share insights and yet large enough to provide diversity of perceptions'. The groups in this study consisted of 4-8 people in order to achieve diversity of opinion.

This method is low cost and more in-depth information is provided quickly when time is limited (Greenbaum, 2000). However, the problems with such groups include the fact that there is little control over the discussion, individuals might not say what they think, a researcher might not always understand an individual's meaning, they are not confidential or anonymous and they often require more planning (Gibbs, 1997). However, focus groups are sometimes appropriate for dealing with sensitive issues as group discussion allows taboo topics to be confronted. Indeed, mutual support may be provided, to discuss the topic (Kitzinger, 1995). Focus groups were used in this research because of the method's advantage of helping to generate information from a group who shared similar experiences, in this case, of teaching visually impaired young people.

There were difficulties such as choosing a suitable time for all, informants arriving late and my gender and age. It was also difficult to choose a time that suited the whole group. This was because the interviewees were teachers and each had their own timetable. In the boys' and girls' schools, it was decided to carry out the interviews during the break but this meant that the interview was short and time was limited. As soon as the bell rang, teachers started going to classes. Second, in

Bahrain, people find it difficult to arrive on time. People always make a joke in Bahrain that if people come on time, they must be English, not Bahraini. This meant that it was always difficult to start and end on time. Arriving on time is mostly valued when necessary for religious matters and very important events, while normal events are less respected. In Bahrain meeting times are mostly arranged depending on prayer times (e.g. will meet after noon prayer), and as Bahrain has two religious sects and prayer times are different between these sects, this makes arriving on time even more complicated. In this study, waiting for others to arrive made less time available for the interview and people left the interview to pray without asking permission as this is accepted practice in Bahraini culture.

The Institute for the Blind teachers chose to have the interview at the end of the day when teachers were free to attend. However, most of them went to pray before they came which took up some of the time that was arranged. Then, when the bell rang, they all wanted to leave as some of them used the Institute bus. This meant that they could not wait and had to go. Ideally, I should have arranged another interview to gather more information. However, Ramadan occurred and working hours were shortened so it was difficult to arrange another interview.

The UoB focus group interview presented different difficulties. I had to search for the teachers who usually teach visually impaired students and then review their timetables. University teachers rarely stay in the university if they do not have to give a lecture. The university is based in two campuses, which are in two different cities. In addition, teachers were also based in different departments, which meant that getting access was more complicated as each department needed a separate letter for gaining access. Therefore, I focused on the Social Work department. I found that most staff in the Social Work department had more experience of teaching visually impaired students than in other departments. Getting access to them was easy,

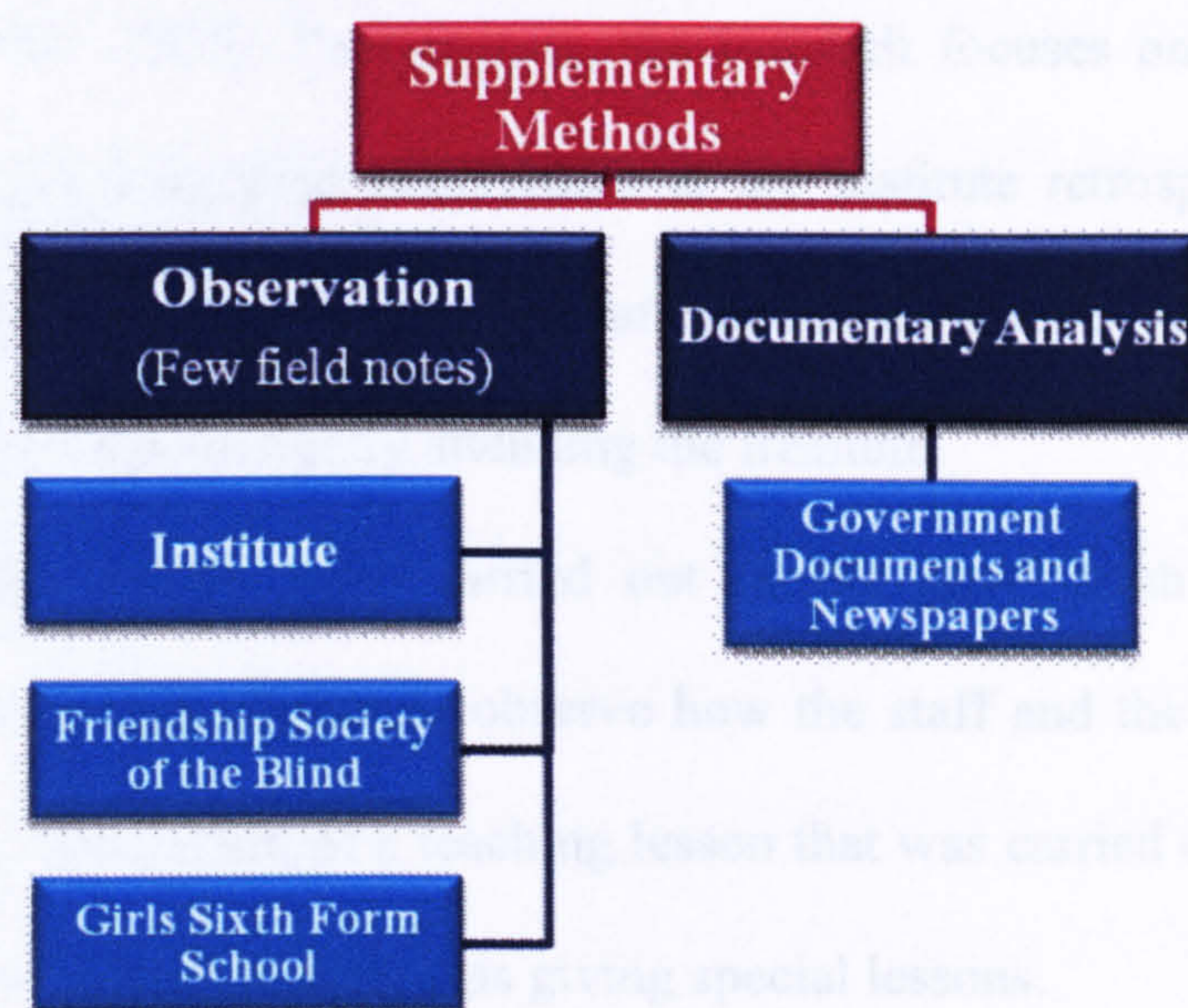
because I was a research assistant in the same department and knew most of them as either a colleague or former student. Additionally, arranging times was easier, because the interview was conducted after a department meeting finished, which meant all were present. However, at the end of the interview, some of them went to a lecture or to pray and came back. All of the lecturers were males, but they were used to a mixed gender environment so there was less of a gender difficulty. Nevertheless, because they let me sit at the head of the meeting table, I felt awkward because I was the youngest person present and this seating arrangement is unusual in Bahrain. This interview was further complicated by the fact that interviewees were very tense following a difficult discussion about work organisation that had arisen in a meeting they had attended prior to the interview. As a result, interviewees were reluctant to talk to each other during the focus group.

My fieldwork experience shows that some interviewees were more cooperative than others. All users and visually impaired service providers were very co-operative, in addition to the interviewees from medical background and/or who had relatives with visual impairment. Some policy makers and service providers however, were less interested in the topic even though it was related to their work place. In general it seemed that those with personal experience of visual impairment* were more willing to spend time being interviewed and give more detailed interviews than those who had no such experience. This relates to one of the key arguments in this thesis that more positive attitudes towards and better services for visually impaired people is likely to arise out of experience of meeting and working with them.

* Visually impaired themselves or had relatives who were visually impaired, or those with experience of working with visually impaired people.

4.2.2 Supplementary Methods

Figure 4:2 Supplementary Methods



4.2.2.1 Observations

It can be argued that all social research is a form of participant observation as the social world cannot be studied without being a part of it (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998). Observation concerns the collection of information about the physical and social worlds (Pole & Lampard, 2002).

Discussing gender is not easy in Bahraini society. Although it is a relatively liberal country, it is also a Muslim Arab state. Neither policy makers, service providers nor users would talk about this issue freely, especially when the interviewees were male and I was an unmarried female. Although some issues related to gender were discussed, issues related to sexuality and marriage or even men talking about their position in the society were often not fully, freely or directly discussed. It was often necessary to pose questions in different ways and to use several prompts to elicit fuller responses.

This limitation could have been overcome if some participant observation had been undertaken in the field to observe relations between pupils in the Institute. A limited amount of observation was undertaken after interviewing the Head of the

Institute and some notes were written. More extensive participant observation was not carried out owing to the cultural unacceptability of a female observing in a single sex boys school (Pini, 2005). Furthermore, the research focuses on young people and interviewees describing their experiences at the Institute retrospectively. Thus, the interviewees would not have been the same as those students who would have been observed, that is, those currently attending the Institute.

Some observations were carried out in the girls' sixth form school after interviewing the social worker to observe how the staff and the students dealt with her. In another observation of a teaching lesson that was carried out on the interview day when the geography teacher was giving special lessons.

Gender is particularly important within a socio-cultural context where segregation by gender and patriarchy are the norm. Gender issues needed to be considered in this research by choosing appropriate methods and processes since cultural and social norms elicit certain expectations from researchers and participants in terms of gender (Jarviluoma, Moisala, & Vilkkko, 2003). I would have been the only female in the school (where they were not used to seeing females). In addition I was 28 and single at that time. A woman has more freedom once she is married and as she gets older, therefore, before marriage, women have to be careful about integrating with unrelated men (Lewando-Hundt, 1984). Therefore, my being in the school would be viewed as odd by the students and this might have affected their behaviour. This would have been very difficult as most students were conservative, as they were mostly *Shi'a* from villages around the town. Other researchers have noted similar fieldwork difficulties. For example, Anwar (1979) describes how gender issues affected his research on Pakistanis when he had less access to the women in the community and could not observe them easily because of the use of partition (*purdah*).

4.2.2.2 Documentary analysis

Documentary analysis was used to supplement data obtained from the interviews and focus groups. Official documents are important sources of information that can shed light on the interests of organisations and state agencies (Padgett, 1998). In this study, documents provided both a descriptive record of the development of policies and practices and insights into the public discourse on disability issues. In this way, much can be learned about the society (Pole & Lampard, 2002).

The documents used were Bahrain Decree Law Number (74) of 2006 Concerning the Care, Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled (Appendix 8) and Bahrain Labour Law for the Private Sector (1976) Number 23: The Regulation of the Employment of Vocationally Rehabilitated Disabled Persons (Appendix 9). These documents from the Bahrain government law were analysed and compared with the study data and current service provision.

4.3 Sampling

The selection of a sample is an important issue in research. As Burgess (1982) says, 'the validity of the sample depends largely on choosing appropriate participants, rather than on the number or size of the sample' (Pope & Mays, 1999). Burgess (1982) and Padgett (1998) stressed the importance of sampling in field research, especially in terms of site, people, time and events, since all these aspects influence the kind of data that can be obtained. Flick (2004) suggests that within qualitative studies theoretical sampling can be considered as 'royal way', especially in theory development.

Within the social science research, probability and non-probability sampling are the main approaches. The first approach, probability sampling utilises some form of random selection to ensure that individuals have an equal chance of being selected. This increases the chance that the sample will be as similar to the wider population of

interest as possible, hence the generalisability of the findings. This sampling method, however, is time consuming and is not possible if a list of the whole population of interest is not available (Bell, 2005; Cohen, Manion, Morrison, & NetLibrary, 2003).

Within the probability approach there are different techniques, such as random sampling, which give equal chances of selecting within the population. Thus, it may result in adequate cases not being selected. Another technique is systematic sampling, which means selecting a sample systematically, but it has the same disadvantages as random sampling since some elements may be missed. Cluster sampling is used in large population studies, but some clusters may have few representatives. Stage sampling extends the previous technique so that a sample can be chosen from a sample. Stratified sampling uses the techniques of both random and systematic sampling (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006; Cohen et al., 2003).

The second approach of sampling is non-probability. In social research it is not always feasible, practical or theoretically sensible to use random sampling. Non-probability sampling allows the selection of information rich cases for a more in-depth study of the phenomena of interest (Cohen et al., 2003). There are a number of different techniques within non-probability sampling. For example, in convenience or accidental sampling, the nearest available sample is chosen to get the required sample size. Quota sampling ensures participants with particular characteristics are selected. In purposive sampling, a range of participants with experience of the phenomena of interest are selected subjectively by the researcher. Dimensional sampling, which is used when different factors of population are needed and there should be a response from each factor. The snowball technique is used when a researcher is able to recruit a small number of participants who can then introduce them to further people who can be recruited (Blaxter et al., 2006; Cohen et al., 2003). In the GCC snowball

sampling is often referred to as net sampling as the term snowball has little meaning in countries where there is no snow.

In this research purposive sampling was mostly used. Bahrain has a small population and so it is easy to select a purposeful sample of users, policy makers and providers who could provide rich information relevant to the research questions. Purposive or convenient sampling technique is thought to be particularly appropriate for biographical-narrative studies (Creswell, 1998; Miller & Brewer, 2003; Rubin & Babbie, 2007). This sampling was also 'theoretical' in that once participants were selected, data was collected and analysed in tandem to aid theory generation (Bryman, 2004). Emerging ideas helped me to decide what other data to collect and therefore, who else to interview. For example, after an initial analysis of data from some service user interviews, it was clear that mobility and mobility training was an emerging theme. Therefore, it was necessary to interview the mobility trainer at the Institute in order to collect data on this theme.

Because of my knowledge of government departments in Bahrain, it was possible to select policy makers in key positions who could talk in depth about policy and service provision for visually impaired people. Service providers from the Institute and the FSoB were selected as these were the only organisations that serve people with visual impairment in Bahrain. Social workers and teachers were selected for schools that had visually impaired student. School teachers who participated in the focus groups were nominated by the Headmaster of the schools. Institute teachers were also nominated by the Institute's Headmaster depending on their years of working experience. Both sighted and visually impaired teachers, from variety of subjects and both sexes were included although the majority were females. Other individual service providers were chosen depending on their positions as they were the only people holding these positions.

The sample of service users chosen varied in terms of age, gender, education and employment. The statistics from the FSoB were used as the government census figures were considered to be inaccurate as discussed in Chapter Three. However, in some cases, the FSoB statistics were not accurate either. One example of inaccurate information was that three of the members' ages were recorded as 25/26, but after the interview it was found that their actual age was 27/28 which exceeded the age set for the sample.

According to the FSoB records there were 31 users that I could interview and I was able to interview most of them (See Appendix 5 for a list of interviewees). A list was made from the FSoB's records of visually impaired males and females aged between 16 and 26. Of these, 9 females and 11 males were selected. I tried to choose interviewees depending on their education level and from students who were studying only in Bahrain at the time of the fieldwork. In other cases, they were chosen depending on different issues. For example, there were two females looking for jobs after school but the married one was interviewed because she was the only married female in the sample. In another case, it was necessary to choose between two university graduate students so the one who was working as a telephone operator was avoided because most of the working sample worked in the same job. Students who studied through distance learning or who did not finish their education were also excluded. In total, only 4 were finally excluded. There were 24 possible interviewees and 19 were interviewed, as one of these was interviewed for the pilot interview (See Appendix 5 and Appendix 6).

Table 4:1 Sample

Sample		Method			
		Narrative interviews	Semi-structured interviews	Focus groups	
Policy Makers	1. Ministry of Education.		-	1	-
	2. Ministry of Social Development.			1	
	3. Ministry of Health.			1	
	4. Supreme Council for Women.			1	
Service Providers	1. Vocational specialists from the Ministry of Social Development.		-	1	-
	2. Headmaster of the Saudi-Bahraini Institute.			1	
	3. Chairman of the FSoB			1	
	4. Councillor and Chairwoman of the National Committee for Employment and Training PWD (Ministry of Social Development).			1	
	Social workers from:		-		-
	1. The Saudi-Bahraini Institute			1	
2. Boys' sixth form schools,			1		
3. Girls' sixth form schools			1		
4. University of Bahrain			2		
1. PE teacher in the Saudi-Bahraini Institute & Sport trainer in FSoB			1		
2. Visually impaired University lecturer		1			
Teachers (6-8 in each group=26) from:		-	-		
1. The Saudi-Bahraini Institute				1	
2. Boys' sixth form schools				1	
3. Girls' sixth form schools				1	
4. University of Bahrain				1	
Service Users	In Education	Males attending sixth form schools	2	-	
		Females attending sixth form schools	2		
		Males attending university	3		
		Females attending university	2		
	Out of Education	From a workplace, those who found work after sixth form school	2	-	
		From a workplace, those who found work after college	2		
		From a workplace, those who found work after university	2		
		Looking for employment after school	2		
		Looking for employment after university	2		
			20	14	
		34			
		In total: 38 interviews (60 persons)			

The sample in this study was selected to ensure the research of emerging theoretical ideas. Although it did not follow the exact steps of the 'theoretical sampling' that is often used in grounded theory (Bryman, 2004). This will be discussed in section 4.4. However, it used the most suitable way of sampling considering the resources available and the outcomes needed in order to answer the research questions. The sample consisted of interviews with policy makers, service providers and users (See Table 4:1). Four pilot interviews were undertaken before interviewing the whole sample.

4.3.1 Policy Makers

Four interviews were conducted with policy makers. The first was with the Assistant Under-Secretary for Education Services and Private Education from the Ministry of Education. He was also chairman of the Saudi-Bahraini Institute for the Blind. The other three policy makers were all females. The Under-Secretary from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is a member of the royal family and asked the Director of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation to attend the interview as well. The third policy maker interview was conducted with the General Secretary of the Supreme Council for Women, whose position is equivalent to the rank of minister. A further interviewee was the Head of Department from the Ministry of Health who is in charge of issues concerning the visually impaired.

4.3.2 Service Providers

A vocational specialist from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was present at the service providers' interviews, as was the Headmaster of the Saudi-Bahraini Institute for the Blind and the vice-chairman of the FSoB. Interviews were carried out with social workers from the Saudi-Bahraini Institute, from sixth form schools (for girls and boys), and from the University. In addition, a visually impaired

university lecturer and a sport trainer, who worked in the Institute and in the FSoB, were interviewed.

Four focus groups were carried out in order to generate data from teachers who had experience in teaching visually impaired young people. These four focus groups were carried out at different levels of educational provision with teachers who taught visually impaired students at different levels from the Saudi-Bahraini Institute, the girls' and boys' sixth form school, and the University.

In total, 11 individual interviews were carried out with service providers, as well as four focus groups with 6-8 people in each group (26 individuals). This means 37 service providers in all were interviewed.

4.3.3 Service Users

In order to look at the gendered experiences of visually impaired young people in an Islamic society, the study considered the effect on disabled young people of being in institutions that were segregated by disability, but not by gender and then transferring to schools that were segregated by gender, but not by disability and then moving on to university and/or work in mixed settings. The young people in this study were visually impaired students and graduates between 16 and 26 years of age.

A sample of 19 users, visually impaired young people of both genders, was interviewed. They included males and females from sixth form schools, college and university, and the workforce. Some had found work after sixth form school, college or university, while others were still looking for employment after attending these institutions.

4.4 Data Analysis

The theoretical approach to data analysis used in this research is grounded theory. This is systematic approach where theories emerge out of the study data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). My theorising about the way Islamic interpretations and

gender shape people's experiences of visual impairment in Bahrain, together with the policies and services for them therefore, is derived directly from the interview data, limited observation and documentary analysis rather than from a consideration of grand theory. It is suggested that such an approach is particularly suited to new areas of studies, such as this study of visual impairment in Bahrain (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Where no theory exists, grounded theory allows new theory to emerge in a new area of study (Bryman, 2004; Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Creswell, 1998).

In a grounded theory approach, data collection, data analysis and theory building are connected. It is often described as an iterative process in that data collection, analysis and theorising occur alongside each other (Bryman, 2004). A grounded theory approach involves a series of tools to guide it including theoretical sampling, coding, theoretical saturation and constant comparison (Bryman, 2004). This study has used theoretical sampling, coding and constant comparison, and to a lesser extent theoretical saturation. Theoretical sampling was used for the reasons discussed in section 4.3 above and, in particular, to ensure that the data collected assisted the emerging theory (Bryman, 2004). Constant comparison refers to keeping a close relationship between the data and development of concepts. The data being coded is constantly compared to other coded data in the category so that theory can emerge (Bryman, 2004). Thus, I constantly compared data from interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis to see if it fitted the coding and to establish how it elaborated on the emerging ideas. I looked not only for data that matched or fitted categories but also for data that contrasted as both these helped theoretical ideas about gender, disability and Islam to emerge from the data.

Theoretical saturation refers to the process of collecting, coding and reviewing data until there is no further point in doing so as categories and themes are well illuminated (Bryman, 2004). In this research, it cannot be claimed that theoretical

saturation was reached for all themes. This was because it would have been useful to have collected more data to illuminate some themes. This was not possible because there were no additional interviewees to recruit. An example of this related to the theme of visually impaired women's experiences of marriage. It was only possible to interview one visually impaired married woman whose age fell within the age range of this study as there are no other married visually impaired women in Bahrain between the ages of 16 and 26.

Coding is a key process in grounded theory and in qualitative analysis in general and this begins after collecting initial data (Bryman, 2001). Coding enables the data to be analysed by creating categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Moreover, codes will enable the development of ideas and theories to emerge. Thus, in grounded theory codes are not just a way of organising data, but part of the process of theory building (Pole & Lampard, 2002; Richards & Richards, 1994).

In this study, recorded interviews and focus groups were analysed for content through identifying key themes. The interviews were coded in lower order descriptive categories using NVivo. As is known, there are many approaches to sorting and organising qualitative data. These include cross-sectional and categorical indexing, the use of diagrams and charts (Mason, 1996) and other approaches.

To analyse the data from the focus groups and interviews, discussions on similar themes were compared and responses were coded. Coding enables the data to be analysed by sorting it into categories.

The NVivo software programme was used for the analysis of narrative, focus groups and semi-structured interviews, as Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) has become an accepted means of managing qualitative data. According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), software packages for analysing qualitative data are now well-known and this is a fast-growing field. Coding data for

use with computer programmes is still not analysis. It is important to avoid the belief that coding using a software package gives qualitative research a scientific gloss. In my study, transcription of interviews, observation notes and focus groups, produced a great deal of text that could be handled more easily in CAQDAS.

It is clear that, in terms of basic underlying ideas, the computerised approach is no great advance over manually indexing, typed or manuscript notes and transcripts, or marking them using code-words, coloured inks, etc. However, in practice, the computer offers many advantages. The speed and comprehensiveness of searches is an undoubted benefit. Unlike a human, the computer does not search the data until it comes up with the first example that is enough to illustrate an argument, and it will not stop after it has found just one or a couple of apposite quotations or vignettes. The software has the further advantage over manually coding and searching in that it can cope with multiple and overlapping codes. This means it can do different searches, using more than one code word simultaneously. The software is able to deal with very large numbers of codings and separate code words and, in purely mechanical terms, the computer can do more comprehensive and more complex code-and-retrieve operations than can be achieved by manual techniques (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

According to Kelle (1997), what is problematic in the context of an exploratory research strategy is that, if theory building is the main purpose of the textual analysis, the codes serve only a heuristic purpose. Codes point very generally to one of the different areas or aspects of the phenomenon which the researcher is interested in investigating. However, it is really the text itself that is of interest and not the fact that the relevant parts of the text are labelled with a certain code. Kelle (1997) states that there are no empirical content hypotheses at hand and the real aim is to develop them from the material. If this is successful, then statements can be formulated and these can be tested empirically.

Ford et al. (2000) see the advantages of using software in that it reduces the time necessary for data analysis, a strength highlighted earlier by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). Miles and Huberman (1994) add that it cuts out drudgery, ensures completeness and refinement, and makes analysis flexible. However, the growing literature on CAQDAS can be seen to express hopes as well as fears. The hopes are that CAQDAS will help automate and thus speed up and enliven the coding process and that it will provide a more complex way of looking at and finding relationships in the data. It will provide a formal structure for writing and storing memos to develop the analysis and help develop more conceptual and theoretical thinking about the data (Barry, 1998). Fears relate to placing distance between the researcher and the data. Over reliance on CAQDAS may lead to description rather than theory building and loss of content analysis.

Language can affect data analysis as the way questions are asked and responses interpreted affects how data is interpreted (Beresford, 1997). Moreover, language may be a problem when the interviewer and interviewee do not share the same language (Green & Thorogood, 2004). From the standpoint of this research, sharing the same language and social context helped me in articulating the aims of the study and in eliciting and interpreting data from respondents. I conducted interviews in Arabic. The interviews were completed using colloquial Arabic and all interviews were translated. However, one user felt it was easier to be interviewed in English because of her level of education and her ethnicity. Also the policy maker from the Ministry of Health spoke English for some of the interview.

Gillham (2000) suggests that researchers should transcribe tapes immediately after the interviews have been completed in case the recording is faulty in some way and so that any missing information can then be recalled. Transcription was not made by me. A professional transcriber/translator was used to ensure the quality of the

work and to save time. The professional translator was fluent in Arabic and English. This ensured the level and the quality of translation. This was also double-checked by me. Moreover, as a form of confidentiality and security, the data set was anonymous. In addition, the translator was from another Arab country and lived in the UK, so she did not know the interviewees. In the interview I used two recorders so that I could be sure if one did not work, the other would. In addition, the interviews were copied with one original sent to the transcriber and the other kept in a locked place in Bahrain in case the other copy was lost in the post or in transit. The transcriber always returned the tapes immediately after finishing them. Therefore, I now have one complete set locked away in Bahrain and another (the original) locked away securely in the UK.

Grounded theory has been criticised because it takes a great deal of time due to the need for recording, transcribing and coding all of the interview data (Bryman, 2004). As was discussed earlier, this study has minimised this difficulty by using a translator, transcriber and the use of CAQDAS. Another criticism is that by using such an approach the flow of narrative context can be lost (Bryman, 2004). This was one of the difficulties I faced in presenting the data. Although I have tried to avoid it by referring backward and forward to the service users stories, this has not been easy to achieve and at times their stories may appear disjointed.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability must be addressed by the researcher throughout the whole process since these are central elements in judging the quality and rigor of the research (Bryman, 2001). The credibility of the data gathered in this study was aided by my own understanding of the social world under investigation. Furthermore, using

a range of qualitative methods strengthened the validity of the findings through triangulation (Blaxter et al., 2006; Bryman, 2001; Burgess, 1982; Silverman, 2005).

It can be argued that data's validity lies in its ability to make situations clearer and to facilitate an understanding of facts and relations which emerge from the setting being studied. In this study, I was well aware of what Bryman (2004) called 'going native' but being an insider as well as an outsider (discussed in Section 4.7) offers richer data that has greater validity and reliability (Blaxter et al., 2006; Bowling, 2002).

Validity can be defined as how correct or credible a description, explanation, etc. is, but how this is understood depends on the approach and how the outcomes of the research are interpreted. Reliability, on the other hand, is concerned with the design and development of the research and what should be included. Keeping the research consistent involves both internal reliability and external stability, which is the degree of consistency of a measure over time (Punch, 2005).

Crossley and Vulliamy (1997) considered that, in order to be reliable, research should usually be able to be replicated by others. However, in qualitative research, since researchers' values and experiences are likely to influence how the work is directed, it would be unlikely that another researcher would be able to replicate the study exactly. In this research, for example, although all the steps were documented, it would not be easy to replicate the work at a different time or in a different setting because things change continually and the social or cultural context may be different. These differences also extend to people's perceptions and attitudes. For instance, perceptions regarding gender integration or segregation will almost certainly change over time and will be different in other groups at different times or in different contexts.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007), however, argued that, to qualitative researchers, the accuracy and credibility of data is more important than being able to replicate their research and that, in practice, the analysis and management of data is an important and ongoing focus of qualitative research. So, since the data is analysed according to the knowledge and experience of the researcher, a defining feature of such research is the role of the researcher and the researcher's own involvement in the whole process, especially during the collection of data. Therefore, only I collected and analysed the data and, after each interview, I felt I knew better how to conduct the next interview. It was an interactive process.

Among the threats to validity the researcher should include strategies in the research design to address such threats (Maxwell, 2005). Maxwell (2005) also identified the following as threats to validity: reactivity, researcher bias and misperception or misinterpretation of behaviour. Reactivity, may be personal and/or professional but, in this study, reactivity was reduced because I am from the same culture, and have lived and worked in this area for most of my life. I was also familiar with the work of the Institute and the FSoB because I had been a volunteer there. I was acutely conscious that, because of my knowledge, views and assumptions could affect my selection, reporting and interpretation of what I saw and heard, resulting in invalid data and bias. However, this internal knowledge of the setting can also be seen as a strength in this research as this permitted me to examine the findings in a critical way and explain them within the context.

Moreover, I discussed the findings of my research regularly with visually impaired colleagues and presented two papers at a conference organised in Bahrain by the FSoB. Moreover, I attempted constantly to validate my findings and interpretations by consulting a number of different researchers and the literature. This research, and the academic activities that have been related to it, have enabled me to

be more critical, less biased and more open-minded. I have learned to think differently about many issues since I have been able to observe my own society through, as it were, different eyes.

4.6 Ethical Consideration and Access

In Bahrain, there is no ethics committee. Access to the Ministries, the Institute and the University was sought via a letter from the Social Sciences Department, of the University of Bahrain, of which I am an employee. The letter explained who I was and my research (See Appendix 7, Section A). Access to the schools was granted via the Educational Research and Development Centre in the Ministry of Education (See Appendix 7, Section B) after I had provided them with a letter from the department and the interview topic guides that would be used (See Appendix 4). In addition, I had to write a letter to the Head of the Social Sciences Department seeking permission to interview department lecturers (See Appendix 7, Section C). Formal permission was sought from policy makers, service providers and service users individually to carry out the research. Access to the users was gained via a key person from the FSoB.

At the beginning of each interview I explained the purpose of the study to allay any concerns the interviewee might have, as Costley (2000) recommends. Burgess (1982) asserted in his work that a number of advantages could be gained from first offering this explanation since it results in discussion that could itself be considered as feedback. Such a process can also save time in terms of discussing the aims of the research during the interview. The purpose of the research and what would be done with the research data and tape recordings was explained.

I asked for verbal informed consent from each interviewee before interviewing them. Written consent was not sought as signing to indicate consent is not an

acceptable custom in Arab culture. The spoken word carries more weight than signing a contract. Many business deals are completed with oral not written contracts. Besides, people do not like to sign papers for political reasons.

Interviewing people I knew was an issue because I felt uneasy in discussing some issues and sometimes so did the interviewees. For example, the interviewee did not always give full details when answering questions as they assumed that I knew about it and there was no need to give details. Also, they might not give details if they knew me and did not want their personal views to be known by people they were familiar with. Some people find it easier to talk to strangers than to people they know (Cotterill, 1992). I tried to avoid this in a number of ways. First, I tried reassuring them about confidentiality and by saying at the beginning that they should assume that I did not know anything about them. Second, I tried to choose a suitable way to ask questions and kept sensitive issues until the end of the interview when participants were more relaxed. I also used prompts such as 'Tell me more' or 'Can you explain this more fully?'

It was important to ensure that I clarified my identity as a researcher rather than as a colleague, student or acquaintance. As Filstead (1970) advises, the researcher must be certain that she is not viewed as the representative of any group. Therefore, I always tried to present myself as only a researcher. Furthermore, the interviewees chose the location and the time of the interview.

Policy makers' and service providers' interviews were conducted in their offices unless one of them preferred it to be conducted elsewhere, such as the FSoB. The focus groups for teachers were conducted for each group in the institutions in which they worked.

As people with disabilities are a vulnerable group and may have less feelings of autonomy concerning taking part in research, it can be helpful if the research is

introduced to them individually by professionals who worked with them (Valentine, Butler, & Skelton, 2005), this approach was used in this research. Professionals were able to introduce the possibility of taking part in the research to visually impaired people without informing me of actual names and identities until participants had given their consent to be approached. There are both advantages and disadvantages to this approach. Firstly, it may make first interviews easier as the interviewee has already agreed to be interviewed. However, it may also mean that the researcher is not able to present the research in the way s/he intended and this, in turn, may affect the relationship between the researcher and the professional in question (Beresford, 1997). In this study I have followed suggestions made by Beresford to arrange all the interviews with users through an intermediary key informant who introduces the research at the beginning of the fieldwork. In this case, she was a key woman from the FSoB who was visually impaired and had been on the FSoB board for a long time and had good relations with all members. She told interviewees what the study was about and reassured them that they could accept or refuse to be interviewed. This key person arranged all the interviews in the FSoB and arranged transportation for users by using the FSoB bus. In order to ensure that participants fully understood why they were taking part, I gave them information about the study, asked them for their consent again and emphasised that they could stop at any time they wanted before beginning each interview. Moreover, I informed them that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to.

Users interviews were not held at the school. Since students were being asked about services and the school was one of the places that provide such services, this could have affected interviewees' answers. Besides this, interviews in school would have taken place during the working hours of the school, that is, during the student interviewees' time of study. So, this meant either interviewing the student at break

time, which was very short and the student would be exhausted or taking the student out of the class. Additionally, carrying out the interviews with boys who are visually impaired in their own schools would not be very comfortable for me, as the boys' sixth form school is a male environment. I conducted some interviews with service providers in the sixth form schools such as interviews with social workers and teacher focus groups.

The interviews could have been carried out in the home. This has the advantage that the time of the interview can be chosen easily. It is also a known environment that the interviewee can move around in easily. From my own experience with visually impaired people, I know that they normally spend some time investigating the area they are in if it is their first time there. In addition, they may not be able to move very easily and will therefore be more comfortable in places they know. However, the disadvantage of doing interviews at home is that there is less control over privacy (Green & Thorogood, 2004). Hospitality is common when people have a guest in their home and I would be viewed as a guest who should be treated hospitably when visiting for the first time. In addition, from the cultural and religious point of view, it is not accepted to visit a male, especially a single male, in his home and ask to be alone. In addition, Lee (1997) raised the issue of how an interviewer may be vulnerable. A female interviewer may be concerned about meeting a male interviewee in a private place. She found that female interviewers did not like to interview strange males in a private place and preferred public places to interview males. Moreover, she wrote about the problems of interviewing a male in a public place and the issue of being with a different man every day which might affect a woman's reputation.

Therefore, from my own point of view, I thought the FSoB was a good place to carry out interviews as these can be done at any time in the morning during working

hours as administration is completed then. Moreover, the FSoB is open for two days in the afternoons (Sundays and Thursdays or Saturdays and Tuesdays in the summer) with transport available for members and visually impaired young people. It is a known environment for visually impaired young people who can move around there safely, as it is designed for visually impaired people who develop their own 'memory map' of the place (Allen, Milner, & Price, 2002).

The same steps that were followed in interviewing students from the schools were followed in interviewing university students. However, carrying out the interviews in the university was easier than at school, as the university is open all day and the students have more flexible timetables. Besides, the university is not segregated by gender, which made it easy to gain access to students.

All users' interviews were conducted at the FSoB, except for one female university student interview that was carried out in the University Library in a special room for the visually impaired at a time that no one was there and when the door was closed. This was because the interviewee did not like to come to the FSoB so the decision was made by her.

The interviews were tape-recorded and the interviewees' consent was sought before the interviews took place. All transcripts were secured in a locked place. In addition, the actual names of interviewees were not written in the transcript. Researchers must protect participant(s) by keeping all personal data confidential and by respecting their anonymity (Murphy, 1998). From an ethical point of view, all information must be seen to be confidential and be deployed only for the sake of the research. Moreover, as a form of confidentiality and anonymity, actual names should not be used, instead abbreviations or synonyms may be used to ensure confidentiality. Nevertheless, most of the sample did not want confidentiality regarding their names and said that I could use their actual names, which is acceptable, as Green and

Thorogood (2004) mentioned. However, I did not mention their names, even after they agreed. I gave service users different names in the research and only gave individual positions. While this was more problematic with policy makers and some service providers as Bahrain is a small country and people can be identified by their positions. Since they agreed to be identified, their positions were listed as it affects the study's argument, but yet their names were not given.

4.7 Issues of Reflexivity and Positionality

Reflexivity is the process of looking both inward and outward with regard to the positionality of the research and the research process (Shaw & Gould, 2001). It is also part of the production of knowledge (Blaxter et al., 2006; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2002). Clearly, researchers will always have an effect on the setting they are studying since they have their own knowledge about this setting. They also play an important part in analysing the data that is produced. In short, researchers cannot avoid having an impact on the process of research (Kosygina, 2005).

As a sighted Bahraini female researcher I was both an insider and an outsider. I was an insider because I was from the same country as the participants. Although, I was more of an insider with the *Sunni* group as when they talked to me they used 'we' for *Sunni* and 'they' for *Shi'a*. In addition, the females talked to me as an insider as I shared the same gender. They said 'we' for females and 'they' for males. I was also an outsider by not having an impairment as all the visually impaired interviewees talked to me as an outsider by saying 'us & you' when including me with the non-disabled people in society. I was an outsider as well by undertaking research whilst studying abroad. However, I managed to preserve a balance between being friendly and being a researcher.

Being a native researcher offered the opportunity to be an insider in relation to the interviewees which gave me the privilege of understanding their perspectives (Labaree, 2002) as this enabled an understanding of both the literal and body language of the participants (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002). My insider role helps participants to interact freely and encourages them to share problems (Gibson & Abrams, 2003). The interviewees and myself shared a culture, religion and a common language (Anderson & Jack, 1991).

As I had worked voluntarily with both the Institute and the FSoB, I knew most of the service providers and users. My position as both an outsider and an insider helped me to be accepted (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004; Labaree, 2002). This technique can be used as a strategy to connect with the gatekeepers of the population of the study and to build up trust with participants (Gibson & Abrams, 2003; van Heugten, 2004).

In some research, such as that of Cotterill (1992), it may be difficult to know when to switch on the tape-recorder and start the proper interview when working with friends. This is because, in such a situation, the informal talk will enter into the interview although it is not necessarily relevant. However, she asserts in her article that some people find it more difficult to talk to strangers because they cannot be natural since they have to talk in a way that is more formal or they try to give ideal answers and hide their own views as they think these may not be accepted. They may not mean to do this or they may be used to adopting such behaviour with strangers. In addition, interviewees may respond differently to the same question when they know the interviewer better and trust the interviewer more. In such cases, there are advantages to interviewing people you know (Cannon, 1989; Cotterill, 1992).

On the other hand, in the same article, Cotterill (1992) explains that when the researcher is a stranger it sometimes makes it easier for interviewees to talk as the researcher does not have the social influence a friend has over the interviewee and the

relation between interviewer and interviewee will end at the end of the interview, which can make talking more comfortable (Cannon, 1989; Cotterill, 1992).

Ribbens (1989) states that the researcher's ability may be limited when interviewing friends by having the responsibility in terms of the friendship to generate information from the interview. Thus, the interviewer has to differentiate between friendship and the experience of interviewing as a conversation between friends is not conducted using a tape-recorder or with one person asking questions and listening carefully with only the other answering the questions.

As I have conducted my research in a community of which I am a member, this, in my view, has allowed me to have special advantages in obtaining access. I also found that I had become an observer on many occasions when I was not involved as a researcher. I was always focusing on the words which were being used, the way people dealt with each other, services that were available and many of these observations became part of my research data.

One of the important aspects emphasised by Ryen (2004) concerning interviews is trust. She noted that 'Trust is the traditional magic key to building good field relations' (2004 :234). For some, interviewing is a positive experience as they get the opportunity to talk about their lives by talking about personal experiences and stories. However, interviewees will not talk in this way unless they trust the interviewer (Green & Thorogood, 2004). As they pointed out, 'the key factor that shapes the kind of data generated is the relationships between interviewer and interviewee' (2004 :90). In addition, they noted that although such relationships will have advantages such as making access easier, they will also have certain disadvantages such as assumptions of shared meaning. This was explained in the section concerning ethical considerations. As I was trusted by the interviewees because of my previous work in Bahrain, this assisted the interview process.

When I went to Bahrain, shortly before starting my fieldwork, my brother and I were involved in a car accident which resulted in my brother having his leg amputated. As a relative and carer I began to view rehabilitation programmes from a different perspective. This experience made me feel closer to people with impairments and to have more empathy.

4.7.1 Issues Related To Being A Female Interviewer

I was aware that being an unmarried young female researcher might be difficult and so I used fictive kinship to build up trust with both male and female users and younger service providers. I was also careful about cultural identity, especially in cross-gender interviews (Anwar, 1979; Pini, 2005), as discussed later in this section. Female researchers working in Arab countries can use a number of strategies such as fictive kinship and informal favours in order to conduct successful research. For example the fictive kinship was used when I referred to them as a brother or sister, especially with male interviewees who were closer to my age. This is a common practice in Arab Muslim society because it means that each one deals with the other with respect and as socially neuter (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Al-Makhamreh, 2005; Hudson, 2005; King, 2005). As a female researcher, I was aware of the gender factors that could affect informants. Burgess (1982) emphasised the fact that the structure of the group under observation, in terms of gender, extensively affects the form and degree of participation.

In addition, body language is an important consideration in an interview. However, this is different in different cultures (Green & Thorogood, 2004). In Bahrain, body language will differ depending on gender. For example, shaking hands or any type of bodily contact between different genders is not common for religious reasons. However, the issue is slightly different with visually impaired people as people from different genders make physical contact with the visually impaired in

order to guide them, for example. This is acceptable in such a situation because there is a reason for it. However, in certain settings there will always be a distance between people of different genders. Additionally, Green and Thorogood (2004) point out the connection between eye contact and listening in an interview. In my research, however, this was not effective when interviewing visually impaired people and so must be replaced with physical contact such as touching a hand on some occasions.

Although I did not touch male interviewees, I had to guide some of the visually impaired interviewees of both genders until we reached the room allocated for the interview. I lowered my voice when talking to males, a common practice when women are talking to men in Muslim countries.

In addition, I paid attention to issues of dress and dressed differently in different places. For example, in the boys' schools I wore a cloak (*'abāya /dafah*) and went without makeup. I could not walk into the school but went to the administration area. In all other locations, however, dress was not a problem and I did not wear the cloak (*'abāya /dafah*). But, I always wear Islamic dress (*hijab*) and therefore had more freedom to walk around and observe. In the Institute, at the FSoB and at the University or even in the Ministries there is no 'women only' provision. Therefore, since these places are mixed gender, my being there was normal, unlike the situation in the boys' school.

Being a female researcher may encourage female interviewees to be more open as they may assume I will share certain assumptions and will understand their experiences (Riessman, 1994). This is derived mainly from cultural notions regarding women's roles (Dahlgren, 2005; Seif, 2005; Seikaly, 1997, 1998). Thus, female researchers may well gather different data from male researchers and vice versa with men interviewing men. When the researcher and participant are of the same sex and culture this can mean that communication is easier since both gender and culture are

then brought into clearer focus, making more sense of the data that is produced (F. Gill & Maclean, 2002; Labaree, 2002).

Being of the same gender allows both the interviewer and the interviewee to share their common experiences as females as well as making them socially closer (Finch, 1984; Oakley, 1981). Additionally, Finch (1984) states that sharing the same gender reduces the social distance between the interviewer and interviewee besides facilitating talking. Moreover, Finch also asserts that some women like to be interviewed by women as it may be a therapeutic and a positive experience. This may be true especially if the interviewee does not enjoy satisfying social contact with others. However, it is not always the case that sharing the same gender will allow women to talk freely to a female interviewer as Cotterill (1992) discovered in her research.

In addition, Finch (1984) makes a simple comparison between interviewing men and women. She states that women are more used to being interviewed and talk about their private life more easily while men find it more difficult to talk about such a topic. In short, it is easy to get women to talk. Additionally, she explains that when both the interviewer and the interviewee are female, the setting becomes a more informal one and is more like a meeting between friends. This point was borne out in my own research as the interview setting with men to some extent was more formal since more attention was paid to dressing, the physical distance between the parties and even the words that were used. These factors originated from the religion and culture and were more evident when interviewing conservative males.

Scott (1984) emphasised in her study that it is difficult to recognise when gender or issues other than gender affect an interview. However, certain issues appear when a female interviews a male. Scott describes an interview as 'a social rather than

mechanical situation' (172) which means that feelings and different issues affect an interview.

Sharing the same gender is not enough to guarantee that the interviewee is at ease as shared culture may be more important and may make for fewer barriers between the interviewer and the interviewee (D. Lee, 1997). In the study carried out by Verdurme and Viaene (2003), they asserted that females were more talkative and co-operative than men. Another study undertaken by Rafoth et al. (1999) notes that males and females talk in the way they have been taught to talk. They offer examples such as men do not like a 'one-down' position in talking while women do not like to show power in conversation. They explain, 'men need to be needed and women need to be cherished' (3). Additionally, they mention in their study that women are more talkative than men, as men have more interest in competition while women prefer personal relationships. Maccoby's study (1990) argues that women are more influenced and offer more help than men. Lee (1997) shows that when the interviewer is female she may feel obliged to listen even when a male expresses sexist views as an interviewee so that a female interviewer may experience a situation which is doubly oppressive.

Conversely, having an interviewer and an interviewee of different genders may have a positive effect in a research study as some people might find it preferable to talk to a person of the opposite sex (Mckee & O'Brien, 1983). Another study by Padfield and Proctor (1996) made the generalisation that the gender of the interviewer was not important to interviewees. They argued that the usefulness of the interview depended largely on the interviewer's skill. This is not the case in Bahrain because of the practice of gender segregation, as was explained in Chapters Two and Three (Dahlgren, 2005; Seif, 2005; Seikaly, 1997, 1998). In this study women's interviews lasted for a longer duration and produced more details, which may be the result of

women being more talkative than men, but may be related to both interviewee and interviewer being of the same gender, as was discussed above.

4.7.2 Difference *Sunni & Shi'a* Affiliation

Green and Thorogood (2004) assert that ‘similarities and differences both in aspects of social identity and experiences and in social power will clearly have a major impact on the social encounter that is “the interview”’ (2004 :92). This makes the interviewees chose experiences that they wish to discuss and the way they want to talk about such experiences. The analytic frame of the interview should include the social difference between the interviewer and the interviewee. There are a number of aspects in which the interviewer and the interviewee may be similar or different, such as nationality, ethnicity, class, socio-economic status, age and gender. Thus, these have a complex impact on the research and will influence the way the research is analysed. Additionally, the impact of social and cultural characteristics on the data collected must be considered (Green & Thorogood, 2004).

In my interviews, although all of us were Muslims and shared the same religion, when I asked about Sunni and Shi'a practices, *Sunnis* had more comments to make about *Shi'as* than *Shi'as* had to make about the *Sunnis*. This may be because *Shi'as* perceive me as a Sunni and did not want to make comments in front of me, even though I told them that my mother and my brother-in-law are *Shi'a*. For some, it did not change the way they talked to me while for others it did. This is currently a sensitive issue in Bahrain because of the conflict in Iraq and political issues between *Sunni* and *Shi'a* in several Muslim countries.

4.7.3 Incidents

I experienced some amusing happenings during my fieldwork, especially in my contact with users. Usually, I was in the habit of guiding interviewees with a visual impairment to the interview room. However, one interview lasted for a long time and

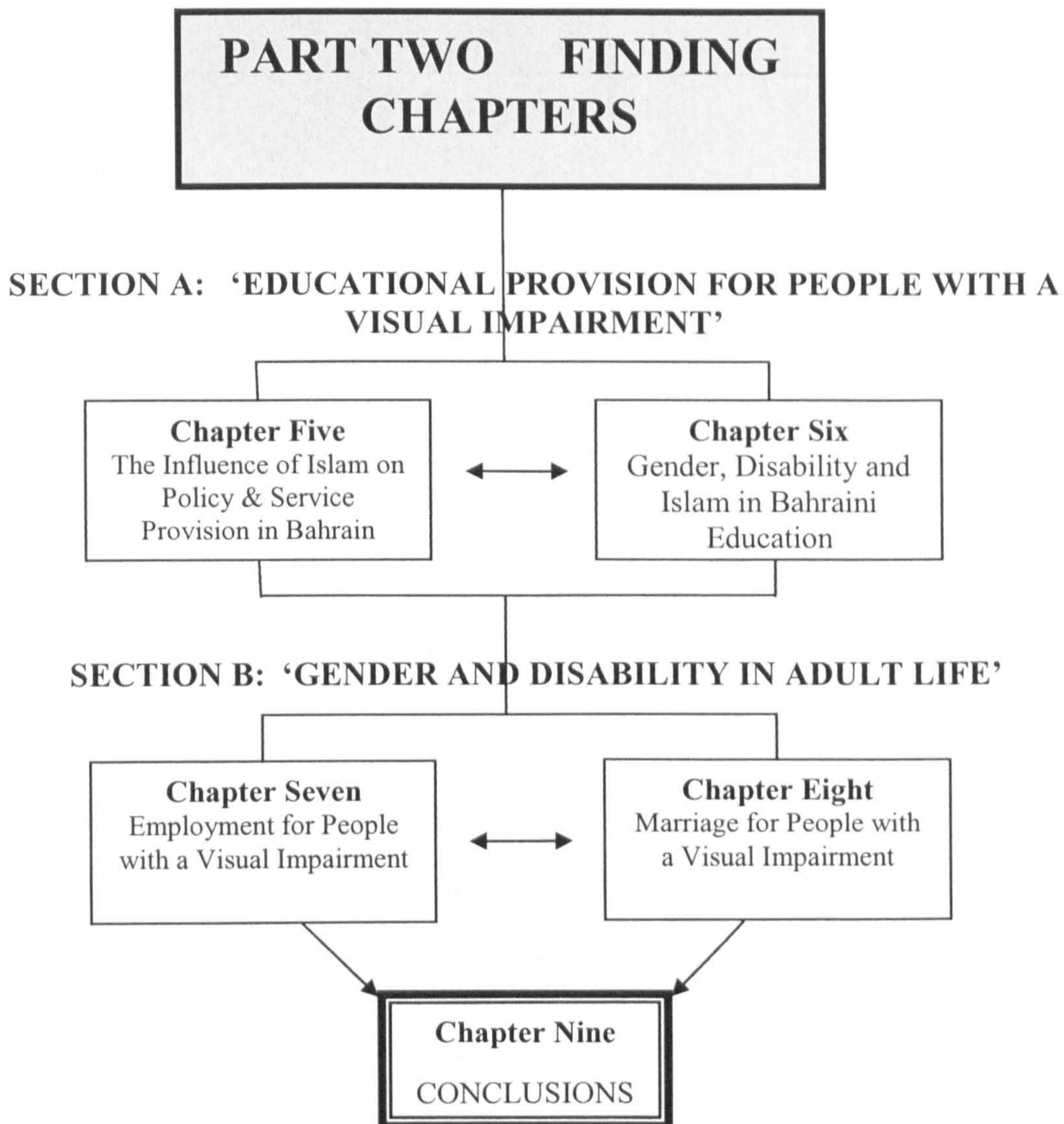
we did not notice the amount of time that had passed until someone called my participant to tell her that everyone was on the bus and the FSoB was closing. Therefore, we had to make our way out of the room when all the lights were switched off and it was very dark. So, my interviewee suggested that we would have to change roles and I had to hold her hand and let her walk me out. It needs to be pointed out that this girl never walked alone, but in this situation she felt very confident and was pleased that she was able to guide me.

Also, I changed all the names for reasons of confidentiality, which meant that I used the research names while I was in the UK carrying out the analysis. Thus, when I returned to Bahrain for a visit and met the users again, I found it difficult to remember the actual names of some of them.

Summary

The research methodology used in this study is presented in this chapter. The variety of qualitative methods (narrative, semi-structured and focus group interviews, together with some observations and a documentary analysis) were selected as appropriate for this topic and setting. Interviews were carried out with users, service providers and policy makers and limited observations were undertaken in the Institute, the FSoB and the girls' school. No observations were carried out in the boys' school because of cultural issues and access. The qualitative data were analysed thematically using CAQDAS Nvivo.

The chapter has discussed how cultural and gender issues affected the way research methods were used, participant engagement with the research and my positionality. The next chapters present the research findings.

Chart 3: Structure of Part Two

5. CHAPTER FIVE: THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM ON POLICY AND SERVICE PROVISION IN BAHRAINI EDUCATION

Introduction

This chapter is an analysis of policymakers', service providers' and users' perspectives on policy and service provision for visually impaired children and young adults. The analysis addresses the first research question; 'How are policies and provision for visually impaired people influenced by interpretations of Islam in an Arab society?' This chapter argues that current interpretations of Islam in relation to disability and gender prevent social inclusion and foster dependency and protection of visually impaired children and adults that are more congruent with a medical model of disability than a social rights based approach.

In Chapter Two it was argued that the interpretation of Islamic doctrine influences policies, services and individual behaviour. Some Islamic texts and interpretations of Islam support the equality, rights and social inclusion of both disabled people and women while others extol and promote charity and pity for people with disabilities in a way that is kind, but socially excluding through segregated specialist provision.

In Bahrain, special needs schools are segregated by disability. The educational provision for children and young people with visual impairments is delivered over eleven years in a specialist, mixed gender institute that provides primary and secondary education. Visually impaired students are not only segregated from sighted students but are also segregated from students with other disabilities. Visually

impaired students who study in the Institute then transfer to mainstream sixth form schools where they are not segregated by disability, but are segregated by gender.

Bahrain was one of the first countries in the region to develop limited inclusion as there is limited integration in the sixth form and at university. Students with a visual impairment do not attend mainstream schools until the sixth form and are then allowed only to enter the literature stream. Up until that time, they are taught the curriculum dictated by the Ministry of Education (Shirawi, 1989). In addition, they receive some rehabilitation lessons in Braille and mobility. Hall (1997) pointed out that education is not only about the curriculum, students also learn from each other. For example, they learn about how to communicate, dress, play, etc. In segregated special schools, visually impaired students only learn from each other and don't have the opportunity to learn from sighted students until they enter sixth form.

5.1 Independence and Support

Currently, independent living is not being necessarily fostered. As was explained in Chapter Three, the majority of families in Bahrain with members who are disabled employ foreign servants who help with daily personal care. Even at home, most housework is done by housemaids, as salaries are affordable for the majority of the population (Maclagan, 2006). Families, who have a member with a disability, may employ a housemaid solely to assist the disabled person.

Some service providers were clear that independence was not encouraged by families:

If a blind person wants to move to get something, they tell him "no, we will get it for you, we will do things for you".

(SP 'M' Vice Chairman FSoB 'VI User 30+', 225)

Blind people in the Arab world move very little... In Bahrain and the Arab countries in general, the connection that the blind person has with his family and friends prevents blind people from being independent. The relationships we have and our religion makes us take care of disabled people, therefore, they don't use canes and move alone. This affects their independence.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 93)

It was suggested that Islamic interpretations and culture encourage individuals and society to help vulnerable people, but not necessarily to foster their independence:

Islam encourages cooperation, love, brotherhood, forgiving and taking care of other people. It is a religion of peace, justice and love. The Arab world in general and Islam encourages us to be cooperative and support other people and so, for sure, blind people will be more supported.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 96)

Some sighted teachers felt their job was a special vocation and Islamic writings state that doing any good deed will be rewarded. Hence, it could be argued that teaching visually impaired students would carry more of a reward than teaching sighted students. Some visually impaired students were treated preferentially by staff from feelings of compassion. For example, at the girls' school, the teachers' gave extra lessons and help to Layla:

Layla is a part time student but we helped her more than the others...Most of the time the teachers gave her summaries in a few pages that she studied from... Because they know about her case, they know she is in need of help. It is a humanitarian issue.

(SP 'F' Girls School SW, 46/99/108)

Support is given in a more organised way by volunteers at the University or at the FSoB. The idea of volunteering is supported by Islamic precepts and encouraged both formally and informally. Volunteers had a direct role in helping students with visual impairments in the University. Some worked within the social work department and were awarded some university credits for this activity.

Religion asks us to do voluntary work.

(SP 'F' UoB SW, 347)

The social workers asked students to work 30 credit hours to teach blind students at the university. It gives them experience, in teaching.

(SP 'F' UoB Head SW Dept., 214)

Volunteers are paired with people of the same sex:

If it is a female student we have a female student to help her, if it is a male student we appoint a male student to assist him.

(SP 'F' UoB Head SW Dept., 206)

In some situations, however, a female volunteer may work with a male student, because there are fewer male volunteers and a female volunteer will often not mind working with a male with an impairment, as the non-impaired girls view them, to some extent, as socially neuter* and doing this will be rewarded by God even if they are working with a non-related male. Culturally, the honour of a male with an impairment is not affected if he works with girls. However, a female with an impairment will not work with a male as she has to protect her honour (*sharaf*). This will be discussed more fully in Chapter Six.

University teachers recommended that volunteers should be trained:

R5: There should be training and workshops for the volunteers to show them what responsibilities they have and things they should not do and let the visually impaired person do, to make him independent.

(SP 'FG' University Teachers, 145)

This research found that volunteers not only read out exams but also helped with writing assessments and in classes. It is clear that currently volunteers at the university are used to support visually impaired students in mainstream settings rather than special teachers employed to do the task and new technologies paid for. Thus inclusion currently is not fully supported in terms of resourcing.

5.2 Charitable Donations

For observant Muslims it is essential to give a certain amount of money to charity through practising mandatory charity (*zakāt*) and optional charity (*ṣadaqa*), as explained in Chapter Two. Thus, some of the ways that society supports disabled people are through charitable donations or voluntary work:

We are committed to help needy people, give donations and not harm other people, or steal. This encourages the human spirit we all have, and it will help us to assist other people who are in need of our assistance.

(SP 'M' Boys School SW, 98)

* In this thesis I use the term 'socially neuter'. By this I refer to the fact that in some situations visually impaired young women and men have more freedom and are more gender integrated than other young people. However, it is not meant to imply that they are considered socially neuter in all situations.

In the early years of Islam they were all volunteers... the whole society were fighting to do charitable work,

(SP 'M' Vice Chairman FSoB 'VI User 30+', 204)

Some interviewees said that basic equipment may be provided through charitable donations. For example, University students receive a Visio-Braille laptop donated by Her Highness Shikah Sabikah (the King's wife) while the University's Visio-Braille lab was funded by a bank. In Bahrain, the Ministry of Social Affairs provides people with disabilities with free wheelchairs or hearing aids if they are in poor financial circumstances. However, the Ministry does not provide any equipment for visually impaired people like white canes, glasses, Braille typewriters, reading materials, or guide dogs. The policy makers and service providers explained that this is because there are other agencies, like the Institute or the FSoB, that provide these items and the government expects that people with a visual impairment will receive these things from the charitable sector. The Ministry of Social Development appeared to provide fewer services for people with visual impairments than for those with other kinds of disability:

The Ministry of Social Affairs provides wheelchairs. However, it does not provide any aids for blind people.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 132)

NGOs dealing with disability receive donations, from individuals and organisations and receive only a small amount of financial support from the Ministry of Social Development (Ministry of Social Development, 2007a). They rely mainly on donations. Service providers suggested that the government should have clear and implemented legislation with regards to donations and should also provide more support:

We don't have a law which forces companies to contribute. Most of the time it is by donations... The government should direct these companies.

(SP 'M' UoB Lecturer 'VI User 30+', 297)

The Law in 1981 started to support blind people... the law for disabled people and the law for equal rights. Things changed, parliament discussed

these laws in their meetings recently. We hope that the law will be implemented in a better way and that disabled people will get all their rights as they have in Europe.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 189-195)

The government and NGOs both provide help but government provision is being withdrawn in certain areas. For example, service provider interviewees reported that the nursery for children with visual impairments was once part of the provision of the Institute thus government funded and controlled. Now it comes under the FSoB, which is an NGO. All mainstream schools are funded by the Ministry of Education but the Institute has been funded from different sources since 1994, the Ministry of Education being only one of them (Ministry of Education, 2007). Service provider interviewees reported that since 1997 the Institute is no longer a regional institution. Unlike all other schools in Bahrain, this Institute only gets part of its funding from the Ministry of Education while it depends on donations for the rest. As this service provider indicated, the Institute relies on charity and needs more money to do its work:

At one stage we were lower than the average, but because of God and our committee we managed to raise money: from BD1000 - 14,000. Up till now we don't have loans, it is all done through activities. We send donations for blind people. Each year, we send BD600 ...our work is within our budget but the limitations don't allow us to continue with other work. We cannot reach all the blind people in Bahrain.

(SP 'M' Vice Chairman FSoB 'VI User 30+', 104/116)

Therefore, provision for people with disabilities is through charities and government services. This shared provision may affect the quality of services and some may argue that, as citizens, visually impaired people should receive their rights through governmental support, not through charities. There are indicators that a rights based discourse is growing but the predominate emphasis of policies and provision is focused on special provision. There is a lack of investment in both human and other resources for supporting inclusion in mainstream institutions by the government. The support is through volunteers and charitable donations in line with Islamic teachings

and practices of almsgiving relating to charity and compassion for the disabled and less fortunate. The next section discusses society's perception of people with a visual impairment and shows how perceptions are changing.

5.3 Social Attitudes

Interviewees indicated that there are a range of social attitudes towards disability and visual impairment, with some people viewing visually impaired people as normal, others as sick, and still others may make fun of them. Islamic precepts stress the need to help the less fortunate including disabled people.

It has a religious element to it; our religion does encourage sympathy and empathy.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Supreme Council for Women, 106)

However, there is also a stigma related to being disabled. A teacher at the girls' sixth form school said that other students respect Layla more than her relatives who are ashamed of having a relative who is visually impaired. Even the driver refused to give her a lift when he knew she had an impairment as he did not want to take responsibility for her. Layla's teacher talked about how some of Layla's family's and some school students' attitudes indicated that disability was perceived as shameful:

R3: *Layla says 'I did not come because of the bus, the driver did not want me on his bus. At the beginning he did not know that I am blind, then the girls told him that I cannot see, so he became angry and said he will not take me because he does not want to be responsible or affected because of me'. Then I asked her [teacher] 'do you not have any relatives or cousins in the school?'. She said 'yes, my aunt, but she is ashamed that her niece is blind'.*

(SP 'FG' Girls School Teachers, 211)

Layla said that she was viewed negatively as the other girls called her '*blind*' (*'amiah*) instead of calling her by her name. She said that even some teachers thought told her that she should not study in a mainstream school. Some students and service providers feel that visually impaired people are particularly 'different':

I feel they are a different, difficult group as they are less sociable than other physically disabled. They do not trust easily. They need a long time before

they start talking with you. You need to be very patient and careful in dealing with them.

(SP 'F' UoB SW, 293)

University teachers talked about how attitudes are changing and Bahraini society has started to move towards inclusive provision:

R5: In Bahrain since 1992 they started to include people with mild mental disability in some schools... they included children with Down's Syndrome, then more groups of special needs... the perception changed... Before fewer parents took their disabled or mentally disabled children to the malls, people used to walk at a distance from them and view them with sympathy. People with disabilities are working at changing this perception. For example we see our disabled teams join in the Olympics and get medals while normal people go and come out with nothing... They start to call them special needs group because they need special services. ... In the 1990s the parents of non-disabled children refused to let disabled children be integrated with their non-disabled children, while now they are welcoming the idea of inclusion.

(SP 'FG' University Teachers, 110-113)

University teachers felt that social perceptions have started to change because of the impact of media and education campaigns, the role of Islam, the actions and achievements of disabled people themselves and finally, by the new disability benefits (Akhbar Alkhaleej, 2005) (this will be further explored in Chapter Seven):

R1: Religious perception is a fact and has never changed. What is changing is how we view it and apply it. What happened is that we are facing openness, globalisation, the Internet... etc. It shows us that this person with special needs is not unable ('ajez), but has abilities. What also helps in this is the number of seminars and lectures organised by the Bahraini Society for Child Development... Then they remember Islamic roles and now, having a disabled child in the family, is a reason for solidarity in the family... Last month there was an announcement about giving a disability benefits by giving each disabled child BD50 (= \$133). So now the disabled child is providing income. By considering that most people with disabilities are from families with low incomes and that, for some of them, their salaries may be as low as BD150-200, this may be equal to 1/3 or 1/4 of their income...

(SP 'FG' University Teachers, 119-121)

It could be argued that social attitudes are becoming more positive towards people with disabilities. However, some felt that the modernisation of Bahraini society could be having a negative effect on attitudes to people with disabilities:

Islam is the religion of love. Religion is not like it was before, it was much stronger, people used to know each other, people were in need of each

other...the distance from religion and the different Western culture which has come to us, affects our lives.

(SP 'F' Girls School SW, 149-158)

A few service providers talked about recent immigrants to Bahrain. These people have come mainly from Sunni Arab countries (i.e. Jordan and Syria) and the Bahraini government has given them citizenship. They felt that some visually impaired students faced difficulties in boys' schools, which were related to having students of other nationalities in the school who were not used to respecting vulnerable people and made fun of them:

R2: This is not the way of Bahraini people, but the other nationalities which came to us cause these problems. Bahraini people would not do that. Bahraini society is known to be nice and cooperative but there is something inside our psychology, something to do with sympathy. Other nationalities don't know how to deal with our society. They not only cause problems for Majied but even for us as teachers, the school and society.

(SP 'FG' Boys School Teachers, 114)

This suggests that people from different Muslim countries can have different attitudes to disability which result from culture rather than religion. Although in practice it is difficult to separate cultural attitudes from religious attitudes, by observing practices among Muslims in different countries there are lots of similar practices which can be related to religion, geographical proximity or some shared history. However, there are also different practices which may relate to differences in culture.

In mainstream sixth form schools, visually impaired students are each allocated a fellow student to support and guide them around the school. It was also felt that the role of the companion was also to protect the visually impaired student from the negative attitudes of other students. During a focus group one teacher suggested that the companion of a visually impaired student should be a 'protector':

R1:...when I am in the classroom nobody says a word, but the problem is during breaks. Who is going to protect him?

R4: No one can protect him.

R2: *The one who is going to protect him is his companion.*

R1: *But watching him all the time is impossible. For example, sometimes I pass by his class and I see a student corner him. Another example: he used to bring his equipment and they broke it, they nearly destroyed it...*

R2: *I see the companion has a big role and Majied has a companion. As a companion is with him, he can protect him, and would not allow anybody to talk to him.*

R1: *So you mean to have someone like a bodyguard (laugh).*

(SP 'FG' Boys School Teachers, 134-146)

It is possible to interpret Islamic precepts in a way that support the independence of people with disability. Islamic teachers have emphasised for hundreds of years that people with a disability are independent and that they should be treated as normal and with equity. However, Islamic precepts also exhort people to protect people with disabilities (Ashworth, 1995; Bazna & Hatab, 2005; EL-Hessen, 2006; Musse, 2002). Service provider and policy maker interviewees expressed this duality, but with more emphasis on protection.

Islam states that nothing good or bad happens to anyone except through fate and destiny (*qaḍā'* and *qadar*) and God will reward the patient (Al-Hedaithy, 1989). This extols people with disabilities, their families and society to be patient regarding whatever it is they face, for Muslims who are patient will obtain greater rewards from God. Therefore, disability might be understood as a test from God and people have to be patient to earn their reward (EL-Hessen, 2006):

Religion has basically urged us to have pity and mercy. Secondly, religion gives the volition and the patience when you are strongly faithful. You can face any disaster in your life when you have religion.

(SP 'F' Women Committee FSoB 'VI User 30+', 226)

Visually impaired people are very religious. Religion makes their personality and their soul, peaceful and beautiful... their beliefs make them accept things, they don't complain, they would not feel that they are treated unfairly.

(SP 'F' Institute SW, 128-133)

Other service providers felt that Islamic institutions and leaders could be giving more support and leadership in relation to disability:

Is there any religious institution which provides anything for people with special needs?...The religious people are totally different from religion, it

all depends how they understand things. I believe that religion is not read and understood in the right way in relation to disability.

(SP 'M' UoB Lecturer 'VI User 30+', 247)

Although religious leaders could have a positive role and are influential, they have not taken this as a key part of their responsibilities, and disability is not one of their priorities:

Alas! The role of the religious leaders is poor in this area. The religious man is the ideal for most of the people, every one follows them. So if they work hard to advise people and rehabilitate them, there will not be a need for workshops or rehabilitation courses. Religious men are working in policy, but disability is not an issue that they think of working for.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 229/238)

This section shows a range of societal views and attitudes towards people with visual impairment, some of which appear to be cultural in origin (e.g. shame). Other attitudes stem from a misunderstanding of the Islamic teaching such as viewing people with disability with pity and sympathy who are in need of help, rather than supporting them to be independent.

5.4 Mobility and Islam

Mobility is one of the most important skills that people with a visual impairment need and using a white cane and/or a dog can make mobility easier and safer. In Bahrain, as in most Muslim countries, there is very limited use of white canes among females and no use of guide dogs, as the section will explain.

In general, people with a visual impairment do not have good mobility because of over-protection. Helping vulnerable people is a duty from a religious and cultural perspective:

We are in a Muslim country. Islam encourages us to do good things and help others.

(SP 'FG' Boys School Teachers, 218)

The Institute provides lessons in mobility and in using canes. They had an expert but, after he left, a visually impaired male teacher taught the students. There were problems with this as he was unable to see and correct the students' mistakes.

Also, as he was a man, he could not touch the girls because of Islamic custom. Until recently, students were taught by a sighted female teacher who had attended some mobility training. This was considered to be more acceptable as a female teacher has more cultural freedom to touch male students and working with female students was not an issue (this will be explored more in later Chapter Six). The problems associated with mobility training are highlighted here by two service providers:

Blind teachers don't see the blind students and cannot correct wrong movements. I am sighted...I trained them how to walk and how to do exercise. Some of them managed, others could not, some of them have physical disabilities...it is not good enough to follow each student for only one or two days and ignore him for the rest of the week...some of them follow it up and do the movements at home.

(SP 'M' PE teacher in the Institute & FSoB, 73-94)

The problem is that sometimes we all go out: 9 or 12 visually impaired girls with only me, I have difficulties in guiding them especially as they are girls and the driver cannot touch them to guide them. So in this case I put them in a row and they practice what they learn in the mobility classes. But if it is a crowded public place it will not work.

(SP 'F' Institute SW, 93)

Cultural restrictions appear to affect the type of help a person can give to disabled people and these impinge on females more than males. Having a few lessons in the Institute is not enough if the families do not reinforce the approach at home in terms of encouraging mobility. Some families do not take their visually impaired children out and some families either hide such children or are scared of the child being injured. In addition, there are gender-specific mobility issues. For example, girls refuse to use white canes as this gives them a public image of being in need of help. Some females also feel ashamed. Males feel ashamed if someone helps them, so using white canes is preferred as they want to be viewed as independent by others. Furthermore, female users were afraid of bumping into people, especially males, which could mean that bodily contact would be made and part of their own body might be exposed if they fell down. Therefore, girls prefer not to use canes but walk with companions as they feel safer. So, girls with visual impairment mostly do not go

out alone, while boys can go anywhere, with anyone, at any time as issues of honour are not a concern:

90% of girls refuse to use white canes; even some blind teachers refuse to use canes. They depend either on themselves or their companions.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 129)

It is a medical issue, but also it is a social one...you have to work with the society and let them live normally without labelling them.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Health, 78)

This emphasises how religious and social views about accepted gendered behaviour shapes the mobility and independence of visually impaired girls and young women. From the interviews and my own observations it is clear that after mobility training being available for students at the Institute for more than 30 years, no females, as yet, use white canes in Bahrain.

In the Institute building, the corners and pillars are covered in coloured sponge so that those with poor vision can see them clearly and, if any students bump into them, they will not be hurt. The stairs are wide and are divided, one side for up and the other for down. Boys also use different stairs from girls. Such adjustments show how the Institute makes students' movements around the buildings easy and safe; allowing free movement with some gender segregation.

When transferring to mainstream sixth form, pupils with visual impairments may lack confidence in their mobility. The social worker at the boys' school talked about Majied, who would not walk on his own to school and refused to use a cane even when teachers encouraged him. At school he always walked with his friend to guide him:

Majied movement is less than normal; he is psychologically afraid of moving and is scared of falling. His integration with the school is good, but his movement in society is weak, he likes to sit and talk. I tell him to walk, but he does not have self confidence... If someone sees him, we stop the car and take him by the hand and get him to a safe place

(SP 'M' Boys School SW, 78-90)

Majied said that he was not trained to use a cane as they did not always have a teacher and his friends always offered him help. He also avoided using the school stairs and used the elevator. Even when Majied walked alone, they guided him and were surprised that he could walk on his own:

I have nice students in my class, they help me to move around... I would not trust that I can easily find the place. Once I tried to use the stairs, I could not, a student saw me and he took my hand and took me there.

(User 'M' Sixth Form School Student 'Majied', 248/278)

A social worker talked about Layla's mobility in her mainstream sixth form school. She arranged for Layla always to have a student guiding her. This appeared to be because they wanted to protect her. Also, they offered her the first aid room to sit in which meant that she did not sit with other students in school, thus missing out on their company. Additionally, as this room is for sick people, it suggested that Layla was viewed as a sick person. The social worker also said that Layla was allowed to use the lift, which was used only by sick people and people with special needs. Neither the design of the school nor the people in it encouraged Layla's independence:

Students walk her from one classroom to another...She finishes her classes and students pick her up. They bring her to our room and she sits here in the first aid room that ill students use. Volunteer students sit with her, read and spend time with her here in this room.

(SP 'F' Girls School SW, 49-53)

The social worker explained that they had not received any training in guiding and that they were trying to support Layla. The social worker thought that if she used a white cane, other girls might make fun of her.

Maybe if she uses the cane they may make fun of her, although they are all good and like to support her

(SP 'F' Girls School SW, 201)

At university, mobility may be difficult for several reasons. First, it is a mixed environment and girls want to avoid bumping into boys, as was mentioned earlier. In addition, university campuses are much bigger and students with disabilities may

have a problem in accessing some lecture halls and toilets, especially in the older buildings:

There are many cases where we have to change the location... Some lecturers go out of a building to a cabin; they transfer because of disabled students. There is no arrangement in the University, especially in the registration department. There should be more organisation. They have a problem also with toilets but now in new buildings they have designed special areas for the disabled in a comfortable way. Normal students get tired and some students and staff go by car so how about the disabled? ... We do not have anything. We offered some suggestions: to mark lift buttons in Braille but we did not get any response... So always, there should be someone with them: a student or a guide.

(SP 'F' UoB SW, 179/240)

I was not prepared. During the orientation period, I did not know how to move around so I was dependent on other students; this caused me lots of psychological stress. I felt I cannot do anything by myself and I need help.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 530)

I would not move without my friends. If they are late I stay in my place and don't move.

(User 'F' Looking for job after Uni. 'Zainab', 447)

Mobility is a bigger issue for females than males with visual impairments owing to religious and cultural attitudes:

Gender is not affecting boys and girls in studying. Maybe in movement, yes, when I hear the young men to say that they travelled, this is normal, but to hear a blind girl saying this could be sensitive... it is harder for girls to travel and move around... you will be worried about her travelling on her own, maybe boys move more freely, maybe she herself is too scared, she thinks that boys can take care of themselves better. For example a car will stop for him with strangers, he can ride any car or taxi, he is not worried to go, but for girls it will be sensitive to do that, they are scared. Maybe only movement or travelling is the only difference between blind boys and girls.

(User 'F' Looking for job after Uni. 'Zainab', 792-808)

In general, people with visual impairments face difficulties with regards to transport and mobility due to the fact that most people in Bahrain and GCC countries do not depend on public transport and mainly use private transport because these countries are oil rich countries and fuel is not expensive (Fakhro, 1990).

The UoB provides free transport to the university and between the two campuses for all students (Ministry of Education, 2003). It also provides access for physically disabled students. Many students own cars and start driving when they join

the University as they are old enough and the wealth of the region allows them to do this, fewer students use the University bus. As these buses only run at the beginning and the end of the day, students have to stay in the University all day, even if they do not have lectures. There is no public transport to the University so disabled people are one of the largest groups that depend on the University's transport. There was a recognition of the transport issues raised by both service providers and service users:

Currently we are trying to improve and provide transportation for disabled people. For people with physical disabilities we have a bus which takes them from public places. We try to facilitate providing taxi services for some areas. We also facilitate parking for the disabled and also allow them to have good taxi services where they can be picked up from the university.

(SP 'F' UoB Head SW Dept., 116)

We asked the social workers and students union either to give us the cost of transportation or to provide us with a bus. They raised this with the university president; they agreed to give us a transportation allowance to arrange for someone to give us transport. I was in contact with one of the students' union members and she worked on the issue. She gave us a few contacts. When we asked the social worker to tell us what happened, they said they had not been informed, they don't know. This lasted for two years.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 566)

In Bahrain, University bus services are mostly used by girls when they do not have private transport. This means that some boys are shy about using it:

We have problems with the bus; I personally have a problem with it... Because I am the only male and the rest are females. The girls feel shy with me. Some girls give me directions for walking. I used the bus only for 3-4 times. Most of the time I go with my peers.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Samad', 704-712)

However, by December 2004 UoB received a donation to provide a special coach for students with special needs that provides transportation from their homes to the University at the beginning and the end of the day (Al-Ayam, 2004). By May 2006 UoB received a donation of small cars to improve the mobility of students with special needs on the University. UoB was the first university in the region provide such a service (Alwaqat, 2006). However, such a service may increase segregation and dependency among students, because instead of having Braille signs, for example, to facilitate visually impaired mobility, a separate service was provided.

Likewise, instead of making the current university bus accessible to student with disabilities, they segregated them on a separate bus.

In conclusion, this section has shown that Bahrain's Islamic society does not foster the independence of disabled people, particularly girls. The lack of adequate mobility training and suitable facilities, as well as the protective social attitudes, discourages independent living for visually impaired people.

This study argues that there is some congruence between some of the possible interpretations of Islamic texts and the medical model of disability in the sense that both emphasise the need to help the disabled person and for the provision of segregated education. In addition, Islamic charitable practices provide equipment and resourcing as well as volunteers to both specialist and inclusive settings. Currently, the policies and types of educational provision seem to reflect the concern and compassion expressed within Islamic teachings for disabled people, in that specialist provision is provided and moves to inclusive provision are under resourced and limited. The next part of this chapter will provide an analysis of the specialist provision within the Institute from the perspective of the providers.

5.5 Special Education Provision From 4-15 years

It seems that only students with moderate or severe visual impairments study in the Institute. In Bahrain visual impairment is initially a medical diagnosis.

Disability is primarily a medical problem, then it's a social problem...This means when a child is born with a disability it should be seen by a doctor. Sometimes the doctors depend on experiments which may succeed or fail. If they succeed it will be in the interest of the person. If nothing can be done about it, he has to adapt to the society he lives in... basically it's a medical problem that turns into a social problem.

(SP 'F' Women Committee FSoB 'VI User 30+', 207-212)

The Institute of the Blind in Bahrain is controlled by the Ministry of Education. The Institute in the beginning was regional and offered educational provision rather than being simply for rehabilitation. This is an advantage as other specialist provision

in Bahrain is mainly for rehabilitation and is controlled by the Ministry of Social Development (Ministry of Education, 2007; Shirawi, 1989):

Most of the schools for disabled people belong to the Ministry of Labour... excluding the blind schools ... Our area is rehabilitation.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Social Development 'with attendance of SP', 37-44)

As indicated by the policy maker from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Health, with support from the World Health Organization (WHO), conducts sight tests regularly in schools with the help of teachers and social workers who are trained to do screenings. Once the Ministry of Health has identified that a child has a visual impairment, the Ministry of Education will not normally accept the child into a mainstream school. Instead, the child is referred to the Institute. In rare cases, a child with poor vision may be educated in a mainstream school if his/her impairment is not classed as severe. This distinction is made by the Ministry of Health which then tries to co-operate with the Ministry of Education to help students with low-level vision:

We send them to the Blind Institute, and some may have other problems as well. The Ministry of Education is not very much involved. They work on one specific area known as the integration of children with low vision with other school children. They have to have special computers and equipment. They are talking about it but it is not fully implemented. However, they work in full collaboration with us.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Health, 58)

As a regional organisation, the Institute was not only for students from Bahrain but also for students from other countries. The Head of the Institute explained the historical reasons for locating the Institute in Bahrain:

There was a need for a regional centre in the Middle East to support blind people and the Bahraini government supported it. The Institute had a huge number of blind students from the Gulf, Somalia and other Arab Muslim countries...Many Arab countries have their own Institutes for blind people but the regional office in the Middle East was interested in the blind people in the whole Arab world, so they worked regionally and asked countries in the Middle East and other Islamic countries to support the Institute. The Institute has donations and provides services free of charge. All of this contributes to attracting students.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 33/42)

Today, the number of international students in the Institute has decreased as other countries have developed their own provision or included them in their mainstream schools. Therefore, the Institute is no longer regional even though some Omani students are still studying there. However, after these students return to Oman in 2007, there will be no international students at the Institute. This may have an affect on maintaining educational segregation in Bahrain, as without income from other countries and such a small number of Bahraini visually impaired students, the viability of the Institute comes into question:

The number of students from Oman became smaller and smaller. In Saudi Arabia they also started to have their own Institutes and as well in other countries so we lost a large number of students.

(SP 'M' UoB Lecturer 'VI User 30+', 214)

As indicated by interviewees, the main special education provision that the Institute provides is the teaching of Braille. However, this is not only for students as sighted teachers also have to learn Braille if they want to teach in the Institute. The Institute and FSoB are the only places that have libraries with Braille books in Bahrain:

In the Institute library we try to provide the resources, books and novels in Braille. Also we have dictionaries and other things which are part of our work, bringing blind people to the level of other people. The books which are written in Braille have tapes. This emphasises our role as an educational institution.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 228)

The Institute's library needs more books but this is a problem in the Arab world where there are only classic religious texts and Arabic literature in Braille. This influences the subject areas visually impaired students can study in the sixth form and at university:

When I finished the books in the Institute I felt that I was in need of more information and reading...In the Arab world none of them have solved the problem of printing new Braille books. There are several printing centres e.g. in Libya, Egypt, Kuwait, all religious books, simple books, books which were published in the 50s... We don't have any current books.

(SP 'M' UoB Lecturer 'VI User 30+', 110/130)

R6: For projects, our library is not rich and big. We do not have lots of books that will be useful for them.

(SP 'FG' Institute Teachers, 206)

Computers are another important resource for people with visual impairment. Nowadays, there is increasing usage of technology, computers and internet in the field of disability by users and service providers (Read & Blackburn, 2005). In the Bahrain Institute of the Blind computers are one of the new services that are provided by the Institute:

In 1994 we bought computers, but we did not have programmes. Now we have Word. This has helped a lot. We turn it to speaking and now they depend on computers for their work. This is a good achievement.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 225)

In the first five years of the Institute (1974-1979) the curriculum came from Saudi Arabia. Not studying a Bahraini curriculum had certain disadvantages for students as they had not been taught the same things as other students in Bahrain. This particularly affected students when they moved to mainstream sixth forms. This changed and a Bahraini curriculum is now taught that is the same as for other students in Bahrain. There was some evidence that policy makers and providers felt that the Institute curriculum was not taught to the same standard as that in mainstream schools and was less well resourced in terms of books:

The curriculum taught in normal schools is much better than what is being taught in specialist schools and institutes... In Bahrain we are behind other countries. I looked at the Qatar curriculum... They are very developed and better than us. They have a better curriculum and books for the visually impaired.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 265)

The Institute had a special class for students with a visual impairment who were slow learners although the teachers did not have any additional qualifications to teach them. Additionally, the Institute had a student (aged 20) who should not have been in the Institute because of his age but they had no services to meet his needs so he was accepted at the Institute because there was no other special provision:

There are special classes for students with special needs, who are slow learners. One boy was sitting there. He was 20 years old, and he is not able to read and write. He has learning difficulties, they don't have special staff who can deal with him, he is visually impaired and his father insisted on sending him to the Institute because he did not have anywhere to send him.

(Field Notes Observation, 233 '20/9/04')

The Head of the Institute emphasised that Physical Education (PE) is one of the most important subjects taught to students with a visual impairment as they can have teams and show their abilities to all.

Sport is important for blind people...they feel like a human being, a normal person. Our interest in sport has a big effect on the students. I think having a team of blind people and winning awards gives them motivation and makes us work harder: a good brain in a good body.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 114-117)

The PE teacher explained that teaching students with a visual impairment is more difficult than teaching sighted people:

We need to be more patient than with normal people. Normal people, maybe through talking and seeing maybe you can correct something...they need hard work.

(SP 'M' PE teacher in the Institute & FSoB, 41)

The PE teacher adapts activities depending on students' levels of vision. He felt that families did not value PE for their visually impaired children:

The Institute has no curriculum to follow... I just copy things from here and there... I find it hard to deliver the information... families say that this is a blind kid. What is sport going to do for him? ... there is no interest from the families.

(SP 'M' PE teacher in the Institute & FSoB, 59-97)

He teaches at all levels in the Institute and in the afternoon he focuses on the visually impaired boys' national team. Although the Head of the Institute had said PE was an important subject at the Institute, the PE teacher felt it was regarded with less importance. The PE teacher complained that not enough attention is paid to sport for people with disabilities, even in specialist institutions where people work voluntarily:

The Institute does not provide adequate equipment and does not prioritise sport. Since 1991 when I joined FSoB they have said they will build a sports hall. They asked me to bring a quotation, and then they refused and said this space is for the nursery. I am nominated from the Bahrain Union of Disabled Sport. The FSoB should provide facilities and I should not be asking for them. I am doing most of my work voluntarily.

(SP 'M' PE teacher in the Institute & FSoB, 221)

The PE teacher also complained that people with disabilities are not treated like people without disabilities in sport. He talked about how the Bahrain Disabled Sport Federation was no longer active and, while Bahrain was once advanced in terms of providing sport, it is now behind other countries in the region:

Now go to any country in the GCC you will see they have special halls and special organisations for disabled sport, they are all improving. At the beginning we taught them all these things, now they are becoming better than us.

(SP 'M' PE teacher in the Institute & FSoB, 227)

While most workplaces are mixed gender in Bahrain, state schools are always single sex. The Institute and other special schools are exceptions to this. They have both male and female staff at the Institute.

The Head of the Institute remembered when he worked as a teacher and talked about the difficulties of working with colleagues who were visually impaired, as half of the teachers at the Institute were visually impaired:

There are difficulties. In addition to my role as a teacher I also had to help blind teachers in writing reports, results, exams, printing and reading the curriculum. Before there were more blind teachers than sighted teachers, therefore, we had lots of pressure...We have a total of 26 teachers, maybe nearly half are blind

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 167-170)

The Head of the Institute also talked about the importance of employing teachers with a visual impairment in mainstream schools. Currently the Ministry of Education refuses to employ them in mainstream schools (this will be discussed in Chapter Eight). He said that university students have to do a placement in the Institute if they are visually impaired:

It is important to have blind teachers in mainstream schools. We have graduates who are waiting for jobs. When they are working in schools this will facilitate the integration process, because you cannot integrate if you don't have teachers who are already working for the school...There are two or three who are working for the Institute of Religion. Their employment started sometime ago, because people were not attracted to the Institute of Religion in the past. The number of students was very small. A blind teacher in a mainstream school faces difficulties...When students are about to graduate they have to take one term to do their practical placement and as long as they are blind, they go to blind schools. They come to the Institute. Everything is

available and easy to find, the visits from supervisors are easy, and the process is easy. If they go to mainstream schools, it will be hard.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 173-183)

Currently visually impaired teachers only teach in the Institute so that both students and staff are within specialist institutions rather than within mainstream institutions with extra technical and pedagogic support. In Chapter Eight employment policies will be discussed and it will be evident that there is no lack of visually impaired teachers who could be employed within mainstream provision.

The Institute's teachers use a range of methods deployed differently with the students depending on the level of vision. They emphasised that teaching students with limited vision is easier in some subjects while teaching science and maths is more difficult.

R1: Working with them is something special. Not everybody is willing to give it a try. Teaching a subject like geography and history anyone can teach, but here, when dealing with people who have special needs, it has to be special information given in a special way.

(SP 'FG' Institute Teachers, 105)

However, not all the teachers in the Institute had been trained to teach in this sector:

Not all teachers are qualified. Some have experience without degrees. There are no experts in special needs... We need experts, practical experience, in addition to theoretical knowledge.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 217)

There are not enough qualified teachers in the Institute to teach them. Most of them are not qualified and do not know how to deal with this group. There should be some specialists.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 146)

If teachers in the Institute have not had specialised training, it is not surprising that in mainstream schools, teachers are also not trained in this area. The Head of the Institute believed that visiting the Institute would introduce the teachers to special methods for teaching visually impaired students. Some teachers in mainstream schools felt unprepared to support visually impaired students:

R5: We feel we are weak, because if the students see that the teachers cannot deal with some students, they will say that the teacher is not qualified and will not respect him.

(SP 'FG' Boys School Teachers, 154)

A policy maker and some service providers felt that the Ministry of Education should take on the responsibility to train teachers in co-operation with the Institute:

'There should be an arrangement between the Ministry and the Institute to prepare teachers to know how they should deal with this group. Teachers are not qualified to teach this group.'

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 140)

Teachers in mainstream sixth form schools discussed their difficulties in a focus group and indicated that they did not have the training and facilities to teach visually impaired students, especially in science subjects:

R4: *I cannot carry out science laboratory work, use chemicals, things that need to be mixed. I cannot explain these things verbally...*

R1: *Transferring the information is easy. But transferring skills is the difficult thing ...I can teach him the subject only by letting him memorise it, but then I will not be sure of his skills...*

R3: *I am teaching geography which is a mixture of practice and theory. Sometimes I let him participate. I want the other students to see and feel that he can participate in the classroom. When we have practical exercises for students, of course he cannot do them.*

R2: *With regards to my subject, I think I have different views. Islamic studies, it is not complicated like mathematics.*

(SP 'FG' Boys School Teachers, 87-120)

The teachers found that, after practice, teaching visually impaired students became easier but they suggested that visually impaired students should have their own resources and curriculum. It was also suggested that a special teacher should be allocated to students with visual impairments in mainstream schools:

Teachers are busy and they don't have free time, especially at the sixth form stage. If the Ministry provided special teachers it would be better and easier.

(SP 'F' Girls School SW, 181)

It was clear that neither the Institute, mainstream sixth forms or universities use the kinds of resources or approaches considered to be best practice with visually impaired young people. Lewin-Jones and Hodgson (2004) outline certain strategies for teaching visually impaired students. They suggested, for example, that a hard copy of written material can be pre-prepared and given to the student, or that the content can be relayed orally. All students actually benefit from material offered in

both visual and oral forms as they do from the extra repetition and explanation which is essential for visually impaired students. Maps, diagrams and photographs do present a problem for teachers but tactile maps can be produced; maps or diagrams can also be accessed if a commentary or a description is provided. Video extracts can also be dealt with through commentary or by introducing a short summary.

The future plan for the Institute is to develop it as a vocational training centre:

The future vision, we hope, is to be a training centre, organising conferences, workshops, seminars, and also act as a training centre for blind people in all areas....We are thinking of improving the dorms, for example, to use the rooms, the building, the swimming pool, restaurant and other halls that are there. We are thinking of investing in building in general, so we will have an income from it...maybe the university can turn it into student accommodation or something.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 139-222)

When I interviewed the Institute's chairman, he only mentioned that future plans were at an early stage. Since the Head of the Institute mentioned that these plans would apply from 2005-2006, I telephoned one of the service providers to enquire about the progress of the plans in early 2007. So far, they have sent one sixth form boy with low-vision to a mainstream primary school for boys and a visually impaired girl in the first year of secondary school to a girls' secondary school as a trial. The additional support, books and follow-up for these two students came from the Institute and no special training has been made available for the mainstream teachers. They chose these two students mainly because they have no disability other than their visual impairment. Students who have multiple disabilities will not be integrated into mainstream schools. Some parents, via the NGO for Parents of Children with a Disability, are pressing for a section in the Institute for people with multiple disabilities and negotiations are going on between the Institute and the Ministry of Education. This shows that the plans for inclusive education are not operationalised.

Policy makers and service providers had diverse opinions about educational inclusion for visually impaired pupils. Some agreed with the current programme, some wished for inclusion at an earlier stage, and some thought that there should be segregation even in the sixth form. Others thought that there should be no inclusion in the first years of education as they thought it was better for students to study at the Institute first:

At this stage the students need more teachers who are specialised. They have limited abilities. Later the students will be more rehabilitated and independent and ready to move into the wider society of schools.

(SP 'M' Vice Chairman FSoB 'VI User 30+', 234)

A University teacher talked about starting inclusion at an earlier stage:

R5: Early inclusion is much better for their future ...the integration process needs a long time to get used to, 3-4 years. Integration starts on all levels, not only in school, but even socially. The sixth form is late.

(SP 'FG' University Teachers, 96-98)

Most mainstream school teachers disagreed with inclusion. Some thought that different processes should apply, depending on the impairment level:

R4: Even if there are 10 students, they can go to the Institute for learning, it is more useful for them than coming to a mainstream school...

R3: With regards to blind people, it is different. I think the blind person is the problem. As for other disabled people or those who are using a wheelchair, they understand and they can integrate easily, as they can see what is going on, unlike blind people.

(SP 'FG' Boys School Teachers, 111/213)

These comments show that there is a range of views amongst services providers concerning inclusion and that progress towards inclusive provision remains at an operational level with implementation barely begun. Students who became visually impaired at a later stage experienced difficulties in mainstream schools because of a lack of awareness and facilities. Even when they were referred to the Institute they faced difficulties concerning the views of their families and wider society. These students' accounts highlight the significant adjustments they had to make when they come to the Institute, such as learning Braille and not using the reading and writing skills they had because the Institute only allowed using Braille. Educational

segregation has consequences for students born with a visual impairment, for students who lose their vision later and for sighted students.

5.6 Transition to Mainstream Schools 'Choice of School and Subject'

Sighted students in Bahrain experience transition from primary to secondary school and then to the sixth form and do not mix with older students when they are very young. In comparison, students with visual impairments stay in the same Institute through their primary and secondary stages of education. This means that very young students mix with older students in the same school. They do not experience the transition from one school to another and wear the same uniform throughout these years. Student with visual impairment experience a very dramatic transition, moving from the Institute to attend the sixth form mainstream school. This transition at 16 is very difficult for students with visual impairments, not only because they leave the Institute after nine years, but because up to this point they had only studied with other visually impaired students. In the sixth form school they studied with sighted students of their same sex in a school not geared to cope specifically with students with visual impairments where, inclusive practices were limited. They, were only allowed to study literature, and could not always attend the school closest to their home. Later they experienced another transition to college or University where they were integrated by gender again, but had limited educational choices and a lack of facilities.

Therefore, in the sixth form few choices were available to students in terms of both the areas they could study and the school they could attend. Although they were no longer segregated because of their disability, they could only study in schools offering a literature stream, while sighted students would choose to study science, or commercial, technical or even applied studies such as textiles or advertising. This is

not only the case in Bahrain but also in Saudi Arabia and in most Arab countries. Thus, students found themselves studying a programme that did not meet their needs or aspirations for the future and graduated with limited choices in terms of higher education and careers.

Users' accounts show that the lack of choice for visually impaired students at sixth form has a negative impact on them as some believed that they were not capable of studying anything else. As visually impaired students can only study literature at university some may stop studying, as happened to one of the users (Makiah). This also means that all of them will be similarly qualified and will look for a limited number of jobs in the same field.

Of the 19 users, 18 had to study within the literature division while only two interviewees had studied in the science division for a limited time. The first one was a student who had lost his vision while studying in the science division of a sixth form school. He did not wish to study literature and therefore left education. The second one was allowed to enter the science stream because her father was influential and used his position and mediation (*wāṣṭh*). However, she faced difficulties and decided to study literature. All the visually impaired users graduated from the literature division and only one visually impaired service provider (a university lecturer) studied in the science division but this was in the 1970s and no resources were available to him.

Eight of the users did not want to study literature, but it was their only option. The rest chose literature. Makiah, for example, did not want to study literature as she loved science. Being denied the opportunity to study the subjects of their choice caused frustration, but studying science was very difficult because of the lack of special provision. Even users who studied in Saudi Arabia, found that literature was

the only choice for students with visual impairments there, showing that this was the case in both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

Historically, the Institute nominated specific schools for students with visual impairments who were moving to sixth form. This had the advantage that they moved through in groups and it was easier for the Institute to follow-up on students and link with a small number of schools. In addition, teachers and other students in these schools had some experience of visually impaired students. However, the limited choice meant that some students had to go to a school some distance from their home and thus were not able to be with students from their neighbourhood. Nowadays, the Institute's policy is that students with visual impairments, like all other students, should be allowed to go to the school closest to their home. However, this was not always possible because some schools refused to accept these students, so they were only allowed to go to one of five schools:

We cooperate with certain schools, but now there are opportunities for blind people to be close to their place of residence. We don't want to spread our efforts. We would like them to stay in certain schools.

(SP 'M' Vice Chairman FSoB 'VI User 30+', 249)

Service providers thought it was better and easier when they all went to one school:

R1: In the past they used to go to the same school together, so they felt familiar but now they go to their own local school, so they are scared of interacting with students... Sending them to more than one school is hard. It was much easier before to send them to one boys' school and one girls' school. The teacher could follow up all the students, but now they have to go to several schools to do their monitoring.

(SP 'FG' Institute Teachers, 281-286)

One problem is that there are insufficient resources to provide someone in the Institute to follow-up on students in a range of schools:

We wished to have a direct connection between the Institute and the schools. It is easier if all blind students go to one school, but now they are distributed between five schools. The second thing is that follow up with schools becomes easy, so any problems can be sorted out quickly with the administration.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 75)

Nine of the users interviewed attended the school that was closest to their home, but four users were not allowed to do this. Shikah and Wadha, for example, were not allowed to go to the school closest to them because the other girls there were annoyed by the sound of visually impaired students typing. Shikah said that it was not too difficult as the two schools were not far apart but for Layla it was more of a problem as she had to go a school in a town which had no transportation to the town where she lived. This problem made Layla leave school for a few years until a new school was opened recently. Zaher also faced transportation problems. He tried to move to the school closest to his home but they refused to accept visually impaired students:

I tried to leave the school due to the transportation problem, but the closer schools rejected me. They did not accept me because I was blind.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 242)

Two of the users chose not to attend the closest school to their home. Jalilah went to a school in another city and this meant that she arrived late and the social worker gave her a warning, while Makiah chose a school where a cousin and other students with visual impairments attended even though they were not in her class. This shows the importance of informal networks and social support for visually impaired students.

Young people with visual impairments often need to rely on other parties in the transition process (Wright, 1997). In Bahrain as the transition came after students had spent a long time in the Institute with friends who were also visually impaired, leaving them had its problems, but moving with someone they knew was helpful. Most users moved in a group because they went to the closest school. Abd-AL-Rahman and Abd-AL-Samad moved together and found this encouraging.

Shikah, Wadha and Zibah said that their class moved as a group as they were all at the same stage, except for one Egyptian and another Bahraini student. The social support they gained by being together made this transition easier.

In summary, inclusion into mainstream schools in literature only at the sixth form level is operating, but without much preparation and with a lack of facilities and/or sub-standard facilities. In addition, there is no training or support. Students may be rejected by local schools and as a result may have to travel some distance to another school. Transportation can be a problem for some students.

Summary

This chapter has shown that despite Islamic texts promoting equality and rights for disabled people, independent living is not fostered within the family, or within institutions and the wider society. People with visual impairment have few opportunities for independent living due to domestic servants, segregated institutions, poor mobility and a lack of training for independent living.

The precepts and interpretations of Islam urge individuals and, by implication, policy makers and service providers to be compassionate, kind and charitable to disabled people. This is done by individuals through volunteering, charitable donations and, by government, through the development of segregated provision that provides special educational facilities.

Currently, the data demonstrate that the predominant social attitudes are those of compassion and kindness but without a concern for the equal rights and independence of those who have disabilities. Policies and provision in this area are shaped by the exhortations to be charitable rather than those fostering independence and equality. Therefore, the policies and provisions are more congruent with a medical model of disability rather than a social model of disability. However, there is some recent awareness of the need to develop more social inclusion in this area.

There is the potential for Islamic leaders to influence policy and provision in this area. There is also the potential to interpret Islamic texts and teachings in a way

that could support more socially inclusive practices and the rights of disabled people. This is, as yet, an unexplored opportunity as was evident in the discussion in the second part of the chapter.

The second part of the chapter has analysed the views of policy makers and service providers concerning the current specialist education provided for children and young people with visual impairments. Segregated education can be seen as a type of discrimination for visually impaired children and young people since children of similar ages are not treated as equals and do not have equal opportunities (Lockhart, 1987). This is particularly so in the Institute where students with visual impairments are taught together whatever their gender, nationality, ethnicity, etc. The only thing that identifies and defines them is that they are young people with a visual impairment. Hall noted that gender, age and culture are negated in segregated special schools and 'disability overrides everything, including parental choice' (Hall, 1997 :85). This form of specialised provision may exclude people with disabilities from some of their rights as citizens (Tisdall, 2003) since they are not treated as non disabled citizens and are segregated.

It is argued in this chapter that the current specialist provision reflects the Islam's emphasis on protection of people with disabilities that is congruent with the medical model of disability, but does not respect the principle of gender segregation as disability is given primacy over gender. This is further explored in Chapter Six.

Bahrain is not yet well prepared for inclusion in the form of services, staff or even socially. Bahrain also seems to be behind some of its neighbours whilst having been earlier in the forefront of provision regionally. It is now old fashioned in its approach within the region. This may be related to the financial situation in Bahrain, which has exhausted petrol supplies, unlike its neighbouring countries, who have higher incomes as was explained in Chapter Three. This may reflect the fact that

neighbouring countries were later to establish services and when they did, they did so within more up-to-date service models whereas Bahrain established services with more out-dated models of the 1970s.

There is some indication that the social model is being increasingly operationalised and moving the country toward more inclusion. There is some understanding amongst providers of the need to move to more inclusive provision at the primary and secondary levels. This will require state funding for facilities and staffing. Currently, educational inclusion is limited by a lack of allocated resources and remains an aspiration.

Students with visual impairments depend on computers and IT technology and suffer from the use of traditional books, difficulties with transport, the noise made by their Braille typewriters, and a good many other problems, as will be explored in later finding Chapters. As was discussed in Chapter Three Section 3.5, that the new 21st century schools* that are introduced in Bahrain might overcome most of these difficulties with very few adjustments needing to be made in comparison to the adjustments necessary in traditional forms of education. This project is not yet open either to students and/or teachers with a visual impairment. Although some of the sixth form schools that are involved in this project do have visually impaired students, none of these students have been involved with this project. Also, the students, social workers and teachers interviewed in this research are part of the boys' and girls' sixth form schools that are involved in this project. However, none of the service providers or even the policy maker from the Ministry of Education mentioned this in their interviews. The use of technology, computers and internet in the field of disability is increasing (Read & Blackburn, 2005). These technologies could greatly

* New developments in Bahrain aim to produce schools with advance information and communications technologies.

improve the educational provision for visually impaired children and young people.

Currently however, there appears to be failure to recognise this.

6. CHAPTER SIX: GENDER, DISABILITY AND ISLAM IN BAHRAINI EDUCATION

Introduction

This chapter offers an analysis of educational provision for people with visual impairment in Bahrain in terms of gender. It relates to the second research question; ‘What are the gendered experiences of visually impaired young people in an Islamic society in relation to education, work and marriage?’

This chapter addresses gender issues in educational policy and provision in Bahrain regarding visually impaired students at different stages of the educational journey. It will show to what extent policies, services and provision for visually impaired young people are sensitive to issues of gender, culture and religion through an exploration of the views of the young, visually impaired people themselves.

Although there is specialist mixed gender provision by disability until the age of fifteen, there appear to be formal and informal mechanisms to maintain gender segregation so that the norms of Islamic society are observed. The main thrust of this chapter is to argue that gender identity is secondary to a disabled identity for visually impaired young people, especially for girls. Visually impaired people however, particularly girls do not necessarily separate out their gender and disabled identities.

The review of the UK and international literature (Chapter One) showed that women with disabilities face more difficulties than men with disabilities and non-disabled women. This is because of their impairment and because of their gender (M. L. Baldwin & Johnson, 1995; E.-K. O. Lee & Oh, 2005; Morris, 1998). This study

will show how females with visual impairments in Bahrain have more difficulties than males with similar impairments and thus face a double jeopardy.

Discussing gender is not easy in Bahraini society. Although it is a relatively liberal country compared to other GCC countries, it is also a Muslim Arab country, which means it has many conservative practices as was explained in Chapter Three. Neither policy makers, service providers nor users would talk about this issue freely (as discussed in Chapter four), especially when the interviewees were male and I was an unmarried female. This limitation could have been overcome if some participant observation had been possible in the field to see the relationships between pupils in the Institute or if a male interviewer had undertaken some of the interviews with males. This chapter begins with an examination of the mixed gender educational provision at the Institute. It then examines visually impaired people's experiences of this provision showing how experiencing a mixed gender education in a society where single sex schooling was a different and difficult experience for many students. It also discusses how formal and informal mechanisms are used to promote and maintain gender segregation in the Institute and the relative acceptability of mixed provision for visually impaired people and those close to them. The chapter then turns to examine how visually impaired people experience the transition to single sex sixth form and university education. Finally, it discusses how visually impaired women experience a double jeopardy related to their gender and impairment. Not only are they worse off in many areas of their lives than non-disabled women, they are also more disadvantaged than visually impaired men.

6.1 Mixed Gender Provision at the Institute

Gender segregation is a complex issue found in many societies (Chatty & Rabo, 1997). In Muslim countries gender segregation is observed. In Bahrain women

uphold Muslim values concerning modesty in their dress as a way of maintaining proper social distance, as was discussed in Chapter Three. During the period before formal education, at the beginning of the 1900s, when education was largely religious, there was more integration between boys and girls (Shirawi, 1989). This was the case in the days of the Prophet Muhammad when men and women were taught together in Dar-Al-Arkam (Khaled, 2005). However, in Bahrain, once formal education has started, the mainstream schools segregated boys from girls until the sixth form. They are then integrated at universities and colleges. In most private schools, however, classes are mixed as such establishments are run by overseas organisations such as Christian churches, or are international schools owned by Americans, British or Asians. The pupils are foreigners or affluent Bahrainis (Ministry of Education, 2003; Shirawi, 1989).

When formal education began in Bahrain, at the beginning of the last century, there were, at first, no specialist institutions for people with disabilities, not because of a lack of awareness of inclusion, but because the needs of people with disabilities in education were not considered. However, when such institutions started to be established in 1970s, these were influenced by service provision in Western countries (Shirawi, 1989) and also by the medical model which advocated special services for people with disabilities. All these institutions provided mixed gender provision.

We are now faced with a paradox: educational provision is segregated by gender owing to Islamic values and ideologies but provision for people with disabilities is segregated by disability, but not by gender. Policy makers and citizens of Bahrain value the educational provision for people with disabilities but the only way it is currently provided is by mixed gender provision until the age of fifteen. How do the pupils, teachers and parents deal with this contradiction?

This section analyses how Islamic ideas of social segregation are maintained within the mixed gender provision in the Bahraini-Saudi Institute for the Blind and later on in the colleges or at university. There is an analysis of the ex-pupils' views of this disparity between the preferred Islamic interpretation or ideal of gender segregation and the reality of mixed residential specialist school provision.

Between the ages of 7 and 15, most people with disabilities study in mixed-gender special schools while mixed gender provision is not allowed in any mainstream government schools, either for students or staff (Shirawi, 1989). This shows that specialist schools are treated differently by the government, for a number of reasons. Mixed gender provision in special schools may be partly due to economic constraints as the number of students with disabilities is small and therefore it is difficult to fund separate single-sex institutes:

The reason for mixed provision is to lower cost and expense. There are also needs for blind people which others might not have. In terms of finance the schools cost a lot.

(35 Policy Maker, Supreme Council for Women, 78)

In Bahrain special schools may be mixed for financial reasons. Hijab (1998) noted that, in some countries, this provision may be due to resource rather than culture. In Bahrain there are only mixed schools in the private sector, so the issue of mixed specialist provision is sensitive (Ministry of Education, 2003; Shirawi, 1989). The extent of mixing may be influenced by the approach of the Director. The first three Heads of the Institute were women and during their periods of office there was full integration of boys and girls in classes. Since 1979, however, the Head has been a man and has tried to separate girls and boys within the school but this has not always been possible owing to falling numbers.

Since the Islamic revolution in Iran and the opening of the bridge between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia in the 1980s, Bahrain has moved towards being a more

conservative society (Seikaly, 1998). The Institute's policies have reflected this, and more formal segregation has been applied in the Institute:

The Institute had mixed them in classes. Some officials noticed that students were going through adolescence and needed more monitoring. Some families did not like mixed classes for their daughters. So the administration a few years ago decided to separate them.

(SP 'M' Vice Chairman FSoB 'VI User 30+', 252)

As was emphasised by Liu (2001), culture has a significant impact on understanding gender issues and education and shapes parents' acceptance of the education of their children:

A lot do not send their child because of this [mixed sex provision]. A disabled female told me if she was late arriving home by ½ an hour her family immediately came to the Institute to see what had happened. They are always scared anything that could happen to their daughter because she is in mixed provision.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 152)

It seems that mixed provision in the Institute has a financial rationale, while the move toward single sex classes can be viewed as a move to bring education for visually impaired children more in line with mainstream Bahraini practice. Segregated classes however, are not offered at all stages of the students' education:

We try not to mix them unless we have to. If there is only one boy and few girls or the opposite we mix them and we monitor.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 155)

There were more mixed gender classes for younger students as mixing at primary level was seen as more acceptable than at secondary level:

R2: Maybe it is the religion, our norms and traditions. We are careful about girls, and we are conservative about our image in society. Some of us are more conservative than others.

R1: Maybe in the secondary stage it is forbidden, because they are older, but during primary, they are young.

(SP 'FG' Institute Teachers, 253-271)

The Institute tries to provide separate classroom for boys and girls but pupils mix in some lessons such as computer lessons. There is only one computer laboratory, one library, one cafeteria and one music room. Both girls and boys use these, on most occasions, at the same time. Although the Institute is supposed to

consist of two sections, only one building is open and some classes are taught in a classroom divided in the middle, with one area for boys and another for girls. At break time, these pupils stay in their own out door areas although the space is open and there are no physical boundaries. They are asked to stay on their own side unless they have a reason to move.

The PE teacher spoke about how he worked with the female PE teacher, and how he only teaches girls up to the fourth grade:

We work together...When I first went to the Institute I told them I don't want to teach girls, because you have to touch students, move their legs, neck and back. It is forbidden in Islam ... even if I wanted to teach them they will refuse, because they fear that they might be drawn by their sexuality.

(SP 'M' PE teacher in the Institute & FSoB, 82/108-125)

Any direct physical contact is not acceptable, showing the difficulties when the PE teacher is of the opposite sex. The Head of the Institute said that they had asked the Ministry to provide them with PE teachers of both genders and that this had increased participation:

Boys like sport more and are more active, they participate in more activities, but girls are also trying. Our blind students here in the Institute have started to like sport, especially now that we have a female teacher.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 120-122)

Visually impaired boys have more chance to practise sport than girls:

In sport society ignores girls more than boys. There are norms, traditions and Islamic rules on mixing. If they build special classes or halls for girls, they will participate.

(SP 'M' PE teacher in the Institute & FSoB, 204)

In sport, men get all they want and more. But females do not have place for sport, unless they intrude on a field in sport and insist. The sport union may create a women's committee next month.

(SP 'F' Women Committee FSoB 'VI User 30+', 363)

The PE teacher cited Iran as an example of an Islamic country where women participate in sport wearing Islamic dress (*hijab*). The example of Iran convinced him that Muslim women should practise this right in public, as Iranian women participate in international sporting events while still maintaining their modesty (*hishmah*).

There are diverse views concerning mixed provision. The Head of the Institute did not view mixed provision as causing major problems. Some other service providers, however, felt that there were problems with mixed gender provision. Teachers at the Institute mentioned that, because of social attitudes, people did not like mixed gender provision. However, some supported the idea of mixed provision within limits as they felt it had certain advantages. There is also a view among interviewees that religious teaching does not prohibit the mixing of boys and girls if there is respect:

During the last 30 years, I am sure there were some problems but from my experience since the 80s there were few problems.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 152)

Mixing in the Institute causes some problems. There were more before because they were together. It is normal at this age they want to know about the opposite sex.

(SP 'F' Institute SW, 162)

R1: It is the social image. We are used to our schools in Bahrain not being mixed.

(SP 'FG' Institute Teachers, 248)

R5: I am a supporter of mixed provision. Some say that we should separate them in adolescence because if they are together it will have a negative impact. But in my opinion, although it might be negative, 90% is positive.

(SP 'FG' Boys School Teachers, 223)

Religion does not forbid mixing if it is based on the right concepts; if there is respect and boundaries between both sides.

(SP 'M' Vice Chairman FSoB 'VI User 30+', 254)

Bahrain as an Islamic society practices gender segregation in education, however, this does not apply in the same way within specialist education. It was argued in this section, that this mixed provision may be related to falling student numbers and therefore, reduced income as well as attitudes to disability.

6.2 Users Experiences of Mixed Gender Education

Users spoke about the advantages of mixed gender education, but they also discussed the difficulties. Their accounts highlighted the notion that mixed specialist provision did not provide an education that was socially and culturally acceptable to

them, suggesting that their emotions and needs were not considered. Gordon (2006) highlighted the importance of the ‘unconscious curriculum’, the idea that family relations are reflected in relations at school, including the feelings of desire and fear. Gordon suggested that an education system organised on purely rational lines hides or ignores emotions or feelings that are actually a part of everyday life. It is important to recognise, however, the ways that students experience the interaction between the unconscious and cultural and social mores at schools.

Many service users felt that at an early age mixed provision was less of an issue from both religious and cultural perspectives as there is less worry about sexual relation in childhood. They also felt that from the age of puberty more segregation should be practiced:

In my third primary grade when a boy wanted to play he wanted to play with another boy...When I was young, I used to play with boys normally; they were my classmates. There were boys I used to play with, but I am telling you the child himself often plays with his own gender.

(User ‘F’ UoB Student ‘Jalilah’, 116-128)

Adjusting to mixed sex schooling was often an issue for students who had not been at the Institute from the primary school stage. Zaher had moved from a single sex government school to the Institute. His feelings about mixing with girls were so strong that initially he did not want to study there:

First I refused to go there because of my classmates and peer group, and also because it was a mixed Institute. I was a teenager, I objected to being there; then I gave in.

(User ‘M’ Looking for job after school ‘Zaher’, 98)

For Hashem, who had also moved to the school at a later stage, even speaking in front of girls was a new and difficult experience:

In the beginning mixing was an issue. In the beginning when we started, it was that everybody was shy, especially me, I was shy of them hearing my voice, I was shy...things like this. It was only in the beginning.

(User ‘M’ working after school ‘Hashem’, 202-212)

Female users who had also moved from a mainstream school to the Institute when they were a bit older, had never previously had to communicate with boys

outside of their families. For them, communicating with boys at the beginning was very difficult:

When I first went, I did not know that there were girls and boys... I did not communicate with them a lot. Even when I met with them somewhere I used to be quiet. I was not used to speaking with boys outside of home.

(User 'F' Looking for job after Uni. 'Zainab', 132/144)

I just wanted my mother; because I was on my own, it was boys and girls, so for me it was different.

(User 'F' UoB Student 'Jalilah', 116)

It was very hard... I did not go out of home at all. I did not see boys, but when I started in the Institute, slowly, it became a normal thing for me...In the beginning I was made uncomfortable by mixing...I don't know...because I didn't like to mix with them...It was complicated.

(User 'F' School Student 'Layla', 227-275)

This suggests that adjusting to mixed sex schooling was difficult, especially for those joining the school at a later stage than some young people. However, most students' accounts suggest that they eventually adjusted.

For the majority of users who attended the Institute from primary school age, it was easier and normal to mix as the following two statements demonstrate:

From the very beginning they implant the idea in girls' heads that they are not to mix with boys. Because we are used to mixing from childhood, it is normal for us.

(User 'F' working after college 'Makiah', 107)

I was from the very beginning, from grade one with girls. I was shy to communicate with girls in the beginning, but then it became normal.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 115)

Even though some students adjusted to mixed sex schooling, it was clear that many would have preferred being in a single sex school. Majied felt that mixing with girls caused problems for students and this was not a preferred option:

It is not forbidden, but, sometimes we had problems... They [society] talked about us. I don't like studying with girls. If there was another option, I would prefer not to... I would say if mixing did not cause problems, then why not, but if it causes conflict [problems] between students then you have to separate them.

(User 'M' Sixth Form School Student 'Majied', 424-482)

It was also clear that ways of behaving and dressing that would have been acceptable in single sex schools were not acceptable in the Institute. Zaher recalled an incident which made him feel very uncomfortable when his behaviour was misinterpreted as being of a sexual nature:

For example, there was a teacher, I don't understand his logic, and he caused me so many problems because of this issue. He did not like to see my shirt outside my trousers. ... He said "you do this for personal reasons". I said "I don't understand". He said, "I know about you, you are an adolescent, you see the female teachers and girls". I tried to make him understand, I said "I am not like an animal, I mean how can I explain, I am not a street boy" ...it was a big problem for me...First, I tried to make him understand, it was all right for me to be taught by a female teacher.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 170-188)

This account illustrates how it was not only the presence of students of the opposite sex but also the attitudes of teachers which created tensions. It also suggests that Zaher felt inhibited and that his freedom was restricted in ways it would not have been in a single sex school. This also reflects how dress is an issue, not only for girls who had to wear the traditional Muslim dress for women (*hijab*), but also for boys who had to take more care about how they dressed than their peers in single sex schools.

In addition, having teachers from the opposite sex may be an issue for the students, especially those who moved at later stages and are not used to it, since students in mainstream schools have only teachers of the same sex. Hashem felt a little shy of female teachers in the beginning until he got used to them:

In the beginning I was shy of female teachers...I was basically shy, then I saw young male teachers, and slowly I overcame this problem... and got used to them.

(User 'M' working after school 'Hashem', 160-182)

Although some students felt getting used to mixing with the opposite sex helped prepare them for later life, not all users found mixing was helpful or desirable. Hassan did not view mixed gender provision as a useful experience and did not impact on attending mix gender at the University level. Hassan had very clear views about it:

No, it is the opposite. I did not find it useful for me.

(User 'M' Looking for job after Uni. 'Hassan', 265)

Hassan's dislike of mixed gender education appeared to be related to the fact that his sister was studying at the Institute with him. This was the same for Abd-AL-Rahman. Abd-AL-Rahman had strong views about his sister studying in a mixed sex school:

It is the only option. If we had Institute only for girls I would prefer her [my sister] not to study in a mixed Institute with boys.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 1038)

Abd-AL-Rahman did not like it because he was not sure that other males would treat the girls with respect:

I should admit that here in our institute we have girls; we also have girls in the university. They are great women; they have very high morals. They are very polite in their behaviour and actions. My dealing with them is normal. I deal with them in a very normal way. I talk to them. But for me, it might be something wrong with me, I cannot accept doing it. I don't like dealing with girls. I have limitations on my dealing with girls. But I cannot guarantee the way other people deal with girls.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 1008)

This dislike of mixed provision may be related to the fact that their sisters studied with them in the Institute. For males in the Arab culture, seeing a sister in mixed sex provision might affect their sense of honour and solicitude (*ghīrah*, *nakhwah*). Since girls are seen as carrying the family honour, to see their sisters mixing with boys may be an uncomfortable experience.

Although studying with girls made some boys feel uncomfortable, it was not the same for all boys. Tawfiq also had a sister in the Institute and had positive views about mixed gender schooling. However, he made it clear that he did not view his sister as a female, as she was very independent and more 'like a boy':

I don't consider my [visually impaired] sister as girl, she is like a boy. I lived with her, our conditions were hard, difficult, we did all this work together, we worked in the kitchen together, we all cooked. We did not have a housemaid, we all helped in preparing food.

(User 'M' working after Uni. 'Tawfiq', 424)

While many users could see that mixed schooling had some advantages in that it helped them cope with social situations later, at work and at university, most users felt that visually impaired young people should be able to receive single sex schooling. Their opinions reflected the predominant view shaped by their culture and religion that girls and boys should be segregated during their education. This view was held more strongly by males than females. For most users, mixing was felt to be more acceptable for younger children than for older ones. Many preferred to receive their education through single sex provision like their peers in mainstream schools. However, among the students who did not like mixed gender provision, there was awareness that segregated provision would be difficult:

If the mainstream schools were mixed boys and girls, I would not study there... In mainstream schools, it should be separated: boys in boys' schools and girls in girls' schools...If there were one blind school for girls, one for boys and one mixed, for sure I would join a boys' school.

(User 'M' Sixth Form School Student 'Majied', 556-568)

We have one mixed Institute; it is impossible to have another Institute to separate boys from girls.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 163)

This section concludes that experiencing a mixed gender education in a society that generally provides single sex schooling is a different and difficult experience, although it has some future advantages in adult life. For example, it mirrors the mixed provision of university, college or the workplace, but it also has disadvantages from a social perspective.

The next section of this chapter analyses some of the mechanisms and strategies that users employ to maintain Islamic ideas of gender segregation within the mixed gender provision in the Bahraini-Saudi Institute for the Blind by creating boundaries, both formal and informal, in relation to the opposite sex.

6.3 Formal and Informal Mechanisms for Gender Segregation in the Institute

Mixed gender provision was operationalised in the Institute and it is argued that there are both formal and informal mechanisms and strategies that maintain gender segregation between boys and girls. From this point of view, it can be argued that limits (*hudūd*) are drawn in relation to the opposite sex within these mixed gender institutions (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2006). The formal mechanisms are those put in place by the Institute, while informal mechanisms are the boundaries and limits that are drawn by people themselves to limit their relationships with the opposite sex in accordance with what is acceptable in terms of the norms of Islamic religion and culture in Bahrain.

6.3.1 Formal Mechanisms

The staff and students are of both genders, but mostly girls and boys are not in the same classes. This, however, was not the case at the Institute's inception when it served the entire Arab region. At that time, there were a larger number of students and they studied together in the same class, but in the last few years and during the data collection period the classes were segregated by gender.

A number of users remembered when gender segregation was introduced:

Up till 1995 we were in the same class, then they separated boys from girls, which is very reactionary

(User 'M' working after Uni. 'Tawfiq', 465)

We were in a mixed class during the first and second primary grade and then they separated us.

(User 'F' working after college 'Makiah', 101)

First we were not more than 8 and we were mixed-girls and boys. During the secondary stage they separated the boys from the girls. We were 4 boys students in one class and 4 girls in the other.

(User 'M' Sixth Form School Student 'Majied', 416)

Users explained the introduction of single sex classes in terms of having students from other countries. They suggested that non-Bahrainis who come from

countries that practice more gender segregation may not know how to behave in mixed classes. This may reflect a belief that other men cannot be trusted and distrust of men in particular from other countries with different cultural practices and norms:

It was better because I mean...we can avoid forbidden behaviour. We would not have any mixing between different genders, and we made sure nothing went wrong. This was because we had some students from Oman with us, they could not understand mixing.

(User 'M' Sixth Form School Student 'Majied', 482)

Users described how the Institute limited gender mixing, mirroring wider Bahraini society where boundaries are drawn to separate the sexes through the use of physical space. These accounts illustrate how segregation was limited through physical arrangements:

We had our own area and they had their own. They only gathered us together during examinations and social events. But we did not mix a lot during normal days.

(User 'F' Looking for job after school 'Wadha', 179)

There were two sections one for boys and one for girls. They also had their own teachers.

(User 'F' Looking for job after Uni. 'Zainab', 132)

We only were mixed in classes like music lessons, or parties or something.

(User 'F' working after Uni. 'Khadijah', 391)

It was not really mixing. In some sections there was mixing in others there was not. I see girls in the bus or in the classroom, we say hello, but we don't mix with them.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 188)

When students were in mixed classes, segregation was promoted through the physical arrangement of the class:

In the classroom the boys took one corner and the girls took the other far corner, or we were on the first row and they were in the last. These were some of the steps the Institute used to limit mixing.

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 273)

We did not even use the playground if the boys were there.

(User 'F' working after Uni. 'Khadijah', 391)

In addition to separate classes, the dormitories and boarding areas were also physically separated. Users' accounts reflected their awareness of segregation within the Institute:

Frankly, I never felt that we had girls with us in the Institute, because they were in one section and we were in another... We had boundaries.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 212)

Mixed sex provision was operated more commonly in the primary grades but was clearly viewed as less acceptable at the secondary level by students:

The Institute was in two parts: one for girls and one for boys. But in primary grades they mixed them, but then they divided them.

(User 'F' UoB Student 'Jalilah', 128)

As students at the Institute got older, they were placed in single sex classes. However, it was not always possible to maintain single sex classes when there were either too few students, specialist classes or a shortage of teachers:

We did not mix in the beginning with girls. In the third secondary grade they mixed us in one lesson only. After classes we mixed.

(User 'M' working after school 'Hashem', 202)

In our group, we had a shortage of teachers so they mixed us. We were teenagers, it was a ridiculous period, we did not take it seriously, we did not remember anything... Maybe religion has an influence, I will tell you, mixing during childhood is all right, but during the adolescent period it is hard. You know teenagers start to approach the opposite sex and express feelings. Up till the third or fourth primary grade it is fine but after that it will be problematic.

(User 'F' UoB Student 'Jalilah', 128-206)

Jalilah found it difficult to talk openly about this subject, even though we are both female due to the sensitivity of the issue. This is an example of how difficulties were alluded to but not fully described.

Aisha and Jalilah were the only girls with a visual impairment in their age group. These accounts highlight the inability of the Institute to maintain formal segregation and the difficulties students encountered because of it:

When I reached the secondary stage, the Institute was strange because we had some mixing in some sections between boys and girls...In the first, second, third and fourth grade I was with boys [only]. In the middle of my fourth grade they moved me into the girls' section, so the teacher took part of the lesson to explain to me the fourth grade materials. The fifth I did not study. It was a problem, when I went to the sixth grade, after I finished the fourth grade. The teachers said they had a problem of how to find time to teach me fifth grade, so I did not take the fifth grade I did the sixth.

(User 'F' UoB Student 'Jalilah', 92/214)

It was normal for me to see them, we had boys and girls. I did not hope for girls only, I was the only girl in the classroom after my Indian friend left. I thought the teacher was another girl in the classroom. I tried to calm myself in this way... They separated us in the third primary grade, but me and my friend were in the second grade with one boy... At some stage the institution was a bit muddled... I don't know, I would say that there were shortages; they did not have a system... I don't care about these things; all I cared about was my studies. I studied and that was it. Thank God

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 237-255)

The comments made by Aisha and Jalilah show that they were happier when they were was taught by a female as this made them feel that there was another female with them. Clearly they found it difficult to be the only girl among boys. According to Islamic Law (*shari'ah*), it is forbidden (*haram*) that only one girl should be with boys, as it may be considered immodest (*khlwah*). It has been suggested that attraction (*fitnah*) may occur when a man is with women and that then there is a danger of sexual relationships starting (Mernissi, 2003; Qasim, 2001; Rippenburg, 1998; Utas, 1988). This is more true after reaching puberty. The Institute's administration had to balance this dilemma. It could either 'protect' a girl from being the only female in a class of boys or it could risk compromising learning by the girl missing a year of schooling.

Formal mechanisms for segregating boys and girls appear to have increased over time as there was less formal segregation when the Institute was established. This is due to Bahrain becoming more socially conservative. Therefore, the Institute started to apply more formal segregation. This may have been a response to the concerns of some of the families of students with visual impairment who were conservative (both *Sunni* and *Shī'a*). In summary, formal segregation increased as the students got older. It is clear that the Institute did not always segregate students when student numbers were very low, when there was shortage of teachers, or for certain specialised activities. In these instances the physical space was used to create some segregation within the class.

6.3.2 Informal Mechanisms

In addition to the existing formal mechanisms to promote gender segregation in the Institute, there were also a number of informal mechanisms that pupils used. Most young people with visual impairments accepted the norms of Islamic society concerning gender segregation in Bahrain where there is limited acceptance of mixed provision in education at the primary and secondary levels.

Ex-pupils talked about how they avoided mixing with peers of the opposite sex at the Institute:

I hardly mixed with boys, maybe because society constrained me to stay with girls.

(User 'F' working after Uni. 'Khadijah', 547)

I did not mix with the boys as some of them were noisy, so I mixed with girls. I would not mix with them, our up-bringing would not allow that... The boys were together. My friendship with boys was only inside the classroom ... I knew that talking to boys was wrong, so I avoided them in every way possible.

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 231/273)

Shikah illustrates how pupils often imposed segregation themselves as they reached puberty:

In the Institute, from an early age I got used to them, so the situation became normal. I often looked where the boys were sitting and sat with them. I looked for things to satisfy my nutty personality. In the past I did not have a female peer group, I started being with the girls when I was in the secondary stage. When I was in my first secondary grade... I became more mature. From kindergarten to sixth grade I was with the boys. I used to ride things with them, play, talk and eat with them...I changed in the first secondary grade, by myself; I knew that I had become older... no one from my family or the teachers told me to change. When you get older you know what to do.

(User 'F' working after school 'Shikah', 477-501)

One coping mechanism used by students for dealing with mixed sex provision was to define their relationships with the opposite sex as those of brothers and sisters, thereby making mixing socially acceptable by using the device of fictive kinship. In Arab Muslim society this means that each one deals with the other with respect and as socially neuter to some extent (Al-Makhamreh, 2005; Hudson, 2005; King, 2005). Some of those who talked about defining their relationships in this way were female users. This may be because it was more important for females to redefine their

relationships with the opposite sex clearly. In Arab culture, the notion of honour (*sharaf*) and shame (*'aīb, khuzy*) are terms used more in relation to the conduct of girls and women (Abu-Lughod, 1999; Riphenburg, 1998; Yamani, 2000).

Here, two females, Khadijah and Makiah, describe the use of fictive kinship:

Mixing was normal for us, we had sibling relations. Anyone who crossed the boundaries was stopped. The administration was very strict, mixing was monitored, there was no way of doing anything wrong.

(User 'F' working after Uni. 'Khadijah', 433)

Some people might think that it is prohibited (haram) for boys to mix with girls. Everything has limits as they say. If I sit with a man in front of people and I respect myself and I consider him as my brother he sees me as his sister. It is different than sitting with him alone and maybe things happen between us. This would for sure be prohibited.

(User 'F' working after college 'Makiah', 119)

One user, Zaher, talked about how he redefined his relationships with girls as 'sisterly'. This suggests he viewed them as socially neuter:

'I did not find anything that attracted me to the girls in the Institute. I was only with them for a short time during the lessons. It was like brothers and sisters. I am not pretending that I am an ideal person or anything, but nothing attracted me, do you understand what I say. If something does not attract you, you will not react to it. The issue is they were like my sisters; I talked and joked with them but within limits.'

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 188)

The lack of such evidence in other accounts may be because the users did not find it appropriate or found it difficult to talk to a female interviewer. Most of them declared clearly that they did not want to marry someone with a visual impairment. This may show that a person with a visual impairment is not eligible for marriage to them (as will be discussed in Chapter Eight) and is another reason for defining their relationships as sisters and brothers.

Redefining relationships with people of the opposite sex as brothers or sisters occurred even at advanced stages of education such as college or university. Users talked about the limits in dealing with male teachers at the college and how they labelled them as brothers to make this acceptable:

College generally is different from university. In the university, male or female students cannot talk normally with their lecturers. What makes it

easier for us is that is it easy for me or anybody else to speak to our lecturers. It is normal to talk to teachers; we always stop teachers and talk, laugh and joke with them as our brothers even if they are our teachers. Although most of them are much older than us, we know our limits.

(User 'F' working after college 'Makiah', 248)

We boys cannot live without girls. I personally consider them as my sisters. We cannot live without them. Even the girls, if you ask their opinion they will not agree with being segregated.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 1080)

Additionally, some people in Muslim countries use the word 'brotherly' to explain informal social interaction (Al-Makhamreh, 2005; Hudson, 2005; King, 2005). Makiah said, 'we always stop teachers and talk, laugh and joke'. Such a relationship should not develop to the extent of laughing and joking with any unrelated men, especially a man who is older and in a higher position such as a teacher. So, she explained the behaviour by redefining their relationship as that of a sister and brother. Another example is that it is forbidden to shake hands with someone of the opposite sex, but some people justify this by calling it a 'brotherly' relationship even though they are not related.

Another mechanism for maintaining social distance is through wearing the traditional Muslim dress for women (*hijab*). As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, this dress (*hijab*) is a way of hiding a woman's shape as it covers her entire body except for her face and hands (El-Solh Camillia & Mabro, 1994; Ruby, 2006). As described by Mernissi (1996; , 2003), the Muslim women's dress (*hijab*) allows women to move among men in public spaces. Mernissi suggested that the *hijab* hides women from view. Secondly, it marks boundaries. Lastly, it identifies what is forbidden as what is covered by the veil is a forbidden space for others. A study by Ruby (2006) concerning Muslim women in Canada showed Muslim dress (*hijab*) indicated female identity, allowed women to take control of their own bodies, and liberated women by giving them more physical and social freedom. Women covered their bodies so as not to cause temptation (*fitnah*) (Fakhro, 1990; Ruby, 2006).

Muslim dress for women (*hijab*) is a mechanism used by women for drawing boundaries in relation to men. Aisha and Shikah set boundaries by wearing such dress (*hijab*) in the Institute when they got older so that mixing would be acceptable within the norms of Islamic society and culture:

*I don't know what the religion thinks about it, but if the girl knows herself and does not talk to them except for studying, I would say to be a recipient for talk not a talker, the religion would not be harsh on her. If she wore Muslim women dress (*hijab*) if she did everything the religion asked of her she will be all right.*

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 263)

*They told me now you are mature you have to wear the Muslim women dress (*hijab*) ...I cannot sit with them without boundaries (*hudūd*), I stopped playing and the nutty childish behaviour. It was different than before.*

(User 'F' working after school 'Shikah', 477-501)

Shikah's quote shows that she was asked her to wear *hijab*. Although, in an earlier quote in this chapter she says that no one asked her to change her attitude to boys, she changed by herself. This shows that simply being asked to wear *hijab* made her change her attitudes. No one had to tell her all the other details, which is why she emphasised that no one asked to change. They just asked her to wear *hijab*.

However, while Muslim dress for women (*hijab*) is one of the most significant ways of drawing boundaries, it is not the only way. The majority of women in Bahrain do not wear such dress (*hijab*) although more women have worn it since the eighties (Seikaly, 1997, 1998). Although the Institute is a joint Bahraini-Saudi institution, it is ruled by Bahraini policies so wearing Muslim dress for women (*hijab*) is not compulsory as it would be in Saudi Arabia (L. Ahmed, 1993; Altorki & Cole, 1997; Dahlgren, 2005; Engineer, 2004; Sabban, 2005; Seif, 2005; Yamani, 2000). However, from my observation in the Bahraini-Saudi Institute, the majority of girls do wear Muslim dress and begin to wear it from an earlier age than girls without disabilities in mainstream schools. This is not related to the Saudi ethos, but likely to be related to family concerns about daughters attending a school with mixed gender

provision. The minority of females with a visual impairment who were not wearing Muslim dress (*hijab*) were *Sunnis* or *Shī'as* of Iranian origin. Most of the *Shī'a* girls who came from villages had worn Muslim dress (*hijab*) from an early age, as they were more conservative:

Shī'as [from Bahraini origin] are more conservative than us to some extent; you feel that we the Sunni are less conservative.

(User 'F' working after school 'Shikah', 1151)

Of the nine female users in the sample, all but one had worn Muslim dress (*hijab*). The one user who had not worn such dress (*hijab*) was a *Shī'a* of Iranian origin.

Another way of indicating social distance and subordination in Islamic culture is by a woman lowering her voice and eyes, together with her use of space. A study by Gordon (2006) in Finland observed differences in the use of space and voice between different genders. The study noted that the idea of invasion applied to agency in informal relations and spatial practices. Boys tended to move about more in school and the image of a mobile boy relates to connections that are made between masculinity and activity. In other words, in Western societies, the movement of males is seen as natural, whereas a girl who makes her physical presence felt and uses space extensively is not as common. The same study showed that use of one's voice is a complex issue for girls in Western societies. Girls use less space, while their bodies will be more contained and their voices quieter (Gordon, 2006).

The Qur'an in *Al-Nour* (The Light) 24: 30 asked men not to look upon women. Men gazing at an unrelated woman can affect her honour as much as through a physical relationship. This explains the extent to which staring is forbidden (Ruby, 2006; Translation of Sahih Bukhari, 2007c).

In Bahrain, girls show submission and modesty by lowering their voices and eyes, by not starting conversations, and by not standing too close to unrelated boys or

men in shared space. Within family settings this behaviour is not observed. Among visually impaired people, the voice and gaze are less likely to be lowered than among non-visually impaired people to maintain boundaries between men and women; not seeing each other may be considered a sufficient boundary. Abd-AL-Muhsen described how, when he first lost his sight, he was encouraged to join the FSoB. He was worried about mixing with females as he was not used to it. He explained how the Chairman of FSoB, who was also visually impaired, told him that mixing with women should not worry him as they could not see each other:

My only worry was that the FSoB contained a mixture of boys and girls. He said [visually impaired chairman] 'don't worry, we are all blind. Nobody is going to see anybody'.

(User 'M' working after college 'Abd-AL-Muhsen', 183)

The voice is the key method used by visually impaired people to communicate with each other and they often speak more loudly to aid communication and to make it clearer as this is the communication tool with no supplementary method such as eye contact which is practiced by sighted people. Although they do not lower their voices, they signify boundaries by the way they use their voices. They speak respectfully and avoid loud laughter. Here, Abd-AL-Muhsen talks about this:

Because they are girls, for example, a girl with me in the college, either she is studying with me, or she is a member in the FSoB. I don't have the right to laugh with her or sit with her or invite her. I am sensitive to these issues. It is prohibited. Apart from marriage, it is prohibited to have a relationship between a man and women. The only legitimate relationship is marriage. This is as stated in religion.

(User 'M' working after college 'Abd-AL-Muhsen', 523)

The section concludes that, within mixed gender provision for special education, both formal and informal mechanisms are used to maintain the observance of Islamic practices. It may be easier to ascertain, observe and discuss formal boundaries, but these may be combined with informal boundaries. Informal boundaries are more readily accepted by people, however, as these are created by the people themselves as opposed to the formal boundaries that are drawn by rules and

policies. Informal boundaries, nonetheless, may be more complicated and contain more related issues than are discussed here as they are linked to the norms of society. As a result, users may not have mentioned them. In addition, I am an insider from the same society which makes me less likely to notice some of these informal boundaries.

The use of such mechanisms exists on different levels depending on age, place, ethnicity and ability. As discussed by El Guindi (1999 :82), for women in Arab Islamic cultures, privacy is a right and is achieved through 'dress, space, architecture and proxemic behaviours'. This privacy is both relational and public.

This section has discussed these mechanisms and the strategies employed by the Institute, service providers and users to maintain social distance and symbolic gender segregation within a mixed education provision setting. There is a paradox between the Islamic norms of gender segregation and the provision of mixed specialised provision.

6.4 The Relative Acceptability of Mixed Sex Provision for People with Disabilities

Mixed sexed education appears to be more socially acceptable for people with disabilities than for non-disabled people due to a number of reasons. First, education is highly valued in Bahrain and, as the Institute is the only option for people with visual impairments, 'necessity overrules the forbidden'. Second, disabled people are seen to some extent, as socially neuter, which makes it less problematic for them to mix with the opposite sex than it is for sighted people. As a result, it could be argued that there is less need to provide segregated provision.

A common saying in Arab Muslim countries is that 'necessity overrules the forbidden' (*al-darūrāt tubīh al-mahḍurāt*). This statement is used in Islam to justify an action when no other choice is possible. For example, although drugs are forbidden in Islam, when it is for medication and will improve the quality of life, it is

accepted in certain doses. As soon as the condition disappears, the drug becomes forbidden again (Al-Hawaly, 2007). Some view the issue of mixed gender provision in the Institute in the same way. As education is highly valued in Bahrain (Shirawi, 1989) and seen as a must, then ‘necessity overrules the forbidden’ and visually impaired people attend schools even though it is offering mixed educational provision.

Most users saw mixing as relatively acceptable when it was for the purpose of studying, especially since there was no other choice:

Here in Bahrain either girls study in this institution or they don't get any education. It is not feared that the girls will not be able to have education because they are studying with boys...There is the statement "necessity overrules the forbidden"(al-ḍarūrāt tubīḥ al-maḥḍurāt)... But for the Institute in my opinion it is allowed because there is no alternative.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 139/181)

Mixing with them, that will be normal, for studying it is all right

(User 'M' School Student 'Rajab', 1010)

People accepted mixing in studying more than in other things; they accepted it more than mixing in other things.

(User 'F' Looking for job after school 'Wadha', 1070)

I think it is normal, there should be respect, we are there to study not for other things... only to study.

(User 'F' School Student 'Layla', 307-317)

Even when I told them at home that there were boys and girls, male and female teachers they said 'not to worry. As long as it is a school nothing is going to happen'.

(User 'F' Looking for job after Uni. 'Zainab', 138)

The majority of families sent their children to the Institute because they did not have any other option. Allowing a visually impaired girl to attend a mixed sex school may reflect recognition, on the part of the parents, that education is particularly important for a girl who is less likely to marry because of her disability. Hatem's (1998) study of Egypt in the nineteenth century found that at Al-Azhar, which is one of the biggest religious institutes in a Muslim country to educate men in the Islamic religion, allowed older women and women with disabilities, especially those with a

visual impairment, to study there. These women were then allowed to teach subjects they learnt at Al-Azhar to other women from the middle and upper classes who were not allowed, at that time, to be integrated with men. Hatem suggested that age and impairment gave them more freedom to mix with men and allowed them to enter some male occupations, as their age and impairment meant that they were not regarded as sexually desirable which gave them some protection (Hatem, 1998).

As indicated in the verse below, the Qur'an imposes fewer restrictions on older women. They are allowed to remove their head covering (*hijab*) and may have more freedom. This may lead some people to think that people with disabilities may be allowed fewer restrictions as they are also less likely to marry, although this is not mentioned in the Islamic religion.

Al-Nour (The Light) 24:60 *AND [know that] women advanced in years, who no longer feel any sexual desire, incur no sin if they discard their [outer] garments, provided they do not aim at a showy display of [their] charms. But [even so,] it is better for them to abstain [from this]: and God is all-hearing, all-knowing.*

وَالْقَوَاعِدُ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ اللَّاتِي لَا يَرْجُونَ نِكَاحًا فَلَيْسَ عَلَيْهِنَّ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ يَضَعْنَ ثِيَابَهُنَّ غَيْرَ مُتَّبِعَاتٍ بِزِينَةٍ وَأَنْ يَسْتَعْفِفْنَ خَيْرٌ لَهُنَّ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

Shami (1988; , 1993), an Arab female anthropologist, has a similar viewpoint. She found that Palestinian refugee families in Jordan did not allow their sighted daughters to be educated. Instead, mothers taught their daughters to cope with housework to prepare them for getting married. Education was considered costly for sighted girls who would marry. Daughters who were visually impaired, however, were educated and had more freedom to go out and mix with people so that they had a better chance of employment. As visually impaired women had fewer chances to marry, education was considered more important for them.

Additionally, there is an Egyptian proverb that is quoted in most Arab countries: 'marry the beautiful daughter and educate the ugly daughter' (*a-lhelwah jwuzūha wa al-weḥshah 'almūh*). This reflects the idea that girls with less chance of

marrying should be educated so they can be independent in the future. This is explored in more depth in Chapter Eight.

This is similar to the situation in other Arab countries. According to Lakkis' study (1997), of Lebanese households, when more than one person is disabled, a disabled male child is treated differently from a disabled female since the male goes to school while the female does not. An example cited in the study concerned a brother and sister in the same household with a motor disability. A wheelchair was acquired for the son but no effort was made to do likewise for the daughter.

Users expressed views concerning gender segregation and Islam, and gender mixing in the Institute. Abd-AL-Rahman made a link between religion and the lack of choice and opportunities for girls in education. He emphasised that there should be separate schools as is the case for other people, but as there are no such schools, girls should be allowed to attend the mixed gender Institute:

The idea of not mixing should start from the beginning of upbringing. It is better to have girls separate from boys in schools ... In my opinion if there was another Institute for girls then I might say mixing is forbidden (haram), but since we don't have another Institute for girls, I think it is wrong that people don't send their daughters to have education. It is not good that parents forbid their daughters to gain education... This is the only educational institution for the blind.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 175-212)

This analysis suggests that there is a conditional acceptance of mixed gender provision for visually impaired people. The idea of conditional acceptance is evident in Layla's account. She reflected that her father allowed her to go to the mixed gender Institute as there was no other choice, while he refused to allow her sighted sister to go to a mixed gender private school:

It was because there is no school for boys and another for blind girls... If I was my sister, I would go to a girls' school. I went to a mixed school because there was no school for girls.

(User 'F' School Student 'Layla', 293-299)

This section concludes that under some circumstances mixed gender was accepted for people with impairment. There was a relative or conditional acceptance. The next section discusses how users experience their transition, first, to a single-sex sixth form school after being in the mixed gender Institute, then again moving to a mixed gender university or college.

6.5 Inclusion in Mainstream Single Sex Sixth Form Schools and Mixed Gender Inclusion in University

After mixed sex primary and secondary school provision, visually impaired young people join mainstream schools for their sixth form and experience segregation by gender. For many of the female participants, a girls-only school at the sixth form level was a positive and enjoyable experience. As the accounts of Aisha and Zibah show, girls were less constrained in single sex provision:

I got used to go with girls for the last three years, I go out with them, I felt that I was in a classroom full of girls, I felt that I had the freedom to go out without my (hijab). I felt that I could take my hijab off to take some air; it was hard to have it on all day with this heat, I hope if God willing I will overcome it at the University, I was used to it before and I am sure it will be all right.

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 261)

Later some users felt that mixing with pupils of the opposite sex was, to a certain extent, problematic in college and university because of the different types of relationship that occur there:

When I transferred from the secondary school to the university I don't want to mix with boys because at the school we were all girls... About the university, I felt awkward to meet boys, because I did not socialise with the boys at the sixth form girls' school. Although I was with boys in the institute, they were few; only 3-4 boys, all the rest are girls. But now it is okay to be with boys at the university because I got used to it after five years.

(User 'F' UoB Student 'Zibah', 672-694)

There are some people who were involved in relationships, they are not interested in studying there are just there joining the programme, they wasted their time...some people get dismissed, some left, the reasons for that is they were in love with certain girls. If you want to love a girl, you can, but you don't need to make it public, to give indications, and broadcast it.

(User 'M' working after college 'Abd-AL-Muhsen', 573)

For sure the society would not accept mixing, if the mixing is like universities [without boundaries], if they mix, there are some good and some bad girls.....mixing is not good, it is better not to have mixing because of the norms and traditions.

(User 'M' working after school 'Hashem', 277-290)

If I see a girl and a boy messing around, saying nonsense things just to be close to each other, I don't like it. She will come close to him or he comes close to her in a silly way...The University is great, but the sixth form school is better, we were close to each other. But at university, there are boys and girls, it is easy for a boy to sit with the girl and talk to her about silly things, not only education ... In the sixth form school it was better... At the university, I did not like mixing in general, except if the conditions allowed, for example, we are fewer boys than girls so we cannot be on our own, so they have to mix us.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Samad', 494-506)

For some visually impaired young men, inclusion with girls and with non-visually impaired people at university was uncomfortable as the way they viewed themselves and were viewed by others changed. Khalid commented:

For blind people [at university], it was different, they were shy and withdrew from the student life, so some of them made sure not to go with girls. [When] in the mixed Institute, that was different because she was blind and he was blind too, so it did not matter. So if a girl[in the Institute] call him blind he will call her blind too, but with normal people it is different.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Khalid', 582)

While Khalid and other male users found this issue difficult to discuss, it is possible that their perceptions of their place in the social hierarchy changed when they experienced mixed university provision. In the Institute, it could be argued that boys were viewed and viewed themselves as superior to visually impaired girls who they may have viewed as sexually neuter. In the university setting, however, boys may become viewed as sexually neuter and inferior to non-visually impaired students.

Although mixing with the opposite sex appeared to be more limited when students were in the sixth form school, this changed when they went to university where the sexes mix much more freely and with fewer boundaries. This is because students at that age are considered to know how to formulate their own boundaries without having formal mechanisms put in place. At the UoB there are no formal boundaries segregating young men and women, only informal boundaries that are

maintained by the students themselves. There is full integration everywhere in the University except in prayer rooms, in some of the sport lessons, and in the student canteen where there is a small special section that is mainly used by a few girls who cover their faces and want to eat freely. The rest of the canteens are mixed. This is different from other countries in the region as universities are not integrated at all in Saudi Arabia (Engineer, 2004; Hekmat, 1997). In Oman, for example, the classes are mixed but with more formal mechanisms as females sit on the back rows and use different hallways and doors. They also have segregated activities (Riphenburg, 1998).

Although mixed schooling at the Institute could be uncomfortable and could create particular problems for students, with hindsight, users who were now in the sixth form, at university or at work could see that experiencing mixed gender provision at school had some advantages in later life. Some users felt that in their adult life they found it easier to mix with colleagues and friends of the opposite sex owing to the experiences they had had during their primary and secondary school years at the Institute. The way in which mixed schooling prepared young people for later life is reflected in the accounts of several users:

In the university, it did not make any difference, but I know there was one of my friends from secondary school who found the mixing at the university very strange. For me it was normal. I can go to any mixed place, it is normal, my family taught us that mixing is normal. We don't think that mixing environment is strange or unacceptable... I feel that the period in the Institute prepared me for university.

(User 'F' UoB Student 'Jalilah', 194-200)

Because we are used to it, we see more advantages than disadvantages. Maybe if I was not used to mixing, I would not be able to mix with men today...In my work, I am the only female among many male employees, I go to lunch with them. '... 'I prefer male company. I can cope better with male friendship than female... I got used to this from the Institute because we used to be together all the time.

(User 'F' working after college 'Makiah', 320-326)

Mixing at University did not affect me, you know primary and secondary school was mixed.

(User 'F' working after Uni. 'Khadijah', 547)

When boys and girls mix, they can integrate into wider society and gain more experiences... So I support the idea of mixing more, at least among blind people at an early age, in primary and secondary school.

(User 'M' working after Uni. 'Tawfiq', 461-471)

The experience of mixing, yes, I found it very useful. I learnt how to deal with them, for later in the future at university and work I have to deal with them.

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 297)

6.5.1 Disabled Identity and Gendered Identity

This research found that some families may accept gender mixing because they do not see this as a major issue for people with a disability. In other words, the identity of the disabled person may eclipse his/her gender*. For example, some people say that people with a visual impairment do not recognise gender differences and so do not mind if they are educated in mixed gender classes.

There is some evidence from the interviews with female users that they had more freedom than their peers without impairments. Even males with disabilities found that they had more contact with girls than non-disabled males. Visually impaired people, and in particular girls and women, appear to be thought of as socially neuter. As a result, there are fewer social restrictions. Some of these freedoms come from their families, others from the wider society.

An awareness of difference was a theme running through a number of user accounts:

Many people including my family got used to it because of our condition. Maybe if we were different [non-visually impaired] then they might have a different opinion. But we are used to mixing from an early age, so the situation of mixing was normal.

(User 'F' working after college 'Makiah', 107)

For me, it did not matter that it was boys and girls...that was normal, we were children at that time... For sure if I had grown up in sighted society it would be different.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 205/302)

* By this I mean that people see a disabled identify first, before someone's sex is considered. Disability has primacy over sex or gender.

Khadijah discussed how she had different treatment with more social freedom at home than her sister who was not visually impaired:

My family did not object as long as it was for my benefit. On the contrary when I was at the Institute boys called at my house several times and my family let me speak with them without any problems. They did not object. This is because they trust me and they know me, the only worry was for me to study... They did not have any alternative but to send us to the Institute while my sister had other options. Of course the situation was different. To be honest with you, my family trusted me more than my sister. Yes they trusted her and everything, but they gave me more freedom. If I wanted to go to any place first I decided then I informed them... Maybe they knew that I did not have any problems mixing with boys, I don't know.

(User 'F' working after Uni. 'Khadijah', 391/409)

Makiah's family did not object to her studying in the Institute, while she thought they might have objected if her sighted sisters had attended an institution with mixed provision:

My sisters studied in mainstream government schools. Maybe for the general public it is not acceptable. Maybe even with my family, I don't know exactly how would they think, but I don't know if they would allow mixing for my sisters as they did with me.

(User 'F' working after college 'Makiah', 113)

Layla's family had similar views concerning her sighted sister:

It was my sister who wanted to go to private school and my father did not agree... Maybe because I wanted to continue my education and there is no separate school for girls...

(User 'F' School Student 'Layla', 263/239)

Aisha felt that her sighted sister and brother were uneasy about mixing with peers of the opposite sex:

They are scared, because they did not have things like that.

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 285)

The experiences of Khadijah, Layla and Aisha, all of whom had sighted sisters, show that their families treated them differently owing to their visual impairment.

As I observed and it was echoed by users and service providers, the majority of the volunteers who work with visually impaired people are female. They work equally with males and females. Females without impairment appear to have more freedom to deal with men with impairments than men without impairments. Again,

this may be explained in terms of the disability having primacy over the gender identity.

The fact that most sighted volunteers are female may not only be a result of them being more willing to help, but may be because boys have more freedom and are allowed to be more outgoing which leaves them have less time to volunteer. Girls, on the other hand, have less freedom and have limited places to go. Therefore, volunteering in societies for people with disabilities will be an accepted form of going out for them:

There are more female volunteers than males...not only the quantity; it is the people who are willing. From my experience I noticed that women are more willing to help than men. For blind people, girls help more than boys...Girls give more. Boys are busy with their outings, they would not cancel their outings with their friends to come and help us. Girls are the opposite. I dealt with girls... they used to assist us in recoding. It is impossible to get a male to do that, but for girls it is normal... Maybe that is connected to the emotional side of the girls, which is more than boys. I would not say that it is because of feeling pity, but I don't know what is it. But girls in general are very cooperative.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 1100-1122)

Although girls deal more freely with males with impairments, there are still certain boundaries which limit their help, such as not being out of the house late, as described by a service provider who was also a user:

Maybe he can read for me at other times, but we could not meet specially if the reader is from the opposite sex, the female is ready to read for you and I faced this during my master's more than my undergraduate degree. During the master's degree, I needed reading, the girls are happy to read for you during the university working hours and the working hours are very limited, so maybe she can read for me from 9-12, then I go for my lectures in the afternoon, so around 1-7 so after 7 I will be tired and I could not read anything after this time, because the reader could not leave her house and come to read for me, especially since we are in Eastern countries not the West, so these are the difficulties. Also I needed more hours during the master's degree, I need more hours for reading which made things more complicated.

(SP 'M' UoB Lecturer 'VI User 30+', 78)

For example, I, as a Muslim from Bahrain, do not shake hands or touch strange men but I touch people of the opposite sex with a visual impairment while guiding them, as their impairment has primacy over their gender identity.

Another piece of evidence which shows that impairment has primacy over gender identity in Bahrain, is that some women who wear *hijab* (*mutahajebah*) do not wear it in front of men with a visual impairment as they are not seen by them. So, for example, some visually impaired men seek to find work as organ grinders for women-only parties at which women are not wearing *hijab* and dance. The visually impaired musician is allowed to attend without using a partition to separate him from the party (as was explained in Chapter Three and will be explored in Chapter Seven). Although Islam asks women to wear *hijab* even in front of visually impaired men many women view this as illogical. Usually, when such a band consists of males they put up a partition so they cannot see the women.

A study of the Bedouin in Egypt by Lila Abu-Lughod (1999) asserted that individuals did not feel shame in dealing with vulnerable individuals despite gender and social differences. Women did not veil themselves in front of men of low social status or non-Bedouins who were ineligible as potential husbands.

My evidence shows that social mixing of girls and boys is more readily accepted for people with a disability in educational establishments because education is highly valued and there is no other choice. Also a disabled identity has primacy over a gender identity which gives the disabled person more freedom.

6.6 Double Jeopardy for Females with Visual Impairment

As was argued in the literature review (Chapter One), women with disability faces more difficulties - a double jeopardy - compared to men with disabilities and non-disabled women because of their impairment and gender (M. L. Baldwin & Johnson, 1995; E.-K. O. Lee & Oh, 2005; Morris, 1998). This study found that although females with a visual impairment had more freedom because of their impairment, they also experienced a double jeopardy because of their gender and impairment (E.-K. O. Lee & Oh, 2005). Boys with impairment have more freedom

than their female counterparts. Girls will be limited in their mobility, going out, dealing with people and have more restrictions than males with similar impairments. There was recognition of this in the accounts of males and females. The following accounts of young male users illustrate this:

Girls they cannot take any car; they cannot ride in a pickup. Because, first she is blind, even if the boy is blind, but for the boy movement is easier... I walk in the street anybody will hold my shoulder...Boys can manage with anybody, but girls cannot... I can go anywhere, even if I don't know where it is, people will help me. But girls cannot manage in going everywhere... It is not the issue that she has less rights than boys, but it is maybe that the norms, traditions and religion have more control over this issue... girls' only entertainment is to come to the FSOB or those who work, so for them it is a change of environment... boys have more freedom than girls... Open freedom, generally... We are in our society they don't allow girls to live on their own. But boys can live by themselves. For example I live on my own.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 811-931)

It is the social context in general in the Arab world, they give boys space to do things and explore the world. Therefore, they depend on this so that they form their own character even it was not that good... The girls within the Arab world are busy caring for the family. She should be more careful, aware and take care of herself, if she is blind that will be even more limited.

(User 'M' working after Uni. 'Tawfiq', 449-459)

Abd-AL-Rahman felt that his sister, who was visually impaired, should have less social freedom than himself. He related his behaviour to his upbringing:

She has not the same freedom as me... I mean I move around, go out and travel. But she cannot do these things. Not because she is blind, but because she is a girl. As I told you the issue goes back to upbringing... Maybe I will deal with girls and call them, but I would not allow my sister to do it... It all depends on upbringing. I cannot give the same freedom for girls to go and come, call and deal with boys...' I know myself, my behaviour and what I do and whom I am dealing with. But I don't trust other people.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 957-996)

Young women users commented on the differences, illustrating the double jeopardy they experience:

The blind boys are more sociable. They have friendships, they go to the FSoB, they see each other and they exchange experiences, even if there is a difference in their ages... In Bahrain we have more blind boys than girls, there are not many girls. You feel that they are more lucky in facing life and its conditions.

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 645)

There were other blind people in the university during my time, Tawfiq and his brother; we were three, three of us at that time. We were in the same group. They suffered from the same problems I did. Maybe the situation for

me was harder because I am a girl and I was very shy.... In general we all face the same problems.

(User 'F' working after Uni. 'Khadijah', 525-535)

Layla described how her brother got more freedom because he was male:

Even if I want to go out of the house, I could not. Because my family says that we would not allow a blind girl to go out alone. ... 'although my brother, he is 18 years, and he is not good in education, he does not want to go to evening schools, however, my mother and father say that he is better than us...affected by norms and traditions...they view him as better than us. If he does anything wrong they don't do anything to him.'... 'He has more freedom. If I come late, they would not argue with me but they get cross with me, but it is not only me but also my sisters.

(User 'F' School Student 'Layla', 479-491/1007-1014/1026)

In general, it can be argued that women in Arab Muslim countries have more limited choices (El-Solh Camillia & Mabro, 1994). Boys are given more freedom as families need to uphold the social and cultural notion of honour (*sharaf*) and shame (*'aīb, khuzy*). This is related to the social modesty of girls and women who uphold this family honour (*sharaf*) and have to take responsibility for what is said about them and reputation (*som'ah*). Boys are allowed to be out of the family home until a later time than is allowed for girls:

A boy goes out in the evening, his friends come around and take him, it is not only blind people but boys in general. They go out. They do not ask about him like they do for a girl. For boys it is normal to go out and do things. A girl does not do that, she stays at home and helps her mother. Sometimes girls come around to take her, but sometimes the families refuse.

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 651)

As was discussed in Chapter Five, mobility is a bigger issue for females than males with visual impairments owing to religious and cultural issues.

For some girls, this double jeopardy may also result in them losing educational opportunities. They may lose the chance to be educated in Bahrain if they come from conservative families that do not want to allow their daughter to be educated in a mixed gender school. Zaher was from a conservative village where education was not even accepted in the past for all girls:

In... [my village]the mentality is different and school was forbidden for girls. When they reached the age of 9 years, they had to stay at home. Now it

is normal for girls to study, but still mixing has limits and boundaries (ḥudūd).

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 194)

This shows that females from non-urban areas may lose their chance to be educated because currently rural areas continue to be more traditional in customs, hence do not accept mixed provision. Other users also commented on this:

Many families don't allow their daughters to have education because of mixed gender.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 1082-1086)

As I told you, there are people who are very conservative. They think that there is no way you can study in this school because it has boys. Other families they are more understanding, our daughter we trust her, we educate her, she knows what to do and when. This girl if she knows herself and her morals would not do anything wrong. They trust her and she will be studying there.

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 273)

For example, in studying in a school which has boys and girls, they refused because they were scared that people were going to gossip about us.

(User 'F' School Student 'Layla', 996)

For example, at the university, they suggested a separation between boys and girls, but that was a problem because they did not have the capacity to have separate education for boys and girls. The university was prepared to give education for both men and women. So if the girls' families refuse for them to attend university because of mixing with boys, this is honestly not fair for the girls.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 175)

The daughters of such families lose their chance of having an education. Because some families may not be in favour of such arrangements, they may decide not to send their daughters to the Institute.

This section concludes that females with visual impairments face more difficulties than their male counterparts and females without visual impairments because of their gender and identity in an Islamic society.

Summary

This chapter analysed the views and experiences of visually impaired students concerning gender segregation and integration in education in Bahrain, a Muslim Arab country. This chapter discussed the national and Islamic approach to social

segregation by gender and illustrated how this is dealt with at the different educational levels for people with visual impairments. The analysis in this chapter showed how visually impaired people were treated and viewed differently, both formally and informally, with regard to gender. In addition, their gender identity was not felt to be of primary importance when there was an impairment. In addition, the chapter has illustrated how females with disabilities face more difficulties than males, owing to the status of women and importance of social segregation and honour in an Islamic society.

The gender identity of visually impaired students in specialist provision is viewed as secondary to their disability. Gender segregation is maintained formally and informally in the mixed specialist provision at the primary and secondary stages of education. Formal and informal boundaries were in place to make mixed provision more acceptable in terms of religion and culture. However, there was a recognition that education for visually impaired people especially girls is important because of the need for them to have financial security and independence as will be discussed in the following two chapters. In addition, this chapter suggested that educational provision is often provided without regard to how students and families would like services to be provided.

7. CHAPTER SEVEN: GENDER AND DISABILITY IN ADULT LIFE – EMPLOYMENT

Introduction

This chapter addresses the employment concerns of the first research question ‘How are policies and provision for visually impaired people influenced by interpretations of Islam in an Arab society?’ and the second research question: ‘What are the gendered experiences of visually impaired young people in an Islamic society in relation to education, employment and marriage?’ The wording of the legislation regarding the employment of disabled people is rights based, but current implementation of the law is more in line with a segregated special employment approach. This is therefore congruent with the policy, provision and practice in the education sector and the protective charitable, but arguably disabling, tenets of Islamic teachings.

People with visual impairments in Bahrain are educated in the humanities at secondary school and university, but are then mainly trained and employed as telephone operators or teachers at the Bahraini-Saudi Institute for the Welfare of the Blind, regardless of their preferences, qualifications or skills. However, there are few employment opportunities for teachers in the Institute and positions such as telephone operators are harder to find since advances in telecommunications have resulted in fewer telephone operators being needed. As a result, a growing number of visually impaired adults are unemployed (Al-Bassrey, 2004).

This study found that many visually impaired people expressed dissatisfaction with employment opportunities and some were very unhappy with their current

employment. University graduates found working as telephone operators demeaning and some wanted to withdraw from further education as they knew they would end up in this job. Working as a telephone operator does not attract a high salary and this affects the financial situation and social standing of visually impaired people.

Although most people with visual impairments face difficulties in employment, these difficulties may be overcome through the utilisation of social networking and mediation (*wāstħ*). A patron client system based on favours is common in the Middle East (Rabo, 1986, 2005) and Bahrain is no exception. Finding work is also affected by gender, levels of education and marital status. This chapter begins with a discussion of employment law, government policies and employment practices before discussing visually impaired people's experiences of finding employment in Bahrain.

7.1 Background on Employment

Throughout the world, people with disabilities face difficulties in employment. In 1987 in the UK, 50-80% of all people with disabilities were unemployed. It would appear that the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (HMSO, 1995) has not improved matters. For example, an employer can reject an application from a person with a disability if a risk assessment suggests that the work is not appropriate (Goodley, 2000). Risk assessments are, however, always individual and this may reinforce an imbalance of power between a disabled applicant and an expert assessor. In such cases, people with disabilities may have to prove themselves worthy of employment when a person considered to be 'able-bodied' does not (Goodley, 2000). Research carried out recently revealed that 44% of UK employers were unaware of policies or guidelines relating to the employment of disabled people. In fact, it has been estimated by the Disability Rights Commission that disabled people are seven times more likely to be unemployed and claiming benefits than their non-disabled

counterparts. Also, disabled people are more than twice as likely to have not to have qualifications. Indeed, it has been shown that disabled people who work are often worse off than those who don't. There are clear obstacles facing disabled people wanting to find employment, with or without qualifications, in the UK (Goodley, Higgins, Wright, & Chataika, 2005). A study carried out by Jones et al (2006), showed, that limited evidence could be found to suggest that wage discrimination existed for disabled people and although the 'penalty' a for work-limiting disability has fallen for men, it has increased for women.

The UK's anti-discrimination law and independent approach suggest that markets would be available for people with a disability if they were actually able to make choices without unfair discrimination. The market approaches, however, do restrict choices for disabled people since individual markets do not address the requirements of different types of disability. In the UK, the employment rate for people with a disability is 3.4 per cent but these jobs are mostly in lower positions. However, by 2006, the target is for companies to have 20 per cent disabled staff (Shakespeare, 2006a).

Studies have shown that in the USA, people with a disability are less likely to work and, if they do work, they have lower economic status and poorer access to employment opportunities than non-disabled people (M. Baldwin & Johnson, 1994; Beegle & Stock, 2003). Therefore, the labour market is discriminating against people with a disabilities and women with disabilities face even more discrimination in the American labour market (M. L. Baldwin & Johnson, 1995). Women from ethnic minority groups often face more discrimination in employment although this discrimination may vary depending on the ethnic group (Anwar, Roach, & Sondhi, 2000).

Having employment and a secure income are necessary if people are to live in dignity, yet the labour force participation of disabled Arab women is very limited. According to the Kuwaiti census, only 2% of Kuwaiti women with disabilities were 'active' in the labour force compared to 10 % of the total number of Kuwaiti women, 20 % of disabled Kuwaiti men were working compared to 67% of the total male population in Kuwait. Within the 2% of women, noted above, 52 % of the women with disabilities had jobs in professional and technical fields and 35 % were employed in clerical areas. Disabled Kuwaiti men (38%) were more often employed in service fields, or clerical work (25%) and also as labourers (16%) (ESCWA, 1994).

This difference, based on gender, is perhaps a characteristic of the Gulf countries where a very small proportion of disabled women are employed in professional jobs with good salaries and social status. There is, however, more pressure on men in the Gulf Countries (with or without disabilities) to earn a living, whatever the occupation (Nagata, 2003).

Conversely, in poorer Arab countries, such as Jordan and Egypt, any vocational training for disabled women must go alongside extra income as otherwise families might be reluctant to agree. In Lebanon, a poorer country, disabled women feel that the vocational training on offer is too traditional and of doubtful value since such women learn to sew and cook while their male counterparts learn computer skills, electrical engineering and other such courses. It is difficult for well-educated disabled women in Lebanon to gain high positions in either the private or the public sector while those that do find jobs frequently mention that they are discriminated against in terms of salary and suffer harassment both at work and while using public transport. When NGOs attempt to recruit people with disabilities, the majority of recruits are male and very few women benefit from mainstream employment initiatives (Nagata, 2003). Bahraini people with disabilities of both genders do face difficulties in

employment. Disabled women however, have the double disadvantaged of being female and disabled in that they have poorer access to employment than non-disabled women and disabled men.

7.2 Policy and Implementation

In Bahrain, as mentioned in Chapter Three, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is responsible for providing services and employment for people with disabilities. It was also the responsibility of the Ministry to provide educational institutions for people with disabilities, with the exception of the Institute for the Blind. Chapter Three also shows that in August 2004, the Ministry was divided into two separate Ministries; the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Social Development (Ministry of Social Development, 2007b). At the time of fieldwork, they were not separated.

According to the Bahrain National Action Charter employment is both a duty and a right for Bahraini citizens. It also indicates that the government will provide citizens with continuous training in order to provide more job opportunities (H.H. King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifah, 2000).

The Ministry of Labour is the Ministry responsible for finding work for Bahraini citizens while the Ministry of Social Development is specifically responsible for people with disabilities (Al-Taweel, 2005). Therefore, all Bahraini citizens apply for jobs through the Ministry of Labour except for people with disabilities who apply through a National Committee for Employment and Training People with Disability (PWD) in the Ministry of Social Development, whose responsibility it is to integrate people with disabilities into the labour market (Al-Taweel, 2005). Service providers explained about the establishment of the National Committee for Employment and Training PWD:

We created committees for all those who are unemployed. There is a committee for engineers, one for teachers...etc. and also the national committee for the employment of disabled people.

(SP Chairwoman of Committee for Employing & Training PWD, 80)

Policy makers from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs indicated that a new law with regard to people with disabilities was being considered:

PM: All the rules and regulations need renewing. We coordinated with the right agencies to change them. We discussed a rule within some of the rules in the Arab world in general, also within the GCC which is closer to us. but now what we have is the Section Four rule for employment and the labour market. We don't have it over here and we hope we can delete this in the new labour rule....

SP: The labour law, Chapter Four, is for people unable to work in particular. It does not specify the services for disabled people, therefore, the ministry decided to have a special law for disabled people which included rehabilitation, employment and integration in general including health, education, housing, employment and other areas... All the parties will take their responsibilities in implementing this law. As long as it is legislation, they have to do it.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Social Development 'with attendance of SP', 71/88)

Before October 2006 there was no law for people with disabilities in Bahrain. In October 2006, Law Number (74) Concerning the Care, Rehabilitation and Employment of the Disabled came into effect (See Appendix 8). This law only applies to Bahraini citizens with disabilities. Before this there was 'The Labour Law for the Private Sector, 1976 (See Appendix 9), which had a section concerning disabled people (Number 23), which was mainly related to the rehabilitation and employment of people with disabilities. It was not a specific law for people with disabilities as it was within the private Sector law. For 30 years the law of 1976 was implemented without review. Both laws are very similar, with the main additions to the new legislation of 2006 in Articles 2-3, 5-9 and 16-25. Most of these additions have not been implemented yet; although Article 23 of 2006 states that the law should be implemented within 6 months from the issuing date.

In June 2007, Bahraini newspapers are reporting that the Ministry of Social Development is considering establishing a team to implement this law. One of the main additions in 2006 was the establishment of a Supreme Committee for the Care

of Disabled Affairs. Although such a committee may facilitate more services for people with disability and will have more supervision on specialist provision in co-operation with Ministry of Social Development as indicated in the law, it may increase service segregation for people with disabilities.

Bahraini law shows that the government considers it important for people with disabilities to be rehabilitated and employed in order for them to have the opportunity to play an active role in society. This law, in some aspects, is similar to the DDA in the UK that encourages the employment of people with disabilities and considers employment as one of the most powerful pathways to independence (Disability Discrimination Act, 2006). Bahraini law states that businesses and industrial firms should be encouraged to employ people with disabilities, either by making such firms aware of their obligation to respect and protect the equality and rights of people with disabilities and/or by giving them certain incentives in return for employing such people (See Appendix 8). For example, the Ministry of Social Development in Bahrain financially rewards any business or industrial firm that employs people with disabilities.

Articles 4 and 10-11 of the 2006 legislation, which replaced Articles 19-21 of 1976, indicate that people with disabilities are more likely to be rehabilitated and trained for vocational rather than professional jobs and, after receiving vocational rehabilitation, a person with a disability is given a certificate rather than a qualification. This shows that there are unequal employment opportunities for disabled people which result in employment only in specific vocational jobs, hence semi-segregation in the labour market. In addition, this indicates that vocational certificates are seen as having greater value than educational qualifications for people with disabilities. For example, even the visually impaired university graduates had to be trained as telephone operators and were employed depending on the vocational

certificate they received after this training and not according to their educational qualifications.

One of the main additions to the legislation for disabled people is in Article 11 of 2006 (which replaces Article 21 of 1976). Prior to 2006, employers who had more than 100 employees were instructed to employ people with disabilities. From 2006, employers with 50 or more workers must ensure that at least 2% of their workforce is made up of people with disabilities. This section of the law only applies to the private sector, not to government sector jobs. It has been suggested that people with visual impairment prefer to work in the government sector as government jobs are more secure (Poya, 1999). Article 12 of the 2006 legislation (that replaces Article 22 of 1976), mentions that only certain government jobs should be prioritised for people with disability. In addition, Article 11 of 2006 indicates that the disabled person should be employed depending on their rehabilitation certificate not their educational qualifications.

The Law implements rehabilitation and semi-segregation in the work force rather than promotes inclusion. This was the case with visually impaired people who were trained as telephone operators. People with a disability have to register to find jobs within the terms of the rehabilitation they have received and have to note other jobs they are able to perform, that do not depend on their qualifications. This suggests that the law is written in a way that supports work segregation and non-equality in work opportunity between disabled and non disabled people.

In both the laws of 1976 and 2006, there is no mention of adjustment of the environment, as the social model of disability emphasises. Although employers are encouraged to employ people with disabilities, there is no legislation about making workplaces accessible for disabled people.

Another addition to the 2006 law was in Article 5, where females with disabilities were mentioned for the first time. This was in regard to maternity leave, which is longer than for women without disabilities:

Exception from the provisions of the Labour Law for the Private Sector and Civil Service regulations, a female disabled worker shall be entitled to a special leave on full payment which shall not be deducted from her other leave if she is pregnant and the Medical Commission recommends that her conditions requires that, subject to the conditions and rules that shall be determined by an Order from the Minister. (Article 5 of 2006).

Another specific mention of disabled women was in Article 6 regarding working years and retirement, which in general requires fewer years of work than people without disabilities and in both cases women have lower requirements than men.

Exception from the provision of the laws pertaining to pension salaries and rewards, for civil, military and social insurance workers, the insured or beneficiary whom the Medical Commission determines that he is a disabled shall be entitled for a pension salary if the period of service calculated in the salary has reached a minimum of fifteen years for male and ten years for female. If either one of them is not entitled for a salary according to the provisions of the laws referred to and according to the salary, in this case on the basis of this period of service or fifteen years whichever is greater. (Article 6 of 2006).

One of the direct benefits that people with disabilities receive from this new law is found in Article 7, which establishes a monthly allowance for people with disabilities. The law does not specify an amount, but the current amount given is 50 Bahraini Dinars (USA \$133) (See Chapter Five) (Akhbar Alkhaleej, 2005). Moreover, all disabled equipments and material are excluded from fees and taxes and the Ministry of Social Development should help in providing them according to Article 8 of 2006. Furthermore, Article 18 of 2006 (section 4) states that it is acceptable to receive charitable aid and donations, thereby underlining the idea of receiving rights through charities rather than from the state (See Chapter One).

Service providers thought that one problem with the legislation was that there was a lack of overall policy:

There is no policy for people with disability while a policy would safeguard their rights in education, work, services and everything... These policies do not meet any needs. We need to have a policy to safeguard disabled rights. The government should provide for the disabled equal to what they provide for normal people, but with special care for disabled people.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 241/250)

Service provider interviewees indicated, as did some users, that the problem is not only with the law, as the law does allow some rights for people with a disability, but with the difficulties of implementation of the law:

The interest from the government is there. Everybody is participating in it. Maybe the government can share via the Ministry of Labour, also the employers, the caretakers, the disabled people themselves, everybody should participate to activate the law.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 197)

The Ministry of Social Development has tried to use the media as a tool for encouraging employees:

We cooperate with the media in programmes, workshops and seminars. For example we asked them to cover our activities, now we have a national seminar to talk about the employment of disabled people.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Social Development 'with attendance of SP', 90)

Table 7:1 shows the disabled population (age 15+) by sex, labour force participation and type of disability. This data from the 2001 census shows that the number of disabled people in Bahrain who are working is small. From the total number of 3,318 disabled people only 497 (15%) were recorded as employed. Of the total population of 438 visually impaired people (15+), only 50 (11.4%) were working of which 44 (10%) were males and 6 (1.4%) women. This illustrates the high rate of unemployment among people with a visual impairment, in particular among women of whom 158 (96%) were not employed (General Directorate of Statistics and Population Registry, 2007b). There are limitations to this data, as was discussed in Chapter Three.

Table 7:1 Disabled Population (15+) by Sex, Labour Force Participation and Type of Disability in 2001 Census

Sex / Labour Force Participation	Census 2001								
	Type of Disability								Total
	Blind	Deaf	Deaf & Mute	Amputee	Mentality Slow/ Strange Behaviour	Paralyzed	Weak Aged	Other	
Males									
Working	44	27	58	55	21	55	16	155	431
Unemployed & Worked Before	1	1	5	2	3	3	2	25	42
Unemployed and Not Worked Before	4	2	12	3	15	4	0	30	70
Student	11	6	20	5	46	6	0	53	147
Home Maker	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Income Recipient	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	9
Pensioners	78	13	6	22	8	67	60	64	318
Disabled	60	8	30	24	278	83	29	186	698
No Desire to work	2	4	1	2	19	2	5	8	43
65 Yrs. + and Not Working	70	2	4	13	7	32	52	24	204
Total	274	63	136	127	398	253	165	546	1,962
Females									
Working	6	6	10	6	2	9	2	25	66
Unemployed & Worked Before	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	1	6
Unemployed and Not Worked Before	0	1	5	0	2	7	0	13	28
Student	6	10	19	2	39	10	1	40	127
Home Maker	109	20	38	33	44	119	98	126	587
Income Recipient	1	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	5
Pensioners	4	0	0	0	0	2	5	1	12
Disabled	8	9	26	6	182	47	8	89	375
No Desire to work	2	3	7	0	19	3	2	14	50
65 Yrs. + and Not Working	27	2	1	4	3	19	32	12	100
Total	164	53	107	53	293	217	148	321	1,356
Total – Males and Females									
Total	438	116	243	180	691	470	313	867	3,318

Source: (General Directorate of Statistics and Population Registry, 2007b)

There are a great many foreign workers in Bahrain and this increases the number of unemployed citizens (Fakhro, 1990; Seikaly, 1997, 1998; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006). The government has developed a law to increase the employment of Bahraini citizens and they also offer incentives so that every disabled person who is employed is counted as two citizens (The Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 2000). As a result, when an employer hires a disabled people, s/he can then employ more

foreign employees, hence increasing the number of foreign employees. Although this shows that the government is trying to encourage the employment of people with disabilities and this is a positive thing, some people, both able and disabled, abuse this. Although none of the interviewees talked about this, as it is illegal, it is widely practised and known that companies register employees to show that they have disabled citizens working for them and give them the minimum salary, but then employ foreigners to do the job. The citizens who have been employed for jobs that are not real either stay at home and get a salary or they go to the workplace but in reality do nothing (Al-Ferdan, 2005). This can be called ‘disguised unemployment’.

This phenomenon may be more prevalent among people with a disability for several reasons. First, employers may feel that they are helping the disabled person and count it as a donation (*ṣadaqa*). Secondly, employers are credited as employing two people when they register that they are employing a disabled person. On the other hand, people with a disability may find this an easy way to get an income without making any effort. The only thing is that they will have a low income and will not be able to look for a job anywhere else, which makes some people decide not to do this. However, this type of arrangement is on the increase among women who want to stay at home and like having extra income.

In Bahrain, until the recent introduction of a disability benefit in October 2006, people with disabilities did not receive many benefits from registering as disabled. The greatest benefit was that they could find employment via the disabled section in the Ministry of Social Development which, in reality, often did not do its job, according to interviewees’ comments. However, when a disabled person gained employment, the employer obtained an advantage if the employment was registered via the Ministry of Social Development as required by Article 11 (2006) that replaces Article 21 of 1976. This often gave an appearance in the statistics that disabled people

were employed via the Ministry when, in reality, they were not and only registered there to benefit their employers. This was explained by the vocational specialist who said that no visually impaired people were employed via the National Committee for Employment and Training PWD:

The number of visually impaired people employed through the ministry is 'zero' ... Any company that employs anyone, the papers should come to the Ministry of Social Development for them to confirm the employment, then the disabled person counts as employing two normal Bahrainis. Many employers employ these disabled people directly then send the papers to the Ministry to get a paper to say that a disabled person has been employed so he gets the advantage of 2%, so the company asks for a visa for foreign employees. This will show as if the person had been employed through the committee ... All visually impaired people have been employed directly via the companies.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 90-97)

Employment for disabled people primarily occurs through the use of influence and informal networks and mediation (*wāsth*). Some service providers and all the users who were interviewed felt that the National Committee for Employment and Training PWD, was not effective in obtaining employment for people with visual impairments. Some of them felt that special provision in this area was not necessary and felt negatively about it:

People with a disability legally cannot come to the department directly and apply for a job like normal people.... My opinion is that segregating their services is a double-edged sword. If we segregate them then we can work more with and for this group to have effective outcomes. But if we do not segregate them their chance would be like any non-disabled citizen looking for a job. So their chance of getting a job will be less

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 58/66)

Users thought that there were limited job opportunities for people with visual impairments because they had to apply via the National Committee for Employment and Training PWD in the Ministry of Social Development. They felt that if they were able to apply like able-bodied people there would be more job opportunities available to them:

The employment section for the disabled in the Ministry of Social Development, is not very effective ... I prefer to apply like sighted people...In the sighted section there are a lot of jobs on offer. In the section

for disabled people, I swear by God, I have been there for three months and there were only two or three jobs. The evidence is, that when I asked x, and he asked them to find me a job, they found me one. There is corruption in their administration.

(User 'M' working after school 'Hashem', 346-359)

Another responsibility of the Ministry of Social Development is to provide appropriate training for Bahraini citizens looking for work (Al-Taweel, 2005). Therefore, they also provide some training and rehabilitation for people with visual impairments although they do not take their educational qualification into account. Shikah, who benefited from this, and who co-operated with them in training other disabled people, thought that they only did this on the insistence of the FSoB:

If the FSoB had not organised training workshops, the ministries would not do anything for blind people... 'FSoB gave us a training course on operating, international communications and English language: communication skills... I studied in BATELCO the computer system on how to transfer information from the normal computer to the Braille computer. After I finished this training course, I was sent 6 people to prepare them to attend the BATELCO training course. The course was organised by the Ministry of Social Development, but the FSoB insisted on having this training course. The FSoB covered the transport too, but the Ministry of Social Development provided the salaries.

(User 'F' working after school 'Shikah', 566-602)

Users said that the Ministry did not help them in finding jobs and thought that the Ministry of Social Development was not helpful because they were qualified to work in educational provision. The Ministry only employed people in the labour market depending on their disability training as indicated by the law:

The Ministry of Social Development has my papers. They asked us to give them our papers, but they did not do anything... they are not cooperative... The Ministry should convince employers and company owners to employ blind people.

(User 'F' Looking for job after school 'Wadha', 1217-1247)

I don't feel the Ministry of Social Development does anything for us because our areas of specialisation are related to school and education, not labour.

(User 'F' working after Uni. 'Khadijah', 670)

The Ministry of Social Development looks for jobs for people with visual impairments via the National Committee for Employment and Training PWD and in co-operation with the employment committee at the FSoB:

We cooperate with the FSoB for blind people. We have a joint plan and a team for employment, we have joint meetings. We plan how can we integrate blind people with programmes provided by the Ministry.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Social Development 'with attendance of SP', 49)

The vocational specialist and users felt that the FSoB played a more effective role than the Ministry:

The FSoB is taking on this responsibility... the FSoB is looking for jobs for them and it is working more effectively than the Ministry. Searching, sending letters, following up and everything, the society is doing it.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 102-104)

About employment, we only relate to FSoB. The Ministry of Social Development does not have any role in employment... The Ministry takes a long time to find you a job.

(User 'F' Looking for job after school 'Wadha', 1183-1193)

This section has shown how the National Committee for Employment and Training PWD is not very effective in finding work places and job opportunities for people with visual impairments in Bahrain, although statistically it can prove the opposite. Users think that the FSoB makes more efforts than the Ministry. This is practised in other countries, for example the UK (Gradwell, 2005).

The new Bahraini law will establish the Supreme Committee for the Care of Disabled Affairs which will take responsibility for seeking employment for disabled people. This will reduce the role of the NGOs which currently help disabled people find employment. Whether the new committee will be more successful than the NGOs remains to be seen.

This section concludes that the government, via its policies and the Ministry of Social Development, is trying to encourage the private sector to employ people with disabilities, even though the government sector itself does not widely employ such people. In addition the focus is on rehabilitation (vocational rehabilitation) rather than mainstream education, which results in segregation in work places and employment in low paid jobs.

7.3 Facilities and Work Accessibility

Accessible work places are key if disabled people are to be employed successfully. In some countries such as the UK, disabled workers have the same employment rights as other workers, as well as some special provisions. In the UK, the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act, 2006) states that it is against the law for employers to discriminate against disabled people because of their disability unless this can be justified. Also under the DDA, employers must make any ‘reasonable adjustments’ to ensure that no disabled person is disadvantaged by arrangements or the physical features of the workplace.

As was explained in the previous section, Bahraini law does not cover workplace accessibility and most employers do not provide special requirements because they must cover the costs themselves:

SP: There are some of them who got jobs in the labour market, others they could not because to work there you need a special machine: some companies have it and others don't. They find it hard to buy this machine as it is specially designed for blind people.

(Policy Maker, ‘F’ Ministry of Social Development ‘with attendance of SP’, 47)

Interviewees explained that one of the reasons for being unemployed was that the environment was not organised to integrate people with disabilities and users felt that more could be done:

The environments are not prepared. The way the place is designed and the people who work there, everything should be prepared...Every day there is new equipment and technologies. For example, they may need an electronic mug that will make a sound when it is full; all these things need to be provided. The environment should be prepared for blind mobility in the way it is planned. They should add some Braille signs. Toilets should be designed in a better way.

(SP ‘M’ Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 178/298)

But the government at least can do something with the ministries. Say, for example, make awards. At least have some coverage from the government; let them be responsible for these things.

(User ‘M’ UoB Student ‘Abd-AL-Samad’, 898)

If we have a decision from the king then things will change.

(User ‘M’ Looking for job after school ‘Zaher’, 1225)

People with a visual impairment also have problems with transport to work. Such barriers prevented the visually impaired from working in some jobs:

But still transport is one of our problems...It all depends on individuals and their willingness. There were some young people who did not have transport; somebody to give them a lift.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 560/1218)

Only the FSoB provides transport for important things, for example, if you have an interview for a job. Otherwise no places provide transport for the disabled.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 286)

Sometimes they cannot be employed, due to transport issues... if people have transport, their problem is sorted.

(User 'M' working after Uni. 'Tawfiq', 394)

Policy makers bear transport in mind, but progress is slow:

There is huge collaboration regarding building and streets and how these can be acceptable for the disabled. There is a committee and we asked them to contribute and they do, it is within an international committee. The other year it was the year for disabled people so they concentrated on mobility in streets and buildings.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Social Development 'with attendance of SP', 90)

Transport issues for visually impaired people in other countries may be less of a problem. In the UK for example, a study found that 88% of people with a disability do not have transport problems in getting to work because of the public transport system (Grewal, Joy, Lewis, Swales, & Woodfield, 2002).

This section shows how the implementation of policies is key to providing access and special facilities for people with visual impairments in the workplace. Laws without implementation are of limited use. Currently in Bahrain there remain many challenges in this area and the majority of visually impaired people are unemployed.

Some socio-cultural factors affect obtaining employment in Bahrain and there are some that are specific at people with visual impairments. These factors include exercising social influence through mediation (*wāṣīh*), gender, marital status, their level of vision and education. These factors are discussed in more depth below.

7.4 Mediation (*wāṣṭh*) in Relation to Employment

As indicated by Rabo (2005), mediation (*wāṣṭh*), which is based on trust, friendship or patronage, is a complex process since it involves actors in relationships that are both hierarchical and horizontal. Mediation (*wāṣṭh*) is used in marriage and in seeking jobs (Rabo, 1986), but personal connections and influence are common in such processes in Eastern countries and communities (Anwar, 1979) where many people use their own personal influence or that of their family to find work:

They think, 'I'd better employ someone I know and who is my friend, rather than someone I don't know.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 1408)

None of the sample found a job through the help of the Ministry of Social Development. Most found work via influence and through mediation (*wāṣṭh*), or via the FSoB. Others used the media as a tool to help them individually or as group.

The vice-chairman of the FSoB, who lost his sight in the middle of his scholarship, could only continue to receive his scholarship with the help of the media and by transferring to the Institute. He could not be employed in a mainstream school as were other students with a scholarship:

When I first started, the ministry was hesitant, then they agreed and they told me, that is fine, we will place you in the Institute. This was before I finished. When I went in 1977 they told me that my issue was over and that I had to deal with the Institute, but I had the help of his Highness and the media which placed my story on the front pages of newspapers. They described me as Taha Hussein of the Gulf. Copies of this went to the Ministry. When I graduated I felt good about the Institute but the Ministry would not agree to employ blind people... nearly, up till now, frankly, I did not try to apply to the Ministry...my work in the Institute is easier than in another place.

(SP 'M' Vice Chairman FSoB 'VI User 30+', 63-66)

The first and only visually impaired lecturer in Bahrain, mentioned that what made it easier for him was that he was partially sighted and he used strategies such as walking close to the students so he could see them. He also developed an easy way to record attendance and tried his best not to allow students to see his impairment. He

was afraid of saying that he was blind and he was too scared to ask for anything, similar to the strategies of ‘passing’ to avoid stigma (Goffman, 1963), as explained in Chapter One. After he was employed, he never asked the University for anything, such as a special assistant or a particular facility, as he did not want to draw attention to his impairment. He always provided what he needed on his own. He was employed on a temporary basis in the beginning and was not employed permanently until he proved himself and used his personal and family influence and mediation (*wāṣṭh*). He compared his experiences of teaching at the Institute, which was much easier as everything was in Braille, with his experiences at the University where he depended on the help of others in reading students’ papers for him. He indicated that teaching Arabic is easier as it only depends on students listening to him and he also spoke about his experience of teaching students with visual impairments in the University:

In UoB, I was the first teacher with a visual impairment... I don't allow the students to feel that I am blind at all. I did not depend on Braille papers in front of them. When taking the attendance register, I discovered a way; now the sighted teachers are doing it... Because I am blind the Dean did not want to employ me in the university although I had taught for a year and a half as a part timer. I was scared to say I was blind... It was easier to teach blind people, because it was in a language I knew... I did not need assistance, but for sighted people I am in need of assistance... At the university I taught blind students... it is easier to deal with them as you can give them whatever they need because you have had the same experience before. I prepare the questions for them in Braille, no other teachers at the university do this for their students. Also some simple thing, for example, some notes and summaries. This is, of course, within my limitations, as I don't have a printer to do that...if they like to write in Braille, they can.

(SP ‘M’ UoB Lecturer ‘VI User 30+’, 147-169)

However, the University initially refused to give him a scholarship for his Ph.D. because of his impairment, even though it gave scholarships to all other academic employees after a certain period of employment:

I have been teaching at UoB for seven years...I taught three terms and the head of department and my colleagues were very happy with my performance. Also students were happy, I did not face any problems during my teaching. I don't know why they appointed me on a lecturer's post... it does not allow me to do my PhD.

(SP ‘M’ UoB Lecturer ‘VI User 30+’, 192-198)

This year he got a scholarship to do his PhD in Jordan after involving lots of people and talking to the University's President, thus showing the importance of personal mediation (*wāṣṭh*).

The Head of the Women's Committee explained that, in her time, no one helped her to look for a job. She looked for one on her own by using her influence and mediation (*wāṣṭh*) after being at home for a year. She has been working as telephone operator for more than 10 years:

I was looking for a job for around a year. No one helped and I was looking by my self until I got the job [operator] that I'm in until the present time.

(SP 'F' Women Committee FSoB 'VI User 30+', 49)

Users talked about their experiences regarding finding jobs. Makiah was lucky. She found employment easily, without even an interview, in an area linked to her studies. This was because she had an impairment and, as the College was not old and wanted to employ people with impairments, they treated her as a special case:

I was the first blind girl to attend the College, so the Minister of Labour wanted to meet me. I went to the minister and he asked me about my studies, and what I wished to do as work after my graduation. He said that he had decided to give me a job in the College. I started to work and study at the same time.

(User 'F' working after college 'Makiah', 80)

Because users could not find jobs easily, they sometimes worked in jobs that were upsetting for them. Abd-AL-Muhsen, who studied Chemistry and is now working as a telephone operator, spoke about his previous work experience as a receptionist, but, as he could not write when he lost his sight, he was offered work as a labourer on a decreased salary. He refused this work as he felt that he was too qualified:

I was a receptionist. He said no, you should write reports and things like that, but should be careful not to place too much pressure on your eyes. So I advise you to work as a labourer. The salary went from 250 down to 130 Dinars. I told him that I did all these studies, my English is good, I hope I will work with you. He said no, it is your sight. Anyway we will keep your documents and you can inquire from time to time.

(User 'M' working after college 'Abd-AL-Muhsen', 639)

Now he is working as an operator, a job he found with the help of the FSoB which shows that, in his case, the influence and mediation (*wāsṭh*) was through the FSoB:

When I applied for job, at the end of the interview I told him (Mr A); don't give me the job because I am blind. If you think I am the right person for the job then give it to me. If not, then let me go. I am not against people assisting me but not in a way which makes me feel that I am in need of your help.

(User 'M' working after college 'Abd-AL-Muhsen', 274)

Shikah talked about her experience in her previous job when she was first working in the private sector. She found this difficult because of the long hours, low salary and transport problems due to the distance she had to travel. So she left the job even though the company was supportive. She indicated that both her previous and current employers and colleagues were very co-operative and encouraged her to continue with her studies:

After I graduated I worked as an operator for two years in a printing agency...The work was hard, from the morning till the evening. My salary was low and I barely reached 100 dinars. The place was too far. Although I should tell you that the manager was so cooperative with me...He let me to work till 4, although my work should last till 6... 'Even in my current work, they did not give me anything I could not manage...They wanted me to improve myself...They wanted me to learn computers. They told me they will not change my employment till they see my efforts...I told them after I graduated I wanted to study at the university but because of the difficulties, this makes me a bit hesitant...I said I needed a laptop and a programme... comprehensive course on computers... She [the Head of the Supreme Council] said write me saying exactly what you need; when you get the acceptance from the university I will contact you.

(User 'F' working after school 'Shikah', 596-625)

Shikah got her new job with the help of the Head of the Women's Committee of the FSoB. Shikah talked about how the influence of personal mediation played a role in getting employment, giving her case as an example:

*Of course, for sure, mediation (*wāsṭh*) has a major role. This is to the extent that when I went there, I forgot the application forms. When I went to the interview, they gave me the employment contract immediately. When you go to jobs you have to bring your documents for identification. They told me even to come without the documents.*

(User 'F' working after school 'Shikah', 649)

Zaher, who did not continue into the sixth form, was looking for a job as a university graduate operator and spoke about his experience. The National Committee for Employment and Training PWD referred him to a place where they had sent physically disabled applicants before, but the post had been filled for three months. Therefore, he did not trust the Ministry of Social Development any more but the FSoB found him a job in the government sector as an operator:

Last year at exactly this time I submitted my application. I went there and they wanted an operator...They told me that they filled the post three months ago with a physically disabled person. After that, I told them, how come you informed me that there is a vacancy and it was filled 3 months ago...Sabah found me a job as an operator in the government sector of the Ministry of Housing. Now I am happy with the job that I will get: it is the job I wanted... Thank God, I am patient. Now I have a good job.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 571-577/763-769)

Some people find their own way. Tawfiq, who already has a B.A. in Arabic and is now taking another B.A. in Law, works in the computer lab at the University because he loves this area of work. He has created a website that suits the needs of people with a visual impairment. He has learned most of these things by experience. He sometimes works privately in his spare time fixing satellites, a job which is mainly done by sighted people. He uses his tongue to taste the equipment:

I studied the Arabic language though it was not my choice. Then I worked in the lab and it is not related to my Arabic studies, nor to what I am studying now [law] ... I am studying law because I want to do something for myself; I want to do something different: to be a blind person and a lawyer. Here we all study Arabic language or something like that... if I managed to do my PhD, I would be in my forties. If I have a PhD in law that will be great. But this job I will continue with it and I like it. I love computers a lot and am very committed to it... I like computers, but I did not consider studying computers ... this is from experience. I learnt how to open the computer and fix I learn from my friends and people outside the university. Now buy things and fix them; I can even build the software. If I have a talking programme, but also my hands have got used to doing things. I am not afraid of anything. I can fix a satellite, and I can do many things. I can even work on them using sharp tools...this was my hope, from the beginning. I have an interest in doing things, I ask and go and do things.

(User 'M' working after Uni. 'Tawfiq', 294-328)

For a while, the Institute took responsibility for looking for jobs for people with visual impairments and now the FSoB looks for work for them. This makes some

dependent on the FSoB and, as a result, they do not look for work themselves. However, the only job the FSoB searches for is work as telephone operators, regardless of the job seeker's qualifications. In addition, interviewees expressed the opinion that they did not have support from the Ministry of Social Development.

The vocational specialist explained that he used personal mediation and networking for visually impaired people looking for work:

All of them get employed by personal efforts...From the beginning I make it clear that the company says that it wants to employ a disabled person but I cannot guarantee the work or write a recommendation. I tell them that I see you have the ability to do this work, but it is you and the employer's choice, not mine. The employer says whether you are suitable for this job or not. As I do with normal people. However, I may care more, follow them more, do more contacts with and for them.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 100-194)

Student users, who are aware that they have influence, know that they will have options in employment, but also know that they are fortunate:

My future, I think I will be working in a bank or something or a company. So I can follow up the documents for the companies. My father said he will help me, he will give me a few choices to choose from...To get a job is a blind person is very hard. There are lots of difficulties especially if they don't have anybody to help them here in Bahrain. Most blind people are from the middle class, they are not very rich and they do not have connections and mediation (wāsth). Thank God, my father is the head of a planning unit so he will be able to help me.

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 465-471)

The role of mediation (*wāsth*) in finding employment is crucial in Bahrain, as it is in many other countries, although other factors such as marital status, qualifications, level of visual impairment and gender are also of relevance.

7.5 Gender Issues in Employment

As was explained previously, disabled girls and women face double jeopardy in most areas of their lives because both their gender and their impairment affect their ability to gain employment. However, it is worth mentioning that the difficulties in employment that people of both genders with a visual impairment face is more of a problem owing to their impairment than their gender (Vernon, 1998). Nonetheless,

the problem for women with visual impairments is particularly acute. Policy makers and users indicated that, in general, there is a lack of employment for females:

The services provided for disabled men all reached them, but women in particular have fewer services than men; the public sector has no interest in these women...The problems women face are in employment and education, so the Ministry of Social Development, the private sector and the public sector can be involved. They need some work plans and strategies to work together in getting there... From the social point of view maybe the position of the Bahraini women is better than other women in education and in employment.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Supreme Council for Women, 35/152)

In general, with disabilities, employment for boys is easier; I think it is related to social attitudes. If they have employment for 40 girls and 60 boys, they take the boys. I think it is because of the environment in society; it is a very conservative environment.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Social Development 'with attendance of SP', 67)

Males can be independent in terms of transport as they can ride with anyone, while females can travel only with other females or close relatives. Because of transport problems, females find it difficult to get employment:

Work, it is better for boys. For girls, who is going to take them around? At least for blind boys their friends come around and take them, but girls need someone to send them. If a girl is married her husband will take her, but if he is not a driver, it is not acceptable to be sent by a [male] driver, but for boys, it is normal to go with a driver.

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 663)

For us, we have the problem of transport. I know a girl had a job last year, but the problem is that, although she got a job, what prevented her from continuing was transport. Maybe visually impaired men have easier conditions. For example, me, if I don't have transportation and I stand in the street, any car will give me a lift. But for girls, it should be someone from the family to give them a lift.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 787)

The decision to employ a young woman or a man was often related to the employers as the work itself was not gender-biased:

For visually impaired people, they will almost always work at the same job, as an operator. So it depends on the employers if they want to employ males or females.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 169)

Some male interviewees thought that females with impairments found employment more easily as they had higher degrees compared to visually impaired

men perhaps this is because women have more interest and are more serious about getting highly educated and obtaining degrees:

Girls are quicker in getting employed than boys...maybe the certificate has a role.

(User 'M' working after school 'Hashem', 954)

As will be discussed in Chapter Nine, in Islamic countries, married men are seen to have more financial responsibility than women. This makes it a priority for them to work. Single women, however, need to work to be independent, while married women are seen as less in need of a job as they are usually able to depend on their husbands. The FSoB has certain criteria including marital status, location, skills and religion for finding employment for people with visual impairments. For example, Shikah was chosen for her job because she lived in the same area, was *Sunni* (in this place, they employ mostly *Sunni* people), was trained as an operator, and was single:

FSoB asked me, would you like to work or would you like to give the job to your sister? My sister Wadha took the same training course with me, but she did not teach because she got married. I said, it is up to you, whatever you think is appropriate. FSoB said, I will be fair and talk to your mother, so FSoB called my mother and asked, who do you want us to employ? Wadha or Shikah? My mother said, Wadha is married and her husband is taking care of her. Thus I prefer my daughter Shikah to get the job. Then FSoB called and asked me to prepare my documents and go for an interview.

(User 'F' working after school 'Shikah', 607)

Therefore, visually impaired single women are more likely to need to work, even in low income jobs, to be independent and have an income as they are less likely to have someone who will be financially responsible for them, while men look for employment when they want to get married. Some users complained when priority was not given to married males as there is a greater need for married men to be employed:

They should review who is really in need of employment. Don't employ a single person, not because I have anything against him, but there is another person who is married and who lives in a rented house; he has a son.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 1390)

Interviewees talked about experiencing gender mixing at work. This is normal in Bahrain as all work places are mixed gender, except for mainstream schools that are single sex (Fakhro, 1990; Shirawi, 1989). In some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, they segregate the sexes in the work places. This offers more job opportunities for women (Poya, 1999). However, this is not the case in Bahrain as gender mixing is widespread, especially in adult life. The respondents indicated that this mixing is not forbidden if it is within limits, as explained in Chapter Six:

At work there is mixing, in the Institute there is mixing, in society there is mixing. Anywhere you go to do your job there is mixing. Most of the dealings with managers are mixed. Religion would not say it is forbidden unless behaviour is unacceptable. Everything has boundaries (hudūd)... We always raise these issues of mixed gender among ourselves. They are our sisters and brothers; we have got used to them.

(User 'F' working after school 'Shikah', 519/1151)

Users who studied at the Institute explained that mixing was not a difficult experience for them as they were used to it from the time they began at the Institute:

Even in my work, I was the only female among many male employees; I go to lunch with them. Even my family accepted my mixing with boys as we are used to it from an early age.

(User 'F' working after college 'Makiah', 107)

Users who lost their sight in the sixth form and did not study at the Institute, found mixing with the opposite sex at work a difficult experience. Abd-AL-Muhsen explained that this made him reluctant to mix but he indicated that in Bahrain there is no other choice than to work in a mixed environment:

I prefer not to mix but work has mixing...I was forced. I did not perceive it as something acceptable...The brother is forced but he is not a hero (mujbar 'akhaka lā baṭal)...I don't like to mix with them; I don't like to talk with them in depth.

(User 'M' working after college 'Abd-AL-Muhsen', 587-597)

This indicates that people who studied in mixed gender educational provision are more prepared for a mixed gender environment at work. Most people in Bahrain have to face a mixed workplace environment, unlike in some other neighbouring countries which have segregated workplaces.

In conclusion, this section showed that gender and marital status are important indicators in gaining employment. The next section will discuss service users experiences in employment.

7.6 Experiences of Visually Impaired People Seeking and Maintaining Employment

This section discusses the experiences of visually impaired people in relation to seeking and finding employment. It shows that job opportunities are limited and unemployment is a growing issue from the perspective of service users. It highlights how many visually impaired people are dissatisfied with their employment situation and the impact of this on their financial independence and family life. It appears from my study that finding and maintaining employment was very difficult for visually impaired people. As one policy maker said:

The most difficult thing we find is to get jobs for the blind.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Social Development 'with attendance of SP',30)

The scale of the problem was made clear by one vocational specialist interviewee who indicated that there were more than 100 visually impaired persons on the waiting list for employment.

It was also suggested that finding employment for visual impaired people was more difficult than for some other groups:

Employment is facing some serious problems [for visually impaired people], although there is some success. But also we are facing employers turning them down... We have a major problem with blind people. People with physical disabilities are all right because they can work in any job.

(SP Chairwoman of Committee for Employing & Training PWD, 77-83)

It is not only in Bahrain that this is a problem. Simkiss (2005) indicates that in the UK a high number of people with a visual impairment are unemployed. In 1991 only 25% of visually impaired people of working age were employed and in 2003 this was only 27%, which shows that over the years there has not been a major change in employment in the UK (Simkiss, 2005). Thus, whatever the employment rate among

non-disabled, for people with a visual impairment the employment rate is lower. Simkiss's (2005) study suggested that employers are not aware of the abilities of visually impaired people, as nine out of ten employers believed that they either cannot employ people with a visual impairment or it is too difficult to employ them. Also, employers lack awareness of the new DDA that came into force in October 2004. Evidence shows that people with visual impairments were not represented in the transitional employment and intermediate labour schemes while people with mental health issues were over-represented (Simkiss, 2005).

In Bahrain, there appear to be fixed ideas concerning what is suitable for each disability rather than taking steps to ensure inclusion. For example, work in the field of cosmetics is considered suitable for women with a hearing impairment and work as a telephone operator or teacher within the Institute was viewed by most of the users, service providers and policy makers as the most acceptable work for people with a visual impairment:

Blind people are either teachers or operators: nothing else.

(User 'F' Looking for job after Uni. 'Zainab', 495)

Interviewees explained that even after getting a degree in Humanities, teaching opportunities were rare for visually impaired people. Most of them worked as telephone operators. Those that did work as teachers were only teaching within the Institute, suggesting only partial inclusion. The Ministry of Education refused to employ teachers with a visual impairment in mainstream schools. The Institute, however, has enough teachers as student numbers are small:

There is an overload in the institute. We don't have blind people teaching in mainstream schools. The Ministry of Education is not convinced that blind teachers can teach in mainstream schools. Therefore, it becomes very hard for the Institute to admit all these new graduates.

(SP 'M' UoB Lecturer 'VI User 30+', 214)

The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education indicated that it did not employ teachers with a visual impairment because of their disability and that they are not in need of them at the moment as they do not meet the necessary criteria:

The Ministry of Education does not employ blind graduates in their mainstream schools... because they are blind.

(Policy Maker, 'M' Ministry of Education, 43-46)

The Ministry of Education not only refuses to employ people with a visual impairment in mainstream schools, it does not allow them to have their B.A. placement in a mainstream school. They can only receive their training at the Institute, as was explained in Chapter Five.

The Ministry of Education even refused to employ students they had sponsored for study. Hassan, who got a scholarship from the Ministry of Education to study Islamic Studies, found that it refused to employ him, even though the Ministry usually employs the people it sponsors. Hassan had not been allowed to study what he wanted. He agreed to pursue Islamic Studies because there are fewer graduates in this subject than in other fields within the humanities area so he thought he would have a better chance in employment. However, even though this qualification made him a qualified teacher, he failed to get a job related to his qualification:

In fact I wanted to study Geography... sponsorship was a great opportunity but only gave me the choice between Arabic, English and Islamic Studies... Jobs should be according to qualifications.

(User 'M' Looking for job after Uni. 'Hassan', 156/377/665)

SP: ...he studied Islamic Studies; he got a job in a private company. He did not have a job in an area of Islamic Studies because it was not needed.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Social Development 'with attendance of SP', 57)

Users complained that the Ministry of Education did not treat them equally even though they had the ability to teach sighted people:

What I wish for is to find employment [in my area]. I am an Arabic language graduate; the Ministry of Education should treat us as they treat other people and give more attention to blind people with regards to employment. The managers in government and the private sector before they decide to reject blind people's applications, they should give them the opportunity to show their skills and abilities. The problem is some people

when they know that the applicant is blind or disabled, they will not employ them.

(User 'F' working after Uni. 'Khadijah', 922)

Teaching in mainstream schools by people with a visual impairment has been tried successfully in other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, as discussed by service provider and user interviewees. Tawfiq explained that when he was a student in Saudi Arabia, there were some visually impaired teachers in mainstream schools who supported students with visual impairments. This gave people with visual impairments more job opportunities and made it easier for students in school:

In the school they had blind teachers... This meant that employment for them [visually impaired] became easier.

(User 'M' working after Uni. 'Tawfiq', 116)

In Saudi Arabia, however, the visually impaired teacher was only there to help visually impaired students and not to teach all students in the mainstream school. The UoB has only one partially sighted teacher who does the same job as anyone else:

I teach the same hours and subjects other lecturers are teaching, they treat me the same... the same as any other sighted person.

(SP 'M' UoB Lecturer 'VI User 30+', 204)

Although one visually impaired lecturer was employed at the UoB, there was no indication that this would be repeated. Currently, there is little association between what these visually impaired users studied and the limited job opportunities that are available to them. The Ministry of Education did not allow visually impaired students or teachers in its mainstream schools, segregating them instead in the Institute. This will only change when special education becomes integrated and supported within mainstream schools. Working as a telephone operator was clearly viewed as the most suitable job by most interviewees. This is popular because no movement or use of vision is required:

Those with partial sight can move but the blind people cannot move. The government should provide blind people with employment in an office, where they can carry out their duties to themselves, their country and their families. We need something like that.

(User 'M' Looking for job after Uni. 'Hassan', 671)

Blind people cannot do anything but be operators...We cannot work as secretaries; an operator is easier because it does not depend on sight.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 565-649)

People with a visual impairment viewed work as a telephone operator as secure.

It offers a fixed income with a pension fund, but there are few opportunities for promotion or advancement. In addition, this kind of work is situated in only one location and does not require movement or transport between places. Transportation appears to be one of the main difficulties people with visual impairments face and this affects girls more than boys, as will be shown later in the chapter.

It was evident that many policy makers, service providers and users thought that there should be positive discrimination in employment for visually impaired people. It was suggested that the government should only employ people with visual impairments as operators, as in other countries in the region. Users complained about non-visually impaired people being employed as telephone operators when they believed that they could do other jobs:

In Kuwait, for example, they always leave the work of operators for blind people. At least they give them this opportunity, and then after that they give it to normal people. That would not be a problem, at least the disabled will be working. It is very hard for somebody to study and then be unemployed.

(User 'F' working after college 'Makiah', 607)

We are looking for a Ministry decision to make certain jobs only for disabled people. This will be like the decision that they made that driving tractors is only for Bahrainis. So if any company has a vacancy in these jobs, we only look at the list of disabled people and choose the suitable person...

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 131/134)

With advances in telecommunications, fewer telephone operators are now needed. As a result there are many visually impaired adults who are not employed as their training is now redundant. There was no evidence, however, that the Ministry's employment policy for disabled people has changed:

We were shocked that everything is now automatic; you can listen to everything on a tape. So if you want to leave your number or a message you can. So in banks and other ministries they don't have operators.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Social Development 'with attendance of SP', 56)

Big companies are using computers, which is easier and cheaper. Therefore, without some support from government they will not employ us.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 565)

It should be considered that that there are now many visually impaired graduates working as telephone operators, a job that does not require a degree:

Now they are moving from having a certificate to work as an operator to a university degree, so they have chance to be employed in an institution or in a place which is suitable for them.

(SP 'M' Institute Headmaster, 200)

Not all users wanted to work as operators but for many it was the only available job:

Most of the people who work as operators, it was not their wish. It was because other chances of employment were closed. They applied for the Institute but till now they have not had a reply, therefore, they started to work as operators till they get a better job. At least work on one thing without losing everything while waiting.

(User 'F' Looking for job after Uni. 'Zainab', 579)

This means that users studied subjects they did not want to learn and then worked in areas they did not want to work in. This was disappointing for them and their families, but it was the only job that they could find so they had to take it in order to be financially independent:

Tawfiq studied Arabic; this degree was not useful for him. He got a job at the university, not because he had a BA, but because he had computing experience. He was able to improve himself in this area and the university was in need of somebody to work with the blind people.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 690)

This is the fourth year since I graduated, I did not work in my area of specialty. I work as an operator to be [financially] independent. My family gave me so much, it is time to return the favour...I have to be independent and need to work to support myself. My family's economic situation is bad, therefore, I have to work even if I don't like it.

(User 'F' working after Uni. 'Khadijah', 652-658)

This was upsetting for those who had studied and it encouraged other students not to study, as will be discussed later. In addition to working as telephone operators or teachers at the Institute, there are some traditional, low-income jobs that people with a visual impairment often work in. Some visually impaired people work as musicians as they were very well taught and trained at the Institute in music, a subject which was taught by a visually impaired teacher. The students performed at parties

and for the media with their groups and some looked for work in this field, either in big bands or working privately for women's parties (as was explained in Chapters Three and Six). Some even play in malls as buskers, although it is mainly men who work in this kind of field as it is less socially acceptable for women to do this. A number of at well-known musicians in Arab countries were visually impaired men, like Sayyid Mekkawy, who was very famous in the 1950s-1970s (Reeder, 1997) or, more recently, Ammar El-Shereey, who is a visually impaired male melodist (Supreme Council of Culture, 2003). Both of these men were from Egypt, which is considered to be the cultural capital of art and music amongst the Arab countries (Reeder, 1997; Supreme Council of Culture, 2003).

In addition, in Bahrain there are some older visually impaired men and women who give clients massages in their homes. They learned this skill from previous generations. People like to use them because, as well as the fact that that they are gifted at what they do, people also feel that they are religious. Some people go to them because they feel that God especially loves and listens to those with impairments, particularly those with visual impairments. Now, however, none of the new generation work in this field due to the increase in the number of professional physiotherapists and massage centres run mainly by overseas guest workers from countries such as Thailand, the Philippines and India (Abdullah, 2007).

Therefore, in Bahrain, job opportunities are limited largely to working as teachers at the Institute or as telephone operators. This is a manifestation of the occupational exclusion and segregation of visually impaired adults in the labour market. All visually impaired students, despite their level of education, usually ended up working as telephone operators or are unemployed. There are a great many graduates with higher degrees who are either unemployed or who work in very low-paid jobs.

7.7 Limited Employment Opportunities

In Bahrain, the likelihood that visually impaired students will find employment related to their higher education qualifications is poor. In Bahrain students enter higher education and study although they know that they may not get a job related to their qualifications and/or it may be a low-income job. As a result of limited job opportunities, there is a need to open up new opportunities as indicated by the interviewees:

We need more employment opportunities. They are still limited to education and telephone operating. I am sure there are other important jobs.

(SP 'M' Vice Chairman FSoB 'VI User 30+', 1181)

The FSoB has tried to open up more job opportunities by negotiating with policy makers, especially in the Ministry of Education, to employ teachers with visual impairments in mainstream schools (Minister of Education, 2004). Other job opportunities which were cited by the interviewees were to open small shops, working in archiving, working as physiotherapists, messengers and assistant receptionists, working in manufacturing, handicrafts, working as translators and teaching in mainstream schools. However, most of the new opportunities that were suggested by policy makers, service providers and even users were mostly low-level jobs with low incomes and still not related to their qualifications. This was why they preferred to wait for an operator's job or not to be employed:

Sometimes they send you to a factory. You work from 7am till 6pm for only BD80, or they send you to the union for BD80-100 and that is all. It is better to be unemployed.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 661)

The lecturer gave an example of another partially sighted person who worked in the University with him. He thought that visually impaired people should be qualified in more areas to open up more job opportunities for them:

Currently there is a person in the computer department here at the university. He is partially sighted and I think he uses Braille for reading and writing. I don't know why there are no more partially blind or blind people.

It's maybe because up till now they don't have enough qualified people for these posts.

(SP 'M' UoB Lecturer 'VI User 30+', 209)

One of the reasons for the lack of opportunities and for the difficulties people with a visual impairment face in getting jobs, specifically ones linked to their qualifications, is a result of their partial exclusion in education and their limits in studying only the Humanities, as discussed in Chapters Five and Six. Users complained that they were unemployed and felt that their problem was linked to the fact that they could only study a limited range of subjects. Although some of them tried to study in different areas, such as Sociology, Social work, Islamic Studies or Physiology, they all ended up in the College of Arts:

Most of the blind study Arabic, There is no demand for this specialisation. Neither the Ministry of Education nor the University will employ us. The Institute has enough teachers; this means that we have many unemployed blind youths... I am the only one who is studying sociology; I don't know how the future will be.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 684/1524)

While the labour market needs people with skills in technical areas, opportunities for this kind of training are limited:

Employing blind university graduates recently is hard ...because university students have very limited specialisations.

(SP 'M' UoB Lecturer 'VI User 30+', 214)

There is no relation between the programmes they study and the jobs they will get in the future. There should be more arrangements with the academic advice centre that is located in the University.

(SP 'F' UoB SW, 399-403)

Service providers indicated that although many people with visual impairments were university graduates, they were not really educated and skilled because of their impairment, and employers look for cheap, skilled labour. In addition, service providers complained that the UoB had no vision and was teaching students without thinking about the needs of the labour market:

The University does not have a plan for all. They let them graduate without making sure they need this number...Take visually impaired graduates as an example, Islamic studies. Where can I employ them? ...They are calling for

the integration of students, so they should let disabled teachers teach as well... The problem is if the University did not let them study Humanities, what would they study? If they want to study computers they only have one lab for Visio Braille and I think most of the teachers do not know anything about Visio Braille. So how will they teach them, deal with them? At the same time there will be some difficulties for the disabled as the university does not make arrangements for people with disability to study. Not only is the university not prepared, it does not even allow them to enter such subjects.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 137)

The Undersecretary from the Ministry of Social Development complained that rehabilitation to suit the needs of the labour market was not provided. The Ministry has to re-train people after they had become qualified because their skills do not suit the labour market:

There is not enough rehabilitation in Bahrain so that they can prepare them for the future and get them ready for future jobs...With regards to employment, some of the graduates are not up to the standard of the labour market. Their qualifications are not needed in the labour market; they have to retrain to match the market.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Social Development 'with attendance of SP', 36-63)

The service providers from the Ministry of Social Development explained about the rehabilitation that people with a disability received in special needs educational provision:

There is no relation between the rehabilitation they get and jobs provided.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 78)

As indicated by service provider and user interviewees, every form of special needs educational provision has its own vision and plans without thinking of the market's needs. An example of this is the narrow training for employment provided for visually impaired people as telephone operators and teachers.

The Ministry is trying to convince the Institute to provide some appropriate rehabilitation:

We are in cooperation with the Institute; we have a committee for the plan. We hope that the curriculum they will use will be educational and lead them to employment.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Social Development 'with attendance of SP', 65)

People with visual impairments were partially excluded in education and forced to study certain subjects that were not related to the labour market's needs and so fail

to give them access to work. Current policy and practice reflects rigid and limited ideas of what constitutes suitable employment for visually impaired people. This situation appears not to be unique to Bahrain. The findings of Wong's study (2004a; , 2004b) concerning Japan were similar. This showed that visually impaired graduates in Japan ended up being either unemployed or working in a limited number of areas. A wider range of jobs, however, was open to some visually impaired graduates who had suitable qualifications and who were aided by technology. Others tried to gain specific skills and qualifications in vocational areas, but no one wished to be employed in work like piano-tuning, a traditional area of work for the visually impaired, even though such jobs were available. Instead, they too preferred jobs such as telephone operators that needed little or no sight. Sometimes, visually impaired people found other options where employers understood their capabilities and limitations because others had already been employed in such a field.

Some areas, such as engineering, were not seen as suitable for visually impaired people yet machine tools are now often controlled by computer so that technological advances, together with the experiences of others, have changed ideas about what is seen as feasible for visually impaired people. Wong (2004a; , 2004b) points out that visual impairment cannot be used as a reason for saying that a particular job is unsuitable since many jobs can now be made accessible with appropriate technology. Equality must be recognised, with employers considering the skills of the individual. Also, qualifications must be a record of achievements and/or a way of equipping students with the skills necessary to gain employment in order to persuade employers that they are worth employing (Wong, 2004a, 2004b). This study of visually impaired people in Japan shows that the status of visually impaired people in Bahrain is not unique.

Summary

The analysis in this chapter has addressed the first research questions ‘How are policies and provision for visually impaired people influenced by interpretations of Islam in an Arab Muslim society?’ and the second research question ‘What are the gendered experiences of visually impaired young people in an Islamic society in relation to education, work and marriage?’ It has shown how adults with visual impairments experience difficulties in finding and maintaining employment. Employment opportunities appear to be restricted to a few areas of work, namely telephone operating and teaching within the Institute. As a result, it can be concluded that there is only limited inclusion in employment for people with visual impairments. As the Institute now has enough teachers, the remaining option is to obtain a job as an operator. Training is offered in this field so the visually impaired are employed in this area regardless of their qualifications. This upsets educated students and encourages younger students not to study as they will end up in the same job despite their level of qualification. However, the labour market is in less need of operators now due to developments in technology and in automated services. Voice messages and the increased use of mobile phones have reduced the need for telephone exchanges. In addition, the experience of gaining employment may be different among people with a visual impairment depending on their level of vision, education, gender, and the degree of social influence and mediation their family or other members of their social network have.

The lack of employment for visually impaired people means that they become the recipients of charitable and compassionate support or the new Disability Benefit. They are looked after, in line with Islamic teachings, within their families and the wider society, but they do not have equal employment rights. Both the Labour Law

for the Private Sector (1976) and the law concerning the Care, Rehabilitation and Employment of the Disabled (2006) are being implemented in a way that benefits the employers more than the disabled employees and not within the spirit of the legislation. Therefore, current employment practices and the situation of visually impaired people are socially excluding and not in line with the aims of a rights based or relational approach to disability. This partial exclusion is based on rigid ideas of appropriate employment and is congruent to the exclusion and provision within education.

The evidence suggests there are more visually impaired adults who are unemployed or who are employed in low-income jobs not related to their qualifications. This appears to have an impact on their marriage opportunities. This is especially true for men, who are responsible for the financial needs of the family, while girls need to be employed to be financially independent as they have less chance of getting married. This aspect is explored in the next chapter.

8. CHAPTER EIGHT: GENDER AND DISABILITY IN ADULT LIFE - MARRIAGE

Introduction

This chapter addresses the second research question ‘What are the gendered experiences of visually impaired young people in an Islamic society in relation to education, work and marriage?’ It will focus on the research findings related to the marriage part of the question. The argument put forward in this chapter, and in the thesis as a whole, is that the particular social model of disability within Islamic society is kind, but disabling and excluding. It allows, at best, only partial social inclusion for visually impaired adults.

This chapter discusses how visually impaired adults in Bahrain are to some extent excluded from marriage and this has a greater impact on women. Both visually impaired men and women have limited marriage opportunities compared to the wider society. This is linked to widely held views that disability is shameful and less acceptable and that the financial and social status of such people raises concerns about their suitability for marriage. While as a group visually impaired people appear to experience partial exclusion in marriage, the degree to which this is experienced varies between groups. This chapter suggests that visually impaired women have fewer marriage opportunities than visually impaired men. Furthermore, marriage opportunities appear more limited for *Sunni* people living in urban areas. This experience is congruent with the partial social exclusion experienced within education and employment by visually impaired young people, in particular girls and women, as argued in previous Chapters.

First, this chapter discusses issues related to marriage for people with visual impairment and how views about visual impairment shape marriage opportunities. It will examine experiences of marriage and some of the strategies participants used in order to marry. Later, it examines the financial and other barriers to marriage, including how religious affiliation within Islam and urban and rural locations intersect to influence marriage opportunities.

8.1 Marriage and Visual Impairment

As set out in Chapter Three, in general marriage in Arab and Eastern Islamic societies is an arrangement between families rather than an agreement between two individuals (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Anwar, 1979; Hassan, 2006; Kholoussy, 2006; Noriani Nik Badli Shah, Forum, & Regional Workshop on Islamic Family Law and Justice for Muslim, 2003). It is a contractual agreement. Nowadays, individuals in some families (usually those from urban areas and those who are more educated) may choose their prospective partners. However, marriage remains a contractual agreement and marrying without the consent of both families is extremely difficult and very unusual. Furthermore, it is only acceptable for sexual relations to occur within marriage. Romantic liaisons may occur but 'in secret' and such affairs are not talked about (Seikaly, 1997, 1998).

In this gendered analysis of the social life of people with visual impairments in Islamic Bahraini society, a woman's disabled identity is considered to have primacy over her gender, whilst for men it is less so. As was explored in Chapter Six young girls with visual impairments report that they have more social freedom than their sighted sisters, but later they are very unlikely to marry, for they are seen, in some ways, to be socially neuter.

As this chapter will show, the level of visual impairment also appears to affect marriage opportunities. Having a less severe impairment appears to increase both men's and women's chances of marriage. Visually impaired males are more likely to marry than their female counterparts. Evidence from this and other studies suggests that it is easier for men with visual impairments to get married than for women with similar impairments in Muslim Arab countries (Arnade & Häfner, 2005; EL-Hessen, 2006; Howland & Rintala, 2001; E.-K. O. Lee & Oh, 2005). As will be argued in section 8.3, in Bahrain, both men and women with visual impairments are more likely to be married if they have a good income, are partially sighted, and live in villages in rural areas. In addition, no contract of marriage exists in Braille, which means if the bride and/or groom are visually impaired they cannot see their own marriage contract, which they have to sign (D. Ahmed, 2005, 2006).

Before discussing views about marriage it is useful to consider the marital status of participants in this study. There were three service providers who were visually impaired - two men and one woman. Both men were married to non-visually impaired women. One of these men had a severe visual impairment and also had a hearing impairment. This man was from the Prophet Muhammad's family (Sayyid). This gave him a high status among *Shī'as* because members of such families hold a high social status and desirable marriage positions even if the family members have a low income, are from a lower class, or have a disability (S. Ahmed, 1999). The female service provider, who had low vision, was single. Of the nineteen service users interviewed, only three with mild visual impairment were married to non-visually impaired partners.

8.2 Views about Visual Impairment and Marriage

Interviewees indicated that there are obstacles to marriage for people with disabilities owing to widely held social views about visually impaired people. Interviewees reported that marriage for visually impaired people was perceived as shameful and being a burden on families. It was shameful in the sense that marrying a visually impaired person meant marriage to someone who was seen as a lesser person because of their disability. It was regarded as a burden because of the additional needs visually impaired people are seen as having and the practical and emotional support they may need in many areas of their lives. Visual impairment was seen as reducing men and women's ability to meet expectations about gender roles within marriage. Women were seen as less able to provide the practical care for children and men viewed as less likely to be able to provide the financial security for a family.

A number of service users discussed how they felt that there were widely held views that visual impairment is shameful and pitiful, and that a non-visually impaired person and their family will not usually be willing to consider marriage to someone with a visual impairment, as socially acceptable. Not only this because of the practical difficulties this may create but also because of the possibility of passing on a genetic defect to any children. Here two service users talk about this:

Unfortunately, until now, if a blind man wants to be engaged to a girl, most families will refuse, and will not accept that. They say they will not give their daughter to a blind man... They think that the blind should marry the blind. They give you silly reasons, not logical reasons. It is not shameful that the person is blind. It is shameful if the person is immoral, not if he cannot see. He has studied, worked and lived a good life, has behaved well and can walk normally.

(User 'F' working after college 'Makiah', 523)

The perception of society is a feeling of pity. Whatever the blind person's position, it is still the same.... They always think of the blind person as a submissive person who cannot do anything.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 767-792)

A recently married, visually impaired university lecturer discussed how his mother did not allow his academic achievements to be publicised in the media after he was awarded his Master's degree because she thought if people knew he was visually impaired some girls would not be willing to consider marrying him:

My mother said 'I am afraid that this news will be published all over the place and people will know that you are blind so nobody will accept you for marriage... She thought that nobody would accept me. She refused to admit that I am blind. She said, 'You are partially sighted but not blind.

(SP 'M' UoB Lecturer 'VI User 30+', 223-270)

He felt that lots of girls did not consider marrying him because of his impairment although his job, income, and family were socially acceptable. His experiences of seeking a marriage partner show there are limits to social inclusion for visually impaired people:

Actually the girls in Bahrain are scared of things like this. I faced this problem too when I was seeking a wife. So maybe society is not aware... There are some blind people who are married. I am one of them of course.

(SP 'M' UoB Lecturer 'VI User 30+', 223-270)

Abd-AL-Rahman spoke about the experiences of his visually impaired friends who were often considered unsuitable as prospective husbands by families of non-disabled girls. He considered this to be a reflection of the way society viewed people with disabilities:

We have a young man in the Institute. He asked for the hand of a girl who was studying with him. Her family refused, because he was blind. Another one who has a good job and has a good salary, asked for a girl, but the family refused. Again, the reason was because he was blind...Many of the young men were rejected because they were blind.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Abd-AL-Rahman', 726-767)

Service providers were also aware that widely held assumptions about visual impairment acted as obstacles to getting married:

A lot of disabled people have difficulties with the bride's family when they want to get married. It is like a war lasting for a year or two until they accept that a disabled man will marry their daughter. Even if the wife's family are educated and do not view a disabled person as unfortunate (meskīyn)...they may fear that she will not have a happy life with a disabled husband.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 271)

Makiah and Majied talked about how their parents felt that it was unacceptable to marry a person with a disability, even if their own child had a disability, because of the burden it placed on families:

My mother, as a member of the older generation, cannot accept disability, even though she has a disabled child herself. For example, if I tell my mother that I want to marry a disabled man, she will tell me that we already have you and we cannot cope. How can we agree to have another disabled person? ... She will say I cannot see my daughter or my son marrying a blind person.

(User 'F' working after college 'Makiah', 541)

My father always tells me that I have to marry a sighted person so if she goes to work she takes you with her.

(User 'M' Sixth Form School Student 'Majied', 1375)

Shikah wanted to marry a sighted partner for two reasons. First, for practical reasons: she wanted someone who could help her with her disability on a day to day basis. Second she was concerned about the greater risk of passing on a genetic visual impairment if she married another visually impaired person. In her view marrying a non-visually impaired person could reduce this risk:

In my neighbourhood, there was a weak sighted man who wanted to marry me but I said no. This is because I wanted somebody to take me around, whom I can depend on, who works. Our family have weak eyesight, and then we will have children who will be a burden on others. I thought, I need someone to take me places, to see things I don't see...I prefer not to marry someone who is less than me; I would like to marry someone who has a car.

(User 'F' working after school 'Shikah', 1111-1133)

Marriage is an arrangement between families and there is always a fear about visual impairment being inherited by the children of a visually impaired person and how this will affect future generations of the family, even though the risks are relatively low, particularly with compulsory genetic screening before marriage in Bahrain (See Chapter Three). Fears about inherited visually impairments still widespread in Bahrain.

While some service providers felt it was acceptable for visually impaired people to marry each other, others felt it was less acceptable, either in terms of practicality or

social acceptance. Here, two service providers discussed how they felt about visually impaired men marrying non-visually impaired women:

Maybe he has a feeling that she will be the second part which will complement his disabilities. I have this feeling, but I don't think he will be looking for a blind girl. So each one will depend on the other.

(SP 'M' Boys School SW, 138)

A disabled person should not marry another disabled person. Who will look after the children? What if the child swallows something? The baby sitter will not care about the child. They should look for a partner that has the abilities that they do not have. For example, if he is in a wheelchair, he should marry someone who can move easily and drive. Then she can help him.

(SP 'M' Vocational Specialist, Ministry of Social Development, 268)

Two themes are reflected in these comments of services providers: that some of the practical difficulties associated with visual impairment can be overcome by marrying a non-visually impaired person and that visual impairment involves dependence on others. Some service users also expressed these ideas. Here, Khalid talked of his wife's desire to help him overcome some of the practical difficulties associated with his impairment:

She said 'fine, now I am your eyes, we are husband and wife, there is no difference between us, and you are my tongue', she does not talk much. Now we are great, life goes on, and we are happy.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Khalid', 898)

I want him to be the eyes I see through... someone who not only has a car, but a better job than me. I want someone dependable, who can manage his life and things like this.

(User 'F' working after school 'Shikah', 1111-1133)

These views demonstrate that some parents and disabled people themselves seek marriage partners who will 'complement' their disabilities. There is also some evidence from other studies that people with a disability prefer not to marry other disabled people. For example, Howland and Rintala (2001) indicated that some women preferred to have relationships with able-bodied men or men with 'compatible' disabilities. The reason given for this was that one partner might need physical assistance from the other. Sexual difficulties, if neither partner could move,

were also cited. Some also felt that a disabled man might be unable to fulfil a husband's role as a breadwinner or helper. Some women with a disability, however, said they preferred to be with another disabled person, perhaps because they thought that such a person would try harder to please them, would be more understanding about their disability, and that less communication would be necessary about disability-related needs.

For Khalid, who had low vision, the experience of seeking a marriage partner was more positive. He talked of how his wife valued other personal qualities more than his disability:

We have been married for 9 years. We had lots of problems but then we agreed not to have problems or fights. Sometimes I spoiled her, other times she spoiled me. We understand each other. My wife told me that she learnt a lot from me. I say if it was not for you, I would not go to the university. She said I married you because I always dreamt of marrying a blind person... My wife said she wanted someone who was religious ... they asked me and they asked after me, they were told that I am God fearing, decent and a religious man... They told her that I am partially blind and I also told her, but she said, 'That is fine. I like your way of life and style. I have met many people but you are different, you are the best.

(User 'M' UoB Student 'Khalid', 898-904)

It is evident that some visually impaired people need to go to extreme lengths to marry. Here, Tawfiq talks about his married visually impaired elder brother's experience and of the options that people with a visual impairment have when they want to get married:

For marriage we need the agreement of the girl and her family. For example, when my brother Saleh got married, he took the girl from her family and wrote their marriage contract secretly without the knowledge of her family. This is because her family had refused permission for their marriage for one and a half years. He is great, and not because he is my brother, but other people say the same thing about him. Dealing with him is very easy; he is nice. They rejected him without a reason... She insisted on marrying him. She left the house, they went to the Sheikh and told him the story. He married them. Her father was dead, so they married in this way. In society this is not acceptable; you have to get the agreement of her family too. Maybe with more rehabilitation and education they will accept such marriages. We had to get the total agreement of the family. It was hard for them to agree, and when they did, it was not genuine and they created obstacles to block the way.

(User 'M' working after Uni. 'Tawfiq', 399-412)

For men with a visual impairment, social rejection was experienced when they asked for a girl's hand in marriage. Wadha were finally married with the acceptance of both families, but without informing the groom's family of her impairment.

Wadha, who was partially blind, was the only visually impaired married woman and mother from the sample. She met her husband when she was in the sixth form. She informed him that she was visually impaired and had attended the Institute only after she had known him for a while, but before they married. However, even after many years of marriage, she has not informed her husband's family of this, as this was his wish. She thought that getting married was not a big obstacle for her because she is partially sighted but she was scared at the beginning of the responsibility:

He was the cousin of one of my friends in the sixth form school, so we met each other through her... From the beginning, he knew about my eyesight and he did not care. He asked me, what is the problem? You manage fine and that is important... His family did not know that I am partially sighted. They know that I cannot see well, but they do not know that I studied in the Institute and the rest of the story... I did mean not to inform them. But they did not ask. The important thing is that my husband knows. I told him 'you should tell your parents', he said 'No, it is better if they don't know.' ... The first day I was married, I thought it was a huge responsibility. I thought it would be very difficult for me. He told me 'No, you just take it step by step and then we will see what is difficult.'

(User 'F' Looking for job after school 'Wadha', 576-609)

Wadha was coping with a supportive partner and had not disclosed that she had been educated at the Institute, as this is considered stigmatising (Goffman, 1963). She was 'getting by' and was able to do so because she had some vision. Wadha's comments demonstrate how the boundary between poor sight and being formally labelled as partially sighted is an important one.

A study carried out by Rabo (2005) concerning Aleppo, Syria noted that a trader family married off their daughter without telling the groom about the daughter's impairment. This caused conflict between the two families subsequently.

8.3 Gender and Marriage

Data from this study showed that in Bahrain it is easier for a man with a visual impairment to get married than a similarly impaired girl, as marriage is offered by men and they choose the women they want, as was explained in Chapters Two and Three. This situation was recognised by several policy makers:

These women have some problems in society: one of them is marriage. They are forbidden to marry, they are forbidden to do other activities. The way society views disabled people, together with sympathy for them, makes them non-productive people in society.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Supreme Council for Women, 98)

If they are blind the impact on females is more than the males.

(Policy Maker, 'F' Ministry of Health, 82)

Aisha, a young single woman, felt it was easier for men with a visual impairment because women have more household responsibilities:

I know many male teachers who are blind who are married to sighted girls and have children. They live normally. Why? Because women are the base for the whole family. The woman is the one who brings up the children, cooks, cleans and washes. The man only eats, goes to work and comes back. He does not do anything. But if the girl is blind, how can she bring up children, clean and cook for them, pay for things? If she has a sister to help her, maybe, but if her sisters cannot take her shopping, how would she manage? ... If she has a child and he asked her to read or to help with homework she will not be able to but if the father is sighted he can do it... therefore it is better to marry to sighted person.

(User 'F' School Student 'Aisha', 669)

Housework and managing the household is largely the duty of women. This is true in the GCC countries and among higher classes in other Muslim countries where they have servants. Servants are under the supervision of the woman and, in the absence of servants, it is the woman's duty to do the necessary jobs in the home (Fakhro, 1990; Maclagan, 2006). As men and women live with their families until they get married. Therefore, men are looked after by their mothers until they marry and are then looked after by their wives (Poya, 1999). If women are perceived as not being able to look after their husbands and children, then they may be viewed as undesirable partners.

Male users expressed the idea that the future for females with a visual impairment is harder than for their male counterparts as they have fewer chances to get married:

The chances of getting married for blind men is better than for women. Also, the future and life in general is better. Men have a different future to women.
(User 'M' UoB Student 'Khalid', 607)

A girl's future is harder than her present...Marrying a blind woman is hard and not accepted to some extent; it is opportunistic marriage. As a blind person I can marry any good woman, whether she likes it or not. Sometimes her family will force her to marry me. But blind women, mostly do not marry...They are not married, either because they did not marry, or their families refused to let them get married.
(User 'M' working after Uni. 'Tawfiq', 418)

She has all her rights. The society gives her all her rights...but for example, in marriage, even though males may have the disability of being blind and it is shameful, he can have a wife. Girls cannot, very rare... society would not allow her.

(User 'M' Looking for job after Uni. 'Hassan', 575/616-623)

Tawfiq expressed the opinion that there are fewer married females with a visual impairment due to the lack of rehabilitation:

There was a girl I know. Her family kept moving her from one place to another. They did not give her enough education or anything; they did not care about her. To marry her is hard; she does not have the basic requirements of a wife. The Arab man wants to marry someone who can move around the house and do things and clean and cook. I consider this marrying a servant, not a wife. In general, marriage is to take care of the husband.

(User 'M' working after Uni. 'Tawfiq', 418)

Shikah thought differently from the others, as she thought it was easier for girls with a visual impairment to get married than boys because men have to carry more responsibility and that new technological developments and having servants meant that marriage is physically not a problem for disabled young women:

To some extent it is similar, but you feel that blind boys face more difficulties... the boy has to establish a family and take care of it. He is the household head and is responsible for the family. Therefore, you see him rejected to some extent in society. But the girl, I mean, wherever she goes, whatever she does, she will end up staying at home. She will have children, bring them up, you know, she is limited to the home. It is not the same for boys. Boys have to go out, work and earn money....girls are getting married faster than boys and within our group there are more girls than boys... In our society it is the man who asks for your hand...the percentage of married girls is higher than married boys...Girls can do everything. Now, with the

development of technology, there is speaking equipment so the girl can get married and bring up a family with a co-operative man and the help of servants.

(User 'F' working after school 'Shikah', 925-937)

These comments suggest that expectations about gender roles within households affect whether visually impaired people are seen as acceptable marriage partners. If visual impairment is seen to reduce a person's ability to carry out expected gender roles, however, then marriage opportunities may be reduced.

In Bahraini society and in the GCC countries in general, most families, even less prosperous, low-income ones, have at least one servant at home. The servants mainly help with housework and cooking (Fakhro, 1990; Maclagan, 2006), and assist in looking after the children. Servants are employed equally by working and non-working women (Fakhro, 1990). These servants are not Bahraini but are mainly from Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines) with a few from Africa (Ethiopia and Eritrea) (Fakhro, 1990). The salaries paid to servants are low compared to average incomes in the region. The laws are not strict in allowing families to bring them into the country and employ them. It is even easier to get permission to employ a servant if there is family member with a disability. There are regional studies regarding the use of domestic labour and its impact on the means that the younger generation, many of which no longer learn how to clean and cook (Maclagan, 2006) (See Chapter Three). This has had a significant effect on people with disabilities as many families have a special servant for their disabled child which may make these children more dependent (See Chapter Five). On the other hand, having servants can be an advantage for women with disabilities when they marry, as this can facilitate the daily tasks involved in running a household and in caring for children.

Therefore, in reality, in Bahrain, owing to the availability of servants, there are few physical barriers preventing disabled women from marrying. The difficulties

stem from social ideas about what is acceptable. It appears then, there are limits to the social inclusion enjoyed by disabled people in Bahrain in relation to marriage.

Another important factor in this analysis of marriage for visually impaired people is the extended family structure of the household. Living with extended family is common in Eastern communities (Anwar, 1979), this means that the couple and their children are more physically and socially supported. One service provider lived in his own house in his village where he was surrounded by his family and his mother was living with them. Married users, Hashem and Wadha, also lived with their families.

Wadha spoke about her experience as a mother, living with her own mother who helps her with raising her children:

First I stayed with his family, then I stayed in my mother's house... One child is three years old, the other is 8 months... My mother helps me. She took care of the first child, he was in her house all the time; I even forgot about him.

(User 'F' Looking for job after school 'Wadha', 603/611-621)

Hashem talked about his experience:

I have been married for a year and eight months... Because I am partially blind, nobody wished to marry me. I always say [to all] that I did not get a wife easily... I am living with my parents... it is difficult to establish a house and have a family, but it is possible.

(User 11 Hashem M working after school, 1202-1218/1232-1248)

There are also social expectations to live in an extended family household generally with the husband's family (Fakhro, 1990).

8.4 Economic and Religion Factors and Marriage

Economic factors appear to affect the marriage chances of people with a disability. Income and housing not only shape people's marriage prospects but also their experiences within marriage. As one interviewee commented, economic and housing problems for people with disabilities can be major barriers:

If they provided housing for blind people, then there would not be a problem with marriage for blind people. With a salary of 150 Dinars, the rent is 80, and he has to live on 70. He cannot do that.

(User 'M' Looking for job after school 'Zaher', 1237)

Not all users believed that disabled people should receive positive discrimination. Wadha believed that people with a disability should be treated equally if they work and have an income:

I can see them all working and they can provide accommodation for themselves... the government should not give accommodation to people with a disability... because we are the same. This one is working and that one is working, this one has a flat and the other has a flat.

(User 'F' Looking for job after school 'Wadha', 1157-1169)

The married Chairman of FSoB thought that the only obstacle to getting married for men with a visual impairment was financial. His view was that in Muslim Arab cultures, the man is financially responsible for taking care of the household and if he is able to do this, his disability will not be a major problem:

If the individual is prepared well, he will get the right job, the right salary, and it will be normal like anyone else. A normal person who does not have a good job or a good qualification; they will face many serious problems in establishing a family. Of course, if the blind person is not rehabilitated he will not get the right job, the right salary and the right house.

(SP 'M' Vice Chairman FSoB 'VI User 30+', 140)

However, as Tawfiq indicated, for women, having an independent income could be perceived by men and families as a positive factor or something that could be taken advantage of:

Some normal people only marry a blind girl for her money if she is employed, so they can take her money. Many marry this way.

(User 'M' working after Uni. 'Tawfiq', 429)

This again shows the importance of financial factors in marriage, just as in the cases of able-bodied couples. Eligibility is about the status of both the family and the individual. As was explained in Chapter Three, in the Kingdom of Bahrain there are *Sunni* Muslims, who mainly live in urban areas, and *Shī'a* Muslims, who live in rural areas and are less well educated, although, there are some *Shī'as* in the cities who are socially mobile and part of the educated elite (Seikaly, 1998).

There was a strong perception among interviewees that visually impaired *Shī'a* were less excluded from marriage than those who were *Sunni*. Shikah, a young *Sunni*

girl, compared *Sunnis* and *Shī'as* in relation to marriage and she thought that visually impaired *Shī'as* have more chance of getting married. She accounted for these differences in terms of the rural-urban divide:

Non-disabled Shī'a people would not mind marrying a blind or weak sighted woman. The Sunni are more sensitive to this issue. My peer group all got married. I have many men who asked for my hand in marriage but it was not my destiny. We told them from the very beginning that I am weak sighted. Maybe it was their perception that I am weak sighted and they did not want to say. For a Shī'a, if the person is blind and he wants to get married, he will get married, have children, and start a family. Similarly the sighted girls can marry blind people. For them this is very normal...You feel the Shī'as just want to live. We are not like that; we don't want only to live, we want to live a wealthy life...But this is the way we differ... For them it is normal... they marry and have lots of children and they are unemployed. Their nature is like this. But I don't know if it is because of their religion. Is it because they live in rural areas and we live in urban areas? I don't know exactly what are the reasons.

(User 'F' working after school 'Shikah', 1097/1157)

In rural areas, it was suggested that marriage to a visually impaired person was seen as more socially acceptable and fewer girls remained unmarried. There was also more marriage between relatives. Hassan's mother and sister are partially sighted. He, as a *Shī'a*, thought that girls have more chance of getting married in villages:

In the past it was different. My mother for example is partially sighted. At that time they did not care about these things, they just got them married.

(User 'M' Looking for job after Uni. 'Hassan', 629)

Tawfiq commented that in villages, where relatives marry each other more often, marriage for visually impaired people is easier than in cities. He suggested this was because in villages the families want to share the responsibility of caring for visually impaired relatives. He thought that the situation of a girl's family, especially in a rural area, might make her accept marriage from anyone, including someone with a disability, if the family wanted her to marry. This, he thought, made marriage in rural areas easier:

Most of those who are married are from the villages. Most of them marry relatives...maybe because they are relatives, they don't care about it, I don't know. Maybe the girl's standard is low, so when they marry them, the family solves the problem of finding a husband for their daughter... It affects girls

badly so when someone asks for her hand she marries him without thinking carefully about it because she wants to get away from family pressures.

(User 'M' working after Uni. 'Tawfiq', 418-479)

Layla, who is a *Shī'a* from a rural area, thought that it varied from village to village. It was more acceptable in some areas, like where she lives, than in others. Her father is partially sighted and married to her sighted mother.

The argument here is that getting married is difficult to achieve for people with a visual impairment. It appears to be easier for partially sighted people, those with employment and for *Shī'as* who come from villages, than for *Sunnis* who are mainly based in cities. In the *Shī'a* villages there is a more cohesive community within extended families who live in the same neighbourhood. By contrast, *Sunni* households are more urban, wealthier, more educated and may be more dispersed (Fakhro, 1990; Seikaly, 1997, 1998).

Summary

The data in this chapter shows that all people with visual impairments face difficulties in relation to finding a suitable marriage partner. Those who have less difficulty are individuals both men and women who are partially sighted, employed, and living in *Shī'a* villages. In general women are less likely to get married.

The lack of social acceptability of a visually impaired individual for marriage relates to a number of factors. This includes the stigma of a possibly inherited disability. Since marriage is an arrangement between two families, it is seen as possibly resulting in future generations being visually impaired. In addition, preferential cousin marriage is common in Bahrain as in other Muslim countries and Muslim communities in non-Muslim countries. Therefore, there is an awareness by individuals, the wider society and government that consanguineous marriages can result in disability. The compulsory screening before marriage for conditions such as

thalassaemia and sickle-cell, is a manifestation of this. The screening does not cover visual impairment or hearing loss.

Living in extended family households and having domestic servants are both factors that mitigate the day to day effect of living with a disability. Therefore, the partial acceptance of visually impaired partners is more related to the stigma of disability than the day to day difficulties.

As was discussed in the literature review, (Chapter One), getting married is not easy for people with a disability in general, and is more problematic for disabled women. A study by Howland and Rintala (2001) of disabled women in the USA argued that women with physical impairments are often perceived as socially neuter. As a result, many disabled women are afraid that they will be unattractive to the opposite sex and that no one will wish to marry them. Indeed, such women may be perceived as 'damaged goods' (Phillips, 1990) and even disabled women may view themselves in this way. In short, women with physical impairments may not be deemed eligible for romance or seen to be socially acceptable for marriage. This was evident to some extent, in this study.

A number of studies have suggested that disabled people appear to find it more difficult to find partners and form intimate relationships than their non-disabled counterparts and this can be evidenced in the low rates of marriage (Howland & Rintala, 2001; E.-K. O. Lee & Oh, 2005). Howland and Rintala's study (2001) also suggested that people with disabilities may find it more difficult to keep a partner. Their study showed that women with a disability in the USA tended to be older at the time of their first dates, were less likely to marry, were more likely to marry later in life and were more likely to be divorced than their non-disabled counterparts.

According to Howland and Rintala (2001), families may encourage their disabled daughters not to think about such relationships so some women who have

been disabled from an early age may lack the necessary personal abilities to form relationships. Even when such women have good social skills and many friendships, these are less likely to lead to romance than for able-bodied women. Furthermore, the family may prevent a woman with physical disabilities from taking up social opportunities so romantic opportunities are reduced for her (Howland & Rintala, 2001).

Lee and Oh's study (2005) of physically disabled women in Korea found similar results. Physically disabled women were victims of 'double jeopardy'. They were both female and disabled so they were more likely to suffer from psychosocial health problems than men and were more vulnerable to gender disparities. They were more likely to be of lower socioeconomic and employment status, and of lower educational attainment than disabled men or able-bodied women.

A rights-based approach to disability would argue for more acceptance of disabled partners in marriage. However, the current social practices reflect a partial social exclusion that is not kind and is reinforced by the continuation of preferential cousin marriage. In terms of gender, women are more likely to be excluded from marriage. They live within the households of their parents and later their married brothers. Islamic doctrine encourages marriage to anyone that is a faithful believer. However, men are allowed to marry women of any faith, while women are only allowed to marry other Muslims. Marriage choices are not generally in the control of individuals and are negotiated through other family members. In addition, the children of Bahraini men become citizens of Bahrain regardless of the nationality of their wife, whilst the children of Bahraini women who have married non-Bahrainis, cannot be citizens. However, since 2005 a Bahraini woman can pass citizenship to her children from a marriage to a non-Bahraini citizen as was mentioned in Chapter Three (BNA, 2006; Supreme Council for Women, 2006). The disadvantaged position

of visually impaired women in relation to marriage needs to be understood within the context of these wider Islamic and national gendered inequalities in marriage.

9. CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This thesis has addressed the topic of how interpretations of Islam affect the policy, practice and understanding of disability – in particular of visual impairment through a case study of Bahrain. The focus of this concluding chapter is how the research questions set out in the Introduction have been answered and a discussion of the original empirical and theoretical contribution to knowledge of this study. In addition, the limitations of the research design, the policy implications, and possible areas of future research will be discussed.

9.1 Research Questions

The thesis addresses the consideration of diversity and impairment within disability theory through a case study of a Muslim society, Bahrain. The research questions were:

1. How are policies and provision for visually impaired people influenced by interpretations of Islam in an Arab Muslim society?
2. What are the gendered experiences of visually impaired young people in an Islamic society in relation to education, work and marriage?

9.2 Empirical Findings

Hitherto no empirical social science research has been done concerning how religion impacts on the lives of disabled people in Bahrain. Therefore, as such a study,

this research contributes to the empirical study of religion, in this case the Islamic religion, as it affects people with a disability in Bahrain. It has done so by showing how in Bahrain, Islamic teachings are interpreted to promote a compassionate and charitable approach to people with disabilities. Segregated specialist educational provision is provided, with limited inclusion in the sixth form, university and in adult life. Owing to Islamic interpretations of gender segregation, visually impaired girls and young women experience the intersection of gender and disability in ways that disadvantage them more than visually impaired boys and young men. Because of their gender and impairment they experience a double jeopardy. It is argued that there is the potential for Islamic teachings to be interpreted to support further social inclusion of disabled people with a focus on a rights-based approach. This study has employed a qualitative methodology; by using focus groups and semi-structured interviews. I hope that this study will emphasise how important such qualitative methods are as very few studies of a social nature have been conducted in Bahrain or in the other GCC countries using such an approach.

In relation to the first research question, 'How are policies and provision for visually impaired people influenced by interpretations of Islam in an Arab Muslim society?', the findings have established that the interpretations of Islam in the Arab Muslim society of Bahrain, predominantly support the provision of charitable giving and policies and provision that support segregated specialist provision in education and employment. The Islamic texts promoting equality and rights for disabled people are less acted upon as independent living is not fostered within the family, nor within institutions and the wider society. The precepts and interpretations of Islam urge individuals and by implication the wider society including policy makers, to be compassionate, kind and charitable to disabled people. This is done by individuals

through volunteering, making charitable donations, and by government through the development of segregated provision that provides special educational facilities.

Therefore, the policies and provisions are more congruent with a medical model of disability rather than a social model of disability although there is some recent awareness of the need to develop more social inclusion in this area. However there is a lack of resourcing in terms of both equipment and human resources within education at all levels and employment so that there is little movement from the rhetoric of inclusion at the policy level.

This research shows that visually impaired people are dependent in an Islamic country. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that this is a general attitude in Muslim countries, especially in the GCC, where the people depend on others. In addition, in a Muslim society, different people have different roles, which are more or less fixed and do not cross. Some depend on gender, age, class, levels of conservatism and other factors. For example, men have more roles outside the home and women are largely dependent on them in this sphere, while women have roles within the home and family. The Muslim view is that this is symbiosis, support and co-operation (*takāful*) and helping each other, it is not seen as dependency (*etekālīah*). Muslims view helping others, especially vulnerable groups (i.e. people with disabilities, elderly people, children, and poor people), as part of their role without thinking that this may make such people dependent. While this philosophy has generated, in many ways a caring and supportive society in which disabled people can live, this has resulted in disabled people themselves having less independence than they would like, and limited opportunities in many areas of their life. The government has provided fewer services for vulnerable groups as it assumes that these services are provided by society (EL-Hessen, 2006; Turmusani, 2003; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006). This again shows that the quality of services is neither guaranteed nor equal since it depends on

the abilities and attitudes of families. It also increases the dependency of vulnerable groups on others.

Both the traditional and independent living approaches used in the UK have been applied in the GCC countries with the traditional approach, built mainly around institutional services, and volunteer support being introduced to the region by Western nations. However, this style of care suited the region because it fulfilled the religious requirement to provide care for vulnerable groups. The independent approach, on the other hand, did not sit comfortably with Islam as religious values in the region depend in general on group support rather than on individual lifestyles, as Muslim societies are more interdependent societies (National Committee for Disabled Persons, 1985; Turmusani, 2003). Nonetheless, as a result of the wealth of the region, direct payments are made to disabled people (Akhbar Alkhaleej, 2005; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006) and, in addition, most people have servants; in particular, most families employ a servant especially to look after the disabled person. The phenomenon of employing a servant increased in the region from the 1980s (Fakhro, 1990; Maclagan, 2006; Seikaly, 1997, 1998) and this decreases the level of independence of people with a disability as they then receive support from the servant, from family members, from society as a whole, and from volunteers who are willing to help in the belief that supporting others is said to obtain rewards from God.

Therefore, not only does the structure of society increase dependency, but the government encourages it within the population, especially in the GCC, as these governments are not used to sharing responsibilities with their citizens. As explained in Chapter Three, having a parliament and the right to vote is a new phenomenon in the GCC. Furthermore, in the GCC, people do not pay tax (Fakhro, 1990) and so are used to the government providing them with the services they need; whatever is not provided, government assume that people do not need it. Although, as explained

earlier, the government depends on society to provide a lot of the support to disabled people and therefore does not need to make much provision available itself.

The GCC countries are even dependent on other countries. For example, Bahrain does not have basic local products but depends on resources from oil in order to obtain these from others. Even the army is not self-sufficient. For example, as soon as the war started between Iraq and Kuwait, it was necessary to ask other armies (mainly the American army) to come to our aid, as it was not possible to support ourselves (Fakhro, 1990; Seikaly, 1997, 1998).

Hence, this shows that the idea of dependency is part of the structure of Arab society and has only increased through the discovering oil and the policies of developing governments. As a result, the dilemma of being dependent and not receiving certain services is inherent in society.

A problem faced by Bahraini people is having liberal policies influenced by the West in an Arabic Muslim country (Chapter Three). This means that, although some excellent services are available, they cannot be used because of cultural and Islamic values such as in Bahrain as an archipelago which means that there it is surrounded by sea and beaches, yet there are no women only beaches. They are open and allowed for both genders to access. This means that most Bahraini women cannot enjoy swimming in the sea due to the religious and cultural values while men and non-Bahraini women do this. In neighbouring countries (i.e. GCC and Iran), with more gender segregation there are beaches for women and more women-only sporting areas. This shows that applying liberal rules in an Islamic country can prevent Muslim women from participating.

This may affect females more than males. This research shows how this has affected people with visual impairment as their educational institutions are mixed gender (Chapter Six). This could only happen in a liberal country such as Bahrain,

which is less conservative than countries such as Saudi Arabia in terms of religion and gender segregation. Therefore, having Western and liberal policies in a non-Western country can cause some problems and difficulties, especially for Muslim women (McEwan & Butler, 2007). This may be similar to the difficulties that Muslims face in non-Muslim countries but to face these difficulties in a Muslim country makes people feel more negative and alienated.

Hence, it can be said that many conservative people in Bahrain feel alienated because they feel that policies and services are not shaped by Islamic values, which was one of the main reasons for the conflicts in 1994 against the Bahraini government as was discussed in Chapter Three (Seikaly, 1997, 1998). Furthermore, feelings of alienation may increase among people with disabilities in Bahrain because of the reasons outlined above and because of the segregation and exclusion they have faced; it is a commonly held view that physical disability can engender a sense of alienation from society (Romeis, 1983) (Chapter Five, Six and Seven).

It can be argued, that in many Muslim countries, people with disabilities face more difficulties from cultural barriers than from religious ones. As, cultural barriers make Islam to be used in a wrong way and as a tool to empower women and vulnerable groups of the society (Kelleher, 2007). However, we should not ignore the fact that historically people with disabilities enjoyed better services in Muslim countries in comparison to people in Western societies (Bazna & Hatab, 2005; Musse, 2002; Turmusani, 2003), as was explained in Chapter Two. From the beginning of Islam, there are many examples of people with disabilities holding important positions such as soldiers, scholars or holy men. Within the Muslim countries historically and until recently, it is suggested that there have been positive attitudes toward people with disabilities (Turmusani, 2003). However, it can be argued that some of the 'over support' attitude increase dependency among Muslim disabled

people. On the other hand, in Western societies, historically and until 1970s, there is evidence that people with disabilities suffered from poor treatment. For example, people with disabilities were totally segregated from society in residential institutions, abortion of unborn babies with disabilities was widely practiced, disabled women were forced to undergo hysterectomies, and plastic surgery was done for people with Down Syndrome to make them look more like non-disabled people. These, together with other discriminatory practices, resulted in the development of the disabled people's movement, which successfully campaigned for better policies and services and improved human rights for people with disabilities (Clements & Read, 2003; Read, Clements, & Ruebain, 2006; Shakespeare, 2006a). Most of the discriminatory practices in Western societies highlighted above are forbidden in Islam and were never practiced in Muslim countries. It can be argued that an Islamic way of treating disabled people has resulted in more protection for disabled people, for example in terms of the right to life: abortions, child killing or suicide is totally forbidden in Islam. This may have delayed the development of disabled people's movements in Muslim countries because disabled people felt less need to be politically active. Today, although disabled people's movements are developing in countries such as Bahrain, they are influenced by Western world models of disability activism. Such models may not suit Muslim countries, as a result of religion, cultural, values differences as was explored in this thesis. It may be more appropriate for Muslim countries to develop an Islamic approach to disability that is more culturally appropriate. As Islam has lots of positive aspects in term of human rights, equality, willingness to support that should be considered and used. However, I do not argue that this Islamic approach to disability is the ideal model for all, but it could be a more appropriate approach for Muslims in Islamic and non-Islamic countries and some aspects of it may even be appropriate for non-Muslims living in Islamic

countries. Although, such an approach draws heavily on ideas from the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, it takes positive approaches from other models (i.e. medical, social, relational models). This approach will also need to draw on new models that will develop in different countries and over time if it is to remain culturally appropriate.

There is the potential for Islamic leaders to influence policy and provision in this area by interpreting Islamic texts and teachings in a way that could support more socially inclusive practices and the rights of disabled people. This is, as yet, unexplored. The segregated specialist education provision, prioritises disability and impairment over gender through mixed provision from 6-14 years of age, and gives limited inclusive access with poor resourcing to sixth form and university education for visually impaired students (Chapter Five). Employment policies are rigid and inadequate and exclusive, preventing the majority of visually impaired adults from working in areas commensurate to their education and also preventing the further development of inclusive education (Chapter Seven). These findings raise the wider issue of how interpretations of Islam could be used to foster a rights based approach to disability.

The findings in relation to the second research question concerning 'What are the gendered experiences of visually impaired young people in an Islamic society in relation to education, work and marriage?' established that within education and socially visually impaired young people felt that they were treated and viewed differently, both formally and informally, with regard to gender and disability (Chapter Five and Six). Gender identity was not felt to be of primary importance, when there was an impairment, by policy makers, providers and some of the users. Young girls and women with visual impairment face more difficulties than boys or men, owing to the status of women and the importance of social segregation and honour in an Islamic society (Chapter Five and Six). Gender segregation is

maintained formally and informally in the mixed specialist provision at the primary and secondary stages of education to make mixed provision more acceptable in terms of religion and culture to families, policy makers, providers and the students themselves.

People with visual impairment are employed in lower income positions and semi-segregated jobs (Chapter Seven), which increase difficulties of marriage (Chapter Eight). All people with visual impairment face difficulties in relation to finding a suitable marriage partner but women are less likely to be married. It appears from my evidence that those who have less difficulty in getting married are individuals, both men and women who are partially sighted, employed and who live in *Shi'a* villages. Difficulty finding a marriage partner appears to relate to a number of reasons. First, to the fact that marriage to a visually impaired individual raises concerns about the possibility of inherited disability for any children resulting from the marriage. Since marriage is an arrangement between two families, it is seen as possibly resulting in future generations being visually impaired, especially with the commonality of preferential cousin marriages in Bahrain, as in other Muslim countries and Muslim communities in non-Muslim countries. Second, it is related to the stigma attached to disability: disabled people are often view as 'incomplete'. Some people say marriage to a disabled person is undesirable because of the practical difficulties it creates. However, because people in Bahrain live in extended family households and have domestic servants many practical difficulties can be overcome, hence practical reasons for not marrying a visually impaired person are less valid. This suggests that concerns about visually impaired people marrying relate more to the stigma of disability than the day to day practical difficulties (Chapter Eight).

It can be argued that the original contribution to knowledge of these empirical findings has various dimensions. It is the first qualitative research study to focus on

visual impairment in Bahrain and the region, and in particular to explore the intersection of disability, Islam and gender in relation to policy, provision, practice, and user experiences. It shows clearly the strengths and weaknesses of the current provision in education and employment in Bahrain, where movement towards inclusion is hesitant and slow and the interpretation of Islamic texts and teaching generates a kind but disabling environment that is not rights based or socially equitable.

9.3 Theoretical Contribution

The medical and social models of disability were set out in Chapter One with a discussion of the various critiques and of the emergent relational model of disability that through its consideration of impairment, combines elements of the medical model within the social model of disability – in other words, a rights based model of disability that also acknowledges the impact of impairment. This study is a contribution to the debate on the relational model of disability, through its consideration of both the consequences of impairment through the lens of a rights based approach to disability.

The study tries to show how models of disability are operationalised in an Arab Muslim country. Services and policies for people with disability were affected firstly by the Islamic religion and the Arabic culture, then, as a result of colonisation. In the 1970s, besides the wave of Western medical models of disability prevalent at that time, policies and practices toward people with disabilities became affected by the medical model from then until the present. It was necessary to adapt some aspects of the medical model to make it suitable for Arab Muslim countries. So for example, in implementing mix sex education provision, as in the West, in Bahrain, some attempts to segregate children within mixed sexed schools for disabled children were carried

out. However, disabled children were not allowed the same right to single sex provision as other children. On the other hand, some cultural attitudes held back the social models of disability in certain areas, although some of the ideas of the social model were already part of Islamic beliefs and approaches. For example, while Islam promotes positive views of disabled people, it encourages protection and care, which can work against the promotion of independence for disabled people. An additional problem is having liberal policies influenced by the West in an Islamic country where many people still hold traditional religious and cultural values. All of these have created difficulties for people with disabilities in Arab Muslim countries, as shown in the study.

Therefore, the study has shown that using only models from Western countries is not suitable because of religious, cultural and lifestyle differences and therefore there is a need in Arab Muslim countries to develop an approach to disability in terms of policies and practice that will include Islamic views and interpretations, as well as it will address a social model interpretation in terms of gender.

This research has also contributed toward the body of literature that already exists by focusing on the issue of disability in a Muslim setting and by considering gender as an important factor. Although, there have been lots of studies about disability and studies about culture, gender and disability have increased during the last two decades, none have considered gender, disability and Islam.

The study has also shown the need to introduce an Islamic approach to disability. This study has shown how policies and services in Bahrain have been affected by culture, religion and Western values, which in many cases, have made the lives of people with disability more difficult.

This study also extends understanding of diversity within disability studies. To date, most studies of diversity and disability have been of Western societies (Ahmad,

2001, 2000; McEwan & Butler, 2007; Riddell & Watson, 2003), or of the South Asian continent (Atkin & Hussain, 2003; Hussain, Atkin, & Ahman, 2002), or about black disabled people or from ethnic minority group, such as Vernon (1998) study, about disabled black women. There is one theoretical paper on disability in the Qur'an (Bazna & Hatab, 2005). Although, there are studies regarding disability and Islam, they are mainly concerned with how the law (*shari'ah*) deals with people with a disability, such as the study by Rispler-Chaim (2007).

Turmusani's (2001; , 2003), however extended the approach to Muslim countries and increased validity, reliability and generalisability within the region. However, Turmusani's study focuses more on the economic problems associated with the adoption of the social model of disability in Muslim countries. My study is more in line with the new relational approach to disability (Shakespeare, 2006a) which acknowledges that people with visual impairments experience physical impairments as well as social barriers, hence they need policies and services which assist them to cope with impairment as well as overcome social and physical barriers. In addition, this study argues for a rights-based approach to disability and inclusion.

This study of the ways in which Islamic teachings are interpreted within a Muslim Arab society and how they influence policy, provision and practice, as well as individual coping strategies, is an original contribution to both empirical and theoretical knowledge. It is applicable to other Muslim Arab societies and to some extent to societies with Muslim minorities. The study findings demonstrate the ways in which Islamic teachings can support both charitable giving and provision, compassionate and sheltered exclusion but also how they have the potential to be used to support a rights-based approach to disability in the public sphere. The findings also show the intersectionality of Islamic teachings, gender and disability

and how these shape provision and the experience of provision e.g. in relation to mobility, or mixed education.

Nowadays intersectional analysis is widely used in studies of gender, culture, ethnicity, religion, sex, race and class (Dill, Nettles, & Weber, 2001), especially among social workers. However, as argued by Meekosha (2006), disability has not been included within intersectional studies. Although this study has benefited in a limited way from such an approach.

The role of gender has been recognised in studies of people with disabilities to some extent in practice and in research settings. Their application however has not been closely investigated beyond the boundaries of Western societies. Until recently, there has been a neglect of gender within disability studies (Barnes & Mercer, 1997; Morris, 1992; Read, 2000) and little on the intersection of gender, disability and ethnic minority status (Atkin & Hussain, 2003) with a new recognition of Muslim disabled women (Turmusani, 2001). This study contributes to this overlooked but important area and the development of theory in relation to diversity within disability studies. Therefore, a contribution to the development of more flexible models of disability that address diversity (McEwan & Butler, 2007; Shakespeare, 2006a).

9.4 Limitations of the Study

As was mentioned in the methodology chapter, the use of more observation as a main method, would have added validity and reliability to the research. Only limited observation was carried out due to the cultural restrictions of observing in male-only settings by a single female. A larger sample of users with a wider range of ages would also have strengthened this research. However, one of the disadvantages of doing this would be that older users in particular would not be able to express views about current or recent educational provision. One of the disadvantages of the data is that

the interviews with policy makers and providers were about current provision and the user's accounts of their experiences were retrospective.

Interviews with people from visually impaired people's peer groups, colleagues and friends in the schools, university, FSoB and in work places may have provided additional useful data. In additions, to interview their families (parents and siblings) and some volunteers, about why they volunteer, may have enhanced my understanding of charitable work in relation to disabled people. I would also interview employers who employ and do not employ people with visual impairment. To extend understanding about marriage and visual impairment, including more married users would have been useful. However, this could only have been achieved if the age group was extended. Therefore, this study has raised a number of issues that would be worth exploring through further research, as suggested in the section below.

9.5 Policy Implications

At the policy and practice level, the study findings have some policy implications. Generally speaking, because Bahraini society is based on Islamic values, policy-makers assume that religion is part of people's lives and its effect is obvious. Hence they ignore the possibility of investigating exactly how religion informs the lives of people with disabilities and, most importantly, how religion can be used as a method and resource to assist people with disabilities and coping with the difficulties without making them dependent.

Bahraini society is based on Islamic values and religious observance is part of people's lives (Fakhro, 1990; Seikaly, 1997, 1998; US Embassy Bahrain, 2006). Islamic teachings can be interpreted to develop policies, provision and practices for people with disabilities in a more equitable rights based way. Mainstream educational and employment provision should provide disabled people with access to the same

areas of study and employment available to non-disabled people. Moreover, there is a need to introduce legislation along the lines of the Disability Discrimination Act in the UK, which gives disabled people equal rights and promotes social inclusion. Such initiatives would require policy and resourcing in terms of equipment, technology and qualified teachers. Visually impaired teachers could be employed within mainstream schools rather than being trained and being unemployed owing to the current restriction to teaching only within segregated specialised provision. Mobility training could be increased with gender specific training so that girls could have access to this training. In addition, more use of adapted road crossings and signage within institutions is required.

In addition, this research suggests that the richer GCC nations lack human resources and depend on foreign workers in their countries utilising Bahrain citizens with disabilities in society and the labour market. This would ease the human resource shortage and also ensure that such disabled people can participate in employment and achieve financial independence.

There is the potential for developing a new Islamic approach to disability which is sensitive to gender issues with religious leaders encouraging not only charitable attitudes and giving but also a more rights based approach to independent living.

This study's findings might be more useful if a similar study were conducted, (in order to see if the results were similar), in other Muslim countries where different conditions, in terms of economic, cultural and social aspects, applied. It is also hoped that this research's findings might encourage others further to explore what parts are played by religion and gender around the world in the lives of those with disabilities. More research could be carried out into aspects of disability, particularly concerning gender, cultural and religious issues in Arab Muslim countries.

In addition, further research might develop a new gendered approach to disability that would be of particular relevance to Muslims with disabilities in both Islamic and non-Islamic countries.

Finally, further research into aspects of gender, religion and disability seems necessary because religion and gender are such important elements in the lives of those with disabilities. Most important of all, it is hoped that this study will benefit, not only visually impaired people in Bahrain, but visually impaired Muslims in any society throughout the world.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Dress Codes

Although there is some argument about finding an equivalent word for '*hijab*' in English (Ruby, 2006), this study will use the terms '*hijab*' to mean the Muslim dress that covers all of the body except the face and hands (as this is how a woman should be when she prays and during the *hajj*, the pilgrimage at Mecca). There are different styles that cover more or less of the body; these are related to culture and vary in different countries. In addition, the study will not refer to a girl who is wearing *hijab* as '*mutahajebah*' as do many studies relating to Muslim *hijab*. Instead, this study will use the term '*mutahajeba*'. There is a difference between these in the Arabic language. '*Mutahajebah*' means that others covered her, while '*mutahajeba*' means that she covered herself from others.

The Muslim women's dress (*hijab*) can be said to put a social distance between men and women, limiting sexual relationships and acting as a form of social control (L. Ahmed, 1993; Hale, 1989).

As Ahmed (1993) writes, 'the adaptation of the dress does not declare women's place to be in the home but, on the contrary, legitimizes their presence outside it' (224). There are different views among Muslim and non-Muslim scholars about Muslim women's dress (*hijab*) (Ruby, 2006). Some writers argue that such dress (*hijab*) was only required for the wives of Prophet Muhammad and not for all Muslim women. The practice of women wearing *hijab* in the Middle East started around 1500 BC, which is before Islam (An-Na'im, 2002). El Saadawi (1997) argues it originated from the Arab culture before the beginning of Islam, while Mernissi (2003) sees it as a form of male social control. Most Islamic religious leaders hold the position that *hijab* should be compulsory for Muslim women.

Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan and Yemen, are more conservative in the enforcement of *hijab*, veiling, segregation and female seclusion

(*pardah*). However, the situation of women in Iran is different from in other countries. Although *hijab* is compulsory, this occurred only in the last two decades as previously women in Iran had always enjoyed freedom. Even now, women in Iran are actively involved in their country in all kind of jobs and are members of the Iranian parliament (Engineer, 2004). Turkey, Tunisia, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Bahrain are also more liberal.

However, even in some of these countries, rural areas are more conservative and honour killings occur. In Jordan, until a few years ago, the law protected the honour (*sharaf*) of the family and a male could kill a female member of the family if he thought that she had crossed any moral boundaries. Bahrain has never had such a law.

In Oman, women were allowed to vote and be elected in 1994. Even so, Oman still differentiates between the genders and encourages segregation. Historically women in Oman were not powerful and did not have an important role in the nation as they have always been viewed as dependent on men. Only recently have they been integrated into the economy and this change in status came from the top, not from the bottom (Rippenburg, 1998).

In Bahrain, wearing Muslim dress for women (*hijab*) (See Figure A) is a matter of personal choice, even to the extent that Bahraini women in the Ministry of the Interior for decades were not allowed to wear Muslim dress for women (*hijab*). This changed in 2004. After long negotiations with the government, women were allowed to wear Muslim dress for women (*hijab*) if they wanted to. Today covering the face and veiling (*nīqāb*) (See Figure B), is not allowed in most work places. In the UoB students are only allowed to veil during study. They are not allowed to wear this at graduation ceremonies and staff are not allowed to wear it at all. Seikaly (1998) states that the number of *mutahajebah* females has increased since the mid-nineties which

shows the increased observation of Islamic values, not only in Bahrain, but in the whole region (Badran, 1998).

Figure A Muslim's dress for women (*hijab*)



Source: (BBC News, 2007a)

The idea about women being liberated by removing her *hijab* and reforming marriage and divorce laws was spread in the beginning of the last century (Chatty & Rabo, 1997). In the 1960s, Kuwaiti women burned their *'abāya/dafah* when they were not allowed to share the same political rights as men (Badran, 1998). This was similar to what happened in Iran, Turkey, Algeria and some other countries when women removed their Muslim dress (*hijab*) to look more Western and demanded more civil rights. In some countries it was a movement led by women and in others it was imposed by the governments. In Iran, the *Shah* banned the Muslim dress for women (*hijab*) and wearing the *chador* in 1936. However, after the revolution in 1979, the *hijab* gradually became compulsory (El Guindi, 1999). Therefore Muslim dress for women (*hijab*), became a symbolic way to resist the affect of colonisation (Chatty & Rabo, 1997).

Figure B Veil (*nīqāb*)



Source: (BBC, 2006)

The Muslim dress for women (*hijab*) is worn by women in Bahrain in a range of ways. Some wear it covering all of their hair, while some wear it in certain places and in front of certain people and do not cover all of their hair; they call this

mutahashemah. The type of *hijab* for the *mutahashemah* or *mutahajebah* is black in the GCC and is named *shyīlah* or *melfa*'. This is also different in style, colour, and the way in which it is worn from the *hijab* in other Muslim countries. Traditionally women in the GCC wear the black version as it is not transparent and gives them more seclusion from men. Although, the weather is hot and the black colour may not suit this. Men's clothes, on the other hand, are mainly white because they do not want to hide or cover anything.

In Bahrain and the Gulf in general the '*abāya/dafah* (the black loose cloth made of heavy silk crêpe worn over the head and covering the whole body) (See Figure C) is the main clothing that is worn by women to mask their bodies (An-Na'im, 2002; Boddy, 2006). To some extent it is similar to the *mīlayah* in Egypt and the *chador* in Iran. The '*abāya/dafah* does not cover all the hair as Islam requires but is symbolic and women use it differently, depending on their level of conservatism. Some wear it as far as their shoulders while others cover some or all of their hair and some use it to cover part of their face.

Figure C Sheikha Sabeeka, wearing the traditional Bahraini '*abāya/dafah*



Source: (Alyassi, 2006)

Bahraini women stopped wearing the old style of '*abāya/dafah* gradually and what they do now depends on the class and education of the women, as well as the place, time and occasion. Educated women in the 1970s stopped wearing

'abāya/dafah (Seikaly, 1998). Some women used to wear *'abāya/dafah* only for work. They would not walk outside their homes without it, which shows that they observed fewer boundaries with people they knew, but gradually women started not to wear it in the work place and even in schools. A more Western style form of dress was adopted by wearing scarves with Western clothes. The old fashioned style of the *'abāya/dafah* started to change in the 1990s and was replaced with a style similar to that worn in countries, such as Syria, Egypt, Turkey and Iran, and even by elderly conservative ladies in some Western countries; this was called *'abāya/dafah katef* (See Figure D). This new style is only worn on the shoulder and not on the head. It is black and is fitted with buttons. It is more practical and easier to wear than the old style.

Both the old style of *'abāya/dafah* or the newer version are worn as a way of signifying the social distance between the genders. Wearing the new style *'abāya/dafah* with the *hijab* was what women preferred in order to show respect to their culture and religion, while the old style *'abāya/dafah* was imposed only by the culture.

Figure D Picture of *'abāya* in *'abāya* Shop in Bahrain



Source: (Wikipedia, 2007)

Men in Bahrain, GCC and some other countries in the region wear white gowns (*thobe*) and cover their heads by wearing a white headdress (*ghutra*) with a black ring on the *ghutra* (*'agal*), (See Figure E). Thus the *ghutra* is not a religious

requirement, it is a traditional form of dress and wearing it is optional. In some GCC countries, however, like Oman and the United Arab Emirates, men in government posts have to wear it, but this is not the case in Bahrain.

Figure E ‘A man wearing white gown (*thobe*), white headdress (*ghutra*), black ring on the *ghutra* (*agal*), and black lose overcoat (*bisht*)’



Source: (Wikipedia, 2007)

Source: (General Directorate of Statistics and Population Registry, 2007b)

Table B Population over 15 Years by Duration of Unemployment, Nationality and Sex (2007) (Continued)

Nationality	Sex	Duration of Unemployment			Total
		Less than 3 months	3 to 6 months	More than 6 months	
Bahraini	Male	1,077	1,424	3,203	5,704
	Female	1,077	1,424	3,203	5,704
Expatriate	Male	73	80	26	179
	Female	73	80	26	179
Total	Male	1,150	1,504	3,229	6,383
	Female	1,150	1,504	3,229	6,383
Total					12,767
Expatriate					358
Total					13,125

Source: (General Directorate of Statistics and Population Registry, 2007b)

Appendix 2: Statistics from Bahrain

Table A: Unemployment Population (15 Years and over) By Highest Educational Level Achieved, Nationality and Sex- 2001 Census

Highest Educational Level Achieved	Nationality/Sex						Total		
	Bahraini			Non-Bahraini			Males	Females	Total
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total			
Illiterate/Read Only	250	60	310	36	5	41	286	65	351
Read & Write	549	112	661	39	9	48	588	121	709
Primary Certificate	1,827	305	2,132	98	10	108	1,925	315	2,240
Preparatory Certificate	2,297	696	2,993	98	18	116	2,395	714	3,109
Above Preparatory	313	122	435	20	11	31	333	133	466
Sixth form Certificate	3,529	3,656	7,185	171	146	317	3,700	3,802	7,502
Above Sixth form/Diploma	369	744	1,113	26	45	71	395	789	1,184
B.Sc/B.A.	271	989	1,260	28	57	85	299	1,046	1,345
High Diploma	11	13	24	(-)	5	5	11	18	29
Master's Degree	13	4	17	2	2	4	15	6	21
Doctorate Degree	5	1	6	1	2	3	6	3	9
Unknown	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)
Total	9,434	6,702	16,136	519	310	829	9,953	7,012	16,965

(-) Nil

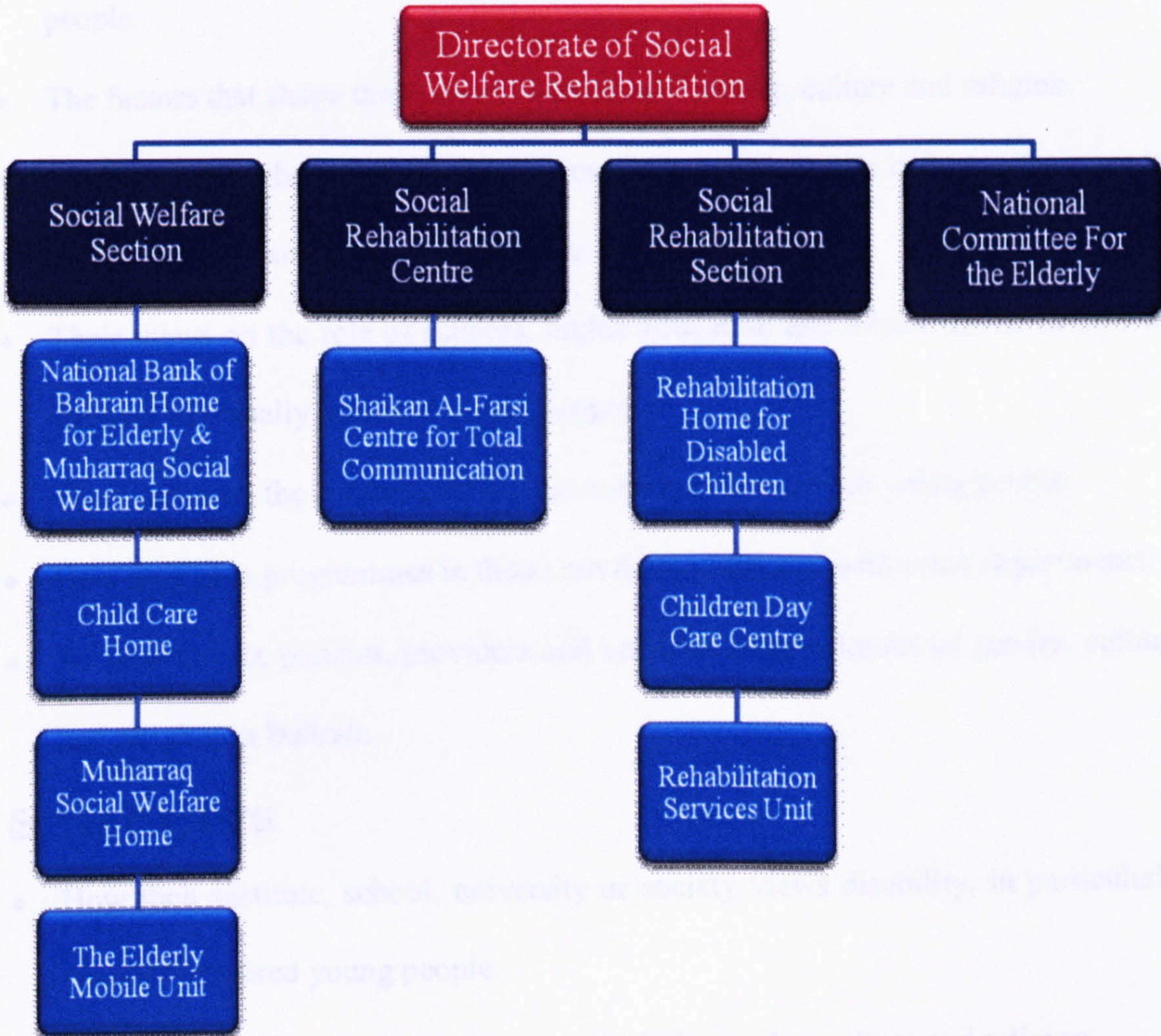
Source: (General Directorate of Statistics and Population Registry, 2007b)

Table B Population over 15 Years by Duration of Unemployment, Nationality and Sex (2001 Census)

Unemployment Duration (Years)	Nationality/Sex						Total		
	Bahraini			Non-Bahraini			Males	Females	Total
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total			
< 1 Year	2,733	1,854	4,587	198	99	297	2,931	1,953	4,884
1-2	1,979	1,410	3,389	113	67	180	2,092	1,477	3,569
2-3	1,395	1,016	2,411	70	37	107	1,465	1,053	2,518
3-4	758	619	1,377	26	27	53	784	646	1,430
4-5	553	433	986	23	20	43	576	453	1,029
5-6	354	237	591	17	16	33	371	253	624
6-7	268	194	462	11	7	18	279	201	480
7-8	175	109	284	5	2	7	180	111	291
8 Years+	1,218	828	2,046	56	35	91	1,274	863	2,137
Unknown	1	2	3	(-)	(-)	(-)	1	2	3
Total	9,434	6,702	16,136	519	310	829	9,953	7,012	16,965

Source: (General Directorate of Statistics and Population Registry, 2007b)

Appendix 3: Directorate of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation in Ministry of Social Development



Source: (Ministry of Labour & Social Affairs (Social Development), 2007)

Appendix 4: Interviews Topic Guides

Policy Makers:

- How their Ministry views disability, in particularly visually impaired young people.
- The factors that shape these views, particularly gender, culture and religion.
- Their views on the needs of visually impaired young people and how their needs should be met through service provision.
- Their views on the role of schools, higher education and rehabilitation centres in the area of visually impaired young people.
- Their views on the current provision in meeting the needs of young people.
- How they plan programmes in their own department and with other departments.
- To what extent policies, providers and services address issues of gender, culture and religion in Bahrain.

Service Providers:

- How their institute, school, university or society views disability, in particularly visually impaired young people.
- The factors that shape these views, particularly gender, culture and religion.
- Their view on the needs of visually impaired young people and how their needs should be met through their institute, school, university or society.
- Their views on the role of schools, higher education and rehabilitation centres in the area of visually impaired young people.
- How they plan programmes in their own institute, school, university or society and with which other institute, school, university, societies, ministries or departments they co-operate.

Service Users:

- Experience of being visually impaired in Bahrain.
- How this experience of being visually impaired is shaped by their gender, culture and religion.
- Whether this experience is different in institutes than in schools in terms of segregation by gender or disability.
- How they experience service provision for visually impaired people at institutes, sixth form schools, universities and in the work place and the extent to which this meets their needs and prepares them for living independently in Bahrain.

**Appendix 5: List of Users Age between (16-26) From FSoB
in 2004 in Bahrain (All the Available Sample)**

List of Female visual impaired in age between (16-26)

No.	Name	Age	Education	Type of Study	Place of Work/Study	Notes
1	Aishah	17	Sixth Form	Attendance	M. Sixth Form School	Both were interviewed
2	Layla	23	Sixth Form	Attendance	S. Sixth Form School	
3	Afifah	-	BA.	Attendance	UoB	Pilot interview
4	Jalilah	20	BA.	Attendance	UoB	2 were chosen depending on who spent more years in university.
5	Zibah	23	BA.	Attendance	UoB	
6	-	-	BA.	Attendance	UoB	
7	Shikah	24	Sixth Form	-	Government Sector	All were interviewed.
8	Kadijah	26(27)	BA.	Attendance	Bank	
9	Makiha	23	College	Attendance	Work & Study in the same Place	
11	Wadha	26(27)	Sixth Form	-	-	Married
12	Zainab	26	BA.	Attendance	UoB	
13	XXX	24	-	-	Company	Was not chosen because she didn't finish her education.
14	XXX	25	Sixth Form	-	-	Was working in a factory. I chose the other girl because she is married & I wanted the viewpoint of a married female.

List of Male visual impaired in age between (16-26)

No.	Name	Age	Education	Type of Study	Place of Work/ Study	Notes
1	Majied	20	Sixth Form	Attendance	H. Sixth Form School	I preferred to choose 2 from the same school so that when I interviewed the teachers & social worker I would know who they are talking.
2	Rajab	20	Sixth Form	Attendance	H. Sixth Form School	
3	XXX	-	Sixth Form	-	N. Sixth Form School	
4	XXX	-	Sixth Form	From home	N. Sixth Form School	Did not choose him because he is studying from home.
5	Abd-AL-Rahman	22	BA.	Attendance	UoB	All in the available sample were interviewed.
6	Abd-AL-Samad	23	BA.	Attendance	UoB	
7	Khalid		BA.	Attendance	UoB	
8	Hashem	25(28)	Sixth Form	-	-	-
9	Abd-AL-Muhsen	20	Diploma	Attendance	College	-
10	Tawfiq	26(28)	BA.	-	UoB	-
11	XXX	-	BA.	-	Bank	I didn't choose him because the other university graduate was not an operator, also they are brothers.
12	XXX	24	Sixth Form	-	Gov. Sector	I did not choose him because he didn't finish his education.
13	Zaher	25	Sixth Form	-	-	-
14	Hassan	25	BA.	-	-	-
15	XXX	20	He didn't learn reading & writing until they send him out of schools	-	-	I did not choose them because they didn't finish their education. Although Zaher did not finish as well but I only knew that after the interview. Also, he had attend the sixth form unlike these two that only study until secondary.
16	XXX	-	Didn't finish his study	-	-	
17	XXX	-	-	-	-	

Appendix 6: List of Interviewees (policy makers, service providers and users) Details

Policy Makers Interviews:

No.	Interviewee	Gender	Occupation	Note
1	Policy Maker	M	Key person from Ministry of Education	-
2	Policy Maker	F	Key person from Ministry of Health	-
3	Policy Maker	F	Key person from Ministry of Social Development	With attendance of a service provider (M)

Service Providers Focus Group Interviews:

No.	Interviewee	Gender	Number of Participants	Impairment
1	Institute Teachers	F & M	6	Sighted & VI
2	Girls School Teachers	F	8	-
3	Boys School Teachers	M	6	-
4	UoB Lecturers	M	6	-

Service Providers Individual Interviews:



No.	Interviewee	Gender	Place	Impairment
1	Institute Headmaster	M	Institute of the Blind	-
2	Institute Social Worker	F	Institute of the Blind	-
3	Arabic Teacher in the Institute & Vice Chairman of FSoB	M	Institute of the Blind / FSoB	VI & hearing difficulties
4	Sport Teacher & Trainer	M	Institute of the Blind / FSoB	-
5	Social Worker	M	Boys School	-
6	Social Worker	F	Girls school	-
7	Head of Social Work Dep.	F	UoB	-
8	Social Worker	F	UoB	-
9	Chair National Committee Employing	F	Ministry of Social Development	Physical Impairment
10	Vocational Specialist	M	Ministry of Social Development	-
11	Lecturers	M	UoB	VI
12	Head of the Women Committee & Telephone Operator	F	FSoB / Government Sector	VI

List of Users:

Interviewee	Age	Time of Graduation from the Institute (When conducting the interview)	Gender	Marital Status	Research Name
School Students	20	Did not study in the Institute	M	Single	Rajab
	20	2 years	M	Single	Majied
	17	3 years	F	Single	Aisha
	23	3 years	F	Single	Layla
Looking For Job after School	25	5 years	M	Single	Zaher
	27	5 years	F	Married	Wadha
Found Work after Sixth Form School	28	8years	M	Married	Hashem
	24	5 years	F	Single	Shikah
Found Work after College	23	6 years	F	Single	Makiah
	20	Did not study in the Institute	M	Single	Abd-AL-Muhsen
University VI Students	22	5 years	M	Single	Abd-AL-Rahman
	-	Did not study in the Institute in Bahrain	M	Married	Khalid
	23	5 years	M	Single	Abd-AL-Samad
	23	5 years	F	Single	Zibah
	20	4 years	F	Single	Jalilah
Looking For Job after University	25	7 years	M	Single	Hassan
	26	7 years	F	Single	Zainab
Found Work after University	28	12 years	M	Single	Tawfiq
	27	11 years	F	Single	Khadijah

Appendix 7: Access Letters

- A. Sample of letter sent by the Head of the Social Sciences Department of the University of Bahrain seeking permission for me to interview social workers.

<p>UNIVERSITY OF BAHRAIN College of Arts Dept. of Social Sciences</p>		<p>جامعة البحرين كلية الآداب قسم العلوم الاجتماعية</p>
<p>التاريخ: 2004/9/26</p>		
<p>الأخت الفاضلة /الدكتورة هدى الخاجة المحترمة عميدة شئون الطلبة</p>		
<p>تحية طيبة وبعد،</p>		
<p>تقوم الباحثة/ دنيا أحمد عبدالله مساعد بحث وتدرّس بالقسم شعبة الخدمة الإجتماعية بإعداد دراسة الدكتوراه حول موضوع رعاية الطلبة ذوي الحاجات الخاصة. لذا يرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهمتها في مقابلة أحد الأخصائيين العاملين في المجال.</p>		
<p>مع خالص شكري وتقديري،</p>		
<p> د. فؤاد شهاب رئيس قسم العلوم الاجتماعية</p>		
<p>P.O. Box: 32038 -Kingdom of Bahrain Telephone: 438438 Fax: 449655</p>	<p>صندوق بريد: ٣٢٠٣٨ - مملكة البحرين هاتف: ٤٣٨٤٣٨ فاكس: ٤٤٩٦٥٥</p>	

Note: schools names were deleted for privacy

B. Permission from the Educational Research and Development Centre in the Ministry of Education to interview selected schools.

973 680157
26/09/2004 12:12 973-680157 D. I. S. E. (MOE) PAGE 01/01

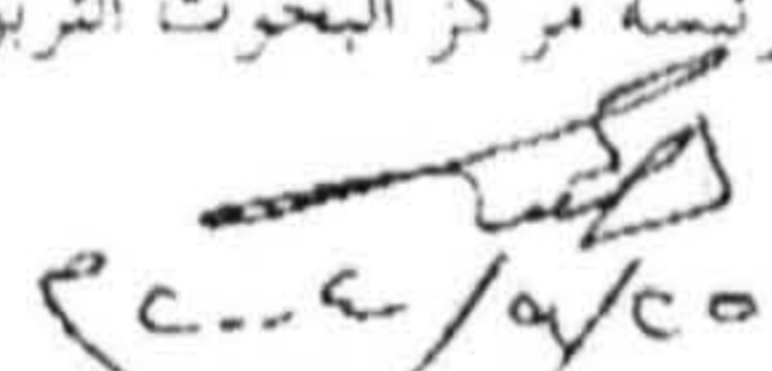
**Kingdom of Bahrain
Ministry of Education**
Educational Research and Development Centre


**مملكة البحرين
وزارة التربية والتعليم**
مركز البحوث التربوية والتطوير


في: 2004/9/25م الرقم: 1-4/244 م ب ت/2004

الموضوع: تسهيل مهمات باحث

اسم الباحثة: دينا أحمد عبد الله.
الجهة الطالبية: كلية الآداب - جامعة البحرين.
موضوع البحث: التعامل مع الحالات الخاصة.
المهمات المطلوب تنفيذها: القيام بمقابلة المشرف الاجتماعي وبعض المدرسين بمدرسة _____
الثانوية للبنين ومدرسة _____ الثانوية للبنات.
مرفقات: رسالة الجامعة - أسئلة المقابلة.
حقوق استخدام الأدوات محفوظة للباحث فقط.

رأي مركز البحوث التربوية والتطوير:
بعد الاطلاع على الأداة المطلوب تطبيقها لا يرى المركز مانعاً من السماح بتنفيذ المهمة المطلوبة أعلاه.
الاسم: لطيفة علي المناخي.
الوظيفة: رئيسة مركز البحوث التربوية والتطوير.
التوقيع:  2004/9/25

رأي الجهة المعنية: إدارة التعليم الإعدادي والثانوي.
بعد الاطلاع على المرفقات وبناء على موافقة مركز البحوث التربوية والتطوير لا ترى الإدارة مانعاً من السماح للباحثة بتنفيذ المهمة المطلوبة أعلاه.
الاسم:
الوظيفة:
التوقيع:  2004/9/25

ختم المركز  ختم الإدارة: 

هاتف: ٦٨٠٠٨٣ (٠٠٩٧٣) - فاكس: ٦٨٠١٦٨ (٠٠٩٧٣) - ص.ب. ٤٣ - المنامة
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Note: schools names were deleted for confidentiality.

C. My letter to the Head of the Social Sciences Department requesting permission to interview teachers in the department.

التاريخ: 2 أكتوبر 2004م

المحترم
الفاضل الدكتور فواد شهاب
رئيس قسم العلوم الاجتماعية

تحية طيبة وبعد،

الموضوع: تسهيل مهمات البحث

بعد التحية، أشيدكم علماً بأني مساعداً بحث وتدرّيس بقسم العلوم الاجتماعية وأقوم حالياً بإعداد رسالة الدكتوراه، وأرغب في إجراء مقابلة جماعية (Focus group) مع بعض أساتذة القسم الذي سبق لهم تدرّيس طلبة مكفوفين، فأرجو منكم تسهيل إجراء هذه المقابلة.

ولكم جزيل الشكر والامتنان،،



الآنسة دنيا أحمد عبدالله
مساعدة بحث وتدرّيس - ماجستير
قسم العلوم الاجتماعية
كلية الآداب
هاتف رقم: 39422502

Appendix 8: Bahrain Decree Law Number (74) of 2006 Concerning the Care, Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled

After full consideration of the Constitution and Order No. (13) of 1975 concerning the regulation of pension salaries and rewards of the Government employees and amendments therefore, and the Order pertaining to the regulation of pension salaries and rewards of Bahrain Defence Forces and Public Security Officers and staff issued according to Decree Law No. (11) of 1976 and amendments therefore, and the Order concerning Criminal Law issued according to Decree Law (15) of 1976 and amendments therefore, and the Labour Law for the Private Sector Issued according to Decree Law No. (23) of 1976 and amendments therefore, and the Social Insurance Order law Issued according to Decree Law No. (24) of 1976 and amendments therefore, and the Order concerning societies, social and cultural clubs, and private organizations working in the field of youth and sports issued according to Decree Law No. (21) of 1989 and amendments therefore, and Decree Law No. (16) of 1991 with respect to the affiliation of the State of Bahrain to the United Nations Agreements for Child Rights which was endorsed by the General Assembly in November 1989 and amended by Decree Law No. (8) of 2000 therefore, and Decree Law No. (3) 1996 with respect to the acceptance to join Arab Agreement No. (17) of 1998 pertaining to the rehabilitation and employment of disabled, and Decree Law No. (17) of 1999 concerning the acceptance to join International Labour Agreement No. (159) of 1983 with the agreement of the Shura's Council and the Council of Representatives.

Hereby assent to the enactment of the Law as prescribed hereunder and do decree:

Article 1

In the application of the protections of this Law, the following words and terms shall indicate the meaning described hereunder unless stated otherwise:

- a. Ministry: The Ministry of Social Development.
- b. Minister: The Minister of Social Development.

- c. **Supreme Committee:** The Supreme Committee for the Care of Disabled Affairs.
- d. **Disable:** is a person who suffers from a defect in some of his bodily or sensory or mental abilities as a result of a diseases, accident, or congenital cause or hereditary factor which led to his total or partial disability to work, continue to work and promoted in it, or reduced his ability to perform any other basic jobs in life, and who requires rehabilitation and care in order to integrate him or re-integrate him into the society.
- e. **Comprehensive Rehabilitation:** is a systematic and continuous process that is based on scientific foundations and that aims at benefiting from the available abilities of the disable, guide and develop them through comprehensive rehabilitation programmes that ensure the achievement of the optimum level of his performance capabilities so as to help him to integrate into the society.
- f. **Medical Commission:** is the body that shall be determined by the Minister of Health.

Article 2

The provisions of this law shall apply on Bahraini disabled.

Article 3

Ministries and other concerned authorities shall provide, in coordination with the Ministry, systematic, integral and continuous services for the disabled, particularly in the fields of medical, social educational, instructional, cultural, sports rehabilitation, employment, transport, housing and other fields.

Article 4

The Ministry shall establish rehabilitation centers and institutes, care homes and workshops for the disabled, and lodgement homes for essential cases for those with severe disability.

It shall not be permitted to establish rehabilitation centers and institutions or care homes or workshops for the disabled without an authorization from the Ministry, subject to the conditions and situations according to which issuance of an Order from the Minister shall be made, after agreement with the concerned Ministers and the supreme committee approval, from the effective date of implementing this law, the

existing authorities shall reconcile their situations and obtain the authorization referred to in the previous paragraph within six months from the date of issuing the Minister Orders.

Article 5

Exception from the provisions of the Labour Law for the Private Sector and Civil Service regulations, a female disabled worker shall be entitled to a special leave on full payment which shall not be deducted from her other leave if she is pregnant and the Medical Commission recommends that her conditions requires that, subject to the conditions and rules that shall be determined by an Order from the Minister.

Article 6

Exception from the provision of the laws pertaining to pension salaries and rewards, for civil, military and social insurance workers, the insured or beneficiary whom the Medical Commission determines that he is a disabled shall be entitled for a pension salary if the period of service calculated in the salary has reached a minimum of fifteen years for male and ten years for female. If either one of them is not entitled for a salary according to the provisions of the laws referred to and according to the salary, in this case on the basis of this period of service or fifteen years whichever is greater.

Article 7

A disabled shall be granted a monthly disability amount subject to the conditions and rules that shall be determined by an Order from the Minister after the Supreme Committee approve.

Article 8

All rehabilitation, medical, educational, technical, and compensatory equipment and materials necessary for the disabled shall be exempted from all types of fees and taxes and the Ministry shall facilitate their acquirement of that.

Article 9

The Minister, after the agreement of the Supreme Committee, shall issue an Order prescribing the conditions of accepting disabled in the rehabilitation centers and

institutes, provided that this Order shall indicate in particular the period of rehabilitation and the cases in which exemption from all or some of the these conditions is allowed.

Article 10

The rehabilitation centers and institutes shall give a certificate for every disabled that has been rehabilitated in it. The certificate shall indicate the occupation or jobs that he can perform in addition to other information that shall be specific by an Order issued from the Minister. This certificates shall be handed to a disabled who proves his competence to perform a suitable work without rehabilitation, as per his request, Every disabled who has been registration of his name at the Ministry. The Ministry in relation with Ministry of Labour shall record these names in a special register that shall be created for that and shall be created for that and shall issue the disable, free of charge, a certificate attesting his registration which shall Indicates the occupation or jobs for which he has received rehabilitation and the other jobs which he is able to perform.

Article 11

Employers employing fifty workers or more, whether such various are employed in one or different locations, shall engage the persons nominated by the Ministry of Labour from amongst those who recorded in the register as having been rehabilitated within the limits that shall be specified by the Supreme Committee which shall not be less than two percent of the total number of workers. However, employers refereed to, may fulfill this percentage by engaging disabled who have not been nominated by the Ministry of Labour provided to obtain the register conceded in Article (10) of this Law. The appointment of disabled shall be made in the jobs for which they have been rehabilitated or in any other work which the disabled can perform and which is recorded in the registration certificates.

The bearears of rehabilitations certificates shall be employed from physical fitness conditions, if any, in respect of the disability mentioned in the certificate. And also from the condition of passing the required examination to occupy the job. In all cases, whoever employs a disabled shall notify the Ministry through a registered letter within ten days from the date the disabled started work.

Article 12

After the agreement of the Council of Ministers and in relation with the Minister and the Director of Civil Service Bureau, the Minister of Labour may Issue an Order prescribing certain Government Jobs or positions for which rehabilitated disabled shall be applicable to Government agencies and public organizations and bodies. Rehabilitated disabled shall have priority of appointment in vacant jobs and positions within the percentage limit mentioned in Article (11) of this Law.

Article 13

Disabled employed in according with the provisions of this Law shall be entitled to all the rights as those employed by other workers in the establishment they are employed.

Article 14

Establishment to which the provisions of this Law are applicable shall mention a specific register for recording particulars of the disabled in their employment that contain the information indicated in the rehabilitation certificate, Such establishments shall notify the Ministry of Labour every year of the number of jobs and positions held by the disabled and the wage of each, on the forum to be prescribed by the Ministry of Labour for this purposes.

Article 15

In the event that a worker scatalns and employment injury causing him disability which does not prevent him from performing other work than his previous work, the employer in whose service the injury was sustained shall employe the worker in suitable alternative work at a wage that is not less than the wage this worker gets. This shall not prejudice the rights and entitlement of such worker, in respect of his injury, according to provisions of the Labour Law for the Private Sector and Social Insurance Law.

Article 16

A committee to be named (The Supreme Committee for the Care of Disabled Affaires) shall be established and attached to the Ministry of Social Development.

Article 17

The Supreme Committee shall be formed with the chairmanship of the Minister of Social Development and membership of two representatives from the Government sector whom rank is not less than director of a directorate, and two representatives from the private sector. The appointment of the Committee members shall be made by an Order from the Chairman of the Council of Ministers and the duration of their membership shall be two years and is subject for renewal. The committee members shall elect a deputy chairman in their first meeting and may limit whoever they consider from among experts and specialties to listen to their views and get their assistance, but they shall not have a counted vote in the deliberation. The Committee shall have an internal rule issued by an Order from the Minister and this rule shall contain the provisions pertaining to the conduct of its business, the covering of meetings, and the majority vote required for the adoption of its resolutions.

Article 18

The Supreme Committee shall specialize in studying and preparing the general policy for the care, rehabilitation and employment of disabled and in particular.

1. To work on planning and coordinating special programmes concerning the care, rehabilitation and employment of disabled.
2. To establish special basis for determining the requirement for the care, rehabilitation and employment of disabled, and the conditions of their acceptance in rehabilitation centers.
3. To establish the regulations and determine the procedures prescribing to the implementation of the Minister obligations contained in this Law with respect to disabled.
4. To accept aids and donations and specify the aspects of spending them.
5. To propose draft laws and regulations pertaining to the care, rehabilitation and employment of disabled.

Article 19

Employers who shall be determined by an Order from the Minister of Justice in agreement with the concerned Minister shall have the attribute of Law officers and they shall have the right to access the places liable under the provisions of this law and inspect them to determine any contraventions that occur in their specialization

departments and relating to their job business in accordance with rules and procedures that shall be specified by an Order from the concerned Minister.

Article 20

Without prejudice to a more severe penalty indicated in the penal law or any other law, each employer or responsible manager who refuse without an acceptable excuse to employ a disabled in accordance with the provisions of this Law, shall be punished by a fine of not less than two hundred dinars and not more than five hundred dinars. Such fines shall be repeated according to the number of disabled to who are such offence is committee it shall be permitted to compel the establishment to pay the disabled whom it refuse to employee in accordance with the provisions of Articles (11) and (15) of this Law, an amount equivalent to the wage fixed or suitable for, as from the date of the offence being committed. Such establishment shall not be completed to pay such an amount beyond a period of one year. Such obligation shall cease if the establishment employs the disabled concerned or if he actually obtain another work.

Article 21

Without prejudice to a more severe penalty indicated in the penal law or any other law, any person obligated to take care of one of the disabled individual, inspective of the source of such an obligation, and he is negligent in carrying duties, shall be punished by a term of imprisonment not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding one thousand dinars or to any one of these penalties in the event that such negligence resulted in the death of disabled the punishment shall be Imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years and a fine not exceeding three thousand dinars or to any one of these two penalties.

Article 22

In case the rehabilitation centers, however, or institutes of disabled that are not attached to the Ministry contravene the provisions of this law or the resolution to case and eliminate the reasons of contravention, however, if the violating canter, however, homes or Institutes fails to implement the resolution referred within ten days from the dates of notifying it, the Minister may issue caseable resolution to put the centre, home or institute under the management of the Ministry of Social Development for a

period not exceeding three months or to cancel the authorization, depending on the circumstances.

The person concerned may appeal against the resolution issued in respect of him in front of the high civil court within thirty days from the date of notifying him of the resolution.

Article 23

The concerned Minister shall Issue the necessary rules and resolutions to implement the provisions of this Law within a period not exceeding six months from its issuance.

Article 24

The provisions of Chapter four of the Labour Law for the Private Sector issued according to the Decree Law NO. (23) of 1976 shall repeal.

Article 25

Ministers, within their respective area of justification, shall implement this Law which shall become effective the following day from the date of its publication in the Official Gates.

King of the Kingdom of Bahrain
Hamad Bin Isa AL Khalifa

Riffa Palace
30th of Ramadan 1427
22nd of October 2006

Appendix 9: Bahrain Labour Law for the Private Sector (1976) Number 23: The Regulation of the Employment of Vocationally Rehabilitated Disabled Persons

Article 17

A disabled person is a person whose capacity to perform and secure a suitable job has been actually reduced as result of any bodily or mental incapacity.

Article 18

Vocational rehabilitation means the services furnished to a disabled person enable him to recover his capacity to resume his original employment or to perform any other work suitable to his condition.

Article 19

The Minister for Labour and Social Affairs shall, in agreement with other Ministries concerned, and with the High Council for Vocational Training make such Orders as are necessary to establish, designate and regulate such institutions as are required to extend vocational rehabilitation services to disabled persons. Such institutions shall furnish to a disabled person who has been so rehabilitated a certificate to that effect. The particulars to be contained in such certificate shall be as prescribed in an Order made by the Minister for Labour and Social Affairs.

Article 20

Every disabled person who has been may, with the validity of his certificate of rehabilitation, apply for registration of his name at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The Ministry shall record his name in a register and issue to him, free of charge, a certificate attesting his registration which shall include particulars concerning the occupation or jobs for which he has received rehabilitation and the other jobs which he is able to perform.

The particulars to be included in the certificate referred to in the preceding paragraph shall be as prescribed in an Order made by the Minister for Labour and Social Affairs.

Article 21

Employers employing one hundred workers or more, whether such workers are employed in one or different localities, shall engage from amongst those whose names are recorded in the disabled persons register as having been rehabilitated the persons nominated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs within the limits of two per centum of the total of their workers.

Such per centum may be fulfilled by the engaging for employment disabled persons who have not been nominated by the Ministry provided that the names of such persons are duly recorded in accordance with the provisions of the preceding Article.

A disabled person shall be employed in the job for which he has been rehabilitated or in any other work which he is able to perform and which is recorded in the registration certificate.

The bearers of certificates of vocational rehabilitation shall be exempt from any pre-requisite conditions of physical fitness, if any, in respect of the disability mentioned in the certificate.

Article 22

The Minister for Labour and Social Affairs may make an order prescribing certain designated Government posts or positions for which rehabilitated disabled persons shall have a priority entitlement to appointment. This provision shall be applicable to Government agencies, public bodies, organisations and the Municipality.

Rehabilitated disabled persons shall have priority of appointment to vacant positions and jobs within the per centum limit mentioned in Articles 21 and 25 of this Law.

Article 23

Disabled persons employed in accordance with the provisions of this Chapter shall be entitled to all the rights as those enjoyed by other workers in the same establishment in which they are employed.

Article 24

Establishments to which the provisions of this Chapter are applicable shall maintain a special register wherein are recorded particulars of all rehabilitated disabled persons in their employment. The register shall contain such particulars as are recorded in the relevant certificate of rehabilitation. Such establishments shall notify the Ministry of

Labour and Social Affairs during the month of January in each year of the number of positions and jobs held by disabled persons and the wage of each. Such notification shall be on the form to be prescribed by the Ministry.

Article 25

In the event that a worker sustains an employment injury causing disability which does not prevent him from performing other work than his previous work, the employer in whose service the injury was sustained shall employ the worker in suitable alternative work at the normal wage fixed for such work, but within a limitation of five per centum of the total number of his workers.

This shall not prejudice the rights and entitlements of such worker, in respect of injury, according to the provisions of this Law and those of Social Insurance.

Source:(Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2002)